Bound by River

by

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Note from the Writer:

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He's cheated he's hagged,
He's driven them mad,
He's eaten dirt and bark,

He's driven the mules,
He's skipped all his school,
He's ragged haggard Joe Clark

Children's rhyme, 1850s
Swat that fly, son, his dad says.

Archy gets up off the floor that's where he was and he walks across the living room to the kitchen area. The stove is hot and smells better than his daddy. The smell of his daddy makes his nose burn. Archy grabs the spatula and he turns around and scans the room. The meat is out and that is where flies often go, but flies aren't very smart and it may be somewhere else.

Not with the spatula. Godd___ the spatula. That's sposed to be used to handle things that are already dead. It's sposed to be used for meat and vegetables. Things that've been killed. It's not sposed to kill.

Archy doesn't know what he's sposed to use. Sometimes there's the newspaper and sometimes there isn't. It depends if it's Thursday or not. Archy's daddy doesn't get
the newspaper for Thursday because it comes out Wednesday and is more expensive on Wednesday.

He never knows what he's sposed to use. There's lots of rules about it, it seems. You can't use something that's sposed to be used for something else. But sometimes you have to. There was that time he made a book into a weapon, chucked it across the room at a spider. Only thing was the spider was on the back of brother John. John didn't feel the spider on his back, but Archy saw it crawling. Just because you can't feel something doesn't mean it won't hurt you. There're heart attacks, Archy knows, and you can't feel your heart, really. Sometimes it just get's you. and there was the time ragged haggard Joe Clark's bag burst. All his junk fell out, but he didn't know it was going to, else he would've fixed it.

Sometimes just someone else has to have plain sight, and help someone out. The book was right near to him, a school book, but he wasn't looking at it much. Only looked at it when it could become a weapon. He could've taken a second and found something else. Could've gotten up and swatted it off. But if you're going to kill something, kill it proper. Don't get your hands in the blood.

He grabs it and it lands flatly on John's back.

It will leave a red mark; the spider was a goner.

Yow!

John turns toward him, yells. What'd you do that for Archy. John curls backwards, an unnatural way, and palms his back.

There was a spider on you, Archy says. He sits with good posture, leans
forward and scared.

Brother still feels his back. Looks frustrated. He starts to speak words but they get caught in his throat. He thinks of what else good be done. His thoughts move fast as blood to his back.

You didn't see it! Archy says.

I'd've felt it if it got to my skin.

It'd've bit through that shirt.

The shirt was hard linen.

I've never seen a spider with tiger fangs, says his brother.

This one had fur though! I've heard stories.

Bulls___.

He was not supposed to say that, John wasn't.

I'm gonna tell momma what you said.

I'm gonna tell her you threw a book at my back. For no good reason.

Archy says, You're gonna get your mouth soaped, I might just get spanked And the spider was there. You're rubbing it in. You're rubbing the poison in.

John's face is angry, but it's not red angry. All the red is on his back.

Check for guts, says Archy. Check for guts. That'll tell you.

It'll seep through the shirt anyway, you know.

How come? I don't believe you.

You ever seen mama ring out the washcloth? Like she does after soaping you?

That water seeps out. Same thing with poison.
How you know what poison even looks like?
Daddy drinks it. You've seen it.
That what burns my nose?
Yes. That's it. You've seen it. Dad drinks poison!
He says he's drinking courage.
That's what gives the spiders courage. Poison.
Well then you better check! Daddy says you can't have the poison when you ask him.

Aw shoot, Arch. See I didn't say the s word there don't tell mama, I did. Don't tell her anything. He crawls up from the floor and sits with his back against the wall. He feels no poison on his back. He wonders if it would feel cool or warm. Spiders are warm blooded not like snakes and dragons but liquid always feels cool on the back. But daddy shivers and leans against walls once he's poisoned. They've both seen it.

I think I'll be okay, Archy. Daddy's usually okay.

John limps against the wall like his father does. He slides down it. There is quiet noise. His back pinches his shirt with the wall and it squeaks faint enough to be head but not to loudly enough to be listened to. He stops sliding when the ball of his neck is against the wall. He ragdolls. He stops breathing. He holds his breath. He closes his eyes slowly.

Silence.

John?

Arch can't see it because his brother's head hangs forward. John bites his lip,
prevents laughing.

Oh no oh no oh no no John.

There's a picture of Italy Arch once saw, of a tower. It was falling sideways. It was falling slowly, and it would be on its side soon. They wouldn't know what to do with it.

John stoops sideways down the wall and he hits the floor. Dust comes up. The house sounds hollow.

Oh no oh no! I'm sorry I threw the book at you. John John John. Archy is over near John. You're still warm, John. You can't be dead yet you can't be. I told you there was a spider. I knew it. I kilt it. He wants to pound John with his fists. He could let it all out. Do dead people bruise?

John coughs. Laughs.

Oh John, No. D_____.
Joe Clark strips. He finds rocks. One is especially sharp. He throws it lets it skip on the river. Must skip around 10 times.

Just like Jesus, he says.

He lays the rocks on his clothes.

He wades, ankle deep. The water is cold. He has never been in the river. He presses on foot into the mud and pulls it back out. Feels the suction. He does the same with the other foot. He bends over and his ass faces the city but he knows no one's looking; it's too early. H___ they can't see anything anyway since the sun is facing him, making him either invisible or a silhouette to the city up the hill. He splashes water onto his calves, works upwards to his thighs, his hips, his penis. He can't splash the water high enough onto his chest. He digs his palms down; his fingers are open and he
pulls up as fast as he can and the water nearly licks his chest. He is afraid he needs deeper water. He kneels. He slaps water up. It licks his chest. Getting clean should work as long as he washes from the top to the bottom.

He reaches into the mud for the soap. He only picks up mud.

Son of a b____, he says.

He looks around. The interior of his body heats up. He is cool on the outside. He looks to the shore, turns his head quickly, figures if the soap's on the shore it'll be on the shore in a minute or two. If the soap's in the water, moving to the center of the river, it'll move further out. The water gets deeper. There used to be lots of steamboats on the river; he saw one get grounded once. Saw the whole process, saw the big blade of a hull come out, remembers thinking how deep the river goes.

He sees the soap. It's not too far out. He remembers seeing that steamboat come at him. It just kind of skidded at the end. He sees the water shallow for a few steps. Follows it to the soap. The soap bobs further away.

Aw s____.

He can't grab it; it just slips away. He walks deeper and begins to feel the resistance on his legs. He can't see the bank anymore and he is caught between the soap drifting away and his own fear of the depth.

As the water comes to his hips, he turns and looks back. Nobody sees his predicament.

He just moves too d____ slow to catch that soap. He needs to go in further. He wants to swing his hips when he walks, really push the water show it who's boss. He's
smart enough to know that water's a delicate thing, that you can push it the wrong way and it'll push itself further away than you could've imagined. Can't pull water to you, that's the biggest drawback. Can't pull water, and can't push a rope, and both can kill you.

He steps further into the water. It's a strange comfort. Comfort isn't usually cold. He keeps stepping and the water envelops him and just his head is out. He is either shaking from nerves or sweating and he can't tell either. He jumps and comes down. Again. He jumps, and pedals his legs, wobbles side to side and he comes back down, slower than before. He feels the upkicked dirt settle on his feet. He knows he needs to become horizontal to swim. He's seen those feet kicking behind a swimmer's head and only way that can happen is if he's laying in the water. Laying in something, that's a thought, usually you lay on something. You have to trust something if you're going to lay in it.

He forgets about the soap, figures out he could figure out how to swim, maybe, hardest part's probably getting in the water.

He gets horizontal and his abdomen tightens and he flails. Looks like a head trauma happened to him. His arms are shaking under the water and his legs are too. Head's staying above water for the most part, chin and beard dip in every third second or so and then he whips his face up breathes in hard, one breath he takes isn't much of a breath more of a slurp of water and it hits his lungs and they expel the water out and it all takes the wrong effect on him and his body writhes and fixes itself so he should be standing again but the water is deeper and he sinks and keeps coughing underwater
he notices how the cough sounds different thinks he might be dying, doesn't know that the sand is a couple long inches beneath his feet, lets himself fall. He hits the floor, all ankles pushes up. His head comes out of the water and there he takes a breath. He's still coughing but he fits a breath in.

His head is out and staying out. He walks back to the shore, sits down. Doesn't like Connecticut sand in his ass, crouches instead, peers out over the water like a drunk shooting dice, trying to see if being lower changes luck.

He isn't any cleaner than when he was first coming down to the water.

Soap costs money.

He moves back in to the water, gets horizontal. He moves forward slightly, no feet on the ground. Swimming. His legs touch the ground. He pushes off. He reaches the point halfway between swimming and jumping. He looks for the soap, finds it, finds it doesn't look so faraway anymore. Doesn't look like it's floating away anymore either, though it really is, Joe Clark just isn't worried as much as he was. He puts his head into the water, crouches, pushes off, shoots himself forward and takes a path as unpredictable as a musket ball. Joe Clark is no Mini

But when he starts to put his legs down to push up, nothing.

Oh s____, he says underwater.

He loses what composure he had. He opens his eyes. Burning, they close. He shimmies up as best he can. His head does come up out of the water and he sucks in some air and some water and he holds back his cough, spasms come and he does let that cough out and it shoots him right underwater again. He comes up and goes and
under. Thinks he might hear someone yelling.
I remember when he almost drowned. It was when they started all that talk about building the railroad. Everyone was all worked up about the river and how it wasn't doing any good to us. Sure did look pretty when it wasn't muddy, but wasn't doing any good.

I wasn't in the meeting, but I'm sure it didn't go anywhere because they didn't start building the railroad til recently, til after the war, and lots of people who sat in the meeting are dead now. It was lots of olds. I don't remember who was in the meeting and who wasn't. Sure, there may have been a full head of hair or two, but I can't be sure. What I'm saying is I don't really know what many old people look like. Most who grow old don't know the way the loom works, or know how to forge a hammer, or construct a pewter bowl.
I've shaken hands with some old people and not many are missing fingers.

I don't mean to dwell off topic. The point is that they were in that railroad meeting to speak to the possibility of bringing in a railroad. Rivers used to be railroads, and our river wasn't one anymore. Most of the old wharfmen weren't wharfmen anymore, and some even lived in the almshouse. They were all older then. They drank a lot. I'm saying it was dumb luck that Joe Clark was saved, because nothing much happened at the river. His salvation was something that just occurred. It had just rained and there was no good reason for that boy to be down there. Had a Greek first name, I think. No, he's not around anymore, else you could ask him about it.

Joe Clark probably just figured that there wouldn't be anybody down near the river so early. Kids were in school, mostly, some unlucky working and sweating, and adults at work never near the river. They are of the river and have history to it, but do not work its shore anymore. If Joe Clark really didn't want anyone to see him he should've gone on a Sunday. He wasn't religious. They say cleanliness next to godliness, and he wasn't clean.

I was on Main Street when the kids ran up. Everyone looked at them like they were dumb. What the h__'re they doing up here instead of going to school? someone did say.

First thing I saw was a piece of cloth. Something was flying off it. Little particles dust like looking. I thought it was a potato sack. I was squinting. You know
the sun comes up over the river. It was a good sunrise. Clouds were parting in the
distance.

They chose one of the steeper roads to come up there were two of them and
their little legs just couldn't get them up fast enough. H___ if I knew someone's life
was on the line I've gone running down to them as soon as I could see em.

Help help! Archimedes said. That was his name, I do remember.

He was a known trouble maker.

He was yelling as loud as a kid could. The other kid was yelling too. His names
on the tip of my tongue, don't worry, you'll hear it soon as I can remember.

Help! Help! Raggedha J Mr Clark! Mr Clark.

I know the kids call him ragged haggard Joe Clark.

He's drowning!

There was lots of commotion.

What happened huh?

What's going on?

Why aren't they in school?

Huh? What? No no no.

See they were talking to themselves at first and not talking to the children. I
was doing the same thing, I was talking to Mr Stacks. He was hammering out some
horseshoes. General Mansfield had recommended him to the army. That army used up
horseshoes quicker than a firefly's light. Mr Stacks was always out there hammering.

What're them children doing, Stacks said.
I don't know.

They're hollering bout something.

I can't hear bout what.

Me neither.

We were talking pretty loud, I guess. The whole street was kinda loud. Mr Laslo the hatter and Mr Louvin the barber came out. Their customers had left to see so why not them.

You can't hear him splashing! one of them said.

Listen. Shh. All you. His finger was up to his mouth. Nobody quieted.

Come on! Follow us! Down to the river!

They turned and tried to lead us down, waving their arms. It was like getting a dumb dog to follow.

Then Sally stepped forward, put her hands on the child Archy, the troublemaker. She'd dealt with him before. Seen him stealing bread. She got down on her knees, down to his level. She looked at him for a second. Didn't say anything.

I swear Ms Sally I swear! He's drowning!

You aren't fooling are you.

I swear I'm not.

She turned her head to the Irish boy. He's not, he's not, he said.

He's drowning!

Who?

Joe Clark
Sally stood up. Everybody quieted. We should go to the river, she said. Joe Clark's drowning.

Now let me tell you something about Joe Clark. He's old Middletown blood. He's Connecticut River blood. You look at him he even kind of looks like the river he has that muddy quality about him, and his eyes are a deep blue that if the sun hits them right and your standing at the right angle, and close to him, they will look like the river.

You'll be so close that you can smell him, and he smells like the worst parts of the river. That's what we figured anyway.

We had imagined him more apt to water.

There was I rhyme about him. I don't remember it, and I won't say it's not all untrue, but like I said, he's old Middletown blood, and we stand by our own.
Archy and Michael Hurley run down the hill. Their weight carries them. They will have trouble stopping. Three men follow. One a doctor, Jenkins. The other two, Hamming and Stover, just good souls. They all know Joe Clark as best as anyone can know Joe Clark.

Their heads bob. They keep their eyes on the road and watch for little holes and sticks and daggets that their feet can stick in to. Don't want the doctor to look at more emergencies than he has to. Don't want to leave Joe Clark to drown.

You see him yet? says Hamming.

Stover lifts his head up quickly. Can't yet, he says.

I see him, says the doctor.

Where?
Can see the white splashing. That where he is child?

I can't say, says Archy.

Why not?

Archy doesn't speak. He is running. It hurts his side to run this much, even if it is downhill he's still tired from running first uphill then yelling his heart out and having to yell it out enough to make people listen.

That's where he was about, says Michael Hurley.

Some folks watch off their front porches the men chasing the child.

They come to the road runs parallel to the river, cross it, get into the muddy bank. A boat in the distance heads to Joe Clark looks like someone is standing on the bow yelling. The boat's horn howls some sort of SOS.

The three men and two boys do not hear it; they only have their eyes on the white splashes yards in front of them. They slow down, the two boys and the doctor stop, the boys further back from the river. Doctor's right up to where the tide touches his toes.

Stover and Hamming continue. The mud slows them down and they sink into it. Trudging into the water where they will move easy. They hear Joe Clark yelling. S___. F___. Godd___. And he is not the sailor who they begin to hear. They swim. The water is calm and their movement disturbs it and sharpens it into thousands of flying needles.

The doctor watches. The boys are on either side, behind him. Archy has never seen death.
We gotta go, says Archy.

We should, says Michael Hurley.

Yet they are transfixed. They watch the men's arms enter the water and hear
the artillery of slaps.

We'll just be a little late to school, says Archy.

Just a little, says Michael Hurley.

You boys aren't going anywhere, the doctor says. He does not turn to look at
them. Joe Clark's splashing reduced to a light jab here and there, a fury no more. The
men reach Joe Clark. They say words. The doctor can hear their voices. Hamming is
holding Joe Clark up, trying to keep both their heads out of the water.

Joe Clark struggles, doesn't differentiate the friendly hands around his ribs from
the hard water. He's been coughing for minutes. It all hurts. It all feels cold.

The boat drifts to the men, splitting the water like Moses did.

Archy and Michael Hurley and the Doctor watch the man on the boat throw
the lifesaver into the water. Joe Clark has calmed. He has become a living deadweight.

Stover turns him horizontal, holds him like a baby. Stover and Hamming've been
holding Joe Clark for a couple minutes now. They tread water and have begun sinking
themselves. They loop the lifesaver around Joe Clark's ankles, wiggle it up. Easiest
body to wrap it around there was in Middletown. They get it up near his armpits, say
something to him, pat him on the shoulder, no response from Joe Clark. They shake
their heads, say something else, Stover grabs ahold of Joe Clark's arm and lifts it up
and plants it forward. Hamming does the same to the other arm. Looks like Joe Clark is on the edge of a building reaching for something, but he's still limplike.

Stover and Hamming swim to the far side of the boat. Nothing for a second. Then they come up, start walking to the bow. There's the seaman watching Joe Clark. He wishes Stover and Hamming had stayed down with him, to make sure he doesn't slip through the lifeloop. He'd be the first to do that.

Is he dead? says Archy.

I don't know, says Michael Hurley. I can't see him.

I feel nervous.

Me too.

Is it the same kinda nervous you felt when you saw someone die?

I can't tell. I don't think it is. Michael Hurley kicks the sand. It might be. It's different. I think.

I feel pretty awful, I think.

Me too.

Me too, says the Doctor. I feel nervous and I'd seen lots of men die. Seen a man drown before. I think he'll be all right, Joe Clark will. It looks okay.

You pulling our hams?

No son I can't say that I am. I can say I feel awful too about what happened, seeing a body get torn up, seeing water go into the lungs like that. I can say that Mr Stover and Mr Hamming've done a good job to get out there and save him and that boatsman is doing a good job too and I don't think god
would've put that boat there if only to find a dead man.

I guess that's right.

Uh huh, sounds good.

You're skipping school today, huh?

The children say nothing. They watch the boat. All the action onboard they cannot see. The boat does not turn and heads to the dock. The doctor turns his head, eyes down to the children. Peering over his glasses.

We did.

Yes sir.

Then I don't think you'd've skipped school if there was a dead man down here. That'd be an awful hard punishment for playing hooky wouldn't it?

They nod.

The Doctor walks. The boys stay. They make shapes in the mud with sticks. The sticks bend and stagger and snap and then they pick up new sticks and repeat. The Doctor tells them to come, tells them to come see their naked treasure, says, Come see what sort of life he's been injected with, see if there're any traces of the dead, see if he's gonna have lungs with water in them. He's almost to the docks, come on now, follow me I can't look back to make sure you're following.

They remain.

Hey, says Archy.

Yeah?

Archy draws an X in the mud.
I liked that feeling. In my chest. When he was drowning, I liked the feeling.

That's just cause the doctor was there. You knew he was gonna save him.

But I had the same feeling before we got the doctor, I just don't know if I liked it the same. I have the feeling now and it's still good.

Michael Hurley draws more X's in the mud. Little X's and big X's. There's no bounty of treasure under any of them. The arrowheads should've washed up. He's thinking of his grandpa. They're saying things over on the dock. He can hear them. They're not all too far away. It's different than when his grandpa was dying. Everyone was quiet when his grandpa was dying. He didn't have a good feeling in his chest when is grandpa was dying; he didn't have that good feeling that Archy had and now wants to seek again.

They stand in the mud near the river, they face the river and stare at the trees across it, watch the thin trees wave in the wind. They have dropped their sticks.

Took the doctor a long time to get to him, says Michael Hurley.

He's a doctor though. He can raise people. You said so yourself.

Hm.

I bet he's alive, says Archy.

Look at him, says Michael Hurley.

I know. I just feel alright about it. We ran pretty fast I think, I think we made it in time. I'm saying we should get that arrowhead.

Just look at him first.

They turn and look. The Doctor is pushing down on Joe Clark's chest. Joe
Clark contracts and expands once with life's intention. He lets out the wheeze of a devil.


I seen someone die after making that sound.

Who?

I don't wanna say.

Was there a doctor?

No.

Well if there's a doctor, he might've been raised.

I know. I wish there was a doctor.

Shoot.

Alright, says Michael Hurley. Look. He's kinda walking now. He's controlling his legs, alright, he just isn't holding himself up.

Let's get that arrowhead, alright?
There was a news article about Joe Clark. It didn't make the front page of the Constitution but it was there Wednesday, right next to the ads for summer hats and wooden teeth. He was cursed, you know, Joe Clark was. He was cursed and he did curse. I saw him outside the pewtersmith's, just standing there and he was looking straight ahead. He had his cart with him and it was night, and I couldn't tell what he was looking at. He was either trying to look inside or he wasn't. You can usually tell. If someone's up close to the window with their hands bridging their brow to the window, then they're trying to look inside. If they're far back then they're trying to look at themselves might even spit on their hand and adjust their hair.

Joe Clark was in between and he was squinting and I can't say exactly just what he was doing. Point is he was cursing himself. See? He was cursed by blood, too.
Godd___ this and godd___ that and burn it all to h___, he was saying. This was before the drowning, mind you. This was a regular occurrence, I figure. I didn't see him do it regularly, but I didn't see him regularly either.

No, he didn't see me. I have a way of being soft and hidden around people, I suppose.

Believe me he was cursed though. Started with his grandaddy's grandaddy who had the best plot of land and died choking on a chicken bone. Land got divvied up between the sons, the sons died, land kept getting divvied up and then the land could not be farmed. They died odd deaths. One was kicked in the head by a mule. One was working in Starr's sword factory and was impaled by many swords when a shelf broke.

Joe Clark's mama was Jess Clark and she watched her daddy's oxen twist the wrong way and bring his cart upon himself.

She did not know that the oxen twist and her great grandaddy's chicken choking were at the same spot. She wept there and her tears fell on black stone. She picked a piece up. If she had thrown it on another stone and seen its cleavage, or if she had noticed that it did not leave black marks on her hands, she would have known it was not coal, but she did not, and she telegraphed for the man with the diamond-tipped drill and he telegraphed back saying that it was not coal, that he had been in Middletown before, but she did not believe him and he came and he accepted her money and when it was not coal she wept.

And then she called the other man with the other diamond-tipped drill, convinced the first was going to come back in the dead of night and dig. It was quiet
where they lived but she was convinced the first man was going to come back and drill
in the night. You could hear dogs howl, but not constantly, and the constant chink of a
shovel would have been heard. And either Joe Clark or one of his brothers would be
told to investigate, and they would have found no trespasser.

You know the way the earth was made in these parts, the land tips towards the
sea. I don't mean just at the shore, I mean from west a hundred miles or more. If
you're in Middletown, like Jess Clark was, and you want to know what rocks are
under your land, all you have to do is go to and through Meriden or Wallingford,
looking at what rocks are on top of their farms. H___, you could even charter a
wagon, or hitch a ride on a wagon, or if you can't do that trust someone else to do it.
Paying someone to send a telegram is cheaper, and you can tip them a dollar or two
for the information. Have the postmaster put up a poster, have him wire you when
someone says they have coal or they don't have coal.

Jess Clark would not trust people she hadn't seen. I heard once she denied an
invitation to meet General Mansfield on the claim that you couldn't trust any army man
who built a bridge that caught on fire, like it was a bridge apt to set on fire on natural
causes. When General Mansfield came and she saw him and she saw how dapper he
was and how clean his beard was and heard him speak about the war in Mexico and
how he ran from the Apaches and how he and a major named Lee had been
outsmaerted and were running their lives off. They had only a few days to make it to
the creek, and Mansfield and Lee rode as fast as they could and had the bridge built in
no time and when it was time to cross they were the last of their troops to cross. The
Apaches, they were coming fast through the night and scalping all who were unwilling
to be scalped, and it was then that Mansfield did light a fire to the bridge to watch it
burn and smoke and hide the Apaches from view, and that was when Jess Clark
decided she liked the man and she wished she could meet him at the dinner but knew
her spot had been taken, and she knew she had been unwise in not trusting the general
because she had heard that he burnt the bridge on his own men.

That kind of drew the Clarks to a close. Jess took to consumption and passed.
His brothers left with the youth of Middletown. I did say Joe Clark was smart, and
that is true of his brothers as well. I don't remember how many there were. I can't
imagine there were more than four or five. I have never seen Joe Clark come out of
the post office. I think one of his brothers might be doing well in Kentucky, or Ohio.
Better chance of being alive now if he's in Ohio. One of them stayed longer than the
others Joe excluded. Tried to open a coffee mill.

I bet you could've taken that coffee all along the wagon trail about forty years
prior to the war and made a killing. All those young people left Middletown. Can't
blame them. Nothing to do but sit and s___, in their eyes. I'm old, but I can see some
of the youth's minds you know. I'm not saying I'm omniscient or not, just that I take a
liking to young minds sometimes.

The newspaper article didn't mention anything of all the curses. I suspect it was
out of kindness for Joe Clark, but it may not have been. If you have money you can
just pay them not to print your name when they're going to run something
embarrassing about you. Joe Clark didn't have money though.
I figure they knew he'd be embarrassed about it. He was old Middletown blood, and Middletown treats its own kindly. He was a bit of a celebrity, though, and word did get out. Children do let secrets out from time to time, and Archimedes and Michael Hurley let that one out alright. It was a good secret to let out, for savior's sake, but not for Joe Clark. For him it was just a secret that got out.

It was a topic of conversation. Nobody thought it too large a deal. I did say Joe Clark was smart, though, and it wasn't smart of him to try and swim when he didn't know how. That was dumb. Looking back, maybe that's what he was so embarrassed about.
How the hand the Indians make their arrows?

Archi holds a stick in one hand, the arrowhead in the other. He rubs the sharp end of the stone into the end of the stick. His fingers are cut from holding the arrowhead wrong.

You're barely making any notch, let me see the stick, says Michael Hurley.

Naw, it's going.

It isn't. Michael Hurley gets up and reaches for the stick. Let me try, he says.

Archi resists. Naw, hold on. He continues to cut the notch. His strokes are slow and light. If he were to press in any further more red would flow. There is already some blood on the stone.

Just let me try. You've been trying for fifteen minutes already.
Archy drops the stone and the two both put both their hands on the stick. They pull. They are both careful not to put stress sideways across the stick; when it starts to bend they both reconfigure so that they are pulling opposites. This was the straightest stick they’ve found. They’ve been bickering all day and they were bickering when they found that stick. They had gone to the falls and walked through the nearby woods and looked at almost every green young growing sapling and each fallen branch. Wood rot on one branch. The green sapling has too much give. This one is too long, oh shoot now it's too short. And then they found one, and they stripped it of its bark, whittled it real smooth, and now they fight over it, and it bends slightly even though they try keep it straight.

You're gonna break it.

You are too.

H___, just let me try.

Michael Hurley is standing and Archy is not. Michael Hurley squats, pushes into the earth, reacts to it and pulls with all his strength.

Godd___, Archy says. He looks at his hands. The cracks formed from dryness now run with blood, like the way an engraving plate would look inked. He puts his hand to his mouth and sucks his own blood. Tastes the salt and iron. Turns slightly and spits a trail of blood, of which a remainder hangs off his lip.

Jesus what'd you do that for.

Does it hurt.

Hurts like h___ it does. I got skin hanging off.
Archie does not want to wipe his hand on his pants or shirt. Mama'd kill him and get papa to kill him deader after that. She just laundered his clothes and they still smell of lye, even after running through the woods and brushing through dirtened water, they still smell of it, and that hand keeps on bleeding and Archie does not and will not lick fast enough. The blood pools and floods the cracks of his dry skin. His fingertip previously cut by the arrowhead bleeds. You opened my old cut, he says. It burns like h____. And Michael Hurley responds and tells Archie that the cut wouldn't have been reopened if he held the arrowhead the right way because then there would be no cut. Archie pulls off flaps of skin that are sawtoothed along the ridge below where his fingers protrude. I got skin coming off, he says, look at my skin, but Michael Hurley doesn't look but does look at the stick and there is fresh blood on it and he doesn't want to wipe it on himself or his clothes either, but he does want the blood off the stick. You got blood on the stick too, he says, and he leaves his hands off the stick and the stick falls to the ground and Michael Hurley sees the flesh caught between the smooth underwood and the bark near the top of the stick.

What'd you drop that stick for? Archie says.

I'm not gonna try and notch that, he says. I think you were doing just fine.

I told you, I was, now I'm all bloody cause you didn't believe me. I'm gonna get a talking to I believe.

You should've just let me try.

Well now I'm letting you try. Why aren't you trying? He is still picking off skin.

Look at it.
Well I can't do anything about it. I can't notch it either, I don't know how I'm to hold that arrowhead anymore.

It's just bloody is all. I don't wanna blood mix.

It's just blood.

It's not my kind of blood though. You have different kind of blood than me, that's what my ma said.

Their mama's are different. Michael Hurley's mama is Irish. She didn't beat Michael Hurley when he came home after saving Joe Clark. She praised him. Archy's ass still hurts.

Just wash off the blood, says Archy.

I don't wanna mix blood at all.

You even got a cut on your hands?

They're easy to cut.

Just go to the creek.

You should go to the creek, your hands are all bloody.

Yeah it's not my fault though, you're the one pulled the stick out of my hands, caused it to cling to my skin and pull it.

You're bloody.

They both go to the creek. It is not far. The water is shallow, not much deeper than ankle deep, even ankle deep for the boys' small ankles.

He should've bathed here, Archy says. Then he slips on the moss, slips right onto his ass. His hands do catch him and it should hurt him but it doesn't. The water
pumps life to his wounds. The stones have been smoothed from water flowing for years. The water has gone and has not looked back.

Michael Hurley is barefoot and the sun is set back on the horizon enough to cause glare on the creek water but he can still see the blood trickling. It glares red.

Michael Hurley jumps out of the creek and says, Jeez, I did not want our blood mixing.

Archy stands up. Water's cold, he says. He puts his hands through the water. Splashes them about in a little grove of water surrounded by rocks. It's like beating eggs the way his hands move. The stick has gone down the creek the same direction the blood did. Grab the stick, he says.

Your blood.

H___ just grab the stick.

You gotta wash the stick.

Archy's hands are purple. I'll wash it alright. He picks up the stick and begins to rinse it.

Rinse it up creek, Michael Hurley says. Your blood's still pouring down.

Blood stays on the rocks, up near where Archy was. Some of it has flowed off but some of it stays on the rocks.

Archy throws the stick up river.

Godd____, Archy, you're gonna break it.

You're not gonna touch it anyway.

I would too, I'm gonna notch.
To h___ you will, you're just gonna find more blood or something on it just wipe it off it's got water on it you don't have to touch it just hold it in your shirt or find a leaf to hold it with there's all sorts of wet leaves here. Look, here's one under this rock.

Fine.

And when we kill the black squirrel and there's blood on the arrowhead don't come back and say it's my blood and don't tell me my shot was bad and the squirrel only died because my blood mixed into it.

I'm gonna kill the squirrel, you aren't. You couldn't kill something if you tried. You only killed that frog back when we were looking for that stick and that was on accident. It still on your foot probably.

Archy doesn't move for a long while. Neither does Michael Hurley. But then Michael Hurley goes and gets the stick and he then takes the arrowhead and he does notch the stick, after a long while. After a long while of the two of them bickering some more. Then the arrowhead sits kind of tight in the stick and they try to throw the stick and it hits a tree, doesn't stick into a tree, but it hits it with the point. Lets out a little plunk of a noise. Leaves a good dent in the birch tree. Pierces the bark. Archy takes the newly forged arrow and peels off a strip of bark. This is sharp, he says. I think you could skin a dragon with it.
The boys did encounter Joe Clark again, but this time they were not playing hooky. It was at sunset. The boys and Joe Clark meander towards twilight together, I suppose.

They were down near Mr Russel's factory. I could hear the boys talking as they were walking down the hill.

What do they make here again? said the Irish one.

Rubbery stuff, said Archy the troublemaker. That stuff that keeps your pants up.

He pulled up on his suspenders.

What for? said Michael Hurley.

Archy said, I just said.
What use is it to us. My suspenders're already too tight.

Bowstring, said the troublemaker.

Then the troublemaker pulled back on Michael Hurley's suspenders and Michael Hurley began to move like he was walking on the bottom of the ocean a feeling of confusion and one that may have stirred Joe Clark's memory. Archy let go of the suspender and it whipped Michael Hurley's back.

J____!

Imagine that as an arrow, said Archy. Shooo.

He moved his hand across the air.

What? Joe Clark was already picking through the trash. I'll get to him later. Yes, he was within earshot. Yes, he could've seen them though the sun was behind. If they were closer then he could've seen their faces.

Archy moved his hand across the air, like a dart.

Imagine an arrow coming off that, he said.

I can't imagine it, the Irish child said. I've a mark?

Lift your shirt higher. Hm. Yes.

I did not see the mark, but the Irish child was pale.

They were then silent. They walked towards the factory. They were close enough so that the land was no longer a hill, and that the smoke was not in their faces. The air was stale under the smoke.

Now I'd been watching Joe Clark, waiting to see what kind of response he'd have to his two saviors. He surely did identify them, at least within the space of his
head. His face did not show it. His face did not show much anymore. He had become more gaunt and his jaws may have rusted. He did not come into town so much anymore, I imagine to avoid us. Maybe he came in the night, when most were asleep. There are alleys that can evade the glow of the oil lamps.

Maybe he said something or maybe he didn't. I don't remember.

Yes. I guess it is important. Did he recognize the kids or not. He didn't wave, or extend his hand. You can shake hands with a child and have it mean just as much as a hand shaken to a man. His hands were full. They were caught in the webbing of elastic.

The children were looking too. They pressed their hips to the edge of the dumpster and tilted forward; they dug with their hands. They did not need a long piece, just one that could be strung to the stick and tied tightly enough to give it flex.

I can't say, and no one else could say what Joe Clark was looking for. Nobody had ever known what sort of trinket he would build.
They marvel at the bow. It is not an Indian bow.

They knew about the Indians and longhouses and squash but they didn't know about Indian bows.

They did not hold a stone, jagged and natural, in hand and hammer a hammering stone into the edge to remove flakes until a new arrowhead was born. The Indians did this for thousands of years, since before they were Indians. They made their arrowheads and when the children learnt their hands bled.

They did not kill a deer. They did not smell the deer's insides or its warmth. They did not use a stone knife to remove the muscle from the leg bones, and the sinew from the muscle. They will not eat what they kill.

They did not take twin sinew and wrap them around each other, like a rope to
rig a boat to dock. They did not squeeze deer blood onto their hands when twisting
the sinew. Archy's hand is a different kind of bloody. Archy's blood washes off, but
Indian blood, and deer blood, and deer scent are harder to remove.

They did not thank the bear in the sky. Their fingers did not callous, and won't
callous.

They did not thank the land.

They aren't careless by their standard. A bow to them takes a day to create. It is
about finding the right components. You just look for them. That's it. You use your
eyes.

The Indians were different. They had to grow the right components. A strong
deer is hard to find. You must find the deer. You may see it as a calf and then wait
years until it is a stag, and when it's a stag you may never find it again. You must kill it;
sacrifice it. You must wait until the right rock is found. It must be compressed by the
earth. A sapling must grow. It must grow strong and be in good sunlight.

You kill with control, if you're an Indian. You don't let emotion come to you
when you let the bow string go. It's all gone already. It's all been spent on the deer and
the craft and the wait.

Archy's different. The craft builds up his anticipation. He Lets the emotion
come with the kill. It comes with death, not with life.
He carried that bow around for a long time. For a while past a boy should. I can't say why it wasn't a real bow. It just wasn't. It reminded me of something General Mansfield would've done, if he had to. I bet that General could whip together a cannon out of skeletons.
They go to the university up on the hill. There is legend of the black squirrel.

Cora told them. Archy walks holding the arrow and Michael Hurley walks holding the bow. Michael Hurley is proud of the bow because it is bigger than the arrow and looks more important. He thinks it is the instrument of death. Archy is proud because he holds the note that kills. He holds the physical object that removes life.

He looked kind of different, didn't he? says Michael Hurley.

He didn't have his cart.

That's not what I mean.

He wasn't picking through the elastic like he picks through other things. He was taking his time.

Nah that's not what I mean either.
They walk beyond the elms, across High Street. It is different on the other side. It is difficult to see the rest of town even though they are on the hill. There are many trees blocking the view. The Forest City. The smoke above it they see. If the wind blew the right way perhaps they would smell the rubber and elastic or the scent of felled maple, or the bullet's iron.

He looked at us like he recognized us, says Michael Hurley.

Why'd he know who we were? says Archy.

We did save his life.

We didn't save his life.

Well we got someone to save his life, we got help, we didn't save him directly but if we weren't there I don't think he'd've been saved.

Hm. Well he still wouldn't recognize us, says Archy. Where's the squirrel?

We have to find it.

They walk past the two brownstone buildings. The grass is high. University students walk past and look at the children, and some of them nod and smile and say h___o. They carry books under their arms.

What're they talking about? says Archy.

Fancy s___, says Michael Hurley. Some of the names they're saying sound kinda like yours.

Shut up.

They're talking about squares some of em.

I know about squares.
Miss Puffett doesn't think so.

She's off her chair, she just can't read my writing.

Alright, that's it.

Just saying they could teach you about squares.

Shut up, Michael. Let's just find the squirrel.

They continue across campus, stop at the big hill. The whole town is a mountain with little and big hills coming off the mountain; a smooth and stratified paddy.

That's it, says Archy. Give me the bow. He reaches for the bow. Michael Hurley lets it go. The squirrel has gone behind the dormitory. Some of the windows are broken, on the lower floors, and students look out the upper windows.

Around the corner of the dorm they see the squirrel. Archy kneels and so then does Michael Hurley. They have test shot the bow. The elastic works alright enough for bow string. Archy pulls the string way back. Can't just use the right arm to pull back but have to push the left arm forward too and then you are good to go. The stick of the bow bends a good deal and if either of their arms were any longer then maybe the stick would break. It resists. Archy has his eye going down the arrow shaft and all of the sudden the arrow doesn't look as straight as it did when it was still a branch near the creek. The squirrel is squirrel sized and Archy either needs to point the arrow a little to the left or a little to the right. He's banking that the squirrel won't move, but squirrels are squirrelly and apt to hustle off at a fly's fart a hundred yards away.

You waited too long, says Michael Hurley.
I wasn't aimed.

If he was aimed, he'd have been ready for the feeling.

You took too long to aim.

Go around and see if it's on the side of the building. I'll set up to aim where it's gonna come out. Then you can scare it out and I'll shoot it.

Michael Hurley groans and walks.

You can't go around that way, says Archy. Then the squirrel would run out the other side.

Michael Hurley comes back and goes around the building. He walks along its long side, looking into all of the windows. Chamber pots under the beds. A golden star of david hidden in a desk drawer belonging to a converted jew. A stove in most rooms, some have fires that have been going on for weeks because the firestarters were awful firestarters and if these fires go out they will return disappointed and need to spend hours to rekindle. Students in some rooms watch Michael Hurley walk by muttering to himself and shaking his head.

He peers around the corner, just sticking his forehead down to his eyes out. He expects to see nothing, but the squirrel is there, looking in his direction. It might be looking at him, squirrels are sensitive creatures. Would it have moved if it saw him or not. How good is a squirrel's eyesight? Probably not that good, that's probably why they run all the time, they just see they don't know what and move then hope it isn't gonna hit them. You can notice a squirrel won't move until you're awfully close then it doesn't know where to go, kind of runs back and forth in place then shoots off to the
side. That's what happened anytime Archy'd seen a squirrel bout to get trampled by a horse and wagon at least.

He hopes Archy is ready. He looks through a window on the short side of the building, looks down a long hall with a wooden floor with cigar ash on it. If all you do in college is smoke cigars, maybe I'll go, he thinks. There's a window at the far end of the hall and if he'd see Archy anywhere, that's where he would. He sees trees blowing in the wind and a flag too but no Archy.

The squirrel's still staring straight in his direction. It moves its head and Oh what the heck, Michael Hurley thinks, Archy better be ready and Michael Hurley goes towards the squirrel and the squirrel does its little dance and then Michael Hurley yells Ahh and the squirrel comes at him, and Michael Hurley's already thinking Archy fired the arrow and the squirrel's going to run through his legs and be gone; Michael Hurley'll have to chase it while Archy gets the arrow out of the ground and the shaft comes out of the ground but not the head and he'll have to dig it out and by the time he does that Michael Hurley'll be way gone chasing the black squirrel and they'll be separated and Michael Hurley'll be lost.

But the squirrel does its squirrel dance again and this time takes off away in the right direction. It stops moving, stops completely, doesn't do another quick movement after half a second like it usually does. There's an arrow shaft sticking out of its neck, quaking. Michael Hurley is glad he doesn't have anything to yell at Archy for.
Archy thinks he might just have to yell at Michael Hurley. He might just have to say Michael Hurley how'd you let that black squirrel get away, that's the only black squirrel. Then Archy thinks that it probably isn't the only black squirrel, that it's probably got a black mama squirrel and a black papa squirrel and a black sister squirrel to make three. Any black squirrel is rare. Like an arrowhead.

He's got the bow pulled back like before. He's gonna hit the squirrel. He feels it like a caged bird in his chest. Giddy is the word. Like the way he would feel if his uncle who moved to Ohio when he was young were to come back is the same way he will feel when that squirrel comes out from the building. He won't think nothing of Michael Hurley. He's heard that up in Hartford, where there's the nice railroad line they have negros that'll carry your bags for you or get whatever you need for you while on the train. That's kind of what Michael Hurley is like even though the squirrel is black and Michael Hurley isn't. Michael Hurley's Irish.

Then the squirrel comes out and he does let the arrow go.

It stops moving and he feels the caged bird come out. He squeals like a school girl letting breath out behind the teacher's back. He thinks his chest is turning red. It's heating up. He's got that feeling again, the one from when he saw Joe Clark almost drown. The squirrel is dead, and blood flows like the feeling.

Archy beams when Michael Hurley comes out from the building. They beam smiles over a black death. Archy watches Michael Hurley walk to the corpse. Michael Hurley kneels and pokes his head real close to it, careful like, and then touches the arrowshaft. He nods his head and gives Archy a mini salute.
Come look, says Michael Hurley.

What's there to see?

You got it you don't want to see it dead?

Archy walks slowly to the squirrel. He hears the pen scratching in a window above. He looks up and there is a student peering over a desk. This your squirrel mister?

No. No. The student laughs. It's not our mascot.

What're we gonna do with it, says Michael Hurley.

I didn't think we'd do anything with it. This is the end, I thought.

We gotta do something with it. We can eat it.

We just cook it over a fire?

I guess so.

Don't we have to skin it?

Michael Hurley sighs. I guess I never thought about how to do that. My daddy never hunted or raised pigs. Didn't yours?

I've seen him cook a pigs head once.

It had the skin and all?

Yeah.

Must've looked kind of scary, says Michael Hurley.

Oh it had a stare. It's eyes were out.

Michael Hurley looks into the squirrel's face. It's eyes are marbles. The mouth hangs open and little teeth that could strip off your knuckles show. Blood has flowed
into and out of the mouth but there's only so much blood a squirrel can flow out its mouth and this particular one has reached that crimson limit. It's half its mama's, half its papa's blood, and Michael Hurley wonders if either of them'll look for it. He wonders if squirrels even act that way. He's seen birds peck their young out of nests and just wait to see if they fly and if they do they're on their own.

Archy pulls at the arrow and the squirrel's limp body comes up with it so Archy presses his foot against it and offers just enough resistance to pull the arrow out. The arrow has not pierced the far side of the neck, and as it comes through the side closer to Archy broad side first the skin bulges and bleeds.

That's gross, says Michael Hurley.

It's dead. What you ever have to be scared of something that's dead for? You ever been scared of a rock?

Naw never a rock unless it's been thrown towards me, but you ever been to the old coffee mill? That's scary and it's dead. Nobody's been in there for years.

Doesn't count. That's not what I meant.

What'd you mean? says Michael Hurley.

Archy picks up the squirrel by the back of its neck. Its blood on his hands. It hangs like a doll and blood drips out of the neck hole and down and off like a paintbrush with too much paint. Archy holds it up to his face, says, I'm just saying it's dead so it can't do anything to ya.

You ever had bad meat? says Michael Hurley.
They bring the black squirrel to Michael Hurley's father, Michael Hurley Sr.  

Senior sees the blackness in Archy's hand. The other five children stand behind him. Maggie, Patrick, Corey, Dana, Seamus. Their ages vary up and down; Michael Hurley's in the middle or one or two away from the middle.  

The girls groan at the squirrel. Archy, I'm not going to touch you! one says.  

Not with that! another one says.  

Michael Hurley Sr puts his arms out, like some kind of Irish Moses, tells his kids to stay back. Tells them to go to their shared room, which they do, but heads poke out. They fight and push over each other to stick a head out. The tallest Seamus does not fight, for his head towers.  

We don't know what to do with it, Michael Hurley says.  

Don't let it drip. He speaks to Michael Hurley but Archy holds the squirrel.  

It's all done dripping Mr Hurley.  

I told you he wouldn't want to do anything with it.  

Children! Mr Hurley says. He turns and the children have spilled into the hall. Some of them lying on the floor.  

Well what's he have daddy!  

He doesn't have anything. Go back in the room. Close the door.  

They do. They fight like a litter to the tit to press their ears against the door.  

Mr Hurley hears their skulls thumping.  

He waits til the sound settles. He raises his finger to his lips, facing Michael Hurley and Archy. He stands and tip toes to the door. He pounds it and the vibration
hits the children's heads and makes their ears red. Occupy yourselves, he says. Michael Hurley and Archy laugh until Mr Hurley turns back towards them.

Mr Hurley squats.

I believe you've taken the lifeblood out of it, he says. Hold it close, Archy.

Archy does.

It's cursed, I believe, says Mr Hurley. It's got black hide, is that why you'd killed her?

It's a mama? says Michael Hurley.

It's a mama, says Archy.

Aye, It's a mama.

Mr Hurley's breath doesn't smell like Archy's daddy's. It doesn't have a bite to it.

You aren't going to cook it? says Michael Hurley.

No I believe it'dn't be smart. You wouldn't want anyone cooking your mama, would you?

No.

Would you Archy?

No.

Well then. That's that. Don't drip its blood.

The boys walk to Archy's house. His daddy is home. Michael Hurley smells a bite in the air. He wonders if it is the squirrel. He doesn't remember smelling it in his
Boys, Archy's daddy says. He has a glass in hand with whiskey and he drinks it, and he goes to the bottle and pours another dram. Michael Hurley wonders why he doesn't pour a full glass, why only pour a little bit if you're thirsty? Get that out of my house, he says.

Michael Hurley is silent.

Aw, you can't cook it for us?

Not now.

When?

Not ever. I ain't cooking black meat.
I won't say I observed his more violent tendencies over the next few years. I saw him carry the bow and in July I saw him skipping stones and aiming for frogs. He was yet a troublemaker. He took joy in destruction and he was a bad kid. You could see something in his eyes when a wagon wheel took a squirrel with it, or when a bird was licked by flame and cindered.

I'll try to defend him, a bit, if you want. What I'll say is that death is fascinating, but just because it's fascinating doesn't mean that I aim to seek it. I did begin the story earlier than may be necessary, I don't know. I like to give background, I like it so you'll be able to picture the incident against other things that happened. That's what I'll say for now.
You see lots of strange folks over the years. Some were affiliated with the election and others not. I saw two men in very nice coats and very nice hats outside the factories, even outside the gun factory.

They had clipboards and I saw that the pages were old and looked like they might've been soaked in tea to make them look old and they didn't have much written on them. The men stood outside every door and they were a strangely sort of friendly. They nodded and took off their hats if a lady passed but when asked anything at all, all they said was I know nothing. Now I know nothing of what they didn't know nothing about, but it seemed a little suspicious. They'd wait for the workers to come out and then ask about the election. They'd say Mr Worker who're you going to vote for? Mr Worker was tall and wore steel shoulders, and the men with clipboards leaned in when they spoke. If men answered one way they'd lean in further, and if Mr Worker answered another way the men, one on each side, would pat him on the back and push him through. They wanted to hear men voting for Woodruff.

Woodruff's a good guy now. He was Repub when it was fashionable to be Loco around here. But back then he was American, which was why he and his people didn't know anything.

I will figure those two intimidators didn't do much since Middletown went Democratic, probably because of all those Irish. Irishmen don't take to intimidation well, and you know what? some of those Irishmen worked in the gun factory, afraid the niggers would come up and steal their jobs, and then the Republicans got control in sixty-one and whose guns were being used for emancipation.
Then another strange one came. Leathery looking fellow No, not dressed in leather he comes later, though I'd heard of him for years.

This other man's name was John Brown and his skin looked like jerky that was salted too much. Had the face of an eagle, and the jaw of Lincoln, may he rest in peace. His eyes were the same color as his skin, and he said he came down from New York and was on his way to Kansas, said that he wanted guns, said muskets would do, that he didn't need any fancy rifling.

He rode into town with his grown sons and they smoked tobacco and watched their father with reverence. Brown would approach someone righteous looking, tip his hat, and ask a question, and when he got an answer he would turn to his sons who had stayed behind and summon them to him. Then they would go on their way and the whole scene would repeat.

He went into city hall, stayed in for a good five minutes before coming back out. Told his sons to stay out and look proud, went back inside. His face had reddened as much as a face as brown as his could. He had taken off his jacket and I could tell that his collar had loosened some amount.

I'm not a snoop. I'm not. I have an eye for things and an ear for things, I'd say.

I sat outside with my back to the mayor's wall, and listened to him and Brown shout at each other. I was out of view of Brown's sons. If they had seen me they would have shooed me like a gnat. They shooed others, women, too. Mrs White had come to take care of some matter of thought of coal on her property, and the Brown boys knocked on the building and John or the Mayor whoever was shouting stopped.
All alright? Mrs White said. She started to walk through the open door and the
Brown boys crossed their arms to block her. She got on her tiptoes and peered
through.

Everything's just fine, ma'am.

Is that right?

Yes ma'am.

Hm. Is that right, Mr Douglas? she hollered.

They did not restrain her physically, but they filled up the space well, and
prevented her entry.

That's right, Mr Douglas answered.

Then I will be going, she said. She tried to look into the window on her pass.
The white curtain showed her silhouettes. One man standing, the other sitting.
She turned back towards the boys, looked white as the curtain she tried to spy
into.

No sense in meddling, one of the boys said. You'll find out soon enough. Our
daddy's the kind of man that likes to, hm, leave a trail behind him. Isn't that what he
says brother?

Oh yes. He does leave him a trail. Only thing is we can't say if it'll be blood or –
Shut up.

Then Mrs White said, What kind of trail?

I might as well tell her. I told her blood or.
The other brother spat. Alright.
What is it?

Blood or

He leaves his reputation behind. He ain't the kind to leave a trail of tears like they do down South.

They both tipped their hats and shooed her along.

I saw Brown peer out the curtains, shut them back solid.

Your city's a little backwards huh?

They voted me mayor.

Well you're running backwards a bit, aren't you?

Look, Brown. I can't give you guns. I like what you're going to do. I support a free Kansas, but I can't give you the guns outright.

Give me the money then. I don't want to use Colt's cheap revolvers. I'm not planning a wild west type shootout.

What are you planning then?

I can't say to you.

You can't say to me because I'm sitting behind this desk, or you can't say because most men wouldn't be privy to your plan.

I just gotta defend. My farm, they took it. They won't sell me guns in Kansas.

There was a pause. They were hinting towards slavery, I think. I wasn't quite decided who Mr Brown wanted to shoot. I was decided on the fact he wasn't going to use the guns only for defense. He had killed before, I could tell. He was the kind of man who would laugh over a downed corpse. I wasn't sure if that was a good thing or
not. Mr Douglas was against slavery, something that I knew because I'd seen black folk run out of his house at dark hours. I heard them speak and heard their accents and they weren't northern niggers, and they had scars on the back of their necks that shined in the moonlight.

Then Mr Brown said that they should speak outside. I heard Mr Douglas's chair scrape against the floor, and then I heard the men leave. Mr Brown asked his sons to step aside. He told them to make sure no one was around, said he had some words to speak in private to Mr Douglas. He said it was growing hot in that office. His collar was spread real wide. I heard the sons shuffle through the path towards me. I figured I better get out. I had the feeling Mr Brown if I were found he'd shoot me for snooping. I was snooping. I was tired. I just was resting. I could've rested other places. But if I did, I wouldn't be telling you all this.

I'll say I eventually learned of their agreement. Mr Douglas'd buy the guns and he'd also admit that the they were from Middletown, if forced to. Mr Douglas didn't have anything much to be afraid of that way. He wasn't going to get shot for selling the guns. We're not lynching territory. That's was why Mr Brown wasn't staying long. That's why he was going to Kansas, to stop the lynching.

Mr Douglas got to eat some cake, too. He let slaves stay in his basement. If the guns were found, they'd be known to be from Middletown. He'd say it with pride. That'd put Middletown on the map as an abolition center. We were progressive, I suppose.

But Mr Douglas didn't want to hurt anyone's business. You can bet the
gunsmiths Starr and North did sell southward, although I don't think you could really call them gunsmiths. They, as men, didn't make the guns. They just owned the people who made the guns, not literal slavery, metaphorical. Employment could quit at any time. Savage firearms wasn't around yet. They came when War was imminent. Douglas asked Starr or North I don't know which to give Mr Brown guns without them having the marks of their maker. In Mr Brown's words, When they pull the gun from my dead hands they would not know which factory it came from specifically, only one in Middletown.

It took Mr Brown a while to draft up that contract; it was around grapefruit sundown when he came out. And it was that crimson sundown when Archy came by the gun factory. I saw him just for a second. I was passing to home.

You know, if Archy'd known what the Browns were gonna do, I think he'd've tried to go with them. I figure Bleeding Kansas would be a fine home for the troublemaker.
Archy admires the brick building. It almost covers the whole city block. He tries to peer in on ground level but only sees his face. His tongue is out and he alternates between squinting his eyes and pursing his eyebrows. The harder he looks the more he only sees himself. He walks to the window and puts the sides of his hands on the glass, and his face to his hands, and he sees nothing.

Could just be the angle of the lights.

He walks backwards. Doesn't even look to see if any mules are coming. He just sees a crimson glare in the bottom window, looks up to the second story just sees more crimson glare. Kind of looks like the whole building is on fire. His reflection is on fire. The bricks do look pretty the way the sun looks pretty this time of the evening, like a day old scrape reopened.
The sunset makes some folks feel good. Archy's heard of older brothers bringing older sisters to the cemetery to watch it. He's getting to that age, but girls don't give him the feeling he's chasing.

He wants to see inside where the guns are made. He's walked by before, during the day when you can only see smoke inside. It moves so fast it looks like it'll wrap a finger around a trigger and pull and cause some sort of massacre. It's a factory; the one his mama works in dresses her skin to look like a minstrel.

Two men watch Archy from the doorway. They smoke tobacco.

The manager comes outside with Brown. The manager isn't Mr Starr. Mr Starr just has his money rung up in the place the way meat is hung up on meathooks. He hands the two men a piece of paper, they all shake hands, and the two men walk to the Washington Hotel.

The manager puts his key in the door. He looks like any other man. He creates killing for a living worse than that he creates death, which is different than a killing; a killing is what grips Archy a nice clean killing. The widow does receive his sympathy.

Hey mister, says Archy.

Yes?

How much is a gun?

The manager walks close to Archy. Archy can smell the pulse of liquored breath.

Depends. I'd say it depends on your budget.

I don't have one of those.
Well, then how're you gonna pay me?

I'll work.

The manager takes his key out of the lock. I've seen you around with that bow.
It works good doesn't it?

Archy makes his arms to hold an imaginary bow. He looks down the arrow. He opens his fingers and closes his other eye and imagines himself rushing through the air dragged by the arrow. The arrow pierces the squirrel again and he comes to an abrupt stop and stare into its eye. He can't imagine what it is like to be dragged by a bullet. To pierce skin by velocity alone.

It works good, he says.

You can make a gun if you can make a bow, says the manager. You just screw what the machine made together. Come in. I'll start you on your budget.

The place smells of coal.

Wait near the door. You step wrong and you're gone to s___.

The manager picks up a stick and walks through the room like a blind man. He weaves through the machinery slowly like a little girl's fingers around the loom. He stops to strike matches and raise them to the lights. Even with the lights on, he uses his walking stick.

Watch for sharp edges, he says. He walks, pauses and Archy can hear the cork being removed from a flask.

Archy follows him to a work bench in the back of the room. He moves slowly, but not as slowly as the manager. There is a large spattered stain by one of the
machines, and he thinks he can see a half moon of a fingernail and more.

The manager pulls out a drawer of a hardware cabinet. There are sixteen drawers and he does not hesitate in his choice. He pulls out a piece of metal that looks like a one inch peeled banana.

You know what this is? he says.

Trigger, Archy says.

He puts the trigger and drawer back. He pulls out another drawer, and pulls out a screw.

What about this sun?

How thick is it?

The manager holds up his fingers about three inches apart.

Then it's the lock plate screw.

Puts it away, pulls out another piece of metal that looks like a ring.

What about this sun?

Well show me the other two rings and I'll tell you.

Just tell me in general then what it is. The manager laughs.

Barrel band.

Alright.

The manager reaches into one final drawer.

Nameplate, Archy says. Lockplate, I mean.

You sure do know a lot about guns don't you kid?

Archy doesn't say anything the way an early teenager doesn't say anything. The
manager looks at Archy a good while. He sits on his stool and slouches and puts one elbow on his thigh and leans forward his head into that palm.

Someone put you on some quest to violence didn't they? the manager says.

He turns around and reaches into another drawer and pulls out a bottle. Takes a dram, turns back. He then continues to look at Archy, who just stands there like a bored undead.

They walk up wooden stairs; the upstairs room is much like the first.

How'd you get these machines up here? says Archy.

The manager does not light the upstairs lamps. We built them up here, he says. He takes a few steps forward. Archy can't see what exactly the manager is doing. Then the manager turns back and walks towards Archy and his features are made clear and the wood in his hands is made clear and he carries with him a musket. He hands it to Archy. The gun is cool in his hands. The manager returns to the table. Archy wants to lift up the gun and pretend to shoot it. It's so dark he doesn't even need to close his eyes to imagine himself someplace else, with deer waiting in line for bullets like old maids waiting in line for corn. But it's not the time for childish games. Archy's at work. He's a working boy. He heard once a woman paused at the mill to bite her fingernail and the manager yelled at her and said he carelessness could cause a lot more to get bit off and then he kept yelling about how much guts he'd have to clean off the floor and then he worked himself up so silly he did fire her outright. Archy doesn't wanna get fired. He wants that paper money.

The manager returns with another gun. Keep your arms out like your holding
firewood for your pops, he says. These barrels are sanded. Won't splinter to you like firewood.

The manager keeps going back and forth until Archy's arms tremble under the weight of the guns.

Downstairs, says the manager.

Archy goes downstairs. He fears he might drop a gun or two or all. All he needs is bullets flying around; a bullet hit's the wrong machine and turns it on and he might find himself chopped in half lengthwise.

I don't like going downstairs either, son. But we have the gun machinery upstairs. We have sword machines downstairs mostly. I know it doesn't make sense. I know it. Last sword we made just to see if we could still make it just so happened we had the parts around. Gave it to Joe Clark I believe. Heard he nigh drowned. Think it was him. You're lucky Mr Brown didn't ask for rifles. Then we'd've had to go up to floor three.

They put the guns on the desk downstairs.

Something tells me Mr Brown doesn't aim to shoot from far away in Kansas. Now, I mean if he does shoot anyone. I believe the guns may just be for defense. It's wild, Kansas is. Alright. This is what we're gonna do. When you called the lockplate the nameplate, you had it right. For this contract we don't want it to be a nameplate. We gotta scrape off Mr Starr's name. We don't want him blamed for what happened out there.

He takes a carpenter's clamp and clamps one gun to the desk. Not too tight
now, he says. Don't want to leave a mark in the barrel. He takes a file and starts scraping at the nameplate. You want to blow on the lock every couple of seconds or so. Don't want the iron fillings to jam up everything. He picks up the gun and points it straight at the cabinet and Archy sees his finger on the trigger and freezes with anticipation. That cabinet's going to explode; the finger pulls and neither bang nor bullet come and the cabinet does not explode.

You can make a gun with Merlin's blessing, the manager says. But what'll get you written about in the papers is if you make a gun that jams when it ain't supposed to. He pulls the trigger a couple more times. He reaches for a bottle of oil and puts it around the trigger. Oil after, he says. You really don't want that gun jamming. Just remember if a gun jams, it isn't only Mr Brown who's dying.

Archy does just like he was told. After the first gun is finished, the manager grabs it and walks to the light and examines the lockplate. The name is unreadable, but it still looks like a Starr lockplate. Something about the way that the letters now look like blocks of scratches in the metal.

We need to sand, the manager says. I need to piss, then we'll sand. Keep filing.

Archy knows the way the poison gets to your bladder. He's taken some of it himself.

He walks up the wooden stairs again. They creak but the manager's drunk. Archy takes one extra gun.

Downstairs again, the manager still outside. Archy opens a window and the window's first noise is the metal rail screeching. Its second is the wind. He takes the
gun and grabs the barrel and lowers it shoulder first into the ground. He figures he can
leave the window cracked a little bit, and then put the gun back inside when he's done
with it. Then it won't be stealing. It'll be borrowing. The manager won't notice the
window open. He won't notice the breeze. One winter his daddy had lots of poison
and slept with no blanket.

Darker night Archy crawls into the window, searches those sixteen drawers for
gunpowder and a ramrod. He has forgotten about the sharp edges, and he draws blood
on his ankle, prays it does not leave a trail.

He makes sure the gun is half cocked. He sets it vertical. He bites the paper of
the cartridge and from it pours the powder down the barrel. It sounds like rain hitting
the river. It will soon ignite and wash the bullet out; a deluge of smoke. He draws the
ramrod out in one motion and does not tilt the gun away from himself. Instead he
stands to the side and awkwardly rams the ball and remaining paper down the muzzle.
He lifts the gun to his shoulder. He cocks the hammer and then aims down the alley.
He aims down towards the river, abandoned, where no one will stand.

Click and boom. Crack of the bullet hitting the wall. A musket does not shoot
straight.

It smells like farts or rotten eggs, except it smells good. He wonders if anyone
else can smell it. His shoulder feels raw; he is small enough to be bruised by the gun's
kickback.

He opens his eyes and they burn in the smoke, and he closes them again. He
hopes that it obscures no bystander's vision. He does not know how large the smoke's cloud is, if it will crawl down the alley, following the bullet that had been fired and now rests warm on the ground. It may drift up and expand, and by morning there may be grey clouds when their rain comes it may smell of gunpowder.

When he opens his eyes again, they burn again. His squints resolve the pain they force the tears to condense in slits, and the tears then thicken in the smallened space, and they are like cheap thick glass that obscure the world into a distorted funhouse.

Smoke goes every which way with up, too. He looks through the haze for another cartridge. He finds it and then finds the ramrod.

When he bites the cartridge, he tastes the sulfur.
I like the city at night. It may be more dangerous, but if you know how to observe you can see things. You can see stories.

Accidents don't happen in the daytime; you see an accident in the daytime, everyone around you sees the accident too, or at least everyone around you hears the screams and comes running out. It's more of an incident than an accident.

Lots of thick skulls in these parts that will sleep through a scream in the night time. Factories are loud and you get used to the noise. You know how you can tell a factory man from a farmer? You wait til they both have six kids and then you go eat dinner with them. When the farmer wants to hear his wife speak he hushes his children. The factory man doesn't.

The moon and the stars gifted their light to the river and the smoke behind the
gun factory hung over them like a worn blanket from childhood. It was night, that's true, but you could see the smoke hardly letting the stars and moon poke through.

There had been one shot. It may have woken some. It could've awoken some such that they couldn't tell if it was reality or part of a dream, or a husband coming home and accidentally letting the breeze carry the door closed too hard.

I didn't know who was shooting, or what they were shooting at. I'd heard of hunters shooting at night to train the reflexes. It helps your eyes. You see just a little bit of movement and then fire to where you think it will be, because you can't see it the whole time, only when it moves. Then in the daylight, when you see it the whole time, it's an easy meal.

I watched the smoke dissipate for a couple minutes. It blossomed out like cream in coffee. You could see stars further out disappear, and the moon crept through the thinning smoke until it hung proud.

Then there was another shot. The first shot, I heard the gun fire first and then I heard the bullet hit the wall.

The second shot I didn't hear the bullet hit the wall. It was like time slowed down, but like it slowed down after the fact. In between the bullet leaving the gun and the bullet hitting the negro, I recalled watching the smoke drift much slower than actual. It felt like I had heard the first shot fire hours ago although only a minute or two had passed. I was sweating and I did not know why, or for how long. It was not a hot night. I wiped my brow. There was no sweat. I was waiting for the bullet to hit the wall, to hit something. More smoke had come up behind the factory and it chased the
old smoke, and a wild cat crossed my path and if it were a dog it would have shown
sadness, but since it was a cat it showed nothing.

How could a cat walk to me before the bullet hit the wall?

The bullet could have pierced the wall, gone through the building, destroyed
the haberdasher's hats, killed a mule, made a bend then another bend, and come back
to lie in front of my feet. I wanted to know where it was.

I know you might be thinking that he shot a blank. I tell you he didn't. Later
the policeman found torn paper with little powders adhered to it. Said that when you
bite the cartridge your spit makes some of the gunpowder stick to the paper. A better
trained soldier uses less spit he sucks his teeth dry before biting and does not let the
cartridge touch his lips. What's important here about the policeman finding the paper
with the powder is that it means it would be a waste to fire a blank. If Archy'd had a
powder horn then he could've fired a blank. I bet he would've fired a blank too. If he'd
had a powder horn, he'd have much more powder than the bullets needed. I also bet if
he were to fire a bullet in this case he would've overloaded and might've blown himself
up instead of the negro.

The cat meowed before I heard that negro's dying groan, but I don't discount
the possibility he meowed after and I confused the order of the two events. The groan
was bad. This was the end of the line. I don't mean an old man dying in his sleep, a
train coming to the last station at night. This train was derailed. I knew where the
bullet went as soon as I heard him. I am curious. I wonder if he heard the bullet before
he felt it. I wonder if his skin was tight as a drum and if it went cluck when pierced.
I've never been on a derailed train. The negro let out a low yell. He'd sing bass in the church choir for sure. He kept going ugh, ugh. I don't recall him shouting for help.

Help was on the way anyway. It was a long moan. I think it was long enough to rouse suspicion. I know that I said people here can sleep through anything but most noises don't last thirty seconds. People wake to persistence.

I saw the boy Archy come out of the alley. He wasn't holding the gun, but I could tell he was the shooter. I could see his paleness, like the moon's, through the smoke. He yelled help. He said, Someone's been shot! People came round soon enough. They came around much faster to Archy than the time he called for people to help Joe Clark? Archy was a rascal but everyone knew he didn't cry wolf.

People just appeared. There's no better way to describe it. They just came out of nowhere. They were all in the street all of a sudden.

There was lots of town talk.

What happened?

Who was it?

What happened?

Huh. Right. No I did not smell your bread baking. Yes I did buy carrots from Mr Sallow today.

Then someone shouted for the doctor. Then everyone shouted for the doctor. Then someone went to get the doctor. Archy was just standing there like a drunk sheep. There wasn't much he could do even though there was a lot he'd already done. He looked neutral in the face. The panic was minutes down the road. The crowd had
quieted enough so that I could intermittently hear somebody tend to the wounded. Shh
don't speak. You don't yell. You don't tell me where it hurts. You just put your head
back on my arm and breath as best you can. I got this shirt to keep you whole.

The negro didn't speak any. He did yell. He didn't yell for anything specific he
just yelled like an animal in pain, which he was. I imagine he lifted his neck off the
woman's arm when he yelled, or he pressed it back so his mouth could yell up to the
air and then dissipate. I imagine he wasted lots of energy tensing his muscles after he'd
been shot. I don't imagine it would've saved him though, if he didn't yell. Maybe he
would've lived more than a few minutes; maybe the doctor may have been able to do
something. Might've been able to relieve pain.

The doctor came and raised an eyebrow to Archy. You stuck around this time,
he said. Come on. Follow me this time, and Archy did.

I could not see them walk down the alley. I can only imagine what Archy felt.
He must've had a good rush when he pulled the trigger, feeling that power. I can't
believe he would want to listen to a man die. He was shot in the belly, a place where
our medicine doesn't do much good, and also a place where death strolls.
He will not follow the river because the river is not straight. It winds through
towns, hills, forests, and machines. It bends around Middletown, halting its expansion.
Happened when the glaciers came through. They just pulled the river out in a c like it
was a prank.

And rivers lead to civilization. Archy figures they'll have his name and
description up in the post office. Everyone going in to send their telegrams would see
it. He's going to go in the wild. It's just camping, though, for a long time. It's not like
in the west where Liver-eating Johnson is. There aren't Indians in the Connecticut hills
anymore. Archy did not believe it when Michael Hurley claimed to see one.

Michael Hurley went Irish, started drinking, said the poison didn't taste so bad
once you got used to it, said it wasn't even poison, said it gave him the feeling. Archy
doesn't see him much anymore. He said Archy could hang on to the bow. He wonders if Michael Hurley knows he shot the negro.

He reaches the road that the mules cannot take if loaded full. It's a steep road.

His arms hurt from carrying his clothes, a blanket, his knife and old bow. Carrying muskets has left them sore. He will make a bindle when there is fine wood to use.

He walks through the forest, stepping on and snapping branches that find themselves under his feet. The wind is slight and causes living branches to bob, makes it seem like Archy's walking on a trampoline. The owls are out but they won't haunt him. They don't scare big animals. Archy once found an owl pellet and took out his pocket knife and cut into it and there were just little bones. There was a mouse skeleton looked like its jaws were open and screaming.

He's heard people leave bear traps in the forest. Then how would people get to the falls? You have to walk through the woods on no trail and then find the path. In the fall all the leaves come down, and their oranges and reds gleam and hide the rusty bear traps. The rust can cause an infection, cause your leg to just about fall off. The infection can crawl all the way into you. Starts crawling the moment you start to bleed.

Archy isn't scared of the bear traps because all the trappers have little tags on their traps. They'll know who to blame if they find Archy lying dead.

Somebody cut steps from the earth and lined them with wood. He takes them,
crosses a bridge over the creek that wails a little bit with each step. The bridge is from a different time, when mules didn't carry so much. It used to be painted white. You can see some white paint on the rocks, paint that slipped through the slats years ago.

This is the part of the trip where he can't tell if he hears the falls or only the creek, and as he walks further on the path he will always hear water. It is the creek, then it is both the creek and the falls, then it is only the falls. Until he sees the falls he will not use his ears. He wants to become part of the wilds.

The valleys come and go as they please, and sometimes he finds himself walking across a hill, grabbing saplings to stay up straight. He hopes he doesn't end up on top of the falls. That can happen. You can end up above where you're aiming for if you're not careful. The best strategy is to just walk straight, and walk so you're a little bit tired. If you're really tired, it probably means you walked uphill too much, and if you're not tired at all, then you just coasted downhill the whole way, and now you'll have to follow the creek up and you'll have to walk through the mud and you'll slip on a mossy rock or two, and it's night out and Archy's a kid so he's got little feet that can get caught wrongways easy.

Archy wants to be just tired enough so that he'll appreciate the cool drink from the pond at the bottom of the falls.

He has aimed true; the falls get louder. You can hear frogs at the top of the falls, but not at the bottom where all you hear are the globs of water hitting the pond.

He puts his face into the pond. He drinks, looks at himself. Water's slobbering off his mouth, and it ripples his reflection. Whiskers may come soon
He walks along the edge of the pond. There are some big rocks where he used
to lay naked in the summer, and now he just walks over them not even thinking about
summers gone. He listens to the crickets and they're chirps are far apart. That means
it's cold out. Someone told him once how you can count and multiply or something
and then you can find out whatever temperature it is. He just knows it's getting colder.

Frogs jump into the pond as he walks along slippery rocks. He feels water
ricochet off the pond. It's a prickly inconvenience like gnats. He's going to have to get
his ankles wet to get to the cave. It's through the hole to the right of the falls, and it's
the kind of hole that gets asked about by children. Kid goes fishing for the first time
and points and asks his dad what that hole is? Where it goes to? His dad just says goes
to a little cave, you can go see it for yourself, and the kid puts down his fishing pole
and the daddy realizes his kid doesn't want to learn how to fish, and this day is daddy
fishing and son playing and then they'll all go home to apple pie. That's the only kind of
settlement the hole and the cave get in one's life. There are better places to play.

Archy remembers the cave warm. If you're inside it and looking out at a long
sunset, you'll just see the rays coming in for you. They'll heat up the cave like an oven
and you can survive for a night, even in the winter.

He walks into it and feels heat in the passageway. He has not been here in six
or seven years. He has grown some. He has to crawl through the tunnel now. He drags
his clothes behind him. He has stuffed his pants and long johns into his extra shirt, now
his bindle bag.

He crawls through the pass and into the cave.
His eyes adjust. He sees nothing.

He reaches behind him for his clothes. He should have waited to run. He should have waited til the real summer. He won't be tried and hanged because the negro was a negro. Someone may be out for revenge though. He could be a sacrifice to the feeling, someone else could get the feeling of hunt.

His eyes are open. The rock is uncomfortable. It digs into his shoulders and he moves but it still digs into his shoulders. He's got tall shoulders. On his side his hip hurts. So he gets up and he moves to the far side of the cave and he leans against it and feels where it pokes his bones. Then he takes his extra shirt and places it behind him and he bunches up the sleeves and places them in between his shoulders and he takes the the body of the shirt and stretches it under his ass. He is not comfortable, but it is better.

He dozes off and wakes up again. The falls sound far off. He can only hear them when he does not move. He wakes and he breathes heavy and does not hear them and then he calms down and hears them and decides that is what woke him. He sees the stars through the entrance.
I can see your confusion. You want to know what John Brown did when the negro was shot, huh. First, I tell you he did nothing. He didn't come out the hotel when the shot was fired. I'll bet he didn't want to get involved. Middletown's over two hundred years old. It's established. Mr Brown was going to Kansas because it was exactly unestablished. There was still a struggle to be had with violence there.

There was a funeral for the negro, over on Vine Street, and Brown had already left. Archy's daddy was there though Archy had disappeared, Joe Clarked, on us. I'll bet his mama was too shamed to go. I'll bet she would've heard lots of things from the negresses about how she raised her child. She didn't want to hear that even if it was true.

Archy's daddy stood tall in the back. He was rightfully shamed to be there, but
he kept his head up. I believe many folks did not know who he was. He was not a town fixture.

The mayor gave a speech with some eloquence. I say some because he was riled up and I don't think you can be red in the face and eloquent at the same time. He stood tall, like he was standing on a soapbox. It is a tragedy that this man fell, he said. It's a tragedy that people are saying this was because he was black. The victim was a man.

All the women in the audience kept saying mmhmm when he said things like this.

It doesn't matter if he was white or black or in between, Douglas preached, no matter what color he was, it's a tragedy. I know many who liked him and many who loved him. Last year Wesleyan put him in his yearbook. He talked to the students as he worked, as he cleaned their floors. I heard some students he was talking about southern students spilled on purpose; they let their inkwells fall and they left their papers. I know the sophomores smoked out the freshmen and left their burnt cigars in the halls. Mr Rosel swept up the ash and didn't complain. Students helped him. I'm proud that people would help him. I think we're making a step in the right direction in attitude towards your people.

Mr Mayor kept going on like that. He was sounding nice. Even Archy's daddy was nodding his head. He even wiped an eye once, I imagine more for his son than for the dead, but nobody else knew that.

I don't have a lot to say about the funeral. I guess I just wanted to say there
was one.

I saw Archy's daddy at the tavern, drinking, later. I don't know where he went in between the funeral and the tavern. I imagine he might've been drinking himself off somewhere. It was early yet after the funeral and he was the type of guy who wouldn't go to the bar by himself. Wouldn't pay the markup on the liquor just to have someone else to pour it for him and converse with. Conversation's free, you know? Stories are free. That's the way it should be. That's why I'm telling you all this, although you can say I paid for the story at the bar.

I'm not saying you shouldn't pay to travel by rail or wagon to talk to someone who you want to hear. What I'm saying is you shouldn't pay someone to talk to you, is all. A story is a story, and if you have to chase it you have to chase it.

Archy's daddy sat at the end of the bar. I take it he didn't want to set himself up for conversation. He was at the close to the door end, to be, well, close to the door. He wasn't teary-eyed but he looked like the wrong word would set him out like a broken aqueduct. He almost wiped his eyes. I'd see him raise his hand with pinched fingers and right when it was an inch or two from his face he'd spread the fingers and rub his temples. I saw his ploy; maybe he was rubbing his eyes dried from liquor. Alcohol is a decent defense though. Makes you start doing things you don't really want to do, then at the last minute you stop, and then it's too late. I'm not saying Joe Clark was drunk when he went to bathe in the river, but he might as well have been. He should've bathed in the falls. There's men waist high in that water fishing and
there's little ledges to grab on to.

Archie's daddy just had to make it til the morning. Then he'd be back on the railroad shoveling coal, working off the hangover. Yeah, his muscles would ache due to that drinking. Can you blame him though? I think physical pain can take the place of mental pain. I think he'd be going further and further away from the incident on the railroad. He might look for his runaway son on the side of the trails. They had a search party out, but they couldn't find Archie. They emptied mule carts and sat men in the places of straw and hay and rode on the turnpike. They let men out, told them to be back here in six hours, then drove the next mile and did the same. The men walked into the forest as deep as they could, two hours twenty minutes deep then walked parallel as much as they thought to the road then walked back another two hours twenty minutes. The muleskinner went on halfway to Meriden. One went up to Rocky Hill.

They had men follow the river. They should've put men on the creeks, too, but they didn't. I don't know if they figured Archie jumped to ship, or what. He was yet a troublemaker.

You know the difference between the river men and the forest men? Nope. The river men didn't want to find him. You ever seen a waterbloated body? Joe Clark looked bad after the water and he was still alive.

It took a couple of weeks for things to calm down after that. They had a candlelighting for Archie in the church. It wasn't as packed as that negro's funeral. Some of Archie's daddy's drinking buddies were there. One man from his work came,
another coal shoveler. Said another one wanted to come to but had to cover for one of the ones taking off. Trains don't stop.

They put a little wax seal with his name in the church. The engraver made the stamp free of charge.
Archy smells a fire in the morning. He aches, like his father or Michael Hurley after the poison.

Day one of the wild. Of the hunt.

The outside world looks hazy.

Outside the cave he can smell smoke, something more than smoke something cooking. It smells foul and sour but something is cooking, was cooking.

He follows the palm's length valley, watches pollen carry off with the smoke, sees the first couple squirrels of the year returning from sleep. He has disassembled his bindle; he carries his clothes under one arm and swings the bindle stick. He swats tall grass and short trees and a small animal scurries at the whack.

There is no meat in the fire pit, just branches and smoke. He takes a stick and
pokes around the fire pit. There're rocks in a circle. Nature doesn't do that.

Archy waits. He takes out his pocket knife and he takes a stick that has not burned completely. He scrapes the bark with his knife, and when the knife reaches the ash, the ash falls into the wind.

It's kind of nice here, he thinks. I can live like this. It's only cold at night. The Indians had their longhouses and they lit fires inside to keep warm. If the Indians can do it he can do it. The Indians aren't around anymore.
I read in the paper about John Brown, it said he killed him some in Kansas, he and his sons. I knew those boys were crazy. They were crazy and devoted. They'd ram a hot spoke up themselves if their father asked them to, I think, so I don't think they found it all too crazy when their father said bring the broadswords, sons. They knew what they were getting into.

Only thing is that the newspaper report said they had broadswords but I know for a fact they used army blades because Starr didn't make broadswords.

There was another article before, I should say. I say because I think it might've said what set Mr Brown off. It said that there was a sacking of Lawrence. I didn't know what sacking meant, but I read on and came to learn what it meant. What a sacking was was a h___raising. Lawrence was built more as a headquarters than as a
town. 1854 was the date. It was a headquarters for abolitionists. I'm sure Mr Douglas had a wire to there. I guess you can't write H___raising of Lawrence as a headline. You'd have to write it as an h with dashes, and it doesn't look too pretty. Doesn't grab your attention.

The slavers tore Lawrence up pretty bad. They found out the hotel wasn't a hotel, that it was a fort, had little holes you could stick your guns out of, and Sheriff Jones had gotten shot there before. He lived and he came back with eight hundred men and he sacked the town. They destroyed the hotel, only left one wall standing. It wasn't a great fort. They threw the news presses into the river.

That got John Brown good and red with anger. No, I'm not supposing that, I just know it.

He was out with the Osawatomie party, he and his two sons and some other men whose names I didn't recognize. The paper said his sons name were Owen and Salmon. Said there was another son but he wasn't with the party. Must've felt some sort of badness coming on. That other son said, Dad don't do anything rash, but he said it the way you say be careful to someone whose running a mule over the falls.

Apparently you never can tell how long a sacking will go for, and John Brown and his Osowatamie company set out to help end the sacking. They brought their muskets and they brought their swords.

Then Mr Brown and his two sons left the party. They went off the main road. It was dark out. It was night. I imagine the camp they left smelled of tobacco smoke and a fire, but I'll bet the new one where Mr Brown and his two sons Owen and Salmon
were, smelled of neither.

That was May twenty-third. I don't know what they did that night and all day the twenty-fourth. The paper wrote that nothing of note happened until the evening of the twenty-fourth. Maybe they played cards or polished steel.

They waltzed on again. I've never been to Kansas, but I imagine it's the kind of land that could get lit up pretty well by the moon and stars. I don't think there's much forest to hide in. They must've walked with that moonglow around them. Mr Brown didn't strike me as the type who would drink whiskey; he was strong enough, straight and true enough with that mind like a mountain, that he didn't need liquid courage in him to do what he was about to do. Those men who sacked Lawrence on liquid courage.

The paper didn't say how far they but they couldn't have walked far because they had plenty of energy when they stopped near Jim Doyle's house.

Jim Doyle and his two sons were slavecatchers.

Mr Brown's crew kicked in the door. Neither Jim Doyle nor his two sons grabbed their guns. It was country quiet where they lived, and there was no reason for them to keep guns near to hand. Mr Brown led them out. They left the sixteen year old son with his mother. John Brown was not a family killer. He just killed who believed was against him.

Kansas is dark but not so dark you can't see your murderer's face. The newspaper wrote that the two Brown boys used broadswords on the Doyles. This is where I point out their error. They didn't use broadswords. They used army swords.
Sabers. I don't like the image that broadswords put in my head. I don't like to think of heavy slashing and hacking and blood flying out of the wounds like a rug being dusted. It's uncivilized and savage. The sabers it's not so savage. It's not as barbaric. It's just a killing. Archy the troublemaker would like it.

John Brown himself didn't have a part in the swordplay. He just shot Jim Doyle in the head to make sure he was dead.
The Leatherman, that's all Archy thinks when he sees him, the Leatherman, he's been heard about for years. The hunters talk about him.

He's smaller than the hunters say. All the kids Archy's not quite a kid, he's just not an adult pictured the Leatherman like he's six feet tall. They pictured him a menace, like the Leather was taken from cattle from h____, like it still flamed on this side of the aether.

There's gotta be a hundred pounds of leather on him. If it wasn't homemade it could be lighter. It's all leather; the boots are much wider than his legs and cover his pants. There are stray flaps all over, and Archy can see where the string has been stitched through previously. The Leatherman squats and Archy can see some bare skin through the leather squares. He's used Mr Russel's elastic as binding.
He has a bow, but he isn't shooting. The bowstring wraps around a vertical stick, and the Leatherman pulls the bow and the vertical stick twists and there's a little smell, maybe, of smoke. Archy can't tell and he doesn't try to smell hard because he doesn't want to make a sound. The Leatherman picks up the bed of straw and cradles it with fingerless leather gloves. He puffs into it.

He holds a neat fire and lowers it to the fire pit to thrive. It's not too warm, but Archy closes his eyes and it seems to get warmer.

If the Leatherman weren't there, he'd feel more of the fire. The flames lick to the leather. Archy keeps his eyes closed and waits until the heat licks his face and it does so seldom he thinks he may be better off running. He could slip away. There's other recluses never did any harm. Joe Clark never did any harm, and he was reclusive, even when he didn't show up so often.

It looks like the Leatherman might even be a little dumb if he is a savage. He hasn't spoken one word. He hasn't looked at Archy. Archy's just a log on the land to the Leatherman; is he part of the land or not?

Archy smells something cooking. Smells like poor meat not like pig or cow. He knows what's cooking can't be bought at the butcher's. He closes his eyes again and waits for a soft breeze to carry the smell.

He feels a poke.

The Leatherman grunts.

Another poke.

Archy goes fetal.
Feels a boot tap him, hears another grunt.

The smell is right near his nose he can feel the warmth but it's getting mixed up with another smell, the smell of the Leatherman. He smells like the river. He smells like the river and Archy opens his eyes and sees an almost remembered face.

His eyes have circles under them, now, and he has a beard but it's not a very thick beard. It's a beard gone wild, though. His head hair just grows and it doesn't part anywhere. It just hangs down and it's uneven and some of it is sticking up on top.

Joe Clark, Archy says.

The Leatherman is silent.

He points to the smell. It's a squirrel sized skeleton on a stick.

This your house? Archy asks. This where you live?

The Leatherman shakes his head no. Grunts.

The cave where I was?

He spits. No. No water.

Then where?

The Leatherman waves his hand all-over.

Huh, goes Archy.

The Leatherman chuckles. His lips are chapped and it hurts him to smile. He points towards town, points at Archy, points back towards town again. Ma, he says. Archy hears phlegm in his throat. The Leatherman crooks his neck, go back, he says.

He's got a funny accent and Archy's conflicted if it's really Joe Clark or not. Joe Clark had no accent, least Archy doesn't think he did. Rarely heard him speak but
curse. Archy once heard a foreigner speak and he didn't say f___ or s___ like Joe Clark did.

Mother. He points again and shakes his wrist, Archy shakes his head naw and the Leatherman shakes his fist.

I can't, says Archy. I'll die.

The Leatherman pushes Archy a bit, a nudge really, says Go. Archy just leans into the push, says No huh, I'm not going.

The Leatherman uses wild force. He's got a lot of muscle in that arm and Archy walks backward loses his footing and lands on his ass. Sits down defeated.

Archy's gotta go back. The Leatherman leaves walks a long way. Archy watches him go until he's so far into the forest he looks like a tree waving.

I can shoot! Archy yells. I got my bow! I can help! I can hunt, too!

The stump does keep walking, doesn't turn back, as if he does not understand English. Archy runs toward him. His toes slip under elevated roots and he falls and he gets back up and by the time he reaches the Leatherman he is dirt dirty. He pulls back his invisible bow, shoots arrows that kill invisible lions.
He'd been coming through Meriden for a while. We just called him the
Leatherman. There wasn't any sense learning his name. He wasn't friendly. He wasn't
mean either. He just was. His demeanor was none.

There was a boy trailing him once. It was ambiguous to me if he was truly with
him or not. The boy would walk on the streets but would hide behind people and carts
and horses as he walked. He cocked his head sideways, leaned out mostly eyes and
watched the Leatherman.

It was somewhat like a younger brother admiring his older brother. They were
clearly not family; the boy did not pull at the Leatherman's coattails; the Leatherman
did not act unkind towards the boy. He walked straight through town and did not
look back. He walked over the rails and through hanging deer and pork ribs, and he
brushed one hunk of meat with his shoulder in aim to send it into the boy's chest and hinder his trail, but the boy had moved further back and the meat had come to a standstill when he passed it.

The Leatherman stopped outside windows and entered stores. He came into my store. He traded me fox hides for survival trinkets. That's what I called whatever he bought, survival trinkets. I could not survive in the wild with just what he bought, some fishing line, an awl, a needle. He did not buy food.

The kid just waited for the Leatherman outside. Maybe the kid thought the Leatherman wasn't going to come out. I saw the kid walk around the building and look for a back door. I wanted to see which way the Leatherman would leave. The shop has a backdoor but the Leathmern didn't use it. He did know the boy would watch him. I'd've let him use it if he wanted; I knew he didn't want to be seen.

I rolled a cigarette and watched. I breathed the fire and after I laid down the butt the Leatherman left. He stood in the doorway and thought about where he wanted to go. He had been in town a bunch and he did not need to look left and right to decide. He just wanted to avoid looking at the boy. I will say that I had reason to believe they were from Middletown. Maybe he just wanted the boy to return home. There is no reason for a boy to be away from his ma and pa, if you ask me. I know there are some vicious mas and pas but that is their place.

I won't drag this out. They walked through town again and the Leatherman looped around the blocks and the kid was unaware. He looked at tavern and hardware signs with wide eyes each time he passed.
The Leatherman did not look back until the newsboy called, Boy shoots negro in Middletown!

Then the Leatherman looked back like a whip had struck him from Archy's tearing eyes. The Leatherman stopped where he was and the boy kept walking and weeping towards him. When the boy was at his side the Leatherman's hands stayed off, but they continued walking together, westward. I wish I could say they were walking into the sunset but I can't.
I can fish, Archy says,

They walk westward on the dirt road. The sun is warm to their necks; the roadbed has cracked and they walk outside the worn wheel trails and dirt shoots off the cusps of their heels and settle in the cracks. When foxes or deer scurry across the road they lift the used dirt and it resettles. Twigs snap in the woods and do not interrupt their silence. Occasionally, the Leatherman coughs and spits and then groans to soothe his throat. The animals rush away as he approaches the road bed and lets the yellow fall from his mouth. The leaves shudder and unlucky ones take the spit and collapse and use their strength to rebend upwards, let the slime slide off.

Archy does not speak. He forgets what it is like to feel the air move through his throat. When he went to school, he used to be silent for hours. The teacher had a
metal ruler one year, and she used it. He remembers remembering the feeling of the
voice grinding in his throat. He wants to remember it for real. He wants to feel it.

I can fish, he says.

The Leatherman groans, and Archy stays silent.

A stream bends towards the road and Archy can hear it and he hopes the
Leatherman has been thinking of his statement. The sun has risen and hunger has set in
Archy's stomach. It wouldn't take him long at all to find a fish. Archy wasn't dumb
enough to forget a fishing hook and wire when he left Middletown. How else was he
going to survive? You can't eat lake meat everyday; you need land meat too. He still
carries his bow. The arrowhead is stained from the black squirrel. It's his only arrow.
He knows it is foolish to keep only one. It is not enough for years.

The sun hits their eyes and the Leatherman walks off the road and the maple
canopy shields the sun. Sunlight peeks through only intermittently. He walks on no
path and Archy wonders where he is going. Where are the bear traps? Are there bears
here? He does not know how far they have walked. The ground feels the same and the
temperature is the same and they are not walking closer to the sun because it looks the
same after each step.

They walk deep into the forest. It has been sunny and dry Archy has felt it in
his nose but the leaves and moss are wet. The Leatherman stops moving and Archy
does not stop moving and the Leatherman turns and he is holding a gun and he points
it at Archy.
They walk and when the Leatherman stops again Archy does stop and the gun is then pointed down the dark towards something Archy cannot see and the gunfire and smell recall Archy's memory to shooting the negro. Like a fever dream.

The fox's mouth hangs open and its saliva leaves their trail. It takes minutes to find the second fox, scared, and Archy is still following and the Leatherman shoots the second and he picks it up and holds twin foxes.

It is warm under the trees. The sulfur travels with the wind and grasps leaves.

A new cave. No water near it. He lays the foxes on their backs and takes out his knife and on one he cuts from the breastbone down to the loins. He separates the foxes insides leaving filth from his hands on the muscles and organs. He carves around a forelimb, separating skin from bone. He pushes it through the hide, removes the ligaments, and sets the leg and meat to the side. He does this to each leg, until there is just the column of the fox's head and breastbone and ribs. He carves the skin from the head and sets the skull aside. He carves from the ribs. The fox hide is put in Archy's bindle. He hands Archy the knife.
There are swindlers. We thought the Leatherman was a swindler at first. Didn't know how he'd swindle but we thought he would. He didn't look smart enough to be a great swindler. He wasn't like that proprietor-mayor who swindled a whole townful of people. Then the swindle got going and all those people had to come back swindling. We move to where the water is. We know you need a river.
Archy has never been to New York and his geography is not good. They follow the road to a small town with an Indian name. The sign has the Indian name and it also says New York and Archy is confused because he hears New York he thinks New York City not New York State. There are no tall buildings in this Indian named town.

It is a collection of buildings that will dust well; the town is new and was built prematurely. The railroad was supposed to come and it never did. It's got that Indian name, but no Indians ever did live here.

The windows are dusty and dirty and this is New York this isn't Kansas. The windows are not broken and they do not shine. There is no reason to break a window. There is nothing to steal.

The Leatherman stands in the middle of the town, at the crossroads near the
post office. Grass has grown out of the road but it isn't as green or as lush as the grass of the yards. When the Leatherman stopped it was unexpected to Archy. Archy stumbled and stopped and he has not recovered his equilibrium, his mental equilibrium. Why did he stop? he thinks. The Leatherman hasn't stopped for nothing like this before. The Leatherman stands and Archy is behind and Archy cannot see what the Leatherman is looking at. The Leatherman moves his head from side to side, but not enough so that Archy can see if he's smiling or what not. He does smile, sometimes. Archy thinks he's got a good sense of humor, like when they came to a creek shore and Archy grabbed a stick and drew a war horse and the Leatherman, he came over and turned it into a unicorn. Archy didn't think it was that funny. It was more goofy than funny. Archy just didn't expect him to do anything like that.

They could choose any house to sleep in. It's dusk and they've walked ten or so miles today and it's not all happy walking. Roads are meant for horses. Archy's feet hurt and the pain won't go away even though he's just standing still. The Leatherman walks into the post office and Archy reluctantly follows. No way I'm going to sleep in the post office, he thinks, but he follows him anyway because where the Leatherman goes, there is survival.

The door of the post office opens, unlocked. The postmaster is gone. His ghost is gone. The counter is dusty and somebody has written goodbye with the fingers in its dust. Archy walks behind the counter, the Leatherman laughs, and Archy goes to the telegraph machine, pushes the button. He once saw the postmaster push the button, and smile under his mustache. Looked like a walrus. Archy couldn't figure out how it
was communicating, but it was fancy and expensive. He watched the metal touch metal and he heard the clicks and the postmaster looked bored except when he was looking at Archy. Then the postmaster would throw out the letter and move to the next and start punching the button again.

It used to be that whenever something noteworthy would happen, like mama buying a fancy new hat made from materials that would make the hatter crazy, she'd say I gotta tell Uncle Bill about it when I telegram him next, and Archy would wait until she came back from the post office and he'd ask about the telegram to Uncle Bill, and she said she didn't tell him about the hat, and Archy would ask well what did you telegram about, and she'd say this and that. Then nothing noteworthy would happen for two weeks until Archy's dad came back from the railroad.

A dog barks, almost, almost howls with the desire to be a wolf, somewhere.

There are advertisements on the cork board for small earthen wares and for shipping. Tabs have been cut onto the bottom of the ads, for people to grab, but only one has been taken, from the earthen wares.

The Leatherman runs his finger along the text of a wanted poster. There are many of them. Some are hand-drawn. The thick lettered ink drips and the pictures of the outlaws generic yet it may not have mattered, for description can go a long way in a community. You can say the man had the same brow as Mr Todd and that he had the same eyes as Mr Coal and that approximation is fine enough. Nobody was worth murdering in town, just the proprietor-mayor, and he was not around so often even though he said he would be. He said he'd be right there growing the tomatoes and
growing the community and all that's there are weeds.

Those who have nothing lead themselves to poor morals.

Cuckolded, was for one poster.

Theft of a pig.

A poster for arson. The tomatoes were destroyed.

Archy reads the poster for Tom Ames. That poster's been in every post office we've been to, he thinks. The list of offenses is shorter here. The picture of Tom Ames is professional. The rangers have been here

Safe, says the Leatherman and his phlegm. He goes outside and spits on the ground then walks back in to the post office, grabs the Tom Ames poster and folds it into his pocket. Ames, he says.

They leave and the Leatherman spits again, in the road not the yard.

Far tomorrow, he says. He points towards New York. Archy can see far down the road. There are birch trees and maple trees that aren't good enough for syrup, and he knows they will bake on the road tomorrow. There is a muted purple hill far off and there is no smoke or other sign of civilization between him and the hill. It doesn't look like too big a hill. It's not as big as Mount Higby looked when they were first outside Middletown, when Archy looked back and said goodbye to his home.

More dogs bark. Birds chirp. Neither of them know what kind of birds they are. The Leatherman has heard the birds before. He knows what they look like. He knows the red one's go woo woo wooooop and the blue ones go woop woop. Archy doesn't know that stuff. He's just starting to listen to the birds now. There's not much
else to listen to on the road. It's just the leaves rubbing up against each other, or the branches bending and creeking if it's real windy, or if it's real windy then a branch might break and if that happens then either the forest animals with quick reflexes will scurry or they won't. A dying whimper, maybe. Joe Clark pretends to be foreign and speaks little.

They walk towards houses. Archy wants to sleep somewhere on his own. It was always sleep in the room with John. He couldn't sleep at Michael Hurley's. There was never any room. There was Seamus, and Patrick, and the others whose names he had forgotten. He used to know them. He misses Michael Hurley.

The Leatherman leads to a house with a pen surrounding a small dirt patch with a hog trough. There's got to be two rooms in there, at least, one for mama and papa and one for the children. He walks in front of the Leatherman not to lead but to explore his new room.

No.

Archer doesn't hear.

No.

Archer doesn't listen.

No! Owner.

Archer's halfway in the door and he hasn't kicked the dirt off his shoes and he turns around fast. If he's in trouble it could be it. He could be sent back home. He's just tagging along. He thinks he may be able to live in the wild on his own. It's not so bad, really, you just stop in cities and somehow god finds you and gives you bread and
soup, and it doesn't taste so bad. He could learn how to make a fire bow.

   Come.

   He does.

   They sleep in the barn. On hay. Hay is not as comfortable as moss. The smell of pigs has left the barn.

   The wild dogs remember fire. It is fire season.

   In the middle of the night Archy hears the howls. They sound refined and unnatural, like an actor about to rape on stage, who knows what he is doing is wrong anywhere but the stage. The dogs used to bark and their masters used to come and then the dogs barked and no master came and the dogs did not use to scratch on the doors to be let in but winter came and when they did, their masters were all gone. The dog is not smart. The dog does remember the fire and the soup pot, and the warmth. And though the dog was trained to lie on the feet of the masters, to keep them warmed, it is true that they kept the dog warm as well. The dogs have adjusted to humanless town. They are the new masters but they aren't as masterly as the humans were. The dogs cannot open the door knobs and kindle the fires and they cannot feed themselves swine bones.

   Intruders.

   The dogs do come back to town. They do not howl in town, only on the outskirts, where they are no longer dogs. Though they come back often, they have not yet seen the Leatherman. He's been through. He's got his loop. Three-hundred sixty
miles every thirty-four days. Archy does not know about the loop. Archy doesn't ever think about where they are going. He just follows.

The Leatherman watches Archy sleep. His lungs go and his chest rises and falls. The Leatherman cannot sleep. The hay is too comforting. He doesn't want to leave Archy alone. Doesn't want him to think that he's been abandoned.

A dog comes into the barn. Archy is closer to the door and the dog licks his face like it used to lick other faces. The Leatherman can't tell what kind of dog it is. The dog must smell him. The dog leaves Archy and goes to him and the Leatherman pets him. He feels the dog's ribs under thin skin. The dog curls against his leather.

Morning light creeps through the slats of the barn and the straw turns to gold. Archy feels it on his face and wakes. He lies on his stomach and his arm raised above his head, he glances at the Leatherman, who sits up. The Leatherman looks tired. He is looking around the room like he lost something.

Archie gets up and walks outside. It smells like morning and the birds are chirping. It may be a blue one, or a red one. He does not see.

He walks around the backyards. Where grass still grows it is overgrown and weeds knick his ankles like barbs. He searches for food. They have eaten berries and onion grass from the woods. There must be something better here. If sweet fruit grows in the forest, all by itself, then there must be a carrot or potato left in this town. People couldn't've have left that long ago. The houses look like some of the ones back in Middletown, the really old ones where the negros live. In this Indian named town
they look regal.

Archy wanders for a while, not finding anything. He walks around the town many times. He looks inside each house and counts the number of wood panels. Then he walks around again and he says the number of panels in his head and looks into the house and sees if he is right. He is not right often. He walks around town again, and this time he is right.

The Leatherman is still in the barn.

We leaving? Archy says.

The Leatherman shakes his head.

Why not?

We Wait.

Sleep. The dog licks Archy's face again. It sleeps with the Leatherman again. The Leatherman ties rope around its collar and hours later the dog whimpers as it tries to leave. It wakes Archy but Archy thinks it's just a dream and he falls asleep.

Go.

The Leatherman speaks with a bit of life to the dog. His accent slightens. He speaks to the dog as if it were an old friend. It is reluctant to his command.

Hunt.

The dog runs in a little circle around the Leatherman. It wags its tail, it beats against his leather covered leg. It sounds a dull and repeating thud.
Archy stands behind and watches the Leatherman try to turn the dog into a hunter. Maybe its daddy was a hunter, or its grand-daddy, but this dog doesn't look like a hunter. It looks just like your regular old Spot.

Stay.

The dog doesn't stay. The Leatherman asks Archy to hold on to the dog. Archy never liked dogs much but he does hold on to the dog. He waits. He hears a bang, which means food is coming.

The Leatherman? hand drips blood.

He holds the squirrel in front of the dog, who shows no hesitation before jawing to it.

Son of a b____, says the Leatherman. He wipes the squirrels blood off onto the grass, then watches more blood flow from his finger. He slaps the dog. Archy doesn't like dogs but he doesn't like seeing them slapped.

The dog does not notice the beating and just eats the squirrel. The dog coughs a sound of death. It eats fast it eats those little bones that aren't noticed until they are thrown up. The dog will heave later.

Go.

He says it meaner this time and points to a squirrel down the road.

Chase, he says.
The dog runs forward a little bit then does a little doggy skip step and turn and faces the Leatherman. It jumps up and down like a crazy. It's halfway between the Leatherman and the squirrel. Archy's eye is on the squirrel. It's looking squirrelly. Archy's afraid the dog isn't going to get it and is going to get slapped again. It's not a hunting dog.

The Leatherman puts his hand up, gestures hold on, dog, to the dog. He snaps a stick and the dog jumps more and more fervently. It's whimpering and slobbering. If it whimpers any louder then that squirrel might sense it and go squirrel off to the woods.

The Leatherman throws the stick and aims it at the squirrel. He knocks the squirrel out. Archy doesn't know if that's what he aimed to do. He might've just wanted to get the dog running.

The dog runs to the stick and squirrel and only comes back with the stick.

The Leatherman takes the stick and hits the dog.

Dinnertime.

They're all hungry, The Leatherman, Archy, and the dog. They're still walking along the road to a destination known only to the Leatherman. It is getting dark, and neither the Leatherman nor Archy see the squirrel that the dog sees. The dog goes coyote and runs after the squirrel and the Leatherman pulls out his revolver and shoots. The dog turns back to dog and whimpers. The dog is in the first layer of trees off the road and the owls hoot and animals moved through the leaves at the sound of
the gun, but they still hear the dog whimper.

Archy does not like its death.
We're a river family. I'm furthest west, along the Hudson. My daddy left
Middletown and stopped at the next big river, the one he was too tired to cross. I still
have a cousin in Middletown. We write back and forth, sometimes. I wrote him about
the Leatherman, and he did not believe me. His memory is finer than mine, but I
believe it was about fifty-eight when I wrote him first about it. Fifty-eight or fifty-nine.

He wrote back and said I was pulling his hams. My letters got a little bit longer.
He claimed I invented details, but they were true details. I wrote about the stained
blood on the Leatherman's leather, and about the way the widows would leave bread
for him. It took my cousin a long time to write back after I said that the Leatherman
had himself a traveling companion.

I remember the image real well. They were up at the top of town, on the side
of town opposite the river. The river's on the west side of Peekskill like my family, they
never crossed the Hudson. The sun was behind them, so I suppose it was morning. I
didn't say it was morning in the letter. I just mentioned the kid. I figured I didn't want
to give too many details.

By the way, I did eventually get a reply. It said the Leatherman was seen, and
there was a comment about a church and an engineer.

The kid looked like he belonged in Peekskill. He walked like other kids. I have
a theory that kids in industrial towns walk harder and with less regard than kids in
other towns. We had a denim factory. Middletown had the elastic factory. Clothes
were cheaper.

The Leatherman stopped at street corners and looked around. He took his
time, just surveyed, noted little changes probably, changes too little for residents to
know. There are gradual changes that you'd only see every thirty-four days, which was
how often he came. Flowers may have bloomed and blossomed, or animals may have
died. We wouldn't notice those things; or we'd be over them.

The kid watched children play stickball. The kid did not smile with his mouth
but he smiled with his eyes, like he had played stickball before but was too old to now.
The ball rolled to his feet and the children yelled Hey mister! and the kid held the ball
with nostalgia before throwing it.

The Leatherman? He just did his normal business. He didn't speak. He went to
the general store and bought his rope, bullets, and gun powder. He had his knife
sharpened. He went to the tanner and fixed up his leather.
That's a process that I can't tell you much about. I do know the Leatherman did whatever it was the tanner did himself. I saw him take off his Leather. He was scant even though he had a round face.

Then he kind of just sat around. He never went to the almshouse. He could've had a bed. We'd've let him stay there for as long as he wanted. We had vagrancy laws but he's no vagrant. We liked him. He was weathered as h____. He looked like he could be related to everybody, or nobody. He knew his leatherworking, but I asked Jake Alpaugh the tanner if he'd known him, by kin or profession, and all Jake said was, If he's kin I wouldn't charge him.
Archy does not sleep well outside Peekskill. He looks at the moon and watches smoke obscure it. Sometimes a gust of wind pushes the smoke aside and Archy can see the moon's craters.

He can smell the smoke, and it smells like Middletown. He remembers sitting on Indian Hill and holding up his fingers to the smokestacks, to North's factory and Starr's factory, and he knew how long it took to walk from one to the other, but from the hill they were finger lengths apart. He did not leave the Leatherman's side even though he wanted to. He wanted to go down to the river, whose name he did not know. It looked as wide and as dirty as the Connecticut, and he wanted to know if it felt like the Connecticut. He wanted to know if it had mud for shore rather than sand.

Joe Clark is now the Leatherman and even though they're different people,
Archy can understand why neither would want to go near the river. He remembers when he almost drowned. He remembers the feeling, sort of, the feeling he enjoyed, watching Joe Clark gasp for air. He remembers seeing a fox struck with a stickball ball. He wished that the fox had died, not because the fox would be better off but because he wanted it to be in fast pain and then go cold just as quickly.

He doesn't think that way anymore. He doesn't remember the feeling, just that he had the feeling. He's killed and eaten a few foxes. People in town, back home and probably in Peekskill too wanted their hides. He and the Leatherman would sell them. Hats were made.

Archy wants to stay warm as long as he can. Blood is warm on your hands but it freezes in the winter and stains your hands and teeth, and that doesn't look too good. The Leatherman scrubs the blood off the leather when he can. You can kill something and the blood stain stays. Gut stains stay. Archy has been walking the thirty-four day loop. He sees the stains, on rocks in the woods sometimes splashed with waterfall water. The kills are not fresh. He remembers when he killed the negro. That was the last time it was fresh.
Archy grows hair from one ear to the other, down around his face. He rarely
looks at himself. He rarely faces water. The Leatherman looks at the beard from across
a meal fire, motions up and down his own face with an invisible razor.

Archy smiles, not understanding the message. He thinks the Leatherman is
going to shave off his own beard. He has some humor. The Leatherman points at
Archy, and motions the razor again.
The Leatherman purchased a razor next time he came back through here, Peekskill. Thought we were going to see him shave his beard off, but we didn't. Saw that boy shave his off, though I wouldn't call what he had a beard. Just long little snips of hair he had the kind that you get when you're that age. They were barely visible blond little things.

You do know they were sweaty when they'd come in? That's when you'd see the hairs, when moisture hung off them, when moisture hung in front of his upper lip and not on or off his upper lip.

I never thought I'd see the kid age, but I did. I saw him grow taller. I saw him grow more muscle, and lose some of the baby fat he had on him, though he didn't have much baby fat to begin with. I shook his hand once, because I met him, I said my name
and he said his, Archimedes, and he had calloused hands. He didn't shake hands til he was older. Young men don't shake hands too often.

They'd take food from the widows, who could not adjust their recipes down from two to one. They ate well. They ate swine sometimes, with maple juices. They used to not do that. It took them a couple years, by my estimate they'd been back twenty, twenty-five, times before I saw them take food. I guess they'd used to want to survive on their own.

That's alright. Farmers do that, survive on their own. Farmer might have scratched arms from tilling or whatever it is farmers do, but the boy and the Leatherman, the wild two, had scratches all over. They had sore necks from sleeping on moss. Farmers sleep on beds.

They were wild. They wandered. They didn't just live in the woods in Peekskill. They lived in the woods all over. They found caves. I got letters about them. My family is spread all throughout New York and Connecticut, and that's just where they wandered.

I'd say they overlapped some with civilization. There were parts of it they overlapped with and parts they didn't. They bought what goods they couldn't make from the store: the child's clothes, the needles to sew with, the tanning supplies, apples because wild apples do not taste good and are rife with bugs. They bought shoes a while back not here in town I don't think. I believe they tried to go Indian on a deer, tried to make Indian quiet shoes, and failed. Specialization, I guess. We got a guy who specializes in shoes. The two of them specialized in survival, I guess.
Some town on no river, the Leatherman in the general store. He takes out his silver coins and says bullets and the cashier shakes his head.

We ain't got them, says the cashier.

Uh.

We're running a war, you know.

Uh.

You should enlist. Not you, your companion. You've got big arms. They look steady. They're offering good bounties now, you know.

I seen the poster, says Archy. Where can we get bullets?

Hm. The cashier leans onto the glass display case. It is emptier than it has been. The jacks, toy soldiers, and metal trinkets are gone. You gotta go to a factory, I'd say,
says the cashier. You can go up to Springfield, though Middletown's closer.

Midtown, says the Leatherman. River? On the river?

On the Connecticut.

How far's Springfield, says Archy. He doesn't know any other geography besides the oval he has circled for years, between the Hudson and the Connecticut, always south of Springfield.

Farther than Middletown.

Map? says the Leatherman.

It'll cost you.

The Leatherman slides his coin. He does not want to watch the cashier's black teeth talk. He and Archy leave, bulletless, and sit outside in the town green. They look like adventurers. Children think they are explorers from the West.

Springfield, says Archy. We gotta go to Springfield. I'm not going to Middletown. I can't go to Middletown.

You should've when I said to, says the Leatherman, slipping his accent.

The Leatherman points at the map near Middletown. He follows his finger up the Connecticut river, near Springfield. He rubs his finger across the river. Cross, he says. No. No crossing.

You hate the water that much, huh?

No crossing.
I didn't believe any of them. I guess they figured their cousin in old Middletown was in need of a prank. They kept talking about this Leatherman. It was cruel. I heard of some strange figure around the woods, near Meriden, but a man dressed in Leather never. I have to see something to believe it. They wrote a boy followed him around.

It was lots of years they kept it up. I don't keep letters; I have a good memory for things. I know letters stand up better than spoken word in court, but I've had to go a few times to act as witness, and I recalled with perfect memory.

The punchline hit me like an actual punch. I got butterflies in my stomach and my heart dropped and then gravity did make it pump harder. I recognized them right away Joe Clark and Archy the troublemaker. They looked different. You can imagine how they looked different. You know the story. You know how they wandered around
the woods for a while. I don't need to catch you up on that part. I'll only tell about when they hit Middletown again.

They came when General Mansfield was in town, trying to recruit for the war. There was rumor Johnny Reb was going to come north and strike. We'd lost a few battles before, and we weren't feeling too hot. We were dogged. When there was talk about Johnny Reb and the south and defeating them, we were alright. We'd let someone political stand up on the soapbox and tell us how it was. We'd let them yell and holler and then we'd yell and holler. They'd preach on about defeating the south and raising our flag down on Richmond again. They'd preach on about slavery and no one was scared of the slaves anymore. The Irish weren't scared of the slaves anymore. There were lots of jobs opening now, though you could notice that there still weren't many negros in town. I don't know. I just don't know.

Mr Douglas was speaking when they came back. There was a good sized crowd because Mansfield was going to speak. He had some blue coats with him who looked a lot better than some of the other soldiers who'd come back. These ones had their arms and legs, and they were still alive.

I guess you've figured out I watch crowds. You should know we're crowd watchers. When Mr Douglas left the soapbox and General Mansfield took it, I wasn't looking at General Mansfield. I was looking over the crowd. That's when I saw them, that's when I knew my cousins weren't joking about the Leatherman and the boy who followed.

I was on the side of Mr Mansfield, and I didn't have to turn my neck too much
to watch them. I kept one eye on them, and one on Mr Mansfield. Some in the crowd may have seen me glancing sideways; some even glanced themselves but I don't know if they saw what I saw. They did not have the same drop in their heart as I had.

I listened to Mansfield for a while. He needed more men, that's what it came down to. There weren't many men in the audience. Many of them had already left. Every body counts, I guess. I guess that one man with a good shot can take out a reb or two.

You can only listen to that for so long, and I'd heard it before. I'd heard the talk about the bounties, how they were going up.

I followed the Leatherman and the boy. I saw them go into the general store and then I waited.

Yup. It was Joe Clark and Archimedes the troublemaker. He had matured some, the boy, and had filled out well. He had muscle, and scars on his lips. His jaw had become defined; I could see it even though there was dirt on his face.

I had a lot of questions I wanted to ask them, just the usual ones, things anyone would want to ask. I had more for Joe Clark. I wondered why he left after he almost drowned. Why didn't he go when he could've when his brothers went when he could've gone to Ohio and done pretty well. H___, he could've gone further west and been a frontiersman and done just fine. I did say Joe Clark was smart. He could've been mayor of a Dokata, or gone prospecting for gold.

I didn't ask the questions, of course. I can respect space. I understood that they didn't come back to Middletown for a long time, and that the reason was Middletown
herself, and they didn't want to make a deal of their return. I don't know why, exactly,
you could only get in Middletown.

They recognized me certainly. I'm sure others recognized them. I saw others
look at them, lots of others. No one said anything to them. They were the first to talk
to us.

It happened when they were walking out of town, to leave I suppose, for good.
They had got whatever they wanted in that store. They were walking fast out of town
and weren't looking at anything but the ground. That's how you can tell when someone
doesn't want to be somewhere if they're looking at the ground.

They walked by the church, and Mansfield was there, and he called to them.

Can you lend me aid?

Mansfield is a tall man, and he wore epaulets. His shoulders looked broad, like
Main Street. He had worked with Robert E. Lee in Mexico.

The Leatherman and the troublemaker stared at him like dead deer.

Not conscription, said Mansfield.

They stood still. They only brushed against society. They were not a part of it.

We need to move the church. You men look strong.

Move the church? said Archy.

Yes.

The whole building?

Yes.
Huh.

Mansfield asked anyone who came within earshot. Lots of people were coming by since it was Sunday. They were going to church anyway. I can't explain why they were moving the church on a Sunday, but I figure since everyone worked Monday through Friday and rested on Saturdays, Sunday was the only one left.

Archi and Joe Clark stared at each other. They were talking but their mouths didn't move. They saw Mansfield recruit more men and they looked at the church. Men dug around its edges. There must have been fifteen or so. You'd hear their shovels chink stones and then occasionally you'd hear the choir inside. They had to move the church while a service was going on. It was an all day affair.

I'd seen Archy go into that church many times. His mama'd bring in him and take him out. It was the church where they had his memorial.

Archi walked forward first, asked General Mansfield for a shovel. The General patted him on the shoulder, told him he was a good man, told him he was a good Christian soldier even though he wasn't yet a soldier.

The Leatherman watched Archy shovel. He saw those wild arms dig, saw Archy's shovel carry more dirt than anyone else's. Joe Clark never went to church, and neither did the Leatherman.

If the workers were outside a negro church, they would have shoveled in rhythm to the spirituals. There were the long syllables of the church choir behind them and it seemed to me like they were haunted to dig, and Joe Clark had not caught the haunt, like Joe Clark couldn't be haunted. He did not move when he watched and had
no reaction. Archy, every fourth or fifth shovel, would look up at Joe Clark.

    He left the shovel down, said, One second, General, and went to Joe Clark.

    You're not going to help?

    No.

    You sure?

    Yes.

    Are you mad?

    No.

    I'll see you.

    I watched the Leatherman walk away. It was the end of something. The Leatherman walked and did not look back at Archy, and Archy did not look at the Leatherman. I can't say how they felt.

    I believe the image should suffice.

    The men kept digging and ladies who were not in church brought them water. They stopped when there was a ditch surrounding the building. The choir flared up. It was a holy image, like the church wasn't part of our land, like it was separate and white and golden.

    Mansfield had planned out the route. They were to move the church diagonally across Main street. He drew a thick line with paint from the corner of the church to where the corner would end up on the other plot of land across the street. Horses and wagons had worn the line some.

    Mansfield gave his volunteers only a short time to rest. They sipped water. He
was a good General and could work men to the bone. I would hate to see him in battle. He wore his gun outside his pants, and his hand hovered over it.

He ordered men to grab levers. He had used his army connection to bring them to Middletown.

Give me a lever and a fulcrum, and I will move the world, said Archimedes.

I didn't think they would lift the building, but Mansfield looked confident and determined. Some of the men had taken their shirts off. There were muscles I didn't know existed on their backs that showed as they pressed on their levers. The levers were strained and they should've more, I think. I'm no engineer but three or four more would've done the trick. Mansfield was used to using what he had. That seemed to be a theme of the times. The soldiers he had with him were clothed in fresh blue, but I'd heard lots about other soldiers who felt wind on their bare backs.

They had the church two or three feet in the air, tilted, just the corner I mean. Some other volunteers, people who had dug but were not now lifting rolled logs under the church.

Lift harder! Mansfield yelled. Right more! No! No! No!

His hand gripped his pistol.

Faster! They're struggling holding up the church! You want to make them work harder!?

The men lifting let the church down on the logs.

Then they lifted again, further back and moved the log back. They ran more logs under the building. They kept going back and lifting then putting more logs under,
til the whole church was lifted up, til everyone in the church was closer to heaven.

The men were visibly beat by now. I'm sure they felt like slaves. I'm sure some of them wanted to go to war now, for slavery, for freedom. No one should do this work for free. I wouldn't want to. I didn't volunteer. I just observed. I was just a records keeper.

They rigged up some mules, ran rope all around the church, quite the length of rope and then rigged that up to the mules. There were enough to cover the whole street width-wise. They started moving like they were born to work together. The ones in the middle of the pact were cramped; mule rib locked against mule rib and like a fine factory they moved the church.

Stop! Stop the mules! Mansfield yelled when the church had moved off a few of the rear logs. Halt them!

You could tell he just wanted to grab for that pistol and fire a shot into the air. But that'd send these civ mules running, and the church a-tumbling.

They ran the logs from the rear to the front, moved the church forward, then ran more logs from the rear to the front.

The church service ended while the church was in motion, and General Mansfield walked up to the church steps they led to thin air now and he grabbed the wrist of every lady who came by and he led them down to safety.

Archy's mother came out, but she did not glance at the laborers, and Archy did not glance at her. He always was determined, I'll say, just not in the right ways.

Moving church is a right way. Shooting people isn't, what I meant.
When they moved the church in position, the front door became the backdoor. They couldn't figure out how to turn the church. When they crossed the street they didn't turn it. Mansfield just couldn't get the mules to turn the right way. He still was a fine engineer though. He set up the defenses about Washington.
The river smells the same as it did, and when he walks in, it feels familiar to his feet. He had never feared the water, but now he does not for anything it has done to him, but for what it has done to the Leatherman. He does not fear a calm river. He fears torrents, when water froths and knicks your ankles like barbs and can leave needlemarks up to your thighs.

He used to lay awake, in the wilds, and think of walking to rivers or ponds. They were near the caves, but he did not go because the Leatherman would not and did not go.

They would go to shallow creeks and ankle deep ponds and scoop water into their faces and the Leatherman, he gripped the mud tight and barely touch his face to the water, and Archy would submerge his head, in the summer, and in the winter he
would not. In the winter they would fear walking on frozen rivers.

Maybe it was appropriate that water ruins leather. Maybe it was an excuse so he couldn't go to the water.

Archy walks into the Connecticut, naked. He swims. He still can. He tastes the metallic water and spits it out. It is like a brass gloved hand surrounding him. The waves are faint and he moves closer to shore and further from shore with the undertow. He holds his breath until it feels like his lungs are closed, the walls touching each other. A pull in his chest. He knows he'll swim back up. Does it look like he'll swim back up? Is there a child watching him?

He does not want to draw attention to himself. He feels his shoulders and back part the water and the warm sun hits them and shines like a beacon. Child, if you're there, will you run to me?

Archy remembers –

He comes up gasping. Did the child take his clothes uphill? Is someone yelling. He can't hear anything but his own breathing, and he holds his breath but he cannot hold his breath long enough to calibrate his ears.

He walks to the shore naked. He puts on his clothes. He looks uphill at the town and he sees long shadows from buildings reaching down to him. Tendrils. They pull him back up, because they cannot push him across the river.
The men lined up single file and came through and Mansfield shook all their hands. Except Archy's. He had gone. He went down to the river.

Mansfield spoke to each man about the war. Some of the men were older, and these men he thanked for doing a service to god. He said you'd make a fine soldier in your day, to them. He did not waste much time talking to the men who couldn't go to war.

There was a drunk he spoke to:

You'd make a fine soldier, he said.
I'm a fine soldier, said the drunk.
You could be better, said Mansfield. I've worked with some similar to you.
Similar to what? said the drunk.
You're drunk.

I am. So what? You gotta be drunk to go to war, to get shot up, I'd figure you'd be crazy if you weren't drunk. Grant's drunk.

I said I'd worked with some similar.

You saying I can be like Grant?

Maybe, said Mansfield. If you'd try.

Mansfield had the drunk buttered up. His hand was off his pistol. Mansfield had to recruit. He needed bodies. He told the drunk to stop by the post office later, where Mansfield would be. Perhaps he could be convinced if sober.

I saw Mansfield smile before I saw the boy return from the river. I recalled when Joe Clark nigh drowned. That was the last time I saw him come up the hill.

You didn't say a word the whole time, Mansfield said to Archy.

Nope.

That drunk was saying words left and right. He couldn't shut up. We can't make use of someone who talks like that, not good use anyway. He'd keep up his tent all night.

That so? said Archy.

Yes.

Mansfield was a good deal taller than Archy, but he wasn't exactly looking down at him. He had his arms crossed and he licked his lips like he was cooking up something to say. It was either going to be about Joe Clark or about the war.

I can shoot alright, said Archy, if that's what you want to know.
I wasn't going to ask that yet.

I don't know, though.

Where else are you going to go?

I've been lots of places, said Archy. I can go to any of them. I could settle down, I think.

You're going to need cash.

I've been doing alright. I can skin a fox.

You've got some? I've heard about you. Don't you want to stop wandering?

We've got scouts.

Archy is silent because he does not care one way or the other.

We'll give you one hundred sixty five dollars. Maybe even more. You may be more than just a soldier in some time. You can scout.

Archy said nothing. He looked Mansfield up and down, a scan that Mansfield had not been in in some time. Archy said he'd come by.
Archy in the wilds again, near Wadsworth, near the falls where he first slept after he last slept in his own home.

The falls look as they did. It is warm summer night. The falls never stop.

Archy thinks of blood. It is pumped through the heart but the heart can stop.

He smells no fire. He figured the Leatherman might be in the cave.

Aw s____, he thinks.

He does not feel abandoned.
The parade for the leaving soldiers marked the happiest Connecticut's Fourth would ever be. Women had woven uniforms. Mr Russel had donated the elastic for the waistbands. North and Starr and Savage donated guns and ammo. They were outfitted well, I bet they looked better than any other regiment heading out.

The boy Archy was in the parade. He kept his eyes forward and didn't turn his head, didn't smile. Everybody on the street was cheering, yelling kill Johnny reb, south goes down, for the union!

Stuff like that.

Most soldiers reacted. Mansfield rode in front and waved, his other hand on his pistol.

Archy was the only one who seemed to know what was coming. I doubt he
did.
Archy does not like the guns. They are all around him and they are not handled with care. They should be handled like they are precious, lest a mistake be made, he thinks.

He sits round a camp fire with other soldiers. They are somewhere south, not in the south, but near it. They are headed to Maryland.

Where are you from, says a soldier Granville.

Archy is the last to speak. He does not want to say a town other soldiers have mentioned. One has said Middletown.

Meriden, says Archy.

The soldier Hanson from Middletown says, My neck of the woods. You know Randall Freedman?
I don't. You know Michael Hurley?

I knew him. He got kilt. In the Irish Brigade.

S___. They made him join the Irish?

Yep.

The soldiers smoked their tobacco. Archy coughs. The Leatherman did not smoke. Archy wants to fit in, a little bit. He's not going to fit in rightly. He can't fit anywhere except the untamed wild.

That's too bad, says Archy. He was a friend of mine.

You knew him in Meriden?

He had a cousin in Meriden. I knew the cousin.

I'm sorry, says Hanson. We'll kill them rebs. We'll shoot em through like swiss cheese.

Granville goes uh huh and shakes his head quickly. He smiles. Archy nods and puffs his cigarette. He's getting the hang of smoking.

You never shot a man have you? says Hanson.

I have, says Granville. I killed on the peninsula. I was sure I got one.

S___ you aren't sure. Everyone was firing.

I know I got him, says Granville.

The three puff their cigarettes. Hanson and Granville have a dram.

I saw one in the woods. A scout, says Hanson. I was the first to see him and I shot him dead. I was the only one to shoot, that's how I knowed I got him.

The fire crackles. Hanson puts more wood on it.
I shot one once, says Archy. Outside of war.

The men exhale smoke. Others are yelling outside other tents, gambling by firelight and drinking. It is warm September. Mosquitoes leave men red and scratching; they cure their itches with their rifles. One man itched so bad that it fired.

I'm too good a shot, says Archy. I didn't mean to shoot him.

He takes one last drag of his cigarette. It finally feels good. It cools his bones.

The soldiers labor.

It is like it was back at the church.

The forests become swamps in the rain and the soldiers sometimes make corduroy bridges to cross them. Mansfield orders from his horse. The horses legs are wet and his aren't. The soldiers legs are wet. Archy's legs are wet. He does not complain.

They march further south. Harper's Ferry has fallen to the south. The b______ Jackson has taken it.

Their beds are tattered but Archy sleeps well. He sleeps outside the tents, where sickness spreads. They have eaten unripe green corn and it suffers their bodies.

Mac's here, says Granville.

God bless him, says Hanson.

Archy nods, above them. The newspapers never liked Mac. They said he hesitated too much. They say he got lots of men killed when they shouldn't've been. If
he went to battle early full force then a widow's thimble would've been filled with
blood then the Union would've only lost a few thousand men.

Archy's never seen the man. The army treats him like a man with an ivory hand,
like all he has to do is wave it and the whole army will be inspired. He can turn lonely
hearts into fierce and brave shooting machines. He's modest. He'd give up the position
if it weren't for the president. He's a patriot, George McClellan is.

Picket duty. Archy's up in the trees, with his rifle, and Granville and Hanson are
below him. They're ahead of the main camp. Antietam is not far ahead. The whole
camp will move up, when it's safe. There aren't any rebs ahead, just the battlefield.
They all know where they're going to fight. The Johnny rebs are going to come up
from the south, and the Billy yanks will come from the north and they will fight visible
to a white one room church. They all know it.

Archy just sits in the tree. He sets the rifle across his lap, reaches into his coat
pocket and eats a piece of salt horse. It has a good chew to hit. He picks up the rifle
again and looks over its barrel into the wild.

He does not consider it the wild anymore. Men walk through it too much. The
swamps suck men's legs to their knees. If they are not left alone, they will make men a
part of them.

We're going in tomorrow, says Hanson. I can feel it.

Yup, says Granville. We won't sleep easy tonight.

This is going to be it, you know, says Hanson.

Archi, from above, says, The end of the war?
Yep.

Archy has not been in the war long. Where will he go after? It was supposed to be a short war, and then it wasn't, and now it seems like it will be.

You see anything up there?

I don't.

You'll see something in the dawn, says Granville.
We only got the newspaper once a week, so sometimes there'd be news overwritten by other news. There was an article said the rebs were moving north into Kentucky. Then another article said they were moving into Maryland and it was more descriptive, said which roads they passed on and which towns they went through and how many men Stonewall had, forty-five thousand. I didn't believe that Kentucky nonsense then.

Well, you know how Antietam went, in general, but I'll say what happened to the General Mansfield. It was his first field command, but don't let that fool you.

I'd blamed a lot of death on McClellan even though the soldiers liked him. He made them fit to die, I think, maybe even made them want to die. I believe until I had read the article that I blamed McClellan for Mansfield's death. You know, now that I
think about it, maybe I still blame him. It depends on perception.

Mansfield led the strike at dawn. He came from the North with other generals at his side. I don't fancy myself for national history as much as local; I don't know their names. McClellan did not send backup when it was needed and McClellan saw the rebs coming only he did not think they were rebs, and they shot him.

It was misplaced violence, I suppose. The article said his servant and scout, unidentified, had died before him. They laid in the makeshift infirmary and waited to die. They heard news of the Union's win. There was lots of misplaced violence, I guess you could say the whole war was misplaced violence. You know who the servant and scout was, don't you. It was the boy the troublemaker meeting his final troubles. He had been struck. I won't speak on his violence then. I don't know how the war did to him.

This is what I'll say. I think it's fitting. The General's last words:

It is god's will.