LAST NIGHT I DREAMED OF SQUIRE. The memory is of such vivid reality as to make the goings-on of yesterday the dream. I can still hear his voice, high-pitched and brusque, echoing around the oak beams of this cabin, and his laughter, rather like a dog’s.

In the dream I was a child again. In fact, I became my father, when he himself was a child. I just knew this—that I was Jason aware that I was also young George. (And, as George, I was white!) He was leading me by the hand into the forest of Savernake, behind where the Evans live. I was aware that we were walking in Savernake Forest along paths that I, the adult Jason, have walked over many years. It was a damp winter’s afternoon, and perhaps a Sunday, for we were dressed for visiting. The spongy paths we took—my father seemed, as fathers always do to little boys, to know where he was taking me—led to a grand white house with grey shutters, set far back from a tall iron fence that kept out the unknown, meaning us. In the dream the small boy, whether Jason or George, was seeing the house for the first time and was dazzled. The father had been here before.

“Who lives there?” the boy asked his father. The voice, curiously, was not mine, but of a boy grown in Wiltshire, with the coarse lilt of the Downs in it.

“Ah lad,” sighed the man who was the father to my young George. “Great toffs they are, scarcely aware of the likes of us.” It was Squire’s voice, but his accent, like mine, was Wiltshire, so that he sounded like his brother Jeremy (whose rude dismissal of my “claim” to be
his nephew resounds still in my head on dark nights). There was an edge to my father’s voice. “Your grandfather lived here when he were a lad,” he continued bitterly. Grandfather’s station I did not have to ask about. (Squire’s statements in the dream, not all of which I can correctly remember, were comprised partially of things he had told me in real life, or that I had learned from the Evans about the Pollards.) Just then a pair of yellow mastiffs, huge and forbidding, appeared from nowhere and launched themselves at us, howling and snapping. My small face was pressed between the bars and would have been swallowed if I hadn’t pulled back in terror. They came at us with such force as to rattle the sturdy iron, and from their purple throats issued sounds as truly belonged in a dream. Squire counterattacked with a stick he had picked up on the way, which impelled a greater frenzy of barking from the guardians of the gates.

“Get off with you, you bloody monsters,” he shouted, and mocked their barking. This drove them quite mad, and they hurled themselves at the fence with demonic fury. Squire laughed, and josted further at them with stick and voice, gripped by a cruel pleasure which I, shivering behind his legs, admired.

Suddenly there appeared a bearded giant of a man, waving a stout stick himself and shouting obscenities in a voice that blended into the yelping.

“Get away from there, Pollard, you bastard!” the man cried, rushing toward the fence. Squire, giving not an inch of ground, shouted back, “Begone with your beasts, Blackman. Threatening innocent passers-by like that.”

“This is private property,” returned the fellow, by now flush with the railing and not four feet from us.

“My arse it’s private property,” Squire mocked. “This side of your prison belongs to the King. And neither you nor those powdered ninnies that own you is the King.” Blackman’s face was quite purple, matching the mastiffs’ open throats. He shouted further obscenities at us.

“Be off with you, Blackman,” laughed Squire. “Take your bloody dogs with you and find the nearest water and bathe yourselves. All together, like you sleep.” He made an obscene gesture.
Blackman reached through the fence and almost grabbed Squire’s face in his hand. “Take yourself off, Pollard,” he screamed, face distorted with fury. “You and your nigger spawn.”

Squire cackled like a hen. “At least I can find something on two legs for spawning, Blackman.” And at that he turned and took me away with him the way we had come. The yelping of Blackman and those dogs died away behind us.

I was too frightened even to speak. But Squire was laughing. “Never fear lad,” he chuckled. “One day you will be the master of such a palace.” “Master” and “nigger spawn” floated with me to the surface of consciousness. I was mildly curious (in the dream) at being called “nigger” when I was so obviously white.

Squire built his palace, and gave it a grander name: Greencastle. The first time I actually saw the Savernake great house entombed in that forest I thought it but a poor relation. By then, two years distant from last sight of it, Greencastle had begun to assume almost mythic proportions in my memory, my perspective reverting closer and closer to childhood, when the “big house,” as everyone calls it, even those who live there, had loomed over my entire life.

When I saw Savernake and realized which house was built first, I gained that insight into Squire’s central ambition which made many other aspects of his character—and of his relationship with me, his bastard son, his nigger spawn—fall into place.

Coming from a lineage of tenant farmers, virtual serfs—white slaves, he called his family and class, and I had seen the hovel in which he had grown—his only dream was a place of his own, with no one to order him about or demand tribute.

But in one important detail the dream was incorrect: Greencastle had not been built for me, and never would have been. The real white child in the dream was not me, but Anthony, who is no doubt by now the Maasa of Greencastle, de facto if not de jure. I am the nigger spawn.