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BARBARIAN DAYS

A Surfing Life

WILLIAM FINNEGAN



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however, the story, the experiences, and the words
are the author's alone.

ONE

OFF DIAMOND HEAD

Honolulu, 1966–67

I had never thought of myself as a sheltered child. Still, Kaimuki Intermediate School was a shock. We had just moved to Honolulu, I was in the eighth grade, and most of my new schoolmates were "drug addicts, glue sniffers, and hoods"—or so I wrote to a friend back in Los Angeles. That wasn't true. What was true was that haoles (white people; I was one of them) were a tiny and unpopular minority at Kaimuki. The "natives," as I called them, seemed to dislike us particularly. This was unnerving because many of the Hawaiians were, for junior-high kids, alarmingly large, and the word was that they liked to fight. Orientals—again, my terminology—were the school's biggest ethnic group. In those first weeks I didn't distinguish between Japanese and Chinese and Korean kids—they were all Orientals to me. Nor did I note the existence of other important tribes, such as the Filipinos, the Samoans, or the Portuguese (not considered haole), let alone all the kids of mixed ethnic background. I probably even thought the big guy in wood shop who immediately took a sadistic interest in me was Hawaiian.

He wore shiny black shoes with long sharp toes, tight pants, and bright flowered shirts. His kinky hair was cut in a pompadour, and he looked

like he had been shaving since birth. He rarely spoke, and then only in a pidgin unintelligible to me. He was some kind of junior mobster, clearly years behind his original class, just biding his time until he could drop out. His name was Freitas—I never heard a first name—but he didn't seem to be related to the Freitas clan, a vast family with a number of rambunctious boys at Kaimuki Intermediate. The stiletto-toed Freitas studied me frankly for a few days, making me increasingly nervous, and then began to conduct little assaults on my self-possession, softly bumping my elbow, for example, while I concentrated over a saw cut on my half-built shoe-shine box.

I was too scared to say anything, and he never said a word to me. That seemed to be part of the fun. Then he settled on a crude but ingenious amusement to pass those periods when we had to sit in chairs in the classroom part of the shop. He would sit behind me and, whenever the teacher had his back turned, would hit me on the head with a two-by-four. *Bonk . . . bonk . . . bonk*, a nice steady rhythm, always with enough of a pause between blows to allow me brief hope that there might not be another. I couldn't understand why the teacher didn't hear all these unauthorized, resonating clonks. They were loud enough to attract the attention of our classmates, who seemed to find Freitas's little ritual fascinating. Inside my head the blows were, of course, bone-rattling explosions. Freitas used a fairly long board—five or six feet—and he never hit too hard, which allowed him to pound away to his heart's content without leaving marks, and to do it from a certain rarefied, even meditative distance, which added, I imagine, to the fascination of the performance.

I wonder if, had some other kid been targeted, I would have been as passive as my classmates were. Probably so. The teacher was off in his own world, worried only about his table saws. I did nothing in my own defense. While I eventually understood that Freitas wasn't Hawaiian, I must have figured I just had to take the abuse. I was, after all, skinny and haole and had no friends.

My parents had sent me to Kaimuki Intermediate, I later decided,

under a misconception. This was 1966, and the California public school system, particularly in the middle-class suburbs where we had lived, was among the nation's best. The families we knew never considered private schools for their kids. Hawaii's public schools were another matter—impoverished, mired in colonial, plantation, and mission traditions, miles below the American average academically.

You would not have known that, though, from the elementary school my younger siblings attended. (Kevin was nine, Colleen seven. Michael was three and, in that pre-preschool era, still exempt from formal education.) We had rented a house on the edge of a wealthy neighborhood called Kahala, and Kahala Elementary was a well-funded little haven of progressive education. Except for the fact that the children were allowed to go to school barefoot—an astonishing piece of tropical permissiveness, we thought—Kahala Elementary could have been in a genteel precinct of Santa Monica. Tellingly, however, Kahala had no junior high. That was because every family in the area that could possibly manage it sent its kids to the private secondary schools that have for generations educated Honolulu's (and much of the rest of Hawaii's) middle class, along with its rich folk.

Ignorant of all this, my parents sent me to the nearest junior high, up in working-class Kaimuki, on the back side of Diamond Head crater, where they assumed I was getting on with the business of the eighth grade, but where in fact I was occupied almost entirely by the rigors of bullies, loneliness, fights, and finding my way, after a lifetime of unconscious whiteness in the segregated suburbs of California, in a racialized world. Even my classes felt racially constructed. For academic subjects, at least, students were assigned, on the basis of test scores, to a group that moved together from teacher to teacher. I was put in a high-end group, where nearly all my classmates were Japanese girls. There were no Hawaiians, no Samoans, no Filipinos, and the classes themselves, which were prim and undemanding, bored me in a way that school never had before. Matters weren't helped by the fact that, to my classmates, I seemed not to exist

socially. And so I passed the class hours slouched in back rows, keeping an eye on the trees outside for signs of wind direction and strength, drawing page after page of surfboards and waves.

I HAD BEEN SURFING for three years by the time my father got the job that took us to Hawaii. He had been working, mostly as an assistant director, in series television—*Dr. Kildare*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* Now he was the production manager on a new series, a half-hour musical variety show based on a local radio program, *Hawaii Calls*. The idea was to shoot Don Ho singing in a glass-bottomed boat, a calypso band by a waterfall, hula girls dancing while a volcano spewed, and call it a show. "It won't be the Hawaiian Amateur Hour," my father said. "But close."

"If it's really bad, we'll pretend we don't know you," my mother said. "Bill *who*?"

The budget for moving us all to Honolulu was tight, judging from the tiny cottage we rented (Kevin and I took turns sleeping on the couch) and the rusted-out old Ford we bought to get around. But the cottage was near the beach—just up a driveway lined with other cottages, on a street called Kulamanu—and the weather, which was warm even in January, when we arrived, felt like wanton luxury.

I was beside myself with excitement just to be in Hawaii. All surfers, all readers of surf magazines—and I had memorized nearly every line, every photo caption, in every surf magazine I owned—spent the bulk of their fantasy lives, like it or not, in Hawaii. And now I was there, walking on actual Hawaiian sand (coarse, strange-smelling), tasting Hawaiian seawater (warm, strange-smelling), and paddling toward Hawaiian waves (small, dark-faced, windblown).

Nothing was what I'd expected. In the mags, Hawaiian waves were always big and, in the color shots, ranged from deep, mid-ocean blue to a pale, impossible turquoise. The wind was always offshore (blowing from

land to sea, ideal for surfing), and the breaks themselves were the Olympian playgrounds of the gods: Sunset Beach, the Banzai Pipeline, Makaha, Ala Moana, Waimea Bay.

All of that seemed worlds away from the sea in front of our house. Even Waikiki, known for its beginner breaks and tourist crowds, was over on the far side of Diamond Head—the glamorous, iconic western side—along with every other part of Honolulu anybody had heard of. We were on the mountain's southeast side, down in a little saddle of sloping, shady beachfront west of Black Point. The beach was just a patch of damp sand, narrow and empty.

On the afternoon of our arrival, during my first, frantic survey of the local waters, I found the surf setup confusing. Waves broke here and there along the outer edge of a mossy, exposed reef. I was worried by all the coral. It was infamously sharp. Then I spotted, well off to the west, and rather far out at sea, a familiar minuet of stick figures, rising and falling, backlit by the afternoon sun. Surfers! I ran back up the lane. Everyone at the house was busy unpacking and fighting over beds. I threw on a pair of trunks, grabbed my board, and left without a word.

I paddled west along a shallow lagoon, staying close to the shore, for half a mile. The beach houses ended, and the steep, brushy base of Diamond Head itself took their place across the sand. Then the reef on my left fell away, revealing a wide channel—deeper water, where no waves broke—and beyond the channel ten or twelve surfers riding a scatter of dark, chest-high peaks in a moderate onshore wind. I paddled slowly toward the lineup—the wave-catching zone—taking a roundabout route, studying every ride. The surfers were good. They all had smooth, ungimmicky styles. Nobody fell off. And nobody, blessedly, seemed to notice me.

I circled around, then edged into an unpopulated stretch of the lineup. There were plenty of waves. The takeoffs were crumbling but easy. Letting muscle memory take over, I caught and rode a couple of small, mushy rights. The waves were different—but not too different—from the waves I

knew in California. They were shifty but not intimidating. I could see coral on the bottom, but except for a couple of heads poking up far inside (near shore), nothing too shallow.

There was a lot of talk and laughter among the other surfers. Eavesdropping, I couldn't understand a word. They were probably speaking pidgin. I had read about pidgin in James Michener's *Hawaii* but, with my debut at Kaimuki Intermediate still a day away, hadn't actually heard any yet. Or maybe it was some foreign language. I was the only haole (another word from Michener) in the water. At one point, an older guy paddling past me gestured seaward and said, "Outside." It was the only word spoken to me that day. And he was right: an outside set was approaching, the biggest of the afternoon, and I was grateful to have been warned.

As the sun dropped, the crowd thinned. I tried to see where people went. Most seemed to take a steep path up the mountainside to Diamond Head Road, their pale boards, carried on their heads, moving steadily, skeg-first, through the switchbacks. I caught a final wave, rode it into the shallows, and began the long paddle home through the lagoon. Lights were on in the houses now. The air was cooler, the shadows blue-black under the coconut palms along the shore. I was aglow with my good fortune. I just wished I had someone to tell: *I'm in Hawaii, surfing in Hawaii.* Then it occurred to me that I didn't even know the name of the place I'd surfed.

It was called Cliffs. It was a patchwork arc of reefs that ran south and west for half a mile from the channel where I first paddled out. To learn any new spot in surfing, you first bring to bear your knowledge of other breaks—all the other waves you've learned to read closely. But at that stage my complete archives consisted of ten or fifteen California spots, and only one I really knew well: a cobblestone point in Ventura. And none of this experience prepared me especially well for Cliffs, which, after that initial session, I tried to surf twice a day.



Path to the water, Kulamanu house, 1966

It was a remarkably consistent spot, in the sense that there were nearly always waves to ride, even in what I came to understand was the off-season for Oahu's South Shore. The reefs off Diamond Head are at the southern extremity of the island, and thus pick up every scrap of passing swell. But they also catch a lot of wind, including local williwaws off the slopes of the crater, and the wind, along with the vast jigsaw expanse of the reef and the swells arriving from many different points of the compass, combined to produce constantly changing conditions that, in a paradox I didn't appreciate at the time, amounted to a rowdy, hourly refutation of the idea of consistency. Cliffs possessed a moody complexity beyond anything I had known.

Mornings were particularly confounding. To squeeze in a surf before school, I had to be out there by daybreak. In my narrow experience the sea was supposed to be glassy at dawn. In coastal California, that is, early mornings are usually windless. Not so, apparently, in the tropics. Certainly not at Cliffs. At sunrise the trade winds often blew hard. Palm

fronds thrashed overhead as I tripped down the lane, waxed board on my head, and from the seafront I could see whitecaps outside, beyond the reef, spilling east to west on a royal-blue ocean. The trades were said to be northeasterlies, which was not a bad direction, in theory, for a south-facing coast, but somehow they were always sideshore at Cliffs, and strong enough to ruin most spots from that angle.

And yet the place had a kind of growling durability that left it ridable, at least for my purposes, even in those battered conditions. Almost no one else surfed it in the early morning, which made it a good time to explore the main takeoff area. I began to learn the tricky, fast, shallow sections, and the soft spots where a quick cutback was needed to keep a ride going. Even on a waist-high, blown-out day, it was possible to milk certain waves for long, improvised, thoroughly satisfying rides. The reef had a thousand quirks, which changed quickly with the tide. And when the inshore channel began to turn a milky turquoise—a color not unlike some of the Hawaiian fantasy waves in the mags—it meant, I came to know, that the sun had risen to the point where I should head in for breakfast. If the tide was extra low, leaving the lagoon too shallow to paddle, I learned to allow more time for trudging home on the soft, coarse sand, struggling to keep my board's nose pointed into the wind.

Afternoons were a different story. The wind was usually lighter, the sea less seasick, and there were other people surfing. Cliffs had a crew of regulars. After a few sessions, I could recognize some of them. At the mainland spots I knew, there was usually a limited supply of waves, a lot of jockeying for position, and a strictly observed pecking order. A youngster, particularly one lacking allies, such as an older brother, needed to be careful not to cross, even inadvertently, any local big dogs. But at Cliffs there was so much room to spread out, so many empty peaks breaking off to the west of the main takeoff—or, if you kept an eye out, perhaps on an inside shelf that had quietly started to work—that I felt free to pursue my explorations of the margins. Nobody bothered me. Nobody vibed me. It was the opposite of my life at school.

. . .

My orientation program at school included a series of fistfights, some of them formally scheduled. There was a cemetery next to the campus, with a well-hidden patch of grass down in one corner where kids went to settle their differences. I found myself facing off there with a number of boys named Freitas—none of them, again, apparently related to my hairy tormentor from wood shop. My first opponent was so small and young that I doubted he was even at our school. The Freitas clan's method for training its members in battle, it seemed, was to find some fool without allies or the brains to avoid a challenge, then send their youngest fighter with any chance at all into the ring. If he lost, the next biggest Freitas would be sent in. This went on until the nonkinsman was defeated. It was all quite dispassionate, the bouts arranged and refereed by older Freitases, and more or less fairly conducted.

My first match was sparsely attended—really of no interest to anyone—but I was still scared sick, having no seconds in my corner and no idea what the rules were. My opponent turned out to be shockingly strong for his size, and ferocious, but his arms were too short to land punches, and I eventually subdued him without much damage to either of us. His cousin, who stepped up immediately, was more my size, and our sparring was more consequential. I held my own, but we both had shiners before a senior Freitas stepped in, declaring a draw. There would be a rematch, he said, and if I won that, somebody named Tino would come and kick my ass, no questions asked. Team Freitas departed. I remember watching them jog, laughing and loose, a happy family militia, up the long slope of the graveyard. They were evidently late for another appointment. My face hurt, my knuckles hurt, but I was giddy with relief. Then I noticed a couple of haole guys my age standing in the bushes at the edge of the clearing, looking squirrelly. I half recognized them from school, but they left without saying a word.

I won the rematch, I think. Then Tino kicked my ass, no questions asked.

There were more fights, including a multiday brawl with a Chinese kid in my agriculture class who refused to give up even when I had his face shoved deep in the red mud of the lettuce patch. This bitter tussle went on for a week. It resumed each afternoon, and never produced a winner. The other boys in the class, enjoying the show, made sure that the teacher, if he ever came round, didn't catch us at it.

I don't know what my parents thought. Cuts and bruises, even black eyes, could be explained. Football, surfing, something. My hunch, which seems right in retrospect, was that they couldn't help, so I told them nothing.

A racist gang came to my rescue. They called themselves the In Crowd. They were haoles and, their laughable gang name notwithstanding, they were impressively bad. Their leader was a jolly, dissolute, hoarse-voiced, broken-toothed kid named Mike. He was not physically imposing, but he shambled around school with a rowdy fearlessness that seemed to give everyone but the largest Samoans pause. Mike's true home, one came to understand, was a juvenile detention center somewhere—this schoolgoing was just a furlough, which he intended to make the most of. He had a younger sister, Edie, who was blond and skinny and wild, and their house in Kaimuki was the In Crowd's clubhouse. At school they gathered under a tall monkeypod tree on a red-dirt hill behind the unpainted bungalow where I took typing. My induction was informal. Mike and his buddies simply let me know I was welcome to join them under the monkeypod. And it was from the In Crowd kids, who actually seemed to include more girls than boys, that I began to learn, first, the broad outlines, and then the minutiae, of the local racial setup. Our main enemies, I came to know, were the "mokes"—which seemed to mean anyone dark and tough.

"You been beefin' with mokes already," Mike told me.

That was true, I realized.

But my fighting career soon tailed off. People seemed to know I was now part of the haole gang, and elected to pick on other kids. Even Freitas

in wood shop started easing up on me. But had he really put away his two-by-four? It was hard to imagine he would be worried by the In Crowd.

Discreetly, I studied the surfing of some of the regulars at Cliffs—the ones who seemed to read the wave best, who found the speed pockets and wheeled their boards so neatly through their turns. My first impression was confirmed: I had never seen such smoothness. Hand movements were strikingly in synch with feet. Knees were more deeply bent than in the surfing I was used to, hips looser. There wasn't much nose-riding, which was the subspecialty rage at the time on the mainland and required scurrying, when the opportunity arose, to the front of one's board—hanging five, hanging ten, defying the obvious physics of flotation and glide. I didn't know it then, but what I was looking at was classic Island style. I just took my mental notes from the channel, and began, without thinking about it, to walk the nose less.

There were a few young guys, including one wiry, straight-backed kid who looked to be about my age. He stayed away from the main peak, riding peripheral waves. But I craned to see what he did. Even on the funky little waves he chose, I could see that he was shockingly quick and poised. He was the best surfer my age I had ever seen. He rode an unusually short, light, sharp-nosed board—a bone-white clear-finish Wardy. He caught me watching him, and he seemed as embarrassed as I was. He paddled furiously past me, looking affronted. I tried to stay out of his way after that. But the next day he cocked his chin in greeting. I hoped my happiness didn't show. Then, a few days later, he spoke.

"Mo' bettah that side," he said, throwing his eyes to the west as we pushed through a small set. It was an invitation to join him at one of his obscure, uncrowded peaks. I didn't need to be asked twice.

His name was Roddy Kaulukukui. He was thirteen, same as me. "He's so tan he looks Negro," I wrote to my friend. Roddy and I traded waves

warily, and then less warily. I could catch waves as well as he could, which was important, and I was learning the spot, which became something of a shared enterprise. As the two youngest guys at Cliffs, we were both, at least half-consciously, in the market for an age-mate. But Roddy didn't come out there alone. He had two brothers and a sort of honorary third brother—a Japanese guy named Ford Takara. Roddy's older brother, Glenn, was a lineup mainstay. Glenn and Ford were out every day. They were only a year older than us, but both of them could compete with anybody in the main peak. Glenn in particular was a superb surfer, with a style that was already flowing and beautiful. Their father, Glenn Sr., also surfed, as did their little brother, John, though he was too young for Cliffs.

Roddy began to fill me in on who some of the other guys were. The fat guy who appeared on bigger days, taking off far outside and ripping so hard that the rest of us stopped surfing to watch, was Ben Aipa, he said. (Years later, Aipa photos and stories began to fill the mags.) The Chinese guy who showed up on the biggest day I had seen yet at Cliffs—a solid, out-of-season south swell on a windless, overcast afternoon—was Leslie Wong. He had a silky style, and he only deigned to surf Cliffs when it was exceptionally good. Leslie Wong caught and pulled into the wave of the day, his back slightly arched, his arms relaxed, making the extremely difficult—no, come on, the *ecstatic*—look easy. When I grew up, I wanted to be Leslie Wong. Among the Cliffs regulars, I slowly got to know who was likely to waste a wave—fail to catch it, or fall off—and then how to quietly snag the wave myself without showing disrespect. Even in a mild-mannered crowd, it was important not to show up anyone.

Day in, day out, Glenn Kaulukukui was my favorite surfer. From the moment he caught a wave, gliding catlike to his feet, I couldn't take my eyes off the lines he drew, the speed he somehow found, the improvisations he came up with. He had a huge head, which seemed always to be slightly thrown back, and long hair, sun-bleached red, also thrown lushly back. He

had thick lips, African-looking, black shoulders, and he moved with unusual elegance. But there was something else—call it wit, or irony—that accompanied his physical confidence and beauty, something bittersweet that allowed him, in all but the most demanding situations, to seem like he was both performing intently and, at the same time, laughing quietly at himself.

He also laughed at me, though not unkindly. When I overpowered a kickout, trying to put a flourish on the end of a ride, slicing awkwardly over the shoulder and into parallel with his board in the channel, Glenn said, "Geev 'um, Bill. Geev 'um da lights." Even I knew that this was a pidgin cliché—an overused exhortation. It was also a dense little piece of satire. He was mocking me and encouraging me, both. We paddled out together. When we were nearly outside, we watched Ford catch a set wave from a deep position and pick a clever line to thread through a pair of difficult sections. "Yeah, Fawd," Glenn murmured appreciatively. "Spock *dat*." Then he began to outsprint me toward the lineup.

One afternoon Roddy asked where I lived. I pointed east, toward the shady cove inside Black Point. He told Glenn and Ford, then came back, looking abashed, with a request. Could they leave their boards at my house? I was happy for the company on the long paddle home. Our cottage had a tiny yard, with a stand of bamboo, thick and tall, hiding it from the street. We stashed our boards in the bamboo and washed off in the dark with a garden hose. Then the three of them left, wearing nothing but trunks, dripping wet, clearly stoked to be unburdened by boards, for distant Kaimuki.

The In Crowd's racism was situationist, not doctrinaire. It seemed to have no historical pretensions—unlike, say, the skinheads who came along later claiming descent from Nazism and the Klan. Hawaii had seen plenty of white supremacism, particularly among its elites, but the In Crowd

knew nothing of elites. Most of the kids were hardscrabble, living in straitened circumstances, though some had been kicked out of private schools and were simply in disgrace. Among Kaimuki Intermediate's smattering of haole students, most were actually shunned by the In Crowd as insufficiently cool. These unaffiliated haoles seemed to be mainly military kids. They all looked disoriented, scared. The two guys who had watched me fight the Freitases without offering help were among them. And so was a tremendously tall, silent, friendless boy whom people called Lurch.

There were other haoles, I later realized, who were too smart to get involved in gang nonsense. These kids, most of them surfers from the Waikiki side of Diamond Head, knew how to keep low profiles when in the minority. They also knew losers when they saw them. And they had, in a pinch, their own mutual-assistance structures to draw on. But I was too clueless those first months to register their existence.

Adolescent cool was, as ever, mostly a mystery, but physical strength (read: early puberty), self-confidence (special bonus points for defying adults), and taste in music and clothes all counted. I couldn't see how I qualified in any category. I wasn't big—indeed, puberty seemed, to my shame, to be eluding me. I wasn't hip to fashion or music. I certainly wasn't bad—I had never even been to jail. But I admired the spunk of the In Crowd kids, and I wasn't inclined to question anybody who had my back.

I thought the In Crowd's main activity would be gang fighting, and there was certainly continual talk of impending warfare with various rival "moke" groups. But then Mike always seemed to be leading a peace delegation to some last-minute powwow, and bloodshed would be avoided through painstaking, face-saving diplomacy. Truces would be formalized by solemn underage drinking. Most of the group's energy actually went into gossip, parties, petty theft and vandalism, and being obnoxious on the city bus after school. There were a number of pretty girls in the In Crowd, and I was serially smitten with each of them. Nobody in the gang surfed.

. . .

Roddy and Glenn Kaulukukui and Ford Takara all went to Kaimuki Intermediate, it turned out. But I didn't hang with them there. That was a feat, since the four of us spent nearly every afternoon and weekend together in the water, and Roddy was soon established as my new best friend. The Kaulukukuis lived at Fort Ruger, on the north slope of Diamond Head crater, near the cemetery that abutted our school. Glenn Sr. was in the Army, and their apartment was in an old military barracks tucked in a little kiawe grove below Diamond Head Road. Roddy and Glenn had lived on the island of Hawaii, which everybody called the Big Island. They had family there. Now they had a stepmother, and she and Roddy didn't get along. She was Korean. Did I know what Koreans were like? Roddy was ready to fill me in.

Confined to quarters after a fight with his stepmother, he poured out his misery in bitter whispers in the stifling room he shared with Glenn and John.

I thought I knew something about misery: I was missing waves that afternoon in a show of solidarity. There wasn't even a surf mag to leaf through while grimacing sympathetically. "Why he have to marry *her*?" Roddy keened.

Glenn Sr. occasionally came surfing with us. He was a formidable character, heavily muscled, severe. He ordered his sons around, not bothering with niceties. He seemed to loosen up in the water, though. Sometimes he even laughed. He rode a huge board in a simple, old-fashioned style, drawing long lines, perfectly balanced, across the long walls at Cliffs. In his day, his sons told me proudly, he had surfed Waimea Bay.

Waimea was on the North Shore. It was considered the heaviest big-wave spot in the world. I knew it only as a mythical place—a stage set, really, for the heroics of a few surf celebrities, hyped endlessly in the mags. Roddy and Glenn didn't talk much about it, but to them Waimea was obviously a real place, and exceedingly serious business. You surfed it

when you were ready. Most surfers, of course, would never be ready. But for Hawaiian kids like them, Waimea, and the other great North Shore breaks as well, lay ahead, each a question, a type of final exam.

I had always assumed that only famous surfers rode Waimea. But now I saw that local fathers rode it too, and in time, perhaps, their sons would as well. These people never appeared in mainland magazines. And there were many families like the Kaulukukuis in Hawaii—multigenerational surfing families, *ohanas* rich in talent and tradition, known only to one another.

Glenn Sr. reminded me, from the first time I saw him, of Liloa, the old monarch in a book I loved, *Umi: The Hawaiian Boy Who Became a King*. It was a children's book, first given to my father, according to a faded flyleaf inscription, by two aunts who had bought it in Honolulu in 1939. The author, Robert Lee Eskridge, had also done the illustrations, which I thought magnificent. They were simple but fierce, like lushly colored woodcuts. They showed Umi and his younger brothers and their adventures in old Hawaii: sailing down mountainsides on morning-glory vines ("From vine to vine the boys slid with lightning speed"), diving into pools formed by lava tubes, crossing the sea in war canoes ("Slaves shall accompany Umi to his father's palace in Waipio"). Some of the illustrations showed grown men, guards and warriors and courtiers, whose faces scared me—their stylized cruelty, in a pitiless world of all-powerful chiefs and quaking commoners. At least the features of Liloa, the king and Umi's secret father, were softened at times by wisdom and paternal pride.

Roddy believed in Pele. She was the Hawaiian goddess of fire. She lived, people said, on the Big Island, where she caused the volcanoes to erupt when she was displeased. She was famously jealous and violent, and Hawaiians tried to propitiate her with offerings of pork, fish, liquor. She was so famous that even tourists knew about her, but Roddy made it clear, when he professed his belief to me, that he wasn't talking about the kitsch character. He meant a whole religious world, something from before the

haoles came—a Hawaiian world with elaborate rules and taboos and secret, hard-won understandings about the land, the ocean, birds, fish, animals, and the gods. I took him seriously. I already knew, in rough outline, what had happened to the Hawaiians—how American missionaries and other haoles had subjugated them, stolen their lands, killed them en masse with diseases, and converted the survivors to Christianity. I felt no responsibility for this cruel dispossession, no liberal guilt, but I knew enough to keep my junior atheist's mouth shut.

We started surfing new spots together. Roddy wasn't afraid of coral the way I was, and he showed me spots that broke among the reefs between my house and Cliffs. Most were only ridable at high tide, but some were little keyholes, slots between dry reef—sweet waves hiding in plain sight, essentially windproof. These breaks, Roddy said, were customarily named after the families who lived, or had once lived, in front of them—Patterson's, Mahoney's. There was also a big-wave spot, known as the Bomb, that broke outside Patterson's. Glenn and Ford had ridden it once or twice. Roddy had not. I had seen waves feathering (their crests throwing spray as the swells steepened) out there on big days at low tide, but had never seen it big enough to break. Roddy talked about the Bomb in a hushed, strained voice. He was obviously working up to it.

"This summer," he said. "First big day."

In the meantime, we had Kaikoos. It was a deepwater break off Black Point, visible from the bottom of our lane. It was hard to line up, and always bigger than it looked, and I found it scary. Roddy led me out there the first time, paddling through a deep, cross-chopped channel that had been cut originally, he told me, by Doris Duke, the tobacco heiress, to serve a private yacht harbor that was still tucked into the cliff under her mansion. He pointed toward the shore, but I was too worried about the waves ahead to check out Doris Duke's place.

Thick, dark blue peaks seemed to jump up out of deep ocean, some of them frighteningly big. The lefts were short and easy, really just big drops, but Roddy said the rights were better, and he paddled farther east, deeper

into the break. His temerity seemed to me insane. The rights looked closed out (unmakable), and terribly powerful, and even if you made one the ride would carry you straight into the big, hungry-looking rocks of outer Black Point. If you lost your board in there, you would never see it again. And where could you even swim in? I darted around, dodging peaks, way outside, half-hysterical, trying to keep an eye on Roddy. He seemed to be catching waves, though it was hard to tell. Finally, he paddled back to me, looking exhilarated, smirking at my agitation. He took pity on me, though, and said nothing.

I later learned to like—not love—the rights at Kaikoos. The spot was often empty, but there were a few guys who knew how to ride it, and, watching them on good days from the Black Point rocks, I began to see the shape of the reef and how to avoid, with a little luck, catastrophe. Still, it was a gnarly spot by my standards, and when I bragged in letters to my friend in Los Angeles about riding this scary, deepwater peak, I was not above spinning tall tales about being carried, with Roddy, by huge currents halfway to Koko Head, which was miles away to the east. My detailed description of scooting through a big tube—the cavern formed by a hard-breaking wave—on a Kaikoos right contained, on the other hand, a whiff of authenticity. I still half remember that wave.

But surfing always had this horizon, this fear line, that made it different from other things, certainly from other sports I knew. You could do it with friends, but when the waves got big, or you got into trouble, there never seemed to be anyone around.

Everything out there was disturbingly interlaced with everything else. Waves were the playing field. They were the goal. They were the object of your deepest desire and adoration. At the same time, they were your adversary, your nemesis, even your mortal enemy. The surf was your refuge, your happy hiding place, but it was also a hostile wilderness—a dynamic, indifferent world. At thirteen, I had mostly stopped believing in God, but

that was a new development, and it had left a hole in my world, a feeling that I'd been abandoned. The ocean was like an uncaring God, endlessly dangerous, power beyond measure.

And yet you were expected, even as a kid, to take its measure every day. You were required—this was essential, a matter of survival—to know your limits, both physical and emotional. But how could you know your limits unless you tested them? And if you failed the test? You were also required to stay calm if things went wrong. Panic was the first step, everybody said, to drowning. As a kid, too, your abilities were assumed to be growing. What was unthinkable one year became thinkable, possibly, the next. My letters from Honolulu in 1966, kindly returned to me recently, are less distinguished by swaggering bullshit than by frank discussions of fear. "Don't think I've suddenly gotten brave. I haven't." But the frontiers of the thinkable were quietly, fitfully edging back for me.

That was clear on the first big day I saw at Cliffs. A long-period swell had arrived overnight. The sets (larger waves, which usually come in groups) were well overhead, glassy and gray, with long walls and powerful sections. I was so excited to see the excellence that my backyard spot could produce that I forgot my usual shyness and began to ride with the crowd at the main peak. I was overmatched there, and scared, and got mauled by the biggest sets. I wasn't strong enough to hold on to my board when caught inside by six-foot waves, even though I "turned turtle"—rolled the board over, pulled the nose down from underwater, wrapped my legs around it, and got a death grip on the rails. The whitewater tore the board from my hands, then thrashed me, holding me down for long, thorough beatings. I spent much of the afternoon swimming. Still, I stayed out till dusk. I even caught and made a few meaty waves. And I saw surfing that day—by Leslie Wong, among others—that made my chest hurt: long moments of grace under pressure that felt etched deep in my being: what I wanted, somehow, more than anything else. That night, while my family slept, I lay awake on the bamboo-framed couch, heart pounding with residual adrenaline, listening restlessly to the rain.

. . .

Our life in the little cottage on Kulamanu felt makeshift, barely American. There were geckos on the walls, cane rats under the floor, huge water bugs in the bathroom. There was strange fruit—mangoes, papayas, lychees, star fruit—that my mother learned to judge for ripeness, then proudly peel and slice. I don't remember if we even had a TV. The sitcoms that had been a kind of prime-time hearth back on the mainland—*My Three Sons*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, even my favorite, *Get Smart*—now seemed like half-remembered black-and-white dreams from a world left behind. We had a landlady, Mrs. Wadsworth, who watched us suspiciously. Still, I found renting grand. Mrs. Wadsworth had a gardener, which afforded me a life of leisure. My yard chores in California had seemed to take up half my waking hours.

Another thing about our exotic new life: we all squabbled less, maybe because we each remained slightly awestruck by our new surroundings. And the fights we did have never escalated into the full-dress screaming and belting and spanking that we had regularly endured in L.A. When my mother yelled, "Wait till your father gets home," she didn't seem serious now. It was as if she were slyly quoting an earlier self, or some TV mom, and even the little ones were in on the joke.

My father worked at least six days a week. When we had him with us, on the odd Sunday, we would ramble around the island—cross the sheer, dripping, wind-blasted Pali (the pass over the mountains that stood like a green wall above Honolulu), or picnic out at Hanauma Bay, beyond Koko Head, where the snorkeling on the reef was wondrous. He made it home most evenings, and on special occasions we went to a restaurant called the Jolly Roger, part of a pirate-themed chain, with burgers named after Robert Louis Stevenson characters, in a shopping mall in Kahala. One night we went to see Disney's *Snow White* at a drive-in on Waialae Avenue, all six of us in a pile in our old Ford Fairlane. I know this because I wrote to my friend in L.A. about it. I described the film as "psychedelic."

My father's Hawaii was a big, truly interesting place. He was regularly in the outer islands, herding film crews and talent into rain forests, remote villages, tricky shoots on unsteady canoes. He even shot a Pele number on a Big Island lava field. Although he didn't know it, he was building the foundation for an adjunct career as a Hawaii specialist—he spent most of the next decade making feature films and TV shows in the islands. His job involved constant battling with local labor unions, particularly the teamsters and the longshoremen, who controlled freight transportation. There was abundant private irony in these battles, since my father was a strong union man, from a union family (railroaders) in Michigan. Indeed, family legend had it that in New York City, where I was born, he spent the night of my birth in a jail cell, having been plucked off a picket line outside the CBS studios, where he worked as a newswriter, and where he and his friends were trying to organize. Though he never talked about it, our move to California, with me still an infant, had been driven by employment difficulties caused by his labor militancy. It was the heyday of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The Hawaiian unions were, around that same time, performing postwar miracles. Led by an outpost of the West Coast longshoremen, in league with local Japanese American leftists, they even organized plantation workers, transforming a feudal economy. This was in a territory where, before the war, the harassment and even murder of strikers and organizers by management goons and police generally went unpunished. By the mid-'60s, however, Hawaii's labor movement, like much of its mainland counterpart, had grown complacent, top-heavy, and corrupt, and my father, although he came to like personally some of the union bosses he fought daily, never seemed much edified by the struggle.

His work carried us into odd orbits. A hyperkinetic restaurateur named Chester Lau, for instance, had attached himself to *Hawaii Calls*, and for years my family turned up at far-flung luaus and pig roasts and civic events organized by Chester and usually held at one of his joints.

My dad gained enough sense of local working-class culture to know

that the streets of Honolulu (and perhaps the schools) might be a challenge for a haole kid. If nothing else, there was a notorious unofficial holiday called Kill a Haole Day. This holiday got plenty of discussion, including editorials (against) in the local papers, though I never managed to find out where precisely on the calendar it fell. "Any day the mokes want," said Mike, our In Crowd chief. I also never heard whether the holiday occasioned any actual homicides. The main targets, people said, of Kill a Haole Day were actually off-duty servicemen, who generally wandered in packs around Waikiki and the red-light district downtown. I think my father took comfort in seeing that my best friends were the local kids who kept their surfboards in our yard. They looked like they could handle themselves.

He had always worried about bullies. When confronted by bigger boys, or outnumbered, I should, he told me, "pick up a stick, a rock, whatever you can find." He got alarmingly emotional giving me this advice. Was he remembering ancient beatings and humiliations in Escanaba, his Michigan hometown? Or was it just so upsetting, the thought of his child, his Billy, alone and set upon by thugs? I had never taken the advice, in any case. There had been plenty of fighting, some of it involving sticks and rocks, in Woodland Hills, the California suburb where we lived, but rarely the stark encounter my dad envisioned. Once, it was true, a Mexican kid, a stranger, got me down under some pepper trees after school, pinning my arms, and squeezed lemon juice into my eyes. That might have been a good time to grab a stick. But I couldn't quite believe that was happening. Lemon juice? In my *eyes*? Put there by someone I didn't even know? My eyes burned for days. I never told my parents about the incident. That would have been a violation of the Code of Boys. Neither did I tell them (or anyone else) about Freitas and his terrible two-by-four.

My father as a scared child—that was a picture that would not come into focus. He was Dad, Big Bill Finnegan, strong as a grizzly. His biceps, a marvel to all of us, were like marbled oak burls. I would never have such arms. I had inherited my mother's string-bean build. My dad

seemed scared of no one. Indeed, he had a cantankerous streak that could be mortifying. He wasn't afraid to raise his voice in public. He sometimes asked the proprietors of shops and restaurants that posted signs asserting their right to refuse service to anyone what exactly *that* meant, and if he didn't like their answers angrily took his business elsewhere. This didn't happen in Hawaii, but it happened plenty of times on the mainland. I didn't know that such notices were often code for "whites only"—these were the waning days of legal racial segregation. I just quailed and stared desperately at the ground, dying of embarrassment as his voice began to rise.

My mother was Pat, née Quinn. Her willowy figure was misleading. With a mostly absent husband and no domestic help, she raised four kids without seeming to break a sweat. She had grown up in a Los Angeles that no longer exists—white Catholic working-class Roosevelt liberals—and her generation, reaching adulthood after the war, was broadly, blithely upwardly mobile. Beachgoing progressives, they hitched their stars, for the most part, to the entertainment industry—husbands working in it, wives managing the suburban brood. My mother had an easygoing, tennis-playing grace. She also knew how to make ends meet. When I was little, I thought carrot, apple, and raisin salad was required fare, seven nights a week. In fact, those were the cheapest healthy foods in California at the time. My mother's people were Irish-immigrant hill farmers in West Virginia and she, even more than my dad, was a child of the Depression. Her father, an alcoholic refrigerator repairman, had died young. She never mentioned him. Her mother, left to raise three girls alone, had gone back to school and become a nurse. When my grandmother first saw my father, who was an inch shorter than my mother, she reportedly sighed and said, "Well, all the tall ones got killed in the war."

My mother was endlessly game. She didn't like sailing but spent most weekends knocking around on the succession of little boats that my father,

as we got less broke, bought and doted on. She didn't like camping but went camping without complaint. She didn't even like Hawaii, although I didn't know that at the time. To her, the provincialism of Honolulu was suffocating. She had grown up in L.A., had lived in New York, and apparently found the Honolulu daily paper painful to read. She was terrifically social, and not at all snobbish, but she made few friends in Hawaii. My father had never really cared much about friends—if he wasn't working, he preferred to be with his family—but my mother missed the wide circle of other families we knew in L.A., most of them also in show business, as well as her close friends from childhood.

She hid all of that from us and threw herself into making the most of life in an insular, reactionary town. She loved the water, which was lucky (though not for her fair Irish skin). On the patch of damp sand at the bottom of our path, she would spread beach towels and lead the little ones into the lagoon with masks and nets. She got my sister, Colleen, into training for her First Communion at a church in Waikiki. She even, when possible, jumped on planes to the neighboring islands with my dad, usu-



Patricia Finnegan, Windward Side, Oahu, 1966

ally with Michael, who was three, on her hip, and some hasty babysitting arrangement in her wake. And in the outer islands she found, I think, a Hawaii more to her liking—not the Babbitty boosters and country-club racists of Honolulu. In snapshots from those jaunts, she looked like a stranger: not Mom but some pensive, stylish lady in a sleeveless turquoise shift, alone with her thoughts in the middle distance—a Joan Didion character, it seems now, walking barefoot, sandals in hand, past a shaggy wall of shorefront pines. Didion, I later learned, was her favorite writer.

I TREASURED THE BREAK from yard work. But, to my sorrow, I was coming into my own as a babysitter. My parents, ignorant of my budding career as a Kaimuki gangbanger, knew me only as Mr. Responsible. That had been my role at home since shortly after the others started arriving. There was a substantial age gap between me and my siblings—Kevin was more than four years younger, Michael ten—and I could be counted on to keep the little ones undrowned, unelectrocuted, fed, watered, rediapered. But formal babysitting duties, evenings and weekends, were a new thing, and a terrible imposition, I found, when there were waves to ride, city buses begging to be pelted with unripe mangoes, unchaperoned parties to attend in Kaimuki. I took my revenge on poor Kevin and Colleen by sourly reminiscing about the good old days before they were born. It was a golden age, really. Just Mom and Dad and me, doing what we pleased. Every night out at the Jolly Roger. Cheeseburgers, chocolate malts. No crying babies. Those were the days.

I tried to lose my job one blazing Saturday with Colleen. She was scheduled to receive First Communion the next day. Saturday was dress rehearsal for the big ceremony. Mom and Dad were away, probably at a Chester Lau function. Colleen was in head-to-toe white lace regalia. She was supposed to make her First Confession that day—although what, even generally, a seven-year-old girl would have to confess in the way of mortal sins is hard to imagine. The Saturday rehearsal was, in any case,

mandatory. The Roman Catholics in those days did not fool around. If you missed the rehearsal, you would not make your First Communion. Come back next year, little sinner, and God save your soul in the interim. Because I had been raised in the cold bosom of the church, I knew what tough nuts the nuns could be. Therefore, when Colleen and I contrived to miss the once-an-hour city bus to Waikiki on the day of her rehearsal, I knew exactly what the stakes were. And because I was still, deep down, little Mr. Responsible, I panicked. I put my tiny sister out in the middle of Diamond Head Road in her showstopping costume, flagged down the first Waikiki-bound vehicle, and got her to the church on time.

I WAS STARTING TO GET my bearings in Honolulu. From the lineup at Cliffs, you could see the whole south coast of Oahu, from the Waianae Mountains in the west, beyond Honolulu and Pearl Harbor, to Koko Head, which was a sort of second-rank Diamond Head—another parched-looking crater at the water's edge—in the east. The city filled a plain between the coast and the Koʻolau Range, whose steep green peaks were usually buried in clouds and mist under brilliant, billowing thunderheads. The mountains sent rain clouds out to water the city, though most burned up before they reached the coast. Rainbows littered the sky. Beyond the mountains was the Windward Side, and somewhere out that way was the fabled North Shore.

Directions in Honolulu were always given, though, in terms of local landmarks, not the compass, so you went mauka (toward the mountains) or makai (toward the sea) or ewa (toward Ewa Beach, which was out past the airport and Pearl Harbor) or diamondhead. (Among those of us living on the far side of Diamond Head, people just said kokohead—same difference.) These picturesque directions weren't slang or affectations—you saw them on official maps and street signs. And they were also, for me—and my sense of this was unformed but strong—a salient piece of a world more unitary, for all its fractiousness, a world more coherent in its mid-

Pacific isolation than any I'd known before. I missed my friends in L.A. But Southern California, in its sprawling, edgeless blandness, was losing its baseline status in my mind. It was no longer the place by which all other places had to be measured. There was a kid in the In Crowd, Steve, who groused endlessly about "the Rock." He meant Oahu, although he made it sound like Alcatraz. Steve's urgent ambition was to escape the Rock, ideally to England, where his favorite band, the Kinks, played. But anywhere "mainland"—anywhere not Hawaii—would do. I, meanwhile, wouldn't have minded staying in Da Islands forever.

In old Hawaii, before the arrival of Europeans, surfing had religious import. After prayers and offerings, master craftsmen made boards from sacred koa or wiliwili trees. Priests blessed swells, lashed the water with vines to raise swells, and some breaks had *heiaus* (temples) on the beach where devotees could pray for waves. This spiritual awareness did not preclude raucous competition, even large-scale gambling. "One contest between Maui and Oahu champions involved a wager of four thousand pigs and sixteen war canoes," according to the historians Peter Westwick and Peter Neushul. Men and women, young and old, royalty and commoners surfed. When the waves were good, "all thought of work is at an end, only that of sport is left," wrote Kepelino Keauokalani, a nineteenth-century Hawaiian scholar. "All day there is nothing but surfing. Many go out surfing as early as four in the morning." The old Hawaiians had it bad, in other words—surf fever. They also had plenty of what we would call leisure time. The islands were blessed with a large food surplus; its inhabitants were not only skilled fishermen, terrace farmers, and hunters, but built and managed elaborate systems of fishponds. Their winter harvest festival lasted three months—during which the surf frequently pumped and work was officially forbidden.

This was not what the Calvinist missionaries who began arriving in Hawaii in 1820 had in mind for the islanders as a way of life. Hiram Bing-

ham, who led the first missionary party, which found itself in a crowd of surfers before it had even landed, wrote that "the appearance of destitution, degradation, and barbarism, among the chattering, and almost naked savages, whose heads and feet, and much of their sunburnt swarthy skins, were bare, was appalling. Some of our number, with gushing tears, turned away from the spectacle." Twenty-seven years later, Bingham wrote, "The decline and discontinuance of the surfboard, as civilization advances, may be accounted for by the increase in modesty, industry or religion." He was not wrong about the decline of surfing. Hawaiian culture had been destroyed, and the people decimated by European diseases; between 1778 and 1893, the Hawaiian population shrank from an estimated eight hundred thousand to forty thousand, and by the end of the nineteenth century surfing had all but disappeared. Westwick and Neushul count Hawaiian surfing less a victim of successful missionary zeal, however, than of extreme demographic collapse, dispossession, and a series of extractive industries—sandalwood, whaling, sugar—that forced the surviving islanders into a cash economy and stripped them of free time.

From this terrible history modern surfing is descended, thanks to the few Hawaiians, notably Duke Kahanamoku, who kept the ancient practice of *he'e nalu* alive. Kahanamoku won a gold medal for swimming at the 1912 Olympics, became an international celebrity, and started giving surfing exhibitions around the world. Surfing caught on, slowly, on various coasts where there were ridable waves and people with the means to chase them. Postwar Southern California became the capital of the emerging surf industry largely because a local aerospace boom provided both new lightweight materials for board-building and an outsized generation of kids like me, with the time and inclination to learn to surf. Not that the local authorities encouraged us. Surfers were typecast as truants and vandals. Some beach towns actually banned surfing. And the trope of the surf bum—brother to the ski bum, sail bum, climbing bum—has never been retired, for good reason. Jeff Spicoli, the stoned-out Sean Penn surf dude in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, muddles on righteously in beach towns

all over the world today. Hawaii was different, though. At least it felt different to me. Surfing wasn't subcultural or imported or oppositional—even though its survival represented enduring opposition to the Calvinist business values of Hiram Bingham. It felt deeply woven into the fabric of the place.

Glenn and Roddy invited me to a meeting of their surf club, the Southern Unit. All I knew about the club was that its members wore green-and-white aloha-print trunks, and that every Southern Unit guy I'd seen in the water, mainly out on good days at Cliffs, surfed notably well. The meeting was held in Paki Park, a little public square on the diamond-head side of Waikiki. It was nighttime, and crowded, and I hung back in the shadows. A short, loud, middle-aged man named Mr. Ching ran the show—rattling off old business, new business, contest results, upcoming competitions, all while jousting with the crowd and getting laughs, though the repartee was too quick for me.

"No get wise," Mr. Ching yelled, wheeling on a boy creeping up behind him.

That, Roddy told me, was his son, Bon Ching. He was our age, but he surfed as well as Glenn. There were only a few haoles on hand, but one of them I recognized: Lord James Blears. He was a burly, golden-maned ex-wrestler and local TV host with a theatrically trained, possibly even authentic British accent. Lord Blears, besides everything else, surfed, in a ceremonial sort of way. Roddy pointed out his teenage daughter Laura, who surfed well, he said, and who seemed to me impossibly beautiful, and her brother Jimmy, who later became a famous big-wave rider.

There were other kids at that meeting who grew up to make names for themselves in the wider world of surfing, including Reno Abellira, then a Waikiki urchin heckling Mr. Ching from the shadows, later a top international competitor, renowned for his low, crouching style and blinding speed. What dazzled me, though, were the jackets. Several people wore

green-and-white Southern Unit windbreakers. These were even more desirable, if possible, than the club trunks. When Roddy urged me to volunteer for a fund-raising project being touted by Mr. Ching, I swallowed my self-consciousness and approached him for an assignment.

I had never been in a surf club. In California you heard about Windansea, which was based in La Jolla and had some big-name members. There was also a club, supposedly based in Santa Barbara, called Hope Ranch, that for some reason sounded like very heaven to me and my friends. None of us knew anyone who belonged to it. We didn't even know its colors. Maybe it didn't exist at all. Still, the idea of Hope Ranch hovered, immaterial, a dream of supercoolness in our geeky, overheated wannabe brainpans.

Now, though, for me it was the Southern Unit. The admissions process was unclear. Did I have to go out and win a contest? I had never surfed in a contest—just a few dorky "surf-offs" against other guys from my junior high in California. I was not averse to more formal competition. But first, apparently, there was fund-raising. Roddy found an excuse to not appear, but I dutifully showed up on a hot Saturday morning at the pickup spot. Mr. Ching drove a group of us, including his son Bon, to a posh-looking subdivision high in the hills above Honolulu. We each got a heavy sack of Portuguese sausage and basic instruction in door-to-door salesmanship. We were raising money for our surfing club—a wholesome cause, like the Boy Scouts. Mr. Ching said "the Southern Unit," and the kids laughed, because he pronounced it haole-style, standard English, though it was usually said "da Soddun Unit." Sales territories were assigned. We were to meet at the bottom of the mountain at the end of the day.

With lonely bravado, I threw myself into the job. I banged on gates and doors, ran from angry dogs, talked loudly to old Japanese ladies who gave no sign that they spoke English. A couple of haole ladies took pity on me, but I made few sales. The day got hotter. I drank from yard hoses, but I had brought no food. Finally, famished, I tore into one of my sausages. It wasn't tasty, but it was better than nothing. Ten minutes later I was on my

knees, retching into a storm drain. I didn't know that Portuguese sausage had to be cooked. I wondered, between heaves, if I was getting closer to or farther from the glory of surf-club membership.

Roddy was transferred, for some reason, into my typing class. Listening to him report to the teacher, I was stunned. Like Mr. Ching in his fund-raising spiel, Roddy abandoned, briefly, his normal pidgin and spoke standard English. But this wasn't for comic effect; it was just for the occasion. Glenn, I learned later, could do the same thing. The Kaulukukui boys were bilingual; they could "code switch." There just weren't many occasions in our daily rounds—indeed, almost none—when they had to drop their first language, the Hawaiian creole known as pidgin.

But keeping my two worlds separate got suddenly trickier. Roddy and I started hanging out at school, far from the In Crowd's monkeypod. In the cafeteria, we ate our saimin and chow fun together in a dim corner. But the school was a small pond. There was nowhere to hide. So there should have been a scene, a confrontation, perhaps with Mike himself—*Hey, who's this moke?*

There wasn't, though. Glenn and Ford were around then too. Maybe Glenn and Mike hit it off over some shared laugh, nothing to do with me. All I knew was that, seemingly overnight, Glenn and Roddy and Ford were showing up not only at the In Crowd's school yard spot under the monkeypod but also at Mike and Edie's house in Kaimuki on Friday nights—when Mike's uncle supplied the Primo (local beer) and mod Steve supplied the Kinks. The In Crowd had been integrated, with no visible fuss.

This was at a time when the Pacific Club, the leading local private club, where much of Hawaii's big business was conducted over cocktails and paddle tennis, was still whites-only. The Pacific Club, apparently unmoved by the fact that Hawaii's first U.S. representative and one of its first two senators were Asian American (both were also distinguished veterans

of World War II; one of them, Daniel Inouye, had lost an arm), still formally banned Asian Americans from membership. This sort of bald discrimination wasn't un-American—legal segregation was still in force in much of the country—but it was badly out of date in Hawaii. Even the low-rent haole kids in the In Crowd were more enlightened. They saw that my friends were cool guys—particularly, I think, Glenn—and, at least for gang purposes, just let the race thing go. It wasn't worth the trouble. It was radioactive crap. Let's party.

Not that kicking it with the In Crowd was the fondest ambition of Glenn, Ford, or Roddy. From what I knew, which was a lot, it was no big deal to them. It was only a big deal to me. In fact, after Roddy got to know a couple of the girls I had been telling him about—In Crowd girls I had agonized over, and had very occasionally canoodled with—I could see he was unimpressed. If the term "skank" had been in use then, he might have used it. Roddy had been suffering his own romantic torments, which I had also heard much about, but the object of his affections was a modest, notably old-fashioned, quietly beautiful girl whom I would never have noticed if he hadn't pointed her out. She was too young to go steady, she said. He would wait years, if necessary, he said wretchedly. Looking at my erstwhile girlfriends through his eyes, I didn't like them any less, but I began to see how lost they were, in their delinquent, neglected-child glamour, their sexual precocity. In truth, they were far more sexually advanced than I was, which made me timid, which made me unhappy.

And so I developed a disastrous crush on Glenn's girlfriend, Lisa. She was an older woman—fourteen, in ninth grade—poised, amused, kind, Chinese. Lisa was at Kaimuki Intermediate but not of it. That was how I saw her. She and Glenn made sense as a couple only because he was a natural-born hero and she was a natural-born heroine. But he was a wild man, an outlaw, a laughing truant, and she was a good girl, a good student. What could they possibly talk about? I didn't really want an answer to that question. "There was a joy of life in him and a kind of tenderness untainted by the merely gentle." When I read that line, written by James

Salter, many years later, I thought of Glenn. Lisa, as I imagine her, might have too. No, I thought, I would just wait, impatiently, for her to come to her senses and turn to the haole boy who struggled to amuse her, and worshipped her. I couldn't tell if Glenn noticed my hapless condition. He had the good grace, anyway, to say nothing off-color about Lisa within my hearing. (No "Spock *dat*"—which means "Look at that," and which boys were always saying to each other, popping their eyes at girlish rumps and breasts.)

Lisa helped me see Ford. I knew he was unusual for a Japanese kid. Glenn sometimes teased him, saying things about "da nip-o-nese" and what a disappointment Ford, who cared for nothing except surfing, must be to his family. But he rarely got a rise out of him. Ford had a powerful inwardness about him. He could not have been more different, I thought, from the Japanese kids in my academic classes. They looked to teachers, and to one another, blatantly, fervently, for approval. I had become friendly with some of the funnier girls, who could be very funny indeed, but the social wall between us stayed solid, and their brownnosing in class still offended my sense of student-teacher protocol. Ford, on the other hand, was from my planet.

He had pale skin, a blocky build, with hard, chiseled-looking muscles, and a stiff, efficient surfing style that carried him swiftly down the line (across, that is, a wave's horizontal expanse). His and Glenn's friendship seemed to revolve around the surf, where they were near equals, but it also included a shared sense of the ridiculous, which Ford, who never said much, expressed with small, dry smiles at Glenn's jokes. Then there was the refuge that the Kaulukukuis provided Ford from family pressures. That was what Lisa explained. She knew Ford's family, including his hard-driving parents and college-bound siblings. The Japanese had surged to the fore politically in postwar Hawaii, moving rapidly off the sugar plantations that they—like the Chinese and Filipinos and other groups—had originally been brought to the islands to work. And they were rising commercially too. They were generally resented for their insularity—unlike the Chinese, say,

they were in no hurry to marry outside their ethnic group. But their collective attitude, it seemed safe to say, especially among the older generation, was that they were not going to get ahead in America by hanging out with Hawaiians and having fun. And this, Lisa said, was what Ford rebelled against daily. No wonder, I thought, his jaw always seemed so firmly set.

Flyers went up for a surf contest, to be held at Diamond Head Cliffs. The organizer seemed to be just a kid at Kaimuki Intermediate—Robert, a small, smooth-talking ninth-grader who didn't even surf. But Roddy and Glenn said he was legit, that he came from a family of sports impresarios. The contest could not have been more small-time—none of the local surf clubs was involved, and the only category seemed to be Boys Under 14. But that was me. I entered.

On contest day, the surf at Cliffs was a sunny, windblown mess on a rising swell. None of the kids who showed up to compete were Cliffs locals—I didn't recognize them, anyway, except for a couple from school. But they all seemed to know their way around the contest rigamarole of heats and jerseys. Some had parents with them, who had gamely made the climb down from Diamond Head Road. I hadn't even told my parents about the event—too embarrassing. Roddy, to my dismay, didn't show up. Glenn was there—he had been drafted to serve as a judge—but he said Roddy had been compelled to go to work that morning with their father, at Fort DeRussy, in Waikiki. I had been counting on seeing Roddy win the contest.

Robert read out the heat lists. When we were not surfing, we huddled under thornbushes on the hillside, squeezing into patches of shade. The judges sat higher up the slope. Some of the surfers looked pretty good, I thought, though none could touch Roddy. One kid wore Southern Unit trunks, but his wave selection was terrible, and he bombed.

I surfed two or three rounds. I was nervous and paddled hard, paying no attention to anyone else. The surf was coming up slightly, which was

good, but little Robert did not have the power to clear a contestants' area, so we were surfing in among the usual Saturday crowd. I knew the reefs at Cliffs well by then, so I moved off by myself, ewa side, where a slab of coral sat outside, at a good angle for this swell. Over there I found set waves that connected cleanly through the main part of the break. Robert had a flag system that was supposed to tell surfers when their heats were over, but he neglected to change the flags as the finals ended, and I kept surfing till Glenn paddled out to get me. It was over, he said. I got second place. A haole kid named Tomi Winkler got first. Glenn was grinning. "That drop-knee cutback," he said. "Every time you do one, bwaah, I give you big points."

It was a startling result in three ways. First, Robert actually gave us trophies, some weeks later, greatly surprising my parents, who were hurt that I hadn't invited them. Second, who the hell was Tomi Winkler? He was, it turned out, one of the low-profile haoles at Kaimuki Intermediate—a sweet, sunny guy and, as I came to know, a better surfer than me. Third, Glenn liked my drop-knee cutback. It was a cold-water maneuver, practically unknown in Hawaii, and if I had been systematically shedding my mainland style it would have been one of the first moves to go. But I was apparently still doing it, and my idol, Glenn, actually saw some grace, or at least some novelty, in it. That settled it—the drop-knee stayed.

But this business of style, mainland versus Hawaiian, was complicated. This was true both in surfing as a whole, in every era, and in my little world. I had often heard Glenn tease Roddy about the way he surfed—"too Island kine." He imitated his brother by crouching, sticking his ass out, extending his arms in exaggerated speed arcs, squinting like an angry samurai. It was unfair and inaccurate, but funny. Glenn would even do it sometimes while riding waves, though the war cry then was always "Aikau!" The Aikaus were a local surfing family known for their traditional styles. Like Ben Aipa and Reno Abellira, the Aikaus would later become famous in the international surfing world—renowned for, among other things, their pure Hawaiian styles in big waves. But I had never

heard of them. Ford and Roddy found Glenn's parodies irresistible. "You see the Aikaus," Ford told me. "You see why we laugh."



Author, Queens, Waikiki, 1967

My first trip to the North Shore, I made with my family. It was spring, and the big swells from the Aleutians that sent huge surf to the North Shore were finished for the year. We stopped at the fabled big-wave spot, Waimea Bay. Except for the fact that the sea was flat, it looked just like its pictures. We hiked up the canyon behind the beach and swam in a freshwater pool. Dad, Kevin, and I jumped off a cliff into the cold brown water, daring each other to go higher. In feats of stupid physical daring, I had, I realized, surpassed my father, although he was athletic, not timid, and not yet forty. My family, I thought, knew less and less about me. I had been leading a clandestine life, particularly since we moved to Hawaii. Much of that was down to surfing, and it had begun back in California.

Why had I even started surfing? In one picture-book version, the hook had been set on a shining afternoon in Ventura when I was ten. Ventura

was on the coast north of Los Angeles. There was a diner on the pier. My family ate there on beach weekends. From our booth by the window, I could see surfers out at a spot known as California Street. They were silhouettes, backlit by low sun, and they danced silently through the glare, their boards like big dark blades, slashing and gliding, swift beneath their feet. California Street was a long cobblestone point, and to me, at ten, the waves that broke along its shelf seemed like they were arriving from some celestial workshop, their glowing hooks and tapering shoulders carved by ocean angels. I wanted to be out there, learning to dance on water. The snug fracas of the family dinner felt vestigial. Even my chiliburger, a special treat, lost its fascination.

In truth, there were plenty of siren songs playing at the time, each calling me toward surfing. And my parents, unlike Ford Takara's, were willing to help me start. They got me a used board for my eleventh birthday. They gave me and my friends rides to the beach.

Now, though, I seemed to be on my own. Nobody asked where I went with my board, and I never talked about good days at Cliffs or my triumphs over fear at Kaikoos. When I was little, I liked to bring my wounds home, liked hearing my mother gasp when she caught sight of blood trickling down my leg. *What are you gasping about? Oh, that.* I enjoyed being fussed over, injured but nonchalant. Once, I recall, I even got a perverse pleasure from being accidentally burned by another mother's cigarette while riding in a boat. The attention, the remorse—the pain was worth it to me. Where did that guiltmongering little killjoy come from? He's with me still, no doubt, but as I entered my teens I suddenly moved on, psychically, from my family. Tripping back down the trail at Waimea in swimsuits, I knew we looked like six kindred souls, blood-tied, a brood, but I felt like the odd one out. A cold gust of pubescent separation seemed to have caught me prematurely. Of course, when I dove face first into a coral head—this happened the following summer, at Waikiki—it was still my mother to whom I was carried, and she who took me to get sewn up.

. . .

I SAY THAT MY DAD was not yet forty. The ages of adults are absurd, of course, to kids, the numbers too large, mostly meaningless. But my dad's age was weirdly constant, in a way that even I knew was odd. You could see it in the family photo album. One moment he was a dark-haired, watchful boy, skating and sledding, playing trumpet in a dance band. Then, at twenty, discharged from the Navy, he was suddenly middle-aged. He smoked a pipe, wore a fedora, looked intent at a typewriter, contented at a chessboard. He married at twenty-three, became a father at twenty-four. That in itself wasn't strange in my parents' world, but my dad seemed to take on adulthood with unusual relish. He *wanted* to be forty. It wasn't that he was a cautious, measured person; if anything, he was moody and rash. He just seemed to want to put youth behind him.

I knew he had hated the Navy, the claustrophobia of shipboard life (the war was over—he had just missed it—but he was in the Pacific on an aircraft carrier). He hated, especially, the helplessness of the ordinary seaman. "They don't call them petty officers for nothing," he said. What I didn't know then was that his early childhood had been a horrorshow. His birth parents were itinerant drunks. Their two sons ended up in the care of elderly aunts. My dad was lucky, landing in small-town Michigan with Martha Finnegan, a sweet-tempered schoolteacher, and her husband, a railroad engineer known as Will. But my father was haunted his entire life by the turmoil and terrors he suffered before his first set of parents gave him up.

My parents were both, not surprisingly, abstemious drinkers. Even in the heyday of the martini, I never saw either one of them tipsy. One of their abiding fears was that their kids would be alcoholics.

They wanted a big family, and they got off to a quick start with me. We lived in a fourth-floor walk-up on Second Avenue in Manhattan. They paid a dollar a month to park my baby carriage in the barbershop downstairs. They hoped to move to Levittown, the prototypical suburb, then

brand-new, on Long Island—a tragic idea, in retrospect. Luckily, they moved to Los Angeles instead. My mother then had three consecutive miscarriages. One may have been a stillbirth. Single pregnant Catholic girls, dispatched by some wing of the church, looked after me. When my mother got pregnant with Kevin, she went to bed for six months. This all happened during the purported golden age.

During that same age, my dad seemed to have a thousand jobs. He was a set electrician, a set carpenter, a gaffer, a gofer, on shows live and taped and stage. Of all his jobs, my favorite was gas station attendant. He worked at a Chevron station in Van Nuys—not far from Reseda, where we lived then—and we could deliver him lunch. He wore a white uniform to pump gas; all the attendants did. I thought the chevron insignia on the uniform's starched short sleeves was dashing in the extreme. He worked as a stage manager on a children's TV program called *The Pinky Lee Show*, which my mother and I watched mainly for glimpses of him offstage in his headset. Even I understood dimly that my father was frantic about supporting us, which was why he was nearly always at work. I also got, at some level, that even though he was our household hero, out in the big world wearing headsets and chevrons, he was also, in his own way, as dependent on my mother's support as I was.

We were dutiful, if not particularly enthusiastic, Catholics. Mass every Sunday, Saturday catechism for me, fish sticks on Friday. Then, around my thirteenth birthday, I received the sacrament of confirmation, becoming an adult in the eyes of the church, and was thunderstruck to hear my parents say that I was no longer required to go to Mass. That decision was now mine. Were they not worried about the state of my soul? Their evasive, ambiguous answers shocked me again. They had been big fans of Pope John XXIII. But they did not, I realized, actually believe in all the doctrine and prayers—all those Oblatios, Oratios, frightening Confiteors, and mealymouthed Acts of Contrition that I had been memorizing and struggling to understand since I was small. It was possible that they didn't even believe in God. I immediately stopped going to Mass. God was not

visibly upset. My parents continued to drag the little ones to church. Such hypocrisy! This joyful ditching of my religious obligations happened shortly before we moved to Hawaii.

And so, on a spring Sunday morning, I found myself slowly paddling back from Cliffs through the lagoon while my family sweated it out up at Star of the Sea in Waialae. The tide was low. My skeg gently bumped on the bigger rocks. Out on the mossy, exposed reef, wearing conical straw hats, Chinese ladies, or maybe they were Filipinas, bent, collecting eels and octopus in buckets. Waves broke here and there along the reef's outer edge, too small to surf.

I felt myself floating between two worlds. There was the ocean, effectively infinite, falling away forever to the horizon. This morning it was placid, its grip on me loose and languorous. But I was lashed to its moods now. The attachment felt limitless, irresistible. I no longer thought of waves being carved in celestial workshops. I was getting more hardheaded. Now I knew they originated in distant storms, which moved, as it were, upon the face of the deep. But my utter absorption in surfing had no rational content. It simply compelled me; there was a deep mine of beauty and wonder in it. Beyond that, I could not have explained why I did it. I knew vaguely that it filled a psychic cavity of some kind—connected, perhaps, with leaving the church, or with, more likely, the slow drift away from my family—and that it had replaced many things that came before it. I was a sunburnt pagan now. I felt privy to mysteries.

The other world was land: everything that was not surfing. Books, girls, school, my family, friends who did not surf. "Society," as I was learning to call it, and the exactions of Mr. Responsible. Hands folded under my chin, I drifted. A bruise-colored cloud hung over Koko Head. A transistor radio twanged on a seawall where a Hawaiian family picnicked on the sand. The sun-warmed shallow water had a strange boiled-vegetable taste. The moment was immense, still, glittering, mundane. I tried to fix

each of its parts in memory. I did not consider, even passingly, that I had a choice when it came to surfing. My enchantment would take me where it would.

Here's how ridable waves form. A storm out at sea churns the surface, creating chop—smaller and then larger disorganized wavelets, which amalgamate, with enough wind, into heavy seas. What we are waiting for on distant coasts is the energy that escapes from the storm, radiating outward into calmer waters in the form of wave trains—groups of waves, increasingly organized, that travel together. Each wave is a column of orbiting energy, most of it below the surface. All the wave trains produced by a storm constitute what surfers call a swell. The swell can travel thousands of miles. The more powerful the storm, the farther the swell may travel. As it travels, it becomes more organized—the distance between each wave in a train, known as the interval, increases. In a long-interval train, the orbiting energy in each wave may extend more than a thousand feet beneath the ocean surface. Such a train can pass easily through surface resistance like chop or other smaller, shallower swells that it crosses or overtakes.

As waves from a swell approach a shoreline, their lower ends begin to feel the sea bottom. Wave trains become sets—groups of waves that are larger and longer-interval than their more locally generated cousins. The approaching waves refract (bend) in response to the shape of the sea bottom. The visible part of the wave grows, its orbiting energy pushed higher above the surface. The resistance offered by the sea bottom increases as the water gets shallower, slowing the progress of the lowest part of the wave. The wave above the surface steepens. Finally, it becomes unstable and prepares to topple forward—to break. The rule of thumb is that it will break when the wave height reaches 80 percent of the water's depth—an eight-foot wave will break in ten feet of water. But many factors, some of them endlessly subtle—wind, bottom contour, swell angle, currents—

determine exactly where and how each wave breaks. As surfers, we're just hoping that it has a catchable moment (a takeoff point), and a ridable face, and that it doesn't break all at once (close out) but instead breaks gradually, successively (peels), in one direction or the other (left or right), allowing us to travel roughly parallel to the shore, riding the face, for a while, in that spot, in that moment, just before it breaks.

The surf changed as spring progressed. There were more swells from the south, which meant more good days at Cliffs. Patterson's, the gentle wave between wide panels of exposed reef out in front of our house, started breaking consistently and a new group of surfers materialized to ride it—old guys, girls, beginners. Roddy's younger brother, John, came too. He was nine or ten, and fantastically nimble. My brother Kevin began to show some interest in surfing, perhaps influenced by John, who was about his age and kept his board in our yard. I was surprised. Kevin was a terrific swimmer. He had been diving into the deep end of the swimming pool since he was eighteen months old. Pigeon-toed, he had a piscine ease in water, and was an expert bodysurfer already at nine. But he had always professed indifference to my obsession: it was my thing; it would not be his. But now he paddled out at Patterson's on a borrowed board and within days was catching waves, standing, turning. He was clearly a natural. We found him a used board, an old Surfboards Hawaii tanker, for ten dollars. I was proud and thrilled. The future suddenly had a different tinge.

With the first big south swell of the season, the Bomb broke. I stood with Roddy on the seawall to watch it. The main peak was so far out, we could see only the first wave of each set break. After that, it was all just shining walls of whitewater and spray. The surf was giant—at least ten feet, the biggest waves I had ever seen. Roddy was silent, staring desolately out to sea. Surely this was out of the question for him. There were two guys out there. Did he know them?

He did.

Who were they?

Wayne Santos, he sighed, and Leslie Wong.

The surfers were only occasionally visible, but we saw each of them drop into monsters. They surfed intently but stylishly, didn't fall, and each kicked out at high speed over the reef beyond Patterson's. Wong and Santos were amazing surfers. They were also adults. Glenn and Ford were out at Cliffs. Surely this wasn't the day for Roddy to make his debut at the Bomb. Sighing deeply, he agreed it wasn't. We tossed our boards in the water and started the long paddle to Cliffs, which would be plenty big for us on a swell like this.

Kevin got hurt—hit in the back by a board at Patterson's. I heard people calling me. *It's your brother.* I paddled in, frantic, and found him on the beach, people standing around him. He looked bad—pale, in shock. Apparently he had gotten the wind completely knocked out of him. Little John Kaulukukui had saved him from drowning. Kevin was still breathing heavily, coughing, crying. We carried him up to the house. Everything hurt, he said, every movement. Mom cleaned him up, calmed him down, and put him to bed. I went back out surfing. I figured he would be back in the water in a few days. But Kevin never surfed again. He did resume bodysurfing, and as a teenager became one of the hotshots at Makapu'u and Sandy Beach, two serious bodysurfing spots on the eastern tip of Oahu. As an adult, he has had back trouble. Recently an orthopedist, looking at a spinal X-ray, asked him what exactly had happened when he was a child. It looked like he had suffered a massive fracture.

Every school had a bull—a toughest guy. Kids from different schools would ask each other, *Who da bull at your school?* The bull at Kaimuki Intermediate when I arrived was a guy named, unbelievably, the Bear. It was like some bad Wall Street joke—Da Bear was Da Bull—except nobody had heard of Wall Street. The Bear was huge, naturally. He looked about thirty-five. He seemed benign, even befuddled. He was Sa-

moan, I think. He was always surrounded by a deferential retinue, like a Mafia don. But the Bear's group dressed like slobs—they may actually have inspired my early impression of Kaimuki "natives" as poor and raggedy. They looked, really, like sanitation workers who had just finished work and were looking forward to that first beer. They were all far too old for junior high. Scary-looking but usually in the safe middle distance, they seemed timeless.

Then something happened. It had nothing to do with the Bear, but it caused him to be deposed. And for me, it changed everything. I didn't see how it started, exactly, although I was right there. It was lunchtime. The In Crowd was in its usual spot. I was talking to Lisa, with the usual stars no doubt in my eyes. Lurch, the haole outcast giant, passed by. Somebody said something, and Lurch replied. He had a deep, shy voice and he did look like the TV character he'd been cruelly named after—the lugubrious butler on *The Addams Family*. He had sad eyes, a broad forehead, a wisp of mustache, and he walked hunched over, hoping to disguise his height. Normally he skulked away from insults, but this time something must have gotten under his skin. He stopped. Glenn was standing near him. He told Lurch to keep moving. Lurch didn't move. Glenn approached him. They got into a shoving match. Then they started throwing punches.

It was a strange sight, a comic mismatch. Glenn wasn't short, but Lurch was a full foot taller. Glenn couldn't reach his opponent's chin except by getting in very close. Lurch was clumsy and couldn't land a punch, but he saw his chance, wrapped Glenn in a bear hug, then lifted him off his feet. He spun Glenn against his chest, one huge arm around his neck. Now the gathering crowd could see Glenn's face. Lurch was choking him, really choking him. Glenn's eyes bugged out. It was clear that he couldn't breathe. He was thrashing, but Lurch's grip was unbreakable. A very long moment passed, with Lisa screaming, Glenn thrashing, and no one else moving.

Ford Takara appeared. He walked up to Lurch, cocked a fist quickly, and hit him very hard under the jaw. Lurch's eyes rolled up in his head.

He dropped Glenn. Then he collapsed himself, falling straight down, and as he fell Ford landed a second shot to his temple. Then the truly weird thing happened. Ford led the gasping, injured Glenn away, and the In Crowd set upon the fallen Lurch. We kicked, punched, scratched. Lurch, probably more from despair than physical incapacity, put up little defense. I remember Edie, Mike's sister, raking his arms with her nails, then lifting her hands triumphantly, like a fairytale harpy, to show the blood she had drawn. Other girls were gouging at his face, pulling his hair. This blood-frenzy went on for a good while until the cry went up, "Chock!" We scattered. Mr. Chock was the school's vice principal for discipline, and he was hurrying to the scene.

When did I realize that I had taken part in a disgusting crime? Not soon. In the immediate aftermath, I was elated. We had defeated the evil giant, or some such crap. In retrospect, I had perhaps exorcised for myself some of the terrors of life without a gang—my time at the business end of a two-by-four, say. Of course, Ford was the hero of the day. And his performance had been so dramatic, so decisive, that people were already starting to say he was the new bull of Kaimuki. I found that confusing. Would he not have to fight the Bear to claim that title? Apparently not. These things turned on popular emotion, not organized competition. But did Ford even want to be the bull? I doubted it, and I knew him better than all the kids who were just learning his name did. Still, maybe there was a Ford I didn't know—a killer, who craved power. There was clearly a me I didn't know—a rabid rodent of some type.

The official fallout from the mauling of Lurch was asymmetrical. Ford was not punished. Lurch became scarce around school. Glenn became a wanted man. The rest of us were not punished, although Mr. Chock seemed to come around more and give us long looks known locally as "da stink eye." Glenn ran away from home. Mike, always good for an escapade outside the law, became Glenn's accomplice, helping him hide. The two of them would appear brazenly on campus at lunchtime to show the colors. Mr. Chock would come barreling down the road in his car, chasing the

two boys across the cemetery and into the kiawe grove where the Kaulukukuis lived. Cop cars would sometimes join the hunt. This cat-and-mouse seemed to go on for weeks, although it was probably just a few days.

Steve, who loved the Kinks, was over at our little house. He surfed competently, and we were changing into trunks, headed out to Patterson's.

His fiery contempt for Oahu aside, Steve was a sweet kid. He was brown-skinned and pigeon-breasted, with a tiny body, a big square head, enormous eyes, and a middle-class command of English. His father was a rich, grumpy haole, and his dark-skinned birth mother long gone. Like Roddy, Steve hated his stepmother, who was Asian. They lived in Kahala. Steve's worldliness let him pass as haole—he certainly wasn't anything else. But he had a gift for mimicry, and he could speak many brands of pidgin.

"I like see," he said, in a voice that was part geisha, part pure island naïf. And with that he lifted my T-shirt and studied my bare boy parts. I was too shocked to react. "Nice," he said softly, then dropped my shirt.

I was in a phase of desperate shame about my balky puberty and could not take the compliment. Steve's suave sensuality was from some borderless, unknown world.

I still didn't have even the reproductive basics straight, and my parents were too shy on the subject to be any help. I discovered the miracle of ejaculation by myself, one agitated night. That was helpful, and quickly became a habit. I was like most boys my age, no doubt, except none of the boys I knew discussed it. My constant erections were a source of constant embarrassment, confusion, and intense fondness for doors that locked. I pioneered a new solo route, on small days, from Cliffs back to our house near Black Point, circling outside the reefs rather than inside through the lagoon. Out there, in the blue depths, no one on the beach or in the houses behind the beach could see me. I rolled off my board in azure water, tak-

ing a break from the long paddle for a delirious bit of what some pidgin speakers called, unpoetically, "hammer skin."

One night there was a tremendous rainstorm, the kind that seems to happen only in the tropics. In my bed, above the din of the rain, I started hearing hollow, familiar bumps. It was the noise, I realized, of surfboards colliding. I jumped up, ran outside, and saw five or six boards floating out of our yard and into a river that had formerly been our lane to the beach. Our street, Kulamanu, and our lane formed, it seemed, a main funnel for local storm runoff. I chased the boards down the hill in the dark, pulling them from the hedges, or from wherever they briefly hung up, lugging them to safe ground in neighbors' yards. There was Roddy's bone-white Wardy, my slate-blue Larry Felker, Ford's baby-blue Town and Country. There was John's board, Kevin's old tanker. Where was Glenn's board? Ah, jammed nose first under the landlady's steps. None of the boards reached the ocean, where the stream running down the path could be heard emptying loudly even as the rain let up. My shins were bruised, my toes stubbed. The boards were probably all dinged, but no skegs were broken. I caught my breath, then carried each board slowly back up to our yard, wedging them all more firmly in their bamboo enclosure, although the deluge was over. Trash cans littered the street. It had been a downpour for the record books. Why did I seem to be the only person in Honolulu who had woken up?

They caught Glenn. He was sent to the Big Island. This, Roddy said, was better than "juvey," which was where they sent Mike. Glenn Sr. had convinced the authorities that Glenn would be strictly monitored by his old-fashioned aunties on the Big Island, which Roddy said was true. He probably wouldn't even get to surf. That seemed to me sickeningly harsh. But everything felt a bit queasy without Glenn. Roddy and John

were subdued. Lisa looked like she had been seriously ill. Roddy wasn't as free to surf Cliffs as he had been before—his dad always seemed to need him down at Fort DeRussy. Really, I thought, he just wanted to keep an eye on Roddy. Maybe he blamed himself for Glenn's running wild. Nothing seemed like a colorful woodcut of old Hawaii now.

Sometimes Roddy invited me down to DeRussy. It was an interesting place, at least when we weren't stuck sweeping sand off walkways, which was his dad's preferred way to keep us busy. DeRussy sat on prime Waikiki beachfront property, flanked by high-rise hotels. Thousands of servicemen ("jarheads," we called them) showed up every week there, on R&R from Vietnam. Glenn Sr. worked as a lifeguard. Roddy and I would sneak into the gardens and lobbies of the neighboring hotels, and while one of us stood lookout, the other would dive in and plunder fountains and wishing wells for coins. Then we'd go buy chow fun, malasadas (Portuguese doughnuts), and pineapple slices from a street cart.

But the most interesting part of DeRussy, by far, was the surf out front. Summer was coming, and the Waikiki reefs were starting to come alive. Roddy introduced me to Number Threes, Kaisers Bowl, and Ala Moana. These were some of the surf spots I had heard about before we moved to Hawaii. They were crowded and, in the case of Ala Moana, frighteningly shallow, but they were beautiful waves, and the trades blew offshore on this side. Riding those breaks made me feel, as the pidgin phrase has it, "big-time," at least when I surfed decently.

I also started surfing Tonggs, down at the diamondhead end of the long swoop of city shoreline that includes Waikiki. This was where Tomi Winkler, winner of the Diamond Head Surf Contest, lived with his mother. The wave at Tonggs seemed to be nothing special—a short, crowded left that couldn't handle much size, breaking in front of a row of high-rises and a seawall. But a lot of good surfers, including Tomi and his buddies, were locals, and they urged me to wait for nearby spots that would light up on big days, particularly a fearsome right peak known as Rice Bowl. Rice Bowl, they said, was town's answer to Sunset Beach—the

great wave on the North Shore. I wondered how Rice Bowl compared with the Bomb, but something told me not to ask. All the guys I met at Tonggs were haoles. Everybody I knew from Cliffs and Kaikoo's was what the Tonggs guys would call a moke. Maybe these haoles had never heard of the Bomb. (They had, but they called it Brown's.) Maybe Rice Bowl was a haole wave. (It wasn't.) Maybe everything would be simpler, I thought, if the Southern Unit just gave me a pair of club trunks and I confined myself to surfing with Roddy and Ford. I never got those club trunks, though.

Ford seemed lost without Glenn. He still surfed Cliffs daily, but it was different. He would take his board from our yard without even checking to see if I was home. At school he seemed to have no interest in exercising any of the droits de seigneur that came with being the bull—a title that the Bear had reportedly relinquished with a weary smile. Ford was too shy even to claim a girlfriend, which seemed to me insane, especially since the school year was about to end.

When the next big south swell hit—it was the biggest swell yet—I found myself at Rice Bowl. The wave broke on the ewa side of Tonggs, across a channel and farther out, and I watched it from the seawall. It looked to be what people said—a small-scale Sunset. Not that I had ever surfed anything on the scale of either break. But there were a couple of guys out at Rice Bowl, and I thought it looked manageable. The wind was light, the channel looked safe. The waves were big and hard-breaking but makable, even precise. The whole setup seemed far less wild than the Bomb. I paddled out. I don't remember any companions.

For a while, things went fine. The other guys acknowledged me curiously. They were much older. I caught a couple of clean waves, each of which startled me with its power and speed. I tried nothing fancy. I just stayed over my board, drawing a prudent line down the face and toward the shoulder. Paddling back out, watching other waves—peering into the

area that surfers call the impact zone, or the pit—I could see that Rice Bowl broke very hard indeed. The noise alone was something new to my ears.

Then a big set came, waves in a category for which I was not remotely prepared. We were already surfing a very long way from shore, I thought, but I started paddling seaward from what I had believed was the main takeoff spot. I had obviously been wrong about where I was on the reef. Rice Bowl had another personality, which it was now revealing—vast, horizon-blotting power, the whole ocean seeming to gather itself toward one outer reef. Where could such a set have come from? Where were the other guys? They had vanished, as if forewarned. I was a fast paddler—light on my board, with long arms—and in my skittishness I had gotten an early start. I knee-paddled, digging hard, angling toward the channel now, trying to keep my breathing deep and even. When the first wave of the set began to feather, it was still far outside, and I felt my strength start to flag. Was I going in the wrong direction? Should I have started for shore when these silver death mountains first appeared in the distance? Had I been heading for the worst possible place all along—the outer reef where these waves would actually break? It was too late to change course. I paddled on, my mouth sour with nausea, my throat dry with panic, my breath short.

I made it over the set, which had four or five waves. It was a close enough thing that I went airborne over the top of at least one, and was drenched with offshore spray by each of them, and I was shaken to the core by the sound of the waves detonating a few yards behind me. I was convinced that if I had been caught inside, I would have died. This conviction was a first for me. This was the fear line that made surfing different, here underscored extra-heavily. I felt like Pip, the cabin boy in *Moby-Dick* who falls overboard and is rescued but loses his mind, undone by visions of the ocean's infinite malice and indifference. I paddled far, far around the Rice Bowl reef, on the Tonggs side, light-headed, humiliated, back to shore.

And that was the overwhelming memory of surfing in Hawaii that I

took back to the mainland the following week, when the first season of *Hawaii Calls* wrapped up and we abruptly packed and moved. I would be back, I told my friends. Write. Roddy said he would, but he didn't. Steve did. Lisa did. But she was starting high school. I tried to accept it: she would never be mine. A big sister, at best. I started ninth grade at my old junior high in L.A. I surfed, I surfed. Ventura, Malibu, even Santa Monica, anywhere my friends and I could get somebody to drive us. I preened here and there about surfing in Hawaii, but I never mentioned Rice Bowl. Nobody was interested in my stories anyway.

Then we moved back, exactly a year after leaving. My dad got a job on a feature called *Kona Coast*, starring Richard Boone—crusty old haole fisherman gets enmeshed in Polynesian intrigues of some sort. We couldn't get our old Kulamanu house back, and ended up in another cramped cottage farther down Kahala Avenue, with no good surf nearby.

The day we arrived, I took the bus to Roddy's house. The Kaulukukuis had moved. The new tenants had no information.

The next day, I got my mother to drop me with my board on Diamond Head Road, climbed the trail down to Cliffs, and, to my joy, found Ford out surfing, still on his baby-blue board. He seemed genuinely happy to see me—more talkative than I had ever seen him. Cliffs had been good all spring, he said. Yes, the Kaulukukuis had moved. To Alaska.

To Alaska?

Yeah, the Army had transferred Glenn Sr. there. That seemed too crazy, too cruel, to be true. Ford agreed. But that's what had happened. Glenn, back from the Big Island, had run away again rather than move. But Roddy and John had gone glumly along with their dad and stepmom. They lived on some military base in the snow. This picture refused to come into focus. Where was Glenn, then? Ford made a strange face. In Waikiki, he said. You'll see him around.

I did. But not right away.

Waikiki became my home break. That was partly the season, partly logistics. The surf was good in summer all the way from Tonggs to Ala Moana, and there were lockers at Canoes, a central spot, right on Kalakaua Avenue, where I could keep my board for the price of a combination lock. So I left my board in the outdoor lockers at Canoes and caught the bus or, if my allowance was exhausted, quietly hitchhiked around Diamond Head each morning at dawn. I spent long days learning the breaks off the crowded, hotel-lined beaches.

Each spot had its locals. I made some friends. Waikiki was a dense nest of hucksterism, tourists, excitement, crime. Even the surfers all seemed to have hustles—some of them legitimate beach jobs, like taking tourists out to ride waves in outrigger canoes or giving them surf "lessons" on giant pink paddleboards; others much shadier, involving gullible tourist girls or friends who worked in the hotels and could get room keys. The kids I met in the water mostly lived in a ghetto called the Waikiki Jungle. Some were haoles, usually living with waitress moms; most were locals with big multiethnic families. There were hot surfers at every break—guys to study and emulate. I asked everybody I surfed with about Glenn Kaulukukui. And everybody said they knew him. He was around, they said. They just saw him last night. Where was he living? Not clear.

Finally, out at Canoes one afternoon, I heard, "Focking Bill." It was Glenn, paddling up behind me, laughing, grabbing my rail. He looked older, a little haggard, but dauntless, still himself. He peered at my board. "What's this?"

It was a nose-rider—a new model known as the Harbour Cheater, with a "step" in the deck that supposedly made it plane better when one was up on the nose. The board was my most prized possession, earned by endless hours of weed pulling after school. It was tinted—not pigmented—a pale yellow. Transparent tints were the style that year. I even loved the discreet black triangular Harbour sticker. I held my breath while Glenn checked out my board. At last he said, "Nice." He even seemed to mean it. I exhaled, unnerved by the vastness of my relief.

He was evasive about his living arrangements. He was working as a waiter, he said, living in the Jungle. Not going to school. He would show me the restaurant where he worked, slip me a teriyaki steak. Roddy was doing okay in Alaska. Cold. They would all be back "bye'm'bye"—but Glenn gave the pidgin expression a darker turn than the singsong treatment it usually got. He actually sneered, not trying to hide his anger toward the Army.

We surfed together, and I was startled to see that Glenn had improved dramatically. He wasn't just a good young surfer anymore. Still smooth, he was now a showstopper.

But I never saw the restaurant where he supposedly worked. Indeed, I rarely saw him on land. We surfed Canoes and Queens and Populars and Number Threes together, and I actually had trouble understanding some of what he was doing on waves, he was surfing so fast, turning so hard, transitioning so quickly, especially off the top. Climbing and dropping, stalling into the tube, squaring up to the breaking lip in a stable, high-velocity crouch. There was something new happening in surfing, and Glenn seemed to be in its vanguard.

Nose-riding was, I suspected, not part of it. I had become adept at hanging five, hanging ten, cross-stepping up to the tip and back as a wave allowed. I had the right ultra-light frame for it. David Nuuhiwa, the world's best nose-rider, and one of my heroes, was also tall and thin. But my Harbour Cheater was far from the most radical specialty model being ridden that summer, 1967. There were others, like the Con Ugly, that had sacrificed all other aspects of performance to maximum time on the tip.

Still, for all its ethereality, its improbability and technical difficulty, I was starting to lose interest in nose-riding. Mixed in with the slow, gentle, outrigger-bearing, tourist-clogged mush at Waikiki, there were shallow reefs, at Kaisers and Threes and even Canoes, that produced, particularly at low tide, hollow waves—waves that created, as they broke, honest-to-God tubes. And I began that summer to find my way into the spinning

blue bellies of a few waves, and even to emerge, occasionally, on my feet. Everybody talked about getting "locked in," but the thing itself, these tube rides, had the quality of revelation. They were always too brief, but their mystery was intense, addictive. You felt like you had stepped through the looking glass for an instant, and you always wanted to go back. The tube, not nose-riding, felt like the future of surfing.

People said Glenn was on drugs. That seemed plausible. Drugs—marijuana, LSD—were everywhere, especially in Waikiki, most especially in the Jungle. It was the Summer of Love, whose epicenter was San Francisco, and we seemed to get a steady traffic of envoys from there, each bringing new music, lingo, and dope. I knew kids my age who smoked pot. I was too timid to try it myself. And when my little friends and I found ourselves once or twice at parties in tumbledown surfer shacks in the Jungle, where strobe lights wheeled, the Jefferson Airplane thundered, and big guys were probably getting laid in the back rooms, we stole beers and fled. We were only ready for so much experience. I wondered where the hell Glenn lived.

My parents, as with Kaimuki Intermediate, seemed to know nothing about my demimonde life in Waikiki. But I almost got them involved after Dougie Yamashita stole my surfboard. I was beside myself with rage, fear, frustration. Yamashita, a Canoes fixture and street punk a bit older than me, had asked to borrow my board for a few minutes, then never brought it back. I was persuaded by savvier Waikiki hands to keep adults out of it. Instead, I enlisted a broad-shouldered kid known as Cippy Cipriano to find Dougie and get my board back. Cippy was a hired gun—he would beat up other kids, no explanation required, for five bucks. He surprised me and took my case for free. People said he had other scores to settle with Dougie. In any event, my beloved yellow Cheater was soon returned, with only a couple of new little scratches. Dougie, I was told, had been on acid when he took it, and should not therefore be held responsible. I didn't buy that. I was still livid. But then, the next time I saw him, I found I didn't have the nerve to confront him. This wasn't junior high

school. I didn't have the In Crowd behind me. Dougie no doubt had a large family full of tough guys, always happy to stomp little haoles. He ignored me, and I returned the favor.

I saw almost no one from the In Crowd. Steve, still stuck on the Rock, said the gang had broken up. No one, he said, could fill Mike's shoes. For some reason, we laughed ourselves sick at the image. There had been something clownlike about Mike. I phoned Lisa regularly, but always hung up, mortified, when I heard her voice.

"Gloria," by the Irish rock band Them, had been the big song on the local hit parade when I was at Kaimuki Intermediate. We all went around singing it. "*G-L-O-R-I-A, Glo-o-o-o-r-ria*." In 1967 the song on the radio in Honolulu was "Brown-Eyed Girl," by Them's singer-songwriter, Van Morrison. It wasn't a big hit, but its lyrics had the kind of Gaelic poetry that killed me in those days, and the tune had a rushing plangency too, almost Island-style. It was an elegy for lost youth, and for years it always made me think of Glenn. The song had something of his fugitive, laughing beauty in it. What I pictured was him remembering Lisa. She was the brown-eyed girl. I didn't really know what had happened between them, but I idolized them both, and I liked to think that they had once been happy "*standing in the sunlight laughing / hiding behind a rainbow's wall*." But it was typical of me, somehow, to put all this into other people, to romanticize their affairs. And it was typical, too, of the perversity of pop culture to start recycling "Brown-Eyed Girl" decades later as elevator music, supermarket music, until I couldn't stand to hear it. Every band on earth has covered it. George W. Bush had it on his iPod when he was president.

My parents had to make a choice. *Kona Coast* wasn't finished, but the school year was starting. They had learned enough about Hawaii by then to know that public schools weren't such a hot option, particularly not for high school, which I was now entering. We would head back to the mainland in time to start school there.

On cue, my surfboard was stolen again. My combination lock, cut

through by hacksaw, lay in the sand by my locker. Clearly the thief had known we were leaving. This time I did involve my parents. But time was short, and no one knew anything. Both Dougie and Cippy were away, sorry. Their families weren't sure about their plans. And so we flew back to the mainland minus one key piece of luggage.

My parents loaned me the down payment for a new Harbour Cheater, which would be identical to the stolen board, right down to the yellow tint. I went to work pulling weeds for a neighbor, at a dollar an hour, after school. With tax, the board would be $135. I figured I could have the money by November.

Breathing Lessons

A Novel

ANNE TYLER



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PART ONE

Chapter 1

Maggie and Ira Moran had to go to a funeral in Deer Lick, Pennsylvania. Maggie's girlhood friend had lost her husband. Deer Lick lay on a narrow country road some ninety miles north of Baltimore, and the funeral was scheduled for ten-thirty Saturday morning; so Ira figured they should start around eight. This made him grumpy. (He was not an early-morning kind of man.) Also Saturday was his busiest day at work, and he had no one to cover for him. Also their car was in the body shop. It had needed extensive repairs and Saturday morning at opening time, eight o'clock exactly, was the soonest they could get it back. Ira said maybe they'd just better not go, but Maggie said they had to. She and Serena had been friends forever. Or nearly forever: forty-two years, beginning with Miss Kimmel's first grade.

They planned to wake up at seven, but Maggie must have set the alarm wrong and so they overslept. They had to dress in a hurry and rush through breakfast, making do with faucet coffee and cold cereal. Then Ira headed off for the store on foot to leave a note for his customers, and Maggie walked to the body shop. She was wearing her best dress—blue and white sprigged, with cape sleeves—and crisp black pumps, on account of the funeral. The pumps were only medium-heeled but slowed her down some anyway; she was more used to crepe

soles. Another problem was that the crotch of her panty hose had somehow slipped to about the middle of her thighs, so she had to take shortened, unnaturally level steps like a chunky little windup toy wheeling along the sidewalk.

Luckily, the body shop was only a few blocks away. (In this part of town things were intermingled—small frame houses like theirs sitting among portrait photographers' studios, one-woman beauty parlors, driving schools, and podiatry clinics.) And the weather was perfect—a warm, sunny day in September, with just enough breeze to cool her face. She patted down her bangs where they tended to frizz out like a forelock. She hugged her dress-up purse under her arm. She turned left at the corner and there was Harbor Body and Fender, with the peeling green garage doors already hoisted up and the cavernous interior smelling of some sharp-scented paint that made her think of nail polish.

She had her check all ready and the manager said the keys were in the car, so in no time she was free to go. The car was parked toward the rear of the shop, an elderly gray-blue Dodge. It looked better than it had in years. They had straightened the rear bumper, replaced the mangled trunk lid, ironed out a half-dozen crimps here and there, and covered over the dapples of rust on the doors. Ira was right: no need to buy a new car after all. She slid behind the wheel. When she turned the ignition key, the radio came on—Mel Spruce's *AM Baltimore*, a call-in talk show. She let it run, for the moment. She adjusted the seat, which had been moved back for someone taller, and she tilted the rearview mirror downward. Her own face flashed toward her, round and slightly shiny, her blue eyes quirked at the inner corners as if she were worried about something when in fact she was only straining to see in the gloom. She shifted gears

and sailed smoothly toward the front of the shop, where the manager stood frowning at a clipboard just outside his office door.

Today's question on *AM Baltimore* was: "What Makes an Ideal Marriage?" A woman was phoning in to say it was common interests. "Like if you both watch the same kind of programs on TV," she explained. Maggie couldn't care less what made an ideal marriage. (She'd been married twenty-eight years.) She rolled down her window and called, "Bye now!" and the manager glanced up from his clipboard. She glided past him—a woman in charge of herself, for once, lipsticked and medium-heeled and driving an undented car.

A soft voice on the radio said, "Well, I'm about to remarry? The first time was purely for love? It was genuine, true love and it didn't work at all. Next Saturday I'm marrying for security."

Maggie looked over at the dial and said, "Fiona?"

She meant to brake, but accelerated instead and shot out of the garage and directly into the street. A Pepsi truck approaching from the left smashed into her left front fender—the only spot that had never, up till now, had the slightest thing go wrong with it.

Back when Maggie played baseball with her brothers, she used to get hurt but say she was fine, for fear they would make her quit. She'd pick herself up and run on without a limp, even if her knee was killing her. Now she was reminded of that, for when the manager rushed over, shouting, "What the . . . ? Are you all right?" she stared straight ahead in a dignified way and told him, "Certainly. Why do you ask?" and drove on before the Pepsi driver could climb out of his truck, which was probably just as well considering the look on his face. But in fact her fender was making a very upsetting noise, something like a piece of tin dragging over gravel, so as soon as

she'd turned the corner and the two men—one scratching his head, one waving his arms—had disappeared from her rearview mirror, she came to a stop. Fiona was not on the radio anymore. Instead a woman with a raspy tenor was comparing her five husbands. Maggie cut the motor and got out. She could see what was causing the trouble. The fender was crumpled inward so the tire was hitting against it; she was surprised the wheel could turn, even. She squatted on the curb, grasped the rim of the fender in both hands, and tugged. (She remembered hunkering low in the tall grass of the outfield and stealthily, wincingly peeling her jeans leg away from the patch of blood on her knee.) Flakes of gray-blue paint fell into her lap. Someone passed on the sidewalk behind her but she pretended not to notice and tugged again. This time the fender moved, not far but enough to clear the tire, and she stood up and dusted off her hands. Then she climbed back inside the car but for a minute simply sat there. "Fiona!" she said again. When she restarted the engine, the radio was advertising bank loans and she switched it off.

Ira was waiting in front of his store, unfamiliar and oddly dashing in his navy suit. A shock of ropy black, gray-threaded hair hung over his forehead. Above him a metal sign swung in the breeze: SAM'S FRAME SHOP. PICTURE FRAMING. MATTING. YOUR NEEDLEWORK PROFESSIONALLY DISPLAYED. Sam was Ira's father, who had not had a thing to do with the business since coming down with a "weak heart" thirty years before. Maggie always put "weak heart" in quotation marks. She made a point of ignoring the apartment windows above the shop, where Sam spent his cramped, idle, querulous days with Ira's two sisters. He would probably be standing there watching. She parked next to the curb and slid over to the passenger seat.

Ira's expression was a study as he approached the car.

Starting out pleased and approving, he rounded the hood and drew up short when he came upon the left fender. His long, bony, olive face grew longer. His eyes, already so narrow you couldn't be sure if they were black or merely dark brown, turned to puzzled, downward-slanting slits. He opened the door and got in and gave her a sorrowful stare.

"There was an unexpected situation," Maggie told him.

"Just between here and the body shop?"

"I heard Fiona on the radio."

"That's five blocks! Just five or six blocks."

"Ira, Fiona's getting married."

He gave up thinking of the car, she was relieved to see. Something cleared on his forehead. He looked at her a moment and then said, "Fiona who?"

"Fiona your daughter-in-law, Ira. How many Fionas do we know? Fiona the mother of your only grandchild, and now she's up and marrying some total stranger purely for security."

Ira slid the seat farther back and then pulled away from the curb. He seemed to be listening for something—perhaps for the sound of the wheel hitting. But evidently her tug on the fender had done the trick. He said, "Where'd you hear this?"

"On the radio while I was driving."

"They'd announce a thing like that on the radio?"

"She telephoned it in."

"That seems kind of . . . self-important, if you want my honest opinion," Ira said.

"No, she was just—and she said that Jesse was the only one she'd ever truly loved."

"She said this on the *radio*?"

"It was a talk show, Ira."

"Well, I don't know why everyone has to go spilling their guts in public these days," Ira said.

"Do you suppose Jesse could have been listening?" Maggie asked. The thought had just occurred to her.

"Jesse? At this hour? He's doing well if he's up before noon."

Maggie didn't argue with that, although she could have. The fact was that Jesse was an early riser, and anyhow, he worked on Saturdays. What Ira was implying was that he was shiftless. (Ira was much harder on their son than Maggie was. He didn't see half as many good points to him.) She faced forward and watched the shops and houses sliding past, the few pedestrians out with their dogs. This had been the driest summer in memory and the sidewalks had a chalky look. The air hung like gauze. A boy in front of Poor Man's Grocery was tenderly dusting his bicycle spokes with a cloth.

"So you started out on Empry Street," Ira said.

"Hmm?"

"Where the body shop is."

"Yes, Empry Street."

"And then cut over to Daimler . . . "

He was back on the subject of the fender. She said, "I did it driving out of the garage."

"You mean right there? Right at the body shop?"

"I went to hit the brake but I hit the gas instead."

"How could that happen?"

"Well, Fiona came on the radio and I was startled."

"I mean the brake isn't something you have to think about, Maggie. You've been driving since you were sixteen years old. How could you mix up the brake with the gas pedal?"

"I just did, Ira. All right? I just got startled and I did. So let's drop it."

"I mean a brake is more or less *reflex*."

"If it means so much to you I'll pay for it out of my salary."

Now it was his turn to hold his tongue. She saw him start to speak and then change his mind. (Her salary was laughable. She tended old folks in a nursing home.)

If they'd had more warning, she thought, she would have cleaned the car's interior before they set out. The dashboard was littered with parking-lot stubs. Soft-drink cups and paper napkins covered the floor at her feet. Also there were loops of black and red wire sagging beneath the glove compartment; nudge them accidentally as you crossed your legs and you'd disconnect the radio. She considered that to be Ira's doing. Men just generated wires and cords and electrical tape everywhere they went, somehow. They might not even be aware of it.

They were traveling north on Belair Road now. The scenery grew choppy. Stretches of playgrounds and cemeteries were broken suddenly by clumps of small businesses—liquor stores, pizza parlors, dark little bars and taverns dwarfed by the giant dish antennas on their roofs. Then another playground would open out. And the traffic was heavier by the minute. Everyone else was going somewhere festive and Saturday-morningish, Maggie was certain. Most of the back seats were stuffed with children. It was the hour for gymnastics lessons and baseball practice.

"The other day," Maggie told Ira, "I forgot how to say 'car pool.' "

"Why would you need to remember?" Ira asked.

"Well, that's my point."

"Pardon?"

"It shows you how time has passed, is what I'm saying. I wanted to tell one of my patients her daughter wouldn't be visiting. I said, 'Today's her day for, um,' and I couldn't think of the words. I could not think of 'car pool.' But it seems like just last week that Jesse had a game or hockey camp, Daisy had a Brownie meeting . . . Why, I used to spend all Saturday behind the wheel!"

"Speaking of which," Ira said, "was it another vehicle you hit? Or just a telephone pole?"

Maggie dug in her purse for her sunglasses. "It was a truck," she said.

"Good grief. You do it any damage?"

"I didn't notice."

"You didn't notice."

"I didn't stop to look."

She put on her sunglasses and blinked. Everything turned muted and more elegant.

"You left the scene of an accident, Maggie?"

"It wasn't an accident! It was only one of those little, like, kind of things that just happen. Why make such a big deal of it?"

"Let me see if I've got this straight," Ira said. "You zoomed out of the body shop, slammed into a truck, and kept on going."

"No, the truck slammed into *me*."

"But you were the one at fault."

"Well, yes, I suppose I was, if you insist on holding someone to blame."

"And so then you just drove on away."

"Right."

He was silent. Not a good silence.

"It was a great big huge Pepsi truck," Maggie said. "It was practically an armored tank! I bet I didn't so much as scratch it."

"But you never checked to make sure."

"I was worried I'd be late," Maggie said. "You're the one who insisted on allowing extra travel time."

"You realize the body-shop people have your name and address, don't you? All that driver has to do is ask them. We're going to find a policeman waiting for us on our doorstep."

"Ira, will you drop it?" Maggie asked. "Don't you see

I have a lot on my mind? I'm heading toward the funeral of my oldest, dearest friend's husband; no telling what Serena's dealing with right now, and here I am, a whole state away. And then on top of that I have to hear it on the radio that Fiona's getting married, when it's plain as the nose on your face she and Jesse still love each other. They've always loved each other; they never stopped; it's just that they can't, oh, connect, somehow. And besides that, my one and only grandchild is all at once going to have to adjust to a brand-new stepfather. I feel like we're just flying apart! All my friends and relatives just flying off from me like the . . . expanding universe or something! Now we'll never see that child, do you realize that!"

"We never see her anyhow," Ira said mildly. He braked for a red light.

"For all we know, this new husband could be a molester," Maggie said.

"I'm sure Fiona would choose better than that, Maggie."

She shot him a look. (It wasn't like him to say anything good about Fiona.) He was peering up at the traffic light. Squint lines radiated from the corners of his eyes. "Well, of course she would *try* to choose well," Maggie said carefully, "but even the most sensible person on God's earth can't predict every single problem, can she? Maybe he's somebody smooth and suave. Maybe he'll treat Leroy just fine till he's settled into the family."

The light changed. Ira drove on.

"Leroy," Maggie said reflectively. "Do you think we'll ever get used to that name? Sounds like a boy's name. Sounds like a football player. And the way they pronounce it: *Lee*-roy. Country."

"Did you bring that map I set out on the breakfast table?" Ira asked.

"Sometimes I think we should just start pronouncing it our way," Maggie said. "Le-*roy*." She considered.

"The map, Maggie. Did you bring it?"

"It's in my purse. Le *Rwah*," she said, gargling the *R* like a Frenchman.

"It's not as if we still had anything to do with her," Ira said.

"We could, though, Ira. We could visit her this very afternoon."

"Huh?"

"Look at where they live: Cartwheel, Pennsylvania. It's practically on the road to Deer Lick. What we could do," she said, digging through her purse, "is go to the funeral, see, and . . . Oh, where is that map? Go to the funeral and then head back down Route One to . . . You know, I don't think I brought that map after all."

"Great, Maggie."

"I think I left it on the table."

"I asked you when we were setting out, remember? I said, 'Are you going to bring the map, or am I?' You said, 'I am. I'll just stick it in my purse.' "

"Well, I don't know why you're making such a fuss about it," Maggie said. "All we've got to do is watch the road signs; anyone could manage that much."

"It's a little more complicated than that," Ira said.

"Besides, we have those directions Serena gave me over the phone."

"Maggie. Do you honestly believe any directions of Serena's could get us where we'd care to go? Ha! We'd find ourselves in Canada someplace. We'd be off in Arizona!"

"Well, you don't have to get so excited about it."

"We would never see home again," Ira said.

Maggie shook her billfold and a pack of Kleenex from her purse.

"Serena's the one who made us late for her own wed-

ding reception, remember that?" Ira said. "At that crazy little banquet hall we spent an hour locating."

"Really, Ira. You always act like women are such flibbertigibbets," Maggie said. She gave up searching through her purse; evidently she had mislaid Serena's directions as well. She said, "It's Fiona's own good I'm thinking of. She'll need us to baby-sit."

"Baby-sit?"

"During the honeymoon."

He gave her a look that she couldn't quite read.

"She's getting married next Saturday," Maggie said. "You can't take a seven-year-old on a honeymoon."

He still said nothing.

They were out beyond the city limits now and the houses had thinned. They passed a used-car lot, a scratchy bit of woods, a shopping mall with a few scattered early-bird cars parked on a concrete wasteland. Ira started whistling. Maggie stopped fiddling with her purse straps and grew still.

There were times when Ira didn't say a dozen words all day, and even when he did talk you couldn't guess what he was feeling. He was a closed-in, isolated man—his most serious flaw. But what he failed to realize was, his whistling could tell the whole story. For instance—an unsettling example—after a terrible fight in the early days of their marriage they had more or less smoothed things over, patted them into place again, and then he'd gone off to work whistling a song she couldn't identify. It wasn't till later that the words occurred to her. *I wonder if I care as much,* was the way they went, *as I did before. . . .*

But often the association was something trivial, something circumstantial—"This Old House" while he tackled a minor repair job, or "The Wichita Lineman" whenever he helped bring in the laundry. *Do, do that voodoo . . .* he whistled unknowingly, five minutes after

circling a pile of dog do on the sidewalk. And of course there were times when Maggie had no idea what he was whistling. This piece right now, say: something sort of croony, something they might play on WLIF. Well, maybe he'd merely heard it while shaving, in which case it meant nothing at all.

A Patsy Cline song; that's what it was. Patsy Cline's "Crazy."

She sat up sharply and said, "Perfectly sane people baby-sit their grandchildren, Ira Moran."

He looked startled.

"They keep them for months. Whole summers," she told him.

He said, "They don't pay drop-in visits, though."

"Certainly they do!"

"Ann Landers claims drop-in visits are inconsiderate," he said.

Ann Landers, his personal heroine.

"And it's not like we're blood relatives," he said. "We're not even Fiona's in-laws anymore."

"We're Leroy's grandparents till the day we die," Maggie told him.

He didn't have any answer for that.

This stretch of road was such a mess. Things had been allowed to just happen—a barbecue joint sprouting here, a swim-pool display room there. A pickup parked on the shoulder overflowed with pumpkins: ALL U CAN CARRY $1.50, the hand-lettered sign read. The pumpkins reminded Maggie of fall, but in fact it was so warm now that a line of moisture stood out on her upper lip. She rolled down her window, recoiled from the hot air, and rolled it up again. Anyway, enough of a breeze came from Ira's side. He drove one-handed, with his left elbow jutting over the sill. The sleeves of his suit had rucked up to show his wristbones.

Serena used to say Ira was a mystery. That was a compliment, in those days. Maggie wasn't even dating Ira, she was engaged to someone else, but Serena kept saying, "How can you resist him? He's such a mystery. He's so mysterious." "I don't have to resist him. He's not after me," Maggie had said. Although she had wondered. (Serena was right. He was such a mystery.) But Serena herself had chosen the most open-faced boy in the world. Funny old Max! Not a secret in him. "This here is my happiest memory," Max had said once. (He'd been twenty at the time, just finishing his freshman year at UNC.) "Me and these two fraternity brothers, we go out partying. And I have a tad bit too much to drink, so coming home I pass out in the back seat and when I wake up they've driven clear to Carolina Beach and left me there on the sand. Big joke on me: Ha-ha. It's six o'clock in the morning and I sit up and all I can see is sky, layers and layers of hazy sky that just kind of turn into sea lower down, without the least dividing line. So I stand up and fling off my clothes and go racing into the surf, all by my lonesome. Happiest day of my life."

What if someone had told him then that thirty years later he'd be dead of cancer, with that ocean morning the clearest picture left of him in Maggie's mind? The haze, the feel of warm air on bare skin, the shock of the first cold, briny-smelling breaker—Maggie might as well have been there herself. She was grateful suddenly for the sunlit clutter of billboards jogging past; even for the sticky vinyl upholstery plastered to the backs of her arms.

Ira said, "Who would she be marrying, I wonder."

"What?" Maggie asked. She felt a little dislocated.

"Fiona."

"Oh," Maggie said. "She didn't say."

Ira was trying to pass an oil truck. He tilted his head to

the left, peering for oncoming traffic. After a moment he said, "I'm surprised she didn't announce that too, while she was at it."

"All she said was, she was marrying for security. She said she'd married for love once before and it hadn't worked out."

"Love!" Ira said. "She was seventeen years old. She didn't know the first thing about love."

Maggie looked over at him. What *was* the first thing about love? she wanted to ask. But he was muttering at the oil truck now.

"Maybe this time it's an older man," she said. "Someone sort of fatherly. If she's marrying for security."

"This guy knows perfectly well I'm trying to pass and he keeps spreading over into my lane," Ira told her.

"Maybe she's just getting married so she won't have to go on working."

"I didn't know she worked."

"She got a job, Ira. You know that! She told us that! She got a job at a beauty parlor when Leroy started nursery school."

Ira honked at the oil truck.

"I don't know why you bother sitting in a room with people if you can't make an effort to listen," she said.

Ira said, "Maggie, is something wrong with you today?"

"What do you mean?"

"How come you're acting so irritable?"

"I'm not irritable," she said. She pushed her sunglasses higher. She could see her own nose—the small, rounded tip emerging below the nosepiece.

"It's Serena," he said.

"Serena?"

"You're upset about Serena and that's why you're snapping my head off."

"Well, of course I'm upset," Maggie said. "But I'm certainly not snapping your head off."

"Yes, you are, and it's also why you're going on and on about Fiona when you haven't given a thought to her in years."

"That's not true! How do you know how often I think about Fiona?"

Ira swung out around the oil truck at last.

By now, they had hit real country. Two men were splitting logs in a clearing, watched over by a gleaming black dog. The trees weren't changing color yet, but they had that slightly off look that meant they were just about to. Maggie gazed at a weathered wooden fence that girdled a field. Funny how a picture stayed in your mind without your knowing it. Then you see the original and you think, Why! It was there all along, like a dream that comes drifting back in pieces halfway through the morning. That fence, for instance. So far they were retracing the road to Cartwheel and she'd seen that fence on her spy trips and unconsciously made it her own. "Rickrack," she said to Ira.

"Hmm?"

"Don't they call that kind of fence 'rickrack'?"

He glanced over, but it was gone.

She had sat in her parked car some distance from Fiona's mother's house, watching for the teeniest, briefest glimpse of Leroy. Ira would have had a fit if he'd known what she was up to. This was back when Fiona first left, following a scene that Maggie never liked to recall. (She thought of it as That Awful Morning and made it vanish from her mind.) Oh, those days she'd been like a woman possessed; Leroy was not but a baby then, and what did Fiona know about babies? She'd always had Maggie to help her. So Maggie drove to Cartwheel on a free afternoon and parked the car and waited, and soon

Fiona stepped forth with Leroy in her arms and set off in the other direction, walking briskly, her long blond hair swinging in sheets and the baby's face a bright little button on her shoulder. Maggie's heart bounded upward, as if she were in love. In a way, she *was* in love—with Leroy and Fiona both, and even with her own son as he had looked while clumsily cradling his daughter against his black leather jacket. But she didn't dare show herself—not yet, at least. Instead she drove home and told Jesse, "I went to Cartwheel today."

His face flew open. His eyes rested on her for one startled, startling instant before he looked away and said, "So?"

"I didn't talk to her, but I could tell she misses you. She was walking all alone with Leroy. Nobody else."

"Do you think I care about that?" Jesse asked. "What do you think *I* care?"

The next morning, though, he borrowed the car. Maggie was relieved. (He was a loving, gentle, warmhearted boy, with an uncanny gift for drawing people toward him. This would be settled in no time.) He stayed gone all day—she phoned hourly from work to check—and returned as she was cooking supper. "Well?" she asked.

"Well, what?" he said, and he climbed the stairs and shut himself in his room.

She realized then that it would take a little longer than she had expected.

Three times—on Leroy's first three birthdays—she and Ira had made conventional visits, prearranged grandparent visits with presents; but in Maggie's mind the real visits were her spy trips, which continued without her planning them as if long, invisible threads were pulling her northward. She would think she was heading to the supermarket but she'd find herself on Route One instead, already clutching her coat collar close around her face so

as not to be recognized. She would hang out in Cartwheel's one playground, idly inspecting her fingernails next to the sandbox. She would lurk in the alley, wearing Ira's sister Junie's bright-red wig. At moments she imagined growing old at this. Maybe she would hire on as a crossing guard when Leroy started school. Maybe she'd pose as a Girl Scout leader, renting a little Girl Scout of her own if that was what was required. Maybe she'd serve as a chaperon for Leroy's senior prom. Well. No point in getting carried away. She knew from Jesse's dark silences, from the listlessness with which Fiona pushed the baby swing in the playground, that they surely couldn't stay apart much longer. Could they?

Then one afternoon she shadowed Fiona's mother as she wheeled Leroy's stroller up to Main Street. Mrs. Stuckey was a slatternly, shapeless woman who smoked cigarettes. Maggie didn't trust her as far as she could throw her, and rightly so, for look at what she did: parked Leroy outside the Cure-Boy Pharmacy and left her there while she went in. Maggie was horrified. Leroy could be kidnapped! She could be kidnapped by any passerby. Maggie approached the stroller and squatted down in front of it. "Honey?" she said. "Want to come away with your granny?" The child stared at her. She was, oh, eighteen months or so by then, and her face had seemed surprisingly grown up. Her legs had lost their infant chubbiness. Her eyes were the same milky blue as Fiona's and slightly flat, blank, as if she didn't know who Maggie was. "It's Grandma," Maggie said, but Leroy began squirming and craning all around. "Mom-Mom?" she said. Unmistakably, she was looking toward the door where Mrs. Stuckey had disappeared. Maggie stood up and walked away quickly. The rejection felt like a physical pain, like an actual wound to the chest. She didn't make any more spy trips.

When she'd driven along here in springtime, the woods had been dotted with white dogwood blossoms. They had lightened the green hills the way a sprinkle of baby's breath lightens a bouquet. And once she'd seen a small animal that was something other than the usual—not a rabbit or a raccoon but something slimmer, sleeker—and she had braked sharply and adjusted the rearview mirror to study it as she left it behind. But it had already darted into the underbrush.

"Depend on Serena to make things difficult," Ira was saying now. "She could have phoned as soon as Max died, but no, she waits until the very last minute. He dies on Wednesday, she calls late Friday night. Too late to contact Triple A about auto routes." He frowned at the road ahead of him. "Um," he said. "You don't suppose she wants me to be a pallbearer or something, do you?"

"She didn't mention it."

"But she told you she needed our help."

"I think she meant moral support," Maggie said.

"Maybe pallbearing is moral support."

"Wouldn't that be physical support?"

"Well, maybe," Ira said.

They sailed through a small town where groups of little shops broke up the pastures. Several women stood next to a mailbox, talking. Maggie turned her head to watch them. She had a left-out, covetous feeling, as if they were people she knew.

"If she wants me to be a pallbearer I'm not dressed right," Ira said.

"Certainly you're dressed right."

"I'm not wearing a black suit," he said.

"You don't own a black suit."

"I'm in navy."

"Navy's fine."

"Also I've got that trick back."

She glanced at him.

"And it's not as if I was ever very close to him," he said.

Maggie reached over to the steering wheel and laid a hand on his. "Never mind," she told him. "I bet anything she wants us just to be sitting there."

He gave her a rueful grin, really no more than a tuck of the cheek.

How peculiar he was about death! He couldn't handle even minor illness and had found reasons to stay away from the hospital the time she had her appendix out; he claimed he'd caught a cold and might infect her. Whenever one of the children fell sick he'd pretended it wasn't happening. He'd told her she was imagining things. Any hint that he wouldn't live forever—when he had to deal with life insurance, for instance—made him grow set-faced and stubborn and resentful. Maggie, on the other hand, worried she *would* live forever—maybe because of all she'd seen at the home.

And if she were the one to die first, he would probably pretend that that hadn't happened, either. He would probably just go on about his business, whistling a tune the same as always.

What tune would he be whistling?

They were crossing the Susquehanna River now and the lacy, Victorian-looking superstructure of the Conowingo power plant soared on their right. Maggie rolled down her window and leaned out. She could hear the distant rush of water; she was almost breathing water, drinking in the spray that rose like smoke from far below the bridge.

"You know what just occurred to me," Ira said, raising his voice. "That artist woman, what's-her-name. She was bringing a bunch of paintings to the shop this morning."

Maggie closed her window again. She said, "Didn't you turn on your answering machine?"

"What good would that do? She'd already arranged to come in."

"Maybe we could stop off somewhere and phone her."

"I don't have her number with me," Ira said. Then he said, "Maybe we could phone Daisy and ask her to do it."

"Daisy would be at work by now," Maggie told him.

"Shoot."

Daisy floated into Maggie's mind, trim and pretty, with Ira's dark coloring and Maggie's small bones. "Oh, dear," Maggie said. "I hate to miss her last day at home."

"She isn't home anyhow; you just told me so."

"She will be later on, though."

"You'll see plenty of her tomorrow," Ira pointed out. "Good and plenty."

Tomorrow they were driving Daisy to college—her freshman year, her first year away. Ira said, "All day cooped up in a car, you'll be sick to death of her."

"No, I won't! I would never get sick of Daisy!"

"Tell me that tomorrow," Ira said.

"Here's a thought," Maggie said. "Skip the reception."

"What reception?"

"Or whatever they call it when you go to somebody's house after the funeral."

"Fine with me," Ira said.

"That way we could still get home early even if we stopped off at Fiona's."

"Lord God, Maggie, are you still on that Fiona crap?"

"If the funeral were over by noon, say, and we went straight from there to Cartwheel—"

Ira swerved to the right, careening onto the gravel. For a moment she thought it was some kind of tantrum. (She often had a sense of inching closer and closer to the edge of his temper.) But no, he'd pulled up at a gas station, an old-fashioned kind of place, white clapboard, with two

men in overalls sitting on a bench in front. "Map," he said briefly, getting out of the car.

Maggie rolled down her window and called after him, "See if they have a snack machine, will you?"

He waved and walked toward the bench.

Now that the car was stopped, the heat flowed through the roof like melting butter. She felt the top of her head grow hot; she imagined her hair turning from brown to some metallic color, brass or copper. She let her fingers dangle lazily out the window.

If she could just get Ira to Fiona's, the rest was easy. He was not immune, after all. He had held that child on his knee. He had answered Leroy's dovelike infant coos in the same respectful tone he'd used with his own babies. "Is that so. You don't say. Well, I believe now that you mention it I did hear something of the sort." Till Maggie (always so gullible) had had to ask, "What? What did she tell you?" Then he'd give her one of his wry, quizzical looks; and so would the baby, Maggie sometimes fancied.

No, he wasn't immune, and he would set eyes on Leroy and remember instantly how they were connected. People had to be reminded, that was all. The way the world was going now, it was so easy to forget. Fiona must have forgotten how much in love she had been at the start, how she had trailed after Jesse and that rock band of his. She must have put it out of her mind on purpose, for she was no more immune than Ira. Maggie had seen the way her face fell when they arrived for Leroy's first birthday and Jesse turned out not to be with them. It was pride at work now; injured pride. "But remember?" Maggie would ask her. "Remember those early days when all you cared about was being near each other? Remember how you'd walk everywhere together, each with a hand in the rear pocket of the other's jeans?" That had seemed sort of tacky at the time, but now it made her eyes fill with tears.

Oh, this whole day was so terribly sad, the kind of day when you realize that everyone eventually got lost from everyone else; and she had not written to Serena for over a year or even heard her voice till Serena phoned last night crying so hard she was garbling half her words. At this moment (letting a breeze ripple through her fingers like warm water), Maggie felt that the entire business of time's passing was more than she could bear. Serena, she wanted to say, just think: all those things we used to promise ourselves we'd never, ever do when we grew up. We promised we wouldn't mince when we walked barefoot. We promised we wouldn't lie out on the beach tanning instead of swimming, or swimming with our chins high so we wouldn't wet our hairdos. We promised we wouldn't wash the dishes right after supper because that would take us away from our husbands; remember that? How long since you saved the dishes till morning so you could be with Max? How long since Max even noticed that you didn't?

Ira came toward her, opening out a map. Maggie removed her sunglasses and blotted her eyes on her sleeves. "Find what you wanted?" she called, and he said, "Oh . . . " and disappeared behind the map, still walking. The back of the paper was covered with photos of scenic attractions. He reached his side of the car, refolded the map, and got in. "Wish I could've called Triple A," he told her. He started the engine.

"Well, I wouldn't worry," she said. "We've got loads of extra time."

"Not really, Maggie. And look how the traffic is picking up. Every little old lady taking her weekend drive."

A ridiculous remark; the traffic was mostly trucks. They pulled out in front of a moving van, behind a Buick and another oil truck, or perhaps the same truck they had passed a while back. Maggie replaced her sunglasses.

TRY JESUS, YOU WON'T REGRET IT, a billboard read. And BUBBA MCDUFF'S SCHOOL OF COSMETOLOGY. They entered Pennsylvania and the road grew smooth for a few hundred yards, like a good intention, before settling back to the same old scabby, stippled surface. The views were long and curved and green—a small child's drawing of farm country. Distinct black cows grazed on the hillsides. BEGIN ODOMETER TEST, Maggie read. She sat up straighter. Almost immediately a tiny sign flashed by: 0.1 MI. She glanced at their odometer. "Point eight exactly," she told Ira.

"Hmm?"

"I'm testing our odometer."

Ira loosened the knot of his tie.

Two tenths of a mile. Three tenths. At four tenths, she felt they were falling behind. Maybe she was imagining things, but it seemed to her that the numeral lagged somewhat as it rolled upward. At five tenths, she was almost sure of it. "How long since you had this checked?" she asked Ira.

"Had what checked?"

"The odometer."

"Well, never," he said.

"Never! Not once? And you accuse *me* of poor auto maintenance!"

"Look at that," Ira said. "Some ninety-year-old lady they've let out loose on the highway. Can't even see above her steering wheel."

He veered around the Buick, which meant that he completely bypassed one of the mileage signs. "Darn," Maggie said. "You made me miss it."

He didn't respond. He didn't even look sorry. She pinned her eyes far ahead, preparing for the seven tenths marker. When it appeared she glanced at the odometer and the numeral was just *creeping* up. It made her feel

itchy and edgy. Oddly enough, though, the next numeral came more quickly. It might even have been too quick. Maggie said, "Oh, oh."

"What's the matter?"

"This is making me a nervous wreck," she said. She was watching for the road sign and monitoring the odometer dial, both at once. The six rolled up on the dial several seconds ahead of the sign, she could swear. She tsked. Ira looked over at her. "Slow down," she told him.

"Huh?"

"Slow down! I'm not sure we're going to make it. See, here the seven comes, rolling up, up . . . and where's the sign? Where's the *sign*? Come on, sign! We're losing! We're too far ahead! We're—"

The sign popped into view. "Ah," she said. The seven settled into place at exactly the same instant, so precisely that she almost heard it click.

"Whew!" she said. She sank back in her seat. "That was too close for comfort."

"They do set all our gauges at the factory, you know," Ira said.

"Sure, years and years ago," she told him. "I'm exhausted."

Ira said, "I wonder how long we should keep to Route One?"

"I feel I've been wrung through a wringer," Maggie said.

She made little plucking motions at the front of her dress.

Now collections of parked trucks and RVs appeared in clearings at random intervals—no humans around, no visible explanation for anybody's stopping there. Maggie had noticed this on her earlier trips and never understood it. Were the drivers off fishing, or hunting, or what? Did country people have some kind of secret life?

"Another thing is their banks," she told Ira. "All these towns have banks that look like itty-bitty brick houses, have you noticed? With yards around them, and flower beds. Would you put your faith in such a bank?"

"No reason not to."

"I just wouldn't feel my money was secure."

"Your vast wealth," Ira teased her.

"I mean it doesn't seem professional."

"Now, according to the map," he said, "we could stay on Route One a good deal farther up than Oxford. Serena had us cutting off at Oxford, if I heard you right, but . . . Check it for me, will you?"

Maggie took the map from the seat between them and opened it, one square at a time. She was hoping not to have to spread it out completely. Ira would get after her for refolding it wrong. "Oxford," she said. "Is that in Maryland or Pennsylvania?"

"It's in Pennsylvania, Maggie. Where Highway Ten leads off to the north."

"Well, then! I distinctly remember she told us to take Highway Ten."

"Yes, but if we . . . Have you been listening to a word I say? If we stayed on Route One, see, we could make better time, and I think there's a cutoff further up that would bring us directly to Deer Lick."

"Well, she must have had a reason, Ira, for telling us Highway Ten."

"A reason? Serena? Serena Gill have a reason?"

She shook out the map with a crackle. He always talked like that about her girlfriends. He acted downright jealous of them. She suspected he thought women got together on the sly and gossiped about their husbands. Typical: He was so self-centered. Although sometimes it did happen, of course.

"Did that service station have a snack machine?" she asked him.

"Just candy bars. Stuff you don't like."

"I'm dying of hunger."

"I could have got you a candy bar, but I thought you wouldn't eat it."

"Didn't they have potato chips or anything? I'm starving."

"Baby Ruths, Fifth Avenues . . . "

She made a face and went back to the map.

"Well, I would say take Highway Ten," she told him.

"I could swear I saw a later cutoff."

"Not really," she said.

"Not really? What does that mean? Either there's a cutoff or there isn't."

"Well," she said, "to tell the truth, I haven't quite located Deer Lick yet."

He flicked on his turn signal. "We'll find you someplace to eat and I'll take another look at the map," he said.

"Eat? I don't want to eat!"

"You just said you were starving to death."

"Yes, but I'm on a diet! All I want is a snack!"

"Fine. We'll get you a snack, then," he said.

"Really, Ira, I hate how you always try to undermine my diets."

"Then order a cup of coffee or something. I need to look at the map."

He was driving down a paved road that was lined with identical new ranch houses, each with a metal toolshed out back in the shape of a tiny red barn trimmed in white. Maggie wouldn't have thought there'd be any place to eat in such a neighborhood, but sure enough, around the next bend they found a frame building with a few cars parked in front of it. A dusty neon sign glowed in the window: NELL'S GROCERY & CAFE. Ira parked

next to a Jeep with a Judas Priest sticker on the bumper. Maggie opened her door and stepped out, surreptitiously hitching up the crotch of her panty hose.

The grocery smelled of store bread and waxed paper. It reminded her of a grade-school lunchroom. Here and there women stood gazing at canned goods. The café lay at the rear—one long counter, with faded color photos of orange scrambled eggs and beige link sausages lining the wall behind it. Maggie and Ira settled on adjacent stools and Ira flattened his map on the counter. Maggie watched the waitress cleaning a griddle. She sprayed it with something, scraped up thick gunk with a spatula, and sprayed again. From behind she was a large white rectangle, her gray bun tacked down with black bobby pins. "What you going to order?" she asked finally, not turning around.

Ira said, "Just coffee for me, please," without looking up from his map. Maggie had more trouble deciding. She took off her sunglasses and peered at the color photos. "Well, coffee too, I guess," she said, "and also, let me think, I ought to have a salad or something, but—"

"We don't serve any salads," the waitress said. She set aside her spray bottle and came over to Maggie, wiping her hands on her apron. Her eyes, netted with wrinkles, were an eerie light green, like old beach glass. "The onliest thing I could offer is the lettuce and tomato from a sandwich."

"Well, maybe just a sack of those taco chips from the rack, then," Maggie said happily. "Though I know I shouldn't." She watched the waitress pour two mugs of coffee. "I'm trying to lose ten pounds by Thanksgiving. I've been working on the same ten pounds forever, but this time I'm determined."

"Shoot! *You* don't need to lose weight," the woman said, setting the mugs in front of them. The red stitching

across her breast pocket read *Mabel,* a name Maggie had not heard since her childhood. What had become of all the Mabels? She tried to picture giving a new little baby that name. Meanwhile the woman was telling her, "I despise how everybody tries to look like a toothpick nowadays."

"That's what Ira says; he likes me the weight I am now," Maggie said. She glanced over at Ira but he was deep in his map, or else just pretending to be. It always embarrassed him when she took up with outsiders. "But then anytime I go to buy a dress it hangs wrong, you know? Like they don't expect me to have a bustline. I lack willpower is the problem. I crave salty things. Pickly things. Hot spices." She accepted the sack of taco chips and held it up, demonstrating.

"How about me?" Mabel asked. "Doctor says I'm so overweight my legs are going."

"Oh, you are not! Show me where you're overweight!"

"He says it wouldn't be so bad if I was in some other job but waitressing; it gets to my veins."

"Our daughter's been working as a waitress," Maggie said. She tore open the sack of taco chips and bit into one. "Sometimes she's on her feet for eight hours straight without a break. She started out in sandals but switched to crepe soles soon enough, I can tell you, even though she swore she wouldn't."

"You are surely not old enough to have a daughter that grown up," Mabel said.

"Oh, she's still a teenager; this was just a summer job. Tomorrow she leaves for college."

"College! A smarty," Mabel said.

"Oh, well, *I* don't know," Maggie said. "She did get a full scholarship, though." She held out the sack. "You want some?"

Mabel took a handful. "Mine are all boys," she told

Maggie. "Studying came about as natural to them as flying."

"Yes, our boy was that way."

" 'Why aren't you doing your homework?' I'd ask them. They'd have a dozen excuses. Most often they claimed the teacher didn't assign them any, which of course was an out-and-out story."

"That's just exactly like Jesse," Maggie said.

"And their daddy!" Mabel said. "He was forever taking up for them. Seemed they were all in cahoots and I was left out in the cold. What I wouldn't give for a daughter, I tell you!"

"Well, daughters have their drawbacks too," Maggie said. She could see that Ira wanted to break in with a question (he'd placed a finger on the map and was looking at Mabel expectantly), but once he got his answer he'd be ready to leave, so she made him hold off a bit. "For instance, daughters have more secrets. I mean you think they're talking to you, but it's small talk. Daisy, for instance: She's always been so quiet and obedient. Then up she pops with this scheme to go away to school. I had no idea she was plotting that! I said, 'Daisy? Aren't you happy here at home?' I mean of course I knew she was planning on college, but I notice University of Maryland is good enough for other people's children. 'What's wrong with closer to Baltimore?' I asked her, but she said, 'Oh, Mom, you knew all along I was aiming for someplace Ivy League.' I knew no such thing! I had no idea! And since she got the scholarship, why, she's changed past recognition. Isn't that so, Ira. *Ira* says—" she said, rushing on (having regretted giving him the opening), "Ira says she's just growing up. He says it's just growing pains that make her so picky and critical, and only a fool would take it to heart so. But it's difficult! It's so difficult! It's like all at once, every little thing we do is

wrong; like she's hunting up good reasons not to miss us when she goes. My hair's too curly and I talk too much and I eat too many fried foods. And Ira's suit is cut poorly and he doesn't know how to do business."

Mabel was nodding, all sympathy, but Ira of course thought Maggie was acting overemotional. He didn't say so, but he shifted in his seat; that was how she knew. She ignored him. "You know what she told me the other day?" she asked Mabel. "I was testing out this tuna casserole. I served it up for supper and I said, 'Isn't it delicious? Tell me honestly what you think.' And Daisy said—"

Tears pricked her eyelids. She took a deep breath. "Daisy just sat there and studied me for the longest time," she said, "with this kind of . . . fascinated expression on her face, and then she said, 'Mom? Was there a certain conscious point in your life when you decided to settle for being ordinary?' "

She meant to go on, but her lips were trembling. She laid aside her chips and fumbled in her purse for a Kleenex. Mabel clucked. Ira said, "For God's sake, Maggie."

"I'm sorry," she told Mabel. "It got to me."

"Well, sure it did," Mabel said soothingly. She slid Maggie's coffee mug a little closer to her. "Naturally it did!"

"I mean, to *me* I'm not ordinary," Maggie said.

"No indeedy!" Mabel said. "You tell her, honey! You tell her that. You tell her to stop thinking that way. Know what I said to Bobby, my oldest? This was over a tuna dish too, come to think of it; isn't that a coincidence. He announces he's sick to death of foods that are mingled together. I say to him, 'Young man,' I say, 'you can just get on up and leave this table. Leave this house, while you're at it. Find a place of your own,' I say, 'cook your

own durn meals, see how you can afford prime rib of beef every night.' And I meant it, too. He thought I was only running my mouth, but he saw soon enough I was serious; I set all his clothes on the hood of his car. Now he lives across town with his girlfriend. He didn't believe I would really truly make him move out."

"But that's just it; I don't want her to move out," Maggie said. "I like to have her at home. I mean look at Jesse: He brought his wife and baby to live with us and I loved it! Ira thinks Jesse's a failure. He says Jesse's entire life was ruined by a single friendship, which is nonsense. All Don Burnham did was tell Jesse he had singing talent. Call that ruining a life? But you take a boy like Jesse, who doesn't do just brilliantly in school, and whose father's always at him about his shortcomings; and you tell him there's this one special field where he shines—well, what do you expect? Think he'll turn his back on that and forget it?"

"Well, of course not!" Mabel said indignantly.

"Of course not. He took up singing with a hard-rock band. He dropped out of high school and collected a whole following of girls and finally one particular girl and then he married her; nothing wrong with that. Brought her to live in our house because he wasn't making much money. I was thrilled. They had a darling little baby. Then his wife and baby moved out on account of this awful scene, just up and left. It was nothing but an argument really, but you know how those can escalate. I said, 'Ira, go after her; it's your fault she went.' (Ira was right in the thick of that scene and I blame him to this day.) But Ira said no, let her do what she liked. He said let them just go on and go, but I felt she had ripped that child from my flesh and left a big torn spot behind."

"Grandbabies," Mabel said. "Don't get me started."

Ira said, "Not to change the subject, but—"

"Oh, Ira," Maggie told him, "just take Highway Ten and shut up about it."

He gave her a long, icy stare. She buried her nose in her Kleenex, but she knew what kind of stare it was. Then he asked Mabel, "Have you ever been to Deer Lick?"

"Deer Lick," Mabel said. "Seems to me I've heard of it."

"I was wondering where we'd cut off from Route One to get there."

"Now, that I wouldn't know," Mabel told him. She asked Maggie, "Honey, can I pour you more coffee?"

"Oh, no, thank you," Maggie said. In fact, her mug was untouched. She took a little sip to show her appreciation.

Mabel tore the bill off a pad and handed it to Ira. He paid in loose change, standing up to root through his pockets. Maggie, meanwhile, placed her damp Kleenex in the empty chip sack and made a tidy package of it so as not to be any trouble. "Well, it was nice talking to you," she told Mabel.

"Take care, sweetheart," Mabel said.

Maggie had the feeling they ought to kiss cheeks, like women who'd had lunch together.

She wasn't crying anymore, but she could sense Ira's disgust as he led the way to the parking lot. It felt like a sheet of something glassy and flat, shutting her out. He ought to have married Ann Landers, she thought. She slid into the car. The seat was so hot it burned through the back of her dress. Ira got in too and slammed the door behind him. If he had married Ann Landers he'd have just the kind of hard-nosed, sensible wife he wanted. Sometimes, hearing his grunt of approval as he read one of Ann's snappy answers, Maggie felt an actual pang of jealousy.

They passed the ranch houses once again, jouncing along the little paved road. The map lay between them,

crisply folded. She didn't ask what he'd decided about routes. She looked out the window, every now and then sniffing as quietly as possible.

"Six and a half years," Ira said. "No, seven now, and you're still dragging up that Fiona business. Telling total strangers it was all my fault she left. You just have to blame someone for it, don't you, Maggie."

"If someone's to blame, why, yes, I do," Maggie told the scenery.

"Never occurred to you it might be your fault, did it."

"Are we going to go through this whole dumb argument again?" she asked, swinging around to confront him.

"Well, who brought it up, I'd like to know?"

"I was merely stating the facts, Ira."

"Who asked for the facts, Maggie? Why do you feel the need to pour out your soul to some waitress?"

"Now, there is nothing wrong with being a waitress," she told him. "It's a perfectly respectable occupation. Our own daughter's been working as a waitress, must I remind you."

"Oh, great, Maggie; another of your logical progressions."

"One thing about you that I really cannot stand," she said, "is how you act so superior. We can't have just a civilized back-and-forth discussion; oh, no. No, you have to make a point of how illogical I am, what a whifflehead I am, how you're so cool and above it all."

"Well, at least I don't spill my life story in public eating places," he told her.

"Oh, just let me out," she said. "I cannot bear your company another second."

"Gladly," he said, but he went on driving.

"Let me out, I tell you!"

He looked over at her. He slowed down. She picked up her purse and clutched it to her chest.

"Are you going to stop this car," she asked, "or do I have to jump from a moving vehicle?"

He stopped the car.

Maggie got out and slammed the door. She started walking back toward the café. For a moment it seemed that Ira planned just to sit there, but then she heard him shift gears and drive on.

The sun poured down a great wash of yellow light, and her shoes made little cluttery sounds on the gravel. Her heart was beating extra fast. She felt pleased, in a funny sort of way. She felt almost drunk with fury and elation.

She passed the first of the ranch houses, where weedy flowers waved along the edge of the front yard and a tricycle lay in the driveway. It certainly was quiet. All she could hear was the distant chirping of birds—their *chink! chink! chink!* and *video! video! video!* in the trees far across the fields. She'd lived her entire life with the hum of the city, she realized. You'd think Baltimore was kept running by some giant, ceaseless, underground machine. How had she stood it? Just like that, she gave up any plan for returning. She'd been heading toward the café with some vague notion of asking for the nearest Trailways stop, or maybe hitching a ride back home with a reliable-looking trucker; but what was the point of going home?

She passed the second ranch house, which had a mailbox out front shaped like a covered wagon. A fence surrounded the property—just whitewashed stumps linked by swags of whitewashed chain, purely ornamental—and she stopped next to one of the stumps and set her purse on it to take inventory. The trouble with dress-up purses was that they were so small. Her everyday purse, a canvas tote, could have kept her going for weeks. ("You give the line 'Who steals my purse steals trash' a whole new meaning," her mother had once remarked.) Still, she had

the basics: a comb, a pack of Kleenex, and a lipstick. And in her wallet, thirty-four dollars and some change and a blank check. Also two credit cards, but the check was what mattered. She would go to the nearest bank and open the largest account the check would safely cover—say three hundred dollars. Why, three hundred dollars could last her a long time! Long enough to find work, at least. The credit cards, she supposed, Ira would very soon cancel. Although she might try using them just for this weekend.

She flipped through the rest of the plastic windows in her wallet, passing her driver's license, her library card, a school photo of Daisy, a folded coupon for Affinity shampoo, and a color snapshot of Jesse standing on the front steps at home. Daisy was double-exposed—it was all the rage last year—so her precise, chiseled profile loomed semitransparent behind a full-face view of her with her chin raised haughtily. Jesse wore his mammoth black overcoat from Value Village and a very long red fringed neck scarf that dangled below his knees. She was struck—she was almost injured—by his handsomeness. He had taken Ira's one drop of Indian blood and transformed it into something rich and stunning: high polished cheekbones, straight black hair, long black lusterless eyes. But the look he gave her was veiled and impassive, as haughty as Daisy's. Neither one of them had any further need of her.

She replaced everything in her purse and snapped it shut. When she started walking again her shoes felt stiff and uncomfortable, as if her feet had changed shape while she was standing. Maybe they'd swollen; it was a very warm day. But even the weather suited her purposes. This way, she could camp out if she had to. She could sleep in a haystack. Providing haystacks still existed.

Tonight she'd phone Serena and apologize for missing the funeral. She would reverse the charges; she could do that, with Serena. Serena might not want to accept the call at first because Maggie had let her down—Serena was always so quick to take offense—but eventually she'd give in and Maggie would explain. "Listen," she would say, "right now I wouldn't mind going to *Ira's* funeral." Or maybe that was tactless, in view of the circumstances.

The café lay just ahead, and beyond that was a low cinderblock building of some sort and beyond that, she guessed, at least a semblance of a town. It would be one of those scrappy little Route One towns, with much attention given to the requirements of auto travel. She would register at a no-frills motel, the room scarcely larger than the bed, which she pictured, with some enjoyment, as sunken in the middle and covered with a worn chenille spread. She would shop at Nell's Grocery for foods that didn't need cooking. One thing most people failed to realize was that many varieties of canned soup could be eaten cold straight from the tin, and they made a fairly balanced meal, too. (A can opener: She mustn't forget to buy one at the grocery.)

As for employment, she didn't have much hope of finding a nursing home in such a town. Maybe something clerical, then. She knew how to type and keep books, although she wasn't wonderful at it. She'd had a little experience at the frame shop. Maybe an auto-parts store could use her, or she could be one of those women behind the grille at a service station, embossing credit card bills and handing people their keys. If worse came to worst she could punch a cash register. She could wait tables. She could scrub floors, for heaven's sake. She was only forty-eight and her health was perfect, and in spite of what some people might think, she was capable of anything she set her mind to.

She bent to pick a chicory flower. She stuck it in the curls above her left ear.

Ira thought she was a klutz. Everybody did. She had developed a sort of clownish, pratfalling reputation, somehow. In the nursing home once, there'd been a crash and a tinkle of glass, and the charge nurse had said, "Maggie?" Just like that! Not even checking first to make sure! And Maggie hadn't been anywhere near; it was someone else entirely. But that just went to show how people viewed her.

She had assumed when she married Ira that he would always look at her the way he'd looked at her that first night, when she stood in front of him in her trousseau negligee and the only light in the room was the filmy shaded lamp by the bed. She had unbuttoned her top button and then her next-to-top button, just enough to let the negligee slip from her shoulders and hesitate and fall around her ankles. He had looked directly into her eyes, and it seemed he wasn't even breathing. She had assumed that would go on forever.

In the parking lot in front of Nell's Grocery & Café two men stood next to a pickup, talking. One was fat and ham-faced and the other was thin and white and wilted. They were discussing someone named Doug who had come out all over in swelters. Maggie wondered what a swelter was. She pictured it as a combination of a sweat and a welt. She knew she must make an odd sight, arriving on foot out of nowhere so dressed up and citified. "Hello!" she cried, sounding like her mother. The men stopped talking and stared at her. The thin one took his cap off finally and looked inside it. Then he put it back on his head.

She could step into the café and speak to Mabel, ask if she knew of a job and a place to stay; or she could head straight for town and find something on her own. In a

way, she preferred to fend for herself. It would be sort of embarrassing to confess she'd been abandoned by her husband. On the other hand, maybe Mabel knew of some marvelous job. Maybe she knew of the perfect boardinghouse, dirt cheap, with kitchen privileges, full of kindhearted people. Maggie supposed she ought to at least inquire.

She let the screen door slap shut behind her. The grocery was familiar now and she moved through its smells comfortably. At the lunch counter she found Mabel leaning on a wadded-up dishcloth and talking to a man in overalls. They were almost whispering. "Why, *you* can't do nothing about it," Mabel was saying. "What do they think *you* can do about it?"

Maggie felt she was intruding. She hadn't counted on having to share Mabel with someone else. She shrank back before she was seen; she skulked in the crackers-and-cookies aisle, hoping for her rival to depart.

"I been over it and over it," the man said creakily. "I still can't see what else I could have done."

"Good gracious, no."

Maggie picked up a box of Ritz crackers. There used to be a kind of apple pie people made that contained no apples whatsoever, just Ritz crackers. What would that taste like, she wondered. It didn't seem to her there was the remotest chance it could taste like apple pie. Maybe you soaked the crackers in cider or something first. She looked on the box for the recipe, but it wasn't mentioned.

Now Ira would be starting to realize she was gone. He would be noticing the empty rush of air that comes when a person you're accustomed to is all at once absent.

Would he go on to the funeral without her? She hadn't thought of that. No, Serena was more Maggie's friend than Ira's. And Max had been just an acquaintance. To

tell the truth, Ira didn't have any friends. It was one of the things Maggie minded about him.

He'd be slowing down. He'd be trying to decide. Maybe he had already turned the car around.

He would be noticing how stark and upright a person feels when he's suddenly left on his own.

Maggie set down the Ritz crackers and drifted toward the Fig Newtons.

One time a number of years ago, Maggie had fallen in love, in a way, with a patient at the nursing home. The very notion was comical, of course. In love! With a man in his seventies! A man who had to ride in a wheelchair if he went any distance at all! But there you are. She was fascinated by his austere white face and courtly manners. She liked his stiff turns of speech, which gave her the feeling he was keeping his own words at a distance. And she knew what pain it caused him to dress so formally each morning, his expression magnificently disengaged as he worked his arthritic, clublike hands into the sleeves of his suit coat. Mr. Gabriel, his name was. "Ben" to everyone else, but "Mr. Gabriel" to Maggie, for she guessed how familiarity alarmed him. And she was diffident about helping him, always asking his permission first. She was careful not to touch him. It was a kind of reverse courtship, you might say. While the others treated him warmly and a little condescendingly, Maggie stood back and allowed him his reserve.

In the office files, she read that he owned a nationally prominent power-tool company. Yes, she could see him in that position. He had a businessman's crisp authority, a businessman's air of knowing what was what. She read that he was widowed and childless, without any close relations except for an unmarried sister in New Hampshire. Until recently he had lived by himself, but shortly after his cook started a minor grease fire in the kitchen

he'd applied for admission to the home. His concern, he wrote, was that he was becoming too disabled to escape if his house burned down. Concern! You had to know the man to know what the word concealed: a morbid, obsessive dread of fire, which had taken root with that small kitchen blaze and grown till not even live-in help, and finally not even round-the-clock nursing care, could reassure him. (Maggie had observed his stony, fixed stare during fire drills—the only occasions on which he seemed truly to be a patient.)

Oh, why was she reading his file? She wasn't supposed to. Strictly speaking, she shouldn't read even his medical record. She was nothing but a geriatric nursing assistant, certified to bathe her charges and feed them and guide them to the toilet.

And even in her imagination, she had always been the most faithful of wives. She had never felt so much as tempted. But now thoughts of Mr. Gabriel consumed her, and she spent hours inventing new ways to be indispensable to him. He always noticed, and he always thanked her. "Imagine!" he told a nurse. "Maggie's brought me tomatoes from her own backyard." Maggie's tomatoes were subject to an unusual ailment: They were bulbous, like collections of little red rubber jack balls that had collided and mashed together. This problem had persisted for several years, through several varieties of hybrids. Maggie blamed the tiny plot of city soil she was forced to confine them to (or was it the lack of sun?), but often she sensed, from the amused and tolerant looks they drew, that other people thought it had something to do with Maggie herself—with the knobby, fumbling way she seemed to be progressing through her life. Yet Mr. Gabriel noticed nothing. He declared her tomatoes smelled like a summer's day in 1944. When she sliced them they resembled doilies—scalloped around the

edges, full of holes between intersections—but all he said was: "I can't tell you how much this means to me." He wouldn't even let her salt them. He said they tasted glorious, just as they were.

Well, she wasn't stupid. She realized that what appealed to her was the image he had of her—an image that would have staggered Ira. It would have staggered anyone who knew her. Mr. Gabriel thought she was capable and skillful and efficient. He believed that everything she did was perfect. He said as much, in so many words. And this was during a very unsatisfactory period in her life, when Jesse was just turning adolescent and negative and Maggie seemed to be going through a quarrelsome spell with Ira. But Mr. Gabriel never guessed any of that. Mr. Gabriel saw someone collected, moving serenely around his room straightening his belongings.

At night she lay awake and concocted dialogues in which Mr. Gabriel confessed that he was besotted with her. He would say he knew that he was too old to attract her physically, but she would interrupt to tell him he was wrong. This was a fact. The mere thought of laying her head against his starched white shoulder could turn her all warm and melting. She would promise to go anywhere with him, anywhere on earth. Should they take Daisy too? (Daisy was five or six at the time.) Of course they couldn't take Jesse; Jesse was no longer a child. But then Jesse would think she loved Daisy better, and she certainly couldn't have that. She wandered off on a sidetrack, imagining what would happen if they did take Jesse. He would lag a few steps behind, wearing one of his all-black outfits, laboring under his entire stereo system and a stack of record albums. She started giggling. Ira stirred in his sleep and said, "Hmm?" She sobered and hugged herself—a competent, adventurous woman, with infinite possibilities.

Star-crossed, that's what they were; but she seemed to have found a way to be star-crossed differently from anyone else. How would she tend Mr. Gabriel and still go out to a job? He refused to be left alone. And what job would she go to? Her only employment in all her life had been with the Silver Threads Nursing Home. Fat chance they'd give her a letter of reference after she'd absconded with one of their patients.

Another sidetrack: What if she didn't abscond, but broke the news to Ira in a civilized manner and calmly made new arrangements? She could move into Mr. Gabriel's room. She could rise from his bed every morning and be right there at work; no commute. At night when the nurse came around with the pills, she'd find Maggie and Mr. Gabriel stretched out side by side, staring at the ceiling, with their roommate, Abner Scopes, in the bed along the opposite wall.

Maggie gave another snicker.

This was turning out all skewed, somehow.

Like anyone in love, she constantly found reasons to mention his name. She told Ira everything about him—his suits and ties, his gallantry, his stoicism. "I don't know why you can't act that keen about my father; he's family," Ira said, missing the point entirely. Ira's father was a whiner, a user. Mr. Gabriel was nothing like him.

Then one morning the home held another fire drill. The alarm bell jangled and the code blared over the loudspeaker: "Dr. Red in Room Two-twenty." This happened in the middle of activity hour—an inconvenient time because the patients were so scattered. Those with any manual dexterity were down in the Crafts Room, knotting colored silk flowers. Those too crippled—Mr. Gabriel, for instance—were taking an extra session of P. T. And of course the bedridden were still in their rooms. They were the easy ones.

The rule was that you cleared the halls of all obstructions, shut stray patients into any room available, and tied red cloths to the doorknobs to show which rooms were occupied. Maggie closed off 201 and 203, where her only bedridden patients lay. She attached red cloths from the broom closet. Then she coaxed one of Joelle Barrett's wandering old ladies into 202. There was an empty tray cart next to 202 and she set that inside as well, after which she dashed off to seize Lottie Stein, who was inching along in her walker and humming tunelessly. Maggie put her in 201 with Hepzibah Murray. Then Joelle arrived, wheeling Lawrence Dunn and calling, "Oops! Tillie's out!" Tillie was the one Maggie had just stashed in 202. That was the trouble with these drills. They reminded her of those pocket-sized games where you tried to get all the silver BBs into their nooks at once. She captured Tillie and slammed her back in 202. Disturbing sounds were coming from 201. That would be a fight between Lottie and Hepzibah; Hepzibah hated having outsiders in her room. Maggie should have dealt with it, and she should also have gone to the aid of Joelle, who was having quite a struggle with Lawrence, but there was something more important on her mind. She was thinking, of course, about Mr. Gabriel.

By now, he would be catatonic with fear.

She left her corridor. (You were never supposed to do that.) She zipped past the nurses' station, down the stairs, and made a right-angle turn. The P. T. room lay at the far end of the hall. Both of its swinging doors were shut. She raced toward them, rounding first a folding chair and then a canvas laundry cart, neither of which should have been there. But all at once she heard footsteps, the squeak of rubber soles. She stopped and looked around. Mrs. Willis! Almost certainly it was Mrs. Willis, her supervisor; and here Maggie was, miles from her proper station.

She did the first thing that came to mind. She vaulted into the laundry cart.

Absurd, she knew it instantly. She was cursing herself even as she sank among the crumpled linens. She might have got away with it, though, except that she'd set the cart to rolling. Somebody grabbed it and drew it to a halt. A growly voice said, "What in the world?"

Maggie opened her eyes, which she had closed the way small children do in one last desperate attempt to make themselves invisible. Bertha Washington, from the kitchen, stood gaping down at her.

"Hi, there," Maggie said.

"Well, I never!" Bertha said. "Sateen, come look at whoall's waiting for the laundry man."

Sateen Bishop's face arrived next to Bertha's, breaking into a smile. "You goofball, Maggie! What will you get up to next? Most folks just takes baths," she said.

"This was a miscalculation," Maggie told them. She stood up, batting away a towel that draped one shoulder. "Ah, well, I guess I'd better be—"

But Sateen said, "Off we goes, girl."

"Sateen! No!" Maggie cried.

Sateen and Bertha took hold of the cart, chortling like maniacs, and tore down the hall. Maggie had to hang on tight or she would have toppled backward. She careened along, dodging as she approached the bend, but the women were quicker on their feet than they looked. They swung her around handily and started back the way they'd come. Maggie's bangs lifted off her forehead in the breeze. She felt like a figurehead on a ship. She clutched at the sides of the cart and called, half laughing, "Stop! Please stop!" Bertha, who was overweight, snorted and thudded beside her. Sateen made a *siss*ing sound through her teeth. They rattled toward the P. T. room just as the all-clear bell sounded—a hoarse burr

over the loudspeaker. Instantly the doors swung open and Mr. Gabriel emerged in his wheelchair, propelled by Mrs. Inman. Not the physical therapist, not an assistant or a volunteer, but Mrs. Inman herself, the director of nursing for the entire home. Sateen and Bertha pulled up short. Mr. Gabriel's jaw dropped.

Mrs. Inman said, "Ladies?"

Maggie laid a hand on Bertha's shoulder and climbed out of the cart. "Honestly," she told the two women. She batted down the hem of her skirt.

"Ladies, are you aware that we've been having a fire drill?"

"Yes, ma'am," Maggie said. She had always been scared to death of stern women.

"Are you aware of the seriousness of a fire drill in a nursing home?"

Maggie said, "I was just—"

"Take Ben to his room, please, Maggie. I'll speak with you in my office later."

"Yes, ma'am," Maggie said.

She wheeled Mr. Gabriel toward the elevator. When she leaned forward to press the button, her arm brushed his shoulder, and he jerked away from her. She said, "Excuse me." He didn't respond.

In the elevator he was silent, although that could have been because a doctor happened to be riding with them. But even after they arrived on the second floor and parted company with the doctor, Mr. Gabriel said nothing.

The hall had that hurricane-swept appearance it always took on after a drill. Every door was flung open and patients were roving distractedly and the staff was dragging forth the objects that didn't belong in the rooms. Maggie wheeled Mr. Gabriel into 206. His roommate hadn't returned yet. She parked the chair. Still he sat silent.

"Oh, land," she said, giving a little laugh.

His eyes slid slowly to her face.

Maybe he could view her as a sort of *I Love Lucy* type—madcap, fun-loving, full of irrepressible high spirits. That was one way to look at it. Actually, Maggie had never liked *I Love Lucy*. She thought the plots were so engineered—that dizzy woman's failures just built-in, just guaranteed. But maybe Mr. Gabriel felt differently.

"I came downstairs to find you," she said.

He watched her.

"I was worried," she told him.

So worried you took a joyride in a laundry cart, his glare said plainly.

Then Maggie, stooping to set the brake on his wheelchair, was struck by the most peculiar thought. It was the lines alongside his mouth that caused it—deep crevices that pulled the corners down. Ira had those lines. On Ira they were fainter, of course. They showed up only when he disapproved of something. (Usually Maggie.) And Ira would give her that same dark, sober, judging gaze.

Why, Mr. Gabriel was just another Ira, was all. He had Ira's craggy face and Ira's dignity, his aloofness, that could still to this day exert a physical pull on her. He was even supporting that unmarried sister, she would bet, just as Ira supported *his* sisters and his deadbeat father: a sign of a noble nature, some might say. All Mr. Gabriel was, in fact, was Maggie's attempt to find an earlier version of Ira. She'd wanted the version she had known at the start of their marriage, before she'd begun disappointing him.

She hadn't been courting Mr. Gabriel; she'd been courting Ira.

Well, she helped Mr. Gabriel out of his wheelchair and into the armchair next to his bed, and then she left to check the other patients, and life went on the same as ever. In fact, Mr. Gabriel still lived at the home, although

they didn't talk as much as they used to. Nowadays he seemed to prefer Joelle. He was perfectly friendly, though. He'd probably forgotten all about Maggie's ride in the laundry cart.

But Maggie remembered, and sometimes, feeling the glassy sheet of Ira's disapproval, she grew numbly, wearily certain that there was no such thing on this earth as real change. You could change husbands, but not the situation. You could change *who,* but not *what*. We're all just spinning here, she thought, and she pictured the world as a little blue teacup, revolving like those rides at Kiddie Land where everyone is pinned to his place by centrifugal force.

She picked up a box of Fig Newtons and read the nutrition panel on the back. "Sixty calories each," she said out loud, and Ira said, "Ah, go ahead and splurge."

"Stop undermining my diet," she told him. She replaced the box on the shelf, not turning.

"Hey, babe," he said, "care to accompany me to a funeral?"

She shrugged and didn't answer, but when he hung an arm around her shoulders she let him lead her out to the car.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

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They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus,* or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite "discovering" the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours.

No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since. Santo

Domingo might be fukú's Kilometer Zero, its port of entry, but we are all of us its children, whether we know it or not.

But the fukú ain't just ancient history, a ghost story from the past with no power to scare. In my parents' day the fukú was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in. Everybody knew someone who'd been eaten by a fukú, just like everybody knew somebody who worked up in the Palacio. It was in the air, you could say, though, like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about. But in those elder days, fukú had it good; it even had a hypeman of sorts, a high priest, you could say. Our then dictator-for-life Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina.[1] No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse's

1. For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history: Trujillo, one of the twentieth century's most infamous dictators, ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality. A portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulato who bleached his skin, wore platform shoes, and had a fondness for Napoleon-era haberdashery, Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, and Fuckface) came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master. At first glance, he was just your prototypical Latin American caudillo, but his power was terminal in ways that few historians or writers have ever truly captured or, I would argue, imagined. He was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up. Famous for changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS in the Dominican Republic to honor himself (Pico Duarte became Pico Trujillo, and Santo Domingo de Guzmán, the first and oldest city in the New World, became Ciudad Trujillo); for making ill monopolies out of every slice of the national patrimony (which quickly made him one of the wealthiest men on the planet); for building one of the largest militaries in the hemisphere (dude had bomber wings, for fuck's sake); for fucking every hot girl in sight, even the wives of his subordinates, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of women; for expecting, no, *insisting* on absolute veneration from his pueblo (tellingly, the national slogan was

servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was *tight*. It was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fukú most powerful, down to the seventh generation and beyond. If you even thought a bad thing about Trujillo, *fuá*, a hurricane would sweep your family out to sea, *fuá*, a boulder would fall out of a clear sky and squash you, *fuá*, the shrimp you ate today was the cramp that killed you tomorrow. Which explains why everyone who tried to assassinate him always got done, why those dudes who finally did buck him down all died so horrifically. And what about fucking Kennedy? He was the one who green-lighted the assassination of Trujillo in 1961, who ordered the CIA to deliver arms to the Island. Bad move, cap'n. For what Kennedy's intelligence experts failed to tell him was what every single Dominican, from the richest jabao in Mao to the poorest güey in El Buey, from the oldest anciano sanmacorisano to the littlest carajito in San Francisco, knew: that whoever killed Trujillo, their family would suffer a fukú so dreadful it would make the one that attached itself to the Admiral jojote in comparison.

"Dios y Trujillo"; for running the country like it was a Marine boot camp; for stripping friends and allies of their positions and properties for no reason at all; and for his almost *supernatural* abilities.

Outstanding accomplishments include: the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community; one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating U.S.-backed dictators, so you know this was a hard-earned victory, the chilenos and the argentinos are still appealing); the creation of the first modern kleptocracy (Trujillo was Mobutu before Mobutu was Mobutu); the systematic bribing of American senators; and, last but not least, the forging of the Dominican peoples into a modern state (did what his Marine trainers, during the Occupation, were unable to do).

You want a final conclusive answer to the Warren Commission's question, Who killed JFK? Let me, your humble Watcher, reveal once and for all the God's Honest Truth: It wasn't the mob or LBJ or the ghost of Marilyn Fucking Monroe. It wasn't aliens or the KGB or a lone gunman. It wasn't the Hunt Brothers of Texas or Lee Harvey or the Trilateral Commission. It was Trujillo; it was the fukú. Where in coñazo do you think the so-called Curse of the Kennedys comes from?[2] How about Vietnam? Why do you think the greatest power in the world lost its first war to a Third World country like Vietnam? I mean, Negro, *please*. It might interest you that just as the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, LBJ launched an illegal invasion of the Dominican Republic (April 28, 1965). (Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq.) A smashing military success for the U.S., and many of the same units and intelligence teams that took part in the "democratization" of Santo Domingo were immediately shipped off to Saigon. What do you think these soldiers, technicians, and spooks carried with them, in their rucks, in their suitcases, in their shirt pockets, on the hair inside their nostrils, caked up around their shoes? Just a little gift from my people to America, a small repayment for an unjust war. That's right, folks. Fukú.

Which is why it's important to remember fukú doesn't always strike like lightning. Sometimes it works patiently, drowning a

2. Here's one for you conspiracy-minded fools: on the night that John Kennedy, Jr., and Carolyn Bessette and her sister Lauren went down in their Piper Saratoga, John-John's father's favorite domestic, Providencia Paredes, dominicana, was in Martha's Vineyard cooking up for John-John his favorite dish: chicharrón de pollo. But fukú always eats first and it eats alone.

nigger by degrees, like with the Admiral or the U.S. in paddies outside of Saigon. Sometimes it's slow and sometimes it's fast. It's doom-ish in that way, makes it harder to put a finger on, to brace yourself against. But be assured: like Darkseid's Omega Effect, like Morgoth's bane,[3] no matter how many turns and digressions this shit might take, it always—and I mean always—gets its man.

Whether I believe in what many have described as the Great American Doom is not really the point. You live as long as I did in the heart of fukú country, you hear these kinds of tales all the time. Everybody in Santo Domingo has a fukú story knocking around in their family. I have a twelve-daughter uncle in the Cibao who believed that he'd been cursed by an old lover never to have male children. Fukú. I have a tía who believed she'd been denied happiness because she'd laughed at a rival's funeral. Fukú. My paternal abuelo believes that diaspora was Trujillo's payback to the pueblo that betrayed him. Fukú.

It's perfectly fine if you don't believe in these "superstitions." In fact, it's better than fine—it's perfect. Because no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you.

3. "I am the Elder King: Melkor, first and mightiest of all the Valar, who was before the world and made it. The shadow of my purpose lies upon Arda, and all that is in it bends slowly and surely to my will. But upon all whom you love my thought shall weigh as a cloud of Doom, and it shall bring them down into darkness and despair. Wherever they go, evil shall arise. Whenever they speak, their words shall bring ill counsel. Whatsoever they do shall turn against them. They shall die without hope, cursing both life and death."

A couple weeks ago, while I was finishing this book, I posted the thread *fukú* on the DR1 forum, just out of curiosity. These days I'm nerdy like that. The talkback blew the fuck up. You should see how many responses I've gotten. They just keep coming in. And not just from Domos. The Puertorocks want to talk about fufus, and the Haitians have some shit just like it. There are a zillion of these fukú stories. Even my mother, who almost never talks about Santo Domingo, has started sharing hers with me.

As I'm sure you've guessed by now, I have a fukú story too. I wish I could say it was the best of the lot—fukú number one—but I can't. Mine ain't the scariest, the clearest, the most painful, or the most beautiful.

It just happens to be the one that's got its fingers around my throat.

I'm not entirely sure Oscar would have liked this designation. Fukú story. He was a hardcore sci-fi and fantasy man, believed that that was the kind of story we were all living in. He'd ask: What more sci-fi than the Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles?

But now that I know how it all turns out, I have to ask, in turn: What more fukú?

One final final note, Toto, before Kansas goes bye-bye: traditionally in Santo Domingo anytime you mentioned or overheard the Admiral's name or anytime a fukú reared its many heads

there was only one way to prevent disaster from coiling around you, only one surefire counterspell that would keep you and your family safe. Not surprisingly, it was a word. A simple word (followed usually by a vigorous crossing of index fingers).

Zafa.

It used to be more popular in the old days, bigger, so to speak, in Macondo than in McOndo. There are people, though, like my tío Miguel in the Bronx who still zafa everything. He's old-school like that. If the Yanks commit an error in the late innings it's zafa; if somebody brings shells in from the beach it's zafa; if you serve a man parcha it's zafa. Twenty-four-hour zafa in the hope that the bad luck will not have had time to cohere. Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell.

Michael Shaara

The Killer Angels

A Novel of the Civil War



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Monday, June 29, 1863

Mine eyes have seen the glory . . .

1.

The Spy

He rode into the dark of the woods and dismounted. He crawled upward on his belly over cool rocks out into the sunlight, and suddenly he was in the open and he could see for miles, and there was the whole vast army below him, filling the valley like a smoking river. It came out of a blue rainstorm in the east and overflowed the narrow valley road, coiling along a stream, narrowing and choking at a white bridge, fading out into the yellowish dust of June but still visible on the farther road beyond the blue hills, spiked with flags and guidons like a great chopped bristly snake, the snake ending headless in a blue wall of summer rain.

The spy tucked himself behind a boulder and began counting flags. Must be twenty thousand men, visible all at once. Two whole Union Corps. He could make out the familiar black hats of the Iron Brigade, troops belonging to John Reynolds's First Corps. He looked at his watch, noted the time. They were coming very fast. The Army of the Potomac had never moved this fast. The day was murderously hot and there was no wind and the dust hung above the army like a yellow veil. He thought: there'll be some of them die of the heat today. But they are coming faster than they ever came before.

He slipped back down into the cool dark and rode slowly downhill toward the silent empty country to the north. With luck he could

make the Southern line before nightfall. After nightfall it would be dangerous. But he must not seem to hurry. The horse was already tired. And yet there was the pressure of that great blue army behind him, building like water behind a cracking dam. He rode out into the open, into the land between the armies.

There were fat Dutch barns, prim German orchards. But there were no cattle in the fields and no horses, and houses everywhere were empty and dark. He was alone in the heat and the silence, and then it began to rain and he rode head down into monstrous lightning. All his life he had been afraid of lightning but he kept riding. He did not know where the Southern headquarters was but he knew it had to be somewhere near Chambersburg. He had smelled out the shape of Lee's army in all the rumors and bar talk and newspapers and hysteria he had drifted through all over eastern Pennsylvania, and on that day he was perhaps the only man alive who knew the positions of both armies. He carried the knowledge with a hot and lovely pride. Lee would be near Chambersburg, and wherever Lee was Longstreet would not be far away. So finding the headquarters was not the problem. The problem was riding through a picket line in the dark.

The rain grew worse. He could not even move in under a tree because of the lightning. He had to take care not to get lost. He rode quoting Shakespeare from memory, thinking of the picket line ahead somewhere in the dark. The sky opened and poured down on him and he rode on: *It will be rain tonight: Let it come down.* That was a speech of murderers. He had been an actor once. He had no stature and a small voice and there were no big parts for him until the war came, and now he was the only one who knew how good he was. If only they could see him work, old cold Longstreet and the rest. But everyone hated spies. I come a single spy. Wet single spy. But *they* come in whole battalions. The rain began to ease off and he spurred the horse to a trot. *My kingdom for a horse.* Jolly good line. He went on, reciting *Henry the Fifth* aloud: "Once more into the breech …"

Late that afternoon he came to a crossroad and the sign of much cavalry having passed this way a few hours ago. His own way led north to Chambersburg, but he knew that Longstreet would have to know

who these people were so close to his line. He debated a moment at the crossroads, knowing there was no time. A delay would cost him daylight. Yet he was a man of pride and the tracks drew him. Perhaps it was only Jeb Stuart. The spy thought hopefully, wistfully: If it's Stuart I can ask for an armed escort all the way home. He turned and followed the tracks. After a while he saw a farmhouse and a man standing out in a field, in a peach orchard, and he spurred that way. The man was small and bald with huge round arms and spoke very bad English. The spy went into his act: a simple-minded farmer seeking a runaway wife, terrified of soldiers. The bald man regarded him sweatily, disgustedly, told him the soldiers just gone by were "plu" soldiers, Yankees. The spy asked: What town lies yonder? and the farmer told him Gettysburg, but the name meant nothing. The spy turned and spurred back to the crossroads. Yankee cavalry meant John Buford's column. Moving lickety-split. Where was Stuart? No escort now. He rode back again toward the blue hills. But the horse could not be pushed. He had to dismount and walk.

That was the last sign of Yankees. He was moving up across South Mountain; he was almost home. Beyond South Mountain was Lee and, of course, Longstreet. A strange friendship: grim and gambling Longstreet, formal and pious old Bobby Lee. The spy wondered at it, and then the rain began again, bringing more lightning but at least some cooler air, and he tucked himself in under his hat and went back to *Hamlet.* Old Jackson was dead. *Good night, sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest . . .*

He rode into darkness. No longer any need to hurry. He left the roadway at last and moved out into a field away from the lightning and the trees and sat in the rain to eat a lonely supper, trying to make up his mind whether it was worth the risk of going on. He was very close; he could begin to feel them up ahead. There was no way of knowing when or where, but suddenly they would be there in the road, stepping phantomlike out of the trees wearing those sick eerie smiles, and other men with guns would suddenly appear all around him, prodding him in the back with hard steel barrels, as you prod an animal, and he would have to be lucky, because few men rode out at

night on good and honest business, not now, this night, in this invaded country.

He rode slowly up the road, not really thinking, just moving, reluctant to stop. He was weary. Fragments of *Hamlet* flickered in his brain: *If it be not now, yet it will come. Ripeness is all.* Now *there's* a good part. A town ahead. A few lights. And then he struck the picket line.

There was a presence in the road, a liquid Southern voice. He saw them outlined in lightning, black ragged figures rising around him. A sudden lantern poured yellow light. He saw one bleak hawkish grinning face; hurriedly he mentioned Longstreet's name. With some you postured and with some you groveled and with some you were imperious. But you could do that only by daylight, when you could see the faces and gauge the reaction. And now he was too tired and cold. He sat and shuddered: an insignificant man on a pale and muddy horse. He turned out to be lucky. There was a patient sergeant with a long gray beard who put him under guard and sent him along up the dark road to Longstreet's headquarters.

He was not safe even now, but he could begin to relax. He rode up the long road between picket fires, and he could hear them singing in the rain, chasing each other in the dark of the trees. A fat and happy army, roasting meat and fresh bread, telling stories in the dark. He began to fall asleep on the horse; he was home. But they did not like to see him sleep, and one of them woke him up to remind him, cheerily, that if there was no one up there who knew him, why, then, unfortunately, they'd have to hang him, and the soldier said it just to see the look on his face, and the spy shivered, wondering, Why do there have to be men like that, men who enjoy another man's dying?

—

Longstreet was not asleep. He lay on the cot watching the lightning flare in the door of the tent. It was very quiet in the grove and there was the sound of the raindrops continuing to fall from the trees although the rain had ended. When Sorrel touched him on the arm he was glad of it; he was thinking of his dead children.

"Sir? You asked to be awakened if Harrison came back."

"Yes." Longstreet got up quickly and put on the old blue robe and the carpet slippers. He was a very big man and he was full-bearded

and wild-haired. He thought of the last time he'd seen the spy, back in Virginia, tiny man with a face like a weasel: "And where will your headquarters be, General, up there in Pennsylvania? 'Tis a big state indeed." Him standing there with cold gold clutched in a dirty hand. And Longstreet had said icily, cheerily, "It will be where it will be. If you cannot find the headquarters of this whole army you cannot be much of a spy." And the spy had said stiffly, "*Scout,* sir. I am a scout. And I am a patriot, sir." Longstreet had grinned. We are all patriots. He stepped out into the light. He did not know what to expect. He had not really expected the spy to come back at all.

The little man was there: a soggy spectacle on a pale and spattered horse. He sat grinning wanly from under the floppy brim of a soaked and dripping hat. Lightning flared behind him; he touched his cap.

"Your servant, General. May I come down?"

Longstreet nodded. The guard backed off. Longstreet told Sorrel to get some coffee. The spy slithered down from the horse and stood grinning foolishly, shivering, mouth slack with fatigue.

"Well, sir—" the spy chuckled, teeth chattering "—you see, I was able to find you after all."

Longstreet sat at the camp table on a wet seat, extracted a cigar, lighted it. The spy sat floppily, mouth still open, breathing deeply.

"It has been a long day. I've ridden hard all this day."

"What have you got?"

"I came through the pickets at night, you know. That can be very touchy."

Longstreet nodded. He watched, he waited. Sorrel came with steaming coffee; the cup burned Longstreet's fingers. Sorrel sat, gazing curiously, distastefully at the spy.

The spy guzzled, then sniffed Longstreet's fragrant smoke. Wistfully: "I say, General, I don't suppose you've got another of those? Good Southern tobacco?"

"Directly," Longstreet said. "What have you got?"

"I've got the position of the Union Army."

Longstreet nodded, showing nothing. He had not known the Union Army was on the move, was within two hundred miles, was even this

side of the Potomac, but he nodded and said nothing. The spy asked for a map and began pointing out the positions of the corps.

"They're coming in seven corps. I figure at least eighty thousand men, possibly as much as a hundred thousand. When they're all together they'll outnumber you, but they're not as strong as they were; the two-year enlistments are running out. The First Corps is here. The Eleventh is right behind it. John Reynolds is in command of the lead elements. I saw him at Taneytown this morning."

"Reynolds," Longstreet said.

"Yes, sir."

"You saw him yourself?"

The spy grinned, nodded, rubbed his nose, chuckled. "So close I could touch him. It was Reynolds all right."

"This morning. At Taneytown."

"Exactly. You didn't know any of that, now did you, General?" The spy bobbed his head with delight. "You didn't even know they was on the move, did ye? I thought not. You wouldn't be spread out so thin if you knowed they was comin'."

Longstreet looked at Sorrel. The aide shrugged silently. If this was true, there would have been some word. Longstreet's mind moved over it slowly. He said: "How did you know we were spread out?"

"I smelled it out." The spy grinned, foxlike, toothy. "Listen, General, I'm good at this business."

"Tell me what you know of our position."

"Well, now I can't be too exact on this, 'cause I aint scouted you myself, but I gather that you're spread from York up to Harrisburg and then back to Chambersburg, with the main body around Chambersburg and General Lee just 'round the bend."

It was exact. Longstreet thought: if this one knows it, *they* will know it. He said slowly, "We've had no word of Union movement."

The spy bobbed with joy. "I knew it. Thass why I hurried. Came through that picket line in the dark and all. I don't know if you realize, General—"

Sorrel said coldly, "Sir, don't you think, if this man's story was true, that we would have heard *something*?"

Sorrel did not approve of spies. The spy grimaced, blew. "You aint

exactly on friendly ground no more, Major. This aint Virginia no more."

True, Longstreet thought. But there would have been something. Stuart? Longstreet said, "General Stuart's cavalry went out a few days back. He hasn't reported any movement."

The spy shrugged, exasperated, glooming at Sorrel. Sorrel turned his back, looked at his fingernails.

Longstreet said, "What have you heard of Stuart?"

"Not much. He's riding in the north somewhere. Stirring up headlines and fuss, but I never heard him do any real damage."

Longstreet said, "If the Union Army were as close as you say, one would think—"

"Well, I'm damned," the spy said, a small rage flaming. "I come through that picket line in the dark and all. Listen, General, I tell you this: I don't know what old Stuart is doing and I don't care, but I done my job and this is a fact. This here same afternoon of this here day I come on the tracks of Union cavalry thick as fleas, one whole brigade and maybe two, and them bluebellies weren't no four hours hard ride from this here now spot, and that, by God, is the Lord's truth." He blew again, meditating. Then he added, by way of amendment, "Buford's column, I think it was. To be exact."

Longstreet thought: *can't* be true. But he was an instinctive man, and suddenly his brain knew and his own temper boiled. Jeb Stuart . . . was joyriding. God *damn* him. Longstreet turned to Sorrel.

"All right, Major. Send to General Lee. I guess we'll have to wake him up. Get my horse."

Sorrel started to say something, but he knew that you did not argue with Longstreet. He moved.

The spy said delightedly, "General Lee? Do I get to see General Lee? Well now." He stood up and took off the ridiculous hat and smoothed wet plastered hair across a balding skull. He glowed. Longstreet got the rest of the information and went back to his tent and dressed quickly.

If the spy was right the army was in great danger. They could be cut apart and cut off from home and destroyed in detail, piece by piece. If the spy was right, then Lee would have to turn, but the old man did

not believe in spies nor in any information you had to pay for, had not approved of the money spent or even the idea behind it. And the old man had faith in Stuart, and why in God's name had Stuart sent nothing, not even a courier, because even Stuart wasn't fool enough to let the whole damned Army of the Potomac get this close without word, not one damned lonesome word. Longstreet went back out into the light. He had never believed in this invasion. Lee and Davis together had overruled him. He did not believe in offensive warfare when the enemy outnumbered you and outgunned you and would come looking for you anyway if you waited somewhere on your own ground. He had not argued since leaving home, but the invasion did not sit right in his craw; the whole scheme lay edgewise and raspy in his brain, and treading here on alien ground, he felt a cold wind blowing, a distant alarm. Only instinct. No facts as yet. The spy reminded him about the cigar. It was a short way through the night to Lee's headquarters, and they rode past low sputtering campfires with the spy puffing exuberant blue smoke like a happy furnace.

" 'Tis a happy army you've got here, General," the spy chatted with approval. "I felt it the moment I crossed the picket line. A happy army, eager for the fight. Singing and all. You can feel it in the air. Not like them bluebellies. A desperate tired lot. I tell you, General, this will be a factor. The bluebellies is almost done. Why, do you know what I see everywhere I go? Disgraceful, it is. On every street in every town, able-bodied men. Just *standing* there, by the thousands, reading them poor squeaky pitiful newspapers about this here mighty invasion and the last gasp of the Union and how every man must take up arms, haw." The spy guffawed. "Like a bunch of fat women at church. The war's almost over. You can feel it, General. The end is in the air."

Longstreet said nothing. He was beginning to think of what to do if the spy was right. If he could not get Lee to turn now there could be disaster. And yet if the Union Army was truly out in the open at last there was a great opportunity: a sudden move south, between Hooker and Washington, cut *them* off from Lincoln. Yes. Longstreet said, "What do you hear of Hooker? Where is he?"

The spy stopped, mouth sagging. "Oh by Jesus. Forgive me." He grimaced, shook his head. "I done forgot. There was an item in the

newspaper this morning. Saying that Hooker was replaced. They gave the command to Meade, I think it was."

"George Meade?"

"Yes, sir. I think."

"You're sure?"

"Well, it was Meade the newspaper said, but you know them damn newspapers."

Longstreet thought: new factor. He spurred the horse, but he couldn't move fast because of the dark. Lee must listen. God bless the politicians. Reynolds was their best man. Why did they go to Meade? But I'm sorry to see Hooker go. Old Fighting Joe. Longstreet said, "It was Meade, then, and not Reynolds?"

"Rumor was that Reynolds was offered the job but wouldn't have it on a plate. That's what the paper said."

Old John's too smart to take it. Not with that idiot Halleck pulling the strings. But Meade? Fussy. Engineer. Careful. No genius for sure. But a new factor. A Pennsylvania man. He will know this country.

The spy chatted on amiably. He seemed to need to talk. He was saying, "Strange thing about it all, thing that bothers me is that when you do this job right nobody knows you're doing it, nobody ever watches you work, do you see? And sometimes I can't help but wish I had an audience. I've played some scenes, ah, General, but I've been lovely." The spy sighed, puffed, sighed again. "This current creation, now, is marvelous. I'm a poor half-witted farmer, do you see, terrified of soldiers, and me lovely young wife has run off with a drummer and I'm out a-scourin' the countryside for her, a sorrowful pitiful sight I am. And people lookin' down their noses and grinnin' behind me back and all the time tellin' me exactly what I want to know about who is where and how many and how long ago, and them not even knowin' they're doin' it, too busy feelin' contemptuous. There are many people, General, that don't give a damn for a human soul, do you know that? The strange thing is, after playing this poor fool farmer for a while I can't help but feel sorry for him. Because nobody cares."

They came to Lee's camp, in the grove just south of Chambersburg. By the time they got there Longstreet knew that the spy was telling the truth. Young Walter Taylor was up, annoyed, prissy, defending General

Lee's night's rest even against Longstreet, who glowed once with the beginning of rage, and sent Taylor off to get the old man out of bed. They dismounted and waited. The spy sat under an awning, grinning with joy at the prospect of meeting Lee. Longstreet could not sit down. He disliked getting the old man up: Lee had not been well. But you could lose the war up here. Should have gone to Vicksburg. News from there very bad. It will fall, and after that … we must win here if we are to win at all, and we must do it soon. The rain touched him; he shivered. Too damn much rain would muck up the roads.

Lee came out into the light. The spy hopped to attention. Lee bowed slightly, stiffly.

"Gentlemen."

He stood bareheaded in the rain: regal, formal, a beautiful white-haired, white-bearded old man in a faded blue robe. He looked haggard. Longstreet thought: He looks older every time you see him. For a moment the spy was silent, enraptured, then he bowed suddenly from the waist, widely, formally, gracefully, plucking the floppy hat from the balding head and actually sweeping the ground with it, dandy, ridiculous, something off a stage somewhere designed for a king.

"General," the spy said grandly, *"à votre service."* He said something else in a strange and Southern French. Longstreet was startled at the transformation.

Lee glanced at Longstreet: a silent question. Longstreet said, "Beg pardon, sir. I thought this urgent. The man has information."

Lee looked at the spy silently. His face showed nothing. Then he said formally, "Sir, you must excuse me, I do not know your name."

"The name is *Harrison*, sir, at present." The spy grinned toothily. "The name of an ex-President, ex-general. A small joke, sir. One must keep one's sense of humor."

Lee glanced again at Longstreet. Longstreet said, "The man has the position of the Union Army. He says they are very close. I have a map."

He moved to the map table, under the awning. The spy followed with reproach. Lee came slowly to the table, watching the man. After

a moment he said to Harrison, "I understand that you are General Longstreet's—" a slight pause "—'scout.'" Lee would not use the word *spy*. "I believe we saw you last back in Virginia."

"That's a fact," the spy worshipped. "I been kind of circulatin' since, amongst the bluebellies, and I tell you, General, sir, that it's an honor and a priv—"

Longstreet said, "He claims their lead elements are here. He says there is a column of strong Union cavalry not four hours off."

Lee looked at the map. Then he sat down and looked more closely. Longstreet gave the positions, the spy fluttering mothlike behind him with numbers and names and dates. Lee listened without expression.

Longstreet finished. "He estimates perhaps one hundred thousand men."

Lee nodded. But estimates meant nothing. He sat for a moment staring at the map and then bowed his head slightly. Longstreet thought: he doesn't believe. Then Lee raised his eyes and regarded the spy.

"You appear to have ridden hard. Have you come a long way?"

"Sir, I sure have."

"And you came through the picket line after dark?"

"Yes, sir—" the spy's head bobbed "—I did indeed."

"We are in your debt." Lee stared at the map. "Thank you. Now I'm sure General Longstreet will see to your accommodations."

The spy was dismissed, had sense enough to know it. He rose reluctantly. He said, "It has been my pleasure, sir, to have served such a man as yourself. God bless you, sir."

Lee thanked him again. Longstreet instructed Sorrel to see that the man was fed and given a tent for the night and to be kept where Longstreet could find him if he needed him, which meant: keep an eye on him. The spy went out into the dark. Longstreet and Lee sat alone at the table in the rain.

Lee said softly, "Do you believe this man?"

"No choice."

"I suppose not." Lee rubbed his eyes, leaned forward on the table. With his right hand he held the muscle of his left arm. He shook his head slowly. "Am I to move on the word of a paid spy?"

"Can't afford not to."

"There would have been something from Stuart."

"There should have been."

"Stuart would not have left us blind."

"He's joyriding again," Longstreet said. "This time you ought to stomp him. Really stomp him."

Lee shook his head. "Stuart would not leave us blind."

"We've got to turn," Longstreet said. His heart was beating strongly. It was bad to see the indomitable old man weak and hatless in the early morning, something soft in his eyes, pain in his face, the right hand rubbing the pain in the arm. Longstreet said, "We can't risk it. If we don't concentrate they'll chop us up."

Lee said nothing. After a moment Longstreet told him about Meade. Lee said, "They should have gone to Reynolds."

"Thought so too. I think he turned it down."

Lee nodded. He smiled slightly. "I would have preferred to continue against General Hooker."

Longstreet grinned. "Me too."

"Meade will be . . . cautious. It will take him some time to take command, to organize a staff. I think . . . perhaps we should move quickly. There may be an opportunity here."

"Yes. If we swing in behind him and cut him off from Washington . . ."

"If your man is correct."

"We'll find out."

Lee bent toward the map. The mountains rose like a rounded wall between them and the Union Army. There was one gap east of Chambersburg and beyond that all the roads came together, weblike, at a small town. Lee put his finger on the map.

"What town is that?"

Longstreet looked. "Gettysburg," he said.

Lee nodded. "Well—" he was squinting—"I see no reason to delay. It's their army I'm after, not their towns." He followed the roads with his finger, all converging on that one small town. "I think we should concentrate in this direction. This road junction will be useful."

"Yes," Longstreet said.

Lee looked up with black diamond eyes. "We'll move at first light."

Longstreet felt a lovely thrill. Trust the old man to move. "Yes, sir."

Lee started to rise. A short while ago he had fallen from a horse onto his hands, and when he pushed himself up from the table Longstreet saw him wince. Longstreet thought: Go to sleep and let me do it. Give the order and I'll do it all. He said, "I regret the need to wake you, sir."

Lee looked past him into the soft blowing dark. The rain had ended. A light wind was moving in the tops of the pines—cool sweet air, gentle and clean. Lee took a deep breath.

"A good time of night. I have always liked this time of night."

"Yes."

"Well." Lee glanced once almost shyly at Longstreet's face, then looked away. They stood for a moment in awkward silence. They had been together for a long time in war and they had grown very close, but Lee was ever formal and Longstreet was inarticulate, so they stood for a long moment side by side without speaking, not looking at each other, listening to the raindrops fall in the leaves. But the silent moment was enough. After a while Lee said slowly, "When this is over, I shall miss it very much."

"Yes."

"I do not mean the fighting."

"No."

"Well," Lee said. He looked to the sky. "It is all in God's hands."

They said good night. Longstreet watched the old man back to his tent. Then he mounted and rode alone back to his camp to begin the turning of the army, all the wagons and all the guns, down the narrow mountain road that led to Gettysburg. It was still a long dark hour till dawn. He sat alone on his horse in the night and he could feel the army asleep around him, all those young hearts beating in the dark. They would need their rest now. He sat alone to await the dawn, and let them sleep a little longer.

2.
Chamberlain

He dreamed of Maine and ice black water; he awoke to a murderous sun. A voice was calling: "Colonel, darlin'." He squinted: the whiskery face of Buster Kilrain.

"Colonel, darlin', I hate to be a-wakin' ye, but there's a message here ye ought to be seein'."

Chamberlain had slept on the ground; he rolled to a sitting position. Light boiled in through the tent flap. Chamberlain closed his eyes.

"And how are ye feelin' this mornin', Colonel, me lad?"

Chamberlain ran his tongue around his mouth. He said briefly, dryly, "Ak."

"We're about to be havin' guests, sir, or I wouldn't be wakin' ye."

Chamberlain looked up through bleary eyes. He had walked eighty miles in four days through the hottest weather he had ever known and he had gone down with sunstroke. He felt an eerie fragility, like a piece of thin glass in a high hot wind. He saw a wooden canteen, held in the big hand of Kilrain, cold drops of water on varnished sides. He drank. The world focused.

"… one hundred and twenty men," Kilrain said.

Chamberlain peered at him.

"They should be arriving any moment," Kilrain said. He was squatting easily, comfortably, in the opening of the tent, the light flaming behind him.

"Who?" Chamberlain said.

"They are sending us some mutineers," Kilrain said with fatherly patience. "One hundred and twenty men from the old Second Maine, which has been disbanded."

"Mutineers?"

"Ay. What happened was that the enlistment of the old Second ran out and they were all sent home except one hundred and twenty, which had foolishly signed *three*-year papers, and so they all had one year to go, only *they* all thought they was signing up to fight with the Second, and Second only, and so they mutineed. One hundred and twenty. Are you all right, Colonel?"

Chamberlain nodded vaguely.

"Well, these poor fellers did not want to fight no more, naturally, being Maine men of a certain intelligence, and refused, only nobody will send them home, and nobody knew what to do with them, until they thought of *us*, being as we are the other Maine regiment here in the army. There's a message here signed by Meade himself. That's the new General we got now, sir, if you can keep track as they go by. The message says they'll be sent here this morning and they are to fight, and if they don't fight you can feel free to shoot them."

"Shoot?"

"Ay."

"Let me see." Chamberlain read painfully. His head felt very strange indeed, but he was coming awake into the morning as from a long way away and he could begin to hear the bugles out across the fields. Late to get moving today. Thank God. Somebody gave us an extra hour. Bless him. He read: . . . *you are therefore authorized to shoot any man who refuses to do his duty.* Shoot?

He said, "These are all *Maine* men?"

"Yes, sir. Fine big fellers. I've seen them. Loggin' men. You may remember there was a bit of a brawl some months back, during the mud march? These fellers were famous for their fists."

Chamberlain said, "One hundred and twenty."

"Yes, sir."

"Somebody's crazy."

"Yes, sir."

"How many men do we now have in this Regiment?"

"Ah, somewhat less than two hundred and fifty, sir, as of yesterday. Countin' the officers."

"How do I take care of a hundred and twenty mutinous men?"

"Yes, sir," Kilrain sympathized. "Well, you'll have to talk to them, sir."

Chamberlain sat for a long moment silently trying to function. He was thirty-four years old, and on this day one year ago he had been a professor of rhetoric at Bowdoin University. He had no idea what to do. But it was time to go out into the sun. He crawled forward through the tent flap and stood up, blinking, swaying, one hand against the bole of a tree. He was a tall man, somewhat picturesque. He wore stolen blue cavalry trousers and a three-foot sword, and the clothes he wore he had not taken off for a week. He had a grave, boyish dignity, that clean-eyed, scrubbed-brain, naïve look of the happy professor.

Kilrain, a white-haired man with the build of an ape, looked up at him with fatherly joy. "If ye'll ride the *horse* today, Colonel, which the Lord hath provided, instead of walkin' in the dust with the other fools, ye'll be all right—if ye wear the hat. It's the *walkin'*, do you see, that does the great harm."

"*You* walked," Chamberlain said grumpily, thinking: shoot them? *Maine* men? How can I shoot Maine men? I'll never be able to go home.

"Ah, but, Colonel, darlin', I've been in the infantry since before you was born. It's them first few thousand miles. After that, a man gets a limber to his feet."

"Hey, Lawrence. How you doin'?"

Younger brother, Tom Chamberlain, bright-faced, high-voiced, a new lieutenant, worshipful. The heat had not seemed to touch him. Chamberlain nodded. Tom said critically, "You lookin' kinda peaked. Why don't you ride the horse?"

Chamberlain gloomed. But the day was not as bright as it had seemed through the opening of the tent. He looked upward with relief toward a darkening sky. The troops were moving in the fields, but there had been no order to march. The wagons were not yet loaded. He thought: God bless the delay. His mind was beginning to function. All down the road and all through the trees the troops were moving, cooking, the thousands of troops and thousands of wagons of the Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac, of which Chamberlain's 20th Maine was a minor fragment. But far down the road there was motion.

Kilrain said, "There they come."

Chamberlain squinted. Then he saw troops on the road, a long way off.

The line of men came slowly up the road. There were guards with fixed bayonets. Chamberlain could see the men shuffling, strange pathetic spectacle, dusty, dirty, ragged men, heads down, faces down: it reminded him of a history-book picture of impressed seamen in the last war with England. But these men would have to march all day, in the heat. Chamberlain thought: not possible.

Tom was meditating. "Gosh, Lawrence. There's almost as many men there as we got in the whole regiment. How we going to guard them?"

Chamberlain said nothing. He was thinking: How do you force a man to fight—for freedom? The idiocy of it jarred him. Think on it later. Must do something now.

There was an officer, a captain, at the head of the column. The captain turned them in off the road and herded them into an open space in the field near the regimental flag. The men of the regiment, busy with coffee, stood up to watch. The captain had a loud voice and used obscene words. He assembled the men in two long ragged lines and called them to attention, but they ignored him. One slumped to the ground, more exhaustion than mutiny. A guard came forward and yelled and probed with a bayonet, but abruptly several more men sat down and then they all did, and the captain began yelling, but the guards stood grinning confusedly, foolishly, having gone as far as they would go, unwilling to push further unless the men here showed some

threat, and the men seemed beyond threat, merely enormously weary. Chamberlain took it all in as he moved toward the captain. He put his hands behind his back and came forward slowly, studiously. The captain pulled off dirty gloves and shook his head with contempt, glowering up at Chamberlain.

"Looking for the commanding officer, Twentieth Maine."

"You've found him," Chamberlain said.

"That's him all right." Tom's voice, behind him, very proud. Chamberlain suppressed a smile.

"You Chamberlain?" The captain stared at him grimly, insolently, showing what he thought of Maine men.

Chamberlain did not answer for a long moment, looking into the man's eyes until the eyes suddenly blinked and dropped, and then Chamberlain said softly, "*Colonel* Chamberlain to you."

The captain stood still for a moment, then slowly came to attention, slowly saluted. Chamberlain did not return it. He looked past the captain at the men, most of whom had their heads down. But there were eyes on him. He looked back and forth down the line, looking for a familiar face. That would help. But there was no one he knew.

"Captain Brewer, sir. Ah. One-eighteen Pennsylvania." The captain tugged in his coat front, produced a sheaf of papers. "If you're the commanding officer, sir, then I present you with these here prisoners." He handed the papers. Chamberlain took them, glanced down, handed them back to Tom. The captain said, "You're welcome to 'em, God knows. Had to use the bayonet to get 'em moving. You got to sign for 'em, Colonel."

Chamberlain said over his shoulder, "Sign it, Tom." To the captain he said, "You're relieved, Captain."

The captain nodded, pulling on the dirty gloves. "You're authorized to use whatever force necessary, Colonel." He said that loudly, for effect. "If you have to shoot 'em, why, you go right ahead. Won't nobody say nothin'."

"You're relieved, Captain," Chamberlain said. He walked past the captain, closer to the men, who did not move, who did not seem to notice him. One of the guards stiffened as Chamberlain approached,

looked past him to his captain. Chamberlain said, "You men can leave now. We don't need any guards."

He stood in front of the men, ignoring the guards. They began to move off. Chamberlain stood for a moment looking down. Some of the faces turned up. There was hunger and exhaustion and occasional hatred. Chamberlain said, "My name is Chamberlain. I'm Colonel, Twentieth Maine."

Some of them did not even raise their heads. He waited another moment. Then he said, "When did you eat last?"

More heads came up. There was no answer. Then a man in the front row said huskily, in a whisky voice, "We're hungry, Colonel."

Another man said, "They been tryin' to break us by not feedin' us." Chamberlain looked: a scarred man, hatless, hair plastered thinly on the scalp like strands of black seaweed. The man said, "We aint broke yet."

Chamberlain nodded. A hard case. But we'll begin with food. He said, "They just told us you were coming a little while ago. I've told the cook to butcher a steer. Hope you like it near to raw; not much time to cook." Eyes opened wide. He could begin to see the hunger on the faces, like the yellow shine of sickness. He said, "We've got a ways to go today and you'll be coming with us, so you better eat hearty. We're all set up for you back in the trees." He saw Glazier Estabrook standing huge-armed and peaceful in the shade of a nearby tree. "Glazier," Chamberlain said, "you show these men where to go. You fellas eat up and then I'll come over and hear what you have to say."

No man moved. Chamberlain turned away. He did not know what he would do if they did not choose to move. He heard a voice: "Colonel?"

He turned. The scarred man was standing.

"Colonel, we got grievances. The men elected me to talk for 'em."

"Right." Chamberlain nodded. "You come on with me and talk. The rest of you fellas go eat." He beckoned to the scarred man and waved to Glazier Estabrook. He turned again, not waiting for the men to move off, not sure they would go, began to walk purposefully toward the blessed dark, wondering again how big a guard detail it would

take, thinking he might wind up with more men out of action than in, and also: What are you going to say? Good big boys they are. Seen their share of action.

"Gosh, Lawrence," Tom Chamberlain said.

"Smile," Chamberlain said cheerily, "and don't call me Lawrence. Are they moving?" He stopped and glanced pleasantly backward, saw with delight that the men were up and moving toward the trees, toward food. He grinned, plucked a book from his jacket, handed it to Tom.

"Here. This is Casey's *Manual of Infantry Tactics*. You study it, maybe someday you'll make a soldier." He smiled at the scarred man, extended a hand. "What's your name?"

The man stopped, looked at him for a long cold second. The hand seemed to come up against gravity, against his will. Automatic courtesy: Chamberlain was relying on it.

"I'm not usually that informal," Chamberlain said with the same light, calm, pleasant manner that he had developed when talking to particularly rebellious students who had come in with a grievance and who hadn't yet learned that the soft answer turneth away wrath. *Some* wrath. "But I suppose somebody ought to welcome you to the Regiment."

The man said, "I don't feel too kindly, Colonel."

Chamberlain nodded. He went on inside the tent, the scarred man following, and sat down on a camp stool, letting the man stand. He invited the man to have coffee, which the man declined, and then listened silently to the man's story.

The scarred man spoke calmly and coldly, looking straight into Chamberlain's eyes. A good stubborn man. There was a bit of the lawyer about him: He used chunky phrases about law and justice. But he had heavy hands with thick muscular fingers and black fingernails and there was a look of power to him, a coiled tight set to the way he stood, balanced, ugly, slightly contemptuous, but watchful, trying to gauge Chamberlain's strength.

Chamberlain said, "I see."

"I been in eleven different engagements, Colonel. How many you been in?"

"Not that many," Chamberlain said.

"I done my share. We all have. Most of us—" He gestured out the tent flap into the morning glare. "There's some of them no damn good but most of them been all the way there and back. Damn good men. Shouldn't ought to use them this way. Looky here." He pulled up a pants leg. Chamberlain saw a purple gash, white scar tissue. The man let the pants leg fall. Chamberlain said nothing. The man looked at his face, seemed suddenly embarrassed, realized he had gone too far. For the first time he was uncertain. But he repeated, "I done my share."

Chamberlain nodded. The man was relaxing slowly. It was warm in the tent; he opened his shirt. Chamberlain said, "What's your name?"

"Bucklin. Joseph Bucklin."

"Where you from?"

"Bangor."

"Don't know any Bucklins. Farmer?"

"Fisherman."

Former Sergeant Kilrain put his head in the tent. "Colonel, there's a courier comin'."

Chamberlain nodded. Bucklin said, "I'm tired, Colonel. You know what I mean? I'm tired. I've had all of this army and all of these officers, this damned Hooker and this goddamned idiot Meade, all of them, the whole bloody lousy rotten mess of sick-brained potbellied scabheads that aint fit to lead a johnny detail, aint fit to pour pee outen a boot with instructions on the heel. I'm tired. We are good men and we had our own good flag and these goddamned idiots use us like we was cows or dogs or even worse. We aint gonna win this war. We can't win no how because of these lame-brained bastards from West Point, these goddamned gentlemen, these *officers*. Only one officer knew what he was doin': McClellan, and look what happened to *him*. I just as soon go home and let them damn Johnnies go home and the hell with it."

He let it go, out of breath. He had obviously been waiting to say that to some officer for a long time. Chamberlain said, "I get your point."

Kilrain announced, "Courier, sir."

Chamberlain rose, excused himself, stepped out into the sunlight. A bright-cheeked lieutenant, just dismounted, saluted him briskly.

"Colonel Chamberlain, sir, Colonel Vincent wishes to inform you that the corps is moving out at once and that you are instructed to take the advance. The Twentieth Maine has been assigned to the first position in line. You will send out flankers and advance guards."

"My compliments to the Colonel." Chamberlain saluted, turned to Kilrain and Ellis Spear, who had come up. "You heard him, boys. Get the regiment up. Sound the *General*, strike the tents." Back inside the tent, he said cheerfully to Bucklin, "We're moving out. You better go hurry up your eating. Tell your men I'll be over in a minute. I'll think on what you said."

Bucklin slipped by him, went away. Chamberlain thought: We're first in line.

"Kilrain."

The former sergeant was back.

"Sir."

"Where we headed?"

"West, sir. Pennsylvania somewhere. That's all I know."

"Listen, Buster. You're a private now and I'm not supposed to keep you at headquarters in that rank. If you want to go on back to the ranks, you just say so, because I feel obligated—well, you don't have to be here, but listen, I need you."

"Then I'll be stayin', Colonel, laddie." Kilrain grinned.

"But you know I can't promote you. Not after that episode with the bottle. Did you have to pick an officer?"

Kilrain grinned. "I was not aware of rank, sir, at the time. And he was the target which happened to present itself."

"Buster, you haven't got a bottle about?"

"Is the Colonel in need of a drink, sir?"

"I meant . . . forget it. All right, Buster, move 'em out."

Kilrain saluted, grinning, and withdrew. The only professional in the regiment. The drinking would kill him. Well. He would die happy. Now. What do I say to *them*?

Tom came in, saluted.

"The men from the Second Maine are being fed, sir."

"Don't call me sir."

"Well, Lawrence, Great God A-Mighty—"

"You just be careful of that name business in front of the men. Listen, we don't want anybody to think there's favoritism."

Tom put on the wounded look, face of the ruptured deer.

"General Meade has his *son* as his adjutant."

"That's different. Generals can do anything. Nothing quite so much like God on earth as a general on a battlefield." The tent was coming down about his head; he stepped outside to avoid the collapse. The general and God was a nice parallel. They have your future in their hands and they have all power and know all. He grinned, thinking of Meade surrounded by his angelic staff: Dan Butterfield, wild Dan Sickles. But *what do I say?*

"Lawrence, what you goin' to do?"

Chamberlain shook his head. The Regiment was up and moving.

"God, you can't shoot them. You do that, you'll never go back to Maine when the war's over."

"I know that." Chamberlain meditated. "Wonder if *they* do?"

He heard a flare of bugles, looked down the road toward Union Mills. The next regiment, the 83rd Pennsylvania, was up and forming. He saw wagons and ambulances moving out into the road. He could feel again the yellow heat. Must remember to cover up. More susceptible to sunstroke now. Can't afford a foggy head. He began to walk slowly toward the grove of trees.

Kilrain says tell the truth.

Which is?

Fight. Or we'll shoot you.

Not true. I won't shoot anybody.

He walked slowly out into the sunlight. He thought: But the truth is much more than that. Truth is too personal. Don't know if I can express it. He paused in the heat. Strange thing. You would die for it without further question, but you had a hard time talking about it. He shook his head. I'll wave no more flags for home. No tears for Mother. Nobody ever died for apple pie.

He walked slowly toward the dark grove. He had a complicated brain and there were things going on back there from time to time that

he only dimly understood, so he relied on his instincts, but he was learning all the time. The faith itself was simple: he believed in the dignity of man. His ancestors were Huguenots, refugees of a chained and bloody Europe. He had learned their stories in the cradle. He had grown up believing in America and the individual and it was a stronger faith than his faith in God. This was the land where no man had to bow. In this place at last a man could stand up free of the past, free of tradition and blood ties and the curse of royalty and become what he wished to become. This was the first place on earth where the man mattered more than the state. True freedom had begun here and it would spread eventually over all the earth. But it had begun *here*. The fact of slavery upon this incredibly beautiful new clean earth was appalling, but more even than that was the horror of old Europe, the curse of nobility, which the South was transplanting to new soil. They were forming a new aristocracy, a new breed of glittering men, and Chamberlain had come to crush it. But he was fighting for the dignity of man and in that way he was fighting for himself. If men were equal in America, all these former Poles and English and Czechs and blacks, then they were equal everywhere, and there was really no such thing as a foreigner; there were only free men and slaves. And so it was not even patriotism but a new faith. The Frenchman may fight for France, but the American fights for mankind, for freedom; for the people, not the land.

Yet the words had been used too often and the fragments that came to Chamberlain now were weak. A man who has been shot at is a new realist, and what do you say to a realist when the war is a war of ideals? He thought finally, Well, I owe them the truth at least. Might's well begin with that.

The regiment had begun to form. Chamberlain thought: At least it'll be a short speech. He walked slowly toward the prisoners.

Glazier Estabrook was standing guard, leaning patiently on his rifle. He was a thick little man of about forty. Except for Kilrain he was the oldest man in the regiment, the strongest man Chamberlain had ever seen. He waved happily as Chamberlain came up but went on leaning on the rifle. He pointed at one of the prisoners.

"Hey, Colonel, you know who this is? This here is Dan Burns from

Orono. I know his daddy. Daddy's a preacher. You really ought to hear him. Best damn cusser I ever heard. Knows more fine swear words than any man in Maine, I bet. Hee."

Chamberlain smiled. But the Burns boy was looking at him with no expression. Chamberlain said, "You fellas gather round."

He stood in the shade, waited while they closed in silently, watchfully around him. In the background the tents were coming down, the wagons were hitching, but some of the men of the regiment had come out to watch and listen. Some of the men here were still chewing. But they were quiet, attentive.

Chamberlain waited a moment longer. Now it was quiet in the grove and the clink of the wagons was sharp in the distance. Chamberlain said, "I've been talking with Bucklin. He's told me your problem."

Some of the men grumbled. Chamberlain heard no words clearly. He went on speaking softly so that they would have to quiet to hear him.

"I don't know what I can do about it. I'll do what I can. I'll look into it as soon as possible. But there's nothing I can do today. We're moving out in a few minutes and we'll be marching all day and we may be in a big fight before nightfall. But as soon as I can, I'll do what I can."

They were silent, watching him. Chamberlain began to relax. He had made many speeches and he had a gift for it. He did not know what it was, but when he spoke most men stopped to listen. Fanny said it was something in his voice. He hoped it was there now.

"I've been ordered to take you men with me. I've been told that if you don't come I can shoot you. Well, you know I won't do that. Not Maine men. I won't shoot any man who doesn't want this fight. Maybe someone else will, but I won't. So that's that."

He paused again. There was nothing on their faces to lead him.

"Here's the situation. I've been ordered to take you along, and that's what I'm going to do. Under guard if necessary. But you can have your rifles if you want them. The whole Reb army is up the road a ways waiting for us and this is no time for an argument like this. I tell you this: we sure can use you. We're down below half strength and we need you, no doubt of that. But whether you fight or not is up to you. Whether you come along, well, you're coming."

Tom had come up with Chamberlain's horse. Over the heads of the prisoners Chamberlain could see the regiment falling into line out in the flaming road. He took a deep breath.

"Well, I don't want to preach to you. You know who we are and what we're doing here. But if you're going to fight alongside us there's a few things I want you to know."

He bowed his head, not looking at eyes. He folded his hands together.

"This regiment was formed last fall, back in Maine. There were a thousand of us then. There's not three hundred of us now." He glanced up briefly. "But what is left is choice."

He was embarrassed. He spoke very slowly, staring at the ground.

"Some of us volunteered to fight for Union. Some came in mainly because we were bored at home and this looked like it might be fun. Some came because we were ashamed not to. Many of us came . . . because it was the right thing to do. All of us have seen men die. Most of us never saw a black man back home. We think on that, too. But freedom . . . is not just a word."

He looked up into the sky, over silent faces.

"This is a different kind of army. If you look at history you'll see men fight for pay, or women, or some other kind of loot. They fight for land, or because a king makes them, or just because they like killing. But we're here for something new. I don't . . . this hasn't happened much in the history of the world. We're an army going out to set other men free."

He bent down, scratched the black dirt into his fingers. He was beginning to warm to it; the words were beginning to flow. No one in front of him was moving. He said, "This is free ground. All the way from here to the Pacific Ocean. No man has to bow. No man born to royalty. Here we judge you by what *you* do, not by what your father was. Here you can be *something.* Here's a place to build a home. It isn't the land—there's always more land. It's the idea that we all have value, you and me, we're worth something more than the dirt. I never saw dirt I'd die for, but I'm not asking you to come join us and fight for dirt. What we're all fighting for, in the end, is each other."

Once he started talking he broke right through the embarrassment

and there was suddenly no longer a barrier there. The words came out of him in a clear river, and he felt himself silent and suspended in the grove listening to himself speak, carried outside himself and looking back down on the silent faces and himself speaking, and he felt the power in him, the power of his cause. For an instant he could see black castles in the air; he could create centuries of screaming, eons of torture. Then he was back in sunlit Pennsylvania. The bugles were blowing and he was done.

He had nothing else to say. No one moved. He felt the embarrassment return. He was suddenly enormously tired. The faces were staring up at him like white stones. Some heads were down. He said, "Didn't mean to preach. Sorry. But I thought . . . you should know who we are." He had forgotten how tiring it was just to speak. "Well, this is still the army, but you're as free as I can make you. Go ahead and talk for a while. If you want your rifles for this fight you'll have them back and nothing else will be said. If you won't join us you'll come along under guard. When this is over I'll do what I can to see that you get fair treatment. Now we have to move out." He stopped, looked at them. The faces showed nothing. He said slowly, "I think if we lose this fight the war will be over. So if you choose to come with us I'll be personally grateful. Well. We have to move out."

He turned, left silence behind him. Tom came up with the horse—a pale-gray lightfooted animal. Tom's face was shiny red.

"My, Lawrence, you sure talk pretty."

Chamberlain grunted. He was really tired. Rest a moment. He paused with his hands on the saddle horn. There was a new vague doubt stirring in his brain. Something troubled him; he did not know why.

"You ride today, Lawrence. You look weary."

Chamberlain nodded. Ellis Spear was up. He was Chamberlain's ranking officer, an ex-teacher from Wiscasset who was impressed with Chamberlain's professorship. A shy man, formal, but very competent. He gestured toward the prisoners.

"Colonel, what do you suggest we do with them?"

"Give them a moment. Some of them may be willing to fight. Tom, you go back and see what they say. We'll have to march them under

guard. Don't know what else to do. I'm not going to shoot them. We can't leave them here."

The regiment had formed out in the road, the color bearers in front. Chamberlain mounted, put on the wide-brimmed hat with the emblem of the infantry, began walking his horse slowly across the field toward the road. The uneasiness still troubled him. He had missed something, he did not know what. Well, he was an instinctive man; the mind would tell him sooner or later. Perhaps it was only that when you try to put it into words you cannot express it truly, it never sounds as you dream it. But then . . . you were asking them to die.

Ellis Spear was saying, "How far are we from Pennsylvania, Colonel, you have any idea?"

"Better than twenty miles." Chamberlain squinted upward. "Going to be another hot day."

He moved to the head of the column. The troops were moving slowly, patiently, setting themselves for the long march. After a moment Tom came riding up. His face was delighted. Chamberlain said, "How many are going to join us?"

Tom grinned hugely. "Would you believe it? All but six."

"How many?"

"I counted, by actual count, one hundred and fourteen."

"Well." Chamberlain rubbed his nose, astounded.

Tom said, still grinning, "Brother, you did real good."

"They're all marching together?"

"Right. Glazier's got the six hardheads in tow."

"Well, get all the names and start assigning them to different companies. I don't want them bunched up, spread them out. See about their arms."

"Yes, sir, Colonel, sir."

Chamberlain reached the head of the column. The road ahead was long and straight, rising toward a ridge of trees. He turned in his saddle, looked back, saw the entire Fifth Corps forming behind him. He thought: 120 new men. Hardly noticeable in such a mass. And yet . . . he felt a moment of huge joy. He called for road guards and skirmishers and the 20th Maine began to move toward Gettysburg.

OLIVE KITTERIDGE

Elizabeth Strout


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Pharmacy

For many years Henry Kitteridge was a pharmacist in the next town over, driving every morning on snowy roads, or rainy roads, or summertime roads, when the wild raspberries shot their new growth in brambles along the last section of town before he turned off to where the wider road led to the pharmacy. Retired now, he still wakes early and remembers how mornings used to be his favorite, as though the world were his secret, tires rumbling softly beneath him and the light emerging through the early fog, the brief sight of the bay off to his right, then the pines, tall and slender, and almost always he rode with the window partly open because he loved the smell of the pines and the heavy salt air, and in the winter he loved the smell of the cold.

The pharmacy was a small two-story building attached to another building that housed separately a hardware store and a small grocery. Each morning Henry parked in the back by the large metal bins, and then entered the pharmacy's back door, and went about switching on the lights, turning up the thermostat, or, if it was summer, getting the fans going. He would open the safe, put money in the register, unlock the front door, wash his hands, put on his white lab coat. The ritual

was pleasing, as though the old store—with its shelves of toothpaste, vitamins, cosmetics, hair adornments, even sewing needles and greeting cards, as well as red rubber hot water bottles, enema pumps—was a person altogether steady and steadfast. And any unpleasantness that may have occurred back in his home, any uneasiness at the way his wife often left their bed to wander through their home in the night's dark hours—all this receded like a shoreline as he walked through the safety of his pharmacy. Standing in the back, with the drawers and rows of pills, Henry was cheerful when the phone began to ring, cheerful when Mrs. Merriman came for her blood pressure medicine, or old Cliff Mott arrived for his digitalis, cheerful when he prepared the Valium for Rachel Jones, whose husband ran off the night their baby was born. It was Henry's nature to listen, and many times during the week he would say, "Gosh, I'm awful sorry to hear that," or "Say, isn't that something?"

Inwardly, he suffered the quiet trepidations of a man who had witnessed twice in childhood the nervous breakdowns of a mother who had otherwise cared for him with stridency. And so if, as rarely happened, a customer was distressed over a price, or irritated by the quality of an Ace bandage or ice pack, Henry did what he could to rectify things quickly. For many years Mrs. Granger worked for him; her husband was a lobster fisherman, and she seemed to carry with her the cold breeze of the open water, not so eager to please a wary customer. He had to listen with half an ear as he filled prescriptions, to make sure she was not at the cash register dismissing a complaint. More than once he was reminded of that same sensation in watching to see that his wife, Olive, did not bear down too hard on Christopher over a homework assignment or a chore left undone; that sense of his attention hovering—the need to keep everyone content. When he heard a briskness in Mrs. Granger's voice, he would step down from his back post, moving toward the center of the store to talk with the customer himself. Otherwise, Mrs. Granger did her job well. He appreciated that she was not chatty, kept perfect inventory, and almost never called in sick. That she died in her sleep one night astonished him, and left

him with some feeling of responsibility, as though he had missed, working alongside her for years, whatever symptom might have shown itself that he, handling his pills and syrups and syringes, could have fixed.

"Mousy," his wife said, when he hired the new girl. "Looks just like a mouse."

Denise Thibodeau had round cheeks, and small eyes that peeped through her brown-framed glasses. "But a nice mouse," Henry said. "A cute one."

"No one's cute who can't stand up straight," Olive said. It was true that Denise's narrow shoulders sloped forward, as though apologizing for something. She was twenty-two, just out of the state university of Vermont. Her husband was also named Henry, and Henry Kitteridge, meeting Henry Thibodeau for the first time, was taken with what he saw as an unself-conscious excellence. The young man was vigorous and sturdy-featured with a light in his eye that seemed to lend a flickering resplendence to his decent, ordinary face. He was a plumber, working in a business owned by his uncle. He and Denise had been married one year.

"Not keen on it," Olive said, when he suggested they have the young couple to dinner. Henry let it drop. This was a time when his son—not yet showing the physical signs of adolescence—had become suddenly and strenuously sullen, his mood like a poison shot through the air, and Olive seemed as changed and changeable as Christopher, the two having fast and furious fights that became just as suddenly some blanket of silent intimacy where Henry, clueless, stupefied, would find himself to be the odd man out.

But standing in the back parking lot at the end of a late summer day, while he spoke with Denise and Henry Thibodeau, and the sun tucked itself behind the spruce trees, Henry Kitteridge felt such a longing to be in the presence of this young couple, their faces turned to him with a diffident but eager interest as he recalled his own days at the university many years ago, that he said, "Now, say. Olive and I would like you to come for supper soon."

He drove home, past the tall pines, past the glimpse of the bay, and thought of the Thibodeaus driving the other way, to their trailer on the outskirts of town. He pictured the trailer, cozy and picked up—for Denise was neat in her habits—and imagined them sharing the news of their day. Denise might say, "He's an easy boss." And Henry might say, "Oh, I like the guy a lot."

He pulled into his driveway, which was not a driveway so much as a patch of lawn on top of the hill, and saw Olive in the garden. "Hello, Olive," he said, walking to her. He wanted to put his arms around her, but she had a darkness that seemed to stand beside her like an acquaintance that would not go away. He told her the Thibodeaus were coming for supper. "It's only right," he said.

Olive wiped sweat from her upper lip, turned to rip up a clump of onion grass. "Then that's that, Mr. President," she said. "Give your order to the cook."

On Friday night the couple followed him home, and the young Henry shook Olive's hand. "Nice place here," he said. "With that view of the water. Mr. Kitteridge says you two built this yourselves."

"Indeed, we did."

Christopher sat sideways at the table, slumped in adolescent gracelessness, and did not respond when Henry Thibodeau asked him if he played any sports at school. Henry Kitteridge felt an unexpected fury sprout inside him; he wanted to shout at the boy, whose poor manners, he felt, revealed something unpleasant not expected to be found in the Kitteridge home.

"When you work in a pharmacy," Olive told Denise, setting before her a plate of baked beans, "you learn the secrets of everyone in town." Olive sat down across from her, pushed forward a bottle of ketchup. "Have to know to keep your mouth shut. But seems like you know how to do that."

"Denise understands," Henry Kitteridge said.

Denise's husband said, "Oh, sure. You couldn't find someone more trustworthy than Denise."

"I believe you," Henry said, passing the man a basket of rolls. "And

please. Call me Henry. One of my favorite names," he added. Denise laughed quietly; she liked him, he could see this.

Christopher slumped farther into his seat.

Henry Thibodeau's parents lived on a farm inland, and so the two Henrys discussed crops, and pole beans, and the corn not being as sweet this summer from the lack of rain, and how to get a good asparagus bed.

"Oh, for God's *sake,*" said Olive, when, in passing the ketchup to the young man, Henry Kitteridge knocked it over, and ketchup lurched out like thickened blood across the oak table. Trying to pick up the bottle, he caused it to roll unsteadily, and ketchup ended up on his fingertips, then on his white shirt.

"Leave it," Olive commanded, standing up. "Just leave it alone, Henry. For God's sake." And Henry Thibodeau, perhaps at the sound of his own name being spoken sharply, sat back, looking stricken.

"Gosh, what a mess I've made," Henry Kitteridge said.

For dessert they were each handed a blue bowl with a scoop of vanilla ice cream sliding in its center. "Vanilla's my favorite," Denise said.

"Is it," said Olive.

"Mine, too," Henry Kitteridge said.

As autumn came, the mornings darker, and the pharmacy getting only a short sliver of the direct sun before it passed over the building and left the store lit by its own overhead lights, Henry stood in the back filling the small plastic bottles, answering the telephone, while Denise stayed up front near the cash register. At lunchtime, she unwrapped a sandwich she brought from home, and ate it in the back where the storage was, and then he would eat his lunch, and sometimes when there was no one in the store, they would linger with a cup of coffee bought from the grocer next door. Denise seemed a naturally quiet girl, but she was given to spurts of sudden talkativeness. "My mother's had MS for years, you know, so starting way back we all learned to help out.

All three of my brothers are different. Don't you think it's funny when it happens that way?" The oldest brother, Denise said, straightening a bottle of shampoo, had been her father's favorite until he'd married a girl her father didn't like. Her own in-laws were wonderful, she said. She'd had a boyfriend before Henry, a Protestant, and his parents had not been so kind to her. "It wouldn't have worked out," she said, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Well, Henry's a terrific young man," Henry answered.

She nodded, smiling through her glasses like a thirteen-year-old girl. Again, he pictured her trailer, the two of them like overgrown puppies tumbling together; he could not have said why this gave him the particular kind of happiness it did, like liquid gold being poured through him.

She was as efficient as Mrs. Granger had been, but more relaxed. "Right beneath the vitamins in the second aisle," she would tell a customer. "Here, I'll show you." Once, she told Henry she sometimes let a person wander around the store before asking if she could help them. "That way, see, they might find something they didn't know they needed. And your sales will go up." A block of winter sun was splayed across the glass of the cosmetics shelf; a strip of wooden floor shone like honey.

He raised his eyebrows appreciatively. "Lucky for me, Denise, when you came through that door." She pushed up her glasses with the back of her hand, then ran the duster over the ointment jars.

Jerry McCarthy, the boy who delivered the pharmaceuticals once a week from Portland—or more often if needed—would sometimes have his lunch in the back room. He was eighteen, right out of high school; a big, fat kid with a smooth face, who perspired so much that splotches of his shirt would be wet, at times even down over his breasts, so the poor fellow looked to be lactating. Seated on a crate, his big knees practically to his ears, he'd eat a sandwich that had spilling from it mayonnaisey clumps of egg salad or tuna fish, landing on his shirt.

More than once Henry saw Denise hand him a paper towel. "That happens to me," Henry heard her say one day. "Whenever I eat a sand-

wich that isn't just cold cuts, I end up a mess." It couldn't have been true. The girl was neat as a pin, if plain as a plate.

"Good afternoon," she'd say when the telephone rang. "This is the Village Pharmacy. How can I help you today?" Like a girl playing grown-up.

And then: On a Monday morning when the air in the pharmacy held a sharp chill, he went about opening up the store, saying, "How was your weekend, Denise?" Olive had refused to go to church the day before, and Henry, uncharacteristically, had spoken to her sharply. "Is it too much to ask," he had found himself saying, as he stood in the kitchen in his undershorts, ironing his trousers. "A man's wife accompanying him to church?" Going without her seemed a public exposure of familial failure.

"Yes, it most certainly is too goddamn much to ask!" Olive had almost spit, her fury's door flung open. "You have no idea how tired I am, teaching all day, going to foolish meetings where the goddamn principal is a moron! Shopping. Cooking. Ironing. Laundry. Doing Christopher's homework with him! And *you*—" She had grabbed on to the back of a dining room chair, and her dark hair, still uncombed from its night's disarrangement, had fallen across her eyes. "*You,* Mr. Head Deacon Claptrap Nice Guy, expect me to give up my Sunday mornings and go sit among a bunch of snot-wots!" Very suddenly she had sat down in the chair. "Well, I'm sick and tired of it," she'd said, calmly. "Sick to death."

A darkness had rumbled through him; his soul was suffocating in tar. The next morning, Olive spoke to him conversationally. "Jim's car smelled like upchuck last week. Hope he's cleaned it out." Jim O'Casey taught with Olive, and for years took both Christopher and Olive to school.

"Hope so," said Henry, and in that way their fight was done.

"Oh, I had a wonderful weekend," said Denise, her small eyes behind her glasses looking at him with an eagerness that was so childlike it could have cracked his heart in two. "We went to Henry's folks and dug potatoes at night. Henry put the headlights on from the car and we

dug potatoes. Finding the potatoes in that cold soil—like an Easter egg hunt!"

He stopped unpacking a shipment of penicillin, and stepped down to talk to her. There were no customers yet, and below the front window the radiator hissed. He said, "Isn't that lovely, Denise."

She nodded, touching the top of the vitamin shelf beside her. A small motion of fear seemed to pass over her face. "I got cold and went and sat in the car and watched Henry digging potatoes, and I thought: It's too good to be true."

He wondered what in her young life had made her not trust happiness; perhaps her mother's illness. He said, "You enjoy it, Denise. You have many years of happiness ahead." Or maybe, he thought, returning to the boxes, it was part of being Catholic—you were made to feel guilty about everything.

The year that followed—was it the happiest year of his own life? He often thought so, even knowing that such a thing was foolish to claim about any year of one's life; but in his memory, that particular year held the sweetness of a time that contained no thoughts of a beginning and no thoughts of an end, and when he drove to the pharmacy in the early morning darkness of winter, then later in the breaking light of spring, the full-throated summer opening before him, it was the small pleasures of his work that seemed in their simplicities to fill him to the brim. When Henry Thibodeau drove into the gravelly lot, Henry Kitteridge often went to hold the door open for Denise, calling out, "Hello there, Henry," and Henry Thibodeau would stick his head through the open car window and call back, "Hello there, Henry," with a big grin on a face lit with decency and humor. Sometimes there was just a salute. "Henry!" And the other Henry would return, "Henry!" They got a kick out of this, and Denise, like a football tossed gently between them, would duck into the store.

When she took off her mittens, her hands were as thin as a child's, yet when she touched the buttons on the cash register, or slid some-

thing into a white bag, they assumed the various shapes of a graceful grown woman's hands, hands—thought Henry—that would touch her husband lovingly, that would, with the quiet authority of a woman, someday pin a baby's diaper, smooth a fevered forehead, tuck a gift from the tooth fairy under a pillow.

Watching her, as she poked her glasses back up onto her nose while reading over the list of inventory, Henry thought she was the stuff of America, for this was back when the hippie business was beginning, and reading in *Newsweek* about the marijuana and "free love" could cause an unease in Henry that one look at Denise dispelled. "We're going to hell like the Romans," Olive said triumphantly. "America's a big cheese gone rotten." But Henry would not stop believing that the temperate prevailed, and in his pharmacy, every day he worked beside a girl whose only dream was to someday make a family with her husband. "I don't care about Women's Lib," she told Henry. "I want to have a house and make beds." Still, if he'd had a daughter (he would have loved a daughter), he would have cautioned her against it. He would have said: Fine, make beds, but find a way to keep using your head. But Denise was not his daughter, and he told her it was noble to be a homemaker—vaguely aware of the freedom that accompanied caring for someone with whom you shared no blood.

He loved her guilelessness, he loved the purity of her dreams, but this did not mean of course that he was in love with her. The natural reticence of her in fact caused him to desire Olive with a new wave of power. Olive's sharp opinions, her full breasts, her stormy moods and sudden, deep laughter unfolded within him a new level of aching eroticism, and sometimes when he was heaving in the dark of night, it was not Denise who came to mind but, oddly, her strong, young husband—the fierceness of the young man as he gave way to the animalism of possession—and there would be for Henry Kitteridge a flash of incredible frenzy as though in the act of loving his wife he was joined with all men in loving the world of women, who contained the dark, mossy secret of the earth deep within them.

"Goodness," Olive said, when he moved off her.

In college, Henry Thibodeau had played football, just as Henry Kitteridge had. "Wasn't it great?" the young Henry asked him one day. He had arrived early to pick Denise up, and had come into the store. "Hearing the people yelling from the stands? Seeing that pass come right at you and knowing you're going to catch it? Oh boy, I loved that." He grinned, his clear face seeming to give off a refracted light. "Loved it."

"I suspect I wasn't nearly as good as you," said Henry Kitteridge. He had been good at the running, the ducking, but he had not been aggressive enough to be a really good player. It shamed him to remember that he had felt fear at every game. He'd been glad enough when his grades slipped and he had to give it up.

"Ah, I wasn't that good," said Henry Thibodeau, rubbing a big hand over his head. "I just liked it."

"He was good," said Denise, getting her coat on. "He was really good. The cheerleaders had a cheer just for him." Shyly, with pride, she said, "Let's *go,* Thibodeau, let's *go.*"

Heading for the door, Henry Thibodeau said, "Say, we're going to have you and Olive for dinner soon."

"Oh, now—you're not to worry."

Denise had written Olive a thank-you note in her neat, small handwriting. Olive had scanned it, flipped it across the table to Henry. "Handwriting's just as cautious as she is," Olive had said. "She is the *plainest* child I have ever seen. With her pale coloring, why does she wear gray and beige?"

"I don't know," he said, agreeably, as though he had wondered himself. He had not wondered.

"A simpleton," Olive said.

But Denise was not a simpleton. She was quick with numbers, and remembered everything she was told by Henry about the pharmaceuticals he sold. She had majored in animal sciences at the university, and was conversant with molecular structures. Sometimes on her

break she would sit on a crate in the back room with the Merck Manual on her lap. Her child-face, made serious by her glasses, would be intent on the page, her knees poked up, her shoulders slumped forward.

Cute, would go through his mind as he glanced through the doorway on his way by. He might say, "Okay, then, Denise?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm fine."

His smile would linger as he arranged his bottles, typed up labels. Denise's nature attached itself to his as easily as aspirin attached itself to the enzyme COX-2; Henry moved through his day pain free. The sweet hissing of the radiators, the tinkle of the bell when someone came through the door, the creaking of the wooden floors, the ka-*ching* of the register: He sometimes thought in those days that the pharmacy was like a healthy autonomic nervous system in a workable, quiet state.

Evenings, adrenaline poured through him. "All I do is cook and clean and pick up after people," Olive might shout, slamming a bowl of beef stew before him. "People just waiting for me to serve them, with their faces hanging out." Alarm made his arms tingle.

"Perhaps you need to help out more around the house," he told Christopher.

"How dare you tell him what to do? You don't even pay enough attention to know what he's going through in social studies class!" Olive shouted this at him while Christopher remained silent, a smirk on his face. "Why, Jim O'Casey is more sympathetic to the kid than you are," Olive said. She slapped a napkin down hard against the table.

"Jim teaches at the school, for crying out loud, and sees you and Chris every day. What *is* the matter with social studies class?"

"Only that the goddamn teacher is a moron, which Jim understands instinctively," Olive said. "You see Christopher every day, too. But you don't know anything because you're safe in your little world with Plain Jane."

"She's a good worker," Henry answered. But in the morning the blackness of Olive's mood was often gone, and Henry would be able to

drive to work with a renewal of the hope that had seemed evanescent the night before. In the pharmacy there was goodwill toward men.

Denise asked Jerry McCarthy if he planned on going to college. "I dunno. Don't think so." The boy's face colored—perhaps he had a little crush on Denise, or perhaps he felt like a child in her presence, a boy still living at home, with his chubby wrists and belly.

"Take a night course," Denise said, brightly. "You can sign up right after Christmas. Just one course. You should do that." Denise nodded, and looked at Henry, who nodded back.

"It's true, Jerry," Henry said, who had never given a great deal of thought to the boy. "What is it that interests you?"

The boy shrugged his big shoulders.

"Something must interest you."

"This stuff." The boy gestured toward the boxes of packed pills he had recently brought through the back door.

And so, amazingly, he had signed up for a science course, and when he received an A that spring, Denise said, "Stay right there." She returned from the grocery store with a little boxed cake, and said, "Henry, if the phone doesn't ring, we're going to celebrate."

Pushing cake into his mouth, Jerry told Denise he had gone to mass the Sunday before to pray he did well on the exam.

This was the kind of thing that surprised Henry about Catholics. He almost said, God didn't get an A for you, Jerry; you got it for yourself, but Denise was saying, "Do you go every Sunday?"

The boy looked embarrassed, sucked frosting from his finger. "I will now," he said, and Denise laughed, and Jerry did, too, his face pink and glowing.

Autumn now, November, and so many years later that when Henry runs a comb through his hair on this Sunday morning, he has to pluck some strands of gray from the black plastic teeth before slipping the comb back into his pocket. He gets a fire going in the stove for Olive

before he goes off to church. "Bring home the gossip," Olive says to him, tugging at her sweater while she peers into a large pot where apples are burbling in a stew. She is making applesauce from the season's last apples, and the smell reaches him briefly—sweet, familiar, it tugs at some ancient longing—before he goes out the door in his tweed jacket and tie.

"Do my best," he says. No one seems to wear a suit to church anymore.

In fact, only a handful of the congregation goes to church regularly anymore. This saddens Henry, and worries him. They have been through two ministers in the last five years, neither one bringing much inspiration to the pulpit. The current fellow, a man with a beard, and who doesn't wear a robe, Henry suspects won't last long. He is young with a growing family, and will have to move on. What worries Henry about the paucity of the congregation is that perhaps others have felt what he increasingly tries to deny—that this weekly gathering provides no real sense of comfort. When they bow their heads or sing a hymn, there is no sense anymore—for Henry—that God's presence is blessing them. Olive herself has become an unapologetic atheist. He does not know when this happened. It was not true when they were first married; they had talked of animal dissections in their college biology class, how the system of respiration alone was miraculous, a *creation* by a splendid power.

He drives over the dirt road, turning onto the paved road that will take him into town. Only a few leaves of deep red remain on the otherwise bare limbs of the maples; the oak leaves are russet and wrinkled; briefly through the trees is the glimpse of the bay, flat and steel-gray today with the overcast November sky.

He passes by where the pharmacy used to be. In its place now is a large chain drugstore with huge glass sliding doors, covering the ground where both the old pharmacy and grocery store stood, large enough so that the back parking lot where Henry would linger with Denise by the dumpster at day's end before getting into their separate

cars—all this is now taken over by a store that sells not only drugs, but huge rolls of paper towels and boxes of all sizes of garbage bags. Even plates and mugs can be bought there, spatulas, cat food. The trees off to the side have been cut down to make a parking lot. You get used to things, he thinks, without getting used to things.

It seems a very long time ago that Denise stood shivering in the winter cold before finally getting into her car. How young she was! How painful to remember the bewilderment on her young face; and yet he can still remember how he could make her smile. Now, so far away in Texas—so far away it's a different country—she is the age he was then. She had dropped a red mitten one night; he had bent to get it, held the cuff open and watched while she'd slipped her small hand in.

The white church sits near the bare maple trees. He knows why he is thinking of Denise with this keenness. Her birthday card to him did not arrive last week, as it has, always on time, for the last twenty years. She writes him a note with the card. Sometimes a line or two stands out, as in the one last year when she mentioned that Paul, a freshman in high school, had become obese. Her word. "Paul has developed a full-blown problem now—at three hundred pounds, he is obese." She does not mention what she or her husband will do about this, if in fact they can "do" anything. The twin girls, younger, are both athletic and starting to get phone calls from boys "which horrifies me," Denise wrote. She never signs the card "love," just her name in her small neat hand, "Denise."

In the gravel lot by the church, Daisy Foster has just stepped from her car, and her mouth opens in a mock look of surprise and pleasure, but the pleasure is real, he knows—Daisy is always glad to see him. Daisy's husband died two years ago, a retired policeman who smoked himself to death, twenty-five years older than Daisy; she remains ever lovely, ever gracious with her kind blue eyes. What will become of her, Henry doesn't know. It seems to Henry, as he takes his seat in his usual middle pew, that women are far braver than men. The possibility of

Olive's dying and leaving him alone gives him glimpses of horror he can't abide.

And then his mind moves back to the pharmacy that is no longer there.

"Henry's going hunting this weekend," Denise said one morning in November. "Do you hunt, Henry?" She was getting the cash drawer ready and didn't look up at him.

"Used to," Henry answered. "Too old for it now." The one time in his youth when he had shot a doe, he'd been sickened by the way the sweet, startled animal's head had swayed back and forth before its thin legs had folded and it had fallen to the forest floor. "Oh, you're a softie," Olive had said.

"Henry goes with Tony Kuzio." Denise slipped the cash drawer into the register, and stepped around to arrange the breath mints and gum that were neatly laid out by the front counter. "His best friend since he was five."

"And what does Tony do now?"

"Tony's married with two little kids. He works for Midcoast Power, and fights with his wife." Denise looked over at Henry. "Don't say that I said so."

"No."

"She's tense a lot, and yells. Boy, I wouldn't want to live like that."

"No, it'd be no way to live."

The telephone rang and Denise, turning on her toe playfully, went to answer it. "The Village Pharmacy. Good morning. How may I help you?" A pause. "Oh, yes, we have multivitamins with no iron. . . . You're very welcome."

On lunch break, Denise told the hefty, baby-faced Jerry, "My husband talked about Tony the whole time we were going out. The scrapes they'd get into when they were kids. Once, they went off and didn't get back till way after dark, and Tony's mother said to him, 'I was so worried, Tony. I could kill you.' " Denise picked lint off the sleeve of her

gray sweater. "I always thought that was funny. Worrying that your child might be dead and then saying you'll kill him."

"You wait," Henry Kitteridge said, stepping around the boxes Jerry had brought into the back room. "From their very first fever, you never stop worrying."

"I *can't* wait," Denise said, and for the first time it occurred to Henry that soon she would have children and not work for him anymore.

Unexpectedly Jerry spoke. "Do you like him? Tony? You two get along?"

"I do like him," Denise said. "Thank goodness. I was scared enough to meet him. Do you have a best friend from childhood?"

"I guess," Jerry said, color rising in his fat, smooth cheeks. "But we kind of went our separate ways."

"My best friend," said Denise, "when we got to junior high school, she got kind of fast. Do you want another soda?"

A Saturday at home: Lunch was crabmeat sandwiches, grilled with cheese. Christopher was putting one into his mouth, but the telephone rang, and Olive went to answer it. Christopher, without being asked, waited, the sandwich held in his hand. Henry's mind seemed to take a picture of that moment, his son's instinctive deference at the very same time they heard Olive's voice in the next room. "Oh, you poor child," she said, in a voice Henry would always remember—filled with such dismay that all her outer Olive-ness seemed stripped away. "You poor, poor child."

And then Henry rose and went into the other room, and he didn't remember much, only the tiny voice of Denise, and then speaking for a few moments to her father-in-law.

The funeral was held in the Church of the Holy Mother of Contrition, three hours away in Henry Thibodeau's hometown. The church was large and dark with its huge stained-glass windows, the priest up front

in a layered white robe, swinging incense back and forth; Denise already seated in the front near her parents and sisters by the time Olive and Henry arrived. The casket was closed, and had been closed at the wake the evening before. The church was almost full. Henry, seated next to Olive toward the back, recognized no one, until a silent large presence made him look up, and there was Jerry McCarthy. Henry and Olive moved over to make room for him.

Jerry whispered, "I read about it in the paper," and Henry briefly rested a hand on the boy's fat knee.

The service went on and on; there were readings from the Bible, and other readings, and then an elaborate getting ready for Communion. The priest took cloths and unfolded them and draped them over a table, and then people were leaving their seats aisle by aisle to go up and kneel and open their mouths for a wafer, all sipping from the same large silver goblet, while Henry and Olive stayed where they were. In spite of the sense of unreality that had descended over Henry, he was struck with the unhygienic nature of all these people sipping from the same cup, and struck—with cynicism—at how the priest, after everyone else was done, tilted his beaky head back and drank whatever drops were left.

Six young men carried the casket down the center aisle. Olive nudged Henry with her elbow, and Henry nodded. One of the pallbearers—one of the last ones—had a face that was so white and stunned that Henry was afraid he would drop the casket. This was Tony Kuzio, who, thinking Henry Thibodeau was a deer in the early morning darkness just a few days ago, had pulled the trigger of his rifle and killed his best friend.

Who was to help her? Her father lived far upstate in Vermont with a wife who was an invalid, her brothers and their wives lived hours away, her in-laws were immobilized by grief. She stayed with her in-laws for two weeks, and when she came back to work, she told Henry she

couldn't stay with them much longer; they were kind, but she could hear her mother-in-law weeping all night, and it gave her the willies; she needed to be alone so she could cry by herself.

"Of course you do, Denise."

"But I can't go back to the trailer."

"No."

That night he sat up in bed, his chin resting on both hands. "Olive," he said, "the girl is utterly helpless. Why, she can't drive a car, and she's never written a check."

"How can it be," said Olive, "that you grow up in Vermont and can't even drive a car?"

"I don't know," Henry acknowledged. "I had no idea she couldn't drive a car."

"Well, I can see why Henry married her. I wasn't sure at first. But when I got a look at his mother at the funeral—ah, poor thing. But she didn't seem to have a bit of oomph to her."

"Well, she's about broken with grief."

"I understand that," Olive said patiently. "I'm simply telling you he married his mother. Men do." After a pause. "Except for you."

"She's going to have to learn to drive," Henry said. "That's the first thing. And she needs a place to live."

"Sign her up for driving school."

Instead, he took her in his car along the back dirt roads. The snow had arrived, but on the roads that led down to the water, the fishermen's trucks had flattened it. "That's right. Slowly up on the clutch." The car bucked like a wild horse, and Henry put his hand against the dashboard.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Denise whispered.

"No, no. You're doing fine."

"I'm just scared. Gosh."

"Because it's brand-new. But, Denise, *nitwits* can drive cars."

She looked at him, a sudden giggle coming from her, and he laughed himself then, without wanting to, while her giggle grew, spilling out so that tears came to her eyes, and she had to stop the car

and take the white handkerchief he offered. She took her glasses off and he looked out the window the other way while she used the handkerchief. Snow had made the woods alongside the road seem like a picture in black and white. Even the evergreens seemed dark, spreading their boughs above the black trunks.

"Okay," said Denise. She started the car again; again he was thrown forward. If she burned out the clutch, Olive would be furious.

"That's perfectly all right," he told Denise. "Practice makes perfect, that's all."

In a few weeks, he drove her to Augusta, where she passed the driving test, and then he went with her to buy a car. She had money for this. Henry Thibodeau, it turned out, had had a good life insurance policy, so at least there was that. Now Henry Kitteridge helped her get the car insurance, explained how to make the payments. Earlier, he had taken her to the bank, and for the first time in her life she had a checking account. He had shown her how to write a check.

He was appalled when she mentioned at work one day the amount of money she had sent the Church of the Holy Mother of Contrition, to ensure that candles were lit for Henry every week, a mass said for him each month. He said, "Well, that's nice, Denise." She had lost weight, and when, at the end of the day, he stood in the darkened parking lot, watching from beneath one of the lights on the side of the building, he was struck by the image of her anxious head peering over the steering wheel; and as he got into his own car, a sadness shuddered through him that he could not shake all night.

"What in hell ails you?" Olive said.

"Denise," he answered. "She's helpless."

"People are never as helpless as you think they are," Olive answered. She added, clamping a cover over a pot on the stove, "God, I was afraid of this."

"Afraid of what?"

"Just take the damn dog out," Olive said. "And sit yourself down to supper."

An apartment was found in a small new complex outside of town.

Denise's father-in-law and Henry helped her move her few things in. The place was on the ground floor and didn't get much light. "Well, it's clean," Henry said to Denise, watching her open the refrigerator door, the way she stared at the complete emptiness of its new insides. She only nodded, closing the door. Quietly, she said, "I've never lived alone before."

In the pharmacy he saw that she walked around in a state of unreality; he found his own life felt unbearable in a way he would never have expected. The force of this made no sense. But it alarmed him; mistakes could be made. He forgot to tell Cliff Mott to eat a banana for potassium, now that they'd added a diuretic with his digitalis. The Tibbets woman had a bad night with erythromycin; had he not told her to take it with food? He worked slowly, counting pills sometimes two or three times before he slipped them into their bottles, checking carefully the prescriptions he typed. At home, he looked at Olive wide-eyed when she spoke, so she would see she had his attention. But she did not have his attention. Olive was a frightening stranger; his son often seemed to be smirking at him. "Take the garbage out!" Henry shouted one night, after opening the cupboard beneath the kitchen sink, seeing a bag full of eggshells and dog hairs and balled-up waxed paper. "It's the only thing we ask you to do, and you can't even manage that!"

"Stop shouting," Olive told him. "Do you think that makes you a man? How absolutely pathetic."

Spring came. Daylight lengthened, melted the remaining snows so the roads were wet. Forsythias bloomed clouds of yellow into the chilly air, then rhododendrons screeched their red heads at the world. He pictured everything through Denise's eyes, and thought the beauty must be an assault. Passing by the Caldwells' farm, he saw a handwritten sign, FREE KITTENS, and he arrived at the pharmacy the next day with a kitty-litter box, cat food, and a small black kitten, whose feet were white, as though it had walked through a bowl of whipped cream.

"Oh, Henry," Denise cried, taking the kitten from him, tucking it to her chest.

He felt immensely pleased.

Because it was such a young thing, Slippers spent the days at the pharmacy, where Jerry McCarthy was forced to hold it in his fat hand, against his sweat-stained shirt, saying to Denise, "Oh, yuh. Awful cute. That's nice," before Denise freed him of this little furry encumbrance, taking Slippers back, nuzzling her face against his, while Jerry watched, his thick, shiny lips slightly parted. Jerry had taken two more classes at the university, and had once again received A's in both. Henry and Denise congratulated him with the air of distracted parents; no cake this time.

She had spells of manic loquaciousness, followed by days of silence. Sometimes she stepped out the back door of the pharmacy, and returned with swollen eyes. "Go home early, if you need to," he told her. But she looked at him with panic. "No. Oh, gosh, no. I want to be right here."

It was a warm summer that year. He remembers her standing by the fan near the window, her thin hair flying behind her in little undulating waves, while she gazed through her glasses at the windowsill. Standing there for minutes at a time. She went, for a week, to see one of her brothers. Took another week to see her parents. "This is where I want to be," she said, when she came back.

"Where's she going to find another husband in this tiny town?" Olive asked.

"I don't know. I've wondered," Henry admitted.

"Someone else would go off and join the Foreign Legion, but she's not the type."

"No. She's not the type."

Autumn arrived, and he dreaded it. On the anniversary of Henry Thibodeau's death, Denise went to mass with her in-laws. He was relieved when that day was over, when a week went by, and another, although the holidays loomed, and he felt trepidation, as though he were

carrying something that could not be set down. When the phone rang during supper one night, he went to get it with a sense of foreboding. He heard Denise make small screaming sounds—Slippers had gotten out of the house without her seeing, and planning to drive to the grocery store just now, she had run over the cat.

"Go," Olive said. "For God's sake. Go over and comfort your girlfriend."

"Stop it, Olive," Henry said. "That's unnecessary. She's a young widow who ran over her cat. Where in God's name is your compassion?" He was trembling.

"She wouldn't have run over any goddamn cat if you hadn't given it to her."

He brought with him a Valium. That night he sat on her couch, helpless while she wept. The urge to put his arm around her small shoulders was very strong, but he sat holding his hands together in his lap. A small lamp shone from the kitchen table. She blew her nose on his white handkerchief, and said, "Oh, Henry. Henry." He was not sure which Henry she meant. She looked up at him, her small eyes almost swollen shut; she had taken her glasses off to press the handkerchief to them. "I talk to you in my head all the time," she said. She put her glasses back on. "Sorry," she whispered.

"For what?"

"For talking to you in my head all the time."

"No, no."

He put her to bed like a child. Dutifully she went into the bathroom and changed into her pajamas, then lay in the bed with the quilt to her chin. He sat on the edge of the bed, smoothing her hair until the Valium took over. Her eyelids drooped, and she turned her head to the side, murmuring something he couldn't make out. As he drove home slowly along the narrow roads, the darkness seemed alive and sinister as it pressed against the car windows. He pictured moving far upstate, living in a small house with Denise. He could find work somewhere up north; she could have a child. A little girl who would adore him; girls adored their fathers.

"Well, widow-comforter, how is she?" Olive spoke in the dark from the bed.

"Struggling," he said.

"Who isn't."

The next morning he and Denise worked in an intimate silence. If she was up at the cash register and he was behind his counter, he could still feel the invisible presence of her against him, as though she had become Slippers, or he had—their inner selves brushing up against the other. At the end of the day, he said, "I will take care of you," his voice thick with emotion.

She stood before him, and nodded. He zipped her coat for her.

To this day he does not know what he was thinking. In fact, much of it he can't seem to remember. That Tony Kuzio paid her some visits. That she told Tony he must stay married, because if he divorced, he would never be able to marry in the church again. The piercing of jealousy and rage he felt to think of Tony sitting in Denise's little place late at night, begging her forgiveness. The feeling that he was drowning in cobwebs whose sticky maze was spinning about him. That he wanted Denise to continue to love him. And she did. He saw it in her eyes when she dropped a red mitten and he picked it up and held it open for her. *I talk to you in my head all the time.* The pain was sharp, exquisite, unbearable.

"Denise," he said one evening as they closed up the store. "You need some friends."

Her face flushed deeply. She put her coat on with a roughness to her gestures. "I have friends," she said, breathlessly.

"Of course you do. But here in town." He waited by the door until she got her purse from out back. "You might go square dancing at the Grange Hall. Olive and I used to go. It's a nice group of people."

She stepped past him, her face moist, the top of her hair passing by his eyes. "Or maybe you think that's square," he said in the parking lot, lamely.

"I am square," she said, quietly.

"Yes," he said, just as quietly. "I am too." As he drove home in the dark, he pictured being the one to take Denise to a Grange Hall dance. "Spin your partner, and promenade . . . ," her face breaking into a smile, her foot tapping, her small hands on her hips. No—it was not bearable, and he was really frightened now by the sudden emergence of anger he had inspired in her. He could do nothing for her. He could not take her in his arms, kiss her damp forehead, sleep beside her while she wore those little-girl flannel pajamas she'd worn the night Slippers died. To leave Olive was as unthinkable as sawing off his leg. In any event, Denise would not want a divorced Protestant; nor would he be able to abide her Catholicism.

They spoke to each other little as the days went by. He felt coming from her now an unrelenting coldness that was accusatory. What had he led her to expect? And yet when she mentioned a visit from Tony Kuzio, or made an elliptical reference to seeing a movie in Portland, an answering coldness arose in him. He had to grit his teeth not to say, "Too square to go square dancing, then?" How he hated that the words *lovers' quarrel* went through his head.

And then just as suddenly she'd say—ostensibly to Jerry McCarthy, who listened those days with a new comportment to his bulky self, but really she was speaking to Henry (he could see this in the way she glanced at him, holding her small hands together nervously)—"My mother, when I was very little, and before she got sick, would make special cookies for Christmas. We'd paint them with frosting and sprinkles. Oh, I think it was the most fun I ever had sometimes"—her voice wavering while her eyes blinked behind her glasses. And he would understand then that the death of her husband had caused her to feel the death of her girlhood as well; she was mourning the loss of the only *herself* she had ever known—gone now, to this new, bewildered young widow. His eyes, catching hers, softened.

Back and forth this cycle went. For the first time in his life as a pharmacist, he allowed himself a sleeping tablet, slipping one each day into the pocket of his trousers. "All set, Denise?" he'd say when it was

time to close. Either she'd silently go get her coat, or she'd say, looking at him with gentleness, "All set, Henry. One more day."

Daisy Foster, standing now to sing a hymn, turns her head and smiles at him. He nods back and opens the hymnal. "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing." The words, the sound of the few people singing, make him both hopeful and deeply sad. "You can learn to love someone," he had told Denise, when she'd come to him in the back of the store that spring day. Now, as he places the hymnal back in the holder in front of him, sits once more on the small pew, he thinks of the last time he saw her. They had come north to visit Jerry's parents, and they stopped by the house with the baby, Paul. What Henry remembers is this: Jerry saying something sarcastic about Denise falling asleep each night on the couch, sometimes staying there the whole night through. Denise turning away, looking out over the bay, her shoulders slumped, her small breasts just slightly pushing out against her thin turtleneck sweater, but she had a belly, as though a basketball had been cut in half and she'd swallowed it. No longer the girl she had been—no girl stayed a girl—but a mother, tired, and her round cheeks had deflated as her belly had expanded, so that already there was a look of the gravity of life weighing her down. It was at that point Jerry said sharply, "Denise, stand up straight. Put your shoulders back." He looked at Henry, shaking his head. "How many times do I keep telling her that?"

"Have some chowder," Henry said. "Olive made it last night." But they had to get going, and when they left, he said nothing about their visit, and neither did Olive, surprisingly. He would not have thought Jerry would grow into that sort of man, large, clean-looking—thanks to the ministrations of Denise—not even so much fat anymore, just a big man earning a big salary, speaking to his wife in a way Olive had sometimes spoken to Henry. He did not see her again, although she must have been in the region. In her birthday notes, she reported the death of her mother, then, a few years later, her father. Of course she would

have driven north to go to the funerals. Did she think of him? Did she and Jerry stop and visit the grave of Henry Thibodeau?

"You're looking fresh as a daisy," he tells Daisy Foster in the parking lot outside the church. It is their joke; he has said it to her for years.

"How's Olive?" Daisy's blue eyes are still large and lovely, her smile ever present.

"Olive's fine. Home keeping the fires burning. And what's new with you?"

"I have a beau." She says this quietly, putting a hand to her mouth.

"Do you? Daisy, that's wonderful."

"Sells insurance in Heathwick during the day, and takes me dancing on Friday nights."

"Oh, that's wonderful," Henry says again. "You'll have to bring him around for supper."

"Why do you need everyone married?" Christopher has said to him angrily, when Henry has asked about his son's life. "Why can't you just leave people alone?"

He doesn't want people alone.

At home, Olive nods to the table, where a card from Denise lies next to an African violet. "Came yesterday," Olive says. "I forgot."

Henry sits down heavily and opens it with his pen, finds his glasses, peers at it. Her note is longer than usual. She had a scare late in the summer. Pericardial effusion, which turned out to be nothing. "It changed me," she wrote, "as experiences do. It put all my priorities straight, and I have lived every day since then with the deepest gratitude for my family. Nothing matters except family and friends," she wrote, in her neat, small hand. "And I have been blessed with both."

The card, for the first time ever, was signed, "Love."

"How is she?" asks Olive, running water into the sink. Henry stares out at the bay, at the skinny spruce trees along the edge of the cove, and it seems beautiful to him, God's magnificence there in the quiet stateliness of the coastline and the slightly rocking water.

"She's fine," he answers. Not at the moment, but soon, he will walk over to Olive and put his hand on her arm. Olive, who has lived through her own sorrows. For he understood long ago—after Jim O'Casey's car went off the road, and Olive spent weeks going straight to bed after supper, sobbing harshly into a pillow—Henry understood then that Olive had loved Jim O'Casey, had possibly been loved by him, though Henry never asked her and she never told, just as he did not tell her of the gripping, sickening need he felt for Denise until the day she came to him to report Jerry's proposal, and he said: "Go."

He puts the card on the windowsill. He has wondered what it has felt like for her to write the words *Dear Henry.* Has she known other Henrys since then? He has no way of knowing. Nor does he know what happened to Tony Kuzio, or whether candles are still being lit for Henry Thibodeau in church.

Henry stands up, Daisy Foster fleeting through his mind, her smile as she spoke of going dancing. The relief that he just felt over Denise's note, that she is glad for the life that unfolded before her, gives way suddenly, queerly, into an odd sense of loss, as if something significant has been taken from him. "Olive," he says.

She must not hear him because of the water running into the sink. She is not as tall as she used to be, and is broader across her back. The water stops. "Olive," he says, and she turns. "You're not going to leave me, are you?"

"Oh, for God's sake, Henry. You could make a woman sick." She wipes her hands quickly on a towel.

He nods. How could he ever tell her—he could not—that all these years of feeling guilty about Denise have carried with them the kernel of still having her? He cannot even bear this thought, and in a moment it will be gone, dismissed as not true. For who could bear to think of himself this way, as a man deflated by the good fortune of others? No, such a thing is ludicrous.

"Daisy has a fellow," he says. "We need to have them over soon."

THE

ORPHAN MASTER'S SON

A NOVEL

ADAM JOHNSON

This is a work of fiction. All incidents and dialogue, and all characters with the exception of some well-known real-life figures, are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Where real-life figures appear, the situations, incidents, and dialogues concerning those persons are entirely fictional and are not intended to depict actual events or to change the entirely fictional nature of the work. In all other respects, any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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PART ONE

THE BIOGRAPHY OF JUN DO

JUN DO'S mother was a singer. That was all Jun Do's father, the Orphan Master, would say about her. The Orphan Master kept a photograph of a woman in his small room at Long Tomorrows. She was quite lovely—eyes large and sideways looking, lips pursed with an unspoken word. Since beautiful women in the provinces get shipped to Pyongyang, that's certainly what had happened to his mother. The real proof of this was the Orphan Master himself. At night, he'd drink, and from the barracks, the orphans would hear him weeping and lamenting, striking half-heard bargains with the woman in the photograph. Only Jun Do was allowed to comfort him, to finally take the bottle from his hands.

As the oldest boy at Long Tomorrows, Jun Do had responsibilities—portioning the food, assigning bunks, renaming the new boys from the list of the 114 Grand Martyrs of the Revolution. Even so, the Orphan Master was serious about showing no favoritism to his son, the only boy at Long Tomorrows who wasn't an orphan. When the rabbit warren was dirty, it was Jun Do who spent the night locked in it. When boys wet their bunks, it was Jun Do who chipped the frozen piss off the floor. Jun Do didn't brag to the other boys that he was the son of the Orphan Master, rather than some kid dropped off by parents on their way to a 9-27 camp. If someone wanted to figure it out, it was pretty obvious—Jun Do had been there before all of them, and the reason he'd never been adopted was because his father would never let someone take his only son. And it made sense that after his mother was stolen to Pyongyang, his father had applied for the one position that would allow him to both earn a living and watch over his son.

The surest evidence that the woman in the photo was Jun Do's mother was the unrelenting way the Orphan Master singled him out for punishment. It could only mean that in Jun Do's face, the Orphan Master saw the woman in the picture, a daily reminder of the eternal hurt he felt from

losing her. Only a father in that kind of pain could take a boy's shoes in winter. Only a true father, flesh and bone, could burn a son with the smoking end of a coal shovel.

Occasionally, a factory would adopt a group of kids, and in the spring, men with Chinese accents would come to make their picks. Other than that, anyone who could feed the boys and provide a bottle for the Orphan Master could have them for the day. In summer they filled sandbags and in winter they used metal bars to break sheets of ice from the docks. On the machining floors, for bowls of cold *chap chai,* they would shovel the coils of oily metal that sprayed from the industrial lathes. The railyard fed them best, though, spicy *yukejang.* One time, shoveling out boxcars, they swept up a powder that looked like salt. It wasn't until they started sweating that they turned red, their hands and faces, their teeth. The train had been filled with chemicals for the paint factory. For weeks, they were red.

And then in the year Juche 85, the floods came. Three weeks of rain, yet the loudspeakers said nothing of terraces collapsing, earth dams giving, villages cascading into one another. The Army was busy trying to save the Sungli 58 factory from the rising water, so the Long Tomorrows boys were given ropes and long-handled gaffs to try to snare people from the Chongjin River before they were washed into the harbor. The water was a roil of timber, petroleum tanks, and latrine barrels. A tractor tire turned in the water, a Soviet refrigerator. They heard the deep booms of boxcars tumbling along the river bottom. The canopy of a troop carrier spun past, a screaming family clinging to it. Then a young woman rose from the water, mouth wide but silent, and the orphan called Bo Song gaffed her arm—right away he was jerked into the current. Bo Song had come to the orphanage a frail boy, and when they discovered he had no hearing, Jun Do gave him the name Un Bo Song, after the 37th Martyr of the Revolution, who'd famously put mud in his ears so he couldn't hear the bullets as he charged the Japanese.

Still, the boys shouted "Bo Song, Bo Song" as they ran the riverbanks, racing beside the patch of river where Bo Song should have been. They ran past the outfall pipes of the Unification Steelworks and along the muddy berms of the Ryongsong's leach ponds, but Bo Song was never seen again. The boys stopped at the harbor, its dark waters ropy with corpses, thousands of them in the throes of the waves, looking like curds of sticky millet that start to flop and toss when the pan heats.

Though they didn't know it, this was the beginning of the famine—first went the power, then the train service. When the shock-work whistles stopped blowing, Jun Do knew it was bad. One day the fishing fleet went out and didn't come back. With winter came blackfinger and the old people went to sleep. These were just the first months, long before the bark-eaters. The loudspeakers called the famine an Arduous March, but that voice was piped in from Pyongyang. Jun Do had never heard anyone in Chongjin call it that. What was happening to them didn't need a name—it was everything, every fingernail you chewed and swallowed, every lift of an eyelid, every trip to the latrine where you tried to shit out wads of balled sawdust. When all hope was gone, the Orphan Master burned the bunks, the boys sleeping around a pot stove that glowed on their last night. In the morning, he flagged down a Soviet Tsir, the military truck they called "the crow" because of its black canvas canopy on the back. There were only a dozen boys left, a perfect fit in the back of the crow. All orphans are destined for the Army eventually. But this was how Jun Do, at fourteen, became a tunnel soldier, trained in the art of zero-light combat.

And that's where Officer So found him, eight years later. The old man actually came underground to get a look at Jun Do, who'd spent an overnighter with his team inside a tunnel that went ten kilometers under the DMZ, almost to the suburbs of Seoul. When exiting a tunnel, they'd always walk out backward, to let their eyes adjust, and he almost ran into Officer So, whose shoulders and big rib cage spoke of a person who'd come of age in the good times, before the Chollima campaigns.

"Are you Pak Jun Do?" he asked.

When Jun Do turned, a circle of light glowed behind the man's close-cropped white hair. The skin on his face was darker than his scalp or jaw, making it look like the man had just shaved off a beard and thick, wild hair. "That's me," Jun Do said.

"That's a Martyr's name," Officer So said. "Is this an orphan detail?"

Jun Do nodded his head. "It is," he said. "But I'm not an orphan."

Officer So's eyes fell upon the red taekwondo badge on Jun Do's chest.

"Fair enough," Officer So said and tossed him a sack.

In it were blue jeans, a yellow shirt with a polo pony, and shoes called Nikes that Jun Do recognized from long ago, when the orphanage was used to welcome ferry-loads of Koreans who had been lured back from

Japan with promises of Party jobs and apartments in Pyongyang. The orphans would wave welcome banners and sing Party songs so that the Japanese Koreans would descend the gangway, despite the horrible state of Chongjin and the crows that were waiting to transport them all to *kwan li so* labor camps. It was like yesterday, watching those perfect boys with their new sneakers, finally coming home.

Jun Do held up the yellow shirt. "What am I supposed to do with this?" he asked.

"It's your new uniform," Officer So said. "You don't get seasick, do you?"

*

He didn't. They took a train to the eastern port of Cholhwang, where Officer So commandeered a fishing boat, the crew so frightened of their military guests that they wore their Kim Il Sung pins all the way across the sea to the coast of Japan. Upon the water, Jun Do saw small fish with wings and late morning fog so thick it took the words from your mouth. There were no loudspeakers blaring all day, and all the fishermen had portraits of their wives tattooed on their chests. The sea was spontaneous in a way he'd never seen before—it kept your body uncertain as to how you'd lean next, and yet you could become comfortable with that. The wind in the rigging seemed in communication with the waves shouldering the hull, and lying atop the wheelhouse under the stars at night, it seemed to Jun Do that this was a place a man could close his eyes and exhale.

Officer So had also brought along a man named Gil as their translator. Gil read Japanese novels on the deck and listened to headphones attached to a small cassette player. Only once did Jun Do try to speak to Gil, approaching him to ask what he was listening to. But before Jun Do could open his mouth, Gil stopped the player and said the word "Opera."

They were going to get someone—someone on a beach—and bring that someone home with them. That's all Officer So would say about their trip.

On the second day, darkness falling, they could see the distant lights of a town, but the Captain would take the boat no closer.

"This is Japan," he said. "I don't have charts for these waters."

"I'll tell you how close we get," Officer So said to the Captain, and with a fisherman sounding for the bottom, they made for the shore.

Jun Do got dressed, cinching the belt to keep the stiff jeans on.

"Are these the clothes of the last guy you kidnapped?" Jun Do asked.

Officer So said, "I haven't kidnapped anyone in years."

Jun Do felt his face muscles tighten, a sense of dread running through him.

"Relax," Officer So said. "I've done this a hundred times."

"Seriously?"

"Well, twenty-seven times."

Officer So had brought a little skiff along, and when they were close to the shore, he directed the fishermen to lower it. To the west, the sun was setting over North Korea, and it was cooling now, the wind shifting direction. The skiff was tiny, Jun Do thought, barely big enough for one person, let alone three and a struggling kidnap victim. With a pair of binoculars and a thermos, Officer So climbed down into the skiff. Gil followed. When Jun Do took his place next to Gil, black water lapped over the sides, and right away his shoes soaked through. He debated revealing that he couldn't swim.

Gil kept trying to get Jun Do to repeat phrases in Japanese. Good evening—*Konban wa.* Excuse me, I am lost—*Chotto sumimasen, michi ni mayoimashita.* Can you help me find my cat?—*Watashi no neko ga maigo ni narimashita?*

Officer So pointed their nose toward shore, the old man pushing the outboard motor, a tired Soviet Vpresna, way too hard. Turning north and running with the coast, the boat would lean shoreward as a swell lifted, then rock back toward open water as the wave set it down again.

Gil took the binoculars, but instead of training them on the beach, he studied the tall buildings, the way the downtown neon came to life.

"I tell you," Gil said. "There was no Arduous March in this place."

Jun Do and Officer So exchanged a look.

Officer So said to Gil, "Tell him what 'how are you' was again."

"*Ogenki desu ka,*" Gil said.

"*Ogenki desu ka,*" Jun Do repeated. "*Ogenki desu ka.*"

"Say it like 'How are you, my fellow citizen?' *Ogenki desu ka,*" Officer So said. "Not like how are you, I'm about to pluck you off this fucking beach."

Jun Do asked, "Is that what you call it, plucking?"

"A long time ago, that's what we called it." He put on a fake smile. "Just say it nice."

Jun Do said, "Why not send Gil? He's the one who speaks Japanese."

Officer So returned his eyes to the water. "You know why you're here."

Gil asked, "Why's he here?"

Officer So said, "Because he fights in the dark."

Gil turned to Jun Do. "You mean that's what you do, that's your career?" he asked.

"I lead an incursion team," Jun Do said. "Mostly we run in the dark, but yeah, there's fighting, too."

Gil said, "I thought my job was fucked up."

"What was your job?" Jun Do asked.

"Before I went to language school?" Gil asked. "Land mines."

"What, like defusing them?"

"I wish," Gil said.

They closed within a couple hundred meters of shore, then trolled along the beaches of Kagoshima Prefecture. The more the light faded, the more intricately Jun Do could see it reflected in the architecture of each wave that rolled them.

Gil lifted his hand. "There," he said. "There's somebody on the beach. A woman."

Officer So backed off the throttle and took the field glasses. He held them steady and fine-tuned them, his bushy white eyebrows lifting and falling as he focused. "No," he said, handing the binoculars back to Gil. "Look closer, it's two women. They're walking together."

Jun Do said, "I thought you were looking for a guy?"

"It doesn't matter," the old man said. "As long as the person's alone."

"What, we're supposed to grab just anybody?"

Officer So didn't answer. For a while, there was nothing but the sound of the Vpresna. Then Officer So said, "In my time, we had a whole division, a budget. I'm talking about a speedboat, a tranquilizing gun. We'd surveil, infiltrate, cherry-pick. We didn't pluck family types, and we never took children. I retired with a perfect record. Now look at me. I must be the only one left. I'll bet I'm the only one they could find who remembers this business."

Gil fixed on something on the beach. He wiped the lenses of the binoculars, but really it was too dark to see anything. He handed them to Jun Do. "What do you make out?" he asked.

When Jun Do lifted the binoculars, he could barely discern a male fig-

ure moving along the beach, near the water—he was just a lighter blur against a darker blur, really. Then some motion caught Jun Do's eye. An animal was racing down the beach toward the man—a dog it must've been, but it was big, the size of a wolf. The man did something and the dog ran away.

Jun Do turned to Officer So. "There's a man. He's got a dog with him."

Officer So sat up and put a hand on the outboard engine. "Is he alone?"

Jun Do nodded.

"Is the dog an akita?"

Jun Do didn't know his breeds. Once a week, the orphans had cleaned out a local dog farm. Dogs were filthy animals that would lunge for you at any opportunity—you could see where they'd attacked the posts of their pens, chewing through the wood with their fangs. That's all Jun Do needed to know about dogs.

Officer So said, "As long as the thing wags its tail. That's all you got to worry about."

Gil said, "The Japanese train their dogs to do little tricks. Say to the dog, Nice doggie, sit. *Yoshi yoshi. Osuwari kawaii desu ne.*"

Jun Do said, "Will you shut up with the Japanese?"

Jun Do wanted to ask if there was a plan, but Officer So simply turned them toward the shore. Back in Panmunjom, Jun Do was the leader of his tunnel squad, so he had a liquor ration and a weekly credit for one of the women. In three days, he had the quarterfinals of the KPA taekwondo tournament.

Jun Do's squad swept every tunnel under the DMZ once a month, and they worked without lights, which meant jogging for kilometers in complete darkness, using their red lights only when they reached a tunnel's end and needed to inspect its seals and trip wires. They worked as if they might encounter the South Koreans at any point, and except for the rainy season, when the tunnels were too muddy to use, they trained daily in zero-light hand to hand. It was said that the ROK soldiers had infrared and American night-vision goggles. The only weapon Jun Do's boys had was the dark.

When the waves got rough, and he felt panicky, Jun Do turned to Gil. "So what's this job that's worse than disarming land mines?"

"Mapping them," Gil said.

"What, with a sweeper?"

"Metal detectors don't work," Gil said. "The Americans use plastic mines now. We made maps of where they probably were, using psychology and terrain. When a path forces a step or tree roots direct your feet, that's where we assume a mine and mark it down. We'd spend all night in a minefield, risking our lives with every step, and for what? Come morning, the mines were still there, the enemy was still there."

Jun Do knew who got the worst jobs—tunnel recon, twelve-man submarines, mines, biochem—and he suddenly saw Gil differently. "So you're an orphan," he said.

Gil looked shocked. "Not at all. Are you?"

"No," Jun Do said. "Not me."

Jun Do's own unit was made up of orphans, though in Jun Do's case it was a mistake. The address on his KPA card had been Long Tomorrows, and that's what had condemned him. It was a glitch no one in North Korea seemed capable of fixing, and now, this was his fate. He'd spent his life with orphans, he understood their special plight, so he didn't hate them like most people did. He just wasn't one of them.

"And you're a translator now?" Jun Do asked him.

"You work the minefields long enough," Gil said, "and they reward you. They send you someplace cushy like language school."

Officer So laughed a bitter little laugh.

The white foam of the breakers was sweeping into the boat now.

"The shitty thing is," Gil said, "when I'm walking down the street, I'll think, *That's where I'd put a land mine.* Or I'll find myself not stepping on certain places, like door thresholds or in front of a urinal. I can't even go to a park anymore."

"A park?" Jun Do asked. He'd never seen a park.

"Enough," Officer So said. "It's time to get that language school a new Japanese teacher." He throttled back and the surf grew loud, the skiff turning sideways in the waves.

They could see the outline of a man on the beach watching them, but they were helpless now, just twenty meters from shore. When Jun Do felt the boat start to go over, he leaped out to steady it, and though it was only waist deep, he went down hard in the waves. The tide rolled him along the sandy bottom before he came up coughing.

The man on the beach didn't say anything. It was almost dark as Jun Do waded ashore.

Jun Do took a deep breath, then wiped the water from his hair.

"*Konban wa,*" he said to the stranger. "*Odenki kesu da.*"

"*Ogenki desu ka,*" Gil called from the boat.

"*Desu ka,*" Jun Do repeated.

The dog came running up with a yellow ball.

For a moment, the man didn't move. Then he took a step backward.

"Get him," Officer So shouted.

The man bolted, and Jun Do gave chase in wet jeans, his shoes caked with sand. The dog was big and white, bounding with excitement. The Japanese man ran straight down the beach, nearly invisible but for the dog moving from one side of him to the other. Jun Do ran for all he was worth. He focused only on the heartbeat-like thumps of feet padding ahead in the sand. Then he closed his eyes. In the tunnels, Jun Do had developed a sense of people he couldn't see. If they were out there, he could feel it, and if he could get within range, he could home in on them. His father, the Orphan Master, had always given him a sense that his mother was dead, but that wasn't true, she was alive and well, just out of range. And while he'd never heard news of what happened to the Orphan Master, Jun Do could feel that his father was no longer in this world. The key to fighting in the dark was no different: you had to perceive your opponent, sense him, and never use your imagination. The darkness inside your head is something your imagination fills with stories that have nothing to do with the real darkness around you.

From ahead came the body thud of someone falling in the dark, a sound Jun Do had heard a thousand times. Jun Do pulled up where the man was righting himself. His face was ghostly with a dusting of sand. They were huffing and puffing, their joined breath white in the dark.

The truth was that Jun Do never did that well in tournaments. When you fought in the dark, a jab only told your opponent where you were. In the dark, you had to punch as if you were punching through people. Maximum extension is what mattered—haymaker punches and great, whirling roundhouse kicks that took out whole swaths of space and were meant to cut people down. In a tournament, though, opponents could see moves like that coming from a mile away. They simply stepped aside. But a man on a beach at night, standing on the balls of his feet? Jun Do executed a spinning back kick to the head, and the stranger went down.

The dog was filled with energy—excitement perhaps, or frustration. It

pawed at the sand near the unconscious man, then dropped its ball. Jun Do wanted to throw the ball, but he didn't dare get near those teeth. Its tail, Jun Do suddenly realized, wasn't wagging. Jun Do saw a glint in the dark, the man's glasses, it turned out. He put them on, and the fuzzy glow above the dunes turned into crisp points of light in people's windows. Instead of huge housing blocks, the Japanese lived in smaller, individual-sized barracks.

Jun Do pocketed the glasses, then took up the man's ankles and began pulling from behind. The dog was growling and giving short, aggressive barks. When Jun Do looked over his shoulder, the dog was growling in the man's face and using its paws to scratch his cheeks and forehead. Jun Do lowered his head and pulled. The first day in a tunnel is no problem, but when you wake on the second day from the darkness of a dream into true darkness, that's when your eyes must open. If you keep your eyes closed, your mind will show you all kinds of crazy movies, like a dog attacking you from behind. But with your eyes open, all you had to face was the nothingness of what you were really doing.

When finally Jun Do found the boat in the dark, he let the dead weight fall into its aluminum cross members. The man opened his eyes once and rolled them around, but there was no comprehension.

"What did you do to his face?" Gil asked.

"Where were you?" Jun Do asked. "That guy was heavy."

"I'm just the translator," Gil said.

Officer So clapped Jun Do on the back. "Not bad for an orphan," he said.

Jun Do wheeled on him. "I'm not a fucking orphan," he said. "And who the hell are you, saying you've done this a hundred times. We come out here with no plan, just me running someone down? You didn't even get out of the boat."

"I had to see what you were made of," Officer So said. "Next time we'll use our brains."

"There won't be any next time," Jun Do said.

Gil and Jun Do spun the boat to face the waves. They got battered while Officer So pull-started the motor. When the four of them were in and headed toward open water, Officer So said, "Look, it gets easier. Just don't think about it. I was full of shit when I said I'd kidnapped twenty-seven people. I never kept count. As they come just forget about them, one

after another. Catch somebody with your hands, then let them go with your mind. Do the opposite of keeping count."

Even over the outboard, they could hear that dog on the beach. No matter how far out they got, its baying carried over the water, and Jun Do knew he'd hear that dog forever.

*

They stayed at a Songun base, not far from the port of Kinjye. It was surrounded by the earthen bunkers of surface-to-air missiles, and when the sun set, they could see the white rails of launchers glowing in the moonlight. Because they'd been to Japan now, they had to bunk apart from the regular KPA soldiers. The three were housed in the infirmary, a small room with six cots. The only sign it was an infirmary was a lone cabinet filled with blood-taking instruments and an old Chinese refrigerator with a red cross on its door.

They'd locked the Japanese man in one of the hot boxes in the drill yard, and Gil was out there now, practicing his Japanese through the slop hole in the door. Jun Do and Officer So leaned against the infirmary's window frame, sharing a cigarette as they watched Gil out there, sitting in the dirt, polishing his idioms with a man he'd helped kidnap. Officer So shook his head, like now he'd seen it all. There was one patient in the infirmary, a small soldier of about sixteen, bones knit from the famine. He lay on a cot, teeth chattering. Their cigarette smoke was giving him coughing fits. They moved his cot as far away as possible in the small room, but still he wouldn't shut up.

There was no doctor. The infirmary was just a place where sick soldiers were housed until it was clear they wouldn't recover. If the young soldier hadn't improved by morning, the MPs would hook up a blood line and drain four units from him. Jun Do had seen it before, and as far as he could tell, it was the best way to go. It only took a couple of minutes—first they got sleepy, then a little dreamy looking, and if there was a last little panic at the end, it didn't matter because they couldn't talk anymore, and finally, before lights out, they looked pleasantly confused, like a cricket with its feelers pulled off.

The camp generator shut down—slowly the lights dimmed, the fridge went quiet.

Officer So and Jun Do took to their cots.

There was a Japanese man. He took his dog for a walk. And then he was nowhere. For the people who knew him, he'd forever be nowhere. That's how Jun Do had thought of boys selected by the men with Chinese accents. They were here and then they were nowhere, taken like Bo Song to parts unknown. That's how he'd thought of most people—appearing in your life like foundlings on the doorstep, only to be swept away later as if by flood. But Bo Song hadn't gone nowhere—whether he sank down to the wolf eels or bloated and took the tide north to Vladivostok, he went somewhere. The Japanese man wasn't nowhere, either—he was in the hot box, right out there in the drill grounds. And Jun Do's mother, it now struck him—she was somewhere, at this very moment, in a certain apartment in the capital, perhaps, looking in a mirror, brushing her hair before bed.

For the first time in years, Jun Do closed his eyes and let himself recall her face. It was dangerous to dream up people like that. If you did, they'd soon be in the tunnel with you. That had happened many times when he remembered boys from Long Tomorrows. One slip and a boy was suddenly following you in the dark. He was saying things to you, asking why you weren't the one who succumbed to the cold, why you weren't the one who fell in the paint vat, and you'd get the feeling that at any moment, the toes of a front kick would cross your face.

But there she was, his mother. Lying there, listening to the shivering of the soldier, her voice came to him. "Arirang," she sang, her voice achy, at the edge of a whisper, coming from an unknown somewhere. Even those fucking orphans knew where their parents were.

Late in the night, Gil stumbled in. He opened the fridge, which was forbidden, and placed something inside. Then he flopped onto his cot. Gil slept with his arms and legs sprawled off the edges, and Jun Do could tell that as a child, Gil must've had a bed of his very own. In a moment, he was out.

Jun Do and Officer So stood in the dark and went to the fridge. When Officer So pulled its handle, it exhaled a faint, cool breath. In the back, behind stacks of square blood bags, Officer So fished out a half-full bottle of *shoju.* They closed the door quickly because the blood was bound for Pyongyang, and if it spoiled, there'd be hell to pay.

They took the bottle to the window. Far in the distance, dogs were barking in their warrens. On the horizon, above the SAM bunkers, there

was a glow in the sky, moonlight reflecting off the ocean. Behind them, Gil began gassing in his sleep.

Officer So drank. "I don't think old Gil's used to a diet of millet cakes and sorghum soup."

"Who the hell is he?" Jun Do asked.

"Forget about him," Officer So said. "I don't know why Pyongyang started this business up again after all these years, but hopefully we'll be rid of him in a week. One mission, and if everything goes right, we'll never see that guy again."

Jun Do took a drink—his stomach clutching at the fruit, the alcohol.

"What's the mission?" he asked.

"First, another practice run," Officer So said. "Then we're going after a special someone. The Tokyo Opera spends its summers in Niigata. There's a soprano. Her name is Rumina."

The next drink of *shoju* went down smooth. "Opera?" Jun Do asked.

Officer So shrugged. "Some bigshot in Pyongyang probably heard a bootleg and had to have her."

"Gil said he survived a land-mine tour," Jun Do said. "For that, they sent him to language school. Is it true—does it work like that, do you get rewarded?"

"We're stuck with Gil, okay? But you don't listen to him. You listen to me."

Jun Do was quiet.

"Why, you got your heart set on something?" Officer So asked. "You even know what you'd want as a reward?"

Jun Do shook his head.

"Then don't worry about it."

Officer So walked to the corner and leaned over the latrine bucket. He braced himself against the wall and strained for a long time. Nothing happened.

"I pulled off a miracle or two in my day," he said. "I got rewarded. Now look at me." He shook his head. "The reward you want is this: don't become me."

Jun Do stared out the window at the hot box. "What's going to happen to him?"

"The dog man?" Officer So asked. "There are probably a couple of Pubyok on the train from Pyongyang right now to get him."

"Yeah, but what's going to *happen* to him?"

Officer So tried one last push to get some urine out.

"Don't ask stupid questions," he said through his teeth.

Jun Do thought of his mother on a train to Pyongyang. "For your reward, could you ask for a person?"

"What, a woman?" Officer So shook his *umkyoung* in frustration. "Yeah, you could ask for that." He came back and drank the rest of the bottle, saving only a swish in the bottom. This he poured, a dribble at a time, over the dying soldier's lips. Officer So clapped him good-bye on the chest, then he stuffed the empty bottle in the crook of the boy's sweat-soaked arm.

*

They commandeered a new fishing boat, made another crossing. Over the Tsushima Basin, they could hear the powerful clicks, like punches to the chest, of sperm whales hunting below, and nearing the island of Dogo, granite spires rose sudden from the sea, white up top from bird guano and orange below from great gatherings of starfish. Jun Do stared up toward the island's north promontory, volcanic black, limned in dwarf spruce. This was a world wrought for its own sake, without message or point, a landscape that would make no testimony for one great leader over another.

There was a famous resort on this island, and Officer So thought they could catch a tourist alone on the beach. But when they reached the lee of the island, there was an empty boat on the water, a black Avon inflatable, six-man, with a fifty-horse Honda outboard. They took the skiff over to investigate. The Avon was abandoned, not a soul upon the waters. They climbed aboard, and Officer So started the Honda engine. He shut it down. He pulled the gas can out of the skiff, and together they rolled it in the water—it filled quickly, going down ass-first with the weight of the Vpresna.

"Now we're a proper team," Officer So said as they admired their new boat.

That's when the diver surfaced.

Lifting his mask, the diver showed a look of uncertain wonder to discover three men in his boat. But he handed up a sack of abalone and took Gil's hand to help him aboard. The diver was larger than them, muscular in a wetsuit.

Officer So spoke to Gil, "Tell him our boat was damaged, that it sank."

Gil spoke to the diver, who gestured wildly and laughed.

"I know your boat sank," Gil translated back. "It almost landed on my head."

Then the diver noticed the fishing vessel in the distance. He cocked his head at it.

Gil clapped the diver on the back and said something to him. The diver stared hard into Gil's eyes and then panicked. Abalone divers, it turned out, carried a special kind of knife on their ankles, and Jun Do was a long time in subduing him. Finally, Jun Do took the diver's back and began to squeeze, the water wringing from his wetsuit as the scissors choke sank in.

When the knife was flying, Gil had jumped overboard.

"What the fuck did you say to him?" Jun Do demanded.

"The truth," Gil said, treading water.

Officer So had caught a pretty good gash in the forearm. He closed his eyes at the pain of it. "More practice," is all he could say.

⁎

They put the diver in the fishing boat's hold and continued to the mainland. That night, offshore from the town of Fukura, they put the Avon in the water. Next to Fukura's long fishing pier, a summer amusement park had set up, with lanterns strung and old people singing karaoke on a public stage. Here Jun Do and Gil and Officer So hovered beyond the beach break, waiting for the neon piping on the roller coaster to go dark, for the monkeyish organ music of the midway to fall silent. Finally, a solitary figure stood at the end of the pier. When they saw the red of a cigarette, they knew it was a man. Officer So started the engine.

They motored in on idle, the pier towering as they came astern it. Where its pilings entered the heavy surf, there was chaos, with some waves leaping straight up and others deflecting out perpendicular to shore.

"Use your Japanese," Officer So told Gil. "Tell him you lost your puppy or something. Get close. Then—over the rail. It's a long fall, and the water's cold. When he comes up, he'll be fighting to get in the boat."

Gil stepped out when they reached the beach. "I've got it," he said. "This one's mine."

"Oh, no," Officer So said. "You both go."

"Seriously," Gil said. "I think I can handle it."

"Out," Officer So said to Jun Do. "And wear those damn glasses."

The two of them crossed the tide line and came to a small square. Here were benches and a little plaza, a shuttered tea stand. There seemed to be no statue, and they could not tell what the square glorified. The trees were full with plums, so ripe the skins broke and juice ran in their hands. It seemed impossible, a thing not to be trusted. A grubby man was sleeping on a bench, and they marveled at it, a person sleeping any place he wished.

Gil stared at all the town houses around them. They looked traditional, with dark beams and ceramic roofs, but you could tell they were brand new.

"I want to open all these doors," he said. "Sit in their chairs, listen to their music."

Jun Do stared at him.

"You know," Gil said. "Just to see."

The tunnels always ended with a ladder leading up to a rabbit hole. Jun Do's men would vie to be the ones to slip out and wander South Korea for a while. They'd come back with stories of machines that handed out money and people who picked up dog shit and put it in bags. Jun Do never looked. He knew the televisions were huge and there was all the rice you could eat. Yet he wanted no part of it—he was scared that if he saw it with his own eyes, his entire life would mean nothing. Stealing turnips from an old man who'd gone blind from hunger? That would have been for nothing. Sending another boy instead of himself to clean vats at the paint factory? For nothing.

Jun Do threw away his half-eaten plum. "I've had better," he said.

On the pier, they walked planking stained from years of bait fishing. Ahead, at the end, they could see a face, lit from the blue glow of a mobile phone.

"Just get him over the rail," Jun Do said.

Gil took a breath. "Over the rail," he repeated.

There were empty bottles on the pier, cigarette butts. Jun Do was walking calmly forward, and he could feel Gil trying to copy this beside him. From below came the throaty bubble of an outboard idling. The figure ahead stopped speaking on the phone.

"*Dare?*" a voice called to them. "*Dare nano?*"

"Don't answer," Jun Do whispered.

"It's a woman's voice," Gil said.

"Don't answer," Jun Do said.

The hood of a coat was pulled back to reveal a young woman's face.

"I'm not made for this," Gil said.

"Stick to the plan."

Their footsteps seemed impossibly loud. It struck Jun Do that one day men had come for his mother like this, that he was now one of those men.

Then they were upon her. She was small under the coat. She opened her mouth, as if to scream, and Jun Do saw she had fine metal work all along her teeth. They gripped her arms and muscled her up on the rail.

"*Zenzen oyogenai'n desu,*" she said, and though Jun Do could speak no Japanese, he knew it was a raw, imploring confession, like "I'm a virgin."

They threw her over the rail. She fell away silent, not a word or even the snatching of a breath. Jun Do saw something flash in her eyes, though—it wasn't fear or the senselessness of it. He could tell she was thinking of her parents and how they'd never know what became of her.

From below came a splash and the gunning of an outboard.

Jun Do couldn't shake that look in her eyes.

On the pier was her phone. He picked it up and put it to his ear. Gil tried to say something, but Jun Do silenced him. "Mayumi?" a woman's voice asked. "Mayumi?" Jun Do pushed some buttons to make it stop. When he leaned over the rail, the boat was rising and falling in the swells.

"Where is she?" Jun Do asked.

Officer So was staring into the water. "She went down," he said.

"What do you mean she went down?"

He lifted his hands. "She hit and then she was gone."

Jun Do turned to Gil. "What did she say?"

Gil said, "She said, *I can't swim.*"

"'I can't swim'?" Jun Do asked. "She said she couldn't swim and you didn't stop me?"

"Throwing her over, that was the plan. You said stick to it."

Jun Do looked into the black water again, deep here at the end of the pier. She was down there, that big coat like a sail in the current, her body rolling along the sandy floor.

The phone rang. It glowed blue and vibrated in Jun Do's hand. He and

Gil stared at it. Gil took the phone and listened, eyes wide. Jun Do could tell, even from here, that it was a woman's voice, a mother's. "Throw it away," Jun Do told him. "Just toss it."

Gil's eyes roamed as he listened. His hand was trembling. He nodded his head several times. When he said, "*Hai,*" Jun Do grabbed it. He jabbed his finger at the buttons. There, on its small screen, appeared a picture of a baby. He threw it into the sea.

Jun Do went to the rail. "How could you not keep count," he yelled down to Officer So. "How could you not keep count?"

*

That was the end of their practice. It was time to get the opera lady. Officer So was to cross the Sea of Japan on a fishing vessel, while Jun Do and Gil took the overnight ferry from Chongjin to Niigata. At midnight, with the singer in hand, they would meet Officer So on the beach. Simplicity, Officer So said, was the key to the plan.

Jun Do and Gil took the afternoon train north to Chongjin. At the station, families were sleeping under cargo platforms, waiting for darkness so they could make the journey to Sinuiju, which was just a swim across the Tumen River from China.

They made for the Port of Chongjin on foot, passing the Reunification Smelter, its great cranes rusted in place, the copper lines to its furnace long since pilfered for scrap. Apartment blocks stood empty, their ration outlet windows butcher-papered. There was no laundry hanging to dry, no onion smoke in the air. All the trees had been cut during the famine, and now, years later, the saplings were uniform in size, trunks ankle-thick, their clean stalks popping up in the oddest places—in rain barrels and storm drains, one tree bursting from an outhouse where a human skeleton had shit its indigestible seed.

Long Tomorrows, when they came to it, looked no bigger than the infirmary.

Jun Do shouldn't have pointed it out because Gil insisted they go in.

It was filled only with shadows. Everything had been stripped for fuel—even the doorframes had been burned. The roster of the 114 Grand Martyrs of the Revolution, painted on the wall, was the only thing left.

Gil didn't believe that Jun Do had named all the orphans.

"You really memorized all the Martyrs?" he asked. "What about number eleven?"

"That's Ha Shin," Jun Do said. "When he was captured, he cut out his own tongue so the Japanese could get no information from him. There was a boy here who wouldn't speak—I gave him that name."

Gil ran his finger down the list.

"Here you are," he said. "Martyr number seventy-six, Pak Jun Do. What's that guy's story?"

Jun Do touched the blackness on the floor where the stove had once been. "Even though he killed many Japanese soldiers," he said, "the revolutionaries in Pak Jun Do's unit didn't trust him because he was descended from an impure blood line. To prove his loyalty, he hanged himself."

Gil stared at him. "You gave yourself this name? Why?"

"He passed the ultimate loyalty test."

The Orphan Master's room, it turned out, was no bigger than a pallet. And of the portrait of the tormenting woman, Jun Do could find only a nail hole.

"Is this where you slept?" Gil asked. "In the Orphan Master's room?"

Jun Do showed him the nail hole. "Here's where the portrait of my mother hung."

Gil inspected it. "There was a nail here, all right," he said. "Tell me, if you lived with your father, how come you have an orphan's name?"

"He couldn't give me his name," Jun Do said, "or everyone would see the shame of how he was forced to raise his son. And he couldn't bear to give me another man's name, even a Martyr's. I had to do it."

Gil's expression was blank. "What about your mother?" he asked. "What was her name?"

They heard the horn of the *Mangyongbong-92* ferry in the distance.

Jun Do said, "Like putting a name to my problems would solve anything."

*

That night Jun Do stood in the dark stern of the ship, looking down into the turbulence of its wake. *Rumina,* he kept thinking. He didn't listen for her voice or let himself visualize her. He only wondered how she'd spend this last day if she knew he was coming.

It was late morning when they entered Bandai-jima Port—the customs houses displaying their international flags. Large shipping vessels, painted humanitarian blue, were being loaded with rice at their moorings. Jun Do and Gil had forged documents, and in polo shirts, jeans, and sneakers they descended the gangway into downtown Niigata. It was a Sunday.

Making their way to the auditorium, Jun Do saw a passenger jet crossing the sky, a big plume behind it. He gawked, neck craned—amazing. So amazing he decided to feign normalcy at everything, like the colored lights controlling the traffic or the way buses kneeled, oxenlike, to let old people board. Of course the parking meters could talk, and the doors of businesses opened as they passed. Of course there was no water barrel in the bathroom, no ladle.

The matinee was a medley of works the opera troupe would stage over the coming season, so all the singers took turns offering brief arias. Gil seemed to know the songs, humming along with them. Rumina—small, broad-shouldered—mounted the stage in a dress the color of graphite. Her eyes were dark under sharp bangs. Jun Do could tell she'd known sadness, yet she couldn't know that her greatest trials lay ahead, that this evening, when darkness fell, her life would become an opera, that Jun Do was the dark figure at the end of the first act who removes the heroine to a land of lament.

She sang in Italian and then German and then Japanese. When finally she sang in Korean, it came clear why Pyongyang had chosen her. The song was beautiful, her voice light now, singing of two lovers on a lake, and the song was not about the Dear Leader or defeating the imperialists or the pride of a North Korean factory. It was about a girl and a boy in a boat. The girl had a white *choson-ot,* the boy a soulful stare.

Rumina sang in Korean, and her dress was graphite, and she might as well have sung of a spider that spins white thread to capture her listeners. Jun Do and Gil wandered the streets of Niigata held by that thread, pretending they weren't about to abduct her from the nearby artists' village. A line kept ringing in Jun Do's mind about how in the middle of the water the lovers decide to row no further.

They walked the city in a trance, waiting for dark. Advertisements especially had an effect on Jun Do. There were no ads in North Korea, and here they were on buses and posters, across video screens. Immediate and

imploring—couples clasping one another, a sad child—he asked Gil what each one said, but the answers pertained to car insurance and telephone rates. Through a window, they watched Korean women cut the toenails of Japanese women. For fun, they operated a vending machine and received a bag of orange food neither would taste.

Gil paused before a store that sold equipment for undersea exploration. In the window was a large bag made to stow dive gear. It was black and nylon, and the salesperson showed them how it would hold everything needed for an underwater adventure for two. They bought it.

They asked a man pushing a cart if they could borrow it, and he told them at the supermarket they could get their own. Inside the store, it was almost impossible to tell what most of the boxes and packages contained. The important stuff, like radish bushels and buckets of chestnuts, were nowhere to be seen. Gil purchased a roll of heavy tape and, from a section of toys for children, a little watercolor set in a tin. Gil at least had someone to buy a souvenir for.

Darkness fell, storefronts lit suddenly with red-and-blue neon, and the willows were eerily illuminated from below. Car headlights flashed in his eyes. Jun Do felt exposed, singled out. Where was the curfew? Why didn't the Japanese respect the dark like normal people?

They stood outside a bar, time yet to kill. Inside, people were laughing and talking.

Gil pulled out their yen. "No sense taking any back," he said.

Inside, he ordered whiskeys. Two women were at the bar as well, and Gil bought their drinks. They smiled and returned to their conversation. "Did you see their teeth?" Gil asked. "So white and perfect, like children's teeth." When Jun Do didn't agree, Gil said, "Relax, yeah? Loosen up."

"Easy for you," Jun Do said. "You don't have to overpower someone tonight. Then get her across town. And if we don't find Officer So on that beach—"

"Like that would be the worst thing," Gil said. "You don't see anyone around here plotting to escape to North Korea. You don't see them coming to pluck people off our beaches."

"That kind of talk doesn't help."

"Come, drink up," Gil said. "I'll get the singer into the bag tonight. You're not the only guy capable of beating a woman, you know. How hard can it be?"

"I'll handle the singer," Jun Do said. "You just keep it together."

"I can stuff a singer in a bag, okay?" Gil said. "I can push a shopping cart. You just drink up, you're probably never going to see Japan again."

Gil tried to speak to the Japanese women, but they smiled and ignored him. Then he bought a drink for the bartender. She came over and talked with him while she poured it. She was thin shouldered, but her shirt was tight and her hair was absolutely black. They drank together, and he said something to make her laugh. When she went to fill an order, Gil turned to Jun Do. "If you slept with one of these girls," Gil said, "you'd know it was because she wanted to, not like some military comfort girl trying to get nine stamps a day in her quota book or a factory gal getting married off by her housing council. Back home pretty girls never even raise their eyes to you. You can't even have a cup of tea without her father arranging a marriage."

Pretty girls? Jun Do thought. "The world thinks I'm an orphan, that's my curse," Jun Do told him. "But how did a Pyongyang boy like you end up doing such shitty jobs?"

Gil ordered more drinks, even though Jun Do had barely touched his. "Going to that orphanage really messed with your head," Gil said. "Just because I don't blow my nose in my hand anymore doesn't mean I'm not a country boy, from Myohsun. You should move on, too. In Japan, you can be anyone you want to be."

They heard a motorcycle pull up, and outside the window, they saw a man back it in line with a couple of other bikes. When he took the key from the ignition, he hid it under the lip of the gas tank. Gil and Jun Do glanced at one another.

Gil sipped his whiskey, swishing it around then tipping his head to delicately gargle.

"You don't drink like a country boy."

"You don't drink like an orphan."

"I'm not an orphan."

"Well, that's good," Gil said. "Because all the orphans in my land-mine unit knew how to do was take—your cigarettes, your socks, your *shoju.* Don't you hate it when someone takes your *shoju*? In my unit, they gobbled up everything around them, like a dog digests its pups, and for thanks, they left you the puny nuggets of their shit."

Jun Do gave the smile that puts people at ease in the moment before you strike them.

Gil went on. "But you're a decent guy. You're loyal like the guy in the martyr story. You don't need to tell yourself that your father was this and your mother was that. You can be anyone you want. Reinvent yourself for a night. Forget about that drunk and the nail hole in the wall."

Jun Do stood. He took a step back to get the right distance for a turnbuckle kick. He closed his eyes, he could feel the space, he could visualize the hip pivoting, the leg rising, the whip of the instep as it torqued around. Jun Do had dealt with this his whole life, the ways it was impossible for people from normal families to conceive of a man in so much hurt that he couldn't acknowledge his own son, that there was nothing worse than a mother leaving her children, though it happened all the time, that "take" was a word people used for those who had so little to give as to be immeasurable.

When Jun Do opened his eyes, Gil suddenly realized what was about to happen.

He fumbled his drink. "Whoa," he said. "My mistake, okay? I'm from a big family, I don't know anything about orphans. We should go, we've got things to do."

"Okay, then," Jun Do said. "Let's see how you treat those pretty ladies in Pyongyang."

*

Behind the auditorium was the artists' village—a series of cottages ringing a central hot spring. They could see the stream of water, still steaming hot, running from the bathhouse. Mineral white, it tumbled down bald, bleached rocks toward the sea.

They hid the cart, then Jun Do boosted Gil over the fence. When Gil came around to open the metal gate for Jun Do, Gil paused a moment and the two regarded one another through the bars before Gil lifted the latch and let Jun Do in.

Tiny cones of light illuminated the flagstone path to Rumina's bungalow. Above them, the dark green and white of magnolia blocked the stars. In the air was conifer and cedar, something of the ocean. Jun Do tore two strips of duct tape and hung them from Gil's sleeves.

"That way," Jun Do whispered, "they'll be ready to go."

Gil's eyes were thrilled and disbelieving.

"So, we're just going to storm in there?" he asked.

"I'll get the door open," Jun Do said. "Then you get that tape on her mouth."

Jun Do pried a large flagstone from the path and carried it to the door. He placed it against the knob and when he threw his hip into it, the door popped. Gil ran toward a woman, sitting up in bed, illuminated only by a television. Jun Do watched from the doorway as Gil got the tape across her mouth, but then in the sheets and the softness of the bed, the tide seemed to turn. He lost a clump of hair. Then she got his collar, which she used to off-balance him. Finally, he found her neck, and they went to the floor, where he worked his weight onto her, the pain making her feet curl. Jun Do stared long at those toes: the nails had been painted bright red.

At first, Jun Do had been thinking, *Grab her here, pressure her there,* but then a sick feeling rose in him. As the two rolled, Jun Do could see that she had wet herself, and the rawness of it, the brutality of what was happening, was newly clear to him. Gil was bringing her into submission, taping her wrists and ankles, and she was kneeling now, him laying out the bag and unzipping it. When he spread the opening for her, her eyes—wide and wet—failed, and her posture went woozy. Jun Do pulled off his glasses, and things were better with the blur.

Outside, he breathed deeply. He could hear Gil struggling to fold her up so she would fit in the bag. The stars over the ocean, fuzzy now, made him remember how free he'd felt on that first night crossing of the Sea of Japan, how at home he was on a fishing vessel. Back inside, he saw Gil had zipped the bag so that only Rumina's face showed, her nostrils flaring for oxygen. Gil stood over her, exhausted but smiling. He pressed the fabric of his pants against his groin so she could see the outline of his erection. When her eyes went wide, he pulled the zipper shut.

Quickly, they went through her possessions. Gil pocketed yen and a necklace of red and white stones. Jun Do didn't know what to grab. On a table were medicine bottles, cosmetics, a stack of family photos. When his eyes landed on the graphite dress, he pulled it from its hanger.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Gil asked.

"I don't know," Jun Do told him.

The cart, overburdened, made loud clacking sounds at every crease in the sidewalk. They didn't speak. Gil was scratched and his shirt was torn. It looked like he was wearing makeup that had smeared. A clear yellow fluid had risen through the scab where his hair was missing. When the cement sloped at the curbs, the wheels had a tendency to spin funny and spill the cart, the load dumping to the pavement.

Bundles of cardboard lined the streets. Dishwashers hosed down kitchen mats in the gutters. A bright, empty bus whooshed past. Near the park, a man walked a large white dog that stopped and eyed them. The bag would squirm awhile, then go still. At a corner, Gil told Jun Do to turn left, and there, down a steep hill and across a parking lot, was the beach.

"I'm going to watch our backs," Gil said.

The cart wanted free—Jun Do doubled his grip on the handle. "Okay," he answered.

From behind, Gil said, "I was out of line back there with that orphan talk. I don't know what it's like to have parents who are dead or who gave up. I was wrong, I see that now."

"No harm done," Jun Do said. "I'm not an orphan."

From behind, Gil said, "So tell me about the last time you saw your father."

The cart kept trying to break loose. Each time Jun Do had to lean back and skid his feet. "Well, there wasn't a going-away party or anything." The cart lurched forward and dragged Jun Do a couple of meters before he got his traction back. "I'd been there longer than anyone—I was never getting adopted, my father wasn't going to let anyone take his only son. Anyway, he came to me that night, we'd burned our bunks, so I was on the floor—Gil, help me here."

Suddenly the cart was racing. Jun Do tumbled as it came free of his grip and barreled downhill alone. "Gil," he yelled, watching it go. The cart got speed wobbles as it crossed the parking lot, and striking the far curb, the cart hopped high into the air, pitching the black bag out into the dark sand.

He turned but Gil was nowhere to be seen.

Jun Do ran out onto the sand, passing the bag and the odd way it had settled. Down at the waterline, he scanned the waves for Officer So, but there was nothing. He checked his pockets—he had no map, no watch, no

light. Hands on knees, he couldn't catch his breath. Past him, billowing down the beach, came the graphite dress, filling and emptying in the wind, tumbling along the sand until it was taken by the night.

He found the bag, rolled it over. He unzipped it some, heat pouring out. He pulled the tape from her face, which was abraded with nylon burns. She spoke to him in Japanese.

"I don't understand," he said.

In Korean, she said, "Thank God you rescued me."

He studied her face. How raw and puffy it was.

"Some psychopath stuck me in here," she said. "Thank God you came along, I thought I was dead, and then you came to set me free."

Jun Do looked again for any sign of Gil, but he knew there wouldn't be.

"Thanks for getting me out of here," she said. "Really, thanks for setting me free."

Jun Do tested the strip of tape with his fingers, but it had lost much of its stickiness. A lock of her hair was fixed to the tape. He let it go in the wind.

"My God," she said. "You're one of them."

Sand blew into the bag, into her eyes.

"Believe me," he said. "I know what you're going through."

"You don't have to be a bad guy," she said. "There's goodness in you, I can see it. Let me go, and I'll sing for you. You won't believe how I can sing."

"Your song has been troubling me," he said. "The one about the boy who chooses to quit rowing in the middle of the lake."

"That was only an aria," she said. "From a whole opera, one filled with subplots and reversals and betrayals."

Jun Do leaned close now. "Does the boy stop because he has rescued the girl and on the far shore he will have to give her to his superiors? Or has the boy stolen the girl and therefore knows that punishment awaits?"

"It's a love story," she said.

"I understand that," he said. "But what is the answer? Could it be that he knows he's marked for a labor camp?"

She searched his face, as if *he* knew the answer.

"How does it end?" he asked. "What happens to them?"

"Let me out and I'll tell you," she said. "Open this bag and I'll sing you the ending."

Jun Do took the zipper and closed it. He spoke to the black nylon where her face had been. "Keep your eyes open," he said. "I know there's nothing to see, but whatever happens, don't shut them. Darkness and close quarters, they're not your enemy."

He dragged the bag to the waterline. The ocean, frothy cold, washed over his shoes as he scanned the waves for Officer So. When a wave reached high upon the sand and licked the bag, she screamed inside, and he had never heard such a shriek. From far up the beach, a light flashed at him. Officer So had heard her. He brought the black inflatable around, and Jun Do dragged the bag into the surf. Using the straps, the two of them rolled it into the boat.

"Where's Gil?" he asked.

"Gil's gone," Jun Do said. "He was right beside me, and then he wasn't."

They were knee-deep in waves, steadying the boat. The lights of the city were reflected in Officer So's eyes. "You know what happened to the other mission officers?" he asked. "There were four of us. Now there's only me. The others are in Prison 9—have you heard of that place, tunnel man? The whole prison's underground. It's a mine, and when you go in, you never see the sun again."

"Look, scaring me isn't going to change anything. I don't know where he is."

Officer So went on, "There's an iron gate at the minehead, and once you pass that, that's it—there are no guards inside, no doctors, no cafeteria, no toilets. You just dig in the dark, and when you get some ore, you drag it to the surface to trade through the bars for food and candles and pickaxes. Even the bodies don't come out."

"He could be anywhere," Jun Do said. "He speaks Japanese."

From the bag came Rumina's voice. "I can help you," she said. "I know Niigata like the lines on my palm. Let me out, and I swear I'll find him."

They ignored her.

"Who is this guy?" Jun Do asked.

"The spoiled kid of some minister," Officer So said. "That's what they tell me. His dad sent him here to toughen him up. You know—the hero's son's always the meekest."

Jun Do turned and considered the lights of Niigata.

Officer So put his hand on Jun Do's shoulder. "You're soldierly," he said. "When it comes time to dispense, you dispense." He removed the

bag's nylon shoulder strap and made a slip loop at one end. "Gil's got a noose around our fucking necks. Now it's his turn."

*

Jun Do walked the warehouse district with a strange calm. The moon, such as it was, reflected the same in every puddle, and when a bus stopped for him, the driver took one look and asked for no fare. The bus was empty except for two old Korean men in back. They still wore their white paper short-order hats. Jun Do spoke to them, but they shook their heads.

Jun Do needed the motorcycle to stand a chance of finding Gil in this city. But if Gil had any brain at all, he and the bike were long gone. When Jun Do finally rounded the corner to the whiskey bar, the black motorcycle gleamed at the curb. He threw his leg over the seat, touched the handlebars. But when he felt under the lip of the tank, there was no key. He turned to the bar's front windows, and there through the glass was Gil, laughing with the bartender.

Jun Do took a seat beside Gil, who was intent on a watercolor in progress. He had the paint set open, and he dipped the brush in a shot glass of water tinctured purple-green. It was a landscape, with bamboo patches and paths cutting through a field of stones. Gil looked up at Jun Do, then wet his brush, swirling it in yellow to highlight the bamboo stalks.

Jun Do said to him, "You're so fucking stupid."

"You're the stupid one," Gil said. "You got the singer—who would come back for me?"

"I would," Jun Do told him. "Let's have the key."

The motorcycle key was sitting on the bar, and Gil slid it to him.

Gil twirled his finger in the air to signal another round. The bartender came over. She was wearing Rumina's necklace. Gil spoke to her, then peeled off half the yen and gave it to Jun Do.

"I told her this round's on you," Gil said.

The bartender poured three glasses of whiskey, then said something that made Gil laugh.

Jun Do asked, "What'd she say?"

"She said you look very strong, but too bad you're a pussy-man."

Jun Do looked at Gil.

Gil shrugged. "I maybe told her that you and I got in a fight, over a girl. I said that I was winning until you pulled out my hair."

Jun Do said, "You can still get out of this. We won't say anything, I swear. We'll just go back, and it'll be like you never ran."

"Does it look like I'm running?" Gil asked. "Besides, I can't leave my girlfriend."

Gil handed her the watercolor, and she tacked it on the wall to dry, next to another one of her looking radiant in the red-and-white necklace. Squinting from a distance, Jun Do suddenly understood that Gil had painted not a landscape but a lush, pastoral land-mine map.

"So you were in the minefields," he said.

"My mother sent me to the Mansudae to study painting," Gil said. "But Father decided the minefields would make a man of me, so he pulled some strings." Gil had to laugh at the idea of pulling a string to get posted on a suicide detail. "I found a way to make the maps, rather than do the mapping." As he spoke, he worked quickly on another watercolor, a woman, mouth wide, lit from below so her eye sockets were darkened. Right away it had the likeness of Rumina, though you couldn't tell whether she was singing with great intensity or screaming for her life.

"Tell her you'll have one last drink," Jun Do said and passed her all the yen.

"I'm really sorry about all this," Gil said. "I really am. But I'm not going anywhere. Consider the opera singer a gift, and send my regrets."

"Was it your father who wanted the singer, is that why we're here?"

Gil ignored him. He started painting a portrait of him and Jun Do together, each giving the thumbs-up sign. They wore garish, forced smiles, and Jun Do didn't want him to finish.

"Let's go," Jun Do said. "You don't want to be late for karaoke night at the Yanggakdo or whatever you elites do for fun."

Gil didn't move. He was emphasizing Jun Do's muscles, making them oversized, like an ape's. "It's true," Gil said. "I've tasted beef and ostrich. I've seen *Titanic* and I've been on the internet ten different times. And yeah, there's karaoke. Every week there's an empty table where a family used to sit but now they're gone, no mention of them, and the songs they used to sing are missing from the machine."

"I promise you," Jun Do said. "Come back, and no one will ever know."

"The question isn't whether or not I'll come with you," Gil said. "It's why you're not coming with me."

If Jun Do wanted to defect, he could have done it a dozen times. At the

end of a tunnel, it was as easy as climbing the ladder and triggering a spring-loaded door.

"In this whole stupid country," Jun Do said, "the only thing that made sense to me were the Korean ladies on their knees cleaning the feet of the Japanese."

"I could take you to the South Korean embassy tomorrow. It's just a train ride. In six weeks you'd be in Seoul. You'd be very useful to them, a real prize."

"Your mother, your father," Jun Do said. "They'll get sent to the camps."

"Whether you're a good karaoke singer or bad, eventually your number comes up. It's only a matter of time."

"What about Officer So—will some fancy whiskey make you forget him digging in the dark of Prison 9?"

"He's the reason to leave," Gil said. "So you don't become him."

"Well, he sends his regards," Jun Do said and dropped the loop of nylon over Gil's head, pulling the slack so the strap was snug around his neck.

Gil downed his whiskey. "I'm just a person," he said. "I'm just a nobody who wants out."

The bartender saw the leash. Covering her mouth, she said, "*Homo janai.*"

"I guess I don't need to translate that," Gil said.

Jun Do gave the leash a tug and they both stood.

Gil closed his watercolor tin, then bowed to the bartender. "*Chousenjin ni turesarareru yo,*" he said to her. With her phone, she took a picture of the two of them, then poured herself a drink. She lifted it in Gil's honor before drinking.

"Fucking Japanese," Gil said. "You've got to love them. I said I was being kidnapped to North Korea, and look at her."

"Take a good, long look," Jun Do said and lifted the motorcycle key from the bar.

*

Past the shore break, they motored into swells sharpened by the wind—the black inflatable lifted, then dropped flat in the troughs. Everyone held the lifeline to steady themselves. Rumina sat in the nose, fresh tape around her hands. Officer So had draped his jacket around her—except for that, her body was bare and blue with cold.

Jun Do and Gil sat on opposite sides of the raft, but Gil wouldn't look at him. When they reached open water, Officer So backed off the engine enough that Jun Do could be heard.

"I gave Gil my word," he told Officer So. "I said we'd forget how he tried to run."

Rumina sat with the wind at her back, hair turbulent in her face. "Put him in the bag," she said.

Officer So had a grand laugh at that. "The opera lady's right," he said. "You caught a defector, my boy. He had a fucking gun to our heads. But he couldn't outsmart us. Start thinking of your reward," he said. "Start savoring it."

The idea of a reward, of finding his mother and delivering her from her fate in Pyongyang, now made him sick. In the tunnels, they would sometimes wander into a curtain of gas. You couldn't detect it—a headache would spike, and you'd see the darkness throb red. He felt that now with Rumina glaring at him. He suddenly wondered if she didn't mean him, that Jun Do should go in the bag. But he wasn't the one who beat her or folded her up. It wasn't his father who'd ordered her kidnapping. And what choice did he have, about anything? He couldn't help that he was from a town lacking in electricity and heat and fuel, where the factories were frozen in rust, where able-bodied men were either in labor camps or were listless with hunger. It wasn't his fault that all the boys in his care were numb with abandonment and hopeless at the prospect of being recruited as prison guards or conscripted into suicide squads.

The lead was still around Gil's neck. Out of pure joy, Officer So leaned over and yanked it hard, just to feel it cinch. "I'd roll you over the side," he said. "But I'd miss what they're going to do to you."

Gil winced from the pain. "Jun Do knows how to do it now," he said. "He'll replace you, and they'll send you to a camp so you never talk about this business."

"You don't know anything," Officer So said. "You're soft and weak. I fucking invented this game. I kidnapped Kim Jong Il's personal sushi chef. I plucked the Dear Leader's own doctor out of an Osaka hospital, in broad daylight, with these hands."

"You don't know how Pyongyang works," Gil said. "Once the other ministers see her, they'll all want their own opera singers."

A cold, white spray slapped them. It made Rumina inhale sharply, as if

every little thing was trying to take her life. She turned to Jun Do, glaring again. She was about to say something, he could tell—a word was forming on her lips.

He unfolded his glasses, put them on—now he could see the bruising on her throat, the way her hands were fat and purple below the tape on her wrists. He saw a wedding ring, a birth-surgery scar. She wouldn't stop glaring at him. Her eyes—they could see the decisions he'd made. They could tell it was Jun Do who'd picked which orphans ate first and which were left with watery spoonfuls. They recognized that it was he who assigned the bunks next to the stove and the ones in the hall where blackfinger lurked. He'd picked the boys who got blinded by the arc furnace. He'd chosen the boys who were at the chemical plant when it made the sky go yellow. He'd sent Ha Shin, the boy who wouldn't speak, who wouldn't say no, to clean the vats at the paint factory. It was Jun Do who put the gaff in Bo Song's hands.

"What choice did I have?" Jun Do asked her. He really needed to know, just as he had to know what happened to the boy and the girl at the end of the aria.

She raised her foot and showed Jun Do her toenails, the red paint vibrant against the platinum dark. She spoke a word, then drove her foot into his face.

The blood, it was dark. It trickled down his shirt, last worn by the man they'd plucked from the beach. Her big toenail had cut along his gums, but it was okay, he felt better, he knew the word now, the word that had been upon her lips. He didn't need to speak Japanese to understand the word "die." It was the ending to the opera, too, he was sure of it. That's what happened to the boy and the girl on the boat. It wasn't a sad story, really. It was one of love—the boy and the girl at least knew each other's fates, and they'd never be alone.

Washington

A Life

Ron Chernow



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CHAPTER ONE

A Short-Lived Family

The crowded career of George Washington afforded him little leisure to indulge his vanity or gratify his curiosity by conducting genealogical research into his family. As he admitted sheepishly when president, "This is a subject to which I confess I have paid very little attention. My time has been so much occupied in the busy and active scenes of life from an early period of it that but a small portion of it could have been devoted to researches of this nature."[1]

The first Washington to claim our attention was, ironically, the casualty of a rebellion against royal authority. During the English Civil War, Lawrence Washington, George's great-great-grandfather and an Anglican minister, was hounded from his parish in the Puritan cleansing of the Church of England under Oliver Cromwell. This shattered a cozy existence that intermingled learning with modest wealth. Lawrence had spent the better part of his childhood at the family residence, Sulgrave Manor near Banbury in Oxfordshire, before earning two degrees at Brasenose College, Oxford; he later served as a fellow of the college and a university proctor. Persecuted by the Puritans as one of the "scandalous, malignant priests," he was accused of being "a common frequenter of alehouses," which was likely a trumped-up charge.[2] His travails may have spurred his son John to seek his fortune in the burgeoning tobacco trade with North America. After landing in Tidewater Virginia in late 1656, John Washington settled at Bridges Creek, hard by the Potomac River in Westmoreland County. Less a committed colonist than a temporary castaway, John was stranded when heavy squalls grounded his ship and soaked its precious cargo of tobacco, prompting him to tarry in Virginia.

One marvels at the speed with which the young man prospered in the New

World, exhibiting certain traits—a bottomless appetite for land, an avidity for public office, and a zest for frontier combat—that foreshadowed his great-grandson's rapid ascent in the world. John also set a precedent of social mobility through military laurels after he was recruited to fight Indians in Maryland and was rewarded with a colonel's rank. In this rough-and-tumble world, he was accused of slaughtering five Indian emissaries and cheating tribes of land, activities that won him the baleful Indian nickname of Conotocarious, which meant "Destroyer of Villages" or "Town Devourer."[3] He also found time to woo and wed Anne Pope, whose well-heeled father favored the newlyweds with seven hundred acres of land. John piled up an impressive roster of the sort of local offices—justice of the peace, burgess in the Virginia assembly, lieutenant colonel in the county militia—that signified social standing in colonial Virginia. Most conspicuous was his omnivorous craving for land. By importing sixty-three indentured servants from England, he capitalized upon a British law that granted fifty acres to each immigrant, and he eventually amassed more than five thousand acres, with the single largest property bordering the Potomac River at Little Hunting Creek, the future site of Mount Vernon.

After his wife died, John Washington married, in quick succession, a pair of lusty sisters who had been accused, respectively, of running a brothel and engaging in adulterous relations with the governor. Coincidentally, both scandal-ridden women had appeared before him in his guise as justice of the peace. In 1677 John succumbed at age forty-six to a fatal disease, likely typhoid fever, setting an enduring pattern of shortened life expectancy for Washington males in America. By then he had struggled his way up to the second-tier gentry, an uncertain stratum that would endow George Washington with a modicum of money, while also instilling a restless yearning to advance into the uppermost ranks of Virginia grandees.

It was John's eldest son from his first marriage, Lawrence Washington, who inherited the bulk of his father's estate and became paternal grandfather of the first president. With the monarchy restored in England, Lawrence had been educated in the mother country before settling in Virginia, where he, too, collected an array of local posts—justice of the peace, burgess, and sheriff—that complemented his work as an attorney. If John furnished the family with a tenuous foothold in the gentry, Lawrence added a patina of social distinction by marrying Mildred Warner, daughter of a member of the prestigious King's Council. When he expired in 1698 at thirty-eight, Lawrence perpetuated the grim tradition of Washington men dying young.

Lawrence Washington's untimely death occurred when his second son, Augustine—the future father of George Washington—was only three or four years old. After his widow, Mildred, married George Gale, a British ship captain from Whitehaven, a port on the Cumberland coast, she sailed there with him and her

three children in late May 1700. Already pregnant during the voyage, she died in January 1701, not long after her arrival in England, and her newborn daughter followed her shortly thereafter. For the next two or three years, Gale placed Augustine and his older brother John in the Appleby Grammar School in County Westmorland, a scenic spot east of the English Lake District. The school provided a classical education, with a heavy emphasis on Latin. When Mildred's three children were ensnared in a protracted legal tussle over their inheritance, they were shipped back to Virginia under a court order.

Raw-boned and good-natured, Augustine Washington remains a shadowy figure in the family saga, little more than a hazy but sunlit memory for his famous son. A strapping man, six feet tall with a fair complexion, he was favored with that brand of rustic strength that breeds backwoods legends. The sole contemporary description avers that he could "raise up and place in a wagon a mass of iron that two ordinary men could barely raise from the ground," yet he balanced this notable brawn with a mild-mannered demeanor that made his manly strength the more becoming.[4] No less community-minded than his Washington forebears, he was named a justice of the peace and sat on the county court.

From spotty early records, Augustine emerges as a remorseless, hard-driving businessman. He started with 1,100 acres that he inherited along the Potomac and augmented that with 1,750 acres from the dowry of his first wife, Jane Butler. He specialized in tobacco farming until he began snapping up properties rich in iron ore at Accokeek Creek, near Fredericksburg. In 1729 he traveled to England to seal a contract with the Principio Company, which owned iron operations in Virginia and Maryland. By the time he returned to Virginia, his wife had died, saddling him with the care of three small children: two sons, Lawrence and Augustine Jr. (often called Austin), and a daughter, Jane. Minding children on his own wasn't an option for a hard-pressed colonial widower, and Augustine may not have been overly fussy in his urgent quest to find a country bride. On March 6, 1731, the thirty-seven-year-old Augustine married Mary Johnson Ball, a pious, headstrong woman who would exert a profound formative influence on her son George. At twenty-three, Mary was already slightly old for marriage, which may say something about her feisty personality or about Augustine's hopeful conviction that he could tame this indomitable woman.

Mary Ball was born in 1708 into a situation that skirted the edge of local scandal. Her English-born father, Joseph Ball, a thriving businessman, had settled on the Potomac, married, and raised several children before his wife's death. Lonesome at fifty-eight, he then shocked propriety and threatened his children's inheritance by wedding an illiterate woman named Mary Johnson. Their daughter, Mary Ball, was only three when her elderly father died, leaving her with a bequest of four hundred

acres, fifteen head of cattle, three slaves, and a sackful of feathers from which to fashion a bed. Her mother remarried but then died, converting Mary into an orphan at age twelve. The girl was farmed out to an obliging family friend, George Eskridge, who treated her so humanely that she would honor his memory by naming her first son George after him. It was probably Eskridge who acted as go-between in matching up Mary and Augustine Washington.

A crusty woman with a stubborn streak, Mary Ball Washington made few concessions to social convention. In a lesson internalized by her celebrated son, she didn't adapt or bend easily to others but stayed resolutely true to her own standards. We can only assume that her forlorn childhood, characterized by constant loss, left innumerable scars and insecurities, producing an anxious personality. With flinty self-reliance and iron discipline, she ran a thrifty household and was sparing in her praise and very definite in her opinions. A plain, homespun woman who may have smoked a pipe, she betrayed little interest in the larger world, confined her attention to the family farm, and shunned high society. Since her own mother was illiterate, Mary probably received scant education. Her few letters are replete with spelling errors, dispense with all grammar and punctuation, and confirm the impression of an unlettered countrywoman.

The thick family Bible at Mount Vernon records that George Washington was born around ten A.M. on February 11, 1732, at the family farm at Pope's Creek in Westmoreland County, an area of bucolic beauty less than a mile from the Potomac River. The modest birthplace later went up in flames. The newborn boy was reputed to be a baby of unusual heft. His original birthday derived from the Julian, or Old Style, calendar, which remained in effect in Britain and its colonies until the mid-eighteenth century, when the new Gregorian calendar deferred it by eleven days to February 22. Until the end of his life, some of Washington's admirers in Alexandria insisted upon celebrating his birthday on February 11.

Baptized in early April, the boy was reared amid the rich, open farmland of Tidewater Virginia, the eastern territory washed by four broad rivers: the James, York, Rappahannock, and Potomac. Broad tobacco fields flourished in tidal flats broken only by a scattering of tiny, isolated towns. George Washington entered a strictly hierarchical universe, ruled by simple verities and dominated by a distant monarch. That the commoner George could ever aspire to a life as richly consequential as that of King George II, then enthroned in royal splendor, would have seemed a preposterous fantasy in the 1730s. Hugging the eastern seaboard, the loyal British colonies were tightly lashed to the trading world of London by commerce and culture. The all-powerful planters in this provincial sphere strove to ape their English cousins, who remained the unquestioned model of everything superior and cosmopolitan. As the economic basis of this undemocratic world, slavery was commonplace and

unquestioned, fostering an idle, dissolute existence for rich young Virginians. As one German visitor sniffed of the average Virginia adolescent, "At fifteen, his father gives him a horse and a negro, with which he riots about the country, attends every fox hunt, horse race and cockfight, and does nothing else whatever."[5]

As the eldest of Augustine Washington's second set of children, George straddled two families, perhaps forcing him to hone some early diplomatic skills. His older half brother, Lawrence, was sent to the Appleby Grammar School before George was born and was shortly followed there by his brother Augustine Jr. while George was still a toddler. Death first encroached on George's life when, right before his third birthday, his older half sister Jane died. As the eldest of Mary Washington's children, George probably helped to care for his gaggle of younger siblings, which grew to include Betty, Samuel, John Augustine, Charles, and Mildred. That only two of Gus Washington's nine offspring perished in an era of elevated mortality rates for children speaks to hardy family stock.

Later on, irked by the sanctimonious moralizing about Washington's perfections, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote mockingly that Washington "was born with his clothes on and his hair powdered and made a stately bow on his first appearance in the world."[6] But there was nothing cosseted about his provincial boyhood, and he had little exposure to any pampered society that might have softened the rigors of his rural upbringing. Nor would the unforgiving Mary Washington have tolerated such laxity. She drilled habits of thrift and industry into her children, including rising early with the sun, a strict farmer's habit that George retained for the rest of his life.

The childhood was a roving and unsettled one. In 1735, when George was three, Augustine relocated his family sixty miles upstream to his 2,500-acre tract at Little Hunting Creek on the Potomac, an unspoiled area of pristine forests. Perched on a hilltop at a scenic bend of the river, the house he constructed was more ample than the earlier one, with four ground-floor rooms bisected by a central hallway and warmed by four fireplaces; a row of smaller bedrooms upstairs accommodated the growing clan. So sturdy was the new house that its downstairs rooms were later embedded into George's expanding mansion at Mount Vernon, turning the building into an archaeological record of his life.

In 1736 Augustine Washington sailed to England and negotiated a one-twelfth ownership share of the Principio Company. To aid his performance as manager of their iron furnace in Virginia, Gus uprooted his expanding family again in 1738 and moved them south to a sylvan 260-acre spread on the Rappahannock River, directly opposite Fredericksburg and a convenient ride away from Accokeek Creek. Poised on the brow of a hill and slightly recessed from the river, the farm had woods nearby for firewood; broad, level fields for growing tobacco, wheat, and corn; and

several pure streams for drinking water. Since access to the ferry later ran straight through the property—to George's annoyance, crowds flocked gaily down the footpath during fair days or when courts were in session—the house would be dubbed Ferry Farm.

Touted in a newspaper advertisement as a "handsome dwelling house," the two-story clapboard residence was a dark reddish-brown color, roofed with wooden shingles and flanked by brick chimneys.[7] With its seven rooms—four downstairs and three upstairs—the house counted as a substantial affair for the time, and recent excavations have disclosed many unexpected touches of gentility. Among the artifacts unearthed have been wig curlers, bone-handled toothbrushes, and a Wedgwood tea set, betokening an unmistakable air of affluence. The Washingtons must have entertained a steady flow of visitors, for they had curtained beds sprinkled throughout the house. Other details of their home inventory—thirteen tablecloths, thirty-one napkins, twenty-six silver spoons—conjure up a sociable, highly prosperous clan. Having acquired nearly fifty slaves and ten thousand acres of land, Augustine Washington had planted his family firmly among the regional gentry. Though not born into great wealth, George Washington doesn't qualify for inclusion in the ranks of self-made Americans.

Ferry Farm provided George with his first treasured glimpses of a world beyond his boyhood haunts. The newly incorporated hamlet of Fredericksburg, with its courthouse and stone prison, was already an active port featuring rudiments of a more developed society. The young George Washington could peer across the river and see a perfect tableau of the British Empire in action. Moored at town wharves, ships bulging with tobacco, grain, and iron gave glimmers of the lucrative transatlantic trade with London that enriched the colony.

Around the time the Washingtons settled into their new home, changes occurred in the composition of the family. George's baby sister Mildred was born and soon died, and he also set eyes for the first time on his older half brother Lawrence, a quasi-mythical figure who suddenly materialized in Virginia, polished by years at the Appleby Grammar School. Tall and debonair, Lawrence must have radiated a mature, well-traveled air of worldly sophistication for George, who was fourteen years his junior. Since Lawrence had stayed at Appleby until age twenty, he had probably graduated to the status of an "usher," or assistant teacher, at the school. Lawrence would function as both a peer and a parental figure for his half brother, and his youthful adventures operated so powerfully on George's imagination that the latter's early life seems to enact a script first drafted by his older brother. When Augustine assigned Lawrence to superintend the Potomac River property recently vacated by the family, it immediately became the most desirable destination in George's eyes.

George's first exposure to war came vicariously through the exploits of his idolized brother. In 1739 Great Britain clashed with Spain in the Caribbean in a conflict styled the War of Jenkins' Ear—Robert Jenkins being a British ship captain whose ear was allegedly mutilated by the Spanish. To bolster an amphibious force the following year, the Crown enlisted colonial subjects into an American Foot Regiment, and Lawrence landed a coveted spot as the captain of a Virginia company. In the major offensive of this expeditionary force, Admiral Edward Vernon hurled nine thousand men against the Spanish at Cartagena, on the northern coast of South America, in what degenerated into a bloody fiasco. Lawrence and his men never disembarked from their ship, which was ravaged by yellow fever and other tropical diseases no less efficiently than their colleagues were mowed down by enemy bullets. Some perished from sunstroke in sweltering heat. In the gruesome account he sent home, Lawrence detailed how "the enemy killed of ours some 600 . . . and the climate killed us in greater number . . . a great quantity of officers amongst the rest are dead . . . War is horrid in fact but much more so in imagination." Amid the gloom, Lawrence struck a cavalier note that George mimicked years later: "We there have learned to live on ordinary diet, to watch much, and disregard the noise or shot of cannon."[8]

In these thrilling, if sanguinary, tales of war, Lawrence must have communicated mixed impressions of his British superiors. On the one hand, he had to brook the condescension of Brigadier General Thomas Wentworth, who sneered at colonial troops and kept them cooped up aboard the ship. At the same time, Lawrence retained clear affection for Admiral Vernon and, in a burst of Anglophilia, would rename the Little Hunting Creek estate Mount Vernon, hanging the admiral's portrait in an honored place there. Thus the name of a forgotten British admiral would implausibly grace America's secular shrine to the revolt against British rule. However frustrated with his British superiors, Lawrence earned the royal commission that would always elude George's eager grasp—a precedent that could only have sharpened the latter's keen sense of inequitable treatment at British hands. In his flourishing career, Lawrence was also named adjutant general of Virginia, which brought him the rank of major and entrusted him with the task of molding militia companies into an effective fighting force.

In June 1742 George's other older half brother, Augustine Jr., also returned from a lengthy stay at Appleby. George must have expected that he would shortly follow suit, but that dream was rudely dashed a year later, when he was summoned back from a cousin's home by news that his father was ill. On April 12, 1743, Augustine Washington died at forty-nine in a manner that eerily prefigured George's own demise at century's end: he had ridden out in a storm, gotten sick, and expired. This early death underscored a central paradox of George Washington's life: that

although he was a superb physical specimen, with a magnificent physique, his family's medical history was blighted by truncated lives. He subsequently lamented, "Tho' I was blessed with a good constitution, I was of a short-lived family."[9]

The most significant bequest fell to Lawrence, who inherited Mount Vernon and the iron mine, while Austin received the family farm at Pope's Creek, where George was born and would spend much time after his father's death. George himself inherited Ferry Farm, a half share in an upriver parcel called Deep Run, and assorted lots in Fredericksburg. The eleven-year-old also found himself the juvenile owner of ten human beings. Since he could not claim this property until he reached maturity, George's newfound wealth was purely theoretical and placed him at the mercy of his strong-willed mother, who would not relinquish Ferry Farm for another thirty years. Augustine's early death robbed George of the classical education bestowed on his older brothers, leaving him with an enduring sense of stunted, incomplete schooling. His father's death threw the boy back upon his own resources, stealing any chance of a lighthearted youth. From then on, George grew accustomed to shouldering weighty family burdens. Because Mary never remarried—unusual in a frontier society with a paucity of women—George developed the deeply rooted toughness of children forced to function as adults at an early age. He discovered a precocious ability to perform many adult tasks, but he probably never forgot the sudden fright of being deprived of the protection of a father. One wonders whether he resented his mother for her failure to find a second husband, which imposed inordinate burdens on him as the eldest son. Quite naturally, George turned to older men as sponsors and patrons, cultivating the art of ingratiating himself with influential figures.

If Mary Ball Washington comes across as an unbending, even shrewish, disciplinarian, one can only imagine the unspoken dread that she, too, experienced at being widowed at thirty-five. She had to manage Ferry Farm, tend five children ranging in age from six to eleven, and oversee dozens of slaves. Gus's death forced Mary to eliminate any frills of family life, and her spartan style as a businesswoman, frugal and demanding, had a discernible impact on her son. "In her dealings with servants, she was strict," writes Douglas Southall Freeman. "They must follow a definite round of work. Her bidding must be their law."[10] With more than a touch of the martinet in her forbidding nature, Mary Washington displayed a powerful capacity to command, and one is tempted to say that the first formidable general George Washington ever encountered was his own mother.

This trying woman inspired a healthy trepidation among George's companions. "I was often there with George, his playmate, schoolmate, and young man's companion," said Lawrence Washington of Chotank, a distant relative. "Of the mother I was more afraid than of my own parents; she awed me in the midst of her kind-

ness, for she was, indeed, truly kind."[11] There was nothing especially gentle about Mary Washington, little that savored of maternal warmth. Gus's death removed any moderating influence between mother and eldest son, who clashed with their similarly willful personalities. Always a dutiful but seldom a loving son, George treated his mother with frigid deference, taking refuge in polite but empty forms. His letters to her would be addressed to "Honored Madam" and end with distant formality, "Your most Dutiful and Obedient Son, George Washington." This studiously correct tone, likely laced with suppressed anger, only highlighted the absence of genuine filial affection.

There would always be a cool, quiet antagonism between Washington and his mother. The hypercritical mother produced a son who was overly sensitive to criticism and suffered from a lifelong need for approval. One suspects that, in dealing with this querulous woman, George became an overly controlled personality and learned to master his temper and curb his tongue. It was the extreme self-control of a deeply emotional young man who feared the fatal vehemence of his own feelings, if left unchecked. Anything pertaining to Mary Ball Washington stirred up an emotional tempest that George quelled only with difficulty. Never able to express these forbidden feelings of rage, he learned to equate silence and a certain manly stolidity with strength. This boyhood struggle was, in all likelihood, the genesis of the stoical personality that would later define him so indelibly.

On the one hand, the similarities between Mary Washington and her eldest son were striking. She was a fine horsewoman, enjoyed dancing, reputedly possessed enormous strength, was manic in money matters, tenaciously superintended her farm, and displayed a stubborn independence. Both mother and son exhibited supreme willpower that people defied at their peril. Both were vigorous, enterprising, and exacting in their demands. Yet in many other ways, George Washington defined himself as the antithesis of his mother. If his mother was crude and illiterate, he would improve himself through books. If she was self-centered, he would be self-sacrificing in serving his country. If she was slovenly, he would be meticulous in appearance. If she disdained fancy society, he would crave its acceptance. If she showed old-fashioned religious fervor, he would be devout in a more moderate fashion. And if she was a veteran complainer, he would be known for his stiff upper lip.

Unable to afford a fancy education for her children, Mary Washington did her best to pound moral precepts into them, reading daily portions from a volume entitled *Contemplations Moral and Divine* by Sir Matthew Hale. Many speculative theories have been floated about Washington's education. Before his father's death, he may have received a limited education in math, reading, and writing at a day school taught by a Mr. Hobby, one of his father's tenants, who boasted that he had "laid the

foundation of [Washington's] greatness."[12] He may also have attended a school in Fredericksburg run by the Reverend James Marye, the rector of St. George's Parish. According to one classmate, George applied himself to math while the others played at field hockey, his sole indiscretion being that he was caught "romping with one of the largest girls."[13] Finally, when he stayed with Austin at the Pope's Creek farm, he may have been schooled in the rudiments of math and surveying by a schoolmaster named Henry Williams. Oddly for a towering personage in history, Washington never cited an early educational mentor, suggesting that his boyhood lessons were pretty humdrum. He left behind more than two hundred pages of schoolboy exercises that focused on geometry lessons, weights and measures, compound interest, currency conversions, and other skills necessary for business or surveying. Almost by osmosis, he absorbed law and economics by monotonously copying out legal forms for bail bonds, leases, and land patents, stocking his mind with a huge fund of practical information. The furnace of ambition burned with a bright, steady flame inside this diligent boy.

With painstaking effort, Washington learned to write in a round hand that lacked elegance but had great clarity. It took time for him to compose clean, declarative sentences—his teenage prose was often turgid and ungrammatical—but by dint of hard work, his powers grew steadily until he became a writer of considerable force, able to register his wishes with precision. It was in Washington's nature to work doubly hard to rectify perceived failings. Writing in 1807, the biographer David Ramsay said of the young Washington that "he was grave, silent, and thoughtful, diligent and methodical in business, dignified in his appearance, strictly honorable in his deportment."[14]

One can't help but surmise that Washington's life would have been vastly different had he attended college. He lacked the liberal education that then distinguished gentlemen, setting him apart from such illustrious peers as Jefferson, Hamilton, Adams, and Madison. He would always seem more provincial than other founders, his knowledge of European culture more secondhand. A university education would have spared him a gnawing sense of intellectual inadequacy. We know that he regretted his lack of Latin, Greek, and French—the major intellectual adornments of his day—since he lectured wards in later years on their importance. The degree to which Washington dwelt upon the transcendent importance of education underscores the stigma that he felt about having missed college. As president, he lectured a young relative about to enter college that "every hour misspent is lost forever" and that "future *years* cannot compensate for lost *days* at this period of your life."[15]

Without much formal schooling, Washington was later subject to condescension from some contemporaries, especially the snobbish John Adams, who dis-

paraged him as "too illiterate, unlearned, unread for his station and reputation."[16] Washington has suffered from comparisons with other founders, several of whom were renowned autodidacts, but by any ordinary standard, he was an exceedingly smart man with a quick ability to grasp ideas. He seized every interval of leisure to improve himself and showed a steady capacity to acquire and retain useful knowledge. Throughout his life, he strenuously molded his personality to become a respectable member of society. As W. W. Abbot aptly expressed it, "More than most, Washington's biography is the story of a man constructing himself."[17]

As an adolescent, Washington dabbled in fiction, history, philosophy, and geography. An avid reader of periodicals, he sampled *The Spectator* by the age of sixteen. With the novel flowering as a literary form, he was to purchase copies of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* in coming years, and he was especially drawn to military history. As he experienced the first stirrings of an abiding passion for theater, he read Joseph Addison's *Cato,* a paean to republican virtues that he quoted repeatedly throughout his life. It is often said, with truth, that Washington absorbed his lessons from action, not books, yet he came to own a vast library and talked about books as if he were a serious reader, not a dilettante. When his adopted grandson entered college, Washington lectured him thus: "Light reading (by this, I mean books of little importance) may amuse for the moment, but leaves nothing solid behind."[18]

Never an intellectual who relished ideas for their own sake, he mined books for practical wisdom and delighted in dredging up handy aphorisms. At seventeen, he possessed an English compendium of the principal *Dialogues of Seneca the Younger* and took to heart his stoic beliefs: "The contempt of death makes all the miseries of life easy to us." Or: "He is the brave man . . . that can look death in the face without trouble or surprise."[19] As his life progressed, Washington would adhere to the stoic creed of governing one's passions under the most adverse circumstances and facing the prospect of death with serenity.

In trying to form himself as an English country gentleman, the self-invented young Washington practiced the classic strategy of outsiders: he studied closely his social betters and tried to imitate their behavior in polite society. Whether to improve his penmanship or perhaps as a school assignment, he submitted to the drudgery of copying out 110 social maxims from *The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation,* a handy guidebook of etiquette that traced its origins to a French Jesuit work of the sixteenth century. This humorless manual preached against assorted social gaffes that would have haunted the nightmares of an insecure youth who daydreamed of venturing into fashionable drawing rooms. Number four warned: "In the presence of others, sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum with your fingers or feet." Number eleven: "Shift not yourself

in the sight of others, nor gnaw your nails." Number twelve: "Bedew no man's face with your spittle by approaching too near him when you speak."[20] Number one hundred: "Cleanse not your teeth with the tablecloth, napkin, fork, or knife, but if others do it, let it be done with a pick tooth."[21]

Many of these rules, which talked about showing due respect for one's superiors, tread a fine line between self-abasement and simple humility. Number thirty-seven: "In speaking to men of quality, do not lean, nor look them full in the face, nor approach too near them; at least keep a full pace from them."[22] Or thirty-nine: "In writing or speaking, give to every person his due title according to his degree and the custom of the place."[23] This is a crib sheet for a world shot through with class distinctions and informed by a deep terror of offending one's betters. This guidebook "taught modesty, deference, and submission to authority," writes William Guthrie Sayen, who notes that it would have instructed Washington on how to control his temper and learn "the importance of managing his body, his facial expressions, his speech, and his moods."[24] The book must have spoken to some inborn sense of decorum in Washington, soothing his schoolboy fears of committing a faux pas. If thoroughly heeded, *The Rules of Civility* would have produced a cool, pragmatic, and very controlled young man with genteel manners—exactly the social facade Washington wished to project to conceal the welter of stormy emotions inside him.

Though respectful of education, George Washington was never a bookish boy. He loved to swim in the smooth, deep waters of the Rappahannock. He excelled in riding, liked to hunt, later learned fencing, attended a dancing school, played billiards, frequented cockfights and horse races, and experimented with his first flirtations. Despite a certain underlying roughness, he would perfect the social graces that prepared him to enter well-bred society. At the same time, he was an unusually sober and purposeful young man. In countless letters in later years, he advised young relatives that adolescence was a risky time when evil influences lurked nearby, ready to pounce: "You are now extending into that stage of life when good or bad habits are formed. When the mind will be turned to things useful and praiseworthy or to dissipation and vice."[25] He issued warnings against young male companions who "too often mistake ribaldry for wit and rioting, swearing, intoxication, and gambling for manliness."[26] The young George Washington seldom seemed to show a truant disposition, as if he were already preparing for bigger things.

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