THE SHADOW OF A DREAM

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I

DOUGLAS FAULKNER was of a type once commoner in the West than now, I fancy. In fact, many of the circumstances that tended to shape such a character, with the conditions that repressed and the conditions that evolved it, have changed so vastly that they may almost be said not to exist any longer.

He was a lawyer, with a high ideal of professional honor, and in his personal relations he was known to be almost fantastically delicate, generous, and faithful. At the same time he was a "practical" politician; he adhered to his party in all its measures; he rose rapidly to be a leader in it, and was an unscrupulous manager of caucuses and conventions. For a while he was editor of the party organ in his city, and he wrote caustic articles for it which were rather in the line of his political than his personal morality. This employment was supposed to be more congenial. than his profession to the literary taste for which he had a large repute among his more unliterary acquaintance. They said that Faulkner could have been an author if he had chosen, and they implied that this was not worth while with a man who could be something in law and politics. Their belief had followed him from Muskingum University, where he was graduated with distinction in letters and forensics. The school was not then on so grand a scale as its name, and a little of the humanities might have gone a long way in it; but Faulkner was really a lover of books, and a reader of

them, whether he could ever have been a writer of them or not; and he kept up his habit of reading after he entered active life.

It was during his editorial phase that I came from the country to be a writer on the opposition newspaper in his city, and something I did caught his fancy: some sketch of the sort I was always trying at, or some pert criticism, or some flippant satire of his party friends. He came to see me, and asked me to his house, for a talk, he said, about literature; and when I went I chose to find him not very modern in his preferences. He wanted to talk to me about Byron and Shelley, Scott and Cooper, Lamartine and Schiller, Irving and Goldsmith, when I was full of Tennyson and Heine, Emerson and Lowell, George Eliot and Hawthorne and Thackeray; and he rather bored me, showing me fine editions of his favorites. I was surprised to learn that he was only a few years older than myself: he had filled my mind so long as a politician that I had supposed him a veteran of thirty, at least, and he proved to be not more than twenty-six. Still, as I was only twenty-two I paid him the homage of a younger man, but I remember deciding that he was something of a sentimentalist. He seemed anxious to account for himself in his public character, so out of keeping with the other lives he led; he said he was sorry that his mother (with whom he lived in her widowhood) was out of town; she was the inspiration of all his love of literature, he said; and would have been so glad to see me. I was flattered, for the Faulkners were of the first social importance; they were of Virginian extraction. From his library he took me into what he called his den, and introduced me to a friend of his who sat smoking in a corner, and whom I saw to be a tall young Episcopal clergyman when he stood up. The night was very hot; Faulkner had in some claret punch, and the Rev. Mr. Nevil drank with us. He did not talk much, and I perceived that he was the matter-of-fact partner in a friendship which

was very romantic on Faulkner's side, and which appeared to date back to their college days. That was now a good while ago, but they seemed to be in the habit of meeting often, and to have kept up their friendship in all its first fervor. Mr. Nevil was very handsome, with a regular face, and a bloom on it quite girlishly peachy, and very pure, still, earnest blue eyes. He looked physically and spiritually wholesome; but Faulkner certainly did not look wholesome in the matter of his complexion at least. It was pale, with a sort of smokiness, and his black, straight hair strung down in points over his forehead; his beautiful dark eyes were restlessly brilliant; he stooped a little, and he was, as they say in the West, loose-hung. I noticed his hands, long, nervous, with fingers that trembled, as he rested their tips, a little yellowed from his cigar, on a book.

It was a volume of De Quincey, on whom we all came together in literature, and we happened to talk especially of his essay on Kant, and of the dreams which afflicted the philosopher's old age, and which no doubt De Quincey picturesquely makes the most of. Then we began to tell our own dreams, the ghastlier ones; and Faulkner said he sometimes had dreams, humiliating, disgraceful, loathsome, that followed him far into the next day with a sense of actual occurrence. He was very vivid about them, and in spite of the want of modernity in his literary preferences, I began to think he might really have been a writer. He said that sometimes he did not see why we should not attribute such dreams to the Evil One, who might have easier access to a man in the helplessness of sleep; but Nevil agreed with me that they were more likely to come from a late supper. Faulkner submitted, but he said they were a real affliction, and their persistence in a man's waking thoughts might almost influence his life.

When I took my leave he followed me to his gate, in his bare head and slippers; it was moonlight, and he walked a long way homeward with me. We led a very simple life in

our little city then, and a man might go bareheaded and slipper-footed about its streets at night as much as he liked. Now and then we met a policeman, and Faulkner nodded, with the facile "Ah, Tommy!" or "Hello, Mike!" of a man inside politics. I told him I envied him his ability to mingle with the people in that way, and he said it was not worth while.

"You are on the right track, and I hope you'll stick to it. We ought to have some Western authors; the West's ripe for it. I used to have the conceit to think I could have done something myself in literature, if I'd kept on after I left college."

I murmured some civilities to the effect that this was what all his friends thought.

"Well, it's too late, now," he said, "if ever it was early enough. I was foredoomed to the law; my father wouldn't hear of anything else, and I don't know that I blame him. I might have made a spoon, but I should certainly have spoiled a horn. A man generally does what he's fit for. Now there's Nevil--Don't you like Nevil?"

I said, "Very much," though really I had not thought it very seemly for a clergyman to smoke, and drink claret punch: I was very severe in those days.

Faulkner went on: "Nevil's an instance, a perfect case in point. If ever there was a human creature born into the world to do just the work he is doing, it's Nevil. I can't tell you how much that fellow has been to me, March!" This was the second time we had met; but Faulkner was already on terms of comradery with me; he was the kind of man who could hold no middle course; he must stand haughtily aloof, or he must take you to his heart. As he spoke, he put his long arm across my shoulders, and kept it there while we walked. "I was inclined to be pretty wild in college, and I had got to running very free when I first stumbled against Jim Nevil. He was standing up as tall and straight morally as he does physically, but he managed to meet me on my

own level without seeming to stoop to it. He was ordained of God, then, and his life had a message for every one; for me it seemed to have a special message, and what he did for me was what he lived more than what he said. He talked to me, of course, but it was his example that saved me. You must know Nevil. Yes, he's a noble fellow, and you can't have any true conception of friendship till you *have* known him. Just *see* that moon!" Faulkner stopped abruptly, and threw up his head.

The perfect orb seemed to swim in the perfect blue. The words began to breathe themselves from my lips:

"'The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;'"
and he responded as if it were the strain of a litany:
"'Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;'"
and I spoke:
"'The sunshine is a glorious birth;'"
and he responded again:
"'But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath passed a glory from the earth.'"

His voice broke in the last line and faded into a tremulous whisper. It was the youth in both of us, smitten to ecstasy by the beauty of the scene, and pouring itself out in the modulations of that divine stop, as if it had been the rapture of one soul.

He took his arm from my shoulders, and turned about without any ceremony of adieu, and walked away, head down, with shuffling, slippered feet.

We met several times, very pleasantly, and with increased liking. Then he took offence, as capricious as his former fancy, at something I wrote, and sent me an angry note, which I answered in kind. Not long afterward I went abroad on a little money I had saved up, and when I came home, I

married, and by an ironical chance, found myself; with my aesthetic tastes, my literary ambition, and my journalistic experience, settled in the insurance business at Boston. I did not revisit the West, but I learned by letters that our dear little city out there had become a formidable railroad centre; everybody had made or lost money, and Faulkner had become very rich through the real estate which had long kept him land-poor. One day I got a newspaper addressed in his handwriting, which brought me the news of his marriage. The name of the lady struck me as almost factitiously pretty, and I could well imagine Faulkner provisionally falling in love with her because she was called Hermia Winter. The half-column account of the wedding described the Rev. James Nevil as "officiating"; and something in the noisy and bragging tone of the reporter in dealing with this important society event disadvantaged the people concerned in my mind. I chose to regard it all as cruder and louder than anything I remembered of the place in old days; but my wife said that it was characteristically Western, and that probably it had always been like that out there; only I had not felt it while I was in it, though, as she said, I was not of it.

She was a Bostonian herself; and it was useless to appeal to the society journalism of her own city in proof of the prevalence of that sort of vulgarity everywhere. She laughed at the name Hermia, and said it sounded made-up, and that she had no doubt the girl's name was Hannah. I thought I had my revenge afterward when a friend wrote me about the marriage, which was a surprise to everybody; for it had always been supposed that Faulkner was going to marry the beautiful and brilliant Miss Ludlow, long, perhaps too long, the belle of the place. The lady whom he had chosen was the daughter of a New England family, who had lived just out of town in my time and had never been in society. She was a teacher in Bell's Institute, and Faulkner met her there on one of his business visits as trustee. She

was a very cultivated girl, though; and they were going abroad for their wedding-journey. My correspondent had a special message from Faulkner for me, delivered on his wedding night. He remembered me among the people he would have liked to have there; he was sorry for our little quarrel and was to blame for it; he was coming home by way of Boston, and was going to look me up.

My wife said, Well, he seemed a nice fellow; but it only showed how any sort of New England girl could go out there and pick up the best. For the rest, she hoped they would not hurry home on my account; and if all my Western friends, with their free ideas of hospitality, were going to call on me, there would be no end to it. It was the jealousy of her husband's past every good wife feels that spoke; but long before I met Faulkner again we had both forgotten all about him.

II

ONE DAY seven or eight years later, when I was coming up from Lynn, where we had board for a few weeks' outing in August, I fell in with Dr. Wingate, the nervous specialist. We were members of the same dining club, and were supposed to meet every month; we really met once or twice during the winter, but then it was a great pleasure to me, and I tried always to get a place next him at table. I found in him, as I think one finds in most intelligent physicians, a sympathy for human suffering unclouded by sentiment, and a knowledge of human nature at once vast and accurate, which fascinated me far more than any forays of the imagination in that difficult region. Like physicians everywhere, he was less local in his feelings and interests than men of other professions; and I was able better to overcome with him that sense of being a foreigner, and in some sort on sufferance, which embarrassed me (quite needlessly, I dare say) with some of my commensals: lawyers, ministers, brokers, and politicians. I had a sort of affection for him; I never saw him, with the sunny, simple-hearted, boyish smile he had, without feeling glad; and it seemed to me that he liked me, too. His kindly presence must have gone a long way with his patients, whose fluttering sensibilities would hang upon his cheery strength as upon one of the main chances of life.

We rather rushed together to shake hands, and each asked how the other happened to be there at that hour in the morning. I explained my presence, and he said, as if it were some sort of coincidence: "You don't say so! Why, I've

got a patient over at Swampscott, who says he knows you. A man named Faulkner."

I repeated, "Faulkner?" In the course of travel and business I had met so many people that I forgave myself for not distinguishing them very sharply by name, at once.

"He says he used to know you in your demi-semi-literary days, and he rather seemed to think you must be concealing a reputation for a poet, when I told him you were in the insurance business, and I only knew of your literary tastes. He's a Western man, and he met you out there."

"Oh!" said I. *"Douglas* Faulkner!" And now it was my turn to say, *"You* don't say so! Why of course! Is it possible!" and I lost myself in a cloud of silent reminiscences and associations, to come out presently with the question, "What in the world is he doing at Swampscott?"

The doctor looked serious; and then he looked keenly at me. "Were you and he great friends?"

"Well, we were not sworn brothers exactly. We were writers on rival newspapers; but I rather liked him. Yes, there was something charming to me about him; something good and sweet. I haven't met him, though, for ten years."

"He seemed to be rather fond of you. He said he wished I would tell you to come and see him, the next time I met you. Odd you should turn up there in the station!" By this time we were in the train, on our way to Boston.

"I will," I said, and I hesitated to add, "I hope there's nothing serious the matter?"

The doctor hesitated too. "Well, he's a pretty sick man. There's no reason I shouldn't tell you. He's badly run down; and--I don't like the way his heart behaves."

"Oh, I'm sorry--"

"He had just got home from Europe, and was on his way to the mountains when he came to see me in Boston, and I sent him to the sea-side. I came down last night--it's the beginning of my vacation--to see him, and spent the night