MORE THAN A WOMAN

Benjamin Janus was the pen name of a best-selling author living in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. His real name was Scott Lamont, and he was a bachelor, age thirty-five. He had written three very popular historical fiction epics so far, and had sold an estimated eighteen million copies. His works had already been translated into twenty languages, with more to come.

The year was 1967. Lyndon B. Johnson was in the White House. Anti-war protests were continually escalating against America's involvement in Vietnam, and racial tensions were dangerously high in the big cities across the nation as well.

Although his writings made him quite famous and wealthy, Scott no longer liked living in the city. While he always enjoyed its world-class museums, fine restaurants, Broadway theaters, and its magnificent New York Public Library and Central Park, the 'Big Apple' had let him down in regards to crime, filth, traffic, overcrowding, and political corruption. The 'City That Never Sleeps' needed a good, long rest, he decided. Lamont had to get out -- away from the endless noise and the non-stop chaos. Plus the city women he wound up dating were usually neurotic, or too aggressive, or into the new trend of feminism -- the so-called 'women's liberation movement.' Out of physical need, he slept with half a dozen NYC ladies, but he quickly discovered that sex was not the same thing as love -- for it was true love and its higher meaning that he was really looking for, and deeply wanted and needed.

Scott was not someone whose good looks made him stand out in a crowd. He could easily be mistaken for the manager of an auto parts store, or a heating/AC repairman. He was of average height and build, with brown hair and hazel eyes. His only distinguishing facial characteristic -- inherited from his father -- was a chin dimple like the actor Kirk Douglas. But Scott was smart and observant, kind and pleasant. Lamont had two brothers and two sisters, and grew up in the small town of Lenox near Pittsfield in the hilly Berkshires of western Massachusetts. Lenox was the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, so Scott was exposed to classical music at an early age. His father, Ted, had worked as a supervisor at General Electric in Pittsfield. And it was also in Pittsfield as a boy, while visiting Arrowhead -- the home of Herman Melville, author of "Moby Dick" -- that Scott first got his inspiration to become a writer.

Lamont's initial published success (under his pen name of Benjamin Janus) was "Tuscan Moon," a sweeping, multi-generational saga set in central Italy during the Renaissance. It had been rejected by eight publishers before finally being accepted (with the help of his new literary agent, Allen Lewis) by Random House, where Scott once met (and had a fascinating lunch with) fellow-RH author James A. Michener, whose thousand-page epic "The Source" was still selling well, even after being in print for two years . Next from Lamont's Royal typewriter came "Nile Nights," a timeless love story set in Ancient Egypt, followed by "Persian Skies," which traced the lives of four families during the time of Darius the Great and his son, Xerxes. His current work-in-progress was officially untitled, but he thought it might eventually be called "China Wind," about an inter-racial romance between a Western journalist and a Chinese woman just prior, and then leading up, to the 1966 Cultural Revolution -- an event which was just becoming disturbing news across both America and Europe. Because the Supreme Court had just made inter-racial marriage legal in the United States, the author also felt that his new novel's main characters would be of special interest to American readers.

Scott Lamont's sole phobia was flying, so he needed to drive across the country to Iowa in his Jeep Grand Wagoneer and scout out -- in the general area he had carefully researched and selected -- a suitable house in a classic small American town. He sold his pre-furnished Manhattan condominium (after informing his agent, his publisher, and his banker what he intended to do), put most of his books, clothes, LP records, and unused files in a temporary storage facility, and then set off west on Interstate-80 on this, a clear mild May morning. The price of gasoline dropped an hour after leaving the city, and soon averaged thirty-three cents a gallon. His car was filled with a few suitcases of clothes, four boxes of necessary books (especially Chinese history), his current working manuscript, and his trusty Royal with six reams of typing paper. Scott's readers were usually surprised at his book signings when they learned he was deathly afraid of ever boarding an airplane, as well as when he confessed to being prone to ocean seasickness. They naturally assumed that he had actually flown to Italy, Egypt, and Iran to research his books, such was his wealth of specific details. Lamont simply admitted that any public library could give any dedicated writer the raw background material to craft any kind of story. But he did love to drive and explore, and had been in all lower forty-eight states and most of Canada, whenever he got behind the wheel to relax on vacation. Scott's favorites were any National Parks, museums, or regional historical sites. He sought out vintage bed and breakfast places as his lodging preferences, especially enjoying the varied conversations over meals with the owners and the other guests.

After three days of leisurely motoring, Lamont arrived in the town of Cherokee, Iowa -- the county seat, population 7424. The rolling hills of the area, at a 1200-foot elevation, were not quite like the Berkshires where he grew up, but the land was inviting and fresh. He got out of his car and walked around Main Street, where he noticed Northwest Realty and the Cherokee State Bank, as well as the other usual stores, markets, bars, and cafes. The County Courthouse was visible in the distance. A block west on Second Street and Maple -- next to the City Hall/Post Office and Police/Fire Department -- was the Public Library, a stately, classical Carnegie built in 1905. The word FREE was dramatically carved above the main entrance, and the front area was framed by two, enormous matching evergreen trees. People actually said hello to him -- a total stranger! -- in an easy-going, friendly manner -- something which almost never happened in the choking megalopolis that he had fled. Scott immediately knew that he had made the right choice, and smiled to himself as he let out a huge sigh of relief.

After exploring several of the small 'feeder' towns surrounding Cherokee, the author finally spotted a perfect house with a big FOR SALE sign in the tiny town of Ralston -- population 210 -- about six miles northwest of the county seat, on the Little Sioux River. It was a solid, two-story, reddish-brown brick home, flanked by five mature oak trees, with a large, wrap-around, grey and white wooden front porch -- which could use a repainting, he noted. Four ground level windows indicated the presence of a basement. There was a standard lawn in front and a vegetable garden in back, both frankly needing attention. A crushed gravel driveway led to a complimenting grey and white, wooden, one-car garage -- also needing fresh paint. The house appeared to have been built well, probably in the early 1920s, and it sat on a small rise of earth. The closest neighbors were about two blocks away in both directions, alongside their farms which were raising corn. Here, Scott Lamont was convinced, I can finally write in peace and quiet! As he walked around the immediate area, he inhaled the sweet country air, and felt the sun and the north breeze refresh his face, as he listened to the soothing symphony of the rustling leaves of his oak trees. If the interior was as pleasing as the exterior, he was sold!

So it next was a quick drive back to Cherokee to the office of Northwest Realty. There he met Stan Goode, a hearty, stout fellow who filled the author in on all the details of the house and its former occupants.

"Previous owner was a widow named Elsie Marsh. She died about five years ago, early '62. A real sweet lady, everybody liked her...her husband, Vern, raised a spread of hogs commercially in Calumet, then retired and later died of a stroke here in '53. The place has been vacant since then. Sits on a fine four acre lot. I'll take you out whenever you like so you can see the inside. I check on the place once a week, to make sure nothing is disturbed. Mow the lawn when needed and rake the leaves in autumn, but I leave the snow alone to melt by itself in the spring. All of her furniture was left behind, still in great condition. The house is like an antique display from the 1950s. You have to see it to believe it..really remarkable! The price includes everything, or we can have all the old furnishings hauled out for no charge if you like. Nobody wants to live there lately because it is kind of remote from Cherokee, and there is really nothing to do out there for families needing jobs and friends in town. But you say you want to move here and write a book? Well, it's perfect for that, Scott. Plus I can offer you a great deal. Real estate here is a whole lot cheaper than in New York City, I can guarantee you that! And the little town of Ralston can use some new property taxes in their coffers too," Goode admitted.

Stan offered to buy the author lunch down on Main Street at the Red Red Robin Cafe. ("We keep bob-bob-bobbing along!" the sign in the front window boasted.) They were served by a tall, very buxom, flirtatious, red-haired waitress named Bunny. She was chewing gum between displaying her teeth and her thick red lips. Her heavily made-up green eyes sported long false eyelashes, and her hair was styled high and wide. She said "hi" to Stan, then boldly arched her eyebrow and winked at Lamont. Both men ordered club sandwiches on toasted white bread with rippled potato chips and iced tea.

"That's Bunny Cantrell, Cherokee's very own Ann- Margaret wanna-be," Goode whispered. She's thirty-three but acts like she's twenty-five. She waits tables here and also works at the beauty parlor down the street. She's 'hot to trot' for any sober, employed, single guy, but she's rumored to be quite a home wrecker too. I notice you aren't wearing a wedding ring, Scott, so be careful with that one," he warned.

At the cash register after the meal when the realtor paid the bill, Bunny coyly brushed against Scott's hand as he reached for a toothpick from its silver dispenser. "Hope to see you again soon, Hon," she purred while making dagger eye contact. Lamont took note of her long, red manicured nails, her perfume, and her very tight waitress uniform. Then the men got in Goode's car and drove out to view the inside of the house under consideration back in Ralston.

Once they arrived, Stan unlocked the front door and darted to open the window blinds or drapes in each room. Downstairs, there was a kitchen with a stove and a refrigerator (and pots and pans and dishes and silverware in the drawers and cabinets); a dining room with a broad walnut table with matching chairs and full china cabinet; a living room with a stone fireplace, a frozen grandfather clock which needed to be wound, and a sofa with two matching recliners, end tables and lamps, and a small vintage television set; and lastly a study with a large desk, a leather-padded chair, and two large walnut bookshelves. Off the back screened-in porch was a half bath with toilet and sink. Upstairs were four bedrooms and a full bath with tub but no shower. Each bedroom had a queen bed with pillows, a closet, and a dresser. There were hardwood floors throughout the house, other than in the linoleum-floored kitchen and tiled bathrooms. As he opened a few windows, the realtor assured Scott that the home's somewhat musty smell would be completely gone before Lamont would move in. "I'll have a professional crew come in and clean every nook and cranny, Scott, as well as steam-clean or prep any furniture you want to keep," Goode promised. "We'll also paint the whole interior of the house in the color of your choice, and repaint the front porch and the garage too." When the pair went down the stairs to the basement, the author saw the furnace, a lead sink with hot and cold taps, and a washer and dryer. There were a few neat but dusty stacks of old "Life," "Reader's Digest," and "Good Housekeeping" magazines from the 1950s, as well as some of Vern's hog-production trade journals and some back issues of "Popular Mechanics" and "Field & Stream." Stan was right...the house did indeed resemble a time capsule from the 50s, with little seemingly changed since Elsie's husband died, Scott thought.

"Furnace works real good -- you'll need it for our tough Iowa winters -- and there are no leaks anywhere in the basement," the realtor boasted, pointing out that there were no water stains anywhere. "Pipes and septic system are sound too. Won't freeze up on you. Now, let's go look at the garage."

The inside of the garage was clean and sparse, except for two items: a tall tool cabinet with assorted well-cared-for tools, and a large porch swing just waiting to be hung every summer. Scott Lamont was extremely pleased with Stan's thorough property tour, and said that he would gladly buy the place, with everything "as is." The pair went back to Northwest Realty and closed the deal after a mild negotiation -- a real bargain, sealed for only $19,250. It was less than one-fifth the cost of his NYC condominium! Scott realized. The author would stay at the Skyliner Motel on the outskirts of Cherokee until the house was cleaned and painted. It was Friday, May 19, 1967.

Ten days later, the author formally moved in. His interior paint choice -- light peach -- looked comforting. His water, electricity, and telephone were all connected. He notified his agent, his publisher, and his banker of his new phone number and address: 529 Oriole Drive. Next, Scott had his banker transfer 10% of his savings to the Cherokee State Bank, after opening an account there that same Monday. He called and had the rest of his clothes, LP records, files and books -- which he had earlier placed in storage in New York -- arranged to be shipped to his new house. He bought groceries at the Riverside Market on Main Street to stock his refrigerator and pantry. Lamont raced home with his perishables, but then quickly returned to town. He bought a new 10-speed bicycle at Keye's Department Store, figuring he could ride the six-miles into Cherokee from Ralston (on a good, paved road) for exercise when the weather was good, and walk the same route in the winter if he didn't feel like driving and wanted some fresh air. Next, he picked up four box fans to help cool the house during the hot and humid upcoming summer, because most Iowa homes of this vintage didn't have air conditioning. Scott's final purchases at Keye's were a new color television set, and a stereo hi-fi console -- with record player and AM/FM radio. Later, he would buy some new LPs to add to his growing collection, because he often enjoyed listening to soothing music while writing. Elsie's ancient TV set would be put in the basement for possible sale at another time, perhaps to some antique dealer, who might also want to buy the stacks of old magazines already down there.

The following day, it was off to the Public Library to get an all-important library card. The quiet interior was welcoming, well-organized but cozy, and the collection of fiction and nonfiction books and periodicals was typical for a town of this size. Except for an elderly gentleman napping in a corner by the card catalogue with an opened newspaper spread out on his lap, the place was empty -- apart from the librarian, that is.

"You must be the fellow that just bought the Marsh house in Ralston. Welcome to town! I'm Sadie Velmer, the head librarian. My two pages won't arrive until later this afternoon once school lets out. So it's just me for now...and Oscar, of course...having a rest over there," Sadie remarked.

Scott Lamont knew from experience that the smartest people in smaller boroughs like this were usually the librarians rather than the school teachers. Sizing up Sadie while he filled out his library card application, he sensed that behind her sixty-eight-year-old ( "I was six-years-old when this building was finished, back in 1905," she admitted), white-hair-pulled -back-in-a-bun, eyeglasses-on-a-neck-chain exterior lay an intense, kindred spirit who was passionate for the written word. Miss Velmer could also prove to be an invaluable research aide while he grappled with writing his latest novel.

The author then casually browsed the book stacks in the fiction section -- being mindful not to disturb Oscar, who by now was softly snoring -- until he came to the area featuring the letter "J" authors. He was pleased, as always, when he saw his own three works there, proudly in residence. Examining the check-out and due dates on the standard card pasted inside each cover, he happily learned that they had circulated very well indeed.

Scott was slightly startled when he heard Sadie's low voice at his elbow. "Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Lamont, but I didn't want to call across the room and perhaps wake Oscar up. Those Benjamin Janus books you are looking at are really good reads. I highly recommend them. He has the rare talent of blending a good imagination with accurate historical facts. You get to totally inhabit the worlds he creates, page after page. I can't wait to order his newest book, as soon as it comes out."

But then Miss Velmer suddenly reached up and pulled "Persian Skies" off the shelf and flipped to the inside back dust cover to glance at Benjamin Janus' photo. Next, she stared at Scott Lamont. "Just as I suspected. The dimple in your chin was the giveaway. You're him! My goodness...You're Benjamin Janus!" she loudly announced, waking up drowsy Oscar in the process. "Huh, what...what??" he muttered from his comfy corner chair.

"It's O.K., Oscar, it's nothing...you can go back to sleep now," the librarian kindly replied.

Scott smiled and admitted, with his hands up waist-high, "You got me, Sadie...guilty as charged. But can you keep my identity a secret...you know, just between you and me? I moved to Ralston from New York City for anonymity and privacy to aid in writing my next book. I'll also need your professional help from time to time to order articles and other source materials from the Des Moines Public Library as part of my research. It's set in China just prior and then up to the 1966 Cultural Revolution. Do we have a deal?" he humbly asked.

"Absolutely, Mr. Janus...I mean 'Mr. Lamont.' My lips are sealed. It will be an honor." Miss Velmer pledged, her blue eyes twinkling. "This could be the highlight of my career, you know. Meeting such a famous author in person!"

Scott thanked her, then excused himself to read the latest copy of the town newspaper, The Cherokee Courier, to catch up on any local activities. Being somewhat of a movie buff, he noted that the newest 007 James Bond installment, "You Only Live Twice," was opening on June 16 at the venerable Tomahawk Theater, followed by a WW2 film, "The Dirty Dozen," a week later. Adult admission was $1.25. Before leaving, he checked out Michener's 1959 epic "Hawaii" to read for pleasure in his spare time. "Oh, that's such a wonderful book...especially nice to snuggle up with during our dreary, cold winters," Miss Velmer noted. "a memorable cast of characters, with engaging Polynesian history, the clash of cultures and religions, exploding volcanoes, tropical warmth, coconut palms, and soft sea breezes! You will SO enjoy it, Mr. Lamont!" Scott chose that particular book because it was unlikely he would ever visit the actual Pacific islands, given his air travel phobia and tendency towards ocean seasickness.

The author headed home after a very productive day. Over the coming days, Scott settled into a regular summer work routine: after a bath and breakfast (while he listened to news on the radio), it was four hours typing at his Royal; this was followed by lunch, then errands or house duties and a twenty minute nap; next came two hours of afternoon research or pleasure reading, and two hours of polishing the morning's written output; then dinner with LP records playing in the background (Aaron Copland, Tony Bennett, Percy Faith, Andy Williams, Frank Sinatra), and an hour walk down to the river (perfect for future fishing, canoeing, and kayaking, he mused) after washing the dishes; and finally, some television viewing, or the usual answering mail, paying bills, checking bank statements, etc. The day ended with the author thinking deep but satisfying thoughts about life while listening to the cricket symphony as he sat rocking on his front porch swing. But each night as he went to bed, the famous, best-selling, wealthy author had to face his ultimate loneliness and frustration in failing to find and fall in love with that one, very special woman. Where could she be? How long must I wait?

Near the middle of June, Scott was about to get dinner going when the doorbell unexpectedly rang. (This was only the fourth time he heard the summons since he moved in -- the other times being once by a delivery man when his boxed belongings from New York arrived, and the other two when his distant farm neighbors came by to introduce themselves and drop off some home-grown produce.)

On his porch by the screened front door stood a 'hippie' -- a tanned young woman with long blondish-brown hair, looking to be in her early 20s. She was wearing a flowing, gypsy-style, purple skirt with paisley flower prints, and a sleeveless, bright orange cotton top, displaying part of her cleavage (sans bra), as well as her flat, bare belly. She had huarache leather sandals on her feet, peacock feather earrings in her ears, and several colorful strands of 'love beads' around her neck. Lamont could smell that she was wearing patchouli oil. Various-sized rings were on her fingers, and woven, banded bracelets were on both wrists. She was holding a casserole dish on a large blue cloth hot pad. Peering over her shoulder at his driveway, Scott noticed a bright yellow Volkswagen Beetle car with several flower decal stickers on it.

"Yes?" Scott asked.

"Hi! I'm Holly Alpert. I live in Cherokee. I work as a cashier at the Riverside Market. I heard you were new to the area, so I brought you a little surprise housewarming dinner! It's a homemade vegetable lasagna, still warm and ready to eat. I hope I'm not intruding. I didn't know your phone number or anything or I would have called you first. You haven't eaten dinner yet, have you?" she asked sweetly.

"Ah, no...I was just getting ready to make some dinner, so you came at a good time. Come on in," the author offered, opening the screen door. "I'm Scott Lamont. You can put the lasagna on the dining room table in there," he indicated. He went in behind her and pulled out two formal plates from that room's china cabinet, then went into the kitchen for napkins and silverware. "I don't drink alcohol, but I can offer you grape juice or lemonade," Scott called out. Holly chose grape juice. The author came back with the utensils and napkins, a serving spatula, and some sliced bread and butter, then went back and retrieved two glasses of juice.

"Well, let's go for it while it's still warm! I'm starving!" Holly declared as they sat down, dug in, and began eating. Looking around, she said, "You've got a really groovy place here, Scott!"

Lamont said he would give her a quick tour of the house after they finished their meal. Holly asked Scott if he had heard the new Beatles album yet --"Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" -- which had just been released. He confessed that he hadn't.

"Oh, you must listen to it! It's so far out! My two favorite songs are "A Day in the Life" and "She's Leaving Home." You must own a radio, so you can hear station WLS all the way from Chicago here in Cherokee and Ralston every night on AM 890. They are playing the whole album because of extra heavy listener demand," the young hippie woman excitedly declared. Scott replied that he only listened so far to Sioux Falls radio in the morning, but that he would check out her suggestion. "I do own some early Beatles albums, as well as LP records from the Bee Gees, the Association, the Moody Blues, and the Beach Boys," he added. "Any group with good vocal harmony pleases me."

"Boy, I sure wish I could go to California this summer," Holly sighed. "The Monterey Pop Music Festival is coming up tomorrow on the 16th...Wow, just think: three days of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead, Simon & Garfunkel, and more! I picture everybody stoned, getting high smoking grass. That's my scene! I'd like to drop acid too one of these days...'Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out,' you know? Yeah...LSD is supposed to blow your mind! My life in Cherokee is just sooo square, I need a major change. Have you heard that San Francisco is having the 'Summer of Love' in Haight-Ashbury and Golden Gate Park, Scott? Free music by the Jefferson Airplane, Donovan, and The Byrds. Free Love! Psychedelic drugs! Wear flowers in your hair...I need to sing and dance! Stop the War! Save the Earth! Be groovy and all-natural," Lamont's bohemian guest gushed. "I want to go to India, too, and study mediation, with some enlightened, you know, bearded guru. Oh maybe someday...someday." she sighed again.

Scott was inwardly amused by her enthusiasm, but realized that Alpert was not even remotely the kind of woman he could ever have a normal relationship with. After they ate, he showed her around the house. She headed right to the area near his stereo console and flipped through his record album collection. "What? No Bob Dylan, no Motown, no Cream, no Rolling Stones?" she teased. "But that's cool, Scott. Everything will be different after the Revolution. People's eyes will be opened! That's what Timothy Leary says." The author then noticed that whenever Holly moved or gestured, it showed that she had neither shaved her armpits nor her legs, which he found rather unconventional and disconcerting.

It was then that Holly the Hippie wandered by Lamont's work desk, with his typewriter and his three previous books stacked for good luck and encouragement nearby. Alpert picked one up, turned it over, and was looking at the back cover. "Oh my God, is that you?" she asked. "Are you this author guy Benjamin Janus? Did you write these books, Scott? You mentioned that you were some kind of a writer."

Scott was trapped, so he admitted the truth. "Yes, Scott Lamont is my real name. I moved here to Ralston for anonymity and quiet, so I would really appreciate it, Holly, if you kept my privacy a secret, O.K.? By the way, have you ever read any of my works?"

"Well, no...not really. Um...I'm not much of a reader, especially of such long books. I wasn't the best kind of student in school. But I like poetry...you know...like Bob Dylan!" she added perkily.

Lamont suggested that they enjoy some mint chocolate chip ice cream for dessert out on the front porch, where it was cooler. "The mosquitoes have mostly been staying away since I bought some citronella candles," he added.

Holly eventually asked Scott directly if he ever got lonely living out here by himself. "Sometimes," he vaguely allowed. She confessed that she was looking to make a new friend. "Most people don't understand me and tend to shy away," Alpert sadly admitted. "I'm a free spirit, and pretty much a non-conformist by Iowa standards. Maybe I come on too strong and crazy. I don't know sometimes..."

As they ate their ice cream, the bohemian visitor frankly asked Lamont what kind of women he liked.

Scott thought for a moment, then answered: "Well...to be perfectly honest, I would say Jean Simmons, June Allyson, or Teresa Wright."

"Who are they?" Holly wanted to know. "Rock stars?"

"No, just famous actresses from the movies, before your time," the writer explained. "O.K., how about June Lockhart and Barbara Billingsley? You know...the mom on 'Lassie,' and the mom on 'Leave It to Beaver?'"

"Oh, yeah...I get it now," she replied. "Hmmm."

Scott continued. "I like women, Holly, who are smart yet feminine, cooperative not competitive, gentle and caring. I want a woman I can trust, a sympathetic listener, a dedicated partner. And if children enter into the mix, I need a calm and loving mother who is also my devoted wife."

The hippie reached over and shyly squeezed the author's hand. If Scott wanted sex tonight, this was the 'green light,' he realized...but...it wasn't right. Not now, not ever.

"Well, it's getting late, Holly. Thanks for the delicious dinner. I hope you get to follow your dreams to California some day. I bid you a fine good night," Lamont said as he stood and shook Alpert's hand, politely smiling.

"Thanks for a nice evening too, Scott. I'm in the phone book if you ever want a repeat! I'll probably bump into you in the checkout line at the Riverside Market sometime, in any case," Holly grinned good-naturedly. She walked down the gravel driveway and hopped into her flowered yellow VW, turned on her radio loud, and drove off, back to Cherokee.

Soon, July brought more summer heat and humidity to Iowa, as expected. Scott phoned Allen Lewis and Random House in New York and reported good progress on his evolving book. His publishers said they hoped his newest opus would be ready by late September of next year, which was the traditional autumn reading 'launch' for anticipated best-sellers. In his leisure time, Lamont now took up fishing for bullhead, pike, and walleye in the Little Sioux River, using a locally rented rowboat. He also took Holly's suggestion and listened to WLS radio for short periods in the evenings. He really liked the new hit ballad "Ode to Billy Joe" by Bobbie Gentry, with its haunting mystery of what exactly was thrown off the Tallahatchie Bridge. Another nice song he discovered was by the Cryan' Shames, called "It Could Be We're in Love." He enjoyed riding his bicycle the six miles into Cherokee on a regular basis, to pick up small, necessary items (placing them in the snug backpack he had purchased), or to visit Sadie Velmer at the library, where he ordered and/or collected research materials from the big library in Des Moines that she obtained for him. He also liked to read the Cherokee Courier and the national weekly magazine "U.S. News & World Report." Movies coming to the Tomahawk Theater in August were "In the Heat of the Night" on the 4th, followed by "Bonnie and Clyde" on the 18th.

Meanwhile, in the nation's urban centers, the so-called 'Long, Hot Summer' erupted in racial violence, beginning in Detroit on July 23. Forty-three people were killed over a five day period of shooting, looting, and arson between black protestors and the police. The racial unrest soon spread to Cleveland and Newark. Like most Americans, Scott was shocked at the riots breaking out as he watched them unfold on the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite.

Near the end of the month, Lamont's doorbell rang one afternoon, just after he finished his lunch.

"Hi! I'm Tricia Kramer. I'm here on behalf of the 'Stop the War' campaign here in Cherokee County. Our two area headquarters are in Des Moines and Sioux Falls. I live in Larrabee, a few miles north and west of here. I would like a moment of your time, sir, if you can spare a few moments. And then I have a free pamphlet I would like to leave with you."

Tricia was about thirty, with close-cropped brown hair and rimless wire spectacles. She was of average female height and build, and was wearing bell-bottomed blue jeans and a brown tank top. She carried a clipboard and a wad of pamphlets, and sported a yellow-orange pencil wedged behind an ear. She was visibly perspiring in the late July heat.

"Hi. I'm Scott. Come on in, Miss Kramer," Lamont offered. "May I get you some cold lemonade?"

"Yes, please. That would be great. It's getting pretty fierce out there." After she sat on the living room sofa with her iced drink, Tricia began espousing her earnest political positions.

"Scott, we need to get out of Vietnam. Our boys are dying in an unjust war. We don't belong in Southeast Asia, meddling in the internal affairs of other countries. Now I'm not here soliciting any contributions -- unless, of course, you want to make a modest donation. I just want people in our county to vote next year for the candidate who will safely and quickly bring our troops home. Our position is outlined in this flyer," Tricia said, holding out a tri-folded color pamphlet.

The writer took it and quickly grasped its main tenets. "Hmm...It says here that your organization is also in favor of ultimately replacing our capitalistic system with a socialist one. Bloodlessly, if possible, but it calls for a social revolution none the less. Well, ending the war is one thing, Tricia, but this is quite another, wouldn't you agree? I'm sure you have watched the recent rioting on television. Is that the kind of lawless destruction you want increasing and then further spreading across the country?"

Kramer was caught somewhat off guard by the challenge. "Well, if that what it takes to bring about justice, economic equality, racial fairness, and radical change in America, then yes, I suppose I do condone it. Such an important revolutionary movement demands it. After all, 'you can't make an omelette without first breaking a few eggs,' as the old saying goes. I believe that history demands extremism when it is rightfully called for."

The author responded. "I admit that I am not a very political person, Tricia. I have voted both Democratic and Republican over the years. I agree with you that the war in Vietnam is a disaster, and I hope it ends soon. But I also believe that violence never brings about a solution to anything. Non-violent protests are a proud part of our American Constitution. Gandhi and MLK have shown us the true way to bring about positive, meaningful and lasting change. Let me ask you something, Miss Kramer: Are you aware of what has been happening in Communist China, beginning last year?"

The activist replied, "No, not really. Why?"

"I'm currently working on a novel on that very subject. Chairman Mao encouraged the formation of something called 'The Red Guards.' These are fanatical, armed youths whose goal is to eliminate all 'intellectual opposition' to mass Communist-Socialist thought. Teachers, authors, university administrators, journalists, artists, and others have been rounded up like criminals. They are beaten, tortured, imprisoned, and some even killed after public humiliation and denouncement. Millions of books have been emptied out of libraries en masse and burned. Anything pertaining to prior Chinese history and culture before Mao is slated to be destroyed. This is a dire catastrophe which will cripple the coming generations of that country for years, Tricia. Before long, in its radical, frenzied fervor, even anyone wearing eyeglasses...simply eyeglasses! -- just like yourself, Miss Kramer! -- was arrested, after their lenses were publically crushed underfoot, and the innocent victims were sent away to perform hard manual labor out in the countryside for months as a punishment. And this horror is continuing today, even as I speak, with no end in sight. So I ask you: is this what you want here in the United States? Mobs, terror, anarchy, destruction -- all for some vague, socialist, utopian ideal? Think long and hard about it, Miss Kramer."

"Um, well...I see your point, Mr. Lamont. I suppose we will need to simply 'agree to disagree,' as they say, about this topic. You know, you remind me somewhat of my ex-husband...only you are much smarter. I commend you for your clear and passionate views, and I respect you for that. I can also see that you are unmarried. If you ever want to meet over a drink or a meal, Scott, I would relish discussing a thousand topics further with you. Deep and educated thinkers are rare and far between here in rural Iowa. You say you recently came from New York City, so just wait and see...Discussions seem to come to a dead stop after talking corn and hogs!" Tricia smiled now, in a very changed and friendly manner. "Can I ask you a frank personal question, Scott? What kind of woman attracts your particular interest? If you don't mind my asking, that is...I would really like to know."

The writer quickly pivoted with the challenging, completely unexpected shift in tone and topic. "Frankly, Tricia, I'm looking for another charming Dinah Shore or a gracious lady like Donna Reed. Now, can I get you a last lemonade refill before you leave? I need to get back to my typewriter. Thanks for dropping by. I'll keep your pamphlet. Have a productive afternoon, and stay in the shade if you can when you walk," he advised. Tricia Kramer called out from the end of his driveway minutes after they shook hands and she departed, saying, "I'm in the phone book, Scott, if you ever change your mind about getting together sometime!"

One mid-August evening, after watching "Bonnie and Clyde" at the Tomahawk Theater, Lamont was walking past the Wig-Wam Tap on his way back to his parked car. The noisy tavern door was opened, and through the haze of cigarette smoke, Scott caught the eye of Bunny Cantrell, who was perched on a bar stool drinking beer with a crowd. She immediately got up unsteadily and rushed towards the door and grabbed the author's arm. "And where have you been hiding yourself, handsome?" Bunny blurted out, with boozy breath. She was wearing a tight, low-cut, red Spandex top, her ample breasts -- encased in an up-thrust brassiere -- looking like twin torpedoes ready to fire. Her shapely legs and firm buttocks were squeezed into a pair of off-gold toreador pants. Bunny must have used half an aerosol can of Aqua-Net hair spray to keep her red tresses aloft. She dragged Scott into the bar.

Heads turn as they came in. Disappointed male barflies, who had been working at getting Bunny drunk and into the sack, realized that they were out of luck for the time being. Other women in the den quickly sized up the rather ordinary-looking Lamont, noting his lack of a wedding ring. Bunny led her prey to an empty corner table in the rear, then asked what Scott was drinking.

"I don't drink, but I'll take a ginger ale. And I can't stay long, Miss Cantrell," the writer admitted. He hated bars.

"Oh please, call me Bunny, Scott," the Red Red Robin Cafe waitress pleaded. "Hey, Crystal! A ginger ale for my friend here and another tall Old Style for me!" she yelled her order across the commotion to the woman bartender.

Once the drinks arrived, Bunny offered Scott a cigarette. "Thanks, but I don't smoke either," he replied. Cantrell merely shrugged, then pulled a pack of Viceroys from her handbag, flipped one out, and lit up.

"So what DO you enjoy doing, sugar? Everybody has their own secret wants and desires, don't they?" She batted her extended eyelashes over her green eyes coyly, smiling suggestively, leaning in to hear his response. "I mean, you're a nice single guy. What exactly are you looking for in a woman, Scott? Good in the kitchen? Good with kids? Good for laughs? Or great in the bedroom?"

The room's smoke was beginning to choke him, so Lamont needed to wrap up this odd encounter fast and leave.

"Look, Bunny. You seem like a wonderful person. You are very attractive. And you truly flatter me with your attentions...or should I say 'intentions.'" (Cantrell was too intoxicated to catch the unsubtle reference.) "But I'm looking for a deep relationship with a woman with...um...a very different kind of personality than yours. I'm sorry, and I don't mean to be offensive. We can still be friends, but not in a romantic sense, I'm afraid. You see, I'm waiting for another Loretta Young, or an Olivia de Havilland or a Greer Garson. Elegant, uncomplicated, someone secure in herself and her own abilities, a selfless giver rather than a taker. Can you understand that view and not take offense with my honesty?"

Bunny was a bit surprised at the author's answer. She had never met an adult male who said such things. It was disturbing. She always assumed that men were simply beasts who wanted sex but little more. She had fashioned her whole adult persona around this belief. Other women were jealous of her formidable body and her power to manipulate men. Yet here was a man who was more of a man than any she had ever met. Even in the depths of her beer-soaked brain, however, she knew that this rare gem of a guy had gotten away.

"Sure, kiddo...and you're saying that I'm more like the Mae West type. I get the drift. I guess I'll see you around. Good luck with those swell gals if you ever get to Hollywood. I know when I'm out-classed."

Scott paid the bill for the drinks, thanked her for her company, squeezed her hand gently for a moment, and left. The drooling, drunk male barflies immediately went back on the attack, and Bunny went back to her carefully crafted sex-kitten act, a little lonelier but a little bit wiser. Did Ann-Margaret ever get the brush-off and feel lost like this? she wondered.

September brought the annual return of a new television season. The author enjoyed "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "Mission Impossible" on CBS on Sundays; "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." and "I Spy" on NBC on Mondays; NBC Tuesday Night at the Movies; The ABC Wednesday Night Movie; CBS Thursday Night Movie; "The Wild Wild West" on CBS and "Star Trek" on NBC on Fridays; and NBC Saturday Night at the Movies. And Scott's favorite game show was "Jeopardy!"

Life was good. His latest book was coming along well, and Lamont informed both his agent and his publisher as to its steady progress every month. Meanwhile, the seasons were starting to turn. Storm windows and doors replaced their screened versions. Firewood was being stockpiled. Farmers began putting their tractors away in barns, after gathering their feed corn crops and plowing the then dried, bare stalks under the black soil. Soon, birds would be flying south. A neighbor's golden retriever had birthed six puppies as well, so Lamont was invited to chose one -- ironically, the same breed he had as a boy back in Massachusetts. He named the frisky pup "Rascal."

October brought cooler weather after a brief warm spell of so-called Indian summer. The leaves changed color, then drifted silently to the ground. Scott enjoyed vigorously raking his fallen oak tree leaves into piles and carefully burning them, the smoldering smell reminding him of his New England childhood. Evenings now had a sharp nip in the air. Sweaters and warm quilts were taken out of storage and put to use. Pumpkins were harvested and made ready for Halloween.

And then, one magical day at the Cherokee Library, the author finally met the woman of his dreams.

Her name was Laurie Gerber, age thirty-one. She taught English to sophomores at Washington High School. ("Home of the Braves!") Scott had just finished chatting with Sadie at the circulation desk. He was about to head over to the periodicals and read the latest issue of the Courier newspaper when Laurie walked in. She looked amazingly like Natalie Wood. She went to the fiction stacks and started choosing some books. Lamont saw her grab selections from Cheever ("The Swimmer"), Updike ("Rabbit, Run"), S.E. Hinton ("The Outsiders"), and Vonnegut ("Cat's Cradle"). Miss Velmer called Scott over and introduced the pair.

"Looks like you picked some strong winners there," Lamont offered, broadly smiling -- indicating the attractive young woman's pile of reading choices. They conversed in hushed library tones for about fifteen minutes about their mutual love of reading, with Sadie peering over approvingly from her office desk several yards away. When Scott discovered that Laurie was single, he asked if she would like to go for coffee sometime when she was free. Miss Gerber happily agreed.

Over the next few weeks, the author and the teacher got to know each other better. They went for long walks around town, then alternated making lunch or dinner at each other's houses as dates. Laurie turned out to be just what Scott was looking for: smart and well-read, gentle, feminine, gracious, trustworthy, and consistent in her moods and positive outlook on life. She also adored Rascal, Lamont's affectionate and rapidly-growing Golden Retriever. Miss Berger had grown up in Georgia, and had a slight but endearing southern accent. She was impressed when she found out that Scott was a writer.

The couple celebrated Halloween together at her place, passing out candy to Cherokee's costumed miniature ghosts and goblins. In November, the first snow flurries appeared, and fireplaces across rural Iowa were lit in the evenings. Laurie and Scott saw the movie "Cool Hand Luke" at the Tomahawk, and for Thanksgiving, she cooked Lamont a wonderful turkey feast. By now, the pair was holding hands and snuggling and lightly kissing. Scott was thrilled and increasingly happy. He was able to keep to his writing schedule during the weekdays while Laurie kept teaching at the high school.

In December, they watched the latest movies "A Man For All Seasons" and "The Graduate" in town. Meanwhile, bitter cold and heavy snow blanketed the whole state of Iowa. Winter break meant that the busy English teacher was off for two weeks of well-deserved holiday relaxation. Neither person was an established churchgoer, but very pleasant Christmas Day with festive dinner was held at Scott's house. After exchanging simple gifts from under his nicely decorated and lighted evergreen tree, Lamont decided to reveal the complete truth about his actual life circumstances -- he was best-selling author Benjamin Janus. He showed Laurie copies of his three published books. She was very impressed!

By now, the couple was getting more serious in terms of their relationship. Folks in both Cherokee and Ralston were taking notice. To avoid any small-town scandal -- especially for the high school teacher, as a model for the young people in the community -- the pair never stayed overnight at each other's houses. Naturally, they had become increasingly physical and affectionate, but their ardor stopped short of anything sexual by mutual consent. It was painful but accepted.

Before long, it was a new year --1968.

Scott was the first to bring up the serious topic of marriage. He was sure that Laurie was the one he wanted to spend his life with. They had many discussions about it. She confessed that she was also in love with him, after he revealed his true, deep feelings towards her.

They decided to have a simple civil ceremony at the County Courthouse in Cherokee on Monday, February 5. Neither wanted a huge, traditional wedding with dozens of guests nor their families in attendance. They would explain the decision to their respective parents in Massachusetts and Georgia later. For a short honeymoon, they would go a modest resort in Sioux Falls (a two-hour drive away) for the weekend so that Laurie wouldn't miss any days at school. Scott would ask Sadie Velmer to look in on and feed Rascal while they were away. The dog liked her and she really liked the dog too.

Everything was blissful after they got married and Miss Gerber became Mrs. Lamont. Laurie moved to Ralston, but kept her teaching job for the time being. Making love under piles of warm blankets in bed at night was ecstatic! February and March soon passed by, with farmers and frankly everyone waiting for the eventual warmer spring weather, still months away. Yet everyone seemed shocked on March 31 when President LBJ unexpectedly announced that he would not run for re-election in November. What exactly was going on in Washington -- and in the whole country, for that matter -- and why? was the talk of Cherokee and Ralston during the coming weeks.

During his monthly call reporting his new book's progress to his agent and Random House, the author revealed the surprise that he had gotten married. His publisher was very pleased and congratulatory, but Allen Lewis said, "That's great news, Scott, but did you happen to have your wife sign any type of pre-nuptial agreement? I don't have to remind you that your estate is quite substantial, and you really should have protected your financial assets." Lamont admitted that, no, he didn't. The thought had briefly crossed his mind, but he further explained, "I'm completely sure that Laurie is the one, Allen...I didn't want to sully our new union with such awkward legalities. Believe me. I'm not worried in the least about it. I completely trust her."

"Oh, Scott...I pray to God you are right. I just wish you had consulted me earlier, both as your friend as well as your agent," Allen replied. The author thanked him for his concerns. Impressive wedding gifts soon arrived from both his agent and his publisher.

The following month, on April 4th, the nation was stunned by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. The country once again erupted into bitter racial violence, as several major cities burned out of control. Military troops and National Guardsmen were eventually called in to help quell the tragic arson and looting. Politicians and church leaders -- black and white --called for peace and calm.

Still, in May, Mother Nature -- being undeterred, as always, by humanity's problems -- underwent her annual rebirth, and a glorious spring finally burst to life. Scott and Laurie brought their backyard garden alive by planting raspberry bushes, tomatoes and green beans. It was warm enough now to go fishing and canoeing on the Little Sioux River, and so they did -- taking their barking, racing dog Rascal along for the fun. The happy couple also went on bicycle rides.

But on June 6 (just a few days after Laurie began her summer vacation from teaching), Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy -- brother of the previously slain U.S. president, John F. Kennedy -- was assassinated by a crazed gunman in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. The nation was once again plunged into grief and mourning, as it had two months earlier with the death of Dr. King. Many Americans wondered where the country was headed, as angry protesters both accelerated their demonstrations against the Vietnam War and marched in favor of other important social issues. LBJ's vice-president, Hubert H. Humphrey, would now have to battle against anti-war Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy for the Democratic nomination in August at their National Convention in Chicago, to determine who would run against Republican Richard M. Nixon for the Presidency of the United States in November.

The rest of the summer was both relaxing and productive -- that is, until August, when three events happened: one very good, but the other two absolutely terrible.

First, Scott finished his fourth novel, "China Wind," an 800+ page epic. The draft copy was sent to New York where his Random House editor would polish it up and Lamont would later approve it. His book would be ready and on the store shelves nationwide by September 30, as planned.

But secondly, Laurie started to suddenly act withdrawn and moody. When Scott asked her what was wrong, she avoided the question. Finally, after several days, she produced an opened letter and thrust it in Scott's face. It was written to Laurie by the political activist, Tricia Kramer. In it, Tricia told how she had visited Scott last summer -- when he was still single -- and how they had vigorously discussed the 'Stop the War' movement that she was promoting. She had left a brochure with Scott with more contact information. However, last May 14th, Tricia was asked by Scott to come over alone to the house in the morning when Laurie was away, as usual, teaching at the high school. The letter went on to detail how Scott had physically attacked her and demanded sex, but that she refused and fled in shock. Tricia was writing to inform Laurie that her husband was secretly a sexual predator.

The stunned author denied the entire episode. "It never happened, Laurie! I have no idea why she would ever make up such a horrible thing. Please believe me!" he begged.

But Laurie had Scott sleep downstairs on the sofa (next to Rascal, snoozing on his favorite rug) for the next two weeks. Imagine his shock when Laurie announced one morning that she had secretly talked over her feelings of betrayal, anger, and disgust with both a marriage counselor and a divorce lawyer. "I can't forgive you, Scott. I won't forgive you. I want a divorce. I'm moving out, and I'm getting an apartment back in Cherokee." Despite her husband's pleas and confession of complete innocence, Laurie packed up her belongings and left.

When Lamont drove to Larrabee and attempted to find Tricia Kramer and straighten out her devastating, marriage-destroying fabrication, he was dismayed to learn that she had left town, leaving no forwarding address. Calling the 'Stop the War' office in Sioux Falls where Tricia often checked in also yielded a blank. One co-worker thought he heard someone say that Kramer moved to Minneapolis. Scott plunged into an agonizing, deep depression. He lost his appetite and couldn't sleep.

On August 26-29 in Chicago, protestors violently clashed with Mayor Daley's police forces at the Democratic National Convention. The appalling rock-throwing, tear-gassing and baton-clubbing riot scene was splashed across the nation's television screens. Half of the country condemned the bloody police escalation and were horrified, while the other half of Americans wanted 'law and order' restored at any cost, and applauded Mayor Daley's response.

While America was reeling from its latest civic unrest and social division, Scott Lament had a second bombshell hit his once happy, harmonious life: he was served with official divorce papers, delivered by certified mail. He phoned Allen Lewis and asked for his advice. "Without a pre-nuptial agreement, Scott, I'm afraid you are going to lose a substantial amount of money, depending on the judge and how well both lawyers negotiate. Let me give your publisher a call and see what they say," his agent replied.

Allen called back within the hour. "Random House advises you to settle up as quickly and quietly as possible. Don't drag this out in court. Demand from the judge through your lawyer that the final settlement be sealed from the public for twenty-five years. Also demand that absolutely no leaks of this are to be made to the press, because with your new book coming out, your publisher fears that any embarrassing scandal or publicity will sink sales badly -- hurting both you and them. They also recommend that you hire a local Iowa lawyer rather than a big name, high-dollar attorney from New York. Some Midwestern judges frankly hate all lawyers from the East coast. Scott, my friend, I'm so sorry that this awful thing had to happen to you, of all people!"

So Lamont did as he was advised. He hired Bill Hillsborough, a divorce specialist from Des Moines. He worked out the details with Laurie's lawyer behind the scenes, which took nine days. On September 17th, the former couple and their lawyers met in Judge Victor Ellison's chambers in the county courthouse of the state's capitol. Laurie wore dark sunglasses the entire time. When the judge realized that such "irreconcilable differences" could not be resolved under any circumstances, he made the divorce final. Both parties signed the official legal documents. No publicity of any kind, and a 25-year seal on the record were both allowed. Laurie was awarded a flat 40% of the author's current assets. After taxes and legal fees, the settled amount came out to $857,000. Scott later broke down and cried in private, but not because of the money. He was badly hurt and betrayed. The whole episode was a nightmare. He ruefully realized that he could never watch another Natalie Wood movie again without getting seriously nauseous.

But the author had to pull himself together for the nationwide book tour of his latest best-seller, which would begin in early October. A dozen cities to blitz through in a month. Random House was providing a deluxe motor home with two male drivers and a female press agent to drive around the country. Book store signings, spotlight radio and television appearances, publicity galas, and fancy luncheons. Scott had done all of this before with his earlier books, and fully knew it would be exhausting. His heart and soul had been battered by the divorce, but he had to hide his pain out of necessity now. He was Benjamin Janus, after all. Sadie once again agreed to take care of Rascal during the author's absence from Ralston.

As it turned out, "China Wind" was an incredible success, even better than the author and Random House had hoped. The recent blow to Scott's finances was quickly erased.

But what Lamont would never learn was the real story behind what had happened between him and Laurie.

The fact was Holly Alpert, Tricia Kramer, Bunny Cantrell, and Laurie Gerber were all friends. They had met at a local knitting group with other craft-oriented townswomen. Each gradually admitted to being unhappy and desirous of leaving northwestern Iowa, if only they had enough money. When Holly returned from her visit with Scott and revealed that he was a famous and wealthy author, a plot was hatched by Tricia. ("Look, he's rich...nobody should have that much money...screw the System, we're just getting our fair share...so don't worry or feel guilty," she rationalized to the others.) Tricia and Bunny would subsequently also try and find out what kind of woman this unaware single man was looking for, then Laurie would combine those qualities and rehearse acting as a perfect conglomerate of all those attributes. Laurie would make Scott fall in love with her and they would get married -- but only for about seven months or so. Then, grounds for divorce would be falsely concocted, and Laurie would gain a fortune -- splitting the amount in fair percentages with her friends. Each woman would later move away from the area after awhile and start a new life. They would then vow never to tell anybody what they had done, or see each other again.

This cunning, evil ruse earned Laurie $428,500 (for marrying the man, pretending to being in love, and sleeping with him); Tricia earned $162,833 (as the mastermind and writer of the false letter); Holly earned $132,833; and Bunny, the same amount of $132,833.

On November 5th, Richard Nixon captured the White House in a landslide election victory over Hubert Humphrey, largely on a "law and order" platform. America, it seemed, wanted no part in any kind of 'social revolution,' at this point in her history. The majority simply wanted peace and a return to stability after having been battered by race riots, anti-war protests, and dual assassinations during an unsettling and extraordinarily turbulent year.

When Scott returned to Ralston, he sensed that his house was still haunted by the spirit of his ex-wife. He then decided to sell his house and move overseas to western Ireland, both for income tax savings and to begin a fresh, new life. He legally changed his name to his pen name of Benjamin Janus. He also obtained a new passport. Next, he went to a renowned hypnotherapist --Dr. Jane Maywood -- in Madison, Wisconsin, who helped him finally overcome both his fear of flying and his tendency to ocean seasickness. Benjamin learned that both phobias were related to dual, reoccurring nightmares that he had as a child.

When Sadie Velmer next saw Benjamin at the Cherokee Library, he told her in strict confidence about his divorce, and asked if she wanted Rascal to keep as her own dog, seeing as he was going to move to Ireland. She gladly accepted. Then the author gave Sadie an autographed copy of "China Wind," as well as another copy for her library stacks. In her personal copy, he inscribed: "To Sadie Velmer -- My best friend in Cherokee...I will always remember you." Inside the book was a surprise check for the library for $20,000 -- the price he got after selling his house on 529 Oriole Drive in Ralston.

Benjamin Janus surrendered his American passport at the U.S. consulate in Dublin on April 12, 1969, and officially became an Irish citizen. He would retain both his agent, Allen Lewis, and Random House Publishers for the rest of his writing career. He found a lovely stone cottage near Killarney, in County Kerry, out in the lush, green countryside, and eagerly began working on his fifth book, set in Russia.

Eighteen months later, he met and fell in love with Fiona O'Hara, a beautiful Irish lass of thirty-one years whom he later married -- after a pre-nuptial agreement was inked, of course. They would soon have a pair of darling twin daughters. Benjamin Janus was happy at last, and, curiously, Fiona didn't remind him of any female movie star...she reminded him only as his beloved "Fiona." His lucky star had finally appeared...

As for the scheming quartet back in Iowa, Holly Alpert finally made it to California and opened her own flower shop in Santa Monica; Bunny Cantrell moved to Rapid City, South Dakota, and started a deluxe beauty parlor; After quitting her teaching job, Laurie Gerber retired to Sarasota Springs, Florida, and took up summer stock acting as a hobby; and Tricia Kramer went to New York City to attend law school and continue her political activism. One rainy evening, however, a taxi cab skidded out of control and Kramer was killed as she ran jaywalking across a street in Greenwich Village. She was only thirty-two years old...

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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