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HARDRAW SCAR

by RAYMOND BEAUCHEMIN

A Thesis

in

the Department

of English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of Master of Arts at Concordia University

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ABSTRACT

Hardraw Scar is a collection of stories, each dealing with the father-son relationship's effects on character-destiny, and the historical, social and economic dimensions of those relationships. Included are "The Corvette," about child abuse; "No Small Thing," about a father's attempt to build a house with the son with whom he has recently been reunited; and "Hardraw Scar," about the process of constructing a past where one barely exists, about the narrator's trying to connect with his long-dead father.

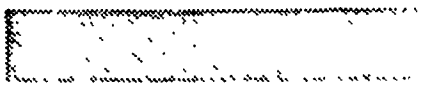
The stories use several types of narrative device: transcriptions of interviews; reverie and dreams; letters; charts; historical, economic and sociological data; diary excerpts; changing narratorial perspective. The purpose is to show the relationship between narrative, "fact" and the "truth" each narrator explores.

Hardraw Scar is dedicated to my father,

Julien Beauchemin

For their support and encouragement during the writing and editing of *Hardraw Scar*, I thank: Denise Roig, Janet Madsen, Ruth Wells Danckert, Phil Primack, Robert Sprague, Richard Nantel, Terry Byrnes, and most especially, my adviser, Robert Allen.

HARDRAW SCAR



by RAYMOND BEAUCHEMIN

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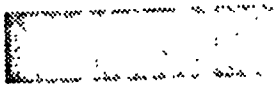
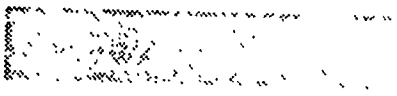


THE CORVETTE



THE CORVETTE

THE SUMMER I turned eleven, Billy Gage's father restored the Corvette.

It was a '53 convertible and originally polo white. Humid summers and salty winters had faded the color of the car until, sallow and sick and with no tires, it was placed on four cinder blocks under an Army tarp that also had changed colors after years of seasonal abuse. I don't remember seeing the Gages' driveway without it. It seemed Mr. Gage had had the Corvette a long time, and that entire time he'd been saying he'd get to it some day; then finally, that summer, he started working on it.

The only time I ever saw the Corvette with everything intact — paint, wheels, side curtains — was in a photograph in the hall of the Avon Junior Athletic Committee, the sponsor of the local sports teams. Mr. Gage's pictures were all over the entrance to the AJAC's Hall. From the time he was 10 years old and the Sister City 8-10 World Series MVP through to the time when, at 27 years old, he bowled a perfect game of 10-pin (this was the year before Mrs. Gage died), Mr. Gage was recognized as the town's greatest all-around athlete. The pictures were taken by the Avon *Voice* photographer, then clipped from the newspaper and hung behind the glass of display cases throughout the hall. His name was on most of the trophies, too.

The first time I was ever inside the hall was when Mr. Gage registered Billy and me for baseball. We were eight years old. That's where I saw the picture of the Corvette — with a caption underneath it that read: " 'Shotgun' Gage heads to Pittsburgh with Corvette signing bonus."

Mr. Gage was legend with a capital L. That he never made it to the majors didn't

tarnish the image. That he was the father of my best friend didn't make him any less godlike. That events turned out the way they did just confuses things.

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Billy and I were best friends, in the same grade, across-the-street neighbors. For three years, since we were allowed to join at eight years old, we played on the same town ball teams — the AJAC's Tigers. In the spring, it was soccer; from June through September, baseball; fall football, then hockey. It didn't matter which season, it was always the Tigers, and the Tigers were the best.

Billy was a lot better than I was at sports. If I hit a home run during a game, he would take first on a dropped third strike and steal the remaining three bases, *then* pitch a two-hitter. It was never a one-upsman thing though. Billy was driven by something else. I had to work at athletic prowess; Billy had his father.

Billy lived alone with his father. I never knew Mrs. Gage. My mother said she had died in an accident when Billy was young and that I should not ask him about it because I might bring up some kind of memory. I wouldn't want that done to me, now would I? she asked. Of course, I said I didn't. But things were different for me. For one, I had both my parents. Mother was always there for me, ready with a homework answer, a Band-Aid, a Popsicle, a ride to practice, an extra dime. My father was a good man.

Besides, I had no memories bad enough to speak of, and if Billy was that young when his mother died, my child's logic said, he wouldn't remember. Mother said an accident such as the one that killed Mrs. Gage would have a horrible impact on someone
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even if it had happened ten years before. I couldn't argue with that; in fact, I never argued with mother, so I didn't ask Billy what he remembered about his mom, though I wanted to. I knew even then that if she were there things would be different.

I imagined Mrs. Gage and my mom as best friends like Billy and I were, driving us to the movies at the Rialto, which was ancient even all those years ago, then picking us up an hour and a half or two later, giggling in the front seat like girls half their age, or sitting on the front porch on a hot August night in their halter tops and cut-off jeans sipping iced teas, maybe spiked with a little gin, while Billy and I — who were supposed to be asleep in my room upstairs — were sitting on the roof of the porch listening, ready to crawl back through the window at the slightest hint of discovery, listening to Mrs. Gage: ... *me to marry him while we were driving down the Parkway. Jesus, I never thought that's how it would happen. Don't laugh, Helen! And don't tell me you didn't believe the same thing. I dreamed about a New York restaurant or an Irish castle or even a picnic on Bear Mountain and a cruise up the Hudson. I wanted everything: the pillow, the bended knee. But I should have known: This was 'Shotgun Gage' I was dating you know. Anyway, we're driving down the Parkway, he must have been going ninety miles an hour and the side curtains were off and the wind was blowing through my hair. I felt like a million dollars I thought the world could end then and I'd die happy. Then he shouts over the wind, 'We should marry.' Some romantic! But I didn't care. I was in love; I leaned over the stick shift and kissed him, and he closed his eyes — while we were driving! I broke off the kiss and sat back in the seat and Gage is doing a hundred! 'That mean yes?' he asks.* Can you believe it?! *We drove to the beach that night and watched the sun set, then we stopped to watch a game under the lights at Ma Manning's on the way back. I was so happy ...*

The daydream would end as quietly as it began and as alone in my thoughts. I

kept it to myself. What I could imagine was nothing in the face of what really happened that summer: Billy, Mr. Gage, the Corvette. I'd never even seen the Corvette's speedometer; I didn't know if it did a hundred. In any case, Billy wouldn't have approved of my story, and would have said: "Don't be so stupid. That's not real." With reason, I guess. He had no mom. Nothing is more real than that.

"We all miss Mrs. Gage," my mother said when I asked her if she was ever best friends with Billy's mom.

I saw a picture of her once. It was the only one I'd ever seen. One morning Billy and I had gone into Mr. Gage's bedroom where Billy could steal a quarter from the top of the bureau so we could share a box of Good 'n Plenty after school. Her picture was on a night table next to the bed. It was an old photo, her pretty, young face lost behind a screen of faded time. She looked like Billy.

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Mr. Gage was an assembly worker at Huron Arms, a gun manufacturer in Belle-Isle. He worked there until American withdrawal from Vietnam triggered a drop-off in orders and a companywide layoff. On unemployment, he had the time to work on the Corvette.

He got his notice from Huron Arms on a Thursday in early spring. Billy and I were still in Our Lady of Perpetual Help, fourth grade. It was windy when we walked home after school that day, lagging behind Marge Adams and Helen Griffin, figuring we'd catch a sight of their underpants when the wind picked up their uniform skirts. Since it hadn't happened by the time we got to the corner of our street, Billy said he'd
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race me to his house and back to the corner — about a hundred yards. He whipped his book bag to the ground and was off while I was still waiting on the wind. Billy stopped cold in his tracks when he got to the fence at the end of his yard, and despite my attempts to get him to race back, he stayed there. I retrieved the book bags and ran to where he was standing; I followed his stare: The tarp was blown flat against the fence; Mr. Gage was scrambling around the Corvette, swearing and stumbling around and around the car, trying to keep the maple seedlings — green miniature parachutists — from landing in the car's red vinyl interior. I looked at Billy, who was still. He looked frightened, and I was frightened for him.

"C'mon, Billy; I'll race you to my house."

"I can't. I gotta go." He took the bag from my hand. "I gotta go." He looked straight into my eyes and tried to smile. "We'll skip the homework tonight, OK?" he said. Then he was gone.

"Dad—," I heard him say to his father as I started across the street. I heard his father swear some more, asking him where the fuck he'd been so long after school. Then I thought I heard a thud against the back porch and the slam of the screen door.

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We were tied for first place with another AJAC team early in the season before all the teams had had a chance to play each other, and were playing one night against the last-place team. Billy was supposed to pitch, because even though the other team was the cellar-dweller it was one we'd had problems with the year before. He wanted to get to the park early to warm up.
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When we were on the side of the AJAC's Hall, Billy touched his glove against my shoulder, said "C'mon," and bolted toward the building.

Once in the hall — the past accomplishments of his father circled around him like mile markers on a speedometer — Billy went over to the picture of the Corvette. I read the caption.

"Polo white," he said. "First model was 1953. They only made them in polo white with red vinyl interiors. Why do you think that is?"

"Don't know, Billy, but it sure is nice. It looks fast, doesn't it?"

"Zero to sixty in eleven seconds."

"Wow."

"That's nothin' now. They make them a lot quicker. So why do you think that is?"

"What is?"

"Why they only made them white with red insides."

"Then they'd be one of a kind."

"Yeah, maybe. Kinda looks like a baseball, doesn't it? And the red's like the stitching, only here it's inside."

I turned my head and looked at him. "You're so weird," I said. We walked to another photograph. "Think your father'll ever finish?"

"I don't know. Don't know if he wants to," Billy said, then swung back around to the exit. "Last one to the plate has to suck Mrs. Futtlebutt's left tit." He took off running and shouting, and I followed behind him as fast as I could, my legs stretching, my voice straining. We got louder and faster as we neared the diamond, as if the two of us were in the Corvette at top speed with the top down having to scream over the rush of the wind.

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On the field, Billy was an aggressive player and would stop at almost nothing to score a goal, steal a ball, outsmart an opponent. He was leagues ahead of the rest of the players our age, including me. He did his best to give me pointers on the diamond or in the backfield, but especially on the ice where I was the weakest — how far up I could raise my stick without getting penalized, or how to get into position to screen a shot on goal, that type of thing.

In return I helped Billy in school, especially because he missed classes a lot, usually one day here or there, never more than two days in a row. If he was playing hooky he was clever, because the teachers never caught him, but I had my doubts about hooky. Any of the other kids who skipped school — Flipper Flanagan, Brat Tolan, Spuckey and Butch Maher — they were forever bragging about it: the fish they caught, the cigarettes they smoked, the condoms they found. Sometimes we even saw them spying on us from up the street while we were outside at recess. But Billy wasn't like that. No stories, no spying. And he didn't show up for practice after school like the other kids did who skipped.

Despite the classes he missed, Billy was a natural in school. Studies came to him easily — math, social studies, English, French. He didn't need the help in school as much as I needed the help in sports, but it was our arrangement and nothing would keep us from it. Every day after school we followed Marge and Helen to the corner of our street, or followed them by walking in front slowly and letting them catch up to us then racing ahead to start the cycle over. We'd stop at Billy's house for him to change, then run across the street to my house where I'd change and we'd work on
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studies for an hour before going to practice.

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"Your dad must have been a great ballplayer," Spuckey Maher said one day when we were walking by AJAC's Hall on the way to practice.

"Yeah, I seen all those pi'tures an' trophies an' stuff," joined in his brother, Butch.

Billy shrugged his shoulders and walked past the hall with his head lowered. It looked like he was bowing reverently, but he gritted his teeth when he said: "I don't know. I guess he was."

"Of course he was," Butch continued. "You don't get your name on a gold plate for playin' like Bozo here," he said, slapping his glove into my stomach.

"Fuck you," I said.

"Oooo, big words, big words," Butch countered. "You kiss your mama with that mouth?"

"Yeah, and I give you answers in social studies, too, so you better cut it out you want help."

"That a threat?" he said.

"No. That's a promise," I replied.

Finally realizing just what he'd said, Butch pleaded, "Jeez, I was only kiddin'." And I slapped him back with my glove.

We'd reached the playing field. Billy was already on the baseline pitching to Jimmy Flanagan, who was called Flipper because he could make his voice sound like the dolphin on TV.
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While I was fishing for my catcher's mask and shinguards at the bottom of the canvas bat bag, Spuckey said to Butch: "Dad says Mr. Gage was great until he started chasing after Billy's mom. Then ol' 'Shotgun' Gage went and shot his load."

Butch laughed and followed up: "Yeah, and that's why the 'vette's full of holes now!"

I threw a glance toward Billy, hoping he hadn't heard the exchange, but it looked like he had. He had pivoted away from Flipper and begun his windup in the direction of the bench. He threw the ball hard and it struck Spuckey in the side under his right elbow. An inch over and it would have hit his kidneys, but Billy wasn't aiming for Spuckey's kidneys. It was a warning. Billy had never lost control, had intentionally struck Spuckey in the way a big-leaguer comes inside to brush back a batter and regain the upper hand. Spuckey folded over and Butch tore out, arms raised, toward Billy, standing still on the line.

"You stupid jerk," Butch screamed, throwing his body at Billy.

But Billy sidestepped Butch and stuck out his leg, tripping him and sending him to the dirt.

Billy walked over to Spuckey and offered his hand to help him up. In a voice without any of the previous teeth-gritting, he told Spuckey: "Don't ever talk about my father like that again."

Later, after the game, as Billy and I walked home, I found myself watching the scene over again in my memory: the pitch, the strike, the offered hand. And as I played b: k the memory, it was Billy's father's face I saw each time Billy turned in from the windup.

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"Let's skip this shit," he said one afternoon toward the end of the school year. "Let's go down to the Rowes' farm and work on our house." I was sitting at my desk and Billy was stretched out on his back on my bed, playing catch with a baseball, throwing it up to within a paint layer of the ceiling.

"C'mon, Billy, there's not much more to this. We can skip the names and just work on the Preamble. You know Mrs. Tuttle's going to make us recite it."

He caught the ball one last time and turned over onto his stomach quickly. "We could take some of the laths from behind the garage, some of the chicken wire and you can borrow your dad's hammer and maybe I can take some nails from the peanut can, some of the bent ones, and —"

"Billy, I'm serious. We can't fail this test."

"Screw ol' Futtlebutt," he said, and punched me in the arm. I grabbed my baseball mitt off the desk and threw it at him. He pulled me off the chair to the ground, sat on my stomach and slapped me upside the head open-handed. I tried to take hold of his wrists, tried to get out from under him, but he was stronger than I was. He had me pinned. " 'Uncle,' " he said, "say 'uncle.' "

"No way, screw you, apeman." Twisting and turning and bucking like the rodeo broncos we watched on ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, I managed to get him off me for a second, but ended up on my stomach, face first in a pile of socks, and with Billy, sweaty and breathing heavily, lying prone atop me. We lay there for one long moment. I could feel Billy's ribs against my back, could feel his legs and arms, skin and bones, could see in my mind the tan he already had and how bleached and soft his blond
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hair had already gotten. Then I felt the tautness leave his body and a tenderness seemed to take its place. But as it did, and I felt him getting up, I sprung on him, forcing him to the ground.

His hands went to his face and he shouted, "No, pa, no!" I shrunk back and said, "Hey, Billy, it's all right, man." I helped him up, and as he straightened himself up, I sensed that I had ruined something. I knew it. "I'm sorry, Billy," I said, knowing no other words. "We can skip all this if you want. I'll understand."

"Forget it, apeman. You started it, let's finish, then go out to Rowe's," he said. He pushed me into the bed, and started reciting the next day's lesson.

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Mrs. Tuttle, Ol' Futtlebutt as Billy called her, taught social studies, of which American history was a part. This was the year before the bicentennial and already there were 200th anniversary celebrations of all sorts throughout the city and the state, remembering Paul Revere's ride and Bunker Hill. Mrs. Tuttle was inspired late that year to have us research our family trees as a final project so we could see how our personal histories paralleled the country's. My mother, being a Daughter of the American Revolution, already had researched our genealogy, making my work that much easier. Billy, of course, was a different story. He was reluctant to ask his father anything about the past, anything that could set him off. Secretly, I thought it was the perfect opportunity to learn about the pretty woman in the photograph.

"You never asked him, Billy. How do you know he'll fly off the deep end?" I asked him one afternoon about a week before the project was due.
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"You don't know my dad, man. He'd go nuts."

"But how do you *know*?" We were sitting on the floor of my bedroom, Billy leaning up against the foot of my bed; me, with my back against my bedroom door. We lobbed a tennis ball back and forth as we spoke.

"I don't have to know; I can just feel it."

"What if I helped?"

"Helped how? Stand in the way when he winds up? You don't know how nutty he's getting. No way. End of discussion." He caught the ball, stood up and made for the bedroom door to leave. "Get up. I'm going."

"Billy, I think it's a mistake. If you don't ask, you'll never know about your mom."

"I know she's lucky not to be here now. That's all I have to know."

I got up, and Billy left.

I felt bad through dinner. My mother had that "I-told-you-so" look on her face when I explained why Billy had left so early. Dad was silent. After we ate, I thought it'd be a good idea to apologize to Billy and I headed over to the Gages'.

I never ran up on the porch; Billy said that was something we should never do. And we were always to knock at the door rather than ring the bell. But I didn't knock. I didn't get that far. I heard Mr. Gage's voice as I walked up the two steps, and I could see the outline of his face — the receding hairline, the straight line of the nose, the square jaw — as he said: "... the only thing left in my life. You understand that? The only thing. No job, no wife. Had a job, had a wife. So long ago. On the verge of signin'. Shoulda been headed to Pittsburgh. But she was preg — said she was pregnant and I believed — I — believed it, I didn't go, I stayed, I married her. The only thing. To do. Asked her on the freeway. In the car. What a beaut she was. Hard to remember

now. I try. Look at the old photographs, what she was like. On the verge of signin'."

As he spoke, he polished a round piece of chrome that was the shape of the Corvette's headlights. He held it in his right hand, rock-steady as his left hand went around and around. Around and around as he talked. Staring out at the car. I got scared; I couldn't see Billy. I didn't understand what was happening. I backed up along the wall of the house, moved in front of the window, looked in, and there he was, cringing in a corner of the kitchen near the refrigerator and his bedroom door, his legs drawn up close to his body, his arms wrapped tightly around his knees and bowed head; Billy. Rocking. It wasn't what I expected and I gasped, turned on the balls of my feet and began to run off the porch.

But I heard Mr. Gage: "Hold it right there, young man." I froze. Mr. Gage had always called me by my name. "Come here where I can see you." A picture of Billy in the kitchen flashed in my mind, and I thought for sure I'd end up in a corner, too.

"Yesssssir, Mr. Gage?" I said.

He never came outside. He stood at the screen door and said, "No running on the porch."

"Yesssssir," I said, and I walked off the porch to the sidewalk that lead to the driveway where the Corvette was parked. I turned back toward the house. He was still standing in the doorway. "You tell your parents I asked after 'em." I nodded and as I walked past the car, I sneaked a look at the speedometer.

One-ten, it said.

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"He *was* a good player, wasn't he?" I asked Billy one time when we had to walk through the hall to get to the bathroom.

"He still is. My hand stings for an hour after we play catch, he throws so hard."

"So why doesn't he play anymore? Like for the Belle-Isle Gunners?"

" 'Cause he doesn't throw hard enough."

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"The game's not for another two hours. You don't have to get there so early. You come out to the car, the both of you, and help me," Mr. Gage said one evening as Billy and I, both uniformed, were headed out.

We followed Mr. Gage to the driveway. He asked if my father were going to the game that night. I said no, he had to work.

"That's too bad. Works a lot, your dad, doesn't he?" he asked.

I said yes, he did work a lot.

"That's too bad," he repeated.

It was soon clear Mr. Gage didn't need any help, that we weren't there to hold a lamp while he worked underneath the car or to fetch wrenches and ballpeen hammers. We were there to listen. As he spoke, he polished the car.

"The proper way to polish a car, especially one whose paint is light like this polo white, well the first thing is, and this is for any car really, and that's to make sure it's been properly washed and dried, and the only way to make sure anything is done properly these days is to do it yourself. On top of all the money you're saving, it's that much more reassuring to know something you want and need done hasn't been done
~~~

shoddily by some low-life grease monkey who don't know transmission fluid from cherry Kool-Aid. And don't think they won't try to shyst you. Some of 'em got their gas gauges rigged up so when you ask for a fill-up, it's readin' half a gallon before they've even pumped in a dime's worth. But what you wanna do is wash it carefully, get yourself a bucket of nice, hot water with a decent amount of suds and one of those peanut-shaped sponges and make sure the hose is by your side so you can wash off the soap quick before it dries. Best not to do it in full sunlight anyway because that's just not good for you anyway. And ..."

I tuned him out, just stopped paying attention to the words and wondered instead why Mr. Gage had ever started trying to restore the Corvette. Or why he'd ever let it go to pot in the first place. And why he didn't just let us get to practice. He knew after all that Billy was pitching, and Billy and sports seemed to be so much a concern for him. All those times I saw him forcing Billy out at dusk to play catch and be still at it long after dark had settled. When my own father would just be turning on the light in his study.

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When Mr. Gage finally showed up at the park that night, he was drunk. He stood behind the screen of the backstop shouting at the umpire for calling balls that should have been strikes even though we knew they really *were* balls, shouting at his son on the mound to quit being a wuss and stay ahead of the batter, shouting at anyone who came to the plate that their father was a bum. The umpire did his best to ignore Mr. Gage, but our coach, Mr. Griffin, Helen's father, went behind the backstop to talk with
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him. They began screaming face-to-face; it was like watching Earl Weaver and an umpire going at it, but there was no Oriole mascot to provide comic relief. Mr. Gage slugged the coach, and before I could shake off my mask and keep Billy away, he was off the mound at his father's side. Helen and I ran over to hers while the ump kept the rest of the team back.

"Dad," Billy cried, "what —"

"Shut the fuck up, boy," his father cut him off. "This is none of your business." And he swung his fist in the direction of Billy's face.

But Billy raised his hands to protect himself and Mr. Gage's fury struck Billy's forearm.

"Why you little shit," Mr. Gage said, "raisin' your hand to me!"

"But, dad —"

"Don't you backmouth me, boy," he said, and he grabbed Billy by the left arm, the one he pitched with, twisting it behind Billy's back. The entire team heard it. A bone cracking. Like a weak pop-up to right field. And we all watched in horror as Mr. Gage led Billy by the broken arm to his truck and drove away. Billy never looked back, never said a word.

I didn't see Billy for a long time after that, maybe two weeks, I was too afraid that the day would be replayed the second I looked in his eyes. I remember the game was stopped; I remember we lost two weeks of games and the championship; I remember wondering if anything would happen to Mr. Gage for breaking Billy's arm. I wondered if a child could sue his parent. I suspected not. The parent would say he was in his rights to punish his child. And besides, everyone in town knew the tough time Mr. Gage was having with no wife, raising a pre-teenage child on unemployment benefits.

But Mr. Gage didn't have to be sued. The police took him from the house for a week and he had to promise never to touch Billy again. And he didn't. Nor did he speak to him the remainder of the summer, which Billy and I spent quietly, sitting on the swing in my parents' screened-in front porch, discussing between sips of Kool-Aid why Joe Morgan did that thing with his left arm standing in the batter's box waiting for a pitch, and fantasizing about Tatum O'Neal in *Bad News Bears*. All the while across the street, the Army tarp was folded neatly against the fence, the hood of the Corvette was up, and Mr. Gage was almost finished restoring his car, preparing it for that day, the one after Labor Day, the unofficial "end of summer," when he would hit top end driving the Corvette through the AJAC's Hall.

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The morning after the funeral, Billy came over to the house. He was dressed in a charcoal suitcoat; the pants were a lighter shade, and he wore a wide black and red paisley tie. He sat down close to me on the front-porch swing, his left hand — a tan line showing where the cast had ended — brushing my right hand. He had put the swing into motion when he sat, and let it die down to a stop. I thought back to the only other time I could remember Billy being as quiet. I could see myself lying on my stomach, could feel Billy, could just see him out of the corner of my eye, like those times when you can see what you can't see, and I thought I saw into the events beyond the screen door.□
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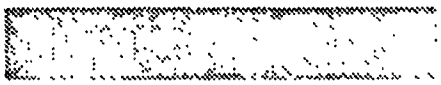
NO SMALL THING



NO SMALL THING

WHEN IT came time for the two of us to move in, Jim wouldn't. Given what happened, I couldn't really blame him. He wanted to sell. I had reservations about the house, too; but I thought the smart thing to do was to go on.

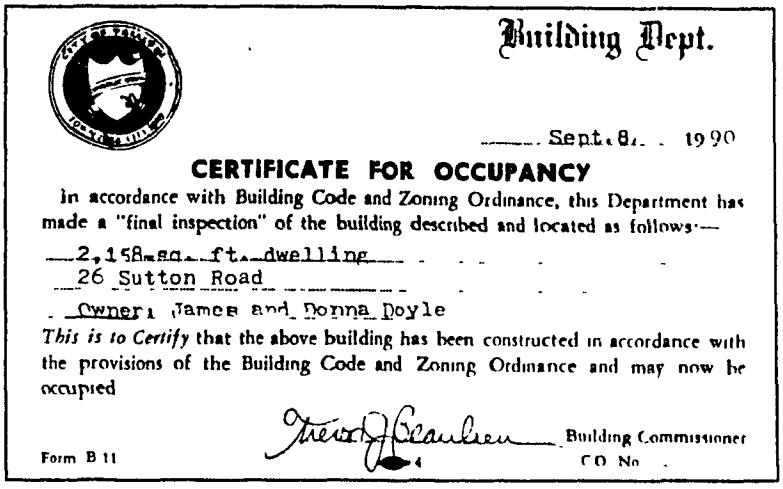
"We've invested too much to sell now," I told him one afternoon. It was October, one month after the house had been inspected and we were allowed to move in. He sat on the bed in Robbie's room in the old apartment, holding the boy's black jean jacket folded in his hands. I was standing in the doorway, shoulder and back up against the jam. Leaning. "Come to dinner Jim," I said. Pleading. After a few minutes he put the jacket in a large cardboard box in the center of the room and came out for the meal.

Midway through dinner the telephone rang; I answered: It was Jim's ex-wife, Marge. She was incoherent, I didn't let her speak to him, wouldn't let her. "You must have the wrong number," I said, "you must have the wrong ..." She said the boy would ... but I didn't hear the rest; I placed the phone in its cradle, turned to Jim. Smiling. "Wrong number," I said.

After dinner Jim went to the bedroom, ours, slid the case of his bass guitar out from under the bed and took it out. He sat in the chair in the corner, the one with my hose hanging over the back, and plucked at the strings. He didn't connect the bass to the amplifier; the notes one by one struck the air and fell unfinished to the carpet.

Things were different when we were building the house. We all seemed a little freer, even Marge, who was rid of Robbie.

Jim and I were picking up after Marge. I'd never say she had failed, but the truth is she couldn't raise the boy on her own. She had a problem with alcohol and she wasn't working; Robbie went out, started running with the Doc Martens kids, the older ones some of whom I'd heard smoked dope. Last year, when he was in seventh grade, he got caught stealing cassette tapes from a record store. That's when Jim stepped in, offered to take him out of school and have him stay with us, where'd he'd be tutored and watched over properly. If it hadn't been for his father, Robbie, I think, would have landed in juvenile detention. The courts didn't waste any time giving the boy back to Jim.



Building Dept.

Sept. 8, 1990

CERTIFICATE FOR OCCUPANCY

In accordance with Building Code and Zoning Ordinance, this Department has made a "final inspection" of the building described and located as follows:—

2,158 sq. ft. dwelling
26 Sutton Road
Owner: James and Donna Doyle

This is to Certify that the above building has been constructed in accordance with the provisions of the Building Code and Zoning Ordinance and may now be occupied

Building Commissioner

Form B 11

CO No.

Tarreton City Building Department Certificate for Occupancy

The land, dreaming about putting a house on it — these things helped carry Jim through the period after his divorce. And when he regained custody of Robbie it was as if the building permit was a new lease on life.

Donna's the one who suggested taking him in. I was embarrassed at having not thought of it first. She, too, was the one who suggested pulling him out of school at the same time. She would tutor him in English and social studies; between the two of

us, he could learn Spanish, and I would handle the science courses. Life skills, ah, the life skills. Those you just have to wing.

It was good to have the boy back though, and all to myself. It must have been hard on Donna, though. It's one thing to marry a guy who's got a kid and you see the boy every other trip to Disney World, but it's quite another when the boy's living with you and he's fast-tracked to a room with concrete blocks for wallpaper.

The tutoring and helping me raise Robbie were good for Donna, too. She was able to stop writing for a while and re-evaluate her life, her goals. Sounds like a mid-career crisis, but it wasn't. I would know, I've changed careers before. I'm a finish carpenter. I used to be a framer, that's what I did before I played bass professionally and before I was a teacher (junior high school science) and coach (soccer). I think what Donna was going through was a pit stop. Everyone has to pit.

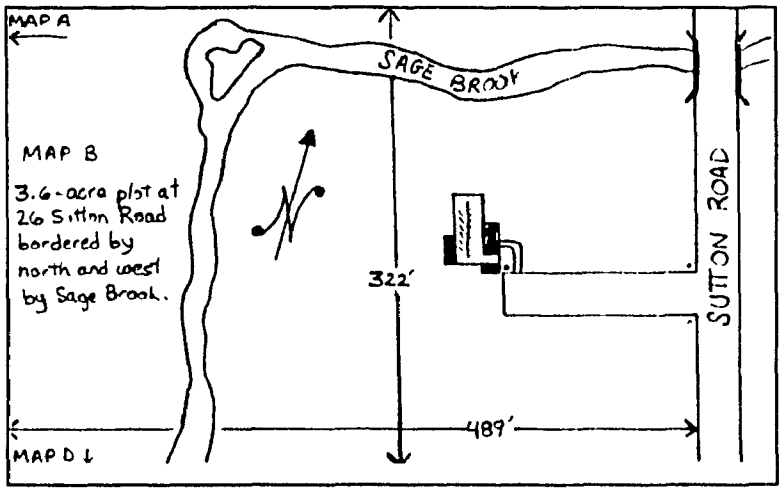
BITCH BITCH BITCH That's all she does. She bitches. Do this, Robbie do that. Cunt. That's C-U-N-T. And now she wants me to keep a journal says it'll help me with my langauge skills and I says I'm no fairy what do I need in a fuckin diary.

Fine, I says. He wants the shithead, he can have him. Him and the slut he married. The kid was nothin' but trouble since I took him. Didn't even want him. Courts gave him to me. To his mother. *I* was the one that left, didn't they remember that?

"The court finds it in the best interest of the minor child that the petitioner be awarded primary physical custody." What about my interest?! Jim coulda had him. All he had to do was quit playing that fuckin' guitar.

Fine. And now look.

The land I bought is on the west side of Sutton Road near Sage Brook. It was just before the ceiling blew on the real estate market, so I got it dirt cheap. There's a few acres, about 16 or so. It's woody, which is what I like. The brook forms the northern boundary of the lot before it takes a mean cut to the south and splits the property almost 70-30. I had to promise not to develop within a certain distance of the brook. The smaller portion is on the east side, flat from the brook eastward for about 120 feet before rising gently and leveling off after another 40 feet. That was where we decided to build, on top of the little knoll, if the percolation test worked of course, but I couldn't imagine that it wouldn't.



Map shows lot No. 26, Sutton Road, near Sage Brook, Tarreton.

I bought it not long after the divorce. It was about the time that I left the band and before I started finish work. I stayed up there a couple of weeks, sleeping under the stars or a tarp, dreaming of the house I could build there. But I never got it together.

I was in the honest-to-God pits. Marge had left one night and I didn't see her again until the day she showed up to take the rest of the boy's clothes and playthings. The boy. Robbie was seven years old. I was all set to sign him up for baseball that spring. I'd bought him a glove, rubbed in neat's-foot oil, placed a ball in the pocket and tied it with string — ready for his hand, ready for play. Then he was gone.

BITCH BITCH BITCH Now she wants me to date these things says fuckin either has a 'g' at the end or a postrophe to show the 'g' ain't there. Well hell if it ain't there it ain't there. Date this: January 10, 1990.

And it's language — g-u-a-g-e. I knew that. I was just testin' her.

I met Jim about three years ago. I had hired him for some cabinet work in my kitchen. He came in with a toolbox in one hand and a portable cassette player in the other. I saw that and moved to my office to write; I thought here it comes, for sure — Merle Haggard — so it was quite a shock when I heard someone reading Joseph Campbell on tape. It made me sit up and take a second look.

"That's ... that's ..."

"Ralph Blum," he said, never looking up from the board he was sanding. "Let me know if it's too loud, 'kay?"

"No, no; it's fine. I like his books. And he's reading Campbell, that's great."

"Yeah, good combo. Like peaches and cream." He looked up and smiled with childlike amusement at his little joke. His teeth were white.

I went back to my office, smiling.

~~Febuary~~ February 21, 1990. I can't imagine what the hell Jim sees in her. All she does is BITCH all day. At least Marge didn't say anything and I could go out. I haven't seen the gang in over a month and every time I ask when I can go back to school which I never went to anyway and I guess they probly know that they say this is my school now. This lousy apartment and The Bitch for a teach. Ah, fuck, at least there's something to eat when I want.

In the court's point of view, as Jim was fighting for custody of his child, well, certainly, being a musician looked a little unstable. But it's not as if he was 18 years old fresh out of school playing in a garage band. This was a legitimate band. Jazz! of all things.

Well, I suppose it might have looked odd: Getting a double degree in education and physics, becoming

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2541 DWIGHT STREET
TARRETON, MASSACHUSETTS 01004
MARGARET DOYLE
SUPERIOR COURT COUNTY OF JEFFERSON
1 KENNELLY SQUARE
P.O. LOI 5001
TARRETON, MASSACHUSETTS 01004
NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT
MARRIAGE OF
MARGARET DOYLE
JAMES MICHAEL DOYLE
INTERLOCUTORY JUDGMENT OF DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE
NCH 782-315-32
July 8, 1982 P
Pro Tem: MORRIS BLACK
JAMES MORIARTY
July 9, 1982

Divorce papers served on James Doyle on July 9, 1982. Custody of minor child, Robert Doyle, granted to mother, Margaret, whose former name, Cavanna, was retrieved.

a carpenter, then joining a band. Not career-oriented movement.

It amused me how similar Jim and his son were, each with a bit of a wild streak — wildness stretched over a continuum, though. Rob could be a terror; Jim's was a respectable rebelliousness.

Thursday, March 15, 1990. The Ides of March. We read about them in a play by Shakespear called "Julius Caesar." They predicted he was going to get killed by his best friend or something like that. Once you get thru the weird language, the scene where he gets it is pretty neat. et tu, Donna?

Sometime after the cabinet work was done, a good "respectable" month later, I burst into his office and said: "Jim, I'm taking you to dinner. Non-business." He smiled and blushed and that's when I *really* knew he was something special. A blushing carpenter who listens to Pat Metheny and books-on-tape. I wanted to know what it would be like to have him read to me.

Tuesday, April 3, 1990. She wants a poem. Says I can get closer to what I'm really feeling if I write poetry. Sounds like shock therapy to me. Then she tells me not to

rhyme like songs. Like who ever heard of a poem that don't rhyme? So fine, you want a poem, here:

BONDAGE

Locks on my ankles,
Chains on my wrists:
I am bound to the Master.
"Do this," and
"Do that":
Parents have a hold on me.
An alarm clock rings,
The fire alarm sounds warning:
I am bound to respond to a Bell.
"Come in, sit down,
and keep quiet":
I am bound to obey the Teacher.
The law says yes,
The law says no:
My bondage to Uncle Sam.
The scripture reads of this,
Act accordingly:
Yes, bound to the Church.
Bound here,
Bound there.
Jesus Christ,
get them outta my hair!
I must,
it's impossible.
I must,
highly improbable,
I must
be free.

We'd been dating about six months when Jim brought me out to the land camping for a weekend. It was brisk our first morning there, though we could feel heat rising from the ground. There was a slight mist and it created the lightest fog. I remember holding hands, we were standing on top of the hill, Jim looking west toward the brook. I was facing him. I remember how happy and at peace he seemed. "I'm going to build

on this land. Build a house. And I ... I'd like you to be there to build it with me. Together." That's how he proposed. Naturally I said yes.

Donna said Robbie was making a lot of progress — he'd cut down on his swearing and had stopped using it in his journal. He read a lot though it was only MAD comic books. Hey, it was a start.

I don't want to make it sound like Robbie was a Freddie Kruger or something. He was a hellion not hell. What I honestly suspected was that most of what he was doing was a search for attention and love. He'd lacked in both for so long he couldn't react any other way.

He was tough on Donna, but I think she appreciated if not actually enjoyed the change of pace. Her writing had become stale, she told me long before we took in Robbie, and she had forgotten how to kickstart it. I told her to let it go for a while. Anyone else probably would have said, 'Keep writing. It'll work itself out,' but I didn't believe that. Now, with what happened, I'd probably say the same thing I said earlier: 'Take a break. But don't let it go. Catch your second wind and then surge through that next mile.' Donna jogged. She would have liked the metaphor, though I never got a chance to use it.

When our lives fell out from under us, there were many things left to pick up — conversation among them.

Then the courts say because this is Robert's third offense in the past year, we're

going to send your boy to juvenile detention unless you release him to the custody of the father, and I says I don't care so long as you get the fuckin' brat outta my hair; that's the way I remember, I know I thought it, I don't remember, oh Christ, I don't know. Shithead takes all his clothes. The next month the money stops comin' and when I ask the courts what the skinny is they says that shitass carpenter had taken custody and I was no longer eligible for aid.

Fuck him and the bitch is all I gotta say.

Never a thought to me. Compensatory renumeration nothin'.

Monday, April 15, 1990. They want to go out to the land camping for a couple of days. Jim says everything I've learned with Donna and with him has been leading up to this. I don't know what he means by 'this.' It can't be a week in the woods, so I have no idea what he's talking about. Sometimes he gets so spacey. All I know is I'm not looking forward to this at all. Sometimes I'd just rather die than deal with the two of them.

Building a house and working side by side would do three things for us: We would get to know each other in a way that couldn't have occurred with monthly visits or even in a normal household; Robbie would learn something about construction, carpentry, maybe even some physics and earth science along the way.

"It'll be a way to learn about himself," Jim said. "That time with Marge, or without her which is more the case, got the kid all confused about himself. I'm not laying all this on her. That wouldn't be fair and it'd wouldn't be the truth. I could've been a better dad. There's no doubt about it. But he's here now and we're gonna give this a real go."

Last, the work would culminate in a house, and that's no small thing.

The perc is the first real test before building. Essentially, you learn two things with a perc — soil types and water levels. You dig the hole for the test where you intend to build. If the water holds, say it only goes down an inch in two hours, then you've either got a high water table or you're too close to wetlands. In either case, you're up a creek. Even on a hill, sometimes it's hard to get a perc that works because underground water sources are difficult to track. But if the water percolates, well, you're bingo and you go on.

The first test with Robbie was convincing him the house in the woods, the teaching arrangement and his new life would be good for him. We thought we'd introduce him to the land by camping there a week. As we were packing, I mused aloud to Donna about Robbie — wondering if anything was sinking in to him at all.

Robbie dressed in black leather for the trip and brought his Walkman and a stack of comic books. Donna had to lift the phones off his ears to tell him to grab enough underwear and socks for the week.

Essential Equipment List

JIM	DONNA	ROBBIE[1]
5 pr. underwear	2 sports bras	1 pr. underwear
5 pr. white socks	5 pr. underpants	1 pr. black socks
1 pr. wool socks red rings	5 pr. white socks	1 pr. black jeans
1 pr. All-Stars sneakers	1 pr. wool socks orange rings	1 black T-shirt
1 pr. Dexter calf-length boots	1 Levis jacket	1 black jean jacket
1 pr. Levis	1 pr. Avia sneaks	5 comic books
2 T-shirts	1 pr. Dunham ankle-length boots	1 pen, black ink
3 flannel shirts	1 pr. lavender fleece sweats	1 cassette
1 sweatshirt	1 diaphragm	
1 Casio watch	2 flannel shirts	
1 portable magnetic chess set	1 turtleneck	
1 poncho	1 poncho	
1 pr. gloves	Greeley paperback	
1 baseball glove, bat, baseball	Journal, pen	
1 pr. binoculars	Nikon FM 35mm camera	
Paperback of *Stop-Time*	2 rolls 24 exp. film	

It misted, drizzled or outright poured three of the first four days we were there. Robbie stayed in his tent or under the dining fly listening to his music or reading. No amount of cajoling would get him out — to fish, hike, explore the woods, help cook. The last night Jim told me he'd get Robbie out if he had to do it with his hands. It didn't prove necessary.

That night, a little after two, we woke to the sound of a raccoon screeching and fighting outside. "How it could have gotten at our trash?" I asked.

"I don't know. I was careful I thought," Jim said. Robbie came charging from his tent, bug-eyed as if he'd seen a ghost.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is it a bear? or a mountain lion?"

"Probably not, Rob," his father said. "There aren't any more big cats up here. I don't know about bears though. I think it's a raccoon."

[1] This was a wish list for Robbie, if truth be told. I insisted he take an appropriate amount of underwear and at least one more set of clothes.

"No way. A 'coon wouldn't make that much noise."

"Sure it would," I said, hoping that in the dark he couldn't see me smiling. "I'd say it's gotten into some jar or something and is frustrated with it for some reason. Tomorrow, I bet we'll find out what it is."

"I don't *want* to know what it is," he said.

I tried to sound reassuring, but it struck me as amusing. Robbie was showing some life after all, even if he was petrified. "Don't worry, Robbie. Now get some sleep."

Jim nudged me over and Robbie lay down at his side.

In the morning Jim got up and went out to the hole he had dug on the first day. Despite the heavy rains, there was no water in it. I thought I'd rustle up Robbie and ask him to help me with breakfast. But Robbie was not in our tent.

Nor was he in his own or under the dining fly. I asked Jim if he'd seen Robbie and he pointed to a trail of flattened grass that pointed toward the woods. We followed it out of the campsite and found a plastic peanut butter jar with teeth and claw marks on it.

"Raccoon couldn't get it open, looks like," Jim said.

"Think he took Robbie, too?" I joked.

"Don't they usually leave a changeling when they take a kid?" We laughed uneasily.

Donna called out his name a few times, but there was no answer. We went back to the site where the sun was beginning to dry the tents and the land. We changed into dry clothes, our boots, then followed the trail into the woods. We searched an hour before breaking for breakfast. We played some cards, thinking perhaps he was

playing a joke on us, wanting to see how concerned we'd get if he were missing, then satisfied that we were, would come waltzing down the trail any moment. The deck of cards, however, turned out to be as difficult to cut as the anxiety, so we headed back out.

We left the trail, following the way of the brook for another hour before finding Robbie sitting in the Sage, buck-naked, his clothes around him on the rocks drying while he soaped up a pair of socks in the brook. Kid was whistling.

Jim couldn't deal with it. He ran into the brook, slipped on a rock under the water and fell crashing and splashing and shouting. Robbie got scared, he must have thought — Lord, knows what he must have thought — that it was a bear or a mountain cat probably. He stood up and slipped into the brook as well. The two were a tangle of arms and legs and screams; Robbie for dear life, Jim at his son, which may have been the same thing.

Before dinner when both were calm and dry, Robbie told Jim he was sorry.

"It's OK, Rob. But you scared me. You weren't here, I thought you were lost in the woods."

"But what's to worry? You said yourself there weren't any mountain lions or anything."

"It wasn't that, son. I lost you once, see; I thought I'd lost you again. And I freaked out."

"Yeah, you did," Robbie said. Smiling. He snapped his towel and it struck Jim in the butt. Jim grabbed the towel, pulled it and the boy toward him then hugged his

son, but Robbie tried to pull away. The two ended up in the mud outside the dining fly.

THE BROOK (4/26/90)[2]

Five a.m.
Sun-kissed orange on horizon.
Lifting ~~mist~~ fog and escaping darkness.
Dad and Donna.
Screen flap ~~unzippped~~ open and
crawl out
into the ~~morning~~ day.
Dew on my fingers
and knees and
boots;
minty taste on my tongue.
Bird in bush
hare at the edge of hole.
~~Day~~ Morning
unfolding under my fingers.
The brook trips over stones.
Take off my clothes,
splash,
sit,
brrrrr.
Water ripples over
my shoulders
and chest
in neat sheets.
I lean back
onto two rocks
force water
to collect behind me.
Then I sit up,
and let it
cascade
down my back,
under the cheeks of my ass,
then rush over my legs.
My own little
water
fall.
Babble away, brook,
I hear you.

[2] Donna found this poem written in Robbie's scrawl on the back cover of MAD issue No. 415 at the beginning of August. It wasn't among his other comic books, but with his journal. It looked like he was about to transcribe it into the journal after he was finished editing it.

Jim drove into Tarreton and asked the town engineer, John Tisdale, to come up for the official perc test. We dug three holes, the first and third of which worked. Later, Jim staked out where to build and Robbie followed him around with flourescent orange paint, slapping it on the top of the stakes. He put most of it on his pants. "Check it out, Donna," he cried. "I'm a Bengal tiger."

"Or a jack-o'lantern," I said.

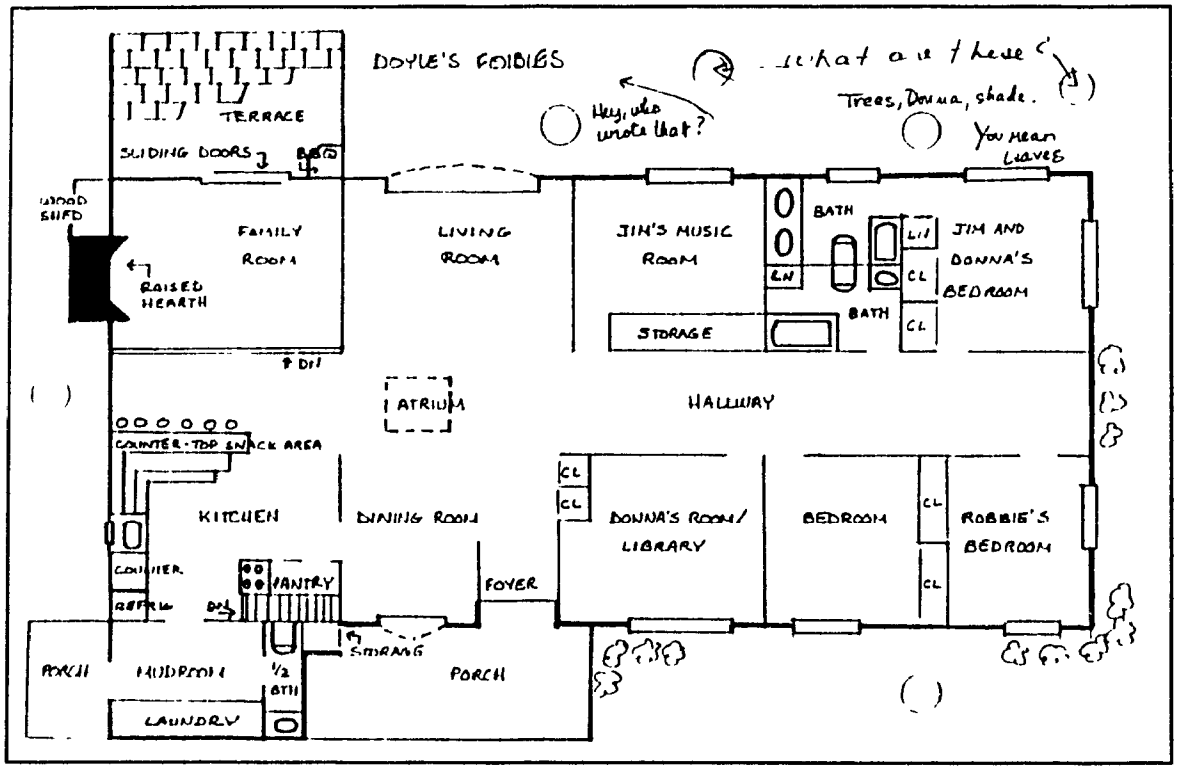
"After someone's blown out the candle," his father added.

We picked out which trees to cut after debating what kind of shade we would want. I opted for optimum shade. Robbie argued for less. "You're not the one's gonna rake this shit," he said. Robbie used what was left of the orange paint for rings around the trees that would be cut.

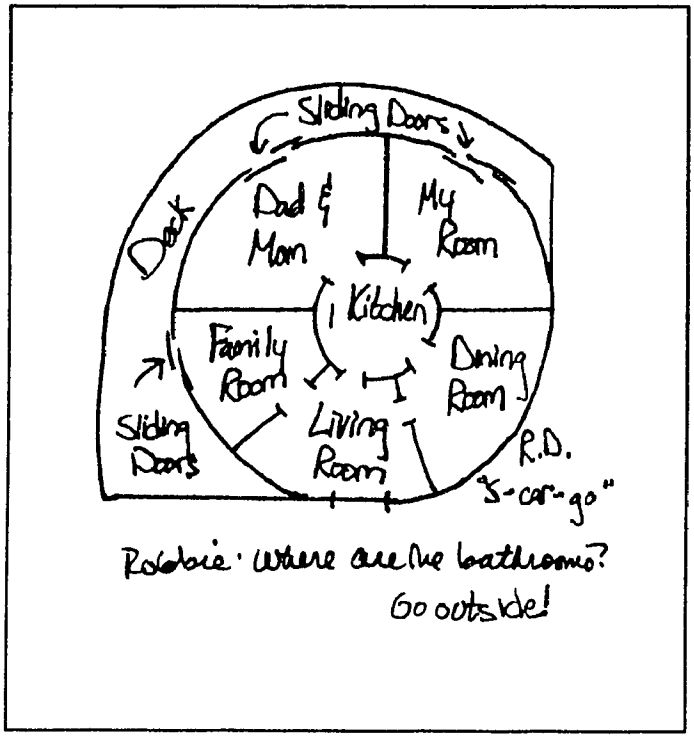
The next week, we went out again for three days of clearing the land. Jim showed Robbie how and why he selected a particular tree to fall in a particular direction, and while the two of them cut I limbed the trunks with an ax. The trees were left where they fell, to be taken by a friend of his to a mill where they'd be cut to Jim's specifications.

Jim and Robbie worked well together. Jim showed Robbie how to handle the tools, then he let him be. He wasn't looking over his shoulder all the time, and it seemed Robbie appreciated the trust, but just when I thought Robbie showed some interest, he'd walk away from the work, take up a slingshot he'd made and pitch rocks at the paint marks he'd made on the trees yet to cut.

The way I figure the kid would still be here if they hadn't taken him away from me.



Doyle's foibles



"S-car-go"

"I think we should have a third bedroom, Jim."

"You trying to tell me something?" he said, looking up over his glasses and the drawing table set up in the apartment kitchen.

I smiled, pretended for a moment that I was. I walked behind the table and drew my arms around him. "No, no, not now I'm not, but some day, hon; I'm not too old, you know." He hesitated,

turned the pencil over and erased the words "Jim's Music Room" from our house plan. He started writing in "Baby's Room."

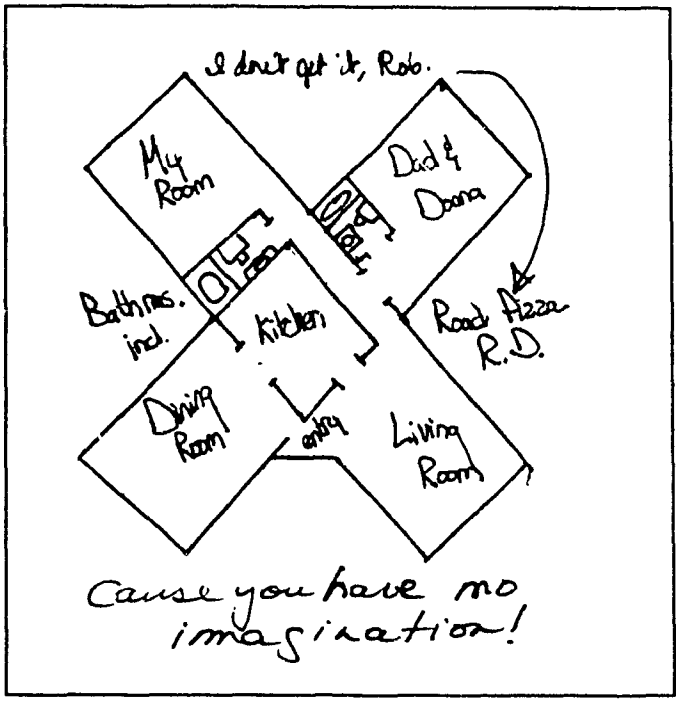
"Jim, you can't do that. You need that room."

"I thought you just told me to draw in another bedroom."

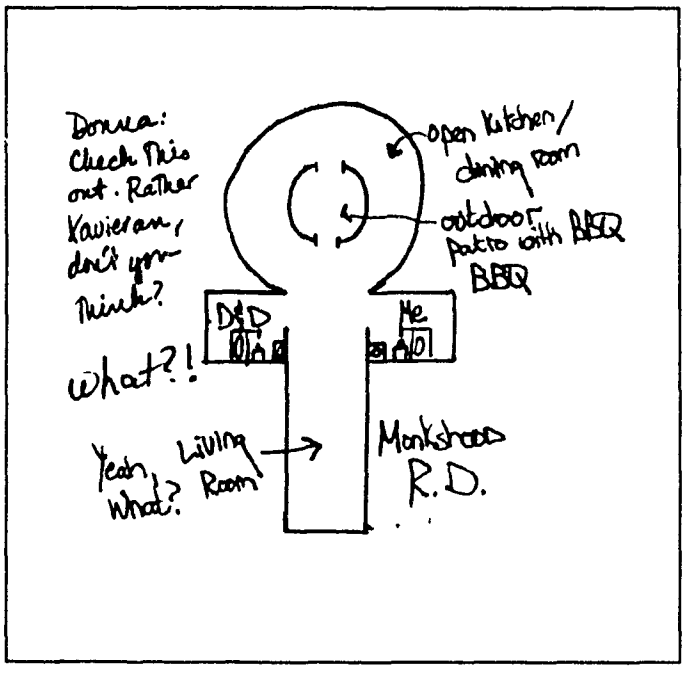
"Yes, but —"

"But what? We'll just turn the music room into a bedroom."

"But you can't deny yourself your pleasure either, hon. Give yourself the room."



"Road Pizza"



"Monkshood"

Donna and I settled on a contemporary design, with plenty of square footage and rooms, and in the living area — the kitchen/family room/living and dining rooms — lots and lots of light. It was her idea not to extend the hall wall past the library and to build an atrium between the living room and the dining room.

I added in a third bedroom by cutting down the size of our bedroom and putting it across the hall where I'd originally drawn in Robbie's.

The boy had some ideas, I swear. It's like he came equipped with a gross of No. 2 pencils, a straight-edge and enough gum erasers to supply Bechtel. He came up with slightly more irregular house designs.

There's something about building a house yourself using the trees from your land. There's that goopy "oneness with the land" feeling, but there's also the extra ceiling space.

Because the mill used my specifications, the trees were cut two inches longer than the standard lumbercut stud, which is somewhere around seven feet eleven.

The trees were cut at a mill where Henry Dufresne the foreman is a friend of mine from my carpentry days, plus he's the captain of the bowling team I belong to. Anyway, Henry kept the place open late on a Saturday to cut our order special.

Robbie got a big thrill at watching the speed and precision with which the saws went through our lot.

Henry, whose wife Am stood up for me at the wedding, stopped the saw. Jim took a stud and stood it up on end.

"Holy shit," Robbie said. "They're so tall."

"This is how high the walls'll be, Robbie. The ceiling'll hang down an inch from the top, see?"

"They must be about six inches longer than usual, right Dad?"

"Well, no, not quite, son. It's more like two. But you're right. They're not the standard cut." He placed it on the ground with the others.

And then Robbie asked: "Well, since we're makin' this our way, why can't we just cut 'em six inches longer?"

Henry looked over at me over his safety glasses and smiled, shook his head.

I thought of how much difference six inches would make. On the face of it, six inches is what separates a tall jockey from a short basketball player or someone like Jim. Six inches shorter and the Green Monster at Fenway would be less green. Take away six inches from the height of a door and you have to duck your head when you enter a house.

But it's the spatial question and its potential for us that I could see Robbie working on — figuring six inches over the square footage of the house and realizing that were our ceilings really eight-six, we'd have an extra thousand cubic feet of living space.

(70′ x 30′10″ x 8′) + (70′ x 30′10″ x .5′) =

In early May, I hired a backhoe to dig for the foundation, the septic tank, leachfield and well. The cement for the foundation was poured a few days later, after which Robbie, Donna and I framed. Within a couple of weeks, the floors were set and the

pressboard exterior was up.

Saturday, July 21, 1990. My hands are so calloused, it's like a second set of skin. Dad says I should wear gloves, but I like the feel of the wood in my hands, how soft it is after I've run the jack plane over it.

My brother was out a couple of Saturdays in July to do the electrical work and lay pipes.

Then Robbie and I set out to finish the roof.

Jim had to tell him a couple of times to quit showboating. But I swear it was hard to keep from laughing when I'd hear him climbing the ladder whistling the tightrope-artist music from the circus.

The way I figure, the kid would still be.

Thursday, July 26, 1990. Now that we've moved to the roof, Donna stays downstairs. We need her on the ground anyway, so that Dad and I are not always running back and forth along the roof rafters and up and down the ladder fetching things.

Donna warns me about "taking the necessary precautions" everytime I go up. Still

nagging after me. I like being up there. Everything's different from high up.

Dad told me about how natives were often used in high-altitude work like bridge-building and some of the Mohawks from the reserve worked on the bridge and the bank tower.

The way I figure, the kid would.

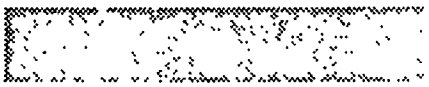
Saturday, July 28, 1990. Dreamed I was walking along the ridge board of the roof with a feather in my hair.

I only asked him to see what his mother wanted on the telephone.

The way I figure.

What if I had told him a 2x6 isn't as wide as he thinks? He would've said, "You could balance this house on six inches, Dad."□

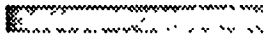
HARDRAW SCAR



The heart acknowledges no other home
than the land of its birth.

Susanna Moodie

HARDRAW SCAR



PART I

i.

THERE is no train running between Staithes and York, England, these days — there hasn't been one since 1958 — so when I left York one morning in mid-October 1990, bound for Staithes where my father was born, it was with my left thumb out, my camera bag strapped over my right shoulder and a U.S. Army-surplus duffle bag at my feet. I carried an old photograph of my grandmother in the breast pocket of my shirt under a used guernsey I picked up in London to keep out the spitting rain and chill. It took a while, but I got a ride that took me from York through Whitby, then up the coast toward Staithes.

The pebbly beaches of Whitby gave way to the limestone cliffs of Runswick Bay and Port Mulgrave. Although from the road the cliffs couldn't be seen nor the North Sea heard, it was easy to imagine their conversation — the water hurtling itself against impervious rock, then being gently tugged back to the sea, leaving behind swirling puddles of brine — the uninterrupted parley of natures: one fluid, one stubborn.

When my driver left me by the side of A-174 and headed north to Grangetown and Middlesborough to inspect iron-making centers, it was after more than an hour of regaling me with tales of whalers and fish-scalers, speaking in an accent I would later be able to identify as mild North Yorkshire. I picked up my bags and walked, watching scraggly sheep graze the fields on either side of me. A second car careening

along the approach into Staithes stopped and I was offered a lift. I thought I'd seen the woman driver before, but knew it was damn-near impossible, and rather than waste conversation over small-worldisms I said nothing.

Cars and lorries traveling the road into Staithes are rudderless cutters riding asphalt waves that rise and fall for a half mile before entering town. I felt sick to my stomach. It was worse than the Thunderbolt at Coney Island. I barely managed to answer my driver after she'd asked why I was headed to Staithes.

"Visiting family."

"Family? And who might that be, if you'll permit my askin'."

"Ann Hardraw."

"Well if that isn't a surprise! Ann's my great-aunt. A Leyburn, as I am. So that must make you Michael Hardy."

I wasn't expecting that and she must have noticed. She continued: "Small town, you know. Ann was extremely happy that her grandbairn was comin' out from America, so word made the round of the pubs. How long are you stayin'?"

"A couple of weeks," I told her, as she squeezed the car through a narrow channel between a pub and several houses before the road stopped. An eggstone crag a hundred feet high rose before us. She made a perfect three-point turn then parallel-parked alongside the seawall.

"Ann lives across the street here," she said, pointing to a house five doors down that faced the ocean. The front door, a narrow, thick oak door with nine small rectangular plate-glass windows, opened directly onto the village's one street, across from which were two park benches, and a fancy iron guardrail to keep people from falling over the seawall and into the harbor. I thanked the driver and fetched my bags out of the

trunk. She smiled, said: "Stand me a pint some time. My name's Marnie," then she waved and walked away.

I stepped out to the wall, built, I learned later, by the proprietor of the Cod and Lobster to protect the street — and the pub — from being swept out to sea. To the north was the sunny side of a scree of cliff jutting out of the Cleveland Hills, separated from the town by the rock-bottom ocean inlet, Roxby Beck, fifty yards wide at its mouth and about two hundred yards long. Hundreds of seagulls had made that side of the cliff their home. It lool ɔd like people had too at one time, but the houses at the base had boarded doors and windows. Except for that, they were replicas of the twenty or thirty homes built alongside the cliff on the west side of town: red pantile and gray slate roofs smeared with guano, no cellars, off-white, almost-jaundiced plaster and chipped stone, heavy wood doors and window panes. Coal smoke was thick in the air.

Staithes is where my father was born. In 1956, he changed his name from Geoffrey Hardraw to Geoffrey Hardy, moved to New York, and shut the door of his Staithes home forever. He died when I was 10, too young to have asked him much about his past.

I hadn't told Marnie the exact truth. I wasn't just visiting my grandmother, I was looking for someone 18 years dead.

ii.

A month and a half earlier, I had been going through some mail in my office at my mother's home on Long Island. Junk and solicitations for the most part, and a letter, air mail, from Staithes. When I opened the envelope, a picture fell out. Faded

from its original black-and-white, it was a mottled mauve. A fold in the left-hand corner had left a crease. I have a copy of this photograph, I thought to myself; it's hidden away, an old memory, like a baseball card of the rookie Thurman Munson, worn, torn and yellowed, in the bottom of a Thom McAn shoebox tucked in the corner of the bedroom closet shelf. This was the same photo, or almost the same. The woman in the photo of my memory was old. Her face more serious. She was standing alone on a pier. But the woman in the photo I'd just received was tall, barely middle-aged. She had black hair, with high cheekbones and dark eyes. In the background, people in motion, but in the frozen half-second of time imprinted on the photograph, they come and go forever, walking suitcase-heavy to never-nearing destinations, determination written on their faces like timetables. There: a man with a train conductor's uniform on. A train station, not a pier. Is the woman leaving, too? No, she's not. I knew because of the story my mother had told me about the photograph. Someone else had left. It's written in the way she's smiling. Her eyes betray her: the eyes so dark, they're mirrors: you see reflected the image of someone in motion. Leaving. What we hide behind smiles. What we disguise so we don't disappoint or hurt others — even when they've hurt us.

When I left for England, I took the photo along. The first time I had seen it was more than 18 years before when my father died. It was 1972. He was 33. He left me some money in a trust I had to wait eight years to touch. A good sum, enough to put me through Columbia, so I can't complain. He left me some of his personals things, too — a ring with his company's logo, a gold fob, a fisherman's cap, a small mining pick and the faded picture, marked in back: *Ann Leyburn Hardraw; at my departure; Staithes, England, 1956.*

I turned the picture over. Nothing. I pulled the letter out of the envelope. It was from Ann Leyburn Hardraw, my grandmother. I hadn't heard from her in years. For most of my life she had been a signature at the bottom of birthday cards, then, a woman in a faded old photograph. Would I write? Why? I hardly knew her. And she wanted me to write "home?" An odd word to describe a place I'd never been. It wasn't my home, but then what was? I looked around the office: a dictionary stand, the book open to "local color" and "Lodi," the pages beginning to tan in the sun, the wood needing dusting in the places the dictionary didn't cover; the computer, my editor's phone numbers at the *Courant* and at home taped to the side of the modem; a poster of Margo Timmins. This wasn't home; it was a room in my mother's place on Long Island, where I worked when I stayed over on weekends if the Yanks were home or I didn't have anything going in the city or my editor didn't want me in Hartford. Still, mother hadn't converted it to a den or a sewing room, so a certain boyhood air remained. The shelves of my old bookcase bent under the weight of fourteen years of reading: *The Phantom Tollbooth, Huckleberry Finn, I The Jury*, Red Smith, Kahn, Kinsella. The posters of Bobby Murcer, Lou Gehrig, and DiMaggio were still

8 sept 90
Staithes, England

Dear Michael,

A young tyke, a writer from America, visit here three year since and give us a nice write-up in his daily, he sent a copy to my niece. I see a picture and yar name above a story on a side called the Yankees. You faver yar dad so much I feel I must write. It took three years, Michael. I wanted to write you but I don't know if tha would even know yar own grandmother. Tha must be so grown now. Tha look good in the story.

Make an old woman happy, son, and write home.

Ann Leyburn Hardraw

up. The glove I played with was in a corner, a bat handle poking out of the glove's wrist strap. The leather was barely worn. This was home, or as close to home as I could have. I hadn't lived there for almost six years and the office-bedroom arrangement was only a season old. Home certainly wasn't my apartment — one room near the East End? And it certainly wasn't some fishing town in god-knows-where, England.

"It is where your father came from, Mike," said my mother, Mary Stuart Hardy, when I told her about the letter. We were sitting across from each other in the nook, warmed by the 7 a.m. sun. I was having a bowl of a cereal I prepare myself from oats, wheat germ, almonds and dried fruits; she was eating pieces of apricot she'd picked out of the bowl between sips of her breakfast tea.

"My father, my father. I didn't even *know* the man," I said. She pulled her hand away from the bowl quickly and sipped her tea. My father, or lack of one, was a subject we did our best to avoid. I resented not knowing him, I resented his being taken away; I thought she had similar feelings, but over the years we'd never come to talk about it. We had neither buried the man nor our feelings of loss.

"This is your chance then, Michael. Write back, make Ann happy. She is blood after all, and ..."

"Yeah, I know. It's thicker than your spaghetti sauce," I said. She tried to feign insult — widened eyes, puffed out cheeks — but it didn't work, I'd caught her smiling. I laughed, she slapped my wrist. It had worked when I was eight. "You're such a brat," she said.

I continued. "So because of this blood thing, she wants me to write 'home.' "

"Exactly. You see, Mike, a small town like Staithes, stuck on the North Sea, people rely on what they feel is sturdy. Ocean storms knock down houses there. Your father

told me a lot about life there. It wasn't easy. So when the elements are against you like that, you look for strength and cling to where you find it."

"That's all fine for them, mom, but I'm not from there."

"But in a sense you are. For all the family you've got there, you're as good as local. A 'homeboy' they say on the streets now, right?"

"Yeah, 'homeboy.' "

"I suspect, too, that Ann is feeling the foundations beneath her beginning to shake — she's looking for that something to cling to. She has no son. She has no husband. She has you. It'd be nice for you to go."

"*Go*?! She's asked me to write, mother; she mentioned nothing about going."

"Ah, she will soon enough. She's never seen her only grandchild — her granbairn, I suspect she'd say — except in that awful picture in the paper. When are you going to get a new one?"

"Oh, who the hell knows. Bureaucracy, mom. And if they change mine they have to change all of them, and you know how old Meri Conley would react to that. She'd die if readers knew how old she was."

"I know, I know." She laughed, then continued: "I think you should write anyway. It's no skin off your back, is it? And you might learn something about your dad." She finished her tea and took her cup away to the sink. She was right really. I knew so little about him, just childhood fantasies knit from a fisherman's cap and a miner's pick and a beautiful dark-haired woman. Mother filled in the gaps when I couldn't remember something, or if an event happened before I was capable of much memory, or even around to remember. She told me no one from his side of the family had come to their wedding, a quiet Episcopal affair at the Stuart home on Long Island, the one she lives

in now; and I knew no one from his side of the family had come to his memorial service, a quiet affair, no casket, no cinders, no crying, not entirely credible either: no corpse.

I knew my father must have written home because I found the odd letter from England lying on his desk. I received occasional cards, and one Christmas a 10-pound note. Regardless, the distance between us was greater than mileage.

—

My earliest memory of my father was of someone in a suit and tie and wings on his lapel. I don't know that I ever saw him out of that uniform. Seeing him was rare anyway. He was gone for what seemed like weeks at a time, up early and out late. He'd come into my bedroom to check on me and sometimes we'd talk — me in a half-sleep, and he, too, I suspect, tired or jet-lagged. I had no real relationship with my father, at least not of the type I wanted.

Dear Grandmother Hardraw,

It was a pleasure receiving your letter, dated Sept. 8, and flattering that you would remember me from a newspaper column. I must admit, however, I am curious as to why communication has been so limited between us; I haven't heard from you since I graduated from high school. But please, let's try again. Perhaps we can get to know one another better this time.

Sincerely,

Michael Hardy

What I wanted most was someone to play catch with, someone who could hit fungoes out to me in the park, teach me how to lean into the ball as I pulled it to left-center. Baseball. That's what I wanted — an American boyhood — nothing short of wearing

the pinstriped uniform of America's team, the Yankees. I tried out for Little League and mostly sat on the bench until our team, the Glen Cove Cougars, had a substantial lead and could afford an out. I could field OK, no worse than Jimmy Rowe, who usually played right field; but I couldn't hit — I might as well have been holding the bat cross-handed.

My father had no time for play. And I don't think he would have known how to play with me if he had had the time. He expected something else from me, and I never knew what it was. To take interest in the things he did maybe, to be a little man. But what we wanted was different. He'd bought into American opportunity and wealth; I'd bought into Saturday afternoons by the radio listening to games broadcast from the stadium. For a brief time in the early '70s, I followed the Pirates passionately, but that ended when their star right-fielder Roberto Clemente died, in the same plane crash that killed my father.

I quit trying to play ball the spring after that, but I didn't leave it. Instead I found a thrill in being able to recreate games. I grew out of my sports uniforms and decided sportswriting fit me better. I pieced together baseball stories for class assignments; when the kids on the block played stickball, I imitated Phil Rizzuto announcing games. I had changed. I saw that people could be writers and sportscasters; they could have fun and even make money doing it. Maybe I saw that my father and I weren't so different. I went to Columbia's Journalism school, wrote for two papers

At 9:22 p.m. December 31, 1972, a four-engine DC-7 piloted by Jerry Hill left San Juan International Airport, Puerto Rico. The plane fell in heavy seas a mile and a half from the Puerto Rican shore. The wreckage was found at 5 p.m., New Year's Day 1973 in one hundred feet of water. There were no signs of Hill, Roberto Clemente, the Pittsburgh Pirate superstar, the third crew member, or the co-pilot.

and on countless innings of minor league ball, until I was called up to Hartford.

My father's dying with Clemente cemented the two in my head forever; my father and baseball, irony of ironies. He was co-pilot of the plane, a DC-7 loaded with money and goods to help earthquake victims in Nicaragua. It crashed in the Caribbean Sea on New Year's Eve when I was 10 years old. There were two other crew members. Clemente was the leader of the relief effort. That my father died a footnote to baseball history was no relief to me. Perhaps my going into sportswriting was an unconscious effort to confront him. I spent much of my free time and used the computer-information access I had at the newspaper working on Clemente and the accident, digging up facts and clues that might shed some light on my father. What I got instead was a readable biography on the Puerto Rican champ. No takers on the book, though, and nothing on my dad.

And now after ten years of not writing me his mother was trying to make amends. I couldn't help but ask why. But I understood my mother at the breakfast table, and asked myself, if Grandmother Hardraw was reaching out to me, why not just go with it? Use the time to find out about dad, I thought. So I wrote. And she wrote back, asking me to visit, as my mother had predicted. More precisely, Ann Hardraw asked me to come home.

Dear Ann,

Thank you so much for the invitation to visit you at home in Staithes. It would be a pleasure to spend time with you, and as you said, would be the perfect opportunity to get to know each other — surely better than letter-writing — and perhaps even, to learn about my father and his time in Staithes.

I've never been to England, and have been meaning to for quite some time — it is after all the land of my forebears.

As it happens, I have a couple of weeks coming to me toward the end of October. If that suits you, I'll be on the next plane over.

Your grandson,

Michael

I said I would make the trip. I had plenty of overtime pay and vacation time coming to me, so time and money were no problem. Plus it would do me some good getting away from work. My writing was in a slump — as bad as the Yankees'. Though it wasn't as simple as my writing reflecting a win or loss on their part. I was trapped. Eight hundred words three times a week for three years. Maybe it doesn't sound so hard, but each of those 2,400 words is read by a good half a million people, two of whom have a direct effect on my life: the editor-in-chief and my agent. I did the unthinkable for a columnist before the All-Star break in July. I wrote an actual game story. Not a tint of color in it, just cliché after cliché. It was a low point. And it came on the day I'd successfully renegotiated my contract with the newspaper. It was not unlike the July 1 game at Comiskey, where Andy Hawkins pitched a no-hitter against the White Sox and still managed to lose the game 4-0. So what is this saying? Only for every high point there is a low; I was at a low, in need of at least an All-Star break. At the end of the season, Don Mattingly observed that it had basically been a waste. "Well, wait a minute," he reflected before concluding: "No. It was a waste." He was only partially right. The lessons of the

Yankees' record Sept. 1990

Date	vs.	Score	Record
Sept. 2	BOS	1-7	58-76
Sept. 3	CAL	0-7	58-77
Sept. 5	CAL	2-1	59-77
Sept. 6	CAL	6-12	59-78
Sept. 8	OAK	2-5	59-79
Sept. 9	OAK	3-7	59-80
Sept. 10	TEX	0-1	59-81
Sept. 11	TEX	5-4	60-81
Sept. 12	TEX	4-5	60-82
Sept. 13	DET	3-7	60-83
Sept. 14	DET	2-5	60-84
Sept. 15	DET	3-4	60-85
Sept. 16	DET	2-5	60-86
Sept. 17	TOR	4-6	60-87
Sept. 18	TOR	2-3	60-88
Sept. 19	TOR	6-7	60-89
Sept. 20	CLE	7-12	60-90
Sept. 21	BOS	0-3	60-91
Sept. 22	BOS	5-2	61-91
Sept. 23	BOS	5-4	62-91
Sept. 24	BAL	3-6	62-92
Sept. 25	BAL	15-3	63-92
Sept. 26	BAL	4-2	64-92
Sept. 28	MIL	7-2	65-92
Sept. 29	MIL	1-8	65-93
Sept. 30	MIL	7-2	66-93

Yankee's miserable season were not wasted on the team or me, and in each case would be used the next spring — after a winter of rebuilding, the Yankees in the Florida sun; me in the damp of the North Sea wind. But what were the lessons I could learn in England? Would I be tempted to echo Mattingly? What was there — in the past, in England, in my father — that my grandmother could give me?

iii.

I visited London on my first day and while trying to cross to the Tower Bridge nearly got run over by a motorcade for Princess Anne. I fulfilled my obligations as a tourist (the Palace, the Bridge, the requisite circuses and squares and stations). Near Picadilly Circus I found a pub where I took a liking to Double Diamond ale. At the station, I inquired about trains to Staithes, only to discover I wasn't the only one who didn't know much about the town. After a search through a few maps and train schedules, it was suggested I take a train through Peterborough and Doncaster to York, then pray someone in town might be headed north to Whitby or along the coast to Staithes.

Having a couple of days before I was expected, however, I took a bus to Cambridge, where I looked up Jack Tolan, a New Yorker on exchange at the university, who'd been the first Yank to keep goal for their soccer team. I interviewed him for a piece I hoped to file with *Newsday*, the *Courant*'s sister paper.

I amused myself in a few record and book stores. I took in a tour of the Fitzwilliam Museum, home to a rich collection of Turners. One watercolor in particular struck me: "Hardraw Force near Hawes in Wensleydale," painted around 1816. Not very large, only a foot by a foot-and-a-half, it depicted a waterfall tucked in a horseshoe-shaped

glen formed by a set of cliffs. That we shared a name was not lost on me and I determined to ask my grandmother what she knew of the place.

—

I watched my driver, Marnie, walk away, then I stepped out from behind her car near the seawall and went up to knock at Ann's door. I peeked into the bay window at its right.

It wasn't Ann who answered, but a woman who in her excitement almost forgot to introduce herself as my father's aunt. "Cum in, cum in," she said, pulling me into the front room. "Ann an' Ah, we been waitin' on yar'rival. Yar trip good? Will tha 'ave some tea? Ann's in'er bed-rume, shoo'll be doown soon ennugh." She shuttled off to the kitchen, turned back at the door and said, "Almost forget mahsell — Ah'm Joan 'Ardraw, yar grandfather's sister."

"Well it's good to meet you Aunt Joan," I replied as I took a seat.

Soon enough though, I heard a slow soft scraping of slippers against the hardwood stairs and I rose to meet my grandmother. Ann Leyburn Hardraw's black hair was now gray, though not the blue-gray of bingo-playing retirees: It reminded me of the color on the horizon where sky and sea meet. Her eyes were as sharp as her cheekbones; her smile was a true one.

"Aah, Michael, tha've come! Joan, look who's darkened t'door! It's my granbairn's come 'ome. Michael it's such a pleasure to see tha," she said, as she walked toward me slowly, but with as much haste as she could. She took my hands in hers, and pulled me down to kiss her.

The rest of the afternoon was spent small-chatting over tea and biscuits: What did I do exactly, and how did it differ from reporting, how did the newspaper operate, how long was I staying, would I have more tea (Joan's question), where was Hartford, was I paid well, if I wasn't married surely there was a girl, what did I think of the scones Joan had prepared (Ann's), how was my mother, did I really get paid to watch grown men play a game ... ?

Joan, who had moved in with Ann about five years earlier, made dinner, a kind of shepherd's pie but with fresh North Sea salmon, and a homemade chutney.

At first it was difficult understanding the two — they pitched rapid-fire fastball questions at me in accented English — but as the evening came on, I grew more comfortable with the Yorkshire — earthy nouns that spring from the moors themselves and verbs that resonate with the motion of the sea.

While Joan was cleaning after the meal, Ann and I chatted. Grandmother Hardraw wrapped herself in an afghan on the chesterfield. She asked me to make her a drink. As I poured us each a brandy, she asked me about my childhood and her son. I didn't know what to say. What was I supposed to do: Tell her he spent so little time at home I hardly knew him? Or was this even true? Had I for the last eighteen years blocked him out of any recollection, or had my memory consciously or unconsciously changed the details? We only remember what we want to remember. I don't remember dad dying.

I offered her the drink then sat on an over-stuffed chair near the couch and said: "There are gaps in my memory at that point, Ann. I can remember the year before he died, a baseball team I liked, and I can remember President Nixon talking on TV, but dad, I don't remember much about. He spent a lot of time away from home, and when

he was home I couldn't bother him to play ball. He wanted me to be quiet and play with the model planes he bought me or to be reading something."

Ann broke the silence. "He was a serious boy after his father died."

Henry (her husband, my grandfather, dead 40-odd years) had this idea that the town — the mines in particular — would eventually kill him, she said. "Geoffrey favored his dad that way — probably the only way. He certainly didn't look like him. Took after the Leyburn in him. Like mah grandniece, Marnie. A good lass she is, a strong woman. Not afraid to say what's on her mind and she had the wherewit'all to come back here. If you haven't met her yet, Michael, you should think on it."

"Ah mum, no time for that."

"It'd be time well-spent, Michael. Shoo's a good lass."

"I don't doubt that, Ann, but you've changed the subject."

"Ah have, 'aven't Ah? We're talkin' 'bout your father. Don't get me wrong about him. Leavin' home is not a sign of weakness of any kind It took a lot of faith that he'd find somethin' — life and love — in a new country.

"He was single-minded in his ambition. Single-minded in everythin' he did if truth be told. I remember him readin' children's picture books on the Great War. This was about the time of the Second War, yes, it was, we buried Henry a year later. So it was the first one that attracted him. He was overwhelmed by the Red Baron, Rickenbaker, all the flyers. He so badly wanted a model for his bairthday.

"I couldn't understand the boy's fascination, but I knew the only way to stop his pesterin' was to buy him the plane kit.

"I couldn't get him out of his room after that. Busy all the day he was — buildin', gluin', paintin', and then for hours just starin' at it 'angin' near his window.

"Later, I bought him books on the war. He never cracked a one. And I found for him patches from some of the soldiers. In a box they went. Not even looked at. It dawned on me then it was the planes. He wanted to fly."

She stopped, took a sip of her drink and put the glass back on the table. The tip of her tongue traced her lips. She reached for the glass again and had another drink. "This is fine," she said. "Fine. Sometime we should go up to the Royal Oak, the two of us for a real drink."

"No problem, Ann. You know I'd do anything for you."

"I will take you up on that, Michael, I will."

I didn't know what she meant and looked at her with a question mark wrinkled into my forehead, but she ignored it. She went back to her story. My father would have flown away from Staithes if he could have, she said, and, now, she couldn't blame him. The sea had done in his grandfather, the mines his father. It was only natural he should look to the sky.

There were only two bedrooms in the house, and though Ann offered me the chesterfield in the living room I declined: Two weeks sleeping scrunched on a couch didn't appeal to me.

"I know that it's not an inconvenience, so I'm not saying that I don't want to be a bother, but it would be easier on us all if I just take a room up the street," I said. Ann and Joan were doing a good job trying to convince me to stay.

"This'll give me a chance to get to know some of the others in town," I said, "and besides, it's closer to the pub." With that I took up my bags, and winked at my hostesses. Joan was smiling, Ann was shaking her head.

"Ah can see where tha get some habits already," she said. I promised to see them

the next morning.

—

I took a room in a bed-and-breakfast owned by Charles and Sharon Preston, up the street toward the center and across from the other pub in town, the Royal Oak, where I had a pint and a whiskey before going to bed.

The bartender, Jules, placed them before me. "T'is on Miss Leyburn," he said.

I recognized the name as Ann's family name, but didn't know who the 'miss' was he was referring to.

"Miss Leyburn," he repeated, "t'owner."

"Tell her thanks, Jules, but I should pay for it. Hell, I don't even know who the owner is."

He crossed his arms in front of his chest and leaned onto the bar. A cloth rag draped his right shoulder. "Not ev'ry day Marnie buys a man a drink. Ah'd take it."

I made the connection. My driver was the owner. She, the one who told me to buy *her* a drink. Accepting this drink would mean I'd owe her two. "Where is Miss Leyburn, so I can thank her?"

"Not 'ere now, sir. Tol'me to put t'American's drinks on 'er tab toneet."

"Well, Jules, when you see her tell her the 'American's' obliged."

"Sur'nough, sir."

iv.

"Ah'm sick, Michael," Ann said. "Ah've been sick a few month now, since t'fore

end of the year." It was Wednesday morning of my first week; the two of us were in the living room after having had breakfast. Pains in her back prevented her from sitting for long periods, she said, but the pain kept her from remaining on her back for very long as well. Joan or I had to help move her and adjust her pillows twice an hour.

"Mah time is neear up Ah'd say, but Ah've got things Ah need to do first. Ah've got a list longer than Cowbairn Nab is high," she said. I told her surely she must be proud of what she'd done in her life.

"Sure, sure, Ah am. Less proud maybe of mah letter-writin'. Ah can't say as Ah done that so well. Ah'm sorry Ah didn't keep it up."

"Oh jeez Ann, there's nothing to be sorry about. I'm here, aren't I?"

"Yes, you are. At least now Ah'll get to know the last of the 'Ardraws before Ah die."

I obliged her the wish, visited daily, and we talked over tea and scones, or milk and biscuits, whatever Joan cooked up. But the visits weren't just my fulfilling her desire to get to know her grandson; I liked Ann, and I felt bad for not having known her better earlier. She asked many questions about me, though I tried, and succeeded for brief periods, to turn the conversation to her and my father. I couldn't imagine him growing up here. He wasn't the sea type, or at least I didn't remember him as such. I asked about family history, who these people were and how they lived here and for how long, and I felt the questions wouldn't stop until I asked the big one: Why had my father left?

Thursday, I took some of the items my father had left me, and a cassette recorder also, so that when the souvenirs of his past took Ann into her own, I could keep her recollections on tape. We sat in her bedroom, where she was most comfortable. It was

the larger of the bedrooms, though small by Long Island standards. In it were her bed, a wooden four-poster with several layers of blankets and a large knitted afghan; a low-standing bureau with a mirror; a nightstand with lamp and a carved wooden box; and a rocking chair near the bedroom window.

I sat in the chair, placed the tape recorder between us, and let her take me through time.

"When your grandfather Henry left for wark in t'morn', I'd step out to the street and see him off. Was quiet that time of day, the sun barely up, the smell of coal dust heavy in the air, smoke risin' out of the chimney."

While she talked, I looked out the bedroom window. I watched a feather of smoke from the Cod and Lobster rise straight up and I imagined myself rising over town on the plume, as if Ann's retelling of the story was a rewriting of it and I was living its history ...

I see the steep incline of the one street leading in and out of town flatten. The weather-beaten look of the plaster walls and clay roofs softens and the dirty white wool of sheep mutes the yellow-green grass of the fields they graze. Nothing seems as clear here as it does at sea-level. Perhaps it is the thinning air, or the smoke. I am five or six miles out of town, near the potash mines where my grandfather works and which will be the death of him. I see my grandfather, Henry James Hardraw, digging and chipping rock, searching for crystals that will be taken by lorry to York, where someone will use them to manufacture soap or potassium salts. Ten hours a day six days a week. He'll die early. In his thirties. If it isn't an accident with a lorry, it will be sulfate in his lungs, or the longing.

I see Henry at home, watch him sup with Ann and a boy. The boy looks like me when I was young, but I know it's my father, Geoffrey. Later that night, the boy hears his father and

mother talking about leaving Staithes. He feels he shouldn't be hearing this — as if it were forbidden: Why would his father want to leave home? To Geoffrey, life in Staithes has been eight years of gambols among sheep, runs along mountain paths with the other boys, tricks played on old men leaving the Cod and Lobster pub when it closes for three hours after lunchtime, fortresses made of overturned rowboats and fish nets. But he hears the answer from his father, who rejected the sea life of those who came before him for 500 years, and whose want for a life in York or Manchester or London are buried in a potash mine. It is not the aspirations that will kill him; it is the failure to live them, to leave this town-by-the-cliff, this cliff-by-the-sea, Henry Hardraw tells his wife.

" 'Enry, 'Enry, thou 'ad a rough warkday; sleep now an' we sha speak i't'morn'," she says. She shuts off the gaslight, lies there hoping Henry will forget the pain. Sleep comes hard to Geoffrey ... .

v.

The more I talked with Ann, Joan and others the more I realized I'd be overstaying my two weeks. I wrote home, and also faxed my boss explaining I'd be staying longer. I said I'd send him a couple of "post-season think pieces," though I'd already given up trying to put together the story for *Newsday* — I didn't know where to begin. I arranged a deal with the Prestons to do minor work about the house in exchange for the room, thus cutting down on my major expense. Except for cutting my hand — a deep slice, really — which I did while scaling fish, the deal went well.

I established a routine early on, and my days ran something like this:

6:30 a.m.: Wake-up knock from the Prestons' oldest boy, Matthew.

6:45 - 7:30/7:45 a.m.: Brisk walk on the ridge along the Cleveland Mountains, or a run of 10 to 15 kilometres.

7:45 - 8:15 a.m.: Breakfast with Chip and Sharon, the children and any guests that might have spent the night.

8:15 - 9:45 a.m.: Work for Prestons.

9:45 - 11:45 a.m.: Writing.

11:50 a.m. - 2 p.m.: Lunch at the Royal Oak and a chat with locals, especially anyone who might remember my dad.

2 p.m. - 5 p.m.: Interviews with my grandmother, Aunt Joan, locals; or some reading — local history, biographies, census abstracts.

5 p.m.: Dinner and the evening at the Royal Oak with locals.

It hadn't taken long before I was a regular in the Royal Oak. Jules knew enough to draw a pint of bitter and set it alongside a double shot of Glenmorangie single malt before I opened my mouth to say "good day."

Usually Marnie was at a table by the window when I came in at lunch, working the books, keeping inventory, preparing orders for the coming week and joking with the patrons. She was an attractive woman, reminding me of the Ann in my photo, with her midnight-black hair and sloe-colored eyes.

My fourth day, a Friday, I rented a black '78 Morris Marina with a manual choke and clutch, and once I figured out how to handle the stick with my left hand I drove to York, where I visited Yorkminster, walked along the remaining portions of the walled city, and ate fish and chips. By the time I got around to the National Railway Museum it was closed for the day, so I made a mental note to return to see it. I remembered the photograph, the train depot. I would have to ask Ann about that. But I'd have to

build up to it, I thought; there was much to know about my father's youth first.

On that first Friday, when I returned to Staithes about eight in the evening, the Royal Oak was half-full. Marnie was at her table, without her work, but with a man and woman, the three of them teasing two young couples who were throwing darts. I had my shot of whisky at the bar and turned to face the group — as far as I could tell they were the only people in town my age.

"Join us, 'Ardraw," one of the men shouted before lancing a dart at the wallboard. It was unexpected. Hearing that surname used in address put me outside of myself for a moment — in a half-lit and smoky pub, watching friends play darts: A young man walking from the bar with a pint to sit at a window table with a couple and a pretty woman with short coal black hair, full lips, soft angular features and a dusty smile in her eyes.

"Well, 'Ardraw, what'll i'be? Tha gooan till join us?" The name draws me back to the pub. No one'd ever called me that before. Hardraw. It was like being called home. I walked over to the table by the window.

"I hope you enjoyed the drink, Mr. Hardy." Her voice warmed me. Just a trace of the Yorkshire hills rolling off her tongue. She gripped my hand in hers as if we were family members long separated.

"Yes, yes, I've been meaning to thank you. And please, call me Michael. It's not like I'm a stranger."

"That is true, isn't it? Your family is very much a part of this town."

"So my grandmother says. She has a helluva memory for as old as she is," I said.

"That would be the Leyburn in her — that memory. She's my aunt, as I told you in the car. A great-aunt really. She's the sister of my grandfather, Henry Leyburn Jr."

I pointed out to her their physical similarities. Marnie said that was the Leyburn in *her*, and we laughed. We talked about the town a bit, her family. I told her I wanted to use my time in England to get to know more about my own. We drank more bitter and scotch whisky, played darts. She told me her grandfather was a local who could count five or six generations of ancestors in Staithes before having to consult a genealogical chart for the remaining 400 years of family members.

"You don't find many of those any more," I said.

"In Staithes? You'd be surprised," she answered. "A lot more history than in the States, you know. We've got a few hundred years on you," she joked.

"That much more to remember. A mind can only hold so much trivia, Marnie."

"Trivia? You meet Henry and talk to him, then you come back and tell me what's trivia," she said. And we agreed that I would — the next day out on the quay, then lunch at the Royal Oak. Marnie and I talked until everyone had left and we'd locked up the house.

"You're a good man, Hardraw, with a sharp mind and a good heart."

"Kind of you to say to a stranger, Marnie."

"Ah! What kind of stranger? We're darn near family, we are. You said it yourself. And tomorn you meet my grandfather. He'll tell you."

It was cool outside as we stood in front of the pub. The sea spray fell in a drizzle; a rainbow framed the moon and the light of the town's only streetlamp. "Well, goodnight Marnie," I said. I leaned to kiss her on the cheek, but she took my hand, drew me to her and pressed her lips to mine. She backed up a few steps, smiled, and raised her right hand slightly as she mouthed bye. I walked across the street to the Prestons', not really sure how I felt about what had just happened. Excited, a little; I was attracted

to her. Confused, certainly; I hadn't gone to Staithes expecting an affair of any kind. My room was stuffy so I opened the window. A gentle breeze wafted in carrying on it a salty reminder of where I was, but it was the memory of Marnie's perfume that I took with me to sleep.

—

I am shoveling coal into a stove in the kitchen of a house I've never been in before though I know where the bin is and I know how to work the flue, jiggling the handle and turning it just slightly to the right to open the passage and let out the smoke.

"Ah's dun, mum," my voice says, and I realize it's not me at all.

"Good, Geoffrey, now off to bed wi'tha," she says.

I see the boy Geoffrey standing in his pajamas in the shadow of the door of his room, listening to his father and mother talking downstairs. His father worked late again tonight. He coughs a lot as he eats the dinner Mother kept warm. The mine is no good for him, Henry says. The work is weakening him day by day, he can feel it. His shoulders and back are tight. His breathing is clipped. Geoffrey is struck by the words his father is speaking, more than what he is saying. Wark, to ache, to work. It's the same thing.

"T'day is nigh Ann, Ah can see it cleyr as Ah feel t'wark i'mah back. Ah's fair pow-fagged. Theer's only so many fish i't'sea an' theer's only 'at much potash i't'grund. Ah dooan't wish to die warkin' fer t'last crystal. We 'ave to leave before we dies of 'unger, Ann. We got to leave while t'leavin's good."

Ann Hardraw sits across her husband at the small oak kitchen table running her index finger along the scratches in the top. Strands of white salt her black hair; her ebony eyes darken

as she says to Henry: "This 'ere is mah 'ome, 'Enry. It 'asn't been owt but kind."

—

The old man, hands in his coat pockets, his cap low on his head, stood against the iron guardrail facing the ocean. I went over to talk with him.

"There were 'un'reds o' cobles i't'arbour nut many yers ago," said Henry Leyburn Jr., who despite his age had kept the black hair of his youth. He had the same glimmer in his eyes, a reflection of the sun, spread out, rosy and low in the sky, its light skimming the sea before which we stood.

"Where have all the boats gone to, then?" I asked.

"To Whitby," he said, "to Whitby like 'at Captain Cook."

And with the boats went the people. He turned his back to the sea and pointed to the homes built into the cliffs. He counted aloud the num-

The population of North Yorkshire rose by 4.2 per cent between 1981 and 1987 to just over 700,000 — 84.9 persons per square kilometer. In 1987, there were 11.6 live births per 1,000, and 11.7 deaths per 1,000.

Three-quarters of the population was between the ages six and sixty-four. The rest broke down as follows:

- Over 75, 7.6 per cent;
- 65-74, 12.1 per cent;
- Under 5, 5.7 per cent.

More and more students were apparently encouraged to remain in school: The percentage of pupils aged sixteen who stayed on rose 6 per cent from 62 per cent in 1981 to 68 per cent in 1987, the latest figures available.

Ten per cent of the population was self-employed; 22 per cent was in distribution, hotels, catering and repairs; 4 per cent in energy and water supply.

Unemployment was 7 per cent.

The figures don't say whether these are a percentage of the total population or the work-age population. If it is of the work force, 57 per cent is unaccounted for. Most probably in the fishing industry, mining and related occupations, or agriculture, which in 1987 accounted for less than 2 per cent of the gross domestic product.

ber of them that were empty or for sale.

The major employer, Henry told me, was the potash mine. Few still fished because of the pollution from the natural gas drilling and competition from huge Danish trawlers. Some of the people, especially those who lived atop the hill, did some light farming or raised sheep. Still others managed the gift shop, the newsstand and the two pubs. There were also four bed-and-breakfasts. It didn't amount to many jobs. His own children had left long ago as my father had, to find employment elsewhere. His granddaughter, Marnie, who'd introduced us, had come home to manage the Royal Oak. Now she was part-owner. She also handled the town's books. What she'd done — leave, and come back — was unheard of.

When he was younger, he'd helped build some of the houses that lined the cliff. He had been living in one of them, two doors up from the Cod and Lobster, on January 31, 1953, when the North Sea took its vengeance on the pub and washed it away — kitchen, scullery and two bedrooms — for the third time.

But the pub was put up again. The houses as well. The people of Staithes, by the act of rebuilding, were defying the sea, proclaiming the cliffs as theirs, as those before them had done.

Independence was a feature of the townfolk, he said, holding up his granddaughter as an example. She had returned to Staithes, bucked the system and turned the Royal Oak into a free house — untied to a single brewery. As if on cue, we turned toward the pub and lunch. Though I knew he had, I asked him if he'd known my grandfather.

"It's your grandfather wedded mah sister Annie, but tha knows that. Aye, but Ah knows 'im from a ways before Annie. Ah knows your grandfather and your father — and your gret-grandfather too, but that was yers ago as 'e died i't'first storm to

knock down t'Cod an' Lobster.

"Your grandfather 'Enry and Ah — we was booath named after t'same tyke, tha knaws, mah father and the old tar 'Ardraw were best friends. We schooiled tally, catchin' tiddlers i'jam-jars and sich before we was of age to wark sortin' and cleanin' t'fish t'men caught, washin' out and scrubbin' down t'cobles and beetin' their nets.

"Your grandfather's mum would 'ave neea part of 'is fishin' though. 'T'sea takes mah 'usband, it shan't 'ave mah son,' she says, and she sends 'im off to mine t'potash. God 'elp me, 'e'd a managed better off t'ocean. But if tha dooan't knaws it now, tha'll see: 'Ardraws drew no luck i' their nets."

vi.

Chip Preston introduced me to the legend of the pirates. He served me a salmon pie and a salad one night, then started back for the kitchen. I asked him to join me at the table. "Too much runnin' around, Chip. Sit down a while." He did, and Sharon came along after she'd put their children to bed. The Prestons were in their mid-30s, married six years. From Birmingham in the Midlands, miles south of Staithes, they'd become sick of the city life and had no wish to raise a family in the pollution and crime of a city that size. So they'd moved to Staithes, bought the

Salmon Pie

2 med. potatoes, peeled, cubed
1 med. onion, chopped fine
4 T. butter
1 lb. fresh salmon meat, deboned, flaked
3-4 T. hot milk
salt, pepper to taste
2 pie crusts (top and bottom)

Cook potatoes and onions together. Mash, adding butter. Make smooth. Add salmon, milk, salt, pepper. Spoon into bottom crust, add top crust and seal. Brush top with milk, sprinkle with paprika. Bake at 400 for 10 minutes. Reduce to 350 and bake another 45 minutes.

duplex and renovated it into a bed-and-breakfast, serving dinners to the public three nights a week. Chip prepared most of the meals; Sharon was the pastry chef (and it was she that had bandaged the cut on my hand).

"It hasn't been easy, that's for certain, Mike. There've been times when I've wanted to pack it all up and go back," Sharon said.

Chip finished off the thought: "But we couldn't — we'd have been unfaithful to a life's ambitions were we to do that. This is home and — "

" — this is where we'll stay," Sharon said. "And it's not like there aren't amenities. We have electricity — there's a couple tellys in town; we've got our friends, and the children have theirs."

"And there's enough boys to side a rugby team," Chip said.

I asked them about Staithes history. They said legend was that the original settlers were members of a French fishing and navigational crew that the North Sea had thrown up on the shores beneath the Clevelands some time after the Hundred Years' War. Two or three generations of the French made a living as pirates and smugglers, running booze and packages up the coast, holing up here and there, hiding their goods in the nabs and scars along the coast or in the cellars of the early homes there. There were families in town, Chip said, who could show you playing cards and spinning wheels that were part of the smugglers' kitty. Better yet, he said, the Brakespears down the street still had in their possession a musket owned by a dragoon stationed in Staithes to patrol the coast against smugglers in 1775. The king had stationed four of them in town, and evidence of their effectiveness is that the smuggling continued for decades after they were originally commissioned there. The descendants of the smugglers took on more legitimate occupations — fishing, farming, raising sheep, managing markets.

Life was simple and hard, Chip said, "and like today, not everyone thought of leavin'."

—

Ann and I were talking in her bedroom. 'I was up, sitting in Henry's rocker chair by the bedroom window, the very one you're in now. The baby Kate was snoozlin' to its titty, nursin'; Henry was sleepin' the sleep of a boy half his age. Geoffrey, just two or three at the time, was in his bed in the other room. Outside, it was perfectly still but for the lappin' of the ocean. Not a gull cry, not a dog bark. The moon she was full, and the light she cast was a sheet of silver on the Sea. The light that came in through the window shone on my Katie's face, she with her eyes closed, her hand made up in a l'il fist on my breast. She was as beautiful and quiet as the summer night she was born under. I was so happy then. We was young, and life was sweet and full of the promise of a robin. When someone says life in Staithes is good, it's a quiet night they's thinkin' of — when the ocean's rhythms lull you to sleep and the moon's the watchman's lamp of God."

Ann stopped, asked that I fix a pillow for her and help her sit up straighter. Then she took a sip of water and continued: "My Kate died not many nights after. In her crib. I found her there, still, at cocklight. To this day I can describe that morn for you. Like a painting I seen once in the museum at Whitby — all waves and circles, as if my entire world was spinnin' about me.

"The babies they died so young then. Only the fighters lasted. It was hard on me, but Henry was good, and Geoffrey, poor Geoffrey, he was too young, I think, to know or to remember. She was a light, you know, two weeks of summer light in my life."

She reached for her water again. I asked if she wanted to stop until the next day. She said, yes, "tomorn."

PART II

i.

"I'm here by choice," Marnie said. "I was born here and left and came back." We were walking along the Cleveland Way, headed north away from town. She had joined me on a few of my nightly walks. I did nothing to discourage her. In fact, I may have encouraged her.

This was a Saturday evening in mid-November just as night was calling everyone in. I had asked her why she hadn't stayed in the city after finishing at the London School of Economics.

"This is my home, Michael."

"But home can be anywhere, Marnie. It's anywhere you hang your hat."

She smiled. "Well, yes, for some this is true." We stopped walking and turned to face the ocean. It was a new moon; we couldn't see the water, but by the sound of it we knew that the tide was out.

We were silent for some time. Just standing there, listening.

"Those same waves brought our families here years and years ago, Michael. Night after night, I fell asleep listening to them, and it was listening to the voices of everyone I'd ever known in my family, their laughter, their songs, but their tears and hardships, too. And morning after morning when I woke up, my folks were there, 'Mornin', Marnie. G'mornin', Marnie.' But there's no ocean in London. There was no one to say 'G'mornin'. There was just the Thames.

"Some nights after classes I'd walk down Lancaster Place to the Waterloo Bridge or Savoy Street to the Embankment Gardens and walk about and just listen to the river near me. Quiet, as quiet as a mouse I'd be, just to listen, hopin' it would say something to me. And you know what I heard? Nothin' but buses and automobiles and whistles and sirens and noise, Michael; noise. But I took consolation in knowing the river led to the ocean. Because I knew that was where I would go. I had to come back."

We stopped in the pub when we got back from the walk. "Storm Front" was playing on the jukebox and it made me think of another Billy Joel song.

'He grew up not far from me, did you know that? Anyway, the line goes: 'May it always be the same as we recall.' But as much as I think about that line, I find it's difficult to accomplish. More and more I can't deal with the fact that home no longer is home. The school, the church, the playground, everything's changed. Except for my mother, nothing at home is as I recall. The neighbors have either died or moved, their

houses owned by record-store chain owners and Michael Milken clones. The home of my memory is changing and it's hard dealing with that. I'd like it frozen, but it won't be. I wish it would stay like the photograph of it I have in my head, but it can't."

"You think it'll be different here? You'll find something resembling that photo in your head?"

"Yes."

"Ahh, Michael." She ran her fingers up the back of my neck and through my hair, stopping and coming back to rest at the nape. She leaned forward and kissed me gently on the lips. "Michael. Home is where you come from, not where you are."

"I come from here, Marnie — "

"In a way, Michael, you are a local. But you — "

" — decided to stay here. I want to make this my home."

"But what will you do? The Yankees don't play Loftus, and you can't bloody well cover cricket."

"I'm not just a sportswriter, Marnie, I'm a *writer*. I have short stories I've been working on, or I can collect my columns."

"Is this realistic? Have you written anything since you've been here? This isn't anything you should jump into, Michael."

"I'm not jumping into anything. I've thought this out. I want to stay here."

She smiled slightly. She didn't respond the way I expected or wanted her to. I opted not to tell her then what else I was thinking — about us, the possibility of staying here with her. A minute passed, and she answered: "Think of what you're sayin', Michael, and think of what you want." She put her finger to my lips. "No, no, don't say anythin'. Just make sure you know what you're doin'."

And I thought I did. I had at that point been in Staithes a month. I was in touch with the paper, with my own editor and those on the national and features desks. I suggested a couple of off-beat travel pieces: washrooms in Bath, and a walk through Sherwood Forest with the foremost Robin Hood scholar at King's College. But they weren't interested in either. Next thing I knew storefronts were decked in their Christmas finery. Whenever Marnie had a free moment, we were together; sometimes that was to join me on interviews or combing through family documents in York and Northallerton. At other times we worked at the pub. I helped her plan parties, cater a wedding and a couple of funerals. The longer I stayed and the more I saw of Marnie, the more, the longer, I wanted to stay.

I was falling in love with her. I never would have thought it possible — love, to me, was something that grew on you the way a ball glove fits to your hand. It's awkward at first, tight, but eventually the fit is perfect, natural, as if it had always been. It wasn't like that with her. Initially I resisted it; there wasn't any point getting involved if I was leaving, I had thought, but she washed over me like high tide — her openness, her sense of place and belonging — and, like my grandmother, Joan and Henry, like the town of Staithes itself, had welcomed me and accepted me, in a manner and with a depth I hadn't even felt in New York. I let it sweep over me; come low tide I was no longer standing on the beach.

—

Geoffrey's dream the night of his father's funeral is of a plane landing on the Cleveland

Way. It waits for him, to take him somewhere far away, out of the shadow of the cliff, out of earshot of ocean thunder, out of sight of the mines.

It's the smell of toast that stirs Geoffrey from his sleep. He is warm beneath his sheet and quilts, the ends of which are tucked tightly around him and over his head, so his sleeping figure resembles a cocoon. It's a wonder that the smell of the toast reaches him with his head beneath his blankets, but it's no surprise really. This is the way he wakes every morning. Slowly, so as to not let too much of the frigid January air in, Geoffrey pokes his head out and sleepily looks toward the weak stream of gaslight rising up the stairs from the kitchen. He hears the light shuffling of feet, one step, two step, stop, that's mother preparing father's lunch. He waits, then he hears the comfort of the litanous murmur: His father: "Over 'ard?" His mother: "As usual, deear." Father: "An' tha coffee? 'Ow is it tha want 'at again?" Geoffrey can just see his father smiling, can just imagine his mother rolling her eyes, cheeks blown out, letting the air out slowly, and saying, "Ah'll 'ave it wi'milk this mornin'." One step, two step, stop, Henry carrying breakfast plates to the table. Then the morning is quiet. The silence broken only by a knife scraping against a plate, a mug being placed on the oak table, a chair pushed along the floor as one by one, first mother then father, rises from the table. Morning silence is good silence, Geoffrey thinks. It's that buffer between dreamy night and dreary day, when the body is still warm and the mind still hazy, before the body and mind are jarred by the cold and noisy sea, knocked out by work.

Matthew Preston knocked at the door. I pushed away my sheets and the continental quilt and got up. I smelled toast. Chip and Sharon had already started breakfast.

—

Sitting in the genealogical section of the public library one afternoon, I became quite conscious of the inextricables in my life — my writing, baseball, my mother, and now, Marnie, Ann and my family. I took a look around the archives: three other men, a woman, all in their mid-50s or older; the endless sea of three-by-five family fact cards; the books, the dust, the yellow-white light streaking in through the ivy that covered the wall and window outside, casting odd shadow-patterns on the tables. It was a very old room, with ornate woodworking for the door and window frames, layer after layer of stain and wood have been worn away from the tables and chairs — as if the people scraping at their family trees were stripping away the years of the wood in their seats as well. A curious metaphor the tree is for genealogy. It's more like a fan opening and closing on itself. Or a photograph of a giant oak tree reflected in a slow-moving river where the bottom of the photo can hardly be told apart from the top.

When you're researching family, you start at the first generation. That's you. The second is your parents. The third tier their parents, and so on. The doubling, the branching out, is the trick: By my calculations, in 1630 in Staithes and Whitby and north to Loftus and Redcar, there were 512 different people whose couplings and children's children's children were responsible for me. It makes me think that if I keep going back from that tenth generation, I'd have 18,384 ancestors in 1540 and 73,536 in 1500. With that kind of math, no one would know *anyone* from Adam. I knew it wasn't possible to look at it that way, so I pared down, looked at the branches. Start with one couple ten generations back. They have two children. Each of those children gets married and has a few children, who marry and have their children. The chart, if I started with them and moved forward, would balloon out forever, its repercussions continuously felt, the chart (top and bottom) now resembling a mushroom cloud. The ever imploding and

exploding nuclear family.

It was frustrating: the careful reading of lists, the slow coming together of information. How much family history could I actually learn in that room, from those ghosts? All those names, all the dates, blurring past my eyes like a microfilm reader on rewind. I charted out family members with their dates of birth and death. I cross-referenced against famous personages to see who was named after whom. A George, a William (though probably after his father and not the King), and a Victor, named, I presumed, for the Queen. A couple of Elizabeths, two Marys — but those were common names even now — and the dates didn't coincide with the reigning monarchs they could have been named after. One was named Mary Evans, however, and that amused me. My Mary Evans, however, was fifteen years older than the other Mary Evans, George Eliot.

Gleaning nothing from the books was particularly distressing because names and numbers were my life and work. Making sense of stats was so much a part of my boyhood and any baseball columnist's background, as second nature as the ribbed feel of the stitching on a baseball resting in a palm is to Nolan Ryan. But the rest of my work and my columns are anecdote — legend and story passed from writer to writer — Lardner to Runyon to Rice.

I felt I needed something more tangible, something to touch, a tombstone maybe, a connection between my fingers tracing the etching of a name and the person lying beneath me. As if the dust they had returned to had a solid silent partner in the slab in front of which I knelt. I felt no such tie with the people on paper.

Name/Birth/Death	Place	Married	Name/Birth/Death	Place
Michael Hardy 1962 -	N.Y.			
Geoffrey J Hardy 1938-1972	Staithes	1961	Mary Alleyn Stuart 1942 -	N.Y.
Henry James 1907-48	Staithes	1935	Ann Leyburn 1912 -	Staithes
James Victor 1873-1910	Staithes	1903	Margaret Seymourd-Ward 1885-1955	Middlesborough
Victor Alleyn 1855-1907	Staithes	1873	Juliet Leaky 1854-1907	Loftus
William Scoresby Jr. 1826-69	Staithes	1854	Eugenie Alleyn 1837-1893	Northallerton
		1852	Nancy Brighton 1830-53	Middlesborough
William Scoresby 1803-60	Staithes	1824	Mary Evans 1804-1869	Staithes
George Michael 1774-1825	Staithes	1796	Beatrice Cleveland 1773-1826	Whitby
Edward Hardraw 1742 1810	Staithes	1775	Elizabeth Huggins 1754-1830	Staithes
		1774	Elizabeth Cavell 1749-1774	Staithes
Daniel Edward Harddraw[1] 1716-1788	Staithes	1741	Theresa St Omer 1720-1789	Staithes

I mapped out the names and dates into a time line. I saw how little overlap there was between generations. There were only four instances in the nine in which a boy would have known a grandparent, could have had stories, family folklore and legend, passed on to him while sitting at the knee of an elder. Not much chance for retelling fish stories. It was no wonder I felt no sense of family history, no kinship with these names; they hardly had a chance to breathe in one another's presence, let alone pass on family legend.

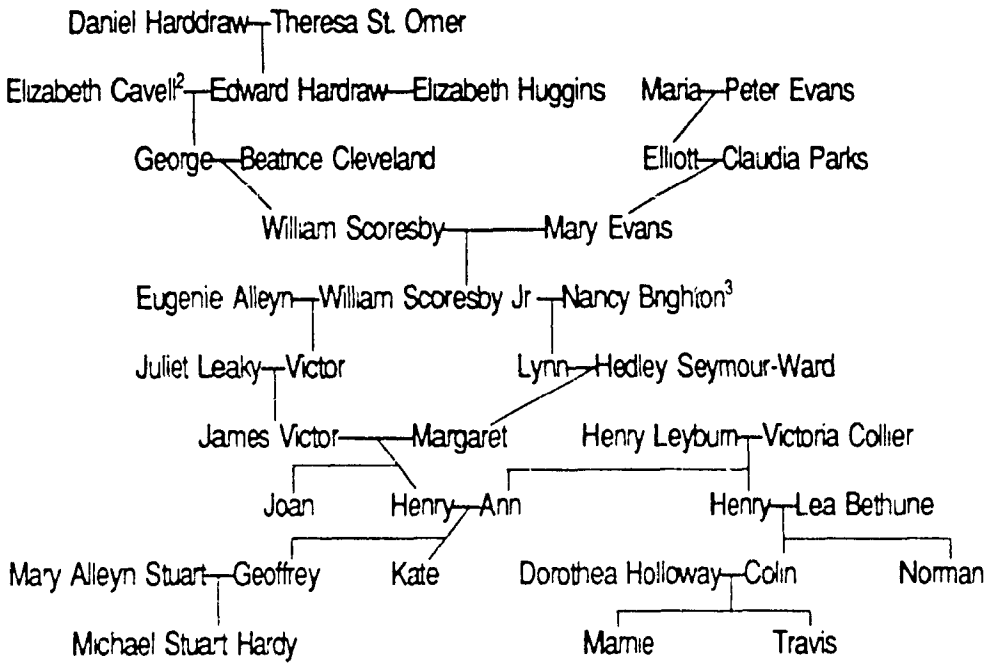
Most of the names I could make sense of. Like Victor Alleyn Hardraw, whose middle name is his mother's family name. Or his son, James Victor, whose middle name is his father's given name. I could make no such connection with William Scoresby

[1] The Hardraw surname is spelled with one 'd' on Daniel's death certificate and two on the marriage license. Edward and subsequent family members used one 'd'

Hardraw. Dammit, I wanted to shout; this is the type of connection I'm looking for.

I was fed up with books. They told me nothing.

I would go to the source — to Ann and her brother Henry. Maybe they could breathe life into these names.



I hadn't the resources to follow up on my mother's family. She had English on her side, I knew that, and found the "Alleyn" connection curious. Maybe it was nothing, maybe somewhere way back there was some relation.

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[2] Elizabeth Cavell, born in Staithes, 1749, was Edward Hardraw's first wife. She died giving birth to George Hardraw, of whom Henry Leyburn Jr. spoke at length.

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[3] William Scoresby Hardraw Jr. worked on railroad construction between Middlesborough and Redcar in 1844, billeting with the Brighton family. He married Nancy and brought her to Staithes when his work was finished and he joined his father on the family boat. Nancy had a difficult time giving birth to Lynn Hardraw in mid-December 1852. William, having had a bad year at sea and needing all the time fishing that he could, set out to fish on Holy Innocents' Day, December 28, against seafaring tradition to not put out to sea on that day for fear of a curse. Nancy died three weeks into the New Year. Lynn was sent to live with her cousins in Middlesborough, Laura Seymour and John Ward, and as a young woman married their son, Hedley.

ii.

"You want to hear a story, lemme tell you about your grandfather seven generations back," said Henry over a fisherman's lunch at the Royal Oak.

"William Scoresby was a fortuitous whaler — fortuitous considerin' he never set foot on a whalin' boat 'til his twenty-fifth year. He was a quick learner, movin' speedily from harpooner to specksioneer of his ship.

"Two hundreds years ago, Scoresby set out from Whitby as captain of a whalin' boat. A captain bein' only as good as his men, however, he returned to port clean. The followin' year, Scoresby handpicked the crew; the youngest member was a seventeen-year-old Staithes lad, George Michael Hardraw.

"George, he was apprenticin' as a shipbuilder when Scoresby was pickin' his crew. Now, George, he was a scraggly one, not very big about the shoulders and thin about the waist. But he had quick hands and a quicker mind. Scoresby liked 'at about him and he paid off the shipbuilder to hire George on.

"Six months they were out at sea, and when they came back they had enough oil to light London lamps for years to come. The catch was only the start for Scoresby, who was on his way to becomin' Whitby's greatest whaler.

"George came back a different boy, too. He'd put on weight and muscle. A fine catch he was, and the girls of Whitby knew it. A young, good-lookin' mate hired on to the best whalin' captain in the port's history. But George he wasn't lookin'. He was just interested in whalin', and he wanted to know to run the books. He had ideas, that one did.

"Three more years George went out with Scoresby, each year more successful than the last. On the return in 1796, the Captain introduced his first mate George to

his twenty-three-year-old niece, Beatrice Cleveland. They were wed and the next year, had their first child, a girl, Elizabeth, who they named after George's mother. George joined Scoresby again, when their ship went up the Thames that year with such a large tonnage of oil as no one had ever seen before.

"George he was loyal to his captain, and the Captain he took notice. When the Messrs. Fishburn and Broderick offered Scoresby a share of their boat, Scoresby dealt for George, too.

"He talked the shipowners into giving George a tenth-share of the boat George was to captain: the *Faithful*. In 1803 George and Beatrice had their first boy and repaid the kindnesses of her uncle and his patron by namin' the boy William Scoresby Hardraw.

"It was Scoresby you might have heard that invented the crow's nest; it helped him in Arctic exploration, see; but it was George thought up the way to save the oil they was gettin' from the whales.

"George had redrawn the oil casks that were fitted to the ship, increasin' the amount of oil they could hold, and fillin' the casks with water before departin' so as to ballast the ship properly. As the casks was filled with oil, water was let out the bottom. Ah, but Scoresby stole the idea and, with those record catches he had after George left, his oil yields were not to be touched.

"The whalin' goes well for George for many a year. Storms battered the vessels he had berthed in Staithes, but he kept many at the port at Whitby. It faces north, you know, so the boats he had there could ride out the storms better than at home.

"He made well, never as good as Scoresby, but he saw Beatrice and the girls and William never were with nowt."

Henry shrugged his shoulders and looked out the window of the pub. "And

there's your legend, Mick."

"A good story, Henry, but not much of an ending. Care to finish?"

He took a swig of his ale, set the mug down in front of him. "Aye, Mick, that's not the end of it.

"The business lasted through the Twenties, though in the later years, it weren't so good. Whalin' made too much of a profit for too many folk. The sea she was full of men bearin' harpoons. The whales they was overfished and whalers had to go out farther and spend longer at sea to make the same money. George died at sea. Beatrice walked the path along the mountain a year before she followed. Every evenin' at the sun's set she was up there, her hand raised level to her eyes, lookin', hopin', but never nothin' to find. For years after she died, townfolk swore they saw her there, and that's how the path became known as the Cleveland Way."

I smiled; legend, I thought, and told him so.

"That's no legend, for Chris'sake," Henry said.

Though I could sense he was telling me something, I didn't know what it was. I thought that if I looked up Scoresby history in the library I could figure it out, narrow the distance between what Henry had said and what he meant me to follow.

—

Trevor Allnut, 32, tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed, is the librarian in Northallerton, the seat of Yorkshire's North Riding. It was from him that I learned some of the current events of the area: the unemployment; the fishing industry ruined because of the oil and gas industries that have proliferated off the coast since the 1970s; the pollution.

MH: Tell me about your family, Mr. Allnut.

TA: My family? ... I thought it was *your* family you were researching.

MH: It is. But that's for another day. And besides that's just too much paperwork to begin at this time of the afternoon.

TA: (*Laughs.*) You are right there, Mr. Hardy. Grave-digging is best done before anyone is up! Most certainly. Well then, my family — innkeepers by way of the Sea. We fished for many years out of Runswick Bay, not many miles south of here, until about the mid-1970s. As far back as anyone can remember that is what we did, cousins and grandparents alike until the mid-70s as I said, and our yields were cut down so far, we had to spend double the time out on the Sea to break even. It was wasted effort, I must say.

MH: What was it that cut into your yields so?

TA: In a word? Overuse. Overuse of the Sea has radically affected our traditional way of life, Mr. Hardy, there is to be no doubt of that. The number of oil rigs has put a cramp on ships passing in the High Seas, which has led to overfishing in areas closer to shore. Plus there are companies digging for sand and gravel for the building industry.

On top of that, in recent years, the environmental groups have come down hard on everyone. And tourists! Demanding clean beaches they can spoil later with their litter, only to go home to their tidy homes and tidy jobs and call their tidy little MP's and pressure them to step in and protect 'their' national preserve.

MH: Sounds altogether too familiar, Mr. Allnut. When you say oil rigs, who do you mean? Who's out there?

TA: Bloody hell, Mr. Hardy, we have got every country mother's son out there. A lot of big players. The government, companies from the Continent, all the mammoth

oil firms — Shell, BP, Esso, Petrofina. I could go on, but it is not just the pollution and oil that has hurt us. No reason could be that simple, or so convenient.

We are as much to blame as anyone. The fishing industry is choking itself. Markets have made it so that there are fewer and fewer ports, but larger and more specialized ships taking on larger and heavier loads. I am surprised there is a herring left out there. We will fish them out the way Scoresby and his boats bloody well killed off the whales.

Back in the early 1970s just before my family quit, we almost had an international crisis. Right here in the North Sea, more damaging than the German bombing of the coast during the Great War. Rotten Denmark smells like week-old fish, Mr. Hardy: They were operating a major fishing industry right off *our* coast with these huge vessels weighing more than a hundred gross tons. And our puny 50-foot trawlers were expected to compete? Christ man, their nets were so big, one could haul in my dad's largest boat.

MH: So your family quit the Sea. What are they doing now?

TA: My parents opened their home as an inn after my sister and I moved out. It is tough running. They thought tourism would do it, but it has been hard. The rails are not running anymore and it is not as if Runswick and Staithes are Liverpool and Bath. Whitby certainly gets its share. My parents' place mostly gets overflow from there.

My sister Alannah moved to Toronto; she is a secretary in the Anglican church there. And me, I came here as librarian. I believe my next move will be to Canada as well — for an advanced degree and a bigger library.

—

It was Trevor who told me I'd find most of the material I needed on Scoresby in Whitby — in the library or the museum. I was overwhelmed by the number of sources. And it was all there — exactly as Henry had told me, right through the crow's nest. The dates, the numbers of whales, the correct tonnage, however, Henry had passed over in the name of the story. No textual mention of George Hardraw though, or his part in the design of the oil cask.

Scoresby apprenticed to John Chapman, a Quaker, on the ship *Jane* for the Baltic trade. While the ship was laid up for the winter of 1779-80, Scoresby studied navigation, and come that spring, when the *Jane* finally lighted from Whitby, he was taken on as a deckhand. They were almost shipwrecked in April of that year.

The next year it was Scoresby, usurping the command of veteran sailors, who saved the ship from foundering off the coast of the Baltic island of Bornholm. His mates were ungrateful for the action, however, and he was forced to leave. He signed on to the *Speedwell*, which on its way home was pirated off the coast of Gibraltar. Scoresby was taken prisoner.

He and another sailor managed to escape to the coast near Cadiz, where they stowed away on an England-bound ship, and when found out, were able to persuade the ship's captain they were capable seamen, thus trading work for room and board.

The experiences soured him for the sealife, so he returned to his father's home in Cropton, intending to settle there, marry, farm, raise a family.

But he couldn't do it. His sea legs weren't made for walking along furrowed land; his hands, used to the grip of the harpoon, were of no use guiding oxen. The sea like

his lover called him back, and he answered by signing on as a harpooner aboard the *Henrietta*, captained by Crispin Bean, in the spring of 1785.

Bean and Scoresby had great success whaling off Greenland. By his sixth voyage, Scoresby became the second officer, the "specksioneer" of the ship, meaning he had special charge of fishing apparatus and was the principal harpooner.

In 1791, Bean recommended Scoresby to the ship owners, Fishburn & Co., for the command of another ship. Scoresby's boat returned home clean that year, but the owners, having faith in their new captain, gave him selection of his new crew — from chief officer down to the cook — and in 1792, he took off again. (This is where Henry picked up the story.) This time he caught eighteen whales, accounting for one hundred twelve tons of oil, an extraordinary feat for a rookie whaler.

In 1795, he took in the largest whale catch in Whitby history, twenty-five whales, yielding one hundred forty-three tons of oil. He surpassed his yield in 1797, however, by taking in one hundred fifty-two tons from sixteen whales.

Scoresby's fame rolled down the English coast like a nor'easter, his name riding the Thames on the tide, and soon enough he was talked into captaining a London-based ship, the *Dundee*. His four years on the *Dundee* furthered his reputation as a great whaler: His first year, 1798, he sailed up the Thames with thirty-six whales (one hundred ninety-eight tons of oil); three years later, his catch of twenty-three whales produced two hundred twenty-five tons of oil.

Despite his success at leading these whaling expeditions, these were lean years for Scoresby, his wife and children. He had little to show for the reputation and fame and the half-years he spent away from his family. In 1802, this changed when Fishburn offered him an eighth-share of the *Resolution*. (Again, no mention of George Hardraw's

starting out on his own.) In March 1803, with his thirteen-year-old son William Scoresby Jr. aboard, the *Resolution* sailed for the first time. In eight voyages, it took in one hundred ninety-four whales (1,617 tons of oil), compared with five other whalers sailing out of Whitby who averaged sixty-eight whales and six hundred forty-six tons of oil over the same period of time.

As his sea reputation swelled, his influence on land grew also. Scoresby planned a three hundred twenty-five-foot addition to Whitby's east pier in 1816, though it was not completed until 1846 — seventeen years after his death. He also published plans for a new bridge to cross the River Esk from the west quay near Angel Inn to Auders'-Waste Ghaut on the east side. The proposal included two one hundred-horsepower water mills and damning the harbour above the bridge to fifteen feet above the low water mark, creating a wet dock. The plan was voted down by city authorities.

Scoresby captained several other boats, none as successful as the *Dundee* and the *Resolution*, before quitting in 1822 after fire took the *Fame*.

—

What amazed me about the Scoresby story is how well Leyburn knew it, and Henry, I knew, didn't read. The Scoresby legend that poured out of Henry was the purest in oral tradition, like poetry.

It was never a challenge to get Henry to tell a story. It was his favorite pastime, and listening to him was one of mine. Henry was the consummate storyteller, just as Marnie had told me. Listening to him, I realized how much the past is solely a construction of language. Time, in this weaver's hands, could only ever be thought of in

terms of the present. The way Henry re-created characters and situations and dialogue, there was no such thing as the past. His storytelling took us back in space to a very "present" time. There was nothing past about it. I could see those elements of Henry's storytelling that I'd lost in my own writing. It gave me an idea — the first real idea I'd had since my "slump" had begun in July — and I wrote a publishing friend regarding a book on ball players who'd had 3,000 hits. I knew where to start, too: My own connection to Clemente, who hit 3,000 in his last at-bat on the last day of the 1972 season and died, with my father, before spring training in 1973. Meanwhile I debated engaging Henry in a discussion about my thoughts, but I felt it'd be like a young writer asking an award-winning poet what constitutes a good poem, or a cub baseball writer asking the second baseman how he'd singlehandedly turned a triple play. There's an element of the mysterious in each experience, and it would spoil it to know too much.

I brought up the subject anyway.

"Don't confuse the storyteller with the story" was all he said.

—

One night in December, a week before Christmas, with the arctic wind reaching south to announce winter's pending arrival and the sea beginning to rise outside the Royal Oak, Henry, Marnie, Chip and Sharon Preston and I drank pints of bitter.

"What cracks with the research, Michael?" Sharon asked. "Anyone in the family that should've been sent off Down Under?"

"Not yet, but you can never tell, right? There may be someone somewhere. I can't imagine that *everyone* in the family was legitimate."

"Certainly adds flavor to an otherwise deadly hobby, eh Michael?" Chip said.

"Ah, no, no. It's not boring at all," Marnie said, nudging me with her elbow. It was no secret that Marnie, the few times she accompanied me, had found my preoccupation with pedantic family detail deadly. "If we're not rubbin' tombstones in the bloody freezin' cold mornin', we're breathin' in dusty air from books not opened since Agincourt." She put on her thickest Yorkshire: "Mistah 'Arddraw, tha're gooan till be t'death o'me wit'yon gormless occupations." Our laughter, along with the smoke from Henry's pipe and the fireplace seemed to mix and float up near the ceiling; we sat in a circle, elbows on the table, sticky with rings from mugs of Younger's. We ordered another round.

I found the work tedious at times, too. It got so I didn't understand what I was doing it for. What was I learning by listening to Henry or combing through death certificates? The past had passed, and it was time I got on with my future.

"T'd find it deadly myself," Chip said, "all the names and numbers with not a face to go with them. Too many dead people."

"Aye, but that's where you're wrong, Mr. Preston," Henry said. "They're many years gone, but who can say they're dead? You look at a family photo, and can't you hear your grandmother scoldin' you to stand still as the photographer snaps close the shutter? And can't you remember the way your grandfather put you on your hide for sittin' in his fav'rite chair?"

Chip said, yes, he could remember exactly that. "Then he'd shut out the lamp and sit down, moving this way and that for what seemed like hours lookin' for that warm worn spot he'd made."

Henry continued: "Then you do see: They're not dead, at all. They live in the

pictures, the furniture, the way you tie a knot, the stories we tell, all those things that are passed over generations like blue eyes and stubby toes.

"You remember a fav'rite tale and it likely will be somethin' your dad's granddad told him, or you smell a cigarette or feel the touch of your grandmum's hand, and they come back, risen up from the horizon, like the moon, and touch us here" Henry tap, tap, tapped himself in the chest.

I waited a polite moment and expressed my reservations. "All those years I had that cap and the axe and the photograph of Ann, and they hardly spoke to me."

"I'm not so sure they didn't, Mick. Brought you 'ere, didn't they? They just needed a voice to give them life."

"So it is the storyteller then, isn't it?" I asked.

He smiled. "Got me there, son. Those items of your father's needed Ann, and me to a degree I'd expect, to show you their significance. But now that the stories have been told, they're yours. And when it's your turn to tell them, you'll bring your self, your own history to them. You'll —"

" — be the story and the storyteller," Chip said.

"Agreed, Mr. Preston," Henry said. He polished off his pint and stood up to leave. "And now, mah young friends, if you'll permit me to call it a night." Chip and Sharon got up as well, leaving Marnie and I and the bartender.

"Why don't you head home, Jules; I'll close it up tonight," Marnie said.

"Well, thank tha Miss Leyburn," he said, then turning to me and smiling, "an' good neet to tha booath."

I helped her close out the register and clean the bar area. We put the chairs up on the tables after wiping them clean. When we were done, we shut off all the lights

and Marnie lit a candle at the table we'd been sitting at. I dropped a few coins in the CD jukebox, and when Bonnie Raitt came around we danced slowly between the tables.

"You're a part of my story, you know."

"And you of mine, Michael."

iii.

Misc. notes:

In 1866, in Staithes, there were sixteen yawls with ten men and boys per yawl; twenty cobles at three per; eighty persons otherwise connected to the fishing industry; one hundred fish buyers and curers. This compared with 1817, when there were fourteen five-man boats each with two cobles apiece, seventy cobles not attached to a larger boat, and eight lobster boats.

The tonnage of fish brought in off the Staithes coast rose as well.

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The marked increase in the number of people connected to the fishing industry has much to do with the emergence of the rail system, which connected Staithes to Middlesborough and Redcar to the north and to the south: Scarsborough, Whitby, York and London. The rail system, the Northeastern Railway, also contributed to a growth in tourism, which in its turn added to the town coffers.

The rail gave townspeople their first tastes of the world outside the horseshoe the Clevelands formed around them. The stations, bridges and viaducts were built using local stone, which blended well with the mass-produced building materials that were brought in — Fletton brick and Welsh slate. Staithes and similarly situated villages imported coal and other products while exporting fish and farm goods.

The British Transport Commission gave up on the Northeastern Railway in 1958. The coastal route, it said, wasn't cost-effective. Too few riders; too much work. The increase in the number of personal cars and trucks did not offset the damage caused by the discontinuation of rail service, however, and the economic slide of North Sea towns continued. The towns were now importing recession and exporting their young.

The following facts, too, I found out, in various books, magazines, encyclopedias, almanacs and journals:

- The area is known for its spas and hot mineral springs. Mineral water may be found at Harrogate.
- Principal bathing places on the Yorkshire coast include Tynemouth, Hartlepool, Redcar, Whitby, Scarsborough and Seaton.
- Staithes was originally called Seatonstaithes because it was the "staithes" or "landing place" for Seaton.
- Dracula is a tourist attraction. Bram Stoker described a terrific North Sea storm in Chapter 7 of *Dracula*. The storm is what brought the Count to Whitby. Lucy is victimized in the churchyard of St. Mary's. Elizabeth Gaskell, also, used Whitby as the setting of a novel, *Sylvia's Lovers*, calling it "Monkshaven."
- Ling pie is a favorite dish. What makes it popular is that ling can be caught any time of the year, whereas the more well-known fish, the cod, is a late

spring catch — after it has "drunk May water," as the old-timers say.

- Cod sounds are a delicacy — gelatinous flakes scraped from the inside of the fish's back.
- In the 1600s, Runswick, two towns over from Staithes, was swept away in a landslide. Everything slipped out to sea except one dwelling. Nothing could be done to save the buildings, but the residents of the town were saved because of the alertness of a group of mourners returning home after waking a corpse.
- Thirteen homes were swept away by a North Sea storm in 1745, including the shop of William Sanderson (or Saunderson), the Staithes grocer to whom James Cook was apprenticed.
- In 1808, two sisters whose family name was Grundy were sitting on a scar that jutted out into the ocean. A large piece of the cliff above the scar splintered off and, gaining speed and spinning motion, hit one of the girls in the nape, severing the head from the body and sending it rolling out to sea.
- On Friday, April 14, 1815, 27 Runswick and Staithes fishermen were lost in a storm.
- In December 1914, German warships bombarded Whitby, Hartlepool and Scarborough. No damage worth mentioning but for the psychological scars.
- Roberto Clemente was the eleventh man in the major leagues to get 3,000 hits. On the last day of the 1972 season, Sept. 30, he doubled off John Matlack of the Mets. It touched off a three-run rally to help the Pirates win, 5-0. The 3,000-hit club at that point included Cobb, Nap Lajoie, Musial, Mays, and Aaron.
- Four days after a devastating earthquake rocked Managua, Nicaragua, Decem-

ber 23, 1972, seventy-four American doctors, nurses and others from New York were working a one-hundred-bed portable hospital.

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"But what does it all mean, Michael?" Marnie asked when I showed her one of the books I'd dug up in an antiquarian bookstore in Whitby. "It's just words and numbers."

"What do you mean 'just words and numbers'? Words and numbers are my life. I create stories with words and numbers." We were in her apartment above the newstand, six doors up and around the corner from the Prestons'. From the window over her kitchen sink we could look out to the dozen schoolchildren playing "Bulldog." It was the morning after Henry, Chip and Sharon had joined us at the pub.

"Sure, I understand that. I know what you do for a living. But words and numbers aren't living, Michael. The facts of a life aren't words and numbers."

"I don't know, Marnie; I don't know that I can say that as surely as you do."

"I know you can't. But it's what I've been trying to show you. What Henry said last night is the same thing."

"No, no. That's where you're wrong. He said it: The things of life are full of stories."

"But the things of life aren't a hitter's statistics or some whaler in 1810 come sailing up the Thames with a hundred tons of oil retrieved from killing twenty-some-odd whales."
~~~

"That's a great story, Marnie; that's legend, that's life. The facts are all there."

" The fact is, Michael, he left home."

iv.

Geoffrey is eight years old; eight and three-fo'ths, he says. It's January 1946. A brully is brewing: The ocean beats the seawall and wind knocks at the door of the Hardraw home. The boy, in bed with his sheets and quilt tucked tightly around him, is frightened. He hears his father talking — at the kitchen table from which he entertains all guests.

"Tis a bad one, ain't it?" a voice asks. Geoffrey recognizes it as his Aunt Joan, his father's sister.

"Aye, it is, but not t'worse. 'Enry, tell us that story of our folks ag'in," Geoffrey's mother says. He can see her, turning to face Henry as she says this, a dish and a dishrag in her hands, cleaning up after their late meal.

"Aye, Mistah 'Ardraw, Ah 'aven't 'eard tha tell 'at one for some time," says Joan.

He begins:

"Tha knows t'Cod and Lobster when we was all children was t'varry center o'town and t'town center — where old salts sang sailin' songs to their pints 'til they forgets the words.

"This one neet, no different from another except it's perhaps it's darker outside than usual, t'pub is smokey, warm an' loud with laughter and talk. In a corner, four sea-'ardened sailors conspire in a tight circle over mugs of ale. Theer's a fireplace to t'right of t'main bar area 'at provides heat an' light to t'rest of t'pub. It's crowded, packed like t'nets on a good afternoon out deep. In front of the tap is three men, fishermen by t'look of their worn, midnight-blue guernseys and their tanned, seawind-burned faces. Tha can read i'their faces an' those of t'sailors around 'em t'tale of their life at sea, its give and its take. It remembers their oaths an' curses an' they

remember its: T'number of men t'sea 'as claimed is as countless as t'waves crashin' against Cowbairn Nab. Its worst damage is to come, though. ... 'xcuse me."

Geoffrey hears Ann pull up a chair and take out her sewing. He imagines she's given his father a cup of tea; he knows that in the morning, if they make it to morning, he'll find the cup, the saucer, and the lace cuff of a chapel dress on the table; two chairs will be out of place.

Henry picks up the tale where he left off. "Mah dad, James 'Ardraw, reaches into 'is left pocket an' pulls out a gold watch. 'E replaces it as 'e gets up till leave 'is two friends at t'tap.

" 'Home to t'missus, afore yar lashed with a 'omecomin'?' asks Ann's father.

" 'Aye,' says James, and he laughs, a good 'earty laugh straight from 'is gut. 'An' tha should as well from what Ah 'ear of yar wife t'Queen,' he says, openin' t'door, from whence a gret blash o' rain splashes 'im. 'Jesus God! 'At's a gret blash o' rain,' 'e says. 'Tha be careful toneet,' 'e shouts to 'is friends.

"After 'e closes t'door behind 'im, 'e 'olds 'is jacket tight with 'is right 'and, an' wit'is left 'e's got 'is 'at, then leanin' to t'wind an' rain turns right up t'incline to 'is 'ome, this varry 'ouse your sittin' in now. 'is wife Margaret, Joan's an' mah mum, is comin' down from t'bedroom where she 'as put we children, me and Joan, to bed. Ah 'ear 'er ask dad about Leyburn an' t'others.

" 'He's sharp, gie thanks for 'at,' our father says. 'E is moody, at least Ah sensed 'at, an' Ah b'lieve mum does too an' she presses 'im. Father says Leyburn an' 'is family is leavin' after t'salmon run is done.

" 'Through with t'sea, 'e told me. But Ah dare say shoo ain't through wit'im. Shoo dooan't give up 'at easy. York 'e's gannin to. Were it were me, Peg. Were it were me,' our dad says.

"To which our mother replies: 'Gooan, Jim, don't talk so fond. 'Ere's our 'ome and it ain't been nowt but kind,' she says.

" 'So kind a 'ome 'as no kin,' " James answers.

"All t'while, t'storm outside is ragin', rattlin' their door; Dad gets up from 'is chair by the coalstove, wraps 'is big arms around our mum's waist and kisses 'er here." Geoffrey's eyes are closed, he can see his father pointing to a spot on the back of his mother's neck. She'll blush, knock his hand away. Geoff smiles, rolls over; the sheets loosen some.

"She turns to 'im and kisses 'im back; she knaws 'e's not gonna leave 'is 'ome.

" 'Ours later, t'wind raises t'dead from t'depth of the North Sea to raze t'Cod and Lobster and neighborin' houses. James runs out i't'storm to t'Leyburns, whose 'ome is nearest t'pub. It's no longer standin'. T'cries of mothers and fathers and sons and daughters are lifted on t'crests of twenty-foot-high waves and brought down against t'seawall and t'walls of t'houses. There are no cellars to 'ide in, there are no prayers left to say. 'Enry Leyburn is trapped beneath t'better part of a 2x8 tie beam dropped while 'e is searchin' for 'is children, Ann 'ere among 'em, who 'ad already managed to escape. Our dad and t'other townspeople, man and woman alike, lift and pull through t'flooded remains of t'pub and 'ouses lookin' for signs of village life. When t'storm ends in the morn, and the sun's begun to dry up t'water left i't'street, a search begins for James 'Ardraw, who was crushed by t'sea as well."

Henry lowers his voice, his eyes, as his story ends. Upstairs, Geoffrey is fast asleep. ...

—

I told Henry I'd asked Marnie to marry me. He asked me what I thought I'd do for a living in Staithes. I told him I'd write and work off the sea. "This is what I want to do," I said.

"The sea, understand lad, requires patience. She asks all your attention and demands

that you submit to 'er completely," he replied. "Dreams are that way, too. To live the sea or to live a dream requires that you put yourself at risk.

"That line of dreamers you come from, lad, *that's* the Hardraw scar."

—

I found it easier to travel to Northallerton than York to do my research. And Trevor was always more helpful than the York librarians — at least, if I fell asleep, he didn't wake me and ask me to move on. We were close in age, had similar interests, and could talk sports. We got along and got to know each other better over the weeks I was in England. A couple of times I spent the night at his place in Northallerton after exhausting myself in study. I asked him about a legend the Prestons had told me.

"Trevor, is there any truth to this stuff about the French founding Staithes?"

"Well now, Mike, I wouldn't say 'founding'. The Scandinavians were before the French, but they were one of the first. They certainly were the most persistent. Hung in here like coal smoke."

"Hmmm. So, in theory then, some Staithes people could be descended from the French?"

"Not just some."

"Got anythin' on this?"

"Nothing that's been printed, but I have asked the question myself and I have my own theory on it. Look now, have a seat while I close up then I'll show you what I have."

I sat at my regular place, at a long oak table near a west-facing window, and as

the sun low in the sky beat weakly against my face, I played with the twisted legs of the table.

Trevor came back with a brown cardboard briefcase jammed out the sides with papers and bound by an elastic. He was excited, it was easy to see, and as he started to show me his research it was clear why: His briefcase was crammed with original work he'd shown no one.

From what he'd been able to uncover and put together, a French navigational crew had set out from Calais on the Strait of Dover, or as it is known in French, le Pas-de-Calais, in 1450, two years before the English were defeated at Bordeaux.

"Calais was still English, was until 1558, another hundred years after the end of the Hundred Years War. Pinard was a man of extraordinary courage — to have gathered a crew in the middle of a Brit stronghold? Unbelievably gutsy."

The sketchy logbook of the captain, Joachim Pinard, listed 34 men aboard, mostly from Calais, but from other towns within the department: Arras, Boulogne-sur-Mer, St. Omer, Montreuil and Ardres.

The boat's destination was the group of islands that would eventually be named the Shetlands, but which then were still a Norse possession.

"I am taking an educated leap here, but I do not think it unreasonable to believe the French were about to make a deal on the islands, and to use them to launch an attack against Scotland and England, putting a final end to its nemesis across the Channel," Trevor said.

Captain Pinard's intention had been to keep the ship in the High Seas as it followed the English coast north, Trevor figured, but a rough sea forced them toward land, and rougher seas forced them into land at Seatonstaithes.

With no chance of repairing their wrecked ship, the crew stayed, the members becoming fishermen, some moving southwest into the moors to farm for the gentry. Trevor said he believed remaining family names (including some in my own family tree) in Staithes that could be traced back to France included St. Omer, Park (le Parc), Berck, Bethune and Harras (Arras).

"Of course there is this one, too," he said, pointing to a small dot on a map of Calais. "Ardres," he said, and when he said it, I thought he'd addressed me by my surname. He saw the look in my face.

"Interesting, isn't it, Mike? ' 'Ardraw' coming from 'Ardres'?"

I nodded, and laughed. "When you pronounce it, yeah."

He squared away his papers into the briefcase, wound the elastic and we walked out of the building.

"A pint, Mike?"

"Sorry, Trevor, it's too long a drive to have to do it with a buzz on. Maybe some other time." I bade him good night and promised to see him the day after the next. As I drove back to Staithes, I noticed, as if for the first time, how twisted the road home had become.

v.

"I haven't been in a coble like this in many years," Henry said, but he shook off my offered hand and stepped lightly into the lapstrake, flat-bottomed boat as if he'd never stepped foot off the sea. I pointed that out as I settled myself in the boat and took hold of the scull, trying to steer us across the beck to the deserted side of the nab.

I made little progress in turning us, so Henry made us switch seats.

" 'Deed, a good thing it hasn't left me, either," he said, smiling, glad to have this chance to return to the sea he hadn't worked in a dozen years.

We tied off on the leg of a ladder and climbed the few rungs to the walk in front of the houses. Little paint remained on the shutters; the plastered walls were chipping away and the guano-streaked roofs were giant slate puzzles with pieces missing. Plywood windows. I'd seen plenty of medium-to-large cities with whole blocks of tenements like this — boarded up and waiting to be razed — but they were unrelated to me. I had no connection to them except as milemarkers as I made my way from New York to Boston, through Bridgeport and Hartford. Despair leading to disrepair. There was no hope for resurrecting those buildings. It was different in Staithes, though. My father had friends who'd lived in those houses. He might have swum out here and pitched rocks at the gulls. The houses had memories, stories.

"This was my boy Colin's," Henry said, pointing out one. "It was here Marnie was born. Colin. And his brother lived next door here" and he pointed to the next door down, one house closer to the sea. We walked toward it.

"What was Marnie's uncle's name?" I asked.

"Norman ... my bow to William the Conqueror." He smiled. We sat on the stoop, a single stone slab at the foot of the front door. I opened a bottle of beer and handed it to Henry. He handed me a ham and cheese. "Norman was t'first to quit this side. He wasn't much older than you are now. Had himself a wife and two lovely boys. It was a good move for him. He was a terror on t'Sea. Handled nets with lobster claws for hands About as blind as a lobster, too. I'm not sayin' this to be mean. It's the honest truth. T'boy couldn't make it here. So now he's in Sandsend, a foreman in an alum

house."

"It's good that he left then?"

"Aye, for the family, much so."

"Yours or his?"

It took him a few seconds to catch my joke, and when he did he laughed and drew his arm around my shoulders. "You're a good lad for an American," he said and laughed.

I smiled and shook my head; he was poking me back.

"What about Mr. Leyburn, Marnie's father?"

"Yes, now there's another tale. Colin was born t'fore end of the year, the first day we set out for cod, about the same time as your father was born. I had one of the best runs of my life that afternoon, come back home to find my wife's had one of her own, too! He was a bright boy. From the time he was stone-mother-nak'd, he took to water. Like it was his mother's milk. Before long, I had him with me on the yawl. He was the capper he was — t'best of the group. Great hands and a sailor's mind. Knew the stars, knew the tides, knew the colors of the sky. I was proud of that boy. Aye, but what am I sayin'? I still am proud. That boy didn't belong on the Sea and I knew it, even if he didn't. He was bound for better. And it happened. One day, he told his mother and myself: 'I'm goin'. to London. I've bought into a business and I'm takin' Dorothea and t'children with me.' And he was gone. Made it damn good for himself. But, Mick ..."

He stopped. I hadn't been looking at him; we were sitting side by side, facing the inlet; I was watching the coble bob. The beers were drunk, our sandwiches lay untouched in their bags on the ground. When he called my name, I turned. "Go on, Henry. I'm

listening." I handed him another bottle.

"Believe me, I know you are." He paused, took a swig. "For t'life of me, Mick, bottlin' beer makes as much sense as eatin' cod which ain't drunk May water. No sense at all."

I nodded and as I did, he continued. "His birthday bein' the first day of the cod season, we had a party for him and to bless our fleet every year. Not much of a party mind you, a bit o'cider left over from Christmas, some cod sounds and bread. Ten of us on the yawl, always someone with a farce to tell, a long paddynoddy about nothing in particular, and a great laugh. We did this for years 'til he left and continued for years after. But it wasn't the same. There was somethin' missin' after. Ah. But we still had fun, it was the the start of a new year after all — and we was all proud of Colin. We all is still."

"You don't resent his leaving then?"

"Resent? Nah, too strong a word for that. I miss him, sure; but I know he had to do what his heart and head told him to do. Resentment's like a fire. Ever watch a fire, Mick? Sit down on the neukin of the fireplace, a seat not unlike this here stone slab, and just watch a fire burn? I have. When Colin picked up and took his family away I did a lot of fire-watchin,' 'til I realized the fire I was watchin' was here, in my heart. I was burnin' myself up, a nonsense activity if never there was one. Resentment feeds on itself like fire. But Mick, you know this yourself."

We finished our beers and headed back across the beck. We walked off lunch. I asked him if he had ever worked the mines. He said he hadn't, especially when he saw what they did to his friend.

"It wasn't natural what Henry's mum done to him — sendin' him off to the

mines," Henry said. "Twenty-three-years-old, he should've stood up for what he wanted, but being' the only boy and without a father, maybe I'd have done the same.

"Every morn' afore sun up, we'd pass each other on the road — he workin' his way up the hill to catch a bus, me and our chums from our school days, walkin' down to our cobles and yawls. In the evenin' it was the same, but in reverse. We'd tie down the boats and the womenfolk would help us unload the catch — salt 'em and set 'em up on rods to dry alongside our nets. Then we was off to the Cod and Lobster for a pint and a pipe. Henry, he'd be walkin' downhill, his lunch tin in his left hand and a lantern in his right, black as jetstone pulled outta the scarps behind Kildale. Black as ol' Scratch himself. I can just imagine what it is he felt walkin' down that hill, to smell the air full of salt and the day's catch dryin' while waitin' for sale. If he had a longin' for the Sea though, he said nothing to me. We saw each other less frequent, sometimes in the pub Saturday evenings, a laugh and a glass, his hand on my shoulder and a word for the family. That he died the way he did is proof enough to me how he longed."

There is one licensed potash mine left on the coast, employing about 800 people, the largest employer in the Moors. It supplies most of the country's potash needs and provides road salt to area highway authorities. The next largest employer is the Fylingdales Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station, with 600 civilian jobs.

Henry reached into his coat pockets, brought out his pipe and a bag of tobacco. As he packed his pipe, his lips curled tightly and he whistled. We stood against the guardrail on the seawall protecting the street. Below us, the tide was going out. Waves spit up salt, then licked it off pebbles and the sides of the boats. I was so caught up in Henry's story, so willingly had I gone back those 65 years, I could hear the greetings

of the women and girls to the returning fishermen and their chatter as they set about unfolding and re-placing nets, setting out and salting fish; I could smell the fish, knew that if I looked I'd see their glassy eyes and the occasional flip of the caudal fin; I heard a whistle, I looked up the street past the Cod and Lobster, but it was not black Henry Hardraw walking home. Leyburn placed his hand on my forearm, turning me in the direction of the hill, and together we began to walk. "I know, Mick. I looks for 'im every day."

vi.

Regarding my grandfather's death and its connection to my father's fateful departure, I asked his sister. I hadn't talked with Joan as much as I had with Ann or Henry. A lot of what we did talk about was food, actually. She was an excellent cook, a surprise coming from the kitchen every time she stepped foot from it. And the food wasn't the bland typical English fare either. I called her the 'spice queen of Staithes.' She called me 'Pit' — short for 'bottomless.' When we did talk about things other than food, I noticed that she shared Henry Leyburn's way of weaving a story and it was more than once that I wondered if indeed she weren't related to him instead of Henry Hardraw.

She asked me what I knew about the mines.

I told her.

"Henry told you that? No. Absolutely not. You don't believe it, do you?"

I couldn't believe she'd reacted that way. For a second it made me question his veracity, but I remembered what he said about storytelling: "No oath more true than a good story." I repeated this to Joan.

"Psshaw! Truth! Twice-told lies like fish stories over beers, that's what you get from 'im. And what else has my brother-in-law told you?"

"Plenty. But you're avoiding the subject. What about this story? What really happened?"

"OK, OK. Henry, God think on 'im, he had never cared for the mines. It pained him to leave the house in the mornin' for those hell-holes. The darkness, pit blackness, with no light, and air so light that the lack of it weighed on him like a piano on his chest — he hated it. And the noise! He wore plugs in his ears to keep out the din, and good enough for him, too, 'cause it kept out the dirt!

"But Henry had a hard time sleeping. It was too much even to close his eyelids. He'd slip into the dark of the mines every time he craved sleep.

"The only alternative for work then was fishin', but there was not a Staithesman who would have him. He was too old to relearn the ways of the sea. Still, he sought escape, and it was at sea he found it. He swam. Every bloody night, he swam. It was therapy, you see, a bathing, a cleansing of the darkness, the filth, the fright he felt in the shafts.

"Geoffrey, when he was old enough to steer the smaller cobles, would follow his father out. Henry'd swim out half a mile to three-quarters of a mile and come back a bit, he'd signal and Geoffrey would pick him up in the boat. He had a towel ready for him, then together they'd sail back.

"Everyone thought they was nuts. Thought the air in the mines had affected his thinkin'.

"Henry didn't die in the mines, Michael. He died of a heart attack, as Ann said, swimming in the ocean. In the end you could say maybe it was the mines killed him.

They was what forced him out to sea.

"Your dad witnessed the drownin'. Henry had gone out a little farther than usual. We never knew why. Maybe work hadn't gone that well that day. Maybe ... I don't know. Geoffrey jumped out of the boat and swam to Henry, whose lungs had already started to fill with water, but he couldn't drag him back to the boat, couldn't have lifted him into it had he tried. The boy near drowned himself. Finally, he took hold of a rope and tied it around Henry's chest and under his arms, got into the boat himself and towed Henry in.

"That was the way your grandfather died. And Geoffrey, poor boy, if it wasn't that 'at made him choose to leave I don't know what it was."

We sat in silence for a while. Then I went out to the guardrail and watched the tide come in.

vii.

March 7, a Thursday night, at the Royal Oak. It was a little tense between Marnie and me, had been for a few days. I asked her again to marry me. She said she loved me but couldn't marry me. I think what it boiled down to was my misinterpretation of what I thought was going on between us.

"By fallin' in love with me, fallin' in love with Staithes, you think you'll be able to recapture the past of your father and your family, and maybe, I believe you think it's probable, you would correct the past. Re-find and refine. Well, dammit Michael, it doesn't work that way. It can't be done. At least not here. Dreams don't come true here. You've fallen in love with me, and I like you, admire you tremendously, but it won't work."

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. "That's bunk," I said. "You know it's not true. There's no reason why we can't be together. You and me, in Staithes, in love."

"No, Michael, there's a difference between being in love and loving someone. This won't go any further than where we've already taken it. I'm sorry I don't believe we'll ever see life the same way. I'm sorry I can't follow you to New York. I'm sorry you weren't born with salt water in your veins and not a glove under your arm."

They may not have been intended as such, but they were harsh words. There was bottle of Glenmorangie in front of us. We drank two long glasses apiece before either of us spoke again.

"I was hoping ... I really ... was ... I thought I could call this home," I said.

"You did, you did. I know you did. But home is what you come from, Michael. You're a Hardraw, certainly. We can see it in your eyes and your hair. But your hands, Michael. They're not local."

"Of course they're not, Marnie, I've never worked potash or repaired a fish net in my life. And look — I can't even scale fish."

"You're not listenin' to what I'm sayin', Michael."

"Well then, what are you trying to tell me? Are you saying I couldn't make it here? This town isn't big enough for the two of us?"

"I'm sayin' you look like a Hardraw, but you'll always be Michael Hardy. It's in your heart. You're no more a part of Staithes now than I would be of New York were I to follow you." She shook her head and re-placed the cap on the bottle.

—

I finally got around to asking Ann about the waterfall, the one at Hardraw Scar, or "Scaur" as Wordsworth wrote after visiting it with his sister Dorothy in December 1799. He marveled to a friend that he could not find the words to describe "the enchanted effect produced by this Arabian scene of colour as the wind blew aside the great waterfall behind which we stood." It seemed to me that he'd found the words. Ann called the falls, as Turner had, the Hardraw Force.

The morning of March 9 I headed west on Route 684 toward Hawes, following the River Nidd.

I reached the scar by a walk in back of the Green Dragon Inn. A fifteen-foot-wide screen of water plummets about one hundred feet to the bottom of a large rock bowl. Paths lead to the falls from two sides and then wind in back. Signs warn against walking against the shale wall in back of the water, but I ignored them. By Wordsworth's account, I knew I wasn't the first one to make my way in back, but at that moment I was the only one, and that seemed much more significant.

Standing behind the screen, leaning up against the scar — after a thousand years of thundering water, the rock is soft and icy cold — the rush of the falls closing out everything but my thoughts, and looking out to the bubbling pond and narrow but deep creek that flowed out, I thought of all the family members whose plans of leaving Staithes never got beyond the Clevelands, who never, unlike the stream ten stories up, took the fall and let their dreams carry their lives away forever. I thought of what I'd done in the past four-and-a-half months. The choices I'd made, where those decisions would lead or could have led. We make our choices, and for better or worse they are ours. I thought I had chosen — Staithes and Marnie — but that choice wasn't only mine to make. It was just as much Marnie's. It was just as much Staithes'.

We do what we do for reasons that aren't simply personal. There are economic, physical, sometimes historical, reasons for what we choose, although in the end even these are internalized, made personal. Generations of Hardraws remained in Staithes for economic reasons. They lived off the sea or they lived off the land, and though they may have thought of leaving they didn't — out of loyalty to their family and their friends. Until my father Geoffrey, though, who, in 1956 was the first in his line for whom leaving Staithes was economically more realistic and feasible than staying. I was responsible to someone who had set in motion an aspiration that my father had begun to live. My father had done well by leaving. There was no future for him in Yorkshire. Who was I then to undo his dream and that of so many Hardraws? I believed Marnie was right: It wasn't meant that I stay, this wasn't home. If I was in Staithes it was for some other reason.

I worked my way completely around the back of the falls to the path leading out on the left side. I took a turn off the path up some steep stone steps up toward the source of the falls, into Shaw Gill Wood, where I found a set of falls, smaller, but no less attractive, and farther up, still another set of falls. I went back to the Green Dragon by the way I'd gone up — around the back of the Force. I touched the scar behind it and wondered if perhaps I was mistaken, perhaps my father's leaving Staithes wasn't a follow-through on a dream. Maybe he'd realized it was no longer home for him either.

—

Ann got worse as the time went on. Neither the local physician nor the specialists

in Whitby could help. That she was dying was obvious. I decided, since it was now clear to me I wouldn't be staying, wouldn't be marrying Marnie, that I would at least stay until Ann died, and that seemed like it would come any day. I felt foolish and hurt and angry about what had happened with Marnie, and I tried to console myself with the fact that it wasn't what I'd gone to England for in the first place. Though even the success of that — this search for my father and myself — was questionable at that point. I wrote home again, telling my mother of my plans; I wrote my editor as well, indicating my imminent return. I apologized for not having written anything; told him I suspected my "block" was close to breaking. I hoped it was close to breaking.

viii.

Ann died in late March. I didn't know when she first knew she was dying, but I remembered one event in particular that shook her up. It was supposed to be a happy occasion, but it didn't turn out quite that way.

Plough Monday fell on January 7; and the streets of Goathland, about 12 miles southwest of Whitby in the Fen Bogs, where Plough Monday is celebrated annually, were virtually turned inside out. A band of youths paraded before a brightly decorated plough, bringing to life images of the first day of the planting season. With their shirts outside their jackets, a rainbow of ribbons worn as sashes across the shoulder and around the waist, the youths marched through the streets accompanied by flautists and fiddlers, and the Plough Stots, three teams of sword dancers with blue and pink uniforms and military covers.

Up rose the youths' voices, one by one, then were joined by girls filing behind the dancers:

"God speed the plough,
the plough, and the ploughman ... "

Marnie called the girls "madgies." They were made up in blackface, their heads horned or crowned with wreaths of leaves and grass; a group of grotesques seeking coins from the proprietors of the houses of Goathland and the crowds of well-wishers and gawkers lining the streets.

" ... the farm and the farmer,
machine and beast and man."

A particularly freakish one rattled her tin at us, and as I fumbled for a couple of ten-pence she sang and performed a macabre dance before us — Joan, Ann, Henry and Marnie and I. Her wild flinging ended with her jetstone face and twisted white-toothed grin inches from the sallow face of Ann, seated in her wheelchair. I gave her the coins. She laughed and left.

"Death starin' me in the face, and you pay him off?"

"Oh, Annie, that was just a madgie, a girl," Joan said.

"I wish you hadn't given her nothin'. She was a bad lass, a frightenin' character."

"Ann, it's a farce," Henry said, "and you know it's bad luck to let 'em pass."

"Henry's right, 'mother. Best to give the devil his due," I said.

"Michael, I'm feelin' dwammish, I want to leave."

I took up my position behind the chair, and together we walked back to the car. Along the way, we saw the last of the paraders. They had run their plough through someone's yard, presumably for non-payment to the madgies.

—

Two months later, in late March, they came to collect on Ann. I was with her to the last.

"You know why you're here now," she said.

"Sure, Ann. My father and me," I said.

"Ahh, Michael, that's only a part of the story. C'mere," she said, patting the side of her bed, "so as I don't have to talk so loud."

I sat with her, fluffed up her pillow, gave her a sip of water. "I came here because you asked me to," I said.

"I know, I know. But do you know why I asked?"

"Because I'm your only grandchild and because we'd never met."

"Yes, all true. And why did you come?"

"Because you're my grandmother, my father's mother, my only link to a past I knew nothing about. My last blood tie — well, besides my own mother — to the people who make up my family. You and Henry, and Marnie, you've all made me realize where I come from, what I'm about."

I paused, long enough for her to open her eyes and wait for me to finish. "By doing that, you've helped me know where my father came from, what dad was all about."

"Yes, yes, all true. Let me tell you what I really asked you here for, though. First let me have my glasses. ... Michael, I'm an old woman; I'm going to die soon, I know it." I started to make protesting noises, but she shushed me. She began:

"You live a good life — passin' from bein' a lass to bein' a woman, from dolls to babies, from lakin' tally from school to wark — and in the end, what do you remember first but the men?

"My men, Henry, Geoffrey, and now you. Ah, my life has been full and satisfyin'. It always was. But most of my satisfaction has not come from the men. When Henry died, I did miss him, certainly. Ah missed his smell and the way he entered our house afternoons after wark, and his shoulder. Not to cry on, but his shoulder with his reddish blond hair and freckles." She smiled.

"I learned though. We all does. This is the hard part, the part no one is around to teach you, so you learn it yourself. We're not anything, we aren't, if we haven't learned how to change, to grow. I accepted Henry's death. I made my choice to live in Staithes and with that comes all that makes this town — the risks of the sea and the land — forty-five years, and each mornin' I made the choice.

"Your father, though, he didn't see it that way. 'If I'm to fight for my life, I expect somethin' in return,' he said. I couldn't make him understand it doesn't matter where you are or how hard you fight, there ain't no guarantee you'll win. But you'll fight nonet'less. You have to.

"In the end, your father must have realized that, too. He changed. He accepted choices he'd made, and he lived with them. And he fought. He fought for himself and others — for his child and his wife, for these." And she sat up and reached into the wooden box she kept on top of the nightstand near the lamp. She handed me an envelope and I opened it. There were a few letters, I barely recognized the handwriting of my father; a photograph of me as a young boy with a Yankees cap on standing in front of my father's car — a 1963 Buick Riviera Sport Coupe. He's crouched at my left side, a hand behind my back and a hand on my stomach. Holding me up. There were drawings I had made in grammar school.

A newspaper clipping from *The New York Times*. January 2, 1973. Two days after

dad died in a plane crash in the Caribbean Sea with pilot Jerry Hill and the baseball star, the hero of my youth, Clemente. I remembered that Christmas, the silver tree, the lights, two gifts: a plastic batting helmet, and a Louisville bat I used to knock it all down. The resentment that had welled up for years now filled my eyes with fire. I had put it all past me, but it found me: in Staithes, England, my father's birthplace, in his mother's bedroom, sitting on the bed in which he was born.

"He was proud of you, son. He just didn't know how to say it. So I'm sayin' it for him. I can fancy how proud he'd be now, too.

"I asked you here for a rather selfish reason. Your dad was a young man when he left home, you know. He was like his dad in many respects: good, clean, hardworkin', but we worry see, we worry about our children. We want to know we did the best possible job and got the best possible result. When you're as old as I am, you hope to be able to look at your children and say to yourself, 'I done well. Now I'm ready to go.' You hear stories about people whose lives pass before them as they lay dyin' — it's not something that happens on the telly screen behind their eyelids. It's the children and grandchildren who parade bedside in the hospital that's their life story. But me, I've lived a life no mother should live — to have outlasted my husband and my two children. For me to know, to be

10 october 1963
Glen Cove

Dear mum,

We're doing fine. Michael gets bigger by the day, as you can see in the photo. It looks like he'll be the only one — given the time Mary had delivering — but what a handfull, right?

Work is going well. I put in more miles last year than any of the other pilots; though Mary thinks I should ground myself more as the child grows. We'll see...

Love to you,
Your son,

Geoffrey

able to say, 'I done well,' I had to see you, Michael. Sure, I could read to see what my Geoffrey had done, but I needed you before my eyes. If Geoffrey had done good, I would know I had. And I see I have. I have."

She tapped the back of my hand with her finger. I smiled. I took hold of the finger, the hand, and squeezed. It didn't feel like her finger, nor did it feel like I was squeezing although the tautness in the muscle of my thumb told me I was. There was a tautness there. I must have been squeezing. I watched my thumb make a little circle around the knuckle of the finger. There was a tautness, too, in the skin around the bone of the finger — a shadow of a finger, really, straight out of *Gray's*, connected to a wrist around which was a gold bracelet with writing on it, an engraving, a name, a name that is as much a part of me as the one I was born with, connecting me to her, to her husband, to generations of fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, to the land, to the land dropping down to the sea, to the waves, to the waves that lulled Ann Hardraw to sleep.

I let her alone then went back shortly before dinner.

"There's another reason for your bein' here," she said. "Now that you're here, that is."

"What's that?"

"I want you to carry me when I die. Be one of my bearers."

"Ann, don't speak so fond," I said, teasing her in Yorkshire. "Tha're not go—"

"Neeea, Michael, don't play me for an ass. I'm an old woman. I know I'm going to die. And when I do, you'll be there to carry me home." She smiled, I nodded. "OK."

"C'mere, a little closer. I want you to have these." She handed me the package of letters and drawings. "These are yours. The letters and your drawings. Some

photographs. I think you know what to do with 'em."

Among them was the photograph she'd sent me. With her other hand she swept away a tear and brushed back a strand of hair that had fallen in her face — all in one motion as if she were embarrassed at having been caught in a moment of weakness.

"Geoffrey was waitin' for me. I was posin' for a photograph he wanted to take. To remember England by, you know. He looked uncomfortable in the suit jacket, like an old fisherman's lost his sea legs; the bowtie he'd insisted I buy him choked and the shoes were tight. He'd saved all his money for the passage from York, to London, then to New York, and now the train was there and all he wanted to do was leave. I could see he was just achin' to smell the smoke of the train that would take him to York, but my breast was hopin' the smell of coal burnin' in Staithes would be enough to make him stay.

" 'T'two men in mah life are deead, nevver to come back,' I says.

" 'Please, mother,' Geoffrey says, 'tha knaws Ah can't stay. T'sea an' t'mines are beatin' us senseless. Ah'd be killin' myself by stayin'. Ah'm only doin' what mah dad would want.'

" 'Ah knaws, Geoff, Ah knaws.'

" 'Because Ah'm leavin' doesn't mean Ah'm not takin' tha with me. This 'ere *is* where Ah come from. 'At can't change and Ah'll always remember 'at, but t'sadness Ah've felt, t'wreckage an' t'waste, Ah can't live with 'at any more. Ah just don't belong 'ere any more.'

" 'Ah knaws, Geoffrey, Ah knaws.'

" 'Then why don't tha come with me, mum?'

" 'Geoff, tha knaws Ah can't leave yar father.'

" 'But 'e's dead, Ann. Ah saw 'im die.'

" 'Ah can't leave my home, son.' "

Maybe it was something she said, maybe it was the way in which she had spoken, but when Ann stopped talking, handed me back the photograph, and looked away from me toward the window and through it to the sea, I realized that what she'd said earlier was right. She had come to the end of her story.

I left her when she closed her eyes and started sleeping, and went to the Royal Oak for dinner. It was about eight-thirty when I returned. I sat down on an afghan-covered loveseat by the fireplace and settled in with a book. Upstairs, someone spoke. I heard the creak of the hardwood floor near the top step. Someone spoke again, and I heard my name. It was Joan.

"Yes?" I said.

There was no answer. Maybe I'd misheard. Maybe she hadn't called. I placed my open book on the floor at the foot of the seat. I drew off the afghan and got up.

"Yes, Joan?" I asked again when I reached the foot of the stairs, but she didn't answer still. She was leaning with her back against the wall at the head of the stairs, her arms wrapped tightly around her. I climbed the stairs. Her cheeks were streaked with tears, her body rocked with quiet, heavy sobs. "Joan?" She looked at me, then back into Ann's room.

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As Ann had asked, I was one of the men who bore her coffin. There was Henry and I, Colin and Norman, Marnie's brother Travis, and Charles Preston.

A funeral service was led by the local pastor. He gave a brief eulogy, filled with anecdotes from the life of a stalwart Staithes woman, but I tuned him out. I found myself counting. Flowers. Lights. Tiles. Looking for patterns. Thinking about the weight of the woman waiting in the coffin. Who was *I* to carry her? Remembering the photographs, the letters, the newspaper clippings, the fisherman's cap, the axe. Who was I here to bury?

There was no hearse. There was Evan Mallett's horse and a cart behind it. We lifted the coffin to the cart, sliding it up to the front and fastening it for it was a steep ride to the graveyard. We filled the cart around the coffin with flowers. Then Mr. Mallett got in the seat, took hold of the reins and snapped the horse into motion behind the minister, already a quarter of the way up the hill.

At the cemetery gate the horse stopped. I looked past it to where the pastor had stopped also. He stood with his profile to us, ten yards up. With his left hand, he held a Bible to his chest. His surplice was caught in the wind, which knocked the lace-trimmed hem about like the clew of a lugsail. His hair became dishevelled. He looked at us, glanced at the gate, turned back at the stream of mourners. He stretched his right arm out and with a slight wave of his hand beckoned us to follow. I saw the toes of his black shoes pivot in the gravel, I heard the sound grating in my ears — and I watched him turn away. The horse kicked up again and we entered the graveyard.

Marnie opened the Royal Oak to the mourners after the ceremony at the cemetery. Sharon Preston came over from across the street with a few ling and salmon pies. A wildflower, which I'd picked from the bouquet atop Ann's coffin before it was put in the ground, I now placed in my coat's breast pocket. I took up a beer and turned to face my friends, my family.

"Neea sich thing as dust-t'-dust i'this town," someone was saying. " 'At woman was salt of t'earth, shoo was. By t'sea, of t'sea, and shoo should've been put out to it." There was the low murmur of acknowledgement from the heads around him. In the corner the jukebox was playing the Waterboys.

These things you keep,
you better throw them away.
You want to turn your back
on your soulless days.
Once you were tethered,
now you are free.
Once you were tethered,
now you are free.
That was the river,
this is the sea.

"To friends," I said, my glass held high, "and the brains, heart and guts to recognize 'em." I looked for Marnie in the faces in front of me. I didn't see her. I felt a fingertip then her hand on my shoulder. "Here," she said.

Later that evening, I returned to Ann's home. I made as large a fire as I could and one by one placed my father's effects into the blaze. I sat on the neukin and watched it, but I was no longer angry. When it had gone out, and the ashes had cooled sufficiently, I scooped them up in a ceramic pot. I went outside to where the boats were tied and took one. Half a mile out, the sea and wind quiet around me, I let a handfull of the ashes slip out between my fingers then I poured what remained. I said goodbye to my father.

ix.

A wind rolled off the North Sea covering my face with cold mist. March 23, a Saturday, shortly after eight this morning. The sun, although up for hours, decided

not to join me out on the boat ramp of this has-been fishing town in North Yorkshire.

A half-dozen cobles tied together about twenty yards from the bottom of the ramp nudged against each other with every sea sweep that passed. Seagulls perched on the boats adjusted to the rocking of the waves like old seafarers.

The sun came out of the clouds for a moment then headed back in. I took a few pictures from a seat on a rock that had probably never seen a dry day. It was my last day in Staithes. After five and a half months I wasn't sure how much I knew about my father, but I knew what little I knew about myself. Maybe, in that sense, I knew something about Geoffrey Hardraw.

Marnie was right. We are all of a time and place; mine is not Staithes; hers not New York. Any romantic notions I had of staying there, thoughts I may have had while my head lay in Marnie's lap or deep in a pillow in my bed at the Prestons, were travelers' dreams, best left on the road.

The smoke thinned as it rose from the chimneys and into the warming air. A cup of tea and a scone were waiting for me at the Prestons', so I picked up my camera and notebook and headed over to the bed-and-breakfast for the last time. I picked up my last piece of mail: a note from my mother saying a publisher was interested in my idea for a biographical look at some of the ballplayers who'd reached the 3,000-hit milestone.

I walked up the hill and stood out on the crossroads, my left thumb out, duffle bag at my feet and camera bag strapped over my right shoulder. Nothing happened for a long time, so I began to walk down A-174 toward Whitby. It was to Whitby that James Cook ran away after apprenticing in Staithes. He joined a ship from this port town and many years later, aboard his ship the *Endeavour*, sailed to Australia, New

Zealand and the Sandwich Islands. This is the way my father left, too: from Whitby, to York, to points west. My father's endeavor made him a part of baseball lore. There was still some humor in that, I thought, and I laughed to myself. My own endeavor ... well, it's not finished.

I heard the distant whirring of a small car coming my way. I turned to put out my thumb, but the car was already stopping. It was Marnie.

"Get in, you bloody fool. I can't believe you tried to leave without sayin' goodbye."

I flung my gear into the backseat then strapped myself into the passenger seat. I tried smiling. "Sorry. I guess I thought we'd pretty much taken care of that."

She put the car in gear and we were off. "Well, we hadn't," she said sternly. And then she cocked her head and said coyly: "So, where you headed, sailor?"

I told her of my plans.

"But the train from Whitby to York doesn't run anymore, it stopped years ago. You know that."

"Yeah, I do, I figured I'd just hitch on to a lorry or something going to York and take the train there."

"I could take you," she said. But I wouldn't let her. It was too far and we'd already talked ourselves out, I said. We drove in silence for a long time.

"There's nothing left to say, except maybe I love you and I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry for," she said. "You found what you were looking for."

"But did you?"

"I had, long time ago. When I left London and returned to Staithes. And I have nothing to regret."

When we arrived in Whitby I asked her to drive me to the old train station, where

my father had most likely caught the transfer to York. I asked her to pose for a Polaroid. She resisted. "It's to remember England by," I said.

"Michael, just shut up and take the photo," she said as I released the shutter button.□