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Mason Bonnereau

Tyson Morgan
Macalester College

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Honors Project

Macalester College

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Title: Mason Bonnereau

Author: Tyson Morgan

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MASON BONNEREAU

Tyson Morgan

Honors Project
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PART ONE

1

The night after baseball ended in sixth grade, Mason told his dad the Lewiston league was too easy, and that he wanted to try out next year for a select travel team he'd heard of on the radio. His dad said the team sounded expensive, and that he wasn't driving all over the state to see games, but Mason said the team would make him better, and that the practices were only twenty minutes away, and his dad said fine, he'd take him to the practices, but that was it, and he'd better find some money. In the fall Mason did yard work for the neighbors, and in the winter he shoveled, and in the spring he made the cut.

When he and his dad turned into the parking lot for the first practice, he wished he wasn't being dropped off by the Buick: all the cars were Audis, BMWs, or Saabs he must've been too excited to notice during tryouts. He had his dad park at the end of the lot, then he said thanks and put on his hood and jogged in. A couple dads were in the bleachers wearing suits, and the other three had dress shirts on. He hoped

no one saw his own dad sitting in the car, with his undershirt that had Worcestershire stains.

About ten kids were already on the field, joking around while they warmed up. Mason wondered how they already knew each other, and he took his time putting on his spikes so he didn't have to ask one of them to throw. When the coach had them introduce themselves, Mason recognized only a couple of their hometowns, ones near Portland he'd heard of listening to the Sea Dogs on the radio. When he said he was from Lewiston, one of the kids put his glove over his mouth, and his eyes showed that he was either laughing or smiling, and Mason wondered why.

When he got back to his house, he looked up their hometowns in the Farmer's Almanac, and saw that they were all from the same part of the coast, on the other side of Topsham, where the practice field was. It made sense now why they'd joked around with each other, but he was still confused—he'd thought the team would have kids from all over the area, since it was a select one—and he wondered if he should play in Lewiston, not wanting to be the only one not from the coast. But he'd shoveled and mowed too much to quit.

Friday night two weeks later, going down Main Street in Brunswick he started shivering. It was the nicest place he'd been. There were streetlamps and shops with different-colored awnings, and normal people were buying ice cream and sitting at tables on the sidewalks. Joey's street was a couple blocks past the shops, and it was just as nice. The houses had porches with columns and doors with knockers, and they

were all Federal-style, like the ones in Mason's history book a couple weeks ago. He went by Joey's house and saw some of his teammates through a big window upstairs, and then he had his dad park in front of another house a couple blocks later.

"Next time you get invited to a party, have someone pick you up," his dad said. "This is the last time I drive past Topsham."

"I *know*," he said. "You told me. Thanks."

He grabbed his sleeping bag and went up the walkway, thinking he'd try to look lost if someone came out, then he turned around on the doorstep, when he could hear his dad a couple blocks away.

Joey's mom answered the door and said everyone was upstairs, and he twisted his body a little on each step, trying to keep his feet on the carpet in the middle. A few of his teammates nodded or said hi when he came in, and Joey gave him a coke when he sat down. They all looked different without their baseball stuff on. He liked the ironed shirts a few of them wore, and how two of them crossed their legs like men, putting the side of one foot on the other knee. No one his age did that in Lewiston.

They were making fun of people they knew at each other's schools, and he laughed when they did, until Mike, the kid who'd covered his mouth at practice, looked over with his eyebrows bent.

After pizza they went back upstairs, and while half of them played foosball or pool, the other half watched another game, and a few of them talked about the times they'd

gone to Disney Land, where the national tournament was this year. Mason asked one of them what Los Angeles was like, and while he listened, he tried to picture Hollywood and the beaches.

“Did you go to San Francisco?” he said. “Is it close?”

The kid laughed, and so did Mike, who was sitting on the couch across from Mason.

“What?” Mason said.

“It’s not close at all,” Mike said. “I’m surprised you didn’t know that.”

“Why?”

“I’m surprised you haven’t been more places.”

Mason wondered what he was talking about.

“I thought people from Lewiston went away as much as they could,” Mike said. He smirked, and so did the rest of them, and blushing, Mason made sure to laugh. Now he knew why Mike had covered his mouth: he had to be from somewhere like Brunswick—so did the other kids. Mason wondered if he should have played another season in Lewiston, but Mike said he was just kidding, and he leaned forward and tapped him on the side of the knee.

Mason went to the bathroom in the middle of the movie they watched before bed, and when he stopped to look at the Wade Boggs poster on Joey’s door, he saw that the room next to it was open. He made sure no one was coming, then he went in.

The walls were full of hardcover and leather books. Walking along one, he looked at the top shelves and let his fingers drag along the books on one of the middle shelves, then he slid out a leather book and opened it. The crooked letters were interesting, and the pages smelled sweet like sawdust. He turned them with his whole hand under them. Then he heard footsteps in the hall and clapped the book shut. Joey's dad walked in, squinted in his direction, then smiled and flipped on a light.

"What's that?" he said.

"Sorry, I was just looking."

"Were you thinking of borrowing it?"

"No, I just picked it up."

"Would you like to?"

Mason thought the book was nice, but he'd never read anything this long. Joey's dad waved him off. "Take it," he said.

"I was just looking."

"Take it. I've got plenty." He cocked his head at the window. "I teach at the college," he said. "I'm paid to have this many books. I don't actually like them." He chuckled. "Just kidding."

"Thanks," Mason said, wondering what college he was talking about.

"Don't mention it. Maybe I'll see you at one of the games and you can tell me what you think."

Mason nodded.

"Terrific." Smiling, Joey's dad put his arms behind his back and nodded, and Mason thought he looked like he'd read everything on the shelves. He had a white

beard, glasses, and little buttons at the points of his collar. Mason didn't care what the book was—he'd read it as long as it made him look like that.

"You should get back to the movie," Joey's dad said. Mason said thanks, then walked by him looking at the floor.

The next day, when he and his dad left Brunswick and came into Topsham, he said the party had been fun, and his dad grunted.

"We played football at a college this morning," Mason said. "You should see some of the buildings."

The road started to turn into one lane, and the truck next to them pulled in front.

"Joey's dad's a professor there. It's called Bowdoin, I think."

"Sounds fun."

"Maybe I can go there someday."

His dad scoffed. "Start saving."

Two weeks later, Mason rode back from the first tournament with Joey and his dad, and when Joey fell asleep up front, his dad asked Mason if he'd started the book he'd loaned him—what had it been, again?

"*North and South*," Mason said. "I already finished it."

“Wow,” Joey’s dad said. “I’m impressed.” Mason felt prouder than he could remember—definitely prouder than a couple hours ago, when his coach had told him he’d pitched a good game.

Joey’s dad asked what he thought of the book, and Mason didn’t want to say that he hadn’t understood all of it, or that he’d mostly finished it to be the only one he knew who’d read something that big, or that his favorite part was that the story happened in a cooler Lewiston, one back when mills still worked (he didn’t want Joey’s dad to know where he was from), so he said he wasn’t sure, he just knew he liked it, and Joey’s dad said that was okay. Then Joey’s dad talked about the first time he’d read it, when he was a little older than Mason was now, and about the class he was teaching on it, and about some of the places he’d gone to talk about it, like San Francisco and London.

When they got back to Topsham, he said he’d bring him another book next week, and Mason said sure, then he walked over to his dad at the end of the parking lot. On the way home, he thought of how Joey’s dad was from Virginia and had flown everywhere, and of how his own dad was from Lewiston and had stayed there his whole life, making pieces of metal all day since he could remember, probably standing at the same machine. If Joey’s dad ever had to stand in front of everyone when they were deciding if he was important, there would be so many people from so many places to say he was. If his own dad ever had to do that, there might be only a few people from Lewiston, and they might not even say he was—and besides, who would listen?

Two months later, the first Saturday after the season, Mason read until he was tired of it, pitched against a wall until it was more fun to throw underhand, then lay down on his bed. He wished he was still staying up late reading books from Joey's dad, and that he was still talking about them on the way back from places like Portsmouth, where they'd turned the mills into shops, and Camden, where the team had taken a tour on a frigate in the harbor.

He got out the roster with everyone's numbers and called Joey. He couldn't call for no reason—he'd make something up. They said hi, and then he asked if Joey had seen a pair of batting gloves he'd lost, and when Joey said he hadn't, he asked what he was doing that day. Joey said he was going to the beach with his dad, and he said cool, someday they should go to that bookstore in Brunswick he'd talked about. Joey said they should, and Mason asked if maybe they could go tomorrow. Joey said he might be doing something, but he'd call him.

Mason waited around the phone until three the next day. He couldn't blame Joey for not calling him: he probably had better things to do. He called him next Friday and left a message with his mom to call him back. When he hadn't by twelve the next day, Mason lay down on his bed and wished it wasn't the weekend. He hated

Blais' Shipping, where he'd started loading trucks last month, but at least he made money.

When he got up, he walked through the backyards to the end of his street, then hopped over the fence at Jack's. Jack was listening to the Sox game, lying on his porch with his shirt off and sunglasses on. He didn't sit up like normal when Mason sat on the top step. Mason asked who was winning, and he said, "Listen." The announcer said the score after the next batter, and Mason said Boggs had been on fire lately.

"Yep," Jack said.

They listened to half an inning.

"We had lots of games," Mason said. "Every weekend."

"Sounds cool," Jack said.

At the next commercial, Mason asked Jack if he wanted to play catch, and when the game came back on Jack got up without saying anything. They tossed the ball, backing up until they were at two corners of the yard. Jack asked him if he'd gotten better like he said he would, and Mason said he had, and they talked about both their seasons, and when there was a pause, Mason said, "Do you think what our dads do is boring?"

Jack scoffed. "Are you kidding me?"

"There was this one kid on the team," Mason said. "His dad's a professor at a college. He reads all these books and flies places to talk about them."

"Who wants to fly places if they have to talk about books?"

They didn't say anything for a while, then Jack laughed to himself and told Mason he'd missed out at the lake—he'd fingered three girls this summer. While he talked about who they were and what it had felt like, Mason made sure to laugh, and when Jack was finished, he said, "You ever afraid you'll just end up sitting in a chair like your dad or your grandpa?"

"I don't know, Mase. What's up with the twenty questions?"

Jack didn't understand, Mason thought, and he tossed the ball for a few more minutes, then he said he had to go home to do something, he'd catch up with Jack later.

After watching the Sea Dogs game with his dad that night, as he was folding the TV trays and his dad was washing the silverware, he asked if they could go to Hadlock the next day. "I can buy the tickets."

"*Why?*" his dad said.

"I haven't seen a game live."

"Sure you have. You play in them." His dad dried his hands. "Can we get a steak dinner there like the one we just had?"

"I don't know."

"Probably not."

"We can get hot dogs."

"Don't like hot dogs."

He took out a beer, then sat back in his chair in front of the TV. “Besides,” he said, “we can see the game better here.”

Next Friday, during the Sea Dogs postgame report, Mason said, “They’re having a deal at the Portland Ship Museum tomorrow. Students get in free.”

“You want me to take you there? I took you to Topsham all summer.”

“No, I want you to come—Mom too. I’ll buy your tickets.”

“Nah. I can fall asleep here.”

“I’ll buy us steak dinners.”

“Hell no, you won’t.”

Mason leaned back in his chair and looked at the ceiling. “You know,” he said, “some people don’t watch TV every night when they come home from work, or go to bed at eight.”

“You’re telling me?”

“They like to see things and read things and write books.”

“Your professor friend teach you that?”

“Steak dinners don’t make them happy.”

“Tell me one reason I should go to this stupid museum.”

Mason sat up and looked at him. “I don’t know—how about because it could be interesting. How about because it’s not the Sea Dogs or the Celts or the Pats for once.”

“You know I haven’t liked the Celts since Ainge left.”

“Fuck you,” Mason said, and got up to leave.

“He teach you that, too?”

Mason went into his room and slammed his door, then he called out *Sorry!*, hoping he hadn’t woken his mom up.

“You’re damn right you are,” his dad said.

Next Friday, Mason rode to the bird sanctuary and listened to the quiet and got drunk, and had to walk his bike back down the hill. His dad was sitting in front of the postgame when he walked in. “You missed your fucking supper,” he said. “Where the hell were you?”

Mason walked over to him. “Give me the keys.”

“What?”

“The keys. I’m going to Portland tomorrow to get us some tickets.”

“Sit down. And ask me next time you want some beer. I’m tired of them missing like there’s some little rat.”

“I can drive,” Mason said. “Someone at Blais’ has been teaching me.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“Give me the keys.” He put his hand out in front of his dad’s face. “It’s a Shakespeare play. *Shake-speare*. Do you know what that is?”

“Go to bed.”

“It’s on Sunday.”

“I don’t care when it is. I don’t want to go to some stupid play.”

“It’ll be good for you.” Mason tapped his dad on the cheek with a few fingers.

“Dammit, Mason.”

“Come on.” He went to tap him again and he knocked his hand away.

“Go to bed. Get a glass of water.”

“*You* get me a glass of water. Get your fat ass off the couch and do something.”

His dad grabbed the arms of the chair, and Mason thought he was going to push himself up and hit him, so he reached back and slapped him across the face before he could get to his feet. His dad put his hand on his cheek and stared at the carpet with wide eyes. Mason’s hand was tingling and he wondered what he’d just done, and he thought about saying sorry, but before he could decide what to do, his dad got up and stood in front of him, and Mason took a step back.

“Listen to me,” his dad said. “I like my life the way it is, and I don’t need some snot-nosed shit to tell me how to live it. You have your own things to do, right? Your books? Your ironing? Go do them, and keep to yourself.”

Mason went to his room. The next night, his dad made him steak, but left it on the dinner table.

The first day the summer before high school, Mason pulled up to the curb outside his house in his new car, a 20-year-old Saab. He walked in and looked at his dad, who was standing at the window with his hands in his pockets, and his mom, who was sitting in her chair with the crossword, before going into the kitchen.

“You get pulled over, don’t call me,” his dad said from the living room.

“I won’t,” Mason said. “I’m a good driver.” He started to make himself a sandwich.

“What kind of lot would sell to a kid your age?” his dad said.

“No lot. Guy at Blais’.” Leaning against the counter, Mason bit into his sandwich.

“Tell him he shouldn’t park it outside the house,” his mom said.

“You can park it on the next street,” his dad said. “We don’t want it on our property.”

“Will do.”

On weekends that summer, when he wasn't working an extra shift at Blais' or painting houses, he drove to the places he'd gone last year and explored more of the coast, all the way up to Bar Harbor, three hours north. He walked along the tide pools imagining he was in Cannery Row, and he sat on the docks thinking the water underneath him was the same as the water in London. He read books, and liked how he wasn't in Lewiston even when he put them down.

Towards the end of summer, while he was sitting on a bench by the harbor at Camden, a couple his age walked along the shore in front of him. They hopped on the rocks without looking at each other, stayed within arm's reach, and sometimes touched hands, and once in a while, one of them said something without looking up. He liked them much more than the other couples he'd seen that summer, who'd laughed, shouted, chased each other, and stood in each other's arm looking out over the ocean, often in his way. These two looked like they could say anything to each other, or just be understood in silence, and he wished he had that. It was nice to take the state highways to the coast and sit by the water, but it would better if he had someone to talk to once he was there. He shouldn't like talking to the clerks at the gas station as much as he did, and he shouldn't feel so let down when the person behind him in line coughed and he had to leave the store.

The first week of high school, he checked out the girls in his honors classes, and after chemistry that Friday, asked the prettiest one, a sophomore named Claire, if she wanted to get ice cream that weekend, and she said yes. In bed that night, he pictured them reading books together in the library, and talking on walks in the bird

sanctuary. She was smart: she would want to talk about something outside Lewiston, and be outside Lewiston.

Friday at Denny's, after talking about their chemistry teacher, he asked if she wanted to do science in college.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm not sure I'll like it in a couple years."

"You are going, though?"

"To college?" she said. "I'm not sure. Neither of my parents went, and they seem to be doing fine."

"What's your dad do?"

She straightened up. "He paints houses."

Mason nodded, not knowing what to say. This was the problem with kids from Lewiston: they hadn't been enough places to know their parents' jobs were boring. How stimulating could painting be? Once you realized some guy with a gun could do most of your jobs in no time, the novelty wore off.

"What about you?" she said. "I saw that article last week. Are you going to get some big football scholarship?"

"Hopefully not." Mason remembered how annoying it had been to talk about whether he gave Lewiston a shot to win state this year, even though he was only a freshman, and to talk about how successful the team would be the rest of the time he was in high school. "I'm saving money," he said. "I'm going to test high enough to

get into an Ivy or someplace like Bowdoin. I'm only playing football in case it helps.

If you do go to school, where are you going?"

Her eyebrows bent. "I don't know," she said. "I always thought it might be fun to be a nurse at one of the hospitals."

"*Here?*" he said.

"Yeah."

"You want to stay around *here*?"

"Yeah, what's wrong with that?"

"Nothing works here," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"There aren't any jobs. The only reason you can be a nurse here is because Lewiston is full of old people."

"Well, someone has to take care of them, right?"

"I guess."

Her eyebrows still bent, she folded her arms across her chest and leaned back and looked at him. "I guess I just can't think of what it would be like to not live around my family."

"Good."

"What?"

"I said it would be good."

"You don't know that."

What was the point. "You're right: I don't. Let's change the subject."

"Good idea." She sat up. "Have you seen any new movies lately?"

“I don’t watch movies.”

“That’s no fun. You should get out more.”

“I should,” he said.

“Well,” she said. “If you do see one, you should see this one I saw with my mom last week...”

As she talked, he tried to look like he was paying attention, and to not blow bubbles in his shake. A week later, he went on a date with another decent-looking girl from his honors classes, and it turned out she only wanted to go to a state school like Orono, which meant she’d end up in Lewiston afterwards. He decided to give up on the girls in his honors classes: two out of six was a fair sample size.

Two weeks later he went to his first party, hoping some of the girls there, who wouldn’t be from his classes, would turn out to be smarter than they appeared. Maybe one of them would mention a book, or a trip she wanted to take somewhere like Boston.

He stood outside a crowd of people watching darts when he arrived, and winced as his teammates shouted at each other. The girls around him talked about that night’s game and who on the team was cute, and he moved to the living room. Facing the TV, he waited for the girls on the couch behind him to stop talking about how much they hated a teacher, and talk instead about the class itself. When five minutes passed without this happening, he went back to the dining room. Within a few

minutes, a couple girls came up to him and said *Mason!* in chorus, and he wondered who they were.

“Great game tonight!” one of them said, and she bumped him with her hip, and beer sloshed out of her can. “Whoops!” She and the other girl giggled at each other, bent double, and he said thanks flatly.

“Your shoes!” the girl said, as if she hadn’t heard him, and pointed at his feet. “They’re so nice! We were just talking about them!” She and the other girl laughed again, then she straightened up and looked at Mason’s chest, her eyes failing to focus. “You’re always so snazzy.” She put her hand on his chest and he got hard. He only wanted to say thanks again, but he thought that would be rude—not that they’d notice. “I like the eyeholes,” he said. “That’s why I got them.”

“What?”

“The eyeholes. On the oxfords.”

“They ARE awesome,” the girl said, still looking at his chest. “Tell me how to get strong and fast like you.” She moved her hand down one of his biceps and gripped his forearm. She had a fake tan and too much makeup, but her teeth were straight and white, and she had nice tits. He could probably make something happen if he wanted. All he had to do was keep amusing her and she’d make the first move. Maybe he could get her into the bathroom or his car. But what would be the point? What could happen afterwards with a girl like her?

“Take steroids,” he said. “That’s what I do.”

“Aren’t those ILLEGAL?”

“They are, but I take them anyway. Horse steroids. Like the Soviets. You should give ‘em a try. Just a sec—I have to go outside and piss.” He squeezed her wrist lightly as he moved her hand off him, then he smiled at the other girl as he walked away. At the door, Jack put his hand on his shoulder. “Never thought I’d see you here, Bonnereau.”

“Angelitis.”

“You dodged a bullet there, man. She’s Labbe’s girlfriend. They’re supposed to get married this summer.”

Mason scoffed. “I don’t care about Labbe. She’s a slut. They all are.”

Jack laughed. “You have a problem with that?”

Mason clapped him on the shoulder and walked out, and on his way home he wondered if he really could have gotten any, and if he should have tried. He could have gotten her to go down on him, and no one would have found out. But if she really was a slut, she might have told someone. Not that he cared what other people thought; he just didn’t want to ruin his reputation in case someone else was out there. It was probably better he hadn’t tried anything.

He thought about her in bed until he beat off to her, and the rest of the year, if his attention was caught by a girl he wanted to fuck but was worthless otherwise, he purged himself like this, holding out for someone better. The whole time, he doubted more and more that there was a girl at the school for him.

Once or twice a week, he read in one of the chairs near the entrance of the library at Bates, a college like Bowdoin in Lewiston, hoping one of the girls there would strike up a conversation about whatever book he had. He wanted to go up to

them, but he knew they'd see through any pretext he invented, with their glasses that made them look incisive instead of nerdy, and with their hair that looked frazzled, not as though it was dead from being straightened, but as though they'd been tugging at it all night, bent over some book or essay. If one of them did talk to him, he would keep the conversation to books, and only tell her who he was once he'd made a connection. She wouldn't go for him if she knew he was from Lewiston—the Batesies hated the Townies, and the Townies hated the Batesies—but she might assume he went to Bates: he had a beard, and he was already six-two, two-fifteen.

By summer none of them had talked to him, but he knew he could wait. He pictured walking around the pond on campus with one of them, and her telling him where she was from and what she was planning to do. Maybe she'd grown up someplace like Lewiston and knew what it was like, or maybe she was from someplace like New York and regretted being there. Either way, she'd get him.

His third time at Bates the next year, while he was reading *The Sun Also Rises*, he was tapped on the shoulder. A voice said, “Turlish, huh?”

A girl was standing over him, nodding and smiling, like guys on his team did when they asked each other if they’d gotten laid last weekend and already knew.

“Had that class last year,” she said. Her forehead was almost bulbous and she wasn’t wearing glasses, but she was blonde and had well-shaped lips and a small nose.

“Uh,” Mason said. “No, not that class.”

She put her hands on her hips definitively and looked away. “*Huh.*”

He sat up straight and leaned forward. “I’m reading it for”—he thought of a name he’d seen in the English Department—“Watkins.”

“Watkins? Didn’t know he taught that. Must be a seminar. Mind if I sit?” She hopped into the seat across from him, and landed so her legs were hanging over one of its arms. “It’s such a tragic story, huh?”

“Yeah,” he said, wondering if she was still talking about the book.

“Imagine having your man-stick put out of commish like that.”

What was she talking about?

“So you’re new here,” she said. “A freshman.”

“No.”

“A transfer? Why haven’t I seen you around?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “Yeah, I transferred.”

“From where? What the hell made you come here?”

He couldn’t think of a place or reason. A moment later he said, “Sorry. I’m a little out of it. All this reading.”

She pulled her head back and looked him in the eye. “I gotcha,” she said.

“Well, I’ll let you get back to it.” She got up.

He tried to speak, but he could only say, “Um.” He watched her walk out the entrance, then he went outside to look for her, but the quad was empty. When he came back he wondered why he’d been so stupid, so slow. She liked Hemingway—one of his favorite authors! They could have talked about him and about other things! She could have been it!

He picked up the book to distract himself, then he remembered what she’d said—something about a meat-stick being out of commish, the story being tragic. He went back to the beginning and found what she was talking about. Now the story made sense. He’d wondered why Jake hadn’t gone for Brett. How had he missed that? It was one of the key elements. How had he been so stupid?

As he walked back to his car, he wondered if he’d always been kidding himself. Sure, he read a lot, but had he always done this because he liked the idea of reading, or because he liked the satisfaction of finishing a book, or because they made him forget where he was—*not* because he liked the actual stories? And sure, he got

good grades, but it was high school, and it was Lewiston, and even then he had to study a lot. What if he wasn't supposed to be one of these Bates kids? What if he was just another kid who was supposed to stay in Lewiston, or go to a state school and come back?

He got into his car, and stopped when he went to start it. Of course he wasn't. Of course he wasn't meant to be one of these kids. He was going to play football at Orono and be nothing great, and then he was going to come back and work. He wouldn't load trucks. He'd manage people loading trucks. He wouldn't paint. He'd supervise. He'd be like his boss and walk around saying "peh-fect" when someone did the job right, and he'd eat two Boston Creams and sip Dunkin' Donuts each morning. The Dunkin' Donuts and the Boston Creams would make him happy. Was he any different than Jack or his dad?

He started the car and blasted the radio, and changed it from classical to rock and hummed during lulls so he didn't have to think. He drove all over town without paying attention, not wanting to go home, and when he finally got to his street, he came in the back way and saw Jack in the window of his house. He pulled over. It seemed wrong to ring the doorbell or knock, but it also seemed wrong to just walk in, so he rapped on the door twice, and Jack answered wearing jeans and no shirt. He nodded. "Bonnereau."

"Jack."

Jack stayed where he was, his body blocking Mason's view of the living room.

"What're you up to?" Mason said.

“Celts.”

“Mind if I join?”

Jack stared at him for a moment, and Mason was afraid he’d say no, but he turned around and walked towards the couch. “There’s beer in the fridge,” he said. Mason grabbed one and sat on the other end of the couch, and they watched the first quarter in silence. At halftime Mason said, “I have some chips at home.”

“All right,” Jack said.

When Mason came back, Jack had gotten out more beer.

Going down the stretch, they cheered for the Celts and called the other players faggots, and when Bird got fouled with seven seconds on the clock, putting the Celts up four, Jack clapped Mason on the back. They watched the postgame together, and during the replay of a dunk, Mason said, “You remember that time we made that hoop in fifth grade?”

Jack laughed. “Only thing I ever dunked on.” He coughed, then he thumped his chest with his fist. “I still bang bitches, though.”

Mason laughed, and after the show, he asked Jack if he was watching the Phoenix game in two days, and Jack said yes. They watched a few more games that week, and Mason realized he’d forgotten how nice it was to sit back and be entertained. It didn’t wear on him like books could. He liked shouting at the screen and talking football during commercials, and even though he got boners, he liked hearing Jack go on about girls he’d fucked. In general, it was just nice to say something and be heard, even if it was stupid. He could see why people liked doing this; he shouldn’t have written Jack off.

They went to a party that weekend, and Mason couldn't remember laughing as hard as when he joked around with his teammates that night. He and Jack watched more of the Celts the next week, and that weekend they went to another party, where they downed three beers apiece walking in the door.

"Pussy patrol," Jack said, clapping Mason on the shoulder, and walked off.

When Mason scanned the room, lots of girls looked appealing, but he paid the most attention to one named Christina Labonte, who'd caught his eye in the halls a few times. When she passed by the other girls they called to her, but instead of having her come over, they just smiled or waved, and she responded with closed-mouth smiles, almost grimaces, before squeezing sideways between more clusters of people, looking blank-eyed at the ground in front of her.

Mason didn't understand why the other girls shunned her in particular. She was a junior who'd had an abortion as a freshman, and who'd had sex with a different guy each month as a sophomore, but some of the other girls had been around more than she had, and a couple had had their own abortions. Maybe they disliked her because they thought she was below even them: not only was she supposed to be dropping out soon; people thought she might have something. It was more likely, though, that they resented her because she was a slut who still looked good. Her skin was pale and clear, her eyes were large and inky, her lips were pouty and crimson, and her black top was short enough to reveal the cut of her hipbones.

When Mason was going down the stairs half an hour later, having just gone to the bathroom, she was starting to come up. The top halves of her breasts shone in the poorly lit stairwell, and he imagined biting her tits. He stepped in front of her so she'd have to look up, and she did, just as he was about to bump into her. Their eyes met and hers didn't blink. He said, "Sorry," turning sideways and brushing by her as he took a step down, and looking back up, he smiled and said, "I'm drunk," then continued down while she was still looking at him. He wasn't drunk—he was just loose—but it might work.

Sometime later, while he was pretending to watch darts in the dining room, he let his eyes wander to the living room, where he sensed she was sitting, and found her alone, staring at him. He popped his eyebrows up and down a couple times, thinking he should appear playful, even careless. She kept looking at him, but she stayed expressionless, and she did so for so long that it was hard to tell if she was really looking at him, or just zoned out again. He looked away, and when he looked back a few minutes later, Jack had an arm across her shoulders. Even though Christina wasn't paying attention to him, Mason still wanted him to leave, so he could get to her before someone else did.

Jack got bored quickly when Christina showed him no reaction, and when he left, Mason walked over and stood in front of her. When she looked up at him, he smirked and nodded in the direction of the stairs. "I'll be up there if you want to join," he said. "No pressure." In case she was going to reject him, he turned away.

Upstairs, the bathroom was locked. Down the right side of the hall, several of his teammates were having a pillow fight in one room, and someone was crying in the

dark in the other. He quickly shut the door, then went down the hall to the other end, where the school mascot, Mr. Blue Devil, was lying on the ground in front of the door, looking like a large blue ant. Mason rolled him back with the heel of his shoe, and stepped over him and into the room, which was empty. Then, with no better idea what to do, he flopped back-down onto the comforter, put his hands behind his head, and watched the ceiling fan spin.

A few minutes later, he saw her come in out of the corner of his eye, and heard the door click shut. He scooted over on the bed and looked away when she lay next to him. When he peeked at her feet, he saw that her red nail polish was chipped. He imagined her skin having smudges all over it, and her pussy being untamed. But it wouldn't matter once he was in, and it didn't matter if anyone found out. There was no one to save his reputation for.

Closing his eyes, he rolled over on top of her and knocked his forehead against something—her nose—but it helped him find her mouth. He pursed his lips over her top one, and her bottom one lifted against the skin under his bottom one. He got his tongue into her mouth, but her mouth was smaller than his, so he started pursing his lips over hers in different ways and biting them, then he began grinding on her. She had her hands on his face and moved with him, but not in rhythm. He ground against her until the skin of his dick was getting caught on his belt. He got up and straddled her with his knees. He pulled her blouse up until it got caught under her elbows. He tugged it up with both hands but couldn't get it off. "Take off your bra, too," he said, undoing his pants and pushing them down past his butt.

When he went back down to her, he bit one of her tits and she winced, then he took her by the waist. He grabbed her jeans by the waistline in the back, and pulled them down, and she reached up and tugged at the bottoms. When they were off, he pinned her down by the stomach. “Just a second,” he said. His hands shook as he opened the condom. Once it was on he went back down and kissed her. With his eyes closed he felt for her. She was smooth and slippery. “Help me,” he said. She grabbed his wrist and directed his hand. He grabbed his dick and put it in. It stopped halfway—he had the wrong angle—and she winced, but he still moaned and fell onto her. He grabbed her by the waist and lifted her butt off the couch. When he slowly thrust she cried out.

He came within a couple minutes, then put a second condom on. When he was finished, his face buried in the pillow, he held onto her, thinking it was nice to have a body against his. He was sweaty when he got up to put his clothes on, but he still felt clear and fresh.

The next afternoon, when she came down the steps of her tenement, he didn’t feel compelled to say hi or smile. He wasn’t necessarily happy to see her, and it wasn’t like they were going on an actual date. She seemed to know this too, looking at him evenly, and he was grateful she understood. When he nodded, she ducked her head and walked past him, to his car.

At the bird sanctuary, he took her on a lap of the base of the hill. She stared off into the woods or kept her head down, and he looked straight ahead or at her

body, but not at her toes. He could have forgotten she was a slut if her nail polish was in better shape: her tiny jean shorts were frayed at the bottom, but her leather sandals and white tank top looked new, and there was a nice sheen to her hair.

When they came back to where they'd started, he led her down a second trail, then down a path that was barely visible, to a stone bench about fifty yards off. After he took a towel out of his backpack and spread it out on the bench, he drew her towards him and pulled her onto his lap. He made sure to kiss her.

Over the next week, he picked her up after football practice each night, and took her to places like the lot behind the water treatment facility, or the dugouts of ballparks. He did all the stuff Jack had told him about: he did her doggy-style and put her legs back as far as they'd go, and fucked her so her head hit whatever was behind it. He was delighted when he tapped her on the side and she rolled over, or when he had her by the ankles and her whole body was folded under him. Each time they were finished, he held onto her less.

At the park that weekend, when he went to take off her pants, she said, "I can't."

"Why not?" he said.

"My period started today."

"We can do *something*, can't we?" Why hadn't she told him this when he picked her up?

She nodded and kissed him again, and he put up with it, then moved her hand to his pants. She bobbed unevenly, and he had to take her by the cheeks and guide her. When he came, it felt like nothing had gotten out.

As they got into the car, she said, “My mom doesn’t get home till one tonight, and she has work at six.”

“Yeah?” He started the car without looking at her.

“You could stay the night,” she said. “We could get a movie.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I got work in the morning.”

“Maybe some other time?”

“Yeah, sure thing.”

When he finally fucked her again, two days later, her body was clammy and she had no rhythm. He told her not to move and he pinned her down, closed his eyes, and focused on the sensation. He got off, but he didn’t like how he’d basically used her to masturbate.

The next day, he told her to get on top. Given that he wasn’t moving, she was moaning too much and moving too slowly, so he put her on her back. She was a stupid slut. She was dirty. She was stupid. This was the last time.

He came weakly, then he couldn’t remember this much trash being in the dugout. He was cold and clammy. He got up and started throwing clothes on. “That was awful.”

“I’m sorry.”

When he was dressed, he said he'd see her tomorrow, and when he bent down to peck her, he averted his eyes.

After football practice the next day, he drove out of town and tried not to think about her. He was stupid. He should have called it off earlier.

Later that week, he kept his eyes on the floor when he sensed her coming towards him in the halls, and a month after that, she dropped out. The rest of the year, he spent most weekend nights reading at Denny's, and the others going to parties, and kept everything with girls to one or two days.

PART TWO

1

The first day of lit junior year, a girl Mason hadn't seen before walked into class and stopped a step beyond the door, then surveyed the room without moving her head. She wore baggy jeans, a hooded gray sweatshirt, and reddish-brown, unlaced work boots, and she had green eyes, fair skin, and hair almost as short as a guy's. She was beautiful.

Everyone had taken their seats, and the teacher, Mr. Boucher, was shuffling papers behind his lectern, getting ready to start. The desk in front of her was open, but she started making her way, with her hands in the pouch of her sweatshirt, and with her shoulders sagging, up the aisle closest to the door, towards Mason, who was sitting at the back, pretending to read his planner as he listened to the heels of her boots scuff the linoleum. She passed by the empty desk in front of him, walked behind him, and didn't stop at the seat on his right, which was also free.

As she made her way along the back row, which was empty besides Mason, Mr. Boucher looked up at her, then went back to shuffling his papers. She let her bag,

which was slung over one shoulder, drop onto the far right desk, then she rolled up her Walkman and put that on top of the bag. After lowering herself into her seat, she scooted her butt forward, and with her legs spread like a guy's, her neck resting on the top of the chair, her hands in her sweatshirt, and her eyes half-closed, she settled.

By this point, Mr. Boucher was facing her directly. His elbows were propped on the lectern, and his lips were pressed against his interlocked hands. Mason thought he might say something like *Thanks for taking your time*, but he only gave her a curt nod, and then straightened up and began taking roll. When he called out her name, Julia Giroux, she let her head fall backwards. When he called it out again, she said, "Here." The rest of the period, while the class discussed a poem, she stayed comatose, and Mason wondered where she'd come from, and if she'd been expelled from another school.

After the final bell that day, he asked one of the girls in his history class, whose mom was the receptionist at the high school, who Julia was. The girl said she knew her parents ran Labadie's, and he worried, but only a little. If they owned a bakery, Julia's family might have money, at least by Lewiston standards, but he had his oxfords, his shirts, and the Saab. He asked the girl what else she knew. She said she thought Julia had transferred from St. Dom's, and Mason laughed, thinking of Julia in a private school uniform. "Did she get kicked out?"

"I don't think so," the girl said. "She seems like a pretty good student."

"What do you mean?"

“My mom says she’s only taking a few classes here. She’s getting credit from Bates.”

“The *college*?” Mason said. This was the first time he’d heard of a high school student taking classes there. He said thanks, then turned around and walked through the halls looking for Julia. What he’d do if he found her, he didn’t know, but he at least wanted to get a glimpse of her. He told himself not to get his hopes up. He’d built up people before, and they hadn’t turned out to be what he’d thought they would. But she had to be it. She was already taking classes at Bates, and look at the way she dressed: she thought the way other girls did was stupid, the way he did guys. Of course she was like him.

He didn’t see her, though, and he didn’t either when he got to school early the next morning, and not in the afternoon. The next time he saw her was the day after that, their second class of lit. While everyone else talked about the beginning of *Jane Eyre*, she kept her hands in her sweatshirt and didn’t speak, just like before. She even yawned a couple times, and he thought the class must be kid-stuff for her. After the bell, he waited near the door, hoping she would walk out with him, but she had her headphones on before she got to him, and even though he avoided her eyes, he could tell she looked right past him.

Thursday he took long detours to each class, hoping to run into her, but again he had no luck. This meant he would probably have to wait until Tuesday, their first day of lit next week; they probably wouldn’t cross paths on Monday, and though he’d see her on Friday in class, there was no way he was going up to her then; on game-

days, he had to wear his football jersey to school, which wouldn't impress someone like her.

Friday night, he fumbled in the red zone at the end of the first possession, and during the second quarter, he missed a couple easy blocking assignments, leading to sacks. He was thinking of her at the Bates coffee shop, the Den, with a few of her classmates. One of the girls would be putting down her book and mentioning another one it reminded her of, then the group would discuss it, and somehow a piece of art would come up, and this would lead to a current event, which would take them back to the book.

In the locker room, before he stepped onto the field for the second half, his coach took him aside and slapped him upside the head. "Where the hell have you been this week? You want to sit?" Mason said he wanted to play, but knew he'd continue to think of Julia, and that, though he'd do a better job covering up, he wouldn't try to stop it.

He ended up doing fine, and at Denny's afterwards, he pictured Julia at a gathering over at Bates. She and her classmates were probably having the same discussions they'd had at the Den, except they were now standing in the living room, or the parlor, of one of the Federal-style houses near the campus. It would be crowded, and everyone would be holding fancy drinks he didn't know the names of.

Though he knew it was pointless, he left Denny's at one o'clock and drove to Bates, hoping she'd be walking back from the party. He took a couple laps around the campus, then circled the neighborhood on the north side, thinking the Giroux might live there, in one of Lewiston's nicer neighborhoods. But he didn't find her, and took the long route home.

Near the end of lunch Monday, she walked into the cafeteria and sat down facing a wall at an empty table in the corner. On the other side of the room, he was double-checking his Calc homework, due next period. He ducked under the table like he was looking for something, and gave himself a couple sprays of deodorant, then stood up, packed his bag, and started towards her.

When he stopped a couple feet away from her, she didn't look up. Nodding to her Walkman, she was sitting with her legs crossed like a guy, and was looking at her tuna sandwich, which she'd just taken a bite of and was holding in her hands. Of course, she wasn't *really* looking at the sandwich; she was thinking of higher things—probably *Jane Eyre*. Still, in case she did notice him, he had to do something quickly; he didn't want her to catch him looming. But he didn't know what to do. He couldn't just say hi. It had to be something unconventional. He flicked his middle finger on the headphone closest to him, then realized what he'd done.

"Ah!" She winced and hunched over, uncrossing her legs, then covered her ear and glared at him. "What the fuck?"

“I’m sorry!” he said. He put his hands up like he was innocent. “I called your name but you had your headphones on.” He knew this was a lie, but it didn’t matter; he just wanted to fix things.

She pulled her headphones down around her neck. “*What?*”

“I said I called your name but you had your headphones on.”

“Oh.” She appeared to understand. Crossing her legs again, she looked at the wall. “Well, poke me next time or something, man.”

“Yeah, I will. Sorry about that.”

She nodded as if to conclude things, then picked up her sandwich. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye.

“Can I sit down?” he said.

Her eyebrows bent, and she pulled up a sleeve of her sweatshirt and checked her watch. “There’s only a few minutes left,” she said, speaking to the wall.

It would be better to act like he didn’t know this. “Oh. Really?”

“Yeah” she said, still not making eye-contact. He thought about telling her it was fine, that he’d sit down anyway, but he decided against this; it might seem needy, and she might think he was imposing himself more than he already had. He also thought about introducing himself—if she’d recognized him, she hadn’t shown it—but he could see her just nodding again, and he wouldn’t know what to do from there. “Well,” he said. “I guess I’ll see you later, then.”

“Yup.”

He waited for her to say he could still sit down—to do something. When she didn’t, he walked out of the cafeteria thinking she was a bitch, and that she could sit

by herself if she wanted to. He jabbed one of the lockers, then looked down and saw that his knuckle was bleeding. It was more embarrassing that no one was around. He sucked on the blood. Of course she hadn't asked him to sit down. What would he have done in that situation?

In the following day, he tried to catch her eye, but she stayed comatose. After class, he caught up to her in the hall, and this time he tapped her on the shoulder. She continued walking, but flicked her chin up at him in acknowledgment, pulling her headphones down.

"Hey," he said, "sorry again about yesterday."

She faced forward. "Don't worry about it." She pushed through a set of double-doors, and he followed her down the main stairwell. He cleared people out of the way with his forearm, staying on her left shoulder.

"I'm Mason, by the way." He offered his hand, even though they were still moving. She looked at him and hesitated, but shook his hand, pulling her own out of her sweatshirt and reaching across her body.

"You're Julia," he said.

"I am." She faced forward again. She pushed through another set of doors, and they came out into a hall on the first level.

"How're you liking it here so far?" he said. "You're new, right?"

She shrugged. "It's school."

He should keep her talking. "You like that book we're reading?"

“What book?” she said.

“The Bronte one.”

“It’s alright.”

“Yeah, it’s kind of a slog.” He remembered spending all weekend at the library finishing it, even though they were supposed to have read only the first part by today. He’d also picked up another book by Bronte, *Shirley*.

When they came out into the lobby, he followed her to the entrance, where she stopped and finally faced him. “I have to go class,” she said.

“Class? Where?”

“Bates.”

“Oh,” he said. “What do you take there?”

She shrugged and looked away. “Stuff.”

He nodded, not wanting to appear invasive, and said okay, then they looked at each other for a moment.

“Nice to meet you,” she said. She was stone-faced and her voice was flat. He wondered if she was being perfunctory, ironic, or genuine. She was looking at him directly, and he wanted to believe she was being honest, so he did. “Yeah, you too.”

She nodded, then turned and walked outside. He waited for her to look back. She didn’t, and after a few seconds, he found himself smirking.

A couple days later, as Mr. Boucher was lecturing, he heard her cough. She was looking at him. She flicked her head up in Mr. Boucher’s direction and rolled her

eyes. He did the same, then faced forward again, so it didn't look like he was expecting anything more.

About a minute later, she coughed a second time, and when he looked over he laughed once. Smirking and facing Mr. Boucher, she was holding open her copy of *Jane Eyre* under her desk, for only Mason to see. Drawn in blue ink, about the size of softballs, were two cartoon breasts taking up the entire inside of the front cover.

Was that you? he mouthed. She shook her head, and still facing Mr. Boucher, showed him the inside of the other cover, which had a dick. He laughed again, and this time a couple people looked back. When they turned around, he wrote on his notebook, with permanent marker and in block letters, "TOO BIG FOR MR. ROCHESTER". He showed it to her and she laughed, then she sat up and pulled out her own notebook, and she scrawled with her head a few inches from the page.

"JANE, TOO. SHE'S FLAT. ALL NIPPLE."

She had a point, but he wanted to show he could think for himself, and that he wouldn't give in easy. "DISAGREE. SHE'S BUSTY."

"NO. THAT'S BERTHA."

He didn't think about whether she was right; either way, he was going to let her have it, because he wanted it to end quickly. This would prove he had reserve. Plus, he didn't know if he could keep it up. If it went another direction (maybe back to the dick, to Saint John) he might make a mistake.

"OKAY. YOU WIN."

She laughed again, and they both turned back to Mr. Boucher.

After class he waited near the door, and she came up with her headphones around her neck, her mouth half open and smirking. They walked downstairs together, both of them silent and looking at their feet, then came to a stop in the lobby and faced each other. When he asked what she was up to that weekend, she shrugged. "I dunno." He asked if she wanted to get together.

"For what?" she said.

"We'll figure something out."

"I might have things to do."

"Like?"

"I dunno," she said. "Family stuff."

"You want to give me your number, then? I could give you a call and we could work it out."

"Sure."

She gave him the number, which he wrote on the palm of his hand. "All right," he said. "Maybe I'll see you."

"Yeah, maybe."

He nodded, as though to make it official, and walked off immediately, to show it wasn't a big deal.

When he called her on Saturday her mom picked up, and when he asked if he could speak to Julia, the woman said, "*Julia?*"

"Yes, Julia, please."

“Really? May I ask who’s calling?”

He told her his name, and she said to wait a minute. After they said hello, he asked Julia if she wanted to go for a walk. He thought this would be a nice first date: lots of face time, and if it had to be, it could be short.

“Uh,” she said. “Not really.”

“I know some cool places,” he said. “This wouldn’t be your average stroll around the block. You’d forget you’re in Lewiston—in Maine.”

“Walking’s not really my thing,” she said. “Sorry.”

“That’s fine,” he said. “You got any ideas? I got the whole afternoon free.”

“I’m thinking of taking a nap, actually.”

“A *nap*?”

“Yes. Do you have a problem with that?”

“No.” This came out more bluntly than he’d meant it to. “What about tonight? We could get some ice cream or something.”

“I have stuff going on.”

“Like what?” he said.

“Stuff.”

“Come on,” he said. “You’re like me. You don’t have any friends.”

On her end of the line, there was a longer pause than usual. “Thanks, man.”

“I was just joking.”

“I know. Me too.”

There was another pause. He’d started saying *Um* when she said, “Maybe we can hang out next week.”

“Okay,” he said.

“See you in class.”

He searched for a way to keep the conversation going, but could only hear himself thinking, stupidly, *Come on, come on*, and came up with nothing, and she hung up.

When he went to a party that night with Jack, he couldn’t stomach the stupidity of his teammates’ jokes, the boom box’s tinny music, or the girls, so he lost quickly at poker, stood up, and said, “I gotta go.”

Jack looked up from his cards. “What? That was just the first game.”

“I gotta go.”

“Why?”

“I’m tired.”

Jack leaned back. “You’re not going M.I.A. on me again, are you?”

“No.” Mason chuckled him on the shoulder and walked out, then drove to Denny’s and opened *Shirley*.

Half an hour later, Julia came in with five other people, who, judging by a couple of their sweatshirts, were from Bates. This came as no surprise: Batesies dropped in once in a while, because Denny’s was the only place open past twelve.

Julia squeezed in between a girl and a guy at a booth near the door, where he had a clear view of her. He turned so he wasn't facing her openly, then, bent over his book, watched her reflection in the glass. Sitting up straight, with her head moving from one person to the next, she gesticulated, and though he couldn't hear her, because they were all talking, he could see her laugh. The waiter came and took their orders, blocking his view, and when he walked away, she was sitting turned to the guy on her left, next to the window. The guy had messy bangs and a thin patchy beard, and looked a buck-fifty at best. Mason watched them for a few minutes, then had to go back to his book to distract himself.

He looked up every page or so, and each time he was more convinced she and the guy were together. They never touched each other, but he was the only one she talked to privately, and she did it often. Mason told himself she'd been just as engaged, just as lively, when she made fun of Bronte with him, and he remembered her jumping to write the first note, but he didn't believe what he told himself.

The person she was with had been the nice, older guy, he thought, who saw her lost before their first class, and told her to follow him. He'd introduced himself and they sat next to each other. She thought he was cute, and when she saw him at the library the next day, she took the seat across from him. She asked him a question and they got to talking. She didn't show it but she was fascinated: he'd read so many things, been so many places. He was from New York; his family summered in Maine, up in Bar Harbor (this was how he heard of the school); each fall, his parents dropped him off and left him with the Audi, then flew back down to Manhattan. They had an apartment on the Upper East Side, Tenth Floor.

When the Bates kids had been there half an hour, the girl next to Julia got up and she got out of the booth, and walking upright, went to the bathroom. Mason made sure the Bates kids weren't looking, then brought his milkshake and book to that side of the restaurant. He slid into a booth four away from the bathroom and faced the bathroom. She would definitely see him coming back, and she would think she'd missed him on her way there. He was worried she'd noticed him before going to the bathroom, but he was willing to risk it. He'd invent some excuse if he had to.

While he waited, he set up so that he looked as natural as possible: sipping his shake in his left hand, holding down his book with his right. He remained in that pose for a few seconds, then he pulled off his collared shirt, balled it up, and dropped it under the table, and flipped up a sleeve of his undershirt and resumed his pose. He wasn't quite sure what he wanted or expected, besides that he had to be noticed. If she stopped and talked to him, he might be reassured somehow that she was still interested in him, or at least that she wasn't with that guy. And if she was with that guy, at least that she could be interested someday.

A moment later, her boots came out of the bathroom, and when they were almost even with him, he looked up. She glanced down and made eye-contact, then looked straight ahead and kept walking. She'd ignored him. She didn't want to be seen with him. He waited fifteen minutes, then picked up his shirt and left.

In bed, he kept picturing her going down on the Bates guy. She would stretch him out and tell him to relax. She would run the heels of her palms up his torso, back and forth.

He couldn't beat him. He didn't have to do anything. Why did he even try?

Before class Monday, she was standing outside the room with her headphones down around her neck, and when he approached she stepped up and said hey. He wondered if she wanted to apologize—she looked earnest—and said yo and walked past her into the room. The rest of the week, he only nodded when he saw her.

At a party that Friday, he tried to leave after ten minutes. He was at the door when Jack said, “Where you going?”

He turned around. “To take a piss.”

“Already?”

“Yeah.”

“No, you aren’t. You’re leaving again.”

It was pointless to keep lying. “Listen, I’m sorry, Jack. I just have to take a break from this stuff.”

Taking a pull of his forty, Jack looked at him with one eye. “You’re a flake.”

“Hey, I can’t help if I find this stuff boring.”

“Whatever, man. If you’re too good for this, don’t come back.” He turned and walked towards the crowd in the living room. Mason called his name, but he only rolled his shoulders and slid in between the people.

Mason was reading at Denny’s half an hour later when Julia walked in, came directly towards him, and sat down. “I thought you might be here,” she said. He put a finger up and pretended to finish a page, then closed the book softly, hoping to appear pensive. As he looked at her he said, “What’s up?”

“About last week,” she said. “That was rude.”

It was nice to have her in his debt. If she ever shut him out, he could remind her of what she owed him, and she’d have to let him back in. “Don’t worry about it,” he said. “You were with your friends.” He wanted to come off as understanding, and, even though it was stupid to think it was possible, given that he’d blown her off last week, to show he hadn’t been miffed by her. But when she said *I still could have said hi, couldn’t I?*, it sounded genuine, so he meant it this time when he told her not to worry about it, and he thought he’d blown the whole thing out of proportion. But so had she, since she was here, which made her just as stupid, and which meant she was still interested; he could relax.

“Here,” he said, and slid his milkshake forward. She said thanks, and he pushed *Shirley* across the table. “I lied,” he said. “I can’t get enough of this stuff.”

She scoffed. “Apparently.” After looking at the back of the book, she made a sound of disgust and shot it back at him. He laughed. “What do *you* like to read, then?”

“I don’t,” she said. “I do physics.”

“*Physics?*”

“Yep. That’s what I do over at Bates.”

They had to be fundamentally different if she didn’t like to read. But maybe he was exaggerating, and maybe it didn’t matter that much to begin with: she was obviously smart.

“I’m gonna be famous someday,” she said, and smirked as she took a sip. He chuckled. “Why? Are you some kind of physics star?”

“No,” she said, “but I’m a girl. Most girls do stuff like study this.” She flicked her chin up at *Shirley*. “Pussy stuff.”

He laughed again. “What does that make me? If I want to study it? Extra-pussy?”

“No,” she said, “it makes you sensitive.” They laughed, and then she said, “Is that really what you want to do when you grow up, or were you just kidding?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I mean, I see all these Bates professors walking around—” She asked him when he went to Bates, and he said he sometimes went to the library or the Den, and she nodded several times, apparently thinking. “Anyway,” he said. “I go over there, and I see all these professors walking around, and they all seem so happy. They have their jackets and their mugs, and the campus is so nice, the

leaves and everything. And if it's not nice, they spend all day inside reading, or go to some conference in San Francisco. Sounds like the life to me."

"I get what you mean," she said. "It's like they never have to be somewhere they don't want to."

"*Exactly!*" He leaned forward. "I mean, compare that to what your parents do—"

"What do my parents do?"

He'd gone too far. He'd seen an opening to point out something they had in common, and he'd taken it without thinking. "I don't," he said. "I mean, I was just assuming it was something shitty because you're from Lewiston—no offense." She looked amused, but he still thought he should recover. "My dad," he said, "he makes metal parts all day—he works at a factory—and that's all he does. And he has to be there, in the moment. Imagine what that's like. I load trucks in the morning, and the only way I get through it is by listening to books on tape—I go insane if I don't have my Walkman. I start talking to myself, or I have to treat it like I'm lifting—I do shrugs walking up the ramp. But my dad can't do that. He has to pay attention to the lathe, and the lathe is a lathe. And then he comes home and goes to bed, and that's it. And the thing is—" He stopped. He wanted to say more, but he was afraid he'd offend her like he had Claire, or that he'd come off like someone who talked too much, or that she'd think he was boring. "Never mind."

She looked at him for a moment, and he worried that she was judging him negatively, then she said, "My parents have been running a bakery their whole life. It doesn't sound as boring as what your dad does, but it can't be much better."

“Oh, yeah?” He hoped she’d keep going. He needed to keep her there.

“Yeah,” she said. “They used to have me work there and I hated it. It wasn’t the work itself; it was the people. The same people, *everyday*. Most of them were family—my Meme, my aunts—and they’d gossip for hours. I never got it. How many times can you talk about my uncle cheating on his wife, or about some fraud at the fire department? Who *wants* to talk about that?”

He nodded, and she looked out the window and said, “I used to think they all had the same model of Lewiston built in their heads. I thought the more time I spent with them, the more I’d be like them. That’s when I started checking out physics books from the library, or stealing them from Bates. I’d read them in the bathroom, and I’d try to hold a problem or a theory in my head while I worked. I’d be humming the whole time or saying nonsense like you.” She turned to him and laughed, then looked out the window again. “I still remember some of the words. They didn’t make sense, but they were noise. If they weren’t working, and I couldn’t focus on what I wanted to think about, I’d fuck something up so my mom would have to help me, and they’d stop talking.” He laughed and she said, “I used to resent her for getting involved in all the gossip. But now that I think about it, what else could she have done? It’s the same thing, I guess: you had to be there.” She looked back at him. “I guess you and I are looking for a little transcendence.”

He couldn’t fight off a small smile. It was like they had a secret in the face of all of Lewiston, which might have been why she was smiling now too, in the same way. She’d understand anything he said.

“I have to tell you about my dad,” he said.

“Okay.”

He straightened up. “Okay. So he has these steak dinners on the weekend, right, and they’re all he looks forward to.” She nodded. “He spends all afternoon making them, and half an hour setting up. First he puts his TV tray in front of his chair, then, instead of bringing it all out at once, he makes separate trips back and forth to the kitchen. He gets his plate, he gets his fork and knife, he gets his beer, he gets his Worcestershire sauce—and the little bowl he puts it in. Then he looks pleased with himself and brings the plate back to the kitchen, and carries the steak from the oven to the counter and blood drips on the floor. Then he lays the steak on the plate like a baby, and he presses it down with the side of his knife and lifts the fork out straight, instead of jerking it out like I do. Then he adds a scoop of mashed potatoes and green peas, even though he knows he’s coming back for more. Then he sits down.”

“Is that it?”

“No, I’m getting there. So normally he takes the first half of a game to eat—this is because he dips each bite in the Worcestershire. He stops eating the steak when he’s halfway done and polishes off the potatoes and peas. Then he gets a second serving of both of them, and polishes them off before he starts eating the steak again. He makes sure the steak’s always the last thing in his mouth—he finishes his beer before the steak. When he’s done, he leans back and watches the rest of the game. Then he gets up and does the dishes right away (normally he leaves them overnight) and he whistles and does everything deliberately. It makes him happy to do unnecessary things, to *execute* them. It’s like when you’re at the grocery store, and all

the baskets under the counter are messed up, but you straighten them out anyway and put yours on top. There's no reason for it—no one sees you, no one sees the baskets—but you do it anyway.” She nodded. “So that's how he wipes the water off the sink—it's a *sink!*—it's supposed to be wet!—and how he flicks it off his hands when he's done. You don't do this when you're about to use a towel, right? But he does, and you can tell he's actually paying attention to his hands, not zoning out like a normal person would. His eyes gleam, and he's so content, and I hate it. You can have moments when you do stupid things and they make you happy, right? But they should sneak up on you; they shouldn't be part of some routine. So none of this should make him happy, right? Most of the time people are happy when they discover something—a book or a theory, for you—but this is the same thing every weekend and he loves it.”

“You're bristling,” she said, smirking.

He looked at himself. His back was straight, and he was leaning forward so his chest was pressed against the edge of the table and his elbows were on its surface, and she was leaning back against the booth with her legs crossed like a guy. He laughed. “I guess I am.”

“Are you sure you don't have anything like that?” she said. “Anything that makes you automatically happy?”

“Books.”

“That's a lie.”

He didn't want to consider if she was right, and he needed this point.

“Driving.”

“Well, there you go.”

He had her. “But that’s not the same. Driving makes me happy because it’s novel; I can go anywhere anytime. With him, it’s the same thing every weekend.”

“I guess you’re right,” she said. “But don’t you think you might just think that because you’re younger?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “Point is, I don’t want to be someone who stupid things make happy. That’s what I wanted to say.”

She looked in his eyes, sizing him up without moving her own. “I see.” She leaned forward so her elbows were on the table and opened the book. “I *guess* this could make me happy.”

They laughed, and she flipped through the book, unaware of him—no, comfortable he was there without speaking to him—and he was no longer afraid she’d leave. He looked at her freckles, her mint green eyes, and the oily edge of one wing of her nose, and fought down the urge to kiss her.

She clapped the book shut and looked at him. “What’re you doing the rest of the night?” He said he was thinking of getting another shake, since she’d finished his. “Don’t,” she said. “I want to show you something.”

He followed her out to her truck, which was spray-painted so many colors it looked camouflage. But he liked that it was a truck. “Nice paint job,” he said, and she said it was better than the pie logo that had been there; it had been one of their catering trucks.

She started it and some kind of rock—something messy—blasted from the speakers. “NIRVANA?” she said. “THEY’RE NEW.”

“WHAT?”

She shook her head and turned it off. “Never mind.”

She drove to the east side of Downtown, where all the houses were boarded up and the names had faded off the brick stores, and at the edge of it they turned onto a road running along some woods, which he could see the river through every now and then. About five blocks later, she pulled up to a Federal-style house he never would’ve pictured more than a couple blocks from Bates, let alone in this part of town. “You don’t live here, do you?” he said. “No,” she said. “This is the historical society. And don’t worry—I don’t believe in ghosts.”

They got out of the car, and he struggled to keep up with her as she walked behind the house, down the boulevard of lawn created by the pines, and he saw that at the very back of the lawn, about a hundred yards off, were gravestones, and that far beyond them were the tops of trees which had to be on the Auburn side of the river. Was there a cliff on the other side of the gravesite? Why had she brought him here?

As they got closer to the edge of the lawn, the two banks opened before him like jaws, and he could see more of the river below, and at the edge of the lawn, he realized he wasn’t standing on a cliff, but at the top of a bank about fifty yards long and fifty yards wide, cut into four tiers with gravestones on each.

She dropped down onto the tier below them, and he sat on the edge of the lawn, scooted his butt forward, and landed on all fours anyway. As he followed her along the tier, she said, “No one knows about this place. It only has the Brits who settled Lewiston, and the Irish who started working in the mills around the Civil War. No Bonnereaus or Girioux here. That’s why the last date on any of these stones is

1910. Here, feel this.” She pointed at one of the stones that simply said *Father*, and as he felt one of its worn edges she covered his hand with hers, and then she grabbed it and tugged his arm, and at first he stumbled trying to keep up as she walked along the tier. “I found this place when I was in seventh grade,” she said. “I don’t know what I was doing—probably just dicking around Downtown. Sometimes I’d spend all day looking at the stones and making up characters for the families.”

He liked how she had somewhere like this—they had to have a lot in common. He couldn’t wait to bring her to the bird sanctuary. He’d tell her about how it had been a retreat for polio victims until World War II, and about how there was a huge stone fireplace no one knew about there. “That was when Lewiston had character,” he said.

“Exactly,” she said. “Before all the mills shut down and the shops closed. This place must have been awesome then.”

They dropped down a tier, and when they got to the end of the second-lowest one, he expected her to drop onto the bottom one, but she said *This is my favorite part* and let go of his hand, then hiked up the bank along the outside of the tiers, and ducked into the woods on the left at the top. A few yards in, she climbed a tree and dropped onto a ten-foot-high Mausoleum, and he followed her, hoping his oxfords were okay. They sat on the Mausoleum with their legs hanging off the edge of it, looking through a gap in the trees towards the handful of amber lights dotting the woods across the river.

“I used to come up here and imagine this was the Mississippi,” she said, “or that Auburn was some small English town. Here, give me a massage.” She scooted

next to him and he got behind her. Now that he was still, he shivered, but it gave him an excuse to lean forward and put his arms over her shoulders. They sat in silence, and at one point he kissed the back of her head without thinking, and she pulled his arms tighter, and turned around and kissed him a little while later. As he lay back, the leaves chattered underneath him, then the only sound was their kissing. When they stopped, she lay on top of him with her head over his shoulder. They didn't speak till an hour later, when she dropped him off at Denny's and told him to meet her there tomorrow.

On the way home, the stop lights vibrated like reflections on rippling water, and house lights ran past him like rain drops on the side windows, and he felt permeable and wanted everything to enter him.

The next night he showed up early, and they talked while doing homework. He asked how she'd started taking classes at Bates, and she said one of her uncles (who her dad refused to talk to) worked there. Then she talked about how she was going to do physics at someplace like Columbia or Chicago—she didn't care, as long it was a city—before getting a PhD, and when he asked if she had a good shot getting in, she said yes. He talked about how he wanted to study literature someday, and he said good schools might look at him if he played well that season, and he made sure to explain the deal with football.

When he said he wanted to take her somewhere, thinking he would bring her to the bird sanctuary, she said no, she had something planned, and though he was a

little miffed, he said okay. They drove to Riverside Cemetery again, and after parking she grabbed some blankets from the back of the truck. She smiled and said, “You were quite the gentleman last night.”

On top of the Mausoleum, her skin shone. He kissed her, and when she told him to go ahead, he kissed her more, until he couldn’t wait any longer, and when he was in her, he cradled her head off the ground and bowed his, so he was never above or past her.

That week, they showed each other notes in class and studied a couple times at Bates, and on Saturday she brought him to Portland. She introduced him to a couple people who worked at a music store, and afterwards he followed her down the cobblestone streets in the Old Port, and onto a ferry when the attendants weren’t looking. They stood on the side of the boat during the ten-minute ride, and the brine stung his nostrils like it never had in Camden. On the island, they got sandwich fixings at a market, then sat on the end of a pier as they ate silently. He liked how they didn’t have to speak all the time, and could just pipe up whenever they wanted to.

In the middle of his sandwich he said, “I like how you have all these things you do on your own. I like how you think for yourself.”

“Thanks,” she said. “You’re not too bad, either.”

When he was done eating, he said, “I have this weird vision I get sometimes. I’ve been having it since I was a kid.”

“Yeah?”

“It’s of me in a courtroom, with everyone I’ve ever known and a bunch of strangers. There’s an old man with a robe, even though everyone else is dressed normal, and he has a scroll in his hand that says everything I’ve done.”

“Like Santa Claus?”

“Kind of. He reads it out loud and the people I know testify about things. He never gets to the end, and I don’t know what would happen if he did. I don’t think it determines whether I go to heaven or hell—I’m not religious—but I’m scared of the verdict anyway. I think I’m just scared of the judgment itself. I don’t want the verdict to be that I’m stupid, and I always had the ridiculous notion that if I got into a good school or became a professor, this wouldn’t happen. But lately, since I’ve been hanging out with you, none of this has mattered.”

“Is that supposed to be flattering?”

“I don’t know. I guess.”

“It’s kind of weird,” she said, “but I like it,” and kissed him on the temple.

“You shouldn’t care so much about what people think. Forget ‘em: that’s what I say.”

Over the next few weeks, they met every couple days at Denny’s or Bates, had sex in one of their cars or at the gravesite; she took him to a rock show in Portland; and he brought her to Camden and the bird sanctuary. As they said goodbye a couple times, he thought of asking if they could meet up the next day instead of the one after that, but he didn’t, because she probably wanted space. Whenever she wasn’t around, he worried she’d just stop seeing him one day, and he wanted something official so this

wouldn't happen. But he decided not to ask if they were an item, because it seemed immature, and because she might have already assumed that was the case.

In the hall after lit one day, when they'd been dating for about a month, he asked if they were going to get together that night, and she said she had a group study session for physics, and when he asked about the next night, she said she had one then too.

"You know you can just call me, right?" he said. "Anytime works."

"I gotcha."

That night, he thought about going to see if she was really working, but decided it would be immature not to trust her. In bed he wondered if she was with the Bates kid, and the next night he went to the library and saw him studying next to her in a group of people. He turned and left, not wanting to see if they were more engaged in the work or each other.

A couple days later, they finally met up at the cemetery and walked around, and as she was getting into her truck, he asked if they could get together more often.

"You mean every day?" she said.

"No," he said. "Well, maybe. I guess I'd like to check in, yeah."

"That's not my style."

“I thought you’d say that,” he said. “I guess I’m just feeling a little uncertain about things. I mean, are we together?”

“Sure. If you want to think about it that way.”

Coming from her, this was good enough. “All right,” he said. “That’s nice to know.”

But the next time he saw her she didn’t mention getting together, so he called her afterwards to see if she wanted to do something that night.

“Uh,” she said. “Not tonight.”

“Why?” he said.

“I might see a movie.”

“With who?” he said.

“Myself.”

“Oh,” he said. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“You sure you don’t want me to come with you?”

“I am.”

“Fine. Call me when you’re not so busy.” He hung up.

He tried to do some practice SAT problems in his room, but he kept wondering if she was with the Bates guy, or if he himself had done something wrong, and half an hour later he went to the theater. Her truck wasn’t in the parking lot, and when he bought a ticket and went in, she wasn’t there. He looked up her address in a

telephone booth, then drove to her house in the nice neighborhood near Bates. A plump man with a moustache and a collared flannel shirt came to the door. “Yep?”

“Is Julia here?”

“Julia?”

“Yeah, I was wondering if I could talk to her.”

Her dad looked at him. “You’re the Bonnereau boy, aren’t you? The running back?”

Mason nodded.

“Nice game last week,” Julia’s dad said. “Just a sec. Let me get her.”

As she walked out, she slammed the door behind her, and he stepped down onto the walkway while she stayed on the doorstep. “Don’t ever come here again,” she said.

“Why?” he said.

“Just don’t.”

“Okay, I won’t.”

“What’s up?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why are you here?”

“I just wanted to see you.”

“For?”

“For? I just wanted to see if something was wrong. If I did something wrong.”

“You haven’t.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure. I’m always sure. Stop asking me that.”

“All right, all right. But why’d you go to a movie by yourself, then?”

“I wanted to. Why can’t you get that?”

“I don’t know—it just seems like a dumb thing to do. If there’s someone around, why wouldn’t you bring them?”

“Because I wanted to be by myself.”

“If you don’t want to spend time with me, just say it.”

“I *do* want to spend time with you. Just not as much as you want to spend with me.”

“Is there someone else you’d rather spend time with?”

“*What?* No. I mean, yes—yes, there is. But it’s no one in particular. It’s people in general. I want to get to know more people, see more people than you think.”

“Then what was the point of this? Did you plan this all along?”

“Plan *what?*”

“To lead me on like this, then go off with other guys?”

“No, I didn’t. I didn’t plan anything. I just thought you were an interesting person, not like all the deadbeats around here, who wanted to have some fun. I didn’t expect a commitment.”

“It’s not a commitment. It’s two days a week.”

“I don’t care. I’m in high school. I don’t have to have commitments. I don’t have to have a serious relationship. I thought you liked that I thought for myself, then you expect me to act like every other girl around here.”

“That’s not what I’m saying.”

“But it is.”

They stared at each other.

“I thought we could depend on each other,” he said. “I’m the only person in this place you like.”

“You’re right. But I guess I’m undependable, and that’s fine with me. It’s better than doing the same thing every day.”

“You don’t give an inch, do you?”

“I don’t.”

“See you around.”

“Yep.”

He turned and walked towards his car. He waited for her to say something, but heard the door close before he’d taken a few steps.

The rest of the fall, he studied at Dunkin’ Donuts instead of Denny’s or Bates, and he stared straight past her most of the time he walked by her, but sometimes straight at her to annoy her. On nights he was tired of reading, he drove by the cemetery half hoping to see her, and wondered if they could’ve gotten along if he hadn’t tried to force things. But it was probably better this way: they would have fought at some point. She was right: he did want to spend every day with her. And there wasn’t anything wrong with that. It wasn’t like other people; it was different. He didn’t know why, but it was.

PART THREE

SYNOPSIS: Parts Three through Five (the end)

(Very Subject to Change)

Part Three of the story begins at the start of Mason's senior year, when Julia finds him at Dunkin' Donuts and says her dad died a few days ago of a heart attack. While Mason consoles her, she tells him this event has cleared things up about her life. She says she's treated Mason poorly; that her idea that being in a relationship would make her conventional and therefore weak was stupid; that she's disrespected Lewiston and the people there; and that she no longer plans to go to college, but to stay in town after she graduates, to help her mom run the bakery. Mason forgives her, and they go for a couple walks that week, and though he's worried he's taking advantage of her, he goes along with it when she kisses him their third time together. They begin seeing each other again, and he has more affection for her than ever, wondering a couple times if he's in love. He's the happiest he's been.

Towards the end of fall, he suggests that maybe she wasn't thinking clearly when she decided not to go to college. She tells him that she's sure she doesn't want to leave Lewiston, or to deal with academic, theoretical problems, now that she has a real one (whether she and her mom can keep the bakery running) on her hands. She also tells him that his ambitions are stupid, and that he should "screw" books. After the conversation, he sees the state university, Orono, as appealing for the first time (he'd be able to visit her from there), and he even considers staying in Lewiston to work his way up the ladder at Blais'.

But around winter the Stanford coach (who he'd sent tapes to last spring) calls, saying he's interested in having him play there; Mason is elated. Stanford flies him out for an overnight visit, and he becomes infatuated with the campus and the area, and before he leaves, the coach says he's willing to give him a partial scholarship, and that, if he does well enough, he could earn a full one in a couple years. On the plane home Mason calculates that, with the partial scholarship, his savings, and loans, he could go to Stanford for a year and a half, and that, if he locked up a full scholarship by the end of that time, he could go for all four years. When he gets home he calls the coach and says he's coming, and the coach says he can expect an acceptance letter soon.

When Mason tells Julia the news, she doesn't congratulate him like he's hoped. She says he's caught up in a myth about schools like Stanford—he could get the same education at Orono, or not go at all—and that, unlike he—and she—have thought in the past, there are real people in Lewiston, some of whom are happy. Mason considers what she says, but is still uncertain about what to do next year. When he asks if she'd marry him if he stayed in Lewiston, she says she can't promise that, but that she could see it happening. He tells her he needs a decision, and she says, “Yes—probably—yes,” and he says, “All right, I'm staying here.” When she says he could still go to school part-time, he says no, he's not half-assing it. He tells the Stanford coach he's not coming, then he talks to his boss at Blais', and they decide he can start as an assistant supervisor after graduation, and work his way up from there. Mason feels at peace, that he has a real, legitimate life ahead of him.

Part Four begins at the end of Mason's senior year, when Jack is paralyzed in a car crash after he's been drinking. At the hospital, while Jack is unconscious, Mason hears Jack's relatives talk about how this happens all the time in Lewiston; Mason sees himself unhappy a few years down the road, and getting into a similar situation. The next day he begs the Stanford coach to re-offer the scholarship; he does.

Mason tries twice to tell Julia his new plans, but she's too excited about living with him next year (they've decided to live with each other for a while before they make any big decisions). Only after they've graduated, the day they're supposed to sign an apartment lease together, does he tell her, and she blows up on him, calling him a coward and stupid, and telling him to never speak to her again. His apologies then, and at several times during the rest of the summer, do nothing, and he leaves for Stanford planning to never come back.

In California he struggles with his classes, and he comes to resent what people who excel in them stand for: worldliness and wealth. During the football season he gets no playing time, convincing him that he doesn't have a shot at ever earning a full ride, and he begins wondering whether he'll return for a second semester. The first weekend after the season, he goes on a ski trip with a few acquaintances, and the conversation at the cabin—about all the places people have been—and the excess—the expensive alcohol, the uneaten food—finally revolt him. He decides to withdraw at the end of the semester and return to Lewiston, convinced that his life there will be more substantial. He'll be doing something useful at Blais'—getting people their mail, connecting them—whereas he'd be doing something vague and

theoretical if he finished at Stanford. He plans to get back in Julia's good graces and eventually ask her to marry him.

Part Five begins with him visiting the bakery his first day back, when Julia throws something across the counter at him and tells him to get out. When he knocks on her door the next day, her mom tells him that Julia never wants him to talk to him again, and that it would be best for him to stay away. Mason begins to wait in his car outside the bakery, and tries to catch Julia on her way home. About a week into this, having had no success, he tails her as she leaves the bakery, passes her once she's on her street, and blocks her with his car. He apologizes for how he's treated her, and he begs her to hear him out, but she hits him and threatens to call the cops if he comes near her again, and he lets her go into her house. Over the next month he sends her a few letters, apologizing profusely, but never receives anything in return. Meanwhile, his work at Blais' is dull, and living alone bores him. He starts going to one of the town bars, where he patches things up with Jack, and a year later, he hears Julia has left Lewiston for school in Boston. He sends a few letters to Harvard, and when she's supposed to be on break, he visits the grocery store and drives around town more frequently, but the four years she's supposed to be in school, he never makes contact with her.

The next year, he meets a girl at the bar and marries her within a few months. He feels content with her, and with his now-upper-level job at Blais', but he sometimes looks back on Stanford and sees his reasons for leaving there as false, and wonders what his life would've been like if he'd stuck it out. More often, whenever

he drives by the cemetery or Denny's, he wonders where Julia is, and if he could have had something greater and more mysterious with her than what he has now.