Every Day by the Sun

A MEMOIR OF THE FAULKNERS OF MISSISSIPPI

DEAN FAULKNER WELLS

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Dean never needed a watch. He lived every day of his life by the sun.

—FAMILY MEMBER SPEAKING OF DEAN SWIFT FAULKNER

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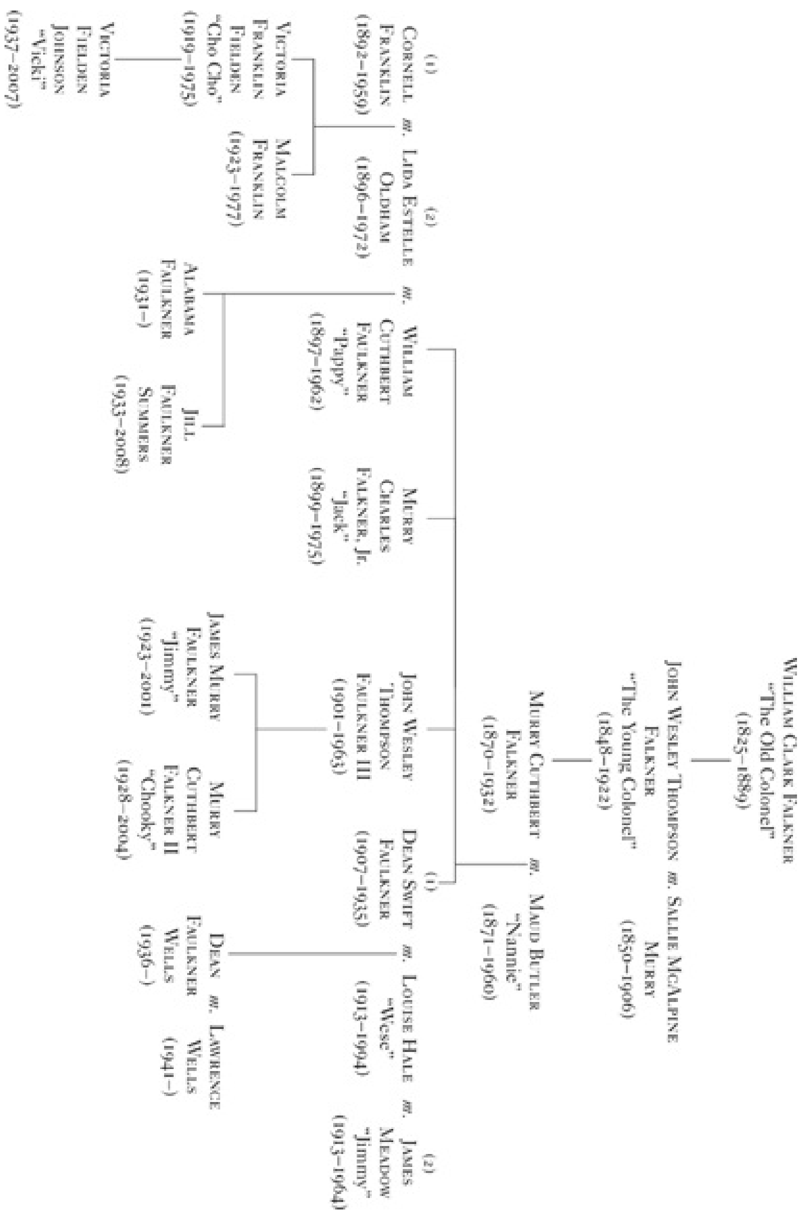
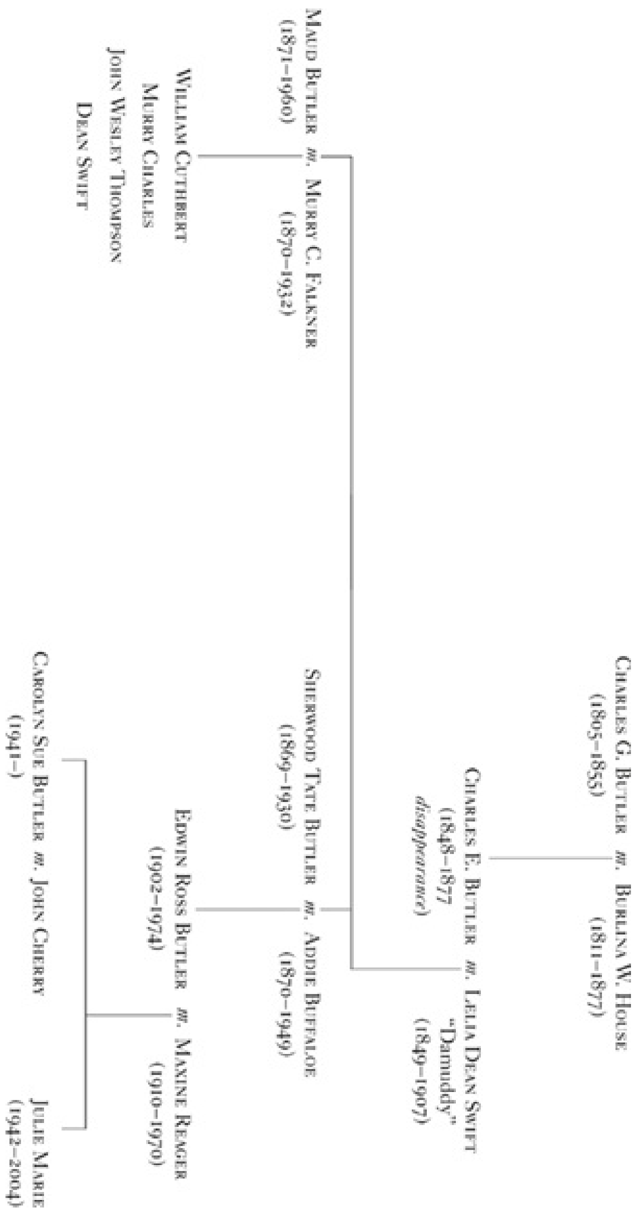


Butler Family Tree



Prologue

THE BEST AND THE WORST THING THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED to me took place on November 10, 1935, fou months before I was born, when my father, a barnstorming pilot, was killed in a plan crash at the age of twenty-eight. The best, because it placed me at the center of the Faulkn family; the worst, because I would never know my father.

He was Dean Swift Faulkner, the youngest of the four Faulkner brothers of Mississipp William, the future Nobel Prize winner in literature; Jack, an FBI agent; and John, a paint and writer. All four were pilots. Dean was the baby of his generation as I am in mine. H death defined my position in the family. I became more than just another granddaughter niece. I was the last link to my father, and since he was gone, the people who loved him s dearly cared for me in his stead; they did the best they could for me. Due to an accident birth I belonged to all of them, but it was Dean's oldest brother, William, who felt th heaviest responsibility for me. He encouraged Dean to learn to fly, paid for his lessons, gav him a Waco C cabin cruiser—William's own plane—and with it a job at Mid-South Airways Memphis, Tennessee.

After Dean's death, William suffered from grief and guilt I imagine almost every day of h life. He attempted to assuage the pain by offering me security, both emotional and financia whenever he could. It was as if William made a vow to Dean that November afternoon whe he saw his unrecognizable body in the wreckage of the plane: He would tend to me in Dean place. He fulfilled his promise, and I grew up calling him "Pappy."

Cherished by my family as an extension of my father, I have had to struggle to find m identity. My search for who I am started when I began to research my father's life. H influence on me could not have been stronger had he lived. And as Pappy's fame grew, course we were all touched by it.

In 2010, I became the oldest surviving Faulkner in the Murry Falkner branch of the famil My father's first cousin, Dorothy "Dot" Falkner Dodson, daughter of Murry's brother, Joh died January 23, 2010. We were the only remaining family members with firsthan memories of the long dead people who shaped and supported the man who is arguably th finest American writer of the twentieth century. Now I am, one might say, the last primar source—and I don't like anything about it. By the time I reached seventy, I expected to b transformed into Miss Habersham, Aunt Jenny, Granny Millard, or, if I was lucky, Dilsey. believed with all my heart that to grow older was to grow wiser. I am living proof that th aint so. (Note that throughout I'm using Pappy's preferred "aint," without the apostrophe.)

My relatives were private people, building walls not only to shield themselves fro outsiders but from one another. This vaunted Faulkner privacy, which has been interpreted a anything from crippling shyness to arrogance to paranoia, may have evolved as a safety hatc in light of our eccentric and sometimes outrageous behavior.

Over the generations my family can claim nearly every psychological aberratio narcissism and nymphomania, alcoholism and anorexia, agoraphobia, manic depressio paranoid schizophrenia. There have been thieves, adulterers, sociopaths, killers, racists, liar

and folks suffering from panic attacks and real bad tempers, though to the best of m knowledge we've never had a barn burner or a preacher.

The only place we can be found in relative harmony is St. Peter's Cemetery in Oxfor Mississippi. Yet there we can't even agree on how to spell our name. It appears "FALKNER" on several headstones; in the next plot "FAULKNER"; in the main family pl both "FALKNER" and "FAULKNER," buried next to one another; and one grave marker rea "FA(U)LKNER." It is obvious that though there were not many of us to begin with, we' never been a close-knit family. We are prone to "falling-outs," quick to anger, and slow forgive. Whereas most families come together at holidays or anniversaries, ours rarely has, least not in my generation. With the exception of our immediate kin, we've been derelict keeping up family ties.

Pappy tried. On New Year's Eve in the 1950s, he liked to host small gatherings for fami and friends at his home, Rowan Oak. Dressed to the nines, we met shortly before midnight the library, where magnums of champagne were chilling in wine coolers, and cryst champagne glasses were arranged on silver trays. As the hour approached, Pappy move about the room and welcomed his guests. When our glasses were filled he would nod at o of the young men standing near the overhead light switch. Then he would take his place front of the fire. When the lights were out and the room was still, with firelight danci against the windowpanes, Pappy would lift his glass and give his traditional New Year's toas unchanged from year to year. "Here's to the younger generation," he would say. "May yo learn from the mistakes of your elders."

I'm still learning.

I

My Father's Death

IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME THAT IT COULD HAVE BEEN PILOT error, that the plane crash that killed four youn men—including the pilot, my father—could have been his fault. He had been taught to f by the best. He had a commercial pilot's license and hundreds of hours of flight time ar complete confidence in himself. When I began to search for answers, his fellow pilots told m that he was a natural, a pilot's pilot, that there was no aircraft that Dean couldn't fly, that h instincts for flying were almost mystical. The crash, the old barnstormers insisted, was cause by factors beyond his control. It could not have been Dean's fault.

He loved performing in air shows, and several days before his last one, in November 193 he flew to Pontotoc, a small town in north Mississippi, where he was scheduled to put on a Armistice Day exhibition. He flew the Waco C cabin cruiser, a gift from William, a fir engine-red biplane with tan leather seats and ashtrays on the armrests. An elegant aircraft, seated four in comfort.

As usual, Dean had written all the promotional copy for the air show, had flyers printe and flew over the town making low passes to drop the leaflets. Down they fluttered lik confetti onto streets, trees, and rooftops. It was supper time on a Friday. At the sound of th plane's engine, people ran outside, children first, clapping their hands in excitement, pointin at the sky, their parents close behind, all caught up in the moment, plucking the flyers out o the air.

MAMMOTH ARMISTICE DAY AIR PAGEANT

Two days—Nov. 10–11, Two O'Clock.
Featuring Dean Faulkner and Navy Sowell.
THRILLING EXHIBITION OF STUNT FLYING
AND AERIAL ACROBATICS.
Death-defying parachute jumps by Navy Sowell.
See Pontotoc from the air. Long rides, one dollar.
Landing field west of Pontotoc.
In case of inclement weather show will be held
the following week.

Barnstorming shows were circuses, carnivals, vaudeville shows, and county fairs rolled in one. As a plane would thunder over, spectators would gather in a field to watch female win walkers make their way from the cockpit to the struts, as sure and as precise as ball dancers. Jumpers with parachutes clutched to their chests would plunge out of the plane feeding the chute out to catch air as they plummeted toward earth. The real stars, howeve were the daring young men in their flying machines. Reeve Lindbergh once wrote me that h

father thought of the early aviators as members of a select fraternity, “the brotherhood of th air,” drawn together by the love and danger of flight.

Dean had flown into Pontotoc from Memphis on Friday. He was at work early Saturda morning taking up fifty or sixty passengers before stunt flying in the afternoon: figure eigh and loop-the-loops and heart-stopping stalls. One of his passengers that morning was a youn farmer, Bud Warren, who had never flown before. As soon as the plane landed, Bud knew h was coming back the next day with two of his cousins. He wanted them to see their farm from the air. Bud Warren had had a real good time.

Sunday, November 10, 1935, was just right for flying. Dean went out early that morning t check on the weather. He rubbed his bare feet in the moist grass, licked his finger, and held up against the wind. Perfect.

He was at the landing field west of Pontotoc by ten o’clock dressed in khakis, a white shir boots, a leather helmet with goggles, and a white silk scarf around his neck. He began, as h had on Saturday, taking passengers for rides, charging a dollar for ten or fifteen minutes the air. Dean’s wife, Louise, arrived unexpectedly around one o’clock, having driven dow from Memphis. He was delighted to see her. They chatted briefly before he went back t work. Louise was five months pregnant with me and had recently been grounded by he doctor until she came to term. She had logged so many hours, Dean teased, that she coul have been a pilot herself.

The line for rides was a long one, and it was nearly one thirty when Bud Warren, who ha been waiting patiently, came forward with his cousins Henry and Lamon “Red” Graham Dean recognized Bud from the day before. “Come on,” he said. “Let’s go see those farms.”

Bud and Henry settled themselves into the back seats. Red, probably because he was student pilot with several hours of flying time, sat up front with Dean. As they taxied dow the field to get ready for takeoff, Dean returned Louise’s wave. The red Waco took off int the sun.

Louise stood by the airfield eating an apple, wishing she were flying. As she waited for th plane, her sister, Clara, and brother-in-law, Roger Caldwell, showed up. Louise sat in th front seat of their car, chatting through the open door with Navy Sowell, the parachutist wh was to make a jump that day. A young man delivered a ham sandwich that Dean had ordere from a café. Louise paid him and said, “Just hold on to it and take it out to the plane. He’ll b hungry when he lands.” Thirty or forty minutes passed. Someone in the crowd remarke “Those Grahams are getting a first-class ride.” Dean must have been rewarding them, Louis reasoned, for having waited so long. Then another onlooker: *“I bet they’ve crashed.”* It wa past two. The crowd was restless, complaining that the show should have started. Louis began to worry.

Louise, Clara, Roger, and Navy drove down a narrow gravel road where Dean’s plane ha last been seen. A pickup truck came barreling toward them. Passengers stood in the truc bed, shouting, “We saw it. We saw it go down. Over there just past that stand of pines. In th pasture. The plane’s buried in the ground.”

Navy and Roger ran across the field, leaving the car doors open. Louise struggled again Clara to get out. The men vanished into the pine thicket. When they reappeared momen later Clara could read the agony in their faces. They had found the Waco. Dean and his thre passengers were dead.

Louise collapsed. Roger held her as Navy turned the car around and headed back t
Pontotoc. News of the crash had reached the airfield by the time they returned. Spectato
raced toward their cars. Two of Dean's friends and fellow pilots, Murry Spain and C. I
Lemmons, were waiting. They took Louise to C.D.'s home, where Lemmons's first phone ca
was to his family doctor to come take care of Louise. The second was to 546 in Oxford-
William Faulkner's number.

When the telephone rang at Rowan Oak, William was outside in his yard putting up
trellis for a grape arbor. His wife, Estelle, called him inside and handed him the phone. H
features went smooth with shock. "How far from Thaxton? At what time? Was he alone?" H
turned to Estelle. "Dean was killed in a crash at Thaxton." He began to place calls, first t
Judge John Falkner, his uncle, asking him to get the operator to block calls to 15, th
telephone number of his mother, Maud Butler Falkner. He phoned his brothers, Jack ar
John, and told them, "Come home. Mother will need us." Then he called the police. Thinkir
Louise was in Memphis, he asked them to set up a roadblock to detain her in Byhali
Mississippi, and bring her to Oxford. "She must not be allowed to go to Thaxton." He wa
soon on his way to his mother's house.

One of Dean's fellow pilots had just heard the news. He had flown with Dean the wee
before and could not believe he was dead. He picked up the receiver and asked the operato
to connect him to 15. After a long pause, the operator explained that she had orders not t
put through any calls, but "just this once—"

Maud was waiting on her front steps when William pulled into her driveway. She grippe
her handbag and gloves, rigid with grief. William reached out and she took his hand. The
stood together in silence. Then he helped her into the car. They drove to Pontotoc without
word passing between them. Highway 6 was filled with traffic as Dean's friends raced to th
scene of the crash. William drove to C. D. Lemmons's house and went inside. Maud stayed
the car, a small, erect figure.

Louise was in bed, groggy from a sedative the doctor had given her. William and C.I
helped her to the car, and C.D. tucked a blanket over her lap. She sat in the backseat, starir
out the window. Then they began the drive back to Oxford. Maud spoke only once. "Did
ever do anything to make him unhappy?"

At Maud's home they were met by family members. Clara helped put Louise to bed
Dean's old room. Before dark, Maud's second son, Jack Falkner, an FBI agent in Nor
Carolina, would fly home in his yellow and black Aeronca. Her third son, John, was delaye
in Lambert, Mississippi, when his crop duster nosed over on takeoff. He was now driving t
Oxford with his family. The Falkners were banding together.

William drove by himself to the crash site at Thaxton. He found men working wi
blowtorches and hacksaws, racing against darkness to remove Dean's body from th
wreckage. The Waco had been almost completely destroyed, its nose buried deep. It had gor
down in an open spot in a wooded area about ten miles from the Pontotoc airfield. Under
towering oak, the bodies of the Graham cousins and Bud Warren lay on a flatbed truck. The
had been hastily covered with bedsheets. William went to the plane and looked inside. Th
impact had driven the engine through the cockpit and smashed it into the passengers. Whe
William saw what the crash had done to his brother, one of the Graham kinsmen overhear
him say, "Hell, Dean, is that you?"

At five o'clock that afternoon, after the bodies had been taken to the funeral home
Pontotoc, a crowd was still standing around the plane, many of them Dean's fellow pilot
staring at the crash site in disbelief. Part of the red fabric covering the top left wing ha
ripped away.

On Armistice Day, November 11, 1935, the story of the crash appeared on the front page
the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*. The article stated that "an unofficial investigation disclosed th
the control was on the right side and the wheel in the lap of Red Graham [which] wou
indicate that the student-pilot had taken control." The story ran with pictures of the Wa
and of Dean's pilot's license photograph. He was twenty-eight; Red Graham was twenty-fou
Henry Graham and Bud Warren were both twenty-one. Red, Henry, and Bud were buried th
day after the crash in Sand Springs Cemetery, "the cemetery near where the wing fabr
fluttered to earth." Finding fault for the crash is beyond mortal consideration.

2

Second Coming

OXFORD IN THE 1930S WAS A SLEEPY LITTLE ONE-HORSE town in the hills of north Mississippi, seat c Lafayette County (pronounced La*fay*ette by locals), and home to the University c Mississippi (Ole Miss). The town doubled in population every fall with a vital influx of yout and energy. The courthouse dominated the square, big and white in the center of an island c grass and old oak trees, its two stories and clock tower making it the tallest structure town. Four clock faces pointed in each direction, and chimes rang the hour. Benches beneat the trees were occupied by farmers in overalls who whittled, talked, and played dominoe when the weather was right.

Town streets were laid out in an orderly grid with the courthouse at the hub, and the ma street, Lamar Boulevard, connecting north and south. A Confederate statue, so common Mississippi towns, faced south.

On Saturdays, farmers from out in the county came to town in mule-drawn wagons fille with seasonal produce to sell on the circle surrounding the courthouse. The pace was easy ar slow even on days when Ole Miss had a home football game.

Each Christmas the square was transformed into a magical place when long strands c brightly colored electric lights were mounted on the courthouse cupola and stretched acro the streets to the roofs of surrounding buildings. The square at night resembled a giar carousel, an enchanted place.

DURING THEIR BRIEF year together, Dean and my mother had lived in Memphis with Vernon Omli Dean's mentor and partner at Mid-South Airways. One painful afternoon in late Novembe Louise and William drove to Memphis and collected her belongings and Dean's. They sa good-bye to a weeping Exxie Hardiman, Omlie's housekeeper, who had taken Dean under he wing and later welcomed Louise with open arms, nicknaming her "Baby Lou." Ever Christmas, my mother received a letter from Exxie recalling the good times. They wer addressed:

Baby Lou Faulkner
South Lamar
Oxford, Mississippi

Louise moved in with Maud and settled into Dean's room to await my birth.

Maud's house was a buff brick structure located a few blocks south of the square. Th courthouse clock could be seen from the dining room window. It was a British-style "captain cottage" that she had designed herself with a gabled roof, a porthole-shaped window in th center gable, and a wraparound front gallery with French windows and a green canva

awning. A captain's lantern hung by the front door. Each morning Maud would roll down th awning to keep the sunlight off the parlor furniture. In winter the house was heated by cantankerous coal furnace that she stoked by hand, and in summer it was cooled by larg black oscillating floor fans. The house was a few blocks from the local cotton gin, and season it rumbled day and night. By late October the window screens were white with cotto lint.

Maud's home showed her love of detail: high ceilings, hardwood floors, a formal dinir room, a spacious parlor with a fireplace, three compact bedrooms, and two baths ideal suited for her, her husband, Murry, and Dean, when he still lived at home. Much of th furniture had belonged to Murry's grandfather, William Clark Falkner, some of which h brought back from Mexico after the war of 1846: primitively carved, heavy oak chairs an tables, mirrors, and sideboard.

Dean's bedroom had a private entrance off the gallery. After Murry's death in 1932, Mau and Dean lived together until September 1934, when he married Louise and moved t Memphis. Two maiden ladies, Miss Frances Ward and Miss Judy Reed, rented the fro bedroom for twenty-five dollars a month (the same rate Maud charged writer Elizabe Spencer fifteen years later). Then on November 10, 1935, the crash brought Louise to her.

Maud's other sons were married with families of their own. Jack lived in North Caroli and was an FBI agent who traveled the world, and John lived in Lambert, Mississipp farming and crop dusting. One year John sent his sons, Jimmy, fourteen, and Chooky, eleve to live with Maud and attend school in Oxford. They slept on cots in the dining roon William and his wife, Estelle, lived in Oxford, but at the time of my birth he was Hollywood working as a screenwriter. A month before I was born, he sent my mother a on line telegram: "What will we do if it's a girl?" After Maud telephoned and left the news of m birth, he wrote to my mother: "You take care of the girl until I can get there and do it," vow he honored for the rest of his life. The first step was having himself declared my leg guardian shortly after my birth.

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

STUDIOS
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

March 27th, 1936.

Dear Louise:-

Grand news. I know everything is going well. You take good care of the girl until I can get there and do it.

Sincerely,

Bill

Mrs. Louise Faulkner
Oxford,
Miss.

I was born in Oxford just before daylight on Sunday, March 22, 1936. Spring had com early that year. The redbuds and dogwoods were in full bloom as Maud took Louise for long afternoon drive in her yellow Buick coupe with a rumble seat, which she loved dearl They had driven far out in the county on gravel roads. It was twilight when they pulled bac into Maud's driveway. Before dark she telephoned her family doctor, Gene Bramlett. "Gen this is Maud. Meet us at the hospital now. Louise is having our baby."

Being born in a Mississippi hospital during the Depression was apparently a luxury. Tw babies were delivered in Oxford's Bramlett Hospital in 1936. I was one of them, and Willia Lewis, Jr., son of the co-owner of Neilson's Department Store, born exactly one month befo I was, was the other.

There has never been a Poor Little Fatherless Child as spoiled as I. For the first five years, thought life was perfect. My uncle William believed that a girl would be secu psychologically if she felt safe between the ages of two and five. (I certainly qualified.) M mother and I alternated between Maud's home in Oxford, and that of my Hale grandparen in the country, with occasional interludes at Rowan Oak. They were all havens of order ar stability.

I never called anyone "Mother" or "Father," or "Mom" or "Dad," and certainly n "Mommy" or "Daddy," though my Hale grandparents, Pearl Brown and Elijah Sanford, we "Mama" and "Papa," which I thought were their real names. Maud was always "Nannie," ar William was "Pappy." Their attempts to get me to say "Mother Louise" failed. The best could do was "Mowese," which I gradually shortened to "Wese." The name on my bir certificate was Dean Faulkner. Nannie called me "Lamb." Papa Hale called me "Little Feller Everybody else called me "Dean Baby."

When I was just six months old, Wese went to work as a part-time secretary. Caroline Bar whom we called Mammy Callie, and who had nursed all four Faulkner boys and Jill, Pappy daughter, walked the half mile from Rowan Oak to Nannie's every morning before dawn

supervise my care. In winter and summer she wore layers of clothing topped by a frilly lo
apron stiff with enough starch to stand by itself, and a matching white lace cap. She was
tiny that when Pappy picked her up after she collapsed shortly before her death, he could n
believe how light she was, smaller than his mother, who stood a mere four feet eight inch
and weighed eighty-nine pounds. Pappy held her funeral in the front parlor at Rowan Oa
and in 1940 he dedicated *Go Down, Moses* to her:

TO MAMMY

CAROLINE BARR

Mississippi
[1840–1940]

Who was born in slavery and who
gave to my family a fidelity without
stint or calculation of recompense
and to my childhood an immeasurable
devotion and love

Her tombstone in St. Peter's Cemetery bears the inscription "Her white children bless her.

At Nannie's house, Mammy would sit in a child-sized wooden rocking chair with a cane se
and no armrests to prevent bumping a baby's head. Pappy had it made especially for her.
was placed next to the fireplace in the front parlor, where she dipped snuff as she held m
and spat into the furnace register. In winter the stench of drying snuff was overpowering. A
argument arose between Nannie and Mammy over whether snuff dipping was permitted
the parlor. If Nannie wanted her to attend me—and she did, though certainly not for a
physical contribution, considering that Mammy at her advanced age could hold me only wh
someone placed me in her lap—she would have to take Mammy, snuff and all.

A young woman named Jerry was my regular nurse. She came every weekday at eight a
stayed until five. Her one duty: *Keep Dean Baby happy*. To Jerry, a happy baby was a goo
baby, and good babies who were mostly seen and not heard had good schedules. Early to b
was an integral part of Jerry's routine. Before she left for the day, I ate an early supper a
then went happily into the bathtub, where she sang my favorite song: "Froggy Went
Courting." And if we had had an exceptionally good day she would recite "The Little Orph
Annie." I could hardly wait to hear her say "The goblins will get you if you don't watch out.

Then, thoroughly scrubbed, in a clean fresh nightgown, I was handed over to Nannie
Wese for a bedtime story such as "The King's Stilts." When I was old enough, Pappy had
pair of fire-engine-red stilts made for me with "DEAN" painted on them in large black lette
Then I said my "Now I Lay Me" prayers on my knees and stalled as long as I could over m
list of "God blesses" from every family member down to every dog I could think of. By s
o'clock I was in bed. Rarely did I see the sun go down.

Jerry taught me wonderful things: how to stand on my head, to say the alphabet backwa
(which I can still do), and to mind my manners. I learned not to be a scaredy-cat siss
britches cry-baby tattletale Goody Two-shoes. The yessums and no'ms, please-sirs and than

you-ma'ams are still with me—and with my children—thanks to Jerry's attention-getti devices, such as "I'll snatch you bald-headed," and "I'll yank a knot in you," and most of a "Just because you don't get caught telling a lie don't mean you were telling the truth."

Nannie also had a cook, Lily, who arrived at the house by nine o'clock to have dinner rea at noon, the main meal of the day. The laundry was picked up on Monday and delivered Thursday. A handyman, Henry Jones, lived just two blocks across the street from us. H could fix anything that broke. Every Friday, Mr. Ray drove in from the county to deliver dozen eggs and a pound of butter. On our doorstep at dawn every other day appeared tw quarts of milk in glass bottles that revealed cream at the top, along with a pint of hea cream, which Nannie hand-whipped for desserts. She ran a tight ship with some very go help. We lived well in spite of the Depression.

Meals were served in the dining room because to Nannie the kitchen was a workplace. block letters she painted "DONT COMPLAIN DONT EXPLAIN" over the stove, her adaptati of a phrase made famous by Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor. When she ate alon Nannie took all of her meals in the dining room, where she kept her easel by the window catch the morning light. A slight odor of turpentine infused the air.

At every meal she would entertain me with a story we called "The Boat." I don't kno when she made it up, but it was a significant part of our daily ritual, a meal-to-meal serial adventure and danger during the First World War. At supper she painted a different scene the bottom of my glass using tempera paint on the outside. I was able to see these pictur only if I drank all my milk. Our "boat" looked very much like the *Titanic*, but the hero characters were based on our family and friends. Whenever Pappy ate with us he would ta over the storytelling. His torpedoes barely missed the bow (and Jimmy and Chooky and me and more than once the machine guns of his Messerschmitts raked the deck. We abandon ship only to be miraculously rescued at breakfast the next morning.

I lived with Nannie, but I thought of Rowan Oak as home, too. Pappy had bought th antebellum house with four acres of land for six thousand dollars. It had been built in 18 by Colonel Robert R. Sheegog and was designed by the architect William Turner. traditional Greek Revival–style home, it had two stories, high ceilings, and two large parlo on either side of a central hallway. The facade featured a second-floor balcony behind fo white columns, all framed by a cedar-lined walk. The first impression was of quiet grandeu but in 1930 when Pappy, his wife, Estelle, and her two children from a previous marria moved in, the house was falling apart from years of neglect. There was no electricity and running water; squirrels and mice were completely at home on the second floor. Pappy an Aunt Estelle had their work cut out for them. The shell of a house needed everything from new foundation to a new roof, wallpaper, wiring, plumbing, painting, and screens f windows. Pappy rolled up his sleeves and went to work, doing many repairs himself. Even its dilapidated state, the house—with its grounds and long, curving driveway—evoked h great-grandfather's estate at Ripley. He named it "Rowan Oak," after the Scottish legend th a rowan tree bough nailed over a barn threshold would ward off evil spirits, keep the cow milk from going bad, and—most important—guard and protect the privacy of all who live there.

Behind Rowan Oak was a small cabin, and after Mammy Callie's death in 1940, Chriss and Andrew Price moved into it. Chrissie and her daughter, Estelle, helped run the hous

while Andrew tended the grounds and horses. At Rowan Oak, I learned that "dinner" mea the *evening* meal and candlelight. Aunt Estelle was an excellent cook. She made exotic curri and chutney dishes and set an elegant table with meals served by houseboys on delica china, with silver goblets, silver bread and butter plates, and finger bowls on han embroidered linen place mats. In season there was a centerpiece of fresh-cut flowers. Papp presided over this table with a quiet dignity and pleasure.

He was a stickler for good manners and taught my cousins Jill and Vicki and me how behave at table: We were not to sit down until Aunt Estelle was seated. The grown-ups we given a choice before the first course was served: to smoke at table or drink wine with th meal. He would not allow anyone to do both. Smoking dulled the palate. The wine could n be appreciated. He would circle the table, wine bottle in hand, and each adult had to make choice. He designated smokers by turning their empty wine glasses upside down so the could be no recanting the decision. We were to serve ourselves from dishes presented by th houseboy left to right. We were not to begin to eat until Aunt Estelle took the first bite (ju in case the food was poisoned, he said). We were not allowed to leave the table un permission to be excused had been asked of, and granted by, our host.

The year I was born, the Prince of Wales was to be crowned Edward VIII, King of Englan In his honor the Gorham Company released a new flat sterling silver pattern called "Ki Edward." Nannie's sister-in-law Holland Pierce Falkner (whom we children called "Auntee and Nannie promptly ordered my first place setting of sterling flatware. By the time I w married twenty-two years later, twelve place settings were nearly complete—the king abdication notwithstanding.

Every two or three months, Wese would drive me out to Mama and Papa Hale's far where Papa had built a wood-frame house on land he inherited from his father. While Mam and their three children stayed in the nearby town of Ecru in Union County, Papa and som hired hands sawed wood, baked bricks, framed and roofed, put in window pane whitewashed the house and picket fence, and dug a well. They added a front porch with swing and rocking chairs, and—best of all—a screened sleeping porch in the back.

As Wese and I drove east on Highway 30, time fell away. The farm, without electricity plumbing, seemed to exist in a bygone era. There was no running water, no telephone radio or refrigerator or electric fans. Not even a coal furnace or stove. The house was heate by fireplaces and the kitchen by a cast-iron wood-burning stove. A box of kindling sat next it. At night the house was lit by kerosene lamps.

Mama Hale was up before dawn every morning, stoking the kitchen stove. She made ha and eggs (if the hens were laying), biscuits with white gravy, her blackberry jelly or Papa homemade molasses. We had fresh milk, if the cows were giving and hadn't grazed bitterweed. Otherwise Mama opened a small tin of Carnation Evaporated. There was icebox—a large wooden cabinet with the bottom half insulated to hold a fifty-pound block ice. Food that needed refrigerating was stored above. The ice truck would show intermittently during the summer. Most of the time we did without. Water was drawn fro the well behind the house. It was always cold.

My best friend in town was a little towheaded boy, Carl Downing, who lived two doo down from Nannie and who charged me a penny to ride my tricycle in front of his house t Nannie caught him at it. My best friend in the country was B. C. Jones, a handsome a

funny African American boy a year older than I, who lived with his parents just down th
road.

B.C.'s father sharecropped with Papa and ran the sawmill, worked the fields, slaughtere
the hogs, cured the meat, and made the sorghum. Every Saturday his mother helped Mam
Hale wash clothes in a cast-iron pot over a fire in the yard. B.C. and I would follow he
around as she hung the wash out to dry. We tried to do everything the grown-ups did-
hoeing, chopping and picking cotton, weeding Mama's garden, and generally getting in th
way.

Life on the farm was orderly. Cows had to be milked, chickens fed, pigs slopped. Ever
Saturday afternoon, Papa would put B.C. and me in the back of his pickup for the five-minu
ride to George Adams's store. He'd bring us a Baby Ruth to share while he talked weather an
crops with our neighbors. If he could find some children to play with us, he'd stay for a gam
of checkers. On Sunday morning, Papa, Mama, and I were at Philadelphia Baptist Church b
nine o'clock, squeaky clean.

B.C.'s main job was to "take care of Dean Baby"—along with my dog, Spot. Though Papp
and Aunt Estelle had several dogs at Rowan Oak, they weren't mine. Nannie hated dogs an
would not have one in her house. Spot stayed in the country and waited for me. As the su
went down, I would say good-bye to B.C. and go inside. Mama would light the kerosen
lamps, one in the living room and one to walk around with. We ate a cold supper left ove
from noon, then played Rook or Chinese checkers until everyone was yawning. Papa an
Mama Hale allowed me to stay up past my bedtime. Nights were still and silent except fo
katydids and tree frogs. It was my favorite place on earth.

Occasionally the comfortable rhythms were disturbed. During the Depression man
homeless, hopeless men walked the country roads. Some stopped at our house and begged
meal or offered to work for food. Mama fed all of them. B.C. and I would watch then
approach the house. They made us feel sad but they never scared us. Gypsies were anothe
matter.

Late on a Saturday afternoon, Papa came home from George Adams's store and told Mam
that a band of gypsies had been seen camped on Cypress Creek only a mile or two awa
"How many?" Mama said. We were shelling beans on the porch. Her voice shook. B.C. and
moved closer to each other on the swing.

"Probably two families," Papa said. "They have two wagons, a horse and a donkey, five o
six men and women and a few little ones. They'll be coming this way before dark."

B.C. and I were terrified. We had never seen Papa so serious and could not have imagine
that anything or anyone could scare Mama Hale. This was the woman who drove a surre
over a flooded bridge to take her five-year-old daughter to the doctor. This time, howeve
she was afraid. "Gypsies steal children," B.C. whispered. The dogs crept under the house.

"I think we better hide now," I said. I was halfway around the house when I heard th
jingling of the bells and an accordion playing. There they were at the top of the hill. Th
caravans were covered in designs of vivid colors. The gypsies wore bright red vests, gree
scarves, and blue sashes trimmed in gold. The men wore big gold earrings. Papa went to me
them. I noticed that he stretched to his full height of six feet, four inches.

"What can we do for you?" he said. B.C. and I couldn't understand the heavily accente
reply. After a moment, Papa turned to Mama. "Pearl, they're hungry. They'll work. The

sharpen knives and do chores. Or we can trade. They have jewelry and spools of thread."

"Trade!" Mama said. "Go get them a ham. I'll take a spool of silk thread." When Papa cam back from the smokehouse Mama was holding a small spool of green thread. Then the gypsi were gone, vanishing as if by magic.

Darkness was setting in. Papa said, "Little Feller, let's walk B.C. home." Hand in hand, w went down the path, B.C. on one side of Papa, me on the other, holding on tight.

One night I was awakened by the dogs barking and chickens squawking. Papa took h shotgun and went outside. I ran to Mama's room. "Fox in the henhouse," she said, and put m back to bed. Another night I awoke to a bell tolling. Each farm had a large iron bell in th yard close to the house, and each one had a distinctive tone so that the urgent tolling in th middle of the night was identifiable and frightening. "Trouble at the Waiteses'," Papa sai Someone needed help, and all who heard the bell got dressed and went to their aid.

In December 1941 my mother married Jimmy Meadow, a newspaperman. I had been sent out the country to stay with Mama and Papa while the newlyweds were on their honeymoon.

My mother and Jimmy returned late at night. Papa had long since gone to bed. I refused sleep, and Mama and I waited up for them. She held me in her lap in a rocking chair in fro of the fire. The kerosene lamps were out. The house was dark except for firelight.

We heard the car coming a mile away, as it turned off the highway onto the Hales' di road. We watched the headlight beams glancing off the treetops while the car came clos and closer, stopping just outside the picket fence. I ran to the window and watched m mother and stepfather coming across the yard. Then I hid behind Mama. While we waited, had been idly playing with the big pearl buttons on her nightgown. They were cool to th touch and pretty. Now, when Mama picked me up to hand me to Wese and *Jimmy*—no long the Wese that I had known and had had all to myself—I instantly and forever hated a buttons.

Late the next afternoon, Monday, December 8, 1941, we drove into town. I had overhea some of the whispered grown-up talk all day Sunday and had seen Mama shake her head Papa whenever he started to ask Jimmy a question. I'd even heard her say, "Hush, Sanfor you'll scare the baby." Now I sat in the backseat clutching Janie Walker, my doll. There w a light frost and I was glad the car had a heater. Even so, I should have been up front wi Wese. Then Jimmy turned on the radio. At first there was static, then I heard a clea resonant voice say, "This is a date that will live in infamy." I didn't know what infamy wa but I agreed with the man. I did not know who or what a president was, but this voice spo to me when he said that our country was at war. This sounded too good to be true. We probably all get shot or blown up and die and I wouldn't have to go and live with Wese an Jimmy.

We settled in Clarksdale, some sixty miles west of Oxford. We lived in a small apartme building on the second floor. Janie Walker was my only link to Oxford. I had packed h clothes in her doll suitcase when I left Nannie's. Within months my identity was gone. Dea Baby Faulkner was gone. Jimmy adopted me and I became Dean Meadow and would be f twelve long years. It's too easy to blame my mother. She always said, "I did it for you. Yo needed a father." She could not have spoken truer words.

Poor Jimmy. He had married a beautiful young widow, a tragic figure, a lovely woma

who needed him—and with her came the worst piece of would-be-royal baggage Mississippi. Later we moved into a nice white house on a nice tree-lined street. Jimm bought me a bicycle and taught me how to ride it. He bought me a fox terrier puppy that named “Little Bit,” who became an integral part of my life for the next thirteen years. taught Little Bit how to ride in the basket of my bicycle. We were a sight to behold. Or Saturday afternoon when Jimmy and I were walking home from the picture show, he taug me to recite the Twenty-third Psalm, betting me a quarter that I couldn’t learn it by the tim we got home.

JIMMY: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.”

ME: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.”

JIMMY: “He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

ME: “He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

We stopped at the school playground to swing. The lesson went on. By the time we g home I could recite the psalm all the way to *I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever*, whic to my five-year-old ears sounded like a real good place to be. I kept that quarter a long time

From Jimmy I also learned what the smell of whiskey on a man’s breath could mean. learned to run fast when things got ugly and then to feel fearful and guilty about runni away. He may have been a fine journalist, but he was also a world-class drunk. The first nig that Jimmy hit Wese, I packed my suitcase, then I packed Janie’s. I picked her up and w left. It was very late. Wese and Jimmy had finally gone to sleep. I made it down two fligh of stairs, out the front door, and two blocks down the street. There was no place to go. I s on the curb in the dark until I stopped crying. Then I turned back to the only home I kne *Where did I belong? Where were my people? Who was I?*

3

Ancestors

MAUD BUTLER FALKNER, MATRIARCH OF THE FALKNER FAMILY and my beloved grandmother, was one o
those people I thought were just born old. She was sixty-four when I came alon
Recently the *Oxford Eagle* ran a picture of her taken by an unidentified photographer in th
mid-1890s. There she sits in all her lace and ruffles, puffed sleeves falling below her elbow
a wide sash at her corseted waist, upswept hair, a small, delicate, lovely, dark-eyed figu
with a childlike countenance, slightly sad, innocent and shy, and very, very young.

This is not the woman I thought I knew. Growing up I became aware of her private natur
of the distance she kept between herself and the rest of the world—and her family—but I ha
no idea of the extent to which she had isolated herself. For instance, we never celebrated h
birthday because no one knew the date. Though I had always understood that I was name
for my father, I did not know until I was a grown woman, long after Maud's death, that m
father had been named for his maternal grandmother, Lelia Dean Swift Butler.

The day that Maud married Murry Falkner in the fall of 1896 in Oxford, Mississippi, sh
gave up being a Butler and became a Falkner. It was as if she wished to eradicate everythin
pertaining to the Butlers, or so I've been told. Yet there are a few family members an
Faulkner biographers who credit the Butlers for the genius of William Faulkner.

I did not know that Maud's mother and brother were buried in St. Peter's Cemetery with
a stone's throw of all the old Falkners (and now of Maud herself). I was not aware that sh
had a brother or that they grew up in Oxford. The house where she spent her childhood st
stands on what is now Jefferson Avenue. A Victorian cottage with a touch of gingerbrea
surrounding the porch, of light brown clapboard construction with heavy oak double doo
and a backyard large enough to hold her father's pigs, cow, and mule, it is situated a fe
blocks northeast of the square within shouting distance of the L. Q. C. Lamar house. Th
Butler and Lamar children were playmates. I like to think of her as a happy little girl sittin
in the front porch swing, waiting for her father to come home for supper.

Maud's family arrived in Oxford long before the Falkners. According to Joel Williamson
William Faulkner and Southern History, Charles G. Butler and his wife, Burlina, Maud
grandparents, were living in Oxford in the early 1830s while the Falkners were still in Riple
Mississippi. They were among the earliest settlers in Lafayette County. Charles G., a
influential Baptist and prosperous property owner, was the first county sheriff and surveyo
He laid out the grid for the new city of Oxford. He and Burlina owned twenty-five acres o
land, including lots on the courthouse square where, in 1840, they built a hotel named th
Oxford Inn that "became the centerpiece of the Butler family's prosperity."

I had no idea, growing up, that my Butler great-great-grandparents owned more property
Oxford than the Falkners. Their real estate holdings approached $12,000, "placing the
comfortably among the well-to-do people in the county." There were six children in th
family. The youngest son, Charles Edward, was to be Maud's father. They called hi
"Charlie." I never heard his name mentioned.

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