

An aging, disgruntled philosophy professor in search of some sense of self, retreats to his idyllic farm in the mountain village of Halfmoon, Vermont. What he finds there is not what he expected. Incongruous presences haunt Halfmoon and its environs.

Halfmoon Confidential

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3342.html?s=pdf>

Halfmoon Confidential

Also by Edward Fotheringill

Previous Volumes of the *Wisdom Trilogy*:

Lanterns in the Mist
Darkness Withdrawn OR The Eclipse of
Nietzsche's Shadow

Halfmoon Confidential

Edward Fotheringill

Copyright © 2008 Edward Fotheringill

ISBN 978-1-60145-430-0

All right reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Booklocker.com
2008

Chapter 1

High on a wooded hillside in Halfmoon, Vermont, in a dense grove of tall white poplars, a bald eagle majestically sits atop the highest of the poplar crowns. It slowly rotates its regal, white head, surveying the earthly realm with prescient circumspection. The large, predatory bird would be considered an incongruous presence, for it is calculated to be endangered in these parts. But incongruous presences haunt Halfmoon and its environs. Shortly, they will make themselves known. And it will seem as if the forces of nature had converged on the innocent like a macabre maelstrom of unwarranted strife.

The bright yellow irises of the bald eagle's eyes shine in recognition of a human form moving about in a clearing below. The weathered aviator cocks its head, its curved, yellow bill pointing toward the red western sky like a cipher of doom. In a moment's flash, the bird opens its solid brown-feathered chest and spreads its mighty wings to a full span of seven feet. In this ominous posture, summoning ancient presences of prehistoric wanderings, it witnesses the human form with some distant and mysterious recollection of pity.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Edward Fotheringill

Alexander Lessing jumped into his Dodge Ram pickup, slammed the gear into DRIVE, and sped off a little too fast down the long, precipitous, dirt driveway toward Snake Hollow Road. It wasn't as if he had to be somewhere in a hurry. It was just that he was excited. He had made up his mind. Finally.

Alexander slowed down a bit at the end of the driveway and turned left onto Snake Hollow. The truck fishtailed on the turn, but he paid it no mind. After all, he was excited. Taking it up to fifty-five miles per hour on the narrow, backcountry road, he zoomed past two dilapidated farmhouses sitting back off the roadside some thirty yards and an old trailer founded just behind the forest tree line. Long-time Vermonters lived in those dwellings. Alexander didn't see them much, but they were there. A couple of old widows and a retired New York City homicide cop. Yeah, they were there. Somewhere.

Bearing right onto Riverneck Road, Alexander crossed over the Ottaquechee River on the Riverneck Bridge. As he navigated the wooden span, the sun was setting in the autumn sky, reflecting orange and red off the lazy current of the rock-speckled river. An eighth of a mile later, he turned left onto Route 4 and headed for the Elk Head Saloon. That's where he liked to be. That's where he could be himself. Whoever that was.

Chapter 2

“So, would you like to talk about it?”

“No. Honestly, what good would that do?”

“Well, Raymond, that is why we get together for these sessions. To talk.”

“Doc, you know me. I’m not a troublemaker. I’ve pretty much gone along with the program, haven’t I? I’ve babbled on about myself and my afflictions for two years now.”

“Yes, Raymond, it’s been about two years.”

“And I’m tired of talking. Tired of dwelling on myself. I don’t want to know any more about myself.”

“Well, that’s not a very healthy attitude, is it?”

“To me, it’s completely healthy. To me, it’s a sign that I’m ready to look outside myself. That I’m ready to consider the bigger picture.”

“The bigger picture? What bigger picture?”

“Life. That’s the bigger picture. There is life outside the walls of Sheppard Pratt. Did you know that?”

“Now, Raymond. There’s no reason to be hostile.”

Edward Fotheringill

“Hostile? I’m not being hostile. I’m just saying that there is life out there. Outside of me. It’s every bit as important as I am. I’m just saying that I’m ready to go and see what it’s all about. I’m ready to contribute to it, become part of it.”

“Well, Raymond, I think you should let me be the judge of that.”

“Well, I’m trying to tell you that I’m ready. I can make it this time. Really.”

“I’m sorry, Raymond. The clock on my desk tells me our time is up. Enjoy your weekend.”

“But, Doc. Don’t you hear what I’m saying? I want to live my life. I want to connect with the world. Is that an unreasonable request?”

“Raymond, we can talk about this next week. I really must be going. I have an engagement.”

“That’s my very point, Doc. That’s it. You’re going out into the world. You have an engagement with life. See how healthy that is? That’s what I want to do. I just want to lead a normal life. Does that sound crazy to you?”

“Raymond, you know we don’t use that word here.”

“What word? ‘Crazy’? I don’t see anything wrong with that word. People do crazy things. That’s why they land in here with you.”

Chapter 3

Alexander Lessing sipped contemplatively on his third pint of Smuttynose Old Brown Dog Ale. The predominately hopped ale reminded him of the bitter he had so enjoyed during his university days at Oxford. *Those were the days. Sitting in the dark shadows of noisy pubs, drinking beer with scholars brandishing large, sloping foreheads and receding hairlines. Conversing about the dimensions of moral experience in Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Kant and Hegel. Those were the days...*

“You seem quiet tonight, Alex.”

Alex raised his head and looked into the wide, brown eyes of Madeline Kerr, the barmaid at the Elk Head Saloon. Madeline was forty-something. A Vermont girl through and through. Grew up down the road near White River Junction. Orphaned at age seven when her parents died in a freak hunting accident. Raised by her grandparents on a dairy farm. Alex considered her wiry, beguiling frame, her full breasts beneath her navy blue crewneck sweater, her mischievous oval face with a peaches-and-cream complexion and a scattering of brown freckles meandering across her nose from one cheek to the other. Alex wondered if she had freckles on her bountiful breasts. “Oh, I’m just doing some thinking.”

“What about?”

Alex leaned forward, bracing himself on the bar with his elbows. “I’ve made a decision. It feels good when that happens.”

Madeline smiled and nodded in agreement. “So what have you decided?”

“I’ve decided to leave the university. I’m going to quit!” Alex peered into his beer glass and contemplated the brown ale’s frothy head. “I’ve never quit a job in my entire life. It feels good to be decisive. To say *no* when things no longer make sense.”

“I always thought you enjoyed teaching.”

“Oh, I have. Don’t get me wrong—it’s been a great ride. But now, everything has a nasty political odor. What the administration calls political correctness, I call intellectual dishonesty. Today, teaching is more about coddling the students than it is about communicating the seminal ideas that have shaped the movements of Western culture.” Alex leaned back and shrugged his shoulders. “Anyway, I’m quitting.”

Aaron Riley turned his big, burly head to the right and peered out from under the brim of his red Budweiser Beer ball cap. “I couldn’t help overhearin’, Alex. So you’re quittin’ your job? Nothin’ wrong with that. I’ve pretty much quit every job I ever had. It’s not good to let grass grow under your feet. Especially if the grass doesn’t suit you. No, sir. Gotta keep on movin’.”

Alex surveyed the massive torso of Aaron Riley and pondered the remark. Then he pondered the source of the remark. Aaron Riley. A great hulk of a man. Six-feet-three, two hundred fifty-five pounds. Juvenile delinquent at the age of sixteen. Stole cars

Halfmoon Confidential

in high school and set them on fire. Why? Because he liked to. Spent two years in a juvenile correction facility. When he was eighteen, he disappeared. No one in these parts knows where he was. And Aaron never said, either. At the age of twenty-five, he reappeared in Halfmoon. He had changed. Really. He was a good man. Why? No one knows. And Aaron hasn't pontificated on it, either. Now, he's fifty-five. Lives alone in a log cabin on a dirt road off Route 4 on the outskirts of Halfmoon. Fixes truck transmissions for a living. When will he quit that job? Who knows?

"Aaron, I'm just tired of all the bullshit. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, sir. I do."

Madeline pulled two more pints of Smuttynose and slid the brimming glasses in front of the interlocutors. "On the house, gentlemen." She winked and sashayed down to the other end of the bar in response to a crowd of thirsty patrons.

Alex watched Madeline's alluring hips sway to and fro as she strode away. He raised his eyebrows at Aaron.

"Oh, yeah. I get your drift."

Alex nodded knowingly. "Anyway, I'm going to quit. Think I'll do some traveling."

"Hmmm. Where you gonna go?"

Alex considered the question. "Don't know. Some place where I can find myself."

Aaron shook his head and groaned. “Jesus Christ! You talk about how you want to get away from all the bullshit, and then you tell me you want to go on some fuckin’ odyssey in search of yourself.” Aaron shifted his bulky frame on the barstool. “You just have no clue, do you? All those philosophy books you’ve read. They don’t help much in real life, do they? Alex, the simple truth is this: If your mind is all fucked up, it doesn’t matter where you go. Your fucked-up mind is gonna go with you.”

Alex shrugged and looked forlornly into his glass of creamy brown nectar. He felt his mind spinning down into a dark chasm where personal demons might very well exist. “Well, I’ve got to do something.”

Unconvinced, Aaron shook his head. “Change of subject. How’s Ray doin’?”

Alex felt a bolt of dizziness cascade through his temples. He inhaled deeply. “That’s another thing I’ve got to get some closure on.”

An aging, disgruntled philosophy professor in search of some sense of self, retreats to his idyllic farm in the mountain village of Halfmoon, Vermont. What he finds there is not what he expected. Incongruous presences haunt Halfmoon and its environs.

Halfmoon Confidential

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3342.html?s=pdf>