AFTER DINOSAURS



A Novel

ROBERT A. CHAMBERLIN

After Dinosaurs

A Novel

Free to read and share.

afterdinosaurs.com

Prologue — The Ghost in the Painting

Hays, Kansas, the 1920s

The room in New York had been brick-lined and narrow and on the third floor of a building that had been several things before. The brick was old. The window at the end of the room faced west. The light came in at four in the afternoon and stayed until the light left, and during those hours Knight worked, and during the other hours he did not.

He had taken the room because it was cheap and because no one knew he had it. He told his wife he was teaching. He told the school he was painting. Both were partly true. Mostly he was in the room, and the room had a wall, and the wall had the painting on it.

The painting was large, a single canvas, and it covered the long inner wall from the wainscoting to a foot below the ceiling. Two dinosaurs in it. One rearing. One crouched. Between them and beneath them, a skull broken open at the temple, the break running down through the jaw and into the ground the dinosaurs stood on. The ground was the color of the bluff country west of the Laramie range. He had never been to that country. He had drawn its dinosaurs for the men who had.

He painted the skull twelve times. He painted it and walked away and came back and painted over it. He painted it smaller. He painted it larger. He painted it whole and then he painted it broken. The break he could not get right for a long time. A skull breaks the way a skull breaks; a man painting a skull can paint it anyhow; the anyhow is the problem. He knew what the break should look like. He had carried the knowing of it for some years by the time he came to the wall. He painted it finally the way he had always been going to paint it. When he had the break, he had the painting.

He went back into the room for some months more. He painted the ground under the dinosaurs, the light on the far ridge, the small scrub that grew there. He was trying to make it so a man would see the dinosaurs before he saw the skull, and the skull before he saw the break, and the break last of all. He thought he had got it. He could not tell.

One morning he stood in front of the painting and knew he was not going to change

anything else in it. He cleaned his brushes. He rolled his rags. He walked out of the room and shut the door and went down the stairs. He paid the rent through the end of the year and never went back.

The room had other uses after that. A bar, for a while, which left the smell of beer in the brick. A rooming house, which left worse smells. A period of no use at all, which left a slow green bloom of mildew along the low edge of the painting before the landlord's son noticed it and wiped it off with vinegar and did not mention it to anyone. The painting was there through all of it. No one looked at it long.

In 1919 a dealer came through the building and understood in perhaps ninety seconds what he was looking at. He had it removed by a crew that specialized in such removals. The painting traveled to a warehouse in Brooklyn. It sat there until a museum in Kansas bought it on the rumor of what it was and had it crated and shipped west and installed on the east wall of the dinosaur room in the spring of 1922.

* * *

The old man stood in front of it. He had been standing there a while.

He was tall and had gone narrow with age, and he held his hat in both hands the way men do in churches and in front of things they have not decided about. The light in the room was poor. It came from two high windows and from a fixture that buzzed, and it fell on the painting unevenly, so that the driving animal was bright and the one giving way stood in a brown dusk, and the skull between them was lit just enough.

There was a case in front of the painting, low and long, glass on a wood frame. In it lay a thing the room had not made a card for yet. Stone the color of old bread, and pressed into the stone the shape of an animal lying on its side with its skin still on it, the skin gone to rock but holding, holding the pebbled grain of it, the seams down the flank, the pull of the neck where it had dried before it sank. The old man's eye went to it and came back up to the painting and went down to it again, the way a hand returns to a sore tooth.

"You can stand closer," a voice said. "It doesn't mind."

Knight stood near the painting with a soft cloth in his hand, working at the bottom edge of the frame where the dust gathered. He seemed older than the old man, or wore his age nearer the surface. He kept his face very close to the work. When he looked at the painting he looked at it from a hand's distance, tilting, finding it by pieces, the way a man reads who has nearly run out of reading.

"I made it," he said. He said it lightly, as if it were a small thing and they were already partway into a conversation that had been going on for some time. "A long time ago now. You stop being sure of the years. The colors I'm sure of, though. I could tell you the colors with my eyes shut, which is most of how I see them now."

The old man did not answer. His thumb moved on the brim of the hat.

Knight drew the cloth along the frame, finding the wood by feel where his eye no longer found it. "The animals were the part I couldn't lose," he said. He passed the cloth once. "I painted this so I wouldn't forget."

He said it without weight, as if naming a tool.

The old man's gaze had not moved from the skull. When he spoke his voice came out lower than he seemed to intend, and a little roughened, as though it had not been used in some hours.

"That looks like Como Bluff," he said.

Knight tilted his head toward the canvas, considering it as if the remark were about the brushwork. "Does it. I've heard people say it puts them somewhere. Never the same somewhere." He passed the cloth once more and stopped. "You don't forget these things," he said. "You just stop looking at them."

Something went through the old man then. It was not large. A man watching from the door would have seen only that he shifted his weight and did not find a better place to put it, that his breath changed, that the hat went still in his hands. He looked at the giving-way animal in its brown dusk, and at the skull, and at the crack in the skull, and a color came up his neck and did not leave. He put one hand out, not toward the

painting but toward the glass case between him and it, and let it rest on the wood frame, and held there, as if the room had moved under him and the case was what there was to take.

“Are you all right,” Knight said. He had not seen the hand. He had heard the change in the breathing and turned his face toward the sound, missing him by a foot, searching.

The old man did not say whether he was all right.

Knight let the silence be what it was. He found the lower molding by touch and drew the cloth along it, and did not press the old man for anything.

“It begins before I came into it,” Knight said at last, from very close to the canvas now, almost into it, his nose a finger’s width from the paint, finding the driving animal’s eye and losing it. “It begins with two men, and a great deal of bone, and a country nobody had finished drawing yet.” He found the eye. His voice went easy and far off, settling, the voice of a man who has told a thing to himself so many times that telling it aloud costs him nothing he can feel. “Cope,” he said. “And Marsh. You would have liked Cope. That was the trouble.”

The names did not fill the room. They made it smaller.

The buzzing light. The held breath. The hand on the glass. The old man was looking at a low rise of painted ground where two animals had been fighting for as long as there had been a wall to hang them on, and at a place between them, and he was somewhere else, and the somewhere else was coming up around him the way ground does when it has been hollow a long time and you have only just put your full weight on it.

The room went out from under both of them, and the prairie wind at the seams of the building became a colder wind off a city street in a year a long way back, where a young man climbed to a door with a great deal of bone waiting behind it, his hand already lifting to knock, with no idea in the world what it would ask of him.

Chapter 1 — The Visit

Philadelphia, 1897

The house on Pine Street looked like it was trying to swallow something. Knight noticed that first, before anything else, before the iron gate that listed on one hinge, before the dead climbing rose along the brick that nobody had cut back in at least two seasons. He had come up the street with his collar turned against the damp, twenty-two and down from New York to draw the bones of a man he had never met, his fingers counting the cold brass numbers screwed into the weathered pine, two, one, zero, two, the metal biting through the thin leather of his glove.

Crates on the porch, stacked unevenly, some stamped with return addresses from Wyoming and Montana. A jawbone, cleaned white but still wearing a thread of sandstone matrix, sat on the top step as though someone had set it down to answer the door and never come back.

The door opened before Knight had finished knocking, and a hand came out of the dark hallway and took him by the wrist.

“You’re the one Wortman sent,” the man said. It was not a question. The hand was hot and dry and very strong, and it pulled him over the threshold and into a smell he had no single word for, varnish and dust and old paper and something underneath all of it that was mineral and faintly sweet, like wet stone left to dry in a closed room. “Come in, come in. Mind the crate. The other crate. There. Now stop.”

Knight stopped.

He had been told the house was full. He had imagined full the way a studio is full, crowded with the tools of its owner’s work. He had not imagined this.

The hall ran back into the house like a seam through rock, and on both sides of it the collection rose past his shoulders and past his head. Drawers pulled half out and never pushed back, their trays heavy with teeth. Long bones stacked the way cordwood is

stacked, butt-end out, each one tagged with a curl of paper going brown at the edges. Flat crates leaning, stenciled with the names of places he didn't know, WYOMING and FORT BRIDGER and a county somewhere that the lamplight wouldn't give him. From one pried box the dried excelsior had spilled onto the floor like coarse hair, and it caught on his trouser cuff for a step until he stooped and brushed it free. When he straightened, his shoulder grazed a leaning tray and a tooth slid to its lip and stopped, and he put it back with one finger.

A jar stood on the newel post at his elbow with something pale suspended in it, and the alcohol had gone the color of weak tea, and whatever hung inside turned very slowly as the floor took Knight's weight.

"Cope," the man said, releasing the wrist to thump his own chest with the flat of his hand. "Edward Cope. You'll have heard the rest of it. You don't need the rest of it." He was already moving. He moved the way water moves when a dam goes, not gracefully, but with a great deal of itself, all at once, downhill. He went down the hall sideways between the crates with a candle-end going, and Knight came after, turning his shoulders the way Cope turned his, and the bones brushed both of them as they passed, and Cope was talking the whole time without once looking back to see if any of it landed.

"You draw animals. Living ones. Wortman says you sit at the menagerie and draw the cats until the keepers know you. Good. That's the only school there is. A man who draws from the dead animal learns the dead animal. Useless. Worse than useless. They have you painting restorations now, I hear, flesh back onto old bones. Better than the men who put dead things into glass and congratulate themselves on accuracy. Death is not accuracy. Death is only the part that waited. Here."

They came out of the hall into a room that had once, Knight thought, been a parlor, and there was no parlor left in it. The windows were there, but the daylight had to fight to the middle of the floor and lost. Tables stood end to end down the length of it, and the tables were covered, and what they were covered with was the past.

Skulls. A skull as long as Knight's forearm with the teeth still seated in it, each tooth a serration, each serration meant for something. A pelvis like a piece of architecture.

Vertebrae in a row going from the size of a fist to the size of a man's chest, laid out so that the spine grew as your eye traveled it, and at the far end of the table the animal the spine belonged to was only suggested, a curve of rib, a promise.

Cope set the candle down in a saucer that already held three dead candles, and turned, and for the first time stood still long enough for Knight to see him.

He was not well. Knight saw it the way he saw everything, all at once and through the surface, the way the skin had gone loose and yellowish over the bones of the face, the way the collar stood away from the neck because the neck had shrunk inside it, the way the eyes had too much light for the rest of him, as if all the fuel left in the man had been routed to that one place. His hair stood up in white shocks. His coat hung off him as though it had been cut for a broader man, or for the same man in a year when he weighed more.

But it was the hands that Knight kept. The hands were perfectly steady. While the rest of him trembled faintly, the way a struck wire trembles, the hands, when they reached for the long skull on the table, went to it without hesitation and lifted it and turned it to the light as gently as you would turn a sleeping child. That was what Knight could not stop looking at, the contradiction of it, the wreck of the man and the certainty of his hands.

"Closer," Cope said. "You can't see it from there."

Knight came closer.

"Closer than that. You're an artist, aren't you, not a clergyman. You don't have to keep a respectful distance from the dead."

Cope laughed, and the laugh turned into a cough, and the cough went on past the point where Knight expected it to stop, and Cope rode it standing up, one hand flat on the table, the skull held out from his body in the other so that nothing should happen to the skull. When it passed he wiped his mouth on the back of his wrist and went straight on as if the cough had been a knock at a door he'd decided not to answer. "Dust. Thirty years of rock dust in every room I've ever worked in. The price of proximity. Here.

Take it. Take it, I won't drop it and neither will you, you've better hands than your face says. Now. Tell me what you see."

The skull was heavier than Knight expected, the way real things are always heavier than the idea of them. He brought it up close. He brought it up very close, because that was how he saw, closer than other men, near enough that the world narrowed to the thing itself and the room fell away around it. The bone was dark and dense, and the teeth, when he turned them under the candle, were not white but the brown of old honey, and along the cutting edge of each one ran a line of tiny teeth-within-the-tooth, a saw set into a knife.

"Edges," Knight said. "On the teeth. Like a bread knife."

"Like a bread knife." Cope said it back to him with enormous pleasure, rolling it. "Yes. Exactly like a bread knife. It did not eat bread. What does an edge like that want?"

"Meat."

"Meat that fights back. Meat with bone in it. You don't grow a saw to cut a thing that holds still." Cope took the skull out of his hands, gently, but he took it, the way a rider takes back the reins, and held it up beside his own face, jaw to jaw, and for a moment the living head and the dead one hung in the candlelight together. Knight's hand twitched toward the satchel where his pencils were, because he wanted that, he wanted it badly, the two long jaws side by side, and he had not yet been told he was allowed.

"Eighty feet of swamp away," Cope said, to the skull, not to Knight, "and you'd hear it before you saw it. That's the thing they get wrong. They draw you a lizard sunning on a rock. A torpid thing. A slow thing. They want everything to be a turtle. Low, slow, easy to put a card under." He set the skull down, not back where it had been, somewhere new, so that the careful order of the table was a quarter-turn less ordered than it had been a minute ago. "Come here. Come *here.*"

* * *

The afternoon went like that. Knight would remember it afterward as one continuous

motion, though he knew there must have been pauses, there must have been moments when nothing happened, and he could not find them. Cope did not so much show him the collection as ride it, the way you might ride a flood that had carried away your house, knowing every piece of it, grieving none of it, pointing out the furniture as it went by.

Here was a tooth the size of a banana, and it had come out of Wyoming in a block of stone that had taken four men to lift, and the men had been Cope's men, paid out of Cope's pocket, in a season when Cope had no pocket left to pay out of. Here was the foot of something, set on its own velvet in a cigar box. Knight counted the toes twice and got a different number twice. Cope lifted the lid of the box the way other men lift the lids of jewel cases.

Here, on the wall, where another man would have hung his children, were the long shallow trays of the Texas reptiles, the ones with the great bony sails standing up off their spines, and Cope took one down and laid it across both his arms like a tray of bread and brought it to Knight. "Now. What's the sail for," he said, and waited, actually waited, his eyes bright and impatient and delighted, for a young man he had met forty minutes ago to solve in one guess a question he had spent twenty years arguing about in print.

"To catch the sun," Knight said. "In the morning. Like turning it to the light to warm."

Cope went very still.

It was the only time he went still without coughing. He looked at Knight over the bony sail of the reptile that had been dead a quarter of a billion years, and something moved across his face that Knight had no name for, and then it was gone and the motion came back, faster than before, as if to make up the lost seconds.

"You see," he said, to the room, to the bones, to nobody, "*you see*, a boy off the street, a boy who draws cats, and he has it in a sentence. Not a fin. Some idiot called it a fin, in print, a paddle on a reptile that never saw water in its life, and his men draw beautifully and not one of them ever stood still in front of the thing and *asked it* what it wanted." He set the tray back on the wall. He set it back crooked. "Draw what you see," he said,

and it came out of him not as advice but as a creed, the way another man might say a prayer he'd worn smooth. "Not what they tell you. They will tell you a great deal."

Knight had the pencil in his hand by now. He didn't remember deciding to. He was on one knee against the edge of a table with his sketchbook braced on his thigh, getting the long skull down, the bread-knife one, holding the book up close to his face, very close, near enough that his breath stirred the page. The lines did not exist for him until they were near. He had stopped, years ago, being ashamed of the distance at which the world consented to be clear.

"You hold it like you're going to eat it," a voice said behind him.

He hadn't heard her come in.

* * *

She was not what the house had led him to expect. The house was a wreck and a wonder and the man was a flood, and the woman who stood in the doorway with a tray was none of those things. She was contained. She was dressed plainly and well, and she held the tray level, and she looked at Knight on his knee with his book against his nose with an expression that was not unkind and was not surprised. It was the expression of a person who has seen a great many people fall under this particular spell in this particular room and has formed, over the years, a steady opinion about it.

"Mr. Knight," she said. Not a guess. Someone had told her his name, and she had kept it. "I'm Mrs. Cope."

He got up too fast and his knee caught the table and a small vertebra rocked and he put his hand on it and stilled it and felt himself go red. "Ma'am."

"Don't mind the table. They've all been knocked off worse than that." She came into the room. She did not pick her way; she walked it the way Cope walked it, knowing the buried books under the rug. But where Cope's path through the room was the path of a creature that no longer saw the obstacles, hers was the path of someone who had decided, long ago and on purpose, exactly where to put her feet.

She set the tray down on the one clear corner of the one table that had a clear corner. Knight understood, watching her do it, that the corner was clear because she kept it clear, that it was the single square foot of this house that was hers and that she defended it daily against the tide. On the tray were a covered dish and a glass and a small brown bottle and a spoon.

“Edward,” she said. “You haven’t eaten.”

“I’m showing the boy the Permian.” Cope didn’t turn around. He had another drawer open. “We’ll eat. We’ll eat presently.”

“You said that at eleven.” She uncovered the dish. Whatever was in it had gone the way food goes when it waits. She looked at it, and looked at him, and something passed over her face. Not anger, Knight thought, nothing so loud as anger. It was the look of a person totting a column of figures she has totted many times and reaching, again, the same sum. “I’ll bring something hot. Sit down while I’m gone.”

“I don’t need to sit.”

“Sit down, Edward.” She had not raised her voice. She did not raise it now. She set the small brown bottle and the spoon at his place with a click of glass on wood that was somehow louder than anything Cope had said all afternoon. She stood beside the chair, and she waited, and the waiting had weight. Knight watched the flood meet the one thing in the house that did not move when it came.

Cope sat down.

He did it grumbling, he did it making it look like his own idea, he did it telling Knight over his shoulder that the Permian had waited two hundred million years and could wait while a man humored his wife. But he sat. And Knight saw, in the moment of his sitting, what the standing had been costing him all afternoon. Something in the man’s spine let go when the chair took him, a long breath he had not been spending on words, and for the space of that breath he looked his age and worse than his age. His hand on the table was not steady after all. It had only been steady when there was a bone in it.

Anne Cope measured the dose into the spoon. She did it without comment and without ceremony, the way a person does what she has done five hundred times, and Cope took it the same way, opening his mouth like a much younger and a much older creature both at once. The brown bottle went back on the tray, and none of it was discussed. Knight looked very hard at his sketchbook, because he had the sudden strong sense that he was seeing something he had not been invited to see.

“You hold the page very close,” Anne said to him. To Knight. Quietly, while Cope worked the taste of the medicine off his teeth and reached already for the nearest tooth in the nearest tray to fill his hands again.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Then don’t let him make you draw in bad light.” It was not sympathy. It was an instruction fitted to the facts, and Knight found himself nodding as though she had corrected a measurement.

“There is no bad light for a true line,” Cope said from the chair.

“There is bad light for eyes,” Anne said. “Even yours.” She turned the lamp wick up until the flame strengthened, and the teeth caught gold along their edges and the dust lifted and turned visibly in the strengthened air. Something passed between the two of them then, too practiced to be argument and too edged to be habit alone. Cope looked down first, because the bread was there and the hand required something to do.

“He’ll talk until you fall down,” Anne said, to Knight, low. “He’s always been like that. Don’t let him persuade you you’re not tired. You are. You only haven’t noticed yet.” Then she went out the way she’d come, level and certain. A door at the back of the house opened and closed, and the smell of the kitchen reached the parlor a moment later, woodsmoke and something with onion in it. It was so ordinary and so human in that room full of the teeth of dead giants that Knight felt, briefly and without understanding why, like he might cry.

“Now,” said Cope, restored, the spoon already forgotten, a small black tooth turning in his fingers. “Where was I.”

* * *

He had been, it turned out, everywhere. Knight learned that this was simply how the man's mind ran. It did not go in a line, it went in a flood-plain, spreading, finding the low ground, doubling back. A skull would remind him of the man who'd dug it, and the man who'd dug it would remind him of the railhead they'd shipped it from, and the railhead would remind him of the freight charges, and the freight charges would darken his whole face for a moment, and then he would be off again, lifted clear of the money by the next bone before the money could close over him.

He worked the lid up off a crate that was still nailed shut, with a chisel he kept on the sill, and the nails complained and gave, and he lifted out something wrapped in newspaper that crumbled as he peeled it. A shoulder blade, enormous, the blade of it wider than Knight's portfolio.

"Colorado," Cope said. "Garden Park. Eighteen seventy-seven. I had a man named Lucas out there, a schoolteacher with an eye, and he sent back crate after crate, and every time I opened one it was like opening a window into a room that had been sealed since before there was anyone to seal it. You could smell it. The age of it."

He set it on the desk, displacing a stack of letters that slid to the floor in a fan. He did not pick them up. "Marsh got his out of Como Bluff. More of it, if you want to be honest, and better. But he got it by building a machine for it. Hired men on a wage, standing camps, a telegraph line, every crate documented and owned before it was out of the ground." He picked up one of the fallen letters and looked at it without reading it. "I got mine by going."

And always, under it, like a current you couldn't see but could feel pulling at your legs, was the other name.

Knight did not raise it. Cope did, sidelong, and then not sidelong. The first time it was almost gentle, a date, a place, said the way you'd note bad weather. The second time it had an edge. He took down a plaster cast of a long narrow skull from the shelf over the cold fireplace and held it in both hands and turned the empty sockets toward Knight.

“Laelaps,” he said. “My Laelaps. The first great runner anyone described correctly. It came out of the marl of New Jersey. I named it, I published it, I proved the thing stood up on its hind legs and moved with speed when every authority alive wanted it on its belly in the mud. And then.” He set the cast down with more care than he had used on anything in the room. “Then he decided it wanted a different name. His name. Some technicality of priority you could read a newspaper through. He took the name off it like pulling a tag off a piece of luggage.” He looked up, and by now the edge was all there was. “Marsh never touched a bone without a lawyer nearby.”

He said it while sorting teeth into a tray with the speed of a man dealing cards, and his fingers had become very careful.

“He had money where other men had weather. He had Yale, and the Peabody behind him, and the comfortable patience of a man who knew the bill would be paid by somebody else. He had the Survey, federal money, a federal appointment, every shipment that moved between the Missouri and the mountains passing under his hand in Washington. And what did he do with it. I had men who knew stone. I had eyes. I had the West under my hands, on my own money, sleeping on the ground, while he sat in Washington and bought the survey out from under me, and bought my own men with it, men who’d eaten at my fire, and they sent their best pieces east to him, to New Haven.”

The hand, Knight realized, was on his sleeve now; Cope touched constantly, a hand on the arm, on the shoulder, steering, the way he steered the bones. Knight’s pencil had stopped against the page. He caught himself doing what he always did, leaning in too close, near enough to see only what was directly in front of him, which was the hand itself, the gray come into the knuckle, the grip that had nothing to do with the bones and would not steady the way the bone-handling steadied. He made himself sit back.

“And you’ll go to the Museum, and Wortman’s a good man and they’ll do fine things, I’ve no quarrel with the Museum. But you’ll see names on cards under the bones, and you’ll see his name where mine should be, and you won’t know, how could you know, you’re a boy, you won’t know which of those dinosaurs I pulled out of the ground myself and which he took off me with a letter and a lawyer.”

“Edward.” Her voice came from the kitchen passage, not sharp, just there. A marker

dropped. *I can hear you.*

He let go of Knight's sleeve. He looked, for a second, almost surprised to find his own hand where it was. "They're still taking from me," he said, lower now, to the tooth in his palm rather than to the boy. "Even now. Especially now. A name printed under a thing is a second excavation. They dig you out twice if you let them. You think it stops. It doesn't stop." And then, before the words could settle into anything Knight might have to answer, before the room could go quiet around them, Cope was up. Up out of the chair he'd been made to sit in, the medicine and the cold food forgotten, gathering himself again, across the room with the candle, saying, "But that's nothing, that's old business, come here, I haven't shown you the best thing. I haven't shown you the *King.* "

* * *

The best thing was in the back room, and the back room was where Cope slept.

Knight understood that the moment the candle went in ahead of him, because there was a cot. It was a narrow iron cot, the kind a soldier sleeps on, pushed against the wall, and the wall above it and the floor beside it and the foot of it were all bones. The man lay down each night in the middle of what he'd spent his life pulling out of the earth, and woke each morning the same way. Knight stood in the doorway and looked at the cot among the bones and could not, for a moment, make himself come in. It was the most naked thing he had ever seen, and Cope had walked into it without a flicker, the way you walk into your own bedroom, because it was his own bedroom.

"Here." Cope was at the long table that ran under the window, there was always another table, and from a drawer he lifted a single tooth and set it down in the lamplight where Knight could come at it. It was black as coal and polished by some ancient water until it shone, curved like a scimitar, longer than any tooth Knight had handled all afternoon, and the edges of it were lined with the same fine saw he had drawn on the smaller one, only this saw had been built to a different scale of work.

Knight bent to it. He bent low, until his forehead was nearly at the table, because the fine lines only came clear when they were close, and the little serrations caught the wick

and threw it back, and there was a reddish depth in the black enamel like something that remembered blood.

Cope's voice had changed. The grievance had gone out of it. What came into it instead was something Knight had not heard from him yet, and it took Knight a moment to place it, and then he placed it, because he had heard it in his own voice, on his own good days, in front of his own work. It was joy. Unmixed. A boy's joy in an old man's ruined throat.

"The biggest thing I ever got my hands on came apart in them," he said. "A single bone out of the Dakota sands, bigger than my two fists put together, and it crumbled in the wind before I could get it whole, it was that old, older than anything I have. But you can stand in front of a fragment and know the missing body. A man with sense can. There is one out there everything else was only practice for. The great one. Bigger than the building we're standing in. They come out of the West, the big ones, and somewhere out there, still in the ground, still whole, still waiting, there's the King of them."

He had his hands on a great curved rib now, longer than he was tall, not lifting it, he couldn't have lifted it, just resting his two hands on it the way you rest your hands on the rail of a ship. "Whole herds of them, going somewhere, in the morning, two hundred feet of dinosaur moving against the light. They walked here. Not here, but here, this same poor used-up ground we put railroads on."

He turned his head, and the candlelight caught the too-much light in his eyes and threw it back doubled.

"He has men out hunting the same ground for it. I know he does. He has men in the freight office copying the labels off my crates. But they don't have the first sight of it, and the name belongs to the man who sees it first, when it's still wet from the stone. I'll find the crown of it before he does. I'll go out there on this," he slapped his own bad leg, "and dig it out with my hands if I have to, and when I do, his name won't be anywhere near it. It'll be mine. The whole crown of the thing. Mine."

He believed it. Knight, twenty-two years old and good at surfaces, saw that he believed it completely, that there was no corner of the man that did not believe it. And he saw

too, because he could not help seeing surfaces, it was the only thing he had ever been able to do, that the hand resting on the great rib had gone gray at the knuckle, and that the breath had gotten short again. The man who was going to go out West and dig the King of all the dead things out of the ground with his own hands could not, just now, quite get enough air to finish a sentence standing up.

Cope sat. There was a stool by the table and he found it without looking and sat, hard, and for a moment he didn't speak at all, and the room was as quiet as it had been all day, and the quiet was terrible, and Knight stood in it not knowing what a person did.

What he did was lift his sketchbook. It was the only thing he knew how to do in a room. He held it close to his face and he drew, fast, the way you draw a cat that won't sit, catching the line before it goes, and what he caught was Cope on the stool with one hand on the rib of the giant, the small ruined living thing and the enormous dead one, joined at the hand. He drew the rib too large for the page and the man smaller than the rib, and then corrected the line, because the first attempt had made the man frail, and frailty was only one surface among others, and it was not the true one.

He didn't know what the drawing meant and it wasn't his business to know. He only knew it was true, and that you drew the true thing while it held still, because it would not hold still long.

When he looked up, Cope was watching him.

"Let me see," Cope said.

Knight's whole body wanted to refuse. But you did not refuse this man anything in his own house, and so he crossed the uneven floor and crouched by the stool and held the book out. Then, seeing how Cope leaned toward it and squinted, seeing Cope's own difficulty with the near distance, Knight did what he never did for anyone, what he was careful never to need witnessed. He brought the book all the way up, up to where his own eyes lived, close enough that the two of them had to lean in together over it, the young man who saw only what was near and the aging man whose far sight had carried him across a continent and was failing him now in his own back room, both of them bent over the small bright page in the candlelight, almost touching, both of them

squinting at the same near thing.

Cope looked for a long time.

“You drew the bone right,” he said at last. “And you drew me,” he tapped the page, where his own face was, with one gray finger, “smaller than it. Good. That’s right too. That’s the only thing that’s right.” He sat back. The flood was very low now; Knight could see the bottom of it. “Nobody draws it small enough. Not the dinosaurs, I mean, they make those too small, they make them lizards. I mean the man. You stand next to the right thing and you find out how small.” He was not looking at Knight anymore. He was looking at the wall of bones above his cot, at the dark there past the candle’s reach. “He never learned that. For all his money and his Washington and his lawyers, he never once stood next to a thing big enough to find out how small he was.”

It was the closest Cope came, all afternoon, to saying something about himself, and even then he said it about the other man. Knight, who had been told nothing about any of this, who could not have said what he had walked into the middle of, wrote none of it down, because the room did not allow for writing it down. He only kept it, the way he kept everything, through the surface.

* * *

It was nearly dark when Anne came to tell him the cab was at the door.

Knight had not ordered a cab. She had. She stood in the parlor with his coat already over her arm, she had found it somewhere in the wreck of the front hall and brushed it, and she held it out to him, and the gesture was so plainly the end of the visit that even Cope, mid-sentence, let it end. She had her own coat on now, buttoned to the throat, and her bonnet pinned, dressed for the street and the cold the way a person dresses who is not staying. She handed Knight his satchel after checking the flap was buckled, practical care moving through her hands without asking permission from anyone’s pride.

“You’ll come back,” Cope said. It was the same voice he’d used at the door, hours ago. *Not a question.* He had a small flat thing in his hand, and he pressed it into Knight’s

palm and closed the boy's fingers over it with both of his own, and his hands were hot and dry and very strong, exactly as they had been at the door, as if the whole afternoon had cost them nothing. "You'll come back, and we'll do the big ones properly, and you'll draw them the way they were, and not one of them will look like a lizard on a rock. Promise me that. Not the coming back, I don't care about the coming back. The lizards. Promise me no lizards."

"No lizards," Knight said.

"Good." Cope let go. "Draw what you see. Not what they tell you. Now get out, it's late, your eyes are no better than mine and the streets are dark."

At the door, Anne turned the hall lamp up so the passage would hold enough light for his leaving, and Cope stood in that light with the bones crowded at his back and around his feet, one hand already reaching toward a crate as if the interruption of farewell could be folded back into the work.

In the cab, under the carriage lamp, Knight opened his hand.

It was a tooth. A small one, not the scimitar from the back room but a lesser cousin of it, dark as the rest, serrated along one edge, a bread-knife edge, a knife-edge meant for meat that fought back. It was warm, still, from Cope's grip. Knight held it up close to his face in the swaying light, closer than another man would have, and turned it, and the little saw-teeth caught the lamp.

He should go home, he thought. He should go to his rooms and his own work. He was meant, in a week, to begin the restorations at the Museum, to put flesh back on the dead, and he had imagined that work as a beginning, a thing that started with him.

But the tooth in his hand had not started with him. It had not started with Cope, either, nor with the man whose name Cope could not say without his hand shaking. It went back. It had been pulled from ground that had been laid down before there were men to pull it, and the men who had fought over it had begun fighting over it long before this house, this afternoon, this dark cab. It had a beginning, a first morning of it, somewhere behind all this, and the beginning was not here, and it was not now.

The cab pulled away from Pine Street. Behind him, in the lit window of the house full of bones, Knight could just make out, before the distance took it and his eyes gave it up, the shape of the man already on his feet again, already moving, already turning back to the long tables and the work that would not wait, pulled forward, always forward, by what he was certain still lay out there in the West waiting for him.

But Knight, holding the warm tooth up to the carriage lamp, was being pulled the other way.

Back.

To a morning thirty years gone, on the far side of an ocean, when the two of them were young, and were not yet enemies, and a tooth like this one, clean in a glass case in a foreign museum, was, for both of them, the most beautiful thing either had ever seen.

Chapter 2 — Natural Order

1863–1864

Leidy’s room at the Academy held the weather out the way good rooms do, by being older than it. Rain had come down the windows since before light, and inside there was lamp oil and the particular dryness of paper kept too long. Leidy sat behind his desk with his hands flat on either side of a railway timetable, an opened letter, and a packet of notes tied with string. He had taught one of these young men since the boy was twelve. The other he had acquired more recently, by introduction, the way an institution acquires anything. The two of them he had brought together himself, only this season, for the crossing, so that they came to the work as near strangers paired by the professor’s judgment. Neither had thought to begin the trip anywhere but here.

Cope had already untied the packet once, to show Leidy a measurement, and retied it badly. The string sat crooked under his thumb and he kept worrying it without seeing it.

“I don’t dispute that we should go,” he was saying. “I dispute the reason men give for going. We are told to study their cabinets as though the answer to American vertebrates were sleeping in a drawer in Berlin. It is not. It is in the ground at home, under the marl, under the chalk, waiting for a man to be quick enough.”

“Or careful enough,” Marsh said.

He sat upright across the desk, his coat still buttoned, and he had picked up the timetable and was pressing one folded corner flat with a single finger, slowly, as if the paper had given offense by being creased. He was thirty-two and built heavy through the shoulders, and he spoke the way he flattened the paper.

“They have solved problems we have not yet learned to recognize as problems,” he said. “A man can save ten years by reading what another man already wrote down. That is not slowness. That is arithmetic.”

“It is a way of arriving second.”

“It is a way of arriving correct.”

Leidy let them go a moment longer without leaning into the argument. His eyes moved when the speaker moved, to Cope when Cope leaned too far into his own brightness, to Marsh when Marsh’s mouth closed over a thing he had decided not to add. The rain ticked the glass. When he spoke his voice stayed low enough that the room had to come to it.

“It is possible,” Leidy said, “for both of you to be entirely right in a way that helps neither of you.”

Cope laughed first, as he always would. “That is what a man says when he means to refuse us both.”

“I mean to refuse speed as a virtue.” Leidy reached out and turned the letter a quarter so its edge ran true with the edge of the desk. His cuffs were clean. He did not read what he had straightened. “Speed is a fine thing in a horse. It is a poor thing in a conclusion.”

“Yes,” Marsh said.

Leidy looked at him without unkindness. “That was the easy half for you. The hard half is the rest of it.” He set two fingers on the desk and lifted them once, a small punctuation. “Respect the ground you take them from. The discovery is not yours; it belongs to anyone who comes after and wants to understand. And serve the truth before you serve your own name.” He said it plainly, the way a man names the parts of a tool he is handing over. It did not sound like instruction. It sounded like the inventory of something he expected returned. “There. Now I have said it and you may forget it on the boat.”

“I’ll remember it separately,” Cope said. “All three.”

“It is one thing said three ways.”

“He thinks it’s three,” Marsh said.

“I know what I think.” Cope was grinning now, the argument forgotten in the pleasure

of being argued with. He stood, caught his hat off the chair-back, and his elbow swept the packet of notes toward the edge of the desk. Marsh's hand came out and stopped it, flat, unhurried, and pushed it back to the center. For a moment both their hands rested on the same string-tied sheaf. Neither lifted away first. Then Cope had his hat and Marsh had his trunk-check and they were going, and the cold came under the door as they opened it, and the professor sat in the room and listened to the two of them descend the stairs into the rain, their voices crossing each other the whole way down, neither finishing a sentence the other had started.

Leidy squared the letter once more against the desk and let them go.

* * *

The crossing took eleven days, and for nine of them Cope talked.

He had a berth on the lower deck of the *Etna*, which he shared with a German mineralogist who spoke no English and slept in shifts of twelve hours, so that Cope had the use of a second bunk as a desk for half of every day. He filled one notebook with anatomy drawn from memory, a mosasaur's gape, the long architecture of a plesiosaur's neck laid out joint by joint, and a second with questions, four pages of them, ordered by city, that he meant to put to every curator between Hamburg and Paris. The questions ran out before his appetite for asking did.

Marsh had boarded the day before in New York with a single trunk. Cope had three, and two crates of reference volumes besides, and a leather satchel he did not let off his shoulder even at the rail. Marsh watched the porters fight the crates up the gangway.

"You brought a library to a continent of libraries," he said.

"I brought my own notes. Their libraries are full of other men's."

"That is the point of a library."

"Not mine."

Marsh let it go. He went below and unpacked his trunk behind a closed door, each shirt and instrument in its brown paper, each labeled in a small even hand, and when he was done the cabin looked as though no one had arrived in it at all.

They dined together every night. The saloon pitched and the lamps swung and Cope steadied his coffee with one hand and drew with the other, and his sentences came faster than the ship, breaking and crowding the way young horses break from a gate. He was twenty-three. His beard had not yet filled. Marsh cut his food into squares and listened with his fork stopped an inch above the plate, and when he answered it was usually to turn the whole conversation a quarter, the way he had turned the letter on Leidy's desk.

"You are leaning on Cuvier holding good at the family level," Marsh said one evening.

"Because he does hold."

"In Paris he holds. I want to know what Berlin does with him."

"Berlin doesn't quarrel with Cuvier."

"Berlin shelves him differently. I want to see the shelving."

Cope looked up, caught somewhere between amusement and the unfamiliar sensation of having been redirected. The difference between them sat on the table like a third plate. Cope wanted the creature, the living thing behind the bone, the head turning. Marsh wanted the cabinet that would still hold the creature in place after everyone who had argued about it was dead. At twenty-three and thirty-two, in a swaying room over the Atlantic, the difference felt like temperament and nothing worse. Cope thought Marsh thorough. Marsh thought Cope quick. Neither word had yet been sharpened into anything that could cut.

On the third day they quarreled, happily and completely, over a fish skeleton printed in a passenger's illustrated weekly. It had been drawn by someone who had never seen a fish die, and labeled by someone who had not seen the drawing. Cope took the pencil from behind his ear and bent over the page, striking lines, adding others, working with the concentration of a man setting a broken limb.

“Look at the articulation here. If that joint were true the thing would swim like a swinging gate.”

“You are correcting a picture made for people reading on a train.”

“That is no defense of a falsehood.”

“It may be the entire reason the picture exists.” Marsh held the page flat against the wind off the deck. “Comfort is not obligated to be accurate.”

Cope looked up at him, delighted. “There. That is why I am glad of you. You will defend bad work, and for an honest reason.” He laughed loudly enough that a woman three chairs down drew her shawl tighter. Marsh took the pencil and put a single short stroke where Cope had put three long ones, fixing the same line with less.

“And you improve it faster than the truth requires,” Marsh said.

By that night the ruined fish had become a standing joke between them. By the next morning the joke had grown into a real argument, whether the New World would go on borrowing European names for its own creatures or whether it had earned the right to name its own order, and they carried that argument, unfinished, all the way to Germany.

* * *

They came into Hamburg on a Thursday in the rain and went straight to the Naturhistorisches Museum, soot-dark stone set behind an iron gate. Cope went through the entrance hall without slowing. Marsh stopped under the door to read the inscription cut above it, and copied it into his notebook before he followed.

The collection rooms were cool and lit half by gas and half by tall windows of milky glass. The cases stood in ranks, each one numbered, each shelf labeled in a hand so exact it might have been engraved by machine. Cope moved down the rank fast, bending close, breathing on the glass, naming under his breath.

“Ichthyosaur. Plesiosaur. No, *Nothosaurus*, look at the neck on it. *Ichthyosaur* again,

but young.” His finger hovered, never quite touching the glass. “They have the whole sea here, Marsh. Dry, and behind glass, but the whole sea.”

Marsh came behind at his own pace with a small notebook and a pencil he sharpened every few pages. He stopped at the case Cope had just fogged with his breath and copied its number off the brass plate before the glass had cleared. Where Cope read the specimens, Marsh read the cases. He noted how they numbered them, how the labels were set, whether the glass was sealed or hinged, where the accession dates were kept and who had signed them.

“They cross-reference by formation,” he said. “Not by creature. By the rock it came out of.”

Cope was already two cases on.

A curator found them in the reptile gallery, a small man named Schilling, round spectacles, ink on his cuffs, his English careful and a little proud of itself. He welcomed them with the politeness a working man keeps for visitors who might be important and probably are not. He walked them through the halls. Cope asked him about the specimens, where each had come from, how the matrix had been cleared, whether they had washed the stone with acid or worked it dry. Marsh asked him about the museum, how a purchase was approved, who decided what went on a shelf and what went into a drawer, what the building cost to heat.

Schilling looked from one to the other, unsure for a moment which of them he was answering.

“You are both naturalists?”

“Vertebrate paleontologists,” Cope said. “Students of Professor Leidy, in Philadelphia.”

The name landed even there, in the wet German light. Schilling nodded slowly.

“Leidy. Yes. His paper on the *Hadrosaurus* reached us last year. Very careful work.” He paused on the word *careful* the way the others kept pausing on it, as though it were the highest thing he had to give. “He drew the whole animal from very little bone, and

he did not pretend to more than the bone allowed."

Cope said nothing to that. Marsh inclined his head as if a debt had been acknowledged.

* * *

From Hamburg they took the train south, and Cope read aloud from a monograph on Triassic amphibians while the flat gray country went by, and Marsh watched it go and now and then asked him to read a passage twice. The light was the color of pewter. Neither had anywhere else to be, and the having of nowhere else to be was its own kind of wealth.

Berlin was larger, and deeper, and the German came faster. Cope's German had come down to him through his family and he had sharpened it on books, and he moved through the curators' talk the way he moved through the halls, quickly and with open pleasure, charming men who had not expected to be charmed before noon. Marsh's German was stiff and serviceable, and he made up the difference with patience and a notebook. Where Cope opened a door with a joke, Marsh stood in it afterward, copying the catalog numbers, asking how the storage was kept dry, drawing the floor plan to scale in the back of the book.

Behind the public galleries was a workroom, and the workroom was warm. A stove burned coke in the corner and two preparators in aprons worked at benches under high windows, one lifting shale from an ammonite with a needle and a small hammer, the other brushing plaster dust off a cast. It smelled of wet plaster and hide glue warming in a pot and the faint iron of tools. It was the first room on the trip that was about work and not about display, and Cope went straight to the bench and stood too close, watching the man's hands.

"How long for that?" he asked, pointing at the half-freed ammonite.

The man did not look up. "*Drei Tage*."

"Three days," Marsh said, "for that much of it."

“In the New Jersey marl we take one out with a pick in an afternoon and lose half the suture doing it.” Cope said it ruefully, almost admiring, watching the needle move.

Marsh was not listening for the lesson Cope had drawn. He had his book open and was sketching the bench. He drew the rack of tools fixed to the wall above it, each tool’s shape painted in shadow behind it so that a missing one showed at a glance. He drew the tray of numbered tags, and the logbook the preparator stopped to write in every half hour, whether or not anyone asked him to.

“You want to build this in New Haven,” Cope said, grinning.

“I want to build something that runs whether or not I am standing in the room.” Marsh said it without pride, the way another man might state his height. It was the first time Cope had heard him put the difference between them into a single sentence, and it did not feel like a wall going up. It felt like the two halves of one problem being set side by side on a bench and named.

They ate in a low dark beer hall full of students because Schilling’s assistant insisted and because it was cheap. Sausage, black bread, small beers. Cope talked with his mouth full and his fork conducting, describing the swimming of a thing sixty fathoms and a hundred million years gone as though it had passed the window that morning.

“It was *alive*, Marsh. Not a name in a list. Not a genus. A living thing that turned its head and watched another living thing swim away from it.” He set the fork down for once. “When Owen made his word, *Dinosauria,* people heard a monster. A lizard grown past all decency. But it is not that, and it is not merely one more animal to set in a row beside the others. It is an *order*. A whole kind of creature that stood up off the ground and walked and ruled the world for longer than there have been men to forget it. We have been drawing them as fat lizards. They were not lizards. They were the thing the lizards remember.”

Marsh ate methodically, wiping his mustache. When Cope paused to drink, he said, “Old Bronn’s correlation tables set every Jurassic bed in Swabia in order by the ammonite that marks it. If we had that for the Cretaceous in Kansas.” He let the rest hang unsaid.

“We will,” Cope said at once.

“Then a man could place a bone in time before he ever cleaned it,” Marsh said, taking the sentence back up.

“We will map it. Bone by bone.”

They agreed without noticing they had agreed, and they leaned in over the scarred table to do it, and each meant a different thing by the agreement. Cope meant the finding, the moment of lifting the thing out of the dark. Marsh meant the table that would hold the finding still afterward, where it could be checked. Both were right. Neither saw a reason to say so.

That night in their room near the Friedrichstrasse station, two narrow beds and a table already lost under their papers, they wrote letters without speaking. Marsh wrote to his uncle in London, the pen going steady and even. *The collections here show what permanence costs,* he wrote. *Fireproof stone, men paid by the year to do nothing but prepare, catalogs printed and bound. America improvises and calls it character. Europe builds, and the building outlasts the builder.* He blotted it and did not read it aloud.

Cope, cross-legged on the other bed, wrote to Leidy. *I have seen today what you have always done,* the pen scratching faster than was wise. *They let the specimen speak and they write down only what it says. I will bring that home if I have to carry it in my hands.* He underlined the last of it three times and did not blot it, so that the ink smeared a little when he folded the page.

* * *

London was a cathedral and behaved like one. The galleries of the British Museum ran high and stone-floored and cold the way only large English stone is cold, and the specimens there were not displayed so much as enshrined. Owen’s reconstructions ruled the reptile halls. As they walked Cope talked about Owen the way a student talks about the master he means to overtake, and out beyond the city, at Sydenham, the great brick-and-iron beasts of the Crystal Palace stood in their park, and Cope had it in his

head to see them.

They went. They stood on the gravel path in a thin English cold and looked up at the things Owen and Hawkins had built. The *Iguanodon* with its horn on its nose, the crouching crocodilian shapes, the whole impossible menagerie sat heavy among the planted trees as if the park had grown up around creatures that had simply refused to leave.

“They are wrong,” Marsh said. “Half of them. That spike on its nose, for one. I would wager it never sat there at all, and the guess is set in brick now, where every schoolboy in England will learn it.”

“They are wrong,” Cope agreed, and he was smiling, his breath showing. “And look at them. Look at the *people*.” Families had come out on the path, children pulling at sleeves, men reading aloud from a printed card. “He took a word, *Dinosauria*, and a few cartloads of bone, and he made a thing that a draper from Cheapside can stand in front of and feel the size of the world before his own. That is not nothing, Marsh. He got it wrong and he made it *real*. Nobody in America has made one of these real. We have the bones and we keep them in drawers and we are too honest to build the dinosaur until we are certain, and so the draper never feels it at all.”

“Better an empty drawer than a brick lie.”

“Better both. Be certain *and* build it.” Cope turned from the models, his color up, and for a moment he was not arguing with Marsh at all but with the whole careful continent behind him. “These were not monsters and they were not lizards. They were a kingdom. They stood up and walked and they were here, on real ground, under real weather, for an age so long it makes Rome a rumor. The least we owe them is to build them true and let people *see* what walked here before us.”

Marsh looked at the horned *Iguanodon* a while longer. “Then we had better find better bones than Owen had,” he said, “before we build anything at all.”

That, Cope could not quarrel with.

Back inside the Museum they stood a long time before the *Archaeopteryx*, the London slab Owen had bought for the nation and studied and called a bird, still half-understood, its limestone holding the feather-fans open like a flower pressed in a book. Cope bent until a curator coughed behind them.

“It flew,” he said. “Look at the vanes. They are not even. The shaft sits to one side. A feather built like that is built for flight, not for warmth and not for show. This thing beat its wings.”

“It may have glided.”

“No. The asymmetry is the proof. This is powered flight, and look at the jaw. It has *teet h*, Marsh. It has a tail of bone. It is a reptile that flew like a bird, or a bird that has not yet finished being a reptile. A dinosaur with feathers, taken into the air. Owen has it under glass and calls it a bird and lets the matter rest.”

Marsh studied the slab for a long while and his pencil did not move the whole time. When he spoke he was not looking at the feathers. He was looking at the case around them, the label, the careful word painted on the card.

“If you are right,” he said, “then the wall they have built between the birds and the reptiles is in the wrong place. The whole shelf is wrong.”

“That is exactly what I am saying.”

“Then someone is going to have to take it down and build it again.” He said it slowly, and there was something in his face that was almost appetite, not for the creature but for the rebuilding. He wrote one line in his book and closed it.

In a back room of the Museum a thin curator with side-whiskers, whose every sentence sounded already footnoted, unlocked the drawers that held less spectacle and more danger. Fragmentary jaws, small vertebrae bedded in cotton, a tray of teeth that one hand had sorted by size and a later hand had resorted by guessed affinity. Cope’s fingers hovered over all of it. Marsh kept his behind his back until he was invited.

“A man could lose a year in this room,” Cope murmured.

“A man could save ten,” Marsh said.

The curator did not look up from the lock. “What you save,” he said, “depends entirely on whether you write down what you have seen before you decide what you think of it.” Cope took the correction better than he would have taken it in Philadelphia. The room was old enough to make the offense small.

One afternoon a dealer up from Manchester brought them a mosasaur jaw he hoped to sell to somebody important, and hovered while Cope turned it in his hands.

“The suture lines are wrong,” Cope said. “Too heavy for the genus. Someone has added plaster, and ambition.” He passed it to Marsh.

Marsh weighed it, found the seam where the plaster met the bone with his thumbnail, and set it down on the cloth. “We decline it,” he said to the dealer, not unkindly. “A collection cannot afford a mistake that travels under its name.”

The dealer took his jaw and his hope away. Cope watched him go and laughed, but there was no cruelty in it. “You are right, of course. Still, imagine if it had been real. Imagine the head that would have hung off a jaw that size.” They walked out together into the damp afternoon, the judgment shared without a seam in it, and the sharing of it sat between them as the plaster had not, clean and theirs, a thing that drew them closer rather than apart.

* * *

Paris was the last city, and they came into it in December under a low pale winter light, the gardens of the Muséum bare, the stone the color of bone itself, the halls heated by ceramic stoves that put a taste of dust and iron into the air.

The French collection was the oldest and the most complete, and Cuvier was still physically in it. His specimens, his labels, and the logic of his arrangement still governed the order of the rooms a half-century after his death. Cope and Marsh walked through those halls, and for the first time on the whole trip they both fell quiet.

The bones in that room were older than any system anyone had built to hold them. Older than Cuvier's names. Older than Linnaeus. Older than the stone the museum was cut from. The two Americans stood among the Jurassic sea-reptiles and said nothing for several minutes together. A clock went somewhere out of sight. A curator passed with a tray of labeled drawers and did not look at them.

"This is what permanence looks like," Marsh said at last, very low.

Cope ran one finger along the lip of a case, the wood smoothed and oiled by a hundred years of hands. "This is what permanence *asks for*," he said. "Somebody had to go and find them first. Before the case. Before the label. Before the name. A man on his knees in the wet, lifting it out." It was not a contradiction. It was the old difference, carried since the boat and set down quietly in a quiet room, and for once neither of them reached to win it. Both, in that room, were content to let the other be true beside them.

They were shown the great mosasaur out of Maastricht, the one that had survived a siege, the saw-marks of 1795 still in the jaw where it had been taken. The curator, a small white-whiskered man, told the story as he turned the key. The French army had carried it off not as plunder but as a specimen, a thing of natural history worth a war's small trouble. Cope listened with all his impatience gone out of him, thinking, Marsh could see it, of New Jersey marl, and of the farmers there who sold teeth out of a bucket by the handful.

Marsh asked the curator, in slow and careful French, how they kept the damp out in winter. The curator showed him the ventilation grilles cut low in the baseboards and the charcoal trays they changed each week, and Marsh wrote it down word for word, the French and the method both.

On their last evening they ate near the Jardin des Plantes, in a small warm room. Roasted duck and potatoes in cream, and bread that Cope tore with his hands, and wine, and then more wine. Cope's French was better than his German and he ordered for both of them, confident that every language was finally a matter of enthusiasm.

"What did Leidy tell you," Cope asked, "the morning we left? When I'd gone out to the trunks."

Marsh folded his napkin into a square. “He told me to respect the collections.”

“He told me three things.” Cope put up three fingers and bent them down one at a time. “Respect the land. The discovery belongs to the world. Serve the truth before your own name.”

“That is one thing, said three ways.”

“Maybe. But I keep them in three drawers.” Cope picked up his glass. “Were we listening? Truly.”

“I was,” Marsh said.

It was the kind of answer that could have started something. Instead Cope laughed, and lifted his glass higher, and after a moment Marsh lifted his.

“To Leidy’s rules,” Cope said.

“To the collections,” Marsh said, which was the same toast in his own language, and they both knew it, and drank. Through the window the bare branches of the garden trees made their black lines on the Paris sky, and the room was warm, and for that hour there was nothing between the two of them but the table and the wine and a future neither could see and both believed in.

* * *

They sailed for home in January and the sea was rough. Cope was sick for two days, flat in his berth with the porthole screwed shut, and Marsh carried broth to him from the galley without being asked and without making anything of it. He carried it twice a day, at the hours the galley was quietest, and he tested the heat of the tin against the back of his knuckle at the top of the companionway, because a sick man burned was a sick man worse, and if it had gone cold on the ladder he turned around and went back down and had it warmed.

He did not sit with him, the first day. He set the broth where Cope’s hand would find it,

took away the one before it, and stood a moment in the pitch and roll to see that the crates of books were riding square in their lashings, and went out.

On the second day the ship took a heavier sea and Cope's notebook went off the bunk, the one with the anatomy in it, the mosasaur and the plesiosaur's neck drawn joint by joint from memory, and it lay open and face down on the boards with the pages bent under it. Marsh picked it up. He squared the bent pages flat with the heel of his hand, one at a time, taking care at the corners, and he did not read them. He stood in the swaying cabin holding the shut notebook while Cope slept, and anyone watching would have said he was only waiting for the ship to steady. Then he set it under the water carafe, where the weight would keep it, and picked up the empty tin, and went up the ladder without waking him.

On the third day Cope came up on deck pale and short-tempered and found Marsh in a deck chair with a blanket over his knees and a German journal open on it.

"I have been thinking about Owen," Cope said.

"You have been vomiting."

"Before the vomiting." Cope took the rail in both hands. The Atlantic went gray-green and heavy under the bow. "Owen built something people could stand in front of. The Crystal Palace. The models. Wrong as they are, families take the train out to look at them. America has nothing a family takes a train to see. We have drawers. We are too honest for anything but drawers."

Marsh turned a page. "America has the Smithsonian. It has the Peabody coming. It has Leidy."

"Leidy doesn't want the spectacle of it."

"Leidy wants it correct."

"I want both." Cope's color was coming back as he talked; it always did. "Find them, name them, and then build them so true that a man who has never held a bone can stand in a hall and understand what walked on the ground he was born on. A whole world,

before this one. That is the work. Not the drawer. The drawer is only where the work waits."

"You will need money for that."

"I have money. My family's."

"Family money ends."

"Then I will find more."

"Or," Marsh said, and turned another page, "you could build the institution that finds it for you, and outlives you, and goes on being right after you are gone."

Cope turned from the rail and looked at him. The suggestion sat between them, sensible, generous, and somehow faintly insulting to a man who believed that one good mind in the field was worth any building.

"I'll build a better thing than an institution," Cope said. "I'll do so much work, and so correctly, that the institution comes to *me*."

Marsh said nothing. He went back to his journal, and the wind took the quiet and filled it with the long sound of water dragging down the hull, and it was not an argument, only the two of them being exactly what they were, side by side, going home.

A letter from Leidy caught them at the harbor office on the last morning, forwarded on from the London hotel. Marsh broke the seal while Cope was still counting the trunks against the manifest, and they read it standing together in the gray harbor light. Leidy asked what they had seen, and whether the crossing had earned itself, and whether they had learned anything about method and not only about specimens. There was nothing soft in any line of it. The affection was in the fact of the letter, and nowhere in its words. At the bottom, in a shorter and more careful hand, one line stood by itself:

Come home no more interested in having a thing than in understanding it.

Cope took the page out of Marsh's fingers and read that line twice.

“He thinks us twelve years old.”

“He thinks us young,” Marsh said. “It is not the same thing, and he means the second.”

Cope folded the letter along Leidy’s own creases, more carefully than he folded anything. “Then we’ll oblige him,” he said, “and come home older.” He put it in his breast pocket, over the smeared one he had written in Berlin and never sent.

* * *

They came into New York in the last week of January and parted on the pier. Cope was going south, to Philadelphia, to the Academy, to Leidy, to the crates he had shipped ahead out of Berlin and London that were even now somewhere on the gray water behind them. Marsh was going north, to New Haven, to Yale, to his uncle George Peabody, whose money was already quietly building him a museum and a chair to sit in at the head of it.

They shook hands. It was firm and brief and meant.

“Write to me about the Berlin material,” Marsh said. “The amphibian beds.”

“I will. You write to me about the Peabody budget.”

“You don’t need the Peabody budget.”

Cope grinned, his collar open to the harbor cold, color full in his face again. “I want to know everything. That’s the whole of my method, if you must have it written down. I want to know everything, and I want to know it first.”

Marsh very nearly smiled. He took up his single trunk, found a carriage, and was gone into the city without looking back, which was its own kind of consistency.

Cope stood on the pier a while longer with the satchel on his shoulder. He was twenty-three. He had seen the deep collections and the careful systems and the weight of two centuries of patient men, and his own notebooks were full and his crates were somewhere on the sea, and the wind off the harbor smelled of salt and coal and winter.

He was already thinking, before Marsh's carriage had reached the end of the pier, about what lay under the marl at home, and under the chalk in Kansas he had never seen, and how quickly a man might get to it if he did not wait for anyone's permission.

He shifted the satchel and walked toward the train.

Chapter 3 — Marl

1868

The pit took a man down out of the world. Cope had learned that the first summer and never lost the pleasure of it, how you climbed down the cut bank on the notched plank the diggers left, and the road noise stopped, and the wind stopped, and you stood at the bottom of a green-black trench in the New Jersey marl with the daylight running in a strip far overhead and the smell coming up around you of old sea.

That was what the marl was. Sea, pressed flat and turned to a greasy dark clay the color of a bruise, full of the small bright shells of things that had died swimming when there were no men anywhere to name them. You could close a fist on a handful and feel the grease of it and know you were holding the floor of an ocean ninety feet under a Quaker county.

He had a creature in the wall.

He had found the first of it two days before, a long bone, then the bulb of a joint, then the unmistakable run of a limb going back into the marl where the diggers had not yet cut. He had stopped the marl-men from their loading and bought the face of the cut for the week with his own money, and now he worked it himself, on his knees, with a trowel and a wide soft brush and his coat off and folded on a barrow out of the wet. He worked the way other men prayed, which is to say without noticing that he was doing it.

“Slower at the hip,” he said, not to anyone. The nearest digger was twenty feet off, leaning on a long-handled spade, watching the gentleman crawl in the muck for free entertainment. “You go slow at the hip or you lose the head of the femur and then you’ve a cripple to show the Academy, haven’t you, and they’ll say Cope found half a creature.”

He took the marl off the bone in slivers. He did not pull. The rule was you did not pull. The marl gave the bone up in its own time or it kept a piece of it, and the piece it kept was the piece you needed. He had learned that from Leidy without Leidy ever saying it.

He had simply watched the old man's hands once, in the workroom on Sansom Street, the patience in them that was not patience at all but a kind of respect, as though the bone were a guest and you did not hurry a guest toward the door. *Respect the ground you take them from.* Cope did not think the words. He did the thing the words were for. He brushed, and waited, and let the femur come up clean.

When he had it free he sat back on his heels in the wet and looked at it and laughed out loud, once, the sound going up the trench and out.

"There," he said. "There you are."

He had written to Marsh about the pits in July. He had written him a long letter, the pen going faster than the sense, about the Haddonfield beds and the *Hadrosaurus* country and how the marl gave up a creature a season if you only paid the diggers to keep their picks off it, and he had ended the letter the way he ended all his letters to Marsh that year. *Come down and see it, come down and I'll show you the whole floor of the sea.* He meant it. He always meant it. It did not occur to him to mean anything else.

They had not seen each other since the spring. There was a thing between them now that had not been on the boat. Cope felt it and could not have named it, a half-second of arithmetic before each of Marsh's answers that had not used to be there, a way Marsh had begun to write *I note your finding* instead of asking what the finding was. But it was small, and the letters still came, and a friendship is a hard thing to feel cooling from the inside when you are the warm one.

* * *

Marsh arrived in the heat of the afternoon, heavier than Cope remembered from Berlin, the years since Europe settled into him. He stood on the lip of the cut in a dark coat too good for the weather and looked down at Cope on his knees in the muck.

"You'll break your neck on that plank," Marsh said, "and they'll mount you instead."

Cope went up the plank fast, carrying the femur in both hands rather than trust it to the basket, and at the top the world came back, the flat hot September fields, the loaded

carts, the smell of horses and cut hay over the smell of the sea. He set the bone down on the grass and gripped Marsh's hand and was, in fact, glad. That was the worst of it, though he did not know to call it the worst of anything yet. He was simply glad.

"You came," he said.

"You sent four pages. It was come or hire a man to read them to me." But Marsh's eye had already gone past Cope to the bone in the grass, and stayed on it, and Cope saw the stillness come into him, the way Marsh went quiet and exact in front of a real thing, the way he had gone quiet in front of the Berlin slab. "That is a good femur," Marsh said.

"That is the smallest good thing here. Come down. Mind the plank."

He took Marsh down into the pit and walked him along the working face, talking the whole way, what came out of which layer, how the marl-men loaded the green sand for the farmers and how the bones came up in the loading, three a year, ten a year if you paid them to slow down and look. Marsh went along behind him at his own pace with his hat held against his chest to keep it off the wet wall, and he asked questions. They were good questions. They were not the questions Cope would have asked.

"Who owns the digging?" Marsh said.

"The marl company. Then the farmers under lease. It's a tangle. Hageman runs the loading here, that's him up top with the carts."

"And he sells the green sand by the cartload."

"By the cartload. The bones he gives to whoever's standing there when they turn up, which until lately has been me." Cope grinned back over his shoulder. "I make a point of standing here."

"And when you are not standing here?"

"Then they go in the load and the load goes on a field and a hadrosaur fertilizes a turnip." Cope said it as a joke, because it was funny, and because the small grief in it was real and he was already moving past it. "Which is why a man must stand here.

There’s no apparatus for it, Marsh, that’s the whole of it. No system, no catalog, no curator. Just a man who knows what he’s looking at, on his knees in the wet, fast enough to be there first.” He stopped at the working face and put his hand flat on the marl where the rest of the creature still lay. “I’m fast enough. That’s my whole method. I’m always there first.”

Marsh stood in the strip of daylight with his hat against his coat and looked at the wall and said nothing for a moment, and then he said, “You should write it down. Who owns it. What it costs.”

“You write it down. You write everything down.”

“Yes,” Marsh said. “I do.” And he took out the small book and the pencil and he did, standing in the bottom of Cope’s pit, while Cope went back to his knees at the wall.

They came up at the trestle in the shed where the larger pieces lay out under canvas, and Marsh moved among them without speaking, lifting tags, resetting them exactly to where they had been. He stopped at a long run of vertebrae, the dozens of flat discs Cope had laid in their order.

“You still think these are from one animal,” Marsh said.

“I do.”

“Despite the disparity in the associated elements.”

“There is no disparity that cannot be answered by form we have not yet recovered.”

Marsh turned a tag over and set it down again. “Or by the possibility that you have several animals and one enthusiasm.”

Cope laughed. “I have several enthusiasms. The animal is singular.” He took up the chalk stub from the trestle ledge and wrote on the board the name he had been carrying for a week, *Elasmosaurus*, and then, because the pleasure of it ran ahead of him, he added beneath it *marshii*, and struck the stroke through before it was finished. “No. Not for you. You would only insist on a proper suffix and then complain of vanity.”

Marsh took the chalk from his hand. He paused over the board, considered a moment, and wrote beneath the name, in small neat letters, choosing his ending with visible care. *cope-ANUS.*

The nearest laborer, seeing the exchange but not understanding it, grinned uncertainly. Cope snatched the chalk back.

“That is no suffix convention asks for. That is the schoolroom joke every boy is caned for, the coarse third syllable Latin gives up too easily, and you have hung it on my name and called it taxonomy.”

“It is a possibility,” Marsh said. “You are too hasty to deserve immortality on the first pass.”

Cope rubbed the word out with the heel of his palm. The chalk smeared, and the ghost of it stayed visible in white dust, the soft ugly little turn of the syllables hanging there a moment before he wiped it again.

“When I am immortalized,” he said, “it will not be by your permission.”

“No.” Marsh had already turned back to the vertebrae. “It seldom is.”

The remark might have stung if it had been said differently. In Marsh’s mouth it landed flat, almost abstract, and so Cope let it pass. He was still half-smiling when he carried the canvas back over the tables and began to talk about the great thing waiting for them both in Philadelphia.

“I haven’t shown you the best of it. It isn’t here. It came east in the spring, in nine boxes, from a fort in Kansas. An army surgeon dug it out of the chalk and crated it to me because he’d read my name in a journal, can you imagine, my name in a chalk bluff a thousand miles past anywhere. A sea creature, Marsh. A serpent with paddles. The reach on it.” He laughed. “I’ve not got it all stood up yet but the reach on it will frighten the deacons. I’m building it now. I’ll have it up by the meeting. You’ll be in the city for the meeting?”

“I had meant to be.”

“Then come. Come and see it stood up. I want someone in the room who’ll know what he’s looking at.”

Behind him, Marsh closed the book.

“I’ll be in the room,” he said.

* * *

They went up at dusk. At the top of the cut the carts were loaded and the diggers were knocking off, and the foreman Hageman stood by the gate counting his men out, a broad slow man with marl to the elbows and a way of not quite looking at the gentlemen who came to dig in his pit for sport.

Cope went on toward the farmhouse to wash, calling back something about supper. Marsh did not follow him at once. He stopped at the gate, by Hageman, and took the small book out again, and stood with it open against his coat. Cope, twenty steps on, peeling his ruined shirt off his shoulders, half-heard the start of it without hearing it at all. The heavy coat. The hat going back on. A voice gone quiet and level and reasonable, the voice for a thing that is only business. *The bones that come up in the loading.* Something about Yale. Something about a standing arrangement, money against the season, crates and a freight account and an address in New Haven, so that a man needn’t stand in the wet himself to be there first, so that the pit could simply send.

Marsh wrote a line in the book while Hageman talked, and another. Hageman looked at the ground while he listened, a man being offered something he had not been offered before and deciding it cost him nothing. Down the slope a loaded cart that should have gone to the collection yard was turned by its driver, on a word from the foreman, toward the access road and the rail instead, and no one called it back.

Cope, at the pump, with the cold water going over his head and the day’s marl running off him gray, heard none of it. He was thinking about the serpent. He was always, that autumn, thinking about the serpent.

* * *

It was some weeks before he learned what had happened, not until the work itself had gone strange under him.

The first sign came as an absence small enough to be mistaken for weather. A worker named Jennings, reliable, strong enough to swing a pick for ten hours in the heat, stopped arriving. A younger digger who had joined the crew that spring failed to appear after him. When Cope asked the men who remained, they looked at their boots. One of them, who had been with him since the first season, finally said only that the others had been offered other work, and his eyes went to the second trench, the one where the best material had been coming, and then away.

Cope walked the trenches that afternoon with a new kind of attention. The eastern end of the second trench had been backfilled. He had not authorized that. The stratum where he had shown Marsh the articulated vertebrae was covered now with loose fill, and a fresh-cut drainage channel ran not toward the collection area but toward the access road, as though the priority had quietly changed from keeping the material to moving it. He crouched and pressed his hand into the turned earth and felt the difference, the crumbled softness of fill against the packed weight of undisturbed marl, and he pulled his hand free and looked at the green-black dirt under his nails for a long time.

At the company shed a clerk in a light summer coat too clean for Haddonfield stood beside a horse with a leather tube under his arm. He drew out a paper and smoothed it against the boards and read from it without raising his voice, in the flat tone of a property transfer.

“The New Jersey Marl Company has transferred exclusive deep-excavation privilege in the west pit to Yale College, with collection rights assigned to Professor O. C. Marsh for purposes of permanent scientific preservation.”

Cope looked at the signature at the bottom, small, clear, perfectly centered between the margins.

“He has not seen the bones,” Cope said.

“I couldn’t say, sir.”

“He has my letters.”

The clerk blinked once. “I couldn’t say to that either.”

A second envelope came out of the tube, blue and uncreased, Cope’s name written on it with the same spacing Marsh used for his labels. Cope reached for it, and his hand left a smear of gray marl across the bottom of the transfer paper, over the clean centered signature, before the clerk drew the document back and rolled it away into the tube. Cope broke the seal of the envelope with a dirty thumb.

Edward, the Haddonfield material is too important to remain dependent on local arrangements, variable labor, and insecure Academy storage. I have acted through proper channels to secure the west cut under institutional authority. No personal slight is intended. The specimens will be better served by continuity of custody and adequate cabinet provision. I trust you will see the necessity once the immediate inconvenience has passed.

Cope read the line about inconvenience twice.

Down in the pit, one of the men laughed at something a boy had said, ordinary and brief, but it entered Cope’s body as if thrown.

Hageman had come halfway up the bank and stopped there, his face embarrassed, watchful, already arranging the next necessity.

“You knew,” Cope said.

“Yesterday.”

“And you let my men pack his boxes for me.”

“They were company boxes by then.” The sentence did not shout. It simply moved the work out from under Cope’s feet.

“Get out of the pit,” Cope said.

No one moved. Near the second trench one of the men stood with a crate half-lifted against his knee, not setting it down and not carrying it on, his eyes going once to Hageman and then to the ground. Cope said it louder, and the foreman gave the man the smallest nod and started down the slope himself, and the man went on with the crate toward the road, and a boy near the tool shed gathered a wet sack against his chest and turned the wrong way with it.

“Not that way,” Cope said, and the boy stopped, and for one hot second the whole day narrowed to the boy’s two hands and the small shape folded inside the sagging cloth. “From the bottom. If you pinch the edges you break what you are trying to carry. I told you. From the bottom.”

The boy corrected his grip and carried the specimen up toward the Yale cart, gently, the way he had been taught, and Cope stood in the wet yard with Marsh’s white letter in his black hand and watched the boxes his own men had packed go north.

* * *

He built the serpent in a back room of the Academy through the first weeks of autumn, and it was the happiest work of his life.

The room was long and low and smelled of plaster and shellac and the river coming in the window, and he had the nine Kansas boxes open along the wall and the chalk still on the bones, a soft white chalk that powdered your hands, nothing like the greasy marl. He laid the creature out on trestle tables down the middle of the room, the great flat paddle-limbs, the barrel of the body, and the vertebrae, the dozens and dozens of vertebrae, each one a flat disc he had to set in its order along a bar of iron he’d had the smith bend to the curve of the spine.

It was the vertebrae that undid him, though he would not understand that for weeks. There were so many of them, and they were so alike, and they ran so long. He worked fast. He worked the way he always worked, by the eye, by the feel of the thing, by a confidence that came up in him like a tide and carried the slower questions off their feet.

The animal wanted to be a certain shape. He could feel the shape it wanted. A short deep body, and behind it the great long lashing reach he had promised the deacons, the architecture of a hunting thing that swam down its prey with the whole length of itself.

He set the long run of vertebrae onto the bar going back off the body, sweeping out and up behind, and he capped the short forward end with the skull, the small flat fierce skull, the teeth still in it, and he stood back, and his breath went out of him.

It was magnificent. It was a serpent thirty feet long with a reach like the future. Nothing in America had ever been stood up that looked like this.

Leidy came to see it before the meeting. Of course he came. He came to see everything, quietly, on his own feet, on an afternoon when he thought the room would be empty. Cope was there though, fussing a paddle into truer line, and he turned and there was the old man in the doorway in his clean dark coat with his hat in his hand.

“Sir,” Cope said, and his whole face opened. “Look at him. Look what came out of Kansas.”

Leidy came down the room slowly and stood in front of the mounted creature and looked at it for a long time. He did not say it was magnificent. He walked the length of it once, the way he walked the length of everything, and he stopped at the head, and he stood at the head a while. Then he reached out and laid one finger, not on the skull, on the first vertebra behind it, the flat disc where Cope had begun the spine at the wrong end. He pressed the pad of his finger to the face of the bone, lightly, the way you would touch a key on a piano you did not mean to sound. His eyes moved along the spine to the far end, to the long reach sweeping up off the body where the head should have crowned it, and came back.

He said nothing for a moment. His face did the thing it did, which was almost nothing, a stillness that came down over it, a held breath that never became a word. He took his finger off the bone. For a moment Cope thought the old man would speak, and waited for it with his whole skin, because Leidy’s praise was the one praise he had never stopped wanting, and Leidy looked at him, and something passed behind the old eyes that Cope could not read, and what Leidy finally said was only:

“You have worked very fast.”

“I’m always fast.” Cope laughed. “You taught me to be careful and I learned to be careful and fast.”

Leidy looked at the head of the creature one more time. Then he put on his hat, and he had his hand on the door before he spoke again, gently, to the floor more than to Cope.

“Before the meeting, go over the count of the spine. Once more. With the monograph open.” And then, because he was who he was, and because he had handed the rules over years ago and would not stand over a grown man and read them back to him, he left it there. He did not reverse the bone with his own hand. He did not say the head is on the tail. He left the man the dignity of finding it himself, which was either the kindest thing he could have done or the cruelest, and Leidy, going down the stairs alone, did not himself know which, and carried the not-knowing out into the street.

Cope stood in the long room with his magnificent serpent and felt, for one cold second, the floor of his confidence shift under him, and then the tide came up in him again and carried the second off. *Go over the count.* The old man said that about everything. The old man would have a man count the legs on a dog. He looked at his creature, stood up thirty feet and fierce and finished, and he could not see anything in the world wrong with it, because he had built it the way it wanted to be built, and he trusted that feeling the way he trusted his own hands.

He did not open the monograph. There was no time. The meeting was Tuesday. There was never, with Cope, quite enough time to be as careful as he had been taught, because the being-first used the time up, and he had said as much himself, out loud, at the bottom of a pit, to the one man now coming south to watch. *That’s my whole method. I’m always there first.*

* * *

The meeting room at the Academy was full on Tuesday. He had seen to that, a word here, a note there, the western serpent talked up for a fortnight until half of scientific Philadelphia and a good part of unscientific Philadelphia had found a reason to come.

Gaslight and broadcloth and the smell of forty wet wool coats steaming dry. The creature stood on its trestles at the front under the lamps, thirty feet of it, the long reach sweeping up and out over the first row of chairs, and the small fierce head riding low at the near end so that the men sitting there had it level with them in the light.

Marsh was in the third row, on the aisle, his notebook open on his knee and his gloves laid on the chair beside him, claiming the space. Leidy sat nearer the front, his hands folded, wearing the expression he always wore at presentations, attentive, patient, withholding the particular judgment that everyone in the room both wanted and feared.

Cope spoke for twenty minutes and they were the best twenty minutes he knew how to give, which was very good indeed. He did not lecture. He did the thing he did, he made them see it, the warm sea over Kansas, the paddles working, the long reach of it driving down and down into the dark after the bright flash of a fish, the whole drowned afternoon of a hundred million years gone brought up into a gaslit room full of men in collars. He gave them the name. *Elasmosaurus.* He gave them the size of it and the strangeness of it and the marvelous fact that an American had it, that it had come out of American chalk to an American who had read its finder's name into existence from a thousand miles off.

He had them. He could feel that he had them, the room leaning the way rooms leaned for him, and he lifted the small skull last and set it at the end he had prepared and stepped back, and he was happy, as happy as the pit, as happy as the femur in the grass.

When he finished there was the good noise, the lean-forward murmur, and then the chairman asked, as chairmen do, whether any member wished to remark.

Marsh did not stand. He spoke from his place in the third row, unhurried, his coat buttoned, and his voice was the voice from the marl-pit gate, quiet, level, the voice for a thing that is only a matter of fact.

"Dr. Leidy," Marsh said, "would you place the chevrons so far forward?"

The words were quiet. They could have been inquiry. They could have been a man asking that the room notice what he had noticed without making himself the instrument

of the damage.

Leidy did not look at Marsh. He was looking at the bones. He rose with one hand on the chair back and waited for the room to notice that he was standing, and then he came forward to the trestles, and he walked the length of the long reach once, slowly, and came back to the disc his one finger had touched in the empty room, and laid two fingers on it now.

“No,” Leidy said. The single syllable reached the back row.

Cope stepped onto the platform. “The curvature is deceptive from that angle.”

Leidy turned to him. There was no anger in his face. That was the first bad thing.

“Edward,” he said, and Cope hated the softness of his own name in the old man’s mouth. Leidy pointed with the same economy he used over a drawer. “These are caudal. The articular faces run the wrong way against the count in your own monograph, and against mine. The short run you have set under the head, those are the tail. The long run you have hung out behind, those are the cervicals.” He looked up, and the whole room looked up with him, at the long reach standing up off the body where the head should have crowned it. “You have put the head on the tail.”

For one heartbeat there was the silence Cope would carry the rest of his life. A pure silence, a held thing, forty men not breathing.

Then a man near the wall made a sound through his nose and smothered it at once, and the failed suppression was worse than laughter, because it showed the laugh choosing manners and still getting out. Someone near the door whispered it, two words only, *wro ng end,* and the whisper was worse than the laugh, because it asked permission of the whole room. The permission was given. A startled bark went somewhere in the middle rows, not cruel, only the laugh that comes when a thing tips over, and it struck the silence and the silence broke along it, and the murmur came up under it, the lean-together, the hands to mouths, the man turning to the man beside him. The long reach stood up over all of it in the lamplight, thirty feet of confident error, the head set at the wrong end of it, pointing the wrong way down a hundred million years.

Cope heard all of it. He stood under his serpent with the heat coming up his neck and into his face, a physical heat, a flush he could not stop and knew they could see, and his hands had gone cold at the same time, cold and clumsy. And he understood at last, a full beat after the room, what had been said, and that it was true.

It was true. That was the thing the heat was made of. Not that Marsh had raised it, not that Leidy had said it. That it was true. He looked up at his own creature and saw it the way they were all seeing it now, saw the count run wrong along the spine, saw the neck he had loved as a tail, and the part of him that served the truth before it served his own name, the part Leidy had built in him and could not unbuild even now, that part said yes even as the rest of him burned.

He went forward. He put his own hands on the bones. He heard his own voice come out of him too fast and too high, the words tumbling, reaching for the recovery. “The articulation is not settled, the faces are worn, in a creature this novel the convention of the count cannot simply be.” And he had a vertebra in his hands, he was lifting it off the bar, he was going to show them, he was going to take the spine apart in front of the room and rebuild it true right there under the lamps and make the rebuilding the marvel instead of the error.

But his hands were cold and the disc was heavy and the bar was long, and the bone slipped in his cold fingers and clacked back down against the iron, loud in the held room, and drew a fresh sound out of the chairs before he had it steady again. The more he moved the more the bone he was moving said, plainly, to the whole room, that he had it backward, and the murmur did not stop for his moving. The murmur fed on it.

“Professor Leidy’s count settles it, I think,” Marsh said, once, from the third row, not gloating. There was no gloat in it, Cope would search the memory for years and never find the gloat, which was its own kind of torment.

He had taken out the small book again, and he wrote in it, the count and the date and the name of the creature, the way he wrote down everything. A line set into that book did not stay in the room. It went north with him, and it kept, and other men in other rooms would read it in his small even hand and know, before they ever met the man, where Cope had put the head.

And Leidy did not press it further. He had said the true thing once and would not stand over the wound. He looked at Cope across the platform, and what was in his face was not triumph and not pity but the steady disappointment of a standard that had been there all along, and he said only, “Better corrected here than in print.”

It was practical. It was mercy of the only kind he would permit himself. It also told the room the error was real.

Cope set the vertebra down. Carefully. He was, even then, careful with the bone. The bone had done nothing. He said something to close it, some chairman’s-sake sentence, the matter will of course be reviewed, I thank the members, and he reached for the high recovering joke, a fortunate thing, gentlemen, that the animal is long enough to forgive a misplaced end, and it came out too high, and two men smiled late and then withdrew the smiles, and the delay burned worse than refusal.

The room let him have the close, the way a room lets a man have the last stair when he has already fallen down the rest of them. Chairs scraped. The good warm crowd became a lot of men with somewhere to be. Marsh took up his gloves and put them on finger by finger and was, very shortly, gone, north, the way he was always gone, without looking back.

That was the thing Cope would not be able to explain to anyone afterward. He watched the dark coat go out the door into the gaslight and what he felt was not hatred. It was the heat in his face and the cold in his hands and a single sentence going around and around with nowhere to land.

They laughed.

* * *

He took the creature apart himself that night, alone, after the lamps in the rest of the building were out.

He did not have to. A preparator could have come in the morning, with two strong students with a wrench, and the creature could have been turned in an hour in good light

with no one the wiser till the corrected mount stood up clean and true. But he could not leave it standing backward through the night. He could not have slept in a city that held it standing backward. So he lit the lamps in the long room again and took off his good coat and folded it on the barrow out of habit though there was no wet, and he went to the head of his serpent and began, disc by disc, to take down what he had built.

It was slow. The bar he'd had bent to the wrong curve fought him. He lifted each vertebra off in its order and set it on the table and did not let himself hurry, because hurry was what had done this, hurry and the tide in him that he trusted and should not have, the being-first that he had stood at the bottom of a pit and named as his whole method to the man who had stood up tonight and named it back to the city. He took the head off the tail.

He held the small fierce skull in both hands a moment under the lamp, the thing that had drowned its afternoons down a long neck after all, a longer one than he had let himself build, and he set it down at the other end, on the true neck, the long reach he had hung as a tail, and it fit. It had always fit. It had been waiting all along at the end he had not loved. He wiped the chalk dust from his palms onto the folded coat on the barrow, the same motion his hands made for marl, not thinking, the way they had made it ten thousand times in the wet.

When it was done it was a different animal. A truer one, and a greater marvel, not a smaller. The long neck stood up off the trestles where he had hung a tail, taller and stranger than the wrong thing had been, the head riding the height of it where it belonged, and it was correct, and it was the strangest thing that had ever been stood up in America, and there was no one left in the room to see it but him. He stood at the foot of it in the late lamplight with marl-dust and chalk-dust both on his hands and looked at the animal as it actually was, and he was very tired, and the heat was gone out of his face at last and left only the cold, the steady cold in the hands that would not quite go.

He did not curse Marsh. He did not plan anything. There was no oath in him, no figure of a man brought low, none of what other men would later pretend had been in him from this night. There was none of it, not yet, only a young man alone in a long room with a corrected skeleton and a thing in his chest he had no name for and would not

have chosen to keep.

He thought of the journals. That was the first cold practical thing his mind reached for and closed on, the description already written, already set, the paper with the creature built backward in it already gone out into the world to the few dozen men whose good opinion was the only currency he had ever actually wanted. He would buy them back. The thought arrived fully formed and a little wild. He would write to the publisher, recall the plate, purchase the error out of existence copy by copy before it could set the way a wrong horn had once set in a famous mount where every schoolboy learned it. He would spend whatever it cost. He could not stand here. He had to be doing. The doing was the only place the cold went quiet.

He took up a sheet of paper from the side table to begin the letter to the publisher, and his hand, of its own accord, out of a year's habit, wrote at the top not the publisher's name but Marsh's, *My dear Marsh,* the way it had written it twenty times that year, the way you reach for the friend to tell him the thing that has happened to you before you remember that the thing that has happened to you is him.

He looked at the two words a while.

He did not finish the letter. He did not tear it up either. He set it down under the lamp with its two words on it and left it there, and he found the publisher's sheet and began the other letter, the practical one, the recall, his pen going fast and even now, all the tide of him narrowed down into the single hard channel of undoing. Buy it back. Set it right. Be first to the correction the way he had been first to the error. Outrun it.

He wrote until the window went gray. When the light came up off the river he was still at it, the long room cold around him, the corrected creature standing modest and true at his back with its head finally on straight, and the unfinished sheet with its two soft words lying where he had left it, just outside the circle of the lamp.

Chapter 4 — Open Ground

1869–1871

The recall cost him more than the expedition would have, and he paid it the way he paid for everything that winter, fast, and without looking at the figure twice. He sat at the desk on Pine Street with the publisher's accounting in front of him and a cup of coffee gone cold at his elbow and he wrote the drafts to buy back the plates, copy by copy, the description with the creature built backward in it, out of the libraries and the reading rooms and the hands of the few dozen men whose good opinion was the only currency he had ever wanted to hold.

Some of them sent the sheets back folded. Some of them did not answer. One of them, a man in Washington he had dined with twice, returned the plate uncut with a single line that said he had already shown it to the section and thanked Cope for the curiosity. Cope read the line standing up and put it in the fire and felt the heat of it on his face long after the paper was gone, and then he went back to the desk and wrote the next draft, because the writing was the place the heat went quiet, and there was always a next draft.

He did not think about Marsh. He had trained himself out of it the way you train yourself off a sore tooth, by not putting the tongue there, and he had got good at it through the autumn, so that whole hours went by in the workroom with the casts and the calipers and the new monograph and the friend's name never once surfacing. It was only the hand that had not learned. Twice that season he had taken up a clean sheet to begin a letter about a find and watched his own pen put down *My dear* before the practical part of his mind caught the wrist and stopped it, and both times he had set the sheet aside rather than tear it up, the two soft words lying there, and gone and found another sheet for whoever the letter was actually for.

He did not examine this. He was a man with a great deal to do.

"You haven't eaten," Anne said.

She had come in without his hearing the door, which meant he had been at it a while, and she crossed the room and moved the cold coffee out of his reach and set down in its place a plate with bread and cold mutton and a cut apple, arranged, the apple fanned the way she did it, and she did not stand over him to watch him eat because that was not her method. She went to the window instead and opened it two inches on the December cold to let the lamp-smoke out, and tidied the run of plates along the side table back into the order he had taken them out of, and waited.

"There's a thing I've decided," Cope said, around the bread, already up out of the chair and moving, because he thought best on his feet and he had been sitting too long. "I've been going at this from the wrong end, Annie. All of it. The whole of it." He gestured at the desk, the accounting, the recalled plates, the city beyond the window full of rooms where men had leaned forward and then leaned back. "I have been standing in a pit in New Jersey paying farmers not to grind up my creatures for turnip fields, and being grateful for three bones a season, and writing east to ask might I please come and see what's already been dug, and the whole time the ground that matters isn't behind me at all. It's west. It's been west the whole while and I have been facing the wrong way."

"West where," Anne said. Not no. A question with a cost folded into it.

"Kansas, to start. The chalk along the Smoky Hill. Leidy's had teeth out of it, sea-things, a saurian as long as this room, and that's from soldiers and railroad men picking up what the rain washes loose, that's the leavings, Annie, the surface, nobody has gone at it properly, nobody has stood there and *worked* it." He had the apple now, eating it in halves, walking the length of the workroom and back. "And it's open. That's the thing of it. There's no Academy out there to take a vote on me. No man in a good coat to stand up in a warm room and read me my own work back to me with the bones turned around. No tangle of leases and farmers and other men's say-so. A man pays his own way and digs his own ground and the ground answers to him and to nobody else."

"With whose money."

"My own." He said it as though it were the freeing part, and to him it was. "That's the cleanness of it. No subscription, no committee, no institution holding the purse and the credit both. I pay the men, I own the boxes, the boxes come to me. My men, my crates,

my hand last on the lid.” He was not thinking of Haddonfield when he said it, not on the surface, not the foreman who had gone over to the other interest or the deep cut he no longer had the run of, the boxes that had been packed by men he trusted and shipped north all the same. He was not thinking of it and it was the whole shape of what he said. “You only lose a thing once that way, and then you build it so it can’t be taken twice.”

Anne folded the publisher’s accounting closed so the figure was face-down on the desk, a small precise motion, and left her hand flat on it a moment.

“The Pim account is what pays for it,” she said. “Not the Academy’s vouchers, not a patron’s subscription. Ours. The child’s, after us.” She was not consulting a ledger. She carried the figure in her the way she carried the time of day. “You spent at this pace once before, when you were sure the silver would come back. I am not saying the chalk is the silver. I am saying the account does not know the difference between a wise spend and a fast one. It only knows the bottom.”

“It will come back tenfold out of that ground.”

“It may.” She did not soften it and she did not press it. “You’ll be gone the season.”

“The season. Perhaps into the fall.”

“And the cough you had in November you’ll have again in a railway car with the windows down and no one to make you sit.” She was not asking. She had moved to the coat he’d thrown over the press and she was hanging it properly, on the peg, by the collar. “You’ll go light on the medicine because it slows you and you’ll go light on the sleep because there’s always one more thing in the ground, and you’ll come back in October thinner than you went and showing me a crate and telling me it was worth it.” She turned and looked at him, and what was in her face was not reproach, which was a register she did not use, but measurement, the clean fast arithmetic she did and he did not. “It probably will be worth it. That’s not the part I’d argue.”

“Then don’t argue any of it.”

“I’m not arguing it.” She picked up the cold coffee cup to take it out. “I’m telling you

the cost so that one of us has said it out loud, and so you don't go west believing you are buying ground when half of what you're buying is distance. Eat the rest of that before it browns."

He ate the rest of it. He always did when she put it that way, which was the only way she ever put anything, and he loved her for the plainness of it the way you love the one fixed thing in a turning room, and it did not slow him down by a single day.

* * *

The notice about Marsh came in a journal, three lines, the way that kind of news came, and Cope read it at the breakfast table and set the journal down and picked it up again.

A party out of Yale was being organized for the western territories the coming season, students and a professor of the college, with the cooperation of the railroad and a military escort to be arranged through the proper quarters. There was a sentence about the scientific objects of the expedition and a sentence about its patron and a sentence, the third one, about the careful provisioning and the route. It was the third sentence that Cope read twice. It was so like the man it was almost funny. The route arranged, the escort arranged, the proper quarters, the whole apparatus of permission assembled and oiled before a single spade had touched a single foot of ground.

Marsh would not go west the way a man goes west. He would have the West brought into order first, surveyed and provisioned and routed and made safe, and then he would arrive into the order he had built, by arrangement, on a schedule, having extracted from the railroad and the army and the patron every assurance a careful man could ask for, and he would dislike the train the whole way and say so to no one, and he would be correct in every particular.

There was nothing in the three lines to be wounded by. That was what Cope sat with at the breakfast table. The man had done nothing but organize an expedition, lawfully, with backing he was entitled to, toward ground that belonged to no one, and there was not a word in it Cope could have stood up and objected to in any room in the country without looking like exactly the thing he could not afford to look like. It was all defensible. It was always all defensible.

That was the particular cold of it, the cold that had no name and no grievance he could point at, only the fact of the man moving toward the same open ground with the army at his elbow and the railroad at his back and the proper quarters already arranged, while Cope sat in Philadelphia with his own money and his own cough and a recall still grinding through the libraries copy by copy. Marsh would go west in a hired car with the cabinets built in along the wall, and Cope would go west on a passenger ticket with his boxes thrown onto the flatcar like cordwood, and the difference between those two ways of crossing a continent was everything that stood between them, and only one of the two men felt it as an injury.

He did not finish his coffee. He went and found a sheet of paper.

His hand put down *My dear* and he stopped it, and for once he sat and looked at the two words instead of setting the sheet aside, and then he drew a line through them, one stroke, and under them he wrote a different name, the first of the men he meant to take, and the letter that came out after it went fast and even and was about wages and rendezvous and the kind of boxes to bring, and there was nothing of the breakfast table in it at all.

He would not be brought into order. He would not arrange and provision and route and arrive into safety on a schedule. He would simply go, faster than the apparatus could be assembled, and be there first, the way he had always been there first, and let the careful man arrive into ground that Cope had already opened.

By the time the coffee was cold he had the route in his head and four men named on paper, and the heat in his face had gone, the way it did, into the moving.

* * *

He took the men the way he took everything, by being in the room.

There was a fossil-dealer’s back office in a building off Market Street, a low room that smelled of pipe tobacco and the particular dust that comes off old bone, and a man in it named Eli Whitford who had spent two years on the Kansas Pacific grades and had a crate of things he’d pulled out of the cuts and didn’t rightly know what they were, and

Cope went to buy the crate and stayed three hours and came out having hired the man. He did not mean to. He meant to buy a crate.

But Whitford had set the pieces out on the table like a hand of cards he was proud of, a vertebra the size of a fist, a length of paddle-bone, a tooth, and Cope had picked up the tooth and gone still the way he went still in front of a real thing, and then he was not still at all.

“You found this loose? On the surface?”

“Washed out of a bank. There’s banks of it out there, mister, miles of it, white as a tablecloth, and the rain just takes the dirt off and leaves the bones laying there like a table that’s been set.”

“Show me how it was lying.” And then, when Whitford turned the tooth in his fingers to show the set of it in the jaw it had come from, a jaw fifty feet of chalk and a drowned age from where they sat, Cope was around the table and beside him, fast, both of them bent over a fist of stone under a bad lamp, and Cope was talking, what the tooth said about the creature, how it had swum, what it had taken in those teeth and swallowed whole in a sea that had stood where the wheat was now, how you would know its kin when you saw them in the bank because the vertebrae would run so, like this, look.

And Whitford, who had hauled this crate around for a year and a half and been told by three professors that it was interesting, stood in the lamplight and watched a man see the whole drowned animal in a single tooth, and watched him see it fast, and want it, and make the wanting a thing you could warm your hands at.

“I pay two dollars the day and your keep and your powder,” Cope said, somewhere in the third hour, not as an offer, just as the next true thing in a conversation that had stopped being about the crate. “And I’ll teach you what you’re standing on so you stop selling tablecloth-bone for the price of the freight. You know the cuts. You know which banks. I know what’s in them. Between us there’s no surface left unworked from Fort Wallace to the river.”

“Other outfits pay three,” Whitford said, because a man has to say it.

“Other outfits will have you loading another man’s boxes onto another man’s car and never once tell you the name of the thing you dug.” Cope set the tooth down between them on the table, gently, the way you set down something that is the actual point. “Come with me and the thing you dig has your hand on it from the bank to the box, and I’ll put your name in the paper next to the creature you found, and no professor in a good coat anywhere will be able to take it back out again. That’s worth a dollar a day to the right man. I think you’re the right man. I think you’ve thought you were the right man for two years and nobody’s said it.”

Whitford looked at the tooth. Cope let him. It was the one thing he could do slowly, the leaving of a true thing on a table for a man to look at, and he did it now, and he watched the man choose momentum the way men chose it around him, not because they were fooled and not because they worshipped him but because he had shown them, in three hours over a bad lamp, that the ground was bigger than the wage and that the ground would have their hand on it. By the time Cope left the office it was dark and the crate was sold back to him as part of the bargain and Whitford was his, and would stay his, through worse weather than either of them could see from a back room off Market Street.

He took three more the same way that month. He did not assemble an expedition. He recruited the way he did everything, which was to say badly if recruiting meant caution and magnificently if it meant combustion. He took a man out of a freight yard who did not know one bone from another but could lash a load down so that the crate forgot it had ever been separate from the wagon, and when the man said he knew nothing of fossils Cope told him that was the cleanest condition a man could come in, having no other man’s mistakes to unlearn.

He took a farm boy who wanted any road that did not end in the same field he had started in. He took an older hand who could make a splint out of scrap wood and weather and had the patience the young ones lacked. He fed them badly at a hotel table and drew them a rib, a vertebra, a jaw, the track of a creature through a sea that had since become grass, and they leaned in, practically, asking what it paid and when, and he told them less than comfort and more than boredom and that the figure was the truest one he had, and not one of them signed anything, and all of them came.

That was the method, if it could be called one. Rather than lower the work to bring men to it, he raised the work until their own hands looked to them like instruments chosen by the task, and then there was nowhere to stand but inside it.

* * *

The train took four days and changed him by degrees he did not notice until they had accumulated.

He had ridden out of Philadelphia with a basket Anne had packed and a notebook on his knee, and he had spent the first day writing, letters and field notes and a description of a tooth he had meant to publish and forgotten, using the work as a wall against the circuit rider across the aisle who wanted to discuss the age of the earth and got one sentence about the succession of the strata and the sight of Cope's open notebook for his trouble. By the second day the corn had given over to pasture and the pasture to a country that did not end.

He had read the Survey reports and studied the maps, and he understood now that reading a distance and being carried through it were different operations entirely. The plains did not submit to the eastern scale. There was nothing in them to measure a man against, no hill at the right size, no wood closing the view at a comfortable distance, and Cope could feel small out there without feeling diminished by it, a sensation he had not had before and found, to his surprise, that he liked. The wound he had carried out of Philadelphia did not heal in that country and did not lessen.

It converted. The distance took the heat of it and turned it into something that felt, from the inside, indistinguishable from purpose.

The train let them down in the high short-grass country in May and after that it was wagons and mules and the men's own legs, and Cope was happy in a way he had not been since the bottom of the marl pit, which was to say wholly, and without noticing he was doing it.

The country did what he had promised them it would do and more. They came up out of the river bottoms onto the chalk and it was as Whitford had said, banks of it standing

white above the green, miles of it, cut into bluffs and badlands by ten thousand years of the weather, and the rain had done its slow work down every face of it so that the bones lay where the dirt had left them, in the open, on the ground, a whole sunk world surfacing into the Kansas light. The first week they took a paddle of bones out of a bank before breakfast.

The second week a man named Carrow put his boot wrong on a slope and slid down it on the seat of his trousers and fetched up against a run of vertebrae as long as the wagon, lying in their order in the chalk, a creature that had gone down into that sea on its side and waited in the rock for a railroad and a clumsy man's boot, and Cope was down the slope before Carrow had got his breath, on his knees in the white dust, brushing.

He worked the way he had worked the marl, on his knees, coat off, the wide soft brush and the slow hand, *slower at the hip, you go slow at the joint or you lose the head of it,* the boy's-handed care he could not have explained and never tried to, the respect that was not patience but a kind of courtesy to the dead thing coming up out of the floor of its sea. The men learned it off his hands the way he had learned it off Leidy's, by watching. He had not set out to teach it.

He taught it the way he did everything, by being on his knees beside them in the chalk doing it, and they came to do it the same, the slow lift, the wait, the letting the rock keep the piece it meant to keep, and a kind of pride came up in the crew that was not about the wage. He would stop a man's hand over a bone and say *do you know what this is* and not wait for the answer, which the man never had, and tell him it was a window, that the chalk and the grass and the sky over them were the present and the thing under his hand was a world, and that they were the first men to stand over it since the day it ended.

He said it cheap and often and meant it every time, and the men who had been cowhands and railroad hands a season before found that they had begun to feel it too, the strangeness of what they were lifting, an age of it come up under a borrowed brush into the ordinary afternoon.

It was the speed that frightened them, when it frightened them, and it was the speed that

was the whole method.

Because Cope did not work one creature the way Leidy worked one creature, for a season, in good light, with the patience of a man who has all the time there is. Cope worked the way the country let him, which was everywhere at once, six banks open in a week, a vertebra here and a jaw there and a sketch flung off in the field notebook and the name of the creature arrived at before the rest of it was even out of the rock, because he could see the whole dinosaur in a tooth and he trusted that he could, and mostly he could, and the trusting was the engine of all of it.

There was a bank, late in a long day, where the find ran back into the face of the chalk under an overhang that had no business holding the weight it held, and the older hand looked up at it and said they could cut the face back first, lose the hour, and take the bone out from above in the morning with nothing over their heads. Cope said the seam might crack in the night and give the whole line to the weather, and put the boy under the overhang because the boy’s hands were smallest, and told him to take it from the bottom, always from the bottom, and they had the run of it out and roped before the light went.

An hour after they had moved off the bank and were brewing coffee thirty yards back, the face gave a soft dry sigh and let a sheet of chalk down flat across the spot where Cope’s shoulder had been. Nobody said anything. Cope looked at the fallen chalk the same as the rest of them, and did not pretend he had not seen it, and clapped the dust off his hands once, sharply, and the sound put the men back into motion, and that was all the reckoning the thing got.

One find he crated before it was rightly ready, a paddled saurian he had taken near whole the week before, shipped east half-jacketed in green plaster because the wagon was going and the next wagon was a month off and he would not let a season’s work sit in the ground for the credit to go to whoever came along the bank next. That one he had. That one only wanted careful hands at the far end. The other was the new creature, the one not yet out of the chalk at all, and that one he named in a letter he posted from Fort Wallace off a paddle and a string of vertebrae and three teeth, confident, in print, before the skull was free of the bank, the skull that alone would have told him for certain what

he had, because being first to the name was being first.

And being first was his whole method, and he had stood at the bottom of a pit once and said so to the one man who had later stood up in a warm room and said it back to him as a charge.

“You don’t want to wait on the skull?” Whitford said. Once. Quietly. He had a vertebra of the new creature in his two hands, freed the slow way, and the skull he meant was still in the bank below them, run back under the chalk where the line of the spine led, not yet reached, days of lifting off. He was not arguing. He had learned the slow lift off Cope’s own hands and he stood there now with the rock keeping its piece and the daylight going and he asked the small flat question and let it sit.

Cope was already three banks on in his mind, the letter to the publisher half-composed, the name already set in the sentence. “The skull will say what the teeth already say,” he said, not unkindly, not even slowing, capping the field notebook and standing and brushing the white dust from his palms onto his folded coat without thinking, the marl-motion, the same hand the same way it had made it ten thousand times in the wet. “And if it doesn’t, we’ll have the correction first too. A man who’s first to the bank is first to the error and first to the fixing of it. The standing-still has never once helped me, Eli. Not once in my life.”

Whitford looked at the vertebra in his hands a moment longer. Then he lifted it free the slow way, the way Cope had taught him, and wrapped it, and said nothing, and the daylight went on going, and the question stayed in the air over the chalk after both of them had moved on from it, not answered, not pressed, just there, the way a thing is there in a country that wide.

* * *

It came out at night, the King, the way the truest things came out of Cope, around a fire, not meaning to.

They had a good fire going in a coulee out of the wind and the day’s haul laid out wrapped in the wagon and the men were easy, tired in the good way, and somebody,

Carrow, it would have been, said what he always said, which was *how big do they get out here,* and Cope, lying back against a roll with his hat over his eyes and his coffee on his chest, did not answer it the way he answered it in daylight, with a figure and a Latin name. He let it sit. And then he said it slow, half to the fire, the performing gone out of his voice and the seeing come into it.

“We keep pulling the eaten out of these banks. You notice that? All of it. The fish, the swimmers, the great paddled things, the herds of them, the whole drowned pasture of it lying down in the chalk for miles.” He turned the coffee cup against his chest. “And a pasture has a thing that eats it. There is no country anywhere, dead or living, that grows that much meat and grows nothing to take it. It’s a law older than any of ours. Where the herds are, the thing that hunts the herds is, and it’s bigger than they are, and it’s better than they are, and it’s the last thing any of them ever saw.”

He was quiet a moment. The fire popped. “We’re digging the prey. Every bank we’ve opened, it’s the prey. Somewhere in this chalk, or in rock like it, north of here, west of here, there’s the other thing. The one that stood over all of it. The one the whole drowned pasture was afraid of.” He tipped his hat back and looked at the fire and there was something in his face the men had not seen in daylight, not the speed and not the appetite, something quieter and much harder to stand against. “And I am going to be the man who takes it out of the ground. Not another paddle for another cabinet. Not another curiosity packed off east for somebody to vote on. The king of the whole of it. I can feel it out there the way you feel weather coming. I have felt it since the first tooth.”

Nobody laughed. That was what Whitford would remember, later, when it mattered, when there was a great deal to remember. Five tired men around a fire in a country a thousand miles from any room with good coats in it, and one of them had just told them he could feel a king buried in the weather, and not one of them laughed, because the man had spent the season on his knees beside them in the chalk teaching them the slow lift with his own hands. And had put their names in the paper next to the creatures they’d found, and had been right about the tooth, and the wanting in him was a thing you could warm your hands at on a cold night in a coulee, and they wanted, now, the same thing he wanted.

They wanted to be the men who took the king out of the ground. He had given them that. It was the best thing he had to give and he gave it freely and they took it, and the fire burned down, and out past the light the chalk stood white in the dark for miles, full of the eaten, keeping the one thing he was sure of and could not yet prove.

In the morning there was a letter at the bottom of his satchel he had started weeks before and not sent, two soft words at the top of it and a line drawn through them, and he found it looking for something else and held it a moment in the early light. Then he turned it over and used the clean back of it for the day's list, banks to open, the wagon's load, a wire to send east for more money, because the money was going faster than he had told Anne it would and there was a season's worth of ground still in front of him and he would not stop on account of a figure.

He wrote the list on the back of the unsent letter and folded it into his coat and went to wake the men. He did not face east again. There was nothing behind him he could look at without slowing. The whole of what he wanted was out ahead, in open ground, under the chalk, and he was already, in his mind, on his knees in front of it, first, his own hand last on the lid of the box.

Chapter 5 — Bridger

The Bridger Basin, Wyoming Territory, 1872

The land came up out of nothing.

For three days the wagons had crawled south from the rail, through sage that ran flat and gray to every edge of the world, and the country had given them nothing to measure themselves against. No tree, no fence, no smoke but their own. Then the ground tilted, and the team labored a long rise that did not look like a rise until they were on it, and at the top of it the basin opened below them all at once, and the men stopped talking.

It went down and out and did not stop. Where the sage broke off, the earth had been cut away in benches and channels and bare burning walls, banded in rust and ash and bone-white, run through with shadow where the washes had carved down into it, mile beyond mile of it, until the far rim of it stood up blue and small as a thing seen across water. Buttes rose off the basin floor in flat-topped ranks like the foundations of a city that had been quarried out from under itself. A hawk hung over the middle distance and was the only moving thing, and it was nothing, a fleck, lost in the size of what it crossed.

Cope was off his horse before the wagons had fully stopped.

He stood at the lip of the divide with the wind taking his hat-brim flat against his head and did not put a hand up to it. He had ridden the last hour ahead of the train, and the dust of it was on him to the eyes, and his eyes moved across the basin the way a man’s hands move over money. He was already counting. No one looking at his face could have said what he was counting. The walls, perhaps, the washes, the cut banks where forty feet of dead time stood exposed to the weather and waited only to be read. The count was running in him, fast, the way it always ran, and it did not include the three days behind him or the wire he would have to send east or the figure waiting at the bottom of the wire.

“There,” he said, to no one, and then, because there was no one near enough, louder,

half-turning. “Sternberg. Come and look at this.”

The young man came up beside him on foot, leading his animal, and looked.

He was perhaps twenty, and built for the work without yet knowing the work. Broad in the shoulder, big-handed, with a sunburn already going to brown across the back of his neck and a way of holding still when he was taking something in, as though motion might spend it. He had attached himself to the outfit at the rail on the strength of a letter and a willingness to carry, and Cope had let him come because Cope let willing men come. It cost him a place at the fire and bought him another pair of hands, and the arithmetic of that pleased him. The young man was not on the books. He understood that he was not on the books. He had come anyway.

He looked at the basin for a long time. The wind worked at his coat.

“It’s bigger than I had it in my head,” he said finally. That was all. It was not a fine thing prepared. He said it as a fact that had gone past him.

“Everything out here is bigger than you had it in your head,” Cope said. “That’s the first thing the country teaches you and the only thing most men ever learn from it.” He swept his arm at the cut walls. “You see those bands. Every band is a floor somebody lived on. The whole of it is floors. We are standing on the roof of a house with no bottom to it, and the wind has taken the roof off.”

Sternberg said nothing. But he had taken his hat off, though the sun was hard on him. He held it against his chest in both hands, as if in a doorway he was not sure he was permitted to enter, and he was not aware that he had done it.

Behind them the wagons creaked down off the divide one at a time, the brakes shrieking, the mules sliding stiff-legged in the loose, and Whitford’s voice came up over the noise of it, flat and unhurried, telling the second teamster to ride his brake and quit fighting the leaders. Whitford had been with Cope a season now and rode the train the way he did everything, without spending more of himself on it than it asked. He had heard the country called bigger than a man’s head before. He got the wagons down.

* * *

They made the first camp at the mouth of a wash where a seep gave water that the mules would drink and the men would not, except boiled, and not gladly then. The heat did not break with the sun. It came up off the bare ground after dark in a steady exhalation, and the wind that had been a torment all day was missed the moment it dropped, because without it the gnats came up off the seep in clouds and got into the eyes and the corners of the mouth. Carrow, who cooked, draped his head in cheesecloth and swore through it, and the swearing had a muffled domestic quality that made one of the younger hands laugh until Carrow found something for him to do.

Cope did not sit long at the fire. He ate standing, walking the edge of the firelight with the plate in his hand, talking. About the bands in the wall they had seen, about the seep and what it told him of the drainage, about how far a man could work in a day if he did not let the day be wasted on him. He had a way of talking that did not require answers and did not tolerate silence, and the camp arranged itself around it the way a camp arranges itself around weather.

The men were not worshipful. They were tired, and they were paid, and most of them had taken his measure and decided the work was worth the man. But they listened, because he was worth listening to, and because the talk carried something the country had drained out of them on the road and they wanted it back.

“We’re not the only ones who know what’s here,” Cope said at one point, lightly, picking a bone out of his teeth. “There are others coming into the basin this season. There may be others in it now.” He said it as evenly as he would have named the weather. “It changes nothing about the work. It changes only the speed of the work.”

Whitford, mending a hame strap by the fire, did not look up. “Speed’s been changing already,” he said.

“Speed is the whole of it,” Cope said, and seemed pleased to be agreed with, though he had not been. He set down his plate. “A thing in the ground has been there a long while and is in no hurry. The only race is between men. The bone does not care which of us reaches it. But the name of it.” Here something came into his voice, a relish, an appetite

that was very near to joy. “The name of it goes to the man who reaches it first and is not afraid to say what it is.”

He went to his blankets still talking, in a lower voice now, to himself, and the camp let the talk go on without it, the way you let a fire burn down that you are too tired to feed.

Sternberg lay awake a while in the new dark and listened to the country make its sounds, the seep, the gnats, a coyote somewhere taking up a complaint and being answered, and he was happy in a way he could not have given an account of, and did not try to. He had wanted, without knowing he wanted it, to be exactly here, doing exactly this, without ever having known the place existed to want. In the morning he was the second man up. The first was Cope.

* * *

The find came on the fourth day, and it came the way Cope always swore the great ones came, which was without warning and to the man who had earned it by being out in the heat when better-rested men were not.

They had been working a system of low buttes a half-day’s ride from the water, splitting the crew across the faces, and the work was the slow miserable work that the country mostly gave. Down on the knees in the wash-bottoms with the sun standing straight overhead and no shade the width of a hand, going over the surface foot by foot for the weathered-out scraps the rain brought down. A tooth here, the butt of a limb-bone there, the small change of the dead. Sternberg had found that he had an eye for it. He did not say so. He simply found things, and brought them to be looked at, and was sent back for more, and the being-sent-back was the nearest thing to praise the day allowed and he took it as praise.

It was Cope who found the skull, because Cope had gone up the face of the butte itself when the rest of them were content to work the apron below it.

He did it without meaning to. He stopped in the middle of saying something, the sentence simply abandoned in the air, as though something had gone through him at the level of the breastbone, a low note he could not have named and did not pause to try,

and went up the broken slope on his hands as much as his feet, sending down a hiss of gravel, heedless of the footing, until he stood thirty feet up against the wall with his face a hand's breadth from the rock. And then he made a sound. It was not a word. It was the sound a man makes when something he has hoped for past reason turns out to be true, and it carried down the face of the butte and brought the whole crew up off their knees and around to the foot of the slope, shading their eyes.

Out of the wall, where the weather had been at it for who knew how long, a great curve of bone stood half-free of the matrix. Dark, mineral-heavy, the size of a man's torso and plainly only a part of something far larger still buried. As they came up one by one they could see the shape of it resolve. The long heavy box of a skull lay on its side in the rock. Along the top of it, where Cope's hand hovered and would not quite touch, a series of bony bosses or horns rose in paired ranks, and below, swept down from the jaw, the broken bases of tusks stood as thick as a wrist.

"Look at the architecture of it," Cope said. His voice had dropped. He was not performing now; the performance was for the camp at night, and this was something else, something private that he could not help doing in front of them. "Look at what it had to carry. No creature grows that on its head for nothing. That is display. That is a thing built to be seen by its own kind and feared by everything else." He laughed, short, almost shaken. "And it has been lying in this wall being seen by no one for longer than there have been eyes to count the years, and now it is mine."

"Ours," said Carrow, mildly, behind him, and there was a small laugh from the hands, and Cope laughed too and let it stand, because he was generous in the hour of a find, generous the way a winning man is generous, and it cost him nothing.

The work of it took the rest of that day and all of the next. Cope drove it. He was up on the face with the men, his coat off and then his collar, the chalky dust of the matrix in the creases of his neck and the lines of his hands, calling for tools, calling for the burlap, calling for the flour paste Carrow boiled up to stiffen the jacketing, working with a quickness that the others could match only in bursts and that he held to all day without seeming to spend himself.

He knew how to take a thing out of the ground. No one watching could have doubted it.

Whatever else the man was, in the heat against that wall, with the great horned skull coming free of the rock under his hands, he was exactly and wholly equal to what he was doing, and it was a fine thing to see, and the young man working below him could not take his eyes off it.

Sternberg worked with his hands and learned with them. He had been set to clearing the loose below the skull and bagging the fragments that came down, and he did it as though the fragments were eggs, which earned him a glance from Whitford that he did not see and would not have known how to read. He had a feel, already, for the difference between rock that was only rock and rock that had once been alive; his fingers found it before his mind did.

When a piece of the jaw shelf broke loose under the bar and started to go, it was Sternberg who got under it, taking the weight of it against his chest and his braced thigh, and held it, gone white in the face with the effort and saying nothing, until two of the hands could get the burlap and the splints around it and ease it down. Then he sat down hard in the wash with the thing in his lap and breathed.

“That would have cost us the whole shelf,” Cope said, looking down from the face. He said it to the crew, not to Sternberg, which was its own kind of saying it to Sternberg. “You don’t drop bone. Everything else you can drop. Not bone.” He went back to his work. But he had marked the young man, a watcher would have understood, the way he marked anything that proved useful to the speed of the thing. And the young man, sitting in the wash with the jaw of a beast in his arms and his heart going, had been marked, and felt it, and would have followed the man up the wall barehanded if he had been asked.

* * *

It was at the end of the second day, with the skull jacketed and roped and the first sections already cradled in the wagon-bed in straw, that Cope began to name it.

He did it aloud, walking around the loaded wagon in the last light with a stub of pencil and the back of an old letter, looking at the great white-wrapped bulk of the skull as though it could still be read through the burlap. He was building the name as he built

anything he loved to build, trying the parts of it against each other, discarding, keeping. The horns gave him one root and the size of the beast gave him another and somewhere in the muttering the two came together into a word, and he wrote it down and looked at it and was satisfied.

“That’s it,” he said. “That’s what it is. I’ll wire it from the fort.”

Whitford was coiling the spare rope. He did it slowly and looked at the wagon-bed while he did it, at the straw and the white bulk and the open back of the load.

“The skull’s free,” he said. “Most of it.” He laid the coil in the wagon. “There’s the back of the head still in the wall. We had the light go on us.” He was not arguing. His voice did not argue. It only put the fact down where it could be seen, the way he put the rope down. “Might be the back of it changes what the front of it looks like it is. Wait on the skull?”

For a moment something moved in Cope’s face. Not doubt, the man did not keep doubt where he could reach it, but the brief friction of a man who has heard a true thing he intends to step around. He looked at the wagon. He looked, past it, at the dark coming up out of the basin and filling the washes, and beyond that at the rim, and beyond the rim at the whole invisible country east of it where other men were doing exactly what he was doing and might do it faster.

“The back of the head will say the same thing the front of it says,” he said. “I’ve named things off less and not regretted it. I named the great sea-lizard, years back, off a paddle and a string of the neck, and there is a quarrel about the head of it still going on in some of the better magazines, and I would do it the same way today.” He folded the letter with the word inside it and put it in his coat. “A man who waits until he is certain has already lost the thing to the man who wasn’t afraid to be right out loud. We’ll have the back of the skull in two days. The name goes tomorrow.”

“All right,” Whitford said, and that was all, and he finished with the rope.

Sternberg had heard all of it. He did not understand all of it. He understood that a great thing had come out of the ground and that the man who had brought it out was going to

give it a name that no one had ever spoken before, and that this was the most extraordinary kind of authority he had ever stood next to. The authority to look at a thing the world had never seen and tell the world what it was. It did not occur to him to weigh the back of the skull against the front.

He was twenty, and the front of the skull was magnificent, and the man was magnificent, and the word folded in the man's coat was going to go out over the wire into the world and come back as fact. He helped Carrow bank the load for the night. He set the last of the straw himself, careful as packing, and stood a moment with his hand flat on the cool burlap in the dark, feeling the size of what was under it.

* * *

Fort Bridger was a day and a half off, low buildings the color of the ground around a parade square with a flag standing out stiff in the everlasting wind, and Cope rode in ahead with two of the hands and the wagon to put the first sections on the road east and to send his wire. He had two wires to send. He told no one of the second.

On the cattle siding behind the post stood a polished private car, brass-railed, its shades drawn against the sun, too clean for that country and too quiet to be empty. Cope took it in once as he passed and did not look at it again.

The telegraph shared a room with the sutler's store, and the room was close and dim after the glare outside and smelled of coal-oil and bacon and the hot resin of new pine boards, and the man at the key was the loudest quiet man Sternberg, who had come in behind Cope with his hat in his hands, had ever encountered.

He was small and quick and had taken his collar off against the heat, and he ran the key with one hand and a sheaf of flimsies with the other and conducted an argument with a freighter over a misdirected case of axle-grease the whole time without losing the thread of either. When Cope laid his folded letter on the counter and smoothed it and announced, with some ceremony, that he wished to send a scientific dispatch east, of the first importance, and that the spelling must be exact, the man at the key took the letter, read it, turned it over, read the back where Cope had done his building, and looked up.

“This a word?” he said. He read it off the page, mangling it, the foreign roots of it coming apart in his mouth into something that sounded like a sneeze and a man falling downstairs. “That’s a word? You want me to spend the company’s wire sending that to Philadelphia and you’ll pay by the letter and there’s a power of letters in it.”

“It is the name of a beast that has been dead longer than you can conceive of,” Cope said, “and you will send it exactly as it is written or not at all.”

“It’s the name of a pile of money is what it is, at the rates,” the man said, already counting the letters with the point of his pencil, his lips moving. “What’s it do, this animal? It worth all this?”

“It carried six horns on its head and tusks the length of your forearm and it stood as tall at the shoulder as that doorway and it has been waiting in a hill out there.” Cope tipped his head at the country. “Since before the first man, to be given its name. Yes. It is worth all this.”

The man looked at him a moment with an expression that was not impressed, exactly, but was paying close attention, which from this man was the same coin. “Six horns and a name nobody can say,” he said. “Well.” He started to send. The key chattered. Then, in the middle of it, not pausing, he said: “You’re not the first one in here this month wanting to spell me a monster.”

Cope went still. “No?”

“Tall fellow’s man. Last week. Maybe ten days.” The key ran on under his hand; he was talking around the work, the way Carrow swore around the cheesecloth. “Sent east about the same kind of business. Horns, bones, names a Christian can’t pronounce, all of it of the first importance and all of it costing the earth.” He grinned without warmth and without malice, a grin that was simply the truth showing through. “Seems like everybody’s monster is the most important monster there ever was, right up until the next man’s wagon comes in. You scientific gentlemen are keeping the wire warm this season. I’ll say that.”

“What name did he send,” Cope said. His voice had not changed but all of his attention

had come down onto the small man like weather.

“Couldn’t tell you. Don’t keep ‘em up here.” The man tapped his own head. “Soon as I send ‘em they’re gone. That’s the only way to do this work and stay friends with everybody.” He finished, listened, made a mark. “There. Your monster’s away to Philadelphia. They’ll have it by morning, supposing the line stays up past Laramie, which it does about half the time.” He pulled a fresh flimsy. “You said two.”

So Cope sent the second wire, and the young man standing behind him with his hat in his hands heard it sent and did not understand what he was hearing, because the second wire was to a man in the East about money. A request, phrased the way Cope phrased everything, as a certainty rather than a request, for funds to be forwarded at once against the great work now proving out beyond all expectation in the western fields. Sternberg heard only the confidence in it. He did not hear, because he had no way to hear, that the great work was already running ahead of what had paid for it.

The wagons and the wages and the straw and the long road to the rail were being carried on the credit of a man’s certainty and a name folded in a coat. Each find drove the cost of the next, and “speed is the whole of it” had a price written under it in another column that Cope did not read aloud and perhaps, in the hour of a find, did not read at all.

What Sternberg saw was a man who had pulled a beast out of a hill and named it and sent the name to the great cities of the world and asked the world for more, and had been told, by a small loud man at a telegraph key, that he was one of several men doing the same thing in the same country in the same season. And who had heard it, and absorbed it, and walked back out into the white light entirely undiminished, more himself than before, as though competition were not a threat but a confirmation that he was hunting where the great game was.

The small man called something after them as the door let the glare in. “Tolliver,” he said. “If you’ve a need to come back. Click, to most. Anybody asks, I never can remember a single one of your names. That’s a service. You’d be surprised what it’s worth.”

Out in the wind Cope laughed for the first time since the counter. “I like that man,” he

said. “He understands the business better than the men who pay him.” He squinted east, the way he had squinted east from the divide. “Marsh’s man. Ten days.” He said the name without heat. It was the only time the name was spoken, and it landed in the bright air and was gone, a fact among the day’s facts, neither more nor less. “Then we are not behind. Ten days behind on the road is nothing. Ten days behind in the ground is everything, and in the ground we are not behind at all. We are standing on it.”

He swung up onto his horse. “Doctor Leidy works careful and slow out of Philadelphia, and careful and slow is getting buried under the fast in this country, and that is a pity, and it is also the weather, and a man can stand in the weather or he can get out of it.” He turned the horse. “We get the back of that skull tomorrow.”

* * *

They did not get the back of the skull the next day, because the wind brought up a wall of dust off the basin floor that stood the work down till noon and put grit in everything, the food, the eyes, the joints of the wagons. The men roped the canvas down twice and rode the lee of the wagons with their hats pulled low and neckerchiefs over the mouth, and even so they were spitting the country out of their teeth by midday. So the camp kept itself close, and the fire that night was a better fire than the road had allowed, fed with the dry sage roots Carrow had been hoarding, and the men sat in close around it out of the cold that came down hard the moment the heat of the day let go, and Cope talked.

He talked about the horned beast first, where it had lived and what it had eaten, building it back up out of its bones in the air over the fire with his hands, giving it a world to stand in. A country of warm shallow water and green margins, fat with growing things, thick with browsing herds. He was good at this. The men who had pulled the dead gray skull out of a dead gray wall sat and watched a green country rise over the fire and put the living beast into it, vast and slow and ridiculous and magnificent under its crown of horns, and even Whitford had stopped working his hands and was looking into the fire as though he could see it.

“All of that meat,” Cope said.

He had gone quiet. A man at that fire would have noticed the change in him, that he had talked himself, as he often did, out past the thing in front of him and onto the edge of something larger, and that out there his voice lost its performance and got low and almost careful, the way Tolliver's grin had been careful.

"Think of it," he said. "A whole country of it. Herds of the horned ones, and the great water-beasts in the rivers, and everything growing and breeding and dying, ton upon ton of living meat standing around in the sun for the taking." He looked up from the fire, and his eyes had gone past the fire and past the men and out into the dark over the basin. "With all of the meat. There must be a meat eater."

"There's always something eats it," Carrow said comfortably. "There's wolves on a buffalo herd. Stands to reason."

"Not a wolf." Cope shook his head slowly. "Not something that pulls down the weak one and runs from the herd. Something the herd runs from. Something built at the scale of the meat. Bigger than the horned ones, bigger than anything we have brought out of any wall yet. The bones we have been finding all our lives are the bones of the eaten. Somewhere there are the bones of the eater." He leaned in. The fire was in his face. "There's something bigger out there. I have known it the way you know a thing before you can prove it, for years now, and the more I take out of the ground the more certain I am, because every great herd I dig up is a table laid for something I haven't found yet."

There was a silence around the fire. It was not an uneasy silence. It was the silence of men who have been given something to hold and are turning it over.

It was Sternberg who broke it, and he broke it the way the young break a thing like that, plainly, with the question itself and no shell around it.

"How would you know?" he said. "If you've never found it. How would you know it's there?"

Cope looked at him across the fire, and for a moment did not answer, and the look was not unkind. It was the look of a man recognizing, in a younger one, the particular hunger he had spent his own life feeding and never filling.

“Because the world is built honestly,” he said. “Because it does not lay out that much meat and forget to make a mouth for it. Everything we have ever pulled out of the ground fits with everything else like the parts of one machine. The teeth fit the jaws and the jaws fit the necks and the necks fit the country. And there is a shape in the middle of all of it that we have not found yet, a shape everything else is arranged around, the way the prints of a thing in mud tell you the weight and the stride of the thing that is gone. I have been reading those prints my whole life. They are getting bigger.”

He picked up a sage root and turned it in his fingers and did not put it on the fire. “It will not be a curiosity. Do you understand me? When it comes out of the ground it will not be one more strange beast for the cabinet drawer. It will be the thing the whole drawer was waiting on. A ruler.” He said the next words slowly, and they came out of him not as a boast but as a creed, a thing settled in him long before this fire and only now spoken whole.

“The king carnivore. The last and the largest. The one that everything else in the ground was only the court of.”

No one said anything. The fire popped. Out beyond the firelight the basin lay invisible and enormous, full of the dead, full, if the man was right, of the king of the dead, somewhere under some wall waiting for the weather to bring it down to where a man with no fear of being right out loud could reach it first.

Whitford put his sage root on the fire. He had heard this before. The unsurprised way he moved showed that this was not the first night Cope had talked the king up out of the dark, that the men who had been with him a season carried the king the way they carried the rest of his weather, as a known thing. He had heard it, and he believed about as much of it as a working man believes of any other man’s certainty, which was that the man believed it, and that belief in this man tended to put bone in the wagon, and that the back of a certain skull was still in a wall a half-day off and would have something to say about how good this man’s certainties were. He banked the fire for the night.

But the young man had not heard it before.

The young man sat with his hands open on his knees and the king standing up in the

dark in front of him, the way the green country had stood up, the way the horned beast had stood up, only larger, the largest thing the man's hands had built over any fire. And something in him that had been loose since he first saw the basin open below the divide came to rest, found the thing it had come west without knowing it was looking for. He did not say anything wise. He did not feel a shadow on it.

He was not visited by any sense that he was at the beginning of something that would not let him go, because he was not at the beginning of anything yet that he could see. He was at a fire in a cold country with a great man and a great find roped in the wagon and a greater find promised out there in the dark, and he was, simply and entirely, happy, and full of wonder, and decided, not in words, but in the body, the way he decided most things, that wherever the man went to look for the king, he meant to be carrying.

"I'd like to be there," he said. "When it comes out. Whoever's hands are on it." He flushed a little, having said more than he meant to, and reached to feed the fire to cover it. "I'd just like to be there."

"Then be useful," Cope said, "and don't drop bone," and the men laughed, and it was a good laugh, and Sternberg laughed too, the heat coming up in his face, and across the fire Cope was watching him with the frank pleasure of a man who has found, in a hard country, on a good day, exactly the thing he came for and a little more besides.

The fire went down. The cold came on. One by one the men went to their blankets, and the talk thinned, and at last there was only the wind working in the sage and the great basin holding its dead in the dark.

Cope lay awake longest, as he always did. The wagons, the wire, the figure coming back from the East, the back of the skull, the road, the speed, the king. He did not lie awake out of worry. He had no gift for worry. The same engine that made him quick made him unable to dwell where dwelling might have served him. He lay awake because the day had been a good day and the country was full and a king was somewhere under a wall in the dark waiting to be reached, and every part of him faced forward, toward the next wall and the one past that, with nothing at his back worth the turning, and in the morning they would go and get the back of the skull.

And after the skull the next thing, and after that the next, west and west into the size of it, faster than the men behind him, faster than the cost, fast enough, he was nearly certain, lying there in the cold with his eyes open on the dark, to outrun everything but the finding itself.

Out past the last red coal of the fire the land went on without them, mile beyond mile, indifferent to all of it, keeping its kings.

Chapter 6 — The Institution

New Haven, 1872–1873

The study smelled of linseed oil and cold stone. Marsh shut the door behind him with both hands, pressing it flush until the latch took, and stood a moment in the held silence of the room. The curtains were drawn against the November light. His desk, wide, walnut, squared to the window, carried a lamp, an inkwell, and a folded copy of the *American Journal of Science* with a diagonal crease across the cover where some hand had carried it carelessly.

He crossed to the desk and straightened the journal. He moved the inkwell an inch in from the edge. He hung his coat on the stand by the door and checked that the collar lay flat before he let it go. Then he sat.

The chair had not been touched. The seat was at its height, the armrests level, the correspondence drawer ordered exactly as he had left it three weeks before, dividers upright, the most recent letter on top. Nothing had shifted in his absence. Nothing required shifting. He found, in this, the particular satisfaction other men took from a warm room.

He opened the file and began to read.

The western reports had come in batches. Two from the Hayden survey office, forwarded through the Smithsonian. One from a supply agent in Cheyenne who had billed the museum for crating lumber Marsh had not ordered, and who would not be paid until he produced the requisition that did not exist. Three from former students now working as field assistants, each carrying specimen counts, site conditions, and news of Cope.

Cope had published seven papers since August. The figure came in a note from Grinnell, underlined once. *Seven.* Three of them naming new forms out of the Bridger material. One claiming a genus Marsh was confident he had already described, the previous year, from fragmentary teeth.

Marsh read the note through. He set it down on the blotter, squared its lower edge to the blotter's edge, and picked up the next letter. He read that one and laid it beside the first, aligned. He picked up the third. The hand was poor and the grammar poorer, but the content stood plain enough. Cope's men were still in the field past the season's natural close, working ground that Marsh's own people had mapped the year before and had not secured.

He did not raise his voice in the empty room. He did not stand. He took a fresh folder from the drawer, set the three letters inside it square, and wrote on the tab in small precise capitals, *WESTERN. PRIORITY*, and slid the folder into the second drawer, where it belonged.

Outside, a wagon went down Whitney Avenue, its iron rims grinding over the frozen ruts, and he did not look up. He drew a clean sheet from the stack, unstopped the inkwell, and began a letter to Grinnell, the pen moving in even strokes, the lines set close, each sentence finished before the next was begun.

He wrote that the Bridger duplicates were to be cataloged before storage. That every specimen entering the building would carry a number, a locality, and a date, cross-referenced to the field log, and that any specimen arriving without its log would be held, not shelved, until the log was supplied. He wrote that he wanted a full accounting of every paper Cope had published since August, journals, dates, pages, and a separate column for any name that touched material the Peabody already held or intended to describe. He wrote the word *Friday* and underlined nothing.

He did not write that he had been wrong to go west himself. He had been west. He could be west again if the work demanded it. A man did not refuse the field merely because the field was hard. But he had watched, out there, how everything that ought to have answered to order came loose at the edges, how men wandered, how mules failed, how a clear instruction thinned to nothing in the dry air before it reached the person meant to obey it, how Cope moved through all of it at the tempo the country itself seemed to set, taking the disorder as condition and reading speed off it. That was a thing seen and filed, not a thing to be argued in a letter. He sanded the page, folded it once, and set it in the outbound tray.

Then he opened the master ledger and brought the western column current, because the letter would mean nothing if the ledger did not stand behind it.

* * *

The Peabody was not finished. The eastern wing stood roofed but unglazed, the window frames stretched with oilcloth that cracked and bellied in the December wind, and the collection hall smelled of plaster dust and green pine. Crates lined the walls in double rows, some opened, most still sealed and banded, and the gas fixtures had been hung but not yet charged, so the light came from oil lanterns on temporary hooks along the ceiling beams, swaying when the wind reached in through the unfinished wing.

Marsh walked the hall each morning before the preparators came. He carried a small notebook in which he set down the position of each crate, the state of each specimen, and the progress of each man’s bench. The notebook fit the inside pocket of his coat. He had used the same size since his first year at Yale and saw no reason the size should change because the building had grown.

This morning the thermometer he had hung from the beam nearest the sorting table read thirty-six degrees. He had hung the thermometer himself and he read it himself, at seven, each day. Below thirty-five, exposed specimens were sheeted in cotton against frost fracture. Between thirty-five and forty, the men worked in gloves. Above forty, bare hands were allowed. The rule was not for the men’s comfort. Bone that had lain in dry western matrix could split along a frost line in a single New Haven night, and a split that took a second to make could take a season to undo, if it could be undone at all.

He found such a specimen that morning. A partial jaw, Bridger, still in its field jacket, had been left on the sorting table overnight uncovered, a junior man’s oversight, the cotton sheet folded an arm’s length away on the bench. The exposed surface had taken a rime so fine it showed only when Marsh tipped the lantern toward it and the frost caught the flame.

He called for no one. He set the lantern in its hook, drew off his right glove, and laid two bare fingers flat against the bone, not to warm it quickly, since quick warming was its own kind of fracture, but to learn how cold it had gone. He held them there while the

cold climbed into his hand. Then he lifted the jaw with both palms, carried it the length of the hall to the bench nearest the stovepipe where the air stood a few degrees warmer, set it down out of the draft, and drew the cotton sheet over it himself, tucking the edges as though over someone sleeping.

He stood over it a moment. Then he took up the lantern and went on with the round, and when Grinnell arrived a quarter hour later Marsh said only that the night man was to be told the sheeting rule was not advisory, and gave him the bench number, and nothing else of it.

Grinnell's pen moved. He was twenty-six, thin, serious in a way the work suited, and he had studied under Marsh long enough to have learned two things about him. That every instruction would be followed up, without exception and without warning. And that to ask the reason for an instruction was never a profitable use of breath. Marsh did not explain. He assigned, and the explanation, if there was one, declared itself later in the shape the collection took.

"One more," Marsh said. "I want a map. Every western locality where we or Cope have worked. Ours in blue, his in red, the overlaps marked. Scaled to the quarter-section where the land records allow it."

"By when?"

"When it is right." He moved to the next tray. "A wrong map is worse than none. It tells you where to send men who are not there."

When Grinnell looked up from his notebook Marsh had a vertebra in his hand and was reading it through a glass, the bone dark and heavy against pale fingers, turning slowly, the way another man might turn a coin he was not certain was good.

* * *

The board met in a room that had been made to make money feel honorable. Dark chairs. Heavy curtains. A carpet that took the sound out of shoes. Portraits of dead benefactors whose expressions suggested they had known in advance that living men

would ask for more. Marsh sat with his back straight and his hands quiet on the papers in his lap. Across from him were Dana, Verrill, a trustee with soft hands, and a banker who had not come to discuss bones but could be made to discuss the permanence of collections.

The figures were laid out plain. The endowment carried the building, the collections, and two preparators' wages. Field operations wanted more than that, and the more than that had come, since the previous spring, out of Marsh's own account. The difference between what a museum could be given and what it could be made to do was a difference he had decided to pay rather than to argue. He made no mention of the payments. The meeting concerned the museum's standing, not his ledger.

"Professor," the trustee said, "you are asking us to understand field expense as museum expense."

"I am asking you to understand that a museum without command of the field is a room waiting to be furnished by other men."

The banker looked down at the schedule. "Students, transport, freight insurance, a field collector, telegraph allowances. This is not a modest furnishing."

"No."

The answer landed cleanly. Marsh did not apologize for the figure. Apology would have made the figure seem negotiable.

"Mr. Cope has had early success," Verrill said, the name set down carefully, as though it might jar something loose.

"He has had field success," Marsh said. "That is not the same thing as possession, preservation, classification, or permanence. A creature found in haste must still arrive somewhere, be housed somewhere, named carefully enough to survive correction, and held where students may learn from it after the finder has gone on to the next hill."

"You propose that Yale be that somewhere."

“I propose that Yale already is. We are discussing whether to behave as if we know it.”

A chair creaked. Someone smiled, not warmly, but in recognition that a line had been drawn without anyone raising his voice.

“We are behind in mounted display,” Verrill said. “The public sees nothing.”

“Display follows classification,” Marsh said. “Classification follows preparation. Preparation follows secure acquisition. The order is not reversible. We can show the public a mounted error now or a mounted fact later. I would rather be slow than wrong in a glass case where a thousand schoolchildren can copy the mistake into their notebooks.”

Verrill did not press it.

The banker touched the schedule with one finger. “And this Reed.”

“A field man. Useful with distance, weather, and men who do not read instructions until after they have broken something.”

“Academic?”

“No.”

“Then why him?”

“Because the ground is not academic either.”

That got the banker, not laughter exactly, a small release through the nose. Marsh turned the page as if he had not noticed.

“A permanent collection requires permanent habits,” he said. “Field parties answer to instructions. Specimens answer to numbers. Freight answers to routing. Reports answer to dates. Men answer to appointments. If we leave any one of those matters to enthusiasm, enthusiasm will decide for itself and send us the bill.”

Dana called the vote in due course. The trustee with soft hands turned the schedule to its

last page and made a mark beside the field column. The banker did not vote against a figure he had already touched with one finger. Dana entered the result in the minute book. Marsh voted with the rest, slid the approved schedule back under his own papers, closed his notebook, and waited for the room to be done.

The letter from Washington came on a Tuesday. It was from Powell, short, formal, and concerned, on its face, with appropriations. The Geological Survey was consolidating its western operations, and Powell wished to know whether the Peabody's western collections might be brought into a federal inventory. The request was dressed as cooperation. Underneath the dress it was oversight, and Marsh, who had drafted letters of that exact cut himself, read the dress and the body both on the first pass.

He read it a second time at his desk, then took out a clean sheet and began the reply.

He wrote slowly, the way he wrote when each clause would have to bear an inspection later. He thanked the Major for the candor of the letter and the seriousness of the Survey's western work. He set down, in the next paragraph, that the Peabody's holdings were held in trust as university material, accessioned under the procedures of the corporation, and described in publications open to any member of the scientific community who wished to consult them. He used the word *stewardship* once and the word *permanence* twice and did not use the word *no*.

He proposed, in a careful sentence near the close, that the question of a federal inventory might be best taken up after the Peabody's current cataloging cycle was complete, and that he would write again when that work permitted a fuller answer. He named no month. He signed it and let the ink dry, watching the room's flat light move across the page until the gloss went off.

The letter did not go to Grinnell. He took his coat from the stand and carried it himself, sealed but unaddressed, past the building's outer door and into a street where the November cold had hardened the puddles to glass underfoot. The New Haven post office took two blocks and a turn, and Marsh walked the distance at his own pace, the sealed letter held flat against the inside of his coat, and gave the envelope to the clerk and watched it laid in the federal tray and walked back without speaking to anyone.

* * *

By the new year the wire that carried Marsh's traffic ran through Bryan Station, the Union Pacific junction where the western line split toward the territorial stops and the eastern line ran unbroken to New Haven. Click had come over from the key at Fort Bridger, where the sutler's-store telegraph still took the army post's own business and little else worth a man's time. The bone went east by the main line, and a man went where the traffic was. The room was new and the work was the same. The plank counter, the coal stove with the cracked leg shimmed by a folded newspaper, the window onto the track where, in season, Marsh's hired car stood on the siding like a parlor that had wandered off and got lost among the freight.

Click sat behind the counter with his boots up, reading a dime novel whose cover had torn off three towns back. The hero had been captured by Apaches for the second time and Click was beginning to lose sympathy.

The machine chattered. He set the book down, listened four seconds, and picked the book back up.

"Wrong office," he told no one.

It chattered again, longer. He sighed, swung his feet down, and pulled the pad over. The message was for the Peabody Museum, New Haven, care of Professor O. C. Marsh, and it carried a list of specimen numbers, a request for crating nails, and the phrase *ship immediately* with no flourish on either side of it. Click took it down clean, tore the sheet, and laid it in the outbound tray, where it would go east on the main line the same as all of Marsh's traffic.

Then the machine started again, same origin, same destination, and this one held instructions for a field man named Williston, in Kansas. Where to trench. What to lift first. How deep to go with the spade before he changed to the hand pick. The instruction was particular enough that Click, who had never in his life held a geological pick, could have dug the hole.

"Runs a quarry from a thousand miles off," Click said, and pinned the second sheet to

the board, and sat back down.

By January the traffic had doubled. Marsh's messages came in clusters, three and four in a morning, sometimes six before noon, addressed to different men at different stops but all of them out of the one office in New Haven, all in the one tone. Particular. Directed. Unhurried. *Do this. Ship that. Confirm receipt. Report Tuesday.* Cope's came the other way, fast and ragged, a burst of three in an hour and then a week of nothing and then a single telegram that cost more than Click cleared in a month, crowded with description and question and a fresh set of instructions that contradicted the last set. Marsh's came like a clock. Same hour. Same length. Same build.

Click noticed because noticing was the work. He crossed the station agent at the Carbon water stop one afternoon and tried to put the difference into words.

"Cope talks," he said. "Marsh files."

The agent asked what the difference came to.

"Cope tells you what he found. Marsh tells you what to find next."

The agent thought about it. "Which one's ahead?"

Click looked at him the way he looked at messages addressed to offices that had shut six months back. "Ask me when they quit sending."

It was that winter that the line about coding came through, at the bottom of an evening cluster, and made Click read it twice. *All further site references to be sent in the abbreviated form, per the table to follow.* No table had come with it. He checked the counter, the tray, the floor. Nothing.

A week later a clean-faced young man with eastern boots came in carrying a coin purse and trying to look as if he did not mind being seen at a frontier counter.

"Professor Marsh has arranged an account," the assistant said.

"Professor Marsh has arranged a sentence," Click said. "I haven't found the account

yet.”

“Messages concerning fossil material are to be copied for his office.”

“Are they.”

“That is the instruction.”

Click leaned on the counter. “Young man, this wire carries births, deaths, axle grease, Army complaints, weather, money, and the names of monsters nobody can spell. I can send what a man pays me to send. I can forget what is worth forgetting. I cannot make every fool with a bone belong to Yale because Yale wrote it neat.”

The assistant colored. “Professor Marsh will not appreciate obstruction.”

“Then do not send him any. Send him the rate sheet.”

He took the purse, counted the money, and entered the account because money was real even when instructions were foolish. But he did not enter obedience. That was a different commodity and no one had yet paid enough for it.

The table itself arrived two days on, sealed, carried by a supply rider who plainly had no notion what he held. Click slit it, studied the grid for half a minute, and pinned it to the wall by the rate schedule. Site numbers for place names. Initials for full names. Short dates for written ones. Nothing a working operator could not read off in seconds.

“Tidies his own mail now,” Click said to the empty office. The stove ticked.

He sat and looked at the table again. The point of it, he understood without anyone explaining, was not to keep a thing from operators. It was to keep place names off a sheet of paper that would pass through a half-dozen hands between Bryan Station and New Haven, relay men, depot clerks, whoever picked the paper up after Click set it down. Marsh’s specimens went east worth more than the cars that carried them, and a man who would bill a museum for nails he never sold would sell the location of a bone bed for less. That was all it was. It was a lock put on a door because the door had something behind it, and Click had never yet met a lock he took as an insult.

He also understood, because he handled both wires, that Cope’s messages still came through in plain open English, the men’s right names and right stops spelled out the length of the page, as though the country between Wyoming and Philadelphia were a single trustworthy room.

“One of them is keeping books,” Click said. “The other one is keeping faith.” He set both into the outbound tray, at the same rate, to offices a thousand miles apart, and the wire carried them the same, because the wire had never once cared who was right.

* * *

The fire began on a Thursday evening in the workroom adjoining the sorting hall, because a lamp had been set where a lamp had no business being set.

It was a small fire at first, which is the only kind men believe they can manage until it has become another kind. A student shouted. Someone knocked over a stool. Smoke pushed along the ceiling and made the gaslight dim. Marsh came out of the catalog room with a ledger in his hand and saw, in the same instant, the flame climbing the rag waste in the corner bin, the open drawer of labels, the tray of small Bridger bones on the table, and the boy standing nearest with his sleeve already smoking at the cuff.

“Coat off,” Marsh said.

The boy stared.

Marsh crossed the room, stripped the sleeve down off the boy’s arm, and threw the coat to the floor before the boy had understood he was burning. Then he took the tray of bones in both hands and passed it to the nearest student.

“Cabinet three. Top drawer. Now.”

The student moved.

“Ledger.”

Another hand took it.

Marsh pulled the label drawer out entire and carried it against his chest as the smoke thickened. He did not run. Running made men collide. He walked quickly, corrected one student’s grip on a specimen box as he passed, and said, almost sharply, “If you save the bone and lose the number, you have saved an anecdote. Take both.”

The water came down the hall in buckets, and behind it sand, two heavy pails carried by Grinnell and one of the night men. Marsh took the sand from Grinnell without comment and threw it where it belonged, at the base of the frame where the curtain had gone, not at the bright flame on the rag bin where the eye wanted to go. The bright was already finished. The dark was where the work was. The curtain came down half-burned, the wall scorched in a long tongue, a pane in the upper window cracked from the heat. Glass tinkled into the courtyard below.

By the time the last of the smoke had gone up out of the broken pane, the workroom was scorched, one curtain ruined, the boy’s wrist blistered, and every tray that mattered was in the hall. Marsh stood there coughing once into a handkerchief that came away gray, then turned to the student with the burned wrist.

“Have that dressed. Not by an undergraduate.”

“Professor, I”

“You set a lamp badly. You will not do it again. That is the useful portion of the event. Go.”

The boy went, shaken and grateful and not forgiven in any sentimental sense. Marsh looked back into the blackened room. His face showed anger now, but it was not anger at danger. It was anger at preventable disorder.

The trustee with soft hands arrived too late to help and early enough to be seen. He looked at the trays in the hall, at the blackened window, at the students waiting for dismissal, at Marsh in shirtsleeves with soot on one cuff and the ledger still under his arm.

“My God,” he said. “You might have left the room.”

Marsh checked a label against the ledger before he answered.

“I had not finished with it.”

Something in the trustee’s face changed from alarm to calculation, then from calculation to approval. Marsh saw that too, and registered it the way he registered a thermometer reading, and turned to Grinnell.

“Additional fire buckets,” he said. “Two per corridor. Sand in covered bins. No lamps stored near textiles. Specimen drawers to be numbered on the exterior and duplicated in the ledger.”

“Now?” the trustee asked.

“Especially now.”

By morning the fire had become a memorandum, not diminished but preserved. Marsh wrote the account himself because accounts written by excited men became stories, and stories misplaced causes. The cause was a lamp. The correction was storage. The exposed weakness was not personal failure but insufficient system. He sent copies to the trustees, to the museum office, and to the room where students would now sign for drawers before moving them.

* * *

Reed came east in February. He arrived by rail out of Wyoming with a leather case and a coat that carried the smell of woodsmoke and animal grease into the plaster-and-pine air of the hall, and he stood on the far side of the sorting table while Marsh told him what the work was. He was tall and raw-boned and still in the way of men who had wintered alone where talk bought nothing. He removed his hat at the door and waited without looking around the room. He was not impressed by the cabinets. That counted in his favor.

Marsh had laid the terms out on a single sheet that morning and now read them down the page in order. A site held. Hired labor managed under one head. Plaster jackets fit

for two thousand miles of rail. Telegrams in, telegrams out, no man left to his own initiative for more than a week if the weather permitted otherwise. The instruction would be followed as it was written. There would be no second site started on museum time. There would be no publication. Not a line. Not a name.

Reed took the sheet from the table when Marsh laid it down and held it at the angle a man holds a bill of lading. He read it through without his lips moving. He read the whole thing, then read the bottom line a second time, and set it back on the table the way it had come, square. There was nothing searching in his face. His hands stayed at his sides between readings, as still as a man who kept his hands for work and had found none in the room.

“You have collected in rough country.”

“Yes.”

“You can manage men.”

“If they know who is paying.”

“They will.”

Marsh gave him a list. Tools, canvas, wire, field tags, plaster, rope, ammunition only where necessary, no unnecessary display, no specimen moved without number, no locality omitted, no letter delayed past the next post or wire. Reed read it from top to bottom. His lips did not move. He did not ask what the dinosaurs were. He asked how many wagons.

“Two to start.”

“Mules?”

“Yes.”

“Who is loading?”

“You are.”

Reed folded the list and put it inside his coat. “Then I want the rope first. Men pack badly after dark.”

Marsh looked at him for a moment, then reached for another paper. There was satisfaction in the exchange, but not warmth. The right tool had identified the first obstacle.

“You will report by wire when possible,” Marsh said, “by post when necessary, and by silence only when prevented.”

“Yes.”

“You will not improvise names.”

Reed’s face did not change. “I do not name things.”

“Good.”

When Marsh finished, Reed asked two things more. The first was the pay. The second was the supply.

“Both will be adequate.”

Reed nodded, once, and did not put out his hand. He picked up the leather case, went to the door, and stopped there.

“One thing,” he said. “I do not write reports. I send counts. Specimens, crates, days. You want it described, hire a professor.”

“Counts will do,” Marsh said.

Reed went out. His boots were loud on the stone, hard heels, no give in the sole, the gait of a man who had worn those boots on frozen ground and saw no reason to shorten his step for a polished floor. Marsh stood at the table a moment after the door had shut. Then he took out the notebook and wrote: *Reed. Confirmed. April. Standard field rate,*

crating bonus. Full kit, shipped ahead. He closed it and put it away.

The hall was empty. The lanterns burned. A preparator’s apron hung on its hook by the east wall, and beside it a rack of picks and brushes stood ranked in falling order of size. Marsh looked at them. He did not take one down. He had not set his own hand to a field tool since sixty-eight, and the rack was not for his use. It was for the men whose use he had organized, and the difference between the two was the whole of what he had built since he came home from the West and shut the study door.

* * *

By April the system stood. Marsh sat at his desk on the first Tuesday of the month with the four-site sheet flat in front of him, weighted at the corners with a brass paperweight, a folded pair of spectacles, and two ink-jar lids he had set there because the morning sun came hard across the wood and curled the paper if nothing held it down. Reed in Wyoming, near the Union Pacific line. Williston in the Niobrara chalk in western Kansas. Two junior men at a second Kansas bed and a site in eastern Colorado whose names Marsh kept in the notebook and out of his correspondence.

He read each line down the page in his own writing and against the entry in the master ledger to its right, and the names sat under his pen with the settled look of things freshly signed for. Each team had a leader, a supply account, a shipping schedule, and a reporting protocol, and each of those four things existed on the paper before the team did, so that the team, when it formed, formed into a shape already cut to receive it.

The students went out in pairs. He chose them from the advanced classes, young men who wanted field seasons, who would sleep on the ground and eat badly for the sake of standing in a formation they had only read in lecture. He briefed each pair alone, in the study, with the door shut. The briefing was short. Where they would go. What they would lift. How they would ship. He said nothing of the other teams. He did not mention Cope. He told each pair the same sentence and watched it land the same way.

“You report to me. Not to one another. Not to anyone else. Your site is your charge. Your specimens are the museum’s property from the moment they leave the ground.”

The students nodded. They were young enough to find it thrilling rather than strange, which was its own kind of usefulness, and Marsh did not disturb the feeling, because a man who believes he is on an adventure works harder in the rain than a man who believes he is being managed.

He walked each pair to the New Haven depot himself, handed over the sealed instruction packets on the platform, and watched the train take them. He did not board. He had not boarded a westbound train in two years. The engine at close quarters did something to him he did not discuss and did not record even in the notebook, the iron heat off the boiler, the shudder that ran the couplings one to the next, the plain fact of being lifted and carried by a power that answered to no man's particular will. He used the railroad the way he used everything: completely, exactly, and from a small fixed distance, the way one uses a strong animal one has declined to ride.

The traffic through Bryan Station had tripled since the new year. Click handled the coded sheets as routine now, reading the table off from memory, setting down the plain text, dropping the originals into a box he kept under the counter against the day someone might want to know who had said what to whom. Cope's wires still came through the same key, fast, open, and now and then addressed to men Click had never heard of, at stations that were not on his route map, as though Cope were sending into the West and trusting the West to sort it out.

"Professor Marsh wants to know did the shipment off site seven come in," Click read aloud one morning, translating for the benefit of no one but the stove. He took up the next sheet. "Professor Cope wants to know whether God put the bones there to test us or to reward us." He laid them both in the outbound tray. "One of these men is running a railroad. The other one is running a tent revival, and they are both paying me the same to carry the collection plate."

He did not say which was which. He laid them both in the outbound tray and keyed them east at the one rate, a thousand miles to two offices that would never meet, and picked his book back up.

* * *

The thaw opened the western ground in the last week of March, and the reports began. Counts from Reed. Formation notes from Williston. Supply wants from every stop on the line. Marsh answered them all inside the day. His replies were numbered, dated, and tied to the master ledger he kept in the top drawer.

In May a letter came from Cope. Four lines. It concerned a taxonomic disagreement over a partial skull out of the Niobrara chalk, the same Kansas bed where Williston now dug under Marsh's direction, though the letter did not know that, or did not say so. The tone was professional, just. Cope held the specimen for a new genus. Marsh held that it fell under a genus he had already named. The letter asked him to reconsider his classification.

Marsh read it once. He took the file marked *Cope, Taxonomic* from the left of the drawer, where it stood apart from the Western folder and its field reports, placed the letter inside, and returned it to its place. Then he drew a sheet and wrote the reply, which ran to three lines. It cited the original description. It gave the page. It declined to reconsider. He did not mention the seven papers, or the field reports stacked in the Western folder, or the four sites, or the abbreviated table pinned to a wall at Bryan Station, or the supply rider now making a weekly run from the railhead to Reed's camp. None of that belonged in a letter about a skull. He signed it, sealed it, and set it in the tray with the morning's wires.

The hall had gone quiet. The preparators had gone home. The gas had been charged the week before, and the fixtures were lit now for the first time, an even steady light laid down the length of the room over the sorting table, the ranked trays, the rows of sealed crates waiting to be opened and numbered and placed in the order he had drawn for them before the first crate ever arrived. He walked the round once more, by gaslight, reading the thermometer, reading the benches, and the light did not swing and gutter the way the lanterns had. It held, and under it the bones held too, each in the place the system had cut for it, each tagged and dated and waiting on a name.

He stood in the doorway before he locked up. The hall ran ahead of him into the new light, cold and ordered and full of the dead, and he looked at it the length of a held breath and did not say anything to it, because there was no one in it to hear and nothing

in him that needed saying aloud.

He turned off the gas. He locked both doors and tried each once to be sure. Then he walked home through the spring dark along Whitney Avenue, where the elms had begun to leaf and the new growth showed pale against the older wood even by lamplight, and he did not stop to look at it. He walked at the pace he always walked, steady, measured, neither slow nor hurried, the gait of a man who had never once in his life been late.

Chapter 7 — The Game

The Kansas chalk; New Haven; Philadelphia; the Wyoming draws; the journals, 1873–1876

The chalk country did not open the way the Bridger basin had opened. It came up gray and low and went on without drama, a sea-floor that had forgotten it was a sea, soft white bluffs cut by the wind into shapes that crumbled when you set your weight wrong, running flat to a horizon that gave you nothing to want until you were standing on what you wanted and it was already half in your hands. Cope liked it better than he let on. The Bridger had made you climb for a find. The chalk gave its dead up at the surface, weathered clean, lying in the open like change spilled on a floor, and a man who moved fast and looked hard could fill a season's crates out of country other men had already ridden across and called empty.

He moved fast. He had always moved fast, but there was a thing in the way he moved now that had not been in it in the basin, and the men who had been with him both seasons felt it before they could have named it. He no longer stood at the lip of a new exposure and let it teach him. He went down into it counting, and the count had a second column in it now, and the second column was not bones.

"Who else has been in here," he said, the first morning, before he said anything else. He was off his horse and down on one knee at the foot of the nearest bluff, and he had a weathered vertebra in his hand and was turning it, but his eyes were going along the ground, not over the bone-bearing face, over the *ground*, the flat in front of it, reading it for boot-sign, for the square corner of a pick-cut, for the place where another man's wheel had stood. "Somebody's been in here. Look at the apron. It's been walked."

"Stock, maybe," Whitford said. He had got down off the wagon and was looking where Cope looked. "Antelope come down off the flat to the draw."

"Antelope don't carry a spade." Cope stood. He did not say it angrily. He said it the way he said the weather. He brushed the chalk off his knee and looked east along the bluff

line, the long soft white run of it, and for a moment the men nearest him would have seen him do the thing he did over a find, go still, and count, except that what he was counting now was not in front of him at all. It was a thousand miles off, in a building with the gas just charged in it, and Cope could no more see it than he could see Philadelphia, but he had begun, this season, to keep a place in himself where the other man stood, and he checked that place the way he checked the sky for weather.

“Get the camp up off the water,” he said. “We work east to west, fast, and we ship as we go. I don’t want a single crate sitting in this country one day longer than it has to.”

* * *

The work that summer was the best work and the hardest, and it ran at a pitch the Bridger had never asked of them.

The chalk gave up wonders. It gave up the long jointed paddles and the barrel ribs of the sea-lizards, mosasaurs forty feet from the snout to the tail-tip, lying full-length in the soft rock as though they had died swimming and the sea had simply set over them and gone to stone. It gave up the thin hollow bones of things that had flown, flying reptiles, the wing-finger longer than a man was tall, so light and so far gone to chalk that a careless thumb went through them, and Cope handled them himself and let no hired hand near them and swore at the wind that tried to take the fragments off the burlap before the paste could set.

It gave up, out of the same white beds, the small strange skeletons of birds that had teeth in their jaws, which should not have been and were, and which Cope held up to the flat Kansas light the first evening with a look on his face that the young men around him would carry the rest of their lives, a look that was, for one unguarded moment, exactly the look of the boy who had first understood that the world was older and stranger than he had been told. Then the second column came back into his eyes, and he wrapped the bird and called for it to be packed and labeled and put on the road that night.

Sternberg was on the books now. He had come back a second season and a third, and somewhere in there the willing pair of hands had become the best pair of hands in the

outfit, the one Cope called for when a thing came out of the matrix too fragile to trust to anyone else. When a toothed-bird skull came up so far gone to chalk that Cope would not risk his own field-roughened hands on it, it was Sternberg who knelt over it with the paste and the burlap and the long patience while Cope stood at his shoulder and let him, which Cope did for almost no one.

And the day Cope said *your wages start at the rail this trip, I had Carrow put you on the sheet* he said it without ceremony, in passing, the way he said most of what mattered, and Sternberg said *thank you* and bent back to the chalk and did not let his face do anything, though it wanted to. He had learned the country now. He had learned the man. He could jacket a specimen as well as Cope could and faster than Cope had patience for, and he had a feel in his hands for the line between rock and bone that the older men said could not be taught and that he had not been taught, had only stood close to the work until it came into him.

What he had not learned, because he had not been there for the start of it and because no one explained it to him, was where the pitch came from. He felt it.

And once, working a face beside Whitford, he had started to ask about it, *why does he*, and had stopped, because he did not have the end of the sentence and because Whitford had a way of answering questions you had not finished that made you wish you had kept them whole. So he did not ask. He worked. The work was wonderful. That was the whole of what he let himself know about it, and it was, that summer, very nearly the truth.

* * *

The mail came up from the rail once a fortnight when it came at all, in a canvas sack a freighter dropped at the supply camp, and it was three weeks old before it reached Cope’s hands and three weeks older than that before the things inside it had happened. That was the chalk. A man worked it at the far end of a wire that ran fast and a road that ran slow, and the world reached him in arrears, and he found out what had been done to him on a Tuesday that had been done in fact in some other month he could no longer do anything about.

It was a bundle of journals that did it, that August.

Cope read at the fire, as he did everything, standing, with the plate balanced and the firelight bad, tearing the wrappers and going down the contents pages faster than a man could properly read them, looking, the men understood by now, for one name and then for one subject, in that order. He had been cheerful all day. The chalk had been generous and the wagons were heavy and he had three new things wrapped in the supply tent that he believed no living man had seen the likes of. He came to the second journal and the cheerfulness went out of him the way a lamp goes out, all at once and from the inside, and he stood holding the open thing in both hands and did not turn the page.

“He’s named the birds,” he said.

No one answered, because no one but Sternberg knew which birds, and Sternberg did not know what the right thing to say was, and so said nothing, which was the right thing.

“The toothed birds. Out of this chalk. *This* chalk.” Cope turned the journal a quarter-turn as though a better angle would change what was printed on it. “Dated in May. He read it to the Academy in May.”

He looked up, and his face in the firelight was not the face of a man grieving and was not the face of a man who hated. It was the face of a man doing arithmetic at speed and getting an answer he did not like. “He had the material in New Haven by Christmas, then. He had it while I was.” He stopped. He shut the journal on his thumb to keep the place and looked into the fire, and the count was running, the road and the wire and the months turning over behind his eyes. “Three months. Three months it took for me to find out, sitting in the same country the bones came out of.”

“You’ve got birds in the tent,” Carrow offered, from the cook-fire. “Better ones, you said.”

“It is not about better.” Cope said it sharply, and then heard himself, and brought it down. He was not a cruel man and Carrow had meant well and the camp ran on

Carrow's good will as much as anyone's.

"It is about *first*, Carrow. A thing in the ground does not have a name. It is the truest thing there is and the most patient and it lies there forty million years not caring, and then a man reaches it and says a word over it and from that hour the word and the man are stuck to it forever, in every cabinet and every book and every schoolroom, world without end. That is the whole of the science. That is the only part of it that lasts. And it goes," he opened the journal again and looked at the page as though it were a thing that had been taken out of his own hand, "it goes to whoever says the word *first*, whether or not he had the better specimen, whether or not he understood the better half of what he was looking at. First."

He shut the book. "I have the better birds in that tent and they will be the *second* birds, now and forever, because a freighter's road runs slower than a wire."

It was very quiet around the fire. Sternberg had stopped eating.

"So," Cope said, and the strange thing, the thing Sternberg watched and did not understand and could not look away from, was that the cheerfulness was coming back into him as he said it, not the same cheerfulness, a harder grade of it, but unmistakably the man rising rather than sinking. "So we do not lose the next one to a road. We send the names from the rail ourselves, by wire, the hour we have a thing worth a name, and let the specimen follow on the slow road behind its own christening. He has taught me something tonight that I should have known in the basin." He set the plate down. He was almost smiling. "He has taught me that the bone and the name are two different shipments, and the name travels faster."

He went to the supply tent in the dark to look at his birds. Whitford watched him go.

"Wait on the skull," Whitford said, very low, to the fire, to no one, a thing he had said before and stopped expecting to be heard saying. He fed in a root. He did not say it again.

* * *

In New Haven the same months were a different country.

Marsh had the map finished now. It hung on the study wall behind a baize curtain that he drew across it when men he did not entirely trust were in the room, and behind the curtain the West lay flattened and quartered, his men's localities in blue and Cope's reported in red, the overlaps ringed where the work would collide. The map was current to the week. He brought it current himself, on the evening the field reports came in, standing at it with a fine pen and the master ledger open on the reading-stand at his elbow, and he did not editorialize the colors even to himself. He only kept them true, because a wrong map sent men where the work was not.

The chalk country on the map had a great deal of red in it that season. He stood before it one evening in March with a letter from Williston in one hand, *Cope outfit reported moving east along the Smoky Hill, four wagons, the man Sternberg with them*, and he did not frown at the red, because frowning changed nothing, but he stood at it a while, the way he stood over a specimen that had gone cold in the night, taking the measure of the thing before he handled it.

Then he sat down and wrote his instructions, and it was in the writing of them, that March, that the name first went onto the paper.

He did not set down *Cope*. He had stopped setting down *Cope* on anything that went out over the wire some weeks before, because a place name and a rival's name on the same flimsy, passing through the hands of relay men and depot clerks and whoever picked the paper up after the operator set it down, was an account of his intentions left lying in a public room. So he had ruled himself a small private convention, of the kind he kept for everything, entered once in his own correspondence hand and never explained to anyone, and where he meant Cope he now wrote *Jones*.

It was not a flourish. It was the flattest word he could find, a name so common it named no one, a name you could not sell and could not act on, a man reduced to a clerk's placeholder and filed where a placeholder was filed. *If Jones is reported within a day's ride of the Butte Creek beds,* he wrote to Williston, in the abbreviated form, *secure the beds. Post a man. Ship priority. Confirm by return.* He read it once, sanded it, and carried it to the tray.

The instruction reached Bryan Station four days on, and Click took it down, and read it, and stopped at the one word the way you stop at a stone that was not in the path yesterday.

“Jones,” he said, to the stove.

He sat with it a second. He had carried Marsh’s traffic two years now and Marsh did not put a name on a wire he did not need on a wire. Marsh put initials, site numbers, short dates, the whole tidy grid of it pinned to the wall by Click’s elbow, place names locked off a public sheet the way a careful man locks a door. And here, into the middle of all that lockwork, a name. A plain one. A name with no number against it and no place, riding loose in the message like a word in a foreign sentence a man has decided to speak in his own tongue.

Click had translated enough traffic to know a code that meant a thing from a name that meant a man, and he knew the difference between them the way he knew the difference between Cope’s wire and Marsh’s, and he understood without anyone explaining, he was always understanding things without anyone explaining, it was the entire content of the job, that *Jones* was not a man named Jones. There was no Jones. *Jones* was the one man Marsh would not spend a wire naming and could not stop himself making a place for, the way you carry a stone in your boot you keep meaning to shake out and keep walking on instead.

“Now he won’t even say it,” Click said. He took the originals and dropped them in the box under the counter, and he sent the instruction on, clean, at the standard rate, the same rate he charged Cope’s open wires that spelled every man’s right name the length of the page as though the whole West were a single trustworthy room. He did not enter a verdict on it. He entered the account. “One of them won’t say the other’s name,” he told the stove, “and the other one says everybody’s.” He pulled the next sheet. “And they both pay the same to make me carry it.”

Out on the Wyoming line that month Reed sent his counts, as he always sent them, specimens, crates, days, the numbers in a column and nothing in the margins, no weather, no trouble, no opinion of the men he hired or the man he answered to, and the counts were good, better than good, and Marsh entered them in the ledger in the column

where they belonged and slept that night the sleep of a man whose system stood.

Reed did not know about Jones. Reed did not need to know about Jones. Reed knew the Butte Creek beds, and the rail schedule, and the price of crating nails at the Cheyenne depot, and that the specimens were the museum's property from the hour they left the ground, and that was the whole of what the work asked him to know, and he carried exactly the load assigned and not an ounce of any other.

* * *

That winter Cope went home, because the chalk closes when the ground freezes, and because the journals were the field that did not close, and the journals were in Philadelphia.

Anne found him in the dining room on Pine Street with his coat still on and three letters open beneath the lamp. Mud had dried along the hem of his trousers. A railway timetable lay across one plate. A plate of cold mutton sat pushed to the side, untouched.

She took the timetable first and set it on the mantel.

"Eat before you argue with New Haven," she said.

"I am not arguing with New Haven." Cope had not looked up from the proof in his hand. "I am refusing to let New Haven define the country from a cabinet drawer. He has made a table of my dinosaur, Anne. A table. A little ruled cage for a thing that walked across a continent. He has compared teeth he has never seen in life to teeth I have held in my hand."

"You have held many teeth in your hand."

"That is not an argument against me."

"It is a request that you wash before supper."

He looked at his fingers. The nails were black with field dirt and printer's ink both. He laughed then, not loudly, but with real warmth, and the speed went a little out of his

shoulders, and Anne's face softened without becoming indulgent. She moved the plate in front of him, poured the water, gathered two of the letters into a square stack before the grease from the lamp could spot them. Her white Quaker collar was pinned exactly at the throat. She did before she explained, always, and the room grew smaller and more ordinary around him as she worked, the way it did, the way nothing in the chalk ever did.

"He has published a correction," Cope said around the first impatient bite. "He claims my description was drawn from a mixed lot, and he is probably right, I described them together because they were found together. But the correction stands attached to my name now, his hand on my dinosaur forever. That is his whole method. He does not find things. He improves what other men have found, and by improving it he owns a piece of it."

"The bank sent again," Anne said.

Cope's bite slowed.

"One account," she said. "Not all of them. The flour and the plaster are paid. The men are paid. But the plates will wait unless the Philadelphia printer takes your note on credit, and he has taken two on credit already."

"The printer will take it. He understands that delay is theft by another name."

"Delay is sometimes only cleaning the bone."

He turned, ready with an answer, and found her standing with the wet towel in her hand, wringing it once over the basin, a small act that took the room away from him for a second and gave it back changed. He did not have the answer ready after all.

"Edward," she said, and her voice did not rise to meet his speed, it stayed where it was and made him come down to it, "if the names outrun the bones, the names will have to carry weight they were not made to carry. You have time this winter. You will not have it in May."

"If I wait, Marsh will not."

“Then do not let him become your reason for being right.” She set the towel over the chair rail to dry. “You were right before there was a Marsh to be right against. I should like to have that man at the table sometimes, and not only his answer to New Haven.”

He had nothing ready for that either. For the length of the winter evening he sat inside the small domestic ring of it, the proof sheets and the bank letter and the cold meat, and was, in her presence, very nearly the man she was asking for, and the asking was still a thing the room could hold, because it was winter, and the ground was shut, and the road was still open both ways.

* * *

Cope rode to the Butte Creek beds in May because the chalk there was supposed to be the richest in the country, and he found a stake in the ground and a man sitting on a wagon-seat with a rifle across his knees, not pointed at anything, just held, so as to be seen holding it.

“This is taken,” the man said. He was young, a student by the soft hands and the hard new boots, and he said *taken* like a word he had been given to say and had practiced. “Professor Marsh’s party. The beds and the ground for a quarter-mile.”

Cope sat his horse and looked at the stake. He looked at the soft white country running away behind it, the country that did not belong to the man on the wagon any more than the weather did, that had lain open to the sky since before there were men to own it and to no man’s particular ownership ever, and he looked at the stake driven into it with a paper nailed to the top, and he made the reckoning one more time, fast and cold, and came out somewhere he had not expected to be standing.

He did not argue with the boy. There was nothing in the boy to argue with. The boy was a stake with a voice. He did not ride onto the ground, either, though there was no law that could have stopped him and both of them knew it, because the boy had a rifle held to be seen and Cope had a young Sternberg and an old Whitford and a cook and no wish to find out, two hundred miles from a magistrate, what a hired student would do to keep a quarter-mile of chalk he had been told was his.

“Whose man are you,” Cope said. Not to the boy. Past him, to the country.

“Professor Marsh’s party,” the boy said again.

“Yes,” Cope said. He turned his horse. He rode back to his own outfit at a walk, and he did not say anything for the better part of a mile, and when he spoke it was not about the boy or the stake or the rifle. It was an order.

“There’s better than Butte Creek,” he said. “There’s the Hackberry exposures, two days north, and nobody’s wired about them because nobody but me knows the chalk runs that far up the drainage. We don’t go and look at them. We go and *take* them. Sternberg, you’ll stay on the south end with two hands and a tent and you’ll hold it while I work the north, and if a boy with a rifle comes to tell you it’s taken, you tell him it’s taken, and you mean it, and you sit on the wagon the same as he did.”

He said it flat and fast, the orders of a man who has just learned a rule he intends never to be on the wrong side of twice. “We are not going to lose ground we found to a stake and a child. We are going to be the stake and the child. Do you understand me.”

“Yes, sir,” Sternberg said.

And he did as he was told. He sat the south end of the Hackberry chalk a week with two hands and a tent, and no boy with a rifle came, and the country up the drainage gave out wonders the way the man had said it would. And Cope worked the north end at a pitch that left the hired hands gasping and named three things off the surface in a week and sent the names, not the specimens, the *names*, down to the rail by the fastest rider in the outfit with money in his pocket to keep the wire warm till the words were away east.

And it was a victory, plain and whole, the kind of victory the camp could feel. The wagons rode home heavy and the names rode home first, and there was a fire that night nearly as good as the basin fires had been, Carrow’s hoarded roots and a hand with a mouth-harp and Cope talking, building a vanished country up over the flames the way he used to, generous in the hour of a win.

But Sternberg, who had sat a week on a wagon-seat holding nothing in his hands and

watching an empty horizon for a boy who never came, found that he could not get all the way warm at the fire that night. He did not know why. He had done the work and the work had gone well and the man was pleased with him. Cope had said, in front of the camp, *that's how you hold ground*, which was praise, which a season ago would have lit him for a week. He turned it over.

He could not get under it. He had wanted, all his life that he could remember, to be exactly here, doing exactly this, and a week on a wagon-seat with his hands empty, holding a quarter-mile of God's chalk against a boy who never came, was *this* now, was part of *this*, and he did not have anywhere to put the fact, so he did what the country had taught him to do with facts he could not place. He set it down where it could be seen and left it there and did not pick it up again.

He fed the fire. He laughed when the camp laughed. He was up in the dark of the morning, and Cope was up before him.

* * *

It went back and forth like that for three years, and the going back and forth was the thing, was the whole shape of those years.

Marsh named the flying reptiles and Cope named the swimming ones and each disputed the other's genus in the next number of the journals, and the disputes were correct in their language and exact in their citations and underneath the language they were two men keeping a tally that had stopped being about the bones somewhere neither of them had marked. Cope founded his own journal.

And the contest came down off the page that second summer into the Wyoming draws, where the chalk gave out and the older harder country began and Cope had pushed a crew north to follow the bone where it went. Whitford had the lower draw, and Sternberg working below him, the morning a rider of Marsh's came down off the ridge. Sternberg knew him now by the way the horse was let to choose its own careful ground without being hurried. Reed dismounted before the animal fully stopped, checked the cinch, looked at the stake by the cottonwood.

“That marker’s in Marsh ground,” he said.

Whitford set the spade-point into the clay. “That marker was put there by our hand in April.”

“April’s over.”

Sternberg brushed dirt from the exposed edge with the flat of his thumb. The bone ran on under the shale toward the line Reed had named without raising his voice. Whitford stepped down into the wash. “We are clearing this bed.”

“Clear it.” Reed took a short-handled pick from his saddle and turned the head over in his hand, looking at it the way a man looks at a tool he is about to use and not at the men he is about to use it in front of. “Ship what belongs to you.”

“And the rest?”

Reed looked up the ridge, where two of his men were loading a crate. “Cover what you cannot ship. Break off what will draw fools back. That is how a camp keeps a site.”

“That how Professor Marsh says it?”

“Professor Marsh says museum property leaves the ground under account.” Reed tested the pick handle against his palm. “Men in weather say it shorter.”

He walked up the wash and drove the pick into a loose, half-exposed process of bone that the rain had already cracked. The sound was small. Not a crash, not a shot, a dry click and crumble, as though a bad stone had been split for road fill. One of the Yale men laughed from the ridge, not loud, a working laugh, the laugh of a man pleased with a nuisance simplified. Reed did not laugh and did not look to see who had. He gathered his reins.

“The count goes east Tuesday,” he said. “If you have a claim, put it in print.” And he rode back up toward the north draw at a walk, the rifle swinging light against the leather, nothing in his face that suggested a victory and nothing that suggested a wrong, a man who had found an obstacle and dealt with the part of it that could be dealt with

and left the rest to weather and argument.

Whitford stood looking at the broken process a moment. “You hear that, boy?”

Sternberg had his hand around his brush, and a gray flake had fallen onto his wrist, and he blew it off and bent lower over the edge he had uncovered. “Rain got into it first,” he said. “If we don’t plaster this side now, we’ll lose the seam.” He said nothing about the pick. He put it down where the rest of them went, and reached for the damp cloth and packed it under the edge, and saved the seam, because the seam was a thing his hands knew how to save.

Whitford looked at him a while longer than the answer needed, then let out a hard breath that was almost a laugh, and picked up his spade. “All right,” he said. “Save the seam.” They worked until the water in the canvas bag went warm, and now and then a small dry sound came back to them off the north draw, broken bone or split stone, near enough alike that a man could call it whichever he needed it to be.

A letter came down with the flour and the powder in the third of those summers, in Anne’s hand, and Cope carried it in his coat through the unloading and read it at his own fire after the camp had eaten. It was a practical letter. Julia had had the croup and was over it. The Pine Street rent was paid and the man about the coal had been seen to. The bank had written twice, and she had answered both letters as well as she could, and she set that fact in among the coal and the rent as if it were the same size as they were, and went on to the garden and the state of the roof.

There was no asking in any line of it, and under her name, in the smaller hand of a thing added after the folding, she had written that it had been a long time.

His hand went to the pencil stub in his coat and stopped there, and he did not take it out, and after a while he folded the letter small and put it away in the breast of his coat with the pencil still unused beside it, and he did not answer it that night, and the count that ran in him as he went back to the fire had, for once, more than two columns in it.

But a man could write a letter from the rail and could not, from the rail, dig, and so he stayed, and dug, and the picture that did not look like him went on not looking like him

in a drawer on Pine Street while the wagons filled.

* * *

The last fire of the last of those seasons was a cold one, the wind up off the chalk and the roots burning fast, and the talk had gone where Cope's talk still sometimes went, late, when the day's count was done and the men were too tired to want anything from him but the sound of it.

He talked the King up out of the dark.

He did it the way he had done it in the basin, building the great meat-eater over the fire with his hands, the last and the largest, the thing the whole drawer was waiting on, and the men who had been with him long enough carried it the way they carried his weather. Sternberg, who carried it nearer than any of them, sat with his hands open on his knees and watched the shape rise the way it had risen the first time, and wanted it the way he had wanted it the first time, and was, for the length of the telling, entirely happy.

But the telling had a thing in it now that the basin telling had not had, and Sternberg heard it without being able to say what it was, the way he heard everything that year. When Cope came to the end of it, *the one that everything else in the ground was only the court of*, he did not stop there, the way he had stopped there in the basin and let the silence hold the king up. He went one sentence further.

"And I will reach it first," he said.

That was all. He said it quietly, almost to himself, looking into the fire. It was not a boast and it was not a challenge. It was the simplest thing in the world, a man stating the order in which two things would happen.

But it put the other man into the dark beside the king, where the king had stood alone before, and the men around the fire felt the size of the dark change, felt that it held two things now where it had held one, and that the one had been a wonder and the two were a race, and that somewhere out under the same cold sky a thousand miles off there was a man at a desk with a curtain over a map who would have said, in his own flat

unhurried way, the same five words, and meant them just as simply, and been just as certain, and that both of them could not be standing first when the king came out of the ground.

Whitford put his root on the fire. He had heard the king talked up many nights, in the basin and in the chalk, and he had a way of moving when he had heard a thing before, an unsurprised economy, and he moved that way now. But anyone still awake would have seen him glance once across the fire at Cope before he turned in, a short flat look, the look of a man who has just heard a familiar tune go up half a step into a key he did not know it had, and cannot say what the half-step costs, only that it has changed the tune. He did not say *wait on the skull*. He had stopped saying it. He banked the fire and went to his blankets.

Cope lay awake longest, as he always did. The count ran in him still, the wagons, the wire, the figure from the bank, the picture in the drawer, the chalk that was nearly worked out and the Colorado country opening beyond it that the rumors said was bigger than anything, the names gone east and the names that would go east, the king somewhere under some wall waiting for the weather to bring it down. He did not lie awake out of worry. But the dark over the chalk was not the dark that had been over the basin.

The basin dark had been full of the dead and the king and nothing else, and he could lie under it and feel that the only race was between him and the patient ground. This dark had the other man in it now.

Cope had put him there himself, season by season, the way you wear a path to a thing by walking to it, and he found, lying in the cold with his eyes open, that he could no longer think the king all the way through to the end without the other man arriving in the thought, at the last, reaching from the far side of the country for the same buried crown. The wanting of the king and the beating of the man had grown together in him so quietly that he could not now have pulled them apart, could not have said where the wonder ended and the scorekeeping began, and did not, lying there, particularly try.

It was still, that night, a thing that could have been pulled apart. A man could still have ridden home and let the bank be answered and let the boy with the rifle keep his

quarter-mile and let the slow correct names out of New Haven stand and gone back to wanting the king only for itself. The road was still open both ways. Cope did not take it, because the chalk was open and the season was short and the other man’s men were west of him in the dark, but that neither man had yet done the thing that would close it, was the truest and most fragile fact in the whole cold country.

Chapter 8 — The Thrum

Pine Street, New Haven, and the Colorado country, 1877

The house on Pine Street kept a different time than the field did, and for the few weeks Cope was inside it the two times ran side by side without quite touching, his and hers, and it was Anne who held the seam between them so that the household did not feel the strain. She did it the way she did everything that mattered, without announcing it. She kept the accounts in a drawer she opened only after Julia was asleep, and she had a way of saying the figure once, plainly, and then not saying it again that night.

The bank had written, she told him the second week he was home, in the same voice she used to say the coal was laid in. They wanted to know his intentions on the note.

He held the chip from Colorado against the window glass that evening until the afternoon light came through the red grain of it.

“This is not Bridger,” he said.

“No,” Anne said. “It is on the bank’s paper.”

He turned, laughing, because the answer was sharp and because she had not looked away from him. “You are cruel today.”

“I am exact today.”

“Then be exact with me. Look at it.” He crossed and put the chip in her palm. “That color is not a pond bed. That is a whole country lifted and broken open. Bigger dinosaurs, Anne. Not the King yet, perhaps. But the court around him.”

She weighed the fragment. It was heavier than it looked. “And how many men does a court require?”

“Enough to keep Marsh from locking the door.”

“That is not a number.”

“It is the only number that matters.”

The report it had come with was from a schoolteacher named Lakes, out of Golden, a careful uncertain hand that knew it had found something and did not know its size. The ridge above Morrison had given up bones a wagon could not have carried whole, a thigh longer than the man who dug it was tall. Lakes had sent a box of the smaller pieces east to Marsh at Yale, and then, because Marsh had not answered as fast as a man waits on the largest thing he has ever found, a second box of the same provenance to Cope in Philadelphia, the same question asked of both, so that the identical hill now lay open in two studies a hundred and fifty miles apart.

A second teacher named Lucas, out of Cañon City a hundred miles south, had written by the same week’s mail in a careful Sunday-school hand to say that a draw north of his town had given up vertebrae that might prove the larger dinosaur of the two, so that the two letters had sat side by side on Cope’s desk and the choice of which ridge to stand on first was a part of what the trip itself was for.

Anne watched him with the box on the desk. She had seen him over a find a hundred times and she knew the look, the going-still, the count, and she saw that there was a new figure in the count now that she could not read and did not like the weight of, and she said the one thing she had to say and said it without freight, the way she said the things she most meant.

“You are not going because the bones are there,” she said. “You are going because he reached for them too.”

“I am going because they are the biggest thing anyone has found,” Cope said, “and because a schoolteacher in Colorado does not know what he has, and because if I am not standing on that ridge inside the month, the question of what it is gets answered by a man who answers slowly and is never wrong twice.” He was already not looking at her. He was looking at the box. “Both are true. You are saying them as if only one can be.”

“I am saying,” she said, “do not let the second one do the steering.” She closed the

account drawer. “It steers worse than the first.”

He heard her, and he even agreed with her, in the part of him that agreed with true things. He had already gone to the map pinned near the bookcase, where Colorado had been marked in pencil and then marked again, the second line darker than the first. Three days later he was on the cars going west with the schoolteacher’s box repacked in his trunk.

Anne stood on the platform a moment after the train had taken him, and then went back into the house and did the figures again, alone, which was the form her steadiness took and the form it would go on taking whether or not there was anyone in the country to feel the want of it.

* * *

The Colorado ground did not lie down the way the Kansas chalk had lain down. It stood up.

That was the first fact of it and the one the body learned before the mind did. The chalk had given its dead up flat, weathered to the surface, and the body worked it bent at the waist, reading a floor. Here the dead were in the hills, tilted up edgewise in long hard ridges of sandstone that ran north off the Arkansas like the broken teeth of something the size of the country, and the bone was not on the surface but in the rock, sealed into a gray ledge laid down soft and gone to stone with the dinosaurs inside it, so that to reach a single thigh a man had to take down the mountain that stood over it.

Lucas had found the place, another schoolteacher, out of Cañon City, who botanized the hogbacks on his own time and had turned up, in a draw north of the town that the locals called Garden Park, bones that made the Morrison teacher’s look like the calf beside the cow. He had sent his east to Cope as well. And Cope, standing in the draw the first morning with the dust of the cars still in his collar, looked up at the gray ledge running above his head with the joints of the great backbone standing out of it forty feet up, and did the count, and the count came back at him in a size he had to tilt his head to take in.

“Look at it,” he said, hat pushed back, coat open. “The whole continent has turned itself

up for us. No waiting on weather to show a rib. The dinosaurs are in the architecture." Then, lower, to the foreman. "How much rock is over the rest of it."

His chalk hands had been left east, Whitford keeping the last wagons at Hackberry to close that outfit down through the winter, because hardrock and chalk asked different things of a foreman. The man he had hired in Cañon City, a hardrock foreman named Garrett who had spent ten years in the silver and knew stone the way Cope knew bone, squinted up the ledge and spat and gave him a figure in tons that Cope did not bother to doubt. It was a great deal of rock.

To take it down with bar and pick and the patient shoulder, the way the basin had been worked and the chalk after it, would cost a season for a single dinosaur, and Cope did not have a season for a single dinosaur, because a hundred and fifty miles north the Morrison ridge was being opened by men who answered to New Haven, and the question in front of Cope was not how to get the great backbone out clean. It was how to get it out *first*, and the whole of his appetite that spring went into the difference between those two questions.

"You can move that overburden in a week," Garrett said, "or you can move it in a morning."

"Tell me the morning."

"Powder," Garrett said. "You drill it, charge it, bring the dead rock off the top in one shot, clear it with the scrapers, and you are on your bone-ledge by noon with a week of pick-work saved. Folks do it in the quarries every day. It is only rock." He looked at Cope. "Up top it is. You do not put a charge near the bone. You bring the country down to a foot or two above your layer with the powder and you take the last of it off by hand, soft, the way you would want. The powder is for the mountain. The pick is for the dinosaur. You keep the two of them straight and there is no trouble in it. She is not a cannon. She is a wedge. You treat her like one."

It was acceleration offered as plain craft, a tool for a task, no different in kind from the wire that carried a name faster than a wagon carried a bone. The mountain and the dinosaur were two different jobs, and the mountain could be made to travel faster too,

and he gave the order the way he gave most orders that mattered, in passing, already moving on to the next thing.

“Get your powder,” he said. “Bring the country down. I want to be on the ledge by the end of the week and the first vertebra wrapped and the name of it on the wire before the men in the north have their tents square.”

* * *

The first shot went at the end of the third day, in the long gold light, after Garrett had drilled the top of the ledge through an afternoon and tamped his charges and walked the line twice with the slow attention of a man who did not intend to lose a hand to his own hurry. He cleared the men back. He called the call. And the mountain jumped.

That was the only word Sternberg had for it after, and he did not say it aloud. The gray ledge that had stood over them since before there was anything to stand under it lifted at its top edge, a clean lift, no higher than a man’s reach, and broke, and came down the face in a slide of rubble and dust with a sound that was not a sound so much as a blow, a flat enormous clap that he felt come up through the soles of his boots and through the bones of his legs and arrive in his chest from the inside, before his ears had it at all. The dust stood up tall and gold. The rubble ran and stopped.

And in the place where the call of the rock-doves had been, and the wind off the river, and the small busy noises of a camp at the end of a workday, there was nothing, a held nothing, the country gone dumb the way a struck bell is dumb in the instant before it finds its note. And the silence went on a beat longer than it should have, two beats, three, the men standing in it with the dust settling on their hats and the hawk that had gone up off the ledge swinging out over the river and not crying, and Sternberg stood in the held quiet with his hand flat on the rock beside him and felt the last of the shudder go out of the ledge into his palm and could not, for that long moment, have told anyone what he was waiting for.

Then Garrett called the all-clear, and a man laughed at something another man said, and the cook banged the iron, and the camp came back up out of the quiet all at once and went on, and the silence had not become anything. It had only been the time it took the

noise to leave. By the time the dust was down they were already at the new face with the scrapers, and they were on the bone-ledge by the following noon, and the great backbone began to come out of the hill at a rate that no dinosaur had ever come out of the ground for Cope before.

It was wonderful, and Sternberg, who was on the ledge with his picks laid out on a square of canvas in the order he liked them, felt the wonder of it the way he felt everything that year, fully, with his whole young heart, the giant emerging joint by joint under his hands, the largest creature he had ever been let to touch. He worked the last rock off the bone the way Garrett had said, soft, by hand, his dental picks and his brushes and his pot of paste, bringing the matrix down to the seam grain by grain so that the surface came up unmarked, and Cope came by twice an hour to watch him do it and was pleased, and said so. That was the day-side of it, and it was the most of it, and it was true.

But there was a thing in his hands that week that had not been in them in the chalk, and it showed in the hands before it would ever have got near his mouth, because his mouth had nothing to say about it and his hands did. When the powder went, up the draw, twice a day now and then three times as they chased the layer back into the hill, Sternberg stopped. He did not decide to stop.

He found that he had stopped, the pick still, his palm gone flat to the rock the way a hand goes flat to the flank of a horse that has heard something, and he held it there through the shot and the slide and the held quiet after, feeling the shudder come through the stone, and only when it had fully gone did he go back to the grain he had been lifting. And he began, without saying why, to ask for the hand-work sooner.

Garrett would set his charges to bring the country down to a foot above the layer, which was close work and good work and exactly what had been agreed, and Sternberg took to walking the ledge after the drilling and before the shot, looking at the bone that lay nearest the top of the layer, the pieces that stood up closest to where the charge would break. And more than once he came to Cope or to the foreman and asked, in the plainest way, without weight, the way you ask for a tool, whether the last shot of the day might be set a little shy of the north end, where the great skull was coming, and the last two

feet there be taken by hand instead.

It would cost a morning. He would do it himself. He did not mind the morning. He did not say why the skull. There was no why that would go into words, and he did not reach for one. He only knew, in the hands, that he did not want the shudder going through that particular stone with that particular thing inside it, and he asked for the morning, and sometimes he got it and sometimes the season was too short and he did not, and when he did not he laid his palm on the rock through the shot and took it back to the seam after, and said nothing.

* * *

In New Haven the first box from Morrison came east with schoolhouse dust in its seams.

It was not a proper crate. It was a lesson box, pine boards cut too thin, nailed by a man who owned more excitement than packing sense, and by the time it reached the long table one corner had split and a wash of red grit had sifted onto the receiving-room floor. Marsh saw the grit before he saw the bone.

“Do not lift it by the lid,” he said. Salisbury froze with his fingers already under the edge. “The lid is no longer part of the box. Treat it as weather.”

Two students slid a board beneath the crate and brought it onto the table. Marsh opened the side panel nail by nail. He did not hurry. The students did, and he corrected them without looking up.

“If your hand wants to be fast, give it something less important to do.”

Inside lay a section of enormous vertebra packed in newspaper and flour sacks, the broken surfaces shining with a dry red-black grain that was neither chalk nor Bridger stone. Marsh bent over it. His thumb hovered beside a ridge as high as a man’s knuckle and did not touch it.

“Jurassic,” he said. “Older than Kansas. Larger.” He looked at the address again.

“Morrison. Or Morrison until the ground corrects him.”

He read the teacher’s letter twice and set it under the brass weight and took out a clean sheet, and he wrote the order in the sequence he wrote all such orders, payment first, secrecy second, shipping third, because men did better when their duties arrived before their excitement. Lakes was to be put on a proper footing, paid a proper wage against the Morrison ridge, made a man of the Yale party rather than a freelance schoolteacher selling boxes to whoever answered his mail. The material was the museum’s from the hour it left the ground, on the usual terms, the terms that made a thing safe by making it owned.

Specimens covered. No public description. No discussion of locality with station men. And the box that had gone to Philadelphia was to be requested back, courteously, as a matter of correct provenance, the request made easy to grant by the size of the wage that came with it. Marsh did not call this a bribe, in his own mind or on the paper, and it would have surprised him to hear the word. To him it was the opposite, the act of taking a man who could be reached by anyone and making him a man who answered to a system that would keep the Morrison bones safe against the day, a hundred years off, when someone would want to know exactly which ridge and which foot of which layer each had come from.

That, to Marsh, was not corruption. That was care, and it was the only form his care knew how to take, and it took that form completely, with no part of itself left over to be warm.

At the foot of the field instruction, where the matter of Cope’s movements had to be set down, he set down, as he had for a year now, not the man’s name but the flat convention he had long since ruled himself in its place, a name so common it named no one. Where he meant Cope he wrote *Jones. If Jones secures further Cañon City ground*, he wrote to Mudge, *do not contest the draw directly. Hold Morrison. Confirm the recovery of the Philadelphia box by return.* It was not a flourish and it was not theater.

It was a placeholder filed where a placeholder belonged, a man reduced to a clerk’s blank so that the clerks would carry no part of the thing that mattered. He sanded it and carried it to the tray, and somewhere down the line a careful operator took it down and

read the one plain name riding loose in the grid of site-numbers and dates, and made of it what he made of everything, an account, and entered it, and sent it on clean at the standard rate.

* * *

Marsh went west himself that summer, which he did not often do, because the Colorado front was worth seeing and because a thing seen once with the eyes corrected a great deal of paper. He went in a private car, which the railroad provided to men the museum's size, and it carried him out of the green East and across the brown middle of the country to the Colorado sidings without his once having to stand in a public aisle. He disliked the motion of trains and used them anyway, which, because it was useful, required no confession.

The Morrison compound, when he reached it, was what he had built it to be, and the building of it was the answer he gave to disorder wherever he met it. Where Cope's Garden Park camp was a scatter of tents pitched to the work, Marsh's Morrison ground had a fence around the diggings and a gate in the fence and a man at the gate, and the spoil was thrown in ordered heaps, and the crates stood squared under a tarpaulin in rows with the route-tags already on them, and the field catalog lived in a tin box in the supply tent.

It was a place where nothing was loose and nothing could be reached by a stranger, and Marsh walked it the first evening with Mudge a pace behind him, found the few things out of true and named them, saw them put right, and was, in the dry economical way that was the most of what his pleasure ever showed as, content.

Then he took the tin box with the field catalog in it, and he opened it and went down the evening's entries and found them current and entered the day.

* * *

Sternberg came down to the Cañon City siding in the second week of July to ship four crates east and to take on freight, and Marsh's car was on the siding when he got there.

Sternberg was seeing to his route-tags when Mudge came down the car steps and said the Professor would take it kindly if Mr. Sternberg would give him a quarter of an hour.

The car was cool and dim after the platform glare and it smelled of paper and cigars and machine oil, and Marsh was at the let-down table with the field reports squared in front of him, and he did not rise, but he put his pen down, which from Marsh was the same courtesy as another man rising. And he looked at Sternberg the way Sternberg had seen Cope look at a vertebra coming out of the matrix, an appraising look with nothing personal in it, taking the measure of a thing before handling it.

He asked him to sit and asked him three or four short questions, about the ledge, about how the bone was running, about the hand-work, good questions, the questions of a man who knew quarries, and Sternberg found himself answering them fully before he had decided to, because they were the questions he himself thought about all day and no one but the bone usually asked them back.

And then Marsh made the offer, and he made it the way he did everything, without warmth and without insult, as a matter of correct placement.

He understood, he said, that Mr. Sternberg was a sound field man, the soundest in the Cañon City country, and that soundness ought to sit on a proper footing. The method, he said, was only ever as good as the hand that applied it, and good hands were rare. The museum took men on for the year, not the season. It paid on a fixed day from a fund that did not depend on the sale of last year’s plates or the mood of a Philadelphia bank, and it paid whether the ground was rich or poor, because a system carried a man across the poor ground smoothly, without his having to feel it.

There would be a place at Morrison for a man who could bring a skull down to the seam by hand, and the place would still be there in five years, and in ten, which was more, Marsh said, without looking at Sternberg, looking instead at the report under his hand, than could be honestly promised of a house that funded its field out of its own pocket and answered its bank with silence. He did not say Cope’s name. He did not need to, and not needing to was its own kind of exactness.

He laid the offer down flat and complete, and then he picked his pen back up, which

was the same as another man sitting back, and waited, with no more heat in him than a ledger has, for the figure to be entered one way or the other.

It was the best offer Sternberg had ever been made or ever would be, and he knew it sitting there, the cool car and the fixed day and the fund that did not depend on the weather. And he found, taking the measure of it the way he took the measure of a fragile thing, palm flat, feeling for the seam, that it did not move him at all. He was not tempted and then virtuous. He was simply not tempted, the way a man is not tempted by a country he has no wish to live in, and he answered plainly, because plainness was the only register he had.

“I am Professor Cope’s man,” he said. “He took me on green and taught me the work and calls me for the things he will not trust to anyone else, and the bone runs at Garden Park better than I have ever had it run, and I would not leave that in the middle of a season for any wage, sir. I thank you. I mean the thanks. But I am spoke for.”

He meant no verdict on Marsh or on Marsh’s house or on the fund or the fixed day. He had no verdict. He had only the fact of where he belonged, and he stated the fact. And Marsh, who had spent his life reading the difference between a man who was bargaining and a man who was telling the truth, heard that it was the truth, and did not press it, because pressing a fixed thing only taught it that it could be moved.

“Then we will not speak of it again,” Marsh said. He had already, visibly, filed it. The small disorder of an unplaced sound man had been named and routed and the matter was closed. He picked the report back up. But at the door, as Sternberg was going down into the glare, Marsh said one thing more, dry, almost to the paper, true the way the offer had been true. “He pays late,” Marsh said, “out of his own coat. A man worth keeping ought to be kept by something steadier than another man’s coat. Good day, Mr. Sternberg.”

* * *

The wire carried it to Cope before Sternberg did, because the wire carried everything first now and a siding does not keep a secret from a telegraph.

Click had the Cañon City traffic that summer, and Click read the country the way other men read print. The news that Marsh's car had sat two hours on the siding and that Cope's man Sternberg had been seen going up the steps of it and down again was the kind of news Click did not have to be told the meaning of, because the meaning was the whole of his trade.

When Cope's open wire came down the line that evening spelling every man's right name the length of the page, and Marsh's came down the same hour in the dense routing code with one plain common name riding loose in the grid, Click took them both and charged them both the same. *The northern house puts its car on the southern man's siding,* he tapped to the next station, folded under the official traffic the way the depot chatter always rode, *makes its offer, has its answer, and the answer is no. And if you spell the locality loud, Professor Tablecloth will hear it from Connecticut.* The next man asked did Click want to come down off the wire and ride out to see the giant they were pulling. *There is coffee out there,* Click sent back. *There is coffee in jail too.*

I still do not sleep there. He kept a tally that summer of who had named what and who had reached where first, a scoreboard run off the wire and the camp talk, and he added a mark to it that evening that was not about a bone at all, and told the stove that the count had started keeping men now and not only dinosaurs, and pulled the next sheet.

Cope had the news at the fire and he sat with it a moment, and the men who had been with him long enough saw the arithmetic run through him, fast, and come out somewhere that pleased him in a harder grade than a good day in the quarry pleased him. He looked across the fire at Sternberg, who had said nothing about his quarter-hour and plainly did not mean to. Cope said little in the moment a thing mattered most. He said it sideways, after, in an order.

"He sent his own car to the siding for you," Cope said.

"Mr. Mudge asked me up," Sternberg said. "I shipped the crates. I came back."

"Then you will run the south end of the draw yourself from tomorrow, with your own men and your own powder count and the skull entirely in your hands, and I will not have Garrett over you on the close work again, because Garrett is a fine hand with a

mountain and you are the better hand with a dinosaur, and a man Marsh sends his car for is too good to be kept under a foreman." He went back to his plate. "He has done me a favor, telling me what you are worth. He taught me about the wire, and now he has taught me about you."

Sternberg said *yes, sir* and did not let his face do anything, though it wanted to, and in the morning he had the south end of the draw and his own men and the great skull coming up under his own hands, and it was the best thing that had happened to him in the field and he knew it, and he was, working it, entirely happy, the way he was entirely happy a great deal of that summer. And if there was a thing under the happiness that he could not get all the way under, a place the day-warmth did not quite reach, he did with it what he had learned to do, and fed the fire, and was the second man up. The first, as always, was Cope.

* * *

The draw gave up its giant through the back half of the summer at a rate that would have been the whole pride of a Bridger season in a single week, and Cope worked it at a pitch that left even the hardrock men gasping, and the names went east off the wire ahead of the bones, the great Garden Park sauropod christened *Camarasaurus* and in type while its vertebrae still rode the slow road behind their own christening. The count of it stood the way Cope wanted it to stand against the count coming down from Morrison, even, a thing the camp could feel and feel good about, the southern house holding its end of the Colorado front keg for keg and name for name.

A letter came up from Philadelphia in August, in Anne's hand, and Cope read it apart from the others, walking the edge of the firelight the way he did. It was a practical letter and a short one. Julia was well. And she would be easier in her mind to know his intentions, not for the money, though there was the money, but because it had been a long time, and the picture Julia had drawn of him in the spring still did not look like him, and Julia had stopped asking when he would be home, which Anne had found she minded more than the asking.

It was all stated plainly and without weight, which was how Anne stated the things she

most meant, and at the end of it there was no instruction. She only ever set the true thing down where he could see it and left the steering to him, which had always been the form her steadiness took.

He stood at the dark edge of the camp and read it twice, and the count ran in him, the wagons and the wire and the figure from the bank and the great skull coming up under Sternberg's hands at the south end and the Morrison house even with him keg for keg and the season already shortening toward the cold. And he reached, standing there, for the place in himself where her voice usually came in, the steadying figure that had always run alongside the count and slowed it where it wanted slowing, the *do not let the second one do the steering* that had stood on the Pine Street platform.

He reached for it. And the strange thing, the thing he noticed and did not stay with, was how far off it had got. It was still there. It was only that there was so much country between him and it now, so much wire and rail and rock and the noise of the work still going in his chest after the work had stopped, that her voice came in faint, came in the way the mail came in, three weeks old and about a month he could no longer do anything about. And he found that he could hear it and go on past it in the same motion, the way you hear a thing called after you down a platform by someone the train is already taking you away from.

He did not answer the letter that night either. He meant to. He folded it small and put it in the breast of his coat, where the letter he had carried west unanswered since the season before still lay, two of them now against his chest, and he went back to the fire. In the morning he gave Garrett the order for the autumn that he had been turning over for a week, which was to double the powder and run two faces at once, the north and the south, and bring the rest of the draw down before the cold closed the ground, because the Morrison house would close its own ground for the winter at the same hour and the spring would start them even again unless he could go into the winter ahead.

It was the order the season and the front and the wire all asked for, and there was no one in the country to set the other true thing down beside it, the thing about the steering, because the one person who set that thing down was three weeks and fifteen hundred miles away doing the bank's figures alone in a drawer. And so the order stood

unweighed against anything but itself, and the powder doubled, and the two faces opened.

And the road home, the open road, the one a man could still have taken any morning that autumn by simply turning his horse east and letting the bank be answered and the front go even and the great skull belong to whoever reached it next, that road was still there, unwalked and open both ways, while the rock came down and the wire sang and the country gave up its giants into the accelerating dark.

Chapter 9 — Wire and Rail

Cañon City, Colorado, autumn 1877

The Cañon City telegraph office had been built into the end of the depot like an afterthought, one room and a counter and a stove, the wire coming in through a notch above the door and going out again through a notch behind the key, and Ephraim Tolliver who answered to Click had had it to himself since the spring, which was the way he liked it. The room was small enough that a man at the counter and a man at the stove and a man waiting on the bench could not move without one of them giving up an inch to another.

And Click had arranged the room so that the inch a man gave up always came off the customer side, never off his own, the counter a foot deeper than depot counters tended to be and the door swung so that a body coming in had to turn its shoulder first to fit. He kept the floor swept and the stove fed and the log books squared on a shelf above the key in the order he liked them, the Garden Park log next to the Morrison log next to the depot log next to the day-book, and he did not let the porter touch any of them, because the porter was a sound man for a floor but unsound for a column of figures.

The morning of the day in question came in cold. The first wire of the day was always the railroad’s, the Denver and Rio Grande dispatch giving him the eastbound schedule and the Pueblo connection and the through-freight slots out of Cañon City, and Click took it down without taking his eyes off the cup he was warming his hands around, the key rattling under his other palm like a small dog. The schedule was tight that morning. The eastbound would stand fifteen minutes at the siding for crates and passengers and would not stand a sixteenth.

The Pueblo connection was three hours behind because of a frost on the rail above Florence and could be looked for at noon. He sanded the slip, hung it on the depot spike, took down the second slip, which was the morning’s first paid traffic, and the morning began the way it had begun every morning for a month, with both houses on the wire before the sun was over the hogback.

The Garden Park wire came in first, in the open clear English that Cope sent everything in, with the bone's name spelled out and the man's name spelled out and the place spelled out, *to E. D. Cope, Pine Street, Philadelphia, from Garden Park, Cañon City, by way of operator Tolliver, two crates of vertebrae and pelvis southern face, signed Sternberg.* Click took it down at the rate it came, which was Cope's rate, fast, and he had it on its way east before the second cup of coffee was off the stove. The Morrison wire came in second, in the closed grid that Marsh sent everything in, site-numbers and tonnage and a string of dates and one of the placeholder words Marsh's office used where another office would have used a person's name, *Reed at Morrison reports two faces opening to twenty feet by noon if powder holds.*

Jones north siding inactive overnight. Strip and ship as before. New Haven advises. Click took it down at Marsh's rate too, which was the same rate, because the wire did not know about subscribers and Click ran it on the wire's terms. He sanded the slip, hung it on the Morrison spike, made his entry in the day-book, and entered the charge in two ledgers, the Cope rate and the Marsh rate, and the two rates were the same rate and were entered on the same line and the line balanced.

He had said, the morning the practice began, that he kept two books only because the men paying him would not have liked seeing their names next to each other in one. He told the stove the same thing now and the stove, which had heard it several times, made no answer.

* * *

The first of the day's customers came in at half past seven, which was Sternberg, and he came in dusty, which meant he had ridden down off the draw at dawn, and he had four crates on a wagon at the siding and a sheet of paper folded twice in his coat that he laid on the counter before he said anything. He laid it flat with the crease running square to Click's elbow and his thumb at the corner, setting it down as carefully as it had been carried.

"Three of these are for the morning eastbound," he said. "The fourth's for the noon Pueblo, if the noon Pueblo holds, and if it doesn't it goes on tomorrow. The Professor's

signature is on the freight bill at the back. He's given me the south face on his own count. I'm to sign the route-tags myself."

Click looked at the paper. It was Cope's hand at the top and Cope's hand at the bottom and Sternberg's name written in between in the middle of a sentence in Cope's hand, the way Cope wrote out a thing when he wanted no man at any counter to ask the same question twice. Click had been around the wire long enough to know what a letter of authority looked like and what a letter of authority did not look like, and this was one of the cleaner ones he had seen. He turned it on the counter so the foreman's hand was facing him and read it through.

"You've got the south end of the draw, then," he said.

"Since August," Sternberg said, and a small warmth came up under the dust and went down again. "I'd thought the Professor wrote you about it."

"He doesn't write me about anything," Click said. "He spells everything aloud over the wire, which is more or less the same as writing it on every newspaper between here and Philadelphia, and I take it down and send it on and charge him for it. I knew about the south end by August twelfth from the wire he sent his wife. So did the operators at Pueblo, Topeka, Saint Louis, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia." He looked at the paper again. "You'll want this to walk over to the freight agent before you wire anything. The agent will not take your name on a route-tag without a bond, and the bond will need to be on Philadelphia bank paper, and the bank paper will need to have your name on it next to the Professor's, which it doesn't yet."

"The Professor said the agent would clear it on the freight bill alone."

"The Professor was telling you what ought to be true," Click said. "I'll wire Philadelphia for the bond paper. The Professor's bank is the United States National which closes at four, which is two o'clock our time, which gives us six and a half hours to get an answer back, which is enough if the line stays up and the bank is in a mood to answer."

"Is it?"

“It hasn’t been in a mood to answer for about three weeks,” Click said. “But that is between the Professor and the bank. I send what you tell me to send and I send what they tell me to send and I charge you both the same, and the wire does not have an opinion on it. Tell me what to send.”

Sternberg told him. He told him plainly, as Cope had told him to tell him, the size of the bond and the route, the names of the four crates and the contents of each. Click took it down without comment, and Sternberg watched the key go, and watched the slip come out from under it neat and stamped, and Click hung the slip on the outgoing spike and ran the bell once for the down-line which meant the wire was carrying his next message, and Sternberg stood at the counter and waited the way a man waits at a counter, which is to say that he stood, and the room felt the standing without the standing announcing itself.

“That’ll be a half hour at least,” Click said, “and an hour more likely. Go to the agent. Get the route-tags written. Come back at nine. If the bank’s answered we’ll bond your tags. If they haven’t we won’t and you’ll have lost nothing. You can ride up to Pine Street in your mind while you wait at the counter, or you can go to the agent, and one of them gets you a crate on the eastbound and the other one gets you nothing.”

“You’re a comfort, Click.”

“I’m a wire,” Click said. “Try the agent.”

* * *

The agent’s office was twenty paces down the platform, which was as far away as anything got in Cañon City from anything else, and Sternberg was back at the counter at five of nine with the four route-tags written and unsigned and the agent’s note clipped to them. The note was short. *Tags to be bonded against Philadelphia bank or Denver bank, no field-bond accepted on Cope account this quarter, signed Hinkle.* Click read it without making a face that anyone could have called a face.

“Hinkle’s careful,” he said. “He’s been careful since June.”

“What changed in June?”

“A Cope crate went east on a draft against the season’s plates and the draft was not paid for sixty-one days. Hinkle does not like to be a creditor without being asked first. Also he had a letter from somewhere about it.”

“From where?”

Click looked at him. “From wherever a freight agent on the southern Colorado line gets letters about which accounts to be careful with,” he said, “which is not the kind of letter that comes with the sender’s name written on the outside in spelling the agent’s wife can read.”

Sternberg sat on the bench.

At twenty after nine a wire came in for Marsh that Click took down and read twice without entering it, because the third word in it was wrong.

“Hold a minute,” he said to the wire, and ran the bell, and ran the query, and the operator on the other end ran the query back. The wire was from Morrison and it was for New Haven, and the third word was a tonnage, and the tonnage was a hundred where it ought to be a thousand, and Click read the wire whole, the Morrison foreman’s name at the bottom which was Reed. And the request which was for the standard fifty kegs against the doubled face, and the figure which made no sense against the request, and he sent the query and stood waiting for the line to come back with the corrected figure.

The line did not come back. It did not come back at twenty-five after, and it did not come back at twenty to ten, and Click stood at the key with his hand flat on the counter the way a man stands at a horse that has shied.

“What is it?” Sternberg said.

“A Marsh figure is wrong by a power of ten,” Click said, “and the operator at the other end has not yet noticed that he sent me the wrong figure, and until he does the Morrison foreman cannot order his powder against the doubled face, because no agent on the

southern Colorado line will sell him fifty kegs against an order that asks for five. And so the Morrison face is going to wait at the powder shed an hour, possibly two, on account of a finger that slipped on a key in New Haven. Which is what makes the wire what it is. It does not move because the Professor is a great man. It moves because the operator's finger does not slip on the key."

"Will you tell them what happened?"

"I will tell them when I am asked," Click said. "I am paid to send what is given me and to query what does not parse and to wait for the answer. I am not paid to fix the Professor's traffic for him out of my own good nature. If I fixed the Professor's traffic for him out of my own good nature I would be doing the Professor's work for the Cope rate, which is not a rate the Professor would care to be paying." He looked at Sternberg. "Also I do not particularly like the man."

"He's been good to you."

"He's been on schedule," Click said. "Those are different things." He looked at the key. "The line will come back. It always comes back."

It came back at ten minutes after ten. The corrected figure went up. Click sent the corrected wire on to the powder agent at Pueblo and sent the corrected wire on to Reed at Morrison and entered the charge in the Morrison ledger, and the Morrison face moved again at his small careful hand on the key, and he did not look at Sternberg while he did it, because the doing of it was none of Sternberg's business.

At ten twenty the eastbound whistle blew at the upper end of town, two long and a short, which meant the train was eight minutes out and would stand the fifteen minutes Click had been promised that morning. Sternberg felt the whistle the way the room felt it, in the floor through his boots and in the cup that ticked once on the shelf above the stove. Click did not look up from the key. Sternberg looked at the spike where the bond would hang when the bond came, and the spike was empty, and the key was quiet, and the whistle blew a second time at the lower end of town, closer, two long and a short again.

The bond from Philadelphia had not come.

* * *

Sternberg stood at the counter and watched Click stand at the key and watched the key not move, and the eastbound came into the siding three minutes later than the whistle had said it would, and stood there breathing, and Hinkle the agent loaded what was loadable and turned away the three Cope crates because the tags on them were not bonded. And the train took its fifteen minutes and a sixteenth and pulled out for the Pueblo connection with the three Cope crates in the warehouse and a Morrison crate on the eastbound that had come down from Florence on the upper line at first light.

The Morrison crate rode east now under tarpaulin in the through-freight slot Cope had been promised since June and had not had since June. Hinkle had loaded it without ceremony at six minutes past the standing time and it was, by the time the bond came down out of Philadelphia at noon at the wrong rate against the wrong account and was sent back for correction, three sidings further east than the country Cope's bone had not yet left.

The bond came down at quarter past noon. It came down in Anne Cope's hand and not the bank's, and it came down with the wrong figure for the wrong crate, and Click read it twice and sent it back for correction by the same wire and entered the charge.

"It'll come right by three," he told Sternberg, who had not moved from the bench. "The Pueblo connection holds till four. You'll get the fourth crate on the noon Pueblo, which is now the three Pueblo, which is now the four Pueblo if the bond comes back at the right figure on the next pass. Mrs. Cope did the figures from her own head and got them off by a hundred dollars. I do not blame her for the hundred dollars. The bank was meant to do the figures for her. She has been doing them alone for some time now."

"You read the wire."

"I read every wire," Click said. "It is the work."

Sternberg did not answer that. There was a yellow envelope on the spike behind Click's

shoulder, the spike marked *Garden Park*, that had been there three days at least and was Anne's hand on the outside. Sternberg saw it and did not say he saw it. The envelope had been there since Tuesday. Today was Friday. It had ridden up to Garden Park twice on the boy who carried the mail and ridden back down twice without being claimed, because the boy did not go all the way up to the south face where Cope had been since Wednesday, and Cope had not come down. Click followed Sternberg's look and did not comment on it.

"It's yours to take up if you're going up tonight," he said.

"I'm going up."

"Take it up."

Sternberg took the envelope and put it inside his coat against the smaller envelope already there, which was the route-paper Cope had given him at dawn, and the two paper sounds rode against each other when he moved.

* * *

Two o'clock came in with a railroad man and an envelope and the rest of the day with it.

The railroad man was named Boon, and Click had seen him before, and he was the Cañon City freight clerk for the Yale museum's standing freight contract, which the museum had had with the Denver and Rio Grande since June of that year. The contract gave the Morrison crates a through-rate from the siding to New Haven without any intermediate handling and without any bond against the railroad's note, because the museum's note had been posted against the line in New Haven for the whole of the year and the bond on it covered any crate moving east under the Yale tag.

Boon was a careful clean small man who had been a clerk for the railroad for twelve years and was now a clerk for the museum and the railroad both, and he came in with three wires to send and an envelope to leave on the counter, and he sent the three wires and stood at the counter while Click sent them and then put the envelope down between

them with one finger on it.

“Professor Marsh sends his compliments,” Boon said.

“That’ll be a first,” Click said. “He’s never sent them before.”

“He’d like the operator on the Cañon City line to have it understood that the museum values the operator’s work.”

“I’m being thanked?”

“You’re being thanked,” Boon said, “and the Professor would like you to know that the museum’s standing freight contract carries an operator’s clause. The clause is in the envelope. The terms are inside.”

Click did not pick up the envelope. He looked at the line of Boon’s coat, which was a good coat for a clerk to be wearing on a Friday afternoon, and he looked at Boon’s hat, which was a hat a freight clerk did not buy at a freight clerk’s wage, and he picked up the envelope and turned it over once in his hand and put it down again on the counter at the same place Boon had set it.

“What’s in the clause.”

“A retainer,” Boon said. “A small one. Twenty-five dollars a month, to be paid the third of every month against the museum’s standing account, in consideration of the operator’s service to the museum’s freight traffic out of the Cañon City line.”

“Service in what.”

“Prompt handling,” Boon said. “The Professor’s view is that time is the enemy and prompt handling a thing worth paying for. The museum’s traffic, as you’ll have noticed, is heavy this season. The clause secures the line’s first read of museum traffic during the heavy hours.”

“First read of museum traffic,” Click said.

“First read,” Boon said. “Yes.”

Click looked at him. He looked at him long enough that another man might have left the counter, but Boon was a clerk for twelve years and stood the look out of habit, and Click looked at him until the looking had stopped meaning anything and then he picked up the envelope again, and opened it, and read the clause through, and read it through a second time, and folded it back into the envelope and put the envelope under the day-book on the shelf above the key.

“The clause says first read of museum traffic,” he said. “The clause does not say anything about other traffic on the line.”

“The clause is about the museum’s traffic. The other traffic is the operator’s own business.”

“That’s good,” Click said. “Because if the clause had said anything about the other traffic on the line I would have torn it up and given the pieces back to you, and the Professor would have heard about it from Pueblo by suppertime, which would not have done either of us any good. As it is, the museum is paying the standing rate for prompt handling and is putting twenty-five dollars on the third of every month behind it for emphasis, and I will give the museum the prompt handling I give the railroad and everybody else who pays the standing rate, and the Professor will have what he is paying for, which is the rate. He will not have the other traffic. The other traffic is not the museum’s business and it is not the railroad’s business and it is not Mr. Boon’s business and the clerks at Pueblo will be pleased to hear me say so.”

Boon’s face did not change.

“The Professor,” he said, “will be pleased to hear that the clause is acceptable.”

“The clause is acceptable on the terms it is written on,” Click said. “Tell him so. Tell him the operator at Cañon City takes the standing rate from every man on the line and adds twenty-five dollars on the third of the month if the museum’s the man, and tell him that the line carries Mr. Cope’s traffic at the same rate it carries Mr. Marsh’s, because the line does not know about scholars and would not change rates for them if it did. Tell

him I do not particularly thank him for the offer. Tell him I do not refuse it either. The standing rate covers what the standing rate covers, and what it does not cover is not for sale at this counter. Mr. Boon."

"Mr. Tolliver."

Boon went out the way he had come in.

Click stood at the counter a long minute. Then he turned to the stove and told it that there was an envelope under the day-book and twenty-five dollars on the third of every month behind it and that Boon had got out of the room without it being any worse than that, because if Boon had pressed it the third sentence Boon had spoken would have had to have been the last sentence, and now nothing had been said that anyone would have to remember. The stove made no comment, because it knew what it was being told.

The wire was no different now than it had been before Boon had come in, except for the envelope under the day-book, which lay there small and harmless and was, if Click read it right, the part of the museum's standing contract that the standing contract did not have to include in order to work, and was therefore worth more to the museum than the contract was. He sent the next wire on the line, which was for the Garden Park account, which was Cope's, at the standard rate, and he sent it as fast as he had sent any Marsh wire that morning, because the wire did not know about it, and he was not going to teach it.

Sternberg, who had heard every word of the exchange from the bench because the room was eleven feet long and there was nowhere for the sound to go, sat with his hands on his knees and did not look at Click and did not look away, and the look on his face was no look, and only the knuckle of his right thumb moved once against the bench when Boon left, a small flat tap that was not a thing he had decided to do.

Click sanded the slip and hung it on the spike.

"Don't tell the Professor about the envelope," he said, without turning.

"Which Professor."

“Either.”

“What would I tell him.”

“That a thing was put on the counter that nobody picked up the wrong way,” Click said. “Which is not a story. There is no story in it. Tell him the bond is not back yet from Philadelphia and that I am sending again at three.”

“All right.”

“And eat the bread on the shelf. You have been sitting on that bench five hours and you have not eaten.”

Sternberg ate the bread.

* * *

The bond came back at twenty minutes after three.

It came back at the right figure, and Click bonded the route-tags with a flat little stamp he kept in a tin, and Sternberg watched the stamp go down on each of the four tags in turn, and the stamping was a small clean dull sound on the counter that he had not known he was waiting to hear. Click walked the four bonded tags down to Hinkle at the agent’s office, and walked back, and stood at the counter while Hinkle walked the bonded tags out to the warehouse and walked the three crates onto the four Pueblo, which had been held three quarters of an hour past its time by a Pueblo dispatcher who liked Click.

And the three Cope crates rode east on the Pueblo at five minutes to four, and the fourth crate was held against the morning eastbound the next day because the noon-now-four Pueblo had no Saint Louis through-slot.

He entered the day’s charges on both ledgers and balanced them. The lines balanced. The wire did not know.

Sternberg stood up off the bench.

“You’ll be all right going up in the dark?” Click said.

“It’s the road I came down on.”

“It is. Take a piece of bread for the road. The piece on the shelf. Not the loaf.”

Sternberg took the piece. He had Anne’s envelope inside his coat and the route-paper inside his coat and the day’s bonded tag copies inside his coat and a wire of his own to carry up, which Click had written out for him on a square of depot paper and folded once, which said the three crates rode east on the four Pueblo and the fourth would ride on the morning eastbound and the bond was good and the freight agent was paid through the month. He felt the four papers against his ribs through his coat and the felt-ness of them was a thing he did not name, only adjusted his coat once so the inside pocket sat true.

At the door he stopped and looked back at Click, who was not at the key now but at the stove, feeding it from a stack he had brought in that morning. The room was very full of the day that had been in it. The two ledgers stood open on the counter where Click had left them. The two spikes stood at the wall behind the key with their day’s slips stacked on them. The yellow envelope was no longer at the Garden Park spike, because Sternberg had it in his coat.

“Click,” Sternberg said.

“What.”

“What was in the envelope.”

“The museum’s standing contract,” Click said. “I told you. There was no story in it.”

Sternberg did not move.

Click turned around and looked at him. He looked at him for a beat that was a beat longer than the look had needed to be, the way the camp had stood the held quiet after the first shot a beat longer than it had needed to, and what passed between them was not a thing either of them would have said out loud, because Click did not say things out

loud that he did not have to say and Sternberg had no words for what he was waiting to be told. After the beat Click said it the way he said everything, plain and short and not for keeping.

“They want to know what your Professor sends,” Click said. “Before he sends it. They are willing to pay for it. They are not going to get it. They will pay anyway because they think it will help, and it will not help, and the offer will keep coming through other men in other coats until the war ends or I do. That is what was in the envelope. There is nothing else in it.” He turned back to the stove. “Go up. The Professor will want his wire.”

Sternberg went out.

Click stood at the stove a while longer and then went and took the envelope out from under the day-book and put it in the morning’s drawer, which was where he kept the standing-contract paperwork for the line, and shut the drawer, and did not write anything in either ledger about it, because there was nothing in either ledger that it belonged in. He tallied the day’s traffic on the slate beside the key the way he tallied it every evening, in two columns, the columns being open names sent east on the Cope line and coded routings sent east on the Marsh line, and added the tally to the running tally for the month, which was the tally that had started keeping men now and not only dinosaurs.

The columns at the end of that day stood even on bones, three and three. They did not stand even on motion. The Morrison crate had ridden out at quarter past ten. Cope’s first crate had ridden out at five minutes to four. The difference was five and a half hours, which was, if Click read it right, the new shape of the country.

He swept the floor.

* * *

Sternberg rode up the road in the dark with the wire in his coat and the envelope from Anne against it and the bonded copies in the inside pocket against his ribs, and the country was cold and the wagon track was clean and he held the horse to a walk because

the horse knew the road and he did not need to push it. The hogback stood up black against the stars on his right hand and the Arkansas ran sound only on his left hand and he heard them both without needing to hear them, and he did not turn over what had been said at the counter, because there was nothing in it to turn over and he had no method for turning over things that did not turn into words.

He only carried what he was carrying, and his shoulders were tired from sitting and not from working, which was a tiredness he did not know the shape of yet. At the top of the draw the camp came up out of the dark with its fire and its tents and the smell of supper, and he rode in and unsaddled and tied the horse and took off his hat and walked to the fire.

Cope was at the fire with the south-end men. He had been on the face all day, which Sternberg saw by the dust on the knees of his trousers, and he had eaten already, which Sternberg saw by the plate set aside on the box behind him, and he had a piece of charcoal in one hand and a flat board in the other on which he had been making a count of something while he talked, and he stopped both when Sternberg came in and stood up.

“Tell me,” he said.

Sternberg gave him the folded square. Cope read it once standing, and once seated, and put it in the breast of his coat, and gestured Sternberg to the box opposite his own.

“And the bank.”

“Mrs. Cope answered for them,” Sternberg said. “The figure was off by a hundred.”

Cope was still a beat, and then he was not.

“She did the figures from her own head,” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

“From her own head, because the bank would not do them for her in a timely fashion.”

“Click said it was between the Professor and the bank.”

“He said that to you?”

“He said it to the room. I was in the room.”

Cope looked at the fire. His face did not move. He put one hand inside the breast of his coat and felt for what was in there, which was a thicker stack of paper than it had been in August, three letters now against his chest unanswered, and he did not take the new one out, because he knew the hand on it without taking it out and was not going to read it at the fire with the men around. He took it out anyway, and held it a moment, and put it back. He did not open it.

“And the Morrison crate,” he said.

“On the morning eastbound.”

“The crate that was supposed to be on the slot we had been promised.”

“The slot has been a museum slot since June, sir. Click said the museum has a standing freight contract with the line.”

“A standing contract.”

“Since June.”

“Out of New Haven.”

“Yes, sir.”

Cope turned this over. He turned it over the way he turned over a vertebra he had not seen the shape of yet, looking at it from one side and then the other, and his face was very alive in the firelight and was not, for once, smiling. The men around the fire had not stopped eating and had not begun talking either, which the camp had done lately when the Professor was thinking, and Sternberg felt the room as well as he had felt Click’s room, and held it, and waited, because he had been at the south end since

August and had learned in those weeks that Cope would tell him what to do in the morning and that the count between then and now was a count Cope did the rest of by himself.

“A standing contract,” Cope said again, to nobody, looking at the fire. He picked up the charcoal he had set down when Sternberg came in. He put the flat board across his knee. “We will need our own contract, then. Or our own slot. Or our own car.” He looked up at Sternberg. “Eat. I’ll have the morning’s order for you at first light. You’ll go back down the day after with the fourth, and you’ll take a wire for Philadelphia I’ll write tonight, and you’ll wait at the counter until I have an answer. I am tired of being a man whose crates ride the freight on whatever room is left after the museum’s. The room left after the museum’s is not a room a man builds a season on.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Eat.”

Sternberg ate, and Cope did not say anything more about the day at the fire, and the men around the fire began their small talk again the way the camp had taught itself to do, and the night came up cold over the draw with the wind in the cedars at the south end and the wire still singing on its poles down at the river. The country between Cañon City and Pine Street had grown overnight, somehow, by the difference of five and a half hours, and only the men whose business it was to feel that difference felt it, and they felt it without saying it, and the camp went on, and the fire fed, and the powder shed at the south end was full and ready against the morning.

And at the bottom of the draw twenty miles away in a small room behind a depot counter Click was sitting at his cold key in the lamplight, finishing the day-book by hand, entering the museum’s standing contract at the museum rate and the Cope account at the Cope rate, and balancing the two on the same line, the way the wire did not know not to balance them.

And outside his door the eastbound for the next morning was already being made up in the yard, with two through-slots open and one of them spoken for by Yale and the other by a small dairy in Florence, and a crate of Cope’s somewhere down the line on the four

Pueblo riding east into a country that was, in the count Click kept in his head and would not have admitted to keeping, no longer the same country it had been when the crate had gone out.

He turned down the lamp. He shut the day-book. He went out and locked the door behind him with the brass key he kept on a string at his belt, and he stood a moment on the platform and listened to the wire singing thin on the cold pole above his head. He told the dark, without raising his voice, that the line was not the line it had been in the spring and was not going to be again, and that the part of the line a man could buy was bigger now than the part a man could not, and that the part a man could not buy was getting harder every week to keep his hand on. The dark did not answer. He went home.

Chapter 10 — Como

Como Bluff, Wyoming Territory, 1877

The ridge ran for seven miles and the wind ran the length of it without anything to stop it, off the Medicine Bow snow in the south and across the flat sage country and up the long shaley back of the bluff and down again to the lake at its foot, which was called Como and was shallow and alkaline and the color of pewter under cloud. And the men who worked the line had learned to lean into the wind as into a held door, because the wind did not stop for the noon meal and did not stop at dark and was simply the weather of the place the way the cold had been the weather of Cañon City.

A section hand named Vance had been the one to find the first of it, walking the rail east of Como Station with a bar over his shoulder to set a loose tie, and he had stopped to kick at a thing that had weathered out of the cut where the grade had been blasted through the toe of the ridge, thinking it was a root, and it had not been a root. It had been longer than his leg and heavier than stone had any business being and one end of it had the look of a thing that had once fit into another thing, a knob and a socket worn smooth, and he had carried it back to the station and set it on the agent’s counter and the agent had looked at it for a while without touching it.

The agent’s name was Carlin. He had been the Union Pacific man at Como for two years and he knew the value of a thing by the number of men who came to look at it, and within a week of Vance’s root the number of men who came to look had grown past the number Carlin could account for with anything ordinary, because the bones were not in one place. They were the place.

You could walk the wagon track along the foot of the bluff and see them standing out of the shale on both hands, ribs the curve of a barrel stave, joints the size of a stove lid, a black length of something that might have been a thigh lying half out of the bank with the sage grown up around it as though it had always been furniture there and the country had simply arranged itself to leave it room. They lay for seven miles, in the cuts and the dry washes and along the bedding planes where the rain had stripped the soft stone off

the hard, and they did not give the impression of a graveyard, which is made by burial, but of a floor, a single floor laid down under the whole ridge and now coming up through it.

And Carlin stood on the wagon track in the wind one afternoon and understood that he was standing on more bone than any one house could carry away in the working life of any one man, and that the fact was worth money to whoever understood it first, and that he understood it first.

He did not write to the museum at New Haven under his own name. He wrote under the name Harlow, and he had Vance write under the name Edwards, and the wire that went east out of Como Station that week said only that two men in the employ of the railroad had located vertebrate remains of large size and fine preservation in quantity near the line and would treat with a serious party for the working of the same, and Carlin sent it through the Como key himself because the regular operator had gone down to Laramie.

And he spelled the false names out twice so the operator at the far end would not query them, and then he waited, and the wire came back inside three days in a closed grid of site-numbers and dates and a sum of money against a season of secrecy, and at the bottom of it, where another office would have signed a man's name, there was a single word that was not a name. The word was *Jones*. Carlin did not know what it meant. He learned what it meant the way everyone on that line learned things, which was by doing what it told him and being paid.

* * *

Reed came up from Colorado on the second week of it.

He came on the cars with four men and a tarpaulin-load of tools and a letter in his coat, and he did not go to the hotel at Medicine Bow and he did not go to the agent's house, he went to the bluff, and he walked it. He walked it the way he checked a handle before he trusted his weight to it, slowly and with his hands, crouching at this cut and that wash, turning a knob of bone over and setting it back exactly where it had lain, pacing off the distance between one quarry of weathered ribs and the next and keeping the count in his head.

And at the end of the day he had walked four miles of the seven and he had not said a sentence longer than six words to any man, and he had decided everything. He hired Vance and he hired Carlin's three section men at a wage above the railroad wage, and he hired Carlin, after a fashion, which is to say he put Carlin's name on the museum's books at a clerk's retainer for the use of the station, the key, the freight scale, and the agent's silence, and Carlin took it, because a man who has found the thing does not always get to keep the working of it, and a retainer was better than the view.

By the end of Reed's first month Como was an operation. There were tents along the foot of the bluff in two camps, the upper camp at the richest cut where Reed himself worked and the lower camp by the lake for the green hands, and there was a cook and a wagon and a string of horses and a powder shed dug back into the bank with the door padlocked and a man who slept against it, and there was a schedule. It was the schedule that told a visitor what Como had become.

Crates went down to the station on the wagon every second day whether they were full or not, and the empty room in a half-full crate was packed with shale so the weight would read true on the freight scale and the contents would read like ballast on the way-bill, and the way-bills did not say bones. They said building stone, samples, mineral specimens, and once, on a run that carried the better part of what Reed thought might be a new dinosaur, they said farm implements, and Reed checked each way-bill himself against the crate before the wagon went, not because he cared what the paper said but because a way-bill that did not match its crate was a delay, and delay was the only enemy Reed recognized.

He numbered the quarries. He did not name them, the way Cope named things, out loud and in clear English for the whole line to hear. He cut a number into a cedar stake with three strokes of a knife and drove it at the head of each working face, and he kept the numbers in a book, and the numbers told him and no one else where the good ground was and where the worked-out ground was and where the ground was that he had opened a foot into and covered again because it was good and he was not ready to work it and did not want it found by anyone walking the bluff with a glass.

There were stakes on the bluff that quarter that marked nothing. There were quarries

under sage that Reed had laid a tarp and a foot of dirt across and walked away from whistling.

Down at the station Carlin sent Reed’s closed-grid wires east in the evenings, the site-numbers and the tonnages and the strip-and-ship instructions and the placeholder word at the bottom, and he sent them at the museum rate, and he kept his own small book of what he sent, because a man who has been moved off the working of the thing he found keeps a book against the day it is worth something. He did not know yet what day that would be. He kept the book anyway.

* * *

Cope learned of Como the way he learned of most things, all at once and too late and from a man who would ordinarily have charged him for the telling.

There was an operator at Como now who was not Carlin, a thin sardonic man named Click who had come up from the southern Colorado line when the southern Colorado work began to slow and the northern work began to roar, and who had taken the regular operator’s chair at Como Station the way he had held the chair at Cañon City, which was to say he ran the wire on the wire’s terms and charged every man the standing rate and did not have an opinion that anyone was paying him for.

Click read both houses now, the way he had read both houses in Colorado, except that at Como the closed-grid traffic ran ten to one against the open, because there was only one house working the bluff and it worked it in cipher, and Click sent the cipher and entered the charge and did not pretend to himself that he could not count. He could count. He counted Reed’s crates going down to the platform two a day and he counted the way-bills that said building stone over a weight that no building stone he had ever lifted came to.

And one evening in the lamplight he put it to the shut door, which did not answer any better than the Cañon City stove had, that there was a man up on that bluff shipping a museum out from under the sage two crates at a time and calling it gravel, and that the only house on the line that did not know it yet was the house that ought most to want to.

So Click sent a wire. He sent it on the open line at the standard rate to Garden Park, Cañon City, by way of an operator he trusted to walk it up the draw, and it said only that the freight out of Como was heavy and was all one man's, and that a serious party would find the country worth a look before the snow. He charged it to no one. He entered it in no book. He told the key it was the one wire that year he had sent out of his own good nature, and that he had sent it because he did not particularly like a one-house line, a one-house line being a quiet line, and a quiet line being bad for a man whose living was the noise.

Cope came up in October with the snow already gray on the Medicine Bow and Sternberg riding beside him on the cars, and he came up talking, and he was still talking when the cars stopped at Como Station and he stepped down onto the platform and saw, stacked under tarpaulin against the freight house, eleven crates that said building stone and weighed what bone weighed, and for a moment he did not talk.

And Sternberg, who had come down off the cars behind him with the bags, watched the Professor's face do the thing it did, which was to go from the talk to the thing under the talk, the appetite, naked for a second before the talk came back over it, and he felt, watching it, a small lift in his own chest that he did not examine, the lift of arriving somewhere that was going to matter.

"He's been here since summer," Cope said.

"It looks like it, sir."

"He's been here since summer and he has eleven crates on the platform, and the car I wired Philadelphia for in the fall is a thing the trustees will take up in the spring, and I have a ticket stub." Cope walked the length of the stacked crates once, fast, reading the way-bills, his hand flat on the cold wood. "Building stone. He is shipping the best floor of bone on the continent east under a way-bill that says building stone, and the agent is letting him, and the railroad is letting him, because he has paid the railroad to let him, the way he paid the railroad in Colorado."

He turned. The appetite was all the way under the talk now and the talk had the speed in it that Sternberg had learned to read as the Professor deciding three things at once. "We

will not get the ground he is standing on. He has had it since summer and his stakes are in it. We will get the ground beside it. There is seven miles of this and he cannot stand on seven miles. Find me the agent, find me a wagon, find me where the open ground is, and find me whether the operator in that office is a man or a museum. We are a season behind and we will not spend the winter being a season behind."

Sternberg found him the wagon and the agent and the open ground, and he found him the operator, who was Click, who looked up from the key when Sternberg came in out of the wind and said, "You took your time getting north." He gave him the lay of the bluff in four sentences without being asked and without charging for it, and told him which two miles of the seven Reed had not yet staked, and told him that the man to watch was not the man in New Haven and not the man in the upper camp but the man with the section gang, because the section gang knew where every bone on that ridge was and the section gang worked for wages and not for love.

* * *

They put the Cope camp up on the open ground a mile and a half west of Reed's upper camp, on a bench above the wagon track where the bluff turned and the camp could see both the lake and the long cuts to the east, and within a week the two camps could see each other's smoke.

That was the new fact of the country, the smoke. At Cañon City the rivalry had been a thing on the wire, a thing of rates and slots and bonds, a thing that happened to crates and never to men in the same hour in the same air. At Como the other side was a column of gray rising off a bench a mile and a half away that a man could watch lean in the wind exactly as his own leaned, and the watching went both ways.

There was a man on the high point of the bluff between the camps most mornings now with a glass, sometimes a Reed man and sometimes a Cope man, and each side knew the other watched and each side worked partly for the work and partly for the glass, packing the wagon in plain sight when there was nothing in the crates worth the packing, leaving a quarry open and conspicuous that had been worked out a week before so the glass would spend a morning on it. The talk in both camps got shorter.

A man learned not to call a find out loud across open ground. A man learned to bring the foreman to the bone and not the bone to the camp, and to throw a tarp over a good face before the noon light got high enough to show its color to the ridge, and Sternberg learned these things in a week and taught them to the green hands in the second week in Cope's own clipped grammar, because he had heard Cope say them and they had become the way the work was done.

Reed answered the new camp the way Reed answered everything, by removing the delay it represented. He sent two men down the wagon track on the second day with a maul and a roll of wire and they drove a line of stakes across the mouth of the dry wash that ran up between the two camps, the wash being the only easy grade a wagon could take from the Cope bench down to the good cuts along the foot. And they strung two strands of wire between the stakes and hung a board on it, and the board said, in Reed's three-stroke knife-cut letters, that the working east of the wire was claimed and held, and they did this without hurry and without a word to anyone and walked back up the track when it was done.

It was not a fence. Two strands of wire on a Wyoming bench is not a fence and both camps knew it. It was a number cut into a cedar stake made large enough for a glass to read at a mile and a half. It said the ground had been counted and the count was Reed's, and it cost Reed an hour and two men and it cost Cope, who had meant to run his wagon up that wash, the better part of a day finding another grade.

And when Cope rode down to look at the wire he sat his horse in front of it for a while with the wind taking his coat and then he laughed, once, a short hard laugh that had real pleasure in it, because it was a good move and he knew a good move when it was made against him.

"He's drawn a line on the ground," he said to Sternberg, who had ridden down with him. "Two bits of wire and a board, and he thinks I'll respect it because he respects it, because to him a counted thing is a held thing." He turned the horse. "Pull it."

So they pulled it. Sternberg and two of the south-end men rode down at dusk and pulled the stakes and rolled the wire and stacked the stakes neat at the foot of Reed's track with the board on top, because Cope had said to pull it and not to take it, there being a

difference, and they were back at the Cope camp before full dark, and Sternberg found that his hands were not quite steady when he got down off the horse and that the unsteadiness was not fear. It was the other thing.

It was the thing he had felt as a boy the one time he had taken an apple off a neighbor's tree and run, the bright bad lightness of having done a thing and gotten clear of it, and he stood by the fire with his hands held to the heat to still them and he did not give the feeling a name, because there was no name for it that he was willing to use, and because Cope was already talking about the morning.

In the morning the wire was back across the wash, restrung, with a new board, and a man sitting on a rock above it with a rifle across his knees, not pointing it at anything, cleaning it.

* * *

The man on the rock was the method shift, though no one in either camp would have called it that.

He was there the next morning and the morning after, always a different man and always the rifle, always being cleaned or being carried slung or being leaned in plain sight against the stake at the head of the wired wash. And never once pointed, because a rifle that is pointed is a thing that has to be answered and a rifle that is merely present is a thing that can be lived with, and Reed understood the difference exactly the way he understood the difference between a way-bill that matched its crate and one that did not.

A man could still pull the wire. He could pull it every dusk and Reed could restring it every dawn, and for three days that was the game, the wire down at dark and up at light, and the camps half-enjoyed it, the green hands laying small bets on whether the wire would be up or down at breakfast, until the morning the rifle was on the rock.

It was Cope who answered it, and he answered it without a rifle, which Sternberg understood later was the whole of the Professor in a single move. Cope rode down to the wash in the full light of midmorning with the glass surely on him from the ridge, and he did not go near the wire and he did not look at the man with the rifle, he rode

past the wash and up onto the shale slope above it where a long gray rib was weathering out of the bank in plain sight of both camps, a rib that everyone on the bluff had seen and no one had worked because it stood on the disputed ground above the wash.

And he got down off his horse and he took out a hammer and he began, alone, in the open, in front of the rifle and the glass and both camps, to work the bone out of the bank. He worked it for an hour. He worked it badly and too fast and he cracked it, Sternberg could see even from the camp that he had cracked it, and it did not matter in the least that he had cracked it, because the cracking was not the point.

The point was a man in a black coat on a contested slope taking a bone out of the ground in front of a rifle and not hurrying and not looking up, and by the time he rode back to camp with the cracked rib lashed across his saddle the man with the rifle had come down off the rock and gone back up the track to the upper camp to tell Reed that the Professor had worked the slope above the wash in full view and taken a piece off it. And Reed had listened, and gone back to greasing the hub, because there was nothing in it that he could remove by doing the next practical thing, and a problem he could not solve by doing the next practical thing was not a problem Reed spent words on.

That evening Carlin came to the Cope camp.

He came after dark and on foot, down the wagon track from the station and up onto the bench, and he stood at the edge of the firelight until a man saw him and brought him in, and he stood turning his hat in his hands in the way of a man who has rehearsed how he will stand, and he asked to speak to the Professor. Cope, who was at the fire with the board across his knee and the charcoal in his hand, looked at him a while and then sent the men off out of earshot, all but Sternberg, and told Carlin to sit.

Carlin did not sit. “I found it,” he said. “I want that understood before anything else is said. I walked that bluff before any man here, before Reed, before the museum, before you. Vance kicked it loose but I knew what it was and I wrote the letter, and I wrote it under another man’s name because that is how it is done, and for my trouble I am a clerk on the museum’s book at a clerk’s wage for the use of my own station, and the man working my bluff cuts numbers into stakes and will not tell his own hands which stakes are live.”

“And you have come down the track in the dark,” Cope said, “to tell me that you are an unhappy clerk.”

“I have come to tell you that I know where the live stakes are,” Carlin said. “Every one. I send the wires. I keep the count. I know which quarries Reed has covered and walked away from and means to come back to in the spring, and I know which crates on the platform are gravel and which are a dinosaur nobody east of here has a name for yet, and I know the day and the hour of every shipment before the wagon is loaded, because I am the hand every order of it passes through.”

He stopped turning the hat. “I am not offering you my loyalty, Professor. I had loyalty for the man who would have let me work what I found, and that man did not come. I am offering you what I know, by the week, for money, and I will go on sending Reed’s wires with my own hand the whole time, because if I stop sending them he will know inside a day that the leak is the station, and a leak nobody can find is worth more to you than a friend nobody can doubt.”

Cope was quiet. Then he did a thing Sternberg had not seen him do, which was to look at a man for a long moment with no talk coming, weighing him, and what he was weighing was not whether the offer was good, because the offer was plainly good, but whether the man was the kind of man who would take the same walk down the same dark track to the next camp the next time he was passed over, and deciding that he was, and taking him anyway, because a season behind is a season behind and a man does not refuse the only ground he can get on account of the character of the man selling it.

“You will be paid by the week,” Cope said, “in cash, at the station, by Sternberg, who will not write your name in any book. You will go on sending Reed’s traffic exactly as you send it now. And the first week the thing you tell me does not match the thing that happens, you are done, and I will let it be known up at the upper camp who took the dark walk, which will be the end of you on this line and you know it.” He picked the charcoal back up. “Sit down. Tell Sternberg the live stakes. He keeps the count for the south end and he will keep it for the bluff.”

Carlin sat down and told it, and Sternberg held the count in his head the way he held everything now, the numbers of the live quarries and the covered quarries and the

worked-out ground and the shipping days, and as he held it he felt the weight of the thing from the night of the wire change in him, gone quieter and heavier and more comfortable, the way a thing carried against the ribs gets warm and stops being felt as a separate thing. He sat in the firelight taking down a traitor's count of another man's bones and he was, though he would not have used the word and was not asked to, having a fine time.

* * *

With Carlin's count the work changed its tempo.

Cope no longer prospected, because he no longer had to. He worked from the count. He sent his men to the covered quarries Reed meant to keep for spring and opened them, in the open, in daylight, taking what could be taken fast and leaving the rest cracked and conspicuous so that the glass on the ridge would see the cover pulled off Reed's own held ground, and the message of it was not lost on the upper camp, and the tempo of the upper camp answered.

Reed put more men on, and worked longer into the dusk, and brought up two cases of powder from the shed where one had done before, because the fast way into a hard face was the powder and the count had made every face a race, and the talk in both camps now had blasting in it the way the talk in a railroad camp has blasting in it, as a tool and a schedule and a thing measured in kegs. And no one in either camp said the word for what it did to the bone it freed, which was to break some of it, because the breaking of some of it was the price of getting the rest of it before the other man, and that price had been agreed to by everyone without anyone agreeing to it out loud.

It was in the second week of the count that the rocks were thrown.

It began as nothing, the way these things began, two crews working faces forty yards apart across the line of the wash, near enough to hear each other and too near for either to pretend the other was not there, and a Reed man called something across the gap that a Cope man answered, and then a clod came across, a clod of the soft shale that breaks on the air and does no harm and is thrown the way boys throw, and was thrown back.

And for a while it was clods, and the clods were almost the old game, the wire-up-wire-down game, a thing the crews half-enjoyed and laid small bets on, until somebody, and neither camp ever agreed which side it had been, picked up a stone instead of a clod, a real stone, the size of a fist, and threw it hard and on a flat line. It took a Cope man over the eye and put him down. For one held moment the whole gap went silent the way the camp at Cañon City had gone silent after the first shot, the held quiet of men who have just felt a line move under them.

And then both crews were up the slope at each other and it was, briefly, a real thing. Fists and stone and one man swinging a shovel by the blade. It lasted under two minutes because Reed came down off the upper face at a walk, not a run, and waded into the middle of it and pulled his own men off it by their collars one at a time and stood them back and faced them down the slope.

And Cope's men, seeing the other crew pulled back, pulled themselves back, and the gap opened again, and the man with the cut eye was helped down to the wash and the blood was got off him and it was found that the eye was sound and only the brow was opened, and by supper both camps were telling it, and by the second telling it was already a story with a winner in it, and the winner depended on which fire you heard it at.

Sternberg got the cut man down to the wash and cleaned the brow with water from the canteen and his own neckerchief, and his hands were steady doing it, steadier than they had been at the wire, because there was a hurt man and a thing to do and the doing of it was clean. He washed the neckerchief in the lake in the last light and wrung it out and carried it back wet, and at the camp Cope was at the fire already laying out the morning, about which quarry of Reed's they would open next and how fast.

* * *

The shooting started three nights after the stone.

One of the green hands at the Cope camp, a boy named Dyer, took the camp rifle out past the last tent in the dark to where the lake lay flat and pewter under no moon. He loaded it and put a shot out across the water at nothing, at the dark, at a far shore he

could not see. The report went out flat across the water and came back off the bluff a moment later, once. And then the night had a hole in it.

For a moment nobody moved. Then, a mile and a half east, Reed's camp answered. One shot, high, over their own ground, the way a man knocks back when a man knocks on the wall. And then the Cope camp put up another, and Reed's another, and for the better part of an hour the two camps stood off at their mile and a half and shot at nothing, at the dark, at the lake, over their own heads, not one barrel of it pointed at a man or a tent or a fire.

It quit when the powder a man would waste on it ran short, which came sooner at the Cope camp than at Reed's, Reed having more of everything.

Down at the station Click had heard all of it through the shut door, the Cope camp and Reed's, and he had counted the shots the way he counted crates. When Sternberg came in for the Professor's morning wire Click told him, not looking up from the key, that the two camps had stood off at a mile and a half in the dark and killed, between them, one tin cup and a great quantity of night, and that he had not been asked to send a word of it either way and had charged nobody. He would say this much for it, that it was the first thing the two houses had done in the same hour since the summer, even if what they had done was waste powder at the sky.

Sternberg had stood at the edge of the firelight all through the shooting and had not picked up a gun, and he told himself afterward, walking the dark down to the lake to see the boy had put the rifle back, that he had kept clear because someone had to keep a head, and that was true and was not the whole of why. The rest of why was the bright bad lightness from the night of the wire, except that the stone over the cut man's eye sat in him now too, three nights old and not gone, and the lightness and the stone together made a thing he had no use for and could not set down.

He found that he had enjoyed the hour and that the enjoying had a floor under it now he could feel through his boots and would not look down at. The rifle was back against the wagon. He went up to the fire. Cope was laying out the morning.

There was a letter in Sternberg's coat he had carried up from the station that afternoon

and forgotten in the business of the shooting, a letter in a woman's hand addressed to the Professor that Click had given him off the spike with no remark. He gave it to Cope now, and Cope took it and felt the hand of it without looking and put it inside his coat against the others there, of which there were more than there had been in Colorado, and did not open it, and went on talking about the morning.

* * *

By the time the first real snow came down on the bluff Como was no longer a place where men dug.

It was a place that was held.

Cope stood out at the edge of the Cope camp in the first snow one evening with the board under his arm and looked east down the bluff at the other fire, and Sternberg stood near him, and Cope did not say anything for a while, which was the rarest thing he did. The snow came down small and dry and the wind drove it level along the foot of the ridge and the bone lay under it where it had lain under the sage, seven miles of floor, and the two fires burned at their mile and a half apart.

And a man on either bench could have walked to the other in half an hour over open ground in any weather, and no one did, and the not-doing of it was the whole shape of the country now, and Cope looked at the far fire the way he looked at a vertebra he had not seen the shape of yet, from one side and then the other.

"He will hold the east end through the winter," he said. "I will hold the west. In the spring we will both be here, and there will be more of us, and the wire will go up again across the wash, and we will pull it down again, and he will put it up again." He turned and went toward his own fire, and the snow was already whitening the shoulders of his coat. "Tell the men we ship the day after tomorrow if the line is clear, and tell Carlin I want Reed's shipping days for the whole month, and tell the cook the green hands eat after the wagon's loaded and not before. We are a season behind. We do not eat first."

Sternberg told the men, and told the cook, and walked down the track in the dark to the station to tell Carlin and to send the Professor's wire to Philadelphia, and the snow

came down on him the length of the walk, and the bone lay under it on both hands, and the wire sang thin on the cold poles over his head the way it had sung over the road out of Cañon City. At the station Click was at his key in the lamp with the door shut against the snow, and he looked up when Sternberg came in stamping the cold off, and he looked at him a moment longer than the look needed to be, the way he had looked at him at the door of the Cañon City office.

And then he took down the Professor's wire to Philadelphia without remark, and entered the charge, and told the snow on the dark window, not to Sternberg and not quite to himself, that there had been a quiet line at Como in the summer and there was not one now, and that a noisy line was good for his living, and that he had not yet decided what it was good for otherwise, and that he supposed he would find out, because the kind of noise a line made told you in the end what was being carried on it, and the noise this line made now was the noise of two houses that had stopped sending each other anything at all.

Sternberg went back out into the snow. Behind him the wire sang. In the last stretch before the camp the wagon ruts lay frozen under the new snow, and his boot found the edge of one and turned, and he went down on a hand and was up again before the cold of it reached him, and he came into the firelight brushing the snow from his knee.

Chapter 11 — Cairns

Como Bluff, Wyoming Territory, 1878

The snow held the bluff for four months and held the camps in it like two coals banked under ash, and then in March the wind came around out of the southwest and the drifts went gray and sank and the wash ran brown for a week and the country came up out of the white the way the bone had come up out of the sage, which was all at once and everywhere and as though it had only been waiting.

The men came back up the cars from Laramie and Medicine Bow in twos and threes, the ones who had wintered south and the ones who had wintered in town on their own coin spent too fast, and there were more of them than there had been in the fall, on both benches, because both houses had spent the winter writing east for money and men and both houses had got some. And by the second week of the thaw the wire was back across the mouth of the wash, up at dawn and down at dusk, and the green hands who had wintered over laid the same small bets on it they had laid in October and found the game had not gone stale, only cold, and was warm again now the ground was.

Sternberg came up on the same car as the Professor with the count of the winter's shipments folded in his coat against the letters, and he stood on the platform at Como Station in the new mud and looked north at the long shale back of the bluff with the snow gone off the south faces and lying yet in the cuts. And he felt the lift he had felt in October, the lift of arriving where it was going to matter, except that this year it had a floor under it he could feel through his boots and had stopped trying not to feel, and he picked up the bags and went to find a wagon.

The first cairn was up before the Cope camp had its second tent staked.

It stood on the high point of the bluff between the two benches, where the man with the glass had sat all the fall, a waist-high pile of flat shale laid up dry and square and plumb, the kind of thing a man builds who has built chimneys and dry walls and knows how a stone wants to lie on a stone. And there was a cedar stake driven in the top of it with

three knife-strokes cut in the wood, and from the Cope bench a man could see it against the sky a mile off and know it had not fallen out of the ground that way.

It had been carried up there stone at a time and laid by a hand that meant it to stand through a season and a winter and another season, and it was not on the wire and it was not at the wash, it was on the height, on the ground that overlooked both camps and belonged on any honest reading to neither, and that was the whole of what it said. The wire said the working east of here is held. The cairn said something the wire could not say, which was that a man had come up onto the high neutral ground in the cold and built a thing to last and gone back down, and that he would do it again, and that he was not in a hurry.

And Cope rode up to look at it on the second morning the way he had ridden down to look at the wire, and he sat his horse in front of it with the spring wind taking his coat and he did not laugh this time.

“He’s been busy in the snow,” Cope said.

Sternberg had ridden up with him. “There’s another one east, sir, on the point above the second wash. The glass shows a third past that, too far yet to read.”

“A line of them.” Cope got down off the horse and walked around the cairn once, slowly, with his hand not quite touching it, reading the lay of the stones the way he read the lay of a joint, and he put one finger on the cut stake at the top and turned it, and it did not turn, it was driven in mortar-tight with shale chips tamped around it, and he took the finger back.

“He’s run a line of marks down the top of the bluff on the ground that’s nobody’s, and he’s built them to stand, because a thing built to stand is a thing a man has to knock down on purpose, and a thing you knock down on purpose is a thing you’ve answered. The wire I could pull at dusk and he could string at dawn and we could both call it a game. You can’t pull a cairn. You have to take it apart stone by stone with your hands in front of the glass, and then he builds it back in a day, and now you’re two men who tear down each other’s stone walls, and that is a different country than two men who pull each other’s wire.”

He stood looking at it. “He’s a careful man, Reed. He has been promoted to punctuation and he takes the work seriously.”

“Sir?”

“He doesn’t talk. He marks. A stake, a number, a wall of stone. The whole bluff is getting to be a sentence in a language only he can read, and he means me to know I can’t read it and can’t rub it out.” Cope got back on the horse. He was smiling now, but it was not the short hard laugh of the fall, it was the other smile, the one Sternberg had learned meant the Professor had found the work harder than he wanted and was glad of it and meant to win it anyway.

“Leave it. Don’t touch it. A cairn a man leaves standing is a cairn he’s looked at and decided he doesn’t care about, and that costs me nothing and costs him a winter’s worth of carrying stone uphill for no answer. We don’t fight him on the height. We beat him in the ground.” He turned the horse down off the point. “Find me Carlin. I want to know what’s under the marks.”

* * *

Carlin came to the Cope camp the way he had come in the fall, and he had wintered no softer than anyone, he was thinner in the face and his coat was the same coat. He sat this time when Cope told him to sit, and he took the cash from Sternberg’s hand and counted it without seeming to and put it away before he said a word, which was its own kind of telling.

“He built through the snow,” Carlin said. “Most of the men he laid off in December and kept four, and the four of them carried stone up onto the height all winter on the days it was fit and some it wasn’t, and he didn’t tell them why and they didn’t ask, and they built nine of them down the top of the bluff from the station ground to the far wash. Nine.” He said the number the way he said all his numbers, flat, as a thing he had counted and was selling.

“There’s a quarry under three of them. He capped his own covered ground with the marks. The cairn on the second point is sitting on the face he opened a foot into in the

fall and laid the tarp over, the good one, the one with the long dinosaur in it he wouldn't ship before the snow because he wanted the whole of it and couldn't get the whole of it out before the freeze. He built a stone pile on top of it so it reads to your glass like a marker on empty ground, and it isn't empty ground, it's the best face he's got, and he's hidden the best face he's got in plain sight by making it look like a thing that means nothing."

Carlin almost smiled, and did not. "I'll say this for him. It's good work."

Cope was quiet, turning the charcoal in his fingers. "Which three."

"Second point. The little point past the dry wash. And the one nearest the station, though that one I'm less sure of, it might be the spring he means and might be a true marker, he covered it after I'd sent the wire and I didn't see the face."

Carlin spread his hands. "I send what passes through my hand. What he does with his own four men on the height in the snow doesn't pass through my hand. I walked it on a Sunday and counted the piles and looked under the one I could get under without leaving a track, and that's the second point, and that's the one I'd dig if I were you, and I'd dig it in the daylight so he watches me do it, because the one thing a careful man can't stand is to watch a careless man get into his careful work and not be able to come down off his own bench to stop it without starting the thing neither of you can stop."

He stood. "That's worth the week, Professor. The shipping days are the same as the fall, second and fifth, and there's a car coming up empty on the fourth that's his and not the railroad's, which means he means to ship something whole that won't break down small, and I'd think about what's worth a whole car to a man who packs gravel in his crates to make the weight read true."

"You'd think about it," Cope said.

"You're paying me to think about it part of the way and stop," Carlin said. "I stop here." He put the hat on. "Same time next week." He went out of the firelight and down the track in the dark, and his boots sounded on the wet ground a while and then not.

* * *

They opened the second point on a bright still morning with the glass surely on them from the station ground, and they did it the way Cope had said, slow and open and in no hurry to hide.

Sternberg took six men up onto the point and they did not climb the cairn and did not touch it, they worked around it, they came at Reed's covered face from the downhill side and cut a bench into the slope below the stone pile and worked up under it. The long dinosaur was there exactly as Carlin had said it would be, a run of vertebrae the size of bread loaves laid out along the bedding plane with the tarp gone to rot over them and a foot of Reed's careful dirt, and it was good, it was very good, it was the best thing either camp had got into since the fall.

And Sternberg knelt over the first clean vertebra he brushed out and felt the old thing come up in him clean and whole through everything else, the wonder of it, the simple animal wonder of a made shape coming up out of the country into the light after the long time, and for the length of a breath he was the boy at Bridger again who had loved this before he had been good at it. And then he heard the men working and remembered the glass and the morning and got up and called the foreman over to the bone instead of the bone to the camp the way he had taught them, and the wonder went down under the work where it lived now and did its work from underneath.

The shale ran wet under the morning. It had held snow in the cuts a week ago and the melt was in it still, and a wet face does not give bone up clean, it gives it up soft, the matrix coming away in a paste that takes the thin edges with it if a man hurries the pick. Sternberg knew it the way he knew his own hands. He set the men to the soundest dry shale at the top of the run and kept the wet lower edge for himself, working it with the small pick and then the awl and then the brush, slow, because there was a right way to do a hurried thing and the right way was to keep one clean edge no matter what the rest of the day asked.

Cope rode up onto the point by mid-morning to see the dinosaur, and he came already in motion, calling for the cord before he had both boots down, and the men leaned

toward him the way they always did, as though the morning had been waiting on him to come and make it mean something. He had the measuring cord out before he was off the horse. “We should wait a winter? Reed waited a winter. We have inherited his patience and we will spend it by noon.” He was bright with it, and the brightness was the old voltage, and Sternberg felt the pull of it in his own arms before he felt the catch under it.

“The lower edge is wet, sir,” Sternberg said. “It’ll come cleaner if it dries an hour.”

“Then dry it with work.” There was no anger in it, and that was the difficulty. Cope crouched by him over the bone and the wonder was in his face too, the same wonder, and his finger was already on the cord. “An hour is an hour Reed gets to look at us not taking it. Caution is a virtue when the time belongs to no one, Sternberg. Here the time belongs to the man who spends it first.” He set the first measurement aloud, and the men took it down, and the morning closed back around his voice.

Sternberg bent to the wet edge and saved what he could. He lost two small chips off the side of the plate when a green hand lifted a jacket too soon, no bigger than a thumbnail each, too small to figure in any count and too much bone to leave in the dirt, and he put them in the tobacco tin in his coat without saying why and went back to the edge. He did not look up to see whether Cope had seen him do it. The wonder went on doing its work from underneath, and so did the other thing, the thing that had no name and lived lower than the wonder, and he kept the edge clean because keeping the edge clean was the one part of the morning that was entirely his to keep.

By noon the upper camp had answered. Not with men down on the point, Reed did not send men down, but with the tempo of the height, which got faster and harder all morning, the ring of bars on stone carrying down off the bluff. And twice the flat crack of a charge from up where Reed was working his own ground, and the second crack was close enough and hard enough that a sift of dust came down off the cairn on the point where Sternberg’s men worked and one of them looked up at it.

It was not aimed. A charge laid in a face on the height could not be aimed at men on a point below it and both camps knew a charge could not be aimed that way, it was powder spent on Reed’s own work at Reed’s own tempo, except that the tempo was the answer, the tempo said you have got into my good ground in the daylight and I am

working twice as hard above you and I am not coming down, and the dust off the cairn was the tempo made visible. Sternberg brushed it off the vertebra and went on working and did not look up the second time.

It was the section man who found the tell.

He was a Reed man, one of the four who had wintered, a square quiet man named Vance who had kicked the first bone loose off the rail the year before and worked for the museum now because the museum was who paid to work what he had found. And he came down off the height in the early afternoon along the top of the wash on some errand of his own with a coil of fuse over his shoulder, and the line of his errand brought him within forty feet of where Sternberg's men were working Reed's face, near enough to see what they had, and he stopped.

He did not say anything. He stood at the top of the cut with the fuse on his shoulder and looked down at the long run of vertebrae coming clean out of the slope, the dinosaur Reed had covered and meant to have whole, lying open now to the Cope men's bars, and his face did the thing a man's face does when he sees a thing gone that was meant to be kept, and then it stopped doing it, and he turned to go back up.

Cope was at the head of the cut by then with his hand on a vertebra, and he saw Vance stop and saw the face and saw it stop, and he straightened up and called across the forty feet, friendly, the way he called everything, "Is there a skull to him?"

It was a question one collector asked another across any open ground in the territory and meant nothing by, and Vance should have said nothing or said he didn't know, and what he said was, "Not down here," and went up.

Cope watched him out of sight up the height. Then he came down the cut to where Sternberg was working and crouched by him over the bone and said, low, not for the men, "Did you hear him."

"He said there's no skull to it, sir."

"He said not *down here*." Cope was looking up the bluff where the man had gone, and

the appetite was all the way under the talk now, the naked thing under it, and his voice had the speed in it. “A man who doesn’t know whether there’s a skull says he doesn’t know. A man who knows there’s no skull says there’s no skull. A man who says *not down here* knows where it is and it isn’t down here, it’s up there, it’s up at the upper camp in a crate that Reed won’t ship small and is putting on a whole car on the fourth, the head of this dinosaur, off, and held, and he’s had it since the fall.”

He put his hand flat on the open vertebrae, the long headless run of them. “Reed took the head off it before the snow and packed it whole and left the body in the ground under a stone pile, because a body you can come back for and a head is the thing the other man wants, and now I know the head’s up there because his own man can’t lie quick enough to say he doesn’t know.” He stood, and he was smiling the hard fall smile now and the slow spring smile under it both at once.

“Carlin can’t get me that. Carlin sends the wires. Carlin doesn’t know what Reed took off this dinosaur with his own hands before he covered it. That man just told me, for free, by being honest for half a second about a thing he loved.” He looked down the cut at the headless dinosaur a moment longer. “Get it out clean. All of it. We’ll have the body of the best thing on this bluff in a crate going south before he ships the head north, and he can put the head in a museum and label it, and every man who knows bone who looks at the two of them will know who had to ship half a dinosaur because the other man got the rest, and that will cost him more than the dinosaur.”

* * *

The word came down to the Cope camp the way most things came down, through the green hands, who carried talk up and down the bluff faster than any wire.

It was the boy Dyer who brought it, the one who had shot at the lake in the fall, and he brought it to the supper fire the second night after the point, pleased with himself for having a thing, that he’d been down at the wash hauling water and two of Reed’s men had been working the far side close enough to hear, and one of them had cut a charge wrong or set a stake wrong, Dyer couldn’t say which, and the other one had told him to do it right, to do it the way Jones wanted it. And Dyer thought that was a fine thing, a

man named Jones up at the upper camp nobody had ever seen, and did anybody know who Jones was, because he'd asked Reed's man across the wash who Jones was and the man had looked at him and not answered and gone back to the work.

Nobody at the Cope fire knew who Jones was.

Sternberg knew the name. He turned it over once and set it down, because it was a Marsh-side thing and meant nothing he could use and there was no profit in a name with no man under it.

He told Dyer it was likely the New Haven clerk who signed the orders and to leave it, and Dyer was a little disappointed that Jones was probably only a clerk, and the talk went to other things, and the word stayed up the bluff where it lived, a thing the upper camp said to each other now to mean the orders that came from a long way off and had to be done right whether the men saw the sense of them or not.

* * *

The flashpoint came over the cairn on the little point, and it came the way the rock had come in the fall, out of nothing, between crews too near each other to pretend.

Cope had moved a crew east after the second point, working down the line of Reed's marks one at a time, into the ground under the third cairn, the small one on the little point past the dry wash, and Reed had a crew of his own working a face on the height not eighty yards above it, and the two crews had been in each other's noise all morning, the Cope men below at the covered ground and the Reed men above at the open.

And the talk across the gap had started friendly the way it always started and had gone the way it always went, shorter and flatter, until a Cope man, getting under the cairn from the downhill side to pull the stone off Reed's covered face, took the bottom stones out from under it the wrong way. The whole pile of it slid and came apart down the slope, the careful dry-laid wall of it that had stood the winter. And it went to a heap of loose shale in a slide and a clatter and a small dust, and the cut stake that had stood on top of it went down the slope with it and lay in the rubble pointing nowhere.

The Reed crew came to the edge of the height and stood and looked down at it.

It had not been knocked down on purpose. The Cope man had been digging out a covered face and the cairn had been on top of the face and the cairn had come down because he was under it, and every man on both sides of the gap knew the difference between a wall a man takes apart with his hands looking up at you and a wall that slides because a man is working under it. And knew it the way they knew the difference between the rifle pointed and the rifle leaned, and for one held moment it could have gone either way, because a careful thing built through a winter was down in a heap whatever the reason, and the man who had built it was not there but four of the men who had carried the stone up were, on the height, looking down.

One of the four came down the slope. He came down fast, not at a walk, a young Reed man with his hands open, and he came to the foot of the slide where the stones lay and he stopped. He looked at the heap of his winter's work. He bent and picked up a stone off the top of the slide, a flat stone the size of two fists. And he straightened with it in his hand, and the gap went quiet the way the gap had gone quiet in the fall over the man with the cut eye, the held quiet of men who have felt the line move under them, and every Cope man at the face stopped working and a couple of them came up off their knees with bars still in their hands.

The young man stood with the stone in his hand a moment that was longer than a moment.

Then he turned and set the stone down. He set it back on the heap, on the top of the slide where a cairn would start, square, the way a man lays the first stone of a wall he means to build, and he straightened the fallen stake up out of the rubble and stood it in the loose shale as best it would stand. And he looked at the Cope men once, not at any one of them, at all of them, and went back up the slope to the height, and the four of them went back to the face, and the Cope men, after a breath, went back to the bone.

Nobody had thrown anything. Nobody had said anything past the short flat talk that had started it. The stone went down on the heap instead of across the gap, and the not-throwing of it sat in the air over the wash a good while after, heavier in its way than the thrown rock had been in the fall, because a thrown rock is a thing that happens to a

man and a rock set down is a thing a man decides, and both crews had watched a man decide.

Sternberg had been at the foot of the slide and had seen all of it, the stone come up and the held quiet and the stone go down, and he found that he had stopped breathing for the length of it and started again, and that his hands, which had been steady at the bone all morning, were not steady now. And it was not the bright bad lightness of the wire and it was not the clean steadiness of the cut man's brow, it was a third thing he had no name for and did not look for one, the feeling of having watched a thing nearly happen that he had wanted, for half a second, to happen, and been glad past telling that it had not, and not known which of the two feelings to carry.

He went up the slope where the young Reed man had set the stone and he looked at it a moment, the one stone square on the heap of the slide, and then he came back down and told the foreman to leave the rubble where it lay and get the rest of the body out before dark. And he did not rebuild the cairn and he did not scatter it further, he left it as it was, a wall come down with one stone laid square on top of it, and he could not have said why he left it exactly that way except that to touch it either way seemed a thing he had no right to.

* * *

Reed answered the slide the way Reed answered the wire and the stone, which was by doing the next practical thing, and the next practical thing was the powder.

He had been blasting his own faces on the height all spring as a tool and a schedule the way both camps blasted now, two cases where one had done in the fall, the fast way into a hard face, and in the week after the slide he moved the blasting to the faces nearest the line of the wash, the ground closest to the Cope crews, and he worked them harder and later and with bigger charges than the rock strictly wanted, so that the crack of it came down off the height all day and into the dusk.

And the dust of it drifted down across the wash and settled gray on the Cope men's backs and on the open bone, and twice a charge brought down a slide of loose shale off the height that ran most of the way to where the Cope crews worked and stopped short.

And stopped short every time, because Reed was a man who knew to a foot how far a slide would run off a given face under a given charge and laid the charge so the slide would run to the line and not across it.

A slide that stopped ten feet short of a Cope crew every single time was a thing nobody could answer, only powder spent on Reed's own ground at Reed's own tempo that happened to send the country down the hill to the edge of where the other man knelt. And a man cannot fight the country coming downhill, he can only kneel in the dust of it and go on with his bone and feel the next charge in his back teeth before he hears it.

They said the work was going fast. They said the second point was nearly out, body and all, and would ship whole on the fifth, loaded and gone south while Reed's whole car still sat empty on the siding waiting on the head.

The count had made every face a race and the race had no brake on it that anyone had been asked to build.

* * *

They made a victory of the second point at the fire that night, because men have to make something of a day that has nearly turned and has not, and Dyer had stacked a little pile of the cairn's loose shale by the supper fire as though it were a trophy, and it leaned and did not fall, and Cope let it stand. He had the map board across his knees and had not put it down since supper, drawing the headless dinosaur from memory, making the gap where the head was not into a promise and the promise into print, and the men leaned toward him the way they leaned toward him on the point, and Sternberg leaned too. He could feel the pull of it. He could feel it as plainly as he felt the tobacco tin against his ribs with the two chips in it.

He ate late, because the wet lower edge had taken work. Cope saw the tin before Sternberg got it closed.

"Fragments?"

"Edges. Off the plate. The shale was wet."

“Good. Nothing wasted.” Cope said it warm, and the warmth almost did the thing warmth did, almost settled him, and Cope leaned closer to the coals, bright again, tireless in the way that made tired men feel taller for being near him. “You see what Reed did with his hill of stones. He put a roof over the spring and called it order, and he thought the roof would keep the season for him. That is Marsh entire. He buries the future and files it. We take the roof off and call it discovery.” The men laughed. Cope’s eyes stayed on Sternberg. “You’d have waited the hour.”

“An hour.”

“And in the hour?”

Sternberg looked east, where Reed’s fire showed low and steady down the bluff. “The face would have come cleaner.” He turned a chip over in the tin and did not look up from it. “And they’d have worked twice as hard above us either way.”

“They will work twice as hard above us whatever we do. That is the one thing about Reed a man can lean on.” Cope’s voice softened, which was its own kind of force. “He tightens because Marsh tells him to tighten, and Marsh will never say take the hill, he will only ask why the count has fallen, and a man like Reed hears the rest of the sentence and builds it out of stone. We hear the rest too, Sternberg. That is the whole of why we are still on this bluff and not a season further behind than we are.” He held out the charcoal. “Mark me the true cairns for the morning. The three with quarries, not the six that are only weather. We are a season behind and the only way out of a season behind is to spend the daylight before the other man does.”

Sternberg took the charcoal. It left black on his thumb. He marked the board carefully, more carefully than the board needed, the true cairns and the false ones and the covered faces and the load path down to the platform, and Cope watched him do it and was pleased, and said he had the bluff in his hand, and the men went to their blankets, and across the dark one of Reed’s men lifted a lantern off a peg and hung it on another, and the Cope side made a small joke of it. Sternberg wiped his tools before he lay down, the pick and then the awl and then the brush, laying each in the roll in its place, more slowly than the tools asked, and when he lay down he did not sleep at once.

He set the day in order the way he set the tools in the roll, the wet plate and the saved edge and the stone come up and set back down and the one chip he had lost in the dirt and not got into the tin. It helped to set them in order. It did not make him warm.

* * *

The body of the second-point dinosaur shipped whole on the fifth, packed long in a single crate that took six men to lift, and it went down to the platform on the wagon in the open in the middle of the day with the glass on it the whole way. Cope rode down behind the wagon to the station himself to see it weighed and put under tarp by the freight house, and he stood on the platform in the spring sun and looked at the long crate that held the body of the best dinosaur on the bluff, the body of the dinosaur whose head was up at the upper camp waiting on a whole car, and he was as near to happy as Sternberg had seen him since the platform in the fall.

Click was in the office with the door open to the warm. He had wintered there, he was the only man on the bluff who had not gone south or to town, and he looked the same, thin and dry and reading both houses' traffic at the standing rate. He came to the door and looked at the long crate and looked at Cope and said, not unkindly, that the Professor had a whole body and the other man had a whole head and that between the two of them they had made one dinosaur into two half-dinosaurs shipped to two cities, and that he supposed that was science, and Cope laughed, the short hard laugh, and said it was science the way two dogs and one bone was supper.

And Click said he wouldn't know, he only sent the wires, and that he'd sent more wires off this bluff this spring than he'd sent all the fall and that not one of them, either house, was addressed to the other house, and that he found that a curious thing in two outfits a mile and a half apart who thought about each other every waking hour, that the one place neither of them would spend a word was on the only other man on the continent who understood exactly what they were doing. He said it to the platform and the spring light and not quite to Cope, the way he said most things, and went back to his key.

Cope did not answer it. He watched the long crate weighed and watched the figure entered and watched it slid under the tarp by the freight house next to the morning's

lesser crates. Then he turned and looked north and east up the long back of the bluff at the line of cairns standing on the height against the bright sky, the nine of them, one of them down now in a heap with a single stone laid square on it, and the upper camp's smoke standing off its bench, and he stood looking at it the way he looked at a thing he had not got the shape of yet, and Sternberg stood near him.

"He'll ship the head on the car that came up empty on the fourth," Cope said. "Whole. North. And he'll have his name on the head of the finest dinosaur off this bluff and I'll have my name on the body of it, and neither of us will have the dinosaur, because the dinosaur's in two cities now and will never be one thing again, and the only place you could ever see the whole of it is in the ground it came out of, and it isn't in the ground anymore."

He said it without weight, as a fact of the count, a thing the season had made true the way the season made the wash run brown, and there was no grief in it that Sternberg could hear and no triumph either past the ordinary triumph of a good crate weighed, only the flat arithmetic of two men and one dinosaur, and he turned and went to his horse.

"We open the little point clean tomorrow and start east on the rest of his marks. He has nine cairns and a head and a whole car, and I have his count and his shipping days and a body in a crate, and we are still a season behind, and in the summer there will be more of us and more of him and he will build the marks back where we pull them down and we will work the ground under them faster than he can build them, and that is the bluff now, and it will be the bluff in the spring after this one."

He got on the horse. "Tell the men the body shipped. Tell Carlin I want the fourth car's manifest before it's loaded. And tell the cook the green hands can eat first tonight. They got the body out clean and whole and that's worth a supper." He rode up the track toward the bench, and the spring wind took his coat, and the cairns stood on the height the length of the bluff, and the two fires would burn that night a mile and a half apart on the held ground the way they had burned through the fall and through the winter.

And a man on either bench could have walked to the other in half an hour over the open spring ground in the good weather, and no one would, and the not-doing of it was the

whole shape of the country still.

Sternberg told the men the body had shipped, and told the cook the green hands ate first, which made the boy Dyer grin and the cook grumble and the camp easier for an hour. He walked down the track in the long spring dusk to the station to tell Carlin about the fourth car and to send the Professor's wire to Philadelphia.

And at the station Click was at his key in the last light with the door open, and he took down the wire to Philadelphia and entered the charge and looked at Sternberg a moment longer than the look needed, the way he had looked at him at the door in Cañon City and at the door in the snow. And said the line was busy this spring, busier than the fall, and Sternberg said it was, and Click said the line did not care who paid it or what it carried, only that it carried, and went on entering the charge, and left the rest of it unsaid the way he had in the snow.

Sternberg took the receipt and the fourth car's manifest Carlin had left folded under the lamp without a word, and he put them in his coat, against the tin with the two chips in it, and he walked back up the track into the dusk toward the two fires, carrying the manifest of the head going north, carrying it warm and low and easy now where it lived. He passed under the line of cairns on the height standing dark against the last of the light, the nine of them, the one come down with the single stone laid square on the heap where a man had decided not to throw it.

And he looked up at them once going by, the marks of a careful man run the length of the bluff in stone that would stand the summer and the next winter and that someone would have to take apart with his hands or leave alone, and he did not slow, and he did not give the looking a name. And ahead of him the new grass came up green through the gray on the seven miles of bone that no one yet had any idea how to stop wanting.

And the cairns stood.

Chapter 12 — Broken

Como Bluff, Wyoming Territory, 1879

The bone came up faster than the cars could carry it down all that last year, and by the third week of October the question on both benches had stopped being how much was in the ground and become how much could be got off the country before the snow. That was a smaller question and a meaner one, because the ground had given more than two outfits could carry in a season twice as long, and the carrying was the whole of the war now, the cars and the crates and the days.

A man stood on either bench at the end of the season looking at more good bone than he could ship and did the arithmetic that the country had been teaching both camps for two years without once saying it aloud. A thing you could not carry was a thing you left, and a thing you left was a thing the other man came and took. And so the end of the season was not a rest, it was the last hard sorting, the deciding of what went south and what went north and what stayed in the ground for whichever of them got back to it first in the spring.

And the deciding had an edge under it this year that it had not had before, because both men had spent the summer learning that the ground was not endless and the money was, that the bluff would be worked out before either of them was beaten. The only sure way left to keep a thing from the other man was the way that had been sitting at the bottom of the work all along like a stone under the wash, waiting, which was to see that the thing was no longer there to be kept.

Sternberg kept the count of it the way he kept the count of everything, in the book against his chest, the cars filled and the crates weighed and the days left. He kept the other count too, the one that was not in the book, in the tobacco tin in his coat where the chips were, the lost edges and the broken corners too small to crate and too much bone to leave, which had been two in the spring and were a handful now, because the powder had gone on breaking what it freed all summer, and a man who could not bear to leave bone in the ground could bear even less to grind it under a boot heel in the spoil.

So he had got in the habit, when no one was looking and sometimes when they were, of going down on one knee at the foot of a worked face and picking the bone-chips out of the rubble with two fingers and putting them in the tin, where they rode against his ribs all day and meant nothing and weighed nothing and were the only part of the season's count that was his and not the Professor's.

He did not think about why he did it. His hands did it. They had been doing it longer than he had been keeping track of them doing it, and on the days the work went fastest and the breakage went highest they did it most, going down quiet at the spoil-line while the foreman called the next face. He let them, the way a man lets a habit of prayer carry him through what his mind has stopped being able to hold. And he had stopped, somewhere in the long middle of the summer, telling himself it was something he would explain to someone later. It was not for later. It was for now, and it did not help, and he did it.

The wire came down across the mouth of the wash at dawn the way it had come down for two years, and went up at dusk, and meant nothing now that it had not meant in the first fall, which was that the working east of it was held.

But the cairns on the height meant more than they had meant, the nine of them gone to eleven over the summer and then to fourteen, run the whole length of the bluff in dry stone that had stood a winter already and would stand another, and under the new ones as under the old there was covered ground, Reed's good faces capped and hidden and held against the day he could get back to them.

The upper camp worked late now and blasted late, the crack of the powder coming down off the height into the dusk most evenings, the dust of it settling gray on the Cope men's backs the way it had settled all summer, the slides running down to the wash-line and stopping short, always short, ten feet and eight feet and six. Near enough that a man felt the country come down behind him, and far enough that there was nothing in it to answer, only powder spent on Reed's own ground at Reed's own tempo that happened to send the bluff down the hill to the edge of where the other man knelt.

It had been the shape of the whole year, the slide that stopped short, the charge that was bigger than the rock wanted and could not be called anything but a charge, the breakage

that went up and got packed and shipped and counted the same as the whole bone so long as the count was crates. Both camps had lived inside it and called it the work and nodded along. And the door it left open was the door the season had kept cracked without anyone naming it, the door that said none of this yet was past walking back. The slides stopped short. The cairns could be left or taken apart by hand. The bone that broke, broke by accident of speed and not by anyone's deciding. A man on either bench at the end of October could still have ridden home and let it cool.

What changed was not the powder. There had been powder all year. What changed was the date on the freight house calendar and a single line at the foot of a wire that Carlin sent north with his own hand on the nineteenth and copied south for cash that same night, four words under the day's traffic where an office would have signed a man. Sternberg read the copy at the fire and turned it over once, the way he turned the name over every time it came, and set it down, because it was a Marsh-side thing and meant nothing he could use. The four words were *do it before snow* and the name under them was Jones.

* * *

Reed had the charges laid in the northeast faces by the morning of the twenty-third.

The northeast ground was the best the upper camp had not yet shipped, three faces of it run back into the ridge under two of the late cairns, the long good dinosaur opened in August and covered and meant to have whole in the spring. The ridge above was loose shale on a hard core the way the whole bluff was, and the knowledge of how far a slide would run off a given face under a given charge was the same knowledge turned the other way, which was how to lay a charge in the core under a face so that the face did not slide clear but came down on itself, and the ridge came down on the face, and the good ground went under thirty feet of its own country and stayed there.

The holes were set in the core where they would break inward and not out, loaded deep and tamped, the fuse run down off the height to the bench below the line of the slide. Twice the fuse was pulled back through the hand checking for the cut or the damp, because a fuse that failed was a face to be climbed back up to in the open with the glass

on it.

Reed fired the three faces a little before noon, one and then the count and then the second and the count and the third, so the ridge came down in three long folds rather than all at once. The sound of it was not the flat crack of the working charges that had come down off the height all summer, it was lower and longer and went up through the soles of the boots on the far bench before it came to the ears, and the Cope crews at the wash stood up off their knees one after another along the line and turned and looked north and up, and saw the top of the ridge lean out against the bright sky slow, the way anything that big moves slow, and hang, and go, the whole face of it shrugging down into its own dust in a roll that ran the three folds together into one long fall. The dust came up off it gray and brown and climbed the still air two hundred feet and stood there.

And under the standing dust where the three faces and the long good dinosaur and the two cairns had been there was a new slope of broken country lying at the angle that broken country lies at, fresh and raw and the same color all the way down, with nothing in it that a glass could read and nothing on it that had been built by a hand, and the sound came back once off the south wall of the basin a beat late. And then there was no sound at all.

The dust stood a long time. There was no wind that noon to take it, and it climbed and spread and thinned and hung, and it drifted at last down the bluff on the cold settling air and came across the wash and over the Cope crews where they stood in the open with their bars in their hands, and it settled on them the way the working dust had settled all summer, gray on the shoulders, gray in the hair.

Except that the men did not bend back to the bone under it the way they had bent all summer. They stood in it and let it fall on them and watched the new raw slope where the ridge had been, and nobody on the Cope line said anything for a while that was longer than it sounds to say it.

Then the foreman said, to no one, that there had been a dinosaur in there, and nobody answered him, because every man on the line had seen the August crate-talk come down the bluff in the green hands' mouths and knew there had been a dinosaur in there, the

long good one, and knew it was in there yet, under the thirty feet, with the ridge on top of it, and would be in there past all of them.

Sternberg stood at the wash-line with the dust coming down on him and the tin against his ribs, and he watched the slope where the faces had been. What he felt was not in the book and was not in the tin, and he did not, in the standing dust of that noon, look for a name for it any more than he had looked for a name for the third feeling at the slide in the spring. Except that this was not that feeling either. It was the floor under that feeling, the thing the floor had been the floor of all along, and it came up through his boots the way the sound had come up through them, before the ears, before the words.

He found that his hands, which were steady at the bone in any weather, were not doing anything at all, were hanging at his sides with the dust falling on them, and that he had not gone down to the spoil-line for the chips and was not going to. There was no spoil-line. There was no face. There was nothing broken small that a man could pick up with two fingers and carry. There was a hill where a hill had not been and a dinosaur inside it that no two fingers would ever reach, and the count he kept of the bone that could be saved had just been handed a number it had no column for, and he stood and let the dust come down.

* * *

Cope rode up from the station in the early afternoon, fast, having heard the sound at the freight house a mile and a half off and felt it in the planking, and he came up the wagon track at a hand-gallop with his coat out behind him and got down at the head of the wash where the crews still stood. He walked out to the wash-line and looked north at the new slope for the length of time it took him to understand the whole of what it was, which was not long, because he read ground faster than any man on the bluff and he read this ground in a breath, the three folds, the buried faces, the dinosaur gone under, the deliberateness of it that any man who knew powder could see in the way the ridge had come down inward and not out.

The understanding went across his face and under it and came out the other side as speed, the way everything came out of Cope as speed, and he turned from the slope and

began to talk.

He talked the way he talked when things were worst, fast and bright and moving, walking the wash-line as he did it so the men had to turn to keep him in front of them. What he said was not an argument, because he was not arguing with anyone, it was the thing itself coming out of him at the speed it came.

Reed had buried a face rather than lose it. There was a dinosaur in that hill that belonged to the science and to the age and to anyone who would ever want to look at the truth of the old world, and Reed had put it past all of them forever rather than let it be got by a man whose name was not the right name. This was what they were now, men who would unmake a thing of the deep past sooner than see a rival's label under it.

And he, Cope, had spent two years being the one who worked the ground while the other man worked the wire and the lawyers and the stone walls, the one who got the bone up clean and shipped it whole and let the marks stand on the height because a mark cost him nothing, and where had it got him, a season behind and a hill full of buried truth across the wash and his own good name a thing he defended in journals while the other man's hired hand brought the country down on the best dinosaur on the bluff at noon in front of forty witnesses and would never answer for it because there was nothing to answer, a slide is not a crime, a buried face is an accident of powder, the same as the slides that stopped short all summer were an accident of powder, and a man could go mad keeping his hands clean against a man who had decided that clean hands were a thing you kept by keeping someone else's dirty.

Then he said it, not loud, the speed gone flat and certain in it the way the bright in him always went flat and certain when it reached the bottom of a thing, out loud, to no man, into the dust and the new slope.

"We would be in our rights to destroy Marsh's finds."

And he was already past it, already three sentences on, a man who buries a dinosaur at noon has told you what the rules are and you are a fool to keep to the old ones. The answer was not to stand here, the answer was speed, the answer was to get every crate that was theirs onto the cars before the snow and to get it south whole and to beat the

man in the only place left to beat him, which was the count. The men should not stand in the dust. The men should work.

He did not say a name and he did not point at a crate and he did not tell any man to do any thing. He had said the line to the wash-line and the dust and the new slope, the way he said everything, out loud, into the air, turning it over, and then he was already moving on, already going back to the cars and the snow and the south. He turned to go back to his horse. And behind him at the head of the wash where the wagons were loaded and the day's crates stood for the weighing and the manifest there was a crate.

* * *

The crate was Marsh-side bone.

It had come into the Cope camp the way such things came into such camps at the end of a season, sideways, from a contested face up the east end of the bluff that both crews had worked in the last weeks of the race, ground that was nobody's on any honest reading and both men's on every dishonest one. The Cope crew had got into it ahead of Reed's and pulled a run of good material out of it before the upper camp closed it off, skulls and the long bones of the limbs and a girdle, the best of the contested ground.

It had been crated at the head of the wash three days and not yet weighed for the car, a long crate, packed the way the camp packed everything, the bone bedded in dry grass and the lid laid on but not yet nailed, because the weighing came first and the manifest, and it stood there in the load-line in the falling dust with the other crates of the day around it.

And it was the only Marsh-side bone in the Cope camp. It could not be shipped south as a Cope find without a fight in the journals that Cope could not win, because the ground was contested and Reed had the cairns to prove he had marked it, and it could not be left at the head of the wash over the winter without the upper camp coming down and reclaiming it the moment the Cope cars pulled out. So it sat in the place where the year's arithmetic ended, a thing that could not be carried and could not be left, and the Professor had walked past it three sentences into the next thing without looking at it, and a man at the load-line had not.

The man was Mills. He had been in the crew since the spring, a steady hand, not a green one, a man who loaded clean and ate after the wagon the way the Professor had taught them all to eat, and he had not made trouble in a season of it. He had stood at the wash-line in the dust with the rest and heard the sound come down and watched the ridge fold and heard the Professor walk the line saying what they were now and what their rights were, every right in the world, a man who buries a dinosaur at noon has told you what the rules are.

And he had taken the hammer up off the load-line where it lay among the tools for the nailing, the long sledge they used to drive the freight-house wedges, not because anyone had told him to and not in a temper that a man could have seen coming, but the way a man does the next thing when what he has just heard has made the next thing plain. He stepped to the Marsh-side crate and put his boot on the edge of it to hold it and raised the sledge over the open lid.

Sternberg was twenty feet off and saw the hammer go up.

He came across the ground faster than he had moved all day, the dust still coming down, and he had his hand out and his voice was going ahead of his hand. What he said was not a sentence, it was the start of one, it was *no* and it was *Mills* and it was the half of a word that was going to be *wait*, the way he had said wait over a skull a hundred times in two years, the field word, the word that bought a man the second he needed to get his hands under a thing before it moved. It was the only word he had, and it was not enough ground to cross in time.

He got three steps. He got close enough to see the grass packed down clean around the first skull and the curve of it coming up out of the grass the way a made shape comes up out of any ground into the light, close enough that it was a particular dinosaur and not a crate. And then the hammer came down.

It came down on the skull first because the skull was at the top of the open crate, and a skull that has lain in the stone since before it was stone and come up clean under careful hands and been bedded in dry grass for the car is, in the end, a shell of mineral no thicker in places than a plate. It did not resist the sledge any more than a plate resists it. Under the iron it went to pieces with a sound that was not loud, a flat crump and a

settling.

Mills lifted the hammer and brought it down again on the long bones, and they broke across, and he brought it down again, working down the crate the way a man works down a row, not fast, not in a fury, steadily, the way he loaded, putting his back into each stroke and lifting clean for the next.

The grass that had bedded the bone puffed up gray under each blow and the bone went down under the grass into pieces and then into smaller pieces, the skulls and the limbs and the girdle of the best dinosaur off the contested ground going from things that had a shape to things that had no shape, to gravel, to the spoil that Sternberg knelt at the foot of faces to pick the chips out of, except that there would be no picking these out, because there was no face and no spoil-line, there was a crate at the head of the wash full of what had been a dinosaur an hour before and was now ballast.

Mills worked it down to the bottom boards and then he stopped, because there was nothing left in the crate that was bigger than the grass it was bedded in. He stood the sledge on its head on the ground and stood beside it breathing hard, and he did not look pleased and he did not look sick, he looked like a man who had finished loading a wagon, and the dust came down on him and on the crate and on all of it.

Cope had stopped at the sound of the first blow.

He had turned from his horse at the flat crump of the skull going, and he stood at the head of the wash eight feet from the crate and he watched the rest of it, the long bones and the girdle and the working down to the boards, and he did not call it off. He stood with the dust settling on his shoulders and he watched a crate of irreplaceable bone go to gravel under a hammer his own words had raised.

His face did not do what Vance’s face had done in the spring over a thing gone that was meant to be kept. It did a different thing. It held, it watched, the quick bright eye that read ground faster than any man on the bluff reading this and not turning away from what it read, because to turn away would have been to say that what was being done was a thing a man should not watch, and he had just finished saying, to the whole wash-line, that they were in their rights, and a man does not look away from his rights.

He watched it to the bottom boards. He did not look away once. And when it was done and Mills stood the hammer up and the last of it had settled, Cope let a breath out through his nose and said, in a voice with no speed in it at all, flat, almost mild,

“Fossils get damaged in shipment all the time.”

And he turned and went to his horse.

* * *

Sternberg had stopped three steps short with his hand still out.

He brought it back. The dust was on it. He stood at the head of the wash between the man with the hammer and the man going to his horse, and the thing that had been coming up through his boots since noon came all the way up, not as the floor under a feeling now but as the feeling itself arriving full and entire in a single piece, the way a thing you have known a long time without letting yourself know it arrives.

It came up past the count and past the tin and past two years of his hands doing what his mouth was not allowed to say, and it found the only words that were near the size of it. They were not an argument and were not a verdict on the camp and were not the start of any speech. They were the smallest true thing he could put on the largest thing he had ever felt, and they were about the man across the wash because the man across the wash was where it had started that noon, and Sternberg said them, low, to the Professor’s back as the Professor reached his horse.

“Reed is what science becomes when it stops caring who gets hurt.”

Cope had his hand on the saddle. He heard it. He turned his head part way, enough to show he had heard, and the speed came back into him at once, because the speed was how he met everything. He said, not unkindly, almost agreeing, that yes, that was Reed exactly, that was the whole of Reed, a man with no more conscience than a charge of powder, and that it was why the man was dangerous and why they could not afford to keep clean hands against him. He had the rest of it ready, the next three sentences, the turning of it into the morning’s work the way he turned everything.

Sternberg watched him take the line and fold it into the thing the line had been spoken against and not feel the seam, watched it go into Cope and come back out as more of the same and faster, and understood, standing in the dust with his hand coming back to his side, that the Professor had heard a sentence about the enemy.

He did not say the rest of it.

There was a rest of it. It was in him, arrived and entire, and it had the man with the hammer in it and the crate at the head of the wash and the Professor watching to the bottom boards and not looking away, and it had Sternberg himself in it, the tin against his ribs and the two years of his steady hands. It would have come out as the second sentence if he had let it, the sentence that took the first one and turned it the way the slide turned the same knowledge the other way, that said the thing about Reed was now the thing about all of them, that named the wash and named the camp and named the hand he had reached out three steps too late. He stood with it in his mouth and he did not say it.

Not because the law of the camp forbade it and not because the Professor would not have heard it, but because he had just heard his own first sentence go into Cope and come back wrong. He understood in the same moment that the second one would go in the same way or would not go in at all, that there was no sentence he could say across the eight feet of dusty ground that would land as the thing it was, and that the only thing left that was the right size for what had happened at the head of the wash was the thing the head of the wash already was, which was quiet. He let the second sentence go back down into him unsaid and he closed his mouth on it and he stood.

Cope got on the horse. He said something to the foreman about the cars and the snow and getting the day's good crates weighed before dark, and the foreman answered him, and the camp began, slowly, the way a camp begins again after anything, to move. The green hands first, because they were young and movement was easier for them than standing, and then the older hands. Mills picked the sledge up off the ground and carried it back to the load-line and laid it down among the tools and went to the weighing. No one spoke of the crate. The crate stood at the head of the wash with its lid still off and the gray grass and the gravel in it, and the dust that had stood over the bluff

since noon thinned at last and let the cold light down onto all of it the same.

* * *

The afternoon went on. That was the thing Sternberg could not get the size of, that the afternoon went on.

The light came down cold and clear off the thinning dust and the crews went back to the open faces at the wash because there were crates to fill before the snow and a man cannot eat a buried dinosaur or a broken one, and the count had to be kept whatever was in it.

So Sternberg kept it, because keeping it was what his hands knew to do when his mouth had been shut by a thing too big for it, and he walked the line with the book and entered the day's crates, the good ones, the whole bone going south. He did not enter the crate at the head of the wash, because there was no column in the book for what was in it, and he did not enter the hill across the wash, and the two largest things that had happened on the bluff that day went into no count at all.

That was the truest thing the count had ever told him, that the book had room for everything except the things that mattered. He wrote down the small whole bone and let the large gone bone be nothing on the page, the way it would be nothing on the page in New Haven and nothing on the page in Philadelphia, two ledgers a continent apart that would both come out even at the end of the season with no line in either of them for a hill or a crate.

He went down once to the spoil at the foot of the nearest face out of the old habit, the habit older than his keeping track of it, and he got down on one knee in the rubble and put two fingers in it to pick the chips, and he stopped with his fingers in the spoil and did not pick any. He knelt there a while with his hand in the broken country. The tin was against his ribs with the summer's handful in it, and there was room in it for more, there was always room in it for more.

But the habit had gone out of his hands the way a word goes out of a man's mouth in the middle of it. The two fingers that had picked bone out of rubble all summer for no

reason he had ever named would not close on a chip, because the reason they had picked, the reason that had been under the habit the way the floor had been under the feeling, had been the small private holding-true that as long as one man went down on his knees and saved the chips too small to count, then the saving was still in the camp somewhere, the care was still in the camp, the thing he had loved before he was good at it was still being done by somebody, even if only by him in secret at the spoil-line.

The hammer had gone down on the skull at the top of the crate and the care had gone out of the camp at the same blow. A handful of chips in a tin against one man's ribs was not a counterweight to a hill and a crate. It had never been a counterweight to anything. It had been a thing he did so he would not have to know what he knew, and he knew it now. So he took his hand out of the spoil empty and stood up and did not get the chips, and that was the first thing the day took from him that he felt it take, his hand at the spoil-line, the one private thing, and he let it go because it had stopped being true.

The crate stood at the head of the wash through the weighing and into the dusk. Somebody would have to deal with it. It could not go on a car and it could not be left whole, because there was nothing whole in it. In the end, in the last light, two of the green hands tipped it on its side at the foreman's word and shoveled the gray grass and the gravel of it out into the spoil at the head of the wash with the rest of the day's broken country, the bone that had a shape in the morning going out among the bone that never had one. They stood the empty crate up to dry for the boards, because the boards were good and a crate was a crate, and the camp did not waste a crate.

* * *

The two fires burned that night a mile and a half apart on the bluff the way they had burned for two years, and the men ate, and the talk came back the way talk always came back, low and ordinary, the cars and the snow and the south. No one at the Cope fire said the word for what had happened at the head of the wash, any more than they had said the word all summer for what the powder did to the bone it freed.

The not-saying of it was the same not-saying it had always been, except that there was nothing under it now to keep deniable. The thing it had been protecting was gone. The

door it had been holding cracked was shut. And the men talked around the shut door the way they had talked around the cracked one and a man listening could not have heard the difference, which was itself the heaviest thing about it.

Cope ate at the fire and talked, the speed back in him, the season's end and the count and the spring, what they would get back to first when the snow went. He had a letter in his coat that Sternberg had carried up from the station that week, a woman's hand on it, against the others, and he did not open it, and he laid out the morning, and he was the same vivid man at the fire he had been at every fire for two years, alive in the talk, generous with it, sure.

Sternberg sat in the edge of the light and watched him be it and could not find in him the seam where the man who watched the hammer to the bottom boards joined the man laying out the cars. There was no seam. It was one man, it had always been one man, the man who got the bone up clean and the man who did not look away were the same man and had been the same man in the pit at Haddonfield and would be the same man at the end.

That was the thing Sternberg took to his blankets that night and could not set down. Not that the Professor had done a wrong thing, the Professor had not done a thing at all, had said a true sentence into the air about his rights and walked three steps past a crate. But that there had been no moment in it, no place where the man had crossed from the one thing to the other.

The line had not been a line a man stepped over. It had been a slope the whole camp had been walking down for two years at a grade so easy that no single step on it had ever felt like falling, and they were at the bottom of it now and the bottom looked exactly like the rest of the slope, the same fires, the same talk, the same count, and only the hill across the wash and the empty crate drying for its boards said that anyone had come down at all.

He did not sleep much. He lay and listened to the camp go quiet and the wire sing thin on the cold poles down at the mouth of the wash, and once in the night the upper camp's last late charge came down off the height, a small one, ordinary, the working powder, a flat crack and the country settling, and he felt it in the ground under his

blankets the way he had felt the noon in his boots, before the ears, and he lay still under it and did not get up.

He found that the sentence he had not said at the head of the wash was still in him, whole, the second one, the one that took the first and turned it onto the camp and onto himself, and that it had not gone anywhere in the hours since. It had only gone quiet, the way the bluff had gone quiet after the dust came down. He was going to carry it now the way he carried the count and the tin, low and against his ribs and unsaid.

And he did not yet know, lying in the dark with the cold coming up through the ground, whether the carrying of it unsaid was the last of his loyalty or the first of something he had no name for and was not going to look for one for, not tonight, not in the dark, with the work going on at first light and the cars to fill and the snow coming and the hill standing across the wash with the dinosaur in it that no two fingers would ever reach.

In the morning the dust was gone off the bluff and the new raw slope stood north and east where the ridge had been, the same color all the way down, with nothing on it a glass could read and nothing in it a hand had built. The crews went back to the open faces, and the count went on, and the bone came up out of the country into the cold light the way it had always come up, all at once and everywhere and as though it had only been waiting, and there was less of it now, and there would be less of it every season after. The men loaded what they could carry and left what they could not, and the leaving of it was a different thing than it had been the morning before, and no one said so.

Interlude — The Cost of Como

The sound of the sledge was still in the room when the room came back.

It came back slowly, the way a far thing resolves for tired eyes. The high windows. The buzz of the fixture. The two animals on the wall, going at each other over the low rise of ground, and between them the long skull with the crack run through it, lit just enough. The prairie wind worked at the seams of the building and could not get in.

The old man was on his feet. He did not remember getting up. He was a step back from the case now, and a hand had gone out to the glass, flat on the wood frame, and the hand was not steady. He watched it not be steady the way you watch a thing that belongs to someone else. His breath was coming high and short and he could not get under it. He looked at the skull in the painting and he could not stop looking at it, and the wall behind his eyes that had held for thirty years was not a wall now but a thing of paper with water coming through it in a brown fan.

“Take your time,” the painter said.

He was where he had been, near the canvas, the cloth gone slack in his hand. He had not been looking when the old man rose. He turned his face toward the sound of the breathing and held it there, near and missing, his head tilted to bring what was left of his sight to bear and bringing it to bear a foot wide of the man. He could hear that something had changed. He could not see what.

The old man tried to speak. The first time nothing came. He shut his mouth and tried again.

“They spoke of priority,” he said. “Shipment. Damage. Delay.” The words came low and even and far too controlled for the size of what was moving under them. “People think this was rivalry.”

The painter waited.

“It was something worse.” His hand pressed flatter on the glass. He was not looking at the painter. He was looking at the rise of painted ground, at the two animals that would never finish and would never stop. “Rivalry ends. One of them wins.” He stopped. The word he wanted was not a word he would let himself reach. “This only had a bottom.”

It was not said to be heard as confession. It was said the way a man corrects a figure that has been written down wrong, with force enough that the painter went still.

“Is that Como Bluff,” the old man said.

“It’s a place I was told about,” the painter said. He chose the words slowly, by feel, the way he did everything now. “I never stood on it. I painted it from how it sounded when a man who had stood on it talked. He didn’t talk about it much.”

That was not an answer and they both let it not be one.

The old man’s eye had gone to the skull again and would not leave it. “And that,” he said. The hand came off the glass and lifted and did not point, only opened, toward the long flattened skull and the crack. “Why is that in it. A man fighting a man, you put the men. You don’t put the.” He did not finish. His arm came down.

The painter looked at the skull the way he looked at everything, from too near, finding it by pieces. “Destruction needs a thing in the middle of it,” he said. “Or it’s only weather. You give it a thing and then a person has to look at it.” He was quiet a moment. “He told me once the skull was the only part that didn’t take sides. I didn’t understand him. I painted it anyway.”

The old man’s eye crossed the long case beside him as he turned, and caught for a moment on the shape under its glass, the body lying there asking nothing of anyone. It was the stillest thing in the room. He looked at it once and looked away, back to the wall, to the two that would not stop.

“Why did you paint it.” The old man was facing the painter now for the first time, and his voice had dropped almost out of sound. “Any of it. You could have painted anything. Why this.”

The painter did not answer.

He stood with the cloth slack in his hand and his face turned a foot wide of the man who had asked, and the question went out into the buzzing light and was not taken up. Somewhere in the building a door closed on the wind. No one came. The old man waited for the answer and the answer did not come, and in its not coming was the whole shape of the thing, larger than any answer, and the old man's face changed as if he had heard one.

He sat. There was a low bench along the case and he found it without looking and sat heavily, his hands open on his knees, his head down. He did not weep. It was worse than weeping. It was a man being held still by something with no give in it.

For a long while neither of them moved. The painter did not come toward him. He seemed to understand that coming toward him was not allowed, though no one had said so.

"It gets harder from here," the painter said at last. Gently. As a warning, and an apology, and a thing he could not help. "There's more of it. There's the part after."

The old man did not lift his head.

"May I continue?" the painter said.

A long silence. The wind at the seams. The two animals fighting over the skull, in the brown dusk and the bright, going at it and going at it.

The old man's head moved. Not a nod so much as a giving-way, the smallest downward settle, a man assenting to his own sentence because the only other thing was to get up and walk out into a country that no longer had a clean place in it for him to stand.

The painter turned his face back to the canvas. He found the driving animal's eye, lost it, found it.

"After Como," he said, "the two of them called it a beginning. Not an end."

And the ridge wind came up cold off the breaking season, and took the room.

Chapter 13 — Aftermath

Como departure route, Medicine Bow, and the first southern camp, 25 to 30 October 1879

The morning after the last day of work the camp began to come down, and it came down the way it had gone up, by hands that knew the order of it, the cook tent first because the cook was up first, then the wall tents struck and folded along their old creases and the poles bound in their bundles, and the ground where the tents had been showing pale and packed and rectangular under the gray sky, the shape of the season left printed on the bluff for the wind to take back.

The men worked at it without much said. A camp coming down is quieter than a camp going up because there is nothing ahead of it to talk about, only the south and the snow behind the south, and the men knew the south the way they knew the work, and there was no need to say it.

The northeast ridge stood black behind them. Marsh's crew had fired it on their way out, the cribbing and the brush and the trodden ground of a summer's camp, the way a crew fires a worked place when it leaves nothing it means to come back to, and the smoke of it had been gone two days and the ridge was the color of a cold stove now, the black going gray at the edges where the wind had carried the ash off down the basin.

Below the black the raw slope ran down to the wash, the same color all the way to the bottom, the new slope with nothing on it a glass could read, and under the new slope, where no man on the bluff said it was and every man on the bluff knew it was, the long dinosaur lay under thirty feet of its own country. The wagons would route south and west off the bench and the black ridge would be at their backs and then it would be gone. No one walked up to it. There was nothing up there to get.

Sternberg kept the strike the way he kept everything, which was with the book. He stood at the load-line in the cold and entered the wagons as they filled, the crates by their numbers and the tools by their bundles, the canvas, the kegs that were empty now

and the kegs that were not, and his hand on the page was the hand it had always been, square and unhurried, the count coming off the pencil in the same letters it had come off in for two years. He did not enter the slope. There was no number for the slope. He had stopped, somewhere in the days since, expecting there to be one.

Mills loaded at the second wagon. He loaded clean, the way he had loaded all season, lifting square and setting down without drop, and he ate after the wagon when the cook called the nooning and he took his place in the line and he did the next thing and the next thing, and nobody who had come up the track that week and watched the crew work could have picked him out of it, the steady hand among the steady hands.

Sternberg entered Mills's wagon when it was full. He wrote the number and he did not write anything else, because there was nothing else the book had a column for, and Mills wheeled the empty barrow back up the line for the next load and that was the whole of it between them, a wagon full and a number on a page. It was enough and it was not nothing and it would have to be both of those at once now, which was the new condition, that a thing could be enough and not nothing at the same time and a man went on with it.

The Dyer boy hauled water and said little. He had been the loud one at the supper fire all season, the one who brought what he had heard down at the wash and laid it out pleased with himself for having it, the one who had shot at the lake in the fall and told it for a month. Since the day of the dust he had gone quiet the way a young one goes quiet who has not yet learned where to put a thing too big for him, carrying the water in both hands with his eyes down and not bringing anything to the fire. No one made him talk. The cook gave him the heavier buckets and the boy carried them and that was a kindness in the only language the camp had for it, which was work.

* * *

Cope was up before the cook on the second morning of the strike and writing.

He wrote at the plank table in the mess before it came down, in his coat with the collar up against the cold off the floor, his pen going the way his pen always went, fast and forward, the letters running ahead of themselves, the season's end and the cars and the

spring laid out in front of him on the paper before the light was full in the tent. He had the speed back in him entire.

It had been back since the morning after the dust, the talk and the plans and the forward lean of the man, and a stranger to the camp would have found him the most alive thing in it, the professor up before his crew with the spring already drawn on the page, what they would get back to first when the snow went off the good ground, the south faces they had not yet had time to open, the four cars he wanted standing at the siding by April.

He wrote to Philadelphia and he wrote to the Academy and he wrote a half page he did not finish, begun and broken off when the cook came in to take the table, and he left it under his cup and got up and went out to the line to see the wagons.

Sternberg came in to fold the table. The half page was under the cup where Cope had left it, the pen still wet on it, three lines and a fourth begun, a draft meant for a clean copy later, the Professor's hand running across it the way it ran. Sternberg read it without meaning to, the way a man reads a thing left open under his hand, and it was nothing, it was the spring again, the cars and the snow and the good ground waiting, the Professor talking on paper the way he talked at the fire.

He folded the table and did not leave the half page on the ground for the wind. He picked it up and squared it and put it inside his coat without a thought he could have named for doing it, the way he had begun doing small things in the days since that he did not name, the keeping of a paper that was nothing, and he went out after the wagons with it against his chest and did not think about it again that morning.

It was at the load-line, later, that the wire was spoken of. Sternberg had sent the Professor's wire to Philadelphia on the first trip to the spur, the one asking after the August shipment, the cars that had gone east in the fall before the snow talk started, and the reply was not back yet and would not be back before they moved. He told Cope this at the wagon, that he would go to the spur again on the twenty-ninth for the last of the freight bills and would bring the Philadelphia reply down then, that Hoyt would hold it at the spur against his coming.

Cope had his field book open against the wagon-box, writing the wagon's number into his own count the way he kept his own count beside Sternberg's, and he wrote and he was going to say all right the way he said all right to forty things a morning, and the pen stopped on the page.

It stopped for the length of a breath. The Professor did not look up. The pen sat on the paper where it had stopped and a small bead of ink came off the nib into the letter he had been making and ran, and he looked at that, at the ink running in the letter, and then the pen went on and finished the word and he said, not all right and not to the wagon and not the way he said it to the cook and the foreman forty times a morning, he said, "All right, Charles," and he closed the field book on his thumb and went on down the line.

It was the only time in the strike he used the name. Sternberg stood at the wagon with the boy's water going by behind him and the cold coming up off the bench and the half page of nothing folded against his chest inside his coat, and he heard the name land, and he did not answer it, because there was no answer to it that was the size of it, the same as there had been no second sentence at the head of the wash that was the size of that.

He wrote the wagon's number. The Professor went on down the line, and the speed came back into his walk before he reached the next wagon, and he was calling the foreman over to a crate that had been packed wrong before he was out of earshot, and a man listening would not have heard, in the calling, that anything had stopped on a page a minute before. Only Sternberg had heard it, and only because he was the thing it had stopped over.

* * *

He drove the spur road on the twenty-ninth in the cold middle of the day, the mule and the light wagon and the freight bills to settle, the last of the season's paper to close out before the camp went south past the reach of the wire. Medicine Bow sat low on the flat with the rails running through it east and west and the wind coming off the basin with nothing to stop it, and the spur station was a single building with the agent's counter and the key behind it and a back room off the end of the counter, and Hoyt was the

agent and had been the agent through two seasons of Como freight and knew Sternberg's face and the camp's account.

Hoyt had the freight bills ready and the Philadelphia reply with them, a yellow envelope, and he gave Sternberg the bills and then the envelope across the counter and Sternberg opened the envelope there at the counter because it was the Professor's and the Professor would want it the moment he was back. The reply was four lines from the Academy. The August shipment was received. The cases were opened and the contents checked against the manifest and found complete. All in order. The Academy thanked the Professor for the season's work and looked to the next.

Sternberg read it twice. The cases were checked against the manifest and found complete and all in order, and one of the cases that had gone east in that shipment was the case that had come down to the wash with a corner sprung and a side stove from a drop off the wagon-tail in the fall, the case they had repacked in the field and shipped on because the bone in it was sound even if the box was not. And the Academy in Philadelphia had opened it and checked it and found it complete and all in order, and the paper said so, and now it was so.

It was in the count. It was a closed case in a closed shipment received complete, and the sprung corner and the stove side were nowhere on the paper and would be nowhere on any paper, the same as the slope was nowhere and the crate at the head of the wash was nowhere, the box made whole at a counter in Philadelphia by four lines that thanked the Professor and looked to the next.

He put the reply back in its envelope and the envelope inside his coat, against the freight bills, and he stood a moment at the counter with his hand still on his coat.

Hoyt was writing in his own book. He said, without looking up from it, that there was a man in the back Sternberg might want to see before he went, that he had an hour yet before the eastbound and had been sitting back there most of the morning, and Hoyt named him, Click, and went on writing, and did not say anything more about it, because Hoyt was a station agent and a station agent learns early which things are his to say and which are not.

Sternberg went down the counter to the back room.

* * *

It was a narrow room with one window onto the freight yard and an unlit stove and two mismatched chairs and a crate stood along the far wall that the spur men used for a bench, and Click was on the crate-bench with his coat on and his bag on the floor at his feet and his hat on top of the bag. He was sitting forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands loose between them, and he was not watching the clock and he was not watching the door, he was looking at the window and the freight yard beyond it, and he had the look of a man who had been sitting long enough that he had stopped expecting the next thing to come and had let his hands go loose.

He turned his head when Sternberg came in. He did not get up.

“Charles,” he said.

Sternberg took the other chair. He turned it a little and sat, and the two of them were not quite facing, the way men sit who have sat together before and do not need to face.

“Hoyt said you were back here.”

“Hoyt’s all right,” Click said. “He let me sit.” He looked back at the window. “I’ve got the eastbound at four. Chicago. There’s a dispatcher’s place at a road out of Chicago, a man I keyed with at Cheyenne went up to it and there’s a second chair and he wired me to come and take it. I have to be there by the tenth.” He said it flat, like a thing read off a paper too many times, the facts of it lined up and gone over until the going-over had worn the shape off them. “Dispatcher’s a step up from a key in a shed. More money. Inside work. Out of the wind.” He turned his hands over and looked at them. “Out of the wind,” he said again, as if the second saying might make it the reason.

Sternberg said that was a good place, Chicago, that it was good work.

“It is,” Click said. “It’s good work.”

The room was quiet. Out in the yard a brakeman walked a car down with a pole and the iron knocked once and ran and stopped. Click watched it through the window and then he looked at the floor between his boots, and something came up in him that was the old thing, the lean toward the joke, the gather a man makes who has made his living a certain way and reaches for the way without thinking, and he started it.

“I was going to make a joke,” he said. “Just now. About dispatchers.” He stopped. His mouth worked at it a moment and nothing came. “I had it ready. Couldn’t get it out of my mouth.” He looked at the floor. “It wasn’t even a good joke.”

He did not try again.

He sat a while with his hands loose and the window light on the side of his face, and then he reached into his vest with two fingers and took out a card. It was a scoreboard card, folded, the kind a man keeps in a vest and takes out and puts back, and it had been taken out and put back so many times that the edges of it had gone soft and the corners had worn round and the fold of it had gone from a crease to a hinge. He did not open it. He flattened it once against his knee with the flat of his hand, not looking at it, the way a man smooths a thing he has decided about, and then he held it out across the space between the chairs.

“I don’t want to keep this,” he said. “Score.” His thumb was on the top crease of it and he was not looking at Sternberg, he was looking at the card on his own knee where it had been. “I kept it wrong, anyway. It doesn’t come out even.”

Sternberg took it. He did not open it. He had the freight bills and the Philadelphia envelope inside his coat already, the bills against the one side and the letter from Hayden he had carried unanswered most of the month against the other, and he put the card in between them, in the middle place where neither of those was, and he felt it go in soft against the other paper, the worn card with whatever was written inside it, and he buttoned his coat over all three.

Click watched the coat button. Then he looked back at the window.

He did not ask about Cope. There was an hour in the room and a man leaving the

country for good in it and the two of them who had stood at three station doors together over two years, and the name that had been the center of every wire Click had ever taken down and every score he had ever kept did not come into the room, and the not-coming of it sat in the room larger than anything either of them said. Sternberg felt it sit there and did not put a question into it, because he understood that the absence of the name was the thing Click had come to the back room to say and could not say any other way.

“I’m sorry I read the traffic,” Click said.

He said it to the floor. He said it once. Sternberg did not answer him.

The brakeman’s car ran again in the yard. The light through the window had moved a hand’s width along the wall. Click looked at the window a moment more and then he leaned and took the hat off the top of the bag and stood. Click put his hat on.

“I’ve taken to leaving quickly.”

He opened the door and went out. The door settled behind him.

Sternberg stood a moment in the back room. He did not call after him. There was nothing to call, no plan unmade, no date unset. Click had not said goodbye because there was nothing left to say goodbye to.

And with that Click was gone.

* * *

Sternberg did not wait for the eastbound. He went out through the front, past the counter, and Hoyt did not look up from his book, and he untied the mule and turned the light wagon and drove the south road back to camp with the cold at his back and the freight bills and the Philadelphia reply and the worn card buttoned in his coat against his chest, the three of them riding together over the ruts the whole way, and he did not take the card out to look at it or think about looking at it. It was a thing he was carrying now, one of a number of things he carried and did not look at.

He came onto the bench at the end of the light. The wagons were nearly loaded for the morning, the camp down to the cook tent and the last of the canvas, and Sternberg put the mule up and went along the line to see the loads against the morning, the way he saw everything against the morning. On the third wagon, roped clean along the side of the load, lay a stack of loose dry boards that had been a crate once and were boards now, good dry lumber a camp did not waste. He looked at them the time it took to pass them. The count on his manifest was right. A thing that was boards was not a crate any more and went on the page as boards, and the page came out even. He walked the rest of the line, gave the teamster the morning's order for the string, and went to his supper.

* * *

They moved out on the thirtieth in the first gray, the lead wagon first off the bench and onto the south road and the string strung out behind it, the freight wagons and the stock and the men, and the cold was hard and dry and the sky was the color of the struck ground and the wheels went over the ruts loud in the stillness because there was nothing else making a sound, no work behind them now, no key down at the spur, only the wheels and the stock and the wind.

The black ridge stood behind the lead wagon the first half hour. A man on the lead wagon who looked back over the loads would have seen it standing there over the bench, the burned height and the raw slope under it going down to the wash where the camp had been, smaller as the road ran south and the basin opened. Then the road bent west around the shoulder of the basin and the shoulder came up between the wagons and the bench and the black ridge went behind it, and after that there was the shoulder of the basin and the gray sky over it and the south road, and the ridge was not there to be looked back at any more.

None of the men looked back. There was nothing back there a man would drive a string south to look at, and the south was where the road went, and a teamster in the cold keeps his eyes on the stock ahead of him and the ruts under him, and the ridge went behind the shoulder of the basin while the men were watching the road, and no one on the string marked the moment it went, which was the way of it, that the last of a thing goes behind a shoulder of ground while the men are watching the road, and is gone, and

no one says so because no one saw the going, only, later, the not being there.

* * *

They made the first southern camp at the end of the day off the basin ridge line, on lower ground with a creek in it and a stand of cottonwood gone bare, the first night the bench was not under them in two years. The camp went up smaller than it had come down.

There was no work to face in the morning, only the road again, and a camp that faces a road instead of a season puts up less of itself, fewer tents and those closer, the fire smaller because the night was the only thing the fire had to hold off and not a season's planning.

And the tents went up in an order they had not stood in on the bench because the ground was different ground and a different ground takes a different order, the Professor's tent where the lay of the creek put it and not where it had stood for two years, the cook downwind of the new thing instead of the old, the whole camp arranged by a creek it had not slept by before, and a man waking in the night would have had to think a moment where he was.

The Dyer boy fed the mules at the picket in the last light. He had carried water all day and said little, and now he was at the line with the feed, and Sternberg, going by with the book, saw him stand to the near mule with the feed in one hand and his other hand up on the animal's neck the way a boy does who is easy with stock, not minding his hands, not careful with them, the off hand resting on the mule's neck while the near hand held the feed up, the boy's whole body gone easy against the animal in the cold the way it had not been easy in a week. And the mule took the feed and put its head against the boy and the boy let it, and stood there in the last light with his hand on its neck and the feed gone and let the animal lean its weight on him.

It was a small thing. It was the boy's hands gone easy again at the one thing that asked nothing of him but to be fed, and Sternberg saw it and went on by with the book and did not say anything, because there was nothing to say to it, only a thing to see, a boy and a mule in the last light and the feed gone and the weight of the animal leaned warm

against the boy, and the boy bearing it.

Cope sat at the small fire when the camp was up. He had laid out the morning already with the foreman and the road south, and now he sat at the fire with the cold coming down and the cottonwoods bare against the last of the light. Sternberg came to the fire when the book was closed and the wagons seen to, and sat at the edge of it where he sat, and the two of them were at the fire and the fire was small and the men were down at their own fire nearer the stock, and there was no one at this fire but the two of them.

Cope talked the spring. He talked it into the fire, the south faces and the good ground waiting under the snow, the cars he wanted standing in April, the season already drawn for him on the dark the way it had been drawn on the page in the mess tent, and his voice had the lean in it, the forward thing, the man already up the road and into the next of it while the fire was still new.

Sternberg sat and let it come and did not answer the spring. He had stopped answering the spring somewhere on the bench, the small answers a man gives at a fire to keep the talk a thing two men do and not one, and Cope did not seem to want them, the talk ran on its own the way it ran, and the fire burned down a little, and there was a silence in it at last where the spring ran out for a breath.

Cope put a stick on the fire. He did not look across it. He looked at the fire and he said it into the fire, not as a question and not turned toward the man it was for, flat, the way a thing is said that has been decided and is only being set down.

“Are you with me.”

Sternberg looked at the fire.

There was no second fire on the far ridge to look at across the dark the way there had been a second fire on the far ridge every night for two years. There was no sound off the height behind them, no late charge coming down through the ground into the soles of a man’s boots before it reached his ears. There was no one down the line keeping the count of who had said what at the fire tonight and folding it into a card to take to a key.

“The spring,” Sternberg said.

He said it to the fire. He did not look across it at the man, and the man did not look across it at him, and the two of them sat with the fire between them and the words gone into it, the one and then the other, neither of them carried across the fire to the other’s face, both of them set down into the coals the way a man sets down a thing he is not ready to hand to anybody, and the fire took them. That was the whole of the exchange, a thing said to a fire and a thing said back to it, and neither of them an answer and neither of them a refusal, only the spring named between them and left where it was named.

* * *

The fire burned low and Cope went to his blankets and the camp went quiet, the first quiet of the south, no wire singing on cold poles because the poles were behind them now, only the creek going and the stock shifting at the line and the wind in the bare cottonwoods. Sternberg sat on at the dead fire a while with the three things buttoned in his coat against his chest, the freight bills and the Philadelphia reply that said all in order and the worn card folded between them that he had not opened, and he did not open it now. He sat with them against him in the cold and then he got up and went to the wagon and got the book down to close out the day before he slept, the way he closed out every day.

He did the count by the last of the fire. The wagons and the stock and the loads, the day’s road and the water made and the camp set, the south camp entered under its date the way the bench camp had been entered under its dates for two years, and his hand went across the page in the square unhurried letters it had always gone in, the same hand, and the hand did not shake.

He had half thought, getting the book down, that it might. It did not. It made the letters it made.

He entered the loads and the stock and the road and the camp, and there was no line for the ridge gone behind the shoulder of the basin and no line for the man on the four o’clock eastbound out of Medicine Bow and no line for a card folded in a coat or a box made whole at a counter in Philadelphia. And the things that had no line went into no

count, and the count he kept came out even the way it always had, and he read it over once in the dying light and it was right.

He closed the book.

Chapter 14 — The Parlor Transaction

The eastern cities, Philadelphia, the Lawrence house, and the Smoky Hill chalk, winter through the summer following

It was winter again, and the southern bench was a long way behind him now, the string struck and moved and the seasons run on since, when Sternberg came east a second time to the room Marsh kept for business in the city. The room was on the second floor of a hotel off the square, a corner room with two windows onto the street and the street noise coming up through them muffled by the carpet and the heavy curtains and the cloth on the long table where the work was laid out, and it was a room arranged the way Marsh arranged everything, which was so that a thing put down in it could be found again. Sternberg came up the stairs with his hat in his hand and a clerk showed him in and Marsh did not get up from the table.

He was working when Sternberg came in and he went on working for a moment, a stack of labeled slips in front of him and a ledger open beside the slips and his hand moving a slip from the stack to a place in the ledger and squaring it there, and then he set the pen down across the top of the page so it would not roll and he looked up. He had the look of a man who has already priced the thing in front of him and is only confirming the figure. He did not offer his hand. He gestured at the chair on the near side of the table with two fingers, expecting it to be used, and Sternberg sat in it with his hat on his knee.

“You came east with the Cope material in August,” Marsh said. It was not a question. “The Kansas shipment and the Wyoming spring boxes both. I have the manifests.” He did not say how he had the manifests. He had them the way he had everything that was set down on paper anywhere by anyone he paid, the receiving clerks and the freight agents and the men who wrote a thing received and in order and made it so by the writing, the record truer in his world than the thing it stood for.

He turned a slip over and read the back of it and turned it face up again. “You prepared the spring boxes yourself. The two large reptile blocks and the turtle. The work on them is clean. The matrix was taken down to the bone without the bone touched, and the

breaks were old breaks, field breaks, not preparation breaks. That is not common work."

Sternberg said the spring had been a good season for bone.

"The season is not the thing," Marsh said. "The hand is the thing. A good season puts bone in front of a hundred men and ninety of them ruin half of it getting it out of the ground." He moved another slip into the ledger and squared it. "I keep men in four states. I pay them by the month and I pay them whether the month finds bone or not, because a man paid by the find learns to find fast and a man paid by the month learns to find clean, and I would rather wait for clean. You have been paid by the find, or not paid at all, for some years now. I know what Cope's people are owed because I know what Cope is not collecting, and a man who is not collecting is not paying."

"You have spent eight years learning a hand that is worth a wage, and you have not been drawing the wage."

He let that sit. He did not lean toward it. He moved the next slip.

Sternberg looked at the cloth on the table and the slips squared on it. He said that Professor Cope had carried him through years when there was no money, and had fed his crews out of his own pocket when the funds were late, and that a man remembered that.

"I am sure he did," Marsh said. "Loyalty is a real thing. I do not dispute it. But you have brought a thing into this room that you think is loyalty and it is experience, and those are not the same thing and you should not spend the one believing it is the other." He squared the slip. "Experience is not loyalty. Experience is yours. You carry it from one employer to the next the way you carry your tools, and it does not thin out for the carrying, and it does not owe a debt to the man it was learned under. The hand that took down those reptile blocks would take them down the same in my field as in his. I am offering to pay it what it is worth, by the month, in four states, beginning when you say."

The street noise came up through the curtains. A dray went by below and the iron tires rang on the cobbles and faded. Sternberg sat with his hat on his knee and his hand flat

on the brim of it and he did not answer quickly, because there was nothing quick in him to answer with, and the not answering went on long enough that it might have been read across the table as the offer working.

Marsh did not read it as anything. He moved a slip.

“No,” Sternberg said.

He said it to the cloth and then he said it again to Marsh, once, the second time no louder than the first, and that was the whole of it. He did not explain it or lay out the years or the debt or the camps or the reasons a man stays with a man. He had the reasons and they were in him and they did not come out across the table, because the table was not the place for them and Marsh was not the man to spend them on, and a no that came with its reasons attached was a no that could be argued with, and Sternberg did not want to be argued with. He wanted the room behind him. He said no and he let it be the size it was.

Marsh set the pen down again across the page. He looked at Sternberg for the first time as something other than a manifest, a short look, level, and there was nothing in it that wanted to change the no.

“When the time is right, you will,” Marsh said.

He said it without triumph. He said it the way he had said the rest, a figure confirmed, a thing he had priced and was setting down where it could be found again, and then he took the pen back up and moved the next slip from the stack, and the moving of the slip was the end of the meeting, the room going back to the work it had been doing before Sternberg came up the stairs. Sternberg stood. He put his hat on. The clerk was at the door before he reached it, and he went down the stairs into the street with the no still on him and no lighter for having said it, the no a man says to the wrong master and walks out into the same street he walked in from, owed the same money, carrying the same hands.

* * *

Cope was in Philadelphia and glad to see him, and that was the trouble with going to see Cope, that he was always glad to see you and the gladness was real and it did not pay what was owed.

He took Sternberg up to the workroom at the top of the house where the spring boxes had come, the two reptile blocks Sternberg had prepared standing on trestles along the wall with their labels still in Sternberg's hand on them, and the turtle on the bench under a cloth. And Cope went along them talking, the speed in him the way it was always in him, the blocks already placed in the monograph in his head, the plates already drawn, the genus already named and the name already defended against the men who would dispute it, the whole future of the bone laid out in the room faster than the bone itself had come out of the ground.

He put his hand flat on the larger block and left it there a moment before he spoke. He said it was the finest reptile material out of the Niobrara in ten years and that Sternberg had taken it down like a surgeon and that there was no one else in the country he would have trusted the spring faces to.

Sternberg stood by the bench and let it come. He had heard the spring praised before. He had prepared the spring on a promise made at a fire in the cold, a thing said into the coals and a thing said back, and he had gone back in the spring and worked the south faces Cope had drawn on the dark and taken down the blocks clean and shipped them east, and the season had been everything Cope had said it would be at the fire. The wages for it had not come, not in the spring and not in the summer and not now with the blocks standing praised on their trestles in the room. He had come to Philadelphia for the wages and he did not say so yet. He let Cope go along the blocks.

It was Cope who brought the money, because Cope always brought the money before you had to, that was what you forgot about him between the times of needing it and remembered when you needed it, that Cope did not make you ask. He turned from the block and he had the thing in his face that he had instead of the money, the forward lean, the next thing already bright in him, and he told Sternberg about the silver.

The silver was in the mountains in the southwest, a property he had bought into, the Pueblo holdings, and the assays were back and they were good, better than good, and

the thing was nearly turned, a season from turning, two at the most. And when it turned it would clear everything, the back wages and the field debts and the engravers and the cars, all of it at once, and there would be money behind the science for the first time that did not depend on a committee in Washington or a vote of the survey or the goodwill of men who had never stood in a quarry in their lives.

He said it standing in the middle of the workroom with his hands going, and he believed it, that was what you had to understand about it, he was not lying, the silver was real to him the way the spring had been real at the fire, the future drawn so bright and so fast that the present could be borrowed against it. And the back wages were a present thing being borrowed against a bright future, and Cope did not feel the borrowing as a debt because in his head the silver had already paid it.

He said the assays were the soundest he had seen. He said a man in Pueblo he trusted had walked the property himself. He said that when it came in he meant to put Sternberg on a proper footing, a yearly arrangement, no more of this hand to mouth, that the years of the late funds were ending and Sternberg had been there through the worst of them and would be there for the better, and he said it warmly and he meant it warmly, and it was the warmest thing said to Sternberg in a month and it had no money in it.

Sternberg asked, because he had come to ask and a man who has driven from Kansas to ask does not go home without asking, whether there was anything against the spring wages now, against the present, anything at all, fifty dollars against the blocks standing there finished.

Cope’s hands came down a little. The brightness did not go out of him but it gathered in, the way it gathered when the present pressed on it, and he did not say no, Cope did not say no to a man. He said that everything liquid was in the Pueblo property until the spring, that he had put it all forward to hold the holdings through the turning because to sell out now before it turned would be to throw away the whole of it for a season’s patience, and that he could do twenty against the wages today, that he had twenty in the house, and that the rest was a month away, two at the most, certain, when the silver turned.

He went and got the twenty. He brought it back and put it in Sternberg's hand and closed Sternberg's hand over it with both of his own, and that was the worst of it, the closing of the hand, the warmth of the two hands over the one, twenty dollars against the better part of a year and the warmth laid over the twenty like the warmth was the rest of the sum. Sternberg put the twenty in his coat. He felt it go in against the other things in his coat, the worn card he had not opened, the half page of the Professor's own hand he had pocketed at the strike and not given back, the Hayden letter gone soft now with carrying, the twenty going in among them thin as a leaf.

He stood a moment in the workroom with his hand still on his coat over the money and the blocks standing finished on their trestles along the wall. Cope was already turning back to the larger block, the silver said and done with for him, the present borrowed against and the future bright again, his hand going back up to the shoulder of the bone. Sternberg watched him go to it and did not say anything, because there was nothing the size of it to say, and a man does not say a thing that is not the size of the thing.

* * *

He came home to Kansas in the last of the cold, the train to Lawrence and the walk up from the depot with his bag, and the house was the house, smaller than the houses of the men he had sat across tables from that month, a frame house on a lot at the edge of town with the garden dug under for the winter and the woodpile low against the side and a light in the front room where his wife Anna had it.

She had supper held and she did not ask about the money at the door. She took his coat and hung it and she felt the weight of it going onto the peg, the way a wife feels the weight of a coat she has hung a thousand times, and she did not say anything about the weight. She got him to the table and got the food in front of him and let him eat before there was any talk, and she watched him eat the way she watched everything, without seeming to, and what she saw she put away to act on and not to say.

The boy was asleep. The girl woke and came down and he held her a while by the fire and she went back up, and then it was the two of them at the table with the lamp and the accounts, because the accounts could not be held off any longer and they both knew it

and there was no use pretending the supper had been about anything else.

Anna kept the household book the way he kept the field book, in a square hand, and she had it out on the table and she did not push it at him, she turned it so the lamp was on it and let him see where they were. The store account was carried three months. The note on the lot was due in the spring. The doctor for the boy's winter throat was not paid. She had the figures in the book the way figures are in a book, not complained of, only entered, and the entering of them was the whole argument and she made no other.

He told her what Cope had given him. He put the twenty on the table by the book. He did not tell it as a defeat and she did not take it as one, the twenty sat on the table by the household book and the two of them looked at it and it was the size it was. Anna did not say what twenty was against the book, nor the thing about Cope that a wife three months into the store account might have said, that the Professor's gladness did not feed a boy's throat, that a man could not eat a silver mine that was a season from turning and had been a season from turning since the autumn.

She did not say it. She had measured it long before this and she had stopped saying the part of it that was only feeling, because feeling moved no figure in the book, and she had married a man whose work she believed in and she was not going to spend the marriage telling him the work did not pay, because he knew the work did not pay better than she did, it was his hands it did not pay.

She said one thing. She closed the book on her finger and she said that George had written again about the chalk.

George was his brother, settled south and west in the chalk country, and George had been after him for a year to come down and work the Smoky Hill beds on his own account, not for Cope and not for Marsh and not for any man's monograph, but for the trade, the fish and the reptiles the chalk gave up whole and clean, sold east to the colleges and the cabinets and the men who paid cash on delivery for a good slab and asked no question about whose genus it was.

There was money in it, George said, steady money, a man's own money that came to his own hand the week he earned it and not a season from turning. George had buyers.

George had a list of them. All it wanted was the hand, and the hand was Sternberg's, the best in the family and George knew it and said so.

Anna said it and left it. She did not argue the chalk. She turned the household book back toward her side of the table and entered the twenty against the store account, and she let the book and the brother's offer sit in the room together and did not draw the line between them, because the line was already drawn and a thing did not need saying that the lamp was already shining on.

Later, when she had gone up, he sat at the table with the lamp low and he took the things out of his coat and put them out on the table by the household book, the journey emptied onto the wood. The twenty was already in the book. He laid out the freight receipts and the Hayden letter and the worn card and the half page of Cope's hand, and he did not open the card, the card stayed folded the way it had stayed folded since the back room at Medicine Bow, soft at the corners, the hinge of it worn through, and he set it to the side without opening it the way he had set it to the side a hundred times.

The half page he did open, because it was already open, a page folded once and not sealed. He had read it once at the strike, the way a man reads a thing left open under his hand, and it had been nothing then, it had been the spring, and he had kept it without a thought he could name and not looked at it again. Now in the low lamp he sat with all of it, the three lines and the fourth begun, the Professor's hand running across it the way it ran, the south faces and the cars and the good ground waiting under the snow, written out in Cope's own hand in the hour before the strike came down, the future bright on the page and the page broken off mid-sentence when the cook came for the table.

It was the same spring he had read at the plank table and it had stopped being nothing, because he had gone back and worked it clean and shipped it east and not been paid for it, and the bright unpaid season lay set down here in the hand that owed it. He read it to the broken-off end. Then he folded it on its old fold and put it back in his coat with the card and the letter, and he turned the lamp down, and he sat in the dark of the front room a while with the household book closed on the table and the chalk offer in it like a figure he had not yet entered, and then he went up.

* * *

He wrote to George in the spring and George wrote back with the buyers. That was how the chalk began, not as a decision made at the table that night but as a letter written and a letter answered and a season worked, the Smoky Hill beds in the heat with the white chalk burning under him and the fish coming out of it whole the way George had said they would, the long-jawed fish and the toothed ones and once a slab six feet long with a fish inside a fish, the big one taken with the little one still in its belly an age of the earth before any man came to dig either of them out.

He took them down clean. He took them down the way he took everything down, the matrix off without the bone touched, and he crated them whole, and he learned George's trade, which was that the slab was sold by what it showed and the man who bought it bought a thing to look at, and the buyers were east and the cash was on delivery and it came to his own hand the week he earned it, the way George had said.

The buyer that summer was a man named Aldis who kept a house in a good street in the east and had a room in it for his collection, and Sternberg took the best of the chalk to him by rail because Aldis paid the best and paid in cash and had bought from George before and was known to George as a man whose money was good. Sternberg crated the fish himself and rode east with them in the freight and brought them to the house in a hired wagon, and a man in an apron helped him carry the crates in through a side door and down a hall to the room where the collection was.

And that was the parlor, though no one called it that, a long room at the back of the house with cases along the walls and shelves in the cases and the things on the shelves arranged the way a man arranges things he has paid for and wants seen.

Aldis came in while they were uncrating. He was an ordinary man, not old, well kept, in a good coat, and he had the manner of a man receiving goods he had ordered, pleasant and unhurried and entirely clear about why the goods were in his house. He shook Sternberg's hand and asked after George and said the rail was a misery in the heat and stood back while the apron man and Sternberg lifted the largest slab out of its packing and set it on the long table under the window where the light was good.

It was the fish within a fish. Sternberg had taken it down himself in the chalk and it had cost him three days on his knees in the white heat to take it down without losing the small fish inside the large one, the line of the small one's spine running clean inside the ribs of the large one, all of it on a single slab six feet by four, the matrix carried under it like a tray, and he had crated it whole and shipped it whole and carried it into the room whole. It lay on the table under the window in the good light, the two fish, the eaten and the eater, one inside the other on the one stone.

Aldis looked at it for a while. He put his hands behind his back and leaned over it and looked at it with the plain pleasure of ownership, and he said it was a handsome piece, that George had not oversold it, that the small one inside was the thing that made it, a thing a man could tell at a dinner. Then he straightened and he looked at it again with a different look, the pleasure gone out of the look and the measuring come into it, and he walked down the length of the slab and back, and he said the difficulty was the size.

The room, he said, was shelved for cases. He had no wall for a thing six feet on the long side, and a slab that size wanted a wall or a table to itself, and he had neither to spare. What he wanted, he said, what would suit the room and what he would pay the best price for, was the head. The head of the large fish was the thing, the long jaws and the teeth, and the head with a foot of the body behind it would sit in a case on the wall and be the best thing in the room, and the rest of it, the body and the tail and the small fish inside, was matrix he had no room for.

He said it plainly, in his own house, with every right to say it. He asked Sternberg what it would take to bring the head out of it.

Sternberg said the slab was one piece. He said the small fish was inside the large one and that the value of the thing, the whole reason George had named the price he had named, was the two of them together on the one stone, the eaten inside the eater, that there was not another like it that he knew of, and that to take the head was to lose the small fish and lose the thing that made it more than a head.

Aldis heard him out. He was not unreasonable and he did not hurry, he let Sternberg finish, and then he said that he understood all that and that it was very interesting and that nonetheless he had no wall for six feet of stone and a great many men would want a

head with teeth like that and very few wanted a lecture on a fish inside a fish. He would give a good price for the head and nothing at all for the whole, because the whole would go back east in the freight and sit in George's barn, and a head in a case on his wall this week was worth more to both of them than a slab in a barn in Kansas.

He asked, again, pleasantly, what it would take to bring the head out, and he took a chamois roll of tools from a drawer in one of the cases and laid it on the end of the table, his own tools, a collector's tools, a mallet and a set of chisels and a thin pry, kept clean and bright, the tools of a man who opened his own crates and was not afraid of stone.

He did not pick them up. He laid them on the table by the slab and he looked at Sternberg, and the asking was done and it was all on the table, the tools and the slab and the head that could come out of it, and the price that would come with the head, and Sternberg stood at the table in the good light with the fish in front of him that he had taken down on his knees in three days of white heat.

And the money in his coat was twenty dollars against a year, and the store account was carried four months now, and the note on the lot came due, and the boy's throat, and George's list, and his own hand that had taken the slab down whole standing there over it now, and Aldis waiting, pleasant, unhurried, a man in his own house who had named what he would pay for and what he would not.

Sternberg did not pick them up.

Aldis picked up the chisel. He set it himself, because it was his house and his tools and his stone now, and he set it the way a man sets a tool he is not afraid of and does not altogether know, a little high and a little sure, into the country of the bone and not the matrix the way Sternberg would never have set it. And Sternberg saw where it was set and saw what it would do, saw that it would not part clean there, that it would take the head and run on through the small fish instead of freeing the head along the line the stone wanted to give.

His hand came up off the crate edge the width of a thought. It came up because the hand knew before the eyes had finished knowing, and it wanted to go to the chisel and move

it a finger's width to the line that was there to be found, and he did not let it. He put the hand back down on the crate edge. He said nothing. That was the thing he could not afterward put down, not the head coming out, but that he had the clean line in him and the man did not, and he kept it, and let the stone be opened wrong for the want of the one word he did not spend.

The mallet came down. The slab parted, but not the way it would have parted for him, the head coming away with its foot of body on the good stone and the break running on past where Aldis had meant it to stop, the way a break runs when it is started off the plane, down through the ribs and through the small fish inside the ribs. And the small fish that had been an age of the earth inside the large one came apart in a single stroke of a collector's mallet in a good room in the east, broken across where it should have come free along.

And it was not a loud sound, the parting, it was a small dry sound like a plate set down a little hard, and then it was two pieces of stone on a table where there had been one, and the lesser piece was not merely halved but broken in a place no hand that knew the stone would have chosen.

Aldis looked at the head. He turned it a little toward the light with one finger and he was pleased, the teeth catching the light from the window, and he said that was the thing, that was exactly the thing, that it would sit a treat in the corner case, and he asked the apron man to fetch a baize for it.

He did not look at the other piece. The other piece was matrix now, the body and the tail and the broken small fish, a thing with no wall in the room and no case for it, and it sat on the dead side of the table where it had come apart and Aldis had already turned from it to the head, and that was all the room did to it, that a man turned from it to the better piece and called for a cloth.

Sternberg took his hand off the crate edge. He did not say anything. He stood at the table with the two pieces of stone in front of him, the head going off under its baize to the corner case and the body lying on the dead side, and he did not move to the body and he did not move it back together and he did not say what his whole hands and whole years were saying in him, that this was waste, that a thing taken whole out of the

ground at the cost of three days on his knees had been broken on a table for the want of a wall and broken worse than it needed for the want of a word, that the small fish had come through the eater and the chalk and the long ages and the freight whole and had not come through a good room in the east.

He did not say it. He had no line for it. He stood and let the body lie there the way he had stood at a load-line and let a count come out even, the same stillness, the same hands held at his sides, and the saying of it stayed in him under the face of a man who had learned that a thing could be wrong and be done and a man went on with it, and he went on with it. He let it lie.

* * *

Aldis paid him in the front room and paid him well, the head being worth what he had said it was worth, and counted the notes out onto a side table in good light and pushed them across, and it was more cash to Sternberg's own hand in one afternoon than Cope had put in it in a year. Sternberg took it up and folded it and put it in his coat, against the other things, against the half page of the spring and the soft Hayden letter, the good notes going in thick where the twenty had gone in thin, and the weight of the coat changed with it the way a coat changes weight with money in it.

He did not stay. Aldis was pleasant at the door and said George should send more, that there was a market in the heads and the toothed jaws and the showy single fish, that the whole big slabs were a trouble to place but a good head would always sell. And Sternberg said he would tell George, and he did tell George, later, all of it, the market and the heads and the trouble with the big slabs, because it was the trade and George was the trade and a man in the trade told his brother what placed and what did not.

He rode west in the freight with the money. The chalk country came up under the train in the second day, the white beds running off to the south where George was, where the fish were, where there were more of them in the ground waiting for the hand to take them down whole and the east waiting to be sent the heads. Sternberg looked at the chalk going by from the freight-car door and he had the money in his coat and the trade in front of him and the store account coming down when he got home and the note on

the lot to be met and the boy's winter to be paid for. His hands lay on his knees in the dark of the car the way they lay, square and unhurried, the same hands.

He came home to Lawrence with the money and Anna took his coat at the door and felt the new weight of it going onto the peg and this time she felt the money in it and not the lack, and she did not say anything about that either, she hung the coat and got him to the table.

The store account came down off the book that week and the doctor was paid and the note on the lot was met in its season, and the chalk trade went on, the slabs taken down whole in the white heat and the heads going east to the cabinets and the bodies going where the bodies went, and the family came up off the bottom of the book and onto better ground, and it was the chalk that did it, the chalk and the hand and the heads.

The card stayed folded in his coat through all of it. He did not open it. He moved it from the summer coat to the winter coat when the cold came, the way a man moves the things he carries from one coat to the next, his hand finding it in the middle place where it had ridden since Medicine Bow, soft at the corners and worn through at the hinge, and he moved it without opening it and buttoned the winter coat over it and the half page and the letter.

And went out to the next thing, the way he went out to the next thing now, a man with money in his coat and a trade in his hands and a thing buttoned against his chest that he carried and did not look at, and a count that came out even, and a house that had come up onto better ground. And behind him in a good room in the east a head in a case with the light on its teeth and a body on a dead table that no one had carried out, and they rode together the way the things in his coat rode together, and he carried all of it, and went on.

Chapter 15 — The Dark Mirror

The Permian beds of north-central Texas, the Pine Street workroom in Philadelphia, in the autumn and the winter following

It was the third week of September and the red beds south of Wichita Falls were giving up their bone the way they always gave it up, hard and dry and in pieces, when Cope decided that someone had been to the Coffee Creek outcrop before him. He stood on the rim of the cut with his glass up to his face. His hat was pushed back and his beard had gone gray and gone disorderly through the summer, and he was looking down the long line of the cut at a place where a piece of the shale had come out of the wall not by weather but by a tool, and he said so.

He said the chip was a tool chip and the working below it was a working and someone had been at the outcrop in the spring or early summer and had taken the upper plate off and left the lower for whoever came after, and that the whoever was, by the manner of it, men sent west under the survey, which was to say men under Marsh, which was to say Marsh, and that the outcrop had been worked already and the better material taken east before any of them had come down out of Kansas.

Sternberg was on the slope below him at the bone he had been at since first light, a low pelvic block of an Edaphosaur he had been taking down on his knees in the white dust, and he had heard the same hand drop the glass and raise it again three times that morning at three different places along the rim, and he did not stop his work to answer it. The sail spines were coming up clean under the long brush he kept in his belt for the fine work, and he kept his eye on the spines.

Cope said it again, down to the slope. He said Sternberg should come up and look at the chip and tell him whether it was a tool chip, because Sternberg’s eye for the cut of a tool on stone was the best he had ever known, and if the upper had been Marsh’s then the lower would be theirs by the rule of the field, which was that a man took what the man before him had left and named it after himself and the prior man could write a letter about it, and the letter would not be answered.

Sternberg came up the slope without hurrying and without making slow of it. He looked at the chip without taking the glass. He looked at the line of the break and the angle of the back of the chip and the surrounding shale, and at the rodent burrow above it, and down the cut at the other places Cope had stopped that morning, and he said it was a frost chip. He said the upper plate had come off in the spring frosts and the chip with it, and the rodent above had pulled the loose into the burrow and out, and that was what had broken the line. He said no man had been at the outcrop. He said it without weight, the same hand, the same voice, the same not spending of more words than the matter required.

Cope did not take it. He said he had seen tool chips for thirty years, and Sternberg said he had also seen tool chips for thirty years and had also seen frost chips, and that there were more frost chips in the country than there were Marsh men in the country, and that if every frost chip in north Texas were a Marsh man then Marsh would have nothing left in Connecticut to send. He said it the way he would have said it to George at the chalk, a thing about stone said to a man who had asked about stone, and then he went back down the slope to the Edaphosaur and to the brush.

Cope watched him go. He held the glass at his side and did not raise it again, and something went through him on the rim that he did not name, that he had been told a thing by a man who used to take the thing he was told and lay it down inside his own seeing, and the laying down was not happening now.

He turned the chip over with the toe of his boot. The frost line on the back of it was as plain as a printed thing once it was turned, and he saw the frost line and did not change his mind about the chip, because the question was not the chip, the question was that he had been told he was right too plainly. He went down the cut to the next stop and raised the glass again, and the day went on.

* * *

The camp was on a low bench above a dry wash south of the cuts, a tent for Cope and the smaller tent for the cook and the men, and a third tent at the end where the work was crated and where Cope had set a long plank for his papers when the field-table was not

enough. The papers had grown through the summer. By September the strapped case Cope had brought down from Philadelphia had been replaced by two boxes nailed of pine that the cook had built him out of the freight slats, and the boxes sat under the plank with the green ledger on top of them, and the green ledger was the spine of it.

He worked the papers at the supper hour. The men ate at the cook tent and Cope ate at the plank, a plate brought to him, the fork in his right hand and his left hand moving the slips and the cuttings and the copied passages from the journals he had carried down, and he ate and worked and did not feel the eating, and the work went on under the lamp.

The bulk of it was the newspaper. He had a subscription that came south by the stage to the post in Wichita Falls, six papers in a bundle every Thursday, the Philadelphia and the New York and the New Haven, and he cut from them what was Marsh and what was about Marsh and what was the survey under Marsh, and the cuttings he glued onto pages of the ledger in a hand that was once exact and was now hurried. He marked them in the margin. He wrote dates and volumes and pages, and what was the error in the cutting and what was the lie and what was the silence, because a thing not said in a Marsh column was as much an entry as a thing said.

The other bulk was letters. He had three correspondents by September. One had been a counter-man under Marsh and had been let go without his last quarter’s pay. One was still in the rooms at Yale and copied for him passages that came across his desk before they were published and would not put his name to the copying. One was in the survey building in Washington and wrote what came up the hall, the funding numbers and the procurement notes and the names of the men being sent and where. Cope did not pay them. They paid themselves in the writing of it, and he wrote back to them by the same Thursday stage with the small steady warmth of a man who had taken their grievance in, and they sent more.

He took the letters down into the green ledger one at a time, copied the load-bearing sentences, and put the copies behind a marker of brown paper in a section at the back. The section was what he turned to first when he came to the plank, before the cuttings, before the day’s notes from the field. He marked the load-bearing sentences with a stroke of the pencil along the margin, and by September there were pages in the back

section that were more pencil than text, and the pencil itself was the work.

He said it once at the plank, half to the lamp and half to the open flap of the tent, that if a man controlled the survey he controlled what the country was allowed to have discovered, and he wrote the sentence down after he had said it, in a margin already crowded with margins. Sternberg, at the fire across the way, heard the cadence without the words and did not turn.

Sternberg saw the section. He had come to the plank one evening with a wire about the Aldis crate that George had asked him to deliver to Cope's hand, and Cope had taken the wire and read it and pushed it aside, the wire about the chalk not being what he was waiting for from Wichita Falls, and the green ledger had been open on the plank under his hand and the back section had been the one open. Sternberg had not turned it to read it.

He had turned his eyes from it as from a thing not his, and he had stood at the plank a moment longer than he needed to and then he had gone, and Cope had not looked up to mark his going, and Sternberg had taken his supper at the cook tent and not at the plank, which was where he had eaten in the past, in the years when there had been a place laid for him beside the lamp.

He took his supper with the men now, on a tin plate, the way the men took it, and he sat by the fire after with the cup of coffee on his knee and his hands quiet on the cup, and he did not go back to the plank in the evenings unless he was called. He had begun to be not called. Cope at the lamp was at the green ledger, and the ledger had moved into the place where Sternberg used to sit, and Sternberg saw the agreement that had not been made and let it stand.

The warmth had not gone out of Cope. What had changed was the moment. The right moment was now the moment when a correspondent wrote a sentence about Marsh that Cope could mark in the margin, and the warmth came down on the sentence and on the man who had sent it. Sternberg watched it fall at the plank under the lamp on the Yale clerk's letter and on the New Haven counter-man's, and the warmth was the same warmth that had come down on him at a fire eight years before, and it was being spent now on a different fire, and Sternberg drank the coffee.

* * *

News of the Brontosaurus reached the camp in a Philadelphia paper of the second week.

It was in the science column on the third inside page, a brief notice of the figured restoration Professor Marsh had given of the great sauropod from the Como cliffs, with a small engraving printed at a third the width of the column, the long neck out at full extension, the small head set up on it square and forward, the head a Camarasaurus head set on an Atlantosaur frame, the way Marsh had figured it in the monograph that summer. The notice spoke of the restoration as a great work and as the first time the public had been given the proper proportions of the largest dinosaur that had ever walked the earth.

It spoke of the smallness of the head on so vast a frame as the most striking thing about it, and it printed Marsh's words about the head, that the proportions had been arrived at after careful comparison with the better materials from the Yale collections.

Cope read the notice at the plank. He read it once and he read it twice, and on the second reading he was already up, the plate pushed aside, the lamp turned higher, the green ledger laid open across the cutting, and he was talking the engraving down. He said the head was wrong. He said the head was not the head of the dinosaur but the head of another dinosaur entirely, a small light skull that Marsh had pulled off a Camarasaurus frame somewhere in his own boxes and clapped onto the Atlantosaur neck because the proper skull had not come up in the Como work and Marsh had not been willing to publish without a head and had set the wrong head on it sooner than wait.

He said it was a fraud. He said Marsh had mistaken possession for anatomy. He said no dinosaur of that mass could have carried that skull at that distance from the body without the neck going down and staying down, and that the smallness of it was not the truth of the dinosaur but the haste of the man who had figured it.

He said it pacing. He said it to the lamp and to the tent wall and to the dark beyond the tent flap, and the men at the fire heard the cadence without the words and ate. He said the public would now carry this skull on this frame in its head for ten years, that the

man who would later put the right skull on the frame would not be believed, that the public believed the first thing it saw and forgot that it had seen anything else, and that Marsh had known this when he set the head on, that to figure was to fix, and that the fight had now to be brought to him.

He sat down at the plank. He took the cutting and he glued it onto a fresh page of the green ledger and he wrote the date in the margin and he wrote *FALSE HEAD* across the top of the page in a hand that pressed the pencil through the paper at the F, and below the cutting he wrote three lines, then four, then a page, the words spilling out faster than he could write them, and the page filled and he turned it and wrote on the next page and the next. The lamp burned low and Bell came across with the coffee and set it down without speaking, and the writing went on.

Sternberg sat at the fire across the way. He could see the lamp through the open flap of the third tent and the back of Cope at the plank and the hand moving, and he could hear the words in the cadence Cope used when the words were good in him, the cadence that had once made Sternberg lean forward at a fire to hear them, and he did not lean forward now. He held the cup in both hands and he heard Cope say once, lifted a little above the rest, that to set a wrong head on a great body was the kind of error that no man should be allowed to walk away from, that the head was the thing that was looked at, that the body was made for the head in the public's mind, and that to misname the head was to misname the whole.

Sternberg set the cup down by his boot and put his hand flat on his knee.

He did not say anything. The sentence belonged to a man who had spent the last twenty years inside the work of one man and the work of his rival, and there were not three men in the country that night that the sentence could have landed on the way it landed on the man at the fire, and the man at the fire said nothing. The lamp at the plank went on burning, and Sternberg sat with the cup at his boot and his hand flat on his knee until the fire was down, and then he rolled into his blankets and slept without speaking, and the green ledger filled the rest of its page and a page after.

* * *

The wire from Pueblo came on the next Thursday stage.

It came in a packet with the papers and the letters, and Cope went down to the post himself, as he had taken to doing through the summer, the wires not waiting on the messenger when Cope was the one waiting on the wires. The packet was three letters and the bundled papers and the wire on top, folded once. He opened it standing at the post. He read it. He folded it again. He put it in the inside pocket of his coat and he came back to camp with the papers under his arm and the letters in his hand and the wire in his coat, and at the plank that night he laid out the letters and cut the papers and worked at the green ledger as he had worked at it every Thursday night through the summer, and the wire stayed in the coat.

The wire said the manager at the Pueblo holdings had gone west to Denver on a matter of his own, that the assays of the second working had come back below grade, that the timbering at the upper level had given and the upper level was lost, that the consortium would not advance further capital against the property at the current showing, and that the consortium proposed to wind up the holdings under the receiver and asked Cope to wire instructions by return. The wire had been sent by the consortium's attorney out of Pueblo eight days earlier. The eight days were the time it had taken the wire to come down through the line to Wichita Falls and then by the Thursday stage to the camp.

Cope did not wire back. He worked the green ledger. He spent two evenings on a long entry on the Marsh head, a third evening on a letter from the Yale clerk about the upcoming volume, and on the fourth a long letter himself to Ballou in New York about the figured restoration and the public seizure, and he sealed it and addressed it and put it in the pile for the stage, and the Pueblo wire stayed folded in the inside pocket of his coat through all of it. He would answer the wire, but the answering was a thing for after the Brontosaurus, and Cope made the order of what was in front and what was behind by what he picked up and what he set aside.

He did not tell Sternberg about the wire. He did not tell Bell. The silver had been a thing he told at fires when it had been bright, and now that the silver had gone dark the telling of it went dark with it. It was a great deal of money that was not now to come back. The back wages and the field debts and the engravers and the men in the four states had all

been arithmetically defended in his head by the silver coming in, and the defense was gone, and the things to be paid for stayed, and the wire stayed in the coat, and the work at the plank went on as if it had not stayed there.

Sternberg knew. He saw Cope come back from the post that Thursday with the packet under the arm and the eyes set, and he saw Cope put a hand to the inside of the coat through the rest of the day and not draw it out, and he saw the silver not get mentioned at the supper hour the way it had been mentioned at every supper hour of the summer. He did not press it. He had asked once, in the workroom at the top of the Philadelphia house more than a year before, and the asking had got him twenty dollars and a warmth laid over the twenty, and a man did not ask twice for the thing the asking did not bring.

He went back to the Edaphosaur and took the rest of the pelvis down clean, and went back to the chalk in his head, the long white beds in the south, George's offer running steady through them.

The season ended in the second week of October with a cold wind off the north and the freight crates packed. The men were paid less than they were owed, and Sternberg did not press what he was owed because what he was owed was now a figure in two ledgers, and only one of them was going to be the figure that was paid. He took what Cope had to give him and put it in his coat against the Aldis money in the lining, and he shook the Professor's hand at the camp on the last morning, and Cope shook it the way Cope shook a hand, both of his over Sternberg's, the warmth real and the unpaid balance not mentioned by either of them.

Cope said he would see him in the spring at the western fields. Sternberg said only that he would be at the chalk through the winter for George, and that the Professor's letter would find him there.

He rode the wagon out to Wichita Falls and the cars north and east and home to Lawrence, and Anna took his coat at the door, and the chalk trade went on through the autumn and into the winter, the slabs out of the white in the cold months when the heat was gone, and the cash came east from the Aldis house and from two other houses Aldis had given George's name to.

The household book came down again under the lamp the way the household book came down, and the boy's throat was paid for, and the note on the lot was held, and the family stayed on the better ground the chalk had put them on. The card stayed folded in the middle place, and the half page of Cope's hand stayed folded behind it, and the Hayden letter stayed soft against them, and he carried them as he carried them, and went on.

* * *

Cope came east in November with the season's papers and the season's bone in the freight behind him and the wire from Pueblo still in the inside pocket of his coat. He came into the Pine Street house in the long afternoon with the light going out of the front rooms and into the back, and Anne heard him at the door and did not come down at once, because a wife who had heard her husband at his own door for twenty years did not have to come down to be sure he was her husband. She finished what she had in her hands and then came down the stairs.

He was in the front hall with his hat still in his hand and his case on the floor by his boot and a stack of bundled papers under his arm. He kissed her cheek and she took the hat from him and put it on the table by the door, and she did not say what the year had done to him in the way of the beard and the shoulders. She took the coat from him too and laid it across her arm. The coat was heavy in a way that was not the coat.

She felt the weight of the inside pocket against her wrist and did not put her hand to it. There were two folded things in there at least, paper-feel under the cloth, the one she had felt before and the one she had not, and she did not name either of them to herself. She turned him toward the back of the house where the workroom was, because he was carrying the papers like something he wanted set down. She took the coat to the hall closet and hung it and went after him.

He set the papers on the long table in three stacks, the cuttings, the letters, and the green ledger on top, and he put his hand on the green ledger a moment longer than he needed to. It was the one thing in the room he had come to see. Then he turned. The bones were where the bones had been when he had left in the spring. The reptile blocks Sternberg

had taken down the spring before last were along the wall on their trestles still and the turtle was under its cloth on the bench, and Cope went down the wall and put his hand on the blocks the way he would put it on a house that had stood while he was away. Anne stood at the door of the workroom and watched him do it, and she did not interrupt him.

She did interrupt him at the table. She came down the room when he had come back to it and laid her hand on the back of his over the green ledger, and she said his supper was in the dining room. She said it the once. Julia was setting the plates and she had kept it warm against the train and the workroom would still be the workroom in the morning, and his hands were cold from the cab and he was to come and eat before he sat down to anything. She moved her hand to his wrist and turned him from the table the way she had turned him from a hundred tables across twenty years, the body doing what the words would have taken five sentences to do, and he went.

He went because she had moved him and not because he had decided to be moved, and he went with the green ledger left on the table under the lamp, and she did not look back at the table as she took him out.

He ate. Julia sat across from him. She was thirteen now and she watched him eat with the quiet eyes she had got from her mother. The silver did not come up, because Cope did not bring it up and Anne did not bring up a thing she had not been told.

He went back to the workroom after, the lamp going with him through the house. Anne let him go. She sat at the dining table a moment with her hand flat on the cloth where the lamp had been, and she did not follow him. She put the household concerns down in her head in the order they needed to be acted on, Julia’s croup of the autumn, the second mortgage Edward had taken on the house in the spring before he had told her about the silver, the boxes coming in by freight in the morning that would need a place to be put because the workroom was already full, the maid’s wages three weeks unpaid. She would act on them in the morning. She would not act tonight on the lamp going down the hall. She got up. She went up to bed.

* * *

The letter from the Department came in the third week of December.

It came by the morning post and the maid brought it up to the workroom because the seal on it was a thing she had been told to bring up at any hour of the day. Cope was at the table where he had been at the table since the night he had come home, the green ledger now joined by a second ledger and a third, the back section of the green one spilled out into the new ones and indexed across them with brown-paper markers, the whole of the table a worked surface of cuttings and copies and the long pencil marks in the margins. He took the letter from the maid and he opened it and he read it standing.

The letter was from the office of the Director of the Survey and was signed by a clerk of the office, and it set out, in the manner of the office, that the records of the Survey indicated that during the years 1872 through 1879 inclusive, materials had been collected from public lands by Professor Cope under the auspices and partial funding of the Surveys of the Territories, and that the materials so collected were the property of the United States and were properly held in the federal collections, and that the Department had been advised that the said materials were in the private possession of Professor Cope at his residence in Philadelphia, and that the Department requested an accounting of the materials at Professor Cope's earliest convenience and gave notice that an agent of the Department would call at the residence on the morning of the eighth of January to inventory and to take custody of such materials as were determined to be the property of the United States.

He did not pace. It was something nearer to recognition. The move he had spent six months telling Ballou and the Yale clerk and the New Haven counter-man was coming had come, signed by a clerk of the office and laid on the green ledger on his own table, and the green ledger was the thing it had come up against.

He saw that he had been writing the answer for ten years without knowing the question, that he had been keeping the receipts and the invoices and the bills of sale and the customs declarations and the field-cost notes and the names of the men he had paid and the dates he had paid them out of his own purse for the simple reason that he was a man who kept his accounts, and that the accounts were now what would defend the house. He stood up and he started in on the bottom drawer.

He worked through the night and through the next day. He had the maid bring food up and he ate at the table with the papers around the plate. Anne came up twice and stood in the doorway and went down again without speaking to him, because she had seen the letter on the desk and read it and put it back, and she knew nothing she could put in front of him would compete with it. She let him at it, and went down to handle the boxes and the maid's wages and the second mortgage and Julia, and she handled them.

He brought out of the bottom drawer of the writing desk a leather case as long as his forearm, bound in two straps. The case was the case of his Hayden years, the receipts and the invoices and the orders and the field accounts of every season he had been into the West under the survey and out of his own pocket. He had kept them because he had kept everything, the habit of a Quaker family that had taught its son that a man's account was the proof of his honor. He opened it now and laid the contents out across the table beside the green ledger, and he sat in front of them and began to sort.

He cross-indexed. He started a fresh leather book and wrote at the top of the first page *A ccounting of Privately Funded Acquisitions, 1872–1879*, and below it the names of the territories and the years and the totals from his own purse, and the totals were the better part of a fortune set out in a careful hand.

He had spent them and knew he had spent them, but he had not before seen them set down in one place and totaled, and the totaling did something to him at the table, a thing of pride and a thing of grief and a thing of vindication all in one, that the work of his life had been paid for by him out of his own hand and the proof of it was now under his hand on the table and the office of the Director could send what clerk it pleased.

He worked nights through Christmas and New Year, and on the seventh of January he had the clean account book and the cross-indexed receipts and the cuttings of the original government circulars setting out the terms of the surveys all bound into a single dossier by a binder in Walnut Street whom he sat with through an afternoon to make sure the binder set the dossier in the order he had given him. The dossier came home in a leather portfolio on the evening of the seventh, and Cope set it on the long table in the workroom and stood looking at it a moment, and what he felt looking at it was the feeling of having set a thing down where it can be found again.

He squared the portfolio to the edge of the table and laid his hand flat on it and held it there, the way a man sets a slip into a ledger and squares it and is for a moment content, and the room did not tell him, and after a while he took his hand away.

The agent came at ten in the morning of the eighth. He was a clerk of middle years from the Department's office in Washington, in a good coat, polite, with a leather satchel and a printed inventory form folded into it. Cope received him in the workroom and offered him a chair at the long table and offered him coffee, and the clerk took the chair and declined the coffee and laid the satchel on his lap and unfolded the inventory form, and Cope laid the portfolio on the table between them and unfastened it.

He took the clerk through the dossier with the speed in him, the speed now bent down onto the page in front of them, not the bones along the wall, and what came out of him was not a bright future but the bright past of his own purse, the years and the receipts and the cross-indices, the *Accounting*, the customs declarations under his own name, the bills of sale from the freighters made out to him personally, the wages he had paid the men and the engravers, all of it. He went through it in two hours. The clerk turned the pages and made small notes in the margin of the printed inventory form and did not look up at the bones along the wall.

The clerk closed the *Accounting* and said he would take a copy of the totals for the Department's records with Professor Cope's permission, and Cope said the permission was given gladly, and a clerk's assistant who had waited in the front hall was called in and copied at a side table through the afternoon. At four the clerk closed the satchel and rose and shook Cope's hand and said the Department would communicate its determination by post within the month, and went out.

Cope stood at the workroom door and watched the cab leave. He came back to the long table. The dossier was on the table where the clerk had set it down. The lamp was burning, although it was only four, because the workroom in January took the lamp by four.

Anne came up at five. She stood at the door and looked at him at the table with his hands on the dossier, and she came down the room and sat across from him in the chair the clerk had sat in. She did not take his hand off the dossier. She did not move the

dossier. She did not ask him what the clerk had said. She said the maid had brought him tea and he had not taken it, that he was to come down and eat, that the dossier had done its work for the day and would still be the dossier in the morning. She said it the way she had said it in November about the supper, the body doing what would have taken sentences, and she stood up to take him by the wrist again.

He said it then, not to her exactly but to the lamp and the dossier and the bones along the wall, that they would not have it. He said it once. He said they had come to take the collection and they would not take it, that the receipts had defeated them and the dossier had defeated them, and the men who had thought to use the Department to do what they could not do in the field had been answered, and the answering was on the table between his hands, and the answering would stand for as long as the receipts stood, and the receipts would stand as long as he stood, and longer. He said it with the warmth he gave to the things he was sure of, the warmth that had come down on the silver and on the spring and on the Yale clerk's letters at the plank.

Anne heard the warmth and did not move yet, and she did not say what she could have said about the receipts as defense and the receipts as something else, because she had read the brown-paper section of the green ledger during the agent's day, the receipts that defended the house, and bound in among them in the same careful hand the pages that were not receipts of anything. She had seen by the lamp that morning, in five minutes, how near the one ran to the other, and the saying of it would not have changed the shape the dossier had been bound into in Walnut Street the day before.

She took his wrist. She turned him from the table and got him down to the dining room and to the food, and he ate, and Julia ate across from him, and Anne ate at her place. The talk was small the way it had been in November, and Cope answered when he was asked and ate when he was not, and after he went back up the stairs to the workroom and the lamp went with him.

What he did at the lamp that night was not the dossier. The dossier had done what it had been built to do. What he did was the back section of the green ledger, the long brown-paper section, the copied letters and the cuttings and the *FALSE HEAD* page and the pages after it, and he sat with it under the lamp the way he had sat with it on the

plank in the Texas field at the supper hour all summer. He read through what he had built.

He took up a clean book from the stationer's stack on the corner of the desk and wrote at the top of the first page *Accounting of Professor Marsh's Errors and Wrongs, 1869 to the present*, and he began to enter, in the careful hand of a man who had bound a dossier in Walnut Street two days before, the headings under which the entries would fall, *On the Question of Priority of Publication*. And *On the Misapplication of Federal Funds*, and *On the Conduct of Field Operations in Wyoming, 1877–1879*, and *On the Reconstruction of the Atlantosaur Skull*, and below the headings the spaces for the cross-references to the green ledger and to the letters.

He wrote into the small hours, and the new book filled its first pages with the architecture of what it would carry, and the architecture was the same architecture as the dossier in the leather portfolio, the cross-indices and the totals and the binding, the same hand, the same care.

He set the pencil down at two and turned the lamp down and sat in the half-dark a moment with the book closed under his hand, and he was tired in a way he had not been tired all autumn, and he was not unhappy, and he did not know what he was, and he went to bed.

* * *

The same week, Sternberg was south of Hays in the chalk in a wind out of the north that ran the white dust along the beds in a thin smoke, on his knees over a fish slab he had been taking down through the morning, the long jaws of the larger fish coming up clean under the brush. He had not had a letter from Philadelphia in two months and did not expect one.

He laid his hand flat on the matrix at the head's edge a moment and felt the cold of the stone and the dust on his palm, and the chalk was the chalk, and he went on with the work, and the wind ran along the beds.

In Philadelphia at the same hour, Cope was at the long table in the workroom with the

new book open under the lamp, the second cup of coffee at his elbow gone cold, entering the third cross-reference under *On the Reconstruction of the Atlantosaur Skull*. Behind him on the trestle along the wall the larger reptile block stood with its label still in Sternberg's hand on it from the spring before last, and Cope did not turn to look at it, and the lamp at his elbow burned, and the green ledger and the leather portfolio and the new book lay on the table together, and the hand went on across the page.

Chapter 16 — The Marsh Dossier

Philadelphia, the Pine Street rooms, and the chalk south of Hays, in the January following and the months after

The rooms had learned to close around the bones.

Cases stood where chairs had stood. Boxes made a wall down the passage from the front room to the stairs, and a pelvis leaned against the bookcase with old newspaper folded between the bone and the wood so the varnish would not mark, and vertebrae sat on the mantel under a film of coal dust. A plaster jacket waited on two dining chairs with a towel beneath it. The house no longer contained the collection. It served it. Cope went through the narrow lanes of it sideways where a man with a guest would have stopped, and he touched nothing by accident, and the cough that had come with the winter took him twice between the front room and the table and he held the edge of a case until it passed and went on.

On the long table lay the two books, the dossier from Walnut Street with its leather corners new enough to take the light, and the second still soft at the spine beside it. The Department's word had come by post in the new year, a short letter over a clerk's signature that upon the showing of the accounts the office would not press its claim to the collection, and Cope had read it as a thing already settled and behind him.

The second had begun by borrowing the first one's order, the same headings ruled the same way in the same careful hand. Cope did not think of the two as kin. He thought of sequence. A record had defended what he had earned. A fuller record would defend the truth. He squared them both to the edge of the table before he began, and the room did not correct him.

The second book had filled through the rest of the month, a heading and then the entries under the heading, the cross-references run down the margin into the correspondence and into the green ledger, and by the third week the architecture of it was no longer architecture. It was full. *On the Question of Priority of Publication* had its pages and its

dates and the volumes named and the days counted between the reading of a paper before the Academy and the appearance of the same matter under another man’s hand.

And a column Cope had ruled himself for the part of the figure that had gone to the rooms at New Haven and not to the field.

He read the book as if a stranger had set it down for him, and the strokes of the pencil were heavy in the margins where the matter was heavy, and the matter was heavy on every page. He was not astonished. He had kept the accounts for twenty years and they were only now in one place and totaled, and the totaling was a thing of pride and a thing of grievance and a thing he did not name, and the warmth came down on the page under his hand, and he sat in it at the table and the lamp burned at midday because the bones had taken the window.

No one else was keeping the count. That was the part the colleagues did not understand when they wrote, and the part Anne did not say when she came. The Academy had let the matter lie. The office in Washington had its own files and called them administration. Marsh, in the rooms at New Haven, kept whatever Marsh kept and showed none of it. The count was Cope’s, kept alone, for twenty years, against a day, and the day had a shape now, and the shape was a printed column, and he bent to the page and ruled the next cross-reference and did not feel the cough come up again until it was on him.

* * *

Anne came on the Thursday.

She did not come as a woman coming home. She had taken the smaller house across the city after the new year, quietly, in the weeks after the agent had come and gone, the way she did the things that could not be undone, and she came now to the Pine Street rooms the way a person comes to a place she has only lately stopped keeping, removing her gloves in the hall and listening for the cough before she called his name. She had not brought Julia. She had stopped bringing her when the rooms had grown too full for a child to turn in without being corrected, and Cope asked after her and had reached for another paper before she answered.

“She is well,” she said.

“Good. That is good. You must see how it fits.” He had the Department letter in one hand and was setting the rail account beneath it. “Marsh’s man in the same week, writing that the New Haven cases were paid twice over out of the public funds. Powell will say administration. He always says administration. But administration leaves dates.”

She stepped around a femur wrapped in muslin and set the parcel she had brought on the only clear surface, near the stove, and unwrapped it, bread and cheese and a small jar. There was a tray on the sideboard with the meat of an earlier meal gone hard at the edge and untouched.

“Have you eaten?”

“This is better than food.”

“Eat before this.” She put the bowl where his hand would find it, and he ate three spoonfuls standing while she read the open page, because the bowl was there. She read the headings first and then the copied testimony and then the small cross marks that joined one man’s unpaid grievance to a government appropriation and then to Marsh’s title page. She did not move her lips.

“You have put Mr. Ballou’s name here,” she said.

“He understands newspapers. A scientific man writes to the record. A public man writes to the hour. The *Marshiana* wants both.”

“We.”

“Science.”

She set the page down exactly where she had found it, squared to the edge where his hand had squared it. “Do not use a larger word to hide a smaller one.”

He looked at her, not wounded and not angry, only impatient with a delay he could not

classify. “Marsh has had the larger words for twenty years. Institution. Survey. Nation. Yale. Government. I am at last spelling out the small particulars underneath them.” He smiled then, brief and bright, almost grateful for the old form of the interruption. “No office in Washington has ever waited for soup. That may be its chief defect.”

She folded the cloth back over the bread because the room had dust in it and because he would forget. On her way out she stopped at the hall table and took down the small household book she still kept for him and entered the maid’s wages from her own purse, three weeks of them and a fourth coming, and did not tell him, because the telling would have taken his eye off the table for the length of it and would have changed nothing. The maid had been the one who carried the food up to the workroom.

There was no longer a maid. Anne put on her gloves, one finger catching where the seam had worn through, and she stood a moment with her hand on the latch while he called from the table that Ballou was expected on the seventeenth, and then she opened the door and went out, and the house was quieter by one more person, and he did not mark the quiet.

* * *

Ballou came to Pine Street on the seventeenth.

He came in the early afternoon with city mud on his boots and a leather case and a notebook already in his hand, a younger man than Cope and broad through the shoulders and quick in the eye, and Cope received him in the back room where the light was better and the bones were fewer, and offered him the chair at the long table and offered him coffee. Ballou took the chair and took the coffee and looked once down the wall at the bones on the trestles and then did not look at them again, because the bones were not what he had come for.

What he had come for was on the table. He had written Cope back in the new year, in answer to the long letter Cope had sent from the Texas post in the autumn, and he had held that letter through the season and come now because the matter, he had written, was one the public would take the way the public took a war. He had a pencil out before he sat.

“Professor, I can make no use of this as a heap.”

“It is not a heap.”

“Then I can make no use of it as a private order. The public has no patience for private order. I need names, charges, sequence, and a way to keep the reader from drowning before the third paragraph.”

Cope liked him the better for it. He took Ballou through the book, the speed in him bent down onto the page in front of them and not the wall, and he turned the pages one at a time and gave each its date and its volume and its cross-reference, and Ballou wrote. He wrote fast and he stopped Cope twice to ask a thing back, and the things he asked back were the things a printer asks, whether the date could be stood behind and whether the letter behind the charge was a letter in a hand that could be named.

And Cope answered that the date could be stood behind and that the letter was in a hand and the hand had a name and the name was in the field with the survey and could be had if it were wanted. He laid the New Haven counter-man’s letter on the table and turned it for Ballou to read, and Ballou read it and made a note, and he laid the procurement figures beside it, and Ballou read those and made a longer note and asked whether the figures were the office’s own, and Cope said they were the office’s own come up the hall in the office’s own hand, and Ballou wrote that down and underlined it.

The light went out of the front of the house and into the back the way it went in January, and the lamp was lit at three, and Cope went on turning the pages, the priority and the funds and the field and the skull, and the warmth was on him through all of it, the warmth that came down on the things he was sure of. And it came down now on the page and on the young man writing at the page, and the young man wrote in the warmth the way the men who had written letters to Cope had written them, taken in and warmed and made to feel that the grievance he carried was a true grievance and a part of a great matter.

When Cope came to the skull he stood up. He set the *FALSE HEAD* page in front of Ballou and stood over it and talked it down the way he had talked it down in the Texas tent, the small head pulled off a Camarasaurus frame and clapped onto the long neck

because the man had not been willing to wait for the right skull, that to figure a thing was to fix it in the public's eye, that the public would carry this skull on this frame for ten years and would not believe the man who later set the right one on.

Ballou stopped writing and looked up at him while he said it, because the cadence had come into Cope's voice that came into it when the words were good in him, and Ballou heard the cadence and knew it for what a printer knew it, which was a column.

"Do not make it merely personal," Cope said.

"It is personal. A man has done it." Ballou crossed out a word and wrote another. "But the injury is public. The public pays for science and is handed a private kingdom. I will write that. Not kingdom. Something colder."

"The facts have been muffled by courtesy long enough."

"Still." Ballou closed the notebook over his thumb. "He must be able to breathe, or he stops reading at the third paragraph." He said it would run as a series, on the Sundays when the paper was largest and most read, the documents named though not printed whole, set under a heading that would take the eye of a man who had never heard the name of either of them, and that the heading was his, Ballou's, to set and not Cope's, and Cope said the heading was Ballou's. Ballou tied the first packet and took it in both hands, and Cope held it the part of a second longer than was needed before he let it go.

"No embroidery."

"The facts are sharp enough."

"Facts go dull in timid hands."

Ballou put the packet under his arm and made his circuit toward the door and stopped once at the larger reptile block on its trestle, the long block with the field label still on it, and asked what it was, and Cope told him, the season and the man and the freight, and Ballou nodded and did not write it down, because it was not the matter, and he went out into the dark of the street, and the cab took him to the station and the train took him to New York with the notebook full in the case. Cope stood at the workroom door until the

cab was out of the street, and the room was quiet behind him.

* * *

The series ran on the Sunday, on page eleven of the Herald in New York, under a heading set in a size the paper kept for a war or a wreck, *SCIENTISTS WAGE BITTER WARFARE*, and below it in a smaller line the two names set against each other the way the paper set the names of two fighters. Below that ran the column, Ballou's column, set out in the language of a Sunday paper, plain and forward and made to be read by a man who had never held a bone, the documents named in it though not printed whole, the dates that could be stood behind and the letters in the hands that had names. The bone was in it, but the bone was the floor of it. What stood up off the page was the quarrel.

The paper reached Philadelphia on the Monday by the early train, and Cope had it by ten. He opened it on the long table and found the page and read it standing. He read it once and he read it twice, his own matter come back to him in another man's hand and set in type, the years of the green ledger's back section and the December nights and the Texas supper hours carried now out of the workroom and into the hundred thousand houses Ballou had spoken of. The move was here now and it was his move and not the office's, set under a heading that took the eye.

The heading was *BITTER WARFARE* and the warfare was on the table in front of him in his own matter, and he did not change his mind about the matter, because the matter was record and the record was true.

* * *

Anne came once more.

She came on a cold afternoon with the lamp burning in the front of the house at the wrong hour, and the rooms smelled of lamp oil and paper and of medicine left uncorked, and there was dust along the one side of the stair where no shoe touched now. Cope was at the table in his shirtsleeves, thinner than she had seen him, his collar open and one hand blackened with newsprint, and he did not rise. He lifted the paper instead,

the Herald squared on the green ledger under his hand.

“He will have to answer it now,” he said. “It is set out plainly and the documents named, and no office in Washington and no rooms in New Haven can put it down now that it is in a hundred thousand houses.” He said it the way he said the things he was sure of, and there was the warmth in his face that came when the thing was sure in him, and he waited, the way a man waits who has set a thing down where it can be found and turns to the one nearest him to have the finding shared.

She did not share it. She did not say the thing she could have said about the receipts that were a defense and the pages that were not a defense of anything, the two things she had measured and kept to herself, because the paper was printed and the saying of it would not unprint the paper any more than it would have unbound the dossier in Walnut Street. She set the tray down and gathered two cups, one with a dry ring at the bottom, and her eye went once to his coat on the chair, where the two folded things were in the inside pocket against the cloth, the old fold soft now with the carrying and the newer one stiffer, the wire that had come east in the autumn and had not been answered. She had felt both before. She did not touch them now.

“Edward,” she said. “Julia will not come here.”

He heard the name and sorted it among the others. “Not while the cases are open. Later, when the rooms are clear.”

“No.” It was a small word and she did not sharpen it.

He looked at her then, and for a moment the room offered him the old order of it, interruption and answer and repair, and then a newsboy went by in the street below crying the word *scientists* stretched into a cry, the paper being sold on the corner, and Cope’s eye broke toward the window.

“They are still carrying it,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Then the answer must be ready before the next issue.”

She picked up her gloves from the table, where she had set them down a minute before, and they looked as if they belonged to another house. She came to the table once and touched the edge of the green ledger and then the leather book, and she did not open either, and she looked at him once, not in accusation and not in any farewell made for him to see, but the way she had read the books, as a measurement completed. She reached out and set the collar of his coat straight where it had twisted under his shoulder, the gesture practical and brief and final, the last of the twenty years of turning him from a hundred tables, spent now on a collar and not on his wrist. Then she stepped back.

“I will not come again,” she said.

The words did not carry anger and did not carry grief. They were a statement of fact, set down with the same exactness she might have used to say a window was broken or a fire had gone out. He had no answer ready, because it was not a thing filed under Marsh or Powell or Survey or funds or the skull. He took up the clipping again because his hand wanted the paper. “Anne, I cannot stop in the middle of a public correction.”

“I know.” She waited the length of time it would have taken him to hear the answer if hearing had been there to be had. Then she took the tray and left the bread because he had not touched it, and she went out into the narrow hall, where a crate had been moved across the passage and had to be shifted before she could pass, and Cope rose and moved it with a sudden irritation and then a sudden care when he saw the plaster edge scrape the wall, and said *careful* to the crate, and Anne went out.

She did not close the door softly. The latch caught with its ordinary sound, not made final, and then a carriage went by in the street and the sound was taken up into the larger noise of the city, and Cope stood listening to it a moment and then went back to the table, and the paper was on the green ledger in the light from the window, and he sat down to it.

* * *

The Herald reached the chalk south of Hays in the last week of the month, wrapped around a box of plaster and twine that George had sent up from the Aldis house with the

freight.

Sternberg was at the beds in a wind out of the north when the box came, on his knees over a slab he had been taking down through the morning. And he opened the box for the plaster and the paper came off in his hands, two days of the Herald that George or George's man had used for the packing the way a man used whatever paper was by, and he would have balled it for the fire the way he balled the rest, and he saw the two names in the heading before he balled it.

He did not ball it. He smoothed it on his knee against the wind and held it down with the flat of his hand at the top and the heel of his boot at the bottom, and he read it through. He came to the field, *On the Conduct of Field Operations in Wyoming*, and he read the New Haven counter-man's grievance set out in the plain forward hand, the man let go without his last quarter's pay. He had been let go of nothing.

He had been not called to a plank, which was a different thing, and he had taken his own supper with the men on a tin plate and built his own trade in the chalk against the day, and there was no letter of his in any book in Philadelphia and would be none, because he had not written one and would not. And he knew the warmth and knew where it was spent now.

The column told him nothing about Cope he had not carried out of the Texas field in his coat.

He said nothing. There was no one at the beds to say it to. He folded the paper, but did not fold it small to carry it, because the paper was not a thing of that kind. He set it under the plaster box out of the wind, and he took up the brush and went back to the slab and took the head of the fish down clean with the body the way he took every slab down, because that was how he took a slab down, and the count he had been keeping for years was even in him still, and he laid his hand flat on the cold matrix at the head's edge a moment in the wind, and he went on with the work.

That night at the house in Lawrence, Anna asked him whether he had seen that the papers had it, the trouble between the Professor and the other one, that a neighbor had spoken of it at the store. He said he had seen it. She asked whether it was as bad as the

paper made it, and he was quiet a moment over his plate, and he said the paper made a war of it because a war sold the paper, and that the trouble was old and was real and was neither of those things the size the paper made it, and that it was a thing between two men who had each spent a life on the same ground and could not now get off the ground.

He said it the way he told Anna a thing about the weather or the freight, a plain thing said plainly to a woman who had asked, and he did not say the other thing, the thing about the warmth and where it was spent, because the other thing did not belong at the supper table and he had no words he was willing to spend on it. Anna did not ask again. The boy's throat had cleared with the new year and the lot was held and the chalk was carrying them, and the supper went on.

* * *

The matter ran in the eastern papers through the rest of the winter.

It ran first as Ballou had set it and then it ran as the other papers took it up off the Herald, the Philadelphia and the Boston and the smaller ones, each setting the heading in its own size, and it ran in the science columns and then off the science columns and onto the pages where the public read its quarrels, and the names of the two men were set against each other in print in houses that had never carried a bone and never would. It did not travel like water. It traveled like files, a copy to Washington and a copy to New Haven and a copy onto a committee table with a blue pencil beside it.

Men who had never lifted a plaster jacket spoke of appropriations. Men who had never seen a winter camp asked whether the department of paleontology had become too dear for what it returned, and whether a science whose great men aired their grievances in the Sunday papers was a science the public purse should carry as it had been carrying it. Names went into the minutes. A funding line was cut, and then narrowed further, by hands that did not know the shape of the work the cut would delay, and the cut fell on the survey side, on Marsh's side, on the rooms in New Haven and the field men they paid.

And the colleagues wrote east that the office was uneasy and that the money was the

part the office could not pretend about, because the money was a figure and a figure could be read by a congressman who could not read a bone.

Marsh did not answer in the first week, or the second. The word came east in the careful colleagues' letters that the rooms at New Haven were at work on a reply, that it would be a long one and documented in its turn, the survey's own answer on the funds and the rooms' own answer on the priority, and that Marsh had said the reply should not be quick, it should be exact. When it came it did not shout. It corrected and it distinguished and it denied, and it set Cope's name inside phrases that made him smaller by their grammar, and it answered the funds with the office's figures and the priority with the volumes and the dates, and it did a thing besides, which the colleagues had warned of before it came.

It went back twenty years. It took up an old error of Cope's own from his young days, a reptile he had figured wrong end about and had set the small head on the wrong end of the long animal and had tried afterward to call the printing back. And it set the old error out in the same plain forward way Ballou had set Cope's matter out, one sample, Marsh's reply said, of Professor Cope and his methods, the same haste, the same wrong head, the same correction come too late, offered to the public that had just been taught to read such things.

The reply ran in the same papers. It did not clean anything. It lengthened the stain.

The allies came, because the institutions had doors and the doors had men assigned to them. They could not make the article vanish and they could not give Marsh back the quiet authority he had carried before it, but they could say the procedures had been followed and that a distinguished man had been misread by a desperate rival, and they could write with a restraint that made the restraint sound like proof, and they kept the floor from opening under him. He was damaged and he was not destroyed. Neither man was. What had been a long private war between two men was a public embarrassment now, and the science they had each given a life to was a squabble in the Sunday papers between aging men who could not share the ground, and that was the thing the public took from it.

Cope read Marsh's reply at the table. He read the part that went back twenty years to the

reptile he had figured wrong end about, the error he had made and corrected and recalled the printing of when he was a young man with the whole of it before him, and he had not thought of the reptile in years and he thought of it now, set down by a stranger's hand into the same plain forward language he had given Ballou for the skull. He did not write a name on what went through him.

The priority and the funds and the field and the skull, the years of it, the brown-paper markers, the careful hand, and he found in it no error of his own and was not looking for one, because the question was not whether the book held an error. The question was that the book was a thing he had built and the building of it was true and the manner of it was his, and the manner was a thing in the world now that came back at a man, and he had not built it to come back and he did not see that it had come back, he saw only that Marsh had answered and that the answering would have to be answered.

One of the colleagues had written it plainly, that Cope had handed Marsh the manner of the thing, that the heading and the documents and the plain forward setting-out of an old grievance in a Sunday paper were Cope's manner now and Marsh would answer in it, and that a war fought in that manner was a war in which the first blow taught the second. Cope read that letter too, and laid it flat on the green ledger, and put his hands on the table on either side of it, and did not pace, and did not absorb the line into himself, because the line was about a manner and the manner was the true one and a true thing could not be the error the colleague seemed to mean.

He took a clean sheet from the stationer's stack and headed it to Ballou in New York, and wrote that he understood Professor Marsh was preparing further matter, and that the matter would go back twenty years to find its ground because the present held nothing Professor Marsh could stand on, and that he, Cope, would have a rejoinder ready and documented when it ran, and that the documents were in hand and indexed as before. He sealed it and set it in the pile for the morning post, and the rejoinder was a thing he had already, sitting at the table, turned to, and he would build it the way he had built the book, in the careful hand. He laid the colleague's letter on the green ledger, and the lamp burned.

* * *

By the spring the rooms were worse and the matter was not finished.

Men came who had not come in years. One praised his courage. One asked to borrow a document and went away without it when Cope required a receipt for it. One stood in the narrow hall and said the Academy was uneasy, and Cope said the Academy should have been uneasy sooner, and after that fewer of them came. He cut Marsh's answers from the papers as they ran and pasted them into the leather book and wrote the date beneath each, and he marked the sentences that struck and the sentences that missed, and he read the damage in the columns as a kind of movement, every hostile notice a proof of circulation, every cautious friend a proof that caution had come into the room.

He wrote Ballou again, and then a third time, the letters shorter and more pressing. He did not eat the plates that no one now carried up. The cough was worse with the cold and the lamp oil, and his hand was black to the knuckle with the newsprint, and he did not stop.

In Lawrence at the same season Sternberg was at the chalk through the short days, and the freight went east and the cash came back. He had read the Herald off the plaster box and folded it once and set it out of the wind, and when the work moved down the bed and the box moved with it the paper stayed, and the wind took it in a day or two, and it went the way packing paper went, and he did not look for it and did not miss it.

The card stayed folded where it rode, the half page of Cope's hand behind it, the Hayden letter soft against them, and he carried them as he carried them.

In Philadelphia the lamp burned over the green ledger and the leather book and the leather portfolio and the rejoinder that was growing now in the careful hand. The household book lay closed in another house across the city, where the figures of the month did not total and were carried on the lectures and the writing and the small purse of a woman who had stopped coming. The matter ran in the eastern papers. Marsh's further answer was at work in the rooms at New Haven, and the funding line stayed cut, and the reptile Cope had figured wrong end about in his young years had come up out of twenty years to be set in print where it would stay.

None of it was finished. None of it was answered. The heading the paper had set over it

stood over all of it, the size the paper kept for a war, and the war ran forward of itself now, in the manner a man had built in the careful hand and had not built to come back. The hand that wrote the rejoinder did not shake.

Chapter 17 — A Good Man

Philadelphia, the first week of May, in the spring after the dossier

The black coat had been a good coat once and was a good coat still in the way a thing is that has been kept and not replaced, brushed at the seams and worn thin at the cuff, and Cope had it on by seven and was talking before he had the second arm in it. He talked at the room and the room was empty. He talked the dossier, the dates of it and the order it would land in, the Sunday column already in the hundred thousand houses and the second series Ballou had as good as promised.

And he talked the men who would be at the church today, who among them had read it and who among them would have read it by the time the box went down, and he buttoned the coat wrong by one and did not feel the coat sit crooked on him because he was counting the men and not the coat. He had not eaten. The cough that had come with the winter was still in him and came up twice while he dressed and he put it down both times with the flat of his hand against the table and did not stop talking through it.

The light came up gray over the back of the houses and the milk cart went by below and Cope stood in the wrong-buttoned coat in the workroom among the trestles and told the empty room what the day would do.

Anne came at half past seven because there was no one else to come.

She came in her own black, from the smaller house across the city, and she let herself in with the key she had not given back and went up, and she heard him before the landing, the run of his voice through the workroom door, and she stood a moment on the stair with her hand on the rail before she went in. She had said in the winter that she would not come again and she had not come again, not to the table and not to the supper hour and not for any of it, and this was not that.

This was the funeral of Joseph Leidy and Edward was to stand up at it among the men of the city and there was no one in the house to see that he went out fit to be seen, no maid and no Julia and no one, and a thing could be the last office a person did and not

be a return. She went in. He was at the long table with a sheet of paper in his hand, the address he meant to give, and he turned to her with the warmth already up in his face, the warmth that came on him now over anything, and he did not say good morning and did not ask after the girl.

He said had she heard what Osborn's people were saying in New York, that the column had been read aloud at a club, and he held the paper out not for her to take but to show that he had it, and the coat hung crooked off him and he was thinner than at the new year and the hand that held the paper had the old ink dark in the knuckle that no washing took out now.

She did not answer about Osborn's people. She crossed the room and took the front of the coat in both hands and unbuttoned it down and did it again right, the way she had done a hundred things to him across twenty years, the body doing the work, and he stood for it the way he stood for the cough, not stopping the talk, talking over the top of her hands about the order the men would read the series in, and she got the coat to sit straight on him and stepped back. She looked at him while she stepped back.

She had married a man who could hold a room with the truth of a thing and she had stood at the edge of a hundred rooms while he did it, and the man in the wrong light at the long table holding a paper up to be seen and not read was talking the way that man had talked, the cadence in it, the sureness, and it was not him. It was the shape of him with the inside run out. She did not say so. She said the cab would want to be called for half past eight if he meant to be early, and she went down to call it, and behind her on the stair she heard the voice go on in the empty room as if she were still in it.

* * *

Marsh came into the city the night before in his own car.

It was hitched to the back of the evening train out of New Haven and run onto a siding near the depot for the night, a long car paneled in dark wood with his name nowhere on it and the survey's nowhere on it and the look on it all the same of a thing kept by a man who did not mean to ride the public coaches, and in the morning he received in it. He had the steward bring coffee and he sat at the small fixed table in the good light off the

siding and he saw the men who had wired ahead that they would call, two from the Academy and one down from the college at Princeton and one who carried a letter from a museum in the west that wanted casts, and to each of them he was the same.

He was square and gray and unhurried and he let the man talk first, and then he put the principle the way he put it now to everyone, which was that the great dinosaurs were not the property of the man who happened to dig them but of the institutions that would hold them after the man was gone. A bone in a private cabinet was a bone lost to science and a bone in a museum was a bone kept, and the work of the age was not the finding, which any sharp man with a crew could do, but the keeping, which only an institution could do.

He said it without heat. He said it as a man states the standing order of a thing.

The man from the Academy heard him out and said it was a sound principle and that the Academy had always held to it, and did not say what the Academy would do, and left. The man from Princeton was cool and stayed cool and asked one question about the survey's plans for the western beds that Marsh answered shorter than the man had hoped, and went. The man with the museum letter wanted the casts and did not much care for the principle and said so pleasantly, and Marsh said the casts could be arranged, and made a note, and that was the one call of the morning that came to anything and it came to plaster.

None of them had come to give Marsh what he had come south to be given, which was the weight of their names behind him in the matter of the appropriation, and Marsh marked that none of them had, and squared the cards of them on the small table when each had gone, and drank the coffee, and at ten he had the steward call a cab to take him the half mile to the Academy, where Major Powell had agreed to see him before the church.

The Academy gave him a room off the library and Powell was already in it.

Powell stood at the window with his back to the door and the empty sleeve pinned at his side and turned when Marsh came in, and the two of them shook hands, the one hand each, and Powell said it was a sad business about Leidy and Marsh said it was, and they

sat. Marsh had brought no case and no papers because the matter as Marsh understood the matter wanted no papers, it wanted only the two of them to agree on what they both already knew, the value of the work and the standing of the man who did it and the necessity of carrying both forward another year.

And Marsh began to put it, the western beds and the casts going to the museums and the volumes still to come, the long view, the institution's view, and Powell let him put it and did not interrupt and when Marsh had laid it out Powell did not take it up.

Powell said the matter had moved past where the two of them could settle it. He said the committee had reported and the House had taken the report and the appropriation for the geological survey had been cut and then cut again on the floor, and that where it had been cut deepest was the work in paleontology, which the members did not understand and would not defend. The line that carried the department Marsh had built could not be carried at its figure into the next year and very likely not at any figure. Powell was not bringing it to Marsh to be argued because it had been done in a room neither of them sat in by men who had never seen a bone.

He said it level and direct and without any color of regret in it past the regret a man shows for weather, because to Powell it was nearer weather than wrong, the working of a system that had weighed the work and the man and concluded, and the conclusion was not yet the formal thing, the formal thing would come in its season and be signed and filed, but the conclusion was made and Powell was telling him that it was made.

Marsh took it sitting. He did not change in the face and did not raise the voice and did not reach for the long view again because the long view was what had just been closed. He asked one question, which was whether any part of the line could be held if it were narrowed to the cataloging of what was already taken, and Powell said that was the part most likely to be lost first because it showed least, and Marsh nodded once at that as a man nods at a sum he has checked. He stood. He said he was obliged to the Major for telling him plainly. He said he would see what the other offices thought, and Powell said he might, in a way that told Marsh what the other offices would think.

At the door Powell said the one thing that was not procedure. He said the car had become a difficult thing to defend. Marsh stopped with his hand near the door and said

it had carried the work. Powell said it had carried more than the work, and said it without unkindness, the way a man names a fact that the room has already named and will go on naming, and Marsh inclined his head at that as he had inclined it at the sum, and went out through the library and down to the cab, and the cab took him back past the church where the people were already gathering on the steps, and he did not stop at the church.

He went on to the siding and the car, and he saw two more men before noon, men he had sent word to, and to each he put the question of the appropriation sideways and watched the man find a reason not to lift a hand for it.

* * *

Sternberg came to the church on foot from the depot with the dust of three days' travel still on his coat.

He had come east with a consignment for the Academy, the chalk fish crated and the freight paid out of the chalk money the way everything was paid out of the chalk money now, and he had meant to see the crates delivered and turn around west again, and then the wire had reached him at the Aldis house that the old man was dead, and Sternberg had stayed for the funeral. Leidy was the first man in the east who had answered him. Years back, a green collector with a shoebox of teeth and no name, Sternberg had written east to the men whose names were on the papers and most had not written back and Leidy had written back, a short letter in a plain hand that took the teeth seriously and named them right and told him where to send better.

And Sternberg had kept the letter and kept the man who wrote it in a place in himself that the years of the field and the war between the two great men had not reached or spent. So he stayed, and he came to the church on foot, and on the steps among the black coats he found Cope.

He found Cope already talking. Cope had come early as Anne had got him to come early and the earliness had given him a half hour on the steps with the men as they came up. And Sternberg came into the edge of it and stood at Cope's shoulder the way he had stood at Cope's shoulder in the field, the big collector a half pace back and to the side,

Cope's man, and the men who came up the steps saw him there and read him there, Cope's man up from the west for the day.

Cope took his arm a moment when he came and said good, good, that he should be here, that he should see this, and turned back to the man he had been talking to without finishing the thought about Sternberg, and Sternberg stood at the shoulder and watched the men come up and saw which of them took Cope's hand long and which took it short and which found a way up the steps that did not bring them past where Cope stood. There were more of the last than Cope marked. Cope marked none of them.

Cope was up in the warmth and the warmth did not let the short handshakes through.

Powell came up the steps at a quarter to the hour and Cope saw him and went to him.

He went across the front of the steps to Powell with his hand out and Sternberg came at the half pace behind, and Cope took Powell's one hand and held it and said the Major was good to come, that Leidy would have valued it, and Powell said the right plain thing back, and then Cope did not let the moment close. He held on past the closing of it and went into the dossier sideways, the western funds and the misapplication of them and the figures that the office's own hand had sent up the hall, not naming Marsh and naming Marsh in every clause that did not have his name in it.

And his voice came up out of the low pitch the steps of a church kept men's voices in and went up into the cadence, and the men near enough to hear turned their faces a degree away in the manner of men who do not wish to be seen hearing. Powell stood in it. Powell did not step back from it and did not take it up and did not give Cope a thing to fasten the next clause to, and into the first break in it Powell said, level, that he had heard Professor Cope was at work on a large book, the osteology, the whole of the western forms, and that it would be a valuable thing to have, and that when it was complete the survey would be glad to consider it for publication.

It stopped Cope a half second. It was a gift and Cope took it for a gift and the warmth came up brighter on it, and he said it would be complete within the year, that the greater part was written, that it wanted only the plates, and Powell said he would be glad to see it when it was done. And the ease with which Powell said it was the ease of laying

down a thing already weighed and filed, an offer that costs nothing to make because it will not be called, and Cope did not hear that in it and Sternberg, at the shoulder, did.

Cope went straight on from the offer back into the funds and the field as if the offer had been fuel and not a door closing, the cadence climbing. It was then that Anne came up on the one side and Sternberg moved in on the other and the two of them, without a word between them and without a word to Cope, took him out of it, Anne with a hand at his arm and the small ordinary sentence about their seats and the hour, Sternberg with his bulk simply between Cope and Powell, and they turned him and walked him up the steps and in. Behind them Powell let the men he had been keeping waiting come up to him.

* * *

Inside, before the service, Powell found Sternberg again.

He came down the side aisle while the church was filling and stopped at the end of the pew where Sternberg had put Cope and found him a seat, and he said Sternberg's name, which Sternberg had not known he had, and asked was he the Kansas man, the chalk, and Sternberg said he was. Powell said there was a field map wanted, a survey sheet of the western country, that an aide of his named Harker had it in a case in the small committee room at the back and that the man did not know the western sheets well enough to find the right one quickly, and would Sternberg, who knew the country, go back and find the sheet of the Niobrara and the Judith and bring it through.

Sternberg looked once at Cope, who was settled now and talking low and fast to no one in particular with the address-sheet on his knee, and he went back.

He found the room and the aide and the case of rolled sheets, and he found the sheet wanted faster than the aide could have, the Niobrara and the country north of it that he had walked, and he had it half unrolled on the table showing the aide the line of the beds when Powell came in behind him and shut the door most of the way. There were two other men in the room Sternberg had not been told would be there, one from the Interior and one Sternberg did not place, and Powell did not send Sternberg out. Powell said stay a moment, you know the ground, and Sternberg stayed.

They talked the western beds over the map for the better part of a quarter hour while the organ started up beyond the door, and Sternberg stood at the end of the table with his hand flat holding the curl of the sheet down and listened to them lay out the country he had spent his life in as a thing to be administered.

They talked which beds the survey would work and which it would lease and on what terms a private party might be let onto federal ground and on what terms not, and they talked the Judith and the Niobrara and the Como country by their place-names as squares on a sheet, and they marked two of the squares with a soft pencil that rubbed out again. The names that ran the talk were the survey's names and the Interior's names and the names of museums that would take what came up, and in the quarter hour neither the name of Cope nor the name of Marsh was said once. They were not kept out of the talk. They were simply not in it.

The country had passed to other hands while the two of them had been counting each other, and the men in the room did not say so because to them it was not news, it was only the map. Sternberg held the curl of the sheet down with his hand and did not say anything either, and when they were done Powell thanked him for the sheet and said he might leave it, and Sternberg went back out into the church where the service was about to begin and took his seat at Cope's shoulder.

Cope leaned to him and asked low what Powell had wanted, and Sternberg said a map of the western country, and Cope said good, good, that Powell would want him in the western country, and faced front. The thing Sternberg had heard in the back room he did not carry forward into any word. He set it down inside where the field had taught him to set things down, and he faced front.

* * *

The service was plain because the man had been plain.

The church was a Unitarian church and the order of it was spare, no great show of flowers and no choir past the one organ, and the program was a single folded sheet handed at the door, and on the cover of it under the name and the dates was a line they had chosen from among the things the old man had said, set in a small type with no

border around it. *Be faithful to the evidence. And patient with the earth.* Sternberg read it standing while the church filled and then folded the program once along its fold and held it, and the people came in and sat, the family in the front and behind them the men of the Academy and the college and the city, the doctors and the naturalists and the curators and the men who held the chairs the old man had held.

And behind them the rest, and Cope sat among the Academy men with the address-sheet on his knee and his lips moving over it, and Marsh was not among them.

He had not come, or had not come yet. He had gone back to the car and the calls and the appropriation he could not raise a hand for, and his place among the men of his standing was an empty place, and the men near it marked the empty place and said nothing, and the service began without him.

The minister spoke first and spoke briefly, and then a man of the Academy who had known Leidy fifty years stood up and spoke, and he did not make the dead man large. He said Leidy had described a thousand forms and quarreled over none of them, that he had given up the field of the great reptiles when the field grew loud because he found he could not work in the noise. And had gone back to his protozoa and his parasites and his students and had been content, and that he had told them once, the man said, when a younger man pressed him on why he did not fight for his ground against those who took it, that the ground was not his to fight for.

He had said be faithful to the evidence, and patient with the earth. The man said the line the way the old man had said it, plainly, and did not say it again or turn it over for them or tell them what it meant, and went on to the next thing, the students and the long teaching, and sat down. The line went out over the church once and was not underlined and lay where it fell, and some heard it and some did not, and the organ took up again.

Then they asked if any who had worked beside him would speak, and Cope stood up.

He stood up with the address-sheet and did not use it. He began well. The cadence that had been running loose all morning came into true the moment he had the church in front of him, and for a space he was the man Anne had married, the man who could hold a room. And he spoke of Leidy with a real thing in it, the early years and the first

descriptions and the hand that had named the first of the great American forms, and the church settled into him because he was good and they could feel that he was good.

He came to the rules. He said Leidy had set the rules they all worked under whether they kept them or no, that science was a faith kept with the evidence and a patience kept with the earth, that a man took from the ground only what the ground gave and claimed only what he could stand behind and left the rest for the next honest hand. And he said it as a man says a creed he has lived by, his own voice warm on it, and Sternberg sat at the aisle end of the pew and watched him say it.

Sternberg had been in the third tent in the Texas dark when the false head was talked down. He had carried the green ledger's weight out of the field in his own coat. He sat and watched Cope stand in Leidy's church and lay Leidy's rules across his own chest like a man fitting on a coat that was not his and finding it fit, and Sternberg's face did not change, and he did not look away or look at anyone else to see if they saw it. He watched the one man, and held the folded program, and said nothing, and the gap between the rule and the man who recited it hung open in the air of the church for anyone in it to see who had eyes for it, and the narrator of it was not Sternberg and was not anyone.

It was only there.

And then Cope did not stop where a man stops.

He had the rules in his hand and the warmth up and the room with him and he could not leave the room without giving it the rest, and the rest was what had been in him all morning, and he went from the rules to the breaking of the rules, and from the breaking of the rules to the man who broke them, not by name, never once by name, but by every road that led to the name. He spoke of the misapplication of public funds to private cabinets. He spoke of the seizure of another man's ground and the printing of another man's work under a borrowed head, of the small skull clapped on the long neck for haste and for show, of the men sent west on the survey's money to take what honest hands had found.

And the field minutiae came up in him, the dates and the seasons and the freight, the

whole of the dossier rising into the eulogy as if Leidy's open grave were the place it had been waiting to be read, and his voice climbed up out of the church-pitch and into the column-pitch and stayed there. The settling went out of the church. It went out of it in a low movement, a turning of heads to other heads, a man near the front saying something low to the man beside him and the low thing traveling back, a sound under the organ-quiet that was not a voice and was made of many voices, the sound a room makes when it has understood a thing the speaker has not.

Two of the Academy men looked at the floor. A woman in the family's row turned in her seat. And Cope, up in it, heard the sound and read the sound as the room coming with him, read the turned heads as men leaning to hear, and went on, and gave them the dates.

Anne stood up while he was giving them the dates.

She stood from the pew near the back where she had put herself, apart from the Academy men and apart from him, and she did not hurry and did not stumble and did not look up at him at the front, and she went down the side aisle to the door and out, in her own black, the way a person leaves who has seen the last of a thing and has no more to do in the room.

And the leaving was quiet and was complete and was not a scene because she made it not a scene, one woman walking out of a church while a man talked, and a few near the aisle saw her go and most did not, and Cope at the front, giving the room the seasons the survey crews had been sent west, his back half to the family and his face up in the warmth, did not see her go, and did not mark the door. He gave them the last of it, the strong close he had built, the line about the evidence and the earth come round again at the end the way he brought a thing round.

And he stood a moment in the close of it as though he had given the room the best he had, and he believed that he had, and he sat down among the Academy men, who did not look at him, into a silence he took for the silence that follows a thing well done.

The crowd was aghast and Cope did not know it. He sat in the warmth with the address-sheet on his knee and the church around him appalled and quiet, and he did not

know.

* * *

Marsh spoke last, after all.

He had come in at the side during Cope's address, come quietly into the empty place his standing held for him with the dust of the cab still on him, and whether he had heard all of what Cope said or come in on the end of it no one could tell from him, because nothing of it showed on him when he rose. He rose when they came round at the close to the men of standing and he stood square and gray at the front where Cope had stood, and he did not answer Cope.

He did not look toward the pew Cope sat in and did not bend one word toward the thing that had just been done in the room, and a part of the room braced for him to and let the brace go when it saw he would not. He spoke of museums. He spoke of permanence, of the hall built to outlast the man, of the specimen cataloged and numbered and laid up where it could be found in a hundred years by a student not yet born, of science as a thing that was not the brief loud life of any man who practiced it but the long cold keeping of what those lives turned up.

And he spoke of institutions because institutions were what he had left to speak from, and he said it well in his dry way and it was, every word of it, the answer to Cope that he had said he would not give, made by grammar and not by passion, made by talking only of the keeping in a room where one man had just shown he could not keep himself.

But the room had had enough of the day. Marsh had built the speech to be the steady thing after the unsteady thing and it might have been, on another day, but the appropriation was gone and the men in the room half knew it was gone, and the long car was on the siding for any of them who cared to walk past it, and a thing had cracked under Marsh that morning that did not show on his face and showed, somehow, in the room's patience with him, which was short.

Before he was done the men of the Interior went out, the two who had been over the map with Sternberg, not rudely and not all at once but out, down the side aisle and gone,

with that much of the day still to come and the speaker not finished, and others saw them go and a few more rose and followed, the way men leave a thing when the part of it that mattered to them is over. And Marsh saw them go and did not falter and did not hurry the close and finished the speech he had come to give to a church that was leaving it, and the door at the back of the church kept opening and closing on the spring light while he spoke, and when he was done he sat.

* * *

When it was over the church emptied the way a church empties, slow and from the back, the people standing into the aisles and the talk coming up low among them and the family going out by the side to the carriages, and Cope went out in the middle of it.

He went out talking. He found a man on the steps and then another and the warmth was still up in him, the address gone well in him, and he went down the steps and into the day with all of it behind him as a triumph, and Sternberg, who had got up to go with him as Cope's man went with Cope, came as far as the end of the pew and stopped.

He stopped at the end of the pew and let Cope go up the aisle without him. He did not decide it in any place he could have named. He stood at the end of the pew with the people moving past him toward the door and the light, and he did not move with them, and he did not look up the aisle to where Cope was going and he did not look toward the front where Marsh still sat among the thinning men, and he did not follow either of them out.

He stood still while the church emptied around him and let the two of them go their two ways into the day without him at the shoulder of either, and the stillness was the thing, and it cost him nothing to do, and no one in the church marked it because there was nothing in it to mark, a big man standing a moment longer in a pew while the others filed out.

When most of them were gone he sat back down.

He sat down in the emptying church and the coffin was still at the front where it had stood through the service, plain and closed and waiting on the men who would come for

it, and a caretaker had begun at the far end to take the flowers off the rail and lay them in the crook of his arm, working along the row without hurry, doing a thing he had done many times. The program was in Sternberg's hand, folded once along its fold, and he opened it and read the cover again in the light that came down now through the high plain windows of the Unitarian church, the name and the dates and under them the small line with no border around it. *Be faithful to the evidence.*

And patient with the earth. He read it once more and he folded the program the second time, in half against the first fold, into a small square the size of the things he carried against his chest, and he did not put it in his coat where the other folded things rode, the unopened card and the half page and the letter that had been in the middle place of the coat since Kansas. He opened his shirt at the second button and put the program in against the cloth, against his chest, where it would ride apart from the rest, and he buttoned the shirt over it.

He sat a while longer with the old man's box at the front and the caretaker going down the row with the flowers, and he did not pray over it and did not speak and put nothing on his face, and the box stood closed at the front and the flowers came off the rail one row at a time, and then he got up.

He went out the back way into the spring, where the carriages were going and the men were talking on the steps and Cope was somewhere up the street still telling the day what it had been, and Marsh's empty car was on its siding, and the country that all of it had been about had passed that morning to a map in a back room with neither of their names on it, and Sternberg went down the steps alone and turned west, toward the depot and the chalk, with the line riding against his chest, and he did not look back to see which way either of the two great men had gone.

Chapter 18 — The Blind King

The Texas redbeds, the summer after the funeral

The country was red and ran red to every edge of it, and the heat stood on the red ground without moving and had stood there since before they came and would stand there after. Into the middle of it the two of them had cut a camp that was hardly a camp at all, one wagon and one tent and a fire pit gone gray, with the team hobbled in the one strip of shade a cutbank threw down across the morning. Cope was up before the light as he had always been up before the light, and he was at the face of the bank with the sun not yet over the rim of it, and he was talking.

He talked the way he breathed now, without choosing to, the run of it going out over the empty ground the same as it had gone out over the empty workroom in the spring, and there was no one to take it but Sternberg, who was twenty feet off along the same bank on his knees in the red dirt with a brush in his hand, and who did not take it either.

Cope had the long pick. He stood to the bank with his coat off and his sleeves rolled and the braces showing dark with sweat already, and he swung the pick into the red marl in long strokes that brought the bank down in slabs, and he talked while he swung. He was thinner than he had been in the spring and the cough was still in him and came up between the strokes, and he did not stop for it, he put it down with the back of his wrist and went on. The hand that held the pick had the old ink dark still worked into the knuckle that no season of washing had ever taken out.

He was sixty in the body and forty in the wanting and the two did not agree and he paid the disagreement no mind. He swung the pick and the slabs came down and the dust of them stood up red in the slant light and did not settle. Somewhere in the third or fourth sentence of the morning the name of Marsh came into the talk the way it came into all the talk, not summoned, just arrived, the way a stone in a boot arrives at the place a man cannot help putting his weight.

He had read of the new beast in a journal that had come out to the rail with the last

freight, the great long-necked thing Marsh had stood up in the hall at New Haven and named, and the reading of it had been in him for three weeks now and had not cooled. He told it to the bank again.

He told how Marsh had taken the body of the one dinosaur and the head of another dinosaur off a shelf in another quarry forty miles from the first, and had set the wrong head on the right body and stood the whole made-up thing up in plaster before the public and the press and called it new, called it his, a beast that had never walked the earth in the shape Marsh gave it, because no part of it had ever belonged to any other part of it. Cope's voice climbed on it the way it climbed on everything now.

He said it was the sea-serpent all over again. He said the man had been in the third row on the aisle the night he was laughed down for putting the skull on the wrong end of the swimming-lizard twenty years back, and had asked Leidy the chevron question quiet from his seat, and a friend would not have asked in the room. A friend would have taken him aside after. The man had not taken him aside. The man had asked from the third row and it had come down, and the man had not learned a thing since.

The man had gone right on his whole life setting the wrong heads on the wrong bodies, because the keeping mattered more to him than the truth of the thing kept. A museum was only a great cabinet of wrong heads if the man who filled it could not tell a head from a tail. He brought the pick down hard on the close of it, and a slab the size of a door came off the bank and broke at his feet.

Sternberg flinched.

He did it without looking up and without a sound, the big shoulders going in a half inch the way a man's shoulders go when something is dropped near him, and then they came back and he went on with the brush. He had heard the pick come down and he had heard, under the pick, the small particular sound of something giving that should not have been made to give that fast, and he did not say anything. He had stopped saying anything about the pick some weeks back.

He worked the way he worked now, which was slow, down on the knees with the small tools laid out on a square of canvas at his side in the order he liked them, the brushes

and the awls and the little hammer no bigger than a tack hammer. He took the ground apart a hand's breadth at a time and let it tell him what was in it before he asked it for anything. He had not always worked that way. The field had taught him the rest of it and the years had taught him the slowness, and the slowness was the part Cope could not use and did not pay for and stepped around in his hurry the way a fast man steps around a slow one in a narrow street.

The same freight that brought the journal had brought a government circular, and it had come to the rail post folded in with a map notice and a list of districts to be reported before any private removal. Cope had read it once at the post and laughed without pleasure and put it under a stone so the wind would not take it. They have discovered paper beds now, he had said. The printed lines on the notice ran across the country with the blank confidence of men who would arrive later and possess it anyway. They did not ask whose camp had stood on which ground, or who had named what first, or which of two men in the East the country owed anything to, because the country in the printed lines owed neither of them anything and was not the country Cope was standing on.

And he had gone back to the bank and left the circular under its stone and not spoken of it again except to fold the offense of it into the longer offense that had Marsh's name on it.

* * *

At the noon halt Sternberg brought up the money.

He said it plainly, sitting on the wagon tongue with the bread in his hand and not looking at Cope while he said it.

"The first of the month was four days back," he said. "We had said the first."

He did not raise it to a quarrel. He had learned that the field paid better for plainness than for heat and he kept it plain. There was freight to pay on the chalk crates still sitting at the depot, and a household in Kansas that ate whether the bones came up or not, and he said so, and said he would want the month's pay in his hand before he opened the next bank.

Cope was up and walking the edge of the shade with a biscuit going to crumbs in his hand, already half back at the bank in his mind, and he heard the money come into the talk and his face did what it did, the warmth staying up over the top of a small inward flinch of its own.

“Of course,” he said. “Of course. It is a small thing and it will be seen to.” There was money coming from Philadelphia, he said, on the sale of some duplicates, a draft expected any week, and the moment it came Sternberg would have the whole of it and more. “A man of your parts ought not to have to ask. You know I am good for it.”

He said it warmly and he meant the warmth, and the warmth was not the same thing as the money, and Sternberg knew the difference between them the way he knew rock that was only rock from rock that had once been alive, with his hands, before his mind had to be asked. He put the bread away.

“The bank will keep till the draft comes, then,” he said.

“Now there is no need to take it that way.” Cope had stopped at the edge of the shade. The work could not stop for a draft, he said, the season was short and the country would not hold its dead politely while two men waited on a Philadelphia bank.

Sternberg looked at him a moment across the dead fire and saw what he had been seeing for some weeks, which was a man he had followed up a wall barehanded once and would not follow now. He got up off the wagon tongue and went back to the bank, because the work was the work and the work had never been the thing he held against any of them. He went back on his own account. That was the part that had changed and neither of them said it. Cope counted out a part of it then, bills and then coins, from a thin fold he did not want to open all the way. Sternberg took the part and folded it once into his own book and wrote the figure down before he closed the clasp, and Cope watched the small writing of it and looked away first.

* * *

It was the bank Sternberg worked that gave it up, in the long light of the afternoon, under the brush and not the pick.

He had been a slow hour on a swelling in the red marl, a roundedness in the face of the bank that the rain had just begun to bare, and he had taken the dirt off it the way he took dirt off everything now, a little and a little, until the curve of it stood proud of the wall and he could lay two fingers on it and feel that it ran back into the bank deeper than a season's digging. He sat back on his heels and looked at it.

Then he wet it. He had the canteen at his hip and he poured a little from it into his palm and laid the wet across the bared curve, and the red dust drank it and went dark, and the surface came up under the water the way a face comes up out of deep water, and it was bone, and it was big.

He called Cope over. He called him the way one man calls another to a thing in the ground, without a word in it but the name, and Cope came down the bank at a speed his body should not have given him, and he got down in the dirt beside Sternberg with the breath loud in him, and he put his own hand on it. For a moment the two of them were only what they had been in the beginning, two men at a wall with a great thing coming out of it under their hands.

It rang. Sternberg had set the little hammer to the haft of it to sound the matrix away from the bone, a single tap, and the thing gave back a sound that the red banks had not given them all season, not the dead packed thud of the marl and not the dry click of the small change of the dead, but a low full note that went down into the bone and came back up, a resonance, a thing with a room inside it. Both men heard it, and both men went still on the hearing of it the way men go still in a church when the organ first takes the air.

Cope had heard that note before. He had heard it in Kansas off a paddle the length of a man and off a horned skull the size of a hogshead and off the great forms that had made his name when his name was a thing the whole world said, and the hearing of it now woke in him the oldest part of the wanting, the part that had nothing of Marsh in it and nothing of Philadelphia in it, the part that had stood at the lip of a basin twenty years gone and counted the dead time in the walls and been happy.

The King. He did not say the word. He had carried the word in him for twenty years, the great hunter, the one at the top of all of it, the beast the whole of his system pointed up

toward and had never closed its hand on. The note off the bone had the size of that word in it, and the wanting came up in him whole and young for as long as the note lasted in the air.

Then it was gone and he was a tired man in the dirt looking at a bone, and the looking began.

* * *

They worked it free of the bank together as the light went long, and it was a vertebra, a single segment of the spine, and it came out of the red marl the size of a man's two fists set together and then larger than that as the matrix fell away from it, and it was a strange thing in the hand. Cope had it across both palms in the last of the good light and he turned it, and his mind went over it the way it had gone over ten thousand bones, fast, sure, the whole apparatus of forty years coming up to meet it, the comparisons running. He read it aloud as he read it, because he had never in his life read a bone in silence.

He named the parts of it. He set it against the long-necked forms and it was not those. He set it against the horned forms that had made him and it was not those. He turned it and looked into the broken face of it where the saw of time had cut it across, and what he saw there stopped the running of the comparisons a moment, because the inside of the bone was not solid.

It was chambered. Where he had expected the dense pack of a great weight-bearing thing he found instead an architecture of hollows, thin walls of bone around cells of air, a structure built the way a thing is built that means to be large and light at once. He wet the broken face of it with his thumb dipped in the canteen the way Sternberg had wet the curve of it, and the wet brought the chambering up clear, the fine walls and the open cells, lacework in stone.

He held it up against the red sky and turned it, reading the lightness of it in his two hands and saying the lightness aloud, the air worked all through it, the spongework of it, a thing built large and built hollow both at once, and the reading ran on and did not yet land anywhere, because he had not yet decided what the lightness was for.

Sternberg had the rest of it under his hands while Cope held the one bone to the sky.

He had not stopped working when Cope began to read. He had gone on along the bank from the place the vertebra had come, his fingers reading the marl ahead of the brush, and the ground had gone on giving, a second segment behind the first and the ghost of a third, the line of them running back into the bank in the order they had lain in for all the time there was. Sternberg followed the line with his hands and his eye and did the thing the field had made him able to do, which was to stand the dinosaur up off the line of what was left of it. He did it without meaning to and could not have stopped doing it.

The spine ran so, and a spine that ran so carried a body hung so, and a body hung so went on its hind legs and not its four, balanced forward over the drive of them. The lightness Cope had in his hand was not a weakness in it, the lightness was the whole point of it, the lightness was speed, the lightness was a great thing built to be quick, and a great thing built to be quick was built to be quick after something.

Sternberg knelt in the red dirt with his hand flat on the buried curve of the second segment and saw the dinosaur go, low and fast and forward over the ground that was red now and had been otherwise then, and saw the size of it, and saw what the size of it and the speed of it together could only have been for. He was quiet a moment with his hand on it. Then he said the thing he saw.

He said, “It hunts.”

He said it low and he said it once and he did not turn it into anything. He did not say what it was or what it would be called or what it would mean to the man holding the loose bone of it against the sky, and he did not say the word that Cope had carried twenty years and would not say either, and he did not reach across the small distance between them to take Cope by the sleeve and turn his face down into the line of it in the ground where the thing could still be seen if a man had the eye to stand it up. He said the two words that were the true thing and were also the smallest thing he could be made to say, and he let them go down into the heat between them, and he waited.

Cope did not take it up at first, and so Sternberg laid his hand on the buried line and said the one thing more that was only what the bone said, that it had hunted large, that a man

could read it in the set of it, that the weight left the front of the thing and rode back over the drive of the legs. He pointed where the line ran. He did not say anything past the line.

Cope looked where the hand was and did not see down it. He was a man with a problem of classification in his two hands and the dusk coming and a draft owing in Philadelphia and Marsh's wrong-headed monster standing in plaster in New Haven for the press to wonder at, and into the middle of all of that one of his collectors, a good man, a man with hands, had said a thing about a creature hunting. Cope heard it the way he heard most things now, which was through the run of his own talk, and he answered it out of the talk.

He said yes, very likely a carnivore of some kind, the proportions might bear that out, but a small thing, a light thing, nothing that would signify. He said it was too light. He said a bone with that much air worked into it would never have carried the loads the great beasts carried, that it was porous through and through, a spongework, that the great forms he honored were crowned forms, horned and frilled and armored, and that a king to his mind was a crowned thing. There had come up nothing with this one out of the bank that spoke of a head or a horn or a crown, only a long light hollow-boned segment of a spine. And so he said the other thing, the practical thing, part to Sternberg and part to the bone and part to the forty years.

He said it doesn't fit.

He said it the way a man says a thing has come to him in the wrong size, without grief in it, a practical man finding a practical wrongness. The chambered lightness of it and the no-crown of it were the whole of his objection, and the thing would not go into any of the rooms he had built to keep the great ones in.

The one notable thing the specimen had was the porousness of it, the loose and chambered look of the centrum, and he said he would put a name to the one bone for that. He tried the roots of the name against each other under his breath the way he had built names his whole life, the loose, the spongy, the thin-walled, the vertebra. He got the word and was satisfied with the word and said it aloud once to settle it, Manospondylus, the porous vertebra, and he took it for the record and the type and no

more.

He would not spend a week of a short season on a light hollow-boned thing that did not fit, and he said so, working it aloud as he always worked everything aloud. He would take the one segment and leave the rest of the line in the bank for the weather, because a man chasing the great forms could not stop for a fragment. He wrote the word on a tag in the failing light in the ink-dark hand and tied the tag to the one bone and set the bone in the wagon with the day's other findings, among the things that fit, and the two segments and the ghost of the third he left in the bank where the brush had bared them.

He never once set the bone in his hand against the word he had carried twenty years. The two of them lay in him in different rooms and he did not open the door between them, and no one opened it for him. The dusk came down red on the camp and on the wagon and on the bank with the rest of the dinosaur still in it, and Cope was already talking of the morning.

* * *

He was still talking when he walked away from it.

The light was nearly gone and he had the one tagged bone seen to and the morning planned, a bank two miles up the wash where the journal-reader in him hoped for a horned thing. He turned from the place with the talk still running, telling it now to Sternberg, the plan of the morning and the figure he would put on the duplicates and the letter he meant to write to a man in Washington who would understand, at last, what had been done to him. He walked up out of the cut toward the tent talking, sure that the big collector was at his shoulder where the big collector had been at his shoulder for fifteen years, the half pace back and to the side, Cope's man, and he did not look around to see that he was not.

There was no one at his shoulder. Sternberg had not got up. Cope went on up the slope in the last light with the sentences going out of him into the red dark, the plan and the grievance and the great book that wanted only the plates, and the distance between his voice and the place he had left it grew, and he did not mark the distance growing. The voice went on up the hill and over the rim of the cut and was a while in dying out of the

air, and the last that Sternberg ever saw of him was the dark shape going up the red slope, talking, getting smaller, not looking back.

Sternberg stayed down at the bank in the dark.

He knelt where he had knelt and he laid his hand once more flat on the buried curve of the second segment, the one Cope had left, the cold of the bone coming up through the cooling dirt into his palm, and he was quiet. Then a small thing happened at the corner of his mouth that was not quite a smile, and it was the nearest thing to one his face had made in a long season. He did not say any of the things a man might have wanted said over it. He left it nameless and he did not mourn it and he did not promise it anything large. He said the one small thing, low, to the bone in the ground and to nothing else, the way a man speaks to a thing he means to leave and means to remember.

“You will have to wait a bit longer,” he said.

Then he got up off his knees, and his knees were not young, and he gathered the small tools off the square of canvas in the order he kept them and rolled the canvas and stowed it. He set a damp cloth over the bared line in the bank and weighted the edge of it with a few light stones against the night, and he went and got his own pack and his own bedroll out of the tent without waking anything, and he did not take the wagon and did not take the road the wagon would take in the morning.

He had his own way to go. The chalk was at the depot and the freight wanted paying and the household in Kansas ate whether the bones came up or not, and there was a country west of here that he knew. He settled the pack on his shoulders and felt, through the shirt, against his chest where he had carried it since the spring apart from the older things in his coat, the single folded program with the old man’s plain line on the cover of it, carried and not opened. He set his face to the dark in the other direction from the one the wagon would take, and he walked out of the cut and onto the flat and was gone into the country.

Chapter 19 — The House of Bones

Pine Street, Philadelphia, near the end

The house had been a narrow brick house when Knight last stood in front of it and it was a narrow brick house still, but the windows had gone the color of a thing left too long in the sun and there was a film over the glass that the city threw up onto everything now. And Knight stood on the walk a while before he went up the steps, because he had told himself on the train coming down that he would only look at the front of it and that the looking would be enough.

He had come to put the thing to rest. He had drawn the man's dinosaurs into the world out of nothing but the man's talk and a heap of broken stone, and he had gone away from it that same winter and meant to stay away, and the meaning had lasted barely a month before a letter came in a hand he did not at first know, the letters of it gone shaky and run together, asking him to come, and he had not been able to make himself not come.

He held the card with the number on it close to his face to be sure of the house, near enough that the print stood up black and the rest of the street went soft, because that was how he had read every printed thing since he was a boy with a stone thrown in his eye, and the number on the card was the number on the door, and so he went up.

The bell did not work or no one heard it. The door gave when he tried it. He went in.

The smell met him first, the dry mineral smell of stone that had been a long time out of the ground, with under it the closer smell of a sickroom, of a body kept too long in one set of rooms with the windows down, and over both of them the cold paper smell of a thousand thousand pages that no one had moved in years. The hall had been a hall once. It was a passage now, a single track worn down the middle of what had filled in from both walls, because the walls were not walls any more but shelving and crating run floor to ceiling, and the shelving had filled and the floor in front of the shelving had filled.

And the filling had come out from the sides until what was left to Knight was a path the

width of his shoulders that he had to go down sideways in the dark places with his coat pulled in. There were bones on the shelves and bones in open crates and bones laid out on planks set across two crates to make more shelf, the long limb bones and the blocks of jacketed matrix and the trays of small change with the cotton gone gray, and there were jars. And there were the casts hung on nails, and there were papers, the papers everywhere, tied in bundles and stacked loose and slid down into drifts against the bones, and there was dust on all of it lying even and undisturbed the way dust lies on a thing the hand has stopped reaching for.

Knight went down the path with his hat in his hand. He could hear his own feet. He could hear, somewhere ahead and to the left, the small dry sound of a man breathing who had to think about the breathing.

He found him in the back room that had been the workroom and was now the only room, a man in a low iron bed pushed against the one clear stretch of wall, propped high on bolsters with the journals and the slates and the inkstand laid out on the counterpane within the reach of his right hand. The man was talking when Knight came to the door, low, to no one, the run of it going out into the crowded air the same as it must have gone out for months, and Knight stood in the door and the man heard the floor and turned his head, and it was Cope.

He was very thin. The big head that Knight had drawn a hundred times was the same head and the flesh had gone off it so that the structure of it stood out, the brow and the long jaw and the sockets, and the eyes in the sockets were the eyes Knight remembered, quick, dark, lit from somewhere the body had no more business lighting, and they found Knight in the doorway and knew him at once. The hands on the counterpane were the hands, with the ink worked dark into the knuckles past any washing. He was not yet sixty in years and looked older than any number, and the wanting in the eyes was not old at all.

Knight had thought on the train of the things you say to a man you find like that. He had none of them in his mouth now. He came in over the sill and stood at the foot of the bed and he said the man’s name, and then he found he had nothing after the name, and so he gave him nothing after the name. He had never been able to talk to the man. He had

only ever been able to draw for him.

Cope looked at him a moment with the breath going in and out of him in the careful way, and he did not say it was good of Knight to come and he did not ask after Knight's health or his journey, and he did not say the thing a dying man might be forgiven for saying to the last face that came to him. He looked at Knight and then he looked at the slope-board leaned in the corner with the paper still clipped to it from some other day, and he lifted the ink-dark hand off the counterpane two inches and let it fall back, toward the board, and he said, "Good. Sit there where the light is and draw. I have the new restoration of the amphibian and there is no one to put it down. Sit there."

So Knight sat there and drew. He had told himself the whole way down that whatever he did in this house he would not do that, and now he was doing it inside two minutes of the door, because the man had said draw and the drawing was the one true language the two of them had ever had between them, and because it was easier than the silence, and because it was what he did.

He took the board onto his knee and turned it to the gray window light and got the soft pencils out of his coat and laid the old sheet aside and clipped a clean one, and he held the board up near his face to find the tooth of the paper, and he began to lay in the long lines of a creature that was not in the room and never had been, out of nothing, the way he always had, out of the man's talk.

And the man talked.

* * *

It came up out of him slow at first and then in the old flood, and it was all of it the one subject under the many subjects, which was the wrong that had been done to him, and Knight bent to the paper and let it come over him the way you let weather come over you in a field where there is no shelter.

He had told it so many times that the telling had worn a channel and the water had only to be let into it.

He told how it had begun, the head set on the wrong end of the swimming-lizard and the laughter, and how the laughter had been arranged, how a man does not get laughed at in the journals of a whole profession by accident, how it had been built against him from the start by a man who could not make a discovery to save his life and so had set himself up instead as the keeper of the discoveries of better men, who bought what he could not find and hired what he could not do and then stood in front of the bought and the hired in his frock coat and let the world call it his.

He told how the quarries had been taken from under him, the diggers turned with money, the boxes rerouted at the depots, the wires read before he read them. He told the names of the men who had been turned. He told the years. He had the years exact and he had the sums exact, the cost of a season at Como and the price the other man had paid to spoil it, and the figures came up in the flood as clean as the grievances, because they were the same thing to him, and Knight drew and did not look up and let it run.

He was not raving. That was the thing Knight would not have been able to say to anyone after, the thing there was no drawing of. A man raving you could have pitied straight through and gone home lighter. This was not that. The mind in the wasted head was as fast as it had ever been and faster for the fever in it, and the talk leaped and built and turned a corner you did not see coming and was waiting for you when you came round it, brilliant, the old brilliance that had made men cross rooms to be near him, and every leap of it carried him further into the one place and not one inch toward the door of that place.

He was alive in there. He was more alive in the wrong than most men ever are in anything. He told Knight that history would set it right, that the record was the record and the record was on paper in this house and could not be bought the way men could be bought, that a hundred years on it would be plain to any fool which of the two of them had loved the work and which had loved only the having of it.

And the having always lost in the end, the having was a coffin, you could not take a museum into the ground with you, and here he laughed, a short laugh that turned in him and became the cough, and he put the cough down with the back of the wrist the way Knight had seen him put down everything that interrupted him, and went on.

Knight drew. He drew the amphibian the man had asked for and when that sheet was done he laid it on the bed where the hand could reach it and the hand reached it and the eyes went over it quick and the mouth said yes, yes, the dorsals heavier, and went back to the wrong without stopping, and Knight clipped a new sheet and began again. He held each sheet up close to his face to see it true and the man never remarked on how close he held it, the man had never once in all the years remarked on it, the man had only ever cared that the line was right, and the line was right, and that was the whole of what passed between them and it was enough to both of them and always had been.

He did not say to the man any of the things that were in him. He did not say that he had drawn these dinosaurs and stood them up in the halls of the museums of two cities and watched the crowds come and that the crowds did not know the man's name nor the other man's name nor any name but the names of the dinosaurs. He did not say that he had come down on the train to put it to rest and that there was nothing here to rest, that the man would die still talking and the talk would not have changed by a word.

He did not say that he had looked at the house from the walk and been afraid of it. He looked, and he drew, and he kept the looking and the drawing and let the rest stay down where it was. He was not a man who knew what he knew until his hand had found it on the paper, and his hand was busy with the amphibian, and so he did not yet know the thing about the house that he would know later on the train going home and would carry the rest of his life without ever once saying it plain.

* * *

A door went somewhere in the front of the house and there were feet in the passage that knew the passage, that did not go sideways or slow, and a woman came into the back room with a covered basket on her arm and a way of coming in that took the measure of the room in one pass and set to work on it.

She was past her middle years and plainly dressed and there was nothing in her face of a woman come to a sickbed for love of the one in it. She set the basket on the one cleared corner of the table and took the cloth off it and began to put the things away, the bread and the wrapped meat and the jar, finding the places for them among the slates and the

inkstands without asking where the places were because she had made the places. And she went to the window and tried it and it would not go and she left it, and she came to the bed and looked at the man in it the way a person looks at a chart, and the man did not look at her.

He had gone on talking when she came in and he went on talking now, over her, through her, the flood not troubling to part for her, and she did not wait on the flood. She picked up the brown bottle from the slate-ledge and held it to the window light and saw what was left in it and set it down and took a spoon out of her apron and wiped it on a clean cloth she had brought for the wiping.

“You have not taken it,” she said. Not a complaint. A reading off the bottle. “You will take it now.”

He talked. She got the spoon into the talk the way a person gets a spoon into anything, at the small turn where the breath came, and he took it because the spoon was there and not because she was, and a little of the grievance went down with the medicine and he came back up out of the swallow already three sentences along, telling now about a letter to Washington, a man there who would understand at last what had been done.

And she capped the bottle and set it where her hand would find it next time and moved the bread out of the reach of his elbow and squared the slates and the inkstand back into the order he scattered and she kept rebuilding, and the care of it was real and exact and had nothing in it of tenderness, the way the care of a good nurse has nothing in it that the patient has not earned in some other life than this one.

She turned and saw Knight in the corner with the board on his knee and she knew him, and something went over her face that was not unkindness, that was nearer to a thing remembered from a long way off, and she said, “Mr. Knight,” and he half rose with the board sliding and caught it and stood the awkward way he stood. She looked at him a moment and at the sheets laid on the counterpane and at the man between them talking, and she did not ask him why he had come and she did not tell him to go.

And she did not say any of the things that were standing in the room as plainly as the bones, that she had stopped being the man’s wife a long way back and was only his

nurse now and came because there was no one else and the coming was a duty and not a grief, that she had measured this house and what it cost and had taken herself out of the reach of it and came back only to do the one practical thing. She said none of it. She had never been a woman who said the thing the room already said.

She gathered the cloth off the basket and folded it and put it in the empty basket and took the basket up on her arm. At the door she stopped and looked back, not at the man in the bed who had not once looked at her, but at Knight, and she said, “He will not last the week.” She said it the way she had read the bottle, a fact taken off the surface of a thing, with the consequence of it left standing in the room behind her where she did not have to carry it. “Good day to you, Mr. Knight.”

“Good day,” Knight said, and it came out of him too quiet and a beat too late, the way things came out of him, and she was already gone down the passage with the basket, the feet that knew the way going quick and even back toward the front of the house and the door, and the door, and then the house was only the two of them again and the breathing and the bones.

The man in the bed had not marked her going any more than her coming. He was at the heart of the Washington letter. Knight sat back down and took the board onto his knee and held it up close and found his place on the line.

* * *

In the afternoon the men came for the bones.

There were two of them and then a third, in the rough coats of men who move heavy things for a wage, and they came down the front steps from the street with a flat hand-truck banging and they set up at the door and they had a paper that one of them kept going back to, a list. And they began at the front of the house and worked back, taking the crates that were marked and leaving the crates that were not, and the marks had been made by some other hand on some other day, chalk numbers on the deal boards, and the men read the chalk and took what the chalk told them and stacked it on the truck and ran the truck out to the dray at the curb and came back with the truck empty for more.

They were not rough with the crates. They were not careful with them either. They were men moving goods that had been sold, and the goods happened to be the floor of a man's life, and they did not know that and it would not have changed how they carried them if they had.

The sale had been made in the winter to the great museum in New York, the whole northern half of what the house held, the types and the mounts and the monographs, for a sum, and the sum was thirty-two thousand dollars.

And the man in the bed had told Knight the figure that morning in the flood and told it without grief, the way he told the cost of a Como season, a clean number set among the grievances as proof of something, that the work was worth that to men who knew, that no museum in Philadelphia had found the money and a museum in New York had found it in a week, that the bones would stand in New York under his name where the New Haven man could not reach them or buy them or set the wrong heads on them.

And he had made the selling of half his life into one more move in the long game and could not see that the board had been folded up and put away years ago by larger hands than either of theirs.

Now the men carried it out past the foot of his bed, crate after crate, down the worn path that got wider behind them as the walls gave back their freight, and the gray light came further into the passage than it had come in years as the shelves emptied, and the man watched it go and talked it out the door. He named the crates as they passed. He knew every one by the shape of it going by, the dorsals of this, the great limb of that, the skull he had stood up against all comers in the year his name was a thing the world said, and he sent each of them off with a sentence, where it was found and what it had cost the other man to fail to find it first.

And there was no mourning in him, there was the old triumph, he was loading his evidence onto the wagons of the men who at last had paid him what he was worth, and Knight drew and watched the crates go by over the top of the board and did not say what he saw, which was a house being emptied around a man who thought he was being proven.

One crate going by was a small one, half full, and the men had it open to lay another thing in on top before they nailed it, and in the bottom of it among the cotton was a single broken segment of a spine, a vertebra the size of two fists, and it had a tag on it tied in a dark hand. The saw-cut face of it where it had been parted showed an inside that was not solid but built in fine walls around cells of air, a light thing, a porous thing, lying in the cotton waiting to be boxed and carried out with the rest.

And the man in the bed sent it off with no sentence at all because he did not see it go, it went by under his eye among a hundred better things and he was telling Knight about New Haven, and Knight saw it for the half a moment it was in the light and did not know what he was seeing, only that it was a strange light-boned thing among the heavy ones. And then the men laid a slab of matrix in on top of it and the cotton came up around it and they nailed the lid down over it and carried it out to the dray, and it was gone with the others up the street, and no one in the house had said a word over it, and the door at the front banged in the cold and banged again.

By the dusk the front half of the house stood empty and swept of everything but the dust-lines where the crates had been, long pale rectangles on the boards like the marks of a tide gone out, and the men folded their list and took their pay from a clerk who had come at the end with a leather folder, and they went, and the dray went, and the house that had been packed to the ceilings was a thin house again with a path down the middle of nothing, and the man in the bed in the back room talked on into the emptied dark as though the talk were still falling on the bones, and for all that changed in him it was.

* * *

The lamp had to be lit. Knight lit it and brought it near and went on, because the man would not hear of stopping, and in the lamp the wasted head threw its shadow up the bare wall behind the bed where the shelves had been, and the man came round at last, by his own road, out of New Haven and the museum and the thirty-two thousand, to the brain.

He had been a long time getting to it and when he got to it he was glad, Knight could hear the gladness, the gladness of a man laying down the last and best card of a hand he

had been holding through a long night. He said it had come to him, the way the true things came, all at once and entire. He said the quarrels of living men proved nothing because living men could always be talked down or bought off or outlived, and he was being outlived, he knew it, he was not a fool, and a thing that cannot be settled in life must be settled by what is left.

He said the head was where it lived, all of it, the speed and the seeing and the making, the thing that told one man's work from another man's having, and the head could be weighed. He said he would give his.

He would set it down in his will in plain words, that when he was done with it his skull was to go to the men of science to be measured, the capacity of it, the size of the seat of the thing, and that the New Haven man should be asked, should be dared, to do the same, to lay his head on the scale beside it and let the figures speak, the one true comparison there could ever be between them, made of bone, past all the buying, where the better man would show at last in the one place a man could not hire another to be larger for him.

He was delighted with it. He lay back into the bolsters with the thing said and the delight on him was the delight of a boy, and he turned the dark quick eyes on Knight to see it land, and it was not the face of a man making peace with his end. It was the face of a man who had found one more move with the board already gone, who would carry the rivalry past the grave on the strength of his own skull because the rivalry was the last warm thing in him and he would not let it cool while there was any part of him left to burn it in.

He asked Knight did he not think it was sound, was it not the only honest way to have it out at last, and Knight said, from behind the board, that it was a remarkable idea, which was the truest thing he could find that was not a wound, and the man took it for agreement and was satisfied, and went on to the wording of it, how it must be put so the other man could not weasel from the dare.

And Knight drew, and the lamp burned, and the dare went up into the cold air of the emptied house and there was no one in the house to take it but a man with a pencil who could not have weighed a thing in his life, who saw forms and surfaces and the strain in

a body and the line of a thing, and not the inside of any head at all.

* * *

Knight did not mark the moment the talk stopped.

That was the thing of it, after. He had drawn through the talk so long that the talk had become a part of the lamplight and the cold and the dust-smell, a weather he worked inside of, and you do not mark the moment the rain stops while you are bent to a thing, you only know after a while that the sound that was on the roof is off the roof. He worked a sheet to its finish and laid it on the counterpane for the hand to take, and the hand did not take it.

He clipped another and laid in the long bones of it and brought it up close to his face to find the line and worked it down and laid it on the bed, and that one too lay where he put it. He had filled the counterpane with the day's work and none of the last of it had been reached for and none of it remarked, and he came up at last out of the drawing the way a man comes up out of deep water, slow, and into a quiet that he understood without yet understanding it, and he saw that the slates and the inkstand sat where the woman had squared them and that the hand had not scattered them in hours.

He set the board aside and stood. He went to the head of the bed. He had to go close to see, he always had to go close, and he went closer than another man would have had to, down near the wasted face with the lamp at his shoulder, near enough that the breath would have touched his own face if there had been breath, near enough to read the thing the way he read print, the eyes part open and gone dull as glass that no one is behind, the jaw fallen the small distance a jaw falls, the chest under the counterpane neither rising nor making to rise.

And so close to it that he could not for a moment make it large enough to believe, the way a thing held too near the eye will not resolve, and then he stood back the half step that let it resolve, and it resolved, and the man was dead.

Knight stood and looked at him a while in the lamplight. He did not say anything because there was no longer the one person he had ever said anything to in this house,

and there had never been anyone else. He did not close the eyes because he did not think to and would not have known he had the right. He did not go to the door and call down the passage because there was no one in the passage and the woman had said the week and meant it and would come when she came.

He felt the thing in him that a man feels and he did not look at it, he was not a man who looked at the things in him, he was a man who looked at things on paper, and after a while he turned from the bed and went back to the board.

He finished what he had been drawing. The line of it was not done and his hand knew where the line wanted to go and he let the hand take it there, the last of the long bones of a creature that was not in the room and never had been, and he worked it to the place where it was right and held it up close and saw that it was right. And then he gathered the sheets off the counterpane from around the dead man, carefully, in their order, and he gathered the sheets off the floor and the board, and he squared the stack the way the woman had squared the slates, and he put the soft pencils away in his coat.

He folded the slope-board and leaned it in the corner where it had stood. He took up the stack of his sheets and his hat. He put on his hat. He went out of the back room and down the worn path through the emptied front of the house where the dust-lines lay pale on the boards, and he went out the door into the cold street and pulled the door to behind him, and he went down the steps and along the walk toward the station the way he had come, with the drawings under his arm, and he did not look back at the house.

He did not stop on the walk. He did not, that anyone could have seen who watched him go, react at all. He had come to put a thing to rest and the thing was not at rest and never would be and he was going home, and what he carried out of that house under his arm was the only thing he had ever been able to make in it, and he carried it level and did not let it bend in the wind, and he went.

* * *

In New Haven, two springs on, the room was warm and the room was in order.

It was a large room in a large house and the lamps were trimmed and the fire was kept,

and the bed in it was a wide bed with the linen smooth and turned, and the man in the bed lay propped against pillows that had been set right by a hand that knew how to set them, and on the table to the right of the bed the papers stood in their stacks squared to the table's edge. And on the table to the left of the bed the papers stood in their stacks squared to the table's edge, the correspondence on the one side and the proofs on the other, each held down against the draft by a stone, the stones chosen, and a pen laid straight across an inkstand that had been filled that morning.

Nothing in the room had drifted. Nothing in the room had filled in from the walls. The shelves held what the shelves were meant to hold and the floor was the floor.

Once in the long afternoon he had spoken, low, not to the nurse and not to the room but to the order of it, and it was a small dry thing about the papers, that the proofs were not to be set among the letters and that nothing was to go onto the answered side until it had been copied out fair, and the nurse had said yes and had moved nothing because there was nothing to move, and he had heard the yes and was satisfied, and that was the last of the talking. The instruction stood on in the room after the voice that gave it had stopped, the way the chosen stones stood on the stacks, holding in place a thing that would not have drifted if no hand had ever held it down at all.

The man was old and very ill and lay still, and he had been still a long time, and the great catalogs of his work stood about him in the room and in the rooms beyond it and in the halls of the building across the green that bore another man's name carved over the door but held his life's whole gathering inside it, ordered, labeled, numbered, tended, the thousands of them, the monsters he had drawn up out of the western ground and brought east and named and set in their drawers in their sequence where they would stay after him exactly as he had left them because he had built the place that would keep them and had seen to it that the keeping did not depend on him.

They did not need him now. That had been the whole of the building of it, that in the end they would not need him, and they did not, and he lay among them in the warm ordered room and they were perfectly tended and would go on being perfectly tended, and there was that much of him that would not stop.

A nurse sat by the bed in a chair set square to the wall. She had the watch a nurse keeps,

which is not a grief, and she rose at the times she rose and did the things she did and sat again, and the room stayed as the room was.

The breath of the man on the bed had gone long and far apart, and she marked it, and she did not wake the house because there was nothing in the waking of the house that the house could do. She sat and she watched the counterpane, and the fire settled in the grate with a small sound and was built up by no one because she did not leave the bed now, and the papers stood squared on the right and squared on the left, and the stones held them, and somewhere out past the green the drawers held their thousands in the dark in their order.

She watched him take a breath and let it go, and she waited the long time for the next, and the next came, shallow, and she waited again, and the room was very quiet and very warm and entirely in order, and she waited, and after a while she understood that she was not waiting any more. She looked at the small clock on the mantel and noted the hour to set it down later in the book where such hours were set down. She did not say anything either.

There was no one in the room to say it to but the man, and the papers, and the stones that held them, and out beyond the wall the monsters in their drawers that did not need telling, that had never needed telling, that would lie numbered in the dark long after the last of the men who had quarreled over them had been carried out of his ordered or his crowded rooms and put in the one plain box that holds a man whatever he has gathered, and would lie there still.

Chapter 20 — The Last Dinosaur

Hays, Kansas, the 1920s

The telling ended the way a long road ends, not with a wall but with the road simply not going on. The two men were dead. The painter said so plainly, one and then the other, in order, the way you would read names off a list, and then there was nothing more to say about them, and the room came back and stayed back.

The wind was at the seams of the building. The fixture buzzed. The two animals fought on the wall over the low rise of ground.

The old man was on the bench. He had been there a long time. He sat with his hat in his hands and his eyes on the painting, and the thing that had broken open in him hours before had not closed, but it had stopped widening, and a man can live in that. He looked at the two animals the way you look at a window you have passed every day for years and have only now stopped at.

He had bought the painting in the spring. A dealer in Denver had written him about a large early canvas, water-marked at one corner, artist of some standing, a battle piece, a fair price for the size, sitting in a warehouse in Brooklyn NY. He had not gone to see it. He had wired the money and signed the bill of lading when the crate came down off the train, and the name on the invoice had meant something to him and nothing, the way a name will when you have heard it across a life and never stood next to it.

He had pried the crate himself in the unfinished room of the building his son had got the town to put up, the building that was going to carry the family name over its door whether he liked the look of that or not. He had hung it himself, on the long wall, with a borrowed level and a boy holding the bottom corner. He had stepped back and thought, the animals are good, he has got the weight of them right, the way they carry their own size. He had not looked at the ground they stood on. He had not looked at what lay between them.

He looked now.

The skull lay between them as it had lain on the wall for months while he walked under it and did not see it. A long skull, flattened, cracked through. He knew the kind. He had pulled its like out of more than one bank with his own hands, brushed the marl off the broad bill of it, said the soft name a man says to a thing he is glad to find. He knew the rise of ground too, now, knew it the way you know a face in a crowd a half second before you can place it and then cannot unplace it.

He looked at the animal driving and the animal giving way, and the names came up under the paint without his asking, and he sat very still, because he had hung his own account on the wall of the room that would bear his name, and he had done it without knowing, and he had walked under it for months, and it had been waiting for him to be told the rest before it would let itself be seen.

The painter had come away from the canvas. He stood now a few feet off, the cloth folded once in his hand, his ruined eyes turned in the old man's direction.

"Charles Hazelius Sternberg," he said.

He said it without surprise, the way you say a name you have known the whole time and were waiting for permission to use. The name did not echo. It entered the room and found the man already standing inside it. It did not enlarge him. It only took away the last courtesy of being unnamed.

Sternberg did not deny it. He turned the hat once in his hands.

"You knew," he said.

"I know the colors," the painter said. "I told you that. I know the colors with my eyes shut." It was not an answer and it was the only answer he gave.

Sternberg rose. This time the bench did not scrape. He took up his hat and crossed to the long wall with the slow economy of a man who had measured the room many times and no longer needed to look down. He stopped before the painted skull.

The painter remained where he was.

Sternberg looked at the two animals. He named the driving one, the forward weight, the open jaws, the body caught in its own force.

“Cope,” he said.

Then the other, the one giving way.

“Marsh.”

No triumph entered either name. No accusation. They were placements, like labels put back where they belonged after years in the wrong drawer. He raised one hand toward the painted crack and did not touch it, then let it fall again.

“The break is Como,” he said.

“One of the breaks,” the painter said, and did not deny the rest.

Sternberg looked from the mural to the long case under it, low and glass-topped, and back.

“This is my room,” he said.

It was not a claim of possession. It was inventory.

“The museum,” the painter said.

“The room. The cases. The dinosaur. The boys put my name where donors like names to go. That does not make the things answer to it.”

The painter’s head turned a little farther. He did not smile, or if he did there was no comfort in it.

“No,” he said.

* * *

For a while they did not speak, and the not-speaking was not empty.

“History prefers sides,” the painter said at last, half to the canvas. “It likes heroes. It likes villains.”

“That makes it easier,” Sternberg said. He said it as correction, not agreement.

“It does.” The painter found the driving animal’s eye with his face an inch from the paint, and lost it, and found it again. “Remembering it the way it happened is harder.” He drew his face back from the canvas, the half-step a man takes when the thing will not come clear no matter how near he brings it.

Sternberg looked at his hands, open on the hat in his lap.

“You kept painting,” he said.

“I didn’t know what else to do.” The painter said it with no plea in it. “I painted them after they were dead. I painted this one I don’t know how many times, smaller, larger, this one is the largest. I would think it was finished and then I would be at it again. A man told me once that was grief and I let him think so because it was easier than the other word.” He stopped. “It was not grief.”

“Some of us kept writing,” Sternberg said.

The painter waited.

“I wrote two books.” Sternberg turned the hat. “About the life. The collecting, the camps, the country. Good country, told well, I think. A man could read both of them cover to cover and come away thinking it had been a fine thing to be part of, all of it, the whole of it.” His voice did not rise. “I knew what I was leaving out while I left it out. I told myself I was sparing the dead. The dead don’t need it.” He was quiet. “It kept me moving. Thirty years. You write the part you can stand and you put your name on it and you send it off, and there is the next season’s work and the boys to feed, and the part you can’t stand waits. It is very patient. I did not know how patient until I walked into a room and hung it on the wall.”

“You stayed,” the painter said.

“I tried to.”

“Then you did,” the painter said. “Most didn’t.”

Sternberg said nothing to that. He would not take it. It was held out to him, the small mercy in it, the suggestion that staying was something, and he would not close his hand on it. He let it sit in the air between them until it was only air.

* * *

“There is one more,” the painter said. “If you will have it. It is not theirs. It is yours.”

And he told it, in the easy far-off voice, the way he had told all of it, and the room went out from under them one last time, not backward into the war now but sideways, into a dry hill in another state in a later year, where there was no rivalry left to lose and a man was on his knees in the dirt doing the only thing he had ever fully known how to do.

* * *

It was August and the hill had no shade on it. Sternberg was past sixty and his knees were gone and he worked on a folded sack to spare them and it did not spare them. His sons worked the slope above and below him, the three of them spread along the bone the way a family spreads along a thing too big for one.

They had found it in July. A duckbill, lying on its side the way it had lain down to die in some shallow water a world ago, and the water had done the rare kind thing and laid fine mud over it before the air could get it, and the skin had gone to stone with the animal still in it. Not a skeleton. A body. The hide pebbled and seamed down the flank, the pull of the dried neck, the webbing of one hand spread open against the rock.

You did not hurry a thing like that. There was no hurrying it that did not also destroy it.

He worked with the small tools. A brush first, always the brush, the matrix lifted away a grain at a time so the skin came up under it whole. Where the brush was too strong he used a finer one. Where the rock held he wet it and waited, and the waiting was the

work, and the boys knew not to ask him to stop waiting. He marked each section before he touched it. He soaked the strips and laid the plaster and built the jacket out around the block in good thick bands and let it cure, and only then did they cut under it, slow, with the long bars, four hands easy on the bar and no man putting his back into it at once.

The money was not there. It was never there. The season had cost more than the season had, the way it always did, and the men in the East who would buy the thing had to be written to and waited on, and the letters came back asking what was the hurry and naming a smaller figure than the last letter. There was a claim on the land that was not clean. There were other parties who had heard, the way they always heard, that the Sternbergs had found something with skin on it, and that summer two men came out from the land office or near enough to it, in a hired rig, in town shoes, and stood at the top of the hill with their hands on their hips and looked down at the slow careful work and did not like the speed of it.

One of them came down the slope sideways, minding his shoes.

He said they understood there was a question on the title. He said the simplest thing, for everyone, would be to lift what was loose and settle the rest later. He said a man could take the good piece, the head, the head was the thing collectors wanted, take the head out clean today and the matter of the rest could wait on the lawyers. He said it reasonably. He said it twice, in slightly different words the second time, the way a man does when he can see he is not being heard and has decided the trouble is the hearing.

Sternberg did not get up. He had a strip of soaked sacking across his palm and he laid it where it went before he answered, and smoothed it, and only then sat back on his heels.

“You’d take the head,” he said.

“The head’s the value. Everybody knows that. You’d thank me in a year.”

“And the rest of it. The skin. The hand.” Sternberg looked down the long jacketed block to where the spread hand was still in the rock under three inches of plaster. “You’d break it at the neck to get the head out today.”

“It breaks where it breaks. That’s the nature of the business.”

Sternberg was quiet a moment. And for one half of one second, old now and tired, he heard the man out and thought how much lighter the wagon would be with only the head in it. Then he put the thought down where it belonged.

“Enough,” he said.

He did not say it loud. He said it the way you say a word to a horse that has had enough rope. He said it to the man and he said it to the work and he said it to the part of himself that had heard the man out, to the letters and the figures and the town shoes at the top of the hill. He put his hand flat on the cured plaster the way a man puts his hand on the shoulder of someone he is keeping behind him.

“It comes out whole,” he said, “or it stays in the ground and the ground can have it. We are not breaking it for your hurry. Mark that block, George. We’ll cut under it in the morning when the plaster’s hard. Nobody puts a bar to it tonight.”

The man went back up the hill in his town shoes. The rig went off down the wash trailing its dust. They never came again, or if they came it was after, when it no longer mattered, and the family was gone west with the thing whole in its crates.

It took the rest of the season. It came out whole. The skin, the seams, the open hand. He did not stand over it when it was loaded and say what it was or what it had cost. He checked the bracing on the crates and signed where you sign and rode in the wagon with his hand resting on the boxed weight of it the whole jolting way to the rail, the way you ride with your hand on the weight of a thing you have brought up out of the earth without breaking, which is the one thing a man in that trade can do that nothing afterward can take back from him.

* * *

The hill went out. The room came back, and stayed.

The case was in front of him, low and long, the glass catching the bad overhead light. In

it lay the thing he had brought up off that hill, the duckbill in its rock, the skin gone to stone and holding, the open hand pressed against the matrix. It had been to the East and been bought and been sold and had come at last, by the long accidents that move such things, to the room with his name going over the door, and it lay there now a few feet under the painting, the one clean thing under the other thing, and he sat between the two of them and did not pretend that the one made up for the other.

It did not make up for it. He knew that the way he knew the weight of a bar. The skull on the wall was still cracked. The country he had walked into as a boy had been quarried out and shipped East in crates and a good part of it ground to gravel in the hauling, and he had been there, and he had carried crates. The body under the glass had survived because enough hands had slowed down when speed would have been easier. He was allowed to keep that. It was a small thing to be allowed and it was his and he kept it.

He took the note out of his breast pocket.

It was folded small and worn soft at the creases from years of folding, the paper gone the color of the matrix. He had carried it since the funeral, apart from the older papers he no longer needed to touch. He opened it on his knee and the hand he opened it with was steady, steadier than it had been in months, and he read the one line on it that he did not need to read because he had it by heart, and then he rose, slowly, his knees taking the rise in stages, and he stepped to the case and laid the open note on the glass above the boxed weight of the mummy where the light could reach it.

Be faithful to the evidence, and patient with the earth.

He stood over it a moment. The painting was at his back. He did not turn to it.

Then he took the note up off the glass and folded it again along its soft creases, once and again and again, and put it back in his breast pocket over his heart, because it was his and the room was not the place for it and he was not done carrying it, and he was not going to leave it behind to be tagged and filed by people who would not know what it was.

He put his hat on.

The painter was not where he had been. The old man did not look for him. The room held what it held, the painting on the long wall and the case under it and the bad light and the wind that could not get in, and it would go on holding them after, with or without the man who had stood near the canvas all those hours finding the colors by heart.

Sternberg crossed the floor. At the door he paused, not to look back, only because the latch was stiff and a man pauses for a latch. He worked it open. The prairie was out there going gold in the late light, flat to the edge of the world, the country that had been here before any of them and would be here after them all.

He went out, and he did not look back, and the door settled shut behind him, and the two animals went on fighting over the broken skull in the dark, and the thing he had brought up whole lay quiet under them in its glass, and the wind kept on at the seams of the building, the way it would.

Epilogue — After Dinosaurs

The order came down in the spring that the long room on the ground floor was wanted for the mineral cases, and two men were sent up from the basement with a ladder and a roll of brown paper to take the painting off the wall.

It had been there a long time. The men were not told how long and did not ask. One held the ladder and the other went up it and got the top corners free of the cleats, and they walked the canvas down between them the way you walk down anything large that is not quite stiff, talking about the hold and not about the thing in their hands.

“You have it.”

“I have it. Bring it left.”

It was big and it had gone dark with its years on the wall, the varnish ambered in the low corners where the bad light never reached. There were two animals on it, fighting, or the younger man supposed it was fighting, locked together over a hump of ground. A long pale shape lay between them that he took for a rock. He had no opinion about any of it. It was a wall’s worth of canvas and it was coming down and his hands were full.

They laid it face up across two trestles and looked at it the length of time it takes to decide a thing, which was no time at all.

“Off the old natural history floor,” the older man said. “Goes down as one oil. Large. Subject, animals.” He had a board with a list clipped to it and he wrote while he talked. “Artist.”

“There’s a name in the corner.”

The older man bent and read it and could not place it and wrote it the way it was spelled, which was near enough.

“Then artist as marked,” he said. “Roll it paint-in. Mind the cracked corner.”

They rolled it from the bottom, the two animals going in on themselves and the ground closing over them and the pale shape between them going last, and they tied the roll in three places and pasted a tag to the paper with a number off the list. The number meant the third rack on the north wall of the basement, where the light did not go and the wind off the prairie came in at the foundation and was warm by the time it got that far down.

There was a case under where the painting had hung, low and long with a glass top, and the list had a line for that too. In it lay a slab of stone the color of old bread with an animal pressed into it on its side, the skin gone to rock but holding, the seams down the flank, one hand spread open against the matrix. It had never been given a card. The younger man wiped the glass with his sleeve out of habit and looked in at it.

“What’s this one go down as.”

The older man came and looked. “Fossil, mounted, in case. One.” He wrote it. “Skin on it. You don’t see that.” He said it the way a man says a thing is a long way to the next town, as a fact about distance and nothing else, and went back to his board. “Leave the case. We’ll send the hand truck for it.”

They carried the rolled painting out between them and down the stairs that took the corner badly, and stood it on its end in the third rack against the others already there, and the men went back up for the case and brought it down on the truck and set it on the floor at the end of the rack because there was no shelf that would take its length. Then they were done, and they went to their dinner.

The card by the door had said Dinosaur Room. Someone took it out of the brass holder and there was nothing yet to put in its place, so the holder stood empty by the door for a while.

The mineral cases came in over the next week, tall ones with good new glass, and the room filled up again with quartz and lead ore and a meteorite the size of a loaf, and people came and stood in front of those. On the long wall where the painting had hung there was a clean rectangle, paler than the rest of the wall, where the paint had been kept off the light all those years. A man with a brush and a bucket painted the whole wall one even color in an afternoon, and after that there was no rectangle, and the wall was

only a wall.

The name the family had put over the door stayed over the door. It was a good name for a building and it held the roof up the same as any other.

Down in the basement the prairie wind came in warm at the foundation and went along the north rack and did not stir anything, and the roll stood on its end in the dark with the two animals inside it still going at each other over the broken thing between them, and the long case lay on the floor at the end of the row with the animal in it that still had its skin, and the dark held them both the same, and the building went on holding the dark, and aboveground the room was full of people who had come to see the rocks.

———————

Faithful to the Evidence

A Note on the History

“Be faithful to the evidence, and patient with the earth.”

Joseph Leidy says those words in this novel. So far as we know, he never said them in life.

We wrote the sentence. We did not invent the belief.

The line distills the Leidy we found in the historical record: exacting in observation, cautious in claim, generous in scientific practice, and far less willing than the men who followed him to turn natural history into personal combat. We allowed that distilled belief to become the moral backbone of this story. Because the words are ours, they are also the first invention we owe the reader.

The Bone Wars and the lives of Cope and Marsh is one of the most interesting periods in American paleontology. It is easy to make Cope into a misunderstood hero and Marsh into a cartoon villain. Neither are true. Our aim in writing *After Dinosaurs* was to be faithful to the historical figures without pretending that a novel is a transcript of their lives. We have done our best to honor the true lives of the historical characters. We did not rescue these people from their failures, reduce them to those failures, or give them modern explanations for themselves. We kept the documented discoveries, ambitions, humiliations, institutions, relationships, and broad chronology as our bedrock. We reconstructed dialogue and interior life. We compressed time. We joined events that occurred apart. In a few places, we moved a person, reassigned a mechanism, or created an encounter so the human consequence of the documented history could be carried through the story.

Fidelity in historical fiction cannot mean that nothing is invented. It must mean, at minimum, that invention is not allowed to masquerade as evidence. What follows is an account of the book’s principal liberties.

Leidy’s Rules

Joseph Leidy was a real and foundational American scientist. His influence on Edward Drinker Cope, Othniel Charles Marsh, and the emerging study of American fossils is historical. “Leidy’s rules,” as the novel presents them, are our distillation of his scientific character rather than a documented code.

The sentence “Be faithful to the evidence, and patient with the earth” is invented. So are its use in Leidy’s funeral service, its appearance on the folded program, the funeral remarks built around it, and Sternberg’s preservation of that paper through the rest of his life. The funeral scene is a dramatic construction. It is intended to express what we believe Leidy’s example meant to the story, not to report words spoken at his funeral.

Conversations, Thoughts, and Private Conduct

Unless a passage is identified as coming from a letter, publication, memoir, or other surviving record, the dialogue in this book is reconstructed. The same is true of private thoughts, gestures, silences, motives, and scene-by-scene reactions.

The emotional and moral readings of Cope, Marsh, Sternberg, Knight, Reed, Leidy, and the other historical figures are interpretations grounded in the record. They are not documentary findings. We have tried to extrapolate from what these people did, wrote, valued, repeated, avoided, and became. The resulting people belong to the novel even where the evidence beneath them belongs to history.

Knight and Cope

Charles R. Knight and Edward Drinker Cope did work together near the end of Cope’s life. Cope engaged Knight to model and depict prehistoric animals, and Knight’s art helped give living form to Cope’s ideas.

The Philadelphia visit that opens the historical narrative is a reconstruction. Its setting draws from the documented condition of Cope’s home and collections late in his life, but the conversation, Anne Cope’s participation, the private exchanges, and the particular objects passed between Knight and Cope are dramatized. Knight’s admiration

for Cope and the later burden the novel gives that admiration are our interpretation.

Europe, Friendship, and the First Fracture

Cope and Marsh both studied in Europe and were genuinely friendly before their rivalry. The novel compresses their European years into a shared sequence and reconstructs their conversations, travel, encounters with collections, and invocations of Leidy. The precise itinerary and fellowship depicted should not be read as a day-by-day historical account.

The New Jersey marl-pit dispute and Cope's reversed reconstruction of *Elasmosaurus* are real parts of the history, but the novel brings separate pressures into a concentrated dramatic movement. The private exchanges are invented, and historical accounts do not agree in every detail about who first recognized Cope's anatomical error or how the correction unfolded. The book adopts one story arrangement; it does not claim to settle that dispute.

Sternberg

Charles Hazelius Sternberg was a real fossil collector whose long career crossed the age of Cope and Marsh and continued far beyond it. His formal work for Cope began in 1876. The novel places him peripherally in earlier events so that the reader can experience the Bone Wars through one continuous life. Those early appearances are a deliberate compression.

Sternberg wrote extensively later in life and we relied upon these writings in understanding his beliefs and internal tribulations. Sternberg's movement from wonder, through complicity and silence, toward a slower and more careful method is the novel's interpretation of his life. His exact witnessing of the central destruction at Como, his private reckonings with Cope and Marsh, his departure from Cope, and his possession of Leidy's funeral program are dramatized.

The parlor transaction—in which he breaks an exceptional fish-within-a-fish fossil to satisfy a buyer—is invented. It condenses the real financial pressure on commercial collectors and the compromises created when scientific objects must also be sold. We

have found no evidence that this particular specimen, buyer, or act existed.

Como Bluff and the Destruction

Como Bluff was real, as were the secrecy, surveillance, competing crews, damaged excavations, filled-in sites, and reports that fossils were destroyed or concealed to keep them from a rival. William Harlow Reed was a real collector associated with Marsh's Como operations. Charles H. Sternberg worked for Cope, and Cope's side did obtain material from the region. Cope visited his Como quarries in 1879.

The novel concentrates that scattered and sometimes disputed record into a sustained confrontation. It places Cope's real presence at the exact point of the decisive escalation and brings the rival operations into a degree of prolonged direct proximity that the surviving evidence does not establish scene by scene.

The blast, the sledgehammer, the buried skeleton, the timing of the acts, and the exact chain of command are dramatic reconstructions. They are meant to embody documented practices of destruction and denial, not to claim that the climactic sequence occurred exactly as written. Reed reported destroying remaining bones to keep them from Cope, but the novel's particular scene and mechanism are not documentary reconstruction. The book does not depict Cope as personally swinging the sledgehammer; it assigns him responsibility through rhetoric, permission, and proxy. Reed's broader role as Marsh's enforcer is a concentration of function. His specific orders, actions, and dialogue in the climax are not documented.

The King and *Manospondylus*

Cope named *Manospondylus gigas* in 1892 from fragmentary vertebrae. Its later relationship to *Tyrannosaurus rex* belongs to a history Cope did not live to know.

The "King" is a narrative thread created for this novel. Cope's intuition that a supreme carnivore was waiting to be recognized, Sternberg's response to the bones, and Cope's rivalry-distorted failure to understand what stood before him are inventions built around the real specimen and Cope's documented appetite for discovery. The chapter should not be read as a historical claim that Cope nearly recognized or named *Tyrannosaurus*

rex.

The Dossier and the End of the War

Cope's campaign against Marsh and John Wesley Powell, the use of documents and press exposure, the resulting institutional scandal, Cope's financial decline, and the late isolation of both Cope and Marsh are grounded in history. The novel compresses the gathering, release, sequence, and personal transmission of the dossier. Private confrontations and motives are reconstructed.

Click and Other Composite Figures

Ephraim "Click" Tolliver is fictional. He is a composite telegraph operator created to carry the practical language of wire, rail, money, speed, and rumor through a conflict whose famous participants often experienced one another through systems and intermediaries.

Some minor laborers, railroad workers, clerks, household figures, and field hands are also invented or composite. They give the work, danger, and consequence of the Bone Wars a human scale. A historical name elsewhere in the book does not mean that the person's dialogue or presence in every depicted scene is documented.

The Mummy

The extraordinary duck-billed dinosaur mummy discovered by Sternberg and his sons in Wyoming in 1908 is real. It was sold to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where it remains. The novel reconstructs the excavation in order to show the patient method Sternberg practiced later in life.

Its placement in the Hays museum frame is fictional.

The Museum, the Painting, and the Final Meeting

The museum frame is invented. We know of no meeting in Hays between the elderly Sternberg and Charles R. Knight like the one depicted here.

Knight’s great canvas, the two animals fighting over the broken skull, the painted crack, the canvas’s history of neglect and recovery, its function as Knight’s private penance, and its eventual removal into storage are all fictional. So are Sternberg’s ownership of the painting, the conversation conducted before it, and the uncertainty surrounding Knight’s presence in the room.

Knight and Sternberg were real. Knight’s failing eyesight, Sternberg’s survival into old age, and the material legacy both men left behind gave us the human ground on which to imagine their final encounter. The encounter itself belongs wholly to the novel.

Our Standard

We made these choices to preserve truths that a chronology by itself might not carry: that the rivalry operated through workers and institutions as well as famous men; that destruction of evidence is irreversible; that care is expressed through method; and that a person may learn without being absolved.

Those are interpretations. The events and people that support them are history. Where the two differ, the reader deserves to know.

We do not ask this note to make the novel innocent of invention. We ask it to make the invention visible. Where the evidence is uncertain, narrative confidence must not be mistaken for historical certainty.

Thank You,

Robert A. Chamberlin

Oh one more thing; Robert A Chamberlin is fictitious. Many worked on this novel none of them named Robert A Chamberlin