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SONG LAKE SUMMER

Continued

The house I sought is on a corner at 80 South Main, on the west side of the street. It was now painted yellow, with white pilasters, and there is a square cupola at the peak of the sloping four-sided roof. A sign across the small porch at the front entrance says: The David Harum House. The house is beautifully built of tongue-in-groove clapboard.

I entered the front door with a fascinated and tremulous feeling. The foyer is large; at the back of it a stairway with a slim banister sweeps gracefully up to the left. In the curve of the wall half-way up the stairwell is a niche for statuary. It was empty now. A 1965 study of the house for the Historic American Buildings Survey, which I read later, says that the niche has been there since the house was built about 1825. The entire hall, the report says, is in its original condition. The first owner paid $1,050 for the house, and sold it to one Charles Weadon who in turn sold it to David Hannum about 1853. The present owners allowed me to explore it at ease, explaining that a number of rooms had been changed since Hannum's day. (The house has since been sold to new owners, who have continued its restoration.)

I cannot describe the feeling I had as I wandered through the house, then looked out through a second floor window at the street, imagining what it was like in David's time when the horse-drawn streetcars went by. A large pine stands on the lawn to the right. Beyond it, in perfect condition, is the brick home in which Andrew Dickson White was born. When you look from the one house to the other, any question of how well White knew Hannum is resolved.

Later I saw a photo of the house taken in David's time from across the street on a snowy winter day. In the picture the property is surrounded by a delicate cast-iron fence that has disappeared. The street is filled with people and horse-drawn sleighs.

I thanked the owners of the house, took my leave, and walked north. There is a modern fire hall on the right a block north of the house; probably the Eagle hotel stood there, and perhaps Phil Zimmer's barbershop. On the left is a large square of trees, bare at that time of year, and grass. Cortland Academy, one of whose founders was Andrew Dickson White's father, once stood at the west side of it, but it burned down long ago.

I imagined David walking this way to work accompanied by the young man Westcott called John Lenox. The front bedroom of the Harum-Hannum house is now called the John Lenox room. Lenox is one character in his book who is poorly drawn. I think the reason is that there was much of Westcott himself in the boy. Westcott was, I suspect, a modest man, and he did not ascribe to Lenox all the talent Westcott actually had. I took a great liking to Westcott in researching this book.

Arthur T. Vance in *The Real David Harum* says that John Lenox was based on John Rankin, who became the mayor of Binghamton, which lies a few miles to the south. Vance wrote that he "probably knew David Hannum better than any living person, and in many ways undoubtedly was the original John Lenox of Mr. Westcott's novel. In fact Mr. Westcott got many of his anecdotes about David Hannum from Rankin. Rankin and Hannum were in business for some eighteen years. Mr. Rankin says it was not an unusual thing for Mr. Hannum to stop and swap horses fifteen or twenty times a day with the neighboring farmers who came to Homer. Mr. Rankin was about twenty-one years of age when he was first engaged in business with Hannum. They were interested in patents notes, mortgages, real estate, and oil-stoves, and they used to travel over the county from one end to the other. I had a very pleasant interview with Mr. Rankin a few weeks ago at his home in Binghamton. He told me many very interesting stories about David Hannum."

This was written, remember, in 1900, two years after Westcott's death.

"The last trip that Mr. Rankin made with Hannum," Vance wrote, "and this was after they dissolved their partnership, was a drive up to the farm of a well-known personage called 'The Deacon,' the same Deacon in *David Harum*."

John Rankin told Vance: "As to John Lenox, while there are a good many circumstances in the book resembling my own acquaintance with him, leaving the hotel while there and stopping at his house, and other similar incidents which friends have recognized, I doubt whether these matters had more than a passing thought in Westcott's brain . . . In the

book he made John Lenox a leader in the choir, whereas I do not know one note from another." Ah, but Westcott did.

"Westcott," Rankin continued, "was cognizant of pretty near all the facts of Hannum's career, and it is true he did bring into the book some of Hannum's friends and colleagues, like Billy P. (Randall) of Cortland."

After a few years of my fascination with David Hannum, and thoughts about adapting it for a film or a musical, I decided the best thing to do with the material I had gathered was to restructure it into a new novel, giving John Lenox the combined qualities of Westcott and Rankin, adding much of the factual material I had uncovered and my knowledge of the region and its contours and woodlands and watercourses.

I gave a great deal of thought to my ethical position in drawing on a prior novel, concluding at last that our literary history is full of twice-told tales. Twice or more. Even King Kong has made it into three movies. And there are all the versions of the tales of Robin Hood, not to mention King Arthur. Shakespeare's plays draw on prior sources. And then there are all the literary works about Faust, which originate in a man of that name born about 1480, a fortune-teller and charlatan who inspired *Historia von Dr. Johann Fausten,* published in Frankfurt in 1587. It is in this version of the story that Faust first makes a pact with the devil. Then, in 1587, came Christopher Marlowe's drama *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus.* But the classic interpretation of the tale is Goethe's poetic drama *Faust*, the first part of which dates from 1808. Henrich Heine's ballad *Faust* appeared in 1851.

The uses of *Faust* continued. Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus* was published in 1947. Its protagonist is a composer modeled on Arnold Schoenberg. Stephen Vincent Bennet had a good time with the legend in *The Devil and Daniel Webster* in the 1930s, with his version of it making it into a 1941 movie with Walter Huston as Scratch. Even Woody Allen had a shot at the subject in one of his short stories.

There is plenty of precedent, then, for using elements of an earlier tale in constructing a new one. But more. There is sometimes substantial and even compelling reason for doing so. In this case, I can think of three.

First: The Westcott book lacks any sort of coherent core. There is no central story to draw the reader onward, only the delightful but episodic vignettes about David. This alone made it unacceptable to those friends I urged to read it.

Second: The book is written in such dense country dialect, phonetically rendered, that it is all but unreadable today, and I was told so by those I importuned to look into it. I realized I would have to modify it if anyone was even to understand it. I was immensely satisfied when one of my friends, on reading my draft of the manuscript, told me that he had an aunt who grew up in that region and I had perfectly rendered her way of speech. If this is so, it is because I saturated myself in it, learning to think in it as one would a foreign language.

Third: Since Westcott was writing about his own time for readers of his own time, he gives you no historical setting for events. For a modern reader some of this background needed to be folded into the story.

There may be yet another reason, unknown even to me until recently.

A Parisian friend of mine once told me that the most vivid descriptions of Paris he had ever read were by Ernest Hemingway, who, he said, noticed things that the French took for granted.

When I was a boy, growing up near Niagara Falls, a chilling Puritanism pervaded Southern Ontario. It was a cold and soulless part of the world. Toronto was known as Hogtown or, more damning, Toronto the Good, for its hypocrisy. Stephen Leacock wrote that they didn't bury the dead in Toronto, they walked them up and down Yonge Street. And someone, perhaps Leacock again, said that the best place to die would be in Toronto on a Sunday because the transition would be so slight. (That was long ago, of course, and the city has changed enormously since then, becoming one of the most attractive and vibrant in North America.)

The moment I crossed the American border, I entered a different ambience. I found most Americans to be warm, friendly, prosperous, contented, generous, and accessible. That has changed in the recent decades of runaway materialism, greed, religious fundamentalism, and corporate corruption, leaving much of the populace worried, defensive, and cynical. The political life of the country has become rancorous, intolerant, and vindictive.

I think I wanted to remind people that once there was an world like that of David Hannum. And while I was working on the story, I virtually *lived* in it. I wish I could go back there and stay. It was all that was good about this country, and, under it all, I believe, still is.

And so I set out on the task, combining fact wherever I could find it with my own free invention, and always with a certain reverence for Alfred Noyes Westcott.

The popularity of the Westcott novel ended with World War II. After Leningrad and Auschwitz and Dresden and Hiroshima, it became increasingly difficult to believe that a man of the kind Westcott portrayed ever existed. And so David was forgotten. It's not that Westcott's novel is hard to find: so many copies were printed that it is easy to pick up

first editions. I have three.

Wherever I could, I restored the names of the communities, and I gave other characters back their original names, using the Arthur Vance book as the source. When I have been unable to restore the real names, however, I have left them as Westcott gave them. Like Dickens, Westcott had a flair for names. Who was the real Zeke Swinney? I don't know. But there is a Swinney Road not far west of Homer.

The source of the story about Hannum and Lena Seward is the girl herself. In 1946 Mrs. Lena Seward Eaton, by now seventy-seven, who had lived her first twenty-five or thirty years in Homer, remembered Hannum in an interview with the *Syracuse Post-Standard.* I obtained a clipping of that interview. Mrs. Seward too said that Westcott's account of the horse-trade with The Deacon is factual. And apparently David and The Deacon did further business together, indicating that the latter in time forgot his anger over their deal. It was, apparently, all in the game among the horse-traders of the time, like winning or losing at cards. Mrs. Eaton said Phil Zimmer was the proprietor of a cigar store. Vance said he ran a barbershop. I've left it a barbershop, on the theory that Vance knew the town well as an adult and, in 1900, was writing from a much fresher memory. I have researched the story of the Cardiff giant. The account is factual.

"David was a great favorite with the young people," Vance wrote. "He loved nothing better than to have a crowd of young boys and girls around him telling them stories. Whenever there was a circus in town he would take them to see the show. Time and again his friends would ask him to have his picture taken. One day he told the children that he had yielded to their wishes, and that if they would go up to the photographer's they could each get a copy. When the eager little ones got there they found that Hannum had had his picture taken, but that he stood with his back to the camera. He laughed a good deal over this joke, and then to appease his young friends had another taken for them."

There are four photos of David in Vance's book. One shows him with his back turned, his left hand behind him and wearing a tall silk hat. In another he wears a Homburg and a suit with a vest and a white handkerchief in the breast pocket, a watch-chain, and a four-in-hand tie. A full-figure photo taken immediately after the Civil War shows him in a short beard. A fourth photo, taken shortly before his death, is a bust shot. His head is bald, the fringe of hair around the pate is white, his nose is long, and the mouth is sensitive. The eyes have a look of sadness.

I reached the building to which I had been directed: David's bank. It stands on the east side of the street, a three-story brick structure. It is now occupied by a restaurant called, inevitably, David Harum Restaurant. I went in, looked at its plank floors, and imagined what it must have been like when the teller's cage and the counter were here.

Next I went to the Homer town hall. At the side of it was an entrance to some sort of basement meeting room. The sign identified it as the David Harum Senior Citizens' Center. I entered the front door of the building and found the registrar's office, where I asked for a plot map of Glenwood Cemetery. I looked at its markings, saw David's name, thanked the clerk, went back to the car, and drove to the cemetery, which is at the juncture of Cayuga Avenue and the highway that leads to Preble and Song Lake. I searched in the cemetery, which slopes up the west side of the valley, and found the area indicated on the map, but I couldn't for a long time find the grave.

Whether Hannum's father — whose name was Zalatis Hannum — was as harsh a man as Westcott portrayed, I cannot say. The reference in the Andrew Dickson White autobiography suggests that he was. The Arthur Vance book paints a softer portrait. But one of Vance's sources of information was T.W. Hannum, a brother of David's living in Hartford, Connecticut, who perhaps had reason to modify the image of his father. I have assumed that Westcott, supported by White, was reliable on this point. (There are still Hannums in that region and in Connecticut.) If there was a brother as despicable as 'Lish, he was presumably the one who died before David. While T.W. Hannum took mild issue with certain details in the Westcott book, he did not, which I find suggestive, quibble with the portrait of 'Lish.

As I looked through the cemetery on a mild March day, with the last patches of snow melting around me, it seemed that I had for years been drawn to this place. I grant you this is silly; but I felt as if he had wanted me to come, wanted me to restore his true name.

And then I found the grave, on a hillside toward the north edge of the cemetery, which abuts the long sloping road on which, in Westcott's imagination and mine, David drove the buggy as he described one of the dark times in his life.

It was a simple vertical tombstone, with his name not on its face but across the curved top of it. It was flanked by two small tombstones, lying flat. One of them was engraved, to my surprise, Zalatis Hannum. Then his father was buried with him. The other stone was inscribed: Lois Babcock, His Wife.

I stood there on the slope, sodden with snow-melt, among pine trees, looking across the valley, lovely even on this leafless March day. In the distance beyond the town, on the eastern slope, cars and tractor-trailers and trucks and buses

hastened north and south on Interstate 81, their occupants as unaware of what had happened here as I had been for so long.

The sky was scattered with clouds, the pale sunlight was filtered, patterned, by the bare trees. A slight pink afternoon glow illumined the top of his tombstone, in the manner of what in movie-making is called a key light. And I kept looking at the name, knowing that all that remained of the country banker I had come to admire lay under the wet brown grass at my feet. I was overwhelmed by emotion, almost in tears, as I stared at those eleven letters.

David Hannum.

And I thought:

I've found you at last, old friend.

SONG LAKE SUMMER

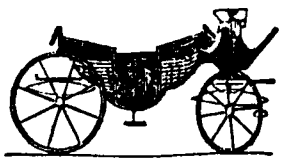
Chapter One

"And that, I am sorry to say, is the situation," General Woolsey concluded. He was a big man, hard muscled in spite of his age, with a stone countenance whose most conspicuous features were a large cleft chin and gray walrus mustaches that all but concealed his mouth when he fell silent. He had been seriously wounded at Vicksburg, John knew. His veined hands rested motionless on the yellow oak of his heavy desk, and his pale blue eyes were soft with compassion as they looked unblinkingly at John Lenox. "If I can lend you some money . . . ."

"No sir," John said. "I appreciate your offer, General, but I must gratefully decline to accept."

The general's low voice had the measured steadiness of habitual command. "The estimate is that you will realize about two thousand dollars when everything has been sold and all claims against the estate have been met."

"My piano should bring another thousand," John said. He was a slim young man with a long face now drained and pale with growing comprehension of his prospects. His thick straight hair was very dark, his skin had a slight olive hue, and his eyes were a deep liquid brown. They had an almost haunted expression and, had he not been a man, they would have been described as beautiful. Fellow students had often remarked that he slightly resembled the famous portrait of Chopin, which he had come to find quite ironic. He sat erect and still at the visitor's side of the desk, looking at the general in his high leather chair, back to a large window through which one could see, below



and in the distance, the masts and furled sails of ships at anchor in the Hudson and, beyond, the early-summer green of New Jersey farms.

"You do not have to sell your piano, John. I must reiterate that you are under no legal obligation for your father's debts."

"I understand, sir. It is a question of integrity."

"Yes, yes," the general said, on the edge of discomfort. One did not discuss such things. They were to be taken for granted. "It is a very good piano, as I recall."

"Yes sir. It is a Bechstein."

"Is that better than a Steinway?"

John smiled slightly. "Yes sir. Much better. It should fetch a good price."

"And what will you use in its place?"

"Nothing. I have no further need of it. In truth, General, I had all but made up my mind in Paris, even before I received your cable, to give up music. My father's death only hastened a decision that was inevitable anyway." His controlled and modulated speech was as correct as his posture.

"But why? I was under the impression that you were doing rather well."

"In music that is not enough. In music, the difference between good and bad is enormous, but the difference between good and excellent is small and that between excellent and superb is perceptible perhaps only to the professional. And I aspired to something even beyond that. But I lack something. Perhaps it is because I am an American. We have yet to produce an important composer, although some, I suppose, would make a case for Gottschalk."

"That scoundrel!" the general said with some heat.

"Yes sir, no doubt he was. But he made an effort to give us an American music, and for that I must respect him. But to explain, if I may. Last year I heard some music by a young man named Debussy who is not yet known in this country, although I assure you that he will be. When I heard it, everything else in music seemed . . . stale to me, and all at once I knew what greatness is, and I knew that I did not have it." He took a deep breath, then sighed. "How did my father lose his money, General?"

General Woolsey cleared his throat. "It is not necessary, I am sure, to tell you how much I respected your father."

"No sir."

"The times are changing, John."

"Yes sir."

"I can't say that I am any more pleased by that fact than your father was, but I recognize it." He tossed a slight nod over his shoulder toward the window and the ships in the distance. "In a few more years, the sailing ships will be gone.

The steam packets are replacing them very quickly now. As a ship's chandler, your father should have prepared to supply the new trade. He hated machines. There was something of the romantic about him, you know."

"I cannot picture him that way."

"If you had ever seen him dance with your mother, you would. Do you remember her at all, John?"

"Sometimes I think I do, and sometimes I think I have merely constructed a memory from her photographs."

"One of the loveliest women I ever knew. And how she could sing!" He paused, thoughtful. "John," he said firmly, "your father's people in Boston are all wealthy — *very* wealthy. Have you thought of contacting them?"

"No sir!" John said, his eyes hardening. "Absolutely not. I want nothing of those people, nothing. I have never even met any of them. My father never spoke to them or of them, and I don't intend to either."

"It was only a suggestion. I grant that they behaved badly."

"I have stronger words for it. As far as I am concerned, I have no relatives. Now you were telling me how my father lost his money."

"There's not much more to tell. The business was declining. He could have cut his losses but he refused to do so, preferring to pay old employees out of his private reserves. I helped him as much as I could, and he held on as long as he could, but in the end, he . . . " The general made a vague wave of the hand to complete the story.

"He never told me," John said, almost inaudibly. "I could have lived on a quarter of the allowance he had been sending me. We were not very close, I fear."

"You must not blame him too much. After your mother's death, he wrapped himself in . . . a kind of silence. But he was proud of you, and very fond of you. I can tell you that."

"I sometimes felt that he was."

A silence settled on the two men, which the general finally broke. "Well, John, I only wish I'd had better news to give you. At least you'll have a little money to live on until you can make some plans."

"I have been thinking about reading for the law, but I do not know if I would have an aptitude for it."

"I would not try to decide anything immediately, if I were you. Now, when do you think you would like to hold the auction?"

"I shall find lodgings in the next several days. There are things of my mother's that I should like to keep . . . ."

"Of course, of course! Take anything you want."

"Well," John said, rising, "I have taken up enough of your time. You have been very, very kind, General."

"Not at all," General Woolsey said, also standing. "Please call on me at any time. If I can introduce you to anyone in business, if I can do anything at all." He came around the desk.

"I will indeed call on you, sir, I promise. I thank you again, and I bid you good morning."

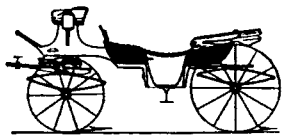
"Good day to you, John," the general said, shaking his hand. He escorted John to the double doors, which were padded with fine green leather and studded with heavy brass nails. The general opened the door for him, then said, "John, perhaps you should not be so hasty in giving up music. The young are intolerant, even of themselves. Surely there is room in the world for the merely excellent." The general smiled with gentle amusement.

John smiled back. "Not for me, sir. I would rather do something that is only a job, something that does not matter much to me. Thank you again, General."

General Woolsey watched him walk through the outer office, past several clerks in green eye-shades. The bald man at the desk near the general's door said, "That's a likeable young man, sir."

"Yes, he is. He looks like his mother, even to her gestures. And he doesn't even remember her. Bring me the market report, Harley," the general said and went back into his office.

John emerged from the five-story stone building and stood for a moment by an attached half-round pillar at the right of the entrance. On it there was a brightly-polished brass plate bearing the inscription *Woolsey, Walsh & Davis, Brokers.* The noise of traffic was deafening and it grew worse as John walked east through the busier districts: the crashes of horses' hooves and the clatter of iron-tired wooden wheels, the crack of whips, and the cries of angry drovers. It diminished as he approached Fifth Avenue, where the carriages of the rich were tired with rubber. He paused to watch the passing broughams, landaus, and Victorias in which young ladies posed with tiny parasols for the admiration of pedestrians. John felt himself a stranger in these streets, and in this city. He far preferred Paris.



The cries of a newsboy penetrated his thought. "Get your Tribune, get your Tribune." The boy, in torn knickers held up by suspenders and wearing a peaked cap, was no more than eleven. He looked appallingly poor, and John bought a paper for a penny and gave him a dime besides.

He walked on and found himself by the East River, on which a warm June wind was whipping up scallops, brilliant

white against the water's clear blue. Small boys were, to his amazement, swimming near a high wooden pier: the water must still be very cold. John watched one boy, nine or ten years old, hold his nose and leap from the pier, screaming as if he were plunging to destruction. The boy disappeared in a splash, then came to the surface, calling to a friend, "Come on, the water's great!" John felt a twinge of regret, which came over him from time to time, that he had not had a brother or sister to share his childhood, his dreams, and now his great sadness and confusion. Never, in fact, had he felt as alone as he did now.

He looked up at the Brooklyn Bridge whose construction he had watched through much of his life. Now it was completed. It had lost none of its power of astonishment. He considered it one of the wonders of the world. There were those who thought it ugly, but to John it resembled, with its two great stone Gothic arches and thick curved suspension cables and the myriad vertical sustaining cables, a fabulous musical instrument stretched across the water, a great æolian harp designed to be played by the river wind. He almost could hear its ethereal and spectral music, a lament perhaps for an age he sensed was vanishing. So too many of the French thought the Eiffel Tower, built for the 1889 Paris World's Fair, was ugly and should be torn down. John thought it was beautiful, an augury of the future, and that it would be there for a long time.

Already telephones lines were reaching out through the country, and the Twentieth Century was not all that far in the future.

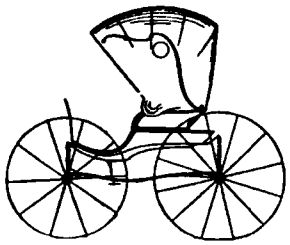
Chapter Two

David Hannum's black buggy passed with considerable clatter over a wooden bridge, then veered to the right along a yellow dusty road beside a creek whose waters rippled over round stones, slowing occasionally to form clear deep pools on whose sandy bottoms sunfish and trout cast their moving shadows. He was happy with himself, having an hour earlier concluded a small real estate transaction to his complete satisfaction, which is to say that he had got the better of the deal. The roan mare, Jenny, jogged along easily as David looked up at the lovely round Adirondack hills, smooth in places with light green farmlands whose crops were just coming up, darker green in the woodlots.

He was rather under middle height, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, with a clean-shaven ruddy face. He had not a mole but a slight protuberance the size of half a large pea on the line from the right nostril to the corner of his mouth. He was bald but for a clamp of thick reddish-yellow hair that surrounded his head to a line an inch or two above the ears. He had small but intensely blue eyes, a nose of indeterminate long shape, and a large mouth whose corners now — and usually — were held downward, as if in ceaseless effort to repress a chuckle. He wore a sack-coat of dark pepper-and-salt coloration and a waistcoat and trousers to match. A diamond stud of perhaps two carats showed in the triangle of the spotless white shirt front.

The buggy and horse left a trailing dust cloud above the road, a cloud that settled at leisure in the still and almost luminous June air, highly visible in the sunlight but invisible in the great splashes of shadow from chestnut and maple trees. David was whistling — a peculiar whistle produced by his tongue against the roof of his mouth; and he was incapable of carrying a tune — and enjoying the infinitely more musical sounds of the birds and the murmuring creek.

Presently he came to a small community that consisted of a few houses near a crossroad, a blacksmith shop, a general store, and a large white clapboard building whose red-lettered wooden sign declared that it was the Whiteboro Inn. He had no intention of stopping, but as he passed the inn, he was given pause by a bay horse with a handsome coat and good muscle and fine lines. It was being halter-exercised in the yard at the inn. He did not stop his own horse immediately, not wishing to give an impression of eagerness, but drove a hundred yards or so past the inn before halting. He got out of the buggy and made his way slowly back to the inn, the image of an idler.



One of the two men, the one who had been trotting the horse in a circle around him, was lean and fairly young. He wore bulky work pants, broad suspenders, and a full-sleeved shirt. The other, somewhat older, was of heavier build and he wore a soiled and rumpled suit of uncertain age.

David leaned on the top rail of the fence and rested a buttoned shoe on the bottom rail. The two men were as aware of his unspeaking presence as he was of theirs, but they did not give him a glance. In due time they brought the horse to a halt and the younger man began to rub him down. The animal was beautifully groomed.

"For sale?" David said at last. He pronounced it fer sale.

"Walll," drawled the older man in the suit, "I never see the hoss that wa'n't, 'f the price was right."

"Yourn?" David inquired.

"Mine an' hisn," the man said. He was about ten years David's junior, maybe forty-five or six.

"What ye askin' for him?" David asked eventually.

"One-fifty."

David looked the horse over, this time with conspicuous attention, and shook his head to indicate he did not like what

he saw. Finally he shook it more decisively and started to turn away, as if he had seen enough.

"There ain't a scratch nor a pimple on him," said the man in the suit in a tone of slight hostility. "He's sound an' kind an' he'll stand without hitchin' an' a lady c'n drive him's well as a man."

"Walll," David drawled tolerantly, scratching his right cheek with the fingers of his left hand, "I ain't got anythin' agin him. An' probably that's all true, every word of it. But one-fifty's a consid'ble price for a hoss these days. I hain't got no pressin' use for another hoss, an' in fact I've got one or two for sale myself."

"He's worth two hundred just as he stands," the other man said. He was beginning to look angry. "He hain't had no trainin' an' he c'n draw two men in a road wagon better'n fifty."

David looked the horse over again. The more he did so, the more he liked it. "Just so," he said. "Just so. He may be wuth the money, but just as I'm fixed now he ain't wuth it to me. An' I hain't got that much money with me if he was."

The thin younger man, who had bitten off a block of tobacco and was now chewing it, spat a brown stream contemptuously into the dirt. "I suppose you'd take him for a gift, wouldn't ye?"

"Well yes," David said. "I dunno but I would — if you'd throw in a pound o' tea an' a halter."

The younger man laughed a little in spite of himself: the rites were as familiar to him and his partner as they were to David, and their hostility was feigned. "Well this ain't no gift enterprise," he said, "an' I guess we ain't gonna trade. But jus' for the sake of speculation, an' my own abidin' curiosity, just what would you say he's worth t' yeh?"

"Well, I come over this way this mornin' to see a feller that owed me a trifle o' money," David lied. "Exceptin' of some loose change, what he paid me's all I got with me." He took out his wallet and removed some bills from it. "That wad's got a hunderd an' twenty-five into it. An' if you'd sooner have your hoss an' halter than the wad, why, I'll bid yeh good day."

"You're offerin' one-twenty-five for the hoss an' halter?" the younger man said.

"It appears that I am."

"You've made a trade," the older of the two said, taking the money from David's hand.

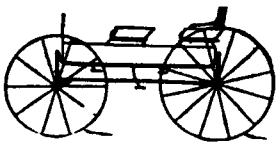
David was immediately suspicious: why hadn't the man dickered? Dickering was part of the game, like bluffing at cards, although David had no interest in cards or, for that matter, fishing or hunting or any other sport. He loved only a good horse-trade. He wasn't even interested in racing the animals, having had one bad experience in that line. He just liked to trade them, win or lose, and if a man wouldn't dicker, why that took half the pleasure out of it for David, and he felt cheated, and he was now faintly annoyed. Yet as far as he could see, he had purchased a fine and sound animal. "Well," he said, "this here's all right, far's it's gone. But you've talked pretty strong 'bout this hoss. I don't know who you fellers be, but I can find out."

"There hain't been one word said to you about this hoss that wa'n't gospel truth," the man said, "as you'll find out."

"So be it," David said. "I'll take him home."

The younger men led the horse out of the exercise yard and handed the halter rope to David. Still discomfitted by the ease of the transaction, David tied the horse behind the buggy, then climbed into it. "Good day to yeh," he said to the men, touching his forehead with his buggy whip, and clucked the roan into motion. The bay followed patiently behind.

It was three days later that David discovered what was wrong with the horse, and it was, as he told his sister Polly, the meanest thing that can be wrong with a horse. It was a balker. It stopped dead in its tracks on the road. Nothing David could do would move the animal until, after a half hour, it made up its mind to continue. A mile or two along, the horse halted again. "An' it's slow work settin' behind a balker," David told Polly, then chuckled. "When I got t' thinkin' on it, mebbe what those fellers told me about the hoss wa'n't gospel truth, but it was sure good enough jury truth."



John wandered absently through the fine old house on a street two blocks north of Washington Square, now and then touching an object — a bookcase, a glass dome covering wax flowers on a marble table — and passing on to something else. It all seemed strangely familiar and familiarly strange.

The first conversation about her that he could remember must have taken place when he was about four. It was after dinner, and he asked how it was that he had no mother, like other boys. His father said that he had a mother, she was the lady in the painting, the lady in the photographs. "Then where is she?" he seemed to remember asking. There was a hush. Mildred, the housekeeper, paused in the act of pouring tea for his father, then resumed, and his father said, "She's dead," in a tone so bleak that John could still hear it. That he did remember. He had heard about dead. It was something like asleep. "Then let's go and wake her up," he said. "She's gone to heaven," Mildred said. He had heard of heaven, too:

it was someplace pretty, like Central Park, but farther away, and it was hard to get there.

A child cannot understand death, he mused now. Can anyone? Can anyone really understand the absolute cessation of perception and thought?

By the time he was in school, he had come at least to accept that she was never coming back. And by then he had another problem to puzzle him: why did he have no grandparents, no aunts and uncles and cousins, like other children? He had posed this question to Mildred. His father had by now become so aloof that he asked him almost nothing. Mildred had replied that he did in fact have grandparents and other relatives. Then why had he never seen them? From her circuitous answer he gained an impression that his father did not like them.

Not until he was thirteen did he find the courage to breach the wall that his father had built around himself and ask for answers to his mysteries. In a long and anguished monologue by firelight, his father had told him the story, halting now and then over some thought he found particularly painful or to refill his brandy glass at the sideboard. John could not comprehend what he was hearing: that his father's people had disowned him for marrying a French-Canadian immigrant, a servant girl and, worse, a Catholic.

"I have never forgiven them," his father said, then added with a venom John had never suspected he possessed: "And you mustn't either."

His father had, fortunately, inherited some money directly from his grandfather, and with it he founded his own business. For three years he and his young wife tried without success to have a child and then, at last, had John. Two years later, John's mother died of diphtheria.

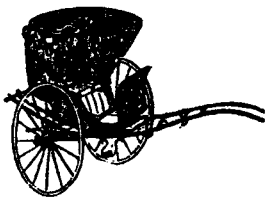
"She was the loveliest woman I ever knew," his father said. "She was truly a gentle soul, and very wise. I wish she had lived at least long enough for you to know her." His face was without expression but tears were tracing down his cheeks. That was the only time John ever saw his father weep. Indeed, he could almost see it now, and the firelight caught in the brandy glass.

"You have my face," his father had said, "but you have her eyes and her mouth and her hair. And so I want you to understand, John, that if sometimes I look away from you, it is not that I do not love you, but that I see her in your face."

Another minor mystery was resolved. At least it was not because, as John had sometimes suspected, his father did not like him.

Oh Pa, he thought now, why did you not see me as a consolation for her loss? We might have helped each other. Instead they had lived together in this house, in their separate solitudes and their distance, and thenceforth unexpressed, affection, at least until John went off to Andover and then Princeton and finally the Paris Conservatory, and by then John felt himself detached from the world.

He did not participate in the Sunday ritual of church-going because his father did not. Drawn by a shy curiosity, he entered a church — for the first time in his life — when he was fifteen, and sat in a back row to watch an Episcopalian service. He found it infinitely strange: the costumes, the ritual gestures, the murmurous incantations, the kneeling, and the hymns. To be unnoticed, he rose when everyone else did, sat down when they did, knelt when they did. But he felt foolish, and he watched those around him with deep incredulity. Later he desperately wanted to discuss this experience and, lacking anyone else, told his father he had been to a church service. His father, who was reading his evening newspaper, looked up over his spectacles and said, "Why?" And that seemed to end the conversation.



A moment later, however, his father looked up again and said, "Which one?"

"Episcopalian," John said.

"Hypocrites," his father said, and that was the end of it.

A week or two later, John went to a Roman Catholic service. He thought the church itself and the costumes were more beautiful, and the theatrics rather more interesting, but otherwise the ritual meant no more to him than the first he had seen. Then came Easter, and he brooded on the story of the Crucifixion. It was beyond his comprehension that masses of the human species should so gaily celebrate an execution. There was a gory morbidity about Christianity that made him almost shudder when he thought about it. If the story of the Passion taught anything, it was that man is cruel and unjust and virtue is despised.

His mother had played piano by ear, and sung old French songs. Because he had been told that about her, John asked if he could study piano. A smile flicked across his father's face as he said, "Of course."

Within weeks, the piano was his passion. Within six months the German woman who taught him said that he had gone beyond her, and sent him to another teacher. And in time a second passion came to him: the desire to go to France and learn the language of his mother.

To be continued