

*Grafton House, a Harvard research center in a Newport, RI mansion, is hosting a conference on international immigration policy on a Fourth of July weekend. The stories of academics, lovers, hapless criminals, Newport police, and others whose lives are touched by the conference are woven together by a benevolent narrator.*

## **GRAFTON HOUSE**

by John Vialet

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JOHN VIALET

# Grafton House



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## CHAPTER 16

Imagine that we are sitting in my Aunt Genevieve's parlor watching a magic lantern show. Imagine further that Aunt Genevieve and her magic lantern really are as magical as they seem. If we ask them to, they will show us what the people we have met so far are doing right now.

Phoebe Snow is standing by herself in the Grafton House Commons. She is thinking about men. In particular, she is thinking about three men, each of whom interests her for a different reason. Or maybe the same reason. Anyway, she's thinking about Henry Leathwood, Andy Eads, and Juan Carlos Cisneros. In that order. She's also very hungry. She has a craving for gelato. Hazelnut gelato if possible, but vanilla will do.

Harold Cummings is sitting on a folding chair in the garage. He is changing the oil in the Lincoln Town Car and drinking a cold Budweiser. Out of a bottle, not a can. The Grafton House kitchen has located one of the rare liquor stores that sell Budweiser in long-neck bottles.

Phoebe's friend Jackie Persac and his partner Edgar Stern are eating an early supper at a small Chinese restaurant in Cambridge, and arguing about which movie to see that evening. Jackie wants to see "Jules and Jim" at the Brattle. Again. Edgar doesn't. Jackie grew up in Fall River, MA speaking French with his French Canadian parents, and he loves French movies. His driver's license says he's Jacques Persac, age fifty-two. At age two, his nickname was p'tit-Jacques. His first-grade teacher decided that p'tit-Jacques sounded too foreign and renamed him Jackie.

Juan Carlos Cisneros is having a cocktail with his wife Catherine in the living room of their house in Cambridge, and pretending to watch a discussion of agricultural subsidies on WGBH-TV. In fact, he is thinking about Phoebe Snow. Catherine is thinking about the civil-rights case she will argue in the morning.

Melanie Ferguson is working late in University Hall, and is finishing her third can of Diet Coke. The laser printer in her office has jammed, and there is no one she can call to fix it. After work, Melanie is planning to go to the gym for her weekly Pilates class. She has a crush on the instructor, who is a former rugby player from New Zealand.

Anettka Gardiner is sitting in Jack Chrysler's car. They are parked under a tree in an out-of-the-way corner of the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown, RI. Jack and Anettka are kissing. Unbeknownst to them, they are being observed by a fascinated group of novice birdwatchers, a troop of Brownies who are standing on a nearby ridge looking down on Jack's Mini Cooper. The Brownies' leader, Winifred Gardiner, is Paul Gardiner's first cousin. She will shortly catch up with her charges on top of the ridge and discover Anettka and Jack kissing. We do not know now if she will tell her cousin.

Paul Gardiner is in a taxi speaking French to the pretty young woman driver. He is not thinking about Anettka.

Karim Pandit is watching the WGBH-TV story on agricultural subsidies. He is very interested in agricultural policy. He hopes the nurse will remove his catheter in the near future.

Andy Eads is pretending to listen to Dexter Slate's report on Donald Pike's misdeeds. He is thinking about the satisfying thud that Donald Pike made when he hit the floor after Andy tripped him. Dexter is of two minds, but on balance (he says) he believes that Donald will probably have to be dismissed. He hopes (he says) it won't be necessary to fire Tobie Shaw, who is difficult, but one of the few people that understand the ancient Grafton House computer system.

Tobie Shaw is slowly sipping a glass of white wine and considering the thorny issues presented by her various boyfriends. In about five minutes, Teresa Morgan is going to tell Tobie that Donald Pike has told everyone about her unauthorized search of the Grafton House personnel data base.

Teresa is standing outside the men's lounge. She is waiting for two of the youngest male staffers to collect the inebriated Donald Pike and take him to his room.

Donald Pike has just vomited on the shoes of the young men, and is resisting their efforts to remove him from the bathroom floor. His arm hurts. A lot. Later that evening, Teresa will drive Donald to the emergency room of the Newport Hospital. There, they will learn that Donald's arm is broken. In two places.

Suleiman Khan has returned to his rooms, and is scrubbing out the vomit on the trousers of his seersucker suit. He is about to take a shower. He is late for evening prayers, and he is feeling unfriendly toward Donald Pike.

Sam Graves is still sitting at his desk. He is examining the Facebook photo of George Rakylz on the wanted poster issued by the Cambridge police. In the photo, George has long, curly black hair, and a bushy black beard. Unless he's completely nuts, Sam thinks, he'll cut his hair and shave off his beard. The photo probably won't be much use. Unless he really is nuts. But he's not very old. Maybe I could locate his high school yearbook photo.

Alex, the Irish beekeeper, is up on the roof repairing a beehive. She has missed all the excitement in the Commons. From her vantage point, she can see the spire of Trinity Church. I would like to be married there, she thinks, if the Americans ever fix their silly laws. But I'm not sure Teresa really wants to get married.

Oscar is standing in the corridor outside Phoebe Snow's room. He thinks he smells a mouse in the utility closet. He enjoys catching mice, even though no one seems to appreciate it when he does. He is being very quiet so the mouse won't know he's there.

Andrew Eads, Sr., is dozing in the chair in front of the television set on the terrace of Pinewood. He is dreaming. In his dream, he is playing golf on a beautiful spring day in Mississippi. He has just hit the ball, a tremendous shot, and he is watching the ball arc through the air towards the 16th hole.

Henry Leathwood is standing by a pillar in the Commons. He is watching Phoebe Snow. What a pretty girl, he thinks. I would like to talk to her.

Ed Moriarty, or rather the lump of organic matter that was formerly Ed Moriarty, is stored inside a refrigerated metal box in the Cambridge morgue, awaiting an autopsy. The Cambridge morgue's budget has been cut, so the autopsy won't happen any time soon.

Wilford "Fat Willie" Thomas is sitting next to a dumpster behind the Stop and Shop supermarket on Bellevue Avenue in Newport. He is eating potato chips and drinking a can of Budweiser. He is trying to call Tobie Shaw's cellphone, but Tobie won't answer the phone. He doesn't know where he will spend the night if he can't get hold of Tobie.

George Rakylz is also calling Tobie Shaw's cellphone. Tobie still hasn't answered the phone. He is thinking about spending the night on the beach, but the idea doesn't appeal very much.

Peruvian Naval Ensign Arturo Cisneros-Stern is standing on the deck of the *Marte*, a twin-masted brig, used by the Peruvian Navy as a training ship. The *Marte* is anchored in Newport Harbor, where it is part of the group of Tall Ships visiting Newport. Arturo is thinking about his famous uncle, Juan Carlos Cisneros-Puglisi. He plans to call Juan Carlos later in the evening. He hopes that Juan Carlos will come to Newport to see him. He is also thinking a lot about Tobie Shaw, with whom he plans to make love during his visit to Newport.

Have we missed anyone? Now that I think of it, we have. Four very different groups of concerned, not to say agitated, citizens are gathered together in various locations in Newport, Providence, and Fall River. They are planning to demonstrate at the Grafton House immigration conference.

One group is the CMCN, the Concerned Muslim Citizens of Newport. They aren't radical in any sense of the word, but they're deeply unhappy about the news that an anti-Islamic professor will speak at the Grafton House conference. (Anettka is the professor in question.) They want to show the world that Muslims are good citizens, and they're going to demonstrate this peacefully tomorrow morning in front of Grafton House. They're meeting in the basement of the Newport Mosque. They are excited. The imam of the mosque is a little worried about their being overheated, and is planning to call

Lieutenant Sam Graves later that evening to make sure everything goes smoothly.

The second group is meeting in a Unitarian Church in Providence. This group isn't radical either. It's called CFFIP, which stands for Citizens For a Fair Immigration Policy. There are lots of birders in this organization. The group's views will be familiar to any reader of the *New York Times* editorial page. Their goal is to motivate like-minded people to press harder for immigration reform. Not really a bad goal. They are relaxed and drinking herbal tea. The sister of the Mayor of Newport is part of this group. If she doesn't forget, she will call the Mayor after the meeting.

Third, we have a small group of Hispanic immigrants, perhaps 25 in all, meeting at the Iglesia de Dios in Newport. The Iglesia de Dios is an evangelical church. Most but not all of this group are legal residents, but some are not. (They prefer the term "undocumented.") They are heatedly arguing about whether the undocumented parishioners should attend the demonstration. One of the parishioners of the Iglesia is a cousin of Sam Graves' wife, and has told her about the group's plans.

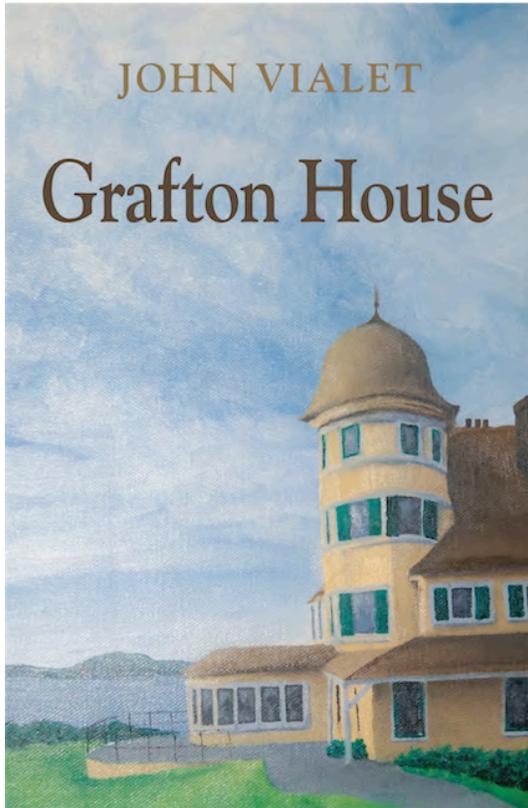
Finally, we have SNARL, which stands for Systematic National Anarchist Revolutionary League. They are certainly radical, to put it mildly. Not as radical as George Rakylz, perhaps, but almost as batshit crazy. It's not clear what they're in favor of, but it's clear that they don't like the way things are now.

Like George Rakylz, several members of the group have read a book that explains everything. Not the same book that George read, but that kind of book. They have decided to be profoundly opposed to capitalism, which they believe was founded by Woodrow Wilson and is probably responsible for something called free trade, which is why there are no more good jobs in Fall River. They like the idea of blowing things up. They are hoping to get a lot of TV coverage that will show people in Fall River how scary they are.

This is a new group, composed primarily of underemployed college dropouts. This will be their first public outing, so the Executive Committee is meeting in secret in the parking lot behind the Peter Pan Bus stop in Fall River. Which is three blocks from

Lizzie Borden's childhood home. One of the members of the Executive Committee is a confidential informant on the payroll of the Fall River Police Department. We can assume that he will check in with the Department after the SNARL meeting breaks up. That's how you keep getting paid in that line of work.

In short, life goes on in Southern New England in its usual fashion. Now let's take a closer look at Phoebe Snow, and see how she's doing.



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