ALL THE KING'S MEN

by ROBERT PENN WARREN

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

Mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde.

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By H. Wolff

Introduction

SOME TIME in the winter of 1937-38, when I was teaching at the Louisiana State University, in Baton Rouge, I got the notion of doing a verse play about a Southern politician who achieved the power of a dictator, at least in his home state, and who was assassinated in the Capitol which had been the scene of his triumphs. As well as I can recall, the notion began to take on some shape when, sitting one afternoon on the porch of a friend's cottage, I began to describe my intentions.

Very often it is in conversation during the germinal stage of a project that I stumble on my meanings, or they stumble on me, and I recall this particular conversation rather vividly because it was then that I hit on the idea that the politician — then unnamed — would not simply be a man who by force or fraud rises to absolute power, offends the principles of decency and democracy, and then is struck down by a self-appointed Brutus. There would be no drama to such a story — no "insides," no inner tensions, no involvement of the spectator's own deep divisions. My politician would be — or at least I was groping toward some such formulation — a man whose personal motivation had been, in one sense, idealistic, who in many ways was to serve the cause of social betterment, but who was corrupted by power, even by power exercised against corruption. That is, his means defile his ends. But more than that, he was to be a man whose power was based on the fact that somehow he could vicariously fulfill some secret needs of the people about him. The choruses — and it was in talking about the place of the choruses in the proposed verse play that the notion came — were to develop this in a subsidiary way — a chorus of builders, a chorus of highway patrolmen, a chorus of surgeons, etc. And, naturally, each of the main characters should bear such a relation to the politician,

even the Brutus assassin. But over against his power to fulfill, in some degree, a secret need of those about him, the politician was to discover, more and more, his own emptiness and his own alienation. So much for that conversation in the unseasonable sunshine of a Louisiana winter day.

The play did get written. I wrote a couple of choruses in the next few months. In Italy, the next summer, the summer of 1938, I got a little more done, beginning the process, I recall, in the late afternoon, in a wheat field outside of Perugia. The thing dragged on all the next winter and spring, in Louisiana, with a bit done after classes and on week-ends, but the bulk of the play was written in Rome, in the fall and winter of 1939, with the news of the war filling the papers and the boot heels of Mussolini's legionaries clanging on the stones. During that time I was deep in Machiavelli and Dante. Later, in the novel *All The King's Men,* Machiavelli found a place in the musings of Jack Burden, and Dante provided the epigraph.

When the play was finished, it was somewhat different from the thing dreamed up in the conversation with my friend. For instance, another theme had crept in – the theme of the relation of science (or pseudo-science) and political power, the theme of the relation of the science-society and the power-state, the problem of naturalistic determinism and responsibility, etc. At least, if such grand topics did not find explicit place in the play, and if I did not pretend to wisdom about them, they were casting a shade over the meditations of composition. The play, by the way, had the title *Proud Flesh.* I was rather pleased with the double significance of the phrase.

I mailed off the play to some friends back home. I knew that it was not finished, but I would postpone the rewriting for the benefit of the judgment of my first readers and my own more detached contemplation. Back in America, in the summer of 1940, I did do some rewriting, with the subtle criticism and inspiring instruction of Francis Fergusson. But still the play was not, to my mind or taste, finished. And besides, I had

already begun a novel, to appear as *At Heaven's Gate,* which was drawing on some of the feelings and ideas involved in the play.

It was not until the spring of 1943 that I began again on the play. I had taken the manuscript out of its cupboard with the intention of revising it, but immediately I found myself thinking of the thing as a novel. That idea wasn't entirely new. Now and then I had entertained the possibility of making a novel of the story. But now, all at once, a novel seemed the natural and demanding form for it, and for me.

This new impulse was, I suppose, a continuation of the experience of writing *At Heaven's Gate,* just as that novel had been, in a way, a continuation of *Proud Flesh.* Despite important contrasts, there were some points of essential similarity between my businessman hero, Bogan Murdock, in *At Heaven's Gate,* and the politician hero of the play. And even some of the contrasts between them were contrasts in terms of the same thematic considerations. For example, if Bogan Murdock was supposed to embody, in one of his dimensions, the desiccating abstraction of power, to be a violator of nature, a usurer of Dante's Seventh Circle*, and to try to fulfill vicariously his natural emptiness by exercising power over those around him, so the politician rises to power because of the faculty of fulfilling vicariously the secret needs of others, and in the process, as I have already said, discovers his own emptiness. But beyond such considerations, the effort of *At Heaven's Gate* had whetted my desire to compose a highly documented picture of the modern world – at least, as the modern world manifested itself in the only region I knew well enough to write about.

There was, however, another consideration, if one can use such a term of scruple and calculation to describe the coiling, interfused forces that go into such a "literary" decision. This

*It was this Circle that provided, with some liberties of interpretation and extension, the basic scheme and metaphor for the whole novel. All of the main characters are violators of nature.

consideration was a technical one — the necessity for a character of a higher degree of self-consciousness than my politician, a character to serve as a kind of commentator and *raisonneur* and chorus. But since in fiction one should never do a thing for merely a single reason (not if he hopes to achieve that feeling of a mysterious depth which is one of the chief beauties of the art), I wanted to give that character a dynamic relation to the general business, to make him the chief character among those who were to find their vicarious fulfilment in the dynamic and brutal, yet paradoxically idealistic, drive of the politician. There was, too, my desire to avoid writing a straight naturalistic novel, the kind of novel that the material so readily invited. The impingement of that material, I thought, upon a special temperament would allow another perspective than the reportorial one, and would give a basis for some range of style. So Jack Burden entered the scene.

But that is not quite a complete account of his origin. In *Proud Flesh,* at the time when Dr. Adam Stanton is waiting in the lobby of the Capitol to kill the Governor, and is meditating his act to come, an old friend, now a newspaperman, approaches him, and for one instant the assassin turns to him with a sense of elegiac nostalgia for the innocence and simplicity of the shared experiences of boyhood. This character, who appears so fleetingly in the last act of the play to evoke the last backward look of the dedicated assassin, gave me Jack Burden. And the story, in a sense, became the story of Jack Burden, the teller of the tale.

The composition of the novel moved slowly, in Minneapolis, in 1943 and through the spring of 1944, in Washington through the rest of the year and up till June of 1945, in Connecticut in the summer of 1945. The work was constantly interrupted, by teaching, by some traveling, by the duties of my post in Washington, by the study for and writing of a long essay on Coleridge. The interruptions were, in some way, welcome, for they meant that the pot had to be pushed to the back of the stove to simmer away at its own pace. The book

was finished in the fall of 1945, back in Minneapolis, the last few paragraphs being written in a little room in the upper reaches of the Library of the University of Minnesota. The book, after a good deal of revision along the way, with the perceptive criticism of Lambert Davis of Harcourt, Brace and Company, was published in August, 1946.

One of the unfortunate characteristics of our time is that the reception of a novel may depend on its journalistic relevance. It is a little graceless of me to call this characteristic unfortunate, and to quarrel with it, for certainly the journalistic relevance of *All the King's Men* had a good deal to do with what interest it evoked. My politician hero, whose name, in the end, was Willie Stark, was quickly equated with the late Senator Huey P. Long, whose fame, even outside of Louisiana, was yet green in pious tears, anathema, and speculation.

This equation led, in different quarters, to quite contradictory interpretations of the novel. On one hand, there were those who took the thing to be a not-so-covert biography of, and apologia for, Senator Long, and the author to be not less than a base minion of the great man. There is really nothing to reply to this kind of innocent boneheadedness or gospel-bit hysteria. As Louis Armstrong is reported to have said, there's some folks that if they don't know, you can't tell 'em.

But on the other hand, there were those who took the thing to be a rousing declaration of democratic principles and a tract for the assassination of dictators. This view, though somewhat more congenial to my personal political views, was almost as wide of the mark. For better or for worse, Willie Stark was not Huey Long. Willie was only himself, whatever that self turned out to be, a shadowy wraith or a blundering human being.

This disclaimer, whenever I was callow enough to make it, was almost invariably greeted by something like a sardonic smile or a conspiratorial wink, according to what the inimical smiler or the friendly winker took my motives to be – either I wanted to avoid being called a fascist or I wanted to avoid

a lawsuit. Now in making the disclaimer again, I do not mean to imply that there was no connection between Governor Stark and Senator Long. Certainly, it was the career of Long and the atmosphere of Louisiana that suggested the play that was to become the novel. But suggestion does not mean identity, and even if I had wanted to make Stark a projection of Long, I should not have known how to go about it. For one reason, simply because I did not, and do not, know what Long was like, and what were the secret forces that drove him along his violent path to meet the bullet in the Capitol. And in any case, Long was but one of the figures that stood in the shadows of imagination behind Willie Stark. Another one of that company was the scholarly and benign figure of William James.

Though I did not profess to be privy to the secret of Long's soul, I did have some notions about the phenomenon of which Long was but one example, and I tried to put some of those notions into my book. Something about those notions, and something of what I felt to be the difference between the person Huey P. Long and the fiction Willie Stark, may be indicated by the fact that in the verse play the name of the politician was Talos – the name of the brutal, blank-eyed "iron groom" of Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* the pitiless servant of the knight of justice. My conception grew wider, but that element always remained, and Willie Stark remained, in one way, Willie Talos. In other words, Talos is the kind of doom that democracy may invite upon itself. The book, however, was never intended to be a book about politics. Politics merely provided the framework story in which the deeper concerns, whatever their final significance, might work themselves out.

ROBERT PENN WARREN

New York City, March, 1953.

ALL THE KING'S MEN

Chapter One

MASON CITY.

To get there you follow Highway 58, going northeast out of the city, and it is a good highway and new. Or was new, that day we went up it. You look up the highway and it is straight for miles, coming at you, with the black line down the center coming at and at you, black and slick and tarry-shining against the white of the slab, and the heat dazzles up from the white slab so that only the black line is clear, coming at you with the whine of the tires, and if you don't quit staring at that line and don't take a few deep breaths and slap yourself hard on the back of the neck you'll hypnotize yourself and you'll come to just at the moment when the right front wheel hooks over into the black dirt shoulder off the slab, and you'll try to jerk her back on but you can't because the slab is high like a curb, and maybe you'll try to reach to turn off the ignition just as she starts the dive. But you won't make it, of course. Then a nigger chopping cotton a mile away, he'll look up and see the little column of black smoke standing up above the vitriolic, arsenical green of the cotton rows, and up against the violent, metallic, throbbing blue of the sky, and he'll say, "Lawd God, hit's a-nudder one done done hit!" And the next nigger down the next row, he'll say, "Lawd God," and the first nigger will giggle, and the hoe will lift again and the blade will flash in the sun like a heliograph. Then a few days later the boys from the Highway Department will mark the spot with a little metal square on a metal rod stuck in the black dirt off the shoulder, the metal square painted white and on it in black a skull and crossbones. Later on love vine will climb up it, out of the weeds.

But if you wake up in time and don't hook your wheel off the slab, you'll go whipping on into the dazzle and now and then a car will come at you steady out of the dazzle and will pass you with a snatching sound as though God-Almighty had ripped a tin roof loose with his bare hands. Way off ahead of you, at the horizon

where the cotton fields are blurred into the light, the slab will glitter and gleam like water, as though the road were flooded. You'll go whipping toward it, but it will always be ahead of you, that bright, flooded place, like a mirage. You'll go past the little white metal squares set on metal rods, with the skull and crossbones on them to mark the spot. For this is the country where the age of the internal combustion engine has come into its own. Where every boy is Barney Oldfield, and the girls wear organdy and batiste and eyelet embroidery and no panties on account of the climate and have smooth little faces to break your heart and when the wind of the car's speed lifts up their hair at the temples you see the sweet little beads of perspiration nestling there, and they sit low in the seat with their little spines crooked and their bent knees high toward the dashboard and not too close together for the cool, if you could call it that, from the hood ventilator. Where the smell of gasoline and burning brake bands and red-eye is sweeter than myrrh. Where the eight-cylinder jobs come roaring round the curves in the red hills and scatter the gravel like spray, and when they ever get down in the flat country and hit the new slab, God have mercy on the mariner.

On up Number 58, and the country breaks. The flat country and the big cotton fields are gone now, and the grove of live oaks way off yonder where the big house is, and the whitewashed shacks, all just alike, set in a row by the cotton fields with the cotton growing up to the doorstep, where the pickaninny sits like a black Billiken and sucks its thumb and watches you go by. That's all left behind now. It is red hills now, not high, with blackberry bushes along the fence rows, and blackjack clumps in the bottoms and now and then a place where the second-growth pines stand close together if they haven't burned over for sheep grass, and if they have burned over, there are the black stubs. The cotton patches cling to the hillsides, and the gullies cut across the cotton patches. The corn blades hang stiff and are streaked with yellow.

There were pine forests here a long time ago but they are gone. The bastards got in here and set up the mills and laid the narrow-gauge tracks and knocked together the company commissaries and paid a dollar a day and folks swarmed out of the brush for the dollar and folks came from God knows where, riding in wagons with a chest of drawers and a bedstead canted together in the wagon bed, and five kids huddled down together and the old woman hunched on the wagon seat with a poke bonnet on her head and snuff on her gums and a young one hanging on her tit. The saws sang soprano and the clerk in the commissary passed out the black-

strap molasses and the sow-belly and wrote in his big book, and the Yankee dollar and Confederate dumbness collaborated to heal the wounds of four years of fratricidal strife, and all was merry as a marriage bell. Till, all of a sudden, there weren't any more pine trees. They stripped the mills. The narrow-gauge tracks got covered with grass. Folks tore down the commissaries for kindling wood. There wasn't any more dollar a day. The big boys were gone, with diamond rings on their fingers and broadcloth on their backs. But a good many of the folks stayed right on, and watched the gullies eat deeper into the red clay. And a good handful of those folks and their heirs and assigns stayed in Mason City, four thousand of them, more or less.

You come in on Number 58, and pass the cotton gin and the power station and the fringe of nigger shacks and bump across the railroad track and down a street where there are a lot of little houses painted white one time, with the sad valentine lace of gingerbread work around the eaves of the veranda, and tin roofs, and where the leaves on the trees in the yards hang straight down in the heat, and above the mannerly whisper of your eighty-horsepower valve-in-head (or whatever it is) drifting at forty, you hear the July flies grinding away in the verdure.

That was the way it was the last time I saw Mason City, nearly three years ago, back in the summer of 1936. I was in the first car, the Cadillac, with the Boss and Mr. Duffy and the Boss's wife and son and Sugar-Boy. In the second car, which lacked our quiet elegance reminiscent of a cross between a hearse and an ocean liner but which still wouldn't make your cheeks burn with shame in the country-club parking lot, there were some reporters and a photographer and Sadie Burke, the Boss's secretary, to see they got there sober enough to do what they were supposed to do.

Sugar-Boy was driving the Cadillac, and it was a pleasure to watch him. Or it would have been if you could detach your imagination from the picture of what near a couple of tons of expensive mechanism looks like after it's turned turtle three times at eighty and could give your undivided attention to the exhibition of muscular co-ordination, satanic humor, and split-second timing which was Sugar-Boy's when he whipped around a hay wagon in the face of an oncoming gasoline truck and went through the rapidly diminishing aperture close enough to give the truck driver heart failure with one rear fender and wipe the snot off a mule's nose with the other. But the Boss loved it. He always sat up front with Sugar-Boy and looked at the speedometer and down the road and grinned to Sugar-Boy after they got through between the mule's nose and the

gasoline truck. And Sugar-Boy's head would twitch, the way it always did when the words were piling up inside of him and couldn't get out, and then he'd start. "The b-b-b-b-b—" he would manage to get out and the saliva would spray from his lips like Flit from a Flit gun. "The b-b-b-b-bas-tud—he seen me c-c-c—" and here he'd spray the inside of the windshield—"c-c-com-ing." Sugar-Boy couldn't talk, but he could express himself when he got his foot on the accelerator. He wouldn't win any debating contests in high school, but then nobody would ever want to debate with Sugar-Boy. Not anybody who knew him and had seen him do tricks with the .38 Special which rode under his left armpit like a tumor.

No doubt you thought Sugar-Boy was a Negro, from his name. But he wasn't. He was Irish, from the wrong side of the tracks. He was about five-feet-two, and he was getting bald, though he wasn't more than twenty-seven or -eight years old, and he wore red ties and under the red tie and his shirt he wore a little Papist medal on a chain, and I always hoped to God it was St. Christopher and that St. Christopher was on the job. His name was O'Sheean, but they called him Sugar-Boy because he ate sugar. Every time he went to a restaurant he took all the cube sugar there was in the bowl. He went around with his pockets stuffed with sugar cubes, and when he took one out to pop into his mouth you saw little pieces of gray lint sticking to it, the kind of lint there always is loose in your pocket, and shreds of tobacco from cigarettes. He'd pop the cube in over the barricade of his twisted black little teeth, and then you'd see the thin little mystic Irish cheeks cave in as he sucked the sugar, so that he looked like an undernourished leprechaun.

The Boss was sitting in the front seat with Sugar-Boy and watching the speedometer, with his kid Tom up there with him. Tom was then about eighteen or nineteen—I forgot which—but you would have thought he was older. He wasn't so big, but he was built like a man and his head sat on his shoulders like a man's head without that gangly, craning look a kid's head has. He had been a high-school football hero and the fall before he had been the flashiest thing on the freshman team at State. He got his name in the papers because he was really good. He knew he was good. He knew he was the nuts, as you could tell from one look at his slick-skinned handsome brown face, with the jawbone working insolently and slow over a little piece of chewing gum and his blue eyes under half-lowered lids working insolently and slow over you, or the whole damned world. But that day when he was up in the front seat with Willie Stark, who was the Boss, I couldn't see his face. I remem-

bered thinking his head, the shape and the way it was set on his shoulders, was just like his old man's head.

Mrs. Stark—Lucy Stark, the wife of the Boss—Tiny Duffy, and I were in the back seat—Lucy Stark between Tiny and me. It wasn't exactly a gay little gathering. The temperature didn't make for chit-chat in the first place. In the second place, I was watching out for the hay wagons and gasoline trucks. In the third place, Duffy and Lucy Stark never were exactly chummy. So she sat between Duffy and me and gave herself to her thoughts. I reckon she had plenty to think about. For one thing, she could think about all that had happened since she was a girl teaching her first year in the school at Mason City and had married a red-faced and red-necked farm boy with big slow hands and a shock of dark brown hair coming down over his brow (you can look at the wedding picture which has been in the papers along with a thousand other pictures of Willie) and a look of dog-like devotion and wonder in his eyes when they fixed on her. She would have had a lot to think about as she sat in the hurtling Cadillac, for there had been a lot of changes.

We tooled down the street where the little one-time-white houses were, and hit the square. It was Saturday afternoon and the square was full of folks. The wagons and the crates were parked solid around the patch of grass roots in the middle of which stood the courthouse, a red-brick box, well weathered and needing paint, for it had been there since before the Civil War, with a little tower with a clock face on each side. On the second look you discovered that the clock faces weren't real. They were just painted on, and they all said five o'clock and not eight-seventeen the way those big painted watches in front of third-string jewelry stores used to. We eased into the ruck of folks come in to do their trading, and Sugar-Boy leaned on his horn, and his head twitched, and he said, "B-b-b-b-as-tuds," and the spit flew.

We pulled up in front of the drugstore, and the kid Tom got out and then the Boss, before Sugar-Boy could get around to the door. I got out and helped out Lucy Stark, who came up from the depths of heat and meditation long enough to say, "Thank you." She stood there on the pavement a second, touching her skirt into place around her hips, which had a little more beam on them than no doubt had been the case when she won the heart of Willie Stark, the farm boy.

Mr. Duffy debouched massively from the Cadillac, and we all entered the drugstore, the Boss holding the door open so Lucy Stark could go in and then following her, and the rest of us trailing in. There were a good many folks in the store, men in overalls lined

up along the soda fountain, and women hanging around the counters where the junk and glory was, and kids hanging on skirts with one hand and clutching ice-cream cones with the other and staring out over their own wet noses at the world of men from eyes which resembled painted china marbles. The Boss just stood modestly back of the gang of customers at the soda fountain, with his hat in his hand and the damp hair hanging down over his forehead. He stood that way a minute maybe, and then one of the girls ladling up ice cream happened to see him, and got a look on her face as though her garter belt had busted in church, and dropped her ice-cream scoop, and headed for the back of the store with her hips pumping hell-for-leather under the lettuce-green smock.

Then a second later a little bald-headed fellow wearing a white coat which ought to have been in the week's wash came plunging through the crowd from the back of the store, waving his hand and bumping the customers and yelling, "It's Willie!" The fellow ran up to the Boss, and the Boss took a couple of steps to meet him, and the fellow with the white coat grabbed Willie's hand as though he were drowning. He didn't shake Willie's hand, not by ordinary standards. He just hung on to it and twitched all over and gargled the sacred syllables of *Willie*. Then, when the attack had passed, he turned to the crowd, which was ringing around at a polite distance and staring, and announced, "My God, folks, it's Willie!"

The remark was superfluous. One look at the faces rallied around and you knew that if any citizen over the age of three didn't know that the strong-set man standing there in the Palm Beach suit was Willie Stark, that citizen was a half-wit. In the first place, all he would have to do would be to lift his eyes to the big picture high up there above the soda fountain, a picture about six times life size, which showed the same face, the big eyes, which in the picture had the suggestion of a sleepy and inward look (the eyes of the man in the Palm Beach suit didn't have that look now, but I've seen it), the pouches under the eyes and the jowls beginning to sag off, and the meaty lips, which didn't sag but if you looked close were laid one on top of the other like a couple of bricks, and the tousle of hair hanging down on the not very high squarish forehead. Under the picture was the legend: *My study is the heart of the people.* In quotation marks, and signed, *Willie Stark.* I had seen that picture in a thousand places, pool halls to palaces.

Somebody back in the crowd yelled, "Hi, Willie!" The Boss lifted his right hand and waved in acknowledgment to the unknown admirer. Then the Boss spied a fellow at the far end of the soda fountain, a tall, gaunt-shanked, malarial, leather-faced side of jerked

venison, wearing jean pants and a brace of mustaches hanging off the kind of face you see in photographs of General Forrest's cavalrymen, and the Boss started toward him and put out his hand. Old Leather-Face didn't show. Maybe he shuffled one of his broken brogans on the tiles, and his Adam's apple jerked one or twice, and the eyes were watchful out of that face which resembled the seat of an old saddle left out in the weather, but when the Boss got close, his hand came up from the elbow, as though it didn't belong to Old Leather-Face but was operating on its own, and the Boss took it.

"How you making it, Malaciah?" the Boss asked.

The Adam's apple worked a couple of times, and the Boss shook the hand which was hanging out there in the air as if it didn't belong to anybody, and Old Leather-Face said, "We's grabblen."

"How's your boy?" the Boss asked.

"Ain't doen so good," Old Leather-Face allowed.

"Sick?"

"Naw," Old Leather-Face allowed, "jail."

"My God," the Boss said, "what they doing round here, putting good boys in jail?"

"He's a good boy," Old Leather-Face allowed. "Hit wuz a fahr fight, but he had a leetle bad luck."

"Huh?"

"Hit wuz fahr and squahr, but he had a leetle bad luck. He stobbed the feller and he died."

"Tough tiddy," the Boss said. Then: "Tried yet?"

"Not yit."

"Tough tiddy," the Boss said.

"I ain't complainen," Old Leather-Face said. "Hit wuz fit fahr and squahr."

"Glad to seen you," the Boss said. "Tell your boy to keep his tail over the dashboard."

"He ain't complainen," Old Leather-Face said.

The Boss started to turn away to the rest of us who after a hundred miles in the dazzle were looking at that soda fountain as though it were a mirage, but Old Leather-Face said, "Willie."

"Huh?" the Boss answered.

"Yore pitcher," Old Leather-Face allowed, and jerked his head creakily toward the six-times-life-size photograph over the soda fountain. "Yore pitcher," he said, "hit don't do you no credit, Willie."

"Hell, no," the Boss said, studying the picture, cocking his head to one side and squinting at it, "but I was porely when they took it. I was like I'd had the cholera morbus. Get in there busting some

sense into that Legislature, and it leaves a man worse'n the summer complaint."

"Git in thar and bust 'em, Willie!" somebody yelled from back in the crowd, which was thickening out now, for folks were trying to get in from the street.

"I'll bust 'em," Willie said, and turned around to the little man with the white coat. "Give us some cokes, Doc," he said, "for God's sake."

It looked as if Doc would have heart failure getting around to the other side of the soda fountain. The tail of that white coat was flat on the air behind him when he switched the corner and started clawing past the couple of girls in the lettuce-green smocks so he could do the drawing. He got the first one set up, and passed it to the Boss, who handed it to his wife. Then he started drawing the next one, and kept on saying, "It's on the house, Willie, it's on the house." The Boss took that one himself, and Doc kept on drawing them and saying, "It's on the house, Willie, it's on the house." He kept on drawing them till he got about five too many.

By that time folks were packed outside the door solid to the middle of the street. Faces were pressed up against the screen door, the way you do when you try to see through a screen into a dim room. Outside, they kept yelling, "Speech, Willie, speech!"

"My God," the Boss said, in the direction of Doc, who was hanging on to one of the nickel-plated spouts of the fountain and watching every drop of the coke go down the Boss's gullet. "My God," the Boss said, "I didn't come here to make a speech. I came here to go out and see my pappy."

"Speech, Willie, speech!" they were yelling out there.

The Boss set his little glass on the marble.

"It's on the house," Doc uttered croakingly with what strength was left in him after the rapture.

"Thanks, Doc," the Boss said. He turned away to head toward the door, then looked back. "You better get back in here and sell a lot of aspirin, Doc," he said, "to make up for the charity."

Then he plowed out the door, and the crowd fell back, and we tailed after him.

Mr. Duffy stepped up beside the Boss and asked him was he going to make a speech, but the Boss didn't even look at him. He kept walking slow and steady right on across the street into the crowd, as though the crowd hadn't been there. The red, long faces with the eyes in them watching like something wary and wild and watchful in a thicket fell back, and there wasn't a sound. The crowd creamed back from his passage, and we followed in his wake, all

of us who had been in the Cadillac, and the others who had been in the second car. Then the crowd closed behind.

The Boss kept walking straight ahead, his head bowed a little, the way a man bows his head when he is out walking by himself and has something on his mind. His hair fell down over his forehead, for he was carrying his hat in his hand. I knew his hair was down over his forehead, for I saw him give his head a quick jerk once or twice, the way he always did when he was walking alone and it fell down toward his eyes, the kind of motion a horse gives just after the bit is in and he's full of beans.

He walked straight across the street and across the patch of grass roots and up the steps of the courthouse. Nobody else followed him up the steps. At the top he turned around, slow, to face the crowd. He simply looked at them, blinking his big eyes a little, just as though he had just stepped out of the open doors and the dark hall of the courthouse behind him and was blinking to get his eyes adjusted to the light. He stood up there blinking, the hair down on his forehead, and the dark sweat patch showing under each arm of his Palm Beach coat. Then he gave his head a twitch, and his eyes bulged wide suddenly, even if the light was hitting him full in the face, and you could see the glitter in them.

It's coming, I thought.

You saw the eyes bulge suddenly like that, as though something had happened inside him, and there was that glitter. You knew something had happened inside him, and thought: *It's coming.* It was always that way. There was the bulge and the glitter, and there was the cold grip way down in the stomach as though somebody had laid hold of something in there, in the dark which is you, with a cold hand in a cold rubber glove. It was like the second when you come home late at night and see the yellow envelope of the telegram sticking out from under your door and you lean and pick it up, but don't open it yet, not for a second. While you stand there in the hall, with the envelope in your hand, you feel there's an eye on you, a great big eye looking straight at you from miles and dark and through walls and houses and through your coat and vest and hide and sees you huddled up way inside, in the dark which is you, inside yourself, like a clammy, sad little foetus you carry around inside yourself. The eye knows what's in the envelope, and it is watching you to see you when you open it and know, too. But the clammy, sad little foetus which is you way down in the dark which is you too lifts up its sad little face and its eyes are blind, and it shivers cold inside you for it doesn't want to know what is in that envelope. It wants to lie in the dark and not know,

and be warm in its not-knowing. The end of man is knowledge, but there is one thing he can't know. He can't know whether knowledge will save him or kill him. He will be killed, all right, but he can't know whether he is killed because of the knowledge which he has got or because of the knowledge which he hasn't got and which if he had it, would save him. There's the cold in your stomach, but you open the envelope, you have to open the envelope, for the end of man is to know.

The Boss stood up there quiet, with the bulge and glitter in the eyes, and there wasn't a sound in the crowd. You could hear one insane and irrelevant July fly sawing away up in one of the catalpa trees in the square. Then that sound stopped, and there wasn't anything but the waiting. Then the Boss lounged a step forward, easy and soft-footed.

"I'm not going to make any speech," the Boss said, and grinned. But the eyes were still big and the glitter was in them. "I didn't come here to make any speech. I came up here to go out and see my pappy, and see if he's got anything left in the smokehouse fit to eat. I'm gonna say: Pappy, now what about all that smoked sausage you wuz bragging about, what about all that ham you wuz bragging about all last winter, what about—" That's what he was saying, but the voice was different, going up in his nose and coming out flat with that little break they've got in the red hills, saying, "Pappy, now what about—"

But the glitter was still there, and I thought: *Maybe it's coming.* Maybe it was not too late. You never could tell. Suddenly, it might be there, he might say it.

But he was saying, "—and so I'm not going to make any speech—" In his old voice, his own voice. Or was that his voice? Which was his true voice, which one of all the voices, you would wonder.

He was saying, "And I didn't come here to ask you to give me anything, not even a vote. The Good Book says, 'There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, it is enough—' " and the voice was different now—" 'the grave, and the barren womb, the earth that is not filled with water, and the fire that saith not, it is enough.' But Solomon might have added just one little item. He might have just made his little list complete, and added, the politician who never stops saying, Gimme."

He was lounging back on himself now, and his head was cocked a little to one side, and his eyes blinked. Then he grinned, and said, "If they had politicians back in those days, they said, Gimme, just like all of us politicians do. Gimme, gimme, my name's Jimmie. But I'm not a politician today. I'm taking the day off. I'm not even