

## The Train

THINKING ABOUT the porter, he had almost forgotten the berth. He had an upper one. The man in the station had said he could give him a lower and Haze had asked didn't he have no upper ones; the man said sure if that was what he wanted, and gave him an upper one. Leaning back on the seat, Haze had seen how the ceiling was rounded over him. It was in there. They pulled the ceiling down and it was in there, and you climbed up to it on a ladder. He hadn't seen any ladders around; he reckoned they kept them in the closet. The closet was up where you came in. When he first got on the train, he had seen the porter standing in front of the closet, putting on his porter's jacket. Haze had stopped right then—right where he was.

The turn of his head was like and the back of his neck was like and the short reach of his arm. He turned away from the closet and looked at Haze and Haze saw his eyes and they were like; they were the same—same as old Cash's for the first instant, and then different. They turned different while he was looking at them; hardened flat. "Whu . . . what time do you pull down the beds?" Haze mumbled.

"Long time yet," the porter said, reaching into the closet again.

Haze didn't know what else to say to him. He went on to his section.

Now the train was greynflaying past instants of trees and quick spaces of field and a motionless sky that sped darkening away in the opposite direction. Haze leaned his head back on the seat and looked out the window, the yellow light of the train lukewarm on him. The porter had passed twice, twice back and twice forward, and the second time forward he had looked sharply at Haze for an instant and passed on without saying anything; Haze had turned and stared after him as he had done the time before. Even his walk was like. All them gulch niggers resembled. They looked like their own kind of nigger—heavy and bald, rock all through. Old Cash in his day had been two hundred pounds heavy—no fat on him—and five feet high with not more than two inches over. Haze

wanted to talk to the porter. What would the porter say when he told him: I'm from Eastrod? What would he say?

The train had come to Evansville. A lady got on and sat opposite Haze. That meant she would have the berth under him. She said she thought it was going to snow. She said her husband had driven her down to the station and he said if it didn't snow before he got home, he'd be surprised. He had ten miles to go; they lived in the suburbs. She was going to Florida to visit her daughter. She had never had time to take a trip that far off. The way things happened, one thing right after another, it seemed like time went by so fast you couldn't tell if you were old or young. She looked as if it had been cheating her, going double quick when she was asleep and couldn't watch it. Haze was glad to have someone there talking.

He remembered when he was a little boy, him and his mother and the other children would go into Chattanooga on the Tennessee Railroad. His mother had always started up a conversation with the other people on the train. She was like an old bird dog just unpenned that raced, sniffing up every rock and stick and sucking in the air around everything she stopped at. There wasn't a person she hadn't spoken to by the time they were ready to get off. She remembered them too. Long years after, she would say she wondered where the lady was who was going to Fort West, or she wondered if the man who was selling Bibles had ever got his wife out the hospital. She had a hankering for people—as if what happened to the ones she talked to happened to her then. She was a Jackson. Annie Lou Jackson.

My mother was a Jackson, Haze said to himself. He had stopped listening to the lady although he was still looking at her and she thought he was listening. My name is Hazel Wickers, he said. I'm nineteen. My mother was a Jackson. I was raised in Eastrod, Eastrod, Tennessee; he thought about the porter again. He was going to ask the porter. It struck him suddenly that the porter might even be Cash's son. Cash had a son run away. It happened before Haze's time. Even so, the porter would know Eastrod.

Haze glanced out the window at the shapes black-spinning past him. He could shut his eyes and make Eastrod at night

out of any of them—he could find the two houses with the road between and the store and the nigger houses and the one barn and the piece of fence that started off into the pasture, grey-white when the moon was on it. He could put the mule face, solid, over the fence and let it hang there, feeling how the night was. He felt it himself. He felt it light-touching around him. He seen his ma coming up the path, wiping her hands on an apron she had taken off, looking like the night change was on her, and then standing in the doorway: Haaaazzzzzeeee, Haazzzee, come in here. The train said it for him. He wanted to get up and go find the porter.

“Are you going home?” Mrs. Hosen asked him. Her name was Mrs. Wallace Ben Hosen; she had been a Miss Hitchcock before she married.

“Oh!” Haze said, startled— “I get off at, I get off at Taulkinham.”

Mrs. Hosen knew some people in Evansville who had a cousin in Taulkinham—a Mr. Henrys, she thought. Being from Taulkinham Haze might know him. Had he ever heard the. . . .

“Taulkinham ain’t where I’m from,” Haze muttered. “I don’t know nothin’ about Taulkinham.” He didn’t look at Mrs. Hosen. He knew what she was going to ask next and he felt it coming and it came, “Well, where do you live?”

He wanted to get away from her. “It was there,” he mumbled, squirming in the seat. Then he said, “I don’t rightly know, I was there but . . . this is just the third time I been at Taulkinham,” he said quickly—her face had crawled out and was staring at him—“I ain’t been since I went when I was six. I don’t know nothin’ about it. Once I seen a circus there but not. . . .” He heard a clanking at the end of the car and looked to see where it was coming from. The porter was pulling the walls of the sections farther out. “I got to see the porter a minute,” he said and escaped down the aisle. He didn’t know what he’d say to the porter. He got to him and he still didn’t know what he’d say. “I reckon you’re fixing to make them up now,” he said.

“That’s right,” the porter said.

“How long does it take you to make one up?” Haze asked.

“Seven minutes,” the porter said.

"I'm from Eastrod," Haze said. "I'm from Eastrod, Tennessee."

"That isn't on this line," the porter said. "You on the wrong train if you counting on going to any such place as that."

"I'm going to Taulkinham," Haze said. "I was raised in Eastrod."

"You want your berth made up now?" the porter asked.

"Huh?" Haze said. "Eastrod, Tennessee; ain't you ever heard of Eastrod?"

The porter wrenched one side of the seat flat. "I'm from Chicago," he said. He jerked the shades down on either window and wrenched the other seat down. Even the back of his neck was like. When he bent over, it came out in three bulges. He was from Chicago. "You standing in the middle of the aisle. Somebody gonna want to get past you," he said, suddenly turning on Haze.

"I reckon I'll go sit down some," Haze said, blushing.

He knew people were staring at him as he went back to his section. Mrs. Hosen was looking out the window. She turned and eyed him suspiciously; then she said it hadn't snowed yet, had it? and relaxed into a stream of talk. She guessed her husband was getting his own supper tonight. She was paying a girl to come cook his dinner but he was having to get his own supper. She didn't think that hurt a man once in a while. She thought it did him good. Wallace wasn't lazy but he didn't think what it took to keep going with housework all day. She didn't know how it would feel to be in Florida with somebody waiting on her.

He was from Chicago.

This was her first vacation in five years. Five years ago she had gone to visit her sister in Grand Rapids. Time flies. Her sister had left Grand Rapids and moved to Waterloo. She didn't suppose she'd recognize her sister's children if she saw them now. Her sister wrote they were as big as their father. Things changed fast, she said. Her sister's husband had worked with the city water supply in Grand Rapids—he had a good place—but in Waterloo, he . . .

"I went back there last time," Haze said. "I wouldn't be getting off at Taulkinham if it was there; it went apart like, you know, it . . ."

Mrs. Hosen frowned. "You must be thinking of another Grand Rapids," she said. "The Grand Rapids I'm talking about is a large city and it's always where it's always been." She stared at him for a moment and then went on: when they were in Grand Rapids they got along fine, but in Waterloo he suddenly took to liquor. Her sister had to support the house and educate the children. It beat Mrs. Hosen how he could sit there year after year.

Haze's mother had never talked much on the train; she mostly listened. She was a Jackson.

After a while Mrs. Hosen said she was hungry and asked him if he wanted to go into the diner. He did.

The dining car was full and people were waiting to get in it. Haze and Mrs. Hosen stood in line for a half hour, rocking in the narrow passageway and every few minutes flattening themselves against the side to let a trickle of people through. Mrs. Hosen began talking to the lady on the side of her. Haze stared stupidly at the wall. He would never have had the courage to come to the diner by himself; it was fine he had met Mrs. Hosen. If she hadn't been talking, he would have told her intelligently that he had gone there the last time and that the porter was not from there but that he looked near enough like a gulch nigger to be one, near enough like old Cash to be his child. He'd tell her while they were eating. He couldn't see inside the diner from where he was; he wondered what it would be like in there. Like a restaurant, he reckoned. He thought of the berth. By the time they got through eating, the berth would probably be made up and he could get in it. What would his ma say if she seen him having a berth in a train! He bet she never reckoned that would happen. As they got nearer the entrance to the diner he could see in. It was like a city restaurant! He bet she never reckoned it was like that.

The head man was beckoning to the people at the first of the line every time someone left—sometimes for one person, sometimes for more. He motioned for two people and the line moved up so that Haze and Mrs. Hosen and the lady she was talking to were standing at the end of the diner, looking in. In a minute, two more people left. The man beckoned and Mrs. Hosen and the lady walked in, and Haze followed them.

The man stopped Haze and said, "only two," and pushed him back to the doorway. Haze's face went an ugly red. He tried to get behind the next person and then he tried to get through the line to go back to the car he had come from, but there were too many people bunched in the opening. He had to stand there while everyone around looked at him. No one left for a while and he had to stand there. Mrs. Hosen did not look at him again. Finally a lady up at the far end got up and the head man jerked his hand and Haze hesitated and saw the hand jerk again and then lurched up the aisle, falling against two tables on the way and getting his hand wet with somebody's coffee. He didn't look at the people he sat down with. He ordered the first thing on the menu and when it came, ate it without thinking what it might be. The people he was sitting with had finished and, he could tell, were waiting, watching him eat.

When he got out the diner he was weak and his hands were making small jittery movements by themselves. It seemed a year ago that he had seen the head man beckon to him to sit down. He stopped between two cars and breathed in the cold air to clear his head. It helped. When he got back to his car all the berths were made up and the aisles were dark and sinister, hung in heavy green. He realized again that he had a berth, an upper one, and that he could get in it now. He could lie down and raise the shade just enough to look out from and watch—what he had planned to do—and see how everything went by a train at night. He could look right into the night, moving.

He got his sack and went to the men's room and put on his night clothes. A sign said to get the porter to let you into the upper berths. The porter might be a cousin of some of them gulch niggers, he thought suddenly; he might ask him if he had any cousins around Eastrod, or maybe just in Tennessee. He went down the aisle, looking for him. They might have a little conversation before he got in the berth. The porter was not at that end of the car and he went back to look at the other end. Going around the corner he ran into something heavily pink; it gasped and muttered, "clumsy!" It was Mrs. Hosen in a pink wrapper with her hair in knots around her head. He had forgotten about her. She was terrifying

with her hair slicked back and the knobs like dark toad stools framing her face. She tried to get past him and he tried to let her but they were both moving the same way each time. Her face became purplish except for little white marks over it that didn't heat up. She drew herself stiff and stopped still and said, "What IS the matter with you?" He slipped past her and dashed down the aisle and ran suddenly into the porter so that the porter slipped and he fell on top of him and the porter's face was right under his and it was old Cash Simmons. For a minute he couldn't move off the porter for thinking it was Cash and he breathed, "Cash," and the porter pushed him off and got up and went down the aisle quick and Haze scrambled off the floor and went after him saying he wanted to get in the berth and thinking, this is Cash's kin, and then suddenly, like something thrown at him when he wasn't looking: this is Cash's son run away; and then: he knows about Eastrod and doesn't want it, he doesn't want to talk about it, he doesn't want to talk about Cash.

He stood staring while the porter put the ladder up to the berth and then he started up it, still looking at the porter, seeing Cash there only different, not in the eyes, and half way up the ladder he said, still looking at the porter, "Cash is dead. He got the cholera from a pig." The porter's mouth jerked down and he muttered, looking at Haze with his eyes thin, "I'm from Chicago. My father was a railroad man," and Haze stared at him and then laughed: a nigger being a railroad "man": and laughed again, and the porter jerked the ladder off suddenly with a wrench of his arm that sent Haze clutching at the blanket into the berth.

He lay on his stomach in the berth, trembling from the way he had got in. Cash's son. From Eastrod. But not wanting Eastrod; hating it. He lay there for a while on his stomach, not moving. It seemed a year since he had fallen over the porter in the aisle.

After a while he remembered that he was actually in the berth and he turned and found the light and looked around him. There was no window.

The side wall did not have a window in it. It didn't push up to be a window. There was no window concealed in it.

There was a fish net thing stretched across the side wall; but no windows. For a second it flashed through his mind that the porter had done this—given him this berth that there were no windows to and had just a fish net strung the length of—because he hated him. But they must all be like this.

The top of the berth was low and curved over. He lay down. The curved top looked like it was not quite closed; it looked like it was closing. He lay there for a while not moving. There was something in his throat like a sponge with an egg taste. He had eggs for supper. They were in the sponge in his throat. They were right in his throat. He didn't want to turn over for fear they would move; he wanted the light off; he wanted it dark. He reached up without turning and felt for the button and snapped it and the darkness sank down on him and then faded a little with light from the aisle that came in through the foot of space not closed. He wanted it all dark, he didn't want it diluted. He heard the porter's footsteps coming down the aisle, soft into the rug, coming steadily down, brushing against the green curtains and fading up the other way out of hearing. He was from Eastrod. From Eastrod but he hated it. Cash wouldn't have put any claim on him. He wouldn't have wanted him. He wouldn't have wanted anything that wore a monkey white coat and toted a whiskbroom in his pocket. Cash's clothes had looked like they'd set a while under a rock; and they smelled like nigger. He thought how Cash smelled, but he smelled the train. No more gulch niggers in Eastrod. In Eastrod. Turning in the road, he saw in the dark, half-dark, the store boarded and the barn open with the dark free in it, and the smaller house half carted away, the porch gone and no floor in the hall. He had been supposed to go to his sister's in Taulkinham on his last furlough when he came up from the camp in Georgia but he didn't want to go to Taulkinham and he had gone back to Eastrod even though he knew how it was: the two families scattered in towns and even the niggers from up and down the road gone into Memphis and Murfreesboro and other places. He had gone back and slept in the house on the floor in the kitchen and a board had fallen on his head out of the roof and cut his face. He jumped, feeling the board, and the



train jolted and unjolted and went again. He went looking through the house to see they hadn't left nothing in it ought to been taken.

His ma always slept in the kitchen and had her walnut shifferrobe in there. Wasn't another shifferrobe nowhere around. She was a Jackson. She had paid thirty dollars for it and hadn't bought herself nothing else big again. And they had left it. He reckoned they hadn't had room on the truck for it. He opened all the drawers. There were two lengths of wrapping cord in the top one and nothing in the others. He was surprised nobody had come and stolen a shifferrobe like that. He took the wrapping cord and tied the legs through the floor boards and left a piece of paper in each of the drawers: THIS SHIFFERROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL WICKERS. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED.

She could rest easier knowing it was guarded some. If she come looking any time at night, she would see. He wondered if she walked at night and came there ever—came with that look on her face, unrested and looking, going up the path and through the barn open all around and stopping in the shadow by the store boarded up, coming on unrested with that look on her face like he had seen through the crack going down. He seen her face through the crack when they were shutting the top on her, seen the shadow that came down over her face and pulled her mouth down like she wasn't satisfied with resting, like she was going to spring up and shove the lid back and fly out like a spirit going to be satisfied: but they shut it on down. She might have been going to fly out of there, she might have been going to spring—he saw her terrible like a huge bat darting from the closing—fly out of there but it was falling dark on top of her, closing down all the time, closing down; from inside he saw it closing, coming closer, closer down and cutting off the light and the room and the trees seen through the window through the crack faster and darker closing down. He opened his eyes and saw it closing down and he sprang up between the crack and wedged his body through it and hung there moving, dizzy, with the dim light of the train slowly showing the rug below, moving, dizzy. He hung there wet and cold and saw the

porter at the other end of the car, a white shape in the darkness, standing there, watching him and not moving. The tracks curved and he fell back sick into the rushing stillness of the train.