

# William Faulkner, Insurance Agent

*by* Con Chapman

*At The Hartford, we've been in tune with businesses for more than 200 years. (. . .) We're here to help them, so that when the unforeseen happens, you don't just endure—you prevail.*

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*I believe that man will not merely endure, he will prevail.*

William Faulkner, Nobel Prize acceptance speech



Popeye sat in the chair, watching the drunken coed sleep off her hangover. She was blond and had her legs tucked up under her, like a cat.

She couldn't have been more than eighteen, Popeye concluded. Maybe she had taken college prep courses in the summer, Popeye thought. Town folk would do that just to give their kids a leg up

over good country people who were stuck behind a mule from sunup to sundown.

Temple began to stir. She turned her head away from the wall, rubbed her eyes and flinched when she saw Popeye sitting there, silently smoking a cigarette.

“What are you doing?” she asked, a note of apprehension in her voice made husky by cigarettes and the moonshine whiskey that the college boys in Oxford had no doubt laced the punch with. “What do you want?”

The shadows of the shades fell across Temple's face as she said these words, making it seem as if she was speaking from behind bars—a prison of her upbringing, so far removed from the poverty and degradation and ignorance and pellagra and bad table manners and somebody stop me before I run out of conjunctions.

“Don't want nothin',” Popeye said as he picked his teeth. “‘Cept to do you some good.”

“Do me good?” Temple threw her head back and began to laugh, loudly and riotously, the way she had surely laughed the night before just as the party was getting going good. “What could you possibly do that would be of any worldly good to me?”

Popeye glared at her but repressed the knot of lust and impotent rage that welled up within him. “It would do you a world of good,” he said finally. “You're young, and if you start buyin' whole life now, by the time you're 54 you'll have built enough cash surrender value to buy you a goddamn plantation.”

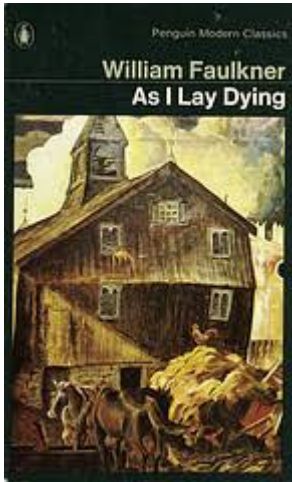


The fruit of the octoroon who had been his lover who had joined with him in flesh and thus had perpetuated his blood, yes his blood, that fruit now stood before him in the person of Charles Bon and asked for the hand of his daughter Judith who did not know could not know that the man she would marry was the son of her father, yes every son needs a father also daughters do too.

"I cannot allow this proposed marriage to go forward," Sutpen said to Bon. "I cannot condone or allow or permit or in any way stand idly by while the run-on sentences yes the sentences that began before I left Virginia for Mississippi were first conceived in the heat and humidity of the Southern summer it was never the heat no not the heat it was always . . ."

"Mr. Sutpen," Bon said by way of interruption. "I will support your daughter in the style to which she has become accustomed even if she is [SPOILER ALERT] my half-sister. What possible objection could you have to our union?"

Sutpen seethed and gritted his teeth and words hissed out of his mouth like vipers out of a cave. "I looked at the insurance certificate in the glove compartment of your four-wheeled horse-drawn brougham," he said. "You've only got \$100,000 liability insurance per accident, and \$300,000 in the aggregate. That's the kind of limits white trash half-breeds buy."



It was nigh to midnight and it had set in to rain when he woke us. Peabody's team had come up, lathered, with the broke harness dragging and the neck-yoke betwixt one critter's legs.

"Come in the house," Cora says. "It's Addie Bundren. She's gone at last."

"No, ma'am. It ain't Addie Bundren."

"Well, then who is it?" Cora says.

"It's one of them oxen."

"What about it?"

"It done fell in a ditch."

She looked at me. "That is the fate of all of us in the South, we will fall in a ditch eventually, a ditch with run-off rainwater that tastes so fresh, yes, but which at the same time gorges our mouths and at last finally yes at last makes us shut up," she said. "There is nothing can be done."

That man looked like a drowned puppy in them overalls, without no hat, splashed up to his knees where he had walked them four miles in the mud with absolutely no sympathy whatsoever from the omniscient narrator.

"Yes there is something can be done, Cora," I says.

“What?” the man said. “You can't bring no oxen back from the dead, that's only for Jesus Christ and Lazarus and such in the Bible.”

“No, you can't bring 'em back,” I says, with resignation and finality and despair but without bitterness. “But there's something in this miserable God-forsaken, Christ-haunted South you can do about it.”

“What's that?” he says.

“You can make a claim under your homeowner's policy. Cattle is chattel, personal property, and you should be covered for loss after payment of a standard deductible.”

