

WHEELS

by

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A Thesis
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of
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in Partial Fulfillment of
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of
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Wheels

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing at George Mason University

by

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Master of Science
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving wife Iris.

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I would like to thank the many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made this happen, Ann, Margie, DQ, Kim, Brett, and Danielle.

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ABSTRACT

WHEELS

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George Mason University, 2015

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This thesis is the beginning section of *Wheels*, a novel set in Albany in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER ONE

The train arrived at Albany's Union Station on an August afternoon in 1931. It was hot in upstate New York that year. Longtime residents said it was the hottest August they could remember. Nathan Wilson lugged the Jenny Lind trunk as the brakes on the big steam engine, the Empire Express, hissed as he and his wife Nancy with their son Nathan Junior in her arms, walked past. He had fitted the trunk with wheels on one end and he felt the vibration in his hands as they rolled across the dusty, well-used platform boards of the station, making a "Ka-lump, Ka-lump" sound. It reminded him of the uncertain rhythm of the train as they traveled from Buffalo. His legs strained to fight the resistance of the trunk's weight, but it felt good to be on the move after the long ride. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as he reached a hand to his wife. A hint of dampness hung in the air. The river was close. He could smell it. It wasn't the raw and insistent smell that came off Lake Erie, an ocean in miniature. This smell was different, mild, almost sweet, and inviting.

Nathan sat the trunk on its end and pulled the paper out of his pocket with the directions to the boarding house on it. He looked past the station platform, down Broadway in the direction of downtown. He craned his neck to see around the mass of passengers moving in all directions. The throng gave way as each traveler found the faces

of loved ones and connected in boisterous little clumps. At the end of the platform, men in overalls formed a chain and unloaded crates off large wooden carts and piled them into the recesses of the cargo car.

“Is that the way, Nathan?” Nancy looked past her husband towards downtown and clutched Nathan Junior tighter.

“That’s the way,” he said, wiping the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand and peering at the buildings looming in the distance beyond the protective overhang of the train platform. Across the street, a freshly painted white building rose many stories higher than the other buildings on the block. A large sign hung vertically from the building’s corner, Woodstock Hotel. White lacy curtains flapped gently in several open windows.

Albany was only a third the size of Buffalo, but the downtown seemed just as lively to Nathan as he and his family walked down the wide boulevard of Broadway in the direction of Mrs. Hoff’s boarding house. According to the map his sister drew for him, it was just a few blocks away. The street was teeming with people. Groups of men walking four and five abreast, deep in conversation, dotted the wide expanse of sidewalk. Automobile horns honked urgently as horse drawn livery wagons dodged the impatient cars that darted between them. Mammoth trolley cars moved slowly in their tracks down the center of the street. A newsboy, no older than ten, stood on the corner and lifted his singsong soprano voice above the din of the street, “Hey, right here, get your Knickerbocker News. Right here, get your Knickerbocker News.” Nancy hung close to Nathan as he navigated around two women in brightly colored summer dresses, their hair

in wavy perms. A truck partially blocked the sidewalk, as delivery men unloaded crates in front of a sign reading Driscoll's Department Store.

When they reached the corner of Broadway and State Street, Nathan stopped to check his map again. A traffic cop, with white gloves, stood in the intersection pointing at automobiles, waving one arm, and using a whistle to reinforce his authority. The brass buttons on his jacket glistened when the sunlight hit them just right.

Nathan looked up and down State Street. At the end of the street in one direction was the Hudson River. A triple decker steamboat was moored at the dock. Near the dock, a tan colored dog arched its back in a menacing manner. He couldn't hear it, but by the way the dog's chest heaved in and out and by the motion of its snarling head, Nathan could tell it was barking at something in the water. The policeman blew his whistle again, sending a jagged sound through the air. Nathan heard the metallic click and grind of a handbrake disengaging just before a Model A Ford sputtered through the intersection on its wagon-like wheels. The smell of raw gasoline and exhaust fumes followed behind. The old car needs a tune up, thought Nathan. That carburetor was way out of adjustment.

"We can cross here," he said to Nancy while pitching the trunk back to a good angle for pulling. They crossed the intersection and headed up State Street. Nancy cast one last glance back at Driscoll's department store.

"That sure is a big store." Nancy said. "What's the big white building up the street there on the top of the hill?" she said turning her attention to the massive building several blocks in the distance in front of them.

“That’s the State Capitol Building. That’s why this is State Street,” Nathan said with a chuckle. “The next street should be Pearl Street.”

State Street grew steeper with every step Nathan took. He concentrated on finding the most efficient angle to pull his load forward. The balls of his feet dug into the hot pavement. The heat radiated through the soles of his shoes.

“You and Nathan Junior go ahead. I’ll meet up with you at the next corner. Once we get to Pearl, we go left. The boarding house should be a couple of blocks over.”

As he willed the increasingly heavy trunk forward, Nathan watched his wife carry Nathan Junior on her hip with the same ease as the day in South Boston, Virginia, when he was walking by her house and saw her carry a load of wash. Just as she did that day, she caught his gaze and smiled. He admired her short sturdy figure, bronze-skinned face, liquid eyes, and long brown hair fixed in a single braid. With little Nate on her hip, she was a vision of fluid motion.

Nathan had saved all the money he could from his job at the auto plant but he wondered whether it was enough. After losing the job, the only work he could get in Buffalo was as a smelter in a steel mill. It was dirty, mind numbing work that made men old before their time. With a new wife and a young child, he had needed to find something more.

His sister Madge suggested he go to Albany. It was going to take the bulk of his modest savings to rent two rooms at the boarding house but Madge had recommended the place. She knew the owners. She said the town is bustling and businessmen were still

making money and looking for workers. From the looks of downtown, she might be right. Maybe this was the place he would find the work that he loved.

He could not get his father or anyone in his family, not even Madge, to understand that he wasn't going to settle for any kind of work anymore. He was a trained automobile mechanic. He wanted to work on automobiles. That was the only work he wanted. He would get that work.

When they finally reached the boarding house, Nathan wished Madge and Skip could have been there to introduce them, but it was the middle of the thoroughbred season at Saratoga and he knew it was impossible for them to get away.

Mrs. Hoff was as Madge described her, a small stern looking woman who kept her greying hair in a tight bun. Although she looked like a schoolteacher ready to launch into a lecture, her manner was friendly. Nathan saw kindness in the blue eyes behind her spectacles.

"It's a quiet place," Mrs. Hoff said as she pulled a ring of keys out of the pocket in her dress and removed one and stopped at a door with the number six on it at the end of the hallway on the third floor. She showed Nathan and Nancy the two furnished rooms "Here's the main room." She fitted the key into the lock and pushed open the heavy oaken door revealing a large sparsely furnished room with two large windows that poured in a cheerful sunlight. In the room sat a little kitchen table with two chairs pulled up to it. An extra chair of the same type, a simple Shaker style, leaned against the wall between the two windows. A small coal burning potbelly stove and an empty coal bin sat in the corner near the door of a second room. Through the door opening, Nathan saw a

plump bed with a brass bedframe and part of a dresser, also in Shaker style, with a porcelain wash pan and pitcher sitting on top of it that looked a lot like the one his parents had in their bedroom.

“Look, little Nate, see the river?” Nancy crossed the room to get a better look out of the window, Nathan Jr., on her hip. “You can see the boats and the men workin’ the docks,” she said with a southern Virginia drawl.

“Yes indeed. The docks are still several blocks away but on a clear day like this, you can see the ships moving up and down the river from here. And big ships too. The ships come from all over the world. We’re the last port on the river that’s deep enough for the ocean going ships to navigate,” responded Mrs. Hoff. She moved closer to Nancy at the window, as Nancy continued to look towards the river. “The sun rises in that direction and it is a marvelous view from these windows in the morning.”

Nathan watched Mrs. Hoff, his wife, and son look out the window and savored their delight. Little Nate tugged at his ear and buried his head in his mother’s bosom.

“I don’t generally let my rooms to the men who work the docks, or sailors either, but there is one sailing man living here, Mr. Bailey. He’s Jamaican. They have such wonderful accents, don’t you think?”

Nancy nodded. Nathan wondered if she had ever known anyone from Jamaica or heard a Jamaican accent.

“And he’s a religious man,” Mrs. Hoff continued. “He was a chaplain on one of the ships. He came in here one day asking if I had a room to rent. He said, ‘God told me to get off the ship here and make this place my home.’ If you could have seen him. He

was so sincere when he said it. I believed he was touched by God. I gave him a room right then and there. He's been living here almost three years now."

"Well, I'll be," said Nancy.

"He's working two jobs, so he can bring his wife and son from Jamaica. He says he almost has enough money to send for them," said Mrs. Hoff. "I hope he sends for them soon. He is such a hard worker. He works for a minister in a Baptist church in town and he is a waiter at the Ten Eyke Hotel at night when he is in town. He still goes out on the ships if the money is good enough, sometimes months at a time, but not as much as he used to."

"How many others live here?" Nathan asked. He pulled the trunk from the hall into the big room. He had a good feeling about the place. Madge was right. It was a good place start.

"Oh, the other families," said Mrs. Hoff. She moved some keys on the big ring back and forth with her thumb. "Mrs. Sweeney and her daughter, Nora, live on the second floor. A sad case. They came all the way from Ireland, her husband and her and the girl. Mr. Sweeney's cousin who lives here got him a job in the lumberyards up on the North End. They hadn't been here more than a few months when there was an accident. The poor man got crushed by a load of lumber that fell off of a train car he was loading."

"Oh my lord," said Nancy. "How awful. Truly."

"That happened almost a year ago. I thought Mrs. Sweeney would take the girl, she's twelve now, cute little thing, and go back to Ireland. But she stayed. They are doing pretty well now. Some people have such strength."

Nancy nodded in agreement and kissed the gold cross she wore around her neck. “Is that the bedroom?” she asked as she put little Nate on the floor and walked towards the open door to the second room. Little Nate smiled at his father and then toddled shakily behind the two women.

“Yes, let me show it to you.”

Worn out by the eight-hour train ride from Buffalo and lugging the trunk from the station, Nathan sat down in a chair at the table and listened as Mrs. Hoff finished showing the rooms and telling Nancy about the other boarders. He wasn't sure what to make of Mrs. Hoff. She seemed to know a lot about her boarders and was fairly quick to share it. Where was Mr. Hoff? She hadn't mentioned him.

Mrs. Hoff mentioned other boarders. tried to remember what she was saying about them, but their names and occupations started to flow together as Nathan half-listened to Mrs. Hoff speak. He wasn't very good with names anyway. He did remember hearing that there was a bathroom at the opposite end of the hall and that they would share it with the Hahns and some of the other neighbors.

The only thing on his mind was his finances. He had not been prepared to pay Mrs. Hoff a month's rent in advance. Fresh linens weekly were extra. He had figured he would have enough money for the family to live on for at least a month, maybe two, if he was careful. If the economy was as good as Madge said, he was sure he would find a job in that time. Now, he wasn't sure his money would last more than a couple of weeks. He needed a job and he needed it soon.

“Here are the keys, said Mrs. Hoff. She placed two tarnished keys in Nathan’s hand. I serve breakfast promptly at six o’clock in the morning.”

After Mrs. Hoff was gone, Nancy unpacked the trunk and put some of their clothes in the bureau dresser in the bedroom. She laid Nathan’s best shirts, trousers, and brown serge suit on the bed and tried to smooth out some of the wrinkles. Among the clothes, Nancy found a wooden box slightly smaller than a men’s shoebox. It had a lock on it. She picked it up and took it into the main room where Nathan was dozing in a chair at the table.

“What’s in this?” She picked it up and examined it. “It doesn’t weigh much,” she said to herself. She put the box to her ear and shook it gently.

“My father gave it to me just before we left for Albany,” said Nathan. “Something that he wanted me carry. It’s just a few old family memories, nothing for you to be concerned about.”

Nancy looked at Nathan and narrowed her eyes. “You’re not going to tell me what’s in the box?”

“It’s not much of anything. Just some old pictures.”

“If it is just some old pictures, why is the box nailed shut?”

“That’s how my father gave it to me. It was his box. I’ll show you what’s in it later but I don’t want to open it now. After you finish unpacking the trunk, put the box back in it.”

Nancy sighed. He'd tell her what was in it when he was ready. After she finished unpacking all of the other items, she put the box back in the trunk. She gave it another shake before she put it away.

+++

Even though it was August, Nathan knew he'd need to buy some coal for the stove. He was sure Nancy planned to heat her flat iron on it, so she could iron out the wrinkles in his clothes until they were smooth and crisp. "A man needs to look good to get a good job," she had said to him on the train while they watched hours of pine trees and an occasional cornfield past the dusty train window.

Nancy felt more settled after unpacking the trunk. She pulled out the last of the food that Nathan's mother, Josephine, packed for them, some homemade bread, pot cheese, and beef jerky. She arranged it on a napkin in the center of the little table. She was grateful that Josephine had packed such good food. How nice and welcoming Josephine had been to her.

Nathan hadn't said anything, but Nancy knew money was tight. While they were on the train, she hinted that it would be nice to visit the dining car to get something to eat. She had never ridden on a train with a dining car before. When Nathan finally took her to the dining car, he ordered coffees for them and nothing else. The wrinkles on his forehead when he pulled the money out of the change pocket of his wallet told Nancy he hadn't wanted to spend it.

Nancy watched Nathan unwrap the newspaper from the two old coffee cups, plates, and silverware that her mother-in-law, Josephine, had given them.

“I’ll rinse these cups in the bathroom and bring back some water,” Nathan said.

Nancy thought it would be nice to have some coffee. She had a coffee pot. They could use the potbelly stove to heat the water, if they had some coal and she could warm the iron and press some clothes.

When he was back in their rooms, Nancy watched him hold the cup with both hands and take a sip. It reminded her of how deep in thought he looked when he held the communion cup the previous Sunday at the church where his father was pastor. How far they seemed from that place now.

“This town is going to work out,” Nathan said. He sliced off a portion of cheese and put it on a hunk of bread he had just ripped off the loaf. Nancy looked into Nathan’s eyes for some sign that he believed it.

“I know it will,” Nancy responded. She smiled at Nathan and handed Little Nate, who was sitting on her lap, a small piece of the soft part of the crusty bread. Little Nate squeezed the bread in his fingers and then stuffed it in his mouth. Saliva began to run down his chin. “Make sure you chew, Nate,” Nancy said as she wiped the spittle off his chin with a handkerchief she kept in the pocket of her dress.

“How does your sister know Mr. and Mrs. Hoff?” asked Nancy. Little Nate decided he wanted to be on the floor and struggled to get out of his mother’s arms. She let him down and he crawled away towards a teddy bear that was a few feet away on the floor.

“Madge and Skip met them in Saratoga. The Hoff’s love the thoroughbreds. A couple of summers ago, they were up to Saratoga during thoroughbred season and took a liking to a horse named Dancing Jack. Skip is Dancing Jack’s trainer. Skip said he’s a good little horse. When Skip took Dancing Jack to the reviewing area before a race, Mr. Hoff asked Skip if the horse was going to win. Skip gave him a little wink.”

“Did they have the dern good sense to bet on that horse?”

“Yeah. They sure did. Later that night, the Hoff’s happened into Madge’s café and discovered that she was married to Skip when they saw him helping her serve customers. Madge said the Hoff’s were in a fine mood because Mr. Hoff won some good money off of Dancing Jack.”

“Alright now. I bet they were then,” said Nancy smiling.

Nathan chuckled. “Madge said the Hoff’s ran up quite a big bill that night. Now, Mr. and Mrs. Hoff go to Madge’s café whenever they are in Saratoga. They say it brings them luck at the track.”

Little Nate toddled back to the table near his mother, dragging the teddy bear by one leg. He put a hand on the table leg to steady himself.

“What does Mr. Hoff do?” Nancy broke the last of the bread into two pieces. She scooped out some cheese, spread it on the larger piece, and gave it to Nathan. Then she took a bit of the smaller piece and handed the rest to Little Nate who grabbed it with both hands and shoved it in his mouth.

“Madge isn’t sure what he does for a living. But he sure likes to bet on the thoroughbreds and the harness races the rest of the year. And he likes to get tips from Skip.”

After they were finished with their meal, they walked down to the river to get a closer look at the docks. They walked through the little park that Nathan had seen at the end of State Street when they first arrived. Nathan carried little Nate on his shoulders. They found a bench under a tree and watched the men go up and down the gangplanks while they unloaded one of the big ships that came across the Atlantic Ocean to New York Harbor and then made the 150-mile trip up the Hudson to Albany. Nathan looked out at the river and the big ships and wondered if he was making the right choice. There was still time to move on, New York City maybe.

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The next morning when they entered the dining room for breakfast, most of the other boarders were already there.

Some of the people seated at the table looked at the newcomers with curiosity while others concentrated on eating their meals. Nathan wasn’t sure if he should sit down or wait for introductions. Nancy stayed close to Nathan, ready to follow his lead. Nathan mustered a smile in Mrs. Hoff’s direction but did not move. He didn’t see Mr. Hoff.

“Come in and sit here,” said Mrs. Hoff. She stood at the head of the long wooden table that dominated the room. “I have places for you.”

He felt Nancy close to him. She slipped her hand into his.

“Don’t be shy. We are all friends here. Sit down. I’ll introduce you to your new neighbors.”

Nathan held out the chair next to Mrs. Hoff for Nancy. She sat down and put little Nate in her lap. Once they were settled, Nathan sat next to Nancy.

“This is Mr. Brent,” said Mrs. Hoff. “You’ve been here almost as long as Mr. Hoff and I, haven’t you Mr. Brent?”

“Hello,” said Nathan and Nancy in unison. Little Nate buried his head in Nancy’s shoulder. Nathan nodded to Mr. Brent, a smallish man. It seemed to Nathan that he looked like a man who didn’t smile very often. Mr. Brent looked up, smiled uncomfortably, nodded, and returned to his meal of oatmeal, toast, and coffee. The smell of coffee permeated the room. Nathan felt a growl in his belly. Nathan remembered that Mrs. Hoff had said Mr. Brent worked in the Permits Office for the city.

“Mrs. Sweeney and her daughter Nora are next to Mr. Brent.”

“Hello to you. And such a sweet wee one,” said Mrs. Sweeney, a pleasant-faced, ruddy-cheeked woman. She smiled at Little Nate. “He looks like a handful. They all are at that age.” She was short and sturdy looking much like his wife, Nathan thought. Her hair was a rich auburn. “This is my daughter, Nora.” How wispy and frail she looked. She pushed her copper colored hair away from her face.

“Oh, he’s no trouble, no trouble at all,” said Nancy rocking Little Nate slightly and kissing his head.

Nathan noticed Nora staring at him. He smiled and she smiled back. She cocked her head to the side and pulled back a handful of hair that had fallen in front of her face

again and looked at Little Nate. He remembered the tragic story Mrs. Hoff had told them about Mrs. Sweeney's husband. It explained the sadness in Nora's eyes.

"Mrs. Sweeney works at Teague's Machine shop just around the corner on Broad Street. Nora is in the sixth grade at the Industrial School. A smart one she is."

"Mr. Novack is at the other end of the table." Mr. Novack looked up briefly.

Nathan tried to think of what Mrs. Hoff had said about him. It was something to do with the docks.

"And you have met the Hahns." The Hahns smiled cordially.

He had run into Mrs. Hahn on the way to the bathroom they shared. She seemed friendly.

Nathan tried to remember what Mrs. Hoff had said about them. He's a butcher in a meat market. Did Mrs. Hoff say Mrs. Hahn had a job?

"Hello again," said Mrs. Hahn smiling broadly. Mr. Hahn nodded his head politely and returned to his oatmeal.

"And next to Mr. Hahn is Mr. Schneider," said Mrs. Hahn.

Nathan remembered Mrs. Hoff mentioning Mr. Schneider was a jeweler. There was something about his face and the stoop of his shoulders that suggested to Nathan that he was a man who sat peering at small objects all day. Perhaps one day when he had the money, Mr. Schneider could help him select a diamond ring for Nancy.

Mrs. Hoff passed the bowl of oatmeal to Nancy. Nancy put some oatmeal in a smaller bowl that Mrs. Hoff laid out for Little Nate. She poured in some milk and mixed

it into the oatmeal with a spoon. Then, she took some oatmeal and coffee for herself.

Nathan was hungry but when the bowl got to him, he took a modest portion.

“If I may be so bold, what is it that you do, Mr. Wilson?” said Mr. Novack. He peered at Nathan through his gold-rimmed glasses. His gaunt face and sad eyes reminded Nathan of the basset hound that lived next door to his house in Buffalo.

“I’m looking for work in an automobile garage or a repair shop.”

“He’s a mechanic. Trained right at the Pierce Arrow plant in Buffalo, New York. Can fix anything on a car. Anything,” said Nancy. “Got a certificate and everything.”

“Is that so?” said Mr. Brent. “It’s an up and coming industry. I expect that they will need workers of all kinds.” Nathan had seen that look before. He had seen the same kind of looks when he first started working at the Pierce Arrow plant. How had someone like him gotten a job building automobile engines?

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On their second day in Albany, Nathan and Nancy found a grocery store with reasonable prices on Pine Street only a few blocks from the boarding house. They bought some things they could cook on the potbelly stove, rice, beans, and some canned vegetables. They bought some condensed milk for Little Nate and some bread. On the return to the boarding house, they met a man delivering coal to some of the houses in the neighborhood and Nathan bought some.

That evening, Nathan and Nancy enjoyed another evening at the docks. When it got dark, they returned to their rooms and Nancy got Little Nate ready for bed. Nathan had lingered at the docks past little Nate’s bedtime but the breeze drifting off the Hudson

had been so soothing Nathan had almost forgotten about his money troubles. Once back in the rooms, he was sobered with the fact that his need for a job was not something he could put out of his mind for long.

“I’m going down to the sitting room for a smoke,” he told Nancy. He hoped he didn’t sound as anxious as he felt. When he got to the sitting room on the first floor of the boarding house, he found Mr. Bailey sitting on a leather couch in front of a stone fireplace. There was no fire in the fireplace but the smell of smoke hung in the room and clung to the air. Nathan felt the smoke in his nostrils, the lingering odor of a well-used fireplace, and the pungency of freshly smoked cigars. It reminded him of the living room in his home in Buffalo. Nathan thought of his mother Josephine, and his younger sister Agnes, sewing or reading by the fire, as they did nearly every evening. Most evenings after dinner, his father sat in his leather chair, read the Bible, and made notes for his next sermon.

“You must be our new neighbor,” said Mr. Bailey rising from the couch to shake Nathan’s hand. Mr. Bailey was not as Nathan had imagined from Mrs. Hoff’s description. He had imagined Mr. Bailey as a small man, reserved and pious looking, who was never far from a prayer book. Instead, Mr. Bailey was tall, well over six feet, with broad shoulders and a toothy grin that seemed a permanent part of his face. His face exuded merriment, as if he had just heard the funniest joke. And his grip was hard as if his hand were made of wood with skin over it. “I am Desmond Bailey, so happy to meet you. Mrs. Hoff said that you and your family arrived just yesterday?”

“Yes, yes we did. I’m Nathan Wilson.”

“Come sit down,” bid Mr. Bailey. “Tell me all about yourself. I was just sitting down for my evening smoke.” Mr. Bailey pulled a small metal box out of the pocket of his shirt and extracted two cigars. I got these in Cuba on my last trip there. Try one. They are quite good.” Mr. Bailey pulled an oblong silver metal object with three holes out of his pocket. He slipped his thumb and his middle fingers through the outer holes and pulled his thumb and finger apart until the metal that filled the center hole spread apart. Mr. Bailey placed the curve end of one of the cigars in the middle hole. It made Nathan imagine a head in a guillotine. He looked away when Mr. Bailey severed the end and it dropped on the floor.

“You’ve never seen one of these have you?” Mr. Bailey said as he scooped the piece of cigar off the hardwood.

Nathan shook his head no. He had never smoked a Cuban cigar. His father stuck to White Owls. He said Cuban cigars were too expensive. “You can get White Owls at any store,” his father said. “They are cheap but good enough.” His father always poked a hole in the end of his cigars with a little punch he kept on his key chain. It was not as elaborate as the thing that Mr. Bailey was using.

Mr. Bailey smiled at Nathan, clipped the end of the cigar, and did the same to the other one. “I have seen the way you Americans treat your cigars. You punch a hole in the end, or even bite the end off. If you want a good smoke, this is the best way to finish the end.” He showed the perfectly cut ends to Nathan and handed a cigar to him. “There is a lot to love about America, but how you treat your cigars is not one of them.” Mr. Bailey

chuckled. Nathan detected the lilt of an islander in his voice that Mr. Bailey was trying to suppress.

“Mrs. Hoff said you have a wife and little son,” said Mr. Bailey as the two men settled in to enjoy their cigars. Nathan had never tasted tobacco so sweet or smooth. “I have a wife and son too, Matilda and Edward. They are still in Kingston but soon they will come to live with me here in America. I have almost saved up enough money. I am going to send for them soon.”

“How old is your son?” asked Nathan.

“Edward is thirteen. A fine boy. I can’t wait to have my family with me again. My Matilda and my Edward. Not every woman would wait you know.”

Nathan saw Mr. Bailey’s eyes fill. He wasn’t used to seeing such emotion in men. He had never seen his father cry, or his grandfather. It would be unthinkable. His father would find Mr. Bailey’s tears a show of weakness, but Mr. Bailey did not seem like a weak man. Nathan took a drag on his cigar and filled the air with smoke, providing Mr. Bailey with a veneer of privacy.

Mr. Bailey cleared his throat and used the back of his hand to wipe the corner of his eye. He picked up an ashtray sitting on a stand next to the couch. “Mrs. Hoff said that you are in need of a job, Mr. Wilson.” Mr. Bailey’s voice seemed too loud as it broke the uncomfortable stillness of the room. He handed the ashtray to Nathan.

“Thank you,” said Nathan taking the ashtray. “Yes, I’m looking for work.”

“And you fix automobiles?”

Nathan didn't like the idea that everyone seemed to know his business. He would be more careful when he spoke to Mrs. Hoff in the future. She shared information a little too freely for his taste, but she didn't say that much about herself and her husband still hadn't appeared.

"Yes."

"I don't know anything about automobiles or repair shops," said Mr. Bailey, "but if you are looking for work, a good place to go is the Friendship House up the Hill on South Swan Street across from the Cathedral of All Saints. The Episcopal priests from the Cathedral run the Friendship House. It is a meeting place for the people of the Hill. The priests help many newcomers find jobs. They might be able to help you."

"The Hill?" asked Nathan.

"Arbor Hill," said Mr. Bailey, explaining that one of the oldest parts of this old city was now where most of the newcomers got their start in this town. "Are you a church going man, Mr. Wilson?"

Nathan had spent nearly every Sunday and many other days of his life sitting next to his little sister Agnes and older sister Madge in the front pew of his father's church in Buffalo. His mother looked down on her children from the choir. She gave them stern looks if they didn't sit up straight and look like the well-behaved children of the pastor. He was happy to be beyond the constant reproach of his stern minister father. Yes, he was a church going man, but that was not what Mr. Bailey was asking.

"Yes, I'm a church going man."

“Then you must bring the family to church on Sunday. I assist the pastor, Reverend Hunt, at a church on South Swan Street, the Missionary Baptist Church. Please come this Sunday and enjoy the fellowship. We have some wonderful church members. I am sure you and your family would have a good time.”

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Nathan had spent nearly three weeks looking for work in different parts of town. He started with downtown. Once he could not find work there, he had walked up State Street past the Capitol Building and kept on walking into another part of town. The farther he walked, the more the houses had become more impressive. When he got to the junction of Western Avenue and looked down the expansive boulevard. The lawns broadened and became more landscaped and manicured. He walked on Western Avenue for nearly a mile. This is where the rich people live, he thought. No commercial buildings were in sight, so he turned around and headed back downtown.

He had taken the bus to North Albany and the West End. In North Albany, called the North End, he found a bustling commercial area near a huge lumberyard along the bank of the Hudson that processed the pine logs hauled down from the Adirondack Mountains to the north. Men were loading some of the lumber on massive ocean going ships docked at the riverbank. Nathan watched the men use the trucks to move the lumber from the lumberyard to the nearby train yard. Someone had to repair and maintain the trucks, he reasoned. He found the foreman in the dispatch office near the truck compound.

“Do you need any mechanics to work on the trucks?” Nathan asked.

The foreman was sitting at his desk with his back to the door filling out some paperwork. He glanced at Nathan and then swiveled in his chair to take a better look.

“What do you know about trucks?” asked the foreman. He rubbed his chin and then pulled off his spectacles and cleaned them with a handkerchief he extracted from his pocket.

“I worked in the Pierce-Arrow factory for three years. I built engines and I can repair any part of a car or truck.”

“You a union man?”

“What union?” asked Nathan.

“The Teamsters. All the drivers here are in the Teamsters. You can’t work here without being a Teamster.”

“Who do I need to see about getting in the union?” Nathan asked.

“You need to see John Murray about that,” the foreman replied.

“Who is John Murray?” asked Nathan.

“If you don’t know, there is no point in looking for work around here.”

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In the South End, the neighborhood next to downtown, Nathan discovered Luck’s Repair Shop on Second Avenue. He found the owner, Mr. Ferrell, sitting on a stool at a small countertop made out of corrugated tin. A half loaf of bread and slices of a big yellow onion sat on a dirty rag on the makeshift countertop. Mr. Ferrell, cut off a piece

of bread from the loaf with a knife the size of a small bayonet and laid it next to the onion. When he noticed Nathan, he set his concoction down on the filthy rag with some reluctance.

“I see you have no automobile, so you must be looking for a job.”

“Yes, sir.”

Nathan watched as Mr. Ferrell looked around his shop. The place was a mess. Tools lay on the floor, rubber hoses and drive belts sat in a heap on a wooden counter. Everywhere Nathan looked, he saw disarray.

“I guess I could pay you a dollar to clean this place up.” Mr. Ferrell looked at his meal with longing.

“I’m a mechanic, sir.”

“A mechanic you say?” Mr. Ferrell smiled as he picked up his meal with grease stained fingers and took a bite. Nathan watched him chew a few times and then swallow. The onions made a crunch when he bit into them. The sound reminded him of the hunger in his belly.

“I don’t need a mechanic but I do need someone to clean this place up. Do you want the dollar or not?”

Nathan started to say no thanks but then he thought of his finances. In two whole weeks, he had not found even one promising lead. He skipped lunch nearly every day and Nancy had prepared modest meals, mostly beans and rice, but their money was running low. A dollar was a dollar. It would put food on the table for a few days.

“Where is your broom?” Nathan asked. A day’s work was better than nothing.

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After a few days at the boarding house, Nancy settled into a routine. Every night, just before bed when it was coolest, she ironed the white shirt that Nathan would wear the next day with his brown serge suite and brown winged-tips shoes. As she had done every morning since the first day they arrived at the boarding house, she got up first, so that she could get Nathan ready for work. She opened the transom window above the door, so she could hear the activity in the hall and the comings and goings of her neighbors using the common bathroom on the floor. When it sounded like no one was using it, she went to the bathroom with the pitcher. Once she was there, she took a few moments to freshen herself.

Early morning in the bathroom was the only time in the day when Nancy had a few moments to herself. Of course, she loved taking care of Little Nate and he was a good boy but children need constant watching and caring for. It was exhausting. Nancy looked at herself in the mirror over the sink. The slight changes in the curves of her face told her she had lost weight in the last few weeks. She hoped that she was feeding little Nate enough. Mrs. Hoff made sure that he got a nice big glass of milk at breakfast every morning. She kept some Carnation condensed milk on hand at all times, so Little Nate could have milk any time he liked. She wanted to think that she was a good mother but she had her doubts. Being a wife and a mother wasn't easy and she wondered if it would always be this hard.

Nancy turned on the cold water and let it run. Somewhere in the wall, the pipes made a screeching noise. She reduced the force of the water until the screeching stopped. She wanted cold water but she didn't want to wake the whole boarding house. She put her hand into the stream running from the faucet to see if the water was cold yet. Rivulets ran over her fingers and around her wedding band. The slender gold band shone brightly in the water streaming from the spigot. She put the pitcher under the spigot and watched the water rise in the bottom. Had it been two and a half years since they eloped?

She thought about what her sisters and brothers were doing at that moment. Sarah and Grace would have just finished feeding the chickens and getting some eggs in for breakfast. Momma would be in the kitchen making Daddy's usual breakfast, fried eggs, bacon, biscuits, and coffee. Grace would be setting the table and Sarah would be making the coffee. Daddy and Brother would still be working in the fields until Momma called them to breakfast. Nancy turned off the water when the pitcher was nearly full to the brim.

When she got back to the room, she filled the basin on the chest of drawers and laid out a clean washcloth for Nathan, next to the clothes she laid out for him the night before. By then, it would be about half past five and Nathan and Little Nate would start waking up. Nathan didn't say much when he got up. It was his way. After Nathan had washed up and was going about his business of getting dressed, Nancy would get Little Nate cleaned up and dressed. While Nancy was washing and dressing him, he acted like he was in a trance. She would tell him what to do and he did it. "Lift up your arms, Little Nate." His arms would go up and Nancy put on his undershirt. "Lift up your foot, Little

Nate.” Sure enough, he would pick up a foot. He acted just like the people she saw at the Ringling Brothers Circus when it came to town just before her fifteenth birthday.

It was about the only day she could remember her daddy taking a few hours off from working the farm, so he could take them to the circus. Even Uncle Henry took time off from working his farm too. Aunt Beulah, and cousins, Jessie, Nelson, and Elizabeth all went. It was a wonderful time. She remembered a man at the circus, a magician named Eric the Magnificent. He called out for people in the audience to come on stage. Aunt Beulah went up even though Uncle Henry didn’t want her to. Once he got all the people on the stage, he did some hocus-pocus and the people on stage did anything he wanted. They didn’t seem to be awake and they didn’t seem to know what they were doing. He made them strut around like chickens, moo like cows, bray like donkeys, and all sorts of funny things. Aunt Beulah didn’t remember anything but going up to the stage and coming back.

“Now pick up your other foot.” Little Nate obeyed and Nancy fancied herself just as good a magician as Eric the Magnificent.

When breakfast was over, they went back to their rooms. Nathan took the pitcher and got some of the left over coffee. Mrs. Hoff always made plenty at breakfast. They had one more cup together and then she gave Nathan the sandwich she made for him. It was always peanut butter because Nathan said that is what he liked. Then, he went off to look for a job.

After Nathan left, Nancy waited for everyone to go to work and then she cleaned the coffee cups and utensils and the washbasin and pitcher. If Nathan’s extra shirt needed

washing, she'd wash it with lye soap in the tub in the bathroom along with anything else that needed washing. Then, she would wring the clothes as dry as she could before she carried them back to their rooms. For some reason, watching his mother twist the clothes to wring out the water delighted Little Nate. He laughed and danced as if it was the funniest thing he had ever seen.

After everyone went to work, the boarding house got quiet. She and Mrs. Hahn were the only two women who didn't have jobs. It was just the two of them and Mrs. Hoff until the people came home from work. Most days, Mrs. Hahn left the boarding house mid-morning and didn't return until mid-afternoon. Mrs. Hoff made a habit of checking in on Nancy at some point during the day.

Sometimes in the morning while it was still cool, Nancy would open the big windows that pointed toward the Hudson, so she and Little Nate could catch the cool breeze that came off the river. She would pull up a chair, and she and Little Nate would look out at the backyards of the houses on the adjacent block to see what the neighbors were doing. They discovered who had dogs, who had little children close to Nate's age, and who hung their wash out in the morning. Beyond the next block, they watched the big ships and little ships come and go. Each morning, they saw people in festively colored outfits crowding the dock waiting for the triple decker excursion boat they had seen on their first day. When they were all loaded, the ship steamed north, up the Hudson. The only city that Nancy knew up that way was Saratoga, where her sister-in-law and her husband, Skip, lived.

Sometimes, if the weather was bad, Nancy would play with Little Nate on the floor with the teddy bear his grandmother Wilson had given him on his first birthday. It's brown fur was patchy in spots and one eye was missing but Nate didn't seem to mind. When Nate got tired, she would sing the songs he heard at church and seemed to like. His favorite was "At the Cross." He especially loved the chorus and tried to sing along, "At the cross at the cross where I first saw the light

And the burden of my heart rolled away."

Sometimes, Mrs. Hoff invited Nancy and Little Nate to have lunch with her. She usually served a hot or cold soup and some fresh bread. Nancy was grateful for the companionship and kindness. She was also grateful not to have to eat her usual lunchtime meal, a peanut butter sandwich. During their lunches, Mrs. Hoff told Nancy about the downtown neighborhood. Broadway was the hub of the downtown nightlife. Pearl Street, the next street west of Broadway, was full of shops and markets. State Street began at the Hudson and ran west intersecting Broadway, Pearl, Chapel, and Eagle streets until its end at the steps of the Capitol Building. It was the center of commerce with banks, insurance companies, law offices, and the offices of congressional representatives and assembly members lining the way.

After lunch, after Little Nate woke from his nap, sometimes Nancy explored the streets that Mrs. Hoff described. She liked walking on Pearl Street with its small stores and markets. She liked walking past the little storefronts where the storeowners put some of their goods on stands outside. She especially liked a grocery store on Pearl near Columbia Street. What Nancy loved most were the fruits and vegetables that Mr. Verona

stacked on crates and pallets in front of his store. It reminded her of the vegetable stand her family had in front of her house. Many afternoons in the summer, she and Gracie sat on stools under an umbrella tending to the stand, selling snap beans, sweet corn, and tomatoes to passers-by.

Nancy made sure she was back in the boarding house before half past four, so she could have dinner ready for Nathan when he got home. Most times, he came home around half past five. The meal was the same most nights. Sometimes Nathan brought home some cooked meat like roasted chicken or shaved pork or beef that he got from one of the vendors on Pearl Street. Each day, even as days turned into weeks, Nancy never lost faith in the belief that when Nathan came home, this would be the day he would tell her he had found a job.

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At the end of the third week of searching, Nathan looked for a job at the Orange Motors garage. The manager, a man named Spitzzi, according to the sign over the door leading to the repair bays, hadn't even asked him any questions. "Naw, we don't need no mechanics right at the moment," he said. He wiped the grease off his hands with a shop rag while he looked Nathan up and down. Then, he stared beyond Nathan into the street.

Behind the manager, Nathan saw a 1929 Pierce-Arrow Model 133 Roadster sitting on the shop floor with the engine running. When he was working at the Pierce-Arrow plant, he built engines for many of the 133 models. The model 133 was a beauty and the engine was a dream. Built on a straight-eight cylinder engine with a single

crankcase and cylinder block assembly, the model 133 was one of the first Pierce-Arrows to use that design. Nathan had never been impressed with the carburetors that Pierce-Arrow designed. The butterfly valve spring was too weak and they needed adjustment too often. The model 133 used a German designed Stromberg UU-2 carburetor that purred like a kitten. Nathan could tell from the sound of the engine that there was something wrong with the cylinder compression, a leaking head gasket most likely.

“I have considerable experience working with the model 133. If you allow me, I can show you what’s wrong with it.” Nathan walked toward the manager as he stood in the doorway between the front counter and the repair shop area.

“We don’t plan on hiring any time soon. You have a nice day now.” He receded into the repair area, leaving Nathan standing at the service desk.

The counter man looked Nathan over and moved closer to the cash register. “Is there something else I can do for you?” he said. The counter man watched Nathan closely until he exited. He was still watching him when Nathan turned back to take his last look at the shop.

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They had been in Albany for nearly a month and still Nathan had no job. Nancy could see that he was getting discouraged although he tried not to let on. He was a quiet man. Nancy was used to that. He was content to hear her talk and just listen, but there was something about his temperament now that made her uneasy, like he was drifting away just a little bit more each day. She felt guilty that she felt relief when he went job-

hunting each morning. The strain of pretending that everything was fine was beginning to wear on her.

One morning, Mrs. Hoff had to go to Schenectady to visit a sick friend. When Mrs. Hahn left mid-morning, Nancy and Nathan were alone in the boarding house. After Nancy finished her morning chores, she collected Nathan and his teddy from the floor and sat down on a chair at the table. Outside, misty rain filled the dark sky. At the river, the fog was so dense Nancy couldn't see the ships at the dock. She had never thought of it before, but when Mrs. Hoff was in the house, there was seldom a moment when there wasn't the sound of activity, the clanging of pots, the swishing of a broom, or footsteps in the halls. Without the usual sounds, the house seemed somber and sullen. Before long, the hush and the prolonged noiselessness began to make Nancy feel uneasy.

Little Nate felt it too. He began to fidget in her arms. The last few nights, Nathan had gotten up and paced the floor in the other room. What would they do if they had to leave Albany? They could go to her family's home in Virginia. Daddy and Momma liked Nathan and all of the womenfolk would love to make a fuss over Little Nate. But Nathan was no farmer and he never lived in the south. He doesn't know the ways. A grown man from the north wouldn't know how to act. It's not the kind of life she wanted for her husband and she would never raise any of her children, especially a boy, in the south. No, that wasn't an option. They couldn't go back to Buffalo. Nathan's pride wouldn't allow it. Perhaps they could go to Saratoga. Madge and Skip said it was a good place to make a living, almost as good as Albany. No. That wouldn't work either. The town was about horses. That was fine for Skip and Madge who had the café. What would Nathan

do? If he couldn't find work with cars in Albany how could he possibly find work with cars in a town that only seems to care about horses? Nancy couldn't think of another option. As far as Nancy could tell, their future in Albany seemed bleak. A sense of despair overcame her and she began to cry, softly at first and then more loudly. Before long, Little Nate began to cry too. The louder little Nate cried, the louder Nancy cried. The louder Nancy cried, the louder Little Nate cried. Soon they were both crying at the top of their lungs like newborn babies. Tears ran down Nancy's face. A passage of Nathan's favorite hymn drifted into her mind.

“Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.
But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do.”

Nancy was still in the depths of her self-pity when she heard a knock on her door.

“Mrs. Wilson. Is everything all right?”

The banging on the door startled Nancy. She thought she and Little Nate were alone in the boarding house. When she opened the door, she found Mrs. Sweeney standing in the doorway.

“Mrs. Wilson are you all right?”

Nancy pushed tears from her cheeks and tried to speak. The look of concern on Mrs. Sweeney’s face convinced her that she must be a sight. She set Little Nate and on the floor. He stood next to his mother and looked up at Mrs. Sweeney, wide-eyed and silent. After a few moments, Nancy regained her composure.

“Hello Mrs. Sweeney. Would you like to come in?” Nancy stepped aside to show Mrs. Sweeney to the table.

“Oh, no thank you, dear girl. I heard the crying. I just wanted to make sure you were all right.” Mrs. Sweeney waited at the doorway. Little Nate receded into the room and picked up his teddy bear.

“I’m sorry,” said Nancy. “I didn’t think there was anyone here.”

“I didn’t mean to intrude. My employer is moving his offices and he gave me the afternoon off. Now that I see you are all right, I’ll leave you alone.”

“No, please Mrs. Sweeney, please come in and sit down.” Nancy realized that she wanted to talk to someone. If anyone could understand what it was like to try to make a new life in a strange new place, it would be Mrs. Sweeney.

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Near the fourth week of job hunting, Nathan decided to go to the Friendship House. He should have gone there right away, as Mr. Bailey had suggested, but he didn’t think anyone there could help him find the kind of work he was looking for. Now the prospect of finding a job as a mechanic seemed remote. He had gone to every place in

town he found in the newspapers or that someone had recommended to him. He wondered if his insistence that he find a job as a mechanic was simply his stubbornness. There was honest and decent work in the city if he wanted it. His money was almost gone. Maybe it was time he looked for something other than a job as a mechanic. If he had a job, at least he would be able to put food on the table and pay the rent that was coming due soon. If he had a job, he could still look for the job he wanted. What was most important was that he get employment.

Friendship House, a small building consisting of a large main room and two smaller rooms, was located on the grounds of an Episcopal church. When Nathan entered the main room, men were playing checkers at several tables near the entrance. At one table, men had just finished. The loser, a short stout man with a thick, black, handlebar mustache, and ruddy cheeks, was vacating his seat after a loss. The winner caught Nathan eyeing the open seat.

“Sit down, Bub. You’re next.” Ernie set the board with the speed and deftness akin to a card shark. “Smoke before fire,” said Ernie after taking a long drag on his Camel and setting up the board.

When Ernie put the cigarette to his lips, Nathan saw the yellow nicotine stains on his long spindly fingers. His skinny head poked out of his tan workmen’s overalls like a turtle out of its shell. His overalls looked impossibly oversized on his skinny body. His skin glistened like the paper on the fine Cuban cigar that Mr. Bailey had given him. Although Ernie did not appear to be short, Nathan estimated that he could not have

weighed more than 130 pounds soaking wet. He made Nathan think of greyhounds in motion, or the wind whipping off Lake Erie and careening through the streets of Buffalo.

Ernie talked nonstop as he systematically cleared the board of Nathan's checkers.

"If you don't concentrate better than this, you won't win a game," Ernie said with a smile as he scraped a checker off the board. Ernie put his stained fingers up to his chin and rubbed. "You look like a man with a burden."

The way Ernie looked when he asked the question made Nathan feel like he could talk to this stranger. "I've been in town for some time looking for a job and I haven't found one," said Nathan.

"I know what it can be like not to have a job. I see you're married," said Ernie looking at Nathan's wedding ring.

Nathan told Ernie about Nancy, Little Nate, and where they were living.

"I got a wife myself. Her name is Mae. What line of work you looking for?" asked Ernie.

"I'm an automobile mechanic," said Nathan.

"That so," said Ernie. "I like automobiles myself and engines. I like to build things, especially motors and things that move."

After Ernie said that, he knew he and Ernie were destined to be friends.

Over the course of three games, Ernie told Nathan about the best places to eat, where he could find the speakeasies, and where he could find the best music.

"This ain't your regular town for us," continued Ernie as he moved one of his checkers to a new square. "Colored folks and white folks have lived and worked together

and gotten along around here for over 300 years, just like they do at this house of friendship.”

“Once we got free, we have been pretty much like everyone else, able to live pretty much anywhere we want and can afford. You notice that there ain’t nobody segregated by race here like in other northern towns?”

Nathan looked around the big room. He and Ernie sat unnoticed. Three men listened attentively to a priest explain to them something on the piece of paper in his hand. Another man looked at some bulletins posted on a wall. Men sat playing checkers at the other three tables in the middle of the room. They looked like immigrants, with the dirt of their homeland still on their boots. The scene reminded him of the story he read about immigrants in second grade, Ragged Dick. There was something about these men. Nathan got the sense that they were not just a group of immigrants trying to find their way in a new place, but a community.

“It sure wasn’t like that in Buffalo,” said Nathan looking at the assortment of men around the room.

“If you are looking for work to hold you over until you can get a job you want,” said Ernie. “I know a place where you can make some real good money real quick. It’s downtown, not far from the boarding house where you are staying.”

“What is the job?”

Ernie leaned forward and spoke in a low voice. “Let’s not talk about it here.”

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Nathan and Ernie left the Friendship House and headed downtown. Ernie looked up and down the street, when the two reached a narrow alley between two houses. “In here,” said Ernie. He slipped between the two buildings and pulled a silver flask out of his pocket. Ernie took a long gulp from the flask. “Want a drink?”

“Alcohol is illegal. Where did you get that?”

Ernie laughed. “This is Albany. Nothing is illegal unless the party bosses say so.” Ernie took another long gulp from his flask. Then he fired up a cigarette, took a drag, and cleared the smoke from his lungs. “You want a drink of this?” he said, pointing the flask in Nathan’s direction.

Nathan had drunk alcohol before. Larry Moncrieff at the Pierce Arrow plant kept some he smuggled from Canada in his locker and several men at the foundry always had some. Where they got their liquor, Nathan never knew. Nathan took the flask from Ernie and took a sip. He handed the flask back to Ernie who put it away quickly. The liquor burned as it slid into Nathan’s stomach and the men continued on their way.

By the time they got to Pearl Street, Ernie had filled Nathan in on more of the history of Albany. As a native, he prided himself on his knowledge of the city.

“Albany has always been a city with an unusual view of how things are done.” He patted the flask in his pocket and winked at Nathan. “In the early 1600s, the first Dutch settlers traveled up the Hudson River lookin’ to trade for fur with the local Indian tribes. Those traders brought one lone African slave with them.” Ernie eased the words out of one side of his mouth as the Camel bounced up and down on the other side. Somehow, he managed to take a drag without even touching the cigarette with his hand.

“Isn’t that something?” said Nathan enjoying the bit of history and Ernie’s enthusiasm as he shared it.

“Yeah. Imagine what those Indians must’ve thought of that bunch,” said Ernie smiling and lighting up a new Camel.

After they crossed Clinton Avenue, they passed in front of the Kenmore Hotel.

“That’s the Kenmore Hotel. The son of a freed slave started it. His daddy, his last name was Burke, I forget his first name, was a body servant to one of the Van Rensselaers. The Van Rensselaers are one of the founding families. The son of the body servant, Simon Burke, was a freeman and started out as a waiter. Eventually, he made enough money to buy his own restaurant over on McArdle Street. It was so successful he made enough money to buy this hotel. By the time he died, it was the fanciest hotel in town. He was one of the richest men in the city. Imagine that.”

Ernie rested for a moment. Then he retrieved his flask from his pants. “You want another drink?”

Nathan shook his head no. Ernie took another quick nip and then put the flask away. He lit another cigarette. Ernie and Nathan stared at the big ornate entrance to the hotel. Two dark skinned men in richly brocaded 19th century style red coats and white breeches held the doors open for the hotel guests. Then they moved back to their places on either side of the big wooden doors. It reminded Nathan of the lawn jockeys he’d seen on nearly every lawn when he drove through the south to visit his family in South Boston, Virginia. There were more than a few in Buffalo too.

“Still, there ain’t but a few of us,” Ernie said soberly. “There’s never been but a few of us. It’s just like it was when there was that one lone African slave and all of those Dutch settlers. We’re barely here, but as long as we are,” Ernie paused and searched for the right word, “accommodating,” he finally said. “If we are accommodating we can always figure out what we need to get along.”

Nathan watched the men bow and open the door for a short stout silver haired man in a blue pinstriped business suit. The man hurried past them as if they were invisible and disappeared into the brightly lit lobby. Standing in front of a hotel in white breeches and a fancy coat didn’t seem like much of a job to Nathan, but he could appreciate that sometimes you take what you can get. He thought back to the last job that he had before he left Buffalo, foundry chipper in a steel plant. As he thought about it, the visceral memories of the hot air of the plant floor came back to him. He smelled the metal in his nostrils and the oven-like heat that radiated through his work gloves as he filed smooth the jagged edges of hot metal pipe casings. The work was boring but if you lost your concentration on the job, you could burn a hole through your glove and cripple a hand.

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Nathan had heard of speakeasies but he had never been inside one. He would have disgraced his father and the family if the police had arrested him in a speakeasy in Buffalo. Ernie and Nathan stood in front of an unremarkable looking grocery store on Pearl Street.

“It doesn’t look like much, but this is the place I told you about.” Ernie finished the last of his Camel, dropped it on the ground, and crushed it with his foot.

The man at the door knew Ernie and let them in at once. The room was dark and not very large, no more than thirty by thirty feet in size. An ornate bar sat at the far end of the room and ran the full length of the wall. Bottles of various liquors sat on shelves behind the bar. A bartender dressed in a white shirt and an apron, poured a draft of beer from a golden spigot into a huge mug, and leveled the head of the beer with a foam scraper. Then the bartender sent the mug careening nearly the length of the bar where a man caught it as casually as if he were picking up a napkin and then pressed the mug to his lips. Several other men chatted with each other at the bar. They looked at Nathan and Ernie when they entered the room and quickly returned to their beers and conversation. Against another wall, four men sat at a table playing cards and drinking what looked like whiskey from whiskey glasses. One of the men, neatly dressed and wearing an ascot, began to raise his voice above the others.

“Face it men. Prohibition is ending. It might not be now but it will be soon. We don’t want to be on the wrong side of this.”

When one of the men saw Ernie and Nathan, he threw his cards onto the table, got up, and walked towards them.

“Ernie, you’re a little early. Who is this?” the man said, looking at Nathan.

Ernie pulled a brown envelope out of his pocket and handed it to the man. “This is a friend of mine. His name is Nathan. I thought he could take over the territory on Third Street.”

“You vouch for him?” The man looked Ernie in the eye and Ernie straightened up and stopped smiling.

“Yes, I vouch for him.”

Nathan was surprised to hear Ernie say that he was his friend. He was even more surprised that Ernie would vouch for him after knowing him for such a short time. These didn't seem like the kind of men you wanted to disappoint.

“Okay. I'll check with Hoff.” He looked at Nathan. “If you want the job, come back tomorrow night at nine. If Mr. Hoff says it's okay, you can have the job. If Hoff says okay, Ernie can show you the ropes.”

So this is why Mr. Hoff is never around thought Nathan.

“What's the job? whispered Nathan, once the man was back at the card table.

Ernie laughed. “Numbers. Running the Numbers.”

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That evening when Nathan returned to the boarding house after visiting the speakeasy, he found Nancy on the bed holding Little Nate in her arms. “The boy is burning up. He's been getting worse since the afternoon.” Nathan looked at his son, lying limp in his mother's arms like a rag doll. Little Nate looked in his father's direction with unfocused eyes. The effort to look up seemed to exhaust him and he slumped even deeper into the soft flesh of his mother.

“He won't eat nothin'. I've been tryin' to keep 'em cool but he keeps gettin' hotter,” she said as she wiped little Nate's face and bare chest with a wet cloth. Nathan

knew Nancy was upset when she slipped into her southern accent. She pulled back the thin summer blanket exposing the pristine white sheets she hand washed in the hall bathtub the day before. She laid little Nate on the sheet.

“Did you speak to Mrs. Hoff about getting a doctor?” He had no idea but no matter how much the doctor cost, it was more than he could spare.

“Yes, she’s got a telephone. She called ‘em. He’s s’ pose ta be on his way. That was ‘bout ten hours ago.”

Little Nate turned his head and stared up at Nathan with glassy eyes. He planted his head in the pillow. His sweat soaked into the sheets as he rested on the bed. Nancy went to the dresser and poured some water onto a washcloth.

“It’ll be all right, baby. Momma’s takin’ care of you.” Nancy mopped up little Nate’s sweat and rubbed him down again with the wet cloth.

An hour later Mrs. Hoff knocked on the door. Her face said her news was not good.

“I spoke to Doctor Franklin’s wife.” Mrs. Hoff wrung her hands and then pinned them to the sides of her skirt. “There was an explosion and fire at the meat packing plant. All the doctors in town are at the hospital. She didn’t know when Dr. Franklin might be able to get away.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Hoff.”

“If I hear from Doctor Franklin’s wife, I will let you know.”

Nathan watched her walk down the hall. She wanted to say something, but said nothing and disappeared down the stairs.

“He’s burning up.” Nancy nestled little Nate beside her on the bed. She mopped his face and chest with the washcloth.

“It’s going to be okay.” How could he comfort his wife? This was not the first time he’d seen a child so ill. His father took him with him when he visited sick church members. “No medicine is stronger than the faith in God.” He watched his father offer the comfort of prayer and faith but his father’s faith was so strong, much stronger than his own. He couldn’t comfort his own wife Nancy with faith the way he had seen his father do so many times.

Nathan sat at the kitchen table in the evening darkness. He found his hands pressed together. Without thinking, he was on his knees. He tried to think of his own words, not the ones he had heard his father say so many times when he comforted his gravely ill parishioners and their families. Then he realized that words were not needed.

A half hour later, Nathan heard a knock on the door. It was Mrs. Hahn and Mrs. Brent.

“We heard about the little boy. How is he doing?”

“He still has a fever, but he is sleeping right now.”

“This might help,” said Mrs. Hahn handing a pot to Nathan. “It’s a poultice with some herbs in it, a family remedy. I cooked it on our coal stove. Hold it on with a cloth.”

“Thank you. Thank you kindly, Mrs. Hahn,” said Nathan taking the pot. He looked into it. There was a soft mass made of plant-like materials with a strong smell of herbs and peppers. He put the pot on the coal stove next to a pot of soup that Mrs. Hoff had brought by a little earlier.

Nancy got Little Nate to sit up and gave him some of the soup she had simmering on the coal stove. He ate about half a cup.

“He doesn’t seem any better even after the soup,” said Nancy holding Nate in her lap.

“Try the poultice,” said Nathan. He fished some of poultice out of the pot with a fork, placed it in a moist washcloth, and handed it to Nancy. She felt the washcloth with her hand to make sure it wasn’t too hot. She turned Little Nate on his back and placed the washcloth on his chest. She had just about gotten him to sleep when there was another knock on the door.

“Maybe this is the doctor,” said Nathan.

When he opened the door, there stood Mrs. Sweeney.

“How is the wee lad?” said Mrs. Sweeney.

“He’s still got a fever.”

“I made this medicine for him. It’s a potion. It will break his fever. Use it all,” she said handing the bottle to Nathan. “It’s an old remedy. It works.”

Nathan took the bottle. “Thanks, Mrs. Sweeney. We appreciate your kindness.”

“I’ve been praying for him. You’re God fearin’ people. I can tell that.”

“Thank you for everything.”

Mrs. Sweeney turned to walk down the hall and then stopped and looked at Nathan.

“Maybe I shouldn’t tell you this ‘cuz the advertisement won’t be in the papers til the mornin’. My employer, Mr. Teague, is starting a new automobile business. He is

looking for three mechanics. The advertisement says that appointments start at noon tomorrow. If I were you, I'd get there by 5:00 a.m., before the Times Union's out. I'm guessing there will be a line before you know it. The garage is at 85 Stockade Street. Can you remember the number?"

"Yes. Yes I can."

"Mr. Teague's a starchy man. He likes everything proper, but he's decent." Mrs. Sweeney paused and looked towards the hall for a moment, then looked back at Nathan. "He's the kind of man that will give you a chance. Be there at 5:00 a.m. It's when he comes to work. He'll see you if you stand by the garage doors. That will mean something to him, a man getting there that time of the morning to look for a job. She waved back to Nathan as she headed down the hall. Have him drink the potion. The wee lad will be fine."

Nancy had Little Nate drink the potion, just as Mrs. Sweeney had told Nathan. Nathan considered going to the hospital to find a doctor, but he was afraid to leave Nancy and the boy, so he waited tending Nancy as much as Little Nate. He could see she was in a state of near hysterics. They stayed up most of the night waiting for the doctor. By three o'clock in the morning, he still hadn't come, but Nancy seemed much calmer and Little Nate was sleeping, although his breathing was a bit labored.

"Get some sleep, Man. You got to be at the garage by 5:00 in the morning. I'll get your clothes ready."

Nathan got into the bed next to Little Nate and put him on his chest. Little Nate was hot against his chest. Nancy went into the other room, put some of the coal that

Nathan had bought for her in the stove and lit a fire. In a few minutes, it would be hot enough for her to iron his best white shirt until it was crisp, and his suit pants, and his jacket. Nathan had already put a shine on his best shoes. He could smell the coal and the starch as Nancy ironed his shirt. "A man needs to look good if he wants to get a job," his wife muttered. He heard her spit on the flat iron to see if it was ready. He drifted off to sleep to the rhythm of her iron thumping against the table.

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Chapter TWO

James Teague looked across his desk at the man sitting in the chair in front of him. He wondered what John Murray wanted.

“Think of it like this Jimmy. You’re making a contribution to the Democratic party and the betterment of the great city of Albany.” John Murray took a long slow drag on his stump of a cigar and then blew a gray puff of smoke towards the rafters. The smoke swirled and mingled with the particles of dust suspended in the sunlight shining through the big shop windows. Murray shifted his body to reposition himself on the wooden chair that was too small to accommodate his bulk comfortably.

Murray pulled the brown bowler off his head, revealing a crop of curly blond hair, and positioned the bowler on his knee. He tugged at the neck of his starched white shirt as if he was not used to wearing it.

Teague observed Murray in his brown pin stripe suit. Murray looked uncomfortable and the new suit fit awkwardly in the shoulders. The coat was too loose and revealed too much of the sleeves of his shirt. Teague tried to wait patiently for Murray to reveal the purpose of his visit.

“Listen,” said Murray breaking the silence. “It’s 1931. Times are changing. You’re a businessman. I’m a businessman. In this town, there are rules. If you play by the rules everybody wins.”

Murray was finally getting to the point. Teague wondered what was worth Murray’s time for him to come himself to his shop on a Saturday morning? Perhaps Murray had heard about the ad in the Times Union. He had men everywhere. More than likely one of his ward committeemen told him. Very little happened in town without them knowing. But the ad asked applicants to show up between noon and 1:30 p.m. It was only 8:00 a.m. Teague wondered how Teague knew his daily routine.

“My office knows that you are getting ready to turn this building that you just bought into an automobile dealership. You got a nice spot here Jimmy, right near the Armory, lots of nice traffic. As county assessor, I’m paying you this visit because I want to make sure that you know that the city has to assess your property now that it will be a business instead of a warehouse. There are a lot of city codes and ordinances that this building will need to meet, and of course, my office will need to conduct a new assessment. I’d hate it if there were any delays in opening your new automobile dealership.

Teague didn’t respond and waited for Murray to continue.

“It’s a smart move Jimmy. Albany could use another car dealership. The city and the state governments are always looking to buy cars. You’re selling Chryslers, right?”

“Yes. Chryslers and DeSotos.”

Murray glanced at the automobile sitting in one of the fully equipped service bays on the other side of the room. It was a 1925 Chevrolet Superior, not a Chrysler, or a Desoto. Teague could see the Murray was trying to figure out what a Chevrolet was doing there. It was like an elephant in the room. Murray scratched the side of his head, tousling his hair, and peered at the Chevrolet.

Teague knew that Murray could assess his property for three or four times its real value if he felt like it, or a small fraction. It was his call. He ran the machine. He made the rules.

“Sure Mr. Murray. I understand,” said Teague, bringing Murray’s focus back to the business at hand.

“No need for us to be formal, Jimmy. My friends call me John.”

“Sure John, and my friends call me Teague.”

Teague pulled his checkbook from the inside breast pocket of his jacket and reached for his fountain pen. He placed the tip into a jar of black ink that he kept on the side of his desk and pulled the lever that sucked the liquid into the belly of the pen. Then he removed the excess from the tip with his blotter and began to write a check.

“We want to make sure that everything is done right.” When he was finished, he slid the check across the desk.

“That’s a little contribution to the party. As the party chairman, I know that you will put it to good use. I wrote it out to cash to make it easier for you to deposit.”

Murray picked up the check and stared at it for a few moments. Then, the corners of his mouth curled into a small smile. “Sure. Sure, Teague. That’s fine,” said Murray

as he waived the check like a little flag in an attempt to dry the ink a bit faster. Once he was certain the ink would not smudge, he placed the check in his coat pocket and patted it.

Murray stared placidly at Teague as if Teague had just given him a glass of water rather than a check for a thousand dollars. “You know, Teague,” Murray continued as he rose from the rickety chair and placed his bowler back on his head, smoothing his hair with his hands, “The Democratic party needs men like you on the town council. Have you ever considered running for public office?”

Teague looked directly into Murray’s eyes. That question was as loaded as the dice it was rumored that Murray used when he played craps. The Irish ran the Democratic political machine in Albany, but they couldn’t get elected to political office. It was still a Protestant city. Murray was looking for a good Protestant to run for office in exchange for a certain amount of loyalty. He probably figured that Teague’s check meant he had bought him, or at the least, rented him.

All Teague really wanted was to make sure that his dealership opened without problems from the Murrays, John, his older brother Patrick, and younger brother Michael. The Murrays controlled the political power in Albany. John used his political post as tax assessor, one of the few jobs besides Sheriff and Chief of Police to which an Irishman could be elected, to put the squeeze on businessmen and insinuate himself into situations that might benefit him or the machine. He could manipulate the assessment of any property in Albany. Patrick was a lawyer, a really smart lawyer. He could figure all of the angles and turn them into a straight line. Mike was muscle in the old-fashioned sense of

the word. His presence in a room was enough to make most men so nervous they would be willing to agree to almost anything. Perhaps it was a sign of good faith that Mike was not part of the visit today.

Teague studied Murray's face. The tranquility was disarming. If Teague said no, it would mean delays to the opening of his business, maybe long and expensive ones. Yes meant he would be a front for Murray and the Democratic machine. After ten years of quietly establishing a machinery shop in Albany and watching the Murrays systematically gain a stranglehold on elected offices, it looked like it was no longer possible to hide in the shadows. Sooner or later, either you were with the Murrays or it was them against you. Until now, he had been able to stay safely on the sideline. Now he had to pick a side. He knew which side he needed to be on, but as his father always told him, "a great sin can enter by a small door."

Murray began to speak about his plans for the city and the Democratic Party. Teague tried to look attentive but only half-listened. There were always men like Murray to deal with, men whose honor was subject to speculation, and it was always a mistake to underestimate them.

After Murray left, Teague thought back to when he was eleven and first learned about honor. He recalled the sound of fallen autumn maple leaves and the needles of firs crunching underfoot as he made his way along the short cut from his house through the woods and the apple orchard owned by the nuns at the convent school. It was over three miles from his house just outside of Springfield to the school in town. That year, his father was having trouble finding work and there was never enough breakfast in the

mornings. By the time he got to the nun's orchard full of Macintoshes, Macouns, and Spencers, he was always starving. He only picked a few apples, not enough for the nuns to notice. Sometimes he picked extra so he'd have some for lunch. Soon, he found that he could sell two or three apples a day, enough to buy something to eat from the Perkin's Corner Store down the block from the school before he headed home at night.

Timothy Console told the teacher that Teague was stealing apples from the nuns. He could still see his father, flushed with shame, head bowed with hat in hand, listening to the principal tell him how his son had stolen apples, a cash crop for the convent and school, and sold them for his own profit. "The sisters were gracious enough not to ask for restitution, but a transgression of this seriousness cannot be overlooked, Mr. Teague. James is expelled from school for two months."

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Teague inhaled the quiet of the empty warehouse interrupted only by intervals of Mrs. Sweeney's vacuum cleaner whirring on a floor above him. Teague surveyed the room. The only remnant of Murray's visit was the faint smell of smoke that still hung in the air. The room was empty, almost barren with the exception of the mechanics bays he had set up to the specifications of the Chrysler and DeSoto representatives who had told him what tools his mechanics would need to repair their automobiles. The only furniture on the oaken floorboards was a desk with a desk chair and the accompanying chair he had set up so that he could interview the job applicants. The rest of the space was quiet and cavernous, waiting for mechanics equipment and a fleet of Chrysler automobiles to fill it.

Teague looked at the purchase order on the desk and studied the list of Chryslers he had on order twenty-two automobiles, ten Imperial Sedans, ten Series 77 Crown Sedans, eight Royal Coupes, and four Model 66 Roadsters. He considered the five floors of his newly acquired building. The first floor would house the mechanics' bays. He imagined the vehicles spread out on the second and third floors surrounded by excited customers with cars ferried up and down in the two oversized freight elevators that could lift two cars each to any floor in the building. He had only two more months to finish renovating the showroom floors and turn the two uppermost floors into office space and storage for spare parts. Then he would be the only dealership to sell Chryslers and DeSotos in upstate New York.

Breaking the silence, one of the huge service elevators rattled and then levitated into the upper reaches of the building. Before long, it returned and Mrs. Sweeney, a tired looking woman in her forties, and her daughter, Nora, a wispy girl about eleven or twelve with fiery red hair and freckles, emerged from the big elevator bay. Mrs. Sweeney held a rusted faucet handle in her hand and Nora stayed near the lift and stared at Teague with apprehension.

"Beggin' your pardon Mr. Teague but there is a wee problem with the plumbing on the third floor. The hot water handle in the wash room's come loose," she said waving the useless handle in the air.

"I'll get someone to fix it by this afternoon Mrs. Sweeney."

"Thank you, sir."

"Are you getting on alright?"

“Yes sir, and thank you for letting me bring Nora to work with me today. She’s a good worker, really she is. We’ll be getting back to the cleaning now. I’ll move up to the fourth floor. The washroom is fine up there.”

Teague watched Mrs. Sweeney and her daughter enter the elevator and disappear. Maintaining the dealership was more work than when she maintained the machine shop. He needed to hire more cleaning people to give Mrs. Sweeney a hand, at least until the dealership opened. The woman had a hard enough time in Ireland. Now she was in a new country, a widow with a young daughter. Perhaps he could have her take over some of the housekeeping duties at his home instead of cleaning the dealership.

Teague glanced at his watch. It was half past eight. He went to the Colvin Avenue side of the building with the big garage doors and peered through the glass opening to see if anyone was waiting to apply for the jobs as mechanics. By the main door, over thirty men were already waiting in a line that stretched along the side of the building. At the front of the line was a small colored man in a crisply ironed suit. He had seen the man standing near the building when he had arrived for work in the morning. The man looked too well dressed and neat to be indigent and he didn’t look dangerous. It had never occurred to him that the man might be waiting in line for Teague to interview him for the mechanic’s job. Hadn’t the man anticipated that there might be some dirty work associated with the interview?

Teague looked back at the Chevrolet sitting in the mechanics bay. The automobile had been in the building when he looked at the location for the first time. Teague was able to strike a good bargain for it as it didn’t start and the owner had no idea

what was wrong with it. It would be a good test for the mechanics during their hiring interview. He had looked it over but had not investigated what the problem was. He was an engineer, but he had not studied automobiles and their engines much. It was just a simple combustion engine of some configuration and a series of related systems on a four-wheeled chassis. Teague's interest was combustion science, but his interest and the focus of his studies at R.P.I was turbine engine technology. The science of the automobile was of no real interest to him but it was an up and coming industry that could pay the bills and perhaps give him the means to fund some research of his own.

Teague opened the garage door and stepped onto the sidewalk. The line of men that had been mulling about, straightened themselves into an orderly line when they saw him emerge from the building. The men were dressed in work clothes, bib overalls and workmen's caps, except for the first man in line, dressed in a suit.

"I'll see you one at a time men," said Teague as he looked down the line. One more man rounded the corner and sauntered to the end of the line as he spoke. The heat was oppressive. Some men were wearing sleeveless shirts, while others were shirtless under their bib overalls. The first man in line still had on his suit overcoat. He was wearing a tie with his white shirt. Incredibly, he appeared cool and relaxed.

Let's see how good a mechanic this man is while wearing a suit thought Teague as he ushered the man into the building.

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Teague wrote the first applicant's name on the note pad on his desk, "Nathan Wilson." The man sat in the chair that John Murray had occupied earlier in the day. The contrast was striking. Where Murray had seemed oversized and awkward, Wilson seemed elegant and poised. In his suit, crisp white shirt, and tasteful tie, Teague found it hard to believe that Wilson was really a mechanic.

"Tell me about your experience as a mechanic," Teague asked.

"I have certification as an automobile mechanic from Pierce-Arrow." Nathan pulled a document from his breast pocket and handed it across the table to Teague.

Teague looked at the diploma. It confirmed that Wilson had training at the Pierce-Arrow plant in Buffalo, New York and was competent in the areas of engine repair, transmissions and transaxles including automatic transmissions, suspensions and steering, heating, and engine performance. On paper, his credentials were solid.

"Why do you want to be a mechanic?" Teague asked.

Nathan looked at Teague as if he didn't understand the question.

"What is it about working on cars that makes you want to do this as a profession?"

Nathan looked at the certificate on Teague's desk and was quiet for a moment.

"When I was twelve, my father brought home a 1922 model 80 Pierce-Arrow Touring automobile. It was the most beautiful machine I had ever seen. It had a 70 horsepower six-cylinder engine and purred like a kitten. It was perfect. From the moment I saw that car, I knew that the only thing I wanted to do for the rest of my life was be around automobiles. I wanted to know everything about them. I wanted to know how to

fix them, how to drive them, and how to keep them perfect. I feel stronger about automobiles today than I did then.”

Teague understood. He felt that way about engineering and building a business. He knew how it felt to take something and shape it by your will and desire. Teague pointed to the Chevrolet.

“See that automobile over there. The motor won’t start. Let’s see if you can fix it.” Nathan followed Teague to the Chevrolet.

“The battery is fully charged. The engine turns over though,” said Teague. He stepped back to watch the action.

Nathan got into the driver’s position on the bench seat of the Chevrolet. He put the gearshift lever into neutral position, moved the throttle lever on the steering wheel to the idling position and the spark lever to full retard, the starting position. Then he put his foot on the starter button on the floor. The engine turned over but did not start, so took his foot off the starter.

“How fresh is the gas?” Nathan asked stepping out of the driver’s seat.

“I had the tank siphoned and the gas replaced.”

“How much gas was in the tank when you siphoned it?” Nathan knew that empty tanks were subject to rust. That could mess up the engine.

“I’m not sure,” said Teague. “I didn’t supervise the procedure.”

Nathan had to assume that rust wasn’t the problem but there was a possibility that the vacuum tank that fed gas to the engine was empty because of the siphoning, or the intake hose to the manifold had become loosened. He opened the hood of the automobile

and smelled the engine compartment. No smell of gasoline. The hose to the manifold was on tight. He checked the filter screen on the bottom of the carburetor. There was some sediment on the screen but not enough to cause the automobile not to start. The battery was good, so he could rule that out. The likely problem was the igniter or the coil. Maybe the contact points were burned out, or needed adjustment. Maybe a wire from the coil to the ignitor was loose or broken. Nathan inspected the resistance unit on the top of the coil. It didn't look burned out so the coil looked in working order. The high-tension lead from the coil to the ignitor was in place. Nathan felt the connections with his hand. The connections were sound. He removed the top of the condenser to look at the coil inside. He checked the condenser contacts inside the coil. If the contacts were burned, or too pitted, the spark to the condenser would be too weak to start the automobile. The contacts didn't look good, but they didn't look bad enough to keep the engine from starting. The problem appeared to be the ignitor.

Nathan suspected the points needed adjustment. He removed the top cover on the ignitor to reveal the cam, driving pin, and the contact points. He went back to the service bench and found a contact gauge in a drawer. It was a nice setup, nearly as good as the setups at the Piece-Arrow factory. He inspected the contact points. They were worn but serviceable. They would need a cleaning and an adjustment. He looked for an oilstone on the service bench to use to clean the points.

It hadn't been that long since he began the trouble shooting but Teague looked like he was becoming impatient. Nathan needed to find the problem soon. He couldn't find an oil stone, but he did find a magneto file. He removed the contacts, gave them a

light filing, making sure that he filed them level, and then reinstalled them in the ignitor. He loosened the contact screw lock nut and set the size of the contact opening using the contact gauge. He tightened the locknut and rechecked the gap.

“I’m almost done,” Nathan said. He looked at his watch. The whole process had taken fifteen minutes. Nathan put the cover on the ignitor and closed the hood. He noticed a smudge of grease on his index finger and wiped it off with a shop rag. “It should start now,” Nathan said. He got into the driver’s position, adjusted the levers, and pressed the accelerator. The ignitor churned. After a few seconds, the engine compartment shook and rattled and the engine sprang to life.

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Nathan put his hand in his pocket and felt the five silver dollars that lay there. He felt the impression of the Walking Liberty image on each one as he turned them over. He felt the eagle with spread wings on the other side as he rubbed his fingers on the surface of the coins. He wanted to pull them out and look at them but it would not be wise to show his money while he was walking on the street. It was Saturday evening at suppertime and Dove Street was nearly empty. When he reached Sheridan Park a few blocks from the where it intersected State Street, he saw a mother playing with her toddler on the freshly mown grass and suddenly realized that he had been gone since early dawn. Nancy was probably frantic with worry about where he might be. Once he told Nancy that he had a job, no, that he had a position, she would forget her worry. He would tell Nancy how his new employer, Mr. Teague, had not only hired him on the spot,

but had engaged him to supervise testing of the mechanical skills of the other applicants and assessing their capabilities. “Now that you fixed it, can you foul it up again for the next applicant to fix?” Teague had said. At the end of the day, Mr. Teague gave him five silver dollars for the day’s work and told him he would be the foreman of the mechanics.

The toddler, a boy, broke loose from his mother’s grip and ran toward the merry-go-round where some older boys were spinning it a few yards away. The mother caught up to the toddler and picked him up before he reached the merry-go-round. Enraged, the boy screamed and squirmed in his mother’s arms. Nathan began to feel guilty that he had gotten so engrossed in the day that he had not thought of Little Nathan at all. He seemed better this morning. Nathan doubled his pace and headed for the corner of State Street. Once he got to State, it was only a few more blocks to the boarding house.

At State Street, he came upon the cluster of state office buildings. They looked similar to the city office buildings in Buffalo. Maybe all office buildings look alike, he thought. He never wanted to work in one. What kind of job was it to sit at a desk and push a pencil around a piece of paper all day? How could that compare to working with your hands to make machines work? Where was the sense of accomplishment? Where was the beauty in it? He thought about when he was thirteen. His father brought home the automobile, the Pierce-Arrow. It was the most beautiful machine that he had ever seen. The cabin was two different colors. The bottom panel was a cream color. Just below the windows, at the level of the door handles, the hood and the top of the cabin were the color of caramel candy. The fenders were black.

“What kind is it, Sir?” Nathan asked his father, his eyes fixated on the marvel of metal that sat in front of his house.

“It’s a brand new 1922 model 80 Pierce-Arrow Touring automobile,” said the reverend in a matter-of-fact manner as he stepped off the running board. “President Roosevelt drove a Pierce-Arrow you know,” he said, as he rubbed his hand across the black glassy finish of the front fender.

“Where did you get it?” asked Nathan stepping closer to get a better look. The sun hit the glossy finish on the hood and it glistened like moonlight on Lake Erie.

“Percy Pierce, the owner of the Pierce-Arrow Automobile Company, presented the automobile to me himself.”

Nathan was impressed that the owner of an automobile company would present a car to his father but he was aware that he was a man that people respected.

Nathan moved to the front of the car. The engine was still running and the hood of the car and the radiator in front vibrated in a steady pulse. The gleaming chrome hood ornament, an archer with his bow fully stretched, leaning forward poised to let loose an arrow, bobbed to the rhythm of the pulsing motor.

“Why did the owner of the Pierce-Arrow Automobile Company give you such a beautiful thing?” asked Nathan as he put his ear close the hood to hear the sounds of the engine better.

“It’s a donation to the church. Mr. Pierce said a man of my status should not be driving around town in that old model T. It’s a generous donation but Mr. Pierce is a generous man.” Reverend Wilson gazed at the new automobile and then back to his

son. “He believes the work I do in our community is important to the entire city. The mayor appointed me to his advisory council today.”

Nathan could see that his father was proud that the owner of a big automobile company would give him, or rather his ministry, such a wonderful gift. He knew that his father was an important man in the community. Nearly every night, parishioners came by the house to ask for his father’s help with something. Even the mayor called their house on several occasions.

Nathan’s father stepped back onto the running board and opened the driver’s side door. “I’m going to shut her down,” he said as he slid onto the bench seat in front of the steering wheel.

“Can I see the motor running before you turn it off?” Nathan looked towards his father hoping for an approving nod. Reverend Wilson looked small behind the wheel of the massive automobile.

“For just for a minute. Mother will be wanting to serve supper soon.”

Nathan lifted the metal flap of the hood to expose the motor. He looked closely at the intricate interlace of thickly coated wires, painted metal, and rubber hoses that pulsated and shivered. He leaned closer and felt an intoxicating heat on his face. He felt his blood rush to his head. In his whole life, he had never experienced such a feeling, not even when he kissed Sally Mae Jackson near the fountain in Lincoln Park when he was eleven.

“That’s enough, Nathan. It’s just a piece of metal.” His father had never been pleased with his enthusiasm for automobiles.

Now, as he neared the boarding house, Nathan broke into a quick trot. If Little Nate was well enough, he would take him and Nancy to that Italian restaurant on Eagle Street, the one that Nancy said looked so nice, but now that he had a job, he knew he was going to save one of those dollars and he'd keep saving whenever he could. He was going to take care of his family and he was never going to be broke again.

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CHAPTER THREE

Nathan stared at the parts list on the mechanics bench and took a swig of Nehi orange drink. He kept a few bottles at his work bay at all times. It was the only soda he liked, and it stored well because it didn't have a lot of fizz in it. He pulled his pocket watch from his shirt pocket and checked the time, half past eleven. Ivan, the parts man, would arrive in a few minutes. Nathan wondered how Ivan made the hundred fifty-three mile trip from New York City every week and always managed to make it to the dealership in Albany between half past eleven and noon.

He needed the head gasket that was on Ivan's truck to fix the Desoto in the bay. He had promised that Mr. Morgan could pick it up by the end of the day. One thing Mr. Teague insisted on is that the mechanics have cars ready when promised. He had to finish filling out the parts order before Ivan arrived, too. Nathan surveyed the belts and hoses that hung on the wall. The tricky part for Nathan was anticipating what kinds of parts he might need for the next week. If he needed a part that he hadn't anticipated, he could call the parts warehouse in New York City but phone calls cost money and there would be another expedited delivery fee. Mr. Teague kept track of every expense. After two years, Nathan could anticipate the jobs the dealership would get each week, mostly

tune-ups with oil changes, changing broken radiator hoses, and broken fan belts. As long as he kept a small amount of inventory on hand, he could make do.

Sitting in a brown paper bag on his counter, the fried chicken and biscuits Nancy had made for his lunch was sending out an aroma that took his mind off his job at hand. He liked living close enough to work that he could go home and sit down to a hot home cooked lunch when he had the chance, but this was not one of those days. Today, he had too much work to do. He had gone home and asked Nancy to wrap his lunch in waxed paper and put it in a paper sack, so he could get back to work. He picked it up an hour ago, but he had been so busy he hadn't had time to eat any of it. There it sat making his mouth water.

Finally, Nathan heard the familiar rumble of Ivan's truck as it parked in front of the garage doors. He went to the garage door and opened it. The big green truck, a 1933 Dodge Pickup fitted out with a flatbed with a huge storage compartment on it, sat on the other side of the door.

"Nathan my friend," said Ivan as he uncoiled his long body out of the driver's side of the truck. Nathan followed Ivan to the back of the truck to unload the parts. Ivan climbed in and rummaged through the stacks of boxes.

"Here's your order," he said, handing several boxes down to Nathan. Nathan looked at the boxes. They were made of a paper material like cardboard but they felt thicker and stronger.

"Those boxes are made of corrugated paper-board," said Ivan with a smile, as if he had read Nathan's mind. "We're using them to transport our parts now."

Nathan felt the parts shift in the boxes as he arranged them in his arms so he could carry them better.

“I left the new parts order inside,” said Nathan still looking at the boxes. “I’ll go get it.”

“There is still one more box.” Ivan picked another box off the floor of the truck, tucked it under his arm, and followed Nathan inside to the mechanics bay where he left the parts order form. Nathan knew that Ivan made the run from New York City to Albany once a week and tried to make it home by dinnertime, so he could have dinner with his wife. Nathan hated to waste Ivan’s time.

“That smells delicious. Where is that smell coming from?”

“It’s my lunch,” said Nathan. “My wife’s fried chicken and biscuits. You want a piece?” Nathan opened the sack and fished out a drumstick wrapped in wax paper.” Ivan unwrapped the paper and revealed the golden brown drumstick. He took a bite. Nathan watched him devour the chicken. He considered having a piece himself, but he was still working. It would be unprofessional. Mr. Teague would not approve.

“Say, this taste is as good as it smells. The skin has so much flavor and it’s moist and tender. My wife makes good chicken, but not like this. How does she make it?”

“I don’t know how she makes it, a little of this and a little of that. It’s a family recipe. That’s how they cook in the south. Pretty much everything tastes good. Want to taste a biscuit?” Nathan went into the bag, found a biscuit, and handed it to Ivan.

“This is delicious too,” said Ivan with a mouthful of biscuit. “If this is how your wife cooks, you are a lucky man. Your wife should open a restaurant. My wife packs a lunch for me when I make this trip. I forgot it today.”

Nathan took the lunch sack off the counter and handed it to Ivan. “Here, take this for your trip home. I’ve got an orange Nehi you can have too.” He handed a bottle of soda to Ivan. He hadn’t noticed before how big Ivan was, at least eight or nine inches taller than he.

“I won’t forget this, my friend.” Ivan waved as he put the truck in reverse and backed onto Lark Street and headed south towards Coxsakie. Nathan looked at his watch again. He should make it, he thought, and by seven that evening Ivan should be home having dinner with his wife. He opened the boxes and put away the parts except for the head gasket for the DeSoto. He had to get the car fixed before Mr. Morgan arrived at five.

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Teague arrived at the modest home on Delaware Avenue where John Murray lived. The small lawn leading to the two-family home was manicured and the grass lush, green, and thick. As he navigated the few steps from the curb to the front door, the sun shone on the silver tips of the massive flagpoles that jutted out of their perches on either side of the broad front porch. An American flag rippled slightly in the light summer breeze on the left. The New York State flag waved majestically from its anchor on the other side of the porch. Teague felt the history in the clapboard siding covered over with

a coat of fresh white paint. It seemed sacrilegious to knock on the smoothly polished oaken front door.

Mrs. Murray opened the door and beckoned Teague in. She was a petite woman and wore her hair in a permanent wave. It seemed the style of the day. “John is expecting you,” she said.

The house was small. If John Murray was getting rich, you couldn’t tell it by the modesty of his home. It looked no different inside than any of the other unpretentious older houses in the neighborhood. Mrs. Murray led Teague through the paneled hall covered with family pictures and mementos.

“Have a seat in the living room. I’ll let John know you are here.” Mrs. Murray gestured to a room off the hall. Teague sat on the couch and waited. After a few minutes, Mrs. Murray returned.

“John is waiting for you in his office.” She gestured down the hallway.

John Murray sat in an overstuffed chair next to a big bay window overlooking a small but well-manicured back yard. On the end table next to his chair sat two china cups on saucers, a bowl of sugar cubes, and a teapot on a trivet. A secretary desk dominated the room. On a hutch were photos of men of power shaking hands with Murray, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Joe Kennedy, Hamilton Fish III, and other smiling faced men Teague did not recognize. The largest picture was of Murray and Paddy Doyle, the man Murray displaced as the leader of the Albany Democratic Party.

“You want some tea? My wife believes in Prohibition. She’s trying to get me to like this stuff.”

Teague accepted a cup of tea to be polite. Murray filled a cup and handed it to Teague.

Murray poured himself a cup. “It’s better if you put a little something in it, but I better not do that here. My wife has the nose of hound dog.” Murray gave Teague a wink, then picked up his cup of tea and blew on it.

With the physique of a lumberjack, curly blonde hair, and twinkling blue eyes, Teague thought Murray was an imposing figure in his overstuffed leather chair.

“She’ll skin me alive if I put a ring on her table,” he said with a smile on his face. Murray put his cup of tea back down on the saucer Mrs. Murray had placed on the table next to his seat.

“I know some things about you, Teague,” Murray said without warning. “I know you graduated from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in nineteen twenty-two and opened up that machine shop down by the docks on Frontage Road. You did well. I know you are a good businessman. You hold a patent on one of those big turbine engines that General Electric uses and that gave you enough money to open up your new automobile franchise.”

Teague wondered where Murray was leading. He hadn’t said anything that couldn’t be found in the local newspapers.

“You are a young and ambitious man like me. That’s plain to see. I had my people do some digging and I found out some things about you that are interesting to me. You’re from Springfield, Massachusetts. Your father is a gunsmith for the Springfield

Rifle Company. And your people are Cornish.” Murray picked up his cup of tea, leaned back in his chair, and took a sip.

It seemed to Teague that Murray took some sort of satisfaction in knowing about his family background. He wondered why Murray had gone to the trouble of investigating him. Was this the beginning of some sort of extortion scheme?

“You’re a Protestant, but you’re Cornish,” Murray continued. “Most of the Cornish are miners. Based on your father’s profession, I’m guessing your kin were hunters and trappers, real contrarians. You Cornish are hardscrabble people. You don’t look down on the Irish because we are hardscrabble people too, and you don’t like that crowd with their noses up in the air any more than the Irish. You even went to a Catholic school run by nuns just like the Irish. I am a good judge of men and I believe two things about you. Like me, you have a deep-rooted interest in making this city grow and prosper. And you are a sensible man open to sensible propositions.”

Murray settled into his chair, adjusted his teacup, and nestled the cup and saucer in this lap. He put the thin bone china to his lips and sipped. Then he returned the cup to the saucer and balanced it on his broad flat thighs.

“The French may have come down from Canada a long time ago to trade with the Algonquian tribes. Henry Hudson may have sailed his ship up the Hudson in the seventeenth century and claimed this land for the Dutch. And the Dutch, Brits, and other Protestants may have made this city prosper through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but it’s the Irish and the Democratic Party that can bring this town into the twentieth century.”

“I’ll be blunt, Teague,” said Murray. “Do you want to join with us and help make this city what we know it can be?” Murray paused for a moment.

“What I am going to say is between us.” Murray looked Teague hard in the eyes and waited until he nodded.

Murray sipped his tea and looked out the window. “This city has only had Protestant mayors and the city council is run by Protestants,” said Murray.

“The Protestants built this city but they don’t like to get their nice suits all wrinkled; they’d rather sit in their posh offices in City Hall and let other people do the dirty work. It’s okay for Catholics to be the bureaucrats, as long as a Protestant sits in the mayor’s office and the Protestants run the City Council. The Blue Bloods won’t stand for an Irishman, or any Catholic, to hold a high political office in this city. In 1904, the Protestants let Paddy Doyle run the Democratic Party as long as he didn’t upset the apple cart. Paddy is a great fellow, but he was not much of a party organizer. He didn’t understand what it took to win elections or make this city grow. When me and my brother Mikey hooked up with Paddy after we came back from the Great War, Paddy thought winning elections was all about shaking hands and making speeches. That’s not what it takes.”

“What does it take?” asked Teague. He was beginning to understand why Murray had invited him to his home for this meeting.

“It takes knowing what you have of value. Paddy didn’t know. ”

“And what is that?” asked Teague.

“The immigrants,” said Murray. “Paddy was trying to organize the Irish into a voting block and get Irish candidates elected, but the Germans, Italians, Poles, and Jews were pouring into Albany before the war and settling in Arbor Hill, in the Gut, and the North End. They were looking for work on the docks unloading the ships and in the train yards, the brick factories, and the shops downtown. Paddy was trying to get them to register and vote for the Irish candidates. Hell, they didn’t care anything about Irish candidates. They didn’t care who was running for office. What they cared about was food on the table and a roof over their heads. A bag of potatoes got them to the voting booth faster than a long-winded speech. Once we started getting the immigrants lined up we had a real block of voters, but that was only half of it and the easy half at that. The immigrants could register and vote but there still weren’t enough of them for the Democrats to elect candidates on their own. What we need is a different approach and that is where you come in.”

Teague had no real interest in politics but he understood the value of it. It was part of everything in Albany from how much you paid in taxes, where you lived, and what jobs you could get. Murray might not become as powerful as he expected but it was in Teague’s best interest to listen. “How do you mean?” he asked.

“We figured out a way to use our power to give the Protestants what they want and get what we want at the same time. Paddy thought the power was in holding the political offices because that was what the Protestants wanted. The Protestants have run the city for so long they forget where power really comes from. The power isn’t in the office. Power comes from knowing how to make the deal. If you can make the deal, you

can put anyone you want in office, and you can get what you want done. Once we figured out how to do that, we knew what to do to control the city. That's why we've created the Apparatus."

"The Apparatus?" asked Murray.

"Pure and simple, the Apparatus is a way to tap into vanity and greed. Paddy always focused on appealing to the Irish, Catholics, and other immigrants. He saw them as just a block of voters. They are more than a block of voters. They are currency. If a particular Protestant wants an office, we can make a deal. We assure him the votes to get elected and he agrees to do some things we ask. We are not going to run around like shantytown potato eaters either. My brother Michael, and his friend Philip Van Slack, came up with the idea of the Apparatus. They were chums in Albany Law School, Class of '14. Van Slack is from one of the most prominent blue blood families in Albany. The Van Slacks have been here since the seventeen hundreds."

"What's in this for Van Slack, if his family is so prominent?" asked Teague.

"The Van Slacks have plenty of blue blood prestige, but not as much money as you might expect," Murray responded. Philip finds Protestant candidates to run for mayor and City council offices. Michael has made deals with company owners and other groups that can muster up some votes in exchange for favors, a lucrative contract, a favor from the police or some other department the Democrats control. Once they are in, they are under the influence of the Apparatus."

Teague was beginning to see that Murray was even more powerful than he had believed. "How long has the Apparatus been in existence?" Teague asked.

“We started the Apparatus after the Great War, once we moved Paddy out. Honestly, I think he was happy to step down. He could see he wasn’t cut out to do the job that needed to be done. Back then, the Republican Party was made up of tired old men who weren’t doing anything for the city. Whitney Simpkins ran it like his own Harvard country club. He walked around like he had a stick up his ass and didn’t listen to anyone, especially the businessmen. He played right into our hands. He was fond of telling members of the press that the only use for working people was to serve men of wealth like him. He forgot that many of the newspapermen are Irish. You can imagine what a field day we had with that one. Since we started, the Apparatus has made the careers of many politicians and some people’s fortunes. We keep this town safe too, especially now during Prohibition. The mobsters could be overrunning this town like they do New York City and Chicago. They’re not, thanks to the Apparatus. Sure, Albany is a wet town and maybe there was a little gambling too but we never let the mob in. The Apparatus saw to that. It’s a good town. Everybody is making money. Working people are still moving here because of the jobs and prosperity, and the Apparatus makes sure that when they get here, they register Democrat.” Murray took a final sip of his cold cup of tea and placed the cup and saucer on the coaster on the end table. “Are you with us?”

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Nathan had only been in Mr. Teague’s office two other times in the two years he had worked at the dealership. The first was the week he started, when the movers came to take his big ornate wooden desk from the first floor up to its current location on the third

floor. The movers arrived at the same time as a shipment of automobiles and Mr. Teague asked Nathan to supervise the move of his. The dealership wouldn't open for another week, so there wasn't much work for him then anyway. He was surprised how sparse the office was, just a few pieces of furniture and that big desk.

The second time was almost a year later when Mr. Teague had Danny, the office boy, come to get him. Nathan wondered why Mr. Teague was summoning him to his office. Nathan spoke to him every day. If Mr. Teague wanted to say something to you, he came to you. He wasn't a man to call people into his office. Nathan tried to think of anything he might have done wrong. Had a customer made a complaint? He didn't think so. When he got to the office, Mr. Teague was looking at a set of brochures trying to decide which models of automobiles he wanted for the next selling season. "Which of these automobiles is the easiest to maintain and repair?" he asked Nathan. Mr. Teague always looked at things with a level eye and tried to anticipate what his customers might want. After Nathan gave his opinion and was about to leave, Mr. Teague said to Nathan, "Could you have Danny get me a small block of ice? I've twisted my ankle."

Mr. Teague had a way about him that many people found unnerving but not Nathan. What people saw as formality, Nathan saw as Teague's attempt to be straightforward. He wasn't a man to waste words. Nathan appreciated that. It wasn't as if Mr. Teague didn't take part in running the everyday activities of the dealership. He spent much of each day on the showroom floor talking to customers or with the mechanics, asking questions about the automobiles. Sometimes his ways were a little peculiar, but

people seemed to like his plain talk and honesty, and it was clear that women found his formal manner charming.

When Nathan got to Mr. Teague's office, the sunlight that flooded through the two large windows behind the desk surrounded him like fuzzy halo.

"Nathan, please sit down," Teague offered a Shaker chair. Nathan picked the one that was not bathed in sunlight and sat down. Mr. Teague was always serious, but today he seemed beyond his normally sober demeanor.

"It's been a busy several years, hasn't it?"

"Yes it has, sir." As usual, Mr. Teague's demeanor gave nothing away.

"You've been a valuable asset to this endeavor, Nathan. I am hoping you will consider taking on a role of some personal importance to me."

"I'll do what I can, sir."

Teague paused briefly and then continued. "I believe that the automobile is the future of travel in this country. People and businesses are going to need automobiles, and they are going to need to buy them from someone. You and I have watched this dealership grow and become profitable despite the weak economy. I am working on some new opportunities that could increase our business significantly."

Nathan speculated that these new opportunities involved John Murray. He had seen him in the dealership several times over the past few weeks and he clearly wasn't interested in buying an automobile. Each time he went straight to Murray's office and stayed for some time.

“These new endeavors necessitate much more activity on my part, lots of evening meetings and a good deal of local travel, and I am in need of someone to drive me from place to place. I’m going to tell you something that you may find amusing. The automobile is a marvelous machine, but I don’t enjoy driving them. It requires too much concentration. Driving is not the way I want to spend my time. I could use the services of someone who could drive me to my appointments. It is important that this person be someone whom I can trust to take me to my appointments and manage his duties with the utmost discretion, a man like yourself. If you are willing to take on this additional responsibility, I am prepared to increase your salary by five dollars.” Teague looked at a paper on his desk, “This would increase your current wage of twenty-six dollars and fifteen cents to thirty-one dollars and fifteen cents a week. In addition, as I would need your services several evenings, you will have full use of one of the sedans that you can take home at night. Are you interested?”

Nathan thought about what he could do with the extra money. With a new house and a new baby, the money would come in handy. Nancy wouldn’t like him leaving her alone with the boys at night but he sure could use the money.

“I wouldn’t mind.” said Nathan.

Teague leaned back in his big leather chair and smiled slightly.

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Nathan Wilson and Ernest Jenkins had been friends since the first time they met at the Arbor Hill Friendship House. Their strongest bond was their love of automobiles.

The friends could talk for hours about the relative merits of the four-cylinder engine versus six-cylinder engine, or a Ford model A coupe versus a Chrysler CM coupe.

Ernie saw the frame and wheels in a barn in Cocksackie one day when he was out for a drive with Mae. He paid Elmer, the junk man who roamed the streets of Arbor Hill buying and selling various items of trash and treasures, seventy-five cents to haul the frame back to his house once the farmer told him he could have it as long as he got it out of his barn.

“What do you plan to do with that thing?” asked Nathan when he found Ernie putting the frame up on cinder blocks in the old shed with grease paper windows behind Ernie’s house on 1st Street.

“Give me thirty-five cents.” Ernie stuck out his hand and waited.

“Why do you want thirty-five cents?” asked Nathan already hunting for the loose change in his pocket.

“Just give me the money, man,” said Ernie, grinning a wide grin.

Nathan handed Ernie the quarter and dime.

“Now you are half owner of this frame. We’re going to build us a model “T.”

“Say what?” said Nathan. “Where are we going to get the money for parts?”

“We ain’t going to buy no parts. You know how many people around here have parts from old model T’s? Able’s seen ‘em. They are all over. We can take them off their hands for nothing and fix ‘em. We can build this car from the frame up.”

“Aw, you are crazy,” said Nathan.

“I’m telling you we can do it. Let’s make a bet. Let’s build this car and not spend any money on parts. We’ll only use parts that we can get for free. I already know a man over in Guilderland who has an old engine he thinks is no good, but I know what’s wrong with it. We’ll keep score of who collects the most parts. The one of us who collects the most parts, gets to keep the car.”

Nathan didn’t have any use for the automobile, but Ernie was so excited about the prospect of building it that Nathan couldn’t say no. Besides, it might be fun to build the old Model T from the ground up. Since the parts were interchangeable in most years, Ernie was probably right. There were plenty of places they might be able to find repairable parts, especially if they cannibalized them.

“Okay,” said Nathan looking at the frame. It had surface rust on it but nothing a little sand paper and steel wool couldn’t take care of. He knew a mechanic, Jim Wheeler, over at the Ferguson’s auto repair on Western Avenue. He wondered if he might be able to get some of the parts customers discarded after they got their cars fixed.

“You gonna have time to help me work on this heap, right?” Ernie lit up a Camel and leaned against the workbench in front of the window. He took a drag and blew out the smoke in a small deliberate stream. “That guy Teague runs you pretty ragged as it is. He’s got you running him around town nights and weekends, don’t he?”

Nathan hadn’t really thought about how much time he would have to work on the Model T. Ever since Mr. Teague had declared himself a candidate for the city council, Nathan had spent many evenings shuttling him around the Albany. Working all day and driving Mr. Teague around some nights and weekends did take up a lot of his time. But it

enabled him to buy a new roof for the house he and Nancy had bought on Third. Working on the model T wouldn't take up that much more time. Nancy would understand.

Nathan and Ernie agreed to rebuild the car and make a contest out of finding parts. They agreed that the parts could be salvage or cast away, but none could cost more than ten cents.

Once word of the contest spread through the community of Arbor Hill, many of Ernie's and Nathan's neighbors, including old man Wolanski who never participated in anything, were actively engaged in helping them find free parts for the old car. Some neighbors, like Nathan Green, bartered Nathan's services to do minor repairs on his automobile in exchange for parts he saved from his old model T when he bought his new Dodge from Armory Garage. Others were happy to get rid of bulky parts in need of repair and not worth taking to the salvage yard, like the rear axle assembly Ernie's neighbor Arnold Stecktor, had in his garage.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Nancy laid her youngest son Brady in his crib next to Little Nate's bed. Little Nate was already asleep. Nancy straightened up, put her hands on her hips, and stretched her back to relieve the ache. It was after nine and Nathan still wasn't home yet. He seemed to be getting home later and later now that Mr. Teague was running for councilman. She headed for the kitchen. Nathan would want something to eat when he came home. She turned on the radio and waited for the tubes to warm up. Once they were warm, she tuned in to that new program Kraft Music Hall with Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. The bouncy tone of clarinets and woodwinds filled the kitchen. Through the floor, she heard the faint sound of another radio tuned to a station she couldn't make out, band music of some sort, but more exotic and foreign. Sometimes she wished that Nathan had not picked a house that had two floors that were like two apartments, but the Zimmermans' rent nearly paid the entire mortgage.

She looked in the icebox and pulled out two lamb chops wrapped in butcher's paper. Nathan loved lamb chops, and she hadn't made chops in some time. She started a pot of rice on the stove. Nathan liked rice with his chops. She had a few ears of corn in the pantry. She could put a pot of water on low and boil them up when Nathan came home. She lit the stove, put the flame to the right size, and put a small cast iron skillet on

the grate. She poured some oil in the bottom and waited for it to heat. She rubbed coarse salt on the surface of the chops, peppered each side of the meat, and eased the chops into the hot skillet. The meat sizzled when it hit the bottom of the frying pan. It reminded Nancy of when her mother taught her how to fry meat in a skillet when she was a young girl.

“Child, don’t let men fool you.” One by one, Nancy’s mother placed the pieces of chicken in a bowl of flour seasoned with salt and pepper. Her golden brown fingers rolled the meat through the mixture, and the flour stuck evenly to the moist skin of the meat. Deftly, she eased the battered pieces into the big cast iron skillet full of hot cooking oil she used for most dishes. “You might think you need to do all kinds of things to keep them satisfied, but you don’t. You might think a man wants a woman who looks good, but that is just nature. If a man is with you just ‘cuz of your looks, chances are he’ll be looking at other women once he makes you fat with his babies.”

Bubbles formed in the grease around the edges of the meat. A pleasant aroma began to fill the kitchen. “Remember this child, looks can get a man, but it can’t keep him. I’m not saying you shouldn’t try to look good and take care of yourself, but looks won’t last. You’re a pretty enough little thing, but there will always be a prettier gal out there. You might think men are lookin’ for the beauty but they are really lookin’ for the booty. It ain’t the beauty; it’s the booty. If you don’t know how to keep your man, the booty is out there everywhere. What you want to do is give your man reasons to come home to you at night.”

Nancy had never thought about men or her looks before. She knew she was smaller than most girls and not so thin. She was lighter skinned than most. Boys seemed to like that. She knew she wasn't beautiful. Her sisters, Sarah and Grace were prettier. When she found a man, she wanted to keep him, so she listened to her mother while the chicken babbled cheerfully behind her on the stove.

“There's but a few things that a man will always want from a woman. One is that he needs to know that you respect him and will stand by him no matter what. It ain't so easy for our men out there. People are pickin' at 'em and tearing 'em down every day. They need to know that isn't going to happen when they come home. Another thing you need to know is that if you got a good man, what he is doing when he's out there working at his job, he's doing that for you and your babies when you have them. He wants a woman he knows will be happy when he comes home and appreciate how hard he is trying every day. He wants a woman who will listen when he talks.”

Nancy's mother turned her attention back to the chicken. She maneuvered the pieces into different positions with a long fork. The chicken was starting to brown in places. Then, she turned back to Nancy and pointed into the pan with her fork.

“If you want to keep your man, you have to know how to cook the foods he wants. Men like meat. You have to know how to cook meat the way men like it. They like potatoes and rice with gravy on them, and they like gravy on their meat. You have to know how to make gravies, gravies with bacon drippin's, gravies with beef and chicken stock. Men like their gravies. Men like to eat. If you want to keep your man, you have to

treat him right and feed him right. If you do, all he's going to think of all day is coming home to you and thinking about the tasty meal you are going to feed him."

Nancy lifted the lamb chops out of the pan and laid them on a plate. She began to prepare a fresh batch of gravy from the beef drippings she had in the Frigidaire. Nathan would be home soon.

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Nathan was glad that Mr. Teague let him take the beautiful new car home in the evenings. The 1933 Chrysler Imperial had a burgundy exterior with cream-colored seats. With a 108 horsepower engine, a vacuum clutch, and hydraulic brakes, Nathan loved to drive the Chrysler. He especially liked to park it in front of his house for the neighbors to admire.

"Eh, you must have got some raise to buy that thing," said his next-door neighbor Vito Denuzio. Nathan was always happy to show the men in the neighborhood the car's features like the 298 cubic inch engine with the Delco Remy ignition, the eternal trumpet horns, and the suicide-hinged doors. He didn't mind that the price for bringing the car home was that he might be called on at any time to drive Mr. Teague to one his appointments. Now that Mr. Teague was running for the city council, he required more of Nathan's time in the evenings. When he began to ask Nathan to drive him somewhere nearly every weekend, he offered Nathan an additional dollar fifty a week to pick him up at his stately Dutch Colonial home on New Scotland Avenue across from Washington Park.

Driving him around so much, Nathan began to see Mr. Teague from a new perspective. Every morning, he arrived at Mr. Teague's home at half past seven. Nathan had always considered Mr. Teague as lean and fit, but he had not known that he ran four laps around lake in Washington Park, a total of three miles, every morning before work. While it only took less than fifteen minutes for Nathan to drive Mr. Teague to the dealership on Dove Street near Clinton, Mr. Teague spent the duration of each trip writing in a leather folio. Once they arrived at the dealership, Nathan went about his duties as a mechanic while Mr. Teague made his rounds checking things around the building.

After he made his rounds, Mr. Teague's next order of business was to meet with the two young salesmen, Mr. Smithers and Mr. Rossi, whom he hired to sell automobiles on a commission basis. Nathan could see how much Mr. Teague enjoyed teaching Smithers and Rossi how to be good salesmen. Part of their training was to learn about their product inside and out. Each morning before the sales floor was open to customers, Mr. Teague brought Smithers and Rossi to the mechanics bays to see what repairs the mechanics were making on the automobiles in the repair shop. He wanted them to know how the automobiles were repaired, so that they could talk about the cars based on their knowledge and understanding. Nathan and the other mechanics learned something about selling every time Mr. Teague brought the salesmen to the shop. Nathan learned a lot of useful information about how to satisfy customers. He used the tips he learned when he spoke to customers, and so did the other mechanics. Mr. Teague kept those salesmen on their toes too.

One day Mr. Teague brought Smithers and Rossi down to the mechanics bays and began to speak to them about a fine point of selling.

“Gentlemen, customers can tell when you don’t know your product. It is not enough to know the specifications. Any schoolboy can tell you how many cylinders in the engine block of a Chrysler Imperial, or the cubic inches of the motor in the Model CO. That’s not going to make a sale.”

Smithers used a stub of a pencil to write in a notebook and listened intently to every word. Rossi leaned against the workbench. He looked relaxed and wasn’t taking notes. He seemed to be enjoying the lecture more than Mr. Teague appreciated.

“Mr. Rossi,” said Mr. Teague looking at Rossi leaning casually with his hands in his pockets.

“Yesterday Mr. Wilson demonstrated how to change the oil in a 1931 Dodge much like the one in the bay.”

Rossi straightened up and he removed his hands from the pockets of his pants.

“I would like you to show us how to change the oil in this automobile, Mr. Rossi,” said Mr. Teague.

“This isn’t a Dodge. It’s a DeSoto,” said Rossi. “I don’t know how to change the oil on a DeSoto.”

“I believe the process is essentially the same. Is that correct, Mr. Wilson?”

Nathan nodded. “Pretty much,” he said.

“Then Mr. Rossi, please demonstrate.”

“I’d need to crawl under with that dolly contraption and I’m in a suit,” said Rossi.

“I watched Mr. Wilson repair an automobile in a suit once, and he didn’t get a smudge of dirt on him.”

“Here’s the wrench you’ll need,” said Nathan handing the wrench to Rossi. The other two mechanics, Wilson Cheevers and Otto Van Dyne, stopped what they were doing to observe the scene.

Rossi resigned himself to his fate and slid under the automobile on the mechanics dolly, jacket and all.

“You’re gonna need this,” said Nathan. He grabbed a pan used for catching the oil and slid it under the automobile to Rossi. Nathan watched Rossi’s legs flail like flapping rubber bands from under the automobile. Nathan knew that Rossi might have a tricky time unscrewing the bolt in the bottom of the drain pan. There wasn’t enough room for him to position the pan to catch the draining oil at the place in the drain pan where he was loosening the bolt because the wrench was so big. He had to be careful to loosen the bolt with the wrench until it nearly removed. Then, he had to get the pan in place to catch the draining oil and finish removing the bolt by turning it by hand. If he didn’t do this right, he would get oil everywhere. After a few minutes, Rossi let out a yelp like a dog when someone steps on its tail. Seconds later, Rossi wriggled out from under the automobile. Dark droplets of oil fell from his right shirtsleeve. He had stained the arm of his jacket with grimy splotches of oil.

Mr. Teague looked at the soiled condition of Rossi's jacket and shirt. "It might serve you well to listen more carefully, Mr. Rossi. Clean yourself up before our customers arrive."

Nathan saw Rossi around the dealership for a few days and then he never saw him again. He always wondered about Mr. Teague's coaching sessions in those mornings in the mechanics bays. Was it just for the salesmen, or was he trying to train the mechanics too?

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Soon after Nathan began to drive for Mr. Teague, he found that his chauffeuring duties demanded certain discretion. Not a man who was fond of spontaneity, Mr. Teague would usually know what evenings he needed Nathan's services as a driver. Often, Nathan drove Mr. Teague to the Hibernia Hall where Murray liked to hold meetings with his inner circle, his lawyer brother Michael and the other lawyer, Van Slack. Sometimes the other Murray brother Patrick joined them. He saw Legs Diamond, the notorious bootlegger come and go a few times along with Mr. Hoff, the owner of the boarding house where he, Nancy, and Little Nate lived until they found the house on Third Street in Arbor Hill. Usually, when Nathan drove Mr. Teague to his destinations, he told Nathan that he was free to leave and to return at a certain time. Nathan made sure that he was always at least a half hour early, so that Mr. Teague never had to wait for him, even though he was seldom ready for Nathan to pick him up at the appointed time. Mr. Teague seldom spoke after his meetings. Nathan drove him to his home in respectful

silence and bid him good night when they arrived at Mr. Teague's home. "Thank you Nathan. Good night. I will see you in the morning," and "Goodnight sir," were usually the only words the two men exchanged.

Nathan did not need Mr. Teague to tell him that he should not discuss his comings and going with anyone. Nathan knew that the Murrays and their business was not a good subject for discussion with anyone. The Murrays had people everywhere. If Mr. Teague or the Murrays thought that Nathan was speaking to anyone about what he saw, it would certainly mean the end of his chauffeuring duties and possibly his mechanics job as well. He told no one what he saw, not even his best friend Ernie, especially not Ernie. He was a great friend but he was a talker and talking could lead to trouble. No, he could forget what he saw and keep his mouth shut.

Nathan proved his capacity for discretion many times, especially when Mr. Teague began to spend some of his evenings at Patrick Murray's place, The One Note, a private dinner and dance club on Logan Street, a quiet dead end street adjacent to Lincoln Park. Murray's establishment was located at the end of the street. Policemen in uniform, under the indirect control of his brother, John, patrolled the block and restricted access to the street, ensuring that the goings on were not disturbed and the wrong sort did not pass. Then Murray got the Chief of Police, an imposing figure of a man named Blake, elected. He and his men made sure that Apparatus-supported businesses, legal or illegal, were able to operate unmolested. The police always allowed Nathan to pass and they gave him a spot near the entrance to the club, so he would be close when Mr. Teague was ready to leave. It didn't take long for Nathan to figure out that Patrick's club was the most

upscale speakeasy in town. Many of the most prominent men in town came and went. Teague was one of them. Over the course of many visits, Nathan observed most of the elected officials of the city and many state senators and members of the state assembly come and go, while waiting in the car. Mr. Hoff was also a visitor. He nodded to Nathan if he saw him sitting in the automobile at the end of alley, but Nathan saw Hoff less frequently after Legs Diamond was shot and killed in the Hoff's boarding house. He was glad he had already moved Nancy and Little Nate to their house on Arbor Hill by then.

In the early months of 1932, Teague spent many nights in the company of John Murray and his cronies in the Democratic Party. Nathan drove and waited, and forgot all that he saw. Business was good at the dealership. Teague landed multi-year contracts with the city to supply automobiles and trucks to many of the city's departments, including the police and highway departments. During that time, Nathan saw the Murrays and their cronies meet with an increasing number of prominent businessmen and politicians at various places around the capital district. If there could be a king of Albany, Nathan thought that John Murray would be that king, as it seemed that nearly everyone of importance came to visit him. As good as business had been for Murray and the Democrats in 1932, Nathan speculated that it would get even better in 1933 if Franklin Roosevelt defeated Herbert Hoover in the 1932 presidential election. A Democrat would finally be President. Without Hoover to back it, prohibition was likely to end. If Prohibition ended, Nathan knew who would be running the legal bars and taverns, the same ones who ran the illegal ones, Murray and his cronies. Albany would still be Albany.

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By the beginning of 1933, Nathan and Ernie spent most of their spare time finding parts, bringing them back into working order, and installing them on the skeletal Ford frame. For nearly a year, they had been restoring the 1923 Model T, piece by piece. One day when they were, Nathan saw a melancholy expression wash over Ernie as he fitted the 1924 Stromberg carburetor that Nathan's friend Ivan found in the trash heap of one of his customers in Newburgh over the intake manifold. He adjusted the accelerator pump linkage, checked the idle screw settings, and then leaned back on the cab. He pulled the pack of Camels out of his pocket, pulled out the cigarette, and put it to his lips. He lit it with his lighter and flipped it closed with one hand. When it made a loud click, he looked at the lighter as if it contained some sort of meaning he couldn't quite grasp, then he smiled at Nathan without enthusiasm.

Nathan had seen how Ernie used the project as a diversion from his situation at home, especially in the last few months when Mae had become more and more distant. Their families hadn't gotten together but once to play bid whist. Mae seemed listless whenever Nathan saw her and she seldom got together with Nancy any more. Lately, Ernie was seldom without his flask of bourbon and hardly ever without a lit Camel in his mouth. By the amount of drinking he had been doing, Ernie was clearly in a bad place and Nathan was not sure how to reach him. Nathan wouldn't say that Ernie had become a drunk exactly, but since Mae lost their baby and the doctors said that she might not be able to have children, Ernie had been hitting the bottle pretty hard. The whole ordeal had

taken its toll on Mae as well. It made Nathan feel a little guilty to have two fine healthy young boys at home.

Now that the car was nearly complete, there would be no reason for Nathan to spend so much of his spare time at Ernie's working in the shed. The car project had taken longer than he expected. Nancy had become less and less pleased with the time Nathan spent away from her and the boys. But in Ernie's present state, he couldn't tell him he was looking forward to spending more time with his family. From the look of things, Nathan imagined that Ernie wasn't looking forward to spending more time with Mae in her present state.

Nathan watched Ernie reposition the paper gasket between the carburetor and the manifold and tighten the screws to hold the carburetor in place. They had worked out a routine; Ernie did most of the assembling and Nathan did the final calibration and tuning. Nathan watched Ernie's hands move swiftly and assuredly around the engine compartment of the car as he checked the hoses, fittings, and wiring connections. He wondered why Ernie couldn't find a job better than pumping at a gas station and cleaning up. He had a real feel for machines and how they worked.

"Move back," Ernie commanded as he inserted the slightly rusted metal starter crank into the hole for the crank in the front of the car and gave it a vigorous turn. The old car choked and coughed but did not start.

"Hold on," said Nathan in his usual voice only slightly louder than a whisper. Nathan checked the carburetor adjustment screws and turned each a few more degrees. Ernie twisted the crank again and the engine backfired, then sputtered, then began to run.

“Beans and rice. Ain’t that nice,” said Ernie and he did a little shuffle.

Nathan knew his way around automobiles, but Ernie was a wizard with all kinds of machines. He always marveled at Ernie’s mechanical skills. Given the time, Ernie could bring almost any piece of machinery back to life. He had seen him fix hopelessly broken toasters, vacuum cleaners, electric pumps and other machines with ease. Nearly all of the neighbors who were not handy themselves called on Ernie to fix their broken things, but as skilled as he was in fixing broken things, there was a limit.

Nathan looked towards Ernie’s house and saw Mae’s silhouette through a window as she moved about the kitchen. The back door opened and Mae walked to the edge of the porch and leaned her slender figure against a post. Dressed in a yellow sundress that complemented the rich brown of her skin, she looked every inch the young country girl that she was. Two years earlier, she had stepped off a Greyhound bus after leaving her hometown of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, tired of working as a domestic. Her father and mother had given her twenty-two dollars, nearly all the money they had, and a knapsack with enough spoon bread and smoked ham to last her the duration of the trip north to Albany. “Cousin Edna says she can get you work with her making phonographs at the RCA Victor Company,” her father had told her. On the way, she had filled her Mason jar with fresh water at every stop where there was running water in the bathrooms reserved for coloreds.

“Y’all want somethin’ to drink?” she said. “I made some fresh lemonade.”

Nathan could tell from the puffiness around her eyes that she had been crying. Was her hand trembling when she handed him the glass? The afternoon sun caught and

highlighted the brilliant red in her hair that was fashioned in one long braid that laid over her right shoulder. He thought about last weekend when he, Nancy, and the boys had dinner and a night of bid whist at Ernie and Mae's house. When he helped Nancy put the boys to bed in Ernie and Mae's bedroom, he saw that the baby's crib, covered with what looked like fresh bedding, was still set up in the corner just as it had been months ago before Mae lost the baby.

Now, he and Ernie avoided Mae's distant stare, drank the lemonade quickly and greedily, like some medicine they had to endure before healing could occur.

"Thanks. That was real good," said Nathan.

"Thanks, honey," said Ernie handing his glass back to Mae and lightly stroking the back of her hand.

Mae smiled a faint smile, took Nathan's glass, and glided silently towards the house, up the porch, and through the back door. Ernie brought his hand to the side of his face and then rubbed his eye with the back of his hand. "I'll be right back," he said.

"Gonna get some gas outta the shed. Maybe we can drive it a bit."

"It's getting late," said Nathan. "Let's try it out tomorrow."

Ernie stopped and turned and walked back to Nathan. Then he retrieved his flask from his pants, took a nip, and lit another cigarette. He handed the flask to Nathan who pretended to drink.

"She might not be able to have babies," said Ernie, snapping Nathan back to the moment.

“What?” said Nathan, pretending not to know the news Mae had shared with Nancy.

“Mae. The doctor says she might not be able to have babies.” Ernie stared blankly. The ash on his cigarette was long and about to drop. At the last possible instant, he flicked the ash and took a long drag.

Nathan wanted to console Ernie, but he wasn't sure what to say, so he said nothing.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Nathan sat with Nancy, and their sons Nate and Brady in the second pew of the Missionary Baptist Church and waited for Reverend Hunt to speak from the pulpit. The ushers in their white dresses and white gloves moved down the aisles as they passed the offering plates from row to row. Reverend Hunt adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles and looked out over the congregation of over hundred parishioners. Brady sat in Nancy's arms and tried to reach for the hymnals that rested on little shelves on the back of the pew in front of them. The soothing smell of bread baking at the Friehofer's bakery plant next door filled the church and made Nathan think of the church supper they would have after the services were over. The smell of the baking bread coupled with the low muted tone Brother Richardson played on the organ transported Nathan into a trance-like state of well-being.

"Brothers and sisters, began Reverend Hunt. "I received this letter from our dear friend, Pastor Lewis Brown, the pastor of our sister church in Monrovia Liberia. Reverend Hunt pulled the letter out of its envelope and waved it briefly before he set it down in front of him on the podium. "Pastor Brown thanks us for our generous financial gifts over the past year. With the money from our donations, he has been able to put a new roof on his church and purchase a new altar. He says our donations have enabled

him to double his ministry, and he has baptized over fifty souls bringing them into the grace of Jesus.”

“Amen,” came shouts and calls from parishioners.

“I know you asked yourself, ‘How can I give this money that I could use to put more food on my own table to people half a world away?’ Let me remind you of Corinthians 9:6-7. Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

“Amen,” the congregation called out in unison.

“Please give from your hearts, brothers and sisters. Remember the Lord’s work is never done.”

Brother Richardson continued to play the organ music until the ushers collected the offerings from the last row of the church and the four ushers walked in unison down the center aisle of the church and delivered the offering to the table in front of the pulpit. The two golden plates were filled with silver and bills.

“This is a wonderful time, brothers and sisters,” said Pastor Hunt as he pulled his spectacles from his broad round face and wiped them with a handkerchief he pulled from the breast pocket of his suit coat. “We have a new president who is promising a ‘New Deal’ for us, one that will put all Americans back on the path to prosperity.”

“Amen,” the congregation responded.

“Let us hope, brothers and sisters, that the president remembers that all Americans means All Americans and he does not forget about us like the last president.”

“Amen,” shouted the congregation.

“Let us bow our heads and pray for the president and the hope that he offers us.

Heavenly father, I am your humble servant. I come before you today in need of hope for our president Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the people of this country. Guide him and our people through these times of trial. There were times when I felt helpless and I put my faith in you. There are times when I feel weak and I know you are there to give me strength. I pray to you for hope for this country, hope for love and kindness.

Some say that the sky is at it's darkest just before the light. I pray that this is true, for all has seemed dark. I need your light, Lord. I pray to be filled with your light from head to toe. To bask in your glory. To know that all is right in the world, as you have planned, and as you want it to be. Help me to walk in your light, and live my life in faith and glory.

In your name I pray. Amen.”

“Amen,” Shouted the congregation.

Nathan looked at Desmond Bailey, the new Assistant Pastor, as he sat in the chair next to the Deacon's bench to the right of the pulpit. It had been nearly three years since the Wilsons had become members of the congregation on Desmond's advice, and it was just as he had described. Nathan was glad that Desmond was finally able to bring his family, his wife Adela and their son Edward, to Albany. He watched Edward as

he sat in the baritone section of the men's choir. At seventeen now, how tall and handsome he was in his blue and gold choir robe, and so much more grown up than he had been two years earlier when he and Adela arrived from Jamaica. Adela looked serene in the soprano section of the women's choir. He thought that He and Nancy should join the choir too. Maybe one day he could become a deacon.

Nathan was in a blissful mood when Reverend Hunt, sturdy and rotund, began his sermon about kin and kinship. His own father had preached on the same subject often. How unlike his father's church Missionary Baptist was. His father's church, Mount Calvary Baptist, was a cornerstone in the community of Norwood, a modestly affluent African American neighborhood on the south side of Buffalo. Missionary Baptist was a small church in the heart of Albany in a neighborhood where few of its parishioners lived. Reverend Hunt was a fiery man who sometimes fell into a deep raspy singsong voice when he gave his sermons. In the summers, when the air was thick and the breeze drifting past the open stained glass windows was not enough to cool the high arched ceilings in the main room of the church, Reverend Hunt would sweat profusely and wipe his face often with his white linen handkerchief. By contrast, Reverend Wilson was a diminutive and more regal man with a voice that sometimes dropped to a whisper when he gave his sermons. The effect was dramatic. When this happened, the congregation leaned forward in their seats to try to catch the pastor's words.

The size and stature of the churches in their cities was different too. Mount Calvary had a sizable congregation of nearly a thousand. Because of the size of his

congregation and his moderate views on race relations, Reverend Wilson was invited to meet with the sitting mayor. In these meetings, he would give his assessment of the temperament of the black community and suggest courses of action on certain matters that might ensure that the mayor and other elected officials could continue to enjoy the enthusiastic support of the Norwood community. Over the years, mayors often invited Reverend Wilson to attend important events that were certain to get the attention of the newspapers. As a result, Reverend Wilson wielded considerable influence in his community. In his modest political role, the politicians in Buffalo considered Reverend Wilson a spokesman for the African American presence in the city and one of Buffalo's most prominent African American citizens. In contrast, Reverend Hunt had no political influence in Albany and little influence at all beyond the scope of his small but growing congregation. Nathan thought of something Ernie liked to say, "There ain't many of us, but we are still here."

Nathan had never appreciated what an influence his father was in Buffalo. If it hadn't been for his father's position in the community, Percy Pierce, owner of the Pierce-Arrow automobile company, would never have given his father a Pierce-Arrow automobile as a donation to his ministry, and Nathan may never have come to know automobiles. Nathan had not thought about how the primly elegant automobile was a complement to the primness of his father until he compared him to Reverend Hunt. In his ever-present dark suit and black felt hat with the gray band, Reverend Wilson and the Pierce-Arrow matched each other in stateliness. Reverend Hunt was a different kind of preacher for a different kind of flock.

One area where Reverend Hunt and his father were alike was in giving fiery speeches, but his father was more committed to saving his congregation's souls than Reverend Hunt. His father's speeches about hell and damnation were a sterner spiritual guidance to his congregation than Reverend Hunt's, which were based on hope and enlightenment.

Nathan looked over at Reverend Hunt's wife sitting in the row in front of him with their two young daughters, Ruth and Marie. He could not imagine Reverend Hunt being as stern with his daughters as his father had been with his two older sisters, Lillian and Madge. It wasn't easy to be the family of a minister. Lillian accepted the mantle of the oldest daughter of a prominent minister and followed the lead of their mother, Josephine. Mrs. Hunt and his mother supported their husbands well but so did Lillian. Nathan thought about Lillian and how she immersed herself in the array of activities expected of a minister's daughter. There was seldom an afternoon or evening when he got home that he did not find his mother and Lillian working on some church related activity, or working at the church. They made regular visits to church members who were too ill to attend Sunday services and made sure that they were safe and had enough food and other provisions to get them through the week. Lillian headed the Mt. Calvary Youth Group and when old enough, Lillian sang in the Mt. Calvary Choir, and taught Sunday school to the youngest members of the congregation.

Nathan felt guilty that he hadn't helped his mother by being a better minister's son. He thought about how he and Madge had rebelled against the preordained and pious life thrust upon them. They had found excuses not to participate in the

activities that their mother and sister performed so dutifully. Nathan liked automobiles and Madge liked boys. They had thought only of themselves.

“I’m not staying in this town a minute longer than I have to,” Madge would say to Nathan when they were alone. When her chance to escape presented itself unexpectedly, Nathan remembered how she jumped at it. She met Horton “Skip” Nelson, the cousin of her best friend, Amelia, when he was visiting Amelia’s family for the Christmas holidays. Nathan had helped Madge conduct her secret courtship. It was the first time Nathan had seen two people madly in love.

“I’m going with him,” she said to Nathan when Skip’s visit was ending. Nathan helped Madge elope to Rochester to be married. From there they made their way to Saratoga to live where Skip lived and trained horses.

For Nathan, nothing had mattered but automobiles. From the moment his father brought home the glistening black Pierce-Arrow, he spent all of his spare time attending to it. He thought back to his fourteenth birthday when the present he asked his father for was a chance to drive the automobile. To his surprise, his father agreed. By the time he was fifteen, he could drive the vehicle as well as his father did and perhaps even better. By the time he was sixteen, rather than going to school, he had spent much of his time hanging around the Pierce-Arrow factory doing odd jobs for the mechanics and learning about the automobiles. His father could deny him no longer. He begged his father to ask Mr. Pierce if he could learn to be a mechanic at the Pierce Arrow factory and Mr. Pierce was happy to oblige.

“You know Mr. Pierce is just doing this so he can use it to his advantage,” his mother had told his father. Nathan did not believe his mother at the time, but now he understood the world of politics. He knew it was true.

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After the church service, Nathan, Nancy, and the boys had supper in the church basement, as they did most Sundays. Nancy and the women helped with the cooking in the big kitchen in the church basement, while the older girls watched the smaller children. Reverend Hunt always retired to his office and met with the children in the congregation. “Have you been good this week?” he would ask them, or “Did you do well in school this week?” Of course, the children always said “yes” and Reverend Hunt gave the older ones a quarter, and the littler ones a dime. The men retired to the meeting room next to the dining hall to study the Scripture. Many times, they broke their studies early to talk about sports or the politics of the day.

Nathan enjoyed the casual and friendly fellowship of the members of the church. A few of them like the Greens, Baileys, and Hortons lived in Arbor Hill, but many of the members of the church lived in other parts of Albany. Church members lived in nearly every part from the rich New Scotland Avenue area to the Gut.

At dinner, the Wilsons sat across from the Baileys. Nathan hadn’t spoken to Desmond since helping him paint the trim on the outside of the house he’d bought on Colonie Street, a few blocks away from the Wilsons. But that had been months ago and in the meantime Desmond and Adela had gone to do missionary work at Reverend Brown’s

church in Liberia. Nathan hadn't had the time to stay for the church supper in months either. Mr. Teague's schedule had been hectic. Nathan hadn't socialized with any of his friends except Ernie for some time. He was pleased to have a chance to socialize with Desmond and his family.

After dinner, Nathan and Desmond went outside to a little grassy area in the back of the church for a cigar smoke and a chance for some conversation. Nathan always enjoyed watching Desmond handle his cigar cutter with such skill and precision. He cut the ends of the cigars, handed one to Nathan, and lighted them with deft speed. In no time at all they were puffing happily and gazing up at the white washed walls on the side of the Friehofer bakery plant next door. All the windows were open in the plant. The pungent odor of baking bread and rolls mingled with the smoke of the cigars, and the scent of the blooming tulips that lined the edge of the walk, created a sensational aroma Nathan could almost taste.

"How are you enjoying your new home?" Nathan asked, pulling himself out of the moment of enjoying the cigar. "I'm sorry I haven't been able to visit with you. It's been a busy time."

"We've only been back from Liberia since last week. We are just now settling in, so you should not feel sorry," said Desmond. "We shall have lots of time to enjoy each other's company now that we are neighbors."

"Did Edward go with you to Liberia?"

“Edward stayed here, watched the house, and went to school. He just turned seventeen. That’s more than old enough to be on your own. When I was his age, I was already earning a living on a fishing boat.”

Nathan tried to imagine his sons as teenagers. He hoped they could grow up to be as fine as Edward and that he could be as good a father as Desmond.

“Have you seen any of the people from the boarding house lately?” asked Nathan.

“I went back just this week to pick up a trunk I left in the basement. Mrs. Hoff is the same as ever. Mr. Novack got a cargo inspector job in New York City and moved there. The Hahns are still at the boarding house, but that gangster was murdered on their floor. You heard about that right? He was shot in the apartment you used to rent. It scared Mrs. Hahn nearly to death.”

“He was shot in the apartment we rented?” Nathan didn’t tell Desmond he had seen Legs Diamond many times at the Hibernia Hall. The last time he saw him at the hall was a few days before his death. It seemed peculiar that a bootlegger who was doing business with the Murrays would be shot and killed just as Prohibition was ending.

“What about Mr. Brent?” Nathan asked.

“Mr. Brent is still Mr. Brent. I’m waiting to see his first smile.” Desmond laughed. “Of course you know about Mrs. Sweeney. She works for your employer, right?”

“Yes,” said Nathan. “She worked at the dealership for a while. Now she is Mr. Teague’s housekeeper. She’s helping him get his new house ready. She has people working for her and everything.”

“She is a very nice woman.” said Desmond. “And her daughter is very nice too. She and Edward often did homework together. I know Edward misses them.”

The two men drifted into a relaxed silence and finished the rest of their cigars. Nathan made a mental note to try harder to make time for Desmond. He owed so much to him. Desmond had given him advice and guidance when he had first come to Albany. Desmond told him about Arbor Hill, and the fellowship of his church. He wanted to tell him how appreciative he was, but he couldn't find the words.

“Good smoke,” said Nathan finally.

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CHAPTER SIX

The 1934 Chrysler Airflow Sedan was a technological marvel. Its powerful 323 cubic-inch engine, streamlined elegance, comfortable ride, and sophisticated engineering made it an automobile before its time. Teague thought it should have been the most popular car on the road, but its cost and futuristic look were enough to keep his more frugal buyers, still recovering from the economic hard times of the Depression, from buying such an unusual car. The one Airflow Teague had ordered to test the market languished for months on the second floor of his showroom. After he moved it nearer to his most popular upscale sedans, the Touring Brougham and Imperial Sedan, and still it found no customer, Teague decided to take it out of the showroom and use it as his personal business car. Nathan will enjoy driving it, Teague thought.

It bothered Teague that he had miscalculated the popularity of the Airflow. He had let his perception of technological excellence get in the way of his sensibility. Customers were not willing to pay a much higher price for the satisfaction of driving a state-of-the-art automobile but not a luxurious automobile. Now he understood that customers would pay more for luxury, but not for technology.

One summer morning, Teague sat in his office and thumbed through the latest edition of the Times Union on his desk. He found the article he was looking for on the

front page of the Business section. He grimaced when he saw the article about him titled, “Wheeler and Car Dealer.” Teague was unsure how he felt about his newly found notoriety. He preferred to conduct his business less observed. It was true that since he opened the automobile dealership, his circumstances had improved considerably, but the article made him seem like an opportunist. Is that what he had become, another shill for the Apparatus? Why had he let Murray talk him into running for public office? Still, on balance, his association with the Apparatus had been beneficial.

Teague read more of the article, “from a modestly successful machinery shop owner to one of Albany’s most prominent citizens.” The tips of his eyes began to burn. “In just a few short years of operation, his Chrysler, and DeSoto automobile dealership is one of the fastest growing businesses in the area.” The article turned quickly to the politics, “Staid and handsome, James Teague is the new darling on the Albany political scene...leading in all of the polls for the City Council seat in the 4th district...If he wins, there is no limit to his political possibilities.” Teague felt his face flush. The article made him sound like a playboy. He was not used to reading about himself in the paper in this way. He read the rest of the article quickly. The last paragraph mentioned his recent engagement to Esther Van Valkenberg, and his impending move from his house in the Pine Hills section of town to “a palatial house in the West End where the wealthy and influential are gravitating.” It was galling.

Everything was changing. Teague mulled over the conversation he had with John Murray during their last meeting. “You’re going to win this election, Teague. It is a good thing you are getting married too. Married men with children, that spells solid

citizen to voters. People like your sensible nature. It makes it easy to get you elected to the City Council. Think of the future. Think of the long term. Serve a term, or two, on Albany's City Council, then, we will put the full weight of the party behind you. After that, we'll go for the Democratic nomination for the state assembly and we may not stop there."

By midsummer of 1934, Teague was leading in every election poll the newspapers conducted, but he found campaigning more and more tedious. He was glad he was able to have Nathan drive him to his campaign functions. There was just so long he could be charming, and a quiet relaxing drive helped him get in the right mood.

Teague was glad he had offered Nathan the position. He was the ideal driver, as well as an excellent mechanic and kept any car he drove in perfect condition. He was loyal and trustworthy. The last several years had proven that. He knew that Murray was as likely to spy on his friends, as his enemies. He had seen how effectively Murray had used ill-gotten information about others to his own advantage. He did not have to worry about Nathan.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was only the fourth time Nathan had been in Mr. Teague's office in nearly five years. Sometimes, Mr. Teague needed to be driven places during the day but he usually just called him on the intercom and told him to get ready. Nathan kept a fresh shirt and a suit at work, so he could be ready to drive Mr. Teague to any kind of event on short notice, no matter how fancy. The tone of Mr. Teague's voice on the intercom told Nathan that something was up.

When he reached the office, the door was open and Mr. Teague was sitting at his desk looking at a photo.

"Come in Nathan. Please close the door and have a seat," said Mr. Teague. He looked at the photo for a few more seconds and set it gingerly on the table. The room was warm. It was not air conditioned like the two showroom floors. "Nothing but the best for the customers," he had said the day the workers installed the Carrier air conditioning units. His was the only car dealership in the area with air-conditioned showroom floors, and Nathan knew how proud Mr. Teague was of that fact. Mr. Teague could afford to have an air conditioning unit in his office that fit in one of the windows in his office, but it was not his kind of luxury.

Teague opened a bottom drawer in his desk and pulled out a bottle of Chivas Regal and two glasses. He put them on the desk pad that covered most of the top of his desk. Nathan could see the label on the bottle. It was the good stuff, twenty-five years old. Teague poured two fingers of whiskey into each glass and pushed one towards Nathan. Nathan took the glass.

“Thanks,” he said. Something was really up. Nathan did not know Teague had liquor in his desk and it was only two in the afternoon.

“You might need this. I know I do,” said Teague. He took a good swallow and put the glass back on the desk pad. Nathan took a drink to match Mr. Teague’s belt of whisky and wondered what had brought on this occasion. Nathan felt the Chivas make a slow burn down his throat and into his gullet.

“You know Mrs. Sweeney, my housekeeper. I believe you lived in the same boarding house for a time,” said Teague.

“Yes,” said Nathan. If it wasn’t for Mrs. Sweeney, Nathan might not have his job now. He hoped that she and Nora were all right.

“She’s been helping me move into my new home. It’s a big house, and I was planning to have her and her daughter Nora live there too.”

Teague took another sip of whiskey. Nathan followed suit.

“Mrs. Sweeney gave me some unsettling news yesterday. It’s her daughter Nora. The girl’s in a family way.”

Nathan was surprised. He hadn’t seen much of Nora since Mrs. Sweeney began keeping Mr. Teague’s house over two years ago. Before then, she came to the dealership

after school and on weekends often to help her mother. He suspected that Mr. Teague had encouraged the arrangement as a way to give Mrs. Sweeney additional income without it seeming like charity.

“Is she going to get married to the father?” Nathan asked. He knew enough about Catholics that a girl did not have a child without being married. Mrs. Sweeney would never let her daughter be an unwed mother.

“At first Nora refused to say who the father was, but Mrs. Sweeney had her suspicions. When she confronted her, Nora finally confessed. The father is a young man who used to live in their boarding house. Marriage is out of the question. It’s an unfortunate situation, unfortunate indeed.”

Nathan thought of the first time he met the inquisitive girl with fiery red hair at breakfast over four years ago. She would be maybe sixteen now.

“I had Mrs. Sweeney take the girl to a doctor today. The doctor said she’s about six months along.” Mr. Teague furrowed his brow. “Nora was very good at hiding her situation from her mother. She is a just a slip of a girl to begin with, so when she gained a little weight, Mrs. Sweeney didn’t take any notice. Nora hid her condition as long as she could, but when the weather got warmer and Nora insisted on wearing clothes inappropriate for this hot summer, she suspected the worst.” Mr. Teague put both of his hands around the glass of Chivas sitting in front of him on the desk. He looked like a man who was about to pray. “I need your help. I told Mrs. Sweeney, I’d take care of this,” he said to Nathan.

Nathan could see that Mr. Teague was taking this situation on as his personal responsibility. It was as if the Sweeneys were his family. It was something he always did. When Otto Van Dyne's wife fell and broke her arm and couldn't take care of her children, Mr. Teague hired a woman to help her take care of them for a few weeks until the arm got better. "I take care of my people," he had said to Otto. "I can't expect you to do your job well, if you are worried about your wife and children." Nathan wondered why Mr. Teague had summoned him, given him a whiskey in the middle of the day, and told him this story. Did Mr. Teague think that he could do something? Did Mr. Teague think that because he lived in Arbor Hill he knew what do in these matters?

"What can I do to help?" asked Nathan.

"Take a look at this," said Teague. He picked up the photo on his desk and handed it to Nathan. It was a picture of a boy around twelve or thirteen, and a nun standing in a grove of apple trees.

"That's me and Sister Benedict in the photograph. Sister is the Mother Superior of a convent and school in Springfield. I graduated from that school. If it wasn't for Sister Benedict, I may have never gone to university. You may be wondering how a Protestant like me happened to go to a Catholic school, but that is another story."

"I'm not sure I understand," said Nathan. He downed some of the whisky. Normally Mr. Teague was more direct.

"There is another part of the convent most people don't know about, not even the locals," said Teague. "The convent is also a refuge for wayward girls. They go there to have their babies with the support of the nuns. I contacted Sister Benedict and I've

arranged for Nora to go there to have her baby. I told Mrs. Sweeney I would take care of this.”

“What about the father?” asked Nathan.

“Mrs. Sweeney asked Nora if she had told the father. Nora said she hadn’t, but Mrs. Sweeney has her doubts.”

Nathan tried not to react as Mr. Teague spoke.

“Right now, the Sweeney’s, Doctor Morton, you, and I are the only people who know about this. With the election coming up, I can’t be connected with any of this directly. If I can get Nora to Springfield and to the nuns, they will handle the rest. I would understand if you do not want to become involved. I know that if you decide not to, you will not speak of this. As a personal favor to me, would you collect Nora and Mrs. Sweeney and drive them to Springfield? Of course, you will be compensated for your services.”

Nathan did not hesitate. “I can do it,” he said. “I don’t want money for it.”

“I can’t ask you to do something like this for nothing.”

“I’m not doing it for nothing. I’m doing it for Mrs. Sweeney,” Nathan responded.

Teague finished the rest of his drink. Nathan finished his and put the glass back on the blotter on Teague’s desk.

“It’s settled then. Once Nora is safely at the convent, I would like you to be my go between to handle any arrangements I might need to make for the Sweeneys.”

“I will do what I can,” said Nathan.

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The next day, the Sweeneys arrived at the dealership by cab at seven in morning. Mr. Teague had made the necessary arrangements with Sister Benedict at Convent of the Sisters of Saint Mary. Nathan had the Airflow parked outside by the garage doors of the dealership, warmed up, and ready for the two and a half hour drive from Albany to Springfield. Nathan wasn't sure what to say when he saw the Sweeneys, but Mrs. Sweeney established tone for the trip.

"It's so good of you to assist us Mr. Wilson," said Mrs. Sweeney setting a black and floral patterned carpetbag on the ground next to the car. "So we are taking this car," she said eyeing the Airflow. "I'm so glad that it is you who is looking after us. How are your wife and the two wee lads?"

Nathan exchanged pleasantries, stowed the bag in the trunk, and Mrs. Sweeney went inside to find Mr. Teague. Nora smiled at Nathan and said hello. Then she settled in the back seat of the Airflow and began to read a book she was carrying. Nathan gave Nora some privacy and waited outside the car until Mrs. Sweeney arrived a few minutes later. Within minutes Nathan had crossed the Hudson and they were headed east on the Columbia Turnpike to Massachusetts through the Berkshires, where they would head south to Springfield.

Except to comment on the pleasantness of the weather and the beauty of the trip, Mrs. Sweeney sat in the back seat next to Nora and said little. Nora said nothing at all, preferring to devote her entire attention to the book she was reading. Nathan was relieved that no one wanted to talk. He wasn't much of a conversationalist under the best of circumstances. Periodically, Nathan glanced in the rear view mirror to see what Mrs.

Sweeney and Nora were doing. It was the same each time he looked. Nora stared intently at the pages of her book and Mrs. Sweeney looked out the window at the scenery.

The countryside between Albany and Springfield was beautiful in the summer. As they neared the Berkshires, the road peaked in places to expose miles of trees and farmland. The peaks gave way to declines that descended into small valleys. Nathan had made the trip several times after Nancy read an article in the Knickerbocker News about Norman Rockwell's pictures in the Saturday Evening Post. Many of Rockwell's subjects and locations were from the towns in the Berkshires, Pittsfield, Lenox, Stockbridge, and Lee. Nancy loved to take the Post pictures and see if she could find the location in the picture, or one of the subjects Rockwell painted like the mailman, or the policeman, or the man at the drug store counter. They found the Lennox Drug Store featured in a Post edition but that was it. But they did find a dairy farm near Pittsfield that sold wonderful homemade vanilla bean ice cream in the summer. When he, Nora, and Mrs. Sweeney passed the farm this day, Nathan wished the circumstance had been different. They would have enjoyed the ice cream even if it were still morning. Traffic was light. They made it to Lee in a little over an hour and with the restroom break at the Sinclair station in Huntington, they arrived at the convent by half past eleven.

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Nathan found that Mr. Teague's directions had been excellent. "We're here," he said as they neared the convent just outside of Springfield. Nathan made the turn and headed down the long dirt road that led to the convent. There were apple trees on both sides of the road as far as he could see. In the distance, he saw a cluster of stone buildings

behind a low stonewall. The Airflow kicked up road dust as it made its way. He glanced in the mirror to see what Mrs. Sweeney and Nora were doing.

“Wake up dear,” said Mrs. Sweeney nudging Nora.

Nora looked out the window with bleary eyes.

When they approached the entrance to the cluster of buildings, they found Sister Benedict sitting in a chair under a trellis near the walk to what looked like the main building. Sister Benedict put down her knitting when the car approached and walked briskly to the circular drive at the end of the walk.

“I’m glad that you have come to us,” said Sister Benedict after Mrs. Sweeney and Nora exited the car.

Nathan removed Nora’s bag from the truck. “Where would you like this Sister?” asked Nathan holding Nora’s bag.

“It is nearly time for lunch. You are welcome to come in and have lunch with us,” said Sister Benedict.

“Thank you Sister, but I have some business in Springfield to attend to.”

Sister Benedict, Nora, and Mrs. Sweeney were still standing in front of the convent when Nathan looked into the rear view mirror as he headed for the main road. He had agreed to return at half past three to collect Mrs. Sweeney to take her back to Albany. Nancy had packed a lunch for him that was in the trunk. If he hurried, he might be able to see the Springfield rifle museum and still be back at half past three to collect Mrs. Sweeney.

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When Nathan returned at half past three, Mrs. Sweeney was sitting in the chair that Sister Benedict had been sitting in when they arrived. Nathan got out and opened the rear door for her.

“Mind if I sit in the front with you?” she asked. “It’s a long ride home.”

As soon as they left the grounds of the convent, Mrs. Sweeney pulled out a handkerchief and began to weep quietly. Nathan wasn’t sure whether he should say something to try to comfort her or leave her to her own thoughts. His boys were young, but he couldn’t imagine what he might do in Mrs. Sweeney’s situation. At least he had Nancy. Mrs. Sweeney had no one.

“It isn’t easy raising children, is it Mrs. Sweeney?”

“Please call me Maeve, and may I call you Nathan?”

“Of course Maeve,” Nathan said. It felt strange to call Mrs. Sweeney by her first name, but perhaps they were past the point of such formality.

“Do you have any cigarettes?” she asked.

“Sorry. I only have cigars.”

“A cigar will do.”

Nathan pulled out two pre-cut White Owls from his jacket pocket and handed one to Maeve along with a lighter. She took her time lighting it until she had lit it well. She handed the lighter back to Nathan.

“I use to smoke cigars with my husband,” she said. “This makes me feel like he is near. No. It isn’t easy raising children, Nathan,” especially girls. “You are lucky. You

have two boys and a wife to look after them. I should have done a better job of looking after my Nora.”

“I’ve never seen anyone who cares more for their children than you,” said Nathan.

“Caring isn’t always enough, Nathan. Bad things happen, even if you care. I should have seen what was happening. I should have never let her get close to that boy.”

Nathan doubted that Nora was close to many boys, but he knew at least that she was close to one. If he was right, the situation was even more delicate. He wanted to find out for sure, but now did not seem the right time. Maeve seemed to be no longer interested in talking. He imagined he would be driving her back and forth many times before the baby arrived. Perhaps one of those times would be the right time.

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A few days later, Mrs. Sweeney moved out of the boarding house and into Mr. Teague’s house as planned. When people asked, Mrs. Sweeney told them that she had sent Nora to live with her uncle and his family in New York City to help his ailing wife with the housework and raising her many cousins.

As for Nathan, he told no one except Nancy about the situation and performed the duties that Teague requested of him without question. For the rest of the summer and into the fall, Nathan made periodic visits to Nora, per Teague’s request, to see how she was getting on. Sometimes, Mrs. Sweeney went with him, but these visits were always painful. Mrs. Sweeney often cried most of the way home. In the middle of October, when

Nora's time came, he drove Mrs. Sweeney to Springfield to be with her daughter for the birth.

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“For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Sister Benedict closed the bible and peered at Nora through her rimless spectacles. Nora could see a mixture of forgiveness and pity in Sister Benedict's pale blue eyes, but mostly pity. To Nora, the brown of the spots on the pink and wrinkled hands of the tiny aged nun seemed intensified by the eeriness of the flickering candles that lighted the damp and claustrophobic room. It felt like a closet, and the bed felt as hard beneath Nora's tender body as the ground her mother described in the winter famines in Ireland. Nora studied Sister Benedict's face for some sign of tenderness. The white of Sister Benedict's wimple encased her tiny face and made it look childlike in the warm and generous glow of the candlelight. Nora wanted to believe that it was a reflection of what Sister Benedict felt inside.

“Rest now child. You have a long journey ahead of you tomorrow,” intoned Sister Benedict as she rose and headed for the doorway. She covered the few steps then paused in the doorway and nodded to Mrs. Sweeney sitting in a chair by the doorway. “The glory of Christ, Mrs. Sweeney, is that He can lead even the fallen and the ruined to salvation. Through His love, penitence, and hard earnest work, she can redeem herself.”

Mrs. Sweeney crossed herself and rose to her feet. She spoke in a whisper, “Sister, can I have a word with you in private about the arrangements? I believe that the driver will be here soon.”

The noise of the door closing followed by the scraping of metal and the click of the latch amplified Nora’s misery. She listened as the sound of footsteps diminished into quiet, then turned on her back and looked up at the tops of the gray brick walls and the tiny square of ceiling above her. The only adornment on the walls, a cross of Jesus, loomed above her head. The outstretched arms of Christ on the cross did not fill her with holiness but an aching lament for the love that she had lost and the other she would never know. She thought of Edward and wanted to believe that he had searched for her when he didn’t find her at the boarding house. That first he checked the Old South End and then looked for her at the Friendship House, and at the shops where she had worked before, that he checked the hospital and the police stations. Finally, she wanted to believe that he went to the Teague Mansion demanding to know where she was and what had happened to her. She wanted him to do all of these things, but she knew that he could not.

Nora tried to lie very still to keep from hurting. Her back, hips, and legs still throbbed with pain every time she tried to move. She put her hands on her still bloated belly and felt the emptiness that started there and seeped through her entire body. She felt more alone than she had ever felt in her entire life, more scared than she had felt on the boat ride from Ireland. She wanted Edward. She wanted him to come to the big front door of the convent, pound on it and demand that they give her to him. The image of Edward pounding on the door was so strong to her that she held still and listened, fully

expecting to hear the thunder of Edward's strong fists shattering the stillness. As stillness gave birth to more stillness, she began to accept the fact that she would never see Edward again. She would never again feel his warm breath on her neck when he was holding her in the darkness. She would never feel his warm soft lips covering her mouth, his hand stroking her hair, or his comforting weight when they came together. She would never again feel warm and safe nestled against the firmness of his body.

Nora remembered the first time she saw Edward in the parlor of the boarding house sitting in a high back chair by the fire. How shy and awkward he looked when he glanced in her direction then turned away quickly and looked intently at the flames. She remembered when he finally got up the courage to invite her to Edelbaum's Ice Cream Shop and they snuck away that day for an egg cream soda. She remembered how they met inside the Palace Theater where they sat in the last row of the balcony where no one could see them and watched all the movies in the serenity of the darkness and the faint comforting whirr of the movie projector in the projection room just behind them. How hard they had laughed at the Marx Brothers in Duck Soup and Mae West in I'm No Angel. How Edward had put his arm around her and kissed her for the first time when she started to cry in the sad part of Little Women. How she saw a teary glaze in Edward's eyes when he watched the plight of Don Quixote when Adventures of Don Quixote played at the Strand Theater. In the lonely bed of the convent waiting for morning and the end of everything she loved, she came to believe that it is not always the child who should beg forgiveness.

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When Nora awoke, her mother was sitting in the little chair by the door looking at her. Next to her mother was the brown leather suitcase she brought with her on the steamer when they had sailed from Ireland when she was three years old. She looked at her mother but said nothing. Her mother sat as still as a stone. After what seemed to Nora an eternity, her mother began to speak.

“I know it doesn’t seem like it now, but this is the best for you, my dear. I blame myself for all of this. We should have stayed in New York with Uncle Thomas, but I didn’t want to live in that big dirty city. I should have known I couldn’t take care of you myself after your father died. With my savings and a wee loan from Mr. Teague, I paid for your passage back to Cork. Sister Benedict has made all the arrangements with her sister convent there. The Magdalene sisters have agreed to take you in, tend to your spiritual needs, and teach you a trade.”

“I don’t want to go,” said Nora. “I want to stay here.”

“You can’t stay here. It’s impossible,” said Mrs. Sweeney. “You will not stay here. I’ve made the arrangements. Everything is settled. Mr. Wilson will be here soon.”

Nora stared at her mother sitting in the chair. It seemed that the whole part of the room where her mother was sitting was shrinking and receding into the distance.

“Can I see her?”

“Nora, you’ve been in and out of consciousness for over a week. She’s gone.”

“But I never saw her.”

“It is for the best.”

“What about Edward? I want to see him.”

“You can’t see him again. He won’t see you. He can’t see you. Do you know I could have Edward thrown in prison for this? You have to understand these things.”

Nora turned and tried to bury her head into the mattress but it was too thin and hard. Instead, she covered her face with her hands. She tried to envision the face of her baby girl but all she could conjure up was Edward’s face.

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Nathan drove Mrs. Sweeney home after they saw Nora’s ocean liner, the SS Algonquin, leave the dock in New York City. Mrs. Sweeney cried for the first part of the trip. By the time they had reached Peekskill, she had succumbed to exhaustion and emotion. She fell asleep and slept until they reached Mr. Teague’s house in Albany. Now, he and Mrs. Sweeney had an understanding and a bond that was much stronger than a mere friendship.

“I will not forget what you have done. If that is what you want for your service, I will make sure that it is done,” Teague had told him after Mrs. Sweeney had gone up to her room in the servant’s wing. By the time Nathan got home, settled into bed, after telling Nancy about all that had happened, in his heart was a mixture of elation and sadness.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

On a sunny day in late October in 1934, the Model T was finally completed. Nathan speculated that he and Ernie had used the parts from over 50 different vehicles to transform the skeletal frame that Ernie found and transformed it into a reasonable version of its former self. The final product looked surprisingly uniform thanks to the fact that nearly every one of its parts came from a car that was black.

“You want to take her around the block?” said Ernie as he poured gas into the tank from the five-gallon gas container.

They fitted themselves in the front bench of the passenger cabin, Ernie at the wheel and Nathan on the passenger side. Nathan tried to roll up the door window and noticed that it was missing a tooth on the gear as it slipped a bit on every turn. He made a mental note to fix it when he got back. Ernie put the car in reverse and let out the clutch gingerly as he pressed his foot to the accelerator pedal. The clutch responded smoothly and Ernie winked at Nathan as he backed the car out of the shed. In moments, they were heading up 1st Street and turning onto Lark Street past the old row houses in the direction of the Friendship House.

On Lark Street, the carburetor made a sputtering noise and Ernie pulled to the side of the road and stopped. Nathan jumped out, flipped up a side of the bonnet and made a

few adjustments to the carburetor, then jumped back into the car. Ernie pressed on the accelerator and the car pulled away smoothly. Nathan could see that the drive was brightening Ernie's mood. When Ernie was working on automobiles or fixing anything, he focused fully on the task. When he was driving, he was like a bird that needed to sing.

When they arrived at the Friendship House, Ernie pulled to a stop and launched into his favorite topic, race relations in the city, or at least the old times that colored folks told each other. "Did you know that there is a colored fella in that Irish gang over on the north side? His last name is McGarr. Isn't that something?" Ernie said with a smile. Although he only finished high school, Ernie knew the local history as well as any local historian. Ernie had once said to Nathan, "You can learn as much about a place in an evening of talking and playing cards as you could in a classroom."

Nathan enjoyed listening to Ernie talk about Albany, especially the stuff that seldom made its way into the history books. It reminded him of the times he sat next to his mother and sisters and listened to his father tell his congregation about how slaves would tell stories about the villages in Africa they came from. Many times, they passed the stories down for generations. His father made a point of telling his congregation they should never forget their history, no matter how shameful. Ernie was the only person he knew in Albany who talked about people of color, including Native Americans and their contributions to building the City of Albany. Ernie seemed determined to make sure that black folk did not forget their part in the history of Albany.

Ernie stopped for a moment and pulled a flask out of a pocket in his overalls. Even though Prohibition was over, Ernie hadn't shaken the habit of carrying a flask

nearly all the time. “Want some of this?” he asked, handing the flask over to Nathan. Ernie’s new favorite drink was bourbon made in Lawrenceville, Kentucky. Although no stores sold it above the Mason Dixon line, Ernie had a cousin who was a truck driver who got it for him when he made his run to Kentucky. Nathan took a long swig. It was good bourbon. He handed the flask back to Ernie and imagined what his teetotaler of a father would say if he could see him now, drinking and wasting his time on automobiles.

Nathan watched Ernie take another long gulp from his flask and then return it to the pocket in his green overalls. He fired up a cigarette, took a drag, and cleared the smoke from his lungs.

Ernie shifted the car into gear and drove past the center towards Arbor Hill Park. Then he turned south onto Manning Boulevard and pressed his foot to the accelerator. The old car responded and for a brief moment, momentum pinned Nathan to the back of the seat. Ernie raced the car down a long stretch of the empty Boulevard. He braked sharply when they reached an intersection and turned left onto Livingston Avenue. A man, just beginning to cross the street, jumped back onto the sidewalk and gave the pair a stern look as they passed. Finally, Ernie slowed the car down a little, turned right on North Pearl Street, and headed south towards downtown. After he crossed Clinton Avenue, he pulled the car to the curb in front of the Kenmore Hotel. He and Nathan looked towards the two dark skinned men in richly brocaded 19th century style red coats and white breeches who held the doors open for the hotel guests just as they did the time he and Ernie had walked past the hotel the day they first met, over three years before.

Nathan noticed that these were not the same two men at the doors that day. He wondered where those men were now.

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Nathan knew he would never forget 1934, especially the last few months. After they finished building the model T, it took Ernie and Nathan a few days to determine which one of them had collected the most parts. Even though they had kept a running list, Ernie had forgotten to update it a few times. When the counting was over, Ernie was the winner. To thank the neighborhood for the charity it showed helping them find parts, Ernie and Nathan decided to throw a block party for all of the neighbors. Nathan was able to use his modest influence with some of the people he knew at City Hall to get a permit to hold a street party in the first block of Colonie Street where Lark Street ended and Colonie Street began. The Democrats often used this block for rallies and other celebrations because very little traffic was disrupted when it was closed.

Nathan could see that Ernie's wife Mae was finally back to her old self. She and Nancy spent nearly two days getting everything ready. Nancy cooked a hillside of her southern fried chicken; Mae made candied yams, baked ham and cooked string beans. Frannie Meyers brought potato salad and Mary DeNunzio brought mounds of cannoli. Everyone brought something. Even old man Wolanski brought some jars of homemade pickles no one knew he could make.

The celebration started in the afternoon on the first Saturday in November and lasted well into the evening. At over fifty degrees, it was the warmest day in November

that anyone could remember. The men, reveling in their new freedom, brought out the liquor openly, turned up the radio and asked the ladies to dance once the libations had elevated the mood. Couples danced the “Jitterbug” to Cab Calloway songs, or did the “Big Apple” to other earthy tunes. If the noise was too loud, it didn’t matter. The whole neighborhood was at the party. Nathan understood why he had gotten the permits for the party so easily when big Tim Butler, the Democratic Ward leader, showed up and started handing people dollar bills, reminding them that the election was the following week and for whom to vote. The only thing that marred the festivities for Nathan was when he looked towards the house that belonged to the Baileys. Desmond had decided to go back to Liberia to work with Reverend Brown and the whole family had gone with him.

“We will be back,” Desmond had told Nathan before he left, but Nathan doubted they would ever come back to Albany again.

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A few weeks later, Ernie sold the model T to Abel Stein, the druggist, who used it to make deliveries around the neighborhood. Whenever Abel saw Ernie in the street, he always gave him a nod. With the proceeds from the sale of the car and some money he had saved, Ernie was able to buy a used 1929 green DeSoto coupe with green leather interior, white wall tires, and half-moon hubcaps. In no time, he had the car running like a top and looking show room new.

1934 was also the year that Ernie and Mae spent their first Christmas with their newly adopted daughter. To Ernie and Mae, she was beautiful and she was precious. Her

skin was the color of parchment, her wispy curls of hair - the color of copper. Nathan thought she was the most beautiful baby he had ever seen, and Ernie and Mae agreed. They named her Zene.

BIOGRAPHY

David M. Robinson grew up in New York. He attended the Cornell University, where he received her Bachelor of Arts in English in 1973. He went on to receive his Master of Science in Education from the University at Albany in 1976. He then received his Master of Fine Arts from George Mason University in 2015. He is currently the Director of Communications and Client Relations in Information Technology Services at George Mason University.