

## Joshua Harmon

### THE LEGEND OF JIMMY FRYE

Fence blown down in a winter storm  
darkened by outstripped possession  
Field stretching out of the world  
this book is as old as the people  
There are traces of blood in a fairy tale  
—Susan Howe, *Thorow*

*Late in the year, depressed with that disappointment which ever treads upon the heels of extravagant expectation, they returned from their melancholy journey across the wilderness. They seemed to expect a treasury underneath every foot of the rude soil. They imagined every rock of yellowish hue to be impregnated with gold. They slept on the mountains, dreaming of the rich ore lurking in their rocky foundations, and overlaying the roofs and floors of their deep subterranean halls. With fancy's eye they saw through the fissures of the rocks, and beheld yawning caverns starred with gems and rough with gold.*

Here the country is wide and a man can see a farm from a mile off over hayfields and fences. In this country I lay as a dead man through the short summer nights blown over with stars and waited for each moment to arrive. Then the stars fell from the sky to land shining at my feet, lighting the green grass with fires that burned till morning. I ran that wide country searching for water, lost, tasting the air for salt.

The moral of a *fable* is expressed formally; the lesson of the *fiction*, if any, is inwrought. A *fiction* is studied; a *myth* grows up without intent. A *legend* may be true, but cannot be historically verified; a *myth* has been received as true at some time.

In Boston he had had his portrait taken by a photographer—years back, he said, though the face looking out at me from the image looked older than that before me, pressing the creased print into my palm. The hair oiled and combed flat across the brow, the collar and tie, the fine coat, the jaw smooth and

strong. When I looked up from it to him the other face seemed to appear in the air between us but what I noticed was his voice saying Go on take it but keep it for yourself.

Near six feet; longlegged fellow; bit fallen away, as if he'd been living off nuts and berries in the woods; illkept beard; dark hair tending toward long; generally scurvy-looking when he first came through; blue eyes. His clothes all gone to tatters, coat and stained trousers and his boots torn and flapping. Carrying only a single leather pack as if it was all he owned. And a coonskin cap on his head like he thought he was Davy Crockett. After a few days we saw him again down Baldwin's store buying some tobacco and it looked like the widow Godfrey had cleaned him up some, trimmed his hair and mended his dungarees and shown him to the washroom. Gentlemen, he said.

We never knew how he arrived here, already bearded and unkempt as though he'd been lost in the woods for years. Maybe he had. He appeared one afternoon and no one could say for sure whether he'd come in the road from Skunk Hollow and Clarksville or over from Beecher Falls or whether he'd hitched a ride up the river from Colebrook. It was the end of summer, 1918.

First few seasons here he rarely spoke but to widow Godfrey, in whose house he boarded with the principal. During the week he logged alongside all of us, yet didn't open his mouth except at dinner, when he'd empty his pail into his lap and put away whatever the widow had placed inside it. Any questions he only nodded or spoke a word or two, and so we learned he didn't want to be asked. Of an evening anyone would see him and the principal sitting out on her front porch, both of them staring off at the wooded hill across the river. But neither of them came out to the camps for the poker games or the dances, and though we saw the principal in church on Sundays, singing along in a pew near the front, the hymnal held in one hand, we never saw the other. We could never figure why the widow Godfrey was lodging him, for we hadn't believed she would allow such a man, nor certainly a man with no religion, into her house.

Russ Covill said he thought it was the old word of the caves that had passed south decades back on the lips of one of the gentleman hunters who came up for a week or two holiday in the camps that had brought him, same as it had brought others. Most of them never lasted more than a summer, and one or two ended up vanishing in the woods, their bones whitening like fallen

antlers, unless they'd made off with the Indian's gold, since we never saw them again. Yet with him it was his patience that made us believe Russ was wrong. We'd seen that hunger before, and it didn't allow a man to sit quiet, gazing at the country instead of heading out into it. Others of us thought he was bootlegging whiskey from Magog or Sherbrooke, searching out a trail across the border, or perhaps building a still deep in the woods. He was here near four years, logging and no more, before he vanished one March morning. Didn't think we'd see him again until he showed up mid-April with that mute Frenchman.

*Kwenitekw or Quinaticquet—something like that the native tribesmen called their Great River, speaking so low in their throats that the English, making hard work of imitation, had many versions. At last they decided to spell it Connecticut River.*

In the spring of 1939 the state of New Hampshire began work on the Murphy Dam project, a flood control measure following the great hurricane of 1938. Workers came from throughout the northeast and worked into October of that year. The river valley below First Connecticut Lake, some of the most fertile land in Coos county, was to be flooded, and with it much of the village of Pittsburg, ensuring regulated hydro-electricity and prevention against future damage from floods.

A young engineer from Yale, working in town that summer, heard a story—evidently quite popular among the villagers—about a mysterious gold hunter who had lived for a time in those parts nearly two decades ago. Some in town said the man had vanished years back, under mysterious circumstances, after his mining failed to yield results; others believed he still lived in the woods nearby, working his claim. Still others alleged to have known the man personally. The engineer repeated the tale to some of his fellows, and by the end of summer every laborer at the dam site must have heard the story. As of September 1, 1939, the manager of the site estimated he had lost twenty-three men, either alone or in pairs, who had stolen tools and vanished overnight; some of these men, he explained, were those he had hired to replace the initial deserters.

*One fine morning, Jimmy stepped out of his cabin, his rifle slung across his broad shoulder and his tall boots shining in the sun. He watched the stream ripple over its*

*rocky bed. The air was filled with promise and his heart felt light. A gentle breeze stirred the spruce branches. "Vince," he called into the dim interior of the cabin, "I do believe today is the day we will find it at last."*

That he could summon the north wind by speaking certain words over a fire of fir-cones. That if led blindfolded into any woods between here and the sea he could point the direction of the nearest town and tell you its distance and what country lay between and the location of every hiding hole large enough for a man. That he had killed one man for each year he had lived; that if ever a year passed when he did not take another's life he would surely die. That he had fathered many children by different women so that his seed would never be erased from the earth; that they walk untold miles not knowing the yearning in their own hearts.

A small house shaded on all sides by pines, no grass, the ground covered with dry orange needles. Never knew where his own father went off to—announced one night he was heading to the barn to repair an axe handle, and didn't return. His mother took up with another man from town, farmer who had a family. His sisters, all older, raised him until he was old enough to leave as his father had, in the night while everyone slept—sneaking out just after that farmer left his mother's bedroom, and following him down the road. He never saw his sisters or mother since. Downstate, all this, or else over into the Green Mountains—some town I never heard of. Don't recollect the name. Course this is all just what he told me. Thing was, he loved to hear himself talk.

He had told me he'd been abandoned by his family as a child and each night we prayed for him, for what he'd had to do to get by, things he refused to tell me from the goodness of his heart. I did not try to imagine. He was not a bad man. After supper I would shoo him from the kitchen or he would have done all my washing and scrubbing. I will not have a boarder do my work, I told him, and only then would he sit with Mr Harding on the porch where I allowed them their tobacco. Some nights the three of us would sit in the parlor and Mr Harding would read to us, his well-trained voice such a wonder, of the poems of Longfellow or Bryant, or several verses from Peter, and at these times was such a peace in my house as I'd never felt. He would study the ceiling while Mr Harding, holding the book in his palm and standing by

the hearth, read and licked his finger to turn its pages, or he would look at the floor or some corner of the room where he could focus on nothing but the even rhythm of Mr Harding's voice, so moved was he.

The first time I was told it I was told it in a cabin outside Beecher Falls where I'd come with old Hap him showing me the cabin and then leaving in the dark his bags rattling against his legs. Both the man who told me and another man present who heard it I killed and took the bodies one at a time deep into the woods back of the cabin. Dug a hole the night through. The lamp had burned out by the time I came back to lie in the man's bed for a bit. They asked twenty-six dollars which I laid on the table between us one hand atop it while the older fellow scratched out lines on a stained scrap this here's the river and this here's the lake. And this is the road from the village.

It wasn't the trees but the shapes between the trees in the dark the different colors of the dark and how I walked through it not a man could've followed or even kept pace could he have seen the path. Say a night of clouds and no moon when a man can't see his hand held before him. Even Vince I had to slow for the trail I'd shown to him down in the dirt and leaves a bent-back twig or a fern growing where it shouldn't where it wouldn't last even but would turn orange and then brown in the soil too dry for it. A branch the stars hung beyond or the one spot in a rainstorm you'd never get wet no matter a leaf spinning circles no Vince didn't understand in his head these things I tried to put there. Vince I say. These trails the Indians walked or even later the slaves they smuggled up to the border this last stage of the journey before they would throw themselves on the free ground and cry for joy. The bog I have unearthed the bones from where several never saw anything later but the sunlight winking through leaves a pattern I like to think of when I close my eyes at night. The swinging motion of everything so many miles from home.

It's true, there was a time when this town belonged not to the United States nor Canada but only itself. The charter named it the Republic of Indian Stream, perhaps out of allegiance to the old stories or the Abenaki who first lived here, who some say can still be found in small groups deep enough in the woods. This was near a hundred years ago, long before any other state in this nation had taken it upon themselves to secede. Course we're proud.

Some days we still talk about doing it again—damming up the river and claiming its waters as our own, or closing down the roads in and out. There is nothing we need that comes from anywhere else.

All my life I have been moving toward something I can't see the shape of. At night I can feel it out beyond wherever I am waiting for me or even speaking my name Jimmy in a whisper no one else can hear. I have known this since I was a boy. But it has followed me from place to place so that even if I am trying to escape it I am only leading it on and if I am running toward it it hides on me. I wake in the night and listen to the loons on the lake and feel it out there.

From the appointed hour I waited with some few belongings I could not bear to leave behind tied up in a sack. A petticoat with some lace embroidery, my father's folded maps, a sampler I'd been at work on which I thought I'd hang over our mantel, a pin my father had given me which I never wore so as not to lose it, and his very words which I vowed never to burn no matter what he had said. Through the night I barely slept waiting always for some sign, a knock at the window or an owl call just outside. The next morning I could barely stand and my mother commented on my sluggishness in the kitchen where she was trying to cook breakfast for nineteen men. During the day, despite my state, I would look from every window I passed. I stood by the doorway every twenty minutes until one of the men asked me if I was expecting a telegram and if it might arrive sooner if I watched for it. That night I nodded over the dishes, my hair drooping in the steam and my hands under the hot water, searching. I couldn't help but fall asleep, though I imagined him waking me in the night, his hands gentle on my arms or shoulder and his face rising out of the darkness to call me away.

*Three Indians and three white men were traveling together. They came to a river and found a canoe, but the boat would only carry two at a time. Now if more Indians were left on a bank, while a crossing was made, than white men, the latter ran the risk of being treacherously killed. If more white men than Indians were left on the bank while the canoe was crossing, the savages were likely to be foully dealt with. How did the whole party get across, and always have white men and Indians on either bank evenly matched?*

The first day out we took several deer. One fellow I'd met over breakfast had shot a grouse though the shot had torn the wing clear off in a burst of feathers and he threw it into the brush rather than have a taxidermist attempt it. The young man named Jimmy, who'd been there when I arrived, stayed at the lodge, claiming he was sick from the homemade liquor he'd bought the night before and of which we'd all seen him partake liberally after supper. Yet when we returned we found him chatting up the cook's daughter, she in her dirty apron staring at the ground while she listened. He had given her a mangy mink hide to woo her. Of course the fellows gave him a ribbing seeing this. Supper lasted well past ten in the lodge that night with the serving girls coming and going bringing out deermeat pies and mince pies and roast duck and all manner of excellent country fare. The young fellow watched the cook's daughter all the night long making no secret of it. Admittedly she was a gorgeous creature but most of us had not come north for that sort of thing. Later he lost seven and a half dollars at cards and broke a bottle against the doorpost, threatening us with the splintered neck. I turned in soon after.

That crooked woodpile standing against the barn I could smell what lay beneath it already but took each log to burn through the winter armloads of logs that stack getting smaller until I saw a foot a hand some knee bent was it bones under there now and nothing more or the flesh still on it the grass withered away. And now growing a bit warmer and on the roads all the trees just waking and the pails stuck into them to drain it out walking past I could see their tracks in the snow hear the drops filling everything flowing now. There was a rhythm inside my skull.

#### THE SEARCH FOR JIMMY FRYE: HOLMAN AMEY.

Jed Parker and Windy Williams proposed the search party. The canoe had been found the morning after, clearly tampered with, and it was only a few minutes later that someone said what we'd all been thinking. Where's Frye.

There were nineteen of us, four on horseback, and we began the hunt right then, the riders galloping down the road to the village and the rest of us moving off in a ragged line across Perry Stream, heading for Indian Stream where we imagined he was wedged in some crevice or hidden in a bramble patch. The Frenchman watched us from the road, shading his eyes with his hand as we entered the trees. I looked back a few yards later and he was walking away in no particular hurry, his hands in his pockets.

I had barely slept since the night before last. My throat felt dry and ticklish and my hands shook a bit on the barrel of my shotgun. The woods were green and dark and all I could think of were the swollen eyes of the two men they'd laid out on the shore, that smell of the lake.

Rob Marsh fired the first shot. We all jumped, swinging our own guns as the echo died among the trees. A leaf fluttered down. No one spoke for a moment and all the birds had ceased singing. Rob walked in the direction he'd fired, jostling ferns with his legs. We watched him bend down.

Nothing, he called back.

For days I would refuse to let myself eat whether or not the food was available my body only emptying itself as around me the other men ate or I smelled the meals their women cooked. My stomach protested and in cramps I curled to the ground. Hands twisted the leaves in my ears with my eyes closed everything was near at hand. For days scratching at the skin over me. Beyond the hunger came vision and quickness. My body circling in it ate itself. I taught it denial.

It was Henry Cummings who found what everyone agreed was their old camp some years after anyone had last had word from him. A couple of dented old tin pans, scraps of lumber and some carpenter's tools, some contraption like a cradle but with a piece of sheet iron all filled with holes instead of slats. A coil of rope, a pile of rotten burlap, and one shovel, the handle broken off eight inches above the blade, which was rusted and broken itself.

In my sleep my feet were taken. By axes cut off and on my knees I crawled into a thicket to fashion crutches wrapping the bloody parts in rags. No no I was shouting but they hearing me came back their axes still clutched and I hid my hands in my armpits. Their boots crackling twigs. A shining knife for my tongue no hands to beat them back no feet to run.

NINETY-NINE YEARS OF WILDERNESS.

*Days roll by...*

*Days roll by.*

*Days roll by,*

*like logs down the river.*



APRIL 3 In the absence of Something to Drink Jimmy and I took a smoke and our journey is commenced arrived in. Saint John a Six o clock put up at friend Websters.

APRIL 4. A Young School Marm got aboard the Train about 10 o clock the Seats were all occupied and gave her a part of mine. Mind Jimmy asleep with his hat over his Face. She proved quite an interesting School Mam. We dined together Several times during the night first out of my Basket and then out of hers. I was Sorry when we reached her Station. the only name I have for her is the Sweet Cracker Girl

APRIL 5. Not getting any Sleep last night am inclined to be drowsy to day We come to Bangor in a snowstorm this morning and Jimmy not to Pleased. Forenoon was Spent in trying to make arrangements for Horses Jimmy bought a Box of chocolates at the five and Dime We plan to Strike a cross country to the West

APRIL 6 To day saw a bear my horse started nearly Threw me but the bear run off Jimmy laughed but the horses no good. Dont know what he paid for it. Got mad but He says just to wait till we come to Where were going but he wont Tell me yet where it is Tired and cold and already having serious apprehensions about this trip Dont know why he came and fetched me says he has a Task for me and a reward ate some Bread and dried Beef for supper. Tried our guns Snow and wind are trying to See which can do the most Devilment

APRIL 7 Rode 16. miles in deep snow and come to Skowhegan at dark. fearful cold. am not in a very good Humor this evening. Snow still flying thick. Jimmy wont have us be Seen in town and we camped in a Thicket lots of Wood and a fair camping place but Wind is Howling so the tent threatens to blow over feel I will freeze but Jimmy seems happy tonight singing of riches and a Pretty Girl melted Snow for cooking Purposes and ate bacon and bread Smothered in fat made us a pot of Tea and Turned in

APRIL 8. an other Windy day and what is very Strange a foggy one at lest its warmer but the horses having Trouble in the heavy Snow. Started to

rain by noon and no cover anywhere got soaked through right away        went  
N. along the Kennebek to find a Place for a Crossing and found an Old cuss  
on the bank        said he thinks he is going to die        Jimmy said he Might  
travel with us but the Fellow is clearly foolish        only fit to Bottom a chair  
and look out the Window.

APRIL 9. Our old man is not Dead yet        we gave him Some  
Grub        think he will make the trip        has led us to a spot in the  
Kennebek        sure enough we crossed just above where a brook came in.  
Followed upstream and saw an old Thundershower Mill half fell  
over        mostly just a pile of loose stones        friggd around the Woods  
a while clearing Brush and looking for a path

APRIL 10 Last night will be remembered for a long time. Our mutual Friend  
the Bummer led us upstream into the Mountains        couldnt ride and had  
to lead the Horses        rains turned back to snow and come midnight our  
Tent was blown down Hats Blankets and evrything that was loose was Scattered.  
Some of my Tools lost in drifts        our Blankets was filled with the driving  
Snow. Jimmys chocolats lost too and he cussing and digging in the snow to  
find them        We sleped with our Boots on or they would have been  
gone        We laid Still for ten or fifteen minits        We found that we  
were going to loose our Blankets So we cralled out and tried to keep  
on        Our old Friend lay up wailing and wouldnt move        Jimmy took  
some ugly Fit and Stove in his Head        We left him and getherd up Camp  
went back downhill again        dont know what Jimmy has plans  
for        known him six Years Ago but not like this

APRIL 11. Followed a Brook upstream        Jimmy said wed find a  
village        Met some loggers Nooning and they gave us a dite of red flannel  
Hash. Pointed out where we wanted to go. Jimmy said he knew this Country  
but were Turned Around some and Back to the South to far Jimmy said will  
have to come by way of Berlin        a nother strange thing Jimmy asked if I  
could talk any French said he Thought Id learnt it in Halifax.        Told him  
No and he was Quiet a While        Came to Some small place after  
dark        only one House in Town and we had the privilage of Sleeping in  
the Dining Room by furnishing our own Blankets

APRIL 12. All Ready a week out of Bangor Jimmy said six days to get there Still wont Tell me where but were almost to Berlin at lest a Hope of dry Lodging Past two days Sunny but still cold in Old Specs Shadow now Jimmy is itching to be done this trip

APRIL 13. an Exciting day in Berlin. About noon a man was found by the river Dead cause of Death poor whisky. Jimmy and I do our first Washing and we do a first class job after which we take a Look round bought more Supplies and Jimmy got a few Pie Plates ate a fine boiled dinner and it is a Splended Day we left Town riding upriver rode on past dark .21. Miles and campd by Philips Brook

APRIL 14 Rode through the Notch this morning and by afternoon camped in a Pine Stand atop a Hill near Clarksvill Only some Beans and cold meat for supper Jimmy says To morrow morning well be There and if I cant learn any French to just Keep Quiet and let him talk I dont know what its about have Never seen this Country before rolling hills now were Past the mountains all dark Trees and dont like the Looks of it

#### TRAVELS.

A road that follows the descent of a valley, a stream flowing in the ditch and then crossed at the bottom by a small stone bridge. He walks down the wheel ruts toward a cluster of houses and barns, squared fields broken by stone walls. Halfway downhill a small cemetery off the roadside, the gravestones grass-grown and spotted with lichen except one new marker B. 1897 D. 1918. From the cemetery he can sit and watch as the lamps come on one by one in the farmhouses. A man walks his cows into the barn. Behind him the last strip of light fades from the hill.

Come full dark he has followed the road to the bottom of the valley. Walks bent-over beside one house and drinks from the barrel on its north side, smooths wet hands over his face and wipes it with his sleeve. Beyond the window above him, voices. Through the thin curtains he watches the shadows lift cup and fork to mouth, listens to the scrape of silverware on crockery. He can smell the biscuits and gravy.

Later the moon lifts into the sky. Wrapped in his coat he has slept three hours under an apple tree.

The low coastal blueberry country in summer rain. He stretches on his belly under the bushes, breathing the smell of salt air and the stink of smoke and sweat from his sleeve where he rests his chin. Water trickles down his forehead, beads in his lashes. He has wrapped his supplies in a burlap sack then placed this inside the leather pack. But his blanket becomes heavy and smells of wool.

*Jimmy them long lashes of yours near break a girls heart if that smile dont.*

*After Caleb Lyman's raid against the Cowasuck Indians on the upper Connecticut River (June 1704), their settlement at Cowass was abandoned. Cowass became Cahoos and Cohos and later Coös (county est. December 24, 1803), finally Coos.*

No abiding place. A circle amid the trees where winds and words cannot penetrate a mossy rock and a faint view of stars obscured by smoke. My fire burning the scraps I have no use for in cold weeks I would throw my life there if I could. Through it we all must pass it licking at our edges. A man I saw on a corner in the city chanting as everyone passed him I stopped to watch his hands fingering the air. *This world is not my home. This world is not my home. This world is not my home.* His dull coin eyes finding me even here.

As if blindly seeking the magnetic pole his feet over the years led him north.

HOLMAN AMEY.

I laid low in the woods once to try to see what they were up to but lost the trail about two miles from the village. He is good at woodcraft from his years knocking about here and there I imagine. I cast off into the trees making a circle but couldn't discover their path, not a broken branch or print in some mud. I hunkered down behind an old deadfall and tried to wait them out. Sometime well past dark I woke not knowing I'd been asleep. I lifted my head over the log but there was no one near. Don't know what it was that woke me. I stayed put till dawn and never saw anything. I walked back to town with one eye over my shoulder the whole way but they didn't approach me nor had they returned during the night and did not come for several days.

*It may be interesting to know that the Indians had several well-marked trails from Canada across northern New Hampshire to Maine, the most used one started from*

*Clifton, P.Q., across by South Bay, Connecticut Lake, thence across the northern part of Clarksville, New Hampshire, and down the Magalloway into Maine.*

That he worked for a time at a textile mill in Lawrence we can prove by the books locked in the safe, the key available only to the bookkeeper and the manager. The pay records, the word of the Italian woman from whom he rented his room. And after his shift one afternoon he walks along the Merrimack with a young woman from town, the wind blowing loose papers and dirt along the street. Their arms linked, her scarf and his upturned collar flapping. He studies the brick façades, the tall windows with dozens of panes, and tells her of the smell of balsams, the wild cries of loons, the northern lights wavering green behind the trees in summer. She tucks a loose strand of hair into her scarf and with her fingertip flicks soot from his lapel. The river gray and full this time of year flows behind them. Later, alone, he watches trains rattle slow through the trainyard, men stepping over the shiny tracks.

When we heard him speak the first time we knew why he'd kept quiet so long. Why he hadn't come to church to sing with the assembly. Why no one had heard tell of the plans working themselves out in his mind. We could never have imagined such a voice could come from him—the few words he'd spat out during his time in the logging camps had not even hinted at this voice, and we knew right away that it was how he had charmed his way into the widow Godfrey's keeping. Those of us with daughters and wives kept them close at hand.

MR HARDING.

He kept the room across the hall from me. A very courteous fellow he took great care to keep quiet while I was reading or studying in the parlor. Yet at night I'd occasionally hear all manner of noises from his room and once found myself standing in my robe and slippers outside his door while inside the room he moaned and whistled in his sleep. Something thumped the wall. Mr Frye, I said, knocking on the door and trying to keep my voice low as not to wake Mrs Godfrey. Mr Frye. There was a pause in the sounds coming from behind the door and a rustle of blankets perhaps and then silence. I stood there waiting, my hand poised before the doorknob. But I have always valued my own privacy and would never intrude upon another man's without good

cause. Mr Frye himself has always been a discreet man and this too I took into account. The noises did not continue and I returned to my bed leaving my door open a crack to hear should the noises resume. I did not sleep for some time after that. Something about the sound of his unconscious voice had unnerved me as if I had seen his naked soul. At breakfast he seemed himself and I did not see him again until after supper when we took a smoke on Mrs Godfrey's porch as was our custom. I lit the bowl of my pipe and rested my hands upon the porch rail, gazing out at the lawns before us, and Main Street and town hall at the bottom of the hill. Out of sight in the trees behind the hall and down a small bank the river ran south, and east beyond it a low hill rose. I studied Mr Frye from the corner of my eye. He seemed innocent enough of what had transpired the previous night and I was loath to discuss it. We took our smoke in silence but for the sound of the river. To this day I am certain that he was merely asleep and fighting some invisible enemy who had assailed him there.

*Yet John Redskin appreciated beauty when he saw it mirrored in the River—tall trees and mighty oaks, the trout pool blushing under the sun's last kiss, the stars, the tender sickle moon; and his heart swelled within him so that he needs must fashion a flute of a reed and make a song about it all full of wild high pipings. He sang of the three jeweled lakes where the River was born far up among the larch-hung mountains . . . . He sang of the wide intervale below it, the Coos Country, through which the river writhed laughing in summer's sun, or reeled drunk with a foaming brew poured into it after thaw or heavy rain, by those mad torrents, Ammonoosic, Passumpsic, Ompompanoosic, Cascadnac, Ottaqueeche, and all the soberer tributaries which form, along with Quinaticquet itself, that long lovely valley he called the Smile of God.*

The sky was sudden. A strip of blue peeping out where the clouds had begun to tatter some hand reaching down to pull them back to cast light on this patch of hills and woods. Or the narrow view of low rainclouds through branches so dense a jay could not fly through. That tired sun lighting the boles of spruce the dead limbs still clutched to before it passed below. A man could never see his shadow before him.

I'd seen Jimmy since the first time he came to town. Must've been only ten or so but I recall him a longlegged fellow with scanty beard, not too old himself.

Met him up the lodge one day running an errand for my mother, and he called out and said did they breed all the young girls up here this pretty if so he thought he might stay awhile. I looked back at him for a moment and then ran on away. There were many men around the lodge all the time and mother had told me never to speak to them. I didn't hear him speak to me but once again for four years, and that time he was overheard and he walked off right quick. But that voice played itself out in my mind every so often, a faint sound like the wind in bare branches. Then one day, not long before sugaring season, he found me alone again and told me he was off but would be back for me shortly and to sit tight in the meantime. True to his word he was gone the next morning. Holman Amey come up to the lodge with a load of firewood and said he'd left the widow Godfrey's house on foot that morning, and good riddance.

I started planning but I didn't know what for. I walked in the dooryard after supper and if my mother knew I'd some foolish ideas in my head she never spoke of it.

Each of us is a hundred men known and secret even to each other as a crowd in a tavern vying for attention the old man and the fresh boy and yes they moved inside me at times. Sitting on a rock in thick woods. All answering to the same name though it meant differently. If I could cut a man open like cleaning a fish. The things we say. Jimmy I shouted till the trees understood.

#### HISTORIES.

*Soon we came to a larger tributary, practically the same size as the River itself, and knew it for the rivulet which had given name to the Indian Stream Territory, whose history is among the strangest of all River tales. It is difficult to believe that this jagged corner of New Hampshire determinedly maintained complete independence up to about a century ago, but such is the truth.*

*Indian Stream, Indian Stream Settlement, Indian Stream Territory, Township of Indian Village, Township of Liberty in Indian Stream, Indian Grant, Bedel's Grant, Bedel's and Others' Grant, Bedel's and Associates' Grant are all names which were applied to a tract of land situated in what is now the extreme northern portion of Coös county, the northernmost county of New Hampshire.*

*The assumption usual in regard to border settlements, however, should not be too readily made in the case of Indian Stream. The conclusion that the region was a haven for the lawless and indebted, who trusted in the ambiguity of its location for protection against legal authority, is unwarranted by its history. Indian Stream had its disorders, but nothing is more certain, in light of the record of their activities, than that the great majority of the settlers were men of good character, serious purpose, common sense, and no mean degree of ability. The amount of lawlessness from which the community suffered was probably the minimum, and the serious attitude assumed toward it was due to the natural Anglo-Saxon desire to enjoy perfect system.*

*The treaty of 1783 defined the northwest boundary of New Hampshire as "the most northwestern head of the Connecticut river." The country was wild and unsurveyed. The British considered that their title under this treaty extended down to the forty-fifth parallel of latitude, and the real head of the Connecticut, while New Hampshire did not concern itself with the subject. In 1789, however, Col Jeremiah Eames was on a commission appointed by the legislature to survey and establish the boundaries between Maine, New Hampshire, and Lower Canada, and his journal shows that they made the head of Hall's stream, the northwest bound of this state, and established it by suitable monuments. Hall's stream is the northwestern branch of the Connecticut, and this survey brought all the land between Hall's stream and Connecticut river, including the fertile valley of Indian stream, within this state. The advantages of this region becoming known, in 1789 two settlers made their homes on Indian stream. Others followed, led hither by the richness of the soil; others, to seek in this remote district an asylum from pressing creditors or punishment for crime.*

*In 1819 the British and American commissioners attempted to jointly establish the boundary line between Canada and this state, but they could not agree. The American commissioners held to Eames' survey and Hall's stream as the bound made by the treaty, while the British commissioners contended for lines according to their construction. From the survey in 1789, the settlers here had known nothing else than that they were in New Hampshire territory, and, so far as they were amenable to any law, acknowledged that of this state.*

*In 1824 Indian Stream Territory was inhabited by about fifty-eight settlers, who, with their families, made a population of 285 persons, having about 847 acres under improvement.*



*The settlement, in 1830, numbered ninety voters, and there was a large enough number of disaffected men to lead them to talk of resistance to the long acknowledged authority.*

*July 9, 1832, the voters of the disputed tract met, by notification, formed the government of "The United Inhabitants of Indian Stream Territory," adopted a constitution, which created an assembly and a council.*

*March 12, 1835, Deputy Sheriff William M. Smith, from Colebrook, attempted to arrest C.J. Haines and Reuben Sawyer, and was violently beaten and driven from the Territory by several men. March 13, Milton Harvey and an assistant were assaulted while trying to attach some property, and also driven from the Territory. Wild reports came down to Lancaster of this resistance; it was asserted that the Territory was organizing a military force, had made an alliance with Indians for war, and were building a block-house for an intrenchment, under the name of "jail."*

*Indian Stream War was caused by a boundary dispute when the town of Pittsburg, for a short time, was an independent nation in 1829.*

*One occurrence of the war was often related by old settlers. The town had no prison so when a Britisher or Tory was captured he was confined under a large potash kettle, overturned on a large flat rock, a smaller rock placed underneath the edge allowed air to enter the prison. He was there confined until tried and justice meted out.*

*The large flat rock has been pointed out to me as the spot where stood the "jail" of the Indian Stream War.*

Jimmy Frye is an old wives' tale, a story someone invented long ago during a time he was snowed in his cabin. A story to distract himself from the snow mounting in front of his windows and the blue light he knew he would wake to in morning, the water melting down his stovepipe to hiss on the logs when he got a fire lit. My grandfather told me how he had heard about Jimmy and the gold years back, how even his grandfather told him stories of a character he called Jimmy Moonshine, who would come to town with the summer thunderstorms, steal the corn and the livestock, foment discord among the men, despoil the women, and then vanish under cover of darkness. That this story somehow got tangled up with the other story of the Indian's gold—which according to some may go back to the time before any white men lived on this continent—is only natural. In this remote corner of the world there is

nothing but wilderness and darkness and drink. Any man can be forgiven an evening's dreaming as long as it is not passed on as fact. There were many hoboes in those years, and while there may well have been a man named Frye who passed through the village at some point, this Jimmy Frye they speak of has never walked the earth except in men's minds or the stories they tell.

I knew you were out there. I looked for you in the face of every man who came to the camp, every pair of eyes that met mine while I carried my mother's trays of steaming trout and potatoes around the table. And recognized each time that I had longer to wait. At night I stood by the shore of the lake, listening to the silence that hid everything inside itself. I thought of any far-off place, the sound of train whistles. Your face as you cupped a match to your cigarette. Where are you, I said, knowing that you heard my voice. When I looked down the empty road to town I was seeing you already.

I swear he used to shit his pants. We boys would go out there to throw rocks against the roof or ask him to show us the best spots for trout. Some claimed he'd left decades back but the whole town knew he was still in the woods whether or not they'd say as much. Most people wanted to forget him, as though he had never lived. His shack was twenty by thirty, pine boards and tarpaper, his bed in one corner and the rest workbenches covered with junk. Old traps rusted shut, pelts of muskrat and raccoon and fox, some in piles, some stretched out and drying with flies crawling on them. All kinds of rusty and worthless tools and frayed ropes and tin cans filled with Lord knows what all. Way out in the frigging woods by Indian Stream. He had piped the stream in through his wall and it poured through his sink and back out again, running all the time. It was dark inside, only one or two windows and those often covered with rags. Come closer, he'd tell us, and we'd step nearer while he sat on the edge of his bed unmoving. His beard white and wild, hiding all of his face but his blue eyes. His wool trousers soiled and patched and his hands on his knees. Closer, he'd say. I remember gripping tight to my fish pole and trying not to breathe. From under his pillow he'd pull out a small pouch and out of that shake into his palm five or six dull lumps. He'd put one between his back teeth and bite, showing us the marks. You'd like to know where the rest of it's at, he said, wouldn't you. He showed us the shotgun he had wired to the underside of his rough table, the trigger in easy reach of where he sat. In case the warden comes, he said, winking, or anyone else I don't like and

that means any one of you. Then he'd take us along the stream and point out the places to drop our lines. He only came to town once a month, leaning on a polished ash cane, to buy what he needed to eat. Everyone said he'd been out in that shack for years and years, since before my father had been a boy, hunting for it. Yes, we've seen it, they'd answer, when we told of his pouch. Still I wonder if it may have been a ploy. He never seemed to want for food and no one knew where he got his money. Once when he hadn't been to town for some weeks, they went out to check up on him and found him dead, and though they tore the place apart, no one found anything else, nothing to back up his stories, not even the pouch we'd all seen so many times.

Me in a tub with a Chinese whore in this great city of Boston Massachusetts where outside the cars rumble over the cobblestones and ships sail into the harbor after journeys of several years and hundreds of strangers walk the streets and alleyways with hands concealed in their pockets. She pours water over my head and the hair slicks into my eyes the water slurring past my ears and off my chin she laughs at me this paperwhite girl I have secured with the last coins and bills in my pocket. A dozen paper lamps burn around us and steam rises from the water. She soaps the space between my shoulders and again I ask her name and again she asks me to speak into her ear. I raise a hand dripping strings of water and foam and brush back the black hair from her face.

Once at a sawmill outside Lebanon I watched as a man named Toby Moore lost his arm in the belt of the steam engine powering the saw. The blood sprayed everywhere and Bill Page who'd been working beside him keeping up the fire was covered in it some his own from where a chunk of Toby's bone had gashed his cheek. That sight I hope never to see again the strands of muscle or tendon holding the pulp of Toby's arm to his shoulder and the instant white of his face as he passed out there and every man jumped down into the pit where the engine was. Bill Page on his knees screaming. I never found out if Toby lived or died in that moment of the saw ceasing its spinning and the whine quieting I ran from the mill the shouts quieting behind me too.

Down the niggerhole for two days buried I ate nothing but carrots Vince had thought to stow there when we first opened it up. Chewing them in the dark and thought I would gag before the end. I clenched my bowels tight and let

out piss a little at a time and when I climbed out the packed earth all damp from it.

JAILED.

On the ceiling a circle of water dripped by me and each time I watched that mouth in it open and close and the sound of the drop on the cement at my feet. I sat against the wall. Knees against my chest and arms tight around them to keep off the chill.

At dawn three men had surprised me climbing out a window with a gold necklace and a set of sterling candlesticks in my vest pocket. Some hilltown far to the southwest of here I had been just out of Fort Edward in the Dutch country then and observed the occasion of my seventeenth birthday with some boys met in the lake valley. A rollicking night and they'd left heading west where I'd just come from gave me a jug of whiskey and some bread to take on the road with me. Next night I lay up in the hills and finished both watching the stars fall below the edge of the world where other strange countries lie. The long hour before light I saw the house sitting lonely on the road and shimmied a tree up to the porch roof. Man and wife asleep in the bed didn't stir while I grabbed a few things off the chest. Their mouths wet breathing holes I looked at the yellow teeth and flat tongues. Stepping bare-foot across the floor and pulled my boots back on at the windowsill.

The men were riding along the road with a wagonload of wood when I squirmed my head and shoulders through the window. I ran along the roof and made a leap into a leafpile came down hard on my ankle and all three were on me.

Spent my eighteenth birthday there and when they let me out squinting at the sun half the village followed me at a hundred yards until I came to the signpost on the road where they stood to see I did not turn back.

The first man I killed I killed as dark turned above us caught us on the road and witnessed a pressure of my hands around his throat and then a barehanded rock. I was redhanded while he lay choking in the dirt turning in his coat and leaves stuck to it and his hair. Then the rock again and he was quiet. I panted there some time the house behind me where yet no one knew I was not though it had been a half hour I had followed his shape down the vanishing road. Where mother slept not knowing and another part of me watched stars purl through the oak branches.

Into the woods leaf-covered I left him in a ditch scraped over with moss and branches then was into the deeper woods still in darkness. I washed in a standing pool and by dawn straddled the crotch of a tree five miles away.

*The border between New Hampshire and Vermont is the winding line of the Connecticut River.*

*Part of the border between New Hampshire and Québec is formed by Hall's Stream.*

*Several bodies of water, including Umbagog and Aziscohos Lakes, and the various branches of the Magalloway and Dead Diamond Rivers, lie on or near the border between Maine and New Hampshire.*

*A common story told in the region recounts the experiences of a woman from Exeter, in the southern part of the state, who was abducted by Abenakis during the mid-Eighteenth century and brought north by her captors. After a journey of many days, the woman, whose name is not recorded, was able to escape—according to differing versions of the story, possibly by fleeing while the Abenakis slept, or by killing them in their sleep with their own tomahawks. The woman took her bearings by the sun and walked south for several days before she came upon a small settlement. She learned from a farmer that she was in Vermont, on the western side of the Connecticut; but in her travels with the Abenakis she knew she had not crossed the river. Only then did she realize how far north she had been conveyed, beyond the headwaters of that river and into dangerous and unknown lands. It was claimed that following her return to Exeter, the woman was subject to visions and fits.*

*A countryside surrounded by moving waters is said to experience frequent psychic phenomena.*

He is, perhaps, seven. Yet already in his eyes one could read his fate. A skittishness in league with a certain wildness. He roams the woods days, snaring rabbits and tracking squirrels and raccoons he kills with a slingshot. He discovers a shallow cave where he stashes a stolen box of matches and a supply of small rocks. He does not know what for but all his life he has pocketed loose things and concealed them in places only he has knowledge of.

Entry from a misplaced day. He sits in melting snow by a stream, yellow grass lifting through the dirty slush. The stream is still mostly frozen and he watches green bubbles slide below the ice. Above him in bare trees a few birds,

chickadees. With a fingernail he peels the wet bark from a branch. His horse's breath hangs still in the air.

For miles around him not another man stirs. Only wary deer browsing the stripped thickets, the moose standing in muddy bogs, coyote roaming the spruce woods in small packs. Even the bear remain asleep.

A hand-drawn map sketched by a dead man. He has been a week in the woods, sheltering under a fallen spruce and lighting few fires. But now he will return to the village he bypassed before dawn last week—the small white church and clustered houses, the town hall and general store, the valley farms—and find lodgings.

Four years is near enough to drive a man mad with frosted windows and clocks ticking all night and the cold never leaving his bones for months. But I stayed waiting for the one I needed to wait on still young and unready and I waited long winters where I did nothing but work beside the other men in the hidden timber clearing woodlots and sending the lumber downriver where I'd come from and where each time I wanted to go. Knowing all along I could've struck it and found more than enough to settle somewhere. Biting my tongue to keep still as the blankets covered me in the dark. In hiding away from me I imagined her the hair curling down her back and all the things her eyes would see. I waited and kept my eyes open the world and everything in it in reach of my fist. Four years out of my life.

A midwinter barn dance and that Hennessy girl as sour as old milk. The floor pounding under so many feet and she stood by the wall with her arms crossed the whole night, an empty cup in her fingers. Refused the few boys who dared ask her to dance. Oh she's always been a snooty one and it's only been worse since the summer. Told her own mother she was off to the city to search him out and didn't speak a word for a week when her mother told her she'd do no such foolish thing. But one look at her face and you can see she's just counting the days. As if any sensible girl would even think of it. Mr Currier's son comes in the sleigh to pick her up after school and she won't say a word to him either, just climbs in and rides the six miles up to the lake in silence, not even seeing the snow-covered trees or the ice edging the river in the valley.

#### DIVINATION.

A girl wishing to know her destiny must go blindfolded into a cabbage patch, turn around three times and point to the cabbages. If she designates a hard head, her future husband will be all she could wish for. If, unfortunately, she points to a soft head, she is doomed to live with a worthless mate.

No man in this town is as brave. No man as handsome. No man as cunning as he and soon when we leave this godforsaken country forever we will have a large house in the city with maids and many doors and closets large enough to stand inside.

He had not been back but a day when he came for me. I had heard already how he had come into town with some friend of his, both of them looking as though they'd been beset by wild Indians in the woods. But when he called at the lodge the next day he was shaven and his clothes neatly pressed. He stopped me in the hall and whispered to meet him at seven o'clock by the shore and then he was clapping on the back some of the men who'd remained during his absence, asking them how their luck had been.

At seven o'clock I told my mother Mr Currier had an errand for me. I ran through the woods away from the shore should anyone see me and then crept back through the trees to the edge of the lake. He stood in the shadow of a tree and came forth only when he saw it was I.

I am certain of you, he said, are you certain of me? It was a dark night overcast with clouds and I couldn't see his eyes. The lake lapped the rocks by our feet. I will take you far and you will not see this country again he told me. I thought then for a moment of the farm, father in the rocky hilltop, the kitchen and the sound of men's pinched laughter from the dining room, their eyes as I walked from the room. I could hear his breath, feel it stirring the hair on my forehead.

I would help father check the traps he kept in the woods during winter, the pelts he could sell to bring in extra money. One time when I was younger I had pulled the brush off a fox hide stretching in the shed by petting and petting it. It had meant more money than I cared to think about but father didn't scold me. He wrapped it around my neck and carried me inside for mother to see.

Father and I walked the loop each morning the snow wasn't too deep for me and he carried both a gun and a heavy stick for the animals. Sometimes we

found a fox or a fisher cat but more often rabbits and coons and such. This morning he had stopped for a skunk that had somehow tangled the chain round a bush, its blood tingeing the snow pink. I ran ahead up the trail, the sky bare of clouds and the snow already blinding me. In the next trap was a bobcat still quite alive and hissing at me as I approached it. Its hind leg was caught in the jaws. I knew what it was only from the stories I'd heard about them, never having seen one before. I picked up a stick and as I'd seen my father do I gave it a wallop on its head. It hissed and spat and jumped sideways, dragging the trap through the snow. I gave it another crack with the stick and it yowled and slashed the air with one claw. My father came running up the trail, and when he saw what it was said oh Jesus and dropped his sack and drew his pistol and shot it. After he was sure it was killed he showed me how the trap held it only by two toes. Thereafter he walked the loop alone and I helped mother in the kitchen as it has been ever since, all this time, she handing me a bowl of eggs to beat or flour to sift down into a bowl, snow over the valley.

Years later by the lodge he gave me the skin of a mink and as I held it in my hands rubbing my fingers over the fur told me to have my mother make me a set of mittens from it.

As I became deaf blind and mute.

As I left my own body.

As the body a map the voice a flame.

As this name never spoken.

As a journey answers a question.

#### THE CIDER-MAKER.

George Belknap owned a few acres of orchard on the side of a hill in southern Vermont. His cider-mill stood beside a stream that in summer and fall was a shallow brook cascading over rocks and in spring, green with runoff, often flooded its banks. His family had possessed the land for five generations going back a hundred and eighty years. In one of the beams inside the mill were carved the initials of his father and grandfather and great-grandfather who had raised it. He had been born his own father's child the year the man turned sixty. And never marrying had worked the mill alone, pressing cider and burying the pomace in the woods or leaving it for the deer. His orchard Baldwins and Northern Spies and McIntosh. The bones of his family were



buried on the hillside and sometimes after a day's work he climbed to the flat stones placed in the grass and imagined their voices spoke to him.

The hobo had appeared by his mill one morning in September, asleep on a pile of oat straw. Belknap poked the man with a stick and stood back while the man pulled his hat from his face and with it shaded the sun to look at Belknap looking at him.

Belknap instructed the hobo in the operation of the grinder and the press and let the younger man use his greater strength to crank the bar while he layered the pomace and straw and boards. He gave the hobo the spare bed in his dark-shingled house, the bed where for thirty-nine years no one had slept though its linens were washed as regularly as those on his own, and in the morning they took their coffee together. At night the hobo sang while he soaked in Belknap's tub, his voice tentative and boyish.

Jimmy crack corn and I don't care  
Jimmy crack corn and I don't care  
Jimmy crack corn and I don't care  
My master's gone away

A pressing took them all day. By evening they poured the cider from the tub into five gallon kegs, the sediment sinking slowly to the bottom. Later they brought a keg into Belknap's cellar and after supper the hobo went down the steep wooden stairs and drew a pitcher, and as they drank the hobo told him of the places he had been, west to the thundering falls at Niagara where he and a crowd of men women and children had watched a man die in a splintered barrel, east to Cape Breton where he had seen the sun rise red from below the sea. By winter, when the hobo left unannounced in the night, Belknap could no longer recall his tales of the road, and the granite hills and the sea-broken shores the hobo had conjured became confused in his mind, and he wondered if the stories had not been something he had dreamed, or some tale his father had told him from the gloom of his rocking chair one evening some fifty years back. But now in his mind instead of his father's voice he heard the voice of the hobo, drunk on their cider, only the sleepy words and the ticking stove and the wind beyond his windows. All that winter the snow fell thick and in the mornings still stuck to the tree branches, auguring a good apple year.

*In those days, after the fear of King Philip's War and the raids had long since ended, and when Indian and white man had in places begun to work together as they had at first, the Abenaki Migounambe (called Sheepscoat John by the settlers) showed his friend Nathaniel Perry, one of the first white settlers by the Connecticut Lakes, the cave with walls streaked with gold far into the wilderness. This cave had long been known among his people as a sacred place where they had once gone to commune with the great spirits. It was a half-day's journey into the woods from the village in the valley, down faint and forgotten traces no eye but that Indian's knew: for Migounambe was even then one of the last of his people. On the return journey, Perry's mind was consumed with thoughts: his plough set aside for a pick, the rocky earth yielding at last. For even though the valley was fertile where the young Connecticut meandered, the growing season was short and the farmers had to put much care into their work. Each step of the path back, Perry thought only of how he could obtain the gold in secret, and forgot the many kindnesses Migounambe and his people had shown his own family and the other early settlers. And so in the woods, when they had almost neared the village, Perry slew his friend, shooting him from behind as the Indian guided him home. Migounambe fell and knew he had but a moment of breath. Ahead of them through the trees he could see the first fields. And so he said, 'Out of greed you have killed me but your greed will be your undoing. No white man will again see this cave and your valley will one day be flooded with angry waters destroying your homes.' These final words were never heard by any in the settlement until Perry, wasted and gaunt, overcome with sorrow and filled with repentance on his deathbed, bade that they be recorded.*

Some nights I tried to remember the lines of his face and from them piece together the man he had been or maybe still was somewhere I didn't know of. Always those turned-away eyes escaped me and the mouth drawn into a frown. For years I never let anyone touch that axe handle splintered six inches above the blade where he'd been splitting dry red oak. Why he had chosen that rocky plot of land to settle and raise a family.

The roads I walked I asked after him to people who didn't bother to think hard on it. No they said and soon I stopped asking. After some time had gone by and I had grown into myself I knew he was nowhere in this country but somewhere far out west or bellied in a ship across the wide and raging seas wherever his own star had steered him. Each time I thought to give chase I could feel the hills calling me back to them their rocks my bones and their dirt on my feet. The sea had never agreed with me its stink of things rotting and

the muck washed onto its beaches and shores. The churning motions of the ships I'd been on had angered me that man had yet to find a way to remedy it. But for all I knew he had just waited for us all to leave one by one and now was returned to his home the crooked corners he had raised among the pines where now he listened to the wind in their boughs by himself. I could never bring myself to go back there to see fearing what I might.

The axe I buried still broken before I left.

Jimmy Frye was at least half Indian himself, which is why he knew of the gold to begin with. His great-great-grandmother was an Abenaki who knew the exact spot. She left for some village down east where she married a white man and raised a family. The legend she passed on to each of her children, and they to each of theirs, until it came to Jimmy. His mother had married a Pessamaquoddy which accounts for the extra Indian in Jimmy and that blood is what drove his feet along the empty roads to this town.

Six or seven men came on him, arming themselves from the woodpile of the man whose farm it was. That farmer had found him sleeping in the barn when he went out in the morning to tend the cows and had driven him off only to find him again on a pile of moldy hay when he carried out his lamp the next morning. This time he didn't thump his ribs with his boot as he'd done the morning previous but stepped out quietly to fetch the hired hands and several men from the farm a half mile down the road. And still somehow in the short minutes it took them to gather he had awakened from some animal sense and stood in the shadows just outside the barn door. He had no pistol nor even a knife, nothing in his hands but a clutch of that straw he'd been using as his bed. Sure, you think, he aimed to throw it into their eyes, to use it to ward those split logs off his shoulders. And that may well have been his aim. But he didn't let them get close enough to hit him. While they circled in he began in that voice you've all heard for yourselves. He may have told them that he was a preacher from distant parts who'd fallen on a hard spell and had simply put his trust in Providence to furnish him with a shelter for the night. If only you'd let me explain myself yesterday, he may have said. Or perhaps it was some incantation that stayed their blows, as some of you would have it. No matter. You can imagine as well as I. For the truth is that none of those men laid a hand on him but instead let him pass through them while the sticks they

held dropped to their sides. What he spoke none of them has ever said and likely never will for shame at his tale's flimsiness.

This is a story I heard down Lancaster way from a man I know there, who I'd gone to see about a horse. You should have heard the voice on this fella, the man told me. That was what kept them from him, more than his words. He could've talked his way out of a nest of vipers. And once he'd said it I knew it could be none other than our very own hobo.

PORTLAND.

Up the stairs two at once my hands sliding over the plaster walls and through the door my coat heavy with water the whisky still flooding the space behind my eyes. Inside the room was in darkness and my breath made hearing hard I banged up my shin on a table. Everything in the room a sleeping animal to snare me and a trickle of light coming through the gap in the heavy curtains. Felt a chair arm the wood smooth as a girl's belly. Into the next room.

The bed stood there clothes draped over the posts and before anything else I could smell them that smell of bodies asleep in a shut-up room a winter smell the coals in the grate barely glowing at all. I reached under the covers with my hand found her leg first she could not have been eighteen yet and with thumb and finger I circled the tiny bones of that ankle and held her fluttering pulse against my palm. Then I fished around under there and came up with his foot gave a mighty heave and he fell to the floor trailing half the blankets and making a quick burst of air from his mouth. She bolted up and I turned to see her before she drew the covers back over herself.

I fell atop him pulled the blankets from his face and we were both of us laughing while the girl still silent looked at us drawing on her clothes beneath the quilt she held. Even that patched fabric a map of something. My beard dampening the sheet dripping rain.

It's me I said I need something. He dropped his head back against the wood floor my eyes growing accustomed enough to the dark to see the hair on his head stood every which way. I need Vince Bouchard. Have you seen him.

Not in six years. Not since I last saw you. How did you find me? Again I smelled him her their bed and she was up now and hunting for her shoes under the blankets. Stay he said.

Well where is he. Where is he goddamn him.

He can't be anywhere near or I would have heard.

I'm leaving.

Louis I need a place to lie my head. The rain pouring off the eaves I curled into the warmth her body had left holding it in my hands while he went to the kitchen fried an egg and drank some coffee cold since supper. You're just drunk he said.

In one place what I wondered was how the other places still were the people still there still walking and working still eating each meal. But me not there but here unless a part of me has stayed. How a man's head cannot begin to take in the places he has been or the people each word spoken a line somewhere in the land. And if everything behind us to return in circles the only way my feet then have worn this old ground bare.

He told me to gather my tools. Only the finest ones he said. We placed them in a bag. We can find other things we need when we get there he said. Where? You'll find out. I wrapped my hammer in a cloth tied twine around it and put it in the bag. The matches in a metal tin. Hurry. Hurry, hurry. Is it a secret. Lock your door you won't be back for some time. Let's go.

June 2nd, 1922

A most curious and disturbing thing has happened yesterday and last night. Just after noon, during a thunder storm, a canoe of sportsmen overturned on First Lake. We heard of it in town some hours later. Earl Young's boy came by with the news. Apparently many others attempted to rescue them, yet by the time word had reached us only a fishing rod and an empty lunch pail had been retrieved. Many of those listening rode up to the lake at once. I accompanied the boy to his house and heard the rest as we walked.

At supper Mr Frye did not return from the woodlot and while Mrs Godfrey kept the dishes waiting for a time he still did not return and we assumed he had stayed at the lake to assist the others. After we had eaten I paced the parlor rug, the clock's loud ticking ringing in my ears. Shortly thereafter Mrs Godfrey came into the parlor and as I was too agitated to read we discussed the day's events. Only a few minutes had passed when we heard horses on the street and I went to the porch. Mr Covill, Mr Young, Mr Rolfe and several other men were traveling past. I hailed them and went down to hear the

news. Mr Young said that they had recovered the two bodies, both those of men from Massachusetts. It appears that nearly the entire village took part in the operations on the lake. Now as it was turning dark I asked them if they had seen Mr Frye at the lake and none of them had. It was a curious whim that had made me ask the question and I regretted it at once as I recalled Mr Rolfe's quarrel with Mr Frye. Nor did I want to seem overly concerned for Mr Frye's welfare, nor too curious about another. Certainly there are times when he travels to Littleton to see his ailing mother and is gone from Mrs Godfrey's house for a time, but before these journeys he always tells us that he will be away. Other than these times I am pressed to recall an evening when he was not at home to share our supper.

Mrs Godfrey and I waited up for a time past dark, lighting the parlor lamps, she fussing over some embroidery and I pretending to study the pages of a Latin grammar. Finally I announced I was turning in and heard her do the same while I lay in bed upstairs. Her own room of course is downstairs and I set down these facts only because of what happened during the night.

Past two by my pocketwatch I heard steps coming up the porch. I thought it a bit odd at once because nearly everyone who visits uses the back door and Mr Frye had never been known to come in this way. Of course I assumed it was he, back from the lake at last after perhaps lending a hand in whatever final arrangements were necessary. The front door opened and whoever it was stepped inside and closed the door behind him. The footsteps paused in the parlor near the door to Mrs Godfrey's bedroom, which I attributed to Mr Frye determining that he had not woken her. Next the footsteps seemed to walk toward the kitchen, which I thought rather odd until I realized that Mr Frye must not have had anything to eat since dinner and was likely famished from his hours at the lake and the long walk home. I turned over to my side and waited to hear him come upstairs. I half-fancied meeting him in the hall to hear the details about the rescue and the two drowned men and by what means their bodies had been retrieved. It seemed I waited a long time and when I next held my pocketwatch to the moonlight coming in the window I saw that an hour had passed and I must have fallen back asleep in that interval.

In the morning Mrs Godfrey and I took our breakfast at the usual time but Mr Frye did not rise to join us. She too had heard him enter during the night. Before we started I went back upstairs to knock on his door. There was no

response from within. I knocked several times and finally opened the door an inch and called his name through the crack. As there was again no response I opened the door wider. The bed was still made without a wrinkle on the quilt.

Mrs Godfrey is in a terrible state. Neither of us can imagine where Mr Frye is nor who came into the house last night. I have tried to assure her that our nightly visitor was only someone troubled in his sleep or perhaps a drunk fellow who believed he was entering his own house and, when he realized his mistake, tiptoed out the kitchen door to avoid any further embarrassment. But these rationalizations cannot persuade me, nor her I suspect. At noon I will go to Baldwin's store where I'm persuade a crowd will have gathered to mull yesterday's events and hope that if I do not find Mr Frye there I will at least come by word of him and will find last night's trespasser.

Moose Hillock towers over the Connecticut below the Fifteen-Mile Falls, by which latter all further navigation of the river is precluded. Above and below the Fifteen-Mile Falls, on the Connecticut, are tracts of country, called respectively the Upper and the Lower *Coos* or *Cohoss*; which term implies, according to some, a fall in a river; according to others, a bend in a river; and, according to a third party, a parcel of meadowland; but the true interpretation is pineland, the word being derived from the Indian *cohâ* or *coä*; a pine-tree. Some Indians, of this part of the Connecticut, still remain at Saint-François, where they call themselves *Cohâssiâc*.—Such is the origin of the name *cohass*, *cohoss*, or *coös*; but, the pine-trees having been removed, their place is occupied by meadow; while, at the same time, the lands lie on bends of the river, and are contiguous to the Fifteen-Mile Falls:—hence, the diverse explanations.

*Another and more immediate problem haunted the families in the clearings that fall of 1828, one that drove men to check the priming of their rifles every day, and women to almost impossible trips accompanying their men rather than to be left alone in the cabins. A man named David Robbins, a trapper and hunter from the Magalloway valley, having quarreled with his partner, Hinds, had the previous year burned their cabin and made off with the furs. Robbins had experienced a change of heart, "great penitence" (after his arrest), and had settled with Hinds for \$350. Incredibly, this fall Hinds had gone into the woods again with Robbins, this time taking his son.*

*The bodies of Hinds and his son were found covered with brush in a brook near Little Kennebago Lake.*

*David Robbins lived near the mouth of the Diamond River, two days' tramp, for an able woodsman traveling fast, from settlements to the east. A mad murderer such as Robbins might turn up at the Lake Settlement or at Fletcher's Mills. He might raid the remote log houses for food and supplies, in Stewartstown, Colebrook, or Milan. People said he had killed a child in Maine and used the body to bait his traps.*

*The entire north country was roused up. Jurisdiction fell to New Hampshire, because Robbins's house was west of the Maine-New Hampshire line. Warrants were issued to Coos County sheriffs. Public subscriptions provided Sheriff Hezekiah Parsons with twenty-four pounds of pork, fourteen pounds of cheese, and \$34. Parsons took with him into the woods, as his deputy, the champion wrestler Lewis Loomis.*

*For thirty-three days, Parsons and Loomis searched the woods along the New Hampshire border, toward Maine. They traveled as far east as Farmington to get legal authority to take Robbins in that state. The people in the settlements were in terror all during the month of October. Tension increased in November when Parsons and Loomis returned to Colebrook without their man. Later in the month, word came from the Magalloway that Robbins had been seen again at his home near the junction with the Diamond River.*

*Sheriff Parsons and Loomis set out again, in snowy weather. Apparently Robbins had laid in winter supplies, for he had gone back up the Magalloway toward his wilderness trapping grounds. Parsons and Loomis finally caught him portaging traps and provisions around Aziscoos Falls. Loomis jumped Robbins before the trapper could grab his rifle from his sled or pull his knife. They tied him up and slung him into the boat, then paddled down to the Colebrook Road east of Dixville Notch.*

*Jailed in Lancaster, Robbins never stood trial, for he managed to escape and disappear into the woods toward Canada. Supposedly he died in the forest that winter, although later another story reached the settlements of his having been hanged in Canada for another murder. Months passed. In lonely cabins, men, women, and children continued to start up at the sound of scratching among the leaves outside, or at a haunting call among the snowy trees. The man would say it must be a coon or an owl, as he moved closer to the axe by the door or to the rifle over the fireplace.*

#### IN THE CAMP.

*Was a young guy name of Al Duncan who knew how to play the saw. He had one that had never once been put to a tree, kept it oiled and shiny without a*



spot of rust anywhere. Some evenings at the camp when everyone was gathered he would take it out, holding it between his knees with one foot tapping out a rhythm on the ground. One hand held the other end of it moving it up and down and wobbling it, and with his other hand he ran the bow across it. Some kind of wild music to hear it at night with the stars scattered over us and only a lamp or two keeping back the dark. Those songs would stay an agitated man from speaking as he followed the sound of the music out into the night, though in some they may have only made more wildness as Al stamped the ground and scratched the bow back and forth, his eyes closed and the sweat standing out on his brow.

#### TALL MEN & TALL TREES.

Those woods were full of old growth spruce, some of it two and a half feet through on the stump. When the timber had been felled we set to it with crosscut saws two men to a trunk and cut it into logs the right size for the teams to twitch out. The chips covered the lot a few inches deep, so soft a man could twist his ankle in it. We wore kerchiefs tied over our faces and hats to keep out the dust and shield our eyes. Any sawdust got down your neck you'd go mad itching. It was a rainy spring and summer and bad for blackflies. Jimmy was the one who showed us how to cut up the mushrooms growing on the sides of the trees and burn them. Didn't say much, just put them on a stump and set a match to them. That smoke was thick and kept off the flies.

He knew old Ned Mascamah the Indian, who was maybe only a halfblood but who had been living in those woods so long he knew more about them than many pure Indians ever did. Ned came to town only twice a year, three times, buying groceries and tools and whatever else he needed and hauling it out into the woods in his wagon. It wasn't a small wagon, either, and we never figured how he got it down some of those bridle paths or through the wet spots. Ned had been working the lost Indian gold mine for some years, after hunting for it all his life. He and Frye were friends, sure, more than he was friends with any other man, and Frye always claimed that Ned had told him that before he died he'd pass on the secret location of the mine to him if he promised to keep it only to himself. Old Ned was old long before Frye got to town and so he figured he wouldn't have long to wait. Sure enough it was

only about some four years after Frye arrived that an Indian no one had ever laid eyes on before came running down Tabor Notch one morning saying that Ned had need of Jimmy Frye. We all went downstreet to Baldwin's store and found Frye out front and soon he and a few others were off through the woods toward Ned's cabin, led by this strange Indian. Don't know if they got turned around or stopped for dinner but by the time they reached the cabin old Ned had died. The thought of that old Indian, waiting and waiting. Silent leaves falling all around him and sunlight through the branches. Frye shook those hands, still warm, but no words came from Ned's mouth and his eyes just looked up at the ceiling. They said he kneeled there sobbing. Right after that was when he disappeared. Some said he vanished into the woods, looking for Ned's claim, trying to track his prints and discover it for himself. Others said he went back away wherever his people come from and still others that he became mad on the spot and rushed off raving among the trees never to be seen by human eyes again.

#### TOPOGRAPHY.

*The high ridge of land forming the elevation or divide between Indian and Hall's streams is a slate formation, through which large and frequent dikes of quartz have been ejected. The most southerly point of its surface-indications is one mile north of the Connecticut river. It crops out quite often towards the boundary northwardly (a distance of eighteen miles), varying in width from two to four miles, and covers an area of probably not less than 35,000 acres....It is in this formation that gold has been found on the head waters of Indian stream, at several points over an area of 4,000 acres, and more frequently in Annance gulch, a vein leading into the middle branch on the east side thereof, three miles south of the Highlands, where evidence of quite extensive mining operations (probably by parties from Canada), such as deep excavations in the banks and former beds of the stream, marks of quite extensive camping grounds, and sluice-boxes in the last stages of decay, are found.*

I remember him as an old man but then I was so young everyone was old to me. White beard, crushed hat, wool pants held up by suspenders. He washed maybe once a week.

It was my stomach collapsing on itself as the old fools talked of what they had seen going back every day of a man's life a lonely road not even a crossroads

just a place between other places no reason to stop. Still the voices spoke and the earth hummed under my feet it was my stomach telling me here.

Vince I met down Penobscot Bay where he worked on the boats and built anything from a lobster trap to the finish work on some rich folks' house his hands callused but gentle and one finger gone at the top joint from a saw. I just coming from some months up north in a shack by Ktaadn eating potatoes and shooting moose. A quiet man mostly we went to the tavern and he sat with his mouth to his glass for hours. And never got an edge on. One night. Vince standing over me in some street stars behind his head and a halo round the moon I could feel already the blood dried on my mouth and the ache back of my head. Vince lifted me with his arm and we walked back to his mother's house him never speaking one word. He laid me out in his bed and come morning woke me. His mother in the kitchen frying a mess of sausage and eggs. Didn't think you was ever going to rise she says and I Morning Mrs Bouchard.

Not long after his mother took ill and Vince brought her on the train up to her people in Halifax. I drove them over to the station in Ellsworth Falls with a borrowed team and trying to keep those horses steady. His mother coughed behind me like a clatter of stones and Vince bundled blankets around her. Already she seemed gone and shriveled up like a cornhusk. How quickly it comes. Vincent she said and one hand reached out of the blankets for his. I watched the train pull out then went back to the horses hitched outside the station just standing there stupid I have never thought much of any horse. Brought the team back and the next morning packed my own bags and left too heading out anywhere a man could go.

*On December 10, 1840, the town of Pittsburg was incorporated, containing the territory of Indian Stream, the Carlisle Grant, the Colebrook Academy Grant, and sixty thousand acres of state lands. . . . Since its incorporation Pittsburg has enjoyed unbroken peace and prosperity, and is a favorite resort during the summer weeks and the hunting season.*

Once a man's gone woods queer he'll never change. I heard he killed the Indian who drew him the map to the cave. Windy Williams told me he paid

the Indian twentysix dollars and shot him right in the back once he'd turned around. Fetched back his money and whatever else and buried him out in the woods. A trapper and his boy checking their line in the woods out past First Lake heard the shot just after their dinner break. Said they thought it was just someone out taking an off-season deer until they saw him on the road back to town that night, his trousers muddy to the knees, his jacket torn and his hands raw and bleeding. Oh sure he joked with them, told some story about something, why he was in a state, I don't know what. Later they realized that Indian never turned up again. Real old Indian everyone called Sam. Windy told me he buried him with his bare hands seeing as he had no spade.

It is constricted I feel and have felt always the clothes never fitting to my body in the proper way a way I imagine they fit to anyone else. As if they were never made for me though the first time I laid up some money I had a suit made an old man wheezing to his knees to measure the distance from my crotch to the floor unwinding a yellow tape. But even inside that suit a brown gabardine I could feel the drape all wrong a seam too tight here or loose even sometimes a pressure on the chest or even on my head say woken in bed by it. At times a boy I felt a sharp pain trying to breathe as if a string circled my lung and beat my chest and threw myself to the earth to dislodge whatever it was. A dizziness my breath coming shorter until what I saw was the distant mouth of a cave and all else only pure dark.

Deep in those bogs I hunted the source of the river for no reason but my own satisfaction. And I can claim to have seen the very place where the water bubbles up from the earth where I lay wondering one day at what force draws it out forever flowing or if someday it would dry and the river with it. That small hole in the earth's crust the source of all that water I have crossed and recrossed so often in my life. On my return I closed my eyes for some of the way and ran in deliberate circles so as to become unable to find it again.

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF J. L. FRYE.

1897. *Born October 12, near Cuttingsville, Vermont. Only son to a dairy farmer.*  
1908. *Father dies. While his mother and sisters manage the farm he is sent to work at a sawmill in Rutland to supplement the family's income.*

- 1917. *United States declares war on Germany, April 6. Enlists in the 26th "Yankee" Division of the New England National Guard. Arrives in France September 20, at St. Nazaire.*
- 1918. *Falls in combat at Château-Thierry, July 24. Is buried in a cemetery in La Ferté-sous-Jouarre.*
- 1933. *Mother dies. His correspondence from France is preserved at the Rutland Historical Society.*

Old Molly the Indian lived out in a shack by Dead Diamond River, way off in the woods where no one could trouble her and she heard the voices of her people on the winds. That corner of the country, from Clarksville down through the notch toward Bungy, is the windiest corner of this state, the windiest spot on God's good earth perhaps though why He saw fit to bless us with such winds is His own mystery. Old Molly was an old woman even when I was young and now some said she was past a hundred, that the blood flowing through her veins had never mingled with the white man's and that was what accounted for her longevity. Or that it was by some kind of ghostly magic that she kept herself going long after she should have been called back. Molly might not even have been her real name. It was what we called her as long as I remember and after enough time she may have taken to calling herself Molly too.

I say was. For all I know she may be there still. Smoking her pipe and walking those empty woods, touching wrinkled hands to the trees. She used to come to town every so often, whenever we least expected her or had near forgotten her. However many years had passed she had not changed, an old scarf wrapping her wild hair, her black eyes bright. She would ask after folks dead twenty years and buy some sundries at Mr Baldwin's store, spools of thread and odd ends of fabric and barrel hoops and empty bottles, things no one else would have any earthly use for. Some said she paid in wampum beads, others said she used French coins minted two hundred years ago. I don't think she has ever tried to keep herself a secret but has chosen to live apart from the race of man and even the few of her own people who remain up on St. Francis. Now it has been some six or seven years since we have seen her in town.

Some of the old hoboes or lumbermen could have pointed out the way to her shack, or perhaps some who hunt that river and may know its exact spot.

Scraps of lumber held together by rusted nails, twine, and mud, the cracks plugged with old leaves and rags and more mud. I have never seen her shack but from those who have I have been told everything about it: the smoke funneling from the crooked stovepipe, the door so low anyone would have to bend clear over to step inside. Not that anyone would, unless he was foolish or drunk or both, or if he was after something no one else in this country remembered anymore. For that there have been many of us who wished we could question her, who wonder when she'll come back from the woods.

Dearest Martha. I have given this to Vince for you as I am occupied presently but need to send word. Any moment you need to be ready at the word go I will come sudden in the trees and we will be gone from here forever away. If you are in need of anything just ask Vince and he will see to it. He can be trusted but no one else this country is filled with watchful eyes and listening ears. Do not tell a word of this to anyone especially not to your ma or anyone at the lodge. The hour draws ever closer and do not listen to what they may say. I am in fine health and condition is fine too. When you have done with reading this put a match to it and stay by the flame until you are certain not one scrap of it remains. Your Jimmy.

*If you want a man to clear a pasture, send Art Hollister, for he's strong and handy with an axe. If you want to get a message to Canada, send Tom Phelps, for his sons live there and he would like to visit them. But if you want to get word to hell, send Jimmy Frye, for he will have to go sometime and it is time he was there now.*

#### THE OLD SQUAW.

She told me to take a reckoning of my life. The smoke from her stove blew all around us so thick she was hidden in it but her dark eyes burning as if to cut through me. Above us from the rafters hung drying weeds. It is not in the land she told me and with a feather and a black rock drew circles in the air and after her hands had dropped back to her lap I could see them still shining there like rings of gold in all that smoke. The ghosts walk with you and ask you to look she said. You have already seen your own fate. Coughing I reached for the circles. Soot whirled around us. She began to speak the words long like the rain falling on a roof all night and I shoved back the door and still choking crawled out on my hands my eyes watering with smoke into the

clear wind blowing everything away amid the trunks of pines and my hands sticky with pitch. The door swung shut.

Nit msiw kisi mawewsehtit, nit mace tpitahatomoniya tan op al te 'tollukhotiniya. Stehpal msiw siwacyukuhtit eli wapoli pomawsihtit. Yukt kci sakomak 'tiyaniya kotokihi, Yut elapimok asit weckuhusihq, knomihtunen eli pokahkonaptuwoq. Knomihtunennul kehsok ewapolikkil. Yuhtol pekahkonikil tomhikonossisol olu, naka tapihik, pahqihil, cuwi puskonasuwol askomiw.

November afternoon in the woods, any woods, old hardwoods and conifers, the ground rusty with dead leaves or needles, or white in patches where snow fell last night, the week before, woods outside any town or between any towns, near some small river, its name perhaps changed many times though he could not speak any of them. Say rain falls and his hat brim droops with it, the water running off it to his shoulders and his breath obscuring his beard as the low clouds drape the hills. A stone wall the marker of someone's old land, each stone placed by hands he can never grasp he thinks as he sits beside it, the stones against his back. He rubs his hands together. Above him a crow's nest, a clump of leaves and twigs.

APRIL 27. Jimmy is not a Handsom man but he has a way with ladys        has  
Found himself a young girl calld Martha from the lodge on Second  
Lake        Says when were done here soon hell run a way with her

APRIL 28 Staying in Town at the Hotel while Jimmy is back at his lodgings  
with the Widow. To day she went out for Lunchen and he took me through  
the house to test the Walls        sure enough after some hunting we found  
the space Between the floor and the old sassholl        very good Construc-  
tion and got it opened up in no time        greased up the hinges and the  
latch. Cunning airholls to        a Bit musty but Jimmy says it will do fine

MAY 9 Building Jimmy a rocker and sluice box cross Indian Stream        a  
bout Four Miles into the woods he says no one is to see us out here        Spend  
the days shaking the Rocker and pouring water through while he Shovels the

gravel        tiresome work but so far weve filled a Burlap sack and Jimmy  
says Evvrything is lovely        prospects Bully        after Supper He panned  
out a bit he says for Marthas Ring

MAY 23. Not Sure of the date but think that one is right        have been in  
the Woods at lest a fortnight. Last night at Happy Corner Jimmy got cocked  
as a Cannon and walked it to some fellow as had it Coming        Fellow was  
teasing Jimmy about waiting round the lodge        after hed pound him up  
cald to me and said lets go so We left out into the night        Jimmy led us  
round Back Lake in case our mans friends tried to follow        rather Id staid  
and drank

MAY 26 Jimmy has shown me the Trail through the swamps up to the  
Border        Something confusing but he tells me its the only way when the  
time comes        and says its soon        twenty miles strait north through  
P.Q. and from there a train back to Halifax without entering U.S. teritories  
once        Enough he says I wont have to Build another cubbard again and  
can quit the Shipyards

MAY 28. Jimmy getting antsy        he says there is more to dig out but he has  
need to Get a way soon        in Town he showed around a nuggett and  
some old timers asked if wed found the indians caves after all. Jimmy laughed  
and said we still Couldnt find much        I said nothing Think of leaving  
soon not telling Any One. he is getting careless

BALDWIN'S STORE.

*Holman I ever tell you I used to be on the stage?*

*No . . .*

*Oh sure I rode the stage from Albany to Connecticut once . . .*

He came one afternoon to the barber's in Colebrook with two week's growth  
of beard and his hair matted with pine pitch and dirt and that mute French-  
man by his side. The barber was a Frenchman himself, called Frank by every-  
one but the other Frenchmen who came to get their hair cut and who called  
him something I could never make out. Frank kept his scissors on a neat



white cloth and used a clean cup and brush to lather each new face that sat in his chair. His hands were small and delicate like a woman's. He didn't talk much but his shop was usually busy with a few men and young boys sitting there arguing about something and watching as the wet clumps of hair fell around his feet.

By this time the stories of Frye's brawling and such had made it to Colebrook and Frank looked none too pleased to see him and his companion march into his shop smelling of weeks in the woods. It was me and Charlie Hubbard's boy and one other fellow I didn't know, plus Joe McCabe in the chair. When Frye came in this other fellow took a look at him and then looked at his shoes a minute and then got up and left without a word. I had no acquaintance with Frye beyond seeing him at Young's once or twice and what I'd heard at Baldwin's store up in town, which wasn't then as much as it is now.

Me and Ben here are in no hurry, I told Frye. Why don't you go on ahead. He sat down without paying me any mind and his friend stood by the window for a while looking out at the street and chewing his fingernails. When Frank finished Joe's cut Joe stood up and dusted off the hairs on his hands and while Frank took his money Frye had already sat down in the chair and was busy wrapping the cloth over him.

Okay okay, Frank said and tried to straighten the cloth. He started to comb some water through Frye's hair but the comb caught in a tangle everywhere he tried to put it and soon he gave up and got a hot towel for Frye's beard instead. This whole time Frye seemed to be dozing in the chair and had yet to say a word to anyone.

Presently Frank brought out the cup and brush and lathered up Frye's face. He stropped the razor some and then set to work making even paths through the lather with the bare skin peeping through. He'd done Frye's mustache and sideburns and was scraping off the last white flecks from his throat when he drew a bright line of blood below Frye's chin. That mute one was watching all this and started to laugh and I got a bit worried given what I'd heard of Frye's unnatural temper. He was still sitting slouched over while Frank dabbed the blood away with the corner of one of his clean towels. I gave Ben a coin and told him to run downstreet and see if he could find me a pouch of pipe tobacco. He headed out looking back through the window at us all as he passed in front, and as soon as Frank took the towel away the blood rose to the surface again and Frye's companion laughed a second time. Frank made a

few more strokes with the razor to clean up the rest of Frye's beard and the blood was beading up when he finished. Aside from everything else I ought to add that Frye's face looked little older than Ben's without its beard.

Frye lifted his head and turned to his friend. What is it he said. The Frenchman nodded at his chin. Frye lifted one hand from under the cloth and touched his throat. He looked at his fingertips smeared dark red for a moment and then rubbed his thumb across them thoughtfully. A smile broke out on his face. Vincent, he said. Come on. And with the cloth still draped around him he put his hat back on and walked out of the shop still bleeding. I have yet to guess what is so funny about as common a sight as a shaving nick on a man's face. He vanished soon after that afternoon but for some years it was told how Frank the barber was the only man in Coos County to ever draw the blood of Jimmy Frye.

#### THE GIRL.

It was ropes around me keeping me from rising while all the while the wind fluttered the curtains but did not reach me. Outside the men's voices low as they shouldered canoes. Only a corner of the sky showed itself to me where I lay still unable to close my eyes. She returned and looked in at me said something then left. Returned again still later and the sky turned orange. It was as if my head against the damp pillow as if my ears the river swollen as if spring and rushing green carrying sticks and things with it away.

He. A vision. The oak. Heeled to a branch thicker than his waist a dark pool of blood soaking the ground below the slit neck. The rack raking the dirt. That peculiar mud rubbed in his hands, the rich smell, the creases in his palm. At the corner of the eye, its, a lash. Bare branches and bare branches behind them in rising pattern against the low sky. Steps in the leaves, a whistling. A hand on his shoulder, a voice.

#### ISLANDS IN THE CONNECTICUT—DIGGING FOR GOLD.

*In the Connecticut River, just below the mouth of the Passumpsic, there are no less than fifteen islands. The most prominent one is Gold Island, covered with spruce and cedar. Many years ago some persons, who had been led to believe that the Indians had buried gold there, dug the island over in search of it, but their efforts were not rewarded with a*

*yield of the precious metal excelling a California placer. Between this place and Lunenburg, Vt., are the famous fifteen miles falls in the Connecticut.*

#### SUPERSTITION.

He would never name a thing until he grasped it in his hand, never speak the word of what he wanted until he was certain it was his. So that word for what he hunted never passed his lips during the time he was determining whether the old cave existed and obtaining maps and scouting the territory, nor even when he had probably found already the first small flake or nugget and then another and finally had set off to find Vincent Bouchard and bring him back.

No one had ever believed a word of those old campfire tales about the gold. All of us had spent enough time out in those woods and casting for brook trout in Indian Stream that if it had been true there would have been an afternoon when someone, reeling in his fish, would have wondered enough at a shiny stone to draw it dripping from the bed of the stream. And in no time the entire town would have decamped to the woods to pan and build whatever contraptions are needed to draw up the ore. Of course nothing of the sort ever happened and I'll tell you why: there is no gold in these woods, nothing under these hills but granite and the bones of the dead. Where would an Indian have got the gold to begin with? Even when he couldn't resist boasting to the fools gathered at the bench at the store or passing round the soft nuggets most of us guessed it was simply stolen or else pure fantasy, fool's gold. If it was honest, he'd been up and down this country enough times to have somehow stumbled on some cache that was Lord knew how old. I'm sure there were some simple enough to have ventured out to the woods, most likely in secret packs of two or three, after he'd shown his discoveries, though if anything had ever come of such foolishness every man woman and child in this village would have heard of it within the hour.

#### HOLMAN AMEY.

I mistrusted what he was doing from the start of things. No kickabout like he was has ever shown himself honest nor respectable and this one turned out no different than the rest. Everyone said he had a way with words but he's just so crooked he couldn't piss a straight hole in the snow. He claimed to work well

with a team so one day we had him in charge of twitching logs with a single sled and two horses. The horses balked and he started talking to them, patting their ears to get them to move. Gave them each a cigarette to eat, most simpleminded thing I ever saw. I came up and got on the sled with the whip. Cleaned out the woodlot in a week and he went back to swamping and helping us limb out.

Old Hap Brown the tinker came through town round that time, first visit in five years. I'd always got by well with Hap and planted every season a small row of corn at the edge of my land for him in case he visited. In winter he'd cut some wood and I'd give him dinner. Never knew how long he'd stay in town. Sometimes a few months, sometimes only a short while. You'd wake up and he'd be gone with never a word. When his star moved, he moved. Then before long he'd be back. This five years was the longest he'd been away since I first saw him as a boy. My father had started the custom of planting the extra corn for him back then.

We took dinner and set to talking, him telling of things he'd seen on the roads or other farms he'd stayed at. Speaking of what had happened in town I mentioned Frye and his hunt for the gold. At that Hap said he knew this Frye and had met him on the road outside White River Junction some years back. They'd traveled together some and swapping stories one night Hap had told him the legend of the Indian's cave. So you're the cause of his coming up here I says. I guess I am Hap says.

Next morning I went out to the barn where Hap was sleeping in the hayloft but he was gone and all his things. I didn't think much of it, because that was his way. But they found him a few mornings afterwards, and he'd died out in a pasture somewhere down the valley. No mark upon him and Dr Rowell up from Colebrook said it was natural causes.

Hap Brown wasn't his real name. That's what he went by. His brother had been a prospector up in Alaska. He came here later to ask people about Hap, and he gave me a big gold nugget for the kindness I'd shown him. I gave it back. We've had enough of that around here I told him.

All the faces the eyes meeting mine for an instant some still clear in my mind years after apart from the face even rising like my own from the lake's surface as ripples still and clear enough I couldn't tell whose they were or how they had searched me out with plain seeing. Yet at one moment or another everyone has seen everyone else despite our best devices. What is exists beyond the designs of men and so is obvious to pure vision.

*Jimmy lifted his pick in the air above his broad shoulders. There was a shower of stones and gravel as he swung it into the earth at his feet. In short order he had dug a large hole. Beside him Vince toiled over his own hole, then paused to mop his brow. The sun was high and soon both men were stripped to the waist. Jimmy struck the earth again and then dropped his pick to sift through the dirt with his fingers. He thought he had seen a strange glint—unless it was only the sun playing tricks on his eyes. His fingers closed around the shiny stone and he lifted it into the light. Could it be? Then: “Gold!” he shouted, “gold!”*

Later we pieced together how he'd been interested in the crawlspaces and hidden closets carpenters had fashioned for escaped slaves. Several homes right in the village had secret cupboards and such. He'd had a lot of questions for Jake Stark, whose grandfather had harbored slaves beneath his staircase. This had been the last stop before the border, the last hills before those wide fields around Chartierville and onto Sherbrooke or Québec where many southern negroes ended up. Course he'd hunted out the old trails through the bogs the river gets its start in, the spots where in summer the blackflies chase the moose out of, but no one put much thought to why, or else no one knew but a part of what he was up to, and that part seemed innocent enough. Him coming to town of a Saturday afternoon and pulling a bottle of gold-flecked water from his pocket for a pretty girl, or trying to pay for a gun with a nugget he'd found in some isolated place where Indian Stream flows shallow over rocks.

No one'd known that that other fellow he kept as company when he returned, the dark little Frenchman who Frye said came from Halifax, had once worked as a cabinetmaker.

They said he could walk through the woods on a new moon night without snapping a single twig or once stumbling over a root. He may have had some Indian blood in him himself, or it may be that he possessed some kind of magic which allowed him to pass unseen. Every man in the village knew better than to follow him into the woods alone. Some even believed the birds were his spies, singing certain songs to alert him of danger.

JUNE 2 Jimmy is in                    evrything worked as Expected as I assume he fixed  
the Canoo                    The whole Town stood by the shore while they tried to

bring the Poor Bastards in. Finally did after midnight a Sorry sight and  
now I am to Saddle up the horses we purchasd and leve them at the Camp.  
Saw the Girl at the Lake and hidd in the trees she drawing water whistled  
and when shed seen me Gave her the sign to Pretend she hadnt then  
Showd her the Note and as she watchd Dug it under the Needles and gave  
her the O.K. now am off to camp Jimmy has it All with him he  
Thinks but there is what Ive set aside and still a night of Work to do To  
morrow before he rises I will have Left

JUNE 3. A Long Night in the Woods but a little to show for it Scared off  
horses so they will have to Find an other way. He thought hed had me Fooled  
I know what he wouldve Done when he came Back to Camp have not  
slept in some Thirty Hours and feeling Tired. Only a Week and the trail  
seems Diffrent backtrackd through dense Woods and Swamps all morning  
looking for the Path Jimmy showed me up the Stream and follow the  
east Branch but cant find the lightning struck Hemlock he markd out No  
trace even of our Own Tracks made just a week ago dont want to rest  
yet as Tonight he comes I want to be a cross the Border and hidd in  
that country he dont Know

*Previous to the survey of Dr. Jackson, the scenery at the extreme north of the state was little known. Its striking features were observed by him, and are known, to a few persons who have since visited them, to be among the grandest exhibitions of nature in North America. Indian Stream is a small settlement near the falls at the outlet of Connecticut lake. It is the most northerly inhabited place in New Hampshire, and comprises, in the whole, a colony of three hundred and fifteen persons, scattered on the undulating shores of the lake. They are far removed from any other settlement, and for many years refused obedience to the laws of the state. Desiring none of the benefits of civil government, they claimed exemption from its burdens; and under a simple government of their own, they resisted the officers of the law, until they were visited by a military force and reduced to subjection.*

At once it was clear to me as nothing in my life has appeared terrible in its certainty there in the clearing by the stream I stood as it rushed over the same rocks as if nothing had happened as it may still rush for all I know. Through

the night I had carried the sack from the village creeping from the dank and stinking hole my legs at first cramped and trembling enough I fell but kept on for the horses which my own labor had purchased and which in several hours would bear me across the border so that at dawn when the first fools stirred here I would be on my knees kissing the very soil as had others before me and deliver the girl from this country of trees into the wide empty lands beyond the north. Ran dark miles. Yet before me the new diggings and the tether posts standing bare in the moonlight and only the shape of him in the shadows that remained. And deep in the woods I could feel that which I have hunted all my life calling to me except now it was myself who was calling my own voice coming back to me from the last hours of night reaching back to yesterday each night turns two days. I bent to the stream the pools still muddied from his work and splashed water on my neck though I was already chilled with sweat from stumbling through the woods and the night air. He had left me no provisions even but a heel of bread spotted with mold. This I ate as the mooncast shadows stirred in the faint wind and then headed off along that trail the sack across my shoulder and my legs and arms and chest burning.

After the first few seasons the village seemed to take him in as its own, the way it has with others who have arrived some chance morning without histories or names. It may have been his silence at first drawing respect, or the honest facts of his work and his living. He was unseen. I do not know when he first told of his plans. It may have been only on returning. Yet the leaving and the return in themselves were enough to alter respect to suspicion. If he had settled here why leave and if he had left why return. They thought. Or it may have slipped before he left and therefore at his return the village realized he had the will to see it through. Yet what no one knew was the part I played to draw him back, the fact that it was not only the stream. He told me he had seen my face each night when he closed his eyes.

His second passage, whenever it occurred, was not his choice, that much I am assured of each time I stand by the lake's far shore and wait for his voice to come to me with my own echoing from the hills.

#### THE TRUE STORY OF JIMMY FRYE.

When the fire dies to white cinders and the snow drifts all during the dark hours, or when the heat forces us to the porch and the loons laugh at us from

the still lake; when the supper has been eaten and the last drop drunk; when I want to see eyes grow round with wonder, or hard with suspicion; then I tell my listeners the true story of Jimmy Frye.

Now I must confess that I am not sure that his name was Jimmy Frye. I do not believe that he ever told me what his name was, but everyone else called him Jimmy, and Frye is a good name, as good as any, so we will call him that now. But the rest of the story is as true as true can be. It all happened, just as I am telling it, in the North Country, many years ago.

The train tracks follow this small river and as the engine passes the steam drifts back and sinks in the humid air, settling over the motionless water where already mist curls. The sun is still below the earth's curve and as the train moves through the trees the man steps from one of the cars as if stepping off a curb. His pack cradled in his arms. He rolls down the bank and into the brush so quickly that no one notices him, unless perhaps the train's whistle as it approaches the sleeping village has caused some passenger to stir in his sleep and see the figure through a smeared windowpane. The conductor walks between the rows of silent people in second-class. Prochaine station Rosaire. He stoops to stir a woman awake.

Ici la campagne est large et d'un mille sur les champs et les clôtures un homme peut voir une ferme. Dans cette campagne je gésis comme le mort au-dessous des nuits d'été, courtes et étoilés, attente pour chaque moment arriver. Alors les étoiles tombèrent du ciel poser à terre en feu à mes pieds, allumèrent les champs jusqu'au matin. Jes couris cette campagne aveugle, je cherchai l'eau, je goûtai l'air pour le sel.

#### Notes

The italicized passages on pages 37 and 82 are taken from *The History of New Hampshire, From Its Discovery, in 1614, to the Passage of the Toleration Act, in 1819*, by George Barstow (Concord: I.S. Boyd, June 4, 1842).

The definitions on page 37 are taken from *Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Funk & Wagnall's, 1963).



The italicized passage on page 39 is taken from *Connecticut River*, by Marguerite Allis (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1939).

The italicized passage on page 42 is taken from *What They Say in New England and Other American Folklore*, collected by Clifton Johnson, Edited with an Introduction by Carl Withers (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963).

Vincent Bouchard's diary was suggested by, and uses certain lines from, *An Illinois Gold Hunter in the Black Hills: The Diary of Jerry Bryan, March 13 to August 20, 1876* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Society, 1960).

The italicized passage on pages 48-49 is taken from *More New Hampshire Folk Tales*, Collected by Mrs. Moody P. Gore and Mrs. Guy E. Speare (Plymouth, New Hampshire: compiled and published by Mrs. Guy E. Speare, 1936).

The italicized passage on page 50 is taken from *Connecticut River*.

The passages in "Histories" are taken from, respectively, *Connecticut River, Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society, Volume Eleven*, edited by Otis Grant Hammond, M.A. (Concord, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1915); *History of Coos County* (Somersworth, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Publishing Co., 1972; originally published in 1888 by W.A. Ferguson & Co., Boston); and *More New Hampshire Folk Tales*.

The passage under "Divination" is taken from *More New Hampshire Folk Tales*.

The "Moose Hillock" passage on page 67 is taken from *A Treasury of New England Folklore*, edited by B.A. Botkin (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947).

The italicized passage on pages 67-68 is taken from *Indian Stream Republic: Settling a New England Frontier, 1785-1842*, by Daniel Doan (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997)

The italicized passage on page 70 is taken from *History of Coos County*.

The italicized passage on page 71 is taken from *Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society, Volume Eleven*.

The italicized passage on page 74 was suggested by, and uses certain lines from, a passage in *More New Hampshire Folk Tales*.

The passage of Passamaquoddy on page 75 is taken from *Wapapi Akonutomakonol, The Wampum Records: Wabnaki Traditional Laws*, edited by Robert M. Leavitt and David A. Francis (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Micmac-Maliseet Institute/University of New Brunswick, 1990; originally published in 1897 as recounted by Lewis Mitchell). The following translation is that given by the editors: “When all had gathered together, they began to think about what they might do. It seemed as if all were tired of how they had lived wrongly. The great chiefs said to the others, ‘Looking back from here the way we have come, we see that we have left bloody tracks. We see many wrongs. And as for these bloody hatchets, and bows, arrows, they must be buried forever.’ ”

The italicized passage on pages 78-79 is taken from *Burt’s Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*, by Henry M. Burt (Springfield, Massachusetts: New England Publishing Company, 1866).

Holman Amey’s story about Hap Brown was suggested by, and uses certain lines from, the story of Tom Brown in *The Last Yankees: Folkways in Eastern Vermont and the Border Country*, by Scott E. Hastings, Jr. (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1990). This book was also helpful for its oral histories and descriptions of cider-making.

The passage under “The True Story of Jimmy Frye” was suggested by, and uses certain lines from, “The True Story of Polly McFarland” in *More New Hampshire Folk Tales*.