

Ch. 2 Malden and the Waitress

"I don't think I want to do this." said John Ronald Ingram. Malcolm Malden was stunned. The two men sat in the middle of *The Thunder Shack*, John's bar. It was a small place, with a low ceiling and a carpet stained by years of drunkards pissing or puking or both. The walls were decorated with the taxidermy bodies of ducks, squirrels and quail, as well as with pictures of varying sizes of hunters and fishermen holding up their proudest catches. The radio was playing a local golden-oldies station on a warbled stereo system.

"What are you talking about?" asked Malden, struggling to find the word.

"I mean, I've decided that I don't want to do this. Sell the plot to you, I mean." said John. He was a big man, with a prominent gut emerging.

"But, I'd thought that we were- *you* were set on selling? The price-" said Malden.

"I know the price, and it's a very generous offer, but I'm in no position to sell it right now, I'm sorry." said John.

"But I had papers drawn up, and you retrieved your deed. Don't turn back now, not when we've put so much effort into it!"

The deed was right in front of Malden. It was sitting there, taunting him. John took the paper, folded it back up, and put it in his pocket, where it would stay. Malden seethed. He tried again to persuade John to sell, but the man brushed him off and insisted that he had work to do. Malden, surprised and confused, did not protest, but left The Thunder Shack as quickly as he had come.

Malcolm Malden was not a man given to philosophical rumination. The nature of mankind, the question of what is moral, the meaning of life, the nature of time, these were questions that did not bother him. In fact, all his life he'd been told to that to think too deeply on such things would lead only to tragedy for himself. The rabbit hole of such questions would never end and he would find himself falling forever. And so he did his best to avoid such thoughts, even in the deep of night when they threatened to creep in, or on lazy, warm days when he had fight to keep from dozing off.

He sat, cross legged, in the middle of his rented apartment in Red Shore and breathed slowly, as he'd been taught. He felt the worries of the day flow out of him with every breath and soon his mind was calm and empty. This was another time when the sorts of deep questions he'd been told about threatened to sneak in, but he pushed each thought away before they could fill up his empty mind.

There was a reason why he'd been told to not think of such questions. It had to do with his "gift", as they called it, his special ability. As a youth, he'd been a quiet child, so much so that when he was nine, he had been marked as a problematic child and placed in a special education program. In the small town where he had been born, this became a source of gossip and he became a prime source of shame and embarrassment for his parents. It was here that he first came into contact with his ability. One of the other children, a larger boy with a speech impediment named Daniel Burch, had snuck up behind him and hit him with a stick he'd found during recess. Malden had been standing in line for the water fountain when Burch beat him down. He fell to the ground unconscious. The other children in line had fled, but had

not thought to alert a teacher, leaving Malden to lie on the floor for a full ten minutes before someone noticed him on the floor. It took a full day for him to recover, and the doctors were worried that the blow had worsened Malden's perceived condition.

Much to their surprise, Malden's first act upon waking was to start speaking, but more than that, he spoke with a lucidity before unknown to anyone. But though he spoke, it was as much out of fear and confusion as anything. Thoughts were assaulting Malden, and his young mind could not bear the stress of it all. He began to convulse and to shake and a several nurses had to come in and restrain him. His parents turned away, his mother in tears, his father barely able to look at his son. The doctors had him sedated and ordered constant supervision. For another week, Malden was wracked by these convulsions until at last he entered a quiet spell and was allowed to return home.

Another week passed and he returned to school, changed. He was still quiet, but there was something disconcerting about him. Where he had been shunned by classmates, he was now openly avoided. Something had changed within him, something the other children of the school could feel, but not define, and so they feared him. Daniel Burch kept his distance until Malden met him in the schoolyard. Malden started to speak to Burch, to say things that Burch thought no one else but him knew. Malden spoke of Burch's parents, of his father, who he called a drunkard, and of his mother, who he called a whore, even though he could not say for sure why he'd said those things. He simply knew that doing so would be enough to make Burch beat to the ground, which he did, and leave him bloodied and that if he was bloodied,

the same pain would be delivered two fold unto Burch. A teacher broke up their fight and Burch's father was called in to take his son home. The next day, Burch came to school with an arm and back covered in welts and a band-aid underneath his left eye. Daniel Burch never bothered Malcolm Malden again.

He could not hold the floodgates and the memories welled up and washed over him. It made Malden smile just thinking about it. *In retrospect I should have thanked him*, Malden thought. The first beating had set so many things in motion, so many little ripples. He looked around his rented apartment and suddenly felt the need for fresh air. His apartment was covered in scraps of paper. Paper clippings littered the floor and notes and information maps were taped and pegged to the walls. He'd moved the furniture, all of which was hideous white-lacquered rattan, to one corner so that it wouldn't interfere with his thinking. Gathering himself up and checking himself in the mirror, he left his apartment and got inside his government-issue car. He turned on the air conditioning and waited until the car was entirely cooled before starting his drive.

He had *known* that Burch would come back to school beaten if he made him attack him, Malden had seen it, as if in a dream passing before his waking mind, or a stream of images that he could stop and observe, but still as blurry as a stream in real life. He had no way to describe it other than that. He had been so young, and so foolish and he had no concept of what he was doing or even the effect it might have. A month passed and Malcolm began to experiment, began to test himself. When he focused, he could see things, still images, short clips of things that were yet to

happen, things that he could affect. Specifics were hard, he failed to predict the answers for his tests, but he could still make out a vague sense of how things could affect one another.

The car was entirely cooled and he drove off down the main highway. As he drove by, he went over every one of his schemes and the ways he'd brought them about. He passed the Ten Stars hotel, the crown jewel of hotels in Red Shore, was being sued into oblivion by a collection of angry patrons and one woman rendered deaf. At Johnson's, that terrible grease trap, a bribe to the one of the cooks led to a fire occurring, which in turn led to Johnson nearly having a heart attack, which convinced him that it was time to sell the business and retire. John R.I. had diverged somewhere, which bothered Malden to no end, but he still had plenty of chances. In his head he heard the words of Dr.Korliss. *This is quiet acquisition of land. We'd prefer if you didn't hurt anyone, but you're not forbidden from doing so. Spare no expense. This is a mission of the utmost importance. You have 5 months. Do not fail us.*

Malden already missed Dr.Korliss, though he'd not been gone for more than a few months. He remembered the first time he saw him. Two black cars had pulled up in front of his house. Two men in black suits emerged from the first, and two more emerged from the second, but they flanked a small man in a beige suit, Dr. Korliss. Malden's parents had told him to wait in the living room, with a packed suitcase. Dr.Korliss and his parents exchanged a few quick words and then they called him outside with his suitcase. His mother hugged him, teary-eyed, and his father patted

him on the head. They both told him he would be going away for a while, which Malden had known would happen. He hadn't been sure how, but he knew that someone would come along who would take him to a better place, a happier place. The men in black helped him with his suitcase while Dr.Korliss continued to speak with his parents. Through the window he saw Dr.Korliss give his father an envelope, which caused his mother to run into the house. Turning away, Dr.Korliss entered his car and they drove out. Peering out the back of the government car's window was the last Malcolm Malden ever saw of his childhood residence.

He pulled into a restaurant, *Sapag's Kebabs*. The alliteration in the name made him wince, but he wanted a place to sit and nurse a drink and this was as good a place as any. It was a lively place that smelled of saffron, dill and freshly baked bread. The walls were covered in rainbow colored arabesques and instead of seats and tables, people sat on pillows on the floor. It was also dark, which he appreciated, and he found himself a quiet spot in the corner, away from the other patrons. That was another thing he didn't like about Red Shore, about all coastal towns, really. Sunlight bothered him, and the people who came to towns like these were all sun worshippers.

His home was a large structure of concrete, secluded from the rest of the world. It was surrounded by wheat fields that seemed to go off endlessly towards the horizon in every direction. The farmers that tended the fields were paid to ignore the large government building placed there for seemingly no reason.

He was shown to his room by the men in black and then taken by Dr.Korliss to meet the other children who'd been collected. Dr.Korliss seemed a kindly enough old

man, at least compared to the men in black, who loomed at least a good foot over Dr.Korliss's head. He was small man, with a stooped posture and gait that suggested he'd once been club-footed. Along the way to the room with the other children, Dr.Korliss told Malden of how they'd found him, how the moment he'd been struck by Burch something had been unlocked within him.

They came to a large room with many tables. In the center was a pile of bean bags and three other children.

"Children, please say hello to Malcolm." said Dr.Korliss and the children waved back dutifully. "Would you like to sit down, Malcolm?" asked Dr.Korliss. Malcolm took a seat in between two of the children, a small tan girl with short hair and a very pale child with the sniffles. The third child was an older girl with long bangs who seemed to be napping in her bean bag chair.

"Now, don't we all introduce ourselves?" said Dr.Korliss. Thus did Malcolm's education, and his new life, begin.

A waitress came over to him. She spoke with a thick accent, possibly armenian, if he had to guess. It had been so long since he'd been in that region.

"Hello, would you like anything? Appetizer, drink?" she asked, notebook out. In truth, Macolm Malden wasn't that hungry, and he had no taste for drink, but he couldn't just sit in the corner without ordering anything.

Falafel. And lamb kebab for the main course. Water for my drink. he was about to say, when he decided to play a little joke on himself.

"Surprise me." he said.

She looked confused at first, but smiled. "Surprise, okay." she said, scribbling on her note pad.

"Bring me your favorite dish." he said. She smiled and walked away.

Malden, of course, knew that. He had looked to a future where he'd asked her what her favorite food was, she'd responded, and he'd ordered. Why not have a little fun with it? Alone, his thoughts again turned to the other children he'd lived with.

The tan girl was Cynthia, the pale boy was Dexter, the older girl was Elise. They were all like Malden, in their own ways. There were many more doctors in their lives than just Dr. Korliss. They came in to teach math, history and science, and then they hooked up electrodes and tried to glean the mechanics of the children's minds. And always, they were under the eyes of the men in black. Still, they were happy. The four of them ran through the halls and tried, in their inarticulate ways, to describe their gifts to one another. Malcolm could see the future, Cynthia and Dexter could sense the past. They could peer deeply into history, though they said they didn't like to. There were many dark things in the past. Malden remembered thinking that there were many dark things in the future. Elise didn't like to talk about what her gift was, only that she was still searching for the words to describe it. It was somehow more than Malcolm's, Cynthia's and Dexter's gifts combined. He missed her.

His time in the facility with the others had made him confident, had made him sure of himself. He had purpose, even if he couldn't risk looking to see what exactly it was. But now he doubted, he knew in his heart of heart that he doubted. And in doubt, came the temptation. He'd been sent to act as an agent of change many

times, putting his talents to work to ensure the best outcome, the least loss of life, or perhaps the death of a few specific people, or the resolution of some economic hurdle. Always, he'd been able to ruminate and let the visions of the future come to him, but now, here, they only came with resistance. And try as he might, he could not see the end of his time in Red Shore, nor could he see the outcome for his superiors. He did not sense his death, as he'd been able to in other assignments, but that was because he could not see. The plans he'd already set in motion would resolve, and the next few he enacted would do likewise, but after that, when his mission was done and the last souls in Red Shore had been driven from their homes or buried in the ground, he could see nothing. Despite the warmth of the restaurant, he shivered.

He thought of the day when Dr.Korliss had shown the four children a video of the previous discovered children and the fates they had met. There was a time when they began to look inwardly, to use their powers for self discovery, but such paths only lead to madness.

There were those like Malden, who in their vanity, turned their eyes towards dreams of the true end, the end of time itself, and whose bodies were reduced to twisted things by whatever horrible visions they saw. Catatonia always followed. It was the same for Dexter, and for Cynthia, who looked to far back, but for Elise, the subjects were simply gone. Each simply disappeared one day, leaving only their belongings and, in one case, a note that read "I'm bored". The four children looked at one another and they had never felt so alone or lost as they did then. None of them slept soundly that night, for fear of the thoughts that might tempt them down the same

path as those before them. Malden was afraid then, and he was afraid now. There was a pervasive sense that his life, and the lives of the other children, were all mistakes and that they were linking humanity to something beyond its comprehension.

As he grew older, he also grew bored with Cynthia and Dexter. He saw them as old people in the skin of the young, reliving events past. Years of training with Dr.Korliss had allowed them all to sharpen their minds to razor edges. While the future was could still be tenuous and needed to be handled delicately, Cynthia and Dexter could look back to the past with crystal clarity. They could recall the names of individual warriors from the great battles of antiquity, recall conversations they'd had, and often spent time alone with one another, recounting their time spent witnessing all of histories greatest triumphs and greatest atrocities. They were soon enough taken away, "put to work", as Dr. Korliss said, as their training was over, though to what work he would not say. Malden was alone with Elise and the two spent long hours talking to one another. They were teenagers then, and alone except for each other. One day, Elise seemed tired. After days of talking, he saw a vision of himself, alone in the facility. He asked Elise if she planned to leave, to which she said yes. She told him of the things she'd thought, of the fact that there was something beyond. She did not feel curious, so much as compelled to go. Malden thought to stop her, but knew even without ability to see the future that such an endeavor would be pointless. The next day, she was gone, her room, empty, and Malden was left alone in the facility, the last child under the care of Dr.Korliss. Malden was not sad, but became quiet and

completed his study. His grasp of reading the future became sharper and at last, with a last pat on the back by Dr.Korliss, he'd been set to work.

The waitress came with a heaping plate of food, falafel and lamb kebab. She set them down on the floor and wished him to enjoy. Malden barely looked at her, lost in his thoughts. The smell of charred meat and fresh bread whetted his appetite, but he only nibbled here and there and sipped his water. This too, he had seen. Suddenly bored, he turned his mind to the timeline of the waitress. She lived alone, would soon find someone, would break up, would leave the country, go back home, not to Armenia as he'd guessed, but to Turkey, where she would live with her mother until finally entering an unhappy marriage and dying in childbirth. A sad life, and he saw that he could save her from it. He could insult her, a man would rise up and defend, she would offer thanks, they would begin a relationship, they would marry and live a relatively happy life together in America. At the very least she wouldn't die in childbirth. But, oh, to interfere with lives in such a way was the start of a path that Malden knew he could not take, for though he saved the woman, he saw himself doing it again, and again and again on a continually escalating scale until he he had fooled himself into believing that he was the only one who could save humanity from the evils that plagued it. The choice was his.

A while later she came with a check and asked him if he'd enjoyed the food. She gave him a wide, clean smile and he smiled back. Her tipped her appropriately according to his check and left the restaurant went back to his apartment and slept.

Arpi watched the dark man in the suit walk out of the restaurant. Much of his food still remained on his plate, which saddened her. He'd seemed so eager to eat when she'd taken his order, but then he'd quieted when she brought him his food. She'd seen him peck at his plate, lost in thought until he suddenly got up and left. She thought he was angry, he must have been angry or displeased by the food, her favorite food. *He hated it, he must have*, she thought, and she felt a fool for having brought it to him. Sapag's Kebabs was a large restaurant though, and she soon forget about the man in the suit in the whirlwind of taking order, moving and picking up plates and rearranging the piles of pillows that people sat on in place of chairs and tables.

A family came in near the end of her shift, a large man in a sports jersey, his large wife, and their equally large children. They were loud and crowded into the spot that the man in the suit had occupied earlier. They called for cokes and menus. The children complained to the mother that they wanted chicken fingers and mozzarella sticks. The mother complained to the father, who in turn had no one to complain to until Arpi came to wait upon them.

"A'ight, give us, eh, two kebab, beef, some fried cheese, and, uh, a side salad." said the man. "And that's for me. Honey, how 'bout you?"

Arpi had prided herself on being able to understand people mangling the names of some of the dishes on menu, but in this case, the man spoke with as thick an accent as she'd ever heard. The speed with which he spoke changed, hastening and then slowing down suddenly before she could have time to write down the order.

"Could you repeat that?" she asked, trying her best to sound courteous. The man repeated the order, this time with a hint of annoyance in his voice. Again, she could not understand him through the thickness of his accent and she asked him to repeat himself.

"Jesus christ, listen to me, do you not understand English!?" asked the man. Arpi did understand english, quite well in fact, but even this insult came out as an unintelligible mash of syllables coated in the thick accent of wherever these people came from.

"What's your name?" asked the man. His wife had also grown visibly annoyed and had pulled out her cell phone and started typing. Arpi saw that she had long nails, each painted with a different design. They reminded her of fake witches fingers she'd seen in halloween stores. Seeing such fingers in real life somehow made her want to break those fingernails, to see them splintered and shortened.

"Arpi." she said to the man, growing a little nervous.

"Arpy? How the hell do you spell that?" asked the man.

"A-R-P-I." she said. The man's wife giggled.

"A-R-P- I? Goddamn, no wonder you can't even take an order, the hell kind spelling is that?" the man said and leaned over. "Hey, can we get someone to take our friggin' order over here?" he called out to no one in particular, hoping the loudness of his voice would be enough to see him waited upon.

Another man from another set of pillows leaned over and told the loud man to be quiet.

"Why are you getting loud man? Don't bother her."

"Hey, stay the hell out of my business alright. I just want someone who can freakin' understand english."

"I don't think that New York accent of yours even qualifies as English. Sounds more like cave speak to me. Just a bunch of grunts." said the man.

The man in the sports jersey got up while his wife feebly tried to restrain him. Armin Sapag, the manager and son of the owner came over. They talked for a moment and Armin asked her to step aside. For 15 minutes she sat on a pillow, silent and quivering. In the end, both parties were asked to leave. Armin apologized to her for not coming to her aid sooner and told her to go home, to get some rest. She did not fully hear him, so lost was she in her thoughts, and it took a full second for her to nod her head and leave the restaurant.

Arpi pulled into the bakery slowly, free from work, and not tired in the least. She raced home past the speed limit, but not much faster than the speed limit. She lived in an apartment owned by a family of Lebanese bakers. The apartment rested on top of the bakery, which gave the whole building a squat look, and apartment itself was cramped. It was unbearably hot during the day from the heat of the ovens and often as not she would be woken up by the sound of the mother or the father downstairs, arguing over raising the price of a half pound loaf of rye, or whether their flour purveyor was overcharging them.

It was past midnight, far past the bakery's closing, but the smell of fresh bread and rolls still hung in the air. The smell filled her with longing for fresh bread and butter and her stomach growled at her. She fished for her keys as she walked up the stairs that hugged the bakery and led to the apartments that sat above. She opened the door to her apartment, tossing her purse to the side and immediately going to her pantry to look for something to eat. She hadn't had the appetite to eat at the restaurant, but now, in the comfort of her home, she felt famished. The thought of bread again came to her and she looked to the basket where she normally kept a loaf, but found it empty. Finding nothing in the apartment that could sate her hunger, she instead sat down in her chair and let her stomach growl. In truth, she did not think that she could have eaten anything even with her hunger.

The events of the day had cast a shadow over her. She thought of crushing the man in the jersey in between her hands, or of stomping him underfoot as a giant would, him and his entire family. She wanted them to burn, to be torn apart by wolves, to be stricken from the earth and remembered only as the horrible people they were. For some time she smoldered in her chair, staring at nothing, thinking of things she should have done. She thought she should have yelled rather than let a stranger step in to defend her. She should have taken the nearest pot of tea, boiling or not, and thrown it in the fat man's face. She caught herself thinking these thoughts and tried to force them away.

She, more than any of her siblings, had the most uncontrollable rages. They came over her at the oddest moments. Sometimes, things that would have sent others into a rage did nothing to stir her.

No, it was the days like today that brought out her rage, and it wasn't always people who brought out the rage in her. Once, when she was standing in line at the bank, she saw another woman be rejected for something. She started yelling at the cashier and soon enough, other people in line, their children began to laugh at the woman. Arpi had been taken by a rage then. She wanted to beat down the people and the cashier for laughing at the woman, in fact, she'd wanted to tear down the whole bank and bring it crashing down over their heads so that no one would ever have to go there ever again.

She felt her rage on the bus when, on a rainy day, a child slipped and hit his head upon one of the seats. She had covered her mouth with her hands in shock, but looked around to see others respond with casual indifference. It was the injustice of it all, seeing them standing around. Nobody wanted to help, nobody seemed to be shocked, or outraged, or show any kind of empathy. It was just business. That too had filled her with rage.

She was taken by the urge to escape from her apartment. She needed space, and fresh, cool air blown in from the sea. She took a coat, one that covered her entire body and threw it over herself. The beach was not a far walk, just across the highway street, past the beachside *Beach Bum Apartments*. The highway was exceptionally bright. Bars didn't close till 2am and the neon signs of hotels, restaurants and bars

illuminated the street. She was glad to get to the beach, which rose up in a series of dunes before sloping down into the sea. The dunes kept the light and noise from Red Shore away and gave the beach a sense of solitude and isolation.

She walked along the beach, letting the waves lap against her ankles and the cold sand squish in between her toes. Beaches were not safe places after midnight, people often told her. Every few weeks someone would be found on the sand, passed out, mugged of their wallets and phones, or bloodied from some drunken brawl. Murder was rare in Red Shore, but not unheard of.

Once, she'd seen another figure walking on the beach late at night. Her heart had started pounding but, though the moon was bright, they couldn't see each other's faces and the coat she wore hid the fact that she was a woman, which gave her a measure of courage. They passed within fifty feet of each other, acknowledged one another, and kept walking down the beach. She liked to think that the stranger hadn't been a dangerous person, but that he was just like her and all he'd wanted was a stroll down someplace that was beautiful and quiet and not burning under the light of neon signs. Her friends, the other waitresses, did not understand why she loved the beach at night as much as she did.

Arpi had been born to a small family in a village that rested in between some hills near a highway gouged through a mountain. During smoke breaks she'd often heard some of the other waitresses speaking of how Red Shore was a small town, one that filled up quickly and came alive in the summer months, but died during winter. She'd never understood what they meant, and so when they spoke of wanting to leave for

places like New York, or places in the west, she faded out of the conversation and finished her cigarette break alone. She liked living in a place where she could go out at night and see the stars. *More people need that*, she thought. Everyone in Red Shore spent too long under the orange glow of halogen bulbs. Whatever happened to walking along a deserted road at night, and looking up to see a cloud of stars? Her youth had been one of wandering among the rocks and boulders of the foothills of the mountain, of climbing the mountain, looking up, and then looking down at the lights of her town and the band of lights of the highway that trailed off into the distance.

The beach was the closest she could get to that in Red Shore. She had no love for the forested hills that rise up as one left the town to the west. It was good to walk alone, skirting the danger of being found by something or someone.

A ways down, she came upon a a bonfire. She recognized some of the faces sitting around the fires. She saw Timor and Sergei, two of the cooks from Johnson's, a little grease trap a few blocks down from Sapag's. They often gave her free fries when she and the other waitresses went down for lunch. This was their farewell party, as they were due to leave in two weeks.

"Johnson just sold the place anyway," said Sergei. "They're gonna tear it down on the first of August."

"Why?" Arpi asked. "I thought he loved having a restaurant."

"I guess he liked a check with a lot of zeroes on it better," said Timor.

This stirred her temper, and she grew quiet.

A cold wind from the north blew by and the group around the bonfire shivered. She thought of the colder months, after September, and waking up to the warmth of the ovens below and the scent of freshly baked rolls. Then, the apartment didn't seem so bad. It became cozy, and she was happy to curl up into her chair with some tea and write a letter to her mother telling her that she was well and that she wouldn't be returning next year either. The bank was closed half of the week, and even so, barely anybody went to do business in the winter months. Snow was still a little odd to her, especially when she saw how warm and almost tropical it seemed in the summer, but she had come to like that as well. Now was summer, with its humidity that addled the mind and the heat that made blood boil. But soon enough would be winter when the neon signs would lie frozen and dark, stores would be empty and, on some nights, the clouds could open up and stars could be seen.

The people in the bonfire were curling up and falling asleep or getting up and leaving. In the far distance, Arpi could see the sky turning a lighter shade of blue. She did not have a watch and she guessed it to be just after 5 in the morning. She'd volunteered to work the late shift, so she wasn't worried. Maybe seeing the sunrise would do her good.

"Sergei, do you like it here?" she found herself asking. He seemed tired, but not drunkenly so. He struggled for a moment to find the answer.

"I suppose I do. I worked here for seven years," he said. "Sometimes I wish it was different. People are loud, and too fat," he said. She nodded at both of his observations. "But it is still a beautiful place to live. They may be loud, and fat, and

stupid, but they are happy. It is very easy to be happy here, and I think that is why I like it. Why do you ask.”

“No reason. Curiosity.” she said, and curled up.

Sergei, nodded and turned his back to the fire, facing the sea.

She thought again of the dark man in the suit. She had come to a conclusion about him. He did not suffer the same fears that she did. He was above fury and possessed no temper. The way he acted, the way he came and left and was unperturbed, told her that he was above the furies that plagued her. As she stared into the dying fire, she leaned over and rested on the sand. She felt its coarseness, but also how it shaped around her and how right then, the sand of the beach was more comfortable than even the bed in her apartment above the bakery.

Miles away, Malcolm Malden, wide eyed and awake, turned his thoughts to the waitress, though he did so for a different reason. He again sat cross legged, letting visions of the future reveal themselves to him. As he was often tempted to intervene in the lives of others, and he resisted the temptation, he made to satisfy himself by looking at other futures, at some of the brighter paths that could await them. When he looked to the waitress Arpi, his brow furrowed and he was troubled by the vision before him. In it, she did not go back to Armenia, she did not marry a man chosen by her mother and she did not die in childbirth.

Instead, he saw her turning away from that path, and intersecting again with his own, the path that led to the haze that he knew was the end of his time in Red Shore.

The thought scared him, and the feeling of fear, something he so rarely felt, was in itself a terrible sensation that filled his mind with doubt. He tried to look again to the future, to see some vision that would put his worries at ease, but found none. Instead, every vision led to the same end, the same haze at the end of his time in Red Shore. He turned his head away and dispelled the images before him. He was again turned towards the present. He felt anxious in a way he had never been before. A sense of powerlessness gripped him. His palms became sweaty and he ripped off his shirt as it had begun to make him itch. He was Malcolm Malden, possessed of a power like nothing else on earth, he told himself. The future laid itself before his eyes, and he was its augur. His words gave him back a measure of confidence, but doubt still nagged at him. He pushed such thoughts aside and instead looked to the work that yet remained to him. He was worried, that much was true, but he also something else, a fluttering in his chest. His heart beat a little faster, and all his senses felt slightly heightened. Excitement. There were elements in Red Shore that even he could not predict, and they were just beginning to present themselves to him. Before the season was over, they would all come together and his vision would fulfill itself. He made a mental note to go back to *Sapag's* sometime soon. He wondered if she would care to join him for lunch, paused, parsed through the images that he called before him, and knew that she would say yes.