

September

By midday the rain had long since stopped, the clouds were gone and the persistent September sun flashed in brilliant whiteness upon the countryside. It was a southern Mississippi countryside of huge quiet forests, of bluffs slashed with occasional dirt farmroads winding carelessly into the interior. It was a farming land with some of the best black and red soil in the state, where farms and plantations were not marked by the surveyors tool, but by what generations of toilers, both white and black, had been able to claw away and hold. The times of cutting out new land were gone. It was nineteen twelve and a truce had been established here between man and the forests. But it was an uneasy truce requiring constant vigilance lest the sedulous woodland take back what it so begrudgingly had given.

The model T Ford, its newness obscured by splattered mud, struggled feebly for a moment through a sticky puddle by the gate crossing. The engine coughed and strained as the car pulled free from the mud and turned up the narrow hill road, to the weed-shrouded cemetery. The automobile labored slowly as it climbed. The thin tires, now made thick with coatings of mud and weeds would not hold and the car slid sideways and stopped. The engine whined louder this time; mud flew as the wheels spun then finally grabbed. The little car jerked forward and moved unhindered up the rest of the hill.

The woman, the one who had been driving was the first to get out of the car. Her companion remain in his seat for a moment and stared intently toward the small fenced in grave yard. He was looking at the corner of the plot where there were flowers color-dulled and wilted now by several days of fierce rains and even fiercer suns. She walked around the car and poked her head under the canvas top so that she was looked directly into his eyes.

" This was your idea, " she said. Now get out of the car and lets get this over with. "



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English & French
Dance of a fish

He looked at her for a moment and she looked at him. ~~xxxxxxx~~ His face was expressionless except ~~for perhaps~~ ^a slight hint of fear. His hand reached slowly for the door handle but she reached over and opened the door for him.

"Come on," she said kindly. "You Owe this much to her."

He got out of the car and stood blinking in the sun. He was not a tall man, but he seemed tall, for he nearly dwarfed the woman who stood stiffly beside him. Both people were ~~about~~ in their early forties. There was more than just a slight hint of grey in his hair though his figure looked surprizingly young for a man of his age. The woman's hair was still dark ~~and~~ ^{Her} eyes flashed with a youthful brilliance and yet she was getting the bearing of an older woman. Perhaps this was because of her shortness, the ~~more~~ ^{unatural} than natural slope of her shoulders.

~~Board~~ had been laid down to make a path through the mud, from the grave yard gate to the fresh grave. Neither of them said anything as they approached the grave and both stood quietly for several minutes just looking at the grave and listening to the muted sounds of a cicada which had secluded itself in the branches of the old pecan tree, the only tree in the plot. The woman did not want to speak first. She wanted him to make the first comment, but silence in this situation was becoming uneasy. She found herself trying to think of something appropriate to say, even though she hated what lay beneath that fresh grave.

"She was a wonderful woman, Duncan," she said.

Duncan did not take his eyes from the grave.

"My mother was a wretched woman and you know it," he said.

"She was not wretched; she was just hard to understand. That made her hard to live with."

"You don't have to say those things to me. She was a bitch."

"Duncan!"