

Sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount the road toward her, Lena thinks, 'I have come from Alabama: a fur¹ piece. All the way from Alabama a-walking. A fur piece.' Thinking *although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi, further from home than I have ever been before. I am now further from Doane's Mill than I have been since I was twelve years old*

She had never even been to Doane's Mill until after her father and mother died, though six to eight times a year she went to town on Saturday, in a mailorder dress and her bare feet flat in the wagon bed and her shoes wrapped in a piece of paper beside her on the seat. She would put on the shoes just before the wagon reached town. After she got to be a big girl she would ask her father to stop the wagon at the edge of town and she would get down and walk. She would not tell her father why she wanted to walk instead of riding. He thought that it was because of the smooth streets, the sidewalks. But it was because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too.

When she was twelve years old her father and mother died in the same summer, in a log house of three rooms and a hall, without screens, in a room lighted by a bugswirled kerosene lamp, the naked floor worn smooth as old silver by naked feet. She was the youngest living child. Her mother died first. She said, "Take care of paw²." Lena did so. Then one day her father said, "You go to Doane's Mill with McKinley. You get ready to go, be ready when he comes." Then he died. McKinley, the brother, arrived in a wagon. They buried the father in a grove behind a country church one afternoon, with a pine headstone. The next morning she departed forever, though it is possible that she did not know this at the time, in the wagon with McKinley, for Doane's Mill. The wagon was borrowed and the brother had promised to return it by nightfall.

The brother worked in the mill. All the men in the village worked in the mill or for it. It was cutting pine. It had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and who existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away. But some of the machinery would be left, since new pieces could always be bought on the installment plan—gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and un-smoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a stump-pocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the galloping fury of vernal equinoxes. Then the hamlet which at its best day had borne no name listed on Postoffice Department annals would not now even be remembered by the hookworm-ridden heirs at large who pulled the buildings down and burned them in cookstoves and winter grates.

There were perhaps five families there when Lena arrived. There was a track and a station, and once a day a mixed train fled shrieking through it. The train could be stopped with a red flag, but by ordinary it appeared out of the devastated hills with apparitionlike suddenness and wailing like a banshee, athwart and past that little less-than-village like a forgotten bead from a broken string. The brother was twenty years her senior. She hardly remembered him at all when she came to live with him. He lived in a four room and unpainted house with his labor- and childridden wife. For almost half of every year the sister-in-law was either lying in³ or recovering. During this time Lena did all the housework and took care of the other children. Later she told herself, 'I reckon that's why I got one so quick myself.'

She slept in a leanto room at the back of the house. It had a window which she learned to open and close again in the dark without making a sound, even though there also slept in the leanto room at first her oldest nephew and then the two oldest and then the three. She had lived there eight years before she opened the window the first time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all. She said to herself, 'That's just my luck.'

The sister-in-law told the brother. Then he remarked her changing shape, which he should have noticed some time before. He was a hard man. Softness and gentleness and youth (he was just forty) and almost everything else except a kind of stubborn and despairing fortitude and the bleak heritage of his bloodpride had been sweated out of him. He called her whore. He accused the right man (young bachelors, or sawdust Cassanovas anyway, were even fewer in number than families) but she would not admit it, though the man had departed six months ago. She just repeated stubbornly, "He's going to send for me; he said he would send for me"; unshakable, sheeplike, having drawn upon that reserve of patient and steadfast fidelity upon which the Lucas Burches depend and trust, even though they do not intend to be present when the need for it arises. Two weeks later she climbed again through the window. It was a little difficult, this time. 'If it had been this hard to do before, I reckon I would not be doing it now,' she thought. She could have departed by the door, by daylight. Nobody would have stopped her. Perhaps she knew that. But she chose to go by night, and through the window. She carried a palm leaf fan and a small bundle tied neatly in a bandanna handkerchief. It contained among other things thirtyfive cents

¹ "fur" for "far"

² "paw" for "pa" / "papa"

³ giving birth to a child

in nickels and dimes. Her shoes were a pair of his own which her brother had given to her. They were but slightly worn, since in the summer neither of them wore shoes at all....

William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932), Chapter 1, excerpt (https://www.amazon.com/Light-August-Modern-Library-88-6/dp/0394600886/ref=tmm_hrd_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1545155160&sr=1-1) - **ONLINE**



GIST: What light? Which August? Where? **SKIM READ** Faulkner's *Light in August* for these words, **COUNT** them, and **CHOOSE** the right answers from the pulldown menus. Read **FAST** and only **ONCE**. You are reading for a *panorama*. Watch out! Faulkner's a bit worried, so he's put in at least one thing not in the text! **MAXIMUM 5 MINUTES**.

35/thirtyfive

dozen

Lena

McDonald

DETAILED: Great, now you have a general idea, but now you need to understand the *content and details*, better. **READ** the questions **TWICE**, **SCAN READ** the text (a little more slowly) at least **TWICE**, but **WITHOUT** looking at the questions. **TICK** the correct answers **TRUE (T) | FALSE (F)** **WITHOUT** looking at the text. Beware! Sneaky Faulkner has put in at least one trick question. **MAXIMUM 15 MINUTES**.



1. When she was a girl, Lena liked to pretend she lived in town, and not in the countryside. (T) | (F)
2. Even if they were poor, Lena and everyone in her family always wore shoes. (T) | (F)
3. Lena's parents both died in the same summer when she was rather young. (T) | (F)
4. When Lena moved in with her brother, the wood-cutting mill had already shut down. (T) | (F)
5. A train stopped regularly everyday in the small town where Lena lived with her brother. (T) | (F)
6. Lena – still single – had gotten pregnant; that's why she was in trouble. (T) | (F)
7. Lena left climbing through a window in her room, even if she could have gone through the door. (T) | (F)
8. Lena went looking for her child's father, even if she had no faith in him. (T) | (F)

EXPRESS YOURSELF (UNGRADED):

What ways does Faulkner use language, itself, to convey feelings and meaning?

How does Faulkner use language, itself, to convey differences between the narrator and the protagonist, Lena?

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