

# Finally, a new Starcherone Sampler

June 2007  
(87 pages!)



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**Sara Greenslit**

**FALCONIFORMES**

**An excerpt from the novel *The Blue of Her Body***

**G-E**

(Golden Eagle)

- 2 pairs large gloves
- 1 large monkey rope
- 1 leather wrist protector

Only one person, Mary, knows how to handle the birds, and she wants to learn how, from her. She has to start smaller, with the hawks and owls before she can handle the weight of the eagle and its jesses. The red-tailed hawk, the broad-shouldered hawk, the kestrels, the turkey vulture, the harrier. The screech owls, the barred, and the great horned. Then finally, the eagle.

A wave of blackbirds overhead. The sun slants through feathers, their wings cutting the sun then resealing the wound. The birds flounder and congeal. They spin and highlight each other's shimmering. The air is thick with chatter.

*Mew*: [ME *mewe*, fr. MF *mue*, fr. *muer* to molt, fr. L. *mutare* to change] an outdoor enclosure for birds of prey, used in falconry

All the beauties she's seen this week: mourning doves on the telephone wire, robins in the yard, always in the yard, a blue winged teal surprised by Max at the park. She carries them inside. They are free to go and do, but always leave something: the imprint of feather on her ribcage, the rush of song, the echo of wings. This is how she keeps them.

Mary is the bird-charmer, the seducer. She can coax the golden eagle onto her arm and keep the bird calm, a raptor who can crush her bones to splinters. She's always laughing, coffee in hand, her curly hair fading to grey. "Look here," Mary says pointing at a round scar on her palm. "A four pound red-tailed hawk footed me right through my thumb, out the other side." She laughs, the room brighter, fuller. Her grey curls accent her flecked irises as she waves her hand. "They know you more than you know yourself, those eyes always watching."

Why we keep what we keep:  
the amputated, the blind, the stunned, the trapped, the shot, the frozen, the lost,  
the imprinted, the poisoned, the electrocuted.

Mary asks about her home. She obliges with words about Max. Mary says, “Sounds like you’ve got yourself a divine dog, the kind we only get once in our lives.”

She moves from task to task slowly, calm and silent. Sometimes she talks to the birds as she cleans. Even a few words can be too loud against their slow squinting and shift of feathers.

It’s sprinkling and the birds open and shake their wings as if wet despite the roofs. Whenever she enters their cages, they sit in the same places, in a nook above the door, or a nest box along a far wall. The only evidence of a different life is the food and feces, and the heads, feet, headless bodies and yoke sacs strewn over the feed stumps, in the nest boxes, on the perches, in the cedar chips.

She and Mary drive an hour to the Mississippi where cliffs and multitudes of old trees provide prime bird of prey nesting and hunting. The river is wide at this point in its path, not yet ox-bowing. And it is indeed stunning—the wind gusting open the sky, clouds absent, the sun in full swing.

They wind their way down the river road, the water blue and startling, shimmering. They have come to see a raptor release.

The late summer's tornado birds, downed by storms, are ready after rehabilitation at the vet school. Two birds, a pair of red-tailed hawks, each step out from their carriers onto a person's arm. The birds' hoods are removed, and the hawks rouse and stretch, looking at the sky, the river, the trees.

And it is over before she has time to register, each bird is thrown into the air, their wings open. They rise. One hawk flies down river, out of sight. The other stops at a nearby tree and stares at the small crowd.

"Jesus," Mary says, holding her blowing hair out of her eyes with her hand, "Look at them go."

*Raptor—L. "to seize"*

Golden eagles glide for hours or ride the thermals up, spiraling like vultures, then diving—150-200 miles per hour straight down, almost as fast as a peregrine—picking off the unsuspecting in surprise and lift and devour.

The birds rarely eat all their food: hatchery trout, road-killed and culled venison, lab mice, commercially hatched chicks. What's not eaten is tallied on the feeding chart. Collected, then weighed. Subtracted from previous day's feed to estimate appetite. Health as simple equation.

*Falco sparverius*

(hooked claw shaped, falcate + Fr. “espervier” sparrow hawk)

Wing span: 20-24.5”

Length: 9-12”

Weight: female, 4.5 oz., male, 3.5-4 oz.

Flight speed: 22-36 mph (migration)

She opens the door to the kestrel cage, sights them immediately, on a small wooden perch above the door, hidden from the outside. They are unafraid, not shaking or fluffing their feathers like the owls do. They merely blink and stare and sit. They are small and perfect—mustached white faces, rufous backs and tails, cream chests beaded in dark brown, the male’s shoulders grey, the female’s rusty. They are small as jays but long-tailed. Yellow scaled feet. Talons shiny as ebony piano keys. When she finishes cleaning, she backs out the door, somehow lighter.

The first weeks of work she comes home weary from hoisting and dragging, shoveling and stooping. Her muscles speaking out.

“Mary? How many birds have you handled?” *All my life I have wanted my hands on a living thing.*

“Ah, well. I think I’ve lost count. Indeed.”

The owls excrete mice hair and whole bones in pellets below their roosts. Taking apart a capsule, she reassembles a skeleton, places its bones on a piece of black felt and thinks *Rodentia*, each tiny sharp tooth present and exacting.

Skittish, the eagle tends to spook with strangers, so Mary advised her to wait to enter the mew until the bird was in the middle of the cage away from the entrance.

The bird sits on its perch near the door and she goes in anyway, its eyes following her hands, her tools. Over three feet tall, the bird sits high above her, exuding an edgy, kinetic tension. Yet it makes no threats to jab or grab the rake.

It's a good pace for her, alone with the eagle in the early morning. She dumps the water dish, scrubs it and then scrubs the feeding stumps and perches. The eagle cocks its head. One talon is missing from its left foot, and its beak overlaps in an X—electrocution by telephone wires, its wide wings catching the current.

As she rakes, the bird slowly opens its wings. It lifts off the feeding perch, the air parting in a thick whoosh whoosh whoosh, wings, brown wings filling the air with wind and sound. She is not afraid and turns to watch it fly.

The bird takes the air and her breath in, moving currents across her back. Yellow eyes mark her face, her shoulder.

The air pushing and exhaling, feathers full and open, flush, work against gravity. The mew fills with shadow and motion, the rising and expanding bird.

The brown blur of wings and the sound of flying lodges in her head. The eagle lands on a rope-bound stand in the middle of the exhibit.

She and eagle are close enough for her to touch its crooked beak. It shakes and folds in its wings, staring back.

She rakes around the bird in a wide orbit, careful and alert. Wings in her head, eyes on her skin, her hands moving the rake, the bird near and watching, watching her.

**Harold Jaffe**

## **SUICIDES**

Yukio Mishima

Completed the final volume of his tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility*, while wearing his death shroud in the dawn hours of the day he was to commit seppuku?

November 25, 1970.

He made a point of leaving his complicated financial affairs in order.

He provided money for the defense of three of the four retainers who would accompany him on his final day.

The fourth retainer, Mishima's lover Morita, was also to commit seppuku.

Suicide for Mishima was a complex application of style.

It had a ritualized camp in the mix, as in his outlandish bodybuilding photos.

As in certain excesses of his prose, which resemble DH Lawrence, with whom Mishima had much in common.

Suicide for Mishima was pain-love allied with guilt for having lied to get out of serving in World War 2 and disappointing his rigid, Nazi-sympathizing father.

It was allied with his doting mother and semi-secret homosexuality.

Recall the erotic elegance of the double suicide in Mishima's "Patriotism," where the "disgraced" Lieutenant seizes on a pretext to lovingly disembowel himself in front of his compliant wife, who does likewise.

On the day of his suicide, Mishima was accompanied by four members of the Tatenokai, or Shield Society, elegantly uniformed young men who practiced martial discipline and strenuous physical exercise in the spirit of the samurai.

Mishima founded the group, which he thought of as his private army, in 1967, with the absurdly utopian intention of restoring the Emperor to his feudal leadership of the nation.

Presumably to supply a cultural context for the restoration of Bushido, the code of the samurai.

Mishima, wearing his shroud beneath his elaborate, self-designed uniform, along with four stiff-backed, uniformed young retainers, made an unannounced visit to the commandant of the Ichigaya Camp, the Tokyo headquarters of the Eastern Command of Japan's Self-Defense Forces.

Once inside, they bound and gagged the commandant and barricaded the office.

Mishima strode onto the balcony, unfurled his Shield Society banner and prepared to read his manifesto to the soldiers gathered below.

His speech was intended to spur them to overthrow the government and install the Emperor as the supreme leader of the country.

The response was unanticipated: irritated by his pretensions and heterodoxy, the soldiers jeered at him.

Mishima cut his speech off, stepped back into the commandant's office, stripped to his shroud and assumed a Bushido position on the carpet.

Then he cut his stomach fatally.

The seppuku was to culminate with his retainer-lover Morita committing kaishaku, ritually beheading him.

However, after several attempts, Morita could not effect the decapitation, so another of Mishima's retainers, Hiroyasu Koga, drew his own sword and decapitated Mishima.

With Mishima finally headless, Morita cut his own stomach and was beheaded by Hiroyasu Koga.

Both bloody heads--Mishima's with his face scarred from Morita's aborted attempts--lay on the beige carpet for many hours while the police were summoned and an investigation mounted.

## Simone Weil

Wanted to swallow the blood or sputum from a tubercular patient, but only if the patient was poor.

She was admitted to the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure with the highest test scores in her class (Simone de Beauvoir scored second highest).

After graduating with honors in philosophy she became a teacher in various girls' lycées in remote areas of France.

Because of her unorthodox active involvement in workers' demonstrations, she was transferred from lycée to lycée.

Simone Weil abandoned teaching.

She stopped communicating with friends and colleagues.

Sickly as she was, she worked in factories to experience first-hand the deprivations of so-called ordinary people.

Through the intervention of a Dominican priest she found arduous physical work on a farm in the Ardèche.

At the same time she set about learning Sanskrit, the classical language of the Hindus.

Wherever she was, she lived ascetically, fasting, sleeping on a straw pallet, reading by candlelight.

Though her family was secular upper middle-class Jews, progressive and charitable, Simone Weil was unceasingly critical of Judaism and the Old Testament.

Some of her adversaries labeled this “Jewish self-hatred.”

But that would unjustly discredit an extraordinary, if eccentric, humanist whose most intimate identification was with Jesus.

Even as a child Simone Weil would eat sparingly in honor of the hungry poor.

She went to Mass regularly and yearned to imitate Christ, but she would not convert to Roman Catholicism, she said, so long as the Vatican privileged wealth and status.

She wrote these prophetic words toward the end of her brief life:

*Unless supernatural grace intervenes, there is no form of cruelty or depravity of which ordinary, decent people are not capable, once the corresponding psychological mechanisms have been set in motion.*

She abandoned her pacificism and traveled to Spain in 1936 to fight with the “people” against Franco.

Although her family, including her mathematically gifted brother and Simone Weil herself, managed to escape Vichy France and settle in New York in 1942, she returned to Europe only a few months later to join the “Free French” resistance headquartered in London.

She wrote polemical anti-fascist reports and essays for the Free French until April 1943, when she was hospitalized in Kent and diagnosed with tuberculosis.

She refused to eat in respect of the starving multitudes throughout war-torn Europe.

Thus she commits suicide by starvation and is buried in a small grave in Ashford Kent on August 24, 1943.

Thirty-four years old.

## Mark Rothko

Was born Marcus Rothkowitz in Czarist Russia (now Latvia) in 1903.

He escaped the pogroms by emigrating with his family in 1913 to Portland Oregon, which at that period was the “epicenter of revolutionary activity in the US, and the area where the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World was strongest.” ([libcom.org/history](http://libcom.org/history))

As an adolescent Marcus Rothkowitz along with his anarchist family attended IWW meetings where they met Emma Goldman and Big Bill Haywood.

He referred to himself an anarchist even when he was admitted to Yale, changed his name to Mark Rothko and subsequently became widely identified as a leader of the Abstract Expressionists, a designation he loathed.

“I’m not an abstractionist.

“I’m interested only in expressing basic human emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom . . . “

His minimalist but intense and refined use of color without any figuration associated him with the “Color Field” painters, such as Morris Lewis, Kenneth Noland, Barnett Newman, and Helen Frankenthaler.

Rothko rejected that designation as well.

He used color, he insisted, instrumentally, solely as a means of conveying his subject.

At Philip Johnson’s instigation, the architect and Rothko collaborated on several projects, notably a church designed by Johnson in Houston.

Rothko contributed 14 thematically related paintings to the church.

After Rothko’s suicide the church became known as the Rothko Chapel, a privileged space of visionary esthetics and meditation, which continues to attract pilgrims from around the globe.

The clinically depressed Rothko fatally slashed his wrists and arms and shoulders with a palette knife in his Manhattan studio.

He was sixty-seven years old.

Despite Rothko’s insistence that he was a life-long anarchist, it came out after his death that he was in the employ of the CIA.

He was scarcely alone.

According to Frances Stonor Saunders's *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (The New Press, 2000), TS Eliot, Andre Malraux, Stephen Spender, Czeslaw Milosz Bertrand Russell, Robert Lowell, Dizzy Gillespie, Peter Matthiessen, George Plimpton, Mary McCarthy, George Orwell, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko . . . all professed progressives, with the exception of the royalist Eliot, were in the employ of the CIA.

They received funding in exchange for “battling Communism” (however implicitly) on the cultural front.

The well-known art critic and unrelenting champion of Jackson Pollack, Clement Greenberg, a nominal leftist, also on the take, wasn't the least bit chagrined after being outed.

He argued that artists have no choice but to rely on patrons to support their art; whether the patrons are royal dukes, wealthy industrialists, global oil corporations, or the CIA matters little in the end, so long as strong art is produced.

## Johnny Ace

Rhythm and blues recording star Johnny Ace, age 25, accidentally killed himself while playing Russian roulette at a Negro holiday dance at the City Auditorium in Houston on Saturday night.

January 1, 1955.

The shooting occurred at a show featuring the popular Negro singer and his band.

Johnny Ace had gone backstage for a five-minute break and was sipping sour mash while messing around with a .38 Smith and Wesson revolver with one live round in the cylinder.

He spun the cylinder, snapped it back in place, pointed the revolver at his temple, and pulled the trigger.

The Negro crooner did this three consecutive times.

On the third time he caught the live round and shot himself in the head fatally.

Johnny Ace, whose real name was Johnny Marshall Alexander, Jr., was born in Memphis in 1929 to a large Negro family with an absent father.

It wasn't long before Johnny Ace became one of the brightest Negro stars in the rhythm and blues field.

He rose to fame on Duke Records with "My Song," in 1952, which was a hit in Negro juke joints then unexpectedly "crossed over" to white audiences to become a big-time hit.

Since then he had eight crossover hits in a row, including "Please Forgive Me," "The Clock," "Yes, Baby" and "Never Let Me Go."

The news of the talented Negro crooner's death caused a huge demand for his past records, both hits and misses.

Peacock Records, which owns the Duke label, is rushing out an LP of Johnny Ace's sides to meet this demand.

In addition, the label is releasing another new single, "Pledging My Love," which is both mellow and sad, sure to be a huge crossover hit.

Cover records of "Pledging My Love" have also been made by Tommy Mara on M-G-M, the Four Lads on Columbia and Teresa Brewer on Coral.

And now, to further enhance the growing Johnny Ace legend, Aladdin Records has released a new tune titled "Johnny Ace's Last Letter," with Negro blues singer Johnny Fuller on the vocal.

Speaking of Johnny Ace, it has been learned that Duke Records just signed another Ace for its label, one of the six or seven older brothers of Johnny.

His name is Buddy Ace, he is lighter-skinned than Johnny, and just 26-years-old.

Buddy Ace just completed a stint in the Marine Corps for Uncle Sam.

From what we hear through the grapevine, his voice bears a very close resemblance to his brother Johnny.

## Suicide Bomber

We turned the corner slowly, and there, crouching in the headlights, was a man with a black and white headscarf masking his face.

He was laying a roadside bomb, a crude-looking device that appeared to be bound with Saran Wrap.

It was easy to imagine the man putting the thing together in his kitchen, which somehow made it all the more menacing.

As we motored slowly through the narrow broken streets we noticed more masked men and boys in the darkness, several carrying automatic weapons.

The Hamas fighters were on patrol.

Their enemies, the Israeli army (IDF), had moved into Rafah the night before.

Its tanks sat in formation at the end of the main street.

IDF soldiers were ransacking the Tel Sultan neighborhood in a hunt for “terrorists.”

For the Israelis, Hamas is a constant, deadly threat.

From its ranks come suicide bombers--men and boys and girls--who have murdered hundreds of Israelis on buses, in cafes, in malls.

Most people in Rafah see the Hamas fighters and suicide bombers very differently.

To them, these men and children with their black and white checkered keffiyas masking their face, with explosives strapped to their chests, are heroes.

They confront Israel's tanks, and jets and helicopter gunships and they die in large numbers.

In death they are honored as martyrs for the cause of Palestine.

Their faces are revealed on posters plastered on Rafah's walls.

Prayers are recited for them at the central Al Awda mosque, a dense cubic structure that resembles a fortress.

From its minaret fly the black and green banners of the fighters and martyrs.

When the bodies (or body parts if they were suicide bombers) emerge from the mosque, and the march to the cemetery begins, it is led by a pickup truck with loudspeakers that cry out for revenge.

On the south side of town the Israelis have been demolishing the small houses they say Hamas use as cover for attacks on IDF forces.

We met an old lady in a black veil trying to salvage what she could from the ruins of her bulldozed house.

All down the narrow alley, her neighbors were convinced that the Israeli bulldozers would be back, that their houses would be next.

They are poor people, and they tried to save what they could.

They loaded worn-out televisions and pots and rugs onto donkey carts.

As they labored, the air was filled with the sound of gunfire from nearby streets.

The old lady in the veil raised her voice above it.

"They call us terrorist," she said.

"But they're the terrorists.

"They kill our children.

"They drive us from our homes."

When we met an adolescent boy, called Asim, we asked him what he thought when he saw the Hamas fighters and suicide bombers move through the streets armed and hooded.

"We call on God to give them victory," he said.

"Would you ever become a suicide bomber?" we asked.

"If it is God's will, yes, I will do as they."

In the eyes of the people in Rafah, the fighters and bombers are standing their ground.

That is important because like all Palestinians they are haunted by memories of a terrible retreat.

As many as a million of them left or were expelled from their towns and villages in what is now Israel in 1948, the year the Jewish state was founded.

For some Palestinians the journey into exile ended in the tents of the Rafah refugee camp, at the end of the Gaza Strip.

The town that has grown out of that camp remains infected with a an almost palpable sense of grief.

Still, families from different villages have managed to remain together for nearly three generations.

We camped in an area where the streets were full of the descendants of what was once the Palestinian village of Barbera.

The people told us that the old place, once famous for its grapes, has become part of an Israeli township now, not far from the city of Ashdod.

One afternoon we watched an old man move slowly up the alley on a donkey cart.

He was selling grapes, and he chose to make a joke on these people of long-lost Barbera.

"Grapes," he called out.

"Grapes from Barbera."

A younger man squatting under the bombed ruin of a building away from the glaring sun called back, "Barbera and its grapes have all gone."

"I know", said the old man, suddenly passionate.

"Everything is gone.

"Everything."

***Ted Pelton***

## **KITCHEN ON FIRE**

the fire / the guitar / the kitchen / the cowboy hat

I was making an omelette in the kitchen. I was using the guitar to break the eggs. It is very difficult to make omelettes this way, as you know. I don't know how the fire started. I tried to put it out with my guitar. It is easier to put out a fire with a guitar than to break eggs with it such as are fit to use in an omelette, if the fire is small. If a large fire, the guitar is probably more useful with the omelette eggs. In either case, the guitar is unlikely to be of much use as a guitar after being used to put out a fire, as you know. It is likely to no longer be a guitar.

A cowboy hat can put out a fire. I think I have even seen this done on TV, as perhaps have you. And if it is the cowboy hat which is on fire in the kitchen the guitar can be used to put it out, and will be used more profitably in this way than in attempting to break eggs such as may be used in an omelette, as we have seen.

I prefer to play a guitar.

In the kitchen. There's someone in the kitchen, I know. The kitchen in this instance is also a bedroom. This is a famous song on guitar. There is also a banjo, and the banjo is likewise something else as well in the famous guitar song, as we all know. Someone's in the kitchen with a banjo, we know, and someone else is there as well, and the kitchen is not just a kitchen, and the banjo is not just

a banjo. And there will be a fire. That's what the singer on guitar is telling us in the famous song, that you can't have a banjo in a kitchen without the potential of starting a fire.

The fire / the guitar / the kitchen / where is the cowboy hat?

The cowboy hat is atop the head of a man in a yellow suit. The yellow suit is sprinkled with large black musical notes. The large musical notes are metonymic, that is, they mean nothing in themselves, not on a staff, with no time signature, but floating in space, the space of the man's yellow suit, suggesting something about the man who wears the cowboy hat and who also has a guitar, that is, establishing in a sense the man's guitar even if we were not to see it. But there it is.

If we were to say, "This is a man who can do anything with a guitar," no one would assume anything to include breaking eggs for an omelette or putting out a fire. One might assume he could start a fire, this man who can do anything with a guitar, but the fire meant would be the type of fire that is also something else, as we know. In fact, this is also suggested by the musical notes, floating on the yellow space of his suit, because only a man who could start a type of fire with his guitar would wear such a suit, which is to say that the notes on the suit are metonyms, as we have already seen, as we all know. So where above we saw that a guitar can be used to put out a fire we all know that in another sense a guitar does not put out a fire, it can only start one. Yet it is also true what is contended in the first sense, that a guitar can't start a fire, not alone, no, it can only be used to put one out, as we all know. There's fire and then there's fire, as

we all know.

The cowboy hat / the fire / the guitar / But who is it now that's in the kitchen?

A woman is in the kitchen. Ah, that changes things. Before there was a man and we asked what he was doing but then we saw the guitar or the banjo and we said, "Ah." And the woman, or a woman, was probably there too then, what with the banjo and the kitchen that was not a kitchen and the fire that was starting, but there was nothing said of a woman before and now there is a woman in the kitchen alone and things have changed. Ah, yes, things have changed. Now she's wearing a cowboy hat. Is it too large? No, it fits her. It is her cowboy hat. Even so, we don't say cowgirl hat. Cowboy hat. It, that is, the hat, contains a space and the space is filled by her perfectly and so we say it fits. And there is no fire. Everything is calm. There is no guitar, no banjo. Quiet. Just a woman in the kitchen with a cowboy hat. Ah, things have changed. The space is filled by her perfectly.

The kitchen / the cowboy hat / Where is the fire?

There is fire within her. She is a fiery woman. There is a fire in her heart. Her nerves are on fire. There is quiet, no guitar, no banjo, but not everything is calm. There is a letter in her hands. She looks at it, keeps looking at it, then looks up. She doesn't know why she's in the kitchen. She catches her reflection in something in the kitchen. A window, the tea kettle, the stainless steel of a spoon. Her reflection upside down. Her nerves on fire. Her reflection wearing a cowboy hat. Why is she wearing a cowboy hat? She doesn't know. There is a

fire in her heart. It fits the space perfectly. There is a letter in her hands in the reflection in the window or the kettle or the spoon in the kitchen and her reflection, large or small, fits the space perfectly, even with her head in the cowboy hat. The hat does not put out the fire that is in her heart or that burns here nerves. The fire is in the kitchen but the kitchen is not on fire. It is the letter. The letter discovered left in the cowboy hat from a man who played guitar, but there is not guitar and the guitar started no fire, no, not this fire.

There was an omelette. Made with a guitar? Yes, made with a guitar, each egg cracked with difficulty so as to still be useful in an omelette, and it was silly. Talk of a guitar and of putting out a large fire. How do you put out a large fire? Not with a guitar. Not with a cowboy hat. All silly. How is it she now finds herself in the kitchen? Silly. Her nerves are on fire. She takes off the cowboy hat and puts the letter back inside. It fits the space perfectly.

There was a song. There was someone in the kitchen. There was a banjo.

It was a song on guitar. There was a fire. There is a fire in her belly. The kitchen was not just a kitchen, the banjo not just a banjo. Her nerves are on fire. There was a fire started with a banjo. There was a man in a yellow suit with large black musical notes which, if they somehow fell from that space would heap in a pile such as could be set on fire. She remembers the omelette. Everyone always finds themselves in the kitchen and are unsure how exactly they arrived there, as we all know. She discovers a letter left in the cowboy hat. There is a fire in the kitchen.

It's the cowboy hat.

It's the banjo, the musical notes, the guitar, her nerves.

How do you put out a fire, a very large fire? How do you put out a fire that fits the space perfectly?

The fire / The guitar / The cowboy hat.

The kitchen? Someone in the kitchen? Ah, that changes things? Fits the space perfectly?

The yellow space of the suit? The breaking of eggs with a guitar? Fire in the belly? The kitchen? The kitchen?

**Jeffrey DeShell**

**EXCERPT FROM *PETER: AN (A)HISTORICAL ROMANCE***

“Where are we going?”

“We are going to see a man whom you should see. I will leave you to speak with him while I go to my cousins to search for the book you desire.”

“What was that all about back at the hotel?”

“They are cheating Egyptians. They saw your American passport and charged us double for what I have paid before. They are worse than the Turks.”

Reham (the same black levis, the same North Face, the same Cat work boots and black leather jacket with a fresh maroon silk and cotton short sleeved blouse [Diesel], the same rings and the same Byblos scarf tying back her hair [although this time it {her hair} was tucked inside the back of her jacket] and little makeup and scent [just a brush of the she umara on her eyes and a hint of Thousand Plateaus] looked almost dykish [Peter didn't mind]) walked quickly (Peter scrambling to keep up) down Sultan Sulieman Road, toward a plaza crowded with merchants and stalls (some covered with brightly colored umbrellas) and a mass of people facing the gate (Damascus [Bab al-Amud]). Reham suddenly stopped and jerkily removed her jacket. She was definitely pissed (there had been a small scene [raised voices and angry gestures] at the Golden Walls). Peter sincerely hoped it wasn't that T.O.T.M.

“Are you mad at me?”

“No. I do not like to pay too much for things. We will sleep another place tonight.”

“I’ll pay you back for the hotel. I found a bank this morning.”

“No. You are my guest.” She found her cigarettes and matches, lit one, and sucked in deeply. She exhaled, and then smiled at him. “You have eaten breakfast, yes?”

“Yeah. I got up early so I walked around. Got some eggs at the City Café.”

“You mean the City Restaurant.”

“Right. The City Restaurant” (whatever). “I saw our friend Señor Sonic at that road where Jesus carried his cross. He told me about the restaurant. He said to say ‘hi.’”

“Did he have that disgusting monkey?”

“No, just a little dog.”

“That is almost as bad. I do not understand you westerners and your dogs. In Paris they are everywhere, even in the cafés. And their shit is everywhere too.” Reham took another drag and yawned. “I need some coffee. Turkish coffee. There’s probably a place near the gate.” She touched his elbow lightly as they crossed the street.

He followed Reham through a maze of narrow streets, alleys, courtyards, sidewalk markets and stairs, dodging donkeys, cats, sheep, towelheads, furhats

(spodik), dreadlocks (earlocks), skullcaps (yarmulkes), headscarves (babushkas and the full Monty Yashmaks), cowls, birettas, pillboxes, Gable and French hoods (depending on the order), baseball caps (mostly Yankees and 49'ers [all at either 12 or 6 o'clock]), zucchetos, Tupac do-rags, garrison caps and berets (every third dude [and some dudettes] under thirty with an Uzi [some in levis and tee-shirts]). It was getting warmer, and more crowded, and the air thicker; a combination of cooking (chick peas, onions and bread), shitting (sheep, cat and donkey) and working (the populace in general could use a few [hundred] bars of Zest). Reham kept urging him to keep up ("You should not walk behind me"), but he was having some trouble negotiating himself, his Eastpak and Zero Halliburton through the mob.

Somewhere through an alley they made a sharp left turn through an old iron gate into a courtyard, frightening about twenty cats from some sort of rotting garbage delight (what appeared to be a decaying donkey head was in fact just a green plastic bag full of foul smelling waste), and then (dodging some hanging laundry [red shirts and a camo jacket and pants], past a steel table with some nasty looking stains underneath a balcony with a wrought iron railing on which had been attached a couple of klieg lights) Reham started up some crumbling stairs. This place was old, older than shit, and it smelled like something dead (Jeffrey Dahmer?). Peter hesitated. This was it; this was the kidnapping (or murder or cannibalism, torture [in Jerusalem no one can hear you scream]). Reham turned around.

"Please hurry, we are now late."

“Where are we going?”

“I am leaving you with my friend, and then I will go to my cousins to look for the book. Do not worry, my friend is a good man, speaks good English. He is a physician, but the Zionist occupiers will not let him work, and so he is a physician for animals, I do not remember the word.”

A doctor? Definitely not a good idea (Is it safe? Is it safe?) “A vet. A veterinarian.”

“Yes. Hassan is a good, kind man. Please, hurry.” Peter didn’t move (he’d seen enough flicks to worry). “Please, you are being rude. What are you frightened of?”

“I’m not frightened; it’s just that this wasn’t part of the deal. When I agreed to come here, you said we’d get the book from your cousins. You didn’t say anything about having some doctor baby-sit me or whatever.”

“I did tell you that I would have to approach my cousins while alone, that you could not journey with me.”

“So why can’t I just bop around, see the sights? Why do I have to hang with your doctor friend? We could meet later, at some cathedral or something. Or mosque” he added quickly, “or church, doesn’t matter. Or a restaurant: I’ll spring for grub” (he was deliberately being obscure). “I just don’t want to spend all day inside with some dude I don’t know. I’ve never been here before, and I want to see some stuff” (there was probably good reason they wouldn’t let him work [wasn’t Hannibal a doctor too?]: he’d much rather find a bar or Starbucks or something (it was too early for that), scope out some furry [Israeli women were

supposed to be hot {he owed Little Pete big time after this adventure (and what Wanda didn't know wouldn't hurt her [as if])}, and wait till Reham showed with the photos).

“Peter, please be more wise. You are an American, alone, with a computer and backpack, in a place that is not always safe for Americans.”

“I was alright this morning.”

“Yes, you were. If you stay with my friend today, I will take you to see what you wish tomorrow. We will visit the Christian monuments.”

“I can do that today. I can buy a book, and see what I need to. And then we could meet later this afternoon, or even tonight, if you need more time.”

“I have told Hassan that we would meet him. He is looking forward to seeing you.”

Peter shrugged.

“Please, if you will not come, I will not look good.”

Peter looked at the ground.

“I'm sorry, but if you will not come, I will not look for the book. And you have wasted your time. And mine.”

He looked up. Fucking bitch. All the way from LA, to London, to Istanbul and now Jerusalem, and now right in the fucking shorts. He couldn't believe it (yes he could). She had called his bluff (again [she was forceful]): it was either walk away René or follow the hootchie up the stairs to some evil ass doctor who'd probably connect Little Pete to a 50 volt generator with jumper cables.

Thanks daddy: bite me. Ah, but what the hell, since he was already here (plus he wanted to prove he had the stones) . . .

“You win.”

“As you will see, it is you who have won.” Sure thing Yoda.

“Hello Reham,” a kiss on each cheek, “it is so good to see you. And this must be Peter. Welcome, welcome, please come in and sit down.”

Hassan was large (fat, Chris Farley fat, with one of those monster bellies on skinny legs), dark (deep oak), and older (perhaps sixty [anything between fifty and seventy Peter could only guess]) than Peter had expected, with one of those lilting, Masterpiece Theater British accents. He had thick, lightly tinted square, black framed glasses (think George C. Scott in *The Hustler*), thin, straight black hair greased back, and was wearing a clean if somewhat worn (two more wearings away from shabby) white doctor’s coat, buttoned almost to the neck, a bright red with black swirls Michael Fish tie, a nicely laundered and starched pinstriped white and blue Thomas Pink two ply slightly fraying at the collar, Henry Poole lightweight wool slacks and what looked like a pair of black John Lobb’s English oxfords, in immaculate condition. He was heavily scented in *Blindness and Insight* by Nino Cerutti, and didn’t wear a watch (if you were that obese you were either impeccably dressed [John Goodman in *Barton Fink*] or a fucking slob [Matt Foley {You have plenty of time to live in a van down by the river, when you live in a van, down by the river!}]—there was no middle ground. Hassan had

taste [more taste than money, obviously], but was beginning to go to seed. Peter began to feel somewhat sympathetic [although he usually hated fat fucks]).

He took off his C & G's (the guy could block out some serious light) and allowed himself to be gently escorted into the room (much cooler than outside). As Hassan turned, Pete saw that there wasn't much light to block, as the room's single source was rectangular window made of wood in which holes and slats had been delicately carved (looking something like Reham's drawings): nice looking, but rather weak for illumination. Music came from upstairs, Soft Cell's Tainted Love (?). When he was out of range of the Cerutti, he noticed the smell of incense and antiseptic, with something underneath, perhaps cat piss, perhaps frying olive oil. "Please, sit, I have tea already made."

Peter sat down next to Reham on some indefinable love-seat thing, covered with a thin (almost transparent in places) purple and white batik throw (he could feel her hip against his), and watched as the fat guy, who moved well for his weight (must be the shoes), dance around the kettle on top of a gas canister with a burner (like some sort of Coleman [didn't pay the electric bill?]), pouring here, stirring there, until he lightly glided back toward them with a tray and service, which he set on a low hammered copper table in front of them. Hassan poured, and Peter noticed the same manual dexterity and grace he'd seen when Shamir rifled through his clothes

"I'm afraid I don't have sugar, as Americans sometimes prefer. I do however, have honey, but I suggest you try the baklava, as it will likely displace the need for additional sweetener."

The china was nice, although mismatched (Royalcrest and Colcough bone [Peter's saucer chipped and repaired]), and the tea was hot and strong. He wasn't really hungry, but when Hassan pushed the plate of pastry toward him, he somehow knew it would be bad form to refuse.

"Peter, you don't mind if I call you Peter, do you?"

"No, it's my name."

"Splendid. And you must call me Hassan. Peter, Reham tells me this is your first time in this part of the world. What do you think of our little tinderbox?"

The baklava has amazingly sweet. It was like injecting sucrose directly into his veins (he could almost feel his heart revving). And sticky too: it was impossible to answer with the honey and pistachio paste glued to his upper palate. He took another sip of tea to try to clear the roof of his mouth. He could feel Reham looking at him. "I really haven't seen all that much yet, we just got here last night. There are a lot of guns around here," he added helpfully.

Hassan laughed. "When a young man from Los Angeles USA says that you possess many guns, you possess many guns." Hassan laughed again and gestured toward Peter with his teacup. "You are right, my young friend. Palestine, Israel, we have many weapons. Although one side has more weapons than the other. Would you like some more tea?"

He was going to need more liquid to rinse his mouth and teeth of the honey, and offered his cup. "Thank you."

"The pleasure is mine." Was the Chunkster coming on to him? Was Reham pimping for Fats here? He looked across the table. Hassan was looking

at Reham and smiling. Was that some sort of code or something? He knew he should have backed out, walked away, got out while the getting was good. Instead, he was trapped in this fat chicken hawk's studio (or office or whatever), while Antie Emm here waited for his mack to split so he could get down to some serious dicksmoking. No wonder there were no windows.

Maybe he was just being paranoid. He didn't want to get caught staring, so he shifted his gaze over to the left, away from Reham (although Hassan's large white mass remained in the corner of his eye, dominating in the gloom). To his far left, there was a once-white porcelain sink with accompanying towels and rags hung on pegs to the right. Continuing across that wall, Peter's gaze came to a couple of folding chairs, and what looked like bags of feed or animal food, stacked six high in the corner. On the far wall, next to the corner, was some sort of chart or diagram of what appeared to be sheep, although Peter couldn't be sure in the dim light. Against the far wall, almost directly behind Hassan, was a large glass book or display case, with a number of unknown objects inside, a stack of books and a small globe on top. Tacked above the globe was a map, a city map (it was too far way and too dark for Peter to ascertain what city).

"I see you are looking at London. I adore London. Have you been?"

Have you been? Have you been? "Yes I have. Four times" (not counting the recent stopover at Heathrow).

Hassan sighed. "London was the home of my youth, my idealistic, innocent youth. I went to school there, well, at Oxford: although I must add, while

I went to school there, I was educated here, in Palestine. Reham doesn't care for London, do you dear?"

"Except for the British, I like it fine."

"You are right to distrust the British: they are simply Germans with better manners." Hassan took a bite of baklava and a sip of tea. "What did you study at university, Peter?"

"Business mostly."

"Ah yes, business. The business of America is business, is it not? Before I was trained to be a physician, I read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Exeter College, where J.R.R. Tolkien, of Hobbit fame, attended."

That was close to interesting ("Where did our love go" was replaced by some indecipherable chatter). I read economics at the University of Southern California, where the famous OJ Simpson attended. Peter stifled a yawn. If Chubby here was coming on to him, he was doing one lousy job of it (unless he wanted to bore him to sleep before trying to meet Junior). He'd better keep alert, because there was definitely some plot or something going on here, otherwise Reham would not have insisted so strongly on this visit. And why was she still here (although he was grateful she was [and enjoyed her presence on his hip and thigh])? This was just ignorant: he should have turned and walked (weeks ago). He could still split, but he wanted that book, wanted that 411 about his father, about himself. And he wanted to avoid losing all those hours and bucks on what would be, if he left now, *certainly* a wild goose chase. It was like that time he went to Vegas (MGM) with Suarez, and he kept betting and betting

(blackjack then roulette), unwilling to face the fact that he'd lost over six grand: he remembered sitting there at the wheel, betting a split (sixteen and twenty) over and over again (he had the ugly-ass canary yellow chips), thinking I'm going to make this up, I'm going to make this up, just one more hour, fifteen more minutes, one more spin. And the fucking thing is, he did it. It took him all night (and two sixteens in a row), but he broke even (exactly [he'd come out ahead if you counted the free Heinie's]). Same thing here: he'd wait this out, see what the shit was. And maybe he'd break even. He considered another bite of baklava but decided against it.

“Forgive me if my curiosity supersedes my manners, but I don't enjoy many opportunities to converse with Americans. I would like to learn from our meeting, profit from it, so to speak. May I ask you, what do you think of us?”

Peter shrugged. “I don't know. Like I said, we got here late last night.”

Hassan removed his gray glasses, wiped them on his lab coat, and returned them to his face. “Forgive me for being obscure. What did you think of us before you arrived? While you were in the States? When you saw us on the news? What did you, or do you, think?”

Fuck, I don't know. To be honest, you were pretty much below my radar, if you get my drift, until I had to go to that art opening. “I don't know.”

“I am very sorry, and don't mean to be incult, but please, you must have possessed some impression of us, of Palestinians, of Palestine. Fiery young rock-throwing crazies? Prostrate mothers covered in black crying over coffins? You must have seen us on the television, at least our funerals. Yassar Arafat,

with that Italian restaurant tablecloth on his head? Dreadful public relations, that. We need someone polished and photogenic like Netanyahu, someone who looks more American. Surely you must have heard of the intifada? Shatilla? Deir Yassin? Or the American Zionist Baruch Goldstein, who opened fire with an automatic rifle in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron, creating over forty martyrs for Allah, all shot in the back? Beirut? Erez Crossing? What do these names mean to you?"

Jesus, lighten up chief. Peter didn't know about any of that shit, although he was somewhat relieved to find that Hassan was more interested in dropping some poli sci smack rather than trying to open up his booty. Still, fatty was getting irritated, so if push came to shove, he'd try to outrun the lard-ass (he'd stay near the door), and even though this wasn't his barrio, he probably could lose Reham (smoker, workboots) as well (although he did have his computer and pack [he'd ditch the Mac before his Kitons and Banfis {although the Weil was with the Mac, fuck}]). He could always find a cab to the airport. He didn't say anything, and looked down at his tea.

"Hassan, remember yourself. Peter is your guest. He is my guest as well."

"Yes, of course, you are right, he is my guest. However, where does he think all of the weapons he saw this morning, Israeli weapons, came from? The sky? Yahweh? Did Moses go up and bring them down from the mountain? No. They came from his country, the United States. That is where they came from. What have we done to you that you arm our enemies?" Hassan removed his

glasses and leaned forward toward Peter (the return of Blindness and Insight). “I ask you my friend, why does your country hate us so?”

“We don’t hate you. I mean I don’t hate you, and no one I know hates you” (we don’t give much of a shit, pal, we got our own problems [like Mexicans, Crips and Bloods {and Y2K}]).

Hassan leaned back and smiled. “That is reassuring. I am very glad that you and your mates, at least, do not hate us. Please, please, take another piece of backlava.”

Peter knew when he was being dissed. Fuck you very much. “No thanks.” He turned to Reham for support. She smiled at him and gently patted his knee. Whoa. He thought about returning the gesture but didn’t (she was his sister).

“When you were in university, did you ever study something called ‘Business Ethics,’ or some such thing?”

“It was offered, but I didn’t take it.”

“Have you heard the joke that business ethics is an oxymoron, something like military intelligence or English cuisine?” Hassan paused but Peter clammed.

“Why do you not treat us ethically? Why do you not treat us as your Jesus insisted?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “Perhaps you do treat us according to your ethics: perhaps this is what is so disturbing. I will attempt to explain.”

Hassan reminded him of the large dude in that Bogie movie (Intro to Film as a freshman) about some statue.

“You have heard of Hegel, have you not? He was no friend to the Jews, certainly. Hegel developed this theory, this story really, about what happens when two men meet each other. Now according to Hegel, men are differentiated from animals, from dogs and sheep, by the fact that they desire something besides food and shelter, besides material comfort: men want power. Now, when two men meet each other, they both naturally desire to have power over the other. They cannot help this, they have no choice. What can happen, then, when these two men meet each other, both desiring power over the other?”

Peter looked at Reham, who was looking at Hassan. She had a sweet profile: a strong nose, high cheekbones, (not too) thick lips and beautiful olive skin (Wanda’s could be a bit red at times [tanning was for trash], especially when high or aroused). He couldn’t see anything of his father (himself) in her (Reham). Peter turned back to Hassan. He was waiting for an answer. “I don’t know, what?” Like he gave two shits (speaking of which).

“There are three possibilities. One, they kill each other, end of story. Two, one man kills the other man. At first, this seems like a desirable solution, does it not, as one man has conquered and vanquished the other. But is this outcome truly desirable? One man alive, one man dead.”

“Sure. One winner, one loser.”

“Yes,” Hassan was getting jazzed, “but if it is power that men truly desire, then what power can one have over the dead? The dead are dead. Do you see? If one man kills the other man, then the man who is alive cannot get what

he desires, he is left standing over a corpse, as powerless as before. Therefore, the only possibility is a third, I will not say final, solution.”

What was that knee squeeze all about? And that kiss? And the drawing? And the elbow touch? All those little gestures. In some ways, it was probably a good thing she was his half sister (if she was), because he wouldn't mind some of that right now. That what? You know. Bad thoughts bad thoughts bad thoughts.

“The third solution, and the only event that allows the story to continue, is for one man to enslave the other man. Here, at least one man is satisfied, for he now has power over the other: the master is master, and the slave is a slave. And the slave now does work for the master—that is the nature of slavery. But as I said, the story continues.”

What if he put his hand on her knee? Just to show that he wasn't pissed. His guess was that she didn't let many men mack on her, so if she left it there (or covered it with her own), maybe she was interested. Interested in what? It would probably be this huge insult, especially in front of Hassan (who with his eagles and slaves wouldn't notice anyway). After all, she did tell the airport 5-0 they were boyfriend and girlfriend. Me so horny, me so horny. This was crazy.

“The master is happy at first, for he now has someone over whom he has power. It is wonderful to have someone work for you; till your soil, plant and gather your crops, slaughter your animals and make your wine. But then he begins to think. The slave too begins to think, but we will talk about that later. The master begins to think that even though it is very comfortable being a

master, that in some ways he has grown dependent on the slave. If not for the slave, he would not have wine to drink or food to eat. More importantly, for this is what makes a man, if not for the slave, the master would have no power over anyone. If the slave were to die, through overwork let us say, then the master would no longer be master. Do you understand? The master now depends on the slave, the master has, in some sense, become slave of the slave. And there is something else that bothers the master. It is not that wonderful to have power over someone who is a mere slave. The slaves are not really human, they are not masters by any means, so to have power over slaves is like having power over a donkey or a camel. And so, the satisfaction that they once felt begins to ebb. The slaves, however, have another story.”

Four or five loud cracks filled the air. Peter jumped. Shouting followed, then three or four more cracks (gunshots?). (Singsong Euro) Sirens began to blare from further away.

“That was rather near, I believe. It would be wise to avoid the window and door for the time being.”

“Were those shots?” Peter had heard gunfire before (he lived in LA after all [and had gone out with Wanda and father to the {Burro Canyon} gun club to squeeze off a few {Wanda was mad with her Glock 9 while he preferred the Walther PPK (borrowed from daddy [Kay wouldn't dig him owning a gun {besides all the fucking paperwork}})}}).

“Perhaps we are hearing those weapons you saw this morning: they sound to me like rubber bullets.”

“What are rubber bullets?”

“The Israeli army and the IDF often use bullets made of rubber when they shoot at children. Irgun and Mossad have no such compunction. They always employ ‘live ammunition.’ Lovely term that. Supposedly, these rubber bullets do not kill, unless they strike the head. Unfortunately, some of our children are young and not tall, and their heads are closer to the ground. The sound of rubber bullets is slightly different.

Anyway, I was telling you a story, a story of mastery and slavery. After the beginning, after this encounter where the master has enslaved the slave, the slave is naturally very fearful of his master, and acts with this fear to serve his master. But as he works the land in service of his master, he begins to educate himself, to educate himself with work. He begins to see that the master is just another man, another man who is becoming dissatisfied. He begins to understand that while the master is dependent upon him, for without slaves there would be no masters, he is not dependent on the master, or he is dependent on the master only to the extent that he is, and remains, a slave. And he does not wish to do this. So the slave possesses, at first as desire, a freedom in regards to the master that the master does not possess in regards to the slave. The slave is, at least potentially, free, while the master is enslaved to his slaves for his mastery. You understand this, I am sure?”

Yada yada yada. What the fuck: here he was getting shot at (practically) in the middle of fucking Jerusalem, and this dude keeps droning on, laying down

some incomprehensible bullshit. I think not. This is so bogus. “Yeah, I follow. The slaves are masters and the masters slaves.”

“That is not quite correct, for while the slaves do possess potential freedom, it is not yet actualized. The slaves remain slaves, and the masters remain masters. It is only through a gradual process of work and education that the slaves finally realize they are free and that the masters are enslaved, and move to throw off their enslavement, to actualize their freedom and become truly free. This process, which was further developed by the Jew Karl Marx, is really the story of all oppressed peoples, of all slaves. ‘Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains,’ and all that.

I will bash on. Why am I telling you this? I want to offer a theory, a theory of why the West hates the Palestinians. Guilt plays a large role in my narrative, it is true. Put simply, the West feels tremendously guilty for trying to rid itself of its own Jews, and is so trying to exculpate that guilt by giving the Jews land and allowing them to do as they please within that land. I am not one of those revisionist historians who disbelieve what the West calls the Holocaust. The numbers were possibly exaggerated, but I do believe that Europe did actually make the attempt to purify itself. I personally find it telling that it was the pinnacle of western civilization, Germany, with its philosophy, music, architecture and art, which actualized this process of purification.

Have you ever thought about why the Holocaust is so terrible, why it is such a terrible mark upon the Western world? It is because for the first time in recent history, the killing happened within Europe’s borders, right under your

eyes and noses. There is no Holocaust when you come here to the Levant and murder, or to Africa, or Japan and drop atomic bombs on its cities. No, it is only when the killing happens in front of you that you begin to feel guilt.”

Peter turned back to look at Reham

“The west has attempted to appease its guilt with the creation of Israel. And we Palestinians are in the way of this self-absolution. This guilt is part, but not the only part. There is. . . “

There was more shouting, and then from the courtyard, “Somebody please help. I need your help. Hassan-bey please, help me. Hassan - bey.”

Hassan looked at Peter, then at Reham. “Who could that be? Are you expecting someone?”

Peter shrugged and Reham answered no. Hassan went to the door and looked out, while Reham stood behind. Peter stayed put.

“It is that disc jockey, the fool with the baby squirrel monkey.”

“Please Hassan! My mother’s dog has been shot. Please help me.”

Twister.

“I will be down.” He turned back into the room. “Reham, please go and calm him. Peter, please wait up here, I will require your assistance.” Peter stood as Reham slipped out the door and Hassan quickly crossed the room and disappeared through another door in the far corner behind the desk and hotplate.

Peter could hear Señor Sonic through the window, “What am I going to do? What am I going to do? We were walking on Antonia near Simtat, and these youths, young hoodlums, not political, just hoodlums, came running up the

street. A couple of policemen followed, and then some soldiers. Someone started firing, just a couple of shots, and I fell to the ground. When I looked to my side, I saw Twister covered with blood. Please, you have got to help me: she is still breathing. My mother will be so hurt, so hurt.”

“Please, calm yourself. Hassan will be here to help.”

“But where is he? Where is Hassan?”

Good question.

Hassan emerged from the back room and quickly moved to the glass case, where he proceeded to fill a black kit bag with instruments and assorted (doctor) paraphernalia. He turned and handed the bag to Peter, and Peter saw that Hassan had changed his clothes. He’d removed his Pink (along with the Fish tie), keeping some sort of white tee under his coat. He’d substituted army pants for Henry Poole’s, and Reebok low cut Players for the John Lobb’s. He’d evidently freshened the Blindness and Insight, as the wave of scent seemed much more forceful than before.

“Please, take this bag, while I look for a book. I am not skilled with canines.” He turned toward the bookcase, and quickly removed a couple of books from the bottom shelf. He then moved back behind the desk, where he opened a drawer, took out a folded white square, which turned out to be some sort of butcher’s apron, and handed it to Peter. “You had better wear this to protect your clothing.” Peter put it on (it smelled not unpleasantly of bleach) as they made their way out the door and down the stairs.

Sonic was a mess. Half of his long hair had come undone, and was hanging over the right side of his face. His white leather pants were covered in blood, and he had a large red splotch above his left eye. He had wrapped the dog in his jacket and was holding her against his stomach. Her long, elegant neck was limp, and smeared with blood. Peter couldn't tell if she was breathing or not, or if her eyes were open. He glanced at Reham, to see how she was reacting to all this: stiff, but cool as a fucking cuke.

"Please, set the dog on the table, and we will see how it is doing."

"She. It's a fucking she. Not an it. She."

"She. Of course. There. Now, please remove the necklace, or whatever you call it. Thank you. Now, please go upstairs with Reham, who will fix you a cup of tea."

"I'm staying."

"You will only be a distraction if you remain. Please, I will give you a diagnosis as soon as I can. Peter will stay and assist me. Please."

Sonic shrugged and sighed, and moved slowly toward the stairs, the empty collar useless in his hand. Reham started to follow, then looked at Peter, directly into his eyes. "I am sorry. Obviously, I could not know this would happen. Are you fine?"

"I'm okay, sure."

"Perhaps you are not a bad American." She kept her eyes (huge pupils and deep, almost black corneas) locked with his, then looked away (not down) and walked past him up the stairs.

Hassan had switched on the klieg lights, and directed them on the body of the dog, which he had positioned on the dirty table. He was rinsing off the table and the dog with a small garden hose, which ran, as Peter saw, up along the wall to the roof. Numerous small flies had begun to attack the bloodstains on the ground, and he heard a couple of cats meowing behind. This was going to be quite a trip.

“There is a can of aerosol disinfectant in my bag, please remove it and coat both of your hands, and then mine as well. Be generous with the spray.”

Peter did as instructed, and his hands were soon colored a surprisingly bright, deep neon blue. Hassan set the hose on the table and held out his hands. “What is this stuff?”

“It is disinfectant. For sheep. Now, please coat the dog as thoroughly as you can. Again be very generous. I will give it a shot for the pain.” He took his bag and drew out some glass works with an ampoule of something.

Peter had so far managed to avoid directly looking at the wounded animal, and hadn't prepared himself (how could he) for the sight of the small, skinny torso with the huge red wound, not quite golf ball size, in the middle of its flank, just below the ribs. Blood was oozing from one side, and dripping down the belly, where it mixed with a pool of blood and water on the table. The dog's eyes were closed, foam on the corner of its lips, and it was breathing heavily, jerkily. He looked closer into the wound (he couldn't help himself), but all he could see was reddened, bloody flesh. The dog began to shiver slightly as Peter coated the wet fur and the red wound with blue sheep disinfectant. Hassan gave a shot

in the left buttock, and very soon, the shivering stopped and the breathing became less labored. Hassan had taken what looked like small salad tongs and a small blunt hook from his bag.

“Please spray these as well.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I will need to see if the bullet is inside of the body, and if it is, remove it. I will then suture it, and hope for the best. As you see, the wound is quite large, which would indicate those rubber bullets I was speaking of, as they are often larger than regular bullets because they are not designed to penetrate, only to stun. As you see, our little friend here is more than stunned. I will need some assistance, as I am not completely familiar with the anatomy of canines.”

“I don’t know what I can do: I don’t know much about dogs and their bodies and stuff. I never even took bio, biology.”

Hassan smiled. “You will not require any biology to hold this book open.” He handed Peter one of the books he had gathered in his room, his thumb inserted to hold the page. When Peter opened it, he noticed a bright blue smear on the white paper.

Hassan placed one of those fifties doctor’s hats with the little round mirror in front, adjusted one of the klieg lights, and then pulled out a stool from under the table, sat, and leaned forward. “I don’t think I’ll need to spread the ribs, but I will have to retract the rictus addominis, and some of the greater omentum. Could you hold its leg up a bit, so that the hips swivel? Thank you.”

He raised his eyes to look at the book Peter was holding, the back down at the wound. “That must be the liver, which looks undamaged. Would you mind holding this clamp, please. You can keep the leg raised with your elbow.” Sure doc (George Clooney you ain’t).

A few of the more emboldened flies, not content with the dwindling plasma supply on the ground, began to buzz around the table, a couple even alighting in the pool near the dog’s wound. Peter, with one hand on the clamp and the other holding the book (not to mention his elbow positioning the leg), could do nothing. The presence of the flies really pissed him off.

Hassan worked silently for a while, looking a couple of times up at the book, and once adjusting the clamp. Peter could hear “Little Red Corvette” on the radio above his head, and the fucking flies increased in number. Apply a couple of ligatures a little distance apart around the colon where it is entering the pelvis, and also at the juncture of the duodenum and jejunum.

“We were just about to talk about how the master and slave story relates to our story, the story of the West, or more specifically the United States, and Palestine, before we were interrupted.” What the fuck! Pay the fuck attention!

“Now while it is true, as I said earlier, that guilt plays a large role in determining, one can even say overdetermining, your feelings toward Zionism, and therefore towards Palestine, I would like to argue that guilt is not the grounding reason you are so hostile towards us. Your guilt for slaughtering the Jews is great, and makes you wish we Palestinians, and Palestine itself, would

disappear, simply vanish, poof, like who was it? Jimmy Hoffa. We disappear, the Jews are happy, your debt is forgiven. Voila, Peace in the Middle East.”

A muscle in Twister’s neck twitched and then stopped. Peter caught a whiff of shit cutting through the meaty odor of the blood. Peter looked down at Twister: she was (is? [probably was {Peter didn’t see how any animal could survive with that big a hole in its gut (although if Hassan could cut as well as he talked she’s be up in a week or two chasing balls or whatever)}}) beautiful (if one ignored the gaping puncture under her ribs on her left side). Even lying there bleeding, perhaps dying, she looked like grace incarnate. That wonderful spade shaped head, those long white legs (one tawny) and delicate white feet, that deep chest with arching, almost minimalist torso, that elegant whip-like tail: she would go with just about anything (a cas levis, Banfis and Lars Nilsson urban look, a more outdoorsy A & F or LL Bean ensemble, and even a relaxed Armani and Kenneth Cole semi-formal [although Kay didn’t dig pets and as far as he knew {they had never discussed it} neither did Wanda {maybe when he moved a sort of housewarming present for himself}]). It was more than that: she was striking, sweet and, except for the blood, immaculate (how did one go about acquiring such an animal [pet stores were bad news he knew that {he could ask Suarez (owned a couple of Dobes) but supposedly he got his dogs from a meth dealer}}]), and Peter wished she wouldn’t die (he had never seen anything die before). God, if you’re out there. He blew at a fly that had settled on Twister’s nose. It flew off, then returned. The ventral extremity of the spleen lies immediately caudal to the liver on the left side of the abdomen. Not infrequently

the visible part of the spleen is more caudal in position and extends farther in position towards the middle line.

“It is partly guilt, and partly public relations. The Jews have done a wonderful job presenting their story. Many many American Christians come here, and after the Jesus tour, they all go to visit Masada. It is simply brilliant. I am not one of those Jewish conspiracy fanatics: I do not believe that there exists some sort of underground organization, although it is true that many Jews are prominent in newspaper publishing and other media corporations, and so are naturally predisposed to the Zionist cause. But this still is only a partial answer. Why are the Americans, and Westerners in general, so eager to believe the Jewish story? Why do they ignore reports of their own organizations, Amnesty International, for example? Why do they turn their heads when images *are* presented to them, images of children, rocks and funerals on one side, and soldiers, tanks and guns on the other? Why do you Americans disbelieve your own eyes?”

Why don't you shut your own mouth? This was getting way old. He wished Reham was out here with them. He tried to concentrate on “Little Red Corvette,” but it was too faint to compete with Hassan's dissertation.

“Remember that I said that the slaves were freer than their masters, in the sense that they are not dependent on their masters, or dependent on their masters only so long as they wished to remain slaves. They are also tied, in a way the masters are not, to history. Slaves, because they can work the world and therefore progress, therefore educate themselves out of slavery, possess

history, possess progress, possess movement and momentum, while the masters, because they are, always already, as soon as they become masters, outside of progress, outside of movement, outside of history. Americans, and you must agree with me here, are the most ahistorical people the world has ever known. To paraphrase the brilliant Czech writer Milan Kundera, America is the land of laughter and forgetting. You forget that there already existed multiple civilizations when you began to colonize the Americas; you forget that your country's early economy was built of slave labor; you forget that most of your peoples, especially the people in power, are not native to the land, and it is these people who are attempting to keep immigrants from Mexico and Asia away. You are a state of squatters: you have no ties to land, no sense of the place or the past. And so you forget that there existed millions of Palestinians on the land you decided to give to the Jews. We do not forget."

The serous covering is complete except along those narrow areas following the curvatures by which vessels and nerves gain access to or egress from the wall of the organ.

"Palestine is nothing but history, pure history. We remember Mount Hira and the ascension as if they were yesterday, Tancred's lie and the First Crusade as if it were this morning, al makbah as if it were an hour ago, Qubiya, a single minute and Sabra and Shatila twenty seconds. Americans have difficulty remembering the winner of last year's Super Bowl."

Broncos. Before that, Packers.

“Jews too remember: we Semites are an historical people. The Jews remember what you did to them, and they remember what they are doing to us. The Jews are slaves in the process of overcoming their slavery, slaves in the process of becoming masters.”

The duodenum should be opened by an incision along its greater curvature. The mucous membrane has a markedly velvet appearance due to the presence of innumerable delicate filliform *villi*, and is folded longitudinally.

“We, however, remain your slaves, your historic slaves. We are your history, reminders of what you try to forget. Eureka. I have found it! Near the stomach. You may dispense with the book and hold the clamp carefully with both hands. Up, up. There!”

Hassan slowly withdrew the tongs, flipped up his headlight, and then stood as he examined the dime-sized super ball he had removed from Twister’s gut. The flap of his doctor jacket had opened, exposing an off white wife beater and a pale chest covered with dark black hair. “You may release the clamp now. I do not think this penetrated the stomach walls, although I cannot be certain. The ribs do not seemed damaged. Hold out your hand.” Hassan dropped the bloody ball into Peter’s left hand. It was surprisingly heavy. “A souvenir from Jerusalem. If you look closely, perhaps you can see ‘Made in USA’ etched on the side.”

Fuck you. Peter turned to go fetch Reham and go, just go. For the first time, he felt bile rise in his throat. “Where are you going? Please, we are not finished: I will require assistance to close the wound. Please.”

He couldn't just abandon the poor dog to the butcher and his slaves, but this anti-American crap was really beginning to torque him off. What about all the American movies and music (Little Red Corvette) and Levis and Walkmans (ok, Walkmans were Jap), what about those? He didn't want to argue; it would just set Hassan off on some other incoherent rant. "Alright." And just please please please shut the fuck up.

"Close the book and place it over there, carefully. Then spray the wound as generously as before. After I thread the suture needle, I will ask you to spray my hands as well." Hassan had brought his bag up to the table and had removed the blue can. Peter set the books to the side where Hassan indicated, then took the can and began to spray Twister's side again. The dog gave a little shudder, opened its eyes, and sighed. It did not continue breathing.

"Look. It stopped breathing. Hassan, it stopped breathing." Peter's heard his voice become shrill and loud. Hassan looked up, then put his thumb on Twister's throat. He leaned over and looked into one of her eyes. He shrugged.

"It is difficult to survive such a wound."

"What?"

"There is nothing I can do. I am not an angel."

Peter grabbed Hassan's coat. "Do something you wordy motherfucker."

Hassan turned away and snapped his bag shut. "Do not be impolite. I can do nothing. I am not an angel." Peter leaned over and picked up Twister's Body, slippery with blood. "Do something." Hassan picked up his books and began to walk away. Peter wiped Twister's mouth on the front of his Terra Nova

(no great loss), placed his mouth over her muzzle, and blew hard. Once, twice, three times, four times. He waited. The dog remained still, and very very heavy. He set it carefully down on the table, blew again, and waited. He wiped his mouth on his arm. Nothing. Nothing.

Peter removed his (butcher's) apron, placed it over Twister's body, turned and walked toward the gate. He could hear Señor Sonic wailing in the background. He heard Reham call his name. He continued walking.

*Nina Shope*

## ELEVATION

### SANTA FE

M.,

The colors here seem too vivid now. The bright orange rooms, in which Mexican lamps hang plentiful as stars, are almost blinding to me. And the chili peppers are like tongues rooted and torn. Strung translucent. I find myself filling our room with mirrors – hung in careful patterns across the walls or spread out on the floors, in hope of catching some trace of you. But instead I see myself reflected from too many angles. And again, it is blinding.

--N.

M.,

In our room, the ristras have rotted. The moths have infested them all. Attracted to the wreaths as if they are filled with a light we cannot see. Or maybe you can. I cracked one open yesterday to find it filled with larva – thick webbing, their wormlike bodies. I hope they are nowhere near you.

--N.

M.,

I am afraid that, without you, I cannot survive this city. And wonder whether I should return to New York. What stops me, I think, is that they petition their dead

here, like I do. In New York, I would have to resign you to the ground. Here they live with the saints intimately. And the dead still have days to visit.

--N.

M.,

Last night I placed a pepper on my tongue to absorb the taste. But I am frightened to remove it. It seems to have become a second organ of speech, filling my mouth with fire.

--N.

M.,

I leave peppers on the pillows. Fill the room with them. Drying them on doorknobs, over the bed, on the windows. I place them in my mouth. Press them between my thighs. It feels as if I am trying to burn something out of me.

--N.

M.,

Some type of resurrection. When caught in the mirrors, I freeze solid. I sleep for days. Today I awake surrounded by tongues. Speaking in tongues. Solitary. Surrounded by mirrors. I awake translucent. Burning. I awake to lanterns circling me like half open eyes. I awake during the festival of lights. I awake on the Day of the Dead. I awake with my tongue torn at the root.

--N.

## NEW YORK

M.,

I am careful to only eat bland foods now – rice and yogurt, small perforated crackers wiped free of salt. I walk quickly past the rows of Indian restaurants on 6<sup>th</sup> street. They seem to house implosions of light and color – each one strung wall to wall with Christmas lights, stranded with glitter, with mirrored balls and sequins. I saw one today which had plastic chili lights hanging down in fleshy strands that made the entire room look like an aorta. And I knew I had to turn away. That placed upon my tongue, the pepper would fill me with blazing electrified light. With a current too intense to control. And everything now must be about control.

My mother told me months ago that this runs in my family – my grandfather and his brother. One of them never made it out of the hospital, and the other in and out for shock treatments and lithium. It made me think more about my father, roaming the house ranting to himself, his scarlet face and clenched teeth. My mother never connects him to this lineage – when I question her, she says that he is only thinking aloud. She says, “you know philosophers”. But, by “know”, she means “understand”. And that is one thing I cannot do.

--N.

M.,

When I walk through the subway here, I must be careful to avoid the men's spit.

It sickens me, the way they insist on sharing even this moist inner part of themselves, such a public physicality. I try to leave as little trace of myself as possible –lysoling the computer keyboard after I have used it, walking so lightly that I do not leave footprints or a single smudge of dirt behind me. I know there is something urgent in this. I do not want to create a trail – anything that could be followed.

--N.

M.,

I have realized that what is necessary to convince my parents that I am sane is stillness. I must learn to move my hands less and cross my legs more and above all, not to speak. When they talk to me, their language changes. Word by word, the adjectives drop out of their vocabularies. They only use nouns and verbs, words meant to convey solidity, simplicity, a sense of order.

I know that it is important to avoid questions. I remember this. Something about a family history with the fragments missing. That I must not ask about the day my grandmother walked into a room to find both her brothers dead. Must not ask about my great aunt whose son met a similar end, muscles atrophied in the wheelchair, or about my grandmother's guilt for having son after healthy son. My grandmother once told me there was a curse upon this family. That my parents had prayed for daughters. I remember spending nights wondering why my body did not succumb to this wasting disease. Something about boys and the way they are born.

I know now that this is why I loved you. The strange contours of your body. The way your spine twisted. The weak and frail bones of your legs. How, when I would wrap around you at night, our bodies were as entangled as the ristra hanging from the window ledge. Do you remember my ridiculous theory that the heat of the city would relax your muscles, that your body would unwind in the harsh New Mexican sunlight? I am ashamed to say that I am not sure I would have loved you like that – straightened out entirely. I think something inside me must be twisted – wasn't that something you often said? You made it sound like a compliment, like something you admired. I am not sure you should have. I am unsure of many things.

--N.

M,

Do you think it was strange that even though we were both Jewish, we would walk into churches and rub ourselves with dirt that was supposed to heal believers? The crutches hanging like crosses on the walls. I remember sitting underneath the santuario's famous staircase, the perfect double helix that curved like a spine twisting supinely. We said this place would heal us both. Even when we knew it would not.

--N.

M.,

I think how hard it must have been for my parents to fly down and get me – to

open the door and find a room filled with the raw earthiness of rotting peppers, filled with moths. Their daughter surrounded by mirrors, unable to speak, tongue seared by chili. My mother cannot understand it, having prayed so hard to avoid having sons, only for her daughter to cling instantly to a boy she had to know would die. And I must have, mustn't I? I imagine she was desperate to get me away from that city, where they worship too heavily the cult of broken male bodies. Angered by the crucifix affixed to our wall. Of course, it is something we never talk about.

--N.

M.,

When I came down from that altitude, my lungs contracted as if all the air had left them. I have learned to breath shallowly in this city, with its utter lack of elevation. It is unnatural how easily the air enters here. And I do not want it in me.

--N.

M.,

I do not tell anyone, but I remember everything about that place. How we hung a tin lamp, cut in the shape of a star, above the bed. Our polaris – its tarnished constancy. The brittle streams of light that broke from its body like a nova. The tiers of lanterns left on the stairs at night.

I remember backbones sold in a bowl at the flea market. Scraped out so

that we could still see where the marrow used to be. The woman behind the booth putting a string through them and pulling suddenly – a whole spine recreated right before us. I remember books of martyrs and the way we bent over them late at night. Shrines with Christ leaning heavily into his nails, like a mourner relying on hands to keep him from falling. And the staircase at the santuario - wondering what it would be like to curve and curve and not break. I remember how the clouds hung like bodies over the mountains. The hour at which the adobe took on the color of coagulation and injury. Until it made you feel ill and you refused to look at yourself in any mirror.

It was unbearable how quickly the moths settled in afterwards. And the larva. Attracted to the red centers of the peppers. I drank water at first, to keep them away from me. Scared that the dryness, the rawness, would draw them to me. But it burned when I swallowed and everything felt hollow. Unable to catch an angle of you anywhere. Chilies twisted to resemble your body. Until that was the only thing I wanted. The slow incineration. The emptiness. Larva filling the peppers. Placed on my tongue, they were the only trace of you. Blistering. Speechless. And the moths flew closer then, as if I'd drawn the light into me. When I left the city, I thought that might be the way you would find me. Lit up from the inside like a lantern. I would have traded even speech for that – the ability to draw you to me.

--N.

M.,

I sleep in a room with sky blue sheets and think of the nights when we would lie in the shape of the northern cross, polaris above us - cautiously luminous. I have tried to take that radiance into me, but even it is fading. And in this room there are no directionals. Nothing to navigate by. Across the water, I can see the bridge illuminated like a string of lanterns or blue beads, too fragile to touch, let alone to stand upon. Tankards slung so low in the water that they give the impression of perpetually sinking. Half-submerged. The lights of the city like stars failing. I try to go to sleep remembering the clustered constellation of your sex. That dark space on the bed that I moved towards again and again. Until the lights drop into the water like fireflies dying on lawns in late August. The blue of the water and the bed always invades my sleep at night. Trying to extinguish the mirrors spread out like moons, the dreams from which I awake dry and strung out as a ristra. Suspended.

--N.

*Joshua Harmon*

**EXCERPT FROM *QUINNEHTUKQUT***

**1 8 9 3 – 1 9 4 7**

Mr Ephraim Currier, of Lowell, Massachusetts, raised the frame of the lodge he named Idlewild on a gentle slope overlooking the Second Connecticut Lake in three months. That summer, 1893, ignoring the beginnings of his home city's severe economic crisis, he hired any boy he could distract from farming the fields around Pittsburg village or milking his father's Guernseys and Holsteins to saw planks and carry stones and mix mortar while the Italian and Portuguese and French-Canadian carpenters and masons he had brought with him from Lowell nailed joists and laid the foundation and men from the village rode up from the valley before dark to watch each day's progress. Currier and his workmen and their caravan of wagons had arrived unannounced one afternoon as May faded into June, the leaves and pastures as green as they would be that year, and, as boys ran from farmhouse to barn to Baldwin's general store telling that wagons were coming along the River Road from West Stewartstown, by the time they drove through the center of town men had long been assembled on Baldwin's porch, or leaned against fenceposts and on shovels; women watched from doorways and windows, and children and dogs galloped in the wagons' dusty wake. The workmen, sitting on bundles of tools, bouncing and swaying as the wheels caught ruts, waved as they passed the villagers, but the wagons did not stop until they had reached Second Lake, as one farmer who followed them on horse later reported. By nightfall every household from Clarksville to Beecher

Falls to Back Lake had heard of the men in the wagons, though no one knew their intentions.

Every foot of Second Lake's shore, and much of the undeveloped country for miles around it—north to the border with Québec and east into Maine's Oxford county—had been, almost since the days when the territory was claimed by both the United States and Canada, the property of the St. Alban Paper Company, but with the earnings of his textile mills on the Merrimack River Currier had persuaded the Company to sell him twenty acres, six of them waterfront, along with the promise that no other land on the lake would be sold to any interest but timber. In addition to the undisclosed purchase price, Currier agreed to blaze an access road from the highway, then little more than a cart track at its northern terminus, to the shore of Second Lake, and every board foot he cleared after his lodge was standing he had guaranteed to St. Alban's logging teams. It was only in the early years of the next century that anyone in Pittsburg learned that Mr Jacob Wainscott, who married the heiress of St. Alban and later became its president, had been a classmate of Currier's at Harvard, and that neither he nor his wife had ever set foot on this tract of their company's land. Until the early 1920s, when the Wainscotts sold the St. Alban Paper Company and all its assets and holdings to The Everett Company—a group of private investors and land speculators from Boston, who in turn sold the land around Second Lake in parcels to several smaller timber companies prior to the Depression—little of the timber on St. Alban's lands was ever cut, most of the logging in Pittsburg at that time centering around First Lake and Perry Stream, on lands owned by the Connecticut River Lumber Company.

All summer, the workmen fought the blackflies hovering around their faces and crawling behind their ears and under collars, the horseflies that would leave a welt the size of a quarter, the mosquitoes that found the backs of their necks,

their ankles, their wrists. Early mornings, when the men stepped barefoot out of their tents onto damp grass, mist floated over the lake, lifting in shreds and scraps to reveal the dark water. Hidden loons wailed and laughed, and later, when the sun had burnt through the haze, the men would see them near the middle of the lake, only their dark heads and necks visible from shore before they dove, disappearing for minutes at a time and surfacing far from where they had vanished. Currier stood in the shade with his foreman and, over a stump still bleeding pitch, spread the plans a Boston architect had drawn. Occasionally he shared in some of the work—spending an afternoon helping to dig the foundation or to carry wall studs and end girts, since, despite his strength, he was clumsy with most tools—and at these times the men felt some of his urgency, and hammer blows echoed across the lake. By August's end, when the grass shone with frost some mornings and the swamp maples had begun to turn crimson, the glaziers had installed every one of the four-hundred and forty-eight panes in the lodge's fifty-six windows; the painters had whitewashed the new clapboards and limned every sash and porch rail and the soffit and fascia boards the dark red Currier had chosen to recall his home city's brick; the roofers had nailed down the shingles; and smoke lifted from the three chimneys at night. At the edges of torn earth stunted fir thrust spiky branches toward the sky that had been opened above them. Wind blowing through the maples' curling leaves sounded, to the workmen dreaming of home, like rain.

The interior was still rude, with only rough flooring in place and no finishwork, but by the end of the next year oak paneling had been installed in the sitting room, stoves and furniture shipped to West Stewartstown station before being hauled overland, glass-front cabinets put in the kitchen and pantry, and every room plastered and painted. Currier hung, on the wall above the head of the dining room table, an oil portrait of himself—a commission by a minor artist

then briefly popular for his paintings of Massachusetts society—outfitted in breeches and hunting jacket and posed lifting a limp pheasant in a dusky woodland. For three-quarters of an hour, two servants nudged and repositioned its corners until Currier, several paces across the room, was satisfied that the heavy gilt frame was perfectly level.

Despite its remote location and hurried construction, Idlewild, with its clapboard siding, steeply pitched roof, and great central chimney and smaller chimneys at either end, was a fine example of the New England Colonial style, and though the lodge was a rustic cabin compared to Currier's home in the Belvidere district of Lowell, still it was far grander than most farmhouses north of Littleton. Its dining room could accommodate quite comfortably some thirty people; upstairs, a narrow hall gave onto a master bedroom suite and seven other bedrooms; a separate stair from the kitchen led to a servants' quarters. From Idlewild's front porch one looked across a sloping lawn to the lake's unbroken blue, the far shore a tangle of spruce and fern and laurel from which Camel's Hump rose to the northeast, at the boundary with Maine.

For several years Currier came to the lake at the end of April, when ice still floated in the water and before the last snow had melted from the north-facing hillsides and sheltered hollows in the woods, to open the lodge for the season and repair whatever damage winter storms had caused, and each time he brought with him servants and cooks, handymen and drivers, and apparently so many supplies and provisions that his servants would appear in Baldwin's store but once every week or two, their suits damp and wrinkled, their cuffs and shoes dusty. Throughout the summer months he returned for weeks at a time and it was during these visits that the people of Pittsburg village observed that he was not the bachelor they had at first believed but a husband and a father, though few of them saw his decidedly younger wife nor his children save the

local men he occasionally hired to guide him into the deep woods toward Mount Magalloway—not to hunt, for he usually carried no gun, but simply to learn, he told them, the deer trails and old Indian paths that crossed the brooks and bogs and ridges. The pale and silent son Currier had fathered in his forty-second year accompanied his father on these excursions at Currier's request, though as they forded streams still nearly snow-cold and slapped the blackflies drawn to their sweat it was clear to the guides that the son would rather have stayed at the lodge with his mother and sisters, or, perhaps, remained in Lowell for the summer.

Sometime during October's smoky beginning Currier rode in on the stage from West Stewartstown, accompanied by a half dozen other men—managers at his mills, newspapermen, municipal officials—outfitted in wool jackets and trousers, peering at this new and unknown countryside while he pointed out its landmarks. Currier again hired guides, though now he and the men he had brought with him carried shotguns and rifles, some of them never before fired. But Currier proved to be a better marksman than his guides would have guessed, and each fall grew more skilled at stalking and tracking his quarry. When he and his companions retreated south for the winter, closing shutters over Idlewild's windows, locking its doors and carrying with them anything perishable, the men who had steered them through the woods would return to their homes after two weeks with less money than Currier had offered them; with tales of his shrewdness at cards, of the whisky they said Currier drank with every meal; with the furs of the bear, moose, marten, and lynx Currier and his associates had killed and left for carrion once they had hacked off the heads, telling each other that they would properly decorate the walls of Idlewild's sitting room, though their attempts at taxidermy mainly failed and one of the guides, walking past the lodge

months later, would see a whitened jaw or a skull still bearing a few scraps of flesh that the snow cover had preserved.

The reason why Currier chose such a remote location for his summer retreat, a place neither fashionable nor accessible, was the subject of a great amount of discussion not only in Pittsburg but also in Lowell, where the other successful families were more likely to build summer cottages in Newport or along Massachusetts's rocky north shore. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the once prosperous textile mills in Lowell and Lawrence were already beginning their slow decline that would last decades and eventually see the industry depart for the south, where the workers were less organized, and where cotton fields surrounded the mills. Already, competition from the huge Amoskeag mill upstream on the Merrimack, in Manchester, and from mills in places such as Fall River and New Bedford—located, more conveniently than Lowell, on shipping routes—had diminished Lowell's importance as a textile city. After the departure of the skilled labor during the Civil War years, during which the mills closed their doors, and the arrival of the immigrant workers who worked longer hours for less pay, a series of strikes and lockouts hampered manufacture. From 1867 to 1884 there were at least four major strikes, and by 1893 the economic depression had caused all the mills to drop production to half-time; now, formerly contentious employees were satisfied to have any wage at all, though mill owners' profits suffered as well. Currier, despite the immense expenses he incurred in building Idlewild, was still largely immune to hardship during these years. Indeed, the villagers often saw mysterious crates and parcels being driven on the stage toward Second Lake, and occasionally Currier himself appeared at the post office, whistling happily off-key, to receive such parcels—their unknown contents the subject of that afternoon's talk in the village—from the counter clerk. Nevertheless, perceptive to changes in the business, Currier

may have planned to shift his assets into the timber industry, which had yet to reach its peak, and perhaps saw Idlewild not as a summer home but as one that would become permanent as the focus of his endeavors moved northward.

As the turn of the century neared, Currier's autumn visits to Idlewild, without the company of his family, became longer, and each year he brought with him more and more men. His local guides, when their employer had left for winter, often departing in a sledge rather than a wagon, now told stories about the two- or three-week long hunts into the wild country toward Parmachenee and Kennebago lakes, past Hellgate Falls to the Dead Diamond River, crossing and recrossing the border with Maine, or up into the highlands north of Idlewild, the ridge of hills that separates the basins of the St. Lawrence and Connecticut rivers, into Québec and back depending on where Currier's urges led him. Hip-deep in a cedar and tamarack bog, Currier and his companions all turned and fired at a bull moose startled by the noise of their passing, the meat so full of lead that two nights later men spat shot into the campfire as they ate it. Currier was said to have challenged his companions to wrestling matches, both men stripped naked on the dry earth under a stand of fir, needles and dirt clinging to their skin as they rolled and grappled, and when it became clear to the other men that Currier could rarely be beaten and then usually only when he had just wrestled and was still slick and cut, welts from roots and rocks across his shoulders and back and chest, he began to offer wagers to them—twenty dollars if a man could bring him to both knees, fifty if he could pin him—and while Currier would sometimes lose money this way, the gambles made him fight with even less regard for his person, so that he and his opponent both finished the match bleeding and bruised, panting heavily as they cursed and bent to pull on their trousers. One October one of Currier's friends brought with him several dogs, not pointers or hounds for hunting with but muscled terriers bred for fighting, and

Currier hung fresh flanks of venison or moose from a tree to watch the dogs leap and tear at it, clutching the bone in jaws Currier's friend claimed could snap a man's leg in half. Nights in the camp as embers wafted above shifting logs, or around a table in Idlewild's sitting room, Currier hosted card games, and it was said that whether he was using his own deck or one he had neither seen nor touched he was so skilled not only at playing but at cheating that in a round of five card draw he ended up with eight or nine cards in his hand though no one else noticed, and knew at least two of the cards everyone else at the table held. The stakes increased from one night to the next and one of Currier's floor managers, gone bust double or quits, ended up working at half salary for one year to repay an evening's debt. Soon few of the villagers agreed to serve as guides, telling Currier that even at his wages they could not afford to spend a month or six weeks in the woods, that they had too much work at their farms—though soon Currier needed no guides, knowing the land nearly as well as some men who had lived on it all their lives.

In 1897, Currier wintered at Idlewild, and though his wife and children stayed in Lowell, the villagers began to realize that the Currier family would add its name to the local registers. Most of Pittsburg's inhabitants were men and women originally from northern New Hampshire and Vermont, or from various points in Maine, and everything from Currier's speech to his manner to his dress made them suspicious of him, as did his wealth, which they felt was unearned given that they never saw him work. The stories that began to circulate during this time only heightened the villagers' sense of his difference, and even though he likely knew what the general opinion of him was in the Connecticut Lakes region, he did little to ease the villagers' doubts—rather, he seemed content to let various stories drift downriver from the plot he had carved into the woods on Second Lake, and though while his family was with him he made brief public

appearances in the village, at the Methodist church or Baldwin's store, the times he passed in Idlewild without them he made no effort at such mannerly gestures and played host to any number of rabid and extravagant events. Though even in Lowell he had been known as a reckless and rather untamed man who had bought his way into textiles with an unknown source of capital and whose volatile and unconventional business practices—refusing to lock out his mill's weavers and creeler-boys during the 1884 strike while at the same time resisting the unions' demands for the ten-hour day—had caused among the older, more conservative owners of other mills such as Boott and Hamilton and Middlesex as well as among his own shareholders some degree of concern, still he was regarded as a member of society and had been on intimate terms with mayor Pickman and many other notables.

The following spring, Currier's wife and children joined him in Pittsburg, and the family retired to the lodge and was seen only infrequently during the months of May and June. During this period of Currier's life, he had very few dealings with the men and women of Pittsburg, and was visited by few who later offered recollections of this time, so it was only when his son returned north in 1906 that the villagers learned that in 1899 Currier had sold his mills for little more than he had paid for them nearly twenty-five years earlier. As the century ended, the villagers simply knew that the Curriers returned to Lowell only for brief intervals; that, even in the presence of his family, Currier still went into the woods for several weeks with those men who had made it a habit to travel to Idlewild each fall. Hunters and trappers from Pittsburg or Clarksville or Errol encountered Currier and his retinue, unwashed and wild, butchering a moose they had killed in the Magalloway valley or scouting along the Diamond Range or ringing a bonfire while one man dealt cards upon an overturned rock. The single incident of those years that most villagers were able to recall later occurred during the

spring of 1900, when Currier's wife came to Pittsburg village, her two daughters and son riding in the wagon one of Currier's servants drove, to ask for help in locating her missing husband, who had, she said, departed four days ago for the afternoon and not returned since. A dozen men from town—taking pity on her frantic dishevelment—rode out to the lodge in wagons and on horses and set off into the woods where Mrs Currier told them her husband had gone. In twelve hours they had found him sitting alone by Smith Brook under a lean-to of branches and heaped leaves and spruce boughs. His shirt, ripped into rags, was scattered across the ground, and his bare arms and shoulders were scratched and muddied. As they approached, he stood up and asked them if they had brought any whisky, and then agreed to return to Idlewild with them when they told him of his wife's worries, though those who observed him said that he did not appear drunk or disoriented or confused.

Ephraim Currier died on August 17, 1901, aged fifty-seven years, apparently the victim of a sudden stroke that felled him as he mounted the stairs, and once again the villagers would have had no news of it but for the wagon passing by their farms the next morning, Mrs Currier wearing a black veil no one knew how she had obtained, her face behind it nearly invisible, the children sullen and unmoving but for the jostling of the wagon as they looked out over the rising fields and pastures and fir trees, and the body housed already in a temporary rough coffin one of Currier's handymen had fashioned overnight. By the week's end Currier's servants had closed the lodge and departed themselves. For five years, Idlewild lay vacant, disturbed only by hunters, who, finding themselves caught in an early storm, climbed in through a ground-floor window a branch had broken to shelter in the still-furnished rooms while snow buried the dead grass, or even to build a fire in the woodstove and spread wet clothes on the hearth and, perhaps, given the stories of Currier's amazing wealth,

to search through the mahogany desk or the master bedroom closet for a stash of money. Instead of coins or bills they found only folded maps and notes and letters still sealed with wax and crates of leatherbound books. Young men from town climbed onto the porch roof where they forced open a window and on their bellies slid over the sill into the bedroom of Currier's eldest daughter to steal the strange and lacy garments secreted in a chest of drawers as gifts for their own sweethearts. Bears clawed the front door, carving deep white gouges in the wood. Winds worked shutters loose and slammed them against the clapboards, and the sound carried across the lake. Ice dams along the edges of the roof at winter's end forced water through the shingles and into the ceilings of the second-floor rooms, where it seeped through sagging plaster in brown blotches. Summers, swallows nested under the eaves and in the three chimneys. Paint ten years old buckled, blistered, chipped, peeled. Grass grew tall, competing with the maple and spruce seedlings that had taken root, and which, in 1906, when Currier's son returned to Idlewild, stood waist-high between the porch and the shore. As the weather turned colder, lazy farmers drove a wagon to Currier's woodpile and carted as much of it as they could back to the village until, after two or three years, only a scattering of half-rotted logs overgrown with grass remained.

That Currier's son—Phillip Currier, though at first none of them remembered his name from the summers he had spent at the lake, and, when they had learned it again, even when he had lived among them nearly as long as his father had, still would not speak it except in his presence, referring to him instead as Mr Currier's boy or Currier's son, himself not earning the right to be called Mr Currier until the days when he achieved his own degree of prosperity and so surpassed that of his father—returned to Idlewild, not only to re-establish ownership of belongings and land which the villagers had considered abandoned

and therefore free for the taking, not only to gaze once more upon the site of his father's last turbulent years and perhaps to reconsider his own recollections of the place and the man, but to bring his own wife, and to restore and inhabit the lodge which in its brief five years of untenancy had suffered a decrepitude far swifter and more extensive than many of the village's elderly, surprised and confounded those villagers who remembered him, anemic, close-mouthed, scratched by burrs and branches on the rambles for which his father drafted him during their first years at the lake. That he, admittedly a tall man now, with shoulders and arms sturdier than those they would have imagined the boy would grow into, but still to them forever a boy on the cusp of an unattainable manhood, stamped with the sooty mark of the city he had been born into and raised in, dressed in clothes they could never have afforded and would very likely not have worn had they been able to afford them, had returned with a wife to the edge of the woods was another thing entirely, and, following his arrival, as had happened with his father, speculation began from supper table to fencepost to the woodstove at Baldwin's store, rumors that his father's wealth had been gambled away during his father's last years, the decades-long run of luck inevitably souring, or that the neglected lodge was all the son had inherited from the father, or that Currier had discovered that this son so unlike him in temperament was actually not his son and had disowned him. In any of these rumors may have existed some measure of truth save the last, for soon after his return the villagers began to realize that Phillip Currier was indeed the equal of his father, if not in strength and stature then in shrewdness and force of will.

What he told them was simply that he had had enough of the city life and that among his childhood memories those fondest to him were of the times he had spent at Idlewild, and if the villagers doubted him they said little, nodding and looking anywhere but his eyes as he spoke. Impossibly, he brought with him no

workmen as his father had, no tools or supplies, nothing but his wife and the half-dozen bags and chests which the stage had carried from West Stewartstown, and it was in Baldwin's store—while he selected nails and a claw hammer, a hacksaw and an axe, bundles of shingles—that he announced his intention to restore the lodge himself. He might hire a helper, a handyman, he added, someone to assist with those jobs a single man, no matter how proficient, could not do alone, and though ultimately several men from Pittsburg village did receive contracts for certain jobs at Idlewild, Currier completed most of the work himself, pitching a tent on the lawn he had cleared of saplings and weeds his first days back, and, much like the Portuguese and French-Canadians who had built the lodge some thirteen years before, working as long as the sun gave light for his labor. His wife stayed in the village, renting a room at Young's hotel where by October's end Currier joined her, riding the horse he bought from a farmer out to the lake to work each day the weather held. Among themselves, the circle of loiterers at Baldwin's store gave Currier until the first hard snow to retreat south, but he surprised them by staying through the winter, attending the Methodist services with his wife and by all appearances resolved to stay whether the village would have him or no. Before the ground had thawed he was riding back to Second Lake each morning, building fires to keep warm and working inside, replacing floorboards where snow had drifted through a broken window, replastering buckled walls and ceilings, and though no one could guess how, in his brief absence from the village, he who had certainly never had need to learn or practice them had acquired such skills, the work was deemed of a fine quality by those who inspected it later that summer, rowing close to shore or gathering blackberries within sight of the lodge, while Currier climbed a ladder propped against the clapboards to scrape and paint the walls.

Nearly fourteen years to the day that his father had first opened Idlewild, and nearly six years to the day of his father's death, Currier's renovations seemed nearly complete, the great house restored to a near duplicate of its former appearance to those who had seen it through trees or from the lake, smoke lifting from its three chimneys, its clapboards the clean white they remembered, every window reflecting the sky. Maples along the shore had been red a week under pewter clouds that had blown in from the north and seemed to hang unmoving. Currier hired a farmer to drive him and his wife and their few belongings from Young's to the lake, and on his return the farmer predicted to any who would listen that the couple, young and childless, citybred and inexperienced, would not last the winter in the lodge's isolation, that they would either make it to the village at some point, having burned all their wood or eaten all their pantry, or that they would be found somewhere along the road come spring. And again Currier, whether he was ignorant of them or determined to prove them wrong, defied all of the villagers' predictions by sledging to town occasionally, buying more lumber or nails or plaster or attending services with his wife, and then vanishing into the snow for another month before he would be seen, bundled in an overcoat and scarf, a cap pulled low over his reddening face, driving the sledge back. By spring, the second since Currier's return to the north, the villagers were accustomed to the irregular appearances of Currier and his wife as they had become accustomed to those of Currier's father, though now it was apparent from Mrs Currier's appearance that the couple would be childless only a short time longer. During that following summer, when Currier's wife bore him the first of two sons, wagons again passed through the village on their way to Second Lake, some of them containing boxes and crates, and others furniture, all of which the villagers believed was most likely the couple's belongings from the city being sent north, and which they took to mean that the couple—or family,

now, they corrected themselves—was perhaps settling on Second Lake indefinitely. What no one expected were the groups of strange men, flatlanders by their look and dress, who passed through the village that fall, north, on the stage or on horse and once, memorably, in a Model T Ford, the first automobile many of the villagers had ever seen and perhaps the only car, with its high clearance and light weight, that could have managed the rutted road to the lakes and the corduroys of logs that covered its low spots. In their appearance and manner and their speech as well these men recalled those whom Ephraim Currier had brought north with him from Lowell a decade earlier, the municipal officials and bureaucrats and businessmen, though if the villagers had known how to distinguish between an upper-class city man and a middle-class one, they would have realized that these men passing by Baldwin's store and the town hall and the schoolhouse and the pastures and Young's hotel were less prosperous than the associates of Currier's father. But to them, all of the men who had followed either of the Curriers to their village, as well as the Curriers themselves, were one and the same: more foreign than the men and women and children who lived a day's ride north and spoke a language they did not understand. Currier hired several villagers, still dubious and hesitant after the memories of his father, as guides, and the woods around Second Lake again echoed with gunfire. But it was soon apparent that these city men were not known to Currier any more than they were to the villagers, and it was about that time that the villagers learned that during the winter he spent at the lodge with his wife as well as the following spring and summer, that even as his wife lay—attended by a midwife and Dr Rowell from Colebrook and several female relatives from Massachusetts—in the same double bed where Ephraim had been laid to await the construction of the temporary coffin which would carry him from the north for the last time, Currier had engaged in further renovations to the lodge's interior,

putting up walls, adding doors, so that now Idlewild's upstairs hall gave onto the remodeled master bedroom suite as well as ten small rooms, each with a pair of narrow beds or bunks and a washstand between, the windows overlooking either the lake's wrinkled surface or dark spruce woods—the waters abounding with lake and rainbow trout, the woods home to black bear, moose, deer, and innumerable smaller animals and game birds, and the altitude and healthful climate such that hay fever was unknown here, according to the two-column-inch advertisement Currier took out in the *Lowell Sun*, the advertisement running twice a week from May to September, 1908, by which time the lodge was nearly booked through hunting season. David Young and two of his brothers, all of them part owners of Young's hotel, rode out to the lodge one afternoon to speak with Currier, but as soon as it was obvious to them that he intended no competition with their business, that his own would be largely seasonal, that his guests would all be coming from out of state, and that he would happily recommend their establishment to any of his guests seeking lodgings closer to the village or when his own rooms were filled, they departed. Currier offered to purchase the baked goods of various women his wife knew through the church, and made a contract for milk and butter with Bill Coombs, and hired several men to serve as guides to the city men who'd as likely fired a gun as not before they arrived at his lodge, and paid Windy Williams to deliver his mail from the post office, and during the busy weeks would bring in girls from the village to cook and clean under his wife's eye, so that soon the money the city men brought with them was circulating throughout Pittsburg village, and despite their complaints about the foreigners' rudeness when they stopped at Baldwin's store to ask directions or buy a Coca-Cola or a Mission Orange tonic, or their worries about the habits and beliefs these outsiders would bring with them, the villagers began

to accept his presence, as well as that of his restored and converted lodge, though he would never be anything but an outsider himself.

Within two years, two men from the village had built competing lodges, The Glen and Camp Otter, on First Lake—both of them on the lake's north shore, both of them only half as far to town as Idlewild. Following Currier's lead, these men bought advertisements in various newspapers from Hartford to Springfield to Boston to Portland, and so almost overnight an area which had been something of a secret as a resort for sportsmen—most of them instead preferring the grander hotels at Vermont's Lake Memphremagog, or further south in the more impressive setting of the White Mountains—began to draw travelers from southern New England and even the lower Hudson valley. By the time President Wilson asked congress to declare war on Germany in 1917, and so put a brief, temporary halt to further construction in the Connecticut Lakes region, several smaller lodges had been erected on Back Lake, and the villagers had become inured to the annual autumnal procession of Fords and Nashes and Hudsons passing north along Main Street, and the extra stage that had to be hired to bring men in from the train station.

Given the terms of the agreement his father had arranged with St. Alban for the deed to the twenty acres upon which Idlewild stood, Currier's business did not suffer much since on First Lake and Back Lake the cabins and lodges were beginning to crowd one another and he could advertise his lodge as the village's first and still its most pristine remnant of the Abenakis' old hunting grounds. But in the years immediately following the war and after the passage of the Volstead Act, rumors began in the village that Currier was using his secluded location for various additional and covert business ventures, renting his barn and cellar to the men crossing into Québec and importing unmarked crates from Sherbrooke. Though few in the village would have opposed such actions, if substantiated, for

their morality or legality, some of them resented the fact that once again an outsider had shown more foresight than they had in developing a network of enterprise in their own country, while others resented the attention such rumors would inevitably attract to their own affairs and the increased scrutiny they too would have to endure, and still others resented the presence of the Packards and Hudsons driving through the village, sometimes at sixty miles an hour where the road flattened out along the river, either for their noise and nuisance or the flaunting of wealth in a place where most people still drove wagons. Whatever the actual reasons, Currier was successful enough in the 1920s that he was able to raise Idlewild's rates to a level significantly above those at The Glen or Camp Otter or any of the smaller lodges, and began to attract a different clientele than he had previously, the middle-class hunters who saved all year to come north for a week in November now staying on First Lake while at Idlewild the guests were much younger, dressed in the raccoon coats which had not yet made it, and with this exception never did make it, to Pittsburg, showing less interest in hunting or fishing than in rowing their fussy girlfriends three hundred yards into Second Lake where they would let the boat drift, or in sitting all day on the front porch with their feet on the rail, smoking one cigarette after another, complaining about the weather and the boredom and wondering aloud to the guides and serving girls how anyone could choose to live here. At night the lodge was said to be host to card games no less heated than those Currier's father held in his sitting room, which was now part of the great dining room where Currier had recently hung a crystal chandelier, and on certain weekends Currier hired bands to play and pushed the tables against the walls for dances, and young men from the village hid in the bushes beyond the circle of light cast by the lamps inside to listen to the music and watch the men and women who stood on the porch for a breath of that clear and wholesome air Currier advertised and a nip from a silver

hip flask before they returned inside. Currier's sons, Thomas and Francis, now young men themselves, purchased a Ford roadster in 1925, and many assumed that they were assisting in the business the village believed their father was engaged in, since the car was often seen passing the customs house at Beecher Falls and even as far south as St. Johnsbury or Littleton, if not racing along the River Road between West Stewartstown and Second Lake, overtaking wagons loaded with hay or causing cattle crossing the road to scatter while, wreathed in dust, an angry farmer hurled rocks at the roadster. Though the villagers predicted that the Currier boys would kill either themselves or whoever was unlucky enough to be caught in their path when they rounded a curve or crested a hill, Thomas was instead shot to death in the woods north of First Lake the following year, allegedly by a man whose name had once been scrawled in Idlewild's guest register, and who was later jailed in New York for smuggling, the dispute claimed by some to have arisen from a dozen crates of Canadian whisky which disappeared from Currier's barn and which, others said, had actually been impounded by patrolmen from Colebrook and destroyed in that town's dump before a gathering of interested citizenry. Idlewild was closed for the remainder of the season, and, save for the burial, Currier and his wife and son did not appear in the village all winter. When the lodge reopened the following spring, the rates had been lowered and the hunters from Lowell and Lawrence and Lynn stood on the lawn each morning, stuffing new shells into their pockets before vanishing into the predawn darkness with guns broken over their arms.

Currier closed Idlewild after the 1929 season and did not reopen the following spring as he had no reservations. While he had not lost much money, if any, in the actual crash, he had no income the villagers could see while his lodge stood vacant. Some of the villagers he had previously employed brought small gifts of milk or corn or flour, since he had no land to raise any food of his own, but

they all imagined that during this time whatever fortune he had accumulated began to erode rapidly. It was, therefore, no surprise to them when, in the fall of 1930, he announced that he would be closing Idlewild indefinitely, until the economy recovered, but that as soon as times were better he would return at once. He and his wife—his remaining son, Francis, had enlisted in the Navy the year after his brother's death, when he turned eighteen—drove away in their five-year-old Auburn after shipping many boxes south on the train and leaving Idlewild's key with one of the former guides, who was to inspect the property each spring, perform whatever small repairs he judged necessary, and notify Currier in the case of extensive damage. The caretaker fixed loose shutters and replaced broken panes of glass, and in summer maintained the grounds, and twice yearly a check arrived at the village post office bearing a return address in Lowell, though there was no letter. When the 1938 hurricane devastated much of New England, particularly along the Connecticut River valley, Idlewild, in addition to losing many shingles and windowpanes, sustained severe injury when a fir breached the roof and the heavy rains poured into the upstairs rooms and streamed down through the walls and floor. The caretaker wrote to the address in Lowell from which his checks had been sent, describing the wreckage and asking Currier what he wanted done or if he would prefer to come examine the property himself before deciding, and waited several months for a response though none arrived, after which time some in the village suggested that Currier had written off the property as a complete loss. That winter, snow drifted inside the lodge, through the hole in which the uprooted fir still rested, and much of the interior was further spoiled during the spring thaw. In the ensuing years, hunters or loggers—for the woods around Second Lake had been logged since the early 1930s, when the various small firms which had bought parcels of land from the Everett Company began operations—who stumbled upon Idlewild now saw only

a sagging ruins, the clapboards rotted and loose, the glass nearly entirely gone from all fifty-six windows, the roof collapsed, the central chimney a jagged turret from which smoke had not risen in a decade, the grounds a fury of weeds and saplings, a few half-skeletal rowboats and canoes growing moss and swamp maple or cedar seedlings from their overturned bottoms along the lake's edge. If he ventured a walk across the decaying porch to peer through one of the missing panes of glass, the man could see wallpaper buckled and waterstained or peeled away from crumbled plaster in strips, warped floorboards, chairs and tables dusty though still usable, and the chandelier, now tarnished, cobwebbed, and missing some of its prisms. But soon even the locals stopped noticing Idlewild, stopped expecting to see Currier, perhaps looking older, his hair gray now, drive up to Baldwin's store with his wife to herald his return, stopped even discussing the lodge or its former owners—for now it seemed to belong to no one or nothing but the weather—stopped mentioning its progress toward complete disintegration. It was only the lodge's burning, early in September of 1947, under circumstances mysterious to this day, that again caused the villagers to mention it, to recall their memories and stories about the Curriers, who even now did not appear. How the fire was started was never answered to anyone's satisfaction, some saying that it began in smoldering brush, others saying that it was deliberate though purposeless arson by local boys or out-of-town fishermen, or that it was quite intentional arson set by Currier himself or his son or even his son's son—though no one had any proof that such a person even existed—to claim insurance money, though why such a claim was not made after the hurricane was never explained either, others saying that it had been some sort of freak lightning strike even though later the skies over Pittsburg the afternoon of the burning were recalled to be clear, one man insisting that the only logical explanation was that rotting flour in the pantry or some similar substance had spontaneously

combusted, and most of the village's wives saying that their husbands had done it simply for something to talk about during afternoons of loafing now that the war was over and even the war stories of the village's several veterans had been told and retold and compared against those of the veterans of the earlier war and exhausted. What had survived of the lodge to that day was now smoke dispersed above the lake and a heap of ash and sooty rubble and charred timbers. The foundation still stood, but the heat had been such that even what had been in the cellar had burned. Those who lived on First Lake or in that part of town called Happy Corner or north of the new lake—Lake Francis, the one created after the hurricane by damming the river and flooding the valley—could see the black smoke rising from the trees to the northeast, and many of them, dropping whatever they were doing to head that way, witnessed some of the burning, and sent word to the village that something was ablaze near Second Lake, so that most of the villagers had assembled by the shore, their cars parked at skewed angles to one another, some of them with doors still flung open, to watch the last bits of wood frame burn in the approaching dusk—some working to see that the fire did not spread and some merely watching the violent flow of flames, their voices displaced by the heat and orange light, by the swaying shadows as it grew darker.

Though the woods surrounding Second Lake remain in the possession of several small logging companies, and though nearly all of the old-growth timber that once surrounded the lake has been cut, the corridor of woods along the Daniel Webster Highway, which runs parallel to the lake's western shore and on to the Canadian border, has been designated state forest land. Since the only access to the far side of the lake is through this protected forest or along logging roads little more than washed-out dirt tracks barely wide enough for the logging trucks, it seems unlikely that Second Lake will suffer the development of First

Lake or Back Lake, where cabins and summer cottages and lodges crowd the available shorelines. A boat ramp has been built on its western shore, not far from the site where Idlewild once stood, and a faint path leads from the ramp through blueberry bushes and birch trees to a scoop of earth, green with weeds and tangles of blackberry, ringed by a rectangle of tumbled and overgrown rock, where, standing below tall spruce and fir, one can see Camel's Hump rising from the trees to the northeast, or Mount Magalloway in the deep woods to the south.