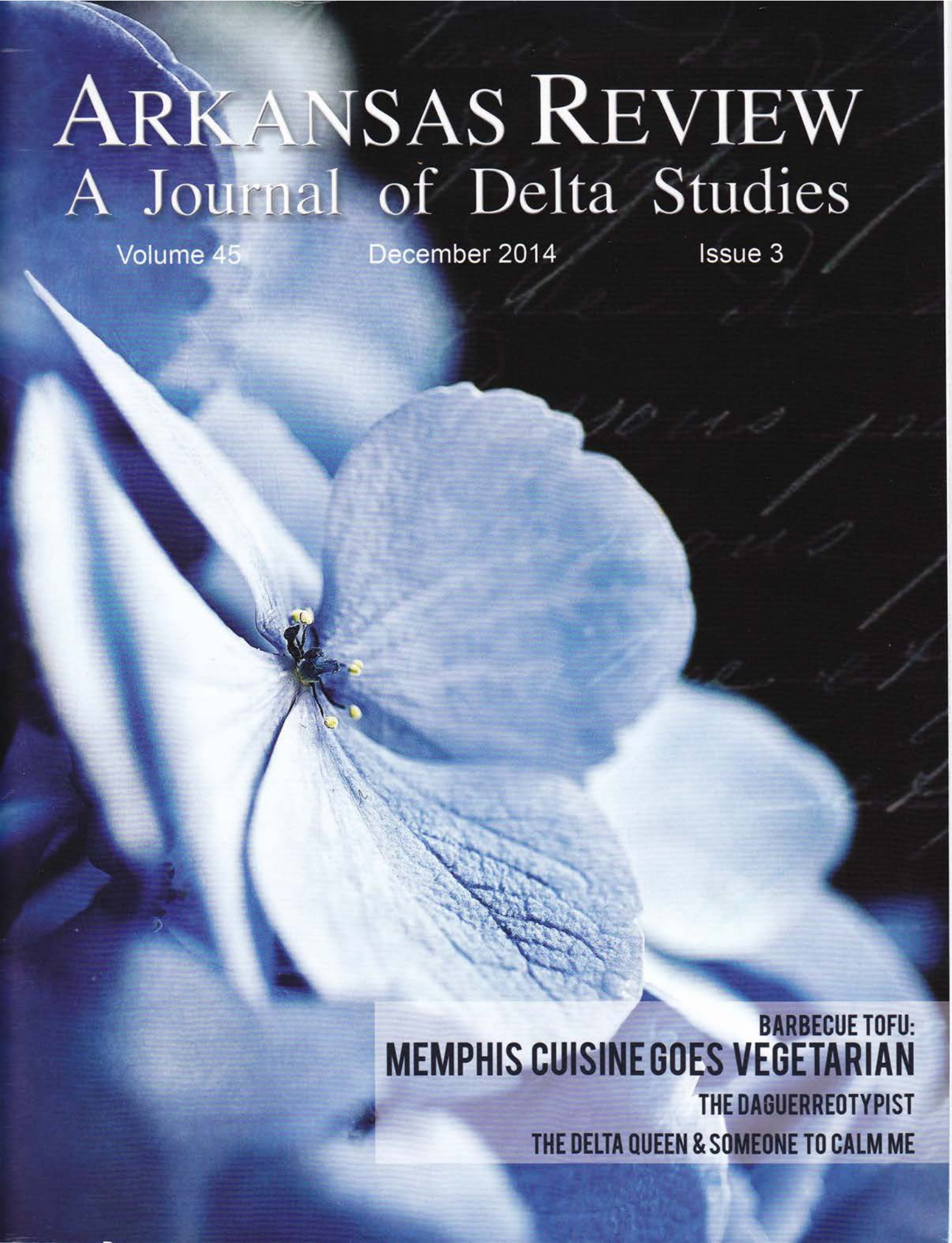

ARKANSAS REVIEW

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BARBECUE TOFU:
MEMPHIS CUISINE GOES VEGETARIAN

THE DAGUERREOTYPIST

THE DELTA QUEEN & SOMEONE TO CALM ME

The Daguerreotypist

by Elaine Ford

excerpted from the novel *God's Red Clay*

He came riding into town hauling behind him his saloon, a sort of outhouse on wheels, gaily striped, his name and occupation painted in red and green letters on the rear: Charles S. Lounsbury, Daguerreotypist. Anner, who was returning from a trip to the store, watched the dappled horse stop in front of the Kosciusko Hotel. A dark-haired young man with full lips and a cleft chin swung himself down from the horse and hitched the animal to the rail.

Anner paused on the porch, her basket in hand, and waited for him to mount the steps. "Did you wish to let a room?"

"Are you the proprietress of this establishment?" he asked, removing his broad-brimmed hat.

"My husband's the proprietor. We have a room available."

Inside, the daguerreotypist glanced at the wide staircase leading to the second floor, took in the glass-globed chandelier above his head and the floral carpet beneath his boots. Yes, he'd like room and board for the night. Anner set her basket down on the reception desk, behind which Tom should have been, but wasn't. Probably passing the time of day with one of the storekeepers in Courthouse Square. She opened the register for the guest to sign. "The rate for a man and horse is two dollars per day. A meal is fifty-five cents." She gestured toward the pen and inkwell.

His hat under his arm, Mr. Lounsbury picked up the pen and then set it down. "Perhaps you could you tell me—has a daguerreotypist already established himself in this town?"

"Last year one passed through with a saloon like yours. He stayed a week or so."

"Did a good business, did he?"

"There seemed to be a line of customers outside the saloon most days."

"I wonder . . . . Do you happen to have in your hotel a space suitable for a studio?"

On the ground floor was a bar-room, a dining-room, a barbershop, a newspaper agent, and a bootblack's stall. She showed him a corner room bare of furnishings, which had previously been let to a dressmaker, now deceased. Mr. Lounsbury examined the pair of tall windows. Strong afternoon light streamed through the panes. "Both south and west exposure, good light for my purpose," he said. "However, I'd need a dark-room. Maybe draperies. Or I could build some sort of closet, with your permission, of course."

"I don't wish to discourage you, Mr. Lounsbury. But I'm not sure you'd find enough customers in Kosciusko, or even in the county, to support your enterprise for long."

Turning to look at her, he said, "If you cared to make a profit wouldn't you encourage me? Whether or not my course is sensible?"

Certainly her husband would do so. However, Anner thought there was no point in letting the room to a man who might flounder and then vanish in the dark of night, leaving his bills unpaid.

"People here don't have much spare cash to spend."

"On frivolous things like daguerreotypes?" He smiled with his eyes. Much taller than she, he dipped his head a little to speak to her. Unlike most men, he wasn't looking past her or examining his cigar, paying her no more attention than a side table or a hat rack.

"On anything."

"Nonetheless, I reckon I'll stay awhile," he said. "I'm road-weary. Sick to death of traveling like a turtle with my house on my back." He

told her that he'd come to Mississippi from New York via Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, taking likenesses of people in towns and villages all along the way. "I'll supplement my income if I need to. A man who's been a cabinetmaker, a schoolmaster, a store clerk, and a daguerreotypist can manage to earn a living one way or another."

Can he be old enough to have done all that? she wondered. Back at the reception desk she explained that the price for a month's room and board was fourteen dollars, and the rent of the studio another twelve. Stabling and feeding his horse, nine dollars and fifty cents. They'd find some place to stow the saloon.

As Mr. Lounsbury was signing the register Tom appeared from wherever he'd been. "Thomas L. Ford, proprietor," he said, vigorously shaking the new boarder's hand. He assured Mr. Lounsbury that his hotel was superbly desirable to persons of business and that he would exert himself untiringly to render his guest comfortable and to assist in every way possible.

The daguerreotypist followed Anner up the staircase, which led to a large open space with a raised platform at one end. "Traveling troupes perform here," she told him, "and sometimes there are balls." Along the sides of the performance hall were ten or so rooms, one of which she unlocked. Inside were a bedstead, a bureau, a braided rug, an easy chair. "Will this suit you?" she asked.

He walked to the window and peered out between lace curtains. "I see a church spire in the distance."

"That's the Presbyterian Church. Are you a member, by any chance?"

"Oh, I'm not a church-going man. But I like churches, for the civility they lend to the landscape."

Anner took the room key from the pocket of her apron and put it in his hand.

* * * * *

Within a week Mr. Lounsbury had moved all his equipment from the saloon into his studio in the hotel. He purchased some pine planks, a penny's worth of nails, a tin of varnish, and a set of brass hinges. From the carpenter on Washington Street he borrowed a saw, plane, square, and hammer, with which he constructed a plain but efficient darkroom within the studio and a sturdy work table. Next he went to the Kosciusko *Chronicle* office and ordered seventy-five broadsides and two hundred handbills to be printed, as well as placing a notice within the weekly newspaper itself. On his dappled horse he rode about the county, tacking up broadsides in taverns and general stores, pressing handbills on likely-looking prospects. In the evenings Anner often saw him entering the barroom to join the company of men gathered there.

One day her son Bill, who was working as the bar-keep, mentioned Lounsbury's name over dinner in the family's quarters. "Oh, the fellow has plenty to say when downing a whiskey. He's got opinions on just about everything. The war in the Crimea, which he says is a rat's nest. Walker's adventuring in Mexico, which he doesn't approve of. Governor Foote's politics, which he does. Lounsbury's a unionist and ain't shy about saying so."

"He's not an abolitionist, is he?" his father asked.

Bill, at eighteen, had a wispy moustache, pale brown hair like his mother's. A slim body, muscular. "Course not. Crazy to stay in Mississippi if he was."

"Still, talking union could be dangerous for a Yankee."

Yes, Anner thought, given how high feelings are running these days, for and against secession. More for than otherwise, it seemed, especially among the readers of W.D. Roy's editorials in the *Southern Sun*. She heard nearly every day about a fistfight or a duel somewhere in the county.

Bill shrugged. "Lounsbury looks like a man who knows how to take care of himself."

Soon thereafter Mr. Lounsbury asked

Anner, Tom, and their children to pose for their portraits, so that he would have specimens to exhibit when customers came calling. Anner was the last to agree. She'd never liked her face, avoided looking in mirrors, and knew she hadn't grown any more beautiful in her forty-one years. But the daguerreotypist prevailed, arguing that the set would be incomplete without her.

On a Sabbath afternoon Anner entered his studio, which smelled of all kinds of mysterious chemicals. She wore the black silk dress that had stood her well through many a funeral and mourning period and, folded into a trunk, had traveled with her from Alabama to Mississippi. He bade her sit on his cane-bottomed chair, and then he studied his subject. She could not help but look at him, the dark eyes, the intent, intelligent expression. "Please remove your bonnet," he said.

"But my hair's—"

"Your hair is fine. The white of the linen is too stark for my composition." When she'd undone the strings he took the bonnet from her and tossed it aside.

Behind the chair was an apparatus, a pole on a stand with a tongs-like device attached to it, to hold her head steady during the long exposure. He stood next to her and twisted a knob to adjust the pole for height—the cloth of his frockcoat brushed her shoulder—and then he positioned the arms of the tongs at the sides of her head. She shivered when his fingers touched her hair, her skin. He arranged her right hand upon a cloth-draped table and gave her a book to hold in her left. Smooth leather. A Bible, she imagined.

The daguerreotypist backed up and studied her some more. Then he stood behind the camera on its tripod and opened the wooden doors at the top. He took the cap off the shiny brass lens, pocketed it, and slid a piece of glass into the camera box. Stooping to peer into the camera, he turned the lens to focus it, making tiny adjustments. The room was utterly quiet, a Sabbath quiet. No creaking of rockers on the porch, no distant clatter in the kitchen, no clopping of hooves in the street. She could hear him breathe. Never had anyone gazed at her for such a long time, with such complete concentration, except for an infant suckling at her breast. Then, at last satisfied with his preparations, the daguerreotypist fished the cap from his pocket and gently tapped it onto the lens. With economical, practiced movements he replaced the glass with the plate-holder. On the sensitized plate therein, he explained, her image would be captured.

"Now you must be very, very still. Cast your mind back to the most contented time in your life and hold that memory until I say you can let go of it."

With a deft motion he plucked off the lens cap. Anner could not think of a time in her life when she'd been more content than at this moment, so she simply looked straight ahead at the walnut camera box, at the brass lens, at his hand holding the cap. Slowly he counted off forty, fifty, sixty-five seconds. The pulse in her temples seemed to beat in time to his words. Then he replaced the cap on the lens, and the exposure was done. "You may think whatever you like now," he said, removing the plate-holder from the camera.

He took away the head-holding device and she stood, a little dizzy from the chemical fumes and from holding her breath. She left the leather book—yes, a Bible, though he was not a church-going man—on the table. He bowed slightly and said, "I'm obliged to you, Mrs. Ford. I'll show you the portrait once it's been developed and mounted. And when I leave Kosciusko, it will, of course, be yours."

Back in the family quarters at the rear of the hotel, Anner remembered her bonnet. It remained behind, somewhere in his studio. She pictured it collapsed on the floor, the strings in a careless tangle.

* * * * *

Seven months later, in May of 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act is the talk of the hotel

boarders and Anner's family when it passes Congress and President Pierce signs it into law. The huge Nebraska territory is chopped in two. The law decrees that popular sovereignty, the democratic vote of the residents, will decide whether the territories come into the Union as slave or free states. Suddenly the Missouri Compromise, which forbade slavery in new territories north of the 36°30' parallel, is tossed to the four winds. In short order, free-staters and abolitionists, inflamed by that scurrilous insult of a book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, pour into Kansas from the north. Soon thereafter, proslavery men rush in from the south. Each side is determined to win the coming elections. It's no marvel to Anner when the dispute turns violent.

She knows that the agitation up in the territories bodes ill, but she doesn't spend much time fretting about Kansas. Her days are consumed with overseeing the washerwomen in the laundry and the cooks in the kitchen, making sure the beds get made and the floors scrubbed and swept, the chamber pots emptied, the guests welcomed and their needs provided for.

It's now October. After breakfast she pushes the youngest children off to school. In the evenings she helps Mattie and Jennie with their spelling and sums. John, done with school now, works as a waiter in the dining-room. When Bill's not bartending he's in the stable out back, mucking out stalls for the hostler.

Nearly two years ago her eldest son Ben took himself off to Jackson. He found work as a printer and lives in a boardinghouse there. She wishes she could visit him, meet the boarding-house keeper and see to it that he's properly taken care of, greet his friends even if they turn out to be Irishmen or common laborers, urge him to go to church. However, visiting him doesn't seem possible, the cost of the stage so dear and her free time so limited. She misses him sorely, her firstborn.

Charles Lounsbury reminds her a little of Ben. Both with that lovely dark hair, both given to intense concentration, both inclined to make up their own minds rather than go along with the crowd. Mr. Lounsbury has been living in the hotel a year now. Anner was right that he wouldn't find enough business as a daguerreotypist to make a proper living. As he was ordering his lot of broadsides and handbills over at the *Chronicle,* he fell into conversation with Frederick Kleine, owner of the press and editor of the newspaper, and they found they saw eye to eye on a number of matters. When Lounsbury told Anner he was going to work for the newspaper, she wasn't surprised. She reckoned he could do anything he set his hand to.

Tom doesn't read the *Chronicle* because it's a Whig paper, and he's a Democrat. The *Chronicle* is in favor of preserving the Union, and Mr. Roy at the *Sun* is screaming secession. Not, Anner understands, that Tom necessarily agrees with every single thing Roy says. As the proprietor of a hotel, he must be genial to both sides. They don't talk to one another much, she and Tom, except for discussions about practicalities—why there's an unseemly spot in the carpet outside the bar-room, whether the hostler has been indulging in spirits to the detriment of his duties, where they can find a cheaper supplier of beefsteak or lamp oil—so she doesn't know exactly what her husband thinks about politics.

Tom and Bill frequently exchange bitter words back in their quarters, out of the hearing of the guests, but their arguments confuse Anner more than enlighten her. There's a new secret party, the Know-Nothings, and somehow they have become entangled in the snarl between unionists and secessionists. Tom says the Know-Nothings in the South are a Whig trick to undermine the Democrats, abolitionists in sheep's clothing. On the contrary, Bill says, the Know-Nothings are opposed to extremism and want to counter the antislavery Republican Party now gathering strength in the North. The Whigs are disintegrating, he says, at each other's throats over slavery and everything else and as good as dead as a party. Tricks? Tricks are beyond them. Tom says secret parties are secret because they're up to no good. If trying to pre-

vent the Union from flinging itself into bits isn't good, Bill says, then the Know-Nothings are indeed up to no good.

Anner's opinion is that father and son take the opposite side in any argument mostly for the sake of annoying one another. They give her headache, the pair of them.

Every week she looks for an abandoned copy of the *Chronicle* on one of the chairs on the porch or left behind in the reception lounge, and she carries it back to their sitting-room. When she has a moment she pages through, trying to parse whether it's Frederick Kleine or Charles Lounsbury who has written a particular editorial. The more intelligent and witty ones she attributes to Lounsbury.

He built a little display case to go outside his studio. It's a shallow box constructed of walnut with a glass top, mounted on wooden legs, illuminated from above by the chandelier. Inside the case are the daguerreotypes of Tom, all of the children except Ben, and herself. Often, when no one's watching, she glances at her own face gazing out of the gilt and plush frame. Somehow, the daguerreotypist has made her look very much better than she ever appears to herself in a mirror: her hair smooth, her brows straight and dark, her expression alert yet composed. Modest yet confident. Oddly, she feels transformed on the inside, just as on the outside. She likes the person Charles Lounsbury has invented.

* * * * *

Often the political discussions in the bar-room become fevered, or so Anner hears from Bill. He'll fetch a broom to sweep up broken glass or politely suggest that it's time for a customer to wend his way home. On the last Saturday of the month, as she's descending the stairs to see to the family's supper, she sees Bill escorting a customer out the door of the hotel, his hand firmly under the man's elbow. Through the oval glass panes in the doors she watches the man turn to shake his fist before stalking off into the gloom of the rainy evening. He's a sallow-complected fellow with a gap between his front teeth.

"Who is that? What did he do?"

"Name's Dick Payne. He said some unpleasant things to Lounsbury."

"About an editorial in the *Chronicle*?"

"He's been goading Lounsbury for a while now." Bill hurriedly returns to the bar-room.

Anner nearly collides with Charles Lounsbury exiting the bar. His expression is darkly determined, not a look she has seen on his face before. He enters his studio, but almost immediately re-emerges, kicking the door shut with the heel of his boot. Under the light of the chandelier she sees that he's carrying a knife in a scabbard. It's almost a foot long, the handle bone or ivory. She gasps.

"Which way did he go?"

"I can't say."

Gripping her shoulder, he says, "You must tell me, if you know."

"Toward the Rockport Road. But—"

He's out and away, no stopping him. A drizzly wind blows through the open door. She thinks of summoning Bill from the bar-room, but he can't leave it unattended. Tom's not at the reception desk. No telling how soon he'll be back.

Now she finds herself out on the street. The rain has made the hard-packed clay slick, and she's wearing only slippers. Lounsbury is ahead of her, moving fast. "Wait, please!" she calls after him, but her voice is lost in the wind, and she doubts he'd pay any attention anyway, so intent did he look, his knuckles tight on the knife. She's running across the Natchez Trace, ignoring the stares of a peddler with a donkey cart and a pickaninny crouched in a doorway. She can still see Lounsbury ahead of her and now she sees the man Payne, too. They're in front of the Presbyterian Church, facing one another. She hears shouts, watches Payne stumble toward the church door. As she arrives, completely out of breath, Lounsbury is upon him. He thrusts the knife at the man's head and then draws back. Payne slumps onto the wooden

steps, whether dead or not, Anner doesn't know. A muted cry escapes her throat, and Lounsbury turns.

"Why are you here?" he says, furious. "You don't want to be a witness to this."

"You've murdered this man!"

"Defending one's honor is not murder."

The sexton, having heard the commotion, hurries round the corner of the building. The old man kneels and presses his handkerchief to Payne's left temple. The wounded man groans. At once the handkerchief is soaked through with blood. By now five or six people have ventured out of stores and houses and are gaping at the spectacle of a man bleeding to death on the steps of the Presbyterian Church. "Fetch Doc Lewis," the sexton yells, and one of the gawkers runs off down the street.

Lounsbury stoops to clean the knife blade in the wet grass, two swipes, one side and then the other. He tucks the sheathed knife inside his frockcoat. "Please go home," he says quietly to Anner. He takes her hand, pressing her palm to his, just for a second.

"Won't you come with me?" She pictures the knife against his breastbone.

"You'll be quite safe."

"I'm not worried about my own safety, Mr. Lounsbury."

"I have to walk my anger off. Don't be upset, it will be all right."

* * * * *

"How did you happen to be at the door of the Presbyterian Church," Tom asks, "when Lounsbury stuck a knife into Dick Payne?"

"Bill told me about the insult. I saw the knife. I thought I could stop him."

"You should have more sense than to interfere in men's business."

Charles S. Lounsbury is indicted on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon, pleads not guilty, and is freed on his own recognizance. Very little seems to change in his life. He takes the likenesses of those customers who seek out his studio, goes to the *Chronicle* office nearly every day, has a drink in the bar-room most evenings. Sometimes he attends the shows of the traveling minstrels that perform in the hotel and play Stephen Foster's tunes on their fiddles and banjos. *Hard times, hard times, come again no more. . . .* Graciously Mr. Lounsbury greets Anner whenever their paths happen to cross in the hotel.

However, he never has a private word with her about the events of October 28th. Her thoughts keep returning to the moment between them when he clasped her hand, whispered in her ear. But he has evidently forgotten, done his best to put everything that happened that terrible night out of his mind, and she doesn't blame him. It weighs on her that she will have to testify against him.

This year Ben doesn't return home from Jackson for Christmas, pleading the pressures of work. Has she lost him for ever? she wonders. Anner does her best to make the holiday jolly for the young ones, filling their stockings with treats. She decorates Christmas trees both in the hotel reception area and in their own quarters. "Just like President Pierce's in the White House," she tells the girls, "except that we're doing them one better."

The trial is set for the third Monday in February, 1855. It's a cool day with a fitful sun. Headed toward the brick courthouse, walking alone, Charles Lounsbury crosses Jefferson Street. Anner and Bill follow, having been summonsed as witnesses.

Anner hasn't been inside the courtroom before, though it's not much more than a hundred yards from the hotel where she has spent the past five years of her life. The room is small and minimally furnished. Anner and Bill find seats on one of the crude benches. Ahead of her she can see the defendant, seated next to his lawyer, Sam Quimby. Quimby has a ruddy face and a cap of thick white hair. The sexton is there, too, a bearded old man who looks to be dressed in a borrowed frockcoat, since it fits him so badly. Some of the jurors are familiar to Anner by sight. Others must have come into town from

distant parts of the county.

When the case is called, the prosecutor approaches the judge's bench. "Mr. Payne is still too gravely wounded to testify, Your Honor. I request a continuance until such time as he is sufficiently recovered to withstand the rigors of a trial."

Judge Babcock frowns. "Perhaps you could have communicated this news to me in a more timely manner."

"I apologize, Your Honor. Mr. Payne is . . ."

"Slippery?"

The onlookers snort with laughter and the judge bangs his wooden mallet. Embarrassed, the prosecutor says, "Indisposed, Your Honor."

"Very well." Judge Babcock sighs. "Case continued."

Payne may be gravely ill but thank God he didn't die, Anner thinks, as she and Bill walk back to the hotel.

"Could be months before the trial resumes," Bill says. "If I was Dick Payne I'd want to lay low, milk as much sympathy out of the jury as I could, make Lounsbury sweat."

"Where is Payne?"

"I'm told he's got kin somewhere near Possumneck. He's licking his wound out there, I reckon, nursing his grievance."

"His grievance! But he began the whole thing! If only Mr. Lounsbury hadn't taken up that knife."

Climbing the steps to the hotel Bill says, "When a man's insulted and he fails to fight, his life ain't worth a cow bean, in his own eyes or anybody else's."

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At the end of the month, of a Sabbath morning, the citizens of Kosciusko awake to find that an astonishing two inches of snow has whitened the ground and coated the tree limbs. The following day Mr. Lounsbury seeks Anner out. She's in the dining-room, folding napkins still warm from the iron. "I'm going away for a while," he says. "If customers inquire as to my whereabouts, please tell them I'm currently unavailable."

He's holding a carpetbag, which she recognizes as having come from the new stock at Stinson's dry-goods store. "This is no weather for traveling."

"The snow won't last."

"Forgive me if I'm mistaken, but I thought the judge warned you to remain in the county until the trial."

"Whenever that may be."

Anner feels stricken. Suppose he doesn't come back. "Won't you tell me where you're going, in case someone needs to find you?"

John, who is laying silverware on the long table, looks up curiously from his task. He's a quiet boy, whose gray eyes miss little.

Mr. Lounbury smiles. "No one will be looking for me, Mrs. Ford. No one I care to see."

"Well, I bid you a safe journey."

She imagines him on the dappled horse, the hooves making prints in the snow, heading . . . where? Surely, if he intended to depart for good, thumbing his nose at the state of Mississippi, he'd take his equipment and his saloon with him. The camera and all its appurtenances must be worth quite a bit of money.

After finishing up in the dining-room, she stops to have a word with her husband at the reception desk. He's going through accounts in a ledger, the wires of spectacles hitched round his ears. "Prices keep going up," Tom mutters, raking furrows in his coppery hair with his fingers. "I may have to raise the rates again."

"Mr. Lounsbury's gone off somewhere," she says.

"So he has. He gave me the key to the studio for safekeeping."

"Did he happen to say where he was bound?"

"Not to me."

"I hope nobody at the Circuit Court gets wind of it."

"Oh, you needn't concern yourself, Anner. I reckon he hasn't ventured far. I wouldn't be surprised if he's gone a-courtin' up-county. A widow with a nice fat dowry, perchance—land,

negroes, cows, the lot."

"Who'd be likely to introduce him to such a person?"

"Why would he need a formal introduction? Perhaps she had her likeness taken. Or advertised an estate sale in his newspaper, and he smelled an opportunity and took up the hunt."

Anner doesn't believe for one minute that Charles Lounsbury is a fortune hunter. If anything, the widow would be hunting him.

Upstairs, she finds raggedly made beds, water pitchers not yet filled. To the girl Belinda she says sharply, "I've half a mind to send you back to your master. You're not worth the money we pay him."

* * * * *

On Wednesday, March 7, after nine days' absence, Charles Lounsbury reappears, with no widow—wealthy or otherwise—in tow. To Anner he looks weary, as though he hasn't slept much since his departure, but he offers her no explanation. Certainly it's not her place to ask for one. Nodding to her, he walks upstairs with his carpetbag and shuts the door of his room.

Three days later his notice appears in the Kosciusko newspapers, the *Chronicle* and the *Sun*:

C. S. Lounsbury

Has again returned to Kosciusko and intends to remain but a short time for the purpose of furnishing all who patronize him with a true and correct likeness of themselves.

Pictures taken at reduced price for one week longer.

Give me a call at the Kosciusko Hotel, and examine my specimens.

March 10, 1855

At least he's mindful enough not to let politics cut him off from half his customers, Anner thinks. That afternoon, seeing the door to his studio ajar, she works up the courage to approach him.

"Please come in," he says.

He's at his work table, polishing a photographic plate. In the room is the same scent of chemicals that she remembers from the day she sat in front of his camera. His dark hair is mussed. He's not wearing his frockcoat, and the sleeves of his shirt are rolled up to the elbows. He continues to work on the plate, which is held in a special vice clamped to the work table, polishing the plate with strokes so vigorous it's a wonder it doesn't vanish without trace under the buffing stick.

"I saw your advertisement in the newspaper. Do you really expect to stay in Kosciusko only a short time?"

Now he sets the buffing stick down on the table and fixes his eyes on her. "Why don't you have a seat, Mrs. Ford?"

So she sits in the cane-bottomed chair. Sunlight warms her back. Motes of dust dance in the stream of light.

"Maybe the threat to decamp is a ploy to encourage business," he says, smiling a little. "Or maybe not."

"And the trial?"

"Would you have me be forever at the beck and call of that fool Payne?"

"It's a felony they say you've committed. The Court won't let you just wander away."

"Yes, everyone would be bound to notice the saloon lurching from rut to rut on its way out of town, conveniently painted with my name in large green and red letters. I'd find myself in the county jail soon enough. Well, I'm not about to give the town that pleasure."

"When you went away in the snow I worried you might not come back."

He pauses. "Ah, did you."

She knows she's said too much, but doesn't drop her gaze.

"I'll confess to you, Mrs. Ford, I felt discouraged after the trial got cut off at the knees. I'd badly wanted it over and done with."

"I understand."

"On impulse I went to Jackson and visited someone, a cabinetmaker I knew in New York. I was desperate to get away from the anger and turmoil of politics."

"Not easy to do."

"Well nigh impossible in Mississippi. Especially in an election year, when half the population would happily throttle the other half."

Mr. Lounsbury picks up the buffing stick by its handle and stares at his tool. It's the size of a rolling pin, but flat, and has stretched deerskin tacked to one side of it. Anner supposes the stick could be used as a weapon if a person had no other. His dirk-knife is somewhere in the county jail, confiscated by the police as evidence. But the daguerreotypist doesn't look like a man who wants to hurt anyone now, if he ever did.

"No peace in Jackson, or anywhere else," he says, "and Fred Kleine needed me at the newspaper. So I came back."

"I wish I could help you in some way," she says, standing.

He rises too. "I value your friendship, Mrs. Ford."

For a moment they look at one another and then she takes her leave, smoothing her skirt over the cage of hoops beneath it.

* * * * *

It's a summer of fiery editorials howling either for or against secession, political barbecues where plenty of drink is passed around, and candidates' speeches on the porch of the Kosciusko Hotel, with hundreds of partisans shouting in the street. Even Jefferson Davis, Pierce's Secretary of War, stands on the porch and speaks in support of the Democratic candidates.

In the elections of November, 1855, the Know-Nothings are soundly beaten by the Democrats in Mississippi. Whether this means that those Democrats who have been trumpeting secession will succeed in their goal, no one can say. Smoke from the burning of cotton stalks mixes with a drizzly mist, and day after day a gray haze hangs over the town of Kosciusko.

The Monday after the elections Charles Lounsbury once again leaves the hotel and crosses the street toward the courthouse. This time the square is lined with wagons hauling cotton to be ginned, and he must make his way between two of the wagons. Anner and Bill follow, stepping over the mules' droppings in the street.

They take seats on one of the crude wooden benches, which are backless so as not to encourage idle gawkers, Anner imagines. Yet the room is nearly full, spectators standing in the rear against the wall. To Anner's right is the victim, Dick Payne. He's in his early twenties, half a head shorter than Lounsbury, with dark yellow hair. Below his left temple is a scar, perhaps an inch and a half long, from his eyebrow to his ear. On his sallow face is a smirk.

The prosecution calls four witnesses, the first being Dick Payne himself. Led by the prosecuting attorney, he describes the events of the evening of October 28th, 1854. He'd had a drink in the bar-room of the Kosciusko Hotel. Yes, words were exchanged between himself and Lounsbury. Nothing serious, no more than the casual swapping of opinions of the kind that takes place every evening in the hotel bar-room. He paid for his drink and left, eager to return to his lodging house in time for supper. When he reached the Presbyterian Church he was suddenly set upon by Lounsbury, who was brandishing a dirk-knife.

At the request of the prosecution, and with a nod from Judge Babcock, the bailiff steps forward with the knife. As the crowd leans in to look, the bailiff removes it from its German silver scabbard. For the record, the prosecutor describes it as having a walrus ivory grip, a seven-inch spear point, a two-sided blade. Yes, Payne says, that's the weapon that wounded him. Fingering the scar at his left temple, he says that Lounsbury struck him with the knife and left him to bleed to death. Luckily Doc Lewis saved his life.

Lounsbury's lawyer, Sam Quimby, manages to get little more out of him. Payne insists that he did not provoke the argument between himself and Lounsbury. Yes, he left the hotel at a fast pace, but that was not because he feared reprisal for anything he might have said there. It had begun to rain, and he didn't want to be

late for his supper. He admits that he himself was armed with a bowie knife, but never had the opportunity to use it, since the attack was a complete surprise to him. When he's asked to step down Payne smiles smugly, displaying the gap between his two front teeth.

Anner testifies that she witnessed the stabbing. Yes, she'd followed Lounsbury, knowing he was after Payne and carried a knife. She'd wanted to stop him from using it but failed to reach him in time. No, she had not personally been present in the bar-room and could not say what exactly transpired between the two men prior to Payne's leaving the hotel. Sam Quimby declines to examine her on Lounsbury's behalf, which makes her uneasy. She would like to have spoken to Lounsbury's character. A mild man, a gentleman, not given to angry outbursts or rash acts of violence. Perhaps Sam Quimby assumes that a woman's testimony will have little weight with the jury, might even prejudice them against his client.

The sexton recounts hearing a scuffle, leaving his residence in the rear of the church, and coming upon Dick Payne lying senseless and bleeding on the church steps. He saw Lounsbury with the bloody knife in his hands. Dr. Lewis testifies as to the severity of the wound, certainly life-threatening. Impossible for him to say, however, whether the attack was meant to warn or to kill.

With little ceremony the prosecution rests its case, and Judge Babcock calls a dinner recess. Anner and Bill leave the courtroom together. "How do you think it's going for Lounsbury?" she asks.

"Well enough, I reckon." He takes his dinner in the dining-room, and, though she has no appetite, Anner orders toast and a cup of tea to be brought to her in the family quarters.

When the trial resumes, Sam Quimby calls William Henry Ford to the witness box. After some preliminary questions Quimby asks, "Who do you recall being in the bar-room the evening of October 28th, 1854?"

"Besides myself, Mr. Lounsbury, Mr. Payne, Mr. Joshua Phillips, and a fellow who was staying in the hotel just the one night—don't know his name, never saw him again."

"Why so few? I'm given to understand that the bar-room of the Kosciusko Hotel is a popular place for a libation of a Saturday evening."

The onlookers chuckle, since Quimby is well known for quaffing libations there himself, and not only on Saturday evenings.

"It was early yet," Bill says. "And raining. Windy."

"Therefore, since you weren't very busy, you had the opportunity to overhear the conversation between Mr. Lounsbury and Mr. Payne?"

"I couldn't hardly help it, sir."

"Do you recall the topic of the conversation?"

"I believe it was about the Know-Nothing party. Payne accused Lounsbury of being a member, and Lounsbury denied it. Payne said that Lounsbury, being from New York, was a dirty abolitionist, and Lounsbury denied that, too. Said the South was his adopted home and he had no use for extremists on either side of the slavery issue."

"Was this the first occasion on which you heard Mr. Payne attack Mr. Lounsbury verbally?"

"No, sir."

"Do you recall any specific words that Payne used?"

"Liar," Bill says. "Coward. Poltroon."

"And do you consider these words to be insulting? An attack on the honor of Mr. Charles Lounsbury?"

The prosecutor objects, but the judge allows Bill to answer.

"No one in the state of Mississippi would think anything else."

Now the prosecutor walks up to the witness box, and, smiling with an eye that blinks disconcertingly, begins his examination in smooth, self-deprecating tones: Is it not astonishing, Mr. Ford, that you are blessed with such a remarkable memory that you are able to recall the evening of October 28th, 1854—more than a

year ago—in such detail? Is it not within the realm of possibility that you have confused any comments of Mr. Payne's with that of the unnamed and missing drummer? Since Mr. Lounsbury has resided in the hotel managed by your father for some time, might he happen to be a particular friend of yours? Might you not have some reason to exaggerate or even fabricate words that the estimable Mr. Payne, who has no onus of legal approbation upon him, as no one in this courtroom has reason to deny, could have casually uttered, or indeed not uttered at all?

The prosecutor's questions wind on, growing ever more convoluted, and Anner can tell by the red patches that rise on Bill's cheeks that he is struggling to keep his temper. However, to each one he firmly answers, "No, sir." At last he is told to stand down. Anner's glad to have his reassuring presence next to her on the bench.

Joshua Phillips, hostler, when called to the witness box, verifies Bill's account of the evening of October 28th. When prompted by Quimby, he adds more insults that he remembers Payne uttering: Puppy. Scoundrel. The prosecutor dismisses him from the box, as if the testimony of a hostler can be of no possible interest to him or to the Court.

The last person to enter the witness box is the accused. Lounsbury's replies to his lawyer's questions are brief and direct. "I chased Payne down in order to defend my honor. I regret that the man placed me in that position, but once he'd done so, repeatedly, in public, I had no alternative."

"Could you not have challenged him to a duel?"

"No, sir. Dick Payne is not my social equal," he says matter-of-factly.

When it's his turn to examine Lounsbury, the prosecutor waves a copy of the *Chronicle* in front of the editor's face and reads out loud a paragraph ridiculing those who would destroy the Union out of false pride and hot-headed ignorance. "Was not that editorial intended to outrage the sensibilities of a man such as Richard Payne?"

"If he chose to see himself in that light, I cannot help it."

"Did you write that editorial, Mr. Lounsbury?

"I did not."

"Do you agree with its sentiment?"

"I stand by my position that the Union is worth preserving."

"That will be all."

The jury takes fifty-five minutes to acquit Charles Lounsbury. Anner watches Payne, scowling, leave the courtroom, his thick neck hunched into the collar of his frockcoat.

On their way across Jefferson Street Anner says, "You did well, Bill. You spared Mr. Lounsbury from going to jail." She feels excited, elated, as if she'd been rescued herself. She's had too many visions of the daguerreotypist convicted, led off in humiliation, locked behind bars.

"All I did was say what I heard," Bill answers. "No jury in this state will convict a man for defending his honor."

It's the end of the day and the wagons laden with cotton are gone, leaving only the stink of the mules' manure and the odd tuft of cotton in the street. Her children's needs await her. The hotel is lit up with oil lamps, the brightest structure in Courthouse Square.

"Payne and his kin aren't happy," Bill says, as they pass through the doors with their oval glass insets. "I reckon they'll slink off to Possumneck with their tails between their legs."

He hustles to the bar-room, where his father is pouring out the whiskey in his stead. Anner's thinking about the girls' supper and whether she'll be able to focus her mind on sums and grammar tonight. In her relief she forgets all about the backache from sitting on the courtroom bench all day.

* * * * *

A few days after the trial, Lounsbury posts a notice on the door of his studio. Charles S. Lounsbury is, at present, unavailable for the

taking of likenesses. He wishes to thank the public for their kind patronage in the past.

"Have you determined to leave Kosciusko, then?" Anner asks when they encounter one another on the stairs. She's carrying an armload of towels and sheets.

"By no means. It's just that I'll be too busy at the *Chronicle*, now that Kleine has gone."

"He's gone? But where?"

"Off to Kansas to start a newspaper. I bought out his share in the *Chronicle*."

"Kansas is a dangerous place."

"I reckon he's eager for the adventure."

"Are you an adventurous man, Mr. Lounsbury?"

He smiles. "Not as much as I once was. A trial tends to sober a person."

"I hope you won't leave us, now that you're free to go anywhere you like."

"I have no plans to do so, Mrs. Ford."

In the evening a traveling troupe puts on a minstrel show in the hotel, the third act of which is a parody of *Macbeth*. Wildly lurching about the platform, Macbeth cries, "Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?" Cross-eyed, Macbeth peers at the wooden weapon. His eyes roll around and then widen, bulge toward the audience. "Is this a dagger or a . . . false . . . daguerreotype?"

Standing at the back of the hall, Anner is relieved to see Mr. Lounsbury laughing as heartily as anyone.

Again this year Anner has young pine trees brought to the hotel by wagon. She decorates them with dried fruit slices and sugar cookies. Mattie and Jennie string cranberries. Anner hires a blacksmith to make two punched-out metal stars, one for the top of each tree. In their stockings the girls find small dolls and trinkets, candies, a precious orange in the toe. For Christmas dinner the cooks prepare roast turkey, ham, fricasseed chicken, mashed turnips, fruit cakes, mince pies. Ben manages to find time to return to Kosciusko to celebrate the holiday with his family.

Anner gathers her flock of children to go to chapel to thank God for their many blessings. On her knees she prays for peace.

* * * * *

Editor Murdered

Mr. Charles S. Lounsbury, Editor and Proprietor of the Kosciusko *Chronicle*, was murdered on the night of the 20th inst., by Richard W. Payne, who has not been apprehended by the officers of justice.

About 16 months since Payne undertook to belittle and run over Lounsbury, and for that purpose sought a quarrel with him, in which he nearly lost his life. Lounsbury inflicting a severe and dangerous wound with a dirk-knife over his left eye and for which he was indicted, stood his trial, and came clear in the Circuit Court of this county. Being foiled in this attempt, Payne's vicious mind could ill bear the reproof, but seemed to be whet with a keener thirst for revenge. On Tuesday last he came to town, gun in hand, and his saddlebags well packed, ready for an emergency. He took a stand in the evening near the Kosciusko Hotel, and lay in waiting for Lounsbury to go to supper. Lounsbury, who has been sick for the last five or six weeks, and confined to his room until a few days past, was just able to crawl about, and started from the office between dusk and dark for the hotel, when, just as he was going up the steps, Payne discharged a double-barreled gun at him, loaded with mixed shot, from small squirrel shot to turkey shot, hitting him with 73 on the right side, ranging from the hip up to the shoulder, and then mounted his horse and made off with all speed to parts unknown. Lounsbury lived after being shot about 25 or 30 minutes. He was a peaceable, well-disposed, law-abiding citizen, attending to his own business and never intermeddling with that of others: such a one as would do credit to any community.

Kosciusko *Chronicle*. February 23, 1856.

Crouched on the porch steps, Anner held Charles Lounsbury in her arms as he was dying. He spoke no last words. Later, when she soaked her skirts in a tub, she stood and watched as his blood leaked crimson into the water. ▲▼▲