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Brief Synopsis of Faulkner's *Sanctuary*

American author William Faulkner insisted that his novel *Sanctuary* was written purely for profit. However, the novel, which was published in 1931, became a significant work for Faulkner. It positively impacted his literary career in that it was both a critical and a financial success. It was also highly controversial because of the theme of rape. It was later developed into a film in 1933 and again in 1961. The main themes of the novel deal with double moral standards and the disintegration of Southern genteelism. The three families in the novel are the Benbows, the Goodwins, and the Drakes. They serve as contrasts to each other to demonstrate social division and entitlement.

The setting for *Sanctuary* takes place in fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, which is theoretically close to Faulkner's actual hometown. The year is 1929. The story begins with a lawyer named Horace Benbow who decides to leave his family and his practice and return to his hometown of Jefferson, located in Yoknapatawpha County. On his way to Jefferson, he stops to get some water at an old familiar homestead. However, a bootlegger named Lee Goodwin has taken up residence there. Benbow continues on to his hometown where he stays with his widowed sister Narcissa.

Benbow's stopping at the old house and meeting the Goodwins sets the scene later for a college coed named Temple Drake and a recent college graduate named Gowan Stevens. Both come from prominent families. They meet at a dance one night, and decide to accompany Temple's friends to an out-of-town baseball game. However, Stevens misses the train the next morning and decides to drive to the next town to intercept it and to convince Temple to ride with him to the game. Temple has a reputation for being "fast" and agrees to go with him even though it is against her school's rules to accompany a man out of town. Stevens is an alcoholic and knows about Goodwin's bootlegging business. He decides to stop there for some whiskey. However, he runs into a felled tree placed in the middle of the road by a sinister associate of Goodwin's named Popeye. Goodwin is not at home at the time, but his wife Ruby warns Temple

that it is not safe for her there and that she should leave immediately. However, the other men return and they, along with Stevens, become drunk. When one of the men tries to make advances towards Temple, she hides out in an upstairs bedroom. Stevens attempts to protect Temple but is knocked out. The next morning he leaves the house, abandoning Temple.

Tommy, a somewhat slow individual, does not like Goodwin's men. He decides to hide Temple in the corn crib located in the barn in an attempt to keep her safe. However, Popeye is aware of Tommy's actions and kills him in cold blood with a shot to the back of the head. He then proceeds to "rape" Temple with a corncob. Goodwin returns from a whiskey run and discovers Tommy's dead body. The police also arrive and arrest Goodwin for the murder. Although Goodwin knows that Popeye is the murderer, he chooses not to tell the police for fear of retaliation from Popeye. In the meanwhile, Popeye has taken Temple to Memphis where he has connections with the underworld.

Benbow decides to defend Goodwin against the charges of murder. He also provides Ruby and her baby with shelter while at Jefferson. He knows that Goodwin cannot pay for his services and that Ruby has no money for boarding, and so Benbow takes care of the expenses himself. He soon discovers that a young woman named Temple was at the old house at the time of Tommy's murder. He tries to locate her at her school but is told that she is gone and that rumor has it that her father, a wealthy judge, has sent her somewhere up north. In reality, though, she is being kept as a sex slave at a brothel run by an old widow named Miss Reba. Although Popeye wants Temple, he is impotent. Instead, he has a young gangster named Red to continuously have sex with Temple while he watches.

At some point, Benbow had encountered a state senator names Clarence Snopes who is familiar with the rumor that Temple's father had sent her away. Snopes, however, later encounters Temple at Miss Reba's brothel. He becomes aware of who she is and how valuable this piece of information might be to her father and to Benbow in his defense of Goodwin for Tommy's murder. He tells Benbow where to find Temple after being paid for the information. Miss Reba, a sympathetic character, allows Benbow to speak to Temple. Temple relates the story of how she was raped and Tommy was killed. Benbow is sickened by the story and returns home. Temple, who has been corrupted by her experiences at the brothel, remains. However, she decides to bribe a servant into letting her leave the brothel, but unfortunately, runs into Popeye

who takes her to a location called The Grotto. Temple drinks to excess and attempts to have sex with Red, who rejects her. Popeye kills Red out of jealousy. Miss Reba is heartbroken over Red's murder and wants revenge on Popeye.

Meanwhile, Benbow has decided to divorce his wife. He also has problems with his sister Narcissa who does not want him defending lowlife such as Goodwin. She has even interfered with Benbow finding shelter for Ruby and the baby while in Jefferson. Narcissa wants the trial to end as quickly as possible so that Benbow can sever his ties with the Goodwin family. Benbow attempts to see Temple again to convince her to give testimony at the trial, but he is told that she and Popeye have left. Unexpectedly, however, Temple does show for the trial. Instead of giving testimony to help Goodwin, she lies to protect Popeye, saying that Goodwin killed Tommy and raped her with the corncob. The jury takes only 8 minutes for deliberation before finding Goodwin guilty of murder. That evening, Goodwin is broken out of jail, hanged, and his body set on fire. The mop sees Benbow and threatens to hang him as well. He leaves Jefferson and returns to his wife. Popeye and Temple head to Pensacola, Florida to escape. Ironically, Popeye is arrested and found guilty for a crime he did not commit and is hanged. Temple and her father reunite later in Paris.

Critics of *Sanctuary* note that the protagonist, Benbow, is a decent human being who tries to do what is right, but he is unable to successfully stand up against the evils of society. Critics even suggested that though Faulkner was a truly talented writer, he should find something happier to write about.

Works Cited

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