

STEPHEN  
KING



IF IT BLEEDS

NEW FICTION

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IF IT BLEEDS

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*Thinking of Russ Dorr*

*I miss you, Chief.*

# MR. HARRIGAN'S PHONE

My home town was just a village of six hundred or so (and still is, although I have moved away), but we had the Internet just like the big cities, so my father and I got less and less personal mail. Usually all Mr. Nedeau brought was the weekly copy of *Time*, fliers addressed to Occupant or Our Friendly Neighbors, and the monthly bills. But starting in 2004, the year I turned nine and began working for Mr. Harrigan up the hill, I could count on at least four envelopes hand-addressed to me each year. There was a Valentine's Day card in February, a birthday card in September, a Thanksgiving Day card in November, and a Christmas card either just before or just after the holiday. Inside each card was a one-dollar scratch ticket from the Maine State Lottery, and the signature was always the same: *Good Wishes from Mr. Harrigan*. Simple and formal.

My father's reaction was always the same, too: a laugh and a good-natured roll of the eyes.

"He's a cheapster," Dad said one day. This might have been when I was eleven, a couple of years after the cards began arriving. "Pays you cheap wages and gives you a cheap bonus—Lucky Devil tickets from Howie's."

I pointed out that one of those four scratchers usually paid off a couple of bucks. When that happened, Dad collected for me at Howie's, because minors weren't supposed to play the lottery, even if the tickets were freebies. Once, when I hit it big and won five dollars, I asked Dad to buy me five more dollar scratch-offs. He refused, saying if he fed my gambling addiction, my mother would roll over in her grave.

"Harrigan doing it is bad enough," Dad said. "Besides, he should be paying you *seven* dollars an hour. Maybe even eight. God knows he could afford it. Five an hour may be legal, since you're just a kid, but some would consider it child abuse."

"I like working for him," I said. "And I like *him*, Dad."

"I understand that," he said, "and it's not like reading to him and weeding his flower garden makes you a twenty-first-century *Oliver Twist*, but he's still a

cheapster. I'm surprised he's willing to spring for postage to mail those cards, when it can't be more than a quarter of a mile from his mailbox to ours."

We were on our front porch when we had this conversation, drinking glasses of Sprite, and Dad cocked a thumb up our road (dirt, like most of them in Harlow) to Mr. Harrigan's house. Which was really a mansion, complete with an indoor pool, a conservatory, a glass elevator that I absolutely *loved* to ride in, and a greenhouse out back where there used to be a dairy barn (before my time, but Dad remembered it well).

"You know how bad his arthritis is," I said. "Now he uses two canes instead of one sometimes. Walking down here would about kill him."

"Then he could just hand the damn greeting cards to you," Dad said. There was no bite to his words; he was mostly just teasing. He and Mr. Harrigan got along all right. My dad got on all right with everyone in Harlow. I suppose that's what made him a good salesman. "God knows you're up there enough."

"It wouldn't be the same," I said.

"No? Why not?"

I couldn't explain. I had plenty of vocabulary, thanks to all the reading I did, but not much life experience. I just knew I liked getting those cards, looked forward to them, and to the lottery ticket I always scratched off with my lucky dime, and to the signature in his old-fashioned cursive: *Good Wishes from Mr. Harrigan*. Looking back, the word *ceremonial* comes to mind. It was like how Mr. Harrigan always wore one of his scrawny black ties when he and I drove to town, even though he'd mostly just sit behind the wheel of his sensible Ford sedan reading the *Financial Times* while I went into the IGA and got the things on his shopping list. There was always corned beef hash on that list, and a dozen eggs. Mr. Harrigan sometimes opined that a man could live perfectly well on eggs and corned beef hash once he had reached a certain age. When I asked him what that age would be, he said sixty-eight.

"When a man turns sixty-eight," he said, "he no longer needs vitamins."

"Really?"

"No," he said. "I only say that to justify my bad eating habits. Did you or did you not order satellite radio for this car, Craig?"

"I did." On Dad's home computer, because Mr. Harrigan didn't have one.

“Then where is it? All I can get is that damn windbag Limbaugh.”

I showed him how to get to the XM radio. He turned the knob past a hundred or so stations until he found one specializing in country. It was playing “Stand By Your Man.”

That song still gives me the chills, and I suppose it always will.



On that day in my eleventh year, as my dad and I sat drinking our Sprites and looking up at the big house (which was exactly what Harlowites called it: the Big House, as if it were Shawshank Prison), I said, “Getting snail-mail is cool.”

Dad did his eye-roll thing. “*Email* is cool. And cellular phones. Those things seem like miracles to me. You’re too young to understand. If you’d grown up with nothing but a party line and four other houses on it—including Mrs. Edelson, who never shut up—you might feel differently.”

“When can I have a cell phone?” This was a question I’d asked a lot that year, more frequently after the first iPhones went on sale.

“When I decide you’re old enough.”

“Whatever, Dad.” It was my turn to roll my eyes, which made him laugh. Then he grew serious.

“Do you understand how rich John Harrigan is?”

I shrugged. “I know he used to own mills.”

“He owned a lot more than mills. Until he retired, he was the grand high poobah of a company called Oak Enterprises. It owned a shipping line, shopping centers, a chain of movie theaters, a telecom company, I don’t know whatall else. When it came to the Big Board, Oak was one of the biggest.”

“What’s the Big Board?”

“Stock market. Gambling for rich people. When Harrigan sold out, the deal wasn’t just in the business section of the *New York Times*, it was on the front page. That guy who drives a six-year-old Ford, lives at the end of a dirt road, pays you five bucks an hour, and sends you a dollar scratch ticket four times a year is sitting on better than a billion dollars.” Dad grinned. “And my worst suit, the one your mother would make me give to the Goodwill if she was still alive, is better than the one he wears to church.”



I found all of this interesting, especially the idea that Mr. Harrigan, who didn't own a laptop or even a TV, had once owned a telecom company and movie theaters. I bet he never even went to the movies. He was what my dad called a Luddite, meaning (among other things) a guy who doesn't like gadgets. The satellite radio was an exception, because he liked country music and hated all the ads on WOXO, which was the only c&w station his car radio could pull in.

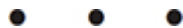
“Do you know how much a billion is, Craig?”

“A hundred million, right?”

“Try a *thousand* million.”

“Wow,” I said, but only because a wow seemed called for. I understood five bucks, and I understood five hundred, the price of a used motor scooter for sale on the Deep Cut Road that I dreamed of owning (good luck there), and I had a theoretical understanding of five thousand, which was about what my dad made each month as a salesman at Parmeleau Tractors and Heavy Machinery in Gates Falls. Dad was always getting his picture on the wall as Salesman of the Month. He claimed that was no big deal, but I knew better. When he got Salesman of the Month, we went to dinner at Marcel's, the fancy French restaurant in Castle Rock.

“Wow is right,” Dad said, and toasted the big house on the hill, with all those rooms that went mostly unused and the elevator Mr. Harrigan loathed but had to use because of his arthritis and sciatica. “Wow is just about goddam right.”



Before I tell you about the big-money lottery ticket, and Mr. Harrigan dying, and the trouble I had with Kenny Yanko when I was a freshman at Gates Falls High, I should tell you about how I happened to go to work for Mr. Harrigan. It was because of church. Dad and I went to First Methodist of Harlow, which was the *only* Methodist of Harlow. There used to be another church in town, the one the Baptists used, but it burned down in 1996.

“Some people shoot off fireworks to celebrate the arrival of a new baby,” Dad said. I couldn't have been more than four then, but I remember it—probably because fireworks interested me. “Your mom and I said to hell with that and

burned down a *church* to welcome you, Craigster, and what a lovely blaze it made.”

“Never say that,” my mother said. “He might believe you and burn one down when he has a kid of his own.”

They joked a lot together, and I laughed even when I didn’t get it.

The three of us used to walk to church together, our boots crunching through packed snow in winter, our good shoes puffing up dust in summer (which my mom would wipe off with a Kleenex before we went inside), me always holding Dad’s hand on my left and Mom’s on my right.

She was a good mom. I still missed her bad in 2004, when I started working for Mr. Harrigan, although she had been dead three years then. Now, sixteen years later, I still miss her, although her face has faded in my memory and photos only refresh it a little. What that song says about motherless children is true: they have a hard time. I loved my dad and we always got along fine, but that song’s right on another point, too: there’s so many things your daddy can’t understand. Like making a daisy chain and putting it on your head in the big field behind our house and saying today you’re not just any little boy, you’re King Craig. Like being pleased but not making it out to be a big deal—bragging and all—when you start reading Superman and Spider-Man comic books at the age of three. Like getting in bed with you if you wake up in the middle of the night from a bad dream where Dr. Octopus is chasing you. Like hugging you and telling you it’s okay when some bigger boy—Kenny Yanko, for instance—beats the living shit out of you.

I could have used one of those hugs on that day. A mother-hug on that day might have changed a lot.



Never boasting about being a precocious reader was a gift my parents gave me, the gift of learning early that having some talent doesn’t make you better than the next fellow. But word got around, as it always does in small towns, and when I was eight, Reverend Mooney asked me if I would like to read the Bible lesson on Family Sunday. It might have been the novelty of the thing that fetched him; usually he got a high school boy or girl to do the honors. The reading was from

the Book of Mark that Sunday, and after the service, the Rev said I'd done such a good job I could do it every week, if I wanted.

"He says a little child shall lead them," I told Dad. "It's in the Book of Isaiah."

My father grunted, as if that didn't move him much. Then he nodded. "Fine, as long as you remember you're the medium, not the message."

"Huh?"

"The Bible is the Word of God, not the Word of Craig, so don't get a big head about it."

I said I wouldn't, and for the next ten years—until I went off to college where I learned to smoke dope, drink beer, and chase girls—I read the weekly lesson. Even when things were at their very worst, I did that. The Rev would give me the scriptural reference a week in advance—chapter and verse, as the saying is. Then, at Methodist Youth Fellowship on Thursday night, I'd bring him a list of the words I couldn't pronounce. As a result, I may be the only person in the state of Maine who can not only pronounce Nebuchadnezzar, but spell it.



One of America's richest men moved to Harlow about three years before I started my Sunday job of delivering scripture to my elders. The turn of the century, in other words, right after he sold his companies and retired, and before his big house was even completely finished (the pool, the elevator, and the paved driveway came later). Mr. Harrigan attended church every week, dressed in his rusty black suit with the sagging seat, wearing one of his unfashionably narrow black ties, and with his thinning gray hair neatly combed. The rest of the week that hair went every whichway, like Einstein's after a busy day of deciphering the cosmos.

Back then he only used one cane, which he leaned on when we rose to sing hymns I suppose I'll remember until the day I die . . . and that verse of "The Old Rugged Cross" about water and blood flowing from Jesus's wounded side will always give me chills, just like the last verse of "Stand By Your Man," when Tammy Wynette goes all out. Anyway, Mr. Harrigan didn't actually sing, which

was good because he had kind of a rusty, shrieky voice, but he mouthed along. He and my dad had that in common.

One Sunday in the fall of 2004 (all the trees in our part of the world burning with color), I read part of 2 Samuel, doing my usual job of imparting to the congregation a message I hardly understood but knew Reverend Mooney would explain in his sermon: “The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.”

When I sat down in our pew, Dad patted me on the shoulder and whispered *You said a mouthful* in my ear. I had to cover my mouth to hide a smile.



The next evening, as we were finishing up the supper dishes (Dad washing, me drying and putting away), Mr. Harrigan’s Ford pulled into the driveway. His cane thumped up our dooryard steps, and Dad opened the door just before he could knock. Mr. Harrigan declined the living room and sat at the kitchen table just like home folks. He accepted a Sprite when Dad offered, but declined a glass. “I take it from the bottle, the way my pa did,” he said.

He got right to the point, being a man of business. If my father approved, Mr. Harrigan said he’d like to hire me to read to him two or perhaps three hours a week. For this he would pay five dollars an hour. He could offer another three hours’ worth of work, he said, if I would tend his garden a bit and do some other chores, such as snow-shoveling the steps in winter and dusting what needed dusting year-round.

Twenty-five, maybe even thirty dollars a week, half of it just for reading, which was something I would have done for free! I couldn’t believe it. Thoughts of saving up for a motor scooter immediately rose to mind, even though I would not be able to ride one legally for another seven years.

It was too good to be true, and I was afraid my father would say no, but he didn’t. “Just don’t give him anything controversial,” Dad said. “No crazy political stuff, and no overboard violence. He reads like a grownup, but he’s just nine, and barely that.”

Mr. Harrigan gave him this promise, drank some of his Sprite, and smacked his leathery lips. “He reads well, yes, but that’s not the main reason I want to hire him. He doesn’t *drone*, even when he doesn’t understand. I find that remarkable. Not amazing, but remarkable.”

He put his bottle down and leaned forward, fixing me with his sharp gaze. I often saw amusement in those eyes, but only seldom did I see warmth, and that night in 2004 wasn’t one of them.

“About your reading yesterday, Craig. Do you know what is meant by ‘the daughters of the uncircumcised?’”

“Not really,” I said.

“I didn’t think so, but you still got the right tone of anger and lamentation in your voice. Do you know what *lamentation* is, by the way?”

“Crying and stuff.”

He nodded. “But you didn’t overdo it. You didn’t ham it up. That was good. A reader is a carrier, not a creator. Does Reverend Mooney help you with your pronunciation?”

“Yes, sir, sometimes.”

Mr. Harrigan drank some more Sprite and rose, leaning on his cane. “Tell him it’s *Ashkelon*, not *Ass-kelon*. I found that unintentionally funny, but I have a very low sense of humor. Shall we have a trial run Wednesday, at three? Are you out of school by then?”

I got out of Harlow Elementary at two-thirty. “Yes, sir. Three would be fine.”

“Shall we say until four? Or is that too late?”

“That works,” Dad said. He sounded bemused by the whole thing. “We don’t eat until six. I like to watch the local news.”

“Doesn’t that play hell with your digestion?”

Dad laughed, although I don’t really think Mr. Harrigan was joking. “Sometimes it does. I’m not a fan of Mr. Bush.”

“He is a bit of a fool,” Mr. Harrigan agreed, “but at least he’s surrounded himself with men who understand business. Three on Wednesday, Craig, and don’t be late. I have no patience with tardiness.”

“Nothing risqué, either,” Dad said. “Time enough for that when he’s older.”

Mr. Harrigan also promised this, but I suppose men who understand business also understand that promises are easy to discard, being as how giving them is free. There was certainly nothing risqué in *Heart of Darkness*, which was the first book I read for him. When we finished, Mr. Harrigan asked me if I understood it. I don't think he was trying to tutor me; he was just curious.

"Not a whole lot," I said, "but that guy Kurtz was pretty crazy. I got that much."

There was nothing risqué in the next book, either—*Silas Marner* was just a bore-a-thon, in my humble opinion. The third one, however, was *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and that was certainly an eye-opener. It was 2006 when I was introduced to Constance Chatterley and her randy gamekeeper. I was ten. All these years later I can still remember the verses of "The Old Rugged Cross," and just as vividly recall Mellors stroking the lady and murmuring "Tha'rt nice." How he treated her is a good thing for boys to learn, and a good thing to remember.

"Do you understand what you just read?" Mr. Harrigan asked me after one particularly steamy passage. Again, just curious.

"No," I said, but that wasn't strictly true. I understood a lot more of what was going on between Ollie Mellors and Connie Chatterley in the woods than I did about what was going on between Marlow and Kurtz down there in the Belgian Congo. Sex is hard to figure out—something I learned even before I got to college—but crazy is even harder.

"Fine," Mr. Harrigan said, "but if your father asks what we're reading, I suggest you tell him *Dombey and Son*. Which we're going to read next, anyway."

My father never did ask—about that one, anyway—and I was relieved when we moved on to *Dombey*, which was the first adult novel I remember really liking. I didn't want to lie to my dad, it would have made me feel horrible, although I'm sure Mr. Harrigan would have had no problem with it.



Mr. Harrigan liked me to read to him because his eyes tired easily. He probably didn't need me to weed his flowers; Pete Bostwick, who mowed his acre or so of lawn, would have been happy to do that, I think. And Edna Grogan, his

housekeeper, would have been happy to dust his large collection of antique snow-globes and glass paperweights, but that was my job. He mostly just liked having me around. He never told me that until shortly before he died, but I knew it. I just didn't know why, and am not sure I do now.

Once, when we were coming back from dinner at Marcel's in the Rock, my dad said, very abruptly: "Does Harrigan ever touch you in a way you don't like?"

I was years from even being able to grow a shadow mustache, but I knew what he was asking; we had learned about "stranger danger" and "inappropriate touching" in the third grade, for God's sake.

"Do you mean does he grope me? No! Jeez, Dad, he's not *gay*."

"All right. Don't get all mad about it, Craigster. I had to ask. Because you're up there a lot."

"If he was groping me, he could at least send me *two*-dollar scratch tickets," I said, and that made Dad laugh.

Thirty dollars a week was about what I made, and Dad insisted I put at least twenty of it in my college savings account. Which I did, although I considered it mega-stupid; when even being a teenager seems an age away, college might as well be in another lifetime. Ten bucks a week was still a fortune. I spent some of it on burgers and shakes at the Howie's Market lunch counter, most of it on old paperbacks at Dahlie's Used Books in Gates Falls. The ones I bought weren't heavy going, like the ones I read to Mr. Harrigan (even *Lady Chatterley* was heavy when Constance and Mellors weren't steaming the place up). I liked crime novels and westerns like *Shoot-Out at Gila Bend* and *Hot Lead Trail*. Reading to Mr. Harrigan was work. Not sweat-labor, but work. A book like *One Monday We Killed Them All*, by John D. MacDonald, was pure pleasure. I told myself I ought to save up the money that didn't go into the college fund for one of the new Apple phones that went on sale in the summer of 2007, but they were expensive, like six hundred bucks, and at ten dollars a week, that would take me over a year. And when you're just eleven going on twelve, a year is a very long time.

Besides, those old paperbacks with their colorful covers called to me.



On Christmas morning of 2007, three years after I started working for Mr. Harrigan and two years before he died, there was only one package for me under the tree, and my dad told me to save it for last, after he had duly admired the paisley vest, the slippers, and the briar pipe I'd gotten him. With that out of the way, I tore off the wrappings on my one present, and shrieked with delight when I saw he'd gotten me exactly what I'd been lusting for: an iPhone that did so many different things it made my father's car-phone look like an antique.

Things have changed a lot since then. Now it's the iPhone my father gave me for Christmas in 2007 that's the antique, like the five-family party line he told me about from back when he was a kid. There's been so many changes, so many advances, and they happened so fast. My Christmas iPhone had just sixteen apps, and they came pre-loaded. One of them was YouTube, because back then Apple and YouTube were friends (that changed). One was called SMS, which was primitive text messaging (no emojis—a word not yet invented—unless you made them yourself). There was a weather app that was usually wrong. But you could make phone calls from something small enough to carry in your hip pocket, and even better, there was Safari, which linked you to the outside world. When you grew up in a no-stoplight, dirt-road town like Harlow, the outside world was a strange and tempting place, and you longed to touch it in a way network TV couldn't match. At least I did. All these things were at your fingertips, courtesy of AT&T and Steve Jobs.

There was another app, as well, one that made me think of Mr. Harrigan even on that first joyful morning. Something much cooler than the satellite radio in his car. At least for guys like him.

“Thanks, Dad,” I said, and hugged him. “Thank you so much!”

“Just don't overuse it. The phone charges are sky-high, and I'll be keeping track.”

“They'll come down,” I said.

I was right about that, and Dad never gave me a hard time about the charges. I didn't have many people to call anyway, but I did like those YouTube videos (Dad did, too), and I loved being able to go on what we then called the three w's: the worldwide web. Sometimes I would look at articles in *Pravda*, not because I understood Russian but just because I could.





Not quite two months later, I came home from school, opened the mailbox, and found an envelope addressed to me in Mr. Harrigan's old-fashioned script. It was my Valentine's Day card. I went into the house, dropped my schoolbooks on the table, and opened it. The card wasn't flowery or sappy, that wasn't Mr. Harrigan's style. It showed a man in a tuxedo holding out a top hat and bowing in a field of flowers. The Hallmark message inside said, *May you have a year filled with love and friendship.* Below that: *Good Wishes from Mr. Harrigan.* A bowing man with his hat held out, a good wish, no sticky stuff. That was Mr. Harrigan all over. Looking back, I'm surprised he considered Valentine's Day worth a card.

In 2008, the Lucky Devil one-dollar scratchers had been replaced by ones called Pine Tree Cash. There were six pine trees on the little card. If the same amount was beneath three of them when you scratched them off, you won that amount. I scratched away the trees and stared at what I had uncovered. At first I thought it was either a mistake or some kind of joke, although Mr. Harrigan was not the joke-playing type. I looked again, running my fingers along the uncovered numbers, brushing away crumbles of what my dad called (always with the eye-roll) "scratch-dirt." The numbers stayed the same. I might have laughed, that I can't recall, but I remember screaming, all right. Screaming for joy.

I grabbed my new phone out of my pocket (that phone went everywhere with me) and called Parmeleau Tractors. I got Denise, the receptionist, and when she heard how out of breath I was, she asked me what was wrong.

"Nothing, nothing," I said, "but I have to talk to my dad right now."

"All right, just hold on." And then: "You sound like you're calling from the other side of the moon, Craig."

"I'm on my cell phone." God, I loved saying that.

Denise made a *humph* sound. "Those things are full of radiation. I'd never own one. Hold on."

My dad also asked me what was wrong, because I'd never called him at work before, even on the day the schoolbus left without me.

"Dad, I got my Valentine's Day scratch ticket from Mr. Harrigan—"

“If you called to tell me you won ten dollars, it could have waited until I—”

“No, Daddy, it’s the big prize!” Which it was, for dollar scratch-offs back then. *“I won three thousand dollars!”*

Silence from the other end of the line. I thought maybe I’d lost him. In those days cell phones, even the new ones, dropped calls all the time. Ma Bell wasn’t always the best mother.

“Dad? Are you still there?”

“Uh-huh. Are you sure?”

“Yes! I’m looking right at it! Three three thousands! One in the top row and two in the bottom!”

Another long pause, then I heard my father telling someone *I think my kid won some money*. A moment later he was back to me. “Put it somewhere safe until I get home.”

“Where?”

“How about the sugar cannister in the pantry?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Yeah, okay.”

“Craig, are you positive? I don’t want you to be disappointed, so check again.”

I did, somehow convinced that my dad’s doubt would change what I had seen; at least one of those \$3000s would now be something else. But they were the same.

I told him that, and he laughed. “Well, then, congratulations. Marcel’s tonight, and you’re buying.”

That made *me* laugh. I can’t remember ever feeling such pure joy. I needed to call someone else, so I called Mr. Harrigan, who answered on his Luddite landline.

“Mr. Harrigan, thank you for the card! And thank you for the ticket! I—”

“Are you calling on that gadget of yours?” he asked. “You must be, because I can barely hear you. You sound like you’re on the other side of the moon.”

“Mr. Harrigan, I won the big prize! I won three thousand dollars! Thank you so much!”

There was a pause, but not as long as my father’s, and when he spoke again, he didn’t ask me if I was sure. He did me that courtesy. “You struck lucky,” he

said. "Good for you."

"Thank you!"

"You're welcome, but thanks really aren't necessary. I buy those things by the roll. Send em off to friends and business acquaintances as a kind of . . . mmm . . . calling-card, you could say. Been doing it for years. One was bound to pay off big sooner or later."

"Dad will make me put most of it in the bank. I guess that's okay. It will certainly perk up my college fund."

"Give it to me, if you like," Mr. Harrigan said. "Let me invest it for you. I think I can guarantee a better return than bank interest." Then, speaking more to himself than to me: "Something very safe. This isn't going to be a good year for the market. I see clouds on the horizon."

"Sure!" I reconsidered. "At least probably. I have to talk to my dad."

"Of course. Only proper. Tell him I'm willing to also guarantee the base sum. Are you still coming to read for me this afternoon? Or will you put that aside, now that you're a man of means?"

"Sure, only I have to be back when Dad gets home. We're going out to dinner." I paused. "Would you like to come?"

"Not tonight," he said, with no hesitation. "You know, you could have told me all of this in person, since you're coming up, anyway. But you enjoy that gadget of yours, don't you?" He didn't wait for me to answer that; he didn't need to. "What would you think of investing your little windfall in Apple stock? I believe that company is going to be quite successful in the future. I'm hearing the iPhone is going to bury the BlackBerry. Pardon the pun. In any case, don't answer now; discuss it with your father first."

"I will," I said. "And I'll be right up. I'll run."

"Youth is a wonderful thing," said Mr. Harrigan. "What a shame it's wasted on children."

"Huh?"

"Many have said it, but Shaw said it best. Never mind. Run, by all means. Run like the dickens, because Dickens awaits us."



I ran the quarter of a mile to Mr. Harrigan's house, but walked back, and on the way I had an idea. A way to thank him, even though he said no thanks were necessary. Over our fancy dinner at Marcel's that night, I told Dad about Mr. Harrigan's offer to invest my windfall, and I also told him my idea for a thank-you gift. I thought Dad would have his doubts, and I was right.

"By all means let him invest the money. As for your idea . . . you know how he feels about stuff like that. He's not only the richest man in Harlow—in the whole state of Maine, for that matter—he's also the only one who doesn't have a television."

"He's got an elevator," I said. "And he uses it."

"Because he has to." Then Dad gave me a grin. "But it's your money, and if this is what you want to do with twenty per cent of it, I'm not going to tell you no. When he turns it down, you can give it to me."

"You really think he will?"

"I do."

"Dad, why did he come here in the first place? I mean, we're just a little town. We're *nowhere*."

"Good question. Ask him sometime. Now what about some dessert, big spender?"



Just about a month later, I gave Mr. Harrigan a brand-new iPhone. I didn't wrap it up or anything, partly because it wasn't a holiday and partly because I knew how he liked things done: with no foofaraw.

He turned the box over a time or two in his arthritis-gnarled hands, looking bemused. Then he held it out to me. "Thank you, Craig, I appreciate the sentiment, but no. I suggest you give it to your father."

I took the box. "He told me you'd say that." I was disappointed but not surprised. And not ready to give up.

"Your father is a wise man." He leaned forward in his chair and clasped his hands between his spread knees. "Craig, I rarely give advice, it's almost always a waste of breath, but today I'll give some to you. Henry Thoreau said that we don't own things; things own us. Every new object—whether it's a home, a car, a