

Alone Among Friends and How Memories of the Father Inform a Son's
Understanding of Masculinity in the Novels of Per Petterson

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Abstract

A combination of an original work of fiction, *Alone Among Friends*, and a critical discussion of masculinity in the work of Per Petterson, this dissertation joins a growing conversation in the field of Masculine Studies about the depiction of men in literature. Written in a spare and realistic style, *Alone Among Friends* is a novella that hopes to explore ideas of masculinity, friendship, success, and failure present in the mindset of the American Millennial generation. Taking its cues from *The Sun Also Rises*, *Light Years*, and *The Salt Point*, *Alone Among Friends* examines the destructive nature of hyper-masculinity and highlights the danger of attaching too much meaning to external validation as the measuring stick for one's self worth. Moreover, *Alone Among Friends* is also influenced by the themes of memory and knowing found within the work of Per Petterson. "How Memories of the Father Inform a Son's Understanding of Masculinity in the Novels of Per Petterson" discusses the ways in which Per Petterson, a Norwegian writer, has been both influenced by American notions of masculinity and also managed to incorporate European aspects of family into his work to create a unique hybrid perspective that merges the American idea of the emancipated male protagonist with the European family centered narrative. By tracing Petterson's influences, this dissertation will attempt to show how Petterson is a logical heir to such American writers as Ernest Hemingway and Richard Ford, and it will argue that, by firmly grounding his novels in the point of view of sons that study every aspect of their fathers, Petterson inhabits a space that has long been absent from both American and Norwegian literature alike. Through the examination of *Out Stealing Horses* and *In the Wake*, this dissertation focuses on the varying ways in which these direct comparisons between father and son influence the son's perception of his own success and failure as a man.

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"For it is not their enemies who condemn men to solitude. It is their friends."
Milan Kundera, *The Joke*

ALONE AMONG FRIENDS

Part 1.

"All things truly wicked start from innocence. So you live day by day and enjoy what you have and do not worry. You lie and hate it and it destroys you and every day is more dangerous, but you live day to day as in a war."
Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*

I.

For a moment he allows himself to believe that it will be Monica, not Troy, who will walk through the double doors a few feet away, and that the plane and its passengers have arrived from Paris, not Southern California. He imagines seeing a slender woman in a trench coat. She holds a burgundy handbag. She drags a small suitcase behind her. Occasionally, it tips over onto its side. She turns to look at it, a bit confused, a bit annoyed, the corner of her mouth twisted in an expression that he could never gauge, before she approaches him, stands on her tip-toes, kisses him on the cheek and then asks how her cute boy is doing.

A week ago he received a phone call. Seeing the name flashing across his phone had shocked him, and when he answered the conversation was short, but everything that needed to be said was said. *Hello. How are you? I'm good. Yes. Yes. It's been a long time. You're coming back? Yes. You're doing better? Yes. And then: Stay at my place a while.*

So he purchased an air mattress and a couple of heavy down blankets because, even though it's a quality apartment in a Park Slope brownstone, the heating goes out from time to time and he doubts Troy is accustomed to the approaching New York winter.

He bought a mini-fridge, where he stowed all the beer. He covered it with a red-and-white checkered tablecloth. He topped it with a few plants to give it the appearance of just another innocuous piece of furniture. The liquor he moved into his room. After four days of careful preparations, what was once a small study is now ready for Troy's arrival. Still, Clancy knows he *should* have put the mattress and blankets in what would have been Monica's bedroom, if they hadn't always spent the night together in his, but even now, it's a place he can walk into whenever the images of her on the cobblestoned streets of Paris keep him awake at night, and he doesn't want to relinquish that just yet.

The doors open. People stream in. It's been a few years since Troy flew into the Hudson Valley to see him. It had been awkward and strained. Clancy still wonders if it was because he had changed, or if Troy was simply too far gone by then.

He figures he should just stay where he is. Troy will find him. It will be easier that way. He hasn't changed all that much. His eyes gloss over people rushing, hugging, kissing, laughing, and jumping. One man even swings a tiny woman in the air. He envies the simplicity of their happiness. He watches them until he notices a man in a pea coat with a blue Los Angeles Dodgers sweatshirt underneath it. The man carries two duffel bags. The man has shoulder-length hair, dark, a hint deeper than Monica's, which he occasionally flips from in front of his eyes with a sudden jerk of his neck. His face is thin. The bones of his cheeks and jaw are prominent and when Clancy meets his gaze, the man smiles.

"Thank you," the man says. He drops his two duffel bags and takes Clancy in an embrace he's not prepared for.

You can stay as long as you like. Don't worry. Take as much time as you need. Stay as long as you want. It's no imposition really. This is what Clancy finds

himself thinking, and the suddenness of it shocks him. He wants to tell him to move in. The place will be empty unless he does. Right now, it's just him and Dan, his old college roommate, who doesn't yet know about Troy's "visit," and it doesn't feel like home to him anymore.

But it has been years, and Clancy isn't certain if he knows who this person standing in front of him is anymore. He's still broad in the shoulders, but before he had been big, huge even. He had been built like a brick shithouse. He had been muscle on top of muscle, and he had sported a high-and-tight Marine Corps fade. He'd been the kind of young man mothers pray their daughters might bring home for dinner. Now, he looks more like the guy in the corner of the Lower East Side dive bar who, afterwards, girls never tell their mothers about.

Troy picks up his bags. He stares at Clancy. He seems to be waiting for instructions. He flashes a strange smile. There is an innocence in his face that unnerves Clancy. Troy seems simultaneously there and absent all at once. He cannot gauge this look, either.

"Here," Clancy reaches down towards one of the oversized duffels. "Let's get going."

Waiting on the platform for the train, Clancy watches Troy rock slowly back and forth. Troy appears calm, but there seems to be some type of nervous energy inside of him. Night has fallen, and as the cars arrive, Clancy can see his face reflected in the windows of the train. He studies himself before the doors slide open. He thinks he looks more tired than Troy.

Soon they are speeding towards Brooklyn. They sit in silence, and Clancy is fine with this. He's not sure what there is to talk about. Troy was always solitary. Even when they played together in high school, Troy would vanish from the dugout and go off to "think," as he had called it, though it appeared as if he was simply half-

asleep down in the bullpen or, on some of the more rustic, fenceless fields, underneath a tree. To be a pitcher, Clancy thinks, to carry the burden of an entire team. At least, after a bad day, he could always wake up, return to the field, and go at it again. But he had been amateur, run-of-the-mill. Troy had been godlike. He had anger in him. He possessed a rage that he somehow channeled into success, and when they were younger, Clancy had always thought of Troy as someone akin to a World War One fighter pilot. He was the kind of person who embraced the chance to go off at first light, and without anyone to guard his wing. Troy had always seemed ready for any challenge. He seemed to seek them out and welcome them. He had been the type built to go it alone. The thought of it all now is so ridiculous that it makes Clancy laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Troy asks. He takes off his pea coat.

“Nothing,” Clancy says. “Nothing at all.”

It is only without the bulk of the pea coat that Troy’s true thinness becomes apparent. His sweatshirt cannot hide the fact that he has become a rail. His wrists are tiny, and his arms are long and slender.

“Dan doesn’t know you’re coming,” Clancy says. “So please don’t frighten him.”

“Dan?”

“You’ve met him,” Clancy says. He glances out the window once again. “In college a few times.”

“I tend to run in the mornings. But all of you won’t notice me,” Troy says.

“All of us,” Clancy says. “Monica left me. She relocated to Paris. She took a job offer there.” As he finishes Clancy realizes that, even with all his thinking about her, and even after all of those nights spent pacing Monica’s room, this is the first time he has said these words aloud.

“Why not ‘we broke up?’” Troy asks. “Why do you say it that way? You broke up. Give yourself some agency.”

“Positive as ever, aren’t you?”

“Never killed anyone, did it?”

“Don’t know,” Clancy says.

“Still working with the finance people?”

“Yes.”

“It’s treating you well?”

“As good as it can.”

“Things are like that, aren’t they?” Troy says.

“I supposed they are,” says Clancy.

“Do you have any peanut butter? At home, I mean. Not here.”

Clancy nods. It is an odd request.

“We used to have the sandwiches all the time, before games I mean. Between double-headers, remember? You become,” Troy pauses and rubs his hand across his face. “You become addicted to them.”

“I haven’t had one in a long time,” Clancy says.

“We can have one,” Troy says.

“I already ate,” says Clancy. “But you can make one, if you want to.”

“If you don’t mind.”

“What’s there to mind?” asks Clancy. “It’s just a sandwich.”

“Do you have an extra jacket? A blazer that I can borrow for tomorrow?”

Nothing crazy. Just for the day. You won’t even know I had it when you get it back.”

“Peanut butter and a blazer?”

“That’s all.” Troy snuffles hard. “I have slacks, but not the jacket.”

“Since you already have the slacks, I guess it’s all set then,” Clancy says.

“Thank you.” Troy repositions the back of his head against his seat and shuts his eyes. “Nudge me when we get there?”

“I used to look up your stats all the time,” says Clancy.

His eyes still closed, Troy laughs faintly. “I was good, wasn’t I?”

“You weren’t half bad,” Clancy says. He stares out into the Brooklyn evening, past the houses and apartments and tenements that spring up between barricaded car lots and boarded up storefronts.

“Thanks.” Troy says. “It’s nice to know you’ve done good every once in a while.”

Later, much later, after he’s helped Troy carry his duffel bags up the hill toward the apartment, and watched silently as Troy eagerly spread a bit of peanut butter across two pieces of bread, then folded them together like a man at prayer, Clancy sits in his room with a tumbler of scotch and tries to figure out what time it is in Paris. The red numbers on the clock across from him read 2:30AM. It’s morning there, perhaps just after sunrise. He wonders if Monica has the same difficulty trying to fall asleep that he does. The ‘0’ of the minute morphs into a ‘1.’ Clancy hears the apartment door open, and with it, the thud of steps too heavy to be Monica’s.

“Anybody home?” sings Dan.

Clancy gets up from his chair. He heads down the narrow hallway to the apartment’s entrance. Dan is hopping in place. He is struggling to remove his shoe. Clancy places a lone finger across his lips. “We have a visitor. He’s sleeping.”

“Sorry.” Dan hisses. He drapes his arms around Clancy and kisses him on the cheek. “Pretty, but the laces are a pain.”

Clancy waves his hand. He turns and heads back down the narrow hallway. He pauses by Troy’s makeshift room. He opens the door and peers in. A sliver of

light sneaks through the gap between the door and the frame. It catches the side of Troy's face. He's naked from the waist up. A half-eaten peanut butter sandwich lies just next to his nose. Clancy slips into the room. He moves the sandwich onto one of Troy's duffel bags as Dan supports himself against the doorframe.

"I'm thinking Last of the Mohicans, Daniel Day-Lewis, but the light adds a bit of the tragic."

"Troy," Clancy says. He is not sure if he should wake him or not.

"That slender waif of a thing? Interesting," Dan says. "I thought wounded animals went off into the woods to die."

"Don't be mean."

"You're precious," Dan says. "Trading one for another."

"Am I?" Clancy says. He walks past Dan and shuts the door quietly behind him.

"Darling." He points to the tumbler in Clancy's hand. "I'm drunker than I should be."

"Surprise, surprise," says Clancy.

"I will ignore that," Dan says. "Because I have good news."

"Monica's plane crashed?"

Dan ignores him and continues, "As I'm sufficiently lubricated to broach the awkward, I've been meaning to ask. Do you remember my mentioning my friend Dawn? The little tart of a girl I told you about? Well, she's still looking for a place and I mentioned our," he pauses. "I mentioned our situation. Vaguely, of course. Better than putting it up on the Internet and ending up with *god* knows what, but..." Dan nods towards the door.

"He's just visiting," Clancy says.

"Define visiting," says Dan.

“A few weeks, at most,” Clancy says, though he doesn’t know if this is true. He has no idea how long Troy might stay. For all he knows, he could be gone tomorrow.

“Well then, if he’s *just* visiting, I say we offer it to Dawn. You’ll like her. If I didn’t know any better, I’d have thought she’d gone to school with us and we’d missed her somehow.” Dan brings his hands together into a soft, muted clap.

“Fantastic. I’ll tell her tomorrow. It’s been so depressing to have to just walk past the emptiness of it this last month.”

“Yeah,” Clancy says, pausing in the doorway of his empty room to take one more sip from his tumbler before speaking to the four walls in front of him.

“Something like that.”

II.

Clancy is gone when Troy returns to the apartment from his morning run. It's a nice place. It consists of a series of rooms along a long, narrow hallway that branches out into a communal area of decent size, and a small, functional kitchen. Clancy hasn't done too badly for himself, though there's no reason why he should have. Clancy had always seemed to know what he wanted from life. He had viewed it as a progression from A to B to C. Now seems no different, and the neighborhood, though hillier than he'd anticipated, is a quaint mixture of the homely and the chic. It's a perfect blend of city and suburb that offers the best of both worlds.

When he enters his room, Troy finds a blazer laid out on the air mattress. A key and a hastily scribbled note rest on top of the breast pocket: *Was Monica's Don't Lose*. Right, thinks Troy. Because it's clear she's coming back to need it.

He'd like to offer. He has a bit of the money left from his signing bonus. Even after taxes and indiscretions, he's managed it well enough. He didn't splurge on a fancy car or unnecessary clothing or jewelry. He put it in places where he couldn't touch it when he saw things starting to get really bad. So he has some of it now. It will buy him time to start over. He'd like to offer to pay for that room, but there's a part of him that already feels like he's intruding. Clancy needs to ask him to stay first.

But he hasn't come home empty-handed, he tells himself. He's accomplished more in twenty-six years than most people attempt in a lifetime. Still, he'd had *potential*, and now his *wasted* potential would be all that people would ever speak of, if they spoke of him at all.

He lays out his clothes: a shirt, a tie, slacks, a pair of loafers, and the well-worn handkerchief that accompanies him everywhere he goes. He dresses, and then he pulls his father's old police badge from inside of his duffel bag. He runs his fingers along the badge's edge. It's the one constant. He had almost lost it once, when he'd

left it out by his locker during a post-game shower. It had ended up in the laundry. Holding it now, he remembers how he had screamed and cursed and threatened to kill his locker mate, who was just some seventeen-year-old Dominican kid fresh from Santa Domingo who didn't speak a word of English. He'd been coming down from some pre-game lines, and his behavior should have been a red flag to those in the organization who had probably been watching his fuse become shorter and shorter. The trainers found it. They returned it the next day. Everyone had smiled. The locker room laughed. The incident was forgotten. He was still too important, then, for it to matter.

Outside, he can taste the autumn air. There's a specific flavor to it, a frosty wetness that he loves. He wants to revisit the simple. He's not foolish enough to think that, with a snap of the fingers, the life of *before* will return, but there's no better place for him to throw off the last eight years of his life and go back to whatever new beginning he can create for himself. It's so simple that it's nearly impossible, but it's worth a shot, and standing on the subway platform he feels calm. He's not sure of the effect that his return will have on Clancy. But he can't worry about that now.

As the train pulls into the station, he tries to remember "home." Other than signing his contract before vanishing out West, what is most vivid, most immediate are all the white gloves, especially the white-gloved hands of Clancy's father, when he covertly slipped Troy the badge in the corner of the funeral home. He had said something when he did it. Probably the run-of-the-mill condolences everyone else had tried to give him that day. They had all been too small and too insignificant for what had occurred.

Troy gazes out of the window of his Long Island Railroad car as it shuttles him eastward. The city slowly recedes. The skyline seems to be waving him goodbye. Despite where he is heading, it feels good to be riding this train. It feels good to be

around New York again and to see small things like piles of damp, brown leaves blown into the base of chain link fences.

He's missed autumn. Training in the Southland of California year round had been like Groundhog Day. Every moment had felt the same. Each day had felt repeated, and every aspect of his life had felt pre-lived. More than anything, that is what pushed him over the edge. He could bear the repetition, but it was feeling that the routine led nowhere that broke him. It was that stasis that required the extra stimulus that eventually brought down everything that twenty-four years had built.

The sky is blue and light. Clouds smear portions of the horizon. The sun is out, but it is still early, and it has yet to make its presence felt as he leaves the train. The street forks. The path takes him under the grand arch with the frieze of the Holy Family huddled together on the keystone. He tries to orient himself. His memory of this place is hazy. It feels like he is walking in a dream and that time has stopped. There were lines of men in uniform, all saluting with their hands sheathed in white gloves. He remembers the faint hum of traffic inching along the turnpike that flanked the cemetery. There had been the constant droning of engines and the occasional angry shriek of a car horn. Each time he'd heard one blaring off in the distance, he'd had to fight back a nervous laugh.

Eventually, Troy recognizes where he is. He squats like a catcher in front of the shiny, black stone. He isn't sure if he should speak or not. It's not as though the dead have working ears. It's laughable that he even thinks talking aloud, or in his mind, will have any tangible effect. If his father can hear him, then he could have seen him over the last eight years. He would know everything that there was to know.

"I got close," Troy says. "Not close enough."

Troy can see the tips of his shoes reflected in the black obsidian. At least the marker is well kept. The grass is like infield grass, sheared to within an inch of the

brown earth abutting the marker. There are no flowers, no flag, and no trinkets that the superstitious might think the departed need on the other side, and Troy is embarrassed that he's brought nothing along.

He scans the cemetery. A handful of other people attend to their own private business. He reaches into his pocket and removes the badge. He places it on the ground next to the headstone. He lets it lie there for a moment before he reaches out and takes it back. Next time he'll bring something that he can leave behind. Perhaps a small flag, or maybe some flowers, like everyone else seems to have done. Troy stands. He shoves the badge deep into his pocket, puts two fingers to his lips, and then rubs them along the smooth top of the stone.

III.

Sitting at her office desk, Dawn opens the lid of her coffee and pours in a bit of half and half. She takes a small pleasure in watching the liquid turn from black to brown. Here, her capacity to be amazed has been steadily stripped away. She knows she should feel differently. Moving to New York should have opened up a world of wonders to her. She had her roadmap, and this was going to be the first leg of a longer journey. All she had needed was an excuse to get here, and graduate school had served as just that. She figured she could work during the day and study at night. Everything would begin again once she arrived.

But it has been a year now, and what does she have to show for it? Yes, she's in graduate school, and yes, she has managed to find her way to New York, and yes, she has managed to publish a handful of impressionistic prose pieces in small magazines that nobody reads. Still, she cannot help but feel that she lacks something. Despite all of its vibrancy, there is a void in her that New York City just doesn't seem to fill. She has come to believe that New York City is the type of place designed for people who either do not want, or cannot handle, silence. It's a cacophony of feuding tones and beats. There is something discordant about it all, and she is seeking a pocket of quiet where she can locate herself.

Her one respite, at times, is the museums that dot the city, but even these don't fully allow an escape from the daily bustle and noise that surround them. Being inside of them offers a passing pleasure. She can sit for a few minutes, with a notebook in her lap, and collect her thoughts as she studies the art.

She has always been drawn to the images of women. She is fascinated by all the different ways they are depicted by, as it always seems, men. Whenever she visits a museum, she buys a handful of postcards that she keeps in the small shoebox that contains similar 6 x 4.25 inch images of the European landmarks she

collected during her childhood. She had told Dan about her interest in art once. He had found it all adorable, laughed, and told her that, if she ever wanted to know what it felt like to be “depicted,” he had a contact uptown who photographed professionally. It is something that she could, eventually, see herself pursuing.

She has always wanted to know how she appears to others from the outside, because at times, she has no idea how she views herself. She knows nearly nothing of her own history. She has little knowledge of her early childhood, and her mother exists for her only in photographs.

She is trying to create herself in the images she possesses, and in the ones she seeks out, and perhaps that is the reason why, the other night, she left Dan and went home with that boy at the bar who spoke of Seifert and Kundera and Skvorecky. She wanted to be bold and daring, and afterwards, as she rose and walked from the bed, she imagined how she might appear to his eyes, with the secrets of her body only half-illuminated by the faint glow coming from the corner of his apartment. It had thrilled her.

Dawn, like Hope or Joy or Sunshine, is a name that gives immediate personality to the person who possesses it. It is the beginning of something. It is the start of new possibilities. She knows, despite what she forces herself to believe, that she is her mother’s daughter. There is something that connects them. Dawn possesses her resilience, and, in a way, her selfishness. That, more than anything else, is probably why she is here in New York. She needed to prove that she could leave, too.

“Lost in thought?” She feels fingers tickle her sides and she jumps in her chair. “Delusions of grandeur?”

Dan leans against her desk. He positions his body like a diva about to burst into song. He’s wearing sunglasses, which, she’s sure, hide his hangover. He takes

off his glasses, and Dawn watches as his bloodshot eyes dart back and forth. He lifts his legs from the floor and lets them swing from under him as he adjusts himself on her desk. “How soon can you move in?”

Somewhere, thinks Clancy, Troy is doing something with my jacket. He has spent the morning imagining Troy in various situations, not all of which would necessitate a blazer but which, when thought of in that context, were quite entertaining—hot dog vendor, subway conductor, amulet merchant, break dancer.

He checks his watch. 1:07 PM, it’s just past seven in Paris. He hates this habit. It’s embarrassing and pitiful. He hates what he has become. Around him, standing or leaning against the lunch counter, are older men. All of them are dressed in the same suits. Their shirts bulge around their waistlines. Each one of them has the same short haircut with the same salt and pepper hair. The eyes on their cleanly shaven faces all possess the same focused stares. Five years ago he’d been thrilled that he’d managed something like this. In the midst of a burgeoning recession, he had scored a position straight out of college. It had allowed him to put his name and his name alone on an apartment lease. But the space had been too big, and that was why he’d asked Dan and Monica to join him while they both got their feet on the ground. In hindsight, it had been a stupid decision. It had made the place a shared possession instead of his alone. He had never imagined that splitting it would mean that, if one of them left, they could take a piece of it with them. He pitches what is left of his sandwich into the nearest garbage can. Strike.

Troy can probably relate to the sudden loss. He probably understands better than most how one becomes stranded when the reason why one worked so hard vanishes. To just *be* is not something Troy ever trained for. There was always the goal, the thing to be chased, and the point to be gained, but what does he do now?

Clancy, at least, can keep going. He still has his job, and the daily tasks that he needs to perform, but what about Troy? What does he do now? Wander around Central Park in a blazer and slacks selling balloons to children? He needs to find something to fill the void. A hobby, maybe? Collecting stamps? Knitting? It's 1:10, that's 7:10 in Paris. Clancy knows he could use one too.

He slips out of the cafe and takes his phone from his wallet. 7:10 is East Coast baseball starting time. Clancy pulls up the Internet and navigates to the ticket website for the New York Mets. He searches the schedule. They play at home this Saturday against the Pittsburgh Pirates. The first pitch is scheduled for 4:10 PM.

It's an odd starting time and a meaningless game for both teams, but he buys a pair of tickets, anyway. It is supposed to be a warm afternoon, and it will be nice to just relax with Troy. It will allow him the chance to take more stock of him, and he doubts Troy has seen the new stadium yet. It might help ground him, and he wants to see the look on his friend's face when the baroque, brick façade of Citi Field comes into view. Monica hadn't understood his giddiness when he explored all the ins and outs of this new place, and she had seemed annoyed that they had to be there two and a half hours before the game began just so he could watch men who stood around in the outfield and occasionally chased after a ball.

There were certain things about him that Monica didn't understand. That Troy called him for a place to stay, even after years of having other teammates, and other friends, should be proof that certain bonds, no matter how frayed they might appear, are unbreakable. Still, he can't help but wonder if the real reason was only because Troy had had nowhere else to go. Even without Monica around, he's never brought himself to contemplate that level of abandonment. At least he still has his family. Troy is nobody's son anymore.

IV.

Saturday's weather is warm and dry. It feels as though summer is making its last assault and succeeding, for the moment, in dislodging fall from its September foothold.

Troy's initial reaction to the tickets had surprised Clancy. He had seemed scared. Clancy had expected more. Not that Troy would clap, jump up and down, and run around the apartment in sheer bliss, but he had imagined something upbeat. He feels that, rather than providing two tickets to a baseball game, he has announced a funeral, and now, dressed in an outdated Mike Piazza jersey and a ratty one-size-fits-all cap, Clancy looks like a strange cross between an overeager child and a corporate middle-aged man.

Troy is dressed like this could be any other day. He wears jeans, Clancy's blazer, and no cap. He shows no signs that he is going to see the team the two of them tirelessly supported during their youth, and whose rosters and pitching rotations they could recite from memory.

Off in the distance, the stadium comes into view. Suddenly, Clancy is ten again, off to see supermen with limitless talent and skill. Part of him wishes he had a ball to be autographed.

"It's going to be a good pitching match-up today." Clancy nudges Troy, who's been staring out the window of the train in silence the entire trip. "I checked the probable starters before we left."

"Is it?"

"Colon versus Burnett."

Troy turns to him as the train pulls into the station. "Colon's still in the League?"

They walk down the stairs, and with the crowd that has travelled with them on the train, they stroll along the promenade outside of the park. “It’s like a palace inside,” Clancy says.

“They’re all the same once you get inside.” Troy pushes his hands deep into his jean pockets. “The brick,” he pauses. “It’s pretty.”

“It’s still the same place,” says Clancy. “Really, it’s like a person suddenly getting a different haircut. Same person, new style.”

Clancy lets Troy go ahead of him at the turnstile. He wants to watch him gaze around the rotunda. He wants to be able to smile at Troy when he walks up to the life-size ‘42’ embedded in the middle of the foyer. He wants to laugh at him when he stands next to it and asks for a picture. The new stadium is modeled on Ebbets Field, the place where the Dodgers played before their abrupt move to Los Angeles, and Clancy knows he can relate to that feeling of seeing something one adores leave. At least it’s the Dodgers who drafted Troy. There must be a comfort for Troy in that. For Troy, being here is perhaps a bit of personal nostalgia.

He turns around. Troy is studying the rows of boutique stores. Escalators are shuttling fans up past flat screen TVs that show highlights of Jackie Robinson stealing home, legging out doubles, and making diving stops behind second base. Troy shakes his head. He breathes deeply and places his hands in his jeans. The place has finally penetrated him. Clancy walks over to Troy and places his arm around Troy’s shoulder. “Let’s watch B.P.,” he says.

“This place,” says Troy. “Is like a fucking *shopping mall*.”

Two outs into the fourth inning, and Clancy still can’t shake Troy’s comment. All through batting practice, Troy sat in his seat and stared out at the vacant

bleachers in left field. He said nothing more than “yes” or “no” or “hmm, maybe,” to whatever Clancy had asked.

But the game has been good. It has been moving quickly, and it’s being played clean. There is enough action to entertain, and there is enough of a lull to allow for the spectators to converse about everything they are watching. Still, the most emotion he’s seen from Troy was a muffled “bullshit,” uttered when he disagreed with the official scoring of a ball that could have been ruled a hit or an error in the bottom of the second inning.

Now, Troy is just munching on peanuts. The process of cracking them open and extracting them from their shells seems to be a more engrossing activity for him than watching the game.

“Having a good time?” Clancy asks as the Pirates’ batter dribbles a ball weakly to the first baseman and the inning ends.

Troy nods towards a group rushing onto the field. “Time for another T-shirt toss,” he says. “Peanut?” He holds the bag out to Clancy and waves it back and forth while a team of giddy young people sprints up and down the foul line. They have some type of cannon that shoots T-shirts in the direction of jumping, screaming fans.

“Good game so far.” Clancy takes a handful of peanuts.

“Pittsburgh’s going to blow it open next inning,” Troy says.

“That so?”

“It’s their second time around the line-up. We’ve got a two-pitch pitcher on the mound. He’s done next inning.”

“You think?”

“I know.” Troy reaches down into his pocket. He pulls out Monica’s key. “You need this back yet?”

Clancy nods.

“Quick turnover.”

“We posted it online,” he lies. “People flock. It seems like everyone in New York is always looking for a new place to stay.”

Troy pats the key against his palm twice. “So, she’s not coming back?”

“We broke up,” Clancy says. Troy smiles and hands him the key.

He isn’t sure why he’s lied to Troy, and he’s even more confused by how Troy’s taking the news. Troy hadn’t mentioned anything. It was his for the taking should he have wanted it. “Actually, Dawn, the girl,” says Clancy. “She’s Dan’s friend.”

“She saw the *ad-ver-tise-mohnd*?” Troy asks.

“He mentioned it to her before I knew you’d be coming,” which, Clancy thinks, *is true*.

“Right,” Troy says as the inning is set to begin. “Now, watch and be amazed.”

Clancy chucks a peanut husk towards Troy. It bounces off the side of Troy’s head and falls lazily into his lap. “We’ll see.”

But a half-hour later the inning is still going. The Mets have given up five runs, have yet to record an out, and have changed pitchers three times. There are runners on the corners when time is called again. To a chorus of boos, the manager takes another slow walk from the dugout to the pitcher’s mound. Halfway there, he raises his arm towards the outfield bullpen. The previous two times he had, at least, acknowledged the man he was taking out of the game, but this exchange is cold. It is nothing more than a quick swap of the ball from one hand to another.

“Best job in the world. It’s too bad I wasn’t drafted by the Mets,” Troy says.

“They’ve had a great history with lit-up players. Hell, look at the entire ’86 team. If I were with this franchise I’d still be playing. Their sober players can’t even get outs.”

“We could all play for them,” says a man five rows in front of them. “In fact they should pay me to watch this mess. Rooting for this team is like rooting for a paraplegic in a triathlon.”

“Is that so?” Troy says. Clancy stifles a laugh.

“Yeah. And you,” the man shouts at the right fielder, “You’re a bum!”

“He’s got their only two hits today.” Troy reaches for the last handful of peanuts in his bag.

“So,” the man says. “He’s still a bum.”

“Clearly you’re a connoisseur.” Troy cracks a shell in his hand as the man turns to face them. His face is pockmarked, and his hair is windblown. A scar runs from his lip to his right ear.

“What’s it to you?” the man says.

“Me?” Troy points his finger to his chest.

“Yeah, you.”

“It’s nothing to me. I just don’t like morons.”

“You calling me a moron?”

“You prove my point.”

“Show some respect,” the man says.

“To what?”

“I’ve been a fan of this mess since before you were born,” the man sneers back.

“In all that time you should have learned something.” Troy cracks another peanut, and Clancy watches as the shards again fall between his fingers.

“Listen buddy.” The man’s hands tighten around the back of his plastic chair. “I played quite a bit in my day.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Troy says with unveiled contempt.

“You mocking me?”

“I’d never dream of demeaning you,” Troy says. He takes a peanut and rolls it around in his hand before he rests it between his thumb, pointer and middle finger.

“Easy,” Clancy says. He knows Troy has the peanut in a throwing grip, and that he’s just waiting for an excuse to fire it down at the man five rows below them. “Let’s just all watch the game.”

“Watch the game,” the man parrots, “I’m watching the game.”

“No,” Troy says. “You’re looking at the field but I don’t think you’re seeing a damn thing.”

With that, the man stands up. He starts to climb over his chair. Troy cocks his arm back, but Clancy grabs it, and then springs in front of him.

“Just watch the game,” Clancy says. Troy rises and stands next to him. “These tickets are too expensive to get kicked out.” He throws his arm out across Troy’s chest. “I’ll take care of him. Just watch the game.”

“Tough guy,” the man nods at Troy. “With his buddy up there.”

As the man turns back to his seat, Troy starts forward. Clancy swings his palm against Troy’s chest and yanks Troy by the lapel of his blazer.

“You’re not as big as you used to be,” Clancy whispers. “Sit down.”

“I told you they were going to blow it open this inning.” Troy sits down and stares out towards the pitcher’s mound.

“Yeah,” Clancy says. “You were right about that.”

As the bottom of the ninth begins, the Mets trail by three.

“It’s getting cold.” Troy says. He takes a handkerchief from his pocket and dabs at his nose.

“Not used to the weather?” Clancy asks. He can make out a smear of red against the handkerchief’s white cloth.

Troy folds the handkerchief quickly and tucks it back in his pocket. “Runny nose.”

From his five rows down, the man with the scar yells: “Come on you bums! Don’t screw up another one.”

“I want to find out where he works,” Troy says and sniffs hard. “I’m going to go find out where he works and go stand over him. I’m going to scream at him while he tries to do his job.”

If nothing else, thinks Clancy, Troy hasn’t lost his temper, his strange loyalty, or his desire to protect those he views as his own. Clancy tries to ignore the handkerchief. It is probably nothing.

“Watch for the bunt,” Troy says, and with that the batter gracefully drops his bat in front of him and pushes the ball down the third baseline. He beats the throw to first by a step.

“Lucky!” yells the man with the scar.

“I’m going to kill him, Clance.”

Clancy laughs, but next to him he feels Troy shuffling, looking around, and gathering his things as the following batter grounds into a routine double-play.

“You’re leaving?” Clancy asks.

“The game’s over.” As the voice on the loudspeaker announces a pinch hitter, Troy nods towards the jumbo screen in center field. “I faced him when he was in the Padres’ system,” Troy says. “He’s a September call-up. He doesn’t belong here.”

“Watch the end.”

“I *know* how it’s going to end.”

“Tr—”

“High fastballs and it’s over,” Troy says. “He couldn’t even hit me.” Troy pushes his hands down into his pocket and snuffles hard. He quickly brushes the side of his face against the shoulder of his blazer before he walks away.

Watching him go, Clancy can see the mistake in bringing him here. The stadium is different. The atmosphere is too clean. He shouldn’t have paraded the game in front of Troy like this. It never occurred to him that Troy might actually know some of them, or worse, that he might have stared in and dared them to come out and get him. He can only imagine what it must be like for him to be on this side of the fence now, just watching.

Troy can’t escape the ballpark quickly enough. Once he’s sure that Clancy can’t see him, he breaks into a dead sprint. He’s going so fast that it almost feels like it only takes three steps and a leap to propel him through the concourse, down the stairs, and out of the ballpark.

He doesn’t know if Clancy noticed his nose bleeding or not. If he did, did he follow it to the most obvious conclusion? Does he now know that the rumors were—are— true?

But these aren’t things Clancy needs to know. Clancy is handling his own issues, and they aren’t things that he has inflicted on himself. Monica was probably the reason for this whole day. The game was probably meant to be a throwback to a simpler time, or a way for them to reconnect. It isn’t Clancy’s fault, thinks Troy. How could Clancy have known that this is the first game he’s been to since he stopped playing, or that even when he was playing, he couldn’t watch a game? Baseball wasn’t something to be enjoyed. It was something to be escaped from.

Outside the stadium Troy slows. He takes out his handkerchief. His nose feels a bit drippy, so he plugs it up again. He doesn’t want to focus on the game anymore.

He doesn't feel the need to rant silently in his head. He doesn't want to sound like his father right now. He just wants the train to come so that he can escape back into Brooklyn. He knows he should wait for Clancy, but he needs time to be alone. He needs time to unwind from the last two and a half hours. He climbs up the stairs to the platform of the train. He can apologize later.

Troy rides the subway to Brooklyn. He exits at Grand Army Plaza and searches until he finds a small bar tucked away on a side street. A narrow courtyard leads into a large, dark room where a guitar inlaid with jewels rests against a vacant stool. As people begin to trickle in, Troy lays Clancy's blazer across his seat. He goes to the bar. He'd like to be able to take Clancy out for a drink. They could catch up in that way, perhaps.

During his convalescence, he bought wine weekly. He used it for cooking. He started watching cooking shows on PBS as a way of calming himself. He took notes as if it were a class. He made two meals a week based on whatever episodes he saw. It was a task he could occupy himself with. He loved watching how each host gracefully navigated the kitchen. He liked to see how the tools and instruments they used were like extensions of themselves, and he found it cute that, no matter what was being prepared, it was always ready after twenty-five minutes.

Cooking shows, running, and forcing himself to just read issue after issue of *The New Yorker* had given him back structure. Each of these activities had offered its unique form of mental escape. Together they had helped him to slowly wean himself off of the lines that he had started to cut religiously. He wants to just *be*. He doesn't want to be defined by the first quarter or so of his life. He feels down into his pocket once more. The rough edges of the badge are a painful comfort. He sighs and lets his mind drift away into the dark confines of place he finds himself in. Bars don't worry him. He can control drinking. He never was an alcoholic.

In the next twenty minutes, the bar goes from a quiet, vacant space to a kettle boiling with people. They mill about over drinks or shuffle for seats. Troy gives away his chair to a thin man and girl who kindly asked if they could swap places. He stands against the wall and watches them. They seem to be playing a game where they push and jab at each other, and they smile and laugh when the other person manages to score a point by poking the other in the chest. He doesn't know if they are at the beginning of something, or if they have reached a point where the rest of the world has fallen away. But they seem to exist alone in it. He likes to imagine that he would be capable of surviving with another person, but deep down, he isn't sure if he can. It's not that he is selfish or unwilling. It's just that he believes that everybody has his or her own trajectory. Some pairs might fly a parallel course for a while, but in his experience, paths always tend to diverge. He wonders if he has never truly meshed with anyone because of his ideas, or if it is because he has never truly had the chance to meet anyone on anything like common ground. He has never been normal. He has always been someone from somewhere.

The couple continues their playing until a tiny man takes the stage. Dressed in all black, the man scampers to his seat. He picks up the guitar from the ground, positions it against his leg, and, with a high shout, he begins to play. Troy takes his hand from the rough edge of the badge and crosses his arms across his chest. The man brings a smile to Troy's face, and as the night drags on, there seems to be no tiring the guitar-playing man. There is an aura around him. He is vibrant and powerful, and Troy knows he could watch this man play for days. He doesn't know the terms, flamenco, classical, salsa, but he doesn't care. He prefers things he knows nothing about at this point in his life. He can come to them without any prior expectations, and they can do the same with him. There's less chance of anyone being let down this way.

The man plays and plays. And then, suddenly, it is over. He finishes with a hard downward stroke, and with it, he drops his head to his chest. He lingers there a brief moment as the audience applauds. Troy smiles. The man is the consummate showman. Over an hour has seemingly vanished in an instant.

Bending down to take Clancy's blazer from the floor, Troy feels someone standing over him. "Have a favorite?" a soft, female voice asks.

"I didn't know they had titles," he says.

He lifts his eyes from the ground. A short girl is standing in front of him. Her blonde hair is layered, and it falls to her shoulders. The darkness of the bar hides the color of her eyes.

"I noticed you standing in the corner," she says.

"I'm still standing in the corner."

"Why?"

"I like standing in corners," Troy says.

She stands on her tiptoes and brings her face closer to his. "Want to sit? Standing is tiring."

"I like standing," Troy says.

"Then we'll stand," she replies.

"Alone?" Troy asks.

"I'm enjoying my own company."

"Sometimes it's the best kind."

"I'm more interesting than most other people."

"Are you?" he asks. He tries to imagine her earlier in the evening. He pictures her in her post-shower towel. She probably had another one wrapped around her head. He thinks of how she might have stared into her mirror and taken stock of her reflection. Perhaps she stood erect and confident, smiled proudly, even a little

haughtily. Or maybe it was none of this. He has no way of knowing. And she has no way of knowing him. "Say something interesting," he says.

"Your drink is empty."

"That's an observation."

"An interesting one."

"More obvious than interesting."

"I obviously have an interest in getting you another drink."

"Good reason," he says.

"Does everything need a reason?"

"Most reasonable things."

"Then be unreasonable."

"Let me think about it for a minute."

"A second."

"So little time." He likes her, and he wonders how her wit might be translated into bed. Giddy, eager, a bit rough or a bit angry.

"I live close," she says.

"Interesting."

"Happy now?"

"What about the other drink?"

"Would you prefer that?"

"What's your name?" asks Troy.

"Callie," she says.

"Troy."

"And I didn't even need a horse," she laughs. Troy looks around the bar. To any other set of eyes they might appear as friends, a pair of lovers, and not complete and utter strangers.

“Do you like Spanish guitar?” asks Troy.

“You ask a lot of questions.”

“Do I?”

“Funny,” she says.

“How close is close?”

“I’ll show you.”

“I like it here, though.”

I’m a better decorator.”

“And modest.”

“I’m the most modest person you’ll ever meet, and proud of it,” she says and smiles. He cannot help but like her.

“Cab—”

“Is that a question or a statement?” she asks.

“It’s whatever you want it to be,” he says.

“Is that so?”

“Who’s asking all the questions now?” he says.

She takes his hand. Her grip tightens around him, and she pulls him to a far table where she collects her coat, scarf, and purse.

Outside the night is cool, and the night sky is a deep, bruised blue. Callie stops at the corner. She throws her arm in the air and waits.

“Makes you feel powerful, doesn’t it?” she says.

A cab breaks from traffic and eases its way towards the curb. She pulls the back door open and shuffles across to the far side. When Troy doesn’t follow immediately, she leans forward with her body weight resting on her bent arm.

“You scared?”

“Of you?” Troy says. “Petrified.”

“Good,” she says. “Then we’re doing it right.” She reaches out her hand, and he lets her pull him into the cab. She gives the driver a Bushwick address, wraps her fingers around his, and drums them gently, anxiously against his palm.

V.

When Clancy arrives home from the game, there are bags in Monica's room. It is a challenge to the emptiness he's grown accustomed to. He peers inside. Mostly, he sees books strewn across the floor. A fallen pile creates a stream meandering towards the door. He picks up a couple. The titles are a motley assortment. There are things he can recall like Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, Susan Sontag, and Henry James, as well as other writers whose names he struggles to pronounce, like Milosz, Seifert, Zagajewski, and Herling. If nothing else, Dan hasn't brought them an idiot.

He starts to enter the room, but he stops himself. He feels like he is intruding, but he wants to vet this newcomer, this Dawn, who Dan thinks will mesh so well with them, and who will help replace the dynamic they all once had. Four people in a space designed for three, thinks Clancy. It will be interesting at best, uncomfortable at worst. He just hopes it will be functional.

"You're Clancy. Right?"

The voice comes from behind him. He's been caught, and her words are less a question and more a declaration that she knows all about him, while he, in turn, knows nothing of her. He faces her. He still has her books in his hands.

"I always do the same thing," she continues, "I judge people by their books. It's the first thing I look for in a place, the bookshelf."

"Have you got much more?" asks Clancy.

"Books? Yes," she says. "What do you think?"

"I'm sure I'll make my mind up eventually," he says.

She smiles. "I'm sure you're not overly thrilled at me being here."

Clancy stares back at her. He has no desire to be interrogated by this newcomer. He's both annoyed and unnerved that Dan might have given away the

reason for them needing a new roommate. He already feels this girl knows too much about him. He doesn't like being uncomfortable in his own apartment. If he can't at least pretend he is safe here, then where?

"Just that I'm Dan's friend. He knows me, and you don't. So it might be odd for you, is all."

"I have friends, too," says Clancy.

"That's not how I meant it." Dawn purses her lips and puts her hands on her hips. "Let's start over. Hi," she extends her hand. "I'm Dawn. I'm going to be living with you and Dan. Thank you."

Her hand is smooth and tiny. It almost vanishes completely inside his own, and when she tugs, gives the yank of a shake, he can't help but smile because she's trying as hard as she can. As she tries to take her hand back, he holds on a second longer than one normally would. He enjoys feeling her fingers slide from his palm as she pulls away. She's the first woman he's touched since Monica.

"Dan and I were going to go to that place on the corner. Would you like to come?" she asks. "Maybe figure out what you're in for?"

"The Commonwealth," he says. Why not, he thinks. He has no idea where Troy is, and after all, going out somewhere is better than sitting alone in his room and contemplating the difference between time zones.

Dan's already commandeered a nook in the far corner when Clancy and Dawn join him on the bar's back patio. A forest of space heaters grows between the cast iron stools that flank tables lined with tea lights.

"This must be nice in the summer," Dawn says. She sets her beer down and sidles up to Dan.

“Yes.” Dan stirs the thin red straw in his slender highball glass. “On those humid nights when all one truly wants is a breeze and something with a kick. We must enjoy them. Not all of us come from a land of the midnight sun.”

“That’s the Arctic,” says Dawn. “There’s nothing warm about Arctic.”

“The Arctic, Los Angeles, same thing.” He lifts his glass in Clancy’s direction and makes a small circle with it in the air. “Will Troy be joining us?”

Clancy shakes his head.

“Troy’s one of Clancy’s old friends. High school. He’s visiting us at the moment.” Dan continues stirring his drink. “He is—no, was—the baseball player? Is that right?”

Clancy nods and sips at his scotch.

“Is the ball player as talkative as his friend here?” Dawn asks.

“I wouldn’t know,” says Dan. “Right now he’s just our resident Natty Bumppo. Comes and goes as he pleases. I’m sure you’ll meet him eventually. Just make sure you treat him, how shall we say.... Delicately.” Dan flashes a mischievous smile.

“You’ll be fine,” Clancy says. “He’s fine.”

He watches Dawn tilt her head slightly to the right, as though this new knowledge has unbalanced her. Dan’s tone is playful but disingenuous. He doesn’t want this girl getting the wrong impression, and though he does worry about the potential for friction, he doesn’t want her view of Troy completely colored before Troy has a chance to make his own impression, and potentially screw it up for himself all on his own.

“He’s out now, somewhere,” Clancy says. He feels the need to offer some kind of alibi for why Troy isn’t joining them at this impromptu “house” event. “He does that.”

“Just picks up and vanishes,” Dan laughs. “Poof, and he’s gone.”

“Some people are like that,” says Dawn.

“Oh, we know,” says Dan.

Clancy feels a shoe against the cuff of his pant leg. He is not sure whose it is, but it only brushes him briefly before it is gone. It is probably nothing more than an accident. Still, he cannot help but enjoy the contact. Across the table, Dawn averts her eyes. They fall to her beer, and she tilts the bottle back and forth in front of her on the table. Dan trains a less-than-sober gaze upon him. His lips are twisted into a drunken smile.

“Oh, they go way back, our dear Clancy and Troy. Way, way back. I can only imagine the things you two might’ve pulled, back then,” Dan says.

“He’s perfect,” Clancy says. He stares over the tops of their heads and smiles.

“Setting the bar quite high now, aren’t we?” Dan says.

Dawn stifles a laugh. Clancy doesn’t respond. He brings his eyes back to Dawn. He’s interested in studying her. She seems thoroughly content to just sit there while Dan plays the part of the storyteller. Perhaps she’s treading lightly, but he isn’t sure if this is an act. She’d seemed more confident and forward in the apartment. He’s trying to pin her down. He needs a better read on this girl who snuck up and surprised him before. She has had him off balance ever since.

“But anyway,” Dan says. “If Troy is Hawkeye, then who is *he*?” He tilts his glass in Clancy’s direction. “Because we already know that you, Dawn dear, are the second coming of *Unbearable’s* Teresa.”

“Clearly,” Dawn says.

“So clearly.”

“And you are my little Lord Sebastian Flyte.”

“Dear, I have no ambitions of dying in a Moroccan monastery.”

“He doesn’t die.”

"But of course he does. They all do."

"Pshh," Dawn rolls eyes.

"But our dearest Clancy," Dan continues. "Who *are* you? Teresa-Dawn, who do you think he is?"

"I don't know, Sebastian-Dan. Who *is* he?"

"Who *are* you, Mr. Clancy? Monica was easy. *You* are the tough one."

"And *she* was," Dawn asks. There is a hint of playful jealousy to her voice.

"Our former third," says Dan. "The kind that just picks up and vanishes."

"My ex," says Clancy.

"Oh," says Dawn.

"Don't worry Teresa-Dawn," says Dan. "I like you better."

"Thanks," she says.

Dan places his hand on Dawn's shoulder. "You might say she was the kind of woman men used to write Russian novels about," says Dan. "Devastatingly beautiful. Ephemeral. Destined to die of consumption."

"God willing," says Clancy.

"Be nice," says Dawn.

"It was mutual," says Clancy.

"Mutual," echoes Dan. "Yes. Mutual."

"What was mutual?" asks Dawn.

"The break-up," says Clancy, while Dan simultaneously shouts "The death wish."

"Well, then," Dawn says.

Dan begins to laugh. He brings his knees up to chin and shimmies in his seat.

"You can't teach timing," he says.

"No," says Clancy. "You can't."

“Bendrix? Merton Densher?” says Dawn.

“Oh, no,” says Dan. “Our dear Clancy isn’t nearly cruel enough for that.”

He wonders how these two, Dawn and Dan, found each other. Perhaps they were thrown together by circumstance, or maybe they found a foil in each other. Some people can just exist together. He knows that he and Troy used to be that way. He’d like to think that, at times, he and Monica were like that, too. More than anything, he misses her laugh. It had been a silent laugh. It would go on and on and on, but she would never make any noise. He always thought there would come one day when she might, and each time she laughed he waited, anxiously, wondering if that would be the moment when she made a sound.

Monica, a Russian novel? He has never read any, but he thinks he can imagine the type. In his mind, they are probably all tragic and dramatic women caught between husbands of necessity and lovers of desire. But, unlike her, they are women trapped. They couldn’t just suddenly up and go.

Even now, if he tries to remember their beginning, he can’t. It was as though *they* simply happened. They simply lived, and he had been encouraging, enthusiastic even, in his support for her to apply for jobs in Milan and Paris and Madrid, and though he foresaw her acceptance, he never planned for it. He never understood what it would mean for him, until he found himself in bed and heard her say: *I don’t know if I can do this. If I want to.* In his foolishness, he had told her: *Of course you can. Of course you want to.* He had thought she had meant accepting the job. Even then, he had never once contemplated that she was referring to *them*.

Clancy tries to pick up a bit of the conversation between Dan and Dawn, but they are in their own world, gossiping about colleagues and friends and classmates. It is not something that pertains to him. He polishes off his scotch and gets up from the table.

“Another round?” asks Dan.

“Long week,” Clancy says.

“All the more reason,” Dan says.

“You’re not leaving, already, are you?” Dawn says. Her voice rings with mock accusation.

“Dawn, tell him to stay,” says Dan.

“Stay,” says Dawn.

“Another time.”

“You don’t know what you’re missing,” she says. “It could be a party.”

“Yes, yes, yes!” Dan interjects. “We *should* throw a party.”

“Before the weather gets too harsh,” says Dawn.

“I want a picnic in the park with wine in paper cups,” Dan says. “A little bit of cheese, perhaps. Our very own pastoral in the middle of the city.”

“Cute,” says Clancy.

“Like a house date.” Dawn turns to Clancy and smiles.

“Let’s invite more,” says Dan. “*Au revoir* summer party! Next weekend? O.K. Done.”

“Once again,” says Clancy. “Dan has spoken.”

“Old man,” Dan says. He slips his straw between his smiling lips and sucks in the rest of his drink. “I’ll have his round. Get home safe, *mon cher*.” He turns to Dawn, nudges her and slips his arm under hers. “And we need to talk more about those pictures. I know you’re interested, and I have his card.”

Back in the apartment, Clancy taps on Troy’s door. He waits for a response, but nothing comes. He pushes the door open. The room is dark. Troy’s phone sits on the air mattress. For a moment an image of Troy face down in an alley flashes

through Clancy's mind. He recalls the bloodstained handkerchief from the game. No, thinks Clancy. There are a million positive things Troy could be doing. Safe things. Until he has reason to believe otherwise, those are the images he'll focus on.

But right now, he's annoyed. He doesn't like to be ridiculed or to feel like he's on the outside. There is something unnerving to him about when other people know more about a situation than he does. The references he's missed make him want to find things out. He leaves Troy's room and goes to Dawn's. He searches the pile of books on her floor, but in the end, he simply takes the one closest to the door.

Sitting in front of his computer, Clancy skims through stanzas that make little sense to him. After a few minutes, he puts the book down. He opens the top drawer of his desk and pulls out a folded piece of paper. He opens it. 9 Rue Rodier. The letters are big and round, and drawn smoothly in blue ink. He does not know why he has not done this sooner. He opens his computer, types the address in, and waits. A small red marker appears. The map is a gray maze of streets that all curve and slant into each other. He moves the mouse to the bottom left of the screen and changes the viewing mode. Suddenly, colors appear. Pockets of green are interspersed between white and blue quadrants. He is looking down on Paris from above. So these are its houses and trees. He zooms in until the images become bigger and clearer. He zooms until it is as if he were standing there.

The road is darker than he had imagined it would be. Gray brick lines the sidewalk. There are no trees. The only color is the muted blue of closed shutters. The paint on the building's facade appears to be flaking. The most ornate facet of the whole scene is a lamp that hangs over the door. The image shocks him. He had been expecting more beauty.

He leans back and takes a deep breath. In a separate window, he begins searching for plane fares. They aren't overly expensive. He selects an outward flight

departing in a week's time. It is only curiosity. That is what he tells himself. He continues on checking boxes and filling in information. In two years he hasn't taken a day off from work. If he asks, they can't refuse. He tries to imagine what Monica would say if he showed up. She'd never said not to, and she'd left the address with him, not Dan. She'd wanted *him* to have it. She'd wanted to see what he would do with it. He takes his credit card from his wallet, types in his billing information. He stares at the screen, amazed by how easy it actually all is.

"Planning a vacation?"

He turns. Troy is standing there, grinning, and Clancy can't help but feel foolish. Troy springs forward. He waves his arms above his head and hops from one leg to the other. It is like watching a spastic ballet.

"My-hi name is Jacques," Troy says with a mock French accent. When he reaches Clancy, Troy stops his gyrating and reaches out his hand. "How very nice to meets you. Can I int-trez you in my baguette?" Troy thrusts his groin forward. "It is very fresh. My baguette. My name is Jacques."

"Asshole," Clancy says.

"That's a better name for him." Troy folds his arms and leans against the desk. Clancy laughs involuntarily. He is tired.

"Anatole," Clancy says. "In my mind his name's always Anatole."

"Does he have a striped shirt and a pom-pom beret?" asks Troy. "Because if he doesn't, he should, and he should be in Paris for the weekend on leave from some ship stationed in Marseilles."

"The Mets came back and won, you know."

"Oh, did they?" Troy says. It is clear to Clancy that he doesn't believe it.

"No," says Clancy. "They didn't. I just wanted to see if you'd be surprised you were wrong."

"I never am," Troy says.

"Not about high fastballs. Three in a row."

Troy nods, and Clancy notices how the light seems to miss him, how in the shadows he seems a bit more secure, a bit less fragile. "Where did you go?"

"Out," says Troy.

"Me too."

"Night's the hardest," Troy says. "The time slows down." Troy pushes himself from the desk and walks towards the foot of Clancy's bed. "If we exist in it, we're trying to conquer it and stay out for all of it. We try to live in that no-man's land between high and drunk and hung-over. But when you can't fall asleep, night just seems to never end." Troy brushes a bit of hair from in front of his eyes.

"Keep going," Clancy says. "It was just starting to get good."

"If she finds someone better than you, she'll forget you," Troy says. "And if she finds someone who's worse, she won't. You can't control it."

"Unless I go there."

"Will you be better for going there?"

He hates how direct Troy can be. Clancy stares at the split screen of Paris rooftops and the hypothetical flight that is one click away from being a booked reality. He moves the cursor to the *Submit* button. "I don't know."

"That's because you haven't acknowledged the problem."

"What problem?" Clancy scoffs. He turns back to Troy. "I'm not some type of addict."

Troy exhales deeply, rests his hands at the base of his neck and glances up at the ceiling. "Clance 1. Troy 0."

Clancy tries to laugh. "I'm sorry about the ball game."

"I enjoyed it."

“Don’t lie to me.”

“What does it matter?”

“Honesty,” says Clancy.

“Honesty, what?”

“Just tell me these things,” Clancy says. “If there’s a problem, just fucking tell me.”

Clancy waits, but Troy doesn’t respond. He just picks at his fingers and walks back towards the desk.

“Book the ticket,” Troy says. “Just book it. You’re waiting for me to tell you not to, but just book it. Just go. You owe it to yourself.”

“You’re so full of shit,” Clancy says.

“So don’t book it.”

“I’m booking it. I’ll book it right now,” Clancy says as he presses the mouse and clicks on *Submit*. “There.”

“There,” Troy says. He takes Clancy’s glass. He raises it to his nose, swirls it and sniffs. “To you,” Troy says. He drinks quickly, and then he places the tumbler on Clancy’s desk. Troy bends down and gently places his lips against Clancy’s temple for a brief moment before he turns and heads back toward the door.

“I booked it.”

Troy pauses under the doorframe, but he doesn’t turn. “You did,” he says, and then he disappears into the hallway.

VI.

Living with three men will be interesting, thinks Dawn. It's not something she's used to, or something that she really understands. Once again, she's learning on the fly. She's being thrown into a pool without first being asked if she knows how to swim. Her sole reason for going out last night had been to get to know Clancy, but that had vanished as soon as he went home. Her first impression of him was that he is still in love. That is obvious enough. But what had nagged her over the course of the evening was the idea of this Troy character, this seemingly ephemeral fourth that neither Clancy nor Dan seemed ready to discuss.

She removes a sweatshirt from her drawer and pulls it over her head. The loose hem of the fabric brushes against her bare legs as she heads to the door. She stops and turns back to get a pair of sweatpants. She laughs to herself and shimmies into them.

She wonders how she would explain this all to her grandmother. She doubts the scenario would shock her. The woman came of age in the 1960s. She was a flower child, a facsimile of Bridget Bardot in hemp. She was fond of peace marches and Haight-Ashbury love-ins. If anything can be traced from grandmother to mother to daughter, thinks Dawn, it's a propensity for adventure and the need to run and to escape, but from what, exactly?

Dawn stretches her arms above her head and yawns. She walks to the kitchen, where a shirtless figure in a pair of spandex shorts is standing over the sink. He is spreading peanut butter on a slice of bread. When he notices her, he pauses. He gives her a quizzical look and a half smile. Her hair, she thinks. It's probably protruding in all directions. With her free hand, she pats it down quickly, and then she flips up the sweatshirt's hood.

"You look like a gnome," the shirtless boy says.

“A garden one?”

Dan apparently hasn't done too badly for himself. She studies him quickly. His hair is long and wet. Bits of water dot his sloped shoulders. His body is slender, sinewy muscle, and the way he stands, with his back slightly arched and his hips out, gives his waist an almost feminine curve.

“I didn't think anyone else would be up this early,” he says. He places the knife on the counter, lays one piece of bread atop another, and completes his sandwich.

“Normally, I wear pants.”

“Are you one of Dan's?” she asks.

“One of Dan's what?”

She laughs and claps her hands together. “Sorry,” she says. “Sorry. Sorry.”

“If you say so.”

“I do say so.”

“I didn't know I'd been insulted,” he says.

“Just in case,” she says.

“Do you make it a point to randomly insult people early in the morning?”

“Only if they don't have clothes on, while making food in a kitchen,” she says.

“Then I'll have to make sure to never cook and to always be clothed,” he says.

“Solid life philosophy.”

“And yours is?” he asks.

“Never begin talking before the coffee is finished,” she says. She begins to prepare a pot. “So you're the baseball player then?”

He rubs his hand on the back of his neck. “Always seems to be so.”

“Did you like it?”

“It was a job. Like most.”

“Clearly, it's a common profession.”

“More common than you might think.”

“Where did you play?” she asks.

“Out West,” Troy says. He squats down and opens a drawer. He pulls out a roll of tin foil and tears off a piece. It crinkles in his hands. “Some place in California with a glorious name,” he says, sarcastically. “The,” he pauses. He looks at her from his crouch as though he’s trying to heighten the dramatic effect of what is to come, “Inland Empire. What a magical way of saying dirt and desert.”

“You make it sound like hell.”

“Hell would have been a vacation.”

“Hell is other people,” she says.

“You could compare it to Sartre,” he says.

“Could you?”

“Depends on what you’re willing to compare?”

Yes, she thinks. It does depend doesn’t it? Because whenever people asked her where she was from, she told them just outside of Los Angeles or near the beaches. All of them were places people could easily recognize, or easily conjure in their minds. She figured it was close enough. There was a bit of truth in it. No one knew the area well enough to push it any further. No one ever cared enough to pry below the superficial questions about Venice Beach and Beverly Hills and Hollywood. She never wanted to admit that she lived on the outside of all of that.

“Do you still play?” she asks.

“Play?” He takes a napkin from the counter and dabs at his nose. “Past life.”

“I think I was Cleopatra in mine.”

“So who was better, Caesar or Marc Anthony?”

“I preferred the slaves,” she says. “They didn’t ask for anything in return.”

“Touché,” he says. “What do you do?”

“Office drudgery by day,” she says. “Grad classes by night.”

“How the mighty have fallen,” he says.

“You have to do something after you lose an empire.”

“I know.” Troy cradles his sandwiches in his hand. “It must be tragic.”

“Do you have any other skills besides baseball and the ability to catch quick allusions to esoteric topics?”

“Other than making balloon animals at children’s birthday parties, no.”

“Too bad,” she says. “Because the coffee’s almost ready.”

“Never found caffeine to be strong enough,” he says. “Thanks, though.”

“Well,” she says. “Let’s continue this sometime.”

He nods, and she feels him slip by her. She wonders if he would know Mount Rubidoux, if he might have driven past it during the night and seen the illuminated statue on top of it. She wonders if he has ever walked through Fairmount Park, or stopped by its man-made lake to throw breadcrumbs to the geese.

“Hey,” she calls. “Why was it so bad?”

He stops and turns to her. “So bad?”

“That place. What about it was so bad?”

“The desert,” he says. “I hated the desert. Everything there is fucking dead.”

The cemetery is nearly empty today. The weather, no doubt, is keeping people away. The clouds that Troy noticed forming during his morning run have become darker now, and he can’t imagine why, if given the choice, most people would visit graves on a day when it might storm. The dead would understand. They’re not going anywhere anytime soon.

When he reaches his father’s headstone, he squats down and rakes the soil with his fingers. He digs a small flag into the dirt. He pulls his two sandwiches from

the pouch of his sweatshirt, an old LA Dodger one that he still likes to wear because it is comfortable and warm. He places one sandwich next to the flag and peels away a bit of foil on the second. He bites. Dry peanut butter sticks to the top of his mouth. It is difficult to swallow. He should have brought something to drink. He stops eating and wraps what is left of the sandwich before he rests it on the gravestone, stands up and turns to go. He wonders what the caretakers will think when they come across the half eaten sandwich and the bit of foil. Some might laugh at the offering. Perhaps they might find something tender about it.

With his head down, Troy walks along the small sidewalk that lines the turnpike. He has no desire to look around. There is no sense of relief or of release on these streets. What he feels, instead, is abandonment. Coming back here has been nothing more than a constant reminder of everything that is gone. Lifting his eyes from the pavement, he notices a large, green space not far from him. Until now, he has never realized how close these two places are to each other.

He leaves the sidewalk and walks toward the chain-link backstop, past the first base dugout, and out onto the vast expanse of damp grass. He can feel the ground give way as he crosses the infield before he slowly climbs up onto the mound.

The pitching rubber has been removed. The fall season must be over by now. He steps over the mound's crest and stands on its back slope. The outfield goes on endlessly. They still haven't put up the fence continually promised to them since his freshman year of high school. He takes it in. He's forgotten how it feels to stand on a mound and look out at something that goes on forever. There was something both freeing and disheartening about playing on a field that just kept going. It lacked the integrity of limits and parameters. It gave the illusion of things being unending.

He imagines Clancy out in center, his body tense and ready to gallop off at the first sign of a ball in his direction. Troy can see him sprinting, gliding across the

outfield as far as he needs to go, with nothing to stop him or slow him down. They had all had nicknames in high school. They had always been given out by the older players based upon performance, or lack thereof. He thinks of Clancy's first at bat as a junior. He'd struck out on three pitches. He didn't swing once, and when he came back into the dugout, a senior had yelled: *Next time, don't look like you're going to cry*. From that moment on, Clancy was "Tear Drop." It was to be written under the brim of his hat as a constant reminder of an embarrassing at bat. Troy had gotten his own a year prior. As a sophomore on the varsity, he'd struck out the side in his first-ever appearance. He'd needed only nine pitches to do it. It had been "Perfect." And then, so was he.

Troy nods out to center field. He tips an imaginary cap, turns, and climbs onto the rubber-less mound as a drop of water falls onto the back of his neck. He wipes it away and gazes towards the vacant backstop. He sets himself, and then he pauses. He steps back from where the rubber would be. He tilts his head to the left. He runs his eyes along the bleachers, to the fourth row bench that abuts the staircase, and he smiles. He can see his father there. He is sitting with his arms folded across his chest. His own cap is pushed up to reveal his full face and ruddy cheeks. He can hear his father's voice clearly over the din of everything else: *Deep breath. Don't get ahead of yourself. One pitch at a time*. The same voice that, during car rides home, never focused on the positives or the good things. It always highlighted what needed to be improved. *You should know by now what you did well*, he can hear his father say in the cramped confines of their car. *I'm not going to bullshit you. If you ask me how you did, I'm going to tell you*.

Decent, could have always been better. He was always on the cusp, and then, when there was finally a moment to be celebrated, to be taken and held, his father was gone. And when all the "Local Boy Makes Good" articles were written, there

were always a handful of somber lines relating how unfortunate it was that Troy Stefany's father had suffered a brain aneurism on a Tuesday morning in April.

It's raining harder now. He can feel the drops against his head and the base of his neck, but then, as if on cue, Troy blocks it all out. He feels nothing. He sees nothing except for a single spot sixty feet and six inches away. He begins to rock back. There is a comfort in that. One, two, three, four, five, explode. He whips his arm forward. He hears the whoosh of it cutting through the air before the torque of his body propels his back leg around so that he's standing at the base of the mound. He hears the curt pop of ball to mitt. He climbs back up on the mound, sets himself again, and follows the routine so ingrained in him: step, turn, rise, break, explode. Whoosh.

Raindrops fall onto his head and his face. Strands of his hair cling to his forehead and cheeks, but he brushes it all away. He keeps going through his motion. He keeps throwing his phantom pitches to his phantom catcher, while his phantom team behind him calls out phantom words of support. The heavy rain will begin soon. He glances towards center field. It doesn't matter. He wants to pitch.

Soon the rain has darkened his sweatshirt and made it heavy. It sticks to his arms and back. He takes it off and tosses it next to the mound. The rain is cold. He gazes around the park. There is nothing but the grass and the dirt. He's alone. He takes off his shoes, and then he loosens his jeans. They fall to his ankles. He steps out of them and kicks them off next to his sweatshirt.

Was it worth throwing everything into the fire? Was it worth offering up most of the normal things in life to a pyre that left him with nothing but ash? He would like to know what it meant to have been young and carefree, but this is what he knows. He knows how to be "Perfect."

Naked, he toes the non-existent rubber and begins his wind-up again. He can feel the mud slip between his toes, under the arch of his foot, and against the side of his heel as he twists and turns and explodes once more towards home plate to deliver pitches so wicked, and so nasty, that no one will ever be able to put them into play. He looks around the field. The rain won't matter today. Nothing will matter today. His eyes move around the diamond before he nods in towards his catcher and stares in over his outstretched hands. The rain isn't bothering them. It's just a bit of rain. They can play through it. They can just take it one pitch at a time. Deep breath. Explode. Whoosh.

Part 2.

"All life is just a progression toward, and then a regression from, one phrase—"I love you."

F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Offshore Pirate"

VII.

Staring out the large bay window in the common room of the apartment, Dawn watches the droplets of water catch against the panes. They slide together and streak along the glass in tiny rivulets. Even in such a small space, the fact that four people can constantly miss each other astounds her. Clancy is gone. He is off to Paris on a whim, and Troy, well, except for last Sunday when he returned to the apartment with a plastic bag full of wet clothes, she hasn't seen much of him either. Perhaps it's scheduling. Perhaps it's the fact that New York is so insular that even roommates are strangers to each other.

In their planning, she and Dan hadn't accounted for rain. Still, this hasn't dampened Dan, who, before he ran out for last-minute supplies, turned the common room into a faux-meadow. He decorated it with vases of flowers and bowls of potpourri. Then he blanketed a checkered tablecloth across the bare, wooden floor, and topped it all off with a wicker basket filled with hotel minibar style bottles of liquor. Dawn half-expects him to come through the apartment door like a modern-day Pan, playing a lute and trawling a line of dancing followers behind him.

On the street below her, people scurry with their bags and parcels and groceries. Some carry umbrellas. Others fold newspapers above their heads. Some have no protection at all. Eventually, she can make out Dan's familiar form as he appears around a corner. A bag in one hand, his free arm shields his face from her eyes. His gait is undeniable.

Dan bursts into the apartment's narrow hallway. "Last minute details!" He flings off his scarf and shakes his hair like a soaked dog before he ruffles it with his

hands. He shuffles over to her and takes her by the arm. He pulls her into the kitchen. "People will be here soon. We need to prepare."

He has a baguette, a variety of cheeses, apples and pears and grapes. "I'm not letting Clancy think he's upping us by being in Paris," he says.

He takes a knife from the drawer and holds it out to her. "Make nice thick pieces. We're going to feast, and we're going to take pictures, and we're going to make lover boy jealous he's missing this. So what if he has the Eiffel Tower. It's only a bunch of riveted steel."

"It's romantic," she says and cuts the pear.

Dan takes a plate from above the sink and places it next to her. He plops a bunch of grapes down in the middle. He bends over, pulls the remaining fruit from the bag, and places it on the counter. He's making an assembly line for her to work her way through. "If you ask me, which you didn't, but I don't care. He and Monica, it was just fucking with emotion."

"You're cruel," she says.

"I'm honest. He didn't know what to do with it."

"The fucking?" asks Dawn.

"The emotion," says Dan.

"Do any of us?"

With a deft flick of his hand, he slides the baguette from its bag and catches it in his free hand. He takes another knife and slices the bread into smaller pieces.

"Love, love, love, needs to cut, cut, cut the fruit," Dan says.

"Just because she left doesn't mean she didn't care," says Dawn.

"Right," says Dan. "She's just been overwhelmed and hasn't had a chance to send flowers yet."

“That’s not fair. People have lives and dreams. Sometimes they get in the way of things.”

“Darling, I don’t know if you’re the most romantic cynic I know, or if you’re the most cynical Romantic that I’ve ever met.

“What about her?”

“*What* about her?”

“The Russian Heroine.”

“She’s not diving under any trains in the near future.”

“And that means?”

“How should I know what that means,” Dan says. “It means what it means.”

“And here I’m always looking for a deeper meaning.”

“That’s because you believe there are deeper meanings in things.”

“There are always reasons.” She begins to cut the next piece of fruit. There is something about his opinions she doesn’t like. It is as though they are mean simply for the sake of being mean.

“Reasons are value judgments,” says Dan. “Paris was more valuable than he was. Plain and simple.”

“And I’m the cynic,” Dawn says. She puts down the knife. “You think it’s that simple? That it’s a matter of worth?”

“Isn’t everything a matter of worth?”

“Not everything.”

“Name one thing that isn’t.”

“Children,” Dawn says. She refuses to think that there is nothing in the world that people wouldn’t sacrifice for, and Dan’s dismissal of it all angers her. She doesn’t want to believe he can be so cynical, or that, perhaps, everything she has tried to assign to certain situations was only blissful naiveté on her part.

“Wouldn’t know about the children. Don’t have any,” says Dan. “And since when do you have maternal instincts?” He pauses. “Why are you laughing?”

“I’m not laughing,” she says through a giggle. She has no idea why she finds herself suddenly giggling like an idiot. She shouldn’t be. She doesn’t find this funny, but it is as if some nervous energy has overtaken her. It has arrived from nowhere, and it is beyond her control.

“Quick!” says Dan. “You’re cracking up.”

Dan takes a towel from the counter. He runs it under water and presses it to her forehead. “I guess we’ve found our true Russian heroine.”

“Have we?” She snatches the towel from him and flicks him with it. He jumps away from her and yelps playfully as the towel connects against his backside.

“If this is what talking about children does to you, don’t ever have any,” says Dan. The buzzer to the apartment rings, and he heads off down the hallway. “Don’t you die on me now. I’m not having your sense of theater wreck my afternoon.”

Two hours later they are all a bit drunk. Being inside has turned out better than Dawn could have ever imagined. Everyone seems willing to play their part to make it seem that they are actually outside in a park. It has been hysterical to watch how Dan has christened the various parts of the room as flora and fauna. He’s taken a pen and paper, and he’s labeled everything. The bookcase is an old oak. The couch is a field of daisies. The chairs lining the far wall are a copse of maples. The hard wood floor is a grand lawn scattered with baguette crumbs, stained paper plates, and empty bottles of wine.

Dawn has lost herself in the moment. She finds herself enjoying it all. She has managed to mostly forget the child comment. She has gotten herself into character.

She finds herself pretending that the lawn could be some modern Versailles. They all have nothing better to do but sit and be pretty. They own the world.

With her and Dan are Jonah, Cait, and Sarah. They are all people she knows of through school. She wonders if Troy might join, but she feels no need to find him at the moment. The dynamic is fine. She doesn't need to spoil it, and he doesn't strike her as the kind who needs an invitation to join something he wants to be a part of.

Besides, Jonah has sidled up next to her. They lean shoulder to shoulder, and in this way they keep each other from falling. She likes the feel of his body against hers. It seems to support both of them as they sit. He's wearing a gray V-neck T-shirt that reveals the patchy tufts of hair that cover his chest. His brown pants are tight, but he sports them with confidence. He's attractive enough, with his buzzed head, blue eyes, and sloping nose.

"Smile, you two," Cait says from her spot next to Dan.

Dawn shifts her head to the side. She meets the lens with her eyes and lifts the side of her mouth into a grin. She can feel the scruff of Jonah's scalp chafe her neck as he snuggles up next to her.

"Cute," Cait says as she examines the result.

"Dan gave me the card of his photographer friend the other day," Dawn says.

"You're interested in that type of thing?" Jonah asks.

"Dawn's very daring," Dan chimes in.

"Not daring. Just curious."

"You strike me as daring," Jonah says.

"Yes, Dawn could paddle down the Amazon," Dan says. "An adventurer like our dear Clancy. Running after his love."

"Byronic," Dawn says.

“The boy is no Byron,” says Dan. “Dawn is *Unbearable’s* Teresa, and I’m Lord Sebastian Flyte, but we haven’t figured out who our Clancy is yet.”

“And I bet not from lack of trying,” says Cait.

“A fruitless, long, wasted endeavor,” says Dan.

“Who am I?” Jonah asks.

“A man swallowed by a fish,” says Dan. His words are accompanied by the loud banging of the apartment’s door.

“Troh-hoy,” Dan coos. “Come say hi to everyone.” Dan mouths softly, “He’s shy. He’s our *guest* at the moment.”

Troy enters the room wearing no shirt, with his wet hair matted to his forehead. The muscles of his stomach and chest contract and relax visibly with every breath he takes, and Dawn wonders what, exactly, his aversion to covering himself up might be.

“Do you ever wear clothes?” Dawn sarcastically says. She pushes herself towards Jonah.

“My, my,” Dan says.

“We met the other day,” Dawn says. “Apparently living here is like being in hell.”

“Are we really *that* bad?” Dan pretends to be insulted. “I mean living here can be a kind of endless purgatory, but a hell? I wouldn’t go that far.”

“What are you cleansing your soul for?” Cait asks.

“Eternal paradise,” says Dan. “Perhaps an escape to Bora Bora or Tahiti or Portland.”

“Fitting trio,” Troy says.

“I thought so,” Dan says. “Cait, take a picture of him before he runs away and dresses.”

“Done,” Cait says as she lifts the camera to her eyes.

“You were much more entertaining last time,” says Dawn.

“Do you always use the rain as an excuse to take your clothes off?” Sarah asks.

Troy shakes his head. Flakes of water fly from his hair. “It wasn’t raining when I went out running,” he says.

“It’s been raining all morning,” Jonah says.

“Tilt your head to the side and say something like ‘Obsession,’” Cait says.

“Is this a cologne commercial?” asks Dan.

“What are you running from?” asks Dawn.

“Everything.”

“Oh, profound,” says Dan.

“You training for something?” Jonah says.

“Troy was drafted,” Dan says.

“We still do that?” Jonah asks. “Afghanistan or Iraq?”

“And the award for the dumbest comment of the afternoon goes to...” Sarah says.

“Baseball,” Dawn hears herself say. “He played professional baseball.”

“Professionally?” Jonah says. “Where?”

“California.”

“Dawn,” Dan says with a smile, “aren’t *you* from California?”

“Just outside L.A.”

“Really?” Troy says.

“See, I knew you were adventurous,” Jonah says. “That’s a pretty big move coming all the way here from there.” He slides his hand so that its edge grazes against hers.

“Are you just going to keep standing in the doorway?” Sarah playfully mocks.

“Fine with me,” Cait says.

“There’s beer in the little fridge,” Dan says. “Apparently Clancy has been hoarding it away while he’s been in Paris. Go dry off and join us.”

“Wait. One more.” Cait snaps another photo as Sarah and Dan laugh.

Troy shakes his head shyly and wipes water from his brow. “You’re going to delete those, right?”

Cait smirks slyly, and Troy turns around and heads back down the hallway.

“What team does the cabana boy play for?” Cait asks Dan.

“Not mine, sadly,” says Dan.

“I think she meant pro,” Dawn says.

“No,” says Cait. “He understood me.”

“Watch out,” Jonah says. “Before he starts taking his pants off.” Dawn catches a bit of jealousy in his voice.

“I wouldn’t mind,” Cait says.

“Hussy,” Dan says. “Are you going to hoard those photos or share them with the rest of us?”

“Depends on how nice you are to me,” says Cait.

“Then keep the photos. Dawn and I have the real thing,” Dan says.

“Aren’t we lucky?” says Dawn.

“Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth,” says Cait.

“Was that supposed to be funny?” asks Dawn.

“I have no idea what she’s talking about.” Cait looks at her camera. “Dan, do you think Martin would like these?”

Dan leans over to look at the images. “Perhaps. He’s always looking.”

“So your other roommate’s in Paris?” Jonah asks.

"C'est la vie," says Dan. "I want to go to Tahiti."

"Dan saw *South Pacific* once," Dawn says.

"Five times, dear. Five times and counting."

"I want to go to Peru," says Sarah.

"They eat guinea pigs there," says Cait. "Why do you want to eat guinea pigs?"

"I said I want to go to Peru," Sarah says. "I didn't say I wanted to eat guinea pigs there."

"When in Rome," says Dan.

"That's what I'd take," says Jonah. "Rome and wine."

"Boring," says Sarah.

"At least I won't have to eat guinea pig," says Jonah.

"I went to Barcelona in college," says Cait. "The men were amazing."

"Go back," says Jonah.

"Gladly," Cait says.

"Dawn is all quiet in the corner," says Dan.

"Where would you go, Dawn," asks Jonah.

"Prague," she says. "I'd go to Prague."

"Yes," Dan says. "You *would* go to Prague."

"What does that mean?" Dawn asks.

"Show off," Jonah jokes.

"How is Prague more showing off than Tahiti or Peru?" Dawn asks.

"It sounds esoteric," Jonah says.

"What is esoteric about Prague?" Dawn says.

"What do you call people from Prague?" asks Sarah.

"Is that a joke?" Cait asks.

"Praguers," says Dawn.

"No, really," Jonah says.

"It's Praguers," Dawn says.

"That's ridiculous," says Cait.

"Oh, leave the girl alone," Dan says. "If she wants to call them Praguers, let her call them Praguers."

"And your Clancy is in Paris drinking wine and reading Hemingway," says Dawn.

"Hyper-masculine bullshit," says Cait.

"What's wrong with hyper-masculine?" asks Dan.

"Nothing," Dawn says. "Cait just has a problem with bullshit."

"Wise beyond her years, isn't she?" says Cait.

"Precocious," says Dawn.

"It's about people sitting around feeling sorry for themselves and being bored," Cait continues. "Grow up."

"It's existential," Dawn says.

"Is Hemingway existential?" Cait asks. "How existential is a guy without balls?"

"Very," Jonah says.

"Dead white men," Sarah quips.

"Agreed," says Jonah. "You don't buy a classic anymore unless you've been told to."

"Don't you believe in them, though?" asks Dawn.

"Believe in whom?" asks Jonah.

"Dawn believes in things," says Dan.

"I believe in the naked, wet one," Cait says, looking at her camera.

"Hush," Dan says and pokes her in the shoulder.

"Truth. Beauty. Love," says Dawn.

“All with capital letters?” Jonah says.

“And if I do?”

“Then you are a better person than all of us,” Dan says. “Teresa-Dawn, my love.”

“How do you want to die?” asks Jonah. “Isn’t it funny how we’ve all chosen a field where you’re remembered most for the way you die? Hemingway, Plath, Wallace.”

“The list goes on,” Cait says.

“Non sequitur much?” asks Dan.

“Happy,” says Dawn. “You know my birthday’s this week,” Dawn says and the room laughs.

“That would be a way to go out,” Cait says. “It would make the gravestone look funny.”

“We should get you a cake,” Jonah says. “When is it?”

“Wednesday.” She watches as his face registers the date. Then, she stands up. “You can make me crème brûlée.”

“Wait, Dawn. Cait hasn’t told us how she hopes to die,” Dan says. “But I bet it’s in the arms of the boy in the camera she’s still staring at.”

“You should tell Martin about him, Dan,” Cait says. “You should see how *he* photographs. Where is that boy, anyway,” Cait says. “I thought he was coming back.”

“I’ll check,” Dawn says. “I’m already up.”

Dawn goes to the kitchen and pours herself a glass of water from the kitchen tap. She drinks it quickly, and then she heads down to Troy’s room. She knocks gently before poking her head around the already partially opened door.

Troy sits on his mattress. The top of his head is under his blue sweatshirt hood, and the most recent issue of *The New Yorker* hides all but his eyes from view.

"I know where you live," she says. He doesn't look up from the pages, but she thinks she can see the skin around his eyes tighten, as though the hidden, lower half of his face is in the process of forming a smile. "Want to come out? You're missing a good time."

"Nothing screams 'good time' like a bunch of people sitting around and talking about ways to die." His eyes do not leave the magazine.

"Try," she says. "You might be surprised."

"I saw it all the time when I visited Clancy in college. All the empty talk. If you shut your eyes, you can't even tell the difference between who is talking and who has stopped."

"Excuse us for talking."

He places the magazine on the bed next to half a sandwich and something else that she can't quite make out. He picks up a book from the floor. It's her collection of Zagajewski. "I'm from a place that respects results," he says. "Not mindless talk."

"And people respect *you*?" she asks.

His body stiffens for a moment. He puts the book on top of the magazine and reaches for what looks like a badge lying next to the sandwich. He cradles it in his hands and looks down.

"They used to," he says. He's staring at his feet like a toddler being scolded, and this sudden vulnerability is not something she is prepared for. She had expected him to fight back.

"Where in L.A. are you from?" he asks. "If I may?"

"A little inland," she says.

"Inland where?"

"Empire," she says. "The I.E."

"That's not L.A.," he says.

"No, it's not L.A.," she replies, a bit taken aback by his knowledge of the area.

"How did you know they were called Praguers?" Troy asks. "They are. It sounds funny, but they are."

"My mother sent me a postcard from there, once."

"Did she travel much?"

"From time to time," Dawn says.

"She ever take you with her?"

Dawn thinks of all the picture postcards, and of the soft, looping cursive writing on them that had been nearly impossible for her to read when she was a child.

"We're planning a trip," she says. "And you pride yourself on asking actual questions? Ones where people can give actual answers?"

Troy reaches down into his bag and rummages around. "Did you ever think that they had friends who were mad at them, your idols?" He holds out a handful of folded money. "I was going to offer this to Clancy."

"Come out," she says. "You can start an uncomfortable catfight."

"That sounds promising."

"Or do you not think that your sincere questions can keep up with the acerbic, hipster one-upmanship?"

"I was wondering why you all always seemed to sound exactly the same," he says.

"Do we?" she asks. True, there is much similarity to their banter, but she is, in her way, just playing along. She would like to believe that at some point it has the potential to move from superficial to meaningful. Even her conversations with Dan, like the one in the kitchen before everyone else arrived, have existed on the surface for too long.

"You do," he says.

"Isn't that wonderfully direct and earnest?"

"Was that meant ironically?"

"No. It wasn't. I could use an ally, or maybe an excuse for a real conversation.

That is if you don't mind keeping your shirt on for a while," she says and smiles, thinking a bit of flirtation might help the matter.

"You know the bad part of allies is that you end up relying on them too much," he says.

"Are you unreliable?"

"Stay here a minute and find out?"

She weighs his question. She would like to, but she knows that with everyone else in the other room, she can't. Disappearing in here, with him, would be taken the wrong way, and she doesn't want to give anyone that ammunition. Still, there is a part of her that would like to just sit down here and talk without the need to seemingly say something snarky in response to every meaningful comment offered. "That would be rude, to them I mean."

"Right, too many other people counting on you to come back," he says.

"Maybe later?" she says and waits.

"Perhaps," he says after a while.

"Do you ever deal in absolutes?"

"Maybe," he says, before burying his eyes back in his magazine. She has to fight back the urge to smile.

"Quick learner," she says, softly enough to leave him the option of answering or not, before she takes one step back and heads down the hallway.

In the room nothing has changed. They are all sitting and talking, apparently already closing whatever gap in the conversation circle her departure caused, and

she wonders if they even noticed her absence, so fluid and fast is the conversation still. At times, she doubts that she is even necessary in this grand performance of friendship they all seem to occasionally share. "Is there any wine left?" she asks, her hand clenched tight around the money she's been given.

VIII.

In the past, Troy would have said it was because he was competitive, and that's how he hopes others would've described his sudden fits of mood and temper. He wants to believe people chalked it all up to a passionate nature, and that they dismissed whatever petulance he might have thrown their way as a necessary streak in those who were *driven*. He *had* to be completely focused, completely on point, and completely *ruthless*. Because if he wasn't, there might be somebody else somewhere who wasn't resting, or who was hungrier. And if he eventually met them, he would lose and they would win. So he had kept going. He could never stop. He could never slow down. He was chasing an idea of an idea that always seemed slightly beyond his grasp and control. Still, he worked and worked. And he never stopped, but despite never stopping, and despite constantly pushing himself to the brink, and then even further, eventually, in the end, he never got to where he thought he might.

Now he assumes his cut-throat aura was probably why the organization put up with his rages and his tempers, and why it wasn't until the outbreak of sudden nosebleeds that those around him began to suspect the cause for his rage was something more than a lust for the game. But that life is over. Anger can only keep a body going so long.

He'd run past this farmers market last week and took note of it. Now, he navigates his way through narrow canals that separate one vendor from another. He has an idea of what he will make. He searches for the specific ingredients he will need. He runs through the list in his head as he makes his way from one vendor to the next: linguine, olive oil, semolina, mozzarella and pecorino, fresh garlic and basil. His bag slowly fills as one item after the next is collected. At a stand devoted entirely to tomatoes, he pauses. He takes a tomato from the pile and lets it rest in the palm of his hand. He feels the weight of it against his calloused fingers, and then he cradles it

between the sideways “V” created by his pointer, middle finger, and thumb. He imagines it has seams. He shifts the grip in his hand: four-seamer, two-seamer, cutter, curve, change-up, and then he drops it in his plastic bag. He reaches for a few more before he continues on to the far end of the market. There, he locates the dairy and cream and sugar and eggs, which if he remembers correctly, is basically everything that the recipe requires.

IX.

With a crumpled piece of paper in one hand and his phone in the other, Clancy navigates through Paris. He's packed lightly. He has a few pairs of clothes that he shoved hastily in the backpack slung over his shoulder. He hadn't expected the weather, the violent wind and the cold that rides on its back. He hadn't taken the time to plan. He felt prepared in that he had surprise on his side, but now he wonders if this has been some grand mistake. What if she refuses to see him? What if she leaves him calling up through an intercom from the wind-swept Parisian street? What if she isn't even there? Would it really be so bad to arrive and find her out? To have her never know he'd come?

Part of him wishes he had Troy here with him now. He used to confide in Troy at the beginning. Prior to Monica, he'd only been able to recall the naked body of one other girl, a prom-night encounter that was over almost right after it began, but which, nonetheless, rid him of his virginity, which he'd wanted gone before moving away from home. He knew Monica had more, many more, and though his own inexperience, his own lack of a body count, shouldn't have intimidated him, it always had.

Clancy scans over the names written in cursive. "Laue" is the fourth from the bottom, but he doesn't press it. He reaches out towards the door. It is heavy and more like the gate to a fortress than the entrance to a home, but he tries it. He pushes at the door. Surprisingly, it gives way, and he steps into a small courtyard of uneven cobblestones that lead to yet another door, which, like the front one, is also unlocked. It's almost too easy. It feels like a trap.

He climbs the spiral staircase towards the fifth floor. He knocks. From inside, he hears a muffled French response. The voice is foreign. His watch reads 3:47 AM Eastern Standard Time. He has never heard Monica speak French before.

When the door slides open, he notices her hair first. She's cut it. Her long, amber hair has been chopped to her ears and dyed black. He wants to reach out and touch it. He wants to know if it feels the same. Her eyes are still blue, but if she is surprised to see him, her expression does not reveal it. Perhaps she has been warned. Her haircut accents her neck, and his own eyes move quickly from hers to the robe covering her chest, where the letters Y-S-L intertwine above her left breast.

"Well," she says. "*Bonjour, mon ami.*" Her voice is an octave higher than what he is used to, softer in this language, and yet much, much colder.

"Am I interrupting?" asks Clancy. He is nervous. There is a heaviness in his stomach that seems to be slowly rising up into his chest and pushing its way into his throat. He has missed her, but couldn't he have just written an email or an old-fashioned letter? And the robe, it is a soft sky-blue. She is beautiful in it, in an almost ridiculously, stereotypically Home and Garden catalogue sort of way.

"What would you be interrupting?"

"I don't know. In case," he nods weakly towards the lettering on her chest. "In case Y-S-L is in there."

Her lips stretch into a full smile. She takes a step back inside the apartment before motioning with her hand for him to follow her.

Stepping into the small kitchen, he can smell the hint of coffee brewing. The walls are white and sterile and bare, save for a small, framed print of wavy, Impressionistic flowers above the stove.

"I like the painting," he says. "Vuhn Go?"

"Van Gogh," she says, almost coughing out the final syllable into a k-sound.

He tries to force his gaze upward, but his eyes drop to the floor in front of her.

"Was that the reason?" he asks.

She smiles. "When did I become the kind of person who puts a 'K' at the end of Van Gogh's name?"

"When weren't you?"

"If I'd known you'd be dropping by, I'd have made enough for two cups." She folds her arms across her chest. Her fingers pull the loosening robe taut against her skin. She is thinner than he remembers.

He looks at her neck, how long it seems in the robe. When she swallows he can make out every muscle tensing. He wonders if she is nervous; he doubts it. She is in her element here. He is the one in unfamiliar territory. He would like to be brave enough to take her in his arms and say something profound. He tries to imagine what Troy would do in this situation, but he knows that Troy would have never lowered himself by flying here. He knows his friend would have silently waited for the woman to come back to him, and if she didn't, he would have found another one. "I should've called."

"And ruined the chance of catching me and Y-S-L? Never."

"That quickly," he says. "Impressive, even for you."

"You're a strange boy. You know that?"

"Don't call me that."

"What?"

"Boy."

Monica shakes her head. She pours a bit of coffee into a mug onto whose side is stenciled 'I Heart NY!' "Has something been removed since we last met?"

"Just you," he says. It jumps out before he can catch it. He needs to get himself under control, but the boy comment angers him. He has always hated when she called him a boy, and he hates it now more than ever because it seems to speak to a gap in experience and understanding between them that he has never been able

to bridge. She is a woman, arrived, capable, sexual. She has agency. And he is a boy. A mere, simple, reliant boy. Not fully formed. Comic in a way. Hearing it again, here, makes him wonder if she ever took him seriously at all or if he was just a childish fling for her before she moved onto cosmopolitan men that outpace and outstrip him in every possible way.

“Even now, there’s no joking with you, Clance.”

“So, no Y-S-L?” he asks, not knowing if he wants, or is ready for, the answer.

“Yves Saint-Laurent?” She places the mug on the countertop. “You always jumped to that conclusion with everything, didn’t you?”

“Well, look at you.”

“What does that mean, ‘Look at me’?” Her voice is pointed and terse.

“You’re in a monogrammed robe, and the monogram isn’t yours.”

She shakes her head, pegs him with her gaze, and again tugs the robe’s fabric against her body. “You’re incredible, you know that? Absolutely incredible. I work in *fashion*. I just got out of the shower, and I wasn’t expecting a sudden guest. And at the risk of having to put your mind at ease for the thousandth time, Y-S-L, as you call him, is not only dead, but he was probably even gayer than Dan.”

“So you’re not seeing anyone?” He knows it is wrong to ask, but a part of him needs to know, because he is hoping that even if she has left him, she might still, at least, be single. He does not want to have been replaced that easily, that quickly, or worse, did it begin while they were still together? Was she planning it the entire time while he foolishly believed in a possible future for them?

“You flew to Paris to talk about my sex life? Has Brooklyn become that boring?” She goes to the cupboard and takes a second cup. She pours the little remaining coffee from the pot into it. She holds the cup out to him. “You look tired.”

“Don’t worry about me.” He places his hands in his pockets.

"Take the coffee," she says.

"You don't have enough for two cups," he says.

"Sit down," she says. "It's surreal to see you."

"Surreal?"

"I never imagined it," she says. It is like a blow to the chest, how such an innocent phrase can betray her entire state of mind. It reminds him of how expendable he must have actually been.

"Of course you didn't imagine that the *boy* would come to Paris."

"I didn't mean it like that," she says, and for a moment she seems to soften. She almost looks like she wants to comfort him, and he wishes that she would.

"No?"

"It was complicated," she says, regaining her composure.

"Was it?"

"Yes."

"Because I had a choice?" Clancy says. "Complicated implies a choice."

"It was—"

"Complicated. Oh, you've made that very clear. Yes, very complicated." He pushes his hands down into his pockets. He should have taken the coffee. His hands are an excess weight. He doesn't know what to do with them. Her eyes come up to his own, and in them he can see a faint hint of the girl he remembers, one who is pleading with him to stop this, not because she is too weak to fight him, but because she already knows she will win. Her eyes stay fixed to his, and she pulls the robe tighter around her torso.

"You want to know everything, don't you?" she says. "You always wanted to know everything. Will knowing everything make it any better? Did it ever make

anything better? Is that why you came? Because you wanted to prove something? Clance, you're so easy to see through."

"Perhaps. I don't know," he says, and he isn't sure. All he knows is that he is losing control and that he is watching whatever bit of dignity he might have possessed leave him as the situation progresses. "Maybe."

"It was after. Not before," Monica says. "David."

"David," he says. His hands have found their way back up to his chin, and they rub at the skin there. His hands remind him that he *is* there. That he *is* full, solid, and real. That *this*, a conversation he's played out and practiced so many times alone during his sleepless nights, is not a dry run. It is full immersion, and he is drowning. "I was expecting something much more."

"You always were."

"I was expecting something much more Gallic. Like Anatole or Jacques or Chartreuse even, but David," he says. "So ordinary."

"I can call him Pierre if you want."

"Since when is this about what I want?"

"It isn't," she says with a firm finality from which he knows she will never budge. She will no longer be kind to him. She will no longer try, in any way, to take his feelings into account.

"I see that."

"Should I not be honest?"

"Why start now?"

"Clancy, really."

"Really, what, Monica?"

"It hasn't been easy," she says, and then adds, "For me."

"New city. New life. New everything. My heart aches for you," he says.

“I didn’t come here for that,” she says. “It was never about that. It was never about you.”

“You’ve made that quite clear, but thank you. Your kindness knows no bounds.”

“You can be such a child.”

“Just because,” he says. “Just because I’m not *fucking* some Frenchman, doesn’t make me a child. Just because, I haven’t fucked half the island of Manhattan, doesn’t make me a child.” He watches her tilt her head forward. She swallows hard.

“This is the last time I’ll listen to that,” she says. “Please leave.”

His breath is short. He can’t catch it. “I,” he starts before pausing to inhale one short, hearty puff that stalls in his chest. “I wish you all the happiness in the world.” And, in a way, he does. He wants to mean it. He wants to believe so badly that he is capable of that, and that he is being honest both with himself and with her, this woman across the room, who somehow seemed closer to him when she was still an ocean away.

“Are you happy now?” she asks. “You flew 5,000 miles for this? I would have asked you to go to dinner like mature *adults*.”

“Fuck you.”

“Leave,” she says. Her voice is quiet. Her words are gentle, yet forceful. They possess all the reserve and strength and composure he wishes he was capable of mustering. She hasn’t lost her self-respect.

“Fine,” he says. His voice is nothing more than a whisper. “Enjoy life with David.”

Even now, he cannot stop. He does not register her as he leaves, he just slams the door shut behind him.

Clancy can't process anything. His mind is cluttered. He is in Paris. He has seen Monica probably for the last time. He has slept briefly in Sacre Coeur. He needs to do something in this city, but what? Strangely enough, he does not feel beaten, but optimistic. If she can start over, so can he. It begins now. Right now. He is done worrying about other people. He's going to start worrying about himself and only himself. He is going to be his own reason for happiness, and he is not going to ever let anyone else have the chance to take that away from him. Standing beneath the white domes of Sacre Coeur, Clancy sees the entirety of Paris stretched out before him, like it is his for the taking.

He finds a small brasserie nestled in among the shops and cafes of Montmartre. If anything, it is its unpretentious nature that attracts him. He finds no familiar beers as he scans the taps rising from behind the bar. Their newness comforts him. The only one at the bar, Clancy chooses a beer whose name he cannot pronounce. He doesn't really want to be alone, but for the moment, he enjoys the peace of mind that comes from being hidden away. He is purposefully lost in a pocket of a foreign city, and he loves the anonymity it brings. He waves his hand and points his finger. The barman pulls a chalice-like glass from the rack overhead, fills it with a light amber liquid, and puts it in front of Clancy, who gulps at it hungrily. The beer tastes of cinnamon and nutmeg. It is cold and filling and satisfying. He finishes it quickly and motions for another. Placing his money on the bar, Clancy takes his beer and goes to the door. The street slopes downward and curves to the left. Across from him there is a small windmill on top of a raised knoll. The wind has died down, a welcomed change from the morning, and the night air is still and crisp. It has an old taste to it. There is a wonderful peace to it all that he admires. He breathes deeply. He holds it in his chest for a moment before he releases his breath back into the night. He needs to take some time to slow down.

After he finishes three more beers, Clancy walks down to a long boulevard at the base of the hill. Lit by glowing neon bulbs that hang in front of doorways masked by black curtains and heavy, vaulted doors, the night becomes vibrant. That he suddenly finds himself in a red-light district doesn't shock him as it might have only hours ago. He simply views it as the winds of fortune blowing in his direction. He wants to live, to experience something new and extreme. Safety no longer concerns him. He wants to feel the gears of life turning. This new excitement is something he has been lacking. To this point he has been spending too much time thinking about the correct way to live his life rather than simply living it. He has attempted to control chaos by ordering everything, and despite that, everything managed to get turned upside down. That won't be the case anymore. He wants to make mistakes. He wants his own stories. He is tired of merely sitting by and listening to other people's adventures. For the first time in as long as he can remember, he feels proud, like he is taking the type of chances that Troy and Monica and even Dawn have already taken.

As he walks, his senses feel heightened. The smells and sounds and sights around him are pungent and vibrant and clear. He is conscious of every aspect of his body. His hips brush against the waistline of his pants with every step he takes. He can hear the clicking of his heels against the cobblestones below him. Broken bits of French conversation ring in his ears. The night breeze blows against his cheeks. Right now, he owns the world. There is no one here who cannot be his.

Live mannequins adorned only in the most alluring lingerie sit on stools behind thin, glass windows. Some tap lightly against the panes that separate their customers from them. Others play around on their cell phones. He cannot believe what he is doing. No one else who knows him would either, and that is why he keeps going.

A short distance away, Clancy spots an overly slender, small-breasted girl. She is standing in a doorway. A trail of smoke wafts upwards from the cigarette balanced between her pointer and middle finger. Her shoulders are thrown back, and she looks like a soldier at attention, like one who is ready to be inspected on a parade ground. She seems to emit a wounded confidence, perhaps earned from too many nights spent in that doorway. Her head is raised. She appears lost in thought as she searches the night sky above her. Her hair is short, ashen blonde and cut so that her bangs frame a round, almost cherubic face. Her cheeks are flushed, and he is unsure if this is the result of the cold night air, or if it has been caused by a recent encounter with a customer. In a way, she reminds him of Dawn.

When he finally reaches her, he smiles. He feels foolish and nervous, unsure of how one is supposed to begin in this situation. But she smiles back and reaches for the blue cigarette box she has tucked into the elastic of her lingerie. She opens it and holds it out to him. He is not sure if taking one means that he will suddenly enter into a tacit negotiation, but he pulls one out anyway. He has never smoked before.

As she lights the cigarette for him, Clancy sees her hands in the faint glow of the flame. Her nail polish is flecked and chipped. Speckles of white mix with red. He inhales. The cigarette is heavy, unfiltered, and thick. It tastes sour. He coughs, bits of tobacco stuck to the tip of his tongue. He spits. The girl is laughing, but this does not bother him the way it might have another time. Instead, he joins her. There is a strange honesty to everything going on around him, an innocence that seems ridiculous and perfect all at the same time.

She finishes the last of her cigarette before she flicks it into the street and says something in French that he does not understand, so he follows her example and flicks his own, unfinished cigarette, into the night. It skids along the street. Small sparks flash from it before it rolls to a rest. She leads him down a slender hallway.

She opens a wooden door and, with an extended hand, invites him inside. The room is not what he expected. It is furnished lavishly. Its preparation almost gives the illusion of real intimacy.

Removing her bra, she holds her open palm up to him and says something quickly in French that he doesn't catch. She repeats herself, and Clancy places his finger to his ear. He doesn't want her to realize that he doesn't understand. It must be obvious, but he wants to pretend that he knows what he is doing. She flashes five fingers, and then she follows it with a closed fist. Clancy pulls fifty Euros from his pocket and hands them to her.

She removes the bottom half of her lingerie, and with a wave of her hand, commands him to undress as well. As he strips, he watches her go to a bureau in the corner. Taking a small bottle of lubricant the girl begins to prepare herself. Once she is ready, she points to the small bed. It is long and narrow. It is not the type of bed where two people can sleep comfortably side by side.

"Allongez-vous sur votre dos," she says.

He just stares.

"Your back," she says. "Lay."

He does what she says. The bed is hard, but warm. He shuts his eyes and breathes deeply. He waits. The girl is speaking to him in French. He assumes she is telling him to relax as he feels the tips of the girl's fingers wrap gently around him. She strokes him slowly, but he is afraid that he isn't going to work. He tries to will himself to action, yet all he can think about is Monica. He remembers the first time he saw her from across the room at a party, remembers how she pointed at him, then turned her finger around and beckoned him over to her. They danced. She told him he was a cute boy and then she said she wanted to leave, and he followed her, too, back to a small room whose bed might have been only slightly wider than this one.

Where is she now, he wonders? Probably having dinner somewhere with David. Probably sitting on a couch drinking tea. Probably she doesn't have to think about anything at all. She has nothing that concerns her, and this makes Clancy want to scream. He wants to let five years go in a moment. He wants something new to believe in. He wants to not care anymore.

“Détendez-vous.” The girl takes his hand and places it on her breast. He closes his fingers around it. Her skin is warm and soft, and he grabs her tightly. She gasps quickly, and he loosens his grip. Clancy doesn't want to hurt her, but he feels he needs to be violent somehow. Opening his eyes, he looks up at her. He moves his hand from her breast to her neck and presses. She moves down to his chest, to his stomach, to where he needs her to be. He thinks of Monica one last time. He thinks of her alone in that small apartment with the small picture of the flowers over the stove.

When the girl has prepared him, Clancy watches her climb on top of him. He disappears inside of her. Looking up he tries to gauge the girl joined to him. Urgency seems to fill her face. Her eyes are like glass, and inside of them Clancy can only see his own reflection. She is not there. She has left him only a body, a body that rocks slowly against his own as she bends down and rests her jaw against his shoulder so that she might thrust harder and faster and speed it all along. Occasionally, she sighs, though she does her best to control the depth and the force, and Clancy does not fight against her. He just lies there and lets her do what he has paid her to do. However long it might take it is not his concern. He will enjoy it the best he can. And when it happens, it is quiet and soft. Barely twitching, his body forces its climax from him, and she collapses on him. She feels like a weight against his chest when she offers one final thrust to be sure all is finished. He goes to place

his arm around her, but before he can, she rears herself up and lets him slide out of her.

Her back to him, she leaves the bed and moves back to the bureau at the far corner of the room. She takes a small towel from inside the bureau's top drawer and begins wiping at the inside of her legs. He watches her. She just keeps wiping away as she looks up towards a calendar hanging above the bureau. Each passed day has been marked off with a large 'X.' Above the month, there is a photo of the Empire State Building.

Clancy stands and dresses as quickly as he can. He says nothing to her. He does not know what to say. Retracing his steps down the narrow hallway and out into the night, he imagines she follows him, if only to the doorway, so that she might light another cigarette and have a few moments of rest before another client strolls down the road in her direction. The night air is still inviting, crisp, cold, and wonderful. It comforts him as he walks through it. The sky is heavy with clouds. They seem lower, as though here they could be touched if one were only tall enough. He does not know where he will sleep tonight. He doesn't care.

X.

For most of her life, Dawn has tried to downplay her birthday. She didn't *have* to exist, and sometimes she thinks it would have been better for other people if she hadn't. These are not the thoughts of a sane human being, and she does not like thinking them. How many people believe the world might have been better if they hadn't been born? But it is difficult to find joy in an event that brought so much pain to so many others. She has spent too many birthdays wondering if this year is the year that her mother might reappear.

She just wants the day to end, and she regrets mentioning last weekend during the picnic. The fewer people who know, then the better it will be for her. Then she doesn't have to pretend that she's enjoying the day, or answer all of the questions about whether or not she has plans for celebrating. This is not a day she celebrates. If all goes well, today will pass by quickly and silently. After work she can go home. Perhaps she will draw herself a bath and have a glass of wine. She can have a simple evening by herself. It is something she has learned to do now that she is a bit older. She doesn't mind it so much. Maybe she will stop by a bakery and pick up a piece of cake. The apartment will probably be empty. There will be no one around to bother her. She will have a languid evening. She will pretend she is somewhere far away.

At 2 PM, there is no more work to do, so she takes the subway north and exits at 57th Street. She wants a little time to herself. She walks across the street to Central Park. The leaves on the trees are beginning to turn. There is a wonderful simplicity to it all. She likes the baroque, but she often finds it unnecessary. Things that can be beautiful without having to be dressed up in gold have always attracted her more, and she has always wanted to be beautiful in this way. She has always wanted to lead with her passion and with her mind. Dawn wonders if this is how she

comes across to other people, if this is how she appears to them, and what opinions of her they might form in their minds when they see her. To be on the other side of a gaze, to be put back together by another person, that's something she's always been fascinated by.

She reaches into her purse and takes out a handful of postcards that she purchased the last time she went to the Met. Dawn leafs through images of women dancing, or sitting, or laying in all different manners and rendered in all different styles. She stops at "The Bed" by Toulouse-Lautrec. She loves how simple the image of two women sleeping next to each other is. It looks like something that could have been colored in by a child, and yet there is something more to it. Something she can't quite explain. They seem to be protecting each other, just by laying there. They don't need to do anything more.

Placing the postcards back together, she shuts her eyes and imagines the old postcards her mother used to send her, the ones she kept in plastic cases and stored in the small shoebox that she kept hidden under her childhood bed. Her mother had sent them from Vienna, Budapest, Krakow, and Lvov. These images of baroque churches, royal palaces, and imperial gardens were proof that her mother was thinking of her. They are signs that she existed in her mother's mind. Dawn thinks of the many from Prague: a mountain fortress, statues of saints in rapture and mourning, the silhouette of the tower at the end of Charles Bridge bathed in mist and fog. She thinks of all the messages she read over and over, as if in them she might find some secret answer to when the woman was coming back. It was through these letters that she knew her. Perhaps she was given more than most.

She reaches deep into her purse and pulls out a plastic case that protects a black and white image of the skyline that frames Central Park. She flips it over. It dates from 1996. She taps the side of the case twice. The card slips out. The photo

still has a bit of gloss. She looks up to the tops of the buildings around her, and then she looks back at the postcard. If she's been given nothing else, she thinks. Dawn stands up and faces the bench. She tucks the postcard between the wooden slats, and then she turns and heads towards the subway.

Dawn arrives home with a cheap bottle of Bordeaux and a generous slice of chocolate cake. Someone is cooking. Her bag bouncing against her leg, she hurries toward the kitchen, where she finds Troy hunched over a kettle of boiling water. There is a massive spread on the small kitchen table. Plates of olives and cheese surround two unlit candles. A basket of bread flanks tomatoes and nuts. What looks to be figs round out the myriad of hors d'oeuvres.

She is angry. How is *he* is having company? He does not live here. He is a guest, a guest whose minor transgression of stealing her book she can get past, but the idea of a guest inviting other people to an apartment that is not his infuriates her all the more. This sight is unnerving. The notion that even he has friends for whom he can cook this meal reminds her of how truly isolated and alone she is.

And, what's more, this is something special. It has the distinct mark of something done for a woman. She tightens her grip on the bag at her side, and her anger increases as she wonders how much longer she can stand here unnoticed. This squatter has had the gall to steal her book, to dismiss her invitation to sit with her friends, and now she cannot believe that, to him, her presence is so pathetic that it cannot even be sensed a mere six feet away. She wants him gone.

"Impressive," she says. "Nice to see that you are capable of wearing clothing for once."

He turns. A broad smile appears on his sweat-stained face. His eyes move to the slender stem of the Bordeaux's neck that rises from the bag. "May I? It's the one thing I don't have."

"No, you *may* not."

His shock at her reply lasts only a moment. He looks down and rubs his fingers across his mouth. She thinks she can hear him chuckle.

"You think this is funny?" she says.

"I do." He raises his gaze and looks her in the eyes. She cannot tell if he is mocking her or not.

"You're an asshole."

"If anything, be mad at me for assuming you had no other plans," he says.

"Happy Birthday."

She almost drops her bag. *This* is for her. She isn't sure what to say, but she knows she has to say something. She does not want to risk looking as dumbfounded as she truly is.

"Even if I did," she pauses and runs her hand through her hair. "We could refrigerate some of this, right?"

"We could," he says, reaching for a box of pasta from beside a half-eaten sandwich on the counter.

She takes a corkscrew, cuts the small bit of foil concealing the Bordeaux's neck, and then uncorks it. "I thought you said you'd never cook?"

"I lied." He dumps the pasta into the boiling pot.

"Do you lie about a lot of things?"

"Only some," he says.

"I want to change," she says. She scampers to her room. There she pulls off her clothes, douses the nape of her neck with a dash of perfume, and blindly pulls the first dress she sees from her closet. It will do. It is white, with frills.

She returns to the kitchen, where she finds him leaning against the counter. He holds out the glasses of wine. She takes one, and he clinks his own against its rim.

"Interesting dress," he says.

"It has style," she says.

"You look like a wedding cake."

"A wedding cake?" she says. True she has not had much time to prepare, but still she cannot imagine that she looks *that* ridiculous. "You've spent how long preparing?" she teases. "And now you risk eating by yourself. I think I liked you better when you were just sitting alone in your room."

"You did say you always preferred the servants," he says.

"A man that listen when a woman talks," she says. "So you're slowly digging yourself out of your hole? You know why I liked the servants most?" she asks and swirls the wine in her glass. "It was because they knew when to hold their tongues."

He rubs his hand along his jaw and focuses his gaze on the floor as he contemplates his rebuttal. He seems to be enjoying the play. "I thought you wanted real, honest conversation," he says.

"I do."

"But you can't take me telling you that your dress looks like a wedding cake? Then how can we discuss anything of substance? How do you know that I haven't not only been preparing food but also outlining all the possible topics that might serve to entertain you?" He reaches towards the countertop, takes a few loose sheets of paper, and waves them in her direction.

"Because you called me a wedding cake," she says.

"I said that *your dress* looked like a wedding cake. Specificity is important in real conversations. And you're twisting my words to try and prove that I'm rude and tactless."

"Then show me your list," she says. She folds her arms across her chest and holds her wine next to her cheek. "Because we both know that's a lie."

"It is," he says. "You've caught me in that."

"So a lying, insulting, cook. Are you always this flattering?" she asks.

"Who said wearing a dress that looked like a well-prepared, styled, organized, delicate, meaningful symbol of a highly valued societal convention was a bad thing? Plus, wedding cakes are expensive."

"Oh, my my," she says, adding a lilt to her voice. "Dear heavens I must tell ma'ma *all* about you." She sips at her wine. "Seriously, you think you're smooth, don't you?" There *is* something about him she finds interesting, but he is distant. It is as if this whole tête-à-tête is a charade, though a good one, that allows him to hide who he really is behind wit and candor. He is intelligent, clearly, but she would like to see what he could be like if he allowed for the honest part of himself to come out, sans performance. It is as though he has spent the last years of his life creating himself in some image or pastiche of what he believes charming. "Do these lines always work?"

"I don't know," he says. "I've never used them before."

"Ahh," she says. "You *are* good at this-- the flattery, making people feel special. Giving the allure of safety and danger at the same time. Is that supposed to work on me, too? Or is this just dinner?"

"I've had a few birthdays alone," he says, and his sudden honesty catches her off-guard. She isn't exactly sure what has triggered it, but for a second he is less sure of himself.

"You know," she says. "Most people who pride themselves on directness are just trying to put others off balance because they can't take having to answer the type of questions they normally pose."

"Sit," he says, motioning to the table.

"I've been sitting all day."

"So stand," he says and sits himself. "There's no pretense here."

"No?"

"None at all. Well," he reaches into a basket of sliced bread resting near the table's edge. "Not unless you start making more allusions to esoteric things."

"Is living here with me really such hell?"

"Cheers," he says.

"So will you talk poetry with me?" she asks. "Since you stole my book? Or are we shying away from pretense this evening?"

"Your book?" he asks. He looks confused.

"The Zagajewski," she says.

"It was in Clancy's room, though that makes more sense now. It didn't seem to suit him."

"What didn't?" she asks before finishing the rest of the wine in her glass. He picks up the bottle from the table and holds it out to her. She nods her head in reply.

"The depth in it," he says.

"Hmm," she hums as he fills her wine glass. "And now I know you're full of it." She raises her glass to him. "Cheers."

He points to the table. "The food is getting cold."

After they have eaten, and after she's raided Dan's room for more wine, they sit with the empty bottles between them. He's managed to hold his own on the

poetry. He seems to prefer the melancholy verses to the happier ones, though he is unable to articulate why. She finds it interesting how opposite this seems from the character he had been playing before and what he seemingly tries to project to those around him. She wants to find out more, but with rare exception, he is only a series of one or two word replies that directly answer the question posed and nothing more.

“What do you think Clancy’s doing in Europe?” she asks.

“European things.”

He smiles and sits back in his chair. The small wrinkles that form around the slits housing his tea-colored eyes suit him. She is drunk. She can feel it now.

“The desert isn’t that bad,” she says. “It’s beautiful at night.”

“Do you miss it?”

“No,” she says. “I don’t.”

“I used to run in it,” he says. “I tried to see how far I could go before I would pass out.”

“How Nietzschean.”

“It hasn’t killed me yet,” he says.

“You’re not as tough as want you want everyone to believe.” She puts her fists up in front of her face. She reaches out and gently socks him in the jaw the way a boxer might.

“No?” he asks.

She rises from her chair. She goes to him and sits on his lap. “Not by a long shot.”

“And you are?”

“I’m invincible. Haven’t you heard? They tell stories about me far and wide.”

“We must run in different circles, then,” he says.

“That’s a shame.”

“Is it?”

She does not reply. She has had enough talking at this point. She is relaxed, loose. She doesn't fear what she is about to do. There is a certain bravery in it, though she has no idea how it will be received. She wants to know what else is hidden behind these one-word answers and quick turns of phrase. It is her last recourse to pull these things out. Placing her mouth to his, she bites down on his lip. Her fingers move along his scalp. She pushes against the back of his head and forces his mouth to stay in contact with her own. She feels his tongue against hers, and though she needs to breathe, she does not want to pull her mouth away for fear that he will vanish, and that then she will find herself kissing nothing but smoke and an idea. She breathes through his mouth. She steals his air. She is not sure what this will bring her, but as her tongue begins to trace itself along the contours of his mouth, there is something about him that makes her believe she can step out from behind the veil of whatever shadow has engulfed her until now, and she wants to be able to cast one of her own.

It is early morning in Prospect Park, and Troy runs alone. It is cold, but he has always enjoyed the clarity that the cold brings to him. She was rougher, more violent than he ever imagined she would be. His mouth hurts. The cold air he sucks in soothes his swollen lips. He should be angry with himself. He should have put a stop to it once she sat on his lap in the kitchen, and if not there, then at the doorway to her bedroom, or at the foot of her bed, or on the hard floor, but he did not. Nor did he stop it after she slipped from her dress and began to undress him one piece of clothing at a time. Stupid, he thinks. This isn't some random stranger from a bar whom he probably will never see again. This is the roommate of his friend. Someone he, too, lives with. He shouldn't have drunk so much.

He makes a final loop around the park. It is his fourth trip around this particular path. He needs to keep moving. He isn't sure how long he will be here. Even here, he is still something people remember. He wants a clean slate. He wants to go where he can just erase everyone's preconceptions of him. He wonders what his father might have said could they talk about it all.

He will not tell Clancy. Not when he returns, and probably not until a little after that. It can only serve to complicate things, though he is not sure how she will proceed. He can't offer a guess. He doesn't care to. He's probably getting worked up over nothing. Perhaps all of this is speculation on his part. Perhaps to her it was one night and nothing more. But there was something different to it. It didn't feel like a task. He didn't feel like he was being judged on his ability. There was actually something freeing about actually knowing a bit about the person he laid there with. Perhaps that is normal. He wouldn't know. Either way she probably expects nothing.

When he arrives home, he does not go to shower, but pokes his head into Dawn's room to see if she is still sleeping.

"Not used to having to come back to them?" she asks. She stretches, and the sheet falls away to reveal the round top of her breast.

"I went running," he says.

"You left this to go running?" She shakes her head, half laughs and half yawns. She pulls her legs up under her so that the sheets trace the contours of her body. "You're insane."

Part 3.

"One of the last great realizations is that life will not be what you dreamed."
James Salter, *Light Years*

XI.

She hadn't imagined he would say yes.

They begin in a gallery filled with images of young girls. The way some of them are depicted, they almost border on being nymphs or sprites. The paintings are Romantic and mythical. They are the products of imaginative English masters being drawn to the darker qualities of a gothic Mediterranean that, in their minds, seems to be in a state of chronic disrepair. They paint crumbling castles and wilting gardens that are lit by the weak, orange haze of a setting sun. It is so hyperbolic that it loses something. She wants to engage with them, but they fall flat. She feels like these men are trying too hard.

Troy lingers somewhere behind her. He looks strangely out of place. He wears a blazer. It doesn't fit him in the shoulders, and the arms are too short. It hangs from him. He has been taking his time. He has read nearly every placard. It's like he's never been to a museum before, and now that he is in one, he wants to know everything he can about the pieces in front of him: painter, city of composition, title, medium, year of creation.

He's standing in front of a painting of a couple sitting beneath the boughs of a shedding tree. The painting reaches from floor to ceiling. All of its proportions are lifelike. She slips her arm around his and rests her head against his shoulder.

"Look at how they are sitting," Troy says.

Her eyes go to the painting's young girl. Her blouse billows and opens halfway to her chest. Her breasts are flushed a light, pinkish crimson.

"I can see why you like it," she says and nudges him gently in the ribs.

“They’re looking in different directions,” he says.

“Maybe it’s a first date,” she says. “Sometimes I try to imagine what they are thinking.”

“It’s not a first date.”

“Convince me.”

“The trees,” he says. “They’re starting to lose their leaves.”

“And?”

“If it was a first date, it would be spring. It would be the start of something. This is the end of something.”

She studies the painting. They lean towards each other, but they do not touch. The boy’s eyes are looking towards the ground. “No,” she says. “He’s just shy.”

They pass gallery after gallery. She is happy to be there with him. It gives the museum a warmth that she isn’t used to, because even with all of its pastels and colors, she has always found it a bit cold. She likes watching him in this environment. He seems less sure of himself, vulnerable even.

Late afternoon comes, and it is darker than it should be. The sky warns of snow. They walk shoulder to shoulder, but they do not hold hands. It is cold out, and neither of them have gloves.

In her pocketbook, Dawn has the card that Dan gave to her at the picnic. It’s a glossy, shiny thing reading, ‘Martin Kronenbourg, Photographic Artist.’ She tries to recall the directions she’s written on the business card’s back: left, left, right, another left. It couldn’t be simpler, yet the random course makes it difficult to conceal her motive for such a circuitous route. She wonders how long she can zig and zag before he asks her why she can’t walk in a straight line.

When they reach it, the building offers no clues as to what may be inside. The street is quiet and sterile. It is just another row of brownstones tucked between the

rows of high-rise apartment complexes. There is no number on the building, but on the small gate leading down to the brownstone's basement level is a small sign awash with the same vibrant colors as the business card.

It has been a good day. For the last week, the apartment has felt like it belongs to them alone. Dan has been in and out. She does not know when Clancy might return, but she wants to make as much use of their privacy as possible before he does.

She reaches out her bare fingers and digs into Troy's pocket. She brushes something made of leather before she finds his hand and clasps it. His pocket is deep and warm, and from its security she directs them to the nearest subway station.

That evening, like many evenings of the past week, they lie together in Dawn's room. Outside it is dark. Thin, white flakes float past the window. Frost collects at its base.

"I love snow," Troy says.

"Did you miss it?"

"I forgot how quiet it is," he says.

They are alone in the apartment. The room is like a hermitage or a dell. There is something magical to it all. It is secure. It feels like a place where secrets are told, where whatever might be offered up would forever be locked away and immune to any past, present, or future reality. Words spoken here, Dawn thinks, will remain trapped in a void and recalled only as *déjà vu*, as though they occurred in a dream.

"Let's play a game," Dawn says.

"A game?"

"Yes," she says and waits for his response.

"The rules?"

He seems on edge. There is a nervous flutter to his voice, but she trudges on.
“One for one. That simple.”

She will go first. She will calm him. “I thought you were an arrogant prick when I first met you.” She pokes his naked side.

“Did you?” A bit of lightness returns to his voice.

“I did.”

“I thought the same.”

“Oh, really?” She moves against him and tickles him with her fingers, but he doesn't flinch.

“Let's just lie here,” he says. “Look outside. The snow is like stars.” He breathes deeply. “How often can you see the stars in Brooklyn?”

She stops tickling, but she doesn't feel like giving up just yet. There are things she needs to say, that she *must* say, and she fears she might never experience another moment like this.

“Riverside,” she says. “One of those towns in the Inland Empire desert where ‘everything is fucking dead,’ that's my home.”

He turns towards her. In the moonlight his face seems softer. He almost looks better in the dark.

“And all of my life,” she continues, “I wanted to get out of there. Being there felt so distant, so removed from the world.” She shifts her gaze to the window and watches as the snow continues to fall silently. “And then one time my grandmother and I, we were driving across the desert from Riverside to Flagstaff. And in the desert everything is normally so clear. During the day, you can see everything for miles on land, and at night, you can see millions of miles into the sky. But I couldn't see the stars. There must have been clouds. I kept putting my head out the car window the way a dog does, and my grandmother kept reaching across the gear shift to yank me

back into the car until I finally gave up and started to cry. I was nine,” she says. “I thought the stars were gone, and I wanted to go back. We were finally out of it, and all I wanted to do was go back because there I could see the stars.” She exhales slowly.

“You can’t see the stars in New York half the time, either.”

“There’re places where you don’t need them as much.”

“Different things keep people going,” he says. “Anger or hate.”

“Hope,” she says. “Naiveté.” Her voice is barely above a whisper, and she cannot tell if he seems distant because he is somewhere lost in thought, or if it is because she finds herself back in that car. Her grandmother is driving through the desert night, and she is crying because she believes that her mother is going to come back, and when she does, she will find the house empty. They will be gone, and she will be guilty for her mother never finding them again because she had not thought to leave a note taped to the front door. She didn’t think to find a way to tell her mother where they were going and how she could get in touch with them.

It had only been for two weeks. Whatever it was that her grandmother was attempting hadn’t worked out. Their return had been one of the few times she’d ever been happy to be heading back there, and when the car had finally come to a stop back in their driveway, she’d jumped out and scoured the yard for any signs of a note or message, but found only two week’s worth of mail stacked in an awkward pile against the side door. Inside there was a postcard from Prague. After that none came anymore.

She closes her eyes, “My mother left when I was four,” she says. “I don’t know who my father is.”

He shifts against her. He slides to his side, and she can feel the last bit of his body leaving hers. He rolls his face away. The sheet around her rises slowly as he takes a long breath.

“My father,” he begins.

She wants to reach out and touch him. She wants to roll him back towards her.

“My father,” he continues. “He loved peanut butter sandwiches.”

He stops. She notes the past tense of his sentence. She waits and looks up towards the snow that sticks silently against the window. She puts her hand on his shoulder, but he doesn't seem to notice her. His back is to her, and his voice is barely above a whisper. “I don't like this game,” he says. “I'm tired. I just want to go to sleep.”

Gently, very gently, she places the tips of her fingers on his back. His skin is warm, taut, and tense. She feels him breathing. The muscles of his back expand and contract in a long and languid rhythm. She slides over to him. She places her ear against his shoulder blade. She thinks she can make out the beating of his heart, but he doesn't respond. She reaches her arm around him and places her hand on his chest. Still, he doesn't stir. He is asleep, she is sure of this. In his sleep, she holds him. She clings to him. She is the one protecting him. Or at least this is what she tells herself as she rests her cheek on his back and closes her eyes.

XII.

The snow forms a thin film over the grass, and it reflects the bit of weak sunlight that has managed to force its way through the clouds. Troy walks through the endless rows. The path is hidden, but by now he knows the route by heart. His father would be sixty-three this spring. He is not sure how old Dawn is. Even on her birthday, he never brought himself to ask. Deep down, he doesn't want to know more about her than he has to. He left early. He left her sleeping. He doesn't know what to think of her. Last night was different. That game was too much. He doesn't need to get involved. He can't. He doesn't know how.

He reaches into his pocket and runs his fingers along the leather case that protects his father's badge. It is starting to crack in places.

His father's grave is to the left. The small American flag has frayed some. What he can see of its black, wooden mast has chipped in places. The sandwich, he presumes, was removed some time ago, but all else appears the same. He brushes the bit of snow that has accumulated atop the headstone away with his hand. Snow in late October. It would have driven the man mad.

All of his life, Troy knows that people have looked at him either with awe or envy because he could do something magical with a small, white ball. People enjoyed being close to him. Watching him play brought people joy. What did it bring him? He wants to flee from it all. For the first time in a while, he has the urge to go find something and just let the initial sting in his nose give way to lightness.

Coming here over and over again has been wrong. There is too much stillness. He has been gone too long. Everything has changed so much. Everybody else has their own lives. Everyone else has their own problems. He's scared. No, he's petrified. His hand clenches the badge. It digs into the cold skin of his palm.

“You fell down the stairs. You made it messier than it already was, you know that?” He laughs. “I called Clancy’s dad. He came. He called it in. They kept it quiet. Your wife is gone. I don’t talk to her anymore. I haven’t been back there. Clancy’s dad looks after the house from time to time. Apparently, she won’t sell it.”

He exhales deeply and watches the trail of his breath vanish into the air around him. He doesn’t know what to do or say, but he knows he will not come back. Not after today. Not ever again. He has come enough. There is nothing he can gain by coming back here anymore.

“Was it worth it?” Troy asks. He rubs his hand below his nose, and a streak of red appears on his skin. He laughs. “What now? I gave everything,” he says. “What the hell do I do now?”

For Clancy it has been a long week. He should be exhausted. He has slept in hostels, on benches, and in Metro stations. When he had access to it, he showered with hot water, but mostly he used public fountains or bathrooms sinks. He has tried, with limited success, to talk to nearly every beautiful woman he’d passed. He assumes his failure is a combination of being out of practice, and of having no ability in French. It doesn’t matter. A smile is a victory, and he has had many of those.

His body no longer understands AM or PM. He has not measured time in this way for a while now. He simply is. He is living life the way he couldn’t have imagined before. He is reckless. He is powered by adrenaline alone. And it is adrenaline that drives him down the hallway to Troy’s room. He needs to share it all before he collapses. He wants to tell him that he was wrong. Going there did do something. Now, he feels free.

He barges into the small spare room, but Troy is not there. The air mattress is empty and deflated. No, thinks Clancy. He can't have left. Not now, not yet. He goes to Dawn's door and pushes it open.

"Come here," she says without looking up at him. She stretches and yawns and readjusts herself against her pillow. "I'm cold."

"Where's Troy."

"Troy?"

"Yes, Troy."

"Troy." She opens her eyes. "I don't know. He runs in the morning, doesn't he? Don't you knock?"

"There's three inches of snow outside."

"Would that stop him?"

"His bed is flat. It hasn't been slept in."

"What time is it?" She pats her hand on her bed before she raises herself up on one arm and looks at the clock to her left.

He wants to go over and shake her. He isn't sure what she knows, but it is clear she knows something. He can guess what she's hiding, but the thought of it is too incredible for him to process. "Troy hasn't," he searches for the right words, "moved out?"

"Go away," she says. "And no, he hasn't moved out."

He closes the door behind him. Perfect bastard, Clancy thinks, you wonderful, awful, incredible, perfect bastard. It is a thought born as much out of love as it is out of envy.

It seems like the best option, like the only option. Troy opens the door and walks inside. The room is bright. It feels sterile, as though each millimeter has been

scrubbed with a toothbrush. Part of him thinks that he is losing his mind, yet this also feels completely right. At least here he doesn't have to figure out everything alone. In fact, he won't have to figure out anything at all. He will be told. Perhaps, that is what he truly needs—to be told what to do, and how to do it, and when it needs to be done. The freedom he has now overwhelms him at times. He is not sure what this process will entail, though he is sure he will be interviewed in some capacity. Presently, he is just trying to make sense of the lobby, when a young woman behind the front desk, who is busy with a phone to her ear, hands him a pamphlet and forms to fill out. It is like a doctor's office. It is like he has made an appointment and simply arrived for a year-end physical. He takes a seat in the corner, fills out the paperwork, and waits.

At last, a man summons him into a separate room, and from the neck protruding out past through the gap between the door and the doorframe, Troy can tell he is huge, built the way many of his type are built. The man has presence. He has a purpose. He has the ability to conquer, to command, and to control. He directs Troy to a chair, and then he resumes his place behind his desk.

“So,” the man says. He probably thinks this is a joke, and there is an unveiled contempt in his voice. His isn't a popular type in a neighborhood like this. Troy is sure that he has had many run-ins with students that have nothing better to do than come in and bust his balls about the things he does, and that is why before coming here, Troy went back to the apartment and changed into Clancy's blazer, so that he might be taken more seriously. He's been meaning to get his own, but he likes the fact that he can borrow Clancy's whenever he needs to.

“What do you want?” The man still hasn't looked at him. He is busy with Troy's paperwork. “A little late to the party, aren't we?”

“Perhaps, sir,” Troy says.

“Let me guess,” the man says. “Went to college. Sat in on rallies. Complained about us, and now you can’t get a job because you majored in English or hand-holding?”

“Not exactly, sir.”

“No,” the man says. He flips through the pages. “That’s right. Highest degree of education is high school, and you’re nearing 27.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Occupation is blank.”

“I didn’t really have a real job, sir.”

“I didn’t really have a real job, sir,” the man echoes. “So, what exactly have you been doing the last near decade?”

“I played Minor League Baseball, sir.”

“Bullshit.”

Troy reaches into his pocket. He takes a small business card out of his wallet and hands it to the man.

“How do I know this is real?” the man asks.

“Look me up online,” Troy says, before instantly regretting it. He isn’t sure what about him might be up there.

“I like athletes,” the man says, and he finally looks up. “You’re good at taking orders.”

“There isn’t much difference.”

“Except the bullets,” the man says. “First time I was live in combat I kept telling myself the shit whizzing past my head was fastballs. Didn’t do much good. I nearly pissed myself.” He lays Troy’s paperwork on his desk and leans back in his chair. ‘Thompson’ is embroidered in black letters across his chest, and below it, a row of ribbons and medals hang. He has Jump Wings, and a rifleman’s patch. A single gold

bar shines on each of his shoulders. The man is a captain. "What did you play?" the man leans back in his chair and folds his arm across his broad, ribbon filled chest.

"I pitched, sir."

"What'd you throw?"

"Standard stuff, sir" Troy says. "Four-seamer, two-seamer with dip. A hook, and bit of a change."

"Righty? Lefty?"

"Righty."

"Bring it pretty good?"

"Ninety-six, sir. I topped at ninety-six, but I stayed mostly in the low nineties."

"That's some shit," he says. "What was your favorite part?"

Troy thinks. It is a question he has been asked by interviewers, or fans, or strangers in bars more times than he can remember, and he always came up with the right answer to fit the moment. He always looked into the eyes of the person asking him and tried to figure out exactly what it was that they wanted to hear from him, and then he gave them exactly that.

"I hated every minute of it," Troy says. It is not something he has ever admitted before. "It wasn't really a team. It was a group of people all trying to be better than each other because that's how you moved up. You needed to impress the right people." Even now he isn't sure if he is saying this because he believes it, or because he thinks he needs to give this man some answer about unity and common goals.

"Given a lot of interviews in your life?" The man smiles. "Know what people think they want to hear?"

"You've got a pretty good bullshit detector, sir."

"Excuse me?"

“Something my father would have said, sir.”

“Intelligent man,” he says. “Any military in your family?”

“My father was NYPD.”

“So he gets it.”

“I’m sure he did,” Troy says.

“Retired.”

“You could say that, sir.”

“What does he do, now?”

The question surprises him, and Troy isn’t sure how to answer it. “He spends a lot of time in a park with the people he’s met there.”

“Well,” the man says. “I’m sure he’s earned it. I hope I’m half as lucky.”

The captain leans forward. He looks down and types something into his computer.

“Ever been put in the back of a squad car?”

“No.”

“Ever smoke marijuana?”

“No.”

The man looks up at his computer screen. “Man,” he says. “Did you get hurt?”

“I don’t follow, sir.”

“Your first two years. ERA near 2.00. 10-3 your first year. 9-5 the next, and yet you never make it out of A ball?” He types something else into the computer.

“No, I never got hurt, sir.” Troy says. He snuffles hard.

“Last three years, 3-9, 2-6, 1-7. Wheels fall off the bus?”

“It stopped being fun, sir.”

“Jobs aren’t always fun. You think sitting in a foxhole in the freezing rain is fun?”

“Depends on your definition of fun, sir.”

The man smiles. “That’s the first honest answer I’ve gotten from you all afternoon, isn’t?”

“Second or third counting the baseball and drug question, sir.”

“Ever do any of the hard stuff?”

Troy pauses.

“I can look the other way on steroids,” he says. “If that’s your concern.”

His gaze is stern. Troy can feel the man’s eyes on him. They remind him of his father’s.

“That’s the amazing thing about the internet,” the man says. “You can find all sorts of things on it.”

Troy breathes deeply through his mouth. He tries to compose himself, but there is an itch in his nose that he cannot control. He sniffs twice, hard and quickly, and just like it did at the baseball game with Clancy, and just like it did numerous times in the locker room during that 1-7 season, it betrays him.

“I see,” the man says.

“It’s nothing,” Troy says. He takes his handkerchief from inside of Clancy’s blazer. “I’m not used to the weather”

“Listen,” the man says. “You might get through the physical. You might get through Basic. Hell, you might even do good. You might even do great. You’ve been fooling people your whole life. And hell, you might be damn good at it. You might continue fooling them.”

His voice is soft but stern. “But you’re not going to fool them here.”

“So there’s—”

“I’m sure I can trust you to find your way out?”

“Sir.”

“Dismissed.”

It has only been a week, thinks Clancy, but it feels a decade. He has returned to a wild new dynamic. Now, he is the newcomer.

He wanders the hallway. He touches the walls, the doors, the molding. He rummages through the kitchen drawers. He feels the utensils. He goes to the living room and pulls open the curtain. He sits in a chair and stares out into the night. Yes, these things are all his, but everything here is stale. It is not only that it is quiet, but also that it is still. There is no action here. Before, the apartment had always seemed dynamic and alive, with Dan’s ramblings or with Monica’s voice echoing through the narrow corridors. Now, it feels frozen, abandoned almost. He opens the window. He lets the night air rush in, and with it, the bustle of those below. The noise that rises up from the street calms him. There are things here that he needs to rid himself of.

He takes a large, black garbage bag from the kitchen and returns to his room. He tries not to think. He tries not to look at the things he piles inside of the bag. He does it quickly, because his fingers tell him more about what he is throwing away than he cares to know. There is the engraved flask—a gift for his twenty-first birthday. There is the ugly tie from Valentine’s Day that was used to wrap his actual present, cuff links, which were meant to go with a French cuffed shirt that he never received. He throws away a Fossil watch from last Christmas and a fountain pen from an anniversary two years ago. He takes the “I Heart Paris” mug from his desk and drops it into the bag. From the bottom drawer, he takes the thin, yellow plastic folder that holds pictures, so many pictures, from a time before they simply went onto a computer. He tucks the folder under his arm and carries the trash bag down to the curb outside the apartment. He opens the garbage can and tosses everything inside, and then he closes the lid over it all.

He watches the night. On the road, cars drive past him. There are a few pedestrians out. They walk along the sidewalk on the other side of the street. He lingers next to the garbage can. It is tranquil. The snow, and the darkness, and the noise of the neighborhood make him feel less alone. He wonders if the girl in Pigalle is standing out in the evening and coaxing men in from the night with the promise of her body and Gauloises. He smiles. He relaxes. He shivers, but he is not cold.

Off in the distance, he sees a lone figure staggering along. The man jumps from curbside to street to sidewalk and back again. He is obviously drunk, and his zigzag pattern makes Clancy laugh. It is clear that this man's mission is to make it to his doorway, and then one step inside. He checks his watch. It is still early, only just past nine in the evening. He enjoys the spectacle, but as the man gets closer, Clancy's mood suddenly shifts. He swallows deeply and tries to make out everything he can about the figure approaching him. The man's jacket is open, and it bounces against him as he stumbles along. The man's hair is unkempt, and it blocks his face from view, but Clancy already knows what he needs to know as the man braces himself against the hood of a car. He watches as Troy rights himself, but he only manages a few steps more before he grabs onto a tree and swings around its trunk. He tries to move again. His pace is slower now. His movements are short bursts of energy exerted between islands of support—another tree, a metal fence, the garbage cans of a neighbor a block and a half down. But these do not support him, and Troy tumbles over them. Clancy watches to see if he will try to get up, but he just lies there and doesn't move.

Troy still has not picked himself off of the ground by the time Clancy reaches him. He straddles Troy. He reaches down and lifts him by the armpits. It is so easy. He is so small and so light. He slings Troy's arm over his shoulder. Together, they stagger on through the night.

“Have a good time?” Clancy asks. He does not expect an answer. His words are only filler. It was only a matter of time, Clancy thinks. How long can he be expected to do this? Agency, he thinks. Where is Troy’s agency? Troy lectured him about it on the train, and on the night when Clancy bought the ticket to France, but *he, Clancy, he* did act, and what has Troy done? Does he even have the ability to listen to himself? Has he done anything to make things easier for himself here? Has he tried to get a job? Has he tried to figure out a way that he can become self-sufficient and stable? Has he done anything more than just leach off other people’s kindness, or seduce Dawn, who obviously has no idea what he is truly like? He’s just wandered about and getting drunk in other people’s clothing, crashing at other people’s places, and stealing time from other people’s lives.

Clancy moves quickly, too quickly. It is deliberate. He lets Troy slip from him, and he turns to watch him fall one more time. Troy tries to get up, but Clancy pushes forcefully against his shoulders. He hears Troy gasp as the side of his face hits the pavement. From above him, Clancy stares down at Troy’s slender outline. He can imagine the body flanked by chalk. There is hatred in him right now, and he revels in it. Even as he reaches down to pick Troy up, he wants to push him onto the pavement, into the pavement, through the pavement again and again and again. Because now he *can*.

It is not until they are inside the apartment that Clancy truly realizes the extent of Troy’s condition. His is filthy from his fall. The palms of his hands are scraped, and he has blood on his left temple. The knees of his jeans are ripped, and he is bleeding there, too. His eyes are red and swollen. Dried blood and snot crust on his upper lip, and his hair is matted to his cheeks.

Clancy holds him tightly. He takes him to his own room and sits Troy gently on the edge of his bed. He steadies him, and then retrieves a washcloth from the

bathroom that he bathes under lukewarm water. When he returns, Troy is rocking back and forth with his head in his hands.

Clancy kneels in front of Troy. He places his hand under Troy's chin and gently lifts up his face. He rubs the washcloth along Troy's forehead, cheeks, and the base of his nose. He places the washcloth on the back of Troy's neck. He removes Troy's pea coat, folds it, and lays it on the floor. He pulls Troy's shirt over his head. He tosses it away, and then he finds a sweatshirt that he helps Troy wriggle into. Troy is laughing, and Troy is crying. He seems totally insane.

He looks into Troy's eyes and presses the washcloth to Troy's face a second time. He will never understand Troy. For years he has tried and for years he has failed. For years he has wondered what it must have been like to be him, to have his skills, his charisma, and his apparent grace. For years he has wondered how life played out on Troy's side of the fence, where the grass always seemed to be so much greener. "Easy now, Perfect," he says.

He doesn't see the hand. He only feels a sudden sharp pain as Troy's palm collides with the side of his face and pushes him to the bedroom floor. Troy's eyes are demonic. They are wide and full of rage.

"Fucking Perfect?" he yells. "Does this look fucking perfect to you? What the fuck is perfect? What do you want from me? What else do I have to do? Is this what you want to be? Are you proud of this? Look. *This!*" Troy yells and punches himself in the chest with his hand. "*This!* I don't want to do this anymore!" He looks Clancy directly in the eyes. "You want to know, don't you? You want to ask it. Everyone wants to know."

Clancy just watches. He says nothing. He has no idea what Troy is talking about.

“Just fucking ask me if he blew a hole in the back of his goddamn skull. You want to ask. You’ve been staring at me like you want to ask. So have some balls and just fucking ask. Just do it, damn it. For Christ’s sake, just do it.”

Troy is screaming now. Clancy picks himself up from the floor. He of all people knows that some days are better than others and that some nights are worse than most, but this here in front of him? This is something different. It is something he’s never seen before. He won’t say anything. It is neither the place nor the time. And Troy is not in his right mind. He swims in the oversized sweatshirt. As his arms flail at the air around him, he looks pathetic and alone. Clancy walks over to his friend, who seems not to have the energy to push him away. The rant has exhausted him. Clancy takes him in his arms and holds him as tight as he can.

“I want to go home,” Troy says. “I want to go home.”

XIII.

Clancy watches Dan sip from a glass flute of orange juice. They are sitting in a small cafe down the block. Getting out of the apartment for a late breakfast had been Dan's idea, and Clancy hadn't objected.

"Your eye is a little red," says Dan. "You're a saint for dealing with him."

"Who else will?" Clancy asks.

"And that is your problem?"

"Yes," Clancy says. He isn't sure what else to say, and now that it is clear that the purpose of this breakfast seems less about letting him relax after last night's debacle than about ambushing Troy, Clancy wishes that he had turned it down. He knows that he cannot do this forever, but he understands what it is like to be suddenly left alone. It can upset and unbalance even the most stable and established of people, and Troy is anything but that at the moment. Giving him an ultimatum might have a fallout effect that none of them are ready for, and he isn't prepared to accept that responsibility, even if that would be the sensible thing to do. He doesn't want to have to argue against fact, but he realizes that is exactly what he is going to have to do.

"I was afraid you'd say that," Dan says, settling into his role of rational opponent. Clancy can tell he is well prepared, and it angers him that there seems to be no respite from things falling apart around him. He just wishes that, even in chaos, there would be some consistency, some order, some stable normality to fall back on.

"Troy and Dawn," Clancy says.

"And that surprises or bothers you?"

"It worries me." And this is true. It is an X-factor that he cannot control and that complicates things. He isn't sure where Troy's head is, and if he had it his way, Clancy would remove anything from the situation that he deemed a threat to Troy,

because Dawn definitely amounts to one, or perhaps he is overthinking everything and looking for problems where none truly exist.

"It worries you. It bothers you. Is there much of a difference? You seem more worried about his wellbeing than yours or mine or Dawn's. It's a three-to-one proposition. You're a numbers person. The math is simple, dear," Dan says.

"I know him." Clancy pushes the eggs on his plate around with his fork. He is simultaneously hungry and without appetite. Despite everything he feels the need to defend Troy, perhaps out of a sense of loyalty to a common background, to common experiences, or perhaps it is only because he would like to believe that if he were ever to be spoken about in situations like these, there would be someone there to defend him, too.

"Do you? And what exactly do you '*know*'? He's a big boy. He can take care of himself. Last night is perfect proof."

"Don't call him a boy."

"As if that is something to be worried about," says Dan.

"It's not him I'm worried about."

Dan points his knife towards the plate in front of them. "You haven't eaten anything. Should I order you a mimosa? Would that make it better?"

"How long?"

"I just think you're jealous," says Dan. "Take the mimosa."

"Jealous of what? This isn't about me."

Dan slices a piece of Brie and places it on Clancy's plate. "Or did you eat too much cheese in Paris?"

"I didn't have any cheese."

"I think it's time for the *visit* to be over."

"What visit?" Clancy asks, though he knows that playing dumb and stalling for time can only go so far. Dan will not fall for it, and he will only continue to embarrass himself in front of yet another person if he keeps up this charade.

"You need to ask him to leave."

"And go where? I'm not throwing him out on the street."

"There are hotels."

"You are either the cruelest person I have ever met, or you believe only in sheer pragmatism." Clancy places his fork next to his plate and folds his arm across his chest. "It was one night."

"I thought you were concerned."

"I am concerned, but I'm more concerned about protecting him than having a knee-jerk reaction to a breakdown. You've never done something like that?"

"Have you?" Dan tilts his flute of orange juice at Clancy. He drinks the rest of the juice and then taps the empty glass with his pinky.

"Everybody has. None of us are," he stops and catches himself. He nearly chokes on the word. How ironic and yet telling of how illusory everything with Troy has always been. "Perfect," he says finally.

"I won't stay if he does."

"I won't abandon him."

"Abandon him," echoes Dan. "What if he's already abandoned you, Clancy? Haven't you ever considered that?"

"No," Clancy says.

"To be loved by you," says Dan. "It must be heavenly."

"Tell that to Monica," Clancy says, happy to have a momentary break from the topic of Troy.

"I never liked her anyway," Dan says.

"You adored her."

"I *adored* her fashion sense," Dan says. "One can have a great eye for clothes and still be an awful human being. Just like one can be a good one, and have no sense for self-preservation." Dan places the flute down. He leans forward and presses his palms against the table. "You can't save him."

"What makes you think I want to save him?"

"I was fishing. You just proved it."

"You didn't know him. You didn't know what he was."

"And what is he now? Don't you see what this is? Divide and conquer. That's what people like him do."

"People like him?" Clancy asks. "Who are people like him? My people?"

"I never said that," Dan says and leans back in his chair.

"You implied it."

"I did no such thing."

"And what does Dawn think?"

"I need you, Clance."

"Because she doesn't want this, either?"

"Who said I wanted it? You should be the one who wants it. You were the one with him last night." And in a way he knows Dan is right. There a part of him, deep down, that has always hoped in a small way for Troy to fail. He hates himself for it, for the envy that he would like to think himself better than, but in reality what has there ever been to be truly jealous of? If anything Troy was one to be pitied because he had no idea how other people viewed him. He's only ever been reminded of his failures and his shortfalls. "How come everyone always focuses on Icarus crashing to earth rather than celebrating the gall it took for him to believe he could fly that close to the sun?"

"Stop being dramatic," Dan says. "It doesn't suit you."

"You mean it doesn't suit 'people like me?' Whose name is on the lease? Mine is. Did you forget that?" Clancy says.

"Do you like having him around because it makes you feel better about yourself or because you secretly want to be him?"

"That might be the dumbest thing you've ever said." Clancy looks for the waitress. A mimosa might not be such a bad idea after all. He doesn't want to fight, and he doesn't want another relationship to disintegrate suddenly overnight, but the lines are being drawn by forces that none of them, neither he, nor Dan, nor Dawn, nor Troy can control. It comes down to loyalty. The only problem is that no one has ever clarified to whom or to what that loyalty is owed. They are all flying by the seat of their pants, and there is no emergency brake around that they might pull to slow everything down. Who set this train in motion? Was it Monica leaving? Or was it Clancy saying to Troy, yes, come stay? Or was it Dan inviting Dawn to live with them? Or was it Dawn seemingly falling for Troy? Each of them is to blame in their own way, when in earnest all any of them were trying to do was to be kind to another person.

"You're jealous of the fact that he's tragic, isn't that it?" Dan says softly. There is a hurt in his voice that he cannot mask, as though he is finally laying out a truth that has been there all along. "Compared to him your pain is just ordinary."

He turns back to Dan. Dan's gaze is sad but firm, resigned in the fact that they seem to have, each of them, their own, individual point of no return.

"I'll think about it," Clancy says.

"No, you won't," says Dan. "We both know that."

"I said I would think about it."

"I'll start packing until I hear something different."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Eat the cheese," Dan says. "Let us just eat the cheese and enjoy each other's company for a few minutes more."

XIV.

Moments. Even now it is moments. Three days is all it took for a placid environment to become a tinderbox. A minor scratch, and everything will ignite. She is not surprised. She does not blame herself. She has no fault in this whole matter. It is between the boys of the house. Up to now, she has kept to herself and tried not to have any role in any of the drama. She finds it ridiculous, how petty it all seems from her vantage point.

Since it began, Troy has distanced himself from her. He has retreated back into his own room. When he emerges, he is randomly making peanut butter sandwiches and stacking them in the kitchen or in the living room. He has been leaving piles of them next to his bed, as though he is preparing for a picnic of epic proportions, or he is gone, off running somewhere. She does not pretend to understand him. She does not pretend to think that a couple of weeks and one night of sharing secrets lead to someone offering up unadulterated trust. She knows that such a thing is impossible.

Dan has begun to pack. There are boxes in his room, and it is as though he is offering some ultimatum by displaying them so clearly to everyone else. She is not sure whether or not to take him seriously. It will all pass, and things will go back to being normal again, but there is still something about it all that worries her. She is most concerned about Clancy. He seems to be the one who could right everything, but he has chosen to just let these things play out around him.

So, she is trying to bring them all together. She's planned an event out as a house. She imagines them as a group of people who should be able to exist together, because, in reality, there is nothing that should be keeping them apart.

She went to Troy first. She told him about a Europop night at a local bar called Seville. He'd seemed intrigued, if distant. He said it might be the closest they'd get to Europe for quite some time.

Next was Dan. With him it was simple. Any excuse for fun would do.

And finally there was Clancy. He was ambivalent, but she assumed only because he had just returned from the real thing. Still, he had agreed.

She did not, directly, tell any of them that it involved the entire apartment. She figured it was implied. If they can't infer that, it isn't her problem. Besides, she's sure that the bar will be large enough that, if they need to scatter, they can. A large part of her assumes that is exactly what they will do.

It is raining, and with a cordiality she did not expect, the three boys agree to share a cab. They arrive early. There is no line. They walk right inside to heavy, oppressive base lines that, coupled with the sporadic waves of colored light being thrown by swirling disco balls, give one the impression of being caught in a sonic hurricane.

It is not long before they all pair off. Troy and Clancy go towards the bar. Clancy has his arm on Troy's shoulder. He pulls him close, and then he playfully pushes him away. Dan places his hand on her wrist, and they stand together in the entrance.

"I spread the word," Dan says. "Cait and Sarah and Jonah are coming. I figured it's been a while, and if things explode we can lose them," he nods toward the bar, "and still have a good time."

At the bar, Troy stands with Clancy. "There are times," Troy begins, but Clancy places his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm drinking whiskey," Clancy says. "What are you having?" Clancy smiles, and Troy orders two whiskeys. When they arrive, Troy pays, and Clancy takes them both in his hands. He holds one out to Troy. "It happens to the best of us," Clancy says.

"And to the worst."

"Drink it," Clancy says. "And stop frightening Dan."

Clancy clinks the rim of his glass against Troy's.

"You forget Paris yet?" Troy asks.

"It's a nice city."

"Romantic?" Troy asks.

"Planning a trip?" He raises his glass in the direction of Dawn, who appears to be kindly nodding in time as Dan talks.

Troy shakes his head from side to side.

Clancy places his arm on Troy's shoulder, and Troy lets him pull him close. He places his head on Clancy's chest for a moment. Against the crown of his head, Troy can feel Clancy offer a slight kiss before he releases him. "Hang in there," Clancy says. "It'll get better."

"So it's settled then?" Dan says, and Troy feels himself being taken by the arm.

When they reach the far corner of the bar, Dan stops. "How long have I known you now?" Dan asks.

"In time or in quality?"

"Who exactly are you?"

"Who am I?" Troy repeats. "It's always depended on the person asking the question."

"I am asking you, *Mr. Troy Stefany.*"

“How much time do you have?”

“I’m not playing this game,” Dan says. He goes to leave, but Troy bars him with his arm. He looks Dan in his eyes, and his gaze seems to soften.

“Neither am I,” Troy says. “I’m a failure. A former cokehead who pissed away every God-given gift he was ever given and lost nearly everyone he loved.”

“Sometimes it’s so simple, isn’t it?”

“Maybe,” says Troy. “Define simple.”

“We’re not so different, you and me.” He nods towards Clancy. “I adore him. I adore his pettiness and his stupidity. And he loves you so much he hates you,” Dan says. “He’ll never forgive you for sleeping with her.”

Dan pauses for a moment as the music stalls. The quiet is palpable, alarming almost, and as the music returns, Troy feels Dan’s hand reach down and grasp his own. “Dance with me,” Dan says. “This isn’t a request. Just come out and dance with me. I’m moving out. I’m going to go *somewhere*. I need to get out. I’ve been here for too long.”

“You two make quite the pair,” Dawn says, once she and Clancy are alone.

“It ebbs and flows,” he says. “Eruption. Calm. Calm. Eruption.”

“What did she look like?” Dawn asks.

He regards her with a puzzled expression on his face before her question seems to register in his mind. He exhales and scratches his fingers against his temple.

“She was.” He drinks. “She was.”

She is surprised. She had expected more.

“What are you going to do if you fail?” he asks. The question startles her.

“I’m not going to,” she says.

He nods, and then with a long gulp, finishes what is in his glass. He raises it in the direction of the dance floor, and she turns to see Troy dancing with Dan. They are an odd pair. They look out of place, but they seem to be enjoying themselves.

“That’s what he thought,” says Clancy. “That’s what we all thought.”

“Oh, I’ll manage,” she says and turns back to Clancy.

His eyes meet hers. They are calm, yet firm. “Good luck keeping him.”

Troy is flushed. He breathes heavily. He feels the sweat dripping down the side of his face. He reaches deep down into his pocket and feels the cracked edges of his father’s badge case. If you could see this now, Dad, he thinks. If you could see me now....

“Right?”

“Right,” Troy responds. Jonah has been talking, but Troy can only hear pieces of what he says. Mostly he asks questions about baseball, and Troy tries to block him out the best he can. He offers one-word answers and polite responses in the hope that Jonah will get the hint, but so far, it is not working.

“I mean, it must’ve been amazing,” Jonah says. “They pay you to play and travel. You jump from town to town.”

“Ever spend twelve hours a day on a bus, play a four-hour game, and then have to get back on a bus for another eight hours?”

“I took the Chinatown bus to Boston once.”

“Yeah?” Troy says.

“Like sardines.”

Troy scans the bar. Heads and arms bob up and down. It reminds him of how the fans in some stadiums would occasionally jump up and down in an attempt to will

the ball club to success. It never worked. He needs another drink. "You want a beer?" Troy asks.

"I'm good. I got what I need." He smiles and taps his nose. "Got a guy at St. Mark's. You interested?"

"Beer?" Troy repeats and motions to the bar. He won't. He won't take the chance. Not now. Not after the other night. He should even cut back on the drinking. One never seems to be enough anymore.

He orders a beer at the bar. He wipes the foam away with his finger and licks it. He gulps it down quickly. The cold soothes the back of his throat. He puts the glass on his forehead and holds it there for a moment. He tries to clear his mind, but thoughts of his father keep coming to him. He recalls Christmases, birthdays, languid summer nights listening to ball games on the radio, or watching them on TV. He thinks of their own simple games of catch, which they played in the yard until his father could no longer handle the ever-increasing velocity of Troy's fastball. He thinks of his father's books, of the way they were arranged on the living room shelves. He never saw him open one. It was as though they were meant solely for decoration. He thinks of their small kitchen, of its morning smell of eggs and toast mixed with his father's Polo cologne, and how, each morning, the man would get up a few minutes earlier just to make sure that Troy ate something before the day began.

"So," the voice is faint, high, female. He places her instantly. "Always sneak off in the middle of the night?"

He recalls the night in the cab, and the long, narrow basement apartment it brought him to. It was sparsely furnished, but there had been a water pipe in the corner. He cannot remember what they talked about, only that her lips tasted like cherry lip gloss, and that had made it seem like he was kissing a high-school girl.

"I would have made breakfast," she says.

"I'm not a breakfast person."

"You people never are, are you?"

"More brunch," he says, when he notices her hand coming towards his face.

She lands a hard blow above his cheek, and catches the bone below his eye socket.

"Stay for breakfast next time."

"There will be a next time?"

"I'm a forgiving person."

"I can see that." He rubs the side of his face. "You box?"

"Forgiveness can be painful," she says.

"Do you make pancakes?"

"Eggs over easy."

"I'm more of a pancake person," Troy says.

"It was nice to see you," she says and rubs the side of his face.

"You made my evening," he says.

"I told you I was interesting." She pushes one finger into his sternum. "Think about it," she says. "You've never had my eggs." She turns and heads back out towards the dance floor.

Eventually, the smarting subsides, and his eyes come to rest on a familiar face, one whose shocked expression tells him that she has just seen everything.

"I won't ask," Dawn says.

"It's a small town," Troy says.

"Yes, New York is practically a village."

"Her name is Callie."

"I'm glad she has a name."

"Most people do."

“Want me to beat her up?” Dawn asks. “I’m pretty rough.” She stands tiptoed and kisses his jaw gently.

Troy looks around. He is searching for Clancy. He would like to talk with him, or stand with him, if only for a moment, but when he catches a glimpse of him, he is off with Jonah and Dan. They dance. They all look happy.

“Go,” Troy says. “Go, I’ll finish this, and then I’ll join.” He swirls the bit of beer that is left in his glass.

“Your loss,” Dawn playfully quips. Her eyes are bright. Their blue is deep and powerful. She kisses him once more on the jaw. “Play nice,” she says. “Stay away from strange women.”

“I didn’t know you were normal,” he says.

She hustles to join Dan and Jonah and Clancy on the dance floor, and when she reaches them, Dawn positions herself next to Clancy. She no longer has to pretend she is composed. She would like to smack him on the other side of his face. *Most people have names*: he said. He can be a right bastard some times. There is a part of her that is annoyed that she feels this way. Does she have a right to expect more? Why does she feel like she has been betrayed in some manner? The situation could have been reversed and what then? It is just something fun she is currently doing, and assigning more weight to it would be foolish. She doesn’t want to be weighed down by anything. She doesn’t want to go back to when things had the capacity to hurt her, yet despite this, she finds herself looking to see if he is standing alone along the bar. She is jealous, and Clancy’s words sting.

She feels Clancy against her. His hand grazes the side of her face. He strokes it the way a lover might. He is laughing and drunk. It is the lightest she has ever seen him, and there is something different and carefree in the way he moves. His hands

go to her waist. She hesitates at first, but then she allows them to stay. She looks for Troy, and from across the floor, she sees him shake his head. He seems to fight back a smile, but the corners of his mouth move up into a slight grin. She puckers her lips and blows an invisible kiss across the dance floor to him. He raises his jaw to it, and shows it has reached him by jerking his head back.

The music rises, swells, and dips. She lets herself get lost in it. She feels free. She feels like no one can touch her. She is sure Troy is watching her. He is watching how she moves, and he is watching the person she is moving with. She goes faster. She turns. She reaches back out to touch Clancy's face. She spins back around and presses the small of her back against his waist. She likes knowing she is still the one in control, and that she is the one with the power. Tomorrow, she thinks. Tomorrow she will make the trip back uptown.

Clancy places his hands on Dawn's hips. He has been thinking about what Dan said. It is an impossible decision, and one he knows he cannot make because the reasonable thing to do is exactly what Dan says. He should take yesterday as a warning sign. He should try to find another way to help him. He will give him until the end of the week, and then he will sit down and talk with Troy. By then, he hopes, everything will have calmed down enough that it is not an issue any more.

XV.

She stares at a postcard depicting Gerome's Pygmalion and Galatea, where a female statue comes alive and reaches out to embrace her craftsman. It is a beautiful gesture, old-fashioned, yet touching in its way. She pauses beside the metal gate leading to the basement studio. She reviews the business card one last time. Its colors are warm and inviting. She breathes deeply. She tries to conjure an image of her mother in Prague, and Dawn attempts to imagine what *she* might do in this situation. So Dawn enters the studio.

There is no lobby, and there is no one there to greet her. There are two umbrella-like lights that face a simple, white backdrop. The set up is simple. She had expected more. The room reminds her of a grammar school picture day.

Framed photographs depicting the legs of women walking the streets of Manhattan line the wall. All of them, strangely enough, have been taken from behind. All of them appear to have been purposely blurred. She is not sure what these seemingly disembodied legs, which rise up towards hems and the slits on skirts that brush against handbags, are supposed to represent.

Between the women hang blown up posters advertising openings and showings across Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Hudson Valley. They are more than reputable, but she can feel herself wavering. In the far corner, she finds the nudes. These stills of women dancing are flamboyant, but tasteful. They twist and stretch their limbs into beautiful poses of controlled aggression. They are lean and ferocious, and the lines of their bodies are perfect.

"I know what you're thinking," a voice from behind her says. "You want to know where I find them. Juilliard mostly. Some come to me from Columbia. They are all dancers looking to make a bit of money on the side. You have no idea how fickle and cheap *that* industry can be."

She turns. He is her height, maybe an inch or so taller. His stomach pounces over skin tight jeans. His black shirt seems painted on. His facial hair is an extraordinary array of slashes and daggers. Sunglasses cover his eyes. She would be more comfortable if he would take them off. She cannot read him.

She glances at the business card in her hand.

“Are you Martin?” she says.

“What brings you to my *atelier*?”

“I thought, maybe.” She raises her chin in the direction of the dancing women on the wall.

“That,” he says. “That, O.K. But you...” He pauses. Even with the glasses hiding his eyes from view, she knows that he is working them up and down her body. “No,” he says. He takes off his glasses. His eyes are green, friendly. They are softer than she would have imagined.

“No, what?” she ask.

“*That* isn’t you. No. I don’t see that at all. You’re a nymph. You belong in a field with daisies and fawns. I don’t do that.”

“Dan said to say hello,” she says.

“Ahh, young Mr. Baumberg. And how is he?” He moves to a small desk in the far corner of the room, bends down, and pulls a handful of papers from inside. “Take this home and read it and sign it. If we go to show, which, I think given the strange avenue you’ll allow me, we definitely could, you’ll make it back and more. The rates are all in there.” He holds it out to her. “You *are* over eighteen, yes?”

She nods.

“I.D.” he says.

She takes her driver’s license from her purse and hands it to him. He takes it. He flips it back and forth in his hand.

"Everything in order?" she asks.

"Take your time and look it over." He hands the I.D. and papers to her, and then he turns to head back to wherever he originally appeared from.

"Wait." She takes a pen from her purse and leafs through to the final page. She braces the paper against her thigh and sloppily scribbles her name along the dotted line.

"That, my dear, is a legally binding contract. Take it home first."

She shakes her head.

"Impetuous. You *must* be a friend of Dan's." He holds out his hand to her. She is unsure of what he wants, and he regards her curiously. "I won't sign my end just yet, but I will ask you to pay, in case you never come back."

"How much?"

"Four hundred cash," he says. "It's all inside the contract that you didn't read."

There is a sinking feeling in her stomach. She tightens her purse against her shoulder. She gets ready to leave, and then she remembers. With her free hand, she riffles through the inside of her bag and pulls out the crumpled bit of green she'd all but forgotten about. She separates Troy's money, six hundred in total, and gives Martin four hundred-dollar bills.

"You just seem to be full of surprises, don't you?" He takes the papers and goes to a closet in the corner. He returns with a camera. "Stand in front of the screen. I want you all in white to start. It will help accentuate the innocent motif."

"No make-up?" she says.

He shakes his head. "Your clothes, please."

She turns her back to him. She removes her jacket, then her sweater, and the T-shirt underneath. Next, she goes for her shoes. She unties the laces. She unbuttons her jeans and slides them down her legs. She unhooks her bra and tosses

it off to the side, and then she shimmies out of her underwear. The room is cold, but it is not as bad as she imagined it would be. She turns to face him. He smiles. His look is both professional and gentle. She is naked. The room is large. She is unsure where, exactly, she should stand, or exactly where she should put her hands.

“Good,” he says. The camera flashes, and Martin begins to move around her.

She tries to recall the pace and beat of a song, any song, from last night. She tries to play it out in her head and to move in accordance with it. She wants to be like the dancers he’s hung on his walls.

Martin stops. “What are you doing? What is all this flailing? Are you having a seizure? No,” Martin continues. “Now, I want you to sit. Tuck your knees into yourself like you’re at the beach.”

She does what he instructs. This, at least, feels natural. “Look past me,” Martin says. “Look far off into the distance. Look for a ship that in your heart you know is never going to come. Good.” He keeps snapping away. “Now, put your arm across your breasts. Push in. Try to give yourself some cleavage.” He moves the camera from in front of his face, and she can see him smile when he says, “Perfect. These are perfect. It’s like you *know*.”

In her mind, she is on a bluff overlooking the ocean. It is the height of summer. A warm breeze blows in from the sea. She imagines she can taste the flavor of salt in the air. The spray from the waves occasionally flies up and dampens her face. She tosses her head to the side, and her hair falls over the front of her shoulder. She drops her arm. She lets herself lean forward a bit. She elongates her back, and, rather than accentuate her lines, she tries to greater amplify her curves, the slope and dip of her hips and waist.

“Wonderful, but Victorian. *Safe*,” he says.

She is not sure what he means, but she can offer a guess. If she is going to do this, she needs to go all the way. She clenches her legs together, and then she lets herself relax.

“Look directly into the camera,” Martin says. “Stretch out against the wall,” he says. “Move your legs a bit. Relax them.”

She leans back against the wall. She raises her arm up, and in one long, languid loop, she lets her hand come to rest at the back of her neck. She shuts her eyes. She imagines someone is caressing her face. She breathes deeply, and she tries to exhale as sensually as she can. She pulls one of her legs in towards her. The other, she stretches out as far as she can. She can hear the camera’s shutter clicking away, and when she opens her eyes she sees that he is on his stomach in front of her. He shoots upwards. He shoots everything. He moves quickly and with mechanical precision. There is something petrifying about this, but she will not stop him. She lets go. She is giving something that she had not planned, and it is exhausting. It is then, as she feels the wall against her spine, that she thinks, maybe this is how her mother felt. It was never about me, Dawn thinks.

XVI.

Troy wears his Dodgers sweatshirt and sits on the couch. Clancy is with him. They are watching football, eating pizza, and drinking a few beers. It reminds him of the sleepovers they shared together when they were younger, when they would waste away summer nights doing nothing more than watching movies, arguing about baseball players, or seeing who could stay awake the longest. They have talked a bit, but they have mostly passed the morning in a comfortable silence. Clancy has been a different person since his return from Paris. He is looser and more comfortable in his own skin.

“Do you know how they cut you in the pros?” Troy says. He keeps his eyes glued to the television in front of them. “Most of the time you’re half-naked at your locker when they tap you on the shoulder. They probably get you like that so you’re too preoccupied to immediately realize what’s going on. Someone tells you the manager wants to talk to you. They always send the pencil pushers. That’s when you know. You stand there in a towel, still dripping wet.” Troy pulls a cold slice of pizza from the box on the table. “When you get called up, the manager comes over to you with a big smile. He tells you to take your bag, which is probably still packed from the day you arrived, and to get the fuck out before the powers that be change their mind.” He shakes his head and laughs. “I’m sitting with my locker mate at my locker, and both the manager and the pencil boy come over at the same time. It’s this comedy of errors. It was this slow motion race, with both of them trying to beat the other, and then they both arrived at the same time. Neither of them wanted to go first. So they just stood there staring at us. They didn’t say anything. The whole room was silent and watching. We could already tell who was here for whom, because the media boy is looking at me, and the Old Man is looking at Beattie, but the rest of the clubhouse doesn’t know whether to laugh, because it really *is* funny, or to be all dignified,

because someone's about to be out of a job." He takes another bite of his pizza. "I wish they'd laughed or cheered or did something for Beattie. He was the guy they called up, Mike Beattie. Because it was like my being there ruined his moment to be happy. Not that it matters," he laughs. "The bastard isn't leaving the show anytime soon."

"What did you do?"

"What did I do?" He moves his eyes to the ceiling. The white paint is chipped in places. "I spent three days in a dive motel on the beach in Santa Monica, watching HBO with three bottles of whiskey and a bag of blow, and I wondered when I was going to be sufficiently fucked enough to walk into the ocean and not turn around."

"You were great," Clancy says. "Nearly 'Perfect.'"

"Not good enough," Troy says.

"You were better than most," Clancy said.

"Still, not good enough."

"None of us ever are."

Troy pulls off a bit of his pizza crust and launches it at Clancy. It hits him in the cheek, and then Troy flings himself at him. He knocks him off the side of the couch and sends him to the ground. There has never been a time when he couldn't beat Clancy with one hand tied behind his back, but Clancy is stronger than he recalls him ever being, and he finds himself repeatedly thwarted in his attempts to flip and turn his friend, but he refuses to give in. He strains. He pushes. He feels Clancy doing the same, before Clancy suddenly whips his arm around and catches Troy in the nose. Troy is laughing. His nose stings, and he can feel blood dripping from it.

"Now we're even," Clancy says. Clancy reaches into his pocket and throws a balled tissue at Troy. Troy sticks it into his nostril. When he comes to his senses, he

notices that Dawn is standing in the corner of the room. He has no idea how long she has been there.

"I need to talk to you," she says.

"So talk," says Clancy.

"Troy," she says. "Now."

She heads toward her room. Troy follows her. He can only imagine that this has something to do with the girl from last night.

When he arrives, he finds her sitting on the edge of her bed. She stares at a series of postcards that she holds in her hands. There is a business card between two of them. She does not move.

"What makes this art?" she asks. He has no idea what she is talking about. She looks up at him. "You think I've gone crazy, don't you?"

He breathes deeply. He realizes that he still has the tissue in his nose. He takes it out and places it in the front pouch of his sweatshirt. He does not walk to the bed. He does not sit beside her. He just stands there and listens while she seems to talk to the print. She tells it everything. She recounts getting the business card. She tells him about the photos. She seems scared and angry. He cannot read her.

"Are you hurt?" he asks.

"Define hurt," she says. "It's nothing that won't pass. Just like everything else. Maybe I'll end up naked on a billboard in Time's Square. Fifteen minutes of fame. All that, you know? Isn't that how it works nowadays? It's not like I've been raped, physically." She forces a laugh, but there is something hollow in her voice. She looks at him. "Black humor can be very comforting."

Troy isn't exactly sure what he should do or what he should say. He isn't trained in these types of things. "Do you want a glass of water?" he asks. She laughs again, but this time it is real, genuine.

"I'd rather have a shot of something strong," she says. "And forget that all of this happened for a while."

"Drinking won't help," he says.

"Thanks, Dad," she replies.

"That isn't--"

"I know that's not what you meant," she says. "Sorry, it's just--"

"Don't worry," he says, though he full well knows how empty words like that can be.

"Can you build me a time-machine?"

"I'd have to find books for that first"

She forces a grin and sighs resignedly before she lies down and places her cheek against his leg. Troy puts his arm across her shoulder and rubs gently against her arm. It seems like the right thing to do.

"There's something very calming about you," she says. "Has anyone ever told you that?"

"No," he says.

"There is."

"No one else would believe you."

"I don't care about anyone else."

"No?"

"No."

"Maybe you should," he says.

He keeps rubbing against her arm. He isn't exactly sure what she means. He doesn't want to read into anything, but he can't help but wonder if she is trying to tell him something that otherwise would be impossible for her. He thinks back to the night of her game. He thinks of the moments, however brief, they have shared. He

thinks of the first time in the kitchen. He wonders if somehow he has missed everything that should have been so clear to him.

"Why?" she asks. "Are you mad?"

"Why does it matter what I think?"

"You can be dense sometimes, can't you," she says with her cheek still resting on his leg.

"Maybe," he says. He waits to see what her reply might be, but she says nothing at first. She just lies there. "Can I see the card?" he asks.

She reaches down to the floor, picks it up, and hands it to him. "Have you ever wanted someone to just tell you everything will be OK, even if it is a lie? Isn't it strange how we operate like that? How irrational we can be? How we can trick ourselves into certain things? We can almost trick ourselves into anything if we try hard enough, can't we? What's the dumbest thing you've ever done?" she asks.

It started on a beach in Santa Monica. He had been tired. He had been in pain. He hadn't wanted to keep playing, but he didn't know how to stop. He had been with a girl. They were watching the sun go down below the ocean when he tried it the first time, and then he just never stopped. It had helped him to just keep going, to keep chasing. "Baseball," he says.

"Baseball and photography," she says. "The innocent destroyers of potentially great lives. Tragic, isn't it?"

He starts to reply, but before he can she shifts in his lap and says, "Don't answer that. We've talked enough. Thank you, though. Thank you for just listening. It was kind."

XVII.

Monday morning, pre-rush hour and the trains are empty. Troy is reminded why he loves them so much. They can be good places to think. He has memorized the card. He recalls the location from their trip to the Met, the side alley she meandered to. It makes sense now, he thinks.

He has his plan. He wears his sweatshirt. He is cold, but he is better underdressed than dressed incorrectly. It will be quick and efficient. It has to be. He will request the photos and the negatives. He will threaten tacitly, but enough. His fingers run over a small lighter and his father's badge. Both are tucked away in his sweatshirt pocket. He will flash the badge quickly, just long enough for his target to see that it is real, and just long enough for him to respect it.

He should make quick time on a mark like this, or so he tells himself. If nothing else, Troy knows he must be efficient and clean. Nothing can lead back to anyone surrounding him. The only liability is Dawn, but she knows nothing. She can deny it all. She will never need to know the details, just that things are taken care of.

His first escape route is back to the subway. If all goes well, he will exit during the height of the morning rush. He will vanish into it. His fallback route is through the park. It is big. Should he need to hide for a few hours, there are plenty of outcroppings. He is dressed so that he will blend in most places. Two, three, four hours max, and then he'll be back in Park Slope. The train finally arrives at 86th Street. Part of him just wants to shut his eyes, have the doors close, and let the subway continue its trek uptown, but he forces himself up from his seat.

The studio is locked when he gets there, and he does not want to linger out front. He crosses the street and leans against a tree. He can watch from a distance. He did his best to find out what this Martin looked like, but all he knows is that the man has eccentric facial hair.

After about a half-hour of waiting, Troy spots someone who could possibly be the man he wants. He heads across the street, and calls out to him.

“May I help you?” The man turns to Troy.

“Got a moment?”

“For you,” Martin looks him up and down. “Surely.”

Troy pulls the badge from his sweatshirt and flashes it quickly.

“I didn’t know that they made you so young,” Martin says. His tone is playful, but Troy senses that he is suspicious.

“I’ve aged gracefully,” Troy says.

“So this is just public outreach on a Monday morning?” Martin asks.

“I need a favor.”

“Ask away.”

“Can we go inside?”

“Why not,” Martin says. “I’ll make coffee.”

Troy follows him inside. Martin closes the door behind him. They are alone.

“Everything here is legitimate,” Martin says. “I’m a visual artist, and, as you can see, my subjects vary.”

Troy notices the photos that line the wall. “What’s with the legs?” he asks.

“You mean ‘Rush Hour?’” Martin says.

“What does that have to do with commuting?”

“You’ve never noticed the legs of women hurrying from place to place?” asks Martin. “I highly doubt it.”

“They know they were being photographed?”

“My models are not junkies and whores. They’re all legal, and they’re mostly students. If you’re one of those prudish types who have a problem with my *art*, I know plenty of lawyers who see it my way.”

“That’s not my concern,” Troy says. “Coffee ready?”

“What’s your concern, then?” Martin takes a cup of coffee and hands it to him.

“One of your subjects in particular. Girl named Dawn. Ring any bells?”

“Well, that was quick,” Martin says. “I have her I.D. on file. She’s perfectly legal.” He opens a closet and pulls out a folder. “Impetuous, but legal.”

“I just want the photos,” Troy says.

Martin places his fingers to his jaw and drums along his cheek. “I can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“We have a contract,” he says. “You’re the boyfriend? The brother? Tell her she should read her contracts before she sends people here.”

“She didn’t send me here,” says Troy.

“They turned out quite well,” he says. “She has potential.”

“Potential,” Troy laughs.

“I’m sure you do, too,” Martin says. “Interested?”

“Give. Me The. Photos,” Troy says. He tries to punctuate each word with a pause for effect.

Martin laughs. “Young man, really? Doesn’t the NYPD have anything better to do than send you to harass me over a couple of artistic photographs? Did she complain?”

“Are they in that folder?”

“Why are you here?”

“Give me the folder.” Troy thrusts his arm forward and reaches for it, but Martin is quicker. He pulls it away, but Troy’s arm continues onward. He catches Martin in the windpipe with his fingertips. Martin gasps. “Get out,” he yells. “Now!” Martin reaches into his pocket and pulls out a cell phone.

Troy panics. It was not intentional. He's had no desire for violence, but what is done is now done. It was an accident, but still if it's started, it must be finished. He knows he can't let this man make this phone call. He has no recourse. He's impersonated a police officer, and he's struck the man. He can't let his stupidity come back to Clancy or Dawn. They never asked this of him, and he doesn't want to involve them in it.

Troy moves quickly. He grabs Martin by the lapel and drives him towards the wall. Martin's hand opens, and the cell phone falls to the floor. Even lifted off the floor and pinned to the wall, Martin laughs. "Fuck off," he says. Troy can feel spittle fly into his face.

How did it come to this, thinks Troy? He's been indifferent to Dawn, hasn't he? She was just around, wasn't she? Why is he even here? Or maybe this is just the culmination of the last five years finally coming to fruition, after trying to be indifferent to everything, of trying to numb himself to everything, of trying not to care about anything at all, he's finally arrived at a point where he realizes nothing is in his control. Not even this. All he has wanted was to feel safe. He doesn't want to let anyone down anymore, but what has he hoped to gain by coming here? What has he been trying to prove? That there was still something in him worth salvaging, or is this proof that he threw that all away a long time ago. It doesn't matter anymore. Nothing does. He can't control anything. He never could. So why should he try to now?

With all the strength he can muster, Troy throws Martin to the floor, but his laughing does not subside. As he hits the ground, it becomes louder, and his grin becomes wider, more cynical, and more disdainful. This man, who in his way is a great success, who has managed to carve this life out for himself, who has survived, and who has continued to exist simply by doing what he loves, laughs at him from the floor. And his grin, it says you are nothing. It says I can see through you, I saw

through you the moment you walked in here. For Troy, it is too familiar. It is too haunting. He has seen it before. It was on the face of the media boy who told him he was being released from his contract. He saw it on the face of the man with the scar at the Mets game. It is the look he imagines on the face of every sportswriter, blogger, radio show caller, and faux expert that commented on the waste of his career. It is a self-righteous, vicious sneer. It is the look that Troy is sure Clancy had when he first heard the news of Troy's demise. It is the look on the face of the captain in the recruiting office. Patronizing. It is a look he seems to have received from everyone but his father, and perhaps only because rather than offer it he'd....

It is a look that, a lifetime ago, Troy could flash himself, as he looked in towards scared opposing hitters who had no chance, and who seemed to want to be anywhere in the world but in that batter's box sixty feet and six inches away from him. Inside of him, Troy feels that fire, that anger, that power that once shot from his arm, building again. The controlled violence of a pitch, of the beautiful dance that he can still repeat without thinking—one, two, three, four, five, explode— but this time it is not a ball. His fist lands flush against Martin's jaw. Again and again it falls there. He can hear the cadence in his mind. He lands blow after blow on this man's face, which despite his efforts, seems to never cease smiling.

Troy only stops when he can no longer feel his hand. Martin lies on the floor. The slight heaving of his chest proves that he is still alive. Troy takes the folder. He pulls a camera from the closet and smashes it against the wall. He does the same to the laptop he takes off the man's desk. He pulls out the drawers of the desk and dumps their contents onto the floor. He looks back at the man on the ground. Yes, he is breathing, and he is moving slowly along the floor in the direction of what Troy sees is his cell phone. Troy does not hesitate. Folder in hand, he snatches the cell

phone from the floor. He gives Martin one final, swift kick to the chest, and then, Troy is out onto the street.

He pauses outside of the studio and tries to assess his situation. He is breathing heavily. He looks at his hand. It is dark purple and beginning to swell. He checks his reflection in a car window. His sweatshirt is peppered with dots. They appear black in the window, but when he drops his head to look at them, he sees that they are brown and crimson. Taking the subway is out of the question. He needs to get to the park, and quickly. He needs to dispose of the sweatshirt and everything else. He scans the street. Somehow, miraculously, it is still empty.

He pulls the badge and the lighter from his sweatshirt. He pulls the sweatshirt over his head. He wipes his face with it. He searches for a storm drain, and he finds one on the other side of the street. He squats and pushes the sweatshirt inside of it. After he is rid of it, he takes the lighter. He flicks its wheel and lights the folder on fire. It catches and goes up, and when he is convinced that enough of it has been burned away, he drops the remaining piece of it down into the sewer. Hopefully there are no other files hidden somewhere that he doesn't have access to, but he has done the best that he can given the circumstances. All that is left is his father's badge.

He opens it one last time. His stomach knots as he looks at it. He kisses the metal shield. He does not want to do this. He just wants to hold it. He wants to hold his father. He wants to look across the car seat and see him. He wants to look over into the stands from the top of the mound and watch him nod back. He wants to walk into their kitchen and smell eggs and Polo one more time. He wants to hear his voice. He wants to be able to go home. He wants to not have to open his hand, but he does it. He opens his hand and lets the badge and its case slide from his palm, and then he gets up and runs towards the park.

Each footfall is jarring. They pulse through him. The shockwaves of his soles on the ground are uncomfortable and hard. He lengthens his strides. He keeps on because he must, because if he stops, he does not know what will happen. He barely notes what he passes. The park is a blur. Bare branches, dark, weathered bark, this naked forest of skeletal trees, but all his mind can process is the slow motion falling of the badge as it plummets down to somewhere. In his mind, it just continues to fall. Each footfall hurts more than the last, but he does not stop running. He runs harder. He pushes himself, and his legs strain. He waits for, longs for, the crash. He tries to run faster, but it is not possible. He is going as fast and as hard as he can, and still it is not enough. He needs more. He must find more to keep going, but until he does, he just pushes. He pushes and goes on. For how long he maintains this pace, he doesn't know, but suddenly he is not running. He is on his knees. Kneeling in wet grass, he wrenches forward and vomits.

Dawn showers. The bathroom is warm. The steam is invigorating. She has been rash, but her initial panic has worn off. She didn't read the contract. She should have. She would have realized that she controls the rights to her image, an image that she still hasn't seen because she ran out yesterday before the photos could be processed. Part of her feels ridiculous. She over-reacted. She was scared. Who wouldn't be? It isn't every day that a person goes to a studio in Manhattan and has spontaneous nude photos taken. She imagines seeing herself in a gallery and laughs. She can't imagine that they have turned out that good, but perhaps.

She retraces her route uptown. When she arrives, her excitement shifts to confusion. Police cars line the street. There is an ambulance, and a group of patrolmen are questioning some people across from Martin's studio. She heads towards them. A man on a gurney is being wheeled towards the ambulance. They

seem in no rush with him, and she wants to know what is going on. But halfway there she stops. A terrible thought comes to her. Troy has been here, and he has done something rash and stupid. He has misinterpreted what she said to him yesterday. How could that happen? She had hardly said anything at all. She just recounted being here because she had needed someone to talk to. No, she thinks. Her imagination is getting the better of her.

This could all just be a strange coincidence. She has no idea if Martin's studio is the place they are investigating. She walks towards the police tape and tries to make out what is happening inside the quadrant that the police have cordoned off. But if he is involved, her presence here will only hurt him. She curses. She should never have come here in the first place. She should never have allowed those pictures to be taken. But she catches herself. This is not her fault. None of this here is her fault. She did not ask this of him. He had no right to intervene, if he did. She hates him for now rendering the entire situation beyond the control of any of them, if he has.

She watches from a distance. The police continue to move around. Two of them are now leaning over a storm drain. One reaches in. He moves his arm around, and then she sees him stop. He says something to his partner. His arm reappears, and with it a dark blue bundle. It looks like clothing. She has no idea how deep those things go. She always imagined they went on forever. The standing officer takes the balled-up blue thing from his partner, and unfolds it. Dawn immediately recognizes the sweatshirt with the bold LA in white letters across its middle. Her heart sinks, but she tells herself that there are millions of things like that in the world. It could belong to anyone, to anyone at all.

She walks away slowly. Whatever has been done has been done. All she can do now is return to the apartment and wait. She can talk to Clancy and see what he

knows. She can talk to Dan and see what he knows, but even as she tries to look for the best, and to convince herself that all of this is not what it seems, she knows she is deluding herself. She is creating possibilities where none truly exist. It is something that she has been doing for years.

Three hours later, Troy emerges from the subway at 14th Street. He buys a sweatshirt from one of the vendors. He washes himself quickly in the bathroom of a fast food restaurant. He walks south. He cannot go back to the apartment. His hand is throbbing. It has turned black. There is a good chance that it's broken. He needs something to dull the pain. He needs to be able to stay awake and alert. It is only a matter of time before someone comes looking for him.

When Troy reaches St. Mark's Place, he scans the people he passes. He knows what he is looking for, but he has not done it this way for a very long time. He doesn't like going in blind and cold. In California, there was always some local kid, fresh out of an Orange County high school, who knew someone. If not that, then there were the Mexicans and the Dominicans in the locker room. They always had their own sources. A bunch of them dabbled, though never at his level. They never would have been kept around if they did.

On a stoop down the block, Troy sees two men and a woman sitting outside of a small smoke shop. It seems like the right sort of place. It has just enough foot traffic to not be suspicious, and it is the type of location where one would instantly notice something out of the ordinary. Three people are perfect in the open. One of them can watch the block, while another cases the buyer and the third makes the sale.

He approaches them. "Which one of you do I talk to?" he asks.

The man in the front stands up and walks past Troy without saying a word.

"Me," the girl says.

"I need an eight-ball."

The girl laughs, as does the man behind her. "We've got a comedian on our hands today," she says.

"Brother's in a bad way to ask for that much from a stranger," the man says.

"Or he's a cop," she says.

"That hand doesn't look like a cop's hand," the man says. "It looks like he might have just punched one with it, though."

The girl looks at his hand. "Damn," she says. "You're having a good day today, aren't you?"

Troy says nothing. This has been a dumb idea. He begins to leave when the girl says, "An eight-ball's too much for a first time. You'll get a gram at most."

"Two," Troy says.

"One." she says. "Or go somewhere else. Two hundred."

"Two hundred?"

"Capitalism at its finest," the girl says.

Troy reaches into his back pocket. Without the badge it feels empty. He hands her the money.

"Go see the guy down the street," she says. "And take care of that hand."

He continues south until he reaches Bryant Park. He finds a bench and sits for a moment. The sky is clear, and the air is cold. He feels calm. The world around him is still. He takes the bag from his pocket and taps some cocaine onto his black hand. He straightens the line. He shuts his eyes. He pushes his right nostril closed and brings his left down to his hand. He drags his nose along the back of his hand. His sinuses tingle and his eyes water. He sniffs twice more to make sure he has it all. And then he sneezes, once, twice, three times. He starts to laugh, because if he doesn't laugh he doesn't know what else to do. He sniffs twice more. There is

something peaceful about just sitting in this park. He could sit here all day, but he knows that he needs to find a cheap hotel that takes cash and that doesn't ask questions. He will disappear for a bit. Eventually, he'll send a note, somehow, if he can, but he knows it is better, ultimately, if he doesn't. It's just for a few days, and then it will all go back to normal, whatever that is going to be now.

XVIII.

One day has turned into four, and four, Clancy knows, is when he should start to panic, because there is a very real chance that Troy is face down in an alley somewhere. But, after what Dawn has told him, he can't call the police. He searched Troy's room, but he couldn't find the sweatshirt. How could he have been so dumb as to wear that? And how have they not had a knock on the door yet? How have two men in suits not come by to ask them if they have a few minutes to talk about an *incident* that occurred uptown? He could call it in. He could say that he has anonymous information. In the end it might be the best thing to do. It might save him and Dawn, or it might mitigate whatever could be connected to them. Or he could call his father and pose a hypothetical question, but he has been off the force for five years now, and with the turnover, Clancy doesn't know what, if any, contacts his father might still have in the department. It is best to wait, though he knows that waiting is what got them all into this situation to begin with. If he had only listened to Dan, he thinks. He was the wise one. He was the one who got out at the first sign of trouble.

For the most part, he has managed to keep Dawn calm. He has taken her with him to search the places she thinks Troy might be, but he knows that walking around Central Park or Prospect Park or any other park in the city is a fruitless endeavor. Troy isn't going to just sit in a park and wait to be found. On his own, he has canvassed Canal Street and Delancey and St. Mark's Place. He has gutted the bowels of Penn and Grand Central Station. He has taken the train east into Williamsburg and Bushwick. He has gone up to Riverside and Morningside Heights and Spanish Harlem. He has called friends from high school whom he hasn't talked to in years. He has called his high school. He has called the Los Angeles Dodgers, and he waited on hold for two hours as he walked the entirety of FDR Drive.

How long can Troy exist in the state he must be in? He does not want to tell Dawn that Troy has a history of this. That he was trying to recover from something. She doesn't need to know. He will let her keep whatever image she has of him. He just wants it all to be over. He feels like this is entirely his fault. He was the one who let him come back. He was the one who brought all of this on them.

He has picked up a bit of Chinese food. Dawn has not eaten much in the last few days. It is as though she blames herself, too, but he wants to tell her that, in reality, it is not their issue. It is Troy's fault. He knows that if Troy is alive, he will come back, because where else will he go? Because he will want to know that he did a good job.

"Anything?" Dawn asks as he walks into the living room. She is sitting on the couch with a half-empty beer bottle in her hand. There are others on the floor, fresh ones. She has been drinking.

"Eat something," he says.

"Why?" She tilts the bottle back and chugs from it.

"It will keep you sane."

"Sane, huh?" She finishes the bottle.

"Eat," he says.

"I don't want to eat," she yells back. She stumbles as she tries to get up from the couch. Her hair falls in her face. "I want to know where he is. I want to slap him and tell him he's an asshole for this, and then I never want to see him again."

"Tell him that when he's back." Clancy tries to portion out the Chinese food. He does not look up. He needs to remain calm. Only one of them can snap.

"When he comes back?" she says. "He's not coming back. They took the guy out on a gurney. He might've killed someone. Don't you realize that?"

"Just eat, please," he says.

“He’s gone,” she says.

“So he’s just going to vanish?” he says. “Poof! Into thin air?”

“You did this,” she says.

“What did I do?”

“This,” she waves her hands in an erratic circle.

He slams the plate on the table. White rice grains scatter on the floor. “I did this? What did I do? This is *your* fault. Who do you think you are? What are you trying to prove? All of you are exactly the same. You do what you want. You take what you want, and you leave others to pick up *your* shit.”

He stares back at her. He doesn’t know whether to hate her or hug her. He doesn’t know what to do in this moment. He moves toward her. He takes his hand and rubs it against the back of her head. He moves her hair to behind her ears, kisses the small space of her exposed temple.

“We need to stay calm,” he says. He begins to pull away, but as he does, she takes his face in both of her hands, pulls his mouth to hers, and refuses to let him go.

XIX.

The morning of the fifth day. Morning, he thinks. He must go back. He cannot feel his throat. His nose is raw and bloodied. His whole body is on edge. He is sweating. The shower is cold. It calms him. He doesn't know if he's eaten. The television is on, but he cannot remember watching it. He looks at the room around him. He has been in it. He has filled every corner. He has arranged and rearranged the furniture over and over again. He has picked up the phone and listened to the dial tone, heard the long, unending drone that comes to him from somewhere. He does not call people. He laughs at nothing, at everything. He cries sometimes. He has yelled for his father. He has pretended he was the pillow. He cuddled it. He punched it. He tried to drown it in the toilet. The toilet is broken. It will not flush. There is a growing puddle of water on the bathroom floor. He does not know where it is coming from. There have been complaints, enough of them now that he cannot afford to stay here anymore.

But the shower calms him. He is coming to his senses, so he leaves through the fire escape. It is old and rusty, and the ladder doesn't reach all the way to the ground. He jumps from the second floor. He lands awkwardly, but it is only a short fall. His body, what he can feel of it, feels fine. He would rather he rolled an ankle, so that he might know his current capacity for pain. His black hand is numb. It continues to swell. He needs help. He needs to go home. He wants to go home. Not to be in a building, not to be in a room, not to be around people, but to go home. That is all he has ever wanted, the chance to go home.

He enters the apartment. The faint scent of Chinese food hangs in the air. There are boxes by Dan's room. Some are packed. Others are empty. Some say 'Fragile.' Some don't. He passes them and moves to Clancy's room. It is empty. He

goes to his own. His duffel bag has been unpacked. His clothes are thrown across the floor.

He goes to Dawn's room. He pushes gently against the door and lets his eyes adjust to the light. They are lying there, sleeping. They look peaceful and at rest. They are so still that they almost look like they could be dead. He looks at Clancy. He wants to speak to him and to tell him that he is back. He wants to ask why, but it won't matter. Nothing matters to him anymore. He is starting to come to terms with the fact that some questions will always remain unanswered. He feels numb. All of his anger seems to have left him. The rush he feels in his chest is not sadness. It is not what he felt that June day surrounded by row after row of white gloves. He doesn't know what it is. He doesn't know where he goes now, but he must keep moving.

He takes a final breath. He allows his eyes to remain on the two of them for a few more seconds. He is ready. It is time to go, and in that moment, as if he realizes something is about to happen, Clancy opens one eye, and then the other. He looks, but it seems like he is not able to recognize that the person standing in front of him is a *real* person, and not the product of his dreams. Clancy doesn't move. He doesn't call out. He doesn't whisper. He just stares back at Troy. It is as if the two of them exist in a haze. Clancy starts to shift, and Troy shakes his head. Clancy blinks twice, and Troy thinks he can make out tears forming in the corner of his eyes. He wants to tell him to stop it. It is a waste. There are seven billion people in the world. None of them matters very much. But what is there to say now? I love you. I loved you. I always loved you. I needed you. How did we always manage to let each other down?

It is pointless. It is all past, but a prelude to nothing. Live. Survive. Run. Chase. Go. And he does. He turns and leaves the room. He leaves it all behind. He sprints through the hallway and bursts out the front door. He flies down the stairwell and

takes the steps three or four at a time. He has no idea where he is going, but he runs down the hill towards the subway, and there he veers left. He runs down the street, past people and stores and parked cars. Like the park, it is a blur. One great, fantastic blur. He can hear the cars on the street. He can hear the sound of their engines. He can hear their horns blaring. He can hear the people he passes. He can hear the wind as it blows over his ears. He hears the sound of his own breathing. He focuses on it until that is the only sound around him.

The ground slopes back up. He sprints uphill. He is laughing. He sprints on. He feels a strange wetness on his cheeks and upper lip. He can't breathe through his nose. He tastes the bit of blood that seeps into his mouth as he tries to gulp in more air. He keeps on. Uphill and west, he thinks. Eventually, he'll reach the river. The city's just a short swim away. He'll dive into the river and go. It's waiting for him on the other side. He can get there. It's just a short swim away. He'll make it. He has a bit left in him. He'll make it. He's always made it. It's never been a question of making it. It's just always been a question knowing what to do once he's gotten there.

Clancy knows he should get up. He knows he should follow after Troy. Even if it will change nothing, he should do it. He begins to get up. He presses his hand against the mattress. He feels the weight of Dawn's head on his chest. He isn't sure if she's noticed that Troy was here. Her eyes are still closed. Clancy goes to lift her head from his chest, but as he moves, he feels her body press against his. She raises her arm, cups her hand against his shoulder, and holds him.

"Stay," she says. Her eyes are closed.

He turns his face towards her, but she doesn't open her eyes. She scrunches her nose. She inhales sharply, and as Clancy starts to put his own arm around her, she says, very softly, "Don't go running this morning. Just stay, please."

How Memories of the Father Inform a Son's Understanding of Masculinity In the Novels of Per Petterson

1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing Per Petterson

Per Petterson is a new voice describing men in literature. He is the author of nine works of fiction, five of which, at this writing, have been translated into English. Petterson has received numerous international literary awards, notably the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the *Independent* Foreign Fiction Prize for *Out Stealing Horses*, and he has been lauded, by both critics and fellow writers alike, for his ability to render the pain and folly of the human condition with a dark and lonely charm that still allows for the faintest glimmer of hope. Of Petterson, Richard Ford stated, "(He) is a profoundly gifted novelist" (qtd. in *It's Fine By Me*).

Making use of a spare and realistic style, Petterson is a logical heir to such 20th-century American realists as Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, and Richard Ford, though his writing lacks "that slight touch of slickness that can mar Carver...or Ford" (Binding qtd. in Campbell). His "hard-boiled," yet poetic approach to topics like isolation, trauma, and stoicism attempts to re-imagine the way in which we discuss masculinity, as his characters inhabit a no-man's land between the hopeless and the hopeful. Furthermore, Petterson's writing merges the European idea of family as the backbone to one's identity with the American theme of the orphan that has attempted to break away from the family's hold on him.

This thesis will attempt to prove that, unlike previous (American) male writers who have explored masculinity, Petterson's use of a son's memories of his father offers a compelling way to examine the father/son dynamic in literature. For the son, the memories of the father both explain the reasons for certain masculine ideas and inform later perceptions of success, failure, and personal worth felt by the son during

his adult life. These early experiences trap the son within a specific mental framework from which it is nearly impossible for him to extricate himself. In Petterson's world, sons' entire lives are lived with one foot in the past. They constantly reflect on how they compare to the ideas they have of their fathers and how their fathers might have better handled or better survived a given situation. For Petterson's sons, their fathers are both the molds in which they are created and the measuring sticks by which they are judged. Though Petterson's characters are often orphaned or isolated, the shadow of the father is ever present and far reaching, and it is not something his characters can easily outrun.

1.2 Gender and Masculine Studies

Over the last few decades, "the study of gender has expanded rapidly and with it, studies of gender issues about men and masculinities" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 1). This field of Masculine Studies attempts to examine, deconstruct, and reshape the conversation regarding what is considered "masculine" behavior. In seeking to complicate the idea that the male experience is a universal and homogeneous one, Masculine Studies has expanded across many academic disciplines, and it might be best described, now, as "an interdisciplinary field of cultural, social, historical, political, psychological, economic, and artistic analysis that interrogates the constructions of masculinity in communities across the world and at various times in history" (Gurfinkel). Masculine Studies is an offshoot of Cultural Studies, which seeks to understand "how cultural productions work and how cultural identities are constructed and organized" (Culler 42-43), and Women's Studies, through which feminist scholars attempt to show how gender--the cultural prescriptions that each society attaches to one's biological sex--forms the backbone to one's core identity.

Ultimately, Masculine Studies desires to illuminate how masculine understanding informs the way in which men relate to other men and to society as a whole.

1.2.1 Literary Masculinities

One specific area of masculine examination is Literary Masculinities. The study of Literary Masculinities rests on the foundation that masculinity is shaped by both "the intersection of gender with other social divisions" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 3) and the "realization that masculinity...is a fictional construction" (Murphy 1). Referring to the depiction of men in literature, the study of Literary Masculinities attempts to move the conversation about what makes a "real man" from the realms of sociology and psychology to cultural and literary depictions of men. Since the 1990s, masculinity scholarship has been paying closer attention to the cultural and literary representation of masculinity (Kimmel, *Gender Desire* 16), and "It follows, therefore, that studies of cultural and literary representations of gender are particularly relevant to the analysis of the social construction, and de-construction of masculinity" (Armengol, *Ford* 2).

Due to the ubiquity of men in art, literature, and popular culture, and their accepted places in the hierarchy of society, historically, less has been done to deconstruct and understand the foundations that hold in place certain cultural ideas of men. "The superordinate is usually hyper visible; indeed to be a straight white male is to embody exactly what an 'individual' is. As a result one is invisible as a member of a group...if you are a member of the dominant group" (Kimmel, *History of Men* x). The group is seen, but the characteristics of the individual are subsumed, and the reasons that inform action are often left uninvestigated.

The critical study of representations of masculinity in literature evaluates the nuances of male behavior. It attempts to isolate and analyze the thinking and actions

of men. While men, especially white heterosexual men, have always been at the forefront of society, "white masculine identity is far from unitary" (Armengol, *Ford* 19). Because of this lack of uniformity, "completely different individuals can embody similar ideals of masculinity, just as completely different notions of masculinity can refer simultaneously, or sequentially, to the same individual" (Armengol, *Ford* 19). Thus, "Revealing the dynamics of gender...makes masculinity visible and problematizes the position of men" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 1).

1.2.1.1 The "Self-Made Man" and American Literary Masculinity

Because masculinity is now considered a culturally fluid idea, it is impossible to discuss masculinity without also taking into consideration the culture in which it is enacted. "Men and masculinities are not formed by gender alone" but "are shaped by differences in age, by class situation, by ethnicity and racialization and so on" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 3). The performance of masculinity might be universal, but the way it plays out from culture to culture varies. As a whole, masculinity is unfixed and variable. That is to say, one country's masculine ideal can be the complete antithesis of another's.

Using what has come to be called the Cultural Dimensions Theory, the Dutch social scientist Geert Hofstede has attempted to qualify and quantify notions of culture, which he defines as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others" ("The Hofstede Center"). "The model of national culture consists of six dimension" ("The Hofstede Center"), and the measuring of a country's masculinity comprises one of the six dimensions that help to compare one country's cultural framework with another's. Hofstede's research seeks to describe the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members ("The Hofstede Center"), and while America cannot claim to be the

only land where masculinity is an important cultural aspect, it does offer a unique paradigm where "behavior in school, work, and play are based on the shared values that people should 'strive to be the best they can' and that 'winner takes all'" ("The Hofstede Center").

In America, the idea of the "Self-Made Man" is "one of the most influential ideals in American cultural and literary history" (Armengol, *Ford* 25). However, the ideas informing the "Self-Made Man" and American "manhood" seem to be paradoxical. Not long after the founding of the United States of America, the American idea of manhood was described by the French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville as "restless in the midst of abundance" (qtd. in Kimmel, *Man in America* 314). This new American man differed from his European counterpart because the American man was "mobile, competitive, aggressive in business" but also "chronically insecure, and desperate to achieve a solid grounding for a masculine identity" (Kimmel, *Man in America* 137). Thus, the trouble with being an American man stemmed from the new idea of personal independence, since now "being a man meant being in charge of one's own life, liberty, and property" (Kimmel, *Man in America* 137).

In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel discusses the foundation of the "Self-Made Man" in the United States. He argues that the idea of the "Self-Made Man" was the byproduct of the American Revolution because the "Self-Made Man" was independent and individualistic, and he valued autonomy and self-control over anything else (Kimmel, *Man in America* 17-21). The American man wanted to be in charge of his own destiny, and he did not want to be beholden to the rules and regulations of a government system that he felt did not fully understand or represent him. Because of this desire for personal autonomy, a new mode of operation was put into place. Individual men now became the makers of their own destinies, and in a

country where success could now be considered entirely as a product of one's own industry, one's innate manliness became quantifiable. Manliness, like wealth, became something that could be amassed. This intermingling of success with true manhood, "to win, get laid, get rich" (Khazan, "The Bro Whisperer"), results in a constant comparison of the individual to both his immediate peers and to society as a whole. However, success is only one side of the masculine coin, and it cannot be examined alone.

When one is in charge of his own destiny, failure is a constant hazard. Success is not guaranteed, and it is invariably linked to the prospect of failure. Therefore, in equating success with manly ability, failure now represents the absence of it. Failure is the result of a lack of virility, or of not being man enough. To be successful is to reach a predetermined level of manliness, while to fail is to fall short of it. Accordingly, in this system, by the time one is an adult, "It's easy to think you're always in competition with other men" (Osheron 291).

In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Kaja Silverman argues that masculinity is based on a "lack" (61) and that the normative male ego is fortified against any perception of void. It attempts to block out its weaknesses, and therefore, it indirectly judges itself in the context of what it does not have. This forces a constant re-evaluation of one's own masculinity and masculine ability, as each new challenge or new situation arises. Characters as varied as Robert Cohn, Jake Barnes, Frank Bascombe, Frank Wheeler, and Francis Weed inhabit a literary landscape in an American society with "a model of masculinity that derives identity entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and social status, by geographic and social mobility" (Armengol, "Re-Reading" 64). Despite being written at different times in history, the unifying theme between these men,

which will be expanded in Chapter 2, is that all of them are defined by what they lack, not by what they have achieved.

Furthermore, Kimmel espouses that the history of the "Self-Made Man" is "less about what boys and men actually *did* than about what they were told they were *supposed* to do, feel, and think and what happened in response to those prescriptions" (*Man in America* 10). Masculinity is a perception, and classic American novels such as *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Revolutionary Road*, and *The Sportswriter* have proven fitting laboratories for both the construction and the deconstruction of masculine ideas. Meanwhile, critical works—including Ben Knight's *Writing Masculinities*, Berthold Schoene-Harwood's *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man*, and Alice Ferrebe's *Masculinity in Male Authored Fiction 1950-2000*—have shown the capacity of the novel to highlight, expound, and comment on the image of masculinity in literature (Ferry 191).

Moreover, one of the most well-known American literary examples of masculinity as success is found in the work of Horatio Alger, who "offered his young readers stories of upward mobility gained through hard work and dedication" (Armengol, *Ford* 26). His protagonists are often young boys, orphans, or dislocated individuals (Armengol, *Ford* 26), and "Alger's stories illustrate a distinctly American take on the making of the self-made man" (Kimmel, *Man in America* 126). That is, a man can create himself in whatever image he wishes. He is free and mobile, but he is also in constant competition with his peers. It is a theme that much American fiction will return to, and it directly reflects the national myth of America, namely that America is a land constructed upon the dreams of immigrants now living in a land devoid of ancestral titles and born out of democratic ideas. Therefore, if one were man enough, he could be successful, and failure is not a result of social situation or class, but rather one's innate lack of ability. In America, "Self-Made men were

present from the start, and they came to dominate much sooner than in Europe" (Kimmel, *Man in America* 17), whereas "European novels...spend a good deal of time locating the protagonist in his social and familial background" (Armengol, *Ford* 63) or offering tales of "the struggles of several caring fathers or father figures who raise children on their own" (Armengol, *Ford* 63).

1.2.1.2 American Literature and Paternal Absence

What principally sets Petterson apart from his American forbears is his use of the father figure. While it is impossible to encapsulate the entirety of American male fiction in a singular study, a great deal of the American literary tradition has made limited use of the father or of fatherhood as a central theme. David Leverenz has argued that a vast majority of American novels "portray fathers who are either weak or dead" (49), and Josep Armengol cites a wide range of American literature, from *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to *Naked Lunch* and *Going Native*, as evidence for how "fathers have long been absent from American literature" (*Ford* 62-63).

"Given the specificities of American cultural history, it is no wonder, then, that fathers in American literature, when/if present, tend to be represented as distant and authoritarian patriarchs" (Armengol, *Ford* 65). America's literal and symbolic rebellion from a dominant, patriarchal England allowed its "sons" to create a new existence devoid of the intervention of the "arbitrary patriarchal authority under which Europeans labored" (Pugh xvi). Freedom implied that these sons "could build a new life independent of the culture, the traditions, the class system, and the institutions of England" (Armengol, *Ford* 64), and the "American Adam" (Lewis 5) has come to be seen as a central character in canonical American literature. This "American Adam," as defined by numerous literary critics "so varied in time and ideology as D.H.

Lawrence, Leslie Fiedler, and R.W.B. Lewis," is "a self-willed orphan, an individualistic character who breaks with all familial ties and begins a new life by himself, alone and unencumbered by the responsibilities of family life" (Armengol, *Ford* 64). R.W.B. Lewis sees this as a positive development, as the "American Adam" is "happily bereft of ancestry" (5), which is something he views as a heroic break with his paternal past. However, Fielder believes this to be, at times, a catastrophic tragedy that has a lingering effect on the character's emotional life (Armengol, *Ford* 81). Thus, like the Self-Made Man, the American Adam seems to inhabit a paradoxical space. He is unencumbered and unmoored, but he has no foundation for his identity other than what he creates for himself. This lack of security, coupled with the need to constantly be on show or prove who he is, creates a dynamic where men must find value in external things that they then use to prove their worth and value to those around them. One well-known example of this self-made "American Adam" is found in *The Great Gatsby*, where F. Scott Fitzgerald "portrays his protagonist as a self-made man who leaves both his parents behind to make his American Dream come true" (Armengol, *Ford* 61), but who is also ultimately betrayed by his beliefs when he meets a tragic end attempting to live out his dream.

The absence of the father is "a recurrent theme in twentieth-century American literature" (Armengol, *Ford* 61), and "at century's end one thing seems clear about fatherhood: although we miss it, we can recreate its authority only either as an absence or as a failed relationship" (Bueno, Caesar, and Hummel 2). From the work of Hemingway to "midcentury American literary texts, fathers tend to remain absent and distant figures as well" (Armengol, *Ford* 62), and "American novels often begin with a dislocated individual, off to seek his fortune away from home" (Armengol, *Ford* 63). In the American mindset, the full separation of the son from the father is

possible, but such a freedom has often ignored the way in which paternal influence might have shaped one's character.

Per Petterson, on the other hand, often centers his fiction on the interaction between fathers and sons. If "paternal absence" is a sign of American fiction born from a nation that threw off both a literal and metaphorical Fatherland, England (Pugh xvi), then as a non-American, Petterson is freed from this intrinsically American mindset. It might be argued that Petterson's personal circumstance, rather than his political history, allows him to step into the middle space between the American emancipation of the individual and the European understanding of the family dynamic. Petterson's skill is that, while his characters are, like their American counterparts, "fatherless" or "orphans" (Kimmel, *Man in America* 143), this is not a personal choice. It has been dictated by situation. Therefore, Petterson's characters persist in a constant limbo. They exist as separate, and they have absent fathers. Nevertheless, these same fathers have managed to cast a wide-reaching shadow over their sons' understanding of themselves before their departure. For Petterson, the father is simultaneously absent and ever-present. Petterson's characters cannot run away from, or rebel against, fatherly influence; instead, they are dogged and haunted by it.

1.3 Masculinity in Per Petterson's Work

1.3.1 Family, Death, and Place in the Work of Per Petterson

At the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy writes, "All happy families are alike: each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (1). Like many of his European forebears, Petterson's work has focused on depicting family and familial situations. Regarding his own creative process, Petterson has said, "I'm a family-based person, even though we didn't exactly have a very happy family. I was never in any doubt that

this was a centre of writing" (Campbell). In Petterson's writing, relationships are often tried and strained. His characters are forever intertwined with the families that have created and raised them, but they seek isolation from them:

All my life I (Trond Sander) have longed to be alone in a place like this. Even when everything was going well, as it often did. I can say that much. That it often did. I have been lucky. But even then, for instance in the middle of an embrace and someone whispering words in my ear I wanted to hear, I could suddenly get a longing to be in a place where there was only silence.

(Petterson, *Horses* 7)

For Petterson's characters, silence offers a space for them to probe deeply into their own thoughts and memories. By escaping into silence, Petterson's characters attempt to construct a bulwark against the chaos of a world that has thrown them off-balance. Thought and quiet are ordering mechanisms for Petterson's characters, as they tend to be cerebral beings. In silence they can not only exist in a state of prolonged thought and self-examination, but they can also feel secure enough to unpack their innermost demons. They do not need to fear appearing weak or incapable in front of others who can judge them. Through silence and personal reflection, they can construct an emotional "no-fly zone" where they attempt to understand the tumultuous and chaotic nature of the world, for if they can comprehend the impetus for chaos and loss, then they can protect against it. In distancing themselves from other people and by seeking silence, Petterson's characters attempt to exert the bit of control they can over an ultimately uncontrollable universe. This singular act is their defiance and rebellion. They fight, despite what has been thrown at them and despite how wounded they might be. They do not capitulate. Intellect and contemplation are their weapons against the irrational and unpredictable environment they inhabit, and routinely they direct their

intellect and contemplation towards understanding the mechanisms governing their families and their personal experiences therein.

In this way, Petterson's characters, like Trond Sander of *Out Stealing Horses* and Arvid Jansen of *In the Wake*, offer a bridge between the European and American representation of family in literature. They are characters who shun companionship and who seek their own goals and fortunes. However, in doing so, they are perpetually haunted by feelings of loneliness, and this loneliness often stems from not having the chance to show a deceased or absent parent personal change and/or emotional maturation. In 1990, Petterson lost his mother, father, and younger brother in the Scandinavian Star ferry fire, which claimed the lives of 159 people. Not surprisingly, this lack of closure, and the feeling that the world might be irreparably altered at any moment, informs much of his work:

If I'm fascinated by it (family), and it seems I am, surely I don't want to know why... None of the books were mentioned in the family, by the way, only the one Saturday when my mother called me and said... "and then I hope the next book won't be so childish"... The next Saturday, she was dead. I didn't even talk to her in the week between. ("Per Petterson: Author")

Death and death imagery abound in Petterson's novels. It is a catalyst for movement, as is the case for Trond Sander, who finally acts on his desire for isolation only after his wife is killed in an automobile accident and his sister dies of cancer:

In the course of one month they both died, and after they were gone I lost interest in talking to people. I really do not know what to talk to them about. That is one reason for living here. Another reason is being close to the forest. It was part of my life many years ago in a way that nothing later has been, and then it was absent for a long, long time, and when everything around me

suddenly turned silent, I realised how much I had missed it. (Petterson, *Horses* 122)

However, the silence being sought by Petterson's characters is a double-edged sword. In many ways, it is better in theory than in actuality. Because once Petterson's characters are surrounded by this silence, there is nothing else for them to focus on but the pressing metaphysical and existential issues that plague their minds. They mull over moments, and they meditate on the nature of transience, loss, and death. Often, their inquisitions make inroads, but invariably they are left with only more questions that need to be answered.

The symbolic nature of death, or of being left, is the ultimate question for Petterson, and he makes perfect use of death not only as a storytelling device but also as the lens through which one views his characters. Death traps Petterson's characters in limbo. No matter how they might grow or mature, they realize that their family will always see them as the men that they used to be, not as the men that they have become. This haunts them because, though sustained thought and reflection can offer clues and insights into one's past failures and actions, no amount of mental acrobatics can allow for one to travel back in time.

For Petterson, "the angst moment" (Petterson, "We Cannot Know Each Other") that has led to loss and isolation is paramount. By constantly re-examining a singular moment through the character's memory of it, Petterson seeks to understand how a singular event can change the trajectory of a character's life. This leaves the character on a treadmill, where, though he tries to improve himself, there is no one present who can validate his progress. For Petterson, without death, there would be no conflict. By removing a character's father from the picture, but by still leaving that father as the focal point of the character's life, Petterson creates a dynamic where

action and growth are both necessary and pointless. His characters want to believe that they can be better, but paternal validation will never be received.

Often, we never know the supporting cast of Petterson's novels as living beings. Instead, we are told about them in flashback. Petterson's work can often be read as the son's extended eulogy to his father, and this is especially true in *In the Wake*, where Arvid Jansen only comes to reflect upon his tumultuous relationship with his father after the man has passed away suddenly and violently. Throughout the novel, Jansen grapples with guilt and frustration born from believing that he has been unable to show his father that he has left childish ways and manners behind and become a fully capable adult.

The narration of Petterson's work is both a coming to terms with loss and an examination of another human being's psyche. Petterson's characters attempt to make sense of those who have been close to them by latching onto whatever clues they come across. They believe that by doing so, they are becoming closer to these lost family members and that they now better understand who they were. However, as readers, we are aware that this coping mechanism for dealing with the loss of a loved one is, at the same time, well practiced self-delusion on the part of the grieving character. They project their own desires, wishes, and perceptions onto another without real, tangible proof that what they wish to believe was, in fact, actuality. For example, when Arvid Jansen recounts examining his father's bedroom after his father perished in a ferry fire, he pays particular attention to an otherwise throwaway idea:

I kneeled down and put my cheek to the floor and looked under my father's bed.

"It's crammed in here."

"With bottles?"

"No, with shoes..."

I crawled further in and lay flat under the bed and pulled the shoes out, one pair after another, and some of them were old and some were brand new and had never been used. There was a strong smell of leather under the mattress there, and I recognised that smell from when I was small, on my way down the dimly lit stairs to the cellar where he stood at his workbench with rough leather in his rough hands and shiny tacks in his mouth, the yellow light and eerie shadows, and I do not know *what* we were up to, my brother and I, but I could not stop...There had been twenty-five pairs in all. I had counted them, and every one was welted. He (father) would never wear anything else. He hated cheap shoes. (Petterson, *Wake* 29)

Here, as in other places, Petterson's men recount moments of seemingly minute, insignificant action that must be executed in the normal course of daily life, but as they describe these moments, they try to interpret them. They want to glean whatever symbolic meaning they can from the subtlest detail presented to them, but invariably they are left only with theories and hypothesis that can never be confirmed. No matter how hard his characters attempt to connect the dots in order to build the psychology of another human being, they will never be privy to that person's true thoughts and feelings. In Petterson's universe, other human beings can never be known, and it is foolish to continually try to circumvent this truth, but still they try.

Through anecdotes and eulogies, Petterson's sons attempt to both create and understand fathers that have hitherto been simultaneously near and yet inaccessible to them. In their exploration of their fathers, sons probe for answers to questions that have been denied to them during their father's lifetime. From found shoes they extrapolate theories about a man's hatred for cheap footwear, and they hope that these deductions contain a modicum of truth and are not merely the fabrications of grief-stricken minds.

One of the great tragedies between fathers and sons in Petterson's work is that, no matter how close they might seem to be to each other, they often share little and know little of the other person. Petterson's sons are simultaneously near to their fathers as well as alienated from them. No matter how much time they might spend around each other, there is a gap in understanding between them that is unbridgeable. They want relationships, but they do not know how to build them. For Petterson's sons, their fathers are a perpetual mystery, and Petterson's focus on such epistemological and ontological questions within his writing has led him to being labeled an existentialist, because his writing often examines how "we cannot know each other" (Petterson, "We Cannot Know Each Other") and how we exist in the face of nothingness.

Both *In the Wake* and *Out Stealing Horses* serve as treatises on the idea of alienation, the "sense of displacement" that comes from a character "living in a chaotic and fragmented world" (Nadin Vila 247). Petterson's characters search for meaning, but they are skeptical that it exists. In *In the Wake*, Arvid Jansen states that he has been reading *A Friend of My Youth*, by Alice Munro, because of what he attempts to find inside it:

I am reading it for the third time, I have all her books, because there is a substance there, and a coherence that does not embellish, but conveys that nothing is in vain no matter what we have done, if we only look back before it's too late. I don't know. I don't know if that's true. (Petterson, *Wake* 12)

Petterson walks the line between a hopeful understanding of the future and the feeling that believing in redemption will only bring about further pain. Consequently, his characters distance themselves from family and society and go to places where they can think, only to have their thinking constantly revolve around their families.

For Petterson, external redemption from a place outside of oneself is not something to be sought, because this idea of redemption carries too heavily with it the notion of absolution, or of putting the past right:

I (Trond Sander) have in fact done a lot of reading particularly during the last few years, but earlier too, by all means, and I have thought about what I've read, and that kind of coincidence seems far-fetched in fiction, in modern novels anyway, and I find it hard to accept. It may be all very well in Dickens, but when you read Dickens you're reading a long ballad from a vanished world, where everything has come together in the end like an equation, where the balance of what was once disturbed must be restored so that the gods can smile again. A consolation, maybe, or a protest against a world gone off the rails, but it is not like that any more, my world is not like that, and I have never gone along with those who believe our lives are governed by fate. They whine, they wash their hands, and crave pity. I believe we shape our lives ourselves, at any rate I have shaped mine, for what it's worth, and I take complete responsibility. (Petterson, *Horses* 67-8)

Often, this time spent reflecting leads Petterson's characters to believe that, perhaps, if they had been better men, then they would have been able to hold their lives together, but they do not believe in fate. As Trond Sander says in *Out Stealing Horses*, "I believe we shape our lives ourselves, at any rate I have shaped mine, for what it's worth, and I take complete responsibility" (Petterson 68). Per Petterson's sons focus primarily on their previous interactions with their fathers, and the sons attempt to re-evaluate their understanding of their own masculinity in comparison to these men, who set the bar for them. In isolation, Petterson's characters might achieve a new level of awareness, but this often comes with the simultaneous realization that they cannot "make time stop and go into reverse" (Petterson, *Wake*

159). Suffering is not noble. It is not there so that a character might finally experience a greater truth. Suffering merely exists, and longing, in whatever form it takes, is a central part of life: "If you long for another place, another landscape, what you long for is something specific, something that gives you hope, even if those things that you long for do not exist" (Petterson, "Per Petterson on Voice").

The idea of longing for something specific, often something lost, could easily be mistaken as a token nostalgia, but to classify Petterson's writing as nostalgic would be to misunderstand the ideas informing his work. Nostalgia is present for Petterson, but what is important is how the past can be mined and turned into fuel to live another day in a world where one knows that he has already been beaten. However, the more basic and difficult question that Petterson attempts to explore is how to merge the past and the present into one survivable future.

1.3.2 Character Memory and Unrest in Per Petterson's Writing

Through the use of a character's memories of his father, Petterson focuses on ideas of closeness, love, and acceptance between father and son. His narration is nearly always from the child's point of view, and these children often recount their childhoods from a remove of many years. Arvid Jansen of *In the Wake* is forty-three years old when the novel begins (Petterson 2), and Trond Sander of *Out Stealing Horses* is sixty-seven (Petterson 6). Petterson's characters attempt to survive in the present moment, but their present moment is continually informed by their memories of their fathers. They are forever chasing the ghosts of these men.

In Peterson, there is a constant, uncomfortable dueling between the immediate moment and the recalled one, as his narrators continuously swing from present to past. "Petterson's adult protagonists have intense, complex, anxious relations with the past. Their childhoods are flagrantly vivid to them. In Petterson's

work, the past ghosts its way back into the present with spectral power. It is always clutching at life, pulling at the sleeve of the present" (Wood, "Late and Soon"). The memories the adult male carries of his childhood, and of his father during that time period, are paramount. These memories inform how the character views the present moment and how the character exists in it. Often, Petterson's characters seek clarity through distance, or they view the world as though life is "like pictures done in rough mosaic. Looked at close, they produce no effect. There is nothing beautiful in them, unless you stand some distance off" (Schopenhauer 234), such that they speak of understanding events as though they are coloring in a canvas. "My father could not have told me all this, not with all the details; but that is the way it is printed in my memory, and I do not know whether I began filling out this painting at once, or if it is something I have done over the years" (Petterson, *Horses* 49).

From their removes, sons juxtapose themselves with their fathers, and by doing so, they understand success and failure. Alternatively, they impose on others the memories they have of their fathers, who seem forever frozen in time:

The man I (Trond Sander) am watching, his movements and skill, is a man of barely forty, as my father was when I saw him for the last time when I was fifteen, and he vanished from my life forever. To me he will never be older. (Petterson, *Horses* 76).

For Petterson, respect and validation, more than love, seem to be the most important feelings that can pass between father and son.

It felt as if knives were cutting my neck and I walked very slowly over to the others. When I passed my father, he raised his hand casually and stroked my back and said quietly:

"You did good." And that was enough. The pain vanished and I was already eager for the next thing. (Petterson, *Horses* 63)

Moreover, Petterson's work possesses an interesting parallel with certain ideas of survival and masculine existence expressed by Arthur Schopenhauer, who posited:

Of every event in our life, we can only live for one moment that it *is*; forever after, that it *was*...the whole foundation on which our existence rests is the present--the ever-fleeting present. It lies then, in the very nature of our existence to take the form of constant motion, and to offer no possibility of our ever attaining the rest for which we are always striving...Unrest is the mark of existence. (232)

Petterson continuously writes characters that are unable to rest:

The beginning and the end have no meaning at all, not there, not then, and the only vital thing is that you keep going until everything merges into a single pulse that beats and works under its own steam, and you take a break at the right time and you work again. (Petterson, *Horses* 81-2)

Petterson's characters must always be occupied. Stasis is impossible, and projects, whether mental or physical, consume them:

I am spending my days getting this place in order. There is quite a lot that needs doing. I did not pay much for it. In fact, I had been prepared to shell out a lot more to lay my hands on the house and the grounds, but there was not much competition. I do understand why now, but it doesn't matter. I am pleased anyway. I try to do most of the work myself, even though I could have paid a carpenter, I am far from skint, but then it would have gone too fast. I want to use the time it takes. Time is important to me now, I tell myself. Not that it should pass quickly or slowly, but be only *time*, be something I live inside and fill with physical things and activities that I can divide it up by, so

that it grows distinct to me and does not vanish when I am not looking.

(Petterson, *Horses* 8)

Furthermore, apart from the continual action that accompanies their work, Petterson's characters cannot turn off their minds. The activity of thinking plays a central part in Petterson's work. For Petterson, an individual's mind is a dynamic and dangerous place. His characters are victims of their own inquisitiveness, and their intelligence is both a blessing and a curse, because while it allows them great insight and self-awareness, they invariably always find fault with themselves. They think and reflect on singular moments of angst. They work and move forward, but they are ultimately unable to find permanent rest or peace of mind. As Schopenhauer writes, "a man...spends his whole life in striving after something which he thinks will make him (happy); he seldom attains his goal, and when he does, it is mostly to be disappointed" (233). Petterson's characters refurbish cabins (*Horses* 8) or publish fiction (*Wake* 31), but upon the completion of these projects, they continually wonder what they should have done differently, what they might have missed, or what else they still must do. They feel no validation in the eyes of their fathers. However, despite this failure, they still dream of achieving success and validation one day, and they believe that, if only they keep working, they might make it there. Tragically though, they never know when they might rest, because they have no one around to tell them when they have succeeded.

For Petterson, no gesture can ever be overlooked, and "the external world is described in minute detail--with significance hanging on a look, a remark, a minor action" (Campbell). Regarding Petterson's use of memory, James Wood says:

One detail seems near at hand, while another can be seen only cloudily; one mental picture seems small, while another seems portentous. Yet everything is jumbled in the recollection, because the most proximate memory may be the

least important, the portentous detail relatively trivial. Petterson's interest is pictorial and spatial rather than logical and interrogative. ("Late and Soon")

Petterson's writing often lacks a clear chronology, but self-examination is at the heart of Petterson's novels. What Wood argues is that, no matter how much one thinks, clarity is never achievable. Clarity implies hard fact and truth, and neither of these is possible for Petterson's characters because their sources, their fathers, are dead or gone. Petterson's characters can only hypothesize possible answers to the questions that haunt their minds. In a 2012 interview with *The Economist*, Petterson stated:

We are locked in our own minds, although we instinctively reach out to each other for compassion, solidarity, understanding, and we often succeed, it should not be forgotten. But we cannot know each other. You could call it loneliness, or you could call it character; making us who we are, being different from one another, which is a good thing. The unending conversation with ourselves, we all have, but it ought not to be the only conversation. How can we know ourselves, when there is no one to compare ourselves with? We define each other, to a large extent, and that is also as it should be. ("We Cannot Know Each Other")

It is this "unending conversation" that his characters would prefer to have with their fathers, if only it were possible, because these are the men who have defined them.

1.3.3 The Father/Son Dynamic in Petterson's Work

Petterson spends much time examining the relationship between fathers and sons:

Going back to the Freudian model, before a child learns to emulate his father, he desires him, and then is reliant upon him for a sense of his own masculinity. Perhaps the reliance, the insecurity, and the desire to prove

oneself are predicated on this early homosexual desire, causing fear and exaggerated masculinity. (Benson 81)

For Petterson, "family can be a place of safety, of belonging, identity, but it can also be a dangerous place" (Petterson, "Petterson: Author"). Parents are the initial barometers one uses to locate oneself in the world, and "Beginning at birth, the self-meanings regarding one's gender are formed in social situations, stemming from ongoing interaction with significant others such as parents, peers, and educators" (Katz 33). The strongest feature of the homo-social enactment of masculinity is how a boy sees his father:

According to psychoanalytic theory, one's gender identity develops through identification with the same-sex parent. This identification emerges out of the conflict inherent in the Oedipal stage of psychosexual development...Thus, boys come to learn masculinity from their fathers. (Stets and Burke 1001)

A son attempts to mirror the father, and the father acts as the judge who evaluates these actions. Michael Kimmel maintains:

The father is the first man who evaluates the boy's masculine performance, the first pair of male eyes before whom he tries to prove himself. Those eyes will follow him for the rest of his life. Other men's eyes will join them—the eyes of role models, such as teachers, coaches, bosses, or media heroes; the eyes of his peers, his friends, his workmates; and the eyes of millions of other men, living and dead, from whose constant scrutiny of his performance he will never be free. (*Gender Desire* 34-35)

The father imbues the son with his initial sense of self, with value, and with moral compass. It is from the father that all things flow, and it is in them that Petterson's sons see themselves most greatly reflected: "I go on looking at myself in the mirror. I

am so like him it would make you laugh" (Petterson, *Wake* 38). Another example follows:

I stopped by the letter box and leaned against it and looked at the two of them standing in the middle of the road clinging to my father. I glimpsed his face over their shoulders; confused at first and helpless, and then his eyes sought mine, and mine sought his. I nodded lightly. He nodded back and smiled faintly, a smile meant for me alone, a secret smile, and I realised that from now on it was all about the two of us, that we had a pact. And no matter how long he had been away he seemed closer that day than before the war started. I was twelve years old, and in the passing of one moment my life shifted from one point to another, from her to him, and took a new course.

But maybe I was too eager. (Petterson, *Horses* 201-02)

In this passage, Petterson highlights two of his central themes. The moment of change occurs, and a life is altered. The character seeks validation from his father. However, the scene also carries with it a lack of understanding on the part of the son, who misinterprets the meaning of his father's gaze and who assigns to it a worth that it does not truly have. The rest of the son's life will be spent reflecting on such misinterpreted moments and analyzing why, or how, they could have been interpreted falsely.

Petterson's sons crave these moments. They continuously search for the rite of passage from adolescence to manhood, and if a paternal blessing is never given, for whatever reason, a young man has a hole within him that he can never fill. However, this notwithstanding, he will attempt to fill it his whole life, and he will be left with a goal that he must always chase, but which he can never complete.

Furthermore, Petterson also plays with notions of faith and trust between father and son, but ultimately, these seem to erode because they have been

betrayed. Faith morphs from "I thought it was just like my father, to take me as far as he possibly could where it still was called Norway, and I asked no questions about why precisely *here*, for it was as if he was testing me, and I did not mind that. I trusted my father" (Petterson, *Horses* 40) to "there is a trustfulness in that look I probably do not deserve. But maybe that is not the point, to deserve it or not, perhaps it just exists, that trust, disconnected from who you are and what you have done, and it is not to be measured in any way" (Petterson, *Horses* 196).

The examination of masculinity within the context of father and son is not something uncommon in literature. Petterson himself says so. "The relationship between father and son is really a classic. There are incredibly many variants" (Petterson, "I Have to Write"), but for Petterson, this is a key element that drives his narration:

If you look totally animalistic at it, it's all about the youngster trying to conquer his father's place. But the old father wants to stay as he still feels he has his youthful force. And then we have a conflict. If the father is very strong he can crush his son's self-identity or he might be too weak and give away too easily, which also can cause a conflict. (Petterson, "I Have to Write")

Michael Kimmel notes, in his essay "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," that men "are under constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, and grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval" (*Gender Desire* 24). This specific aspect of masculinity within Petterson's work will be dealt with in depth in Chapter 3.1, but it begins to set the groundwork for understanding Petterson in the context of his American influences. American literature greatly influences Petterson's writing, "In Norway I'm considered very American influenced" ("Soul Food" *The Independent*), and Petterson also admits, "Sometimes I think the

English version (of my work) is better than the Norwegian" (Campbell). Still, though in reviews and essays Petterson's style has often been compared to that of Ernest Hemingway, John Cheever, Richard Yates, Raymond Carver, and Richard Ford, for whom the ideas of becoming, arrival, or achievement are crucial narrative motifs, Petterson complicates these themes by also tying them to a son's need for paternal validation.

1.4 Masculinity and Fatherhood in the Norwegian Tradition

However, before it can be argued that Petterson's work should be read in context with a specific group of American male writers, one must first examine the ideas of fatherhood and masculinity present within the cultural and literary tradition of Petterson's native Norway.

According to Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, masculinity within a culture consists of a paradigm wherein "Social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (*Cultures* 297). In Hofstede's model, "A national culture consists of six dimensions. The cultural dimensions represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other" ("The Hofstede Center"). In using Hofstede's model to compare Norway and the United States of America, one immediately notes the disparity in the category of masculinity. Norway scores 8 points out of 100, while the United States scores 62 ("The Hofstede Center"). For Norway, "The softer aspects of culture are valued and encouraged such as leveling with others, consensus, 'independent' cooperation, and sympathy for the underdog" ("The Hofstede Center"). The result of Hofstede's study seems to suggest that Norwegian culture values traditional feminine traits more than

traditionally masculine ones, that its idea of masculinity is passive, and that it is not something performed overtly on a daily basis, but which is relegated to the background of society.

Conversely, for Americans, "It is believed that a certain degree of conflict will bring out the best of people, as it is the goal to be 'the winner'" ("The Hofstede Center"). It is the type of character that Petterson is drawn to. "I've always liked that type: working class but at the same time fiercely individualistic. 'I'm out for myself.' Rebellious, drinking, fuck-you type. I like that" (Campbell). For an American mindset, masculinity is present, performed, and visual in nearly every aspect of identity and culture, and if winning is heavily emphasized, then it is clear that the opposite paradigm, losing, must also be looming constantly within the cultural psyche. Either one is victorious, or one fails. To gauge this, one must be in constant, unending competition with one's peers.

It is clear, then, that the idea of masculinity drastically varies between these two countries, but it is impossible to present the entire scope and trajectory of the images of fatherhood and masculinity within the full tradition of Norwegian literature in this study. Nevertheless, one can note specific convergences, and divergences, regarding certain examples of American literature. Moreover, though current Norwegian culture, as evidenced by Hofstede, tends towards a less overt masculinity, as Norway's score of 8 puts its masculinity ranking above only Sweden, Norway has long had a culture steeped in a rugged individualism and a "cabin masculinity" that has been associated with "nostalgia and a sense of atavistic longing, longing for an imagined past that never was" (Rees 5). Furthermore, Rees states that cabins "become marked predominately as masculine spaces, largely because of the explosion of the hunting narratives that dominated the Norwegian literary market (in the late 19th and early 20th century)" (Rees 7-8). Novels like Knut

Hamsun's *Pan* present a unique form of "Romantic Masculinity," where Lt. Glahn "lives in a cabin in a small fishing community, hunts his own food, and configures himself as a true child of nature" (Von Schnurbein 148). In these situations, cabins offer a form of masculinity that must exist on the edge of society because it challenges conventional norms. "In these novels, love exists on the periphery of what's socially accepted, and often clashes with authorities and class barriers. In *Pan* and *Mysteries*, the forest is the staging for erotic encounters" (Anderson, "Hamsun and the New Gender Relations").

However, though Petterson considers his own work to be closely aligned with the "early writings of (Knut) Hamsun" ("We Can Never Know Each Other"), the cabin motif in Petterson's work is not Romantic. The masculinity that it represents is not positive; rather, it symbolizes a:

Necessary place of retreat, and as a locus for the psychological trauma connected to the disintegration of the family and traditional society... (*Out Stealing Horses*) activates multiple layers...in a story about an attempt to withdraw from the world. (Rees 9)

In this way, Petterson's characters are "more like us (Americans) than other Scandinavian protagonists including Knut Hamsun's Lt. Glahn" (McGuane, "In a Lonely Place").

These ideas of longing and nostalgia also strike at the heart of much American-male fiction written during the 20th century. However, there is a subtle difference between what the past is meant to symbolize when one contrasts the American understanding of it with Petterson's. In framing the American paradigm, one cannot help but recall the classic words of Jay Gatsby, who says "'Can't repeat the past,' he cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!'" (Fitzgerald 110). For the American mindset, the past is a place of youth, vitality, and hopefulness. It is a

simpler, more Romantic time when the world seemed capable of offering up grand favors rather than tragic surprises. Hemingway's Paris in *A Moveable Feast* and the idea of New York City for Frank Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* speak to the same notion, namely, if one could only find a way to transplant the past onto the present moment, then all of one's troubles could be wiped away. It is a retrospective point of view, one that seems to believe that the world will only become a bleaker and more menacing place as we age, and that we will invariably be left old and alone, carrying with us only the faint recollections of a golden time immemorial.

For Petterson, however, the forest or "time-gone-by" do not represent magical cures to present maladies. What Petterson's characters desire from the past is a better understanding of what transpired in it. They want to study it to find out what went wrong and when it happened, rather than to relive its tranquil moments. Petterson's characters return to their memories and to the past because of the knowledge they believe might be provided there. If they do wish to travel back in time, it is so they can live the same life better, not transform it completely:

I didn't want him to die, I wanted to be ten years old again and have the smell of leather tickling my nose on my way down to the cellar, I wanted all that I looked upon to have a meaning and to surround and embrace me, and all that had to happen and be gathered into one *now* and give me peace. (Petterson, *Wake* 34-35)

For Petterson the past is not glorious or innocent, and if it is better than the now, it is only because the past was a time when fewer mistakes had been made and the collection of one's failures was not as great. Nostalgia is present in the work of Peterson, but it is only a faint undercurrent. He presents loss, but he is neither hyperbolic in his description nor nihilistic in his presentation. His work is subtler in its

longing, and it longs not for the myth of eternal happiness but merely for another's acceptance--namely that of one's father.

Moreover, Petterson seems at odds with the positive representation of fathers and fatherhood that has historically presented itself within Norwegian literature. In the American tradition, the father seems to serve as a distant specter of patriarchal authority that casts a shadow over the protagonist's feeling of worth and accomplishment, and that, therefore, must be thrown off. Conversely, the Norwegian tradition has long positively portrayed both fathers and fatherhood. In *The History of Fatherhood in Norway*, Jorgen Lorentzen states, "Research into the discourse of fatherhood in Norway from 1850 onward substantiates the assertion that the home was also significant for men and fathers" (15). Furthermore, Lorentzen attempts to show that fatherhood has long been a central element in canonical Norwegian literature, even if it only exists at the periphery. "Fatherhood is pervasive, but it is kept in the background" ("Ibsen and Fatherhood" 817), and in the work of Ibsen, for example, his trend is to "dramatize so consistently the relationship between father and child without fully developing it as a theme" ("Ibsen and Fatherhood" 817). Fatherhood plays a unique and powerful supporting role in Ibsen's family dramas, which are commonly associated with:

Women who fight for the right to a life of freedom and heroic men who become embroiled in great moral battles related to truth, freedom, power, suppression and bourgeois double standards of morality...his dramas do not explicitly deal with fatherhood. It is not the relationship between fathers and their children that comprise the dramatic plot. Fatherhood lies in the background.

(Lorentzen, "Ibsen and Fatherhood" 817)

The family dynamics used by Ibsen and Petterson place them in opposite camps.

Unlike Ibsen, who is a chronicler of the middle class, Petterson is a writer of working-

class masculinity who takes time to unpack and to specifically mine the relationship that exists between father and son. He resists any comparison to Ibsen, saying, "I don't really like him" (Campbell). For Petterson, the relationship between fathers and sons is often the central thematic element, and "The reverberations of parents' lives on their children's...may explain the fraught relationships between fathers and sons in Petterson's novels" (Kirch).

More recently, the most well-known Norwegian literature dealing with father/son discourse, apart from Petterson's work, has been written by Karl Ove Knausgaard. Knausgaard's *My Struggle* is a "six-volume, 3,600-page novel-cum-autobiography" (Anthony, "Writing is a Way") that heavily explores Knausgaard's relationship with his late father and his father's demise. Like Petterson, Knausgaard writes from the son's perspective, but unlike Petterson, Knausgaard is a memoirist. He does not mask reality in the cloak of fiction.

Thus, while Petterson clearly has been influenced by his countrymen, he sets himself apart from their Romantic masculinity with a cold and sober examination of how "small things can change lives and make them spin off in a strange direction" (Kirch). Petterson writes from a wounded and dark perspective, and home is not a place of sanctuary filled with heroic struggles of individuals against class boundaries, but a broken and fractured locale.

In examining *Out Stealing Horses* and *In The Wake*, I hope to show that, though positive moments do, at times, occur in Petterson's work, ultimately, for Petterson, the father/son dynamic exists in a very specific context of validation and competition, and his men, unlike what Hofstede's cultural assessment might have one believe of the current Norwegian male, are consumed with their masculine identity. So, if Knausgaard's tale is one of the father's demise, Petterson writes of fathers who are seemingly incapable of failure, "but he (Trond's father) had so much

self-confidence he could take on almost anything and believe he would succeed" (Pettersen, *Horses* 56), and who set the ideal of what their sons should aspire to be. Thus, Pettersen takes the Norwegian motif of a central and strong father figure and shifts it into a dark and brooding American paradigm that offers a deep and sustained insight into a relationship that has long been ignored both by many American and Norwegian writers alike.

2. From Ernest Hemingway to Richard Ford: American Literary Masculinities and Their Influence on Petterson

Though Norwegian, Per Petterson admits that he has been heavily influenced by American fiction, even going so far as to say that he finds "it difficult to take the Americans out of my work" (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels"). While aligning Per Petterson's work, specifically *In the Wake* and *Out Stealing Horses*, with his American influences, this chapter will attempt to show how Per Petterson's approach to examining masculinity is both a logical addition to writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, and Richard Ford as well as unique from them.

2.1 Ernest Hemingway: Masculinity as Conflict and Violence

For Petterson, the writing of Ernest Hemingway has served as a major influence. Of Hemingway, Petterson has stated, "Hemingway said that you can leave anything out of a book as long as you know exactly what it is. I used to think he was right, I used to think everything Hemingway said was right" (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels"). Hemingway's examination of men in conflict with other men, as well as the nature of male friendship, can be seen within Petterson's work, and while this study will not attempt to offer a detailed analysis into the violence and conflict within the collected works of Ernest Hemingway, it will attempt to show how the work of Petterson has been informed by, but diverged from, the Hemingway notion of violence and conflict as proof of masculinity.

Hemingway's understanding of masculinity as "tough, stoical, suffering, exhibiting the kind of Hemingway courage that we have been taught to call 'grace under pressure'" (Burgess 5) was to influence a burgeoning American middle-class, primarily young men recently returned from military service in Europe during the First World War. This cadre of veterans represented a new American, whose traditional

values were being called into question during the 1920s as American culture began "struggling with its masculine identity and a more sexually permissive European culture brought to the United States by American soldiers after World War I" (O'Donnell). Hemingway's writing accompanies both this shifting moral paradigm and a second, massive change in the fabric of American society, namely the great advancement in industrialization begun by Henry Ford's invention of the Assembly Line in 1913. Thus, the dawn of the specialized worker, "created the opportunity for a division of labor on an unprecedented scale in America" (O'Donnell). This birthed a society where a sizeable portion of the American male population was now able to earn a decent living from fields that no longer required traditional, brute-male physical exertion. It is not surprising, then, that the advent of the "industrialized man" paralleled a moment in American history that saw the rise of "a cult of muscularity," where "middle-class men began to identify themselves with all sorts of working-class men; bodybuilders and prize-fighters" (O'Donnell), as the average man now worked solely as a cog in a very specific and highly specialized industrial machine. This has been argued as creating a need for the vicarious escapism that validated a more primal male self-understanding for the average, industrialized workingman, and Hemingway's fiction, resplendent "with violent adventure as a test of manhood" (Armengol, *Ford* 102) served as a perfect outlet for this.

O'Donnell posits that the middle-class attempt to identify with working-class brawn resulted from the fact that, now, most men existed as salaried employees of other men, and "Instead of laboring with their hands for their privately owned businesses, middle-class men found themselves increasingly employed in the offices of expansive corporations--in the employ of other men" (O'Donnell). By being employed, they assumed a subservient position, and the writing of the time, like Kenneth Wayne's 1912 *Building of the Young Man*, fostered the belief that "A man

has his own rating, and instantly he lays it alongside another man" (18). Feeling emasculated by their work, American middle-class men sought other means by which they could assert their masculinity and an outlet for vicariously living it--a trend that would continue throughout the 20th century.

However, this is not to say that Hemingway is the only American male writer to use violence and conflict to symbolically discuss rites of passage. Nor is it to say that hyper-masculine ideas within American culture were born at this specific moment in time. "American literature has long reinforced the connection between masculinity and violence, usually by means of the adventure story" (Armengol, *Ford* 100), and notable examples of this connection are found in such disparate works as "James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, Mark Twain's *Roughing It*, Theodore Roosevelt's *Autobiography*, and Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam*" (Armengol, *Ford* 100). Martin Green writes, "Adventure (the experience) has been the great rite of passage from boyhood to manhood...and adventure (in books) has been the ritual of the religion of manliness" (6), but in Hemingway, this adventure story and the idea of the "self-made man" moves the paradigm from one of manliness as personal success, or bravery, to one of manliness as dominance over something.

Within Hemingway's work, there is always the underlying theme of male conflict, either against nature or against other men, as though Hemingway truly believed that "he had been put on earth to test himself and to overcome" (Minter 138-39). Hemingway, himself, was the son of a "violent and abusive man who insisted that his sons learn to hunt...and prove (their) masculinity through boxing" (Armengol, *Ford* 102), and "Hemingway's lifelong involvement in violent conflicts and activities such as war, hunting, boxing and bullfighting" was "transformed into one of his fictional subjects" (Armengol, *Ford* 103). In Hemingway, violence, whether literal or metaphorical, often manifests itself as a "symbol of virility" (Armengol, *Ford* 103).

However, conflict, like that between Francis Macomber and Robert Wilson in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," is not to be confused with the competition that takes place between the men in Per Petterson's work. Conflict in Hemingway is meant to prove a clear winner, whereas--with rare exception--the competition in Petterson, which will be expanded upon in Chapter 3, is meant to either prove equality or to show a child what he must aspire to be. One sees a prime example of this Petterson trope when Arvid Jansen attempts to show that, although his father was a dominant man, he was never overtly violent:

I don't think there was a time in my life when he couldn't beat me with one arm tied behind his back. But he had never hit me, I had never even had a slap on the cheek except the once when he was trying to teach me to box and I refused to hit him and he became so annoyed that he slammed me on the chest and I fell over and landed on the floor and rolled under the sofa.

(Petterson, *Wake* 31-32)

For Petterson, such a moment is tender. The adolescent Jansen is not weak but confused. He cannot take it upon himself to throw a punch at a man whom he views as an almost god-like creature and whose only goal in the scene is to pass along to his son something he believes to be valuable for him.

In Hemingway, such a moment would never be glorified. It is an embarrassment. Men can never flirt with any action that might be mistaken for weakness. In relation to women, a man must be conquering ("The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"); in relationship to fate, he must be stoically resigned ("The Killers"). In relation to the future, he must be dispassionate ("Hills Like White Elephants"). He must also be resilient, even in the face of failure (*The Old Man and the Sea*), because in Hemingway's world, weakness gets people killed.

Hemingway even goes so far as to present what ideal masculinity is by continually reaffirming what it is not. For example, in *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway portrays an ideal of masculinity through the absence of an alpha male. He uses Jake Barnes, Mike Campbell, Robert Cohn, and Romero as examples of men who are all somehow lacking, especially in their relationships with Lady Brett Ashley, whom none of them can "conquer." By displaying their flaws in the men's interactions with Brett, Hemingway constructs an ideal of masculinity without explicitly describing it, for while all of these men hunt her, none of them is capable of killing their prey. It might be implied, then, that a man should be dominant and powerful, and that he should also possess the abilities to keep an ambitious and promiscuous woman in check.

While violence and conflict do exist in Petterson's world, it is often isolated and random. He prefers the idea of competition to conflict, and when violence appears, it in no way enhances the character's masculine standing. In addition, though violence in Petterson's writing can take place in the present moment, as is the case with the ultimate scene in *In the Wake* (Petterson 197-99), it is more frequently presented through memory. It is throwaway, and it is routinely not fully understood by the characters themselves. For example, in *In the Wake*, Arvid Jansen recalls a childhood fight between him and his brother:

But all that comes to mind is that once we fought in the hall at home when he was twelve and I was nine, and we were alone and rolled on the floor and punched and punched each other and tore the coats down from the hooks and knocked the chest over and tipped the vacuum cleaner out of the cupboard which was open, and it burst apart and everything that was in it spilled out on the floor and made a massive cloud of dust and dirt, and when we suddenly stopped because we realised both at the same time we hadn't anything to fight

about...And we were both so embarrassed that he went straight to his room and I went out...because I was the one who had attacked him, and I had no idea why. (Petterson 56)

It is a moment of childish insanity that ends almost as quickly as it begins, and its end is rather amusing, as though the fight has been staged for effect before the characters return to the normal pattern of their day. They gain nothing but confusion and embarrassment from it. They do not grow in any masculine way, nor do they experience a shift in a power hierarchy. Unlike in Hemingway's writing, where conflict and competition seem to bleed into a singular idea, in Petterson's world, competition is not married to overt violence, and overt violence does nothing to establish one's position in relation to other men. For Petterson, the completion of action is more important, and the validation of the father is what helps to confer the status of manhood:

And before my father could say anything, I had jumped in and let myself sink until I stood on the riverbed. There I felt the current punch me in the back and pull at my arms, and I opened my eyes and saw the end of the trunk straight in front of me, got the loop over my head and fastened it where I wanted it to be. It all went so well I felt I could stand there a long time almost weightless and just hold my breath and keep my hands around that log. But then I let go and rose to the surface. My father tightened the rope, and all I needed to do was haul myself in to the bank. I stood up dripping on dry land, and my father said: "Goddamn it, that was not bad," and then he smiled...My father looked almost happy then, and I could see by the way he looked at me, that I did too. (Petterson, *Horses* 235)

Such an interaction carries greater weight in Petterson's universe than mindless sibling quarrelling or the equally impetuous moment where a young Trond, in the wake of his father's departure, mindlessly threatens a man on the street.

"Do you want a punch on your mouth?" I said...

"If you want a punch on your mouth you can have it now, because I certainly feel like giving you one," I said. "You've only got to say."

"No," he said.

"No what," I said.

"No," he said, "I don't want a punch on my mouth. If you hit me, I'll call the police." He spoke very clearly, like an actor. It made me wildly irritated.

(Petterson, *Horses* 250-51)

The scene unfolds almost comically, and it reads like a pastiche. Petterson's violence stands in direct contrast to that of Hemingway's, who uses violence as an attempt to establish hierarchy and to assert dominance. The violence of Trond, and of Arvid Jansen and his brother, differs greatly from, for example, the violence inherent in *The Sun Also Rises*, where Cohn, the most effeminate and effete character in the book, is immediately introduced as a boxer (Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 1). It is as though he needs to somehow be redeemed and not be presented as entirely pathetic. Constantly mocked by Barnes, Cohn is a character who is seemingly incapable of action. He is viewed as beneath Mike Campbell and Barnes, until he uses his boxing prowess to knock out both Barnes and Romero. He shifts the power dynamic, because although his masculinity has been brought into question due to Brett's straying from him and despite the group containing the bullfighter Romero, Cohn is still its most physically dominant member since he has the ability to fight (Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 195, 205-206).

Furthermore, of Hemingway's own father, David Minter states, "(The father) was a distant and authoritarian patriarchal figure who suffered from a mental disorder" (138-139). Unlike Petterson, for whom the presence of the father figure is paramount and central, Hemingway often avoids depicting fatherhood or discussing fathers. It is a subject "he associates with marriage and family life, and therefore with boredom and responsibilities of adulthood" (Armengol, *Ford* 61). For Hemingway, fatherhood is a direct assault on the sanctity of male-male friendship. When he does seem to deal with fatherhood, like the conversation between Nick and George in *In Our Time*, the subject is "represented in negative terms and that he (Hemingway), more often than not, avoided the issue altogether" (Armengol, *Ford* 62).

Moreover, Hemingway's obsession with violence and conflict is not limited to his fictional works, of which "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and *The Old Man and the Sea* serve as prime examples. It also informs his memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, where he speaks about his tumultuous relationships with literary giants Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and most specifically, F. Scott Fitzgerald, whom he seems to regard with a grudging respect:

His (Fitzgerald's) talent was as natural as the patter that was made by the dust on a butterfly's wings. At one time he understood it no more than the butterfly did and he did not know when it was brushed or marred. Later he became conscious of his damaged wings and of their construction and he learned to think and could not fly anymore because the love of flight was gone and he could only remember when it had been effortless. (*A Moveable Feast* 147)

In addition, Hemingway is particularly fond of presenting Fitzgerald in comparison to his wife, Zelda, whom Hemingway views as a challenge, both to their male friendship and to himself. She is a leach and a drain on Fitzgerald's ability:

If he could write a book as fine as *The Great Gatsby* I was sure that he could write an even better one. I did not know Zelda yet, and so I did not know the terrible odds that were against him. But we were to find them out soon enough. (Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* 176)

For Hemingway, anything that is an attack on the "idyllic friendships between men" (Armengol, *Ford* 61) and their communing with each other is an affront and something to be guarded against. Domesticity, as I will expand upon in Chapter 2.2, is an attack on virility, and to be domesticated is to be subjected to the whims of the female domain, a problem that will come to the forefront of the American male's crisis of masculinity during his movement to the suburbs in the years following the Second World War.

Further expanding on his relationship with Fitzgerald, Hemingway describes him being distraught because Zelda supposedly claimed "the way I (Fitzgerald) was built I could never make any woman happy...She said it was a matter of measurements" (Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* 190). In taking Fitzgerald to the Louvre, Hemingway tries to prove to him that Zelda was merely putting Fitzgerald "out of his business" (Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* 190). The scene recalls many of Hemingway's stories of male friendship, "The Three Day Blow" and "Cross Country Snow" being two prime examples where men must serve as each other's protector against the encroachment of a woman.

While Petterson specifically mentions this passage in *I Curse the River of Time*, a novel filled with cultural and literary allusion, he does so in order to show his movement away from Hemingway as influence:

And it was not that the advice was bad, but when I read it again after I had turned thirty, the year we are talking about now, 1983, then the first thing that struck me was the condescending tone in which the episode had been written.

More than thirty years after Paris, Hemingway still needed to humiliate Fitzgerald, even though Fitzgerald at the time this took place was already on his way down and would end his life practically forgotten, wasted away in alcohol, while Hemingway was on his way up, and would stay there for a long time. It was a sign of pettiness which recurred in his writing, and I especially found the incident in the men's room in rue Jacob painful, as though it occurred to me personally, and I began to wonder how much it said about Hemingway's writing, the fact that he could quite clearly be a right bastard. (Petterson, *River of Time* 68)

Though critical of Hemingway's portrayal of male friendship, Petterson rarely uses his own work to comment on the relationship between male peers. Additionally, his books do not present much romantic involvement between his protagonists and women. Trond Sander is twice married, but these women never appear meaningfully in *Out Stealing Horses*. Arvid Jansen is divorced, and though he does have a fling with a female nurse named Mrs. Grinde in *In the Wake* (Petterson, 84), it is mainly used so that he might recount a memory of his father. Afterwards, Jansen only knows that her first name is "something with a G" (Petterson, *Wake* 85). In both *Out Stealing Horses* and *In The Wake*, women exist on the periphery. They are not the measuring sticks for the character's masculine prowess, and they are not central to the journey of the character. The notion of friendship is also removed from many of Petterson's narratives. Petterson's characters are men alone, and they are men with simple plans. As Trond Sander says in *Out Stealing Horses*, "My plan for this place is quite simple. It is to be my final home. However long that might be for is something I haven't given much thought to. It is one day at a time here" (68). The daily act of survival and of never stopping outweighs everything else in life.

Notwithstanding, there is a palpable Hemingway influence in the work of Petterson, but it lies primarily in style. Their tones are matter of fact, and there is a certain cool distance in the writing of the two men that attempts to keep emotion in check. When emotion is presented, it is often offered in a straightforward manner, without ebullience. Hemingway writes,

"Oh Jake," Brett said, "we could have had such a damned good time together."

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.

"Yes," I said. "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* 251)

While Petterson offers:

We were never to walk like that again. When we came home to Oslo, she fell back into her own weight and remained that way for the rest of her life. But on that day in Karlstad we walked arm in arm down the street. My new suit fitted my body so lightly and moved with me every step I took. The wind still came icily down between the houses from the river, and my hands felt swollen and sore where the nails had pierced the skin when I clenched it so hard, but all the same everything felt fine at that moment; the suit was fine, and the town was fine to walk in, along the cobblestone street, and we do decide for ourselves when it will hurt. (Petterson, *Horses* 258)

Both writers have a penchant for long compound sentences that seem to go on without pause. For example, Hemingway's first page of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*:

The young man, who was studying the country, took his glasses from the pocket of his faded, khaki flannel shirt, wiped the lenses with a handkerchief, screwed the eyepieces around until the boards of the mill showed suddenly

clearly and he saw the wooden bench beside the door; the huge pile of sawdust that rose behind the open shed where the circular saw was, and a stretch of the flume that brought the logs down from the mountainside on the other bank of the stream. (Hemingway 5)

can be compared with Petterson's *In the Wake*:

And I never asked myself why, never looked back to find out whether he was still standing there, but now I am sitting in the middle of this steep slope on a ridge north-east of Oslo with my feet against the base of a spruce tree to stop me from slipping, and there is not much snow now, but it is well below freezing, and I stretch my arms out to the sides and suck the air in, keep it down for a long time and slowly let it out again, and I do it once more and then again until I find a rhythm I can keep. (Petterson 69)

The similarities are striking, but apart from style and syntax, the writers do not align in the ways that they explore masculinity in their work. Unlike Hemingway, Petterson is not nihilistic, and he does not believe in "fate." Rather, "'You decide for yourself when it will hurt,' as Trond Sander says in *Out Stealing Horses*, and I believe that. But it can be very difficult" (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels"). Hemingway's characters observe and think, but they do not mull over an individual thought ad infinitum because questions are "not answerable" (Berman 35), whereas Petterson's characters try to find answers to nearly everything that they can. Hemingway's characters are people for whom interpersonal conflict is more important than personal reflection. When reflection could take place, it is either presented as quickly passing or readily dismissed (Berman 58) because Hemingway must arrive at an endpoint where something has been achieved or lost. But the process of winning or losing supersedes why, or how, one wins. Often, in Hemingway's fiction, this conflict plays out within a present moment, not after a remove of many years, as

Hemingway's novels are rarely retroactive. As evidenced by the anecdote about Fitzgerald in *A Moveable Feast*, within his work, there will always be a clearly defined winner and loser among peers.

The effect of Hemingway's fiction and the "Hemingway hero" (Burgess 5) is wide reaching within American letters. The "virility school," comprised of such writers as Frederick Exley, Norman Mailer, and Chuck Palahniuk, continues to promote a type of masculine writing that showcases the belief that "Nobody was born a man; you earned manhood provided you were good enough, bold enough" (Mailer qtd. in Armengol 107), and apart from serving as an influence on American letters, this is the exact psychology we find on display in *In the Wake* and *Out Stealing Horses*.

2.2. Cheever, Yates, and Carver: Suburban Discontent

If the industrial modernization of the American economy at the turn of the 20th century began to confuse the middle-class American male's understanding of masculinity, then the advent of the suburb signaled the next vital development in American masculine angst. Since the end of the Second World War, much American fiction has examined the divide "between the new world order of the consumption, leisure, and family-centric lifestyles of the suburbs and the desire for a masculinity fostered by frontier idealism and war heroism" (Moreno 85). Being incompatible ideas, this new standard of American masculinity creates an unreal expectation of what it means to be a real, successful man. It fosters a cycle of failure, as one is always striving towards a finish line that, with each "accomplishment," only manages to recede further from one's grasp. Having been alienated from the intrinsic hunting, gathering, and fighting mode of the soldier to a completely domestic sphere, there is little to nothing that now separated a man from a woman or, more specifically, from his wife. "Unlike the detached, male entrepreneur of the early American metropolis or

frontier plain, the organization man was to become a domesticated cog in the corporate wheel who dwelled in the suburbs and consumed products from the burgeoning mass market economy" (Moreno 86).

Again, while a comprehensive examination of American suburban fiction is not possible in this study, this section will attempt to highlight the psychological similarities between the American suburban male and the protagonists present in Per Petterson's writing. Like the men of the middle-class American suburb, Petterson writes characters that are "trapped," but Cheever, Yates, and Carver's men are trapped by a physical space that requires conflicting "manners" of masculine behavior. The American suburb is a polite society that prevents a man from communing with his more primal instincts, whereas Petterson's suburb is a suburb of the mind, which cannot be moved away from. Petterson's men are not "suburbanites" in that they live in a specific cul-de-sac, but in that they possess a similar existential angst that permeates the work of Cheever, Yates, and Carver, namely, how to be unique and how to maintain hope in a place that has seemingly stolen it from them.

For the sake of this study, I will divide the masculinity of suburban fiction into two camps. The first is the white-collar world of John Cheever and Richard Yates, whose Shady Hill community and street of Revolutionary Road serve as fictional representations for the affluent upstate New York and Connecticut housing developments that sprang up in post-war America. The second is the blue-collar writing of Raymond Carver, whose burnt-out towns show both the myth of the suburban dream and the beginning of suburban decay.

These writers inform our understanding of Petterson in that his masculinity turns out to be a hybrid of these disparate perspectives. Petterson's characters are educated men. They are capable of quoting literature and of referencing esoteric topics, but they are simultaneously firmly rooted in their blue-collar upbringing. They

are not suburbanites. They are city people, but they are not urban elites. Much like Petterson himself, they are university-educated factory workers:

I grew up in the city. Both my mother and father were factory workers, and I loved the life in the "metro." Everybody saw me as a very urban guy. And I was. But then love came overnight...this second marriage opened a new world to me. The world of physical work, work with a purpose. I had worked in a factory for five years, and in a way I loved it there too, the monotony of the labor, strangely enough. (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels")

The trio of John Cheever, Richard Yates, and Raymond Carver are important in understanding the ideas of masculinity that Petterson's work explores, which will be highlighted more fully in Chapter 3.2.

2.2.1 Cheever and Yates: Welcome to the Suburbs

John Cheever and Richard Yates examine the idea of the veritable castration that comes from a loss of individual identity and the integration of one into both the corporate wheel and the suburbs (Moreno 86-87). This "nada concept" of existence, "when one of man's most profound fears is of nihilation by absorption into the machine, the mass or whatever" (Killinger 11), signals the movement from the "industrialization man" of the early 20th century to the "organization man" of the 1950s and 1960s. In the suburbs, where all is exactly the same, man's fear of being rendered faceless is magnified. Thus, he seeks new ways to stand out from those around him, and this is usually through conspicuous consumption and the purchasing of status items (Whyte 4). "Although the organization man was not to be considered an emasculated drone, he was, nevertheless, often distraught by the loss of his identity and his manhood in wearing the suburban apron of consumerism and familialism" (Moreno 87). This new benchmark measures both success and

masculinity not in relationship to work and individual productivity, or to dominance over something, but to accumulated goods produced by other men. Thus, the suburbs become a bubble where men "could display (their) success through the accumulation of consumer goods" (May 164). Manhood is now purchasable, and it is measured in direct proportion to one's purchasing power.

Cheever and Yates are writers of white, middle-class men who work white-collar jobs. They are ostensibly part of an educated class that is capable of purchasing whatever they want. They have time to read and to learn how to converse on the topics of the day. They have moved out of the cities, but they have not moved to the wilderness, like Trond Sander, who says, "I was forest" (Pettersen, *Horses* 80). Characters like Francis Weed and Frank Wheeler have nothing wild about them, and they are almost cut off from their formative years. They inhabit a new, vague suburban space, and this space collapses the clear distinction between work and leisure. This contributes to their sense of emasculation. The skills that were now the most important to cultivate at work and in the social sphere, such as dealing with people and getting along with others, were those considered traditionally feminine (Aubry 70). At the office, a man worked only "with ideas and symbols; and was thus deprived of the traditional means whereby he could assert his individual initiative and realize his masculinity. In short, he lacked a sphere that would distinguish him from his wife" (Aubry 70). Because of this, "Do-It-Yourself" home projects appear constantly in the work of Cheever and Yates. In "The Country Husband," Francis Weed sets up an amateur woodworking station in his basement. He has been instructed to do so by his psychiatrist, "who recommends woodwork as therapy" (Cheever 409). Weed attempts to reconnect with his roots as a man and to prevent his sexual attraction to his children's babysitter from posing a threat to the normal order of family life that the suburbs sought to create. Weed's woodworking becomes

a safe and acceptable way to channel his excess sexual energy, while also serving as a stand-in for the affair that he wishes to have. Weed's projects are also an attempt at building a tangible product that he is the direct creator of and that he can take pride in. His woodworking room allows him a mental, masculine space to which he can retreat when he feels smothered by the feminine, domestic sphere.

Trond Sander, on the other hand, comes from a working-class background. His father ingrained in him the things he knows: "I had a practical father. I learned a lot from him" (Petterson, *Horses* 76). Weed's basement woodworking is an attempt to commune with an idea of what a man "should" be. It is tragicomic. Weed is the weekend warrior who is capable, and who is ostensibly able to handle his own household, but this facade of manhood is a mere face-saving affectation. He is attempting to present himself for the other men in the neighborhood against whom he must compete. Unlike Weed, Trond Sander competes against no one but himself and the ghost of his father:

What I do, which I have never let anyone know, is close my eyes every time I have to do something practical apart from the daily chores everyone has, and then I picture how my father would have done it or how he actually did do it while I was watching him, and then I copy *that* until I fall into the proper rhythm, and the task reveals itself and grows visible, and that's what I have done for as long as I can remember, as if the secret lies in how the body behaves towards the task at hand, in a certain balance when you start, like hitting the board in a long jump and the early calculation of how much you need, or how little, and the mechanism that is always there in every kind of job. (*Horses* 75-76)

Trond Sander possesses a foundation that both Francis Weed and Frank Wheeler distinctly lack, but his foundation curses him with a competitor that he can never

escape. Trond's crisis of masculinity is not created by an external stimulus, like his environment or neighborhood. He is born into it, and it is a state of mind that will remain with him regardless of where he finds himself.

In *Revolutionary Road*, we see a more sinister example of the suburban masculine crisis. Frank Wheeler is a former inhabitant of Manhattan who has moved to the suburbs because he thinks this is the next logical step to be taken by the successful American male consumer. His home becomes his status symbol, and it reflects who he is as a man to those around him. The irony is that, in the suburbs, everything is basically the same. Accordingly, while he tries to conform to purchasing as a means to present one's status, he also tries to subvert the system. He wants to think himself wiser and worldlier than the other men who inhabit *Revolutionary Road*. Throughout the book, Wheeler staunchly attempts to maintain that he is still set apart, unique, and better:

When Frank incessantly complains throughout the novel about the alienating role of suburban fathers, the disgust and anger he articulates stems from the fear of being contaminated by them, rather than from his anxiety that he is indistinguishable from them. Although he outwardly maintains that he is not one of them, Frank truly is no different from men who have been colonized by their wives. (Moreno 89)

Such a colonization becomes apparent for Frank Wheeler the morning he wakes to find that his wife has taken his old flannel shirt and is out mowing the lawn (Yates 46). The fear and anger aroused in Frank Wheeler by this event underpins an unconscious and unspoken concern that has begun to appear in the male psyche, that is, having one's role as man of the house usurped. He is frightened by any perceived attack on the status quo of gender roles represented by the suburbs because, in nearly every way, the lines between men and women have begun to blur.

The moment Frank sees his wife, April, inhabiting the space that he has reserved for himself, his situation is dire because a personal humiliation suddenly becomes a public one as well.

Kimmel repeatedly argues that "Manhood is equated with power—over (among other things) women," (Kimmel, *Gender Desire* 37). Therefore, the swapping of roles, in something as simple as lawn mowing, becomes a grander usurpation of the normal social structure and dynamic. Frank Wheeler ceases to be the dominant man in his house. April's minor action is in actuality a grand rebellion, both symbolic and literal, that leads Frank to retreat into the bathroom, where he examines his hands, "the symbol of a true laborer and an icon of masculine strength and power" (Moreno 90). Frank Wheeler finds them to be the exact opposite of his father's, which were sure and massive as if "something unique and splendid had lived within (them)" (Yates 49). Moreover, Frank Wheeler also recalls the embarrassment he felt whenever his father would take him aside and attempt to instruct him in the ways of men, here, specifically, in the handling of tools:

"No, boy, no!" his father would shout and scream of the power saw. "You're ruining it! Can't you see you're ruining it? That's no way to handle a tool." The tool, whatever obstinate thing it was, chisel or gouge or brace-and-bi, would be snatched away from the failure of its dismally sweat-stained woodwork and held aloft to be minutely inspected for damage. Then there would be a lecture on the proper care and handling of tools, to be followed by a gracefully expert demonstration (during which the grains of wood clung like gold in the hair of his father's forearms) or more likely by the sigh of manly endurance pressed to the breaking point and the quiet words: "All right. You'd better go on upstairs." (Yates 48-49)

Again, we find characters at odds with their perception of what men should be and with what they have become. Even with economic and material success, they feel insignificant and lacking. There is nothing physical about them, and this rots their masculine psyche. Ultimately, Frank Wheeler becomes so paranoid that he has an affair and prevents his wife from having the abortion that would probably save their marriage.

Petterson's crisis of masculinity does not come from this fear of being physically inadequate, nor do they need to lord themselves over women to maintain a hetero-normative status quo. Moreover, though Petterson's men might be critiqued by their fathers, they are neither castigated in the manner Frank Wheeler is, nor are they ignored in the way Francis Weed is. They are never made to feel fully incapable, and with the important exception of John's father in *Out Stealing Horses*, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this study, it is rare that Petterson's men are ever physically emasculated. They do not lack for brute strength or endurance, and they are usually handy. Even at sixty-seven, Trond Sander can leave the comforts of life to begin again by taking on one construction project after another at his fixer-up cabin. He fells a dead spruce, chops it, and stacks it in a two metre high pile that he plans to split in due time (Petterson, *Horses* 96).

Furthermore, if Petterson's men do decide to relinquish a physical task, such as repairs or road clearing, to another, it is not because they are incapable of doing these things themselves. Rather, they realize that time can be saved by delegating the work, and this time can be used to either accomplish something they view as more important or to work at a parallel task. This is shown when Trond describes his interaction with a plumber he needs to assist him in getting running water into his kitchen:

I called a plumber who knew my place well, and he told me to dig down to the water pipe in a trench two metres long starting from the outside wall so he could change the angle of the pipe into the kitchen...the plumber would not do the digging himself, he was not a labourer, he said. I did not mind...

(Petterson, *Horses* 97)

As Trond states early on in the novel, the reason he desires to purchase the cabin is partially due to his knowing that he will be required to continually complete one new task after another. He enjoys the work. For Petterson's men, such work is a distraction from their perceived emotional failings in life. Emotions are complex and tricky; they do not follow a logical path or a numerical sequence, whereas labor exists within a specific framework, "with clear limits, with beginnings and ends that I {Trond Sander} can foresee," (Petterson, *Horses* 171). Clarity and limits are important because they offer both parameters and a tangible benchmark for success that are not available for Petterson's men in the emotional realm.

Work takes on a dual function for Petterson's men. It serves as a means for personal validation and satisfaction, and it is also an ordering mechanism that helps to facilitate clear thought and self-examination. With work there is a specific task, a logical time-line, and milestones for progress, or as Trond Sander says, work offers a "calculated order" (Petterson, *Horses* 171). Work creates calmness, because work gives Petterson's men the illusion that they are in control and can directly effect the environment around them. For Trond, nothing is better than ordered work, whose cycle comprises being tired in the evening, waking for coffee the next morning, dressing and then deciding what tasks shall "fill that day" (Petterson, *Horses* 171). Even when a storm knocks down a birch tree and nearly traps his car inside his garage, possibly rendering him immobile on the cusp of a Norwegian winter in the

mountains, Trond does not panic. He assesses the situation and reacts to it in a calm, rational manner:

My yard tree, the big old birch, has been knocked down by a gale and lies huge and almost unreal between the shed and my car; the topmost branches practically reaching to the kitchen window, other branches on top of the roof rack of the car, and others again have torn the gutter off the shed and bent it into a large V so that it hangs down and bars the door to the woodshed... Automatically I get to my feet, about to go out, but of course there is no sense to that. The birch is not going anywhere. So I sit down again and go on with my breakfast, looking out the window while I try to think out a plan for the removal of this giant that has lain down to rest in my yard. (Pettersen, *Horses* 123-24).

It slowly becomes apparent that when structure and order are present, there is nothing to be feared, and if kept up regularly, mechanical routine can calm even the most agitated of souls.

In comparison to Trond Sander's working ability, both Frank Wheeler's debacle with the lawn mower and Francis Weed's basement projects are laughable. For Francis Weed and Frank Wheeler, their fundamental masculine crisis is proving that they are unique. Moreover, they wish to believe that they could still function as "men" if the suburb was razed and they were forced into the wilderness. The suburbs have stripped them of their more primal masculine hunter/gatherer instincts because everything around them has been commodified, ready-made, and pre-packaged for their consumption. They are men who, because they have no viable physical outlet to prove their masculinity at work, attempt to find another manner in which they can prove themselves as men. In Weed's case, the results are funny; in Wheeler's, the results are tragic, as he is ultimately unable to reconcile his idea of himself with the

idea of suburbia that he finds himself in, namely the paradoxical promise that a man can both "live in a suburban ranch house, buy the same commodities as everyone else, work in a corporation, and still be a unique individual" (Aubry 65).

Unlike their American suburban counterparts, Petterson's men do not fear emasculation. Where Petterson's men do primarily differ from those of Cheever and Yates is that they have been emotionally castrated by fathers who have never bestowed upon them praise or validation. They exist in a strange limbo. Though they are more than capable in all things physical, they have never truly undergone a rite of passage from adolescence to manhood. Having not been confirmed by their fathers, Petterson's men seek the wilderness because there they can prove their masculinity over and over again through work. Work allows them an escape from the chaos and whim that befalls them in traditional society. In many ways Petterson's men crave the stasis and simplicity that governs the peaceful and humdrum lives of Frank Wheeler and Francis Weed, but they exist believing that this is only possible if they first prove themselves through the completion of physical tasks. Trond Sander, speaking on behalf of many Petterson protagonists, expresses, "I want to enjoy what I do, to solve the daily challenges that may be tricky enough...That is what I want, and I know I can do it, that I have it in me... and there is nothing to be afraid of...it would be finally nice to have some rest" (Petterson, *Horses* 171-72). Often the action of working is wedded to particular memories or angst moments that must be reckoned with in order for the character to emotionally mature. It is this emotional reckoning that proves to be most difficult for Petterson's characters, such that one starts to believe that Petterson's men would be better off if they were machines that lacked deep and detailed cognitive ability. This is perhaps why another recurrent theme that Petterson explores is a character leaving an academic environment in favor of taking a mundane factory job, where they need only turn off their mind and

perform a singular, simple task with a clearly defined start and end point over and over again.

Furthermore, though Petterson's men could easily turn bitter, there is always a bit of hope that accompanies the completion of a task. His men may be wounded, but they are never insecure, and Petterson does not allow his protagonists to yield to despair. This trait sets him in stark contrast with the narratives of Richard Yates, as Yates's writing is dark and angry, and "his stories and novels return repeatedly to the weakness and hysterical anxiety of mid-century American masculinity" (Wood, "Like Men Betrayed"). They focus on "male selfishness and insecurity. His men operate along a terribly narrow track, squeezed on one side by patriarchal expectation and on the other by female competition" (Wood, "Like Men Betrayed"). If for Cheever "happiness...is always happening somewhere else" (Aubry 68), then for Yates, it does not exist at all. His work contains "an astonishing comprehension that is sometimes a little close to cruelty," and often his stories end "at a perfect zero of hope" (Wood, "Like Men Betrayed"). One need look no further than April Wheeler's death at the hand of a botched self-abortion attempt as one of the most well-known examples of this (Yates 440), but stories like "The B.A.R. Man" and "The Best of Everything" are also telling examples of Yates's pessimistic outlook on life, where jaded and weak men must exercise their power by dominating the women around them.

Petterson neither casts his men in opposition to women, nor allows them ever to fully relinquish hope. The prospect of hope is not something that will overwhelm his narrators, but despite their difficulties, he seems to leave them in a place where they have enough motivation to believe that the future can be better. It will never be perfect, and it will never be the same as it was. But it might be a slight improvement

over the struggles of the now. *In the Wake* ends with Arvid Jansen coming to terms with his estranged brother, who has recently survived a suicide attempt.

"I'm selling out my share in the firm," he says. "It's a long time since I did my bit anyway. It's no fun anymore. Besides I'm broke."

"So what will you do now?"

"I don't know. Actually I like it like this; cleaned out, rock bottom."

"Welcome to the club," I say. He smiles, but his eyes are shining. He raises his glass.

"Rock bottom," he says,

I look down. I see my hand round the glass, the glass is full, but at least it is not gin. I raise my glass.

"Rock bottom," I say. (Pettersen, *Wake* 202)

The ending of the novel, where Jansen shares a moment with his brother and where both men are not only communing over their current lack of fortune, but jesting about it, gives the book, however dour, an optimistic ending. It is as if Pettersen is saying that, even in the wake of tragedy, there is always something to be hoped for, and that despite all that might be thrown at a person, if he can find a way to keep going and not stop, he might one day succeed in being O.K. in his own right and no longer need external validation.

Ultimately, apart from continuing the tradition of masculine fiction begun by Hemingway, Cheever and Yates lay the groundwork for Raymond Carver and Richard Ford, who both continue and refine this tradition of trapped middle-class American masculinity. However, Carver and Ford diverge in the way they explore and portray masculinity. Carver highlights the bottom stratum of society, while Ford, especially in his latter work, highlights the top.

2.2.2 Raymond Carver: Blue-Collar Burnout

The best way to understand the writing of Raymond Carver "is to look searchingly into the stories themselves, to observe with a minimum of external clutter" (Nesset 30). His work embodies a "common plight rather than a common subject" (Skenazy 79), and Carver's exploration of masculinity does not play out in the white-collar suburbs of Cheever and Yates, but in rough, broken, blue-collar towns inhabited by struggling members of the working class. Like the characters of Yates, Carver's men are "embittered as well as dismayed" (Nesset 31). They "suffer in markedly new ways; many are not only numbed and confused but outraged as well, hovering precariously close to violence, and in a few cases—'Tell the Women We're Going' and 'The Third Thing that Killed My Father Off'-- murder" (Nesset 31). According to Nesset, Carver's world is a place "darkened by havoc and loss, a world with little light at the end of the tunnel, or no light at all. It's darkness, rife with fear and frustration and brooding violence" (Nesset 31). His men are the "walking wounded of American suburbia" (Mars-Jones 76). The violence, or potential for it, in Carver can be assumed to come from the hopelessness and desperation that informs much of his work, as violence for men can be "restorative" (Kimmel, *Gendered* 257). Men's violence results from an attempt to recover power they believe to be rightfully theirs. Thus, feelings of powerlessness often result in feelings of impotence, and violence is enacted as a means to regain some semblance of control and potency (Kimmel, *Gendered* 257).

Petterson's Jansen bears resemblance to this "walking wounded" motif found in Carver. At the beginning of *In the Wake*, he is half-drunkenly stumbling through Oslo and unaware of what transpired the previous evening:

It was something to do with a face. I had never seen it before, yet I did recognise it, but as it comes to me now, the thought of it is unpleasant.

Someone gave me a gin. I had had enough already. I see my hand around the glass, the glass is full to the brim, and then I do not remember anything more except that face, and now I stand with my forehead against the glass of this bookshop door, and I kick the door. They have to let me in. I do not know how long I have been standing here. I have been out of this world and now I am back, and I don't feel well. (Pettersen, *Wake* 1)

Although the novel highlights Jansen's penchant for occasionally indulging in self-destructive behavior, it is not the story of a downward spiral, but rather the escape from one.¹ Jansen's journey will ultimately involve deep introspection and contemplation, and Jansen is not a character who uses violence in order to re-establish control or to feel potent. He is one who uses his mind and his memories to attempt to right his situation. He is trying to come to terms with his personal trauma from an intellectual perspective and to analyze the how and why that have brought him to his present situation, rather than simply railing against it. Pettersen's fiction is more layered and textured than works like "Cathedral," "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," and "A Serious Talk." He takes time to mull over the intricacies of minor details, whereas Carver keeps his words to the bare minimum possible and doesn't offer the reader the same level of metaphysical examination that Pettersen attempts to present.

Carver's struggle is with "bearing witness to an entire continent in distress" (Clute 532). By exploring "a sociological phenomenon involving the disinheritance of a whole group of people" (Nesset 102), Carver shines a spotlight on the decaying American suburban model. Carver's characters inhabit the burnt-out neighborhoods that their fathers first populated, and like his forebears, Carver's characters struggle with their places in that society. For Carver, the importance of describing an entire

¹ See Chapter 3.2.

group, rather than an individual, is central. His American men are betrayed by the American Dream and by its suburban promise. In many cases, Carver's characters even lack "real" names and are referred to either as "the man" or "the girl" in "Why Don't You Dance," or they are only "I," as they narrate the events in "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" and "Viewfinder." This lack of specificity offers a universality and "every-man" appeal to much of Carver's work.

Such a sociological study does not interest Petterson. He is not attempting to capture a specific milieu of any kind in his fiction. Rather, Petterson talks about the decay of individual families who are their own individual world. "I suddenly realized, hey, this looks like a project...I couldn't get away from it...Every time I start a book I try not to think about it and every time I end up in the same bag" (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels").

Unlike Carver, Petterson is a writer for whom cultural allusion is key. Jansen, in particular, continually quotes esoteric texts, novels, and movies, and this will ultimately align him closer with Richard Ford's Frank Bascombe than with any of Carver's characters. Petterson's protagonists are comfortable with knowledge. They are learned, no matter how rough their upbringing might have been. For Petterson, knowledge is not something that lessens a man's masculinity; rather, it is respected and prized. Even if it is occasionally sublimated in favor of manual labor, it never takes second place. Arvid Jansen is a writer who works in a bookshop in both *In the Wake* (Petterson 2) and *I Curse the River of Time* (Petterson 66). In addition, in *I Curse the River of Time*, a college-age Jansen is slapped in the face by his mother when he tells her that he has dropped out of his university to work in a factory.

All this I tried to tell my mother...and as I turned in my chair to sit face to face with my mother during this moment we had to ourselves, the words still flowing from my mouth, I suddenly saw the flat of her hand sweeping across the table

like a shadow, and hit me on the cheek, and the sound it made was the loudest in the room...her face was pale and her eyes were moist.

"You idiot," she said. And then she left. (Petterson 40-41)

While not a novel that deals with father/son interaction, *I Curse the River of Time* is Petterson's homage to the esoteric, and it expands upon the motif begun in *In the Wake* of "cultural name-dropping." In this novel, Jansen seems unable to go more than four or five pages without alluding to a movie or a book that he believes parallels the situation in which he currently finds himself. Petterson overloads his book with references to both high and low culture: *Casablanca* (9); Günther Grass (21); *From Here to Eternity*, *The Hustler*, *The Misfits*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Montgomery Cliff, Paul Newman, James Dean, and Marlon Brando (29); Rudolf Nilsen (36); *Zorro's Legion* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (37); Albert Finney (38); Mao, Bob Dylan, and Joni Mitchell (49); *Arch of Triumph* (41); *The Razor's Edge* (46); Gorbachev (48); Jan Myrdal (57); *The Tin Drum* (62); *A Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Zelda Fitzgerald (68); Edvard Munch, William Faulkner, and *Absalom, Absalom* (78); *Grand Prix*, Yves Montard, James Garner, and Eva Marie Saint (84); Stalin and Trotsky (86); Elvis (98); Lenin (106); John Steinbeck, Erich Maria Remarque, *East of Eden*, *Three Comrades*, *Heaven Has No Favourites*, and *The Three Musketeers* (107); Erich Kästner and *Emil and the Detectives* (110); *Klute*, Jane Fonda, and Donald Sutherland (111); *Les Miserables* and Victor Hugo (112); Javert and Jean Valjean (113); Marius and Cosette (114); *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (117); Klaus Rifbjerg, (Paul) la Cour, and Tom Kristensen (149); and *The Myth of Wu Tao-tzu* and Sven Lindqvist (156). All these serve to highlight the character's breadth of reading and scope of knowledge. Such esoteric name-dropping and cultural allusion never appear in the work of Carver.

Interestingly enough, though, Petterson occasionally mentions Raymond Carver as a writer whom his characters read and are influenced by. "It is something I once wrote in a novel mixed up with a story by Raymond Carver" (Petterson, *Wake* 140). He often does it when attempting to set a dour mood for an upcoming scene or to foreshadow doom, as is the case when Jansen describes the moments right before he talked to his father on the phone for the last time:

Around me were boxes full of books sent all the way from America, and the books were all by Raymond Carver. He had died two years before of lung cancer at just fifty years old and we were going to have a memorial exhibition of all the titles published in stylish new editions. I had one of them in my hand. It was called *Where I'm Calling From*. (Petterson, *Wake* 167)

Furthermore, like Carver, Petterson proudly proclaims both his upbringing and his fiction as "strictly working class" (Campbell). In both *In the Wake* and *I Curse the River of Time*, Arvid Jansen refers to himself as a full-fledged member of the Communist Party. "I was a Communist in those days, a Maoist...I read books. Many books, and it looked sufficiently intriguing and intense, the way I lost myself in those books" (Petterson, *River of Time* 34). But for Petterson, what is to be highlighted is all the reading that has been done because this offers Jansen a specific status within this young Communist community.

Ultimately, as is also the case with the writing of Ernest Hemingway, when compared to Carver, Petterson is ornate and nuanced. He does not attempt to say the bare minimum, but to say everything possible. In Petterson's work, external stimuli breed extensive, internal reflection, and he has admitted, "I work from the outside to the inside" (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels"). An interior landscape is vital and required in Petterson's novels, as is the amassing of knowledge. After all,

without knowledge, it is impossible for his characters to thoroughly reflect on and ultimately try to correct the situation in which they find themselves.

2.3 The Ford Parallel: Angst, the Contemplation Man and Fatherly Vulnerability

Regarding his writing, Petterson states, "I am very interested in the choices we make, or don't make, in life-defining matters. The moment of 'angst' and its consequences can be such a cruel thing" ("We Can Never Know Each Other"). In many ways, the works of Per Petterson serve as an extended meditation on the idea of Arthur Schopenhauer's "Man Running Downhill," which Schopenhauer set forth in *Studies in Pessimism: "The Vanities of Existence."* "We are like a man running downhill, who cannot keep on his legs unless he runs on, and will inevitably fall if he stops; or, again, like a pole balanced on the tip of one's finger; or like a planet, which would fall into its sun the moment it ceased to hurry forward on its way" (232). This continual expectation of "arrival," without ever truly having a final destination present, resonates within Petterson's work, which might be characterized as:

A world where all is unstable, and naught can endure, but is swept onwards at once in the hurrying whirlpool of change; where a man, if he is to keep erect at all, must always be advancing and moving, like an acrobat on a rope--in such a world, happiness is inconceivable. (Schopenhauer 233)

This leads to the need of Petterson's characters to create a sane and stable sphere where they can protect themselves from the daily struggles of mortal existence. To this end, we often find Petterson's characters creating safe houses of work for themselves. Once again, we see Petterson echoing the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who set forth the idea that man is perpetually driven by a dissatisfied will that seeks satisfaction or "unrest as the mark of existence" (232). Work and

action, or thought, attempts to offer stability for a character so that he will not become "a shipwrecked man without an anchor in the world except in his own liquid thoughts where time has lost its sequence" (Petterson, *Horses* 210).

For Petterson, a man's mind is his last bastion of defense against a world that will invariably rob one of relationships and of loved ones, where no one can be truly trusted, or worse, truly understood. However, the mind is incapable of perfect memory. It can compare and contrast, but it can only judge an event from the remove of its own perspective. Therefore, one is caught in a constant flux between the idea of what one believes he experienced and what really occurred. It is only by repeatedly replaying these moments that one ever has a chance of understanding them.

Of all the American writers to whom Petterson can be compared, he most mirrors Richard Ford, both in depth and scope of character self-examination, and in the way in which the relationship between intimacy and distance between people is explored. Like Petterson, Ford is a writer fascinated by the idea of "knowing" our fellow man:

The truth is, however, we know little and can find out precious little more about others, even though we stand in their presence, hear their complaints, ride the roller coaster with them, sell them houses, consider the happiness of their children--only in a flash or a gasp, or the slam of a car door to see them disappear and be gone forever. Perfect strangers...that interest can mingle successfully with uninterest in this way, intimacy with transience, caring with obdurate uncaring. (Ford, *Independence Day* 76)

Moreover, Ford's "tendency to quote French existentialist philosophers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre in his critical works as well as in interviews shows the author's fascination with concepts and dilemmas like being, knowing, and

nothingness, which recur in Ford's fiction" (Armengol, *Ford* 6). Furthermore, Ford's fiction tends to focus "on epistemological questions" that highlight "how we can never know each other, and how we exist in the face of nothingness. In doing so, he provides what appear to be simple narratives with an underlying philosophical complexity" (Armengol, *Ford* 6).

Both writers depict loss or the absence of a parent. Both writers deal heavily with the ideas of social alienation, displacement, and place. Like Petterson, Ford is a writer for whom no singular idea is too small or too nuanced to be explored. Ford's early work, namely his debut novel *A Piece of My Heart* and the collection *Rock Springs*, might be better associated with the work of Raymond Carver. But Ford's latter work, beginning with *Women With Men* and what has come to be known as the Bascombe Trilogy (*The Sportswriter*, *Independence Day*, and *The Lay of the Land*), shows a significant shift in style and subject matter.

Two of the novellas in *Women With Men*, "The Womanizer," which is set in Paris and follows an affluent group of ex-patriots fluent in French, and "Occidentals," whose lead character Charley Matthews is a published writer, begin to inhabit a social sphere wedded, if not to high culture, to the pursuit of it, and the nuances of male/female relationships begin to show as the central themes of the work:

He (Austin) had believed that he and Joséphine could have a different kind of relationship. Sexual but not sexual at its heart. But rather, a new thing, founded on realities--the facts of his character and hers. With Barbara he'd felt he was just playing out the end of an old thing. Less real, somehow. Less mature. He could never really *love* Joséphine; that he had to concede since in his deepest heart he loved only Barbara, for whatever that was worth. Yet he'd for a moment felt compelled by Joséphine, found her appealing, considered

even the possibility of living with her for months or years. Anything was possible. (Ford, *Women With Men* 78)

For Ford, the male/female dynamic is of utmost importance, and it should be handled with extreme care, as "emotional commitment and love are indissolubly linked to pain and suffering. Love often entails suffering for the beloved can suddenly disappear" (Armengol, *Ford* 50). Thus, Paris and Haddam--a New Jersey suburb reminiscent of Cheever's and Yates's settings--replace the dark and vile landscape of the American South and Upper Mid-West. The travails of blue-collar working men, like Sam Newel (Ford, *Piece of My Heart*) and Earl Middleton (Ford, *Rock Springs*), give way to the existential crisis of a middle-aged, white-collar divorcee in Frank Bascombe, who:

Embittered by personal circumstances such as the premature loss of his son and his divorce...rejects as emotionally dangerous the possibility of living a life in relation to others and instead chooses a solitary life without such problems and complexities...He (Bascombe) believes that emotion might make him vulnerable to other people and so concentrates on his job as a sports journalist, dismissing emotional engagements both with women and other men. (Armengol, *Ford* 50)

Both Frank Bascombe and Arvid Jansen are literary foils for their authors. They are both writers. They are both highly educated, divorced men who find solace in books and who cite esoteric texts as a way to highlight their level of education and to separate themselves from the men around them. Most importantly, they are both men trying to isolate themselves from the prospect of pain, as they are people for whom the ideas of home and security have been stolen and for whom death and tragedy intrude repeatedly.

However, while there is certainly an overlap between the writing of Petterson and Ford, the main differences between them is that, unlike Petterson, for whom the past and one's family roots are paramount, "Ford's fiction portrays a sense of rootlessness, of being cut off from the past" (Guargliardo 5). Furthermore, Ford takes into consideration the idea of male/male friendship among peers, and his father/son writing comes from the father's point of view.

In *The Sportswriter*, where Bascombe is a member of "The Divorced Men's Club," he meets a man named Walter Lockett, whose attempts at emotional closeness he repeatedly rebuffs. "I am in no way interested in him...I'm simply performing a Samaritan's duty I would perform for anyone (preferably a woman)...I shove him backwards and in one spasm of wretchedness shout 'Quit it Walter, I don't want to be kissed!'" (Ford 184, 186, 187). Bascombe is hesitant to give such an elevated status to homo-social friendship. He wants it at arm's length because this is safe, and "contemporary men's friendships are usually characterized by emotionally neutral, instrumental, 'side-by-side' interactions" (Nardi 322). This arm's-length mentality for emotional information is echoed by Trond Sander, but it is phrased a bit more eloquently and philosophically:

People like it when you tell them things, in suitable portions, in a modest, intimate tone, and they think they know you, but they do not, they know *about* you, for what they are let in on are facts, not feelings, not what your opinion is about anything at all, not how what has happened to you and how all the decisions you have made have turned you into who you are. What they do is they fill in with their own feelings and opinions and assumptions, and they compose a new life which has precious little to do with yours, and that lets you off the hook. No-one can touch you unless you yourself want to be touched. (Petterson, *Horses* 73)

The idea remains that men do not share, and vulnerability is dangerous because it is something that takes agency away from an individual. Emotional closeness gives others the chance to inflict hurt, rather than allowing the individual to be in full control of what will hurt him and when the hurt will occur.

Furthermore, Ford pays specific attention to the depiction of male friendship among peers in the Bascombe Trilogy, which highlights "the traditional U.S. narratives of male bonding by underlying the male protagonist's fear of (same-sex) friendship and intimacy" (Armengol, *Ford* 49). The relationship between Frank Bascombe and Walter Lockett in *The Sportswriter* serves as an example of this. "Intimacy," says Bascombe, "has begun to matter less to me" (Ford, *Sportswriter* 96). Walter Lockett represents a threat to Bascombe's attempt at emotional isolation, and at times, it seems that Ford has created this relationship just so he can destroy it to highlight Bascombe's emotion coldness.

The interactions between Bascombe and Walter are often strained and laconic, as the "unspoken boundaries of the Divorced Men's Club prohibit personal questions" (Armengol, *Ford* 52). Compared to Walter, who at times goes against the grain by speaking of a brief homosexual affair, "I went to a bar in New York two days ago, and I let a man pick me up" (Ford, *Sportswriter* 92), Bascombe is a stoic figure. He is governed by rationale, not by the emotional, feminine need to disclose his private thoughts. He is more in control and, thus, more manly than Walter Lockett in traditional ways, because "disclosing one's inner feelings entails acknowledging one's emotional dependence and vulnerability" (Armengol, *Ford* 52). To be a man is to be both stoic and rational. One can argue, as Victor Seidler in *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory* has, that since the Enlightenment, reason has come to be perceived as opposed to emotionality:

As rational selves we (men) learn that we can only know ourselves through reason and that reason is the only way we can guide our lives. We learn to *silence* our natures and so we also become deaf to the cries of others, learning to treat them as "emotional" or subjective." (11-12)

Walter, in turn, takes on an almost feminine role when the two engage in conversation, such that Bascombe, despite his own problems, can look on Walter as a man who has fallen farther than he has. He is a foil for Bascombe. He shows Bascombe that, regardless of how bad Bascombe's own life might be, it is still not as bad as that of Walter, who will eventually commit suicide.

In both *In the Wake* and *Out Stealing Horses*, friendship is relevant primarily in memory only and in how it informs current, banal interaction. The vast majority of relationships described in Petterson's work are retroactive ones between father and son, regardless of whether they are positively portrayed.

However, the best example that can be found in Petterson's work of adult peer friendship, which parallels the relationship between Bascombe and Lockett, takes place in *Out Stealing Horses*, where Trond Sander has the (mis)fortune of meeting a man named Lars Haug, who is out one evening searching for his lost dog (Petterson 8). This chance meeting is the catalyst for the entirety of Petterson's novel, but while Walter Lockett is a character desiring emotional closeness, Haug is equally as happy as Trond in his emotional isolation. He is dealing with his own traumatic situation, namely the accidental shooting death of his twin brother, Odd, which occurred when they were all children (Petterson, *Horses* 48). On one occasion, the two men share a meal (Petterson, *Horses* 100), and Lars also assists Trond with removing his birch tree after a storm (Petterson, *Horses* 152). But they are not men who have actively sought out each other or men who attempt to share things with each other.

Furthermore, while Bascombe and Lockett are both divorced men who meet each other on a relatively neutral playing field, the relationship between Trond and Lars is anything but neutral, for while Trond has the capacity to serve as a sounding board for Lars, Lars can only serve as an emotional threat to Trond. Lars's presence forces Trond to recall a specific summer from his youth, which he has long sought to sublimate:

It has become hard to concentrate, my meeting with Lars has thrown me off my balance, has made my plan for being here seem obscure, almost unimportant when I do not put my mind to it, I have to admit that. My mood takes me up and down like in a lift, from attic to cellar in a couple of hours, and now my days have turned out differently from what I had imagined. The slightest thing goes wrong and I build it up to catastrophic dimensions.

(Pettersen, *Horses* 171)

Lars is a visual reminder to Trond that his place as son was usurped by another. The fear that even more has been stolen from him festers within Trond's psyche, though he never has the capacity to verbalize it. "In real life I have not had the courage to ask Lars the obvious question: 'Did you take the place that was rightfully mine? Did you have years out of my life that I should have lived?'" (Pettersen, *Horses* 213).

Because of this relationship, Trond is forced to re-examine emotional pain that he sought to deaden by distancing himself from all human connection. After half a century, Lars awakens Trond's childhood memories of the summer before Trond's father abandoned him. Trond now finds himself "thinking about this summer, which begins to trouble me. And that it has not done for many years" (Pettersen, *Horses* 16). This relationship between father and son, as described from the son's point of view, is central to the work of Pettersen. Moreover, this centrality of the father to the

narrative also unites Petterson and Ford, but they differ in the perspective that they choose to explore.

In an American context, Ford is unique because, unlike many of his predecessors, he attempts a prolonged and nuanced exploration of the "irreducible complexity of fatherhood in contemporary U.S. culture and fiction" (Armengol, *Ford* 67). This takes place in the second two books of the Bascombe Trilogy.

Independence Day, in particular, attempts to portray Bascombe as a mature, loving, and nurturing father. The novel focuses more on "the emotional potential of fatherhood as well as its ability to transform men's lives and relations" (Armengol, *Ford* 68). It explores fathers from the father's point of view:

My fatherly job, needless to say, is not at all easy at this enforced distance of miles: to coax by some middleman's charm his two foreign selves, his present and his childish past, into a better, more robust and outward-tending relationship--like separate, angry nations seeking one government--and to sponsor self tolerance as a theme for the future. This, of course, is what any father should do in any life, and I have tried, despite the impediments of divorce and time and not always knowing my adversary. Only it seems to me now...I have not been completely successful. (Ford, *Independence Day* 15)

Petterson, on the other hand, consistently discusses the father from the child's perspective. He does not offer a treatise on the issues and rewards of fathering, as Ford tries to do when he has Bascombe attempt to actively bridge a gap between himself and his troubled son Paul, an adolescent seeing several therapists due to acute anxiety. Central to the bonding is a long trip taken by the pair. This journey parallels the summer that Trond and his father spend together in Petterson's *Out Stealing Horses*, but while Petterson's summer ends with the father's departure and with the lack of a paternal blessing, the entire goal of Bascombe's trip is greater

intimacy with his son at the "ur-father-son meeting ground" (Ford, *Independence Day* 18) of the American Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Eventually, Bascombe even utters words that seem to be unthinkable in a Petterson novel: "I love you son, okay" (Ford, *Independence Day* 402). In this manner, for Bascombe and Ford, "fatherhood appears to have the potential to transform...traditional concepts of masculinity as emotionally inarticulate" (Armengol, *Ford* 72) to something resonate and connective. Thus, Bascombe's new life is marked by a level of emotional commitment that is antithetical to his former existence, which prized individualism and self-centeredness as a means to protect one's self from pain. It is this level of growth and positivity that is primarily absent in the work of Petterson, and when it is given, it serves only to fuel confusion and awkwardness:

He (father) stretched out his hand to pull me up, and I took it, and he squeezed it so hard it almost hurt, but he did not pull me up. Instead he suddenly sank to his knees, threw his arms round me and pulled me close to his chest. I didn't know what the hell to say, I was really surprised. Of course we were good friends, had been anyway, and no doubt would be again. He was the grown man I looked up to most of all, and we did still have a pact, I was convinced we did, but we were not in the habit of hugging. We could have mock fights and hold round each other doing that and roll back and forth like two idiots over the hillock on the farm where there was room enough for such childish play, but this was not fighting. On the contrary. He had never done such a thing before that I could remember, and it did not feel right. But I let him hold me while I wondered where I should put my hands, for I did not want to push him away, but neither could I hold my arms around him like he did around me, and so I just left them hanging in the air. (Petterson, *Horses* 228)

For Trond, this final, personal encounter with his father highlights his ultimate understanding of the man. In the moment, he does not realize that he will never see his father again, and he is caught off guard by the suddenness of the embrace. He cannot take in its true meaning, and he will only retroactively understand the impetus behind his father's action. What is clear and explicit, though, is the way in which he sees the man and the esteem in which he holds him. As I will argue, Petterson's sons want to be their fathers, whether they realize it or not.

3. Masculinity and Memory: The Father/Son Dynamic in Per Petterson's Work

The resonance of the father figure is central to the thematic understanding of the novels of Per Petterson. In all but one of his translated novels, *To Siberia*, Petterson's main characters are men or boys who have either deceased or absent fathers to whom they assign almost superhuman standing. They seek to create themselves in the images of these men, and they crave recognition from these men in some form. For Petterson, recognition and respect are two of the most important emotions that can pass between father and son because the son wishes to be viewed by the father in the same esteem that he holds him. In the realm of Petterson, success comes from being acknowledged by one who has already achieved, built, or survived in some manner. However, because Petterson's tales are retrospective, and because fathers are often deceased or absent, Petterson's characters chase an unattainable goal, namely to be better, stronger, and worthy of praise in the eyes of men who are no longer present to give it to them. Petterson's characters perpetually compete against their fathers, and the memories they have of these men are what sons use to measure themselves.

At times, in Petterson's work, father and son border on being friends. They exhibit traits of competition present between male peers, yet they often lack the ability to communicate with each other. If there is communication, it often comes in the form of a gesture or in the form of a brief comment in response to some action that has taken place between them. Petterson combines Hemingway's male/male bonding motif with Ford's distanced model of male friendship, and in doing so, he offers a unique way to explore the relationship between the father and son in literature.

This section will attempt to highlight the three major facets of father/son interaction dramatized in the work of Per Petterson: paternal validation and unrest, male/male competition, and the perception of failure. Focusing primarily on the novels *Out Stealing Horses* and *In the Wake*, this analysis will also attempt to highlight how sons use memories and perceptions of the father in an attempt to better understand them. Because both books are retroactive tales, in which the past is recreated and recounted in the minds of the narrator, there is no present "truth" with which to contrast these memories. Fact and reality are marred both by time and by the inability of the human mind to perceive fully objectively, and closure is, for the most part, usually unattainable. There is only a continual and repeated striving, on the part of the sons, towards something that is unreachable.

3.1 *Out Stealing Horses*: Unrest and the Continued Quest for Paternal Validation

Late that autumn a letter arrived. It was postmarked Elverum, and my mother's name was on the envelope, and the address on the Nielsenbakken was there, but on the sheet of notepaper inside all our three names were written, our surname too, although we had the same one. It looked odd. It was a short letter. He thanked us for the time we had spent together, he looked back on it with happiness, but times were different now, and it could not be helped; he was not coming home anymore. In a bank in Karlstad, Sweden, there was money due for the timber we had felled that summer and sent downriver. He had already written the bank, and he now enclosed an authorisation for my mother to draw that money by going to Karlstad with proof of her identity. Best Wishes. End. No special greeting to me. I don't know. I really thought I had earned one.

Per Petterson, *Out Stealing Horses* (242-43)

As Michael Kimmel argues, "Men are under (the) constant careful scrutiny of other men... Men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval" (*Gender Desire* 14). As such, the performance of father/son masculinity in *Out Stealing Horses* serves as a

compelling literary exploration of the potential for the paternal anointing of the son, and if this does not occur, the son can never rest, but always chases after an idea that he has previously fallen short of. Male/male competition abounds in *Out Stealing Horses*, and the idea of performed masculinity serves as the unofficial bedrock of the tale. However, as I will attempt to show, male/male competition here does not necessarily mean just the pitting of one man against another in a situation where something can be won or lost, but also as a means by which men can demonstrate that they are on equal footing with each other and that they deserve validation. This sub-chapter will attempt to show how Trond Sander both continually seeks his father's approval and subconsciously absorbs from his father the ideas of what makes one a true and able man.

The plot of *Out Stealing Horses* centers on Trond Sander's recollections of a childhood summer over fifty years ago, during which he and his un-named father--a dashing and charismatic, yet scheming and inaccessible man--spent their days off in the woods felling timber together. It is both a guilt-ridden coming-of-age tale and a deeply introspective narrative in which Trond, who is now sixty-seven and living alone in a run-down cabin at the edge of the world, attempts to figure out how he missed so many signs of his father's impending departure from their family. The tragedy of the novel does not stem from the idea that things might have been different had certain signals been clearer for Trond, but rather from the unspoken questions "Am I better?" "Am I the same?" "Am I worthy?" and "Was I worthy of this man's blessing?" that Trond has carried with him since then.

One could argue that *Out Stealing Horses* explores a type of Freudian screen memory, defined as "fragmentary recollections which have remained in the patient's memory from the earliest years of his childhood" (Freud 303). One problematic area in understanding the father in *Out Stealing Horses* is that we only know him from

Trond's perspective and from Trond's memories of him. Although Trond is an ostensibly reliable narrator, we have no other vantage point from which we can gauge Trond's father. Moreover, of memory, Freud goes on to state:

Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused... And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. (321)

Therefore, in *Out Stealing Horses*, we may be presented with a falsified image of Trond's father that has been formed over the course of Trond's life, and we run the risk of being given Trond's idea of the man and the image of him that Trond requires, so that he might continue to survive himself. He creates the idea of his father that he wants to believe in, and he sustains these ideas of the man because Trond has attempted, for better or worse, to model his own life around his father.

While it is both understandable and almost expected that Trond's adolescent perception of his father would be heroic and grand, it is important to note that, even after a half-century and a major disappointment, it has not been altered. What is prized in the father is his strength and skill. The respect he commands in the presence of other men and his power to create are paramount. He is a working man. He is a man capable of wresting from the land, and from his own skills, the things that he needs for his life:

So how he (Trond's father) had scraped together enough to buy the cabin where we stayed that summer is still a mystery. Frankly I never had a clear idea what my father did to earn a living; to keep his life going, and mine, among others, because it often seemed to change from one thing to another, but there were always numerous tools involved, and small machines, and sometimes a great deal of planning and thinking with a pencil in hand and

journeys to all kinds of places around the country, places where I had never been and never knew what they looked like, but he was no longer on another man's payroll. Often he had a great deal to do, at other times less, but still he had managed to save enough money, and when we went there the first time the year before, he walked round looking things over and smiling a secret smile and patting the trees, and sitting on a big stone on the river bank, his chin in his hand, looking out over the water as if he were among old friends.

But of course it could not have been so: could it? (Pettersen, *Horses* 22-23)

In the eyes of a child, this industry is almost magical, and Trond is in awe of the way his father can seemingly produce something from nothing. It establishes in Trond the idea of the man that he wants to become, and throughout the summer, he wonders at what point in time he might have his father's abilities or fully become a man like him. However, this youthful reverence that Trond recounts having for his father is simultaneously tinged with the clarity that comes from growing into one's own adult life and from learning that there is always something slightly more sinister to the romance we assign to those we idolize. We are constantly being given Trond's perception of his father from a remove, and with it, the realization that there was always more going on than Trond could have understood at the time. Trond is caught between trying to tear down the idea of his father as idol and worshipping the ability he saw in him. He believes that he has molded himself in the image of this man, but he is never quite sure if what he believes of the man is true. He has never seen him age, and he has never seen him weak. He has only ever seen him as a champion that never lost at any endeavor (Pettersen, *Horses* 76), and when Trond compares himself to his father, his father almost always seems to have one-up on him. "Then I go back and dress, open the woodbox, which fortunately is full of logs, and light the stove as systematically as I can. I never succeed at first try, something my father

always did, but as long as there is time it will burn in the end" (Pettersen, *Horses* 121).

In *Out Stealing Horses*, the father is never depicted as a superhuman, but certain mythical qualities are assigned to his simplest actions. Trond primarily remembers his father in his deeds, specifically his work in conjunction with the men around him. He is the alpha male of lumberjacks and outdoorsmen. He has an inexhaustible ability to work and the ability to seemingly sublimate pain. Early on in *Out Stealing Horses*, Trond recounts clearing a field, one of the many manual tasks that he and his father engaged in to earn money:

But alongside the cabin wall there was a big patch of stringing nettles, growing tall and thick, and I worked my way around them in a wide arc, and then my father came round the house and stood looking at me. He held his head aslant and rubbed his chin, and I straightened up and waited to hear what he would say.

"Why not cut down the nettles," he said.

I looked down at the short scythe handle and across the tall nettles.

"It will hurt," I said. Then he looked at me with half a smile and a little shake of the head.

"You decide when it will hurt," he said, suddenly getting serious. He walked over to the nettles and took hold of the smarting plants with his bare hands and began to pull them up with perfect calm, one after the other, throwing them into a heap, and he did not stop before he had pulled them all up.

Nothing in his face indicated that it hurt, and I felt a bit ashamed as I walked along the path after Jon, and I straightened up and changed gait and walked as I normally would, and after only a few steps I could not think why I had not done so at once. (Pettersen 30)

For Trond, this is both a moment of pride and shame. He is happy to be out helping his father. He revels in finally feeling like an equal to the man he idolizes, but the feeling of joy quickly transforms into one of embarrassment, as his father clearly asserts that there is no equality between them. They are working differently. Trond works with the passivity of a child scared of injury, while his father works with the direct aggression of a man who believes that the completion of the task is more important than his own physical well-being. Trond's father's manner is telling. At first, it is quizzical, almost quaint in its disbelief, but this cuteness soon gives way to direct instruction. He has realized that his son doesn't yet understand how to go about this task and that he must teach him.

The interaction possesses such significance for Trond that the phrase "You decide when it will hurt" will serve as the refrain for Trond whenever thinks about his father or whenever he finds himself in a situation where he hesitates for fear of encountering pain. Furthermore, it is nearly the same exact phrase, "and we do decide for ourselves when it will hurt" (*Horses* 258), that Petterson uses to close the book, as though Trond is saying, *I will not forget, even now, what I have been taught.*

The scene with the nettles is a seminal moment of understanding for Trond. He is a boy being told *This is where you come from, and this is what I expect of you.* His shock at being admonished is such that he cannot imagine why he had thought of doing the task differently, because after being instructed by his father, it is clear that there is only one possible way to go about this work.

Furthermore, it is clear to Trond that he should obey his father's instructions. He is a child. That is his duty, but other grown men are not beholden to the same rules that govern the interaction between father and son. Therefore, seeing the deference offered to his father by other men gives Trond a special feeling of pride and awe:

And he was. I had never really seen him like that before, with other grown men where there was a job to be done, and he had an authority that made other men wait for him to tell them how he wanted things done, and they just went along with what he said as the most natural thing in the world, even though they themselves probably knew better and most certainly had more experience. Until then it had never crossed my mind that anyone except me saw him like that and accepted it, that it was something more than a relationship between a father and a son. (Petterson, *Horses* 84)

The images Trond recounts are always positive, as though his father is incapable of fault. In *Out Stealing Horses*, Petterson describes Trond's father's interaction with another man, Franz, who is a burly, thick, and capable lumberjack. Franz is another outdoorsman who makes a living with his hands and with his body. He embodies power and overt rebellion. Trond says of him, "(I) saw the red star Franz had on his forearm. It was glowing in the sunlight and waving like a flag each time he moved his fingers or clenched his fist. He did often. He was probably a communist. Many lumberjacks were, and with good reason, my father had said" (Petterson, *Horses* 136). Like Trond's father, Franz is another man designed for power and action who openly flaunts a symbol of Communist defiance that he waves "often," yet he routinely defers to Trond's father, "...But if he (Trond's father) wants to do it now, then we'll do it now. That's fine by me. He's the boss around here, your dad" (Petterson, *Horses* 84).

Trond is beginning to realize that his father possesses a special place in the hierarchy of the men around him. His father is not necessarily the most experienced or skilled, but he has a leadership ability that allows people to look past this. By being out in the forest, he inhabits a space where men are respected, not out of obligation, like the way a son must respect his father, but because of their ability. Having one

foot in the world of men and one foot outside of it is a continual theme in *Out Stealing Horses*. Manhood and success are not matters of age, but of one's perception in the eyes of other men, and Trond comes to understand that, even between near equals, like Franz and his father, there is still an unspoken hierarchy that must be respected. This becomes clear during moments of work because Franz and Trond's father seem to respect him, and respect is the highest level of praise one can receive from other men in Petterson's world. But Trond also comes to see that he is still on the outside looking in:

"Let's chop in time."

"So we will," my father said, and they change rhythm and synchronised their strokes, and the sound of the ax blows was like one sharp crack each time. I could see they liked doing this, for Franz suddenly smiled and laughed, and my father smiled, and I wished I were like them, that I had a friend like Franz I could swing my axe with and make plans and use my strength with and laugh and cut logs with by a river like this one, which was always the same and yet was new, as now... Of course I had my father, but it was not the same. He was a grown man with a secret life behind the one that I knew about, and maybe even one behind that, and I no longer knew if I could trust him. (Petterson, *Horses* 187)

Here, Trond perceives that he is different from the two men with whom he is working. They possess an unspoken bond that is lost upon him, and it distances him from them. He is equal to the task of working, but he does not have a friend who is also his peer. There is a hierarchy between men and boys, between manhood and adolescence. This does not bother Trond, initially. He does not view it as something to be feared. This separation is to be understood as part of the aging process. Eventually, one will cross over through some ritual of passage. Just by being along

and by being able to compete with the brute, physical strength of these men, Trond shows that he is on his way to becoming a full member of this world, or so he believes. It is something that Trond cannot fully articulate or understand, but it is obvious that he wants to possess these attributes and qualities. But more than this, Trond sometimes seems to believe that there may be something mystical informing his father's actions, as he implies when he recounts how his father would go about his lumberjacking:

Sometimes he stood there a long time just sniffing the wood, even pressing his nose against the bare timber where the bark had been stripped off and the resin was shining still, and breathing it deeply in, and I did not know if he did it because it was something he liked to do, which I did, or whether his nose could read some information from inside it to which we other mortals had no access. (Petterson, *Horses* 178)

Trond's perception of his father possesses a strange reverence, and Trond seeks an added reason for why the man put his nose to the wood. It cannot be something as simple as his liking the fragrance. Rather, maybe he possesses another faculty of understanding that the rest of the world lacks. In trying to both understand and become his father, Trond searches for meaning in the smallest and most insignificant of his father's actions. Ultimately, he begins either to parrot them, as is the case with the smelling of the wood, "Before I fell asleep I put my forehead against the coarse timbered wall sniffing the faint scent of the forest it still held" (Petterson, *Horses* 180), or to use them to empower himself when he feels weak or tired, as is the case with the story of the nettles:

I pushed my feet into the shoes without tying the knots, so as to avoid bending down, and then we walked on into the forest. Jon first with me at his heels with a tender crotch, my back stiff, one leg dragging slightly and one arm held

firmly against my body, still further in among the trees, and I thought perhaps I might not manage to walk all the way back when the time came. And then I thought of my father's asking me to cut the grass behind the cabin a week ago.

(Pettersen, *Horses* 29)

Even with his father not present, Trond must live up to a certain pre-determined standard. His fear is less about appearing weak in front of his friend and more about not living up to the example that his father has set for him. Everything is for his father and for his blessing, even if the man is nowhere in sight, because maybe the message of it all might get back to him.

Trond spends the summer working and following in the footsteps of his father. He wants to understand him, but the more Trond feels himself close to his father, the more his father seems to distance himself from Trond. After learning about his father's time as a resistance fighter during the second World War, which is revealed to him by Franz, Trond comments, not only on his father but also on the overall way in which he views the world around him:

After my morning with Franz the valley looked different. The forest was different, and the fields were, and maybe the river was the same, yet somehow altered, and that, too, was how my father seemed to me when I thought of the stories Franz had told me about him and just as much after what I had seen him do on the jetty in front of Jon's house. I did not know whether he was more distant now or maybe closer to me, whether he was easier to understand or harder, but he was certainly different. (Pettersen, *Horses* 177)

By being among men, Trond begins to see that there are other aspects of his father, secret aspects, that he cannot know. There is a mystery to the man, and this scares him, but this fear is not something he can skillfully articulate as a child. While Trond

realizes that he might be able to compete with his father physically, regarding emotional understanding, he still has a long way to go:

It is more than fifty years ago...I (am) still fifteen and still frightened of everything that went on around me, which I did not understand even though I was close enough to reach out my hand as far as I could, and then maybe reach the whole way and know the meaning of it all. That at least was how it felt to me, and I recall running from the bedroom with my clothes in my hand that summer night in 1948, realising in a sudden panic that what my father said and how things really were, were not necessarily the same, and that made the world liquid and hard to hold on to. (Pettersen, *Horses* 102-103)

In this moment, Trond makes an allusion to the night his father did not follow him to bed like he claimed he would, but instead went off to visit his mistress --the mother of Trond's childhood friend, Jon. The fear and panic felt by Trond are brought on by a feeling of betrayal. His father, the man he trusts implicitly and more than anyone else in the world, has lied to him. Trond has been misled, and he cannot find direction because he cannot believe that there can be a difference between what his father says and what he actually does. He is learning that he cannot ever fully know the man, and it is also unclear whether Trond's father wants to be fully known or understood by his son. Truth and reality are different things. Trond has held his own against his father in their daily labor, but this does not make him a man yet. In order to fully be a man, Trond must first understand that not everything exists in black and white, and he must realize that his father had a life independent of and before him. All the while, Trond's father is growing in Trond's esteem, but he is also becoming unreachable. No matter how hard Trond tries, his father is beyond him, a possessor of charisma, skill, and grace, but also darkness and secrets he keeps buried from his son:

"I took to him at once, I did," said Franz.

And who would not? Men liked my father, and women liked my father, I knew no-one who did not like him, except maybe Jon's father, but that was about something else, and I imagined that under different circumstances they would really not have had anything against each other at all, and might well have been friends. And the strange thing is that it was not as I have seen it so many times later in life, that someone who is so well liked by so many people can often be a touch shapeless and unassuming and will go out of their way not to provoke. My father was not like that at all, it is true he smiled and laughed a lot, but he did that because it came to him naturally and was not something he did to satisfy anyone's need for harmony. Not mine, anyway, and I liked him a lot, although he sometimes made me feel shy and that was probably because I did not know him as a boy ought to know his father. (*Horses* 137)

In a way, Trond's father is all things to all people. He is a man capable of turning himself into whatever other people need him to be in the moment, and this fluidity makes him impossible for any one individual to hold. He is the type of man that lights up a room, and he possesses a unique dynamism. But he is also the type of man who is skilled at keeping people at a distance. Trond feels intimidated in the presence of his father. He exists in his shadow. His excuse is that, because he finds the man's secrets out from other people, he does not know his father the way that a boy should. They do not commune verbally during the summer; they only work together. Indirectly, Trond learns that it is better to be fluid than to be beholden to anyone or anything that can be suddenly stolen away.

Having served as a resistance fighter against the Nazis, Trond's father kept "the line (of intelligence) going for two years, through summer and winter" (Pettersen, *Horses* 143), but this is something that is kept secret from his family. However, all

Trond knows of his father is that "He went away, and then he came home again. One week later, or one month, and we became used to living without him, from one day to another, from one week to another. But I thought about him constantly" (Petterson, *Horses* 140). For Trond, to this day, this constant thinking about his father has not changed. Even at sixty-seven, his father is a constant force in his life because Trond knows so little about him. What he does know has often come from seeing his father in comparison to other men, never from his father directly, so that "each time he (Trond's father) came home he had changed a little, and I had to concentrate hard to hold on to him" (Petterson, *Horses* 138).

Trond's father exudes a cool grace, an almost Hemingway-esque "grace under pressure" (Burgess 5). He is the kind of man who, while on a clandestine mission, takes the time to stop "for a chat with the German guard," and he "soon found out where each of them came from, whether they had wives in Germany, whether they preferred football or athletics or maybe swimming, whether they missed their mothers" (Petterson, *Horses* 142). This is important because Trond's father's bravery and courage is directly contrasted with that of the father of Trond's childhood best friend Jon, who is also the older brother of Lars:

Jon's father did not take part (in the resistance). He was not against what they were doing, he had never said as much that anyone heard, at least Franz had not, but he would have nothing to do with the 'traffic'. Every time something was about to happen he looked the other way, and he looked the other way when his wife went down to the river carrying her basket and stepped into the red-painted boat to row up to my father. (Petterson, *Horses* 145)

As Trond begins to have trouble fully accessing his father, he starts to mimic him in action and work. Moreover, in doing so he begins to view Jon's father and his father as representative of two different types of men, and this sets up the ultimate

masculine dichotomy in young Trond's mind. As a child, Trond exists in a realm of black and white understanding. The stark juxtaposition of character represented by his father and Jon's father reinforces this idea for him. Trond begins to believe that there are two classes of men--capable and incapable, courageous and cowardly--and that invariably all boys will eventually find themselves inhabiting one of these two spheres. Therefore, it is imperative that he take every opportunity to prove that he is worthy of inclusion in the group peopled by brave and capable men like Franz and his father, so that they will ultimately open their ranks to him.

Trond sees that Jon's father has been denied their respect, and Trond believes that this must be the result of his lack of action and work. He is ineffective and passive in that he has abdicated his responsibility as a man to protect Norway from its invaders. Instead of fulfilling his manly duty, Jon's father has allowed his wife to go off into harm's way, which recalls April Wheeler pushing a lawn mower across her Connecticut lawn as a lazy, ineffective man watches from the comfort and warmth of his living room. Still, this should not be a great concern for Trond, because in his mind, there is no chance that he can end up like Jon's father. Jon's father exists on the periphery of the action while Trond, having been taken along by his father and Franz, is embedded in it. Jon's father simply stands on the sideline as an blunt example of what one should not grow up to be.

However, as Trond learns more about his father's past, Trond finds it more difficult for him to talk to his father about it. This is because the knowledge of the events has not been passed down directly from his father to him but has come from a secondary source. This go-between has corrupted, somehow, the bond between father and son. Of the situation, Trond says, "and I could not talk to him about it, for *he* was not the one who had opened that door, and so I had no right to enter in, and I did not even know if I wanted to" (Pettersen, *Horses* 177). Trond realizes that he

currently exists in limbo. He possesses information, but it has not come to him the way he imagines it should have. He has not been directly invited by his father to engage him in conversation about these things. The knowledge has distanced them, and while he is pleased to learn more about his father, he is also troubled by this new revelation about the man because it has placed him outside his father's circle:

All this that Franz talked about was new to me then, but I had no reason to doubt anything he said. Why *he* (Franz) should tell me about those times, when my father had never done so was a question I sat pondering while he talked on, but I did not know whether I could ask him that and have an answer I could live with, for he (Franz) must certainly have thought I knew all about it already and was merely amused to hear another version. (Pettersen, *Horses* 140-41)

Through these stories Trond begins to see that his black and white understanding of manhood may not be the correct one. If there were a formula to becoming a man, then it stands to reason that his father would have laid it out for him as clearly as Franz did. The complication of the simple brave/cowardly or capable/incapable duality is a revelation that Trond is not quite ready for. He wants to believe that being a strong and capable man comes from something as simple as being skilled at felling timber, but he begins to see that he is still a boy who lacks the experience and experiences of his father. This begins Trond's journey from the clarity of his black and white world to a realm of gray uncertainty.

Moreover, even though Trond is engaged with his father, he is not taught songs the way that his father and Franz have been: "Franz piped up with a song he had learned from his father about the wolverine that hung from the top of a tree. As it turned out my father knew that song too and had learned it from *his* father, and they bellowed it in unison" (Pettersen, *Horses* 184). He is not part of this line, and the fact

that he is not the one singing again shows Trond's distance, not only from his father, but also from the world that his father and Franz inhabit. Though he is there with them, Trond is not necessarily included. They sing; he watches. They have received knowledge from the men above them. They have a lineage and have been offered the secrets that seem to bestow true manhood on a man. Trond is not given this. Trond can only know his father by how he moves and jumps, by how he cuts logs, and by how he commands other men, but he shares nothing directly with his son. Thus, in many ways Trond's father is more of a perception than a man, and Trond is only able to understand his father through his father's actions. It is no wonder, then, that these are the actions he attempts to imitate his entire life, because though his father occasionally compliments Trond on Trond's actions, Trond is never fully validated by the man he so wishes to impress.

The more Trond comes to experience his father, the more he realizes that there is a huge gap between them, and he begins to feel lonely. Though Trond has been taken along on this journey, he feels like he is being kept at a distance. It is clear that he wants to find a way to break through to his father, but as with the story told by Franz, this can only come if his father offers him the chance:

It was a strange, lonely sound out there in the night, but I did not know whether it was the bird I thought was lonely or if it was me.

When I went back inside my father was in bed sleeping as he had said he would be. I stayed there in the semi-darkness looking at his head on the pillow: his dark hair, the short beard, the closed eyes and his face far off in a dream somewhere that was not in this cabin with me. There was no way I could reach him now. His breathing sounded peaceful and content, as if he did not have a care in the world, and perhaps he did not, and neither should I

have, but I was uneasy and didn't know what to think about anything at all, and if breathing was easy for him, for me it was not. (Pettersen, *Horses* 180)

Trond spends the entire summer trying to break into this world. He wishes to be an active participant in it, as shown in the passages "I looked forward to the physical side of it (work), to the pressure on my arms, to the trunks resisting me and then feeling them give way at last" (Pettersen, *Horses* 179) and "I thought of the piled-up timber beside the river that would be going off any moment now, and I wanted to be part of that" (Pettersen, *Horses* 182). He does not want his father to leave him out of moments that he believes are important for his progression into the world of men--or out of any moments at all. He does not want to sit on the sidelines and watch others in action the way Jon's father did, and it is almost as though, if Trond had his way, he would probably accompany his father into the man's dreams. It is, at the time, ridiculous, but it is an important idea that informs Trond's later actions in the book, when he speaks of his own dreams.

Furthermore, in what is possibly the most dramatic scene in the novel, Trond finds his role in the action being so minimized that he attempts to force himself into the moment. Trond's father is working alongside Jon's father, and in the presence of Jon's mother, both men become reckless, determined to out-do each other in stacking timber on a precarious lumber pile. At the outset, Trond watches with amazement. He even describes himself as wanting to call out to his father to tell him to stop what he views as nonsense, because, to a childish perspective, what Trond is watching is nothing more than the boyish behavior of two men who should know better, but Trond still views himself as subservient to his father. Trond knows "he {his father} would {not} have liked that too much" (Pettersen, *Horses* 87). Moreover, Trond slowly begins to realize "that what he {Jon's father} was doing was challenging my father's authority" (Pettersen, *Horses* 85), though Trond does not quite know why

this is the case. The recklessness of both men ultimately leads to an accident in which Jon's father breaks his leg, and in describing the scene, right before Jon's father breaks his leg, Trond says of Jon's mother:

But the face that a moment ago had been open, almost naked, was closing now, only her eyes had a dreaming look as if she was not present at all and looking at the same thing that I was looking at, but at something beyond, something larger than this that I could not fathom, but I realised that she was not going to say anything either, to stop these two men, that as far as she was concerned they could go on to the bitter end to settle once and for all something that I did not know about, and possibly that was just what she wanted. And that alarmed me. (Pettersen, *Horses* 87)

For Trond the world around him is becoming more complicated, but he does not yet possess the emotional vocabulary to articulate what is transpiring in front of him. He knows well enough that what he is watching is important. He can feel the weight of the performance of Jon's father and his own, whom he describes as sparring knights from "England's age of chivalry" (Pettersen, *Horses* 85), but Trond does not know what he is looking for, as evidenced by the fact that he can also sense that Jon's mother is privy to information is not.

To the reader it is obvious that this moment is the ultimate climax of a Darwinian battle on the part of the men for Jon's mother's favor and affection, and it is clear that she will not intervene because the result of this competition will ultimately validate her decision regarding whom she will remain with. However, all Trond understands is that he is being excluded from the moment, and this threatens his understanding of his place in the world of the men around him. So he does what he can to be noticed, and he forces himself into a moment that is not his:

I took a step closer and stood right beside her {Jon's mother} so my hip was almost touching her hip...and the two on the pile noticed, and they looked down at us and for a second slipped out of their roles, and then I did something that surprised even me. I put my arm around her shoulders and drew her close. (Pettersen, *Horses* 87-88)

Trond's action is subconscious. He cannot explain his reasoning for doing it, but this simple action so shocks his father that "though they {Jon's father and Trond's father} were in the very middle of hauling and heaving, he {Trond's father} straightened up and all but let the timber pole slip out of his hand and that was distraction enough, and Jon's father, who looked just as surprised, struggled to hold on" (Pettersen, *Horses* 88). In this moment of distraction, Jon's father can no longer balance himself, and his leg is crushed under the weight of loose log, thereby ending the scene and the competition between the two men for dominance.

Because of his subtle action, Trond feels himself a part of this experience. He has made his presence felt, and now he believes that he is no longer a spectator in the world of the men around him. By placing his hand on Jon's mother's shoulder, he has contributed to the string of actions that has resulted in Jon's father's broken leg and his own father's triumph. In Trond's mind, *he* is the cause for the outcome. Nevertheless, the way his father later discusses the event places Trond at a palpable distance. Trond becomes an observer, rather than the active participant in it all that he thought himself to be:

"What happened today," he said, still with his back turned. "It was completely unnecessary. The way we were carrying on, it was bound to end badly. I should have stopped it long before. It was in my power, not in his. Do you understand? We are grown men. What happened was my fault."

I said nothing. I did not know if he meant that he and I were grown men, or if he and Jon's father were. I guessed the latter.

"It was unforgiveable."

That might be so, I could see that, but I did not like him taking the blame just like that. I felt it was debatable, and if he was to blame, so was I, and even if it felt bad being responsible for such things happening, he belittled me by leaving me out...but there was no way of discussing it. (Pettersen, *Horses* 93-94)

Trond realizes that he is not seen as an adult by his father. In his father's mind, Trond had no bearing on what occurred. It is as if he was not even there. For Trond, it is not that he is seen as being a child who must learn something from the event that is most belittling. He can grudgingly accept this because he knows he is still in the process of learning the finer points of manhood. What is most jarring, and to some extent damning, is that he is not even allowed to share in the responsibility for an accident *he* caused it.

Moreover, as Trond is seeking greater understanding of the ways of men, it is important to return to Jon's father. Throughout *Out Stealing Horses* Jon's father is seen as a pathetic, emasculated character. Furthermore, it is Jon's mother for whom Trond's father will leave his family. Although it is unclear how long the affair between Jon's mother and Trond's father has taken place, it is implied that it began when Jon's mother:

Rowed up the river once or twice a week, with food or without it, with "mail" or without it to act as some kind of cook for my father so that he could dig in to some proper meals and not fall ill and weak because of the unbalanced diet men who live alone generally swear by and not be fit enough to carry out the work he was meant to do. (Pettersen, *Horses* 144-45)

It is a believable cover for their liaisons, but it also highlights the disparity in character between not only Trond's father and Jon's father, but also between Jon's father and his own wife. She assists on missions her husband is too afraid to take part in. In fact, Jon's father is so pathetic in comparison to Trond's father that he even refuses to walk in the footsteps of a man Jon's mother is trying to smuggle into Sweden (Pettersen, *Horses* 148). His inaction causes the death of the man, and it also forces his wife and Trond's father to flee "hand in hand, more or less, to Sweden" (Pettersen, *Horses* 162) until the war's end.

This is not something to be pitied, but understood. Some men are better than others, and some men are braver than others. Some men are more capable and more deserving than others. It is not surprising, then, that the same man who sends his wife out on missions he should have taken part in has his leg broken when he attempts to compete with Trond's father. Furthermore, the accident occurs in the presence of Jon's mother, which in a way compounds the insult to Jon's father's manhood. In the competition between these men for the attention of the woman, Jon's father is an inferior specimen. It is almost like watching two elk butt heads during mating season. Despite his efforts, we know Jon's father will lose, because he cannot win when pitted against a man like Trond's father.

For Trond, this signals a change in his understanding of manhood, but he misunderstands what has actually transpired. Although he has been excluded from the action, he surmises that even though he is an adolescent, he is more capable than some grown men. He believes he can exist in this world of Franz and his father better than a full-grown man like Jon's father can, and this false appraisal of his own status within the group leads to his emotional downfall once his father leaves him to raise children sired by a man Trond viewed as beneath him. This is made all the more painful for Trond when he recalls his own shortfalls in the eyes of his father, like

his experience with the nettles, or moments that could have acted as his initiation into the world of manhood but that did not. In particular, on the evening after Jon's father has broken his leg, Trond and his father engage in a bizarre activity that, for all intents and purposes, resembles a rite of passage. Trond and his father agree to shower together, but what starts as a simple, routine action morphs into a strange and beautiful theatre between father and son, as Trond's father suddenly sprints from the washbasin and calls for his son to follow him out from the cabin and into the evening rain:

he {Trond's father} screamed:

"It's now or never!" before he leaped out into the rain and started to dance stark naked with his arms in the air and the water splashing onto his shoulders. I ran after him into the pouring rain to stand where he was standing, jumping and dancing and singing 'Norway in Red, White and Blue,' and then he started to sing too.

"Ok," I shouted, and slapped my stomach and drummed on my thighs with the flat of my hands to beat some heat into the numb skin until I had the idea of walking on my hands, for I was quite frisky in that way and I shouted:

"Come on you," to my father, and bent down and swung up into a handstand, and then he had to follow suit. And we walked on our hands in the wet grass as the rain beat our rumps in a way so icily and weird that I had to get back on my feet very soon, but never did anyone have cleaner arses than ours as we ran into the house again and dried ourselves on two large towels and massaged our skin with the coarse cloth to get the circulation going and make the warmth come back, and with a cock of his head my father looked at me and said:

"Well, so you're a man now."

"Not quite," I said, for I knew that things were going on around me that I did not understand, and that the grown-ups did understand, but I was close to being there.

"No, maybe not quite," he said. (Pettersen, *Horses* 91-93)

Even as a boy, Trond has no problem competing on the physical level. He can share in action, and he can experience the closeness that comes from two men being equals in a task. He is continuously attempting to prove to his father that he is a worthy son. It is this masculinity, this closeness in the performance of shared action, and the affirmation of something on the cusp that is most important. However, Trond's perception of equality is not the reality, for even then, after such a shared moment, his father has the capacity to leave him alone, because after the moment in the rain, Trond's father promises Trond that he will follow him into bed:

"You go to bed first. I'll be right behind you."

But he was not. (Pettersen, *Horses* 94-95)

The simple way in which Trond recounts this shows the amazing amount of power and pain this event continues to hold over him, as these four words can almost be used to sum up the entire relationship between Trond and his father. His father was not only "not" behind him, but he was also "not" what Trond believed him to be, nor was the summer what Trond assumed it to be. For Trond everything hinges on this small lie because it shows Trond that the man he both loves and trusts the most in his life has the capacity to use and mislead him. The implication for his father's disappearance, to the reader and to an older Trond, is that his father has gone off to spend the night with Jon's mother, and it is this very same evening that Trond wakes and runs out naked into the forest to first realize that perception and reality can be two wildly different things (Pettersen, *Horses* 102-03). It is this aspect of the things the grown-ups understand but that Trond does not that causes Trond to panic.

The ultimate tragedy about the accident on the logs, as well as the evening's faux initiation, is that, as a boy, Trond believes that the summer is about him. He assumes the excursion into the woods with his father has a specific symbolic meaning. He believes he is about to be initiated into the world of men. Trond mistakenly thinks that his father views him as an equal. Trond views this summer as an apprenticeship to manhood, which both informs and adds to his confusion when he constantly finds himself on the periphery or is told things about his father's past by Franz and not by his father himself. Even in the moments when it is plain for all the other adults around to see, Trond does not realize the Machiavellian nature of his father, or his father's true plan. He even misses the clues in the tales Franz tells Trond about his father's time in the resistance because Trond views his father as a pure creature with no baser instincts. Trond takes everything at face value, which is something that after this summer he will never be able to do again. He comes to realize that he was, despite his talents and ability, nothing more than a means to an end. He was used by his father so that his father might accomplish his own task, leaving his old family with a bit of money made off the timber they felled together, before he vanished from their lives forever. Over the course of a summer spent seeking his father's blessing and working as a devoted son, Trond is, in many ways, no better than a hired hand, and it is this psychological trauma that he carries with him for the rest of his life.

As Trond grows and the pieces of his memories finally align to create the true pattern of the events that took place that fateful summer, the betrayal Trond feels does not come from the fact that his father leaves him and his mother for another wife and another family. It is merely an event. The answer to why his father left is unimportant; that is his father's decision. The answer will not change the fact that the moment occurred and that his young life was altered. What is heartbreaking though,

is that, in the final correspondence between father and son, there is nothing of note. His father says nothing about Trond's ability as a worker or as a son. He does not acknowledge him in any particular manner. It is as though, for his father, Trond has ceased to exist and all that Trond has done to assist his father has been wiped away. Of the letter, Trond says there was, "No special greeting to me. I don't know. I really thought I had earned one" (Pettersen, *Horses* 243). His father has simply left, and he has never taken the time to finalize Trond's rite of passage from childhood into manhood.

Moreover, because Trond's father knew he would be leaving and because he was not sure if his son would be ready to be given such information before that time, he appointed a surrogate to tell his son about his past. Thus, Trond must discover his father's war life and the beginnings of his affair from another man:

"Why are you telling me these things when my father will not talk about them?" I said.

"Because he asked me to," said Franz. "When the opportunity arose. And it did now." (Pettersen, *Horses* 162)

Ironically, though, Franz seems to place more faith in Trond's ability and maturity than his father does, because he offers Trond the story when his father still has not left physically. However, merely by appointing Franz as a surrogate, Trond's father shows that he has already left in spirit. It is only a matter of time before his physical presence will be gone, too. It is this question, of which abandonment is worse, that seems to haunt Trond later in life when he wrestles with the idea of being replaced by the son of a man he viewed himself as being more powerful and capable than (Pettersen, *Horses* 213).

Referencing a passage from *David Copperfield*, regarding whether one "shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody

else" (Petterson, *Horses* 212), Trond mulls over the eternal question that has dogged him since the day that his father vanished from his life. His greatest fear is that another person might have taken what was rightfully his, but he has never been given the opportunity to have this question answered until, by sheer coincidence, his closest neighbor, Lars Haug, just happens to be one of the children from his father's new family. It is an obvious piece of literary artifice, but it allows for the entertaining of a profound question for Trond, namely, was Lars given the birthright that his father never bestowed on him:

Real life was something different. In real life I have not had the courage to ask Lars the obvious question:

"Did you take the place that was rightfully mine? Did you have years out of my life that I should have lived?" (*Horses* 213)

Trond has no idea what has transpired between Lars and his own father, and he never will. Ultimately, he chooses not to ask Lars about his father, and instead, he chooses to hold onto his memory of the summer that he and his father shared. New information has the ability to destroy that image and to complicate Trond's memories of the man. In the end, Trond never asks Lars about his father, not because Trond doesn't want closure, but because Trond knows that asking Lars for information about him will not give Trond any closure. Even if Lars were to answer "No," the only true validation that would give Trond comfort would have to come from Trond's father, and that can never be.

What is important to note is that Trond did not want for his father to merely give him a commendation. He wanted to earn it, and he believed, then, that he had. The question of what he did not do, or what he failed to do, is what he carries with him. He knew himself to be close to confirmed adulthood the night in the rain, but he still realized that there were things happening that were beyond his comprehension.

He realized that perhaps his perception of the adult world was lacking, but at no time was Trond ever given pause to think that his working ability was below par. Still, he lacked something, but what exactly that was he needed his father to explain.

Because of this lack of acknowledgement, Trond is forced to live forever as an adolescent who has never been granted access into the rarified realm of manhood. As Kimmel writes in "The Birth of the Self Made Man," "Being a man meant also not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control...*manhood* was synonymous with 'adulthood'" (Kimmel, *Man in America* 138).

Trond's most obvious lack of knowledge regarding male competition lies in the sexual dynamics that are playing out around him. He is a pubescent boy whose greatest desire is to accompany and to help his father. He knows that he does not yet understand the things that are happening in the adult world around him (Pettersen, *Horses* 93), yet he still is drawn into the competition that exists around Jon's mother. These are both the confused actions of an adolescent as well as, at times, Trond's attempt to show his father that he is just as capable as he is even if Trond does not know how to do this. It is repeatedly during sexual moments that Trond feels most distant from his father and when he forcefully inserts himself into the group. As with the scene where his father and Jon's father compete on the logs, Trond again attempts to divide his father from anything or anyone that might relegate him to a secondary role. He wants to be the primary focus of his father's attention, and when this is threatened he acts out:

"Come here, Trond, and sit down," said Franz, a bit awkwardly, patting a stump near his one...

But I did not sit down on that stump. I did something I thought was unheard of then, and I still do, because I shoved my way up behind my father and Jon's

mother and flung one leg over the log they sat on and pushed myself right between them. There really was not room enough so I pushed hard against the both of them and against her in particular and my aggressive movements were sharp against her softness, and it made me feel sad doing it, but I did it just the same, and she pulled away, and my father sat stiff as a board.

(Pettersen, *Horses* 191-92)

Again, Trond cannot explain why he does what he does. His actions upset him and make him feel foolish in the eyes of the adults around him, but he moves awkwardly between his father and Jon's mother just the same. There is a definite intent on Trond's part to assert himself in some way, and he does this by physically placing himself between his father and Jon's mother, but his ability to understand what motivates him is lacking. The cause for action is beyond the scope of his comprehension, and it is like he needs someone to explain to him why he feels the way that he does.

He ignores Franz's invitation because it is not Franz's attention that he wants. He wants his father's, but what compounds the confusion and frustration for Trond in this moment, and what adds another level to the normal male/male interaction previously present between father and son this summer, is that Trond has just woken up from a sexual dream involving Jon's mother that contained an "intense and strange warmth" (Pettersen, *Horses* 189) that he doesn't understand. The sexual dynamic of manhood is far removed from the work aspects that Trond has to this point associated with his burgeoning adulthood, and it is this area of understanding that he repeatedly alludes to when he speaks of things that the grown-ups understand but that he does not (Pettersen, *Horses* 93). The strength of his action against his father in this moment reinforces the fact that he is an outsider. Trond is trying too hard at a game he does not fully understand. He needs instruction, but it is

clear that his father has no intention of assisting his son in comprehending this part of manhood, especially regarding a woman for whom Trond's father is planning to leave his own family. Thus, Trond's emotional education is truncated, broken off perhaps at its most important point.

Moreover, this image of Jon's mother continues to haunt him up to the present day. Trond experiences recurring dreams in which he is drowning under the force of another (Petterson, *Horses* 194). Trond says of these dreams:

There was something about that dream which was disturbing. I know I can work it out if I try, I'm good at that, I used to be anyway, but I don't know whether I want to. It was an erotic dream, I often have them, I admit...Jon's mother was in it, as she was that summer of 1948, and I as I am now, sixty-seven years old and more than fifty years later, and maybe my father was in it somewhere, in the background, in the shadows, it seems he was, and if I so much as touch the dream there is a tension in my gut. I think I must let it go, let it fall back and sink down to rest among the others I have had and do not dare to touch. That part of my life when I could turn the dreams to some use is behind me now. I am not going to change anything anymore. I am staying here. If I can manage. That is my plan." (Petterson, *Horses* 196)

It is an eerie, creepy dream, wherein Trond's father watches from a distance as his son makes love to the woman with whom he started a new family, and the fact that such a dream is not uncommon for Trond shows a strange desire on Trond's part to once again not only compete with his father, but also to prove that he is his equal in nearly every task possible. The idea of the watched copulation and the shared sexual prowess over the same woman is yet another extension of Trond's need for validation from his father. It is a validation that manifests itself through the final competition that the men could engage in. However, Trond simultaneously realizes

that this is the most impossible of fantasies. Even after fifty years, he is still competing with the ghost of his father, who literally haunts his dreams, and it recalls Trond in the cabin, when as a child, he watched his father sleep and Trond could not intrude upon his dreams (Petterson, *Horses* 85), and it comes as no surprise, then, that Trond is a good worker but an emotionally isolated man.

In this way, Petterson seems to be saying that the image and the idea that Trond's father represents for him can never be outrun. He will continue to inform the life of his son and cast a shadow over it. Trond cannot escape him. His father suffocates and drowns him, and even in dream state, he leaves him no calmness or rest. Trond cannot change anything anymore. He can only hope to make peace with it in his own way, which is through continued work and competition, though the only person he has left to compete with is himself, if he can manage, for as long as possible.

Being forever trapped in the realm of adolescence, Trond has lost a semblance of his honor: "I do not switch on the torch, merely let my eyes grow used to the darkness until I stop straining them to catch a light that went out long ago" (Petterson, *Horses* 105), and he is not whole. In recounting another dream, this time about his first wife, Trond describes how he is insulted by the woman:

I was in a bedroom with my first wife, it was not our own bedroom, we were in our thirties, I am sure of that, my body felt that way. We had just made love, I had performed as well as I could, which was usually more than good enough, at least I thought so. She lay in bed and I stood by the chest where I could see my whole body in the mirror except for my head, and I looked good in the dream, better than I really did. She flung the duvet aside and was naked, and she looked good too, really beautiful, almost unfamiliar in fact, and not quite

like the woman I had just made love to. She looked at me the way I had always feared and said:

"You're only one of many, of course." (Petterson, *Horses* 132)

Even in this context, what should be seen as love and passionate emotional coupling takes on the vocabulary of work, action, and completion of task, as this is what Trond understands. For him the completion of an action is the goal, and completion should, ideally, be good enough for whomever he is working with. However, he is met not with praise but with an indifference that borders on disdain. Trond is not unique. He is one of many. To make matters worse, he is not even ranked. He is given no standing against his competition. He is a body and a tool for a task, but he is headless. He compares himself to a painting by the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte, where a man is "looking at himself in the mirror {seeing} only the back of his own head, again and again" (Petterson, *Horses* 132). Trond's confusion and fear come from the fact that the natural order of things has been upset, and chaos seems to reign. There is a flaw in his construction, and this flaw in an otherwise ordered realm terrifies him because what Trond desires is to be capable in all facets of masculinity. He needs to know that he can order the things around him and excel as a man. Not being able to do so is his greatest fear, and the idea of repeat failure or repeat disorder fills him with despair. He can shout and rail against this, but he is not given the comfort, support, or reassurance he desires (Petterson, *Horses* 132). Psychologically he is trapped, constantly reflecting on what other people appear to have and what he is seemingly not allowed:

When we get to the bridge I stop for a moment where the rails begin and look over at Lars's cabin. The windows are lighted, and I can see his shoulders in the yellow frame and the back of his head without a grey hair yet and the television on at the far end of the room. He is watching the news. I don't know

when I last watched the news. I did not bring a television set here with me, and I regret it sometimes when the evenings get long, but my idea was that living alone you can soon get stuck to those flickering images and to the chair you will sit on far into the night, and then time merely passes as you let others do the moving. I do not want that. I will keep myself company. (Pettersen, *Horses* 105)

Trond is forever running. He is neither entitled to the peaceful sleep of his father, nor to resting out his old days in leisure like Lars is. He will keep himself company so as not to be let down by others. In isolating himself, Trond has left his own daughter behind. It is as though the idea of action outweighs the idea of domestic stability and family, because family and love are impermanent and they lead to the possibility of suffering. However, Trond's daughter seeks him out, and in her presence, Trond is forced to reflect on his own leaving in a way that his father never had to. Seeing what his leaving might have done to someone close to him is not something that Trond had previously considered, but it suddenly assails him with great force.

"Would you rather I hadn't come?" As if she realized only now that this might be a possibility. But it's a good question... "Perhaps you'd really rather be left in peace. This is why you're out here isn't it? This is why you moved to this place, because you wanted to be in peace, and then here I come bursting into your yard and disturbing you at the crack of dawn, and it wasn't anything you wanted at all, if it was up to you?"

She says all this with her back to me. She has dropped the cloth in the sink and grips the edge of the worktop with both hands, and she does not turn around.

"I have changed my life," I say. "That's what's important. I sold what was left of the firm and came out here because things would have turned out badly. I couldn't go on the way it was." (Petterson, *Horses* 216)

Trond's initial response is painfully simple and telling. It is the response of a man molded by the belief that self-preservation is paramount. To be impacted by other people negates the ability to choose if something might hurt, as is made clear by his daughter, when she finishes her question with "if it was up to you" (Petterson, *Horses* 216). Having it "not up to him" is not something Trond likes, because it takes the decision of what might hurt out of his hands. Trond wants to exist in the safety of a place where he is in full control. Still, his instinctive need for validation for his work and action pulls him back:

"I understand that," she says. "I really do. But why didn't you tell us?"

"I don't know. It's the truth."

"Would you rather I hadn't come?" she says again, insistently.

"I don't know," I say, and that is also true; I don't know what to think of her coming out here, it was not part of my plan, and then it strikes me now: she will go away and never come back. (Petterson, *Horses* 216)

However, as a woman, she is not beholden to his evaluation. She can go and never come back without consequence. She does not need him to be complete and whole. Moreover, it is telling that, though Petterson constantly returns to the idea of fathers and sons, he never gifts his protagonists with sons of their own, as though he is saying that they cannot validate the next generation because they, themselves, were never inducted into the realm of manhood. For Trond, then, the work must continue, and the more basic and difficult question is, how does one merge past and present into one survivable future? This is something he has yet to figure out.

Moreover, though Trond has been the one sought out, he still fears abandonment. It is the fear of the uncontrollable and the unplanned. It is as though Trond foolishly believes that, should he organize and order everything, he will be able to break away from the whim and chaos of the universe. He believes that living on the periphery of the world will protect him and that self-imposed alienation is better than being left by another. The idea is puerile and almost cute. What his daughter's arrival shows him is that, no matter how far he runs away, chaos will always follow him. It is the natural order for things to be unordered and messy.

The idea of living inside of time and of building something that will not vanish when one turns away, to combat the chaos of the universe, is paramount to the psychology present within the Petterson universe and in the mind of Trond Sander. Work keeps chaos at bay, and men are to be judged by other men regarding the work that they do and by how well they accomplish it:

I am spending my days getting this place in order. There is quite a lot that needs doing...I am pleased anyway. I try to do most of the work myself, even though I could have paid a carpenter, I am far from skint, but then it would have gone too fast. I want to use the time it takes. Time is important to me now, I tell myself. Not that it should pass quickly or slowly, but be only *time*, be something I live inside and fill with physical things and activities that I can divide it up by, so that it grows distinct to me and does not vanish when I am not looking. (Petterson, *Horses* 8)

As previously stated, Petterson does not believe in "fate," but "work, what it does to your body, how it feels on the palm of your hands, your back" (Petterson, "Per Petterson: My Novels"). Trond is a man molded by a singular idea, namely that a man works. It does not matter whether the work takes place in solitude or in company of others, even if this other person might have stolen his paternal blessing:

We take a break...Then Lars rolls a cigarette and lights up, he leans against the outhouse door and smokes peacefully. I recall how good it was to have a smoke after a spell of work, in the company of the partner you had toiled with, and for the first time in many years I miss it. (Petterson, *Horses* 163)

He produces. He makes many things with his body and with his hands. He creates and creates, but all of this is still superfluous. No matter what he creates, his father cannot see it, and the man will not return.

Trond's knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a man has been shaped by his father, but his father has never told Trond that he has succeeded in becoming one. Trond projects the ideas of masculinity that he absorbed onto others, and he tries to live them out himself. It is as though his memory of his father is the instruction manual for manhood, and by comparing himself to his father, he attempts to understand how to put these ideas of manhood into action. Moreover, apart from just being blueprints for Trond, these memories of his father are what he must compete against, as they are the measuring sticks for his own understanding of success. However, because there is never the moment when his father can anoint his progress, Trond cannot rest or stop working towards this goal of manhood. In this continual expectation of arriving at a place of peace, but without ever having the prospect of reaching the final destination, we see again in Petterson the idea of Schopenhauer's unrest. In the end, Trond can only attempt to choose what "will hurt" (Petterson, *Horses* 258), and he is in continual competition not only with himself but also with the ideas of manhood that his father bestowed upon him and that he never knows if he will reach.

3.2 *In the Wake*: The Father as Mirror and the Perception of Failure

I remember myself at eighteen reading Keats and Shelley and Byron and dreaming of publishing one book, or maybe two, which would be on everyone's lips and be everyone's mirror, and when they looked in that mirror they would see the people they might have been and they would have to cry, and after that I would just disappear, become one of the young dead and thus immortal, but now I am one of the middle-aged forgotten.

Per Petterson, *In the Wake* (53)

The sons in Per Petterson's world often seek isolation. Whether this flight from emotional relationships is an active choice or the result of personal trauma is not important. Regardless of what has set them on this path, they still exist in active competition with the memories of their fathers, and the father casts a shadow over the character's understanding of himself. This sub-chapter will attempt to show how, in *In the Wake*, Arvid Jansen constantly uses memories of his father, Frank, to rate himself. Most of the time, this is unconscious on Jansen's part. He is simply recounting his recollections of the man, but whenever he does, he has a hard time not gauging how he, himself, compares with the man that he is describing. Jansen's idea of masculinity is indelibly linked to his memories of his father, and he can only view his own situation in life in comparison to what Frank had accomplished at a similar point in time. When they align, Jansen feels that he has been successful, but when they do not, Jansen sees it as his own personal failure to achieve a certain masculine standard that his father represents.

Written like an extended eulogy, *In the Wake* is a dark and brooding novel. Petterson, himself, says of it "*In the Wake*) was a very bleak book...The relationship was not too good, the father and son" ("Fueled by Tragedy"), and it can be read as Petterson's own coming to terms with the Scandinavian Star ferry fire that took the life of his own father. "What he (Jansen) goes through in two weeks, the stress that he's under, I experienced over two years" (Petterson, "Powell's"). Furthermore, if Trond's father in *Out Stealing Horses* is to be read as a fabricated projection of

masculine dominance, then Arvid Jansen's father in *In the Wake* almost reads like a direct facsimile of Petterson's own blue-collar, factory-working, and boxing father, whom Petterson described as "an athlete, looking like Tarzan" (Campbell) and who is described in *In the Wake* as "looking like Johnny Weissmuller or a sculpture from ancient Greece" (Petterson 132).

In the Wake is Jansen's attempt to write himself "into a possible future" (Petterson, *Wake* 18), but to do this, he must first come to terms with his present situation and with the memories of his father that assail him. Jansen's narration is jumbled and non-linear, and "often his sentences shift from present to past, mid-flow without warning" (Wood, "Late and Soon"). For Jansen, it feels like every moment is a comparison to his father or an indictment for his failure to be fully like him. "You would think I lived a normal life, that I was on my way out to the bus for work after a shower. But I am not on my way to anything my father would have called a normal job" (Petterson, *Wake* 90-91). Jansen cannot escape the shadow his father casts over him, and he literally sees the man each time he looks at himself in the mirror:

I go on looking at myself in the mirror. I am so like him it would make you laugh. It won't be long before I reach the point where he was when I remember him way back, and I remember him well. If I screw up my eyes and stand there in the charcoal-grey sweater with the red band at the neck it looks like a photograph slightly out of focus from 1956. He was still boxing then. He was the eldest father in the block where we lived, but none of the others looked like him. (Petterson, *Wake* 38)

However, this resemblance is purely a physical one, and it ends there. It is both ironic and symbolic. It is Jansen seeing that he is simultaneously everything and nothing like his father, or as he himself puts it, "And I still look like him. I am not like him" (Petterson, *Wake* 39).

At the beginning of the novel, Jansen is lost, both literally and metaphorically. "Arvid's life is drifting, like the sentences he voices, moving between banal failure and bottomless loss" (Wood, "Late and Soon"). He is hung over, and perhaps he is still drunk, but he possesses enough awareness to realize that he is making a fool of himself. He is an embarrassment. "I cough and look down; I see my hands. They have an emptiness I cannot account for and they are dirty, there are grazes on both palms...and maybe it is Sunday. I don't remember" (Pettersen, *Wake* 3). In the midst of this, he cannot help but recall an image he has of how his father behaved at the same age:

I am forty-three. When my father was this age I had just been born, and he never touched a cigarette in his whole life. He only had a drink with Sunday dinner; one pint because he deserved it. The body should be a temple of life, he said, not a whited sepulcher. He was a skier and a boxer, and when he breathed, the air went straight into his lungs, and did no harm at all for the air was much cleaner then. If he ever coughed, it was because he had a cold, and he rarely did. Now he is dead, but through no fault of his own. If I die now it will definitely be my fault. That is the difference between us, and it is a big difference. (Pettersen, *Wake* 2-3)

In this passage, Jansen contrasts himself directly with his father, and he distances himself from him. Jansen is well aware that he is not half the man that his father was. Jansen is filled with a sense of loss, but this loss is also coupled with a strong feeling of inferiority and failure. The contrasting images of where the two men are at the same point in their lives show that Jansen believes that he is behind his father, and the idea of trailing the man recurs throughout *In the Wake*. "I am skiing through Lillomarka with my father, but I do not want to, my body is not like his body, I am only twelve and I am worn out, and he wants to go on and on, and he coaxes me, he

tempts me on, and then insults me, and he does not stop" (Pettersen, *Wake* 120). He watches his father "far ahead on the track, and he is calling me" (Pettersen, *Wake* 122). He is an unreachable point in the distance that continues to recede no matter how hard Jansen pushes. They are separated by a chasm of ability, so much so that Jansen even seems to apologize for his father's untimely death and the fact that he is somehow still living. His father is pure, while Jansen considers himself to be a "whited sepulcher." This symbol, of something outwardly beautiful but, which inside, contains only bones, is another image Jansen will continually return to throughout the book.

Jansen is the total antithesis of his father. All is different, even the quality of the air one breathes. He is embarrassed, because he is aware of how pathetic he seems in comparison to this man, and with Frank's death, this comparison is frozen in time. There is no longer a chance for Jansen to change this perception, which one can easily assume is the way Jansen believed his father viewed him. No matter how he might advance subsequently or what he might still accomplish in life, the image of who Jansen was upon his father's death has left an indelible stamp upon him. That is the man his father will always remember.

Sitting in his late father's apartment, Jansen imagines himself observing Frank. "On the balcony below me, my father is standing in the sun. He stands quite calmly, his eyes closed and arms crossed. He fills his shirt completely. It is quiet, he is fine" (Pettersen, *Wake* 10). Frank is the epitome of calm power, as he stands there stoically, broad in his shirt and with his workman's arms folded across his chest, while Jansen is anything but ordered and put together:

I undo my jeans and push my shirt down as well as I can as fast as I can, and try to do up my flies. It's not easy, my empty hands are stiff and have hardly any feeling, and the buttons are obstinate. One of them gets into the wrong

buttonhole, but I get it done eventually. I try to do my jacket up, but the zip is ruined, it's hanging loose, several teeth are missing at the bottom so I can't fit the ends together. (Petterson, *Wake* 10-11)

Moreover, Jansen suddenly realizes that he has lost the briefcase he had taken from his father, who had three of them stored away unused (Petterson, *Wake* 11). His father was meticulous and ordered. He was the kind of man incapable of wasting anything and who kept "a rope tied around" (Petterson, *Wake* 87) his own briefcase because he couldn't see the need to change it until it lacked all functionality, while Jansen has managed to misplace a perfectly good one.

More than just a eulogy for Frank, *In the Wake* is a tipping point for Jansen. He is poised either to destroy himself completely or to use his memories of his father to right his life, which he is watching unravel before his eyes. Most of his immediate family has been killed in a ferry fire. His wife has divorced him, and his one living brother has attempted suicide by drinking a bottle of port and taking "a hundred Sarotex without capsules so they would work quicker" (Petterson, *Wake* 56). Of himself, Jansen says, "I have been on my way down for a long time, and now I am there. At rock bottom" (Petterson, *Wake* 14). He is the "whited sepulcher," and while his father had a presence--"He was *visible*. In real life. In photographs" (Petterson, *Wake* 39)--Jansen seems to be slowly withdrawing from the world around him and disappearing from view. "I haven't been out for almost a week, nor have I talked to anyone except the doctor and my brother and the Kurd on the third floor, and that was hardly a conversation" (Petterson, *Wake* 38).

The ideas of visibility, trailing, and false perception are recurrent trends in *In the Wake*, and this idea of visibility often manifests itself when Jansen describes his father's athletic prowess. Frank is not only an athlete, but also an athletic specimen. Like Trond's father's working ability, Frank's athletic ability is something to be

marveled at, as is the case when Jansen recalls being eight years old and watching his father in a sauna:

He (Frank) laughed and bent down, put his hands flat on the floor and swung himself up into a handstand, stretched his legs up together and with his heels lightly touching the burning wall he smiled upside down and started to do push-ups with his head tapping the floor and his legs straight up. His cock bounced against his flat stomach with a sound I could have done without, his muscles swelled under his shiny skin, and sweat poured down his chest. He could breathe where no-one else could, and I counted to myself half aloud: ten, eleven, twelve and on as I always did when he did that kind of thing. I kept my eyes on his body, up and down, up and down, and knew I would never look like that if I lived to be a hundred, not *that* graceful, not *that* solid.

(Pettersen, *Wake* 8)

Even at eight, there is the understanding for Jansen that this is something that he will never become, because his father is a man who could do things in middle age that Jansen could not even manage in his youthful prime. Now that they are the same age, Jansen says:

I smoke and drink when I feel like it, and I often feel like it. On Sundays I sit at home reading whether it's sunny or raining or snowing. I haven't owned skis since I was thirty. But I have trained for several years, sometimes a lot and sometimes less, I have lifted most things around me, chairs and tables and boxes of books, ten-kilo sacks of potatoes I have bought, I've stood in the kitchen and just lifted them; shopping bags full of milk cartons, I've lifted them up and down, up and down until the sinews by my wrists have tenses like bowstrings. I have attended health studios for six months at a time, and if I

need to go to the shopping centre three kilometres away I walk, and I walk fast. (Petterson, *Wake* 39)

Jansen knows that the men are different, and he knows that he cannot compete with his father on his father's terms. Nevertheless, he wishes to present the notion that he is not as bad as he might seem. By highlighting what he is capable of, Jansen, in his way, is apologizing for himself and for his lack of ability. However, he refuses to admit full defeat. He *can* do things. No matter how quaint or insignificant they might make him look in comparison to his father, Jansen still wants us to know that he attempts things and that he is capable of something.

Moreover, Jansen makes it clear that "there is not one sweater that belonged to him that I cannot fill today" (Petterson, *Wake* 40). He refuses to believe that there is no hope or that there is no equality between him and his father. Even if it is in something as small as sharing the same clothing size, Jansen has achieved parity to his father in something. Jansen is searching for any similarities or any comparisons that he might be able to hold on to, and he believes that no matter how bad it might be at the moment, he can right the course of his life. He wants to be an active participant in this endeavor, but he is unsure how one goes about it because his example for how one behaves as a man has been taken from him. Accordingly, he must search his memories hopefully to find something resembling a template that he can follow.

Although Jansen's memories of his father are significant to him, they can also be stifling, as is the case for many of Jansen's recollections of his adolescent or early adult encounters with Frank. In attempting to come into his own as a man, Jansen tries to distance himself from Frank. Recounting going to visit his brother, who is studying in England, Jansen says, "I was leaving my childhood behind and my father and all he stood for and all he was not, and it had taken its time, but I felt fearless

now standing at the edge of the road and free to choose my own life, full of love for the future" (Petterson, *Wake* 148). He flees and endeavors to create a space where he can define himself. He does not want to be defined by where he comes from. He does not want to be beholden to the typical Norwegian existence, with weekdays in the factories and weekends in the forest, which Frank represents. Although Jansen sees his father as an athletic master, he simultaneously views Frank as someone run-of-the-mill because Frank is a factory man, "where he jumped when the boss said jump until the factory collapsed under the weight of cheap Italian shoes, and then nothing was left" (Petterson, *Wake* 46). Jansen desires his own life and possibilities. He craves distance, and his desire for escape is so strong that, upon leaving, he articulates how different everything appears to him:

Now I was walking in a Swedish night, with an all-Norwegian pack on my back on my way through a town where the sea air blew in quite differently from the fjord at home, and the houses were not unlike those I was used to seeing, but still somehow different; somewhat higher and more beautiful, and all crafted with some other stone containing some other glow that I did not know, and canals traversed the town reflecting the street lights, and they were yellow and orange and almost red in the oily water, and there was music from an open window. It was something from an opera, and I had never liked opera, but I did like opera now, and I remember singing, but I do not remember which song. (Petterson, *Wake* 148)

Everything is elevated and loftier now that Jansen has struck out to see the world. He has escaped the base existence of his father. He suddenly loves opera. The houses rise higher and shine more brightly. The water is like a painting. He is off to pursue his own path, and he is trying to fulfill his own Romantic expectations of what the world can be. "I was exhausted and happy...I looked straight up at the sky with its

multitude of stars, and I knew the names of the biggest ones, and I saw the gas flame shining and heard it crackling and felt at home in the world" (Petterson, *Wake* 149). He is full of hope. He believes the world is what he can make of it. He reads the Romantic poets "Keats and Shelley and Byron" (Petterson, *Wake* 53), and he dreams:

Of publishing *one book*, or maybe two, which would be on everyone's lips and be everyone's mirror, and when they looked in that mirror they would see the people they might have been and they would have to cry, and after that I would just disappear, become one of the young dead, and thus immortal.

(Petterson, *Wake* 53)

Jansen succeeds in this, but even after publishing a book, fleeing from Frank, and arriving at a point he believes will make him happy, his will is dissatisfied because he still cannot entirely escape his father:

My first book had just been published. Almost everything in that book was about him, and I knew he had read it, my mother said he had, but he never mentioned it when I went home to visit. Their neighbours too had read it and the other chaps stopped him in the road in front of the house and said:

"Well, well, Frank, we didn't know you used to be such a tough guy," and then he just smiled secretively and would not say a word. Perhaps he was a little proud, or he smiled because he had no choice I will never know. But he and I could not talk. (Petterson, *Wake* 79)

In writing of his father, Jansen faces a dilemma. He wants to excise his father's influence over him, but he simultaneously does not want to give his private moments with his father fully away:

"Do you remember the smell of him?" my brother says. "Of bonfire and pine needles and marshes, and how we loved that smell and how we wanted to live

a life like his, but we were too young, weren't we, and we had to go to school, and how that made us furious." He smiles, what he says is just crap, and I cannot understand why he talks like this, for we have never shared such an experience, never shared those words, but *I* can clearly remember thinking like this when I was a teenager and have often done so since, and I never heard my brother say he had the same ideas. It was *my* secret, all that, and no-one knew a thing about it until I started to write about it many years later. (Petterson, *Wake* 140-41)

Like Trond Sander, Jansen is a man trapped between two positions. On one hand, he wants to be free of his father and what he represents. On the other hand, he wants to become him. He is torn between his need to establish his own identity in contrast to that of his father and his need to live up to whatever expectations he has placed on himself. He often returns to this motif of dueling desire. "I am afraid he will leave me. At the same time I want him to. Leave me" (Petterson, *Wake* 120). Jansen wants him gone, but he knows he cannot exist without him.

It could be argued that *In the Wake* hearkens back to the classic American idea that the father "remains inseparable from despotic authority" (Armengol, *Ford* 66), but there is a tenderness that informs *In the Wake*. The tension that arises between Jansen and Frank results not only from Jansen wanting to be his own, free man but also from his not wanting to be abandoned. Jansen is a man who desires an emotional connection with his father, but who is unable to communicate with Frank or to deal with Frank when Frank is weak. Paradoxically, Jansen resents his father's prowess and abilities, but he also fears seeing his father in moments of desperation. Of his work, Petterson states that it is not only the dominance of the father that his characters rebel against but also their vulnerability. "In my writings it is often the case that the son suffers from seeing his father not being as strong as he wished. 'Please,

dammit, don't be so weak. That's awful to look at" (Petterson, "I Have to Write Now). Often, when Frank experiences moments of emotional vulnerability, Jansen cannot manage to handle it, and what Jansen offers his father in terms of emotional support is hollow. His mind is elsewhere, and he concerns himself with his own problems, not with his father's. Such is the case when Jansen accompanies his father to clean out an old cabin the man doesn't want to sell:

"It really is a shame to have to sell this cottage," I said as we carried the last things out to the van we had borrowed...

"Do you think so?" my father said.

I said it because I knew *he* felt it was a shame and much more. To me that cottage was full of memories of uncles and aunts and bladderwrack and glass jellyfish and physical defeats I could well live without. I had no room for it. My life was filled to the bursting point, and it had been like that the year before and the year before that, and as long as I had been thinking with the better part of my brain; each year bombarded me with choice I did not understand at all and which left no room for anything more; my throat was dry from running to catch up, always too late, and the last thing on my mind was fishing for mackerel and cod in the Bunnefjord...

"Of course it is, isn't it?" I said.

"Sure," he said.

That was the end of that conversation. (Petterson, *Wake* 109)

His father's sadness comes from the fact that his father "had almost built that cottage single-handed, and even though he had good reason not to be there much any more, it was painful for him to see it go" (Petterson, *Wake* 108). His father is not something an adolescent Jansen worries about. His sadness almost annoys Jansen, and he only says what he thinks he must in order to fill the silence around them. Moreover, in

more intense emotional situations, Jansen flees and leaves his father completely alone:

I looked around and there was no-one else in the corridor just then. Only him at one end and me at the other, and I took a few steps towards him, and then I saw that his body was shaking, was trembling, and I went on for a few more steps before I realised my father was crying. Then I stopped completely. Never once in my life had I seen him cry, and I realised from the way he was clutching his stomach that he cried because he was in pain, and he must have been in tremendous pain...

I could not take another step. No way. I stood there for I don't know how long, and I remember thinking it was incredibly hot, that I was thirsty and wanted a drink, but I am sure he did not know I was there, for he never turned round, just held his hands to his stomach and his face to the wall as he wept, and that was what saved me. I held my breath, turned silently and walked away.

Straight out of the hospital, into the car and then drove home. (Pettersen, *Wake* 81, 83)

It is impossible for Jansen to see his father as someone he must take care of, as someone who is capable of suffering, or as someone capable of not reaching his potential. It is this latter issue that informs much of Jansen's interaction with his father, because though Frank seems tireless, he seems to have never gotten anywhere with his immense abilities. Jansen believes him to be the type of man who "is not really *going* anywhere" but who "just goes on" (Pettersen, *Wake* 122) without a reachable destination in sight. This frustrates Jansen. At times, he views the man as a failure because he has not attempted anything other than the ordinary. He complains that his father seemed to lack a certain courage. "But you could say no. You could just leave everything and choose a different road" (Pettersen, *Wake* 122),

and to Jansen, this seems an almost unforgiveable offense. Like the cabin scene, Jansen seemingly lacks compassion for his father's weakness, and he treats him with disdain and anger. At times, he even goes so far as to belittle his father. "The previous day I had bawled him out and told him he belonged to the most backward part of the working class because he subscribed to *Aftenpost*" (Petterson, *Wake* 110). Often the disparagement is intellectual or cultural, as this is the one area where Jansen feels that he can outpace the man.

Shortly after Jansen's first successful publication, he recalls his thirty-fourth birthday:

"My first story had been published in a magazine no-one had heard of before, but they had all read it anyway and were a little confused and uneasy because it was about my father. No-one was divorced yet, no-one had died" (Petterson, *Wake* 31).

The passage offers a telling parallel to Petterson's own life, in that Petterson's first book, *Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes*, was a collection of autobiographical stories "about this father and this boy" (Petterson, "Fueled by Tragedy"), but though it was published three years before the ferry fire, his father never mentioned it. Moreover, though Jansen wishes to describe a time of ostensible happiness, the scene is colored by melancholy and foreboding. More importantly, this scene represents a seminal shift in the way Jansen views his father. He no longer carries the intimidating presence of a man capable of doing hand-stand push-ups in a sauna or of skiing through the Norwegian mountains for miles on end. He lacks a level of invincibility, and this is what Jansen finds so striking about the moment. Although there is clearly a change in the stature of the man, Jansen does not want to fully acknowledge this. He must return to his ideas of the man he knows, and this is a man of power, but the veneer of Jansen's ideas regarding his father's invincibility is

beginning to be stripped away in front of him. Furthermore, the idea that his father might be a mere mortal scares him.

Jansen recounts:

He stared into the glass in his hand, then rose unsteadily and said: "Well, well Hemningway, [*sic*] so you're a writer." He didn't look at me but past me at something on the wall, or maybe he looked through the wall, and he smiled with his mouth only. I didn't like that smile. He wanted me outside with him, but I didn't want to go. I was happy where I was, and so he went outside alone.

(Pettersen, *Wake* 32)

In this moment, Jansen cannot read Frank. He only knows that there is something strange and uncomfortable in the way his father is behaving and carrying himself in front of him. He does not make eye contact with his son, but stares off at something else, and this unnerves Jansen. He does not want to accompany him outside because doing so would force Jansen to be alone with his father, and this would place him in a more emotionally vulnerable position than he already finds himself in. They might have to talk, and it is clear Jansen has no idea how he should handle himself with his father in a room full of people, let alone when the two of them are alone by themselves. In one evening, Jansen's father goes from being a super-human figure to a frail, old man:

I saw his back in the dusk. Maybe it wasn't that strong any longer. He leaned heavily against the wall before straightening up, swaying a little, and trying to lean back again. But then his body sailed in the opposite direction, and he lurched out to steady himself with his hands, clutched the fence and slipped before he had a good enough grip and clung there until he got his balance back... I didn't give it a thought until he came in again. It was a barbed wire fence. His arms hung straight down and both palms were covered with blood. I

was the only one who saw it. The others were chatting and laughing and celebrating my birthday, but between him and me there was a tunnel of silence. He paid no attention to his hands, just looked at the wall behind me and smiled the same way and said: "Well, well, Hemningway, [*sic*] so you're a writer. Good for you" (Petterson, *Wake* 33).

It is a shared moment between the two. No one else sees Frank fall or the "red smears" (Petterson, *Wake* 32) that Frank's hand leaves around his glass. The two men are joined, and everything else around them falls away. It is as if they have become the only two people in the room, and Jansen is unsure why his father allows him to see a side of him that he has never outwardly shown before. For Jansen, Frank has never been a man capable of fear and weakness, and it is only later in the chronology of the story that Jansen will come across his father weeping in a hospital corridor. To this point, even when Frank was lying in the snow with a broken foot, Jansen still says of him, "He is afraid of nothing" (Petterson, *Wake* 120).

It is only when Jansen finally begins to see his father as mortal that he begins to soften towards him:

"Now then Hemngingway," [*sic*] and then he stumbled over the rag rug. The bag of bottles hit the bench and there was a sound of glass smashing. It was a film in slow motion. I saw his face on the way down, an incredulous expression in his eyes, before he landed flat on his chest with the bloody hands out to his sides. Now he will die I thought. Everyone shot up from their chairs and the chairs crashed over, and I didn't want him to die but I couldn't get up. I sat glued to my chair. (Petterson, *Wake* 34)

The sudden disconnect between what Jansen imagines his father to be and what he has become is almost too much for Jansen to bear. Jansen is in shock, and as

everyone else reaches out in an attempt to assist the man, Jansen can only watch and repeat that he does not want his father to die:

I didn't want him to die. I wanted to be ten years old again and have the smell of leather tickling my nose on my way down to the cellar, I wanted all that I looked upon to have meaning and to surround and embrace me, and all that had happened to be gathered into one *now* and give me peace. I wanted my father to say Hemingway, not Hemningway. (Pettersen, *Wake* 35)

Seeing his father "on the floor in a lake of beer" (Pettersen, *Wake* 35) makes him want to return to the safety of childhood, when his father was the man doing handstand push-ups in a sauna. For Jansen, the birthday party signals the beginning of his father's descent into frailty and age. Although Jansen has admitted that he, himself, has been on the way down for a long time, it is arguably the death of his father, the man he has both compared himself to and fought against his entire life, that pushes him over the edge.

Moreover, Jansen's recollection of the party changes his understanding of certain things about his father. Frank's mispronunciation of Hemingway's name is not the mockery that Jansen initially believes it to be. Still, as with the anecdote about the *Afterpost*, Jansen seems to try and assert his dominance over his father in matters of culture and taste. It is as if, for Jansen, his father inhabits two, antithetical realms. Either he is the conquering athletic hero, or he is the simpleton who lacks any sense of culture or erudition. If Jansen cannot overtake him on the former, then he will do everything in his power to outpace him on the latter. However, what annoys Jansen, and what he assumes to be mockery, is in fact a subtle sign that he has, in his own way, surpassed his father. Jansen is an educated man, and he has succeeded in doing something his father never could do. But he is blind to this. Jansen wants the type of validation that he expects, and he cannot see that something as simple as his

father saying, "We must have some beers, Hemningway" [*sic*] (Petterson, *Wake* 33) is a sign of affection. Jansen only sees it as a dismissive utterance on the part of his father, yet another sign of the man's ignorance and something he has sought to flee by entering an esoteric and academic world.

Throughout his life, Jansen has attempted to distance himself from his father. Even though he has seen his father in moments of weakness, he ultimately lacks compassion for him, as is the case when Jansen speaks of his father's love for a specific pastry. "You can say what you like about Napoleon, but he *could* make a cake, my father used to say, and that was about as funny as he could get. He really loved Napoleon cakes. So do I" (Petterson, *Wake* 47). In recounting the story, Jansen not just highlights his father's relatively simplistic humor. They might both like the cake, but it is as if Jansen is tacitly also saying that he would never be the kind of person to make such a joke that, in actuality, is not even funny. His father possesses a pedestrian, almost plebian, humor. Jansen cannot help but feel that he must take advantage of each vulnerability his father offers. It is as though, even after publishing a book, Jansen still believes that he can only compete with Frank if he demeans minor things about him that are ultimately insignificant.

Jansen possessed a cruel streak toward his father when the man was alive, and even in their final conversation, which takes place on the telephone, Jansen finds fault with his father wherever he can:

I saw him standing there in the hall with the striped wallpaper in white and gold I thought was tasteless, and I had thought so since I lived at home almost twenty years earlier. He stood by the mirror and the small table with its open drawer and the telephone directory open at T in front of him, for he could not remember the number of my workplace although I had been there for ten years. (Petterson, *Wake* 167)

It does not matter that his father had called. Nor does it matter that he greeted his son with, "Hi there, this is Dad. How is the writer doing?' And then he laughed, embarrassed, before stopping" (Pettersen, *Wake* 166). All of this is insignificant for Jansen. He is unsure what to think. Such a phone call is not a usual occurrence. One could speculate that Frank is beginning to understand his own mortality and that he wants to try and build a better relationship with his son in the time that they have left because now, perhaps, Jansen has reached a point where he is capable of this. However, for Jansen, the competition between him and his father still comes to the forefront of the exchange. Of the phone call, Jansen says, "It was so strange hearing him that I just stood there behind the counter with the phone in my hand, gazing into the air. There were books everywhere and lots of people, but I saw nothing. You had a very strange expression on your face, said my colleagues later" (Pettersen, *Wake* 166). What is more telling is that this is the second call Jansen has received regarding this family trip. His father has no need to call him. His mother already has. She has attempted to coax him into coming because she believes that her husband will not ask for the help he needs. Even as an "old man" (Pettersen, *Wake* 168), he does not want to appear weak in front of his own son. Still, Jansen does not budge. "He had always been old and he had always been strong, and on the few occasions I tried to help him he just pushed me aside and said: 'This is nothing'" (Pettersen, *Wake* 168).

However, talking to his father, Jansen experiences a feeling hitherto absent in their relationship. "The fact that *he* was the one to call touched me. I do not know why, he had never touched me before, not that I could remember... And now I really wanted to go, I could feel it. I don't know what came over me" (Pettersen, *Wake* 169). After this, Jansen will never speak to his father again, and he describes his father's final words being said "with that hesitant voice old men have when they lose their

sense of direction" (Petterson, *Wake* 169). It is the first and only time that Jansen overtly acknowledges his father's age and fragility, though he has alluded to it during the birthday scene. It is a seminal moment in the course of the relationship between the two men, where Jansen has come to realize that his father needed him more than he might have ever dared to admit.

Again, Petterson returns to the idea that we can only know so much about another human being. Jansen and Frank are tragic in that they are often presented as facsimiles of each other, but they are two men incapable of emotional closeness. Jansen's most heartfelt description of his father is only offered after the man's death, and it is given to a complete stranger. The way he paints his father gives great insight into not only the man that Jansen viewed his father to be, but also into what he saw lacking in himself:

I will tell you something about my father. He was past forty when I was born, but he was different from other men where we lived. He was an athlete. I mean a real pro. He had taken his body as far as it could go and filled it with a strength you would think it could not hold, and you could see it in the way he walked and in the way he ran, in the way he talked and in the way he laughed that there was a fire inside him that no-one could ignore, and it was clear from the way that he was *seen* that he was body and energy both, that he reached out and was heading somewhere, that there was something *about* him. And he had been that way for as long as anyone could remember. He had trained to make his body into a crowbar, a vaulting pole to break free with and be lifted by. He had worn tracks into mountainsides on his way up and on his way down to strengthen his legs to get better on the football pitch, on the ski run and in the boxing ring, and on his way through town to the factory from Galgeberg and Valerenga where he lived, and no-one had strength like his. He

had crossed the Ostmark by every single path, up every single ridge and down on the other side, and it made him into an all-rounder. Good at everything and best at nothing. He was not fast enough. He could keep running in the tracks longer than most, but weaker men crossed the finish line before him. He was never front man, never anchor man, and even though no-one was untouched by his capacity for taking a beating in the ring, standing firm with his little smile, driving his opponent crazy, for much longer than anyone thought possible, it was hardly ever enough to make him one of the chosen few sent out to tournaments to fight for the club and its colours and be seen by the crowd the way he had longed for. He had the strength and he had the will, but he did not have the speed nor the imagination to give him that little extra. But that did not break him, as you might have thought. He just went on, year after year, and far beyond the point in time when what he trained for would be possible, and it made him different from all the other grown men I knew. He could endure anything. (*Wake* 81-83)

The passage encapsulates all that Jansen loved in his father, and the last line soon takes on an added meaning beyond mere physical prowess because, to this point in time, Jansen has been ignorant of much of his father's past.

The notion of "almost" informs the entire passage, and what seems to have frightened Jansen for most of his life is that he has always realized that, if a man of Frank's caliber could never manage to make it to the top of the mountain, then what chance would he have? There must have been a reason why this man was held back, and there must be an answer for why he did not break away and chase after his own dreams.

As in *Out Stealing Horses*, access to the "time before" in *In the Wake* is key to understanding the true nature of another person's character. Often, there is

something hidden, and it is usually a transformative event that informs the entirety of a character's present point of view or life situation. However, without access to this knowledge, one is never operating at full capacity when dealing with another person, and the ability to know why one acts in certain ways and why one does certain things remains a mystery. In Petterson's universe, these secrets are often shared by a mutual acquaintance or by a family member, but rarely do they come from the characters themselves.

Through a conversation with an aunt, Jansen is informed about a time when his father was just as romantic as he was. It was a time when Frank "was still reaching out," "still shining," and when he still "thought if he just persevered and learned still more, nothing was impossible" (Petterson, *Wake* 155). The idea that his father was also once a romantic youth, capable of pledging, "I never give up...it is not in my nature" (Petterson, *Wake* 155) to a woman who would ultimately break off an engagement with him is incomprehensible to Jansen. This, and the revelation that his father also once had a small flat where he lived alone "with the books he had bought by the greatest Norwegian authors and then some, perhaps to find something there that he could aspire to" (Petterson, *Wake* 155-56), offers Jansen a new insight into the man. He comes to understand that there was a time when Frank was still innocent and when Frank believed in greater things, like pure love, that could not be destroyed by something as base as his fiancé arriving in his hometown and looking "at the shabby town which was not in the least like Copenhagen; no canal and golden domes, no great squares, no towering grandeur. But she saw the childish pride he took in all this, and her heart sank like a stone from summer to far below zero" (Petterson, *Wake* 156). She leaves secretly, and when all thought they would "see Frank Jansen finally crossing the finish line" (Petterson, *Wake* 156), he was left jilted and alone.

Realizing this and learning that "some months later he received a letter telling him he had a child in Denmark, in Jutland, with a lady he had met in a cafe near the factory and had spent a short time with the previous autumn, and who then just vanished" (Petterson, *Wake* 158) allows Jansen to understand that his father's entire world, just like his own, imploded within a very short period of time. A man for whom the world seemed a place where anything was possible now found himself "nailed to a cross on earth" (Petterson, *Wake* 159) and living a life he had never imagined for himself. Still, he never complained about it, only buried the memory, and with the exception of carrying a photo of the lost woman in his wallet, never mentioned it again (Petterson, *Wake* 101).

With this, Jansen learns that his father's life was not his own, but that he was a man who made a choice, remained faithful to it, and persevered. He sublimated his own dreams, and he possibly pushed his sons harder so that they might never have to give up on their own. Perhaps Frank calling Jansen "writer" is a great term of endearment because it was something he wanted for himself, but it was also something that he was never able to achieve. It can be inferred that Frank was proud that Jansen managed to carve out a niche for himself in a way that he never could. But, with his father's death, these are ideas that Jansen can never confirm. Jansen only knows that, while his father was alive, these feelings were emotions that Jansen:

Would never believed him capable of...passions, deep despair. All that. And would it have made any difference if it was something I had know while he lived?

"Without a doubt," I say aloud, "it would have made a great difference," and I know that is true, and nothing I can do or anything I can say will make time stop and go in reverse and make that difference less. (Petterson, *Wake* 159)

In the end, Jansen comes to realize that he and his father are not as different as he might have wanted to think that they were. In a way, they are the same man, but during their shared time together, neither of them could find a way to articulate this understanding.

The great theme in *In the Wake* is learning how to be a man, as well as realizing that, to become one, one must let go of the myth that anyone is or can be perfect. No matter how infallible one might appear, there are weaknesses and flaws hidden beneath the veneer of perfection, and the continued promulgation of this facade is detrimental to the ability to form relationships with others, especially those we want to appear worthy in front of and value greatly. Jansen's own perception of his father distanced him from the man, but it was not entirely his fault. In understanding this, Jansen learns to forgive himself. He learns that, to be a successful man like his father was, one must learn to embrace the unexpected and unplanned, not run away from it, as Trond Sander attempts to do. Success is measured not necessarily by one's accomplishments or the goals one reaches, but by how well one is able to adapt and to react to what happens by chance. Ironically, though Jansen appears to be the more lost of Petterson's characters, he manages greater emotional growth over the course of *In the Wake* than Trond Sander does in *Out Stealing Horses*. Jansen comes to understand how to forgive himself for his failure as both a man and as a son. It is a type of emotional understanding and maturity that Trond Sander never reaches.

By the end of the novel, Jansen realizes that, even if he is "like a whited sepulcher" (Petterson, *Wake* 85), he is not a failure. He reflects on his father in a tender, half-joking way that would have been impossible before: "I ought to stop smoking myself. My father would have liked that. Or maybe not. It would have made him less unique among us, with his body like a temple; no whited sepulchers in sight"

(Pettersen, *Wake* 190). He feels better than he has for a long time, and in the final scene of the novel, Jansen meets his brother, who has recently been discharged from the hospital. It is April 7, the anniversary of his father's death, and after a brief conversation where Jansen inadvertently insults his brother, the two find themselves fighting:

I slip away from the table in the middle of the room with my hands clenched and raised in front of my chest before lunging out again like my father did in the photograph above the radio at home, when the world was young and he was still younger; his crazy body naked to the belt with its shining shoulders and dancing feet and dancing curls and his left arm straight out in a punch like a battering ram. Or as in the picture cards I found in a bundle box in the attic; one card for each position with arrows for foot movements and arrows for the angle and direction of the arms, like a dancer's beginner's course, really, foxtrot, waltz, cha-cha-cha, but here on small cards with descriptions underneath in tiny writing: straight left, left hook, right hook, uppercut, and so on, there were at least ten of those cards in all, and I can see them clearly before me now, and once or twice some years ago I tried them out for myself, step by step, blow by blow, behind a closed door and felt like an idiot.

Maybe that's what I *am* now, but I do not feel like it. (Pettersen, *Wake* 198)

In this moment, Jansen allows himself to become his father, and he embraces the fact that he might appear foolish. However, the perceptions of other people no longer matter to him. He is nearly at peace, and he is finally able to be both his own man and a product of his father, without any lingering feelings of disdain or inferiority. He is coming to terms with his past and attempting to right his path for the future.

Moreover, in the midst of the fight, he chastises his brother, who had previously referred to Jansen as selfish. "Selfish. Am I selfish? What about you trying

to get out of everything and leave me alone. What about David? You fucking prick" (Petterson, *Wake* 199). In a final rage, Jansen releases all that he has carried with him throughout the book. His words are less about admonishing his brother, who would have left a young son, David, behind, than they are an expression of helplessness for being left alone by his own father. Jansen sees that his brother still has time to rectify his own situation and have the relationship with his son that Jansen and Frank never got to have. It infuriates him that his brother would throw all of that away. Jansen is displaying his understanding, and in doing so, he shows both his father and the reader that he has reached a new point in his life. He knows that he will make it out all right, just like his father did.

However, what is most telling is that Jansen, who has spent much of his life attempting to distance himself from his father and who seems averse to any type of emotional sentimentality, reveals a final secret directly to his brother. When his brother asks him how he learned to fight like that, Jansen says, "From the old picture of Dad that used to hang above the radio. I've got it in my bedroom. I always look at it before putting out the light" (Petterson, *Wake* 200). Not only has Jansen offered a vulnerable piece of himself to another, but Jansen has also shown that he is coming to terms with allowing others close to him. In attempting to be honest and open, he is trying to pursue relationships with other people, and he does not want them discovering things about him from others after he is gone.

In the end, though ostensibly a book about failure, *In the Wake* is a much more hopeful book than *Out Stealing Horses* because, while Trond Sander continues to look into the past and lets the events of one summer dominate his life to the present day, Arvid Jansen appears to look forward. Although the relationship between Trond and his father reads as a closer and more heartfelt one, its final result is tragic and debilitating whereas, despite the distance prevalent between Jansen

and Frank, Jansen has learned a greater lesson than how to sublimate pain and truncate emotional relationships before they might cause him to hurt. He has come to realize that the idea of failure is relative, and it is in one's own hands to effect the changes necessary to live a happy, productive life and to build relationships with those around him. He knows that he cannot travel back in time, the way Trond believes he still might, but he can use what he has learned to create a better future for himself and others, just like his father attempted to do.

4. Conclusion

While it is impossible to comprehensively discuss the varying ideas and understandings of masculinity that exist throughout the world in a singular study, it is the hope that this analysis has served to highlight the ways in which the work of Per Petterson joins a dynamic conversation about the depiction of men in literature. Petterson is a writer for whom masculinity is an ever-present motif, and his constant exploration of a son's quest for paternal validation through competition with his father helps to carve out a special niche for Petterson within the field of Literary Masculinities.

As the field of Gender Studies continues to expand, it is imperative that works of literature and art that seek to complicate the understanding of masculinity as a monolithic experience be analyzed and studied. By examining the novels of writers like Per Petterson, we can begin to better understand masculinity by focusing on the reasons that lead one to engage in certain types of "masculine" behavior, as Petterson's work attempts to grasp the psychology behind an action. From an academic and research standpoint, Petterson's work is important and timely because it moves fluidly between two cultural understandings of masculinity, and it complicates the notion that masculinity is a learned behavior with specific cultural associations. It merges aspects of Norwegian and American masculine psychology to create a middle ground that offers a rounder and fuller narrative study than either culture has seemed to produce on its own.

By blending aspects of these two literary traditions, Petterson has found a way to intelligently reflect on childhood and the emotional formation of a son's idea of masculinity from an adult perspective, but he also manages to imbue his characters with a child's hopefulness. His characters do not resign themselves to fatalism; still his characters are torn between worlds and states of mind. They are emancipated,

yet they are chained to their emotional upbringings. They are intelligent, yet they yearn for mindless, physical labor. They are physically strong, but they are emotional cripples. Petterson's men exist in a no-man's land between the hopeful and the hopeless, and it is this unique positioning that allows them to continue to work and to struggle for the idea of a better tomorrow when all rational modes of thinking would have one believe that such dreams are impossible to achieve.

According to the writer Jakob. M. Appel, writing on men in fiction in *The Los Angeles Review*, "Since the heyday of Raymond Carver and Larry Brown in the early 1980s, middle- and working-class masculinity has come to be associated with hapless and befuddled blockheads incapable of interpreting their own failures" (98). Petterson flies in the face of this trend. Instead of mocking or parodying these men, he has given them the mental wherewithal to articulate their own deficiencies in a cogent, academic, and eloquent manner. By bestowing brains and awareness upon his characters, Petterson complicates this tendency in modern masculine writing that seems to adhere to a belief that men can either have brawn or brains, but that they cannot have both. He eschews irony and dystopia and operates in an earnest, realist mode, "Petterson's signature technique lies in drawing the most zigzag line imaginable through narrative chronology but the effect is not of confusion, rather of a dense, layered complexity: it is the realist novel form's mimetic faithfulness to life itself" (Mukherjee). Instead of filling his books with allegory and symbolism, Petterson locates his metaphysical exploration firmly in the daily struggle of people to know each other, and "This has a direct bearing on how {Petterson's} narrative positions and unspools itself in relation to the consciousness of time, and on how a writer represents human interiority perceiving it" (Mukherjee). His work offers a sustained and nuanced look at a specific aspect of masculine behavior, namely the maturation and formation of the adolescent male psyche into an adult one. However, he never

romanticizes this; rather, he chooses to depict it with all of its difficulty, pain, and frustration, and somehow he finds beauty in its most tragic elements.

Moreover, what also makes Petterson important from a Masculine Studies perspective is that, unlike many other writers who have been characterized as "masculinists" and who have taken to using grit, strength, and violence to probe into the masculine psyche of a given culture, Petterson instead chooses to examine the trauma of masculine psychological formation not in a cultural context alone but in a familial one. He does not, like many of his American influences, remove the father figure from his narrative. Instead, his writing explores this dynamic fully. By taking into account "The disappearance of parents; male friendship; childhood damage and loss... secrets and repressed, hidden or unspoken things – with a rigour and doggedness that is beginning to look like an aesthetic programme with a unity of vision" (Mukherjee), Petterson focuses on the lasting psychological effects such traumas have on a son's ultimate development. He is a writer who wishes to unearth the reasons and causes that create one's specific masculine self-understanding, and instead of simply exploring a character's masculine understanding of himself in relation to the outside world, Petterson examines it in the context of its formation. He seeks to comprehend the psychological weight that comes when one believes he has fallen short of his own self-imposed masculine standard rather than that which society as a whole has thrust upon him. Thus, he has begun to carve out a new male model in contemporary literature--The Petterson Man, who is both wounded and hopeful, who possesses a European upbringing tied to an American sense of restlessness, and who is simultaneously academic and populist.

For Petterson, a son routinely performs masculinity for powerful and capable father in the hope that the father will validate and accept him into the fold of men. Petterson uses ideas of competition to showcase how sons seek to achieve equality

in the eyes of their fathers, and it is this theme of constant and unending action that informs how his protagonists both view themselves and how they interact with the world around them. Like Schopenhauer's "Man Running Downhill," Petterson's sons possess a continually dissatisfied will; therefore, they repeatedly undertake activities and tasks to prove themselves to be men worthy of praise and validation, but these tasks bring them no fulfillment.

By setting up this dichotomy where sons require constant and continued validation from their father, and by setting the father/son interaction at the center of these novels, Petterson creates a never-ending cycle of action for his protagonists to engage in. They seek out projects in the hope that their completion will bring about a feeling of satisfaction, but invariably, even upon the completion of these projects, Petterson's sons remain unfulfilled and dissatisfied because they still have managed to fall short of what they think a man should be. Petterson's sons are swallowed by their fathers, and each of the son's actions are informed both by a desire for paternal validation and the need to escape from the paternal shadow that their fathers have cast over them.

Petterson uses memory to explore the son's understanding of the masculine ideal that their fathers represent. His narratives highlight how specific events and "moments" continue to inform the son's perception of the world, and Petterson's sons are people molded in a particular image of masculinity that they cannot escape. Petterson's sons are men haunted by their fathers, and yet they adore them. They see their fathers as the men they should aspire to be, and nearly all of a son's actions are undertaken with the idea of their father in mind. Petterson's sons act according to how they believe their fathers would behave in a given situation, and sons perform their tasks in the manner that they believe their fathers would approve of. Petterson's sons exist in continued competition against the ghosts of their fathers. They live with

one foot in the past as they try to thrust the second into the future, but no matter what they may achieve, no one is there to offer them the validation that they crave.

By presenting this constant conflict, where sons are competing with the ghosts of their fathers, Petterson shows the psychological trauma and damage that can come from requiring that one's self-validation comes from an external source. Petterson's men lack. His narratives revolve around the sons attempt to discover what makes a real man, and yet they simultaneously wish to rid themselves of the primary example of manliness and masculinity that they have been exposed to as children. They are pulled in two conflicting directions, and they are forever unsure what path is best for them to take.

Ultimately the centrality of the relationship of an adult figure to a child, in this study the father figure to the son, is key to understanding the motifs that inform Per Petterson's work. His choice to isolate both *Out Stealing Horses* and *In the Wake* in the point of view of the son not only gives one a new lens through which to understand the psychology of the father/son dynamic in literature, but it also allows for the analysis and study of why Petterson's protagonists grow up to have the specific ideas of masculinity that they do.

Still, this is not to say that Per Petterson is the definitive writer of interactions between fathers and sons. Like Richard Ford or Karl Ove Knausgaard he is one of many. Nor can one claim that this inquiry into Petterson's work is exhaustive. It acknowledges certain shortcomings and additional areas for analysis and study in the future, because while the father/son dynamic and the use of memory are paramount within the collected works of Per Petterson, this study restricts itself to only those books in which the narration is solely first person retrospective and conducted by an adult male who is reflecting on his own masculine formation through specific recollections of a father. Moreover, due to the nature in which Petterson's

fiction has been translated into English, until now it has been impossible to conduct a comprehensive study on his entire oeuvre in order to chart the overall development and maturation of his themes and writing style from his first to most recent work. Furthermore, this study does not take into consideration *I Refuse*, which has only recently been translated into English, and which serves as the only current example where Petterson offers multiple perspective narration in both first and third person, as well as an adult protagonist with a living father. To this end, as masculinity, adolescence, the knowing of others, and the father/son relationship come to the forefront in all but two of Petterson's novels, with *I Curse the River of Time* and *To Siberia* being the exceptions, it is imperative and necessary that further scholarship on Petterson expand the inquiry begun by this study. Such avenues of research include, but are not limited to, the representation of the adolescent male, as shown in *It's Fine By Me*, and with it a comparison of the way in which narrative style, structure, and characterization differ between the singular adolescent viewpoint present within *It's Fine By Me* and the retrospective narration used in *Out Stealing Horses*, *In the Wake*, and the recently translated *I Refuse*, which further expounds on "lost parents, chance, {and} the absolute unknowable mystery of other people" (Lane).

With such questions and possible themes in mind, there is no doubt that much can be gained within the field of Literary Masculinities and Masculine Studies by looking at the depictions of men and male relationships within the novels of Per Petterson in the future. However, in analyzing how early childhood impressions leave an indelible mark on a son's ultimate understanding of himself, it is the hope that this present study has laid the groundwork for further analysis into the work of Per Petterson by specifically highlighting the way in which Petterson's approach to the father/son dynamic within the novels *Out Stealing Horses* and *In the Wake* sets him

apart from both his American and Norwegian influences, creates a new model for masculinity in contemporary literature, and serves to enrich and further the conversation about masculinity within the growing discipline of Gender and Masculine Studies.

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