

**Grand Opening. Jon Hassler. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987.**

**AUTUMN**

**One**

Driving along the Mississippi on Highway 61. Brendan experiencing “dread.” His father “gripping the wheel tightly.” His mother reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. [11]

The car was “propelled quite literally by the river, fir the engine leaked coolant...” [11]

Brendan pleased to note that Grandfather had miscounted the number of cars on the train he had pointed out. “Adult error was reassuring. Small error, that is. Large error, of course, was frightening.” [12]

He prayed that this move was not the large error he felt it to be. [12]

Catherine “... loved flat earth. She abhorred restricted vision.” [12]

“Grandfather having aged to the point where change was unimaginable.” [13]

With water for the car, Hank brings flowers for Catherine. “His parents were linked by a love as direct and mute as a beam of light and very few of Brendan’s joys equaled that of coming between them and feeling himself pierced by that beam.” [14]

“Hank, the eldest son in a family of nine, was accustomed to taking chances.” [14]

91 year old Aunt Nancy, whom they visit en route: “Live lived enough of life to know it works.” [15]

“The engine clattered, the exhaust pipes thundered like guns and the car moved off down the highway.” [15]

Next stop is at Uncle Herman, who takes them out to dinner at the St. Charles Hotel. [16]

“Throughout the mean Herman and Grandfather exchanged the memories they held in common, happy and sad. Grandfather’s style of remembering was exuberant, full of moans of regret and sighs and laughter. Herman’s was restrained. Happy, he emitted a whispery chuckle. Sad, he lowered his head and shook it.” [17]

They mentioned “names mythical to Brendan because he had never seen the flesh they stood for.” But he had heard their names at family get-togethers – “names printed on the funeral cards the family used as bookmarks in their missals.” [17]

Herman points out the State Home School for Boys: “It’s bad what goes on there.” [17]

## Two

Plum had been named for a grove of wild plum trees, but by now “the grove was long dead and so were most of the people it had warmed when it was chopped into firewood.” [19]

Hank and Brendan get up early. Hank tells Brendan to listen, and Brendan asks “what?” “Silence.” Then he hears a dog bark, and the breeze rattling cornstalks. [19]

In Minneapolis, “where he had been unacquainted with a quarter of a million people, [Brendan] had never felt so unknown.” [20]

When Hank and Brendan got to the store, they couldn’t find the key. But: “It was unlocked.” [21]

They meet Wallace in the store. “... gaunt eyes and a long nose.” – “Brendan thought it remarkable the way this young man never paused to form his thoughts or choose his words.” [21]

Hank reveals that he had cashed in his life insurance to buy the store. [22]

Wallace “reminded Brendan of the haggard and dying exiles of eastern Europe he had seen in newsreels and *Life*.” [23]

“Brendan wondered if his father sensed in Wallace the overdramatic manner of an actor...” “No, his father never speculated on people’s expression or mannerisms. He took people for what they said and did and never mind the subtleties.” [23]

Hand “felt crushed by the toil ahead.” He invites Wallace for a cup of coffee at the Pool Hall next door. [23]

## Three

“The moment he set foot in home room, Brendan was offered a stick of gum by a shifty-eyed boy named Dodger Hicks who had been lying in wait for a friend.” [25]

Dodger “had spent every recess and noon hour of his life lingering at the edge of a game.” [25]

Dodger goes home with Brendan after school and discovers the boomerang. [26]

Dodger “accomplished a magnificent throw – all by sheer instinct apparently.” -- but it crashed through the kitchen window. [26]

Dodger instinctively ran. [26]

As Grandfather prepares for dinner, the brush and mirror remind him of his wife; it was her gift to him on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1918, “the last year of the Great War.” – and this would have been their 50<sup>th</sup> – “and another great war going on.” [27]

She had died in 1923. Kneeling by her then on the sofa: “She was cold. He couldn’t get over how cold she was, and this during a heatwave.” [28]

Being a brakeman was tremendous work; Grandfather had seen a coworker killed, had pulled the man off the tracks after he had been run over. [28]

“Ah, the damn trains. The wonderful damn trains.” [29]

“In this strange house in this strange town named Plum, Grandfather, brushing his hair, heard the whistle of a locomotive.” [29]

“To this day, short toots made Grandfather think of potatoes.” [29]

“Noisy locomotives often moved through that part of Grandfather’s life that was pure memory, but hardly ever this loud.” [29]

Grandfather walks through the Ottman’s yard – exchanging greetings with Mrs. Ottman – to get to the train backing into town. [30-31]

Memory of a man killed by a train, and meeting the man’s widow. [31]

Grandfather gets on train; Catherine sees him, and drives to pick him up. [32-34]

Catherine, re: Wallace: “One look at his quick, dark eyes and you knew was a man of intelligence and humor. And something else besides, like sorrow or desperation.” [34]

Hand more doubtful than Catherine about Wallace. [35]

Wallace: “I despise this town!”

They decide “to shoot the works” and place a large (\$1,000) stock order for their Grand Opening sale.” [35]

#### **Four**

Dodger amazed that Brendan’s father wasn’t angry about the broken window. “His own errors had always led to punishment, never pardon.” [30]

Dodger tells Brendan, at the furniture store: “sometimes there’s a dead body to look at, but not today.” [38]

Brendan and Dodger throwing the boomerang – “By what miracle did something you cast away come back to you?” [39]

This “gave Brendan a curious sense of consolation, suggesting that not every law of the universe was immutable, that you *could* rethink your impulses.” [39]

Brendan and Dodger ‘confess’ regrets to each other. [39]

Brendan tells Dodger about being Catholic, because the Fosters are going to register at the priest’s house. [41]

“No one was so taken with the outward forms of Catholicism as Brendan was – the rituals, the candles, the Latin.” [42]

“God was so evasive, so hard to know.” [42]

“Brendan’s religion at twelve was strangely ascetic compared to Grandfather’s at eighty. Brendan’s was meditative. Grandfather’s was social.” [42]

For Catherine, Church was “a place to evaluate actions.” Church as umpire in life’s contest between good and evil. – Catherine “helped God keep score.” [42]

“Hank’s faith resided in the marrow of his bones.” He never spoke of doctrine or morality. He simply accepted whatever the Church asked him to, and he went about his life accordingly.” [42]

“... another of his beliefs was that there was more to life than he could understand, more ways of looking at things than the one afforded him by his human and therefore limited sight.” [42]

“The priest’s Roman collar caught the light as he unlatched the screen and held it open, but his face remained in shadow.” [43]

Fr. O’Day to Grandfather, who has told him about getting in trouble for letting his friends ride trains free: “At least your fault was on the side of charity.” [46]

## **Five**

Wallace is jealous of Dodger, and advises Brendan not to hang around him. [47]

Brendan gets his boomerang to attract the attention of the ‘inner circle’ of 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It was Dodger’s throw that catches their attention, but he is soon excluded. [48-49]

Brendan: “surrounded by new friends.” [49]

Dodger: “at the edge of the crowd.” [49]

Brendan’s “treachery.” [49]

Dodger walks “out of Brendan’s life with same swiftness and grace with which he had mastered the boomerang.” [49]

## **Six**

Stan Kimball offers Hank and Catherine business advice. It was he – the undertaker – who suggests the walk-in cooler. He doesn’t like Wallace. [51-52]

Wallace likes to talk about religion, and mocks Catholicism. Catherine to Wallace’s objection: “Categories make sense out of things.” [52]

Catherine: “Think of it like the night sky, Wallace. The Big Dipper. It’s nothing but a few unrelated stars until somebody sees the pattern and gives it a name.” -- “... seeing the pattern in human actions.” [53]

Catherine: “I don’t know who’s in heaven and who isn’t. God know.” [53]

Hank, re: whether a Lutheran can go to heaven: “It’s fine with me.” [53]

Wallace: “Plum is hell.” [54]

## Seven

Grandfather troubled by Mrs. Ottman just staring out the window of her home. [55]

Brendan was like his father: "... a listener, not a talker." [55]

Grandfather and Brendan talk about Rufus. Rufus in the grocery store: "He was content to stand endlessly at the full-length window of the front door, looking out as though enchanted... his face locked in its customary grin." [55]

Brendan wished he could smile at Rufus or ignore him, but could do neither. [56]

Grandfather goes to the Ottman house with a Grand Opening circular. [58]

Mrs. Ottman re: Rufus: "Happy... He was born happy." [60]

## Eight

Brendan and Wallace distributing circulars. Brendan comes to associate names, not with faces, but with front doors. Wallace expects the Grand Opening to be a flop. In his experience, "aspiration came to nothing." [63]

Brendan had been avoiding Dodger, who "glanced at him a hundred times a day. Even looking the other way, Brendan felt the glance, and they made his face prickle with shame." [64]

Wallace realized "how intensely he despised Brendan... a hatred born of jealousy." Wallace arranges to have Brendan visit the houses with dogs. [65]

Gordy from the pool hall reveals to Catherine that upon hearing the Scripture passage about the lion and the lamb "he got a warm feeling and thought of his pool hall because this was one of the few places in town where Protestants and Catholics mixed with each other." [67]

Gordy: "... the city's got too many places... Here, the whole town is only one place." [68]

Catherine is looking for Gordy, who had left the pool hall without anyone noticing. [68]

Catherine's longing for Minneapolis: "she missed the anonymity of the city." [68]

Pictures of an abandoned movie set in a magazine. "It was a stunning display of nullity and it stood, in her heart, for Plum." [68]

Catherine's disappointing visit to the library. [70-73]

"... getting acquainted in Plum was like learning your way through a zoo." [73]

## Nine

Grandfather had noticed how the Flint house resembled his own childhood home, and he was "determined to go upstairs in this house and stand at that window and look out." So he takes a Grand Opening circular to the Flints. [77]

"It had been a long time since Mrs. Flint had invited anyone into her house..." [78]

“Grandfather “was here to look for his boyhood.” [78]

As Grandfather goes upstairs, Mrs. Flint “felt suddenly sad at the sound of a man’s voice in her room” – her husband had died 24 years ago. [80]

“Mrs. Flint paid no attention to his words, but listened to the rising and falling of his voice as though it were music. It made her husband’s death fresh in her memory.” [80]

Grandfather asks Mrs. Flint whether Reverend Dimmitburg was “the sort of man you can talk to about the verities... the meaning of life. The good old days. Trains.” [81]

On the way to the Dimmitburgs, Grandfather hears the DeSoto and ducks into a garage to hide – there was Mrs. Clay shucking corn, wearing a 2-piece bathing suit – Grandfather “admired her shapeliness, her bronzeness, her honey-colored hair.” [82]

He “admired the curve of her haunch.” [83]

Her husband had complained about Catholics (“fish-eaters”) moving in: “today the grocer, tomorrow the Pope.” [83]

Grandfather: “I’m Catholic to my bones.” [83]

“... this old codger with the grocery circular was making her feel more like a woman than her husband.” [84]

Wallace receives draft notice. He had previously received deferments because of his epilepsy. [87-88]

Wallace: “Failure was always so much more dramatic than success.” [89]

Wallace, re: his mother: “Her tone was the one he despised the most, tender and coaxing.” [89]

## **Ten**

First two days of the sale were successful – “convinced Wallace that the Grand Opening had transcended religious barriers.” [92]

Catherine hugs and kisses Wallace and he has a seizure – Mrs. Brock and Mrs. Kimball had witnessed the embrace but not the seizure. [94]

## **Eleven**

Mrs. Brask and Mrs. Kimball spread “the most stupendous gossip of their lives.” [98-99]

Mrs. Dimmitburg agreed that the pastor must be told: “for it was a scandal with theological overtones, proving beyond a doubt that the union of Catholicism and atheism led to depravity.” [98-99]

The telephone operator overhears and spreads the gossip. [99]

“Phyllis Clay was elated to learn of another adventurous woman in town.” [99]

Wallace, making deliveries, learns that Dodger and his mother are moving to Winona. [102]

Mrs. Clay tells Wallace about the rumor. [103]

Wallace tells Hand and Catherine. Catherine: "Are they nothing but lunatics in this village?"

Hank: "Catherine, don't take it so seriously." [104]

Wallace "felt strangely elated at having been accused of an illicit affair." [104]

Wallace tells Brendan about the rumors and about Dodger moving. Brendan had been troubled by his betrayal of Dodger and had confessed it, but "the old priest hadn't seemed the least interested." [105]

Hank to Catherine: "... like we were having a kind of Grand Opening inside ourselves." – Hank, exhilarated by the success of the sale, tells Catherine that he can't continue to feel that if she can't: "I can't feel it if you don't." [107]

## **Twelve**

Wallace had painted 32 faces of writers and artists on the ceiling and walls of his room – they consoled Wallace, for they were "people whose genius had not been acknowledged in their lifetimes." [109]

Wallace goes to Mr. Torborg's office at the school – writes letter to Winona school warning them of Dodger's penchant for truancy – sees military pictures of Mr. Torborg, and regrets not being in the military – "sadly aware of how little he was affecting the course of world events." [110-111]

Dodger brings marbles to give to Brendan at school. "What did they mean?" Reward for a few days of friendship? Or meant to deepen Brendan's shame? [112]

Brendan was "enormously relieved to have seen the last of Dodger Hicks." [112]

## **Thirteen**

Distributing circulars for the new sale, Brendan learns that Dodger has been sent to the Home School for Boys in Flensboro. [118]

Grandfather drops a circular off at Dimmitburgs and meets Paul, who has two books open – "a volume of Kierkegaard and a carpentry manual." [120]

In seminary, Paul "had suffered a nervous collapse in late October from an overdose of moral theology." [121]

"The very thought of God's majesty and man's sinfulness filled him with trepidation."  
[121]

Brendan gets picked up by a carload of kids who help him deliver circulars. "What could be better than fitting tightly into the Ramberg pickup with a girl on your lap and fizz in your nose?" [124]

Paul Dimmitburg takes a job at the market. He had been in school with Wallace and understood "his smug, disdainful behavior calculated to fend off friendship." [126]

Wallace resents Catherine's immediate fondness for Paul. He decides to volunteer for induction. [127-129]

## WINTER

### Fourteen

Letter from Uncle Herman's new wife inviting the Fosters to a family gathering, which leads Catherine to suggest to Brendan that he visit Dodger.

Brendan: "I suppose I should... It's one of the corporal works of mercy, visiting prisoners." [134]

Nancy Clancy's attire: "... giving her the aspect of a small jewel wrapped as a gift." [135]

Nancy: "When you're as old as I am, you feel like you're coming unmoored from the human race unless your dear ones stay in touch." [136]

Brendan and his cousin Julie visit Dodger. [138]

Dodger asks about living with Brendan. "To be so utterly homeless and needy - it took Brendan's breath away." [140]

Re: Dodger - "... at the first sign of rejection he backed off with something of apology in his manner. Sorry for needing you, he seemed to say." [141]

Julie insists that Brendan eat with Dodger. [141]

Julie accepts Dodger's offer of a comic - "aware that accepting his gift was a gift." [144]

The man who had let Brendan and Julie in tells them about Dodger's cigarette burns. [145]

### Fifteen

Dodger's case worker ("with a certain amount of compassion in his eyes") comes to take Dodger to Winona for Christmas. [147]

The warden "reminded Dodger of drawings he had seen of the devil." [148]

Dodger's mother not home. "Wherever she was tonight, Dodger hoped she was with a man she liked, someone thoughtful enough to give her a present." [150]

"It was Dodger's policy to steal only out of necessity and never - or seldom - at random." [151]

Midnight Mass - Fr. O'Day losing his place. "The ceremony was punctuated by his cries of 'Dominus Vobiscum,' to which Melba Heffernand responded nasally from the choir loft, 'Et cum spiritu tuo,' accompanying herself on the organ and adding an extra trill because it was Christmas." [152]

Brendan watching the stream of communicants. [153-154]

Rufus "casing his grin over the congregation" - which left Brendan "full of questions." [154]

"By making a place for misfits weren't the villagers carrying out Christ's command to love one another?" [154]



Stan Kimball: "... these villagers were never so happy as when they were at odds for the love of God." [155]

Mr. Heffernand at the switchboard – goes to kiss Mrs. Clay. She responds by saying, "You're an absolute angel." [159-160]

### **Sixteen**

New house: "Brendan was heartened by the effect of the move on his mother." [161]

Hank cured Grandfather's disorientation by arranging one corner of the living room exactly like the old house." [161]

First Mrs. Clay – then Mrs. Brask and Mrs. Kimball – visit. [165]

The letter, re: the Heffernands – a history of moonshine: "Unavoidable perhaps, them being Catholic." [165]

Re: the Woodruffs: "a good, healthy Protestant sense of cleanliness about them." [166]

Then "thumbnail sketches" were "conceived with a Lutheran bias," but "there was a perverse generosity in the way she delivered them." [166]

"Mrs. Crowley is a Catholic of the most militant, disgusting kind." [166]

### **Seventeen**

Very small crowd at the Fosters' party. Talk of Paul's plan to remodel the store. [173]

"With his ambition to transform the world temporarily thwarted, Paul was determined to transform Hank's Market." [174]

Dodger stops at the store. Wallace lies and tells him the Fosters are out of town. Dodger gives Wallace caps for Brendan, which Wallace throws away. [176]

### **Eighteen**

Wallace goes to Minneapolis for his physical. [181-182]

The federal building "struck him as a fitting portal for a man about to take up arms against the forces of evil." [183]

Catherine re: a shopping trip with Bea Crowley: "the woman's religious fanaticism proved insufferable. She blamed Luther and Lutherans for every ill including World War II and her major purchase in Rochester was a set of soap dishes depicting saints of the Near East." [185]

Cranshaw asks Hank and Catherine to take in Dodger. [187f]

Catherine to Hank: "Dodger may just be what this town needs to save its soul." [189]

Hank: "... she was never more appealing to him than when her eyes shone with purpose, never prettier." [189]

“Wallace, too, was coming home from war.” [191]

Hank admires Wallace’s courage, puts his arm around Wallace, who “immediately began to weep, snuggling up to him like a little boy.” [191]

### **Nineteen**

Catherine and Brendan riding to meet with Dodger. [193]

Catherine was “elated by her mission.” [194]

Brendan “wished his own preparations for Dodger were simple enough to put on a list.” [194]

Grandfather’s response to Dodger coming: “the more the merrier.” [194]

Catherine “couldn’t take her eyes off Dodger.” [195]

Dodger’s smile “came easily to his face.” [195]

Catherine’s heart “brimmed over with love.” [195]

Catherine: “Dodger does not belong to a type, Mr. Cranshaw.” [196]

### **Twenty**

Grandfather tells Dodger the story of the blizzard and the deer. “My mother told us it was a sign.” [202]

Dodger “had no memory of anyone taking the trouble to tell him a story.” [202]

### **Twenty-One**

#### **SPRING**

### **Twenty-Two**

Wallace paints the Axis leaders in his mother’s room. [222]

Dodger asked to try out for track. [224]

Phyllis Clay comes to the Foster house to tell Grandfather that FDR had died – she didn’t want to be alone. After listening to the radio, they go uptown together. [226ff]

### **Twenty-three**

In the remodeled market, “Hank was struck by the curious mix of people he had brought together under his roof. How peculiar that a scholarly would-be preacher should greet the village idiot.” [232]

### **Twenty-Four**

FRD was taken by train to Washington. [243]

Hank to Dodger: “We’re going to miss you.” Dodger: “You are?” [246]

Hank saw hunger, even starvation, in Dodger’s eyes. [246]

Catherine spoke of Brendan's "Christian charity" with Dodger - "but was there no limit to the things God expected you to do for others?" [247]

### **Twenty-Five**

Dodger wins the 220 - "galloped like a stallion." [256]

In the 440, Dodger "cut his speed in half in order to let Brendan catch up." [260]

### **Twenty-Six**

Dodger confronted about the missing money. Brendan declines to intervene.