THE REICH PHOTOGRAPHER’S TALE

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*The Reich Photographer’s Tale* is a collection of six short stories, each of which is either true historical fiction, in which history itself serves as a character in that it has a direct affect upon other characters in the story, or historically-influenced fiction in which the history portrayed in the story is important, but secondary to, the motives of the characters. The distinction between these two forms of fiction is discussed at length in the Introduction.

The genesis for the stories in this collection derive both from the author’s personal experiences as well as his strong interest in history and have been influenced by several who have written about historical events. A partial list of these writers includes John Barth, Thomas Berger, T.C. Boyle, Joseph Heller, William Styron, Kurt Vonnegut and James Welch.

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Introduction

The stories collected in *The Reich Photographer’s Tale* are related to each other in that they all feature characters who are affected in a personal way by the history of their respective times and places. The stories move from the last great Indian wars of the American West, to the rise of Nazi Germany, to the aftermath of World War II, to the Vietnam War and beyond. While such historical figures as General Nelson A. Miles, Colonel George Armstrong Custer, Adolf Hitler, and others appear in some of the stories, each one of them has as its protagonist a fictional character who can best be described as “one of the people,” a simple citizen of his time and place caught up in events that he cannot control.

As a history student it is no surprise that historical events inform much of my fiction, but it is not the canonical History of generals and statesmen that interests me as much as it is the history of the common man, the people of whom Howard Zinn wrote in his *A People’s History of the United States*.

Although each of the stories in this collection has a connection to historical events, not all of them can be considered examples of historical fiction. The title story, “The Reich Photographer’s Tale,” along with “Thrown Away” and “Like Sun after Clouds,” may be considered examples of historical fiction because the conflicts within the protagonists rise directly from historical events. In these stories, the history itself is almost as much a character as the protagonists. The remaining stories do not have such an obvious cause and effect relationship to historical events and fall into something of a sub-
genre that may be termed historically-influenced fiction, rather than historical fiction. Is this quibbling over semantics, or are there real differences in these two forms of fiction? If so, do these differences imply that the writer will have a different approach to each? A little background on some of the theories regarding the writing of historical fiction may be helpful in answering these questions.

In, *On the Historical Novel*, published in 1850, Italian novelist and literary critic, Alessandro Manzoni "drew a distinction within history proper between historical narrative, on the one hand, and the verisimilar, on the other" (Manzoni 37). These distinctions correlate to the modern distinctions between history (historical narrative) and discourse as defined by Emile Benveniste in *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971).

Historical narrative uses the form proper to a third-person narrative of past events expressed in the past definite tense. By contrast, discourse is both written and spoken, employing all the personal verb forms. Although generally appearing in present, future, and perfect tenses (which Benveniste excludes from strict historical narrative), the other tenses are also acceptable in discourse.

In historical narrative, the third-person form never intervenes in the narrative; indeed, Benveniste says there is no narrator at all: “No one speaks here; the events seem to narrate themselves” (Benveniste 208). But in discourse, “a speaker opposes a non-person” (Benveniste 209). A unique voice is heard, that of someone tied to the time and place in which the historical drama unfolds.

It is something of an oversimplification of Benveniste’s theories, but it may be helpful to think of historical narrative as an objective telling of historical events while discourse represents a subjective retelling of those same events.
The historical narrative is the skeleton upon which the historical fiction writer builds his creation. It encompasses the objective, historical truth under discussion, the "facts," inasmuch as they can be determined, pertaining to an historical event or person.

It is the discourse, Manzoni’s verisimilar, that allows the writer to make judgments about the historical events, to evaluate the sources, and to consider the limits of knowledge. It is through discourse that the fictive imagination is allowed to enter the narrative. Through the careful use of language employed in both historical narrative and the verisimilar in *I promessi sposi*, his historical novel of seventeenth-century Italy, Manzoni discovered a rational method of "maintaining authorial integrity without sacrificing the reader's unity of belief or undermining the author's persuasive power" (Manzoni 38).

Hayden White, in his *Metahistory, The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, takes the approach that all history is fiction, that is, "viewed simply as verbal artifacts, histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another" (White 122). White means that any verbal construct brought into an historical text by the author (Manzoni's verisimilar) automatically renders that account less than objective. It would no longer be an historical truth, but is compromised by the author's subjective use of language, as well as his own interpretations and opinions of the historical fact, therefore blurring the lines between objective history and subjective interpretation of that history, as in historical fiction. Whereas Manzoni supposed there to be historical facts that could be either reported factually or interpreted by an author, White supports what could be thought of as a relative historical honesty in which historical facts are interpreted
differently by authors in other times, other places. Both positions would seem to justify the truth value of historical fiction.

White goes on to say that each of these written versions of the historical event have equal truth value, as long as the authors adhere to the raw data. This would seem to imply that historical fiction about the American Revolution, as an example, would hold equal truth value to a scholarly, academic book about the same event.

It would seem odd that a fiction writer, whether a writer of historical fiction or other genres, would be concerned at all with the idea of truth. What does truth have to do with fiction? It is not within the scope of this Introduction to address the idea of literary truth except to say that even the most far-fetched work of fiction has, at its heart, some central truth. Historical fiction writers may carry a heavier burden than other novelists in relaying the truth. The truth value of historical fiction is determined by how well the author captures and reflects the historical events, persons, and details of his subject matter.

Still, one must remember that we are talking about the writing of fiction. Even William Styron, whose historical novel, *Confessions of Nat Turner*, was a Pulitzer Prize winner, once wrote that the writer of historical fiction works best when fed on “short rations” by the factual record. How else could David Foster Wallace have written “Lyndon,” a short story about President Lyndon Johnson, which ends with the President in bed with a dead, gay African-American? How else could T.C. Boyle have written “Ike and Nina,” a story about a long-term love affair between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Nikita Khrushchev’s wife, Nina? How else could Toni Morrison have fashioned the true-life events of the slave Margaret Garner into her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*?
At least three of the stories in *The Reich Photographer’s Tale* use the factual historical record in “short rations”: “There Comes a Season,” “Pointman,” and “The Last Honorable Man.” All three have as characters either Vietnam war veterans or men facing the consequences of the war. But in no story is the war itself part of the central conflict for the characters. The conflicts in these stories arise from fear, guilt, insecurity, pride, and other human emotions that are not necessarily contingent upon war in order to be expressed. In other words, these stories are more about people working out their personal conflicts against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, which may exert some influence over how the characters act, but does not, ultimately, shape the outcome of their actions. These stories fall into the category of historically-influenced fiction.

Distinctions between historical and historically-influenced fiction aside, the stories in *The Reich Photographer’s Tale* reflect both my personal experiences as well as my interpretation of the historical events surrounding them. They are meant primarily to entertain, rather than to teach, although I would be pleased if the reader finds himself discovering new truths or asking himself new questions as a result of reading these stories.

The genesis of these stories owes much to my own strong interest in history, which began at an early age when I read the Landmark series of histories for children, and to several writers whose work, both in content and form, I greatly admire. I remember well the war stories in *Men at War*, an anthology edited by Ernest Hemingway, which included nonfiction accounts by Julius Caesar, Tacitus, and Sir Winston Churchill, along with fiction from such writers as Steven Crane, C.S. Forster, and Rudyard Kipling.
As a teenager I discovered two books that gave me new ideas as to how history could be written as story, rather than chronicle. The first was William Carlos Williams’ *In the American Grain*, a book which relied on prose poetry to tell the stories of mostly minor historical figures who, unknown to themselves were making history; early Norse settlers, Native Americans, English and French explorers. For many years after reading this book, my own poetry, some of which was published in various journals, was imitative of Williams and largely historical. The second book was John Dos Passos’ trilogy, *USA*, a work that demonstrated how the lives of fictional characters could be played out against a panorama of American history. His Newsreels and other bits of ephemera inserted within the text provoked my thinking about how historical events could be juxtaposed with the lives of fictional characters.

In later years, I learned how memory works in the recollection of history and how the historical past may still intrude upon and affect the present by reading and studying such books as *Worlds End* by T.C. Boyle, *The Grass Dancer* by Susan Power, and most recently, *The Heart of Redness* by South African writer, Zakes Mda. In each of these books, the historical past is palpable to those in the present, the historical figures of the past exerting influence upon those living in the present.

Although the stories in this collection deal with war and its various effects upon people, the reader will note how little violence actually occurs within these pages. This is deliberate, in that the topics I write about are difficult enough to explore without becoming melodramatic. Body counts are not needed to invoke the horrors of war. I have been impressed by writers who have treated serious historical subjects with wit and levity, writers who have not succumbed to that overly easy appeal to pathos. Some books
that best exhibit this style are John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Thomas Berger’s *Little Big Man* and *The Return of Little Big Man*, Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In my book, *How to Write Funny*, I write that using humor in an otherwise serious work is “the literary equivalent of whistling in the graveyard” and I believe that is why these books have appealed to me; they show how a writer can make horrible and fearful topics “safe” for a reader.

Trying to find the proper voice in historical fiction requires determining the perspective that each character will have relative to the historical events surrounding him, but that voice must also be unique to who that character is as a person. The voice must be historical, yet simultaneously personal. An additional problem with voice in historical fiction is the language itself. The characters in John Bart’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* speak in a seventeenth-century English dialect difficult for many modern readers to easily comprehend, while William Styron’s Nat Turner, in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, speaks with a cadence and dialect that recreates nineteenth-century Virginia without confusing the reader. Each writer makes his own choice based upon the needs of the story he is telling. James Welch’s *Fools Crow* and *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, as well as the two novels mentioned above have all provided me with interesting approaches to the problem of voice in the historical novel. Of course, in the end, it is my own unique voice that I hope will move my readers.


Thrown Away

Shortly after Schuyler Cortland looked down at the frozen bodies lying in the windblown ravine at Wounded Knee Creek—unable to write a single word in his reporter’s notebook—Plenty Horses shot a young lieutenant named Edward Casey. The officer’s Cheyenne scouts told Schuyler that Casey went to convince the Sioux at No Water to accept terms of peace and relocate to the Pine Ridge Agency. Plenty Horses walked up behind Casey, stuck the barrel of an old Army Colt revolver against his spine and squeezed the trigger.

General Nelson Miles didn’t want more bad blood by arresting Plenty Horses, especially since the Sioux chiefs did agree to a peace treaty, but Casey was popular among the other officers and the local ranchers were still afraid of the Indians. Plenty Horses was arrested and transported to Fort Meade.

Plenty Horses sat on a bunk behind bars in the stockade, wearing a blue shirt and black pants gone shiny with wear. The pants had tabs for braces but the braces had been removed so that the young man wouldn’t be tempted to hang himself. His moccasins were so poorly made that his flesh showed through gaps in the seams. He sat with his knees drawn up to his chest, his head resting on them. His black hair was cut shoulder-length and Schuyler wondered if he had cut it as a sign of mourning, since Sioux men did not usually cut their hair.

“He speak English?” Schuyler asked the sergeant on duty.

“Some, I think. Try him.”

“Hello,” Schuyler said. “Plenty Horses.”
Plenty Horses didn’t respond at first and Schuyler thought maybe he was sleeping but then he slowly turned his head. Shakespeare said the eyes are the windows of a man’s soul but if that were true, Schuyler thought, Plenty Horses was soulless. He looked at the reporter with dark eyes that were flat and expressionless.

“Schuyler Cortland, from the *Omaha World-Herald.*”

No answer.

“Thought I might ask you a few questions.”

The Indian looked at him but did not speak.

“You speak English?” Schuyler said.

His lips curled into a wry smile. “I do.”

“Good. I’d like to do a story on you.” He took a pad from his coat pocket and the stub of a pencil from his waistcoat. “Why don’t you tell me what happened at No Water.”

Plenty Horses looked at him silently. Schuyler licked the tip of the pencil and waited. He knew that sometimes you had to wait a person out. Especially Indians. But White or Indian, wait long enough and they would finally talk. He waited. So did Plenty Horses. A little longer and Schuyler became impatient.

“Look, all I want to know is why you shot the Lieutenant. Do you deny shooting him?”

“No.”

“That’s a start. Why’d you do it?”

No answer.

He was about to try again when the general’s aide appeared in the stockade, informing him that General Miles wanted to speak with him.
“We’ll talk later,” Schuyler said, but Plenty Horses ignored him.

Schuyler stepped outside into the cold sunlight and walked across the frozen parade ground to the house that was the general’s headquarters. The two-story stone house sat in a cluster of pine trees, the barren ridges of the Black Hills rising up behind it. General Miles sat erect behind his desk, the brass buttons of his uniform shining upon his broad chest. He was all business today. His blue eyes held Schuyler intently.

“Mr. Cortland, please, sit,” he said, indicating a chair beside the desk.

Schuyler removed his overcoat and sat in the chair. The general rolled his chair out from behind the desk, drawing closer to the reporter.

“How’s the weather?” he said, fishing one out of a glass humidor that stood upon the desk.

“No, thank you.”

Miles struck a match, touched it to the cigar and placed it in his mouth. Schuyler saw that the general was careful not to muss his luxuriant moustache. “Cuban,” he said, letting a cloud of fragrant smoke spiral toward the ceiling. “Very nice.”

As the general puffed contentedly, Schuyler surveyed the room, noting the leather volumes of Tacitus and Herodotus in the bookcase, the elk antlers above the mantel, the framed portrait of President Harrison hanging behind the desk and, on the opposite wall, between the windows overlooking the parade grounds, the black crepe-draped photo of Colonel George Armstrong Custer.

“Did you speak with him?” Miles asked.

“Plenty Horses? Not much, sir.”

“That’s what I thought. He hasn’t said more than a few words since we brought him in. He’s an odd duck. Something of an outcast, you know.”
“What do you mean?” Schuyler patted his waistcoat, searching for a pencil. “You don’t mind if I take a few notes, General?”

The general waved his cigar in the air. “Suit yourself.”

Schuyler found a pencil and drew a pad out from his overcoat. “An outcast you were saying.”

“Maybe not exactly an outcast,” Miles said, “but a misfit, for sure. He’s one of those educated Indians, you know. Went to school at Carlisle.”

“In Pennsylvania.”

“That’s the only Carlisle School I know.” Schuyler heard the honking of wild geese flying overhead and Miles swiveled in his chair, watching them through the window. The flock formed a distant “V” as it disappeared behind the hills. “They’re coming back early,” the general said. “Maybe winter’s finally over.”

“How do you know this about him?” Schuyler asked.

Miles turned around. “His band, the Brule, live nearby.”

“When did he leave the school, General?”

“I’m not sure. Not too long ago, I guess.”

“That would explain the hair,” Schuyler said, more to himself than the general. “What?”

“His cut hair. I thought maybe he had been in mourning but his hair was short because it would have been cut at the school.”

“I suppose so,” said Miles, “I really don’t know. Schuyler, you and I have known each other for some time now, haven’t we?”

“Twenty years at least, General.”
Miles nodded. “And you’ve always done great work in reporting on our difficulties with the Indians.”

“Thank you.”

“That’s why I asked you here, to tell you that we’re moving Plenty Horses to Sioux Falls for trial. You may not get much more time to talk with him before we move him out, but I wanted to give you as much time as possible with him.”

“Sioux Falls is close by. I can probably speak with him there if I need to, and cover the trial as well.”

Miles tapped the ash from his cigar into a little iron pot on the desk. “I’ll do what I can to help you with access. It’s important that the trial be reported accurately.”

“Of course.”

“This is important. I’m counting on you, Schuyler.”

Schuyler bunked that night in the enlisted men’s barracks, the cold Dakota wind shivering the plank walls. It was more than the cold that kept him awake. The bodies piled in the ravine. Women. Children. The 7th Cavalry finally avenged the death of Custer, using Hotchkiss guns to slaughter Bigfoot’s band of Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek. The bodies still lay frozen in the snow when Schuyler arrived only a few days later. From where he stood shivering on the lip of the ravine, he could not determine women from children, warriors from old men, their uniqueness erased in dying. Snow dusted the bodies. He was glad he had not brought a photographer with him.

Still, the images were indelible in his mind.

For over twenty years, nearly half his life, Schuyler had been on the beat for various newspapers, covering all the skirmishes and battles, the murders that were so
much a part of the landscape of the plains. Custer, the murders of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, Wounded Knee, and still it went on, even now, in 1891. It was getting harder to write about them. He thought his words could no longer convey the truth of what he saw.

It had been easy at first as he followed the Army from one hostile encounter to the next, to write stories that gripped his readers and made them feel as if they were there, fighting right alongside those brave boys in blue. Try as he might, it was difficult for Schuyler to see the world in red and white and, as he aged, he began to see the Indians as people, rather than quaint curiosities bound for extinction, a distinction that, sadly, did not suit the purposes of most newspapers. Even now, Hitchcock, his editor at the *World-Herald*, was hounding him, demanding more “boots and saddles” in his stories and less about Indian concerns, but when Schuyler closed his eyes it was the doll clutched in a child’s frozen hand at Wounded Knee that he saw.

He tried to sleep but the bloody images gave him no rest.

“You didn’t tell me you were at Carlisle,” Schuyler said. He had drawn a chair up close to the bars of the cell. He was determined to get something from Plenty Horses.

“No.”

Plenty Horses wore the same clothes he had the day before. An empty tin plate and cup sat beside him on the bunk. Schuyler noted there were no utensils. A small frosted glass window high up on the wall was set behind iron bars and allowed a flat white light to fill the cell. The light clearly revealed Plenty Horses’ features. Schuyler noted eyes that were set too close together, a prominent nose, the thin line of an old scar on his left cheek.
“How is that an educated young man like yourself got into so much trouble? Is that what they taught you at Carlisle?” Plenty Horses cut him a look and snorted contemptuously, but did not speak. “You do know you’re in a barrel-full of trouble, don’t you? They can hang you.”

“I am not afraid to die,” Plenty Horses said.

“I would be,” Schuyler said.

“Why? Will you not go to heaven?”

Schuyler laughed, surprised by the Indian’s question. “Not very likely,” he said, and he knew that to be the truth. How could a man keep his faith when he had witnessed all that Schuyler had witnessed? It was as if the evil had attached itself to him. He could smell it, riding on him as easily as his coat, and he could not shake it off. “What about you?”

Plenty Horses ignored him. For a few moments, neither man spoke, eyeing each other through the iron bars. Schuyler turned his head and looked through the open door to his right into the next room where the duty sergeant was talking with two blue-coated privates. Framed in the window behind the soldiers he saw a team of horses hitched to a wagon. In a little while Plenty Horses would be transported to the Sioux Falls jail.

“Shouldn’t be much longer,” he said, turning back to the prisoner.

Plenty Horses sat on the bunk, his back against the wall, his feet planted firmly on the floor. He looked like he was waiting for a train.

“Listen, Plenty Horses, if you talk to me, I can get your words to people all across the country. Don’t you care what people think about you? Wouldn’t you want them to know why you killed the lieutenant?”
“My people know,” he said.

Schuyler scratched his head. “All right, let me help you. You were distraught over the events at Wounded Knee, right? When you saw a chance to avenge your people you took it. Casey just drew an unlucky hand. It could have been any White man. Does that sound about right?” Plenty Horses did not answer. “But here’s what I don’t understand,” Schuyler continued. “You were sent to the Indian school in Carlisle. You were taught the ways of the Whites. You were taught to speak like a White, dress like a White, eat like a White—"

“Yes, and walk like a White man in hard shoes that made noise all the time,”

Plenty Horses interrupted, “on stairs that I could not even dream of when I was a boy on the plains and had my words, the words of the Brule people torn from my mouth and thrown away.”

“They tried to help you,” Schuyler said.

“They tried to kill me.” Plenty Horses stood. “They wanted me a dead man.”

There was a commotion in the room next door and the sergeant, along with four soldiers came into the cellblock. The sergeant carried handcuffs and leg irons. One of the soldiers carried a buffalo robe and fur hat. Schuyler stood.

“That’s all, Mr. Cortland,” the sergeant said. “We’re taking the prisoner to Sioux Falls.”

Schuyler stayed out of the way while the soldiers cuffed Plenty Horses’ hands behind him, draped the buffalo robe over his shoulders, set the hat upon his head, and fastened the irons around his legs. Plenty Horses offered no resistance and shuffled out of the building, surrounded by the soldiers, Schuyler trailing behind. The soldiers helped the
prisoner up into the back of the wagon. Four soldiers brandishing Winchesters sat in the wagon with him. As the wagon moved out, two dozen mounted troopers fell in around it as an escort.

Schuyler watched the wagon disappear in the distance, his breath steaming in the freezing air. That evening he booked a room in the Excelsior, across the wide, dirt street from the Masonic Temple, where the trial would be held. There was a saloon a few doors down from the hotel where he ordered up a steak and beer. Sioux Falls wasn’t much of a town and the saloon was smaller than any he had frequented in Omaha, but it was noisy and crowded because of the trial. There were several cattlemen still wearing long dusters over their clothes, a handful of uniformed soldiers, a few townspeople, and even a pair of Cheyenne scouts in Army tunics and canvas pants who kept to themselves in a corner by the bar. Schuyler could hardly hear himself think as he sawed through his steak but that was a good thing. In quiet moments his thoughts took him back to the windswept ravine at Wounded Knee. He finished his dinner, left sixty cents on the table to pay his bill and stepped out on the wooden sidewalk, buttoning his coat against the cold.

It was a moonless night and the deep shadows along the sidewalk made the night seem colder. As Schuyler approached the hotel, passing before the dry goods store, some darker shadow detached itself from the gloom and stumbled into his path, nearly tripping him up. The two men grappled with each other for a moment, each trying to recover his footing, until the stranger managed to disentangled himself and slouch against the wall of the store.
“Friend, you gave me a start,” the man said, one hand fluttering on his chest as though he were massaging his heart. Schuyler could smell the whiskey on the man’s breath as he spoke. “Scared the daylights out of me.”

“Sorry,” Schuyler said, starting to walk away.

“Wait,” the drunk said, grabbing Schuyler’s arm. “You wouldn’t happen to have two bits for a friend down on his luck, would you?”

Schuyler didn’t like being panhandled by the drunk but there wasn’t anyone else nearby and the hotel was still several yards away. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a three-cents piece. That would have to do. He dropped it into the drunk’s extended hand.

The drunk straightened himself up, swaying unsteadily on his feet and pocketed the coin, unaware of how little he had received. Still, he had hold of Schuyler’s arm. “Thanks, friend,” he said, “you’re a true Christian gentleman, salt of the earth you are.”

“Not at all,” Schuyler said, trying to free himself from the drunk’s claw-like grasp.

“Say, you wouldn’t happen to be one of them legal types come here for that Indian, would you? That cut-hair?” said the drunk, pulling himself closer to Schuyler so that his miasma hung over the two of them.

At such close quarters, the darkness could no longer conceal the features of the drunk and Schuyler noticed for the first time that the man was Indian. No, note exactly Indian, a breed perhaps, maybe the love child of some lonesome trapper and an Indian girl.
“You wouldn’t happen to be maybe the judge, would you, friend?” the drunk continued.

“No.”

“You sure? Because that boy needs help,” the man said, taking a sudden step backward, releasing his grip on the reporter.

Despite the fact that the drunk’s rancid breath was suffocating him, Schuyler found himself wondering what he knew. “Why?” he said, guiding the drunk to the edge of the raised sidewalk, helping him to sit there with his legs dangling.

“Friend, you don’t know the half of it,” the man said, leaning back against the post that supported the awning over the sidewalk.

Schuyler sat beside him. The man closed his eyes and Schuyler thought he was going to pass out. He nudged the drunk awake. “What don’t I know?” he said.

“What it’s like when nobody wants you. Like me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nobody wants you,” the drunk repeated. “You ain’t Indian, you ain’t White, you ain’t nothing at all.”

“Do you mean Plenty Horses?” Schuyler asked. “He’s Indian, isn’t he?”


The drunk closed his eyes again, resting his head against the post. Schuyler rose to his feet. The drunk opened one eye.
“Say, you wouldn’t happen to have two bits for a friend down on his luck now, would you?” he said.

Schuyler thought, as he walked back to the hotel, that there wasn’t enough money in the world to change Plenty Horses’ luck.

Despite the fact that Plenty Horses was being tried in civil court rather than before a military tribunal, mounted troopers of the 7th Cavalry took up prominent positions around the Masonic Temple, ensuring the proceedings would be peaceful.

The courtroom was already crowded by the time Schuyler got there but he managed to squeeze onto a bench near the rear. He could barely see the back of Plenty Horses’ head where he sat up front at a table with his attorneys. This was the first time he had seen Plenty Horses since he left Fort Meade.

The Indian’s lawyers were two local men, George Nock and D.E. Powers. They stunned the court by insisting that a state of war had existed between the Sioux and the U.S. government when Lieutenant Casey was shot and that Plenty Horses’ act was therefore excusable as an act of war.

“How can a man be convicted of murder if he kills an enemy in time of war?” Powers asked. “Wouldn’t the U.S. Army soldiers who killed so many of Big Foot’s band then also be liable for murder? What about all those who had served, and killed, in the late war between the states? Powers demanded. Were they murderers, too?”

Schuyler had to admit that the defense was an ingenious one, too ingenious, he thought, for the likes of these two country lawyers. He remembered the conversation he had had with General Miles when he arrived at Fort Meade only a few days after the
killing at Wounded Knee. The general gave him his version of how it was some three hundred Indians were killed.

“Schuyler,” he said, well into his fourth whiskey, “it was a mistake, one terrible, bone-headed mistake. Damned Forsyth,” he said, referring to the colonel whose troopers had surrounded Big Foot’s people. “Didn’t need to be so belligerent. Rash.” Miles poured another two fingers. “The way he placed the guns, his men fired directly into their own lines, not to mention the Indian camp. The women and children. Damned fool. It was a massacre. I’ll not be brought down by that man’s incompetence, Schuyler, you can be damned sure of that.”

Still, Miles had a reputation of protecting his men and Schuyler wondered if perhaps he were doing so again. He jotted down a few more notes, but Judge Shiras, at the request of the prosecution, soon brought the day’s proceedings to an end, to be resumed the following day. Plenty Horses had not taken the stand.

That afternoon, Schuyler was granted an interview with Plenty Horses. He looked in better condition than he had been at Fort Meade. He wore a new white shirt and black pants, courtesy of his legal counsel, and the ragged edges of his hair had been trimmed. The torn moccasins were gone, replaced by respectable boots.

“You’re mighty spruced up,” Schuyler said. “Remember me?”

“Yes.”

“How are you getting along?”

“Why do you still hunt me?”
“Am I hunting you? I think we have a lot to talk about,” Schuyler said, taking out his pad and pencil. “Why don’t you tell me about Carlisle first?”

Plenty Horses sighed and turned away for a moment. It seemed to Schuyler as though he were considering whether he would talk or not. “What about Carlisle?” he said, at last.

“What was it like?”

“It was like falling off the earth,” he said. “Everything was different. Bad medicine.”

“What do you mean?”

Plenty Horses spoke softly. “It was the White man’s world, not mine. My hair was cut, my clothes taken away, my tongue silenced, all to kill the Sioux inside me. I was forced to become a White man.”

Schuyler pressed on, trying to understand. “If it was so bad, why did you choose to go to the school?”

For the first time since Schuyler had met him, Plenty Horses laughed. “Choose? I had no choice. The government agent said to my father, Living Bear, that if I did not go to the White man’s school, there would be no more provisions for him. I was forced to leave my people. We were all forced.”

“How long were you there?”

“Too long. I was a boy when I left the Rosebud Agency. I was a man when I returned.”

“What did you do when you came back to your people?” Schuyler asked.

“We have talked enough,” Plenty Horses said.
“Please, it’s important that I know. I can help you.”

Plenty Horses shook his head, as though trying to shake out the thoughts that were in it, the memories. He closed his eyes. “My people did not see me,” he said. “They saw a White man. They did not see a Brule. And I had learned the ways of the Whites and forgotten the way of the people. I was a mule among painted ponies.” He opened his eyes. “I wanted to be Brule again.”

“So you shot the lieutenant to prove you were an Indian,” Schuyler said.

“When the soldiers hang me, I will have died a warrior’s death.” Plenty Horses said. “I will be happy.”

“What if they don’t hang you?”

Plenty Horses had no answer.

Schuyler telegraphed his interview with Plenty Horses to Hitchcock. The editor wired back that no one really cared about Plenty Horses’ life or his motives for the killing--they seemed obvious after all--and that maybe Schuyler’s time would be better served ascertaining the attitudes of the locals.

Schuyler didn’t sleep well that night, distracted by thoughts of Plenty Horses, a man disowned by both Whites and Indians, truly a man without a country. Schuyler knew that those Indians who survived the Hotchkiss guns would eventually disappear anyway, their identities stripped from them by the blessings of White culture. An entire people could be erased without bloodshed. He could not find the words to write about such an enormous and invisible crime. He had seen too much. Plenty Horses, at least, could pick up a gun.
It was obvious the next day that the trial had become national news. The little town of Sioux Falls swelled with visitors. Schuyler noted that there were now reporters in the courtroom from as far away as New York City.

Nock and Powers meticulously laid out their case in an attempt to prove that a state of war had existed between the Sioux and the U.S. government. They began with the rise of the Ghost Dance movement among the Indians and the murder of Sitting Bull, proceeded through the surrender of Big Foot and the massacre of his people, right up to the final hours of Lieutenant Casey’s death. As before, the lawyers argued for Plenty Horses’ innocence because he was a legal combatant. Again Powers claimed that if Plenty Horses was guilty, than so were the 7th Cavalry troops that cut down Big Foot’s people.

It was a clever defense, Schuyler thought, too clever for these small-town lawyers. Schuyler remembered how General Miles had emphasized the importance of accurately reporting the trail and suddenly he was sure that the general was behind it all, that he had come up with the defense strategy that would, yes, free a murderer but would also exonerate the men under his command. Schuyler could not prove his theory, but he felt it in his bones.

The U.S. District Attorney tried to counter the defense’s arguments but the larger implications of upholding the prosecution’s case were not lost on Judge Shiras. After he heard the final arguments from both sides the judge ordered the jury to bring in a verdict of not guilty, agreeing that a state of war clearly existed between the Indians at the Pine Ridge Agency and the U.S. government. Although the judge condemned the manner in which Casey was killed, he did uphold the defense claim that the killing was an act of
war and not murder. Plenty Horses was never called to the stand and now he was a free man.

Pandemonium broke out in the courtroom. Schuyler watched the other reporters rushing out to the telegraph office. He saw the two attorneys shaking hands with Plenty Horses but the young man seemed stunned, his eyes focused on some point beyond them. Schuyler sat on the bench, his writing pad on his knee. It had all come to pass as General Miles had hoped it would. His soldiers were not murderers, they were heroes. No doubt, they would receive medals for their heroism. As for the Indians, there would be no medals, only the mass grave at Wounded Knee and for Plenty Horses, not even that.

Schuyler ripped his page of notes from the writing pad, crumpled it into a ball and threw it on the floor. He knew what Hitchcock would do when he failed to wire a report on one of the biggest news stories of the year, but there were others who would find the words to write about the trial. Let them.

Schuyler walked out of the courtroom. He stopped for a moment on the steps, inhaling the fresh spring air. Then he noticed Plenty Horses below him, standing at the side of the street. He was alone. The young man looked up the street, then down, but did not move.

Where was he to go?
The Reich Photographer's Tale

My photo of Herr Hitler slowly emerges from the bath of silver nitrate. I carefully pick it up and hang it on the line to dry, here in this silent closet where everything glows red and the madness of the world outside is safely locked away beyond the door. As I watch, the various tones--pure white, coal black and all the gradations in between--emerge on the paper, revealing the man clearly. Again and again, I remove the sheets from the chemical bath and hang them on the line, surrounding myself with the images of the man I have come to know so well, the man whose every move I record for posterity through the lens of my camera.

Each photo reveals a man with a short moustache, wearing an ill-fitting dark suit and gesticulating wildly, like some overwrought Shakespearean actor. His lank hair falls to one side across his forehead. In the subdued lighting, his face and hands float like ghosts, white and menacing, but it is the eyes that draw the viewer.

In one photo, defiance and anger loom large in his eyes as he takes a step forward, his hands balled into fists, one raised above his head as if he were about to strike. In another, one arm reaches skyward, the fingers of his hand spread wide, while the other hand reaches behind his head like a shot-putter. His head tilts up to the ceiling, eyebrows arched, the eyes open wide and staring, fixed on some star only he can see. In yet another photo, Herr Hitler stands erect, one hand at his waist, the palm curled upward, the right hand raised chest-high. A slender finger points up in a pose reminiscent of Jesus, or some Biblical prophet, but he seems uneasy with this posture; his eyes look off to the right rather than straight ahead, as if unsure of where they should focus.
If one were to take all these photos in hand and flip through them like a moving picture, one would see clearly the furious physicality of Herr Hitler's speeches; the reaching for the stars, the pounding of the air, the angry contorted facial expressions. It is all so melodramatic as to be almost comical but no one is laughing since the September elections, least of all the man who, only six years ago--1924--was imprisoned in the fortress at Landsberg am Lech, convicted of treason. The man whose book, Mein Kampf, swept through Germany like a grass fire and propelled him to the top of the Nazi party.

The photos also reveal the presence of a full-length mirror in the background. It is a secret shared by Herr Hitler and myself that the mirror's presence is not accidental, for he scrutinizes his every movement before the glass, studying each gesture, each action for the effect it would have on an audience. The viewer could not possibly know that Herr Hitler is listening to a recording of one of his speeches as he practices his theatrics, no doubt noting to himself, *When I recite this phrase, I will raise my arm thus and turn my head to the right just so and then when I begin my denunciation of the Juden Republik, I will punch the air with my fist like this, vigorously three times.* It is all mechanical, calculated, each move enacted by rote and I alone know this about him.

While the German people are hungrily devouring his message--the young men lionize him, the Frauleins adore him--I alone know the true man behind the pose. This is no Barbarossa; my photos prove that. Still, we would all do well to remember that he is a driven and dangerous man. I need to always remember that, especially where my wife, Roselyn, is concerned, since Hitler abhors those of her faith.
Later that afternoon, he asks me to bring the photos to the dining room where he is finishing his usual lunch of vegetable soup, black bread and water. The aroma of boiled cabbage fills the room. He dismisses his aides, who dine with him, and we are alone.

--Well then, Heinrich, he says, let's see the photos, shall we?

I hand him the packet and he spreads the photos on the table. For a moment he sits there looking at them. I watch the light blue eyes dart over the images. His face reveals nothing. At last he sits back and looks up at me where I stand beside the table.

--Do you remember the speech, Heinrich? he says, referring to the taped speech with which he practiced.

--Ja, Herr Hitler, I lie, hoping he doesn't test me and ask me to recite a line or two from it.

He nods his head, his eyes locked on mine, silently questioning me.

--A good speech is a flaming javelin which sets the audience afire, he says, a line I have heard him recite before, to which I make no reply.

He picks up one of the photos, a particularly flamboyant pose, and studies it, a slight smile forming beneath the bristly moustache. Then he lets it fall from his fingers.

--Burn them, he says, the negatives as well.

--Herr Hitler? I say.

--Burn them all.

In the evening I hurry through the city streets, strewn with garbage and the debris of the current depression, to my own flat, home to Roselyn. It is unusual for me to have this time with her; Hitler's obsession with recording his every move for future generations
leaves me little time of my own, but tonight he will be engaged in long conversation with his precious Rudi until the early morning and has no need of me. The streets are cold and windy--studies in shadow and light--but the little flat is moistly warm, where potatoes and dumplings simmer on a stove.

I see Roz framed in the kitchen doorway. She stands at the stove, her back to me. She turns when she hears me and her ash-blonde hair is shot through with the light behind her.

In the usual way of husband and wife, we have no need of words between us but gradually settle into a contented intimacy. We dine mostly in pleasant silence until she serves the coffee and asks about my work. I tell her the latest.

But I do not tell her everything. I do not want to alarm her.

In my job as Herr Hitler's personal photographer, I have almost unlimited access to the man and those around him. I have photographed many meetings between his allies and himself, have heard many things as my camera captures the subjects and the man behind the lens, Heinrich Hoffmann, becomes invisible, no more than a part of the set. I concentrate on my work, of course, but I am not deaf to the words I hear and much of what I hear I cannot tell my wife.

Herr Hitler hates the Juden, among others, everyone knows this--indeed, he is proud of the fact--and there are many in Germany who think like him. Raised a Catholic, as was Hitler, I cannot fully understand what it means to be a Jew in Germany, but Roz can. She tells me of the jokes and rude comments made about Jews, the little public snubs. She says she can tolerate these; it is nothing compared to what her grandparents suffered at the hands of the Cossacks in Russia. But I remember how Jewish shops were
vandalized by the Nazis on election night last September, when their party surprisingly 
took 107 seats in the Reichstag, making it the second largest political party in Germany--I 
remember and I worry.

So, we talk of other things, Roselyn and me--the depression, of course, and the 
millions unemployed and hungry--as we sip our coffee from chipped cups. I do not want 
to dwell on unpleasantries and I tell her of the photos, of the ludicrous poses of Herr 
Hitler. She laughs as I tell her this and her laughter is all the music in the world to me.

Roselyn sits across from me, her white coffee cup held chest-high against her dark 
sweater. Behind her head, the doorway to the kitchen. I would bring out the contrast 
more, I think as I look at her, darken the doorway to better emphasize her hair, her face.

--But, Heinrich, she says, I don't understand why he asked you to take the photos 
if he planned to destroy them anyway.

--He is not an easy man to understand, I say. I think the photos embarrassed him.

--How so? she asks.

--The people love his speeches, I say. They are pure theatre. He stirs them up, 
inspires them. What would they think if they knew their fiery leader practiced before a 
mirror?

--They would think he was a fraud, she says.

--Exactly.

--Have you destroyed the photos?

--Not yet, I say.

Later that night, while Roz sleeps peacefully beside me, a terrible dream disturbs 
my sleep. I dream of my darkroom, the photos of Hitler and the negatives lying in a metal
I strike a match and touch it to a corner of one of the photos, watching the image blacken and curl. A small fire grows in the pan, reducing the photos to ash. I turn to leave and open the door. I am instantly outside, alone in a panorama of intense heat and swirling flame. I can feel the heat sear my skin, smell the foul odor of burning things and there is nowhere to run in a world that is furiously burning.

The next day I accompany Herr Hitler and one of his aides across town to Osteria Bavaria where he is to meet with a group of business men and socialites, people who only a few years ago would not walk on the same street with him. It is a boring assignment and I take the requisite photos of Hitler shaking hands with each man, smiles all around for the camera and I wonder why he can't change his necktie once in a while. At least he has left the whip he habitually carries in the car.

Six of them crowd around the table and it takes me some time to frame them all properly. The lighting in the low-ceilinged restaurant is not good and I fiddle through the f-stops until I can compensate for it. The men ignore me as they go on talking and eating; I will signal them when I am ready.

A portly, bald man sits to Hitler's left, a man I know only as Froehlich. He is a merchant of some sort and is complaining to Herr Hitler about how his business is suffering in the current depression. Hitler warms to the subject immediately.

--Froehlich, it is the Juden, he says. They control the money, the banks. They fatten themselves while Germany starves.

--Froehlich nods in agreement and the others listen intently. Herr Hitler is invigorated and his eyes flash as he launches into his vision of a future Germany. He is
talking so rapidly, no one can interrupt, even if they dared. His slender fingers punctuate his points. Then, in a well-practiced gesture, one hand closes into a fist and slams to the table as he says, there will be no place for Jews in a modern Germany. A knife clatters to the floor and the restaurant is silent.

--Meiner herren, I say, this way please. Smile.

In the darkroom that evening, Hitler's face gradually materializes in the chemical solution like the face of a drowned man floating to the surface. He looks directly at the camera and his eyes are like chips of obsidian, devoid of light. The photos were taken just as he concluded his tirade in the restaurant. His smug expression tells me he is quite pleased with himself. The men gathered around him seem less sure and wear nervous smiles. Their eyes are troubled with shadow. One man cuts his eyes to the left, as though seeking escape.

I recall the words Herr Hitler spoke in the restaurant and I think of Roselyn. It is not so much his words that trouble me--he is, after all, a politician and his speeches are full of rhetoric, empty of specifics--but it is the transformation I see in him whenever he speaks of Jews. Something comes over him, takes hold of him and I know that he truly believes his words. He hates Jews absolutely and each day his power grows. This is what troubles me. This is what makes me fear for my wife.

He never inquires about my personal life so I do not think he knows about Roz. I hope he does not know, but I am aware of the network of informants, spies and Brown Shirts surrounding him and I cannot be sure that my secret is safe. I am struck with the sudden thought that perhaps I should resign my position and take Roz and leave the
country. But where would we go? Germany is our home. It is a crazy idea, born of my fanciful imagination. So, the man hates Jews. What could he do about them?

I show the prints to Herr Hitler before I leave for the night. He is pleased with them and compliments my work. I am nearly out the door when his words stop me in my tracks.

--Heinrich, he says, the others? You have destroyed them?

The photos from his practice session. Busy as I am, I have forgotten to burn them as he had ordered me to do, but I cannot tell him that.

--Ja, Herr Hitler, just as you directed me, I say.

--Good man. I will see you in the morning, he says.

When I leave the room, I quickly steal back to the darkroom, grab the envelope containing the prints and negatives in question, thrust the packet beneath my overcoat and hurry outside. I do not dally on the way but try to maintain a normal appearance so as not to arouse suspicion. How would I explain the photos hidden beneath my coat if a policeman detained me? The packet pressed against my chest seems to weigh me down like armor.

At last I am home and I rush up the stairs to the flat on the second floor, bolt the door behind me. Roselyn looks up from the book she is reading and smiles but the smile disappears when she recognizes my agitation.

--Heinrich, she says, closing the book and putting it aside, what is it? What's wrong?

I remove my overcoat and drop it on a chair.

--Look, I say, dropping the envelope on her lap.
She looks at me, then opens the envelope and removes the photos. For a moment I think she is going to laugh at the images of the ridiculous little man but she doesn't laugh. Her face is pale.

--What are you doing with these? she asks.

I kneel on the rug beside her chair.

--I was supposed to burn them, but I didn't.

--Heinrich, if he finds out--

--I know, I say, reaching for her hand. Don't worry. I'll take care of everything. Here, give them to me.

I take the photos into the kitchen. I set them on the stove, then crack open the window. I turn on the burner and, one by one, set the photos ablaze, the fine, pungent smoke curling out the open window. When all the photos have been burned, I reach for the negatives.

I am aware of Roz standing behind me, watching. Without turning, I see her before me, clearly defined in my mind, the most beautiful portrait I have ever seen. My hand holding the negatives freezes before it reaches the burner. I hear Hitler's words again, see the hatred in his eyes and I think that perhaps Roselyn's safety, our safety, may be leveraged with these little pieces of film. They may be insurance against an uncertain future. I know I am not being rational, am, in fact, sinking into paranoia, but I cannot shake these thoughts. Nor can I speak them aloud. I would sound like a madman. Instead, I slip the negatives into my pocket and turn to Roz.

--You're not destroying those? she says.
I tell her no, but when she asks why not, I cannot tell her the truth, cannot speak my fears or tell her of the world in flames, shown to me in my dreams. I smell the acrid smoke again and I do not know if it is real or imagined. All I can do is softly kiss her and tell her not to worry.
Like Sun After Clouds

Dover’s first recollection of Italy was not of the country itself but of the sound of artillery shells screaming overhead--or was it his own screaming?--while he clawed deeper into the hole, the warm Italian earth spouting up in geysers all around him. His second recollection of Italy was the sunlight collecting in little pools among the shards of pulverized buildings.

That was 1944, five years ago. He had come a long way since then, Anzio and the endless year in hospital recovering from his wounds no more than a dream seen through gauze. Until now and his third recollection of Italy which was no recollection at all, but a pang of grief and loss felt deeply in his bones. It was to understand that pain and, by understanding, to overcome it, that Dover had returned.

Sunlight flooded over the cobbled piazzas where bricklayers sang from scaffolding. He watched them working on new walls high overhead, heard the whispered scrape of their trowels on stone. Everywhere the rebuilding. Everywhere the songs. What mad faith this was, to put one's trust in bricks mortared with song.

The sunlight was warm on his face. He closed his eyes for a few minutes. When he opened them he saw again the workmen brightly illuminated like saints in a medieval manuscript.

He picked his way around a pile of splintered timbers and crossed the piazza. A tobacco shop squatted at the corner of a narrow street. The tiny shop was welcoming compared to the vast, flaring space of the piazza. Although he wasn't looking for cigarettes--he had his own—he stepped inside.
“Buon giorno,” mumbled the old man behind the counter. He wore a naval watch cap pulled down over his ears, as though he were in Siberia instead of sunny Italy. “Americani?”

Without waiting for a reply, the old man pushed forward a pack of black market Lucky Strike, a knowing smile upon his face.

“No, grazie,” said Dover in his limited Italian. He continued to browse the shop until he saw a rack of dusty books and maps, a single Baedeker guide to Rome and its environs prominent among them. It was printed in German, a language he couldn’t read and didn’t speak except for a few commands, but the maps were clear and the illustrations plentiful.

“How much?” he asked. “Quanto?”

The man shrugged, smiling a toothless smile.

Dover dropped a handful of lire into the old man's hand and stepped outside.

He found a bench in the shade beneath a tree and sat there, casually riffling through the pages of the old Baedeker. He paused when he came to Anzio pages. There was a photo of the harbor as seen from the pine-covered heights of the ridge above the town, the promontory of Monte Circeo rising from the sea like a spine. There was also a city map with churches, important buildings, and historical sites laid out in meticulous German detail.

He studied the map then looked across the piazza. He consulted the map again. The two images did not match. The map depicted a thriving seaport but the actual town looked as though a child had used an eraser to rub out entire sections at random.

He sat for some time studying the gaps in the town's ancient profile where centuries-old houses and churches, shops and cafes had once stood. Beyond those
gaps the Tyrrhenian Sea curled as blue as it did that spring five years ago, a few small fishing boats bobbing on the tide.

What had he expected? Considering the war’s destruction, it was a miracle that the town had been able to rebuild itself at all. In a few more years, all the gaps would be filled, all the wounds healed. And himself as well? Could he fill in the gaps of his own life?

“Sir? Are you all right?”

He was suddenly aware of a man buckled into a tweed Norfolk jacket standing before him. In Dover’s distracted state, the man seemed to have materialized out of nowhere. The man leaned toward him and Dover saw concern in his eyes.

“Yes, I’m fine,” he said, rising from the bench.

“Ah, good,” said the man. “Sorry to have disturbed you then. You looked to be in quite a state.”

“No, I’m fine.” Dover smiled, despite his inclination to tell the man to mind his own business. He thought it might be the man’s British accent that annoyed him.

The man straightened himself and said, “It’s the heat, no doubt.”

Church bells suddenly rang out, drowning the songs of the masons toiling above the hot piazza. The sound emanated from a bell tower only faintly visible in the glare from off the sea and Dover did not know what it signified, if anything; church bells were forever ringing in Italy.

The man checked his watch and frowned. “I must be off. Are you certain you’re quite all right?”

“Yes,” Dover said.

“Very well, then. A good day to you, sir.”
Dover nodded his reply and watched the man stride across the piazza. The bells tolled again.

In the pealing of the bells he recalled the church along the road between Anzio and Nettuno, the sixteenth-century church his map identified as Santa Maria della Consolazione, although he hadn't known the name then. Nor had he ever heard that church's single bell ring except with the metallic ping of stray bullets. He wondered if the church still stood by the roadside but thought, no, it could not be, not after all that had happened.

The bells fell silent, echoes rolling up the ridge behind him. The workmen were singing again, their voices breaking out like sun after clouds.

Three boys came loping down the narrow street and exploded into the light of the piazza, kicking up little whirlwinds of dust as they booted a half-deflated ball among them. Their clothes were second-hand, Red Cross issue perhaps, but they didn’t seem to care. If they had suffered from the horror inflicted upon the town a few years back, they did not show it now. In their youthful faces Dover saw nothing but sheer delight in the sunshine, in the vitality of their limbs, their bodies, as they punished the hapless excuse for a ball. Radiant, the word came to him then, and he thought of the marble cherubs riding clouds of glory, smiling down at him from the ceiling of Santa Maria just before the darkness smothered him.

The boys ran across the piazza, their shouts to each other gradually fading. His mind still lingered in the cool recesses of Santa Maria, the thick, dark quiet after heaven had burst forth--what else could it have been?--the rising, the lifting up, the engulfing well of silence.

He remembered opening his eyes to cool, white light, hearing the gentle slap of crepe soles on polished linoleum, and realizing in one horrible moment
that he felt nothing below the waist. It’s all right, son, the doctor said. Don’t worry, we’ll get you walking again.

The sun warmed his hand where the shadow of the tree had moved and he started from his reverie. Brushing dust from his pants, he retraced his path across the piazza. He came to a street that roughly followed the contour of the shore. Guidebook in hand, he strolled down the street, making mental notes of weedy and wind-blown patches of earth that the map argued were pensiones, shops, and cafes.

He was aware of these missing pieces as an amputee is aware of a missing leg, with a distinct pain and memory that could not possibly be real. He thought he could remember empty tables and chairs in the disappeared cafe, shattered windows in the invisible bakery and phantom bread loaves spilling onto the street, the bloated carcass of a dead mule in the alley, but could he trust those images? What had been real and what had been the product of his long recuperation, a carefully crafted recreation of what he thought his life had been?

In time, son, it will all come back to you, the doctor had said.

Will it?

Yes.

What if I don't want it to come back? What then?

The doctor had made no reply, and some time later Dover decided he could not move forward unless he went back, the gaps in his memory like chasms he could not cross.

A cool breeze sprang from the shore as the sun began to retreat in the west. He was hungry and tired, this return to Anzio and the morning train ride down from Rome draining more from him than he thought it would, more than he
would ever admit to the smug shrink at the VA hospital who had advised against the journey.

He ate a simple meal in a nearby trattoria and found a pensione on the harbor side of the street. It was a new building, still awash in the scent of fresh plaster and paint.

An old woman led him upstairs to his room, a tiny but clean space with a single window overlooking the bay. Through the open shutters he could see what remained of the sun—a thin, red line upon the horizon—and the blue sea turned gun-metal gray. He lay down on the bed, still in his clothes, and shut his eyes. The surf boomed outside the window, its constant pounding both soothing and terrifying, and he thought of Anzio Annie, the huge German railroad cannon, lobbing quarter-ton shells down on the town, on him. He squeezed his eyes tighter, as if that could stop the throbbing in his head, but he knew there was no remedy.

He didn't know how long he lay listening to the crashing sounds within and beyond him before his fatigue overcame him and he fell into a deep sleep. He dreamed of the stone cherub faces smiling down at him.

In the morning he went back to the trattoria, took a seat facing the street, and ordered breakfast. The young woman who set the steaming cup before him smiled but he did not notice. He sipped the coffee, his eyes trained on the street as though awaiting something momentous, but there was only a man pushing a barrow full of bricks and an old woman unfurling a dusty carpet from a doorway.

Something about her attention to her work, the determination in the simple act of shaking out an old rug, shook his memory. He saw the hospital and the ghostly nurses floating among the beds, dutiful in their valiant, hopeless
ministrations. The corpses beneath the crisp sheets, the bodies lying amid the rubble, all the same, and he walking out of hospital instead of being carted out. Good as new, son, good as new, the doctors said. Dover wondered even then, Were they right?

The woman snapped the carpet one last time before disappearing inside her house. The man with the barrow was gone. Anzio was trying to heal itself, plastering its wounds with brick and mortar, but was it working? Desolate places remained, chunks of the town's collective memory yanked out like botched surgery. He wondered if the desolate places would always be there.

So maybe this trip wasn't such a good idea--I tried to tell you, the psychiatrist would say, no good dredging up the past, you must look to the future--but debating the wisdom of his decision was useless. He was here.

He turned his head at the sound of another English speaker, saw the man in the Norfolk jacket about to take a seat near him, and their eyes met before Dover could turn away and he was caught.

“Buon giorno,” the man said, loud enough to attract the attention of the other patrons. “We meet again.”

The man stood near Dover’s table. “May I?” he said, already drawing out the empty chair.

Dover gestured vaguely with his hand and the man seated himself.

“Ronald Arlington,” the man said, thrusting his hand toward him. “Ronnie. I’m an engineer, working with the Italian government.”

“Dover,” he said, shaking hands, “from the U.S.”

“Of course you are,” Arlington said. “Know a Yank when I see one.” He signaled to the waitress, ordered tea and, when it was served, loaded it with what seemed to Dover to be several pounds of sugar.
He watched the man stir his tea. He couldn’t tell how old Arlington was. Young, he thought, but his broad grin and booming voice imitated the demeanor of a much older man, a man confident in himself and the ways of the world. What was that like, to have such confidence in yourself?

“If you don’t mind my asking,” Arlington said, “what brings you to Italy? You can’t be a tourist.”

“No,” Dover said. But if not exactly a tourist, what was he? An archaeologist? Digging up his past?

“What then?”

“I was here before.”

“During the war, you mean.” Dover nodded. “I see.”

“You do?” he asked, curious about the man’s presumptiveness. “What do you see?”

Arlington carefully set the teacup on the saucer. “I don’t mean to presume that I know precisely why you are here,” he said. “Nothing of the sort. But I can understand a military man visiting again the scenes of his personal triumphs, reliving, so to speak, his glory days.”

“Glory days?”

Dover sat back in his chair, his untouched coffee cooling before him. He was aware of other people coming and going around him but only peripherally, as if he and the engineer had been drawn inside a tube. At the far end of the tube, the man sipped his tea.

“Mister Arlington, are you a religious man?”

“Please. Ronnie.”

“Are you?”

Arlington noted Dover’s serious expression. His smile disappeared.

“So you would believe in eternal life.”

“An afterlife? Maybe heaven or something like that? Yes, I would. I do.”

“And resurrection of the body? What about that?”

Arlington did not answer and it seemed to Dover that the young man was rattled. He slid his coffee aside and leaned across the table, narrowing the gap between them.

“What if I told you I died five years ago?” Dover said.

“What?”

“I died, Ronnie, I’m certain of it, even if only for a moment.”

“Died.”

“Yes.”

“You don’t expect me to believe that you’re some sort of Dickens ghost.”

“Of course not. That’s the point. I’m as real, as alive as you are. Flesh and bone and blood.” He rapped his knuckles on the table. “Still—“

“What?”

“It haunts me, this little death of mine. To have seen it, felt it, to have survived it. Why me, when others did not?”

Neither man spoke. Dover saw again in his mind’s eye, the hospital, the doctors, the nurses, and before that, the church, and knew that he was right. He could only imagine what Arlington thought, probably that he was loony, but Dover knew better.

“This is a very strange conversation,” Arlington finally said.

Despite himself, Dover laughed and the laughter seemed to break something free in him. “Yes, it is.”
“See here, Dover. By the time I was called up for the army Berlin had fallen to the Russians, so I can’t say I know what it’s like to be in combat, but I know something of fear, something of death and dying, something I learned as Hitler’s bombers flew over London. I know this. Death has no favorites. It makes no sense and you can drive yourself bonkers trying to make sense of it.”

“When it’s your time, it’s your time?”

“Righto.”

“Maybe, but I feel like I’ll go crazy if I don’t try to understand.”

Arlington held his teacup in two hands. Dover noticed how finely manicured were his fingernails.

“You should be grateful you’re alive,” the man said.

“Yes.”

“Aren’t you?”

That was really the question, wasn’t it? He was thankful, of course, to feel the sun warm his face, to feel the cold metal chair beneath him, to hear the engineer’s voice and the voices of the others chatting over coffee and biscotti, to know that his feet pressed firmly upon the tile floor and that his legs would answer should he decide to stand, yes, for all these things he was grateful. But how could his life go forward when others had died, when he, himself, had died but somehow cheated death?

“I need to understand.”

“Some things are beyond understanding.” Arlington drank the last of his tea. “I wish you the best of luck, though,” he said.

The men shook hands.

“Perhaps I’ll see you again,” Arlington said, as he rose.
Dover took a swallow of his cold coffee and sat for a few minutes after the engineer had departed. He paid the bill at the counter and stepped out into the street. He took the Baedeker from his rear pocket and flipped it open. Ambling down the street, his head dipping and rising as he checked the guide against landmarks, he looked like a priest immersed in his Divine Office. Each time he looked up and saw emptiness, he wished that the space could be filled, not with a new structure as was happening all around him, but with the original. He wished to march the years back to a time before the fascists and the madness, when the town drowsed peacefully in the sun, a time in which something—what? God? Fate?—could have inserted a single cosmic finger and stirred up a different future, one that would have precluded him ever reaching these shores.

Don't worry, son, you're in good hands here, the doctor said once he had been shipped stateside. We'll get it all back for you, you'll see. You'll remember everything.

I don't know if I want to.

Of course you do.

No, I don't know. Will I have to die again?

Son, you didn't die. You're damned lucky to be alive, the doctor said.

He had been wandering the streets and now, when he lifted his head, he found himself on the road to Nettuno. There were fewer buildings here on the outskirts of town and the wind skipped down the road, swirling dust and debris. He squinted in the bright light, the wind filling his ears, his heart stuttering in his chest. Just around that bend had been Santa Maria della Consolazione.

Do I have to die again? He had asked the doctor.

You didn't die.
Didn't I?

He stood there a long time, alone on the hot, dusty road, the wind plucking at his clothes, no sound but the rushing air whispering in his ears. Slowly, he began to walk. His heart knocked against his ribs but his feet were moving anyway, trucking him down the road. A copse of trees in the bend of the road hid what lay beyond but he thought he remembered. He drew closer, broke into a run, rushing to face whatever was there and get it over with, just as he had done five years ago.

Around the bend he slid to a stop, his breath rasping in his chest. He knew the church could not have survived--it would have died with him that day--but the shock of the rubble-strewn field of weeds and wildflowers nodding in the sunlight was a hammer-blow to his heart. For long moments he stood there, trying to breathe, the warm air as thick in his lungs as the ceiling plaster and dust that nearly choked him that day. It was crazy to think it, he knew, but he had hoped that somehow the church would still be there, a memorial of sorts dedicated only to him, with an inscription in granite: He is risen.

Instead, a field mouse rooted among bits of mosaic tile. Vines crept over the stub of the campanile, a broken-toothed lump of stone. The wind sighed over the ruins. The only other sound was the muffled thump of construction machinery from the town below.

The throbbing in his chest slowed. He carefully picked his way among the debris, heaps of stones and shattered timbers, jewel-like fragments of colored glass. He did not often find the need for prayer, but he remembered his need that day five years ago and he remembered Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name--and the high-pitched whistle of the shells pouring down--and Mother, Mother--and the angry whine of the shell he knew was right on target, the
sound and the furious light stuffing his senses to congestion and the lifting up to heaven.

He stood in the devastated churchyard, his head cocked to one side, listening still.

That night it all came back to him, the first time in five years. Through fretful sleep he saw it all, the 45th. pushing off from the beach in a storm of shells and rifle-fire, his own K company leading the way, the town and men exploding around him in indistinguishable bits of stone and bone, and himself suddenly alone, stepping around the corner of a crumbling building at the same time as a Nazi soldier from the opposite direction, the bursts of gunfire leaving the German dead and himself with a searing fire in his thigh that made every step torture.

He collapsed to the ground, the earth founting up around him as the shells continued to drill the landscape. Amid the ear-splitting din, he heard the bullets ricocheting off the bell of Santa Maria della Consolazione, only dimly visible through smoke and dust. Crawling all the way, he finally dragged himself through the open doors, discovering--thank you, God--that the church was empty but then realizing that his legs were gone, no, not gone really, but senseless, immovable as stone pillars. In great pain, he twisted onto his back and lay on the floor, looking up at the painted ceiling arching above him. Marble cherubs smiled down at him, mocking him, perhaps, for the helpless turtle he had become. He lay there listening to the shells closing in around the church, finding the range, toying with him. The certainty came to him that he would die and so he was not at all surprised when the cherubs and he flew towards each other as the church was instantly obliterated in explosive, blinding glory.
He awoke with a start and sat up in bed. He heard the sea dragging itself over the shore, inhaled the scent of low-tide and jasmine. He threw his legs over the side of the bed, the cold terrazzo floor a shock against his feet. There would be no more sleep that night. He lit a cigarette and stood by the open window. Shreds of black clouds scraped across the moon. All was darkness along the shore except for a tiny signal light far up the coast. He focused on the light and it seemed to grow larger in his eyes.

Yes, yes, you're doing fine, son, said the doctor, removing the light from Dover’s right eye, then shining it into his left as he searched for God only knew what. Now, let's check those legs, shall we? and he began to knead the atrophied muscles, squeezing and pushing, oblivious to his patient's pain.

How is it? Dover asked, through gritted teeth.

Weak, still, said the doctor, but I see no reason why you can’t have complete recovery.

How long?

The doctor released his legs. Depends on you, son. It's all up to you. How strong are you?

He hadn't answered then, hadn't known the answer. A year passed before he walked out of the hospital, his legs restored and functional. From the outside, he looked good as new.

Daylight was creeping up over the beach and the signal light was growing indistinct. He took one last drag on his cigarette. He flicked the butt out the window.

After a quick breakfast of coffee and crusty bread, he strode up the slope to the Nettuno road and the ruins of Santa Maria della Consolazione, Baedeker in hand. The sun was rising, the weeds wet with dew.
He sat on a shattered column and opened the book. He held it in his lap and turned to the picture of Santa Maria della Consolazione. The slightly grainy photo did not detract from the architectural wonder that had been the church; the gracefully wrought spiral columns of the facade, layered in stories one upon the other, the niches between them filled with life-sized statues of saints and angels, the whole pantheon surmounted by an elaborate rose window in the apex, above which, on the roof, stood the marble likeness of Santa Maria. To one side of the church stood the campanile, a slender, squarish tower of columns and arches, stone-latticed windows, and angels high above supporting the uppermost section of the tower which housed the great, brass bell.

He had never seen the church that way. Five years ago, through the fog of war and the storm of his own terror, the church had been nothing more than a place in which to crawl, a place to bury himself, one more foxhole.

He looked at the rubble strewn before him and tried to imagine the church standing there in all its grandeur, as it had for five centuries. He stared long and hard at the fractured stones, as if his will alone could lift them into place, and he strained to hear the bell's song ringing out over the town below.

It depends on you, the doctor had said. How strong are you?

Maybe there was an answer to that question after all. He was alive. Anzio, Italy, the world was dragging itself forward, trying to forget, to rebuild. New hopes mortared in song. And here he was.

He picked up two broken stones and set them end-to-end in the dirt.

He imagined the church slowly taking form again, healing itself from the inside out. He imagined that he could thwart time, redirect it, so that the blood and bombs would magically vanish. The war, if there had been a war, would never come to Anzio. It would never come to him.
The sheets were tangled around Carter’s legs. Hot air slithered in over the window sill. It smelled of car exhaust. Night voices echoed in the street below. Cars motored by and somewhere above the dirty tenements, a siren wailed.

He had been dreaming of Nam again, rain drumming on body bags, transports waiting like vultures in the distance. He heard the cargo bays snap shut as the dead slid into the bellies of the transports. The engines sprang to life and he awoke.

He glanced at the clock by the bed. Three A.M. He rolled on his side and threw his legs over the edge of the bed. He sat up, the steamy air close upon his skin.

"Baby? What is it?"

He turned and saw Della leaning on one elbow, the sheet drawn up over her naked breasts. She gently touched the hard ridge of scar tissue at his back.

"You okay, baby?" In the dim light of the room her dark eyes glittered.

"Couldn't sleep. Sorry I woke you."

He got up and went to the window. He placed his large hands upon the gritty sill and leaned out. Three men stood outside the halo of a streetlamp, cursing each other, pushing and shoving, their feet scratching on the sidewalk as they fought over a paper-wrapped bottle.

"Shit," Carver said, as he sat back on the bed. It sagged under the weight of him.

"I hate this goddamn town."

Della's fingers trailed lightly over his back. He tried to relax, let her touch soothe him, but he felt the bones beneath his skin rigid and inflexible.
She knew what was bothering him. "It'll be all right, baby. It's not like the end of the world or nothing. They come around. You'll see."

"You don't get it, Della," he said, staring at the wall. A dim red glow from a sign outside pulsed weakly on the wall. "There ain't nothing to come around to. The plant is closing. Just like that. Six years pissed away."

How long he had waited for a job like that. After the army, it was still nothing but lines, waiting on lines every day. Lines for food stamps, lines for welfare, lines for lines for jobs that didn't exist and then, one day, there was work finally, and he took it. Pushing rivets into no-name jeans but decent enough pay. Now, nothing. Just like his father after the railroad shut down and left him with nothing.

He sighed deeply. Della felt the rise and fall of his spine beneath her fingers. She wished she could do something for him. "Come to bed, Sam," was all she could say, all she could offer.

Morning broke through the open window. Carver's eyes were wide open. He wasn't sure whether he had slept or just imagined he had. Della was already out of bed. He heard her in the kitchen, trying to be quiet as she made breakfast.

He shuffled into the tiny kitchen, pushed his cap from off the table and sat down, his elbows resting on the scratched surface. His wife filled the coffee pot.

Street sounds flew up from the avenue below and swirled through the kitchen. It was like he was already on the bus, heading crosstown to the factory.

But not today. Man.

"Coffee be ready in a minute," Della said.
"I ain't going nowhere." He watched his wife while she got out mismatched plates and cups, took the eggs out of the refrigerator, and cracked them with a delicate tap into a little yellow bowl. He had never paid much attention to her morning ritual before, contenting himself with a quick look at the sports page as the aroma of coffee filled the room. It was her job. It didn't much matter to him. He saw her in a new light this morning, her petite form wrapped in a blue bathrobe, moving through the kitchen expertly, efficiently, like some new machine down at the plant. He envied her usefulness.

Watching Della, he was reminded of his mother fixing breakfast for his father before he went to work at the rail yards. He was comforted by the memory because it was warm and smelled of happier times. But he was just a boy and life was still good for his parents.

Carver’s father came up from Georgia to this damned cold city by the lake and was lucky enough to find work with the railroad. Carver remembered the greasy overalls and dirty cap, his father's big hands etched in grease, his mother running hot water in the sink so he could wash for dinner.

He talked about work while he scrubbed his hands beneath the steaming water, of the trains that came and went out of Chicago and Carver imagined himself riding those trains, watching the vast countryside roll by as he rushed on to some new and exotic place. Sometimes on the weekends his father would take him to the rail yards where he watched the names of those magical places slowly scroll by, painted in letters taller than himself on the dirty cars. Erie and Lackawanna. Chesapeake. Baltimore and Ohio. Santa Fe. At night, the long slow whistle of a distant train was comfort to him, tucking him in, whisking him off to sleep.
His mother worked too, only a few hours each day, in Woolworth's pet department where she scooped dead fish from the aquariums and dumped bird shit out of the parakeet cages until management decided that the store made more money on caramel popcorn and greasy hot dogs at the lunch counter than it did on guppies and neons. After that, she did what she could, taking in laundry, a little sewing, a little mending.

Together, Ned and Opal Carver made it work.

Carver and his brothers never went to bed hungry as some of his friends did, guys like Freddie and some of the others at the basketball court, who didn't even know their fathers. The Carver kids wore clothes that weren't all hand-me-downs or Goodwill issue either, but were sometimes bought brand new at Robert Hall's.

If his family was poor, Carver didn't know it.

But then the railroad died and his father was out of work. The streets were filled with black men with no place to go, nothing to do. Business at the liquor stores and the pawn shops was brisk. The basketball courts became crowded with players and spectators, men who gravitated to the drugs and paper-wrapped bottles being passed among the loiterers.

Ned Carver looked for work but none was to be had. The few dollars that Opal brought in barely kept the family in groceries. Once the unemployment compensation kicked in, the family fared a little better but there was a change in the apartment as palpable as the rime of ice that formed on the winter-chilled windows.

His father became sullen, withdrawn, and at times, surly. His mother tried to ignore the stranger that slumped at the kitchen table all hours of the night, rarely speaking, his eyes fixed on something far away, something that only he could see, but she
was not a good actress. Carver could see the fear and uncertainty swimming in her eyes like predators of the deep and he was scared.

And then the drinking started.

He never saw his father hit his mother but sometimes Ned would disappear for a few days and Opal would do her best to cover up bruises that she called accidents. There wasn't anything he could do about it, being just a kid.

On the nights when his father was gone and he could sleep without fear, he longed to hear the trains again. He longed to feel the rails pounding beneath him as the train carried him away, took him to a better place. When he was old enough the U.S. Army obliged his longing and carried him off to Vietnam, where the pounding of the rails became the pounding of rocket mortars in the night.

He survived, mostly because of Della. He remembered the letters she sent to him in Nam, the only things that kept him sane. Little birds of love, they winged their way to him through the tracers and the napalm. Without them he would not have made it.

It hadn't been easy for her, either. He knew that, knew about the two jobs she worked to hold things together and to divert her mind from the cruelties of the evening news. Knew, too, about the fools that came around, sniffing around his woman like dogs in heat. But Della wasn't like that. She stood by him, just as Opal had stood by her husband, despite what he had become.

Well, he would do better by her than his father had done by Opal. He was a vet now, had served his country, had even taken a few wounds in the back that almost killed him, and now it was his time to be repaid. It wasn't too much to ask.
He remembered the jungle, walking point, out ahead of the others, dragging his feet forward, just waiting to step on something solid, something bad, something like a mine that would blow him sky high like a fucking geyser.

When his luck did run out, just one month short of being shipped stateside, he never knew what hit him. One minute he was on point, the next he was in a chopper being air-lifted to a field hospital, two ragged holes punched through his lower back. He wondered if the bullets had ripped through Della's letters, folded neatly in his pack.

They said he was lucky. A millimeter to the right and his spinal cord would have been severed. He got his Purple Heart and a free ride home. Not that he didn't have long painful days of recovery and a rehab that felt like years, but he survived, even though there were still days when the pain speared through him again just to remind him who was boss.

This fucking country owed him.

He boarded the smoky bus at the corner and headed crosstown, not for the plant but for another place. He found a seat directly over the wheel, bouncing along as the driver steered for every pothole that damned city had to offer.

The bus passed the basketball court, the cracked asphalt buckling under the sun, the young toughs, their lean torsos dripping sweat, glaring at him as he watched from the window. All they saw was an old man. They didn't know.

They probably weren't even born yet when he played, when he muscled his way through the solid wall of flesh, dodging, spinning, looking for an opening. None of them remembered him or Freddie.
Freddie the Fireball. So fast the ball was just an orange blur in the air. He remembered Freddie rocketing down court, flying, skying toward the basket like a crazed eagle, shoving that B-ball down through the net as easy as pie. He dreamed of the pros. He was NBA material all the way. Everyone said so. Some pro, Oscar Robertson maybe, even came down here to take a look at him.

That seemed like ages ago but the young bloods didn't know. They were maybe only babies when Freddie the Fireball fizzled. They may remember him, like a dream, sitting in his wheelchair by the fence, dully watching the players flow up and down the court like a beautiful black tide. Maybe they glanced at him and figured he got his in the war. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time, too busy concentrating on his lay-up to see what was going down in the streets. He was caught in the crossfire of a turf war and the slugs nailed him in the spinal cord, dropping him to the asphalt like an old broken doll.

After that, he would show up courtside in his chair, never saying anything to anybody, just watching. That went on for maybe a year or two before he finally blew his brains out with a borrowed pistol.

Whole city blocks, glaring in the bright sun, passed by as the bus rolled on. It went by the little brick church where he and Della were married. First Abyssinian Baptist Church, the Reverend Orlando P. Queens officiating. The neighborhood was looking sad now, worse than ever. Some of the windows of the church were boarded over. It was hard to tell if there was even an active congregation there anymore.
Farther downtown, the streets and sidewalks were crowded with people, each one knowing exactly where to go and what to do. He wished he were like them, wished he had someplace where he was supposed to be.

The bus squealed to a halt. He stepped off, the doors whooshing closed behind him, and entered a world at once familiar yet alien to him, a place he had known so long ago, a place he thought he had escaped.

A small brick building with grimy storefront windows stood on the corner. One window was cracked. A long length of brown tape tried to hold it together.

Across the street was a liquor store, the windows protected by a thick metal screen, the bottles on display behind it like cons on visiting day at the slammer. The iron security fence was folded back. The lights were on inside. Ten a.m. and open for business. A woman in tight shorts and halter top, too tight for her flabby body, loitered near the door. If there was money for booze, maybe there was money for her.

People gathered in knots, milling around the brick building. Some were dressed in Sunday clothes but most were dressed like himself, in work clothes. A couple of men passed around a bottle. A teenaged girl sat on the step of the building. In her arms she cradled a sleeping baby wrapped in a pillow case. The girl was no more than a baby herself, fourteen maybe. Couldn't have been older than that. She held a cigarette in one hand. It seemed dangerously close to the baby.

There was a vacant lot beside the building, weedy and littered with garbage. An old man in a greasy mechanic's uniform sat on a rusty barrel, his hands dangling loosely in his lap, as he stared into the weeds. For just a moment, Carver saw his father, his big hands layered with black grease in the days when he had work.
He stepped past the young mother—"Hey girl, careful with that cigarette, now,"—and pushed open the door. Lines of people snaked along the breadth of a wooden counter behind which impassive faces called out "next" with an undisguised lack of interest. The people looked as though they had been there forever, even though the office had just opened.

He remembered the lines, these people whose faces were the same as before. He remembered his father standing in line, his long fingers worrying the soiled cap in his hands, shaking his gray head sadly as he talked about the lack of work with the man in front of him. He saw again his father's stony expression as he led Sam by the hand out of the office, denied once more. That was a long time ago.

Welcome back, man. Welcome to the rest of your life.

He found his proper section along the counter. Seemed like old times. Wonder of wonders, there was no line at all. He was first. He took his cap off. Carver stood there, behind the red line of tape upon the floor, his arms folded across his chest, and waited.
The Last Honorable Man

When I first called on Luther Holloway to ask him for his help with Operation Helping Hand, I could almost understand about his not having much idle time because of his pumpkin, an Atlantic Giant squash to be exact. It was one hell of a pumpkin, five hundred pounds easy, looking like the moon just fell down from the sky. No time for anything else, he said, especially with the Circleville Pumpkin Show coming up; Meigs County is a poor one, a man finds his pride where he can.

Operation Helping Hand wasn't my idea, but I liked it from the start. Reverend Phelps and Howard Soames from the county social services department came up with it after they heard about a similar event that happened near Cincinnati. The plan was to round up as many of the homeless as we could, more than a few of them Vietnam vets, and bring them together for a weekend where we would give them food, shelter, clothing, whatever they needed, maybe find work for some of them and a place to stay.

I figured I was lucky to have come back from Nam in one piece, to have a place to come back to, and I wanted to help out. One thing I learned in Vietnam was the value of sticking together, watching out for each other just to get through one torturous day after another. There were some other vets in the county that I called to help out. We couldn't raise more than a hundred dollars donation among the five of us, so we thought about the next best thing and gave what we did have, food raised on our own farms. We hoped Luther Holloway would join us.

"Why don't you just see about him, Russell?" said Buddy Raab.
We were standing out front of Atkinson's Feed, the late afternoon sun shooting bars of light through the dusty air. Buddy sat on the muddy rear bumper of his truck.

"Why me?"

"You're the one talked us into this. You convinced us, you can convince Holloway," Buddy said, trying to keep a straight face; everyone knew that Luther Holloway was not an easy man.

The others were grinning at me.

"Thanks for nothing. Any of you care to come with me?" No one volunteered.

"Chickenshits," I said.

Holloway's farm was the closest to my own, two miles down Stump Hollow Road, but I cut off some time by crossing over the fields. Much of my acreage was in tobacco, not uncommon in this corner of Appalachian Ohio. The crop was still standing tall in the field as I passed through the rows and I noted the broad green leaves already turning yellow and starting to curl.

As I drew closer to Holloway's farm, I thought about the chickenshits back at the feed store. They weren't the strongest-willed men I had known. They talked a good game but not one of them would ever take a stand. Let good old Russell do it, they would say, and I would. It wasn't always easy for me but I had long ago decided that it was far more satisfying to be the one leading, rather than the one led.

I came up the ridge overlooking Holloway's place and startled a pheasant out of the brush. The bird rocketed up into the sky in a flurry of feathers. I drew an imaginary bead on it and took it down. Buddy Raab could have dropped that bird before it had climbed more than a few feet above the ground. I remembered a time before the war,
Buddy and me out hunting, when we flushed a pheasant just like this. Before I see the
bird, Buddy has his rifle up and, blam, one shot knocks that pheasant down. The bird falls
to the ground. Not a feather out of place and I don't see any blood. It's as if Buddy talked
the bird into dying. Target shooting is all Buddy does these days, with an old Smith &
Wesson that belonged to his daddy. Don't need two hands for that kind of shooting.

Holloway's farm lay below, the white frame house nestled between the ridge and
a lively little creek. In the spring, swollen with winter melt, that creek would come roiling
over its banks, threatening to relocate the Holloway house to another county, but it never
happened. Too afraid of old Luther, I figured. On the opposite bank stood a tobacco barn
black with age and shot through with sunlight. A neat white fence ran by the barn and
disappeared up over the ridge.

I didn't see anyone around as I came down from the ridge. Luther's brand new
Dodge Ram was parked in the yard, sporting a Marines Corps decal in the rear window. I
was about to step up on the porch when Ike, Holloway's fat old black-and-tan, came
around from behind the house, sniffing the air like he was tracking something, and right
behind him came the man himself.

"Luther," I said, with a nod of my head.

"Hello, Cates, something I can do for you?" He regarded me with a stern look, as
if I had just scratched the paint on his truck. He stood with his hands thrust into the
pockets of his overalls, a green ballcap pulled low over his eyes. Even at sixty-something,
he was like an oak, solid and imposing.

"Hope you can," I said, shuffling my feet in the dirt. It was hard to look at him.
He had a square-jawed bulldog face that made you think one wrong word and he'd bite
your head off. "I was sort of asked by the others to talk with you and see wouldn't you like to help us out this weekend. You know, with Operation Helping Hand."

He snorted. "Helping Hand."

It sounded ridiculous when he said it. His squinty eyes drew down to mere slits. He stared as if I had suddenly sprouted horns. His gaze unnerved me and I understood how he had been a war hero in Korea, probably stared the enemy to death.

"You all going through with that?" he said. He thought about it for awhile, as if we had decided to do something truly bodacious, like plant all our fields in marijuana and invite the feds in for the harvesting. "What do you want with me?"

"We'd like you to help out."

Ike was nosing around my boots. He chuffed loudly, put off by something pungent that had attached itself to my sole, gave me a sorrowful look, then waddled off to the porch, curling up under the steps.

"Cates, let me show you something." He had me firmly by the arm before I could run. He led me around back of the house. I figured he didn't want to shoot me where people could see. But he didn't shoot me. Instead, we were walking through his pumpkin patch, careful not to trip over the green vines that slithered across maybe a full acre, snakes trying to escape over the ridge. Right in the middle of the patch was the Atlantic Giant. I remembered that goofy nursery rhyme, the one about the guy who kept his wife inside a pumpkin shell. This pumpkin could have kept my whole family, me, Kate, and the three kids, safe from the elements with room for sleepover guests.

He patted the giant squash fondly. "You see this, Cates?" he asked, as if I was completely blind. "This baby is going to take first prize at Circleville this year."
"I have no doubts about that, Luther."

"Yes, sir. I've coddled this thing every blessed day, weeding, watering, fertilizing, killing the bugs, chasing away the varmints. You have no idea how much time and energy I've put into raising this pumpkin. Do you know I haul six thousand gallons of water up from the creek every week for it? It's taken everything from me. You can't imagine."

I could imagine. When I was seventeen years old, my obsession was rebuilding a '59 Ford top to bottom. All my waking moments, and most of my sleeping ones, were centered on that car. It was my life. I could understand the passion, except that I was seventeen then and didn't know what I know now which is, that all things pass. All the heartless things. Pumpkins, old Fords, they don't matter. They all disappear. Only people mattered.

"Luther, we could use your help this weekend," I said, striking up enough nerve to get to the point.

"No time," he said, running his hands over the pumpkin, inspecting it for God only knew what.

"Well, how about a cash donation then? We could always use some help in that regard."

His hands stopped. His dark eyes turned up at me.

"Listen, Cates, count me out of your little tea party, understand?"

"Luther--"

"Forget it."
"Damn! I don't get you. Most of these guys are vets. You were a damned jarhead, yourself."

He glared at me. "That was a long time ago, boy. I'm out of it. We have nothing more to talk about."

He went back to his pumpkin, ignoring me as I stood in the field, rigid as a scarecrow. I turned and walked back around the house.

"Russell?"

Eleanor Holloway was standing on the porch. She wore a dark blue sweater draped over her shoulders to ward off the chill settling over the land as dusk fell. A cool breeze sprung up, floating a few strands of her iron gray hair.

"Ma'am."

She took a step closer. "I saw you two out back. He turned you down, didn't he?"

"How did you know?"

She shrugged. "I thought that was what you were here for. I'm sorry you wasted your time."

"Yes, ma'am. I just don't understand what's bothering him, though."

She came down the steps and stood before me. Ike perked his head up when he saw her, expecting food no doubt, then dropped it down upon his paws again when he saw she was empty-handed.

"It's just his way, Russell," she said. "Sometimes he gets riled up about something and there's no changing his mind. He's not just being ornery for the sake of being ornery. He's got his reasons."

"What reasons?"
Her clear blue eyes clouded for a moment. "I don't know," she said, unconvincingly. "But I'm sure they make sense to him."

"Only to him," I mumbled. Too late, I realized she may have heard. "Sorry," I said. "I'm just getting a little edgy trying to put this whole thing together."

Eleanor was never one to take offense. "It's all right," she said. She turned and headed up the steps. "Say hello to Kate for me."

"Yes, ma'am."

The next day, a small convoy of trucks lurched down the dirt road beside Roger McHugh's fields and came to a stop at a broad, fallow field, his contribution to Operation Helping Hand. Men were already unloading the trucks, hauling out field tents, cots, mess equipment, medical supplies, and a whole assortment of things necessary for a base camp. It could have been Nam all over again.

Buddy Raab was standing alongside Roger, watching the volunteers. The day had gone chilly and he wore a fluorescent green sock over the stump of his left hand.

"You boys do good work," I said, watching them doing nothing at all.

"We're specialists," Roger said. "We come on later." He was wearing an army field jacket, the one he wore in Nam. I envied the fact that he could still fit into it. My jacket had mysteriously shrunk on me several years back and had long since found its way to the Baptist clothing drive.

Roger didn't belong to my church. He was one of the handful of Catholics in the county, so few they didn't have a church closer than twenty miles away. I kidded him about the Bathtub Virgin standing in his front yard, saying that he didn't need to go to
church, he could just pray at his little shrine and get clean at the same time. One-stop soul and body cleaning.

"Did you talk to the man?" he asked.

"Yeah. No dice."

"What's his problem, anyway?" Buddy said.

"Beats me," I said. "I say we forget about him."

That evening, we brought our own trucks, loaded with food, over to McHugh's field. There were about twenty tents set up, the majority of them sleeping quarters and the others serving as commissary, mess, medical clinic, job services, and counseling. We even had a tent where our guests could get a hot shower and a haircut. We unloaded the trucks. Me, Roger, and Buddy, along with Wilson Shifflet and Charley Oldham.

"You think he'll change his mind?" Wilson asked me, hefting a bushel basket of apples.

"Who?"

"Holloway, of course. Who did you think I was talking about?"

I sighed. "Wilson, I don't want to hear anything more about Luther Holloway. The man told me he was out of it and that's the way it's going to be. Understand? Let's just forget about him and do what we came here to do."

"Sure, Russell, okay," he said. "Just asking."

Truth was, I couldn't forget. It wasn't him really, not Luther Holloway the man, as much as what he stood for, what his refusal to pitch in meant. I was okay about people holding different points of view. One of my friends ran off to Canada to avoid the draft, but I never condemned him. Still, this was a tight community and it was so because we
all looked after each other. Not that we got into each other's business, although that happened at times, but we did try to help each other out when help was needed. That was the only way to make it in Meigs County.

Luther's refusal to help, his mulishness about his damned pumpkin were starting to get to me, especially with everyone asking me about him, as if I were his keeper. It was becoming personal.

When I got home that night, Kate could see right away that something was eating at me. She asked me what was wrong but I didn't have much of an answer, so she let it drop. Sometime later, after I had tossed and fidgeted half the night away, she tried again. "This is about Luther Holloway, isn't it?"

I raised my arms and let them fall heavily to the mattress. "Yes," I said, gazing up into the darkness.

"Why does it bother you so much?"

"I don't know, Kate. It's just not right somehow. He's got more money than any of us. Why can't he help? It's not like it would kill him."

She turned on her side, propping her head upon her hand. "Maybe he's got his reasons."

"That's what Eleanor said, only she didn't know what they were. At least she said she didn't." I turned to Kate. "What kind of reasons could he have for refusing?"

"Does it matter?"

"What do you mean?"

"Luther believes he has reason. Isn't that good enough?"
In the dim light, I could just make out her long dark hair flowing against the whiteness of her shoulder. I reached out and stroked her hair, my hand a black bird in the dark. We were quiet for a moment before Kate spoke again.

"Russell, did you know that Luther had a brother?"

"I’d heard something about that."

"He was in Korea just after Luther. He died there."

I felt something cold and sharp as a bayonet suddenly expand within me, filling me with a sadness and despair I had not felt since my days in country. A brother. I had lost friends in Nam, had seen them pulverized in the dark jungles, and had learned, after considerable effort, how to get over it, how to go on. But a brother?

"How do you know this?"

"Eleanor told me. It was awhile back and she asked me not to tell anyone about it."

"Why not?"

"Because of the way he died, Russell. He was running away, leaving the others behind, running for his life, when he was shot."

I was silent as I remembered the cold sweat of anticipation, the heart hammering when the first shell exploded, the overwhelming terror that could force you to run as easily as stand and fight when the jungle exploded into flame around you.

"It happens, Kate. Not everyone is a hero like Luther."

She turned. In the pale moonlight she looked made of marble.
"I guess so but he took it very badly. He said his brother had never been afraid of anything, said the Army did it to him. Wore him out, he said, kept him in the field too long, until he snapped."

"I'm sure it was rough on Luther," I said, "but that was a long time ago. Is he going to hold onto his anger forever? Maybe it's time he let go. Maybe it's time to heal."

I settled back in bed wondering how easy it was to let go.

The morning dawned cold and bleak. Fog slithered down the ridges and collected in the hollows, magically transforming everyday objects into shrouded ghosts. Frost coated the stubble fields and glazed the windows. I felt the cold air rushing through the leaks in the windows and made a mental note to caulk them again before the winter set in.

I arrived at the Helping Hand camp just after eight. Volunteers were already gathered at the site, bundled against the cold morning. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee scented the air as hot cups were passed eagerly among numbed hands. Gratefully, I accepted a cup.

There were more volunteers than I had expected. Reverend Phelps, and Howard from social services, Roger, Buddy, Wilson, Charley, and me, the wives, some of the other farmers and some people I didn't know, maybe from around Athens. It was really something, to see all those people gathered in the cold to help out a bunch of strangers. I felt good, felt like we were doing what was right, what needed to be done.

That feeling made Luther's absence so much worse for me. I tried not to think about him, told myself to forget him but I could not.
I hadn't been there much longer than half an hour when the first bus parted the soggy curtain of mist and rolled into camp. Everyone cheered as if the bus had just returned from a trip around the world. When the doors opened, a ragged assortment of men stumbled off, embarrassed by the cheers and smiles of the volunteers. They looked stunned, the walking wounded. Reverend Phelps came forward and shook hands with the first man off the bus. After a few mercifully brief words of welcome, the group was led to the mess tent.

Then I saw Eleanor Holloway.

She was standing at the edge of camp near the mess, barely visible in the fog swirling around her. She seemed confused, just standing there, like she had been out sleepwalking and suddenly woke up at our camp. She turned and slowly walked under the canopy of the tent. Kate was working at the commissary and I saw her look up and stop what she was doing. Then she reached out to Eleanor, took her by the hand and led her behind the row of plywood tables that had been set up for the men. Eleanor followed Kate's lead and began pouring coffee for the chilled guests.

Even Luther's wife saw fit to come and help us, to join the rest of the community as we reached out to others, and still he did not budge. I imagined him in his pumpkin patch, worshipping that damned orange giant of his, and I was furious.

Something had to be done.

I went around to the boys and told them to meet me later that night at Buddy's place, told them I had something important to talk over with them. They all showed and the five of us sat around in Buddy's parlor.
I thought once I laid out my plan to destroy Luther’s damned pumpkin everyone would agree with me right off, since they were the ones kept pestering me about him. It didn't happen quite that way.

"I don't know, Russell," Buddy said, "seems a bit drastic to me." He rubbed his chin with his hand and glanced at the others. "What do you all think?"

There was silence. Nobody would look at me. Then Wilson squeaked from the end of the sofa.

"We don't want to hurt anyone," he said.

Some of the others bobbed their heads in agreement.

"Who said anything about anyone getting hurt?" I said. "We're just going to teach him a lesson, not lynch him for God's sake."

Silence again. From the corner of my eye I saw Buddy's wife, Rose, standing by the kitchen door.

"You all aren't trying to tell me that you agree with that old goat, are you? Whatever happened to neighbors helping neighbors? Whatever happened to charity?" I said.

"We're all for that stuff," Buddy said, "but--"

"But nothing," I said. "Chickenshits. You all talk a good game, don't you?"

"Maybe we should just give it a rest," Roger said.

"We can't," I said. "He's part of this community, just like the rest of us. Do you think he's any better? Is he a better man than you, Roger?" Silence. "That's what I thought."
Rose eyed us from the parlor as we pulled on our jackets and headed out into the night. We didn't say anything to her and I saw her face against the window while we climbed into Roger's truck. She looked sad. Buddy and Roger sat up front in the cab, the rest of us shivering in the back as we bounced over the road to the Holloway farm. The night was cold and clear. The branches of the trees hunkered near the road were like the bones of dead men against the sky.

We came up on the ridge and saw the house below us, the moon flowing like molten silver upon the tin roof. Roger cut the motor, turned off the lights, and let the truck glide down the ridge on its own, applying the brakes so that we came to a stop a safe distance from the house.

The five of us slipped out of the truck. The only sound was the quiet chuckling of the creek, slipping beneath the moon. Ike was nowhere around, probably curled up inside the house, dreaming doggie dreams, but Charley kept the package of wieners in his jacket pocket just in case.

We crept around to the back of the house, our shadows tangling with the dark vines upon the ground. For just a moment, we paused there, awed by the immensity of it rising from the earth. Luther's pumpkin seemed to grow larger, threatening to obscure the stars and moon, threatening to overtake the field, the farm, the county itself if we let it. We set to work.

Buddy stood sentry while the others carefully rolled the orange monster to one side. They held it there while I took a claw hammer to its pale belly, smashing a big hole through the orange meat. Then we gently set it back in place and stole off to the truck.
Roger started it up and pulled out of the yard, spraying gravel when a light came on inside the house. I used a rag I picked off the floor to wipe pumpkin guts off the hammer. No one said a word as we drove home.

In less than a week the pumpkin died, collapsing in on itself like a slowly deflating balloon, its mortal wound concealed beneath five hundred pounds of rotting meat.

That Saturday I drove by McHugh’s field, the imprint of the tents still visible in the flattened grass. I was proud of our community, proud of what we had done; in one week we provided care for over fifty homeless people from several counties. We had done good. I sat in the truck a few minutes, thinking, and I couldn’t help but wonder about Luther, whether he finally understood. Despite the warm Indian summer sun, I felt a sudden chill pass through me and remembered that winter was coming on and that my windows needed caulking. I started the truck and drove home.
Adam holds the infant in the crook of his arm, carrying it protectively against his chest. The little bottom and tiny legs lay in the palm of his hand. The baby's head rocks gently against his arm as he walks. It's a girl, less than two hours old.

The deserted corridor from Labor & Delivery is gloomy, half-concealed in shadow punctuated by occasional pools of light. The only sound is the gentle slap of his crepe soles upon the shiny floor.

The baby rocks in his arm, as if stirring, and he is suddenly conscious of the weight of her miniature body pressed against his chest. He doesn't want to think about it. He is only eighteen. He shouldn't have to do this.

He wishes the baby were alive.

He stops before the elevator and fishes the key out of his pocket. The elevator bumps and sinks into the bowels of the hospital and squeals open when it reaches the basement.

This is the part of his job he hates most.

The silent darkness yawns before him. He feels for the light switch, finds it, and a single bare bulb flares overhead, chasing back the shadows. Something slick and leggy skitters across the damp wall, fleeing from the light. Black pipes like arteries snake through the darkness above him. He switches on the lights as he walks down the hall to the morgue, lighting up the narrow channel sections at a time. Each time he reaches for a light, the baby cradled in his arms moves.

Jesus.
The morgue is in darkness, the light switch halfway across the room. Adam pauses for a moment, listening to the electric hum of the cooler beyond and glances back at the naked bulbs flickering in the passage. He plunges into the dark as if stepping off a cliff, his fingers scrabbling over the cold walls, searching for the switch.

The lights flood the little room in a pure, white brilliance, like noon on the beach. In the center of the room stands the cooler, a wooden box six feet square, deep enough for a man to lie in at full length. Four compartments, two up, two down, are secured by doors with large metal handles that remind him of a Good Humor truck. A simple metal cross is mounted above the top doors.

Three of the compartments are occupied, the top right compartment partially filled. He lifts the baby with both hands, the little girl's head filling his palm, and gently places her in the compartment.

He leaves the girl and flees the morgue, half walking, mostly running, flicking off the lights as he goes, the darkness pooling behind and streaming after him, palpable and living. Only when he ascends into the light of the hospital's main floor and the elevator door closes behind him is he certain that nothing has followed him up from the subterranean morgue.

It is 1 a.m. and the floor is deserted. He heads for the canteen and sags into a cracked plastic chair, nursing bitter coffee from the vending machine. He feels his gut dissolving into a mess of runny tissue as the acidic brew sludges down inside him but it is something he needs now, something to prove that he is still alive. Heartburn will do that for him.
Adam picks up a discarded newspaper from the table and scans the front page. The usual news from Vietnam. Battles at places with unpronounceable names. Pep talks from the generals and the state department. The latest body count. One article talks about the Selective Service's new lottery system, the first drawing a mere six months away. He tosses the paper in the trashcan.

When the first rays of pink touch the windows, he punches out and steps into the morning, filling his lungs with the cool, fresh air. Although it is early, the city is already coming alive, shrugging off sleep, preparing for yet another summer's day. The cross atop St. Vincent's dome slashes dark lines against the rising sun.

Adam's old Ford is parked on a side street. As he unlocks the door and slips behind the steamship-sized steering wheel, an oriental-looking boy passes by. He notices Adam, dressed in his whites, and waves, probably thinking he is a doctor, a man worthy of respect as his parents had taught him. Adam returns the wave and watches the boy pick his way over the buckled spine of sidewalk beneath the shade of a large maple, his Loony Tunes lunchbox twinkling when he emerges into the sunshine.

Adam eases the car into traffic. He punches buttons on the radio but finds only news--mostly about the war. He switches the radio off and thinks instead about the boy and his lunchbox, wishing he were that young.

Where was the boy going so early in the morning, armed with a lunchbox? Running away from home? He remembers when he was six and decided to run away. He took a lunchbox packed with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, two Oreos, and a pack of baseball cards. He walked around the block to the empty field behind his house and ate
the food. Through the tall weeds his house seemed unreal, otherworldly, like a painting, and he was suddenly afraid of not being a part of that painting and ran home.

His mother never said a word about his running off but the framed photograph of his father—wearing the same uniform in which he was buried, after being shipped home from Korea and lingering for several months in the West Haven veterans' hospital before the Chinese bullets finally killed him—stared reproachfully at him and he knew he would never run away again. From anything.

Adam is drained by the time he reaches home and falls into bed, dreaming fitfully of uniformed men as the photo he knows as his father comes to life.

The next morning, a day off, he is out and heading for Seaside Park and the waters of Long Island Sound. The day is bright and golden, the sun warm on his skin as he drives with one arm out the window.

Kathy sits on the seat beside him. She is a cool sixteen-year-old, a smoker and gum chewer, tough, a worry for her parents. While the Byrds sing "Turn! Turn! Turn!" on the car radio, she blows smoke out the open window with a bored expression.

He gives her a sideways glance while he drives, seeing only the back of her head as she gazes out at the bone-dry fountain at Park and Fairfield. Clouds of cigarette smoke blow back into the car.

"I thought you were going to quit," he says, pitching his voice over the electric guitars on the radio.
She turns to him and snorts out a little cloud of smoke from her nostrils. Jesus, Puff the Magic Dragon, he thinks.

"Yeah, I am. Soon as this pack's gone."

He hates to kiss her after she has been smoking, stale tobacco lingering upon her lips and breath. He has seen the old men hacking up pieces of their lungs, spewing up bright blood, as they wait to die. He doesn't wish that on her, or anyone.

He wonders which is worse, dying of lung cancer or being shot. He is not a smoker so he is probably spared the one, but the lottery is only six months away. Whether or not he gets shot up in some rice paddy thousands of miles away could be settled by a bingo caller in an army uniform--"B-23, pack your bags."

He wonders what his father would have thought of the lottery, of the war itself. Would he have served, if called, or would he have resisted? He doesn't know the answer, buried as it is with the remains of a man he couldn’t remember; Adam was a baby when his father died.

No one seems to know how many men LBJ needs but estimates keep climbing. Adam doesn't like to think about it, neither do the guys he hangs around with, but they all feel the tension, the uncertainty. One has already begun his run for the Canadian border.

Adam imagines Jonathan tramping along dark country roads somewhere in Vermont, sleeping by day in birch woods or some farmer's barn, pushing stealthily northward by the light of the moon. What desperation, Adam thinks, to leave family and friends behind with no hope of return. Wasn't that a kind of death too? Still, he couldn't blame his friend for running. Adam wonders if his father ever thought of running away.

"Do you like this song?" Kathy says.
Her voice breaks his reverie and he's fully returned to the red and white interior of his '59 Ford, the hot summer air blowing in through the windows. "Yeah, it's cool."

"God, I hate it. Too depressing."

"No way. Listen to the words. There's more to the world than Beach Boys songs, you know."

A cloud of cigarette smoke drifts past his face.

"Oh, please. Beaches and fast cars. Man, what more can you want?"

He glances at her and sees that she is smiling. "That's enough for you, huh?"

She nods and lets a ghost of smoke slowly escape from her lips. "Right on, brother." The wind blows a wisp of hair across her face.

He laughs and shakes his head, but he is jealous of her innocence. What pleasure to lose yourself in fast cars and beaches, rock & roll and mindless sex. It's more difficult for him these days when his thoughts are often hung up on horrors that can't be described in daylight.

They pass beneath the park's stone arch entrance, a replica Arc De Triomphe constructed years ago to memorialize veterans of World War I.

Kathy flicks her cigarette butt out the window.

Beyond the arch, the waters of Long Island Sound glow like liquid jade in the sunlight. People didn't swim in the polluted water anymore, fearful of what they might step on or swallow, but the coarse sand is hot and the sunlight sparkles on the water, and that is enough for Adam.

The beach does take him away for a while. There is a spirit here, hovering over the water, riding on the ebb and flow of the waves that soothes him. The thin blue line of
Long Island far across the water beckons him. He can forget about everything, let his mind open up and spiral across the hard blue sky like the gulls wheeling overhead. The sounds in his ears are the wind whistling across the sand, the crying gulls, and the muttering rumble of the waves dragging over the rocky flats.

They spread their blanket on the sand. Revealed in a two-piece swimsuit, Kathy's body is an interesting distraction for him. She is no cheerleader but it doesn't matter. He finds comfort in the warmth of her leg beside his. He lays his head upon her chest and is fascinated by the beating of her heart. She is his drug, his anesthesia against the nightmares.

He tries not to talk about his job as a nurse's aide because he knows it depresses her, but sometimes it cannot be helped. Something in the crying of the gulls tugs at him and he feels the little girl in his arms once again.

Kathy listens to him talk about the baby, or at least he hopes she does. He is propped up on one elbow. She lies on her belly, her head turned aside, eyes closed. She could be sleeping for all he knows. She has the top of her suit untied to get an even tan.

"Jesus--I held this--little baby, like it was my own, you know? Like I was tucking her in for the night."

He feels a shiver ripple along his spine and thinks it is a gust of wind from offshore. She does not answer. He looks out to the water and sees a gull dip low, strafing a wave, snagging something in its beak before flapping up and away.

She opens one eye and squints at him. "Why don't you quit if you don't like it? It's only part-time, anyway. There are plenty of other jobs around."
"I don't know," Adam says, "maybe I just feel needed there." He sits up, one hand in the sand, letting it sift through his fingers. "I like what I do. Who knows, maybe one day I'll be a doctor."

"You take it all too personally. I don't think doctors are supposed to do that."

He shrugs. "Maybe not. I can't help it."

"I'd walk away from it if I were you."

He knows that is true. She wouldn't be able to handle it, wouldn't want to, once she saw the old men fading away in the pungent wards and heard the prayers and fearful whispers in the waiting rooms. You have to be--what? A sadist or a martyr to do what he did. She couldn't handle it. Sometimes he can't handle it himself.

His friends are hauling golf clubs for fat old duffers at the Brooklawn Country Club, wiping down newly washed Camaros at E-Z Wash, or flipping burgers at McDonald's. Safe. No pain.

"I can't do that," he says.

He picks up a small crab shell, nothing left anymore but the carapace, riddled with holes. He holds it up to his eye and looks through it, narrowing the world down to this single framing of the peaceful waters of the Sound. It's an image he holds in his mind--an image thankfully devoid of the morgue or the TV footage of black body bags laid out in rows waiting to be flown back to the U.S. He flicks the shell away.

He can't explain to her what his work at the hospital means to him; he can't fully understand it himself. He feels that he helps relieve the suffering he sees there every day and isn't that important? He thinks of his father and those that helped him through those last agonizing months. Isn't that a valuable gift to offer, compassion? Especially now,
when entire populations of Vietnamese villages are incinerated by napalm? What if he
were sent there? Surely, God would grant him some small favor in return for his mercy,
wouldn't he? Maybe a fair trade--one day’s safe passage in Vietnam for every patient he
helps now.

"I can't walk away," he says. "I feel like I'm the only one that can do the job. That
sounds stupid, doesn't it? But that's how I feel sometimes. The job is something I'm
supposed to do right now."

"Who says?"

"Just me."

She lifts her head from the blanket and looks at him, both eyes open, one hand
shielding them from the sun. He sees the smooth upper slope of her breast. He can hear
her heartbeat in his mind.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she says.

Adam laughs. "Yeah, guess I'm laying a pretty heavy trip on you, huh?"

"Are you all right, Adam?"

"Sure, I'm cool."

She studies his face. "Really? You seem bummed out."

"No, I'm OK."

He leans toward her and kisses her forehead. He tastes the sea salt on her skin.

She smiles, lays her head on the blanket, closes her eyes, and, with a slight wiggle
of her hips, resettles herself beneath the sun's rays.

He looks out to sea where a ship moves slowly across the horizon, its profile
ghostlike in the haze. He wonders where it is going, wonders what it would be like to be
aboard right now, bound for mysterious ports. He is surprised to find a part of himself eager for escape and he thinks of his friend, Jonathan. Has he finally made it to Canada? He hopes so.

He watches the ship until it is lost in the mist. He turns back to Kathy lying peacefully in the sun and envies her, envies the safety her gender gives her. What does the war mean to her, anyway? He can feel its weight bearing down on him, even from six months away. Does she feel it too? To him, the burden is palpable, like the body of the infant in his arms. He would like to tell Kathy more about the baby, about the others, about the fear he has for his own life, but he knows it is unfair to her. She is only sixteen, still in high school. What can she say?

How could she understand how unprepared he had been for college and what that could mean? An average student in high school, he finds himself struggling in his first semester in college. He is afraid he could fail. He is afraid to disappoint his mother, but even more, he is afraid to be suddenly snatched up by the army. College is only a deferment and not an exemption from military service. He could try to ride out the war in college--how long could it possibly last?--but if he flunked out and were assigned a low number in the lottery, he could kiss his ass goodbye.

"It's more than the job, isn't it?" Kathy says, interrupting his thoughts. He doesn't answer. "It's that fucking lottery."

Adam is surprised by the anger in her voice, yet finds comfort in it; it's a blessing to know she cares.

"You can't let it bring you down, Adam."
"I know." And he does know that he shouldn't be depressed by what has not yet happened, but this is 1967 and every eighteen-year old male in the country is depressed. Every one of them tastes the uncertainty, the hopelessness upon their tongues like cold steel.

"You're a smart guy. You'll figure it out, I know you will," Kathy says, still lying on her belly.

“Figure it out?”

How do you figure it out, he wonders. How do you make an end-run around fate and the democracy of chance? His father couldn't figure it out. Jonathan ghosting his way through northern woods couldn't figure it out. What makes her think he is any smarter than the others?

“I heard somewhere that if you enlist, instead of waiting to be drafted, that you could go wherever you want. You don’t have to go to Vietnam,” she says.

“Why would I enlist?”

“I mean if your number came up. Mark Hopkins enlisted. Now he’s in Spain with the Air Force.”

“You can’t always make a deal with them,” he says.

“But it’s worth a try, isn’t it?” Kathy asks.

“And you’d wait for me?” he asks, surprising himself with the question.

“Where would I go? I haven’t even finished high school yet.” She switches on the radio and Bob Dylan's nasal whine is instantly snatched up by the wind and carried down the beach. All Adam hears is a tinny chirping like crickets in beach grass.

"Would you mind doing my back? There's some oil in my bag."
He squirts oil in his hands and smoothes it upon her back. He feels heat radiating up against his palms. She stirs a little at his touch, her muscle and bone flowing beneath his fingers. He watches the slow rise and fall of her back, noticing the artery throbbing along the side of her neck.

Later, after the sun sets and they are entangled naked on the wide back seat of his car, he feels the thrust of her pelvis against his, her bones moving beneath him, the fragile skull under his fingers, and, Jesus, he thinks of the baby. Kathy is moving beneath him and he concentrates on her hot flesh, on the softness of her skin, on her scent, her taste, the sweet sounds that escape from her like music.