

PROLOGUE

Yes—Kilgore Trout is back again. He could not make it on the outside. That is no disgrace. A lot of good people can't make it on the outside.

I received a letter this morning (November 16, 1978) from a young stranger named John Figler, of Crown Point, Indiana. Crown Point is notorious for a jailbreak there by the bank robber John Dillinger, during the depths of the Great Depression. Dillinger escaped by threatening his jailor with a pistol made of soap and shoe polish. His jailor was a woman. God

rest his soul, and her soul, too. Dillinger was the Robin Hood of my early youth. He is buried near my parents—and near my sister Alice, who admired him even more than I did—in Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis. Also in there, on the top of Crown Hill, the highest point in the city, is James Whitcomb Riley, “The Hoosier Poet.” When my mother was little, she knew Riley well.

Dillinger was summarily executed by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He was shot down in a public place, although he was not trying to escape or resist arrest. So there is nothing recent in my lack of respect for the F.B.I.

John Figler is a law-abiding high-school student. He says in his letter that he has read almost everything of mine and is now prepared to state the single idea that lies at the core of my life’s work so far. The words are his: “Love may fail, but courtesy will prevail.”

This seems true to me—and complete. So I am now in the abashed condition, five days after my fifty-sixth birthday, of realizing that I needn’t have bothered to write several books. A seven-word telegram would have done the job.

Seriously.

But young Figler’s insight reached me too late. I had nearly finished another book—this one.

In it is a minor character, “Kenneth Whistler,” inspired by an Indianapolis man of my father’s generation. The inspirer’s name was Powers Hapgood (1900–1949). He is sometimes mentioned in histories of American labor for his deeds of derring-do in strikes and at the protests about the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti, and so on.

I met him only once. I had lunch with him and Father and

my Uncle Alex, my father's younger brother, in Stegemeier's Restaurant in downtown Indianapolis after I came home from the European part of World War Two. That was in July of 1945. The first atomic bomb had not yet been dropped on Japan. That would happen in about a month. Imagine that.

I was twenty-two and still in uniform—a private first class who had flunked out of Cornell University as a student of chemistry before going to war. My prospects did not look good. There was no family business to go into. My father's architecture firm was defunct. He was broke. I had just gotten engaged to be married anyway, thinking, "Who but a wife would sleep with me?"

My mother, as I have said *ad nauseam* in other books, had declined to go on living, since she could no longer be what she had been at the time of her marriage—one of the richest women in town.

It was Uncle Alex who had arranged the lunch. He and Powers Hapgood had been at Harvard together. Harvard is all through this book, although I myself never went there. I have since taught there, briefly and without distinction—while my own home was going to pieces.

I confided that to one of my students—that my home was going to pieces.

To which he made this reply: "It *shows*."

Uncle Alex was so conservative politically that I do not think he would have eaten lunch with Hapgood gladly if Hapgood had not been a fellow Harvard man. Hapgood was then a labor union officer, a vice-president of the local CIO. His wife Mary had been the Socialist Party's candidate for vice-president of the United States again and again.

In fact, the first time I voted in a national election I voted for Norman Thomas and Mary Hapgood, not even knowing that she was an Indianapolis person. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman won. I imagined that I was a socialist. I believed that socialism would be good for the common man. As a private first class in the infantry, I was surely a common man.

The meeting with Hapgood came about because I had told Uncle Alex that I might try to get a job with a labor union after the Army let me go. Unions were admirable instruments for extorting something like economic justice from employers then.

Uncle Alex must have thought something like this: "God help us. Against stupidity even the gods contend in vain. Well—at least there is a Harvard man with whom he can discuss this ridiculous dream."

(It was Schiller who first said that about stupidity and the gods. This was Nietzsche's reply: "Against *boredom* even the gods contend in vain.")

So Uncle Alex and I sat down at a front table in Stegemeier's and ordered beers and waited for Father and Hapgood to arrive. They would be coming separately. If they had come together, they would have had nothing to say to each other on the way. Father by then had lost all interest in politics and history and economics and such things. He had taken to saying that people talked too much. Sensations meant more to him than ideas—especially the feel of natural materials at his fingertips. When he was dying about twenty years later, he would say that he wished he had been a potter, making mud pies all day long.

To me that was sad—because he was so well-educated. It seemed to me that he was throwing his knowledge and intelligence away, just as a retreating soldier might throw away his rifle and pack.

Other people found it beautiful. He was a much-beloved man in the city, with wonderfully talented hands. He was invariably courteous and innocent. To him all craftsmen were saints, no matter how mean or stupid they might really be.

Uncle Alex, by the way, could do nothing with his hands. Neither could my mother. She could not even cook a breakfast or sew on a button.

Powers Hapgood could mine coal. That's what he did after he graduated from Harvard, when his classmates were taking jobs in family businesses and brokerages and banks and so on: He mined coal. He believed that a true friend of the working people should be a worker himself—and a good one, too.

So I have to say that my father, when I got to know him, when I myself was something like an adult, was a good man in full retreat from life. My mother had already surrendered and vanished from our table of organization. So an air of defeat has always been a companion of mine. So I have always been enchanted by brave veterans like Powers Hapgood, and some others, who were still eager for information of what was really going on, who were still full of ideas of how victory might yet be snatched from the jaws of defeat. "If I am going to go on living," I have thought, "I had better follow them."

I tried to write a story about a reunion between my father and myself in heaven one time. An early draft of this book in fact began that way. I hoped in the story to become a really good friend of his. But the story turned out perversely, as

stories about real people we have known often do. It seemed that in heaven people could be any age they liked, just so long as they had experienced that age on Earth. Thus, John D. Rockefeller, for example, the founder of Standard Oil, could be any age up to ninety-eight. King Tut could be any age up to nineteen, and so on. As author of the story, I was dismayed that my father in heaven chose to be only nine years old.

I myself had chosen to be forty-four—respectable, but still quite sexy, too. My dismay with Father turned to embarrassment and anger. He was lemurlike as a nine-year-old, all eyes and hands. He had an endless supply of pencils and pads, and was forever tagging after me, drawing pictures of simply everything and insisting that I admire them when they were done. New acquaintances would sometimes ask me who that strange little boy was, and I would have to reply truthfully, since it was impossible to lie in heaven, “It’s my father.”

Bullies liked to torment him, since he was not like other children. He did not enjoy children’s talk and children’s games. Bullies would chase him and catch him and take off his pants and underpants and throw them down the mouth of hell. The mouth of hell looked like a sort of wishing well, but without a bucket and windlass. You could lean over its rim and hear ever so faintly the screams of Hitler and Nero and Salome and Judas and people like that far, far below. I could imagine Hitler, already experiencing maximum agony, periodically finding his head draped with my father’s underpants.

Whenever Father had his pants stolen, he would come running to me, purple with rage. As like as not, I had just made some new friends and was impressing them with my urbanity—and there my father would be, bawling bloody murder and with his little pecker waving in the breeze.

I complained to my mother about him, but she said she

knew nothing about him, or about me, either, since she was only sixteen. So I was stuck with him, and all I could do was yell at him from time to time, "For the love of God, Father, won't you please grow up!"

And so on. It insisted on being a very unfriendly story, so I quit writing it.

And now, in July of 1945, Father came into Stegemeier's Restaurant, still very much alive. He was about the age that I am now, a widower with no interest in ever being married again and with no evident wish for a lover of any kind. He had a mustache like the one I have today. I was clean-shaven then.

A terrible ordeal was ending—a planetary economic collapse followed by a planetary war. Fighting men were starting to come home everywhere. You might think that Father would comment on that, however fleetingly, and on the new era that was being born. He did not.

He told instead, and perfectly charmingly, about an adventure he had had that morning. While driving into the city, he had seen an old house being torn down. He had stopped and taken a closer look at its skeleton. He noticed that the sill under the front door was an unusual wood, which he finally decided was poplar. I gathered that it was about eight inches square and four feet long. He admired it so much that the wreckers gave it to him. He borrowed a hammer from one of them and pulled out all the nails he could see.

Then he took it to a sawmill—to have it ripped into boards. He would decide later what to do with the boards. Mostly, he wanted to see the grain in this unusual wood. He had to promise the mill that there were no nails left in the timber. This he did. But there was still a nail in there. It had lost its

head, and so was invisible. There was an earsplitting shriek from the circular saw when it hit the nail. Smoke came from the belt that was trying to spin the stalled saw.

Now Father had to pay for a new sawblade and a new belt, too, and had been told never to come there with used lumber again. He was delighted somehow. The story was a sort of fairy tale, with a moral in it for everyone.

Uncle Alex and I had no very vivid response to the story. Like all of Father's stories, it was as neatly packaged and self-contained as an egg.

So we ordered more beers. Uncle Alex would later become a cofounder of the Indianapolis chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous, although his wife would say often and pointedly that he himself had never been an alcoholic. He began to talk now about The Columbia Conserve Company, a cannery that Powers Hapgood's father, William, also a Harvard man, had founded in Indianapolis in 1903. It was a famous experiment in industrial democracy, but I had never heard of it before. There was a lot that I had never heard of before.

The Columbia Conserve Company made tomato soup and chili and catsup, and some other things. It was massively dependent on tomatoes. The company did not make a profit until 1916. As soon as it made one, though, Powers Hapgood's father began to give his employees some of the benefits he thought workers everywhere in the world were naturally entitled to. The other principal stockholders were his two brothers, also Harvard men—and they agreed with him.

So he set up a council of seven workers, who were to recommend to the board of directors what the wages and working conditions should be. The board, without any prodding from

anybody, had already declared that there would no longer be any seasonal layoffs, even in such a seasonal industry, and that there would be vacations with pay, and that medical care for workers and their dependents would be free, and that there would be sick pay and a retirement plan, and that the ultimate goal of the company was that, through a stock-bonus plan, it become the property of the workers.

“It went bust,” said Uncle Alex, with a certain grim, Darwinian satisfaction.

My father said nothing. He may not have been listening.

I now have at hand a copy of *The Hapgoods, Three Earnest Brothers*, by Michael D. Marcaccio (The University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1977). The three brothers in the subtitle were William, the founder of Columbia Conserve, and Norman and Hutchins, also Harvard men, who were both socialistically inclined journalists and editors and book writers in and around New York. According to Mr. Marcaccio, Columbia Conserve was a quite tidy success until 1931, when the Great Depression hit it murderously. Many workers were let go, and those who were kept on had their pay cut by 50 percent. A great deal of money was owed to Continental Can, which insisted that the company behave more conventionally toward its employees—even if they were stockholders, which most of them were. The experiment was over. There wasn't any money to pay for it anymore. Those who had received stock through profit sharing now owned bits of a company that was nearly dead.

It did not go completely bust for a while. In fact it still existed when Uncle Alex and Father and Powers Hapgood and I had lunch. But it was just another cannery, paying not

one penny more than any other cannery paid. What was left of it was finally sold off to a stronger company in 1953.

Now Powers Hapgood came into the restaurant, an ordinary-looking Middle Western Anglo-Saxon in a cheap business suit. He wore a union badge in his lapel. He was cheerful. He knew my father slightly. He knew Uncle Alex quite well. He apologized for being late. He had been in court that morning, testifying about violence on a picket line some months before. He personally had had nothing to do with the violence. His days of derring-do were behind him. Never again would he fight anybody, or be clubbed to his knees, or be locked up in jail.

He was a talker, with far more wonderful stories than Father or Uncle Alex had ever told. He was thrown into a lunatic asylum after he led the pickets at the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. He was in fights with organizers for John L. Lewis's United Mine Workers, which he considered too right wing. In 1936 he was a CIO organizer at a strike against RCA in Camden, New Jersey. He was put in jail. When several thousand strikers surrounded the jail, as a sort of reverse lynch mob, the sheriff thought it best to turn him loose again. And on and on. I have put my recollections of some of the stories he told into the mouth of, as I say, a fictitious character in this book.

It turned out that he had been telling stories all morning in court, too. The judge was fascinated, and almost everybody else in court was, too—presumably by such unselfish high adventures. The judge had encouraged Hapgood, I gathered, to go on and on. Labor history was pornography of a sort in those days, and even more so in these days. In public schools

and in the homes of nice people it was and remains pretty much taboo to tell tales of labor's sufferings and derring-do.

I remember the name of the judge. It was Claycomb. I am able to remember it so easily because I had been a high-school classmate of the judge's son, "Moon."

Moon Claycomb's father, according to Powers Hapgood, asked him this final question just before lunch: "Mr. Hapgood," he said, "why would a man from such a distinguished family and with such a fine education choose to live as you do?"

"Why?" said Hapgood, according to Hapgood. "Because of the Sermon on the Mount, sir."

And Moon Claycomb's father said this: "Court is adjourned until two P.M."

What, exactly, was the Sermon on the Mount?

It was the prediction by Jesus Christ that the poor in spirit would receive the Kingdom of Heaven; that all who mourned would be comforted; that the meek would inherit the Earth; that those who hungered for righteousness would find it; that the merciful would be treated mercifully; that the pure in heart would see God; that the peacemakers would be called the sons of God; that those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake would also receive the Kingdom of Heaven; and on and on.

The character in this book inspired by Powers Hapgood is unmarried and has problems with alcohol. Powers Hapgood was married and, so far as I know, had no serious problems with alcohol.

There is another minor character, whom I call "Roy M. Cohn." He is modeled after the famous anticommunist and lawyer and businessman named, straightforwardly enough, one would have to say, Roy M. Cohn. I include him with his kind permission, given yesterday (January 2, 1979) over the telephone. I promised to do him no harm and to present him as an appallingly effective attorney for either the prosecution or the defense of anyone.

My dear father was silent for a good part of our ride home from that lunch with Powers Hapgood. We were in his Plymouth sedan. He was driving. Some fifteen years later he would be arrested for driving through a red light. It would be discovered that he had not had a driver's license for twenty years—which means that he was not licensed even on the day we had lunch with Powers Hapgood.

His house was out in the country some. When we got to the edge of the city, he said that if we were lucky we would see a very funny dog. It was a German shepherd, he said, who could hardly stand up because he had been hit so often by automobiles. The dog still came tottering out to chase them, his eyes filled with bravery and rage.

But the dog did not appear that day. He really did exist. I would see him another day, when I was driving alone. He was crouched down on the shoulder of the road, ready to sink his teeth into my right front tire. But his charge was a pitiful thing to see. His rear end hardly worked at all anymore. He might as well have been dragging a steamer trunk with the power in his front feet alone.

That was the day on which the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

But back to the day on which I lunched with Powers Hapgood:

When Father put the car into his garage, he finally said something about the lunch. He was puzzled by the passionate manner in which Hapgood had discussed the Sacco and Vanzetti case, surely one of the most spectacular, most acrimoniously argued miscarriages of justice in American history.

“You know,” said Father, “I had no idea that there was any question about their guilt.”

That is how purely an artist my father was.

There is mentioned in this book a violent confrontation between strikers and police and soldiers called the Cuyahoga Massacre. It is an invention, a mosaic composed of bits taken from tales of many such riots in not such olden times.

It is a legend in the mind of the leading character in this book, Walter F. Starbuck, whose life was accidentally shaped by the Massacre, even though it took place on Christmas morning in eighteen hundred ninety-four, long before Starbuck was born.

It goes like this:

In October of 1894 Daniel McCone, the founder and owner of the Cuyahoga Bridge and Iron Company, then the largest single employer in Cleveland, Ohio, informed his factory workers through their foremen that they were to accept a 10 percent cut in pay. There was no union. McCone was a hard-

bitten and brilliant little mechanical engineer, self-educated, born of working-class parents in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Half his work force, about a thousand men, under the leadership of an ordinary foundryman with a gift for oratory, Colin Jarvis, walked out, forcing the plant to shut down. They had found it almost impossible to feed and shelter and clothe their families even without the cut in wages. All of them were white. Most of them were native-born.

Nature sympathized that day. The sky and Lake Erie were identical in color, the same dead pewter-gray.

The little homes toward which the strikers trudged were near the factory. Many of them were owned, and their neighborhood grocery stores, too, by Cuyahoga Bridge and Iron.

Among the trudgers, as bitter and dejected as anyone, seemingly, were spies and agents provocateurs secretly employed and paid very well by the Pinkerton Detective Agency. That agency still exists and prospers, and is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of The RAMJAC Corporation.

Daniel McCone had two sons, Alexander Hamilton McCone, then twenty-two, and John, twenty-five. Alexander had graduated without distinction from Harvard in the previous May. He was soft, he was shy, he was a stammerer. John, the elder son and the company's heir apparent, had flunked out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in his freshman year, and had been his father's most trusted aide ever since.

The workers to a man, strikers and nonstrikers alike, hated the father and his son John, but acknowledged that they knew more about shaping iron and steel than anybody else in the world. As for young Alexander: They found him girllike and

stupid and too cowardly ever to come near the furnaces and forges and drop hammers, where the most dangerous work was done. Workers would sometimes wave their handkerchiefs at him, as a salute to his futility as a man.

When Walter F. Starbuck, in whose mind this legend is, asked Alexander years later why he had ever gone to work in such an inhospitable place after Harvard, especially since Alexander's father had not insisted on it, he stammered out a reply, which when unscrambled, was this: "I then believed that a rich man should have some understanding of the place from which his riches came. That was very juvenile of me. Great wealth should be accepted unquestioningly, or not at all."

About Alexander's stammers before the Cuyahoga Massacre: They were little more than grace notes expressing excessive modesty. Never had one left him mute for more than three seconds, with all his thoughts held prisoner inside.

And he would not have done much talking in the presence of his dynamic father and brother in any event. But his silence came to conceal a secret that was increasingly pleasant with each passing day: He was coming to understand the business as well as they did. Before they announced a decision, he almost always knew what it would be and should be—and why. Nobody else knew it yet, but he, too, by God, was an industrialist and an engineer.

When the strike came in October, he was able to guess many of the things that should be done, even though he had never been through a strike before. Harvard was a million miles away. Nothing he had ever learned there would get the factory going again. But the Pinkerton

Agency would, and the police would—and perhaps the National Guard. Before his father and brother said so, Alexander knew that there were plenty of men in other parts of the country who were desperate enough to take a job at almost any wage. When his father and brother did say this, he learned something else about business: There were companies, often pretending to be labor unions, whose sole business was to recruit such men.

By the end of November the chimneys of the factory were belching smoke again. The strikers had no money left for rent or food or fuel. Every large employer within three hundred miles had been sent their names, so he would know what troublemakers they had been. Their nominal leader, Colin Jarvis, was in jail, awaiting trial on a trumped-up murder charge.

On December fifteenth the wife of Colin Jarvis, called Ma, led a delegation of twenty other strikers' wives to the main gate of the factory, asking to see Daniel McCone. He sent Alexander down to them with a scribbled note, which Alexander found himself able to read out loud to them without any speech impediment at all. It said that Daniel McCone was too busy to give time to strangers who had nothing to do with affairs of the Cuyahoga Bridge and Iron Company anymore. It suggested that they had mistaken the company for a charitable organization. It said that their churches or police precinct stations would be able to give them a list of organizations to which they might more appropriately plead for help—if they really needed help and felt that they deserved it.

Ma Jarvis told Alexander that her own message was even simpler: The strikers would return to work on any terms.

Most of them were now being evicted from their homes and had no place to go.

"I am sorry," said Alexander. "I can only read my father's note again, if you would like me to."

Alexander McCone would say many years later that the confrontation did not bother him a bit at the time. He was in fact elated, he said, to find himself such a reliable ". . . muh-muh-muh-machine."

A police captain now stepped forward. He warned the women that they were in violation of the law, assembling in such great numbers as to impede traffic and constitute a threat to public safety. He ordered them to disperse at once, in the name of the law.

This they did. They retreated across the vast plaza before the main gate. The façade of the factory had been designed to remind cultivated persons of the Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy. The factory's clocktower was a half-scale replica of San Marco's famous campanile.

It was from the belfry of that tower that Alexander and his father and his brother would watch the Cuyahoga Massacre on Christmas morning. Each would have his own binoculars. Each would have his own little revolver, too.

There were no bells in the belfry. Neither were there cafés and shops around the plaza below. The architect had justified the plaza on strictly utilitarian grounds. It provided any amount of room for wagons and buggies and horse-drawn streetcars as they came and went. The architect had also been matter-of-fact about the virtues of the factory as a fort. Any mob meaning to storm the front gate would first have to cross all that open ground.

A single newspaper reporter, from *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, now a RAMJAC publication, retreated across the plaza with the women. He asked Ma Jarvis what she planned to do next.

There was nothing much that she could do next, of course. The strikers weren't even strikers anymore, but simply unemployed persons being turned out of their homes.

She gave a brave answer anyway: "We will be back," she said. What else could she say?

He asked her when they would be back.

Her answer was probably no more than the poetry of hopelessness in Christendom, with winter setting in. "On Christmas morning," she said.

This was printed in the paper, whose editors felt that a threatening promise had been made. And the fame of this coming Christmas in Cleveland spread far and wide. Sympathizers with the strikers—preachers, writers, union organizers, populist politicians, and on and on—began to filter into the city as though expecting a miracle of some kind. They were frankly enemies of the economic order as it was constructed then.

A company of National Guard infantrymen was mobilized by Edwin Kincaid, the governor of Ohio, to protect the factory. They were farm boys from the southern part of the state, selected because they had no friends or relatives among the strikers, no reason to see them as anything but unreasonable disturbers of the peace. They represented an American ideal: healthy, cheerful citizen soldiers, who went about their ordinary business until their country suddenly needed an awesome display of weapons and discipline. They were supposed to appear as though from nowhere, to the consternation of

America's enemies. When the trouble was over, they would vanish again.

The regular army of the country, which had fought the Indians until the Indians could fight no more, was down to about thirty thousand men. As for the Utopian militias throughout the country: They almost all consisted of farm boys, since the health of the factory workers was so bad and their hours so long. It was about to be discovered, incidentally, in the Spanish-American War, that militiamen were worse than useless on battlefields, they were so poorly trained.

And that was surely the impression young Alexander Hamilton McCone had of the militiamen who arrived at the factory on Christmas Eve: that these were not soldiers. They were brought on a special train to a siding inside the factory's high iron fence. They straggled out of the cars and onto a loading platform as though they were ordinary passengers on various errands. Their uniforms were only partly buttoned, and often mis-buttoned, at that. Several had lost their hats. Almost all carried laughably unmilitary suitcases and parcels.

Their officers? Their captain was the postmaster of Greenfield, Ohio. Their two lieutenants were twin sons of the president of the Greenfield Bank and Trust Company. The postmaster and the banker had both done local favors for the governor. The commissions were their rewards. And the officers, in turn, had rewarded those who had pleased them in some way by making them sergeants or corporals. And the privates, in turn, voters or sons of voters, had it within their power, if they felt like using it, to ruin the lives of their superiors with contempt and ridicule, which could go on for generations.

There on the loading platform at the Cuyahoga Bridge and

Iron Company old Daniel McCone finally had to ask one of the many soldiers milling about and eating at the same time, "Who is in charge here?"

As luck would have it, he had put the question to the captain, who told him this: "Well—as much as anybody, I guess I am."

To their credit, and although armed with bayonets and live ammunition, the militiamen would not harm a single soul on the following day.

They were quartered in an idled machine shop. They slept in the aisles. Each one had brought his own food from home. They had hams and roasted chickens and cakes and pies. They ate whatever they pleased and whenever they pleased, and turned the machine shop into a picnic ground. They left the place looking like a village dump. They did not know any better.

Yes, and old Daniel McCone and his two sons spent the night in the factory, too—on camp cots in their offices at the foot of the bell tower, and with loaded revolvers under their pillows. When would they have their Christmas dinner? At three o'clock on the following afternoon. The trouble would surely be over by then. Young Alexander was to make use of his fine education, his father had told him, by composing and delivering an appropriate prayer of thanksgiving before they ate that meal.

Regular company guards, augmented by Pinkerton agents and city policemen, meanwhile took turns patrolling the company fence all night. The company guards, ordinarily armed only with pistols, had rifles, and shotguns, too, borrowed from friends or brought from home.