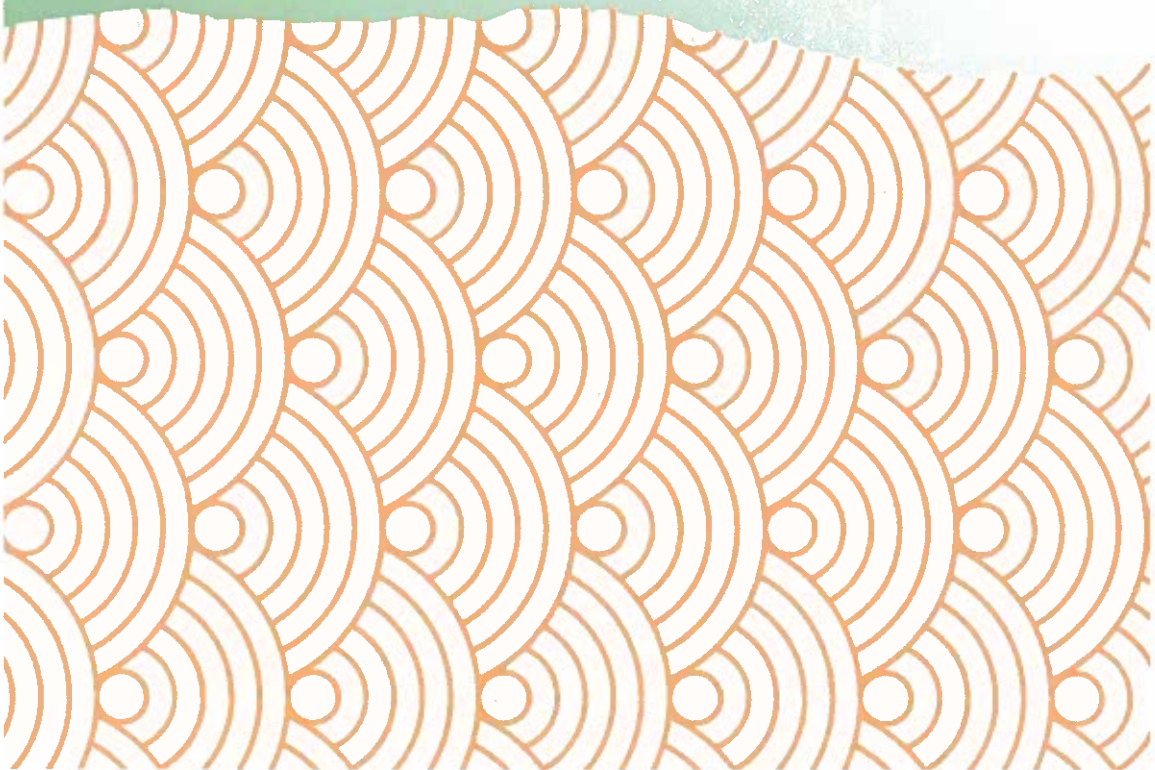




# *A Cook's Tale*



## A Cook's Tale

"Are you done with these? And can I freshen your cup?"

Looking up from her notes, she smiled and nodded to both questions. She thanked him and wondered if he had noticed how she had kept trying to size him up during the meal period.

He was unlike the American GIs her editor had sent her to report upon. She had seen plenty of them from one part of France to another. But he was different. English from his uniform. Strange he wore a clean and pressed uniform in place of the kitchen whites most of the mess staff wore. And he wasn't an officer, either. For two days and a night she watched him as their paths crossed throughout the compound. Here in the mess tent and in the field hospital, across the jeep-rutted mud expanse that was meant to be a parade ground and sometime soccer field.

She had heard his voice twice before. Once as he fed a patient whose both arms were in traction and wrapped in plaster. The second time when he quietly read a letter from home to a soldier whose eyes were bandaged. He leaned close and almost whispered to preserve the man's privacy in the cot-packed ward. There was a gentleness in his manner. He walked with a straightened spine and squared off shoulders, and his slim frame looked comfortable nonetheless. He was clean shaven, with no shadow; but was not as young as the teenagers from middle America she filed feature stories about for readers back home in the heartland. His fingers were long, his nails were neatly trimmed and clean; but not manicured.

The previous night she had wondered how, as a non-combatant, he might fit the stereotype of a kind of man she was introduced to for the first time here below the fields of Flanders. Homosexuality was not too often spoken of back home in Topeka, but there was discussion of it here in Europe. She trusted her woman's intuition more than her reporter's objectivity now though. She felt in her soul that this man, one out of thousands she'd seen fight, watched die, and reported on for her American audience, was enveloped in some unique aura created from within. Too unique to be stereotyped. Too within to be merely physically transparent.

She must have looked at him too long or too hard as he walked away, her breakfast tin and silverware in one hand and the stainless-steel coffee pitcher in the other. Now he was walking back to her end of the long, wooden mess table with a porcelain, oversized mug, steaming at the brim, with his eyes upon her.

"Since we were not *formally* introduced," and he emphasized the 'formally,' "I'm not supposed to be so bold as to come up to you and start a conversation. Very un-British of me, you know, but we've seen each other for two days now. Here and at the hospital. So. My name is Robert. Robert Farraday. No relation, of course. And so you won't think I'm some stuck-up Brit who can't make a handsome woman feel welcome without asking her for a date—Welcome to Europe. Sorry it couldn't be under better terms."

He sat without asking, setting his steaming mug of tea in front of him. Smiled. Looked at her notebooks and said, "What will the good people back home be reading about when you file your story?"

“It was going to be about the boys over at the hospital. What they feel about the sacrifices they’ve made for freedom. The usual patriotic fare to make the boys here feel good and the people back home even better. Same as in the London papers, I’d guess.”

“I’m afraid that not until they have to turn the farmhouse lights out in the States and—how do you say it back West—‘hunker down’ in their storm cellars—while the Luftwaffe blows the next harvest’s corn and wheat out of the ground—will our papers be the same.”

“I only meant...”

“Not that the help’s unwelcome. God knows, without your GIs, I’d be finishing my studies in Goethe rather than Chaucer when I go home.”

ii

Barbara recalled their first meeting with a touch of nostalgia, and some longing to be in his company again, as she dropped her letter to him in the mail slot in the elevator lobby. Down the glass chute of the New York City skyscraper, it slid several floors before landing in the mail room, the beginning of its trip across the still-war-tossed ocean. Sending it was an act of faith in itself, that no U-boat would torpedo her message and send it chilled to death to the floor of the Atlantic with the transport’s crew. All hands lost beneath the storm-chopped waters, leaving no trace on the face of God’s forgotten earth of the young, scared faces and their never-to-be lived dreams. For them, and for the boys of war she covered for two years, as well as her own newly found hope for love, she prayed her letter would arrive safely.

iii

For his own part, Robert Farraday steeped his hot tea in his scarred and banged-up porcelain mug, and looked out the university library window. He gently enveloped his long fingers around the mug’s warmth. Newly back from the still-raging war, his time of service was over. For those who looked upon his intact body, limbs, and mind still apparently in place, there were gazes of mixed hostility and curiosity. They could see something different in the thin young man’s erect frame, fair face, and some sense of grace that emanated from within. He projected a peacefulness that belied his time away at war. “Why wasn’t he still fighting over in the forest-packed snows of Germany? Had his mother lost all her other sons, to advance his respectable discharge, the maternal gift of a thankful nation? He decided to respond to none of their glances, knowing full well the true story would not interest them. So he kept to himself.

Chaucer’s pilgrimage was the last he needed to trace in this academic setting to earn his degree. He had only three months’ time in which he needed to complete six months of work. The inner calm he would need to draw upon to stay his course seemed deeper now that he had a further purpose. He looked forward to sailing to America to renew his friendship and, he hoped, to romance his foreign correspondent. But the obstacles were

huge as he had written to her about a few weeks before. Now, her longest letter in hand, he felt a closeness to her he had felt for only one person before. A long time ago.

*Dear Robert:*

*I was so happy to see your letter when I arrived home from the paper. But then how sad I felt as you described your current dilemma. I would so much like to help. That is, if you feel that I can, and that you would like me to do so. If so, we will need a faster method of communication than the sea-going post. My editor's sons are serving in the Pacific theater. He is sympathetic to your plight. He says we can use the cable to our London bureau office as long as we do so at times the paper doesn't need it, and as long as he can take the fee from my pay, and we do not abuse the privilege. The name of the person you should contact in our London office about using and receiving cables is Roger Radley. How happy I am not to be still in Topeka. Here is an idea I had after reading your letter ...*

He set the letter down carefully and without panic at the sound of the library chair across from his being withdrawn from the table. He looked up to see the face of the very man who cast a shadow upon his hopes of graduation.

"I see Mr. Farraday that your mind has wandered from your studies." The balding pate and narrow-set grey eyes looked at him leeringly. "A letter from a war ... buddy?" The way he intoned 'war' was so sarcastic in itself; but the 'buddy' after the suggestive pause was simply outright crude. Robert chose not to answer. He had learned the lessons of silence well as a boy and used them well as a man. An awkward silent moment dissipated as the professor gave in. "Have you the next part of your work finished yet? I know it is due at noon, but I may want to take a holiday tomorrow after my eight o'clock lecture."

Robert was too self-contained to give in. Even though he knew it would mean he would have to work late into the night. "Very well, sir. I'll have it to the department secretary by nine."

His professor rose to leave, sneering, almost disappointed. Not to lose the upper hand, his last and parting comment was, "I'll be leaving at 8:50, sharp."

iv

The wet ride to the bureau required over an hour. Robert's hands were stiff with the night cold against the metal handlebars. Twice he almost fell off the bicycle as it slipped on damp, broken cobblestones. It was his balance within that kept the bicycle upright and safe. The hesitancy he felt about accepting Barbara Milovich's offer was beginning to evaporate like the evening mist, in the light of his professor's latest insulting arrogance. Revenge and anger held no sway in his choice. It was more the honor Robert hungered to see surface and win out over this abuse. The struggle brought back to mind his grandmother's narrations of Odysseus, trying to return to his wife and home, with his honor and self-control intact.

When Robert felt early in the course that his professor's attitudes were just an affectation of academia, he put up with them. But once, when Robert was early for an appointment, he overheard the professor bragging to the department secretary that he was going to "break the fag's genitals, since he wasn't inclined to need them for anything worthwhile" and "string the pacifist along enough to evoke his hatred and violence." Robert knew he was in for trouble. So, he had written about it all to 'Barb.' She was the one person who understood his conscientious objection to the war that led to his assignment as a cook; and who, though they both remained honorable in one another's company until her departure, knew him to be heterosexual.

Now tonight, he sent her a cable accepting her offer, went home to his rented flat to finish his portion of his thesis on Chaucer's time as a civil servant. It was nearly five o'clock in the morning when he set his alarm for seven, and lay his troubled head to rest awhile, before waking, shaving, and dressing simply but neatly, and hiking back to the University to leave his paper with the department secretary at 7:45. He, too, knew the game of arrogance—taught well by intemperate officers in the military. It would irritate Professor Norman Wedley no end to see the package was delivered an hour before his unreasonable advanced deadline. As Robert fell back to sleep, he regretted that some unsuspecting university student was going to be made to pay for his 'insolence.'

v

"Now let's get this straight, Barbara," said the Arts & Leisure Editor. "You want to find here in New York City some museum items that date back to Geoffrey Chaucer's lifetime?"

"Yes. My friend is studying in England. For his Chaucer dissertation he needs some edge over the other students. He needs access to something none of them can attain. This way his paper will be more refreshing and unique."

"Well, let's see," he mumbled thoughtfully, flipping through the index cards in a wooden file box on his desk. "Wait here a few minutes. I'll be right back." He carried two of the index cards away with him, holding them in between the thumb and first finger of his right hand and lightly, thoughtfully, slapping them against the palm of his left hand, as he went out the door.

She looked around his office as she waited, without leaving her chair, lest she seem to be prying. The walls were polished wood wainscoting, with windows above that extended to the ceiling. The tops of two windows were framed out in the same wood, to mimic the transom window that opened over the door. The windows facing the reception and in the door were frosted to offer privacy. The clear windows in between the offices facilitated the editor's seeing who was available for assignments and who was working away at articles and reviews already parceled out. All but one of the offices were in use.

On the editor's one interior wall that was paneled there were framed pictures and award plaques. There were actors and actresses in group portraits with the editor, probably from his time as a burlesque and theater and film critic in Los Angeles. There were his diplomas from Northwestern and Columbia. An awards dinner photo, she didn't recognize the individuals other than the editor. And a dramatic picture of Carnegie Hall

showing the stage and private boxes in a slightly distorted angle to include as wide a view as possible.

"I think I have something." The editor's voice preceded his entry into the office. It was a practiced maneuver. It had actually prevented many an embarrassing situation in his career, serving enough notice for snoops to get back to their chairs or for some romantic rendezvous to assume some seemingly innocent posture before he came into view. Many a director, actress, or agent over the years appreciated his uncommon discretion, in an industry rife with print and radio exposés. He had mastered these 'entrances' and they helped him enjoy the difference between being a major New York newspaper's editor over a gossip columnist who still banged away a daily slice of someone else's life, like those working right down the hall.

"About six years ago, John D. Rockefeller donated some Middle Ages tapestries in town to the New York Museum of Art. Here are photographs of them, so your friend can see what they look like. Now, make sure you tell him some of these were only woven about a century after Chaucer lived, but you'll get the idea. The deal was that Rockefeller would have the right to consult with the museum in housing and displaying the tapestries in a medieval setting. There's a place up in the Bronx, at Fort Tryon Park, that houses them. It's called 'The Cloisters.' The museum's entire medieval collection will be housed there one day, when all the construction work is completed."

vi

Robert rang up the contact at the London Bureau to see if any cables had arrived. The pleasantly voiced gentleman informed him a considerably long cable had indeed arrived. Also, there were to be some pictures available in about ten days, carried over by an editor who was about to disembark from New York for a scheduled visit and upon whom Robert's 'lady friend' had prevailed to include in his steamer trunk. There would also be some 'supplies' for his project.

Robert's return cable was brief and to the point. She would understand. He knew that for sure.

vii

Her plot was uncommonly simple, yet intriguingly sublime. Robert had convinced her of Professor Wedley's devious nature. He would not confront Robert about his suspicions that Robert was more interested in men than in women. He would simply assume it. Moreover, he would not challenge Robert's views on the war. He would rather abhor them without knowledge, and chalk them up to cowardice.

As far as Robert knew, and which he had written about to Barbara, Wedley's reasons were probably grief and revenge and jealousy. For, on the corner of the professor's desk were two companion photos, piano-hinged together in a double frame so they stood on the desk in a 'v-shape.' The one on the left was the portrait of a young soldier from the 'war to

end all wars' some twenty years earlier. There was a black mourner's frame around the picture, the kind fashionable before the twenties, surrounding the infantryman with his flat dish helmet and gas mask canister slung haughtily over one shoulder. In the photograph to the right was the same young man in an academic sweater. His arm rested in a devil-may-care intimacy on the shoulder of his teammate—the person eighteen years of age who would later remain unmarried and seek the solace of the university for shelter in his sterile, empty, miserable life.

Barbara's suggested plan meant quite a bit of hard work for Robert. Perhaps more than she knew. But she was uncannily confident he had it in him to make it happen. In effect, it was comparable to doing another, separate research paper while completing his thesis. But both tasks were very Chaucerian. There was at least that. What's more, the sheer volume of work required to pull off the intended fraud would make Robert's doing it seem impossible. He would succeed precisely because the plan was beyond belief.

### viii

There were now only three weeks left to complete the dissertation. After that a fortnight's reprieve before the oral exam to defend his thesis. Robert needed two things. He needed to get a passing grade from Norman Wedley. Then, he needed to make sure Wedley was not on his oral exam board. The way he figured it, Wedley would give him a passing grade begrudgingly, and then cause him to fail the oral exam out of spite. People had strung Robert along before, mistaking his serenity for weakness. This time he could not let the matter drop.

Robert knew he had to gain an advantage. He had the bait. His New York connection had seen to that. But what he still needed was the opening, the opportunity, to tempt Wedley into a trap. He got just that opportunity with a mere three weeks left. Without Barbara's encouragement he would not have done so.

Tuesday morning. The secretary's door was ajar. But she was nowhere in sight. Voices from inside Wedley's office were muffled. No. Just one voice. But still a conversation was suggested by the tone. Robert assumed Wedley was on the telephone. Desperate for some advantage, and halfway finished with the bait for the trap, Robert looked around for the secretary. She was still among the missing. So, he dared. Dared on this new front with the same inner persistence and fortitude he had displayed when he poured a hot tea and walked across a mess tent to talk to a woman reporter from the United States some months before.

Treading lightly, still listening behind himself, Robert walked forward. The office was a central space, with the secretary's desk facing the public hallway door. Three professors' offices were behind each one's own private door that opened into the secretary's foyer office. A fourth room, which had its door removed, presented a couch and two armchairs. It served as a waiting room during school hours and a sitting room for the professors after hours.

Robert made certain there was no one in the sitting room. He knew the other two professors were on sabbatical this semester and that their offices were empty, unlit, and locked. Their absence resulted from the lack of classes that term. Wartime duties had

drained the university of students to take the usual number of class sections held. Without the other teachers around, Robert drew Wedley as an instructor and a thesis mentor by default.

And it was Wedley's raised voice that caught him in mid-step. "And what in bloody hell is this about, anyway?" Robert turned expecting to see the professor in the middle room of the suites, challenging him. But instead, he was still back in his office on the phone; speaking more angrily than Robert had ever heard him. "The Association knows my credentials. Who cares about publications, anyway? So what, if there have been no breakthroughs from my work with students here."

Robert made his way closer, sensing what Barbara had told him to risk was true. He could see the words in the static teletype letters: JUST GO AND LOOK AROUND. YOU'LL FIND SOMETHING. YOU'LL FIND A WAY. GO WITHOUT KNOWING EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR—LIKE WE REPORTERS DO. WHEN YOU SEE THE THING THAT LEAPS OUT AT YOU, YOU'LL RECOGNIZE IT, INSTINCTIVELY. YOU MUST TRY, MY DEAR. THERE'S TOO LITTLE TIME TO HOPE YOU'LL FIND IT OUT IN CLASSES.

She had written 'MY DEAR.' It had energized him. Innerved and enabled him beyond his own considerable reserves. Could she have been right? Would eavesdropping on this call be THE THING?

He stood close enough to hear, but still at an angle to see the hallway and appear to be waiting if the secretary should happen along. And hear he did. "Look, Michaelson, here's the thing. I have a class to get ready for tomorrow; then there are the last two lectures next week before review for the term. I save the unfinished *Tales* for the last two classes. Makes sense, what. Then I can get on this credentials business. But it seems a bit odd in the middle of a blistering war when it's so hard to get students and hold on to faculty that some credentials committee is concerned that I have been without a published article in a half-dozen years. Why they won't take my word for it—that I fell deathly ill on my last sabbatical and need to wait until next year to complete my research—is beyond what a person of my caliber and standing should have to tolerate. It's academic suicide for them to suspend my tenure for lack of publishing. What are they trying to do to the department, anyway?" There was a pause. Robert readied himself to move. But then, Wedley sputtered, "What do they mean—I miss out on the details? Don't they know I am larger than that? Don't they appreciate I take the long view, that I always see the big picture beyond the minutiae of details? It's an asset, not a shortcoming."

When the phone hit the cradle there was quiet. Wedley heard the sound of his professional life ticking away on his mantle clock. Robert heard the lid of his trap snapping shut—the tapestries! Wedley put his elbows on his desk, rested his face in his cupped hands, and exhaled loudly. Robert stealthily tiptoed from the outer room and silently blew a kiss to the air, knowing some kindly wind would carry it across the Atlantic.

"My last two lectures are typically spent on Chaucer's unfinished *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's plan was far too grandiose to complete in his lifetime, though it did not daunt his spirit."



A clattering at the doorway as books fell to the floor caused Wedley to stop his lecture. Everyone in the room knew he hated for such things to happen. There were rumors at the University that long ago undergraduates used to risk taking a failing grade by missing classes rather than daring to enter the room after he had started to lecture. They were shocked to see that Farraday was late, since he always came early; but were stunned he dared to disrupt the class. Robert saw the disbelief on their faces as he looked up from his squatting position though his back was still straight and dignified while picking up his books. He laughed in his mind and spoke to his Barbara. Robert had taken to talking to her in his mind, to pass the time in the long week since overhearing Wedley's phone call and discovering his teacher's vulnerability. Now, he confided in her that if his fellow graduate students thought they were surprised at his late arrival, they would be completely unhinged to know he had waited outside purposefully to miss Wedley's introduction to the unfinished *Tales*. For only then could he time his entrance perfectly to spring the trap and initiate the public part of his secret plan. As he heard Wesley just tell the class "... plan was far too grandiose to complete, though it did not daunt his spirit ..."

"Nice of you to join us, hey what," was the opening parley of what would surely build to an attack. It did not take long. "And so, Mr. Farraday, to go in the order of the work, suppose you tell us what you know of *The Cook's Tale*."

Robert had thought correctly. He knew he had a good chance of Wedley starting with the tale of the cook, because it was placed in most chronologies as the earliest tale left unfinished by Chaucer. He calmly set his retrieved books on a wooden desk and sat erect. "Yes. *The Cook's Tale*." He paused just slightly. The silence caused his classmates to look up from their books. Some turned to look at Wedley. Most avoided his glance and stared at Farraday. "Well, Perkyn the revelour and his compatriot are tricked by Rose and her father to take a journey to win back their belongings. In the meantime, while they are gone, Rose and her dad cuckold the compeer and steal Perkyn's possessions. The ..."

"What in bloody hell are you blabbering about, man? There is no such thing in *The Cook's Tale*."

"I was a cook in the war, I can't believe I mistook a cook's story for some other pilgrim's. Could it be truly so?"

The right buttons were pushed. Hard and straight on. Wedley responded in a furious outburst that even *his* harsh reputation had prepared none of them to hear. "You can't talk of war to me. You're as queer as the Pardoner and as deceitful as the Monk. *The Cook's Tale* is unfinished. Do you understand? It was never completed!!!" The words shot out amid Wedley's spittle.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir. I certainly meant no disrespect nor challenge. I just had such a clear memory of the castle and the tapestries. I regret being late and the intrusion. I'll simply leave and wait for you to summon me at another time." Robert smoothly regathered his materials and made his way to the door. All in the class mistook his strategic exit as a cowardly retreat. How well Robert recalled others making the same miscalculation.

Wedley stood in supreme command. His back ramrod straight. His facial color and indignant red flush.

"Perhaps it was something I saw in France, sir," was all Robert said as he turned at the door and faced back into the room, looking at the professor. Wedley himself still postured in front of the rest of the graduate class whose members were stunned into more

silence than Lot's wife. Now not a single one dared to turn around to look at Farraday. With that, Robert left.

x

The words about France, however much spoken in parting, now haunted Norman Wedley in the dark hours of the night. He had awakened, tossed his coverlet aside, and arisen from his bed at three in the morning. Now he was pacing around his flat. Worse yet, he was drinking whiskey and soda as if it were iced water.

Norman Wedley seldom drank alone. And almost never at home in his flat. This Farraday boy had gotten to him. Wedley allowed himself to admit this to himself in the honesty that the hour of three o'clock in the morning seems somehow to nurture, even in the bleakest of hearts and the darkest of souls. Farraday looked nothing like Wedley's lover Sandy. Nonetheless the memories Farraday evoked were strong and urgent, glorious and devastating. Warm memories of camaraderie in their university years. Chilling memories of Sandy's mustard gas-induced death in the trenches of France. For the same reason Wedley could not teach contemporary literature that featured Wilfred Owen's poetry or Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*; Farraday's mention of the war and France catapulted Norman Wedley into his afternoon lecture hall outburst and this night of sorrow and horror.

For four decades Wedley successfully had closeted his homosexuality behind public harshness to any young men who were even the slightest bit effeminate. He drove long, lonely hours to private clubs under many assumed identities to enjoy what momentary solace he could from anonymous liaisons. Unfailingly these just reminded him painfully of his Sandy, whom no one else on earth could ever replace in his heart, his mind, or his bed. It drove Wedley silently mad for years and Farraday pushed him over the line into anger, denial, and the desire for revenge.

There was no logic to it. His heart had reasons though. And these were beginning to frighten a self-examining Norman Wedley at this late hour of the night. And of his life. Was his fierce reaction to Farraday an overreaction to a distinct attraction he felt for the young man? Had his circumstances so paralleled Sandy's that Farraday was the first surrogate or substitute for Sandy's love that Wedley's deep-set consciousness was willing, and desperate, to accept? The inner frustration and the external anger over this latter-day betrayal of Sandy's memory was seething like a boil beneath the upper layers of Wedley's skin. He drained his glass and with hands trembling he refilled it and wondered how long this would fester before it would explode.

He gazed through his curtained window, on past the muntins and then out past the glass. The moon sat low slung in the sky, heading to its setting. This night it would be over the horizon before the sun rose. It was incomplete in its phase. But he worked his will to convince his mind to see what his eyes could not. He knew from other nights it could be full. And now he imagined that fullness even as it was missing in the sky. Just as he had for forty years imagined a fullness to his life because once in an earlier time he thought he found such fullness in his embrace and love of Sandy. The moon would no more face him full-on tonight any more than he would face himself. So, it presented to him only a profile and a

promise of some remembered fulfillment. To his utter horror the profile was vague. In his mind's eye he could not recall what Sandy looked like from the side and from below. Regardless of his effort, Wedley could not put Sandy's face on the night's moon. Slowly he forced a focus, a cloud passed across the profile, clearing as it energized his view. The profile was coming into the focus he wanted, but in amazed shock Wedley stood to see the profile of Robert Farraday instead, looking firmly up at Wedley as the student had when gathering his fallen books. The crash of Wedley's whiskey glass to the floor scattered crystal like so many of Farraday's pages and texts. Wedley stood, frozen. He trembled. He lost focus on the glass at his feet, so many stars of light glistening through the tears welling in his eyes. More clouds skimmed across the still-darkened sky. Wedley stared at them. He had not cried in forty years. He saw the clouds overcome the night's remnant of a moon. He could not see as clearly what had overcome himself. Exhausted, he returned to his bedroom and lay down amid the tousled covers; lacking the strength or will to draw them up into place to offer him comfort.

xi

This time the secretary was at her desk. This Wednesday afternoon Robert Farraday was expected. Summoned, actually. "There's an umbrella stand and coat rack in the common room through the doorway arch, sir. You may go right in to see him, Mr. Farraday. Professor Wedley said to let you in without delay. You are his last appointment of the afternoon. Oh, and please let him know I'm leaving for the day. Thank you." Robert did not know what to make of this immediacy. He could not be sure if it were Wedley's or the secretary's.

Upon entering, Robert saw Wedley only in profile. The professor was at his desk, but he was turned and looking out his window at the rain. He spoke without turning to look at Farraday. "Come, sit here, Mr. Farraday." Robert did, and Wedley continued to talk without turning back from the window. "One wonders if this is the way April's showers looked to Geoffrey Chaucer back in his day, hey Mr. Farraday?"

Robert did not quite know where this was going. He decided, Chaucerian fashion, to follow his host's lead, right to the *Tales*. "I find my research into the *fabliau* constantly reminding me of the French countryside. Strangely enough, when I was there and saw the land scarred and torn apart by artillery or a village devastated by recent aerial bombardment, I tried to think of more chivalrous warfare. When just two opposing and representative champions would joust for honor and victory." Then, looking in Wedley's direction to see if his response was appropriate, Robert noticed the desk was different than during his last interview. The pictures were not on the desk. Wedley had only some student folders on his otherwise relatively clean workspace. Perhaps it was his end-of-the-term routine. When Wedley did not answer, Robert continued.

"My grandfather was never to come home again from France. He was killed in the trenches. My grandmother cared for me as a child. My mother supported the three of us in a small flat. I was never told where my father was, nor who he was. But on long dismal days like this one, my grandmother must have been overtaken with melancholy. She spoke to me of their dreams and plans. None ever came to pass. Just the three of us alone. Alone, except

for grandfather's books. Grandmother read to me of Beowulf and King Arthur and Aesop's fables. She loved the *Odyssey*, but not the *Iliad*. Later, she encouraged me to try Milton, but only *Paradise Lost*, never the rest. She didn't care much for Shakespeare, either."

"Were you lonely as a child, too, Farraday?"

Robert did not know what to say. Wedley now turned to face him. The man looked drawn. His arrogance was not to be seen, nor heard. It was replaced by an enigma. Did Wedley mean to say he, himself, had been lonely as a child? Did he mean he thought Farraday was a lonely adult, still?" Wedley eyed him closely. Robert almost physically flinched under the scrutiny. Only his iron will, clothed in its velvet exterior, kept him still. But the energy from it still emanated from within and Wedley seemed to recognize the stalemate and spoke. But the look that accompanied his words appeared to Robert to be spawned of mischief or of cunning. He just could not yet tell which. It was certainly not a look of comforting. "As lonely as your grandmother, of course." Robert could not help thinking that Wedley was dissembling.

Robert thought he had come to Wedley's ready with Barbara's plan to begin trapping the professor, yet now he suddenly felt apprehensive. It was the same apprehension a GI in a hospital bed described when the American realized he had inadvertently walked into a minefield in the graveyard of a little country church. The Kansan's accented voice and peculiar phrasing came back to Robert. "I thought I knew I was on special ground, revered so to speak. I needed to walk with care. It was then I saw the trip wires under some leaves a breeze came up and stirred. I was in a churchyard and still had no idea just how close I really was to death."

Wedley broke the spell. "Mr. Farraday. There's but one day of lecture left to my course before review. It does not seem quite sporting to have you miss out, after all this time, what. So I asked you to come this afternoon to put aside that nasty event from yesterday and to make certain you had no doubt about coming tomorrow."

"That's very generous of you, sir," was all that Farraday would let himself say. *Am I to take this as an apology*, he wondered in his mind to Barbara? The enigmas continued to unfold before his eyes, and it took all Robert's inner strength to keep himself from unraveling. Dignified, he stood up to leave, not sure whether to extend his hand in accord or not.

"Need you leave right away, Farraday?" Wedley was purposeful in not standing. He caught Robert in an awkward half-way position. "I have your thesis submissions to date here. Perhaps we could review them. I had Mrs. Landry brew some tea just before you came." His glance was enigmatic again. It was an invitation, not a command. And yet, underneath his voice and his gaze there was more. It was as if a wave on the flat Channel had receded already, but some small smooth stones were still rolling backwards to the sea under its momentum and were enveloped by some Arnold-like invisible influence.

Wedley gestured toward the armchairs set around an oblong tea table over in the corner of the room. There was indeed a silver tea service and fine bone china set on the table. Next to them, Robert noticed the over-sized envelope he had left for Wedley the week before. The table stood low, facing a set of double wingback armchairs on one side and a love seat on the other. Behind the love seat was a large window. The curtains in the window had a pattern that matched that of the armchairs, while the love seat was upholstered in a solid earth brown that picked up the background hue in the floral design on the window treatment. On both sides of the window, wooden bookshelves bore the

weight of the professor's most needed volumes. They were set on their sides in piles with neatly cut squares of paper sticking out to mark pages for class reference. Robert surmised the organization was for each of the current term's courses Wedley was teaching. And he was right. Those with bindings facing out were for past terms, now not as readily needing to be at Wedley's beck and call. Even his inanimate possessions were ordered to be at his disposal.

Wedley took his favorite armchair, facing the window and forcing Robert to take a place on the loveseat. That made Robert sit somewhat lower and with less support than Wedley could in his armchair, which took on the appearance of an upholstered throne. "I have read your submissions," Wedley began. Robert reached for the envelope as he spoke because Wedley's hands were together in front of his chest, almost as if joined in prayer, and he dipped them toward the package as he spoke. Just as Robert was about to take hold of it, Wedley leaned forward and placed his long fingers atop the back of Robert's hands. Even at Robert's upward glance and look of surprise, Wedley did not retreat. It even felt to Robert as if he increased his finger pressure ever so slightly to give an assurance of sorts.

Years of self-control were spent in mere moments. The urge to break and run forced back, Robert remained on the settee and struggled against the reflex to pull his hands back quickly. It was his grandmother's voice he heard now, not the Kansan's nor Barbara's nor even Wedley's. Her clear-eyed image held his attention now as much as she herself ever had during their rainy days together. He heard her talking of the Greek warriors coming home from Troy. At every turn, powers wielded and events manipulated by the gods, so much more powerful and fearsome than mere men, plotted to lead those Argonauts astray, to keep them from returning to their loved ones. There was an archaic word she used—*sophrosteine*, rendered in English. It meant immense self-possession. It grew, she had said, from a person knowing himself so well and being so assured in what he was meant to do, so confident that he knew his true destiny no matter what the fates put before him as obstacles. It was his ultimate strength of personal character, sung with such praise by Homer, that Robert Farraday needed to summon up from within himself at this very moment. He blessed his grandmother's memory on the spot, as he heard the echo of her bedtime voice. He knew he had never before in his life had a moment of such recognition. He also knew it could not have come at a more necessary time. How he had loved that woman. Oh, how much he owed to her, then and now.

"Perhaps we could enjoy our tea first and look at the submission afterward." Wedley gently tilted his head down to the left, while rotating it a bit up to the right. He did not free Robert of the lock of his stare and perceptibly narrowed his left, lower eye just a bit. Robert couldn't believe what he heard. Only when Robert consented with a nod, did Wedley smile and, only after twice tapping the back of Robert's hands with his fingertips, did he withdraw his hand, adjust himself, and reach for the tea service. Wedley poured their teas deftly, making sure to keep as much eye contact with Robert as possible. Through gestures that remained unmarred by speech, the professor discovered that his student wanted cream and sugar. He handed the prepared cup on its saucer to Robert, and then picked up a wedge of lemon, squeezed it over his own cup, wiped his fingers with a small, cloth serving napkin made in a pattern to match the chair's upholstery and then took his cup off the table. He sat back deeply in his chair and sipped his tea, looking over the delicate rim so as not to lose eye contact with his guest. His appearance was no longer wan. His professorial

arrogance was replaced with the visage of a man masterfully pleased with himself, more so than his polite smile, wide eyes and courteous nod to Robert bore witness to.

The formal tea ritual had a dizzying effect on Robert Farraday. He had heard that the Japanese allies to the Axis troops he saw across the foxholed fields of France held such elaborate ceremonies. And then he remembered his own tea ritual—slogging across the muddy field to bring Barbara Milovich the first of many cups of tea they would share. But his and Wedley's were Earl Grey, not Sencha. He heard the rain behind him on the windowpane and thought of all that mud. That, and the memory of Barbara, eased him out of Wedley's trancelike web. He took a drink of his tea and waited for Wedley to do the same. As the professor did so, Robert put down his cup and saucer in a smooth and unperturbed movement and retrieved the packet with his papers, before Wedley could stop him again. Wedley seemed almost amused. "I did not mean to make you nervous, Farraday; only welcome."

A few moments passed and Wedley continued. "What made you choose the *fabliau* to study?"

With the practiced patience of years and his newfound realization of self-assurance, Farraday put all his upset at the dishonesty of Wedley's affront aside and rose to the demands of the moment. "I thought Chaucer was a writer only. I knew from school as a child that he lived above Aldgate and collected tariffs. I thought that was just to earn money while he wrote." Wedley nodded acceptance of this typical schoolboy misconception of Chaucer. "But studying as an adult I learned Chaucer was connected to centers of influence in business and government. He travelled in the royal household's service to France, to Italy, and maybe even to Ireland. Some of these were secret diplomatic missions for the throne. Sometimes he needed a royal writ of protection to travel into hostile territory. He might even have helped negotiate peace treaties and trade agreements between otherwise belligerent parties. In short, I learned what you already know, that Chaucer lived a life circumscribed by intrigue and power. He met and dealt with kings and dukes, earls and princes; influential merchants and international business magnates; and he knew the principal writers, artists, and thinkers of his day.

"And in the face of all this, he wrote all manner of things, and *The Canterbury Tales*. The French *fabliau* were transported to a higher level of art at his hand." Robert moved to the edge the settee, and, leaning forward, pierced Wedley's half-attentive eyes with a V-1 stare that projected his inner strength and seized the professor's attention. "Everything I knew and felt about what was right and just and honest—for those who found themselves in society without money and power and influence—were in the *fabliau* my grandmother's reading opened for me. And Chaucer, up to his ink-stained elbows in all that intrigue added to the *fabliau* the apparently innocent and naïve conceit of poetic justice." Robert paused and spoke one word. "Professor." And here, by leaning further forward and sharpening his stare, Robert intended to burrow even more deeply into Wedley's attention, right down to the man's very soul, if he had one left, by disclosing, "For a fatherless boy, powerless and without influence, poetic justice is a God-sent gift. The very *idea* that the powerful will bring themselves down by their pride and arrogance makes justice a possibility otherwise unavailable to those who find themselves socially disenfranchised. That's why I picked Chaucer's evolution of the *fabliau* in the opening *Tales* for my thesis and dissertation." Robert sat back and knew within his heart that he had just thoroughly co-opted Barbara Milovich's plan. It was now fully his own. And it was engaged.

The passion Robert Farraday conveyed shattered Norman Wedley's plot to weave a web of sensual attraction around his soul. Wedley had not dreamt of the depth his adversary brought to this encounter, especially as he was virtually unprepared to know what Wedley had in mind. Wedley trembled inside imagining he thought this fair boy, brought up by women, would be easy pickings for his pent-up lust. Happy he instinctively had chosen not to expose his grand intentions too soon, Wedley backed off. Shaken.

Wedley set down his teacup, half-filled with English tea for a Japanese ceremony. He sat forward in his chair. "That's intriguing. Most certainly puts a personal twist on the work. Hope you're finding it satisfying." He paused. "Of course, the review board will have to judge whether it's too personal and less academically valid, objectively speaking."

Robert could not figure what specifically caused it to happen, but he realized the trance was broken for Wedley as well. The professor's setting the cup down was a signal that their interview was over.

"I must be off. Thank you for coming this afternoon. I trust I haven't kept you from an engagement for supper." Wedley was standing as he spoke. He did not offer his hand for Robert to shake. "You may take the package. I've finished my review and look forward to your final version. I made some comments you may find helpful." Again, the sly look that was impossible to understand was on Wedley's face. But he wore it now like cosmetics applied badly and without conviction.

With the package under his arm, Robert was at the threshold. He turned a quarter of the way around so as to still be on his way out. "Oh, Professor. It was at a French Abbey. I remembered last evening. Actually woke out of a sound sleep with the memory of it."

"What was at an abbey, Mr. Farraday?"

Robert was surprised to find he was thrilled to see Wedley was genuinely puzzled. Not even the last unconvincing enigmatic look was on his face now. "The manuscript with *The Cook's Tale* I saw. Good night, now." He made sure to leave with enough speed to be out of reach of any reply Wedley might make; but did so with such self-possessed grace his vanishing gait look unhurried to the gape-eyed professor.

xii

The knock on Robert's door was quite businesslike. Convinced that it might be Wedley, he almost didn't answer. At the second knock, he replied through the door, "Who is it?"

"Roger Radley from the bureau. I have your package."

"Please come in," Robert stated as he opened the door and then repeated in assurance in case the door opening muffled his first reply. "Do come in, please. What package is this, Mr. Radley?"

"Call me Roger. Everyone does." Their shared nods settled that issue. Radley went on. "Why, these are your pictures from Miss Barbara. Turns out she had them sent by diplomatic pouch. Faster than the earlier set she sent that's still on its way by ship. She must really be sweet on you. You know she's not the easiest ... well let's just say that I saw her give military people a hard time over in France. I know she also arranged for personal communications back home via government means for officers who had family

emergencies when she was on the Continent. She must have chased down somebody with rank to call in such a favor to get you these this way." Radley handed over the package.

Roger scanned the flat with his practiced eye while Farraday broke the seal on the package and looked at the pictures. There were books segregated everywhere—on the chairs, the floor, the end tables. The principal elements of research décor were stacks of handwritten cards and sheets of paper hanging out of the books, even those precariously perched on furniture edges. But to all of it there seemed an order, a balance, wherein each stack or group of material fit.

While Radley took it all in, Farraday started to read the note in Barbara's hand that was a guide to the photos. Robert suddenly remembered his manners. "Please sit down, Mr. ... Roger. May I offer you some refreshments? I have some tea and scones."

"No, I think not," said Radley. "I wouldn't want to do anything to upset your ... organization of materials ... or my dear friend Barbara. I think rumors would be upsetting to her."

"What rumors? What do you mean?"

Laughing a bit, politely, Radley replied with a nod, "I see, she was right then. You are immersed in your studies and somewhat ... uninitiated." Radley walked to the door and opened it. "You don't really know, do you?" He stood, still slightly amused, but more so amazed.

"Know what?" Robert was perplexed.

"Let us just say, Mr. Farraday, that if it were to get around in certain circles that I came to your flat in the late evening and stayed for refreshments that you might begin to fall prey to the overtures of more of a certain group of men and old professors at University than those of some of the young women there." He smiled and said, "Call me if you need to get through to Miss Barbara by way of the bureau. And I mean this genuinely: Thank you for the offer of your hospitality. It doesn't happen too often, and I found it, to my surprise actually, quite nice to be asked."

Robert Farraday's confusion was replaced with a certain shock at his own naïveté, and some regret, that Radley and he could not carry on a conventional conversation as mutual acquaintances because of Roger's preference for selecting men rather than women for his more intimate friendships.

xiii

Again, his clock struck three in the morning and Norman Wedley was pacing. And drinking. The opened envelope from the afternoon's post was discarded on the floor. The letter of summons it had carried from the committee was standing erect on its tri-folded side on the table he was pacing past. Every third trip or so past the table, he would stop and retrieve the letter, re-read a line or two, set it down on its side carefully, and continue his striding vigil.

What possibly new would they think he could come up with? How many areas of Chaucer's life and work could possibly be left for fresh discovery? He thought of all the dissertations and theses he'd been given by students over the past six years. Six years. That was how long it had been since he last 'assisted' a doctoral candidate and enhanced the



young man's chances to secure a teaching position by 'allowing' the research to be circulated under the professor's name in just the 'right' journals; with footnoted thanks for the young man's 'research assistance.' And even at that, it never saw the light of a publisher's camera-ready room.

And the years since had been a drought for fresh ideas. Wedley had quite frankly lost his ambition and drive. News of another imminent war on the Continent like the one that took away the only love of his life was devastating to the professor. The actual outbreak of hostilities and their incursion by aerial bombardment onto the soil of Great Britain herself ushered in Wedley's years of unimaginative classes. The harvest was equally droll, pedantic research papers and tedious oral defenses of obscure, unexciting 'folderol,' according to one committee member who instigated the note that now did handstands on Norman Wedley's three a.m. furniture.

Pouring another whiskey, Ireland's best, without any water this time, and cursing the war, an echo surfaced from out of Wedley's recent memory. The voice was that of his other newfound nemesis, Robert Farraday. "It was in a French Abbey ... the manuscript I saw of *The Cook's Tale*."

The desk lamp illuminated the whiskey as it slid down the inside of the glass to Wedley's lips. He stared right into the glass, directly through the bottom that was now visible, and at the light. As the lapping Channel waters at lowest tide, the last wave of liquor glided over his lips, onto his tongue, and down his throat. Norman Wedley set the empty glass down a little unsteadily and weaved his way back to bed. A little satisfied. Considerably drunk. Immensely hopeful.

xiv

The last review lecture of the term came to a close and now Norman Wedley stood in front of his Chaucerian scholars in as arrogant a fashion as he could muster on so little sleep and so much whiskey from several nights in a row. "Those of you ladies and gentlemen who will be returning next term for your last year should use these next few weeks to determine your doctoral theses topics. Those who have a thesis due this term have until next Tuesday to submit final papers. You can pick up any progressive papers and notes with my comments intact this afternoon until four o'clock or from the secretary tomorrow, Friday."

With that, the class was dismissed without any formal or informal thanks for the current term's participation. Wedley made no mention—as other teachers were announcing all over the University this week—about continuation of studies in the coming term and what to do if war duty was going to interfere or interrupt a course of study.

"A moment, if you please, Mr. Farraday," was all Wedley needed to say to have the flow of students move more subtly forward out the door than their farewell mingling had done to that moment. Robert found himself alone with Wedley in a matter of less than two minutes. "Have you reviewed my comments, yet?" was Wedley's opening parley.

"No, sir. This was my last review class to prepare for and attend for the term. I'll be getting to my paper this evening." There was no way Robert would reveal just how much Chaucer he was involved in every night, especially in the week since he received the

Cloister photos and had taken his afternoon tea with Wedley. And now that the second set of pictures of the Cloisters in New York City and the extra 'supplies' Barbara sent by boat had also arrived and been delivered in a courier package from Roger Radley, Robert's intimacy with his own dissertation would be estranged until late in the weekend.

"You spoke before about seeing a manuscript in France. Perhaps you remember where it is? I might care to visit during the recess." Wedley was trying to hide his anticipation of a Chaucer 'find' that would earn him additional long-term security and restore the esteem in which he wanted his colleagues in the academic community to hold him; though he would never admit it, even to himself.

"Was. You mean. Sad to say." Robert fought down his interior excitement. He remained, in his outward poise, nonplussed and said no more.

"What do you mean was? Was what? implored Wedley, a little more eagerly than he had hoped. Both men knew a tripwire had been triggered.

"Bombarded. Blown off the map. Both the Allies and the Germans took turns at occupying the place and alternately shelling it from the ground and lambasting it from the air. A great loss no doubt. It was a beautiful place." Robert's memory carefully reviewed the pictures of the Cloisters he had been studying now for a week of days and nights. "I found it serene, even in the landscape of battle there was never another ..." Robert couldn't help appearing reminiscent. The hook was in. Now could he finish it? Had he the mettle?

"Enough. Please. I am so disappointed. I so much would have longed for an opportunity to see that manuscript. Alas. Well, good day, then." Wedley made for the door and to soothe the desperation he began to feel deluging his spirit.

Robert let him cross over into the hall before speaking, without appearing overly interested nor anywhere near as overeager as Wedley had revealed himself to be.

"The manuscript is lost. But not the story. See I knew I had read it. But I remember one of the other chaps actually started to make a copy by hand. 'To pass the time when he did not have guard duty,' he'd said. Seems he did get it finished before we were bombed the last time because for two nights he didn't work at it. Then the place was smashed by artillery, and we fled. Wish I could remember his name."

"What?!" Wedley almost dropped his books on the outside of the room the way Robert had dropped his the week before coming into it. "A copy was made?"

"Oh, I most certainly recall its being made. Fellow's dad was an antiquarian of sorts for some group in the New England area of the United States." Robert was very sure he had to change his story a bit from what Barbara planned. If Wedley was willing to go to France, then a jaunt to some book lover's in Great Britain would be too easy. The truth of the fabrication would be discovered before the right time. Again, Robert realized it was *his* plan now. Unaccountably the words came to his mind ... 'to have and to hold ... for better or for worse.'

"Could you reach this young man? See if the text is available? I could really make it worth your while, Mr. Farraday." Robert was stunned that Wedley had crossed back over to where he stood and emphasized the offer by placing his hand up to Robert's head and shoulder. Wedley made sure his fingers contacted Robert's bare skin and did not just rest on his clothing. Unaccountably, Robert saw Roger Radley in his mind's eye and heard the words from the week before ... *'you might begin to fall prey to the overtures ... of old professors.'* Robert fought down his savage instinct to break away, knowing he had to follow through if Wedley was to be trapped. Wedley set his books down on a student's wooden

desktop and placed his cupped, free hand around the other side of Robert's head. With Farraday's head held in his eager embrace Wedley faced him directly and spoke.

"I could put in a good word for you with the review committee. And together we could bring an exciting new chapter of Chaucer to light. You'd get assistance research credit and mention in all the journals." Stepping back, Wedley clasped both his hands in affirmation and exuberance. Then the professor took a half step closer and rested the ball of his fists on Robert's breastbone. "And," raising his eyes to look at Farraday square in both eyes and tapping his student's chest in emphasizing each phrase, Wedley confided, "there may be some other benefits, too. Nice benefits. Benefits befitting a handsome young man whose tender memories of a grandmother's good night stories could be, shall we say, renewed."

It was do or die time for Robert Farraday. A wild urge in him wanted to die. But his deepest, truest self knew this was a moment all the earlier hurt and restraint had prepared him for. Military men had done something like this to him with a bayonet in a latrine during training once. He had to refuse Wedley without losing Wedley. "As nice as that might be, sir, I must confide that I am spoken for. I've pledged myself to another, ah, person, shall we say." He smiled in a way to intimate polite regret. And by using Wedley's own 'shall we say' phrase, Robert mastered the challenge without breaking the spell, adding, "But working together would be an honor and would not," dropping his voice to suggest a shared confidence in exactly the same manner that Wedley had just done moments earlier, "in my mind," and then he dropped his voice even lower still, "compromise my commitment."

"And how could that be?" Wedley again was enigmatic, as he had the prior evening. Was he talking about getting the missing *Tale*? working together? or not violating Farraday's commitment?

Robert decided all were possible for Wedley was that cagey. His own answer would solve the enigma. The unanswered portion would go away, at least for the time being. "I have a contact in journalism in New York who might get us a copy of the *Tale* from the New Englander. I'll write by post and see." The personal intimacy of the encounter abated, and the intrigue of the plan took over. "If I go now, I can make this afternoon's post and it will be away before the weekend." Robert left, feigning being a little flustered and dismayed at Wedley's direct and overt advances.

Wedley enjoyed the game. He smiled, forgetting for the moment about his beloved Sandy.

But out in the corridor, while his back was to the professor, Farraday wore a more satisfied smile, remembering at that moment his beloved Barbara.

xv

Farraday left his front sitting room the way Radley had seen it. Even though his official dissertation was completed and submitted, the condition of the room lent credence to his continued efforts of preparation for his oral exam. The real activity in Robert's flat was taking place in the privacy of his bedroom and the coziness of his kitchen. All about the bedroom were photos of the Cloisters tacked to the walls. On the writing desk were rough papers and French pens Barbara had managed to send in his 'supplies' delivery. These

would authenticate the activity as having taken place in France a few years before, despite its true origin and date. The sand she sent to age the ink once Robert stroked it onto the paper added to the finishing touch. Last was the stylized writing support for Robert to wear, changing his penmanship just enough to render it unidentifiable as his own to the unpracticed eye. She had secured the forearm brace from a friend in the Veteran's Administration Rehabilitation Ward, ironically enough.

Surrounded by these images and implements of creation, Robert Farraday spent seven to eight hours a day imagining a Chaucerian *fabliau* into being—and another three to four hours inscribing the final copy as if it were a war relic from a few years earlier. With these he would lay the trap for the poetically just demise of Norman Wedley.

The knock on his door caused Farraday to jump. His nerves were steady, but his concentration was deep as he crafted his *Tale*. He had to imagine what would appeal to Geoffrey Chaucer in the characters the poet had started to portray hundreds of years before. In the grip of that imagination, Robert had to see them in such a setting as the Cloisters and in the countryside of medieval England. He nursed his written descriptions through three evolutionary stages, probably two more than Chaucer had needed. First, he wrote out the ideas, pictures, and settings; as well as actions and words of the characters Chaucer had midwived but Robert was rearing in the lines of his *fabliau*. Most of this writing Robert did propped up against the pillows on his bed. Occasionally he dozed off, but his daydreams were of his characters, and they became more real to him in these musings.

With the basic fabric of a section of the story in place, Robert made sure not to get too far ahead of himself. He'd gather his notes and work at the bedroom writing desk with his Chaucer books in hand to discover the right Middle English words to use. For all intents and purposes, as he had expressed it to Barbara in his last letter, he felt he was translating into a foreign language. But however foreign, it was neither alien, nor unknown.

He would rest afterwards, usually have something to eat while out for a walk. He didn't want the distraction of preparing food and having to clean up his kitchen, nor did he have the time for it. Inevitably, if he stayed near the flat to eat, he found himself rushing back to work on a new idea or to revise again some aspects of his characters' behaviors.

Lastly, in the afternoon he would try to fashion the Middle English into the right meter, rhyme, and word choice to fit Chaucer's style. This was excruciating, but it was the most rewarding part of the creation. When done, Robert would ride his bicycle farther into town than at midday to have his evening meal. It was then that he would cable Barbara or get from Radley at the bureau anything that had arrived for him that day. If the War Room were busy, he would not gain access to the cable and would have to postpone his excitement of hearing from Barbara or knowing she would soon be hearing from him.

Back home, he strapped on the forearm brace and practiced writing the day's lines. He hoarded those consumable supplies, knowing he would soon have to start on good paper the copy of *The Cook's Tale* he would present to Wedley as the 'real thing' from the fields of war-torn France by way of pristine New England. He awaited word about whether one last delivery of supplies might arrive in time to use to finish the project. For change of scene, this final work he did at the cramped table in his kitchen.

It was mid-evening as he practiced inscribing Middle English that the knock on the door had startled him.

Robert slipped off the sleeve device and stashed it, folded, into a small towel drawer. The special pens he set in the cutlery drawers. He eased the paper between two place mats

and left them on the center of the table. Giving the appearance of straightening out the kitchen after his evening meal, Robert draped the dishtowel on his shoulder and stepped over his books and papers to answer the door.

It was Wedley. Robert surprised himself with the cordiality of his invitation. "Good evening, sir. I did not know you knew where I lived. Won't you come in?" Wesley did.

"I was wondering if you had any word on our manuscript from America." Robert thought Wedley's opening was practiced. The professor dispensed with even the slightest greeting, let alone some small social amenities, getting instead right to the point. However, the sight of Farraday's flat caught Wedley off guard. Once the memorized part of his mission was safely completed, Wedley looked amazed that he was standing in this room. Wedley gave evidence of being so aware of what he wanted at first, that he was unprepared to do anything else. It left an awkward moment that Farraday filled. "I've no refreshments, sir. But we could walk around the street to a nice pub if you'd like."

Wedley turned him down. He moved farther into the flat and picked up a solitary book from one straight back chair that really belonged in the kitchen. "I'll just sit a moment and listen to any news you might have."

"Well, sir. I have no news, not as of yet. I had hoped to hear by now. But this afternoon the transatlantic military and newspaper traffic was so heavy, I was unable to get word from my New York associate." Robert eased aside a stack of papers and sat on the corner of the low table in the middle of the room.

Norman Wedley took in the news at the same time he slowly began to take in the rest of the room. "Whatever do you still have all this around for, Mr. Farraday?" Your paper is handed in. Usually, students can't wait to return books and trash their notes upon handing in their dissertations."

"I may do that after my oral defense. I feel I have more to do."

"Oh, yes. The oral defense." Wedley's look was a stunning leer. "I almost forgot. I will not be on your examining board. I want more time to work with this *Cook's Tale* you are about to receive. I asked an internationally known Chaucer expert who just finished a lecture series up north to sit on your board. And while he's here I hope to have him review my work on the Chaucer 'find.' So, you see why I'm anxious to know how it's going."

"Maybe there will be some word in the morning, sir." Robert stood up to signal the end of the visit. Wedley was quicker in a devious way. He was up and out of his chair and heading toward the kitchen. "Why this is a nice flat you have here Mr. Farraday." He reached out toward the cabinets and ran his hand over the sink edge. "Drawers and spaces for dry goods. How wonderful."

Robert's heart raced, but Wedley could not perceive it behind his pupil's stoic face. *Not that drawer*, his inner voice pleaded. Robert almost choked when Wedley tossed the book from the sitting room chair onto the kitchen table. The corner of the book struck the placemats, but they all slid as a unit on the table and did not reveal the French paper with Middle English characters sandwiched in between. Farraday was surprised his feet did not come off the floor—his heart jumped so high at what he felt for sure would be his premature debut as a scribe.

It was Wedley's movement toward the bedroom that rocked Farraday outwardly. "I'd prefer we stay out here, sir, please. My room is not prepared for showing to guests this evening." Robert pulled the door closed so his teacher could not see through where it had been slightly ajar. But while his hands were lowered to draw the door shut, they were

unable to deflect Wedley's hand that now held him behind the neck. The reddened eyes and heavy breath warned Robert about Wedley's most recent activities. No wonder he did not need to go around the street to the pub.

"Mr. Farraday, we don't need to stand on ceremony. After all, we're about to bring the world an exciting new look at one of its greatest writers and chroniclers of the human condition." Where he was going with this train of thought Robert would never know. For the second time that night, a knock came to his door. They locked glances. Neither would move. Unwilling to yield and risk discovery, Robert simply called out, "Come in. It's not locked."

xvi

Roger Radley had always aspired to be an actor, or at least a theatre critic. So far, he had made it to hard core news reporting. And he was good at it, too. That's why he and Barbara Milovich had such respect for each other, even if he were the first homosexual she had ever knowingly met and actually worked with, side by side. She had told him more than either of them had let on to Robert Farraday; mostly to secure his aid at using the overseas cable, partly to 'keep an eye out for my Robert,' as she had put it.

Another thing that Farraday was unaware of was that Roger Radley knew of Norman Wedley, as well. And Wedley knew who Radley was. They both knew what each other was, as well. Two of Radley's acquaintances had told him stories of how brutal Wedley had been when he jealously raged at them when he discovered they were lovers and had just worked Wedley for a night of drinks and laughs.

It was the moment of a lifetime for Roger Radley. Avenge two friends. Keep a promise to a third. Protect a neophyte. Take down a mean-spirited, abusive, power-drunk, yet still-dangerous, old man. And play a role worthy of a rave review in the morning's paper. He tucked the envelope with Barbara's lengthy cable into his breast pocket, buttoned his jacket, looked at them both, feigned hurt and betrayal. "Well. I never. Fine. If that's the way it is ..." He turned and walked away into the night, without even closing the door. Hoping to entice Wedley into a chase, so as to free Robert of his presence, Roger revved the engine of his motor car, wasting what precious little fuel he had received from the ration pool. He took off at a reasonable speed so the teacher could see what kind of car he drove.

Robert Farraday stood alone in his flat. Roger's ploy had worked. Wedley's sedan pulled away from the footpath in hurried pursuit.

xvii

It took two days for Wedley to approach achievement of his goal and the same two days for Robert Farraday to finish composing his completion of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Cook's Tale*. Wedley needed this third day to finish his business with Radley. Farraday

needed this same day to finalize the Middle English rendition of his *Tale* on French paper, with French pens.

The university professor greeted the news bureau director, who did not rise from his chair to offer a greeting. Over the years, the journalist had had his share of these academic types who knew just how to improve the news bureau's reporting. Typically, this late-in-the-day knowledge seemed to descend upon these academics just prior to their scheduled appearance before a tenure commission back at the university. This time, however, much to the director's surprise, Wedley made no such claim. Instead, he wanted to let the director know he had some information about a bureau employee who was passing cablegram information to certain Aryan-looking young men who might be masquerading at the university as students. Students who were fair of skin, tall and slim, blond and blue-eyed, and somewhat 'gentle of manner' as Wedley put it.

"Myself. I think they are working for the Axis. Spies. Or at least sympathizers. I know I could have waited to get some names for you. But then it seemed better to have the proper authorities discover these activities without the assistance of a professor. It would save everyone all the bloody nonsense about 'academic freedom,' what. What's more, this way it might lead to even more of these traitors than I could ever hope to find on my own."

xviii

Dear Robert,

I'm afraid this packet, which I had the other evening when I surprised Wedley and drew him from your flat, is the last I'll have for you. Wedley set the bureau and the War Department on me. He's led them to believe I'm a Nazi sympathizer and my every move is shadowed. I will be trying to leave for the US through Greenland and Canada, if a news pool flight becomes available. Should I make it to America, I will try to get word to your Barbara. If not, please give her my love and regards.

With no regrets,  
Roger

xix

"Are there any messages, Mrs. Landry?" Wedley asked without breaking stride, expecting the woman to get up and follow him into his office.

She called in before he could close the door. "Just this large parcel from that nice Mr. Farraday."

It was the first time in years she could recall that Wedley thanked her and actually came back out from his office for an item himself. He looked around as if to see if Farraday was in the waiting room.

"He said he had his oral examination before the Board today, sir. He was unable to wait." It was one of the many messages that day which Wedley would not really, fully hear.

"Sir, what about those challenge questions you had me prepare for use by Mr. Farraday's oral review board?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Landry." (She would not see until the next day that the questions meant to derail Farraday's orals would get no closer to the exam room than Wedley's metal rubbish can under his desk. She was happy to see it there the following morning. She genuinely thought Farraday to be a nice person. He made her feel brighter, more pleasant when he dropped by. *At least now Professor Wedley won't see that I left that last offensively personal question off the draft,*" she mused when she noticed the envelope had been discarded unopened).

Behind closed doors, Wedley fumbled nervously with the red cloth tie string on the oversized envelope. Finally unwound, the string that was, not the professor, Wedley set the treasured pages in front of him. Some traces of sand fell out of the envelope. Atop several pages of distinctive onionskin paper, there was a single sheet of stationery paper with a note:

Dear Mr. Farraday:

How nice to hear from your friend at the News Bureau that you remembered me and my manuscript copying during our horrible time in the War. These pages are the one, bright, redemptive facet of those long and heinous days. I have made copies (again) of those sent here, as your friend requested. I am so sorry for the delay. Writing these once more brought back memories. I would daydream so and lose copying time in reverie.

At night once a storm of the type we call a 'nor'easters'—particularly fierce and nasty as they come up the Atlantic Coast and slam into New England—raged into my hometown with an immense and violent fury. Its thunder and lightning so dreadfully reminded me of the artillery bombardments we huddled in that abbey to avoid. I know you will take good care of my little treasure and see that nothing happens to it. It is the one piece of sanity that rescues those years, and my soul—remembering my part in them—from driving me over a brink more precipitous than your fabled cliffs of Dover.

With all regards,

B.

Behind the stationery lay the more fragile sheets of lightweight onionskin. The strokes were broad and strong, made meticulously. Wedley looked at each sheet briefly, though carefully, and almost caressed every sheet flat again when he set it aside, making certain not to smudge the ink with his perspiring hands. Here and there a line jumped out at him. There were coinings he recognized as stock Chaucer and others that seemed uniquely poetic to this *Tale*. Could this really be Chaucerian? How would he tell? He would first enjoy scanning the manuscript copy in its entirety here at his desk. Then he would repackage the manuscript without creasing a page. At home, after dinner and with a brandy, 'for this is too good for whiskey' he told himself, he would read the *Tale* from end to end. So excited by the discovery in front of him and his plan covertly to cherish it alone in the privacy of his home, Wedley actually spoke softly, conspiring with himself. *'Tomorrow I will begin to study it. I'll prepare my presentation. I have less than a week.'*



Settling into bed, Wedley was quite mellowed by the brandy and emotionally drained at the prospect of the fame and respect this week would bring him for the rest of his life. He drifted off to sleep hearing his voice re-reading a couplet from the *Tale*, as he had done several times over the course of the evening. It had fast become his favorite pair of lines from the entire *Tale*. They described the vision of entering the castle in the *Tale*, whose walls were overgrown with climbing ivy that waved in the riverbank breeze and created a sense of isolation from reality that overtook all those who entered through its gates:

*Softly walwenyng and waxen with forsongenese,  
Foryeten as walles, forwrapped in foryetelnesse.*

xx

There was a note tacked to the back door. "How did he know I would try by way of the back door?" Wedley pondered aloud to himself. He walked into the flat with the key in his hand that had been in the envelope, with Farraday's letter.

Dear Professor Wedley:

I have had to leave quite unexpectedly. I completed my orals yesterday by noon and expected to visit you in your office to look together at the *Tale* just newly delivered. After my orals, the gentleman you arranged to take your place on the Board offered me a teaching position in America. I could now join my friend and have a job, too. I was quite taken aback by the prospect. For months since we left one another in France, I thought I would have to make a choice between reunion and employment. So now yesterday both lay before me if I were ready to leave before the evening tonight. I know it is customary to return a dissertation to the department personally after the orals board uses it and returns it to the candidate. I thank you for the favorable grade and have left the paper for you in the package on the kitchen table. Please accept it with my gratitude.

With regard to my leaving before your debut of a *Cook's Tale*, you need not acknowledge my meager role of courier, since I will not be here to assist you in its presentation so few nights from now. I free you from any burden in the matter, with my humble opinion that this is genuinely the tale of a cook on his pilgrimage across this great and marvelous land.

Godspeed,  
Robert Farraday

PS: Please place the key for the landlady in the envelope with her name on it. It's atop my steamer trunk. Then please set it under the mat at the back door. Thank you.

Having left the key as Robert wished and filing his unopened dissertation away as Farraday expected, Norman Wedley promptly erased the troublesome student from his mind.

Back in his office, he set the *Tales* manuscript on his desk to admire and to work upon. Wedley opened his desk center draw and extracted a lined pad of paper, on which to make notes. He set the tablet on the desk next to the manuscript. Finally, he reached down and unlocked the thin bottom drawer to his right. He opened the v-shaped frame and restored the two photographs to their former place of honor on his desktop, overlooking the work he now delved into immediately with a smile.

xxi

Three nights later, an energized and younger-looking Norman Wedley peered out over the gathering audience. In the front rows were colleagues, past and present. Some had even dipped deeply into their petrol rations to come back from schools far to the north, where the war displacement of the normalcy of education and academia had driven them. Without much information to go on, and chalking up the lack of prior peer review to the exigencies of wartime disruptions, these academics gathered out of respect for Wedley's past achievements and hopes for a resumption of his waning career. Most wonderfully, the guest from New York's Columbia University was here to witness the newest chapter in Chaucerian legend. News of Wedley's accomplishments would spread further and faster than could have been expected because of this man. Ironically, he had already paved the way for Wedley's unique notoriety by removing Robert Farraday from the scene. What more the man could do for Wedley was beyond the excited professor's wildest imaginings.

At the appointed time, the lights went down in the hall. By his own wishes, made known to the same Chairman Michaelson he screamed at over the phone just weeks before about not being published, Wedley wanted no introduction. No hyperbole. Not a dramatic entrance. And not a single soul with which to share the spotlight! Not a person on the face of the earth to share the credit. Wedley walked out singly and without ceremony to the lectern.

"Ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great honor tonight to read to you a recently discovered manuscript, unearthed at the last possible moment before war's senseless destruction rendered it lost forever. It is my belief, and I will explain why as the evening goes on, that this is none other than the completion of what for hundreds of years has been thought to have been an unfinished tale from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*." There were mild expressions of surprise and acclamation, mixed with muted applause. Wedley let them die down. Even now Wedley did not explain why he had not revealed the night's agenda nor divulged it to peers to review; such was his disdain for how he had been treated for so many years.

"The Chaucer manuscripts we have had of *The Cook's Tale* have preserved its *Prologue*. *The Cook's Prologue* and *Tale* follow those of the Miller and begins with a biblical reference to Solomon's wise admonition about welcoming strangers into one's home for the night. The cook claims his story is true. The host, Harry Bailey, chides the cook as much as he does other pilgrims contributing a story to his travel entertainment. Bailey accuses

the cook of reheating and selling leftover food that has begun to spoil so much that it attracts flies. The Prologue is as follows:

### The Cook's Tale

#### The prologe of the Cokes Tale

The Cook of Londoun, whil the Reve spak,  
For joye him thoughte he clawed him on the bak.  
"Ha! ha!" quod he, "for Cristes passion,  
This millere hadde a sharp conclusion  
Upon his argument of herbergage!  
Wel seyde Salomon in his langage,  
'Ne bring nat every man into thyn hous';  
For herberwyng by nyghte is perilous.  
Wel oghte a man avysed for to be  
Whom that he broghte into his pryvetee.  
I pray to God, so yeve me sowre and care  
If evere, sitthe I highte Hogge of Ware,  
Herde I a millere bettre yset a-werk.  
He hadde a jape of malice in the derk.  
But God forbede that we stynte heere;  
And therefore, if ye vouche-sauf to heere  
A tale of me, that am a povre man,  
I wol yow telle, as wel as evere I kan.  
A litel jape that fil in oure citee."

Oure Hoost answerede and seide, "I graunte it thee.  
Now telle on, Roger, looke that it be good;  
For many a pastee hastow laten blood,  
And many a jakke of Dovere hastow soold  
That hath been twies hoot and twies coold.  
Of many a pilgrim hastow Cristes curs,  
For of thy percely yet they fare the wors,  
That they han eten with thy stubbel goos;  
For in thy shoppe is many a flye loos.  
Now telle on, gentil Roger, by thy name.  
But yet I pray thee, be nat wroth for game;  
A man may seye ful sooth in game and pley."

"Thou seist ful sooth," quod Roger, "by my fey!"  
But 'sooth pley, quaad pley,' as the Flemyng seith.  
And therefore, Herry Bailly, by thy feith,  
Be thou nat wrooth, er we departen heer,  
Though that my tale be of an hostileer,

But natheless I wol nat telle it yit;  
But er we parte, ywis, thou shalt be quit."  
And therwithal he lough and made cheere,  
And seyde his tale, as ye shul after heere.

Wedley read in a lyrical tone. He was practiced and proficient in the defunct language. His voice and Chaucer's rhythms cadenced the audience into a timeless place they'd never felt more clearly, as they swayed on the backs of their steeds and politely stifled their coughs from the dust of the pilgrim's trek.

"Now the next fifty-eight lines are the first of the *Tale* and all we have had available these many centuries. At the center of the story is a young wag who is an apprentice. But he is a gadabout. He gambles and carouses. He loves to drink and dance. He often abandons his tasks and routinely leaves his master craftsman's business unattended, preferring instead to go off and carry on. This man, Perkyn, is known as a Revelour and is renowned for his skill at throwing dice. He is also a shameless womanizer. Finally, Chaucer's portrait draws to a close with Perkyn being dismissed by his master, who is fed up with the ruinous effects Perkyn's apprenticeship has had on the craftsman's livelihood. He is so annoyed that he puts all of Perkyn's belongings out in the street as well, including Perkyn's bed.

Undeterred by what others might feel misfortune, Perkyn imposes upon a fellow gambler and drinker, who, for his own part, has a wife who runs the family shop. So involved in his own loose living, the shopkeeper is unaware that his wife operates the shop without complaining because she uses it as a ruse with which to lure men to her second story brothel, where she is the sole provider of favors. Let us listen to the remaining familiar lines from the *Tale*.

Heere bigynneth the Cookes Tale.

A prentys whilom dwelled in our citee,  
And of a craft of vitaillers was hee.  
Gaillard he was as goldfynch in the shawe,  
Broun as a berye, a propre short felawe,  
With lokkes blake, ykembd ful fetisly.  
Dauncen he koude so wel and jolily  
That he was cleped Perkyn Revelour.  
He was as ful of love and paramour  
As is the hyve ful of hony sweete:  
Wel was the wenche with hym myghte meete.  
At every bridale wolde he synge and hoppe;  
He loved bet the taverne than the shoppe.  
For whan ther any ridyng was in Chepe,  
Out of the shoppe thider wolde he lepe —  
Til that he hadde al the sighte yseyn,  
And daunced wel, he wolde nat come ayejn —

And gadered hym a meynnee of his sort  
To hoppe and synge and maken swich disport;  
And ther they setten stevene for to meete,  
To pleyen at the dys in swich a streete.  
For in the toune was ther no prentys  
That fairer koude caste a paire of dys  
Than Perkyn koude, and therto he was free  
of his dispense, in place of pryvetee.  
That fond his maister wel in his chaffare;  
For often tyme he foond his box ful bare.  
For sikerly a prfentys revelour  
That haunteth dys, riot, or paramour,  
His maister shal it in his shoppe abyge,  
Al have he no part of the mynstralcoye.  
For thefte and riot, they been convertible,  
Al konne he pleye on gyterne or ribible.  
Revel and trouthe, as in a lowe degree,  
They been ful wrothe al day, as men may see.

This joly prentys with his maister bood,  
Til he were ny out of his prentishood,  
Al were he snybbed both erly and late,  
And sometime lad with revel to Newegate.  
But atte laste his maister hym bithoghte,  
Upon a day, whan he his papir sogthe,  
Of a proverbe that seith this same word,  
'Wel bet is roten appul out of hoord  
Than that it rotie al the remenaunt.'  
So fareth it by a riotous servaunt;  
It is ful lasse harm to lete hym pace,  
Then he shende alle the servantz in the place.  
Therefore his maister yaf hym acquaintance,  
And bad hym go, with sowre and with meschance!  
And thus this joly prentys hadde his leve.  
Now lat hym riote al the nyght or leve.  
And for ther is no theef without a lowke,  
That helpeth hym to wasten and to sowke  
Of that he brybe kan or borwe may.  
Anon he sente his bed and his array  
Unto a compeer of his owene sort,  
That lovede dys, and revel, and disport,  
And hadde a wyf that heeld for contenance  
A shoppe, and swyved for hir sustenance.

“And that is where Chaucer leaves us in all the extant accounts. Accordingly, the new material departs from the storekeeper harlot and her husband to introduce us to the third pair of characters who form the full *Tale*. to counterbalance the older madam, Chaucer introduces us to a younger temptress named Rose, and her father, who knows what she does to support them. These two have wandered far and wide and are masters at connivance. They detect in Perkyn a rich target for theft and mischief. They are going to invent a plan of deceit to steal Perkyn’s goods by taking him into their confidence game before Perkyn can move in on them and seduce the young Rose.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first public reading of these newly found Chaucerian lyrics and portraits, preserved from the Middle Ages until this very night:”

But of this wyf lat me stynte here  
and telle yow of a minstralyere,  
which with his doghter was passing bye  
And seyen they this revelours assay.  
The minstralyere fond his contenance;  
Distreynyge al his covynance,  
Drecchinge also his avariche.  
And the yonge mayde thenchen liche;  
Eyen fixe, the doghter, to the bed  
She bigan to wonder in hir heed  
In which wyse hir might this Perkyn  
Putte on his hood an ape, to wynne  
All his dispense from his pryvetee,  
Withouten hir to be swyven by he.  
Withdrawen the tweye at-ones away  
For to konningly set up their pleye.  
Seith the fader to his yonge Rose,  
“Do yow remembre al the Heroes  
That ones we sawe on the walles of Jean?”  
Seith she to hir elder, “Why certein.  
Al nyne of them I now and now see  
Of Grece and Rome and even Jewrye;  
As wel as Engeland and strong Perce  
And holy saintes from Goddes Churche.”  
Repleyed hir fader to the mayde  
What wyse stelen this array and bede.

Wedley knew when to pause. He wanted to make sure his love affair with the story did not alienate his audience. So, he prepared his reading in segments, to intersperse commentary to keep everyone interested, informed, and attentive. These intermezzos also gave him a chance to lay the groundwork for his comments after the intermission when

everyone was going to want to know why he thought this to be genuinely Chaucerian materials.

“Simply gorgeous characters in the same mode as those in the other *Tales*, what? Chaucer’s grasp of the human condition never ceases to amaze me. Well, then. He returns to the shopkeeper’s wife and draws her as he did the Wife of Bath. But she is without the self-portrait of Chaucer’s most well-rounded pilgrim, for in this *Tale* the bawdy lady has little to say about herself or that reveals her character. Her actions speak for her, rather than her words. And she is undone by her husband, though his actions are inadvertent.

Whyle they derkely devyssen trappes  
Let us looke in at the wyfes shoppe.  
Tables foures has she for chesen;  
Wyn to drenken and cheese for eten.  
In shoppe, with sweete countenance,  
She lymeth men for her daliaunce.  
And hir yaf to them hir privitee.  
Hire scarlet brestes were ful alway  
As were the hondes of those carls  
Which cam to hir with lechouresse bals.  
They were daswen whan by and bye  
Hir brood, derne, deep queynte they see.  
Hire hosbonde knew this not synce  
His day was spente in thefte and dys.  
The wife swyves throughout the daye  
Hir stolen wyn and cheese to paye.  
For as she was werken in the lofte  
Hir goodes were taken ful-ofte.  
The hosbonde yede lofte never  
Cause his wife seith, “Rats are ther.”  
But hir gamen were at its ende  
With the come of reveloure Perkyn.  
This was cause hir hosbonde saide,  
“Perkyn, in the lofte putte your bed.”

Again, Wedley intervened. “So, with her dalliances deferred, the woman returns to her shopkeeping. And into her shop come Rose and her father, purposefully ready to set their trap for Perkyn the Revelour. As a colleague of mine once commented, the poetic justice in this chicanery is a uniquely Chaucerian twist on the French genre of the *fabliau*.”

Oure minstral freende and his doghter  
Folwen Perkyn to that shoppe where  
In the lofte his bed was putte  
Which had been used for putrie.

They cam in whyle Perkyng was drenken  
 And of his futures he was thenken.  
 Quod the minstrel to his doghter, sweren  
 Ful loud ynough for al to heren,  
 "By Cristes bonnes, my faire doghter,  
 What needs we is a wight revelour  
 Who is smerte and also is wyse  
 And who can best of al men throw the dyse.  
 Ther is no manere so suitable  
 For wynnyngge bak our lost at table.  
 You reste here, and I for him looke."

The fader welk out and Perkyng tooke  
 Chaunce to make introductorie.  
 Quod he, "My sweete Ladye, I sory  
 Am that yow and youre fader semen  
 Badde fare to have at gamen.  
 I herde the greef which yow tweye bere  
 As your fader seith, "My doghter faire."  
 I am ycleped Perkyng Revelour,  
 Paraunter I and myn dys kan colour  
 Corrigen for yow and youre fader  
 Withouten cost yow a coyn or a heer."  
 To hymselfe Perkyng thoghte a wyse  
 That he could wynne hir and plese  
 His owne dishoneste liste  
 To have hir queynte and hir kisse.

Wedley saw his audience was in tune with the *Tale* now, so he only wanted to keep the story line in front of them. He added no editorial distractions. "So Perkyng sits down to make his advances at Rose, dreaming of bedding her down in the very loft from which his belongings have driven the shopkeeper's wife's profitable enterprise. Rose is true to her portrait of stalking-dissembling-as-vulnerability. She fusses over Perkyng and engages him in what appears to be hero-worshipping. All the while she is beginning to dazzle him with exotic images of faraway places, and adventures she and her father eventually will lure Perkyng to pursue."

Rose than feyned to been avysen  
 The thynges that Perkyng devysen.  
 Folwenyngge hir own faders trappe  
 At point devys, she hir hondes clappe  
 And seith with hir voys chirkenyngge,  
 "Oh sir, I sholde be seyenyngge



Rather, myn maister, but and only yow  
 can, than for us-self be a Hero yow:  
 As are those Heroes that were  
 Waf on tapys for Duc Jean of Berre  
 By Nicholas Bataille from Paris.  
 Those Heroes I speke of like this  
 Lookede as we sawe them in France  
 When at his court we learned to daunce.  
 Sitteth Hector on his golde throwne  
 With seveyn pepl alle arounde.  
 A knyghte with a forked berd  
 Hadde his bowe and awres for werre.  
 A kyngge lookyngge troublly at Greks  
 Holden his spere whyle he thenkes.  
 A scop recchenyngge tales of Troye  
 Entysyngge the troops and singe joye.  
 Andromacha with floure for the prys  
 That he wol wynne bifornen hir ye.  
 An officere conseilyngge a freesh  
 Aprochen sholde been now updresse.  
 A werreyoure seith that the Greks  
 Hadde to their ships newly slaketh.  
 And a page tellenyngge of som  
 Woden hors so huge it declamen nom.  
 On another tapys is waf Cesar  
 Reignenyngge amide egles egre.  
 Kyng Artour withouten the knyghts of round  
 But with bisshopes and cardnyles found.  
 Kyng Davit gladly is also seyn  
 With holi Bible and swerd, between  
 Joshua there as Jehovahs jugge,  
 And Maccabee who held Rome in grugge.  
 Davits stronge men of werre are there  
 With their wepens and their warnestore.  
 Thre with lances, talle, proude and streighte;  
 Thre with bowes and arowes waite.  
 Atop the grey castel batailments,  
 Waiten the court-folk for merimynte."  
 With swich words the Rose did werken  
 To trappe in flatournesse this Perkyyn.  
 She made him thenken he was a wight,  
 was brave as a Hero or a knyght.  
 She thringed hir hondes to hir brestes;

Lookede at hym and thoghte of knakkes  
Maken hym at discovert his attour lefte,  
So hir fader and hir may it have by thefte.  
Perkyn was of his devys so entente  
That he mismetreth hir tonge pleasante.

This segment and the next were long, so Wedley knew he had to go back to summarizing and editorializing. By giving away some 'inside information' he hoped to win the audience's attention for a while longer. He thought of them as his Perkyn, and he as their Rose, as he spoke. He also saw the chance to feather his cap as a Chaucer scholar.

"Masterfully aware of the intrigue of politics and skullduggery of deceit, Chaucer has Rose's father lurk in the shadows and interrupt with perfect timing. He cools down Perkyn's passions and excites the sense of purpose to the mission they are provoking the Revelour to undertake." Now he paced himself, with pauses and looks around the audience. "For Chaucer, who loaned and borrowed money in his lifetime." And again. "For Chaucer, whom legend has it was assaulted and robbed to satisfy an outstanding debt he had not met." And still once more, "For Chaucer, who secretly went behind enemy lines on missions of international espionage for his patrons at court." The shortest, and then leaning slightly forward. "All the twists and turns of the treacherous heart are on display here in this *Tale*, en fleshed in Rose and inspirited by Perkyn. Chaucer gives us worthy adversaries in intrigue."

Just as he was about to begin reading again from the *Tale*, the revelation rushed in on Wedley. It had been many years ago since he had been so engaging and as enticing as a teacher. He was coming alive again in the hands of his ancient and steadfast friend, Geoffrey Chaucer, long dormant in the ashes of war. He took up the *Tale* with renewed vigor and purpose.

The minstral hadde pouren al of this  
And so knew whan to com bak in, ywis,  
He feyned a colour that was blanche  
And fel onto a stol hard on haunches.  
The noyse was so loude that Perkyn  
Shook as if from slombre he was awakyn.  
Seith Perkyn to the minstral lookynge  
On the stol so asheamed sittyngge.  
"I am ycleped Perkyn Revelour,  
Paraunter I and myn dys kan colour  
Corrigen for yow and your doghter  
Withouten cost yowe a coyn or a heer."  
Into the confidence hadde growen  
They faste and Perkyn was up-sewen  
Into their trappe. But nat alone  
Hym was going down; Perkyn his owne

Compeer swiften called to his syde.  
Now the tale opens ful wyde.

The fader and doghter speke to these  
Of a viage ful of sin and dys.  
At a castel they seith they loste  
Al of their sustenance and moste  
Of their cloothes and their joweles  
In dys, at tables and other games.  
They axed Perkyn and his trewe compeer  
To gooth and wynne bak their array there;  
And if they dide, half of their attour  
Would go to these tweye revelours.

Thanne, just so to keep their privytee,  
Rose spake to Perkyn in secretee  
And hir fader to the compeer wyse  
Also made this same queynte promise;  
"if you can wynne, there you be bisted:  
So on coming we share youre bed."  
Now Perkyn thoghte this swevyen Rose;  
And his compeer egre was for Rose.

"With visions of sexual ecstasy distracting their minds from the task, Perkyn and the shopkeeper are hooked. Chaucer is not satisfied to leave them hanging; he lets the minstrel, Rose's father, twist them in the breeze. He describes the castle where the two adventurers must go to gamble at dice and win back all the possessions Rose and her father lost there. These images are almost uncharacteristically lyrical for Chaucer's *Tales*, but not for his other creations."

Tolde Roses fader to these tweye  
To that castel the ryghte streighte wey.  
"Ther is a road that runneth nighe  
A streem with tweye bankes highe.  
The bankes are hills of palisades  
Overgrew with trees of derke shades.  
The walles of the citee are nighe  
The road and they are also highe.  
Grene yve clombeth these walles,  
And converte them to trees talle;  
Softly walwenyng and waxen with forsongenesse,  
Foryeten as walles, forwrapped in foryetelnesse.  
Yow slyde throu the foryetelnesse  
By passing below an archeweie

That is behewen from stones highe  
 and wyde, pyled so that the yve  
 Danglethe liken goddesses browe.  
 Ther is a gardyn within a crosse  
 With a fountyn, gras, erbes and mosses.  
 Foure patches of gras in squares is  
 Broyded with floures: fleked with trees.  
 One tree has plowmes, another appules heigh,  
 The other tweye are pyrie.  
 Meriguldes are lined in rowes,  
 Ther is Rosemarie and Christmas Rose.  
 Yellowe bedstrawe and percely there  
 All arounde Bethlehemes Sterre.  
 There is a brece to coole wery boones  
 And botterflyes flikeren al around."

"Chaucer lets his intrepid would-be heroes ride off to their adventure. No sooner are they over the horizon than Rose and her father keep their promises of going in Perkyn's bed. The minstrel, Rose's father, beds the wife of Perkyn's compeer, the shopkeeper. The wife, for her part, seems not the least bit sorry to have the use of her loft back. After rifling through Perkyn's goods and gear, stealing what looks good and throwing the rest around the loft, Rose indeed goes in Perkyn's bed. Not, of course, even remotely in the way he had in mind she would."

Swich visage as prospectyve drewe  
 With his wordes that the other tweye  
 Were prikyngge within the houre  
 For the castel, dys and Roses boure.

Whan the minstral was certein that they  
 Both were faste and farwe on their way,  
 He broghte the compeers wyf on lofte  
 And for hours dide not gat off hir.

Whyle he had a share of the compeers  
 Bed, his doghter went through Perkyn's gere.  
 Rose stal al of his array she coude  
 And al the reste she dagged and roof.  
 Than, to kepe hir ferme promyse,  
 As hir fader was doon in his wyse  
 With the wyf; Rose daren on the bed  
 And pissed and shette from foot to heed.

The minstral and Rose that toun long spornen  
 Bifore home Perkyn and compeer tornen.

Wedley looked up to his audience, stepped aside the podium to signal the end of the reading of *The Cook's Tale*. He said nothing to taint Chaucer's last words. He gracefully gave a deep and theatrical bow from the waist.

There was polite clapping at first. Then as the ribald humor of the *Tale* set in, laughter exploded, smiles abounded on heads shaking back and forth, and the applause resounded. Wedley felt he was as responsible as if he had written the *Tale* himself. He took a half step deferentially to the side and gestured to the podium as a diva might to the orchestra in the pit at the end of her aria. The applause rose again in response. Some stood in the front row and the appeal was infectious. In pockets of twos and threes. Then in surges of half dozens, more and more people stood. Rocked by 'bravos' Wedley looked out triumphantly. The entire group was on its feet and cheering.

After taking in several more minutes of affirmation. Wedley measured the cadence and sensed the moment to peak was past. He took a step forward and motioned for all to be seated. In full control, he spoke only as the walls rang their last echo and the last cushion was again sat upon.

"As our program indicates, we will take an intermission now. Refreshments will be served in the foyer by maidservants in period costume, courtesy of the University drama department. The young men among you should not look for Rose. She is not here." There was some laughter. "However, the compeer's wife has not been seen for weeks back at her shop, so we'd advise the more mature ladies of the audience to hold on to your escorts." More laughter. "When we return, there will be copies of *The Cook's Tale* distributed and there will be time for questions and reflections. At the end, the ushers will be re-collecting the copies. Thank you."

xxii

"Excuse me, Doctor. On behalf of Dr. Michaelson, myself, and the University, I wanted to say how honored we are to have you here from Columbia. I understand you've stolen one of our prize students right out from under us this past week. I'm speaking, of course, of Robert Farraday." Wedley was careful not to spill his drink, as well as not to drink any of it either. He was his enigmatic, intimidating self, without even wanting to be.

"Mr. Farraday shows great promise. We were not aware of your interest to add him to your staff and certainly meant no offense. We hope his diligence and sense of balance and the aesthetic will add to our program in New York. You've been responsible for two great discoveries for me this week. Thank you, Professor Wedley."

"That's so kind of you, what. Would you mind me introducing you to the group when we reconvene inside, Doctor? Perhaps you could even say a word or two about *The Cook's Tale*?"

"Actually, I'm afraid I will not be able to stay for the rest of the festivities. I was unsure if we'd have more than a moment or two to speak now, so I left a message for you on the podium."

"That's a shame. I thought I would have a chance to hear you out on the *Tale*, the manuscript, its acquisition, and discuss its authenticity."

"I left some ideas about those things in my message. If I can, I'll look you up before I leave for the States. I can't tell you how pleased I was to have been invited by you to attend your orals. I'll be sharing ideas about the process you use here with my colleagues back at Columbia. They will be as thrilled as I am that sitting in for you allowed me to meet your Mr. Farraday. The Oral Exam Board members were unanimously in favor of granting him a degree with highest honors. Because of my swifter-than-anticipated departure—war schedules you know are not the realm of academics—the formal report and findings are already submitted."

"Do you have any impressions?"

"I was greatly impressed. Otherwise, I wouldn't have offered him a spot at Columbia."

"Sorry. I meant about *The Cook's Tale*."

"I felt you read it quite beautifully. I can never get some of the Middle English tones so perfectly rounded as Chaucer descendants seem to do. But with an English-born and British-educated adjunct grooming in the department soon, I'll be getting more practice."

"But ..."

"I really must go. My colleagues are signaling me that our ride is here. Rationing, you know. When the wheels and wings of progress move, it's time for us to go or be left behind."

xxiii

Wedley made his way to the podium, somewhat deflated. But he had five minutes left to stand up front and be sparked again by the buzz of the crowd. There were still five minutes left to feed off them. Atop his copy of the manuscript of *The Cook's Tale* on the podium was a small brochure advertisement. The cover featured a picture of a castle set on top of a riverside hilltop. Ivy vines hung down from the battlements. He opened the brochure and saw a headline proclaiming the medieval treasures of the Museum of Modern Art's new Medieval Collection at the Cloisters in New York City. Another fold disclosed the Nine Heroes Tapestries, under a banner celebrating the newly opened museum.

The shock of the disclosure shook Wedley badly. Without knowing how or why, he intuited that the appearance in a New York museum of the very same tapestries he had described no more than a half hour ago could not bode well for the authentication of what he had just read as a Chaucerian *Tale*. He turned one more page and saw a twentieth century photograph of the exact garden he had earlier described as a Chaucerian fiction. He quickly gathered his papers from the podium, dropped them into the carton which, he thanked God, still held the copies of the *Tale* which were to have been distributed when everyone was seated again. He retreated to the anteroom just off the stage. With but three minutes left, and the hall beginning to fill again slowly, he hastily jotted a note to a man he was gradually beginning to hate, Director Michaelson. He stopped a stagehand in period costume and shoved the note into her hand. "Please. See that Dr. Michaelson gets this within the next few minutes."

Ten minutes later, the note was read to a numbed and befuddled audience. When done, Michaelson knew the man's career was in jeopardy now even more than it was when he had challenged Wedley some weeks before by phone about not having published in the last six years. Michaelson was long used to Wedley's excuses made to the credentials committee he chaired. For his own part he gave absolutely no credence to Wedley's regrets of being *'so emotionally overcome by the excitement of the evening'* nor of his *'need to heed my physician's advice by immediately retiring from the hall for a restful place in order to calm my heart.'*

Ironically, it was the first fully truthful excuse Michaelson ever heard from Wedley, however much he might be misinterpreting it.

xxiv

Wedley motor-cabbed to the pub around the corner from Farraday's deserted flat. He ordered a whiskey and soda to collect himself. Others had friends sitting with them. Wedley had only his box of medieval forgeries to keep him company. Two drinks and a half hour later, Wedley imposed on the tavern keeper to store his carton for him behind the bar until his return from 'calling on my friend in the district who was supposed to join me' at the pub.

The key was still under the rear door mat. Entry was easy and the lights still worked. Amid the furnished flat, the only remnant of the recent occupant was the steamer trunk in the bedroom. Wedley recalled Farraday had left the landlady's key envelope on top of it for him to use after his last visit.

Wedley snapped on the bureau lamp. Farraday had shielded him from this room the prior week when Radley happened upon them. He paid the details of room little heed when he snagged the envelope off the trunk a few days ago. But now he noticed scores of small holes dimpling the neat wallpaper. They seemed too numerous to form a pattern, but there was indeed an order to them. Everything else in the room's furnishings looked normal, with nothing out of place. So Wedley turned his attention to the steamer trunk.

It was more what was *not* there, than it was anything that *was* there about the trunk that gradually began to sink into Wedley's awareness. The hasps were in place over the metal rings, but there were no locks on them. And though the military issue footlocker had R. FARRADAY stenciled on the front in white paint block letters, there was no label with a forwarding address for the landlady, or for anybody for that matter, to send Farraday his things in America.

Wedley sat on Farraday's bed, facing the steamer trunk. Carefully he undid each of the hasps and paused, not knowing if he really wanted to know what was inside. He gave in and raised the lid. Partially shaded, the interior was only about half-filled, though neatly. Resting on top of the items were two clean and pressed uniforms. They were dazzling white for war clothing. They made Wedley think of his Sandy. He caught himself and hastily set the uniforms on the bed next to him. One sleeve was out of place, and Wedley reached without thinking, to smooth it out. It struck him abruptly that he was on Farraday's bed, neatly caring for and arranging Robert's war issue dress uniforms. He leapt off the bed,

threw the uniforms on the floor on the other side of the bed, so he could no longer see them. He blurted as he fell to his knees, "Oh, Sandy. Why did you have to leave me?" The sound of his own voice startled him. He urged himself to clear his mind as he found himself on the floor next to Farraday's things.

There were photographs staring up at him out of the trunk. The corners of the pictures had small pin-prick-made holes in them. He took one photo up in his hand. He felt the holes. He looked at the wall above the headboard of Farraday's bed. A few other pictures had the same holes. He looked again at the walls. He stood up and walked slowly over to the wall. With his finger he probed a few of the wall holes. He shuffled the photos in his hands and took a large one. Holding it up to the wall one-handed, he saw the holes in the wall matched those in the corners of the photo. He picked a smaller picture and scanned the wall for a tighter pattern of holes. These matched, too. "Why would Farraday tack pictures to his wall?" he asked aloud.

Squatting down, he withdrew a few more of the photos and spread them out on Robert's bed. He picked up the bureau lamp and moved its light across the photos to study them more carefully. They showed details of art pieces, details of architectural features of masonry. He bent over the trunk purposefully so as not to drop the lamp, while grabbing a full handful of black and whites and splaying them across the bed. Statues, gardens, tapestries, castle walls. In horror, Wedley recognized a few of the pictures from their reproductions in the brochure the American left on his podium fewer than two hours ago. "What's the bloody bastard gone and done to us, Sandy?" He was almost wailing.

Wedley thrust his attention back into the trunk, now that all the photos were out and cast over the bed. A long, thin wooden case was next in line for review. The top slid along a grooved track. Inside were writing implements of various sizes and nib widths. The word PARIS was burned into the side of the case. A larger square box was the last solid object left in the trunk on top of longer sheets of what appeared to be paper that lay across the width of the trunk. This box had a lid similar to the stylus case, and the identical brown etched PARIS manufacturer label on its side. Arranged in it by size were bottles of inks in shades of black and grey. Wedley set those down on the nightstand so they would not leak. He felt his hand trembling. "If what I fear is in there, Sandy, this will be my downfall."

A large, raised letter keyboard typewriter, an Italian-made Olivetti, blocked the way to all but one strip of paper. The sheet felt frighteningly familiar to Wedley's fingers. He set the sheaf aside and too terrified even to voice his mind to his lover, he silently raised the typewriter and rested it on the edge of the trunk. Balancing himself and the machine, he finally was able to speak. "If I didn't feel so old right now, Sandy, I might heave this through that window." He drew a breath and answered his hallucination. "You're right, of course. Let's just set it on the floor here out of the way." Even at that he let it drop the last two feet of the way down, so it bounced when it landed and toppled over on its side. The return carriage ratcheted its way backwards since its end hit the floor. "Don't worry about it, Sandy. If he still wanted it, he would have taken it with him. He's obviously left this for us, god damn his bloody soul."

Sheet by sheet, Wedley peeled the blank onionskin pages from the case until he came to what he somehow had brought himself to expect as each layer of the trunk revealed its secret as at an archeological dig. Below about a dozen blank sheafs were those on which the author of the copied manuscript had practiced the medieval penmanship. Words here. Practiced letters there. Lines in which mistakes were made. Three quarters of



a page completed without error was abandoned because of an ink spill. Wedley marvelled at Farraday's industry. And hated him all the more for it. "Well, Sandy. Seems he's done us in, what. Just need a tad more proof. But that should be next."

As he thought, below the onionskin were the triple-spaced typewritten heavily edited pages. Below were the handwritten drafts, in a handwriting that looked freer, more flowing, than the manuscript of the *Tale* Wedley had read from fewer than three hours ago. "You can just picture it in your mind, Sandy. He sat on this bed, looking at the pictures he had surrounding him. He wrote it all out in longhand, using his dictionaries and grammars for vocabulary and endings. Then he typed it all out and changed words for the right meter. And then, literally the master stroke, he penned the final draft onto onionskin as a manuscript. His own secret little Aldgate while everyone thought he was busy doing other things." With handfuls of paper at a time, kneeling next to the trunk and bending over it, Wedley let fly. Papers went every which way. On the bed. On the furniture. Across the floor. Farraday's work was now on display for all the world to see. And Chaucer's version of *The Cook's Tale* once again clearly remained unfinished.

One last package rested on the floor of the streamer trunk. It was the same type of packet, with the red tie string, that Farraday used to deliver the forgery. Wedley undid the string and saw personal letters inside. The writing was different. There were also cablegrams. He tucked them back inside and slipped the pouch under his arm. "We need a drink, Sandy." The key fit easily back under the door mat. Never to be used again.

In the back of the pub, with his retrieved carton sitting across from him, Norman Wedley sipped his whiskey and water and read all the correspondence from "B" to Farraday. For a brief moment he thought about turning the cablegrams over to the News Bureau chief. In the flickering firelight of the tavern's hearth, he read enough to realize the War Department could punish these lovers for using the communications system for personal purposes.

But during his second whiskey, this one ordered neat, Sandy reminded Wedley that he, himself, had used the War Department and the News Bureau for his vendetta against Radley. *'Most likely they will not even give you a hearing this time around, Norman.'* Together they agreed to take all the papers and stoke the pub's firebox with them when the barkeeper's back was turned to serve the 'regular' customers up at the front end of the bar. It was a large fireplace and the night's blaze swallowed the gorge of paper eagerly, with no trouble and only a trace of white smoke.

Turning back to their table to rejoin his coat and Sandy, Wedley saw the photo on the floor. It had apparently slipped out from among the letters, going unseen before. He bent to pick it up and set it next to his glass. He downed the drink and signalled for another.

The woman was attractive, even in her battle fatigues, with properly marked and buttoned shoulder strap and lettered stripes across her breast pocket tops: PRESS. Next to her stood Farraday in one of the white uniforms Wedley had first folded, then tossed onto Robert's bedroom floor. She held a soccer ball. He had his arm rested across her shoulder as they smiled at the camera. Instinctively, Wedley turned the photo over. In the same hand as some of the letters burning away across the room was the simple message: *Sincere wishes with Chaucer and your quest for poetic justice. May you do better at that than at your efforts to teach me to play soccer in the fields of France. Love, B.*

"To think I thought of him at all. Look, Sandy, he even lied to me about this." Wedley carried his drink, walked to the hearth, and pitched in the photo. "Let's go home, Sandy." He drained the glass and set it, empty, before the barkeeper. Wedley took out some paper notes, peeled off two too many and gestured for the barkeeper to give the 'regular' at the end of the counter another pint, and to pour one for himself, too.

They watched him walk out into the night as the fresh pints spilled their foam over onto the bar in just the right amount. "Who do you suppose he's talking to?" the ale man asked the barkeeper. "Probably the war buddy whose letters he thinks he'll forget by crispin' them in my fire."

## XXV

Farraday saw Barbara Milovich sitting across the table from Roger Radley. New York could be so large and at the same time so small. So, too, he guessed could the world. He'd agreed to meet Barbara here in a cable he sent from Montreal the day before as he prepared to board his train. What a great surprise to see his guardian angel had also made it across the war-tossed sea safely and in one piece.

Robert slipped the waiter a new dollar bill from the money he had exchanged at Grand Central Station thirty minutes earlier. "May I borrow your arm towel and your tray for just a moment, please? I've not seen my war buddies for some time, and I'd like to surprise them."

"Sure, soldier." Robert didn't bother to correct him.

Robert placed his finger vertically across his lips so Radley wouldn't give him away. Both smiled to each other as Farraday came up from behind Barbara.

"Are you done with these? And can I freshen your cup?"

She almost knocked him over by jumping up so impulsively. Barbara threw her arms around him and kissed him, for much longer than he felt comfortable about in public. But he held her closely, so she had no doubt he wanted her to stay in his arms. They stood that way, ignoring the stares that wartime made commonly acceptable. "You must have something to eat and then we'll do whatever you want. Roger and I were granted the afternoon off to celebrate your arrival. The Bureau's abuzz about Wedley's dismissal from the University and our boss thought it would be better for us not to have a hand in covering the story."

Farraday and Radley shook hands as Robert took his seat. He gave the waiter back the tray and arm towel and asked for a bowl of soup. "So old man, what do you want to do your first day in America? Celebrate your independence by going to the Statue of Liberty? That's where Barbara took me."

Robert thought for less than a moment. He looked at Barbara, then to Radley, then back to Barbara. He took her hand off the table and placed it between his own. He gave it a reassuring squeeze.

"That's a beautiful sentiment and idea, Roger. But I think I'd like to take a ride up to the Cloisters and sit in the gardens for a while."