

Everybody Gets a Drum

Connecticut, Fall 1963

There's a knock on your door during evening study. You know it's the house master, because he never just walks in. You start for the door, but he's already opened it, looking more grim than usual. "Phone call from your mother," he says.

"When?" you say, wondering why he didn't just leave a note.

"Now. She's on the line." That's another thing that never happens. She complains that you never call, but she never calls either, so what's the big deal?

In the dorm master's apartment, you sit on a little bench in the foyer and pick up the handset, and listen to your mother breathing on the other end for a while. "Hi, Mom."

"I hate to tell you this," she says, and now it's obvious—your father had "that next" stroke. He partially recovered from the first one, when you were in sixth grade, but they said another was inevitable. Years from now, your mother confides that when they took their marriage physicals, the family doctor whispered a warning that her fiancé would not likely live past 35. Medications for extreme hypertension weren't very effective in the early 20th.

"When?" you say. "This weekend?"

"Oh no, a few weeks ago. I don't know. I've lost track of time. I've been so frantic. He's OK. I mean, he's expected to recover, but maybe not as much as last time."

She's trying to sound encouraging, but all you can think of is "weeks ago."

"Mom, why didn't you call me when it happened?" Like you're in a different family?

"Oh honey, I didn't want to worry you. I know how busy you are at school."

"School trumps family emergencies?"

"Well, I'm sorry I'm no good at this," she begins. The edge in her voice speaks of frenzy. You cut her off.

"I know, Mom. Hey, it's OK. I was just feeling left out. Should I come home?" A return to the City would be a welcome change. Maybe he's not too bad. You could encourage everybody.

"No, dear, I have way too much to do. Everything's up in the air. You—"

You cut her off again. You're safely tucked away at school, out of her hair; better to stay away. "That's OK, Mom. I've got a play coming up anyway." You pause, and she doesn't say anything. You're hoping she doesn't start to cry—that's rare, but very hard to process. "Look, Mom, thanks for the call. Give Dad my love, and hang in there, OK?"

She's relieved to hang up, and so are you. You wonder if the end is coming, but you've been wondering that since sixth grade.

For the rest of your junior year, your Dad is recovering slowly. He and your Mom move into an uncle's house in Far Rockaway, where your Dad worked his way through med school as a lifeguard on the Atlantic beach. When summer vacation finally comes, you visit them, as a guest.

That summer, it looks like the US and the Soviet Union will start World War III in Cuba and blow the planet to kingdom come to prove who has bigger balls. The USSR believes that if you disrupt society, it will naturally coalesce into a Communist utopia. The US believes that popular democracy is the natural state of man, so both parties figure it's OK to beat their drums and disrupt every living person on Earth. The US tried to invade Cuba when you were a freshman, and it's hard not to remember the ridiculous Duck and Cover exercises for years before, in grade school.

You spend some weeks at the house in Canterbury, up the Hudson from New York, but your parents are still in Far Rockaway. In the fall, as usual, you return to Connecticut, this time to graduate and get into a Good College. You've been doing reasonably well, but lately you and your friends

have been wondering what exactly college is for. You're toying with not going for a year, since you're still a kid, and anything is possible. You'll be much better prepared after a year in the world, right?

A few months later, in the middle of first period after lunch, classes are called off and everyone crowds into the dining hall to watch Cronkite announce that Camelot has come to an end, and the President has been murdered. Then follow endless replays of Jack and Jackie in the convertible, Jack Ruby murdering Oswald, wild speculations about who was behind it, and the birth of never-ending coverage.

By Christmas vacation, you've decided that a year off makes more sense than just going to college because "everyone does," or because everyone says you should. It's just a year; time is on your side. When you try to explain to your mother, of course, she takes it as another hopeless crisis that will probably kill your father if he finds out. It's hard to disagree, since his brain keeps exploding, but over Christmas you talk to him a little about careers and such. He responds tersely, though he used to love a good discussion. You try to reassure everyone you have no intention of Not Going.

Nyack, Fall 1964

A few days before graduation, Nelson Mandela gets life in prison. But you graduate anyway, and return to Canterbury, wondering what to do first on your year off, and a few days later, three civil rights workers are murdered in Mississippi. But gradually Summer begins to feel like summer vacation used to feel, and passes swiftly with little more than a few neighborhood house-painting gigs. When fall rolls around, you visit an old playmate at Harvard College, since your dad and your brother both attended, and why not? But life in the freshman Yard is not very appealing, despite the auspicious surroundings. Your friend's activities comprise an astounding number of mixers and keggers, and freshman courses seem to be nothing but remedial programs for students from inadequate secondary schools, conducted by uninspired grad students.

Later, you visit some other friends at a progressive college in Vermont. Surprisingly, there's less drinking, and the students are excited about their work. The professors are accessible, though less illustrious than the

unreachable ones at Harvard. You put in your application for the fall of '65, and it looks like a sure thing, which will be a major relief to your parents.

You return to the Hudson highlands, looking for a Real Job. One of your Quaker friends refers you to a peace organization in Nyack, half-way back to the City. A 1940's mansion overlooking the Hudson is now offices for an old non-profit that advocates for pacifism and social justice. You spend the fall months painting walls, stuffing envelopes, washing dishes, and living in an upstairs servant's room. You learn to count Christmas cards by riffling them next to your ear. The Center has several bedrooms for lodging conference attendees, and you clean the bathrooms and make the beds. At night, when the office workers are gone, you type poems of surreal teen angst on huge office typewriters and browse magazines about peace demonstrations. The head of the organization is on a hunger strike to end the war in Vietnam, but you don't see how one guy starving himself to death will bother politicians who send thousands to their death every year. During a conference of the national Action Council of CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, you're washing dishes while famous black leaders slip into the kitchens for a snack. They call you Boy, and you call them Massa, and everyone chuckles ironically.

That fall, the Warren Report concludes Jack Kennedy's killer acted alone, and China explodes its first A-bomb. Posters in the office say, "Peace Is Our Only Shelter."

By late winter, the peace place has run out of odd jobs, and you visit your parents again in Far Rockaway. It's become clear that the house in the City has to go, because there won't be any family income for a while now, if ever. The house in Canterbury is uncertain.

New York, Spring 1965

The second half of your exploratory year you're living alone in the brownstone in Manhattan, packing 21 years of family life into boxes and loading everything into the handyman's van for storage at the Canterbury property in the Hudson highlands. The house in the City has no air conditioning, and any friends you used to have here are long gone, and your days are hot and solitary, loading boxes of books, disassembling furniture, hauling stuff down to the garage, or up to the garage from the

cavernous basement, and then showering for a stroll up to 86th Street and a slice of pizza or a second-rate movie at RKO or Loews' Orpheum.

There is one bright note in the news: Daniel Seeger's imprisonment for not believing in a supreme being has been overturned by the Supreme Court. The draft boards no longer get to define religion.

A yellow form letter arrives from your personal draft board up the river in Goshen. It seems preliminary, and you are ordered (a new experience, being ordered by the government of the whole United States of America) to report to the US Army Whitehall Induction Station on White Hall Street in Manhattan. It's a shock, because you only just registered and you remember your Quaker friends, a few years older, worrying about being able to obtain Conscientious Objector status. You've heard their accounts of many people denied CO status because they hadn't gone to church enough, or couldn't call their conception of God a "supreme being." You haven't had time to think it through. The news stories about Daniel Seeger's pleadings from prison to the Supreme Court have put everything about the Draft into an unexpectedly personal light. Some group of old guys in Goshen, the county seat, will decide whether to send you to Vietnam. You know a few older kids who went to Nam, and two are already dead. One came back damaged, half a leg gone along with some of his mind. It terrifies you, so you try not to think about it.

Last summer, after your birthday, you were warned: five years and \$10,000 if you fail to register within ten days of turning eighteen. After a week of confused scuttlebutt with your peers, you acquiesced to the might of the national Government, not a hard thing to do, of course; you'd never even considered such things. Your mom drove you to the local draft board, a small set of offices in Goshen, not far from Canterbury. Most people in the highlands, it seems, work at the US Military Academy at West Point, or Stewart Air Force Base (Eastern HQ of the Strategic Air Command), and folks seldom make it into the city. There are hundreds of bars, and most kids end up in light manufacturing and bar brawls. So the draft board looked a bit seedy, not at all like an arm of the federal government.

A crabby old lady looked at the black photostat of your birth certificate, and typed a few things, and said, "Distinguishing marks?"

You had no idea what she meant.

“Well?” she snapped.

You shrugged.

“Nothing?” she said. “No scars, tattoos, birthmarks? You musta got something.”

You were a little flustered. What marks? You never thought about distinguishing marks. You looked at your hands. “I’ve got this, and this...”

She grabbed your hand and looked. “I don’t see anything.”

“This,” you said. “I think it’s a scar from my dad’s Swiss Army knife. And this,” pointing to a line of tiny bumps along your right index finger. “Maybe a birthmark?”

She typed: knife scar, left middle finger; birthmark, right forefinger. Minutes later, you had a draft card; officially a citizen, an adult man. You can’t vote, but it’s New York, so you can drink. Is this how your Jewish friends feel after their bar mitzvahs? Nothing, but slightly nauseous.

While emptying the house in New York, every week or so you visit your uncle’s place in Far Rockaway, where your dad is gradually regaining the ability to walk. He’s having a hard time talking, but you can chat a little, now and then. Being careful not to get him agitated. Mention the Draft letter? No way—mainly, he’s still worried that your year off will turn into Never Went to College, so threats from the draft board aren’t prudent. Your mom has no idea. Your Quaker friends don’t live around here.

Back in the City, you procrastinate, and eventually decide it’s just a physical, and can’t be all that serious. Maybe it’s SOP before issuing your 2-S student deferment. Your year off is almost over, and you’ll be enrolled at that liberal arts college in Vermont this fall, so the 2-S is pretty much guaranteed. After college, maybe Nam will be over. Just a preliminary physical exam, pre-induction, not induction: how bad could it be?

And what about the Army, anyway? You and your pals ran around for a decade or more, shooting at each other with your fingers and plastic M1 rifles and cap guns, drinking in WWII movies on TV, laughing at Colonel Klink and Sgt. Bilko. Yes, Audie Murphy showed us that war is hell, but still, a lot of cool guys with grubby faces stood tall and vanquished the unspeakable Nazi monsters. America saved Europe, and Asia. Never lost a war. At least, not any wars we heard about. And if we didn’t entirely come out on top, then hell, it was only a conflict, not a war, and we hadn’t really

tried. Nam was like that, just like Korea. A conflict that we were running on behalf of other countries who relied on us, and we certainly weren't going all out with A-bombs, not for a conflict.

So, although you do have Quaker friends, a few years older and pretty cool guys, you aren't a pacifist. You're concerned about the pollution of the Hudson River, since it's not far from home, in the City or Canterbury, and you like folk music, and sing along with Joan Baez and Dylan and Peter, Paul & Mary. But it might not be too bad in the Army—things are pretty slick next door at West Point. Or maybe enlist in the Air Force. Your dad talks about ships and nautical history, so maybe the Navy. People say it's much better to enlist instead of waiting to get drafted. So you hedge your bets, and figure you'll choose a good career-oriented military stint after college. Well begun, as they say.

Meanwhile, you're mostly at the house in Manhattan, packing and moving, going out for an occasional hamburger or movie. It's interesting to be riffling through literally everything your parents owned, especially the little brass-winged dick and balls charm in the back of your dad's cuff-link drawer, and the stash of rubbers behind some books near the bed. While packing books, you also find that he left a \$100 bill inside some of them. For an emergency? For a rainy day?

The only real upside is that being alone in the city you can do anything you want, at any time. That includes taking the IRT subway up to Pelham Bay Park, where the 1964-65 New York World's Fair is running for its second summer. About twice a week, you take that long ride on freshly spruced-up trains and wander around the fair, dialing a prototype touch-tone phone, riding through GM's city of tomorrow (everybody is driving cars), resting at the jewel-like Thai pavilion, and exploring the newest wonders of the shrinking world.

And now there's this yellow letter from Uncle Sam. You've lived half your life in Manhattan, but you've never heard of White Hall Street. Millions of guys began their Army lives there, inside a dour stone cube on an old four-block stub of a street called White Hall at the southernmost tip of Manhattan. For your convenience, the same Lexington Avenue subway that's been carrying you up to long exhilarating walks around the World's Fair also runs South all the way to Bowling Green, where it's a short walk to #39 White Hall Street, and fate unfolding.

The day comes. Sitting on the IRT downtown, you slowly slip into a nervous daze, not knowing what to expect, reminding yourself that the word “*pre-induction*” probably means *before* you’re actually drafted, even though you have no idea if that’s true, and you didn’t dare call the hostile people up in Goshen to find out. It’s like riding to the dentist, knowing it’s going to be unpleasant, maybe terrible, but it’s necessary and there are no options. You marvel at how the body just silently follows these wildly abstract, unnatural, and disturbing instructions. Is this how suicide is done? Just go through the motions; stay out of it; let the body do it.

It’s a short walk from the subway, and other young guys are wandering toward the same chunky stone archway. Up a few steps and through the double doors into Charon’s world, between uncertain destiny and all that has gone before.

Inside, the halls are painted drab green, a contemporary hospital hue also known as parrot puke green. Everything is unembellished, and the hard walls create a homogenized din of male voices, slamming drawers, scraping metal chairs, rustling papers. The guys entering are being funneled between two rows of desks. As you shuffle forward, you hear an occasional shout echoing from somewhere far off.

Your draft card and yellow letter are checked by grey-uniformed soldiers at the desks and you’re handed a big manila folder with your name on it. The soldier at the last desk says, “Don’t fucking lose that,” and points at a large steel door standing open, through which a line of guys is slowly moving, like a scene from *Metropolis*. The door leads to a huge square stairwell with steel-framed steps running up and down through the center of the building. All the guys scuffing up the stairs with you are about your age, a few of them mumbling to each other, but mostly silent. All are black, except for you and one or two others. You’re an out-of-towner merged with a large local recruitment. So far, all the soldiers are white.

On the next floor, the queue moves into a large room with baskets on rows of shelves. One of the soldiers is chanting your instructions: “Strip to your skivvies. If you aren’t wearing skivvies, strip anyway. Put your clothes in a basket. Put the basket back on the shelf. There’s a number on the basket. There’s a ditty bag with the same number in the basket. A ditty bag is a canvas bag. Put your wallet, watch, and valuables in the ditty bag.

Take the ditty bag with you. The United States Army is not responsible for your personal items.”

It’s a chilly spring day outside, but it seemed colder when you entered the Whitehall building. As you remove your shirt and pants, it’s colder still. Everyone is shivering, even the biggest fat guys. They’re also sweating, nervous sweat, the kind that smells sour and rank. It’s not a pretty picture being surrounded by crowds of other guys in their skivvies, and some who weren’t wearing skivvies. One of the white guys walks by and glances at you with wide eyes, a tall skinny kid with bad teeth and an acrid aroma. The guy stripping next to you is wearing a huge amount of cologne, which shifts the atmosphere towards rotten candy, or maybe a wet dog sprayed with insecticide.

The commanding soldier changes his recitation: “Welcome to your United States Army Pre-Induction Physical. Form a line at the door by the American flag. Keep your folder and ditty bag visible at all times. If you lose your folder there will be trouble. If you lose your ditty bag, tough shit.”

At the door, another soldier is repeating: “Stay in line. Single file. Health history on the right.” The line files into another large room with rows of classroom desks where you sit and fill out a health questionnaire that lists every disease and disability known to man, many of which you never heard of. Someone raises his hand like he’s in class, and a soldier barks at him. The kid asks about some medical term. The soldier tells him to shut up and fill out the form and ask the doctor later. So, you’re going to see a doctor.

This doctor, what are you supposed to tell him? You look at the form, wondering if it’s illegal to leave anything off. You’re so nervous now that it seems risky not to report any diseases or conditions at all, so you check Neuritis and, lower down, Neuralgia. Some ads on TV harp incessantly about this pair of afflictions, and even though you don’t know what they are, they sound a lot like the way you feel at the moment. Probably safer than leaving the form blank.

Somebody shouts, “When you finish the form, exit by the door marked A.” Guys are getting up, and you follow a tall muscular black guy across the room to the big red A over another green door. The door opens into another green hallway with doctor offices along one side and a big desk with three or four soldiers standing around it. Every couple of minutes, a

naked guy comes out of a door and heads on down the hall, and a soldier barks “Next” and the next kid in line goes to the desk, where they take his blood pressure and stick him in the arm with a hypodermic needle and suck out a vial of blood, and then send him in to the next available doctor. The rack of red vials is the only bright color in the room.

You’re getting increasingly cold, standing in line with nothing on, but this nervous sweat thing is weird. You’ve never stood around feeling these cold rivulets of sweat running down your sides, while the rest of you shivers. You shift from one leg to the other, and try not to stare at the occasional genitals that parade down the hall, the guys without skivvies.

When your turn comes, you pad down the worn linoleum to Interview Room 5, where a bored guy is sitting behind a desk smoking a cigarette. He’s a soldier, but his shirt is open and his sleeves are rolled up, and he’s a lot older than all the other soldiers. He holds out his hand and you give him your folder. He looks up at you and stares. Confused, you stare back. “Sit!” he snaps, and you turn and see the steel chair and sit down on the edge of it, cold against your bare thighs. You sit up straight, waiting.

He shuffles the papers in your folder. There were other papers besides the medical history, but you didn’t have time to look at them. “What’s this Neuritis?” he says.

“Um, I get Neuritis,” you say, wishing you knew what it was, actually.

The doctor takes a puff, makes some marks on your forms, and says, “What’s this Neuralgia?”

“Well, I don’t know,” you mumble. “At least I think it’s Neuralgia.”

The doctor scribbles some more, and then flaps the folder closed and sticks it out at you. You lean forward to take it, and he says, “Get up. Get out of here. We’re done.”

You stand and leave Room 5 clutching your folder; your ditty bag dangles by its drawstring from your left wrist. A soldier silently points to your right, down the hall to yet another big metal door. All the doors have wire-filled windows in them, like a hospital, but they’re all propped open. As you walk dazedly down the hall of Interview Rooms, you take a furtive peek at your medical form. The doctor has circled your check-boxes for Neuritis and Neuralgia, and in the Comments section at the bottom he wrote, “Homer sweats.” That’s for damn sure. Both sides of your underpants are wet with this weird watery perspiration.

The next room has a raised walkway along one side, about a foot high, with a long line of guys standing on it, facing a row of soldiers wearing aprons and rubber gloves. At their command, the guys pull down their underpants and spread their legs, the soldiers grab their balls and tell them to cough, and then to turn around and bend over and spread their cheeks. The guys all do this, of course, and the soldiers all take a good close look, and then the line of guys hitch up their skivvies and move off into the next room.

Three more lines go through the motions, and then you shuffle up onto the platform and take a look at the soldier who's going to grab your balls. He looks dead, which you figure is normal for someone who does this all day, week after week. It might go on for months, who knows? What did you do in the war?

"Hey!" the guy shouts. You snap out of it, and pull down your underpants, the jockey kind, definitely in the minority around here, except for the guys without any at all. You spread your legs, and the soldier grabs you, but not by the balls. That's a relief. He pushes his finger up against your crotch just as the soldier to his right screams at his recruit, "Turn your fucking head when you cough, idiot!" This is sheer good luck, because you'd forgotten the instructions already. You look to the right, cough, and then remember to present your ass to the soldier in front of you, so you turn around and bend over and spread your cheeks. Nothing happens to your ass, which is another small blessing, and then you're handed your folder and you set off to the next performance.

The next room is a world unto itself, presided over by a tall, thin soldier with a white coat over his uniform, almost as old as the doctor. He's smoking a cigarette too, and screaming at the recruits. This, it turns out, is the X-Ray room, and it's his kingdom, and he obviously has trouble getting the respect he deserves. As each naked guy walks into the room, the X-Ray man grabs him by the neck, and shoves him over to one of the two pairs of big green machines along opposite walls.

There's a lot of electrical cable and mechanical gear, and you watch as one kid is pressed up against a big flat panel. The panel moves down until it's roughly centered over the boy's chest, and then the X-Ray man steps back, hits a button, there's a brief buzz, and then he grabs the boy, spins him

around, shoves his back up against the panel, another buzz, and the kid is shoved towards the door at the far end.

A couple of other soldiers are assisting, but the X-Ray man has his eyes on all four machines, and is rushing from one to another, repositioning recruits and barking orders at them. What's interesting about all this is that interspersed with the X-Ray man's orders and instructions is the most lurid stream of insults you've ever heard. Everyone is called a fucking asshole, but if you're black, you're a fucking ass-hole nigger piece of shit. You're surprised the Army lets him do this, because you've been living next door to the United States Military Academy at West Point and met quite a few brass who work there, and everything looks much more respectable, with a lot more spit and polish than here at Whitehall Station.

A wide, solid kid with jet black skin gets shoved hard against a machine, but the steel panel isn't low enough, and he catches a good shot to the face. He turns, his lip split and bleeding, with a look of surprise and reproach. The X-Ray man rushes over and screams, "Who told you to turn around, you faggot piece of crap?" He grabs the guy's shoulder and shoves, but this kid is very solid, and nothing happens. Then the kid turns slowly and moves up against the machine. Buzz. The X-Ray man grabs his shoulder again, and the kid slowly pivots, giving the X-Ray man a stony glance, and stands with his back to the machine. Buzz. Then the kid just walks away, without waiting for instructions. The X-Ray man mutters something and resumes shoving people around and yelling insults at one and all.

You're next, and you step up briskly to the next available machine, and get zapped without incident, other than being called a fucking fairy cocksucker, and then it's off to the next thing.

The next thing, it turns out, is another room full of desks. You stand in your jockeys while some soldier flips through your folder, and then he points you to another soldier, who leads you back to the changing room. He waits while you get dressed, and this is harder than it should be because you're shaking a lot, which is strange. Then he takes you to the green stairwell and up another floor, by yourself for some ominous reason you can't fathom, and into a room with rows of benches. There are only a couple of dozen other kids in there, and you sit on an open bench, as far from the others as possible. The soldier hands you a sheet from your folder, and then walks off.

You sit and wait. Now and then another kid comes in and picks a place as far as possible from anyone else. After an hour, nothing has happened. You look at your paper every few minutes, trying to decode the check boxes. The “Group” box has a “W” in it. The box for a draft rating has “1-Y” in it, with “sinusoidal spinal cyst” and “open wound” scribbled nearby. There are no instructions to follow, so you wait, worrying.

A kid comes in and sits a few feet away. He’s about your size, chocolate brown, big Afro, and a big smile. “Hey, what you get?” he says.

You flash your paper at him. “I don’t know.”

The kid peers closer and says, “1-Y, man. That’s great!”

“What’s it mean?”

“Lemme see.” You hand him your paper and after a minute he says, “Looks like a medical thing. You got a cyst or a wound of some kind?”

“Not that I know of,” you say. “That’s what a 1-Y means? Medical?”

“I dunno. I think it means you only get taken if there’s a national emergency.” He hands you the paper. “Why you still here? Somebody picking you up?”

“No. I thought I was supposed to wait.”

“Hell no. This is where you meet with a social worker. I guess they’ll tell you what to do about that cyst wound.”

“I can leave?”

“Sure as shit can.”

You fold up the paper and stuff it in a back pocket. “Thanks, man,” to the other kid. Time to get the hell out of here. On your way out, you notice a huge sign on the wall explaining something about a recruit’s right to counseling, and you realize if you’d read the thing you could have left hours ago. You thread your way through the echoing green halls, following EXIT signs without interference from any of the soldiers, and locate the big double doors you came in through.

Coming down the steps, the sun is bright, but there is still a nip in the air. Across the sidewalk, six or seven large black guys are lounging around on the parked cars. This is a little unsettling, because they’re all looking closely at you as you exit the Draft building. One of them stands and walks up to you.

“You was in our group, right?” he says.

You try to sound confident, business-like. “Yeah, I guess I was.”

“They done with you?”

“Yeah, I’m outta here.”

“Hey, listen, man,” the guy says, and his pals lean forward to hear your reply. “We waitin’ for the X-Ray man, you dig?”

You don’t, not exactly, but that spectacularly obnoxious guy did leave a lasting impression. “Sure, man,” you say, as casually as possible.

“So, you wanna hang with us a while? We give that fucking X-Ray man something to cuss about. He come out sooner or later, son of a bitch.”

If you had 20 pounds more muscle, and a lot more courage, this might be a very tasty option, but no light-weight white kid from the Upper East Side will be much help if these guys actually do get their hands on the X-Ray man. And besides, that jerk has been insulting kids for years, decades probably, and there must be a back way out of the building.

“Hey, man,” you say, as sympathetically as possible, “Believe me, there’s nothing I’d rather do than teach that ass-hole a lesson, but I’ve got places I gotta be. Gotta go. But—give him my best.”

The guy looks a little disappointed, but not surprised. His buddies lean back against the cars again to wait for the next recruit to their own little war. The solid kid with the split lip is there, glaring at the double doors.

“OK, man,” he says. You meet his gaze and nod, and then turn and hurry on to the subway. Back home, you stand with your back to the full-length mirror and drop your pants, bend over, and look at yourself between your legs. Sure enough, there’s a big red pimple between your cheeks, at the base of your coccyx, and it’s been bleeding ever so slightly. You straighten up and wonder if this is the work of a guardian angel, if angels give out ass sores, or just a side-effect of walking for miles at the World’s Fair in the gritty New York summer. You also wonder, briefly, how the X-Ray man is doing.

Vermont, Fall 1965

The rest of your year off passes swiftly, and you’re enrolled at the college in Vermont by early September. Only then, a freshman with your 2-S still being withheld, is the 1-Y finally explained—temporary, but not medical. And this physical you took in New York last spring wasn’t “preliminary” at all. It was called a Pre-Induction Physical because it was the last formality before being inducted for active duty. You dodged a bullet, so to speak.

But now you're back in school, and the forthcoming 2-S will protect you for four years, if you make Satisfactory Progress, which you usually do. Then, before they can draft you, you'll hop on over to the Air Force or the Navy, and see the world. You know, of course, that this kind of thinking is utter bullshit, but there aren't any other scenarios to fantasize about. It's going to be tough, and you're going to have to serve, but growing up next to West Point has given you a pretty decent vision of the brighter side of serving your country. Or maybe look into the Peace Corps—didn't some kids get deferment for that? It might be an even better way to serve, right? Helping people directly, without having to kill them? So the CO thing might turn out to be a viable option. When a kid turns 18, survival strategies suddenly become an underlying theme of daily life.

Your fellow freshmen know a lot about the draft, and you soon learn that since your 1-Y came from having an open wound, the Army's top priority is to re-examine you and re-classify you 1-A, ready for immediate service. And the 2-S you're waiting for is never going to come, because your year off violated official standards for Satisfactory Progress.

The dorm phone is ringing out in the common area, but you're studying for a quiz tomorrow. Eventually someone gets it, and for some reason you immediately know it's for you, and the adrenaline kicks in. Your mother is the only one who ever calls, and only because of an emergency. That is, she never calls unless something happened with your father. It turns out his recovery in Far Rockaway has regressed, and they think he's had another mild stroke. He's back in the hospital. They're running tests.

You hitchhike into New York from Vermont, knowing that visiting your dad won't go well. His recovery is over. Your family doesn't keep you informed, for reasons unknown, so you figure that for once you'll take the initiative and just go to the city and see your dad, and tell your mom in person that everything's OK.

New York, Fall 1965

You get into the city too early for the hospital, so you hang around in a coffee shop, spending your last bucks on a slice of toast. In your wallet is an old Xmas check from your aunt for \$25. You have to have cash in Manhattan if you don't have a home, because there's no place to sit down or escape the cold, unless you can keep buying coffee. You stop by your aunt's

bank, the one on the check, weirdly named Chemical Corn Exchange, but they won't just cash it. They make you sit and wait for fifteen minutes, and then some bank Officer takes you to his desk, and waves the check at you.

He demands to see your draft card. You hand it to him, wondering why, and thinking about the ten years and \$5,000 if you lose it. He glares at it and hands it back, but when you take it he won't let go until you look at him. And then he sneers at you, "You gonna burn this, kid?" "No," you say, thinking, just give me the \$25, for chrissake; gimme a break. Your crime, mainly, is youth.

At the hospital your uncle from Far Rockaway is there, and he takes you aside and berates you for upsetting your mother. Upsetting her by coming home? Then he presses a couple of \$20's into your hand and tells you to be good and no more surprise visits.

In your dad's room, an old friend of his drops in, Rocky, a big happy energetic guy who always brought some obscure gadget for Dad or you to mess around with. Except he's a patient, too, shrunk down under six feet tall now, and about 100 pounds, and is barely recognizable. Seeing him is almost worse than watching your dad try to speak.

Your uncle reluctantly invites you back to their house, where your mom is still living, but you politely decline, and thank him for the \$20's, and kiss your mom good-bye, telling her you're doing well at college, without mentioning the defunct 2-S, and get out of the hospital fast. Your dad used to be a big-time surgeon there, and one or two people nod or smile as you pass by. It's a long walk to the bus station, but you need the air and the city. The bus grinds back to Vermont in the dark, and you sleep most of the way.

New York, Winter 1965

In central Vermont, January and February temperatures can remain 10 below for weeks, so your college wisely breaks the school year into Fall and Spring semesters, separated by a non-resident "winter work term," during which students do jobs or projects off-campus, away from the frozen Green Mountains. In your freshman year, you haven't thought of any great projects, so you go to New York and dig up a job re-shelving books at the NYU Bookstore near Washington Square. The job achieves unprecedented boredom, except for observing Mr. Dolly, the store manager, who is so

thoroughly in charge of every minute detail of bookstore operation that you wonder if he is a cyborg.

When you first begin living alone in New York, crashing in a fifth floor walk-up with another student, who's never there, you go for several days before it becomes apparent you have forgotten to eat. The apartment kitchen is empty, so you wander anxiously out into the New York night, through the upper reaches of Greenwich Village, across Washington Square Park, and find a narrow restaurant where they serve lamb-burgers on toasted English muffins. You feast on one, and when it is done, you know your life is whole again, and, but for this curious lapse of self-awareness, you really don't need much of anything at all to live.

The boredom of placing books back on shelves alphabetically by author finally becomes intolerable, and you move with another classmate to his father's custom kitchen operation in West Springfield. There you work with a pair of elderly French Canadian carpenters who build cabinets so fast and with such expertise that you can't begin to keep up with them. All this moving around is exactly what you had in mind when you took your year off, and it changes your perspective on college in new ways each year. It also means that when the draft board sends you an invitation to your second physical—to change that pesky 1-Y into the 1-A you deserve—they assume you're in Vermont, since that's where your mailing address at college is. So you write them that you're out of state, but will return to Vermont in March, and can they please reschedule.

Just before you leave West Springfield at the end of your non-resident semester, Malcolm X is murdered back in New York. You're relieved to return to the Green Mountains and the academic life.

Vermont, Spring 1966

In March, with Vermont still covered in snow, there's more news from Vietnam, but most of it isn't in the papers and on TV. What do people do, all these other guys you know, while waiting for the draft board to get them? They get letters from their old buddies, now in Nam, slogging through mud, some learning to be gung ho, some losing their minds, some both.

Your roommate gets letters from his brother, who enlisted in the Army because of the advantages. He has a doctorate in Persian literature, which

means he is fluent in Farsi, and gets snatched from basic training before he even learns how to break down an M16, and now he's in spy school in Tehran, learning how to resist torture and interrogations. His tale is like a bad dream.

Each letter is more insane than the last. Eventually he puts in for a transfer, but they tell him, "You can't transfer out of spy school." He gets a military lawyer, and suddenly they say, "OK, we'll transfer you to the front lines, operation Masher." When he points out he never received basic training or jungle survival, or any combat prep at all, they ignore him.

You hear all this when your roommate reads his brother's letters to you, and then you both sit around wondering what the fuck is going on. Enlisting doesn't sound so great anymore, even with some college. The heroism of WWII is getting harder to find in the tales coming back from Nam. Another classmate is an ex-Marine, and he tells of marines he knew, and US soldiers from other branches, beating each other to death in obscure Asian cities, and the monstrosity of this institutionalized war-mindset gets more intense. Nam is becoming the source of innumerable horror stories now, murdered civilians, tortured soldiers held by Hanoi for years, guys coming back so shell-shocked they can't function, while the public can't decide if they're saints or suckers. You and your remaining friends will be joining them soon, in one role or another.

Towards the end of the spring semester, another letter from the draft board: physical rescheduled for Whitehall Induction Station. They didn't get that you're always in Vermont on a totally predictable schedule—just not during January and February. And still no 2-S, of course, just the temporary 1-Y, which is getting pretty old. Sinusoidal spinal cysts have never recurred since the original adventure in the tall square meat-plant on White Hall Street, now more than two years ago. Nothing's changed *down there*, you are quite certain, but *you* are changing.

Nam has changed the whole country, and your father is on a long slow exit ramp, full of endless pain and delusion. Your mom drives to his nursing home every day to sit by his side while he writhes and rambles about life as a prisoner of war. He was never in the military because when he tried to enlist in WWII, they said his hypertension was so high he was useless to them, and besides, they needed some doctors stateside. At the nursing home, they can't give him enough morphine to eliminate the pain,

which is entirely a neurological side-effect of his numerous little strokes, because—he might become addicted. You, your mother, and every medic you've ever met see no logic in that, but it's the law, the current taboo. It seems to fit with the weird system chasing you relentlessly from New York to Vermont to New York and back to get you legally qualified for war.

It takes quite a while for the draft board in Goshen to figure out the college's Fall / Spring schedule, but they don't stop trying, and the yellow orders keep arriving to report to Whitehall Station when you're in Vermont, and report to Manchester New Hampshire when you're in New York. One winter you're in Canterbury, writing the history of a nearby boarding school, and they call you to Manhattan, only an hour away. You phone Goshen, on the off chance that physicals are held locally, since you have no desire to see the X-Ray man again, and they abruptly cancel the whole thing. This seems nice, but once you're back in Vermont for the Spring semester, the next letter orders you to Goshen. The incessant orders from the draft board are like ground tremors threatening to topple your whole college program. Each semester you worry that they'll call you to a place where you actually are, and then the non-2-S jig will be up.

Canterbury, Spring 1967

In early spring of your sophomore year, another phone call from your mom. Dad is gone, finally free of the brutal nightmare that consumed his last years on Earth. A friend drives you to Canterbury, where a funeral has been arranged. For some reason, although neither of your parents was into religion, there is a ceremony at a local Episcopalian church. Your mom says it's for the neighbors. This is so clearly counter to anything your dad would have wanted, that you attend more in disapproval than in sorrow. Thankfully, the coffin is closed. Nobody, even the neighbors, needs to gawk at his corpse. Nevertheless, when you see your sister hugging her childhood girlfriend, the tears come, not so much for your dad, for whom your tears ran out long ago, but for the childhood nobody gets to hang onto.

Manchester, Spring 1968

The draft board letters keep coming, along with personal mail from Nam that depict a war gone totally out of control. Police are attacking anti-war marchers in Chicago. But right now you're in Vermont, and today's yellow

letter orders you to a pre-induction physical in Manchester, just across the Connecticut River. They run a bus from nearby Montpelier, Vermont state capitol, to Manchester, leaving at 7:00 AM to get you to the Induction Station right on time.

You get a ride to the bus with some other students who've been called. Everybody is as nervous as you are. The guy who sits next to you has taken an inordinate amount of speed, in the hopes his tattered physiology will be found unfit for service. This seems risky—surely they'll find drugs in his blood test. Then what? Federal prison? You start to ask him if he's thought this through, but he's biting his chapped lips and twitching and unreceptive to dialog, and it's too late anyway.

Over the next two hours, the normally beautiful New England countryside seems dull and increasingly ominous. The horror stories of the last few years, which have escalated with each new yellow letter, have finally brought the drums of war home; As your bus-load of recruits bounces along in silence, your own endless anxiety morphs inexorably into a knot of deep fear on a cresting wave of paranoia. Sitting next to a jacked up speed freak doesn't help. By the time the bus arrives in Manchester you're twitching yourself—a tic under your right eye has started up. Where did that come from? Is there such a thing as a contact high from speed?

The usual grim soldiers are waiting at the entrance to a grey two-story building just outside of town. It has an unusually large parking lot that reminds you of WWII photos, acres of men standing at attention in rows, waiting to be shipped off to the second war to end all wars. Your fear is expanding off the charts as you walk jerkily into the building with the group. Your mind is so jammed up now it's hard to think, but a faint realization is hovering—you're going to die today. A steadily fading voice inside cries "nonsense," but you can see how far such wild paranoia might go. At what point does a person become truly insane?

The procedure is familiar: strip to your jockeys, then fill out forms, get groped, give blood, get X-Rayed, all while wandering from room to room with soldiers and your bunch of naked guys. Nearly naked. This time there aren't any who don't have any underwear at all, but there are two guys in red Speedos who keep holding hands. Another desperate maneuver, apparently. Or maybe they're in love. The soldiers in each room seem to be expecting them, and they're greeted with snarling remarks for everyone's

benefit. The scene is basically the same as Whitehall Station, except there's not a single African American in sight, and X-Ray Man isn't there.

You sit again, dripping with sweat, on a stool across from another disinterested doctor who asks about your health questionnaire. This time, you were so distracted by visions of doom that you checked quite a few boxes without paying much attention. You're shaking so much he can probably see it, which is bad, because he'll assume you're faking. Half the other guys have long hair and weird clothes, so the soldiers have been calling everyone "College," like it's just the best insult ever. All they have to do is wait—you've never been this freaked out before, so obviously when you calm down they'll see how normal you are. Is that enough to charge you with attempting to evade the draft? Were there cameras on the bus?

The doctor has been talking about something. What? He wants you to stand up and pull down your underpants again. You rise, stumble, and clumsily pull them down and bend over. He examines your ass-hole and then plunks down in his swivel chair and writes on your papers. "No cyst I can see," he says, as if you had been faking it the first time. "What's this about?" he says, holding up your medical checklist.

You can see now that it looks pretty messy. Way too many boxes checked, several crossed-out items. You colored outside the lines. You stare at him blankly, wondering what you're supposed to do about it.

"Homer," he says. "What's all this? You don't have tuberculosis, do you?"

Your dad is dead now, but he was a doctor, well-known among doctors, and treated people with TB. Maybe that's what you were thinking. You start to explain, with your tongue and lips so dry they're all stuck together, but only a shaky mumble emerges. The doctor stares. Your new tic twitches, as if you're winking at him.

"Oh Jesus, never mind," he says. He folds up your papers and stuffs them in an envelope. Is he going to mail them somewhere? Then he writes on the envelope and hands it to you. "Take this to the shrink." You look down at the envelope. "Get your clothes on. The staff psychiatrist is away, so you'll go to an office in town. Don't lose that envelope."

You continue staring at the envelope, trying to suss out their real reasons for sending you away, fully clothed, into the city to see someone, some shrink. What actually happens to kids taken away like this? But

you're not a kid, are you? This do-si-do with the draft isn't new, and you're old enough to vote now. Yippee.

A soldier grabs you by the shoulder, casting a long meaningful glance at the doctor. He pushes you ahead, back to the changing room, and watches closely while you dress and transfer the contents of your ditty bag back to your pockets. They called it a Personal Possessions Receptacle this time.

There is a brief whispered conversation at the front desk, and both soldiers look at you and smirk. "Taking another shot at it, eh, College?" Another one mutters, "Fucking peaceniks. Frag 'em all," and the first one nods. This hostility means nothing to you. If they had the authority to kill you, they would have already. But larger wheels are turning, and a larger unknown gapes.

A taxicab arrives, or what looks just like a regular yellow cab, driven by a fat guy wearing a mustache and a red plaid shirt. You get in and the soldier talks to the driver for a minute. The driver turns and takes a good look at you, and then drives away with you in the back. "Free ride from Uncle Sam, eh?" he says, sounding far too friendly to be trusted.

It's a ten minute drive, and you examine the envelope with your papers inside. Instructions for the shrink, probably, and all the stuff they've been collecting about you. You're careful not to let the driver see what you're doing in the rear-view mirror. The envelope isn't sealed. You would look inside if you could, but obviously the driver will report this, and you'll be found out. An innocent person wouldn't be so fascinated with his paperwork, would he? The driver tries again to lull you with a few more "friendly" remarks, but you know better than to reply. Keep your head down.

The shrink's office is attached to a private home in a Manchester suburb. Flower beds between a serpentine front walk and another straight walk leading to the side door. His name is on a brass plaque, but you avoid reading it. The taxi is gone, and you're alone, on a sunny street in a quiet middle-class neighborhood, just ringing a doorbell. What could be more normal?

The door is opened by a grey-haired man as old as your father, the shrink himself. He leads you to his office, and you sit in a stuffed armchair while he opens the envelope. He smiles, asks if you'd like a glass of water, tries to get you comfortable while he figures out what's really going on

with you. But you know he's just trying to make you relax so you'll let your guard down. It's what all shrinks do, probably.

"Well, hello, Homer," he says. "Just to get acquainted, why don't you tell me a little about your parents."

That's not going to be easy. You're on the edge of something, and it doesn't leave room for explaining, especially complicated stuff like how you relate to your parents. The doctor waits while you try to think of someplace to begin, and then says, "How do you feel about your dad?"

"Dead," you say, after groping with other ways of putting it.

"I'm sorry to hear that. What did he do for a living?"

You'd like to take a moment now and cry for a while, but that's not a good idea. Your mouth is still stuck together so you take a sip of water, wondering what they put in the water. "Doctor." One word at a time is about your limit.

"I see. When did he die?"

"Months."

"How do you feel about your dad?"

Impossible. You start to speak, but nothing comes out.

After a while the shrink says, "How about your mom? Any thoughts about her?"

You struggle. She's complicated. Eventually, "Alive."

The doctor is beginning to get the picture. You can't talk about your parents, at least not in the middle of a life-or-death situation like this. "Any brothers and sisters?" he says.

"Both."

"How do you feel about your brother?"

Well, that's also pretty complicated, isn't it? An older brother can really shake things up over the years. Yours did. Way too complicated to explain right now. Pointless. Does it matter that he tortured you in front of the other kids a couple of times? Would that strengthen your case? But he stood up for you, too, and taught you stuff, and took your side when your older sister called you a little stinker. That was way back, ages ago. Why do they ask these impossible questions? Hah. To throw you off, of course. He's after something. You're about to be found out, unmasked, then imprisoned or killed. Hah! Crazy paranoia. Forget about it. Just wait.

"How about your sister. Is she older?"

You nod. He stops asking questions for awhile and pushes the papers aside, turns, and looks out the window at his backyard with flowers and small trees. Then he swivels back and starts in again.

“It says here you’ve taken some drugs,” he says. “What kind of drugs have you taken?”

You think hard. What to say? “This and that,” you say. Your arms and legs keep trying to jump around.

“Heroin?”

“No.”

“Cocaine?”

“Yes.”

“How often?”

“Once.”

“Why did you stop?”

“Destroys brain cells.” You’re being honest. It feels weird.

“Why not heroin?”

That’s a fucking strange thing to ask. “It’s addicting.” Who the hell in their right mind would take heroine? Oops. Was that out loud? That sounded sane.

“Marijuana?”

“Yes.”

“How often?”

“Evenings.”

“Every evening?”

“Most.”

“Why do you smoke Marijuana?”

“Relaxes me.”

“I see.” He writes. “LSD?”

“Yes.”

“How often?”

“Once.”

“Why did you stop?”

You think a minute. Maybe you should lie. You’re so whacked right now what does it matter? It might help. “Flashbacks,” you say, even though you’ve never met anyone who had an LSD flashback. You don’t really believe in flashbacks, but you’re thinking today might be real good for a

flashback or two, later on, sometime when your guard is down. Better keep your guard up for now. But don't let him see that's what you're doing. You know shrinks can't really read your mind, but they might be incredibly good at recognizing all those little signs that you're guilty, and you know you're guilty, and all they have to do is check some box on your forms, and the Army will take care of the rest. Angry soldiers back at the station will be more than happy to. They're waiting for you, and they already know. Know what? Technically, you're not really guilty of anything, are you?

"Homer?"

You look up. It's been a while, apparently.

"How do you feel about being in the Army?"

Wow. That's direct. Before you can think of a safe reply, your voice just says, "Worst thing that could ever happen."

The doctor takes a long pause. You figure now you've basically signed your own death warrant. The cat's out of the bag. The horse is out of the barn. The cards are on the table. Elvis has left the building.

"Well," the doctor says quietly, "I'm inclined to agree."

What? Oh, there he goes, lulling you, setting up for the coup de grace. But then he says, "You said your dad was a doctor. What kind of doctor was he?"

He's got your head spinning a little, but you say, "Orthopedic surgeon."

"Where was his practice?"

"New York."

"What hospital?"

"Special Surgery." Why would he be asking all this?

The doctor sits back for a minute, not looking at you. Probably setting you up for something unexpectedly devious. Maybe he knows your dad. Knew. How can they use that against you?

"Was he famous?"

"Yes."

Another long pause. Then the doctor leans toward you and puts on an even more sincere face, and says, "Homer, I've been doing this for years now, and nobody I've rejected for military service has ever been bothered again. Ever." He waits until I nod as if I believe him. "But you should also know that if you ever do want to join the military in some capacity, this classification can be reversed. If you really want to."

He sits back, as if now he's set the hook once and for all. You wonder if he might be for real, but you can't afford to let even a sliver of relief slip through your defenses. Did he know your father? No, this is all psychological manipulation, tricks to expose you. Stay down. Stay down.

The cab back to the induction station is a different one, but the driver is still checking you out in his mirror, and you know better than to take even a peek into the envelope, which they deliberately left unsealed. Life and death in little check-boxes. It's too important not to look, but it's too dangerous to even look like you're thinking about it.

Back from the shrink, they make you strip again while all the staff gather round to read your papers. One of them holds up your folder and sneers, "Fucking did it." The others grumble in disgust. "Fucking College," one of them says. They're standing around you now, ten guys in uniform standing in a circle, one skinny college kid at the center, exhausted, in his underpants, and now they're bouncing you from one soldier to another. Back and forth, shove, spin, catch, and shove. Five minutes, maybe forever. Maybe they're trying to see if you'll start crying, or screaming, or maybe they want you to fight back so they can beat the shit out of you. Probably all three.

In '68, about 16,000 US soldiers are being killed in Vietnam, the worst year of the war. These soldiers in Manchester are hearing about it, maybe more than you are. Or maybe they're trying not to think about it, and you get to be their fidget toy. Nobody is having any fun, but they're doing a lot of laughing. When their enthusiasm for toss-the-student dies down, one of them takes you upstairs and orders you to lie on a steel table. The cold against your bare skin makes you shiver as you sweat.

An orderly comes in and takes your blood pressure again. In the next room, centrifuges are spinning, probably looking for drugs in your blood. Some of your friends took things before getting on the bus. You will all be found out, by blood or by association, and you will be sentenced, and for some of you the sentence will be Nam. You're wondering which would be worse, federal prisoner or a private in the rice paddies. Hard to predict that sort of thing.

An orderly comes in and takes your blood pressure again. The centrifuges are still spinning. After an hour or so, some of them have been shut off. There is clinking of glass and metal, test tubes probably,

eyedroppers, beakers and retorts. You've been staring at the white ceiling for a very long time, forbidden from moving, and you visualize a scene from *Frankenstein*, the sinister laboratory. What the fuck are they doing? Your heart races again, and you can feel the pulse in your neck. The steel table isn't as cold, but it's wet with perspiration.

An orderly comes in and takes your blood pressure. This time he mumbles something, like it's interesting for some reason. Later, he returns and takes it again. You lie still for hours, drifting into an unfamiliar daze, surrounded by threats and dire portents, but slowly sinking into a stupor. Your blood pressure must be coming down, steadily, proving that you're an impostor, perfectly capable to serve your country, ready to fight but too lazy and chicken-hearted to enlist.

An orderly comes in. "Get dressed, College. Get the hell out of here."

Exhausted, you dress again and walk the gauntlet of jeering, pissed-off soldiers, back to the bus, and back to Vermont and college. A lot of the guys you arrived with aren't going back; they got on another bus and headed off somewhere else, to their new life. You wonder how many of them realized this wasn't just a physical. The guy on speed isn't on the ride back, either. Somebody says, "They kept him."

A few weeks later you receive a new draft card that says 4-F, but you don't believe it at all. It's a trick.

Vermont, Summer 1968

It's summer now, and Vermont is as beautiful as ever, and the long duel with your draft board ended months ago, and nobody won. They succeeded in denying your student deferment for almost an entire college career, presumably because you took a year off after high school. And you got so freaked out by their ceaseless attempts to commandeer your life, and by the expanding chaos of the war itself, that you're now legitimately bonkers, supposedly out of their reach, a card-carrying 4-F lunatic. This is a Pyrrhic victory at best—the trauma you displayed in Manchester wasn't feigned, and you're still freaked out.

You're standing in the prop room, in the wings at the college theater. A friend is playing Willy Loman on the stage, the third day of his production of *Death of a Salesman*. You are Charlie, the solid and helpful next-door neighbor who pops in now and then to try to help the Lomans, and to

reinforce the audience's growing recognition that yes, Willy is losing it. Here in the wings, you watch the deep dusk of the Vermont night descend over the campus. Charlie doesn't appear on stage much, but he has the last word, so every night you wander around the prop room for an hour or so, waiting for your final entrance cue, while Willy gets progressively despondent and suicidal.

Tonight, you see a pair of headlights slowly move into the upper campus parking lot. Another car has stopped, with its lights on, alongside the entrance driveway. The significance of these two vehicles is obvious—the government has finally figured out that you are indeed an impostor, a fake mental case, and they are here to apprehend you, take you back to Manchester, take your clothes, rough you up a bit, and send you off to the front lines. There, most likely, your CO will have you quietly fragged during a muddy night at the edge of a jungle. You wrestle with this idiotic paranoia for a while, and then go on stage as the play's rock of objectivity and let everyone know that Willy must be forgiven, even if he was a bit insane.

Before *Death of a Salesman* opened, Martin Luther King was murdered in Memphis, and just after it closes, out in LA some political nut-job shows up and murders Bobby Kennedy. You've filed a few short-form tax returns from pathetic summer jobs, but that's the extent of your federal interactions now. Your personality has a scar, however, one that affords a new empathy for the kids who had to go, especially the ones who desperately didn't want to, and the ones who went crazy over there, and most especially the ones who bought the farm, regardless of their views. None of them went in freedom to spread and support freedom; they went faceless, as cannon fodder, sent by old men with lofty rhetoric, in support of little more than political superstition.

Vermont, Spring 1969

A year after Manchester, you graduate, still looking over your shoulder. But nothing further has come from the draft board, no FBI agents have interviewed your relatives (although one did come to interview you about a classmate who applied to the Peace Corps), and the Government seems to have returned to being oblivious to your existence. You don't make it to Woodstock, but the world moves on. Carpet-bombing of Cambodia, kept

secret from Congress, is exposed, and largely ignored. Neil Armstrong walks on the moon. Some wackos murder Sharon Tate and her friends. You begin to make your way out into the world.

Here, Now

Half a century later, Whitehall Induction Center is gone, converted into a high-rent glass condo complex, and your hands are covered with distinguishing marks, liver spots and keratoses on a fine lace pattern of wrinkles, the collagen gone, the skin pale and faintly blotched. You look at your index finger, and find the row of tiny bumps that are still registered somewhere in the National Archives as your one identifying birthmark. On the other hand, a small scar, cut when you dropped a pocket knife and it nearly severed a tendon, now lost among other scars, insect bites that never healed, a bit of pencil lead just under the epidermis. These are not the scars of war. These are nothing, no indication of anything, but they are always there, your secret tenuous tie to uncounted friends and classmates and brothers in age, most of whom you never met, some 60,000 of whom never came home. And another half a million Others. You got off easy, old man.

Codicil

In the winter of 1969, Nixon starts the lottery, and only boys 19-25 are eligible. In the next two years, just guys born in 1951 and 1952 are at risk. By 1972 the last draft is called, and the next year the volunteer army is created and the draft ends. Saigon falls three years later, and the 20-year non-war is over. Those who participated and survived, however, live on. The Selective Service System continues, ready to begin again, and all males 18-25 residing in the US, citizens or not, are still required to register; the penalty for not doing so is now up to five years and a quarter million dollars. Women are not yet required to register, but ground combat exclusions have been eliminated, and removal of all other gender-based military service barriers is underway, so next time, everybody gets a drum.