

Part One: Apple Tree Reverie – June 1, 2003

I hate those cats. I really do. Can't make a single move without one of 'em always watchin' you or leapin' out from behind the door at you, like to scare you half to death if you weren't already. They think I don't know they're laughin' at me when they do that and that just makes me even madder 'cause they think they're so smart. Been here sixty-one years and had to deal with cats for every damn one of 'em. You'd think we'd come to an understandin' in sixty-one years, me and the cats, but they don't hold to their promises. No ma'am, I don't trust 'em, not a lick.

Now dogs...dogs are generally a nice sort, don't have that slyness to their nature and as long as you leave 'em be, they'll leave you to your business. Knock somethin' over, though, and Lordy, they'll raise a racket that'll scare you worse than any cat ever did do. My people don't have dogs but the people next door – that's Hetty's house, the one with the yellow sidin', though why her people did that to her house, I can't say...such a shame they took down the old sidin' and put up that newfangled plastic garbage. Don't hold with that stuff, no I don't. They try to make it look like wood but it just looks cheap. Cheap plastic wood. Seems like damn nonsense they take down the real thing and put up somethin' that's s'posed to look like it. But I guess they say that plastic stuff is better than wood and who am I to say otherwise.

Where was I? Oh yes, the people next door. Yes, they have themselves a big watchdog, one of those German-breed dogs that snarl at you as soon as look at you. Sergeant, they named him. Keeps Hetty in the house most of the time, the poor thing. I asked her once why she doesn't just move but she says she likes her people just fine and they treat her good. And they keep him out of Hetty's way so she can come through our gate when she feels like a visit.

My people are good folks, too, though they did paint the livin' room purple and I'm not sure just yet what I think 'bout that. And there are those cats. But they take good care of me so I've got no complaints. We're still gettin' to know each other – they've only been here a year, after all – but I expect we'll get on just fine together. And they're fixin' up my poor old house instead of bulldozin' it like those other people did to the orchard next door. Did you know I used to have an apple orchard? Me and my dear George, we had that lot next door and we raised apples trees on it. Never did

make much money at it, but it weren't for money anyway. We just planted it 'cause we loved apples and we loved trees and it seemed as good a thing to use that land for as any. Heavens, we surely did have good times in that orchard. Good memories there. In the summer, late in the summer, when it was hot and the air wasn't movin' a lick, you could hear the apples droppin' down like footsteps. Some days, we'd sit out there and just eat 'em one right after another until we got ourselves a bellyache and couldn't look at another apple for a week. Funny thing, though, seemed like we'd always forget how sick we were 'cause sooner or later, we'd be out there stuffin' ourselves full again and gettin' sick again.

We sure did have a lot of trees over there. We'd be pickin' apples for months! George insisted we plant four kinds of trees so we'd have apples from July to October...seemed like such a good idea until they started fallin' and then I'd be cursin' that man from sunup to sundown. But it surely did make the best applesauce you ever ate and he could brew a mean cider-wine that would lay you on your back for two days. And pies? Lordy, we had so many pies we didn't know what to do with 'em! I gave 'em away to everyone I knew and it got so's people were practically showin' up on our porch 'round the time the first of those pie apples started to drop. 'Course, I always did win the prize at the fair for my apple pies and that Edna Wilkins down the street liked to tie herself into a tight little knot every year knowin' I was goin' to beat her and there wasn't a damn thing the old girl could do 'bout it. She tried stealin' my apples from the orchard one year but George was out there late pickin' for a batch of cider and caught her in the act. Gave Edna such a fright that poor George laughed himself till he cried and it took him a whole hour to tell me 'bout it 'cause he just couldn't stop laughin' 'bout it. Well, that was the first and last time she tried stealin' my apples and I think that was the year she stopped botherin' with an apple entry in the pie contest. Served her right, I say.

'Course, we made sure every kid in the neighborhood had themselves as many apples as they wanted. Especially those Petrovich kids. Their poor mother worked herself to the ground all day long, didn't have two pennies to rub together, and they were always just a little bit hungry. I think most everyone in the neighborhood fed those kids, on account of their mother bein' alone and needin' all the help she could get. There were nine of 'em and she took care of 'em as best she could, but nine mouths to feed is still nine mouths to feed. 'Sides, we all had 'nough to share, even if we weren't much better off than she was.

Most of us 'round here grew our own food and we all traded with each other so we always did eat real good. Had to grow things...the general store didn't stock food outside of canned goods and penny candy and fresh food meant a ferry ride up to Sauvie Island at a nickel a ride. The only folks I knew could afford a ferry every week was those Thompsons up on Syracuse

and even they didn't spend that kind of money just to go to Sauvie Island for fruit and vegetables they could grow themselves or trade with us.

Now Hetty, she grew mostly vegetables and canned everythin' she grew. Corn, beans, peas, beets, radishes, carrots, lettuce, cucumbers, broccoli, tomatoes, peppers, onions, potatoes...she had a regular farm over on her extra lot and she did a nice little business on the side. She had a secret to growin' things, 'specially corn, and some days we didn't even bother cookin' it, just laid it out on the plate alongside the rest of our dinner.

But Hetty's pride and joy was her cucumbers. Heavens, you never saw cucumbers like hers. Some of her records stand to this day and she'll be the first one to remind you of that fact. Every year 'round fair time, she'll say, "Cucumber grand prize, sixteen years runnin' and no one's grown a bigger cuke since!" I do love Hetty so but every time she says that, I want to pinch her.

Now, I may be famous for my apple pies but her real talent was her pickles. 'Bout September, she started her pickles, 'bout the same time George was fermentin' his cider, and the smell between the two was 'nough to knock over a rampagin' elephant – 'nough vinegar fumes to burn your nostrils till you wondered if you'd ever smell anythin' again. But she did have a talent for those pickles. Dill pickles, sweet pickles, bread and butter pickles, mustard pickles, hot pepper pickles, pickle relish...she could do more with a cucumber than anyone I ever did meet. Oh, Vivian St. Claire — she lived down the street there, at the bottom of the hill — Vivian swore for years that her pickles were the toast of the town, but I didn't see no line on her porch come picklin' time, not one like the line on Hetty's porch, no ma'am. George and Rufus, that was Hetty's husband, they had her pickles in their lunch buckets just 'bout every day and soon 'nough, word got 'round the docks down on the riverfront and next thing you know, those fellas were just like clockwork for those pickles of hers and between me with my pies and Hetty with her pickles, it looked like a carnival 'round here for weeks.

'Course, it's been a long while since she did her pickles. Her people sometimes talk 'bout that scrap of land next door to the house – it's full of trees and blackberry bushes now, don't look nothin' like it did in Hetty's day – and 'bout plantin' a garden over there, though I don't know where they'd find the time. Hetty says they're gone a lot, workin', and when they're not workin' at their fancy jobs, they're workin' on Hetty's house. She's put the idea in their heads 'bout cucumbers just the same, and reminded 'em what her pickles tasted like. And her people have been cleanin' out those blackberry bushes ever since, so maybe she talked 'em into it after all.

She says I ought to put the idea in my people's heads 'bout apples, get 'em to bring back an orchard, but she knows that's just plain foolishness. No place for that orchard anymore. Some fool developer came in years ago and

bought our extra lot from my people – not the ones who live here now, mind...they wasn't even born yet when the orchard came down – and told 'em he was gonna build a nice place for a couple families to live next door. Well, I threw a fit – no reason was a good 'nough reason to chop down those trees, to my mind – but they needed the money real bad and they never did listen to a loony old lady anyway. So they got their money but that developer fella put an ugly old apartment buildin' next door. I would've laughed at 'em if it didn't just make me sick to see those trees disappear. Yep, the day the bulldozer came, I cried and cried until I nearly drove my people out of the house.

Now these younger ones, these two seem like they have sense 'nough to preserve what's worth preservin'. They've done right by me and my old house so far and they're kind 'nough to listen to this loony old lady when it comes to talk 'bout what to change. Maybe they're just humorin' me, but I guess that's all right too. 'Cept that purple livin' room...haven't made up my mind just yet 'bout that.

'Course, there's still those two apple trees in the backyard so maybe there's hope for apple pies again if I can bring myself to part with my secret recipe. Last summer, one night when it was hot and still and it reminded me of the old days, I snuck out there and dropped some of those apples on the ground, just to remember what it was like havin' that orchard. Like to scare those two poor souls straight out of their wits. Sent the cats clean off their rockers, too, which was just icin' on the cake, you ask me. I wasn't meanin' to scare my people, you understand, hadn't even thought 'bout it really, but I s'pose in the dark, in a new house and a neighborhood you don't know yet, it'd be a mite scary. Well, I damn near laughed myself to death if I could've and all I could think 'bout was my dear George that night Edna Wilkins came to steal my apples.

Yes ma'am, those surely were good times.

Part Two: The Argyle – July 1, 2003

Don't know what all the fuss is 'bout with these gadgets, these computers. My people spend a lot of time shakin' their fists at 'em, just seems like a whole lot of heartache to me. Sure do use 'em a lot, though. Always orderin' things from this Internet they're always goin' on 'bout and they say they can get anythin' from that place. Heavens, they can even buy cars there, can you imagine?

Way I see it, though, nothin' much has changed. Used to be you could order just 'bout anythin' you wanted from a catalog. Why, George and me ordered this here house from a catalog and that was all the way back when cars were just a novelty. Sears and Roebuck, can't go wrong with that catalog, no ma'am. Picked our house out of the April 1915 issue – they called it the "Argyle". Cost us seven hundred eighty-five dollars and they sent just 'bout everythin' we needed to build it. We hired Mr. Jenkins – he lived over by the police station, said he bought that house 'cross the way 'cause the St. John's Police Precinct was the best work he ever did do and wanted to see it every day, to remember that. Sure did a fine job on the brickwork and such for our house. He and George and Rufus had our house put together so quick I barely had time to make all the curtains. Fact, now that I think 'bout it, I guess I didn't quite finish the curtains for the main room by the time we moved in. With the river runnin' down below and those hills and trees on the other side, George said it seemed a shame to cover up that window with a bunch of borin' old chintz curtains, even if it did cost nineteen cents a yard. Well, I'd been savin' up for that fabric for three years, puttin' away a little bit from my sewin' money every week, and I told George I was gonna put that chintz up on that window come hell or high water and if he didn't like it, he could sleep on the porch and have the view all to himself. And you know what he did? Stubborn fool took the quilt off our bed and slept on the damn porch! Did it three nights in a row 'til I finally took down those curtains. Didn't speak to him for two days after that. But he was right – didn't need those curtains when we had the Good Lord's best work right outside our window. Never told him that, 'course. Can't be tellin' a man he's right or he'll start gettin' ideas he knows what's what and that just leads to trouble. Few years later, I used that chintz for a fancy bedspread that ended up winnin' Best of Show at the fair. Me and George never said anythin' to each other 'bout it 'cause we'd end up fightin' 'bout it again, 'cept I'd probably be the one sleepin' on the porch.

Now, the Argyle didn't come with the front porch we wanted but they wouldn't let you make changes. You ordered the plan they had and that was that. Well, me and George decided we'd build us the porch we wanted whether Sears and Roebuck said we could or not. He and Mr. Jenkins spent a fair bit of time figurin' and measurin', makin' sure the porch'd look like it was meant to be there all 'long. Did a right fine job I'd say, 'cause it turned out real nice. Phyllis McDaniel – she and her husband used to live right behind us on Willamette, before they drowned in that ferry accident off Swan Island in '23 – she had the “Beaumont” model, which was the same as the Argyle 'cept bigger up top, and she was wishin' they'd changed their porch after she saw ours. We helped Rufus and Hetty when it came time to put up their Argyle and they changed their porch, too. Did it a little different from ours, just so it wouldn't look like it came from a cookie cutter.

When they started puttin' that bridge up in '29, me and Hetty'd sit on the porch with our mendin' and watch 'em workin' on it. When George got home, we'd stand out there 'til it was too dark to see and he'd point and explain how they were doin' what seemed near impossible. Watched it go up and after it was finished, we'd just sit out there, sippin' our iced tea and lookin' up at that bridge and visitin'.

Watched boats from that porch, too. I loved watchin' those big freight barges come in. They moved real slow, seemed to have a certain dignity to 'em, like old royalty. Seein' those barges meant George and Rufus and all the other men folk in the neighborhood were workin' regular, puttin' dinner on the table. Could see the supply ferries, too, so we knew when Andersen's General Store was gettin' our orders, and sometimes we'd see the Navy ships when they came into port. In the summertime, we'd watch the sternwheelers go by, watch all those fancy people in their 'sensive clothes drinkin' and laughin' their way down the river.

My people are fixin' it up these days. The porch, I mean. The people who lived here before – the ones who sold my orchard – they took down the one George and Mr. Jenkins spent all that time perfectin' and put up a ramshackle affair that don't look right at all. Now, I'm not sayin' that old porch didn't need some work, 'cause it surely did. But the people I had then, they didn't take very good care of it so 'course it needed fixin'. Don't know what they thought was gonna happen when they didn't see to that leak over on the corner 'til the rot started, but they just neglected it 'til it was too late to salvage.

Never were ones to do a job right, neither. Didn't fix it up, just ripped out what was there, even the parts that didn't need fixin', and put up this thing they called a deck. Decks belong on boats, to my mind, not the fronts of houses, but they did it anyway, even when I kept hidin' their hammers and pullin' off that cheap lattice they put on the front. Even Hetty remarked how ugly that deck was turnin' out and Hetty isn't one to say a bad word

‘bout anythin’.

But I guess they had to fix that porch before they could put the house up for sale and they needed to do it quick like. So I stopped interferin’ and let ‘em get on with it. Figured I’d put my energy to gettin’ someone who’d treat me and my house proper. Had my fill of my people by then and I expect they’d had their fill of me, too. Never forgave ‘em for takin’ down my orchard, neither. Oh, they were nice ‘nough folks and I liked ‘em just fine when they moved in – young family with lots of energy – but they started havin’ problems over the years and the family seemed to just fall apart. The father got real sick in the head towards the end, when the children had families of their own and the mother took a job to pay his doctor bills. He was pretty harmless then, just sat on that porch all day long and watched the world go by. ‘Bout that time, he started seein’ me, and we’d talk sometimes ‘bout people in the neighborhood, even the ones only we could see. But after awhile he started talkin’ to the walls and ravin’ ‘bout people hidin’ behind the camellia bush and I don’t mind sayin’ it scared me. Stopped goin’ out on the porch after that and sure did miss it. When the mother decided it was time to put him someplace where they know how to take care of people like that, it was long since time, you ask me.

Saw a lot of people interested in the house there for awhile. Most of ‘em got a good look at all the things needin’ fixin’ – as I said, my people then weren’t the best caretakers – and decided it was too much work. Had a couple people that felt promisin’ but then Mary – that was the mother’s name – Mary would tell ‘em what was happenin’ ‘cross the street... ‘nother damn fool developer wantin’ to tear down Rose Walker’s sweet little cottage on the corner, can you imagine? Well, those folks high-tailed it out of here. Can’t say as I blame ‘em. My poor old house wasn’t much to look at by then, sure didn’t look like the old Argyle I first saw in the Sears and Roebuck and told George was the one I wanted. Idea of an ugly old box maybe goin’ up across the street didn’t help, neither. Sure didn’t make anyone want to take a chance on the place.

That’s why I made Mary keep that developer nonsense to herself after that. She was gonna have a hard ‘nough time sellin’ the place without tryin’ to convince people that the neighbors might beat out that developer on the Walker place. When my people came – and I’ll tell you, I knew they were my people soon’s they came up on the porch and turned ‘round to look, before they even came in the door – I said everythin’ I could think of to convince ‘em to stay. Couldn’t do much ‘bout the smell and the dirt, just hoped they’d look past it, maybe see what it used to be. Made such a ruckus when Mary said they were buyin’ the house, damn near gave Mary a heart attack.

Almost didn’t happen, though. Mary already had an offer from another couple and those people...well, I’m not one to speak bad of folks if I can

help it, but those people...they wanted to take out my built-in in the dinin' room – over my very dead body – and talked a lot of nonsense 'bout “updatin' ” and “modernizin' ” and “renovatin' ”. Sure did use a lot of fancy words, but they all sounded like “destroyin' ” to me and I told Mary she better not sell to those two or she'd never be rid of me. Took me and George ten years to save up for this here house and I'll be damned if I'm gonna watch a bunch of modern-types turn my house into nothin' special. This place is the only thing I got left of my dear George, 'sides memories. Don't know what I would've done if she'd sold to those people, can't really leave my house that way, but glad I didn't have to find out.

So my people are doin' what they can with that porch. Can't afford to put it back like it used to be, not for awhile, but they've spent as much time researchin' porches as George and Mr. Jenkins spent figurin' and measurin' when they first built it so I know they'll set it right. Spend a lot of time doin' what they call “on line” at that Internet place they go on 'bout, and I watch pictures of the Sears and Roebuck flash by and I just shake my head in wonder. Sure am lookin' forward to sittin' on the porch with Hetty again, lookin' up to the bridge and watchin' the boats go by, like we used to do.

Part Three: The Monkey – October 1, 2003

The Monkey was a tinker. Terrence Clifford Hawkins, that was his real name, made him sound all dignified and intellectual, not like a man who wore overalls and workman's boots with a hole in the heel. But he was the Monkey to most everyone, even the dock supervisors who'd sooner crack a tooth than crack a smile.

Loved takin' things apart, seein' what was goin' on inside. He was real mechanical-like, could fix a busted washin' machine in less than an hour. Not them fancy ones like my people got in their basement...no, the ones we had back then, with the rollers that squeezed out the water and like to take a finger off if you weren't watchin', though you were right fancy then if you were lucky 'nough to have one. I know 'cause my dear George surprised me for our anniversary one year. To this day, don't know how he paid for it and not too sure I want to know, neither. I suspect he and some of the neighbors were runnin' moonshine for the River Boys, but I didn't ever ask and he didn't see fit to say.

I was just damn grateful not to have to keep scrapin' my knuckles on that old washboard. And when it broke down, the idea of goin' back to that washin' board upset me so much I made George drag the Monkey outta his work shed right then, to get the thing runnin' again. Don't know what he did, 'xactly, and it was wont to bind up if you didn't feed it just right after that, but it worked and that was all that mattered.

The Monkey was fearless, too. Guess you'd have to be if you were tinkerin' with things that 'splode if you look at 'em wrong. Even when smoke would swallow him up, you'd hear his great shoutin' laugh. "Yessir, she's a firecracker!" he'd say. Can't count the times I'd be over to their place havin' tea with Francesca, me and Hetty and Phyllis and Agnes, and the Monkey was somewhere in the basement, fiddlin' with the 'lectricity. That was when it was still new and no one was quite sure what to make of it, though all of us with the new houses had it. Seemed closer to magic than anythin' made by a man, and we gave it the same distance we gave that Houdini fella's contraptions when he was up to the Lewis and Clark 'Sposition in '05.

Not the Monkey, though. You could always tell when he was fiddlin' with it, 'cause Francie'd be wound up tighter than a banker's watch and the lights would flicker and sometimes the smell of afternoon rain'd come

driftin' up the stairs. If he blew out the fuses, though – and he did more often than the days in the calendar – she'd stand at the top of the stairs and holler at him 'til she looked like she had the pox.

Her daddy named her Franscesca – means “Frenchwoman” in Italian, since Francie's momma was a French lady from someplace she called Belly Veen... 'cept she laughed whenever I said Belly Veen, and would shake her head and say, “Non, mon petit” – and I guess Francie got her temper from her daddy, too, 'cause she'd light the Monkey up with a string of cuss words like to turn his hide to leather. Most of it was Italian and probably French, but cuss words sound like cuss words in any language, whether you know it or not.

“Zita, zita... nessun danno fatto,” he would say and kiss her on her angry forehead, and when I asked her what zita meant, she just shook her head and pressed her lips together so hard they turned thin and pale. Thought he was sayin' somethin' he shouldn't've been sayin' to her, and threatened to box his ears the first time I heard it, but then Rufus and George both laughed when I lit into him, and Rufus put a hand on my shoulder to keep me from beltin' him. “No need to go beatin' the tar outta the Monkey,” he said. “'Sides, Francie'll probably beat it outta him herself.” Turns out it meant “no harm done”, though Rufus wouldn't tell me what zita meant, either, just laughed real soft when I asked. Don't know how Rufus knew no Italian, though I guess workin' with the Monkey, they were likely to learn a bit of all the languages he knew.

Had a good mind, the Monkey did. Guess that's what he liked 'bout the tinkerin'. Lordy, he'd sure get a kick outta all my people's gadgets. Didn't have this stuff in our day, all these mechanical contraptions that beep and buzz and whistle. Guess everybody these days has all that, but it wasn't that way back then. 'Course, there were cars then, though we called 'em horseless buggies for the longest time and they sure didn't look nothin' like what my people drive around now.

Now, the Thompsons – they had that big mansion up on Syracuse – they were the first people in Cathedral Park to get one. A car, I mean. Doc Thompson went off to Seattle one week and came back with one of those Stanley Steamer contraptions that had all the menfolk talkin' 'bout it for weeks. Left their wives alone after work and spent the better part of the evenin's in the Doc's driveway, talkin' and drinkin' and tellin' tales taller'n the Sequoias over on Pier Point. That is, 'til Agnes marched over there and threatened to pitch her Daniel out in the street if he didn't get home right then and well, I guess the rest of us took her lead and did the same.

'Course, the Monkey fell in love with that newfangled buggy. Francie clamped him hard on the arm whenever they'd pass by it on the street but there wasn't nothin' she could do to make him stop lookin'. If you saw him when that car was nearby, you'd see that glint in his eye, like his mind was

turnin' over how to get his hands inside to see what made it tick.

Didn't take long for him to get his chance, neither. Those Steamers were real quiet-like, not like that Model-T the pastor over in Kenton drove through the parade, but it was hard to control. Could launch like a bottle rocket down the street if you didn't have the trick of the throttle. George called it a locomotive without the rails, though his eyes lit up nearly as much as the Monkey's when he said it. I guess they weren't teasin' neither, 'cause that summer, Doc lost control of the Steamer and liked to've killed Vivian St. Claire in her buggy. Let the throttle out too much, he said, and came up behind Vivian's buggy like he was gonna crawl right over it. Spooked the horses so bad they bolted down Baltimore Hill and the wheels came clean off. Now, I never liked Vivian much, with her nose so far in the air she was liable to catch it up in tree branches, but I sure felt sorry for her when Rufus and the Monkey and her husband Richard pulled her outta that mess. Oh, she was all right, more shaken than anythin' and a good dose of Doctor Thompson's best brandy took care of that, but that surprised look on her face didn't go away for days and there wasn't 'nough left of her buggy to fix.

Doc Thompson wanted nothin' to do with his fancy contraption after that. When Vivian's horses bolted down the hill, he kept goin' east, barely hangin' onto the steerin' wheel, and drove himself right across his own lawn and into those rosebushes he was so proud of. He was gonna sell what was left of it to a fella over in Laurelhurst but the Monkey talked him outta that and they traded the Steamer straight across for a bottle of Scotch the Monkey had stashed somewhere.

Well, Francie didn't want nothin' to do with that Steamer, neither, and she made sure he knew it. Cursed him in Italian and French and somethin' else I'm not even sure was a proper language, hollerin' so loud that Hetty and I would sit on the porch sippin' our tea and gigglin' like a couple a fool girls from a block away. Not that it mattered. George and Rufus and Daniel and Richard and the rest spent their time over at the work shed in her backyard and after awhile she just gave up and invited the rest of us over. She needed the solidarity, after all, and there isn't nothin' better than the cold disapproval of the neighborhood women for punishin' the menfolk. Her back porch turned into the Mason-Dixon Line that summer, with the husbands crowded into that dirty shed workin' over that old Steamer and the Sewin' Circle in Francie's parlor schemin' revenge that none of us intended to carry out.

'Round July, they had that thing put back together and pushed it out onto the street. We were sittin' on the porch – Agnes announced it was too hot in the parlor so that the menfolk would hear and not think we were movin' out there to watch – and lookin' everywhere but at that damn car. Don't know that the Monkey even noticed, any more than he noticed the

cold meals Francie'd been settin' in front of him for weeks and the empty lunch buckets he was carryin' to work each day. He climbed into that car, standin' on the runnin' boards like he was the mayor gonna give a speech, saluted the menfolk gathered 'round, caps in hand, then settled himself behind the steerin' wheel.

Don't know 'bout Francie, but I wasn't breathin', just watchin' to see if he was gonna go tearin' down the street like they say the Doc had, or blow himself to pieces like I read in the newspaper happened to that poor fella up at Fort Vancouver, 'cause those Steamers could sometimes bang like a cannon if you didn't take care.

Well, I never heard a cannon in my life, but I bet that Steamer goin' off in the middle of Edison probably sounded damned close to one. Sent the hood of the car straight into the air a good fifty feet and they found the steerin' wheel caught in Mrs. Rivera's maple tree two houses over. The Monkey was layin' in the street, sprawled on his back and not movin' a muscle. Seems like there was commotion everywhere and I remember thinkin' I'd never seen grown women clear a railin' like that; by the time we reached him, Richard and Rufus had him 'wake. Don't think I'll ever forget the sight of the Monkey right then, those eyes starin' outta face so dirty it looked like he'd dumped a dustbin over his head and his bare feet twitchin' 'cause the 'splosion blasted him straight outta his boots. Nobody said nothin' once he'd opened his eyes, not even Francie, who looked like she wanted to hug him and then do herself a murder.

And then the Monkey got that glint back in his eye, and that big grin just like always. "Yessir, she surely is a firecracker!"

Part Four: The NCR Building – June 1, 2004

You know that neighborhood pub my people go to sometimes? The one up on Ivanhoe? Funny thing 'bout that place — used to be a church. Makes a far better pub than it ever did a church, and Lordy, even when it was a church, it weren't no house of the Lord. The goin's on there, I tell you, they weren't no different than those soap stories Mary used to watch on that picture box when she lived here.

Wasn't even a church at first. First time we saw that building — this was before me and my dear George bought our house, when we were still livin' in those little rabbit hutches the company called housin', up to Pier Point — saw it at the Lewis and Clark 'Sposition in aught-five and Hetty 'n me paid two pennies each to see our first movin' picture inside. Saw lots of things in there, now that I think 'bout it, even a contraption of bones they said was a big lizard that lived a long time ago and walked taller than a tree, can you imagine?

Back then it looked different, more like that Capitol building down in Salem with the big dome and all those columns up front. Not big like that, though. Company by name of National Cash Register had it built, and they were a big deal 'round here 'til the Depression cleaned everybody out just like those registers they sold. But when they built that place for the big Fair, they were goin' strong, givin' out paychecks to damn near five hundred people here on the Peninsula.

When the Fair finally closed, there was all kinda talk 'bout what was gonna happen to that building. Some thought it ought to be a school house, some wanted to turn it into an opera house 'cause of somethin' they called the 'coustics. Heavens...there was even talk for awhile that LaVerne Delacroix was gonna buy it, which of course set that goody-goody Harriet Sanderson into her usual tirade 'bout the workin' women over at Miss LaVerne's. Don't know what Miss LaVerne thought she needed with a place like that old NCR building, but the way I see it, she and her girls had as much right to buy that place as anyone. And I told Harriet as much when she tried gettin' me to sign that foolish petition to put a stop to it, though I would've said it whether I believed it or not just to get Harriet's goat.

Now, the First Congregational Church up on John Street had a preacher by the name of Tobias J. Finkle, could sweet talk the dogs off the meat truck. Slicker than a gravy sandwich he was, but had an easy smile and his

sermons were wont to make you laugh more than hang your head as the sinner you were, and folks cotton to that real quick. Had 'nough followers to keep his church and his collection plate full on Sunday mornin's, 'specially the ones that counted, like the Mayor and the Judge and Doc Thompson and all the rest of the muckety-mucks of St. Johns.

So when he got it into his head that that NCR building would make a handsome church for his congregation, don't think there was a soul that thought he wouldn't get it, whether it was a soul he'd been savin' or not. And it wasn't that they didn't need a new place — the one they were in was fallin' apart and they seemed to be growin' even faster than St. Johns itself — but most folk in these parts were poor, could barely afford homes of their own let alone a fancy new one for the preacher and his God. He got it though. Not too sure 'xactly how, but I suspect ol' Tobias had a discussion with the president of NCR 'bout how renderin' unto God what was His could save him the trouble of renderin' unto Caesar what was Caesar's.

Well, they loaded that building onto a boat and ferried it on up the river. It surely was a big spectacle, that big old building on one of the river runners, lookin' like a small tip one way or the other and it'd slide right off, and people were lined up 'long the riverfront to watch it float on by. I suspect they were waitin' for the damn thing to slip into the river as much as anythin' — and they nearly got their wish, George and Rufus said later, 'cause they were on the ferry crew. But they managed to get that building up the river, landed to Pier Point, and carted into downtown St. Johns, over to Ivanhoe where it sits now.

Lookin' back, I s'pose we all should've known that that building wasn't never meant to be a church, as much trouble as it was. Nothin' wrong with the building, 'course, but if it hadn't been a church, I would've thought it was cursed. Well, cursed with that preacher, anyway.

Most everythin' I know 'bout the preacher is 'cause of Dorothea. Dorothea Gibbons — she was part of our Sewing Circle, don't you know, and her husband John worked the docks with George and Rufus — she kept house for him three days a week. I expect she knew the preacher better than anyone, cleanin' up after him like she did; don't care who you are, there's no secrets you're keepin' from the help, no ma'am. You're a fool if you think otherwise, and Tobias J. Finkle, he was a damn fool.

See, the preacher had a fondness for the ladies. Which wasn't no problem, strictly speakin', 'cause he wasn't married and Congregationalists didn't frown on a whole lot anyway. Trouble was, his particular fondness wasn't limited to just the single ladies, but to the married ones, too...to hear Dorothea tell it, 'specially the married ones.

Been 'round a good long time but still don't understand menfolk when 'nother man gets involved. Half of 'em get stupid, half of 'em go blind. I

guess the preacher must've had a streak of good luck, 'cause he got the half that went blind for a fair stretch. Oh, had a couple close calls, don't think he didn't, but for a man who spent more time romancin' the ladies than he did on his divine duties—a man of the cloth, mind—he sure had one hell of a streak of good luck. But when he took up with Madeline St. Claire, that streak of good luck dropped dead.

Madeline was Vivian St. Claire's sister-in-law — the same Vivian nearly got run over by Doc Thompson's Steamer — and had her nose even higher in the air than Vivian ever did. Her Clifford (Vivian's brother) was the pastor over to the Baptist church, preachin' hellfire and damnation Sundays at eight and eleven, and Wednesday nights if you hadn't had your fill. Livin' in a place like St. Johns where the menfolk were more apt to worship at saloons and billiard halls as a church must've driven a man like Clifford bat-crazy most of the time, watchin' all the sinnin' goin' on right under his beak. I guess it didn't help that most everyone 'round here was from somewhere that had their own notions 'bout religion and God and the like, notions that didn't quite square with Clifford St. Claire's.

So when Madeline started havin' an affair with Tobias, it was a right proper ruckus brewin'. It weren't so much Madeline's cheatin' on him that I think got Clifford's back up, not like you'd expect, anyway. No, the thing that broke the camel's back, as they say, seemed to be she was cheatin' on him with a Congregationalist. Consortin' with the enemy, to Clifford St. Claire's Baptist way of thinkin'.

Now, it just so happens that 'bout the same time Madeline started sneakin' round on Clifford, ol' Tobias' church was flush with money, and I mean flush. I'm not talkin' a nice chunk banked, I'm talkin' a small fortune. Well, a preacher might be crookeder than a barrel full of fish hooks, but seems like you don't suspect anythin' crooked when it's a preacher. Leastways, not for awhile.

Don't think even Dorothea knew 'bout the money before the story came out, not where it came from anyway, and it pained her to admit it. But she sure guessed somethin' was up when those nice suits started showin' up in his closets. Oh, he was always a dandy, preacher or not, but Dorothea said that man never had more than two suit coats in his closet and then suddenly he had 'nough for a month of Sundays. Had more shoes than any man has a right to have, too, and I think that's 'bout the time all of us in the Sewing Circle started speculatin' he was fixin' to leave St. Johns altogether. Rose said maybe he was fixin' himself up for a political run, but then Francie says 'course not, no way a preacher's gettin' elected in this town, so then Rose says maybe not in St. Johns, but maybe down to Portland, and Francie says Portland would elect a Prebysterian before they'd vote for a Congregationalist, and that'd be the same day Lucifer himself is ice skatin' down the Willamette River, so then Rose, Rose, tells Francie that if that

yellow-bellied cheat Nathaniel Wilkins can get himself elected Mayor, the Devil most certainly would be doin' figure-eights for the damned, thankyouverymuch.

Well, Rose and Francie reconciled and then the talk at the Sewing Circle was all 'bout where that money was comin' from. Oh, we knew he was skimmin' it outta the church, but the question was, who was givin' it to the church? Yes, Madeline St. Claire, that's who.

Seems Madeline'd been shufflin' money over to Tobias almost as soon as their affair started. And she had plenty of it to shuffle, on account of her family – she was a Fremont before she became a St. Claire...and yes, those Fremonts – and they made sure she had 'nough to keep her livin' like she was still a debutante instead of a pastor's wife. So she and Tobias took up with each other and a few months later, they were plannin' to run away together and she started settin' her money aside so Tobias could make all the arrangements. But she couldn't give it right to Tobias, no ma'am, not without settin' the whole town on fire with the gossip, so she signed it over to the First Congregational Church of St. Johns and then Tobias did the rest. And picked himself up a nice wardrobe while he was at it.

Well, Clifford St. Claire found her bank book one Sunday mornin' right after the early service and he asked her was she donatin' money to those God-forsaken Congregationalists, and next thing you know, they're shoutin' at each other so loud everyone in the rectory can hear 'em and these are Baptists, mind, so when Madeline informs Clifford at the top of her lungs (and that girl had a pair, I'm here to tell you) that she's havin' an affair with Tobias J. Finkle, well...that whole congregation probably trembled with fear of bein' struck down by lightnin' just for bein' in the vicinity of such a sinner.

This next part I'm tellin' you firsthand, 'cause I was sittin' in the pew that Sunday, third row from the front, and I watched Clifford St. Claire march down the center aisle of the First Congregationalist lookin' like he was gonna visit the Lord's wrath on us all. He comes burstin' through those doors – they were still the original ones then, the ones with the carvings in the center panels – and Tobias was in the middle of his sermon and he just stops, looks up, and sorta shivers, like he's got a chill. I'll tell you, I've never seen a man turn so pasty white that wasn't dead. Which I'll bet he was wishin' he was, and I'll admit I thought for a moment we were gonna see Leviticus 20:10 come to life right there in the sanctuary, 'cause Tobias knew why Clifford was there and all of us in the Sewing Circle knew why he was there, too.

But it was Proverbs 6:32 that Clifford started yellin' at Tobias and then the whole congregation knew why, too, and that whole congregation, and I mean everybody, inhaled all at once, like to suck the air right outta that room, and we're all starin' at Clifford and Tobias, just dyin' to see what's

gonna happen next, and then, and then...well, don't know what I thought was gonna happen next, but I sure didn't imagine Tobias would just turn tail and run out the side door. But run he did, all the way to his house, and by the time any of us recovered from the shock, he had his horse loaded up with a steamer trunk and every last one of those suits. Caught the train at the station up to Kenton and that was the last we ever saw of him.

Madeline went chasin' after him, 'course. Caught the twelve thirty-five up to Seattle where the ticket seller told her Tobias had headed. But she never did catch up with him and he never sent for her, neither. Francie said she always suspected he was probably plannin' to leave her behind all 'long, just wanted her money 'til he had 'nough to make life comfortable, and I'd say Francie was right on that count. Had poor Madeline's head so addled she couldn't see what was plain in front of her.

She did all right, though. Married herself an ambitious fella from Portland — a lawyer, I think. He ran for mayor down there a few years later and even managed to get elected. And, as it happened, he was a Presbyterian. Didn't see the Devil ice-skatin' down the Willamette on election day, but we did get one hell of an ice storm when he was inaugurated.