

Jack Deal

“I am sure he felt like he had performed with valor, and perhaps by his lights he had.”

The Courting of Marcus Dupree
Willie Morris

I

Sam Thornton paused briefly before pulling the two hardcover books from their resting-place in the corner bookcase. The antique piece of furniture, chest high and located near the front window of his garret apartment, was reserved for his favorite volumes – ones that had made a lasting indention upon his heart and mind throughout the years, and earned the right to reside in such a public place. It was too humble to be called a library although the sagging shelves and irregularly stacked tenants did indicate ideas mattered, and reading was pursued. Varying in appearance and content, the books were timeless reminders of time and place, and he returned to them often. So he did today, unaware one of his selections held a disturbing surprise.

Sam had moved to Paris almost two years ago, luckily finding the simple five-floor walkup the first week. Once the home of servants, the small place stood atop a nineteenth century building located in the Marias Quarter of the city, at the west end of the block with a view of the river; number sixteen rue des Routiers to be exact. It was late October, and an early morning sun greeted him when he wandered out onto the rooftop terrace with his first coffee of the day.

He enjoyed Sunday mornings. Like most places Paris woke slowly on that day, and for a brief time struck the appropriate balance between quiet and movement; the restlessness and sounds subdued. The sun warmed his face as he stood by the terrace wall and looked

out onto a city that made his heart race with wonder, possibility and expectation. He still could not believe he lived here.

The two books lay one on top of the other in the middle of a café table at the rear corner of the terrace. Sam settled into his chair and pulled one of them into his lap. To his right, he watched a woman sleep through the open window nearby. His eyes wandered from the outline of her slender body beneath the white cotton sheets to her waves of red hair, and the beauty of her face. She would not rise for another hour or so.

Emily Clarke came to Paris from her native Ireland more than five years ago to paint. She lived and worked in her studio one floor below and the two met when she accidentally received a bundle of his mail forwarded from America. Since then she had taught him about watercolors and introduced him to, among other things, the music of Andres Segovia and Edith Piaf, several of the city's public gardens and cemeteries, Four Roses whiskey, and the blessings and curses of Catholicism, not necessarily in that order. She had a daring presence about her; a serious and rare boldness that was seared into her soul. From the beginning, her talent struck him as both foreign and captivating. Perhaps it is why they became friends before lovers.

Later today, Emily planned to board a train back to Ireland. Her father's health had declined in recent months and she felt the need to travel home, since he lived alone. She did not know when she would return.

Emily's father, Tom Clarke, had been a master bookbinder in Dublin for nearly a half-century, and recently restored the two books Sam pulled from his shelves earlier that morning. They had arrived neatly packaged yesterday; their tatter parts now a thing of the past. Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* and *Touchdown Glory*, a teen sports novel by Dick

Archibald that Sam had owned since the eighth grade, were as different as night and day; yet each had earned their way into his heart. It was one of the mysterious qualities of books, and the craftsman's finished product mirrored a similar type of respect.

Sam returned to the novel held in his lap and began to turn the pages. The envelope he found inside had his name and a note from Tom Clarke scribbled across the front.

"Found this wedged between the pages - hope all is well," it said.

With his right thumb and forefinger Sam slowly removed the photograph from the envelope until it came into full view. There he discovered a black and white picture of a dozen boys taken more than twenty-five years ago. All were sitting and uniformly dressed in dark blazers, trousers, and ties; their hair was cropped closely in the style of the day, and a genuine innocence was reflected in their fresh faces. Sam trained his stare onto one of those young faces; the one whose dark eyes danced and flashed with mischief and excitement. It was 1964.

We were seventeen years old and believed those days would last forever, Sam thought, as he studied the boy that sat in the back row, but whose role was front and center on this basketball team. Tall and lean, he had earned all-state honors the year the picture had been taken, and a promising senior season lay ahead. It was also the year Sam met Jack Deal for the first time.

"You look as if you were a million miles away," she said, standing in the doorway.

"I was," Sam said.

"Where were you, if you do not mind me asking?"

“Your father found this picture stashed in one of the books I sent to him and seeing it again takes me back – that’s all. Strange how clear some of those days are, regardless of the years that have passed.”

“Tell me about the picture Sam,” she said, sitting down with her coffee in the chair next to him, her feet curled underneath her. “I really do not know much about your hometown in America, or your life there.”

“It has less to do with the boys in the photograph, and more about one of those boys,” Sam said. “Sometimes I wonder if God winks at some of us, and blinks when it comes to others.”

We lived in Royal, Texas, a place located in the northeastern part of the state and the home to almost 12,000 folks, Sam told her. Royal sat along state Highway 34 and almost squarely in the middle of Lone Tree County; it was the county’s largest town and served as its seat of government and business center. Like many communities in those days, Royal’s core began with a town square that wrapped around a courthouse, and a downtown area that extended out from there – for a few blocks in each direction; it was a place too where almost every need could be met in a short amount of time.

The three-story courthouse, designed by an El Paso architect and completed in 1896, was made of red granite; there, lawyers and judges met in the courtroom, people conducted business, and old timers played dominoes at several tables out front. More than ninety pine trees stood on the Bermuda lawn.

Most years, the land in the county produced a plentiful cotton and peanut crop and due to its sandy soil, some of the best peas, tomatoes, onions, blackberries, and peaches in the state. Oil, natural gas, and some ranching contributed to the economy, but to a lesser

extent than farming, government, manufacturing, and small retail businesses. There were other components to the town. It had two doctors, each willing to make house calls in addition to their nightly rounds at the hospital, and the newspaper, *The Star-Sentinel*, published daily. The town had a radio station that left the air at midnight, a picture show, two drive-in-theaters, and a grand hotel named the Ashton, whose dining room had served dinner and Sunday buffets for most of the century. Along the way, its polished oak floors had withstood the pounding of countless weddings, proms, and political functions. Kids bought fountain-made cherry and vanilla cokes, their school supplies, and read the latest magazines at the *Corner Drug* store (which naturally sat on the corner of Main and South Street); groceries were charged at the local market, customers simply signing a ticket and paying at the end of the month. The gas stations provided full service and on a Saturday morning, the barbershop was maybe the best place in town to substantiate the latest rumor or replay the game from the night before. There were two elementary schools, a junior and senior high, and a fine public library with rows and rows of books; its front steps framed by gardenia and lilac bushes.

Royal was a great place for a boy to grow up and come of age, especially in the fifties and sixties, he told her. We formed lasting friendships and memories, rode our bicycles or walked nearly everywhere until we could drive a car, and most of us knew something about horses, baling hay, tractors, quail hunting, Yazoo lawnmowers, and nights of camping near a lake called The Blue Hole, where we fished and swam. We knew far less about the opposite sex, war, racism, sadness, and the things life would teach us later. Our fathers went to work, and helped little at home except for the times they char-grilled steaks or served bacon and eggs for supper. Our mothers still wore dresses, high-heel

shoes, hats and white cotton gloves to church, and like most mothers, performed tasks that ranged from thankless to heroic. Together, most of our parents formed a formidable duo that kept us in check and demanded we toe the line of respect and decency. The people living in small towns must rely on one another. On one hand, there is more accountability – for the mayor, newspaper reporter, bank president, school superintendent or community leader, for everyone really – but on the other, there are few secrets. Like any place, Royal was not for everyone, even for those who were born and raised there.

But more than anything, almost every boy in town wanted to play for the Royal Swifts when their time arrived to do so, he told her. Through the years we had watched and rooted for so many athletes that competed on the fields and courts of our town, and could not wait until the torch was passed to our class. We had prepared all our brief lives to throw footballs in the fall, hit baseballs in the spring and summer, and make jump shots a key moments during the winter. Somewhere at almost every house where a kid lived, there hung a basketball goal. They were attached to garages, barns, trees and poles; with or without nets, it did not matter.

“What troubles me now is that so many boys, ones that played fiercely and with great passion, believed at eighteen years old, after finishing their playing days for the blue and white-clad Swifts, the best part of their lives were behind them,” Sam said. “Sadly, so many of us pinned our hopes on that one thing and could never let go it.”

Bass Gymnasium was named for the patriarch of an old, established family in Royal. Arthur Bass had begun his timber business in 1912 and during the years had employed several generations of Royal’s families. The gym was built with Depression labor; it had wooden rather than glass backboards and an open stage at one end of the court, where

extra bleachers were placed to hold the overflow crowds. The stands on each side closed to within two feet of each sideline and ran upward at a steep angle toward the exposed rafters in the ceiling. Regulars came early to the games and sat on the top row, their backs supported by a brick wall. Bass Gym was hot, loud and generally packed, ultimately giving the hometown Swifts a distinct advantage. In those days, it was often unlocked, with several leather basketballs resting inside the circle at mid-court, the last person to leave expected to return them to their proper place.

“So you and Jack Deal – were you close friends your entire lives,” she asked?

“No. We were teammates for a couple of years, but I never really knew him – not in that sense,” Sam said. “I guess that is what surprises me.”

“Surprises you – in what way?”

“Oh, the strange impact of the photograph, of thinking backward about things past – it’s hard to explain.”

“Why?” Emily asked. “It is something all of us do at one time or another.”

“Maybe it is because we are affected more than we realize by events, relationships, and other things that happen when we are younger,” he said. “Some pass, but others cling to us permanently and we cannot change them, even though we might like to.”

“Maybe we don’t need to Sam,” Emily said. “Ultimately, they help to make us who we are.”

Every boy decked out in one of those blazers was inexplicably linked together by the mascot patch sewed onto the left breast pocket, and by the common experiences they shared on the basketball court. Each would eventually leave this temporary sanctuary and unfurl their own lives, but none were thinking about that, not then.

“I knew Jack Deal primarily through basketball and met him the year this picture was taken,” Sam said. “We were juniors in high school and full of piss and vinegar, and eager to please.”

Jack Deal’s father had moved the family to Royal from an oil refinery town near the Texas and Louisiana border at the beginning of the school term. His dad found work as a welder at the Bass paper mill south of town; it was Royal’s largest employer and operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Robert Deal worked the graveyard shift, from four in the afternoon until midnight. He had one day off each week and earned a two-week paid vacation every year for his labor. The founder’s son now ran the business and like his father, vigorously fought every attempt to organize the workers at the mill. In doing so, he controlled both wages and working conditions.

“Our employees are like family,” Bass said, always aware that the mill represented the best game in town for many hourly workers.

Robert Deal seldom saw his talented son play ball.

“I remember we could hear the whistles from the mill blow each day,” Sam said. “But I guess if you are not part of that world, it does not dawn on you what that meant. My family attended every game, and I never thought about anything otherwise.”

Sam knew little else about his classmate’s personal life. He remembered he liked him; that Jack Deal had a wicked sense of humor, a willingness to laugh, and that a tidbit of mischief surfaced from time to time. He also recalled the boy’s painful shyness and a willingness to go it alone. Sam and Jack Deal’s worlds seldom collided off the court; they were separated by the stranger-less cliques that one belonged to at that time.

Sam told her he could remember the first practice Jack Deal attended. That day all present took note that something good had unexpectedly fallen their way. With resolve, confidence, and toughness, Jack Deal transformed potential into reality for the team, and allowed the entire town to come along for the ride. At six foot five, and the strongest player, Jack Deal met every challenge presented to him that year. His long legs and rangy body may have looked awkward carrying schoolbooks to class, but on the basketball floor he performed with a skill that can only be described as beauty and grace. The Royal Swifts finished the season at 29-3, losing in the third round of the playoffs by a single point to the eventual state champion. Hope burned bright for the group's senior season.

In those years, many people remained close to home after completing high school, Sam told her. The middle of the country was far more isolated than it is today and for many, so were the expectations. Some kids attended the teachers college nearby, but nearly half of our graduating class chose to do other things with their lives rather than to continue in school; they opted to farm and ranch, enter the military, or seek a steady job at the paper mill or foundry. A few of our classmates ventured to universities, but most of their families were either well heeled financially or considered education a fundamental priority.

Following graduation the following year, Sam left Royal to attend the state university in Austin. He spent the next five years there being overwhelmed, making friends, finding out the different seas people travel, and getting drunk a lot. Jack Deal was not so fortunate. He injured his kidney during a game early his senior year, and bruised it so badly that he had to sit out all but two games; his highly anticipated season had vanished on a single play and Jack Deal never received the scholarship he needed for school, and

never attended. Less than a year later, he followed his father to the paper mill, dragging his lunch box and dreams with him.

“It rained my first day of class in Austin, and I remember being amazed by the number of umbrellas that opened immediately and punched the air. I had no umbrella, never considered buying or packing one, and recall being struck by my oversight,” Sam said. “I asked myself - if I did not know how to stay dry, how would I fare with the more complicated issues and challenges ahead?”

“Suddenly, I realized I had a lot to learn; that I was standing at the bottom of the mountain again. For some odd reason my mind raced to a framed needlepoint that hung on my parent’s kitchen wall. I had probably read the stitched words thousands of times during my life, but now they made more sense – sort of like hearing that whistle at the paper mill.”

*Yard by yard, life is hard,
Inch by inch, it’s a cinch.*

II

It would be almost twenty years before Sam saw Jack Deal again.

Jack Deal had become the sheriff of Lone Tree County, married a second time, and was part owner of a local bar located on the outskirts of town. Sam had slipped into town late one night and decided to stop in for a beer before checking into his hotel room. His parents no longer lived in Royal, leaving following his graduation to teach school in the town of Canadian, located nearly ten hours west in the Texas Panhandle. The place was not crowded, but Sam recognized a familiar face the second he walked through the honky-tonk’s door.

“Hello Jack,” Sam said.

“Well, well if it’s not Sam Thornton – long time, no see,” he said. “Sit down; let me buy you a beer.”

“Alright,” Sam said, pulling out a chair and taking a seat. “But let me do the buying.”

“Nonsense, I own the joint; Sarah Lynn, honey, bring us two beers, please.”

“You look good,” Sam said. “How are you – are you doing ok?”

“Busier than ten cats covering up,” Jack Deal said.

A young woman delivered the beers. She was attractive, dressed in boots, tight Wrangler jeans, and a long sleeve tee shirt.

“Honey, this is Sam Thornton,” he said. “We had some fun together way back yonder.

Sam, this is my wife, Sarah Lynn Deal - my partner in this place and beyond.”

“Nice to meet you,” Sam said, rising to shake her hand.

“Likewise,” she said before walking away and returning to her station behind the bar.

“Hell of a woman,” Jack Deal said. “She definitely keeps me in line.”

“I can see that.”

At the corner table, they talked easily about their lives.

“Still playing hoops?” Sam asked.

“No, not much interest in that anymore. I go to some of the games, but stay only as long as I need to. I don’t even watch basketball on television,” he said. “My wife and I have three kids, and I hunt and fish some - that’s about it.”

“So you’re the sheriff? Sam asked.

“Yep,” he said, “the county sheriff.”

“What’s that like?”

“Crazy sometimes – remember Suzy Conrad?”

“Yeah,” Sam said. “She was a pistol, if I remember right.”

“Still is,” Jack Deal said. “She strutted into my office the first day on the job, slammed a plastic baggie with a pair of woman’s panties inside of it onto my desk and said, ‘I want this bitch put in jail.’”

“Hells-bells, I got a dead body in my office right now,” he said. “But for the most part it is pretty basic stuff – traffic tickets, poachers, some drugs, a few drunks and fistfights, things like that. You see people at their worst sometime and you’re not going to get rich, but I like the job.”

“Last week I pulled over this black Lincoln Town Car out on Highway 34. It was going thirty miles over the speed limit when it passed me, so I spun around, flashed my lights and pulled him to the side of the road. By the time I got to his car, the driver had already rolled down his window and had his license ready. His name was Tim Shy, from Washington, D.C.”

“Long way from home, aren’t you son?” Sheriff Deal asked.

“Yes sir, but we’re here on business,” Tim Shy said.

“We?” the sheriff asked.

“The congressman and me,” he said.

Jack Deal told Sam that when he shined the light into the backseat, it fell squarely upon that of the Honorable Charles M. Griffin, the district’s representative in the U.S. Congress; he was passed out, with an empty whiskey pint lying loosely in the palm of his hand.

“I’d like to buy that guy for what he was worth and sell him for what he thinks he’s worth,” the sheriff added. “But mark my word, he’ll get re-elected in November because most people around here think he hung the moon.”

Jack Deal told Sam that Tim Shy turned out to be the congressman’s personal assistant that apparently considered the priesthood before finding a higher calling on Capitol Hill. The pair was traveling from a campaign event in Stockdale and headed to Lovelady, where they were scheduled to shake hands with workers at an auto assembly plant the next morning.

“Better get along then, it’s late,” Sheriff Deal said. “And be sure to tell your boss what happened tonight.”

“Where am I going, I mean how much longer do we have until we get there?” Tim Shy asked.

“Well, at the next light, take a left. Lovelady is about ten miles down the road. Can’t miss it if you tried,” the sheriff said.

“How far is the light?” Tim Shy asked.

“Forty-six miles,” Sheriff Deal said.

Jack Deal told Sam he’d given a million buck to have a picture of the expression on that young man’s face, his laughter filling the room. They closed the bar that night rehashing old times; they talked about quail hunts and bird dogs, the whereabouts of old friends, the town, and nights they parked with their girlfriends in the back pasture of Jack Deal’s small family farm, located just outside of the city limits.

“We dropped a little laundry out there,” Jack Deal said.

“Yeah, we sure did,” said Sam.

In the mind's eye, Jack Deal looked exactly like a Texas sheriff ought to, Sam told her. He was big and handsome; his six foot five frame a bit thicker. His black hair was trimmed neatly, without a hint of gray and he wore a kaki uniform with the top shirt button snapped at the neck. His cowboy boots were polished and his hat, a buckskin-colored Resistol with a horsehair band, rested crown down on the table to one side.

“Hey Sam, how about you, Sarah Lynn and me taking a little ride?” he asked on the way out the door. You haven't been around here for awhile.”

“Okay, Sam said, pausing briefly, “but not too long, I have to get an early start tomorrow.”

The three loaded into Jack Deal's patrol car and sped away into the Texas night. Soon they were traveling a narrow two-lane road that ran out past the cemetery and into some old dirt, logging roads. There were no other cars in sight and the pine forests tended to make the darkness even more pronounced; it is a time and place where the quiet becomes a symphony of the night, the performers a star-filled sky and the sounds of the piney woods.

That night, without warning, Jack Deal brought the car to a gradual stop on the side of the road. And with the motor still running, he rolled down the window, removed his revolver from its holster and shot several rounds of ammunition into the woods. It lasted no more than twenty seconds.

“Wanna fire it?” he asked.

“No, no thanks,” Sam said.

On the way back to town, Sam sat alone in the backseat, his mind attempting to comprehend what had just happened.

“Hey bud,” Jack Deal said, glancing over his shoulder toward the back seat. “Did I ever tell you about the time we were living in Louisiana and my parents took me to Monroe for the first time?”

“I don’t believe you did,” Sam said, pleased the uncomfortable silence was broken.

“It was on a Saturday and when we arrived there, Daddy dropped Mamma off at one end of town; then he and I drove to the other end to wait for her in the lobby of the bank, a five-story building that at that time was the tallest I’d ever seen. Well, while we were waiting, I noticed some shiny silver doors off to the side.

‘Daddy, what do those doors do?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know son,’ he said.

“A few minutes later, a homely woman walked up to the doors and punched a button.

“She was ugly, I mean real ugly,” Jack Deal said. “The doors opened and the woman walked into this little room, then the doors closed. Above them, the number two lit up, then three, then four, and finally five. There was a pause; then the numbers reversed themselves - four, three, two, and one, before the doors opened again.

“A woman walks out, and I mean she was good looking,” Jack Deal said.

“At that moment, Daddy looks at me and said, ‘Jack, go get your Mamma.’”

They all laughed as Jack Deal slowly pulled his car next to Sam’s. Sam shook Jack and Sarah Lynn’s hands, and wished them the best.

“See you Sam,” he said.

“See you Jack.”

He waited until my car started and as he pulled away, he looked directly at me, touched the brim of his hat and smiled, Sam told her. At three in the morning and with

the streets of my hometown completely deserted, that is the last time I ever saw Jack Deal.

“Jeez, that’s strange,” Emily said, “I thought the Irish were crazy.”

“But you know what I remember most?” Sam asked.

“What?” Emily said.

“The smile, I’d seen it a hundred times, but something about it was different that night – not evil or cocky - but close to it. It haunted me.”

III

“What happened to him, Sam?” she asked.

The years passed. Jack Deal learned the ropes well enough to be elected president of the Texas Sheriff’s Association, a position he used effectively enough to enhance his standing with politicians and law enforcement officials around the state. He made public service announcements about combating drugs and fighting crime, and eagerly campaigned for candidates running for office. He worked hard at making the right friends and many in political circles considered him a rising star; something he had not experienced in a long, long time.

The time spent in Royal, where doors remained unlocked at night and neighboring was part of the culture linked folks together, Sam told her. There were summer evenings of pitching washers, cranking out homemade ice cream, and simply listening to the crickets signal late afternoon, dusk, and finally darkness. Folks took the time to visit – on front porches and in backyards – and to this day there is the belief that if one pays close attention, they can hear the twinkle-twinkle sound of the stars draw the curtain shut on the day. The sheriff’s fate, however, was not as simple or kind as a summer evening.

Jack Deal – a boy blessed with athletic talent and cursed by a spot of bad luck, had become a man that had clawed his way back into the spotlight of another game. He was a man too that had begun to rob banks, including the one in Royal, during a nine-month span in his life.

All four of the robberies were of small-town banks in Lone Tree County and took place when they first opened for business that day. Each bank had only a handful of employees; none were equipped with security cameras or alarms, much less a guard; and none of the four had been robbed in at least a generation - facts not lost on Jack Deal.

Armed with a short-barrel .38 owl-head pistol, a gun no law officer would be caught dead carrying and driving a beat-up pickup truck with muddy license plates, Jack Deal (the county sheriff) hardly resembled his alter ego. Wearing a hooded, oversized jumpsuit and sunglasses, he led employees to vaults or back rooms at gunpoint and kept them there by putting a fake explosive device on the door.

He escaped quickly and made his way to the barn in the back pasture of the family farm. There he carefully hid the money, changed clothes and vehicles, and usually became the first law officer to arrive at the crime scene. On the day of each event, Jack Deal assigned his deputies to check on matters in other parts of the county and he always knew the habits of the state troopers stationed in his area. He acted completely alone.

Few clues surfaced during the investigation headed by a state task force, and while state law enforcement and the high-profile sheriff shared information and coordinated patrols and stakeouts for months, nothing came to light. Jack Deal remained a picture of poise and cooperation. Finally, the task force announced that its funding and political support had run its course and that although it would continue to pursue leads in the case,

a full-time presence would cease to exist. At least that is what Jack Deal was led to believe. The fact was there were no plans to abandon anything; the nature of the investigation had shifted several weeks back when an anonymous tip turned the focus to the local sheriff. A detailed background check had revealed a messier divorce from Sarah Lynn than most thought, three kids attending private universities, and some other complicated financial activities that simply did not make sense.

The state brought in Cree Miller; a cigar chewing thirty-year veteran of the Texas Rangers and a man of established reputation and impeccable integrity, to run the investigation. Miller had earned his stripes in all areas of the state, mostly along the Texas – Mexico border. On a cold February morning with the covert surveillance operation in full swing on the third floor of an abandoned cotton gin, the end came. Jack Deal attempted to rob the Royal State Bank for a second time in a five-month period and as he left the building's backdoor, eight Rangers were waiting for him. He was quickly surrounded and arrested. Within six months, Jack Deal was tried and convicted of the charges leveled against him, and sentenced to eighty years in the state penitentiary in Huntsville.

“When I heard the news, I remember thinking about his giant laugh and those graceful moves toward the basket,” Sam said. “But I knew this was a far different game, and tried to imagine how he must look framed by the bars and darkness of a small cell.

“I was sad for him; I was angry at him.

“I wondered what he thought about the innocence he had stripped away from his hometown, and at what time in his life he relinquished his own.”

Someone told Sam later that plans for an armor car robbery were discovered in an old trunk hidden inside the barn.

Sam finished telling the story to Emily in a taxi on the way to the train station. They walked to Track 19 and looked at each other.

“Are you going to be okay?” she asked.

“Absolutely, I’m just missing you already,” he said.

“Thanks for telling me about that part of your life - I like knowing about you.”

“Tell your father hello and thank him for me,” Sam said, gently kissing her.

“I will,” she said.

It was early evening. Sam decided to take the metro home and on the walk to the station, he questioned why he had conveniently forgotten to visit some things in life that mattered. Was it distance, time, or some kind of fundamental flaw? A light mist began to fall as he navigated the side streets. He passed a jazz club and heard the music from the cellar inside. Last year he had gone there and listened to Abbey Lincoln, but the music he loved or the memory of it failed to sooth him now. Outside of a small restaurant near the train station, a man sold fresh oysters.

Sam descended the steps underground and waited patiently on the platform for his ride home. A man with one good eye - his other an unmasked socket hollowed out like a carved piece of wood - approached and asked for money. Sam placed some coins in the man’s hand and watched him move slowly, but without hesitation toward another passenger. Sam sensed a strange metal-like taste inside his mouth. After all, he thought – I guess all of us Jacks have our deals.

