

have to continue to bear what you believe is suffering; you can always choose to stop that, put an end to that. And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that's shame. But you can't be alive for ever, and you always wear out life long before you have exhausted the possibilities of living. And all that must be somewhere; all that could not have been invented and created just to be thrown away. And the earth is shallow; there is not a great deal of it before you come to the rock. And the earth don't want to just keep things, hoard them; it want to use them again. Look at the seed, the acorns, at what happens even to carrion when you try to bury it; it refuses too, seethes and struggles too until it reaches light and air again, hunting the sun still. And they -' the boy saw his hand in silhouette for a moment against the window beyond which, accustomed to the darkness now, he could see sky where the scoured and icy stars glittered -' they don't want it, need it. Besides, what would it want, itself, knocking around out there, when it never had enough time about the earth as it was, when there is plenty of room about the earth, plenty of places still unchanged from what they were, when the blood used and pleased in them while it was still blood?'

'But we want them,' the boy said. 'We want them too. There is plenty of room for us and them too.'

'That's right,' McCaslin said. 'Suppose they don't have substance, can't cast a shadow -'

'But I saw it!' the boy cried. 'I saw him!'

'Steady,' McCaslin said. For an instant his hand touched the boy's flank beneath the covers. 'Steady. I know you did. So did I. Sam took me in there once after I killed my first deer.'

THE BEAR

I

THERE was a man and a dog too this time. Two beasts, counting Old Ben, the bear, and two men, counting Boon Hogganbeck, in whom some of the same blood ran which ran in Sam Fathers, even though Boon's was a plebeian strain of it and only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible.

He was sixteen. For six years now he had been a man's hunter. For six years now he had heard the best of all talking. It was of the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document - of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it, of Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of it had been his to convey; bigger than Major de Spain and the scrap he pretended to, knowing better; older than old Thomas Supten of whom Major de Spain had had it and who knew better; older even than old Iktemotubbe, the Chickasaw chief, of whom old Supten had had it and who knew better in his turn. It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and relieved against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and inimitable rules which voided all regrets and brooded no quarter - the best game of all, the best of all breathing and for ever the best of all listening, the voices quiet and weighty and deliberate for retrospection and recollection and exactitude among the concrete trophies - the racked guns and the heads and skins - in the libraries of town houses or the offices of plantation houses or (and best of all) in the camps themselves where the intact and still-warm meat yet hung, the men who had slain it sitting before the burning logs on hearths when there were houses and hearths or about the smoky blazing