

“I am usually ten or twenty years ahead of the curve,” he said. “Most people say ‘about thirteen’ and, I won’t lie, that does ring true to me.” He had been motioning with his wallet, but now he put it away. “You are a man who has learned English despite the pressures of the crowd. Consider this me investing in you.”

A roaring sound was heard from outside, a rushing of wind. Could have been a helicopter or a large tractor used to crush hay bales. “Yes, you are old. But maybe this is just what you need to seed your business.” He walked toward the door. “I must go now,” he yelled and ran out.

I struggled to stand up, but was unable to, he was gone and the sounds outside had died away.

Surprisingly, the men around me, these Jobsian derelicts, weren’t very territorial or predatory, not in the least. I often dropped the bills I was carrying, and I would always hear a man whistle at me from behind, someone who was returning one of the hundred-dollar bills to me. They cautioned me gravely, but I didn’t follow any of it. I had dropped my flute studies over a day ago.

Night after night, I sat by the fire, waiting for Herbert to return, until the fifth night. That night, I felt a strong pain in my side, toward the back, maybe near my kidneys and I curled against the wall, trying to control it.

“Oh, blast,” I said. “Oh my.”

I stood up and shook it off and walked around the outside of the flute box. But I could feel it there. Death was in there, waiting to strike again. I walked around the box, holding my side, watching the men hack away at their flutes.

“You idiots!” I yelled at them. “You killed me!”