



WILLIAM FAULKNER

Absalom, Absalom!

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The corrected text

WILLIAM FAULKNER

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William Faulkner (1897–1962)

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From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone full and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them. There was a wistaria vine blooming for the second time that summer on a wooden trellis before one window, into which sparrows came now and then in random gusts, making a dry vivid dusty sound before going away: and opposite Quentin, Miss Coldfield in the eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father, or nothusband none knew, sitting so bolt upright in the straight hard chair that was so tall for her that her legs hung straight and rigid as if she had iron shinbones and ankles, clear of the floor with that air of impotent and static rage like children's feet, and talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent yearning indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked, quite inattentive and harmless, out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust.

Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish. There would be the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall by the savage quiet September sun impacted distilled and hyperdistilled, into which came now and then the loud cloudy flutter of the sparrows like a flat limber stick whipped by an idle boy and the rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity while the wan haggard face watched him above the faint triangle of lace at wrists and throat from the too tall chair in which she resembled a crucified child; and the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand and the ghost mused with shadowy docility as if it were the voice which he haunted where more fortunate one would have had a house. Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacles among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran. Immobile bearded and hand palm-lifted the horseman sat; behind him the wild blacks and the captive architect huddled quietly, carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest. Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*. Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now—the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffle

ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of not people in not language, like this: *It seems that this demon—his name was Sutpen—(Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation—(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—tore violently. And married his sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which—(Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—without gentleness. Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age, only—(Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something. And died)—and died. Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says—(Save by her) Yes, save by her. (And by Quentin Compson) Yes. And by Quentin Compson.*

“Because you are going away to attend the college at Harvard they tell me,” she said. “So don’t imagine you will ever come back here and settle down as a country lawyer in a little town like Jefferson since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man. So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazine. Perhaps you will even remember kindly then the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening while she talked about people and events you were fortunate enough to escape yourself when you wanted to be out among young friends of your own age.”

“Yessum,” Quentin said. *Only she don’t mean that* he thought. *It’s because she wants it told.* He was still early then. He had yet in his pocket the note which he had received by the hand of a small negro boy just before noon, asking him to call and see her—the quaint, stiffly formal request which was actually a summons, out of another world almost—the queer archaic sheet of ancient good notepaper written over with the neat faded cramped script which, due to his astonishment at the request from a woman three times his age and whom he had known all his life without having exchanged a hundred words with her or perhaps to the fact that he was only twenty years old, he did not recognise as revealing a character cold, implacable, and even ruthless. He obeyed it immediately after the noon meal, walking the half mile between his home and hers through the dry dusty heat of early September and so into the house (it too somehow smaller than its actual size—it was of two storeys—unpainted and a little shabby yet with an air, a quality of grim endurance as though like her it had been created to fit in and complement a world in all ways a little smaller than the one in which it found itself) where in the gloom of the shuttered hallway whose air was even hotter than outside, as though there were prisoned in it like in a tomb all the suspiration of slow heat-laden time which had recurred during the forty-three years, the small figure in black which did not even rustle, the wan triangle of lace at wrists and throat, the dim face looking at him with an expression speculative, urgent, and intent, waited to invite him in.

It’s because she wants it told he thought *so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know*

last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth. Then almost immediately he decided that neither was this the reason why she had sent the note, and sending it, why to him, since if she had merely wanted it told, written and even printed, she would not have needed to call in anybody—a woman who even in his (Quentin's) father's youth had already established (even if not affirmed) herself as the town's and the county's poetess laureate by issuing to the stern and meagre subscription list of the county newspaper poems, ode eulogy and epitaph, out of some bitter and implacable reserve of undefeat; and these from a woman whose family's martial background as both town and county knight consisted of the father who, a conscientious objector on religious grounds, had starved to death in the attic of his own house, hidden (some said, walled up) there from Confederate provost marshals' men and fed secretly at night by this same daughter who at the very time was accumulating her first folio in which the lost cause's unregenerate vanquished were named by name embalmed; and the nephew who served for four years in the same company with his sister's fiance and then shot the fiance to death before the gates to the house where the sister waited in her wedding gown on the eve of the wedding and then fled, vanished, none knew where.

It would be three hours yet before he would learn why she had sent for him because the part of it, this first part of it, Quentin already knew. It was a part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man; a part of the town's—Jefferson's—eighty years' heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children—the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride—and so accomplished his allotted course to its violent (Miss Coldfield at least would have said, just) end. Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease without actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence.

“But why tell me about it?” he said to his father that evening, when he returned home after she had dismissed him at last with his promise to return for her in the buggy; “why tell me about it? What is it to me that the land or the earth or whatever it was got tired of him and last and turned and destroyed him? What if it did destroy her family too? It's going to turn and destroy us all someday, whether our name happens to be Sutpen or Coldfield or not.”

“Ah,” Mr Compson said. “Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?” Then he said, “Do you want to know the real reason why she chose you?” They were sitting on the gallery after supper, waiting for the time Miss Coldfield

had set for Quentin to call for her. "It's because she will need someone to go with her—man, a gentleman, yet one still young enough to do what she wants, do it the way she wants it done. And she chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend which Sutpen ever had in this county, and she probably believes that Sutpen may have told your grandfather something about himself and her, about that engagement which did not engage that troth which failed to plight. Might even have told your grandfather the reason why the last she refused to marry him. And that your grandfather might have told me and I might have told you. And so, in a sense, the affair, no matter what happens out there tonight, will still be in the family; the skeleton (if it be a skeleton) still in the closet. She may believe that if it hadn't been for your grandfather's friendship, Sutpen could never have got a foothold here, and that if he had not got that foothold, he could not have married Ellen. So maybe she considers you partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family through him.")

Whatever her reason for choosing him, whether it was that or not, the getting to it Quentin thought, was taking a long time. Meanwhile, as though in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of the man whom she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence. Itself circumambled and enclosed by its effluvium of hell, its aura of unregeneration, it mused (mused, though seemed to possess sentience, as if, though dispossessed of the peace—who was impervious anyhow to fatigue—which she declined to give it, it was still irrevocably outside the scope of her hurt or harm) with that quality peaceful and now harmless and not even very attentive—the ogre-shape which, as Miss Coldfield's voice went on, resolved out of itself before Quentin's eyes the two half-ogre children, the three of them forming a shadowy background for the fourth one. This was the mother, the dead sister Ellen: this Niobe without tears who had conceived to the demon in a kind of nightmare, who even while alive had moved about without life and grieved but without weeping, who now had an air of tranquil and unwitting desolation, not as if she had either outlived the others or had died first, but as if she had never lived at all. Quentin seemed to see them, the four of them arranged into the conventional family group of the period, with formal and lifeless decorum, and seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself would have been seen enlarged and hung on the wall behind and above the voice and of whose presence there the voice's owner was not even aware, as if she (Miss Coldfield) had never seen this room before—a picture, a group which even to Quentin had a quality strange, contradictory and bizarre; not quite comprehensible, not (even to twenty) quite right—a group the last member of which had been dead twenty-five years and the first, fifty, evoked now out of the airless gloom of a dead house between an old woman's grim and implacable unforgiving and the passive chafing of a youth of twenty, telling himself even amid the voice *Maybe you have to know anybody awful well to love them but when you have hated somebody for forty-three years you will know them awful well so maybe it's better then maybe it's fine then because after forty-three years they cant any longer surprise you or make you either very contented or very mad.* And maybe it (the voice, the talking, the incredulous and unbearable amazement) had even been a cry aloud once, Quentin thought long ago when she was a girl—of young and indomitable unregret, of indictment of blinding circumstance and savage event; but not now: now only the lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old insult, the old unforgiving outraged and betrayed

by the final and complete affront which was Sutpen's death:

“He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own anyhow, and the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking some place to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. He sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that. Then he needed respectability, the shield of a virtuous woman, to make his position impregnable even against the men who had given him protection on the inevitable day and hour when even they must rise against him in scorn and horror and outrage; and it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that. Oh, I hold no brief for Ellen, blind romantic fool who had only youth and inexperience to excuse her even if that; blind romantic fool, then later blind woman mother fool when she no longer had either youth or inexperience to excuse her, when she lay dying in that house for which she had exchanged pride and peace both and nobody there but the daughter who was already the same as a widow without ever having been a bride and was, three years later, to be a widow sure enough without having been anything at all, and the son who had repudiated the very room under which he had been born and to which he would return but once more before disappearing for good, and that as a murderer and almost a fratricide; and he, fiercest blackguard and devil, in Virginia fighting, where the chances of the earth's being rid of him were the best anywhere under the sun, yet Ellen and I both knowing that he would return that every man in our armies would have to fall before bullet or ball found him; and only I, child, a child, mind you, four years younger than the very niece I was asked to save, for Ellen to turn to and say, 'Protect her. Protect Judith at least.' Yes, blind romantic fool, who did not even have that hundred miles of plantation which apparently moved our father nor that big house and the notion of slaves underfoot day and night which reconciled, I won't say moved her aunt. No: just the face of a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse—a man who so far as anyone (including the father who was to give him a daughter in marriage) knew either had no past at all or did not dare reveal it—a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that French architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by the negroes—a man who fled here and hid, concealed himself behind respectability, behind that hundred miles of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant Indians, nobody knows how, and a house the size of a courthouse where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a King's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather—a home, position, a wife and family which, being necessary to concealment, he accepted along with the rest of respectability as he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briars and thorns in a thicket if the thicket could have given him the protection he sought.

“No: not even a gentleman. Marrying Ellen or marrying ten thousand Ellens could not have made him one. Not that he wanted to be one, or even be taken for one. No. That was not necessary since all he would need would be Ellen's and our father's names on a wedding license (or on any other patent of respectability) that people could look at and read just as he would have wanted our father's (or any other reputable man's) signature on a note of honor.

because our father knew who his father was in Tennessee and who his grandfather had been in Virginia and our neighbors and the people we lived among knew that we knew and we knew they knew we knew and we knew that they would have believed us about who and where we came from even if we had lied, just as anyone could have looked at him once and known that he would be lying about who and where and why he came from by the very fact that apparently he had to refuse to say at all. And the very fact that he had had to choose respectability to hide behind was proof enough (if anyone needed further proof) that what he fled from must have been some opposite of respectability too dark to talk about. Because he was too young. He was just twenty-five and a man of twenty-five does not voluntarily undertake the hardship and privation of clearing virgin land and establishing a plantation in new country just for money; not a young man without any past that he apparently cared to discuss, in Mississippi in 1833, with a river full of steamboats loaded with drunken fools covered with diamonds and bent on throwing away their cotton and slaves before the boats reached New Orleans;—not with this just one night's hard ride away and the only handicap or obstacle being the other blackguards or the risk of being put ashore on a sandbar and at the remotest, a hemp rope. And he was no younger son sent out from some old quiet country like Virginia or Carolina with the surplus negroes to take up new land, because anyone could look at those negroes of his and tell that they may have come (and probably did) from a much older country than Virginia or Carolina but it wasn't a quiet one. And anyone could have looked once at his face and known that he would have chosen the River and even the certainty of the hemp rope, to undertaking what he undertook even if he had known that he would find gold buried and waiting for him in the very land which he had bought.

“No. I hold no more brief for Ellen than I do for myself. I hold even less for myself because I had had twenty years in which to watch him, where Ellen had had but five. And not even those five to see him but only to hear at second hand what he was doing, and not even to hear more than half of that since apparently half of what he actually did during those five years nobody at all knew about, and half of the remainder no man would have repeated to his wife, let alone a young girl; he came here and set up a raree show which lasted five years and Jefferson paid him for the entertainment by at least shielding him to the extent of not telling his own womenfolks what he was doing. But I had had all my life to watch him in, since he was apparently and for what reason Heaven has not seen fit to divulge, my life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago, since anyone who even had as little to care for living as I had had up to that time would not call what I have had since, living. I saw what had happened to Ellen, my sister. I saw her almost a recluse, watching those two doomed children growing up whom she was helpless to save. I saw the price which she had paid for that house and that pride; I saw the notes of hand on pride and contentment and peace and all to which she had put her signature when she walked into the church that night, beginning to fall due in succession. I saw Judith's marriage forbidden without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse; I saw Ellen die with only me, a child, to turn to and ask to protect her remaining child; I saw Henry repudiate his home and birthright and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister's sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown; I saw that man return—the evil's source and head which had outlasted all its victims—who had created two children not only to destroy one another and his own line, but my line as well, yet I agreed to marry him.

“No. I hold no brief for myself. I don't plead youth, since what creature in the South since 1861, man woman nigger or mule, had had time or opportunity not only to have been young but to have heard what being young was like from those who had. I don't plead propinquity, the fact that I, a woman young and at the age for marrying and in a time when most of the young men whom I would have known ordinarily were dead on lost battlefields, that I lived for two years under the same roof with him. I don't plead material necessity: the fact that, an orphan a woman and a pauper, I turned naturally not for protection but for actual food to my only kin: my dead sister's family: though I defy anyone to blame me, an orphan of twenty, a young woman without resources, who should desire not only to justify her situation but to vindicate the honor of a family the good name of whose women has never been impugned, but accepting the honorable proffer of marriage from the man whose food she was forced to subsist on. And most of all, I do not plead myself: a young woman emerging from a holocaust which had taken parents security and all from her, who had seen all that living meant to her fall into ruins about the feet of a few figures with the shapes of men but with the names and statures of heroes;—a young woman I say thrown into daily and hourly contact with one of these men who, despite what he might have been at one time and despite what she might have believed or even known about him, had fought for four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land where she had been born (and the man who had done that, villain dye though he be, would have possessed in her eyes, even if only from association with them, the stature and shape of a hero too) and now he also emerging from the same holocaust in which she had suffered, with nothing to face what the future held for the South but his bare hands and the sword which he at least had never surrendered and the citation for valor from his defeated Commander-in-Chief. Oh he was brave. I have never gainsaid that. But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it—men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?”

“None,” Quentin said.

“But that it should have been our father, mine and Ellen's father of all of them that I knew, out of all the ones who used to go out there and drink and gamble with him and watch him fight those wild negroes, whose daughters he might even have won at cards. That man should have been our father. How he could have approached papa, on what grounds; what there could have been beside the common civility of two men meeting on the street, between a man who came from nowhere or dared not tell where and our father; what there could have been between a man like that and papa—a Methodist steward, a merchant who was not rich and who not only could have done nothing under the sun to advance his fortunes or prospects but could by no stretch of the imagination even have owned anything that he would have wanted, even picked up in the road—a man who owned neither land nor slaves except two house servants whom he had freed as soon as he got them, bought them, who neither drank nor hunted nor gambled;—what there could have been between papa and a man who to my certain knowledge was never in a Jefferson church but three times in his life—the once when he first saw Ellen, the once when they rehearsed the wedding, the once when they performed it;—a man that anyone could look at and see that, even if he apparently had none now, he was accustomed to having money and intended to have it again and would have no scruples about how he got it—that man to discover Ellen inside a church. In church, mine

you, as though there were a fatality and curse on our family and God Himself were seeing it that it was performed and discharged to the last drop and dreg. Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it, even if it had not rather been our family, our father's progenitors, who had incurred the curse long years before and had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed. So that even I, a child still too young to know more than that, though Ellen was my own sister and Henry and Judith my own nephew and niece, I was not even to go out there save when papa or my aunt was with me and that I was not to play with Henry and Judith at all except in the house (and not because I was four years younger than Judith and six years younger than Henry: wasn't it to me that Ellen turned before she died and said 'Protect them?')—even I used to wonder what our father or his father could have done before he married our mother that Ellen and I would have to expiate and neither of us alone be sufficient; what crime committed that would leave our family cursed to be instruments not only for that man's destruction but for our own."

"Yessum," Quentin said.

"Yes," the grim quiet voice said from beyond the unmoving triangle of dim lace; and now among the musing and decorous wraiths Quentin seemed to watch resolving the figure of a little girl, in the prim skirts and pantalettes, the smooth prim decorous braids, of the dead time. She seemed to stand, to lurk, behind the neat picket fence of a small, grimy middleclass yard or lawn, looking out upon the whatever ogreworld of that quiet village street with that air of children born too late into their parents' lives and doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults—an a Cassandralike and humorless and profoundly and sternly prophetic out of all proportion to the actual years even of a child who had never been young. "Because I was born too late. I was born twenty-two years too late—a child to whom out of the overheard talk of adults my own sister's and my sister's children's faces had come to be like the faces in an ogre-tale between supper and bed long before I was old enough or big enough to be permitted to play with them, yet to whom that sister must have to turn at the last when she lay dying, with one of the children vanished and doomed to be a murderer and the other doomed to be a widow before she had even been a bride, and say, 'Protect her, at least. At least save Judith.' A child yet whose child's vouchsafed instinct could make that reply which the mature wisdom of his elders apparently could not make: 'Protect her? From whom and from what? He has already given them life: he does not need to harm them further. It is from themselves that they need protection.' "

It should have been later than it was; it should have been late, yet the yellow slashes of mote-palpitant sunlight were latticed no higher up the impalpable wall of gloom which separated them; the sun seemed hardly to have moved. It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity—horror or pleasure or amazement—depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale. "Yes. I was born too late. I was a child who was to remember those three faces (and his, too) as seen for the first time in the

carriage on that first Sunday morning when this town finally realised that he had turned the road from Sutpen's Hundred in to the church into a race track. I was three then, and doubtless I had seen them before; I must have. But I do not remember it. I do not even remember ever having seen Ellen before that Sunday. It was as though the sister whom I had never laid eyes on, who before I was born had vanished into the stronghold of an ogre or a djinn, was now to return through a dispensation of one day only, to the world which she had quitted, and I a child of three, waked early for the occasion, dressed and curled as if for Christmas, for an occasion more serious than Christmas even, since now and at last this ogre or djinn had agreed for the sake of the wife and the children to come to church, to permit them at least to approach the vicinity of salvation, to at least give Ellen one chance to struggle with him for those children's souls on a battleground where she could be supported not only by Heaven but by her own family and people of her own kind; yes, even for the moment submitting himself to redemption, or lacking that, at least chivalrous for the instant even though still unregenerate. That is what I expected. This is what I saw as I stood there before the church between papa and our aunt and waited for the carriage to arrive from the twelve mile drive. And though I must have seen Ellen and the children before this, this is the vision of my first sight of them which I shall carry to my grave: a glimpse like the forefront of a tornado, of the carriage and Ellen's high white face within it and the two replicas of her face in miniature flanking her, and on the front seat the face and teeth of the wild negro who was driving, and he, his face exactly like the negro's save for the teeth (this because of his beard, doubtless)—all in a thunder and a fury of wildeyed horses and of galloping and dust.

“Oh, there were plenty of them to abet him, assist him, make a race of it; ten o'clock on Sunday morning, the carriage racing on two wheels up to the very door to the church with that wild negro in his christian clothes looking exactly like a performing tiger in a lined duster and a top hat, and Ellen with no drop of blood in her face, holding those two children who were not crying and who did not need to be held, who sat on either side of her perfectly still too, with in their faces that infantile enormity which we did not then quite comprehend. Oh yes, there were plenty to aid and abet him; even he could not have held a horse race without someone to race against. Because it was not even public opinion that stopped him, not even the men who might have had wives and children in carriages to be ridden down and into ditches: it was the minister himself, speaking in the name of the women of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County. So he quit coming to church himself; now it would be just Ellen and the children in the carriage on Sunday morning, so we knew now that at least there would be no betting now, since no one could say if it was an actual race or not, since now, with her face absent, it was only the wild negro's perfectly inscrutable one with the teeth glinting a little, so that now we could never know if it were a race or a runaway, and if there was a triumph, it was on the face twelve miles back there at Sutpen's Hundred, which did not even require to see or be present. It was the negro now, who in the act of passing another carriage spoke to that team too as well as to his own—something without words, not needing words probably, in that tongue in which they slept in the mud of that swamp and brought here out of whatever dark swamp he had found them in and brought them here:—the dust, the thunder, the carriage whirling up to the church door while women and children scattered and screamed before it and men caught at the bridles of the other team. And the negro would lead

Ellen and the children out at the door and take the carriage on around to the hitching grove and beat the horses for running away; there was even a fool who tried to interfere once whereupon the negro turned upon him with the stick lifted and his teeth showing a little and said, 'Marster say; I do. You tell Marster.'

"Yes. From them; from themselves. And this time it was not even the minister. It was Ellen. Our aunt and papa were talking and I came in and my aunt said 'Go out and play though even if I could not have heard through the door at all, I could have repeated the conversation for them: 'Your daughter, your own daughter' my aunt said; and papa: 'Yes. She is my daughter. When she wants me to interfere she will tell me so herself'. Because that Sunday when Ellen and the children came out of the front door, it was not the carriage waiting, it was Ellen's phaeton with the old gentle mare which she drove and the stableboy that he had bought instead of the wild negro. And Judith looked once at the phaeton and realised what it meant and began to scream, screaming and kicking while they carried her back into the house and put her to bed. No, he was not present. Nor do I claim a lurking triumphant face behind a window curtain. Probably he would have been as amazed as we were since we would all realise now that we were faced by more than a child's tantrum or even hysteria: that his face had been in that carriage all the time; that it had been Judith, a girl of six, who had instigated and authorised that negro to make the team run away. Not Henry, mind; not the boy, which would have been outrageous enough; but Judith, the girl. As soon as papa and I entered those gates that afternoon and began to go up the drive toward the house, I could feel it. It was as though somewhere in that Sunday afternoon's quiet and peace the screams of that child still existed, lingered, not as sound now but as something for the skin to hear, the hair on the head to hear. But I did not ask at once. I was just four then; sat in the buggy beside papa as I had stood between him and our aunt before the church on that first Sunday when I had been dressed to come and see my sister and my nephew and my niece for the first time, looking at the house (I had been inside it before too, of course, but even when I saw it for the first time that I could remember I seemed already to know how it was going to look just as I seemed to know how Ellen and Judith and Henry would look before I saw them for the time which I always remember as being the first). No, not asking even then, but just looking at that huge quiet house, saying 'What room is Judith sick in, papa?' with that quiet aptitude of a child for accepting the inexplicable, though I now know that even then I was wondering what Judith saw when she came out the door and found the phaeton instead of the carriage, the tame stableboy instead of the wild man; what she had seen in that phaeton which looked so innocent to the rest of us—or worse, what she had missed when she saw the phaeton and began to scream. Yes, a still hot quiet Sunday afternoon like this afternoon; I remember yet the utter quiet of that house when we went out and from which I knew at once that he was absent without knowing that he would now be in the scuppernong arbor drinking with Wash Jones. I only knew, as soon as papa and I crossed the threshold, that he was not there: as though with some almost omniscient conviction (the same instinctive knowledge which enabled me to tell Ellen that it was not from him that Judith would need protection) knowing that he did not need to stay and observe his triumph—and that, in comparison with what was to be, this one was a mere trivial business event beneath our notice too. Yes, that quiet darkened room with the blinds closed and a negro woman sitting beside the bed with a fan and Judith's white face on the pillow beneath

camphor cloth, asleep as I supposed then: possibly it was sleep, or would be called sleep: and Ellen's face white and calm and papa said 'Go out and find Henry and ask him to play with you, Rosa' and so I stood just outside that quiet door in that quiet upper hall because I was afraid to go away even from it because I could hear the sabbath afternoon quiet of that house louder than thunder, louder than laughing even with triumph.

" 'Think of the children,' papa said.

" 'Think?' Ellen said. 'What else do I do? What else do I lie awake at night and do but think of them?' Neither papa nor Ellen said Come back home. No: This occurred before it became fashionable to repair your mistakes by turning your back on them and running. It was just the two quiet voices beyond that blank door which might have been discussing something printed in a magazine; and I, a child standing close beside that door because I was afraid to be there but more afraid to leave it, standing motionless beside that door as though trying to make myself blend with the dark wood and become invisible, like a chameleon, listening to the living spirit, presence, of that house, since some of Ellen's life and breath had now gone into it as well as his, breathing away in a long neutral sound of victory and despair, of triumph and terror too.

" 'Do you love this——' papa said.

" 'Papa,' Ellen said. That was all. But I could see her face then as clearly as papa could have, with that same expression which it had worn in the carriage on that first Sunday and the others. Then a servant came and said our buggy was ready.

" 'Yes. From themselves. Not from him, not from anybody, just as nobody could have saved them, even himself. Because he now showed us why that triumph had been beneath his notice. He showed Ellen, that is: not I. I was not there; it was six years now, during which I had scarcely seen him. Our aunt was gone now and I was keeping house for papa. Perhaps once a year papa and I would go out there and have dinner, and maybe four times a year Ellen and the children would come in and spend the day with us. Not he; that I know of, he never entered this house again after he and Ellen married. I was young then; I was even young enough to believe that this was due to some stubborn coal of conscience, if not remorse, even in him. But I know better now. I know now that it was simply because since papa had given him respectability through a wife there was nothing else he could want from papa and so not even sheer gratitude, let alone appearances, could force him to forego his own pleasure to the extent of taking a family meal with his wife's people. So I saw little of them. I did not have time now to play, even if I had ever had any inclination. I had never learned how and I saw no reason to try to learn now even if I had had the time.

" 'So it was six years now, though it was actually no secret to Ellen since it had apparently been going on ever since he drove the last nail in the house, the only difference between now and the time of his bachelorhood being that now they would hitch the teams and saddle horses and mules in the grove beyond the stable and so come up across the pasture unseen from the house. Because there were plenty of them still; it was as if God or the devil had taken advantage of his very vices in order to supply witnesses to the discharge of our curse not only from among gentlefolks, our own kind, but from the very scum and riffraff who could not have approached the house itself under any other circumstances, not even from the rear. Yes, Ellen and those two children alone in that house twelve miles from town, and down there in the stable a hollow square of faces in the lantern light, the white faces on three

sides, the black ones on the fourth, and in the center two of his wild negroes fighting, naked, fighting not like white men fight, with rules and weapons, but like negroes fight to hurt or another quick and bad. Ellen knew that, or thought she did; that was not it. She accepted the —not reconciled: accepted—as though there is a breathing-point in outrage where you can accept it almost with gratitude since you can say to yourself, *Thank God this is all; at least now know all of it*—thinking that, clinging still to that when she ran into the stable that night while the very men who had stolen into it from the rear fell back away from her with at least some grain of decency, and Ellen seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another's eyes as if their skins should not only have been the same color but should have been covered with fur too. Yes. It seems that on certain occasions, perhaps at the end of the evening, the spectacle, as a grand finale or perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, he would enter the ring with one of the negroes himself. Yes. That is what Ellen saw: her husband and the father of her children standing there naked and panting and bloody to the waist and the negro just fallen evidently, lying at his feet and bloody too save that on the negro it merely looked like grease or sweat—Ellen running down the hill from the house, bareheaded, in time to hear the sound, the screaming, hearing while she still ran in the darkness and before the spectators knew that she was there, hearing it even before it occurred to one spectator to say, 'It's a horse' then 'It's a woman' then 'My God, it's a child'—ran in, and the spectators falling back to permit her to see Henry plunging out from among the negroes who had been holding him, screaming and vomiting—no pausing, not even looking at the faces which shrank back away from her as she knelt in the stable filth to raise Henry and not looking at Henry either but up at *him* as he stood there with even his teeth showing beneath his beard now and another negro wiping the blood from his body with a tow-sack. 'I know you will excuse us, gentlemen,' Ellen said. But they were already departing, nigger and white, slinking out again as they had slunk in, and Ellen not watching them now either but kneeling in the dirt while Henry clung to her, crying, and *him* standing there yet while a third nigger prodded his shirt or coat at him as though the coat were a stick and he a caged snake. 'Where is Judith, Thomas?' Ellen said.

" 'Judith?' he said. Oh, he was not lying; his own triumph had outrun him; he had builded even better in evil than even he could have hoped. 'Judith? Isn't she in bed?'

" 'Dont lie to me, Thomas,' Ellen said. 'I can understand your bringing Henry here to see this, wanting Henry to see this; I will try to understand it; yes, I will make myself try to understand it. But not Judith, Thomas. Not my baby girl, Thomas.'

" 'I dont expect you to understand it,' he said. 'Because you are a woman. But I didn't bring Judith down here. I would not bring her down here. I dont expect you to believe that. But I swear to it.'

" 'I wish I could believe you,' Ellen said. 'I want to believe you.' Then she began to call 'Judith!' she called in a voice calm and sweet and filled with despair: 'Judith honey! Time to come to bed.'

"But I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time—once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her—looking down through the square entrance to the loft

It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father's cigar as they sat on the front gallery after supper until it would be time for Quentin to start while in the deep shaggy lawn below the veranda the fireflies blew and drifted in so random—the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr Compson's letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin's sitting-room at Harvard. It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly through which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833 (and, on Sundays, heard even one of the original three bells in the same steeple where descendants of the same pigeons strutted and crooned or wheeled in short courses resembling soft fluid paint-smears on the sooty summer sky);—a Sunday morning in June with the bells ringing peaceful and peremptory and a little cacophonous—the denominations in concord though not in tune—and the ladies and children, and house negroes to carry the parasols and flywhisks, and even a few men (the ladies moving in hoops among the miniature broadcloth of little boys and the pantalettes of little girls, in the skirts of the time when ladies did not walk but floated) when the other men sitting with their feet on the railing of the Holston House gallery looked up, and there the stranger was. He was already halfway across the square when they saw him, on a big hard-riden roan horse, man and beast looking as though they had been created out of thin air and set down in the bright summer sabbath sunshine in the middle of a tired foxtrot—face and horse that none of them had ever seen before, name that none of them had ever heard, and origin and purpose which some of them were never to learn. So that in the next four weeks (Jefferson was a village then: the Holston House, the courthouse, six stores, a blacksmith and a livery stable, a saloon frequented by drovers and peddlers, three churches and perhaps thirty residences) the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen.*

That was all that the town was to know about him for almost a month. He had apparently come into town from the south—a man of about twenty-five as the town learned later because at the time his age could not have been guessed because at that time he looked like a man who had been sick. Not like a man who had been peacefully ill in bed and had recovered to move with a sort of diffident and tentative amazement in a world which he had believed himself on the point of surrendering, but like a man who had been through some solitary furnace experience which was more than just fever, like an explorer say, who not only had to face the normal hardship of the pursuit which he chose but was overtaken by the added and unforeseen handicap of the fever also and fought through it at enormous cost not so much physical as mental, alone and unaided and not through blind instinctive will to endure and survive but to gain and keep to enjoy it the material prize for which he accepted the original gambit. A man with a big frame but gaunt now almost to emaciation, with a short reddish beard which resembled a disguise and above which his pale eyes had a quality at once visionary and alert, ruthless and reposed in a face whose flesh had the appearance of pottery of having been colored by that oven's fever either of soul or environment, deeper than su-

alone beneath a dead impervious surface as of glazed clay. That was what they saw, though it was years before the town learned that that was all which he possessed at the time—the strong spent horse and the clothes on his back and a small saddlebag scarcely large enough to contain the spare linen and the razors, and the two pistols of which Miss Goldfield told Quentin, with the butts worn smooth as pickhandles and which he used with the precision of knitting needles; later Quentin's grandfather saw him ride at a canter around a sapling twenty feet and put both bullets into a playing card fastened to the tree. He had a room at the Holston House but he carried the key with him and each morning he fed and saddled the horse and rode away before daylight, where to the town likewise failed to learn, probably due to the fact that he gave the pistol demonstration on the third day after his arrival. So they had to depend on inquiry to find out what they could about him, which would of necessity be at night, at the supper table in the Holston House dining room or in the lounge which he would have to cross to gain his room and lock the door again, which he would do as soon as he finished eating. The bar opened into the lounge too, and that would or should have been the place to accost him and even inquire, except for the fact that he did not use the bar. He did not drink at all, he told them. He did not say that he used to drink and had quit, nor that he had never used alcohol. He just said that he would not care for a drink; it was years later before even Quentin's grandfather (he was a young man too then; it would be years yet before he would become General Compson) learned that the reason Sutpen did not drink was that he did not have the money with which to pay his share or return the courtesy; it was General Compson who first realised that at this time Sutpen lacked not only the money to spend for drink and conviviality, but the time and inclination as well: that he was at this time completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience, his conviction gained from whatever that recent experience had been—that fever mental or physical—of a need for haste, of time fleeing beneath him, which was to drive him for the next five years—General Compson computed it, roughly until about nine months before his son was born.

So they would catch him, run him to earth, in the lounge between the supper table and his locked door to give him the opportunity to tell them who he was and where he came from and what he was up to, whereupon he would move gradually and steadily until his back came in contact with something—a post or a wall—and then stand there and tell them nothing whatever as pleasantly and courteously as a hotel clerk. It was the Chickasaw Indian agent with or through whom he dealt and so it was not until he waked the County Recorder the Saturday night with the deed, patent, to the land and the gold Spanish coin, that the town learned that he now owned a hundred square miles of some of the best virgin bottom land in the country, though even that knowledge came too late because Sutpen himself was gone where to again they did not know. But he owned land among them now and some of them began to suspect what General Compson apparently knew: that the Spanish coin with which he had paid to have his patent recorded was the last one of any kind which he possessed. So they were certain now that he had departed to get more; there were several who even anticipated in believing (and even in saying aloud, now that he was not present) what Sutpen's future and then unborn sister-in-law was to tell Quentin almost eighty years later that he had found some unique and practical way of hiding loot and that he had returned to the cache to replenish his pockets, even if he had not actually ridden with the two pistols back to the River and the steamboats full of gamblers and cotton- and slavedealers.

replenish the cache. At least some of them were telling one another that when two months later he returned, again without warning and accompanied this time by the covered wagon with a negro driving it and on the seat with the negro a small, alertly resigned man with a grim, harried Latin face, in a frock coat and a flowered waistcoat and a hat which would have created no furore on a Paris boulevard, all of which he was to wear constantly for the next two years—the sombrely theatric clothing and the expression of fatalistic and amazed determination—while his white client and the negro crew which he was to advise though not direct went stark naked save for a coating of dried mud. This was the French architect. Year later the town learned that he had come all the way from Martinique on Sutpen's bare promise and lived for two years on venison cooked over a camp fire, in an unfloored tent made of the wagon hood, before he so much as saw any color or shape of pay. And until he passed through town on his way back to New Orleans two years later, he was not even to see Jefferson again; he would not come, or Sutpen would not bring him, to town even on the few occasions when Sutpen would be seen there, and he did not have much chance to look at Jefferson on that first day because the wagon did not stop. Apparently it was only by sheer geographical hap that Sutpen passed through town at all, pausing only long enough for someone (not General Compson) to look beneath the wagon hood and into a black tunnel filled with still eyeballs and smelling like a wolfden.

But the legend of Sutpen's wild negroes was not to begin at once, because the wagon went on as though even the wood and iron which composed it, as well as the mules which drew it, had become imbued by sheer association with him with that quality of gaunt and tireless driving, that conviction for haste and of fleeing time; later Sutpen told Quentin's grandfather that on that afternoon when the wagon passed through Jefferson they had been without food since the previous night and that he was trying to reach Sutpen's Hundred and the river bottom to try to kill a deer before dark, so he and the architect and the negroes would not have to spend another night without food. So the legend of the wild men came gradually back to town, brought by the men who would ride out to watch what was going on, who began to tell how Sutpen would take stand beside a game trail with the pistols and send the negroes to drive the swamp like a pack of hounds; it was they who told how during that first summer and fall the negroes did not even have (or did not use) blankets to sleep in, even before the coon-hunter Akers claimed to have walked one of them out of the absolute mud like a sleeping alligator and screamed just in time. The negroes could speak no English yet and doubtless there were more than Akers who did not know that the language in which they and Sutpen communicated was a sort of French and not some dark and fatal tongue of their own.

There were many more than Akers, though the others were responsible citizens and landowners and so did not have to lurk about the camp at night. In fact, as Miss Coldfield told Quentin, they would make up parties to meet at the Holston House and go off on horseback, often carrying lunch. Sutpen had built a brick kiln and he had set up the saw and planer which he had brought in the wagon—a capstan with a long sapling walking-beam, with the wagon team and the negroes in shifts and himself too when necessary, when the machinery slowed, hitched to it—as if the negroes actually were wild men; as General Compson told his son, Quentin's father, while the negroes were working Sutpen never raised his voice at them, that instead he led them, caught them at the psychological instant by example, by some ascendancy of forbearance rather than by brute fear. Without dismounting

(usually Sutpen did not even greet them with as much as a nod, apparently as unaware of their presence as if they had been idle shades) they would sit in a curious quiet clump and though for mutual protection and watch his mansion rise, carried plank by plank and brick by brick out of the swamp where the clay and timber waited—the bearded white man and the twenty black ones and all stark naked beneath the croaching and pervading mud. Being men, these spectators did not realise that the garments which Sutpen had worn when he first rode into Jefferson were the only ones in which they had ever seen him, and few of the women in the county had seen him at all yet. Otherwise, some of them would have anticipated Miss Coldfield in this too: in divining that he was saving his clothes, since decorum even if not elegance of appearance would be the only weapon (or rather, ladder) with which he could conduct the last assault upon what Miss Coldfield and perhaps others believed to be respectability—that respectability which, according to General Compson, consisted in Sutpen's secret mind of a great deal more than the mere acquisition of a chatelaine for his house. So he and the twenty negroes worked together, plastered over with mud against the mosquitoes and, as Miss Coldfield told Quentin, distinguishable one from another by his beard and eyes alone and only the architect resembling a human creature because of the French clothes which he wore constantly with a sort of invincible fatality until the day after the house was completed save for the windowglass and the ironware which they could not make by hand and the architect departed—working in the sun and heat of summer and the mud and ice of winter, with quiet and unflagging fury.

It took him two years, he and his crew of imported slaves which his adopted fellow citizens still looked on as being a good deal more deadly than any beast he could have started and slain in that country. They worked from sunup to sundown while parties of horsemen rode up and sat their horses quietly and watched, and the architect in his formal coat and his Paris hat and his expression of grim and embittered amazement lurked about the environs of the scene with his air something between a casual and bitterly disinterested spectator and a condemned and conscientious ghost—amazement, General Compson said, not at the others and what they were doing so much as at himself, at the inexplicable and incredible fact of his own presence. But he was a good architect; Quentin knew the house, twelve miles from Jefferson, in its grove of cedar and oak, seventy-five years after it was finished. And not only an architect, General Compson said, but an artist since only an artist could have borne those two years in order to build a house which he doubtless not only expected but firmly intended never to see again. Not, General Compson said, the hardship to sense and the outrage to sensibility of the two years' sojourn, but Sutpen: that only an artist could have borne Sutpen's ruthlessness and hurry and still manage to curb the dream of grim and castlelike magnificence at which Sutpen obviously aimed, since the place as Sutpen planned it would have been almost as large as Jefferson itself at the time; that the little grim harried foreigner had singlehanded given battle to and vanquished Sutpen's fierce and overweening vanity or desire for magnificence or for vindication or whatever it was (even General Compson did not know yet) and so created of Sutpen's very defeat the victory which, in conquering, Sutpen himself would have failed to gain.

So it was finished then, down to the last plank and brick and wooden pin which they could make themselves. Unpainted and unfurnished, without a pane of glass or a doorknob or hinge in it, twelve miles from town and almost that far from any neighbor, it stood for three years

more surrounded by its formal gardens and promenades, its slave quarters and stables and smokehouses; wild turkey ranged within a mile of the house and deer came light and colored like smoke and left delicate prints in the formal beds where there would be no flowers for four years yet. Now there began a period, a phase, during which the town and the county watched him with more puzzlement yet. Perhaps it was because the next step toward the secret end which General Compson claimed to have known but which the town and the county comprehended but dimly or not at all, now required patience or passive time instead of that driving fury to which he had accustomed them; now it was the women who first suspected what he wanted, what the next step would be. None of the men, certainly not those who knew him well enough to call him by name, suspected that he wanted a wife. Doubtless there were some of them, husbands and bachelors both, who not only would have refused to entertain the idea but would even have protested against it, because for the next three years he led what must have been to them a perfect existence. He lived out there, eight miles from any neighbor, in masculine solitude in what might be called the halfacre gunroom of a baronial splendor. He lived in the spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself, whose threshold no woman had so much as seen, without any feminised softness of window pane or door or mattress; where there was not only no woman to object if he should elect to have his dogs in to sleep on the pallet bed with him, he did not even need dogs to kill the game which left footprints within sight of the kitchen door but hunted it instead with human beings who belonged to him body and soul and of whom it was believed (or said) that they could creep up to a bedded buck and cut its throat before it could move.

It was at this time that he began to invite the parties of men of which Miss Coldfield took Quentin, out to Sutpen's Hundred to camp in blankets in the naked rooms of his embryonic formal opulence; they hunted, and at night played cards and drank, and on occasion he doubtless pitted his negroes against one another and perhaps even at this time participated now and then himself—that spectacle which, according to Miss Coldfield, his son was unable to bear the sight of while his daughter looked on unmoved. Sutpen drank himself now though there were probably others beside Quentin's grandfather who remarked that he drank very sparingly save when he himself had managed to supply some of the liquor. His guests would bring whiskey out with them but he drank of this with a sort of sparing calculation and though keeping mentally, General Compson said, a sort of balance of spiritual solvency between the amount of whiskey he accepted and the amount of running meat which he supplied to the guns.

He lived like that for three years. He now had a plantation; inside of two years he had dragged house and gardens out of virgin swamp, and plowed and planted his land with seed cotton which General Compson loaned him. Then he seemed to quit. He seemed to just stop down in the middle of what he had almost finished, and to remain so for three years during which he did not even appear to intend or want anything more. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that the men in the county came to believe that the life he now led had been his aim all the time; it was General Compson, who seemed to have known him well enough to offer to lend him seed cotton for his start, who knew any better, to whom Sutpen ever told anything about his past. It was General Compson who knew first about the Spanish coin being his last one, as it was Compson (so the town learned later) who offered to lend Sutpen the

money to finish and furnish his house, and was refused. So doubtless General Compson was the first man in the county to tell himself that Sutpen did not need to borrow money with which to complete the house, supply what it yet lacked, because he intended to marry it. Not the first person: the first man, since, according to what Miss Coldfield told Quentin seventy-five years later, the women in the county had been telling one another and their husbands as well that Sutpen did not intend to quit there, that he had already gone to too much trouble, gone through too much privation and hardship, to settle down and live exactly as he had lived while the house was being built save that now he had a roof to sleep under in place of an unfloored wagon hood. Probably the women had already cast about among the families of the men who might now be called his friends, for that prospective bride whose dowry might complete the shape and substance of that respectability Miss Coldfield anyway believed to be his aim. So when, at the expiration of this second phase, three years after the house was finished and the architect departed, and again on Sunday morning and again without warning the town saw him cross the square, on foot now but in the same garments in which he had ridden into town five years ago and which no one had seen since (he or one of the negroes had ironed the coat with heated bricks, General Compson told Quentin's father) and enter the Methodist church, only some of the men were surprised. The women merely said that he had exhausted the possibilities of the families of the men with whom he had hunted and gambled and that he had now come to town to find a wife exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock or slaves. But when they comprehended whom it was that he had apparently come to town and into church to invest with his choice, the assurance of the women became one with the men's surprise, and then even more than that: amazement.

Because the town now believed that it knew him. For two years it had watched him as with that grim and unflagging fury he had erected that shell of a house and laid out his fields, the for three years he had remained completely static, as if he were run by electricity and someone had come along and removed, dismantled the wiring or the dynamo, while the women of the county gradually convinced it that he was merely waiting to find a wife with a dowry to finish it with. So that when he entered the Methodist church that Sunday morning in his ironed coat, there were men as well as women who believed that they had only to look around the congregation in order to anticipate the direction his feet would take him, until they became aware that he had apparently marked down Miss Coldfield's father with the same cold and ruthless deliberation with which he had probably marked down the French architect. They watched in shocked amazement while he laid deliberate siege to the one man in the town with whom he could have had nothing in common, least of all, money—a man who obviously could do nothing under the sun for him save give him credit at a little cross-roads store or cast a vote in his favor if he should ever seek ordination as a Methodist minister—a Methodist steward, a merchant not only of modest position and circumstances but who already had a wife and family of his own, let alone a dependent mother and sisters to support out of the proceeds of a business which he had brought to Jefferson ten years ago in a single wagon—a man with a name for absolute and undeviating and even puritanical uprightness in a country and time of lawless opportunity, who neither drank nor gambled nor even hunted. In their surprise they forgot that Mr Coldfield had a marriageable daughter. They did not consider the daughter at all. They did not think of love in connection with Sutpen. They thought of ruthlessness rather than justice and of fear rather than respect, but

not of pity or love: besides being too lost in amazed speculation as to just how Sutpen intended or could contrive to use Mr Coldfield to further whatever secret ends he still had. They were never to know: even Miss Rosa Coldfield did not. Because from that day there were no more hunting parties out at Sutpen's Hundred, and when they saw him now it would be in town. But not loafing, idling. The men who had slept and matched glasses with him under his roof (some of them had even come to call him Sutpen without the formal Mister) watched him pass along the street before the Holston House with a single formal gesture: he tipped his hat and go on and enter Mr Coldfield's store, and that was all.

"Then one day he quitted Jefferson for the second time," Mr Compson told Quentin. "The town should have been accustomed to that by now. Nevertheless, his position had subtly changed, as you will see by the town's reaction to this second return. Because when he came back this time, he was in a sense a public enemy. Perhaps this was because of what he brought back with him this time: the material he brought back this time, as compared to the simple wagon load of wild niggers which he had brought back before. But I don't think so. That is, I think it was a little more involved than the sheer value of his chandeliers and mahogany and rugs. I think that the affront was born of the town's realization that he was getting it involved with himself; that whatever the felony which produced the mahogany and crystal, he was forcing the town to compound it. Heretofore, until that Sunday when he came to church, if he had misused or injured anybody, it was only old Ikkemotubbe, from whom he got his land—a matter between his conscience and Uncle Sam and God. But now his position had changed, because when, about three months after he departed, four wagons left Jefferson to go to the River and meet him, it was known that Mr Coldfield was the man who hired and dispatched them. They were big wagons, drawn by oxen, and when they returned the town looked at them and knew, no matter what they might have contained, that Mr Coldfield could not have mortgaged everything that he owned for enough to fill them; doubtless the time there were more men than women even who pictured him during this absence with a handkerchief over his face and the two pistol barrels glinting beneath the candelabra of the steamboat's saloon, even if no worse: if not something performed in the lurking dark of the muddy landing and with a knife from behind. They saw him pass, on the roan horse beside his four wagons; it seems that even the ones who had eaten his food and shot his game and even called him 'Sutpen' without the 'Mister', didn't accost him now. They just waited while reports and rumors came back to town of how he and his now somewhat tamed negroes had installed the windows and doors and the spits and pots in the kitchen and the crystal chandeliers in the parlors and the furniture and the curtains and the rugs; it was that same Akers who had blundered onto the mudcoughed negro five years ago who came, a little wild-eyed and considerably slack-mouthed, into the Holston House bar one evening and said, 'Boys, this time he stole the whole durn steamboat!'

"So at last civic virtue came to a boil. One day and with the sheriff of the county among them, a party of eight or ten took the road out to Sutpen's Hundred. They did not go all the way because about six miles from town they met Sutpen himself. He was riding the roan horse, in the frock coat and the beaver hat which they knew and with his legs wrapped in a piece of tarpaulin; he had a portmanteau on his pommel and he was carrying a small wove basket on his arm. He stopped the roan (it was April then, and the road was still a quagmir) and sat there in his splashed tarpaulin and looked from one face to the next; your grandfath-

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