



## To-Morrow, William Faulkner

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UNCLE GAVIN HAD not always been county attorney. But the time when he had not been was more than twenty years ago and it had lasted for such a short period that only the old men remembered it,

and even some of them did not. Because in that time he had had but one case.

He was a young man then, twenty-eight, only a year out of the state-university law school where, at grandfather's instigation, he had gone after his return from Harvard and Heidelberg; and he had taken the case voluntarily, persuaded grandfather to let him handle it alone, which grandfather did, because everyone believed the trial would be a mere formality.

So he tried the case. Years afterward he still said it was the only case, either as a private defender or a public prosecutor, in which he was convinced that right and justice were on his side, that he ever lost.

Actually he did not lose it — a mistrial in the fall court term, an acquittal in the following spring term — the defendant a solid, well-to-do farmer, husband and father, too, named Bookwright, from a section called Frenchman's Bend in the remote southeastern corner of the county; the victim a swaggering bravo calling himself Buck Thorpe and called Bucksnot by the other young men whom he had subjugated with his fists during the three years he had been in Frenchman's Bend; kinless, who had appeared overnight from nowhere, a brawler, a gambler, known to be a distiller of illicit whiskey and caught once on the road to Memphis with a small drove of stolen cattle, which the owner promptly identified. He had a bill of sale for them, but none in the country knew the name signed to it.

And the story itself was old and unoriginal enough: The country girl of seventeen, her imagination fired by the swagger and the prowess and the daring and the glib tongue; the father who tried to reason with her and got exactly as far as parents usually do in such cases; then the

interdiction, the forbidden door, the inevitable elopement at midnight; and at four o'clock the next morning Bookwright waked Will Varner, the justice of the peace and the chief officer of the district, and handed Varner his pistol and said, 'I have come to surrender.

I killed Thorpe two hours ago.' And a neighbor named Quick, who was first on the scene, found the half-drawn pistol in Thorpe's hand; and a week after the brief account was printed in the Memphis papers, a woman appeared in Frenchman's Bend who claimed to be Thorpe's wife, and with a wedding license to prove it, trying to claim what money or property he might have left.

I can remember the surprise that the grand jury even found a true bill; when the clerk read the indictment, the betting was twenty to one that the jury would not be out ten minutes.

The district attorney even conducted the case through an assistant, and it did not take an hour to submit all the evidence. Then Uncle Gavin rose, and I remember how he looked at the jury — the eleven farmers and storekeepers and the twelfth man, who was to ruin his case — a farmer, too, a thin man, small, with thin gray hair and that appearance of hill farmers — at once frail and work-worn, yet curiously imperishable — who seem to become old men at fifty and then become invincible to time.

Uncle Gavin's voice was quiet, almost monotonous, not ranting as criminal-court trials had taught us to expect; only the words were a little different from the ones he would use in later years. But even then, although he had been talking to them for only a year, he could already talk so that all the people in our country — the Negroes, the hill people, the rich flatland plantation owners — understood what he said.

'All of us in this country, the South, have been taught from birth a few things which we hold to above all else. One of the first of these — not the best; just one of the first — is that only a life can pay for the life it takes; that the one death is only half complete. If that is so, then we could have saved both these lives by stopping this defendant before he left his house that night; we could have saved at least one of them, even if we had had to take this defendant's life from him in order to stop him. Only we didn't know in time.

And that's what I am talking about — not about the dead man and his character and the morality of the act he was engaged in; not about self-defense, whether or not this defendant was justified in forcing the issue to the point of taking life, but about us who are not dead and what we don't know — about all of us, human beings who at bottom want to do right, want not to harm others; human beings with all the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs, in the accepting or rejecting of which we had no choice, trying to do the best we can with them or despite them — this defendant, another human being with that same complexity of passions and instincts and beliefs, faced by a problem — the inevitable misery of his child who, with the headstrong folly of youth — again that same old complexity which she, too, did not ask to inherit — was incapable of her own preservation — and solved that problem to the best of his ability and beliefs, asking help of no one, and then abode by his decision and his act.'

He sat down. The district attorney's assistant merely rose and bowed to the court and sat down again. The jury went out and we didn't even leave the room. Even the judge didn't retire. And I remember the long breath, something, which went through the room when the clock hand above the bench passed the ten-minute mark and then passed the half-hour mark, and the judge beckoned a bailiff and whispered to him, and the bailiff went out and returned and whispered to the judge, and the judge rose and banged his gavel and recessed the court.

I hurried home and ate my dinner and hurried back to town. The office was empty. Even grandfather, who took his nap after dinner, regardless of who hung and who didn't, returned first; after three o'clock then, and the whole town knew now that Uncle Gavin's jury was hung by one man, eleven to one for acquittal; then Uncle Gavin came in fast, and grandfather said, 'Well, Gavin, at least you stopped talking in time to hang just your jury and not your client.'

'That's right, sir,' Uncle Gavin said. Because he was looking at me with his bright eyes, his thin, quick face, his wild hair already beginning to turn white. 'Come here, Chick,' he said. 'I need you for a Infinite.'

'Ask Judge Frazier to allow you to retract your oration, then let Charley sum up for you,' grandfather said. But we were outside then, on the stairs, Uncle Gavin stopping halfway down, so that we stood exactly halfway from anywhere, his hand on my shoulder, his eyes brighter and intenter than ever. This is not cricket,' he said. 'But justice is accomplished lots of times by methods that won't bear looking at. They have moved the jury to the back room in Mrs. Rouncewell's boardinghouse. The room right opposite that mulberry tree. If you could get into the back yard without anybody seeing you, and be careful when you climb the tree—'

Nobody saw me. But I could look through the windy mulberry leaves into the room, and see and hear, both — the nine angry and disgusted men sprawled in chairs at the far end of the room; Mr. Holland, the foreman, and another man standing in front of the chair in which the little, worn, dried-out hill man sat. His name was Fentry. I remembered all their names, because Uncle Gavin said that to be a successful lawyer and politician in our country you did not need a silver tongue nor even

an intelligence; you needed only an infallible memory for names. But I would have remembered his name anyway, because it was Stonewall Jackson — Stonewall Jackson Fentry.

‘Don’t you admit that he was running off with Bookwright’s seventeen-year-old daughter?’ Mr. Holland said. ‘Don’t you admit that he had a pistol in his hand when they found him? Don’t you admit that he wasn’t hardly buried before that woman turned up and proved she was already his wife? Don’t you admit that he was not only no-good but dangerous, and that if it hadn’t been Bookwright, sooner or later somebody else would have had to, and mat Bookwright was just unlucky?’

‘Yes,’ Fentry said.

Then what do you want?’ Mr. Holland said. ‘What do you want?’

‘I can’t help it,’ Fentry said. ‘I ain’t going to vote Mr. Bookwright free.’

And he didn’t. And that afternoon Judge Frazier discharged the jury and set the case for retrial in the next term of court; and the next morning Uncle Gavin came for me before I had finished breakfast.

‘Tell your mother we might be gone overnight,’ he said. ‘Tell her I promise not to let you get either shot, snake-bit or surfeited with soda pop... Because I’ve got to know,’ he said. We were driving fast now, out the northeast road, and his eyes were bright, not baffled, just intent and eager. ‘He was born and raised and lived all his life out here at the very other end of the county, thirty miles from Frenchman’s Bend. He said under oath that he had never even seen Bookwright before, and you can look at him and see that he never had enough time

off from hard work to learn how to lie in. I doubt if he ever even heard Bookwright's name before.'

We drove until almost noon. We were in the hills now, out of the rich flat land, among the pine and bracken, the poor soil, the little tilted and barren patches of gaunt corn and cotton which somehow endured, as the people they clothed and fed somehow endured; the roads we followed less than lanes, winding and narrow, rutted and dust choked, the car in second gear half the time. Then we saw the mailbox, the crude lettering: G. A. FENTRY; beyond it, the two-room log house with an open hall, and even I, a boy of twelve, could see that no woman's hand had touched it in a lot of years. We entered the gate.

Then a voice said, 'Stop! Stop where you are!' And we hadn't even seen him — an old man, barefoot, with a fierce white bristle of mustache, in patched denim faded almost to the color of skim milk, smaller, thinner even than the son, standing at the edge of the worn gallery, holding a shotgun across his middle and shaking with fury or perhaps with the palsy of age.

'Mr. Fentry—' Uncle Gavin said.

'You've badgered and harried him enough!' the old man said. It was fury; the voice seemed to rise suddenly with a fiercer, an uncontrollable blaze of it: 'Get out of here! Get off my land! Go!'

'Come,' Uncle Gavin said quietly. And still his eyes were only bright, eager, intent and grave. We did not drive fast now. The next mailbox was within the mile, and this time the house was even painted, with beds of petunias beside the steps, and the land about it was better, and this time the man rose from the gallery and came down to the gate.

'Howdy, Mr. Stevens,' he said. 'So Jackson Fentry hung your jury for you.'

'Howdy, Mr. Pruitt,' Uncle Gavin said. 'It looks like he did. Tell me.'

And Pruitt told him, even though at that time Uncle Gavin would forget now and then and his language would slip back to Harvard and even to Heidelberg. It was as if people looked at his face and knew that what he asked was not just for his own curiosity or his own selfish using.

'Only ma knows more about it than I do,' Pruitt said. 'Come up to the gallery.'

We followed him to the gallery, where a plump, white-haired old lady in a clean gingham sunbonnet and dress and a clean white apron sat in a low rocking chair, shelling field peas into a wooden bowl. 'This is Lawyer Stevens,' Pruitt said. 'Captain Stevens' son, from town. He wants to know about Jackson Fentry.'

So we sat, too, while they told it, the son and the mother talking in rotation.

That place of theirs,' Pruitt said. 'You seen some of it from the road. And what you didn't see don't look no better. But his pa and his grandpa worked it, made a living for themselves and raised families and paid their taxes and owed no man. I don't know how they done it, but they did. And Jackson was helping from the time he got big enough to reach up to the plow handles. He never got much bigger than that neither. None of them ever did. I reckon that was why. And Jackson worked it, too, in his time, until he was about twenty-five and already



looking forty, asking no odds of nobody, not married and not nothing, him and his pa living alone and doing their own washing and cooking, because how can a man afford to marry when him and his pa have just one pair of shoes between them. If it had been worth while getting a wife a-tall, since that place had already killed his ma and his grandma both before they were forty years old. Until one night—'

'Nonsense,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'When your pa and me married, we didn't even own a roof over our heads. We moved into a rented house, on rented land—'

'All right,' Pruitt said. 'Until one night he come to me and said how he had got him a sawmilling job down at Frenchman's Bend.'

'Frenchman's Bend?' Uncle Gavin said, and now his eyes were much brighter and quicker than just intent. 'Yes,' he said.

'A day-wage job,' Pruitt said. 'Not to get rich; just to earn a little extra money maybe, risking a year or two to earn a little extra money, against the life his grandpa led until he died between the plow handles one day, and that his pa would lead until he died in a com furrow, and then it would be his turn, and not even no son to come and pick him up out of the dirt. And that he had traded with a nigger to help his pa work their place while he was gone, and would I kind of go up there now and then and see that his pa was all right.'

'Which you did,' Mrs. Pruitt said.

'I went close enough,' Pruitt said. 'I would get close enough to the field to hear him cussing at the nigger for not moving fast enough and to watch the nigger trying to keep up with him, and to think what a good thing it was Jackson hadn't got two niggers to work the place while he

was gone, because if that old man — and he was close to sixty then — had had to spend one full day sitting in a chair in the shade with nothing in his hands to chop or hoe with, he would have died before sundown. So Jackson left. He walked. They didn't have but one mule. They ain't never had but one mule. But it ain't but about thirty miles. He was gone about two and a half years. Then one day—'

'He come home that first Christmas,' Mrs. Pruitt said.

'That's right,' Pruitt said. 'He walked them thirty miles home and spent Christmas Day, and walked them other thirty miles back to the sawmill.'

'Whose sawmill?' Uncle Gavin said.

'Quick's,' Pruitt said. 'Old Man Ben Quick's. It was the second Christmas he never come home. Then, about the beginning of March, about when the river bottom at Frenchman's Bend would be starting to dry out to where you could skid logs through it and you would have thought he would be settled down good to his third year of sawmilling, he come home to stay. He didn't walk this time. He come in a hired buggy. Because he had the goat and the baby.'

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said.

'We never knew how he got home,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'Because he had been home over a week before we even found out he had the baby.'

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said.

They waited, looking at him, Pruitt sitting on the gallery railing and Mrs. Pruitt's fingers still shelling the peas out of the long brittle hulls, looking at Uncle Gavin. His eyes were not exultant now any more than they had been baffled or even very speculative before; they had just got brighter, as if whatever it was behind them had flared up, steady and

fiercer, yet still quiet, as if it were going faster than the telling was going.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Tell me.’

‘And when I finally heard about it and went up there,’ Mrs. Pruitt said, ‘that baby wasn’t two weeks old. And how he had kept it alive, and just on goat’s milk—’

‘I don’t know if you know it,’ Pruitt said. ‘A goat ain’t like a cow. You milk a goat every two hours or so. That means all night too.’

‘Yes,’ Mrs. Pruitt said. ‘He didn’t even have diaper cloths. He had some split floursacks the midwife had showed him how to put on. So I made some cloths and I would go up there; he had kept the nigger on to help his pa in the field and he was doing the cooking and washing and nursing that baby, milking the goat to feed it; and I would say, “Let me take it. At least until he can be weaned. You come stay at my house, too, if you want,” and him just looking at me — little, thin, already wore-out something that never in his whole life had ever set down to a table and et all he could hold — saying, “I thank you, ma’am. I can make out.”’

‘Which was correct,’ Pruitt said. ‘I don’t know how he was at sawmilling, and he never had no farm to find out what kind of a farmer he was. But he raised that boy.’

‘Yes,’ Mrs. Pruitt said. ‘And I kept on after him: “We hadn’t even heard you was married,” I said. “Yessum,” he said. “We was married last year. When the baby come, she died.”’

“Who was she?” I said. “Was she a Frenchman Bend girl?”

“No’m,” he said. “She come from downstate.”

“What was her name?” I said. “Miss Smith,” he said.’

‘He hadn’t even had enough time off from hard work to learn how to lie either,’ Pruitt said. ‘But he raised that boy. After their crops were in in the fall, he let the nigger go, and next spring him and the old man done the work like they use to. He had made a kind of satchel, like they say Indians does, to carry the boy in.

I would go up there now and then while the ground was still cold and see Jackson and his pa plowing and chopping brush, and that satchel hanging on a fence post and that boy asleep bolt upright in it like it was a feather bed.

He learned to walk that spring, and I would stand there at the fence and watch that dum little critter out there in the middle of the furrow, trying his best to keep up with Jackson, until Jackson would stop the plow at the turn row and go back and get him and set him straddle of his neck and take up the plow and go on.

In the late summer he could walk pretty good. Jackson made him a little hoe out of a stick and a scrap of shingle, and you could see Jackson chopping in the middle-thigh cotton, but you couldn’t see the boy at all; you could just see the cotton shaking where he was.’

‘Jackson made his clothes,’ Mrs. Pruitt said. ‘Stitched them himself, by hand. I made a few garments and took them up there. I never done it but once though. He took them and he thanked me. But you could see it. It was like he even begrudged the earth itself for what that child had to eat to keep alive. And I tried to persuade Jackson to take him to

church, have him baptized. "He's already named," he said. "His name is Jackson and Longstreet Fentry. Pa fit under both of them."

'He never went nowhere,' Pruitt said. 'Because where you saw Jackson, you saw that boy. If he had had to steal that boy down there at Frenchman's Bend, he couldn't 'a' hid no closer. It was even the old man that would ride over to Haven Hill store to buy their supplies, and the only time Jackson and that boy was separated as much as one full breath was once a year when Jackson would ride in to Jefferson to pay their taxes, and when I first seen the boy I thought of a setter puppy, until one day I knowed Jackson had gone to pay their taxes and I went up there and the boy was under the bed, not making any fuss, just backed up into the corner, looking out at me. He didn't blink once.

He was exactly like a fox or a wolf cub somebody had caught just last night.'

We watched him take from his pocket a tin of snuff and tilt a measure of it into the lid and then into his lower lip, tapping the final grain from the lid with delicate deliberation. 'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Then what?'

'That's all,' Pruitt said. 'In the next summer him and the boy disappeared.'

'Disappeared?' Uncle Gavin said.

'That's right. They were just gone one morning. I didn't know when. And one day I couldn't stand it no longer, I went up there and the house was empty, and I went on to the field where the old man was plowing, and at first I thought the spreader between his plow handles

had broke and he had tied a sapling across the handles, until he seen me and snatched the sapling off, and it was that shotgun, and I reckon what he said to me was about what he said to you this morning when you stopped there. Next year he had the nigger helping him again. Then, about five years later, Jackson come back. I don't know when. He was just there one morning. And the nigger was gone again, and him and his pa worked the place like they use to.

And one day I couldn't stand it no longer, I went up there and I stood at the fence where he was plowing, until after a while the land he was breaking brought him up to the fence, and still he hadn't never looked at me; he plowed right by me, not ten feet away, still without looking at me, and he turned and come back, and I said, "Did he die, Jackson?" and then he looked at me. "The boy," I said. And he said, "What boy?"

They invited us to stay for dinner.

Uncle Gavin thanked them. We brought a snack with us,' he said. 'And it's thirty miles to Varner's store, and twenty-two from there to Jefferson. And our roads ain't quite used to automobiles yet.'

So it was just sundown when we drove up to Varner's store in Frenchman's Bend Village; again a man rose from the deserted gallery and came down the steps to the car.

It was Isham Quick, the witness who had first reached Thorpe's body — a tall, gangling man in the middle forties, with a dreamy kind of face and near-sighted eyes, until you saw there was something shrewd behind them, even a little quizzical.

'I been waiting for you,' he said. 'Looks like you made a water haul.' He blinked at Uncle Gavin. 'That Fentry.'

‘Yes,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I didn’t recognize it myself,’ Quick said. ‘It wasn’t until I heard your jury was hung, and by one man, that I associated them names.’

‘Names?’ Uncle Gavin said. What na — Never mind.

Just tell it.’

So we sat on the gallery of the locked and deserted store while the cicadas shrilled and rattled in the trees and the lightning bugs blinked and drifted above the dusty road, and Quick told it, sprawled on the bench beyond Uncle Gavin, loose-jointed, like he would come all to pieces the first time he moved, talking in a lazy sardonic voice, like he had all night to tell it in and it would take all night to tell it. But it wasn’t that long.

It wasn’t long enough for what was in it. But Uncle Gavin says it don’t take many words to tell the sum of any human experience; that somebody has already done it in eight: He was born, he suffered and he died.

‘It was pap that hired him. But when I found out where he had come from, I knowed he would work, because folks in that country hadn’t never had time to learn nothing but hard work. And I knowed he would be honest for the same reason: that there wasn’t nothing in his country a man could want bad enough to learn how to steal it. What I seem to have underestimated was his capacity for love.

I reckon I figured that, coming from where he come from, he never had none a-tall, and for that same previous reason — that even the comprehension of love had done been lost out of him back down the

generations where the first one of them had had to take his final choice between the pursuit of love and the pursuit of keeping on breathing.

‘So he come to work, doing the same work and drawing the same pay as the niggers done. Until in the late fall, when the bottom got wet and we got ready to shut down for the winter, I found out he had made a trade with pap to stay on until spring as watchman and caretaker, with three days out to go home Christmas.

And he did, and the next year when we started up, he had done learned so much about it and he stuck to it so, that by the middle of summer he was running the whole mill hisself, and by the end of summer pap never went out there no more a-tall and I just went when I felt like it, maybe once a week or so; and by fall pap was even talking about building him a shack to live in in place of that shuck mattress and a old broke-down cookstove in the boiler shed.

And he stayed through that winter too. When he went home that Christmas we never even knowed it, when he went or when he come back, because even I hadn’t been out there since fall.

‘Then one afternoon in February — there had been a mild spell and I reckon I was restless — I rode out there. The first thing I seen was her, and it was the first time I had ever done that — a woman, young, and maybe when she was in her normal health she might have been pretty, too; I don’t know. Because she wasn’t just thin, she was gaunted. She was sick, more than just starved-looking, even if she was still on her feet, and it wasn’t just because she was going to have that baby in a considerable less than another month.



And I says, “Who is that?” and he looked at me and says, “That’s my wife,” and I says, “Since when? You never had no wife last fall. And that child ain’t a month off.” And he says, “Do you want us to leave?” and I says, “What do I want you to leave for?” I’m going to tell this from what I know now, what I found out after them two brothers showed up here three years later with their court paper, not from what he ever told me, because he never told nobody nothing.’

‘All right,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Tell.’

‘I don’t know where he found her. I don’t know if he found her somewhere, or if she just walked into the mill one day or one night and he looked up and seen her, and it was like the fellow says — nobody knows where or when love or lightning either is going to strike, except that it ain’t going to strike there twice, because it don’t have to.

And I don’t believe she was hunting for the husband that had deserted her — likely he cut and run soon as she told him about the baby — and I don’t believe she was scared or ashamed to go back home just because her brothers and father had tried to keep her from marrying the husband, in the first place. I believe it was just some more of that same kind of black-complected and not extra-intelligent and pretty durn ruthless blood pride that them brothers themselves was waving around here for about a hour that day.

‘Anyway, there she was, and I reckon she knowed her time was going to be short, and him saying to her, “Let’s get married,” and her saying, “I can’t marry you. I’ve already got a husband.”

And her time come and she was down then, on that shuck mattress, and him feeding her with a spoon, likely, and I reckon she knowed she wouldn't get up from it, and he got the midwife, and the baby was horn, and likely her and the midwife both knowed by then she would never get up from that mattress and maybe they even convinced him at last, or maybe she knowed it wouldn't make no difference nohow and said yes, and he taken the mule pap let him keep at the mill and rid seven miles to Preacher Whitfield's and brung Whitfield back about daylight, and Whitfield married them and she died, and him and Whitfield buried her.

And that night he come to the house and told pap he was quitting, and left the mule, and I went out to the mill a few days later and he was gone — just the shuck mattress and the stove, and the dishes and skillet mammy let him have, all washed and clean and set on the shelf. And in the third summer from then, them two brothers, them Thorpes—'

'Thorpes,' Uncle Gavin said. It wasn't loud. It was getting dark fast now, as it does in our country, and I couldn't see his face at all any more. 'Tell,' he said.

'Black-complected like she was — the youngest one looked a heap like her — coming up in the surrey, with the deputy or bailiff or whatever he was, and the paper all wrote out and stamped and sealed all regular, and I says, "You can't do this. She come here of her own accord, sick and with nothing, and he taken her in and fed her and nursed her and got help to born that child and a preacher to bury her; they was even married before she died. The preacher and the midwife both will prove it."

And the oldest brother says, “He couldn’t marry her. She already had a husband. We done already attended to him.” And I says, “All right. He taken that boy when nobody come to claim him. He has raised that boy and clothed and fed him for two years and better.”

And the oldest one drew a money purse half outen his pocket and let it drop back again. ‘We aim to do right about that, too — when we have seen the boy,” he says. “He is our kin. We want him and we aim to have him.” And that wasn’t the first time it ever occurred to me that this world ain’t run like it ought to be run a heap of more times than what it is, and I says, “It’s thirty miles up there. I reckon you all will want to lay over here tonight and rest your horses.” And the oldest one looked at me and says, “The team ain’t tired. We won’t stop.”

“Then I’m going with you,” I says. “You are welcome to come,” he says.

‘We drove until midnight. So I thought I would have a chance then, even if I never had nothing to ride. But when we unhitched and laid down on the ground, the oldest brother never laid down. “I ain’t sleepy,” he says. “I’ll set up a while.”

So it wasn’t no use, and I went to sleep and then the sun was up and it was too late then, and about middle morning we come to that mailbox with the name on it you couldn’t miss, and the empty house with nobody in sight or hearing neither, until we heard the ax and went around to the back, and he looked up from the woodpile and seen what I reckon he had been expecting to see every time the sun rose for going on three years now.

Because he never even stopped. He said to the little boy, "Run. Run to the field to grandpap. Run," and come straight at the oldest brother with the ax already raised and the down-stroke already started, until I managed to catch it by the haft just as the oldest brother grabbed him and we lifted him clean off the ground, holding him, or trying to. "Stop it, Jackson!" I says. "Stop it! They got the law!"

'Then a puny something was kicking and clawing me about the legs; it was the little boy, not making a sound, just swarming around me and the brother both, hitting at us as high as he could reach with a piece of wood Fentry had been chopping.

"Catch him and take him on to the surrey," the oldest one says. So the youngest one caught him; he was almost as hard to hold as Fentry, kicking and plunging even after the youngest one had picked him up, and still not making a sound, and Fentry jerking and lunging like two men until the youngest one and the boy was out of sight. Then he collapsed.

It was like all his bones had turned to water, so that me and the oldest brother lowered him down to the chopping block like he never had no bones a-tall, laying back against the wood he had cut, panting, with a little froth of spit at each corner of his mouth. "It's the law, Jackson," I says. "Her husband is still alive."

"I know it," he says. It wasn't much more than whispering. "I been expecting it. I reckon that's why it taken me so by surprise. I'm all right now."

“I’m sorry for it,” the brother says. “We never found out about none of it until last week. But he is our kin. We want him home. You done well by him. We thank you. His mother thanks you. Here,” he says. He taken the money purse outen his pocket and puts it into Fentry’s hand. Then he turned and went away. After a while I heard the carriage turn and go back down the hill. Then I couldn’t hear it any more. I don’t know whether Fentry ever heard it or not.

“It’s the law, Jackson,” I says. “But there’s two sides to the law. We’ll go to town and talk to Captain Stevens. I’ll go with you.”

‘Then he set up on the chopping block, setting up slow and stiff. He wasn’t panting so hard now and he looked better now, except for his eyes, and they was mostly just dazed looking. Then he raised the hand that had the money purse in it and started to mop his face with the money purse, like it was a handkerchief; I don’t believe he even knowed there was anything in his hand until then, because he taken his hand down and looked at the money purse for maybe five seconds, and then he tossed it — he didn’t fling it; he just tossed it like you would a handful of dirt you had been examining to see what it would make — over behind the chopping block and got up and walked across the yard toward the woods, walking straight and not fast, and not looking much bigger than that little boy, and into the woods. “Jackson,” I says. But he never looked back.

‘And I stayed that night at Rufus Pruitt’s and borrowed a mule from him; I said I was just looking around, because I didn’t feel much like talking to nobody, and the next morning I hitched the mule at that gate and started up the path, and I didn’t see old man Fentry on the gallery a-tall at first.

'When I did see him he was moving so fast I didn't even know what he had in his hands until it went "boom!" and I heard the shot rattling in the leaves overhead and Rufus Pruitt's mule trying his durn best either to break the hitch rein or hang hisself from the gatepost.

'And one day about six months after he had located here to do the balance of his drinking and fighting and sleight-of-hand with other folks' cattle, Bucksnot was on the gallery here, drunk still and running his mouth, and about a half dozen of the ones he had beat unconscious from time to time by foul means and even by fair on occasion, as such emergencies arose, laughing every time he stopped to draw a fresh breath. And I happened to look up, and Fentry was setting on his mule out there in the road.

'He was just setting there, with the dust of them thirty miles caking into the mule's sweat, looking at Thorpe. I don't know how long he had been there, not saying nothing, just setting there and looking at Thorpe; then he turned the mule and rid back up the road toward them hills he hadn't ought to never have left.

Except maybe it's like the fellow says, and there ain't nowhere you can hide from either lightning or love. And I didn't know why then. I hadn't associated them names. I knowed that Thorpe was familiar to me, but that other business had been twenty years ago and I had forgotten it until I heard about that hung jury of yourn. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free.... It's dark. Let's go to supper.'

But it was only twenty-two miles to town now, and we were on the highway now, the gravel; we would be home in an hour and a half, because sometimes we could make thirty and thirty-five miles an hour, and Uncle Gavin said that someday all the main roads in Mississippi

would be paved like the streets in Memphis and every family in America would own a car. We were going fast now.

‘Of course he wasn’t,’ Uncle Gavin said. The lowly and invincible of the earth — to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Of course he wasn’t going to vote Bookwright free.’

‘I would have,’ I said. ‘I would have freed him. Because Buck Thorpe was bad. He—’

‘No, you wouldn’t,’ Uncle Gavin said. He gripped my knee with one hand even though we were going fast, the yellow light beam level on the yellow road, the bugs swirling down into the light beam and ballooning away. ‘It wasn’t Buck Thorpe, the adult, the man. He would have shot that man as quick as Bookwright did, if he had been in Bookwright’s place.’

It was because somewhere in that debased and brutalized flesh which Bookwright slew there still remained, not the spirit maybe, but at least the memory, of that little boy, that Jackson and Longstreet Fentry, even though the man the boy had become didn’t know it, and only Fentry did. And you wouldn’t have freed him either. Don’t ever forget that. Never.’

The end