

1. Where and when is the story set?
  - Jefferson town, September.
2. What 'had gone like a fire in dry grass'?
  - Rumour that Will Mayes, a Negro, had attacked, insulted, or frightened a white woman Minnie Cooper.
3. What was the barber's name? Why didn't he believe the accusation?
  - Henry Hawkshaw. He says he knows Will Mayes and he would never attack or disrespect a white woman. He also thinks Minnie Cooper, being an unmarried 40 year woman, could be lying since she had made similar accusations against men in the past.
4. Who accuses Hawkshaw of being a 'nigger-lover'?
  - Butch, a bulky white man
5. Who is McLendon? What was his attitude regarding the rumour? Who went with him?
  - John McLendon is a heavy-set man who had commanded troops in France and had been decorated for valour. He believes the rumour and wants to act against Will Mayes. Butch, the stranger, and all others except for Hawkshaw and the barbers join McLendon.
6. What was the earlier accusation by Minnie Cooper?
  - Minnie Cooper had accused a man of hiding on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year earlier.
7. Describe the effects of the hot dry weather on the characters that the story alludes to.
  - Stale, lifeless air, constant sweating of the men, mass of dust when the two cars drive to the ice plant.
8. Where did Will Mayes work?
  - Ice plant
9. What does McLendon do after reaching home? What does it tell us about him? (5 marks)

Hints – After he reached home, McLendon stared at his wife until she looked down. He menacingly told her not to wait for him to come home. Then he struck her and flung her across the room. He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt, mopping his head and shoulders with the shirt, taking the pistol from his hip and laying it on the table beside the bed. He stood panting.

This tells us about his abusive, violent nature which had caused him to lead the attack on Will Mayes earlier. Although Faulkner does not tell us what happened to Will Mayes, the readers may anticipate what a brutish violent man who beats his weak wife would do to a Negro (who was considered sub-human). McLendon's behavior also exposes the

horrifying hypocrisy of white America which lynched innumerable black men in the name of protecting white women. Historians have dissected the charade of protecting the flower of white Southern womanhood that often triggered lynchings and reported that many victims had done nothing more than not stepping aside on a sidewalk, or accidentally brushing against a young girl, or disagreeing with a white businessman or store owner.

10. Discuss in brief the portrayal of Minnie Cooper. (10 marks)

Hints – Minnie Cooper is an unmarried white woman in her late thirties who may or may not have been sexually assaulted by a black man, Will Mayes. There is no proof that anything happened between the two, and some people in Jefferson doubt her story, as this is not the first time she has had a “man-scare.” Minnie has been virtually abandoned by this society, due to her low class and lack of a husband. Though she was attractive as a young girl, she but was passed over by the boys in town in favor of women with a higher social status. She briefly dated the clerk at the local bank, but that did not end well, as he moved to Memphis without Minnie. After that, she settled in with her aging mother and aunt, and had little to do to occupy her time. According to others in Jefferson, Minnie drank whiskey on a regular basis and had accused a man of watching her undress, both of which are seen as desperate attempts to attract attention. The rumor involving Will Mayes makes Minnie the center of attention, whether or not that was her intent in the first place.

On Saturday night, Minnie gets dressed to go to town with her friends. She seems nervous and shaky. As they walk to town she calms down. When they reach the town square she gets nervous again. She hears rumors of Will's situation, and feels men watch her with her eyes. At the movies Minnie begins laughing hysterically. Her friends take her home and try to quiet her down, especially when her laughter becomes intermingled with screams. Minnie doesn't get a single line of dialogue in "Dry September." When her friends ask her questions, she doesn't answer. Together with the treatment of the only other woman whom we hear speak – McLendon's wife – we may recognize the role women are expected to play in Jefferson town and American society, that of silent spectators, to be used by (white) men to further their own interests and prejudices.