# Brother Grasshopper

# John Updike

Fred Emmet—swarthy and thick-set, with humorless straight eyebrows almost meeting above his nose—had been an only child. If he ever fantasized a sibling for himself, it was a sister, not a brother. His father had had a brother, an older brother, who, he let it be known, had dominated him cruelly. Yet into even his more resentful reminiscences crept a warmth that Fred envied, as he tried to imagine the games of catch, decades ago, on the vacant lots of a city that no longer had vacant lots, and the shared paper route in snow that was deeper and more dramatic than any snow today is, with a different scent—the scent of wet leather and of damp wool knickers. Though his father’s brother had deliberately thrown the ball too hard, and finished delivering papers to his side of the street first and never came back to help but instead waited inside the warm candy store, a brother was something his father had *had*, augmenting his existence, giving it an additional dimension available to him all his life. “My brother down in Deerfield Beach,” he would drop into a conversation, or “If you were to express that view to my brother, he’d tell you flat out you’re crazy.” And, though the brothers lived over a thousand miles apart, one in Florida and the other in New Jersey, and saw each other less than once a year, they died within a few months of each other, Fred’s father following his older brother as if into one more vacant lot, to shag flies for him.

But this was years later, when Fred’s own children were grown, or nearly. He had married early, right after Harvard, supplying himself with another roommate, as it were, rather than launching into life alone. He envied siblings their imagined power of consultation, of conspiring against parents who otherwise would be too powerful. Not the least of the charms his future wife held for him was her sister—a younger sister also at Radcliffe, with her own circle of friends. Germaine was more animated, more gregarious, and more obviously pretty than Fred’s sensible Betsy. Among her numerous suitors the most conspicuous was Carlyle Saughterfield, a tall bony New Englander with a careless, potent manner.

Fred had been sickly and much-protected as a child, and even his late growth spurt had left him well under six feet tall. He found Carlyle, who was two years older than he and a student at the Business School across the river, exotic and intimidating—a grown man with his own car, a green Studebaker convertible, and confident access to the skills and equipment of expensive sports like sailing, skiing, climbing, and hunting. Carlyle and his B-School friends would load up his snappy green convertible with skis and boots and beer and sleeping bags and head north into snow country with the top down. Details of their mountain adventures made Fred shudder—sheer ice, blinding fog, tainted venison that left them all vomiting, ski trails bearing terrible names like Devil’s Head and Suicide Ravine. Climbing in the White Mountains one summer, Carlyle had seen a friend fall, turning in the air a few feet away as Carlyle pressed into the cliff and gripped the pitons.

“What was the expression on his face?” Fred asked.

Carlyle’s somewhat protuberant eyes appeared to moisten, as he visualized the fatal moment. “Impassive,” he said.

His voice, husky and hard to hear, as if strained through something like baleen, was the one weak thing about him; but even this impressed Fred. Back in New Jersey, the big men, gangsters and police chiefs and Knights of Columbus, spoke softly, forcing others to listen.

As their courtship of the Terwilliger sisters proceeded in parallel, Fred and Carlyle spent an accumulating number of hours together. In the spring, waiting for the girls to come out of their dorms, they played catch in the Quad with a squash ball; Carlyle’s throws made Fred’s hands sting and revived his childhood fear of being hit in the face and having an eye or a tooth knocked out. The strength stored in the other man’s long arms and wide, sloping shoulders was amazing—a whippy, excessive strength almost burdensome, Fred imagined, to carry. Carlyle had been a jock at prep school, but in college had disdained organized sports; a tendency to veer away from the expected was perhaps another weakness of his. Behind the Business School, across from Harvard Stadium, a soccer field existed where the future financiers played touch football. Carlyle passed for immense distances, sometimes into Fred’s eagerly reaching hands, and protectively saw to it that his timorous and undersized brother in courtship usually played on his team.

In March of the year that Fred and Betsy graduated, the two couples went skiing, and Carlyle was as patient as a professional instructor, teaching Fred the snowplow and stem christie and carefully bringing him down, at the end of the day, through the shadows of the intermediate slope. All these upper-class skills involved danger, Fred noticed. That summer, after he and Betsy had married, Carlyle took them and Germaine sailing on Buzzards Bay and, while the two sisters stretched out in their underwear for sunbaths on the bow, commanded in his reedy voice that Fred take the tiller and hold the mainsheet—take all this responsibility into his hands!

“Take it. Push it left to make the prow move to the right. The prow’s the thing in front.”

“I’d just as soon rather not. I’m happy being a passenger.”

“Take it, Freddy.”

The huge boat leaned terrifyingly under gusts of invisible pressure, the monstrous sail rippling and the mast impaling the sun and the keel slapping blindly through the treacherous water, nothing firm under them, even the horizon and its islands skidding and shifty. Nevertheless, the boat did not capsize. Fred gradually got a slight feel for it—for the sun and salt air and rocking horizon. Germaine’s breasts in their bra were bigger than Betsy’s, her pubic bush made a shadowy cushion under her underpants as the sisters lazily, trustfully chattered. Carlyle’s face, uplifted to the sun with bulging closed eyelids, had a betranced look; his colorless fair hair, already thinning, and longer than a businessman’s should be, streamed behind him in the wind. *This bastard*, Fred thought, as the boat sickeningly heeled, *is trying to make a man of me*.

When, the following summer, Germaine graduated and married Carlyle, the groom chose Fred over all his old skiing and hunting buddies to be his best man, perhaps in courteous symmetry with Betsy, the matron-of-honor. He bought Fred a beige suit to match his own; the coat hung loose on Fred’s narrow shoulders, and the sleeves were too long, but he felt flattered nonetheless. Betsy was five months pregnant, so her ceremonial dress, of royal-blue silk, was too tight. Between them, they joked, it came out even. So young, they were already launched on creating another generation.

A strange incident clouded this wedding, foreshadowing trouble to come. Carlyle and Germaine were married in New Hampshire, at a summer lodge beyond Franconia belonging to Carlyle’s family, and with sentimental associations for him. The Terwilliger parents were getting a divorce at the time and were too unorganized to insist on having the event on their territory, in northwestern Connecticut. With the noon hour set for the service drawing closer, Carlyle disappeared, and it was reported that he was taking a bath down at the dam—an icy little pond in the woods, created every summer by damming a mountain trickle. Mrs. Terwilliger, rendered distraught by this apparent additional defection—her own husband was not present, having been forbidden to come if he brought his youthful mistress—appealed to Fred to go down and fetch the groom. Fred supposed that in his role of best man he could not shy from this awkward duty. In his black shoes and floppy new suit—double-breasted, with those wide Fifties lapels, and a white rosebud pinned in one of them—he walked down the dirt road to the dam. His fingers kept testing his right-hand coat pocket, to see if the wedding ring was still there—its adamant little weight, its cool curved edge. The road was really two dusty paths beside a central mane of weeds and grass, shadowed even toward noon by hemlocks and birches. Bears supposedly lived in these woods, which stretched endlessly, gloomily, in every direction, claustrophobic as a cave. Suppose Carlyle had fled! Suppose he had gone crazy, and with his excessive, careless strength would knock his best man unconscious!

Carlyle was coming up the road, in his identical beige suit, his long wet hair combed flat, his ritual bachelor ablutions at last completed. Fred was relieved; he had been afraid of, among other things, seeing his soon-to-be brother-in-law naked. The road slanted down, to the creek, so their heads for a moment were on the same level, and in this moment Carlyle gave Fred, or Fred happened to catch, a look, a watery warm-eyed look. What did it mean? *Get me out of this*? Or was the look just a flare, a droplet, of the wordless pagan wisdom that brothers somehow shared?

“They sent me after you.”

“I see that, Freddy.”

Carlyle’s eyes were an uncanny pale green, with thin pink lids, and prominent, so that his long face gave the impression of being a single smooth tender surface, his nose so small as to be negligible. When he looked intent, as now, his eyes went flat across the top, the upper eyelid swallowing its own lashes.

In the years to come, the brothers-in-law looked each other in the eyes rather rarely. Not that they lacked occasion: though they lived, with their wives and children, in separate towns, and eventually on different coasts of the continent, Carlyle saw to it that they all spent at least several weeks of the year as one family. There was the Franconia place at first, and when Carlyle’s mother, widowed early by a heart attack that carried off his father—the Saughterfields had fragile hearts—sold it, there were summer houses rented jointly, or two rented side by side, or Christmases spent in one or the other’s home, the floor beneath the tree heaped embarrassingly high with the presents for their combined children. There were nine children, in the end: Fred and Betsy’s three, Carlyle and Germaine’s six. Six! Even in those years before ecology-mindedness, that was a lot, for non-Catholics. Fred and Betsy speculated that, his own father dying so young and his mother remarrying and moving to Paris (her new husband worked for American Express), Carlyle was afraid of running out of family; his New Hampshire cousins depressed him and his only sibling was a much older sister whom he never mentioned, and who lived in Hawaii with an alcoholic jerk of a husband.

The Emmets sometimes found the joint vacations heavy going. Their children were outnumbered two to one and everyone was benevolently bullied into expeditions—to the beach, to an amusement park, to some mountain trail—whose ultimate purpose seemed to be to create photo opportunities for Carlyle. He had become a fervent photographer, first with Nikons and then with Leicas, until he discovered that an even more expensive camera could be bought—a Hasselblad. Its chunky shutter sound sucked them up, sealed them in, captured them in sunshine and rain, parkas and bathing suits, the boys in their baseball caps and the girls in their ribbons and braids. One cherished photo, turned into the Saughterfields’ Christmas card, showed all nine children squeezed into the Emmets’ old workhorse of a Fairlane station wagon, each hot little grinning face smeared by an ice-cream cone. What the photo did not show was the drive away from the ice-cream stand: the cones melted too rapidly in the August heat and had to be thrown out the window when they became, in the mass of flesh, impossibly liquid. “Over the side!” Carlyle called from behind the wheel, and an answering voice would pipe, “Over the side!,” and another gob of ice cream would spatter on the receding highway, to gales of childish glee. Conspicuous waste pained Fred, but seemed to exhilarate Carlyle.

As it worked out, Carlyle was often driving Fred’s cars, and commandeering Betsy’s kitchen for meals he would cook, dirtying every pan. He made the Emmets feel squeezed, not least with his acts of *largesse*—plastic-foam boxes of frozen steaks that would arrive before a visit, mail-ordered from Omaha, and heavy parcels of post-visit prints, glossily processed by a film laboratory in West Germany that Carlyle used. All these fond, proprietary gestures, Fred felt, spelled power and entitlement. Even taking the photographs placed Carlyle on a level above them, as an all-seeing appropriator of their fleeting lives.

Once, on Martha’s Vineyard, when Fred needed his car to get to a tennis date in Chilmark and Carlyle had taken it up to Oak Bluffs to buy his daughters and nieces elephant-hair bracelets, and then to Vineyard Haven for the matinée of a Jerry Lewis movie, with miniature golf on the way home, Fred let his temper fly. He felt his face flush; he heard his shrill voice flail and crack. Carlyle, who had returned from his long expedition with bags of farmstand vegetables, pounds of unfilleted fish, and a case of imported beer, stared at Fred with his uncanny green eyes for some seconds and then cheerfully laughed. It was a laugh of such genuine, unmalicious, good-tempered amusement that Fred had to join in. Through his brother-in-law’s eyes he saw himself clearly, as a shrill and defensive pipsqueak. It was, he imagined, this sort of honest illumination—this sort of brusque restoration to one’s true measure—that siblings offer one another. As an only child, Fred had never been made to confront his limits.

In bed he asked Betsy, “Why does he need to do it—all this playing Santa Claus?”

“Because,” she answered, “he doesn’t have enough else to do.”

What Carlyle did professionally became vaguer with the years. After business school there had been business—putting on a suit in the morning, working for other men, travelling in airplanes to meet with more men in suits. One company he worked for made fine leather goods—purses, belts, aviator-style jackets as items of high fashion—and another a kind of machinery that stamped gold and silver foil on things, on books and photograph albums and attaché cases and such. Neither job lasted long. Carlyle’s weakness, perhaps, was his artistic side. His Harvard major had been not economics but fine arts; he took photographs and bought expensive art books so big no shelves could hold them; he could not be in his house, or the Emmets’, a minute without filling the air with loud music, usually opera. When his mother’s sudden death—she was hit by a taxi in Paris, on the Boulevard St.-Germain—brought him some additional money, he became a partner in an avant-garde furniture store in the Back Bay: chairs and tables of molded plastic, sofas in the form of arcs of a circle, waterbeds. The store did well—it was the Sixties, there was plenty of money around, and plenty of questing for new lifestyles—but Carlyle got bored, and became a partner in a Los Angeles firm that manufactured kinetic gadgets of Plexiglas and chemical fluids. This firm went bust, but not before Carlyle fell in fatal love with California—its spaghetti of flowing thruways, its pink and palmy sprawl, its endless sunshine and perilous sense of being on the edge. He moved his growing family there in 1965. As his children grew and his hair thinned, Carlyle himself seemed increasingly on the edge—on the edge of the stock market, on the edge of the movie industry, on the edge of some unspecified breakthrough. His clothes became cheerfully bizarre—bell-bottom pants, jackets of fringed buckskin, a beret. His name appeared as co-producer of a low-budget film about runaway adolescents (seen romantically, roving against the night lights of Hollywood and sleeping in colorful shacks up in the canyons) that received favorable reviews back east and even turned up in the Coolidge Corner movie complex not far from where Fred and Betsy lived in Brookline.

Fred, unromantically, worked in real estate. After splitting off from the management company that trained him, he bet his life on the future of drab, run-down inner-city neighborhoods that, by the sheer laws of demographics and transportation, had to come up in the world. His bet was working, but slowly, and in the meantime the Emmet Realty Corporation absorbed his days in thankless maintenance and squabbles with tenants and the meticulous game, which Fred rather enjoyed, of maximizing the bank’s investment and thereby increasing his own leverage. That is, twenty thousand of his own equity, plus a hundred-thousand-dollar mortgage, meant a profit of two hundred percent if the building’s worth climbed by a third. He was, like many only children, naturally meticulous and secretive, and it warmed him to think that his growing personal wealth was cunningly hidden, annually amplified by perfectly legal depreciation write-offs, in these drab holdings—in Dorchester three-deckers and South End brick bowfronts, in asphalt-shingled Somerville duplexes and in Allston apartment buildings so anonymous and plain as to seem ownerless. He was the patient ant, he felt, and Carlyle more and more the foolish grasshopper.

Yet, when, ten years into his marriage, Fred found himself swept up in a reckless romance, it was his brother-in-law that he confessed to. The seethe of his predicament—Betsy’s innocence, and the children’s, and the other woman’s; glittering detached details of her, her eyes and mouth, her voice and tears, her breasts and hair—foamed in him like champagne overflowing a glass. It was delicious, terrible; Fred had never felt so alive. One muggy July afternoon he found himself alone with Carlyle in the ramshackle Chatham house that the Saughterfields and the Emmets were jointly renting. The wives and children were at the beach. Carlyle came into the living room, where Fred was working up some figures, and sat himself stolidly down opposite the desk, on the sandy, briny green foldout sofa that came with the house. Carlyle had put weight on his big bones, and moved now with the deliberation of someone considerably older than his brother-in-law. Tennis and worry had trimmed Fred down, given him an edge—for the first time in his life, he felt handsome. Carlyle was wearing a kind of southern-California safari suit, a loose cotton jacket with matching pants, suggesting pajamas or a doctor’s antiseptic outfit when he operates. He sat there benignly, immovably. To relieve the oppressive silence, Fred began to talk.

As Carlyle listened, his eyes went watery with the gravity of the crisis; yet his remarks were gracefully light, even casual. “Well, Freddy—if I could see you with the woman, I might say, ‘What the hell, go to it,’ ” he pronounced at one point in his reedy voice, and at another point he likened the sexual drive to an automobile, volunteering of himself, “I know it’s in there, in the garage, just raring to be revved up.”

Though Carlyle seemed, if anything, to advise that Fred follow his heart (“My doc keeps telling me we only live once”), and with his noncommittal calmness did relieve his brother-in-law’s agitation and guilt, Fred was left with the impression that it would be absurd of him to leave the children and Betsy and the share of the Emmet Corporation her lawyers would demand. Would Carlyle, if he ever *did* see him with the other woman, be enough impressed? Was not erotic passion in truth as mechanical as an internal-combustion engine? Perhaps, in giving him reason to talk of her to Carlyle, to brag, as it were, to the older, taller, stronger man of his conquest, the other woman had served much of her purpose. Looking back, years later, Fred wondered if the sisters hadn’t known more than they seemed to, and hadn’t urged Carlyle to come and have this brotherly consultation, there in the empty Chatham house sticky with salt air.

The marriages, and the families, went on. So many outings, to build up their children’s childhood—beaches, mountains, shopping malls, Disney World. So much shared sunshine. Why, then, did Fred’s scattered memories of Carlyle tend to be shadowy? One Christmastime in Brookline, Fred, responding to a ruthless battering sound from below, went into his cellar and discovered his brother-in-law, sinisterly half-lit by the fluorescent tubes above the workbench, pounding something glittering gripped in the vise. The other man’s eyes, looking up and squinting with the change of focus, had that watery, warm—was it sheepish?—look they had worn that day of his wedding, as he came up the shady road beneath the hemlocks and birches. “Santa’s workshop,” he explained huskily. He hid with his body what he was doing. He looked demonic, or damned, in the flickering basement light. Fred backed up the stairs, as embarrassed as if he had surprised the other man undressed.

Betsy explained it to him later, in bed. To save money, Carlyle was making some of their Christmas presents this year—silver dollars drilled through and beaten into rings for the boys, and strung into necklaces for the girls. It was the sort of thing he used to do as a boy; he had been creative, artistic. It was sweet, Betsy thought.

To Fred, even this exercise in thrift savored of extravagance—silver dollars! “Are they that hard up?” he asked. “What’s happened to all Carlyle’s money?” He had always resented it that Carlyle had simply *had* money, whereas he had had to make it, a crumb at a time.

Well, according to what Betsy had gathered from Germaine, who out of loyalty of course didn’t like to say much, six children in private schools and colleges aren’t cheap, and the stock market had been off under Nixon, and Carlyle had trouble trimming his expensive tastes—the M.G. convertible, the English suits ordered tailor-made from London even though he rarely wore suits, the beach house in Malibu in addition to their seven-bedroom Mission-style home in Bel Air. The people he dealt with expected him to have these things.

“Who *does* he deal with?” Fred asked.

“*You* know,” Betsy said, in the voice of one who didn’t exactly know, either. “Movie people. He’s involved in a movie now, Germaine did allow, that’s just *sucking* the money out of him. He’s in with this guy, Lanny somebody, who was supposed to make a low-budget blue movie with an adventure theme as well, so it would not just be for the triple-X theatres but could get into the softer-core drive-ins, but who without asking or telling Carlyle went and rented one of those sound stages that cost twenty-five thousand a day or something fantastic for these episodes that don’t exactly tie in yet, since he doesn’t have a real script, it’s all in his head. He even bought an old frame house somewhere and burned it down for one scene. Germaine thinks Carlyle is being taken for a *hor*rible ride but is too proud to say anything. You remember all that buddy-buddy skiing and hunting he used to do?—those people used to take advantage of him, too. He has this old-fashioned sense of honor and can’t defend himself. He gets caught up in a macho sort of thing. Furthermore, he likes being around these movie people, especially the little porno starlets. She wishes *you’d* talk to him.”

“Me? What would I say?” Fred’s stomach pinched, there in the dark. He was still afraid of Carlyle, slightly—those flat-lidded eyes, the way he could throw a ball that made your hands hurt.

“Just open the subject. Let him tell you how it is.”

“The tried-and-true talking cure,” he said bitterly. A decade later, he still missed the woman he had given up—dreamed of her, in amazing, all-but-forgotten detail. He would never love anyone that much again. He had come to see that the heart, like a rubber ball, loses bounce, and eventually goes dead. He did feel a faint pity, smelling his brother-in-law’s pain in the house. There had been a physical deterioration as well as a financial. Carlyle’s doctor had told him to take afternoon naps, and it seemed he was often upstairs, in a kind of hibernation, from which he would emerge red-eyed, wearing soft moccasins. To his counterculture clothes his health problems had added a macrobiotic diet, and the clothes hung loose on his reduced, big-boned frame.

One day between Christmas and New Year’s, when all the others had gone ice-skating on the Brookline Reservoir, Fred walked into the kitchen, where Carlyle was heating water for a cup of herbal tea, and asked, “How’s it going?”

The other man wore an embroidered green dashiki hanging loose outside dirty old painter pants. His hair had vanished on top, and he had let it grow long at the back; with the long graying wisps straggling at the nape of his neck, he seemed a dazed old woman, fussing at her broth. His bare arms looked white and chilly. Years in California had thinned his blood. Fred said, “If you’d like to borrow a sweater, I have plenty.”

“Actually, I just turned up the thermostat.” Carlyle looked over at him mischievously, knowing that thrifty Fred would resent this, and continued his aggressive tack. “Everything’s going great,” he said. “Life’s all *samsara*, Freddy. The Terwilliger girls may have been stirring you up about this particular film project I have in the works, but, like they say, no sweat. It’s money in the bank. When you bring your gang out this summer, we should have a rough print to show you.”

“That would be nice,” Fred said. To be brotherly, he was wearing the ring Carlyle had given him; its roughly pounded edges scratched his skin, and an inspection of the basement had disclosed that a number of his drill bits, meant for wood and not silver alloy, had been ruinously dulled.

The film, when they saw it that June in L.A., also seemed crudely made. The young flesh, photographed in too hard a light, in rooms rented by the hour, had a repulsive sheen, a smooth falseness as of tinted and perfumed candles. The adventure parts of the film failed to link up. The burning house was on the screen only a few garish, orange seconds. Fred was struck by the actors’ and actresses’ voices, recorded with a curious flat echo that made him realize how filtered, how trained, the voices in real movies are. Carlyle’s profile had been fascinating in the dark, the screen’s bright moments glittering in the corner of his eye. When the lights came on, his tender-skinned face was flushed. He said sheepishly to his in-laws, “Hope it wasn’t too blue for you.”

“Maybe not blue enough,” Fred allowed himself to say. It was the nearest to a negative word he had ever dared, since that time on the Vineyard when Carlyle had laughed at his pipsqueak indignation.

Now it was his turn to be amused, when, at dinner afterwards, over Hawaiian drinks and Chinese food, while the wives held tensely silent, Carlyle hoped aloud that Fred would consider investing in the film, toward distribution and advertising costs, which were all that was left to get the package off the ground. One more boost and the movie would make everybody a bundle. He could offer eighteen-percent annual interest, just like MasterCard in reverse, or up to a quarter of the net profits, depending on how many hundred thousand Fred could see his way clear to invest. Plus, he promised, he would pay Fred’s principal back right off the top, before he even paid himself. He knew Boston real estate had been going through the roof lately and Fred must be desperate for a little diversification.

Carlyle’s mien, in the shadowy restaurant with its guttering hurricane lamps and pseudo-Polynesian idols, wasn’t easy to read; his strained-sounding voice, almost inaudible, wheezed on doggedly, and a watery fixation glazed over the old glint—the guilty glance from the bottom of something—that Fred had caught or imagined on the hemlock-shaded road twenty-five years before.

Fred didn’t laugh. He said he would think about it and talk it over with Betsy. Naturally, she had a stake in all his business decisions and was always consulted. In private he asked her, “How important is it to you as a sister, if this would bail Germaine out?”

She said, “It isn’t, and I don’t think it would anyway.”

Fred felt contaminated by the other man’s naked plea, and could hardly wait until he got away, safely back to his own coast. He was too cowardly to turn Carlyle down himself. He left it to the Terwilliger sisters, Betsy to Germaine via long-distance telephone, to pass him the word: No way. Fred Emmet, too, could give a brotherly lesson in limits.

When Carlyle Saughterfield, less than a decade after his failed film had emptied his pockets, died, it was in a movie theatre. The girl next to him—not a date; they had just been introduced—noticed him at one point softly thumping his own chest, and when the lights went up the tall man was slumped as if asleep. Impassive. Wearing a green dashiki, and not much older than his father had been.

Germaine and he, some years before, had gotten divorced, and Fred and Betsy, too, as the Terwilliger sisters continued their lives in parallel. Betsy had never really forgiven him for the insult of that old affair. Germaine, a week after Betsy had phoned Fred with the stunning news, called him herself to invite him to a pagan ceremony, a scattering of Carlyle’s ashes in a tidal creek north of Boston where the dead man used to sail and swim as a boy.

This scattering had been his idea, as was Fred’s being invited. Germaine said, “He loved you,” which sounded right, since families teach us how love exists in a realm above liking or disliking, coexisting with indifference, rivalry, and even antipathy. What with his health troubles, ominous family history, and nothing much else to do, Carlyle had done a lot of thinking about his own death: from beyond the grave, it appeared, he was trying to arrange one more group photo. The children were adult and dispersed, most on the coasts but one in Chicago and another in New Mexico. A ragged group gathered on an appointed wooden bridge, on a February day so clear it did not feel cold.

Fred dipped his hand into the box of calcium bits that had been Carlyle’s big bones and, imitating the others, carefully dropped them over the rough, green-painted rail. He had imagined that the tide would carry these fragments called ashes toward the sea, but in fact they sank, like chips of shell, tugged but not floated by the pellucid ebbing water. Sinking, doing a slow twirling dance, they caught the light. Two of Fred’s nieces—young women in defiant bloom, with ruddy faces and blond hair and pale eyes flat across the top—beamed at him forgivingly, knowingly. The sunshine seemed a lesson being administered, a universal moral; it glinted off of everyone’s protein strands of hair and wool hats and sweaters and chilly nailed hands and the splintered green boards of the bridge and the clustered, drifting, turning little fragments in the icy sky-blue tide. In this instant of illumination all those old photographs and those old conglomerate times Carlyle had insisted upon were revealed to Fred as priceless—treasure, stored up against the winter that had arrived.