***THE BOOKWORM TURNS* / A Literary Intrigue
by Robert R. Anderson**

Copyright by Robert R. Anderson

Published by The Press of The Bob Frost Correspondence College of Poetry
*Guilford, Vermont in the year MMXV*

WARNING*: The unsophisticated reader, the unreconstructed liberal, and the smug academic should stop reading immediately and proceed no further. Psychical damage may occur. You have been cautioned*.

 October 1993
Death was instantaneous.
 The woodcock had flushed into the bright mid-morning Vermont sky, an unusually clear going-away shot. It landed with a thump on the soft leaf mold at the foot of the wooded hillside over-looking the tangled wetland stretching beyond. My tough little tan and white Brittany bitch had pointed it and she now scampered down the sun-dappled hill to pick up the small, plump bird and return it to me. It had been all too simple and too easy.
 As I sat on a gentle slope and leaned against the bole of a wild apple tree, I gnawed on a sandwich. The woodcock was a still warm presence, pressing gently against my hip, nestled in the pocket of my canvas hunting vest. Ordinarily, we found woodcock in overgrown patches near boggy ground. When they flushed, they soared through the branches, swerving and twisting erratically. Mounting the shotgun in such contorted overgrowth and trying to swing on the fast-disappearing bird’s flight resulted in frustration all too often.
 Yellow leaves from the apple tree fluttered to the ground and a feeling of mellow languor spread through my frame. The curious dog prowled around the verge of a nearby muddy stock pond, more a ditch than a pond. It had been dug several generations ago and was now going back to scrub, for cattle had not been pastured here for a decade. The strong sun was warming the chill of morning and, when I lit my pipe and sent the fragrant smoke spiraling aloft, I felt a sense of content, just the two of us alone in that placid autumn scene. Contentment, these past few uproarious months, had been elusive. Bear with me, and I will explain.

I had lost my wife of twenty-four years over a year and one-half ago in a bizarre accident. The road commissioner’s teen-age son, furious at his father for abandoning the family, had shouldered his deer rifle and shot and killed Mary as she emerged from the commissioner’s trailer. He had assumed that she was the other woman who had stolen his father’s affections. In fact, Mary merely had been consulting with the commissioner about the state of the muddy parking field at the upcoming town fair in September. The real other woman, horrified, promptly left the town and the state. The foolish young man would contemplate his rashness as a longtime guest of the state.
 Mary and I over the years had grown to accept one another’s interests and peculiarities, and, if romance was conspicuously missing since the outset, we were able to live agreeably with one another. In fact, I had grown to suspect that romance was nothing more than a literary device. She had belonged to the fire department auxiliary, the grange, the town fair committee, and the village church’s women’s group. I had been a justice of the peace and chairman of the board of civil authority. We had served our little Vermont village as upright, responsible, and, possibly, rather dull citizens. I missed her. And I was not particularly good at cooking for myself.
 Life’s little events until now had proceeded in an orderly manner. Suddenly, with her death, all the orderliness was turned upside down and little manageable events became a cascade. I had an offer for the bookstore I had owned and, it being too good to refuse even in the best of times, I accepted it and sold the store on the main street of our little neighboring market town, a congenial place of six thousand souls. Our family stretched back to the Green Mountain Boys and for generations our three thousand acres of Northeast Kingdom forest had been scientifically managed for timber harvest. A purchase offer from a timber company appeared on the heels of the sale of the bookstore, and, after consulting with my son, that, too, seemed too good to let pass and we sold. Hardly had that concluded, when my son, for a decade a Wall Street banker, was offered the presidency of the local bank. That was not without precedent as my father had been its president and his father before him. Longing for a simpler and more harmonious world, he accepted.
 I decided to turn over our family home of four generations to him, his wife, and their three children and intended to build myself a small cottage in a two acre clearing in the woods out of sight of the house. The house had been built soon after the turn of the nineteenth century, a big center-chimney place of two and one-half storeys, breasting a knoll and shaded by an ancient maple. It was framed up with hewn logs, roofed with slate, and, conventionally, painted white. And, to heat it, the owner needed deep pockets. A large red hay barn stood behind the house. It was the kind of place you see in calendars.
 All winter, I felled hemlocks and pines for the cottage. With my small tractor, I skidded the logs out of our woods and across the snowy hayfield to a roadside landing. A dairy farmer who had a small mill with a circular saw ripped the logs into studs, joists, and planks after sugaring was done for the season. Time was pressing as my son would arrive soon and I would need to vacate the house.

As fortune, or misfortune, would have it, in early April I vacated not only the house but the still muddy state of Vermont as well, leaving the construction of the cottage, which I had planned to build myself, to a neighboring carpenter and his son. At the time of my departure, a pleasant prospect seemed to stretch before me. I was wrong.
 This is how the events transpired that appeared at the outset so tantalizingly serene but ultimately scared me to my core. Had I any inkling of what I was getting myself enmeshed in, I would have happily spent those warm months sawing and nailing. But my son, grateful for the gift of his new home complete with antique furnishings, ancestor portraits, table service, family silver, and no mortgage staked me to the construction costs and, quite literally, pushed me out the door.

“I have a deal for you.”
 The mellifluous voice on the other end of the phone line was that of my old boarding school roommate. Wally Nichols was an unusual fellow by anybody’s accounting. Not the hail-fellow-well-met sort that was so off-putting but warm, round, and avuncular. Avuncular he was in the extreme and well-rounded—well-rounded in both senses of the word. When you were around Wally, you had the reassuring sensation that you were now in capable hands and that all would be well, all worries cease. Perhaps, that was why he was one of Hartford’s leading attorneys and, as a board member for countless good causes, one of its most prominent citizens—Wallace Pomeroy Nichols, Esquire, gentleman bachelor.
 “What sort of deal?”
 We had dined together two days previous at the April meeting of the Wednesday Club on Commonwealth Avenue near the Public Garden in Boston. We were both non-resident members of the venerable bibliophiles club. I regularly made the trip from Vermont to attend the monthly suppers, Wally sporadically. He now knew of my housing situation. I had told him that I was a bit uncomfortable at the prospect of what to do with myself now that I was surrendering my home to my son and his family. The prospect of pitching a tent or sleeping on a cot in the barn seemed bleak. Certainly, I could have stayed in the house, but that seemed unfair to its new occupants.
 “I have a house that needs a temporary caretaker for a couple of months. Part of an estate settlement that’s dragging on. Just a small place, sort of cute. Out in West Hartford.”
 “Okay, I’ll do it,” I replied. I am not the impulsive kind, but a voice inside me said ‘Why not, what the hell.’
 “That’s just dandy! When can you get here?” he asked.
 “I was thinking I’d pop in on Gerry for the race next weekend, then I’m all yours. Give me a room for the night Thursday. I’ll catch the train and come back Sunday. That suit?”
 “Eminently,” he said smoothly, “come ahead.”

I liked to get away from the mud and rotting snow of early April in Vermont. The steeplechase race in the hills north of Baltimore was the perfect antidote to my bleak homeland. The daffodils would be in bloom, the trees in bud, and the grass already several inches tall. Spring would be well-started.
 Gerry Mitchell was a friend of Wally’s and mine from school days. He farmed beef cattle and raised hunters on his family’s place in the lovely rolling hills of the Maryland hunt country north of Baltimore. Annually, I would spend a December week with him to ride to the hounds of the Elkridge Harford Hunt which were kenneled nearby. In turn, I would give him a week of trout fishing in early June.
 “Wally wants me to caretake a place for him for a couple of months.” I had explained my precarious housing situation previously.
 We were sipping bourbon at a corner table of Marconi’s. The venerable Baltimore restaurant was wedged into a small row house downtown. It had been a favorite of Mencken’s and long been the premier institution in the city for fine dining. There was a shabby elegance to the place. Its waiters, attired in well-worn tuxedoes, knew most of the patrons by name and preference. There you could find the cuisine of the Chesapeake done with simple elegance and French flair.
 “Sounds like a good deal. What are you going to do with yourself, flop around?”
 I had not given that much thought, and the arrival of our dinners short-circuited further discussion. Of all the restaurants in all the world, or at least my little world, Marconi’s was my favorite. And their sautéed oysters served on a dry-cured slice of Maryland country-cured ham was my idea of what heaven might provide on one of its better days. Thought about the future ceased as I lifted knife and fork.
 The following morning we were up early and, after a hearty breakfast and his daily chores in the barn and stable, Gerry suggested we join the huntsman and his whippers-in to walk the fifty-odd hounds out of their nearby kennel. We strolled behind the well-mannered pack in its morning perambulation through the adjoining pastures. The day still had a bit of chill left over from winter, but the air was clean and clear and the rising sun warmed us. Later, after the hounds had returned to kennel for feeding, Gerry and I decided to kill an hour walking the hilly course across the lane upon which the afternoon races would be run. By the time we had had sufficient hiking, the atmosphere of a country fair setting up had begun as concessions and tents were arriving and being erected around the snow-fenced-paddock and the long finishing straight.
 Race day parties were popping up all over the adjoining countryside and the smoky aroma of grilling meat perfumed the rural air as we drove home in Gerry’s pick-up truck. His wife had laid a festive board and popped the cork from a champagne bottle. Over lunch, they discussed the chances of the local entries, reaching no agreement. Stifling a belch, I pushed my chair from the table and stretched. Already the muscles of my legs were protesting their morning’s exercise. I must get myself into better shape when I returned to Hartford. Despite the winter work in the woods, I still felt lethargic. Was I growing old already?
 The two races, three miles across real hunting country and over sixteen formidable board fences, ran their course without incident. There was a fall over a fence in the second race, but both horse and jockey staggered away, dazed but unhurt. By late afternoon, the thousands who had ventured out from the city and suburbs for a lovely spring afternoon in the country were making their ways homeward, well fed and lubricated. The ninety-first running of The My Lady’s Manor Steeplechase was now a pleasant memory. For the next two weekends, the remaining two traditional steeplechases would preoccupy the countryside. Then as Vermont was beginning to recognize its brief bit of spring weather, Maryland shortly would swing into summer.

What are you going to do with yourself? Flop around? That question that Gerry had asked over supper at Marconi’s perplexed me as the train rumbled northward Sunday evening. I knew no one in Hartford nor did I have any idea of how I might occupy my time. In truth, my only friend was my gun dog and she I had left behind. The confining suburbs are no place for a country dog used to roaming.
 I had left my little Brittany bitch with my son and his family. She was an adaptable sort and would supervise her home as they gradually settled in. I never had friends in the ordinary way. I am a friendly sort but not the kind that makes lasting friendships. Not the kind you would invite out for a beer or a ball game. Between my wife and my gun dog I wanted for no further companionship. Life without her I had slowly been able to accept. But life without a dog? Dogs, I have always contended, make human beings bearable.
 When the taxi deposited me that evening at Wally’s imposing late nineteenth-century home, he was gone. I was deferentially greeted by the elderly Filipino couple who kept house for him and handed a note. It informed me that I was to meet him tomorrow for lunch at an old yachting club in the little maritime town of Essex, fronting the broad, placid Connecticut River only few miles from its outlet into Long Island Sound. Why, I wondered.
 I needed a sound sleep and the soft, enveloping mattress soon had me contentedly wafted off to where the just slept dreamless sleeps. Bird song had me awake at dawn. I had no idea when breakfast might appear so in the intervening hours I shuffled in my slippers from room to room pondering the place Wally had chosen for home. Like him, it was expansive. The scale of it wanted someone like Wally to fill it. A dainty woman would have found it most uncomfortable.
 In style, it fell into the class generally termed Shingle Style with many gables, turrets, and chimneys. It sprouted porches, both the upper storey sleeping variety as well as the broad one that wrapped around much of the ground storey. The house had a rural aspect, despite its city location, as it backed up to the screening woods of the rolling acres of parkland that contained the city’s extensive rose gardens. An acre of lawn and shrubbery surrounded the building.

I was directed to the clubhouse Wally had specified that sparkling spring morning by a helpful codger walking his dog. It was an imposing eighteenth century manse at the end of the little street that ran down to the river. Essex had been home to early sea captains and they had built themselves handsome homes along this street. There was a charm to the little village that only age, ancient shade trees, and sound architectural taste can produce.
 The clubhouse seemed to be empty, but after repeatedly hammering the door knocker, an ancient appeared and informed me that Wally could be found messing about in his sailboat at the tiny dock at the street’s end.
 “Come aboard!” Wally seemed larger than usual, doubtless due to his bulky cowl-necked sweater and floppy canvas trousers, both, appropriately, faded shades of yachting white.
 “What the hell’s this all about , Wally?”
 “Tell you in a bit,” he replied and cast us off. A strong breeze was running downriver and kicking up little whitecaps. He glided out into the middle of the river, came about, and began tacking upstream. In half an hour, he slipped into long, narrow Hamburg Cove. It was calm out of the blustery wind on the river and we skimmed along quietly. With its steeply forested hillsides plunging into the water, the Cove reminded me of the Rhine. I half expected to look up and see the ruins of a Rhenish pirate’s castle.
 “The name of my firm’s Knight, Smith, and Thomas,” he said as he languished over the tiller.
 “I know that. You’re a partner, aren’t you? So what?”
 “The third generation of Thomases died a couple of years back. Good man he was. Had just one son. The kid was so upset at his dad’s death—unnaturally so, in retrospect—that we gave him a job after he dropped out of Yale. Out of sympathy, you know. He didn’t work out. Very much so. Never hire anyone out of sympathy. You’re just asking for trouble.”
 “Again, so what?” I asked.
 “The kid’s running a Ponzi scheme now,” he replied.
 “You’re joking! How do you know that?”
 “I’ve overheard talk at the Hartford Club. Happy talk. Gloating. The silly asses don’t know they’re being had,” he sighed. “They should know better. But they’re not daft enough to let themselves be bankrupted. This is Hartford, you know. We’re pretty conservative with our money. In the end, they’ll be stung, not ruined.”
 “Explain,” I said. I was intrigued.
 “ He got a couple of elderly neighbors of his to let him invest a bit of their money. He lives only a block from me, you know. In his dad’s house with his mother. Anyhow, he paid a quarterly dividend that knocked them on their asses. Word spread. It didn’t take long. Now if you want in, you have to lay out a hundred thousand. He’s smart, though. He doesn’t pay astronomical returns, just quite a bit above what a good investment firm would return. Too much and flags would start to be raised. That way he doesn’t have to dig so deeply into the loot for the payouts, either. Clever boy,” he sighed.
 “And you’re sure? I mean how can you tell?” I was baffled.
 “There was something not quite right about him when he was on our payroll. I took him to lunch at the club a few times. You can tell these things, it isn’t hard. He’s trading on his dad’s good name now. Anyhow, if those bright boys on Wall Street can’t come close to matching him, draw your own conclusion.”
 “But still…” I lost my train of thought. Advancing age, perhaps.
 Wally swung the sailboat around and forty minutes later, thanks to the bluster blowing downriver, we were sipping clam chowder on the club’s back porch overlooking the lawn that led down to the smooth flowing noonday river. We were the only diners as, it seemed, we had pre-empted the season.
 “There’s more. Got a board meeting tonight. Tell you in the morning,” Wally said as we were getting into our cars after lunch. Wally fancied egregious Cadillac land yachts of earlier vintages. This one, a convertible with grungy white leather upholstery, was painted coral blue. It clearly stated to the proletariat ‘Get out of my way.’ I drove a battered Jeep that looked like a left-over from the war years.
 “More?”
 “That’s where you come in.,” he said. He started the powerful engine and glided away down the shady village street.

“Welcome to your new home,” Wally cooed, sweeping his arm graciously and indicating that I should enter through the front door he was holding open.
 It was cozy, just as he had mentioned. Apparently, the small core of the house had been added onto by successive owners. But instead of the result being an architectural hodge-podge, it exuded a charming quaintness. The rooms were tiny and furnished in a reasonably tasteful manner, appropriate to its vintage. It was built during the late ‘thirties as part of a several block development in a hay field in the south end of town. Back then, when money was scarce and people apprehensive, it was the sort of house that prudent middle class folks were comfortable purchasing. Now those houses looked tiny, but the shade trees had grown impressively and there was a pleasant aspect to the neighborhood. I thought I would like living there. The idea of suburban living intrigued me.
 “You’ve got everything you need,” Wally said opening the kitchen cabinet doors to display the crockery and glassware. Apparently, the prior owner had a passion for colored glassware. At first I recoiled, but then, upon reflection, I decided that I liked the stuff. It was cheerful, particularly when the rays of the morning sun shone through the glass. All the place needed now to be revoltingly cute was a white picket fence and a bower of climbing roses.
 “Let me feed you dinner at the Hartford Club tonight. I’ll explain what I wanted you for,” Wally said as he climbed into a shiny black Caddy replete with assertive tail fins. He must have a fleet of the ugly things, I decided.
 “I thought I was just house sitting,” I protested.
 “In part,” he said. “In part.” He pulled away from the roadside and swept grandly down the modest suburban street.

“What do you know about the Bay Psalm Book?” Wally looked at me inquisitively that evening over a tumbler of amber bourbon. The club’s dining room was half full, mostly insurance men. Cigar smoke swirled above the diners’ heads.
 “I don’t know,” I said, tearing a roll in half and buttering it. I was hungry. “First book printed here. Rare as hen’s teeth. You’re still on the AAS board, aren’t you? They must have one.”
 The American Antiquarian Society is considered the premier scholarly library for early American research. The director was a fellow member of the Wednesday Club. He had often invited me to tour its vast library, but somehow our schedules had never meshed. The Society headquarters were in the city of Worcester in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, although I doubt many citizens of the city could tell you its whereabouts. Wally had been on the board for some time. Boards always needed free legal advice.
 “I’ve got a board meeting there next week. I very much want you to come with me,” he stated, “You’re right. They’ve got one of the Psalm Books there.”
 “Okay, why not,” I said. “I don’t have anything special to do.” Anyway, I was eager to visit the place. I was fond of the director. He was an amusing fellow.
 The following morning I got busy at becoming a resident, part-time, of the town of West Hartford, Connecticut. As a child, I had visited my mother’s aunt who lived in an ancient house in the rural west side of town. Now the fields and pastures had been carpeted over by wall-to-wall tract houses and pseudo-Colonials. The charm of the place had evaporated.
 I had a map of the town, but to really learn it I decided that I needed a bicycle. With it, I could tour the town streets, get a little mild exercise, and dispel the boredom that I now realized would be my constant companion. Next, I decided that I would register myself with the town’s Episcopal Church in hope of meeting friendly faces. It was a large, prospering church with many activities available for adults.
 One morning while desultorily pedaling about the quiet, shady streets, I came upon a curious sight. Tucked away in an older neighborhood behind the houses was a little patch of green turf fronted by a small white-painted pavilion. Surrounded by tall shade trees, it seemed a little world of its own. There looked to be nobody about. The sight intrigued me and I glided down the gently sloping drive to investigate. I was at the gate when suddenly I realized what this intriguing oddity was—a bowling green.
 An elderly chap dressed in white emerged from the pavilion, noticed me, and beckoned. Two days later, I joined him mid-morning as a fully paid-up club member, dressed in my whites, to learn the ancient game. About all I knew of the game was that Sir Francis Drake was bowling on the green in Portsmouth when told of the approaching Armada. My instructor was a crusty fellow with a beaky nose, pale penetrating blue eyes, and a silvering pate off which the morning sun glistened. His instructions were concise, I seemed to have some aptitude for the game, and shortly we were engaged in competition. Losing, apparently, was something he did not accept cheerfully. Fortunately, my beginner’s ineptness left him victorious and contented. We scheduled regular morning games for Tuesdays and Thursdays.
 Wally called me that evening to inform me of our departure date for Worcester. In turn, I told him that I was now bowling on the green. I told him my opponent of the morning’s name.
 “You’re kidding,” he said. “That’s *Judge* Harry Aubrey. I heard he had just retired. They called him Hanging Harry. Our darker brethren lived in terror of coming before him. Never discriminated he told me once—he threw the book at all of them, white or black.”
 “He did seem a touch cranky. He likes to win, that I noticed. Or maybe he hates to lose. Same thing, I suppose,” I replied. “We have a regular morning game scheduled. There didn’t seem to be much activity that time of day. He probably figured that playing with me was at least better than bowling by himself.”

“While I’m at the board meeting, you’re going to have a tour of the place,” Wally yelled. The turbulence of the wind inside his turquiose blue convertible made ordinary speech nearly inaudible. “It’s all arranged. Afterwards, they’re digging out their copy of the Bay Psalm Book so you can see it. Take a good look at it. A good, hard look.”
 “What am I looking for? What’s this all about?”
 “Tell you later,” he said. He bored down the passing lane scattering lesser motorists in his path all the way to Worcester. What was the mystery about the Psalm Book I wondered.
 I do not like fast drivers, but Wally was different for he was one of those rare creatures—a natural athlete. His reaction time on the squash court was uncanny. He never seemed to take more than a catlike step or two in any direction to be ready and waiting for the speedy ball. In our school days, opposing teams snickered at the chubby boy playing number one position. The snickering abruptly stopped when play began. I doubt he lost a varsity match in our four years, and it was a rare event when the score was not embarrassingly lop-sided in his favor. I will not bore you with his prowess on the golf course except to note that, like squash, for four years he played in the number one varsity position. The delicacy of his short game was uncanny. The fat boy, of course, was voted class athlete in our graduation yearbook to the chagrin of strapping oarsmen and footballers.

“Well, did you take a good look at it?” Wally asked. We were seated in the nearly empty dining room of the Worcester Club on Oak Street having a late lunch with the AAS director who just had excused himself to consult with a friend who was leaving the room. It was a comfortable place housed in an old ornate brick manse. I was footsore from my tour and glad to relax in the comfortable leather arm chair at the table.
 “It’s not much to look at,” I said. “Kind of small and ratty looking.”
 “But you took a good, hard look at it,” he insisted.
 “I guess. I wasn’t allowed to touch it. What’s this all about?” Before he could reply, the director reappeared and seated himself at the table and we ordered lunch. Wally immediately spun the conversation away from the Prayer Book and toward the upcoming Wednesday Club meeting. The speaker was to be a rare book librarian.

That evening the Episcopal Church was holding a newcomers reception at the cocktail hour. Of course, alcohol was conspicuously missing in the punch so the jollity was a bit tempered. I had on my lapel a large nametag that said in bold red letters “Hi! My name is…..” My natural reaction to such things was to make an instant departure, but, instead, I decided to paste on my face a saccharin smile and soldier on.
 In my perambulation about the room, I noticed the alluring curve of a tanned feminine shoulder. My curiosity got the best of me and I worked my way through the crowd to discover more. As I was about to stealthily peek at the woman in the pale violet sleeveless dress, I almost tripped over an elderly chap standing next to her who suddenly had taken an unexpected step backwards. I nearly sent the contents of my punch cup flying, but, with an uncharacteristically graceful side-step, averted an embarrassing collision. He turned and glared momentarily at me. Then his expression softened slightly.
 “Oh, it’s you,” my bowling partner said.
 “Sorry, close call,” I said.
 “Meet my daughter,” he said, referring to the shoulder’s owner. “Look, the rector just told me we’ve got to have an emergency meeting right now. Be a good fellow, take my place and take her to supper for me. This meeting’ll run long, no doubt.” He fished in his wallet and handed me a wad of paper money.
 “Daddy!” she protested.
 “He won’t mind, will you,” he said, looking me hard in the eye.
 “Delighted,” I said in my most gentlemanly manner as he spun on his heel to depart. Then I looked at her. Delighted, indeed, I thought to myself. She was what men, licking their lips, called a Babe.
 “I’m so sorry,” she said. “You don’t really have to. That was rude of him. Daddy was going to take me to supper afterwards. Incidentally, my name is Tyler.”
 “I don’t mind. I mean, I’d like to. But you’ll have to tell me where. I’m a newcomer,” I said, stating the obvious.
 We walked through the soft, amethyst twilight to a restaurant a couple of blocks distant in the middle of the village. Without being too obvious, I tried to assess her. She was a bit over medium height with brown hair and gray eyes. Her skin, like her hair, was silken. There was a serenity about her which I found striking and her mouth in repose seemed always to be on the verge of a smile. I guessed her age to be about thirty-five, but she might have been a bit older since she appeared to exude robust good health. She moved with the grace of a dancer or an athlete. And, when I looked, I did not see a wedding band. I was already hopelessly smitten.
 What did she see when she looked at me, I wondered, for I must have been close to twenty years her senior. Age had been kind to me and I was frequently assumed to be at least a decade younger than my actual age. My hair was still mouse brown in color and my teeth my own. I hoped the candlelight in the restaurant might soften some of the tiny, spidery wrinkles in my face I had begun to notice recently.
 I know well the old salesman’s trick of getting the customer to talk about himself. Most people, whether they admit it or not, are obsessed with themselves and eager and grateful for an audience willing to listen. She must have known this trick for she, in turn, tried it on me. Thus, as we walked back to the church in the velvet dark, I knew little more about her than that she had a daughter at Choate who intended to spend the summer in France with her French father. And her name, Tyler, was the consequence of a Virginian mother related directly to our tenth president.
 Since she lived alone with her father but a few blocks from the church in an older section of town and I wanted to prolong the evening, I offered to walk her home. The talk turned to bowling, about which she knew nothing except that her father bowled. I offered to teach her since I now was familiar with the basics and, beyond the basics, there is not much more to learn. We agreed that the following morning I would show her the game, and that I would meet her at her house and we would cycle together to the green. She seemed to like the idea of travelling by bicycle. Perhaps because it gave her the opportunity to flee should she find my company irksome. At her door, she offered me her hand rather than a cheek to kiss.
 I walked through the darkened streets back to my motor with the lights in the windows of the houses golden. I began to whistle. The tune, I suddenly realized, was from the musical *My Fair Lady:* ‘On the Street Where You Live.”
 I lay in bed that evening staring at the dark ceiling. What would she think of me come the light of day tomorrow morning. I had lost a considerable bit of weight principally thanks to having to eat my own cooking, and I had hardened my muscles thanks to a winter working in the woods. Still, I was quite a bit older than her. Then my eyelids closed and I slept a dreamless sleep.

The bowling green and its little pavilion occupy a small patch quite cut off from the surrounding neighborhood and the rumble of the busy world passing on the nearby major avenue into the city. At this early hour, with the dew just burned off the close-cropped turf, we had the place to ourselves. Our bicycles leaned against the wall of the pavilion. The ride had been a pleasant one through the now still mid-morning side streets. To be all alone, as we were, with the workday world swirling all about is an uncanny sensation.
 The day was warming and she pulled over her head a white cable-knit sweater and tossed it aside. I could get a good sense of her now, less the bulky sweater. She wore tennis shorts, a short sleeve polo shirt with a crocodile on the breast, and a long-billed cap such as yachtsmen wear. She was solidly constructed rather than willowy, but she carried no evident extra poundage. And she seemed to be perpetually amused, furrowing her brow in concentration only when she swung her arm back and then laid the ball on the turf to roll to her chosen destination. Was she laughing at me or at life or was this simply the natural aspect of her face at rest. I was perplexed and intrigued.
 The game of bowls is a simple one. Throw out a small target ball, called a jack, to the far end of the green ‘rink’ (fourteen feet wide and one-hundred plus feet long) and then, taking turns with your opponent, bowl your four balls—closest ball wins a point. If more of your bowls are closer than your opponent’s closest, they, too, each earn a point. It is the execution and strategy that makes the ancient game intriguing—and, perhaps, the club’s pleasant green lawn with its half-dozen rinks and the languid charm of the setting.
 Morning turned to noonday, a few ancient bowlers were now doddering on the green, and hunger was upon us. Across the avenue whose traffic we heard rumbling into the city we discovered a sandwich shop. The day being too pleasant to eat in its dingy confines, we took our sandwiches and sodas with us and ate under the shade of the little pavilion’s verandah. She had a robust, unladylike appetite and promptly devoured her submarine sandwich. All I could learn about her was that she was fond of racquet sports and that she had recently returned home to live with her father. She was a mystery.
 As we pedaled through the shady streets toward her home that afternoon, I pondered the question of what I next should propose for I desperately wanted to continue being with her. What was happening to me? I had never experienced this emotion, this attraction. Mary and I had known each other since childhood and, after schooling was complete and we returned home again to our little Vermont village, we seemed to drift into marriage. There was no infatuation, no romance, no mind-boggling attraction such as I now felt.
 I had better decide something as we had just rolled along the driveway to the back door of her father’s house, an attractive brick and half-timbered mock Tudor with a multi-colored slate roof. She pre-empted me by asking if I would care for a glass of iced tea. I agreed and we sat on a small, screened porch shaded by a tall maple. The aroma of a nearby lilac bush in bloom wafted on the soft breeze filtering through the screen.
 “Well, what do think of bowling?” I asked. “Want to do it again sometime?”
 “Tomorrow?” she asked. I was flabbergasted.
 “Dandy,” I said. Yippee, I thought.
 And so the days passed. Her father was happy to relinquish our standing arrangement for twice a week games. I suspected he had found better opponents now that the season was getting underway. Occasionally, she and I explored the town on bicycles as a break from bowls. Behind the large reservoir on the edge of town were wooded trails which provided a change from touring the quiet, shady suburban streets. On occasion, I invited her for a stroll in the evening through the rose garden park. Since she cooked supper for her father, there was no opportunity to take her dining.
 Clearly we were congenial companions, but was there anything more? Romance, whatever that was, clearly was surging through my being. But what about her? She said little and maintained that amused expression on her face and agreed companionably to my varied invitations. I was baffled.

I sat at supper with the director of the Antiquarian Society at the Wednesday Club’s May meeting the following week for I was eager to learn more about the Bay Psalm Book. The oak paneled dining room was at the rear of the second storey of the club. The club building fronted the grand boulevard of Commonwealth Avenue near the elegant Public Garden, now in bloom. I had spent a pleasant half hour before the meeting meandering the Garden’s footpaths. The newly returned swan boats sparkled on the pond as twilight descended over the Back Bay and throngs of office workers streamed homeward seemingly oblivious to the Garden’s floral glories.
 Cool evening breezes swept through stained glass window ajar over our heads. Sixty odd bibliophiles, already well-lubricated from the cocktail hour, were arranged around a horseshoe-shaped table, the president, the directors, and the evening’s speaker at the head. We sat close by at the bend of the table. The soft light of candles gave ruby highlights to the dark red wine as white-jacketed waiters scuttled about the room serving the first course. The room was filled with the dull roar of literary conversation. The president stood and, rapping his spoon upon his water glass for quiet, requested a moment of silence for a recently departed member. This was a not infrequent occurrence as the median age of the members was likely six decades. We stood and silently pondered the inevitable, he rang again, and we subsided into our chairs and the room once more filled with muted bookish discussions.
 “Thanks for letting me look at the Psalm Book last week,” I said, leaning towards the director. “I hope Wally didn’t cause too much of a nuisance.” Wally was busy this evening in Hartford with one of his inevitable board meetings for one good cause or another. Why was he making such a fuss about the damn book?
 I learned more about the book that evening than I ever wanted to know. It was printed in 1640 in the college in Cambridge by Stephen Daye, an itinerant printer of indifferent quality, for use in the sung services of the newly-established Bay Colony. It was the book of the first generation of settlers, printed on a press brought from England, with English types and paper for there was no type casting or paper making facility here in those beginning days. There existed eleven copies, one in private hands. Old South Church in downtown Boston owned two which were secured at the Public Library in Copley Square. The remainder was in scholarly institutions such as the AAS. Should one come on the market, the likely asking price would be well over ten million dollars.

The carpenter called two mornings later to report on progress. The sub-floor was laid, the exterior walls upright, the mason was almost finished bricking the chimney, and the pre-fabricated roof trusses arriving momentarily with a small crane on site waiting to drop them in place upon arrival. The roofer would be along immediately thereafter to install the green-colored metal roofing. The carpenter was not happy about the green hemlock lumber which spit water at him when a nail was driven. We agreed, however, that by the time interior work was underway, the warm spring breezes should have dried the wood sufficiently.
 The architect had followed my wishes closely: the kitchen facing south-east, the library south, the porch south-west and the two bedrooms at the north end of the building. The result was a small single storey home with a meandering, rather than compact, floor plan. The result was a bit quirky, but, with the clapboards painted a

cheerful sun-flower yellow, the shutters Dartmouth green, and the trim white, it would approximate traditional Vermont country architecture. Inside, there would be wainscoting on the library and living room walls. The same paneling would skirt to waist height the kitchen and bedroom walls. I had felled quite a few old pines this past winter so there should be sufficient for the paneling, which would be glued using narrow boards, with the flooring using the wide boards. I am fond of the warm glow of our native pine as time turns it a mellow and warm shade of gold. It would be a cozy, little home for a maturing, bookish bachelor.
 My son phoned soon thereafter to report that Taffy, my little Brittany bird dog, was supervising her home and its new owners and both were under her control. Much relieved, I returned my attention to immediate matters like the perplexing Tyler Aubrey and the mysterious matter of the Psalm Book.

The telephone rang.
 “Bob Smith is going to New York Friday to sign some papers. I wonder if you could go with him and do an errand for me?” Robert H. Smith was the Smith of Knight Smith and Thomas and this was Thursday noonday. Tyler and I had just finished a morning game of bowls and we were now sipping iced tea on the miniscule screened porch of my cottage.
 “Short notice, Wally,” I replied. “What do you have in mind?”
 “I want you to pop into a bookstore for me.” He gave me its name which I recognized as one of the grander rare book dealers. Its elegant premises adorned Fifth Avenue.
 “What for? Can’t Bob do it?” I knew him slightly. He was an agreeable sort.
 “He’ll probably be tied up all afternoon,” Wally explained. “He belongs to the Knick. He said he’d feed you supper and put you up there for the night. How about it? You won’t suffer.” The handsome Knickerbocker Club stands on the corner of Fifth Avenue in the upper east side. I had been there once or twice years ago. My elderly uncle had been a non-resident member.
 “Hang on a minute,” I said. I briefly consulted with Tyler. We had been planning to bowl Friday morning. Go, she said. Relieved, I told Wally I cheerfully would accompany Bob. I had not been in Manhattan for years. Returning again would be pleasant.
 “Splendid,” Wally exulted. “I’ll be over this evening to explain the errand.”
 “Sounds mysterious,” I joked.
 “It is,” he replied solemnly.

“So what was that all about?” Tyler asked. She was watching me heating a can of clam chowder on the kitchen stove. The kitchen was barely large enough to contain the two of us.
 “I don’t actually know,” I said. I sliced a few slabs of cheddar cheese. She slipped a couple of slices of bread into the toaster. “But I think it has something to do with the Bay Psalm Book.”
 “The *what*?” Over lunch on the porch, I explained.
 I was reluctant, as always, to part with her company, but she had afternoon errands and I was looking forward to a nap. I had not slept well and awakened feeling seedy.
 She straddled her bicycle in the driveway, preparing to depart. She had helped me wash and dry the luncheon dishes.
 “Aren’t you *ever* going to kiss me?” she inquired.
 I took a step toward her, astonished at the invitation. She laughed, pressed firmly on the pedal, and rolled away. She looked back over her shoulder and waved.

The cool, dark salesroom smelled of tooled leather and light shimmered upon the tapestry of gilded bindings. To my mind, there is nothing as comforting as being in the presence of books. And these books in their tall cases were elegantly bound. There was something sensual about the atmosphere of the rare book dealer’s showroom.
 My instructions from Wally were explicit.
 “I happened to have dinner this week at the Wednesday Club with the director of the AAS,” I mentioned to the owner as I perused the shelves.
 “Know him well. He usually stops by when he’s in town. How is he?”
 I affirmed that he appeared to be in good health and cheerful. The conversation then moved on to Wally, an occasional patron and well-known to the owner. Everybody I encountered these days seemed to know the congenial Wally.
 “He got me a personal tour of the Antiquarian library while he was at the director’s meeting. I got a look at the Bay Psalm Book.”
 “Rarest of the rare,” my companion commented at its mention.
 “I know. Just a dozen in existence.”
 “Eleven, actually,” he corrected me. “One in private hands.”
 “Two, apparently, or so I’ve heard recently. Another one is supposed to have just surfaced,” I said, as instructed the previous evening. Before he could reply, again as instructed, I changed the subject.
 As he watched me, when I departed a bit later, he had a curious, puzzled look on his face.
 The walk of some dozen blocks to the club in the warm May afternoon left me with a ravenous thirst. I joined my host in the little outdoor patio, high-walled from the rumbling of the Fifth Avenue traffic outside, and was soon gratefully sipping a tall, cold gin and tonic. The evening being unseasonably warm, we elected to dine on the club’s rooftop area. A violet evening slowly turned to darkness and the lights in the distant buildings punctuated the silken night sky.

Romance was put on hold temporarily upon my return from Manhattan as Tyler had to retrieve her daughter from school and then send her on to Paris to spend the summer with her father. I still had no knowledge, as Tyler was nothing if not reticent, of the circumstances that had brought Constance into this world seventeen years ago.
 Since there was a pause now, though thinking about Tyler occupied my every waking moment, I turned my mind to the mayfly for they should be hatching in these warming days of May. I had brought my tackle with me on the off-chance that I might find time for angling, and I consulted a map looking for likely trout water. I decided to explore the head waters of the Farmington River, placid in these parts but in the uplands near the Massachusetts state line there seemed potential for the cold water and deep pools that the trout requires. In truth, those hilly uplands were nothing more than the southern continuation, after passing through the Berkshires, of my own beloved Green Mountains.
 In a little tackle shop in a small, sleepy, rural riverside village, I noticed a hand-written card thumb-tacked to a bulletin board offering guiding service. Two days later, thanks to the fellow’s guidance, I was splashing in the rocky upper reaches of the Farmington and casting a dry fly to a rising trout under a mossy bank. I began to realize that this was the life to which I was born. The constrained suburban world in which I was ensconced already was enervating in its regularity. How, I wondered, could people live happily in such a place.
 The guide having shown me the water, almost every morning thereafter for the next week I indulged myself casting to feeding trout in the cold, dark pools. Sunlight sparkled on the water and on the golden cane of the bending rod and the sweet perfume of the mountain laurel in bloom created an enchanted world. Mid-days, I dined at an old riverside inn in the small community called Riverton. There the tumbling river entered the broad valley and flowed placidly to ultimately join the Connecticut River above Hartford, some thirty miles distant, and flow serenely to the Sound. Well fed and satisfied, I then leisurely followed the roadside course of the river and returned to my quaint suburban cottage for an afternoon nap.

“Want to go to the boat races on Quinsigamond tomorrow? My nephew’s daughter is rowing.”
 I had just finished a breakfast of bacon and eggs with the sun shining cheerfully through the kitchen window when the telephone bell jolted me out of my reverie. I put down my book and pipe hoping that Tyler would be on the other end of the line. Instead, it was Wally. He remembered that I had pulled an oar in the third boat during our schooldays.
 “Why not,” I replied. “And maybe you can tell me what I was doing in New York.” I had nothing planned for the weekend other than the early service at church on Sunday morning. I had decided to leave the river on the weekend to the fellows who had to toil at jobs all week. And, anyhow, I never enjoyed angling on busy rivers. We agreed he would fetch me shortly before the hour of eight o’clock tomorrow.
 The New England schools’ annual regatta is held on the long narrow waters of Lake Quinsigamond alongside the city of Worcester the final Saturday in May. Only once had I competed, but I remembered the day vividly. I had vomited from the exhaustion of racing.
 I stuffed my tackle and waders into the Jeep, but before I departed I thought I might hazard a phone call to Tyler’s home to learn about her return. The Judge answered, and I gave him my name.
 “I was wondering when Tyler would be back,” I said.
 “What business is it of yours? Who did you say you were?” The surliness of the reply caught me off-guard.
 “We’ve been bowling together,” I explained patiently.
 “No we haven’t.” Apparently, he had forgotten that he and I had arranged to bowl together several weeks ago. Clearly, I was confusing him with the pronoun.
 “Your daughter and I, I mean. Not you and me,” I clarified.
 “Oh,” he said, “you. You’re the fellow. She said something about you, I think. From Vermont, aren’t you? Now I remember. She’s back today sometime. Call her this evening.” He hung up abruptly without the courtesy of bothering to say goodbye. My potential father-in-law, I mused. Then I caught myself. Dear Lord, what was I thinking?
 I backed out of the driveway badly rattled.

The organized chaos of the annual regatta was impressive. Two dozen or so schools, each with several shells and their conveyances, were arrayed along the shoreline. Oars and warm-up clothing and hampers of food and drink were strewn about and the competitors and coaches clambered amidst the clutter. A loud speaker warned of upcoming heats and every few minutes groups of boats came into view on the water, contesting one another. Wally, attired in blazer, silk cravat, and boater, and I leaned on the railing of the viewing platform and watched. He was smoking a massive Churchill-sized cigar, oblivious to the furious, disapproving looks from fellow spectators. Wally, as usual, cared little what the world thought, especially the world of academia. His nephew’s daughter’s heat was next.
 “What was that New York mission all about?”
 “Ground work,” he replied and sent a blast of expensive smoke in the direction of a scrawny academic female who had been muttering about his setting a bad example for impressionable youth as well as polluting the planet.
 “Ground work for what?”
 “Not now,” he said, waving me off. His nephew’s daughter’s heat had just come into view. Shortly, the four boats were upon us and we could hear the thumping of the oars. The young lady’s boat finished second and qualified for another round of racing later in the afternoon.
 We reclined on a blanket spread on the bank-side grass and feasted from the wicker hamper Wally expansively provided. The cheerful pop of the champagne cork drew covetous glances from lesser mortals doomed to eat soggy sandwiches and drink tepid bottled water. It was mid-day and his nephew’s daughter’s heat was scheduled for two o’clock.
 “Wake me at one-thirty, if you would. This has been a tiresome week,” Wally said and stretched himself flat on the blanket and tipped the boater to shade his face. The matter of the Bay Psalm Book apparently was not going to be discussed further. Clearly, Wally was plotting something and, also clearly, he intended me to be a participant. I knew from schooldays that he could not be pushed and that, if I were patient, his plans would be revealed. He reminded me of a chess master who could see the possibility of checkmate looming some dozen moves ahead and was not about to alarm his opponent yet.

The wood of the pew was cool to the touch. I had decided upon the sparsely attended eight o’clock service for it was brief as there was no music. Hardly had I opened the Book of Common Prayer than I was aware that someone had slipped into my pew. As I thumbed the pages, I glanced sideways. Tyler smiled at me. Apparently, and to my surprise, her father had passed along my message that I would be at the early service for I had called her house that evening after returning from the regatta and was told that she was still away.
 We talked of many things that sunny morning as we walked from the church to her home several residential blocks distant. It was a pleasant, quiet area of handsome homes constructed shortly after the turn of the century. Its trees had grown tall and, as the morning had become warm, provided welcome shade for leisurely strollers. My curiosity about Tyler’s past was gnawing at me. Was there something sordid in her past about which she was reticent?
 In fact, there was. Hardly had she commenced her junior year abroad in Paris than she became pregnant. She too whole-heartedly had joined in the debauchery of the artsy crowd and she had no idea which of her several suitors was the father of her child. Fortunately, one reluctantly had taken responsibility, but not of the financial kind, and it was with him that Constance was spending the summer. Upon returning, Tyler was spurned by her college, one of the Seven Sisters, concerned about the example of waywardness she exhibited with a babe in arms. Her parents were not amused, either. She managed to graduate from a local women’s college, but her hopes of teaching and coaching at a distinguished preparatory school now were effectively demolished.
 Fortunately, her buoyant personality was perfect for the hospitality industry and she served around the globe at fashionable resorts and hotels. She rose quickly to executive positions, but had decided, now that her father was retiring and her mother recently deceased, that she would return home to be close to Constance at nearby Choate and her lonely, cantankerous father.
 “Can I kiss you?” I asked. We were standing on the brick stoop by her front door.
 “Certainly not!” she replied. “The neighbors will see. Besides, Daddy’s home. He wouldn’t like it.” She stifled a laugh.
 We shook hands. I thought I could hear her laughing as I walked away. Another lesson in suburban living I mused.

Several days later, Wally, at his avuncular best, hosted a cocktail party, on the grand scale as was his wont, at his home. I had invited Tyler to accompany me. I knew none of the guests and she but a few, and, thus, we spent much of the evening talking to one another. Standing close to her, almost pressed against her by the crush of the crowd and beguiled by the scent she was wearing and the warmth she radiated, I still had difficulty understanding what she was saying thanks to the din of the conversations swirling about the rooms. Were it not for the inappropriateness, I would have swept her into my arms and passionately kissed her. Never before I had felt such an odd sensation. What was happening to me?
 The evening was warm and soon the guests moved outdoors onto the broad porch that wrapped two sides of the house and provided a sylvan aspect of the urban woodland that belonged to the rose garden park. The white-jacketed Filipino couple, and what appeared to be their sons and daughters and nephews and nieces, passed through the throng dispensing *hors d’ oeuvres.* At least, here on the porch there was air to breathe and room to move about.
 Dark was descending and the guests were trickling away. I looked at Tyler with a look that said it was time for us to depart, but, at that very moment, a hand was laid on my arm.
 “Stay a bit longer, if you wouldn’t mind,” Wally said quietly in my ear. I looked at Tyler and she shrugged her acquiesence.
 “Sounds like some big mystery,” I said.
 “After a fashion, it is,” Wally replied and glided away to attend his departing guests.
 After he left us, Tyler asked if I had any idea what he had in mind. I was pretty sure I knew.
 “I think it’s about the Bay Psalm Book.”

The guests finally had departed, dark had descended, the white-coated help was scuttling about clearing the *debris,* and we three settled ourselves in leather club chairs in his library.
 Wally looked at Tyler, then at me inquisitively.
 “This is confidential,” he said. Clearly, he was dubious about her presence.
 “I’ll vouch for her,” I replied reassuringly.
 “Maybe I had better leave,” she said.
 “Actually, my initial plan included a woman. I just didn’t expect one would be so handy. Are you two…?” He searched for the proper word to describe our relationship. I doubt that there was one.
 “Good friends,” Tyler replied. “Maybe a little more,” she added.
 “Not for lack of trying on my part,” I said. She made a face at me.
 “Glory, you act like an old married couple,” Wally remarked. “Okay, here goes. Remember the Thomas kid?”
 “The Ponzi scheme fellow?” I asked.
 “Right,” he said. For the next few minutes he brought Tyler up to date on the Thomas boy’s adventures with money belonging to others. She listened intently, then wrinkled her brow.
 “I think Daddy mentioned something about that. He said he got a great return on that investment,” she said. “He was gloating about how much he made, come to think of it. So it’s just a Ponzi scheme? Good *God!* ”
 “Hang on a second,” Wally said. “You’re Harry Aubrey’s daughter, aren’t you? Now I remember. Your friend here,” he gestured toward me, “mentioned you a while ago.”
 “I’d better tell Daddy to get his money back right now!” she exclaimed. Clearly, she was panicked by her father’s financial peril.
 “Too late,” Wally said. “It’s a house of cards. Besides, he’s certain to have the cash stashed away where no one could find it. All those Ponzi operators do that. Bring him down now and nobody gets anything but pennies on the dollar and the kid gets a couple of years of minimum security prison with time off for good behavior.”

 “You knew about this for some time,” I said. “So now what’s up?”
 “He just became treasurer at the Congo church on Main Street. It has a sizeable endowment. The hospital’s eyeing him to handle theirs. We’ve got time, but I wouldn’t dare to think we have much now—if he gets his hands on the hospital. He’ll clean everybody out and run. I think I had better put a fly in Charlie’s ear, come to think of it.” I did not know much about the inner-workings of Hartford’s institutions, but I did know that the Charlie to whom Wally referred was the chairman of the board of the hospital.
 “And the Bay Psalm Book?” I inquired.
 “The bait,” Wally said quietly.

“Can Daddy get his money back?”
 She was referring to the intricate plan that Wally had presented to us the previous evening. We were gazing that following sun-struck morning at the bowls we had rolled, trying to determine which was the closest to the jack. Elderly bowlers on adjacent rinks were quietly engaged in battle, their conversations muted. The only sound was the occasional clink when one bowl struck another.
 “If we pull this off, everyone does,” I said. “Looks like you win again.” Her bowl was closest. I was being roundly drubbed.
 As we often did, we ate our lunches under the pavilion’s shady verandah. But unlike days previous, there was a distracted quality to today’s lunch. She remarked, in passing, that she had an afternoon’s tennis game at the old racquet club tucked away from view at the north end of town. I offered to accompany her. I had nothing planned and I wanted a couple of quiet hours to fully comprehend Wally’s proposal of last evening.
 We collected her gear, pedaled a couple of miles through the early afternoon’s quiet residential streets, and rolled into the tennis club’s modest and unpretentious grounds. The courts were busy, and her opponent was warming up on the farthest court as we arrived. I sat on a bench overlooking that court and basked in the warmth of the sun overhead. I needed to think about our conversation in Wally’s library last evening.
 I was growing sleepy but the ponging of tennis balls and occasional distant howls of agony erupting from the club members at missed opportunities on the other courts kept me from slipping away into the mid-day nap I needed. Wally’s plan was far-fetched—far-fetched in the extreme. And, yet, it seemed to be just preposterous enough to actually have a chance of success. Since I have always been reasonably content with my lot in life, I had no idea of how the mind of someone obsessively, and criminally, greedy actually worked.
 Tyler pummeled her willowy opponent. She walked off the court and, after exchanging obligatory pleasantries with the crest-fallen young woman, plopped down on the bench next to me. She was shining with perspiration.
 “She was third last year,” she commented. “In the club championship,” she clarified. She leaned over and planted a sweaty, salty kiss on my lips.
 “Yuk,” I said.
 “Don’t be so damn finicky,” she said.

The following morning at breakfast the carpenter telephoned. The metal roof was on, the mason finished, the insulation installed, and the windows in place. I was eager to hear about the bay window I had specified for the kitchen. In his shop, they were working on the wainscoting and the library bookcases. I am not keen on fancy, pretentious kitchens—serviceable is more than adequate—but I was particular about my new elegant little pine-paneled library. I was eager to see my cozy bachelor home.
 And then suddenly my mind swerved to the woman who had kissed me yesterday afternoon and the thought the other day that had blind-sided me—the nightmare of Hanging Harry Aubrey as my father-in-law.
 Why must I be tormented so? I had come to accept that the balance of my life would be that of a bachelor’s, for in our little village potential life-companions were few and, decidedly, not comely. In the neighboring market town where I had my book store the situation was no better. Vermont women are clean, sturdy, practical, and industrious. But they are not the stuff fellows swoon over. Given a choice, I had decided that I would prefer the less complicated companionship of a bird dog. And then the utterly beguiling Tyler dropped into my placid existence.
 I rammed those troubling thoughts to the back of my mind and concentrated on what Wally had proposed two days ago after the cocktail party. The plan, though intricate, theoretically might be effected. Its psychology was another matter. Would the trout rise to the fly—and, having risen, would it take the fly? But Wally understood greed. He dealt with it daily as his specialty was disposing of estates of the deceased, usually affluent deceased and, thus, acquisitive inheritors. He was canny, of that I was certain, and would not have proposed such a scheme had he lacked confidence in its potential for success.
 Obviously, Wally had intended to chum the water with my visit to Manhattan. The rare book world is decidedly small and everybody in it seems to know one another. The rumor, unsubstantiated, that there was a twelfth Bay Psalm Book should have shot through it by now. That it was privately owned would serve only to enhance the interest.
 Wally had explained, after I had asked the obvious question of how he intended to produce another Bay Psalm Book, that a printer friend was willing to create keepsakes for him from photographs of several of the book’s pages, including the well-known title page. The Antiquarian Society had kindly agreed to provide the photographs. In October, Wally was delivering an after-dinner talk to his fellow-members of the Sunset Club about the Psalm Book. He intended to distribute the keepsakes after he spoke. Beyond that, he had declined to elucidate.
 The Sunset Club had been a literary institution in Hartford since the decade before the turn of the century. Initially, it had met in member’s homes, but for the last half-century held its monthly meetings in a small upstairs dining room at the Hartford Club. Its membership was small and select. Rarely more than a dozen dined these days. The season ran from the first week of October to the first week of June. The final meeting was tonight and I was invited to attend as Wally’s guest.
 I washed the breakfast dishes and then stowed my waders and tackle in the Jeep. As I drove along the misty riverside that morning both trains of thought, those of the lovely Tyler and the devious Wally, intertwined themselves in my thinking.
 Tyler as something more than a summer dalliance? Well, she had no immediate disqualifiers—excepting, possibly, Hanging Harry—like tattoos, body piercing, or addiction to booze (for she rarely finished a cocktail or supper’s wine). Nor had she a penchant for the bizarre, such as astrologers, psychics, radical politics or daffy lost causes. But, really, I hardly knew her—and what about those libidinous Paris days? She never spoke of subsequent amorous relationships. Were there husbands or lovers of whom she had yet to mention? Certainly, a glamorous babe working in the high-end of the hospitality trade was certain to attract the interest of wealthy suitors. The more I pondered, the more perplexed I became.
 And then there was Wally’s scheme. It seemed to me to be like a magician’s slight of hand trick. Get the sucker to zig while you zag.

I was early to the Sunset Club meeting so I contented myself with my pipe and a bourbon on the rocks and watched from the second floor window of the Hartford Club as insurance employees scuttled homewards. Across Prospect Street, which the club fronts, stands the art museum and I reminded myself that I owed it a visit. It contained a noteworthy collection of Hudson River School paintings, a period of which I am fond.
 I was beginning to like the old insurance city. It was a touch down at the heels, but it still retained a bit of shabby elegance. The prestigious west end, where Wally lived, was still desirable, but the big department stores on Main Street had disappeared to re-emerge in the prosperous suburbs and several insurance companies seemed always on the verge of de-camping. The Hartford Club, a brick century-old massive Georgian structure that once was the pulse of the city’s business, was now looking a bit empty at the very times when it ought to be bustling.
 Literary gentlemen soon began filtering into the room. They were a congenial lot and courteous when I explained that I was Wally’s guest for the evening. Bob Smith, my companion a couple of weeks ago in Manhattan, was to be the speaker. His announced topic was the literary and artistic output of Trebor Nosredna , an obscure writer and painter of sporting themes whose works he collected. I had my doubts that he had much with which to work. I had a fleeting familiarity with his subject and was unimpressed.
 Wally bounded into the room, flushed with sunburn acquired from an afternoon on the golf course. He was the last to arrive. He had hardly lifted glass to lip than he was accosted by an elderly fellow member.
 “What’s this I hear about there being another copy of the Bay Psalm Book? My dealer mentioned it yesterday in passing.”
 “I’ve heard something of the sort, too,” I overheard Wally reply.
 The evening passed cordially and Smith’s dissertation on the Nosredna fellow was bearable. Darkness had settled over the city as the members descended the broad staircase with its massive hand rail, and passed through the club’s doors, homeward bound.
 “Word’s out,” I said to Wally as we descended the granite steps to the sidewalk.
 “So it seems.”

 I knew the printer that Wally had mentioned the evening of his cocktail party. I had acted as publisher of our village church’s bi-centennial history and I had sent the job to his shop. Anyone familiar with the little world of fine printing in the latter-half of the twentieth century likely could guess of whom I speak. Wally, the attorney, had cautioned me against revealing the printer’s name for safety’s sake, since we were about to engage in a major league swindle, and he was concerned that the printer be safeguarded.
 The shop was located in a tiny New Hampshire village in the upper reaches of the Connecticut River valley. Despite its small size and remoteness, the shop had secured most of the prestigious scholarly accounts in the northeast and beyond. The work done for museums was noteworthy thanks to the excellence of its reproduction of works of art. The output was restrained but innovative and some of the major talents in the graphic arts preferred to secret themselves in the remote hamlet knowing that their talents there would find fulfillment.
 I have some familiarity with the technics of printing. The printer would convert the supplied photographs into photoengraved printing plates. Doubtless, in the photographs there would be a lot of incidental background grubbiness, for want of a better word, that would need to be cleared away by hand. This would be a painstaking process. Also, the Psalm Book’s presswork was uneven due to the rudimentary press and the sloppy pressman. And this printer prided itself on its pristine presswork.
 To create a semblance of the Psalm Book’s bulk, Wally would have to order an extensive press run, a quantity far in excess of the handful of keepsakes he would distribute. Due to the book’s age and fragility, he understandably could refuse an observer anything but a cursory look. So he might get away with only the title page and the few text pages the printer was to produce. It would be dicey.
 And then there would be the matter of paper, for the original book was printed on rag paper and today’s paper was wood pulp based. Somehow, rag paper would need to be secured. And how would well over three hundred years of age occur overnight? The sheets off the press would be pristine. The complications seemed to mount.

Wally intended to consult with the printer on his way north to the salmon camp in Quebec he annually shared with fellow Hartford cronies. For the next two weeks, I would be able to relax from his machinations. The moment was propitious to visit my new home a-building and embrace dear Taffy who was overseeing her temporarily adopted family.
 Tyler and I saw Wally away from his home the following morning. He was every bit the city gent off for a sporting holiday clad in his red and black check shirt, tan canvas trousers, and leather boots with soft sponge soles. The capacious trunk of his Cadillac convertible land yacht was stuffed with gear: a wicker pack basket, duffle bags, chest waders, assorted tackle, a box of cigars, and a case of his favorite champagne. A pair of rod tubes, too long to fit in the trunk, protruded from behind the front seats. Even Wally’s after-shave had woodsy notes.
 “I’ll pop in and go over the keepsake with Roscoe. Got to deal with the paper problem,” he said after he had settled himself in the supple leather and fired up the powerful engine. The printer, coincidentally and fortunately, was on the route Wally would be taking to Canada. We and the Filipino couple that attended him waved good-bye as he purred out of the driveway and sped away to the great north woods.
 I had called home the previous evening and we were expected that morning for a day’s visit. Tyler was curious to see what I had been talking about, but she objected to riding a couple of hours in the Jeep which distinctly was not designed for comfortable highway motoring. She insisted on driving us in her station wagon. I often mused that the only similarity between Wally’s choice of conveyance and mine was that they both shared four wheels.

My new house had that wonderful aroma of new wood curing. It was framed, insulated, and waiting for the plasterer to begin work on the walls and ceiling. The electrician had installed the wiring and the plumber had roughed in the pipes.
 Taffy had been dividing her time between supervising the new construction and overseeing my son’s family settling into our old house. We were ecstatic to see one another. As I no doubt mentioned previously, I am of the opinion that dogs make human beings bearable. My bookplate reads ‘You can tell the man by his books and his dogs.’
 My son popped in for lunch. My daughter-in-law was lovely as always and what such a beautiful young lady saw in my son I could not fathom. He tends toward stuffiness and plays golf—ideal material for a small-town bank president.
 Grandchildren, until they are well into their school years, are not the delight they are generally supposed to be. They are noisy, messy, demanding, difficult to understand, and addicted to the trivial. I am, of course, referring to other people’s grandchildren. For the sake of family harmony, and since my son and his wife will undoubtedly read my text at some point in the future, let me state that my grandchildren are angelic.
 What my son thought of Tyler I could not determine. His charming wife, as always, was welcoming and gracious. I suspected that over supper that evening there would be interesting discussion and speculation about my companion of the afternoon.
 What Tyler thought of my family and the old homestead was evident—she was enchanted. No doubt, the old place looked its post-card best on a fine early June day. In March, with the snow rotting and the road mud to the hubcaps, she might have had another opinion. As to the little new house, she was reticent. Cozy and bright was all she said and asked little after a cursory tour. Somehow I sensed she had wanted to say more on the subject of my bachelor’s cottage. Something suddenly seemed to be bothering her—but what?
 As we drove away that late afternoon, I looked back. Taffy was sitting in the middle of the dirt track that led from the road to the house. Her head was cocked as if to ask why must I leave her again. I felt rotten.

Our relationship, Tyler’s and mine, seemed to have changed that afternoon. We stopped at the hotel in the center of Northampton that evening for supper in its rustic cellar dining room. Her usual effervescence seemed muted as we ate our meals. There had been no opportunity to advance our nominal romance since that sloppy, unexpected first kiss at the tennis court. Looking across the table at her, what little romance there had been now appeared to have sputtered.
 “Something the matter?” I ventured.
 “No, I’m just being silly,” she replied and smiled wanly. She changed the subject and asked about the chance of her father’s invested money ever being recovered. I wished that I could have provided reassurance, but I was beginning to think that Wally’s scheme was one of the longest of long shots.
 Darkness would not fall for some time after we had finished supper so we decided to stroll through the adjacent Smith College campus. The young ladies had departed for summer vacation, thus we had the place to ourselves. The college is well-known for the excellence of its ornamental gardens and they were in full bloom that amethyst evening and the aromas of the flowers perfumed the soft, moist evening air. We walked the path above the long pond with the setting sun still radiant on the placid water. It was an enchanted moment, and she placed her hand in mine and leaned her head upon my shoulder. I tried to think of something profoundly significant and consequential to say. Instead, I sneezed.
 I must have been allergic to the aroma of one of the blooms. Halfway back to the hotel, the sneezing fit at last stopped.
 “So much for romance,” she said. “You seem to be allergic to it.”

The next two weeks of early June passed uneventfully. I fished a bit as this was the prime moment to cast a dry fly. Tyler and I bowled many mornings and cycled the town’s placid residential streets together most afternoons. Occasionally, I took her to a local restaurant and we shared a pew on Sunday mornings at the early service. Twice I watched her tennis games at the town courts. She seemed to play a rather high-class game—at least against the local talent. But she was still reticent about her past—and about our future.
 And what was our future? Could it have been, seeing my little house under construction, that she realized that it—and, thus, my life—contained no room for her and her daughter. Perhaps that was the explanation for her moodiness at the hotel. Why, when my life was at last simplifying itself, must *sabots* be flung into the works? And perhaps that also explained why these past two weeks were companionable but lacking in the physical passion that commenced with a sweaty kiss at the tennis courts—and had proceeded no farther than hand-holding on the high bankside above Paradise Pond.
 And was I throwing away what was likely to be my last opportunity for love with a lovely woman? What was it the poet Burns had written about the field mouse whose home was destroyed by his plunging ploughshare—“Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim’rous beastie, O, what a panic’s in thy breastie.” Could I be no better than that mouse? The poem, I recalled, ended with the oft misquoted lines, “the best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley.” Could that apply to Wally’s plotting?

“Meet me for lunch at the golf club,” Wally said. “We can play a game of squash beforehand. See if Tyler can come.” The telephone bell had awakened me. Two mugs of coffee settling warmly on top of my breakfast oatmeal had caused me to nod off.
 “Play her. I bet she can give you a game. She’s a hot-shot tennis player. Anyhow, I don’t own any court shoes and I haven’t played in decades. Is this about the Book?”
 “Tell you then,” he replied.
 I telephoned Tyler and she said she would be happy to play a bit of squash with Wally. She still had the necessary gear she claimed. She also said that, during her teen-age years, she had been captain of her school team. This, I thought to myself, ought to be interesting.
 The golf club, a few blocks from Wally’s home, had a long history of hosting squash tournaments and producing, like Wally, top-flight players. The club was founded before the turn of the century and prestigious residential development had grown up around it. The comfortable old shingle-style clubhouse had been forsaken for a new one of recent vintage. The new building had the architectural charm of a roadside motel chain’s attempt at elegance.
 She picked me up at my cottage later that morning. A canvas duffel bag was stashed in the back seat with the handle of her squash racket sticking out of it. Her family, she said, had been longtime members of the club and there, in winters, she had learned the game. She knew of Wally’s expertise but, being a good deal older than her, she had never seen him in action. There was a competitive sparkle in her eye and a detectable flaring of the nostrils.
 “He doesn’t look very mobile,” she mentioned as we drove to the club. She looked very mobile.
 “You just might be surprised,” I said.

“We got lucky with the paper. Roscoe knew a lady who makes the stuff as a hobby. He was going to get in touch with her and tell her what he wants as soon as he’s back from the AAS. He had a meeting there last week and he was going to look at the Book and do some measurements. Check the bulk. I had to tell him what we’re up to. Turns out, he got swindled once. He’s not keen on those buggers.”
 “So when’s he expect to be on press?” I asked.
 “Plates are made. Just waiting for the paper,” Wally answered. We were seated on a bench in the locker room. He bent over to tie his court shoes, something, given his bulk, which caused further conversation to cease.
 I watched the game from the deck above the court. For a time, he treated her deferentially, but, as she began to take points away from him, he began to politely assert himself. Clearly, she was not amused.
 As a result, lunch was a bit tense at the onset, but, gradually, she began to relax and became almost convivial thanks to the copious champagne to which Wally treated us. I realized that I had just learned something I suspected about Tyler—she had a vigorous competitive streak. I suppose in the hotel business that, combined with her good looks, likely would have propelled her to considerable success for she did not seem to lack for the wherewithal of this world. Keeping a daughter boarding at Choate while she spent her days playing with the likes of me and caring for her father suggested she was comfortably fixed, at least for the present. Of course, we had never discussed money. Good taste forbad such unseemliness.

Two days later, Wally telephoned to say that he had had a drink at the golf club that afternoon with young J. Lovelace Thomas, the Ponzi schemer.
 “I thought you two were on bad terms. You fired him, didn’t you?”
 “Suggested that there were far better opportunities for him elsewhere in this great big welcoming world,” he corrected me. “We’re distantly cordial. He was probably schmoozing prospective investors and I was just off the course. I needed a cold one and he was at the bar. What could I do? We bent an elbow. It would have been unseemly not to.”
 “So?” I asked.
 “He’s heard about the Psalm Book. It must be all over the Sunset Club by now and he’s angling for membership there.”
 “So he’s bookish?” I inquired.
 “Not a bit,” he replied, “but he’s now rather fancied by several members, I gather. The dopes don’t realize they’re being had. And it would be to his good to be able to let it quietly slip that he’s a member. Credibility, you know. Impress future prospects and all that stuff.”
 “So what did you say about the Book?”
 “Ah, there’s the rub! Said I was pretty sure the rumor about the twelfth copy turning up might actually be true. And that I had an idea who had it and that if I was right he was local and hard up and wanted to unload it fast, probably cheap.”
 “And what did he say?” By now, I was intrigued. And whom did Wally have in mind as the hard-up owner? I had a pretty good idea.
 “Nothing,” Wally replied “but I could see a light in his eye when I said ‘cheap.’ Probably by now he’s done a bit of research about its value.”
 “Is there any chance he’ll be elected to the Sunset?” I said, abruptly changing the subject. “Is he up for membership now?”
 “Probably at some point. I’ll have to check. I’m on the executive committee. Anyhow, I’d drop the black ball.” I knew that the club actually did pass the box around, each committee member holding one white and one black marble, when time came to vote to accept a new member. One black ball and your hope of membership was quashed. It was an antiquated and, possibly, cruel procedure but just what the venerable Sunset Club’s members would be expected to heartily embrace.

Wally left for a long weekend on Cape Cod to partake of the hospitality of Parmalee Knight, the second generation Knight of Knight, Smith, and Thomas, the firm in which Wally held a partnership. He did not mention the purpose of his visit.
 Tyler insisted that I resume my schoolboy squash so reluctantly I purchased the requisite gear from the club’s racquet shop and joined her on the court. Blessedly, I could still remember the basics—keep your eye on the ball, bend your knees, and move to the middle of the court as soon as you hit the ball—so that I did not humiliate myself, but I had the mobility of a tortoise. She was understanding of my decades off the court, but she played every point to win.
 “You can’t just stand there. You have to try to get to the ball,” she remonstrated as her shot once again whizzed past my flailing racquet.
 “If you insist on hitting the ball where I can’t reach it….,” I was out of breath and could not finish my complaint.
 “You need to get in shape,” she said archly.
 “You need to……” I thought it better not to finish my sentence. She smirked and slapped me on the backside with her racket. Then she kissed me.

Back in April when I had agreed to house-sit the little cottage, I envisioned a quiet few months devoted to literary pursuits with perhaps a bit angling as a diversion. Now I found that assumption to have been woefully mistaken and, instead of bookish solitude, I was flung into situations that I could not have possibly imagined—and, ruefully I had to admit, entranced by the improbability of it all. But caution spoke in my ear to proceed delicately for, hidden in the underbrush, there might lurk a nasty leg-hold trap into which I might blunder.
 I suspect the allure was the sense of adventure, something which, as a small town bookseller and bibliophile with a lackluster marriage, had been conspicuously missing from my placid life. Now serenity and my equilibrium were sent spinning by a beauty with a mysterious past and by a high-stakes swindle of which I was likely to be expected to take a leading part. Would that I could duck out, but I owed Tyler an old school try at retrieving her cranky father’s injudicious investment.
 And what of Tyler? Having seen my little Vermont cottage under construction and likely concluded that it meant that I intended to live a solitary life, did she resign herself to accepting that ours was but a simple summer dalliance? Was that what I wanted? Had that been what she wanted? But we were such comfortable companions.
Granted that, to date, romance had been confined to two kisses—one at the tennis court, the other on the squash court. And, come to think of it, what was there about the racquet sports that made her amorous? Oh hell, the more I analyzed the situation the more perplexed I became.

“How’d you like to live in a mansion?” Wally had returned from a weekend at the Knight’s place out on Penzance Point in Woods Hole.
 “I like this little place just fine,” I replied. The cottage was cozy and all my needs were close at hand. I had settled into a comfortable suburban routine.
 “The Knight’s want you to house-sit their place. I told them about what young Thomas is up to and they’re okay with my plan. Besides they’re on the Cape all summer and not planning to come back at all ‘til fall.”
 “ I figured that at some point I would be the bait,” I ventured.
 “No, the Book’s the bait. You’re simply the agent,” he said dismissively.
 “You find this amusing, don’t you.”
 “Come on, where’s the old sporting spirit?” he rejoined. “I’ll pop by at ten, show you the place, and take you to lunch. Bring Tyler if you’d like.” I had the suspicion that Wally was doing his part to foster our romance, if romance it could be called. Perhaps there was a polite euphemism that cowardly avoided the truth.
 The hour was nearing nine and I had just washed the breakfast dishes, dried them, and put them in the cabinet. Tyler, when I telephoned her, had nothing planned and was agreeable to Wally’s invitation. Twenty minutes later, she stuffed her bicycle in my little one–car garage beside the house.
 Wally swept us away in the black Cadillac with the aggressive tail fins. We climbed to near the crest of Prospect Avenue along which were situated the finest residences of the city. The Knight’s home was large but nowhere as imposing as its sprawling neighbors. Its backside provided a splendid eastern view of the tall city buildings in the distance and the lawn rolled down to a tennis court. Undeniably, theirs was the premier residential site in the city.
 “Welcome home,” Wally said grandly as he opened the door from the foyer. A grandfather clock beside the sweeping staircase ticked loudly in the stillness. “Their Irish couple is with them at Woods Hole so you’ll be on your own. I bet you can manage by yourself. And you can play tennis with Tyler.”
 We explored the house. On the staircase landing, a Palladian window looked east toward the city skyline. The interior doorways, I noted, were hung with exterior-thickness doors giving the place a feeling of solidity, not that it needed any reinforcing in that regard. It was a typical prominent Hartford home—restrained but reliably substantial and tasteful with the sense, in the background, of great reserves of wealth well-invested.
 Since we had no return transport and since a telephone message was waiting at the desk of the Hartford Club for him, after lunch Wally tossed me the keys to the Cadillac for he needed to return to his office to deal with a sudden pressing situation. He said he would swing by my cottage at some point to retrieve his car. Tyler and I glided out of the dim underground garage into the bright sunlight of early afternoon.
 “So what becomes of us?” she asked as I pulled into crawling traffic.
 “A little more inconvenient maybe, but nothing much has to change. We can still bowl and we can still ride our bikes. I wouldn’t want *that* to change. It’s going to be lonely in that old ark, though. Could you….?” I was unsure how to finish my thought.
 “It’d be a great place to get a good suntan again,” she said. There was a sprawling patio secluded behind the house. “I used to be able to go topless when I worked on the Riviera. On the beach, not in the hotel.” She cast an amused glance at me to see what my reaction to that bit of news might be. We were halted at a stoplight.
 “I suppose you could,” I croaked. My mouth suddenly had become dry. Dear God, this woman clearly was considerably farther out of my Vermont small-town orbit than I had suspected. I suddenly had a recollection of Cary Grant and Grace Kelly in *To Catch a Thief* soaring along the winding mountainous Riviera roads in her sporty roadster with the azure and violet striped Mediterranean glimpsed far below. Gradually, Grace Kelly evolved into Tyler Aubrey in my imagining and Cary Grant slid into some loathsome lothario in a silk cravat. Then the stoplight turned green and an impatient motorist behind me blew his horn to prompt me to get underway.
 That evening Wally collected his Cadillac and substituted for it a sleek black Lincoln Continental.
 “It was Dad’s. It’s been in storage since he died. Use it. We can’t have that old Jeep of yours planted in front of the Knight’s house. Stuff it in their garage and keep it there.”

Two days later in the rain, with Tyler’s help, I moved my scant possessions into the Knight’s house. Then I telephoned home to Vermont to explain my change of residence and provide my new telephone number at the Knight’s house. I deposited my bicycle with Tyler since it would have been inconvenient to carry it about in the Continental. And now I was resident in a home that likely ninety-nine per cent of the population day-dreamed of possessing. Elegant and refined as the Knight’s home was, I found myself wishing that I was back in the little cozy suburban cottage. I wandered the lonely rooms and gazed at the Hartford skyline and admired the velvet lawn running down to the red clay tennis court and wished I were still pushing the balky reel mower around the cottage’s tiny lawn and sipping iced tea with Tyler on the little screened porch after a desultory meandering around the town streets on our bicycles.
 My mind turned to the perplexing subject of what constituted happiness. Since I was now temporarily the possessor of a mansion, an elegant *barouche* of a motor car, and the apparent affections of a supremely lovely woman, why was I discontent? To this, I had no answer.

“Ah, the thrill of the chase!”
 “What the hell are you talking about, Wally?” He had telephoned from his office downtown. I was now two days resident at the Knight’s and Tyler was sunning herself on the patio. She was recumbent upon a *chaise lounge* and, from my vantage within the house, I could not determine her state of undress.
 “I have the sheets from Roscoe. I want you two to meet the conservator. Retired a while ago from the Atheneum. He’s going to work his magic.” The Atheneum was the city art museum and I was ashamed that I had yet to enter its portals. “I’ll bring him by in a bit and we can talk.”
 I opened the door to the patio. I could see only the back of the *chaise* and what appeared to be a dressing gown hanging from it.
 “Tyler,” I called, “Wally’s coming by soon with the conservator. Put something on.”
 She stood up and turned around. She was wearing only a skimpy string bikini bottom, the kind that I believe is called a thong and covered up next to nothing. I looked at her goggle-eyed. An electric buzz ran through my loins.
 “Why?” she asked impishly.
 “Because,” I said. I was at a loss for a better explanation.

 She sighed theatrically in resignation and trotted into the house, carrying the robe. She paused briefly to kiss me and then scampered upstairs to vest. By the time she returned, tastefully clad, Wally was ringing the door bell for admittance.
 The conservator was an owlish, thin, stooped fellow with wire-rimmed eyeglasses and a slight tremor. He had that peculiar musty smell about himself that ancients seem to acquire. Wisps of untidy gray hair clung to his scalp and from his eyebrows and ears sprouted longish, curling silver hairs. He looked as though he had spent his entire life indoors. The sun had shined little upon him. His name was Clarence Runnion.
 We had seated ourselves in the Knight’s large living room. Wally withdrew a silver-cased pocket knife from his jacket pocket and, with a grand gesture, slashed open the carton he had had under his arm upon arrival. Inside were pristine sheets from Roscoe’s pressroom.
 “Well, Clarence, what’s the hope?” Wally asked. “Three hundred and fifty odd years—can you do it?”
 Clarence rummaged through the box, fingering the paper ruminatively. The sheets were printed on both sides and the lines intentionally did not back up to one another—a sign of the sloppy press-work that the incompetent Stephen Daye, the original printer, might produce.
 “How much does the fellow know about printing?” he inquired. He was referring to J. Lovelace Thomas.
 “Nothing,” Wally answered.
 “Then two weeks.”
 “And you can bind the sheets, too?” Roscoe had printed the keepsake sheets two-up so that they could be sewn by a binder.
 “Yup,” Clarence answered. He was clearly a man of action and few words.
 As they were departing, Wally asked us to meet him for supper downtown at the Hartford Club. When the door closed and Wally’s Cadillac had purred away, Tyler took me by the hand and led me upstairs.

“Do you think you can really fool the Thomas kid? Won’t he want some kind of verification?” I asked. We three were seated beside a tall dining room window that looked out upon folks occasionally strolling past, enjoying a serene June evening.
 “He’s an idiot if he doesn’t,” Wally said as he tucked into his lobster newburg.
 “So?” Tyler asked. There was a particularly healthy glow about her that evening.
 “Have some more champagne,” he replied and reached out and re-filled our glasses.
 “So?” I asked.
 “I’m a trustee of the stage company.”
 “So what?” I said.
 “I have actor pals who are always looking for extra work.”
 “You’re joking!”
 “Why not,” Wally shrugged. “These guys are pros. Quick studies.”
 “You propose to pass one of them off as a rare book expert? Suppose the kid wants references? Who do you have in mind?” I was astonished at his gall. Tyler nearly gagged on her champagne and coughed violently.
 “Jack Sears,” Wally stated quietly. “He’s gone to Greece for the summer so he can’t be reached. Safer that way.”
 In the Boston book world, Jack Sears was the quintessential rare book scholar and a scion of one of the best of the old families. He was a fellow member of the Wednesday Club, a member of the Tavern and Union Clubs, and best known as a former associate director of the rare book collection at the BPL and later at the Athenaeum (the BPL is common usage for the Boston Public Library in Copley Square. It possesses one of the largest rare book collections in the world. The Athenaeum is the Boston Athenaeum at the top of Beacon Street, is one of the oldest private libraries in the country. The Library Company in Philadelphia, begun by Ben Franklin, is the oldest).
 I knew Jack reasonably well as we often sat together at Wednesday Club dinners. He was an ardent angler and we frequently talked of matters piscatorial. He was an inspired choice for physically he was the quintessence of the ordinary: average height, of no easily determinable age, clean shaven, reasonably fit for a bookish scholar. He peered through horn-rimmed glasses, possessed his own mouse-brown hair in its entirety, and had no evident distinguishing features. Just a very average-looking fellow. His sole eccentricity was the bow tie, and frequently it would be a club tie depending upon which of his clubs he was frequenting that day. I had never seen him without one. He was a Hill dweller with an old family home, reputedly built by Bullfinch, at the upper end of Chestnut Street.
 If young Thomas did some poking around, he would discover that the BPL held in its rare book department, where Jack Sears had spent many years, two copies of the Bay Psalm Book, both belonging to Old South Church where so much of the Boston Tea Party was fomented. Thus, no one could affirm the authenticity of a Bay Psalm Book as well as Jack. Wally’s choice was inspired.

The following morning, I wafted over to Tyler’s father’s home. We had arranged to bowl. Driving the Lincoln, after years of bouncing about in the jouncy Jeep, seemed more like driving a living room.
 “What happened yesterday?” I asked. We were riding our bicycles through the quiet side streets on our way to the bowling green.
 “Evening or afternoon?” she inquired coyly.
 “You know what I’m talking about—afternoon.”
 “Nature just took its course, I guess. Why—didn’t you enjoy it? You certainly seemed to.”
 “Of course I did,” I said. “It’s just that it took me by surprise.”
 “I suppose I figured you’d never get around to it at the rate you were moving. So I decided I’d better try to help things along.”
 “I had been trying to behave like a gentleman,” I said archly in self-defense.
 “Sometimes you’re an idiot,” she responded. “How long has it been since you’ve done it?”
 My marriage to Mary had been for many years a form of celibacy. I suppose most marriages are. I considered myself reasonably sophisticated and worldly, at least for a Vermonter, but Tyler was from a libidinous world with which I was totally unfamiliar.
 “Quite a while,” I admitted.
 “A good looking guy like you! You can’t tell me you *never* had affairs.”
 “I most certainly did *not*,” I replied indignantly. “We don’t do such things in Vermont!”
 Furthermore, Vermont women, being largely a dumpy, prune-faced lot, were unlikely to inspire those ideas in our male population and, doubtless, accounted for the unusually high interest in watching the Red Sox evening games on television instead of in other nocturnal warm weather pursuits. But I was a bit mollified that she thought me good looking.
 “Gawd,” she said in apparent disbelief and shook her head.
 We rode on in silence, each pondering the peculiarities of romance and its attendant complications.

My house, according to the builder’s report the next day, was closed in, the flooring laid, the doors hung, and the pine paneling was already installed everywhere but the library. The bookcases were still under construction in his shop and the porch had yet to be begun. I was mad to see the progress and to see Taffy.
 “Want to take a trip to Vermont?” Tyler and I had just come off the squash court and we were dripping with sweat.
 “I don’t know,” she replied evasively.
 “But I thought you loved it the last time,” I said.
 “Well, sort of. I mean it is *really* beautiful.”
 “Then what? Did something upset you?”
 “I don’t want to talk about it right now. I’ll go if it’ll make you happy,” she said resignedly.
 “Tomorrow?”
 “Fine,” she replied unenthusiastically.
 The topsy-turvy quality of our relationship was unnerving. We headed to our respective showers.

“Look, I’ve never really had the courage to say this, but I really like being with you,” I said. We were serenely gliding north on the Interstate in the big Lincoln, heading for Vermont. Once past Northampton, the traffic had thinned to next to nothing and not another vehicle was in sight.
 “Oooh, that *is* romantic! Be careful or you’ll sweep me off my feet,” she replied sarcastically. Then she smiled conspiratorially.
 “You know what I’m saying,” I replied defensively.
 “Do *you*?” Again she smiled, but with the compassionate smile of the chess player who knows his next move but one will produce checkmate.
 “I mean I like being with you *all* the time.” Oh hell, I just could not seem to find the words I wanted to explain what I meant. As a matter of fact, what did I mean?
 “You’re not very good at this sort of thing, are you,” she said, chuckling to herself. She seemed to enjoy watching me squirm.

Taffy and I were delirious to see one another. To the observer it would have been difficult to determine which of us appeared the more ridiculous. I glanced at Tyler. She seemed to be shaking her head in amusement at the spectacle. After my pathetic declaration in the journey northward and now this, could she possibly want to have any sort of a future with me? Bumbling was a word that seemed appropriate in estimating myself to myself.
 There is something indescribably wonderful about anything custom-made just for you*. Haute couture* from Paris *atiliers*, suits from Saville Row —they endure because they are made for the wearer and no one else. So it was with my new little home. The aromas of new wood curing and damp plaster drying mingled with the astringent smell of the great white pines behind the house and of fresh earth churned by the excavation. Soon that would be graded and grass planted. This would be *my* home.
 The old home I had vacated for my son and his family was never my home. It had been the family’s home for generations, and, properly enough, would continue for at least another generation to be our family home. But this splendid little new place was mine alone—yet I wondered again what Tyler thought when she saw my evident delight that must have been so obvious. And then I realized what she *must* think—that there was no room here for her and Constance.
 I turned around and spotted her some distance away with her back to me, staring disconsolately across the hayfield toward the distant range of green hills. I walked over to her and she turned at my approach.
 “Nice view,” she said quietly.
 “It’s better with you in it.”
 “Aren’t you the old softie,” she replied, smiling wanly. I wished that I could counter her flippancy with a significant declaration but, again, the words evaded me. Anyhow, time to depart my pine-scented home site had arrived.
 We stopped at a German restaurant in downtown Springfield on our return trip. After my humiliating sneezing fit at the Smith College campus, I thought that prudence suggested driving south past Northampton and instead stopping in the city of Springfield for supper. Once a year, but no more than once a year, I like German food—I suppose cuisine would be too ambitious a term to apply to the stuff—and the atmosphere in the dark paneled dining room with beer steins and deer antlers for decoration was agreeably Teutonic. The cold steins of beer were a fine antidote to a warm June day.
 I wanted to say something about our future together, but the stern Germanic ambience was somehow off-putting for discussing matters romantic. We patiently waited for the *wursts und kartoffel mit sauerkraut* to emerge from the kitchen. German cooks can work miracles with the humble cabbage. We gnawed at the slices of dark pumpernickel bread that the stout waitress just had deposited on the table and said nothing.

Clarence Runnion, the conspiring conservator, presumably was working his magic on the Psalm Book keepsake sheets. Constance, Tyler’s daughter, to judge from the post cards to her mother was deliriously embracing France and its delights (which presumably included young Frenchmen) to her mother’s consternation. Tyler’s father, the retired hanging judge Harry Aubrey, was still gloating over the high returns from his investment with J. Lovelace Thomas. I was living a luxurious, though boring, existence in a grand house and driving a *deluxe* automobile—not to overlook enjoying the unmerited affections of a prime-time babe. Wally presumably was grooming an actor pal in becoming the Boston rare book specialist Jack Sears.
 Yet, unless Wally could tempt devious young Thomas to salivate over acquiring the bargain-basement Psalm Book, my old roommate’s plans would be in vain. Events, I suspected, ought to be about to move forward smartly.

Jay Thomas, that is to say J. Lovelace Thomas, had a rather unusual relationship with his mother.
 Wally, Tyler, and I were sipping whiskey on the patio behind the Knight’s ridge-top home and watching the evening descend over the towers of the distant city. Wally was swirling the amber liquid in his glass bemusedly and slowly retailing what Jay’s late father had told him long ago about his son and his wife. Apparently, the marriage was somewhat strained resulting in Thomas senior’s detached appraisal of his family as well as his wandering eye and the inordinate amount of time spent on the golf course with Wally.
 “You’re joking,” Tyler said in astonishment.
 “Quite serious, my dear,” Wally replied avuncularly.
 “She nursed him until he was five, really?” Tyler shuddered at the thought. “I didn’t know that was even possible.”
 “And” Wally added, “she kept him in her bed until he was twelve.” Tyler shuddered again. I cringed.
 “It gives me the creeps,” she said. “Did they…” She thought better not to continue that particular line of thought.
 “So,” I said, “the old man went along with this? The three of them in the same bed?”
 “Separate bedrooms,” Wally replied, tapping the ash from his cigar. “You’d never see the two of them together in public. It was an odd sort of marriage, but it lasted.”
 “How about school?” I asked.
 “Local day schools. He isn’t any kind of an athlete and that galled his dad. Likes guns, though. He’s always been a chubby kid and the girls never had any interest in him as far as I know.”
 “Well, does he like *them*?” Tyler inquired.
 “Anybody’s guess. He’s smart, though. Got into Yale—but that’s the family school so maybe the ways were greased.” Wally leaned back in his chair and sent a ring of smoke aloft.
 “And then the old man croaks and the gun nut kid goes whacko and drops out of Yale,” I mused. “It doesn’t make any sense.”
 “I know,” Wally said. “A field day for the shrinks, eh? Sometimes things don’t make any sense, but they still are what they are.”

So young Thomas liked guns. Wally did not elaborate. Probably he did not have sufficient firearm knowledge to be specific. He was a city boy, born and bred.
 I long had maintained a rough little shooting range at the back edge of one of our hayfields. I loaded my own cartridges for the sake of economy and had an old cast iron launcher that sent clay pigeons sailing aloft in a variety of unpredictable directions. Smashing clay pigeons was good fun and the practice kept me sharp for the bird season.
 Like most country people, I owned several guns—an ancient twelve-gauge Remington pump that balanced beautifully and that I adored for clays, an equally elderly sixteen-gauge double-barreled side-by-side I carried in the autumn for woodcock and grouse, and a twenty-two caliber carbine that I used to use on boyhood Saturday evenings shooting rats at the town dump. The recollection of those youthful evenings made me again long for the resumption of a country life.
 But somehow or other I suspected that my bucolic shooting was not the sort of sport that interested Jay Thomas. I was inclined to suspect, from Wally’s extraordinary evening revelations, that high-powered pistols and rifles that could blow a frighteningly big hole in the intended target more likely would be the weapons of interest. What made me think that I could not say, but I would have been mightily surprised if plinking empty cans with a little twenty-two was his sport.

We were now neighbors—Wally, Jay Thomas and myself. Not close neighbors but within easy walking distance of one another. The Thomas family home was a block from Wally’s sylvan home and I was now situated on the ridge overlooking the city, several blocks from my old roommate’s shingled manse. I decided that the time had come to investigate the adversary.
 I contemplated inviting Tyler to accompany me on my early morning stroll as we had planned a late morning squash game to be followed by lunch at the club. But I decided against her company for I was uneasy that she, being Hanging Harry’s daughter and he a Thomas client, be seen with me should young Thomas be outside watering his lawn or pottering with his petunias or some such activity. My guess, though, was that he was a true indoorsman and would be unlikely to be engaged in such robust outdoor activities—but why take a chance. I had no idea what his daily schedule might be and Wally had mentioned that he worked out of a home office rather than maintain an office in town.
 The morning was a splendid specimen of a fine June day—warm with a mild breeze to cool my ambling. I selected a walking stick from the umbrella stand, knotted my necktie, lit my pipe, and strode off. My route took me downhill past the neighboring mansions into an area of well-built turn of the century homes of impressive dimensions, all clearly the work of competent architects. Sunlight filtering through the tall shade trees dappled the streets and a serene quiet prevailed since the workday already had begun in the city and motor traffic was now negligible.
 I had studied a map of the city streets so I knew how to find the Thomas home. Number seventy-seven was halfway along its block, built in what appeared to be a pseudo-Spanish style with stucco walls and a clay-tiled roof. When it was constructed, it must have looked out of place among the mock-Tudors, Frenchified mini-chateaus, and imposing Colonial revivals, but time and ivy had mellowed it and aesthetically it no longer created alarm. The Thomas house did not look as though any ill-got gains had been lavished upon it and there was a drab, elderly sedan parked in the driveway alongside the house. Apparently, those same ill-got gains had not been directed as of yet toward expensive Italian motorcars. There was an air of seedy respectability about the place, but it would take only little neglect to render it merely seedy.
 I could not linger in front of the house long lest some neighboring householder notice me and alarm the police that I was casing the joint. Although I did not look the part of a cat burglar, to be questioned by the police about my interest in the Thomas domicile could not aid Wally’s plotting and might alarm young Thomas as well. I strolled on.
 The morning was still young and I pondered extending my adventure by a visit to the nearby rose garden park. I know nothing of roses but the day was warming nicely and the prospect of the heavy, sweet aroma from the hundreds of blooms was compelling. Thus, I meandered the grass paths between the beds until a glance at my watch informed me that I had best chart a course toward the Knight’s home and thence onward to the squash court at the nearby golf club. Tyler’s father had yet to complain about the tab his daughter was running up at the club from our squash games and lunches. No doubt he still was dizzily enraptured by his quarterly returns from his investment with Jay Thomas.
 We now were playing squash a couple of mornings each week as well as bowling most intervening mornings on the green. She had an occasional afternoon tennis match with me as a fascinated spectator, often sunned herself on the Knight’s patio, and we pedaled about town occasionally. And we still shared a pew at the eight o’clock service followed by a leisurely walk to her home through the still quiet streets. We both were growing tanned and fit. Life had become a giddy sybaritic dream. Giddy, I began to suspect, might not last long.

“Pop over this evening,” Wally said the following morning as I was washing up the breakfast dishes. “Clarence dropped off his project. Bring Tyler, too, if you want.” I replaced the telephone in its cradle and pondered what lay ahead. Clearly, a new chapter was beginning. But I was well behind time for departure to meet Tyler for a morning’s bowling. I telephoned her that I was running late then hustled out the door and fired up the huge engine under the Lincoln’s hood.
 We were well into our game that sunny morning before I mentioned Wally’s invitation. She accepted eagerly. Beside us on the adjoining rinks, elderly bowlers were casting libidinous glances at Tyler and envious ones at me. I could imagine that their daydreams, should they be revealed, would not sit well with their crotchety-looking partners, presumably their wives.

Eduardo, Wally’s Filipino man servant, deferentially led us to the library that same evening. He bowed us into the room and retired to the nether region of the cavernous house. In the near distance, we could hear the sound of Wally whistling. He was quite an accomplished whistler I recalled from schooldays. The whistling grew louder and Wally glided into the library in three-quarter time while elegantly concluding the final bars of a Strauss waltz*.* He swirled his imaginary partner into a chair, bowed graciously to her, and spun on his heel to expansively greet us. He was wearing on his dancing feet a pair of red velvet slippers embroidered with fox heads. He looked exquisitely urbane in a black silk robe with a silver zig zag pattern in place of his suit coat.
 “Wow,” Tyler exclaimed, “you’re really good!”
 Wally deferentially inclined his head and smiled a gracious smile at the compliment. There was no need to tell him that it said, but thank you nevertheless. I knew the gesture from our schooldays when he just had demolished an opponent on the squash court or chipped his golf ball from well off the green to come to rest alongside the flag.
 “Marry the girl,” he said to me, “she has excellent taste.” Tyler looked at me and expectantly raised her eyebrows ever so slightly. I squirmed. “But you didn’t come here for matrimonial advice,” he continued, abruptly changing the subject. He picked up a small package loosely wrapped in kraft paper. “Behold, the book,” he said and carefully began to unwrap. When it was unwrapped, he placed it on a table. I read the top page, the title page:
 *‘The Whole Booke of Psalms faithfully translated into English Metre—Where unto is prefixed a discourse declaring not only the lawfullness, but also the necessity of the heavenly Ordinance in Singing Scripture’*
 “My God, Wally,” I marveled, “it looks ancient!”
 Tyler peered over my shoulder. “Wow!” she exclaimed.
 “Remember,” he said, “there are only six actual pages—from the photos the Antiquarian Society made for my keepsakes. Clarence used the rest of Roscoe’s sheets for bulk only. So no one can be allowed to thumb through it or they’d immediately realize it’s a fake.”
 “So how do we show it?” I asked.
 “First of all, it’s going into the bank in a safe deposit box. You emphasize it’s fragile—cotton gloves, absolutely no touching. Jack Sears will make the presentation. Let him turn over the top few pages with this.” He handed me a broad, flat ivory letter opener with beveled edges.
 “And how’s your Jack progressing?” I asked.
 “He’s coming along nicely. He can’t quite master tying the bow tie, but he’ll get it yet.”

I drove Tyler home that starlit evening. Her father’s car was in the repair shop and he had needed to borrow her station wagon for his weekly poker game. Having had an opportunity to ponder what we had just observed, Tyler asked the obvious question as we swept through the darkened streets.
 “Suppose that the Thomas boy isn’t interested—then what? How will I get Daddy’s money back? He’s not a rich man, you know.”
 “All we can do now is wait, I guess.”
 “But how do we get him interested?” Despite the confusion of pronouns, I realized that she was referring to Jay Thomas.
 “That’s Wally’s problem, isn’t it?” I replied. “I mean I can’t go knock on his door and ask if he’d be interested in buying a Bay Psalm Book cheap. He’d think I was a lunatic.”
 We rode on in silence for a while, mulling the problem.
 “Suppose Daddy wanted his money back,” she ventured.
 “Why would he do that? Doesn’t he think Jay Thomas hung the moon?”
 “If Wally explained what’s really going on, Daddy would hit the ceiling. Of course, he would want his money immediately,” she said.
 “That might panic the kid, especially knowing your dad’s reputation. If there might be a run starting maybe he’d jump for the Psalm Book for protection. Is that what you’re thinking?”
 “I guess so. I don’t know what to think. Can you talk to Wally about this, please. I’m *so* worried.” I had pulled alongside her house. I kissed her goodnight and she squeezed my hand, wanting reassurance. I drove back to the Knight’s home trying to resolve in my mind this new puzzle. It seemed like a tricky chess situation with a seeming opportunity to break the game wide open but, equally, possessed of potential miscalculations that could lead to an appalling loss. I knew that I was unlikely to sleep soundly.

“I checked with both of the auction houses and neither could put the book up for auction ‘til the fall,” Wally said. “But they’re both madly interested. A new Psalm Book would knock the socks off the book world.”
 He had invited me to the Hartford Club for lunch the following day. I knew that he was referring to the famous Manhattan firms who were the only ones big enough to handle such a sale as the Bay Psalm Book, a sale which would likely exceed ten million dollars.
 “So that’s months away,” I replied, stating the obvious. “Is that good or bad?”
 Previously, I had broached Tyler’s idea about informing her father about the Ponzi scheme perpetrated upon him.
 “*That* could push Jay to act if he had to cover Harry. The judge has no problem speaking his mind—and loudly. If he intimated that he thought there was something crooked going on, that might panic Thomas. That and potentially the threat of a flood of others wanting out,” Wally mused. “What’s working for us is that he’s a momma’s boy. I can’t see him scooping up the cash and running out on her. He’s probably got it in dozens of banks for safety’s sake. May have some in securities, too.”
 “So,” I speculated, “if the asking price for the Book is low enough, he might be able to swing it knowing that in a few months he’d be legitimately stinking rich and out of potential big trouble. How much do you think he’s accumulated so far?”
 “I’ve asked around a bit, but I’ve had to be careful. Let on that I was possibly thinking of getting in on the investment, too.”
 “So how much?”
 “My guess is about three million,” Wally said, “maybe four. He’s only been at it less than a year, you know, and he’s had to pay out quarterly returns from the stash. But he’s probably adding to the pile now that word’s getting around.”
 “As much as five?” I asked.
 “I’m guessing he has around twenty-odd investors,” he speculated. “That feels about right from what I’m overhearing. But some are putting more in now, I bet. Remember, one hundred thou is the supposed minimum, but I doubt there would be any upward limit. I’d say he has about four mil in hand.”
 I was wondering what we could ask for the Book. Too much and he would not be able to swing the deal, too little and he might be suspicious. Whatever the price, he would need to retain enough working capital to cover investor payouts until the auction. Anyhow, why would it be for sale now on the cheap when, in a few months distant, it would fetch a fortune? I asked the question of Wally.
 “Debt,” he replied, sipping his chill Mosel. “Gambling debts, to be precise. There’s no fooling around with *those* people.”
 “A motivated buyer and a motivated seller,” I reflected. Wally smiled conspiratorially and poured some of the pale golden liquid from the tall, slender green bottle into my now empty glass.
 “*Prosit*,” he said. The waiter had arrived with our lobster salads.

Grandchild number two, named for his ancestor Asa of the Green Mountain Boys, was turning five a day hence. At breakfast the next morning, I telephoned Tyler to ask what would be an appropriate birthday present for the boy. She reassured me that in the course of her shopping that morning she would be willing to purchase a suitable present. I remarked that something literary would be appropriate and suggested a couple of titles that I remembered from my book selling days. She agreed to accompany me to the party. That cheered me as I am uneasy in the presence of swarming small children.
 Grateful that I could turn my attention from the skullduggery of swindling a swindler, I began to consider my new cottage. It would need furnishing. My son and his wife had brought furniture of the modern variety with them from Manhattan, but they had decided that, although it was admirably appropriate for the Upper East Side, it was aesthetically unsuited for an old country house which was already filled with generations of handsome family furnishings now certifiably qualifying as antiques. I did not want their stuff so it would go into the barn loft or, if a dealer could not be located, the annual church tag sale. And I could not ask them to relinquish anything from their new home. I had given it to them intact and thus it should remain.
 What I needed were things like braided rugs, checked tablecloths, crockery (preferably of the sturdy diner quality), a wood range for the kitchen, and a bean pot. At the breakfast table, I began to make a list of what needed to be acquired. There was the mundane—towels, sheets, blankets, pillows, and such. The kitchen required pots and pans and bowls as well as knives and whisks and spatulas and on and on. And also, of course, cast iron skillets. The list was growing daunting and I was growing discouraged at the prospect of the requisite shopping expeditions. I had been living these recent weeks in a reverie—now a bucket of the cold water of reality had doused me.
 Grandfather had amassed a sizeable collection of Aldro Hibbard’s landscapes. Hibbard had painted extensively in Vermont as well as in his home country, Boston’s north shore. Grandad must have been prescient for a few years previous when I had contacted Hibbard’s longtime dealer, the venerable Vose Gallery on Newbury Street in Boston, I was astonished at the current prices asked for his oils. A few of grandfather’s smaller Hibbards would brighten the walls of my cottage. I thought I would discuss that matter with my son at the birthday party.
 I lit my morning pipe and wandered out of doors onto the patio. The morning sun was rising and sparkling off the tall tower of the Traveler’s Insurance building, still the dominant pinnacle on the city skyline. What an odd and unimaginable world I was now inhabiting. I reflected on the predictability of my past life—the main street bookstore, the annual town functions, the pot of baked beans for Saturday suppers, the trout fishing in the spring, and the autumn days behind a quartering bird dog. I missed Taffy.

Clearly, the time had arrived to deal with matters domestic. The builders were ahead of schedule: now the library shelving was installed, the doors hung, the porch was finished, and the house had that aspect of awaiting occupancy. The exterior had been painted a cheerful yellow, the shutters dark green, and the trim picked out in white. Pale green metal covered the roof, and protruding above were the rose colored bricks of the chimney. It was a jolly sight. Tyler, Taffy, and I wandered through the building attempting to assign colors to the walls of the several rooms. After several false casts, we came to a satisfactory agreement and noted our choices in the paint company’s sample book that had been left for our consideration. And the bathroom we agreed would be tiled floor to ceiling.
 I wanted to say something significant to Tyler as we stepped outside. The moment clearly was appropriate, but I could not articulate a coherent thought. Furthermore, just what *was* I thinking? Was this merely a summer romance to be enjoyed but not taken seriously? Should we reconcile ourselves to that and embrace it for what it was worth and then let it evaporate come autumn? For it to endure involved so many seemingly impossible complications that would need to be resolved.
 “Yes?” Tyler asked.
 “Yes, what?” I replied. I bent down and patted Taffy on her head.
 “You looked like you wanted to say something.”
 “I do. I did. Oh hell, it slipped my mind. I don’t know,” I said in self-disgust.
 “You must be growing forgetful with age.” She smiled mock-sympathetically at me and that made the confusion worse yet. “Maybe it’ll come to you later.”
 The birthday party was predictably chaotic, but my charming daughter-in-law serenely floated through the confusion. Fortunately, the weather was splendid so the noisy festivities could be held out of doors, lessening the damage that would have been wrought upon their house. My son was more than happy to let me have a few Hibbards—in fact, he proposed that we swap them between ourselves occasionally. I knew he wanted to ask about Tyler, since this was her third visit, but we are reticent folks by nature so he said nothing. I am not sure I would have known how to reply had he asked.

“What kind of guy is Wally?”
 “What do you mean?” I asked. We had just emerged from the Deerfield Inn after an early supper on our way home from Vermont. The Street, the straight mile-long main street of the historic village, was quiet and serene in the late June evening with long shadows of the setting sun streaking the roadway. It was an enchanting vista.
 “He thinks he’s going to pull off this scam with the Prayer Book. People aren’t marionettes. He can’t just pull strings and make them do what he wants,” she mused. “Suppose the Thomas boy isn’t interested?”
 “I know,” I said. I took her by the hand and we began to stroll north along The Street lined with elegant seventeenth and early eighteenth century residences fronted with ancient shade trees. A walk to the vast corn fields of the North Meadows at the end of The Street and back would settle our dinners.
 “And why is he a bachelor. He isn’t….you know?”
 “No,” I said, “he’s not. I guess he’s just too busy having a good time in his own way. I mean he’s out almost every night at some charitable board meeting or other. That old Filipino couple who keep house for him are the most underworked people I know, no fault of theirs. He’s hardly ever home except to go to bed. How’d *you* like to be married to someone like that?”
 “Not much,” she admitted.
 “Just let him be, then,” I counseled. “He does plenty of good and he has a jolly good time doing it.”
 Wally once told me that he belonged to eight clubs. There were the two literary clubs: the local Sunset and the Wednesday in Boston (to which we both belonged); the Hartford Club where much of the city business was transacted over whiskey and cigars; a pair of residential clubs in both Boston and Manhattan where he could spend the night while on business; the local golf club, with reciprocity at racquet clubs in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. He was the personification of the term ‘clubbable.’
 There was a touch of darkness settling in as we returned to the Lincoln and wafted away down The Street heading home.

“What the hell do you mean! You’re telling me he’s a crook?” A vein throbbed in the forehead of retired judge Harold T. Aubrey. “Where do you get such an idea? You better know what you’re talking about before you start slinging allegations like that!”
 “Daddy, calm down,” Tyler interjected. “The doctor said…”
 “There’s nothing wrong with me,” he snarled at his daughter. “Jack Thomas was a good man. There can’t be anything wrong with his son!”
 At some length Wally explained why he was sure that, though Jack Thomas was indeed an honorable gentleman, his son left a great deal to be desired in the pathways of truth and light. The telling point seemed to be why the sharpest minds in Wall Street could not come close to matching the returns provided by the inexperienced young Hartford upstart.
 Quiet fell in the Aubrey living room. Tyler reached out and took my hand. Wally settled further into a chesterfield chair, crossed his legs, and slowly exhaled. The judge stared at the Persian carpet between his feet. Outside the amethyst gloaming was fast disappearing into darkness.
 “So what do you want me to do?” the judge asked surlily. “I don’t like any part of this, I can tell you. I just don’t *believe* it!”
 “Ask for your money back, Daddy.” Wally nodded in agreement.
 “And *how* am I going to explain why I want it? He’ll think something’s fishy. Besides it can only be withdrawn with six months prior notice. *That’s* in the contract.”
 “People have unexpected expenses all the time,” I interjected. The judge looked censoriously at me and then disapprovingly at Tyler’s hand in mine. She removed her hand and sat up straight like a good girl.
 With that the uncomfortable interview drew to a conclusion. In the darkened driveway, as I was opening the Lincoln’s broad door, Tyler whispered that she would convince her father to do what she suggested. She kissed me and retreated into the house.
 Wally, without trying to, had overheard what she had said.
 “I’ve talked to a couple of other fellows about this, too,” he said. “They’re going to withdraw.”
 “A run on the bank, eh?” I hazarded.
 Wally chuckled. We fired up our huge engines and purred away into the blackness of the suburban street.

A run on the bank I jokingly had said to Wally. But, given the contractual time lag of six months before funds were obliged to be surrendered, the run would occur in slow motion. Perhaps, for our purposes, that was to the good. Had Jay Thomas been compelled to surrender funds immediately on demand, he likely would have panicked and any hope of buying the Prayer Book consequently would evaporate. Now he would feel pressure as the three opted for repayment but his ill-gotten gain would still be intact for half a year. An absolute killing lay ahead if he could buy the Prayer Book cheaply now and send it to auction in the late autumn. Further, with the millions he stood to make on the book’s sale pocketed, he could wind down his Ponzi scheme and refund his investors before any potential trouble developed. And he would be a very rich young man.
 Tyler and I were seated the following noon day on the expansive patio overlooking the golf course. She had once again humiliated me that morning on the club’s squash court. She was nursing a tall glass of lemonade and I was sipping something considerably more potent trying to forget my deficiencies with a squash racquet. We were scanning the lunch menus. She had been tactful as I lurched after her shots, but there was no possibility of overlooking her pitying glances at my varied ineptitudes on the court. I considered suggesting we spend more hours on our bicycles and fewer on the sunless squash court. Lately, we had forsaken the pleasures of afternoons wheeling through the sedate suburban streets. That aimless meandering had had an inexplicable charm. On the other hand, afternoons basking in the sun in the seclusion behind the Knight’s manse had become a delightful substitute. She was roasting herself to a rich, delicious, all-over golden brown.
 “So, what did your father decide? Is he going to ask for his money back?”
 “He can’t believe that the boy’s really a crook. He admired his father,” she admitted, “but, after a while, he said he’d go along with what Wally wants.”
 “Reluctantly?”
 “Very much so,” she sighed.

“I saw him,” Tyler said. We had just commenced a game of bowls, the first pair that morning on the green. Soon elderly bowlers would begin to totter in.
 “The Thomas kid? Where?”
 “At the carillon concert at Trinity yesterday evening. Daddy wanted to go so I couldn’t say no. Besides, it’s always really neat.”
 Trinity College is a well-respected small college on a ridge top in the south end of Hartford. Its carillon concerts are a long-standing tradition and attract listeners who sit and picnic on the lawn in the late afternoon alongside the white marble gothic chapel in which the carillon is housed. Eminent carillonneurs from all over the world come to play the famous instrument. This makes for an enchanting summer hour as the sun slips down in the west and, from the chapel tower, the mellow voice of the carillon carries over the campus.
 “But you didn’t actually meet him?” I asked.
 “No. It looked like he was schmoozing a prospect and besides Daddy is a little embarrassed about asking for his money back. He had just put the letter in the mail as we left for the concert. I don’t think he saw us.” I realized she meant Jay Thomas despite the confusion of pronouns.
 “So what does he look like?”
 “Blubbery,” she replied. “He’s really young.” I recalled that Wally had mentioned that the boy had dropped out of Yale and had lasted only a short time at his father’s firm before Wally fired him—something about opportunities beckoning in the great world beyond the firm’s doors he had claimed—but fired nevertheless.
 “Look, let’s do some investigating. Wally said he graduated from the school,” I said, pointing in the general direction of the day school that lay a few blocks from the bowling club. “Let’s drop into the library afterwards and take a look at his yearbook. I’d like to know more about him.”
 She agreed and rolled her bowl which came to rest alongside the target, the little white ball called the jack. She looked quite satisfied with herself. I sent mine spinning down the turf. It curled toward hers, knocking it aside.
 “Rotten bastard,” she hissed, not entirely good humoredly. Her competitive side regularly asserted itself.
 As we so often did, we ate the lunch shop’s sandwiches seated on benches in the shade of the clubhouse’s verandah. It was mid-summer and the day had grown sultry. We then pedaled the short distance through suburban streets to the school campus.
 It is a charming little school. Its buildings of brick, built in a mock-Georgian style. Ivy grew on the walls. There was a stillness about the place, the parking lots empty and no one to be seen walking about. The tall campus trees provided welcome shade.
 We were the library’s only visitors that early afternoon. We looked incongruous in our bowling whites, but the librarian was gracious and shortly provided us the yearbooks we requested. She asked, in passing, if Tyler was related to Judge Aubrey. The judge had been a long-time trustee of the school.
 We had been unsure of Jay Thomas’ graduation year—thus the request for the several yearbooks. But the first one we opened was the correct one.
 “Wow! He’s gained a *ton* of weight,” Tyler exclaimed. A plain, dark-haired stripling in horn-rimmed glasses smiled wanly at us. Under his name and address were listed his school accomplishments and activities: *cum laude,* class secretary,chess club, rifle club (president), and school newspaper (treasurer). There was no mention of athletics. Apparently, he was a bright and popular schoolboy.
 “So, where does this get us? How did he go from *this,”* I said, pointing at the yearbook ,“to running a Ponzi scheme?”
 “Something must have popped when his father died,” she speculated.
 “But they weren’t that close, were they? Wally said he’s a mamma’s boy,” I replied.
 “Who knows? Besides, Wally doesn’t know everything.” She looked smug.

A while back, in fact shortly after the final meeting of the Sunset Club in May, I had asked Wally whether Jay Thomas might become a prospective member. He had snorted derisively at the notion that the fat philistine might be considered for membership in the city’s venerable bibliophilic organization. However, he was well aware that membership would give the young swindler a veneer of intellectual respectability that would be useful in his future sales pitch.
 “Bob Smith told me he had lunch with Jay Thomas yesterday,” Wally said. He telephoned as I was washing the supper dishes. Bob Smith, you may remember, was, like Wally, a partner in the firm of Knight, Smith and Thomas and had accompanied me to Manhattan back in May. It was then that I had let slip to the Fifth Avenue rare book dealer that there might be a twelfth Bay Psalm Book—and that had sent the news racing through the rare book community. Bob was not only a member of the Knickerbocker Club, where we had spent the night, but also a member of the Hartford Club and the Sunset Club. It was he, no doubt you recall, who spoke after dinner on the subject of that dreadful bore, Trebor Nosredna.
 “So?” I inquired.
 “He said the boy seemed a trifle agitated. I suspect he has begun to receive a couple of my pals’ requests for the return of their investments,” he replied. “When he gets the judge’s, he’s going to get a little more antsy, I suspect.”
 “No doubt,” I affirmed. “But you’ve sworn your pals to secrecy, right?” He nodded in agreement.
 “They talked about the Sunset Club at lunch. I think he’s subtly trying to inveigle an invitation for membership.”
 “But you’d black ball him, right?”
 “That’s not the point,” Wally said.
 “So what *is* the point?” I was becoming a trifle annoyed.
 “Bob knows now about the Ponzi scheme. I told him when he came back to the office after lunch. He wasn’t amused—he liked Jay’s father. Respected him. And he knows now about our Psalm Book scheme. He wants to help. He’ll ask Jay to lunch at the Hartford Club in a couple of days.”
 “I’d like to be a fly on *that* wall,” I said.
 “You will be,” he replied. He said good bye and hung up before I could stammer a response.

“Wally wants me to practice acting drunk,” I said. Tyler and I were desultorily pedaling through the town side streets. In this part of town, which until mid-century had been pasture and hayfield, the residential architecture had a bland appearance as though stamped out with a cookie cutter. Perhaps the word ‘architecture’ was stretching the definition unfairly. But, in the intervening decades, shade trees had grown to maturity softening the dreary regularity of the homes’ appearance.
 “Whatever for?”
 “His pal at the office is taking Jay Thomas to lunch at the Hartford Club Friday. He’s just been let in on Wally’s plan, too. I‘m supposed to bump into them there,” I explained.
 “You know this office fellow?” she inquired. I explained about our May trip to Manhattan.
 We rode along for several blocks. She was evidently pondering my news.
 “What kind of an actor are you?”
 “No idea, never tried,” I replied. “Besides, the theater never interested me. We had a god-awful amateur theatrical group at home,” I added. “I remember they did *A* *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. I thought the damn thing would never end. I was half-crazed by the time it actually stopped.” I shuddered at the gruesome memory. The bicycle wobbled beneath me.
 “Do you want to practice tonight? I could come over after I’ve fed Daddy,” she offered.
 I agreed. The idea of practicing being inebriated amused me. The idea that I needed assistance amused me more yet.

I am not sure that I have ever been drunk. Once or twice I had felt rather splendid but I had the sense to realize that I was losing control of myself and that scared me sober. A shot of bourbon on the rocks was my drink, and that but occasionally. I was fond of Mosel wines and Rhone reds, but more often than not I would forget to pour a glass at suppertime. Between my preference for sobriety and my aversion to the stage, I thought I was pretty poor material for what Wally wanted.
 “Don’t shave tomorrow or Friday,” Tyler warned. She had arrived soon after having fed her father and seen him happily ensconced in front of the television set until bedtime.
 “I’d feel grubby,” I said. I actually looked forward to shaving every morning. For decades I had imported shaving soap from Trumper’s on Jermyn Street, and my shaving brush and razor had deer antler handles. Further, I brushed my hair with a pair of silver-backed military brushes. Perhaps I was overly fastidious, but to appear to the world unkempt appalled me.
 “You’re *supposed* to be grubby—you’re a drunk, you know. And here, I brought you Daddy’s flask. It’s got some Scotch in it. Keep the top screwed tight after you take a nip. Don’t want any leaks.” She handed me a rather well-used pewter pocket flask. It looked as if it had done service in the hunting field with its nicks and minor dents.
 “I’m supposed to hang around the lobby at lunchtime Friday,” I said. “Bob will meet me after lunch precisely at one with Jay Thomas in tow. It’s supposed to look like a chance meeting, but Wally’s got it stage managed. Then Bob’ll point me out—but not introduce us. He’ll have been talking at lunch about my Psalm Book and, then, remarkably, who should appear but the drunken sot who is eager to sell it.”
 “Won’t the kid be a trifle suspicious?” she asked. “This is one hell of a coincidence.”
 “Maybe—but these things happen sometimes. Bob’s supposed to notice me out of the corner of his eye. I’m not going to come striding in from stage left or anything.”
 We spent an amusing half hour practicing. In the end, we decided that a nervous, jumpy state was preferable to wobbly knees and slurred speech. Just before the appointed hour, I was to retreat to the lavatory and swish a mouthful of whisky for added verisimilitude.
 “I think you’ve got nervous down pat,” she said admiringly. “Now, how about something to get rid of those nerves? The evening’s still young.” I followed her upstairs.

Thursday we played squash before lunch. We sat again on the club’s wide patio and ate club sandwiches accompanied by ice-cold beer. The weather at last had turned hot.
My mind drifted away to the pond at home in Vermont. Getting there required skirting the edge of the larger of the two hayfields. I had kept a path mowed so that walking was reasonably pleasant and cool under the shade of the sugar maples that separated the two hayfields (called in Vermont ‘mowings’). Hot afternoons Taffy and I had spent together lazing on the pond’s little patch of close-mowed grass verge punctuated by our plunges into the clear, chill water.
 As soon as this Friday escapade was over, I decided that another trip home was needed. Tyler agreed to accompany me. This time, we would spend the weekend. Our day trips of times previous were too brief. I would need to phone for accommodations since my old house was now full of my son’s family. I had a ancient tavern in mind that fronted the green of a nearby village. For a couple of centuries it had purveyed food, drink, and a soft bed for the night. Its restaurant, run by its Swiss chef, long had been my favorite. Feeling expansive, I decided that I would invite my son and his wife to join us Saturday evening for supper at the inn. And I should phone the builder of our arrival.

I hated my appearance that Friday morning when I looked in the bathroom mirror. Yesterday’s growth of beard was barely noticeable, but this morning the fuzz had become stubble. To make the situation yet more nauseating, Tyler had insisted that I not shower this morning. I felt sticky.
 Tyler was to fetch me shortly before noon. I pulled on a rumpled button-down white shirt that was intended for the cleaners and a pair of khakis that were creased in all the wrong places. My seersucker jacket needed a pressing and the madras necktie had its best years behind it.
 “No, no, no,” Tyler remonstrated yanking the necktie askew. “This is better. You looked almost respectable.”
 The day had grown hot as noon approached and perspiration dripped from my brow and soaked my shirt. Since Hanging Harry was a respected member of the Hartford Club, his daughter slipped into his parking slot in the underground garage, a portion of which the club reserved for its members. The sun baked and shimmered on the sidewalk as we made our way to the club’s front door. But inside, the air conditioning provided chilled air in the dark lobby. Tyler informed the receptionist that we would be waiting in the lounge for a friend’s arrival.
 “Okay,” she said, “we’re in good shape. It’s twenty of one. I’m going to take a quick look in the dining room to be sure they’re there.” I dropped into a leather club chair and picked up the morning’s *Wall Street Journal*. She was back in a moment and confirmed that all was as planned.
 “Follow me,” she instructed and we left the lounge, crossed the lobby, and descended a staircase to the gentlemen’s lavatory whose fittings appeared to be original to when the building was constructed a century past.
 “You can’t go in here!” I protested.
 “Nonsense,” she said, “there’s no one in here. Now give me that flask.” She poured a handful of its contents into her hand and flung it into my unsuspecting face.
 “What’re you *doing?* It’s in my eyes! I can’t see!”
 “Perfect,” she said. “you’ll be better in a minute. Now follow me.” She took me by the hand and led me stumbling up the stairs to the lobby. “Now sit here,” she instructed and pushed me onto the upholstered bench at the base of the broad staircase. She glanced at her watch, fished in her pocketbook, extracted a cigarette, and lit it with a steel lighter. I did not know that she smoked. She read my mind.
 “Only when I’m antsy,” she explained. “Here, read this,” she said and tossed me a daily newspaper which had been left on the bench cushion. “Eight minutes—I’ll be in the lounge.” She strode away. I hunched over the paper. My eyesight was returning but my eyes still watered. And I was hungry. The aromas emanating from the adjacent dining room reminded me that I had not eaten since an early breakfast.
 I became engrossed in an article about genetically modified organisms and how our food supply was to be enhanced by scientific breakthroughs in research. Diseases that afflicted plants might well be avoided, pesticides might become unnecessary, fertilizers unneeded, and water needs reduced significantly. The starvation that plagued what we charitably referred to as the undeveloped world would be no longer. Among American liberals, according to the article I was reading, there was a growing movement to protest the use of genetically modified organisms.
 Someone was staring at me. I could sense that somehow and I looked up blearily from the newspaper. Bob Smith was whispering in the ear of a chubby fellow. I was not sure how to react—was I supposed to recognize Bob? Wally had overlooked what, if any, connection Bob and I might have. I returned my attention to the newspaper.
 Moments later, I covertly peeked over the top of the newspaper. They were about to pass through the front door. Just then, the chubby fellow hesitated and looked back. He appeared as though he was intending to return to the lobby, but Bob caught his arm and directed him through the door and out onto the granite steps descending to the street.
 I jumped up and ran to the doorway. Outside on the sidewalk they seemed to be involved in an intense discussion. They parted, and the young man looked back at the doorway to the club. He took a step toward the club, hesitated, stopped, shrugged, turned, hesitated again, and finally shuffled away in the blistering early afternoon heat.
 After a shower and a shave, we promptly departed for Vermont intending to beat the weekend traffic swarming to the coolness of the Green Mountains. By five o’clock we were sipping cold gin and tonics in the inn’s parlor.

My son informed us that Saturday they would be attending back-to-back birthday parties for their children’s classmates—nursery school in the morning, first grade in the afternoon. He did not sound enthusiastic since it meant, among other miseries, forgoing his usual golf game. We would have the place and Taffy to ourselves.
 My new house was essentially finished. The painters had departed a week previous. Without any furnishings or furniture, the place looked sterile. We three walked through the rooms deciding upon how to furnish them. I am fond of braided rugs, but I wanted Persian rugs for the little library and the smallish living room. The list of what was required was seemingly endless. Tyler volunteered to accompany me to antique stores and to those frightening purveyors that sold bedding, kitchen goods, and the other necessaries of home furnishings. I needed support, and I needed a rocking chair.
 I found myself whistling the tune *For Me and My Gal* whose final line of lyrics was “I’m gonna build a home for two or three or more/ In loveland for me and my gal.”
 “I know that song,” she said. We were sauntering the mowed path beside the hayfield leading to the pond. Taffy was panting in our wake. The afternoon was blisteringly hot and the cold pond water beckoned.

 “Odd that *that* song popped into your head,” she remarked as we were stripping off our clothes. Taffy was already paddling about in the water.

The weekend had been a success. My son and his wife seemed content with Tyler being a new part of my life, and supper at the inn had been a genial affair. Taffy, too, had accepted her, and a dog’s tail never lies. Now, as the saying goes, the ball clearly was in my court—and would I swat it smartly or, as so often occurred in our squash games, swing futiley at it as it sped past me?
 At a country antique shop in the Berkshire foothills that Sunday afternoon as we meandered homeward, I began my home furnishing quest and purchased an old shelf clock of the steeple pattern built in the brass valley of Connecticut sometime after the Civil War. I enjoy the sound of hours chimed.
 “There,” Tyler said as we gently placed the clock in the Lincoln’s cavernous trunk, “you’re underway. That wasn’t so bad, was it? Now you need to find a nice grandfather clock for the living room.” I agreed.

“What’s the report on Friday’s lunch?” I had promptly telephoned Wally at his office on Monday morning.
 “Bob’s not in yet, but he’s due any minute. I’ll call you back shortly. You’ll be around?”
 “For a half hour or so. Tyler’s got a tennis match at ten and we’re riding our bikes to the courts,” I answered.
 Ten minutes later, the telephone’s bell rang.
 “Champing at the bit, Bob says,” Wally gloated.
 “That’s what I suspected,” I said. “Bob had to practically pull him through the front door. I watched him out on the sidewalk. He really wanted to come back in the worst way. Feed him a bit more rope—he looks determined to hang himself.”
 Traffic was flooding into the city, but I was motoring in the opposite direction to Tyler’s house and the going was free and clear. I swung into her driveway. She had both bicycles at the ready. We mounted and were quickly away.
 “Wally says he rose to the fly. I just talked to him.” The side streets were placid that morning and the hot spell had broken. A cool breeze was tossing the leaves in the tops of the trees shading the suburban streets. The prospect of a fine day’s weather lay ahead.
 “This is just all too easy,” she remarked.
 “Good planning,” I replied with just a hint of smugness. I suspected that she did not regard Wally as highly as did I and as did much of the city of Hartford. Perhaps she still was smarting from losing to him on the squash court.
 “We’ll see,” she said. We rolled into the tennis club grounds. She dispatched her opponent in straight sets.

Enter Teague Lorraine. I remembered the name from many years ago, decades ago in fact—the quintessential mid-century jet set playboy. Beyond that I knew nothing of him, but I was destined shortly to know a great deal more.
 I recalled a photograph, likely one of those Slim Aarons photographs in *Town and* *Country* magazine of the wealthy at play or standing beside their loot, of Teague Lorraine in a glistening mahogany Chris-Craft speedboat with a pair of topless babes waving to the photographer on the nearby beach as they sped past. He then was spectacularly handsome with a perpetual tan and an engaging smile of sparkling white teeth. Somehow, in the recesses of my memory, I connected him to Palm Beach and the game of polo.
 It was Wally who filled in the balance the next day. Astonishingly, the vapid playboy had become a prominent collector. His marriages and divorces had left him a wealthy man. Usually, the result is just the opposite, but apparently Teague Lorraine had prospered outrageously where lesser mortals simply went broke. And now he had heard of the newly discovered Bay Psalm Book. As I mentioned previously, the rare book world is small and interconnected. The seed I had planted in the book dealer’s Fifth Avenue premises in May rapidly had grown to maturity. I recalled mention of the book overhearing a conversation at the Sunset Club’s May meeting. That was seven weeks ago. By now, the final week of the month of July, the news would be common knowledge, and intimations that the owner was resident in the insurance capitol must have occasioned Teague Lorraine’s arrival in Hartford on his journey northward to join friends at the annual yearling sales at Saratoga and its accompanying dinner dance the first week of August. He would be in residence there for the rest of the season, principally to attend the polo matches.
 Ironically, he and his companion, an academic bibliophile, and their driver currently were lodged across the street from the Knight’s residence on Prospect Avenue’s summit. Their bachelor host was an affable, elegant elderly fellow known to his wide circle of Hartford friends as Fuzzy. G. Mortimer Beach had acquired the preposterous nickname in childhood and it had stuck—I suppose it was preferable to being called Morty. Fuzzy, whom I had yet to meet, was called by local hostesses a ‘treasure’ for he cheerfully lodged the overflow guests of his friends in his vast and elegant Georgian home—bed and breakfast on the grand scale and all for no charge.
 This news had been transmitted to me by Wally who had acquired it from Bob Smith whose wife had heard it from a fellow bridge player whose neighbor had talked to Fuzzy on Sunday during the coffee hour after church. Apparently, Fuzzy had confided that Teague Lorraine’s visit was in pursuance of some rare book or other, presumably the Bay Psalm Book, and that he would go to any end to acquire the precious book. I confess that I became a touch queasy learning this little tidbit of local gossip. What now? What now, indeed!

“This puts a stick in our spokes,” I said referring to the Lorraine arrival. Wally and I were eating lunch at the golf club. He had an early afternoon tee time and Tyler and I intended to play a game of squash there later.
 “We can maneuver, we can still maneuver,” Wally replied languidly. “If he’s going to the yearling sales, he won’t be here long.” But he seemed a touch distracted.
 “I have a feeling that we can’t avoid the fellow forever while he’s here. Suppose he knows a Sunset Club member…”
 “Probably he does, this book world of ours is so damn inter-connected, you know,” he replied. “But no one knows who owns the Prayer Book at this point.”
 “Jay Thomas does,” I corrected him. “Remember, Bob Smith pointed me out to him at lunch.”
 “Duane needs bibliophile advice, not investment advice. Unless Jay has already talked to someone in the Sunset Club in the meantime about how he saw you the other day at the Hartford Club and *that* gets back to Duane. Then we *do* have a problem.” Wally, the unflappable, seemed concerned.
 “What’s the chance of that?” I asked.
 “Pretty small, but, still, I wouldn’t put money against it—Murphy’s law,” he sighed. Wally’s intricate scheming seemed to have caught a snag.
 “Damn,” I said. I passionately wanted to retrieve Tyler’s father’s investment, not because of any affection for her cranky father but from my increasing affection for his daughter. Preposterously, I saw myself as the gallant knight rescuing the damsel in distress. I could not yet admit to myself that I had fallen in love.
 An hour and one-half later, the damsel in distress had given me a thrashing on the squash court.

“Darling boy, I am *so* delinquent,” Fuzzy apologized. “I’m having a few friends for drinks this evening. Won’t you *please* pop across the road and let’s get to really know one another now that we’re neighbors. And bring your friend. Sixish—bye, bye.”
 I was stunned. I thought I had heard the front door bell ringing, but since, to date, no one had rung it I was unsure just what I was hearing. I was used to the chiming of the grandfather clock in the hall, and, clearly, the sound was not that of the clock striking the hour. By the time I had the front door opened, Fuzzy already had turned on his heel to head home. Stunned, I called my thanks and said I would be delighted to accept his hospitality. He smiled impishly, waggled his fingers at me, and tottered homeward.
 “Wally,” I said into the telephone receiver, “you’ll never guess what’s just happened.” I proceeded to retail my invitation for cocktails. “And Fuzzy said to bring my friend. Does he mean you?”
 “I have a board meeting tonight. Ask Tyler. He’s probably seen her around the place. That’s who he must mean.”
 “Somehow,” I said, “I don’t think so.” But I telephoned her and she said she would happily provide support. She said she had heard about Fuzzy but had never met him.
 I was shaken by the sudden invitation which certainly seemed occasioned by the arrival of the Lorraine contingent. As a coincidence, it defied probability. Clearly, I had been run to ground. Would they send down the terrier to try to bolt me?

 Tyler arrived a few minutes before the appointed hour. With her deep tan and her hair up, she was head-swivilling.
 Fuzzy’s manse was set well back from the road. The view was westward to a hazy blue ridgeline in the far distance. To the side of the house, the driver was dusting an elderly and immaculate Rolls Royce Silver Cloud with a chamois.
 “At sixty miles an hour, is the clock *really* the loudest noise?” I asked as we passed nearby.
 “Huh?” the driver replied.
 “Maybe you’re too young to remember the magazine ad,” I explained with a smile. He looked at me dully. The man was enormous and uncomfortably stuffed into his uniform.
 “Don’t read much,” he said sullenly.
 “Were you a football player?” Tyler asked.
 “Yeah, played some pro ball,” he replied, brightening a bit. The two of them talked together for a few moments while I studied the architecture of the front of Fuzzy’s handsome brick house. It seemed reminiscent of the plantation homes one might expect to find along the banks of Virginia’s James River. Then she rejoined me.
 “His name’s Jamal—didn’t get the last name. He’s kind of hard to understand—he mumbles. And he won’t look you in the eye. He said he played his college ball at Miami. I guess academic standards must be *really, really* different for jocks.” I looked back. Jamal was staring after her with furtive lust.
 We paused on the stoop before the front door. I rang the doorbell.
 “Look,” I said, “I don’t know what we’re getting into. Let’s just sort of play dumb.” She nodded in agreement. Moments later, Fuzzy swept open the door and threw wide his arms in welcome. He led us through the house to a pillared porch looking westward to the blue line of hills to introduce us to his two guests.
 Teague Lorraine had a desiccated aspect, reminding me of the Egyptian mummies one encounters in museums. His blue eyes were bleary and his skin almost transparent with age. He was long in the tooth as his gums had notably receded and the flashing white smile had yellowed. His wavy brown hair had turned silver and was beating a fast retreat from his forehead. But he still had that famous tan and he was elegantly dressed with a pale violet cravat at the neck. Like his oafish driver, he eyed Tyler longingly. He raised his cocktail glass to her and nodded at me. He did not offer to shake my hand but he laid his hand upon her bare arm. I could see that she inwardly shuddered.
 To his small, horn-rimmed companion I took an instant disliking. There is something about the snide, arrogant attitude that I find pervasive in the *New Yorker* magazine that repels me. And here was its human embodiment. I think my bird dog Taffy would have taken one look at him and growled. His name was Alan Woodly, and he was acting as a literary advisor. He merely looked at me when our effusive host made the introductions. He cast Tyler a look of loathing occasioned, no doubt, by the resentment of what, for him, would be ever unobtainable.
 Thank goodness we were out of doors that evening with a cool breeze sweeping away the afternoon heat. To be inside with this trio would have been claustrophobic, bordering on nauseating. I had to admit that Fuzzy had a certain indoor charm, but out of doors he seemed a trifle uncomfortable. And I had to acknowledge further that I liked him—there was a decency about the fellow, despite the frippery, that shone through. I had the feeling that this pair of guests had no compunction about presuming upon his good nature and his hospitality. I was uncomfortable and the conversation, heroically led by Fuzzy, was stilted.
 We drifted through various bibliophilic topics. Alan Woodly was dumb-struck that I, a mere Vermont bookseller, was a member of the venerable Wednesday Club to whose membership he long had aspired from afar. I did not volunteer to put forward his name to the membership committee. The conversation moved on to the local Sunset Club and, as I suspected, Teague Lorraine did know a member, a second cousin of his, in fact. Our suspicions were realized. But how did they settle upon me as the object of their interest? Had Bob Smith been indiscrete? Not likely, for he was absolutely trustworthy.
 Ultimately, though, the topic, as I suspected it would, turned to the mysterious twelfth Bay Psalm Book, reputably resident somewhere in the city of Hartford. The insurance capitol suddenly had become the focus of the rare book world. The improbability of that was astonishing Alan Woodly loftily scoffed. The question hung in the air—did I have it?
 It became clear that Teague Lorraine wanted more of my company in the coming days, but the sun was sliding slowly behind the distant hills and we rose to depart. Yet the unanswered question lingered. We thanked our host and crossed the street to the Knight’s.

“Someone’s been here,” Tyler said.
 “While we were gone?” I asked in astonishment. I had not locked the front door. I had given no thought to burglars in this sedate part of the city.
 “I can feel it,” she replied.
 “The football player?”
 “Don’t be silly, that moron can barely read. It *must* be the Book. Go look at the book shelves in the library.”
 She was correct. I had not dusted the shelves for a couple of weeks. But now the thin film of dust had been disturbed.
 “This is creepy,” I said.
 “What’s creepy are that pair at Fuzzy’s. I could just feel in my mind that Lorraine’s cold, bony hand sliding up my thigh.” She shuddered.
 “Then who was here?”
 “Maybe they hired a private eye,” she speculated.
 “I didn’t know you had private detectives here,” I said.
 “Of course we do—this isn’t Vermont, you know,” she replied archly.

I left a telephone message with Wally’s Filipino cook asking Wally to call me upon his return from his board meeting. Tyler had departed, and I lit my pipe and sat on the patio. The city skyline was punctuated by pin pricks of light in the distant buildings as night descended. A dome of pale amber glowed above the darkening city’s silhouette.
 The illusory Psalm Book was being pursued by two peculiar fellows, neither of whom could I understand. One, Jay Thomas, was merely greedy and looking for a huge payoff—and worried, I suspected, that there was a crack in the foundation of his Ponzi structure. The other, Teague Ruane, was a collector. I knew numerous collectors—the membership of the Wednesday Club was largely comprised of bibliophilic collectors. But my fellow members were not obsessive and possibly willing to spend a fortune to possess something so that no one else could own it. There was something distinctly unhealthy about that bizarre mentality. To what ends would such a person go to achieve success?
 “Wally, did Bob Smith mention my name or where I live at lunch Friday?” I was already in my pajamas when he returned my telephone call.
 “Don’t think so,” he replied. “I’ll double check. He’s out of the office for a day or two.
 “Well, there was someone in this house while we were at Fuzzy’s. In the library for sure. Tyler thinks they hired a private detective to poke around. I left the doors unlocked and he must have just waltzed in.”
 “Are you going to see Lorraine again?”
 “He was adamant he wants to,” I said. “He said *that* as we were leaving. I have to tell you these people make me nervous. The driver’s scary and that pal of his is a weird little twit.”
 “Look, we need to make clear to Duane that the Book’s in the bank vault. You don’t have to admit you own it. I just don’t want them beating the be-Jesus out of you to get it if they suspect it’s in the Knight’s house.”
 “Dear God! You’re saying that they would *steal* it. You think *that’s* possible?!”
 “Not really,” he demurred. “Don’t let it worry you. Sleep well.”
 I would have slept a whole lot better had I a box of twelve-gauge cartridges and my pump shotgun under the bed.

I looked at the calendar the next morning. August was upon us and with that the beginning of Saratoga’s season. If he intended to partake of the yearling sales, Teague Lorraine would have to depart imminently. That apparently explained Fuzzy’s invitation to lunch. He was on my doorstep as I was sipping my second steaming mug of breakfast coffee. He called over his shoulder that I should bring that enchanting Miss Aubrey with me. I promptly telephoned her.
 “Look,” she said, “why don’t I hide in your house while you’re lunching. Maybe they’ll send the fellow back to search while you’re eating. I sure don’t want to eat with those two. They make my skin crawl.”
 “And suppose they do send him,” I replied. “What do *you* intend to do—hit him with your tennis racquet? You could get yourself badly hurt, you know.”
 “I‘ll take Daddy’s pistol. I know where he keeps it. He always travelled with it when he was on the bench, but he doesn’t carry it anymore. Anyhow, he’s gone off to a bowling tournament in Greenwich today.”
 “Dear God, this is possibly the worst idea that I think I’ve *ever* heard of,” I exclaimed. “What do you know about guns? Absolutely not!”
 “I know plenty,” she said. “I used to go with Daddy to the range all the time when he practiced. I can shoot just fine.” I had a vision of myself trying to explain to the Knights why there was a large blood stain adorning the pale Persian rug on their library floor. That vanished only to be replaced by yet another vision—that of Tyler in handcuffs being loaded into a paddy wagon and whisked away, never to be seen again.
 I telephoned Fuzzy as soon as Tyler said good-bye and explained that, upon second thought, I had better decline the luncheon invitation as I believed that there had been an intruder last night while Tyler and I were enjoying his hospitality. And, suddenly inspired, I asked him to mention to his guests that I had heard that the Psalm Book was safely secured in a bank downtown. That news should keep them busy for a while. Then I again telephoned Tyler and repeated what I had just told Fuzzy.
 “So leave your gun at home. Pop over later this morning and we can bat balls around on the court while they’re eating,” I suggested. I did not think that last evening’s intruder would be returning with us in residence.
 I believe I mentioned a while back that there was a clay tennis court at the far end of the Knight’s long sloping back lawn. I had found a couple of old racquets in their presses in a back closet. I had tried tennis in my schooldays. The tennis coach, after my freshman year, suggested that I consider crew as eye-hand coordination was less of an issue while pulling an oar.

 “You’ve got visitors,” Tyler called. She swatted a tennis ball at me. I looked through the wire mesh surrounding the red clay of the court toward the Knight’s house. Coming down the lawn was the post-prandial threesome from across the street: Fuzzy carrying a tightly rolled umbrella, Teague Lorraine walking with a slight limp and carrying a shooting stick, and Alan Woodly stepping carefully. Clearly he was uneasy having grass rather than Manhattan’s pavement under his urban feet.
 “It’s not supposed to rain, Fuzzy,” I said as I stepped through the court’s door.
 “The sun, dear boy, the sun,” he replied and unfurled the umbrella. “You should wear hats, both of you, when you play tennis.” Tyler, still inside the court batting practice balls, raised her racket in acknowledgement. “We just wanted to be sure you were well,” he continued. “Teague is off to Saratoga tomorrow.” The afore-mentioned opened his stick and gratefully planted his bony hindquarters in its leather sling. Walking apparently was a trial for him, likely the result of one too many involuntary dismounts on the polo fields of long ago.
 “We want to know what you know about where the Psalm Book is now,” Alan Woody said.
 “Why do you care about that old thing?” Tyler replied teasingly. She had just left the court and was now standing beside me. Alan Woodly looked loathingly at her.
 “It’s as I told Fuzzy,” I said. “I can ask around, I suppose.” Wally intentionally had told Jay Thomas a while ago when they had shared beers at the golf club that not only was the book for sale but it was for sale cheap. I wondered whether that additional tidbit of information also had made its way to Lorraine.
 “You’re sure you *really* don’t know?” I shrugged off Alan Woodly’s insulting insinuation.
 “Well, have a good time at Saratoga. We’ve got to get back to our game while we’re still warm,” I said dismissively and opened the gate to the court. Out of the corner of my eye I watched them disconsolately trudging up the lawn toward the house.

The air had cleared the following day both figuratively and actually. The bizarre Lorraine contingent had departed and, overnight, brisk, fresh weather had blown in. Tyler and I were bowling that morning, but a haze of dew still clung to the grass and we waited on a bench under the pavilion’s verandah. Momentarily, the breeze would evaporate the remnant moisture. A few elderly bowlers in their whites were standing to the side chatting among themselves about the previous day’s tournament in Greenwich .
 “Those people gave me the creeps,” Tyler said. I assumed she was referring to Fuzzy’s guests. “But I like him.” I assumed that now she was referring to Fuzzy. Tyler occasionally lost track of her pronoun references, sowing confusion.
 “I know, I agree with you.”
 “You should call Wally. I bet he’d like to know more about what happened,” she advised. I had previously told her about talking to him late Friday evening and about his unsettling advice.
 The lawn had dried sufficiently and bowlers were now strolling onto it. Aloft, on the flag pole, a light wind rippled the club flag.
 “All set?” I said, carrying my rack of four bowls toward the shaven turf. She picked up hers and followed me.

The serenity of the morning spent on the bowling green was abruptly dispelled with the arrival of the daily mail at the Aubrey household.
 “The little idiot doesn’t want to come home,” Tyler hissed into the telephone receiver. She sounded spitting mad.
 “Who? Constance?”
 “Who else?” her mother replied. “She says she’s going to stay there and help with the harvest. Good God, can you beat *that!* Daddy’s livid*.”*
 Shortly, Tyler calmed herself sufficiently to explain that Constance was now resident in a small village in the Loire valley and had become entranced with the vineyard belonging to her ‘father’s’ uncle (if you recall, Tyler never was certain just who was the actual father of her child. One good-natured possibility had agreed to assume paternity as long as no expense would be incurred.). Constance’s intention was to become a part of the family winemaking business—and to forsake further education at Choate.
 “Not bloody likely,” her mother snarled into the phone. I tried to calm her, but with little success.
 “So, what next?” I asked.
 “Daddy’s booking a flight to Paris. He’ll get her home. She won’t listen to me, but she *will* listen to him,” she replied. “Actually, he had been talking about going to see her and staying there a month or so to travel around. He’s always been keen on Gothic cathedrals.”
 “Maybe the two of them can go sight-seeing,” I suggested. “She might just get interested in learning about the various orders of Gothic architecture. It can be quite fascinating, I’m told.”
 “If you’re trying to be amusing, you’re not succeeding,” she said archly. I had hardly returned the receiver to its cradle when the bell rang again.
 “He’s been onto Bob Smith about you,” Wally informed me. I assumed he was referring to Jay Thomas.
 “So, what now?” I asked.
 “Bob’s going to get back to him tomorrow with your information. Let’s all meet tonight. Eight o’clock, my place. Bring Tyler if you want,” he suggested.
 “She’s preoccupied at the moment. Her daughter’s in France for the summer and wants to stay there instead of going back to Choate. Grandad is flying over to talk her home. It’s all a bit messy,” I explained.

A suppertime shower left behind a fresh-smelling evening. I was on Wally’s doorstep at eight o’clock precisely. The Filipino butler showed me through to the library. Several minutes later, he escorted Bob Smith into the room and took our drink orders. Off in the distance, I could hear Wally whistling what sounded like ‘Beautiful Dreamer.’ The whistling drew closer, concluding with a delicate and lilting trill. The whistler made his entrance, once again clad in his silk zig-zag pattern robe and shod in velvet slippers embroidered with fox heads.
 “Just we three?” Bob asked. In the distance the doorbell chimes could be heard ringing.
 “As far as I know,” Wally replied. A commotion could be heard in the far reaches of the house. The noise drew nearer.
 A swarthy fellow dressed in shades of black and wearing a charcoal gray snap brim fedora bulled his way into the library brushing aside the Filipino butler, hands spread wide in astonishment, who followed in his wake. The unexpected arrival clearly seemed out of place in the refined setting.
 “Which one of youse is Nicklaus?” the visitor growled menacingly.
 “I am,” Wally said indignantly, “and the name, for your information, sir, is *Nichols*.”
 The surly intruder grunted. “Nichols, Nicklaus….don’t make no never mind to me. You owe us dat money and we want it *now!”*
 My jaw dropped. Bob Smith stared goggle-eyed. There was a lingering pause. We looked at one another, uncertain about how to react. The pause lengthened uncomfortably.
 “Gentlemen,” Wally said, turning to us, “let me introduce Tom Hansen.”
 Hanson whipped off his gangster’s fedora, smiled, and extended his hand. I tentatively reached out and shook it.
 “Tom’s an actor,” Wally proclaimed with a broad smile, “and a pretty darn good one, at that. He really had the two of you going for a moment, did he not?”
 The four of us subsided into the soft cushions of the leather-covered library chairs. Wally re-filled our tumblers of bourbon and then poured whiskeys for himself and Tom Hanson.
 “So you now have *two* actors on the payroll?” I inquired. “This is getting pretty elaborate!” Remember, he had been coaching an impersonator for Jack Sears, the Bostonian rare book expert who would display the Bay Psalm Book to the presumably avaricious sucker, Jay Thomas.
 “I just *love* the theater,” Wally sighed histrionically.
 “So what’s Tom’s role?” Bob Smith asked cautiously.
 “He lends verisimilitude,” Wally declared. He then went on to explain the scenario he had planned.

The next day passed uneventfully. I had heard from neither Tyler nor Wally and had contented myself reading Churchill’s history of the past world war. The Knights had all six volumes on their library shelves. The quietude was not long to last. The telephone rang.
 “The little idiot’s gotten a tattoo! Daddy called this morning,” Tyler hissed. Whatever had become of the serene beauty with the perpetually amused countenance? Clearly, the Hanging Harry genes were asserting themselves. I momentarily considered suggesting that she calm herself, but quickly realized that would only exacerbate her anger and, possibly, direct it at me.
 “Where?” I asked.
 “On her stupid shoulder,” she replied. “She might just as well have had ‘I’m a slut’ tattooed across her forehead.” For another five minutes she ranted on the subject of young Constance, but gradually her fulminating began to wear down. Clearly, the subject needed changing.
 “How about I pick you up in a bit and take you out to supper? We could take a walk in the rose garden beforehand. You choose the restaurant.”
 “I don’t know,” she demurred. Then her mood brightened a tad. “Why not?” she said. “Why the hell not. We can go to the Town and County Club. Today’s Friday—they serve supper on Fridays. Mother always belonged and I’ve started up my membership again. Might as well use the place once in a while.”
 I was not madly enthusiastic about dining in the midst of its matronly membership, but I thought better about over-riding her suggestion. The Town and County Club had a distinguished history of womanly service to the city. It occupied an old, dreary mansion on a once fashionable city street.

The bedside telephone was ringing the next morning. I was tangled in the bed sheets and Tyler’s leg was slung across my mid-section and pressing uncomfortably on my bladder.
 “We’ve got movement,” Wally said.
 “Bob gave him my name?”
 “We decided that Bob’s finally going to let slip that he knows where you can be found. That’s all. They’re having lunch today at the golf club.”
 “And we’re going to play squash there this morning—Tyler and me. Should we hang around afterwards?”
 “Let me ponder that and get back to you.” Wally said. “When is your court time?”
 I told him, hoisted Tyler’s leg from my protesting bladder, and, there being no time to linger, scurried to the bathroom. I was in the midst of shaving when the phone rang again.
 “Play squash if you must,” Wally said, “but then clear out. If he sees the two of you he might get suspicious. Remember, his first impression was that you’re a hard-up, boozy sot. Languishing at the club with a babe like Tyler on your arm would shoot that all to hell. Come over to my house afterwards for lunch instead. Things are likely to move fast now. Do you want me to call her?”
 “She’s right here,” I said, “I’ll tell her.”
 “I see,” Wally said slowly, “I see. Lucky boy!”

We dined that lunchtime on salmon that Wally had caught in Canada and had had smoked. A table was set on the verandah, the view was sylvan, and a light breeze wafted through the trees of the neighboring rose garden park.. Tyler’s mood had improved due, no doubt, to the thrashing she had administered to me on the squash court.
 “These are the days and times when Tom Hansen’s free,” Wally said, handing me a sheet of his stationery. Tom Hansen, you remember, was the theatrical mobster of a few evenings previous. “Now, Bob’s going to mention today only that you’re house-sitting the Knight place. He’ll claim that he doesn’t know your name. That’ll get him off the hook if things turn nasty later on.”
 “Who’s Tom Hansen?” Tyler asked.
 “He’s another actor I’ve hired,” Wally explained. “He’s going to provide the reason that your friend here is selling the Prayer Book now rather than later at auction. He’ll play a gangster.”
 “Gambling debts,” I volunteered to the still mystified Tyler. Wally then explained the actor’s role.
 “So timing is everything. When Jay contacts you, you have to arrange a meeting at the Knight’s when Tom’s available. That’s why I gave you that list,” he said, gesturing to the sheet of stationery beside my dinner plate. “And bring Dad’s Lincoln over here. From now on, drive your Jeep. You need to look hard up. Tom Hansen will use the Lincoln—it’s a good mobster’s car. It’s black.”
 “You’re certain he’ll fall for this plan of yours?” Tyler asked.
 “Nope, nothing’s certain. Now, let’s finish up lunch,” Wally said, “I’m off to Essex for a little sailing. Back tomorrow night.”
 We drove deep into the rolling, rural Litchfield Hills that afternoon in search of country antique stores. I seriously needed to begin to furnish my new home. Tyler mentioned that she had located a restaurant supply company that happily would supply me with diner-style crockery. The company would even monogram the stuff. We agreed that seemed a touch presumptuous. Earlier in the week, my daughter-in-law had telephoned to inform me that she had located an old spool bed and a pair of handsome second-hand braided rugs. Did I want her to make the purchase? Absolutely, I affirmed.
 The afternoon was a success and I bought a Boston rocker with a well broken-in rush seat. We stopped for supper at the old inn by the riverside in which I had lunched after June angling mornings. A golden evening was settling into the tranquil river valley.
 Between sips from her Martini, Tyler copied the list of Tom Hansen’s available dates and times. For safety’s sake, she said. How long, I wondered, before Jay Thomas could locate me. Bob Smith was supplying only the information that I was house-sitting at the Parmalee Knight’s. But the telephone directory would reveal their address on Prospect Avenue as well as their telephone number. The telephone could be ringing already.
 “If he bites,” Tyler said, “he’s going to want to see the Book. That means that Wally’s expert’s got to be at the bank to show it. This is getting complicated.”

We woke early Sunday morning, breakfasted, attended the eight o’clock service, and returned to the Knight’s should the telephone ring. But it did not.
 “You know, if you guys pull this off *you’re* going to have to clear out,” Tyler said. We were drinking mugs of coffee and basking in the warm sun of mid-morning on the patio behind the Knight’s home. “If he doesn’t come gunning for you, he’ll send the police to arrest you for fraud.”
 “Dear God!” I replied. She was correct. Why had this not occurred to me before now? But I felt morally obligated to the woman I now realized that I loved to rescue her father’s investment. I recalled the words of the depressing hymn that we used to sing in chapel in our boarding school days, “Come labor on, who dares stand idle on the harvest plain,” and so forth. I could not desert her now. I must labor on.
 “You could still back out,” she suggested.
 “No, I’ll go through with it,” I sighed.
 How serene and contented these last few months had been. I had found the love of my life in this pleasant and happy place. Now that could all be shattered if Jay Thomas took the cast fly. Dear God, indeed.
 I did not know Bob Smith well, but I decided to hazard a telephone call to learn what had transpired yesterday at lunch at the golf club. The prospect of endlessly waiting for a phone call from Jay Thomas to the Knight’s home was stultifying. The bell rang and rang in the Smith house but there was no answer.
 “We can’t hang around here forever waiting for the phone to ring. I’m bored,” Tyler said. She now was sprawled naked on a beach towel on the lawn alongside the patio, basking in the strong mid-morning sunshine.
 I pondered the possible antidotes to Sunday boredom. Bowling? The green would likely be full of the club’s members at play. Cycling? The sedate streets would be annoyingly busy with suburbanites running errands. Squash? The weather was too agreeable to waste at the claustrophobic court. Television? It was a toss-up as which of its offerings was the more stultifying—baseball or golf.
 “How about a walk in the woods,” I suggested. High up in the western ridge that separates the Connecticut River valley from the Farmington River valley there is a long, narrow reservoir with a woodland path of three miles or so along its shoreline. She was agreeable and we spent the afternoon dawdling around the reservoir, admiring the cumulus cloud shapes reflected off the glassy surface of the water.

“I’m back,” Wally said, “and I’ve just talked to Bob. He bit. Bob’s sure of it.” The telephone had rung as we were washing and drying the Sunday evening supper dishes.
 “So when do I hear something? I can’t wait around here all day, every day,” I complained.
 “Don’t worry, he’ll find you. He’s probably getting his financial ducks in a row right now. He’ll have to figure out how to pull the cash back first,” Wally explained.
 “Do you read minds?” I asked.
 “If you knewabout finance, you wouldn’t ask that question,” he replied.
 “You’re right,” I admitted ruefully. “I was just a simple country bookseller.”
 “Don’t get your knickers in a knot. You’re doing us all one hell of a favor, you know that. Regards to Tyler.”
 He must have heard her in the background putting away the supper dishes. Not much got past Wally.

She had a late morning tennis game Monday. We drove to her father’s house after breakfast. She was concerned that some of the contents of the refrigerator might be in jeopardy since she had been resident with me these several days. In the mailbox, well-stuffed since the box had not been emptied since Thursday past, there was a post card from her father. Constance and he were touring cathedrals. All was well. The tattoo was a small discrete butterfly, barely noticeable.
 “Barely noticeable, my ass!” Tyler snarled. She stomped on her bicycle pedal and we were off through the winding suburban streets to her tennis match. Her over-matched opponent spent much of the game leaping out of the way of Tyler’s sizzling serves. There was true animosity in her strokes that morning.
 “So what now,” I asked. Her father was returning from France with Constance at the end of the month, just in time to pack the young rebel off to Choate. The better part of three weeks stretched ahead of us. We were rolling along a quiet noonday residential street heading back to her father’s home.
 “What do you mean?” she asked, befuddled.
 “Are you coming back with me or are you going to stay here?” I was hoping that I was the preferable option to her father’s empty house.
 “You mean move in with you? I don’t know,” she mused. “It *would* be kind of fun, though.”
 By the time we had stuffed the bicycles in the garage, the decision had been made—she would reside with me until the imminent return of daughter and father. She would stop by her father’s house every couple of days to collect the mail and the newspaper and check messages on the telephone’s answering machine.
 We packed the perishables from her refrigerator in a cardboard box and headed back into the city. As Wally had instructed, we planted my well-worn Jeep in front of the Knight’s house. It was a visible eye-sore to passers-by on the avenue. Tyler’s station wagon was out of sight in the garage, a building turned sideways to the house.

I realized that afternoon, for clouds had moved in and rain had begun to fall, that I was unaccountably comfortable being with Tyler. The rain kept us house-bound, and there was little to do that afternoon, but just knowing that she was here with me seemed extraordinarily pleasant and satisfying. How odd, I thought, for I had never had that peculiar sensation with my wife, Mary.
 Fuzzy, my gregarious neighbor, phoned mid-afternoon to invite us to dine with him that evening. His guests for the evening had suddenly cancelled and he could not bear to let all his preparations go to waste. Certain that we would be missing a splendid meal should we decline, we accepted.
 “What do you hear from Mr. Lorraine?” Tyler inquired. Almost a week had passed since Fuzzy’s house guests had departed. Outside the evening drizzle dripped from the eaves, but here in the dining room the glow of candlelight softened the gloom.
 “A couple of phone calls—one this morning, in fact. From little Mr. Woodly,” he clarified. “You know, I never really took to him,” he added with a sigh.
 “Nor I,” I said, raising my wine glass in recognition of a joint loathing.
 “I think he’s a little prick,” Tyler added. Fuzzy raised his glass to her in tacit agreement. Likely, as a consequence of her daughter’s rebelliousness, the lady-like veneer now occasionally slipped from Tyler’s usual serene sophistication.
 “Do they think I have the Psalm Book?”
 “Well, *don’t* you, dear boy?” Fuzzy asked coyly.
 I shrugged my shoulders in response. Then I decided, after swearing Fuzzy to secrecy, to try on him the story of how I acquired the most valuable of this nation’s books.

We, Tyler and I, had concocted an explanation that afternoon of how I came to be the possessor of such a treasure as the Bay Psalm Book. And this would be the story: while cleaning out my grandmother’s attic after her passing, I had found a little packet in the rafters tied with an ancient ribbon that disintegrated at the touch. Inside the fragile wrapper was the Psalm Book which, upon consulting a book dealer, was instantly recognized. We decided that grandmother had lived in the little rural southwestern New Hampshire town of Swanzey through which flowed the placid Ashuelot River, spanned in the village by a covered bridge. I had a passing familiarity with the town so that I could answer basic questions, yet it was some twenty-five miles distant from my own Vermont home.

“Now promise to tell no one, Fuzzy, *especially* Lorraine,” I demanded. Somehow, I felt I could trust the little fellow. Despite the surface frippery, he seemed the sort you would want to have at your side in combat.
 “But *why* not him? He’d pay top dollar happily if you want to sell it.”
 “Someday, I’ll tell you the whole story,” I said.
 “You mean there’s more?”
 “A lot more,” Tyler interjected.
 “But I can’t say anything more now, and, please God, don’t you,” I pleaded.
 He nodded his acquiescence.
 “One more thing,” I said, “if I have to run for it, can I hide here?”
 “Of course, dear boy, of course. Oh my, this *is* getting exciting!”

“That was rash,” Tyler said. We were shaking the rain from our umbrellas under the cover of the portico at the front door.
 “I hope I didn’t just do something stupid.”
 She shrugged and opened the front door. The telephone on the stand alongside the grandfather clock was blinking its little message button. Tyler picked up the receiver and listened.
 “It’s our boy,” she said. “He wants to meet you. Better stop shaving tomorrow. Back to grubby.” She smiled, handed me the receiver, and depressed the button to repeat the message.
 It was nothing more than a request to stop by with investment literature for the Knights to consider. He left his telephone number. I checked our mobster/actor’s schedule that was alongside the telephone. Then I telephoned Wally and reported.

 After telephoning the gangster Tom Hansen, Wally called to suggest Wednesday afternoon at two o’clock. Tom, in the black Lincoln, would arrive beforehand and await Jay Thomas’ appearance. Then Tom would perform a threatening scene with the young swindler as the audience. Tyler would be out of sight on the second floor. She promised not to laugh aloud.
 Remember, if you will, that evening a while back when Wally had introduced Bob Smith and me to the intimidating Tom Hansen. Then he had outlined the scenario that he thought would effectively explain my eagerness to part with the Psalm Book. My gambling debts would occasion a visit from an enforcer, threatening dire consequences if the debt remained unpaid.
 The evening had grown late, too late for a proper business telephone call to the investor Thomas. That could wait until the formal business hour of nine o’clock Tuesday morning. As we pulled the sheet over us, I suggested that Tuesday morning, for old times’ sake, we drive to her father’s home, ride our bicycles to the bowling green, lunch under the pavilion’s verandah, and spend the afternoon cycling the quiet suburban streets. More than likely, if all were to go to Wally’s plan, we would not again be repeating what had become a delightful summer day’s ritual. The realization made me sad. In my dreaming, I could not have imagined a more enchanting and carefree situation than the one into which I had fallen for these past few months. I tossed and turned, unable to sleep.
 “What’s the matter with you,” Tyler complained groggily. Downstairs the grandfather clock in the hall was chiming midnight.
 “It must be something I ate,” I lied.

At precisely nine o’clock Tuesday morning, I telephoned the number Jay Thomas had left in his message yesterday evening. There was no answer. A recording informed me that my call was very important and that I should please leave a message. I did as instructed, suggesting that, although the Knights were still at Woods Hole, tomorrow at two in the afternoon would be convenient if he wished to leave the information with me. And then, just as I was about to blurt out my name as the caller, I realized that after all our subterfuge to disguise my identity I was about to blast all our efforts at concealment. I said into the receiver that my name was Roger Wilmerding.
 Where had I gotten *that* name? From somewhere deep in my sub-conscious I had summoned a name that I had not heard spoken nor read about for some thirty years. The Wilmerdings were a well-respected, large family on the eastern seaboard. In fact, there had been a Wilmerding a couple of classes ahead of Wally and me during our schooldays—a class president, if I recall correctly. I hoped my rashness would not ultimately lead to inconvenience or annoyance for these estimable folks.
 As to the other name—I had a distant cousin named Roger. I never liked him. He once kicked my dog when he thought no one was looking. He died recently. I skipped the funeral.
 I immediately called Wally to confirm that Tom Hanson be on hand as planned. Then we backed Tyler’s station wagon out of the garage and drove to her father’s home.
 “Cheer up, Rog,” Tyler said as we pedaled toward the bowling green. “You look like you’re going to a funeral.” I smiled wanly.
 The weather was perfect for an August morning, and that did not help my mood. The awareness that this could well be the last morning we bowled together was troubling. On the other hand, all our brilliant planning easily could go for naught for there was no way of telling how the Thomas lad would react. Who knows, I said to myself, who knows? In any case, for once, my game was sharp and by lunchtime I was well ahead. Tyler took defeat with uncharacteristic grace. One would be hard-pressed to believe that this serene sophisticate was Hanging Harry’s daughter until engaged in competition with her. Then her father’s genes would begin to manifest themselves vigorously.
 I resignedly tossed my sandwich wrapper in the trash barrel, we mounted our bicycles, and headed off in a northerly direction. Westward lay her home and we had no notion of where we were headed as we glided mindlessly through a maze of shady residential streets, orienting ourselves to the shadows that the sun cast. A couple of hours later we rolled into her driveway and stuffed the bicycles in the garage.
 The telephone in the Knight’s hall was again blinking. The message was that at two o’clock tomorrow afternoon Jay Thomas would arrive to leave his investment particulars for the Knight’s perusal. I promptly informed Wally.

“I wish you would stop calling me Roger,” I said over our breakfast oatmeal. “I couldn’t abide the fellow.” Outside, rain was falling and the day, like my spirits, was dismal.
 “That’s your name. You’d better get used to it. Why’d you pick it if you didn’t like it?”
 “It just came out of nowhere. I almost said my own name. That would have been a catastrophe!”
 I tried to read the morning newspaper, but I couldn’t concentrate. There was nothing consequential but the usual thievery and mayhem among the residents of what are euphemistically called the disadvantaged neighborhoods. I suspected that the problem lay with the gene pool being depleted since all those with initiative had long ago moved out and up the economic and social ladder. No Vermont farmer would breed an under-producing cow to a scrawny bull and expect good milk production. What held true for livestock breeding surely must hold true for humankind.
 As I was sipping my second mug of coffee, Tom Hansen called. He wanted to quickly run through our act, but he feared coming too early lest young Thomas be cautiously cruising the neighborhood and spot the Lincoln languishing in the driveway. Tom’s visit was to be understood to be brief and intimidating. We decided that the less rehearsal, the fresher the performance. I hoped he knew what he was doing as I was mystified.
 “Incidentally, before you hang up,” I said, “my stage name’s Roger Wilmerding. Better write it down.”
 “Wow, that’s a mouthful,” he replied.

Tyler had errands and shopping that needed doing so I reclined on the sofa in the library, turned on the television set, and selected a game show to watch. Outside, the rain was ending and shafts of sunlight were breaking through the murky retreating clouds. Less than five minutes into the game show, I heaved myself to my feet and switched off the television, incredulous at how ordinary people were willing to affect imbecility for a little monetary gain. Or perhaps that class of people was, in fact, only showing its true nature. I dropped into the sofa once more and pondered the proposition. Soon sleep overtook my cogitating and at twelve-thirty I awoke dazed as to where I was and what was happening. Then, suddenly, the fog cleared from my mind and I was acutely aware.

“Action!” Tyler called. She was posted in a second floor bedroom, its window overlooking the front of the house. Her role was to alert Tom Hansen and me of Jay Thomas’ arrival.
 Tom, clad in gangster black head to toe, flung open the front door and, with a vigorous shove, sent me stumbling sideways through it into the circular drive that fronted the Knight’s house. When I had barely recovered my balance, he advanced upon me and stabbed me painfully in the chest with his index finger.
 “When?” he snarled and jabbed me again.
 “As soon as I can,’ I whined.
 “We’re not playing any more games with you,” he threatened.
 “I will, I promise…. I promise,” I whimpered.
 “And just how do you plan to pay?” His face was in my face. I felt myself losing my balance and stepped back.
 “I’ve got something, trust me,” I pleaded.
 He gave me another violent shove. Jay Thomas looked at us, open-mouthed. He had just stepped out of his non-descript sedan.
 “Two weeks—or else,” Tom loudly growled, spun on his heel, and yanked open the Lincoln’s door. He surged out of the driveway leaving behind the aroma of burning tire rubber lingering on the warm summer air.
 “Who *was* that?” Jay Thomas hesitantly asked. “Have I come at a bad time?”

 I looked up at him. I had bent over, my hands on my knees, obviously trying to recover my breath and my equilibrium. In reply, I slowly shook my head.
 “No, it’s okay,” I said. “Might as well come in now that you’re here.”
 “I could stop by another time, if that’d be more convenient.”
 “No, come in,” I said and held open the front door for him to enter. I rubbed my chest where Tom had stabbed me with his finger. I hoped he had not hurt himself.
 Jay Thomas introduced himself and I led him into the library. He opened his brief case and withdrew a glossy folder containing a sheaf of papers. I said I would be sure the Knights would look at them upon their return in a month’s time.
 “I don’t mean to pry, Mr. Wilmerding,” he ventured.
 “Call me Roger,” I interrupted.
 “Roger, then. That was an ugly business out there.” He gestured in the direction of the driveway. “Just how bad *are* things? I know it’s not any of my business, but sometimes it helps to have someone to talk to.”
 One of the lower bookshelves was given over to a bar. He poured a tumbler of bourbon and handed it to me. I gestured that he should avail himself. I gratefully sagged into the leather-upholstered sofa and he primly seated himself at its opposite end. I took a sip of the whiskey, coughed violently, and emitted a long, despairing sigh.
 I considered the solicitous young man. Were it not for the blubber, he would pass as an ordinary fellow of the better sort. He had dark hair, tortoise-shelled bi-focals, his necktie was non-descript, and his suit was poorly cut and rumpled. Clearly, he had little concern for his appearance. But he radiated both kindness and trustworthiness.
 I told him that I had foolishly gotten involved with a rough crowd and borrowed from them to finance gambling debts. The interest that they charged was appalling and I was sinking badly behind. As he had witnessed, they were impatient to be repaid and I was scared what they might do if I defaulted.
 “It’s not that I *couldn’t* pay them, it’s just that I can’t get the money until November at the earliest. I’ve told them that, but I know they think I’m stalling.”
 Jay Thomas looked sympathetically at the poor soul at the other end of the sofa and, sipping his whiskey, slowly shook his head.
 “Explain, if you don’t mind. I’m curious,” he said. I then told him the story that Tyler and I had contrived about how I acquired the Bay Psalm Book. He did not raise an eyebrow. Had he accepted the fable?
 “Well,” he said, rising from the sofa and setting his glass on the bar, “I’ve got to get along—other appointments. I wish you well.”
 We shook hands and I followed him to the driveway and waved a meek good-bye as he drove away. I returned to the house. Tyler was standing at the foot of the staircase.
 “Well?” she said.
 “Damned if I know,” I replied, rubbing my sore chest

“I’m tied up now with a meeting that’ll last all afternoon,” Wally said when I telephoned him after Jay Thomas’ departure. “Come to supper tonight…….and have Tyler drive her car. I don’t want that Jeep of yours in my driveway. Jay lives a block from my place. Just in case he might be cruising past, I don’t want him to connect the two of us. Jeeps are rare birds in these parts. Stuff it in your garage and shut the door. We’ve got to be careful. One false step, you know—and boom!.... there goes all our fancy planning.”
 I do not know how Wally avoided the consequence of his high living. He consumed copious amounts of champagne, dined prodigiously on Maine lobster and Maryland crab, raw oysters slipped merrily across his palate, and he smoked post-prandial Churchillian-sized cigars. Tonight, we feasted on Chateaubriand and an elderly burgundy from his cellar followed by walnuts, Stilton, and an ancient port. I might eat such a meal once or twice a year—for Wally this, presumably, was everyday fare.
 “*How* can you eat like this every day?” Tyler asked in astonishment. I stifled an incipient belch.
 “Esmerelda’s a *very* good cook and, anyhow, it’s just good, nutritious food. Besides, I’m rarely home for supper what with one board meeting and another. Actually, I eat a lot of peanut butter sandwiches out of my briefcase.”
 We seemed to be avoiding the reason for tonight’s festive board. Whatever the reluctance, it was broken by a telephone call from Tom Hansen. He had sprained his index finger on my sternum.
 “Add the doctor’s visit to the bill,” Wally said into the receiver. “I’ll let you know if we need you again.”
 “So,” Wally said, leaning back contentedly in a club chair in the library, and sending a cloud of smoke spiraling toward the ceiling, “tell me all about this afternoon.”

“How do we explain *me*? Suppose he comes poking around,” Tyler asked as she snuggled against me in bed that evening. A cold front had swept in while we were dining at Wally’s. We had been sleeping under a single top sheet.
 “I don’t know,” I replied. “You’d best just keep out of the way.”
 “That’s no answer,” she said disgustedly and threw off the bed sheet and began rummaging in a bureau searching for a blanket or a quilt.
 “Maybe you could be the cleaning lady,” I suggested.
 “Do I *look* like a cleaning lady?” she scoffed. I had to admit that no one would ever accept that explanation. She was clearly what men termed a ‘babe’ and babes ordinarily did not choose house cleaning for employment.

 “We’ve got to change our routine,” I said, “so he doesn’t chance across us together. Who knows where he goes—no more squash, though. Apparently, he hangs around the club a bit. Probably trolling for prospects—the place is full of old guys playing golf during the morning. I suppose we’re safe enough bowling. That doesn’t seem his territory.”
 “If he sees the two of us and does a little investigation, he might connect me to Daddy—and there goes any hope of getting Daddy’s money back.” She had a point.
 She tossed a quilt over us, turned out the bedside lamp, and crawled under the sheet. In the whispered darkness we decided that the safest option would be to motor daily into the Litchfield hills in search of country antique stores. I was still a goodly remove from acquiring even the basics for my new home and the sands were running.
 The night-time quandary resolved, we were motoring into the northwestern green hills well before mid-morning. As I have noted previously, these were nothing more than the foothills of my own Green Mountains and the villages with their white-painted churches were reminiscent of the land to which I longed to return once this present tiresomeness was behind us.
 To call the proprietors of the country antique shops avaricious would not be unkind nor inaccurate. But I acquired a pair of affordable cast-iron skillets that appeared to have seen considerable service in several kitchens prior to mine. A country hardware store provided kitchen basics at reasonable prices, including a large rolling pin for the apple pies I aspired to learn to bake. There is little that pleases a Vermonter on a chill autumn evening more than a tart apple pie, sweetened with maple syrup and accompanied on the side by a large slab of ‘wicked sha’p’ cheddar cheese.
 “I need a bean pot,” I declared as we sat on the bench of a village green. An elegant church steeple peeked above the tops of the maples that shaded us from the heat of the day. “It’s customary at home to have a pot of baked beans for Saturday supper.”
 “*Every* Saturday? Even in the summer? That sounds silly,” Tyler commented.
 “Just during the cold months. And a Saturday night bath whether you need it or not.”
 “You only bathe on Saturdays?” she asked incredulously.
 “Ayup,” I said, “saves hot wat’a.”
 “Gawd!”
 “I’m only kidding—sometimes we even bathe *during* the week. Not often, though.”
 She stood up, balled her wax paper sandwich wrapper, and flung it my skull.
 “Jerk,” she said. But then she smiled and shook her head.
 Later that afternoon, we stashed the loot we had purchased in an unoccupied corner of the Knight’s two-car garage beside the rest of the accumulation that we previously had acquired for my new home. There were two telephone messages blinking as we entered the hall that afternoon. My son had located a wood range in fine condition for the new kitchen. Did I want it? I did—the price was right. The second was from Jay Thomas.
 He was concerned about how I was getting along, he said. He wondered if there was anything he could do to help.
 “That’s nicely ambiguous,” Tyler remarked.
 “What do you suppose he means by ‘help’?”
 “Call him and find out, silly.”
 We decided to wait to reply until after we had dined that evening. Then I telephoned but there was only my old friend on the other end of the line informing me how important my call was and would I kindly leave a message which would be promptly returned. I left a message to wit that I appreciated his concern and inviting him to stop by sometime for a drink.
 “I don’t like it,” Tyler said, “this is going way too smoothly.”

This long, languid summer—it seemed but a day dreamer’s evanescent confection. It had been a lovely soap bubble drifting on a warm languid zephyr, sunlight sparkling on its luminescent surface. And now it likely would burst with a ghastly pop. I wandered outside to the patio and lit my pipe. There is something comforting about a mellow old briar that always produces in me a sense of calm. A serene twilight was settling in—a moment when I often become reflective and occasionally sad. The sweet smoke floated aloft and drifted away.
 Inside, I heard the telephone bell ringing. I paid no attention since Tyler was in the house and could answer. Then I suddenly realized that the caller might be Jay Thomas. I leapt from my chair and sprinted into the house. The telephone had ceased ringing and Tyler was standing next to it looking alarmed.
 “I picked it up,” she said, “then I realized it might be him and I hung up.”
 “But you didn’t say anything?”
 “I was just about to… and then I caught myself.”
 “No harm done,” I replied reassuringly. She looked chagrined.
 Moments later, the telephone rang again and I answered it. The caller was Jay Thomas.
 “You must have a bad connection,” he said, “I just called and it disconnected.”
 “No,” I lied, “it was me. I knocked the receiver out of the cradle. I was outside when the phone rang and I ran in to get it.” That seemed plausible and he accepted the explanation without comment.
 “Well, anyway, I just wondered if I could do anything to help.”
 “I guess I wouldn’t mind some company,” I replied. “It’s kind of lonely here and my last visitor sure wasn’t much fun.”
 We arranged that he would stop by tomorrow afternoon around four o’clock. That gave me a little time to gather my wits. I decided that I needed wise counsel. I dialed Wally’s phone number.
 “Look, if he bites how much am I asking for the book?” I asked. I had explained the impending visit.
 “Under no circumstances push the book. Let him ask. Three million should cover it. I’ve done some re-calculating and I think that’s closer to what he’s collected. At auction, the book should bring ten easy. He probably knows that anyhow.”
 I found Tyler in the kitchen putting away the supper dishes. She turned and raised her eyebrows in anticipation.
 “Wally says three million,” I said, “but suppose he wants to know how I got so far in debt to the gangsters—I don’t know anything about gambling.”
 “You think he’d ask?”
 “I don’t know,” I replied, “but if he does, I better have some kind of explanation ready.”
 “Well, what do you bet on?”
 “I never bet. Where I live, money’s too hard to come by to risk losing it wagering.”
 I knew nothing of card games—I did not even know the names of the cards. As to professional baseball, I could name possibly one or two players. The same ignorance prevailed for the other major professional games. The only horse racing venue near my home was Saratoga, an hour and one-half distant. It has a charm and class and none of the crassness found in the country’s other race tracks, and I enjoyed an occasional weekday visit during the racing season of August. But I never bet.
 We wandered outside and sat down beside one another on the patio chairs. Evening was gathering over the city skyline. I re-lit my pipe and the ash glowed redly in the bowl. Tyler reached out and took my hand in hers.
 “You’re really a dull fellow, you know,” she said, but there was a hint of affection in her voice. “But you’d better think of something quick,” she added archly.
 Maybe a real estate sale gone sour—I knew something about real estate having just sold to a forestry company the vast timberland the family had owned since the days of the Green Mountain Boys. And I thought that a city boy like Jay Thomas would be unlikely to be knowledgeable about large rural land deals.
 I leaned back and sent a deep puff of the fragrant smoke floating away on a tendril of the evening air. The concept had potential.
 “I’ve got it!” I said and proceeded to explain my real estate idea to Tyler.
 “That’d probably work,” she admitted when I had concluded my proposal.

I did not shave the following morning and our buying trip into the Litchfield Hills was abbreviated. The four o’clock appointment with Jay Thomas hovered in the forefront of my consciousness all the day long. We returned to the Knight’s before two o’clock and stowed our meager purchases in the garage. The appointed hour was approaching and Tyler was overlooking the driveway from the upstairs bedroom once again.
 “He’s here,” she called. “You’d think with all that money he could afford a better car than that ugly old heap of his.” I wondered what she thought of a country fellow who drove a well-matured Jeep.
 Jay Thomas and I adjourned to the library. I suppose the lure of strong drink was the motivator in that decision. Fortified, I suggested the patio would be pleasant for the day had been warm but now the sun was sliding away to the western hills. In the shade, the patio was growing comfortably cool. He leaned back in his chair, sipped his whiskey, and admired the view of the city skyline.
 “The time has come,” the Walrus said,/ “To talk of many things:/ Of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax,/Of cabbages—and kings,/ And why the sea is boiling hot/ And whether pigs have wings.”
 Those famous lines from *Through the Looking Glass* had been in my mind all day. The time had come, indeed, to talk of many things.
 “Has that fellow pestered you again?”
 “No,” I said, “but they know where I am and they’re probably keeping an eye on me.” That, of course, was just so much eye-wash. Anyone suspiciously hanging around the Knight’s prestigious neighborhood quickly would have been spotted and referred to the police. Jay Thomas must have realized this, but, hopefully, he would attribute that notion to my evident paranoia.
 “It’s none of my business, but how ever did you get involved with these people?”
 I told him my tale of a timberland deal gone sour—that I had expected to make a killing only to discover that most of the valuable timber had been infested with a disease that rendered it worthless. And that I had had an impossible quest for the money to purchase the land until I chanced across someone who referred me to these folks he had encountered yesterday. Additionally, the interest, which was exorbitant even at the outset, had been piling up at a furious rate. Furthermore, as a warning to future borrowers, bad debts were written off with permanent, incapacitating injury to the defaulter—or, quite possibly, worse.
 “And they won’t accept the book *in lieu* of payment?”
 “I’m afraid they aren’t of the literary persuasion,” I explained. “I’ve tried—they just laugh.”
 “Have you tried to find a buyer?”
 “The New York auction houses are the only ones that can handle such a big sale, and they’re booked until Thanksgiving,” I replied.
 “And they won’t advance you anything?”
 “I tried that long ago. No deal,” I said.
 “Oh boy, this is a pickle, isn’t it.” I agreed.
 “Let’s talk about something else,” I sighed. Fifteen minutes later, he thanked me for the drink, excused himself, and departed.

Promptly at nine o’clock the following morning, the kitchen telephone rang. We were dreamily sipping our second mugs of coffee and the noise jolted us from our reverie.
 “Don’t touch it!” I warned. Tyler quickly withdrew her hand from the receiver. I picked it up and cautiously answered. The caller was my guest of yesterday afternoon.
 “Just how much money do you need? I know it’s none of my business, but I was curious and I thought I’d ask anyhow.”
 “You don’t want to get involved,” I said.
 “I know, but I’ve always been a book collector in a small way,” he replied.
 “Didn’t I hear somewhere that you were going to be a new member of the Sunset Club?” I asked, deflecting adroitly his initial inquiry. I thought proudly that I was becoming rather smooth at this business of deflection and fabrication.
 “I’d like to be considered,” he said modestly. I could sense his impatience.
 “You seem like the right sort,” I said. “They could use some young members. I was there last spring. They’re mostly old coots—nice enough, though.” I suspected my delaying tactic might be wearing thin now. “Anyhow, you wanted to know about the debt, right?”
 “Yes, if you don’t mind,” he said. Clearly, his patience was now stretched thin and he was working hard to remain affable. I told him that the amount was close to three million dollars—payable in cash.
 “This bunch doesn’t take checks,” I said in conclusion.

“Wally,” I said into the telephone receiver, “get your actor ready to show the book.” I explained that I believed that Jay Thomas had risen to the fly. The prospect of a potential seven million dollar profit within a mere few months apparently had the young swindler salivating. Now to set the hook in his jaw.
 “Go canny, you have almost another two weeks to play him if need be.”
 And in two weeks, Tyler would abandon me to await the return of father and daughter from their tour of the French gothic cathedrals. I suspected that young Constance would be eager to return after an extensive bout with the chills and thrills of flying buttresses—not to overlook the delights of weeks of living cheek and jowl with her grumpy grandfather. The prospect of Choate actually might be alluring now.

As always, we attended the early service the following morning and then sallied forth into the northwestern hills searching out antique shops and general stores for kitchen ware. Our meandering travels even took us across the state line into the little Berkshire villages of Massachusetts. These were happy hours winding through the quiet summer by-roads without the several concerns that awaited us upon our return to the city.
 I had not been home to see the progress made on my new home for some time and I was growing madly eager to visit. And I missed Taffy. Could we get away now—and should we? Tyler was agreeable to my proposal and I decided that, as soon as we were back at the Knight’s that afternoon, I would call my daughter-in-law and arrange a suitable day for our visit.
 Upon our return, once again the telephone alongside the grandfather clock in the hall was blinking. The first message was from Fuzzy inviting us to supper that evening (I guessed he must have had another sudden cancellation as he entertained almost nightly—or perhaps his curiosity had prompted the invitation). Tyler eagerly nodded her head in acceptance. The second of two messages was from Jay Thomas requesting another visit.
 “Damn,” I said as we were walking across the street to Fuzzy’s home, “I completely forgot about calling home for our visit.” The second telephone message had had an unsettling effect. A passing late-afternoon shower had dampened the street and its day-long warmth was causing the wetness to dissipate in odd-shaped patches. Overhead, the blue sky slid downward to broad bands of gold and rose. It was a beautiful, serene evening and I was holding the hand of a lovely woman. Somehow, it did not seem fair that such a moment could even exist let alone occur to a simple countryman like myself.
 “Sweethearts!” Fuzzy exclaimed, throwing open his front door and sweeping us into his elegant foyer. “Come this way. We’re on the porch. What *can* I get you for drinks? I want to hear *all* about everything.”
 I half-expected to be confronted by the desiccated Teague Lorraine and his twerp of a companion, but we were the only guests that evening. And the porch was hardly what the term usually implied. Its roof was supported by Ionic columns and the checkerboard floor flagged in gray and white marble. The view was westward over the distant ridgeline beyond which lay the Farmington River valley. A light breeze had begun to waft through the tall shade trees.
 “Well?” Fuzzy said after distributing drinks. His icy gin and tonic was served in a tall glass with plenty of fresh lime juice. That, I thought to myself, was how a real gin and tonic should be made. What too often was served in restaurants was anemic and watery by comparison. Fuzzy, clearly, knew how to enjoy life’s little delights.
 I looked at Tyler. She nodded and I proceeded to tell Fuzzy the true story.
 Candlelight, a dry Mosel, and a lobster bisque soon followed and a consequent mellowness spread through me that evening. Contentment had been pretty well forgotten thanks to the machinations of my old roommate Wally. This evening reminded me that shortly there yet was hope for the return of a civilized life devoid of devious entanglements.
 Darkness had descended by our return to the Knight’s. I switched on the lights in the hall and started to pick up the receiver to phone the Thomas lad. Tyler laid her hand upon mine to prevent my calling. She led me up the stairs to the landing. We paused and looked out through the Palladian window at the lights of the city far away.
 “Sometimes,” she said quietly, “I wish this would never end.”
 I was not sure that I agreed with her, but, upon reflection, I supposed that her use of the word ‘this’ meant something other than the Prayer Book affair. In that case, I agreed wholeheartedly.

At nine o’clock the next morning, I replied to Jay Thomas’s request for another visit. Once again a recording politely asked me to leave a message. Having done so, I telephoned my daughter-in-law and asked which upcoming day would be agreeable for a visit. We agreed upon the next day. She informed me that the bed, the braided rugs, and the wood range had arrived and that she had found a well broken-in kitchen table that she thought would be suitable and had bought it. If I did not like it, she said, it could be returned. And, she said, she knew of a leather upholstered chair that could go into the library. Grab it, I said.
 Hardly had I hung up when the telephone bell sounded. Uneasily, I lifted the receiver.
 “I wonder if I could stop by sometime tomorrow, Roger?” Jay Thomas asked. “I think I might have some encouraging news for you.”
 “I’ve got to go back to….to Swanzey tomorrow. A little final cleaning up needs doing.” Just in the nick of time I remembered the name of my imaginary grandmother’s New Hampshire hometown. I had nearly blurted out the name of my own Vermont town.
 “And I’m tied up all day today. Could we make it the day after next—say four o’clock again?”
 “Fine,’ I said enthusiastically. “That’s *really* good news.”
 “You’d better call Wally right away,” Tyler said as soon as I put the receiver down. She had had her ear pressed close to mine during the preceding conversation and had heard what was being said on the other end of the line. I took her advice and phoned his office. His secretary took my message. In response to my question whether he might be free for lunch, she looked at his calendar and affirmed that he had nothing scheduled.
 “Would you ask him to meet us at our lawn bowling club then—around noon?” I gave her the address. That seemed a safe venue far from possible observation. I looked at Tyler and announced, “Let’s go bowling!”
 “You’re not only dull, you’re corny, Rog,” she replied. Then she kissed me.

 The next day was the Tuesday of the third week of August. We were to travel to Vermont. We loaded into her station wagon as many of our purchases as would fit and were underway shortly after breakfast.
 Lunch with Wally the previous noon had been inconclusive. Until Jay Thomas revealed his proposal, we were powerless to act. But Wally said that he would have the artificial Jack Sears, the book expert, on stand-by.
 The Prayer Book pace needed to move forward smartly for Constance and her father were due to land a week from this coming Friday. The Knight’s expected return to Hartford from the Cape would be the week following Labor Day. That same week, Constance would begin the fall semester at Choate. Furthermore, my little cottage home in West Hartford had been sold so I had no local refuge. I could bunk with Wally I supposed, but I was growing weary of his plotting and my role in it and, by extension, I was growing impatient with my old roommate. And I was keen to return to my new home in Vermont. I particularly wanted to fill the new bookshelves with my books—and I was mad to see Taffy and warm up for the woodcock season busting clay pigeons. Then there was the matter of Tyler.
 Rather than contend with the morning traffic that jammed the expressway between Hartford and Springfield every weekday morning, Tyler chose sedate secondary roads through the towns and villages. I noticed as we drove northward that the foliage was losing its chlorophyll and a slight tinge of yellow was appearing in the topmost leaves. Above Northampton we returned to the expressway, now virtually empty but for an occasional truck. Once again, the time had come to talk of many things.
 “We need to talk,” I said.
 “Oh *no*, you’re breaking up with me!” I knew she was kidding.
 “Of course not.”
 “Okay, so what’s your proposal? *Are* you proposing?” Sometimes I could not be sure if she was joking or serious or somewhere in between. “You’ll have to get my father’s permission, you know,” she added and then snickered. She was well aware of my wariness of him. That amused her.
 The conversation that ensued was in many ways similar to, and as frivolous as, a backyard game of badminton and its resolution as inconsequential. For the immediate future, we agreed, nothing could be done to alter our circumstances. But I told her I loved her. In response, she mumbled something to the effect that she was fond of me—at least that was what I thought she had said.

The wood range had been hooked up to the kitchen chimney. The kitchen table had arrived and the spool bed needed a mattress. There was a braided rug in the little living room and another in my bedroom. We unloaded from her station wagon the loot we had acquired in our trips into the Litchfield hills. I wound the steeple clock and set it on the shelf above the small fireplace in the living room. By mid-afternoon, there was as semblance of hominess. Taffy flopped down contentedly on the wide pine kitchen floorboards and watched us stock the cupboards with crockery and glassware and hang pots and pans on the hooks of the old hewn ceiling beam.
 “Cozy,” Tyler said, looking around with satisfaction, “I like it.” Taffy wagged the stub of her tail.
 We drove to the nearby town where I had sold books and purchased a mattress and an electric stove and a refrigerator. Delivery would be made the following day.
 “Why do you call it an ice box,” she said as we were returning to my new home.
 “I guess it must be from when I was a little kid. Ice wagons still used to deliver to some of the out-lying places. I can remember the driver carried the block on his shoulder with a pair of tongs. And it dripped all over the place. Boy, that was a long time ago.”
 “You’re an old coot,” she said.
 My son grilled hamburgers and hot dogs outdoors that evening. My daughter-in-law had made my mother’s recipe for potato salad and we gnawed on sweet butter-and-sugar corn on the cob. There was plenty of cold milk to drink and a blueberry pie to follow. Pretty tame stuff, I suppose, but food seems to taste better eaten out-of-doors and there’s nothing wrong with simple country cooking. And my grand children managed to get through supper without any tearful episodes.
 By the time we returned to Hartford, prudent householders were in their pajamas, readying themselves to slip into bed for a well-deserved night’s rest.
 “Good night, Roger,” Tyler whispered and snuggled close to me. Momentarily confused, I stiffened under the bed sheet. Then I remembered that, for the foreseeable future, my name was Roger Wilmerding.

Tyler had a ten o’clock tennis game. As before, we drove to her house intending to pedal to the tennis club courts. She collected the mail that had accumulated the past several days, separating the bills from the second-class advertisements and other effluvia. There was a post card from Constance.
 “Daddy has fallen in love,” she said.
 “You’re joking!” The image of goatish Hanging Harry cooing sweet nothings in his sweetheart’s ear seemed far beyond absurdly preposterous.
 “No, she says he’s already proposed—read it yourself.” She pushed the card, depicting a cathedral in some town whose name was unknown to me, vigorously across the dining room table to me.
 Constance’s hand writing was compact, neat, and the letters well-formed. Thus, she managed to impart a considerable amount of information in the small allotted space on the post card. Her grandfather’s intended was an English woman who had been teaching in a convent in Arles. She would be joining him for a visit in September, presumably followed soon thereafter by matrimony.
 “So you’ll have a step-mommy,” I said. “I hope the three of you will be very happy here.” I indicated her father’s home with a sweep of my hand.
 “Come to think of it, I *will* marry you,” Tyler said.
 “Welcome to Vermont!” I replied. She responded with a particularly resonant Bronx cheer. Love takes many forms.
 As you might expect, Tyler’s opponent suffered greatly that morning on the tennis court. She was run back and forth along the baseline only to have Tyler slice a back-spinning drop shot just over the net. And when she began to suspect the imminent drop shot, Tyler slammed a wicked passing shot that was un-returnable. The wretched woman stumbled off the court, badly humiliated. Tyler thereupon heartily congratulated her and assured the poor creature that she thought a re-match certainly might have a different result. The beaten opponent looked at her in disbelief and then turned and walked away shaking her head.
 “Was that really necessary?” I asked. She had slung a towel around her shoulders and was wiping the perspiration from her brow with her wrist band. Then she shrugged her shoulders. We pedaled back to her father’s house in silence.

The Knight’s doorbell chimed precisely at four o’clock that afternoon. Tyler, as before, was sequestered in a second floor bedroom. I opened the door and invited my guest to enter.
 “You said you had good news.” I tried to put extra eagerness in my voice. Instead, I thought I sounded like an over-eager used car salesman. I hoped Jay Thomas would not be put off by my juiciness. Once again, I ushered him into the library and handed him a tumbler of whiskey.
 “I think I do, but, first, I will need to see the book and somehow verify that it’s the real thing.”
 “The best expert is Jack Sears. But you’d have to get him down here from Boston—and you’d have to pay him,” I said. “I could arrange that for you.”
 “If you would, please,” he replied, “and just where is the book now?” I explained that it was in the safety deposit vault of a downtown bank. Due to its fragility, I warned, the book could not be handled except by an expert. He, that is Jay Thomas, could look but not touch. And, I added, even I dared not hold it lest it be accidentally damaged.
 “I’ve made some financial arrangements, but I’d like a preliminary viewing. I’m sure you can understand my caution.”
 “Absolutely,” I said reassuringly. “I’ll see if Sears would be willing. When would you like to look at it?”
 “Let me know when he’s available, but the sooner the better.” He finished his drink, replaced the glass on the bar, shook my hand, and swiftly departed.
 “That was quick,” Tyler said. She had tip-toed down the staircase as he was leaving through the front door. “So what happened? Did he bite?”
 “He wants to meet with Jack Sears. Sooner the better he said. I’ll call Wally right now. Where’s that list of the actor’s available dates?”
 She quickly produced it and we scanned the days the actor would be free. Friday morning, two days hence, the fellow had noted as open. I dialed Wally’s phone number and left a message with his secretary that he should prepare our Jack Sears for his curtain call.
 At Wally’s request, we dined at his house that evening with him and his actor friend. The fellow was a cheerful sort and Wally and I stuffed his head full of bibliophilic information that might potentially be useful in the deception. He took notes and I suspected that being a professional and, thus, a quick study, he shortly would have them committed to memory. Besides, he said, he had been doing a bit of reading on the subject of the Psalm Book. Wally said he would make arrangements with the bank to expect us at ten o’clock in the morning Friday. He was concerned that we move expeditiously, since he had learned that the real Jack Sears was expected to return from his summer studying in Greece in a week.
 Once again, Thursday morning the affable chap in the telephone answering message assured me of the importance of my call. I left the information that, if agreeable, Jack Sears would meet us at the bank Friday morning at the appointed hour of ten o’clock. After returning the receiver to its cradle, I realized that I had forgotten to inform him of the name of the bank. Having accomplished that, Tyler and I again set off for the Litchfield hills in pursuit of more swag. When we had departed my new Vermont home, the place looked semi-inhabitable but much more remained to be secured before the house was actually livable. Tyler suggested that we look for pictures for the walls, but I assured her of my arrangement with my son for sharing the Aldro Hibbard landscapes on a rotating basis. Ours was a desultory ramble that morning producing nothing useful. We ate lunch at a roadside diner and wended our way homeward by early afternoon. Not a word about the following morning’s preliminary inspection had been uttered.
 “If I were you, I’d have my things packed. You never know how tomorrow may go,” she advised.
 “It’s *only* a showing. No money is changing hands,” I protested. But, to keep her content, I stuffed my scant possessions into a dusty old athletic bag that I had found in the cellar and that the mice had worried. No doubt I would have to unpack the stuff Friday afternoon. But I had to admit to myself that I was becoming edgy about what might go wrong. I am a congenital worrier.
 We decided to dine that evening at the Town and County Club. There seemed little likelihood of encountering trouble at the stately club for the city’s distinguished matrons. The setting sun turned the sky a pale amethyst as we parked her station wagon in the lot behind the club and walked toward the side entrance under the *port* *cochere.*  “Roger!” Approaching from the far side of the lot were four corpulent people. One of them was Jay Thomas and it was he who had hailed me. We stopped and awaited their approach.
 “Shit,” Tyler said quietly.
 “Fancy meeting *you* here,” Jay said extending his hand.
 “And you,” I replied.
 “Mother’s been a member for ages,” he explained. He introduced her and the elderly couple who were dining with the Thomases.
 “And this is my cousin, Aubrey Tyler. She’s a member here, too,” I said.
 “Odd,” Jay replied, “one of my clients is an Aubrey—a retired judge. Any relation?”
 “It’s Audrey, not Aubrey,” Tyler corrected. “He doesn’t enunciate,” she said gesturing toward me, “never did, even when we were children. Sloppy, aren’t you, Rog.” I shrugged.
 “Well, see you tomorrow morning. Enjoy your supper,” he said. I held the door and his party passed through into the club. Then I let the door hiss shut.
 “That was a near disaster,” I whispered. “You’re a pretty damn good liar.”
 “You’re not so bad, either,” she said. She looked around to see if anyone was watching and then kissed me on the cheek. We ate in haste as, understandably, we did not wish any further contact with the Thomas party that evening.

I was awake at first light. Relax, I told myself as I drew the razor across my face, there is no need to worry about anything. Today would be nothing more than a simple viewing. And, yet, I was jumpy and nicked myself with the blade.
 “What did you think of mamma last night?” Tyler asked over the breakfast cornflakes.
 “Porcine,” I replied. She had a remarkable resemblance to a well-fed hog.
 “That’s not very nice!” That coming from a woman who, in the nastiest way possible, two days previous had annihilated her tennis opponent. I reminded her of her of the match. She snorted derisively.
 “Anyhow,” she said, “he seems devoted to her. Wally said he might cut and run, but I just don’t see it. He’s way too tied to her. I just can’t see the two of them secretly flying off to Monte Carlo with the loot he’s embezzled.”
 “Weirdly devoted,” I amended.
 “Amen to that,” she concurred.
 Two nights previous, I had arranged with our Jack Sears to meet at the bank one-half hour prior to the showing of the Bay Psalm Book. Wally had given me the key to the vault. He said that a couple of days previous he had switched the book in the bank to a new safety deposit box in my name. The hour was closing on nine o’clock and my palms were sweating. The traffic into the city would now be light, but we decided we would be wise to allow a full half-hour transit. Rather than use a downtown public parking garage, which might be filled to capacity on a busy Friday morning, we decided to park in the underground garage that the Hartford Club leased. No doubt her father would object to our cavalier use of his membership at some point in the future. But, if we could return to him his investment, he likely would be mollified.
 There was a snapping breeze and a touch of September’s coolness that bright blue morning. The walk to the bank was only two blocks. Jack Sears, bow tie slightly askew, was puffing on a briar pipe outside the bank’s door. He knocked the dottle out on his heel and we shook hands. Tyler said to meet her at the Club when we were finished and walked away.
 We crossed the marble-flagged lobby and descended the brass-railed staircase to a small walnut-paneled reception room in the middle of which Mrs. Grout, a dour, gray-haired lady, was sitting behind a stout oak desk. I presented my key and told her my name. She asked me to sign my name in a ruled ledger. As I did so, a bead of nervous perspiration from my brow fell upon the page. I quickly wiped it away with my handkerchief, and returned the book to her.
 “Your name is Widmerling? That’s *not* what you told me and that’s *not* the name on the account,” she stated imperiously. She looked at me suspiciously. “Excuse me,” she said and began to stride toward the staircase, holding the book under her arm protectively.
 “Wait!” I cried. “I must have made a mistake. I’m dyslectic and sometimes I get letters backwards.” I had become a quick-thinking and appalling liar of late. I was becoming rather proud of my accomplishment.
 She hesitated with one foot already on the first step of the staircase.
 “Let me sign again,” I pleaded. “This sometimes happens when I’m nervous—especially when I’m writing checks. It’s embarrassing. ” I again removed my handkerchief and wiped my palms and my brow.
 “Alright, I suppose,” she said, “but *this* time get it right.” She handed me the ledger. With consummate care, I wrote ‘Roger Wilmerding.’
 She studied the signature carefully. I looked at Jack Sears. He was holding his breath.
 “Fine,” she said. Jack exhaled quietly. I mopped my brow again. At this rate, I soon would become de-hydrated.
 She turned on her heel, unlocked the steel-barred door behind her, and invited us to follow her into the safety deposit chamber. With our key she unlocked one of the hundreds of trays in the chamber’s walls, withdrew it, and placed it upon the table in the center of the room.
 “Incidentally,” I said as she was withdrawing and about to lock us into the room, “we’re expecting another at ten. His name’s Thomas, Jay Thomas.”
 “I knew his father. He was a fine gentleman,” she recalled. “I imagine his son must be, too. Just push that little white button on the table when you’re done.”
 “Yes, a fine fellow indeed,” I replied.
 I looked at my wrist watch. We had a scant fifteen minutes perusal. I swiftly undid the string binding the package and withdrew the book from its wrapping paper. The actor, mumbling to himself, thumbed the pages.
 “Here,” I said, handing him the ivory page turner that Wally had long ago given me.
 “What’s this—a tongue depresser?”
 “Wally says to use it to turn pages. Give it a try,” I suggested. “And he gave you gloves?”
 “Oh, yeah,” he said and withdrew a pair of white cotton gloves from his jacket pocket.
 “Don’t put them on until you’re ready to handle the book. And don’t show the book pages to him close up. There’re only six actual ones, you know, then they repeat and repeat and repeat. So keep it shut as much as possible,” I advised.
 I glanced again at my watch—little more than five minutes remained. Sears the actor was bent over the book, thumbing the pages and muttering to himself. We will never be able to pull this off I said to myself. My shirt collar was wet with nervous sweat, my madras necktie hung limply, and I could feel beads of perspiration coursing down my flanks underneath my shirt.
 I thought I could hear voices outside the room.
 “He’s here,” I said and gestured toward the door. Jack shut the book and laid the gloves and page turner alongside it. Moments later, the door opened.
 Mrs. Grout ushered in our guest. Momentarily, he was followed by three stern, silver-haired fellows who, by the looks of them, were canny businessmen.
 “Investors,” Jay Thomas explained.
 “But, I thought….I thought *you* were buying it,” I stammered. I was flummoxed. Our plans were wrecked.
 “Heavens, what gave you that idea? Let me introduce you,” he said and proceeded with the introductions. We shook hands, but I was so discombobulated that their names never registered in my frenzied mind. I stood dumbly alongside the table unable to speak intelligibly.
 “And this is….our expert,” Jay said, tiring of waiting for a response from me.
 “Jack Sears,” the actor said brightly. “Now, I must caution you that this book is too valuable to handle with bare hands,” he stated, drawing on the cotton gloves. He picked up the book and, in turn, held it so that all four investors could see the title page. Then he placed it again on the table and lifted several pages with the page turner. He had just begun to speak when he was interrupted by one of the new investors.
 “Wait a minute,” he said, “don’t I know you? I’ve seen you somewhere before.”
 “The Athenaeum, perhaps?” the actor responded nimbly.
 “No, locally…. not Boston.”
 There was a nasty, lingering pause.
 “I suppose I look like lots of people, but….”
 “Now I know! You’re an actor. I saw you two weeks ago in ‘*Our Town’* at the Stage Company.”
 “What’s going on?” Jay Thomas cried, looking at me in wonderment. I could not find words to reply.
 “What the hell are trying to pull, Thomas,” another of the businessmen snarled. The third had him by the lapels. I depressed the white button on the desk frantically. The first accuser was leafing furiously through the book.
 “This thing’s a complete phony!” he yelled and flung it against the wall in disgust.
 Mrs. Grout opened the door and stood, framed in it, with a look of amazement on her face. The room was in an uproar.
 I looked at the actor and nodded my head toward the door. One of the outraged investors was in my way. I shoved him aside. Mrs. Grout leaped out of my way and I scrambled into her chamber and up the marble stairs. Jack Sears was on my heels. On the main floor, heads were turning in the direction of the commotion. The security officer nearly knocked us down in his haste to find the source of the noise. The two of us, heads down lest cameras be watching, as calmly as possible walked across the lobby and out of the bank. We parted at the corner.
 “All hell’s broken loose,” I rasped. Tyler was seated in the club’s lounge just off the lobby. She was reading the morning paper. “Let’s get the hell out of here!”
 We scurried out the front door and around to the rear of the club, descending a staircase to the garage. We passed out of its dark interior into the bright daylight.
 “Okay, now tell me what happened,” she insisted. I told her every bit of the appalling fiasco that I could recall. I was still shaking.
 “We can’t stay at the Knight’s now,” I said. I remembered Jay Thomas’ affection for high-caliber firearms.
 “Aren’t you glad now I made you pack,” she said with a tinge of self-righteousness in her voice.
 We swooped into the Knight’s driveway. She ran to grab her belongings. I backed my Jeep out of the garage after heaving into it the few remaining items we had purchased in our rambles through the hills. She emerged and tossed me the bag I packed last night. I ran through the house and locked the kitchen and patio doors. Then I emptied the milk in the refrigerator down the sink. Everything else in it would keep safely. With one last admiring glance in the hallway, I stepped out of the foyer and locked the front door. Inside, the grandfather clock was sounding eleven o’clock.
 “Where?” she asked. She was standing next to her station wagon.
 “Fuzzy’s,” I yelled. In five minutes, we had parked both vehicles in his three-car garage and closed the doors. We ran to the front door and rang the bell.
 “Darlings!” Fuzzy exclaimed when he opened his front door. “Come in. It’s getting chilly.”

I telephoned Wally at his office after I had a chance to catch my breath and had allowed my heartbeat to return to a semblance of its normal rate.
 “It’s a rout….a complete disaster,” I gasped and proceeded to retail the appalling events of the morning.
 “It’s bad,” he admitted when I concluded, “no doubt about it. Can you remember the names of any of his investors?”
 “I was too flummoxed. I think one of them was Bunch or something like that.”
 “Bunce? Big fellow, silver hair?”
 “That sounds possible,” I admitted.
 “I’ll give Buncie a call. Maybe we can straighten this mess out yet,” he said reassuringly.
 At dawn, I departed for Vermont. Tyler would return to her father’s home mid-morning. Fuzzy said he would look after the Knight’s place until they returned.
 “Someday, you’ll have quite a story to tell them,” I said as I turned the ignition key in the Jeep. I looked back and both he and Tyler were waving good-bye.

The month of September was soon to be upon us and a great deal of water would need to flow over the dam before the stream of events resumed a normal flow. Tyler and I had parted without having made any plans so frantic had been that Friday and so abrupt my departure. To linger, we both agreed, was to court danger as there was no predicting what young Thomas would do in reprisal for shattering his reputation.
 Once home, I began setting up house-keeping and in, short order, Taffy and I were able to begin occupancy of our own home. Constance was packed off to school and the arrival of Hanging Harry’s fiancé was imminent. Tyler and I telephoned one another nightly. We decided that until her father’s marriage, we should do nothing about our own. Already, I was making plans to enlarge my home in the spring to accommodate Constance. I had pretty much put out of my mind the chaotic conclusion to my summer in the Connecticut state capitol. There was too much that needed doing at home.
 Then, on the final Wednesday of the month, Wally’s secretary contacted me—Wally was eager to talk to me and Tyler as soon as possible. We set a date for noon on Friday, two days hence. As a mid-point for the meeting, I suggested the inn in the historic village of Deerfield. The grouse season would open the next day, but until the leaves were down, the chance of a shot at the furious flight of the flushed bird would be nearly impossible. But the woodcock season would follow a week thereafter, and woodcock cooperatively held for Taffy’s point and the opportunity for a shot at the flush became reasonable. But I digress.

The appointed day broke brisk and bright. The autumn leaves were well on their way to flamboyant as I drove out of the hills and into the broad, placid Deerfield River valley. The corn was being chopped in the vast North Meadows as I turned into the village. The inn was midway along The Street and drawn up in front of it was a massive coral-colored Cadillac. Apparently, Wally had acquired yet another outrageous land yacht.
 I found him and Tyler backed up to the little fireplace in the small reception room warming their backsides. Both were sipping sherry.
 “We have lots to talk about. I requisitioned a room,” he said, pointing to a small chamber off the main dining room. “They have a tour bus coming soon for lunch so this will be a lot quieter.” He was no longer his usual expansive and gregarious self and that concerned me. He wandered off in search of the men’s room. Tyler put her arms around my neck and kissed me hard on the lips. Shortly, Wally returned carrying from the bar another glass of sherry. I could have sworn that his hand holding the glass had a slight tremor.
 I will not attempt to repeat our conversation, as we were engaged for a lengthy while, but I will attempt to summarize what Wally told us.
 That August Friday, after I had reported from Fuzzy’s home the chaos that had occurred at the bank, he had telephoned his friend he called ‘Buncie.’ Buncie confirmed he, indeed, had been one of the Prayer Book investors at the bank that morning. He and the two other investors had threatened to expose Thomas. Wally, on the telephone to Buncie, had quick-wittedly proposed another course of action. Jay Thomas, he said, has been running a Ponzi scheme. Suggest in the strongest way, Wally said, that he dismantle that operation and return the investors money. In return, there would be no further mention of the Prayer Book duplicity. A clean slate, so to speak. Wally, of course, admitted to Buncie that the duplicity about the Prayer Book was of his own conniving, not Jay’s. Buncie, nevertheless, was doubtful. Remind him, Wally said, that his mother would be mortified if any scandal involving her beloved son were to become public knowledge. Then Wally revealed to Buncie the unnatural relationship of mother and son. At first Buncie could not believe such conduct ever could occur, but Wally reassured him that the information had come to him directly from his golf partner, the late Thomas senior. Now Buncie understood Wally’s point.
 “And Daddy got his money back last week,” Tyler said happily. “But, still, I can’t help feeling partly responsible for what happened.”
 “What do you *mean* ‘what happened?’ I asked.
 “Buncie,” Wally said, “told the other two investors what I had told him, including that the Prayer Book scheme was actually my doing.”
 When the investors met with Jay two days later, he sullenly acquiesced and was willing to dismantle the Ponzi scheme and return the money if no more be said. All well and good, but Terry Hardcastle, who was one of the Book investors, had the reputation as a bit of a hot-head. He blurted out Wally’s role.
 “Oh, oh,” I said.
 “Oh, oh, indeed,” Wally continued. “Buncie said the whites of his eyes went red and his nostrils flared. The kid’s unstable, I always knew that. You don’t drop out of Yale just because your father died and you certainly don’t start a crooked investment operation after you’ve been canned from your first job.”
 “And he’s a weird gun nut, too,” Tyler added. I remembered thinking a while back that I had suspected that Jay Thomas’ affection for firearms did not stop at plinking beer cans off fence posts.
 “Hardcastle was my undoing and I was pretty certain the kid would try to revenge himself somehow. So I took to spending long weekends in Essex sailing. Stayed at the club where we lunched back in April. Remember? I was uneasy at home because my house backs up to the park’s woods, you know. I didn’t put the car in the garage. Just parked it by the verandah door and scooted into the house. It wasn’t much of a life I was leading, I can tell you.”
 “Did he make any threats?” I inquired.
 “Not as far as anyone could tell. He went into hibernation at home,” Wally answered. “He must have been seething and finally boiled over. Somehow he found out that I had been weekending on my boat. Then he booked himself into the inn in Essex last Friday. I had no idea that he was there.”
 I knew the inn. It was on the main street and close to the river. The inn dated back to the days of the sailing captains who had made the village their home.
 “With homicidal intent?” I ventured.
 “There’s no doubt in my mind. He brought his dad’s canoe on the roof

rack. Not the flat bottom kind for fishing. The kind you run rivers, you know.”
 “So you don’t think he was going to take a leisurely paddle along the river?”
 “No,” Wally replied, “he intended to kill me.”

There is an island fronting the Essex sailing docks called Nott Island. It is about the length of a several football fields, rather narrow and heavily wooded. As the Connecticut River reaches Essex, it bends gently making a sweep toward the town. Nott Island divides the river at that point with the greater flow on the western, or town side, and the lesser on the eastern side.
 The river is used for pleasure boating, both sail and motor, and commerce. Occasional freighters ply the river’s narrow shipping channel and their passing kicks up a formidable wake.
 I began to see what the livid young man must have had in mind. He would paddle the canoe to the island. Sequestering himself in the island’s thick growth, he could wait patiently until Wally appeared at the club dock. Once on the water, Wally would have presented a ridiculously easy target as he tacked against the current. And the gunman would have two chances: Wally’s going out and his coming in. Using an ordinary deer rifle with a mounted scope, Thomas could not miss.

“I think I get what he was up to,” I said and retailed the above. Tyler, who did not know the area, was confused. On the back of a cardboard coaster, Wally drew a simplified map.
 “I see,” she said, “so afterward he tosses the rifle overboard when he paddles back to the dock. And no one’s the wiser. Bright boy.”
 “And my boat drifts in the river until the current pushes it to shore somewhere down river. By the time someone finds me, he’s sipping a cocktail in the inn and looking at the dinner menu.”
 “But the gunshot?” I ventured.
 “It’s just a bang. Could have been lots of things. The rifle’s in the canoe when he floats it, so no one notices him holding it because he never touches it until he lands on the island. And he can paddle back whenever he chooses and no one can connect him—and the gun’s already in the river bottom mud.” Wally leaned back in his chair with a satisfied look on his face. For the sake of mankind, that Wally bent his mind to the law must be reassuring. He would have made a cracker jack criminal.
 “So what went wrong,” Tyler asked.
 “We’ll never know, but I guess he must not have known how to handle a narrow bottom canoe and tipped it. That’s what the police concluded. There were plenty of power boats and they kick up a wake even though they have to pass by a row boat or canoe at a walking pace. And there’s plenty of current—the outside of a river bend has the fastest current.”
 “Wow,” I said. “Close call for you!”
 “One other thing,” Wally continued, “his mother told the police he didn’t know how to swim.”
 “Go on, don’t leave me hanging,” I said encouragingly.
 “It’s not pretty,” Tyler warned.
 “They found the canoe filled to the gunwales with water and stuck way downriver in the Saybrook marshes Sunday afternoon.”
 “And him?” I ventured.
 “Oh,” Wally said, “on Tuesday he bobbed to the surface off Fenwick Point.”

 \* \* \*

If you enjoyed this, you might enjoy the following by the same author:

EQUINE INTRIGUE: A Maiden’s Tale —A young lady returns from boarding school at Christmas hoping the weather holds for the final meets of the fox hunting season. Instead she finds intrigue and murder.

GOLF MYSTERY—Romance, literature, golf, and an exquisitely ghastly murder.

DUEL IN VERMONT—A contemporary duel between two Boston bibliophiles.

FILTHY TRICKS—Politics, publishing, golf, squash, angling, and fox hunting—and murder.

All are available as e-books through Amazon or Barnes & Noble and all ridiculously cheap.