have the prettiest little shapes you ever saw—I'll show you one some time under the microscope."

"Thank you, ma'am," Miranda remembered finally to say through her fog of bliss at hearing the tree frogs sing, "Weep, weep . . ."

THE GRAVE

The grandfather, dead for more than thirty years, had been twice disturbed in his long repose by the constancy and possessiveness of his widow. She removed his bones first to Louisiana and then to Texas as if she had set out to find her own burial place, knowing well she would never return to the places she had left. In Texas she set up a small cemetery in a corner of her first farm, and as the family connection grew, and oddments of relations came over from Kentucky to settle, it contained at last about twenty graves. After the grandmother's death, part of her land was to be sold for the benefit of certain of her children, and the cemetery happened to lie in the part set aside for sale. It was necessary to take up the bodies and bury them again in the family plot in the big new public cemetery, where the grandmother had been buried. At last her husband was to lie beside her for eternity, as she had planned.

The family cemetery had been a pleasant small neglected garden of tangled rose bushes and ragged cedar trees and cypress, the simple flat stones rising out of uncropped sweet-smelling wild grass. The graves were lying open and empty one burning day when Miranda and her brother Paul, who often went together to hunt rabbits and doves, propped their twenty-two Winchester rifles carefully against the rail fence, climbed over and explored among the graves. She was nine years old and he was twelve.

They peered into the pits all shaped alike with such purposeful accuracy, and looking at each other with pleased adventurous eyes, they said in solemn tones: "These were graves!" trying by words to shape a special, suitable emotion in their minds, but they felt nothing except an agreeable thrill of wonder: they were seeing a new sight, doing something they had not done before. In them both there was also a small disappointment at the entire commonplace of the actual spectacle. Even if it had once contained a coffin for years upon years, when the coffin was gone a grave was just a hole in the ground. Miranda leaped into the pit that had held her grandfather's bones. Scratching around aimlessly and pleasurably as any young animal, she scooped up a lump of earth and weighed it in her palm. It had a pleasantly sweet, corrupt smell, being mixed with cedar needles and small leaves, and as the crumbs fell apart, she saw a silver dove no larger than a hazel nut, with spread wings and a neat fan-shaped tail. The breast had a deep round hollow in it. Turning it up to the fierce sunlight, she saw that the inside of the hollow was cut in little whorls. She scrambled out, over the pile of loose earth that had fallen back into one end of the grave, calling to Paul that she had found something, he must guess what . . . His head appeared smiling over the rim of another grave. He waved a closed hand at her. "I've got something too!" They ran to compare treasures, making a game of it, so many guesses each, all wrong, and a final showdown with opened palms. Paul had found a thin wide gold ring carved with intricate flowers and leaves. Miranda was smitten at sight of the ring and wished to have it. Paul seemed more impressed by the dove. They made a trade, with some little bickering. After he had got the dove in his hand, Paul said, "Don't you know what this is? This is a screw head for a coffin! . . . I'll bet nobody else in the world has one like this!"

Miranda glanced at it without covetousness. She had the gold ring on her thumb; it fitted perfectly. "Maybe we ought to go now," she said, "maybe one of the niggers'll see us and tell somebody." They knew the land had been sold, the cemetery was no longer theirs, and they felt like trespassers. They climbed back over the fence, slung their rifles loosely under their arms—they had been shooting at targets with various kinds of firearms since they were seven years old—and set out to look for the rabbits and doves or whatever small game might happen along. On these expeditions Miranda always followed at Paul's heels along the path, obeying instructions about handling her gun when going through fences, learning how to stand it up properly so it would not slip and fire unexpectedly; how to wait her time for a shot and not just hang away in the air without looking, spoiling shots for Paul, who really could hit things if given a chance. Now and then, in her
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The Old Order

with the Grandmother no longer there to hold it together. It was known that she had discriminated against her son Harry in her will, and that he was in straits about money. Some of his old neighbors reflected with vicious satisfaction that now he would probably not be so stiffnecked, nor have any more high-stepping horses either. Miranda knew this, though she could not say bow. She had met along the road old women of the kind who smoked corn-cob pipes, who had treated her grandmother with most sincere respect. They slanted their gummy old eyes side-ways at the grand-daughter and said, “Ain't you ashamed of youself, Missy? It's against the Scriptures to dress like that. What yo Pappy thinkin' about?” Miranda, with her powerful social sense, which was like a fine set of antennae radiating from every pore of her skin, would feel ashamed because she knew well it was rude and ill-bred to shock anybody, even bad-tempered old crones, though she had faith in her father's judgment and was perfectly comfortable in the clothes. Her father had said, “They're just what you need, and they'll save your dresses for school...” This sounded quite simple and natural to her. She had been brought up in rigorous economy. Wastefulness was vulgar. It was also a sin. These were truths; she had heard them repeated many times and never once disputed.

Now the ring, shining with the serene purity of fine gold on her rather grubby thumb, turned her feelings against her overalls and reckless feet, toes sticking through the thick brown leather straps. She wanted to go back to the farmhouse, take a good cold bath, dress herself with plenty of Maria's violet talcum powder—provided Maria was not present to object, of course—put on the thinnest, most becoming dress she owned, with a big sash, and sit in a choker chair under the trees... These things were not all she wanted, of course; she had vague stirrings of desire for luxury and a grand way of living which could not take precise form in her imagination but were founded on family legend of past wealth and leisure. These immediate comforts were what she could have, and she wanted them at once. She lagged rather far behind Paul, and once she thought of just turning back without a word and going home. She stopped, thinking that Paul would never do that to her, and so she would have to tell him. When a rabbit leaped, she let Paul have it without dispute. He killed it with one shot.

When she came up with him, he was already kneeling, examin-
ing the wound, the rabbit trailing from his hands. “Right through the head,” he said complacently, as if he had aimed for it. He took 
out his sharp, competent bowie knife and started to skin the body. 
He did it very cleanly and quickly. Uncle Jimbilly knew how to 
preserve the skins so that Miranda always had fur coats for her 
dolls, for though she never cared much for her dolls she liked 
seeing them in fur coats. The children knelt facing each other over 
the dead animal. Miranda watched admiringly while her brother 
stripped the skin away as he were taking off a glove. The flayed 
flesh emerged dark scarlet, sleek, firm; Miranda with thumb and 
finger felt the long fine muscles with the silvery flat strips binding 
them to the joints. Brother lifted the oddly bloated belly. “Look,” 
she said, in a low amazed voice. “It was going to have young ones.” 
Very carefully he slit the thin flesh from the center ribs to the 
flanks, and a scarlet bag appeared. He slit again and pulled the bag 
open, and there lay a bundle of tiny rabbits, each wrapped in a 
thin scarlet veil. The brother pulled these off and there they were, 
dark gray, their sleek wet down lying in minute even ripples, like a 
baby’s head just washed, their unbelievably small delicate ears 
folded close, their little blind faces almost featureless.

Miranda said, “Oh, I want to see,” under her breath. She looked 
and looked—excited but not frightened, for she was accustomed to 
the sight of animals killed in hunting—filled with pity and astonish-
ment and a kind of shocked delight in the wonderful little creatures 
for their own sakes, they were so pretty. She touched one of them 
ever so carefully, “Ah, there’s blood running over them,” she said 
and began to tremble without knowing why. Yet she wanted most 
deeply to see and to know. Having seen, she felt at once as if she 
had known all along. The very memory of her former ignorance 
faded, she had always known just this. No one had ever told her 
anything outright, she had been rather unobservant of the animal 
life around her because she was so accustomed to animals. They 
seemed simply disorderly and unaccountably rude in their habits, 
but altogether natural and not very interesting. Her brother had 
spoken as if he had known about everything all along. He may 
have seen all this before. He had never said a word to her, but she 
knew now a part at least of what he knew. She understood a little 
of the secret, formless intuitions in her own mind and body, which 
her had been clearing up, taking form, so gradually and so steadily she 

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had not realized that she was learning what she had to know. Paul 
said cautiously, as if he were talking about something forbidden: 
“They were just about ready to be born.” His voice dropped on 
the last word. “I know,” said Miranda, “like kittens. I know, like 
babies.” She was quietly and terribly agitated, standing again with 
her rifle under her arm, looking down at the bloody heap. “I don’t 
want the skin,” she said, “I won’t have it.” Paul buried the young 
rabbits again in their mother’s body, wrapped the skin around her, 
covered it to a clump of sage bushes, and hid her away. He came 
out again at once and said to Miranda, with an eager friendliness, a 
confidential tone quite unusual in him, as if he were taking her into 
an important secret on equal terms: “Listen now. Now you listen 
to me, and don’t ever forget. Don’t you ever tell a living soul that 
you saw this. Don’t tell a soul. Don’t tell Dad because I’ll get into 
trouble. He’ll say I’m leading you into things you ought not to do. 
He’s always saying that. So now don’t you go and forget and blab 
out sometime the way you’re always doing . . . Now, that’s a 
secret. Don’t you tell.” 

Miranda never told, she did not even wish to tell anybody. She 
thought about the whole worrisome affair with confused unhappi-
ness for a few days. Then it sank quietly into her mind and was 
heaped over by accumulated thousands of impressions, for nearly 
twenty years. One day she was picking her path among the puddles 
and crushed refuse of a market street in a strange city of a strange 
country, when without warning, plain and clear in its true colors as 
if she looked through a frame upon a scene that had not stirred 
or changed since the moment it happened, the episode of that 
far-off day leaped from its burial place before her mind’s eye. She was 
so reasonlessly horrified she halted suddenly staring, the scene be-
fore her eyes dimmed by the vision back of them. An Indian vend-
lor had held up before her a tray of dyed sugar sweets, in the 
shapes of all kinds of small creatures: birds, baby chicks, baby 
rabbits, lambs, baby pigs. They were in gay colors and smelled of 
vanilla, maybe. . . . It was a very hot day and the smell in the 
market, with its piles of raw flesh and wilting flowers, was like the 
mingled sweetness and corruption she had smelled that other day 
in the empty cemetery at home: the day she had remembered alw-
ays until now vaguely as the time she and her brother had found 
treasure in the opened graves. Instantly upon this thought the
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dreadful vision faded, and she saw clearly her brother, whose child-
hood face she had forgotten, standing again in the blazing
sunshine, again twelve years old, a pleased sober smile in his eyes,
turning the silver dove over and over in his hands.

The Downward Path to Wisdom

In the square bedroom with the big window Mama and Papa were
tolling back on their pillows handing each other things from the
wide black tray on the small table with crossed legs. They were
smiling and they smiled even more when the little boy, with the
feeling of sleep still in his skin and hair, came in and walked up to
the bed. Leaning against it, his bare toes wriggling in the white fur
rug, he went on eating peanuts which he took from his pajama
pocket. He was four years old.

"Here's my baby," said Mama. "Lift him up, will you?"
He went limp as a rag for Papa to take him under the arms and
swing him up over a broad, tough chest. He sank between his
parents like a bear cub in a warm litter, and lay there comfortably.
He took another peanut between his teeth, cracked the shell,
picked out the nut whole and ate it.

"Running around without his slippers again," said Mama. "His
feet are like icicles."

"He crunches like a horse," said Papa. "Eating peanuts before
breakfast will ruin his stomach. Where did he get them?"

"You brought them yesterday," said Mama, with exact memory,
in a grisly little cellophane sack. I have asked you dozens of times
not to bring him things to eat. Put him out, will you? He's spilling
shells all over me."

Almost at once the little boy found himself on the floor again.
He moved around to Mama's side of the bed and leaned
confidingly near her and began another peanut. As he chewed he
gazed solemnly in her eyes.