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THE COMEDIANS: A NOVEL

by

Roswitha T. Both

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ABSTRACT
THE COMEDIANS: A NOVEL

by

Roswitha T. Both

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee , 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor George Clark

In the spring of 1970, university campuses across the United States were roiled by the news that the Vietnam War had been escalated, through a bombing campaign, into the jungles of Laos and Cambodia. The protests at UW-Madison campus were among the largest. Frustration that, despite years of protests, the War not only continued but had expanded beyond Vietnam's borders, led to the bombing of a physics research building on the UW campus later that summer. THE COMEDIANS begins a few weeks after that bombing. The novel's primary setting is a student housing co-op near Langdon Street, formerly known as Fraternity Row. The male residents of this co-op decide to harbor one of the bombers of the physics research building, who has failed to disappear into the underground as the other two have. For the duration of the novel, from the beginning of the semester to Halloween, the male residents of the novel are concerned with a scheme to conceal the identity of their new lodger from the female residents, who have begun to hold feminist consciousness-raising sessions that disturb the relationships of several of the couples living in the house. The night of the Halloween party, the co-op is invaded by a local biker gang, rampaging right-wing reactionaries, and the FBI. When the dust clears, the fugitive is gone, and two of the house members, both in relationships with other people, are on their way to falling in love.

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Prologue

The city of Madison lies on an isthmus, a wide strip of land between two blue Midwestern lakes. State Street, on the lower end of the isthmus, is the center of downtown Madison, linking the Wisconsin State Capitol with the University of Wisconsin campus. Back in the 1950s, *Life* magazine dubbed Madison the Athens of the Midwest. But don't be deceived. That big white dome, those faux-Romanesque columns, recall a civilization in ruins when we first re-discovered it, our architectural homages a backhanded compliment to the remains of misunderstood glory.

Opposite the dome on the other end of State Street, on a shady hill studded with more remnants, sits Lincoln's statue on its throne of carved rock. On the right lies the lake they call Mendota, a Ho-Chunk word meaning "big blue lake white man fill with algae." Glories of western civ, dead ahead. Bascom Hill looks deceptively serene on a warm September Friday afternoon. Most of the students have retired to the Rathskellar to drink beer and argue amongst their factions. Only a few linger on the grass, reading or tossing blue or yellow or white disks at each other, sometimes managing to catch them.

At the foot of Bascom Hill, a hirsute and ornery tribe throngs State Street. Among them move small people with clean, short hair, frightened-looking people, especially when they are accosted by leaflets, which they take, hurriedly stuffing them in their pockets. The others, the leafletiers, veterans identifiable by their army-surplus clothing, appear restless, accosting each other with questions, warily looking around.

Along the edges of the Library Mall; outside the University Bookstore (one of many bunker-like structures recently constructed on this part of campus); lining the entrance to Paul's Books (used); covering the lamp pole in front of Rennebohm's Drugs, its windows invisible

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behind sheets of plywood; outside Burrito Brothers (named after the band and selling what you'd expect); at the Brathaus; at Spudnuts (doughnuts made in some arcane manner from potatoes); at the Chocolate Factory; and the place that sells all the Badger sporting things, the hockey sticks and Bucky sweatshirts; thick at the Yellow Jersey Bike Co-op where the same rusty no-speed has been chained outside for months; stopping only at the feet of that white-domed building topped by the gold statue of some muse-type woman; in fact, all along this stretch of straight but not narrow road, with its easy Friday-afternoon traffic and its sidewalks crowded with students and University-town hangers-on, covering every telephone pole and lamppost and papering the entryways to many of the businesses, are eight-and-a-half by eleven sheets covered with words and art, hand-drawn, screen-printed, or run off on mimeograph machines. The Magic Lantern Film Society is screening Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief*. Another flyer, hand-lettered in primary colors, announces: AMRC IS THE REAL CRIMINAL! This one is taped up next to one that says FBI MOST WANTED above a high-school yearbook photo of a thin-faced, wanly smiling boy in black-framed glasses. His name is Barry Stein. The FBI wants him for blowing up a University building, resulting in death to a physics professor and serious injury to his graduate assistant.

The law has been busy. This poster is accompanied by several featuring the other two members of the Labor Day Gang, Kevin Armstrong and Larry Buell. These two are clearly grown men, covered in facial hair but under twenty-five. Given that all three members of the Labor Day Gang are still at large, the law has not been very successful.

On a sunny Friday afternoon, the Capitol Building appears unprotected, benign. But were one of the veterans to approach it unexpectedly, by a side entrance, men in tall boots

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carrying rifles would suddenly appear, directing them to move along now, be someplace else, you long-haired commie piece of shit.

If you really want to enjoy our State Capitol, it's important to see it by night, when it may be a long way a long way up those terraced stairs leading to doors made of brass. But that's all right. We are not going to be hoofing it up those stairs. We will be conveyed.

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Chapter 1. "The Bag of Man"

Around this time, a few steps from the Capitol building when everything is happening at the other end of State Street, Jake Winslow, student and worker, cores a jalapeno in the kitchen of Pancho's foods of Mexico. Focusing the worker portion of his brain (only a third, "lover" comprising a good share) on the guacamole of which this jalapeno forms a component, Jake slices, cores and chops the pepper into tiny, speck-like pieces. He soon notices a fiery tingle in his fingertips and wonders if these fingertips will still be tingling when he gets home tonight and runs them down the (problematically) voluptuous body of his newly wed wife, Jeanie. Would she too begin to tingle? Would his hands leave a trail of fire down the length of a Junoesque thigh? Even more so than usual, let's say? And what if he were to go into the men's room right now and give his cock a couple of pulls? Would he then be able to transfer this same tingling, burning sensation to tender and moist feminine parts? Of course his wife is working tonight, at that new job of hers at the pancake house out on Park Street. But there are ways around that situation. He could, for instance, smuggle a jalapeno into the pocket of his jeans.

Just then a hand appears in the long window that separates the chefs (as they call themselves) from the red cavern of the dining room. Jake feels a kinship with this hand, which is disproportionate to the medium-sized girl it is attached to, because he too has hands that don't match the rest of him. Jake has a slim, muscular frame, thighs that would do a smack-crazed rocker proud, and he ought to have those tapering fingers that look good holding a guitar pick and sending waves of feedback over an adoring crowd. Instead he's got thick-fingered, calloused, working man's hands, now ferociously chopping lemons in half like a Frenchman

decapitating aristocrats. He glances up to see if the owner of that substantial female hand, Renate Weile, has noticed his skill with a blade.

She appears unimpressed, or impressed in the wrong way. The large yet feminine hand now covers the bottom-half of her face, and her moss-green eyes are wide with either mirth or horror as she twirls around and rushes off into the gloom of the restaurant.

“Fuck was that about?” Jake mutters, not really expecting a response.

“I dunno, but if I were you, I’d start singing the praises of Betty Friedan,” says Christian Hobbs, the other day chef, snatching Renate’s ticket off the order wheel and slamming two platters onto the slatted wooden counter next to Jake’s guac-in-progress.

Mashing now, mashing and mashing avocados and hot peppers and lemons and spices and the chopped leaves of some fresh cilantro, Jake asks the first of a series of questions that should not be asked. “You think she’s still holding a grudge about that time at the Six?” He has engaged the dialectic, and you never know where that’s going lead. Jake is pretty sure Renate still does harbor a grudge about a minor political skirmish at the 602 Club during the first week of classes; it’s clear from the studious way she avoids speaking to or even making eye contact with him while they are working together at the restaurant – or any other time.

“What was it you called her? A ‘magazine feminist?’” Christian reminisces. His tone changes as he glances Jake’s way. “Hey, it’s guacamole. Not avocado soup.” Jake isn’t so much mixing the guac as pounding it into submission.

“Oh, yeah.” Jake dumps the guac from a stainless steel mixing bowl into a plastic container as Christian blesses a couple of enchilada dinners with molé sauce and sets them under the grill. “Anyway,” Jake continues, “I didn’t call *her* anything. I merely pointed out that there

are any number of women in this town who could have whatever they wanted if they'd stop bitchin' and just go after it."

"Yeah, but I'm pretty sure she took it personally."

"What makes you think that?" Asking this is sheer masochism.

"The fact that she started crying."

"You know, I seem to recall that, back at the Six, you were *agreeing* with me."

"And then she disappeared and you and Mike had to go looking for her."

"We figured she went back to Dungwood. Where else was she gonna go at bar time? Anyway, it could have been something Mike did. I'm married for Christ's sake."

Christian knows he's onto to something now, but he pretends he's just going about his business, sprinkling an extra pinch of shredded mozzarella cheese on his enchilada dinners before adding a dollop of sour cream. Pancho's has gotten a few complaints about lack of authenticity from freaks who spend their summers idling around the Baja, but if you place in front of most Madisonians a platter of molten dairy products laced with cumin, their eyes light up. After setting the plates in the window and pounding the bell, Christian says to Jake, "You know, man, you're the last guy any of us expected to get married. Right before you left for out West, you were telling everybody that monogamy was not your bag."

"I just decided that the two things are not mutually inclusive. Not necessarily anyway."

"What two things?"

"Marriage and monogamy. Anyway, getting hitched was a matter of convenience, so Jeanie and I didn't get hassled by the man." As Jake says this, he can almost feel Jeanie's eyes fixed on him with that hurt, disappointed look. Their marriage is not a matter of convenience to *her*. And now that he's back in Madtown, this argument sounds weak even to Jake – though it's

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simply not possible that he actually *wants* to be married – so he’s half glad but mostly infuriated when “Street Fighting Man” comes on the jukebox in the bar for like the fifth time that day, giving him a chance to change the subject. “Man, I’m sick of this song,” Jake says as he swabs down the counter.

“Meaning what?” Christian says, and if Jake weren’t such a perceptive student of human nature he might have missed the fact that Christian sounds a little edgier than usual, has been sounding that way, in fact, since he got back from a phone call about half an hour ago. Before that he was scating around the kitchen, turning every flip of the cast-iron pan they use to make *huevos rancheros* into a dance. But after the call, the man dubbed “the magic Christian” by Dungwood Hampster Co-op residents and hangers-on disappeared without so much as a puff of smoke, and a rapier-witted swordsman has been testing his critical jabs on ol’ Jake ever since.

“Meaning the movement is dead. The revolution ain’t gonna happen.”

“The Days of Rage were last spring.” Christian says.

“And they were good days too.” Jake and Christian pause in their work and stare out the window into the restaurant as the song fills their heads with images of past glory on the streets of Madison. Gigantic marches, thousands of people in the streets, riots, rallies, and teach-ins. Classes boycotted. The University open in name only. You started your days at the Library Mall. If you were lucky, you ended them in your own bed and not in jail.

But then Jake says, “That was last year. Before the bombing.” Jake was still in Utah with Jeanie when he read in the *Deseret News* about the bombing of Armbruster Hall, the physics building out on Charter that had housed the Army Math Research Center, or Army Math, as everyone knows it. The first thing Jake learned when he reached Madison by phone was that, though the bombing had taken place a mile away, Hampsters had been flung from their beds.

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Running into the street, they had seen a massive tongue of flame licking the night sky. “Man, when I picked myself up off the floor, I thought ol’ Stace had just had a hell of an orgasm,” is how Christian likes to tell it.

Jake, opening a sixty-four ounce can of tomato base to prep sauce for the night cooks, continues, “That rally on the Mall last weekend was just a couple hundred people walking around looking confused. I heard one guy ask if the war was over.”

“That’s the point. It’s not over.”

“A year ago, the Beatles were still together.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Christian snatches a ticket off the order wheel.

“One event can change everything. You go around bombing shit, and you’re just as bad as the government. I don’t know. It just feels like the movement has unraveled.” Jake knows he should just shut up. He’s arguing with a world-class arguer, his only serious competition for resident wise man.

“A lot of people would say we tried peaceful protest and it didn’t work.”

“When did we try peaceful protest? All I remember is throwing rocks and running from cops. Hey, don’t get me wrong,” Jake says. “I like a good riot as much as the next man. But the times, they’ve a-changed. I can feel it.”

But this argument only gets Christian riled up. And the Magic Christian is dangerous when riled. “Just a few blocks from here they had tanks in the street. They turned Miffland into the Warsaw ghetto. The National Guard used helicopters to look in people’s windows.”

“Which is just stupid, because whoever did that bombing was long gone. That Labor Day Gang is *way* underground by now.”

“Yeah.” Christian covers a couple of platters with corn tortillas. “Of course.”

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The night chefs Freddy “Duck Pants” Barnes and Will Schumacher appear in the back door of the kitchen, hauling a sack of avocados, or really two overlapping sacks, unaccountably squirming. Jake’s welcoming salute freezes in mid-air as Christian grabs by the neck Jimmy, the pimply and cunning dishwasher, and forces his head inside the apparatus. Luckily, Jimmy was loading and not unloading, so he’s not taking in a lung-full of steam, at least. Meanwhile, Barnes and Schumacher, without so much as a “hi, how are ya?” go thumping down the basement stairs with their squirming sack.

Christian lets go of Jimmy, who yells, “What the hell, man! That’s like, battery!”

“You missed a plate. And no, it’s not like battery. It’s like, assault.”

Jake has questions, many questions, but he keeps them to himself. Just then Howard, the boss, walks into the kitchen through the door that leads to the bar. Forty if he’s a day, Howard sports a crew cut above a meaty red face, wears a tie with a short-sleeved dress shirt, and projects an aura of frustrated dimness.

“Where are Schumacher and Duck Pants? Aren’t they supposed to be here by now?”

Jake and Freddy have only been on the payroll for a couple of weeks, Christian and Will for most of the past summer, and even though they all live together at Dungwood Hamper Student Housing Co-op, Howard doesn’t trust them yet as a crew – especially because of that. However, they are trying to earn his trust because they want Howard to stay out of the kitchen.

“They just came in, Howard. Should be up here any minute,” Christian says, doing his best Eddie Haskell.

Jake adds, “Yeah, they were hauling in a big sack of avocados,” hoping to belay any sense that the twosome is late. He realizes his mistake when Christian pokes him in the kidney with the business end of a paring knife.

“We don’t have any shipments at this hour!”

“Must have gotten left out there, boss,” Christian says. “From this morning’s delivery.”

Thinking hard, Howard says, “Well, don’t let it happen again.”

Moments later, Will and Freddy emerge from the basement wearing clean white jackets and black-and-white-checked pants. Jake studies the newcomers. Unless he misses his guess – which happens only rarely – there was a body in the bag Will and Freddy hauled downstairs, and from the way it was squirming, *rigor mortis* hadn’t set in.

Will Schumacher spends his days plucking the strings of the classical bass in a cork-lined room in the Humanities Building. With his bristly bangs, his uni-brow, and his tendency to mad, inappropriate cackling, he’s always struck Jake as a throwback, more of a beatnik than a freak. Now his grin looks even more manic, like his teeth are clamped together so his jaw doesn’t tremble, and his bangs are plastered to his forehead. Freddy Barnes, one of those long-haired, Jesus-resembling men, has a tight expression in his mild brown eyes. (Also, he’s wearing a hairnet over his pony tail, one that comes all the way down to his eyebrows. And people think ol’ Jake looks funny.) As far as Jake knows, hauling people around in sacks has never been part of this duo’s *modus operandi*.

Christian says, “C’mon. I wanna see something,” and clamps a hand on Jake’s shoulder, urging him in the direction of the basement stairs. Will, glancing at Jimmy – who once again has his head stuck inside the dishwasher – mutters, “Men’s changing room.” With Christian practically pushing him down the steps, Jake says, “I’m not feeling good about this thing – whatever it is.”

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Chapter 2. "Fugitive in the Dungeon"

The combined aromas of cumin, onions, and corn tortillas deep-fried in lard, along with some unidentified swamp-gas odor, make the basement a place Jake normally chooses not to linger. The floor, ministered to by Jimmy on an irregular basis, is littered with stuff dragged in on the bottoms of shoes. Sacks of avocados and other commodities and back-up vats of beans and sauce are stored down here. This is where the spare coolers are located, and, on either end of the basement, the changing rooms. The one closest to the bathrooms, Howard's office, and the stairs leading to the bar is used by the waitresses. The one next to the back stairs, a tiny closet hung with dirty black-and-white checked pants and sauce-stained white jackets, is for the male staff members.

"Ready for this?" Christian has one hand on the changing closet's peeling door.

Jake has been asked this many times in his life, usually by a guy with two tiny tabs in the palm of his hand. "Will and Freddy do any capping before their shift?" he asks hopefully. Dungwood Co-op, located on the shores of Lake Mendota a few blocks from campus, has a low-key (or so Jake and his housemates believe) reputation as an alternative-chemistry lab. But those commodities come in baggies, not man-size sacks.

"This ain't about psychedelics. Not that you need any. Stay high on life, man. You're a Bodhisattva. The whole house thinks that."

"What's behind door number one?"

"See for yourself." Christian gives the peeling door a light push so it slowly creaks open. It's dark inside. The bare bulb hanging from a chord is turned off.

“What if I don’t want to?” Jake grabs the knob and pulls the flimsy door shut.

Christian keeps pushing the other way, more firmly now, partly because it’s become a contest and partly because he really wants Jake to see what’s behind this door. Abruptly, Jake lets go, and the changing-room door slams open against the enclosure’s plywood frame.

“Fuck! Too much noise, man!” Christian whisper-yells.

In the dim light of the basement, Jake apprehends a Hobbit-sized figure crouched on the floor of the cook’s changing room, his wire-framed glasses picking up a sliver of reflected light. Jake doesn’t say anything, just stands there squinting at the guy, who gets taller, though not substantially, as he tries to straighten up. Before Jake can hazard a comment, Christian shoves him inside the changing closet and shuts the door behind them. The changing room’s shrill light clinks on.

“We’ll hear anybody coming down the stairs,” Christian mutters.

“Yeah, and in about two minutes, that’ll be Ray.” The bartender’s shift should be starting any minute now. “Who the hell is this guy?” The third man in the changing closet comes up to maybe Jake’s chin. After squinting at him for a moment, Jake finds enough space to wag a finger. “You know, he looks familiar.”

“You guessed it, man. Frodo Baggins.”

Jake knows this is not Frodo Baggins. He recognizes him from somewhere. Jake’s jaw drops, and his stomach see-saws like the deck of the Titanic. Finally, he makes a choking sound, part glee, part panic. He knows who this guy is, and the guy knows that he knows. At least, that’s how Jake figures it’s going down. This man is nineteen years old and a fugitive. His name is Barry Stein. And he’s a member of the Labor Day Gang.

“Every cop in Madison is looking for him,” Jake yelps. “And he’s in the basement of Pancho’s Foods of Mexico?”

The hobbit sticks out his hand and Jake reflexively takes it. Nobody exactly says, “Pleased to meet you,” but an exchange has taken place, a welcome mat has been laid down.

“You saw how he got here.”

“That’s not what I mean.” Jake swats at Christian’s chef hat, and a cloud of nappy blond curls rises from his head as though somebody has let air into it.

“You know, Jake, you can be pretty insensitive,” Christian says, retrieving his hat.

“Forget how I got here!” the hobbit mutters. “As a matter of fact, forget I’m here!”

“Him and his pals blew up a building and killed a guy, and you’re complaining I’m *insensitive*?” Jake notices that he is whispering. At the same time, his ears strain for any sound of Ray coming down the stairs. Jake has been involved in espionage since that first doobie smoked in the woods behind Marathon Senior High; since then, his crimes have escalated but not his basic belief that “to live outside the law you must be honest,” along with smart, cocky, and disciplined enough that you never take an unreasonable risk. “By the way, where’s the rest of the Labor Day Gang? Hiding in the empty bean vats?”

“It’s just him. We don’t know where the other two are. That’s part of the plan.”

“Plan? You’re in on their *plan*?” Jake is stunned, but not too stunned to say in a loud, dramatic whisper. “You wanna hear about *plans*? I’m getting an engineering degree, and recently acquired a *wife*. I have *no* plans to go to prison. A guy got *killed* in that bombing.” Pausing to take a breath, Jake glances down at Barry Stein. “Sorry, man,” he says.

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“The building was supposed to be empty,” Barry says as though he’s repeated it over and over to himself, every day for three weeks, while stuffed inside closets and under beds like unwanted laundry.

“See, there was no intent. It’s manslaughter, not murder one,” Christian assures Jake.

“We’re not hiding this guy.” Jake pokes Christian in the chest. “We can’t do it. We’re not that good. Besides, a couple days ago, weren’t we all saying that we condemn the actions of the Labor Day Gang? Wasn’t somebody gonna write up a statement saying we don’t condone violence in any form?”

“For Christ’s sake, this isn’t about politics!” Christian sounds exasperated. If a saner man had said those words, you’d laugh them off, but when it’s Christian, the effect is mesmerizing. “We either turn him in or we help him. Are you ready to turn him in?”

“No. But there’s another way. We turn *our backs*, go upstairs, and he gets the hell out of here under his own steam. Where the fuck has he been till now?”

“Remember that night at Andy’s, when he had the opium party?”

“Yeah, sure. I got over there late.” Mike had been Jake’s ride that night, the night of the showdown between himself and Renate at the 602 Club, because Jeanie had taken their car to her new job at the I-Hop on Park Street. So he had naturally gone along for the ride while Mike searched the streets for his errant old lady. Of course, he’d been curious himself about why Renate ran out on her old man and all of them, curious if he had anything to do with her sudden departure. What a trivial problem that now seems, some girl being mad at him. He wishes he still had problems like that, instead of the kind that could land him in a federal penitentiary.

“Frodo was hiding in Andy’s closet.” Christian’s talking fast, voice low, an ear cocked to the back stairs. “But it turns out that new chick of Andy’s has an uncle in the state police. She

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never saw Frodo, but Andy figured it'd be a good time for Mr. Baggins to find a different temporary hide-out. See, he needs to get to Mordor."

"Fuck, yeah. And Mordor is –?"

Christian glances from side to side. It's still the same changing closet. Hoarsely, he says, "Mordor is Mexico."

Barry Stein kicks him in the shin.

"If he's gonna be in on it, he has to know," Christian tells him, reaching down to rub his leg. "Besides, he's the brains of our whole outfit."

"Yeah? That's what Andy said about the guy in the duck pants."

"Anyway, Andy talked Will and Freddy into taking Baggins away in Freddy's car. They called me before they left Andy's place. I couldn't figure out what the hell to do, so I said to bring him here and we'd stick him in one of the empty bean vats till closing time."

"You talked about it on the *phone*?"

"Don't worry. We used code."

Jake can just imagine. All that Hobbit, Lord of the Rings jazz is how every drug deal in town gets set up. "So he's gone tonight?"

"Tomorrow. At the very latest."

"Okay. Till tomorrow then." Jake is already starting to calculate his possible jail term, his legal fees, and what he'll say if the FBI should happen to bust in here tonight, which, on the whole, seems unlikely. If they knew Barry Stein was still in town, they would have nabbed him by now.

"Andy says he's got a guy lined up to drive him to El Paso. Besides, they don't really expect him to still be in town. He'd have to be crazy to still be hanging around Madison!"

“And we don’t know him do we? We never saw him before today.” Jake stands there with his chef’s hat in his hand, running sturdy fingers through his tangled hair. “How does Andy know him?”

“Andy doesn’t know him. He found him in the men’s can at Bob and Gene’s Tavern and took him home. I mean, what was he supposed to do?”

“Yeah.” Jake nods. “Okay.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Frodo interrupts. “I can get out of town on my own steam. I’ll just wait down here till the restaurant closes.” His hair is greasy and his voice strained. He looks gaunt and exhausted. Jake’s head itches. It stinks down here. He’s about to ask the kid when was the last time he had a shower or slept in a bed when footfalls pounding down the kitchen stairs announce Ray the handsome bartender showing up for his Friday-night shift. Christian slips out the door and shuts it behind him as the footsteps come to a halt.

“I wouldn’t go in there,” Jake hears Christian say.

“What’s going on?” Sniffing sounds are audible. “Are you guys smoking dope?”

“No, no. Jake threw up is all, and you don’t want to see it.”

At this, Jake begins to moan, he hopes convincingly. “Geez,” Ray says. “What’s wrong with the guy?”

“The usual. Here, give me your jacket and I’ll hang it up for you.”

As Ray’s footsteps recede, Christian tosses the bartender’s denim jacket into a corner of the changing closet. “Coast is clear,” he says, flashing his trademark loopy grin. Jake has often felt the power of that grin, its uncanny ability to persuade. Last summer, before Jake left for his surveying gig out west, Christian had everybody in the house convinced they saw UFOs – not just one, but at least half a dozen UFOs, a small fleet – flying over Lake Mendota at

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sunset. To this day, Jake retains a clear image of those silver saucers, hovering over the lake, tinged pink by the rays of the setting sun. “Look, Jake. There they are.”

“You know, man,” Jake tells Christian now, “you have a dangerous mind.”

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Chapter 3. “Still Waters”

An empty tray in one hand and her ink-stained pocket full of drink tickets, Renate sails into the bar just in time to see Jake make one of his characteristic, open-armed, “I kid you not” gestures and announce, “The Utes and the Pawnee would never turn away a brother just because he burned down the white man’s fort!” In response, Christian becomes so excited that he tips his chair over backwards. Jake reaches down a hand to help him untangle his long limbs and get back on his stool.

The tiny u-shaped bar is crowded with lawyers and state legislators. Jake the chauvinist and the Magic Christian have been sitting in a corner all night, sometimes deep in conversation, sometimes staring off into space with panicky expressions, paying good money to drink Dos Equis they could drink for free at home – there’s a newly liberated case of the stuff in the refrigerator at Dungwood. Howard has been glaring across the bar at them for most of the evening. And yet, they have spent the past few hours firmly attached to their barstools, too engrossed to notice the boss giving them the hairy eyeball.

Clearly, something’s up. But even if she were speaking to Jake, asking the boys a direct question rarely does any good. Renate will merely do what she does best – or one of the things she does reasonably well – observe. Watch and learn. Whenever she’s in the bar, once she’s placed a drink order in the tiny metal rack and leaned her elbows on the padded bumpers, she pretends to be looking at nothing while she continues to study Jake and Christian for clues to the weirdness.

“What do you see in these two characters?” Howard asks her. He knows they’re friends of hers because they recommended her for the job. Renate shrugs and glances over.

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Christian is wearing one of his pocket-flap cowboy shirts with the mother-of-pearl buttons. He's lean and lanky, taller than the rest of the boys, and looks sort of like an Appalachian Harpo Marx. Not that he is Appalachian; he's from Cincinnati. But when he's playing the mandolin there is something authentically hillbilly and slightly mad about him. He has uncanny abilities. When you're hitching with him, he can predict the exact make and model of the next car to come down the road. It's like he conjures them.

And if you take Jake out of that chef's hat and that sauce-stained white jacket, he's transformed into a good-looking cowboy, with a droopy blond mustache, curly reddish sideburns, and that rugged-looking cleft in his chin. It is strange that she never noticed this before he went out west, but then she'd caught only a glimpse of him at that party in February of freshman year when she met the Dungwood gang. Then he'd seemed like one of those quiet guys who are good at math, respected by the other men and faithful to his woman. The whole night, all he talked about was that he had to go somewhere and pick up Jeanie. At the time, he wore his light-blond hair in short bangs over a pair of black-plastic-framed glasses, reminding Renate of a cross between Buddy Holly and a Centurion.

Now his sun-bleached hair is grown out to shoulder length. And he must be wearing contacts, because the glasses have disappeared. He sits at the bar wearing his usual surly expression above a black tee shirt that shows off his molded biceps. Renate's studying those muscles, letting her eyes rove slowly up his chest to his face, when she notices that he's looking back at her. His gaze is rather indirect; close up, he appears to be looking at you and past you at the same time. But at this distance, she can tell he is looking at her, because he sits up straighter and makes a gesture with his hand, a sort of involuntary half-wave.

Blushing, Renate rushes from the bar.

Her tables and most of the bar patrons finally gone, Renate changes out of the ruffled red skirt and puffed sleeve white blouse that are key elements of the Pancho's ambience (along with ribbed burlap wallpaper in the bar and paintings of toreadors on black velvet) and back into jeans and a sweater. A margarita with salt, straight up, awaits her on the corner of the bar where Ray has thoughtfully placed it, and she's taking her first sip when she hears Jake say, "Sweet perspiring Jesus! My wife."

Jeanie Winslow (née Wechsler) has appeared in the round glass porthole that gives bar patrons a view of whoever is coming through the front door of the restaurant, although those entering cannot see in. Following Jeanie is Renate's tall, dark-haired boyfriend Mike, and behind him is Reed Gunderson, slightly hunched over from hauling his guitar and mini-amp. He appears live at Pancho's every Friday night from nine to eleven, when only one waitress prowls the aisles and the customers are drinking steadily.

While Reed heads into the restaurant to set up in front of the wooden partition that separates it from the bar, Jeanie pauses next to Renate, looking Jake's way. Receiving only a perfunctory wave from her husband, Jeanie slides onto a bar stool and reaches for a basket of fragrant, salty chips, still warm from the deep fryer. The chips and salsa have just been refreshed by Angie, the late girl. Mike has walked into the bar looking strangely pissed off for this hour on a Friday night. Without a word, he covers Renate's lips with kisses.

After buying Jeanie another margarita, Renate reaches into the chips and says, "Something's not right with those men."

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Mike, Christian, and Jake have been joined by Will, who grabbed his shift beer and downed it in one slug. Jake and Christian stare at him as though his arrival spelled doom.

“Yeah, it’s even wronger than usual,” Jeanie agrees. “Jake’s not even saying anything about the fact that I’m eating chips.”

Renate, crunching thoughtfully, glances at Jake, who just then flicks his eyes over the basket of chips and Jeanie’s hand reaching for it. “I didn’t eat dinner!” Jeanie says to her husband. While Christian drones on unintelligibly, Jake calls over to Jeanie, “Go ahead. Enjoy yourself. Eat away.”

“He’s being sarcastic,” Jeanie says to Renate. “He hates for me to eat chips.”

Renate narrows her eyes. “He tells you what you can and can’t eat?”

“He doesn’t – . Well, no, I guess he does. He won’t let me eat them, usually.” Jeanie breaks rabbit-sized pieces off a tortilla chip and nibbles at them, glancing Jake’s way.

Women’s liberation, Renate knows, is based on the shared experience of oppression. Besides, there’s something about Jeanie that just makes you feel like opening up. “I feel like I’ve gained, like, five pounds since I moved into Dungwood. Restaurants are the only places Mike and I can be alone.” Madison is crowded with eateries, especially Italian ones with tall wooden booths like little private rooms, where Mike and Renate share a pizza and a carafe of wine and sit in companionable silence.

“Jake and I were alone out west. But now we never see each other. He’s either working or at school, and when I’m not in class, I’m working the late shift at the pancake house. Tonight I took off early so the two of us could be together.”

“Huh. Well, don’t worry, Jeanie. He probably thinks of this as you and him being together. That’s how Mike is.”

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On the other side of the wooden partition, Reed has finished tuning and is strumming the opening chords of “Love Bite,” a song he wrote for a beautiful Jewish woman who ran off with an accounting major when she grew weary of crash pads and bummed cigarettes and the other sacrifices Reed makes for his music. According to the song, it is a lesson in love the guitar player will never forget.

From the corner of the bar where he confers with Jake and Christian, Mike yells, “What do you mean there’s no plan? You said there was a plan!” And then there’s a shriek and Christian’s on the floor again, but this time he doesn’t topple over by himself. Renate sees Mike kick the bar stool out from under him. This time, no one helps him back to his feet.

Renate shakes her head. “Get a load of that.”

“They are so rude,” Jeanie says to Renate. “You’d think they could shut up long enough to listen to Reed play.”

“They don’t appreciate Reed.”

Renate buys Jeanie a margarita, and they share more secrets, or at least Jeanie shares and Renate listens. Renate’s a good listener, as befits someone who prefers observing others to interacting with them. Tonight she observes that the boys seem to have unusually active bladders, because one or two of them are almost always downstairs. When Renate heads down there, to the gray-walled bathroom whose décor evokes a Mexican jail, they follow her with their eyes, and while she’s in the bathroom, she can hear somebody walking through the door that leads to the basement proper and the women’s dressing room. Then, while Ray is shutting down the cash register, the only men in the bar are Freddy Barnes, who has just closed the kitchen, and Reed, who has just finished his set. Ray sets a couple of Michelobs in front of them and tells them to drink up.

Furtively nibbling a tiny, broken-off piece of tortilla chip, Jeanie says, “It’s not easy, being married to a husband who doesn’t want to be married.”

First day of classes, Renate and Mike were just waking up when Jake and Jeanie hustled past on their way to late-register for classes. The couple had arrived from South Dakota during the night and slept on the mattress kept for crashers in Mike and Renate’s study. As soon as they were gone, Mike reached for Renate and said, “They’re married. But don’t mention anything about it.”

“They got *married* and we’re not supposed to say anything?”

“Jake’s not cool with it,” Mike explained. Mike, on the other hand, would be perfectly happy to be married. He’d brought it up over the summer during the pregnancy scare. As though she’d do a thing like that – get married at eighteen. “Jake says it was just a matter of convenience,” Mike said, “so they could stay together out West without getting hassled by the man. I think he’s seen *Easy Rider* once too often.”

Jake had been gone most of the summer for his oil company job, surveying on land that a pipeline was supposed to cross. He was working on stretches where the pipeline had to be re-routed because it crossed Native American burial mounds or prehistoric villages. Jeanie had gotten on a train and joined Jake in Utah. But then as soon as she got out there, he started acting weird. At first he seemed unsure he even wanted Jeanie there. And when she asked him about it, he admitted he was troubled. But he knew how they could fix it. They could get married.

“It was his idea,” Jeanie tells Renate, with just the briefest glance over her shoulder in the direction of her husband. “But now he’s always acting like the whole marriage is my fault. He says he knows it’s what I wanted.”

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Renate wonders how this simple, almost plain little girl ever managed to land the magnificent Oz, the big oracle around here, the pronouncer of judgments. She says, “Wow.” She hopes it’s the right thing. It’s been so long since any woman has taken Renate into her confidence. She can’t help but think, resentfully, about Stacy, who mostly leaves a room when Renate enters it. Talking with Jeanie is making her feel accepted again, and she doesn’t want to blow it.

Then Mike appears by her side, kissing her some more and saying, “Jake and I are going on an errand.” Renate shrugs and rummages in the basket for another tortilla chip. “I’ll go home with Jeanie and Reed and everybody,” she says.

“No!” Mike says. “Wait here. We’re taking Jake’s car. I’ll come back and run you ladies – I mean *women* – home.”

When the men have all departed, the two women are left alone with only Ray, who is busy washing glasses, and Reed, who is packing up his equipment. Renate turns to her new friend and says, “Something’s going on.”

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Chapter 4. “Fugitive in the Attic”

Holding two plastic milk jugs by their handles – one filled with water, one empty – and in the other hand a sack of apples and a loaf of Brownberry whole wheat bread, Jake pauses at the foot of Dungwood Co-op’s dusty back stairs, waiting for his eyes to adjust. The back stairs are lit only by light from a street lamp filtering in through a narrow window; he’s not even sure if the bulbs back here are working, but he wouldn’t flip on the lights even if he knew. He listens for sounds from great room.

When he’s able to see well enough to move without stumbling, Jake places one cautious cowboy boot on the first step. It creaks. So does the second one. As he slowly and squeakily mounts the stairs, he hears the sound of laughter mingled with guitar chords. The chatter, the guitar playing, Reed’s high, raspy voice coming from the great room are like the melancholy sound of a lost idyll. Jake hears the strains of that old Byrds’ tune, “All I Really Want to Do,” followed by a burst of laughter; he tries to imagine what’s funny. Maybe Reed or Christian hit a sour note. By now they’re drunk enough that anything’s possible. As far as Reed and the women, Jean, Renate, Stacy, are concerned, this is just another after-bar-time party. And with luck, Reed and those women will remain oblivious for the next twenty-four hours.

In the attic, Jake makes his way down a narrow corridor to a door in the old-time servants’ quarters. A larger room at the end of the corridor is decorated with a rusty suit of armor, a dusty table with carved legs, and, most interesting of all, a selection of wooden paddles hanging from a rack. The brothers of $\Lambda\Pi\Phi$ were up to some weird shit in their day.

Opening the door, he spies two figures sitting cross-legged on the floor with a flashlight between them, like scouts telling scary stories around a campfire. Jake sits down cross-legged

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on a carpet covered with faded fleur de lis. He picks up each of the milk jugs in turn, demonstrating to Barry. “This is water. This is to pee into. Try not to mix ’em up. Got you a bag of apples and some bread. Best I could do on short notice, but you can take it with you.”

“Yeah, man. You’ve got to be out of here by morning,” Mike says. “Your being here isn’t safe for you or us.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not hanging around here,” says Barry, who’s sitting on the sleeping bag Mike brought up here for him.

“Good,” Mike says, adding, “I mean, we like you and all.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t be bitter. What the fuck are you still doing in town, anyway.”

Barry, who’s shoving a piece of bread in his mouth, chews for a while before saying anything. “My plan was to go down to the Washington Street railyards and hop a freight. I had it all timed out. I was hiding, waiting for my train, and then all of a sudden there were all these railroad dicks walking around carrying clubs. I panicked. When Andy found me I was running from place to place hiding where ever I could.”

“What’d the other guys do?” Mike wants to know.

“I don’t know. Couldn’t tell you even if I wanted to.”

Mike shakes his head. “You’ll look like one sorry motherfucker if they find you hanging around Madison after all this time.” To Jake, he says, “We have got to get him out of here.”

“No argument from me, Fearless Leader.”

“I thought you were the fearless leader,” Barry says to Jake.

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“I’m the brains behind him.” Jake gestures at Mike. “But he’s the one with the official title. Better at kissin’ babies, I guess.” After a pause he says, “So who are you guys with? The Weathermen?”

The teen-age radical stops chewing and runs a forearm across his eyes. “No.” The kid must need a chance to spill, because to Jake’s surprise, he keeps talking. “But they set us in motion. Last spring. You know what it was like. The revolution was everywhere. I was Ann Arbor reporting for the *Cardinal*. I met these two other guys from Madison who wanted to do something. At every rally and teach-in all anybody talked about was bringing the war home. Showing people over here what it feels like to live with chaos and violence all the time. It got to the point where you felt like marching was a non-action, no matter how many people were involved. We wanted to do something that would have a real impact. But we didn’t –. We thought the building would be empty. When we staked it out, we never saw any lights from the outside.”

Jake remembers a hitchhiker he and Freddy picked up the summer before last who was no more than thirteen and told them he was going to buy machine guns so he could mow down all the teachers at his junior high school. At the time, it had seemed as though the kid had a purity about him, a commitment that Jake and Freddy marveled at, knowing it was lacking in themselves. Of course, they never did hear about any junior high schools getting shot up.

“During the Days of Rage?” Barry continues, “Anybody could see the whole thing was coming apart, this country, the whole system. Everyone was talking about China and Paris, revolutionary movements breaking out all over the world, people our age leading the way.”

“Yeah, it’s almost like the bombing was necessary. All that rage had to go *someplace*.”

“Necessary?” Mike says. “That’s not what you said when we drafted our statement.”

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“I’m not saying it was right. But thousands and thousands of people marching on every campus in the country and nothing happens. They just keep right on bombing.”

“Not every campus. I’ve got a cousin at SMU. Says it was business as usual down there. Frat parties and ROTC balls.”

“Every campus that mattered.”

“And the riots in the ghettos, the Panthers stockpiling guns,” Barry says. “Our SDS contacts said that when the government was overthrown, the people who had taken action would be revolutionary heroes.” He pauses, then adds, “We didn’t even know their names. They were all using aliases.”

Mike and Jake exchange a glance

“Look, go to fucking bed,” Barry says. “I’ll be gone in the morning.”

“What are you gonna do?” Mike says. “Walk over to Johnson Street and stick out your thumb?”

“I’ll run. I’ve done it before. I’ll find a place to hide.” Jake and Mike are both giving the young fugitive moody but speculative stares.

“We could put him in the trunk of my car and run him down to, like, Chicago or something.” Mike means the Karmann Ghia roadster, a convertible with a miniscule luggage compartment, the only vehicle he owns that actually has a trunk.

“You heard what Christian said. If we take him across the state line, that’s trafficking in stolen fugitives. We could get sixteen years for that.” Jake has an inspiration. “But for harboring, say we did get caught, Christian says we’d only get two, max. And you could get paroled out of that, easy. With a decent lawyer.”

“You think he’s right?”

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“He has uncanny powers.”

“Uncanny powers,” Barry Stein mumbles and keels over sideways onto the sleeping bag.

“This guy’s not gonna make it as far as Stoughton,” Mike says.

“We just throw him on the street, he’ll get picked up. And we’re next. Look, first thing in the morning, I’ll head over to Andy’s and find out what’s happening.”

Mike sighs. He and Jake gaze thoughtfully at the young fugitive, who lies with his head at an awkward angle, snoring in tiny spurts.

“I mean, look at him. He’s a kid,” Jake says.

“Yeah. He needs a mom,” Mike allows. “Suppose you’re volunteering.”

“You wait on that old lady of yours hand and foot.”

“What is the fucking plan? I’m asking you. He can’t stay in this goddamn room. Because if the helicopters make him, in two seconds they’ll have the Guard, the entire Madison police department, and the FBI down on us like – ”

“Okay! But we can leave him up here for one night. We’ll throw a blanket over the window. Tomorrow, he moves on, one way or the other.”

“Either that, or we all end up in prison.”

“I’m six feet tall and I weigh a hundred and forty-five pounds soaking wet. I wouldn’t last a day in prison. And I’ve got no intention of going there.”

“Jake? You’re five-eleven.”

Jake slides a broken-in, squared-toed Frye boot with an inch-and-a-half wooden heel off his foot and brandishes it in Mike’s face. “Not in these!” he growls.

Coolly, Mike averts his gaze. “All I know is, I did not bomb Army Math, and I don’t intend to swing for it.”

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“It’s funny,” Jake says, “how everybody thinks they got Army Math. Army Math is in the back of the building. It’s sitting there intact right now.”

Suddenly the young bomber’s recumbent form shoots to a sitting position. “What are you talking about?” he almost shouts.

But instead of a reply, his answer is another query. As though it’s being piped in from somewhere, a clear, limpid voice fills the room, high and lilting, singing the words, “Are you going to Scarborough Fair? Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyyyme . . .”

Jake feels icy fingers tapping out a tune on his nerve endings. He glances at Mike, who chuckles. “Our new housemate,” he says. “Debbie Teiler. Guess she went to high school with Renate and Stacy. She’s a folk singer. Plays a little guitar, too.”

“Debbie Teiler,” Jake muses. “I think I’ve heard of her.” He glances at Barry, who has collapsed onto the sleeping bag again, eyes closed, breathing quietly. “Guess we can continue the conversation about Army Math another time.”

“Yeah, man. What the hell?”

“Okay, I’ll prove it to you. Come with me.”

Chapter 5. "The Ruins"

"Good thing we remembered to bring beer." Mike approaches his Karmann Ghia, parked in the narrow gravel lot next to the house, with a six pack of *cerveza* tucked under his arm.

"I'll drive." Before getting behind the wheel, Jake looks up at the third floor of the old frat house designed by some medieval-fantasy-obsessed 1920s' architect and has a momentary sense of historical dislocation. It occurs to him that no real castle has ever had a more interesting prisoner. The moon must have set hours ago, and down here on the shores of Lake Mendota, the street lights are sparse. The black night sky is studded with stars, and against this glowing backdrop the crenellations framing Dungwood's roof and the rounded corners that look like turrets seem grimly medieval. The place is faux, but it's old faux. The algae-tainted smell of lake water filling Jake's nostrils could be coming from a moat in need of dredging. But it's not dudes in chainmail who will be coming to attack them, but federal agents in dark suits, flashing badges as they pull up in innocuous dark sedans.

"Hey, let's go," Mike says through the open window. "Wherever the hell we're going."

Jake fires up Mike's roadster, its engine pleasantly rough as they roll down the cobblestone alley known as Lakelawn Place, turning right onto Langdon. Moments later, they are running up University Avenue, all four lanes empty at this hour.

"I think I know what you have in mind."

"Don't worry, this'll only take a minute."

"Yeah, you say that to all the girls."

Shifting into second, Jake rounds the corner onto Charter Street, one of those small university by-streets used only by the campus police and trash pick-up trucks and people

dropping other people off in front of buildings. At night, this block should be completely deserted, but as soon as they turn the corner they spot a brown Mustang, a '66 with a dent in the rear bumper, idling near the shell of Armbruster Hall. "What have we here?"

"Maybe it's Buell and Anderson returning to the scene of the crime," Mike mutters, probably wishing he'd gotten a chance to check on Renate, make sure she isn't being molested by some amorous guitar-playing Norwegian. But who doesn't want to look at a bombed-out campus building at three in the morning? You'd have no soul at all if you didn't want to do that.

Jake pulls up behind the Mustang, and its driver, reacting to the headlights in his rearview, guns it and peels off down Charter in the direction of Observatory Drive. The Karmann Ghia now has the lonely precincts of Armbruster Hall to itself. Jake pulls on the emergency brake and shuts off the lights. The engine quiets to a purr. Keeping the roadster tuned up and his girlfriend happy are just about the only things Mike Parker works at in this life.

"There they go," says Mike, popping open a can of Carta Blanca. "So this is the ruins of Army Math."

"I keep trying to tell you – that ain't Army Math," Jake corrects him, nodding at the remains. He once had a class in Armbruster, and he remembers the paranoid, almost traitorous feeling of walking in there when campus was abuzz with rumors about the place. The United States Army had its own research wing in the building, and the assumption downtown was that they were cooking up new weapons systems and using the University's resource-rich physics department to help them out whenever they got stuck. Armbruster Hall had thus become a locus of evil, the recipient of the nickname Army Math. And the fact that the floors actually used by the Army were the ones furthest from the street must have seemed unimportant to that bunch of philosophy majors that left a Ford van loaded with explosives parked out front.

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“That wing – the one that’s just a pile of rubble now, was used for theoretical physics research. Army Math is located way in back. The bomb never touched it. The Army’s wing is probably the most intact part of the building right now.”

Mike, who’s an art major and has never been to this section of campus before, grunts but says nothing more. He’s probably thinking what most people think: Army? University? Aren’t they both part of the same military-industrial complex?

“The physics department had a hologram set up in the lobby. Guys on the physics and chemistry assignment committees are still talking about it. All the work that got blown up. Superconductivity. Liquid crystals. Laser applications.”

“Yeah, well. I’m sure the army could figure out some way to put that to use.”

“This was a bad deed, man,” Jake says, climbing out. “Everybody says so.”

Mike gets out after him, carefully setting his beer can on the curb before joining Jake, who stands, arms folded across his chest in his cigar-store-Indian pose, surveying the ruins. Armbruster was an older, beige-brick campus construction, 1930s probably, but intended to be ahead of its time, with a futuristic, art deco look. Now it stands, spooky and hallowed out, next to the real eye-catcher, a tangled pile of metal beams and pulverized brick and mortar, all that’s left of the new wing. The pile of rubble resting on its concrete pad looks exactly as if a bomb had been dropped on top of it. In fact, the whole block resembles Berlin in 1945. There is no glass left in any of the windows of nearby buildings, and wooden planks hang uselessly in the gaping window wells. And right in front of them, preventing them from getting too close, stands a row of red and white wooden trestles with “University of Wisconsin” stenciled in black on each one.

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Though the bombing happened a few weeks ago, the rubble has not been cleared away, and Jake can picture the daily progress of engineers and physicists and forensics experts sifting through the remains.

“Wonder how much dynamite it took to blow this place,” Mike says, lighting a Marlboro.

“Not dynamite. You need permits for that.”

“What’d they use then? Since you’re the expert.”

“Ammonium nitrate.”

“Fertilizer?” Exhaling a plume of smoke in the direction of the ruins, Mike adds, “How’d they ignite it?”

“Man, don’t you read the papers?”

“Frankly, no.”

“Jet fuel.”

The two men glance at each other, Mike slightly open-mouthed. “Should we ask him how they got their hands on *that*?”

“Probably wouldn’t tell us anyway.” Giving Mike a shove out of the way, Jake backs up a few feet for a running start. He lands hard on the other side of the barricade, the balls of his feet only slightly protected by the worn soles of his boots. Hand on hips, he looks around. “He said it looked like the flames reached all the way to the stratosphere.”

“Frodo?”

“The bartender at the 602. I was talking to him the night I got back. Before you and Renate and everybody showed up.”

“Oh yeah. That was the night of Andy’s opium party. Fuck man. Can you believe? The whole time?”

“Yeah,” Jake says absently, walking around the pile of rubble, “that was the night I got into that discussion with Renate.”

“My old lady doesn’t like you,” Mike says complacently; heading back over to the roadster to grab another beer, he settles on the sidewalk with his back against the passenger.

“Shit!” Jake says.

“What? You discover a clue? We already know the identity of the bombers. In fact, we even know –”

“Twenty-five hundred degrees Fahrenheit!”

“Okay. Let’s see. Temperature of liquid steel?”

“Some of this steel is melted. Only explosives can do that.”

This part of campus is lit up like a stadium. You could read by this light, and Jake swears what he sees is a big gray blob of steel at the end of this beam, suggesting that the rest of it was so hot it just, what? Pulverized? That means the pile of loose dust and gray flakes of matter lying six inches deep on the ground isn’t comprised of just particles of smashed brick. Some of that dust is the remains of the metal support beams that held this wing together.

“You know,” Mike says, “even if he didn’t actually plant the bomb, it still took some balls to wait down the street for the other two. Anything could happen, hauling a load like that.”

Jake looks over at him. The guy has no scientific curiosity, but every once in a while he says something interesting. “Yeah?”

“Frodo was just the get-away driver. If that’s any consolation to you.”

“Consolation, right. Tell that to this guy.”

A Madison police car with a loudspeaker lashed to its top has rolled up and is now nose-to-nose with the roadster. The cop sitting inside has a microphone in his hand. He’s not even

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bothering to get out of the car, but Jake catapults across the wooden horses and Mike puts down his beer and raises his hands in the air.

An imperious, pissed-off voice comes over the loudspeaker. “I’m ordering you to leave the premises. Now.”

“I wonder why he’s using that bullhorn. Couldn’t he just roll down the window?” Mike wonders.

“It’s gotten to be a habit with these guys.”

“Get moving or you’ll be placed under arrest.”

Jake and Mike, hands in the air, climb back into the car, Mike behind the wheel this time. “We’re students,” Mike remarks, starting the engine. “Don’t we have a right to be here? You were studying that shit very carefully.”

“Cops have a whole different concept of education.”

Away from the patrol car’s blinding headlights, Mike laughs to himself. “If that cop only knew, huh?” he says, a can of beer parked between his legs as they wind down Observatory Drive. “This is gonna make a hell of a story to tell the grandkids.”

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Chapter 6. “Mad Morning”

Jake wakes up the next morning with the sun beaming on him through the porous bamboo screen that covers their bedroom window, his and Jeanie’s. He rubs his sockets for a while and then heaves himself to his elbows. He doesn’t have to work at Pancho’s today, and he has something less than the usual Saturday morning hangover, and Jeanie is softly breathing next to him, and for that first moment or two of waking, his mind is untroubled.

He looks over at Jeanie and gently lifts the lock of hair that falls over her cheek. Jeanie sighs, and her light brown eyes, honey-colored, the same shade as her hair, blink open. The look she sends him is soft; the smell of her skin lures him to the pillow. It’s Saturday morning, and he doesn’t have to work. His body still feels the muscular after-burn of hauling heavy objects up the backstairs at Pancho’s. He flexes his arms and arches his back – carrying that fugitive out of the restaurant in an empty bean vat was no mean feat, even with Mike manning the other handle.

“Shit!” Jake sits all the way up, pounding his fists into the mattress.

“What?” Jeanie’s hand strokes his back.

“Nothing. Just remembered I forgot to make an extra pot of molé sauce. I’ll hear about it from Will if he has a busy lunch today.” And with that, he’s out of bed and across the room, climbing into his jeans.

“C’mon, Jake. He does it to you often enough.”

Jake looks over his shoulder without turning around, jeans already on sans underwear and sans shirt, zipping carefully so his manhood doesn’t get caught in those nasty metal teeth. Jeanie holds out her arms to him. “Come back to bed,” she pleads. “It’s Saturday.”

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It's their Saturday routine: they lie in bed for an hour or two, holding each other, talking about the log house in the mountains they will someday own; the one with solar heating and a hot tub on the deck. They're going to build it when they move west after Jake finishes school. To the Sierras, maybe, somewhere around Truckee, with Lake Tahoe shimmering in the distance.

"Remember what we said? The next couple of years are all about work. So when we graduate, we'll have enough money to get our land."

"Yeah. Except we'll be living in a tent for the first few years. You'll need help cutting logs, so Will and Freddie will be out there with us. We'll probably end up sharing our tent with them. And then, after we get the house built, they'll decide they don't want to leave"

"Well, maybe they'll finally have old ladies by then. You'll be glad of the company," Jake says, and he's out the door and down the hall.

First thing he needs to do is see what Mike is up to. Then he's heading downstairs to the kitchen to locate some of that famous granola the house ladies made this past week. Not that he eats the stuff. At Mike and Renate's door, he pauses briefly before rapping shave-and-a-haircut and walking in. He should have known from the rhythmic creaking sounds he heard from outside the door that the moment was inopportune. "Hey, man," he says, stepping into the fuggy confines, "You too, Renate."

"Jake?" Mike says. He covers Renate with his body, all in, unless Jake misses his guess, and he's rarely mistaken in such matters. Mike has pulled a sheet over the two of them, which Renate now dislodges, pushing up at Mike's shoulders and simultaneously squirming out from underneath him. Mike rolls off, and in what appears to be one smooth, continuous motion, Renate swings her legs over the side of the bed, wraps the sheet around her, and, diving between

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the strings of orange glass beads hanging in the doorway between this room and their lake-facing study, disappears. "This better be good," Mike mutters.

"Just thought we should, you know, reconnoiter."

While Mike is still moaning and rubbing his face with both hands, Renate re-emerges in a pair of faded jeans and a plaid shirt of his.

"Ren?" Mike says, "Jake was just leaving."

Renate, already in the hall, comes partway back and says, "It's okay. Jeanie and I have someplace to be this morning. We're getting together with some other, you know, *magazine feminists*."

"Renate!" Mike calls after her. "Don't let those women take you away from me!"

Renate doesn't reply. "Now see what you've done?" he says to Jake.

"Did she say *Jeanie* was going with her?"

"Magazine feminist -- that's what you called her at the 602. You started this whole thing."

"Is she ever going to get over that thing at the Six?"

"That was the first time I ever saw her cry. She didn't even cry last summer, over that pregnancy thing. I cried. She didn't."

"It was just a discussion! It was politics, man. You've got to be able to hold your own in an argument."

"Oh, she's holding her own all right. And now she's got your old lady holding *her* own too. If you hadn't laid into her like that, she would have forgotten all about it. Now she's got something to prove. Jake, those women are *dykes*. When I went to pick her up at that libbie meeting last week, they wouldn't let me in."

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“Just be cool, will ya? Look at the bright side. It keeps ’em out of our thing. When we’ve got Frodo safely on his way to Mordor, then we can worry about dykes.”

Mike locates his cigarettes on a small, overturned barrel that holds the kerosene lantern he and Renate use for a bedside lamp. Lighting up, he says, “Aw, fuck. So it is true. When I woke up this morning, it kind of felt like it was all a dream.”

“Funny. I thought the – ”

Jake’s words are interrupted by a sound like a bowling ball being forcefully dropped onto the ceiling above their heads. Mike, naked, cigarette dangling from his lips, streaks out the door in the direction of the attic stairs.

“You take the high road and I’ll take the low road,” Jake yells to him, heading in the opposite direction, downstairs, toward the kitchen.

The co-op kitchen is the clearest indication that Dungwood’s residents now see themselves as a “gendered” people, divided, and therefore at odds. The women refuse to clean the kitchen on the grounds that they are no more inherently capable of it than anyone else. The men dedicate themselves to speculating about the nature of filth, theorizing technological interventions that are still forty, even fifty years down the line. Unfortunately, the kitchen is not equipped with a dishwasher, and pots and pans rise in an unstable tower from the metal sinks, anchored by a roasting pan with moldy slicks of weeks-old lasagna malingering in the bottom. The tabbouleh left out in a Tupperware container appears, out of the corner of one’s eye, to be moving like a swarm. Multi-colored dried substances are hardened to plates and bowls. So many vary-colored furs are being cultured on the aging foodstuffs inside the fridge that it’s like the habitation of some new species of dwarf. Just opening the door has been known to trigger an acid flashback.

And the smell! Bacteria loiter like vagrants, fomenting a jungle-like atmosphere with intimations of malaria, dengue fever, and beriberi.

Of necessity, the Hampsters have developed various strategies for getting around this mess, most of which attest to the uncanny power of mind over matter, or the ability of the mind to simply ignore matter. Renate, for example, now pours herself a bowl of granola from a clean dish she keeps stashed in some secret location. As Jake enters the kitchen, she hails him with the first kind word she's had for him since their clash at the 602. "Want some of this granola? It's almost gone."

Jake proffers a clean bowl hidden in his own secret place on a high shelf. But as Renate starts to push the Tupperware container in his direction, a thought occurs to her. "I forgot. Real men don't eat bird seed!"

"Woah. Whatever gave you that idea?"

"You may have mentioned it to Jeanie."

The collective consciousness of women. If one of them knows something, they all know it. It's like some kind of hive mind. "I was just being chivalrous. More for her that way."

"Oh. So she's allowed to eat granola."

Jake's masculine intuition tells him to drop this subject. Using his bowl as a scoop, he acquires a portion of granola and waits for her to finish pouring the milk over her own, the jungle nasturtium of sliced-bananas filling his nostrils. "Quiet around here ain't it?"

"I think a lot of people are already out. There's a rally down at the library mall."

"Really. Then I wonder what that noise, from the third floor – ?" If she'd heard anything, she'd be chiming in by now. But she just looks at him, puzzled. Relieved, Jake grins

at her and says, all friendly like, “So you’re off to a women’s liberation meeting this morning. With Jean?”

“Oh no,” she says primly. “No such thing I’m afraid. Not in this town. We’ve got it way too good. We could have anything we wanted in life, if only we were willing to work for it. We’re all just a bunch of *magazine feminists*.”

Jake, holding the cereal spoon like an ice pick, smashes down at the granola clusters in the bowl, causing shattered, milky shards to fly across the counter. Chewing thoughtfully, Renate wipes her hand over her cheeks and forehead. Then she picks up her cereal bowl and flees. Jake, heaving a sigh, picks up the bowl of granola he intends to take upstairs to the attic for a pre-departure fugitive feeding and goes after her. He probably shouldn’t be doing this, but he’s got to wait for her to leave anyway, before they can *move the package*.

In the great room, the still of the morning is interrupted by the occasional snort from their semi-permanent crasher, Reed Gunderson, sprawled in righteous Viking slumber on the red Danish modern couch. Renate has taken a seat on the antique-purple horsehair sofa across from the Viking, whose fingers move up and down his bare chest as though on a fret board, while Jake takes a seat at the opposite end, holding the bowl of granola like an offering, his bare feet resting on the round table made from a railroad trestle.

An upside-down American flag, the Dungwood coat-of-arms, hangs above a mantel decorated with frieze-like carvings of elvish gargoyles peering from among leafy vines from which Jake normally tries to avert his gaze, but having inadvertently looked at it he blinks a few times to banish the flashbacks. “So,” he says, pleasantly enough, “You and Jean are off somewhere this morning?”

“I’m not sure Jeanie’s coming with me. She just said she might.”

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“Ah,” he says. Something about her relatively neutral tone emboldens him to continue. “That was a poor choice of words. A couple of weeks ago. At the Six.” He pauses for a moment, but as she says nothing, soldiers on. “It was so long ago, I’m not even sure what the whole damn thing was about, except that, as I recall, the words ‘sexist pig’ were used in connection with myself?”

She stares at him with the merest hint of fury. “And as I recall you had said something about ‘that broad with Andy’ that you probably didn’t mean?”

“Ah yes, that’s where it started.” Jake realizes that it was curiosity about that very broad, an intellectual-looking brunette in denim cut-offs and cowboy boots, that started the whole mess. He hadn’t been able to recall her name. And then Renate had reflexively repeated the word: “Broad?” And Mike, by Renate’s side pouring beer from a pitcher, said absently, “What?” and she remarked, “I’m just trying to decide if Jake’s a sexist pig or not.”

The nomads who had filled the empty rooms of Dungwood over the summer were long gone by the time Jake and Jeanie returned for fall semester, and so were the drugs they’d left behind and the stone-ground whole wheat bread they baked, though a battered guitar still leaned against the great room wall. The travelers themselves had gone back to their own schools and colleges to resume the business of students – rallying and protesting.

Jake had spent the day late-registering for his engineering classes, which were a lot harder than looking around for some rocks to put in your pocket in case you came across a window that needed smashing. The prospect of spending his evenings in the library messing around with a slide rule instead of making revolution depressed him. He was angry by the time he got to the 602 that evening. And he had already downed a couple of beers at the bar when Renate made her off-hand remark.

In reply, he had directed words, for the first time ever, at Renate, till then a preternaturally quiet woman who barely looked at him, let alone said hello. “That’s just like all the shit I hear from you women,” he said, thinking he was simply sticking up for himself. “It bores me. It’s on a really untogether level. All that fem lib stuff is a drag.”

“Fem lib *stuff*?” she asked as though seeking clarification.

What came next was the part that really seems to bother her. When Jake and Mike found her a couple of hours later, she was in her room, furiously scribbling in a journal. He has a feeling she’s been reading over that entry every day since and memorizing every word. He remembers it all pretty vividly himself, remembers the sensation of tilting backward on the rear legs of his chair and saying, with considerable savoir faire, “Oh, you know. All that magazine-feminist bullshit you women are so fond of these days. When the truth is, you can have whatever you want in life, as long as you’re willing to do what it takes to get it.” He knows that’s what he said because it’s exactly what he thinks. Ol’ Jake is nothing if not egalitarian. He’s in favor of the career woman, the more well-paid the better.

“You know,” he temporizes now, “the average man’s working vocabulary consists of only a few thousand words. The women’s liberation movement is imposing restrictions on mine that I haven’t had the opportunity to fully assimilate. Other than that, I think I’m just as reasonable as the next man.”

“I agree. You are just as reasonable as the next man.”

Still turned toward Renate’s end of the sofa, Jake thoughtfully scratches his bare chest, not sure how to respond, but pleased with how he’s handled himself so far. That’s when he notices that his body appears to inhabit two different temperature zones. One of his small, beige, masculine nipples is erect, as though some invisible succubus has been lashing it with her

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tongue. The other is perfectly flat. He flashes a sideways glance at Renate and notices that this phenomenon has caught her attention as well. And then Jake is forced to confront a new apparition, this one small, curvy, jean-clad, and carrying her fringed-suede hippie bag over her shoulder. It's Jeanie, appearing directly in his line of vision in the entrance to the great room.

“Good morning!” Jeanie says. “Renate, I decided I'm coming with you.”

Renate hurriedly places the bowl on the round table and gives it a push in Jake's direction. “Do me a favor? You don't have to wash it. But you know, at the last house meeting, they said no crockery left in the great room.”

Jake nods, already knowing he'll wash the bowl and put it away in her hiding place. Meanwhile his eyes are on his wife, who is wearing what Jake recognizes as *his* jean jacket. “And where exactly are the two of you going?”

Standing beside Jeanie, Renate is taller, darker, more pale than Jake's little wife. Some words swim through his head on a distant current: *And her face at first just ghostly . . .* But there is one thing these two do have in common: they're men's women. He, Jake Winslow, is Jeanie's best friend, confidant, and playmate. And Renate has always struck him as the kind of woman who feels more comfortable in a roomful of dudes. He watches aghast as Jeanie slides her arm around Renate's waist, and the taller woman, despite looking awkward and dubious as hell, throws her arm loosely around his wife's shoulders. It's Jeanie, he sees, who gives Renate a tug toward the door, and then the two of them go skipping out into the sunny morning together, off to do God knows what in the name of women's rights.

Christian appears, holding his own bowl of granola balanced on the tips of his fingers.

“I thought I heard voices.”

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Jake, holding the bowl he's been carrying around for most of the morning, staggers to his feet, feeling as though his life is filled with one too many troubling developments. "Jeanie and Renate. On their way to a women's liberation meeting."

"Don't they know there's a *war* on?"

Jake sighs, "It's fine. It, you know, keeps 'em out of our thing."

"Well, I'm heading down to the rally," Christian says. "How about you?"

Jake gestures with the cereal bowl and nods at the ceiling. "You know. Mouths to feed."

The Viking asleep on the sofa issues a couple of preliminary snorts followed by something that sounds like "Wha?" or maybe it's "wa-wa." Soon, Jake knows, he'll awaken and call for his axe. With a farewell nod at Christian, who has taken his seat on the couch, he grabs the banister, its varnish dulled to a purplish-black by years of neglect, and hoists himself up the stairs.

Chapter 8. "House Meeting"

"I think I have a drinking problem!" Rick Plank says into the prevailing moody silence. A tall guy in wireframe glasses with his thin hair parted down the middle and hanging straight to his collar, he usually doesn't say much, but he's a philosophy major, rumored to be heavy in the synapses, and well-respected as a result. Mike, sitting alone in the armchair that matches the purple horsehair sofa, his elbows propped on the arms, his nose resting on his interlaced fingers, studies him for a long moment.

Then he says, "Okay, I'm calling this meeting to order."

"I second that motion," Reed offers. Wearing a plaid shirt unbuttoned, his draft notice sticking out of the pocket, he continues to occupy the red Danish modern sofa on which he spent the night, but Renate and Jeanie are sitting next to him now.

"There was no motion! And anyway, you are strictly a spectator at this meeting." Reed doesn't pay rent, so technically he doesn't have a vote in matters affecting the house. It would be nice, however, if he would volunteer to clean the kitchen, as compensation for the use of their sofa and their showers. However, he seems to feel that his singing and guitar playing is compensation enough.

The new lodger, Debbie Teiler, who had been sitting on the floor with her head down and her long hair falling over her face like a veil, looks up at Reed now. When he meets her eye, she pouts sympathetically. Reed takes his draft notice out of his shirt pocket and hands it to her. She pores over it for a long time, and when she hands it back, she says, "Oh, Reed!" Reed smiles. "Don't worry," he says. "I'm going to draft counseling."

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Mike looks around at the room full of shirtless freaks and long-haired women, who, as usual, look like they're up to something – his old lady and Jake's, with their usually sweet, open faces preoccupied now with some secret; Stacy, who always looks a trifle lock-jawed and sniffs occasionally as if commenting on unspoken thoughts; and that Debbie Teiler, hiding behind her curtain of hair – and continues to maintain a resolute if gloomy silence. Jake has just informed him that Andy Andrews wasn't home this morning, that, in fact, some guy on his floor said he'd seen him leave with a duffle bag on Friday night.

Stacy, who's sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace, says, "Christian and I would like to propose a motion –"

"Did he tell you exactly what to say or did he leave a few blanks for you to fill in?"

Renate asks.

Jake, occupying the sofa across from the one where Jeanie now stares open-mouthed at Renate, stifles a laugh. Jake's enjoying this meeting. It beats wondering where Andy's run off to. He glances over at Mike, who is twirling his mustache, Snidely Whiplash style.

"And the motion is?"

"We think you should appoint a committee to clean the kitchen."

Mike starts twirling the other side of his mustache. He says, "Appoint? I think you mean 'call for volunteers' don't you, Stacy?"

Will jumps off the couch, waving his hand to be called on. When nobody does, he shouts, "Can I make a motion?"

"No, you may not."

"Why the hell not?" Will appeals to Jake, who shrugs, world weary, and goes back to wondering where the hell Andy's gotten himself off to and if he's ever coming back.

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“You can’t make a motion because we haven’t discussed anything yet. But I’ll tell you right now, I’m not appointing any committees. So if that’s what you wanted to move, forget it. Now, would anyone like to volunteer to clean up the kitchen so maybe we can get back to having a decent meal around this place?”

“Okay, I volunteer Will, Freddy, and Mike,” Stacy says smugly.

“Hey!” Jake yells. “She’s been coached.

“I second that,” Renate says. “But I also nominate Jake.”

“How is this going to solve anything?” Jake shouts. “So we clean it up this time. In a week it’s back to the same mess!”

“Jake?” Mike interrupts. “We can do it. We’re men.”

Now Stacy is waving around a piece of paper. “I made a sign-up sheet. Once you men get it cleaned up, two people sign up for each day of the week. If it’s your night and you have an exam or something, you get a sub.”

“Oh, so we’re taking names are we?” Mike looks pleased.

“Sounds like a good plan,” Freddy says.

“Can I second that motion?” Will says.

And so it’s moved and seconded and a temporary clean-up committee is voted into existence, and a sign-up sheet makes its way around the room as the moody silence once again descends. Finally, after a couple more sniffs and while watching closely that the sign-up sheet is actually being signed, Stacy speaks up again. “I think we should talk about those noises coming from the attic.”

And Rick Plank says, “Yeah, what about those noises?”

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And Reed reaches for his guitar and says, “Hey, anybody want to hear the new song I’m working on?”

Will leaps to his feet again and shrieks, “Poltergeists!”

And just then the front door bangs open and Christian, fresh from the rally at the Memorial Library mall, comes sashaying in, looking pink-cheeked and curly-haired and excited as he crosses the room with that rolling, long-legged Ray Bolger-stride of his to where his old lady is sitting. But when he sits down and sees himself surrounded by frowning faces, his grin shrinks in his face and turns to a peevish, worried expression.

The meeting seems to be over, Will’s remark about the poltergeists being so indigestible for the moment that any further discussion is foreclosed, until Rick Plank gets to his feet and says, “Uh, I have something I’d like to propose.” All the people in the act of standing up sit back down. The two men on the sofa with Jake sit up a little straighter as though hoping for some reprieve from the mighty tasks that lie ahead. With a regal wave of his hand at Plank, Mike says, “Out with it!”

“I want to talk about the up-coming Dungwood Halloween party,” Plank says, clearing his throat, taking off his wire-framed glasses and putting them back on again.

“Right on!” This motion, if it *is* a motion, is greeted by scattered applause. In a few weeks, Dungwood will host its legendary, second-annual Halloween party, though so far nothing specific has been planned.

“I’d like to move?” Rick Plank says, plowing modestly along, “that we get a couple of kegs and maybe even collect some donations –”

“Splendid idea!” Mike agrees, glancing around complacently.

“– for the Barry Stein defense fund!”

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Will jumps to his feet. "I second that motion!" he shouts.

As pandemonium breaks loose, Renate and Jeanie give each other a look that says, "This gets much worse, we're out the door." There is a back way out of the great room via a couple of French doors, each pane decorated Peter Max-style with rainbows, clouds, and big red lips painted by Mike and an art school buddy of his. These doors lead to the dining room and from there to the kitchen and the back exit.

But first they have to get past Freddy and Reed, who are trying to pry Mike's fingers from the surprisingly thick Schumacher throat. Christian's head is in Stacy's lap, and he quietly whimpers while she strokes him. Looking over at Jeanie and Renate, Stacy shrugs.

Jake's voice, sounding surprisingly hysterical for a baritone, breaks through the shouting, scuffling, and grinding of teeth. "Why does a guy who's on the lam need a defense fund?" Will, rescued, is breathing heavily and making a "T" with his hands.

Somehow Renate is not surprised by how Darwinian, how Lord of the Flies-ian, how Hobbesian or Malthusian or whatever-ian these men have become. That is, except for Rick Plank. "I assisted the professor in a survey of philosophy class Barry took last semester?" Plank speaks with an air of diffidence mingled with determination. "The two of us spent a lot of time talking about the Hegelian roots of Marxism? Barry's a good guy? And I think he should get a chance to defend himself if he needs to. There's a rumor that he never made it out of Madison, and the cops are really close to moving in on him. If he gets nabbed, it'd be nice if there were a few bucks set aside so he could at least hire a lawyer."

Another thoughtful yet freaked-out silence settles over the room. Now it's Jake's turn to stroke his mustache like a latter-day Simon Legree. Mike is about to light a cigarette with trembling hands when Renate, sitting down on the arm of his chair, takes the matchbook and

lights it for him, tossing the spent match into an ashtray from the Edgewater Hotel bar. Mike whispers to her, “I love you, Renate. Always remember that.” She nods and pats his arm.

Reed, whose been tuning and strumming this whole time, says, “Hey, you know, that’s a great idea. And this new song I’ve been working on – wait’ll you hear it.” And with no further ado, other than the twisting of a couple of tuning knobs, he begins to sing: “*Oh Barry Stein was a man, my friends, a man like you or me! With his draft notice in his pocket, he was mad as he could be!*”

The way the votes are divided is a puzzle to both Renate and Jeanie, but about all they can do is look at each other and shrug. Jake, Mike, Freddy, and Christian all vote nay, but they can’t stop the combined forces of the four women plus Rick Plank plus Will Schumacher.

And then Stacy declares in a loud, clear voice, “I move that Mike and Jake make the fliers for the first annual Dungwood Hampster Barry Stein Defense Fund Halloween party! And the rest of us can post them around town.”

“I can put one up at the Book Co-op,” Renate says. She volunteers there on Tuesday afternoons, and she knows those folks will want to come.

Christian, who must have tangled with the cops at that rally, commences to howl like a coyote. Jake shouts, “Do we really want that many people here at Halloween? I mean – flyers? Think of all the beer we’ll need to buy.”

“I know where we can get a deal on a couple kegs. Might be cool. Flyers. Here and there. I’ll second,” Reed says.

“You don’t get to vote,” Mike pleads. Renate has never heard of Mike trying to limit the size of a party before, and she doesn’t know what to make of it. Freddy, Mike, Christian and

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Jake once again form a negative voting block. But the coalition of the women plus Rick Plank, plus Will, and now Reed, holds and the motion carries.

Will whispers hoarsely as the men close ranks around him: "It's a good idea. You'll see." And then Jake and Mike, taking him by the arms, and Christian, holding up one leg, drag Will off in to the kitchen.

When the kitchen door has swung shut behind them, Christian says, "So what happened? Is he gone?"

Jake shakes his head. "Couldn't get ahold of Andy."

"I was afraid of that," Christian says. "But look, I have an idea."

Will gets to his feet and starts flinging pots and pans out of the sink onto the counter.

Jake opens the door of the fridge, and after closing it again and finding a dishtowel to tie over his face, begins flinging things from the refrigerator into the kitchen's garbage can. Freddy takes the things Will removes from the sink and stacks them. Mike, intending to function in a supervisory capacity, lights a cigarette.

"Hey," Christian says, his voice rising with indignation, "doesn't anybody want to hear my idea?"

"As a matter of fact, no," Mike says. "Every time somebody around here gets an *idea* something bad happens. What we need is an actual plan."

"Well, when you put it that way," Christian says. After rummaging for a few minutes in the kitchen closet, he removes a pail and one of those scary mops that looks like the head of Medusa.

Jake, running a damp rag around the now-empty insides of the refrigerator says, "Okay, let's hear it. Can't hurt, right?"

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“You’re wrong there,” Mike says, “but okay, fine.”

Christian, leaning on the mop like an old salt with a tale to tell, says, “Guess who I ran into on the Mall today.”

There are no guesses.

Only somewhat daunted, Christian continues: “Some people from the Revolutionary Youth Brigade. You’d know them too if you saw them. They had some flyers that said stuff about Barry Stein. ‘Rally for Barry Stein. Contribute to the Barry Stein Defense Fund.’ Shit like that. Like what Plank was saying at the meeting.”

“You think they know something?”

“I went up to them and pretended I was curious. They acted kind of like Jehovah’s Witnesses. Like they were looking for recruits.”

“Remember Mortensen and Doyle? Those guys that used to make all the acid? They’re Jehovah’s Witnesses now,” Freddy says.

“So we we’re joining the RYB?” Mike says. “Is that your idea?”

“No, but if anybody has the connections to get Frodo to Mordor, it’s those guys.”

Jake closes the refrigerator door and, holding the dishrag by two ends, starts twirling it around itself. “So your idea is we’re just going to walk up to them and ask them if they’d mind giving a friend of ours a ride –across the Canadian border, let’s say?”

“Canada is not a good idea. He will not get across that border.”

“Plenty of ways to get into Canada without going through customs,” Freddy says. “He could just walk into the woods and across the border.”

“He’s extraditable from Canada,” Christian says. “He’s not a draft dodger.”

“Look, the more we talk about this shit, the less we do about it,” Mike says.

“So what’s the idea?” Will is elbow deep in suds.

“The least we can do is meet up with them tonight, kind of feel them out, you know.”

“I’m not going,” Mike says.

“That’s good, cause you’re not all that subtle. I thought Jake and I could go.”

“We’re not telling them anything, okay?” Jake says.

“Of course not. They could be FBI for all we know.”

Mike, leaning against the back door, smoking, says to Will, “Hey, what about that stuff over there?” and points to a stack of plates. On the floor, water sloshes everywhere in greasy puddles, and Christian stabs at them with Medusa’s head. Will lifts a steak knife out of the suds, white foam sliding off his arms. Will’s jeans barely cling to his jutting hip bones, but his chest is flat and smooth, no ribs showing. He turns from the sink balancing the wooden handle of the knife on the ball of his hand, the blade pressed between his index and middle fingers.

The gesture attracts attention. Like spectators at a tennis match, the men watch silently as the knife arcs across the room, slicing air and landing with a pong in the door frame two inches from Mike’s head.

“Missed him!” Will says and plunges into the suds again.

Mike, without having flinched, pulls the blade out of the doorframe, cigarette parked in his lips. “Oh look,” he says, slowly crossing the kitchen in Will’s direction. “It seems you’ve misplaced a piece cutlery.”

Chapter 9. “Revolutionary Movement

Pausing outside Ye Olde Bräuhaus on Francis Street, Christian says to Jake, “Whatever you do, don’t think about what we’re really doing here.”

“That’ll be easy, ’cause I have no fucking idea.”

As the yeasty smell of beer assault his nostrils like an old friend, Jake finds himself engulfed by an atmosphere designed to spell *Gemütlichkeit* with a capital “g.” The bar is made of ancient, dark-stained wood, like a lot of bars in Madison, but over it hangs a wooden gable covered with carvings of birds and flowers and elves in pointy hats. It’s noisy in here, and damn if that isn’t “Street Fighting Man,” Jake’s current least favorite song, on the jukebox, because of course there is a jukebox, and pinball machines in the back, and a cooler stocked with six-packs and bottles of coke, because, in the end, there’s only so much *Gemütlichkeit* you can stand.

They take their seats on a couple of wooden barstools, the kind with matching indentations that are supposed to be easier on your backside (an innovation that strikes Jake as having something Germanic about it), and an ancient factotum approaches and says, in heavily accented English, “What’ll you have, boys?”

They order up a couple of steins of Pschorrbräu, and Jake notes that his inner monologue now consists almost entirely of words with umlauts as the old man calls their order down the bar to a slim, elderly woman who wears her gray hair wrapped around her head in a braid. Jake hasn’t seen any people this old since the last time he visited his great-grandmother in the nursing home. If he isn’t careful, he’s going to cheer up. He glances around the bar, he hopes not too furtively. Does he see anybody in here who looks like a dedicated communist? Yeah, just about everybody, including Christian and himself.

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“How’ m I doin’?” Christian wants to know.

“I dunno. What are you doing?”

“Trying to look like a campus idiot.”

“That shouldn’t require a whole lot of acting.”

“No, Jake, listen, that’s our deal. That’s how we have to play it. Let them do the talking.

The less they think they have to lose, the more they’ll talk.”

“Oh, so you do have a plan. I wasn’t really worried . . .”

“You were worried. You still are. Everyone is. We’d be insane not to be worried.”

To keep from having to say anymore, and to prevent the thought of any sort of intelligence-gathering mission from entering his mind and being written all over his face, Jake starts a conversation with the old man behind the bar, who is standing ramrod straight just a few feet away, ready to spring into action.

“So where you folks from?” Jake says. “Like, originally.” Christian giggles the way he does when he’s hysterical.

“Bavaria,” the old man says reasonably.

“Been here long?” Now Christian’s rubbing his face with his hands. Jake already has that sinking feeling that conversations give him when he’s asking a bunch of questions and getting nothing but one-word answers, and the only way to end it is if somebody throws a punch. But the old man seems nice enough, though not very talkative.

“We left in ’38. I was in the army.”

“. . . ’38. The army.” Something about the conjunction of these two terms nudges Jake’s brain. Because there’s a third term – the undeniable pride with which the old man says these

words, a pride that more than thirty years of pulling taps for horny college students has not managed to extinguish.

But this thought process is abruptly interrupted when a hand clamps down on Jake's left shoulder. He freezes, then glances sideways to see that a hand has also clamped down on Christian's right shoulder. Jake half turns on his barstool and takes in a man he vaguely recognizes, one with short, greasy brown hair and a wide but somehow unfriendly grin slashed across his face. Christian, swiveling around so his knees are now facing away from the bar, sticks out his hand and the man responds with the customary hand shake, joined at the thumbs, hands overlapping. Something about the ritual gesture is reassuring, but Jake reminds himself that it is no reason to think they're on the same side. With a curt nod, the man indicates they should follow him to a booth, and Jake and Christian grab their beers, Jake with a brief salute for the old man behind the bar, who stands watching them with his mouth in a straight line.

A skinny woman with dark blond hair hanging in loose waves sits alone in a corner of the wooden booth. Not much of a turn-out from the RYB. But then, there's no reason for these or any other campus radicals to attach importance to this meeting. The skinny woman has crowded-together, uneven teeth, which Jake notices because her lips are always slightly parted. Her "hi" comes out sounding like "hah."

"Hah," Christian says in return, sticking out his hand. "Nick Danger, Third Eye." The woman looks at the hand but makes no move to take it. Her lips are now curled, not in a smile, but in a cruel grin that telegraphs contempt. Neither one of the RYB-ites is laughing, and since it's not possible that they've never heard of Firesign Theater, it must be because they don't have a sense of humor. Not that it was all that funny. Christian can do better, but he's nervous. Or maybe this is part of his yokel act.

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“So what does that make him?” she’s looking at Jake now.

“That’s right. I’m Porgy. Porgy Tirebinder.”

“He’s a spy and a girl delighter,” Christian sings in falsetto.

The young revolutionaries give Jake blank stares that are mirror images of each other. But Jake tells himself it’s a good thing that their opening gambits are falling flat. This is what they want. They want to look like rubes, like rank amateurs, not like men who have the most wanted radical in Madison hiding in their attic back on Lakelawn Place. Jake fed him before they left. Managed to salvage a few eggs out of the refrigerator, scrambled them up. Kid needs a shower, but he could be worse off. We could show you Marxists a thing or two, he finds himself thinking. And then he stifles a slight frisson of acidic fear that bubbles up from one of the holes in his stomach lining, because that is exactly the kind of thought he isn’t supposed to be having right now.

“So what can we do for you?” the man says, leaning back in the booth, hands flat on the table.

“First off, maybe you could introduce yourselves. Just so we know what to call you.”

“Sure, Porgy. I’m Marc Antony and this is Cleopatra.”

Jake raises his stein, which is nearly empty. Funny, he can’t remember drinking this beer, but it is good strong beer, and behind his forehead he’s feeling the first faint twinges of oblivion. “Marc. Cleo.”

Now the guy laughs, a laugh that’s even more unpleasant than his grin. Christian downs the rest of his beer, slams the empty stein down on the table and notices something. “Hey, aren’t you guys drinking?”

Marc Antony shrugs.

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Jake gets it. They're drinking, if he and Christian are buying. "I'll go get us a pitcher," Christian says, and he brings back a couple of glasses for Marc and Cleo, and as he pours the beers, Jake forces himself to look both of them square in the eye, or as square as he can, since one of his is slightly crossed. All of this trying not to think about the real reason they're here is taking a lot of effort, and he knows it's going to look suspicious if he breaks into a sweat.

"So what are we doing here?" Marc says after he's tossed down a substantial amount of beer. The woman, for her part, smacks her lips and wipes the back of her hand across her mouth. Jake is beginning to find her attractive.

"Taste good?" he inquires.

Her only reply is a snarl. He thinks he might really like her now.

"Uh, well, when I got home today, I was telling Porgy here about you guys –"

"Home? You guys live together?"

"We're roommates," Jake says. "Over on Doty Street."

Barry had insisted they not tell the RYB anything about themselves that could remotely be construed as accurate, but the minute this lie is out of his mouth, it starts making Jake queasy. Or queasier. He and Christian are prominent residents of one of the most prominent student housing co-ops in this town. They show up at all the major demonstrations. Sooner or later, Marc Antony is going to figure out who they are. But then he downs another gulp of beer and it occurs to him. Does it matter? Maybe the guy is expecting them to lie. It's like the names. It's okay to lie as long everyone's in on it. This must be how it works in the underground. It's like being in the resistance in WWII. Your first move is figuring out who to trust.

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“We work together over at Pancho’s,” Christian says. “He’s a mean hand with a tortilla.” Christian jerks his thumb at Jake, who grins at the woman, trying to look dopey. She gives him a sly, sideways glance. “And we’ve been thinking about starting a union.”

The man snorts, and as the woman hoists her beer with a shake of her head, he says to her, “You hear that Cleo? They want the Revolutionary Youth Brigade to help them start a *union*.”

Cleo giggles. “My, my, my,” she says, only it comes out sounding like, “Mah, mah, mah.” “You boys sure did come to the wrong place.”

Jake has downed two steins of beer in rapid succession, but now he stands up, grabbing the empty pitcher by its handle, and notes that he is steady as a rock. “Hey, where you from, anyway?” he says to the girl. “When I come back, I want you to tell me.” He’s having a hard time processing her. It’s not the fact that she’s a woman. There are plenty of communist women in this town, but they’re usually raven-haired Jewesses from Jersey, or tawny, freckled Irish lasses from Chicago. He’s never met a southern commie female in his life.

Back at the bar, he hands the empty pitcher to the old man and, after pointing at the bottle of Jägermeister, holds up four fingers. Christian appears by his side.

“Good. You can help me carry the shots.”

“What the hell are you doing?” Christian says hoarsely, with a glance over his shoulder.

“I’m getting these assholes drunk. Hopefully so drunk they forget we were ever here.”

“I’m talking about all the getting-to-know-you, ‘where’re you from little girl?’ shit. Barry said not to do anything suspicious.”

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“That’s not the same thing as not doing anything to *arouse* suspicion.” Jake looks back at the booth, where two white faces are watching his every move. He waves. Then he reaches into his pocket and pays for the pitcher and the shots the old man has lined up on the bar.

“It isn’t?”

“Look, man. We lost control of this whole episode before we even walked in the door.”

Christian twines his in his long fingers around the shot glasses and carries them back to the booth; Jake takes the pitcher. A word pops into his head. *Spionen*. He must have learned it from some black and white movie about World War II, the kind where the Nazis actually speak German and their dialogue is translated in white letters on the bottom of the screen. *Spionen* are spies, people who try to find out what somebody knows without giving away any of their own intelligence, and he and Christian are clearly lousy at it.

Jake settles back into the booth and as Christian slides two shots across the table to their new friends, who take them eagerly enough. “You know,” says Marc Antony, “Cleo and I were just talking. You guys ask a lot of questions. And you seem kind of nervous.”

Jake pours himself a beer. “Guess you might be right,” he says. “But I’m gonna be a whole lot more relaxed in a minute.” When everyone is holding a shot glass, Jake says, “Here’s to the revolution. It’ll come a lot sooner when we all get over a bunch of wimpy-assed ideas like unionizing, which are just designed to make sure capitalism survives.” Jake looks over at Christian, lip curled in disapproval of his naiveté. Cleo isn’t the only one who can sneer.

“Right on,” Marc Antony says, downing his shot.

They bang their shot glasses on the table, all four of them in near unison. “Seriously,” Jake says to Cleo. “I want to know where you’re from.”

“Ever heard of Beach Grove, Tennessee?”

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Turns out she's a coal miner's daughter, and she has no hesitation about telling her story, the one about the granddad dead from black lung and the daddy getting his leg crushed in a mine accident, left permanently unable to work, and the union reps taking kickbacks from the mine owners and pushing through sell-out contracts that give the workers nothing but the right to be ripped off. She came up here on a scholarship. It was her plan, initially, to go to back to Tennessee and try to change things, but at a demonstration her freshman year, she met some people who were spray-painting the walls of Rennebohm's Drugstore with anti-fascist slogans and somehow, they had made her see the error of her ways.

Jake understands all that. He's grown accustomed to the bitterness of radical activists in the years he's been in Madison. What he marvels at, what he can't quite wrap his head around, is a full-on hillbilly woman – the kind who's supposed to bake pies and play the mandolin and stand by her man – who's cold-eyed as a snake. He can't wait to tell Jeanie about her – he can just say he and Christian happened to run into these guys while they were out at a bar. But then he remembers that lately, Jeanie hasn't seemed too interested in his anecdotes if they involve other women.

“Yeah, so that's why we don't work with union pigs so they can help management pigs rip off workers,” Marc Antony says.

“That? Right there? You mean her story?” Christian points at the woman with one of his long fingers, expertly playing dumb.

“Her story, everybody's story. The biggest manufacturing corporations in this country are unionized. And those unions all support the war. They make money shipping guns and ammo over to Vietnam to kill peasants. They're fascist pigs, just like the guys who own the companies. Off the pigs. Off *all* the pigs. Over in Cambodia right now there's a guy named Pol

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Pot who's taking control. He's making the ruling elites from the cities work on collective farms. They have piles of eye glasses that they take off the pigs. They can see well enough to work in the rice paddies with the people. If they can't, he has 'em shot. One less pig to spread oppression. One less pig who wouldn't be able to exist if workers and peasants didn't do their slave labor for them."

"Well," Christian says, "that's the first good news I've heard about Cambodia in a while."

Marc Antony laughs his mean, hysterical laugh. "Turns out Nixon and Kissinger did Cambodia a favor. Bombed 'em back to the Stone Age and now they get to start over. Build a truly just society. Kill all the pigs and only the workers are left."

Christian raises a speculative finger, and Jake worries that the expression on his face, at once questioning and ironic, is all wrong. "So, anybody who wears glasses is automatically a pig?"

"Have you ever seen a worker in glasses?" the woman snaps.

Christian thinks about it. "Sure," he says, but his expression is doubtful. Jake blinks hard; his contact lenses suddenly feel like they're stuck to his eyeballs with epoxy.

"Barry Stein wears glasses," Christian says with that prissy matter-of-factness that can be so annoying in everyday conversation but will be killer in the court room once he gets his J.D. and becomes a bona fide member of one of those piggish elites.

"Yeah, like we give a shit about him," the woman sneers. "Don't tell me. You were once in a class with Barry Stein and you're worried about him 'cause he's such a nice guy." (Pronounced "gah.")

"He bombed a building for fuck's sake. Isn't that enough for you people?"

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Jake observes with some admiration that Christian no longer seems to be trying to win over the RYB. “I think I’ll get another pitcher,” he says.

“Be my guest,” Marc Antony says, his fierce, narrow eyes never leaving Christian.

“Don’t say a word till I get back.” And to his surprise, when he returns with a full pitcher and starts pouring out the beers, the conversation instantly resumes as though nothing took place while he was gone but this weird, two-on-one staring match.

“He bombed and then he ran.”

“Yeah, and lived to bomb again another day!” Christian yelps.

“He’s a freelancer. All the Labor Day Gang created was some kind of high-end war protest. We’re not protestors. We create revolutionary actions with the goal of destabilizing society. We let the warmongers and the pig cops do the work for us, just like in Cambodia. We’re agitators, not flunkies.”

“Oh right,” says Christian. “And then when society collapses, everybody in Madison will be working on a collective farm in Mosinee.”

“Everybody who’s not dead.”

Marc says it, but the women clearly agrees. She’s looking at Christian with a triumphant expression, because she intends to be among the ones with their fingers on the trigger. She won’t be the stinking corpse at the bottom of the limitless pile of bodies.

“So why are you hiding him then?” Christian says as though genuinely puzzled by this conundrum.

The RYB-ers laugh. “What made you think we were hiding that fuck-up!”

“Your leaflet. You seemed so sure he was still in town.”

“Actually, we’re absolutely positive he’s *not* in town.”

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“Oh,” Christian says. He has this way of saying “oh,” that, while not disagreeable, can make you feel like the stupidest motherfucker on earth.

“Disinformation, man. Make the pigs believe they’re so stupid he’s sitting right under their noses, and they can’t find him.”

“Yeah, but why him, out of the three of them?”

“Cause he’s the rankest amateur. He’s fresh out of high school. Wet behind the ears. And they can’t even capture *him*.”

“You think they believe you?”

“Who cares what they believe? We don’t worry about what the pigs *believe*,” the woman says with another of her gleeful sneers.

“Anyway, that was last night’s leaflet. We just put that around on the mall today so the feminist pigs with their little message of *equality* – which is all about them getting the power so they can be the management pigs and oppress the workers – didn’t get the idea that what they had to say was so fucking important.”

“Okay. So where do we fit in?”

“You don’t.”

Christian lets his shoulders sag as though he’s disappointed at his overall lack of importance in the RYB scheme of things.

“We were just curious, weren’t we Cleo. We wanted to see if you guys have what it takes.”

“Yeah,” Cleo says. “Are you down? Or are you all talk, like most of the kids around here? Running home on weekends, showing off to mommy and daddy in the suburbs how radical they are.”

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Up to this point, Jake has been so in awe of Christian's sudden onslaught of *savoir faire* that he's given no thought to its possible consequences, but now his insides seize in a spasm of warning. But before he can devise a thought to keep the words from spilling out, he finds himself saying, "Oh no. That ain't us. We don't even *have* parents. And even if we did, we sure as hell wouldn't talk to 'em about the RYB." As soon as the words are out of his mouth, he realizes he's struck the wrong note, that his comment is tinged with irony and intense dislike, but at this point, all he wants to do is get out of here. He and Christian have found out what they wanted to know. These two creeps and their gang are incapable of any kind of sustained, constructive effort, even the amount required to simply *know* something. He doubts they can manage to shower regularly and brush their teeth twice a day. They're just waiting for the revolution, the one they're sure is inevitable, so they can demonstrate their usefulness as mindless thugs.

Jake looks over at the clock hanging in the middle of the wooden gable, amazed that he and Christian have spent almost two hours being coated in the venomous fluids of political nihilism. He's looks down at his arm, surprised his skin isn't covered with some kind of noxious goo.

The old man is wiping down his bar with a white rag, cleaning up after a pair of departing customers, his face weary but firm. Jake suddenly remembers the connection between 1938 and the German army. That was the year a group of German officers planned to assassinate Hitler, but they wanted support from outside Germany, from England and France. Instead, Neville Chamberlain had maneuvered that famous act of appeasement, the Munich Pact. Jake can't remember what the history book said about the officers, but he'd assumed they were all shot.

“Look at the old Nazi pig,” Marc Antony gloats. “Him and his German pig wife stand there all night serving beers and acting innocent. And nobody even cares.”

The woman snickers. “Nobody but the RYB. Here, sit on the inside.” She slides toward him and they both stand up and then Marc Antony takes her place in the corner of the booth, where he quickly unbuckles his belt.

The place has gotten crowded since they first commandeered this booth; a forest of bodies now stands between them and the bar. Nobody’s looking their way; nobody sees Marc Antony lower his pants. Jake and Christian don’t move a muscle, and later, they will wonder about that and ask each other what they were expecting. Jake, for one, is expecting Cleo to lean over and blow Marc Antony, and he’s just drunk enough to stay put and watch the show, just as he’d been drunk enough to wonder, at various points during this evening, what it would be like to have this woman’s thin, mean lips wrapped around his own cock. So he finds it puzzling, at first, that the guy deems it necessary to pull his pants all the way down over his ass. Surely this is overkill. But then Marc leans up over the table, closes his eyes and issues a slow, satisfied groan. As soon as the groan is finished, he moves over and in that same swift motion pulls his jeans back up, buckles his belt, and then the two revolutionaries make a run for it, shoving their way through the crowd.

Christian turns to Jake. “Did he just take a dump?”

Jake sniffs the air and then hoists himself up to look over the edge of the table. “Yes,” he says. “Yes, I believe he did.”

“Well, at least we know he’s not FBI.”

“Are you kidding? That’s exactly what he is.”

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Chapter 10. "The Bag of Hair"

It's the kind of September morning that poets rhapsodize about, but Jake, being more the practical, scientific type, finds himself with no better vocabulary for describing it than words like "crisp," "invigorating," and "with just a hint of burning leaves." The sky is a brilliant blue and the air is gold-skinned, as though reflecting color from the trees. In Wisconsin, this is the kind of weather that causes complete strangers to smile at each other, and Jake grins back, though his is more of a rictus, and when they see it, the strangers give him a puzzled glance and their eyes fall to the crinkled paper bag under his arm that bears the legend, "The Wig-Wam." Jake has been all the way to the Capitol Square and back this morning, but now, as his boot heels clatter down the cobblestones of Lakelawn Place and his stomach churns, his eyes – both the slightly crossed one and the one that sees straight ahead – are lit with a fanatical gleam.

A figure in fading blue jeans, olive-green flak jacket, and black combat boots approaches slowly down Lakelawn Place. Mike Bennet has a cigarette in one hand and some academic noticeables tucked under his arm.

"We've got to stop meeting like this," Jake says. "You going to studio or something?"

"Class."

"Turning over a new leaf, huh? You know, man, you look like shit."

Mike's wearing aviator sunglasses, and his hair hangs over the rims in greasy black strands. His chin is covered with a day's growth of beard. He's looking in the direction of the pink stucco back wall of the faux-Mediterranean Villa Maria, a fancy boarding house for rich co-eds. Set in that wall is a double row of opaque windows, each one flanked by a pair of little pillars. Anybody could be behind those windows, taking pictures, amassing evidence.

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Without warning, Mike makes a grab for the paper bag Jake holds in one hand, the bag that contains a natural hair wig, medium brown; a fedora; and a pair of cheap sunglasses, items in which Jake has invested every dime that he didn't spend on booze over the weekend. He hopes the Communist Party or SDS or whoever has an address he can apply to for reimbursement. This kind of extravagance is not like him, and it makes him feel even more proprietary about the contents of the bag. Whipping the noisy paper bag behind him like a treader's cape, he blocks Mike with his free arm.

"You know, man, it's a lot of work being the brains behind you," Jake says, deciding to hand Mike the bag before he tears it to pieces.

But before looking into it, Mike glances up at a freak with a bad case of bed hair, his eyes still crusty with sleep, who has just stumbled out of the Villa Maria and nods at the two strangers, raising his eyebrows in mild, hail-fellow-well-met curiosity.

"What're you lookin' at?" Mike snaps at the freak as he unfurls the bag. The freak flashes them the peace sign and hustles off toward Langdon Street while Jake grabs Mike by the shoulders and gives him a push in the direction of home. "Walk with me," he says. "Talk with me." Mike is burrowing in the bag like a kid looking for candy. When he's done burrowing, he rolls the bag up and hands it back to Jake.

For a moment, Mike says nothing, but when he finally speaks, in a voice of deliberate calm, it is to say: "Just tell me that is *not* a disguise."

"It is not a disguise!" Jake says.

Mike exhales. "Thank Christ!" he says. "For a minute, I was afraid you were going to say we should put that wig and that stupid hat on Frodo and parade him around downstairs."

"It is not a disguise," Jake repeats.

“You said that. You said it is not a disguise. So what is it then?”

“It is a cloak of invisibility!”

As Jake sat and smoked a joint with Barry Stein that morning, after watching him put away his morning granola, an idea had come to him in embryonic form. When you're dependent on other people to bring you food, it must seem like every meal could be your last. Though the night before Jake had smuggled him a generous portion of ratatouille, the young radical didn't so much eat food as devour it. Jake wonders how long it will be before people start to notice their stores going missing, or how much more often they will have to visit the Mifflin Street Food Co-op and Eagle Discount Foods now that they have an extra mouth to feed. And then again, Barry was beginning to smell, that corpselike, almost rotten smell, the universal street person smell with more than a hint of permanence about it. Jake wonders how long it's been since he's showered.

“We've gotta get you out of this attic, man.”

“Not gonna argue with that,” Barry said, holding in the smoke. Rising meditatively to his feet, Jake gathered some spit on his tongue and doused the joint with a small sizzle, pocketed it, and said, “Stay here. Don't move!”

Barry shrugged, but the gesture was lost on Jake Winslow, who was already headed for the stairs. An idea lurked somewhere inside his brain, on the cusp of coming into being, the sensation known as *presque vu* giving him a mental itch, hinting strongly, as it did, at a solution, to the immediate problem of radical relocation, yes, but also one which would demonstrate philosophical originality, prove old theorems in new ways, resurrect concepts long considered buried or disproven, revivify hopes long since abandoned.

Only, once he found himself hitting the cobblestones, Jake felt the inspiration draining out of him before it had a chance to coalesce into a fully formed thought. He should have

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hopped on the State Street bus and ridden bravely to Engineering Hall. Jeanie had spent the whole weekend giving him that questioning look, like she knew something was going on, and she was waiting for Jake to tell her about it, which was what he usually did when that happened, usually found himself confessing something, because, as a graduate of St. John the Apostle Prep in Marathon, he knows that confession feels good, and is followed by forgiveness and rapprochement. This happens even though Jeanie is a Lutheran. But now it was critical that he not give in to that impulse. The less Jeanie knows, the better.

And yet somehow, despite his guilt feelings or because of them, Engineering Hall was not the direction he took, and by the time he found himself near the Square, with the immense white dome looming over him, the potential for inspiration had been replaced by a powerful sense of anxiety. In fact, it was so strong you might almost have called it paranoia. So Jake ducked into an alley and fished the roach out of his pocket and relit it, and inspiration flooded back, only it was the inspiration to go and find himself a doughnut, and as luck would have it, a coffee shop appeared on a side street off the Square – he wasn't even sure what street, Henry, maybe – where he sat down at the lunch counter and ordered coffee and a chocolate glazed. A newspaper lay on the empty stool next to him; he glanced at a headline that read, "Labor Day Gang Now 3 of 10 Most Wanted." Jake looked around to see if anybody noticed him noticing it, and then he picked the paper up like it was a map to the lost Comstock Mine. The article mostly talked about how political fugitives now dominated the Most Wanted list, edging out the more mundane murderers, embezzlers, and kidnapers. When Jake noted that the search for Madison's contribution to the list had fanned out across the country, he was relieved, but hardly giddy with it. This story could be exactly what the FBI wanted him to think.

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A movement in the store window across the street caught his eye, the clerk in a wig store fluffing the hair on a couple of head mannequins. The mannequins had no faces, only a hairdos, and there was something about their blankness that appealed to Jake. They're incognito, he said to himself. Nobody recognizes them. They're invisible.

Throwing a buck on the counter and leaving behind an almost full cup of coffee, Jake reached the Wigwam before the door of Spudnuts slammed after him. Inside the shop, panting slightly, Jake found a clerk wearing a curious expression. She was forty if she was a day, her face covered by a thick layer of make-up, eyes magnified behind her glasses so that her false lashes were the size of tarantulas. "My goodness," she said. "I wish my boss were here today."

"Don't mind me," Jake said. "I'm harmless."

"Oh, I'm sure you are. But I know she'll want that." The clerk pointed at his hair. "Unfortunately, I can't offer you anymore than fifty dollars. My advice is, let it grow a little longer and hold out for a hundred."

"Whoa. What if I don't happen to be kinked that way?"

"You're here to sell your hair, aren't you?"

"Ma'am, do I look like a junkie to you?"

"Well, no," she said uncertainly, not wanting to offend him. "But we do have a lot of customers who would *kill* for hair that color."

Jake made the "hands up" gesture and said, "Lady, you got me all wrong. I'm a buyer. Not a seller."

"I see." Though clearly she didn't. "In that case, what can I do for you?"

Jake had another in a series of potentially devastating realizations: he realized that what he needed now was a story. "You see, it's my wife. She has . . . alopecia."

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“I’m so sorry!”

Jake was operating on pure instinct, words coming into his mouth he didn’t even know he knew. But it seemed that, at some point, maybe when he was out West with time on his hands, watching a snowy TV picture in some three-dollar motel room, he had already decided that if Jeanie did develop this condition, there would be no interruption of intimate relations. In fact, with her pointy little ears, it might make her look like a lusty female from another planet, putting a new twist on the kick provided by that skimpy black underwear he had bought for her. But naturally, she would still want the wig for the day-to-day life things, classes and going to work.

“Of course, you’ll want real human hair,” the woman said, rummaging in a cupboard.

“The humaner the better.”

The clerk turned back to the counter with a disgruntled mop, brown and coarse and frizzy, a distant relative of Medusa from the kitchen closet at Dungwood. “Real human hair,” she said with effortful pride. “Normally, that would cost you several hundred dollars. But this one is selling at a discount.”

“Looks like Janis Joplin woke up one morning to find herself bald.”

Averting his eyes from the blank stare the clerk gave him, Jake pulled a wad of cash out of his pocket. “All I’ve got is fifty bucks,” he said. He knew it was a mistake when the woman’s face brightened. But as no deal had yet been struck, he added, “Course I need at least ten for. . . necessities.”

“Well,” the clerk said, trying to look less gleeful, “if you promise to come back and sell us your hair when it gets a little longer.”

“It’s a deal!”

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Jake made a circuit around the square, first to a pay phone to call Will at Dungwood and ask him to get Frodo downstairs for a shower while everyone was at class; then to the Ben Franklin dime store for a pair of cheap shades; and finally on to Nobel's Men's Haberdashery for a fedora with a red feather in the brim. He plucked the feather out of the fedora, whistling "Edelweiss" through his teeth, and headed back to Dungwood.

Mike has been silent walking down Lakelawn Place, broodingly so, and now he puts out an arm, forcing Jake to a stop. Jake glances up. Against a cloudless, powder-blue sky, the red granite battlements of Dungwood look particularly martial. He could almost swear he just saw a dude in chainmail disappear behind one of them.

Mike has placed a proprietary hand on Jake's chest. "Wait," he says. "Before we go in there, maybe you better tell me what that shit is for."

"Not out here."

"Promise me that is not a disguise."

"I already promised you that! Let's go."

"You don't understand. It's not safe in there, Jake."

"What the fuck, man? We can't stay out here all day."

"You gotta listen to me. You know on Saturday, when Renate and Jeanie ran off somewhere, and they didn't say where they were going?"

"Yeah. Like I said, keeps 'em out of our thing."

"You're not listening."

"I'm already there, man. I'm willing to make a sacrifice for the cause. Renate and Jeanie are becoming Lesbians? Okay. It's the next logical step in women's liberation. I'm not the first

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man of my generation whose woman left him for another woman. I stand tall, unbowed and unbroken.”

“Consciousness-raising! That’s what I’m trying to tell you. It’s happening right now. In Stacy and Christian’s room.”

Jake folds his arms across his chest and stares at Dungwood’s front door as though studying the carvings. “Buck up, man,” he says to Mike. “We’re going in.”

Chapter 10. "Sex and Upsetability"

How *did* she end up here, on the floor of Stacy and Christian's study? The house is quiet. The only two other residents home, Will and Freddy, are barricaded inside Will's room undertaking who knows what evil experiment. Renate helped organize this consciousness raising session, so she can't pretend she doesn't know exactly how she got here. But, as usual, she's not feeling the way she's supposed to. Instead of feeling liberated, she feels as though the world of women is closing in on her.

Stacy and Christian occupy one of the tower suites, and hangings created by Stacy in a variety of shapes and sizes decorate the walls. Stacy likes rust colors and deep reds and oranges in striated bands that finally dwindle into hairy looking tangles of knots, like enormous, oddly shaped pudenda. These hangings seem to celebrate a lush, unfettered womanhood that only someone as stubborn and self-assured as Stacy can manifest. Below them, a Gibson guitar sits on the floor, the open lid of the case leaning against the wall; a tiny mandolin case sits nearby on the floor. A desk covered with yarns, some spooled, some in piles, stands near the door. Stacy does all her work from the big armchair facing the windows. Christian's bike is balanced on its seat and handlebars on one side of the room, bike tools scattered around it. Christian taught Stacy how to fix bikes, and now she works at Yellow Jersey.

Being surrounded by the evidence of so much worldly competence depresses her. Obviously, Stacy and Christian are perfect for each other.

Stacy clears her throat. She has been rummaging around on her desk and, from underneath some skeins of multi-colored wool, has produced a glossy magazine. Sitting back

down, she drapes the magazine over one of her thighs and says in that clamp-jawed way of hers, “I have something we can talk about,” punctuating the sentence with a sniff.

“Don’t we have to do this first?” Jeanie says, looking at Renate. She is holding the pamphlet on how to conduct consciousness-raising distributed by the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union that she and Renate picked up on Saturday at the Women’s Bookstore. “Yeah, that’s right,” says Renate. “At the training they said to read it first, every time we meet, even after we think we know it by heart. It helps maintain the right focus, they said.” Renate wishes she sounded more sure of herself, but no one objects, and Jeanie clears her throat and reads the pamphlet.

The pamphlet selects the remarks men are always making to women on the street as an example of everyday oppression. Most women, says the pamphlet, don’t like being addressed by strange men as they’re walking alone. But they accept it, because they don’t believe there’s anything they can do about it. But this kind of casual verbal assault is really an assertion of dominance. It says men own the streets, and women are only allowed to walk on them if they surrender a bit of the currency of themselves, their privacy, their sexuality.

By the time Jeanie comes to the words “We see personal problems. . .are really political problems,” her voice seems to have changed, from rote reading to actual interest and possible agreement. Consciousness-raising, the pamphlet asserts, is not therapy, because women don’t need therapy. They are not mad or sick. They simply need to see that their problems are problems common to all women, and through solidarity with other women and feminist action, they can begin to address these problems. By uniting with others, they become stronger, at the very least taking the first step of realizing they are not alone in their feelings.

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“Yes,” Debbie says. Renate stares. She had assumed the words would have some import for Jeanie, who certainly is a fool for love, but Debbie, she figured, was just coming along for the ride, sitting over there in her corner of the rug, brooding, slowly running her fingers through her ash-blond hair, the expression in her gray eyes trancelike, focused on something far away from this room. How, Renate wonders, did Debbie even get here? She had been Stacy’s friend in high school. They were in National Honor Society together, and they hung out at NHS parties and had an elite sort of bond. Renate didn’t care about not being in NHS herself, because she had no interest in being a goody-two-shoes, so she wasn’t jealous, exactly, but the last thing she expected was for Debbie to be hanging out with them over the summer and then moving in with them in fall. Dungwood did not seem to be Debbie Teiler’s kind of place. Her presence here wasn’t tantamount to having one of the nuns move in, but it was close.

Perhaps the strangest thing of all is how deeply Renate has come to understand Debbie, and how little that pleases her, despite the fact that Debbie has completely switched allegiances now and seems barely to know Stacy Riorden exists. It is she, Renate Weile, who is Debbie’s new best friend. Everybody makes jokes about the fact that they are both Germans, but Renate and Debbie both know that they are different kinds of Germans. Debbie’s dad is an urban German, a doctor, whose family came to Milwaukee in the 1930s when he was a boy. The Weiles are free European peasants of German descent whose history is entangled with the whole painful mess of World War II. Debbie speaks a few words of German and purportedly studies it in school, though since the end of high school she no longer seems to be much of a scholar. Renate speaks a few more words because she was born there.

The only reason Debbie Teiler worships her is because she, Renate, is with Mike, and he’s the main guy around here, and as a couple, they’re the tent pole, the thing that holds

everything up. The really surprising thing is that Debbie seems not to notice how unsuited Renate is to this role, and how uncomfortable she is with everything about it, including Debbie Teiler's newfound respect.

When Jeanie finishes reading, there's a pause, and Stacy resumes her agenda, the article she holds in her lap. In fact, Renate knows exactly what it is, because she's read it herself, and she is the one who lent Stacy the article, Anne Koedt's "The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm" from *Esquire*, and now she supposes she is going to have to sit here for the next hour or so listening to how stupid the whole thing is and how Stacy and Christian have fabulous, unending orgasms, which certainly seems to be the case from all the moaning and creaking you hear from their bedroom, and the constant complaints about chafing they bandy back and forth. So Renate is shocked, again, at what comes next.

"When Renate first gave me this article, 'The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm,' I guess I didn't think much about it. Christian and I had just fallen in love." Stacy pauses for a moment and gives Renate a sharp glance. "And we made love three times a day, and everything seemed perfect."

"I think this entire house is aware of that," Renate remarks. "Just from the sound effects." Stacy glances sharply at Renate and then lets a small smile play about her already small lips, a smile that indicates, more powerfully than any word, that nothing Renate says has the power to disturb or embarrass her.

Stacy has always had a little too much self-esteem. She was a math whiz at Mother Immaculata's School for Girls. Renate was the passionate, storm-the-barricades writer-person, but back then they had stormed those barricades together, along with four other seniors, the Immaculate Six, as they were known among themselves. During Easter vacation Stacy and

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Renate had invented an elaborate lie to get away from home and hitch down to St. Louis together, braving the dangers of the road, supporting and defending each other against pill-popping long-haul truck drivers and amorous men of the cloth, eating pancakes together in the home of some kindly hippie's sweet old Iowa grandmother.

After that trip their bond had seemed unbreakable, but by the second semester of freshman year, which they had both spent at UWM in Milwaukee, their friendship was over. Stacy, while occasionally still sharing a condescending word with her, is no longer Renate's side sharing adventures. There had been a freeze-out, of the kind only women know how to perform. Renate knows she's not making it up, as Mike often suggests. She is a little vague on the details – so much happened since last winter, she could spend the rest of her life sorting it out, but she does know *when* it happened: the party in Madison where they first met the Dungwoodites, and Renate had first noticed Mike, though they didn't end up together till later, at another party, Dungwood's end-of-the-semester bash, when she and Stacy had signed contracts for the Fall. Renate had ended up moving in a lot sooner, because she and Mike were together after that. And over the summer, Stacy and Christian had become a couple.

At the winter party, everyone had dropped mescaline, and Stacy and Renate had gone back to the bus station together in a City Vets cab, still tripping pretty hard on that synthetic mescaline Reed Gunderson had capped himself and distributed at the party. Renate had sat in front with the driver, and every time she turned around to look at Stacy in the backseat, she had seen flames erupting and shooting through the roof of the car. Whatever happened that night, Stacy remains stubbornly and consistently mad at her, making disparaging remarks whenever Renate opens her mouth, if she can even be bothered to stay in the same room. And she can't get Stacy to talk to her about it. But maybe today, in the consciousness-raising session, the truth can

finally do what it's supposed to and set them free, make them friends again; that is if she's ready to get over her resentment of what a bitch Stacy's been these past months.

"But then I thought about it for a while, and I realized I wasn't sure if I did have vaginal orgasms. So I talked to one of my TAs about it."

"Maybe you should have talked to the professor," Renate quips.

Ignoring her, Stacy continues, "Who's a woman and part of the Lesbian-feminist coalition on campus."

"Mike would say 'Lesbian-feminist' is a redundancy."

"Wouldn't that be an oxymoron?"

"No, Debbie, a redundancy."

"Could we just get back to the topic!"

"So what is the topic?" Jeanie says, alert and curious.

"Well," Stacy stalls, "I, uh, decided Renate might be right about her whole myth of vaginal orgasm deal."

"My deal?" The article was interesting, of course, in the way that so much of feminism is, a way the makes you feel horrible about your life. She had just wanted to talk to another woman about it, maybe get some assurance that everything was okay. She certainly hadn't wanted to make a public statement that something was wrong with her and Mike's sex life. That would hurt his feelings. And anyway, Mike was great in bed. But Renate could only recall one thing happening in her life that seemed to be what was usually described as a full-on orgasm, and that had happened one summer night with a boy she was seeing after high school. And if that *was* an orgasm, she is pretty sure she'll never have another one, because the whole thing had taken, like, three hours.

“Well, you’re the one passing the article around,” Stacy says to her.

Renate sits up very straight as, inside her, a pan of syrup boils over. “So why don’t you just call me a magazine feminist, Stacy! Like your pal Jake did.”

Stacy glances over at Jeanie, who looks toward the ceiling with a blank expression on her face. Somehow, Renate knows, Stacy heard about that fight at the 602 Club and the exact words that were said to her by Jake, and what’s more, Renate knows she agrees with them. Jake and Stacy are buddies. Boiling syrup has spilled all over the stovetop and is pouring off the stove onto the floor.

“Why do you hate me, Stacy? I’d just really like to know.”

“She does not hate you!” Jeanie says. But what would Jeanie know about it? Renate had been ready to open her heart to Jeanie, had hoped at long last to have found a true woman friend. But then, in the small hours of that Saturday morning when, abandoned by their men, they’d been sitting down in the freezing great room, listening to Reed and Christian sing and strum, sing and strum, and it had seemed to go on forever, and for some reason they wouldn’t let anyone leave. And during one of their tuning breaks, Jeanie had turned to Renate and said, as though with mild curiosity, “What do you suppose Mike is going to do when he gets out of school? Draw things? He just goes from one project to another. First it’s cars, then it’s the banjo, then it’s art. Jake, now, he’ll always have his science.”

Jeanie didn’t add, but it was clearly what she meant: “Jake will be able to get a job.” It didn’t seem to occur to Jeanie that Renate was *not* in Madison working on her MRS degree, because Jeanie is clearly planning on riding the Mrs. Winslow deal to a secure berth in the suburbs, from which she will never have to work a day in her life. Still, it had made Renate almost more sad than angry, that that is what Jeanie thought of their new friendship, as a

competition that she was just naturally winning. So she was doubly surprised when, the next morning, Jeanie had offered to come with her to the training at the Women's Book Co-op.

"Anyway," Stacy continues, "my TA said that from a medical standpoint, it's an absolute fact. Vaginal orgasm is physically impossible. Has to do with the low number of nerve endings in the labium major and the vagina. It's kind of dull down there, cause you know, if it were too sensitive, it'd really be, like, intensely painful to give birth."

"Yes," Renate says musingly, "even fucking is such a sort of *violent* action." Some women's liberationist writers are beginning to suggest that all acts of coitus – but particularly those performed in the so-called missionary position – constitute *de facto* violence against women. In a word – rape. But Renate decides to keep this particular idea to herself; her cohorts aren't quite developed enough as feminists to be ready for *that* notion.

Debbie sighs, her expression pained. "I don't get it. You mean women don't have orgasms?"

"No, Debbie," Stacy says patiently. "They have clitoral ones. But men support the propaganda about vaginal orgasms because it makes it so much more convenient for *them*. That way, they don't have to worry about foreplay."

Renate's thoughts fly back to that mosquito infested field in somewhere outside Waukevik, and the blond-haired boy's hand between her legs. He's pre-med now. And he sure did know his way around the human anatomy. But no better than Mike does. It was just that, without the goal of penetration – to which she'd already said no – he seemed to have nothing better to do than keep on working with his fingers. While the mosquitoes ate her alive, his hand remained in position, until finally there had been this clenching feeling, followed by a tingling warmth spreading through her body, and then a gasp. "I think I had an orgasm once," she muses.

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“Jake says everybody’s responsible for their own orgasm,” Jeanie says as though quoting a known authority on the topic.

“How convenient for him,” Renate says dryly.

“Jake and I always come at the same time, and sometimes we have multiple orgasms together.” Jeanie doesn’t smile as she says this, but she does look a little smug.

But after that, no one can think of anything to say, and the women sit staring into space with glazed expressions, Jeanie’s last words clanging in their ears. Renate is afraid Jeanie will start to make small talk, something she’s exceptionally good at since she can’t seem to withhold the slightest detail about herself. She will probably start by asking Stacy where she gets her yarn and that will evolve into a story about some weirdo she and Jake know who lives in the hills of Marathon County and raises sheep. And she’ll end up volunteering to get some undyed sheep yarn for Stacy next time she’s up in Marathon.

Renate has this whole scenario developing in her head, making her feel even more insecure and alone, when a strange thumping noise comes from the room next door.

Both the suites at Dungwood have these outer, round-walled tower rooms facing the lake. Adjoining the tower rooms are bedrooms with doors to the second-floor hall. And in those bedrooms are closets with double doors linked to the adjoining rooms. That means that one can enter the closet in Stacy and Christian’s room from a door in Jake and Jeanie’s room, a door that could be kept locked except no one can find the key. (Besides, privacy is a reactionary bourgeois idea.) From this closet, the women now hear the sounds of cursing and more thumps, like shoes being thrown or kicked.

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While the women start talking about anything, everything at once in loud, excited voices, Renate scampers to her feet and runs to Stacy and Christian's door. She opens the hall door a crack and peers out as the women behind her continue their shouted conversation.

After watching through the crack for a few minutes, Renate sits down in the circle again. "It was Mike and Jake," she says. "They went over to Will's room and knocked on the door, and he let them in. But first he said, 'What's the password?'"

"What was the password?"

"Open the fuckin' door."

"So, do you think they were in our room, mine and Jake's, spying on us through the closet?" Jeanie sounds flattered.

Renate shrugs. "Evidently."

"Maybe we should try spying on them," Debbie Teiler suggests.

Renate yawns. "But when we do find out what they're up to, it'll be some horrible manly thing, and we'll wish we didn't know." To Renate's surprise, the other women laugh, including Stacy, and, as she basks in the unaccustomed warmth of their approval, the world of women is suddenly like the view out Stacy and Christian's windows – open to the sky.

Chapter 11. "Stranger in a Strange Land"

Inside Will's room with the door locked, Mike lands on the bed, muttering to himself and rubbing his face. Will, with a nod in his direction, says to Jake, "What's happening?"

"Nothing," Jake snaps. "He just needs to get his shit together."

Freddy sits on the floor next to Will's bookshelf. The closet door is open, and inside, in the shadows, surrounded by old shoes and dirty laundry and piles of clothes, sits the man who, since last night, they've called Frodo, but from now on he'll have a new name, that is if Jake can convince him and everyone else.

Mike, sitting up, pulls out his cigarettes. "No good can come of this."

"C'mon, let him explain," Will says. He sounds edgy, but then he always does.

"Is it okay if I come out? It smells bad in here."

"Sure. C'mon out. We need to confer."

"You're fuckin'-A right we need to *confer*."

"Mike? The fuck?"

"Did you hear what those women were saying in there?"

"What's this about the women?" Will demands.

"They're sitting up in Christian's room talking about orgasms, whether they believe in orgasms, and if they do, what kind. Cause there's different kinds, you know. And if you don't know, get ready to find out."

"Are they *having* orgasms?" Will asks.

"It's the most pitiful thing you've ever heard in your life."

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“Well, it’s your old lady’s fault,” Jake says, even though he doesn’t want to get involved in Mike’s paranoia. “She’s the one who went to that women’s meeting where *you* said they wouldn’t let you in the door.”

“They were dykes, man. Some of those women could have taken me.”

“They did take you. That’s probably where she got that article they’re passing around in there. Magazine feminism. I tried to tell you. It’s dangerous, man. But did you listen to ol’ Jake? Oh, he’s just drunk, you said.”

“So this is why you got into a fight with my old lady at the 602?”

“Could be. I was a little ahead of the curve that time. Not by much.”

Will sits down on the end of his bed next to Mike and holds out his hand. Mike taps the bottom of his cigarette pack and Will takes out two, one for him and one for Mike, and Mike lights them with a match. When he’s done, he glances at the matchbook before putting it back in his pocket. Will, the cigarette still parked in his wide lips, sits with both hands on the knees of his corduroy pants, not wearing a shirt, as usual. Will hates shirts. Pulling the cigarette out of his mouth and exhaling, Will says, “So in other words, whatever Mike’s raving about has nothing to do with –” and he waves the hand holding the cigarette in Frodo’s direction.

Jake places his right hand over his heart. His left hand continues to hold a now rather crumpled light-brown bag from a wig shop downtown, a bag bulging with various goodies, including a full head of human hair. “I have only one thing to say about what’s going on in Christian’s room: whatever those women are into, good for them. It keeps ’em out of our thing.”

“You’re just saying that because your old lady’s the one going,” Mike pauses before continuing in falsetto, “*‘Jake says orgasms are all in your head.’*”

“As a matter of fact, Jake does say that. Think dirty thoughts, man.”

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“Don’t worry about me. I know what I’m doing.”

“Remember that tonight when you’re between the sheets with Renate.”

“She has no cause for complaint.”

“Vaginal orgasm. It’s a myth. You heard it. Better get on your game, man.”

“Why is that a myth?” Will wants to know.

Jake, at last spying an opening, pounces. “A myth is something that everybody believes that’s not really true, right?”

“That’s one definition,” Freddy says.

Freddy Barnes has dirty blond hair that hangs to his shoulders in gentle waves. He has a light goatee and mustache and mild brown eyes. Even wearing duck pants, he looks exactly like those pictures of Jesus that hang in your grandmother’s living room in a cheap metal frame spray-painted gold. But while many a man downtown has the Jesus-resembling gift, Freddy Barnes has some additional factor. Freddy is always kind. He is non-materialistic to a fault. And he’s more than a believer in the spiritual dimensions of hipness: he’s a manifester. Freddy, Jake figures, will understand what he’s talking about. Then he can explain it to Mike and Will.

When Jake first went west last summer, starting out in South Dakota, he was alone. He took a shoebox full of books with him, figuring that, after a day of on the flat lands of the West, he’d be sitting in his motel room at night, getting a lot of reading done. As it turned out, for those first few weeks in South Dakota, he ended up getting drunk most nights with a swell bunch of Native Americans his own age, and the books were neglected.

But after a couple of weeks in South Dakota, he moved on to Wyoming, and the atmosphere was different there, more majestic, with those enormous snow-capped peaks dogging him wherever he went. He was virtually alone in his work. An old man with silver braids under

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a black hat drove him to the sites and then came to pick him up at night. In Wyoming, Jake started to read the books he'd brought with him, *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein, *Lord of Light* by Roger Zelazny, and a couple of titles by the sweaty and paranoid Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Clans of the Alphane Moon*. He'd found most of them at Paul's Books on State Street just before he left, except for the Heinlein, which had been among his few earthly possessions since high school. Back then they'd talk about grokking life in its fullness when they were stoned. It'd been awhile since he'd read it, and now it seems corny, somehow, like 1950s science fiction movies; the ideas are interesting, but the execution is clichéd. Each era has its own bible, which should be read all the way through one time and then but dimly remembered.

Once Jake got around to reading, he managed to finish off all the novels in a weekend, including the Heinlein, and then, on a Sunday evening, after wandering all afternoon in the tall grass that began where the motel's parking lot left off, he grabbed the only non-fiction book he'd brought along, Swami Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and made for the Antelope Coffee Shop across the street from his motel.

Jake had found the *Autobiography* at Paul's too, in a box of books waiting to be shelved, while wandering around with an armload of science fiction in the crook of his arm. One of his paperbacks had fallen and landed on the box. He was in the science section because he wanted to read some weightier stuff when he was alone out West, so his brain didn't totally lose its tone by fall. The box at his feet was full of books on classical mechanics and electrodynamics and quantum mechanics. Jake crouched down and ran his finger over these titles with a mixture of trepidation and determination. But *Autobiography of a Yogi* was the one he picked up. Somehow it had gotten mixed up with the physics texts. The cover was boring and plain, with

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no pictures, and the text looked crude and primitive enough to be self-published. The title page gave the copyright as 1946 by the International Kriya Yoga Society. Across from the title page was a picture of Swami Yogananda who, with his dark, flowing locks and mild eyes, looked like a guy you wouldn't mind hanging out with.

You didn't need to be Carl Jung to recognize that synchronicity was at work. People were always saying that Eastern mysticism was applied physics, but did anybody really know what that meant? Jake was about to find out.

Jake didn't open the *Autobiography* until he was in Wyoming, started it one night at the Antelope Café and kept reading until the place closed. Whenever his cup of coffee was empty, he'd push it to the edge of the table and a waitress would refill it. He didn't even notice when the waitresses changed. By the time Jake finally looked up from his reading, it was black night outside, and he knew he wasn't going to be getting much sleep, so he kept on reading back in his motel room, and by daybreak he thought he understood.

Jake's relationship with the *Autobiography* lasted approximately seventy-two hours. Then Jeanie showed up, as they'd planned. Jake had moved on to Utah by then. On the streets of Provo, he was a scientifically trained swami whose locks, now that they were grown out, were the color of the light in the desert. But more than that, Jake had finally understood himself to *be* light, to be composed of it as much as any star, and he was looking forward to telling his oldest and most loyal friend, Jeanie, about that. But then, as he watched Jeanie get off the bus in her frayed bell-bottoms and red flowered shirt, carrying that little yarn bag studded with mirrors he'd bought her at Oriental Specialties on State Street, he felt a savage jolt and came thudding back to Earth.

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And yet it was Jeanie who looked like she was going to start crying, her excitement at seeing him again after so many weeks draining out of her face to be replaced by hurt, even a trace of shame. It was his fault, he quickly realized. He was supposed to look happy, to be excited, but all he could think about, after his longest separation from Jeanie since the night they met, was having sex. Jeanie's emotions, in all their nakedness, tended to act on him this way. And he panicked, because Jeanie would be very sad if she thought that was the only reason he had wanted her to come out here. He knew she was just waiting for the right moment to accuse him of it when they were settled over a couple of hamburgers at the coffee shop a few doors down from the bus station. So before she could say anything, while she was still too distracted by her food, by putting ketchup on her burger and cutting it in half, then dipping a French fry in the little puddle of ketchup she made on the side of her plate, Jake, swallowing one bite of his burger and not hungry for much more, said, "I think we should get married."

She looked at him for a moment. Then she said, "Why?" She was not going to make this any easier for him.

The question frustrated him. "So you can stay with me out here for the rest of the summer and we won't have any hassles when we check into motels. These people are weird out here, Jean. They're very conservative. They go to church."

"Will we still be married when we get back to Madison?"

"Unless you decide to divorce me. Do you not get it, girl? I'm in this for life. You and me. Together."

"Is that why you had that look on your face when I got off the bus?"

"What look?"

"That disappointed look."

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How could he explain that it wasn't a look, just the jolt of his body hitting the planet at ninety miles an hour? She'd interpret what he said in one of two ways – either he was disappointed in her, in how she looked after they'd been apart for so long, by the fact that he instantly knew she'd gained five pounds and noticed the dark circles under her eyes from not being able to sleep on the bus for two days, or else all he wanted was to ravage her and use her for sexual gratification from now until they headed back to Wisconsin for school. These were her two modes. It was useless to argue with either one. The only thing he could do was marry her to lessen his guilt, and then maybe he'd be able to think again. Besides, it was inevitable that they would get married. Jeanie wanted it and somehow, though she was never completely happy, she always got him to do what she wanted. It's one of the reasons he's anti-feminist. He believes in his heart that if women get any more power than they already have, they will be herding men like sheep. In fact, they already are.

And so they had married, in the county clerk's office in Provo. A little judge in a bolo tie officiated. The only witness was the judge's secretary, who looked as though she'd been time-warped straight from the 1940s and, by the way she stared at Jake, hadn't quite gotten used to life in the 1970s. Jake had been in a foul mood ever since. Marriage wasn't an attack on your basic freedoms as a human being, it was an onslaught, from every direction, from Jeanie's family who weren't even grudgingly happy for them, who had all along felt that Jeanie could "do better," to his own mother and sister who kept wanting to have showers for Jeanie and demanding that a ceremony be held, with a priest and a reception afterward in a church hall. Jake had warned Jeanie not to tell anyone, but somehow, they all knew. Marriage had him in the vice grip of limited possibility, or at least it would, until he could talk Jeanie into having an open one.

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From the time Jeanie arrived in Utah until the fugitive came to Dungwood, these had been Jake's preoccupations. Then everything changed. Once again, there had been an adrenalin rush greater than all the cups of coffee he'd ever drunk put together. And then, this morning, that hallucinatory moment, over another cup of coffee in another coffee shop, when he looked across the street and noticed the wig store and heard a simpering, effeminate yet strangely authoritative voice with an Indian accent say, "Cosmic law cannot be stayed or changed and man would do well to put himself in harmony with it." He heard this voice so distinctly, he could have sworn the Swami was there beside him and not in his head. He actually looked around, causing a waitress to head toward him with a coffee pot.

And just like that, he knew what to do.

Mike, stubbing out his cigarette in an ashtray stolen from the Chicago Hilton, looks up at Jake and says, "Remember, man. You promised. No disguises."

Jake rakes the reddish blond stubble on his cheek with an upward motion of his nails. He wishes he had *Autobiography of a Yogi* with him now so he could brandish it like some revival-tent preacher brandishing the Good Book. But the only thing he has in his hand is the paper bag. Crouching, he sets it down on the floor and unfurls the wrinkled, shredding top. He pulls the wig out first, then the fedora, then the shades, and lays them on the floor.

"I know! It's voodoo. Right Jake?" Will looks optimistic, Frodo looks sick, and Freddy looks placid, as always. Mike, on the other hand, might be getting ready to throw a punch.

"It's not voodoo," Jake says in calm and, he hopes, hypnotic tones. "It's not a disguise. It's a cloak of invisibility." Jake absolutely remembers having read about the cloak of invisibility at the coffee shop in Wyoming last summer. He can even picture the page it's on. But obviously, for this crowd, he needs some sort of a metaphor, an illustration, like a thought

problem in physics. “Remember when you guys were all at Marathon High and I was at St. John’s? And we all decided to cut school together? We met up at the insurance company and took Mike’s dad’s car out of the parking lot and drove around town, right past Marathon High. And – what was the name of that old vice principal of yours? Morris? He was standing out there looking for truants and escapees and he saw the car, caught us dead to rights, and what did he do? He waved. Cause he knew it was Mike’s dad’s car, they knew each other from the Lion’s Club.” Jake pauses. “It’s like that.”

The faces turned toward him are so blank it’s like he’s staring at a flock of androids prior to activation. He tries speaking more slowly and emphasizing certain words. “What people see is controlled by what they *expect* to see. I’ll give you another example. Columbus reaches the West Indies. His ships sail into a bay, and a bunch of Indians hanging around on the shore just ignore them. They have no reaction. They’d never seen sailing ships before, and their minds didn’t know how to process the information, so to them, the ships were literally invisible.”

Will stirs restlessly and raises a quizzical finger, but then Jake thinks of something else. “Or, you know, Will, it’s like one of your card tricks. Sleight of hand is based on directing people’s attention elsewhere. It’s all about focus. What we’re going to do here is re-focus their attention, make them see what *we* want them to see.”

Will sighs loudly as though finally attaining comprehension and lowers the finger. A smile breaks over his face. “All right,” he drawls. That seems to make everybody else feel like they get it too, even though Jake knows they still don’t.

Of course, what Jake has in mind is more than simply manipulating expectations like a magician performing a trick. But somehow, in trying to explain it, his inspiration has vaporized, and he struggles for a moment to recall its essence. Swami Yogananda teaches that the human

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mind is like a radio, sending as well as receiving thoughts. The reason that most people are unaware of this is, frankly, they don't want to know what other people are thinking. This tendency to be tuned in only to your own frequencies causes ego-driven blindness and confusion for most people, but it can be advantageous to the practitioner of Kriya Yoga. Having already brought his own life force under control, he can easily exert control over the thoughts of others, but only if he's tuned to some higher purpose. In this case, Jake's higher purpose isn't just the protection of a radical on the lam; it's an opportunity to empirically verify whether this cloak of invisibility stuff really works, whether perception not only influences what we see, but actually changes it. It's Schrödinger's fucking cat. That's why Swami Yogananda was to be found, by the astute observer, mixed in with the physics books. He's the living embodiment of a thought experiment.

Gesturing at Frodo, Jake says, "We're the only ones who've seen him the way he is now. And by the way, that shower did him the world of good. But whoever meets him from the time he leaves this room will see what we want them to see."

"And then are we gonna put him on the bus?" Mike says hopefully.

"We'll wait for Andy. He's bound to turn up. We'll see what he's got."

"Andy's bound to do *what*?" Will's voice is a raspy shriek.

It's Mike who breaks the news. "Apparently Jake forgot to mention this to you. Andy has stepped out of town. For a couple days."

"And we're just gonna sit around waiting till he comes back?" Will doesn't sound reassured.

"You know," says Freddy contemplatively, "he could be like my friend Space Tim."

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“You mean that guy from Menomonie who took too much acid and never made it back from the range?”

“Sometimes I think I am that guy,” Jake allows.

“He doesn’t talk,” Freddy says. “Well, not much anyway. I took him out to the Dairy Queen once. We had to walk around the same block for an hour while he made up his mind whether he wanted chocolate, vanilla, or chocolate-vanilla swirl. It’s not that he couldn’t decide, it just takes him a long time to process the answer, to get it from his brain to his mouth. It’s like time moves at a different speed for him.”

“But other people know that guy,” Mike protests. “I’ve even met him a couple times.”

“So?” Jake says. “That guy’s Space Tim. Frodo here will be . . . Space Todd. He doesn’t have to talk, so he doesn’t have to have a story. We just take him out for walks around the block once in a while, get him some ice cream, and the rest of the time he can stay in here. Then when Andy gets back, we figure out the next move.”

“Yeah, when Andy gets back,” Will repeats, sounding semi-hopeful, kind of trusting. Jake’s stomach see-saws.

“But aren’t you forgetting something?” Mike nods at Frodo, who already seems slightly catatonic. “What do you think, man? Are you game?”

The young radical, sitting on the floor tailor-fashion, avoids looking at any of them as he says, “I guess I wouldn’t mind being somebody else for a while.”

For a moment, no one speaks. Then Jake holds up the wig, wearing it on his fist. “Try it on, man. Let’s see how you look.”

Will helps him get it settled on his head, and they study him for a moment. The wig makes Frodo look like some gnome-ish roadie for Canned Heat, and when you add the fedora

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and shades he looks like a blind, white-boy blues legend. Jake sighs. He knows he has to start his explanation all over again. It's not faith that's going to make this gig work, it's enlightenment, realization. If they can all make that shift together, into that space beyond relativity, they can control relativity, they can make people look where they want them to look and see what they want them to see. The lame will walk, the dead will rise, and Barry Stein, a.k.a. Frodo, a.k.a. Space Todd will be just another in a long line of temporary Dungwood houseguests. But the only thing he can think to say is, "Men, all we've got to do is be cool."

And when he looks around now, he sees, not the disappointed faces he feared, but the opaque veneer of genuine cool. And Jake too is cool, and some day, if they ever dig his memoirs out of the abandoned mine shaft he'll bury them in, they may yet realize that he, when a mere college student, was the author of the thought experiment known as Winslow's Fugitive, a.k.a., the biggest bluff of all time.

Raking the stubble on his chin with an audible upward stroke, Jake happens to glance over at Will's bookshelf. He squints to get a closer look. There it is. Will has a copy of *Autobiography of a Yogi*. "You've got it!" he yelps. Then he remembers. It's his copy. He lent it to Will at about two in the morning a couple nights after they rolled back into town. He'd been talking about it for an hour, trying to recapture the spirit, and he'd convinced Will he had to read it. He's got that spirit back now – he really does. Grabbing the book off Will's shelf, he starts swiftly paging through it. But *Autobiography of a Yogi* runs to almost six hundred pages (to finish it, Jake had broken a lifelong vow never to read a book over 300 pages), and Jake can't remember which chapter mentions the cloak of invisibility. All he can find on short notice is a footnote that says, "The power of influencing people's minds and the course of events is a *vibhuti* (yogic power) Control over the universe appears to be supernatural, but in truth,

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such power is natural and inherent in everyone who attains ‘right remembrance’ of his divine origin.”

But it seems to work. When he’s done reading the passage out loud, serenity prevails for several seconds, until someone starts pounding on Will’s door. Luckily it’s only Christian, carrying a notebook, a Bic pen sticking out of his shirt pocket. He points at the figure they are supposed to be calling “Space Todd,” but whom they will all end up calling “Space Tim,” and says, “Who’s this?”

Chapter 12. "Vow of Celibacy"

Renate is drunk a few hours earlier than usual. And it's too chaotic and the room is too full of odd conversations and intrusive energies and stupid opinions and laughs and smokes and strikes of the match for her to remember that, under normal circumstances, bars bore her. Beer makes her listless, and games of skill, like pool and pinball, strike her as acutely pointless. But tonight, a strange feeling of belonging pervades a booth in the back room of the Plaza Bar where she sits with the other house women, smoking cigarettes from the pack Stacy pushed across the table. Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man" blares from the jukebox, a song whose absurdity never fails to make Renate happy because it reminds her that she is not that woman. Mike, Will, Freddy, and Reed are across the room shooting pool. Sometimes one or the other of them will wander over to the booth and sit with the women for a while. Rick Plank ran into some friends and is talking with them in the bar. The clean-up committee arrived a couple of hours later than everyone else, and the women, who've been buying shots for each other, were already drunk and feeling independent.

But then Jeanie says, "I wonder what happened to Jake and Christian?"

"Just go over there and ask them," Stacy says, nodding toward the pool table.

"I'll go ask Mike," Renate says. She's about to slide out of the booth when the people crowded in the space between the front bar and the back room make way and Maribeth Murray appears, scanning the booths, oblivious to the admiring male glances that come her way.

Renate waves and calls her name, and Maribeth approaches with a broad smile that doesn't seem to touch her eyes. "Hi!" Maribeth shouts and leans over the booth, lightly kissing the lips of the women she knows and introducing herself to Jeanie. Renate admires the blue

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dress Maribeth wears over her bellbottoms that makes her enormous blue eyes look even bluer than usual. She wears her hair in braids like Heidi and carries the same old hand-made hippie purse she used in high school, only then she was wearing it with a blue blazer, plaid skirt, and knee socks.

“I stopped by Dungwood earlier,” Maribeth says now. “All these men were in the kitchen scrubbing huge pots and throwing suds at each other.”

“Those men?” Jeanie points to the group hanging around the pool. A strange young man in a fedora and sunglasses perches on a chair nearby, staring at nothing. Renate’s beginning to think he may really be blind; if Freddy’s not leading him around he barely seems to move at all.

“Looks like you have a new house member,” Maribeth observes.

“We’re not sure what he is,” Renate says.

“I wanted you guys to be the first to know.” Maribeth is always bursting with news.

“Well, Debbie, maybe you can guess. Didn’t I see you at the Jesus People rally the other day?”

“Christ, Maribeth, don’t tell me you’ve found the Lord?” Renate says.

“Yes! Yes I have! And I don’t want you guys to mock me!”

“Oh, Maribeth! Don’t you remember Room B-69?”

B-69 was the journalism room at Mother Immaculata’s School for Girls. It held a couple of typewriters, a drafting table for making paste-ups of the school newspaper, and a closet that had been converted into a dark room. The Mother’s Six ran the school newspaper their senior year; sometimes they called it a take-over. They wrote a lot about politics and anti-war demonstrations, but no one ever complained, especially since many of the nuns at Mother’s were social activists and took their students along on the demonstrations they wrote about. The journalism room was the after-school redoubt of the Six and a few hangers-on who were mostly

cultural hippies, into the music, clothes, and drugs but uninterested in fighting political battles or resisting things. Renate recalls the day Maribeth danced in, her hippie purse filled with buttons she'd picked up at a rally in Madison over the weekend, white buttons decorated with the universal symbol for "woman" with a fist inside. The weekend before, her older sister had taken her to a rally for women's liberation. Maribeth had lineage in Madison, and she was passionate and articulate and not afraid to take a stand, a new one every weekend, as they were evolving pretty rapidly at the time. The Radical Six had started wearing the buttons immediately. Maribeth lined them up, pinning the woman's symbol button on each of them (from that day forward, no longer girls but "teen-age women") and then giving each of them a French kiss.

Stacy leans forward from the corner of the booth she's wedged into and says, "Maribeth, have you forgotten who you are? You're an intellectual."

"Try to understand. Please. Please? I'm not *refuting* anything. One day I was sitting on the rim of the fountain, drawing, hating my classes, not wanting to go to school anymore, and this woman came by and looked at my drawings, and she asked me to pray with her, and I realized right then that I could just accept a lot more light into myself."

"That's great, Maribeth," Debbie says. "I'm happy for you."

"Thank you. Madison has changed so much. The spirit that was here last year when I used to visit my sister is gone. It's sure not up on Bascom Hill in the Liz Waters dorms. That Jesus People rally was the only place I've been able to find it."

"Everyone says it's the bombing," Renate says. "It shut people down."

"That was horrible," Maribeth agrees. "But a lot of the people my sister knew left town even before the bombing. They couldn't take being hassled by the police all the time. The pigs would throw teargas canisters inside the Food Co-op so all the food was spoiled. People down in

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Miffland had to go around with baking soda and water plastered over their faces or the gas would make their skin break out.”

“Is that what that was?” Renate says. “I thought they were trying to be mimes.”

“I’m practicing celibacy,” Maribeth says, changing the subject, although she might not think so. “The next man I get involved with, I’m going to be committed to before I have sex with him. I want to have babies!” Nearly every sentence Maribeth speaks ends in an exclamation point. Her sadness and uncertainty have always been strangely exuberant.

“Maribeth,” Stacy says, “Do you have orgasms?”

“Yes! Of course. All the time. That’s what makes it so hard.”

“Remember that old nun at Mother’s who used to stand in the middle of the hall between classes and talking about how, if you have sex, even in a marriage, for a purpose other than procreation, you’re no better than an animal?” Renate will never forget that nun and her wrinkled oval face with its puffy lips. She had smooth white hands she would occasionally remove from inside her flowing sleeves and raise in a gesture of benediction, as though by blessing the girls who thronged around her, she could preserve them from this animalistic behavior. No one paid the slightest attention to her, except maybe Renate, who was caught up in the fallacy of her remarks. She had read an article in her mother’s *Redbook* that said animals *are* the ones who only mate to procreate. Human sexuality has multiple goals and purposes, like intimacy, and pleasure.

“Renate, please,” Maribeth says plaintively, “don’t compare me to that prune-faced nun. I love making love. And I do feel that all of my loves were on a higher spiritual plane, a plane of intense, magical, burning energy.” Maribeth hugs herself as she recollects that energy, eyes half

shut and cheeks flushed. “It’s just that, before I have that feeling again, I want it to be with somebody I’m committed to.”

“So how long have you been doing the celibacy thing?” Jeanie asks Maribeth.

“Three days.”

Even Maribeth joins in the laughter that erupts at her answer; Debbie does too, though Renate can tell she’s not quite sure why it’s funny.

“Well, keep your knees together ’cause it looks like that pool game is wrapping up,” Jeanie cautions. Renate knows what she’s thinking: “These Catholic school girls, they’re so repressed.” The truth is, in the nearly eighteen months since high school graduation, the Radical Six have been working hard on overcoming both oppression *and* repression.

Something catches Maribeth’s eye and Renate follows the direction of her gaze to Reed Gunderson, sauntering over to the booth. When he’s still a few feet away, Maribeth says, “I’m thinking of dropping out of school and moving to Oregon. That woman I met at the fountain told me about this commune where people worship Jesus as an ascended master. It’s called Summit Lighthouse. They teach that we can all be like Him, if we’re just willing to live inside the light. I’ll stop by the Co-op to say good-bye if I go.”

And with that, she slips away.

Reed arrives at the women’s booth, a brown bottle dangling in one hand, an impish grin on his face.

“Was that your friend Maribeth Murray I just saw running out of here at top speed?”

“She was trying to get away from you, Reed,” Jeanie says. “She’s decided to start practicing celibacy – for religious reasons.”

“I hope the rest of you ladies are not tempted in that direction,” Reed says blandly, sliding into the spot vacated by Renate, who has just remembered that she was going to ask Mike a question.

“I’m coming back, you know,” she says.

“I’ll be waiting for you,” he says. Then he says, “Hey!” and Renate spins on her heels. Now he’s addressing the whole booth, and he says, “What’s going on with those guys?” Reed nods in the direction of the pool table, where Will and Freddy take turns shooting while Mike, leaning against the wall near the stranger’s chair, holds his cue in front of him like spear. All three of the house men wear a cultivated, squinty-eyed air of aloofness. “I know there’s something they’re not telling me. And I can’t figure out if it’s some sort of game, and I’m just supposed to figure it out, or if it’s something they really don’t want me to know. But whatever it is, it’s starting to piss me off.”

Renate, standing next to the booth with her hands shoved into the front pockets of her jeans, joins in the laughter that greets Reed’s remarks. “Reed,” Jeanie says, “Welcome to the women’s booth. We’ve been trying to figure that out for a week.”

Chapter 13. "Showdown at the Plaza"

"Can you smell that?" Christian says, plucking at his shirt and sniffing the air. He and Jake are headed into the Plaza Bar on their way back from a futile mission to the rooming house of Andy Andrews, who's still not home. "I was wearing this shirt on Saturday night."

"An olfactory haunting. You may never get over it."

"But what a digestive track that guy had. I've never seen anything like it."

"Yeah. Quite a display of political discipline."

"A *mighty* display of political discipline. I hope none of those people remembers us."

"Especially the old man."

"Jake, you offered to clean it up."

Jake shudders. "Yeah, but I was glad he didn't take me up on it."

Making their way through the Plaza's crowded front bar, they find Rick Plank, who gestures toward the back room. Jake spots some of his housemates, mostly women, in a booth, and the rest, mostly men, hanging out near the pool table, arguing with some cats about who belongs to the next quarter in line. "Fuck, where is he?"

From the back hall that leads to the men's room, Space Tim or Todd doesn't so much walk as seem to emerge, like a photograph in a chemical bath. Jake is impressed. One look at this guy and you know immediately that he flew too close to the event horizon and got sucked into a black hole. People glance at him just long enough to check him out and then go back to their beer and their sanity. Funny thing is, you never see him move, though admittedly Jake watches him with a twitch, trying not to stare, glancing around to see who's noticing him. The next time he looks over, Space is sitting in a wooden chair a few feet from the pool table.

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Hipness, like love, comes in through the eyes. For the hip, image and reality are one. First you saw something – a three-minute segment on an otherwise tedious Sunday-night variety show – and it instantly became a sign that somewhere young people ere alive and unafraid to defy convention. The image constantly changed, evolved, but remained mostly televised until one day you saw it out a window from the backseat of your parents' sedan as it rolled by a street corner where a guy with hair down to his shoulders, in bellbottoms and boots with thick heels, was talking to a chick in a velvet dress, hair in braids, who stood there twirling on a street corner as she laughed up at him. After that your life was never the same. You made that image – or the closest approximation you could come to – your reality, and it transformed your inner life.

The external transformation of a miserable, ideology-crazed radical into a freak has had the same effect. Dude is now cool. And when you're cool, you're unassailable.

Reading Jake's mind, Christian leans in and murmurs, "Course, he's gotta go."

"Now, if not sooner."

"Finally!" Mike says, motioning them over to the pool table. "We're starting a new game." Jake glances in the direction of the booth where his wife is looking his way, frowning, and raises his hand in a preemptory salute. He should have gone over and said hello, but this is an inconvenient time to be married, and the fewer lies he has to tell her about where he was tonight, the better. Taking a stand behind the pool table, leaning on his cue near Space Tim's chair, he rests the sole of his boot on the wall. Will racks up the balls. Mike chalks a cue.

"Man, he is getting good at being . . . that way." Jake nods in Space's direction, but just barely.

"Yeah," Will says. "His own mother wouldn't know him."

Jake bobs his head. For some reason Freddy breaks, even before they decide who's partnering up. "Good thing. He'll have to keep it up all the way to Fort Worth."

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Will raises his brow inquisitively.

“Tonight,” Christian says. He did drop by the booth to say a few words to Reed and the women. Jake will have to ask him what they were so they can synchronize their stories. Too much to keep track of, too many loose threads, but in a few more hours, it won’t matter. On the way over here, they stopped at Dungwood and called the bus station. “Three a.m. Depending on how many stops they make along the way, he should be in El Paso by dinnertime Thursday.”

“Too bad he’s not going through Arizona,” Will says. “I know a commune there, right outside of Tucson. Everybody lives in teepees. They’d take him in. No questions asked.”

“Tucson, hell,” Mike says. “He should go to *Caballeros Liberatés*. It’s right across the border from *Nuevo Laredo*, on the American side. They’ve got a pretty good trade going on with Mexico.”

The men laugh. They are excited, hopeful. For seventy-two hours, they’ve had a wanted man in their lives. Sheltering him may be the most illegal thing they’ve ever done, but not by much, and after the statute of limitations has kicked in, they’ll have a pretty good story.

“He should stick to the plan,” Jake says. “The plan’s the plan.”

No one questions it. No one asks what happened to Andy or whether this plan has anything to do with him, but a bar isn’t really a good place to have that conversation, so Jake isn’t surprised. Later, when the opportunity arises, Jake can explain that he and Christian figured it out after they left Andy’s place, more desperate than ever, figured out that the kid’s just going to have to take his chances because he can’t keep hanging around Madison relying on law enforcement’s fundamental inability to do anything but gas people and beat their heads. Jake glances over at the booth, where, for some reason, everyone is staring at them, especially Reed,

who gestures at the men holding cue sticks, making the woman laugh. Jake's just happy they're amused.

He looks away just as a stout, redheaded guy appears in the entrance to the back room, making his way through the crowd with one hand shoved in the magic pocket of his tan corduroy sport jacket. This familiar and welcome figure is accompanied by a dark-haired woman of a decidedly intellectual appearance, though not, Jake concludes, the same one he was with at the 602 that long ago night during the first week of classes.

"Fuckin-A," Jake says. "It's the cavalry."

With his reddish-gold beard and generous midsection, Andy Andrews is Madison's answer to Henry VIII, and as he makes his way across the Plaza's back room, shaking hands and dispensing hugs, he seems to be straining for levity. Approaching the men of Dungwood, his face wears a regal frown.

"Where the hell have you been, man?" Mike says.

Putting his arms out and gathering as many men as he can to himself, Andy says, "What's happening?" Freddy is the only one left at the table, trying not to take out too many balls in one turn. From a nearby booth, somebody yells, "Hey, it's pool – not football!"

"What do mean, where've *I* been? I was at home waiting for somebody to drop by, fill me in on what's been happening, you know, since Friday night."

"I was at your place. I stopped by Saturday morning. Guy told me you blew town."

"You come over Saturday morning, you're going to get all kinds of misinformation."

"It seemed warranted." Jake looks over at the booth filled with the house women plus Reed and Andy's girl who has wandered over there for someone to talk to. Every last one of

them is staring looking right at their huddle. Is it strange that men want to talk? That sometimes they *need* to talk?

“We’ve got a plan,” Christian says. “We’re getting him out of here tonight.”

“How?” Andy says.

“Oh, look Andy. There’s our old buddy Space Tim,” Jake practically shouts, pointing at the bewigged fugitive, sitting on his chair, staring into space. “He’s going back home to Marathon. Tonight. Too bad you won’t have more time to hang out with him.”

Not just his beard but Andy’s cheeks are pink now, a florid pink, getting darker. But Andrews is a canny dude. A sociology major, he takes a lot of classes where the professor will ask what grade you think you deserve, and Andy has his answer all worked out – he always says, “I think I deserve an A because it matches my initials.” He has a straight-A average. He’s on the dean’s list.

Now he stares at the man in the chair for a couple of minutes, and the man doesn’t stare back or acknowledge him in anyway. Then he says, “My Christ.”

“He’s not really going to Marathon,” Christian says, just loud enough to be heard inside the huddle. “We can get him a bus ticket that’ll take him as far as El Paso. How he gets into Mexico is up to him.”

The pool game has been entirely abandoned at this point, even Freddy is circling up, and when the guy who yelled walks up and puts a new quarter on the end of the table, Jake waves him on. “We’re done,” he says.

“Damn right you are,” the guy says.

“Boys,” Andy says, “come into my office.” He starts making for the back door, past the men’s and women’s cans. Freddy and Will each grab Space Tim by an elbow and half lift, half

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drag him along, the soles of his shoes sliding over the floor. They haven't got all night for him to make it across the room.

In a small parking lot behind the Plaza, Andy leads the way to his car, a 1962 Rambler American. They all scramble in except for Will and Freddy, who act as lookouts. Inside the car, Andy's behind the wheel and Space Tim, who takes his sunglasses off so he can be Barry Stein again, sits shotgun.

"Okay, who's fuckin' idea was this?" Andy gestures at Barry.

"It's irrelevant," Jake says before anybody can point the finger at him. "He's going to Texas. Tonight."

"Who's taking him?"

"A Greyhound."

For a moment, there is silence in the car as Andy clears the sweat from his mustache with his fingertips. Jake half expects him to pull out a handkerchief and start mopping his brow like Sydney Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon*.

"You agreed to this? You agreed to take a Greyhound *bus* – a don't-look-now-but-you're-busted express – out of Madison? Have you ever heard of a freak on a Greyhound making it to his destination? Half the passengers are federal agents. And even if they weren't, by the time you hit Lake Geneva the driver's on the phone in some coffee shop, telling the guys at dispatch he's got a suspicious character on board, looks like he might be carrying drugs. And when you make that stop in Galena, Illinois, they'll be waiting for you. Man, you get on that bus, you're a sitting duck."

"I didn't say I was getting on any bus. This is the first I heard of it."

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Andy shakes his head. “They arrest him, the next question’s gonna be, ‘So Barry, where you been hanging out since you bombed that building and killed that really smart science professor?’”

“Thanks, guys,” Barry says. “But at least you didn’t rat me out yourselves. That would make you really unpopular in Madison.”

“What’s happened to him?” Andy demands. “He wasn’t this cynical when he was living in my closet.”

“Hell if we know. We fed him and clothed him. I paid for that wig out of my own pocket.”

“Yeah, the whole thing was his idea.” Christian points a thin finger at Jake.

“The bus trip, specifically, was *your* idea, Christian. My idea was the, you know. . .” Jake clears his throat. “Cloak of invisibility.”

“You better hope he’s fucking invisible.” Andy rubs the palms of both hands over his face. “I got him a ride. I got him a ride out of town. All you had to do was keep him out of sight.”

“Why the hell didn’t you say so? So he’s not taking the bus. The bus is a bad idea. Fine.” The relief inside the car is palpable. Jake, for one, is not the kind of guy who thinks the only good plan is his plan. “What’s happening? Do we have to drop him off someplace?”

Andy’s thinking, chewing on the little bristly pink hairs that grow under his lips. “He has to lay low until the pick-up.”

“Nobody knows him,” Mike assures him. “Nobody’s made him. They think he’s Space Todd. You know, like Space Tim only Todd.” He’s eager to placate Andy, probably thinking

the same thing Jake is, that as long as Space Todd or Tim leaves tonight, no matter where he goes or who he goes with, everything's still cool. "Where's the pick-up?"

"Your place."

"Well then. What are we hanging around here for? Fire up that engine and put 'er in gear."

"Not so fast. It's not happening tonight."

"When?" Mike says. "Tomorrow?"

"Soon. Soon."

Inside the car, silence falls. They can hear the sound of Will and Freddy's boots crunching on the gravel as they pace outside the car. The back seat sinks a few feet when they decide to sit on the trunk. Jake's stomach feels hallowed out, like it does just before it starts to burn, and he starts patting his pockets for his roll of Tums.

"Can you give us an estimate?" Mike says.

"At the very latest, Halloween."

"Halloween is *weeks* from now," Christian yelps. "We've already got a problem. There's somebody in the house who knows Barry."

"Shit! You never should have paraded him around like this."

"We had to," Jake says. "He has to use the bathroom. He's gotta shower. You can't hide anybody in a house like ours."

"What about this guy who knows you?"

"Never saw him before in my life."

"And even if he did figure it out, he'd never squeal," Jake says.

"What is he supposed to *be*, anyway?"

“He’s just another dude who went for a moon walk and lost contact with the lunar lander. He doesn’t talk to folks or anything,” Jake says, trying to make his plan seem like a success. “He blends in with the scenery.”

Andy studies Barry for long enough to make everyone in the car uncomfortable. “You know,” he finally says, “maybe this isn’t such a bad idea. The Feds will never suspect he’s hanging around in plain sight. Maybe we’ve outsmarted them.”

Jake isn’t sure he likes the sound of those “maybes,” and the “we” isn’t terribly pleasant either, but that seems to be the way with genius ideas – they so quickly get appropriated.

“What do you think?” Andy says to Barry Stein, née Frodo, née Space Todd or Tim. “Are you down with this?”

“I don’t understand why we have to wait so long.”

“Look. Your ride is worried he’s being watched. He needs to hang around doing nothing until the Feds get bored with him. Then, on Halloween, with local law enforcement distracted, you just roll right on out of here. You’ll be in El Paso before they even know you’re gone.”

“You mean they know I’m still here?”

“It’s just an expression.”

“We think the best time for him to get out of town is now,” Christian says stubbornly.

“Everything is arranged. It has to be Halloween. It’s the only way.”

“There are just a couple of minor problems,” Jake says. “Since the last house meeting, some shit has gone down. You men explain it to him. I gotta pee. Tell him all about the proposed *flyer*. And that song Reed’s writing.”

As ten o’clock approaches, Renate’s consciousness is like a fragile canoe rushing down a fast-flowing current of drunkenness interrupted by one or two rocks that arrest her progress and land

her on shore with a thud. And when she gets back into the river again, it's as though the direction of flow has subtly changed.

The first time this happens, she's waiting outside the ladies room in the hallway that leads to the back door. The boys are all outside, probably smoking a joint with Andy Andrews. It's not cool the way they keep going off by themselves, but she and Jeanie have decided they're probably only doing it as a response to the consciousness-raising sessions, to show that they've got their own thing too. "Only in their case it's consciousness *lowering*," Renate said and the other women, except Stacy, giggled. While she's waiting outside the door of the ladies can, the back door opens and Jake Winslow walks in, and he stops in surprise and looks at her as though she's not supposed to be there. His face wears a distracted expression, as though he's miles away from here thinking about something deep, but when his eyes light on her, he lifts his chin and smiles uncertainly, and she grins back at him. For a moment, they stand there smiling at each other, and he seems about to say something, but then Jake's gaze is caught by something else and when Renate turns around, Jeanie Winslow is there. Just then the bathroom door opens, and the woman who emerges says, "You're turn."

Renate studies her face in the ladies room mirror until she hears someone banging on the door. She wants to know what Jake saw when he looked at her, and the mirror reveals that she's having one of her beautiful moments. Her cheeks are flushed, her lips are full, her hair hangs loose and shiny over her shoulders.

Heading into the bar to buy a pack of cigarettes for Stacy, Renate can feel herself glowing. Buying cigarettes from a machine is a strangely satisfying activity. You put four quarters in the slot, push a button, and then wait for the ker-chunk that delivers the pack into a shelf at the bottom.

THE COMEDIANS: A NOVEL

Jake and Jeanie are seated at the bar, deep in conversation. Jeanie has her hand on Jake's leg and leans toward him. She has her back turned to the to the big goldfish bowl full of Plaza Bar matches, so she doesn't see Renate, and Jake is looking away from his wife, arms folded across his chest, staring moodily into the mirror across the bar. Renate walks over and sticks her hand inside the goldfish bowl. Jake could flick his eyes in her direction and see her reflection in the mirror, but it's crowded, and sometimes, if you want to remain invisible, all you have to do is think, "I'm not here; ignore me." She got through her first two years of high school that way.

Renate doesn't hear what Jeanie said to her husband, but she hears Jake's reply. "Damn it, Jean," he says. "I can't just get up and leave Dungwood. I'd be bored to death out there on Park Street, with just the two of us living in some apartment." Sounding exasperated, he adds, "Besides, I need to be downtown with my boys right now."

With no excuse to keep hanging around, Renate doesn't catch what Jeanie says in reply, but it sure looks as though the little woman's great catch wants to flee the tender trap. This is not surprising; Renate has never seen two people who seem less right for each other. As she strolls down the length of the bar, she looks up and sees George McGovern in a rumpled raincoat, standing outside a small plane, the wind on the tarmac lifting his thinning hair. It's the ten o'clock news. Some of the drinkers at the bar raise their glasses to him. In a few weeks, Renate will cast her first vote in a national election, a vote that will pay back Nixon and Kissinger for the bombings in Cambodia and end the war in Vietnam. She watches until McGovern disappears and then heads back to her friends, elated.

The house lights flash on and off, bartenders shouting that it's last call. Renate sits on a bar stool waiting for Mike. Freddy and Will are making a final assault on the Big Indian pinball machine.

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She doesn't know where everyone else is. With a slight hitch in his step and a beatific expression on his face, Mike wanders up and seats himself next to Renate.

"Mike, I'm starving." Renate says, hoping to forestall any romantic declarations. Mike tends to become emotional when he's drunk, the kind of emotional that leads to embarrassing public statements. Elbows on the bar, chin in hand, she concentrates on the bags of potato chips hanging on a black metal rack, some barbecue flavored, some sour cream 'n' onion.

"Oh, Ren. Can't my kisses satisfy you?"

Renate's hand darts over Mike's mouth and she glances up and down the bar, hoping no one heard. But it gets worse. Mike removes the hand from over his mouth and begins kissing her fingertips. When she pulls her hand away, he tosses the bartender fifty cents, and Renate asks for sour cream 'n' onion.

Out on Henry Street, Mike veers toward the curb, where the Karmann Ghia is parked, pulling Renate after him.

"Shouldn't we walk home? You can get the car tomorrow."

"Oh no, we're driving."

"Sometime will you teach me how to drive a stick?" Renate says, pausing uncertainly beside the passenger door.

"I assure you," Mike says, "that I am perfectly capable of propelling this vehicle home."

"Mike, I can remember times when were so drunk you couldn't even hold a glass of beer in your hand and you said you could drive."

"Listen, Ren. Believe me. I know. I know when I'm too drunk to drive. Just leave everything to me."

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Renate climbs into the roadster. Propping her knees against the dash, she tears open her bag of chips, releasing an oniony aroma that temporarily overcomes the musty smell of the upholstery. As Mike lets the car warm up for a moment before putting it in gear, he turns to her and says, “Renate, if you love me like I love you, everything is going to be just fine.”

Chapter 14. "Smokin' and Drivin'"

His name is Michael and he has thick, coarse hair on his chest like my Mike does. But our life as a couple is nothing like Anna Wulf's and this Michael's. Anna Wulf has a child; she is a devoted, protective mother. She works in an office. She strains to do everything perfectly, to keep order in her life. I'm a student and do nothing perfectly and mostly let life float by, watching, observing. It's the only way I can escape myself. Escape seems not to be among Anna Wulf's modes of being. She seems to relish her experience. Her Michael and mine (or at least the one I used to call mine) couldn't be more different. Her Michael is ironic, supercilious, angry. He has witnessed the great European slaughters of the 1930s and 40s. He is a communist. My Mike is grumpy until he's had a couple of beers. He has witnessed the British Invasion. Her Michael is a doctor. Mine is a dabbler at art, a lover of machines and gadgets who likes to record things (parties, people playing music, random conversations) on his reel-to-reel. I once thought, when Jeanie Winslow made her measuring and comparing remarks, that Mike dabbled in everything but me. Now I know that isn't true. Anna Wulf's Michael, with ironic cruelty, in sentences that end in question marks, plots to leave her, blames her for the fact that he is leaving her. She mourns his loss while he's still with her, feels it in the pit of her stomach. My Mike, who's beside me most of every day and all of the night, has already left me. I'm not sure which part of my body is registering that. I only know that it's happened.

Renate's Diary
October 13th

* * *

In the world outside, leaves flutter to the ground in gravity's channels. The gold-saturated light is magical and promising. And yet, Renate experiences the day at a distance, as though it's happening on the other side of a pane of glass. She floats, like a goldfish in a bowl, believing

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that she's going somewhere, that she's heading in a direction, but it's only the currents tricking her again. She's swimming in circles.

She treads carefully as she walks down Lakelawn Place; these cobblestones that she walks down every day feel unfamiliar, and the motion of her legs is awkward. They are walking to Jake and Jeanie's car, the lime-green '69 Maverick. Mike is next to her; Jake and Jeanie are up ahead, strolling down the cobblestones past private residence halls almost as spooky and ancient as Dungwood itself. The smell of leaf smoke taints the air.

Shuffling along behind them is the unfortunate Space Tim, an acidhead in a permanently altered state. In the dimension he inhabits, time is decelerated, and he is therefore out of sync with his environment. You could talk to him, but it would take him hours, perhaps even days, to answer, and by that time you would probably have forgotten the question. Though almost no attempts at conversation are made, everyone tries to be nice. Renate says hello or good morning in passing. The boys bring him food and glasses of milk or water and set them in front of him. He's even been known to down a beer or two. You never actually see him take a sip, but after a while, the glass is empty. And though he seems a visitor rather than a resident, there's been no talk of him leaving. Sometimes, in the consciousness-raising sessions, the women joke that Dungwood has become a rest home for the psychedelically disabled. But Space Tim is only occasionally seen, so no one troubles much about him. Mostly he stays upstairs in Freddy's room, and when he does come downstairs, you're always surprised because you'd thought he was long gone by now.

That is until today, when Renate returned home from class to find Jake and Mike in the great room with Space Tim, and Jake announced, "Space needs some fresh air."

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Then Mike said, “We’re taking him to the Arboretum,” adding, “You and Jeanie are coming too.” She had been planning to head upstairs to read *The Golden Notebook*, which has somehow become the story of her own life; she’s curious, in a sort of numb, depressed way, to see how it’s going to turn out. But it’s a good day for a leaf ride, so she says okay. Nothing more. Just “okay.”

Now Mike walks beside her, smoking, not talking. There is nothing unusual about this, except that normally, when they are walking down a street together, he takes her hand. The fact that he doesn’t take it now is certainly a sign that they are no longer a couple, or that they soon won’t be. But at least he is not a communist, making ironic, supercilious statements in sentences that end in question marks like the man in *The Golden Notebook*. They must walk all the way over to Gilman Street where Jake parked the Maverick because some stranger had taken the spot behind Dungwood when he got home from picking Jeanie up at work the night before. The strange car is still there, and for some reason no one is willing to call the cops to have it towed. Renate watches Jake and Jeanie, walking up ahead, all loose-limbed and self-assured. Even with a foot of space between them, the way they walk telegraphs togetherness. Jeanie grabs Jake’s shoulder, kicking her legs out sideways and clicking the heels of her blue clogs together. She does this several times as she and Jake progress down the narrow street. In light of the conversation Renate overheard at the Plaza Bar that night (How long ago was it? Days? Weeks?), she is surprised by the married woman’s resilience, her stubborn refusal to feel rejected. Jeanie seems light-hearted and free, her clogs coming together with a sharp, woody crack while Jake laughs and lends his shoulder.

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This heel-clicking routine having slowed Jake and Jeanie down, Mike and Renate approach just as Jake turns to Jeanie and says in his gruff, matter-of-fact way, “You know I’ll never leave you.”

In books you read about someone experiencing a “stab of jealousy,” but it doesn’t really feel like that. It oozes out of your heart like some corrosive liquid. Mike takes Renate’s hand and squeezes it and tries to make her look at him, but she continues to stare straight ahead.

When they reach the lime-green Maverick, Renate climbs into the backseat first, and Mike gets in next to her with Space Tim on his other side. It’s crowded in the backseat, and Mike’s leg is pressed up against hers. It’s cruel of him to be turning her on like this when he’s got leaving on his mind, but if he wants to make out with her on the ride to the forest, she will let him. She now understands Tammy Wynette in a way she never did before, grasps the perverse pleasure of masochism.

Jake’s shoulders are a line broken only by the platinum waterfall of his hair; his driving is an aggressive meditation on roads. On the outskirts of Madison, traveling on the Kafka-esque maze known as the Beltline, which just keeps looping around the city with no particular jumping off point, Mike and Jake argue about directions. When they reach the first red barn on Highway 12, where pumpkins are being sold at a stand next to the road, Jake reaches into his pocket for the joint he brought along and hands it to Mike, who lights it and takes a deep drag before passing it around. “Good hit,” he says when he’s finished coughing. Renate knows that smoking pot is only going to make her feel more self-conscious and detached, but it’s something to do, something to momentarily distract her from the pressure of Mike’s leg against hers. That It’s a Beautiful Day song about the white bird in the golden cage plays on WIBA. Renate stifles

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the urge to announce that she loves this song; she can't seem to interrupt the train of silence and withdrawal she's been riding as it rides her.

By the time they drive into the Arboretum parking lot, the forest is filled with afternoon shadows. There are no other cars. The yellow-gold leaves of a stand of oak trees at the trail head blaze up against darkening blue skies, and wind rustles the branches in a welcoming fashion.

Sprung from the car, Jake and Jeanie join hands and run off into the woods singing "We're off to see the wizard!" while Renate, alone in her subterranean world, chooses a path that forks in another direction. Small clusters of birch trees along the trail stand in tense silence, as though they were whispering to each other until they heard her coming down the path. She'd like to leave the path and get lost among the trees. She would be a girl abandoned in a forest. An old witch would find her and give her a home, and she would learn forest lore and escape from telephone poles and fast food joints and all the ugliness of modern life, especially the people. Climbing carefully over a branch collapsed across the trail, she finds herself ankle deep in leaves. And then she suddenly trips and lands in a pile of leaves on the other side. She knows why she fell – Mike had been following her through the woods, and he tripped her. She rolls onto her back and Mike lands on top of her, giving her a long, deep kiss.

"There," he says when he's finished. "Feel better now?" She doesn't answer but looks him in the eye for the first time in days, since there's nowhere else to look in this position. His dark blue eyes shine with amusement

"I'm not letting you up until you listen to what I have to say."

"Okay," she agrees.

"You think I don't love you anymore. But you're wrong, 'cause I do."

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Renate looks away, thinking about it. “It’s starting to feel kind of damp in this pile of leaves,” she says. Her depression has vanished and she feels almost cheerful. Mike pulls her to her feet, and they wander hand-in-hand through the fading light, looking for the trail that leads back to the Maverick. She could explain to him about *The Golden Notebook*, about how reading it had somehow caused her to acquire Anna Wulf’s emotional state, but that doesn’t seem to make much sense anymore, and Mike doesn’t seem to need an explanation. He always knows what’s on her mind while she has no idea what’s on his. Does he read her diaries while she’s in class? That would be okay too. She’s never considered diary-keeping a particularly private act. If you don’t want people to know what you’re thinking, you shouldn’t write it down.

They are sitting on the trunk of the Maverick, smoking Marlboros, when they hear the sound of someone running wildly down the trail. Mike commences a coughing fit. “Gotta quit smoking,” he says loudly, pounding his chest with the side of his fist. The wild crashing has become a subdued rustle by the time Space Tim, head hanging down, arms limp at his sides, ambles into the clearing. Mike opens the car door for him and he slumps into the backseat.

Jake and Jeanie appear at the trail head, deep in an argument and no longer holding hands. “A wig?” Jake is saying to his wife. “Why would you say that? How many catatonic dudes do you know that can get it together to put a wig on every day?”

“Okay, but, something about him seems . . . not right.”

“Well, yes, Jean, his submarine ran out of fuel at forty fathoms deep. He’s never coming back to the surface. I mean, how plain can I make this?”

Renate is glad that Space Tim is already inside the car. He may move slowly and speak little, but there is no indication that his hearing is impaired, and he might not like the suggestion that his hair looks like a wig. But the women talk about it at the consciousness-raising sessions.

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Is it a wig or isn't it? If they could ever get that fedora off his head, they might have a clue, but no one has the courage to remove it.

Once inside the car, Mike relights the fat roach left in the back seat ashtray and passes it to Space Tim, who passes it to Jeanie fairly adroitly. Jake turns the radio up loud. Renate can't make out what Jake and Jeanie are saying over the music, but she hears a yelp from Jake when Jeanie punches him. She does this pretty regularly when he says something that annoys her, hitting him hard in the arm or on the chest. He grabs her fist with one hand to stop her from doing it again.

Renate rests her head on Mike's shoulder, already missing the depression that had consumed her the past few days. The loneliness had been solid and companionable; it filled her up, and she'd had the feeling it would soon lead somewhere, that she'd begin to live her own life and be known for being somebody instead of just being with somebody. Feminism is a way of defining the trap she's let herself slip into, the trap of being a girlfriend. She had been afraid of being on her own in Madison. She's never been much good at meeting people. Once, when a pretty brunette in a blue leather jacket had tried to start a conversation with her before history lecture, Renate stared rudely at the girl and shrugged, unable to understand why this cool, together woman was trying to talk to her. Being an abandoned woman had made her feel more open. She had even made a joke before history lecture and a couple of people sitting nearby had laughed at it. Her jeans, which were becoming increasingly tight as the semester progressed, had hung loose on her hips again. Loss of appetite, she has discovered, is one of the surprising benefits of being left, or even thinking you've been left.

Now, after the fleeting happiness of Mike telling her he still loves her, she's wondering what's for dinner.

Chapter 15. "Pumpkin-Lighting Ceremony"

Except for the sound of the showers running upstairs, all's quiet at Dungwood castle as Jake and Jeanie walk outside to light the candles in the jack-o-lanterns. One fat and round, one tall and narrow, and one or two others frankly misshapen, the big jack-o-lanterns and a cluster of smaller pumpkins were acquired at a farm stand out on Highway 12. Some of the boys and Stacy had carved their leering faces. Now it's up to Jake and Jeanie to make them glow. When it's done, Jake cups the carbonized sticks in his hand, and they stand side by side for a moment – Jake with his other hand, the one closest to Jeanie, dangling expectantly; Jeanie impatiently rattling the keys to the Maverick.

Gamely, Jake says, "Enjoy them while they last, Jean. These guys'll be pumpkin-pie filling by the time you get home from work." By midnight at the latest, these jacks will have been sacrificed to roaming bands of pumpkin smashers, a Halloween tradition among some of the more reactionary campus forces. But better the pumpkin heads than the official residents, whose heads those reactionaries would also like to smash.

"Ick," Jeanie says, turning away. Jake follows as she heads for their car.

"Hey! Is that it?" he says to her back. "Is that what you call a good-bye?"

She gets into the car, slamming the door so hard it makes him wince, and roars off, gravel flying, while Jake lamely waves good-bye. As the Maverick flies down the cobblestones, Jake folds his arms and leans back against a yellow VW beetle, wondering how much angrier she'd be if she knew the real reason he is relieved to have her safely tucked away at work on this Halloween-party night.

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He knows Jeanie wanted him to talk her out of waitressing tonight, that she thinks he would rather party with his boys, doing whatever comes to seem natural under the influence of a variety of chemicals, than be with her. It's one of her longest running grievances. He has letters from her written in high school in which she complains about being allowed to walk home by herself after she had shown up at some bar where they were all illicitly drinking. Back then it was the same crowd, with one or two exceptions. Jake has known these men his whole life, possibly longer (for all he knows or may presently recall), men who are natives of the fields and woodlands of semi-rural Wisconsin, whose personalities are untrammelled by big city manners and social stigmas, whose rough edges have never been smoothed. They've accompanied him on many adventures. It isn't courage that's made them do the things they've done, or even the spirit of rebellion. They just don't know any better. And tonight, by God, they will finally be able to undo at least one thing.

Jake's loyalty to Dungwood is something Jean doesn't understand. She sees the Hampsters as her competition. According to Jean, there comes a time in a man's life when he reaches a fork in the road, when he must choose to leave his childish friends behind and devote himself to wife and family. There's an ultimatum on the table even now – move out of Dungwood with her or she's moving out by herself. He told her he'd let her know after the Halloween party. But he was only stalling. When Jake imagines it being just him and Jeanie, for the rest of his life, notwithstanding the presence of a kid or two, words form in his mind, words like “oubliette” and “claustrophobia,” words that make him shake his head in an attempt to drive them away.

Funny this little yellow car never made him feel that way. Sure, space is tight in there, but this beetle was always more like a capsule launching him and however many people he could

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squeeze inside into the furthest reaches of psychedelic deep space. This yellow VW beetle was Jake's first car; he gave it to his brother last summer when he bought the Maverick to take him out west, and his brother now finds himself with no place to park it while he studies at Marquette University in Milwaukee. But the yellow VW remains a vehicle of legend – the summer before last it traveled to Woodstock – even without the daisy decals peeled off the rear bumper by his brother. In the patch of gravel behind Dungwood, the beetle is parked next to Mike's Karmann Ghia, which is parked next to the blue VW station wagon belonging to Christian, which everyone now thinks of as Christian and Stacy's. With the Maverick gone, it's a regular convention of German engineering out in this parking lot; all they need is a microbus. It occurs to Jake that the empty parking spot, the one left by the Maverick, is guaranteed to be filled up by the time Jean gets home. Unless he does something about it. Not quite congratulating himself for being such a devoted husband, Jake runs inside to find the key to the beetle so he can move it over a few feet and save the spot for Jean.

As he heads back down the stairs with the beetle's key in his pocket, Jake encounters Will skittering around the instruments in the great room, testing plugs. He may spend his days plucking the strings of a stand-up bass in a cork-lined room in the Humanities building, but tonight Will's making his rock 'n' roll debut on a borrowed Fender EBO. Besides Will, Jake, Christian, and Mike, even Debbie Teiler, will have some role to play as members of Reed's back-up band. Jake pauses to survey the impressive array of equipment, a mic stand, a couple of Fender amps, the bass, a mandolin, a banjo, a tambourine, a drum kit belonging to the pick-up drummer from Stone Manor Co-op, Reed's electric Gibson, and his own Yamaha acoustic. "You nervous?" he asks Will.

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“Hell, yeah. Reed’s gonna kill us if we’re not good. You heard him complaining that we’re under-rehearsed.” The big man’s ego is always a force to be reckoned with, but when he suspects you’re keeping secrets from him, he can be downright whiney.

For no reason in particular, Jake looks around the deserted great room. “You don’t think he – ”

“Sure he does,” Will says.

And then Christian comes loping in with a bottle of mescal, and Freddie wanders by with his shadow, a small man whose bushy hair seems sometimes to cover his entire torso. Some have even taken to calling him Cousin It. The bottle is passed around, and there is sighing, and someone says, “Well, I guess tonight’s the night,” and the small man utters a tiny, Cousin It-like squeak, and nobody says any more. But Jake suddenly feels warm inside, probably from the liquor. On the other hand, tonight *is* the night; it has to be. Andy Andrews is going to walk through that door with a mysterious stranger, and in all the weirdness that is surely about to ensue, this little bewigged fella, this stranger in a stranger land, is going to disappear from amongst them, never to return. Jake sighs again in premature relief, a sigh that is returned by the men sitting around him on the great room couches, and when the front door crashes open, they all look up and stare at the spot where whoever it is will appear.

But it’s only Reed, standing at the top of the steps that lead down to the great room, hands shoved into the pocket of his army jacket, grinning that chipmunk grin of his, a small grin in a large, Nordic face. “You men ready to be musicians?” he says, reaching into his pocket for a baggie filled with purple caps.

Chapter 16. "Witches Brew"

Footsteps thump up and down the front stairs, and the door keeps slamming shut as though people have forgotten they're not walking into a supermarket. Renate's in the kitchen, stirring a foul-smelling pot. Eye of newt and toe of frog could not emit a more sickening aroma, but in fact the pot is full of seeds and stems, along with assorted teas that are supposed to make the THC residue more palatable, and at least stirring gives her some sense of purpose, a function. She feels safe here, in the newly cleaned kitchen with the appliances polished to a sheen. She's afraid to go out *there*, to the place with the voices and laughter. Hilarity feels alien to her, as do most of her fellow humans. She sighs.

"How's it going?" Mike says, arms circling her waist, mustache tickling her neck, hands sliding up her green-velveteen paisley mini-dress to give her breasts a squeeze. Black and green beaded earrings mingle with her dark hair, clicking faintly as she twitches her hips to shake him off.

"I don't think anybody will want to drink this," she says, stirring with an expertise that suggests untold generations of witches stirring pots on Halloween.

"Nonsense," Mike says, ladling up some of the purplish goop and swishing it around in his mouth. A look of alarm spreads over his face, and he spits violently into the sink.

"Whiskey!" he croaks. She hands him the fifth of Old Granddad he came in here with, and he takes a swig and swishes it around in his mouth.

From the great room, the muffled sound of a guitar being tuned becomes a strummed G chord and then a rill of individual notes, and Reed, whose voice is firm but scratchy and tends to

the high-middle range, begins to sing in his best imitation John Lennon, “Do you want to know a secret? Do you promise not to tell?”*

Reed has mastered the entire Beatles catalogue. He can pick up a song by hearing it played once on an album or even off the radio. His talents in this area are part of the boys’ collective legend, the stories they start telling you the first time you show up at one of their parties. “Whoah whooo-oh, closer. Let me whisper in your ear/I’ve known the secret for a week or two. . . .” Reed sings, strumming his Gibson while the drummer from Stone Manor Co-op begins some cautious sizzles.

The song’s impact on Mike is strange. His eyes narrow to slits that stare at Renate without seeing her, and he runs out of the room with the bottle of Old Granddad. Renate looks after him, at the kitchen door flapping like a speared fish, and mutters to herself, “Did Reed change the set list or something?”

She recalls that night at the Plaza Bar a few weeks ago when Reed complained to the women’s booth that secrets were being kept, that his oldest friends were playing a game whose sole purpose was excluding him. Jeanie Winslow had tried to laugh it off. But she and Renate both knew that something was going down, and that it still is. The women’s consciousness-raising sessions continue to be preoccupied by the paranoia laced with belligerence that prevails in this house. The women find the men’s callous way of sticking together disturbing. Despite the fact that they never seem to agree on anything, the men dominate the decision making. This stupid Halloween party was their idea. Did she want it? Did any of the women? Not really. Not like this. They thought it was going to be more of a fund-raiser. But it’s turning into the

* “Do You Want to Know a Secret?” Northern Songs, 1963

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usual booze-drenched hallucinogenic orgy. Tomorrow morning the house will be destroyed. And who's going to clean up? The men will be too hung over. For days on end, probably.

But the fact that there's something *wrong* with these men is more an article of faith these days than a problem to be investigated. The Hampsters are a bunch of post-teen-age messed-ups who coalesced into a group, which gives them an excuse to be mad at each other instead of at themselves. These men and their uncivilized ways provide fodder for the women's complaints at the consciousness raising sessions, but this seems far removed from solidarity of any kind; the complaints have something gleeful and, Renate thinks, self-justifying about them. Also something time-honored. The women of Dungwood are beginning to remind her of their mothers' generation. The fact that they've banded together hasn't liberated them; it's only deepened the trough of misery on which they feed. As far as she's concerned, the sessions have become a waste of time, and they should just call them off, stop sitting there in a circle on the floor of Stacy and Christian's study with their knees touching, or if not, then at least change the name to consciousness *lowering*. Though she has to admit that Jeanie, with her inexorable sense of martyrdom, and Debbie, with her blank, dazed quality, and Stacy with her smugness, are pretty fascinating, and they may not be feminists, but Renate continues to believe that she is, and that she's remaking herself in opposition to them. Whatever they are not, she will be. She studies them to see what form her evolution should take.

Damn, Reed is sounding good tonight. Turning off the burner beneath the foul-smelling pot tea, Renate prepares to hurry after her boyfriend. But her progress out of the kitchen is blocked by a couple of witches who appear suddenly in her path. Stacy Riorden has fanned her red curls into their full glory and rimmed her eyes in black eyeliner. She's wearing a crocheted orange shawl thrown over her leotard-clad shoulders. Beside her, dressed simply in overalls and

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a white Mexican wedding shirt, her mane of brown hair also frizzed to improbable widths, is Linda Andrews, sister of Andy, peering through her granny glasses.

“What’s that awful *smell!*” the two harpies shriek. The two women rush past Renate and begin throwing open the kitchen windows and letting air in through the back door. “You can smell it in the great room. How could you do this on the night of a big party?”

Without bothering to defend herself – she was just stirring the stupid pot; it was Mike’s idea to make the tea, and while it does have an evil smell, you could say it lends a bit of authenticity to the Halloween atmosphere, giving concepts like “spooky” and “macabre” an aural component – Renate stalks out of the room.

Chapter 17. "Songs about Secrets and Prisoners"

Reed grins at Jake, his fingers sliding up and down the neck of his electric Gibson, now perfectly tuned. "Hang on to my coattails, boys," the big man says to his band mates. "I'm bringing you along for the ride."

"We have to ride his coattails," Christian mutters, the mandolin perched in his arms appearing tiny against his long, lean body, "We have no idea what the set list is." Still holding the mandolin, he rips open the snap buttons of his cowboy shirt with his other hand and tugs the shirt tails out of his jeans.

The mescaline, or whatever it was in those caps, has slowed things down so much, put so much space between every note, made each one a free choice of some kind, that Jake plunks away with a degree of confidence he rarely feels when he's straight. But he knows it must really be a part of him, simply buried beneath gigantic boulders of routine worry. And then the worry returns, intensified, and he stares at Christian, who stares back with an expression so aghast Jake busts out laughing.

"Do you want to know a secret? Do you promise not to tell?" Mike careens out of the kitchen and stops short for a moment in the entrance to the great room. But when he walks over and picks up the bass guitar, handing it to Will, he has that Mike energy, that living-in-the-now quality Jake has always admired.

Jake pulls his skeleton mask down over his face, making it sweat. In general, hippies don't need to put on special costumes for Halloween. Every day is dress-up day for the hip. But in honor of the occasion, or to honor his own private joke that if things don't go well tonight, he's a dead man, Jake has changed into a black tee shirt with the spinal column and vertebrae in

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white on both front and back, arm bones on the outside of the long sleeves. When the black light is turned on, he looks like a walking skeleton from the waist up. And he's not the only man in a mask. Will wears a Nixon mask on top of his head, pulling it down over his face and giving the two-handed victory salute when they finish the song. He will do that all night, after every song.

The great room sofas are pushed up against the wall; the round trestle table has been moved to the den across the hall as a serving table for the punch. Gathered in front of the band are long-haired dudes in jeans and army jackets, patting themselves for fire sticks, pulling fat joints or flasks of whiskey out of the inner pockets. The women wear square-toed cowboy boots, flowing skirts, and low-necked Danskin leotards. But in a far corner, Jake sees a figure who looks like the Grim Reaper himself: a man in a black cassock with the hood pulled up over his head, whose pale white face and black goatee make him look like some sinister Spanish monk on the business of the Inquisition. Jake recognizes him as that guy from the Process Church of the Final Judgment who hangs out every day in front of Paul's Bookstore on State Street trying to make converts. They rapped together once. Evidently, the Process Church was founded by some British dude named Grimestone who believed that at the end of the world, God and Satan will be reconciled, that Satan has a good side to him, but we're so focused on his negative aspects that we fail to acknowledge the positive, like positive self-indulgence, lying to spare the feelings of others, and killing those who seriously need to be taken out. Given the nature of his philosophy of life, it's possible the guy in the cowl is the man they're waiting for. The one with the car keys. If not, what's he doing here? The cloaked man is a gloomy presence, the sight of him reminding Jake that he needs more punch if he's going to explore those positive aspects of Satan. His nerves are jangling again and his stomach is shooting geysers.

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Reed starts re-tuning his Gibson and says into the mike, “I’d like to ask a *friend* of mine to join me up here,” with that peculiar emphasis on the word “friend.”

Debbie Teiler, carrying her own guitar and wearing a long denim skirt and a leotard that reveals a substantial amount of cleavage, stands next to Reed with a shy yet toothy smile. “Hi!” she says breathily into the mike she will share with him. While Debbie and Reed tune, Mike hands Jake the bottle of Old Granddad he’s placed behind one of the amps,

And then Andy Andrews appears in the entrance to the great room, and Mike and Jake exchange a glance, but at almost the same moment, Stacy Riorden and Andy’s sister Linda, who’s visiting from a commune near Eau Claire, appear from the direction of the kitchen. His sister moves toward Andy with outstretched arms, her black lab with the red bandana collar getting there first and landing his front paws on Andy’s shoulders, nearly knocking him down. Andy beams, the way he usually does upon entering a party, especially once his sister’s dog has been pulled off him, but at the sight of him, Jake’s stomach clenches and the mellow, soothing ambience that had begun to wash over his brain stem after he swallowed the bourbon is replaced by a desire to rush over to Andy and grab him by the throat. By Andy’s side, Jake had expected to see some high-strung freak dangling a set of car keys. Instead, it’s another in a long line of intellectual-looking brunettes, dressed in a black turtleneck, purple crushed-velvet pants, and steel-toed cowboy boots. She spies a member of her affinity group and wanders off, as Andy envelops his sister in a hug.

The couple standing at the mic has finally finished tuning. Her guitar hanging around her neck by a wide, embroidered strap, Debbie smiles gamely and rubs her palms down the front of her skirt in a nervous yet sexy gesture. The chords that Reed and Debbie begin to strum are familiar, but only when Debbie’s high, pure voice launches into song does Jake recognize it.

*“They say everything can be re-placed/They say every dis-tance is not nee-yar.”**

Reed sings the next line. *“Yet I remember every face/of EVERY MAN that put me here.”*

Over the years, Reed has developed a twang worthy of Dylan himself, a combination of hipster street jive and Okie from Muskogee. With the legs of a lumberjack, he’s walked on the wild side long enough that any accent he chooses qualifies as authentic, even though he’s the son of a paper mill executive and the graduate of a fancy prep school. Choate or St. John’s or someplace. Nobody can ever remember. Reed spent only his summers hanging out with Jake and Will and the rest of the boys in Marathon. All sorts of people Jake and Will and Mike know from Marathon High, Reed has never met – people like the young acidhead who eventually became known as Space Tim. The real one.

Then it’s the two of them together, their harmonies so tight they sound like Sonny and Cher as they sing: *“I see my light/come shi-ning/from the West down to the East/Any day now!/Any day now!/I shall be re-leased.”*

Debbie sings solo on the verses: *“Well yonder stands a man in this lonely crowd/ A man who swears he’s not to blame/ All day long I hear him shouting so loud/ He’s crying out that he was framed.”* Reed joins her again on the chorus. Their voices blend so beautifully, the temptation to join in is powerful. “One more time!” Gunderson yells into the mic, gesturing to the crowd, “C’mon everybody: *I see my light, come shining. . . .*”

Everybody sings, even Renate, who’s wearing a paisley mini-dress that looks iridescent in the black light. She’s got a fairly strong alto that blends with Debbie’s voice in a practiced way; these two have probably sung at Mass together. Renate’s cheeks glisten with tears. But Jake is amazed that only Renate has busted out crying because, if the full-throated singing is any

* “I Shall Be Released.” Joan Baez version, Any Day Now (Songs of Bob Dylan), Vanguard, 1968.

indication, every freak at this party has something he wants to be released from. His eyes search out the place where Space Tim once stood, propped up in a corner, to see how he's taking this number, which has way too much relevance to his particular situation. The bewigged pseudo-acidhead is still in the vicinity. But Space Tim, who has barely moved and said hardly a word the whole time he's been at Dungwood, is dancing.

The dance is just a little shuffling jig, the Space Tim version of the old soft shoe. To Jake and the boys, who can read this non-verbal shorthand, it says, "I'm getting out of here tonight!" To the rest of the party-goers it says something more like, "I, Space Tim, have still got a few brain cells left that haven't completely flashed out."

The sweet, Joan Baez version of an old Dylan song ends, and Debbie curtsies to strong applause and hustles out of the spotlight. "Don't leave me now!" Gunderson implores, but he's just flirting. Jake decides to call for a change of pace. He wants the crowd to quit looking at Space Tim, and to distract them, he steps forward, elbows the Norseman out of the way, and opens up with one of the tunes he and the boys had rehearsed without Reed, a bluesy number they picked up from the B side of an old Creedence Clearwater single. "The Midnight Special" suits Jake's *basso profundo*, and when he gets to a certain line he substitutes another name for "Rosie": "*And there goes ol' Renate/. . .Going to see the Guv-ner/Trying to free her man!*"* But when he looks around at the faces of the boys, their smiles tight and their eyes wild as they strum their instruments, he knows they're wishing the rock 'n' roll songbook contained a few tunes about something other than doing time.

Jake's solo singing debut mercifully finishes and, while Reed starts hitting the same string over and over, pinching it in his sweaty fingers to create a sound that's half shriek and half

* "The Midnight Special," Creedence Clearwater Revival, *Willy and the Poor Boys*, 1969.

moan, Mike lights a smoke, and Will and Christian argue: “I think you should play it thumpa-thumpa-*thwack!*”

“Thwack you. I don’t tell you how to play the mandolin.”

Jake glances over at Renate, to see whether she caught the musical reference to herself and maybe has a smile for him. But instead, he sees her turn to Linda Andrews and, nodding toward the bewigged imposter who stands like a withered tree in a corner of the great room, say something that, even at this distance, even lip reading, Jake knows is, “Poor old Space Tim.”

He watches mesmerized as Linda Andrews shoots a surprised look Renate’s way. And in one of those weird moments of quiet that sometimes falls in even the most crowded room, he hears Linda matter-of-factly reply, “That’s not Space Tim.”

Chapter 18. "Moms"

Renate can't figure out why Linda Andrews and Stacy are suddenly hanging out with her and trying to be nice. Or at least they were. Now, it seems, she has made another mistake. So maybe this is Space Todd and not Space Tim after all? She vaguely recalls that on the day of his arrival, his name was Space Todd, but no one calls him that now, and he's not really in a position to correct them. Renate takes it for granted that the ultra-quiet dude in the wig and sunglasses has an identity problem. But then, who doesn't? Linda continues with her practical explanation, "Space Tim is at least 6'2" and he has short, curly hair."

She has taken only a small sip of that punch so far, the one Reed emptied that brown vial into, and she can feel things slowing down rather pleasantly, so that she can see in between objects and around them in a way that you can't in the ordinary dimensions of consciousness, see the traces that even the simplest movements leave in the energy field, traces everyone calls trails. Movements don't begin and end, the way we think they do; psychedelics enable you to see what your eyes normally don't, how the energy of motion keeps rippling out until an innocent butterfly on the far away islands of Japan suddenly drops to the ground and dies with no explanation. Maybe that's why Space Tim – or whoever he is – never takes off his sunglasses. Maybe that's the only way he can see discreet motion.

Suddenly Andy is approaching his sister with a look that is private, familial, time-honored. It's the Big Brother look that goes all the way back to the sandbox, where it advises, "I wouldn't eat that if I were you. It's not a real cupcake, no matter how real it seems now." In more recent times, this look telegraphed the message, "That jug of wine Will is passing around? I just saw him spike it with those caps I sold to him earlier, and if you plan on making it to work

tomorrow, I'd let that jug go by." That look. She doesn't know what Andy says to Linda, what secret he whispers in *her* ear. Whatever it is, it's brief. A mere phrase, probably. But when that clinch is over, Linda seems to have formed a different opinion about the identity of Space Tim.

"Didn't recognize him in the sunglasses!" she says loudly. "He's a little shorter than the last time I saw him. But that'll happen when the, you know – " Linda twirls her forefinger next to her ear " –are affected." She turns to the place where Space Tim was last seen, arms outstretched to give him a hug, but he's not there anymore.

Funny how he can disappear like that. You never actually see him move. Now Linda's on the move too, out the front door. Skunk, her black lab, named after the fact that he likes to chase said critters and so spends much of the year smelling like one, needs to go outside. Her old man is probably out there now, catching a breath of fresh air, and she'll run into some other people she knows coming in and won't be back for a while.

Jake, observing this little tableau while he and his fellow members of the back-up band stand limply holding their instruments, remembers that Linda Andrews, though she hails from the country up around Eau Claire, the hilly, wooded land along the Mississippi River where she and her old man are part of a commune, is Space Tim's sister's friend. Space Tim, Jake now recalls, has spent time at that commune, Happy Fuckin' Valley or whatever it's called. It's funny, the connections your brain forgets to make in an ordinary state of consciousness. There are just too many moving parts. You can't grasp them all. Maybe that's why Space Tim, the real one, is a man of such few words. Maybe making all those multifarious connections is keeping him busy inside his head.

The space in the room opens up, like it was only in 2-D before and now it's in 3-D or even 4-D (there is a 4-D, even if you don't know it's there). The mindless bickering of his band

mates fades into the background, and Jake's reveries take on a new dimension, moving beyond the moment when Linda Andrews will walk up to the fake Space Tim, pull the ridiculous wig and silly glasses off his head, and reveal him to the world in all his glory as Barry Stein, the Mad City Bomber, which she seems only too likely to do.

Everyone else is doing whatever it is they do during set breaks: drinking, lighting smokes, greeting with the same broad, surprised gestures those they haven't seen in months and those they saw only last night. Jake seems to be alone in comprehending the disaster in progress; for him it's like they're all under water, the band, the audience of party-goers – their movements are decelerated, each one standing out as though underlined for emphasis.

Yes, it's funny to old Jake that right now, as they are about to suffer exposure at the hands of a woman they all like and Will, for one, has known in the biblical sense, that what's bothering him is not the years doing hard-time at Waupun, the fact that he'll never be able to get a decent engineering job once he does get out, or that he'll have to postpone having kids till he's an old man – no, of all these ignominies and hardships, what bothers him most is not being able to give his mom a farewell hug.

Kind-hearted Margaret Winslow is a calm, affectionate figure in her white nurse's uniform – and she has kept her figure too – even after three kids, she's as slender as the day she first donned her white cap at the registered-nurse graduation ceremonies, when old Jake was just a tot in diapers. What is she now? A mere forty-four, forty-five years old? And entirely innocent of what her fair-haired boy has gotten himself mixed up with this time, probably believing that marriage has changed him for good, that he's settled down to make something of himself. Jake feels sorry to have to disappoint her again as she goes floating up to the ceiling in

her very own thought bubble that looks like a Christmas ornament, white on account of her nurse's uniform, but with a bright, cheery splash of red from her lipstick.

And how about that ornament in shades of avocado green and celery floating nearby? It's Mike's mom, Betty. So Jake's not the only man having thoughts of one whose tender heart is about to be broken. That tangerine and searing gold ornament, the skinny broad with the glasses and the censorious expression? That can only be Christian's mother, Agnes. And what about that crazy woman in brown plaid holding the double-barreled shotgun? As Will likes to emphasize, she does live by herself in a cabin in the woods.

And so the moms float up toward the ceiling, each in her own bubble, sadly waving, and Renate and Stacy continue to stare with wrinkled brows at the spot that no longer holds Space Tim. Stacy's right hand begins to rise slowly to cup her chin, and her face wears that expression faces wear when some dark suspicion has just been confirmed.

As for Space Tim the So-Designated (and whose brilliant idea was it to have Barry disguise himself as an actual guy, a living human, however barely extant?), he has simply disappeared.

Chapter 19. "Up Against the Refrigerator"

The punch has been spiced with flecks of white paper decorated with little Mickey Mice or stars. At first Reed was carefully counting off his hits with an eye dropper, but after a while he said "Fuck it," and dumped in the whole vial. And others have evidently decided the punch was not quite psychedelic enough. The putrid smell of boiling seeds and stems from the kitchen has somehow become associated with this fetid brew, made from a base of lime-green Kool-Aid, and located in a large, oval-shaped bucket. A brand-new bucket that Jake and Will picked up at Ace Hardware only this morning. In front of the bucket is a small, tastefully lettered sign that says, "Imbibe at Your Own Risk." "Have some more!" the punch screams at Jake.

Will appears. Toasting Jake with a Dixie cup, he doesn't have to say a word, but he does anyway. "This is my third cup. And you saw how well I'm playin' tonight." Andy Andrews ambles over, makes the "drink up" gesture in Jake's direction, then thoughtfully tugs on his beard while examining the green liquid. "I take it that at least some of what's in here is Kool-Aid?" he says.

"So, crisis averted, eh?" Jake manages.

Whatever Jake's trying to say, Andy ignores it. "Gonna get my mustache sticky," Andy says cheerfully, tamping down the stache and nodding in the direction of the steel-toed brunette, who stands nearby, watching. "Get my beard all juicy, too."

"Is that all you can think about? Your sex life?" Jake growls.

"Take it easy, man," Andy mutters, grabbing Jake by the front of his skeleton shirt and nervously glancing around. *Disraeli Gears* is playing on the stereo during the set break, and fortunately, it's turned up loud.

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“Right,” Jake says, taking another reflexive sip of punch. There’s a question that, of course, he must not ask. But the urge to ask is irresistible. Andy and Jake lock eyes.

“Make mine a double,” Andy says, grabbing a paper cup.

Jake figures he’ll try some neutral wording. “So, how’s your friend tonight, that guy you said you were bringing?”

Will, paper cup crumpled in his hand, screams, “Yeah! Where the hell is he?” But Will does this at every party. Nobody pays him any mind.

Renate drifts in and stares at the punchbowl as though seeking her reflection in the green liquid, and when Andy looks at her, Jake sees the face of a hungry wolf. Why can’t Andy focus? Where is the driver? Why can’t they ask him anything? The right dose of acid can make Jake feel alert and ultra-perceptive, but it can also land him on a roller coaster. Tonight lack of rehearsal has become a metaphor for his psychic state, maybe his whole life, and though of course he’s not paranoid, at least not yet, he wishes he understood a little bit more about what’s going down.

Renate stands next to the punchbowl with a Dixie cup in her hand, raising it to her lips, lowering it again. “Pathology plus!” Will cackles. “Just do it. Don’t think.”

“Never mind him,” Andy says soothingly. “Do what you want.”

Renate takes a single sip and dashes out of the room, not back to the great room, but down in the direction of the kitchen. Jake can’t move or maybe he’d go running out to the kitchen too, as Andy does, taking off after Renate like a wolf after a lamb.

Mike wanders in with a full, foamy cup of beer in his hand. “Did they leave? Is he gone? Did the driver show up?” Mike throws his free arm around Will and tosses back half the beer. To Jake he says, “Man, you look like shit.”

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Before Jake can say anything about Andy and Renate in the kitchen, provided he could even get the words out, Christian comes running through the room, arms flailing, and it's a good thing he's wearing sneakers to ward off the chill because other than that he's naked..

The fire under the foul-smelling pot is turned off, along with most of the kitchen lights except for one over the sink, but the smell of pot tea continues to dominate the atmosphere. Approaching the refrigerator, Renate breathes through her mouth, and that seems to take care of most of the smell, but there's something ragged and harsh in the air of the kitchen that she can't quite escape; she's taking it in through her lungs. Heading for the refrigerator to rummage for the remains of a noodle kugel from Debbie's grandma that her older sister dropped off yesterday, Renate acknowledges that she isn't especially hungry, but if you are going to trip, it helps to have something in your stomach. Less oxygenated blood flow into your brain means less information, less mental content, fewer disturbing visions, maybe, and maybe even a slight lessening of the sense of paralysis that overcomes her when the acid takes hold, or less awareness of the state of paralysis in which she lives her life – that would be a more accurate way of describing it. Of course, trying to limit the impact of acid after doing it is kind of counter-productive. Why trip in the first place if you're going to try to clamp a lid on the experience? But then, she isn't really sure why she is tripping. It's not something she finds especially fun. Traumatic and horrifying maybe, but not fun. Sure, once it's over you have something to talk about: "Did you try some of that blotter acid that was going around? Far-out, man. Far fuckin' out." She's no snob. She enthusiastically participates in that kind of communication. Slang unites; it doesn't divide. Okay, maybe it weeds out a little bit, but it doesn't actually divide, except from things you really want to be divided from, like anyone over thirty. But while the trip is actually happening, Renate

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mostly experiences her life as a Sartrean wasteland of other people and their judgments. Nobody likes her. She doesn't need to take acid to be reminded that she lives a life of depression and bleakness; acid only intensifies the experience. If reality ever consisted of anything else, if there were happy moments, they don't exist inside the trip and therefore seem never to have existed. She shudders to think what it must be like for Space Tim if that is his state of mind. Space Tim or whoever he really is. Of course, you hear stories from those lucky souls who see God, who take journeys into the infinite and experience the universe as a place of limitless beauty. But those are people who have an easier time letting go.

Still, she doesn't ask herself why she's doing it. You do the acid because it's there. Because your boyfriend is ignoring you and Will is as mean as ever and Stacy isn't your friend anymore and there's a whole roomful of people out there who are just more of the same. Sometimes, changing your state of mind is the prevailing necessity, even if it means changing it to something worse.

Hearing, or maybe sensing, somebody behind her, Renate turns around to see Andy Andrews standing there. She's about to share some of these thoughts with him, to ask his advice on what to eat and how much – though limiting any experience is not Andy's strong suit – when he is suddenly pushing her up against the silver refrigerator and planting hard kisses on her lips.

For a couple of minutes, Renate allows herself to enjoy the experience – Andy's firm, expert lips rippling against hers; his inquisitive tongue searching in her mouth until it locates her tongue; the cool smoothness of the refrigerator through her dress. But then she pushes hard against his chest and says, "I don't think Mike would like this very much."

Mike starts picking Foggy Mountain Break-down. His picking is hesitant; he's a claw-hammer frailer not a picker, but it's a valiant, recognizable effort, greeted by a smattering of applause and

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laughter, and Jake momentarily feels the buoyancy of hope. They're playing a lot of traditional folk songs and old blues tonight, and with the banjo as part of the mix, the music has a cheerful hillbilly sound. It's getting near midnight, the first floor is filled with people, but that one special person known as Space Tim has never reappeared.

But during a pause between songs, Andy does. This is the first Jake's seen of the guy in, like, an hour.

"Here you go, Jakey," Andy says, breath held in, but otherwise solicitous as a mom as he hands Jake a doob. "This'll take the edge off."

Edge? What edge? Jake starts to say to Andy, "You and her . . . in the kitchen –" In Andy's eyes, Jake sees a diabolical glint, but it's just a joint so he reaches for it. Jake tries to look Andrews square in the eye, or as square as he can. He wants to manage a smile, even a contemptuous sneer. He knows. His best friend has been cuckolded by the freckled satyr. Jake stares at Andy's red, hedonistic lips where, he imagines, Renate's kisses have recently dried. Andrews, oblivious, delicately takes back the joint. Jake's thoughts circle around to Jeanie, a regular stop on his mental circuit; he wonders whether she's flirting with those truckers who never take their eyes off her breasts while she scribbles down their orders. If he weren't tripping, the idea would enrage him, but now this hellish thought is oddly liberating, as hellish thoughts often are, or why would the devil hold such sway?

When Renate reappears, she's talking to a squat, curly-headed guy who looks like a wrestler; he's completely square; if you were ever to get into a fight with him, he'd probably head-butt you in the solar plexus and knock you over. He and Renate are standing across the great room, looking at the band, waving their arms and chanting, "Play! Play!"

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“Okay,” Reed intones into the mike. “I heard that. And I’ll be happy to oblige. This next one’s a little number we got from Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen. And by the way, that’s my friend Mike Parker on the banjo. Mike, why don’t you get us going here.”

And so, in honor of Mike’s decision to make pot tea for the Halloween party, tea no one would dream of drinking, Reed begins to sing the ballad of a man who’s simultaneously experiencing all of life’s major misfortunes (no baby, no cash, no car) called, “And I’m Down to Seeds and Stems Again Too,” with Mike and Jake and the boys plunking away, digging a nice little groove for themselves. And where ever Space Tim went, he’s managing to stay gone.

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Chapter 20. "The Uninvited"

The front door crashes open and half a dozen men appear in the entrance to the great room. They stand there looking around with challenging expressions as though daring anybody to throw them out of this dive. They wear leather jackets, most of them, but on the ones wearing leather vests you can see the 1% tattoos (they're ninety-nine percent bad) on their arms. A murmur of recognition passes through the room. Madison is a one-motorcycle-gang town, and that one gang is the Badger State Riders. Jake notes the insignias on the sleeves of their jackets: 1st Air Cav; 9th Infantry; 102nd Air Borne.

These are men who have killed.

They are also men who have beaten. Who were hired by Bill Bandy, the despised Mifflin Street landlord, to intimidate the dwellers in his tumbledown buildings, which he wanted to empty of rent strikers in lieu of making necessary repairs, hoping to, as he put it, "clean up the neighborhood," at least of the people who were unlucky enough to be his tenants. The story was in the papers, but Jake had heard the dirty details on a Friday night last spring when he and Christian were going porch to porch in Miffland, sampling drugs and swapping tales. All were welcome in Miffland, friend and stranger alike. Until the night the bikers showed up.

Party guests are starting to slip out of the room. Mike and Will stagger over to where Jake stands with the pick-up drummer from Stone Manor Co-op. "Who invited these guys?" Mike says in a harsh whisper.

The answer becomes obvious when Andy approaches the lead biker, a guy with his gut spilling over his belt and the words "Big Dan" embroidered on what looks like a little engineer's cap, and they grasp each other in a sumo embrace. While the other bikers glower menacingly,

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Andy starts taking him around, making introductions while the tension in the room ratchets up a notch. Reed changes his mind about the set break and rips into “Feels Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag.” (“*And it’s one, two three, what are we fightin’ for? Hell no, I don’t give a damn, next stop is Viet Nam!*”^{*}), a risky move on his part, but it seems to be paying off. Jake, plunking along in his wake, has to admit the bikers cut a mean rug, even if they are mostly dancing with themselves, though Big Dan has just asked Renate to dance with him.

With one hand flat on the kitchen counter, Andy faces Christian, Mike, and Jake. “I tell you these guys are changing their image,” he says. It sounds like he’s pleading, which is unusual for Andy, who’s normally self-confident bordering on arrogant. “They’re not so bad once you get to know them.”

“We don’t want to get to know them. We know everything we need to know about them,” Mike replies, holding in the smoke from the joint being passed around.

“Are you out of your fucking mind?” Jake yells. “A couple of months ago they were busting heads on Mifflin Street!”

“They were doing the job they got hired to do.”

“People landed in the hospital. People like *us*.”

“I know it sounds bad. But is it any worse than blowing up a building and getting a guy killed? It’s a fucked up, world, man. Ideological purity doesn’t exist. Moral purity began and ended with Jesus.”

“But can’t we at least make an *effort*?”

“Andy? Tell the bikers to go home,” Mike says. “Things are weird enough already.”

^{*} “Feels Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag,” Country Joe and the Fish, *Electric Music for the Mind and Body*

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“Okay,” Andy says, eyes blazing with more than marijuana smoke as he stares into the faces looming around him, “I’ll go back to the nice motorcycle gang and tell them they’re *uninvited* to the Halloween party.”

Christian, who, in lieu of clothing, wears his mandolin strapped to his chest and a panicky expression on his face, points a long finger in Andy’s face. “You’re bullshitting us. Everything you just said is bullshit.”

Jake is sprawled across a great room sofa like one of your grandmother’s afghans, but in his mind, he’s experiencing lift-off. The unscheduled appearance of the town’s only motorcycle gang has created more tension than his brain can manage. He’s already a master of the flying dream, and the psychedelics make the transition to a lucid dream state easy. In his Lockheed Lightning P38, he’s circling the room at about ceiling height, watching the bikers as they stand around in clusters, as tense as everyone else, but from up here, less menacing.

Instead, it’s like the first CYO dance of the year, girls on one side, boys on the other, only now it’s long-hairs on one side, leather on the other. The band has stopped playing and Reed has disappeared. The last time Jake saw him, he was heading upstairs with his hand on the small of Debbie Teiler’s back. Jake, circling peacefully, notes that one of the bikers, in a leather vest and a tee shirt with the sleeves ripped off so you can see his “Dr. Death” tattoo, has parked it on the couch next to a skinny blond dude in a skeleton shirt. Abruptly, Jake drops back into his body. He sticks out his hand in greeting and says, in a surprisingly competent French accent, “*Sainte Exupéry c’est moi!*” The biker stares, ignoring the hand.

“I make zee zshoke, no?” Jake inquires. *Shit!* Why is he talking to this biker in this stupid French accent? And why can’t he stop? “Have you read *The Little Prince?*” Jake says, forcing himself to speak English.

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“As a matter of fact, I have,” the biker says, but Jake suspects that he’s lying, because without further elaboration, he changes the subject. “Now lemme ax *you* a question.”

“Be my guest!” Jake tucks his hands into his armpits and waits, noting with relief that in the talking-funny department, he’s got nothing on this biker, because if Dr. Death’s accent is any indication, he clearly hails from the southernmost part of Wisconsin.

“What’s in that there punch?”

“Hard to say. More than one man emptied his pocket into that stew.”

“So it is psychedelic?”

“Yup.”

“It’s okay boys,” the biker hollers across the room, cupping his hands around his mouth. He turns back to Jake. “We was afraid there might be booze in ’ere. Me and the boys is drivin’, you know.”

Jake grins and sticks his legs out straight, feet flopping to the sides, as the biker wanders off to enjoy some punch. From this vantage point, he watches as three bikers converge on Mike, asking him questions about the banjo. “Have all banjos got on’y four strings?” the bikers want to know. “Oh, there’s five stringers you say?” They’re banjo fanatics, these bikers, and they lure Mike back to the instruments and sound equipment. Mike signals Jake with a nod in the direction of the stairs, where most of the party has now converged. Jake isn’t sure what’s happening, but Will is in the lead, motioning everyone to follow him, and he figures he might as well head upstairs along with everybody else.

In the attic, folks are crammed in pretty tight, shoulder-to-shoulder and hand-to-butt, when the overhead light suddenly goes off. A woman screams. Jake puts up his fists in the dark. Bikers draw knives in moments like this, just for the hell of it.

As though the bikers are aware that this will be thought of them, their coarse, jeering voices make themselves heard above the frightened hoots and exclamations. “Ain’t this funny!” they crow. “Us caught in the dark with a buncha hippies and war protestors!”

The lights flicker on and off uncertainly, then flicker off again. In fact, this is no accident; it’s all part of the master plan for the evening, the one that included Andy showing up with the driver and the bikers not showing up at all. At midnight, Rick Plank was supposed to head for the basement fuse box. The boys had told him it would lend excitement to the fund-raising portion of the party. And apparently, when the bikers showed up, nobody had bothered to *untell* him. The real plan, Jake suddenly recollects, was to get the party-goers up to the attic, so Andy’s driver and Barry Stein would have the opportunity to slip unnoticed out the back. And in the morning, if anybody bothered to ask what happened to Space Tim, the boys would say, “He caught a ride home.”

Fortunately, they have prepared themselves with heavy duty flashlights hidden all over the attic, which will not only give them the edge in controlling the available light but are also big enough to use as weapons. “Here, gimme that,” says Christian, trying to grab one from Will. Either they think these antics will distract the bikers, or they just don’t know any better.

“I saw it first.” They tussle with the flashlight as Mike appears at Jake’s side, and a voice with a peculiar sort of southern-Tennessee-rural accent says, “Hey, what happened to Barry Stein? We thought *he* was gonna be here tonight.” The roving flashlight beams reveal a gleeful if Satanic-looking biker, Jake’s couch buddy, the one with the moniker “Dr. Death” tattooed on his arm.

“There’s no Barry Stein hanging around here,” says Christian, shining his flashlight on his forefinger and shaking it at the biker. Somehow, being naked lends him an even greater air of authority.

“That right?” Dr. Death says in a smarmy, annoying, know-it-all way. “You think he got spooked, is that it? Cause we heard that crazy asshole was gonna be at your Halloween party. Didn’t we see that on a flyer, boys. Some kinda fund-raiser kinda deal?”

“How did you get a hold of that flyer?” Jake and Mike should never have made a flyer, but Rick Plank kept bringing it up, so they made two or three, hand-drawn and hand-lettered. Renate had said she was going to put one up at the Book Co-op. And Reed had asked for one, but Jake’s pretty sure he doesn’t know the bikers.

Ignoring the question, the biker says, “I always thought hippies were kinda dumb, but throwing parties for a wanted fugitive – that’s dumb *and* bold.”

“It was supposed to be a joke, okay?” Jake figures that since he and Dr. Death have some history, his word may carry weight.

“Okay. So no fugitive. But you all are here. Guess we’re just gonna have to make do.”

Mike illuminates his own face with a flashlight. “Are we just gonna let these bikers call us out in our own house?”

Then the beam pivots for a while, searching for the source of a strangled cry, which turns out to be Jake. “Of course we are! Are you crazy!”

“Call you out? What’s that supposed to mean?” Dr. Death says in the same rude drawl. “We came here cause we thought you guys ’ud have some good acid on Halloween. And if we found that Barry Stein, we were maybe gonna rough him up a little bit, but that’s about it.”

“Hallelujah brothers!” Will shouts, evidently moved.

The crowd murmurs enthusiastically but without true conviction. “Yeah, but what about that, uh, incident in Miffland?” someone asks from the shadows.

“Give it a rest, will ya!” Jake urges. “Let bygones be bygones.”

Dr. Death sighs elaborately, as though this is some sorry rumor that just keeps following him and his brothers around, and an unfair one at that. “That’s when Ugly Dave was our leader and we was still a bad gang.” Evidently Dr. Death is the gang’s official spokesman, possibly its PR man. “Ugly Dave was Big Dan’s older brother. He’s in the big house now, up in Waupun. Since Big Dan took over the gang, we’ve become peaceable. Instead of getting paid to whup folks, we’re lookin’ around for, you know, community service projects and like that.”

“You put that so eloquently. And where might Big Dan be now? I’d like to thank him for dropping by,” Mike says. “And as long as we’re on the subject, where’s my girlfriend?”

So far, in the course of the Halloween party, they have managed to misplace, and with any luck, lose for good, their fugitive, nor can they seem to locate one of their own members, or, for that matter, a big fat biker dude. It’s as tense a moment of *partius interruptus* as Jake’s ever experienced. Instead of being able to pull their pants down and relax a little bit, as they thought they should surely be able to by this point in the evening, they have been caught in a trap by the biggest bullies in town.

Christian is shadow clad, a disembodied head. “How about a game of poker?”

“First I want to know where Renate is.” Mike walks up to Dr. Death, who, though sturdy, is not a tall man. His combat boots planted a few feet apart, Mike looks down at the wiry, gnomish biker and says, “I think you better tell me.”

“Fuck man, I don’t know nothin’,” Dr. Death says. He looks nervous.

A confused silence is interrupted by muffled voices wafting up from the courtyard, raised in some sort of chant. Mike grabs Dr. Death and tows him over to a small attic window. Letting go of the biker's collar, he raises the sash.

“Smash hippie head! Smash hippie head!”

Suddenly, the overhead light comes back on, revealing freaks and bikers alike standing around looking confused. Mike drops to his knees and sticks his head out the small attic window. But before he gets a chance to say a word, Will, who must have gone downstairs at some point without anybody noticing, appears, panting and holding his forefinger in the air in the sign that says, “Just gimme a second.”

Dr. Death complains, “What the fuck? Has this guy got asthma or something?”

Finally able to catch his breath, Will shrieks, “*Reactionaries!*” before diving back down the attic stairs with the crowd stampeding after him.

Chapter 21. “Attack of the Reactionaries”

The actual fight didn't last long. Fights in real life never do, unlike fights in the movies, where they last beyond the point of physical endurance and become, not just a battle between two men, but a battle between a man and his own nature, a test of his will to endure. In real life, a punch gets thrown, or maybe two, and both men figure out pretty quickly who's the strongest and most agile, and the weaker man wants to test nothing other than his ability to end the fight with as much of his skin and dignity intact as possible.

That's if it's an actual fight and not a beat down, and while Jake was still racing out Dungwood's front door to confront the Campus Republicans – or whoever they were – in the courtyard, he suspected that a beat-down was exactly what they had in mind.

Mike, as the de facto leader of this place, is in front, and Christian, who seems to have found his pants and is trying to run and put them on at the same time, is right behind him, urging him on. Will and Freddy and Linda's boyfriend and Andy Andrews and the curly-headed guy who looks like a wrestler, even Plank, running up from the basement, all are sliding down the front steps, slipping on mashed pumpkin goo and wet seeds. Jake would have fallen on his ass if there'd been any room, but the whole party is rushing outside, including the women, uttering angry exclamations. Jake had predicted it, but he hadn't really wanted to believe it. Their pumpkins have been smashed.

The short-hairs, with their bangs and their sweatshirts, look like nothing so much as a bunch of surfers in a small, jeering cluster, trying to recover their nerve in light of the sheer numbers pouring out of the house. They must have showed up when the house was quiet with everyone in the attic, and they had themselves a good time in the courtyard, kicking pumpkins

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and tossing them around and laughing about hippie head. It's taking them a moment to adjust. They've formed themselves into a tight bunch much like the ancient Greek phalanx, only they haven't got any shields, and Mike is so pissed off that his pumpkins got smashed he stomps up to a guy and gives him a hard shove that throws him back, arms out, against the guy behind him, who deftly jumps out of the way.

In a fight, the element of surprise is key. These guys might have been tough, on their own turf, say late on a Saturday night at the Kollege Klub with an empty beer bottle in hand and the other guy with his back turned. But where they were expecting a bunch of limp-wristed flower children, they instead found a sizeable crowd of angry people, many of them too stoned to be scared of anything. People are yelling at them! Women are yelling at them. "You sons-of-bitches!" screams a feminine voice Jake doesn't recognize. "Mother fuckers!" yells another irate female.

But perhaps the most frightening thing is that Christian is giving them a piece of his mind. Jake hears the words "destruction of private property" and "trespassing" coming from his direction.

"You don't even believe in private property!" one of the Republicans yells.

Jake, who's breathing hard from running down a couple flights of stairs and from the one punch he did throw, which didn't connect, leans over and grabs his knees and starts laughing. "They thought this was Golden Gate Park in '68," he gasps. Mike, as he grabs a short-hair by the collar of his UW sweatshirt and shakes him hard, says, "How. Do. You. Know. What. I. Believe?" through gritted teeth.

Jake has momentarily forgotten about the bikers, and now, his back to Dungwood and the party-goers gathered in the pumpkin goop at the bottom of the stairs, some of the women crying

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and a skunk-smelling dog barking its fool head off, he sees something forming at the periphery. He straightens up and looks around the courtyard. The bikers have spread out in a loose circle that encloses both groups of men, and now they're tightening that circle as they move in toward the center. Jake means to draw Mike's attention to the fact that they're surrounded, but the only sound that comes out of his mouth is "*Gack!*"

The College Republicans came prepared for their night's frolic by wearing old sneakers, which are now streaked with yellow-gold pumpkin fibers and wet with pumpkin mash.

The men behind them came prepared too. Bikers always come prepared. Some of them are carrying official-looking sticks, relatively short (eight, ten inches, maybe) and thick (about two inches in diameter), the approximate size of a cop's night stick. Who knows, maybe the cops even gave them those sticks, when the bikers were "helping keep order" down in Miffland. Jake straightens up and he and Mike exchange a glance, both of them backing up now, in the direction of the house. There isn't time for much of a battle plan. Mike says, "Shit!" Jake waits for him to turn around and start running. He wishes those steps were clear of party goers. He wishes they could turn around and yell, "Back in the house! Lock the doors!" There is no doubt that things are about to get ugly.

Then one of the bikers, not Dr. Death, but a bigger one with shoulders like a line-backer, yells, "Gang way, freaks!" Jake and Mike jump apart like they've been split by a cleaver, and the tall biker comes barreling through the space that opens up between them with a short hair by the collar, heading straight into the house.

He's followed by more bikers, and they've each collared a short-hair or two, and they're hauling all of them inside.

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For a few anxious moments, the Dungwood crew, residents as well as party guests, mills around outside. People walk around with arms raised in futile questioning or haplessly clinging to each other. “Are they taking over the house? Was that the bikers plan all along? Did the fraternity hire them?”

“Impossible! They sold us this house fair and square! We have the deed!”

“These dudes are not fraternity brothers,” Jake says. How could they be? Fraternity brothers look like everybody else these days. Nobody would dare hang around Langdon Street with hair that short. “I don’t know what they are, but they’re not the ΛΩΣ.”

“Then what are they doing? And why aren’t the bikers beating us up?”

“Only one way to find out,” Mike says, hitching up his jeans. “Go back inside.”

“Yeah,” Will says, “gotta check on the equipment.”

There’s a reverse stampede of everybody back into the house, where the bikers and their hostages are clustered around the punch bowl, bikers pouring Dixie cups of punch down the throats of the short-hairs, who are drinking it down like good boys obeying their bearded and tattooed nannies.

Chapter 22. "Druids Dance"

When Jake steps back outside, following a truce that's more unnerving than the battle, cool night air dries the sweat on his back. It's past midnight, but he's not sure how far past. A dozen Harley-Davidson Sportsters parked in neat formation at the edge of the parking lot surround the Dungwood cars. As "The Kids Are Alright" blasts through Dungwood's walls, Jake becomes aware of Freddy, who's weaving a bit as he points at the Harleys and says, "Funny how those Republicans smashed our pumpkins but didn't touch these motorcycles."

Unzipping his fly, Freddy wobbles over to the bikes, pulls out his cock and starts watering Sportsters, as many as he can reach with his feet planted, pissing on the famous V-twin engines, the cushioned black leatherette seats, even leaning back and arcing his piss over the handlebars. He's got enough in him to give the bikes a pretty good soaking, especially the lead bike, the one with those tall, ape-hanger handlebars, like Dennis Hopper had in *Easy Rider*.

Jake watches the whole thing, massaging his chin. He senses that a warning is in order, but for sheer pleasure he's seldom had a better viewing experience. Turning around to zip up, Freddy says, "Remember Miffland?"

"Yeah. And hope the bikers think it was the Republicans who pissed on their rides."

Glancing over his shoulder at the front door, Freddy says, "Guess I better head inside by the back way." Jake is about to follow when he notices the glow of a fire coming from the front yard of the Gaelic house, which has its own pier on Lake Mendota. He hears voices raised in choppy, uneven song in one of the old Celtic tongues and finds himself veering off in that direction instead.

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In the days before the Romans invaded the British Isles, bringing with them their own brand of Christianity, the Britons celebrated the ancient feast of Samhain by dancing naked around a bonfire. The Romans declared the Druid religion a form of witchcraft because the Druids had that power he's so interested in, of using the energy of mind to overcome the seeming limitations of the material world. Rumor has it they built Stonehenge, nobody knows how, but Jake likes to think of them all sitting in a circle holding hands while giant stones fell into place around them. He would have been drawn to that bonfire and that strange song even if the women singing it weren't topless.

A few of the men are naked. Jake recognizes the dude from the Process by his thick black brows and his goatee. He has a white, surprisingly hairless body and a long, dangling cock that bounces around like a lively snake. Jake prefers to concentrate on the breasts bounding free. Though the night air is chilly, these people have been dancing around this fire for so long that their bodies are pink and glistening, and one big woman with monstrous breasts just lets them swing and topple. Then Jake spies something more to his liking, a head full of blonde ringlets and small white globes of such firmness that they bounce only a little, just a small flirtatious jostle when the ringlets fly up.

Jake, peeling off his skeleton shirt, waits for the circle to bring her his way, and when it does, parts her from the hand holding hers – whether male or female he doesn't notice – and begins dancing around the fire with the Druids. At first the Flaxen Saxon feels a little self-conscious holding the woman's small hand in his calloused one. The dancing continues, round and round, until the fire begins to die down, and he looks at the woman with the ringlets, and she grins up at him, and the grin holds after the dancing stops.

“What are you doing here?” Jake says, as though he's known her all his life.

“Dancing!” she laughs, and her pale arms curve up and land on top of her head.

“You seem to have lost your top,” Jake remarks.

“Yes. I left it in those bushes there. With my blanket.”

“Show me,” Jake says.

The buildings along this part of the lake are old and built close together and their gardens are tiny, overgrown, secret affairs that you could pass by every day and never notice. The ringletted Druidess – the Romans would have called her a witch – takes him to one of these places, inside a clump of bushes that form an alcove of arching branches, a sleeping bag spread open with a blanket thrown over it, and lying on top of that a hippie peasant blouse with embroidered flowers. The girl reaches to pick up the blouse, and, thinking she means to put it on, Jake says, “Don’t.” He covers her small, firm breasts with his hands. They’re soft, and her skin is faintly damp with sweat; she has pink nipples the size of quarters. Pinching these soft nipples, he pulls her down onto the sleeping bag, where, when their bodies are pressing and moving against each other, their lips finally meet.

As she proceeds down the back stairs, Renate’s mind is like a tunnel with only a few stray thoughts zipping around looking for other thoughts to collide with so they can explode into emptiness and finally let her rest. She’s going in the wrong direction; she knows that. Her bed is upstairs. But she needs to find her boyfriend because she doesn’t want to go there alone.

He doesn’t seem to be in the dining room, where a heap of jeans, belts, tee shirts, and bandannas is piled on the table, surrounded by figures stiff and motionless as corpses, their only covering the fans they hold in front of them. They stare fixedly at these, occasionally breaking off pieces and moving them to some other part of the fan. Will and Christian are both naked, though a couple of the bikers still have leather vests on. But the most arresting thing about this

card game is that it includes two men in Beatle haircuts, the kind boys used to wear in junior high. These men have patterns of blue dots on their biceps and shoulder blades that look like they were made by somebody poking at them with a fountain pen. Renate's never seen either of them before.

Christian mutters, "Are we accepting locks of hair?"

"As long as it's not pubic," a biker replies.

Tiptoeing around the dining room table, Renate hopes to avoid notice. But her movements catch their attention, rousing the men from stupefied contemplation of their cards. Will points at her and yells, "Woman!"

As Renate sprints for the painted glass doors that lead to the great room, a howl goes up from the players. "We won't hurt you!" they cry. "We'll even lend you a sock to ante!"

"Where is Mike?" Renate mutters, more to herself than to them. She hasn't seen her boyfriend in such a long time. Will he still love her? Does he even remember her?

In the great room, the couches remain pushed back against the wall. Sofa cushions are strewn on the floor, and on several of these Mike lies near the fireplace, smoking a cigarette.

Renate dives on him.

"There you are!" he says. "Where have you been?"

"Oh Mike," she says. "Who are those strange men with the Beatle haircuts? One of them had a skull and crossbones on his arm made of all these little dots!"

"Yeah, well," Mike says, "you'd be surprised what the bikers can do with some ink and a couple of safety pins. Those are Republicans, honey. Didn't you hear the fight?" Her long hair dangles onto his chin, and he pushes it back behind her ears. Reflected light from the embers in the fireplace glows in his dark eyes.

“What fight?”

“Renate, where were you?”

“I was with the Big Biker. And somebody else.”

“Where did he take you?” Mike says.

“No place. We were just upstairs. Talking to Barry Stein. There was a fight?”

They say that in the throes of rigor mortis, a corpse will sometimes jerk upright to a sitting position with a similar horrifying abruptness. Mike sits up so fast he and Renate bump foreheads before he knocks her off his lap.

They stare at each other for a moment. Then Mike says, “Uh, what was that thing you said? You said a name. Barry Something?”

“It’s all over Mike. No use pretending anymore.”

Mike rises creakily to his feet. “I can’t talk about this now, Ren. I need to sleep.”

And he leads her by the hand across the entry hall, where Andy Andrews is sprawled face down. “He’s going to have quite a headache in the morning,” Mike says. “That girl with the steel-toed boots kicked him in the head on her way out the door.”

Chapter 23. "Ride of the Yellow Beetle"

The sound of motorcycles being kick-started galvanized the ringletted witch out of whatever post-coital state she had found herself in – and it sounded pleasant enough, from her sighs and whimpers, but a man can never really tell, not on such brief acquaintance. Jake, alone now and lying on bare grass, rises creakily to his feet, finds his shirt, zips up his pants, and crashes through the bushes like Frankenstein. He sees her then, her arms wrapped around Big Dan's ample girth, her head leaning on his back. The big biker backs his Harley onto the cobblestones, and the other bikes pull out after him, one after the other, forming a line. Jake, a few feet away, his eyes sticky, his contacts fogged over, blinks at them as the red tail-lights pause at the end of Lakelawn place and then turn left on Langdon like a line of fuzzy red ducklings following their mama. He thinks he sees something – a small figure with shaggy, disheveled brown hair riding on the last bike – but can't be sure. It could have been one of their women. Bikers always have one or two riding along. How else to account for the blonde? But that sure did look like –

Christian, barefoot, wearing pants, buttoning his shirt, runs from the house, followed by Will. Christian has that look he gets when he's deep in a trip, his eyeballs spinning in opposite directions. "They got him, Jake. They took him!"

"What! You mean, that was really him?"

Christian shrieks, "They're gonna kills us all!"

And just then Reed Gunderson comes down the front steps of Dungwood with his guitar case. "Hey, Jake," he says, "Can you give me a lift over to Williamson? There's another party I said I'd play at."

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Jake starts to head for the yellow VW, feeling for the key that is still lodged in his pocket, but then he stops abruptly, causing the men following to crash, first into him and then each other.

“What the fuck!” Reed yells.

“I’m coming down,” Jake says. “I can’t drive the beetle like this.”

“He’s right. He can’t drive that thing straight. No man could,” Christian says, stroking his chin.

“Will this do?” Will draws, revealing a nearly full bottle of Guevara Gold that’s been concealed behind his back.

The men rush for the car again, and once the other three are crammed inside, Reed and Will occupying the back seat like a pair of strangled gargoyles with Reed’s guitar between them; Christian leaning forward and gripping the dash with both hands, Jake pauses again with the driver’s side door open. “Wait,” he says. “If they’re gonna kill us all, why are we following them?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Reed hollers.

“Get the fuck in here and drive!” Christian shrieks.

And so he does. The beetle careens down the narrow cobblestone alley, somehow managing to avoid hitting the walls on either side. When they get to Langdon street, Jake thinks he can just see the last of the bikers’ tail-lights heading onto Wisconsin Avenue, and he follows, speeding up to the beetle’s maximum 45 mph, the bikers well ahead of them, circling the square, headed for the east side.

“I’m taking the short cut!”

The yellow beetle barrels down Wisconsin, Jake convinced it’s driving him as opposed to vice versa, heading around the square to the State Street entrance to the Capitol Building where a

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series of low flights of steps separated by landings leads majestically to the brass revolving doors of the main entrance. The beetle jumps the curb and then things start to get bumpy, and they are jolted around inside like rags in a clothes dryer.

“Go straight through the revolving doors, Jake! It’s the best way,” Christian urges, still gripping the dash, eyeballs popping as he sways from side to side.

“Not the revolving doors!” Reed yells.

“Here, drink this.” Will manages to hand him the bottle.

Jake drives on, sure it’s him now and not the beetle, Christian howling like a coyote, Will trying to hand the bottle to Jake, and Reed hollering, “You’re going to kill us all!” which is about what you’d expect from a draft dodger, and then the VW hits the top of the stairs, where there’s a wide, graveled walk that runs all around the Capitol Building, and where Jake hangs a right and peels gravel halfway round to Pinkney Street. And then he stops the car and turns off the engine. To Christian he says, “Hear anything?”

“No.”

“We lost ’em.”

“Hey, I thought you were giving me a ride to a party.”

“Where’s that bottle?” Jake grabs the half-empty bottle of Guevara by the neck and takes a deep drink.

Chapter 24. "Probed"

It's full-on morning when Mike and Renate hear the frenzied pounding and manage, wearing hastily scrambled-together clothing, to step over the body of Jake Winslow, sprawled over the bottom stairs facing the landing, to answer the front door.

"I don't remember Jake being here when we went upstairs," Renate says, but the harsh pounding interrupts her, followed by the shout: "Open up! FBI!"

"Wake him up!" Mike says, his hand on the door knob; the pounding rattles the door so hard his arm vibrates.

Renate slaps Jake on the cheeks, once on each side of his face. His eyes pop open. "Are you awake?" Renate whispers.

"Harder," he says.

One more good slap and Jake scrambles into an upright position. Renate leans in close and whispers in his ear. It's a ticklish whisper, and it makes him feel like giggling, but her words are distinct. "He's gone." Then she grabs him by his bare arm and helps him to his feet. Jake's still wearing the skeleton shirt, but his boots have disappeared. He nods at Mike, who slowly opens the arched oak door, letting light into the gloomy foyer.

Jake sees the agents. They all do. He's not surprised to see them. Why would he be? He always knew they would come.

Various things happen. Mike, schooled by The Grateful Dead and numerous first-person accounts, stands with one arm across the doorway, barring entry. Jake hears his opening exchange with the FBI as he stumbles across the hall. Mike moves aside a bit, and Jake leans

against the doorpost, and Renate squeezes in between them so they form a human wall in the doorway.

“You guys got a warrant or not?” Mike says. “Cause we’ve got laws in this country, and without a warrant, you’re not coming in here.”

They have introduced themselves and flashed their credentials, and the one called Mueller, whom Jake has instantly dubbed “the mean one,” studies them, lingering on Renate, who doesn’t look away, simply stares back into his tiny blue eyes, probably noticing how his smooth white face appears stubble free and his shiny crew-cut hair is nearly as pale as Jake’s. When Mueller finally switches his gaze to Jake, the two agents exchange a glance. Mueller licks his ruddy lips. The other one, Agent Evans, reminds Jake of a high school science teacher, with his itchy-looking suit and his white shirt dingy with wear. He seems a bit cannier than Mueller, nicer, but that’s probably just their shtick.

“Look, we need to ask you a few questions, and to do that, we should come inside.” Mueller steps forward with his arm out, aimed at Renate’s stomach, evidently meaning to shove her back, assuming that she, the woman, is the weakest link, and will simply step back or fall over, either way providing them with an opening. But Mike steps in front of his girl, and Jake, as though in a faint, falls forward on top of agent Evans, pushing the older man down the steps and almost off his feet before he manages to right himself.

“Hey!” Mueller yells, reaching inside his jacket. “That’s assaulting an officer!”

“I’m okay. The kid just fell. You can see how messed up he is.” Evans brushes himself off while Jake sinks down onto the steps and leans back, squinting up at the agents. Agent Evans says, “Is it safe to assume you haven’t been to bed yet?”

“Evans! This guy *assaulted* you. I’m calling the Madison P.D. He’s getting locked up.”

“That won’t be necessary, Agent Mueller! These students had a little Halloween party last night. They’ve been up all night, and they’re none too steady on their feet.”

“Off the fuckin’ pigs!” Jake yells.

At the sound of his deep, guttural voice, Mueller sneers, “Students? That what you call these pinko freaks?”

“That’s *agents* to you, son,” Evans says blandly.

He must have kids their age, because he doesn’t seem to hate them as much as Mueller does. When Jake runs his hand over his hair, he can feel most of it standing straight up like a misshapen bale of hay. His eyes feel swollen, and his cheeks burn from Renate’s slaps.

“Look *officer* – ” Mike drawls with no intention of finishing the sentence.

“Agent!” Mueller snaps.

“Well, you see agent,” Mike says, straightening his posture as he warms to his subject, “as you pointed out, we had a little Halloween *get together* last night? And several people are *indisposed*?”

“Yeah, we can see that,” Mueller sneers. “Were you the guys partying with those bikers? This where they were hanging out?”

No one says anything for a long moment, and through the open doorway, the sound of guttural moans and frighteningly loud snores fills the air. Mike scratches his stubbly cheek, and Jake lifts his head with a nervous jerk. “We thought you guys loved the bikers,” he says.

“You’re usually fighting on the same side.”

Mueller says. “Let’s say we find the circumstances a little unusual.”

“Look, we’re not here to charge you with anything,” Evans says almost kindly. “But if you don’t want all your neighbors to see you out here talking to the FBI, maybe we could just step inside.”

“Neighbors? It’s the morning after the Saturday night before Halloween. You see any neighbors around here?” Mike nods over the agents’ heads, but they don’t bother to turn around. “Like I said, not possible.”

“Fine,” says Agent Mueller, reaching inside his coat. The two men stiffen and Renate takes a step back into the hall, but what he takes from his pocket is a piece of blue paper. Unfolding it, he holds it up in front of each of their faces, making sure they all get a good look.

Jake, rising unsteadily to his feet, slings an arm over Renate’s shoulders for support and suddenly growls, “I don’t know what I was thinking, officer!” causing even these two hardened operatives to purse their lips, suppressing smiles.

“Agent,” Mike supplies.

“Right,” Jake says. “It was my idea, the whole stupid thing. I admit it.”

Nervously, Renate jostles him with her hip, and Mike, working around Renate, administers a kick to his shins.

“It wasn’t your idea!” objects Mike. “Geez. He’s always taking credit for stuff.”

“Oh?” Agent Evans inquires.

“The party!” Jake growls. “The Barry Stein Defense Fund-Raiser. That’s our flyer.”

“So Barry Stein *is* a friend of yours?” Evans says patiently.

“Never met him in our lives, did we?” Jake turns to Mike, who shrugs.

“We’re not political,” Mike says. “Hey, either of you agents ever read *The Whole Earth Catalogue*? Forget all that communism shit. People need to learn to be self-sufficient.”

“Like Barry Stein. Building their own bombs?” Mueller offers, a little too eagerly.

“We’re nonviolent,” Mike insists. “And we wouldn’t know that guy if we passed him on the street.”

“Never met him,” Jake agrees.

While Mueller proffers the flyer, Jake takes the opportunity to study Mike’s blocky lettering and his own sketch of a slightly nerdy kid in glasses. It’s funny how disturbing people seem to find this flyer, especially considering all the incendiary leftie stuff flying around Bascom Hill. After all, it contains no bad language and exhorts no one to acts of violence. Finally he says, “I drew it from the picture on the wanted posters,” allowing a note of pride to creep into his voice.

“I did the lettering,” Mike says.

“So let me get this straight,” Agent Mueller says, in a rasping, nasal voice that matches the hysteria intensifying in his suspicious little eyes. “You comedians thought it would be a fun idea to make these flyers and raise a little money for a criminal who used homemade explosives to blow up a university building valued at three million dollars and, in the process, cost a father of two children his life? A criminal you have never met in your lives?”

“It was supposed to be a joke,” Mike explains. “We didn’t actually *raise* any money.”

Renate covers her cheeks with her hands. Looking from one agent to the other, she says. “I feel like somebody finally understands what it’s like to live with these guys.”

“That’s right. We’re jerks!” Jake agrees.

“Total cretins. We haven’t got a brain in our heads.”

Agent Mueller carefully folds the flyer and returns it to the inside pocket of his suit jacket. “That’s what we figured,” he says. In the meantime, Agent Evans removes a small white

rectangle from his wallet and hands it to Renate. “If you think there’s anything we might need to know, you can contact us at that number.” She takes the card and stares at it for a moment before sliding it into the back pocket of her jeans.

“By the way, agents? Where did you get our flyer?” Jake asks as the two men are turning away. There were only supposed to be three of these flyers in existence, other than the one Jake had kept for himself.

Agent Mueller sneers his cruel sneer. “We have our sources,” he says in a smug way that would enflame vast quantities of paranoia in even the most trusting soul.

The Feds retreat to an innocuous dark-blue Ford sedan with government plates, observed by a troubled threesome who stare after them as they drive off down Lakelawn Place. When they’re out of sight, the trio stumbles inside, leaning against the arched front door for a moment, the girl still in the middle, all three panting thoughtfully. The air reeks of stale cigarette smoke, the putrid after-burn of pot tea, and the rank aroma of fear.

Jake turns to Renate. “Before, when I was on the stairs, you said something to me.”

“He’s gone?”

“That was it. Who’s gone?”

“The one you guys called ‘Space Tim.’”

Jake slides down the door until his butt hits the slate. “Does everyone know about this thing! Does my wife?”

“I wonder what they meant by that,” Mike says.

“What?” Jake says from the floor.

“They have their *sources*.”

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Jake wakes into what should be darkness. Instead the light in his bedroom has a yellowish, irradiated glow from the streetlight outside their bedroom window shining through the shade.

Jeanie sits at the side of the bed, dressing. Jake can tell she's doing her best not to wake him.

"What day is it?" he says.

"It's Sunday night," she answers. "You haven't been out that long."

"Where you goin'?" he says, sitting up and rubbing his face.

"Back to work."

"Shit, woman, is that all you ever do is work? Don't go in. Stay here with me." He sits up and reaches across the bed for her, his hand landing on her shoulder, but she shrugs him off.

"They called me in to sub for Sue. She went to a Halloween party last night and she's in no condition. Besides, it's just the dinner shift. I'll be back in a couple of hours."

"You missed a good party." She'd been asleep in their bed when he stumbled in. "We had some pretty strange company."

Jake switches on the lamp next to the bed. It seems eerie, waking up after the sun goes down, his wife going off to work in the dark like this. Not that it's the first time it's happened to him, but it's still feels unnatural. Fluffing up his pillow, he leans back against the headboard, assessing his condition while Jeanie moves around the room looking for things, her purse, her car keys, her earrings.

"Maybe we can make dinner when you get back. I'll wait to eat."

"It's okay. You must be hungry."

"No. Hungry is not what I am." He rubs his face.

Jean, glancing his way, makes that tsking sound with her tongue against the roof of her mouth, a brief, bitter sound no man likes to hear. “Okay, I’ll bring you back something. How about roast chicken?”

“Might taste good by then.”

Jeanie pauses, one hand on the doorknob, keys dangling from the other. “You know, if he’d stayed, he could have had this room. Then we could have moved out without having to worry about getting a sub-letter.”

“If who stayed?” Jake says gruffly, sitting forward, elbows on his knees, blanket wrapped around his waist.

“Space Barry Stein, or whatever his name was.”

“What the hell are you talking about!” Jake shouts.

“I was just thinking that, now that he’s gone . . . maybe you could take care of me for a change. How would that be? Husband?”

“Jean!” Jake raises a hand to his forehead. His head throbs, and he thinks he might still be hallucinating, and if that’s the case, he has to be careful not to say the wrong thing, not to give anything away. But it seems that Jean may know. And Renate knew. And the way these women have of finding out things that are being so carefully kept from them frightens him almost more than anything else.

His wife is already gone, having shut the door behind her. “Jean!” he calls again, knowing it’s useless. He rummages around the bedside table for his Tums. The likely thing is, while he was passed out, Renate told Jean. That has to be what happened.

The bedroom door opens again, and Jake, showing Tums in his mouth, turns quickly, expecting to see Jean come back to answer some unanswered questions. Instead, it's Mike, sticking his head in the door. "Hey. You alive in here?"

"Renate told Jean," Jake says through a mouthful of chalky sweetness.

"Renate's still asleep. She hasn't moved since we hit the rack."

"Damnit!" Jake says, slamming his fist against the mattress. "Why do women always know everything?"

"Look, I'll explain the Renate thing to you later," Mike says in a low voice. His head disappears for a moment, then reappears in the door. "We've only got one thing to worry about now. We have to figure out that shit about, 'they have their sources.'"

"Jesus. It could be anybody. The whole house knows."

"The hell they do. Renate just found out. She won't say anything. And as long as everybody keeps their mouth shut, they've got nothing on us. Besides, you're lucky. A wife can't testify against her husband. Hey, do you know if there's any grass? My stomach's feeling kind of weird."

Looking at Mike with what he intends as a blank expression, but is really a look of such virulence that Mike's head immediately disappears, Jake lets himself fall back onto his pillow, rubbing his aching face. His wife's psychic ability is something he's relied on for years. She always knows which fork in the road is the right one to take and can instantly ascertain the trustworthiness of a new acquaintance. She's not good in math or science, and though she writes well, she seems to mix up the texts of a lot of different books, confusing the sayings of Shakespeare with those of Alexander Pope, for example, but she's a genius at intuition. How

had he been so stupid as to parade a known fugitive in front of her, one whose vital statistics were in all the papers?

“Cloak of Invisibility my ass,” he says out loud.

With a half sigh, half frustrated growl, Jake slides a hand under the blanket and grasps his manhood, not with any notion of pleasuring himself, merely checking for telltale signs. Lifting the blanket, bending his head down as far as it'll go, he sniffs. The scent of the girl with the blond ringlets is still there, musky and tart. Jeanie has an extreme sensitivity to odors and aromas of all kinds. She's always walking into a room and saying, “Did someone bake an apple pie?” or “Who's wearing the patchouli oil?” when Jake smells nothing at all. Jeanie may have been arriving home while he was in the bushes with that curly-haired witch. His wife could have heard cries coming from a few feet away in the shrubbery. Maybe even Jake's voice yelling, “Go for it! You're almost there!”

Jake climbs out of bed and looks around for a towel. Might as well head for the shower. Rubbing his stubbly chin with a hand that still carries a strange woman's sent, he says to himself, “She knew what I was when she married me.”

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Chapter 25. "League Night at the Psychedelic Bowl"

The disappearance of their fugitive and/or ambiguous temporary lodger, Space Tim/Todd a.k.a. Frodo a.k.a. Cousin It, should come as a tremendous relief to the Hampsters, both those who know his secret identity and those who are simply made a little nervous by having this silent weirdo in sunglasses hanging around all the time. But unfortunately, before anyone has a chance to celebrate, or even fully experience a sense of relief, several things happen that are uniquely disconcerting, even for a town – and a co-op – where the residents are used to being disconcerted.

The November presidential election proves to be a defeat of a particularly humiliating kind, not just for George McGovern, but for the youth of America, who had all their hopes riding on a victory for the peace candidate. McGovern won only two states – Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Nixon achieved a stunning victory, the largest percentage of the vote in the history of the presidential contest. This was more than an election – it was a public rebuke. It was the government and all the other American generations saying to America's youth, "Yes, we really do want to kill you all." Obviously, the peace movement, which hoped to achieve through the election what it hadn't achieved through mass protests, had miscalculated on a grand scale. Had the students really been so idealistic as to think George McGovern, a Senator from the sparsely populated state of South Dakota, was going to win election to the White House? That this idealistic man in his rumpled raincoat could defeat Tricky Dick?

So Richard Nixon remains the most powerful man in the world – and added to that is the mandate of immense popularity with what he smugly terms his "silent majority" of the American people. There's no telling what he'll get up to now. "One thing's for sure," Renate says as they

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watch the dismal election returns, “The next four years are going to be interesting.” She sounds almost excited about it.

In honor of the massive electoral defeat of an entire generation’s hopes and dreams, Mike declares that Tuesday night will henceforward become bowling night, and the official Dungwood Hamster bowling league, also known as the Psychedelic Bowl (causing Renate to wonder – why does everything always have multiple names around here? Why are names so elastic? Why do they constantly shift into other names? If rock bands were this weird about names, album sales would plummet. No one would ever be able to figure out who they were), is promptly initiated.

Soon the residents of Dungwood and their various acolytes and hangers-on are taking up nearly the entire Plaza Lanes, located above the Plaza Bar on Henry Street, on otherwise moribund Tuesday nights. The popularity of Tuesday night bowling is enhanced by the Dungwood’s increased notoriety in the wake of a *Daily Cardinal* article about their FBI visit, and sometimes people show up whom the Hampsters have never met before. But it doesn’t matter now, not anymore, and nobody’s paranoid. Or no more paranoid than usual.

Maybe the Feds were right and the neighbors had been watching. Maybe there were *Daily Cardinal* reporters living on Lakelawn Place, because, though no one could remember any reporters showing up at the Halloween party carrying narrow spiral notebooks and stubby pencils, the student daily wrote a story about two federal agents happening to drop by one of Madison’s premier co-operative residences the morning after a particularly drug-addled debauch. When *The Daily Cardinal* called the house to verify that the FBI had been there, they got Rick Plank. He didn’t know anything about any FBI visit until they asked him – and once Jake and Mike and Christian got through with him, he was pretty convinced the *Cardinal’s* entire story

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was bullshit. Except there was that one jarring detail, the thing the paper did seem to get right – they knew about the disappearance of Dungwood’s long-term houseguest. Like the FBI itself, the *Cardinal* appears to have its sources.

The article ran the Monday after the Halloween party. If the *Cardinal* published a Sunday edition, they would have put it in that. From the vantage point of those in the know, it was a scarily well-informed piece of bullshit, especially the part about the “bewigged refugee from a California acid-manufacturing commune” who “disappeared for parts unknown the night of the party.” The *Cardinal’s* reporter, Charlie O’Malley, seemed to feel that this individual was sought by the G-men because they erroneously believed him to be a member of the notorious Labor Day Gang, which the authorities have thus far been unable to get their hands on, and whose culpability in the bombing of Armbruster Hall the *Cardinal* continues to dispute. O’Malley claimed the G-men came to Dungwood looking for Barry Stein because some genius had made a flyer announcing the Halloween party as a fund-raiser for Stein’s legal defense. Nobody can figure out how O’Malley managed to miss the part about the bikers showing up.

Among Tuesday-night bowling regulars, Renate is known as the Anti-Bowler. She ambles up to the lane like someone being dragged in chains to her own execution. Once there, she more or less drops the ball and instantly heads back to her seat on the slippery fiberglass bowling alley bench before her ball has even had a chance to meander into the gutter. As soon as she sits back down, she resumes her off-key whistling of “Some Enchanted Evening,” which could be why there is a big open space next to her on the bench. Jake, whose turn is next, yells, “Buck up, it’s only bowling!” Taking his place on the alley, he presses the black circle to the center of his white Henley and performs the dip-glide-thrust with concentrated fluidity. Somebody in the crowd yells, “Hey, it’s Rudolph Nureyev!” Jake’s ball doesn’t come to earth till halfway down the

lane, where it skids sideways like a cycle hitting black ice and barrels into the sweet spot. It's a strike. After taking his bows, he sits down next to Renate, whose eyebrows shoot up in surprise, and begins imitating her whistling technique (head back, chin raised) because it's so ridiculous it's actually funny.

Renate abruptly stops whistling and waits for Jake to start a conversation. She doesn't have to say "Where's Jeanie tonight?" because everyone knows where Jeanie is: waitressing at the pancake house, like she does every Tuesday night.

"They say horse racing is the sport of kings," Jake says, "but bowling was once the sport of pharaohs."

"Really?" Renate and Jake watch Christian grab his ball, which looks like a giant purple marble. With his rubber-band limbs, Christian puts you in mind of the great Ray Bolger, so they call his stance "the Scarecrow Strut." His first ball takes down half the pins; his second leaves one standing. "Jake's got voodoo on me tonight," he complains.

Christian sits back down next to Stacy, and they resume a fathomless, though at some point bowling-related, argument. A weird energy floats around the alley, fractious and discontented. It's nearly Thanksgiving, and that means exam-time is almost upon them, and after that, everyone takes flight and Christmas break leaves the house deserted, and, though in coming up with the Psychedelic Bowl, Mike's idea was, transparently, to have a little fun and convince everyone to quit worrying so much, it still feels like there are too many secrets among them, and secrets create disunity. Sometimes Jake fears discovery less than he fears that all of the secrets will never become known, that people will spend the rest of their lives wondering. The ones who know nothing are really the best off. Stacy doesn't know. Rick Plank doesn't

know, or else he's doing a great job of pretending. Debbie Teiler doesn't know. So why the hell does Jeanie know? Jake's never had the heart to ask her.

Now Freddy faces the alley, black ball centered against his chest, staring at the pins with relaxed concentration. On bowling nights, Freddy leaves his Donald Duck pants at home and dons a pair of bib overalls, which, though giving him more room in the leg, tend to inhibit freedom of movement at the end of the dip-glide-stretch. The psychedelic bowlers call him "the Discus Thrower."

Renate remarks, "I once took the Badger Bus to Milwaukee with Freddy. He told me about his experiences with astral projection. He's had conversations with, like, Pope Pius the Tenth. He's spoken with several popes, in fact." Freddy and his girlfriend Fran recently acquired a religion, Eckankar or the Science of Eck, which teaches the technique for soul-travel in the Astral Plane to all its adherents.

"Why all the popes when you've got Hieronymus Bosch, Cleopatra, and Mozart to choose from? Or how about Marilyn Monroe? Or JFK?"

"I get the impression he's not that advanced. He just sort of bumps into folks." Freddy is mystical in a down-to-earth way, which can make the mystical seem pretty mundane. "One time I actually went along on his trip. One Saturday morning last October, we were headed in to Pancho's to work the lunch shift, and we saw this white convertible come down the street with all these blond people in it, wearing red sweaters with white Ws on them. Three girls were sitting up in back waving pompoms. It was like the 1950s were rolling down the street right in front of us."

"Are you sure that wasn't the homecoming parade?"

“That’s what Freddy said. But everybody else just ignored it. It was like they didn’t even see it. It was just me and Freddy standing there, gawkin’.”

“Yeah, that was the homecoming parade. Freddy told me about it.”

“It was one car.”

“Homecoming ain’t what it used to be.”

“Yeah. Those days are over.”

“Over and done.”

About five feet of space chasms between the two of them and the next bench, where people are clustered around the score sheets. “You know, speaking of bumping into folks . . .” Renate glances his way and stops breathing for a moment. Jake has a deep, gruff voice that sounds like it rumbles up from his gut; it gets even lower now that he’s trying to whisper. “You still haven’t told me . . . how you knew. When you were waking me up, and you whispered that thing in my ear.”

Renate’s glance swivels around the bowling alley. Mike’s back is turned as he converses with a couple of friends. Other people are watching the bowling. It’s loud inside the Plaza Lanes, with the crash and thunder of the balls and music playing on the loudspeakers. She says, “Should we be talking about this?”

“No one’s paying attention,” he says. “I need to know.”

“You should ask Mike,” she says, leaning back and folding her arms.

“I have asked him. I can’t get a straight answer.”

A smile stretching across her face, Renate gives Jake a look brimming with curiosity. For some reason, talking to him dispels the whole depressing miasma of incompetence and lack of good sportsmanship that bowling unleashes in her. But the smile feels odd, as though these

particular facial muscles have fallen into disuse. Lately, Mike is always telling her to smile. Lowering her head and leaning in close, she says, “Remember the big biker, Dan?”

“The leader of the pack. You were dancing with him at the party.”

“The big guys go for me. I don’t know what it is.” Jake chuckles, and Renate feels pleased with herself.

“So?”

“You all went running up to the attic at some point. Why, I still don’t know.”

Jake shakes his head. “We were hoping it would give . . . certain people a chance to leave more or less unnoticed.”

Renate scans the alley. No one is looking their way, no one notices them. “Well, I took the fat biker on a tour of the house.”

“You were being sort of Jackie Kennedy that night.”

“Yeah, I don’t know what came over me. And we walked past Freddy’s room, there was a light under the door, and I could hear someone rummaging around in there. Which was unusual, cause I knew everybody was in the attic. So I pushed it open. Big Dan was right behind me.” Renate leans in so close she can smell Jake’s hair, a clean smell, musky and invigorating. She’s using one of those low, urgent voices as she tries to get all the information out quickly, before someone interrupts, as someone always does. “We both saw this guy throwing stuff in a knapsack. Looked like he was getting ready to run. The wig was on the bed. That’s when I recognized him, or when I couldn’t help but admit it to myself.”

“But why did Big Dan ride out with him?” Jake says almost anxiously, as though he doesn’t quite believe this part. “I mean, he did do that right?”

“They got to talking. They liked each other.”

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“So they had just met. That night?”

“I guess so. I was pretty stoned. I mean, I had sort of impressions of things, but I have no way of knowing now whether they were real or not. It was kind of spooky, the way he’d been this one thing and now he was clearly . . . somebody else.”

“You know, when a problem like that just walks out of your life. And nobody even saw it leave. I dunno. I guess it’s just hard to accept.”

“You guys took a lot of chances.”

“Shit. You’re tellin’ me. Just don’t ask me why.”

“It all worked out.”

“Did it?”

Neither one of them wants to say anymore. Now that everyone in Madtown knows about the FBI visit, they’ll have to keep the dumb-but-innocent act going indefinitely.

And then Jake says, “You think maybe the bikers really did turn over a new leaf?” which could be an entirely different subject, only it’s the same one. Another mystery: why, lately, does Jake keep having the urge to sit down next to Renate and start talking to her. It’s like she’s the event horizon of some compressed, hidden, yet powerful and mysterious celestial event, and he keeps drifting closer and closer, despite his best intentions to stay away, to say nothing more, to remain noncommittal.

“I don’t know. Big Dan seemed nice enough. What are you worried about?”

“Everything! I’m glad he’s gone. But I’d like to be sure he’s okay.”

“You feel responsible.”

Renate has begun to realize that there is a tender, solicitous side to Jake Winslow. Even his hassling Jeanie about her eating habits has an element of dutiful concern about it. But the

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way he looked out for Space Tim was practically saintly. She's still giving him that curious glance, and he's grinning back at her when Reed Gunderson climbs over the back of the bowling alley bench and parks his substantial self on the other side of Renate. Too late to join in the bowling, he throws an arm, in a plaid shirt unbuttoned at the cuffs, over the back of the bench in the vicinity of her shoulders.

"Hi Reed," Renate says, shifting in his direction. "Want to roll in my place? I'm sure my team will be glad to have you."

"Aw, you just need a little coaching," Reed says consolingly. Sticking a Marlboro between his lips while he pats himself down for matches, he has the air of a man with an agenda. He lights his cigarette and says, "Hey, did you guys hear that Nixon is building concentration camps in Arizona for all the freaks and draft resisters?"

"Yeah. Andy told us. Speaking of that, weren't you supposed to have a physical today?" Jake says.

Reed grins around his cigarette and takes a piece of paper out of his jeans pocket. Standing up, he removes the cigarette and issues a piercing, two-fingered whistle that commands the attention of the whole bowling alley. People just about to roll pause with their balls clutched in both hands. "Here it is, folks. The magic number. 4F!" Reed waves the precious document in the air to the sound of cheers and hoots. People start chanting, "4F! 4F!"

On December 1, 1969, the day of the first United States Military draft lottery since the Korean War, three nineteen year-old men, Jake Winslow, Mike Bennett, and Reed Gunderson, stood in the kitchen of an apartment on Doty Street with the *Wisconsin State Journal*, Madison's newspaper of record, spread open on the table. The *Journal* and hundreds of other daily papers across the country had published a list of each day of each of the twelve months of 1950, the year

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Jake and most of his affinity group were born. As it happens, 1950 was a leap year, and 366 dates were listed in the paper, each one followed by another number designating its placement in a random drawing that had been carried out in a secret location deep below the Pentagon (at least that's where everyone said it happened).

The draft lottery had eliminated the education deferment upon which Jake and Mike and many another future resident of Dungwood had planned to stay in school for as long as it took, getting MAs and PhDs and JDs and any other degrees they could get their hands on until the War in Vietnam was finally over. The education deferment was unfair in a pretty obvious way, and the draft lottery was re-instated to put an end to these academic machinations. At least, that was the rationale. Now every young American male born in 1950 was created equal and pure chance would determine his fate. Those with numbers lower than 195 listed next to their birthdates would be called up. Everyone else was now free to do whatever he chose, including drop out of school. Mike drew a 363. Jake – 265. Reading their numbers, Jake and Mike hooted and cursed with a sense of relief so profound they mistook it for joy. They were going to live. They would not lie in the mud bleeding out of their bullet wounds nor be blown to pieces by mortar rounds. They would not go on patrol in steaming, bug-infested jungles with their boots rotting off their feet. They could forget about being tortured by the Viet Cong, or being forced to napalm little naked Asian girls, or commanded to burn down grass-hut villages and bayonet ancient peasants in black pajamas.

Then they noticed Reed standing there, silent, staring at the newspaper he held in his hands. He handed the paper to Jake, pointing to his birthday, March 2, with a trembling finger. Reed had drawn a 29.

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The Norseman had dropped out of school after only one semester to pursue his music, so he'd been thinking about the draft longer than any of them, and he knew what he would have to do, though he'd been hoping the lottery would mean he didn't have to do it. He wasn't going to make the terminally decisive move of running to Canada, nor would he try to register as a Conscientious Objector, because that could get you sent over there anyway, but as a non-combatant, like a medic, so you'd still be shot at, but you wouldn't be able to shoot back. Reed had other plans. He pulled every string in his possession – and there were a few – and got his physical postponed for as long as he could. And he got himself a draft counselor.

Now Reed takes a couple of bows and people come over to hug him, though Mike and Christian stand at the fringes and only shake his hand. Will slings an arm around Reed's neck, which looks disarmingly like a choke hold. When Reed sits back down, he has a plastic cup full of beer in his hand. Jake, leaning past and a little closer to Renate says, "How'd you do it man? Can you talk about it?"

"Sure, why not? My draft counselor's a medical student, and he taught me a method that was foolproof and completely undetectable. All I had to do was tighten my sphincter muscles, basically all the muscles in my butt. It makes your blood pressure shoot up. Course, I had to keep going back to be tested and retested. They like to be sure." Reed shakes his head and laughs. "So when I went in today, they said they wanted to re-test my hearing too. It turns out, it had gotten worse since the last time they tested it. I have hearing loss in one ear! All those months of tightening my ass muscles, and it was that buzzing in my head that did it."

Jake says, "Now if we could only get rid of Nixon that easily," as Reed, looking more relaxed than he has in months, exhales a plume of smoke. "Yeah, I get my 4-F and we're all headed for the concentration camps in Arizona."

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“At least we’ll be among friends,” Renate says. Reed winks at her.

Chapter 26. "Jake Gives a Pep Talk"

Inside the enclosed bar area, Jake can barely hear the jukebox over the thundering din of the alleys, but the music's there, nesting in his brain. He's stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues again. The bar's walls have narrow windows so you can keep track of your turn on the lanes, and the tinkle and rattle of pinball machines is routinely drowned out by the sound of crashing pins.

Sitting at the bar alone, staring off into space, is Debbie Teiler.

"Well Miss Debbie!" Jake says in a falsely hearty way. "What are you doing in here all by yourself? Didn't you hear the news? Reed is 4-F!" He doesn't say, "Your boyfriend is free of the draft forever." He doesn't want to push it that far, though Reed has been staying in her room ever since the night of the Halloween party, when their harmonies had been tight. The house, after some initial doubts – Reed walks on the wild side, and Debbie's a Jesus freak – had begun to take for granted that the two of them comprised some sort of couple.

"Yes," Debbie says, her eyelids lowering to half-staff, "he mentioned it."

The thing with the lowered eyelids gets to Jake. He knows very well that she's a Catholic girl and therefore deeply conflicted about the body's imperatives. The guilt is always there; no amount of peer reinforcement will ever totally eliminate it. Or else she's flirting with him.

Mike and Rick Plank walk in and set a couple of empty pitchers on the bar. Lighting a cigarette, Mike tells Plank about the number of students and other hip types who have made inquiries about living at Dungwood next year. When the pitchers come back full, Jake motions to the bartender for a couple glasses and pours a beer for himself and one for Debbie. After attending to the foam in his mustache, he says, "Okay, tell ol' Jake the whole story."

“Oh,” Debbie sighs. She looks over her shoulder to one of the bars narrow windows. Jake follows her line of sight and spies Reed, standing behind Renate, supporting her arm as he guides her through the proper ball-lofting technique. Turning away from this *tableau vivant*, Debbie looks crestfallen. Mike, who has his back to the bowling alley, is poking Plank in the chest for emphasis.

“You guys were getting along fine at the Halloween party,” Jake remarks, assuming a semi-frustrated paternal tone. “You sounded great together. Man, that was a surprise. You coming to the mic like that?”

“Yeah. It was nice of Reed.”

“What was? Letting you sing?”

“Letting me sing ‘I Shall Be Released.’ It’s my favorite song. I had to teach it to *him*.”

“Is that how it was?” Jake glances sharply at Debbie as though discovering she has unsuspected depths. He and the boys thought Reed had picked that song to send them a message. In fact, ever since Halloween, certain people in their small circle of conspirators believe that Reed knew all along, or at least suspected, the identity of the one they called Space Tim. Only nobody wants to come right out and confront him.

“Yeah. Reed isn’t much of a folk singer. He’s more of a country rocker,” Debbie says wistfully, with another glance over her shoulder. Every time she looks, Jake automatically follows suit without really paying much attention to what he’s looking at. He’s having a peculiar sensation of brain thaw. So it was all just an eerie coincidence? Reed didn’t choose that song on purpose to let them know that he knew Space Tim was a phony, and maybe even who that phony identity was intended to disguise? Raking the stubble on his cheek with upward strokes, Jake

flashes Debbie an appraising glance, and says, “And Reed’s been staying with you ever since. So what’s the problem?”

Jake knows exactly what the problem is; he just wants to know what *she* thinks it is. Reed’s a notorious crasher. His full name is Reed Crash Gunderson. Before he started sharing Debbie’s bed, he’d been crashed on one of Dungwood’s couches for weeks, and he’s crashed on nearly every sofa on Langdon Street and throughout much of Miffland. He’s determined to make a living from his music, and, as everyone knows, to do that you first have to cut your ties to gainful employment and fully commit. Where love fits into the equation is nowhere, at least until a record contract and a nationwide tour comes along, and why bother with it then?

Debbie’s ash-blond hair frames an oval face with skin so pale and translucent it seems to shimmer. When she blushes, as she does now, that white, shimmering skin turns an appealing shade of pink. “Um,” she says, “he hasn’t exactly said anything to, you know, indicate” She sighs.

“Girl, sometimes the proof is in the putting. If his guitars are there, his heart just might be also. Believe me, I know how it is with women. My Jeanie felt insecure until she heard the magic words from me. I figured it was enough that I was there every day – or close to it. Never did tell her what she needed to hear until she yelled at me a few times. And also she beat me. Look, you just – you think too much of the guy! He’s just Reed. I’ve known him since junior high. Okay, he can play guitar, but he’s a chubzo and he smokes too much. Don’t put him on a pedestal. Tell him what you need!”

“I don’t think I can do that,” she says, and Jake believes her. Debbie’s not like other women. She has this ethereal quality. She’s not a take-charge kind of gal.

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Finishing the rest of his beer and thoughtfully fingering his mustache, Jake says, “Did he ever tell you about Natalie Feinberg?”

Debbie sighs again. “Yes. He told me.”

“Well, if he told you that, he must care about you, because men don’t talk about their broken hearts with women they don’t care about.”

“He told me it’s the reason he can never love again. At least until his career takes off.”

“Oh, he can love again. You just have to make it clear to him that without you, he’s never going to get that record contract. That’s how Jeanie got me!”

“Gosh, Jake. I didn’t know you were trying to get a record contract.”

It’s Jake’s turn to sigh, but he suppresses it. He sees she looks hopeful now and even a little calculating. He’s managed to turn her thoughts in a new direction, and it’s gratifying to his sense of himself as a guru to his people. And then, as he usually does, Jake goes too far. “You want something, girl, you have to go after it. Jeanie made me see that my goals in life were her goals too, and if we worked together, we stood a better chance of making it than if we were on our own.” Somehow, putting it in words makes his marriage sound a little avaricious and calculating, but that’s not the point. “That’s the world, Debbie. That’s living in the material world. I’m twenty-one years old and look at me: I’m married.”

Debbie does look at Jake, a glance filled with surprise, because of course, she’s been in all those consciousness-raising sessions with Jeanie, where his wife complains about her husband who doesn’t want to be married. The boys all know about it because they eavesdrop. They believe in feminism as much as the next man, which is not very much, but they also believe in their inalienable right to information.

“Just let him know how you feel,” Jake says, plunging recklessly ahead, “and you could reel in that big fish out there.”

“But –” she says, again glancing over her shoulder at the bowling alley where Renate, coming back from rolling her ball, sits down next to Reed, who puts his arm over the back of the bench and leans in consolingly. Debbie drops her eyes to her beer. Her wide gray eyes are heavy-lidded, closing slowly and opening even more so, giving her a look that’s not so much sleepy as shuttered. Jake suspects hidden depths in this girl. No wonder Reed is scared. “How do I know if he really likes me?” Debbie gives Jake a searching look before letting her lids drop again. “Maybe all he wanted was a place to crash. And I was the pad!”

“You shouldn’t talk about yourself like that!” Jake yelps. Some strange confluence of planetary forces is turning him into a flaming women’s libber. “Jesus! Don’t even *think* that kind of stuff. You’re just gonna demoralize yourself. You’ve gotta go after what you want. I mean look, he’s in your life, he’s staying with you.”

“Sometimes,” she demurs.

“Really?” Jake says, “I thought it was pretty often. But it doesn’t matter. You want something. Go after it. And never blame anyone else if you don’t get it.” This is essentially the thing he tried to tell Renate during their argument at the 602 Club, which she seems finally to be getting over. “Jeanie has full power over me. And the only way she got it is by letting me know where she stood.”

It’s almost touching to see how much his words inspire Debbie Teiler. “You really think so, Jake?” she says. She may need a bit more reassurance, but she already seems transformed. Jake takes Debbie’s arm and leads her from the bar. In the wide archway where the bar joins the lanes, he sends her off with a gentle shove. “Like the song says. Show him that you care.”

At bar time, as Jake stands at the counter turning in his bowling shoes, he witnesses a scene that should be reassuring to Debbie Teiler and anyone else who believes in true love.

The house lights are blinking on and off to signal closing time when a blonde appears and wraps her arms around Mike's neck. Renate is sitting on a nearby bench untying her bowling shoes, and the blonde's maneuver catches her attention along with that of the rest of the group milling around waiting to leave.

"My hero!" the blonde cries. Mike looks down at her with a slightly sardonic expression and removes the arms that have snaked around his neck. The blonde, keeping a hand on his arm, explains that he had caught her earlier as she was about to fall down the stairs. "If it weren't for him, I would have fallen right on my face," she gushes.

"I was in the bar downstairs making a cigarette run," Mike modestly explains, stepping away from the blonde, who's quite attractive, with regular features and long, straight hair. Renate looks the woman up and down, taking in her hand-embroidered jeans and that air of getting away with stunts like this. She keeps on staring at the blonde even after Mike takes a seat on the bench beside her and begins to remove his bowling shoes. When he's got his boots back on, he puts his arm around his girlfriend, and the blonde stumbles away, vanquished.

Where she stumbles to is the bowling-shoe counter, right next to Jake, who studies her while she pulls off her bowling shoes, reading the embroidery on her back pockets – "Mary" on one; "Jane" on the other. Could be her name; could mean something else. She has an interesting butt, flat yet full, nicely filling out her jeans. When she stands up, bowling shoes in hand, she seems to see him for the first time.

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At this distance, she does look like a Mary Jane or a Mary Lou or a Mary something. It's that clear complexion with a light dusting of freckles across a cute nose, and those cornflower blue eyes, a trifle bloodshot and wearing a hurt expression left over from her failed encounter with Mike Parker, a guy who should have "taken" tattooed on his forehead.

"Live around here?" Jake says.

"Dayton Street."

The bowling alley lights flash twice more and then turn off. Only the light of the red Exit sign and the ones in the stairwell are still on as people file out the double doors. Jake and Mary Jane join the shuffling parade, side by side now, smiling at each other with their eyes, Jake deciding that the embroidery on her back pockets bodes well for the immediate future, the next three or four hours between bar time and the time when he'll steal into the room where wife lies asleep in their bed.