

TIM O'BRIEN

In the Lake of the Woods



A MARINER BOOK
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Glazer, Lynn Nesbit, and my loving family.

Sam Lawrence, who died in January 1994,
was my publisher, advocate, and friend
for more than two decades.

I will always happily
recall his faith
in me.

ALTHOUGH THIS BOOK contains material from the world in which we live, including references to actual places, people, and events, it must be read as a work of fiction. All dialogue is invented. Certain notorious and very real incidents have been altered or reimagined. John and Kathy Wade are creations of the author's imagination, as are all of the other characters who populate the state of Minnesota and the town of Angle Inlet in this novel.

1. How Unhappy They Were

In September, after the primary, they rented an old yellow cottage in the timber at the edge of Lake of the Woods. There were many trees, mostly pine and birch, and there was the dock and the boathouse and the narrow dirt road that came through the forest and ended in polished gray rocks at the shore below the cottage. Then there were no roads at all. There were no towns and no people. Beyond the dock the big lake opened northward into Canada, where the water was everything, vast and very cold, and where there were secret channels and portages and bays and tangled forests and islands without names. Everywhere, for many thousand square miles, the wilderness was all one thing, like a great curving mirror, infinitely blue and beautiful, always the same. Which was what they had come for. They needed the solitude. They needed the repetition, the dense hypnotic drone of woods and water but above all they needed to be together.

At night they would spread their blankets on the porch and lie watching the fog move toward them from across the lake. They were not yet prepared to make love. They had tried once, but it had not gone well, so now they would hold each other and talk quietly about having babies and perhaps a house of their own. They pretended things were not so bad. The election had been lost, but they tried to believe it was not the absolute and crushing thing it truly was. They were careful with each other; they did not talk about the sadness or the sudden trapdoor feeling in their stomachs. Lying still under their blankets, they would take turns thinking up names for the children they wanted—funny names, sometimes, so they could laugh—and then later they would plan the furnishings for their new house, the fine rugs they would buy, the antique brass lamps, the exact colors of the wallpaper, all the details how they would be sure to have a giant sun porch and a stone fireplace and a library with tall walnut bookcases and a sliding ladder.

In the darkness it did not matter that these things were expensive and impossible. It was a terrible time in their lives and they wanted desperately to be happy. They wanted happiness without knowing what it was, or where to look, which made them want it all the more.

As a kind of game they would sometimes make up lists of romantic places to travel.

"Verona," Kathy would say, "I'd love to spend a few days in Verona." And then for a long while they would talk about Verona, the things they would see and do, trying to make it real in their minds. All around them, the fog moved in low and fat off the lake, and their voices would seem to flow away for a time and then return to them from somewhere in the woods beyond the porch. It was an echo, partly. But inside the echo there was also a voice not quite their own—like a whisper, or a nearby breathing, something feathery and alive. They would stop to listen, except the sound was never there when listened for. It mixed with the night. There were rustlings in the timber, things growing and things rotting. There were night birds. There was the lap of lake against shore.

And it was then, listening, that they would feel the trapdoor drop open, and they'd be falling into that emptiness where all the dreams used to be.

They tried to hide it, though. They would go on talking about the fine old churches of Verona, the museums and outdoor cafes where they would drink strong coffee and eat pastries. They invented happy stories for each other. A late-night train ride to Florence, or maybe north into the mountains, or maybe Venice, and then back to Verona, where there was no defeat and where nothing in real life ever ended badly. For both of them it was a wishing game. They envisioned happiness as a physical place on the earth, a secret country, perhaps, or an exotic foreign capital with bizarre customs and a difficult new language. To live there would require practice and many changes, but they were willing to learn.

At times there was nothing to say. Other times they tried to be brave.

"It's not really so terrible," Kathy told him one evening. "I mean, it's bad, but we can make it

better." It was their sixth night at Lake of the Woods. In less than thirty-six hours she would be gone, but now she lay beside him on the porch and talked about all the ways they could make it better. Be practical, she said. One day at a time. He could hook up with one of those fancy law firms in Minneapolis. They'd shop around for a cheap house, or just rent for a while, and they'd scrimp and draw up a budget and start paying off the debts, and then in a year or two they could jump on a plane for Verona, or wherever else they wanted, and they'd be happy together and do all the wonderful things they'd never done.

"We'll find new stuff to want," Kathy said. "Brand-new dreams. Isn't that right?" She waited a moment, watching him. "Isn't it?"

John Wade tried to nod.

Two days later, when she was gone, he would remember the sound of mice beneath the porch. He would remember the rich forest smells and the fog and the lake and the curious motion Kathy made with her fingers, a slight fluttering, as if to dispel all the things that were wrong in their lives.

"We'll do it," she said, and moved closer to him. "We'll go out and make it happen."

"Sure," Wade said. "We'll get by fine."

"Better than fine."

"Right. Better."

Then he closed his eyes. He watched a huge white mountain collapse and come tumbling down on him.

There was that crushed feeling in his stomach. Yet even then he pretended to smile at her. He said reassuring things, resolutely, as if he believed, and this too was something he would later remember—the pretending. In the darkness he could feel Kathy's heartbeat, her breath against his cheek. After a time she turned beneath the blankets and kissed him, teasing a little, her tongue in his ear, which was irritating but which meant she cared for him and wanted him to concentrate on everything they still had or someday could have.

"So there," she said. "We'll be happy now."

"Happy us," he said.

It was a problem of faith. The future seemed intolerable. There was fatigue, too, and anger, but more than anything there was the emptiness of disbelief.

Quietly, lying still, John Wade watched the fog divide itself into clusters over the dock and boathouse, where it paused as if to digest those objects, hovering for a time, then swirling and changing shape and moving heavily up the slope toward their porch.

Landslide, he was thinking.

The thought formed as a picture in his head, an enormous white mountain he had been climbing all his life, and now he watched it come rushing down on him, all that disgrace. He told himself not to think about it, and then he was thinking again. The numbers were hard. He had been beaten nearly three to one within his own party; he had carried a few college towns and Itasca County and almost nothing else.

Lieutenant governor at thirty-seven. Candidate for the United States Senate at forty. Loser by landslide at forty-one.

Winners and losers. That was the risk.

But it was more than a lost election. It was something physical. Humiliation, that was part of it, and the wreckage in his chest and stomach, and then the rage, how it surged up into his throat and how he wanted to scream the most terrible thing he could scream—*Kill Jesus!*—and how he couldn't help himself and couldn't think straight and couldn't stop screaming it inside his *head—Kill Jesus!*—because nothing could be done, and because it was so brutal and disgraceful and final. He felt crazy sometimes. Real depravity. Late at night an electric sizzle came into his blood, a tight pumped-up

killing rage, and he couldn't keep it in and he couldn't let it out. He wanted to hurt things. Grab a knife and start cutting and slashing and never stop. All those years. Climbing like a son of a bitch, clawing his way up inch by fucking inch, and then it all came crashing down at once. Everything, it seemed. His sense of purpose. His pride, his career, his honor and reputation, his belief in the future he had so grandly dreamed for himself.

John Wade shook his head and listened to the fog. There was no wind. A single moth played against the screened window behind him.

Forget it, he thought. Don't think.

And then later, when he began thinking again, he took Kathy up against him, holding tight. "Verona," he said firmly, "we'll do it. Deluxe hotels. The whole tour."

"That's a promise?"

"Absolutely," he said. "A promise."

Kathy smiled at this. He could not see the smile, but he could hear it passing through her voice when she said, "What about babies?"

"Everything," Wade said. "Especially that."

"Maybe I'm too old. I hope not."

"You're not."

"I'm thirty-eight."

"No sweat, we'll have thirty-eight babies," he said. "Hire a bus in Verona."

"There's an *idea*. Then what?"

"I don't know, just drive and see the sights and be together. You and me and a busload of babies."

"You think so?"

"For sure. I promised."

And then for a long while they lay quietly in the dark, waiting for these things to happen, some sudden miracle. All they wanted was for their lives to be good again.

Later, Kathy pushed back the blankets and moved off toward the railing at the far end of the porch. She seemed to vanish into the heavy dark, the fog curling around her, and when she spoke, her voice came from somewhere far away, as if lifted from her body, unattached and not quite authentic.

"I'm not crying," she said.

"Of course you're not."

"It's just a rotten time, that's all. This stupid thing we have to get through."

"Stupid," he said.

"I didn't mean—"

"No, you're right. Damned stupid."

Things went silent. Just the waves and woods, a delicate in-and-out breathing. The night seemed to wrap itself around them.

"John, listen, I can't always come up with the right words. All I meant was—you know—I mean there's this wonderful man I love and I want him to be happy and that's all I *care* about. Not elections."

"Fine, then."

"And not newspapers."

"Fine," he said.

Kathy made a sound in the dark, which wasn't crying. "You do love me?"

"More than anything."

"Lots, I mean?"

"Lots," he said. "A whole busful. Come here now."

Kathy crossed the porch, knelt down beside him, pressed the palm of her hand against his forehead. There was the steady hum of lake and woods. In the days afterward, when she was gone, he

would remember this with perfect clarity, as if it were still happening. He would remember a breathing sound inside the fog. He would remember the feel of her hand against his forehead, its warmth, how purely alive it was.

"Happy," she said. "Nothing else."

2. Evidence

He was always a secretive boy. I guess you could say he was obsessed by secrets. It was his nature.¹

—Eleanor K. Wade (Mother)

Exhibit One: Iron teakettle

Weight, 2.3 pounds

Capacity, 3 quarts

Exhibit Two: Photograph of boat

12-foot Wakeman Runabout

Aluminum, dark blue

1.6 horsepower Evinrude engine

He didn't talk much. Even his wife, I don't think she knew the first damn thing about ... well, about *any* of it. The man just kept everything buried.²

—Anthony L. (Tony) Carbo

Name: Kathleen Terese Wade

Date of Report: 9/21/86

Age: 38

Height: 5'6"

Weight: 118 pounds

Hair: blond

Ever: green

Photograph: attached

Occupation: Director of Admissions, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Medical History: pneumonia (age 16), pregnancy termination (age 34)

Current Medications: Valium, Restoril

Next of Kin: John Herman Wade

Other Relatives: Patricia S. Hood (sister), 1625 Lockwood Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota³

—Extract, Missing Persons Report

After work we used to do laps together over at the Y every night. She'd just swim and swim, like a fish almost, so I'm not worried about ... Well, I think she's fine. You ever hear of a fish drowning?⁴

—Bethany Kee (Associate Admissions Director, University of Minnesota)

He was not a fat child, not at all. He was husky. He had big bones. But sometimes I think his father made him feel—oh, made him feel—oh—maybe overweight. In sixth grade the boy wrote away for a diet he'd seen advertised in some silly magazine ... His father teased him quite a lot. Constant teasing, you could say.

—Eleanor K. Wade

You know what I remember? I remember the flies. Millions of flies. That's what I mostly remember.⁵

—Richard Thinbill

Exhibit Three: Photograph of houseplant debris

Remains of six to eight plants (1 geranium, 1 begonia, 1 caladium, 1 philodendron, others unidentified)
Plant material largely decomposed

John loved his father a lot. I suppose that's why the teasing hurt so bad ... He tried to keep it secret—how much it hurt—but I could always tell ... Oh, he loved that father of his. (What about *me*? I keep thinking that.) Things were hard for John. He was too young to know what alcoholism is.

—Eleanor K. Wade

Exhibit Four: Polling Data

July 3, 1986
Wade—58%

Durkee—31%

Undecided—11%

August 17, 1986

Wade—21%

Durkee—61%

Undecided—18%⁶

Landslide isn't the word. You saw the numbers? Three to one, four to one—a career-ender. Poor guy couldn't get elected assistant fucking dogcatcher on a Sioux reservation ... Must've asked a trillion times if there was anything that could hurt us, scum or anything. Man never said one single word. Zero. Which isn't how you run a campaign ... Did I betray him? Fuck no. Other way around. Worked like a bastard to get him elected.

—Anthony L. (Tony) Carbo

Exhibit Five: Photographs (2) of boathouse (exterior), Lake of the Woods

Exhibit Six: Photographs (3) of Wade cottage" (exterior), Lake of the Woods

I'll bet she's on a Greyhound bus somewhere. Married to that creep, that's where I'd be. She liked buses.

—Bethany Kee (Associate Admissions Director, University of
Minnesota)

I can't discuss this.⁷

—Patricia S. Hood (Sister of Kathleen Wade)

Engine trouble. That old beat-up Evinrude. Busted cord probably, or the plugs went bad. Give it time, she'll walk right through that door over there. I bet she *will*.⁸ —Ruth Rasmussen

I was working down at the Mini-Mart and they come in and I served them both coffee at the counter and then after a while they started having this argument. It went on for a while. She was mad. That's all I know.⁹

—Myra Shaw (Waitress)

A politician's wife, so naturally you try extra hard. We did everything except empty out the goddamn lake. I'm not done yet. Every day goes by, I keep my eyes open. You never know.¹⁰

—Arthur J. Lux (Sheriff, Lake of the Woods County)

The guy offed her.¹¹

—Vincent R. (Vinny) Pearson

That's preposterous. They loved each other. John wouldn't hurt a fly.

—Eleanor K. Wade

Fucking flies!

—Richard Thinbill

3. The Nature of Loss

When he was fourteen, John Wade lost his father. He was in the junior high gymnasium, shooting baskets, and after a time the teacher put his arm around John's shoulder and said, "Take a shower now. Your mom's here."

What John felt that night, and for many nights afterward, was the desire to kill.

At the funeral he wanted to kill everybody who was crying and everybody who wasn't. He wanted to take a hammer and crawl into the casket and kill his father for dying. But he was helpless. He didn't know where to start.

In the weeks that followed, because he was young and full of grief, he tried to pretend that his father was not truly dead. He would talk to him in his imagination, carrying on whole conversations about baseball and school and girls. Late at night, in bed, he'd cradle his pillow and pretend it was his father, feeling the closeness. "Don't be dead," he'd say, and his father would wink and say, "Well, hey, keep talking," and then for a long while they'd discuss the right way to hit a baseball, a good level swing, keeping your head steady and squaring up your shoulders and letting the bat do the job. It was pretending, but the pretending helped. And so when things got especially bad, John would sometimes invent elaborate stories about how he could've saved his father. He imagined all the things he could've done. He imagined putting his lips against his father's mouth and blowing hard and making the heart come alive again; he imagined yelling in his father's ear, begging him to please stop dying. Once or twice it almost worked. "Okay," his father would say, "I'll stop, I'll stop," but he never did.

In his heart, despite the daydreams, John could not fool himself. He knew the truth. At school, when the teachers told him how sorry they were that he had lost his father, he understood that lost was just another way of saying dead. But still the idea kept turning in his mind. He'd picture his father stumbling down a dark alley, lost, not dead at all. And then the pretending would start again. John would go back in his memory over all the places his father might be—under the bed or behind the bookcases in the living room—and in this way he would spend many hours looking for his father, opening closets, scanning the carpets and sidewalks and lawns as if in search of a lost nickel. Maybe in the garage, he'd think. Maybe under the cushions of the sofa. It was only a game, or a way of coping, but now and then he'd get lucky. Just by chance he'd glance down and suddenly spot his father in the grass behind the house. "Bingo," his father would say, and John would feel a hinge swing open. He'd bend down and pick up his father and put him in his pocket and be careful never to lose him again.

4. What He Remembered

Their seventh day at Lake of the Woods passed quietly. There was a telephone but it never rang. There were no newspapers, no reporters or telegrams. Inside the cottage, things had a fragile, hollowed-out quality, a suspended feeling, and over the morning hours a great liquid silence seemed to flow in from the woods and curl up around their bodies. They tried to ignore it; they were cautious with each other. When they spoke, which was not often, it was to maintain the pretense that they were in control of their own lives, that their problems were soluble, that in time the world would become a happier place. Though it required the exercise of tact and willpower, they tried to find comfort in the ordinary motions of life; they simulated their marriage, the old habits and routines. At the breakfast table, over coffee, Kathy jotted down a grocery list. "Caviar," she said, and John Wade laughed and said, "Truffles, too," and they exchanged smiles as proof of their courage and resolve. Often, though, the strain was almost impossible to bear. On one occasion, as she was washing the breakfast dishes, Kathy made a low sound in her throat and began to say something, just a word or two, then her eyes focused elsewhere, beyond him, beyond the walls of the cottage, and then after a time she looked down at the dishwasher and did not look back again. It was an image that would not go away. Twenty-four hours later, when she was gone, John Wade would remember the enormous distance that had come into her face at that instant, a kind of travel, and he would find himself wondering where she had taken herself and why, and by what means.

He would never know.

In the days ahead he would look for clues in the clutter of daily detail. The faded blue jeans she wore that morning, her old tennis shoes, her white cotton sweater. The distance in her eyes. The way she rinsed the breakfast dishes and dried her hands and then walked out of the kitchen without looking at him.

What if she'd spoken?

What if she'd leaned against the refrigerator and said, "Let's do some loving right here," and what if they had, and what if everything that happened could not have happened because of those other happenings?

Some things he would remember clearly. Other things he would remember only as shadows, or not at all. It was a matter of adhesion. What stuck and what didn't. He would be quite certain, for instance, that around noon that day they put on their swimsuits and went down to the lake. For more than an hour they lay inert in the sun, half dozing, then later they went swimming until the cold drove them back onto the dock. The afternoon was large and empty. Brilliant patches of red and yellow burned among the pines along the shore, and in the air there was the sharp, dying scent of autumn. There were no boats on the lake, no swimmers or fishermen. To the south, a mile away, the triangular roof of the Forest Service fire tower seemed to float on an expansive green sea; a narrow dirt road cut diagonally through the timber, and beyond the road a trace of gray smoke rose from the Rasmussen cottage off to the west. Northward it was all woods and water.

He would remember a gliding, buoyant feeling in his stomach. The afternoons were always better. Waves and reflections, the big silver lake planing out toward Canada. Not so bad, he was thinking. He watched the sky and pretended he was a winner. Handshakes and happy faces—it made a nice picture. A winner, sure, and so he lay basking in the crisp white sunlight, almost believing.

Later, Kathy nudged him. "Hey there," she said, "you all right?"

"Perfect," he said.

"You don't seem—"

"No, I'm perfect."

~~Kathy's eyes traveled away again. She put on a pair of sunglasses. There was some unfilled time before she said, "John?"~~

"Oh, Christ," he said. "Fuck it."

He would remember a movement at her jaw, a locking motion.

They swam again, taking turns diving from the dock, going deep, then they dried themselves in the sun and walked up to the cottage for a late lunch. Kathy spent the remainder of the afternoon working on a book of crossword puzzles. Wade sat over a pile of bills at the kitchen table. He built up neat stacks in order of priority, slipped rubber bands around them, dropped them in his briefcase.

His eyes ached.

There was that electricity in his blood.

At three o'clock he put in a call to Tony Carbo, who wasn't available. A half hour later, when he tried again, Tony's secretary said he'd gone out for the day.

Wade thanked her and hung up.

He unplugged the telephone, carried it into the kitchen, tossed it in a cupboard under the sink.

"Kill Jesus," he said, which amused him.

Maybe he dozed off. Maybe he had a drink or two. All he would remember with any certainty was that late in the afternoon they locked up the cottage and made the six-mile drive into town. He would remember an odd pressure against his ears—an underwater squeeze. They followed the dirt road west to the Rasmussen cottage, where the road looped north and crossed an iron bridge and turned to loose gravel. Wade would remember giant pines standing flat-up along the roadbed, the branches sometimes vaulting overhead to form shadowed tunnels through the forest. Kathy sat with her hands folded in her lap; after a mile or two she switched on the radio, listened for a moment, then switched it off again. She seemed preoccupied, or nervous, or something in between. If they spoke at all during the ride, he would have no memory of it.

Two miles from town the land began to open up, thinning into brush and scrub pine. The road made a last sharp turn and ran straight west along the shoreline into Angle Inlet. Like a postcard from the moon, Wade thought. They passed Pearson's Texaco station, a small white schoolhouse, a row of lonely looking houses in need of paint. Somebody's cat prowled away the afternoon on the post office steps.

Wade parked and went in to pick up the mail. A statement from their accountant, a letter from Kathy's sister in Minneapolis.

They crossed the street, did the grocery shopping, bought aspirin and booze and tanning lotion, then sat down for coffee at the little sandwich counter in Arndahl's Mini-Mart. A revolving Coca-Cola clock put the time at 5:12. In nineteen hours, almost exactly, Kathy would be gone, but now the corners of her eyes seemed to relax as she skimmed the letter from her sister. At one point she snorted and made a tossing motion with her head. "Oh, God," she moaned, then chuckled, then folded the letter and said, "Here we go again."

"What's that?"

"Patty. Double trouble, as usual—two boyfriends. Always the juggler."

Wade nodded at the counter and said, "Good for Patty. More power to her." There was that sizzle in his blood, the smell of fish and sawdust sweating up from the Mini-Mart floorboards. An aluminum minnow tank near the door gave off a steady bubbling sound.

"Power's fine," Kathy said, "but not more *men*. No kidding, it seems like they always come in pairs—for Patty, I mean. They're like snakes or politicians or something." She flicked her eyebrows at

him. "That's a joke."

"Good one."

"John—"

"Clever, clever."

A muscle moved at her cheek. She picked up a glass salt shaker, tapped it against the counter.

"It's not my fault."

Wade shrugged. "Sorry."

"So stop it," she said. "Just goddamn stop."

Kathy spun around on her stool, got up, went over to the magazine rack, and stood with her back to him. Dusk was settling in fast. A cold lake breeze slapped up against the Mini-Mart's screen door, startling the plump young waitress, causing a spill as she refilled their cups.

It was 5:24.

After a time Kathy sat down again and studied the frosted mirror behind the counter, the ads for Pabst and Hamm's and Bromo-Seltzer. She avoided eye contact, sliding down inside herself, and for an instant, watching her in the mirror, John Wade was assaulted by the ferocity of his own love. A beautiful woman. Her face was tired, with the lax darkening that accompanies age, but still he found much to admire. The green eyes and brown summer skin and slim legs and shapely little fingers. Other things, too—subtle things. The way her hand fit precisely into his. How the sun had turned her hair almost white at the temples. Back in college, he remembered, she used to lie in bed and grasp her own feet like a baby and tell funny stories and giggle and roll around and be happy. All these things and a million more.

Presently, Wade sighed and slipped a dollar bill under his saucer.

"Kath, I am sorry," he said. "I mean it."

"Fine, you're sorry."

"All right?"

"Sorry, sorry. Never ends." Kathy waited for the young waitress to scoop up their cups. "Stop blaming me. We lost. That's the truth—we *lost*."

"It was more than that."

"John, we can't keep doing this."

Wade looked at the revolving clock. "Mr. Monster."

They had a light supper, played backgammon for dimes, sat listening to records in the living room. Around eight o'clock they went out for a short walk. There was a moon and some stars, and the night was windy and cool. The fog had not yet rolled in off the lake. In the coming days John Wade would remember how he reached out to take her hand, the easy lacing of their fingers. But he would also remember how Kathy pulled away after a few steps. She folded her arms across her chest and walked up to the yellow cottage and went inside without waiting for him.

They did not take their blankets to the porch that night. They did not make love. For the rest of the evening they concentrated on backgammon, pushing dimes back and forth across the kitchen table.

At one point he looked up at her and said, "Kath, that stuff in the newspapers—"

Kathy passed him the dice.

"Your move," she said.

As near as he could remember, they went to bed around eleven. Kathy snapped off the lamp. She turned onto her side and said, "Dream time," almost cheerfully, as if it did not matter at all that she was now going away.

5. Hypothesis

The purest mystery, of course, but maybe she had a secret lover. Marriages come unraveled. Pressure accumulate. There was precedent in their lives.

In the kitchen that morning, when her eyes traveled away, maybe Kathy Wade was imagining a hotel room in Minneapolis, or in Seattle or Milwaukee, a large clean room with air-conditioning and fresh flowers and no politics and no defeat. Maybe she saw someone waiting for her. Or someone driving north toward Lake of the Woods, moving fast, coming to her rescue. An honest, quiet man. A man without guile or hidden history. Maybe she had grown tired of tricks and trapdoors, a husband she had never known, and later that night, when she said "Dream time," maybe it was this she meant—an escape dream, a dream she would now enter.

Among the missing, as among the dead, there is only the flux of possibility. Maybe a heaven, maybe not.

Maybe she couldn't bear to tell him. Maybe she staged it. Not likely, but not implausible either. The motives were plentiful—fed up, afraid, exhausted by unhappiness. Maybe she woke early the next morning and slipped out of bed and got dressed and moved out to the porch and quietly closed the door behind her and walked up the narrow dirt road to where a car was waiting.

6. Evidence

We called him Sorcerer. It was a nickname.

—Richard Thinbill

Exhibit Seven: Photograph of John Wade, age 12

Smiling

Husky, not fat

Holding a magician's wand over four white mice

He used to practice down in the basement, just stand in front of that old mirror of his and do tricks for hours and hours. His father didn't think it was healthy. Always alone, always shut up by himself. A very secretive boy, I think I mentioned that.

—Eleanor K. Wade

Exhibit Eight: John Wade's Box of Tricks, Partial List

Miser's Dream

Horn of Plenty

Spirit of the Dark

The Egg Bag

Guillotine of Death

Silks

Pulls

Wands

Wires

Duplicates (6) of father's necktie

My sister seemed almost scared of him sometimes. I remember this one time when Kathy ... Look, I don't think it's something we should talk about.

—Patricia S. Hood

What did she so desire escape from? Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all.

Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its line of force, she may fall back on superstition or take up a useless hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else?¹²

—Thomas Pynchon (*The Crying of Lot 49*)

To study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature.¹³

—Judith Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*)

There is no such thing as "getting used to combat"... Each moment of combat imposes a strain so great that men will break down in direct relation to the intensity and duration of their exposure. Thus psychiatric casualties are as inevitable as gunshot and shrapnel wounds in warfare.¹⁴

—J. W. Appel and G. W. Beebe (Professors of Psychiatry)

It wasn't just the war that made him what he was. That's too easy. It was everything—his whole *nature* ... But I can't stress enough that he was always very well behaved, always thoughtful toward others, a nice boy. At the funeral he just couldn't help it. I wanted to yell, too. Even now I'll go out to my husband's grave and stare at that stupid stone and yell Why, why, why!

—Eleanor K. Wade

You know, I think politics and magic were almost the same thing for him. Transformations—that's part of it—trying to change things. When you think about it, magicians and politicians are basically control freaks. [Laughter] I should know, right?

The capacity to appear to do what is manifestly impossible will give you a considerable feeling of personal power and can help make you a fascinating and amusing personality.¹⁵

—Robert Parrish (*The Magician's Handbook*)

Pouring out affection, [Lyndon Johnson] asked—over and over, in every letter, in fact, that survives—that the affection be reciprocated.¹⁶

—Robert A. Caro (*The Years of Lyndon Johnson*)

There surely never lived a man with whom love was a more critical matter than it is with me.¹⁷

—Woodrow Wilson

When his father died, John hardly even cried, but he seemed very, very angry. I can't blame him. I was angry, too. I mean—you know—I kept asking myself, Why? It didn't make sense. His father had problems with alcohol, that's true, but there was something else beneath it, like this huge sadness I never understood. The sadness caused the drinking, not the other way around. I think that's why his father ended up going into the garage that day ... Anyway, John didn't cry much. He threw a few tantrums, I remember that. Yelling and so on. At the funeral. Awfully loud yelling.

—Eleanor K. Wade

After a traumatic experience, the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment. Physiological arousal continues unabated.¹⁸

—Judith Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*)

It wasn't insomnia exactly. John could fall asleep at the drop of a hat, but then, bang, he'd wake up after ten or twenty minutes. He couldn't *stay* asleep.

It was as if he were on guard against something, tensed up, waiting for ...
well, I don't know what.

—Eleanor K. Wade

Sometimes I am a bit ashamed of myself when I think how few friends I have amidst a host of acquaintances. Plenty of people offer me their friendship; but, partly because I am reserved and shy, and partly because I am fastidious and have a narrow, uncatholic taste in friends, I reject the offer in almost every case; and then am dismayed to look about and see how few persons in the world stand near me and know me as I am.¹⁹

—Woodrow Wilson

Show me a politician, I'll show you an unhappy childhood. Same for magicians.

—Anthony L. (Tony) Carbo

My mother was a saint.²⁰

—Richard M. Nixon

I remember Kathy telling me how he'd wake up screaming sometimes. Foul language, which I won't repeat. In fact, I'd rather not say anything at all.

—Patricia S. Hood

For some reason Mr. Wade threw away that old iron teakettle. I fished it out of the trash myself. I mean, it was a perfectly good teakettle.

—Ruth Rasmussen

The fucker did something ugly.

—Vincent R. (Vinny) Pearson

Vinny's the theory man. I deal in facts. The case is wide open.²¹

—Arthur J. Lux (Sheriff, Lake of the Woods County)

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