

# Long Live Long Island

A novel by  
Peter Bales

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In memory of my parents... and with deepest appreciation  
to William Alan Bales for  
*A Point in Time*



My good friend, you are a citizen of Athens... are you not ashamed for caring so much for making of money and for fame and prestige, when you neither think nor care about wisdom and truth and the improvement of your soul?

**Socrates, 399 B.C.**

If you fail to work in public life as well as in private, for honesty, and uprightness and virtue—if you condone vice because the vicious man is smart, or if you in any other way cast your weight into the scales in favor of evil, you are just so far corrupting and making less valuable the birthright of your children.

**Theodore Roosevelt, 1886**

Are you kids willing to stick together and pull yourselves out of a hole? I've got an idea. Our folks think we're babes in arms, huh? Well, we'll show them whether we're babes in arms or not. I'm going to write a show for us and put it on right here in Seaport... We'll get every kid in town on our side, and we'll start right now. What do you say?

Hey kids, let's put on a show!

**Mickey Rooney in *Babes in Arms*, 1939**



# Prologue

*“You’ll never make the border..  
You’ll never even make the elevator.”*

*Edward G. Robinson to wounded Fred MacMurray  
in **Double Indemnity** (1944)*

## **ELECTION DAY, 1981**

*Runner’s high! There really is such a thing. I am Superman!  
Pick up the pace and an extra lap around the park. Or two extra  
laps. Maybe I’ll run forever...*

The sight of Brian Werth running through the streets of Sagamore, Long Island, was commonplace to the townspeople. He did it virtually every day. It was a real workout: four, five, six miles a stretch, about thirty miles a week. His blood pumped fast, muscles flexed and loosened, and sweat and warmth enveloped him. He felt utter contentment.

Over the hump and pounding out the last mile to home, Brian relaxed and daydreamed. Shore Road was the nicest part of his course. It ran the entire circumference of Sagamore Harbor: silver-blue water dotted with pleasure craft ranging in panache from transatlantic yachts to leaky dinghies with broken down outboards. Among the boats bobbed dozens of can-shaped lobster buoys, each one marking an underwater prison that might or might not contain crustaceans waiting patiently to be boiled alive, cracked open and savored with anything from Pouilly Fuisse to root beer.

Brian's running reverie instantly halted when a stabbing pain gripped him right where he imagined his heart to be. It was his body's way of telling him there was too much blood in his legs and not enough in his stomach where a chili dog devoured the night before still skirmished with his digestive juices. An experienced runner, Brian knew that a cramp meant his pace was too fast and he needed to reduce his speed to lessen the discomfort. Easing into a jog and feeling better already, Brian turned left away from the harbor and onto the street where he lived. Although he had passed it daily for nearly three years, he still smiled when he noticed the street sign denoting Skunks Misery Road. Streets allowed to keep their Native American names preserved the memory of those who were really here first. Brian surmised the Matinecock Indians had run across more than their share of skunks in the area. *Maybe they had camped right near here...*

A black and battered Chevy Camaro barreled off Shore Road and onto Skunks Misery. Brian laughed. It looked like one of those circus cars stuffed with clowns; heads and arms and legs protruded from every window. On the roof, a cardboard sign read "**BRIAN WERTH FOR MAYOR.**" The candidate glanced at it and felt a rush of excitement. It was finally Election Day after seven months of campaigning he would never forget. *Finally. Thank God.*

The Camaro coughed then stalled and coasted to a halt. He was barraged with shouts of encouragement.

"Good luck, Brian!"

"You're gonna win, for sure!"

"You're going all the way!"

Brian threw his fist into the air. "This is our last day, gang! Let's not let down!" he yelled back.

"We won't!" his supporters roared in unison.

The Camaro roared to life again and from the racket it was obvious the car had no muffler. Brian waved and put his hands over his ears as the car drove away. *At least no one in Sagamore will sleep through Election Day,* he thought.

Brian heard the other car just in time; the missing muffler on the Camaro had masked its approach. Without turning around and with less than a foot to spare, he dove off the road

into the tall grass. A silver Cadillac limousine slammed on its brakes and whirled around one hundred and eighty degrees.

“You bastard!” Brian snarled, jumping up.

He backed up a few paces then started running away from the limousine in the direction of Shore Road. The limousine spun its wheels and began to accelerate. It was a race. Brian wanted to cross Shore Road and get onto the beach. The driver of the car wanted to run him down before he could get there.

Brian won. He sprinted across Shore Road, dove over the guardrail and tumbled about eight feet straight down onto a sand dune. A second later the Cadillac smashed through the guardrail and flew directly over him.

Brian had the wind knocked out of him but he managed to get to his feet. The limousine sat upright on the sand at the edge of the bay. Waves lapped at the front tires.

“You missed!” Brian yelled at the car, stumbling a couple of steps backward. He took some deep breaths. “You missed me you son of a bitch!”

The passenger door opened and a thickset man in his late fifties stepped out. A gash on his forehead streamed blood.

“It’s you,” Brian said.

The man reached into his pocket and pulled out a pistol.

Brian exercised his best option. He dove headfirst into Sagamore Bay.

“You’ll die this time,” the man said. He aimed and fired but his eyes were full of blood and he missed.

Brian swam frantically beneath the surface. Maybe it was his imagination but he thought he heard explosions up in the air and pinging all around in the water. He paddled down until his chest hit bottom. It was dark and cold and he forced himself to focus on his objectives, which were to hold his breath and swim out of range of the bullets. He got rhythmic strokes working for almost a minute until the pain in his lungs became unendurable. He knew he had to go up.

*This has got to be fast.*

His head broke the surface about fifty yards from shore. He gulped air until a splash in the water about a foot from his face sent him under again. Twenty yards farther out he

had to surface again. He treaded water and squinted towards shore. This time there was no ping. Passing cars had pulled over to watch what was going on and the limousine was backing off the beach.

Brian tried to catch his breath and gagged on a mouthful of saltwater. Suddenly, he realized he might drown. He was more than seventy yards into Sagamore Bay—*in November!* The water felt deadly cold, his hands and feet would barely move and his head pounded as if it might split open. A definition of hypothermia raced through his brain. *Anesthesia produced by a gradually reducing body temperature. Damn. I've got to keep moving. My blood has got to flow.* He thrust himself towards shore and stroked and kicked as hard as he could even though his shoulder hurt like a son of a bitch.

He made it out of the water although he had to crawl about twenty feet before he could muster the strength to stand up. His knees would not bend and he could no longer lift his arms, but he found he could propel himself forward in a manner resembling... *that mummy that kept chasing Abbot and Costello in that movie... what was the name of it...*

“Come on, got to keep moving,” Brian said out loud.

He stumbled across Shore Road and down Skunks Misery ignoring the gaping motorists who had stopped their cars. His body was numb but his mind asked questions. *Why? Why did I ever agree to run for mayor? God, this sucks. Come on, I've just got to stay alive until this election is over.*

# Chapter I

*“Politics? You couldn’t get into politics. You couldn’t get in anywhere. You couldn’t get into the men’s room at the Astor.”*

*Jean Harlow to Wallace Beery in **Dinner at Eight** (1933)*

## **APRIL 15, 1981, 7:15 P.M.**

The campaign had begun over half a year ago after a much less eventful run around Sagamore Bay.

Thunder rumbled as Brian stopped in front of number seven Skunks Misery Road. That evening he arrived home just in time to beat the rain. In just a few moments April showers in southern Connecticut would roll across Long Island Sound and pelt the North Shore. He took a key from inside his sweat sock and unlocked the padlock on the wrought iron gate blocking the driveway. Locking and unlocking the gate was an irritating ritual because his modest house did not need the excessive security. But the mansion set back from the main road—known in Long Island’s dusty social registers as “Wildwood”—did.

Wildwood was a Gatsbyesque mansion of seventy rooms located on three hundred acres overlooking Sagamore Harbor. Once bustling and home to more than thirty people, only an ancient Sicilian caretaker occupied it now. Brian viewed the structure as a monument to the excesses of a Jazz Age wannabe. The grandson of a robber baron, Harvey Wherstone III had designed the house himself in 1936 as a present

for his wife, Carmen. Great Depression be damned, his vision encompassed an Olympic sized swimming pool, a ballroom adorned with a ceiling of handcrafted gold leaf, and a master bedroom built in Tuscany, disassembled, then shipped across the Atlantic and reassembled. Three polo fields surrounded the Great House—three so the riders could compete any time of the day without sun in their eyes.

Luck was not with the project, as Carmen died six months before its completion. At the time, Long Island's gentry had made cruel jokes that she was lucky her death kept her from seeing her husband's monstrous creation. True enough, Harvey's amateur attempt at architecture ended in a dismal failure. He had zealously attempted to utilize every design concept he ever heard of—all within a single house. Anglo-Saxon, French, Italian, Dutch, Moorish and even Oriental motifs fused into mush. Gargoyles and a statue of Admiral Nelson perched uncomfortably side-by-side. Sheer size made the house uncomfortable to live in; the toilets were placed directly in the center of bathrooms so huge that the only way to reach the toilet paper was to hop off the bowl and somehow maneuver ten feet to the opposite wall.

When Harvey realized what he had done, he refused to spend even one night there and never returned to the property. A succession of freeloading offspring occupied the house until 1975 when rising property taxes forced Whetherstone to kick them out and put everything up for sale. There were no takers. Even the real estate boom in the late seventies bypassed Wildwood; it was simply too expensive to renovate and maintain. A desperate attempt to lease the property to the Nassau County Historical Society also failed. The Vanderbilts, Whitneys, Phipps and Morgans had built magnificent mansions upon Long Island; Whetherstone's Wildwood was just plain ugly. But to his credit, at a crotchety eighty-nine he was still refusing to sell the property to the drooling developers pining to tear the house down and subdivide the property.

Brian lived in the small carriage house on the edge of the grounds. He had found precisely the type of place he wanted by answering an ad in the *Sagamore Record*. The rent was manageable, the house was private and, most importantly, it

gave him the opportunity for aimless wandering about three hundred acres of prime Long Island woodland. The ten-car garage notwithstanding, the five live-in rooms provided the perfect bachelor quarters. A woman moving in called for certain adjustments.

In the midst of sit-ups on the floor of his bedroom, Brian noticed Iva was late. The words boyfriend and girlfriend conjured images of teenagers going steady and necking at the drive-in, and they never used those terms to describe their relationship. Iva was the woman Brian loved, and the rain smacking against the window made him worry and wish she were home.

He lay prone and panting on the floor of his bedroom following sit-up number three hundred. Nearly eleven years after his last track meet at Princeton, Brian now kept in shape purely out of vanity, having vowed to fight the flab others at his ten-year college reunion had surrendered to. He glanced in the full-length mirror on the back of his closet door. *Thank God I've still got all my hair.* He grabbed at the flesh above his hips. It was tight. He had no love handles, something not many men of thirty-one could boast. The clock on the bureau chimed for seven-thirty and Brian frowned. Iva was still not home and at eight they had a dinner date.

That evening's meal was to be at the home of Alan Sansone, a man of indeterminate age over seventy-five who was the chairman of the history department at Wheatley College where Brian had been a faculty member for five years. As a teenager in 1918, young Alan had planted a victory garden in the backyard and kept it going ever since. In the fifties he erected a greenhouse so all year round dinner guests were certain to be treated to vegetarian delights snatched from their vines or ripped out of the earth just moments before their preparation. Brian, predisposed to meat and potatoes, dreaded his upcoming bout with Brussels sprouts and asparagus. He glanced at his watch and hoped he would have time to grab a quick snack before they had to leave.

In spite of the food, Brian knew they were going to have an entertaining evening. Alan Sansone always captivated his guests. For thirty-one years after the death of his wife in an

automobile accident, he had buried his loneliness in history books. Erudite in everything from the Sphinx to the New Deal, Sansone would emerge from his solitary world selectively, usually only to teach his students or entertain his colleagues. Brian had impressed him immediately during his interview for the first teaching post in the history department at Wheatley to open up in thirteen years. It turned out both men shared a love affair with ancient Greece that involved impassioned reading on the subject and scrimping to pay for Hellenistic adventures poking about in the ruins themselves. Centaurs, Socrates, The Orestia and Zeus, and Brian had a job... a good job: associate professor of history—decent money, intellectually stimulating and not at all time consuming. There was time to write. And his recent appointment with tenure meant he could screw up or coast to his heart's delight. It was neat and secure.

*Too damn secure*, Brian mused as he soaped up in the shower.

"Brian?"

"Who's there?" he yelled, pressing his back against the wall and squinting through the lather.

"Who else?" It was Iva.

"Don't do that. How many times do I have to tell you don't sneak up on me in the shower?" Two nights ago they had watched *Psycho* on television and Brian was still jumpy.

"How much time do we have?" Iva asked.

"About twenty minutes, hurry up."

"You hurry up so I can get in there."

"Okay."

After he was dressed and while waiting for Iva, Brian wolfed down a bowl of Cheerios. He rationalized that he needed at least a small sustenance to avoid passing out from hunger during dinner; Sansone's Lima beans had to be avoided at all costs. Afterward, washing and drying the cereal bowl, he reflected on how Iva's moving in had changed his lifestyle. Dirty underwear on the floor had been impossible to defend in logical debate so he had promised to conform to at least a moderate degree of neatness. Changing to a Felix Unger after over thirty years as an Oscar Madison was no easy

task, but lately he dutifully ironed, dusted and vacuumed. Even the immediate washing of the cereal bowl was new. He used to leave dishes in the sink long enough to cultivate an entire ecosystem.

“Are you ready to go?” Iva asked, entering the kitchen and standing with her hands on her hips. “Come on, we’re supposed to be there in ten minutes.” No matter that it was Brian who always waited for her, she had a way of making it seem the other way around.

Brian smiled; he loved that woman, gorgeous tonight as always. Clad in Calvin Klein jeans and burgundy silk shirt, top two buttons tactfully open, and suede riding boots, Iva really could pass as a fashion model. Champagne glass breasts meshed with a tall slender physique, and wavy dark shoulder length hair accentuated even darker eyes that framed the perfect—for Brian, Iva would have taken it a bit smaller—nose. Bespeaking her Jewish heritage, a Star of David descended sacrilegiously into her cleavage. Brian needed no such reminder; Iva’s Jewishness consumed him. His isolated upper class upbringing had allowed him limited contact with Jews until he left home for college; there had been few Jews at his private Quaker high school and none at the Sagamore Country Club. His parents—blue-blood WASPs both of whom could trace their ancestry back to the 1630s—had been flagrantly anti-Semitic. As a teenager, Brian had found himself embarrassed by his parents’ prejudice and actually intrigued by Jewish women. They were forbidden and different and... erotic.

“Let’s have sex,” he said, deadpan.

“Great, you go first,” Iva answered.

They laughed together and hugged.

“Brian, let’s get going,” Iva finally said. “We shouldn’t keep Professor Sansone waiting. He’s so funny no matter what he talks about.”

Brian opened the door for Iva as they stepped into his midnight blue seventy-nine Volkswagen Rabbit. Once inside, she snuggled against his shoulder and he got a whiff of her *Opium*. It took an extra moment for him to find the ignition key.

Brian and Iva were not married. They were living together “without benefit of clergy” as Brian always said when he teased

her. Driving down Skunks Misery Road, Iva's mind for some reason wandered to the subject. It had happened gradually. First they had slept together once a week, then twice, then suddenly seven. Then she had moved her belongings into Brian's house and was no longer a guest.

Only a few friends knew of the arrangement; at Iva's insistence appearances were maintained. She still paid half the rent to her old roommate so she could maintain a mailing address. To the best of her knowledge her father, a very religious man who would not understand, had not discovered the arrangement.

"Are you glad you met me?" Brian suddenly asked, purposely brushing her leg as he shifted into third gear. Like many men newly in love, he craved the security of frequent reassurance.

"Not really," Iva answered. She understood his need for encouragement, she needed it herself, but it had to be unsolicited to be real. "In fact, I'm going to leave you as soon as I find a guy with any kind of future."

"Thanks," Brian said. "I feel much better now."

"Good," Iva replied. After a moment she kissed him on the ear and said, "I am glad I met you."

They both were indeed glad they had met. It was a turning point in their lives although the initial encounter had occurred under somewhat less than enchanting circumstances: The Soundview Bar at two in the morning. Brian had been there with a friend and Iva had been there with a friend, and their friends had met and dragged them together..

"Come on, help me out with the tall one," Jeff Hollis had whispered to Brian. "Just talk to her, I think we have a shot."

Brian exhaled and shook his head. Jeff was an old grade school chum of his and they had been through the same routine too many times in too many bars. "Not tonight, I'm beat. Come on, let's get out of here."

"Are you crazy? They're both decent looking. Please!" Jeff's face contorted in a wild-eyed desperation that reminded Brian of alcoholics and compulsive gamblers. Jeff needed sex. It was a frame of mind he worked himself into whereby

women merely became a means to an end. “Please,” he said again, “just this once do me a favor, please!”

“All right, relax. We’ll have one more drink.” Brian said.

He had to be sympathetic with Jeff; there had been times when their roles were reversed. Many times since college Brian had used one night stands to distract himself from his feelings, his rage. For a long time it worked but not lately. In the last couple of years sex had brought him nothing but guilt and loneliness and pain. His weekly visits to his psychotherapist—visits he told no one about—helped a lot. He was beginning to understand himself and like himself and even feel. One day he hoped sex could be an act of love, not anger.

“You’ve got ten minutes,” he told Jeff.

Debbie Benson arrived back from the bathroom literally dragging Iva by the shirtsleeve. Their conversation had roughly paralleled Brian’s and Jeff’s:

“Let’s just talk to them,” Debbie had said to Iva.

“Why, why should we?” Iva asked.

“They might not be jerks. Come on.”

Iva hated pickup scenes, so she strenuously suggested the evening would be best concluded over blueberry pancakes at the local diner. Debbie hated pickup scenes too, nothing good ever came of them, but one overriding consideration prevailed. She had not been with a man for over ten months.

Brian reacted to his introduction to Iva with a curt “Hi, how ya doin’?” and an automatic once-over that made her feel like a horse at auction.

“You want to see my teeth?” she snapped, catching him off guard.

“No, uh, sorry, I didn’t mean to, uh...”

“Nice chatting with you, but I really must be going,” she added.

“So long,” Brian replied, recovering. “Let’s not do it again sometime.”

Angrily turning for their friends, they were greeted by the sight of Jeff and Debbie making out. Brian turned away to face the bar and with a sigh Iva plopped down on the stool next to him.

“You live around here?” he asked in a flat uninterested monotone.

“Yeah,” Iva answered, “you?”

“Yeah.”

Neither spoke for about a minute as Jeff and Debbie continued their public display two stools down the bar. Clearing his throat, Brian finally said, “I guess our friends like each other.”

“Brilliant deduction,” Iva answered. “Are you a detective?”

Brian smiled and for the first time really looked at whom he was talking to. Iva smiled back and also checked him out. Both were struck by each other’s physical attractiveness and both assumed they were about to experience the old adage that—in bars especially—beauty and personality are mutually exclusive.

“Did you say you live around here?” Brian asked.

“I live with Debbie on Wolver Hollow Road,” Iva replied.

They borrowed Jeff’s car and headed to Geraghty’s Diner, leaving Debbie and Jeff to continue their lonely revelry by themselves. Over blueberry pancakes Brian listened intently to a life story with, he felt, far more substance than his own. Without question, Iva Fidele at twenty-nine had been through a hell of a lot.

“What do people do on a kibbutz?” Brian asked. “I always picture them picking fruit and taking cover.”

Iva grinned. It was difficult to explain her childhood to an American Episcopalian who had never been to Israel. *Probably*, she thought, *he’s never even tasted gefilte fish.*

“We survive,” she said.

It was a good answer. Childhood in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem, adolescence in Tel Aviv, her twenties on Manhattan’s upper east side, Iva Fidele survived the wars. Her mother and two brothers did not survive. Her father lived, his survival as yet unresolved. An agent of Israel’s Mossad, Conrad Fidele had been unable to insulate his family from the ravages of his country’s struggle to exist. Two elder brothers died within four hours of each other on Yom Kippur in 1973: Syrian artillery fire, cold, unromantic. Iva’s ten-year-old reaction was to mourn for a time, continue growing older and promise never to forget.

Iva heard the gunshot that murdered her mother. Eleven years in anti-terrorist operations and good at his job, Conrad Fidele had many enemies. One afternoon a young Palestinian, barely sixteen, crowbarred his way through the back door of the Fidele house in suburban Tel Aviv. Father and daughter were pulling into their driveway as Lisa Fidele, pinned on the floor, died instantly by a bullet entering her skull at the temple. Iva recognized the sound as gunfire but she did not immediately compute danger and pain. Her father understood immediately. Gun drawn, he bounded through the front door in time to shoot the terrorist in the back. As he ran through the house screaming for his wife, he tripped over her body in the hall.

Conrad stood staring. His childhood sweetheart and life-long companion suddenly gone, shock and disbelief gave way to unbearable pain. Vowing to mutilate every single follower of Mohammed, he reacted too late to block the only person left alive he loved from viewing the death scene.

The image of her mother lying dead in a mass of blood and torn tissue, eyes and mouth still frozen in terror, would endure in Iva for the rest of her life. Her teenage reaction was to mourn once again, continue growing older and promise never to forget.

“I’m talking too much,” Iva said. “Would you like some more coffee?”

Brian did not answer. He was mesmerized.

“More coffee, Brian?”

“My God, I’m a plebe,” he finally said. “What a story! I broke my arm in summer camp once but nothing like... when did you come to this country?”

Iva inventoried Brian’s tall muscular frame and handsome face. *Chestnut hair, sky-blue eyes, high cheekbones, even a little dimple in his chin. God... he’s gorgeous.*

“Right after my mother died my father retired and took a job as a security consultant for the El-Al Airlines office in Manhattan. I came here with him and enrolled at Barnard. I’ve been here ever since. Three years ago I found a teaching job at the Great Neck Academy elementary school and moved out to Long Island.”

“How do you like the island?”

“Too much traffic everywhere. The north shore’s nice.”

Brian nodded. He knew he was about to be blunt but he was in a hurry to get to know this person. “You must feel guilty sometimes about leaving Israel,” he said.

Iva put down her fork and turned away for a moment. Then she whipped her head around so fast her hair splayed over her face. All Brian could see were her eyes, the darkest brown eyes he had ever seen, angry eyes, eyes that had seen a hell of a lot. *Holy shit she’s wild*, he thought. He felt himself getting aroused.

“I miss Israel very much,” Iva said with such intensity Brian was taken aback.

“Hey, I believe you.”

Her face softened. “Come on, you know all about me,” she said in a hurry to change the subject. “What about you?”

“I’m dull.”

“Come on.”

“I’m boring.”

“I doubt that.”

“I’m too damn normal.”

“I’ll be the judge of that. Go ahead.”

“But all I really love to do is watch old movies,” Brian insisted.

Iva raised an eyebrow. *God, this is going too well*. “Me too,” she replied.

“You know, grade B black and white flicks from the thirties and forties,” he went on, leaning forward against the table. “When they really knew how to make movies. Movies where they had fun, the good guys against the bad guys, laughing in the face of danger... you know...”

“Believe me, I do know,” Iva said. “My roommate at Barnard was a film major. We used to go to the Biograph all the time.”

“William Powell,”

“Myrna Loy,”

“*The Thin Man!*” they both shouted simultaneously causing heads to turn. A couple of seconds went by and they both breathlessly whispered in unison, “Wow!”

Iva smiled and looked down at the tabletop. Brian cocked his head and tried to see through the hair falling forward to cover her face. Then he began to talk about growing up in a spacious house overlooking Long Island Sound, remembering a succession of private schools and tennis camps that insulated a young boy from the real world, and a high number in the Vietnam War draft lottery that had quite possibly kept him alive. Beaming, he revealed teaching to be his occupation also, meaning every word when he said there was nothing else he would rather do. For the first time to anyone, Brian talked about his long walks in the woods on the Wildwood estate. He described what he called Long Island's "treasure": forests, wetlands, beaches, some of the most precious landscape anywhere, and the mindless destruction propagated by green-eyed developers and politicians. Iva saw his indigo eyes blaze when he told her about the series of articles on the subject he had written for *Newsday*, the island's main newspaper.

"I pissed a lot of people off," Brian admitted with a satisfied grin.

"You sound like Ralph Nader," Iva said.

"No thank you, Nader's become a pompous egomaniac. I'd prefer Teddy Roosevelt. Just because he was a hunter he's totally misunderstood. He really cared about the land. He's a hero of mine."

"Theodore—I'm taking this canal and screw the Dagoes—Roosevelt?" Iva asked. "The big stick Anglophile to beat all Anglophiles? Do I have it right? Are we talking about the same guy?"

"Yup," Brian replied, "same guy. It's just that you have to understand him within the context of his own times. I'm pretty liberal and I'll say it again—he's my hero."

"I still don't get it," Iva said. "How come you're such a passionate environmentalist? I mean—a spoiled little rich boy from the North Shore?"

Brian did not like being called a spoiled little rich boy though in truth he knew the description was quite apt. Without thinking he said, "Listen, you don't have to have your family killed to really care about something." Iva blanched and

Brian realized he had been too blunt. “Sorry,” he said quickly, “I didn’t mean that.”

“Yes you did,” Iva replied. “It’s okay. Just keep going.”

“All right, why am I an environmentalist? No one reason. Maybe the first Earth Day when I was still at Princeton. It really struck me. We all marched around the campus in gas masks. We talked and watched movies about pollution. A TV movie with Hal Holbrook playing a candidate for the Senate who picks up a bird that can’t fly anymore because of the smog. I’ll never forget that. When I was a kid my parents sent me to camp upstate. I actually saw Lake Erie on fire. A lake burning! Look, I’m not bullshitting you. Even spoiled little rich boys can believe in something.”

Iva nodded and said, “I deserved that, good answer.” After a pause she asked, “What about your family?”

“Uh, it’s just me and my parents. My mother never worked. My father was a writer and a good one—articles in *Life* and a couple of really good novels. But he stopped writing when I was in high school. My mother’s father died and left us money so my father just sort of quit. We didn’t need money so I guess he... well let’s just say cocktail hour kept coming earlier and earlier. He still says he’s going to get back to writing but I know he won’t. I guess I was the last to know. Hey, I was twenty-five before I admitted to myself my father was an alcoholic.

“And now you write because your father won’t,” Iva said.

“Maybe,” Brian admitted.

“It must be tough to love and hate someone at the same time,” she added.

Brian said nothing. But the bile rising up in his throat betrayed the bull’s-eye.

For almost a minute they poked at their food. Both were a bit embarrassed they had opened up so much so quickly. Brian finally cleared his throat and tried another tack. He started talking about ancient Greece. Iva deferred acceptance of his invitation for her to accompany him to Athens in the summer, but she did promise to read Edith Hamilton’s *The Greek Way* as a start. Words flowed freely and as they did Iva realized she was in love. It just happened. Fast. No warning.

As Brian looked into the dark brown eyes scanning his face for approval, he knew. He knew he loved her and she loved him. And although he felt kind of nauseous he knew it would pass. *This is for real! I'm really in love! Fast. Insane. Just like the old movies.*

When Brian dropped Iva off at her apartment, he kissed her on the cheek. There would be sex later, but not now. Two people had just met, become friends and fallen in love. It was not a pickup; no one lied, no one mistrusted, no one hurt the other. Over the next few weeks Brian and Iva would see a lot of each other, even date to the surprise and delight of both. They never tired of finding out what the other was thinking, liked doing or dreamed about. The American staple of dinner and a movie became ecstasy, and blueberry pancakes at Geraghty's Diner provided an afterglow they could call their own.

When sex finally did happen a few weeks later, the moment was right for both of them. Their blood pumped fast, muscles flexed and loosened, and sweat and warmth enveloped them. They felt utter contentment. Cuddling afterward, Brian and Iva both said *I love you* for the first time.

Ten months later, driving to Professor Alan Sansone's house, Brian and Iva were still in love, more so if possible. Idiosyncrasies shared strengthened the bond. Iva enjoyed her initiation to Yankee Stadium as much as Brian enjoyed his first trip to the Museum of Modern Art. Jew and gentile, greens and meat, neat and not so neat—they could not understand their love or begin to define it, they just let it happen and allowed themselves to enjoy it.

"We're almost there," Brian said, turning onto Beaver Pond Road.

"Good," Iva replied, "Because I have to go to the bathroom real bad."

Brian chuckled. They had a running joke about Iva's always having to go to the bathroom while they were driving.

"You should have gone before we left," he said in a tone of parental authority. "Now you'll just have to hold it in. In a terrible German accent he added, "You vill learn zee bladder control and you vill like it."

At this Iva squirmed and Brian mocked her with sadistic laughter.

She played along. “How much farther?” she asked, her arms around her stomach.

“Poland then Belgium then France!” Brian thundered, and then turning into Sansone’s driveway they both broke up.

There was no doorbell on the Professor’s front door; he had removed it twenty years earlier in favor of an antique brass knocker in the shape of Mary Pickford’s upper torso. The metal hammer designed to do the knocking did so directly on her breasts, still firm but tarnished.

“I’m not touching that thing,” Iva said as they approached.

“Allow me with pleasure, Madame,” Brian replied, bowing deeply and straightening his collar.

But it was not to be. Alan Sansone clairvoyantly opened the door thereby robbing Brian of his chance to engage in a bit of bad taste roaring twenties’ style.

“Brian. Iva. Great to see you, come on in.” He pumped their hands, beckoned them inside and, grinning ear-to-ear, announced, “I’ve made a gallon of hot buttered rum. Let’s go into the den. I want to propose a toast.”

Following them into the book-lined study, Iva noted fondly that the two men looked like they had been sent by central casting. The elder absent-minded professor costumed himself in baggy gray pants with cuffs, wingtips, and a brown cardigan over a white shirt and striped bow tie. Bushy white hair, flowing mustache and wire-rimmed spectacles added opening night perfection. Brian also looked right for his role as the rising still idealistic academic. Clad in an old Harris tweed over a lime green shirt, blue corduroys and brown loafers, he appeared how youthful scholars usually appeared in the movies: bright, willing to discuss the causes of the Peloponnesian War at the drop of a hat, but completely ignorant of the aesthetics of clothing combination.

“I sampled a bit of this rum before you got here,” the Professor said with a wink as he poured mugs for his guests. “It’s really quite acceptable.”

“What are we toasting to, Professor?” asked Iva.

“Ah yes, the toast. It’s important, serious, let’s get right to it.” He cleared his throat and looked at Brian. “Are you ready?”

“Sure,” Brian answered, a bit surprised. He had expected something lighthearted. Professor Sansone brought his mug to his chest and held it there with a steady hand. He took a deep breath and said, “I propose a toast to Brian Werth, his past, his future, and the decision he must soon make.” Raising the mug over his head, he nodded at Brian then Iva and took a long slow drink. Iva also drank; Brian did not, the toast was to him. Both wondered about the meaning.

“Mmmmmaaaah,” Sansone uttered in a kind of half belch half sigh intended to verify that the rum concoction had delectably warmed his innards. He transferred remnants of froth from his mustache to his sleeve, looked at his guests and grinned: a wise old man with a special secret. “Wait right here, I have something to show you,” he said, turning on his heels and literally running from the room.

“Say, what’s going on here?” Iva asked, wondering as she spoke whether all those old movies they were watching were actually affecting her speech patterns.

“I don’t know babe, just keep me covered,” Brian answered, deliberately jumping into the same idiom. “Something’s screwy, that’s for sure.” He laughed nervously then became serious. “Who knows what he means by toasting my future and some sort of decision I’ve got? I guess we’ll just have to wait to find out.”

“I’ve never seen him so excited,” Iva said. “He ran out of here.”

“It just proves he’s in shape,” Brian added, understating the youth of a man pushing eighty.

Point of fact, Alan Sansone radiated a vitality that belied his advancing years. Iva noticed it in his posture: head up, shoulders back, chest out—a passion for life fighting and winning against gravity and osteoarthritis.

“Just because there’s snow on the roof doesn’t mean the furnace has gone out,” Sansone would boast to his friends. It was in his eyes: windows on a mind ablaze with activity.

“Maybe you are getting that promotion,” Iva said, not looking at Brian as she spoke. She could not, it was a subject they had discussed earlier and agreed to dismiss. The frown she missed revealed resentment of the breach.

Brian said sharply, “Let’s forget that.”

He could not forget it though, not for a second. He had to admit there was a chance, albeit slim, that the evening would amount to more than just the spinning of yarns. Maybe, just maybe, Professor Sansone planned to recommend Brian Werth as the next chairman of Wheatley’s history department.

Rumors of Alan Sansone’s retirement had been floating around for ten years, but they were never riper. Lately, he had been dropping hints that he needed more time to finish his “master work,” a voluminous treatise on the life of Socrates. Brian’s own cause for hope derived from the infamous “younger man” remark at last Friday’s wine and cheese reception for the history faculty and graduate students. In between crackers, Sansone informed his colleagues that the department “desperately needs youthful direction and fresh ideas.” Brian had felt his eyes widen at the prospect of being promoted over eight older people with years more experience. His coworkers responded with icy stares, an indication they did not embrace the idea of a veritable adolescent rising past them to the exalted chairmanship.

“It’s just that it’s stupid to get worked up over something that will probably never happen,” Brian said, sitting next to Iva on the couch.

“I know,” she said.

“We shouldn’t even think about it.”

“You’re right,” she said.

“I have to admit it would be great. It would really make my night. I’d stay in a good mood even if dessert turns out to be Brussels sprouts.”

“I hope it is Brussels sprouts,” Iva said with a straight face that caused Brian to shiver and swallow hard.

“This is it!” Sansone announced, returning to the room with the same zest he left it. In two hands he held out a bulging

black loose-leaf binder. “There’s two years of hard work in here. It’s good, really good.”

“What is it, Professor?” Brian asked.

“Marcus Noble’s master’s thesis.”

Brian nodded. He knew Marcus Noble and was impressed by him. Noble was African American and from the South Bronx, and he had somehow survived and done well enough in the New York public school system to earn a full scholarship to Wheatley. Vaguely, Brian had heard Noble was investigating corruption in the local political machine of Republican Frank Montesano.

“Right now, just read the section beginning on page forty-one,” Sansone said. “Then take it home tonight and study the whole thing in detail.”

“Okay,” Brian said, curious, although such a big deal over just another master’s thesis seemed a bit of an anti-climax.

“Iva my dear,” the Professor said, walking over and extending his elbow, “I would be delighted if you would accompany me to my greenhouse. It’s time to choose the corn.”

“Charmed I’m sure,” Iva answered, jumping up and taking his arm.

“You know the corn on the cob we’ll be having will have been picked no longer than twenty minutes prior to our eating it. It’s much better that way. When he lived at Sagamore Hill, Teddy Roosevelt used to insist on it.”

“Boy, that Teddy Roosevelt must have been some kind of guy,” Iva said, smiling and looking at Brian.

“He was,” Brian and the Professor replied almost in unison, and they all smiled.

“Okay, I’m ready,” Iva said, “let’s go get that corn on the cob.”

“You betcha. Pardon us Brian, we’ll be right back.”

Brian did not look up or acknowledge he heard: the section of Marcus Noble’s master’s thesis beginning on page forty-one immediately captivated him. Entitled *The Long Island Sound Crossing*, it began with a map diagramming secret plans for a humongous bridge. Outlined were the island’s North Shore and the Long Island Sound across to the town of Rye, New York. The proposed route of the bridge and its access roads

were marked in red and Brian saw blood streaming everywhere. Most of all he saw his hometown virtually destroyed. Sagamore stood to be the southern terminus for the bridge and as such would be the recipient of countless tons of steel and cement. The bridge destroyed homes, schools and churches indiscriminately. His woods were gone too; entrance ramps paved over them. Wildwood mansion ceased to exist; concrete abutments slammed right through it.

Noble's research was clear and thorough. Republican leaders, he charged, wanted to build the bridge for their own personal profit. With the GOP controlling the local governments on both sides of the Sound, the governorship, the state senate, and with plenty of money to bribe a few Democrats in the state assembly, they could very well pull it all off. Access roads included, the super bridge would cost the taxpayers approximately fifteen billion dollars, and Republican Frank Montesano possessed the power to gain control of the project. Although the governor theoretically could appoint anyone he wanted, Frank had to be the odds on favorite—come reelection time his Nassau County machine could make or break a governor. Covertly scheming for the bridge for nearly ten years, Boss Montesano stood well prepared to spread the spoils around, not forgetting himself, to the political allies who helped him keep his stranglehold on the municipal government of Long Island's most populated county.

Brian rubbed his eyes and suddenly realized he was hot and sweaty. If Marcus Noble's source was valid, and Brian desperately wondered who or what that source was, then his charges were within the realm of possibility. He took off his jacket. There was a lot more to read.

On the next few pages Noble went into detail as to how the Republican machine would profit from the project. Kickbacks from firms awarded construction contracts were one way. Real estate transactions were another. Vast amounts of land needed to be condemned to make way for the bridge and New York State's unassailable right of eminent domain would make it all quite legal. State public works officials, in a hurry to start construction and quite free with government money, could be counted on to offer considerably more for a property

than it previously was worth. Noble detailed how Montesano, guided by his foreknowledge of the proposed bridge and its arteries, had been using proxies to buy as much Sagamore land as he could get his hands on.

“Come and get it!”

Iva’s voice from the dining room snapped Brian out of his concentration. Placing the thesis on the coffee table and starting to walk from the room, he suddenly stopped in his tracks. Something told him not to leave the manuscript behind. Rationally he knew Noble must have made other copies but it still seemed too precious to just leave it there. He squeezed the thesis to his chest, walked into the dining room and forced himself to smile at the Professor. Sansone smiled back then both looked away, seemingly hurt by something.

Iva noticed this and Brian’s cradling of the thesis. She became even more curious.

“We’re having steak and potatoes and corn on the cob,” Sansone announced. “Is that all right with you, Brian?”

“It sure is,” he replied, amazed. *Real food.*

“I figured you’d feel that way,” the Professor continued. “We’re having your kind of meal because I want to ask you to do something.”

“That’s it, Professor,” Iva chimed in, “get what you want out of him then spring the Brussels sprouts.”

The Professor laughed, Brian did not. Brussels sprouts were never funny to him. Never.

“Careful Iva,” the Professor said, “I need you on my side and Brian’s going to need your help.”

“For what?” Brian asked. “What do I need her help for? What do you want me to do?”

“Let’s eat first,” Sansone said, “then we’ll get down to business.”

The food really hit the spot. Among his many areas of expertise, Alan Sansone possessed considerable culinary acumen. The only minor drawback for Brian was that his steak was medium and not well done. But he had asked for it medium, having heard the Professor on more than one occasion state unequivocally that overcooked meat is an affront to the memory of a once noble steer.

Wondering what was up, Brian and Iva did not have their minds fully on the meal. Nevertheless, Sansone's dinner table discourse was, as always, great fun to listen to. From the cultivation of maize in pre-Columbian Mexico to Truman's firing of General MacArthur, the Professor seamlessly intertwined entertainment and education.

"Iva, let me tell you a little story about Theodore Roosevelt," Sansone said, dabbing his mouth with his napkin. "He's one of Brian's heroes."

"So I've heard," Iva said.

"Here we go," Brian said.

"Well," the Professor went on, "When Teddy left office in 1909, he headed straight for a big game hunt in Africa. His many enemies hoisted their drinks and toasted 'Health to the lions.' Conservatives joked that 'some lion ought to do his duty.' But after months of tramping through the wilderness, our man Theodore emerged bearing over three thousand trophies including nine lions, five elephants and thirteen rhinos. But Iva my dear, in reality Roosevelt was much too near-sighted to be a good marksman."

Brian chuckled. He knew what was coming.

"Every time he fired his rifle, four other rifles fired at exactly the same instant. You see, the safari leader and his men darn well knew Mr. Roosevelt had only an inkling of the general direction the animal was bearing down on him, and the life of a former president was far too important to take any chances."

The three of them laughed.

"Some say the cartoon character of Mr. Magoo was actually based on President Roosevelt," Brian added.

"As you can see, Iva," Sansone added, "there's no end to the useless and irrelevant information inside the head of a history professor."

They all laughed again. Dinner done, their host leaned back in his chair and uttered "Mmmmmaaaah," a Falstaffian figure with his innards warmed once again. Business, finally, was at hand.

"What do you think of the thesis?" he asked Brian without any preamble.

“Interesting,” Brian replied calmly. Iva saw him clench his fist.

“They’ve really gone too far this time, haven’t they?” the Professor added.

“They certainly have.” Both fists clenched.

“They should be stopped.”

Still low key, Brian said, “Yes, they should.”

Iva stood up. “Would somebody please tell me what’s going on here?”

Brian told her point blank, “The Republicans have secret plans to build a super bridge across Long Island Sound that will destroy countless acres of priceless landscape and displace thousands from their homes.”

He took a deep breath after he finished and both he and the Professor stared at her. There was silence for a moment as no one spoke. As she sat down, the only response Iva could come up with was “Oh.”

Brian continued: “We’ve got to get organized, Professor, start discussion groups, form committees, get petitions signed...”

Sansone smiled and shook his head. “You’re not going to suggest a dance marathon to raise money are you?”

“Now that you mention it, why not?” Brian replied.

“Times have changed,” the Professor said.

“What do you mean?”

“You want to relive your college days and I don’t think it’s appropriate. We’re in the nineteen eighties now and new problems demand new solutions. Face it, Montesano won’t lose any sleep over a bunch of college kids dancing till they drop.”

Brian felt slapped, punched rather, in the face. Clearly, the Professor aimed to fight Montesano and his bridge, and he already had a battle plan mapped out—his way.

“What do you want me to do?” Brian asked numbly.

“Run for mayor,” the Professor said.

The words stunned Brian. They made no sense. “Who should run?” he asked.

“You should dammit!” Iva burst in. “You’d be perfect! Take your message to the people. Campaign. Win. Use the system

to break the machine. And then... then... then... long live Long Island!”

Alan Sansone nodded and smiled at Iva, gratitude in his eyes. *She'll be strength behind Brian*, he thought, *I knew it*. He felt his eyes starting to tear; Iva reminded him of his wife, Melanie, who had been gone nearly thirty years.

“You want me to run for mayor,” Brian said, trying to digest the thought.

“That’s right,” Sansone said.

“Me?”

“Yes, you. You are a registered Democrat aren’t you?”

“Sure, but why me? I have no political experience whatsoever.”

“With your articles in *Newsday*, you’ve already established yourself as a thorn in the Republicans’ side. You’ve got looks, good speaking ability, and you’re young but not too young. I’ve already spoken to the Sagamore Democratic committee about you. They may support you for the nomination.”

“Sounds like nobody else wants it,” Brian said.

“None of the party regulars want it, that is true,” the Professor admitted. “You know Sagamore, for a Democrat it’s a long shot.”

Brian knew “long shot” understated the situation. The city of Sagamore had not had a Democratic mayor since 1896. It was a stronghold so staunchly Republican it served as the location for the GOP county headquarters.

For the past eighteen years Frank Montesano’s long-time crony, Al Savino, had been mayor. Al ran routinely every two years and did not just defeat his opponents, he buried them. A freshman political science major could figure out why. First, there was more than a two to one Republican registration advantage, important because most Sagamore Republicans resembled marionettes in the voting booth. Second, the large Italian population blindly voted for anyone with a surname ending in “o.”

“Why should I run if I have no chance of winning?” Brian asked the Professor.

“To play it safe and avoid offending the voters, Montesano will definitely hold off announcing his bridge plans until after

the election. If we can get proof of what they're up to, concrete documentation that will stand up in court, you can hammer it home during the campaign. Then you will win. One thing history has taught us is the people love to vote the scoundrels out of office. The hard part is exposing the scoundrels."

*Mayor Werth. Sounds nice.* "There's no proof now?" Brian asked, hopefully.

Sansone shook his head. "Noble's source for his thesis has asked to remain anonymous. I don't even know who it is. It's going to take good old-fashioned detective work to nail Montesano and his crew. But make no mistake, we will nail them."

"I'm not sure, Professor," Brian said, "I'd have to leave teaching and give up my writing. You're talking a lot of time and effort, maybe for nothing. I just don't know."

Iva exhaled loudly enough to cause the Professor and Brian to turn and notice her displeasure. *I know what he's thinking, she told herself, he's thinking my life is comfortable now, why rock the boat?* This was the side of Brian she liked the least: too much dreaming and not enough practicable action... behavior her high school English teacher had called *Hamlet crap*. She wished there was a pitcher of ice water on the table so she could throw it in his face.

"I just don't know," Brian said again.

Alan Sansone leaned back in his chair and interlocked his fingers on his stomach. He uttered one word: "Areté."

Brian knew immediately what the Professor was driving at.

"What?" he said even though he had heard.

"Areté," the Professor repeated.

"What is arété?" Iva interrupted. "It sounds like an overpriced cologne."

The Professor smiled.

Brian answered her seriously as if he was in front of a class: "Areté was the word the ancient Greeks used to define excellence. The Professor here is subtly reminding me that government service is not only a duty owed to the community, it is a duty we all owe to ourselves. In Golden Age Athens, the Greek with the greatest arête was the man most well rounded. The body and the mind grew together, neither favored. Arête

demanded time be equally divided among the gymnasium, the battlefield, the theatre, and the Assembly. Completeness, including running for Mayor, that is *arête*.”

Iva muttered “Hmmm” and appeared thoughtful. Then she asked, “What does it smell like?”

This time Brian grinned along with the Professor.

“Is it okay if he thinks it over?” Iva asked, sneaking a wink at Sansone, a wink he correctly interpreted as *If there’s any problem, I’ll handle it*.

“Sure,” Sansone replied. “And Brian, you can keep that copy of the thesis. I’ve got another so does Noble.”

“Right. Thanks. Thanks for an eventful evening.”

“That’s for sure,” Iva added.

Walking to the front door, Brian turned to the Professor. “You know, when we first got here we thought you were going to tell us you’re retiring.”

“Me? Retire?” the Professor replied. “Not for another fifty years.”

“That’s the spirit,” Iva said.

“But what about what you said last Friday about the department needing a younger man with fresh ideas?” Brian persisted.

“Oh that,” the Professor said with a sheepish grin, “I was blasted.”

A kiss on the cheek for Iva, a handshake for Brian and they were back in their car on the way home. Silence prevailed for a time, both lost in their thoughts. Brian, cursing the bridge and wondering whether to try running for mayor, gripped the wheel and stared straight ahead. Iva, trying to imagine what it must be like to be old and without a family, finally broke the quiet.

“We should have helped him with the dishes,” she said.

“You know he never lets us,” Brian replied.

“I know. He’s such a nice man.”

“He’s one of the good people in this world.”

“Yup.”

As he unlocked the gate in front of their house, Brian used the light from the headlights to glance at his watch: twelve ten in the morning, April sixteenth, Iva’s birthday. *She probably*

*doesn't realize it's already her birthday*, he thought. *She's expecting me to give her a present tomorrow night. Maybe I'll give it to her now and surprise her.* He was excited about presenting the gift. He loved Iva more than anything in the world and her present was the absolute best he could do.

"I am bushed," Iva said as they entered the house. "It's late and it's a school night."

Brian cringed as he headed to the kitchen for some junk food. He hated that his chosen profession—teaching—still held him captive to the dreaded childhood admonition that it was a "school night."

"Want a cookie?" he asked Iva. "Chocolate chip."

"No thanks, I'm trying to quit," he joked. But then he took the biggest one in the box.

Brian swallowed the last of his cookie and went over and hugged Iva, hard. "Happy birthday," he whispered in her ear.

"Oh, that's right it is."

"Wait right here," he told her, taking her by the shoulders and sitting her down at the kitchen table. "I've got something for you so don't move."

"Okay," Iva said. *I'm getting a present*, she thought. *I can't wait.* Then her new age occurred to her. *Thirty-two. Damn. Not exactly menopausal but getting up there.*

Brian returned with his hands behind his back, a confident young man with a special secret. "This is for you," he said, revealing in one hand a small rectangular package wrapped in yellow paper topped by a green bow.

Iva accepted his gift and even before opening it threw her arms around his neck. "Brian, it's beautiful, thank you." She kissed him on both cheeks then hard on the lips. The contents of the package mattered little compared with the fact it was given by Brian. She loved that man.

"Open it," he said.

Ripping off the wrapping and peeking inside, Iva saw a necklace: a gold chain connected—not through a clasp or drilling but delicately by wire—to a stone the likes of which she could not immediately identify.

"That necklace is one of a kind," Brian said. "I had it specially made."

"It's quartz?" Iva guessed, noticing the dull white color.

"That's right it is quartz," he replied. "Look closely at it, it's cracked a little on the side but you can see the tip. It's an Indian arrowhead. I found it in the meadow behind Wildwood. It's probably from the Matinecock tribe of the Algonquian nation and could be old enough to date back to... who knows... before the Europeans came here."

"It's beautiful," Iva said, reaching for him. She wanted more hugging.

"Not so fast," Brian said, "there's more." In his other hand he held out a birthday card. "There's some of my writing on the inside. About the arrowhead... and, well, maybe my long walks in the woods will make more sense to you now."

Without a word, Iva sat down at the table to read. As she did, Brian took the necklace and from behind fastened it around her neck. Then he hugged her from the back and peered over her shoulder.

**A POINT IN TIME**  
**BY**  
**BRIAN CHARLES WERTH**

I have no idea on what errand it was sent. It lay on the ground, white and curiously lovely, a little mauled by time but crafted superbly and worthy of the astonishing person who made it.

It was an Indian arrowhead: unmistakable and splendid in the setting sun, its symmetry and terrible purpose making it different from all other stones around it. I picked it up and held it in my hand and knew that I was the first to do so, to test its still sharp edge, since he who had made it released the bowstring and watched it speed toward its target.

I was alone except for bird sounds and an autumn wind that moved across the

meadow grass. What a pity the summer had given up so soon. The arrowhead was really quite easy to see. But now its creator was faced with a winter coming on, and there would be long hours spent making another. And it is unlikely that the finder, unless he be a kinsman, would return it.

I am a neighbor, at least, and a kind of kinsman, and I would be pleased to return this treasure to its owner. I waited for him that evening, hoping to hear him hail me from the line of trees beyond. But the sun moved low, the night grew impatient, and there was no call; I knew that he had given up the search and gone away. Perhaps for him, as for me, there was a dinner even now getting cold and a woman who would be displeased by such aimless wanderings. And so this marvelous instrument was lost to him.

But I'll come back, kinsman. Perhaps some evening we can sit together on that big stone at the western edge of the meadow, and I'll return your splendid arrowhead and we might talk for a moment.

How clever you were to make this arrowhead. I'm afraid the point has been broken, and the stem, too, has partially cracked off. But the work, the long hours you spent shaping this weapon, still shows in the gracefully tapered edges with their terrible sharpness.

Things have changed since you passed this way. The deer have gone. I see a rabbit occasionally. But some things are the same for both of us—morning mists and summer lightning, the first hint of red in the dogwood at harvest time and, in winter,

bird tracks in the snow. Once, near here, just around that clump of trees, I saw a fox.

Ah, yes. Your arrowhead. What were you shooting at that day? An enemy fearfully painted and come from a distant land, and sworn by all his gods to kill you? Or was there a rabbit carelessly feeding on something green and tender, unaware of your slow and patient approach?

Or did you, by chance, fire your arrow at the sun. If so, you almost made it, you with your agile hands and impossible dreams. Of course, it was at the sun you fired this missile. There is something about this arrowhead, so marvelously contrived, so beautiful...

A squirrel, you say? And you missed? And you tried to mark with your eye the place where the arrow fell and you walked back and forth across this meadow but your precious arrow had vanished utterly, and it was almost night and everything you did was wrong. And there was no one there to tell you how wondrous you were, how almost like a god.

It grows late, kinsman, and you are anxious to be gone. I cannot see you in the dark. I gather you do not want your damaged treasure. Very well, I shall keep it and remember you by it and show it to you when next we meet.

And meet again we shall, my father, for it is our destiny that one day we shall journey far from our upland meadow, you and I, and, together, touch the stars.

Iva's eyes glistened with tears as she finished. Brian noticed this and was embarrassed. "Even little rich boys can

believe in something,” he said, shrugging his shoulders.

“It’s beautiful,” Iva said. She turned to face him. “And you know what? I want to touch the stars with you too. I want to be with you forever.”

“You do?” Brian said.

Iva nodded, and a tear trickled down her cheek.

Brian stared at the tear, fascinated. She was crying because of him. In spite of himself, he found himself enjoying the proof he held such power over her. After a moment he moved in to stop it, another good feeling.

“Hey c’mon,” he said, taking her face in his hands and brushing away the tear. “I want to be with you too. I want to marry you.”

Brian stepped back from Iva and dropped his hands to his sides. He had not planned to propose marriage. Then suddenly he found himself feeling total exhilaration. *Iva and I should get married. That came out because it was meant to.*

He got down on one knee. “Iva Fidele, will you marry me?” he asked.

Iva stopped crying, in addition she stopped breathing; they both did. This was a crucial scene in their lives. Iva looked at Brian, vulnerable Brian, and fumbled for her line. *Relax and let it happen* she remembered her college acting teacher telling her as she struggled with Ophelia. Her hand brushed her cheeks and pushed back her hair. She relaxed. She let it happen.

“Yes, I will,” she said.

The embrace that followed was long and hard. They separated when they both realized they needed to breathe.

“I’m very happy,” Brian finally said.

“Me too,” Iva admitted. “What a birthday!”

Brian went to the refrigerator and pulled out the handy leftover New Year’s Eve bottle of champagne. “I want to propose a toast,” he announced.

“To what?”

“To us?”

“Us?”

“Me and you.”

“Don’t you think you should open the bottle first?” Iva asked.

“Oh that’s right. Wait. I have a better idea.” He grabbed two glasses and handed everything to Iva. “Hold this, we’ll drink it in bed.” Before she knew it he scooped her up in his arms.

“What are you doing Brian?”

“Taking you to our love nest.”

“Careful, don’t rupture yourself.”

“Don’t worry.”

“Am I heavy?”

“Can I say two words?”

“Sure.”

“Diet tomorrow.”

“You jerk,” she said, playfully pounding on his chest, “you’re just trying to play Superman.”

“No I’m not.” Then, pinching her rear, “I love you Lois.”

They tumbled onto the bed, miraculously not breaking anything or anyone. Brian popped the cork, poured and made his toast again.

“To us.”

“To us.”

Iva played with his hair and kissed him on the top of his head. She hated to admit it but she found herself enjoying the obvious fact she held such power over him.

The doorbell rang, or more accurately, the gatebell. Brian and Iva reacted identically to the delay in the next item on their agenda.

“Sonofabitch.”

“Damn.”

“Someone’s at the gate,” Brian said.

“It’s probably your parents,” Iva said. “Mental telepathy. They don’t want you marrying a Jew.”

Brian laughed then realized Iva was right. There would be a problem—with his parents and her father. The gatebell rang again.

“I’ll go see who it is,” he said.

“Be careful, Brian, it could be robbers.”

“Robbers do not ring bells.”

“Polite ones do,” Iva said. “I’m coming with you.”

“Great,” he replied, throwing her a sweatshirt, “now we can both become a statistic.”

There was a hundred yard walk down the driveway to the gate, unlit and nearly pitch dark. They both felt... “Spooky,” Brian said out loud. Down behind the bars they thought they could make out the silhouette of a single man.

As they got closer, Iva started whispering: “Lions and tigers and bears, oh my! Lions and tigers and bears, oh my! Lions and tigers and...”

“Knock it off,” Brian said.

A flashlight snapped on in his face, completely blinding him.

“I’m Patrolman Bolster of the Sagamore police department,” a voice said. “Are you Brian Werth?”

“Uh, yes,” Brian replied, shielding his eyes.

The flashlight snapped off.

“Do you have a badge or something?” Iva asked.

“Check out the car and the uniform,” Bolster snapped. “What do you think this is, Halloween?”

“What do you want?” Brian asked. Policemen always made him nervous, feelings left over from a pubescent fondness for firecrackers and, later, more than a little pot smoking in the Princeton dormitories.

“Professor Alan Sansone has been found dead,” the patrolman said. As an afterthought and sounding totally insincere he added, “I’m real sorry.”