

The Cultivation of Weeds

Emory Menefee

This novel is entirely fictional, with no intent
to depict actual persons or events other than
those within a few historical allusions

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Chapter I

Carl

On a forest trail in midsummer, sunlight streaming down through the trees can sometimes produce a striking mosaic of light and shadow on the pathway. Patterns like this were important to the impressionist masters, and their paintings of them remind us that such blotches of light and shade are as complementary as pollen and bee. In the quiet woods, the effect distills our mood into one of contemplation and encourages us to enjoy the lethargy of summer.

Carl Grendil often walked along a path like this in parkland not far from where he lived. The images of shade and light had a strangely powerful fascination for him, almost an addiction, and he felt enlivened when the weather and season collaborated to produce unusually pleasing patterns. He often photographed them for later study to try to learn why some shots worked and others didn't. Though the photos became a comforting map for the territory, he knew they were merely abstractions that could always be improved on. He had taught himself the principles of photographic composition and processing well enough that his work was admired within the family and the very few others who saw it, though hardly anyone ever asked him for a print.

Sadly, Carl's favorite walks amid the impressionist shadows were losing their appeal to him. Many of the wooded areas adjacent to the park were under development for new housing, not on a large scale, but steadily. Carl could hear the sounds of workmen, and while the pleasure of his walks was not yet lost, he feared the worst. He took photos more often, and cherished them more than ever.

Several decades before, Carl's father purchased the family home from a workman who had lost his job and was obliged to leave to find work elsewhere. This man had built the house himself and in spite of some eccentricities it offered a strongly comforting space to grow up in and to feel separate from the world outside. Carl was born there, the only home he had known. It was on a lot large enough to make it invisible to neighbors and passersby, which suited Carl's reclusive habits perfectly. The sylvan setting seemed entirely safe to his parents, and they allowed him to roam freely at any time.

After the local industry failed, the town of Woodville lay unnoticed by real estate agents and developers for years, until its recent rediscovery as a preferred place to live. It turned out to be an ideal refuge for the affluent of the city who were seeking to escape the restive homeless hordes and rampant crime that had affected urban areas all over the country in the wake of the worst economic slump the country had yet suffered. Woodville was far enough from the city to retain its

country setting but close enough for those who had reasons to go there. As magazine ads brought buyers, trees were cut and new roads built. Carl noticed a steady rise in the number of hikers and dog owners exercising their pets. He tried to find times for his walks when the outsiders didn't come so often, but the compulsive fascination of the paths began to fade. A mood of apathy grew on him, and he retreated more and more to his room and the company of his photographs. He still walked, but into entirely different places, and without the enthusiasm he once felt. Eventually, however, and to his surprise, he found on one of these walks an agreeable substitute for his park trails.

The old industrial zone of Woodville was located not far from Carl's house, in a direction opposite to that of the parkland. It was ringed by a rusting railway, narrow gauge tracks that seemed to form a kind of frame surrounding the abandoned factories that had sprung up some 50 years earlier. This was the industry that had created the town and brought in a few hundred workers who settled in the hilly woods nearby. After the tracks were built, the railroad gave the town its name of Woodville, uninspired but accurate enough. It thrived for about a generation, with newcomers arriving in a steady stream and building houses close to the works, like the one now owned by the Grendils. As often happens with small and isolated industrial centers like Woodville, the methods of production changed, shipping became cheaper from more central yards, and overseas labor took over, so the factories

gradually moved away or closed altogether. Most of the buildings were simply abandoned, some chained and locked carefully by their owners who halfheartedly hoped that one day a revival of the industry would make them salable, a vain hope after the entire economy failed. Many buildings were left open and uncared for, to decay and crumble from wind and water. A few of the smallest businesses struggled to hang on for a while, but for the most part it became an industrial graveyard. The revival never happened, and the new urban escapees in their upscale houses looked on the buildings as a blight. There was talk about razing them and making a mall, but all the proposals had died for lack of funding or, more likely, for lack of enough potential users to make such an idea profitable. The buildings were mostly left untended.

Carl had known of the decaying industrial park all his life and was aware of its quiet desolation, though as a disinterested onlooker rather than a participant. He called it the “Zone.” With his beloved park walks losing their appeal, he began to realize that the streets and alleys of this skeletal relic could also offer a stimulating place to walk alone and savor light and shadow. With the eye of a photographer, he found that the geometry of street and building in the Zone could create fascinating images of sun and darkness with the serenity he had known in the parklands, though now the serenity would come from desolation and emptiness rather than the calm of the forest. In this seemingly unlikely setting, he found that he could recover a comforting dreamy and

superreal imagery when walking among the buildings and around the abandoned railroad station with its peeling “Woodville” sign. Cracked walkways with small tufts of weeds became focal points on the sunlit streets and walkways, made more vivid by the blackness of shadows along the base of the walls and on bits of abandoned equipment left to rust. While the quietness of a forest setting is natural and detached from the human world, the quietness of an abandoned architecture arouses an awareness of people long gone. Carl found that his obsession was indeed transferable.

On nearly any sunny day Carl would walk slowly along the streets of the Zone, savoring the melancholy mood of the light around aging brick and concrete structures that showed the decay of age and neglect. He especially liked the crumbling copies of formal devices over arched doors and windows, remnants of an effort to impose a vaguely classical look on the architecture. Usually, after he had studied a scene for a long time, he would take a photograph of it with the small camera he always carried with him. He brought a bottle of water that he often shared with some of the tiny weeds in the cracks of the pavement, tying up in some way his life with theirs.

Carl Grendil was twenty three years old, with time on his hands. He had never trained for any kind of vocation, nor worked at any regular job. For a while he attended a small private college named Forburn and located not far from Woodville. He mostly enrolled in what interested him,

especially the history of science, but he never finished enough of the college's requirements to get a degree, even though his professors had considered him an above average student. Even had he finished, however, his record would not likely arouse much interest among personnel directors.

He was tall and slender with light brown hair and a squarish face, with an angular jaw that gave him a severe and somewhat military look. His intense and piercing eyes actively reflected a keen interest in observing whatever went on around him. He kept himself in good physical condition, not because of any personal goal, but simply because he walked a lot and had little interest in food other than as a necessity. He dressed simply and had acquired a wardrobe consisting of identical pants, shirts, shoes and socks, so that he wasted no time in outfitting himself for the day.

He liked living with his parents in their old and comfortable house, which was large enough that days could pass without his seeing them, though he didn't especially try to avoid them. They had become accustomed to having a son who had no interest in leaving each morning to work, and they could afford to indulge his idleness. His daily walks, often ten miles or more, kept him away from the house much of the day, and usually his meals were taken whenever he felt hungry, from whatever leftovers were in the refrigerator. He had an easygoing and placid personality, with a way of talking that made others feel comfortable. Even so, he rarely smiled or

indicated any facial emotion at all, though he relished an amusing story and could shed a tear at a sad one.

He adjusted easily to a new routine in the Zone, and rarely returned to the tree lined pathways in the park. He would walk among the deserted buildings almost every day, barring dangerously stormy conditions. During merely inclement weather his fascination with light and shadow gave way to observing the melancholia of the deserted streets. Days, weeks, and months went by like this, until a special day came that was quite different from all those before. He had left the house fairly early, as usual, and arrived at the industrial area after a short walk, at a time when the sun had begun casting long geometric shadows along the streets. As it brightened, he felt its reassuring warmth, feeling secure in the constancy of his limited world, believing that by indulging his visual obsession with light he could feel a palpable sense that all was right.

He rarely met anyone in these streets. If he did, it would be someone he had seen before, most likely a former owner of one of the buildings wistfully looking at a lost investment. He never felt that he was being watched by anyone else, nor did the thought occur to him. But on this morning he noticed in the distance, moving in and out of view around the standing ruins, the figure of a girl, someone he couldn't recognize.

Her walk, with its careless abandon, seemed almost like a kind of personal dance, as though she were responding to music unheard by anyone else. Her movements were not so much a walk as a random motion, though it gradually brought her closer to him. As she neared, he saw that she was young, probably about his age, with a pleasing appearance in spite of hair that was a little stringy and a prominent nose and jaw that made her look almost masculine. She was not tall, but her slenderness and vivacity gave her a peculiarly regal appearance, so that while many would not find her beautiful, Carl was impressed.

He usually felt that his privacy was being invaded whenever he saw anyone else in the Zone. But something was different about this young woman. He couldn't tell yet because she was too far away, but as he watched her, more and more fascinated, the surroundings seemed, in his imagination at least, to be transformed from the dark and light contrasts of a crumbling industrial area to hot and roofless stone ruins in some ancient country, high columns holding huge lintels outside walls of great limestone blocks etched by centuries of weather. The woman too had become classical in some way, her simple dress taking on a timeless look, and her very visage a classic profile. He began to feel he had seen her before.

She eventually made her way to him, and he saw that she carried a small notebook. She handed it to him and he read an account of walks among the ruins and desolate paths

that was strangely similar to how he would have described them. He thought she must have been there with him, watching him.

She closed the book and walked a short distance to where an old rusting pipe jutted horizontally from the side of a building. She straddled it as she kept her eyes on him. The contrast of her white thighs against the rust color of the pipe excited him, and though he was inexperienced in such matters, he felt heated, attracted, and confused, all at once. She seemed a complete stranger to him, and yet somehow he thought he had known her before. He had never even come close to having a sexual relationship with a woman, nor for that matter attempted to make more than superficial contact with women he had known in high school or college. But before he had time to reflect and put his feelings into context – after all, he had merely encountered an attractive woman as she walked along a deserted street – she jumped from the pipe and ran toward him. In a voice slightly hoarse and low-pitched she said, “I’m Mora. Don’t you remember seeing me before?”

“No,” he replied, “I don’t recall. I’m not sure. You do look familiar in a way, but I don’t know why. I guess I’ve been preoccupied.”

“Yes, I know that. I’ve watched you for quite a while. I know that you are Carl Grendil. We were in school together,

but I suppose you don't remember me from there. You never seemed interested in girls in those days."

He guessed she knew about his obsession with light patterns, and felt a little foolish at having it being known by anyone else. He couldn't think of anything interesting to say, anything that would impress her. He blurted out, "Why would you be interested in me? Are you some kind of a stalker?" He knew it was a stupid remark as soon as he said it. He had no idea how stalkers operated, or why he would say such a thing, other than that he had heard about them on the newscasts.

"I go after what pleases me, and I like what little I know about you," she said. Her tone was provocative and suggestive. "I was really impressed with you in school. You seemed to understand everything so easily. I'd like to have gotten to know you then, but I guess maybe I was a little shy myself. I always thought we might have been friends, maybe even a lot alike. I wasn't stalking you now, just trying to learn a little more about you. I didn't mean to make you nervous."

"I'm not really nervous. It's just that I don't know much about how to talk to women."

"I'll teach you. Let's go for a coffee."

This was more an order than a proposal. He agreed, and they left the Zone to enter a small café not far away, the

Angelou, one of the few lingering businesses struggling to survive. They sat by a window and got their coffee, a thick brew that had been left heating for hours.

“Not great, but at least it's hot,” she said.

“I don't really drink coffee much. It seems ok to me.”

They sat with only occasional talking for what seemed to him an uncomfortably long time. Their attempts at finding common threads fizzled. Finally she asked, “Would you come with me for an outing tomorrow? I'd like to show you something.”

He had no idea of what to say. “Well, I don't know. This whole thing of meeting up with you seems really strange to me. I'm not actually worried, but it's just kind of strange.”

“Don't worry. I'll be there with a friend, just to make you more comfortable. What if I come by around 10 in the morning, near where we met today? I'll be in a dark car, with a driver. I don't feel comfortable about driving. Is it a date?”

Carl sat quietly for a while, trying to think of what might happen to him. She seemed like a normal young woman, as far as he could tell. Still, his thoughts flitted to a movie he had once seen, in which a woman seduced a guy to go to a remote place outside town for some wild sex, or so he

thought. Instead, he was beaten and robbed by a couple of beefy thugs in armless tee shirts. Nevertheless, Carl could not feel much threat in the advances Mora had made toward him. After all, people do have to meet somehow, even in strange ways like this.

“Ok, I’ll go.”

“I know it seems brash of me, asking you like this, but I just know you haven’t had that much experience in dating women. It’s pretty normal for women to ask men out nowadays. Most men really like it. It’s nearly always hard for guys to make the first move.”

“I’m not worried.” He tried to smile. “I’ll be here. I usually am.”

Mora smiled genuinely, and went out of the café. A car was waiting for her, with a driver, as she had said.

Carl walked back to the place they had met, and stayed there for a time, sitting on a block of limestone. The sun was getting low, and the shadows were long and dark. He started home.

His parents Ed and Lyn were sitting on the porch when he walked up. Ed was reading something, and didn’t look up,

though he did, and sharply, when Carl announced, "You'll never guess. I've got a date for tomorrow."

"Oh, that's exciting," Lyn said. "Your first one, I think. How did you meet?" She tried to make her voice belie the doubt she had that Carl would ever find anyone with whom to share his life.

Carl gave a brief account that intentionally made his meeting with Mora seem more normal than what actually happened. He implied that he asked her to have coffee and then made a date.

Ed glanced up at him, "When I was your age, I was married. It didn't last, but I was married."

"Well, I'm not. Things just don't happen that way with me." Carl went inside. He didn't want to have to explain anything else about Mora just yet.

Ed looked at Lyn before settling back to his reading. "It worked," he said. "I just hope it's the best thing for Carl. I talked a few weeks ago with Bob Smith, an agent I know from the Division of Intelligence, not his real name, of course. I don't think you know him. He gave me some ideas about an organization that might be good for Carl, and that's how it got started. He arranged for the girl to meet him. She's a kind of recruiter. We'll have to see what develops."

Lyn didn't seem concerned. At this point it was enough for her that Carl would actually be having a date.

Chapter 2

Family

Ed Grendil stood on the porch and watched a blimp slowly glide overhead, the second time it had passed by that day. It had the lettering MEGALIFE on the side.

“Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch.” Ed’s voice got louder with each word. “If I had a big enough gun, I’d bring that thing down.” He was yelling. Lyn came to the door.

“Come on, Ed, it doesn’t do any good to get mad.”

“Get mad? How can you not get mad? The insurance companies are near the top of the list of things that have ruined this country. They are just a bunch of greedy, vicious criminals trying to bilk people when they’re most vulnerable.”

She mustered a small laugh, “Well, I don’t know. We were paid off pretty quickly when you totaled the car.”

“That’s a shoo-in for them. They know the statistics inside out, and know damn well they are going to end up with a big profit even when they do have to pay off. I’m talking about the huge catastrophes of life. You have your house blown away by a tornado, wrecked by an earthquake, or washed away in a flood, not to speak of personally coming down with cancer or a stroke. The insurance companies work

overtime to try to avoid paying off. It's like a two-bit gambler trying to weasel out of a bet. And that's if you have insurance. If you don't have any insurance at all, well, you're completely shit out of luck. But even if you have enough money to try to buy a policy and they think you've got some health problem, you won't get any insurance at all. You can only get it if they're convinced that you won't need it."

"It's always been done by insurance companies," Lyn said. "I don't know who else would take care of unforeseen problems. If it weren't for them there would be nothing."

"That's the whole point. Here we are in the richest country ever, and we don't even look after each other. How hard would it be to have a national fund to take care of people in trouble? Sure, there has to be oversight to make sure the bad apples don't abuse the system. Some kind of effective public control, not just some autonomous agency with career bureaucrats to administer the funds. We've got a lot of smart and honest people up and down the ladder. It will work if we want it to, and my guess is that almost everyone in the country wants it to."

"But, Ed, you don't like the bureaucracy we already have. I don't see how this would be that much different."

"It is different. Like I just said, of course you have to have an agency of some kind with authority and tools to act in

emergencies, but it should be controlled by citizens empowered to make decisions and get rid of anyone who doesn't play honestly. A real democracy, from people who would be affected by loss, not by a tiny group of wealthy executives and vested politicians."

Lyn was sorry she had encouraged him. His voice had taken on the sharp and slightly high pitched tones that indicated he was ranting. He went on, "It would pay off without a hassle whenever a citizen is hit by a catastrophe. Private insurance, it's a joke. Look at health care. Privately run, managed by insurance, everybody with a hand has it in the pot, from doctors and drug companies to the guy building a hospital room. What kind of madness would support a system where the people who collect the premiums and stand to profit are the ones who not only decide who is eligible but how much they should be paid, or even if they get paid anything at all?"

She went into the kitchen to make a couple of cool drinks, and brought them out. Ed pushed himself back on the chaise, took the drink and calmed down. "You know, Lyn, the politicians know about the problems. They have seen the movies on global warming, health care, and all that, but nothing ever happens."

Ed Grendil was fifty plus, balding and overweight by a few pounds. He looked a little like Senator McCarthy from the 1950s, though his ideas could not be more different. He

often seemed hyperactive, ready to jump up and immediately get involved in something that interested or disturbed him. When he had taught physics at Forburn, his students were awed and intimidated by him as he strode back and forth across the front of the classroom, shouting out something he thought would be important for them to know. Perhaps because of his temperament, he was casually acquainted with many people but had no close friends he could confide in. His wife was his best friend.

Lyn was barely forty but looked about half that. A tanned brunette, trim and fit, she projected the very image of calmness, a successful result of hiding her stress. She released her nervous energy by physically working out rather than by hyperventilating the way Ed did. They had lived in their Woodville house since they were married and had raised all three of their children there. Carl was first, followed in a couple of years by the twins, Max and Anna. Of all the children, Anna seemed to be the brightest and most self motivated. She diligently studied music and became a proficient pianist. Max did a little drawing, but it suffered from his chronic depression that persisted in spite of treatment by the usual battery of antidepressant drugs. He spent much of his time by himself, though whenever Anna was receptive he would attach himself to her. He regarded her almost reverently because of her accomplishments and self confidence. The three siblings became inseparable playmates and friends, all the more important to them during those years when Ed and Lyn saw

only occasional visitors for the oddly formal events they staged to celebrate birthdays or other milestones. Perhaps in an effort to compensate, the parents gave their children nearly every kind of interactive toy and game that they could find, from Monopoly to state-of-the-art computer and video games. On cold or rainy days, the three children would always be together, sometimes playing, sometimes reading to each other, sometimes feigning to argue about some current event that Ed had brought up for them to debate. In good weather, they would play on the tennis court Ed had built, his one concession to extravagance. Anna had some serious aspirations toward making something of herself, perhaps in music, but Carl and Max were merely content to think of those moments when the three were together as being all they needed from life.

In their teens, Carl and Max became more and more withdrawn, insisting on their solitude as though it were a right. Lyn sometimes thought she had failed somehow as a mother. Still, she could at least carry on a conversation with Carl, though he seemed more reserved with her than even with complete strangers who came to the house. Max took the solitariness of Carl a step further, almost to hermitism. Aside from doing a little outdoor painting that revealed only a mediocre talent, he usually sat alone in his room, unwilling to participate in what the family as a whole was doing. Whenever possible, he ate alone, and rarely spoke to Lyn or to Ed. His attachment to Anna persisted, perhaps because he felt some special bonding that came from their being twins. Ed and Lyn

provided him with the best counseling they could find in the Woodville area, but his attachment to solitude persisted. He seemed to revel in isolation, and eventually ended up communicating almost only to Anna.

Unexpectedly, both Max and Anna left home when they were eighteen, to Lyn's great disappointment. Lyn most of all missed Anna, with whom she had developed a strong bond, entirely unlike her relationship with the reclusive Max. Carl was also deeply disturbed by their departure. His own lesser detachment from social intercourse had come to seem almost normal by having Anna and Max around, both of whom showed little or no interest in developing their social skills. He was most comfortable with Anna, who seemed to be more conventional, and he spent as much time with her as he could. When he confided in her, he knew he very likely could never attain that kind of agreeable rapport with anyone else.

Primarily for lack of anything better to do with himself, Carl stayed after the twins left home. He never tried to develop any other close friendships. Ed Grendil sometimes wondered whether Carl had some kind of mental illness, and had him visit a therapist when he was about fifteen years old. The sessions revealed nothing extraordinary so Ed insisted they be stopped after a short time, even though Carl liked the relaxed conversations he had with the psychologist. His principal family involvement was providing simple company for Lyn when Ed was away on a "personal excursion" or

occasionally conferring with his partner Robert Sikes. Sometimes Lyn would try to act like a friend to Carl, the way Anna and Max had, but the effort always seemed doomed to fail. She felt his isolation as keenly as she felt her own after the twins left home, and would have loved to find a way to bring him out of his loneliness, for her own selfish needs for companionship as much as anything else. Her loneliness grew more profound year after year.

By nearly any standard, Lyn's beauty would be remarkable, not merely because of her striking appearance, but more subtly in the way she projected herself with an air of mystery and invitation. Her dark flowing hair, which she admitted to tinting now and then, seemed always to land on her shoulders in the most provocative way. She knew the powerful effect she had on the men she ran into, and consciously kept this power coiled like a snake for whenever it may be useful to her. She had been just nineteen when she became pregnant with Carl, and now even at forty and having had three children, she looked much the same. In earlier years she and Ed reveled in acting out wild sexual games, and now, much later, she often still lived in a fantasized world of eroticism. Whether for reasons of her age, or, as she suspected, from his having other relationships, Ed had lost interest in her games. On rare occasions he enjoyed trying to act the animal again, but he had recently become more lamb than lion. Their moments of intimacy were rare.

For some years Ed had taught physics at Forburn College, a small private school conveniently close to home. He earned a barely livable salary, but since the teaching assignments were not time consuming, he had plenty of time and energy for his own research projects, at least as long as they required no outside funding. They were carried out in a small outbuilding behind the house. He called it his research laboratory, and going to it made him think of himself as a scientist. He was average in his understanding of physical theory, but he did understand how things work, and how to design them to make them work.

Twenty years before he'd had the idea for a spy chip that ended up making him rich. He didn't know how to produce and manufacture the actual chip, but he was able to find a partner who did, a reputedly brilliant physicist skilled in nanotechnology and computer fundamentals whom he had met at a seminar at Berkeley.

Robert Sikes was ten years younger than Ed, about Lyn's age. He had a difficult and contentious personality that caused him to take consulting work and temporary assignments rather than try to hold conventional jobs, from which he had been fired several times. He had managed to get his PhD in physics from Berkeley, though he had found himself often in stormy confrontation with his professors and thesis advisor. After studying computer science, he decided to go into that field and as a consultant found himself extremely successful in

designing chips for specialized computer applications. He knew, or knew of, almost everything involving chips and computers. Many of his associates felt he had serious mental problems, and though he didn't seem violent, they avoided him whenever possible. Ed Grendil felt the same way about Sikes, but he felt bound to him because of the extraordinary brilliance that he brought to turning rough theory into reality.

The chip idea that Ed had come up with and which Robert developed was actually quite simple. When large computers were sold to other countries, or to anyone for that matter, the F-chip, as it was called, could be installed to sample whatever went through the main bus of the processor. It was designed to transmit a Fourier transform of all this information, with enough power to be picked up by a satellite antenna overhead. Once the transform was deconvoluted, the receiver had access to all the information processed by the computer. Anyone else picking up the signal from the chip, anywhere in its vicinity, would hear what would sound like weak white noise. If the chip were removed or tampered with, the Fourier circuit would self destruct and revert to one that merely passed data through unchanged. The computer would then operate as usual, with or without the chip. To be even more undetectable, the transform had been altered; the chance of having their secret blown was nearly zero.

When Ed Grendil and Robert Sikes showed the chip to the U.S. Division of Intelligence, their technical staff knew

instantly what it would do for them. They immediately put Ed and Robert under the highest security, and forbade them to make any mention of the chip to anyone, much less try to patent it or sell it. The DI let them know that any breach of secrecy would bring dire and instant retaliation and even hinted at possible death. The F-chip was put into computers that ended up in all the major government offices of the world and quickly became a pipeline for secret information funneled directly to the DI. Privately, Ed and Robert were showered with money for their part in the chip development, though they were frequently warned about what would happen to them if one word of it got out. Ed was greatly put off by this, partly because he felt that publication of a paper on the F-chip would be his best chance for scientific recognition, and partly because he disliked bureaucratic kneejerk control. But after it got into the hands of the DI, it was too late.

Robert Sikes seemed content just to take the money and let the government decide how the chip should be used. The whole F-chip idea became one of the tightest-kept secrets in the history of the country. For years it gave Washington deep insight into the affairs of governments all over the world. Even after the Internet and satellites came to dominate information transfer, the chip still found frequent use, though by then other methods for data tapping were being developed. Still, Ed and Robert never had any further concern about their financial security. They had enough banked to last for life, and

even Ed became adjusted to the strictures of maintaining total secrecy.

Lyn Grendil never had any idea what her husband did to earn so much money. He told her and a few inquisitive friends that he and Robert had come up with some popular improvements in chip design that were of value to computer manufacturers and game developers. As far as giving away the actual purpose of the chip to Lyn, he knew that she also would be marked for retaliation if the leak became known. Carl, Max, and Anna were even more in the dark. They were happy to keep it that way and never showed the slightest interest in how Ed earned his living. Max and Anna each got an allowance check every month, and Ed never asked what they did with it.

When they left home, Anna and Max moved to a small northern town, where Anna taught music almost for free to low income families, while Max dabbled with painting, spending days at a time on unfinished projects in his studio. They felt they had to escape the life sucking structure of the Grendil household, but neither of them had any kind of plan for the future.

Carl remained in Woodville, staying at home in the same room he had occupied since childhood, hoping somehow that a chance event might change his life and open the world to him. His needs were few, so it was no strain for Ed and Lyn

to give him whatever he wanted. He had developed an early interest in photography, and this had become the one thing that he felt he could do well. His studies in light and shadow had become to him more than just important but almost obsessive. It was the only thing he did that gave any structure to his life, justifying his long hours spent in studying the pathways of the forest and now the dilapidated structures in the Zone.

So, in these ways time passed at the Grendil home. Everyone in the family was ready for some great change in their lives, though nobody yet knew how it might happen.