HE WAS COMING FOR ROCK AND DISNEY. My instructions were to prepare the Mickey room, and because Harvey sensed a chance to dump the Hendrix Strat, polish and tune it and prime the amp. The millionaire’s strums should sound just like Jimi’s.

On the day of the visit, the four of us—Harvey and I, Paul and his own assistant—toured the Upper Haight house. About fifty, Paul wore faded blue jeans and had his head shaved, cheeks inflamed with rosacea. He’d made his money in pesticides, Harvey told me, and was worth about $200 million.

Disney stuff always sold itself, and Paul swiftly chose two Mickey Mouse signs, engine oil ads from the ’30s—incredibly rare, $1,000 apiece. Once Harvey and Paul finished doing business, they’d retire to the front room to play pinball while I finalized the transactions with Paul’s assistant.

“Nineteen-sixty-three Fender Stratocaster,” Harvey said, opening the case on the rosewood table. “Hendrix played it in ’65 at the Juggy Sound Studio after leaving Little Richard. You can see the tremolo arm’s been modified so he could play left handed.”

“All right, very cool.”

Paul hefted the guitar, studied its face, and slung it on. I felt Harvey’s eyes on me as I ducked to plug it into the amp. When Paul struck a chord, it sounded full, finishing with a fuzzy edge that evoked the Hendrix splendour.

“Isn’t that something,” Harvey suggested.
“What are you thinking?” Paul asked.
“I could let it go for 500 thou.”

By the glance Paul exchanged with his assistant, I could tell he wouldn’t bite. The price was a problem. Harvey could normally negotiate down, but he’d overpaid for the Strat, a rare miscalculation, leaving no room to manoeuvre.

“Let’s put this aside for now,” Paul said, and I was there to take the guitar. “What else are you sitting on?”

To accentuate the Strat, I’d arranged a display of rock memorabilia—original Grateful Dead poster art, unused Beatles tickets, a test pressing of Led Zeppelin III—nothing over $5,000. Paul looked the table over approvingly.

“This is the thing with Harvey,” he told his assistant. “You know you’re getting only the very best stuff.”
“We take pride in ownership,” Harvey said.
“But guitars. I’m really after guitars.”
“The Strat is the piece we’re looking to part with right now.”

It wasn’t my place to speak, but I could see Paul’s interest waver, and I knew Harvey would be depressed and furious if he didn’t parlay this visit into more. I quickly cupped Harvey’s ear and said, “The Jasper.”

My mistake was clear at once. He waved me off.
“What is it?” Paul said.
I stood in the corner, regretting my initiative.
Harvey sighed. “I’ve had another guitar for a little while now. Abel Jasper played—”

“Abel Jasper?” asked Paul. “The folk singer, the dandelion guy?”

“Yeah.”

There was a flash of excitement. “You have one of his guitars?”

Harvey buried his reluctance and signalled for me to retrieve it. I rushed to storage and gave the guitar a quick once-over. Its tune had held. I was back in a minute.

“Well goddamn,” Paul said when Harvey opened the case to reveal the modest acoustic instrument with a dirty rope for a strap. Tiny flecks of red paint were sprayed across its face.

“I didn’t know you were a fan,” Harvey said. “He’s not exactly Hendrix.”

“My dad came up in the Depression,” Paul said, a little quieter now, running a finger along the neck. “He loved this music.”

“Well, if you’re a Jasper collector, this is the piece to have. He played this guitar from about ’33 to ’40, which covers the most prolific period of his songwriting and virtually all the recordings.”

Paul touched the high string, and it sang. “Dare I ask how much?”

“I could let it go for a hundred thou.”

The number surprised me. I knew what he’d paid for it. But Harvey could see Paul was falling in love.

“That doesn’t sound crazy,” Paul said. “I assume you can show provenance?”

“That’s why I didn’t mention the guitar right away. The provenance is still a work in progress.”

“But you have something, right?”

Harvey gave me a nod. It was a gamble. I opened the case’s compartment, removed the slip of paper, and handed it to Paul.

He read: “This is to verify that Abel Jasper played this May-Bell acoustic guitar for many years, before giving it away in 1940. Certification made by the Museum of the Dandelion, 1979.”

When he folded the paper, Paul laughed. “Harvey, what is this?”

“Like I said, we’re still working on it. But I’m confident that you’re looking at Jasper’s guitar. I wouldn’t show it to you if there was a shadow of a doubt.”

“I trust you, of course,” Paul said, “just not to the tune of $100,000.”

“I understand.”

Paul couldn’t take his eyes off the guitar. Then his reverie snapped. He gently closed the case and passed a smile around the room.

“Authenticate the guitar, Harvey, and I’ll buy it.”

**THE JOB WITH HARVEY SISKIND** wasn’t meant to last forever. Out of college in ’95, grades undistinguished, I’d taken a one-year unpaid internship at an
accounting-software company in Seattle. I’d hoped to make myself indispensable, but as the end of the year approached, the company had no place for me, the next intern was incoming, and I was grasping for some way to shake my student loans. That’s when my boss mentioned that a client in San Francisco needed a personal assistant. The details were hazy, but the client was indisputably rich, so maybe I’d kill my debt in a few effortful years.

I moved to San Francisco in ’96, but four years later, there was no end in sight. Harvey kept me on a wage low enough that, despite the occasional twenty-five-cent raise, there was nothing left over at the end of the month. At Christmas, or when we closed a big sale, his idea of a bonus was to buy me a suit. He believed himself a generous employer but didn’t seem to notice that the cost of living had changed since the ’70s, when he paid off his house in the Upper Haight and devoted himself to the collection.

My job title was personal assistant, but all my duties pertained to Harvey’s collection. Having made a fortune in nutritional supplements, he’d indulged his love of pop culture by amassing, in addition to all the Hollywood and rock memorabilia, a profusion of midcentury collectibles and rare Americana. I had to keep everything in pristine working order. You never knew when a middle-aged filmmaker, in a fit of nostalgia, would pay thirty grand for a Wurlitzer jukebox full of doo-wop 45s.

Harvey’s collection was a self-sustaining, self-replicating organism. He never put money in; he just sold a piece and reinvested. That’s why an item like the Hendrix Strat could become such an albatross: it limited his ability to acquire. If, on the other hand, he could flip something like the Abel Jasper guitar, which he’d bought for next to nothing, then all would be well in the spreadsheet that monitored the collection’s fiscal health.

Provenance was everything. A purchase had to be like a royal marriage, the lineage assured. That wasn’t usually a problem. Most of Harvey’s items had already been collected and came with certificates of authenticity from reputable sources, and when Harvey discovered something for himself, he could send it away to a trusted expert who’d authenticate it for us. Occasionally it fell to me to research an item, and then I’d spend days, sometimes weeks, compiling a dossier on, say, a spotlight from the Paramount studios, to show just which stars it had shone on.

Right away, however, we knew establishing provenance on the Jasper guitar would prove difficult. Photographs are the most persuasive evidence, but there weren’t many pictures of the nomadic folk singer who’d ridden the rails through the ’30s. Those that existed were often blurry or had sunlight striking the face of the guitar, obscuring distinguishing features like those red paint specks. It was well documented that Jasper had played a May-Bell with a rope for a strap, but that detail was easy to forge, and nothing in the official record mentioned paint. With $100,000 in the offing, however, Harvey told me to drop everything and work on the Jasper guitar.

One hundred thousand dollars—when I tried to contemplate that amount of money, I actually failed, and I felt a rage that seemed, sometimes, disconcertingly near the surface. But just when I thought I’d summoned the courage to let it out—tell Harvey I’m poor, he had no idea what it cost to live, give me a fair cut for my labour—the fear of the bottom overcame me. You’ll end up on the bottom: that’s how my parents had put it whenever I’d complained about school or said my boss was an asshole or just expressed a desire for more, a desire that, to them, rang as entitlement or an intention to steal. Go ahead, they’d say, get angry. You’ll be expelled or fired or imprisoned, and then what? Where will you end up?

Harvey Supplied the First Lead. Last year, a friend in New York real estate had tipped him off that a small folk music museum in Greenwich Village was closing and some of its collection might be acquired for a song. Harvey flew out for the liquidation and returned with the Jasper guitar. It had been a fire sale, frantic and disorganized, and the curator didn’t have his papers in order. Still, for $12,000, the guitar was worth the risk—just look at how it might pay off. Harvey provided me with the curator’s information, and I booked a red eye to New York. Take no chances, he said, and get the documents in your hands.

The trip came at an awkward time, straddling the first of the month. When I’d moved to San Francisco, I’d answered an ad from a couple seeking a roommate in the south Mission, not far from Cesar Chavez. Cat’s parents had given her and Steven the down payment on a two-bedroom live/work space as a wedding present. Needing help with the mortgage, the couple rented out their other bedroom. They were simultaneously my roommates and my landlords and, to a certain extent,
They condemned the building. Urban blight, they called it.

Riding the rails one day, Jasper saw the sun rise over Capitol Hill. Listen. They're overgrowing Capitol Hill.

"Oh my," Martin said, and crouched beside a row of vinyl records on the floor. He pulled one out, placed it on the turntable, and I watched the wobbling black edge as it played. The music sounded kind of primitive, just a standard bluesy melody for acoustic guitar.

"He played that May-Bell like a banjo," Martin said, eyes closed. "Rhythmic action on both hands. Thundery harmonica."

Jasper started singing, but his Texas accent was so thick, and the quality of the recording so poor, it all seemed dusty, obscure, and I couldn't make it out.

"The dandelion is the people's flower," Martin explained. "Common. Unwanted on the tycoon's lawn. Riding the rails one day, Jasper saw the sun rise over a whole field of dandelions, and he beheld that yellow fire he's singing about, you hear?"

I thought maybe I heard something about a yellow fire. "The song is a call for the common man to unite and prove, somehow, that you bought it from—what's his name?"

"Lonni Nolan," he said, irritated. "Lonesome Lonni, 'The Ballad of the Pony Express,' 'Cherokee Blues.'"

"I'm really sorry. "Sweet lord. Well, we didn't keep receipts, if that's what you mean. But I might've mentioned it in a journal somewhere."

"If it isn't too much trouble."

Martin had sunk into the couch, swirling his wine, but I just held my eyes on him until he sighed and went into the bedroom. I followed. There was an unmade pullout bed covered in paperbacks. The walls were veined with cracks. Martin opened a filing cabinet in the corner of the room and began digging through it. What had once been his museum was now contained in this cabinet. After a few minutes, he produced some notebooks bound in leather and brushed through them, eventually finding an entry from '79.

"Here," he said. "That what you're looking for?"

The entry described Martin's purchase of Abel Jasper's guitar from Melissa Nolan, wife of Lonesome Lonni Nolan. The price had actually been $5,000. But, even better, the entry also said, Lonni was given the guitar by Christian Royce of Dallas, TX.

"Who's Christian Royce?" I asked.
were issues with the timeline. The article said Royce arrived in the Village, at age twenty-one, in 1963, which meant he wasn’t even alive in 1940, when Jasper gave the guitar away.

I dashed over to the library, found the phone book for Montreal, recorded the number of every Christian Royce or Chris Royce or C. Royce, returned to my hotel, and tried them all. When I reached the right one, he seemed happy to arrange a visit. No, he said, Jasper hadn’t given him the guitar, but I wasn’t far off and he’d make everything clear.

After a hasty falafel, I headed into Tower Records. Martin Maggio had left me feeling pretty dumb about the history I was after, so I perused the folk section. An Abel Jasper CD was part of a display of inexpensive best-of compilations. It cost $8.99, and in a rebellious thrill, I decided to charge it to Harvey as a business expense.

Then I went back to the hotel and packed my bag, a little guilty about the extravagance. Today was the first of the month, and I hadn’t paid rent. I summoned the courage to call the apartment.

“I’m glad you called,” Cat said. “I was getting confused. You didn’t leave your cheque.”

“Sorry, I didn’t get a chance to talk to you about it.”

“Is something wrong?”

“I know, I’m sorry.”

“I feel like you’re taking advantage of me.”

“What? No, I didn’t—”

“Did you consider the position you’re putting me in? I’m basically broke right now. I just got Steven his Christmas present, and now I’m really stretched. I was counting on you.”

I wanted to tell her I didn’t even have the ability to stretch. I could extend to a very definite point and no further. Then I was broke—broke broke, not basically broke. But I just apologized again.

“It’s fine, I guess,” she said. “But I’m not doing this anymore. What would you do if you were living somewhere else? You think landlords just give extensions out of the kindness of their hearts? You should think about the pressure you put on others when you aren’t forthcoming.”

“Are you right, I know it was wrong.”

“And either ask your boss for a raise or get another job.”
“EVERYBODY ELSE WORSHIPPED” Bob and Joan,”
Christian Royce told me in Montreal. “Those two played into the pretensions of the Village—the epicentre of pretension. But I was drawn to Lonesome Lonni Nolan. He spoke more to the world I knew back in Texas. Folk wasn’t just an idea to guys like us.”

“You mean like dandelions?” I asked.

Cat had loaned me her Discman for the trip, and I’d listened to the Abel Jasper CD on my flight to Montreal. But the lyrics were still indistinct, the recordings garbled by imperfections, like they’d been unearthed.

“Exactly,” Christian said. “I was a real dandelion. I didn’t just dress up like one.”

We were seated in a café near the college campus, art nouveau reproductions on the walls, the faint bacterial smell of unclean beer lines in the air. Christian’s grey hair hung in strings from a flat-brimmed cap with a tiny red star, like Chairman Mao’s. Every so often, the door opened and he’d check to see who’d entered. He lived above the café and was performing there that night.

“I rejected the Village scene,” Christian said. “Everybody talked a big game about the people, but when it came to the genuine article, they cut me out. I got so fed up with all the fakes and pretenders, this was maybe ’66, I decided to hell with it. I walked away from music. The last thing I did in New York was give Lonni the guitar.”

Some young men came in. Christian checked his watch.

“My pops left me a bit of money,” he said after I prompted him to go on. I was hoping to get out of there before his show. “I tooled around for a while in the ’70s—LA, mostly, and I went to London for a bit, picked up guitar again. I cut a record with a group called Brakes!—brake as in brake pedal, with an exclamation mark—sort of a German-influenced deal. Then I moved up here in ’84. The government gives you all sorts of grants and things.”

I told him about my meeting with Martin Maggio.

“Sure, I know Marty,” he said. “One of Dylan’s chief bootlickers. Kept Bobby’s boots real clean.”

I said he’d told me Christian received the guitar from Jasper. But, as I spoke, a pair of college-age women came in laughing, their high boots caked with slush, and Christian said he’d better get up there.

He employed a synthesizer, a contact mic, and a host of effects pedals. It was pretty simple: he’d strike a key on the synth or hum into the mic, then loop the sound and begin manipulating it with the pedals. Soon the various strands would merge, and he’d let this throbbing wave of noise sustain. The limitation of the technique was that he apparently couldn’t remove any element once it had been introduced, so the pattern of the songs was identical: a small sound snowballing toward crescendo, at which point he’d abruptly cut everything off. The show lasted almost an hour. I think I fell asleep for a minute,
but maybe not. When Christian came offstage, I told him I didn’t have a lot of time.

“Don’t get uptight,” he said.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be uptight.”

“You’re not being uptight, you’re getting uptight.”

I hung around the bar while he tried talking to the women. Eventually they left, the owner started spritzing ammonia on the tables, and Christian gruffly invited me upstairs. I expected some bohemian pad like Martin’s, but in fact, the apartment was modern, with a home entertainment system, black leather furniture, and grey carpeted floors. He dropped one of his own CDs in the stereo’s tray and that aimless music started playing again.

“I don’t want to sound uptight,” I said as we took seats across the glass coffee table, “but I really have to ask about the guitar.”

“Just ask your questions, man. Nobody’s stopping you.”

I brought out photos of the guitar.

“Yeah, that’s it all right.”

“How do you know?”

“Those red dots.” He indicated the specks of paint on the face of the guitar. “Some fascist heckler threw paint at Jasper, but he just stayed in the groove. He wasn’t a pretender.”

So, if Jasper hadn’t given him the guitar, I asked, who had?

Christian started grinding up some pot. “My old man.”

“That makes more sense. Your father was a farmer?”

He licked the paper, sealed the joint, and sparked it. But he hadn’t rolled it tight enough and half went up in flames. When he’d gotten it under control, he crossed his legs and said, “He was a doctor. He serviced all the farms in the region. There wasn’t another man with a medical degree for miles around. That’s how he got the guitar. Those farmers, you know, they didn’t have a lot of cash on hand, this was the time of the drought, so my pops would take what he could get. They’d trade you a couple hundred pounds of beef if you could set a broken bone. Every so often, you know, the really poor ones, they’d pay with some heirloom or another, then he’d drive into Dallas and exchange it for money. That’s how it had to be, back then. Anyway, I was—I don’t know—ten, eleven, and showed some interest in playing the guitar, so my dad wrangled one for me. It just happened to be the most famous guitar in Texas.”

I asked if he had a map and whether he’d show me the region in question, but he said, “What’s in it for me, anyway? Why am I spending all night talking to you?”

I told him I was authorized to offer a hundred dollars for his help.

Christian peered at me. “How about one-fifty?”

“Fine.”

“Then you’ll do 200, won’t you?”

I nodded. He laughed and went to fetch a map. I’d been hoping for something more specific, but he was able to indicate the general area his father had worked in.

“It used to be out in the country,” he said. “Now it’s practically downtown Dallas, the way the city’s grown.”

“I know it’s a long shot, but do you remember the name of the farmer?”

He gulped the smoke. “Sure—Dearlove. That’s what people always said, when they asked about the guitar. My old man didn’t know Jasper, he wasn’t a musical person, but he knew he’d gotten something valuable because all the farmers would ask about the guitar he’d got off Dearlove.”

“First name?”

“Dearlove’s all I know.”

I took notes as he said, “I guess you’ll probably sell that guitar for a whole lot of money, huh? How much?”

I said I couldn’t disclose that.

“Well, even so, I never regretted getting rid of it. Guys like Marty Maggio, down in the Village, they’re just followers, lemmings. But you have to follow yourself. You have to be your own lemming. Nobody down there ever figured that out. They were too busy strumming their little guitars, thinking they were something they weren’t.”

The CD ended, and it was like a fridge or an air conditioner switching off, the sudden absence reminding me that there had been a noise.

I found myself singing of dandelions, of a yellow fire that would burn up Washington. Jasper’s accent entered mine, all our voices joined in the original rage.

I never thought much about the Depression. I’d seen The Grapes of Wrath and the Walker Evans photographs. Answers on multiple-choice exams included Okies, the...
You deserve a cut of this sale.

wind swooped off

John Dearlove Jr.’s purchase of a unit in this tower in

$5,000, I could take a healthy bite out of my debt and

tell him about the Dearlove lead.

of stained concrete. In a long list of tenants behind

off, and surely this was the very thing he’d seen, drift -

— I closed my eyes and saw them all.

even that amount of money seemed small and somehow

cultural records, but I managed to root out mention of

acquired his land in the ‘20s. Ownership passed to his

son, John Dearlove Jr., in 1977, and Jr. sold the farm

in ‘89. The Dearlove name then dropped out of the agri-

cultural records, but I managed to root out mention of

John Dearlove Jr.’s purchase of a unit in this tower in

1990. The timeline held together.

I buzzed the number and a woman answered, but the

intercom wouldn’t let us talk more than a moment, so

I had to buzz a few times, trying to convey that I was

there about Abel Jasper. She kept asking me to repeat

myself, and I was shouting into the speaker when the

intercom harshly beeped and the front door clicked

open. I got into an elevator, cables gnashing as it wob-

bled up twenty-two floors, then hurried along the hall,

television blaring behind doors, until I found the Dear-

love apartment.

Standing at the door was a woman, maybe sixty, with

a spray of freckles, faint brown eyes, and a loose bun of

rose-coloured hair. Her black sweater had a big felt candy

cane sewn on. She introduced herself as Jessie Dearlove.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “I think I’ve made a mistake.”

“But you want to know about Abel Jasper? Is it about

the farm?”

She invited me into a small, tidy apartment with plain

wooden furniture, a portable TV set, and a beaded cur-

tain to the kitchen. Decorated with red and silver bells,

her miniature plastic Christmas tree sat atop a chest of

drawers, and she’d hung some dresses to dry, their folds

gently swaying in the radiator’s heat.

After serving coffee, Jessie sat across from me and

said, “What do you want to know?”

I explained that I was the assistant of a collector who’d

acquired a guitar that might have once belonged to

Jasper. I’d been trying to authenticate the item, and the

chain of ownership had brought me to John Dearlove.

“You have the guitar?” she said.

“Well, maybe. We think so. That’s what I want to find

out.”

“You got a picture I could look at?”

I spread some photos on the table. I watched her lips

move as she muttered.

“What’s that?” I said.

She looked up in surprise. “Oh, it’s just—I never

thought I’d see it again.”

“That’s the guitar?”

She nodded.

“How can you tell?”

“Those little red specks. My brother, Johnny, took

the guitar out on a painting job, got it all messed up.

I wouldn’t mistake it for the world. Last I heard,

Dr. Royce’s boy took it to New York. Fool’s errand.

He couldn’t play a lick.”

I felt the last link materializing. I made a note that

we should clean off the paint.

“Do you remember how your family acquired the

 guitar?”

“This all happened before I was born,” Jessie told me.

“Dad was struggling to keep the farm, but he never re-

 fused somebody in need. He had old ways, like that.

He didn’t have much to offer but the land itself, which

was getting meaner all the time, but as the years went

by, and you started having all these folks on the move,

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He didn’t have much to offer but the land itself, which

was getting meaner all the time, but as the years went

by, and you started having all these folks on the move,

the farm became a kind of waystation for drifters and

migrants and such. Dad would let them come together

and share what they had, then move on to wherever they

were going, or thought they were going.”
Soon enough, she said, word got around about the farm, and new sorts of people started showing up—artists, politicians, activists. They’d stage shows and make speeches and try organizing people.

“One time, we even had a man running for president. I figure Daddy’s face would be on a stamp if that man had won the White House, but I don’t think he sniffed it.”

Those were good years on the farm, she said. People got by, together. When the troubles came later, there wasn’t anybody there.

“As for Abel Jasper,” she said, “I was only a little girl when he came to the farm.”

“This was 1940?”

“You know your stuff. Jasper ducked in with some drifters, slept out with them, sizing up the place. Nobody knew it was him until one night he brought out his guitar. Daddy took my brother along to where everybody’d gathered. Plenty of folks with guitars had passed through the farm before, but they’d never played music like that. It came right out of that place, out of what people were feeling, like everybody’s—I don’t know—pain or soul was talking. His voice cut right to it. Still does.

“Jasper and Daddy formed a bond. They’d walk together, out all night, talking over the situation on the farm. Jasper saw it for the special place it was. When the time came for him to go, he gave Daddy his guitar. Me personally, I’d have turned him down. He’d played that thing for years, criss-crossed the country with it, wrote all his songs on it. But Daddy told me he just accepted, simple. He understood what Jasper was saying by giving it away.”

I jotted some notes and asked how Dr. Royce had acquired it.

Jessie looked into the cup in her lap. “That was all my fault.”

“How so?”

She went out playing where she shouldn’t have and cut her hand on some old metal thing. Nobody thought much of it at the time, but then she started feeling sick and the cut went brown and smelled bad. Her father called Dr. Royce. By that time, it felt like it hadn’t rained in years, the days of the drifters were over, and they were all alone out there. When Dr. Royce presented the bill, there was nothing but the guitar.

“Johnny used to play it,” she said. “So did I, a little. Johnny could really pick it, though. I don’t know, I guess Daddy didn’t have a choice. We had a few good years anyway, here and there, but all through the last twenty or so, we were fighting with the pipelines. There were all sorts of takings on our land so they could lay them down. Those should’ve been prosperous years on the farm, but the construction made it so you couldn’t work. They’d build roads for their equipment that went diagonal across the land, then dig out trenches and never put the topsoil back on, all these big dead scars. I was taking care of Daddy by then, so things fell to Johnny to negotiate, and I don’t know—somehow he never got his footing.”

Her brother finally got so fed up, she told me, he signed the farm away, signed the papers right on the hood of the company’s pickup. With the money, he bought this place in the city for the three of them. It’s a good place, Jessie said.

“Yeah,” I said, “it’s really nice.”

But she was relieved her father died before moving in. He wasn’t made to live up in the sky. The farm had rolled for miles in every direction.

“You’re done with that?” she said, motioning to my cup. “Thanks, yeah.”

She gathered it up and whisked through the beaded curtain. I worked furiously, writing everything down.

When she returned, I asked if she had any documents that might corroborate her story.

“Why? You don’t believe me?”

“I believe you. It’s just— is there any sort of proof that Jasper gave it to your father?”

Jessie bit her lower lip, then went to the chest and withdrew a photograph. The edges were frayed, and the whole thing had a crease down the middle, but I clearly distinguished Abel Jasper with a boy who was holding the guitar. It looked huge on his body.

“That’s Johnny right there,” she said, standing over my shoulder. “This was taken the day Jasper left.”

“Where’s your brother now?”

“Johnny died.”

I glanced up. She was peering past me, into the photo. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” She sat down again. “It isn’t every day someone asks about the farm.”

On the back of the photo was written: *Johnny and Jasper, August 1940.* I was holding the provenance in my hands.

“This is sort of awkward,” I said, “but would you let me copy this?”

“What for?”

“We’re trying to authenticate the guitar.”

“You said that. But why?”

It has very little market value without proof of provenance, I explained.

“You mean you can’t sell it.”

“That’s right.”

She asked for the photo. I handed it over. She studied it a moment and said, “I’m afraid that’s how it’s got to be.”

I said I could offer $200 for a copy.

“No, that’s all right.”

“I could go as high as three. Or why don’t you name a price?”
Jessie laughed and said, “That old guitar must be worth a lot to you. How much it going for, anyhow? Maybe I can buy it back.”

I said I couldn’t disclose that.

“Well,” she said, and I thought for a moment she might relent. “No, this is private. There’s no price on it.”

As if to hide the picture from my sight, she placed it between the pages of a book on the table. I saw its frayed edge protruding.

“Hey,” she said. “Don’t look so glum.”

I brightened my face. I could still convince her somehow.

“You like to sing?” she said.

“Sorry?”

“I was just about to get out my guitar before you buzzed. You care to sing with me a little? It’ll be fun.”

I gave a nervous laugh and said all right, maybe it would, and Jessie went to get her guitar. I looked at the edge sticking out of the book.

She returned with what could’ve passed for a Jasper forgery, a simple acoustic instrument that she wore with a rope for a strap.

“Can you play?” she asked.

“I can only tune it.”

She strummed a chord. “Doesn’t need it. Anyway, Johnny could really go. This guitar was his. I can only mess around a little. You know any Jasper songs?”

I said I’d listened to “Dandelion Blues” so many times over the past few days, I could probably remember the words.

“Then let’s go.”

Jessie’s right hand picked the strings, thumping low notes with the thumb, while her left hand hammered and slid. I was so transfixed by the action of her fingers that I missed my cue. But Jessie only smiled as I found myself singing of dandelions, of a yellow fire that would burn up Washington. At first, I felt embarrassed by the sound of my voice, but Jessie gave me courage. Soon it was like Jasper’s accent had entered mine, all our voices joined in the original rage.

I closed my eyes, gave in to it completely. Let it out. There’s nothing to fear.

The song ended. Jessie slapped her knee.

“Right on,” she said. “We don’t sound half-bad.”

“Yeah, it’s good,” I said, a little scattered.

She picked up the guitar and looked at its face. “I don’t suppose this one’s worth anything to you, is it?”

I blinked, confused.

“No, I don’t suppose,” she said. “Well, it’s about time I got dinner on the stove.”

I collected myself and said I understood. Jessie went to put the guitar away. I looked at the book on the table. Her footsteps faded in the hall.

I hated Harvey for putting me here, but the song had given me courage. I could march back to San Francisco empty handed. I could tell him there’s no provenance, the guitar is worthless, he should give it away.

Then the wind howled on the high-rise. Go ahead, do that, sure. And what about the first of the month? Where will you end up? There isn’t any Dearlove farm. There isn’t an escape anymore. The bottom is deeper than the song.

I pulled the photo from the book and slipped it into my pocket.

Jessie came back. I was standing. I thanked her for sharing her story.

“You’re welcome to it,” she said. “It’s good to keep old things going.”

SPIRIT AT SUMMER’S END

BY ROO BORSAN

Rivulets of scent, dust, wind-borne debris, bent straw and bee music, the shrunken honeysuckle evaporating from the year, a few flies passing nearby swept a fraction sideways by the air — at any given moment something rare and exact will have happened here, where the spirit lies down, gone dormant, whose life this was, whose life was (all of it, from end to end) one summer.