

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations and Theses

City College of New York

2012

Recovering Life in the Finger Lakes

Haywood Hawks

CUNY City College of New York

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/485

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

“Recovering Life in the Finger Lakes”

By Haywood Hawks

For Consideration of Completion for the Requirements of the Masters of Fine Arts Program at
The City College of New York, CCNY

Haywood Hawks

"Recovering Life in the Finger Lakes"

I guess I've wanted his stories all along. I'll consider it three periods. The one before, the one during, and the recovery. I'm now in recovery. Well, semi recovery; I'll Xanax or Valium myself with some wine and weed from time to time, if you consider that fun, as I do. I'm ashamed to admit it, but truth to power, isn't that what they say? Anyway, it's important to mention that even during the period when I was incapable of absorbing the stories from my father, that is period two, my father has always been it for me: my hero, everything I wanted and needed to be but rarely am. And note that I didn't say 'I learned during periods one and three,' but only that 'I was certainly unable to learn during period two.' I struggle with this and it's a big part of why I decided to come back. Maybe 'escape back' is a more truthful phrase. I want to apply my tools, the things he has given

me, from my genes to every patient talk, each more loving, more steady, more nonjudgmental than the last. I remember my father in the finest of lights, and I owe him. He needs to know that I will be okay. But, more urgently, I need to know that I'm going to be okay. But not just okay....good, better, a success: I need to hear redemption echoing in my ears. These tears well up when I think or speak of my dad. I've watched a scientist age, seen a man grow older, seen a father evolve, and I swallow heavily from the bottle of shame as I think of the time I've wasted. I know I can never go back, and I hate it.

I'm sober for me. At least right now, this is the level of functional sobriety I can manage. Yup, I'm off dope. The thing that tried to strangle me and fought to kill my spirit, I kicked it to the curb. The thing that robbed me of time, melted it away into a pale, colorless world, debased and frantic and all-consuming. It lasted for 2 full years and was followed by months of opiate pill use. I understand now, at least as much as I believe I can, why and how I lost myself in a forest of mendacity and self destruction. How I applied my energy, what little I had, into securing my fixes and sustaining my myopia. I couldn't go right or left, only forward, but forward for me was backward. Wrong way down a one way street. I clung to enablers masquerading as friends. I self-rationalized, brilliantly. I spent and spent and spent. I lost the feeling of goosebumps crawling up my legs after a cold swim, the thrill at seeing the first flashes of incipient fall in strokes of yellow and red against the hillside, and the human feeling of connection to the seasons. I

lost the ability to experience all this. I was stunted, my mind melting into a gross puddle of denial. And I thought of my dad, often. Then finally I was able to feel the penetrating, visceral disappointment of a father, generous to a fault and plagued by the waste of a son. It killed me. But I had to die to come back, and this saved me. It took a few times, but in truth I don't know if I was ever really trying. But the last time, and it was the last time I ever used heroin, there was something different. It was sometime after my third ferry ride across the Aegean, after my sixth train from Patras into Athens. All to reach the city districts and Ommonia Square where my Turkish drug dealer, Shota, met me.

I had finally felt something and I longed for more. Even the hurtful feelings, at least they were raw and not blackened by heroin. I needed to get healthy so I decided to fly to Europe and kick my habit. I left JFK with a ten day supply of heroin, a bag of brown over three grams full. I had this taped under my nuts as I went through security. I was going to stop but I needed a few more days. I first landed in Athens and spent a few days looking at the Mask of Agamemnon and the Parthenon, but mostly I don't remember because I was floating, stoned, really high on dope, over the streets, eating barely a meal a day. I was 148 pounds and 6'0 tall. By day three my stash was gone. Fueled partly by the paradoxical capacity one feels immediately after a fix, I had the false sense that I didn't need the junk, largely because I was very high. So I had justified the

reckless consumption of the three grams and now found myself in the third floor of the Glyfada Hotel, out of dope and desperate. I knew I had no recourse. I had never scored hard drugs in a foreign country, except some shitty blow in Amsterdam years ago before I knew heroin. No way out but to face up. I dragged my dope riddled, dope sick body out of my hotel. I began walking to a fast food place. A dooper loves instant gratification whatever the medium, and I was dying for grease amid a sea of Greek delicacies. I saw a mirror image of myself but with darker skin and higher cheekbones. He came into view only a moment before we passed each other, but if ever there was a Turkish reflector of what I was at that moment, then Rashid was it. I knew he was a junkie the second I saw him. My heart soared as the prospect of a fix momentarily blocked the sickness. It was dark and we were walking next to a large 4 lane road. I shouted after him. He spoke English. He knew immediately what I wanted, saw the look of need, and this drove him. White, tourist, junkie, money. I knew it and I didn't care, if he could get me heroin he was ok in my book. After I'd given him 100 Euros, and stupidly told him to meet me at my hotel--it's an amateur move to let a junkie know where you're staying--he crawled off into the darkness and I went straight back to my room. I was excited but truly surprised when he came back at the hour he said he would, this time obviously fixed himself and with fresh comb marks in his greasy black

hair. I was trying to do the math, conversion rates and then what heroin on the street should cost by 1/10. I also was thinking about risk but not enough. He wants me as a customer, I thought, he won't give me bad stuff. And he showed up when he said he would. That's rare with a dooper, it should count for something.

I knew this ordeal for what it was: pure desperation. I was throwing up my hands in defeat. But I kept meeting Rashid for the next week or two, probably two, until I grew sick of his pouches of Turkish heroin growing smaller and smaller. Finally I called one day and an older man answered. I told him that I was to meet Rashid and told him what it was for. He replied in stumbling English that "Rashid not here. Reza? How m'ne gram?" I said five and we arranged Mcdonald's as the meeting place, the one on the left side of Ommonia Square. When I had unwrapped my sandwich and found a table on the second floor, I almost faced the absurdity and danger of what I was doing: buying five grams of heroin in a public Mcdonald's, in a rough part of Athens, while demonstrations against austerity raged... I was a tourist, albeit a travelled one, so I sat quietly and waited. The thought of correct bags buoyed me and dulled my anxiety.

A small man in his 40's. Yeah, definitely over forty, with a receding hairline and large black eyes, fixed in a well defended ease. He

slid into the booth across from me. I still had no reservations. He passed a napkin rather cleverly onto my tray and motioned to the bathroom. I went and checked it out. The same as what I had been getting, but this was a real five gram bag, or damn close. It felt huge and hungry in my hands and I wanted to feed. I went back outside after a bump and handed him the Euros, reciprocating the adeptness he had shown when handing the bag to my tray. I felt my stomach groan with an almost sickness. But this, very unlike the grasping discomfort that one feels when dope sick, was the unmistakable recovering of heroin across the body and around the mind, opiate receptors flooding with manufactured satisfaction after having gone without. The little man counted the money under the table. Satisfied, he got up, nodded at me, and walked away.

I saw Shota probably 5 times. Each visit I spent close to \$400 and got close to five grams. My last ferry ride back into Italy from the Greek port of Patras was in early April. On that occasion, after seeing Italian Customs and Immigration agents with German Shepard's on the docks, I decided that that was my last trip to Greece. I traveled by train up the Eastern coast of Italy, seeing Brindisi and Bari, and conserving my dope as best I could. It was in Parma, after doing my last line, that I decided I would next day fly to Amsterdam and use pot to help me coalesce from the withdrawal I

knew would start. I went to sleep after looking at the smile of my father. The square jaw of youth looking back at me from a picture of his Marine Corps graduation that I kept in my wallet. I swallowed hard knowing that the first feeling to confront me in the morning would be the regret over my decisions.

So I flew to Amsterdam. After landing I took the tube into Central Station. I went into a coffee shop, one I had googled, got incredibly stoned after not smoking for weeks and staggered around until I found an overpriced hotel. Deciding that comfort and security were key during my coming sickness, I paid the money. After all, it was only the price of another trip to see Shota. I would use the large bathtub frequently that night and the next to soak my bones. I was sick within three hours. It was now twenty-six hours since I had last set myself right and I could feel the sickness grip my lower back. It was intolerably cold and cruel, the clutch of a madman intent on ravaging. I was nauseous, dry heaving and feeling the stab of shin splints. My head pounded and sleep was impossible. I learned that night about despair, desiring so desperately to sleep and not being able to. It stung me bitterly, savagely clawing at my chest. My hands sweated. More dry heaves, full body spasms and bile. By the next night, fifty two hours in, I was still violently ill. But I could sense something then that I hadn't the last few times I had tried to stop: I had

made it two days. If I flew back to Athens now I still wouldn't be there for a day, which would put me at seventy-eight hours. I can make it. Really I can.

I checked out of the hotel in the morning. I was going to look for a taxi to Shippinol Airport but was instead greeted with the news that an eruption in Iceland had stalled all international air travel. I didn't believe it. I was ready to fly home. Now all the airports were closed. But I learned in the next moment that France's airports were still open; but alas the cloud of ash was spreading across Europe and it was only a matter of time before De Gaulle and O'realey were grounded. I raced back to Central Station but it was swarming with groups of people waiting at kiosks or standing on queues. I waited and waited, the hours dragging and the news getting worse about my prospects of a midnight train to Paris and an escape across the Atlantic. Beating out the heroin in my body and the cloud of ash in one breath. I finally had a ticket. But it was infested with stops, nothing close to direct. Rotterdam, Flanders, Lille, Aminion, the border, and finally into France. The swollen train was disgusting with people. People bothered me now. I was convinced that they knew, that they could see the dope fighting to keep in my body. It must be obvious. Sitting on my backpack in a storage aisle, I tried to be comfortable with my paranoia and pain. But withdrawal is about managing time. If heroin

melted time, time without heroin slowed to a painful trudge. The hours were creeping by. At the border I was asked directly by a French customs official for my passport and if "I had brought back any cannabis?" I almost said 'I wish' but, thinking better of it, said 'No.'

I was finally in Paris and trying to use my phone to book a flight. All Air France and KLM sites were down and I was having no luck on any search. I arrived at De Gaulle and talked to an exiting Air France employee who said that all flights had been closed, but to keep calling the Air France 1-800 number. I was four days out. The headaches and nausea were beginning to subside. But my body insulted me all over. I was still sore through and through. I was about to give up on finding a flight but I heard someone mention that there was an Air France flight leaving from Toulouse to JFK the next day, the last one leaving, and that there would be a bus taking those passengers that had managed to change their tickets on the twelve hour trip down to Toulouse. I was on hold with Air France in an instant. Finally, after forty one minutes, an operator came on and spoke with me. I pleaded with her for the prospect of a ticket as I had heard ticket sales were suspended and only those airports that had yet to close were able to handle people trying to switch out tickets. I was one hundred hours without dope.

There were, I was told, a 'few tickets left.' I eagerly related my credit card number and got the instructions for the bus. Be in the terminal hall of Air France's lower floor at 9pm and you will be taken to the bus. I was anxious, and idled away the day pacing de Gaulle. I was going home if this cloud didn't hunt me into the south, and for the first time I felt a small bit better. I was getting hungry. I was still tender everywhere, and I wanted to try to sleep. No luck. Quarter to ten and I arrived. I was taken onto a bus with people, some families, some alone, some French, many from New York and some New Yorkers. The twelve hours crept by and at a gas station and rest stop along the way I found that the purchase of my ticket had maxed out my credit card. I wouldn't eat until, I didn't know....the plane? Eventually, by the second stop someone sensed my frustration and a kind French hybrid, I think half-Algerian, bought me candy and chips. I begged him for an address to reimburse him and thanked him for his act. Simple and singular in its contact, I was really grateful for the first time in a long time. Also embarrassed, but I was now certainly hungry and greedily munched away the calories on the remainder of the ride. It was black outside so I couldn't see the land and I wasn't able to sleep, but I was resting. In the morning light we were in the southern port of Toulouse. In front of the airport one takes in the sea. Blue with crashing marks of white, the water violently swelled in the distance. Palm

trees were planted around and I, close to five days away from drugs, was able to be grateful for the second time: the airport was not closed. Our flight was set to leave, three hours away, and so I smoked two cigarettes, the last two I had, and entered the security line. I was heading home and I was going to be five days clean when I left France. It would be almost six when I met New York.

I was still really fresh into my no heroin routine. When you live that lifestyle, always fixated on your stash or where the next taste is coming from, you depart from normal life so much that re-entrance is grueling. Getting used to swallowing each passing hour without dope, not counting down minutes until you get high, but just living, is almost impossible. Waking up, showering, eating, trying to be normal. It sucked. I am an excellent self rationalizer and I had sold myself that my feelings of being unique and an individual would be far richer if I separated myself, further aligned myself on the fringes of society. Drugs. Yes, drugs. They would stimulate creativity and group me together with Kerouac and Ginsberg and Huxley and Castenada. Or Garcia and Hendrix or Du Champs and Modigliani. I saw myself on the fast track to counterculture, on a journey, aided and abetted by the heroin. I was dead wrong and very nearly dead. My European odyssey eventually got me off dope but was a failure in most other respects. I was supposed to get clean early on and

enjoy the history. Instead, I managed to find a connection and stay high almost the entire time. I spent my first four days back in the states sleeping at a friend's apartment. I had the feeling that had hit my gut in Parma. The feeling that eventually drove me to Amsterdam and away from Athens. I thought of my father and my home. I needed to go back.

I sipped strong coffee on the edge of the couch I had slept on for the last three nights and wondered what to do next. The last five months abroad had fucked with me. My plan had unraveled, and, rather than gloriously beating my habit while traveling and convalescing, as I envisioned, I had clouded my trip with drug use could scarcely recall most of it, let alone with any salience. I felt like it was a penalty. The universe exacts justice in odd ways, but it often feels calibrated to a given situation. I had robbed myself of time, of opportunity. You name it, I had stolen it. I had cheated myself, lied to my friends, and lied to myself. Now I had lost the moments that were supposed to be a fresh start. My memories were blurry. I was on a ferry, on a train, in Paris, in Zurich. I had eaten lots of french fries and drunk lots of coca-cola. I had spent a lot of time in public restrooms. I was high everywhere. The only difference between there and here was that my rubber soles had trudged across centuries-old cobblestone streets instead of smoothly paved New York streets.

I was going home. That much I knew. I was already feeling tempted, and I needed to get out of New York. I needed to leave straight away. I had heard that addicts who are trying to get clean should avoid familiar geography. In the coming years, I would understand the importance of that idea much more deeply. Anytime I was in New York, I would inevitably pass a bar or restaurant where I had snorted something in the bathroom. I was going to bring weed home, so I opted to drive. I had to call my dad and ask him to put a few hundred against my credit card so I could rent a car. I left the city that evening. I was stoned and drinking gas station coffee as I drove towards the George Washington Bridge.

Each time I drive past Harlem, I seize with hunger for dope. It's the place where I most often scored. I had a professional drug dealer that I bought from. He was organized and had good product. He didn't do street handoffs, he had me meet him in specific places, usually in Harlem. He was Guyanese and he called himself Lennox. I thought it was because I met him on Lennox Avenue but when I asked him he said that wasn't the case. I didn't want to see Lennox. I needed to see my father. I needed to reengage. I needed to heal. Driving up the West Side Highway, with the lights of Jersey across the river and glowing Manhattan on the right, reminded me of all the times I had driven this way. Now I'd been off dope

almost two weeks. I got into the far left lane as the exit for 125th came up. I didn't want to be anywhere near it.

Driving from Brooklyn into the Finger Lakes, provided you negotiate your escape from the borough with sensitivity to the city's frustrating traffic patterns, can be a peaceful and idyllic experience. The Southern Tier Expressway is windy and flanked with a dense forest of tall pines. You reach the Expressway after suffering through 80 miles of New Jersey on 80 West and crossing the Delaware Gap into Pennsylvania. You pass Scranton and, after a brief stint on interstate 81, you take the Southern Tier Expressway, which breaks off to the West and cuts diagonally across New York State. You reach Canandaigua Lake by getting off at Exit 3 and following Route 21 north through the village of Naples. A few miles past the village, the south end of the lake begins. Named after the Iroquois word for "The Chosen Spot" and formed in the last ice age by receding glaciers, it winds like an outstretched arm seventeen miles end to end. It's three and a half hundred feet at its deepest, a pellucid blue, transformative water the sight of which fills you with a visceral self-awareness. It was

Haywood's chosen spot and his father's too. He had loved it as a boy and he loved it now. It is a little over 300 miles northwest of the city, and it takes about five and a half hours to get there. Near Elmira, where, in a large white house, Mark Twain recalled his time on the Mississippi and crafted "Huckleberry Finn," the hills spring up and soon one is driving in and out of ravines and gorges and feeling the life force of the hills.

Haywood recognized the feeling immediately. It started in his gut and crawled upward: he was almost home. The rain had started and lightning was throwing bursts of brightness into the car, a late model Saab with the wipers set to medium, speeding through the darkness at 68 MPH. The car carried Haywood, a backpack, and a sheet of paper. The shadows of passing trees loomed in front of the headlights.

Sorting through the details would be an immense task. But he had to do it. His old man was turning 75; it was time that somebody told his story, and Haywood felt he was the only one who could tell it. Each act, some long-retired and others still on stage, had to be re-animated and properly recorded. He had wanted to do this for years, ever since it had become clear to him that his influence over dynamic of the house was waning. Now was the time. He needed to recover, he needed to tell his dad's story, and he yearned for the catharsis that both of these things would bring. He had left for college ten years ago and, apart from a

handful of days each year, had not returned. When he left, it was after a senior year spent living with just Big Wood, as Christine had not yet retired. By the end of his freshman year of University Christine had moved in, suitcases and bags stuffed. She had brought not only clothes but new decor, her family photos, her history. At the time it hadn't bothered Haywood. She was to marry his father and of course she would want to bring items with her, proof of another life. As holidays and summers came, and with them visits home, each visit issued feelings more and more foreign: an icy rigidity was gradually ingesting the peace of the house, and the source of the feeling soon became clear.

One summer, roughly two years after she moved in, during a visit for the 4th of July, an undeniable discomfort hit him as he entered the house. He knew then from whence slithered the changes that awoke in his gut the realization that until she was gone, dead or divorced, he would struggle to enjoy the native comfort once so natural inside the walls of home. Christine was a force of anxiety and turgid tension whenever she entered a room, mired in one of her moods, which were becoming frequent. It bothered him that he felt this way inside the house he loved. Big Wood was always there, so was the barn and the hills he had run on as a boy. But there was now an odious, suffocating feeling that threatened to strangle the long-standing serenity of the farm house. And for years he had

fought this, thinking wrongly that being puerile and disruptive was the answer. He knew now, after fighting too long against a current he once ferried, that this would always be his home and one day his house and that refusing to show frustration over Christine's coldness was his only choice. His father has said as much during one of their many long talks, dealing patient wisdom and a supplication to his son for the sensitive negotiation of this world where Christine now lived. His father would say, "human relationships are infinitely complex and learn now, as it will serve you well, that not all people are beholden to what you believe to be right or appropriate. People are complicated and it will make my life easier if you can avoid thundering about rearranging things. I am on your team now and always, but I have to live with her, so let's try to avoid World War III."

There are moments in any relationship when feelings or dynamics can shift, can be altered or led astray. Most of these departures can be traced back to an "incident" or an "issue" that works as a tool brokering relationship discourse. Between Christine and him, it was her migration into the household and the stated feeling of unwontedness that she often professed. This resulted in her application of behaviors and changes within the house that made her feel better. For example, she made a stink anytime the father and son wanted to do something privately. Even their traditional

Sunday breakfast of hash and eggs, a long-standing and multi-generational tradition, was criticized because it didn't involve her. Something as simple as a private hour was made into a melodramatic tirade to the point where just to placate her, any private time became locked into days ahead planning and even then was limited to an hour should Christine be unable to exist without a visual on Big Wood. He knew that he had caused friction in the past, he knew his father was getting old, he knew he had fucked up. He needed to show that these last years had informed him with a man's maturity and cultivated in him a sensitivity that one finds only from touching darkness and surviving it. He was going to make Big Wood proud. He was going to endure Christine and he was going to dig, crawl, and hunt the past. He had decided that before anything else was lost or forgotten, buried in attics or basements in sloppily marked boxes, her handwriting proudly labeled on the containers of his experience, that he would get his father's story. He would find old pictures. He would demand history, both physical and emotional, and this resolve was strengthened by the lingering smell in the old part of the house that he knew awaited him. Olfactory nostalgia brokered by the linens and towels that smelled of his childhood, folded and stashed, and of the musk heavy air that he remembered and needed to smell again.

He was afraid that Big Wood had grown prostrate and overly deferential to his third wife. As things were, he had called ahead, days before, because Christine, though pleasant when her vast bag of demands was accommodated, was a chemically imbalanced emotional pendulum whose penchant for outbursts both odd and disturbing was outweighed only by her capacity to consume scotch and cigarettes. He knew that a surprise visit, though welcomed by Big Wood, would prompt her to heap stress on his father's already burdened shoulders. He would keep cool, refusing to refuel her tankard of complaints, and this visit home could be pleasant. He was excited by the sense of purpose that occupied his thoughts as he glanced down at the gas gauge. Thirty miles out and he was just under a half tank, there was no need to stop. The farther from away from Heroin, the farther away from the place he had used it buoyed him. He noticed a smile had crept onto his mouth as he moved closer to home.

In past summers, while fighting Christine's campaign of power moves, his older brother, a decade older and from Big Wood's first marriage, had warned him that there would always be friction with an adult child and a parent's third spouse, especially one recently arrived and driven by an agenda, convinced that she is disliked by his children. After all, he had dealt with his mother, but Christine was directed by a broken compass. Without proof or explanation for her comments and behavior,

she charged her trapped-in-her-ways curmudgeonly self frantically about, depositing angst everywhere. This visit demands that he avoid conflict, something he feels comfortable with, given the many previous conflicts and a time to meditate on how things often come derailed. He had reached the conclusion that it takes little for Christine to go off the tracks.

Nonetheless, he promised Big Wood in a recent email that he will not foment complications or provoke Christine; after all it is his father's ear that suffers her ire, justified or otherwise. Compromise isn't all bad. He agrees that it can be healthy. But blind appeasement is myopic and dangerous. It sets precedents that are difficult to break and complicated to discuss, and in her case it has established a culture of impunity. Christine's example of compromise dictates that the opening of a window, without authorization, or the adjusting of the thermostat, if that were even possible (she had put a lock over it), are cardinal sins that might provoke a tantrum and land Big Wood in the dog house. In other words, there is no compromise. Her responses, predictably cold, to both real and perceived affronts, consist of icy blank stares and muttered responses. A master of passive aggressive side comments, Christine operates with no filter and like the cut in cocaine is often disagreeable and leaves a bad taste. She complains with an intense focus, issuing a blinding discharge of mishandled fury and Big Wood often tempers the nagging booze-soaked

pillories against his son with booze of his own. Her berating provokes an incipient dissatisfaction that grows and sinks about the old man, disturbing his loving, wrinkled face. Always the peacemaker but not a man to pick sides, Big Wood operates in a liminal space between the rational need to be at peace with his mate and the reality that he is a father with a fierce and grounded sense of duty and abiding love for his children. The son knows that he owes the old man, at the very least a forever respect and love, but that word is absent from his father's lexicon. A man desperate for his children to stand in the sun, always fostering with incalculable support their dreams, is incapable of generating in them a feeling of indebtedness. He certainly never says "you owe me." If Haywood can earn serenity for his father by not causing hassles, actual or otherwise, especially during this visit, a visit that needs calm water to uncover a history in focus, then he's ready to swallow hard and humbly any and all of Christine's callousness.

Chew on the important things, his father said, that is the key. But Haywood, concerned with the level of acceptance his father allowed for her behaviors, pointed out numerous times that he's not the only person to identify Christine's often hostility. Others had noticed. Some even said something about her treatment of Haywood or her behavior at a dinner party, but the old man was tired of fighting and wanted only peace. His

son understood and wanted to contribute to that peace. Yet in the bottom of his belly, Haywood could not conceive that Christine's behavior, not all of it but enough to be alarmed, was love. If you love someone, you don't issue ultimatums or shovel strain on their relationship with family, especially children. Christine often guilt tripped Woody if he dared have a private lunch or outing with one of his children. But forever Big Wood had been a constancy, the only lifelong one Haywood had. Despite all Christine's unfair, passive and overt aggressiveness, despite all the fuck up's, his father never abandoned him; he was never not there. Still, questions over the state of Christine's emotional health failed, in his opinion, to get taken seriously by Big Wood. Maneuvers of stealth were required to uncover the story, and it must happen now, while he was clean and his mind clear. His thoughts were on strategy as his hands gripped the wheel, his coffee-wired eyes checking the speed.

The letter was on the front seat of the car as I reached Hawks road. It cut down from a crest in Route 21, down almost a half mile and close to the water. Long ago my great grandmother had bankrolled the paving and the name was a thank you from the town. A generation later her son and his

wife donated the town's first ambulance, which augmented the already considerable reputation of the family. I guided the car around sharp turns and twists, each revealing a separate but enchanting view of the lake, and with those views came memories of the many trips down this road. I arrived at the turnaround and set about were the few mailboxes all bearing visible family names: Hawks, Lombardi, Gordon, Ryan. This marked the end of the pavement and of Hawks road. A dirt and gravel offshoot with Private and No Trespassing signage continued into the woods. This was Old Post Road, named for the vineyard posts, forgotten and few, that dotted the thicket and were still visible from the road, remains from days when the hillside raised row on endless row of grapes and vines and my house was a working fruit farm. 800 yards down a clearing opened and the house could be seen. It was large, with evidence of a recent addition, but the original structure dated to the mid 19th century and much of the foundation and both chimneys, made with fieldstone from local glens, gullies and hilltop fields, tempered a tastefully minimal piece of new construction to a level of greater balance. Sided with dark stained cedar and trimmed with a desert-dusk red, the house fit well into the lush tree-hugged clearing. A barn with matching paint but original in all other respects sat aside some ten yards from house, with a steeped A frame with floor to ceiling windows through which you can see a double-sided wood-

burning pizza oven and fireplace. A single look told you the stone and mortar was laid by skilled hands.

Since 1863 those with Hawks blood had all lived, happily or in desperation, and had died the same way, but always on the hill or on the point and at 75 my father was and had been settling into a routine since retiring ten years ago. This was his orbit, the ending reaction of his experiment. The nucleus that he would attach to until his end and where our branch of the attractively complicated and ruthlessly dysfunctional Hawks clan resided, just up the hill from the point and the manicured green lawns that approximate the fine houses along the water. Once the point was only the Hawks', but now only two out of five houses belonged to the family. As I turned into the drive, still rummaging into memories as I am wont to do when a flood of reacquaintance flashes and I see the physical proof of my life's path: the swing where my sister laughed so hard she peed on my lap, the cherry tree that I seem always to miss at fruit time. I thought I felt a moment of belongingness when the sounds and colors and smells that sleep in the nest of consciousness suddenly became decipherable, informative moments called experience. They matter. I knew the front door would be locked. It was her way of saying that she, who lived there full time, dictated the comings and goings in the evening hours, which constituted any time after 7pm. At least there was a garden

lamp left alight and that was something because small victories counted for something on this hillside.

Making my way along a rock path between the side of the house and the barn I noticed a Field's Construction steam shovel parked in the back drive. This wasn't uncommon as Jeremy was a close friend to both my father and me. I had met Jeremy years ago and the acquaintance had produced a longstanding friendship and one that had proven beneficial on a multitude of levels. I smiled, recalling the late Spring of 2005 how I had first met him as he filled gravel into rain-eroded parts of our trail leading from the house to the water. On the steep and slick hill Jeremy was adeptly and with a ferocious quickness of movements operating a small hydraulic steam shovel: back and forward, stop, spin, drop gravel, repeat. It was modern blue collar artistry and impressive to watch. I was fresh out of culinary school and with the knowledge that Field's Construction had taken over the lakeside building formerly serving as a marginal to poor seasonal restaurant and bar, and being 20 with a hard-on to do something grand before going back to College, my thinking was to sell Jeremy on the idea of a small burger stand in part of the building. This logic relied on the building's proximity to a reliable stream of consumer traffic. It was adjacent to the only marina on the south end of the lake, where boaters came to gas and fishermen came to collect coveted live bait. After a few

meetings, Jeremy and I were in agreement. It would be called "GrilleVille" and the motto would be "Boat up or Roll up, the Headiest Spot on the Pond," a reference to its accessibility from both road and water. Jeremy was a perfect partner, already successful and willing to support my enthusiasm.

Jeremy Fields grew up in the southern part of New York State near the border of Pennsylvania and deep in coal country. His family ran a dairy farm. His mother Monica, a Brooklyn transplant whose attendant backbone taught Jeremy about hard work and survival, still lives there. He was poor but loved, and, like the gas-rich shale that rode the Pennsylvania fault atop which the farm sat, Jeremy was home schooled, and he was fueled with a hunger for learning. He had practice being at once two operational people, separate in all things but streamlined in functionality. He was the farm kid, familiar with duties of farm life: how to warm an utter on a cold morning to ease milking, how to bridle and saddle a horse, how to prune the fruit trees. At night he was glued to books on computer language and Roman history. He was gifted with numbers. He left the farm, but he never forgot how to work the land.

By twenty-five he had contributed to the backup computer system at NASA, and with his team of engineers he had written the code for the E-Z-Pass system used on all NYS toll roads. At twenty-eight he broke

down from a heart attack. After recovering, he moved to a rural town southwest of Naples and started Fields Construction. Soon he had invaded every small town in the area, including Naples, with his crew all wearing the Fields logo, excavators scooping large buckets full of dirt with 'Fields Construction' emblazoned with red lettering. With his skill and his willingness to underbid, he began breaking up generations-old family outfits which had long been the only games in their respective towns. His reputation rapidly spread.

In a village like Naples, gossip tends to flow quickly. Everyone wants to speak their mind, and at that time it was not uncommon to hear invectives hurled towards Fields and his business. A childhood friend of Haywood's stopped speaking to him because his father had worked for Dave Green and was losing his job because Fields had expanded to dock building and old Dave had to let people go. Fields built beautiful docks. His shop, where his men welded during the winter, could install a permanent dock and boat house within a week, faster than any other contractor. A dock and hoist was sixty thousand dollars. All the big spenders came to Jeremy for their work.

Jeremy had millions of dollars worth of equipment: excavators, cranes, floating barges, tug boats, dump trucks. He was good to his workers, and his workers loved him. He also had a computer consulting

business, another interest that easily netted him \$100,000 a year in addition to the profits from construction. Early last year a pharmaceutical manufacturing company in Switzerland had a hard drive break on a machine for which there were no available parts. Jeremy flew to Zurich and rebuilt, using old components, a new hard drive for the machine. His farm boy work ethic worked well in the world of big business. He was a good man, but he would do anything to make a dollar; every hour was a billable hour.

There was a situation a few years back when Jeremy began a relationship with the wife of a wealthy client who had contracted a multi-million dollar house. The house was to be at the end of a long driveway cut into the hillside off Hawks Road, overlooking Canandaigua Lake. When the husband found out, he began divorce proceedings against his wife. It was looking bad for Carroll Rush. She and Jeremy had been caught on a video camera. Ironically, it was Jeremy who had installed the cameras in the first place. Dick Rush was furious that the 'dirty hick' of a contractor had fucked his wife in the house he paid for. At some point during the divorce, Jeremy discovered that Dick was going to take a long-weekend vacation with his secretary, who had long been rumored lady on the side. Jeremy as familiar with the bed and breakfast where they were staying. A

few years back he had used his crane to help the owner lift his sailboat out of the water, free of charge. Many people didn't like Jeremy, and certainly people resented him. But he was still a working man, part of a fraternity of blue collar folk who, regardless of personal taste, support one another against any rich city people. Jeremy was now up against a rich, city person on account that he was living in Dick's house alongside Dick's wife. People around Naples didn't like money rolling down and throwing up mansions; Canandaigua was already the most expensive lake per foot to live on in the US.

Jeremy gained access to the room prior to Dick's arrival and installed a video camera of his own with a remote feed. He secured some incriminating footage of Dick and his lady. The film was graphic and depraved, and, after learning that Jeremy had the film, Dick quickly settled in court. From accounts, Jeremy's included, there was some seriously lewd shit on the video. He told me this in the kitchen of his new house. So, after the divorce was settle, Jeremy completed the mansion and moved in with the stolen wife. As usual, he had done some fine work.

Living off Hawks Road, Jeremy became close to Big Wood. He was a good friend and a better neighbor, willing and capable of solving any farm related issue and generally a good resource for Woody to have around. When Jeremy heard that Haywood was driving home for a visit,

he knew he wanted to encourage him, but he didn't know how. He knew Woody and Haywood were intensely close, and he cared for the old scientist and his half combed white hair. He wanted things to be good between the Hawks men. Jeremy understood that Haywood had had some problems, mostly involving drugs. Jeremy had never touched drugs, but he had some friends that had or who at least knew people that had. He hadn't talked to Haywood in a few months and hoped that he was doing well so that Woody wouldn't be meditative and fretful during his visit. Jeremy had noticed that when Big Wood felt stressed he far exceeded his stated ration of one drink a day. Jeremy had never drunk until he started having cocktail hour with Woody and Christine during Cathy's divorce from Dick. He was now a religious five-p.m.-er: when the clock struck five the ice would crack and the spirits would flow. The relationship between Jeremy and Woody was important for both of them: Jeremy excited Woody and they would dialogue on science and engineering. It kept the older man's mind sharp. Their relationship was a combination of a dear friend and a father and son; Haywood had joked that 'Jeremy was the favorite Hawks' kid.'

I opened the side door that led to my room, a small stone building that originally served as the farm's cooling house. During the addition it was connected by a set of stairs and a mini entranceway to the new living room. Made totally of field stone, it has two skylights and two old framed

windows with original rusted chains that hold them half open. I remember when my mother was still married to Big Wood, and there was no addition and no money, how the separate stone house was dusty and filled with spiderwebs. A place to store old water toys or maybe to grow mold. Now it had a mounted flatscreen television, a memory foam mattress, and a bookshelf-coatrack combination that I had made with my father, years ago and impatient, and some of the joints had suffered from the hasty construction. But we had done it together and aside from a few chats and even fewer hours in the wood shop working on the lathe, we hadn't spent any real time together since that week, summers ago, when we built the sloppy bookshelf. I stood in the room touching the cool stones and building faces for the many hands that had worked a now rarely seen art and built a wall to last. Before being replaced by machines or computers, before being outsourced overseas, there were people who built beautifully, and this room especially was validation of an art if not dead then long asleep. My father had been coming down here since he was born, and though now a denizen of the hill, his early memories were tennis courts and maids and cooks and green grass right to the waters edge. He also remembered coming to visit the pig pens and full orchards and the once small farm house we now lived in, to help Henry Merklinger milk his cow. He had straddled a number of worlds, and I felt often that everything he

was and was not, the calculated wisdom and love and the way he rendered it, was a perfect mix of all the lives lived in all the worlds that he had touched. (He tapped the source, the best of each experience and giving it to me with every conversation.)

He was born in '38, aware and impacted by the end of the depression era and World War II, raised by a black Baptist creole woman named Beatrice, whose father was born into slavery. They were her arms that hugged him and her patient way in the kitchen that mothered him. He had been kicked out of Andover for sneaking into Boston to hear Max Roach and Clifton Brown; he had served his country in the Marine Corps and been among the first to land in Cuba in '63. Too old to be a hippie and too young to be a beatnik, he was a man from great privilege whose grandfathers ruled over banks and Kodak for years. A man who rebelled and held himself accountable, who never faltered in his devotion to family, leaving any and all of his personal shit at the door. Three wives and five children. This is my father, and I smell him in this room, and I know that I'm finally home.

I was here for the details. I was here to save myself. The womb of time and her faithful watchman offer no loans, broker no deals. I had an opportunity and I was going to make the most of it. There was another more difficult problem that I needed to engage. As honestly as I could I

had to look at him his behavior and mannerisms and ask the question I had long avoided: is he changing and if yes, how? I hated myself for even thinking about it now. Morning would come soon enough. It felt like betrayal: I was here for his story, his help, and to visit him, and still I was going to be watching...for what? a twitch? a goggly eye? It bothered me, having to think of my dad as old. Wondering how and if he was going to be affected by age. If anyone deserved a pure happiness, provided such a thing exists, it was Big Wood. Even so, I knew in the deepest part of me that things were changing. Its hard for me because so much of my thinking, rational person is informed from his genes and his teachings and those have shaped my mind and me in manifold ways. Now I am employing those instincts and lessons to decide whether or not the man to whom I owe not only life but a life of beauty and possibility is losing it in his old age. He had always been the "old dad," fifty before I was born, but not once did he refuse the full duties of fatherhood. Coaching baseball, chaperoning class trips, reading me stories every night until I was twelve (literally), patiently showing me the world and informing my awareness and identity. He gave everything to his family, and the thought that all his years of sacrifice could end in pain or forgetfulness, that there was no guarantee that he would remain healthy and focused until his time came, embittered me. It was strange but I couldn't shake the grip of anger.

Karma. What karma? if such a thing existed it had not shown my father a fair shot at things.

I found my way onto the posture-pedic mattress and was soon sleeping soundly. Everyone slept better down here. Clean air, crisp and constant: flowers and trees and grass and soil, an olfactory overdose conducive to slumber so restorative only post orgasm sleep compares. It was early the following morning that the sun, searing through the skylight, wrested me from sleep. Hardly a decision at all, I pulled my pants on, it was time to get up. As usual, as soon as my feet hit the floor the taste for coffee and cigarettes wraps my mouth. First I would greet Big Wood, Christine too for that matter, provided I hadn't done anything wrong while sleeping that had sent her into rancorous isolation upstairs. When I walked into the kitchen there was already a note on the counter next to the coffee pot: "Call Your Mother." Immediately I scrambled faster for the coffee. I hadn't spoken with her since before my last birthday. It was a singular issue that had broken my will to speak to her. Before I was born, when Big Wood was going through his first divorce and already involved with my mother, his grandfather died, Dr. Chapman the former CEO of the Eastman Kodak Company. During the aftermath an estate sale was held in which an extensive art and wine collection was auctioned. Big Wood approached his mother, Dr. Chapman's daughter, and reminded her of the

grandfather clock that had been promised him. Rather than do the natural human thing, she demanded that he purchase it.

Big Wood was down on cash from support payments, so my mother's mother, Pritch, a Birmingham bred southern gentelady, kindly offered her soon to be son in law the money for the clock. Twenty five years later, and with the death of his mother, he had come into a reasonable cache of financial mobility. With family events such as a large inheritance or other drastic lifestyle alterations, there comes attendant history and used-to-be's that define a family dynamic which in turn prompts reflection. Big Wood had recently meditated about the clock, stout and of deep red mahogany, that he had listened to as a boy, pleasantly occupied in the wilderness of Dr. Chapman's study. With wide curious eyes watching his grandfather wind it and hungrily awaiting the melodic chiming that to this day he could recall with tone- and pitch perfection. The fate of the clock had remained ambiguous during his divorce from my mother, and now a latent feeling of loss provoked a sense that a tiny piece of his human machine had stopped working and would never work again, until he was made whole. He had made a gentle and generous supplication in which he offered my mother more than five times what her mother had lent for its original purchase, offered to replace it with a clock of her choosing, and went still further to explaining the

significance of the clock, and how in his older years there was a memory spark and a deep desire to once again hear and feel the clock that to him was always magic. Of course she already knew all this. After all, it was her mother who showed empathy and an awareness and made acquiring the grandfather clock possible in the first place. She coldly and flatly refused.

On the heel of this incident I wrote a letter and pleaded with her to sell my father the clock, appealing to the generosity and understanding that I knew as a young boy and that her mother had displayed for my father. I desperately hoped this capacity was still resident inside her, even if it was long corralled in a season of bitterness. Reminding her that the man that had gone above and beyond than the divorce settlement: even after her slanderous pillories, untruths and invectives, he never wavered not one time in his responsibilities, never broke down and spoke ill or tried to hurt the mother of his children. And this, this simple request to hear sound the clock he once enjoyed so as a boy, again fill his ears with its echo and send him to a place and time that mattered. A small pleasure in his retirement. My appeal received only some wan excuse about how her mother wanted her to keep it and had made her promise not to give it to Woody but instead pass it to me in her will. A last request that directed the future of another family's heirloom, a clock that she generously helped my

father buy from his own mother. Now as a dying mother in control of the clock she decides to deny it to the man it was intended for. It didn't sound like her, but things change as you get old and I was witness to the last months of Pritch's life and I refuse to believe that that is something should would ever do. My grandmother, though fiercely loyal to her daughter during my parents divorce, did, I believe like and if not like certainly respected my father, and would not issue such a focused and inimical a request. But back to my mother, who I believe has turned stone hearted, not a single relationship to her since my father left in '98. No companion to share life with, to talk to , to walk with, to sit the fuck back and watch snow fall with, nobody. It made me sad but it didn't absolve her and she denied us again. So, my recourse involved visiting the garage behind her house, the house I grew up in in Rochester, to the room where my fathers old workshop was. There was a wood burning stove from, again, Dr. Chapman that sat in the corner semi connected to the flue. Since she was selling the house and the stove sat sadly silent for years, I decided that a piece of family history that would be sold with the house and that was an ancillary prize in lieu of the clock was something I had to move on. One night I backed my car in, dragged the stove on a skateboard to the back of the car, and lifting with all my might managed to get a portion of the stove onto the backseat and push and slide the rest in. Ashy and with hands of

rust I drove the 45minutes to the lake and set the stove in the drive as a morning surprise for Big Wood. I was going to replace the stove before the house sold but since no one ever used the shop, and the house had just listed, I imagined that I had at least a few weeks. The next morning there was heartfelt satisfaction in my fathers eyes over the secondary victory and the acquisition of at least one item from his grandfather. However a few days later while I happened to be away, I was informed by a voicemail that if the stove was not returned my mother would be pressing charges against me for breaking and entering. My poor father, receiving the same call, had to drive his grandfathers stove back up to the house in which he once raised a family and return it to a`woman who would soon be selling the house, the stove alongside it. This was the final straw for me. After the divorce and all alimony had been paid, my father funded her and my then not yet old enough to travel abroad alone sister, trip to Italy to follow around the dance troupe that her college roommate was director for. Not to mention the money he gave her for a car, because the shameless woman came to him asking for more money for a new car as she didn't want to drive something that was old. He didn't want the mother of his children looking badly and just because he is a noble man, he paid for it. And still, this invective, unnecessary, deeply vengeful behavior hurt me more than it did him. His battle with her was over, he was past it,

moved on. But I was her son and to see this barren, hurtful woman, treat a man that had done so well by her, so right and fairly, even after suffering through her lies and badmouthing, with acrimony and spite was too much for me. She chose to deny him a thread of his history, his identity; deciding that maximum hurt would be her default response to the only good man she had ever known. I have not spoken to her since.

Trashing the note he found his father on the porch gazing at his garden. Nylon shorts with plenty of pockets beneath a tucked in royal blue teeshirt a light covering of snow white gristle hugged his cheeks. His hair was thinning, slicked back and grey, with his glasses tucked into his front pocket. His thoughtful look told him that his father was gauging the ripeness of the cucumbers, easily visible from where he sat. Always the scientist, the patient pragmatist, driven by logic and reason but sensitive to the abstract, sat with a big cup of black coffee, his Marlboro Light 100's never out of reach. He looked good for 74. He still had his frame though he had shrunk considerably from poor posture, this due to his overcompensation of sore joints and muscles during decades of self

handled yard work. He had an appreciation for work, and a love for physical activity: earning the third place medal at the National Cup for sailing in 1978. His face was in good shape and you could tell how handsome he was as a young man.

"Hey Big Wood. Morning."

"Big guy, you make it in alright last night? Enough light in the driveway?" the old man had stood at the sound of his sons voice, and as he spoke they embraced. It was firm and long and said things they both wanted to and hadn't yet or would never say, but they each felt a sense of welded foreverness. It was a fathers love and a son returning it gratefully and without condition.

"Of course pop, no issues. Its good to see you, your looking strong. Still walking Hawks road in the afternoons?"

"I do look alright don't I?" looking hopefully at his son, there was only a smile.

"Yes, I told you you did. How's the garden? Did I miss the Asparagus?"

"We have some frozen but its gone until next year. Cucumbers are getting close though. Want some breakfast?"

"Yea I'd love some, did Christine pick eggs yesterday or should I check the coop?"

"We have everything, I'll ask her to take out some bacon."

"I fucking hate that I need to get bacon removal sanctioned, and you do to because you don't have the keys to the coffin freezer."

"Are we going to start a war this early? Life is compromise and you better start learning that now or you're going to spend all your energy fighting."

"Compromise is one thing dad, whatever, forget I said it."

"I can make you breakfast and we can talk about what you wanted to discuss with me, come on I'll make you a hangover."

He hated hangovers, a piece of bread with a cut out middle and a fried egg filling the void, not exactly a foodie breakfast, but if the old man was going to make it he wasn't going to refuse. Besides, the methodical movements, shuffling across the kitchen hardwood in his Princeton slippers, happily preparing breakfast for his child was something that felt important. It was a father cooking for his son and regardless of the result, it was the togetherness and opportunity to observe and share time with the old man that drove the willingness to endure swallowing a hangover.

Inside the kitchen, the father and son began to dance. A dance done by people with an awareness to a bond that extends through time and distance and while always there needs massaging after being thrust back into routine and familiarity. The act of remembering, of reproving to oneself that the ideas we hold, our friendships and perceptions have a foundation, a history, a truth. Our origins, understanding from whence one

came, the identification of a genesis, in as much as it is possible to do so, is fundamental to the self awareness that the young man craved. This was why he had come home. He needed to record it, to hear the stories, and this craving for identity pushed his desire to bond with pieces of his past. Be it a long dead and never known relative who shared a love for a given aesthetic or the discovering of mutual proclivities in behavior with a generations past uncle. Something that could connect and inform his hunger with a more satisfying sense of belongingness. He settled onto a stool to watch Big Wood work.

"Big Wood, I'm going to express this as clearly as I can. The last few years have been taxing on all of us, and its taken me the better part of the last two years to regain even a modest feeling of normalcy. I feel like I have a second chance and I've learned enough to know that for me to operate as a healthy and engaged person, I must be able to rely on mechanisms to stave off temptation and roads of false promise. Thats not to say that I am looking for a default "turn off the struggles of life" button, but rather that ownership over my flaws has birthed a recognized need for self designed support strings. History is important to me but now it is specific to my reality, me, the operational Haywood H. I need to hear, smell and see who and what makes me me on a biological level. If I can understand more fully the amalgam, I can understand what drives moments of weakness

and put a stop gap to them before I lose more time." As best he could he had appealed to his fathers gentle sensibilities: it was all true, he meant it, every word, but as he waited for the old man's eyes to turn and lock with his an inescapable sense that justifying his desire to learn about his past was unnecessary and cheap.

After a moment his father turned and looked at his son, he saw expectant eyes and the boy he use to throw baseballs to in the backyard, the boy he had protected and loved and spoiled, and for an instant he fought away the idea that he was to blame for the many almost tragedies. Yet experience has an always capacity to teach and as the old man had long ago learned from his mistakes an appreciation for the fight and courage it takes to crawl from darkness, he brushed the notion aside as quickly as it had risen. If he was to blame for the struggles, he was equally responsible for the successes, "I will help you all I can, as I have and will always do. You have all the tools and it is time for you to be a self advocate. When's the last time you walked into the human resource office at the New York Times or the Post?"

"Never. Your right I've never done that. Things aren't like they were, the old boys club and grandfathering in is going the way of the buffalo. I know I need to start, at least make an attempt, I should have become an engineer or scientist like you."

"Haywood you have always been good to yourself, something you get from your mother, and I often regret the amount of privilege that you and Emily had growing up. All the fancy trips that Pritch took us on, the Valley Club. I worry about your sense of entitlement, 'I went to college and grad school and culinary school, now give me a job.' You need to make an effort, try for gods sake. Now how do you want your eggs?"

"Poached please."

The kitchen walls on Old Post Rd are stained with memories. It is the room that serves to divide old from new. Though remodeled, it is the barrier between a house built in the late part of the 19th century and the addition, completed only recently. Big Wood was given this house by his grandfather, it had always been a small country house, hidden on a hillside above a long lake, but this feeling came most urgently in the kitchen and the 'old' section. He had five children and three wives who all at one time had sat, cried or cooked inside this room. Hushed conversations over single malt scotch seem to shout, whispering remembrance in the rustle of leaves through the treetops, standing guard over family secrets, looking into the kitchen from a skylight. While Big Wood cooked, bent over the stove with a steadiness that he knew well, Haywood could see how heavy a life, weighted down with relationships and family and commitment and everything that comes with it could be. All the trips and talks and

teachings; baseball games and swim team practices, all the needs of women, three distinctive energies in his fathers history, came crashing about the old mans shoulders as he made breakfast. His father had been singularly kind to him during moments he craved kindness more than encouragement, and walking lightly back into this world where trees breathed gossip with each wind gust but also functioned as fortification for hillside privacy, could not be re-enter swinging, his entrance would be swift and surreptitious.

Years ago during the time Big Wood had to abscond to Las Vegas in order to attain temporary residency and thus earn a divorce filing denied to him by his first wife Beth, the lake house was given to a friend: Archie Howard, for use during the months of July and August 1978. Beth was tired of being a mom and spent too many years absent of responsibility so Big Wood had given her the boot. She was trading on his name at the country club and drinking from the family tap, without contributing to its consistent flow, two things that could not be tolerated. So, after being denied a divorce he had done the only thing reasonable and attained residency in a town with a nightlife famous for its bacchanalian depravity.

That summer was an interesting one, both in Las Vegas and on the small hillside. But as Haywood was concerned not so much with Big Wood and his tendencies in Vegas, though tempting it was to query, the story was here, at least the best parts, the real parts, the family parts. So Archie Howard had a handful of weeks during the summer of 78' to do as he pleased and one of those things involved driving his red MG with surfeit speed. He bragged in the Country Club of Rochester both about his sub forty minute drives from Canandaigua and his use of Woody Hawks's cottage. For at that time Dr. Chapman was still alive and serving as Kodak's chairman of the board and the Princeton trained optics pioneer could often be seen on the country club grounds. Loving his grandson and sharing the embarrassment of his dissolving marriage, Dr. Chapman didn't want or need any more association of the Hawks name and recklessness. It wasn't long before he heard of Archie's boldness and feeling much displeased by this, and being a man who had the ear of those with clout, had decided to uninvited Archie from his grandsons cottage. He spoke to Archie under the shade of a large Elm tree, one that hand't been lost to the Dutch Elm disease that swept away great swaths of ancient Elms. Specifically, those that use to perch in an arbor embrace on either side of East Avenue. Careful not to linger, his words were surgical.

"Archie, Im Dr. Chapman and I am Woody's grandfather. You are not going to use his cottage anymore this summer. I'd appreciate if your effects were gone by tomorrow noon. And Archie, don't speed when you reach Hawks road. I wouldn't want either of us to suffer a second encounter," the chairman of the board drew authority from the sturdy drawl that announced his title, kept his blue eyes and wire rim spectacles locked on poor Archie and his stunned and halfway drunk face. There wasn't anger but specific confidence; it was as if the notion that this could go badly or that Archie might put up a fuss were miles from possible. The reality had already been forged and it seemed that Dr. Chapman knew and spoke as if he was a director and knew the actors would follow his lead, whatever the direction. Archie was stunned so by the meet, frustrated further by what he thought would be a meeting of leisure between he and the man who ran Kodak, that he was leveled. Too embarrassed to return to the club room for another drink, surely it was already passing in muffled whispers between eager gossipers all around the club, he drove straight to a liquor store and bought a liter of Jameson and proceeded to press down on the accelerator, MG pointed south towards the hills.

It was a little past five pm when Guy Donovan, swinging his rig onto 64 south, saw smoke and a slash of red wrapped around a dying tree. Using his CB radio, Guy called for help and emergency services. Archie

was pronounced dead at the scene. An almost intoxicating smell of whisky and smoke and gas rose about the death area. He had taken a turn too sharply, focused on the heartburn from his last gulp, lost control and horseshoed the tiny car. As easy as a hammer smashes a can, Archie was smashed across the broken MG where red paint and red blood met. Guy Donovan said that he must have went quick, and damn if that dying tree wasn't big. Once asked what kind of tree it had been that served as Archie's last parking space, Donovan couldn't help but remember the awe he felt, not from the sight of wasted life, but the great size of the dying Elm tree.

Woody heard about Archie's death and the very people that were whispering on that night when the gossip that Archie felt was spilling around him and going to ruin him, and knew of the chat and what it was, kept their mouths shut. Its one thing to gossip and mock when one is alive and well, but when dead or when a surviving element of that gossip is Dr. Chapman, chairman of the board, those secret holders at the Country Club of Rochester swallowed the keys to that memory and stayed quiet. Nothing more came from this.

By this time, the eggs had been snatched from the roiling boil of salted water and set atop bacon decked wheat toast. A few twists of fresh black pepper and the plate landed in front of him. At least this was better

than a hangover. Haywood looked up at Big Wood and his sea swallowing blue eyes, trying to remember why he had just thought of Archie. He didn't have enough of his fathers stories but those he did have, as he now thought, all seemed to apply to some aspect of whatever was befalling him during life at that moment. Like his father had trolled through the years and pulled certain stories, all suffused with inspiration or life lessons, and all specific to the minute of existence that Haywood was engaging at any given time. He remembered now that he seemed to get Marine Corps stories or Archie type stories around the time he became a teenager. Haywood's eyes, locked in approval, sent his old man a knowing look of gratitude.

I hadn't thought much about going to meet Beth. Now that I was on my way I began to feel anxious. Browncroft Avenue makes a sweeping 'S' through a few of Rochester's outlying suburbs. I was looking for Edward Street. From Edward I would turn right onto her street, Coye. 76 was her house number. I was turning onto Coye when my hands started sweating. I don't usually find myself nervous; I'm more of an Alpha. But I was starting to worry that the stories I had been forewarned about might

actually be true. I was trying to fix myself, and learning to exercise greater command of my emotions was a top priority. I had also found that with application of effort one experiences increased awareness of self. I could only think that was why I was fixated on things going...well, weirdly. I had never met her. All I had were some stories from Woody and my decades-older siblings. Passing years have a way of braiding and emotionally reorganizing fact, and if I had learned anything it was that people are complex and relationships complicated. Infinitely so. I wiped my palms on the sides of my pants. I wanted to make a good impression. The car in park, I checked my face and hair one last time in the mirror: no Xanax crumbs. I gave my balls a swift readjustment and tucked in my shirt. I grabbed the box of Stever's chocolates that I had picked up and walked up the path.

76 Coye was a ranch house. It had a redbrick edifice with dark wooden borders. Wide windows looked onto a large Pagoda tree, heavy with blossoms, and a sloping parcel of front yard. Neatly tended Ewe bushes sided the walkway and stopped in front of a stout burgundy door. There was a stainless steel knocker in the shape of an anchor. Everything but the anchor was tasteful. I could see through one of the windows a woman shuffling around, evidently aware of a visitor. I took a deep breath, exhaled the last of my angst and smiled as I loudly dropped the anchor.

"Hi! You must be Haywood. Its so nice to finally meet you," exclaimed the woman on the threshold.

"I am. Its nice to meet you Beth, I really appreciate you having me over."

"Oh well not at all, come in, come in."

"Thanks, here these are for you. I heard you like chocolate."

"That's so sweet of you. Larry! Haywood brought us chocolate."

I smiled at the old man in tennis pants sitting on the South Beach inspired sofa. He had an old polo tucked into his Adidas and a pair of hearing aides strapped behind his ears. He was struggling with an iPad. I don't believe he heard the chocolate comment but he did sense a disturbance and stood up with a confused look on his face to investigate. When he saw me he walked over.

"Hello there. You're Haywood?" he smiled at me, some loose skin swinging about his neck.

"Yes sir, I am. Thanks for having me to your house. It's nice to put a name to the face."

"Certainly. Beth tells me she is going to share some pictures and what not of her and your father with you."

"Yeah, I hope so, I'm excited to see whatever she's saved."

Beth had shut the door and walked over. She was small-framed and slender with blue eyes and wrinkles that caught bits of mascara around her

eyes. You could tell she was once very beautiful. She wore lots of gold jewelry. Bracelets, rings, and large hoop earrings. She also liked diamonds and had one prominently featured on her ring finger, a token of Larry's love. She had on a teal valor jumpsuit with shiny silver zippers and white house shoes. She was in her late sixties and still active. Her tennis gear sat next to the entrance way. Larry, on the other hand, was 86 and, active or not, that was old. There was an unaffected sense of peace in the house, a strange detente between two partners that struck me as odd. It was unusual to witness a functional relationship, inside a room that my father built, exist between his first wife and her second husband. I could feel an undeniable consideration between the two that had kept them together for thirty years. I looked around the room as we walked to the dining table. It was laid with pictures and postcards, each wrapped in plastic. I saw immediately the effort Beth had poured into both the storage and the arrangement of the material. She and my father had married in the summer of '63, my dad was twenty four years old. They were married for twenty years and grew up together, owned a home, adopted children, and started a life. Things fell apart, but seeing how Beth had preserved each, like a hibernating treasure on the fringes of consciousness needing only to be taken out to be felt and explored, struck me numb. Saved, tucked away for fifty years, her cache showed the intensity of a first love. I imagined the

moments after a divorce, when a person sits down with the still fresh wounds of failed love and through acrimony and anger archives the memories of that gone love. It made me erupt into goose bumps knowing that an ex wife had saved these items.

There were postcards from the time they spent in Germany while my father worked his Fulbright Scholarship. The postcards showed rich Bavarian scenes: mountain villages, lush landscape and medieval spires of churches and castles. I saw my father skiing shirtless in the Alps. Hair slicked back, he could have succeeded Sean Connery as Bond. At one point Beth said, "Your father was an Adonis. Truly. Everywhere we went he turned heads." I swelled with pride at the things she said about Woody. He was almost fifty before I was born. I didn't have any concept of the man he was in the Marines and when he was married to Beth. She had pictures of the house they shared in Princeton while he finished his Ph.D in chemistry. I finally saw a picture of his 1964 Porsche Roadster, the only year they made one. I had been told countless stories about the yellow convertible, which he had sold in a decision that still brought tears to his eye. Her wedding album was also there. I saw my father in a tuxedo, tall and dashing. He was freshly back from Cuba and re-enrolled at Princeton. With Beth on his arm, stunning in her gown, they looked every bit the debutante couple they were. There were laminated newspaper cuttings

from the LA Times, the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, the Brighton Pittsford Post and San Francisco Chronicle. Each announcing the pending nuptials of two prominent families. To read the articles, which described the groom from an influential Rochester family whose grandfather was the President and CEO of Kodak and whose other grandfather was the President of the Rochester Trust Company, gave me a sense of clout once swung by my family.

Growing up, we called her the painted clown because of her excessive makeup. My mother clearly disliked her, and I think this was because Beth was beautiful. I had seen her only twice before this afternoon, both times while accompanying my dad to drop off my sister Alida on Coye, at the house I now found myself inside. She had walked up to the car and spoken briefly to my dad, but that was all I had seen of her. I heard how she was a shitty mother, absent and self-involved. That she would often go out at night and leave Woody to play mom and dad after a day in the laboratory. A picture hangs in my father's house of him wrestling my three older siblings, each clinging to his back, all smiling widely. It had been rumored that Beth was having an affair. Ercil, my grandmother, had nurtured this storyline and, with everything else going on, a divorce was imminent. But Beth had been gracious with me and had spoken so highly of my dad that I knew she still loved him. I found myself

wondering a lot about love while I sat in Beth's dining room. I was tearing up while looking at a picture of them embracing in the small kitchen of the house in Princeton. They looked young and in love. She saw me look long at that picture, turned to me and said, "It was the biggest disappoint of my life not to be able to provide your dad with biological children. We tried so hard and when I heard that your mother had gotten pregnant I was so happy. I am so glad you reached out and came over. You look so much like Woody and seeing you in person makes me feel like you could have been our child."

I was silent. Hearing those words made me feel angry and lost. I was angry that my mother didn't love me the way this stranger was making me feel loved. I hugged her. I hugged my dad's first love. She held me tight and, though it didn't feel particularly maternal, it was gentle and considerate. It meant a lot to me and still does.

Then Beth said something else that caught me off guard. She told me she knew that I didn't talk to my mother and that she was heartbroken that Kitty refused to return Dr. Champan's clock. I had no idea how she had this information. I almost asked her how she knew. But she seemed genuine, and I didn't want to sour our talk. Instead I took out my cellphone and read for her the last text message I had sent my mom. I don't know exactly why. I hadn't shown this to anyone and I guess I felt safe. I wanted

to show some mother, any mother, how hurt I was. This is the text message I sent Kitty and what I read Beth: "What happened to you to make you so cold? Where did the mother who made me St. George costumes and took me to colonial Williamsburg, who patiently read or sang little coyote to me go? You exist in a realm legislated by an inflexibility that stems from entitlement. I will always love you mom. Forever grateful for Pathfinder and 3rd Church nursery. As of now I'm not interested in speaking with you unless you decide to be reasonable and allow me to buy the clock for my father. After alimony, child support, half his 401k, the man still bought you a Volvo and sent you and Catharine to Italy. Not to mention paying to remodel your bathroom. He has paid for everything, never defaulted on his responsibility to his children. Shame, shame, shame on you. This is not the mother who took me to the magical land of Herb's Bookstore. It is but a simple request and simple pleasure for my father, in his declining years, to hear chime the clock he once heard as a boy in his grandfather's study."

Beth was comforting, putting her hand on mine and giving me the support of a mother I hadn't felt in years. But I was suddenly worried I had revealed something too personal. She had shared with me. But I was wary of giving too much to someone that didn't need to know family business anymore. I was very emotional in those moments but was buoyed by the

pictures of my father and the fact that I was sitting in a room he had built in a house where he once lived. The trees he had planted, including the blossoming Pagoda, were still growing, still strong. The outside was lovely but the inside looked like a Boca Raton retirement lounge had exploded. The debris had been pieced together with lots of animal print and gold ornamental items. Larry was a former oil executive and they had plenty of money. Wintering at their house in Florida had, I guess, evolved a taste for teals and pinks.

My dad referred to Larry as 'Lube Job,' and I hadn't made the connection until I learned about his oil company. Woody didn't have a high opinion of 'Lube Job.' I was almost embarrassed for Larry, the way Beth's encomiums about Woody flowed often and freely. I think part of his unaffectedness stemmed from the fact that he was still trying to use the iPad and also essentially deaf. Realizing that Larry was effectively lost made the talk with Beth more natural. I learned a lot about my father that afternoon. Beth had agreed to let me take all the photos, postcards, even her wedding album so I could make copies for my dad. It would also allow me to read the wedding notes sent to them from family I never met. This particularly interested me. I couldn't wait to get home and see my great grandparents' handwriting, smell the history on the pages. The postcards and photos this afternoon certainly held a musk but an intriguing musk.

It had been over an hour since I had arrived, and it was time to make my exit. I thanked Larry but he didn't hear me. I did see him jamming his fingers on the screen of the iPad as I was leaving. Beth walked me to the car. She told me again how amazing it was to meet me and how much I reminded her of Woody. She asked me only once to be careful with the memories. I assured her that I would return them in good order. She put her arm around me and we hugged again. "Let me get one more look at you. I'm so proud of you darling, and I hope we can talk more and maybe you can come visit Florida." I told her how kind she had been and again thanked her for helping me understand more about my father. She waved as I backed down the driveway, and she was still smiling as I pulled away. Before leaving she had microwaved a Pagoda blossom and wrapped it in a cloth. She put it into a plastic bag and handed it to me. "For Woody, tell him his trees are doing marvelously."

Jeremy sat eating his breakfast on the counter. From where he sat he could look across the open kitchen, through the large sliding glass doors and down the hill. The lake spilled out as far as the eye could see, ripples of blue and white catching the early morning sun. Some paperwork, a few

invoices, and some notes for a new project were spread out next to his bowl of cereal. He had recently traded in his pancakes and syrup and bacon and eggs for a lighter diet. It had been a year since he'd been diagnosed with type two Diabetes. Cathy had tried to get him to take better care of himself since they had gotten together. She taught yoga and lived the holistic, raw food lifestyle. Cathy was fifteen years older than Jeremy and engaging her fifties with as much self care and anti-aging precautions as she could. They were happy, or seemed that way most often. But there were moments when the phrasing or mannerisms she displayed suggested an acute anxiety over the age difference and led onlookers to feel as if she spent a great deal of effort trying to thwart the struggles of time on the female body. Her arms were toned and her skin hadn't begun to sag. She always wore makeup, lots of concealer below her eyes, but she looked good for fifty three. She was petite and had no fat on her body. When hugging her, Haywood noticed that her back was rippled with muscle. But her hair was thinning and she had taken to wearing a wide workout headband to hold back her hair and cover a good portion of her troubled areas. She was nimble and well balanced and so light that Jeremy had to strain his ears to hear her walking down the stairs. What gave her away was that she always grabbed the bannister on the way down. It was hand carved from a tree Jeremy had harvested while clearing the driveway, and

it always creaked when touched. Jeremy was wondering if Cathy's habit of grabbing the bannister related to her getting older; he thought it might be some default self-preservation tactic to prevent a fall or dislocated hip.

She was wearing form-hugging yoga pants and a tight, short-sleeved black blouse. Her headband sat delicately in place. As she walked into the kitchen, she smiled at her husband, who sat hunched over his breakfast, shuffling some papers across the counter. She wrapped her arms around him from behind, gently holding his forehead and tilting it back, and she landed a kiss on the top of his head. Jeremy loved this sensation. Cathy was by far the most attractive and fit woman he ever slept with. Even after a few years of marriage, her touch issued excitement and, by contrast, reminded him how horrid and slovenly his ex-wife Laura was. He loved Cathy.

"Morning babe, what'cha doing today?" Cathy's voice was muffled as she spoke into her husband's hair.

"Hey. Tim's coming over to drop off the Kabota, then I have a meeting at the Harbor about that job on East Lake Road."

"Is Tim already on the way? He's not going to be late again, is he?"

"I hope not. Are you going to take the receipts into the bank today? If you do, remember to copy them first."

"If I have time. I have to go to Rochester for a couple hours. I'm seeing Jess for lunch. And don't get home too late, you need to shower before we go to Woody's tonight. Have you talked to Haywood since he got back?"

"Oh right, right, that's tonight. Yea, I'll be home. No I haven't talked to him yet. I hope things are okay. You know how fucked up Woody gets over him. I like Haywood but he needs to get his shit together. I'll speak with him tonight and get a read. Hey-I think that's Tim outside... Yup. Okay babe, have a good day. Call me if you need me." Jeremy dropped his bowl into the sink and held his wife close. They kissed, hugged, kissed again and he walked out the door.

I wasn't excited about dinner. Not at all. I was leaving Beth's house and my mind was caught in the pictures and stories she had told me about Woody. I wanted to get home and start rummaging in the barn. I had a feeling this was where the treasures from the hold house would be.

Christine's audacity did have a limit. She would try to forcibly insinuate

her essence into the hillside, but she wouldn't win. I knew the boxes with old pictures and items that once occupied the house would not be thrown out. She was too clever for that. She had wrapped them, hidden them, but they were there waiting to be found. I felt that finding them was my job. Getting sober, getting the story, understanding--they were all parts of the same whole.

The last thing I wanted to do was eat dinner with a bunch of people. My body was getting stronger, normalcy was returning...slowly. I was away from New York, away from heroin, and out of the geography that swallowed me. Each passing day brought me closer to the Haywood I wanted to be, clean and engaged, and away from what I call the just-awake zone. I had shed the nausea and the deep bone aches, but I was still reeling. Years of day-in and day-out dope use changes one's physiology. I was still breaking through. I was getting honest sleep, deep and restive, sleep that I had long missed. I felt like I had just woken up, groggy, film over my eyes, confused. I thought of the times I had tried to run from the city, resigned to shed my drug skin, only to reach upstate and drive right back. The protection I knew existed in these hills, in my father's house, was finally doing what I had long asked it to do: isolate me, wrap me with strength, teach me, help me get away from darkness. In order to harvest the supportive and healing touch of home, I first had to deal with

Christine. I would never succeed in my coalescing nor in my desire to better understand the man that had been my only constancy if I could not navigate the iceberg Christine. I needed to be humble. I needed to placate her intractability. I needed to avoid convict.

While my bones soaked up the therapeutic country air, I found myself hungry for a challenge. It was all I could do to just live. Each day became easier, but it would be a long recovery, I could feel it. I was happy for this feeling because I believed for the first time that I could stop, truly move away, fully divorce myself from the fell clutch of heroin. If I could give my body the time it needed, if I could wash my mind of the drugs and arrive at a detente with Christine, I would be empowered in a way that I hadn't been for a long time. I knew it was important for me to work, give myself to my recovery, appreciate how difficult the path was going to be and stay resolute to the course. It was time to try. I had floated so often, flying on native intelligence. For the first time there was something that demanded effort, something that challenged me in a visceral and real way. It was me and my demons, barking and fighting to stay relevant, that brought this struggle of significance to my door. I'm a drug addict, tragically flawed and long a denizen of the darkness. I will beat this and I will handle Christine. I will get by, I will survive. I checked the rearview mirror as I pulled onto Browncroft. There were tears streaking down my

cheeks and my stomach wanted to gasp; finally I was regaining my humanity.

I had a 40 minute drive ahead of me. I needed to get home and shower, smoke a joint and snort a valium. Jeremy and Cathy were coming and I knew there would be many questions. I also knew that Christine had gotten frustrated a few weeks ago when Jeremy and Cathy had shown up late for dinner. As a result, last week's standing routine of Monday night supper had been scrapped. Christine had texted Cathy to reprimand her for a lack of manners, and I was curious to see how they would interact. I wanted to make Woody proud and I figured that if nothing else dinner would be exciting and give me with an opportunity to better gauge the atmosphere that had evolved since I'd left. I was curious how Christine operated in front of guests now that she had grown comfortable on the hillside. She was usually on good behavior, or good behavior for her, during the holidays. Christmas and Thanksgiving were the only times I had come back and I was interested to see how she would respond knowing that I would stay indefinitely. Could she be civil without the knowledge that I would leave the following day? As I drove through Rochester and towards the expressway, I decided to drive past my mother's house. She didn't know I was in town; I hadn't called her. I wouldn't stop off, I couldn't; a desire to be home in all ways licked my

insides. I needed to temporarily subdue the urge to feel at home. I needed to see the house I grew up in, the backyard where I played so many hours of make believe. I suddenly wanted to feel my childhood: the trees that served as my forts, the fences I would jump from, my Errol Flynn costumes, urban swashbuckler. My mother lives on Eastern Parkway in the town of Pittsford. It wouldn't take me far out of my way, so I altered my route. I remembered that I needed to get high before dinner and so I drove quickly.

Eastern Parkway creeps off from Monroe Avenue in a winding slope. The houses are all from the early twentieth century and range in aesthetic from redbrick, to colonial, to tudor. Most have spacious front yards, on average a half acre apiece, and rooted into the curb on every block, tall concrete gas lamps light up when darkness sets. Magnolia trees in full blossom, Lilies and Tulips, cover many of the yards. The neighborhood is called Home Acres and consists of three streets; Northland, Southland, and in the middle Eastern Parkway. Announcing your entrance into the neighborhood are two cobblestone foundations, each with gas lamps and Home Acres written into the cement sides.

63 Eastern Parkway is the house I grew up in, mainly. My weekends and summers were spent in large part at the lake, now my dad's primary residence, but I went to school up here and this was my world

until I was fifteen. Then my parents split and I left with Big Wood. I hadn't been back for more than a handful of nights in over twelve years. It is a three story, hulk of a house, but it is tasteful and fits with the giant pine in the front yard. Stucco and wood cover the edifice, and large rectangular windows with led panes in the old style middle each side of the first floor. A brick walkway leads from the sidewalk to a sturdy front door with the same led windowpanes at the top. There is a classic brass, horseshoe looking knocker. Two wide Ewe Bushes stand sentry-like, spanning the length of the windows, running on either side of the front door. As I pulled up my eyes caught a square of white dancing on my lawn. As I got closer I could see that it was a for sale sign. I knew it was unreasonable to be angry, I hadn't spent any time there in almost forever, but my teeth clenched and I had a wildly absent feeling in my stomach. Like I was missing a part of me, or losing it currently. I could almost drive in the driveway, I had done it thousands of times, and get out of the car and shoot hoops on the twenty year old hoop that my father had installed. I remembered how he had bolted it down so I was unable to adjust the height when I wanted to lower it to slam dunk, that way the hoop would last he said, and it had. I was running in the arena big backyard, dressed like Zorro or Francis Marion the Swamp Fox, carrying homemade swords and guns, patiently made by my father. And always wearing a costume

that my mother had made at home. I wanted to stop and think about where that mother went, why she was cold as ice now, but I was running from bandits, escaping into the vines of the mighty Willow that guards the backyard.

I didn't see my mother's car. I was glad. It was a beautiful day and I thought she might be gardening. She had a remarkable green thumb. Growing up, my backyard was covered with beautiful flowers and blossoming trees throughout the spring and summer. Ferns that had been picked from our lake house and replanted, fresh mint for her afternoon iced tea, and Lilies of the Valley. One year, finding the sight and smell of the lilies intoxicating, I ate a handful. I wound up in Strong Hospital, where I had to drink charcoal and had my stomach pumped. Lilies of the Valley are poisonous.

I reluctantly pulled myself out of my old world, my boyhood home, the place I first licked a pair of tits, the place I first smoked pot. I didn't want to leave, but I had to. Dinner would be served with or without me and I needed to be responsible. I needed to be there for Big Wood. I couldn't give Christine the satisfaction of lamenting my immaturity and unreliability to Woody, Jeremy, and Cathy. No, that wouldn't do at all. I passed 63 Eastern Parkway and, in my rearview, a chubby little boy with

red rubber boots, a cape and stick sword, chased after my car. When I reached the first stop sign and turned around, the little boy was gone.

I found my way to 490 and started my drive to the lake. The car had satellite radio and it was the first time I'd been able to listen to old-time mysteries without downloading them online. I am particularly fond of The Mel Blanc Show and The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce reading as Sherlock and Dr. Watson. An episode from 1939 entitled "An Elegant Betray" was airing. Holmes and Watson were on holiday in the Swiss Alps when two murders occurred at their lodge. They uncovered a love triangle between a married couple and a young Swiss ski instructor that had resulted in the husband contracting a killer to murder both his wife and her lover. However, the assassin had made a mistake and killed the wrong ski instructor and a woman to whom he was giving a lesson. The story was predictable in plot elements and evolution, but the voices were rich and full and I could easily see the world they created.

Something about the crackle and frequent static that ripples out from old-time radio broadcasts provides me an escape on many levels. It transports me to a fictionalized realm, where good prevails over constant evil and codified into its sinew is a possibility, the possibility that the good men will defeat the bad, that ubiquitous evil cannot win, ever. This is not

true of life. Terrible shit happens, a lot. Depraved despots rule ruthlessly over millions, and justice is often a half-way justice and many times rendered with pervasive inequality and double standards. But in Sherlock's world good always wins. Intelligence and hard work triumph. I also like old-time radio because it's from an era when my father was very small. I feel close to him when I listen to the drawl and cadence of the voices and the cultural references, knowing I'm getting a taste of a world my father experienced. I know he saw what the men and women who voiced the characters wore, what the houses and living rooms looked like in the early 40's with these stories flooding out from radios and into the ears of people, what the people listening ate for snacks, how they wore their hair. Any history that I can connect directly to my father, or to something he felt or experienced, resonates doubly with me. That is why it is so important that I have this time at the lake. I need to know more, I need to understand his history more acutely. What the world looked like to him, how it sounded and smelled, what inspired him, how he was able to exist as such a force of goodness in this world of everyday shit.

The episode was ending as I reached the top of Hawk's Road. The sun had set by now and the last flickers of light were trapped in the valley walls that held the lake, the chosen spot. I pulled into the back driveway, near the old barn with the rusted water pump and the rusted sliding door

hinges. The barn was built during the Civil War when the hillside was a working fruit farm with apple and pear orchards and cherry trees, grapes and vines as far as the eye could see. Old horseshoes and some small farm tools still hung on the hooks and nails on the inside rafters and beams. Its wood was faded grey and the sliding door was a forest green. The roof was slightly off center, creeping gently towards the house, and needed to be re-shingled. A "POSTED" sign, announcing private property and the intended prosecution of anyone caught hunting, fishing, trapping or trespassing on these grounds was nailed to the green door. The side windows had been boarded up with plywood. Years ago I thought it was great fun to shoot a .22 rifle, since it made only a small popping sound and didn't disturb anyone inside the house, at the barn windows. I successfully destroyed every pane, honing my sniper skills. I was proud of myself until I was summoned home to board up the windows and had to pay for the cost of replacements. It turned out that my aunt, who owned the barn at the time, pocketed the money. Now my dad owns the barn, and it has further rooted him to the hill. He will never leave and, I'm okay with that. I love no place on earth with the intensity that I love Old Post Road and our once-upon-a-time fruit farm. I think my love for the place is hereditary. I parked and walked into the side door that led directly to my room.

I had checked the front driveway by walking around the vegetable garden and was relieved that I didn't see Jeremy's custom King Ranch Ford pickup. It was white with the Fields excavator logo and had duellies on the back, doubled up wheels like an 18-wheeler. The inside was the size of a studio apartment, with recliner-like brown leather captain seats with a stitched 'King Ranch' logo and every piece of electronics you can imagine: AV, voice command, DVD, touch screen interface. But they had yet to arrive, so I darted inside and up to the shower. I could see Big Wood sliding around the stove with his slippers, in much the same fashion that he had made my eggs the other morning, but this time a glass of whiskey and ice was next to the cutting board. His hair was wild but did show signs of a brief combing at some point earlier in the day, and his glasses had slid down on his nose like reading spectacles. Christine was sitting at the island sucking down a Marlboro red and spinning her cocktail tumbler with her left hand. The tips of her fingers were massively swollen, like a cartoon had smashed them with a hammer and they had turned red and were emitting smoke. I didn't know how she managed to get the blinding diamond that my father had given her on her finger. Anytime the light caught it, it was like someone was reflecting a magnifying glass on a bright day straight into your eyes.

I slid shut the bathroom doors and turned on the multi-setting shower. It's like a car wash or an industrial animal wash. There are twelve nozzles that have four settings each and also a rinsing attachment for your feet. There is a temperature-reading mechanism and a degree setting for hot and cold. There wasn't a blind for the window so I popped out the screen and tucked a towel into it and reset it into the frame. This was the only way that I could ensure privacy. Especially now that it was dark and the lights were on, it was like being on stage, and I had a disgusting suspicion that Christine sometimes tried to look in to make sure I wasn't doing something suspicious in the shower. Her step daughter from her first marriage had become her surrogate child, and they were still very close. Her name was Dawn and she had lots of psychological trouble. She also had a bad substance abuse problem, so Christine was versed, much more so than Woody, in the habits of addicts. She had found a few straws in the past and had told my dad, and I knew that she thought I was still using. She was always on the hunt for physical evidence, and I was careful to cover my tracks. I wasn't using dope, so I considered myself sober. I was, however, going to snort some valium before my shower. I had had an emotional day, and my bones were stiffening up. I needed to relax.

The shower steamed up and I could feel my nostrils loosening. It's important to steam up your nose and pick it free of boogers before you

snort something, especially if you're a routine bumper. At this moment, it was important for me not to crush up the valium while the room was steaming, as that would moisturize the powder and would make it clump up in my nose, which would result in less of a high and tons of blue boogers. Once my nostrils were clear, I turned the fan on and the temperature to 50 degrees. Once the steam had receded, I wiped off the sink edge, made sure it was dry, and, using the top of the pill bottle, crushed up two ten milligram valium. I used the back of a clean credit card to further powder up the pill and divide it into lines. Each line I crushed a few times with the edge of my Visa. Satisfied, I licked the edge of the card, wiped it with a piece of toilet paper and put it into my wallet. I had brought a piece of magazine, perfectly edged with scissors, in my bathrobe pocket. Snorting powders through money is unsanitary and a great way to get hepatitis, so I had taken the habit of using a piece of a magazine. The texture is smooth and glossy and won't absorb any of the powder. I rolled the paper up and sniffed the lines. I made sure the fan was on and the water in the sink running to muffle my snorts. I took some water and sniffed it up my nose. The chemical taste of the pills gave me a powerful drip, the sensation in the back of the throat, the taste of what I'd snorted. I had grown hungry for this repulsive taste. I had learned to love it. It was all I had left. The ritualized process is important for me, I'm not yet ready

to give that up. I feel like I have more control allowing myself this vice. It is enough to satisfy my appetite, staying semi-connected while helping detach myself. It sounds funny but it's true. I feel that it's healthy for me. But I know that I must give this up too at some point, just not yet.

I scrubbed my body, the streams of water biting at my back, my legs. It warmed me and the slight euphoria, slight but still felt, of the pills and the water, of being relaxed and safe, of being home, settled in. I dried off and put on my robe. I made sure I hadn't left any evidence, made sure the towels were folded as I had found them and in the same spot, and headed down the stairs to my room. I didn't save many of the gifts I had received, especially from women, but the mini ice bong that the first woman I ever loved gave me was one of the things I kept. It lived behind my shirts and I had kept it clean. An occasional wash with rubbing alcohol and salt will remove even the most stubborn cannabis resin stains. I took it out and filled it with a bottle of water. I didn't want to go into the kitchen before I had to and so forewent the ice. I grabbed my backpack and found the medicine jar of weed that I had brought home. I packed the bong. I sparked a lighter and inhaled deeply. The glass bubbled and the familiar sound roared in my ears. I grew more relaxed. I cleared the slide and my lungs exploded. It tasted chalky and slightly of citrus, and my lungs begged for relief. I held it in until I felt water welling up in my eyes. I

breathed out a large cloud of blue smoke and erupted into a fit of coughing. I dug my head into a tempurpedic pillow to muffle the sound. It was some bad ass pot.

I got dressed in-between bong rips. I was satisfactorily relaxed at this point. I thought about taking another valium but I could tell that it would put me into a dream world. I put on my house slippers and walked into the kitchen. Christine was out walking the new puppy, a Doberman named Felix. Big Wood was still dancing around the stove. A mellifluous odor of roasting meat and garlic climbed in my mouth. My nose was otherwise occupied, but I could taste it, and it was delicious. I remember when I was a kid and Woody and I would have a private weekend at the cottage, before the divorce, before Christine. We would always rent Steven Segal and Chuck Norris movies, pick up a bunch of soda and snacks and make a boys' dinner. My favorite was when he cooked a roast loin of pork with crispy skin on the top and mashed potatoes with peas and apple sauce. Drop biscuits were on the plate too.

"Hey Big Wood. Smells great. What's on the menu." The old man turned at the sound of his son's voice.

"Big guy, grab yourself a drink. We're having leg of lamb and potatoes gratin. How was your day?" He stuck his hand up for his boy to slap.

"Great, I want to talk to you about it, really interesting. I saw Beth, as you know, and I have a lot to tell you. Perhaps we can have a coffee and a quick walk tomorrow morning?"

"Of course buddy, sure we can. How was she? Did you see Lube Job?"

"She's great, she was gracious and really welcoming. Yeah, I met Larry. Old guy can't hear very well. But yeah, let's have that coffee and I have a lot to show you. When are Cathy and Jeremy coming? And where's Christine?"

"They should be here any minute. She's out with Felix, fucking dog never listens to her. It's a riot, she gets so pissed. Dog has a lot of personality though and he's like a cheetah in the yard, fast as hell."

Just then the door opened and a sound of dog collars and leash attachments jingled in the kitchen. Christine walked in with a perturbed look on her face. Her hands were muddy. "Damn dog," she muttered. She didn't say anything to me but instead took up her stool and pulled on her scotch, lighting another cigarette.

"Hi Christine, Felix causing problems?" I said, lightly jabbing her. I knew I shouldn't start that way but I couldn't resist.

"Raising a dog is a lot of responsibility Haywood, it takes patience and a lot of determination. Important life lessons, you could stand to learn a few yourself." I bit my tongue, I should have expected a response like that. She

was, after all, bright, and it was only during moments of severe inebriation, which were not altogether infrequent, that I was able to take small stabs at her without an immediate recognition on her part of the context. Now she was only on her second or third drink, and from experience I knew that she handled her liquor better than most men, drinking men included, so I should have been prepared for a pithy response. She liked to have the last word, the most stinging comment. But so did I.

"Touche Christine, touche. Your hands are muddy, you didn't fall in dog shit did you?" Woody turned around.

"That's enough you two, Jesus. I should put you in the ring. Can't we just have a nice dinner?"

"Sorry Dad, I'm sorry Christine," that you fell in dog shit, I wanted to say, but I thought better of it. Christine didn't say anything but stared at her drink. Presently we heard a vehicle on the road and soon Fields was standing in our kitchen wearing a sweatshirt, jeans and work boots. Cathy was petting Felix and came in behind him. Dinner was about to begin.

The relationship was unusual, I guess. Cathy and Jeremy were younger than Woody and Christine. Jeremy much so and Cathy by about twenty years. There was a wide generational gap and this was protracted by Cathy's attempt to relate and be relevant to Jeremy's experience. Being herself fifteen years older than he, she made efforts at being modern: with her style and cars and electronic accessories. It's evident each time I see her; she has a new Ipad of some kind, a new phone or gadget for her phone. And her outfits, though most always yoga pants and a blouse, fit well, and are chosen with an eye for the trends. And then there is Christine. She is seventy something and so it would seem unusual that these women would be social acquaintances, it is understandable how my dad and Jeremy get along but not them. There are a few reasons for this. Christine hates the fact that when she married Woody he still had two kid's in high school. She had lived alone for nearly thirty years and had been abused by her first husband. Finally a knight in shining armor, a lover of women, a man who chooses fixer uppers; Beth, an abused California beauty queen from a broken home, my mother, incapable of respecting men and approaching the natural life of her ovaries, and finally Christine, also abused and a smoker and a drinker. I think my dad saw an enabler in many respects. Either way, she didn't want to share the best thing that had happened to her and I understand the urge but to behave in a way that

broadcasts that, to put pressure on the relationship between my father and I, to put my father, the man she proclaims to love so, between a rock and a hard place, is well, unfair. It's not love. I would be lying if I said she was all bad. She was intelligent and I'm sure they had stimulating conversations; she had gotten my dad to drop fifty pounds and start walking a mile every day. He looked better and was healthier now, except for the Marlboro Lights and daily cocktails and wine, than when he was sixty. It was a dangerous tradeoff but I'm not really in a position to say anything, dealing with my own demons as I am. It doesn't mean that I cannot see the hypocrisy, the I will love you unconditionally at my convenience and as long as you never leave me alone, include me in everything, and never the house mentality that Christine pumps. She put up a stink when my younger sister wanted my dad to drive her to college, alone, father and daughter. Just for a night, a day and a half round trip. It was a one time thing and Christine complained so much that it was just terribly uncomfortable for my dad. He didn't cave in, but it's reflective of the many instances when she behaved like that, always provoking drama and then blaming it on the other person. Sara doesn't accept me, you have to bring me, I'm your wife, and so forth. If things don't go exactly to her liking or on her schedule, her body language, tone of voice, everything, it morphs into palpable anger and bitterness. It descends on the house and

because my father is so much the peacemaker, he struggles to see any of his loved ones upset. On top of that, he doesn't do a good enough job absolving himself of blame when the poor behavior is without due cause. Which, with Christine, is always the case.

Anyway, Christine doesn't really like it when us kids come to visit. She makes a pedestrian effort to conceal her displeasure, but it's obvious in the way she phrases things, the implication she makes, and her refusal to engage in any meaningful dialogue aside from single word utterances, that she wants us out. Woody would never stand for that and this is why I have such an issue with the whole thing. She knows he won't ever put her before his kid's but she continues to lament and complain over small annoyances and it just adds stress and frustration to my father's world. I cannot, I will not call that love. My father puts up with her, but he never betrays his kids, that I can attest to. My dad told me the other night, the evening before I went to Beth's house, the second night I was home, when I expressed concern that Christine was going to ride him for letting me stay awhile, "You my boy, are my claim to immortality and I would never throw you out. I've put two women to the curb and I'll do it again, don't you worry. I said it's okay, to hell what she says."

Cathy on the other hand had three children, all in college at the time of her divorce, and all bought by their father Dick. Lavish toys, cars

and vacations swayed their loyalties and as a result Cathy lost her children. I would never tell her this, but it speaks terribly poor of her kids that they could be influenced like that, especially given their age. Many times Cathy has told me that she doesn't know what Christine's problem is and if the man she loved had kid's who wanted to come down, that she would cherish it because she knows how horrible it is to feel like your children don't love you. The first time Cathy said that to me, she endeared herself for life. She is a good woman, not particularly smart, but a good woman. To see the stark contrast between her maternal and human capacity for tenderness, compared to the shallow, selfish, operational capacity of Christine, made me sad. Both of my mother's are cold and bitter. It sucked in a big way. I worried about my ability to have a healthy relationship with a woman. The only woman I ever loved I had a wildly unhealthy and dysfunctional relationship with.

Even so, Christine went almost every day to divorce court when Cathy was in front of the judge. For some reason she and Woody took to Jeremy and Cathy's cause. We knew Jeremy through the work he did and from running GrillVille with me. When he and Cathy took up together off the upper part of Hawk's Road, it was only natural, Woody said, to support them. All throughout the divorce, Woody and Christine served as the support team for Jeremy and Cathy. An unusual friendship was born out of

this and it evolved into a standing Monday dinner routine at Woody's. Jeremy had invited them over too, but Christine said she couldn't leave the house what with the dogs and all. Woody had told me that Jeremy worked late and they didn't call to say they were running behind last week. Christine was furious. She sent Cathy a few text messages mentioning to her the proper behavioral response when one is going to be late to a dinner, there was no consideration for the fact that Jeremy works and has young kids. I suspect that Cathy still has a bruise from where Christine stung her, many people did. When Christine wished to cause discomfort she did so with authority. She was seasoned and calculating in her approach. She breathed fire and could hold a grudge better than most. A big part of me wanted to be stubborn, to fight back against the tide of angst that she rolled against my beach. My father could deal with it, so should I. But it's not that easy, I'm not as good a man as he is. I never will be.

I think its after the dollars start building up, after the holes in your walls are too big to be filled in with dry wall tape and joint filler. When your father asks what the \$200 you're borrowing from him is for,

“Ski trip dad.”

“Ski trip my ass!”

When going to sleep hurts as much as waking up, when your soul cannot balance another disappointment, you must say adios. When your body screams no, this treatment is not okay, and if your heart retreats, if not forever at least long enough to be objective, then perhaps you will have the strength that you think you lack.

If you are through brokering all trite complaints and the prospect of another cajoling session after yet another puerile outburst sounds worst than a bivouac surgery without anesthesia,

“you think getting out is easy? you don’t know shit”

then you know its time to say adios.

If you can’t manage to cloak your desires behind grins and guttural hints, if you are tired of compromising, of having to share, then you know its time to say adios,

“sound’s pretty selfish...” “selfish to want to be free?”

There is no way to lend to you the feeling, the sensations that go along with this ride. It must be explored for yourself. If you are ready to be shattered, down low as you can be, if you are ready to touch the fertile lips of bliss, and cycle around the track again and again, then, then you are ready to give yourself to another.

And this was precisely the problem as he descended the stairs, duffel bag clenched tightly, convinced yesterday’s events were a portent of more to come.

He was desperate to abscond, leave, somewhere, anywhere. At the door he caught a glimpse of himself at his high school graduation, halcyon days gone forever.

The door always reflected a young image of him, making him escape into memories. He squeezed the handle tighter, wondering if his best days were gone too. He turned the knob and on rotating out the threshold he saw her face pressed against a side window. He looked away quickly, it was always harder when she was looking at him. He fell in love with her when she came over to buy pot in college. She was coming from an interview for an internship. She was still wearing a tight pants suit that showed her firm breasts and one of the most perfectly shaped asses he had ever seen. She sipped on an ice coffee and smiled and giggled after smoking a joint. He was hooked. But years produce memories, fond and otherwise, and often times he forget how wonderful things could be.

His boots made the fresh snow sing as he trudged through the walkway and began brushing off his car. He heard her shout. "Stoop! What are you doing you promised me you wouldn't leave, what the fuck?" The stoop to the apartment framed a short and slender figure wearing an oversized sweater and boots. "God damn it I'm sorry. Come back inside, you always do this, pleaseee!" Her tone was frantic and his hands fumbled for the keys, his heart always raced when they were on the cusp of a breakdown. He loved making her feel guilty, even though she was. She would be effusive and grab him and hold him and say that she would stop and please believe her this time. He always believed her, but that was why

he had to leave. He knew he had to walk away from the small brick, painted white cast iron awning, and two family house that he and Sharon shared with an older German couple that always complained of the shouting. It was only a little while back when a glass was thrown and the noise prompted Mrs. Gurter to call the police.

The engine turned on and so did her screams as he backed out the driveway, she threw something but he wasn't quite sure what it was, maybe a rock. He remembered when he had thrown wine in her face one afternoon in college. She flipped over the table and a bowl of tomato basil soup spilled on him and on the nasty brown shag of his Puffton Village apartment. He had restrained her, she had unloaded her can of shaving cream on his walls. Part of him wanted to smile at the memory, the other part of him pushed the accelerator faster. After driving a few blocks he pulled over and opened his cell phone. He called the contact marked "H."

"Hello," came a slow paced and faintly Caribbean voice.

"Hey man, are you still out?"

"Yeah, yeah. What'cha need?"

"Two packets of down town and some of that stinky shit if you still have it."

"I don't have that stink on me now, but I have the DT. I'm leaving Chelsea and will be back at 132nd near Adam and Lennox, in about 20 minutes, alright dude?"

the voice on the other end, its foreign and steady drawl, was familiar to the young

man. He had heard it on and off, for various things, and at various time, for the past year or so.

“Okay. Thank you.”

His heart leapt a bit as he could nearly reproduce how it would feel. It had been a few weeks, since the last huge fight. He swung his car out onto Gunn Hill Road and eased onto I-87 North. To his right were the buildings and neighborhoods that housed so much of his frustrations, to his left the glittering glow of Manhattan and her peaks and valleys. He took exit 3 towards the Willis Avenue Bridge. Two stop lights, two McDonald’s later, he turned left and crossed into Manhattan.

He passed Lexington and made his way to Lennox and up seven blocks to 132nd street. He took out his phone and dialed.

“Hello. I’m hear, parked halfway down the block of 1,3,2.”

“Okay, okay. I’m still driving but we just passed 125th. I’ll be there in a minute,” the voice was detached, maybe he was thinking of his home. Somewhere in the Islands the young man thought, Trinidad, Martinique maybe.

He hung up and turned the radio to AM 660 to catch the latest on the Mets. He felt relaxed as he listened to Steve Summer’s play by play, maybe he didn’t need this after all. Beltran had just cracked a home-run as a Lincoln Continental pulled in front of his car and a skinny man got out the back. Soon after his passenger door opened. A dark skinned black man in his early forties

wearing black square framed glasses, a short billed wool cap, and a North Face jacket with a thousand pockets, slid into his front seat.

“What’s up, what’s up,” the man said, focused on retrieving a small plastic bag containing two mini makeshift envelopes of wax paper, each with a small lump inside. From experience the young man knew they would have two small blue insignias on them, he thought he remembered that there was a Seal with a ball on his nose, maybe not.

“Hope your staying warm tonight, its getting cold,” the young man was listening to the Mets, watching the man in his front seat operate, and thinking of how nice it must be to come from near the beach.

"Its not that cold son, toughen up. So here’s the DT, \$160, and next time if you want stink, let me know earlier.”

“Alright. Thanks man have a good night.”

The young man squeezed the bag. As the door shut, someone had just ended the sixth grounding into a double play, “Fucking Mets!” he cried with a look not of anger but one that suggested he was about to move, transition, about to be somewhere else.

He looked at his phone, five missed calls and a number of text’s. All he could see was her face. She held such a lasso on his insides, so often he tried to leave and couldn’t. These little escapes were all he had. He would go back, or try to, he knew that. They would kiss and hug and fuck and then it would start again,

if not that night, a few days later, over something stupid no doubt. He would deal with her later; he had to do this now. He unfolded one of the wax envelopes after pressing it between two quarters, gently so not to rip the paper. When he was satisfied that it was well crushed, or at least down to a manageable degree, he used a subway card and scooped some of the brown powder onto a Jerry Band cd case. As soon as it was out, his olfactory sensed familiarity, it was a strong smell, almost sickening, almost. He organized the powder into small, very small lines, making two for each nose.

The phone rang again. He pressed ignore. Instead of using a bill, who knew what was on it, he ripped a piece of paper from the back of his registration and rolled it into a straw. He bent over, placed a finger over one nostril and a practiced hand delicately up to his nose and inhaled. Instantly he lifted his head back and sighed a long, laboring release of breath. As he breathed in, it seemed like he was filled with a new energy. But as his eyes locked with those in the rearview, he saw the pain, the bitter frustration of a person trapped, he just couldn't feel it. And this was it, the worst single moment, before the drug had truly hit, when he had it in him but could still think for a moment. It was brief but still a rational moment. He hated knowing what he did, or at least the way it sounded in his head, "Yeah, I snort heroin."

He could see her sitting at home. On her bed or on the couch, wrapped in a blanket. She would have the phone in her lap, waiting for him. He swallowed hard

as he tasted the powder in the back of his throat. It was strong, shit he could feel it already. He wasn't really in a place to enjoy the euphoria, he should drive back. Why the fuck had he snorted it this far from his bed. She was beautiful, oh sweet and beautiful. He griped the steering wheel and twisted his hands back and forth clenching his teeth. It didn't need to be like this, fuck.

I think that its after you get comfortable, once you get dependent and convenience usurps reality, thats when you get caught. You know its wrong, you realize its a temporary resolve, needing to be restarted again and again, terrible because it gives only once before going out. Sustainability! Yes, but how? And as he felt the tingle and heaviness of body she danced in his eyes before they closed.