



Andersonville

By MacKinlay Kantor

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"The greatest of our Civil War novels."—*The New York Times*

The 1955 Pulitzer Prize-winning story of the Andersonville Fortress and its use as a concentration camp-like prison by the South during the Civil War.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

“The greatest of our Civil War novels.” —*The New York Times*

“No one who reads it will ever forget.” —*Christian Science Monitor*

“A heartfelt novel...written with truth and power.” —*Atlantic Monthly*

“The best Civil War novel I have ever read, without question.” —Bruce Catton, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, *Chicago Tribune*

“Will give Civil War buffs their greatest hour since *Gone With the Wind*.” —*Time*

“A great book, perhaps the greatest of all Civil War novels.” —*Chicago Sun-Times*

About the Author

MacKINLAY KANTOR (1904-1977) was the distinguished author of more than thirty books and numerous screenplays.

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Chart showing approximate location of various points and areas at Andersonville.

Visit <http://bit.ly/andersonvillemap> for a larger version of this map.

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I

Sometimes there was a compulsion which drew Ira Claffey from his plantation and sent him to walk the forest. It came upon him at eight o'clock on this morning of October twenty-third; he responded, he yielded, he climbed over the snake fence at the boundary of his sweet potato field and went away among the pines.

Ira Claffey had employed no overseer since the first year of the war, and had risen early this morning to direct his hands in the potato patch. Nowadays there were only seven and one-half hands on the place, house and field, out of a total Negro population of twelve souls; the other four were an infant at the breast and three capering children of shirt-tail size.

Jem and Coffee he ordered to the digging, and made certain that they were thorough in turning up the harvest and yet gentle in lifting the potatoes. Nothing annoyed Ira Claffey like storing a good thirty-five bushels in a single mound and then losing half of them through speedy decay.

In such a manner, he thought, have some of our best elements and institutions perished. One bruise, one carelessness, and rot begins. Decay is a secret but hastening act in darkness; then one opens up the pine bark

and pine straw—or shall we say, the Senate?—and observes a visible wastage and smell, a wet and horrid mouldering of the potatoes. Or shall we say, of the men?

In pursuit of his own husbandry on this day, Ira carried a budding knife in his belt. While musing in bed the night before, he had been touched with ambition: he would bud a George the Fourth peach upon a Duane's Purple plum.

Veronica was not yet asleep, but reading her Bible by candlelight beside him. He told her about it.

But, Ira, does not the Duane's Purple ripen too soon? Aren't those the trees just on the other side of the magnolias?

No, no, my dear. Those are Prince's Yellow Gage. The Duane's Purple matures in keeping with the George Fourths. I'd warrant you about the second week of July. Say about the tenth. I should love to see that skin. Such a fine red cheek on the George Fourths, and maybe dotted with that lilac bloom and yellow specks—

But she was not hearing him, she was weeping. He turned to watch her; he sighed, he put out one big hand and touched the thick gray-yellow braid which weighted on her white-frilled shoulder. It was either Moses or Sutherland whom she considered now. Dully he wondered which one.

She said, on receiving the communication of his thought, though he had said nothing— She spoke Suthy's name.

Oh, said Ira. I said nothing to make you think—

The Prince's Yellow Gage. He fancied them so. When they were still green he'd hide them in the little waist he wore. Many's the time I gave him a belting—

She sobbed a while longer, and he stared into the gloom beyond the bed curtains, and did his best to forget Suthy. Suthy was the eldest. Sixteenth Georgia. It was away up at the North, at a place no one had ever heard of before, a place called Gettysburg.

In recent awareness of bereavement had lain the germ of retreat and restlessness, perhaps; but sometimes Ira spirited himself off into the woods when he was fleeing from no sadness or perplexity. He had gone like that since he could first remember. Oh, pines were taller forty-five years ago . . . when he was only three feet tall, the easy nodding grace of their foliage was reared out of all proportion, thirty times his stature. And forests were wilder, forty-five years ago, over in Liberty County, and he went armed with a wooden gun which old Jehu had carved and painted as a Christmas gift for him. It had a real lock, a real flint; it snapped and the sparks flew. Ira Claffey slew brigades of redcoats with this weapon; he went as commander of a force of small blacks; he was their general.

Hi, them's British, Mastah Iry.

Where?

Yonder in them 'simmons!

Take them on the flank.

Hi, what you say we do, Mastah?

He wasn't quite sure what he wanted them to do. Something about the flank. His Uncle Sutherland talked

about a flank attack in some wild distant spot known as the Carolinas. . . . Of course this was later on, perhaps only forty years ago, when Ira Claffey was ten. . . .

Charge those redcoats! They advanced upon the persimmon brake in full cry and leaping; and once there came terror when a doe soared out of the thicket directly in their faces, and all the little darkies scattered like quail, and Ira came near to legging it after them.

In similar shades he had been Francis Marion, and surely his own boys had scuttled here in identical pursuits. It was a good place to be, treading alone on the clay-paved path curving its way to the closest branch of Sweetwater Creek. God walked ahead and behind and with him, near, powerful, silent . . . *words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

He had budded the peach upon the plum as he wished to do, though he feared that it was a trifle too late in the season for success. He budded each of the two selected trees five times, and then went back to the potato field. Coffee and Jem were doing well enough, but they were plaguèd slow; Ira had been emphatic about the tenderness he required of them, and they handled the big sulphur-colored Brimstones as if they were eggs. Well, he thought, I shan't speed them on this. Better forty bushels well-dug and well-stored than eighty bushels bumped and scratched and ready to spoil as soon as they're covered.

Keep on with it until I return, and mind about no bruising. I shall look up some pine straw—where it's thickest and easy to scoop—and we'll fetch the cart after the noonning.

Yassah.

Frost had not yet killed the vines. Some planters always waited for a killing frost before they dug, but Ira was certain that the crop kept better if dug immediately before the frost struck.

He was newly come into his fifty-first year; the natal day had been observed on October sixth. Black Naomi chuckled mysteriously in the kitchen; there had been much talk about, Mistess, can I please speak with you a minute *alone*? He had to pretend that he was blind and deaf, and owned no suspicion that delicate and hard-to-come-by substances were being lavished in his honor. The fragrant Lady Baltimore cake appeared in time, borne by Ira Claffey's daughter because she would not trust the wenches with this treasure.

There they sat, the three surviving Claffeys left at home, sipping their roast-grain coffee and speaking words in praise of the cake, and now Ira had lived for half a century . . . fifty years stuffed with woe and work and dreams and peril. He sought to dwell in recollection only on the benefits accruing. With Veronica and Lucy he tried to keep his imaginings away from far-off roads where horses and men were in tragic operation.

The best I've tasted since the Mexican War.

Poppy, you always say that. About everything.

Come, come, Lucy. Do I indeed?

You do, agreed his wife, and gave him her wan smile above the home-dipped candles.

Yes, sir, chimed in Lucy. It's always the best and the worst and the biggest and all such things, but always dated from that old war.

After this night, said Ira, I presume that I should date everything from my fiftieth birthday?

Poppy, love, you don't look even on the outskirts of fifty. Scarcely a shred of gray in your hair.

Well, my dear, I don't have much hair left to me.

That's no certain indication of encroaching age. Is it, Mother? Take Colonel Tollis. I declare, he can't be aged over thirty-one or two, and yet he's got less hair than—

Lucy. Do you consider it ladylike, to discuss baldness so—so intimately?

Well, I declare—

So it had gone; they uttered their little jests and remonstrances; they had their affection; the stringy candles sank and died in chipped gilt candelabra, and in the end Ira Claffey sat alone in his library and treated himself to port. He had tasted no port since the previous winter (there was so little of it left now) and he made a silent gesture and toasted each of his sons in turn as they stared from ambrotype frames beside him. His hand went down and rubbed along his right leg; it caressed his shabby fawn-colored pantaloons above the knotted hole which for years he had bandaged afresh each day. I'd be with you, fifty or no fifty, he tried to tell his sons, reaching to them across uncharted distances and dimensions. I'd be among the muskets if it hadn't been for Monterey. I wonder who that Mexican was! I wonder if he is living still—sorrowing as I am sorrowing, going through repeated and sometimes doleful mimicry. Still able to love, however? Not so frequently? But still able, and most eager at times.

The wine affected Ira Claffey because he drank so little of it in this time of strife and paucity. He thought of Veronica and the fever which came over him sometimes in darkness, the drawing up of her nightdress, the muffled hysteria of their encounter, the shame which she always admitted afterward because she had been taught that carnal enjoyment was lewd and Ira could never persuade her otherwise. He thought of the mistress he had had in Milledgeville when he was in the Legislature, he thought of pretty strumpets he'd known in the brief time when he was a soldier, he thought of the first brown girl he ever lay with at seventeen or thereabouts in age.

How do you countenance such goings-on? You, professedly a religious man—

I suppose each of us must be guilty of certain sins. We'd be less than human if we weren't blemished a bit. And I strive earnestly not to envy, not to grow little snips and slips and buds and seeds of jealousy. I deplore cruelty, and own no avarice—at least none I'm conscious of. But lust—

I'm steeped in that particular brand of iniquity. At least—when I was younger— And now, now, tonight, the night I'm fifty—

Silently he opened the library door and looked across the dark hall. Lucy and her mother were scraping lint at the big table in the crowded parlor; they had a servant helping them, but Lucy was yawning. He felt a fire as he saw that yawn. Soon, then— To bed, to bed! Incestuous sheets, sweet prince? Nay, my Veronica and I lie within the embrace of a mortal primness known as Holy Wedlock.

Thus we contrived eight children, and thus the four small graves within the red rusty fence—the longest no longer than my walking stick— Thus we had four children to grow to full stature—or close to it— Thus we came to another war.

I was a Stephens man from the first, but what possible difference can that make now, to Mr. Stephens or to me?

I was no Secessionist. Quite the contrary. But dress yourselves in gray, Suthy and Badger and Moses, and be off with your shooting-irons. Scrape the raw white fabric, Lucy. Put up the calves-foot jelly for the wounded,

my Veronica. And cry and cry, and read your Bible, and pray again, and cry once more. . . .

Mist had condensed thickly after a chilly night, and Ira walked through it like a swimmer moving erect, walking rapidly though lamely, a man with broad round powerful shoulders, and carrying his head tipped forward as if to resist the weight of the flat-brimmed black hat pulled low on his forehead. His brow was channeled horizontally by four distinct wrinkles like deep narrow scars. His pale eyes shone from a covert of long dark lashes and coffee-colored eyebrows. His nose was insignificant, his wide full-lipped mouth the best feature in a round smooth face. Ira Claffey demonstrated the manner of a keen-eyed hunter who was forever on the watch for birds and expected that a covey would go crackling up and out, only a few steps ahead.

He would have been able to name the week—and possibly the day—of the year; he would have been able to name it by evidence before him if startled quickly awake from a century's repose. The long-leaved pines themselves, their banks of dark green plush in milky distance, with the outer tips of pine needles touched by autumnal tan, and yet this tan was invisible until you came close. Sunflowers, the little susie flowers still blooming spiritedly; sodden cornfields shrunken merciless, every ragged stalk of fodder soaked with mist; sandy, clayey bare spots in yard and gardens standing out silvery—intense spots, never casual, but seeming to have been cleared and stamped recently, and for a special purpose . . . eight o'clock in the morning, as told by his silver watch, with the sun burning low and solid in a cloudless sky but with farthestmost groves still fogged; jack-oaks half green and looking withered and scrofulous; the scrub swamp gums well turned at this date, and some of them burning in artificial pinks; tulip trees half green; some of the buttonwoods verdant as in summer.

The air hung clammy, but still good because it was wild, unprovoked by many men or their machines or structures. Ira heard the squeal of a train whistle (the service was untidy and uncertain on this Southwestern line from Macon to Americus and Albany. Claffey could not have told you with accuracy just how many trains jounced puffing up and down the line each day; at least he knew that the service was sadly confused because of military necessity) and far above the hill and western pines there frothed some woodsmoke as the cars halted at Anderson Station. Nothing much there except a wretched store, several houses, and a pyramid of old sawdust from Yeoman's mill, no longer operating.

...Air good because it was wild, and because deer had run through it, and turkeys also. It was long since the Creeks trotted those easy slopes, but you could still smell them when fall came on. Cold weather was their time, the time of Indian ghosts, and Ira loved to sense them; he loved the ghosts as well as any boy and better than some. More than the Indians, however: air was tangled with sweet-gum and persimmons and nut trees and dry goober vines and thistles. Ira Claffey worshipped vegetation; he understood the small or wide-spread miracles appurtenant to chlorophyll, photosynthesis . . . oh, list to the botanizing, the rub or splitting of cotyledons! . . . Any plant was his love, some were near to being his spiritual mistresses (he remembered making love and crushing infinitesimal purplish flowers while they did it; he and a slave girl, when he was young, when he was very young; but he could never get a white woman to lie with him in grass and blossoms, though he had tried. Ladies wanted beds). More than these affections, too: Ira had an enormous respect for vegetation beyond loving it; yet he was disciplined and sensible, and recognized that weeds must be ripped out, and some trees also.

Here, in the last field at his left hand, once the cotton had flourished . . . dry toughness of the stalks, the long long picking-sacks, the dark hands going like beaks to bite and swallow the cotton. No cotton now, markets were gone. A few good melon vines had volunteered and come running over the ground, squarely over the bottom rail of the fence; and more gourd vines and some pumpkins had volunteered from another quarter, and doubtless cucumbers as well, though Ira Claffey hadn't checked. They interbred as all gourds will. Now their awful progeny rotted amid visible ruins of a cotton planter's hopes. They were not melons, not

pumpkins; they were monsters; not even the hungriest hand would eat them. Children came and kicked them loose and rolled them around. The green worms had come, too, and the green worms worked their especial penetrating assassination: once the air was admitted to these fruit, spoilage was hurried. The bastard product of vines lay exposed where leaves had fallen, like bulbous rotting bodies—skulls, perhaps—and they made an almost visible awfulness of odor. Ah, said Ira Claffey to himself, I didn't realize that this was such a horror. Well, there's no pride in having an old field turned into a sink, even though we have nothing to plant in it. Send Coffee down here post haste with a cart and let him get rid of these nuisances; he can dump them into the swamp—bury them, if necessary. . . . No, Coffee's instructed with the Brimstones, I shan't take him from potato digging, I'll take Jonas from the woodpile and send him instead.

He left the orbs and jellies of noxious cross-breeds behind him thankfully, and turned north on a path which led from northern limits of his own plantation . . . pines cool in their brittle dignity, and a stile to be mounted over. This was a serious obstacle because his right leg could not be made to bend past forty-five degrees at the knee without pain. Something about a quadriceps tendon fastening itself to a femur; Ira did not know; he was no surgeon. He wrinkled his small nose, thinking of surgeons and probes which looked something like knitting needles—uncompanionable needles, to say the least.

Halfway down the northern slope of this ridge was where the stile bothered him; now he lurched on a downward path through land belonging to the McWhorters, the Yeomans, the Biles. Wilderness barely fit for pasture, these eminences were; no one was ever quite certain just where the joining lines ran, and no survey had been made since the earliest times. The McWhorter heirs lived in Americus and did nothing about their woodland except to pay microscopic taxes; the Yeoman place no longer operated as a plantation, with both the young-middle-aged men gone to the army and their wives dwelling with cousins in Tattnall County. The Biles were old, sedentary, retiring—their house stood two miles away, and they lived off their garden-patch with two slovenly house servants to bear them company. Ira Claffey himself had given them meat as a neighborly gift in winter and trusted that some other folks had done the same.

Irvine Yeoman, aged forty-one, had died in the same battle which claimed Sutherland Claffey—that Gettysburg place. For the moment Ira had forgotten.

In speculation on death (even secret half-realized contemplation of the misery) and on the scrawny barrenness which fell over remote holdings like this when war ruled, Ira desired keenly all faith and sustenance which the forest might give. . . . No deer here nowadays; one had not been shot in these woods for years. Raccoons and bobcats and other vermin, the spotted skunks and weasels darting at night on urgent autumnal errands . . . but lean stringy dancing legs of the deer went piercing other thickets. It was a miraculous thing how a deer could be frightened loose and go rising and plunging through tough jagged windfalls from some old hurricane; then you'd go and examine the route where he'd run, and you wouldn't think that a rat could have gotten through there; but the deer had, and the remarkable mechanism of his small hoofs and elastic sinews was even now carrying him at a fool's pace through tighter fences of tumbled roots and pine boughs at the other end of the wilderness.

The Sweetwater branch to be crossed, a fine fair small stream to visit, generous in its treatment of roots of gums and willows which marked its way. Ira went across on the trunk of a tree he'd had his hands fell for that very purpose: to make a bridge where strollers could pass dry-shod. This portion of the valley belonged definitely to the McWhorters; Ira requested and received permission for the tree to be cut. It was a willow, hurt badly by lightning, and no great sacrifice in any event. He thought of kneeling to drink from the clean black water, he knew that this branch of Sweetwater would taste cold and leaf-mouldy, it would be a balm to mouth and tongue and throat and would pour slowly and darkly as if rinsing at a gentle course through his whole big body, into every extremity. He had risen before sunrise and worked long and well, and he needed a drink.

But better to try the spring beyond. Only a short way above the marshy plashy boundaries of the creek there stood clay and brown boulders exposed. . . . Here, he explained once to Lucy when he took her that way— Here is where the fairies live.

What kind of fairies?

Good ones, my dear. They are wet, very tiny, very green—

As big as me, Poppy?

Heavens, no. Miniature fairies of the damp sort, scarcely as big as your finger.

Where do they sleep?

Ah, there's that moss. Where do you think?

Yes, Poppy, I think they use the moss. And for table linen, too. Would they let me drink their water?

Assuredly. That's the reason they keep it running. Here, child, I'll make a cup of my hand. Beneath this rock, so. Now you bend down—take care, don't wet your boots and skirts— That's the way.

She faced him with plump pink face dripping, and said, I saw one, whilst I was drinking.

Where was he?

In the moss.

Alone he squatted now amid kindly memories and held out his hand. The water looked like a sheer fluted icicle. Ira had seen icicles long before, when he went to Washington City in winter. Water drenched his heavy hand, and curled along his wrist and tried to make its way up his sleeve, and he laughed and drew back his hand and shook it. This was the smallest, loveliest spring of several which he knew in these few square miles of domestic woodland. Especially the moss . . . his daughter was too grown-up to dream about fairies; she was twenty; the youth she loved had died of fever in the Yankee prison pen at Camp Douglas, Chicago, the winter before . . . or maybe she did dream secretly about fairies still. She owned a pretty mouth filled with all the young lady chatter and some of the young lady slang. Veronica would say impatiently, I declare, sometimes I believe that youngun has scarcely a wit in her noggin. But both the Claffeys were glad to boast Lucy as their own. She was dainty and valiant, she was skillful and kindly at nursing the sick be they white or black. Sick people followed her with their eyes. She would have made a noble wife for big Rob Lamar. But he was dead. So many were dead.

A chill came from darker gloom of pines and touched Ira's face and heart.

He shook his head, removed his hat, and—kneeling deeper and more painfully in the niche of stones and moss—he turned up his face beneath the steady pouring of the spring. He opened his mouth and drank deeply, swallowing steadily until he was satisfied.

Distantly sounded the slow talking of shod hoofs on rock and hardpan clay. Ira heard the approach as he was drying his face with a yellow bandana; he heard voices also, and a light metallic drag and jingle. With curiosity he examined the nearer paths to see who might be coming. Seldom did you meet hunters or planters in this quiet place; this section of the county was but sparsely settled—all the hunters gone to more dangerous hunting, some of the planters gone too.

A sorrel horse and a gray came in sight, moving cautiously down the steep trail from the north—from the direction of the empty Yeoman plantation—and ridden by two young men. They appeared to be in uniform, at least as to pants and boots and hats, though one wore a jacket of checkered brown and drab denim. Behind them stumbled a youth in Confederate gray, bearing a surveyor's rod over his shoulder; and in the rear followed a tall ragged Negro who carried some sort of wooden satchel-box in his right hand and held a tripod and a looped linked chain in heavy coils upon his other shoulder. What's this, demanded Ira Claffey of himself in astonishment. Surveyors? Have the McWhorters sold out?

I want a drink, spoke the man in the checkered coat. He seemed to be in charge, for the little procession turned promptly along the declivity toward the spring. Ira walked to meet them.

Good day, gentlemen.

Good day to you.

The two horsemen dismounted. Both were officers or so Ira took them to be. Something about the undersized denim-jacketed fellow made Ira recoil instinctively if slightly as the man moved past him.

Look out you don't slip, Sid, said the other. The young private soldier and the slave were standing back, waiting to drink in their proper turns.

The unprepossessing man called Sid finished his refreshment and stood wiping his mouth on his sleeve. His jacket was smeared with clay, his boots greased reddishly with it. He had been walking in a marsh first; there was black muck higher on his legs.

You own this property? He was addressing Ira curtly.

No, sir. I believe we're standing on McWhorter land at the moment. My place begins yonder. He pointed to the fence barely visible among trees, south across the branch. He said, My name is Claffey. He offered his hand, but not eagerly.

Both officers shook hands with him. I'm Captain W. S. Winder—

In belated respect to Ira's elder years he added *Sir*.

—This is Captain Boyce Charwick. He's from the topographical engineers.

Ira gave his grave smile. Are you looking up a new battleground? This would be rather remote from the lines.

Prison, said Winder.

A prison? Here?

It's possible. I'm charged with locating a site. We're considering several locations. This is one of them.

Ira had a thought of murderers and lunatics in chains. What sort of prison would that be?

A stockade to keep damn Yankee prisoners in, replied Charwick.

A stockade to keep God damn Yankee prisoners in, Captain Winder amended. They both laughed.

Ah, I see. But it's so far from—

Winder grimaced in a manner to show impatience or impertinence, Claffey could not be sure which. The captains climbed back into their saddles and stood waiting for the other two to drink—first the white boy, then the Negro.

It's a long way removed from the theatre of war, is it not?

My father, General John H. Winder, is Superintendent of Military Prisons. I have been authorized to seek a site for a new stockade. You've got railroad transportation here—

His hand swept and stabbed the horizon, pointing out things which Ira Claffey had known for years. He talked impolitely as if the planter were a child retarded in mind.

Excellent drainage. Bountiful supply of water; not that the Yankees are over-prone to bathe, or so I've heard.

Laughter.

I'm considering this area seriously because of the provender situation. You folks hereabouts are not tributary to Virginia when it comes to food. Self-sustaining, I'd say. Bountiful crops—or at least the areas where they could be raised. How was your own corn this year?

Fair, sir, said Claffey guardedly. Merely fair. Locally we received inundation at the wrong season. But—How on earth could you build sufficient structures to house—?

See these pines? How many million board feet of pine's around here, anyway? I didn't say anything about structures. We can take those trees and square them off, and slap them together, and build a fence around ten or twenty acres—a fence so high that the meanest living Yankee couldn't get over the top if he had an aerial balloon.

Laughter. Sid, you're a caution, said Captain Charwick.

Claffey stared. I was told that you are a topographical engineer. Do you agree, sir, that this location is ideal for a prison site?

Charwick said, his smile gone, Well, I agree in general theory with Captain Winder's observations. Of course I'm present strictly in an advisory capacity. His decision will be tailored by demands other than those of topography. He may be aware of military exigencies of which I know nothing—

Oh, thought Claffey, talk, talk, talk. I know your sort. We had mealy-mouths like yours when we were baking in the sun at Matamoras.

Captain Winder took up his reins. I want you to see the lay of the land on this southern ridge, Boyce. I went over it yesterday—

They were turning, the boy and the Negro waited in the path.

Where would you get your labor, to build such a large stockade?

Winder's rodent mouth puffed out as he wiped his teeth with his tongue. Mr. Claffey, sir, and he emphasized that address—Mr. Claffey, we can obtain the authority to impress all the labor we need. Tom Twitt's niggers, Bill Bump's niggers, your niggers, anybody's niggers. Also the authority to take your acres for our

purpose—as much as we need.

Ira said coolly, I trust you'll require none of my acres. If my surviving son returns from the army, he'll need the land.

I take it you've lost a son? Young Winder set his boots tightly into his stirrups. My sincerest regrets, sir.

Two, said Ira. The youngest at Crampton's Gap, the eldest at Gettysburg.

Ah. Sad. A mere boy, I presume—a private soldier?

He was a major.

Winder looked disconcerted momentarily. He felt a stinging rebuke against his bumptiousness and cavalier attitude; it was apparent, yet he could not locate it, or discern in just what words and intonation it was phrased. He gave a kind of half salute. Captain Charwick touched his hat-brim. The Negro and the boy were already far up the slope with their burdens. The officers rode quickly away up the difficult steep, both riding effortlessly as if they had spent years in their saddles, as undoubtedly they had.

The party went into the woods. Claffey did not see them again after he crossed near the stile; he saw only the marks of their going. He saw traces where rails had been taken out beside the stile in order for horses to pass, but the rails had been restored carefully to position again. Ira wondered whether, if these people had not chanced to meet him at the spring near the Sweetwater branch, they might have left rails lying after taking them down. Perhaps he was doing the officers an injustice in the thought.

But he did not like their attitude. They seemed to bring a meanness to war. There should be nobility about the business of risking life, even the business of taking it. Why did we all respect more the memory of the benevolent knight who died in battle—the profound and kingly knight—more than the memory of the truculent, self-seeking warrior? . . . The memory—or the legend? Which? . . . Both the godly knight and the cruel one wagered the same; they wagered hopefully that they would not need to lay their lives down; yet each took the same hazard in the wagering, and one might fight as stoutly as the other, and each would be just as dead as the other when the end came. It was a thought to baffle him. Ira squinted his eyes shut and shook his head like a horse shaking off flies; he always did that when he was perplexed, when he was alone and there was no one to see him. He had to guard against doing it before his family and his servants, for he felt that simple dignity was an honest and important thing. Yet somehow the shaking seemed to help.

He brooded his way back to the potato patches. It was now long after nine o'clock. He had wasted a good hour and a half in his wanderings and musings, and in conversing with the military party. He considered it wasted, because for the first time in—when?—the forest had not granted him the peace and food he sought. A prison, here where always there had been the green pleasure of growth, or water having its way with lichens—the blessing of gum, pine cones, sly animals feeding, rare birds meeting their kind? Let them build their prison someplace else, he'd have none of it. He knew the President, or had known him slightly seventeen years before. He should go to Richmond (but it would cost a sight of cash, and cash was not plentiful in these days) and utter a protest. He should take a firm stand, if this supercilious young captain sought to preëempt any of the Claffey acres.

Oh, bother, bother. That Winder person said that they were merely considering the site. No doubt they'll select another area, Lord knows where.

He said farewell to the forest, and heard birds buzzing through it, and had some thought of taking a shotgun soon and fetching a few birds for the table. Claffey did not truly enjoy shooting birds (he was an excellent

shot; so all his boys had been) and he pitied the blood and drooping which followed. But Veronica was like a child—she beamed and giggled like Lucy herself—whenever he proffered wildfowl. Black Naomi had a special blue earthenware dish in which she cooked them. She used wine and onions—

Coffee and Jem had made great strides with the potatoes. A good two-thirds of the Brimstones were dug, and by noontime the hands would doubtless be ready to start in on the Hayti yams, which they preferred for the table, and which it was easier to raise as fare for the slaves because the Hayti yams were more prolific and they stored well. Common yams were the most prolific of all, but had rather a pumpkinish flavor. Ira couldn't abide growing them.

Coffee. Did you dig these?

Coffee was a long-armed, long-faced fellow with Indian blood apparent. Nossuh, Mastah, I use the hoe. That Jem there—he got the old potato hook. I done told him to look sharp.

Well, Jem, suppose you try the hoe instead. Potato hook's a tricky implement. You've hurt a few in this hill. Look there. And there, in the next. . . .

Real sorry, Mastah. They just jump up out of the earth and get themselves tore, fore I know what they's about.

Hear me, Jem. Do you use the hoe from now on, and give the hook to Coffee. And slow with the hoe. You'll need to eat the ones you bruise, and they don't keep long so. That you know.

Jem, wide and black and rubbery as to body, stood grinning weakly in an attitude of shame.

Caution, Jem, use caution. Hear me, now?

Mastah, I surely take care.

Gracious, thought Ira, I neglected to look into the pine straw situation. But there'll be sufficient, over on Little Sweetwater. We fetched none from there last year. . . . He continued to give the slaves detailed instructions. He had decided that they shouldn't get into the yams today. There was sun, and the crop would have to undergo a good drying for several hours before the piles were started. There were the floors of piles to be built, the trenches to be dug around the floors; then a few days of sustained drying should continue under pine straw only, before the piles were finally earthed up and barked up.

Ira went on toward the big house (oh Lord, if only he had paint) and stopped a moment at the implement shed, which he unlocked with a key selected from the hefty wad at his belt. He cleaned his budding knife and hung it in its groove. Then, locking up, he walked on around through the narrow carriageway, aiming for the west end of the gallery where he wished to examine some cold frames he'd built. But he was surprised to find a gig under the big oak, with an old black horse tied and eating oak leaves. At first Ira thought that the advent of this horse and rig must have something to do with the surveyors he encountered; they had so few callers these days. Then he recognized the horse as belonging to the Reverend Mr. Cato Dillard of Americus.

He heard a voice—Poppy, she said, and it was Lucy, rising drunkenly from the top step where she'd been sitting. She is grown suddenly ill, thought Ira. An epidemic, perhaps? Some fever has struck? He limped toward her and held out his arms as the girl came swaying down the steps.

Oh, Poppy, and she nuzzled deep into his wide-flung coat. Poppy. It's Badge.

Lucy— The minister's horse—

They wrote to him. A colonel did—and—a surgeon. They wrote to him first. Reckoned it'd be easier on—
On us.

Where's Mr. Dillard? Where's your mother, child? He shook her as if he hated her.

She's on her bed. They came— It was an hour ago. The letters only reached them last night. Mrs. Dillard is with Mother, and he's praying up there. He wished me to stay for prayers. I didn't wish to pray.

Still holding her in his arms, he waited and waited. Finally he could command his voice and make it do what he wanted. He could make it talk and sound like a human being, not like a beast's whine. Lucy, where did it happen?

Some place up in Tennessee. Chick-a-something. He was hurt on the twentieth of September, and we didn't know it, Poppy, we didn't know it all this time, we were in utter ignorance. Why didn't they tell us? You might have gone to him. So he died of his wounds, just as my dear Rob died in that Yankee pen of his sickness.

...Lucy, are you certain that you don't wish to pray? I think—it would—be—well—if we both went in to—prayers. Later Mr. Dillard can hold a service for the hands.

It will do no good, said Lucy, but she came quivering along with him. It never does any good. We should know that by now.

...And there sat in a window a certain young man . . . and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves: for his life is in him.

Ah, it was not, life not in him in the slightest, but only abysmal decay and bad sight and odor, like the cross-bred pumpkin-gourd-cucumbers in that unholy field yonder, nigh to the woods. He was the last: Moses, the youngest, first; then Suthy, the eldest; now Badger, the middle son. Get up from your mounds, you small fry behind that old rusty fence, and join in lamentation, for we've only Lucy to help us with the task of weeping.

The Yankees got Moses and Suthy. Yankees now destroy Badge. They got him, with their many cannon and many men, and their quick-shooting breech-loading rifles. Damn the Yankees. Damn them forever, damn them to a hundred hells with their cannon and their money and their blankets and their medicines. God—damn—the Yankees. God damn the Yankees. God *damn* the Yankees. Amen.

II

Having shared the grief of the Claffey's for some hours, the Reverend Mr. Cato Dillard at last handed his wife into the gig and prepared to drive away. Grief was nothing new to Cato Dillard, whether he suffered his own or witnessed it in that portion of humanity he considered to be within his charge; and he believed that all mankind he had observed since leaving the seminary came within his charge. Excepting, possibly, Roman Catholics. Sometimes he wasn't even too certain about those. And, of recent years, Yankees. . . .

Veronica Claffey stared sightlessly at the canopy above her bed, and lay unable to read her Bible or to respond to any prayer offered. Lucy was in her own room, also, with the servant Ninny rubbing her ankles. Ira Claffey attended the brief service to which the slaves had been called. The black people's wail and chanting hung bitterly protracted in the sunlight of early afternoon; the whites wished that the slaves would

not manufacture such sounds, but there was no way of hushing them.

The servant Pet came with a wicker basket containing corn bread, fried chicken and a bottle of beer to refresh the Dillards on their drive to Americus. Cato Dillard embraced his friend and then drove away without looking back; it was better so.

He wished with recurrent regret that Ira Claffey was not averse to metaphysical discussion, but Ira was averse to it. Ira was one of three men among the parson's acquaintances who possessed sufficient scholarly background to indulge in such activity. Still Ira always changed the subject as soon as Cato Dillard was well-embarked and as soon as his tiny eyes burnt bright with intellectual zeal and as soon as his eager voice thrummed with a new range and timbre of enthusiasm. Ira's religion was of a gentle, affectionate, pantheistic variety, and he refused stubbornly to be tricked into any exercise of theology.

I fear the beer may be flat, Ira said in parting. It's from the only brewing which kept, and this year we can't spare the grain. What with military levies and all.

Flat or not, it'll be tasty. Goodbye, my dear friend.

Goodbye, Mrs. Dillard. I can say but Thank You. Goodbye, Brother.

And the dry shivering handclasp saying more.

God bless you, Brother Ira. I'll pray daily.

Whatever benefit that may bring! Bitterness of the deep and stunning hurt.

I'll pray, Brother Ira.

And light wheels going away, and the gloom on all hearts.

Halfway down the lane with its magnolias on one side and its small oaks on the other, Cato turned to his wife and began to quote, So we say farewell to our lamented dead, and know only that we shall reassemble on that great day when all shall foregather—some from the East, and some from the West, some from the South—And it may even be that a few shall come from the North.

Muckle wish have I that any should come from the North. Effie Dillard was a Scotswoman. The words of her Rothesay youth came easily from her wide thin lips when she was stirred. She was wearing a faded frilled pink cap and now she lifted her straw bonnet and drew it on over the cap, which act would have seemed astonishing to a stranger. Mrs. Dillard had suffered fever many years before—had nearly died of it, and all her hair was lost. She wore caps, waking and sleeping. No one except a trusted servant had ever seen her without a cap, since she recovered. Not even the Reverend Mr. Dillard.

She was a bony, bent woman with knobs on her shoulders and a face like a yellow witch. Everyone in the region knew that she had a heart bigger than the area of Sumter County itself, and many traded on her accordingly. Her skin was marred by smallpox which she had acquired when nursing a brood of Negroes from whom the rest of humanity fled.

Effie, don't talk hatred.

I feel it. If I feel it I should utter it.

Thus purging your soul? The minister smiled a tired sly smile.

Aye. She gave him the ghost of her own smile.

Mr. Cato Dillard was plump and squat, and loose flesh squeezed out around his short neck in rolls. His hazel eyes lost themselves in chasms of veined wrinkles; they peeked out like twin squirrels in hiding. He was brilliantly far-sighted, literally as well as figuratively, and donned his spectacles only when working on his sermons or when reading tracts aloud to some blind or illiterate sufferer unable to read the tracts himself. He was sixty-six years old and still moved with the bounce of youth. The Dillards had no living children, but five of their eight grandchildren were serving in the army, all alive as yet.

Mr. Cato Dillard had one vanity: the tufts of luxuriant tingling curly silver, growing down past his ears on either side of his firm fat face, and so fluffy that the lightest breeze set them rippling.

Cate, she called him in private, and sometimes in public when she forgot. Now she cried, Cate! in a manner of alarm.

Is something wrong, my dear?

You've turned off the road. You're not bound for Americus. There's the railroad ahead.

Only bound down this side track on an errand. Briefly.

Where are we bound?

He wriggled guiltily. If you must know, we're bound for the Widow Tebbs' place.

Cate, are you daft?

The Cloth can be worn anywhere and remain unsullied. It is my Christian duty. And I might add—yours also, Effie.

Let me out of this gig, man. I'll not go.

You've been before.

On a fool's errand!

Effie, don't be difficult. She's a poor miserable creature, with no great happiness behind her, and only iniquity and grief to make up her present, and flames reaching ahead. But she's human, and I knew her grandfather well, and as a ruling elder he represented our congregation in the presbytery.

Scarlet is as scarlet does. What charity can you give her? I mean what charity would she accept? Neither the Word nor the practice thereof. She does not know the meaning of repentance.

Perhaps, at one time, neither did Mary Magdalene.

Ah. Touch pitch, I say.

Now, how often do you suppose The Saviour touched pitch? And how severely was He tarred?

Cate, you're daft.

But Mrs. Dillard gave no further remonstrance—only a reedy sigh now and then, as the little vehicle bumped

down the miserable side road.

Over the railway tracks they rocked, the horse snorting when wheels grated on the rails: Blackie recognized the railroad and tossed his head at the notion of encountering a locomotive which always set him to spreading his legs and lifting wild ears. The Widow Tebbs' place was just beyond—a small house with a sloping roof like the tilt of a water-soaked visored cap. There was a ruined stable, a pig-pen, several miscellaneous sheds; and across a wide dirty yard stood a cubicle structure which had once served as a storage place for corn. That was when Dickwood Tebbs was alive. Nowadays it was fitted out with curtains, lamps, a reedy music box, and definitely a bed. In this building the Widow Tebbs did her entertaining. Her children referred to it as The Crib, as did Mrs. Tebbs' regular patrons. This collection of buildings was bounded by a fence of split palings, heavy with gourd vines, some sections leaning in and some sections leaning out. A few tattered specimens of poultry fled jabbering as the gig came closer.

To think you'd carry your own good wife to such a spot.

My dear, be benevolent and forgiving. Her eldest's just back from the battles, and he's wanting a foot. This is sad poverty, dire poverty.

When they halted before the sagging gate, they saw the flight of something other than poultry: a small brown object which sped under the house like a bunchy high-backed varmint. It was a child, a boy of three or four, dressed in a loose skirt and shirt of filthy material. He traveled on his hands and knees with a speed to baffle the eye. One moment he was crouched, gazing fearfully at the approach of the gig; the next he had streaked between the chunks of stone which supported the old cottage, and had gone into darkness like a rabbit or a pig.

The Reverend Mr. Cato Dillard smiled. That would be her youngest.

Never knowing who his father is or was!

Doubtless none of them knows, save the eldest.

A flat-chested youth of thirteen came out on the stoop and stared warily. Mr. Dillard said, Good afternoon, Floral.

The boy mumbled a reply. He had a head small for the skinny body and long neck on which it was perched. His head was covered with spiny golden hair, kept clipped raggedly close by his mother's shears. He wore a dirty undershirt, and patched pantaloons were held around his thin waist by a knotted cord.

Is your mother at home, Floral?

Yes, sir.

Then fetch her, please. And when you've done that, come down here to the buggy. I've something for you.

The boy ducked through the door, there were mumblings inside and then an exclamation of surprise, then Floral reappeared. He came down the two steps and across the littered yard, walking gingerly and seeking smooth places to set his bare left foot as he came.

What's ado here, Flory? Cato Dillard spoke with light jocularly which it was difficult for him to muster, faced with the want and degradation he witnessed, faced with the boy's wizened face and round blank gray eyes. Did you hurt your foot?

Yes, sir.

How did that occur?

Stepped on a damn old nail in a board.

Hush that profanity, child, said Effie Dillard sharply. Now you climb up here on the hub and show me your foot.

With agility, even if in some pain, Flory obeyed. Solemnly he presented the dirty sole of his foot to the woman's gaze. Effie took her specs from her pocket, examined the wound, and gave an exclamation of disgust. I'll be bound. That needs green ointment, and I must see to it.

Will it hurt?

Never you mind about that. It's got proud flesh in it.

Yes, Ma'am.

From his jacket pocket Cato Dillard drew a comfit-case of battered silver; he had carried it since his youth. Solemnly he opened the lid and revealed a hoard of lozenges. These are wintergreen, he said. One for you, one for the little lad— What's his name, my boy? He went under the house.

That's Zoral.

Very well, one for Zoral. One for Laurel—

She ain't to home. She's over helping tend old Mrs. Bile. Both the niggers is sickly, and so's the old Mrs.

Save it for her. These are hard to come by.

Well I know. Flory sucked his lozenge with relish.

Where is Coral?

Coral wouldn't want no sugarplum. He just don't want nothing since he got himself wounded. Flory had a greedy eye on the lozenge offered for his elder brother.

He might fancy it. Where is he, bubby?

Took the shotgun and gone a-hunting.

What? On one foot?

I done whittled him out a crutch. Flory still eyed the lozenge. Had it all ready for him when the wagon set him down at the door. First thing he says was, I'll learn you to make gawk at my crippledness, and he took a swipe at me with the crutch. Coral's mean as sin.

The Widow Tebbs appeared on the stoop, noticeably unstayed but wearing a fringed shawl over an old blue poplin gown which had been obviously a hand-me-down and was too tight for her. Her ruddy hair was wound up in a mass of curl papers. Heavens, said Cato involuntarily, behold the Gorgon Medusa.

Don't you choose to light, Parson? And Ma'am? Her voice was high of key, nervous as a fledgling girl's

voice . . . she had no great share of wits. Her soft chin was weak, sagging; her bright brown eyes kept up an incessant blinking. Her body bulged, but in keeping with its original construction. A walking fleshly altar to Eros, thought Cato. Nothing could be done with her or about her. Nothing, not from her maiden days which must have ended when she was ten.

Despite the fact that she had a son nearly seventeen years old, she was barely in her thirties. Marget Lumpkin she had been born, and her father once conducted a tannery in Americus. He drove his children from him by fiendish exercise of the most antique and ascetic religious profession. Marget, or Mag as she was more commonly called, was in trouble at fourteen, wife to a slovenly young farmer and mother of his child at fifteen. . . . She had a persistent pitiable fondness for color, whether in flowers or in ribbons; the rougher boys of the town in her young time knew for a literal truth that Mag would lay herself down for the mere gift of a brass button or a spool of crimson thread. Lumpkin was a respectable—even an honored—name throughout most of Georgia, but the poor girl had always loathed the sound of it, when meaner children teased her muddled little brain and called her Bumpkin. Hence she groped for some sort of beauty when she named her scrawny troop of children (three of them fathered by men other than her husband). She named them Coral, Laurel, Floral, Zoral. Dick Tebbs had been dead for ten years, but poor Mag was gone into whoredom long before he died; and he spent his last sullen sickly winters in cutting enough wood to keep The Crib warm while she did her entertaining.

Won't you light? The widow asked it a second time, as the Dillards sat in silence, pitying her. Effie Dillard's bark was savage at times, but she did not even know how to bite.

No, thank you, Sister Marget. We stopped by to offer a small gift; but it is a long homeward journey.

The Widow Tebbs brightened at the thought of a gift. Probably she thought of ribbons. She said, I do implore you not to call me Sister, Parson. Puts me in mind of Pa, and he was so cross all the while.

She came forward eagerly as she spoke, her soft red mouth spreading in a smile which enhanced her degenerate beauty.

Paint, said Mrs. Dillard, and lifted an accusing bony finger of her mittened hand.

Whereabouts?

On your face, woman. On your very lips.

Oh, no, Ma'am. This is red off of a candy stick. I keep it special.

Effie groaned. Cato Dillard bent his head to conceal his own amusement; he knew that he was transgressing mildly in finding any glee in the situation, yet he could not help himself. He reached beneath the seat and brought out a solid weighty bag of soiled cotton cloth. Tis meal, he told the widow. A member of the congregation brought us a generous gift from his mill this week, and I'm sharing it with you, Marget.

Perhaps she would rather have had a wornout bonnet or the feathers or flowers from it, but Mag was grateful. Why, Parson, I give you thanks. Times are so hard with—

She was about to say, With so many menfolks gone to the army, but innate and unsuspected delicacy restrained her. Instead she said after hesitation, With things the way they be.

What about the boy's foot?

It's gone complete. Marget blinked more rapidly than ever, and tears were spilling. Poor little Coral—it was

only his third big battle. He got a ball right through the foot, and them surgeons hacked it off. He said they held him down a-doing it. Always cutting. All a surgeon knows how to do.

Effie declared that they might be losing a second foot in the family unless precautions were taken about Flory. She produced a bottle of green ointment of her own manufacture, one of several medicines without which she would seldom travel abroad. She made Flory fetch a cup, and measured a portion of the medicine. Enthusiastically she recited the recipe while Flory listened with horror. Good refined turpentine and lard, also honey and beeswax; these had been melted together with a bit of finely pulverized verdigris stirred in. Did the widow have any beeswax? She reckoned there was some around, somewhere. . . . Well, Effie was determined to enter the house and prepare the poultice herself—or rather a little tent, stiffened with warm beeswax and worked into the oozing wound—but the widow said that her fire was cold and it would take time to build it up. Effie extracted a promise and had to be content with that. Flory still clung to the gig wheel and sucked on the second lozenge which he had wheedled out of the minister by mere exercise of longing in his pinched face.

While they were thus engaged, the whistle of a train sounded, and Blackie's ears arose and Blackie's feet spread apart, and Cato had to climb down and take Blackie's head and speak soothingly. The others watched the train come lurching, smoking past. The engineer managed a couple of extra whistle-toots when directly in front of the cottage; he knew the widow well, and always saluted her. There were a few soldiers guarding the burden cars—foodstuffs for the army, probably—and they waved and shouted pleasantries which could not be understood. The widow waved urgently in reply.

Just as last cinders were flying and while Blackie still snuffled, a thin youth progressed slowly around the corner of The Crib. He stopped when he saw the gig, then came on, looking at the ground beneath and ahead of him. He swung his body from side to side, pivoting on the homemade crutch, putting his right foot forward, hopping the pole of the crutch into a new position . . . thus he traveled. His pant-leg flopped in rags around the stump where his left leg had been severed at the ankle. Coral did not resemble his mother in appearance, and bore no resemblance to the other children. His black hair was shaggy, his thick black brows pulled together in a hairy scowl, his cheeks were darkened with young untrimmed beard. In his right hand he carried a shotgun with a mended stock, and Cato Dillard rejoiced to see that a quail—no, two—hung suspended from Coral's belt.

I see you did well, my boy. Dillard spoke with enthusiasm as soon as Coral was within hearing.

Got two.

I never did hear that old gun at all, said Floral in surprise.

Well, it's an accomplishment, declared the minister. And working without a dog.

Coral glowered as if he'd expected the minister to say, Without a foot. He stopped near the steps and said guardedly, Old Zack got himself kilt whilst I was gone to— Just went to sleep on the tracks and let the cars run over him. Least that's what they tell me.

Coral, cried his mother, come down out the gate and make some nice manners to the parson and the Mrs.

No, said the youth. He moved painfully up the steps.

You got no call to be so mean, sonny. And they fetched meal for us; and Flory's saving you a candy.

Don't want no candy. He was gone into the cottage.

I told you so, said Flory, and popped Coral's designated wintergreen into his own mouth. He's just poison mean.

You shut your trap, Flory. His mother struck at him but the boy dodged.

We must go. Dillard had climbed back into the gig. Marget, daughter, I merely want you to know that you are often in my prayers.

Thank you kindly, Parson, but I don't want to be in nobody's prayers. Had enough of prayers when I was little.

I speak now from the Larger Catechism: *We are by nature children of Wrath, bond slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all punishments in this world and that which is to come.* God bless you, Marget.

He began to turn Blackie away from the gate.

God bless you folks, too, and then Marget stopped in alarm at having been lured into saying it. She cried after them, I do thank you for the meal.

Save the poke, Effie Dillard yelled. Allow no one to make off with it. The dominie can pick it up one day.

Wait, the widow screamed. She sent Flory into the cottage to dump meal into a pan, and then he flew out again, waving the dusty sack in his hand. He hustled down the road at a limping gallop, and grinned shyly up at the pair when he handed them the bag. He breathed, Could I have just one more candy?

You're a little pig. Effie spoke severely. You should save some for your sister and your baby brother. Cate, do you give me that comfit-box. She counted out three more lozenges while her husband sighed. One for you, one for Sister, one for Brother. Mind, now.

Yes, Ma'am.

And mind about that tent of green ointment, lest you be like poor Coral.

I'll mind. Ma can fix it, soon as we get a fire going.

They looked back at the house. Zoral was emerging from his den under the house but the widow seemed to be paying no attention to the child. She kept waving earnestly at the Dillards until they were gone across the railroad. She could not hear him, but the Reverend Mr. Cato Dillard concerned himself audibly with The Gospel According to Saint John.

Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

Revelation comes later than yon, said his wife. *Mystery, Babylon the Great. The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth.*

Oh, Effie. I prefer The Gospel. *She said, No man, Lord. . . . Neither do I condemn thee.*

Back at the Tebbs house, Floral worked reluctantly for a time, fetching wood and kindling of pine splinters which his mother demanded. Coral was hunched on a stool by the table, plucking the first bird. He had put the shotgun on its pegs, and hung the shot flask and powder flask where they belonged. Flory went to take them down, and his brother spewed out a stream of profanity and struck with his crutch. You leave them things alone, God damn you, you little squeak.

Now, you youngsters—

Tain't your shotgun any more'n it's mine!

Tis, by God!

I used it whilst you was in the army. I got some ground doves and—

Ground doves! No wonder I'm shy a foot! That's the unluckiest thing a mortal can do: kill a ground dove. Any nigger in the county could of tolt you that. You hadn't no call to use the shotgun. Tis mine; because I'm the eldest and a gun is handed down from a father to his eldest.

God damn lie.

You touch my gun again and I'll beat the poop out of you.

Ah, you and your old crutch—

Coral hurled the crutch. It might have injured Flory but it only grazed his hip. Nevertheless the younger boy burst into squalls and hurried blindly out of the door, calling spitefully, You damn cripple! Crip, crip, crip, crip, crip, crip, cripple—! He tripped over Zoral below the stoop, and the stunted baby set up a bellowing. Mag flew to the rescue, calling loudly on the world to witness what troubles possessed her.

Floral retreated into woods behind the privy and solaced himself with a wad of pine gum. It occurred to him that if he carried a heavy club, and crept up silently on a covey of quail without disturbance, he might be able to get a bird for himself by flinging the club, much as Coral was forever hurling his crutch. Flory had tried unsuccessfully before with rocks, never with a club. He hunted around for a suitable bludgeon, found one, and tottered off among the trees. He played that the stick in his hands was a gun. Not just a shotgun, but a regular military musket. Maybe even a modern rifle. Maybe even a modern Henry rifle, a repeater with copper cartridges; he had seen such weapons carried by soldiers on several occasions when soldiers called upon his mother. Such weapons were captured from Yankees.

He played that he was killing a Yankee. Hold still there, you Yankee scum. You heard me. Don't move or I'll blow your guts out handsome. Hold right still, don't try to get away, you Yankee bastard! Look sharp; I warned you.

Flory lifted the stick to his shoulder. His face was contorted and he squeezed his eyes shut as he fired. *Poom.*

III

At this same hour in Paris a rain came blackly. It was mid-afternoon in Georgia, evening in the region near the old Medical College where the good Dr. Cordier had lectured hoarsely above his cadavers more than twenty years before. The good Dr. Cordier was long since in his tomb, but at a favorite café two of his former students now sat with wine. There was a tablecloth of flowered green, the crusty bread lay broken upon it, the big shiny casserole still stood on its seared frame above a burning lamp.

Dr. Bucheton reached over and selected a mushroom which had eluded him in gravy; he speared it with surgical precision, ate it, put down his fork and nodded across at his companion.

You see how it is, Henry. I not only take some pride in myself as a gourmet; I'm also a glutton. He patted the

belly which stood out under his tight white waistcoat.

The bearded Henry Wirz said, I am a dyspeptic. He was a round-shouldered thin-faced man, past forty, sallow of skin, and with blood vessels apparent in his pale eyeballs which suggested constant pain, sleeplessness, a constriction of various forces clamoring for release. His French was spoken shrilly, almost explosively, with a pronounced German accent. Many people took him to be a Jew, but he was not a Jew. It was as if he sought to relieve the somber acids moving through his digestive system and in his leaden blood, by gauding himself in tints commonly worn only by younger men. His jacket was saffron, his shirt of checkered cambric, his stock of Stuart tartan silk. His right arm rested in a black sateen sling, and the arm was giving him misery this night; he kept groping across the tablecloth with the fingers of his left hand, and caressing and kneading the slim bandaged bulk within the sateen.

You still have the sulphate of morphia? In your lodgings?

The devil—yes. I have plenty. But I can't take too much of that stuff. Henry Wirz had something else in his lodgings in the Rue d'Assas: he had it hanging in the big wardrobe: a uniform of Confederate gray.

Be sure to reduce the dosage by degrees.

You don't have to tell me that. But you don't understand how it is with us in the Confederacy, Pierre. These things are unprocurable. The blockade is tighter all the time.

Dr. Bucheton nodded sympathetically, and filled Henry's wine glass, then his own. I don't pay much attention to what goes on over there. My dear friend, you'll forgive me when I state a simple if unpleasant professional fact. Between my own patients and what goes on at the hospital and my lectures at the school—Well, my wife tells the children not to run shrieking to their nurse that a strange impostor has forced his way into the house, on those rare occasions when I do appear. As for my mistress—

He shrugged. I should not beat her if she began to dally with a younger and more light-hearted man. It would be only justice if she did. Thus I cast my speeding eyes over the printed page, and I see that your Mr. Mason and your Mr. Slidell are still on this side of the Atlantic, and I wish them well, and I also would like to have you shipping to us cotton and rice and tobacco and other good things, but I don't want to go to war with the Americans about it. And I assume also that when the old friend of my student days appears, and lo and behold he is *Captain* Henry Wirz—I assume that he has possibly some business with Mr. Slidell in France? But I don't give it more thought than that. It's a physical and mental impossibility. Do you forgive me, Henry?

Wirz nodded. My arm is particularly troublesome tonight.

Come, I've just ordered cognac.

I have no head for cognac. You should remember.

Well, perhaps we should call it the poor man's sulphate of morphia or— Do you have cognac in the Confederate States, Henry?

Only what is left in a few people's cellars. Some we get from the Yankees. Damn this thing, Pierre. I think you injured the nerves when you removed the *sequestra*.

Hush, you very stupid fellow! The great Dr. Bucheton does not go about butchering nerves with his scalpel. Do you wish me to draw another diagram? Here, upon the tablecloth; give me your pencil—

Nonsense. I want no more of your diagrams. I want only for the pain to go away.

In time, Henry, in time. You must needs be patient. You've undergone a great deal of treatment—some of it very inept and messy, according to what I found when I got into that wrist of yours last Monday. This is merely Old Dame Nature's way of saying, My God, I've been stabbed, I've been raped, I've been slaughtered. Watch closely. The drainage has already decreased to a bare trickle. The efflorescence has decreased as well. And the seropurulent matter which came out of there! Where did you say you got this wound? In the battle of Louisiana?

No, no, no, Louisiana is my *home*. Or was. The wound I received in the fighting near Richmond, our capital. That was a year ago last summer. They called the place Seven Pines. God damn the Yankee who did this to me.

The fortunes of war, Henry. You know, I did some soldiering myself in '48. Have I yet told you about—?

Fortune of war or no fortune of war, may the good God damn the Yankee who did this to me. I say, Give him to me. Let me meet him face to face. Who are you, Yankee? Was it your fingers on the lanyard which did the wickedness? Show them to me; I will show you my hand, or my arm which you did such cruelty to; now show me, Yankee, your own evil hand which performed the act. So what is that hand like, and where is the Yankee? Is it a young man's hand—lively, tanned, hairy, a strong right hand? Or maybe the Yankee was left-handed?

Henry Wirz was speaking with such passion that Madame bent down from her smoky perch under the archway and gave him a searching look. An idle old waiter had drawn near, in alarm at having to deal with a foreign inebriate; a party of students and girls from the half-world had given up all conversation of their own and were united in attention.

Henry, said Bucheton in disquiet.

I tell you, I should like to meet that hand, and the man to whom it is attached! Ah—

No doubt you should, no doubt you should. Here, waiter, we'll both have another cognac. Immediately, if you please!

In his sudden outpouring of frenzy, Wirz had thudded his bandaged forearm against the table, and the act brought forth a single exclamation of agony. He sat silently, his glance turned down, the sweat standing like fragile pebbled topaz bulbs upon his high bony forehead.

Bucheton began chattering in rapid sequence punctuated by low laughter intended to be soothing. He spoke a string of gossip and reminiscence concerning their mutual student past. Not for one moment did he think that Wirz was imagining or magnifying the misery dancing amid the nerves of his right arm. Pierre Bucheton had seen the slivered radius and ulna exposed, and his own small bright tongs had tightened on crumbs of corroded bone which he found serrated amid the tissues of Henry Wirz. He was a companion of this patient a solid generation previously, but had not fallen in with him again until the current year. Ah, yes—in 1849 Henry had indeed sent him a letter; that was when Henry passed through Paris en route for America, his dead wife left behind beneath her slab in Zurich, his living children left with their grandparents. The note had reached Bucheton belatedly since he was gone with the army. So he had not encountered Wirz again until this modern time of 1863. He had never thought that Wirz would be one to bear adversity with the dignity which passes for serenity. Old Cordier and others had signalled their awareness that Wirz was a talented youth—alert in the extreme, but too taut for his own well-being. His mind was an engraver's stone, ready to be saturated with the inks of acquired knowledge; but reasoning did not come to him with ease. There was no

flavor of humor about him except the taste of humor which is found in most youths; maturity would dry it up—yes, and had.

Bucheton had been willing—even keen—to benefit Wirz with his skill and experience in surgery, and with no mention of a fee. Academically he regretted that Henry must suffer this persistent pain; but as a truth Bucheton had never suffered any great physical agony within his own experience; he had only seen others suffering. He knew that physical anguish was bad; he was sorry that it must occur. But he could dismiss it, since the ache did not lie within his own experience or within his own flesh.

A last draught of cognac?

No.

They went outside into a dark city fresh washed, but it was raining no longer. Bucheton's coachman hurried up to the next wide turning to bring the doctor's chaise. You'll squeeze in beside me, friend Henry, and I'll set you down at your lodgings.

I will walk through the night air. It is chilly, and a stroll may help to clear my poor head and make me forget this.

There are purse-snatchers about. We've been warned.

Even in this quiet area? Well, I have very little money.

They made their goodbyes, Wirz gave his thanks for the dinner, Bucheton cautioned him about the reduction of the sulphate of morphia dosage by measured degrees, he set a day and an hour when Wirz should appear for his next examination. He dared not insult the Herr Doktor Wirz by instructing him about dressings, though he longed to. But Wirz said that the young son of his *concierge* was a tractable youth, and had been taught to hold the basin and bind the ends of linen—so—and now and then got a franc for his trouble.

Bucheton embraced the captain perfunctorily, and then drove off in his chaise. Wirz strolled, rigidly round-shouldered, beyond the Boulevard St. Germain; he held his gold-headed walking stick gripped tightly in his left hand, and it was a heavy stick, and would offer punishment to any slovenly mendicant or possible footpad who approached him. Yes, be he pickpocket or ruffian, Wirz could lift the stick and bring it down hardily.

Be he a Yankee— The pale knuckles grew paler.

Through the cool glistening, Wirz walked homeward slowly. Later he crossed through a corner of the Luxembourg gardens, and two be-caped policemen strode toward him, bearing their batons, and one was carrying a lantern. The lantern was lifted, Captain Wirz spoke a salutation, the policemen gave him their respects and marched away. His arm shriveled, grew cold, grew hot, grew fatter; it was at times made of iron; it was at times an elongated toad which squirmed; always it was an irritant, sometimes a beast.

—Very well. So if you'd undergone an amputation—

—But my hand. *Ach*. It is my hand which I need to retain— Condemn Bucheton and his smugness! If I'd but owned three hands I could have used two of them to operate on myself—

—But you have been your own surgeon at times. The first pink scraps, when they came near the surface; the older more recent bits, turned black as coal, and honey-combed— You worked in sweat, the bottle of whiskey beside you, the scalpel cleanly wiped, the tufts of lint soaking up the liquid— You worked

methodically and well, and even on that night when you were home, and your wife was ill with the female curse, and Cora had the croup and was gagging with it— You worked as your own surgeon, with a Negro bug-eyed beside you—

—But still the leaping pain, the nerves like frogs in their jumping, the frogs bounding and saying, Let us out or we'll burst your skin.

—*Ja*. Frogs.

With discipline he sought to break his recollection away from the concern it held with his wound. Libby—he saw the desk, he put muster rolls into the narrow pigeon-holes when they had been checked, he heard the slam of guards' musket butts on the stones when they halted outside the door—not his door, the other door . . . sat outside the office of Mr. Seddon's deputy, he sat there during three whole forenoons and two and one-half afternoons, he sat motionless or nearly motionless, with his beard neatly brushed and his small gray cap held upon his knee like a bright-beaked bird he had trapped. Then he had his appointment. *Inspecting Officer of Prisons*. That sounded very well indeed.

Special Minister Plenipotentiary in Europe. That sounded even better. Of course he wasn't the only one, and also he was on leave of absence officially.

And why had they not made him a colonel? They had promised that he should be a colonel. Here he was now, doing a man-sized task with only boy-sized rank to wear. A captain!—no wonder he was treated like an errand boy. Actually he had never laid eyes on Mr. Slidell (though he pretended to Bucheton and others that he had). A secretary came into an anteroom on both occasions—once to accept the dispatches which Wirz had brought; the other time to give him an envelope of instructions.

His German was profound and scholarly, because he was native to Zurich and educated also in Berlin. His French was fairly secure, accent or no accent, because he had learned the language when very young; but he was twenty-seven years old before he began to speak more than a few words of English, and was handicapped further (as a loyal Confederate he disliked to admit this) because he had spent most of his thirteen or fourteen American years with the soft long drawl of R-slighting of Southerners in his ears.

So perhaps that was the reason his promotion had been passed over repeatedly? They thought that a man who talked like a Tam Tutchman wasn't worthy of higher grade? What about that Prussian giant—what was his name?—who worked for General Stuart? Wirz had heard him laughing, bellowing delightedly, twisting up his whiskers; he stood close to him once; and Von Borcke was unmistakably of field grade, with his English nothing like so extensive as Henry's.

You had to know influential people, you had to know them well. You had to know—

Ach, mein lieber Gott im Himmel! The arm.

He was walking, measured hurtful step by measured hurtful step, on a stone-bordered path in the Luxembourg gardens, where he had strolled so often when he was a youth; and one day he had even helped two little boys with their sailing of boats, and a great breeze blew the fountain spray loose from its jeweled column and spattered them thoroughly, and they all shrieked with laughter and so did young Henry Wirz, and kindly he took off his shoes and stockings and rolled up his dove-colored pantaloons, and he waded in to retrieve the two white sailboats which the wind had tossed upon their beam-ends—

He was walking, grasping that slung arm which bred its torture, he was walking in midnight amid the damp Luxembourg gardens; and it did not seem real—walking in New Orleans would seem more real nowadays, if

only he could walk there; and in the Luxembourg gardens all of the Parisians turned out in full force each Sunday, except for the thousands who went gabbling to the *Bois*, and all of them had their dogs along with them. French dogs were a race apart: not like American dogs, not like Southern American dogs, with their long ears and jaunty scratching and their loose addiction to raccoons or brawling, or their fondness for copulation in the open dusty roads. French dogs marched in harness, they took tight little steps, they seemed to sniff in French, they carried the pinned-up ears of one breed, the ruffles of another, the hard-curved tails of still another heritage; they were indubitably French—they gestured with their strange tails as they met and conversed—

The dogs. The Yankees were dogs. Oh, God. My arm—

Wirz walked there, and saw and felt no more than the barest impress of a fading past, hung like bleached wall paper against the facade of the October night. What was more real was blackness of a late May storm—*ja*, the night between May thirtieth and May thirty-first, it was—and Blanchard's Brigade was moving up through steady pouring rain, and the arm did not hurt at all because there had been no metal entering to mutilate it. Come the next day, and the next . . . all plank highways built up out of the marsh, and trees thick and dripping, and the uncertain scattered fire of skirmishers cutting through the forest where another brigade of Huger's Division was already making contact with the enemy—

Then came the smash of pain like a fist striking simultaneously his arm, his eyes, his nose, the soft thin hollow of his belly.

Go to the rear. And look out for those batteries moving up, and go stumbling off the corduroy while the great wheels draped with mud come skating past, and hold your arm and watch the blood run down between your fingers and— *Go to the rear.*

And never a moment, from that moment, divorced from the feel of the wickedness. Never a tingling second to escape it, never a long hour of waking to know that the throbbing was subdued. Only in sleep, only in blank blackness, with the bitter small brew of morphia to bring a void before you, and force you over the edge and into it.

Henry Wirz moved across wet and ancient stones. With his left hand he opened the iron gate; he went up to the steps and rang the bell for the *concierge*. A night-walker came past the fence, he heard the light conversation of her heels resounding under barren chestnut trees. She called with low fervor, Oh, *Monsieur*, one moment, please— He coughed and turned his thin face away. The *concierge* came muttering inside with a candle, chains were unfastened, the door swung.

One might then have gone far beyond Henry Wirz, through darkened bricks of the tall old house which once had been occupied by a marshal who died in Egypt, and over the soot and tiles beyond— One could have gone out in thought through the wastes of the *Bois de Meudon* where a suicide and a huddled hare and a softly wailing servant girl (newly and rudely taught a rite supposed to deal with affection) lay nearly in the same thicket— One could have swept on an instant past the spires of Versailles and over secret countryside where the River Eure rose in its initial brimming; and might have passed near Alençon in a twinkling, and given a blessing to old women who spent years with their lace and dangling shuttles; and sped across thrashing coasts of southernmost Brittany where the racket of nighttime winches was forgotten at Lorient and last lanterns were put out by the fog—

Away, away, going in thought or imagination above the long black swells, west and a little south, west and steadily bearing a little to the port dots of the compass, ignoring the marble which emerged from waves and was then sponged into spray by a fresh slapping of salt and was reconstructed into more jet and snowy marble far in the depth, and pushed up and out again to frighten the fishermen in their small plunging boats

and to be seen by birds flying at night, except that none was flying—

And on past a Swedish vessel and a blockade runner which bore no lights because Yankees were looking for her, even in these eternal wildernesses of marble and salt which couldn't be measured easily or plumbed; and on, in the single flaming of a thought, ignoring lonely islands of the Atlantic and into the growing color which suggested a twilight and became finally a sunset and then a remnant of late October afternoon in which coastal cities stood out boldly, and where guards walked above the batteries of some forts which had been attacked and some which would never be hit by any shells—

Above estuaries and over camps the fast wild thought might have gone fleeting, born in a brain which truly had no power to bear it; for this moment became a part of the future where a man can never dwell, and where gods are merely invented, and where the new unseen sun gives off its roaring, and new unseen stars are intact.

The Fifth Maine Battery was bivouacked behind a knotty board fence. When Portland Hyde and his friend Caldwell walked the nearby lane at night they could see cooking fires showing pale red in reflection above the fence, and raw living red through the cracks. Now they moved in dusk, less than two months away from the winter solstice; dusk or not, they did not care, for they carried a duck with a fresh-wrung neck. Got him safe under your coat, Porty? You just bet I have. Don't want no sentry putting down the law to me about foraging. Yes, and then taking our duck for his own self. How do you say we boil him? Twould be easier. Maybe so; but I just couldn't stomach boiled duck. No, sir, I'd as lief toast him bit by bit on a ramrod. I wish we had some peas; a pot of peas would go well along with him. Well, why don't you wish you was to home, and having Betty fetching in beans and biscuits? O laughter. . . .

Companies E and K of the Eleventh Vermont guarded a great pile of earthworks and logworks outside Washington City. Here John Appleby was freshly come on picket duty. He had retreated like a smart soldier below a broken-off sycamore tree where he was cooped safely from any wind or weather, and had a good sight at the road in either direction whenever he felt in his bones that an officer or a provost detail might be approaching. Mainly he thought about his friend Adam Garrett, and how well things must be going with him. Adam was recovered from his Gettysburg wound, which he had received while serving with Stannard's Brigade. Now that the Sixteenth Vermont was mustered out, Adam had re-enlisted in the Eleventh and was still at West Dummerston enjoying veteran's furlough.

Where was Adam? Maybe gone to take supper with the Smalls? John groaned to himself, thinking of the Smalls and their big low kitchen; well, yes, he'd liked Hallie Small too, but Adam always shone up to the girls more successfully. Mrs. Small was noted for her fruit pies all over the town of Dummerston, all the way from East Dummerston across the forest through Dummerston Center and down to West Dummerston on the river. (Fact of the matter was, Adam Garrett was gone to a church supper on this evening. Next Tuesday he'd ride with his father to Brattleboro and take the cars, and head for Northern Virginia to join his new regiment and his old friend John Appleby. Time was when Adam never thought he'd get over talking about that piece of rib which was shot out of his side—he was so proud of it, and rejoiced in the realization that he wasn't actually killed, just hurt a mite. But lately he'd grown weary of telling the same story to the same rural garden-variety of ears. Nobody understood truly what he was talking about. He sat beneath a bower of bunting, and ladies bustled behind him with their big flat blackened pans of chicken pie, and he tried to see Hallie beyond the bunting, and prayed that she wasn't still mad because of that tiff they'd had when he caught Hepsy Clark and kissed her when they played Ruth and Jacob at the Jennings place— He said to old Deacon Root and young tongue-tied Mr. Willis and of course the minister, beaming gravely beyond— He said, Well, you see our regiment was on the left of those trees. There was a stone wall just ahead of us, but the stones was knocked loose and scattered. The Rebs give us one volley before they moved forward past the barn. I forgot to tell you there was a barn and farmhouse towards the Rebel lines from us—I mean, in

between. He kept peering past the bearded listeners, trying to see Hallie. He caught a flurry of her plaid gown—)

Old Tom Gusset, Saddler, Ninth Ohio Cavalry, said to the sutler, That's a pretty price. Thirty cents currency for that one little tin? Look, old man, them preserves are strawberry and they got a little brandy in them, or so tis said. Would you guarantee that? Not me; I ain't guaranteeing nothing. How do I know it's true what it says on the label of the tin? Well, by cracky, if you don't know, who does? How much is that there tin marked quince and nut? That's dearer, partner. Thirty-five cents I got to get for that.

In a bleak ravine west of Chattanooga, a private of the Twenty-sixth Wisconsin said, Haltoogoes there? Friends with the countersign. Advance singly and be recognized. Billy stood with his rifle directed on dim shapes moving among the trees, and he resented the added weight of the bayonet. What in the devil—? Oh, yes; the countersign was *Tippecanoe*. Advance singly, Mister. You come one at a time. Advance with the countersign. . . . *Tippecanoe*. Hey, there, Billy—you sounded scared—I didn't recognize your voice. God damn it, I ain't scared, I'm just sick. Sick of what? Sick of beef dried on the hoof. Well, we may fare better, now that they've got rid of old Rosy Rosecrans. Think Pap Thomas will do better by us? I surely do—rumor has it that the first thing old Pap is going to do is open up a cracker line.

In a Richmond bedroom two great sagging wide-fleshed faces met and stared; one was cased in glass backed by crinkled quicksilver, and the quicksilver had flaked away from the mirror's back to make the imprisoned face more pocked, more scabbed, more seamed than it was in fact. Brigadier-General John Winder put up his pulpy fingers and inspected tenderly the bleeding notch which a razor had made in a ridge of loose skin beside his mouth (his mouth was a thin old scar, wide and long-healed and stitched together by mythical sutures; it was a fierce blue mouth). Amos, you black son of a bitch, what were you trying to do—murder me? A frightened slave in a frayed white jacket hovered behind Winder. Please, General, sir, I don't know what did happen. That old razor seem like it was nice and sharp when I strop it, but it just didn't glide tonight, sir, it just didn't glide. . . . Winder snarled in reply, saying no words, but he was a master of the snarl, his snarls spoke volumes of invective on complicated ugly subjects. Now he must appear at the President's table with a fresh-cut face. . . . You son of a bitch, go fetch a lump of alum! Don't stand there like a gawk, God damn it—*fetch!*

Aboard the United States sloop *Sea Sprite*, bumping on patrol beyond Mobile, a shaggy Irishman named Patrick was squatted in the head, doing his business at the same hour he always liked to perform it. On the same deck, at another place, another seaman was soliciting the youth whom Patrick adored.

I'll give you five dollars, Val, the man muttered—no, I'll make it six. Just think—six beautiful gold dollars.

I don't think you got six dollars.

Yes, I got them, right in this here sock. Hear them jingle? Val, if you'll wait till it's my watch below and—

I don't dast. He'd be mad; he'd maybe beat me black and blue.

Val, he won't know nothing about it, because he'll be on watch. I'll never tell, Val boy—you can trust old Sprit.

The boy backed slowly away, his ferret eyes gleaming with cupidity, his ferret head shaking. No, I don't dast.

Say ten, by God. I'll raise to ten; hain't got no more.

Well, for ten—

In the lines near Knoxville a boy from the Thirteenth Kentucky slid his rifle across a rock, elevated the sight slightly, and fired at a dark shape which had been drifting in front of him through the thickening mountain dusk. *Yipe*, and then swifter howls going away. I'll be blamed. Just one of those damn dogs again. Hey, Charley, what did you pop? Blame dog. Hey, listen, Charley, you got any crackers left? Got three. Give me one? If I crawl over? Thanks kindly.

Near the Rappahannock the woods were witches' woods where the One Hundred and Forty-eighth Pennsylvania crouched along a side road. Ennis, I noticed something. Well, what? It's the quartermaster; notice anything odd about it? No. Well, I did. Tonight's the first night he set up his tent right *in camp—not out with the wagon train*. Now, way it looks to me, we're stuck here for good. Might as well start work on a shebang tomorrow; I give my oath, I'd bet every shinplaster I got that we'll go into winter quarters right here. First time we've settled down since Bristoe Station. What do you say—about the shebang? There's whole loads of wood around, and if we get started before the rest pitch into it, we'll get first pick. By gum, Jake, I think you're maybe right. Get Balder and Timmelpennick and Douglas and Puffy; let's get after that wood *tonight*. Shake on it, Ennis, I'm with you.

A youth from a New York tenement who bore the name of Torrosian, a youth from the Catskills whose name was Plover, a youth named Mutterson whose mother was reputed to be the best cook in their Pennsylvania valley: Brewster's Brigade divided itself across a creek west of Warrenton, Virginia; pork was sizzling. Eric Torrosian tripped over a root and sent the coffee can spattering into the fire. Amid curses of some men and laughter of others he was sentenced to make up the wasted coffee grounds out of his own store. He had no more coffee in his knapsack, he had to walk a quarter of a mile to the sutler's cart, he went in resentment even though he recognized the justice of it.

At the headquarters of Major-General George H. Thomas in a corner of Tennessee, a tired bearded man leaned between his crutches and peered into a circle of lamplight where papers were spread. A man named Baldy Smith was explaining intently how he had prepared lumber for bridges. Did you establish a sawmill, General Smith? Yes, sir—cobbled one together—utilized an old engine we *borrowed* in the neighborhood. Building the pontoons right now for Bridge Number Three. In addition we're well progressed on a steamer for plying between here and Bridgeport—as soon as we achieve possession of the river. The man on the crutches said, Boat building? Have you a shipyard, General? Smith said, Oh, it's not much, but I think it should turn the trick. It's a scow made from planks we sawed in our mill—all well housed in—and the stern wheel is to be propelled by another steam engine we *borrowed* from a local factory. The man on crutches meditated; there was a tired smile under his brown beard. Seems to me you always were a good provider, even when we were Kay-dets at the Point. Don't think I've seen you since graduation, twenty years ago. Pleased to find you doing such outstanding work. . . . Smith looked at him earnestly. Thank you, sir. It's good to see you again, but I'm sorry to find you on crutches. Is that from the accident you suffered out West? . . . General Grant nodded. It was in August, when I went to New Orleans to talk to Banks. My horse fell. It's been pretty troublesome for over two months. By the by, I haven't notified General Halleck of my arrival here. Will one of your people please to take a message over to the telegrapher for me? . . .

Other crutches rapped across the rough planks of a prison hospital in central Virginia. An ugly beak-nosed man tossed on his pallet and mouthed, Whyn't you quit making all that racket? I was trying to sleep. . . . Oh, shut up, Chickamauga! Some fine day maybe that old hacked-off festered limb of yours will get well, and then you'll have some crutches of your own, and you can see how you like it. . . . Not far away, in a mire named Belle Isle, a New York City rough called Collins clamped his fingers around the throat of a sick Ohioan until there was no breath left in the man; then Collins went through the man's pockets and found the watch he sought, the watch wrapped in a dirty handkerchief with *Enoch from Louella* cross-stitched upon it.

Woods' Brigade of Osterhaus's Division of the Fifteenth Corps trailed along a road in northeastern Mississippi, marching still, they would march until after dark, and how long was it since the day they left Memphis? Willie Mann gave only automatic attention to demands of the march, the watching where to plant his feet, the watching to avoid ruts or rocks. He dreamed, as the last pink warmth of sun touched the heavy knapsack bulking on his shoulders, he dreamed of a girl named Katty. Right now, back home in Missouri, she might be putting a big pan of apples into the oven to bake for dessert that evening. Willie had eaten apples baked by Katty, and they were marvelous things: the scraped flakes of cinnamon bark toasted to black, the sugar changed to apple-nectar-syrup, the thick Alderney cream swirling slowly down through the hollow where the apple had been cored. . . . Beside Willie Mann a big-framed comrade was singing in a monotone as he strode. Titus Cherry couldn't carry a tune on a shovel, but he beguiled himself with song whenever they traveled as hard as they'd traveled this autumn day. The other boys didn't relish the sounds he made, but none of them was big enough to silence him . . . *what signifies the life of man if twere not for the lasses, oh? Green grow the rashes, oh, green grow the rashes, oh.* The tuneless rumble of Titus Cherry hung like a weight on the hearing of the rest, it seemed to retard them while they tramped. . . . On an adjacent road the Fifth Iowa Infantry trailed up a low slope where the Seventeenth Corps was pushing, and Eben Dolliver saw a bird he couldn't quite recognize: was it a jay? It didn't look like the jaybirds back home in Hamilton County—seemed to have more gray on it—it was over there in that scraggly oak—he wished he could leave the column, to see it at close range—maybe bluejays in northern Mississippi had more gray than Iowa birds would have at this season. Of course! he thought drolly. Confederate birds, Secesh jaybirds, they're bound to be gray. The man ahead of him snarled over his shoulder, Ebe, quit goosing me with your rifle butt. A butt in the butt, said someone else. A weak chuckle drifted up.

Pines, mountains, stones upon stones, the flat pocked farms below, the burned houses and disordered towns, the girl waving her kerchief, the crone spitting as the enemy passed, the armies squatting or moving, the oceans along margins where hunted craft and hunters went lurching as the wind of night rose. And scattered, dotted singly or by couples or by dozens from Texas to the White Mountains and down to the lead-speckled clefts of Tennessee once more, there labored a pulse and breathing of fifty thousand men whose fate bayed behind them—never seen, never heard, but driving them with the dedicated relentlessness of time itself, driving them toward a common destination.

The next morning before it was light, Ira Claffey walked in the woods with his grief.

IV

Often in early December the north wind beats thinly, steadily across the hillocks of Georgia; it comes like a sickle cutting unseen but felt, and the edge is rawly mean; and before dawn a woman should shiver from her nest (if an indulgent woman who could not presume to awaken her husband first to the task) and let her sleepy grasp go hunting charred billets piled in the corner. . . . The log sinks loosely, deeper and deeper among pink flakes after she has put it there, and for a minute or two there are no flames, only a sizzling. Then the resin has melted out, it pops and fries with a smell like cooking, there are spurts and explosions of crystallized juices as they burn to evaporation in a twinkling: the first solid flame is accomplished. Up it goes, crawls onto a splinter, hangs, droops, falls off, rises wider and more solidly. Its cousin flame joins it from the rear and over the top; the wide hot ruffle is a fringe and a high one, in seconds. The warmth comes out . . . it is good that the warmth comes, for that unseen sickle swings across every upland where the stalks have dried.

In this December darkness, Coffee's wife lifted and fired the small log.

She ran back, long-legged and monstrous in her rough short shirt; she rolled back the old comforters and

plunged beneath them, and bundled them behind her muscular back and wadded them beneath her thin buttock. Her knees drew into the warm space behind Coffee's knees, her right arm slid around his hairy chest, her chin pressed close between his shoulders, and her own breath burnt in its regular strength beneath the covers, helping to warm them both.

Ung, said Coffee.

It's time, old man.

He was twenty-five years old, Pet was nineteen. Coffee could count to forty and a little past, which was often a convenience in his work, and he had learned proudly. Old Leander taught him. Pet could not count past the sum of her fingers, though sometimes she tried to add the sum of her toes; but this bothered her because she had lost one toe from the bite of a rat when she was small, and she could not quite understand why she never seemed to have as many toes as she had fingers. The bite of the rat came in that unhappy antiquity when she and her mother belonged to Mr. Ganwood. It was a filthy plantation where they were owned, and there was never enough wood or coverings or potatoes, seldom any meat except what the slaves stole or hunted down; there was a whipping-morning for accumulated misdeeds every week—just before holiday, so that the slaves whipped might have a chance to recover before they went into the fields again . . . never any Christmas fit to speak of. Old Mr. Ganwood died a smelly death in bed—slaves said that the Devil came and got him, and certain slaves even declared awesomely that they had seen the Devil coming: he wore a tall black hat, and had two hands with him to fetch out the box in which old Mr. Ganwood was finally nailed. Mr. Ganwood's hands were then parceled out at public auction, and Pet and her mother Naomi became the property of Mr. Ira Claffey. From then on (during the next fourteen years, except for privations which occurred because of war) there was every sort of decent generous allowance which you could name. The Claffeys always made a wonderful Christmas for all their people, and they called them people, and the people were pleased. And these very quilts beneath which Pet now snuggled with her wedded husband, had once covered white folks and made them warm; they were a trifle frayed now, the green squares fading to yellow, the yellow squares fading to white . . . this top quilt was warm, and had a softness.

Time, old man.

Ung.

Time.

How you know, old woman?

I just knows.

Coffee stirred, grunted, settled warm but lifelessly again. They lay like a frieze taken down from the wall and placed flat upon the solid roped bed. There were three of them, in this order: Pet, Coffee, Sukey. Pet was married to Coffee when she was fifteen, and she had lost three other children before they grew very large inside her. Each time she had to stay abed for many days, and both the old and the young mistress came to help attend her, and oversee just what Naomi did for her daughter; and the young mistress made her drink of a tea she herself had prepared. This was all very painful and disheartening, and in weakness Pet was certain that she cried enough tears to fill the largest bucket in the kitchen. But now Sukey was an accomplished fact, and the child grinned all day long, and crawled everywhere; she pulled herself up beside chairs, and grinned at the old master and snatched at the finger which he presented with its gold Masonic ring. Soon she would be walking.

How that child, you Coffee?

She all wet. He giggled sleepily. She wet but she sleeping. She got me wet too.

Time, old man.

He yawned enormously. Still got time, and his big strong hand came hunting amusement. He began to struggle around to face her.

No, no, no! You be decent, man.

Still got time!

No, old man. No time now. Them chickens started in.

I don't hear them.

You listen, you hear them. Don't you come funning with me now. You come home tonight, I let you make fun then.

Oh, yes, old woman. I come home all tuckered out.

Sukey awakened and began to yell. Give her to me, you Coffee. Coffee gathered up the dripping child and helped her to crawl across his strong body until she whimpered happily at her mother's fat breast. Pet was built like a bean-pole, but she carried plenty of milk. The milk was rich, and Naomi said, Hi, just see that fat in it. Once Sukey was born she had never been sick a day in her little life.

Get out of there. You hear me?

The chickens were increasingly vocal; Coffee dared not ignore their summons any longer. He could hear the roosters in their high wailing whooping, all the way across the world. He guessed he could hear them away over at the Tebbs place, and in the scrawny village of Anderson itself. *Urr-a-urr-a-oo*.

Bell ain't spoke yet.

It'll speak, but don't you wait. You fly round, get your clothes, put on one more log, make yourself some count.

The bell spoke: pound, pound, pound. It hung in its gallows on the corner of Old Leander's cabin two cabins away from the home of Pet and Coffee, and it was one of Old Leander's proud tasks to ring the bell according to direction. He would beat it ferociously, then go hobbling back to bed. He had worked for a lifetime, he had toiled well and hard, he could sleep as late as he pleased. Nowadays however he spoke of Heaven with increasing frequency; he prayed hourly. He said that he had seen the three young masters in a dream, and they were dressed in raiment. The rest of the hands were impressed. They cried a little whenever Leander spoke of the young masters, and they too talked about raiment.

Alternately groaning and snorting, Coffee emerged from bed and put on the loose shirt and jeans which he had wadded under the foot of the bed. Wind cut through the few cabin-cracks and made even his strong frame shiver.

Where our shawl, woman?

On that peg with my frocksies.

He found the shawl, tied it around his shoulders, and padded away toward the door.

Don't you go making dirt by the door, you hear me? Old Mastah say everybody go down to the privy, else we get a plague.

Coffee mumbled that he had no intention of making dirt. However, the privy was a long way down the hind path, and cold made him squirm. It was dark, no one could see; all he wanted to make was water, and he went between the two small Walker's Yellow apple trees and made it. Around him rose the sounds of earliest morning, though still the night clung black; you could make out the blot of horizon in the east, you could separate the lighter darkness of sky from the darker darkness of earth, that was all. Jonas and Buncombe, his eldest child, were busy at the stables; Coffee could hear them talking to the horse and the mules. That little Buncombe was stepping around smartly these days; before long he would graduate on the rolls and be listed as half a hand. . . . Coffee put his fingers into both of the buckets on a split bench before the cabin door. Empty or practically so. He carried the pails to the nearest well, beyond the line of cabins on a rounding small hill above stockpens and stables. He put down the sweep, brought up water, filled the pails and carried them home. At the well he'd splashed water all over his face, and had rubbed his eyes and ears with his big wet thumbs. He was thoroughly awake at last.

Pet was up and gowned. She had put a second log into the fireplace and flames were merry; the room was cosier. Sukey sat squealing on the bed. Pet was digging around in the wide heaps of light loose ashes, hunting for yams she'd put there the night before. Coffee had reproved her a dozen times: he claimed that she was always getting the yams too close to the center, too near the logs, too near the actual burning. Well, she had done it again, but with only one yam. She lifted out the four—one charred nearly to a husk, one half raw, two excellently baked, and these two happened to be the biggest. She put them down on the table, and Coffee grabbed, and burnt his hand, and swore.

Don't you go a-cursing, old man.

Woman, I like to roast my fingers off!

Coffee, I don't favor no cursing. Dear Lord never favor cursing. Won't never rear this child mongst cursing.

Oh, hush you prattle, woman. He slapped at her playfully, and she assaulted him with the scorched forked stick she'd used for the yams.

Coffee said, pushing the muffled words out of his mouth while it was filled with potato— He said, I got to tote lunch for noontime.

You want me send a child down with your dinner? Coffee, we low on rations.

We eat too much. You burn too much our rations way! Old woman, know what we do today? We start working for the army.

Who all?

I told you once, I told you twice: me and Jem and Jonas. We all queesishunned.

What that mean?

Big soldier man, he come riding up and old Mastah go out to the gate, and they talk right next me. Bet you old Mastah he mad through and through. Soldier man say, I can't help that, Mr. Claffey, sir. What it say here on this paper: how many hands you got for me? Can't take no women; got to have men cut down trees and

dig the ground. So we all get queesishunned, what he say.

What that mean, though?

Just what he say. He say slack work now, won't make no hard times, but old Mastah mad just same.

What you do? Whereabouts?

He say cut down trees, dig ground. Reckon over on Mr. Bile land or mostly on McWhorter land; maybe some on our land.

Well, I got cold pone you fetch along.

Ain't we got no meat?

Well, I let you fetch one piece of pork with your pone. Tomorrow Sunday, tomorrow blessed day, holiday, old man. You take your club, go get us some rabbit.

Dad fetch, we do go through our rations! Bless the dear Lord you get plenty snick-snack up in the big house.

No snick-snack like we used to get. White folks eat mighty plain nowadays; old Mistess watch the platters, and she count and watch careful, and she warn Naomi no waste, and she carry her keys right on the belt of her gown, and she lock up all the time.

Get me my dinner-snack. Don't you hear Jem a-calling?

She wrapped a generous slab of pone and a smaller chunk of greasy pork in clean corn-shucks, and Coffee put the bundle inside his shirt. He tried to kiss Pet, she fought him off, the child shrieked, and Coffee went fleeing. It was much lighter outside and before he got to the tool shed he could see Jem and Jonas standing ready for work ahead of him.

There was a slight ripple of excitement through their uneventful lives at this thought of going to work for the army. Perhaps Coffee was more steeped in melancholy than the other two, and thus he had sought to keep up his own spirits by chatting with Pet while they breakfasted. Behind his long ruddy-tinted face and within his close-cropped skull Coffee had a brain which contained machinery both for imagination and recollection. He remembered, he remembered. In the old days, and during a December week like this, they would have had eighteen or twenty field hands picking cotton, maybe four hands employed constantly at the gin, to say nothing of the people bringing in corn, the people minding pigs, the people hauling boards, the people weaving and making rope or mule-collars, the people inevitably sick. These in addition to house servants flying round at the big house, or busy in dairy and wash house and storehouses and kitchen. The Claffey place was something to behold, before the war.

After the unresolved campaigns of 1862, the drawn battles and tightening of the blockade, Ira Claffey had witnessed the *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* in no uncertain characters. He sold his people right and left, and at great loss, for he would not separate families and would not sell to strangers unless he went personally to see where his sold-off people would be dwelling and under what conditions. In this late season of 1863 another year of protracted butchery and short commons had proved Ira's wisdom. The place could feed the Claffeys and the hands still remaining to them; that was about all it could do, after the military took their tithe.

Coffee might understand but dimly what his master had been about, and why; nevertheless he recalled autumns abounding in prosperity, autumns unperforated by worms of war and death.

He listened idly to the mumbling of Jem and Jonas while they waited for the master to appear.

One of the mules was sick with colic, and Jonas was reciting the remedy he desired to employ and the cure which would follow. It was something Old Leander had taught him when Jonas was young. Take a big plug of tobacco and cut off a slice maybe as thick as your little finger was long. Put the tobacco in cold water—about the size of that crockful, over there on the bench; then throw in four or five shovels of hot oak ashes, and let the mixture set awhile before you give it to the mule. Ask master or overseer to use his watch; ask him to tell you when fifteen minutes had passed. Then the solution was ready to use, and better not use more of it than a chunk bottle full at one time. It still had to be warm when you used it to drench the mule. Chances were that the mule would be well at once; but never let him near water for a good ten hours. If it were noon when you drenched him, you shouldn't let him drink till close to midnight. And never let him eat corn right afterward, nor do any more work that day.

Then old mule get well.

You drench that Devil mule like that?

I got tobacco waiting in the water. I got oak ash in my fire. When Mastah come I tell him about Devil; but I can't go work for old army and drench Devil mule same time. Can't be no two places same time.

A rear door of the big house was heard to open, and Ira Claffey appeared, followed by a setter who was partially paralyzed by the ills of old age, and dragged his rear quarters, sniffing himself into a succession of sneezes.

The Negroes watched with ready amusement. He think he young again, that Deuce. Think he go after partridge.

Claffey left the dog inside the house fence and prepared to latch the gate. Deuce vented a long shuddering whine, and held up his front paw. This was ritual of his, to gain attention, and never failed whether he approached black or white.

Poor Deuce, said Claffey, turning. Have you a thorn in your foot?

Whine, said Deuce, still holding out the paw.

What have you here? An old sand-spur?

Whine.

Claffey returned to the gate, reached through between the palings and pretended to extract a thorn from one of the crumbling split toe-pads. There, got it, he said. Deuce dropped his foot to the ground as if relieved of enormous trouble, and went capering about. The slaves laughed aloud, watching. Morning, Mastah.

Morning, Jem, Jonas, Coffee. I trust you said your prayers.

Jem and Jonas bobbed their heads vigorously, and after a guilty second Coffee nodded also, but in a lie. Ira Claffey looked at his watch, and Jonas stepped forward to tell him about Devil.

Very well, Jonas. I know about that drench. Leander used it for many years.

Yassah.

Have you oak ashes in your fireplace? Good—I'll drench Devil myself, and pen him away from food and water.

The slaves felt a great pride that they were owned by a master who did not stand helplessly, or labor among his fruit trees to no avail, or who did not spend the bulk of his time at whist or in lounging with liquor and no purpose. The dumb affection and faith they gave to Ira stemmed (much of it) from an awareness that he could do many of the same tasks they performed, and often do them better. In such an absolute monarchy, and in the shadow of such a monarch, there was the flourishing of a strange democratic pride; you had to see it and feel it and live it to know it, but it was there, and always exerting.

Claffey did the things an overseer would have done. He performed these tasks with reluctance because he did not approve the work laid out for his hands, demanded of them by their Government. He unlocked the door of the implement house and parceled out three axes and three spades which the slaves put across their shoulders. The tools had been well smithed to begin with; axe-helves and the handles of spades were of timber cured for the purpose. Ira gave to Jonas a whetstone and warned him not to lose it. Each tool had a *C* branded on it; Ira instructed the hands to guard the plantation property jealously. No telling what sort of raggle-taggle herds might have been assembled by the army folks who were impressing labor.

Ira Claffey took his people to the front gate. Daylight came clearly but no troops or workers appeared. He sent Coffee to the kitchen with instructions to fetch from Naomi a small pail of the burnt-grain brew which had to serve in these times, together with a cup and saucer for the master. He poured out his own cup and gave the rest to the people. They drank the hot stuff eagerly, smacking their lips in turn above the tin pail's rim.

Before they had finished, a disturbance moved along the lane from beyond the magnolias. There appeared a wagon drawn by two mules, the box heaped with miscellaneous axes, picks, mattocks, shovels. A bearded sergeant rode on the board beside the Negro driver, and a band of some two dozen blacks trailed behind, gabbling noisily. The rearmost file was closed by a fat youth of fifteen or thereabouts who burst fairly out of his shabby gray clothing, and who wore accoutrements and carried a musket slung from his shoulder.

The wagon halted in front of the gate. The sergeant took out a notebook and consulted it. . . . Mr. Claffey, sir?

Yes, Sergeant. I have three hands ready for you.

Says here you're supposed to have four.

So your impressing officer thought, but the fourth of my black people—full-grown males—is Old Leander, and he's in his dotage. I'll never send him.

Well, sir, right here it says, Mr. I. Claffey, four hands.

If there's any question about it, the officer may complain to me in person.

Might send the provost.

Let him.

Very well, sir.

Jem, Coffee and Jonas had been waiting with docility, grinning at friends from neighborhood plantations they saw before them, conversing in low tones. The sergeant swung round and called, You three nigs fall in

with the others.

They stood, deeply puzzled.

Fall *in*, God damn it!

Don't curse my people, Sergeant. Ira Claffey spoke sharply. They're not accustomed to it. The sergeant means, Jonas, that you shall march along with the others.

Yes, Mastah.

They went, and Ira stood watching the procession as it traveled to the head of the lane and then turned north on a wood road past abandoned cotton fields. He closed his eyes, his head blurred quickly in its traditional shaking, he took a deep breath. Not enjoying the December breeze which continued to wield its knife, he strode off to drench his Devil mule.

The three Claffey Negroes went in docility with their fellows, and presently the sound of axe-strokes came spanking from a valley ahead. Halfway down the slope a man who seemed to be a soldier signalled to the sergeant, and the wagon turned off to the left. This man wore a fine overcoat of bright blue; it had a cape across the shoulders, and instantly all the blacks coveted those gleaming brass buttons.

That Yankee coat for sure.

How you know, boy?

Count of blue. All them Yankee wear blue, blue, blue. Young Mastah Badger tolt me.

But that gentleman ain't no Yankee gentleman. Old Mistuh Bile—he got blue coat too, and he no Yankee.

That gentleman captivate he coat in the war, yes, boy.

They found in the throng people from nearby plantations and smaller farms, people drawn from big places miles away, enormous holdings which they had heard of in legendary fashion. There were hands belonging to the Groovers, the Nickersons, the Rackleys, the Vinings. A larger share of the impressed laborers were engaged in carving out a narrow trench some five feet deep, cleaving down the slope and passing disordered rails where old fences had been ruined. The stile was pulled apart. Gangs dotted up the other slope, felling pines ahead of the diggers; and one troop worked at nothing but rolling fallen trunks aside, or heave-hoing with chains and oxen to tear the roots and stumps loose. It was a fable of the circus which the Claffey hands had never seen but hoped to witness before they became as old as Old Leander. Something was going on in every direction, and they found an added pepper of excitement in observing the white youths who brought a show of force and urgency by strolling about with their guns. Coffee felt his blood warming and his pulse bounding.

What folks do here, you Jem?

White captain say they make jail.

Hi. Jail all over these here woods?

Jail for Yankees.

Hi. Reckon they got ten hundred dozen thousand Yankees cotched already.

Yes, boy. They got ten hundred dozen villain nillain hundred Yankees cotched.

You nigs get over here and line up for axes.

Mastah Captain, sir, we got our own axes. Old Mastah say we keep them by us. They marked with the word, Mastah Captain. Old Mastah say—

Ah, the hell with your Old Mastah! Step lively, over here by the driver—

The driver was an impassive middle-aged creature named Scooper. He belonged to Mrs. Barney Yeoman and was a power at the sawmill when it was in operation. Also Scooper had local fame as the owner of a vicious fighting-cock which had torn the feathers and throats and bellies of all rivals in the region. The Claffey people had lost heavily to Scooper in the past . . . dimes and quarters too. They offered him no resentment; only respectful admiration. They assembled under his command, and Scooper put them in a squad of three; he knew that they were accustomed to toiling in unison and would do better so. With regret Coffee heard the order for them to deposit their shovels in the wagon bed to be drawn by other hands, but Scooper muttered that he would try to keep an eye on the implements.

These two pines here. Cut them down. Fell them over on this side.

The slaves cleared away the thin undergrowth, took their positions, and as chief axeman Jonas set pace and cadence. One, two, three; one, two, three; hink, hank, hunk; hink, henk, honk . . . blades tilted with power, evenly, deeply into fresh jeweled wood; the chips whirled out. . . . Hold up, you; I take a look; now stand back, I cut me a butt kerf. Hink, hink, hink, hink. That good, boy? It good, boy. Old tree lie right over here where Scooper say. Now we go again . . . hink, henk, hunk . . . already it seemed that the needled summit was quivering steadily, gracefully in knowledge of its own death. Behind the slaves another tree came roaring down, making the brown cones and dry needles fly amid dust, and all the people yelped and jumped and let their laughter rise.

Air did not grow much warmer but the workers did. Long since they had dispensed with wraps and hung them on the remains of the fence separating Bile and McWhorter land. Dumbly they were grateful that this clearing of forest did not take place necessarily in August . . . you could work up a mighty sweat, putting that old axe into the pine. But their muscles scarcely recognized the demand put upon them. There was always a demand upon their muscles, an order calling for bending, stooping, lifting, toting, kneeling, bearing, squatting, digging, heaping, covering, flailing. Jonas was thirty-eight or so, Jem perhaps the same age (nobody knew) and Coffee in his youngest prime. They were the sole male active survivors of a troop which once had thronged the cotton rows, cornfields, pig-pens, goober patches, wood brakes. Nowadays they performed any and every task, dreaming no further ahead than the cold potatoes of noon, hot potatoes of night, the boiled turnips, the tasty chew of pork, the picked game bones, the dog yelling that here were squirrels . . . dreaming certainly no further ahead than the next turkey gobble or Christmas gift or yielding of a giggling shiny body in a bed or down a fence-row.

Coffee and Jem stood aside, responding to Jonas's direction, and they watched his last quick heaving of the blade. Piny tendons grew taut, pulled, snapped . . . patch of shade tilted quickly off into space above their heads as Jonas leaped away. Then the hillside jumped beneath their feet, the mincing slam was in their ears.

Scooper, you want we cut him up?

No, cut-up gang do that. You take next one, like I bid you.

...Hink, hunk, honk. The heavy slicing once again, the designing of the kerf . . . cadence thrumming out to

suggest a song.

Put old Yankee in?

Put old Yankee in the jail. How long?

Long, long, long! In the jail—

This here jail. Put old Yankee long, long, long. Put him in the jail.

Oh, how many do you say?

Six-teen-hun-dred-vill-ain-mill-ain-Yankee-in-the-jail.

The smash again, cones bounding like grenades, the cold good woods axed apart, and far away the buzzing of a stubborn and belated covey as they whizzed out of the forest; and did not know it, but they would never fly there again, they would never nest or hide or peek or feed or run, now that trees were coming down and stumps being wrenched and the long roots rending clay.

At noon the Claffey hands sprawled in solid sunlight, protected from wind by the bulk of a broken tree, warm as toast and with a few flies bothering them. Preparations for the stockade were more extensive than people of the countryside had dreamed. Parties of impressed laborers kept arriving all forenoon—also soldiers, with wagons containing ragged tent flies beneath which some of the workers would be housed temporarily. Labor was being brought from points as far as a day's journey distant; the Claffey people said, I wouldn't do it, reckon I'd run off, not sleep in these here woods but put for home and my own good bed. They saw a young captain master riding around on a sorrel horse; rumor said that also there were a major master and an old colonel master somewhere about, but none of the Claffey contingent saw them. Axe parties were kept toiling while the diggers had their nooning, in order to have progressed well ahead of the shovels. A certain grim if slatternly efficiency was now apparent in the whole enterprise.

When the first yells rose about nooning, the welcome fever spread visibly from gang to gang. The Claffeys saw the gang south of them putting their axes at rest and hunting their lunches; in turn they struck their own blades into logs and sought their jackets, or the corn-shuck parcels hung up somewhere; in turn the next gang to the north and east saw what they were doing, and followed suit. Someone had stolen Jem's corn pone, and Jem had nothing left but a jar of cooked rutabagas scorned by the thief. Generously Coffee and Jonas shared their own lunches with their fellow and partook of his rutabagas, changing about in employment of the old iron spoon. They were accustomed, at the Claffey place, to much more variety in the way of vegetables than most slaves ate; the plantation health was that much better in consequence. Old master had a green thumb—two green thumbs—and just wait till those peaches and plums grew ripe again, and berries too. Watch for that lettuce and those onions and those okras when springtime came; yes, and collard greens or mustard, with pork.

You Jem, reckon they put Linkum in this jail?

They never cotch Linkum!

Take a powerful lot of soldiers cotch Linkum.

They is powerful lot of soldiers right here now in these woods.

They soldiers, they got guns, but they young. Take old soldier, lot of big majors like young Mastah Suthy, catch Linkum. Old Linkum he smart as old coon.

Old Linkum, he wear big blue coat like that Yankee coat soldier gentleman captivate from the Yankees.

Yes, boy, all buttons gold.

Never cotch Linkum, insisted Jem stubbornly.

You black little old turd, you not know Linkum.

Jem rose and glowered. Who you call black little old turd?

Scooper came round the crest of the fallen pine, snapping his fingers for them to get back on the job. They rose—not with too much alacrity; they knew Scooper well, and would have been astonished had he driven them as hard as he might drive a gang of strangers. Scooper was full of talk about what would be done with the pine trees, and the people listened with curiosity. Trunks would be trimmed to fit tightly each against the next, with branches and boles chopped clean; they would be set upright in the trench, with earth scraped back and beaten down to hold them solidly. They would be immovable, twenty feet tall, with a quarter of their length held in the ground; thus the fence they made would be a good fifteen feet in height, tall as the front gallery on a good-sized house. Jonas was the only one who understood readily the measurements and dimensions described by Scooper, but the slaves listened to his tale with interest. Jem had forgotten utterly his cross words exchanged with Coffee; they chuckled and nudged each other and said, No Yankee get across that big fence.

But old Linkum, said Jem. He get across.

Maybe he do that, agreed Scooper. He run up them post like bobcat.

The humorous thought of Lincoln running up the posts like a bobcat struck them with full force. They went back to finish felling the next tree in bright merriment. A corporal scolded them later and then they were comparatively silent, working with strong docility, doing what they were ordered to do and doing it well. Until near sunset the axe-strokes were snapping.

V

The next day, perhaps two hours after his hands were on the job, Ira Claffey appeared in a small two-wheeled cart, driving behind a brown mule and with little Buncombe, Jonas's son, beside him. Bun was only six years old but already Jonas had taught him to drive this mule, which was as tractable and dependable as a mule could be. After making inquiries Ira made his way down the slope and found the sergeant who was in charge of implement supply.

I wish to pick up my shovels, sir. My hands did not fetch them home last night.

Carelessly the sergeant declared his ignorance of the shovels, and was not choice about his language when he did it. Instantly Ira Claffey knocked him flat, and while the younger man lay amid the pine trash rubbing his jaw, Ira spoke calmly, describing his situation. There had been no requisition addressed to him about tools; merely he had been instructed verbally that he must equip his slaves for whatever work was demanded of them. Since his people were put in the chopping gang, he had requested that the unused portion of his property be returned. Such articles commanded a premium throughout the Confederacy, which fact Ira knew very well. He was unwilling for some Home Guardsman to profit from the sale or trade of those shovels.

There was every impress of honesty in Ira's statements; nor did the dull sergeant wish to encounter that fist

again. Ira Claffey was distinguished in that community and the sergeant knew it. He had a loaded revolver in a holster on the wagon seat, but who would dare to use a weapon against a former member of the State Legislature, and the father of three dead sons, two of them officers? Grumpily he ordered the diggers to file by and present their spades for Claffey's inspection. One, marked plainly with the C brand, turned up within a couple of minutes; a second was found farther north, across the branch, but only after much searching. The third and last eluded them until a slave whispered that there was a spade with a broken handle in the wagon box. It seemed that someone had tried to pry a big rock with the spade. Claffey put the shovels into his two-wheeled cart and took out a game bag, ammunition pouches, and a fine silver-chased English fowling piece which had belonged to his elder brother, Felton Claffey, and had been left to him in Felton's will.

Mastah, breathed the child shyly, you going take old Deuce?

No, Buncombe. Deuce is too badly paralyzed. His hind end hurts him because he is old; he grows very tired.

Mastah, what you do for you dog?

I heard dogs up in the old pasture when I left the place; that's the reason I went back for gun and ammunition. I think that pair from the Yeoman place—what are their names? Twink and Wink?— They're out hunting by their lonesome. I've shot over them before.

Mastah, said Bun with great conviction, reckon we folks ought to have a new dog.

Well, Bun, if you find any good young dogs, free of charge, please inform me.

Sir?

Let me know if you find any dogs—free.

Yes, Mastah, and the child grinned on his way, delighted beyond description at this first intrusting to himself of the two-wheeled cart for a solitary errand. He drove the mule, whose name was Tiger, very slowly all the way home. He listened with rapture to each thud and crackling of the animal's slow pace, and yet with agony because each step meant that they were a trifle nearer home. He thrilled to the twitching of the reins, patched from scrap material as they were. Bun sang, tunefully but singing no recognizable words, all the way home.

Ira Claffey heard the Yeoman dogs giving voice on distant uplands after he had left the area where forest was in the process of being spoilt. These pointers he sought were damaged through neglect—they came from a line with good noses, and had undergone a certain amount of proper schooling—but now a resident overseer and his family were the only whites left on the Yeoman place, and the overseer did not shoot. The pointers galloped in complete abandon; like mongrels they scented and chased squirrels and varmints, they dug for little beasts in burrows. Ira went through a pine grove where the hubbub from the construction gangs (they were actually *destruction* gangs, and he frowned at the thought) barely reached his ears. He saw a black-and-white tail waving above the scrub; he whistled, and both dogs rushed to him like rowdies. Wink would accept no discipline and finally Claffey had to drive him off; the dog returned to his excavation of a rabbit's tunnel. Twink, on the other hand, reverted handsomely to better behavior when he became aware that Ira Claffey bore a shotgun. He could not be depended upon, but at least he might give some hint of birds waiting unseen ahead.

They hunted across one of the old cotton fields where now weeds were romping, and raised only four ground doves, which Claffey would not shoot because he had been reared in the superstition surrounding them. . . . What other grief, he thought, could possibly befall? Well, I presume that if I were now to lose Lucy or—God forbid it—Veronica—

There was a trick of his imagination which recurred persistently; it had recurred, ever since the last ghastly news was brought by the Dillards. Ira kept seeing his sons around the place, he kept hearing their voices. Sometimes at home he would be in his tool shed, and it seemed that a corner of his vision caught the impression of young Moses going out the door. He was positive that sometimes, lying dry and wakeful in the middle of the night, he heard the faint ring of china from Sutherland's room as the young man got up and used his chamber pot. Ira did not believe in ghosts as such. But he thought that perhaps the actual impress of the boys' living had left a variety of sights, sounds and scents which had never been expended and were not dead, even though the boys were dead. He thought that all trees and shrubbery and walls and fences on the plantation might have absorbed the day-by-day activities of his sons, and still gave them forth, but faintly—as a roasted brick retained its heat long after it had been pinned up in flannel, and so afforded comfort to the cold feet of an invalid who needed warmth. And Ira needed this reassurance that his sons had once been part of a waking, busy scheme called Life; ah, he needed it.

He did not consciously imagine these figments of reappearance, but welcomed them when they befell. He could not share the knowledge with others; he had tried. He said to Veronica, Strangest thing, my dear. I was in the seed house looking up seed for top onions—you know, the tree onion: that's *Allium Cepa*, variety *viviparum*—because I thought it high time to start the onion beds. And distinctly I heard the house door open and close, and it seemed that Badger started down the path. I thought I heard him stumble across the little stones which border it—you know, walking heedlessly, rather floundering like the hobbledehoy that he is—That he was—

Veronica was racked with a fit of dry sobbing on the instant, and walked slowly out of the room with her hands pressed against her cheeks. It would never do to mention such things to her again. So he would never do it, not if he saw clearly all three boys ranged before the fireplace, toasting their parents with good humor, drinking strong drink from the small silver cups they'd had when they were babies.

In a prank which Veronica might have deemed cruel but which Ira thought beneficent, he saw the boys hunting beside him. He missed a fair shot at the first two quail which rose, because he was watching Badger and how the youngster carried his gun. Badger wore an old jacket of yellow tow which his mother had thought so disreputable that repeatedly she begged him to give it to a servant, but it was Badge's favorite. He wore also a powder-horn with a shiny brass plug or stopper, a powder-horn carried long ago by his grand-uncle Sutherland Claffey when Unk warred against the redcoats. The plug was a gem in sunlight and cast out little glistening daggers to stab the eyes.

Sometimes Badger was there, hunting, and sometimes the land was untenanted except for the pointer and the shadow which walked beneath Ira's own bulk. Sometimes he saw the other boys also, but today they were mistier than Badge, and Ira could not have recited what they wore nor what they said when birds went up and escaped their firing, or whether they got any birds at all. He saw them. . . .

He himself missed some more birds, finally got his eye back, and observed the feathers struck and buffed by fine shot, he watched the birds tumbling and felt sorry for them. He put nine quail into the game bag before he was tired. He could have shot many more if he'd had a proper dog; but the half-ruined Twink had done his best, and Ira praised him and gave him a biscuit from his pocket. He regretted the little speckled bodies still warm, dumped in a weight against his hip; he felt a gloom when he thought of blood on a beak, blood in a bright eye soon to be no longer bright. But death was walking the land with such enormous crushing strides that who was he to mourn this microscopic butchery? The birds would be a fair tribute to Ira's womenfolks; the women would know that he had thought of them with love, that he had tried to please.

As he returned slowly to his home at an hour approaching midday, the chorus of axes, shouts, songs, whistles, bellows and thuds came steadily louder, the nearer Ira approached to the Sweetwater branch and

astounded hills hemming it. What ugliness—to know that there would soon be a prison adjacent to one's dooryard! He supposed that prisons were necessary, but the thought of this stockade pained him before it was even made. He counseled himself that he should be glad there was a prison—and in such a healthy area as this—for a prison meant that the young fellows who'd be placed in it were living still; they were not extinct as the Claffey boys were extinct, but they were breathing and able to walk around, even restrained by the fence of massacred pine trees. If there were no places of military detention it would mean that every individual who yielded to superior force was slaughtered when he yielded. That would be a massacre in truth.

But isn't all war a massacre?

Scarcely—not in the sense that we employ when we speak of Indians and massacres. It's not a complete wiping out. It is a knightly contest.

In what knightly fashion did your comrades the volunteers behave in Mexico?

That was a brutal and unprovoked war, although at the time I was comparatively young and did not understand. This is the War for Southern Independence. The Yankees call it a Rebellion. Indeed it is one: a Rebellion against a power whose authority is denied.

But you did not favor Secession.

Neither did Aleck Stephens. *Revolutions are much easier started than controlled, and the men that begin them seldom end them. . . . Human passions are like the winds—when aroused they sweep everything before them in their fury. The wise and the good who attempt to control them will themselves most likely become the victims.*

Georgia—

Sutherland died for Georgia. Badger died for Georgia. Moses died for Georgia. Rob Lamar died for Georgia—

The devil they did. They died for— They died—

That's it. The Alpha and the Omega. They died.

Yet in private philosophy unvoiced, unrecognized, chained in a dark place remotely in his belief, Ira knew that he was undervaluing his sons and perhaps undervaluing his own dreams. The legend must still be alive—the grave and powerful and courteous legend—it must be exalted somewhere, if so many young spirits had embraced it. And elder spirits as well. The legend must be shining, as the slain were shining in whatever realm they occupied. Ira wished doggedly that he could see the shining. But it seemed that he went home in the dark (midnight at high noon) and sounds from the region toward the northeast stunned him as he walked.

VI

In February the one black gown remaining to Lucy was worn shabby, pulled loose at many of its seams. She tried discussing this problem with her mother, but Veronica was treading farther and farther away from both husband and daughter. Often it was hard to win a response from her on any topic in the world. If you spoke of the boys, her face turned more haggard than ever and tears flowed. In speaking of black gowns Lucy had

in fact spoken of the boys. Still addled with her own grief, the girl felt torture afresh as she saw her mother withdraw to her own room. Veronica slept alone, Ira Claffey had moved into Badger's old room. This began when he suffered a catarrhal attack during the Christmas season and wished to avoid infecting his wife. He had enjoyed no physical relationship with Veronica since the last black draught was given them to drink. It seemed expedient for them to continue dwelling apart.

Poppy, I must seek your advice.

What is it, my dear?

About my wardrobe. I tried discussing it with Mother but— You see, Poppy, my last black has gone by the board; and of course we daren't spend money on goods even could we find the proper goods at Mr. Campbell's.

But, Lucy, do you wish to remain in black?

For the time being I'd prefer it. At least until it's been a year since— I've the pale green silk—you know, the old one, my first silk when I was seventeen—and I'm positive it would take a strong black dye mighty well. I hadn't thought to dye a wool, though, for goodness knows how I'll feel about my wardrobe in the autumn; I might choose to remain in black, and then again I might not. Can't scarcely tell.

Her small tender laugh, the laugh he loved, but coming seldom nowadays.

Well, child, you can't wear silk daily.

Oh, about the house I don't mind—I've plenty of fixings for home use, unless we have callers. But when callers appear, or going to church, or just going to Americus— Now, I've the blue figured poplin I could dye; I've two cottons for summer wear which I'm sure would take it well—the blue sprigged on white, and the pink patterned walking gown we had made when I was at the Female Institute. You may remember it: all the girls were required to have them alike, and I surely never did like being all alike.

Ah. And now the uniform turns to black. For Georgians.

Father and daughter stood regarding each other mutely, and Lucy had paled at this observation which escaped him whether he wished it or no. She shrugged wearily, and he bent to kiss her on her high smooth forehead. I suppose there must be a great deal of black in other States. And at the North also, Poppy, she said in her soft voice.

Yes, yes. I've thought of that. He added hastily, Lucy child, I'd recommend the pink walking gown for the dye-vat, since it has an unhappy connotation of seminary days. I remember how miserable you were, forever begging to return home.

And at last you let me, like a dear sweet Poppy, and over Mother's protestations. I regret it deeply, but I never could keep up that old French, and I promised faithfully.

You're a dear good child, and you don't need French. All you need is to go on being Lucy.

Thank you, sir. And I'll take your advice about that little walking gown.

But who can do the trick for you? Ninny, Pet or Extra? Or does Naomi—?

Oh, you've forgotten what a remarkable dye-woman I did become in my very early youth. Before old Ruth

died I learned heaps from her. I used to watch her by the hour—just plain fascinated by all the colors and the way things dripped. I wrote down some of her receipts on the blank leaves of Grandmamma's cook book. I've explored carefully: we've all the necessities for black. I'll take Extra to do the dipping and fire-making; she's mighty slow, but she doesn't talk a body's arm off like the other wenches. I just never can compel Ninny to remain quiet.

Three pounds of sumac, lime water, half a pound of copperas, two and one-half pounds of logwood . . . Lucy assembled her materials. She ordered Extra to prepare kettles and tubs under shade of the wash shed and to build up fires there. She needed blue vitriol also, for the silk, and bichromate of potash for both dresses; she knit her brows above the scales as she weighed the portions with care.

Lucy's hair was not so fair as her mother's, it was nearer the color of honey in the comb, and of fine texture. Rob Lamar used to insist that it was not a natural growth, that no hair could be so fine, that Lucy had ordered it from a shop maybe in Paris, France, and then had it sewn to her scalp. She could cry no longer, no tears were left to her to expend on Rob and her brothers. Now Rob had been dead for some fourteen months; his wide-jawed face and merry straight gaze and pomaded hair were beginning to be confused, to fade in recollection. When she thought of him, which was at least hourly, he seemed always to be mounted and riding rapidly away from her—she could see his back, she could not see his face, he did not turn around to wave in the saddle, he kept riding.

She wore her delicate hair drawn straight up from her brows, and coiled high, knotted with narrow black velvet ribbons. She had not curled her hair for over a year, and wondered whether she should ever curl it again. Her brows were slightly darker than her hair, and they arched in high bent bows, and were luxuriant, as were her dark lashes. She was the only one in the family with brown eyes which were so dark as to be almost black; Grandmamma Sutherland's eyes, everyone said; eyes like Lucy's shone duskily, challengingly from the primitive portrait in the lower hall. Lucy's slim body was made for activity; she rode excellently, could fire a pistol without squeezing her eyes shut, had owned a better skill than her brothers when they played with bows and arrows. She learned to swim in the Gulf of Mexico when the family visited the Gulf coast when she was small, and she lamented that there was no place for her to swim at home, and lamented further because her mother refused her permission to bathe in the Flint River, partly because of water-snakes but mostly because ladies of the region did not bathe commonly in the Flint River.

While Lucy was still very young the exploits of Florence Nightingale were discussed in newspapers and magazines. Lucy burned to emulate the Englishwoman, and was discovered to have set up hospital in a bake house which had been damaged by fire and was not being used at the time. She had five unwilling small blacks for patients and was dosing them with her father's best brandy and Trask's Magnetic Ointment which she had prepared out of lard, raisins and fine cut tobacco. Her brothers dubbed her Florence Nightmare and applied the name until she stormed into tears; then they were contrite. A brother and a sister died as infants before Lucy was born, but she witnessed the arrival and eventual departure of two more little sisters during her childhood, and was stricken with the notion that if she had been grown-up and a capable nurse, the children might have lived. When her mother was ill Lucy tended her eagerly, banishing the wenches, banishing even old Ruth who was the wife of Leander and a skilled nurse in her own right.

There was no instruction in the art Lucy loved most, at the Americus Female Institute. An attempt was made to teach the young ladies French, religious history, geography, Use of the Globes, *Belles Lettres*, velvet and landscape painting. Lucy learned more of value at the plantation than she ever absorbed from this bewildering hodge-podge. From her father she drank of Keats, Wordsworth, Lord Byron and earlier poets such as Herrick, and could recite from their works at length. The Claffeys had a family game they played, quoting verse and the Bible, and Lucy excelled in this, and other members of the family delighted in hearing her recitations. She hated to sew, she loved to take off her shoes and stockings and run barefooted on the

grass. Her father greeted her often in the morning with, *Hail to thee, blithe spirit! Bird thou never wert*, and her mother did also until blows of later bereavement were more than her mother could bear, and it was impossible for her to venture a pleasantry.

It grieved Lucy that she found no balm in prayer; privately she felt like a heretic about it. She spoke her prayers dutifully on retirement, and she had a small morning prayer which she almost always murmured on rising. But she had believed, simply and sincerely, that if she prayed intently enough she would keep her brothers—and later, Rob—protected from bullets. This had proved not to be true, and thus the act of prayer seemed of little consequence any longer. But Lucy did still believe in God as a personal Father, resembling considerably her own father but with whiskers similar to the Reverend Mr. Cato Dillard's. She saw him presiding in a gilt courthouse which rested on cumulus clouds—very high, and always in the west, and frequently lit fiery by sunsets—and the courthouse was populated chiefly by Claffeys, Arwoods, Sutherlands and their kin; and Rob Lamar's horse was tied outside at evening.

Innocently she maintained a deep-seated feeling (it was a feeling, it stemmed solely from emotion, it was not a conscious or deliberate reasoning) that there was a promise wider, warmer, kindlier, prettier than might be contained in the creed or practice of any established religion. At least of established Presbyterianism. She had been taught to regard Roman Catholics as misguided antiquarians, and she knew little of Oriental beliefs: she supposed that they were all barbarous if ornate. But this warm good life which suggested itself as a vague mixture of conduct and dream— It was both balm and provocation each time it affected Lucy. It was not solely the simple worship of Nature enjoyed by Ira Claffey and in no way conflicting with his faith. It was more personal and more feminine, an illusion of the world's sheer beauty mingled with sensuous and sensual delight.

She had supported dreams about Rob, beginning with the first touch and kiss he awarded her; but with Rob's long death (it took him months to die in her imagination) other men supplanted him, and most of these she had never met, and perhaps they did not exist. Babies were mingled in her hidden fancies, along with the act of love. Lucy did not know exactly how the act of love was performed—she had only wicked whispered girlish gossip to go by—but in lonely nights she lay charmed by the contemplation of her own body, excited nearly into fever. Somewhere there might still be a man's body constructed for the express purpose of gratifying her own . . . when she cooled she was crushed by the enormity of her sin, and prayed with moving lips and half-voiced sounds, seeking impossible perfection, swearing to The Saviour that she would never countenance such emotions again.

But the dreams persisted as she grew older and more lonely; in one breath she said that they were a product of Satan, inserted in her drowsy brain in order to disease her immortal soul; in the next breath she yielded lustfully, and went springing down long flowery avenues of the future—she scented blossoms never designated by any botanists, ate fruits beyond the ken of her father or any green-thumbed horticulturist, she counted the stars and knew each of their colored shafts as a light wielded by a friend. She tussled with chuckling dimpled boy and girl babies, lying naked among them on rich mattresses of violets (forever violets; her favorites; she wore them in their season) and waiting the muscular man who would step toward her, smiling and courteous but not to be restrained, out of tapestried shadows.

Inadvertently once she had come upon Moses and Badge and a group of their cronies, when they were all fifteen or thereabouts, splashing nude in Little Sweetwater. So she knew how young boys looked; she supposed that full-grown men must appear the same, but larger.

If she had possessed that intimate trusted friend whom girls in stories seemed often to have but whom she'd never valued, she would never have dared to tell the friend. And of course Lucy could not tell her father; although she had an inkling that he might understand better than most, and might not condemn her for her

passion.

She drudged assuredly, bitterly, suffering the vanishment of her brothers, suffering a quasi-widowhood. Recurrently she tried to pray for particular guidance, but prayer as an unguent for burns seemed to have failed.

VII

Long since the mustering officer who assembled laborers for the stockade had yielded to entreaties of many small planters. He had released every slave (excepting trained carpenters) drawn from a plantation where there were less than five male hands; he had released half of all the rest. This left a crew of not more than forty hands still hewing fallen pines and planting them in the five-foot trench. Ira Claffey had never begged the return of Jem, Coffee and Jonas, but he welcomed them; now his hands were plowing and planting diligently, happy also at having hot rations prepared by their wives, no longer reduced to cold fare at noon. The ridges sustained a comparative silence; the chopping, the whoops of ox-drivers echoed only sporadically. A portion of the fence near the southwest corner remained to be set in place; the rest of the structure towered in a raw parallelogram enclosing seventeen or eighteen acres. A narrow strip at the south was Claffey land, the balance was requisitioned from the neighbors. Posts, so recently the trunks of living pines, had been coarsely stripped and squared to be planted tightly side by side. A dense odor of fresh gum occupied the air; it was sweet to smell; and blue smoke drifted by day from smouldering fires where stumps and roots were charring, and at night there was a devilish glow. Underbrush—there had been little of it to begin with—was scorched off. Less than twenty trees still lived within the area, most of these of little account as to size.

Ira's feet were drawn to the region on two or three occasions, but each time he walked away sick at heart. Beloved narrow deep valley where the branch of Sweetwater made its light music— This had been a place precious to him. He would have deplored the ruination on aesthetic grounds if it had been worked five counties away; but here, gashed on personal timberland, it ached like a sprain. Tight, tight, solid, solid, yellow, tanned, bleeding, the stockade stood, a savage excrescence fifteen feet in height. It marched its short side across the south (except for the gap still remaining), its long side stamped down the declivity through the creek and across it, and stamped up the hill to the north, and across the north once more, and back down the long east side. Better trained hands among the Negroes worked at putting up numerous sentry-boxes along the exterior; they worked under close supervision of uniformed soldiers, they were building ladders. More troops tenanted the neighborhood than ever before, and more came daily; they had cut a road beside the creek, a road leading up to the railway station. Disks of stumps stood up-ended every which way along the route, heavy with clay; ruddy roots curled like snakes and fingers.

Lucy said to Ira at their supper, You're somber, Poppy. She hoped to make a jest of it. More somber than at any time since the Mexican War.

He closed his eyes and shook his head, as she had known he would do. In her place at the table Veronica Claffey ate in rapt cold silence and refused to lift her gaze. Oh, said Ira, it's merely that I walked over there again and observed the destruction they've made and are making.

Lucy shuddered. I shan't go.

...But she did go at last for curiosity's sake, lifting skirts to climb above the tangle and the cruel rough places, her father putting out his hand to steady her as he limped beside. The blacks stared and lazed at their tasks, to see a woman there; soldiers stared also, admiring Lucy and thinking of girls at home, or perhaps many of

them looked at her with desire as young men might.

She screamed softly when they approached the creek. Poppy! It's gone. Oh, oh, how dreadful! They killed it.

What, Lucy?

The spring. Our spring—where you used to fetch me for a drink when I was tiny— She turned away blindly. No, let us go back. I can't bear more, I just naturally can't.

Nearing the gateway where carpenters worked, she looked up at her father with angry eyes. Her eyes were wet above their blaze. Ira offered his handkerchief.

Poppy, where did it go? The spring—

Crushed down, Lucy. Tamped and dragged and beaten and stifled.

But what became of the water?

I imagine, with all that weight of earth forced over it when they dug the ditch and dragged the trees— It had to make a new way for itself. Likely the water seeps through behind rocks, far under all that weight of material, and finds its way down to the branch. Travels underground, you see.

What a pity. It was the fairy place, truly. Reckon you don't recall how I used to see them in the moss?

He made his grimace. Reckon I do, daughter.

It held a lovely flavor, that water. Didn't it?

Yes.

They walked homeward, they passed the place where black workmen scooped at strange angles of earth, where white soldiers in sweaty undershirts were toiling as well.

What are they making?

A fort, my dear. To guard the prison.

Oh, they've a cannon back there in the pines. They'll put it in the fort?

Doubtless. And more than that.

When they walked in their own lane, when noises of dragging and pounding and shoveling fell farther behind them, Lucy still wore her white face. Poppy, I've thought of something. Perhaps the Yankee who killed Suthy— The one who killed Mosey-Wosey— The one who killed Badge— And who captured my Rob. Perhaps they'll all be taken prisoner, perhaps they'll all be brought to the prison here.

Perhaps, Lucy, they're gone already. As the boys are gone. Perhaps they were slain in the same battles.

But it would be mighty strange if all of them—

In war, said Ira Claffey, seldom do you know whom you've slain. You fire, all fire, both sides fire their volleys, and singly. People are hit. You do not know. Artillery is anonymous also. It's better so.

There's nothing better about war, Poppy. Nothing *best*.

He turned and stood still and looked back, but thank God nothing of the evil could be seen from where they waited. However a smell came to Claffey's nostrils, and he glanced quickly at his daughter to see whether she too had sensed it. She gave no indication, but moved on, stroking the back of her hand with a magnolia leaf she had gathered, and she did not know why she had picked it up: an idle thing to do. The smell was one familiar to Ira Claffey but he could not recognize its source. It might have been that one of the plantation cats—there were several—had found its fate in being worried by a stray dog, and now lay beneath the bushes. A rank tangle hugged the fence, and bloated flesh might have been concealed there . . . or an unfortunate recollection of the bastard melons which had oozed their evil until the Negroes, at Ira's behest, got rid of them? Or a varmint of the woods? He did not know, but he detected stench for a time, and then lost it as he went to join Lucy, and to join her in dwelling on happier things if there were any way for them to do so.

VIII

Old Ruth had declared long ago that it was impossible to achieve a permanent black on cotton with less labor, but still it was incredible labor. Lucy estimated that the goods might weigh five pounds; hence she'd assembled three pounds of sumac, wood and bark together. This sumac had been boiled half an hour, then the goods had steeped overnight. Extra removed the cotton after breakfast and hung it on a rope to drip for an hour. Lucy added eight ounces of copperas to the sumac liquor, and ordered Extra to dip the goods for another hour.

We put it back in the lime water, Miss Lucy?

Yes, Extra, for fifteen minutes again. Did you make a new dye of logwood as I bade you?

On this other fire. It been a-boiling already.

How long?

I don't know, Miss Lucy. It just been a-boiling.

It should boil for an hour at least. Then the goods must be dipped for another three hours before I add potash.

They worked in the wash house, which was a shed with a roof but only two sides or parts of sides, and a great wide chimney arching above to accept the smoke. When gusts of spring breeze assailed the area, smoke was rejected by the chimney and came down to smart the eyes of girl and servant. Fires sizzled and spat beneath cranes in a row. Simultaneously Lucy was dyeing her silk, and that necessitated still another vat containing blue vitriol compound; the same logwood mixtures could be used for both, but would need to be diluted for the silk.

Extra was plump and slow-moving and had hips like a stall-fed animal. Her slab of wide-nostriled nose turned squarely up in the middle of her broad purplish face, and dripped with sweat; Lucy saw the sweat on Extra's nose, and it made her feel hotter than ever.

Extra, like Ninny, was a daughter of Old Leander—one of the eight daughters whom he had fathered and whom the dead Ruth had mothered—but the other six had all been sold along with their husbands and children, if any. Extra was married to Jonas, and they had two of the plantation's current four children: little bright Buncombe and four-year-old Gracious. Also Orphan Dick, a four-year-old boy, was tended by Extra.

His parents had perished of galloping consumption during the first year of the war; but Orphan Dick was giggling and spirited and strangely the mark of consumption did not seem to be upon him; it might reveal itself later, Ira Claffey feared.

Lucy would be twenty-one during this year of 1864, Extra would be twenty-three. As children they had played contentedly together; there were few white girls of Lucy's generation among the neighbors. Pet was closer to Lucy's age, but they were not so harmonious in disposition. Extra and Lucy had little shops in shade under the magnolia rustle—shops well stocked with pine cones, acorns, bits of broken glass which they said were jewels, and nosegays of seasonable flowers. Lucy was the proprietor, and Extra came to buy, paying in currency of pebbles. Sometimes they could persuade adults or older children to patronize their store; then both became shopkeepers. When they tired of such play, and in hotter days, they had a playhouse amid lower limbs of an oak. The playhouse had been built for Sutherland originally in 1844, but by this time he considered himself too grown-up to enjoy it. Lucy inherited the playhouse, and sometimes she and Extra would permit Moses, two years younger, to attend them there; mostly they did not welcome him because he was a boy, he was too obstreperous, he liked to pound and dance on the warped old planks. When they were alone Lucy might set Extra to braiding flowery adornments. She would say, Now, Extra, I shall read to you from my new book of verses which Cousin Sally Sue sent for my Christmas book.

Yas, Miss Lucy.

Mind, you're to pay close heed. Should you like to commit some verses to memory?

Do I got to, Miss Lucy?

No. But I daren't teach you to read—it's against the law, you see—but I'd be very glad to help you commit a verse or two.

I don't want to, I guess, Miss Lucy, please.

Very well. I shall read to you. Mind.

...The Child is father of the Man;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

Is that not beautiful, Extra?

Yas'm.

I'll read it again:

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky—

We out of daisies, Miss Lucy. Better I go fetch more?

Go pick enough to finish the collar, and I shall wear it to tea.

She would sit dreaming over her book, the tree would speak to her, her own voice would drift low to a

murmur and then to silence . . . she dreamed across the book and saw Extra—a dumpy, dutiful, black-legged figure in faded yellow calico—tramping through weeds for more daisies to complete her fabrication.

Now, in adult state, slave and young mistress worked at preparing the black gowns for the young mistress. Extra toiled as seriously as she had when weaving flowers. Even her plump arms showed a dye not put there by the God who had designated her as a black. Lucy wore a pair of ancient kid gloves to protect herself, but be she ever so careful it was certain that her hands would absorb some of the color; there would be blotches; she would have to wear mitts or gloves if company came, until the color wore off.

Company came now. It was between ten and eleven in the morning, hot for middle February. The wash house reeked; this task should have been done in an earlier week tinged with frost. More chilly weather would arrive, but it was very bad luck that today the sun was wilfully unblemished by clouds. Cauldrons steamed. Lucy saw the beads drip from Extra's wide nose, and felt more perspiration growing amid roots of her own hair. She had bound her hair in a brown net, and had her skirts caught up, pinned in two places so that she would not trip as she moved in the combined chores of overseer and fellow-dyer.

Company appeared behind her: there was the clearing of a man's throat, an ahem and growl with which some stranger sought to announce his presence. There was no place for Lucy to flee. She felt supreme high-pitched feminine wrath that a man should creep close without warning. She faced him, her face looked boiled and baked, and she knew it; it was dreadful.

I'm sorry, Ma'am, to intrude upon you.

He wore a single spur, he must have been riding, probably he had tied his horse out in front. Naomi was in the kitchen, Ninny was doubtless above stairs, making beds belatedly . . . Ninny was slightly deaf, or pretended to be so habitually when the bell rang. (The Claffey's used to argue as to whether Ninny's deafness was actual or feigned; certainly it was periodic.) Pet, had Lucy but known it, was gone to the root cellar when the stranger rang, and Ira Claffey was gone to the fields. No one could have heard the bell except Veronica, and she was dedicated to a new and dreadful task: she searched wardrobes, presses, cupboards, shelves throughout the house, she hunted for any and all personal relics of the three fallen sons, and was putting them away—fabrics, china, wood and steel—in low chests in the room of Moses, the baby. Then, when they were filled and there was nothing more to put into them, the chests would be locked and shoved under Moses's bed. That was Veronica's plan; her husband and her daughter guessed at it, but said nothing. Ira looked for the boys' silver cups, and found them under infant flannels in one of the carved chests. He removed the cups and put them behind Scott on his own library shelf. Maybe in time Veronica might be cured of this burial passion, and again the cups could take their proud pathetic place in view.

I did try to ring, Ma'am, but there seemed to be nobody about.

I'm sorry no one heard the bell, sir. You see—we're dyeing—

He would think that she meant *dying*! He bowed. He spoke with the genial scratchy voice of an adolescent, though he appeared to be older than Suthy had been—perhaps he was near to thirty. Permit me to introduce myself, Ma'am. My name is Harrell Elkins. Have I the honor of addressing Miss Lucy Claffey?

She stood with hot face and soaked gloves, she edged behind a bench so that her hiked-up skirts mightn't be observed too readily. Mr. Elkins, sir, I'm Lucy. But, you see, we're engaged in dyeing and— If you would be so kind as to rest in the house, I'll have my servant escort you— I'll send to the field for Father—

He was in shabby gray uniform, there were dark blemishes where insignia had been removed. His old hat had faded nearly to green on the crown, and he held the brim in front of his middle with big pale hands on

which a pink of very fresh sunburn was showing. He was a rangy man, with rounded shoulders detracting from his natural height; and his head was small for a man of six feet or thereabouts, and his ears stuck out, roundly, quizzically. He wore silver-rimmed spectacles; these glassy wafers attempted to conceal but could not conceal the dance of dark-blue-black eyes behind them. In no degree was Mr. Elkins handsome. In every degree he was a man peculiar to himself.

Miss Lucy, permit me. Do you recall that your brother Sutherland ever mentioned a Captain Elkins?

The steam from logwood and sumac and copperas blinded Lucy. Elkins thought that she was fainting. He stepped forward with strange animal grace and put his hand beneath the girl's elbow to steady her. He brought out a clean bandana and unfolded it. I'm sorry.

Thank you. It's only— Oh, that was mighty sudden. She tried to laugh, she made a sound, it wasn't laughter, it was a small cry. Of course. Captain Elkins! He called you Harry, didn't he?

Yes, Miss Lucy, people do.

You were not with him at—at Gettysburg?

Elkins shook his head. You see, I was with them both in the early days of the Sixteenth. I knew your youngest brother but slightly, since he was a private soldier and in another company; but I was near him when he died at Crampton's Gap. It was the same engagement in which Colonel Lamar lost his life.

She nodded limply. I—I was affianced to a distant cousin of Lieutenant-Colonel Jefferson Lamar.

Ah, yes. That would have been Rob?

Yes, Captain.

His eyes leaped with a spurt of life behind the lenses. Just Surgeon Elkins now, Miss Lucy. I hadn't yet finished my medical studies when the war came, and I was determined on deeds of derring do. So I served as a soldier.

And you performed the deeds.

He chuckled. Mighty few, I fear.

Not according to the accounts we received from my brother, sir.

Miss Lucy, you're more than kind and I fear your brother was more than generous to his friends. But I stopped a few pieces of scrap-iron last spring, and thus was made unfit for further service in the field. That was some two months before Sutherland—died. Naught for me to do but resume my medical studies again; thus I've become a surgeon—very much of a neophyte.

Then you'll not be returning to the field?

I'd hoped for that, but our Government had other plans. For the moment I've been detailed to this region on what might appear to be a peculiar mission. I did welcome the assignment to this duty, for I've long wanted to call upon the Claffey's, if you'll pardon my saying so. . . .

At sunset, when Ira Claffey himself escorted his guest above stairs, he led the way down a short main hall, turned sharp right into the narrower passage which ran from east to west, and stopped at the second door on

the right. With his hand upon the round white doorknob, Ira said, This was Sutherland's, and ushered Harrell Elkins inside. Elkins's saddle bags, with the waterproof roll containing his personal belongings, had already been fetched up by Ninny and stood upon a chair. There was nothing of Sutherland's in the room. Veronica had banished every young man's trinket and treasure to entombment.

His things are no longer here. Ira spoke in a manner of apology. His mother's put them all away. She has— Possibly you observed it, Harry. She has grown remote.

Elkins went to the front window and looked out at rows of trees fronting the lane. Then he moved to the smaller west window and glanced at plum-colored clouds and strips of glint between them. He turned. Thank you, Mr. Claffey, for calling me Harry. I was fond of your son. I fear I'm mighty shy, as a social individual, and have not made as many friends as some. Suth used to call me Cousin Harry.

We shall be glad to continue the designation, Coz.

I appreciate your welcome more than I can say.

Please to join me in the library at your convenience, Cousin Harry, and we'll taste a glass of wine.

Ira went down to the little library and found Lucy there before him. She was wearing her wornout black dress, but Ira squinted to observe that some one had been very busy with needle and thread, drawing the spread seams together so that the gown would serve. She wore also a pair of ancient black lace gloves: the dye had left its stain.

It would seem, said Ira, that you've taken especial pains with your hair.

She stared at him indignantly, as occurred seldom. Father!

I apologize, my dear. This is no occasion for levity. Nevertheless I'm glad he's come. Ira bent to unlock a cupboard, and drew out the glass decanters which he had not touched since the New Year.

Poppy, may I join you gentlemen?

What might your mother say?

Nothing. She merely bowed when I introduced Mr. Elkins to her. She bowed and said, Pray sit down, sir. Then she was out of the room in another minute, gone to Moses's room.

We'll be honored to have you. Now that I think of it, I wasn't awarded my morning kiss today.

You may have it belatedly. Lucy offered her face. When her father kissed her, she clutched his arms spasmodically, and whined.

Now, now.

Poppy, I think he knew my Rob! When he spoke of Crampton's Gap, he mentioned also Lieutenant-Colonel Lamar and how he died. I said that he was kin to the man I was to marry, and he said, That would be Rob. So he must have known him.

Ira thought about it for a moment. Likely that was at the University. Cousin Harry tells me that he served as assistant to the medical chemist there whilst pursuing his early medical studies.

You call him Cousin Harry? cried Lucy with disbelief.

He requested it. Daughter, remember that he and Suthy were struck by the same shell-burst at Chancellorsville. Though Suthy's was a minor wound.

Harrell Elkins appeared in the doorway, in obvious embarrassment because they were talking about him.

A small wood fire burned on the hearth; coolness possessed the later hours of the day. There had been no matches in that household for many months except homemade ones, and often the homemade matches would not strike. Lucy took a sliver of pine from an old glass vase standing handy, and brought fire from the hearth to wan leaning candles on the table. The light glared on Elkins's spectacles and made him appear as a monster with great orange eyes.

My daughter hoped that she might be allowed to join us, Coz.

I'm pleased. Harry Elkins's rough high voice was unsteady; but he spoke as if he meant what he said. You had a feeling that he might never speak other than a sincere belief, profound or trivial. He said, I trust that Mrs. Claffey is not indisposed, and then stood in shock at having said the wrong thing.

I believe she'll join us at dinner. Lucy, in honor of Cousin Harry's arrival, will you indulge along with us?

Thank you, yes, Poppy.

Ira reached behind the calfbound row of Sir Walter Scott and brought out three small silver cups. Lucy exclaimed; she was positive that her mother must have buried the cups in one of those dreadful chests, and Lucy was surprised but delighted to see that her father had recovered them.

These were the boys'. Lucy, do you take Moses's cup. I'll drink from Badger's. You, sir, Cousin Harry, may observe that the cup which I've handed to you bears the name of Sutherland.

Elkins peered closely at the little silver thing, the child's cup nearly concealed in his broad smooth steady hand. He saw the name, or did not see it: firelight and candlelight were tricky, and not much light of sunset remained to reflect into the room. A streak of water appeared on his slightly hollow cheek. Lucy turned her glance away, but she was glad that he had cried.

Ira Claffey poured dark sherry for all three, though Lucy's was but a token. I give you, he said, and then could not say the names. They drank, and when Cousin Harry Elkins put down his cup he said shrilly, scratchily but in reverence, God bless them all. Wherever they may be.

Lucy repeated it to herself when she was in her bed at ten. Wherever they may be, and she was pleased with Cousin Harry for saying those words and for thinking the thought. He was awkward, strained, almost self-consciously rustic as to habit; yet there was a benefit in being near him. In this single day of acquaintance she considered him as a kind of evangelical relative.

Between mellow yellowed sheets and under a woven blanket some two rods distant from the girl, Harrell Elkins stretched watching toward the ceiling, the ceiling which he could not even see without spectacles. He considered the six pairs of spectacles which he had toted to the army; and he had broken four pairs the first year, and how they cost, and where might one secure good magnifying spectacles now? This was the last pair of the six—here, on the stand beside Suth's bed—and it was remarkable that they had survived the burst at Chancellorsville; they needed only a bow repaired. A watchmaker did that while Harry was in the hospital—or rather, hospitals, since he had been in three.

He lay now savoring the sweetness of Ira Claffey and Lucy. He lay pitying the mother, and wishing that something might be done for her. Short of a general resurrection of the war's dead, he did not know of any act or treatment which might effect a change. He feared that Veronica Claffey must march without deviation toward the solemn retreat which awaited her: a retreat wherein people sat unspeaking in their rigid chairs, and did not listen to what others said, and took their meals alone, and when they smiled—rarely—it was as if to say, I know a secret but I shan't tell. It was terrible when they smiled. Harrell Elkins had seen them.

He felt drawn to Lucy and her father not alone because they were Suth Claffey's flesh and blood, but because they embraced him with a tenderness. All his life Harry had dreamt of warm companionship; he had not found it at college: only in the army, where the general scale of values resolved in his favor. Through young years he had walked in the discomfort of weakness, he had suffered varieties of scorn because he had a strange voice, because he was bookish, because he wore spectacles in a civilization where most young folks never wore them, because he could not see well enough to catch a swift ball or shoot a quail.

He could barely remember his mother. There was a faint recollection of a fleshy, frilled lap and the scent of cologne (it might have been a Sunday when she held him. He knew that she read from a book of Bible stories, and must have simplified them as she read). Also in memory he heard her saying to the cook, Do you let Master Harrell make thimble cookies if he wishes. Then no other memory except black nodding plumes, and his own shrieks because he did not understand death, he did not understand, he feared for his mother; who were all these people, and why did they hold their voices low and musty? His father was bitten by a rattlesnake while hunting, when Harrell Elkins was seven, and died two days later. Harry was reared, until ready for the academy, in the home of a second cousin whose ward he became. The cousin was a physician and surgeon, a cruel man, but brilliant and scientifically experimental by turns. Doctor Epps disliked Harry, whose funds he squandered to the possible enrichment of brokers in cotton and foodstuffs in distant Savannah. He devised strange punishments when the boy was driven to rebellion, when he did wicked things out of resentment at loneliness and immurement.

Once Harry dragged a load of loose cones and pine needles against the ell of the house, and tried to set the place on fire. Nothing burned except a wooden sill, since the structure was of brick. Servants caught the boy red-handed and gave him over to Doctor Epps. The doctor said that he must go to jail and be fettered, and live on bread and water. The jail was a barren windowless entry off the doctor's private sitting room; slats were nailed across the door, and Harry was incarcerated there, fettered with knotted hemp, and with a chamber pot and the traditional pallet of straw for furnishings. Bread and water were given him by the doctor, morning and evening. When Doctor Epps was at home, and not calling on patients or performing operations, he had his meals brought to him on a tray within sight and sound and smell of the child beyond the lattice. Doctor Epps was fond of boiled foods, and they smelt particularly pungent: Harry Elkins recalled the rich odors of ham and cabbage, pork and turnips, beef and onions. His cousin kept him in jail for five days, and then word got abroad through gossip among the slaves. The rector came to call, with fire in his old eyes, and Harry was released, counseled, prayed over, fed.

These were things which he might not tell the Claffeys now. He might tell them in time, if friendship grew as he petitioned that it would; he had told Suth a few of the incidents. It would have offended Harrell Elkins to know it, it would have wounded him immeasurably had he known that Sutherland Claffey's initial interest in him and attention to him were engendered first by a sense of the ridiculous and then by pity. Suth had written to his family: I dislike being a tale bearer, but then you must remember that young Moses and I are new at this task of soldiering, and shall wish to parade the story in completeness before your eyes. It is probable that I shall write to you more frequently than Moses, the idle scut. Of course his company is removed from mine by three companies, and we are separated by the rigid distinctions of rank and cast (sic!) but little birds tell tales now and then. I hear that he and another prankster of his ilk *borrowed* two of their officers' mounts, and went for a fine gallop yesterday. Tricks like that will land the youngster in durance vile, you may be certain;

but I doubt they will get him shot by a firing squad! In my own company we have the most absurd *coterie* of individuals. Not that there are not splendid chaps as well, and those who will stand out gallantly when we face the enemy. Not in all the myths of the ancients have such *phantasmagoria* been assembled! In all my days at Oglethorpe I never saw the beat, in classroom or on campus. One *lieutenant* in particular— Ah, what a figure for legendry! It is said that he achieved his appointment because his late father was a classmate of the Hon. Gen. Howell Cobb at the U. some thirty years ago. The Yankees should see him: they would take off and flee, not a doubt of it. He is somewhere near my own age, but half bald already; he wears the ears of an ape; his voice squeaks like a warped windlass; and surmounting all this *manly beauty* he employs a great pair of specs—to make it easier for him to spy the foe, no doubt. His name is Elkins, and already to myself I call him Elky—you recall?—after the colt in the Rollo tale. Only yesterday I ordered him to engage his platoon in drill according to the time-honored Poinsett tactics. He had no sword to give him a manner of command; it seems that, lean of purse, he is still bargaining for sidearms. Upon my word, he appeared on the drill-ground with a grass *sickle* in his hand. The men were close to splitting. Elkins was immensely serious about the whole thing. . . .

Another letter, later. Your box arrived on a Saturday in fine order. Only the peaches were broken, and leaking rum along the way, no doubt to the satisfaction of sundry *baggage-handlers*. Nevertheless I salvaged them with content, and rinsed off the glass and mildew. Tell our loyal Naomi that her tin of *Federal Cake* made many mouths water and many hearts beat high. The sugar itself would have been a treat, since recently that commodity was lacking in our messes—why, I know not. Tell Naomi that henceforth, however, it must be dubbed *Confederate Cake*. Come evening, a few of the elect assembled in my narrow quarters to taste and to enjoy: those gentlemen around me with *chicken-guts* on their sleeves. Lucy will shrink, but that is merely soldier slang for the braid we officers wear. The redoubtable Lt. Elkins was in attendance. I must say, he is a saint as to good humor, never complaining, and always ready to crack a joke in his peculiar voice. It has come to my attention that the men respect him, and find comfort and perhaps inspiration in his dry sallies. . . .

Another letter. Elkins is a remarkably fine horseman, at least for the demands of a martial life. He is not spectacular in the saddle, he does not cut a fine figure, because of his odd posture; but he can take a horse anywhere. After our arduous *traverses* of the past week, several officers were complaining of saddle boils, chafing and the like. Including The Undersigned. Rob Lamar should be with us—there is a *Centaur* for you! But I must add that the *un-Centaur-like* Harry Elkins had no complaint of *mayhem at the hands of a horse*, and was fresh as the proverbial daisy. . . .

Another. It was our baptism of such concentrated fire. They were fairly focal upon us. With all that smoke and banging and—I regret to state—the sight of blood round about, many in the company might have felt like taking *French Leave*. It seems in battle that sometimes there is a concentrated if brief period of silence—a vacation between the cannonading and musketry. In such a *holiday of silence* there spoke the easily recognizable accents of one Harry Elkins. He was remarking with a degree of pain that he wished the Yanks would cease throwing stones at us. In fact, dear parents and Lucy, what he said was not *stones* but another equally commonplace commodity in a stableyard where animals have been segregated for some time. You should have heard the men roar with laughter. It made matters indubitably easier for all concerned. . . .

...I have had to lecture Harry severely about exposing himself to enemy fire. He looked contrite, but finally faltered out with a statement that he was sure he was constantly more *scairt* than anyone else in the Confederate States Army, and that if he didn't consciously ignore the bullets snapping about him he might be guilty of some unfathomable act of cowardice. Furthermore, his opinion was that since a rank of infantrymen are compelled to stand up and attempt an advance in the face of withering fire, it behooves their officers to be nonchalant, even to the point of suicide, in disclaiming any attitude which might suggest that they were

not invulnerable to *minié* balls. I wonder if there is wisdom here?? Certainly food for thought. . . .

...He is so kind hearted. I feel that he is like a brother, now that Moses is no more, and Badge far away. Sunday night we had a fine talk by the fire. Harry told me of his ambitions as a physician and surgeon. Strangely he was instigated in these ambitions by the example of a relative who possessed experience and technical skill, but no Christian heart and soul. Harry declares that as a youth he swore that, since this relative was a *bad* doctor, he should grow up to be a *good* doctor. There is a strange and valuable salt flavoring his conversation; I enjoy it heartily. When this war is over we shall all be the patients, when necessary, of *Doctor Harry Elkins*. He says that he will give me physic without charge! . . .

...My own wound is a bagatelle: a mere splinter near the left elbow, which made me bleed *pints* and causes some pain, but will not disqualify me for full duty after a fortnight or so. But the thought of Harry occupies more attention. We are eager for word of him, and nothing is heard. His hemorrhage was severe: he was struck in the neck, at the base of his head, in the shoulder and chest. He kept insisting that no one should carry him to the rear; he was quite comfortable; no one must leave the firing line on his account. The last time I spoke to him he murmured something about, Give those Yanks a belting for me. They broke my specs. . . .

Harrell Elkins heard his own voice saying those words, now, as he sought sleep in Sutherland Claffey's old room. They had held that deep love which is disassociated from sex because of the nature of the lovers: they are men made for women, never men made for men. Abhorrent as decay itself was the notion that ever either of them could have loved physically one of his own fashioning, in intimacy. Elkins hoped wistfully that after long search he might find a woman who would (according to the Scriptural phrase he learned early) cleave unto him. The affection between himself and Suth was an attraction of opposites, solidified by peril into a union which only those who'd functioned together in equal peril might ever know.

Suth had known many women, although he was too much the well-taught young gentleman to discuss them. He was handsome, devoted to any phase of the patriotic career to which he had dedicated himself, pleased by his own accomplishments, a bit too vain for popular taste until the close song of bullets blew the swelling from his head. Fear of the death which was to come made him admirable at last, and so he remained to the end. In passing Sutherland Claffey was bewailed by his superior officers, envied in retrospect by subordinates, mourned by his men. He became the complete effigic pattern of a Crusader on a tombstone. So Harry Elkins thought of him now, resting in that sacred bed.

From the first moment of contact, from Lucy's primary flutter in the wash house in front of dyeing-kettles, and from Ira's handclasp and gentle knowing manner, and from the worshipful agony they shared as they sipped from silver cups— From these and subsequent sharings through the evening hours, Harry Elkins knew the Claffeys, father and daughter, as new dignities and beauties to be respected. In no degree could he have considered Lucy as a love for himself. He dared not look at her romantically (not yet) even if he had admitted for an instant that he longed to. She belonged in sanctified association with a dead lover, with her brothers' memory, and with a father who was so obviously a man above most men, and with a mother who suffered as a casualty of the conflict.

He thought, It was so good of them to take me in. He thought, It was more than good of them to accept me as I scarce dared wish I might be accepted. I am very fortunate. His twenty-five-year-old body (not yet twenty-six, despite the scrubby hair and barren scalp and the facial lines) relaxed in a baby's contentment. His arms slid up across the pillow, his big fists were bent loosely, his fingers curved in rest. He slept, but feeling in the last coverts of awareness that some benevolence would be offered him.

In the middle of the night, Lucy Claffey walked and rolled once more in that pagan dream wherein violets

grew, laughing children tumbled, the man come bare and heartily to claim her, to bear her down among flowers while distant flutes were playing and the fallow deer of legend were running past. The man was Harrell Elkins. She roused herself from this sinful illusion with strength and in decided horror. Never again, dear Lord, never, never, she prayed. Oh, that I could be so carnal. Desperately she flung out her hand and found the Shorter Catechism of her childhood, a thin brown tiny volume on the round table by her bed. *What is forbidden in the seventh commandment? The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.* She held it as a talisman until she slept again deeply and her limp fingers fell away from the book. She was inordinately silent at the breakfast table, and her father wondered about it to no avail. He had been up early, showing Cousin Harry about the place.

Lucy avoided being left in the room alone with Harrell Elkins; that did not take much managing, since he was so shy of her. Soon after they had breakfasted he asked for his horse, and little Buncombe led the animal proudly to the front. Cousin Harry thanked them for their hospitality, and rode toward the new stockade. It seemed that Ira Claffey had invited him to be their guest while he proceeded on duty in the region, and Harry accepted willingly. Lucy told herself that she did not approve of the invitation, but Suthy would have wished it, so she must say nothing. Never again, she swore, would she dream such a dream.

IX

Eben Dolliver shouted at the guard in thickening darkness. What in thunder did you lam me for? Like to busted my head—

The guard called across the heads and shoulders of other prisoners jammed fast. I'll bust it sure enough if you don't shush.

I wasn't talking—

Somebody back in that corner of the car was talking. You heard me order you to cease.

You like to busted my head, repeated Eben in fury.

Again the guard drove his musket butt toward the obscure corner of the box car, but men squatted and ducked and the butt thudded against the wooden side. Keep quiet, Ebe, a boy whispered. He's mad. You'll but make him crosser.

The guard withdrew his weapon and again took up a station beside the closed door, speaking with fervor to a fellow guard about what he would do if the prisoners didn't shut up. The prisoners were talking about exchange, the all important subject, but the young guard believed that they shouldn't talk about exchange or anything else. He had been commanded to maintain order in the box car, and to his nervous taste maintaining order was synonymous with maintaining absolute silence. He was a frightened, fat, stupid youth, trembling at being shut into this small space with dozens of savage Yankees. No telling when they might spring at you, seize your musket, perhaps twist your arms and legs out of their sockets.

Certain of the prisoners were considering that very course. Sounds resolved into a disordered fluttering mutter, submerged by coughing, nose-blowing, a continual crunch of timbers as the car jerked into its couplings and again tried to pull loose from them, a chorus of clanking metal underneath. Woodsmoke from the antique engine drifted along the train's top and found its way through every aperture. People were half gagged by smoke, including the guards.

Pushed into a forward corner by weight of the mass on every downgrade, Eben Dolliver and his friends made queer plans and then abandoned them. How many's in here? I was third in, I watched the door and counted: we got forty-seven. With the guards? No, there's either four or five guards extra; I couldn't make out exactly. That makes fifty-one or fifty-two in all.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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