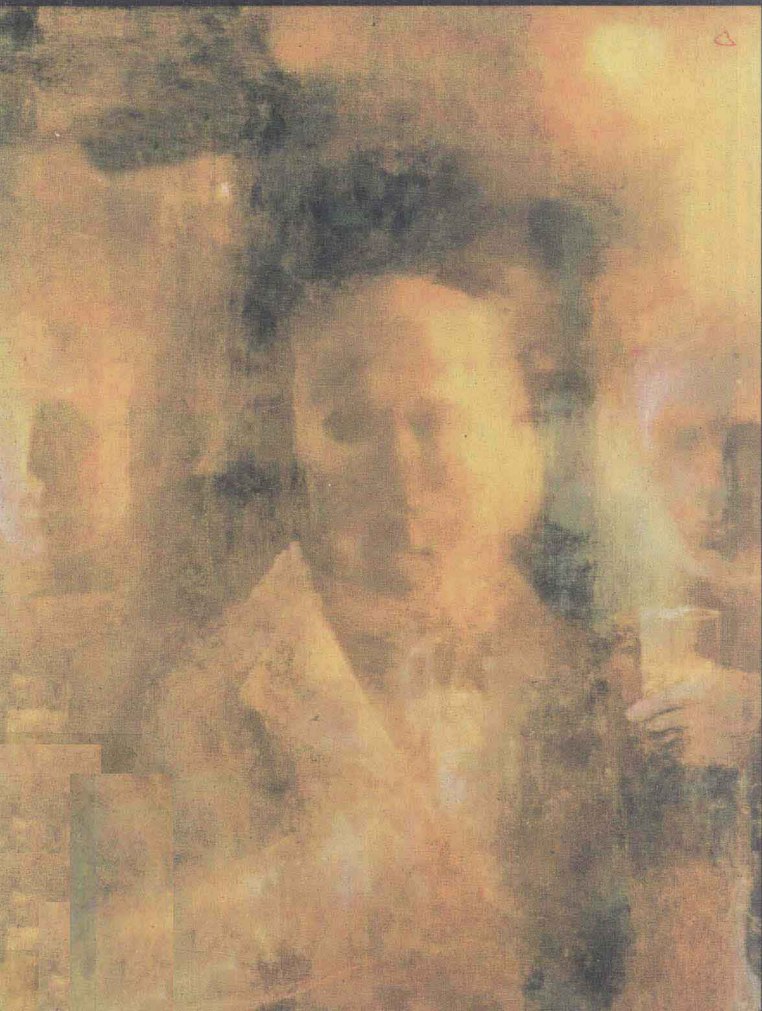




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William Faulkner Sanctuary



SANCTUARY

William Faulkner was born near Oxford, Mississippi, in 1897. His great-grandfather, Colonel William Falkner (so-spelt), had been one of the wild characters of the South. The author, who had made little impression at school, was rejected by the U.S. Army when America entered the First World War but became a pilot in the Canadian Flying Corps. After the war he attended the University of Mississippi for a time and then for several years did odd jobs of many kinds. While working in New Orleans he met Sherwood Anderson, the novelist, who encouraged him: as a result he wrote his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926). Others followed. It was in 1929, the year of his marriage, that he took a job as a coal-heaver on night-work at the local power station and wrote *As I Lay Dying* (1930) between the hours of midnight and 4 a.m. during a space of six summer weeks. He then wrote *Sanctuary*, intending it to be sensational enough to attract sales, which had not been good on his earlier books. Later he worked on scripts in Hollywood, simply for the money. Not long before his death in July 1962 William Faulkner moved his home to Charlottesville, Virginia. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. His other books include *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Wild Palms* (1939), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), all published in Penguins.

WILLIAM FAULKNER

SANCTUARY



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CHAPTER

I

FROM beyond the screen of bushes which surrounded the spring, Popeye watched the man drinking. A faint path led from the road to the spring. Popeye watched the man – a tall, thin man, hatless, in worn grey flannel trousers and carrying a tweed coat over his arm – emerge from the path and kneel to drink from the spring.

The spring welled up at the root of a beech tree and flowed away upon a bottom of whorled and waved sand. It was surrounded by a thick growth of cane and brier, of cypress and gum in which broken sunlight lay sourceless. Somewhere, hidden and secret yet nearby, a bird sang three notes and ceased.

In the spring the drinking man leaned his face to the broken and myriad reflection of his own drinking. When he rose up he saw among them the shattered reflection of Popeye's straw hat, though he had heard no sound.

He saw, facing him across the spring, a man of under size, his hands in his coat pockets, a cigarette slanted from his chin. His suit was black, with a tight, high-waisted coat. His trousers were rolled once and caked with mud above mud-caked shoes. His face had a queer, bloodless colour, as though seen by electric light; against the sunny silence, in his slanted straw hat and his slightly akimbo arms, he had that vicious depthless quality of stamped tin.

Behind him the bird sang again, three bars in monotonous repetition : a sound meaningless and profound out of a suspirant and peaceful following silence which seemed to isolate the spot, and out of which a moment later came the sound of an automobile passing along a road and dying away.

SANCTUARY

The drinking man knelt beside the spring. 'You've got a pistol in that pocket, I suppose,' he said.

Across the spring Popeye appeared to contemplate him with two knobs of soft black rubber. 'I'm asking you,' Popeye said. 'What's that in your pocket?'

The other man's coat was still across his arm. He lifted his other hand towards the coat, out of one pocket of which protruded a crushed felt hat, from the other a book. 'Which pocket?' he said.

'Don't show me,' Popeye said. 'Tell me.'

The other man stopped his hand. 'It's a book.'

'What book?' Popeye said.

'Just a book. The kind that people read. Some people do.'

'Do you read books?' Popeye said.

The other man's hand was frozen above the coat. Across the spring they looked at one another. The cigarette wreathed its faint plume across Popeye's face, one side of his face squinted against the smoke like a mask carved into two simultaneous expressions.

From his hip pocket Popeye took a soiled handkerchief and spread it upon his heels. Then he squatted, facing the man across the spring. That was about four o'clock on an afternoon in May. They squatted so, facing one another across the spring, for two hours. Now and then the bird sang back in the swamp, as though it were worked by a clock; twice more invisible automobiles passed along the highroad and died away. Again the bird sang.

'And of course you don't know the name of it,' the man across the spring said. 'I don't suppose you'd know a bird at all, without it was singing in a cage in a hotel lounge, or cost four dollars on a plate.' Popeye said nothing. He squatted in his tight black suit, his right-hand coat pocket sagging compactly against his flank, twisting and pinching cigarettes in his little, doll-like hands, spitting into the spring. His skin had a dead, dark pallor. His nose was faintly aquiline, and he had no chin at all. His face just went away, like the face

of a wax doll set too near a hot fire and forgotten. Across his vest ran a platinum chain like a spider web. 'Look here,' the other man said. 'My name is Horace Benbow. I'm a lawyer in Kinston. I used to live in Jefferson yonder; I'm on my way there now. Anybody in this county can tell you I am harmless. If it's whisky, I don't care how much you all make or sell or buy. I just stopped here for a drink of water. All I want to do is get to town, to Jefferson.'

Popeye's eyes looked like rubber knobs, like they'd give to the touch and then recover with the whorled smudge of the thumb on them.

'I want to reach Jefferson before dark,' Benbow said. 'You can't keep me here like this.'

Without removing the cigarette Popeye spat past it into the spring.

'You can't stop me like this,' Benbow said. 'Suppose I break and run.'

Popeye put his eyes on Benbow, like rubber. 'Do you want to run?'

'No,' Benbow said.

Popeye removed his eyes. 'Well, don't, then.'

Benbow heard the bird again, trying to recall the local name for it. On the invisible highroad another car passed, died away. Between them and the sound of it the sun was almost gone. From his trousers pocket Popeye took a dollar watch and looked at it and put it back in his pocket, loose like a coin.

Where the path from the spring joined the sandy by-road a tree had been recently felled, blocking the road. They climbed over the tree and went on, the highroad now behind them. In the sand were two shallow parallel depressions, but no mark of hoof. Where the branch from the spring seeped across it Benbow saw the prints of automobile tyres. Ahead of him Popeye walked, his tight suit and stiff hat all angles, like a modernistic lampstand.

The sand ceased. The road rose, curving, out of the jungle.

It was almost dark. Popeye looked briefly over his shoulder. 'Step out, Jack,' he said.

'Why didn't we cut straight across up the hill?' Benbow said.

'Through all them trees?' Popeye said. His hat jerked in a dull, vicious gleam in the twilight as he looked down the hill where the jungle already lay like a lake of ink. 'Jesus Christ.'

It was almost dark. Popeye's gait had slowed. He walked now beside Benbow, and Benbow could see the continuous jerking of the hat from side to side as Popeye looked about with a sort of vicious cringing. The hat just reached Benbow's chin.

Then something, a shadow shaped with speed, stooped at them and on, leaving a rush of air upon their very faces, on a soundless feathering of taut wings, and Benbow felt Popeye's whole body spring against him and his hand clawing at his coat. 'It's just an owl,' Benbow said. 'It's nothing but an owl.' Then he said: 'They call that Carolina wren a fishing-bird. That's what it is. What I couldn't think of back there,' with Popeye crouching against him, clawing at his pocket and hissing through his teeth like a cat. He smells black, Benbow thought; he smells like that black stuff that ran out of Bovary's mouth and down upon her bridal veil when they raised her head.

A moment later, above a black, jagged mass of trees, the house lifted its stark square bulk against the failing sky.

The house was a gutted ruin rising gaunt and stark out of a grove of unpruned cedar trees. It was a landmark, known as the Old Frenchman place, built before the Civil War; a plantation house set in the middle of a tract of land; of cottonfields and gardens and lawns long since gone back to jungle, which the people of the neighbourhood had been pulling down piecemeal for firewood for fifty years or digging with secret and sporadic optimism for the gold which

the builder was reputed to have buried somewhere about the place when Grant came through the county on his Vicksburg campaign.

Three men were sitting in chairs on one end of the porch. In the depths of the open hall a faint light showed. The hall went straight back through the house. Popeye mounted the steps, the three men looking at him and his companion. 'Here's the professor,' he said, without stopping. He entered the house, the hall. He went on and crossed the back porch and turned and entered the room where the light was. It was the kitchen. A woman stood at the stove. She wore a faded calico dress. About her naked ankles a worn pair of man's brogans, unlaced, flapped when she moved. She looked back at Popeye, then to the stove again, where a pan of meat hissed.

Popeye stood in the door. His hat was slanted across his face. He took a cigarette from his pocket, without producing the pack, and pinched and fretted it and put it into his mouth and snapped a match on his thumb-nail. 'There's a bird out front,' he said.

The woman did not look around. She turned the meat. 'Why tell me?' she said. 'I don't serve Lee's customers.'

'It's a professor,' Popeye said.

The woman turned, an iron fork suspended in her hand. Behind the stove, in shadow, was a wooden box. 'A what?'

'Professor,' Popeye said. 'He's got a book with him.'

'What's he doing here?'

'I don't know. I never thought to ask. Maybe to read the book.'

'He came here?'

'I found him at the spring.'

'Was he trying to find this house?'

'I don't know,' Popeye said. 'I never thought to ask.' The woman was still looking at him. 'I'll send him on to Jefferson on the truck,' Popeye said. 'He said he wants to go there.'

‘Why tell me about it?’ the woman said.

‘You cook. He’ll want to eat.’

‘Yes,’ the woman said. She turned back to the stove. ‘I cook. I cook for crimps and spungs and feebs. Yes, I cook.’

In the door Popeye watched her, the cigarette curling across his face. His hands were in his pockets. ‘You can quit. I’ll take you back to Memphis Sunday. You can go to hustling again.’ He watched her back. ‘You’re getting fat here. Laying off in the country. I won’t tell them on Manuel Street.’

The woman turned, the fork in her hand. ‘You bastard,’ she said.

‘Sure,’ Popeye said. ‘I won’t tell them that Ruby Lamar is down in the country, wearing a pair of Lee Goodwin’s throwed-away shoes, chopping her own firewood. No, I’ll tell them Lee Goodwin is big rich.’

‘You bastard,’ the woman said. ‘You bastard.’

‘Sure,’ Popeye said. Then he turned his head. There was a shuffling sound across the porch, then a man entered. He was stooped, in overalls. He was barefoot; it was his bare feet which they had heard. He had a sunburned thatch of hair, matted and foul. He had pale furious eyes, a short soft beard like dirty gold in colour.

‘I be dawg if he ain’t a case, now,’ he said.

‘What do you want?’ the woman said. The man in overalls didn’t answer. In passing, he looked at Popeye with a glance at once secret and alert, as though he were ready to laugh at a joke, waiting for the time to laugh. He crossed the kitchen with a shambling, bear-like gait, and still with that air of alert and gleeful secrecy, though in plain sight of them, he removed a loose board in the floor and took out a gallon jug. Popeye watched him, his forefingers in his vest, the cigarette (he had smoked it down without once touching it with his hand) curling across his face. His expression was savage, perhaps baleful; contemplative, watching the man in overalls recross the floor with a kind of alert diffidence,

the jug clumsily concealed below his flank; he was watching Popeye, with that expression alert and ready for mirth, until he left the room. Again they heard his bare feet on the porch.

'Sure,' Popeye said. 'I won't tell them on Manuel Street that Ruby Lamar is cooking for a dummy and a feeb too.'

'You bastard,' the woman said. 'You bastard.'

CHAPTER

2

WHEN the woman entered the dining-room, carrying a platter of meat, Popeye and the man who had fetched the jug from the kitchen and the stranger were already at a table made by nailing three rough planks to two trestles. Coming into the light of the lamp which sat on the table, her face was sullen, not old; her eyes were cold. Watching her, Benbow did not see her look once at him as she set the platter on the table and stood for a moment with that veiled look with which women make a final survey of a table, and went and stooped above an open packing case in a corner of the room and took from it another plate and knife and fork, which she brought to the table and set before Benbow with a kind of abrupt yet unhurried finality, her sleeve brushing his shoulder.

As she was doing that, Goodwin entered. He wore muddy overalls. He had a lean, weathered face, the jaws covered by a black stubble; his hair was grey at the temples. He was leading by the arm an old man with a long white beard stained about the mouth. Benbow watched Goodwin seat the old man in a chair, where he sat obediently with that tentative and abject eagerness of a man who has but one pleasure left and whom the world can reach only through one sense, for he was both blind and deaf: a short man with a bald skull and a round, full-fleshed, rosy face in which his cataracted eyes looked like two clots of phlegm. Benbow watched him take a filthy rag from his pocket and regurgitate into the rag an almost colourless wad of what had once been chewing tobacco, and fold the rag up and put it into his pocket. The woman served his plate from the dish. The others were already eating, silently and steadily, but the old man sat

there, his head bent over his plate, his beard working faintly. He fumbled at the plate with a diffident, shaking hand and found a small piece of meat and began to suck at it until the woman returned and rapped his knuckles. He put the meat back on the plate then and Benbow watched her cut up the food on the plate, meat, bread and all, and then pour sorghum over it. Then Benbow quit looking. When the meal was over, Goodwin led the old man out again. Benbow watched the two of them pass out the door and heard them go up the hall.

The men returned to the porch. The woman cleared the table and carried the dishes to the kitchen. She set them on the table and she went to the box behind the stove and she stood over it for a time. Then she returned and put her own supper on a plate and sat down to the table and ate and lit a cigarette from the lamp and washed the dishes and put them away. Then she went back up the hall. She did not go out on to the porch. She stood just inside the door listening to them talking, listening to the stranger talking and to the thick, soft sound of the jug as they passed it among themselves. 'That fool,' the woman said. 'What does he want? . . .' She listened to the stranger's voice; a quick, faintly outlandish voice, the voice of a man given to much talk and not much else. 'Not to drinking anyway,' the woman said, quiet inside the door. 'He better get on to where he's going, where his women folks can take care of him.'

She listened to him. 'From my window I could see the grape arbour, and in the winter I could see the hammock too. But in the winter it was just the hammock. That's why we know nature is a she; because of that conspiracy between female flesh and female season. So each spring I could watch the reaffirmation of the old ferment hiding the hammock; the green-snared promise of unease. What blossoms grapes have, this is. It's not much : a wild and waxlike bleeding less of bloom than leaf, hiding and hiding the hammock, until along in late May, in the twilight, her - Little Belle's - voice

would be like the murmur of the wild grape itself. She never would say, "Horace, this is Louis or Paul or Whoever" but "It's just Horace." Just, you see; in a little white dress in the twilight, the two of them all demure and quite alert and a little impatient. And I couldn't have felt any more foreign to her flesh if I had begot it myself.

'So this morning - no; that was four days ago; it was Thursday she got home from school and this is Tuesday - I said, "Honey, if you found him on the train, he probably belongs to the railroad company. You can't take him from the railroad company; that's against the law, like the insulators on the poles."

"He's as good as you are. He goes to Tulane."

"But on a train, honey," I said.

"I've found them in worse places than on the train."

"I know," I said. "So have I. But you don't bring them home, you know. You just step over them and go on. You don't soil your slippers, you know."

'We were in the living-room then; it was just before dinner; just the two of us in the house then. Belle had gone down town.

"What business is it of yours who comes to see me? You're not my father. You're just - just -"

"What?" I said. "Just what?"

"Tell Mother, then! Tell her. That's what you're going to do. Tell her!"

"But on the train, honey," I said. "If he'd walked into your room in a hotel, I'd just kill him. But on the train, I'm disgusted. Let's send him along and start all over again."

"You're a fine one to talk about finding things on the train! You're a fine one! Shrimp! Shrimp!"

'He's crazy,' the woman said, motionless inside the door. The stranger's voice went on, tumbling over itself, rapid and diffuse.

'Then she was saying "No! No!" and me holding her and she clinging to me. "I didn't mean that! Horace, Horace!" And I was smelling the slain flowers, the delicate dead

flowers and tears, and then I saw her face in the mirror. There was a mirror behind her and another behind me, and she was watching herself in the one behind me, forgetting about the other one in which I could see her face, see her watching the back of my head with pure dissimulation. That's why nature is "she" and Progress is "he"; nature made the grape arbour, but Progress invented the mirror.'

'He's crazy,' the woman said inside the door, listening.

'But that wasn't quite it. I thought that maybe the spring, or maybe being forty-three years old, had upset me. I thought that maybe I would be all right if I just had a hill to lie on for a while — It was that country. Flat and rich and foul, so that the very winds seem to engender money out of it. Like you wouldn't be surprised to find that you could turn in the leaves off the trees into the banks for cash. That Delta. Five thousand square miles, without any hill save the bumps of dirt the Indians made to stand on when the River overflowed.

'So I thought it was just a hill I wanted; it wasn't Little Belle that set me off. Do you know what it was?'

'He is,' the woman said inside the door. 'Lee ought not to let —'

Benbow had not waited for any answer. 'It was a rag with rouge on it. I knew I would find it before I went into Belle's room. And there it was, stuffed behind the mirror : a handkerchief where she had wiped off the surplus paint when she dressed and stuck it behind the mantel. I put it into the clothes-bag and took my hat and walked out. I had got a lift on a truck before I found that I had no money with me. That was part of it too, you see; I couldn't cash a cheque. I couldn't get off the truck and go back to town and get some money. I couldn't do that. So I have been walking and bumming rides ever since. I slept one night in a sawdust pile at a mill, one night at a negro cabin, one night in a freight car on a siding. I just wanted a hill to lie on, you see. Then I would be all right. When you marry your own

wife, you start off from scratch . . . maybe scratching. When you marry somebody else's wife, you start off maybe ten years behind, from somebody else's scratch and scratching. I just wanted a hill to lie on for a while.'

'The fool,' the woman said. 'The poor fool.' She stood inside the door. Popeye came through the hall from the back. He passed her without a word, and went on to the porch.

'Come on,' he said. 'Let's get it loaded.' She heard the three of them go away. She stood there. Then she heard the stranger get unsteadily out of his chair and cross the porch. Then she saw him, in faint silhouette against the sky, the lesser darkness: a thin man in shapeless clothes; a head of thinning and ill-kempt hair; and quite drunk. 'They don't make him eat right,' the woman said.

She was motionless, leaning lightly against the wall, he facing her. 'Do you like living like this?' he said. 'Why do you do it? You are young yet; you could go back to the cities and better yourself without lifting more than an eyelid.' She didn't move, leaning lightly against the wall, her arms folded. 'The poor, scared fool,' she said.

'You see,' he said, 'I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it won't run.' His hand fumbled across her cheek. 'You are young yet.' She didn't move, feeling his hand upon her face, touching her flesh as though he were trying to learn the shape and position of her bones and the texture of the flesh. 'You have your whole life before you, practically. How old are you? You're not past thirty yet.' His voice was not loud, almost a whisper.

When she spoke she did not lower her voice at all. She had not moved, her arms still folded across her breast. 'Why did you leave your wife?' she said.

'Because she ate shrimp,' he said. 'I couldn't - You see, it was Friday, and I thought how at noon I'd go to the station and get the box of shrimp off the train and walk home with it, counting a hundred steps and changing hands with it, and it -'