CHAPTER II
ALIENATION FROM SOCIETY.

The first story of this chapter is Lily Daw and the Three Ladies where Lily a half-witted girl is unable to make a decision on her own and three earnest ladies are bent on doing what they consider to be the best for her, no matter what the consequences. These ladies represent the social forces.

The story revolves round a day in the life of Lily. On that particular day at the post office of Victory, Aimee Slocum, an employee receives a letter from the Ellisville Institute for the Feeble-Minded of Mississippi. It is an acceptance letter of Lily into that Institution. Mrs. Watts and Mrs. Carson, a Baptist preacher's wife are there too. The three ladies read the letter together. They are
pleased, happy and excited for Lily. Yet, they have no idea what the institution is like. I've always heard it was lovely down there, but crowded said one. (ACOG—18).

Wanting to give the news to Lily right away, the other two ladies wait for Aimee to finish her duty.

While waiting Mrs. Carson learns of Lily being at the tent show the previous night where she kept staring at the xylophone player. They feel it is unlike her because 'she wasn't bright'. Aimee having completed her work all three ladies set off for Lily's house. They learn with shock on the way of Lily's plans of getting married. Convinced that Lily is their responsibility, they cannot imagine her undertaking anything without their consent. They had already decided earlier that Lily is to remain a spinster. They even persuaded Victory boys not to marry Lily. After her mother's death it is Mrs. Carson who rescued her from her violent father and
provided her with everything.

There is a clear indication from the description of Lily’s house that everything is dependant on charity. *The paintless frame house, the wire chair donated from the drugstore that burned.* (ACOG—21&22). They find Lily packing, wearing her pretty new hat. Lily informs them about her plans of marriage and the ladies try to persuade her and change her mind and go to Ellisville instead. But Lily is adamant. They are alarmed on learning that she plans to marry a musician, the xylophone player she met the previous night. They feel he has cheated on Lily because such musicians are always on the move from one town to another and most probably they have a girl in each and every town to whom they have promised marriage; Lily being one of them. Lily being indecisive is soon persuaded to change her mind.
At the station the whole town of Victory is present to bid Lily goodbye. *The Victory Civic Band had assembled without any orders and was scattered through the crowd.* Ed Newton gave false signals to start on his base horn. A crate full of baby chickens got loose on the platform .......... (ACOG—27).

Mrs. Watts and Mrs. Carson sneaked Lily into the train from the other side. Lily is wearing a small hat—an exchange for her pretty hat—and a travelling dress made out of Mrs. Watts’ previous summer’s mourning dress. Apparently someone close to Mrs. Watts had died the previous summer and she made a dress for the funeral. Aimee is getting emotional, *she was the one who felt things.* (ACOG—27). She is ordered to get off the train. Mrs. Watts and Mrs. Carson are accompanying Lily upto Jackson. Aimee bumps into a stranger who enquires about
Lily. Aimee before realising it asks what he wants Lily for, to which he replies they are getting married. Aimee tells him Lily is leaving for Ellisville then it strikes her that the stranger is the xylophone player. The band is starting to play and the train is starting to leave. Aimee rushes back to the train and informs the two ladies accompanying Lily about the stranger. Excited, they hurriedly got down with Lily unaware of the commotion. They explained that they have decided to marry her off. But Lily now wants to go to Ellisville and not get married, but her protests fall on deaf ears. Lily is not allowed to have a mind of her own and her life is shown as being completely run by these ladies. As soon as they stepped down the train, the band started “Independence March”.

The xylophone player is waiting for them. Mrs. Watts beams at him and Mrs. Carson tells him that her
husband being a preacher can get them married. Aimee gets more emotional. *Some of the people thought Lily was on the train and some swore she wasn't.* Everybody cheered, though, and a straw hat was thrown into the telephone wires. (ACOG—31).

This short story is filled with grim comedy. Lily is taken care of by Mrs. Carson as she is a feeble—minded person without any relatives and is therefore dependent on others. In the course of the story it is revealed that her mother died and her father is a violent person. Her father's consistent beatings and his attempt to murder her must have had a permanent effect on Lily's mind. Thus she becomes terribly confused and cannot do much intelligent thinking. Since Mrs. Carson's rescue of her, she is living on charity both in the material as well as psychological sense. Therefore she is unable to speak
her mind, make decisions independently and stop the ladies from interfering in her life. She cannot protest about being forced into spinsterhood. Not only that, she gradually becomes indifferent to everything around her. Because of her indifference she does not complain when her pretty hat is exchanged for a smaller one or her travelling dress is made out of someone else’s mourning clothes. Nothing really seems to matter to her.

The decision of the three ladies for Lily is either the institution or marriage. The institution cannot guarantee a solution to the problem of Lily as she may never get well in the institution if they are sending her there to be cured. It could also be that they feel that she belongs there. Either way, their attempt to send her there only highlights Lily’s helplessness. Again there is a change of plan and the ladies decide to marry her off to a man of
her choice but who is a complete stranger to them. Probably the ladies are simply shaking off their responsibility in the nicest possible way.

What Lily really needs is a little love and affection from the ladies which she never got from her family. And her father’s harsh treatment may have aggravated her fragile nature and made her what she is. For Lily therefore, going to Ellisville and staying locked up within, away from people and society or marriage to a complete stranger seems to make no difference. In either situation, Lily does not show the slightest awareness of any connectedness to anybody or anywhere. The trip to the institution has been the decision of the three ladies whereas getting married was Lily’s idea. By being able to express this wish she for the first time tries to take control of her own life. But when the three ladies
intervene, first with one decision and then changing it, Lily is left as helpless and as isolated as she is shown in the beginning. At the end of the story, even Lily's physical presence is left unlocated and unspecified.

In the next story *Clytie*, the main character of the same name is depicted as a person who is dissociated from her self. She leads a life of utter drudgery performing chores for a family who takes her presence for granted. This is a family called Farr whom Welty describes as being *too good to associate with other people* (ACOG—145). But in fact the family has fallen on bad days and therefore keeps themselves aloof from the other people in the town.

The story is about a day in Clytie's life which also happens to be her last. Rain starts to fall in the late
afternoon in the town of Farr's Gin. Everybody except one has taken shelter. Clytie Farr is standing still in the middle of the road looking straight ahead, getting all drenched. She always comes out of the big house around this time. Earlier, she used to run around on some pretext or another. Now Clytie simply comes out everyday for no apparent reason. No one speaks to her anymore and the way she rushes about town, people are convinced that one day she will be run over in the busy street. The ladies think that perhaps like her sister Clytie's wits are also leaving her. As she stands still, someone calls out to her to take shelter. But Clytie only clenched her hands and drew them up under her armpits, and sticking out her elbows like hen wings, she ran out of the street .......... (ACOG—145).

Reaching home she enters the hall where there is
only a solitary piece of furniture, an organ. Inside the house, *every window was closed, and every shade was down* ....... (ACOG—146). Octavia, Clytie’s sister is furious with her for running off. She calls her ‘common’ and chides her for running out and wandering about the streets.

Clytie is sent to the kitchen to prepare supper for the whole family of four — Clytie, father, brother Gerald and sister Octavia. Lighting the wooden stove, Clytie thinks back about herself in the street standing still. She had then seen a child’s face looking at her so trustingly and openly. This had made her stand still when suddenly the rain pouring and someone shouting at her stopped her in her meditations. Clytie is beginning to observe faces for sometime now. She feels it is impossible to see a face all at once. The first thing she discovers on seeing a face is that she is seeing it for the first time. She feels that a face is the most profound and moving sight in the whole world. People
conclude that Mr. Tom Bate’s Boy who sells peanuts has a clear face which can be read easily. But for Clytie, he is as mysterious as an Egyptian.

The wind blowing in through the open window breaks her thoughts. Octavia would be furious for she never likes to keep doors and windows open. For her rain and sun signifies ruin. But Clytie knows that more than ruin, it is the prying from outside that terrifies Octavia. Having cooked the three meals separately, she takes them upstairs. On the way up, she thinks of their old cook Lethy who used to be with them since their father’s childhood. They had to give her up after their father’s first stroke. Since then, Lethy has never been allowed in the house by Octavia. The only person allowed in the house is a barber who by appointment comes to shave their father once a week.
Clytie places the tray in her father's room. She wants to feed her father but Octavia snatches the bowl from her. Furious, Clytie screams at her but Octavia is indifferent. As she stands her hair falls over her forehead. She has been ill which resulted in loss of hair. It is now growing and dyed almost purple. Clytie takes Gerald's food to his room. Lying in bed, he looks exactly like their father. After his coffee, he starts reminiscing about the days when he owned a house and was happily married. But the marriage ended soon and he shot his wife. Clytie leaves Gerald with his face hidden. This shows how even the smallest overtures of Clytie for establishing some contact with her family are rebuffed and she is left to her private musings on ‘faces’.

As she has her supper she realises that their faces (the family’s) always comes between herself and that
familiar looking face that she is constantly in search of. She tries to remember the other face which looked a little like a trusting child’s, even the barber’s and Lethy’s, yet it is different. It is very close to hers. But then either her sister’s or brother’s or father’s or the face of her other brother Henry with a bullet hole through the forehead always interferes with the vision. As a result, she hardly ever gets to see the face properly. Searching for a resemblance of that face, she examines every face in the street. Yet she is always interrupted; her name is called and frightened, she flees. She is becoming frightened all the time. Clytie’s abnormal state of mind is reflected in her appearance also. She never dresses up like she used to earlier. Every once in a while, *she would come out in what was called ‘outfit’, all in hunter’s green, a hat that came down around her face like a bucket, a green silk dress, even green shoes with pointed toes*. She would wear
the outfit all one day, if it was pretty day, and then next morning she would be back in the faded jumper with her old hat tied under the chin, as if the outfit had been a dream. (ACOG—153).

Sometimes when a neighbour asks her about anything—like the rose bush she planted—Clytie answers politely but afterwards she comes rushing out screaming Octavia’s negative remarks: *My sister Octavia says you take the rosebush up............If you don’t I’ll kill you!*... ....... (ACOG—153). Then she runs to the vegetable garden and curses alone. Everyone said she is just imitating Octavia who used to do the same thing years ago but in a much louder voice. Finally she rushes out of the gate and through the town with such speed that *no one in town could have kept up with Miss Clytie*...... (ACOG—154). Having eaten her supper rapidly, she checks the doors and windows to make sure they are locked. It is her routine
before retiring to bed.

The next morning Gerald says he is going to their Farr furnishing store which hardly did any business. Suddenly Octavia screams. “It’s started” said Gerald. Perhaps he means Octavia’s madness. He furiously tears the napkin and goes back upstairs.

Mr. Bobo the barber arrives exactly at nine to shave Mr. Farr. As he goes upstairs, all the occupants of the house lined up........and ..........looked at him with repulsion. (ACOG—156). He wished he had never accepted a letter from Octavia to come and shave Mr. Farr every Friday morning. Of course, it is one thing to be the only person allowed into the Farr residence except of course, the undertaker who had been there when Henry shot himself. Everytime he says to himself he will never return but always returns. As he waits to be summoned, Clytie
comes and looks at his face and touches him with gentleness. For an instant they are quiet, then each lets out a cry. Mr. Bobo turns and flees while Clytie stumbles. Meanwhile Octavia orders Clytie to fetch water from the barrel. She looks into the barrel and sees a face there. She realises it was the face she had been looking for, and from which she had been separated. It was a wavering, inscrutable face. The brows were drawn together as if in pain. The eyes were large, intent, almost avid, the nose ugly and discolored as if from weeping, the mouth old and closed from any speech. On either side of the head dark hair hung down in a disreputable and wild fashion. Everything about the face frightened and shocked her with its signs of waiting, of suffering. (ACOG—159). As she recoils from the shock and fright, the face in the water too recoils. It takes her sometime to recognise the face as her own and this recognition makes her sick at heart, as though the poor, half-remembered vision had finally betrayed her. (ACOG—159).
When Octavia’s monumental voice cries out Clytie! Clytie! The water! The water!, it signals the end of Clytie’s vision of herself and Welty says that Clytie did the only thing she could think of to do. (ACOG—160). Clytie’s head-long plunge into the barrel symbolizes her final immersion into the spectre of the lost vision which eluded her in life.

Welty describes the last image of Clytie, When Old Lethy found her, she had fallen forward into the barrel, with her poor ladylike black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongs. (ACOG—160).

Clytie’s dissociation from people and in the process, from herself begins in a family which was too conscious about their status and position to mingle with the rest of the town whom Octavia calls ‘common’. Perhaps a tragedy like the failure of the family business has left them distraught and friendless. The presence of
the only sole furniture—an organ, in their house is indicative of their gradual loss of other possessions. If earlier they were aloof from society because of their wealth and status, now it is their abject poverty which completes the isolation and begins to tell on them mentally too. Neighbours try to be nice but all their attempts are rejected. The peculiar madness borne out of extreme poverty and family pride forces Octavia to eccentricities that prohibit all social contact. So curtains and shades are pulled down and doors and windows are kept locked.

Nobody except the barber is allowed in the house. Under Octavia’s control they live an extremely solitary existence cut off from all communication or contact with the neighbours and society as a whole. Finally even the barber flees unable to bear the strangeness of their behaviour. With the barber’s exit from the household the alienation of the Farr’s seem to be complete.
As for Clytie, the protagonist of the story, the exit is of a different kind. Her constant search for the illusive face is the only energy which keeps her going in a household devoid of all meaningful relationships and an estranged society. When she recognises her face in the water in the barrel as the one which she has been unable to focus on, the realisation shatters her. Her head-long plunge into the depth of the water which results in her death is symbolic of the futility of her search. The finality of her death confirms her alienation not only from her family and society but in the end from her own self.

*A Curtain of Green* is about a woman, Mrs. Larkin who has stopped relating to the outside world after her husband’s death.

In Larkin’s Hill, the rain comes regularly in the afternoon around two o’clock. But one particular day the sun is still shining at five o’clock. Everyone is waiting for
the rain. However, neither the rain nor the heat of the sun can affect Mrs. Larkin who works daily in her garden—a large densely grown plot—behind the house. She lives alone after her husband’s death. The hedge bordering the garden is so high that the garden can be seen only from the upstairs windows of the neighbours. After Mr. Larkin’s death, Mrs. Larkin is seen nowhere but deeply engrossed in her garden. Every morning she comes out slowly with her uncombed hair and wanders for a while among the plants. *And then a sort of sturdiness would possess her ..........and then she would kneel in the flowers and begin to work.* (ACOG—187).

She works tirelessly all day till a servant calls her at dinnertime. Even the rain stops her momentarily only.

*It might seem that the extreme fertility of her garden formed at once a pre-occupation and a challenge to Mrs. Larkin.* (ACOG—187 & 188). Somehow she seems not to seek
order in her garden. She hardly trims, cuts, separates. She never strives for a beautiful garden. Her neighbours peering through the window thinks it looks more like a jungle.

After Mr. Larkin's death—after whose father the town is named—the neighbours used to visit Mrs. Larkin frequently but she never appreciated it. So they stopped coming to her place and sometimes just peered through their windows out of curiosity.

So, on the morning of that particular day when the sun is still shining at five o'clock, the neighbours hear Jamey—a working Negro boy—whistling in the garden. He comes occasionally to work in Mrs. Larkin's garden. She wants Jamey to finish work before it starts raining. As she hoes, the memory of that fateful day returns. It was the previous summer. She was waiting in the front porch for the arrival of her husband from work. She heard his car approaching. At that moment without warning, a chinaberry
tree suddenly crushed over the car. From where she stood she was saying, “You can’t be hurt.” But the tree had crushed her husband to death. She stood on the porch shocked. *It was an accident that was incredible, when her love for her husband was keeping her safe.* (ACOG—190).

She continued hoeing with the memory behind her. Suddenly she notices that everything is quiet. Even Jamey is motionless and has stopped whistling. She calls him but can hardly be heard in the dense garden. She is terrified as if her loneliness is pointed out to her by some outside force. She walks towards him and notices how young and docile he looks. As she draws near he does not turn. She can see the side of his face. She feels *as if that glimpse of the side of his face, that turned away smile, were a teasing, innocent, flickering and beautiful vision—some mirage to her strained and wandering eyes.*
(ACOG—191). Living a lonely and secluded life, the sight of a smiling child should have been like a sight for sore eyes. However, his docility infuriated her with a feeling of condemnation. Strangely she thinks of her husband, how innocent he was, unaware of what was to befall him. Death came to him without warning. So when she is behind Jamey she is still for a moment and then suddenly raises her hoe above her head. In doing so, her overall sleeves fall back exposing the part of her arms which was not burned by the sun, “the shocking fact of their youth.”

She holds the handle of the hoe and looks at Jamey so lost in thought. The head of Jamey, bent there below her, seemed witless, terrifying, wonderful, almost inaccessible to her, and yet in its explicit nearness meant surely for destruction, the bowed head holding so obviously and so deadly its ridiculous dream. (ACOG—192). Mrs. Larkin thinks, such a head she could strike
off, intentionally.... (ACOG—192). Thus gripped by such irrational thoughts, she ponders on the question of life and unpredictable death, *Life and death, she thought, gripping the heavy hoe, life and death, which now meant nothing to her but which she was compelled continually to wield with both her hands, ceaselessly asking, Was it not possible to compensate? to punish? to protest?.... (ACOG—192).

The suddenness and ease with which the accident took her husband’s life is felt anew by Mrs. Larkin as she stands behind Jamey. She thinks how easy it would be to take his young life ‘to compensate the loss of her husband.’ As she stands on the brink of this ‘pale darkness’, the rain starts to fall and she is jolted back into reality.

In contemplating to kill Jamey with the hoe, Mrs.
Larkin re-lives the moment of her husband’s death which she witnessed. Probably she wants others to experience what it feels like to be caught unawares by death. She wants to inflict the same pain she feels on everyone but the rain comes and saves Jamey. She then realises that she cannot prevent the inevitable and collapses after that. When she finally stirs in response to Jamey’s call, it is a moment of recognition for him. He seems to understand the immense loneliness of her life. He had also sensed an intangible chasm between them when she was standing behind him. Looking down at the collapsed Mrs. Larkin, Jamey can only run away from such inhospitable loneliness. This fact eventually completes Mrs. Larkin’s alienation from all human bonds.

Asphodel is the story of Sabina who lives a solitary life. The story of Sabina is told by way of reminiscence by three old ladies.
The three old maids—Cora, Phoebe and Irene—are out on a picnic. There is sadness on their faces as their Miss Sabina’s funeral was just the day before. It is a bright cloudless afternoon when they reach Asphodel—a golden ruin— their picnic spot. They have come in a buggy. They know Sabina would never have appreciated their going over to Don McInnis’ Asphodel.

Reaching their destination they settle down with their food. Then each one of them starts reminiscing about the deceased Sabina. It was like an old song they carried in their memory, the story of the two houses separated but actually situated almost back to back on the ring of hills, while completely hidden from each other...........(TWN—334).

Sabina is forced to marry Don McInnis of Asphodel by her father. Mr. McInnis is the last of the men of
Asphodel and Sabina the last of hers. So all hope lies in Mr. McInnis to continue the line of their family. He is aware of this fact and seems to gloat over it. On the wedding day Sabina stands stoically and rigidly by his side tolerating his malicious laughter and condescending behaviour. They have three children but tragedy strikes, all the three die reaching maturity. Minerva is drowned before her wedding day, Theo is killed in a fall off the horse and Lucian shoots himself. These incidents only serve to make Sabina withdraw into a stance akin to proud aloofness. She will rather stand with such pride than reveal her emotions at her misfortune. But things get worse; her husband starts having extra-marital affair which she learns from the three ladies. She listens without expression then suddenly she is cursing everybody — her husband, the other woman, her children, even the ladies. By then even her father was dead and there was no one to comfort her. So furious and outraged, she asks the ladies,
How can I show him the hate I have for him? (TWN—338).

Learning that Don McInnis takes the other woman to Asphodel, Sabina in anger drives him out of the house. *Drove him out with a whip, in the broad daylight*. Mr. McInnis seems to enjoy all this, *He walked straight ahead as if to humour her, with his white hat lifted and held in his hand.* (TWN—338). At the gateway she cried for the woman to come out but nobody did. She accused the whole town of protecting her. Asphodel burnt that night. Hearing the news, Sabina is pleased but ever since then she becomes remote from everyone. She starts living a secluded life, grand in her isolation. She then lays a rule that the name of Asphodel and Don McInnis are not to be mentioned anymore.

After that she regularly comes down the hill as if
imposing her will on the whole population. She wears a wig as her hair has fallen off due to an illness. She wears all the fineries of her family which is so heavy that she has to drag herself through the streets. She is feared by all, she is aware of everything going on in town, nothing escapes her. *She dominated every ceremony, set the times for weddings and for funerals, even for births, and she named the children. She ordered lives about and moved people from one place to another in the town, brought them together or drove them apart, with the mystical and rigorous devotion of a priestess in a story; and prophesied all the things beforehand. She fortold disaster, and was ready with hot breads and soups to send by running Negroes to every house the moment it struck. And she expected her imparted recipes to be used forever after, and no other.* (TWN—340).

But she never enters the post office. She has no
idea what it is and it is the only thing in town which remains beyond her power. Yet in the end she enters the post office and the atmosphere there becomes charged with fear and apprehension that something dreadful was going to happen. "and alarm like the vibration from the fireball trembled in the motes of the air, and the crowded room seemed to shake, to totter." (TWN—341).

Seeing her standing at the door Cora remembers, "We looked at one another in great fear of her than ever before in our lives, and we would have run away or spoken to her, except for a premonition that this time was the last, this demand the final one." (TWN—341).

Sabina begins to speak demanding her letter. She has never received a letter in her life and knows nobody outside the town. Receiving a negative reply, she begins to tear and throw up everything. Madness seems to come.
over her. She is raging, rocking and dancing. A fury and a pleasure seemed to rise inside her, that went out like lightning through her hands. said Cora. She threw down her stick, she advanced with her bare hands. She seized upon everything before her, and tore it to pieces. She dragged the sacks about, and the wastebaskets, and the contents she scattered like snow. Even the ink pad she flung against the wall, and it left a purple mark like a grape stain that will never wear off. She was possessed then.............. as she could never have been possessed. (TWN—342). Finally she stands still. She had finished her fury and lay toppled on the floor, her wig fallen from her head and her face awry like a mask. (TWN—343).

Thus, the three ladies come to the end of their reminiscing of Sabina’s life. Suddenly they hear a shudder among the vines growing along the columns. They see a naked man stepping out in front of them staring. He scared
them, the three old maids first knelt, then stood, and with a cry clung with their arms upon one another. (TWN—343). In a soft little chorus of screams they waited, looking back over their shoulders, with their arms stretched before them. Then their shoes were left behind them, and the three made a little line across the brook, (TWN—344). They only stopped on reaching safety beside a ‘No Trespassing’ sign. The bearded man did not move at all.

When they regain their breath they are convinced that the naked man is Don McInnis. Cora said Sabina would have been delighted seeing his condition now because her revenge on him would have complete. Suddenly a large number of goats appeared from behind the columns rushing towards them. They jump into the buggy and their horse start running. But since the goats are catching up they start throwing biscuits from the basket they have
saved for the way home. Yet the goats keep catching up.
Only when they throw the baked hen did the goats stop.
In this manner they made their escape.

Irene cannot help thinking that Sabina would have been ashamed of them if she was still alive. Cora feels Mr. McInnis must not be allowed his liberty but Phoebe simply laughs.

It is clear that Sabina was born to a well-to-do family. Her house atop a hill commanded the town at its foot. She grows up confined within the four walls of her house, secure and safe. When she is of marriageable age her father finds a suitor of equal status—Mr. Don McInnis of Asphodel. She has no say in this matter—the most important event of her life. She quietly surrenders to her father’s wishes. The marriage is a disaster; Sabina has to bear with Mr. McInnis’ intolerable behaviour. Even their
children die as they reach maturity. To top it all Mr. McInnis is unfaithful to her. Yet her pride prevents her from breaking down, she never sheds a tear. But the composure breaks when she learns of her husband's infidelity. Though she has been docile for so long, at this stage she musters enough courage and is able to throw her husband out of the house.

Sabina has led a life of secluded protection before her marriage and had no communication with others outside the security of her home. Feelings of loneliness and desperation must have taken a toll on her. Her father's indomitable will rules the entire household and she submits to it without a murmur. However, there is a vital difference between the father's autocratic behaviour and the husband's subsequent treatment of her. Whereas the father forces her to marry the man of his choice because he thought that it would be good for her to marry a man of
status, her husband’s behaviour towards her is devoid of any human consideration. Even the children born out of this loveless marriage who might have been a source of consolation for Sabina die, leaving her alone and desolate. The last straw is when she learns of her husband’s infidelity. It is then that she severes all ties with him and starts living a life of absolute detachment from all human interaction.

Irene said, *she was born grand, with a will to impose.* (TWN—337). All her frustrations and pent-up feelings of her past solitary years and at her present situation surfaces and it is the ordinary townspeople who have to bear the brunt of her fury when she struts in the streets proclaiming her power and imposing her will.

The one place that is beyond her domain is the post office. Having no friends and never receiving a letter
in her life, she has no need to go to the post office—the one inalienable indication of her lonely life. It is a blow to her pride to realise that she is the only one who does not receive a letter in her life. The post office is the one space which seems to be outside her power in a town where she thinks she has supreme authority. So on that fateful day she enters the post—office and demands her letter in a kind of showdown with this elusive space. When she is told that there is no letter for her, she vents all her pent—up fury and in the process looses her own life.

Sabina's story is an example of what being subjected to the tyrannical authority of a parent and the inhuman treatment of a husband can do to a woman's psyche. The only possible reaction to such violence is her violent behaviour in the post office. For sometime she tries to contain her feelings by assuming
the role of a tyrant herself. But on that day when she realises that there was no letter for her at the post office, it signifies her total alienation from everyone and everything around her and she snaps. All the assumed arrogance and posture of self-assurance collapse and as a result of the violent outburst, she suffers a stroke and dies. The cycle of her alienated life culminates in her physical death.

**Livvie** is the story of a girl of sixteen who marries an old man named Solomon. He takes her away to a place in a deep country. Even the way to this place is deserted but Solomon tells Livvie that the road was busy once upon a time. Solomon loves Livvie but keeps her confined in the house. She is not allowed to visit her parents anymore. People feel that Solomon hides his wife because of jealousy. So nine years went by and now Solomon is bedridden while Livvie is still a young woman.
Solomon has a beautiful house. It consists of three rooms — living room, bedroom and kitchen. Solomon has worked very hard to acquire such a beautiful house built by his own hands. The house is filled with furniture, even his quilt is a result of hard work of his mother. It has twenty-one different colors, four hundred and forty pieces, and a thousand yards of thread........ (TWN—380). The Kitchen is filled with cutlery and plenty of food. There is only one possession of Livvie — a picture of a baby of the family she worked for back home.

Even the outside of Solomon’s house is described beautifully. There are chairs to relax and flowers grown and fruit trees on either side of the house. At the entrance there are bare crape-myrtle trees with every branch of them ending in a coloured bottle, green or blue. (TWN—381). Solomon is a superstitious person who believes that the bottle trees prevent evil spirits from
entering the house by luring and trapping them inside the coloured bottles.

Though the house is beautiful, it is isolated. There are cabins of the tenants further away but Livv vie is not allowed to go there. The field-hands who work for Solomon are forbidden to look at Livvie and vice versa. Even the road below, whenever Livvie explores, it is deserted so that leaves reach up to her knees. She is actually allowed only up to the well and the hen-coop.

Livvie is a perfect wife, she works tirelessly, loves to cook and surprise Solomon. But lately he hardly tastes his food and is slowly wearing out. One day Livvie watches the field-hands working together. There is a break and everyone gathers together to have their lunch. Livvie thinks of Solomon blissfully sleeping, unaware of all happenings. She wonders what would Solomon’s reaction be
if she was to go and join the workers. Solomon would be angry and ashamed of her because she has defied him. But she remembers her mother’s advise who said, *I rather a man be anything, than a woman be mean.* (TWN—386).

Later, a lady comes by selling cosmetics. Livvie tries a lipstick but is unable to pay as she has no money. Also she is worried lest her husband wakes and hears a stranger in the house. He would not have appreciated it. The lady is curious and wants a look at him to which Livvie obliges. She looks at Solomon then at Livvie as if they share a secret, then the lady leaves. As Livvie sits by Solomon he awakes but can hardly see her and notice the difference — Livvie with the lipstick on. She then realises that her husband is dying — this is the secret that she and the lady shared.
The truth scares her and she decides to go for a walk and goes further down the Natchez Trace. Suddenly she sees a man dressed finely who introduces himself as Cash. As they start walking together Livvie cannot help but stare at him. It is not his dress or his walk or she may not have looked at him at all. Yet sometimes the sudden appearance of people in one's life makes a vast difference. They can appear either at the right moment or the wrong moment. Cash's appearance in Livvie's life seem appropriate and she welcomes his company. She is feeling sad and lonely thinking of Solomon afraid that he may die soon. At such times she needs someone to share her feelings with or just someone there beside her. They walk on till they are back at Solomon's house. Seeing the same old familiar house and its surroundings Livvie is depressed, she feels trapped here.

Cash whistles a tune Livvie is familiar with. At
last it dawns on her that Cash is a field-hand. Livvie begins to have doubts about him, wondering how he can look so fine, he must have stolen money from Solomon. Curiously she goes closer to him when suddenly he grasps her and she surprises herself by kissing him spontaneously. At that moment Livvie intuitively realises that Solomon's death is near and she runs to her husband's room to find him sleeping soundly. Cash follows her inside and they both look at Solomon. It is said people's faces tell of secrets not known to the one who looks at them while they sleep. While asleep Solomon's face seemed to reveal how all his life he has struggled to build his house which was the infinite thing with him, and he could see no end to the respect he would contrive and keep in a house. (TWN—395). But he has build a lonely house, the way he would built a cage and in building it, he was like the builder-slaves of Egypt who forgot or never knew the origin and meaning of the thing to which they gave all the
strength of their bodies and used up all their days. (TWN—395). He is more laborious than the beetle. But now he looks as if he is taking a rest from his life-long labour. Suddenly Solomon opens his eyes. Cash feels he can easily strike Solomon but again such a strong man now weakened cannot be struck without warning. Solomon begins to speak: Young ones can’t wait. (TWN—397). He has come to the realisation that his hold on Livvie is slipping away and he cannot prevent the inevitable. He indicates that perhaps Cash is the young man Livvie is waiting for. He knew Cash McCord since he was a child. He then asks forgiveness for his sins of marrying a young girl and isolating her from her family and friends. After that he lifts his silver watch — his prized possession—gives it to Livvie and dies peacefully.

Livvie leaves the room with Cash following. She is free at last from the responsibilities of looking after her old
husband. There is no one to restrain her freedom anymore. Even the surroundings seem happy. *Outside the red-birds were flying ..........the sun was in all the bottles ..........and the young peach was shining, in the middle of them with the bursting light of spring.* (TWN—398).

Livvie’s detachment from any societal responsibilities begins soon after her marriage. She is taken to a place far from her home and since then she is not permitted to visit her family. She is also forbidden to visit the tenants near their home and to talk or even look at the field workers. Even within the compound, she can venture only up to the well and the hen-coop. Such are the restrictions on her freedom. But she bears it all because she is a dutiful, loving wife. Also her mother has ingrained in her that no matter what, women must never be mean. So she tolerated her husband’s possessive behaviour. All the same, her loneliness and longing for companionship is indicated by her
desire to mingle with the workers who seem so happy together. But the fear of her husband prevents her from going against his wishes and attempting communication with others beyond her confinement.

However, she is aware of the fact that she will eventually be free from the bonds of her husband’s possessiveness. When Solomon falls sick and is bedridden, she has the first glimpse of hope and thinks that when he dies, she will be free. And so it happens in the end.

In this story, the regaining of freedom is shown rather as inevitable than any conscious effort on the part of the protagonist. Solomon in his last gesture to Livvie offers his most cherished possession, his silver watch. In symbolic terms this can be interpreted as Solomon’s final admission that no one can stop the march of time and when his time on earth is over, it is the beginning of Livvie’s time to be
free and happy at last, in the companionship of Cash, a person who in Solomon’s words is ‘the young man Livvie waited for’.

*At The Landing* is a story similar to *Livvie* except instead of Solomon, it is the grandfather who puts restrictions on Jenny’s movements.

Jenny’s grandfather is dying when the story opens. He dreams of a great flood coming. He comes to Jenny’s room and tells her so. *It is coming*, he said. *It’s the river* ......... (TWN—399). There used to be a river at The Landing but it is now gone three miles away. It comes back only during floods. Jenny seeing her grandfather’s condition takes him back to bed. He dies that night.

Jenny has been living with her grandfather upon the hill all her life. The town ‘The Landing’ is at the foot of the hill where the road drops like a waterfall. They are
hardly seen at The Landing. The grandfather is too old and Jenny too shy and so they stay together inside their home. Jenny spends her monotonous days either looking at her mother’s paintings or sitting on each chair surrounding the dining table or counting the plates in the closet. But she knows one day she is going to be free, be independent. 

*She was calm the way a child is calm, with never the calmness of a spirit. But like distant lightening that silently bathes a whole shimmering sky, one awareness was always trembling about her: one day she would be free to come and go.* (TWN—402).

Everytime she ventures out, her grandfather calls her back. She is only permitted to visit her mother’s grave. On one such day she sees Floyd across the ravine. He intrigues Jenny. It is rumoured that he used to fish all night and sleep all day. He comes towards Jenny and stares at her. Then suddenly he is kneeling down and
drinking the spring water. He then goes back to the field and sleeps. Jenny watches him sleep. *The day she watched him in the woods, she felt that her innocence had left her.* But if innocence had left, she still did not know what was to come. (TWN—406). Jenny is a naive girl, not worldly wise living a secluded existence with her grandfather as her only companion. He is the only person she is in close contact with. So now watching Floyd sleep, who is a total stranger to her, Jenny feels as if she has lost her innocence. But what the loss of that ‘innocence’ meant or what was to come next, she is unable to grasp. Since then they meet regularly though there is a barrier between them. The graves are on her side while the pastures, the sun and the grazing horse are on Floyd’s side symbolising Jenny’s dull, monotonous life and Floyd’s free life compared to hers. But there is no actual communication. Jenny is beginning to fall in love with Floyd. She longs to be free to express her love but reality
comes in the form of her grandfather who always calls her back. Everytime he asks her whether she had put flowers on her mother’s grave, as if to pull her back to the past and prevent her from having anything to do with the present surroundings.

Her grandfather cannot look at Jenny without wonder. She reminds him so much of her mother who like Jenny had a strong urge for freedom and would rave and rant which he ignored. However, Jenny is patient and obedient towards her grandfather. She feels nothing begins in her own heart and that she is there to fulfil someone else’s wishes and desires. The only time she feels hopeful is whenever Floyd passes by with his fish. Floyd somehow inspires her. She craves for the freedom he enjoys without restrictions. She knows that one day she too is going to enjoy the same kind of freedom. In The Landing, every person that moved was watched out of sight,
and it made a little pause in every life. (TWN—404). But for Jenny the moment of hope was when the rude wild Floyd walked through The Landing carrying the big fish he had caught. (TWN—404).

So, in the morning after her grandfather’s death, Jenny goes to town to give the news to the townspeople. Her destination is a store cum post office. Everyone acknowledges her but they are not supposed to talk to her. Must have been her grandfather’s rule. The first person she sees is Floyd and she remembers her grandfather’s order not to speak to Floyd again. So she walks out and informs the old man playing cards about her grandfather’s demise. They offer condolences and take her to the women then back home.

Later that day Jenny meets Floyd by a small river.
Again no conversation takes place. Jenny can not say anything to Floyd because she feels it is absurd to say, \textit{It is a heavy heart that makes me clumsy...}. Forgive the heart that loves more than the tongue can say or the hands can do. Look back at me every time I look at you and never feel pity, for what my heart holds this minute is better than what you offer the least bit less.\textsuperscript{(TWN—414-415)} Even if Floyd is aware of her feelings his attitude is one of indifference. He is standing looking at The Landing waiting for the rain. Why he waits for the rain remains a mystery. Jenny realises that his patience is running out and he will soon leave if the rain does not come.

She knows this ‘moment’ together by the river will soon be over. She watches a bubble blowing up from beneath the river and suddenly realises that this is the true ‘moment’ which will continue to exist regardless of her or
Floyd. The bubbles make her realise that clear true love does exist in the world. People may come and go but true love will continue to exist. *There it was, existing there where they came and were beside it now. It is in the bubble in the water in the river, and it has its own changing and its mysteries of days and nights .......* (TWN—415-416). But soon their moment together ended and Floyd departs The Landing, and the rain comes after his departure.

The rainfall is continuous and at last the flood comes at dawn. Jenny along with the others run for safety towards the hill. Soon the whole town is engulfed in the flood. Floyd is back and Jenny is in his boat. She attempts conversation but again her attempts fail. Due to lack of sleep for a day and a night, Floyd takes her to a small dry place where she sleeps. Later he wakes her up and ‘violates’ her. Even then, after what has happened
Floyd was without care or demand and as gay as if he were still clanging the bucket at the well. (TWN—417)......for him it was all a taking freely of what was free. (TWN—418). This indicates that though Floyd is aware of her feelings towards him he is insensitive towards Jenny. He cooks for both of them and Jenny tries to eat as much as Floyd simply to please him and also to grab his attention. But she realises that nothing in her or what she does, affects Floyd in any perceptible way.

Later, watching the moon so far from them she feels better. The moon is shining in all its glory despite its isolated existence. It looks serene, peaceful and better off staying far away all alone. Jenny identifies herself with the moon—she too desires to be far away from the flood and its torments and be happy in her own world.

At last the flood ceases and everything is in a
mess. ..........the little town had turned the color of river water and the trees in their shame of refuse rattled like yellow pebbles and the houses sank below them scuffed and small. (TWN—419). Seeing the condition of her house Jenny is obsessed with cleaning so much so that she even forgets Floyd. Yet 'the shock of love' brings a tremble to her fingers every now and then. Soon the trembling stopped and she is healed of her love. She hopes one day her life will shine radiantly with love and when that happens, she will never let love go but clasp it. Now, she was like a house with all its rooms dark from the beginning, and someone would have to go slowly from room to room, slowly and darkly, leaving each one lighted behind, before going to the next. (TWN—421).

The Landing being a small town every news and gossip spreads like wild fire. Everyone comes to know of Jenny's love for Floyd through three old women. One of
them thinks Floyd is a Gipsy, the other is beyond care who he is, while the third lady thinks he is a descendant of the Natchez Indian. Through all this Jenny wonders what love, deeper than what she is feeling now will be like. Such kind of love will be quiet, she thinks. Perhaps what Jenny means by quiet love is that she need not express in words or actions her growing love for Floyd. It is enough that the knowledge of her love is within her. She will rather remain quiet than make a big issue out of her love, but she cannot forget Floyd. Looking into the core of the amber beads she realises the difference between the radiance within and outside of the beads. In the same way she knows Floyd's heart is ...........clear still, safe and deep in his innocence, safe and away from the outside, deeper than quiet. (TWN—424). She sees Floyd from within. She realises there is a vast difference between Floyd's inner and outer personalities. She feels Floyd is still pure
and innocent within though he presents a tough exterior.

So, in July, Jenny leaves The Landing in search of Floyd. It is dusk when she reaches the river. A group of fisherman have set up camp near the riverside. She enquires about Floyd and learns that he has gone fishing but always returns to the camp. She is allowed to wait for him. After sometime the men came in to her one by one. She actually speaks to the first one. She protests against their but is helpless. Her first experience outside the safety and security of her home is devastating. This is her contact with the reality of life outside her small world. By the fire, little boys were slapped crossly by their mothers—as if they knew that the original smile now crossed Jenny's face, and hung there no matter what was done to her, like a bit of color that kindles in the sky after the light has gone. (TWN—428).
In this last story of the second chapter, the main character Jenny is brought up under her grandfather’s strict supervision. The early loss of his daughter has made him protective of his grandchild to such an extent that he secluded her from the rest of the town. Her only human contact is her grandfather. She desires to be free like her mother yet she is more patient than her mother as she realises that she will be free someday. Jenny’s freedom is permitted only upto her mother’s grave; her grandfather does not permit her going beyond that point. Torn between her personal desires and her grandfather’s restrictions, Jenny grows up in an alienated environment, innocent of all knowledge of the violence and danger that exist in the world.

Because of her seclusion from outside world, she finds it difficult to express herself even in an ordinary conversation with another person. The reticence that has been induced in her, makes her extremely shy and almost
incoherent. This fact is clearly indicated in the story because even during the flood in her attempted conversation with Floyd: *She knew at once there was nothing in her life past or even now in the flood that would make anything to tell ......... She would like to tell him some strange beautiful thing, if she could speak at all, something to make him speak.* (TWN—417). And despite Floyd's insensitive violation of her and taking advantage of her naivete, she seems to have no hard feelings towards him. This is because she believes that Floyd is not the kind of person that he appears to be. She endows him with qualities that she wants him to possess. She does not realise that Floyd does not really care for her but is simply accepting what is available at hand. Jenny fails to realise this because she has very little contact with people and therefore is a poor judge of human character, especially that of a man.
Jenny’s experience with Floyd brings about a change in her outlook on life. Now that her grandfather is dead, there is no one who can restrain her from venturing out of the environment that she has known all her life. It is true that she does have strong feelings for Floyd which motivates her to undertake the journey in search of him. But much more than just love and longing for him, to her, he is the link to the outside world from which she has been shut out for so long. It is by establishing her connectedness to this link once again that she will eventually gain her freedom from an alienated existence. In her attempt to do so, she suffers another violation at the hands of the fishermen.

The grandfather’s over-protectiveness made Jenny vulnerable to her own and others’s desires and her eventual freedom from her alienated life is gained at a high price.
But in the end Jenny is left with no choice but to go out into this real world where cruelty and violence are facts of life.