

CHAPTER ONE  
December, 1867  
San Francisco, California

It was not that Dr. John Martyn Harlow enjoyed digging up corpses, and, in fact, in his forty-nine years, that would be only his second exhumation, but sometimes a man had to disturb the resting bones of another man. It was the right thing to do for the right reason. That had included journeying to San Francisco, not on one railroad, for it would be two additional years, in 1869, that the entire territory of the United States would be linked by uninterrupted rail line, but rather having to transfer between four separate lines to arrive at the fast growing city by the bay. As Dr. Harlow, attired in a choice suit custom made by one of Boston's finest tailors, scanned the horizon, and its port with the neat row of wooden buildings along the shore, each one belching smoke from a coal stove, he found it hard to consider that hardly twenty months prior, the whole area had been rocked by a major earthquake. None of the folks back in Dr. Harlow or the dead man's hometown in rural Vermont could much comprehend what an earthquake even felt like. But there, on October 8, 1865, as one of the newspapers reported, there existed "scarcely a house in the city that does not show some mark of the visitation, in cracked walls, open joints, flaked plaster, or a cranky position and many of the old heavy brick structures are so shaken up and twisted as to be dangerous to the occupants".

Dr. Harlow, thin and slightly haunted looking, his neat salt-and-pepper beard more salt than pepper with each passing birthday, thought about how appropriate the miserable weather was for the scene playing out before him. Rainy, cold, the foggy morning lent Laurel

Hill Cemetery a more macabre aura than usual. The final resting place of numerous citizens, wealthy and poor alike, which would fittingly include the grave of Andrew Halladie, famed inventor of the cable car, so associated with the metropolis, the fifty-four acre graveyard also served as a place where families would picnic and young couples would promenade among the dead.

Moisture softened the dirt into mud, making it appear as if it were a giant cake batter waiting to be mixed. A dampness that seemed to permeate every cell of his body the way he had seen Scarlet Fever do so in many of his unfortunate patients.

The grave diggers went about their work diligently. Dr. Harlow was acquainted with the knowledge that many corpses were being dug up to be sold to medical schools as cadavers. It was a lucrative endeavor, but one that he did not approve of. As he watched the men work, he wondered if they were indeed part of the grisly trade. That was not his main concern, at least at the moment.

SWACK! Another fresh shovelful of mud was tossed aside.

Holding an umbrella, Dr. Harlow stood impatiently with two other men.

"Just how long will this be, Harlow?" Judge Johnson, the older of the men, between coughs, inquired.

"Does the act of digging up a corpse creep you out, Judge?" Dr. Harlow asked.

The Judge, one of San Francisco's most respected public officials and a person whose social butterfly wife, Lilly, appeared to know everybody who was anybody in the whole region, simply stated, with disdain, "Certainly not. I shall have other commitments to attend

to."

"Whether or not we approve, death is a natural part of the cycle of life," the physician's observation fell on indifferent ears.

The third observer, David Shattuck, took it all in stride. He freely held a flask which he'd take a sip from every so often. Not that it was a party or a celebration or anything like that that he was attending. After all, it was his kin whose bones were being so thoroughly disturbed. Nor was he an excessive drinker who could throw 'em down real good - at least not anymore.

SWACK! Dr. Harlow's ears perked up at the sound of a shovel as it hit wood.

The Judge impulsively shoved a legal document into David's hand, as if he were clutching a piece of cloth ablaze and couldn't wait to get it out of his age-spotted fingers. "It's official," the Judge coughed some more, "he's exhumed." That was not climate for a man with a cold.

David stared at the legal papers and uttered, "Thank you, Your Honor."

Again, one of the grave diggers forcefully bore down his shovel, hitting and splintering wood.

"For God's sake!" Dr. Harlow cried out. "Be careful." Those men were acting like they were participating in a log-splitting contest.

David took another swig from his trusty flask, extended it via his hand to Dr. Harlow, an edgy man who did not seem to notice the bottle at all.

The pair of grave diggers, both youthful men, typical of the profession that was populated by those who were unskilled at little

else or had yet to take on a respectable apprenticeship, took pride in the fact that former president Abraham Lincoln himself had once worked in the trade. Matthew, the stronger of the two, knelt beside the heavy coffin to tie a thick rope around its handles. Then he hopped out of the freshly dug burial space. Taking rope in hand, the grave diggers attached it to the saddles of the two standby muscular horses and slapped their rumps.

"He's been dead for seven years," Judge Johnson barked. "What could you possibly hope to find?"

"I hope to find the truth," Dr. Harlow spoke with truthfulness.

In what gave the impression of occurring as fast as a bolt of lightning hitting a tree, the rope slipped off the coffin, which then began a perilous slide down six feet of mud, eliciting a "For God's sake!" cry from Dr. Harlow. As the one closest to it, the healer immediately dived to his knees to grab the handle to slow the crashing fall, but the weight of the coffin dragged him with it. Part of the coffin cracked open, as if an egg shell dropped carelessly by a child onto a kitchen floor - "DAMN!", was the only word that streaked in the good doctor's mind - and the bones of a foot came protruding out. Dr. Harlow flashed a wicked grin at the grave diggers, who, without hesitation, leaped back into the grave to re-attach the rope.

Moments later, in the compact cemetery hut, lit by lantern, the thundershowers heavier and splashing annoyingly through holes in the roof, Dr. Harlow and David watched as the grave diggers removed the bulky lid. Full of anticipation, the out-of-towner could feel his own heartbeats as pronounced as the precipitation that fell on him. The

corpse came into view. David took another gulp from his flask as he noted how rotted to black the remains had become. Perhaps his brother-in-law being dug up like a deep-rooted bush wasn't such a wise idea after all. Then again, it had been his mother-in-law's decision. His presence was purely as the law required to be "the family member of record" to witness and receive the documentation of said disinterment.

Dr. Harlow, at once saddened by the sight of his deceased friend and former patient, but also elated at what the opportunity would mean for the medical world, carefully touched the head. His fingers gently glided to the top of the cranium, ending at a large lump. Memories of two decades earlier came flooding back, swimming like a school of minnow in his mind. This was, however, not the appropriate time to reminisce. David nudged him, "Doctor Harlow?"

"David. You're second kin," Dr. Harlow stated as he regained his composure, "By law, well, I won't force you. Do you want to?"

"I reckon it's only fitting."

David positioned himself at the top of the coffin. He had to be strong, not physically, but emotionally, spiritually, that was the important thing. Not a religious person by any stretch of the imagination, David yet felt that a higher power did govern the Universe and surely there was a purpose for his standing in the cemetery at that moment in time about to do the unthinkable. David placed a hand on each side of the cranium and, in one rapid motion, with Dr. Harlow holding the body down, twisted off the head, the movement punctuated with a creaking sound.

"You feeling right?" Dr. Harlow asked as David handed him an open

hat box filled with cotton.

Passing the skull to Dr. Harlow, he mumbled, "Right as rain."

Dr. Harlow, cradling the precious cargo, nestled it in the bed of white. Suddenly, the notion of something missing came over him like a cold shiver. The physician with the once dry turned soggy garments snapped his own head back toward the open coffin. "Where is it?", he demanded of no one in particular. Dr. Harlow, who began to search frantically, broke off a piece of coffin wood, then impulsively tossed it aside. "Not here. I know he was buried with it."

David indulged himself another comfort sip from his trusty flask as he and the soiled grave diggers looked at one another, confused. Had this visitor from back east gone mad? Had he contracted the much feared Scarlet Fever, possibly from one of his patients? Was the stress of what he was doing getting to him?

Dr. Harlow grabbed the lantern and peered into the coffin. "It simply must be...A HA!" A partial smile of relief adorning his face, he lifted up a Tamping Iron, and what an impressive rod it was - three feet in length, one-half inch in diameter, weighing thirteen pounds, one end pointed, the other with a crowbar tip. The perfect tool for a railroad foreman to have in his arsenal. Taking it in one hand, Dr. Harlow absentmindedly rested his other on the decayed body in the coffin.

"Extraordinary," David blurted out.

The grave diggers watched restlessly. To them, this was just another gig. Just another corpse in just another coffin in just another cemetery. No questions asked. That was, as long as they were paid in gold coins, preferably, or good old US of A currency.

Finally, one of them asked, "Sir, shall I remove the remains?"

Dr. Harlow could hardly take his eyes from the Tamping Iron, but managed to reply, "That's quite all right. I have what I came for. Do you mind finishing? I haven't much time to prepare it for the train ride."

"I'll put him to with what dignity is left him."

The healer placed the cover on the box and proceeded to carry both the head and the Tamping Iron out of the hut.

CHAPTER TWO  
September 13, 1848  
Cavendish, Vermont

"Phineas, do tell. Please."

Nag. Nag. Nag. Phineas Gage had grown up in a household of women, namely his mother and younger sister. Even though he had lost his father when he was a mere lad of twelve, and had no male role model to draw from, he still considered his skills ample when it came to dealing with the fairer sex. The proof? There he was, at age twenty-five, with his long-term girlfriend, and he still enjoyed his freedom without having tied himself down with matrimony, as was the case with a majority of the people his age. It's not that he had had a "roving eye". Rather, he was climbing the ladder of success in his chosen field and wasn't feeling the itch to rush into the whole marriage and children department. On that brisk autumn Vermont morning as the leaves were about to begin their annual ritual of color change that would turn the whole of New England into an orgy of vibrant hues, Phineas was once again listening to Elisa's barrage of questions about his intentions for their future together. "I have informed you of my knowledge on the matter," Phineas proclaimed whilst standing in the cozy den of the cabin he called home as he prepared for the long day of labor ahead.

"Surely, as a close friend of Harrison's," Elisa pointed out, her hazel eyes sparkling, "you must be privy to knowledge as none other would." She busied herself by brewing her favorite tea since she was a wee girl - peppermint.

"When we labor, we must keep our focus on what is at hand. It is not a social call."



"But still! Marriage is but once in a lifetime," Elisa said with such conviction that her long silky mane of blond flustered.

Phineas packed his meal basket, which included a lunch of stewed rabbit, roast mutton, chestnut soup and plum pudding. There would be no cafes, general stores or saloons in the vicinity of the day's work site. Phineas's mom was known to make the best plum pudding in all of Windsor County. Some folks speculated it was the extra pinch of nutmeg she added. Hannah herself would tell you, if she was telling her secret, which she wasn't telling no one, not even kin, that it was the shot of brandy she added to each batch. "How go the wise words, which you yourself, Elisa, are so fond of stating - Patience is bitter, but the fruit is sweet."

Elisa, disregarding the words spoken by her beau, was in a dreamy state, her lengthy hair flowing in the breeze of an open window, as she declared, "The Cavendish Ball! So romantic a setting for a man to ask for a woman's hand. Under the autumn sky, stars shining bright, the whole of Cavendish in attendance to witness such a joyous event. Oh, how I envy Rose." She floated close to Phineas, put her mouth beside his ear. "Your beloved is getting on in her seasons."

"Hardly. Twenty-one is but a child."

"When mother was thus, she already bore three children."

"That was a different era," Phineas countered. "This is 1848. We reside in a more enlightened time. There's even talk at work of one day soon a railroad connecting the whole of the United States territory. Can you imagine, being able to travel from the Atlantic clear out to the Pacific in only one train compartment? Now, that's progress." Phineas cracked a smile at that thought. He was a laborer

who took pride in what he did, whole heartily believing that he was helping make the nation a better place for its citizens.

Elisa took a sip of tea. "I attempt to see another vision. One that includes marriage and joyful children." She watched with hopeful eyes as Phineas packed up an extra set of work clothes. A railroad foreman never did know when those may come in handy.

Phineas placed his arm gently around Elisa's shoulder. "Elisa, you are my angel," he reassuringly began, "my precious flower. I can not and will not imagine my days without your beauty, intelligence and grace." It may have sounded as if Phineas was laying it on thick as a way of staying out of the doghouse, but he meant every word that escaped his mouth. He recalled back to when he was nine and laid eyes on Elisa for the first time on a trip into town. Maybe it was her sincere, bright smile, or her golden locks, or the hazel eyes that glowed as if two compact bonfires burned inside, so unlike the other girls in town, or maybe the feeling that they had known each other for eons, maybe even in a past life, if one believed in that sort of thing, but whatever it was, Phineas felt drawn to her and considered himself lucky to have her in his life. He sincerely continued, "Please bear my patience. I have made foreman and it is with that responsibility that I endure. When the new addition of the Rutland and Burlington is complete, I shall grace your wishes. And mine too. I must take leave." With that, he kissed her and left.

"The Cavendish Ball. How romantic!", Elisa couldn't help herself.

The Rutland and Burlington Railroad, ever since it's 1843 charter given by the State of Vermont, had been expanding fast. Only the

strongest of men, both in strength and spirit, could handle the long hours, back-breaking employment and, most of all, repetition of the job. In the era before unions and strikes, railroads varied in fairness in how they treated their workers. Some railroad executives believed in fair pay while others treated their laborers as little more than a commodity to be purchased at the lowest cost. Phineas, who had been employed with that particular railroad for eight years, had worked his way up the proverbial ladder, from yard laborer to track layer to blast assistant to blaster to construction gang leader to foreman. He'd even worked as a brake operator for a time. Phineas laughed when his friends told him he wasn't strong enough for that position, but he'd proved them wrong - again. Many of the foremen didn't like the immigrants coming in to work on "their" railroads, but as long as they worked an honest day, Phineas had no problem with any of them.

The construction gang consisted of rugged, young men, who were in the process of moving the railroad through the wilderness and granite bedrock. The lead gang - the blast gang - were in constant movement between the front of the right-of-way, to the safety area just ahead of men laying track. On that Indian summer-like day, Phineas stood proud, clutching his Tamping Iron, and observed his crew. He was happy with all of them. "Yep", he thought, but didn't dare say out loud for fear of stroking any egos, "these boys making me look real good."

"The Blasters bet a nickel they'll lose you today," Phineas teased the gang. He was always real good at doing what he could to make the long days go by faster.

Harrison, with his dark eyes and thin mustache, glanced at a formidable mass of stone. "Not with that wall of rock."

The blasters and the construction crews acted like they were of different species. Like lions and zebras on the African plains doing their eternal dance of death. Even outside of work, the men on the different crews rarely socialized. On the job, that animosity often manifested itself in a flurry of competitiveness. Phineas lifted his Tamping Iron and pointed it at the front line of workers. "If I was you, I'd bet 'em a dime you'll be licking their heels like dogs all afternoon." He knew how to get them going, burrow under their skin, get them working hard, make himself look good. Isn't that what part of being an effective foreman was all about?

Edward, more shy and introspective by nature than most of the other crew, who sported a full grown out viking beard, possibly to compensate for prematurely losing his head of hair, stepped forward. "Don't fall for it. Phineas could trick the Devil into shoveling twice the brimstone and make him think it was his idea of fun."

"Aye, and he'd be smiling," Phineas said with a wink.

Harrison shot a crooked more serious than friendly smile at his friend, Edward. "We'll win that one, if old soft hands Edward here keeps on the straight and narrow." Both of them had enjoyed their after hours rabble-rousing together, but at work, they each thought the other didn't quite pull his own weight.

Edward's brow furrowed. "What kind of thing you implying by calling me soft hands?" To him, those were fighting words.

"You know damn fine what I mean."

"Why don't you spell it out for me?"

"Spell it out? I know you ain't been in school since the fifth grade, but now I got to spell for you? D, O, G, dog. Wait, I got another one. L, A, Z, E. You know what them letters spell out?"

"One of these days, Harrison, you're going to push me too far."

From the front line, close to the granite rock, Tommy Granger, the teenage blast assistant and something of a mascot to the blast team, a crew member universally liked by everyone, shouted, "Foreman!" Tommy was the all-American kid who reminded Phineas of himself at that age. Hearing him, Phineas turned to walk away.

"Bet those boys a shot of whiskey," Edward suggested before his foreman was out of earshot.

"That's an honest challenge," Harrison added, then looked at Edward and shook his head disappointedly as if a mother whom had just caught his son's hand in the cookie jar.

A smaller gang of twelve men, the front line, toiled with intensity. They feverishly handled chisels, hammers, picks and wedges to break holes in the granite. The men had heard tales of other gangs on other railroads in the central states, or even in the Kansas territory, where the ground was soft as finely ground sugar, or at least beach sand. Those pansies didn't know nothing 'bout how hard working a front line could really be. Just let 'em try to deal with New England granite. See how far they would get. The front line team hoisted their tools and moved to the safety of the back line.

Phineas could not let the opportunity pass to have some good-natured fun. He marched right up to the Blast Gang. "The back line says their sisters could blast faster, and bet you a shot of whiskey they'll catch you." The foreman was only greeted by laughter, hearty

roars of laughter at that. A challenge was on. The Blast Gang bellowed a rally cry, which, forty yards away, was echoed by the Track Gang.

Tommy, sporting an impressive set of powder burns on his face, lifted a small urn and poured black gunpowder down a three-inch wide hole driven into the solid rock. He labored meticulously until all the gunpowder disappeared down the neat slot. Then he backed up.

Phineas moved in and knelt in front of the blast hole. What he would do next took skill, focus, experience. He trusted only himself with the task. He carefully looped a piece of fuse over the tip of his Tamping Iron, then lowered its point end down the neat hole. Tommy watched cautiously - this is where the supervisor's years of experience proved essential - as Phineas reversed the iron so that the flat end could enter the hole. The boss nodded, pulled out his iron. Next, it was Tommy's turn to, from a sack, pour sand over the gunpowder and the deep buried fuse in its tidy slot. Phineas carefully tamped down the gunpowder until he shouted, "CUT OUT!" Iron pulled up in a rapid movement, Phineas and Tommy dashed from the charged hole like two rabbits spooked by a horse. They covered their ears to the deafening explosion that followed, as rock rained down upon the area and settled to reveal a ten foot void that seconds ago was solid rock. Phineas always admired the effectiveness of the gunpowder. Poetry in motion. Even the Blast Gang took a breather to proudly admire their work.

"She's a beauty, Mr. Gage?", Tommy asked.

"It'll do." Phineas had blasted more holes than he could count. To him, it would be like comparing pine cones. You've seen one,

well...you know how that goes.

The Blast Gang rushed forward as the construction crew rallied a war cry, to repeat the cycle in order to get the new line built. It still being early, the autumn sun not anywhere near its zenith, they had a long ways to go. Phineas strode to the head, trusty Tamping Iron in hand, his loyal blast assistant dogging his heels. "Mr. Gage," Tommy's blue eyes twinkled, "what do you plan on doing after you finish with the railroad?"

"Have myself some tea and get me some sleep." Phineas wasn't fooling neither.

"I reckon to mean, after your time with the railroad is done?"

Normally, Phineas would not bother making such small talk; he liked to stay focused on the task at hand. But as he sensed Tommy had a right case of hero worship, he didn't mind indulging the youth. "Have me some tea and get me some sleep. And not answer questions." He slapped the hat off Tommy's head in a playful way.

Tommy caught his hat and declared, "Mr. Hayes says you're the best he's seen. You could be foreman anywhere. Set your paycheck aside and buy yourself a farm. That's what I'm gonna do. Buy me a few acres, get me some horses."

Phineas made a slightly perturbed face, as if he just sucked a lime. "Horses? Never got along with them. Since one threw me. Can't stand them."

Tommy was unfazed. "Yeah, well, you don't need to work 'em. Not the way you get men on the right side of a job. Not you, Mr. Gage." This kid was too much.

Behind Phineas, a few of the track workers loaded excavated rock

onto a platform car, to be shipped away for use as building material for other construction projects, including bridges, barns and railroad support walls. Some of it would be exported to far off states. One of the large rocks rolled up to Phineas.

"You mind throwing that back to us, Boss", one of the workers, a six foot, five inch man with the nickname of Shorty – the men were so damn creative in their nicknames - inquired.

"Tarnation," Phineas shook his head. "The next time I crew up, I'll hire the Sisters from St. Mary's. They'll get the job done. Maybe even let them do some blasting." He wiped a few beads of sweat from his forehead.

Shorty, always quick with a comeback, said, "Yeah, but they ain't as pretty as we."

Phineas could only laugh, as did the other workmen within earshot. The foreman looked ahead at the front line, the men intimate with their tools. He bellowed, "Prepare!"

In the Cavendish Hotel, the main lodge in town, which meant it was still small compared to an inn in the capitol, a sick man laid in bed in agony, his face sweated from fever, his stomach covered with black leeches. His concerned wife looked on and silently prayed. Jesse had been a farmer most all his sixty years, but unlike most of the ones who resided in the county, he had moved up from the south as a young man (same year Andrew Jackson was elected president, matter of fact), thinking the cooler, drier air would help his sinuses. Dr. John Harlow, dapper in dress, as was his custom, with his neatly trimmed dark beard, and a face that reflected the can-do



spirit of a man in his early thirties, sat beside the bed, dabbing the bloody tracks left by the leeches doing their vampirical task.

"He's just fretting awful," Linda finally spoke, her emotions pouring out in a flood of words. "What on Earth made him collapse like that? He wasn't doing nothing much. Are you sure we ain't going to catch his spells? Preacher says he got the Devil." After four decades of matrimony, she had never witnessed her strong-willed husband catch a spell quite like the current one.

Dr. Harlow, a man of science and reason, could feel his blood pressure rise in frustration each time a misguided person spoke of spells and the Devil. But, he was aware that ancient superstitions die hard. He calmly said, "The days of superstition are behind us, thankfully. Spells are an imbalance, like all sickness. We heal it with what we call antiphlogistic remedy." The physician was not sure if what he had said was getting through, but he had to give it a shot anyway. "The leeches will balance the humors in your husband. Purge his bowels, and his system will be right as rain."

"God willing." Linda knew of Dr. Harlow's reputation as a fine physician and healer, but it would not hurt to put the power of prayer to work.

Dr. Harlow scraped the last of the bloodsuckers off Jesse's stomach. No doubt they did their job well, their bellies full of his vital fluid as a hummingbird's would be of nectar. With the filthy rag, he wiped the remaining streaks of blood. Turning to Linda, he instructed, "Blot him until the blood forms a scab. He'll be weak, so keep him in bed." He closed up his doctor's kit.

"Doctor, will he...", Linda could not bear to articulate her full

thought.

"Your husband should recover just fine, Mrs. Anderson."

"Bless you, Doctor, bless you."

Dr. Harlow descended the narrow stairway to the hotel lobby. Cavendish, tiny dot on the landscape that it was, did not yet possess a proper hospital, nor even a humble medical center. So Dr. Harlow, when not making house calls, treated patients at the hotel, where there were always available beds, clean linens and fresh homemade cheddar cheese soup. He would purchase select supplies for the lodge as a token of appreciation. Stuart, the mature receptionist, was present and perky to greet the physician with his customary grin and always present black bow tie. "Saving souls once again, good doctor?"

"Our first rule is "do no harm". Upholding that is challenge enough."

"Born with the hands of God, you are."

"And the haunting limitations of Faust," Dr. Harlow chuckled.

"Frost?" Stuart, who, like most natives, left what passed for a formal Cavendish education at a young age and was not be acquainted with Faust, or perhaps even the Bard himself for that matter. Books, like porcelain chamber pots, were expensive. Few homes had any, except the requisite Bible. Stuart handed him a basket filled with tasty muffins. "The little woman who bakes molasses muffins?"

Dr. Harlow took the basket, but was in no mood for a molasses muffin. "Faust," he clarified, "a fictional character. From the book of Faust."

Stuart looked puzzled. "I read a book once." It obviously did not

require a whole lot of book smarts to be a hotel receptionist.

Oh, what the hell. Maybe Dr. Harlow would enjoy a muffin after all. They did smell tasty. Biting into the moist baked good, he explained, "Faust was a doctor, who was idolized by the villagers, but was haunted by the realization that the more he learned, the more he could never comprehend as much as God. Ergo, even his successes were merely detours in a long line of defeats learning the secrets of the human body and soul. A being that God creates, and only God can understand."

Stuart listened with rapt attention, but his blank facial expression revealed that he understood barely anything said to him. "You sure use some big words, doctor."

"Tell Miss Frost her hands work molasses far better than mine heal." The healer patted the clerk on the hand, then took one last big bite to finish off the muffin.

A farmer's wife, a lovely young lady who went by the name of Wendy, rushed into the lobby, a grave look of concern plastered on her smooth face. Spotting her target, she blurted out, "Dr. Harlow, my husband cut his foot on the plow. Can you come right quick?"

It didn't take the medicine man but a moment to have her an answer. "Certainly, Mrs. Beng, I am prepared now." He gathered his things instinctively and followed the concerned lady out of the hotel.

Work on the rail line was going well as the sun reached it zenith, the labor force a finely lubricated machine. There were no such things as bonuses for the men, but if they completed the day's

quota, they might get to head home a little early, even though that rarely happened. Phineas and Tommy settled around the hole bored in another stretch of granite that blocked the railroad's progress. Tommy, his confidence growing stronger by the hour, carefully poured the gunpowder down the hole. Phineas watched him do so, then carefully looped the fuse around the tip of his Tamping Iron. That was always Phineas's favorite part. Most of the men loved watching the blast hole being made – there was something about men and blowing stuff up. But for Phineas, he considered it an art form in itself to use his always loyal Iron and loop just the right amount of fuse around its tip in the correct, skillful way.

Not far behind Phineas, around the platform car, Blasting Gang members argued. To the foreman, it sounded like it was getting serious. Two years before he had started with the Rutland and Burlington, a quarrel broke out between two of the work crew – nobody would ever remember about what – and ended with one of the men dead from a gunshot. Violence wasn't unheard of on railroad work crews, however, murder was. Phineas did not want to see that happen on his watch. As he glanced upward, he discovered it was none other than Harrison and Edward engaged in squabble. "Gentlemen, we have a tight schedule," Phineas admonished. Perhaps a consequence of the day's unusually high temperature was shortened tempers.

Harrison tersely said, "Don't blame me, Boss. Someone 'round this place ain't holding their own." Turning to Edward, he added, in a louder voice, "I said you ain't holding your own!"

"I'm a working as hard as you are," Edward's eyes burned. "You're

upset that Rose danced with me at the Winter Ball and you ain't forgot it, not all this time. This ain't got nothin' to do with my work."

Pulling out the Tamping Iron from the hole, the foreman looked over his shoulder. He did not notice that Tommy, in a rare act of carelessness, fumbled the bag, causing sand to pour out.

"I'm busting my ass," Edward insisted.

Phineas eyed them while his hands slowly turned the Tamping Iron upside down, so that the flat end could tamp the powder. He had had no intention of acting as a babysitter when he signed on with the railroad.

Harrison, using his scrawny body weight in an effective manner, shoved Edward, causing his bushy beard to quiver, adding tenaciously, "No, you're slacking! And them pansies is gonna catch up to us and we're gonna lose that bet. I know it so."

"Shove me one more time and you'll forever be part of the Rutland Burlington Rail."

"That a promise?"

"I'll make it so."

Puffing up his chest in a schoolboy-ish way, Harrison's face contorted into the hardened features of a bull fighting for it's life in a bullfighting ring. "You're calling me out, and I am ready to..."

Phineas had had enough. Goofing around to blow off a little steam was okay, but this was getting into a situation where one of his men might actually get himself hurt. He needed every man able-bodied. He was about to get up, but decided not to expend the energy. Phineas did, however, absentmindedly and unintentionally lean directly over

the point of his iron as he turned his head to shout back, "LADIES!"

The men froze, not just the bickering laborers, but all of Phineas's men. They seldom heard such a stern tone from their foreman. They all knew him as one cool cat, especially under pressure. Tommy came up behind Phineas with a full sack of sand. Out of the corner of his left eye, he caught a glimpse of something that didn't look kosher - the pointed end of the Tamping Iron sticking up as the boss lifted the iron about three inches to tamp down the powder. As the iron descended, Phineas added, not to anyone in particular, "We have work to accom..."

As Tamping Iron dropped into the hole, a spark ensued between tool and granite - BOOM! Aided by the natural acoustics of the remote location, the discharge rang thunderingly loud on an unbearably, brutally soupy-atmospherically humid, scorching late summer day. The blast shot the iron up the gun-barrel shaped opening with the speed of a bullet. With abundant force, the pointy end of the Tamping Iron entered under Phineas's cheek, boring behind his eye, through his skull and brain matter, bursting out the top of his cranium. Happened as fast as the blink of an eye, or maybe, as one of the men would later describe it, the sting of a bee.

The Tamping Iron, drenched in red life fluid and dull gray brain tissue, soared through the air, an iron bird perverted with the stench of human misery. Phineas, thrown onto his back by the upward momentum of the rod - almost in a dream state, for it all happened so rapidly, but to him, and, even to his men, it would seem like an event that happened in slow motion - watched as his loyal Tamping Iron landed on the graphite thirty yards away with an echoing clang.

All around, pieces of rock of varying size rained down. And, for a instant - one of those life moments that can seem oh so much longer than what they actually were - everyone stood frozen, echoes of the explosion swirling in their ears. A surreal dust settled around the foreman.

"Mr. Gage?" Tommy had the courage to inquire. No answer was forthcoming.

Both gangs rushed forward to their boss, who now lay flat on his back, on the ground six feet from the blast hole. Many of the men would later admit that they feared the worst. Big Wayne, a long time member of the blasting gang and perhaps its physically strongest, attempted to hold back the tears. No use letting his co-workers witness him like that. As they reached the stricken man, Phineas sat up. A presumed corpse come to life. The men froze. "Good God," one of the them blurted out.

Blood streamed downriver from Phineas's forehead, his face quickly enveloped in red. Yet, remarkably, and defying the odds, he was and remained conscious, though stunned. His hands and forearms were black with powder burns. "That was a might charge," he spoke to everyone's amazement, including his own.

"Boss, boss...", Tommy cried out. The men all gathered round the injured man.

Phineas slowly glanced up. Funny, only one of his eyes seemed to bring him an image anymore. "I have to report this mishap," he said.

"He's hurt real bad," Edward observed, already feeling a pinge of guilt at what had transpired.

Workers crouched around him, inspected his burned arms, the head

injury, the vacant eye socket. Big Wayne was reminded of a watermelon he had once seen dropped on a walkway and left out in the summer sun to rot. One wage earner tried to hold down the bleeding forehead, but the tissue was so soft he yanked back his hand and stared in horror at the flesh stuck between his fingers.

"That's his brains!", Tommy couldn't help exclaiming. He had never seen the real thing before.

Phineas looked at him and casually replied, "It is?"

"God damn," Edward pointed to the Tamping Iron. "His rod went clear through his head."

"That's impossible," Jeremiah, a rather strawberry-blond haired blasting gang man determined. "He would be dead."

Phineas saw it differently. "Indeed...I reckon it did, though." He ceremoniously stuck his left index finger into the cavity in his cheek and, with the men watching in awe, made it disappear. Phineas wore the mask of a nonchalant expression on his face. "Right through this here hole."

"Hot damn," Jeremiah expressed in the way of a convert.

"It sure felt like that's what it done so."

Suddenly, remembering that an injured man needed medical help pronto, Harrison took charge and bellowed, "Get the ox cart up here."

Edward moved in close to Phineas. "What's that feel like?"

"Like a quick sting. A burn. Odd."

Another worker chimed in, "Take your damn fingers outta your head. You'll hurt something."

Phineas removed the finger from the fleshy abyss. "I reckon you to be right."



Harrison, always the practical one and genuinely concerned for his friend, rallied to the men, "He needs a doctor. Help me move him."

"I can make it myself," Phineas stubbornly insisted. To the men's disbelief and a thorough round of gasps, he slowly attempted to stand on his own. The task, difficult under the circumstances, was not to be completed.

"Come on, hurry up and help him. Don't just stand there like damn trees." Harrison was getting frustrated.

The workers rushed to support Phineas, who appeared conscious but in mild shock. They carried their foreman over to the ox cart as it was wheeled toward him. Harrison and Jeremiah gently placed Phineas with his back to the boards and his feet straight up in front. Phineas took it all in, almost as if watching the scene unfold from a distance. Harrison straightened the injured man out and asked, "You comfortable?"

"As much as I can be, I reckon."

Harrison turned to the men, "Somebody go on ahead and warn the doctor."

Daniel, a diminutive member of the front line crew, the only son of a preacher working the line, raised his hand with purpose. "I'll go." He hopped on a horse and galloped off like the wind.

Phineas stirred. "Get me my time book. And bring me my iron." He wasn't too injured to forget he was a Rutland and Burlington foreman.

The ox cart driver urged the strong beast forward. But before it could get too far, Tommy, running alongside it like a loyal puppy, handed the time book and still bloodied Tamping Iron to Phineas, who

weakly took hold of them, and hopped onto the cart. Tommy strained to think of something - anything - to say that might put Phineas in better spirits, physically, emotionally, spiritually. No appropriate thoughts came to mind. Should he make a joke? Comment on the lovely autumn weather? Ask about his family? Phineas himself broke the ice by handing him the time book and demanding, "Write me off the clock." The ox cart moved at a faster pace, the site becoming a dim dot as Phineas viewed it through the fuzzy vision of his one good blood soaked eye. He heard words of encouragement and prayer from the fading men before all was silent except for the clop-clop of the ox's footsteps.

## CHAPTER THREE

Cavendish's Main Street could have been any main street in any modest town in Vermont. Since its founding in 1761, the wee town's main thoroughfare contained all of the stock-issued types of establishments that tidy New England towns consisted of - barber shop, hotel, butcher, farm supply, small schoolhouse (yes, wooden), saloon (usually more than one, depending on how rowdy the townsfolk liked to get) and, of course, the white structure on the hill overlooking the town where every good God-fearing Christian citizen made a point to be on Sunday mornings - no matter how hungover.

Outside the sleepy Cavendish Hotel, on the porch, the elderly owner, Joseph Adams, sat in a high chair, listening to the birds chirp their final songs of the season before they headed south for the winter. Joseph had built and run the hotel for three decades. Now, with painful arthritis progressively limiting his mobility, he had been relying on Stuart more and more to take on the responsibilities of the day to day operations. Not that business had been too good lately anyways. Joseph leaned forward, slack-jawed at what he saw - an ox cart rolling towards him with its blood soaked occupant appearing like the spectre of the Grim Reaper itself. Even before the cart came to a full stop, Tommy jumped down. "My God, what in tarnation?", was all Joseph could murmur to himself. A few patrons of the nearby shops noticed the wounded man, and moved closer to offer help, or at least to gawk.

Tommy, cautiously placing his arms around Phineas, eyed a burly man. "Help me help him, carefully." The man moved close to assist.

Phineas would have none of it. "I ain't dead yet. Let me alone,"

he mulishly insisted. He grasped his Tamping Iron, stepped down from the cart without help, his actions met with gasps from the onlookers.

"Mr. Gage, please.", Tommy pleaded. "You'll make it worse."

"Nonsense. What ain't killed me yet." Climbing, in a shaky manner but yet without incident, Phineas ascended the steps of the hotel and, noticing the blood that streamed off his body, boldly took a seat on the porch. Red vital fluid flowed from his mouth and forehead, a ghastly image that one of the townsfolk thought reminded him of roadkill. Phineas turned his head stiffly towards Joseph.

Joseph's first instinct was to avert his gaze away from such a grim scene. He had been no stranger to injury, however, having been a veteran of the Indian wars some years earlier and having witnessed atrocities no man should be burdened with. "Good God, Phineas. What kind of trouble did you get yourself into?"

"Accident," Phineas paused to spit out blood, "at the rail." The railroad manager gallantly held up his iron. "See this here iron?"

"Yeah, I see it clear all right," Joseph replied. By then, the townsfolk had gathered tightly around, a freak show like Cavendish had never seen before. Men from the railroad arrived on horseback, holding on to hope that they wouldn't be arriving to a cadaverous sight.

Ignoring the growing ruckus, Phineas continued, "It went clear through my head. Just like you shoving a knife through a deer to skin it." At this, the crowd stirred uncomfortably.

Edward, who arrived on a white horse named Powder, as in the

snowy kind, spoke in defense of his friend. "We seen it."

Phineas clutched the Tamping Iron, as if the tighter he embraced it, the more strength he drew from it, the object that so gravely had injured his being. "That's what this here iron did to me." He closed his eyes, the good one anyway. The onlookers leaned forward, expecting him to expire at that moment. His eye, however, opened again, gazed around with his right pupil. He covered it with his hand, curious and in some pain. "Can't see too good."

"You should be dead," the burly man let his opinion vigorously be known.

"I reckon." Phineas's functioning eye panned the crowd. "Gawk. Go on. A rod don't fly through a head every day."

A young woman, Rachel, who had journeyed into town direct from her husband's farm for a fresh batch of flour, accompanied by her precious juvenile daughter, blurted out, "This is the Devil's work." The child leaned forward, her mouth open, to get a better peek. "Come along, Emma," Rachel pulled the inquisitive girl along. "And close your mouth."

"Or, you'll catch the Devil's flies," Phineas chimed in, actually releasing a small chuckle, the first sign of lightness since the whole miserable ordeal had began.

Joseph looked Phineas in his good eye and in a practiced soft voice said, "Now Phineas, tell me the truth. Did a rock strike you? It's important to know this if you pass out from the pain."

Harrison, who had joined the other railroad men, defended his friend, "It was that bar. Look. It's all blood and brains."

Phineas had a flash of memory, a vision of himself as a young

boy, playing on a riverbank, tossing random rocks into the river, seeing how far he could get them. Then, his mother Hannah, calling out for him to come in for supper. What this the beginning of the end, Phineas wondered for the briefest of moments. The life-flashing-by-in-an-instant death finale? What else would pop into his mind? It did jar him into asking, "Can someone please call my mother and sister up north in Proctorsville?"

A long-limbed man who had known Phineas for quite a spell, Adam, whose uncle was employed by the Rutland and Burlington at the time Phineas commenced his career, spoke up, "I gots to go to Proctorsville. I'll ride up right now, Phineas."

Joseph pressed on for answers. "If it was the rod, how did it happen?"

"Charge didn't blow proper. Went off too soon." Phineas coughed up a petite piece of brain, then held up the piece. "Anybody seen live brain before?" Ironically, he never had much of a stomach for gore. Having seen his share of accidents in his line of labor, Phineas always did what he could to help the injured, but sometimes lost his lunch in the process. Strangely, at this time, the sight of his own bodily entrails didn't leave Phineas sick. Was this nature's way of letting a person deal with their own personal destruction without passing out?

"I'm gonna be sick," Tommy verbalized, his face turning a queasy shade of green as he ran off to find a private spot.

From the opposite end of Main Street, not very far at all by most Main Street standards, Shorty hustled down the narrow road with another man, Doctor Edward Williams, trailing on another horse. Dr.

Williams, a stout, practical man (many would characterize him as hard-nosed), with an appearance older than his fifty-three years, was known around town as a competent physician, if not exactly a warm-hearted one. Phineas sat with one hand pressed up against his head as Dr. William's horse approached and came to a halt. "You're a sight, Phineas."

Phineas sighed. "I reckon. But at least I'm a live one at that."

Dr. Williams carefully dismounted his horse and stood beside the mutilated man. He pulled a cloth from his bag and used it to wipe Phineas's head. "Does this hurt?", he inquired.

"Not so much."

As blood, all varieties of fresh and dried, was wiped away, more poured over the cleared area, but Dr. Williams still managed an inspection. "What hit you?" he finally asked.

Phineas held up the filthy Tamping Iron. "This bar. Went clean through."

"This is no time for stories," Dr. Williams said with a hint of vexation. Sometimes he wondered – though never aloud (that wouldn't be too good for business) if he should have become an attorney, like his brother, and moved to a more populated area. He had grown weary of the never-ending stream of injured farmers, the middle-of-the-night calls to deliver a baby, and the general lack of culture in his patients.

"We seen it," Harrison spoke up.

Dr. Williams continued to manage the life fluid scrub. "He'd be dead. Your eyes saw something, but not that." He spoke directly to Phineas, "I'm going to clean you up out here. No sense messing up

the hotel."

Up on Main Street, nearby the Cavendish Lumber Yard & Feed Lot, a muscular Westphalian horse plodded along. On the mare, sat Dr. Harlow, fresh from a house call on yet another farm. Fortunately, this one only required the attention to a sprained ankle, which included the standard treatment of compression by cloth, elevation to minimize swelling, ice, when available, which depended on the amount that had been harvested and stored for the season from the local lake, and, crucially, the suggestion of bed rest. Tommy, who first observed the glint of the sun that bounced off the saddle, then recognized the healer in the distance, cried out, "Doctor Harlow!", then dashed off as if he were a thoroughbred in a race and the gate had just been raised. "Doctor Harlow, Doctor Harlow," he panted, "There's been a terrible accident." From the distance, the physician got the news and quickly snapped his whip to get his horse moving.

Dr. Harlow arrived amid the commotion and the sea of persons who had gathered around. He jumped down, medical bag in hand, from his ride, whom he had named Jefferson, after a late favorite uncle, whom himself had been named after his granddad's favorite leader. Townsfolk parted to let him through. Phineas had trouble viewing out of his one good eye and had to turn his head around like an owl to watch. The medicine man turned to his colleague and in a soft, confidential tone, inquired, "Is it true?"

Dr. Williams nodded his head, answered in a hushed tone, "That he's dying, yes. That the bar passed through a skull and left the man alive – preposterous. Whatever struck him, he'll be dead by morning. Can you tend him, I'm due to deliver the Brookens baby?"



"Yes, yes. Go."

Dr. Williams stood up. "Phineas...", he started but then stopped. What could he say? Inform him that he had little chance of surviving to hear the sound of the morning roosters. Tell him he may never see family again, at least not in this world. "I best be on my way," he sauntered off, leaving Dr. Harlow standing in front of Phineas.

"Well, here's work enough for you, Doctor," Phineas's voice wobbled.

Dr. Harlow placed his bag down. "I was told of a terrible injury. I can see it was not exaggeration." He pivoted to the beefy men who were obviously railroad laborers. "Help me get him inside."

Leading the crew of men who assisted the gravely injured up the creaky stairs to a room that he kept specially prepared for the wounded, Dr. Harlow secretly harbored concerns about his new patient's chances of surviving even the current hour. Arriving at the barrenly furnished room, consisting of little more than a bed, oil lamp, wash basin and small bedside table, Dr. Harlow instructed, "Place him on the bed, keep him upright. Cautiously." The men acted as told. Phineas's wound began to stream a fresh river of crimson fluid. "Gentlemen, I believe it best if we're left alone. Thank you." The men took their leave, awarding their foreman hopeful wishes as they did so.

Phineas rested on the bed. Dr. Harlow wet a cloth in the wash basin and began to clean off his head. "You bear your pain with heroic firmness."

"Don't have much choice."

Dr. Harlow picked up a straight-edged razor. "Do you have the

strength to hold this towel in place while I shave you?"

"I reckon." Phineas was still trying to get used to the fact that he only had vision in his one eye. He wasn't dwelling on it or freaking out. It was just one more piece of information to process in the day's queer events. He sat and held the cloth as the healer used the razor to shave his scalp. Bloody hair and bits of skull and brain flipped off the blade and floated around the bowl of water. Both men observed this for a moment.

"Most...remarkable." Dr. Harlow put down the razor. It was time for him to examine the open wound from the top. "Do you have any family?"

"My sister and mother. In Proctorsville. Someone fetched them."

"Proctorsville. Been there a few times myself. Mighty fine town."

"Don't get up there much on count of my busy work schedule."

Dr. Harlow meticulously examined the wound on the cheek. "This might hurt." He prudently inserted an index finger into the cheek cavity.

Phineas did not flinch. "It don't."

Dr. Harlow let his whole finger disappear into the human black hole. That was not something that had been taught in medical school. "You say it went all the way through?"

"Yep."

Dr. Harlow took his other index finger and slowly placed it into the gap on top of the patient's head, and let it disappear until - a look of astonishment flooded his eyes - his fingers met somewhere inside of Phineas's skull, and the reality of the situation demanded that he suddenly pull out his fingers.

"I feel tired," the ill man said.

"That's to be expected." Dr. Harlow helped Phineas to lie down. "You've lost a lot of blood."

"Am I gonna die?"

Dr. Harlow did not believe in mincing words, subscribing instead to the doctrine of "honesty is the best policy". This case would be no exception. "It appears..."

Phineas suddenly threw up blood, accompanied by a growl that rang out like it came directly from hell itself.

"Don't choke, Phineas. Breathe. Spit it out," Dr. Harlow begged and tended him with more urgency. With Phineas heavily heaving, Dr. Harlow rushed to the door and threw it open. He shouted down the hallway, "Joseph! I need towels and water," adding, for his own benefit, "And all God knows to save him." Dr. Harlow, by the standards of the day, was not a deeply religious person, but he'd take any divine help he could get. Phineas's mouth erupted in more blood. The healer raced back to him. He administered care quickly, doused the slick-with-sweat Phineas with a freshly dampened cloth, made sure his passageways were clear. Phineas's being went into convulsions. "No Phineas. Fight them," the doctor ordered. "Fight them like the Devil himself." They rolled in like a tsunami. Mustering all his not so impressive strength, Dr. Harlow held the hurt man down. "If you must take him, take him with dignity and peace," he appealed to a higher power.

Seventeen minutes later, Phineas was unconscious. Checking by the minute, by placing a finger underneath his nostrils, to make sure Phineas still drew breath, Dr. Harlow didn't know whether the hurt

soul had drifted off into a natural sleep or if his body had simply exhausted itself into an unconscious state. Either way, Dr. Harlow knew the slumber was essential. The mountain of soiled towels used to clean Phineas sat lonesome in the corner. Dr. Harlow decided bloodletting would be advantageous to the patient. In the procedure, the principle was to reduce the volume of blood in the body to restore the balance of the four humors (one of the four bodily fluids blood, choler, black bile and phlegm – whose relative proportions were thought in medieval physiology to determine a person's general state of health). The method Dr. Harlow used was known as "cupping", whereupon he would make a puncture in a vein, a heated glass cup was placed mouth-down over the wound. As the glass cooled, the partial vacuum that resulted pulled blood into the cup. Some healers did not pierce the patient's vein, the cup merely drawing blood to the surface of the skin. Dr. Harlow, who on many occasions found himself in heated arguments over which method was most conducive to healing, preferred the former. Next, he would place hungry leeches on the patient's chest to complete the procedure.

A light rap permeated the door. "Enter." Dr. Harlow could guess who it was – Mrs. Charlotte Emily Harlow. The plainly dressed, but sweet-looking woman brought with her a change of clothes and a basket that held an assortment of fruit and snacks, which included her husband's favorite treat, her homemade cranberry biscuits. Taking one look at Phineas, the dutiful spouse could only exclaim, "Oh dear."

Dr. Harlow kept his focus on the task at hand. "Thank you, dear. Please place them on the table."

"How is he?"

"Stable. However, his situation is perilous."

Charlotte covered her mouth and nose with her hand. "The putrid stench, quite unlike anything I've experienced."

"A consequence of the open wound," Dr. Harlow, satisfied with the orderly leech placement, turned to his wife to give her a hug.

"Please, my cherished, be on your way. I must keep watch on him through the evening."

"But what of your requirement of rest?"

"I imagine I will slip a bit of rest in for myself. In the fragile state he is in, he will need to be looked after. Assuming, of course...well, never mind."

"I know of your concerns. The commitment you express is admirable. If I can be of any assistance..."

"Thank you. I shall send word if so. Rest well." Dr. Harlow planted a soft kiss on her cheek. Charlotte left the room. He took a good look at the harmed man and decided the wound could use more clean-up. After carefully extracting petite pieces of bone from Phineas's head wound, he once again stuck his finger in the wound. "Utterly remarkable." He removed his finger and drained the wound. He moved ahead to gently press the top of Phineas's skull back in a smooth shape. Dr. Harlow sat down at the small table and from his bag, pulled out a well-worn writing pad and quill pen. Ignoring the delicious odor of homemade cranberry biscuits, he commenced the task of putting into words a chronicle of what had transpired. No fool, Dr. Harlow had a feeling that the current most unusual case of his would have importance and that it would well serve him – and the medical field – if he kept a precise diary. With intense

concentration, the sentences flowed from Dr. Harlow's consciousness through the quill, onto the pages of the journal:

"The accident happened in this town, upon the line of the Rutland and Burlington Rail Road, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Sept., at 4 ½ o'clock, P.M. The subject if it is Phineas P. Gage, a foreman, engaged in building the road, 25 years of age, of middle stature, vigorous physical organization, temperate habits, and possessed of considerable energy of character. It appears from his own account, and that of the bystanders, that he was engaged in charging a hole, preparatory to blasting. He had turned in the powder, and was in the act of tamping it slightly before pouring on the sand. He had struck the powder, and while about to strike it again, turned his head to look after his men, when the tamping iron came into contact with the rock, and the powder exploded, driving the iron against the left side of the face, immediately anterior to the angle of the inferior maxillary bone. Taking a direction upward and backward toward the median line, it penetrated the integuments, the masseter and temporal muscles, passed under the zygomatic arch and (probably) fracturing the temporal portion of the sphenoid bone, and the floor of the orbit of the left eye, entered the cranium, passing through the anterior left lobe of the cerebrum, and made it's exit in the median line, at the junction of the coronal and sagittal sutures, breaking up considerable portions of brain, and protruding the globe of the left eye from its socket, by nearly one half its diameter."

So immersed was he in his note taking, Dr. Harlow did not hear the rapping on the door. Nor did he notice when the door creaked open to reveal the kind-hearted proprietor standing there with a tray of

hot supper. Joseph cleared his throat with volume, which did not arouse the attention of the medical practitioner. Finally, he offered, "John, my wife prepared you supper. You know how she doesn't like to see anybody suffer hunger."

Without looking up, Dr. Harlow responded, "Yes, yes, my gratitude to your lovely wife. Please place it down."

Realizing that the good doctor was not in a conversational mood, Joseph quietly shut the door behind him as he made his way out of the small room. Dr. Harlow, without touching the meal, carried on with his notes:

"Exhausted from the hemorrhage, which was profuse internally and externally, the blood finding its way to his stomach, which rejected it as often as every fifteen minutes. I did not pass a probe through the entire extent of the wound. I think no surgeon of discretion would have upheld me in the trial of such a foolhardy experiment, in the of disturbing lacerated vessels, from which the hemorrhage was near being staunched, and thereby rupturing the attenuated thread, by which the sufferer still held to life."

Phineas lay motionless, too much so, the appearance of a puppet run over by a stampede of wild bulls. Dr. Harlow put his head down to Phineas's chest. He listened for a heartbeat and sighed with relief when he heard the faint sound of one.

From his bag, Dr. Harlow removed drawing paper and an Eastern Red Cedar pencil he kept handy for his medical art. He gazed at the railroad manager's wound and, slowly and carefully, begun to make a illustration of it. Dr. Harlow was aware he was no Picasso, but he did the best he could, aware that a visual representation of the

injury would be an important part of the case notes. He became consumed with his drawing, getting into a "zone", almost as if a professional athlete who trained for a marathon, with the outside world blocked out, pituitary gland flooding his being with endorphins. Dr. Harlow held the Tamping Iron up to Phineas's unconscious head, lined it up and acted out the trajectory, under his breath exclaiming, "Extraordinary," and proceeded to make adjustments to the developing sketch. This back and forth went on numerous times, the physician nothing if not diligent. At an hour when the night was motionless and the full moon illuminated Cavendish, moonlight bouncing off the silent plows, Dr. Harlow fell asleep at the side of the bed, his hand pressed over Phineas's top head wound.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Shortly after Anthony, the town's portly milkman, completed his early morning delivery rounds against the rising sun bathing the Cavendish Hotel in a yellowish glow, Dr. Harlow awoke to the feeling of fingers prying his hand off the damaged man's head, as it had stuck to Phineas's skin and bandages. "Doc?"

"A thousand pardons," Dr. Harlow jumped awake in an awkward moment as he peeled his sticky hand off. "How you do you feel?"

"Can't see out my right eye."

"You might not again," Dr. Harlow practiced his philosophy of being as direct with a patient as possible. He began to remove old bandages to apply new ones. "How's your pain?"

"Felt worse."

"Are you a church going man, Phineas?"

"Should I be praying now?"

"No, but it would be fitting to believe in miracles. You're a walking, talking one." Dr. Harlow finished the careful task of bandage removal.

Phineas appeared oblivious to his surroundings, as he stared straight ahead, as if into his own private dimension. However, he got out the words, "And a hungry one. But feel sick still."

As he cut a fresh dressing and made careful note of the patient's mental state, Dr. Harlow explained discreetly and ironically, as his own pangs of hunger were becoming more pronounced, "I have to purge your system further before you eat." Phineas's stoic facial expression remained. Dr. Harlow thought of something that could cheer him. "Elisa has been by. I told her I thought it best to give you a

few days before a visit. She seems like a fine girl."

Sanitary bandages were snugly wound around his upper head, but Phineas sat in a motionless position like he was posing for a stately portrait. Only his lips stirred, "How long you been known as a doctor? You don't look a hair older than me."

"I had my training at John Adams Medical College. Graduated class of 1844." The good doctor had never had a person under his care question his medical credentials, nor his age for that matter.

"Hmmm...four years hence."

Dr. Harlow made another mental note on the patient's ability to process a math equation, even if an uncomplicated one. "Four years. I can attest to that." He initiated changing the dressing that covered Phineas's lower cheek wound.

"Four years. Ouch!" Phineas squirmed.

Dr. Harlow paused. "I have to change these. You'll lose some skin."

"Go ahead then," Phineas winced. "Four years ain't a whole lot. Barely enough time to build a rail line."

"I assure you, I have taken my studies seriously. It was quite a rigorous program. In fact, many who entered did not end up completing their studies." He cleaned the fleshy damaged cheek.

"Didn't mean nuthin' by it. Just always imagined you medicine men as older folks."

"As Dr. Williams?"

"Yes."

A noisy rap sounded from the partially open door. Dr. Harlow, having completed the task of wound scrub, stood up to peer at the

intruder. As he suspected, it was Joseph, who inquired, "Shall I prepare them for..." Joseph glanced at the patient. "Lord! Would you look at that. Sitting up all by himself." As Joseph let the door swing open more, Phebe and Hannah Gage rushed past him to their loved one's bedside.

"Phineas! We rode all night," Hannah, the worried parent, frantically said. Though a fit forty-eight, the ordeal would be sure to age her prematurely. "I knew it! I just knew something terrible was stirring when that old clock of your grandpappy's in the kitchen, the one that hasn't been worth a pinch, all of a sudden chimed for the first time since I can remember. Isn't that so Phebe?"

"She's saying it like it's so," the patient's sister acceded.

"Don't fret, mother," Phineas weakly said. "I'm still here. Be working end of the week, I reckon."

Phebe, the slim, buxom younger by twenty-one months sister, whom many people had commented on how much she had resembled her brother in facial appearance, turned to the healer. "Doctor, can this be true?"

"I do not presume that to be the case. Whatever miraculous recovery he's had, he's far from well. Infection, that's my worry. And living with only what's left of his brain." Dr. Harlow placed a fresh dressing on Phineas's cheek.

"Will he regain his health ever?" Phebe asked. She loved her sibling and could not conceive of life without him. Phineas had been more than a brother to her, he had also been her father figure and protector for most of her childhood. She had also anticipated acting out the role of aunt in the near future.

"I dressed him, God can only heal him," Dr. Harlow quoted his favorite medical college professor, Dr. Hans Austerlitz, a German immigrant and brilliant physician who harbored what were considered radical – some said nutty – ideas, like advocating that doctors wash their hands prior to performing surgery, a concept that earned him the scorn of his colleagues, who openly mocked, "What in the world would that do?" or "Why bother with such a task?"

Hannah put her hands together. "We should pray then."

"It wouldn't hurt," Dr. Harlow offered. "If you want to stay, you'll have to sit back. And, I must warn you, what you see is enough to make the strongest man weak."

Phineas, for the first time that day, showed a speck of emotion and communicated it as he added, "I think they best leave. I'll be here when you come back after prayer." He slowly pushed his mother away so that the doctor could continue dressing his bandage.

"Is it true what they tell us?" Hannah's eyes welled up with tears.

"That I got a hole in my head from that there iron?"

Hannah stole a peek at the Tamping Iron and nodded.

"By all accounts, yes."

By now, Phebe's own eyes were as wet as the overflowing Mississippi after a major summer rainstorm. "We love you, Phineas."

Phineas's good eye remained arid when he replied, "You're good family. Ain't never heard of one turning a man away for a hole in his head, but you could have been the first."

"This is no time for humor," Phebe objected.

"Oh, but it's a good sign," Dr. Harlow countered.

"Don't fret over me," Phineas calmly insisted. "I'm fine. Be working...working soon." As he spoke, Dr. Harlow noticed his energy quickly waned.

Hannah and Phebe, suddenly more concerned, were urged to exit via a hand motion from Dr. Harlow. "Bless you, doctor," both women said, nearly in unison. The despairing parent reached into her pocket to remove an acorn. She passed it to the physician, whispering, "Make sure he gets this. It's for good luck." After throwing her son an air kiss, Hannah and her daughter reluctantly exited. As soon as the door closed behind them, Phineas collapsed back on the bed, shuddering. Dr. Harlow, without hesitation, began to apply the leeches.

In the dim, shadowy lodging that served as a hospital room, Elisa sat beside the bed and gently held a resting Phineas's hand. His head was elevated, almost bandaged completely, which made him appear more mummy than human. Lit only by modest candle, Dr. Harlow, seated in the corner, using his favorite quill, wrote in his journal.

"Ten P.M., same evening. The bandages are saturated with blood. But the hemorrhage appears to be abating. Has only vomited twice since being dressed. Mind clear. Says he "does not care to see his friends, as he shall be at work in a few days." Pulse 65. Constant agitation of his legs, being alternatively retracted and extended like the shafts of a fulling mill.

CHAPTER FIVE  
December, 1867  
San Francisco, California

By lantern light, Dr. Harlow read from his aged journal. Next to his heels, rested a big bucket. His comfortable room at the Majestic Hotel had a striking view of the Bay and the fog that hung in a thin layer slightly above it, as if a surrounding hill had puffed on a cigar and blew the smoke towards the sea. He paid it no attention, his thoughts immersed in a different time, a different place. He read aloud, "Sensorial powers remain as yet unimpaired." The healer looked down at the bucket. "Could you recall this now, Phineas, if you were alive?" He peered into the bucket. What he saw urged him to stand and reach into the bucket and pull out a bleached white skull, which now showed a hole at the top of it clearly. Bleach dripped off of Dr. Harlow's hands as well as the skull. He took hold of a towel and dried both. Placing the skull under the soft illumination, he studied it, like it was a fine painting or perhaps a sculpture, but yet never halted his tempo as he read, knowing the words so well, he could recite them like an old time actor who stood on a stage, performing Hamlet for the umpteenth time. "Mister Gage has survived the gravest injury I have yet witnessed in my modest time of practicing medicine." He rotated the skull so that he could look through its unnatural slot. "If he can regain his health..." He paused. Then set the delicate object on cloth on a small wooden table, on which sat petite pieces of bleached bone. "This will be a miracle." He set forth piecing together the small bones like a puzzle. Picked up a bone ever so delicately, and another, and another, ventured to fit them together. Placed one down and picked up another, and another. A

puzzle of the aftermath of a terrible injury. Not a puzzle meant for children. Finally, he deposited all on the small wooden table and sat. He addressed the skull, "And I will feel honored to have had a hand in it."

CHAPTER SIX  
September, 1848  
Cavendish, Vermont

Dr. Harlow knelt beside the patient's bed. He tried to capture the words Phineas muttered in his slumber, many of them not articulate. At best, he appeared to be mumbling variously about a lake, his brief time as a student in the town's only school house and, most distinctly, about his labor as a railroad foreman. Dr. Harlow wrote zealously in his journal:

"19 September. Has slept some; appears to be in pain. Speaks during restless sleep, sentences not coherent. Skin hot and dry; tongue red. Excessive thirst; delirious, talking incoherently with himself, and directing his men."

Phineas shouted, "My eye." More garbled, he cried out, "It Burns!"

"Speaks with difficulty. Pulse 70."

Hearing a knock at the door. Dr. Harlow broke away, walking backward carefully so he wouldn't miss anything. He swung open the door, but kept his gaze fixed on Phineas. Charlotte stood there, motionless. "My dear? It's your wife. Remember, Charlotte?" Dr. Harlow robotically embraced his significant other. She held a basket of fresh edibles. "If you are going to sleep here, you should have decent food." She peered at Phineas, laying on the mattress stained with red. "Is he improving?"

"At the moment, no."

"God damn rock!", Phineas ranted.

"Oh my." Young Mrs. Harlow was not used to the sound of a man who cussed.



"I'm sorry, my dear," Dr. Harlow calmed her. "You shouldn't hear such talk."

"He's positively horrid. Oh!" Charlotte noticed the rod. "Is that....?"

"Yes. I am quite sure, each moment more so, that I am partaking in medical history."

Charlotte, visibly discomfited, set the basket on the table. Her husband guided her back to the entrance. With a concerned look in her gaze, she queried, "Are you sleeping at all?"

"In between his fits." Dr. Harlow had been getting precious little sleep, not enough for a man to feel right-minded. But, there was no reason to cause distress in his better half. A year previous, Charlotte had come down with a serious fever and, after ministering to her and doing everything he could, it had appeared as if she might not pull through. It was touch and go for nine grueling days. In the end, however, the fever broke and she recovered. Dr. Harlow remembered the feelings he had experienced of frustration, the helplessness – especially demoralizing for a healer – his somber mood. He would not want to worry her needlessly and cause her any sleepless nights either.

"By the Lord's grace, is there any chance of wellness?"

"The brain doesn't need to be whole for a man to talk, or even walk, and see around the room. He lost as much as a shot glass full, and other than the bleeding, he's functioning as a normal human being with an infection."

Phineas chaotically flailed his arms about and began to slap at his own face.

Charlotte was startled. "Oh, that can't be good. He's mad."

"I'm filthy with blood. You best not embrace me, my love." Dr. Harlow bid her off with a quick squeeze of the hand. "Thank you for the food. Good night."

"You require sleep, too," the young woman, who wore her hair in the popular Queen Victoria-style - hair parted in the center, draped in front of the ears and neatly bunned into a low chignon at the nape - staunchly stated as she departed.

Upon closing the door, Dr. Harlow rushed back to Phineas, who in a remarkable fit of discomfort, was almost all the way out of bed. The stronger man held the weaker one down. After what seemed like an eon, but was actually only about three minutes, Phineas rested.

Two days forward, Phineas sat up - all by himself - as Dr. Harlow checked his vital signs. "How's things looking, Doc?"

"Well, I must say, you do appear to be making an exceptional recovery." He checked the patient's pulse.

"I reckon I'll be back at the railroad in a short spell, thanks to you."

"Not too short a spell, Phineas. You still have a journey to travel to your full well-being. You seem anxious to return to the railroad."

"A man needs to work. Otherwise, what good is he? My men depend on me. They need me." Phineas coughed hard, but it did not seem to affect him. "You going to stick them little bloodsuckers on me again?"

"No, I think they've done their job for now." Dr. Harlow cracked

a smile, "And a fine one at that."

"Aye, and they work for cheap." Phineas's venture at humor was a good omen indeed.

Handing him the acorn, Dr. Harlow said, "Your mother wanted you to have this. For what purpose, I am not aware."

"Mother and her silly superstitions," Phineas said as he took the tiny cup-shaped oak nut. "Believes it will bring me good luck. Any truth in that, doc?"

"Highly unlikely, Phineas. Though, the faith in something may have a powerful effect on the mind."

"That mean this acorn is good luck," Phineas stated with bafflement.

"It means that if you believe it will bring good luck, then it may do so," Dr. Harlow smiled.

"You sure got me confused, doc."

A thump sounded at the door.

"Enter," Dr. Harlow instructed.

Harrison and Edward walked in softly, as if the more hushed they were, the less of a nuisance they would be. Dr. Harlow recognized them and asked Phineas, "You know them as the men who work the railroad with you?"

"Work or not, yes I do."

"Interesting." Dr. Harlow observed how Phineas reacted to his mates. He snatched his journal and quill. What a superb opportunity, he theorized, to witness the injured man's interactions with his peers. How would the impaired brain react in such a social situation?

"Did you sign out of the time book, I reckon?" Phineas kept a

somber, workingman tone.

Edward couldn't help but let out a chuckle. "Always the foreman you are, Phineas."

Dr. Harlow whispered the advice, "Don't rile him." The visitors nodded and approached the bed.

"We heard you was dead," Harrison, one never known for his tact, bluntly stated.

"You're no angel, so I know I ain't yet." Phineas's one good eye looked him over.

Dr. Harlow made a note in the journal: Patient appears to display a definite sense of humor.

"Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know," Harrison roared with laughter, elbowed Edward, whose reaction proved that he didn't find the retort quite as comical.

"Who's foreman in my pit?" Phineas demanded to know.

Dr. Harlow inked a comment: Patient shows an interest in work  
Good cognition.

"Jesse Gruber," Edward offered.

Phineas grimaced, "Heaven help the Rutland and Burlington. He's too slow to know you're missing."

Dr. Harlow strolled to his desk to dip his quill and jot down:  
Remembers work protocol perfectly.

"Oh, he knows," Edward replied.

Harrison chimed in, "We took his carriage." At that, both of the guests let out a loud guffaw. Phineas, however, seemed to be searching within himself for what was so funny. Harrison confided to the foreman, "Hey, hey, we got something for your recovery." He

pulled back on his coat just a bit to reveal in the inner pocket a bottle of distilled spirits. "My own bottler."

"I don't know if Dr. Harlow will consent," Phineas acted confused.

Harrison assured, "What he don't know, he don't know." That statement could have been called Harrison's Life Philosophy, one that also extended to his relationships with women. Heaven help Rose, most of his co-workers privately thought. Based on his track record, she was bound to get hurt sooner or later.

Edward cozied up next to his ailing friend. "Take my word, that'll get you right and back to work."

"What you say, I sneak you in a shot right now? Edward can distract the Doc," Harrison slyly added and placed the compact bottle so that it was half hidden underneath the blanket.

"God Damn It!", Phineas shouted, clenched in pain. "Damn It!"

His buddies were shocked. Dr. Harlow dropped his quill and rushed back as his patient growled in a potent combination of anger, frustration and discomfit, "Bastards!"

Dr. Harlow's brow twitched, a nervous habit leftover from childhood whenever he had to deliver unpleasant information or was ridiculed, a behavior pattern he had labored to get under control. "This is the sign of a bad spell coming on. You men best take your leave."

"Yeah, yeah, we should go," Edward concurred. "We're holding your job for you, Phineas." He turned to the healer. "Tell him."

Harrison stepped back towards the door and pleaded with his crony, "Don't die, Phineas. The rail needs you." He wasn't just

saying that, either, on the account that he suspected a new foreman might not be as easy going and good-hearted as the man he saw before him who bore the nasty injury – that was an era, after all, when disliked and feared railroad bosses were frequently found lynched – rather, Harrison had a soft spot for Phineas and considered him one of his few lifelong and close comrades. A man he could count on always being there for him, a man he could confide his deepest, darkest secrets with. The visitors scooted out the room.

Dr. Harlow noticed the whiskey bottle. After a moment of contemplation, he took hold of the bottle and enjoyed a swig himself, then held it out. "In your situation, this won't help you, but it might ease the pain. And my fatigue."

Phineas ignored the offer. "I want my pants!" he whined childishly, reminding the room's other occupant of his own four-year-old nephew, Judah.

Dr. Harlow placed the bottle down. "Too soon for you to walk. Rest will serve you well."

"The Devil! All I do is rest."

"You are recovering from serious injury, Phineas." The physician and studious journal keeper had the sudden urge to take hold of his quill and jot notes, but decided that that was not the best time to do so. "Your body needs time to heal. The fact that you've come this far is remarkable. The recuperation has just begun, however."

"I don't care!"

"Phineas, please..."

Phineas sat down and crossed his arms. His action indeed mimicked

what young Judah would do when he did not get his way.

The door opened to allow a thin, wrinkled, strange looking gentleman who was on the elderly side – by the days' standards, being that a man of fifty-seven usually appeared to be older than his actual years due to a hard life of labor, limited health care and a diet deficient in vegetables, plus the indulgence in the hardcore practice of a combination of smoking and chewing tobacco – and attired in black garb. Zachariah – known by the nickname of “Rye” to the town's residents – was Cavendish's sole undertaker. He recoiled instantly from the stench. “Dead men don't smell this bad.”

Dr. Harlow walked over to speak with him near the room entrance. “Discharge from the wound.”

“I met some of his companions just a spell ago. They told me they visited him and he was able to talk to them.”

“A miracle, really. Can you watch him while I place a telegram to his mother and sister?”

Rye took a long, hard look at the man he had planned on fashioning a coffin for, in anticipation of a proper burial. “Surely. I'll measure well. But let me wait on cutting it. He looks like he might recover.”

“Let's hope so.”

In the hotel's modest lobby, Dr. Harlow ambled up to the front desk, manned by the always cheery Stuart. Dr. Harlow handed him a paper. “Stuart, can you take this over to the post and have them send this telegram?”

“Just came back.” He handed a telegram to Dr. Harlow. “All the

way from the capitol," he said with a twinkle in his eye. If anyone was born to be a hotel clerk, it was Stuart.

Surprised, the healer opened it and read its contents to himself. Dr. Harlow hurried back upstairs.

Storming into the makeshift hospital room with a renewed vigor, Dr. Harlow immediately began packing his medical bag. Rye concurrently packed up his tape measure. "How was he?" the doctor inquired.

"He just sat there, like nothing but a statue. But, then again, I'm used to being around stiffs. All in a day's work, I suppose. Yesterday, I had a funeral at six a.m. I shouldn't have been there — I'm not a mourning person." The undertaker let slip a sinister chuckle, but his words fell on deaf ears. Seeing how pre-occupied Dr. Harlow was with other concerns, Rye unceremoniously exited the room.

"Phineas, I've been called to the capitol," Dr. Harlow said as he closed up his bulging medical bag, weighted with his journals and medical equipment, which included amputating instruments, bandages, dislocation pulleys, tooth instruments, splints and the much used cupping instruments and glasses, used for the bloodletting procedure. "A very important meeting. Do you feel well enough to be on your own?"

Phineas remained still, but nevertheless answered in a monotone voice, "If it's more important to you than me, you go for it. I'll be fine."

"I won't go until I'm sure you're rational. I'm going to ask you some questions. They're to determine how well your brain functions."



Dr. Harlow did not want to upset the patient and made use of his most professional, but yet calm, pitch.

"All right."

"How long has it been since you were injured?" Dr. Harlow begun with what he believed to be a straightforward, easily answered question for the patient, but one that would test if his perception of time had been affected by the injury.

"Two weeks this afternoon. At three and a half o'clock."

"You got angry with your friends. Is that what you wanted to do?"

"I did not think about what to do or what not to do."

"Hmmm...I see," Dr. Harlow made mental notes. He glanced around the room and spied a jar filled with pebbles. He removed a handful and brought them back to Phineas, pouring some of them into his hands. "These pebbles are yours. Are they of any sentimental value?"

"Nope. Just rocks. Use them to prop open the door when it gets too hot," Phineas coldly observed.

"I'd like to buy them."

"All right."

"I'll buy them for one thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars?" Phineas's expression changed from one of nonchalance to one of distrust.

"Yes, one thousand dollars," Dr. Harlow confirmed.

"No. You're crazy," Phineas agitatedly replied.

"Why? They're rocks. You can get them anywhere."

"I'm not selling!"

"You won't sell them for that price?" Dr. Harlow queried gently. Phineas crossed his arms defiantly and again, reminding the

physician of his young nephew's childish mannerisms, uttered, "Not for a thousand dollars, I'm not."

"Interesting." Dr. Harlow anxiously awaited the opportunity to make a journal note about the damage to the patient's ability to estimate object value and worth.

"Get your own damn pebbles!" Phineas protested.

"It's all right, Phineas," Dr. Harlow pacified him.

"And don't try stealing none either."

"Yes, I won't." Dr. Harlow had never been accused of theft and very nearly smiled at the idea that he, a former choir boy who, in his youth, was known around his hometown as "Honest John" for his impeccable ability to always tell the facts, would be guilty of stealing, even objects as worthless as pebbles. "I'll hand them to you when I leave. I'll be out of town for three days. Stay inside and follow my instructions. My wife will look in on you."

"I shall be dandy, Doctor," Phineas responded as he stroked his handful of stones almost as if he was petting a beloved cat, albeit one that did not purr.

"Very well. I shall take my leave now." Dr. Harlow picked up his bag. He brought the whole jar of pebbles over to Phineas. "Remember — rest."

When the medicine man split, Phineas, still agitated, reached to the side and grabbed the bottle of whiskey. Raising it to his lips, he steadfastly restated, "Just dandy, doc."

Dr. Harlow hurried to his buggy, tethered to a wooden post. In a burst of frenetic motion, he loosened the tying rope, jumped into the

carriage and, with a snap of the whip, his trusty horse trotted off. Twelve minutes of dusty roads later, the excited physician arrived at his Greek revival-styled but humble residence located on the outskirts of town. He hopped down quickly - a child on Christmas morning who couldn't wait to open his gifts - and disappeared into the house.

Inside, Charlotte, engaged in her favorite hobby of knitting, this time a new winter cap for herself, greeted him, "My dear, what a most welcome surprise."

"I have had an unexpected but wholly flattering request arrive from the capitol," Dr. Harlow said as he snatched his travel bag, monogrammed with the initials "JMH" - a gift from his mother upon his graduation from medical college - and rapidly packed up clothes.

Charlotte halted her knitting to observe her husband. "What of Mr. Gage?"

"I left instructions and informed him that you would check up on him. He's prone to arguing. Not his nature. But if you distract him, he'll forget he spoke out."

"Sounds like a child."

Dr. Harlow paused to consider his partner's statement. "Yes, indeed."

"What if he takes a turn for the worse?"

"Wire me in the capitol. An invitation to participate in this level of government debate comes once in a lifetime." He secured the latch on the travel bag, and moved to embrace his wife. "You are the love of my life. My beacon of goodness, my sanctuary of heart, and, at times like this, my pillar of strength."

Charlotte, her cute button-nose glistening in the soft glow of the whale oil lamp, cared for her husband more with each passing season. "Thank you, my dear. Such kind words. I shall live up to them." Holding John's hand, she hurried out of the abode with him.

Once outside, the traveler boarded his buggy and settled behind the reins, placing his travel bag and an overcoat beside him. Continuously worried about her spouse's perpetual robust health, especially as the season was changing to one of a more polar nature, Mrs. Harlow spoke up, "Darling, it's a bit nippy. Perhaps it best to cover up." Without fanfare, the doctor did as she suggested, his mind already having made the journey to the capitol ahead of his physical being. "What of Mr. Gage's supper?"

"He has strong broth and bread for supper tonight. And Stuart will spend until nine o'clock this evening with him." He took hold of the leather reins.

"I will bring him an egg and biscuit for breakfast."

"Not too much more. His system is weak," Dr. Harlow advised, with a rapid forearm movement, snapping his whip to get the transport on it's way. "Be well, my dear," was the last thing Charlotte heard before the buggy advanced toward Montpelier.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The morning proceeding her husband's departure was one that Charlotte would remember vividly for many years afterward. Beside it being the final day of a long Indian summer that Mother Nature announced was over via a blast of Arctic air that slithered it's way down from Canada with heavy rain, there was ample reason in another respect. Upon ingesting her own light breakfast – she never had much of an early morning appetite – of poached egg, cut of sausage and cup of tea, Mrs. Harlow had a neighbor, a lovely older lady named Mrs. Runer, who had the loveliest rose garden every growing season, give her a ride into town, stopping at the destination of the Cavendish Hotel. Charlotte carried with her a basket of edibles she had prepared. Having exchanged pleasantries with Stuart, the good wife walked up the creaking steps and down the corridor towards the resting patient's room. She opened the door just a tad. "Mr. Gage? It is Dr. Harlow's wife. I do not want to enter if you are not decent or awake for visitors." She paused to listen for a response. None was forthcoming. "Mr. Gage?" She felt her heartbeat become slightly more pronounced. "Oh please, Lord, let him be alive." She peered in to discover a barren bed. "Oh my, this is not good." She was youthful, her future unrolling like a scroll of time. The notion of letting down her own youthful beloved, not far into his career as it was and in the process of constructing a respected medical practice, was too much for her to endure. She would locate the mutilated man and make things right.

With his heavily bandaged head, Phineas roamed the Main Street

sidewalks through the intermittent thundershowers with no coat and thin boots. He was a fright to see – he only had one good eye, so to see most objects, the railroad foreman had to turn his head wildly, which, of course, made him appear even more monstrous. A handful of curious and brave residents, considering the weather conditions – though the precipitation had briefly subsided – trailed Phineas, an odd Pied Piper.

A passerby, one Miss Marla Elkins, who sang so angelically in the church choir come regular Sunday mass, slowed in her buggy. "My goodness!", she said, more to herself, as a child would curse a parent under her breath, but then called out, "Phineas!?"

Phineas tried to spot who had called out to him. He may have only had vision in one eye, but his hearing was as sharp as a tack. In his movement of spinning around, arms flailing wildly about, he horrified another woman, an older lady, who let out a peep of fear and rushed away. "Pleasant day to you, ma'am," Phineas said and meant it. With a sudden gale force wind, sheets of water began to fall from the heavens.

The harmed man trudged into Taylor's General Store, a busy spot that served as a sort of central meeting area where, in the winter months, townsfolk would gather around the sizable pot-bellied stove to warm up or share the local gossip – some of it true, some of it hearsay – before heading out to finish their loading up on supplies at the other shops on Main Street. That was more than okay with Mr. Taylor, whose father and granddaddy had run the shop in the same welcoming manner before he had. Phineas's absolute disregard for the sodden weather made him just as much a target of suspicion as his

bloody, bandaged head, more gross now that one end of it had unraveled due to his haphazard gestures. "Phineas?" Mr. Taylor said, befuddled at the sight before him.

Phineas approached the counter. "I am journeying to my mother's and need supplies."

Reviewing the injured man, Mr. Taylor, who knew and respected the man who stood before him, gave an honest opinion when he articulated, "You're not well, Phineas. You should..." The proprietor was clearly repulsed by the blood. "You should be in bed."

"Or a grave," one of the fellow patrons rather insensitively added, holding his nose.

The village oddity cast his good eye about the room; when it set upon people, they cringed or gasped. One young mother shielded her precious child. Phineas, however, did not seem to notice, focused instead on the pressing task of procuring provisions. "I look worse than I feel," he firmly stated to Mr. Taylor. "Now, for food, scrag, chitterlings, crullers."

"You have a carriage?"

"No. I'll walk. I'll need Cambric tea and jerky too."

Outside in the wind-blown, heavy downpour, keeping herself semi-dry with an umbrella, Charlotte spotted her prey through the shop's misty window. "Mr. Gage!" She rushed in, nudged her way through the gawking customers. "Mr. Gage. Oh my, oh my, oh my."

Phineas didn't bother to react to the deep worry of his temporary guardian. Rather, he stepped up his demands. "I will need a lantern. You once sold me one that was weak. Damn thing barely gave me enough light to see my own feet. I want a good one."

"You are in need of proper boots and a warm coat, Phineas. I had a shipment of real good ones come in just yesterday, for the fact that winter be here right before you know it. I'll go to the storeroom..."

The high-strung man snapped back, "Lantern, Damn It! My clothes is good."

Charlotte approached, but did not know what to do, especially with Phineas appearing so ghastly. "Be strong, Charlotte," she pep-rally whispered to herself. She overcame her disgust enough to take his arm. The other patrons glared at her in disbelief, mentally dissuading her from the act of getting too close to the man who resembled a human train wreck.

"You better watch out, missy. You might catch them spells," the previous insensitive patron spat out.

The doctor's wife had had enough. She uncharacteristically lashed out at the store's occupants, "He's just a man who's had a bad accident is all. He needs care." She turned to Phineas, in much the same tone, "What on Earth are you doing out of bed?"

"If I'm strong enough to walk, I shouldn't be in bed."

"Even if you are," Charlotte stood firm, "no right man goes out in the rain without a hat and some proper boots." She felt a confusing mixture of infuriation and sympathy for him.

Addressing Mr. Taylor, the inadequately dressed man acceded, "I reckon she's right. Add a hat. My old one got blown clean off to pieces."

The owner shrugged his shoulders and appealed to Charlotte, "He plans to walk to Proctorsville. It's plain silly, if you ask me."



"No one can walk to Proctorsville in this rain," the concerned woman nodded her head back and forth.

"I don't see why not," Phineas said.

One of the bystanders chuckled, adding his two cents worth, "It's a day by horse is why not, you ninny." Vermonters were known for their outspokenness and not holding back their opinions. The inhabitants of Cavendish did not disappoint.

Charlotte led her charge towards the door and, in her deepest, most authoritative voice, one that she was not aware that she had possessed up until that instant in time, ordered, "You're walking as far as your bed and no further, Mr. Gage. My husband left you in my care and I will not allow you to hurt yourself needlessly." She steered him to the outside, where, she was thankful, only a drizzle sparingly covering the duo until they boarded her waiting buggy.

Phineas strode into his infirmary room on his own power, clearly not happy about the abrupt change in plans. Charlotte followed close behind, and demanded, "Sit at the table. I've brought you broth and herbs and bread. It will do you some good." Phineas did as instructed, but the moment he sat on the wooden chair, he started to shake violently. "Oh dear," Charlotte vented. She helped the mess of a man back to bed. "Lord, Lord...look what you've done to yourself." Phineas did not convulse; rather he shook and "hissed" through clenched teeth in a pained way. Mrs. Harlow wet a cloth and placed it on his forehead. "You got the spells now. Really, Mr. Gage? Going out in such weather dressed as you were. What am I going to do with you?"

The convulsions subsided, but did not entirely fade away. The

mutilated man's being morphed into a fountain of perspiration, drenching his one good eye, the room going out of focus, a feeling of a tightly laced corset that had narrowed around his head, the room vibrating with silence. As he reclined, he had a vision depicting another time, another place. The scene that played out before him never came into sharp focus, staying like a shadowed glimpse of a nightmare, though this one didn't frighten, just remained unclear and dark. Phineas saw himself older and healed, collapsed on the dirt floor of a barn. The sole witnesses to the scene were animals, which he tried to concentrate on right before he lost consciousness.

## Montpelier, Vermont

Located on State Street in the western edge of downtown Montpelier, named after the French city of the same name (citizens of the colonies were appreciative for French aid during the American Revolution), just north of the Winooski River, the Vermont State House is set against a picturesque wooded hillside, it's distinctive gold-leaf dome visible from the edge of town. Montpelier had the notoriety of being the smallest city in the union to serve as capital of a state. Inside, lively debate and discussion took place amongst the educated elite of the Green Mountain State, helped along by generous servings of wine, amongst other distilled spirits, distributed during extended breaks from the seriousness.

"Humorous, I find it," Dr. Theodore Grant, a general medical practitioner from Burlington, an older man who charmed an audience of colleagues amongst the sea of men attired in their proper dark suits, stated, "that we doctors come here to the capitol because we are fascinated with politics, only to meet with men so fascinated with science and medicine that we never debate the future of the country."

United States Representative from Vermont, 4<sup>th</sup> District, Lucius Benedict Peck, a Democrat who served as chairman on the Committee of Manufactures, who was by trade a lawyer, overheard what the good doctor said. "Aah, that is why talking politics tires us so much. The uncertainty. Science deals in absolutes. In what man knows. Why, decades ago, we were in the dark ages. Look how far we've advanced." Soft chuckles from the men seemed to confirm that opinion. But not, however, from attendee Dr. Harlow, who possessed an air of distance about him.

"If only we could get past the problems we encounter after surgery," Dr. Grant earnestly continued. "We have come so far, we are practically magicians when it comes to curing the sick."

Dr. Harlow's ears perked up. "I beg to differ," he said staidly. The other doctors who were gathered became quiet; they could feel a robust debate arriving on the scene.

"Dr. Harlow?" Dr. Marshall Banner, a young doctor around the same age as John Harlow who believed himself to have been blessed by the Divine Light itself with skilled hands, asked.

"I've recently treated a man who had a thirty-six inch iron pass through his brain. An explosion sent it like a bullet," Dr. Harlow explained and motioned to illustrate. "It entered below his eye, dislodged it, bore a hole through his brain, and out the top of his skull. Took a cylinder out so cleanly, that I could put a finger in each opening and touch them together, right about here. And he was conscious throughout most of my care."

"That's fine gallows humor, John," a doctor from the southern city of Bennington, Gus Nedret, son of the town's mayor, scoffed.

"How many minutes before he died?" Dr. Banner grinned.

Dr. Harlow could feel the tidal wave of skepticism that was not so slowly building up, but he graciously answered his peer. "That is my point. He is still alive. Today. Almost three weeks after the accident. Talking, eating, sitting up. But strangely, he has trouble with the value of things."

"Then make him a lawyer," said Dr. Grant, always quick with a one-liner, which caused the other healers to erupt in laughter.

Doctor Stephen Kittridge, a rather stout man, whom, in the

eastern county where he practiced, was believed to have delivered more babies than any other doctor in that county's history, added, "Such superb wit should not be lost in the hospitals."

Dr. Banner, between a sustained chuckle, managed to get out a jab, "I should say not."

Dr. Harlow was not amused. He said, with a sense of urgency, brow twitching, "This is deathly serious. What I have discovered possibly upsets everything we know. A brain survives. Where does the memory go, what part controls what action in the limbs? Recovering like this could cure lunacy, or even paralysis."

The doctors repaid their colleague's passionate words with yet more boisterous laughter, drawing the attention of many of the politicians in attendance, who themselves appreciated good humor.

"Senator, is there an opening in your forum for comedy?" Dr. Kittridge, whose portly frame was akin to the expecting ladies he attended to back home, called out to Senator Samuel S. Phelps, a former military paymaster during the War of 1812.

Representative Beck, a teetotaler, therefore about the only one present whose hand did not hold a drink, offered, "Please, gentlemen, we are here in a mood of openness and new ideas. Let us not begrudge the doctor for speaking his mind."

Dr. Harlow's left brow twitched uncontrollably. His gaze narrowed into a squint, retinas converging on Dr. Kittridge – he had not been fond of this pudgy guy since they had first met four years prior at a medical convention in Boston – and pleaded, "Return with me and see for yourself."

"John, really!" Dr. Kittridge laughed so hard he almost choked on

a gulp of brandy he had ingested.

"I think it best," the disreputable physician went on, "that you can interview the subject and observe the injury with your own eyes." Dr. Harlow's gaze swept over the crowd that encircled him as he promised, "I invite all of you and none will be disappointed."

"Too far for a parlor trick," Dr. Kittridge said as he regained his composure.

Dr. Grant, who often enjoyed distilling his own private batch of intoxicants for him and his friends to enjoy during their all-night poker games, motioned to a server to bring him another serving of wine. "John, I didn't know you had a taste for the spirits. If I didn't know the wiser, I would swear you had your fill today."

From the rear of the room, a speaker announced, "We shall reconvene."

Dr. Harlow hid his bruised ego behind a weak smile. How, he wondered, would he be able to put on a happy face when his beloved asked him of the meeting? The men shuffled into an adjacent lecture hall; Dr. Harlow ambled at the slowest pace, confused and upset over the reaction he had received, his brow twitching, but he didn't pay attention, buried in his own thoughts. He considered slipping out indiscreetly and returning home. No, he decided, that would show the bastards that they had won. Hence, he would most positively not be invited back. The day was about lively debate and discussion and he would take his lumps like a man. Deep inside his soul, he knew that the truth about the case he had presented would one day emerge.

## Cavendish, Vermont

The comfortable buggy, pulled by Jefferson, who was by then so well trained, with the path into town so instinctively ingrained in his DNA, that Dr. Harlow barely had to lead him, came to a smooth halt. Once, after having fallen asleep on the way back to Main Street after a late-night house call, Dr. Harlow awoke to find himself and carriage safely parked in front of the Cavendish Hotel. Dr. Harlow liked to brag that he owned the smartest horse in the county. He hopped down, holding a gift for his wife – a package of the English tea that she so favored, the aromatic Earl Grey. He began to walk toward the hotel entrance, but stopped in his step. Why did he have the feeling of forgetting something, he questioned. He ambled back to the carriage and peeked in. "Of course! Mustn't forget that," he said to himself. He stuck his arm in, pulled out the all important (at least to Charlotte) overcoat and placed it on.

Upon entering his patient's infirmary area, he was startled to discover his better half tending to Phineas, sprawled on the bed in a puddle of sweat.

Charlotte blurted out, "Bless the Lord."

The doctor rushed to her side, absent-mindedly dropped the tea package, hugged her and compassionately declared, "My darling." All of a sudden, for more than one reason, he felt a regret at having left Charlotte with such a sullen responsibility. He looked at her directly, "I don't doubt you did your best."

Charlotte, shaken, not knowing how to best express her emotions, stuttered, "I...I came in...I...with breakfast..."

"It's fine, it's fine, my dear. Worry not your heart." He kneeled

beside Phineas. Checking his temperature, he probed, "How long has he been like this?"

"Three o'clock in the P.M., one day prior."

"You've been keeping his fever down with towels?" Dr. Harlow asked in as gentle a tone as possible.

Charlotte nodded. "As much as I could."

Dr. Harlow began removing the ill man's clothes. "The blacksmith told tale he walked into the general store."

"The fool planned to walk to Proctorsville."

"He has profound difficulty with judgment, what is acceptable risk or trade, and..."

Without warning, Phineas's upper torso spasmed, he heaved out rough coughs, yet concurrently his body slumped in a supreme weakness.

"Oh my Lord, oh my Lord," Charlotte clutched her breastbone, then backed away from the bed.

Dr. Harlow carefully escorted her to the door, gave her a petite hug. "Go, my dear. Your role as guardian angel has passed. For him to live even this long is a blessing to his family, and a gift to science, but I feel he shall pass 'fore the morning. Do what you can to remove these visions from your mind. No mild woman should carry such a burden."

"I love you, John."

"And I so you."

"At least, hot tea?"

"No, thank you. Please be on your way."

Charlotte, eyes filled with emotional moisture, exited. Her



husband strode back to the patient. His first instinct was to grab the glass of blood-thirsty leeches. But, as he knelt down beside the mattress, he studied the suffering man, who lay covered with blood, head bandages that dangled half-off, a present day mummy-in-waiting. "Phineas. Poor Phineas. You do not suffer in vain." The spasms tapered off. Dr. Harlow placed the eager leeches down. He gingerly removed the bandages from the subject's head. Unearthing the Tamping Iron in the bed, Dr. Harlow lifted it up, lining up the rod with the holes in Phineas's head. "By God's grace...remarkable." He set down the tool.

Dr. Harlow picked up his quill, carefully sketching - thin shaky lines put down at first - then, with the uneven strokes of someone who was not a seasoned artist, but diligent about doing a competent job nonetheless, he expanded the work to a full outline of Phineas's cranium as it appeared when he first treated him. The Doctor, still seething over his treatment in the capitol, in the best interest of science, endeavored late into the night. Outside, the occasional passerby - which included the town drunk, Elvin, a jovial fellow who seldom held down a job but irregularly found employment with, ironically for a drinking man, the Church of Christ, helping with maintenance and fundraising and one of the town's trio of "working girls", Priscilla, a bubbly thirty-year old redhead with an accent of which nobody could make out the country of origin - surveyed the illuminated room and the shadows, with the knowledge that the focused physician was attending to his most difficult medical challenge, for by now all citizens, not just in town, but the whole of Windsor County, had heard of his famous case.

Two-twenty in the a.m., Dr. Harlow, working by candlelight, carefully picked through the scab of Phineas's cleanly bandaged forehead to again view his brain. The patient was fast asleep, snoring. Dr. Harlow was thrilled to hear the healthy sound of slumber ooze from the foreman's mouth. A good sign, indeed. The trusty quill was put back to worthy use as Dr. Harlow once again, with another thin, shaky line, initiated a sketch.

As the morning light bathed the small room in an unshowy glow, Dr. Harlow was slumped over in the chair he had pulled up close to the bed, only to be awoken by the sound of a paper being ruffled. He was startled to see Phineas sitting up, studying the primitive, but fairly detailed, drawing that had been made of his brain. "You're awakened," Dr. Harlow said.

"And just in time, I figure. The next drawing would be my head in a casket," Phineas replied with a hint of humor.

The healer moved rapidly to check Phineas's forehead for any sign of fever. "Your fever – gone!" he proclaimed.

"I reckon, if you say so."

"Do you remember walking to the store?" Dr. Harlow gently took the drawing from Phineas and placed it on the table, not desiring, after all his efforts, to have any documents of the accident harmed in some way.

"Of course I do." Phineas checked the pocket watch he had always carried with him, a bestowal from his father. "I'm over an hour late. Could you fetch me my pants?"

Dr. Harlow handed him his pants. "Do you hunger?"

"Mightily," Phineas replied as he swiped the pants.

Dr. Harlow, sensing an opportunity to add to the important notes on the case, reached for his quill and journal. He muttered as he watched the patient, jotting down observations, "Has no disorientation or dizziness. Puts on pants without my help."

"If'n I didn't, I wouldn't want you telling no one." Phineas was dressed.

Dr. Harlow lifted his eyes from the journal. "Oh no, no, don't worry, Phineas, this is just for my peers in the medical field. None of them could believe you lived."

Phineas searched around for an object. He discovered it – the Tamping Iron – on the floor, beside the bed, seized it firmly with his left hand, and shook Dr. Harlow's hand with his right. "Send them over to the Rutland Burlington. I ain't no freak, but, I'll put on a show, I reckon."

With a thoroughly incredulous expression covering his face, Dr. Harlow watched attentively as his patient strolled out. He picked up the drawings to study them, but his attention was broken when he heard a mishmash of voices outside the room's window, a female one in particular that pierced the air when it exclaimed, "Land's sake, it's Phineas!" He strode to the window, peered out. As surely as Elvin dozing off another hangover after an overindulgent night spent in the saloon, Dr. Harlow viewed Phineas strutting, Tamping Iron held tightly in fist, in the direction of the railroad. Dr. Harlow went back to studying the drawings.

The bugle's vibrations echoed throughout the deep stone canyon

walls like the hollow ball bounced back and forth in a sweaty ping-pong tournament. The pronouncement, "Back In!" barked more like a command, bellowed from the current, and most workers wistfully hoped, temporary, foreman - Jesse Gruber. On the Rutland and Burlington, the tedious drudgery had proceeded as usual. The men didn't have any choice in the matter, if they planned on keeping their jobs with the railroad. Most of them did. They all missed their injured supervisor, however, especially considering the no-nonsense approach of his replacement. The wage earners, some of whom hadn't yet finished their lunches, packed whatever food, cups or cigarettes they had been utilizing snugly into their satchels.

"Don't it seem like our break gets shorter and shorter?" Jeremiah asked no one in particular as he took a drag on his clay tobacco pipe, a practical birthday gift from his wife.

Harrison tossed a half-smoked cigarette onto the ground. "Damn right about that. I sure wish Phineas would get well."

Tommy, the rare lad who did not possess a tobacco habit, whom missed his boss most of all, couldn't help but add his two cents. "Wonder if it'd be all right to pay Mr. Gage a visit. I mean, if he's allowed company."

"Best to wait on word about that, Tommy," Harrison advised in a fatherly manner. "We wouldn't want to do anything to get in the way of Phineas's healing."

"I guess you're right." The disappointment in the blast assistant's voice cut through the air almost as sharply as one of the blasts he was so good at helping prep for.

Jesse, a strapping man too brawny for his own ego, rumored to

have once been part owner of a house of ill repute in Chicago (the men didn't dare inquire into his past), his shaved scalp reflecting the autumn sun off of it like a mirror, could not help but get a jab in at the men's expense, the type of foreman who subscribed to the idea that the best motivator was a sharp put-down, stated with no trace of humor, "I say, you sorry lot of mudsills are only fit to lead the blind monkeys at the zoo. Perhaps you please your ladies in a more suitable manner than you do the Rutland Burlington." Jesse spit out a wad of saliva, which barely missed colliding with Edward's beard. "Perhaps not." Edward clenched his fist but, after a few moments, thought better of what he had had in mind.

Forty minutes on, the workers struggled with the particularly nasty gorge known locally as Norton's Pass. Cutting a rail path through such rugged terrain was enough to make even the toughest man weep with frustration, or let out a few choice cuss words. Tommy faithfully performed his task, preparing blast holes while the construction and blast gangs performed their awkward dance of progress.

Approaching from a distant ridge, Phineas swaggered, a proud peacock who planned to reclaim what he felt was rightfully his. As he neared the work site, he was recognized. Shorty, who lately had been thinking of leaving the railroad for a quieter style of life, noticed the man with the rod first and exclaimed, "Looky there. It's Phineas." A cheer spread like a wave. Men rushed up to him, considering him a hero more than ever.

Tommy expressed everyone's feelings when he gleefully shouted, "Phineas!"

Phineas, sporting a half-smile, plowed his way through the gathered crowd. His feet came to an abrupt halt at the work site. His expression became serious when he inspected the modest progress. The newly arrived survivor addressed the workers, "That's enough lolly gagging. Thirty-seven days pass. You should be another two rods up the line by now."

Tommy spoke up. "We lost a rod the day we lost you."

"And here it be," Phineas held up his Tamping Iron. "Back to work before I dock you ten and five."

Tommy and the others searched for a sign - a wink, a grin, an eye roll, anything! - that showed generally good-natured Phineas was having fun with them, but none such was forthcoming.

"I didn't none get to finish my smoke at break. You got to do something, Phin," Harrison blurted out, expecting sympathy from his comrade.

"You heard me right and proper," Phineas said stoically.

Most of the men hustled back to their tasks. A few laborers - the ones who had considered Phineas a friend in addition to their taskmaster - dogged his heels. Edward pleaded, "It ain't our fault. The Burlington sent Gruber."

"He does fail us," Shorty added.

Harrison placed his arm around Phineas. "And he don't know us like you."

Rashly, Phineas erupted into a rage, a volcano of anger that spilled over, his arms flailing around wildly, shaking off his friend's touch and raising his voice, "He don't know you like lazy good for nothings. God damn it! I said work!"

The men recoiled, glared at him as they broke off into groups. No one dared speak, no one knew what to even make of the outburst.

Phineas strode toward the front line. Jesse drew nearer to him with his hand out for a welcoming shake. He may have been a bastard to his underlings, but he had respect for his fellow overseers. After all, he felt, they had to stick together, men like them cut from a similar mold. "As you walk and talk, if it isn't Phineas Gage," Jesse greeted the visitor.

Phineas slapped Jesse's hand aside with the Tamping Iron and grabbed the man's arm instead. "I ain't running a church welcome. I'm running a rail crew. Pack your God damn bags." He turned to his youthful blast assistant, "Powder. Before I drive this iron up your arse!"

Tommy, whom, like the other men, had not heard Phineas speak in such a manner previously, froze like a deer in the oncoming headlights of a freight train.

"You deaf, boy?" Phineas coldly said.

"Na...na...no," Tommy stuttered out, his eyes moist.

The injured man did not bother for an answer, instead moving toward the blasting hole, workers hastily stepping to the side to clear a path for him as he did so. Edward, who endured as a childhood victim of a mother with violent mood swings, felt empathy for the lad. He placed his arm around Tommy and offered comfort. "He didn't mean nothing by it. He's just...you know, he's been through a rough spell. You are a real dandy of his."

"I sure don't feel it," Tommy replied, wearing his heart on his sleeve.

Edward searched for the right words, but any that came to mind didn't feel right, so he decided to verbalize none.

Shorty stepped up to offer his opinion, one that all of the men would come to herald as the truth. "I'll tell ya' what I think - Gage is no longer Gage."



December, 1867  
San Francisco, California

A crowd of travelers awaited to board the idling train. Well-bred women who wore their fashionable hoop dresses, molded from thin steel wire. Over the hoop, a respectable female wore her finest petticoat with pretty lace and, in an elegant touch, embroidery on the hem. The truly hip wore gloves and a bonnet. Refined gentlemen wore their best attire – double-breasted, wide-labeled suits, white shirts made of linen, collars turned perpetually down, tail coat and the enchanting top hat. Impatient children tugged at their mothers' garments to signal their desire to obtain five cent bags of hot popcorn from the local street vendor. Even with the gold rush madness having tapered off, the population growth in the burgeoning metropolis still far outpaced adequate infrastructure. New rail line extensions seemed to sprout up on a daily basis to handle the explosive number of travelers to and from the city.

As he walked toward the train, hat box in hand, led by a teenaged porter who pushed his bags through the mass of flesh, Dr. Harlow anxiously anticipated the journey back east. He considered the trip a success, able to draw breath a bit smoother. Still, he couldn't wait to get back home, especially to his beloved Charlotte, their love for each other enduring throughout the years. In the squeeze, a lanky man scrambling past bumped into the physician, nearly causing him to drop the hat box, along with its priceless contents. "Good God, man, watch yourself," Dr. Harlow spewed out in, for him, a rare outburst.

"Pardon," the lanky man meekly offered.

Dr. Harlow felt a crumb of guilt over his reaction, but damn it, he thought to himself, he hadn't traveled clear across the continent to retrieve such an object of significance, only to have it destroyed by a careless stranger. As he reached the steps that led up to his ride, the porter reached for the hat box. Dr. Harlow held onto it tighter. "No," he informed the porter, "this is far too precious a cargo to entrust to anyone but myself, thank you."

The traveler took a seat in his private berth; on his lap, the hat box rested like a mute pet. His loneliness filled the space, his gaze piercing the window pane, focused on the rail workers who toiled to finish a parallel track. His sight settled on one particular man, a person of Chinese origin, who sat alone, his hands bloody and his face enraged. In the distance behind him, several other men, one the possessor of a bloody nose, pointed in his direction. As the train began to lurch forward, Dr. Harlow turned his torso so he could watch as the beefy San Francisco railroad foreman gave "the thumb" to the lonely man, a signal that he had been fired. Dr. Harlow could only wonder what had transpired. He had knowledge of the mistreatment of immigrants, especially those of Asian descent who had arrived to help build America's rail lines, many of them dying from the terrible work conditions in the process. What had happened in this situation, he would never be aware of. As the locomotive gained momentum, his heart filled with a sadness, a downcast mood that gripped him as he thought of all the injustices in the world, of all the patients that he was not able to save on his watch, of all the carnage, on both sides, in the recent Civil War, and especially of one distinct patient. He pulled down the window's shade. It would

be a long trek. Dr. Harlow closed his eyes and envisioned the grand embrace he would give his wife upon seeing her. A joyful vision as he dozed off.

October, 1848  
Cavendish, Vermont

In the designated break area on the day he first reclaimed his rightful foreman post, Phineas sat by himself, his back turned to his men. What he consumed, the men couldn't tell, but many of them may have wished that it was poison. Jeremiah, between a big gulp of the baked beans that made up his meal on a daily basis, some of which routinely ended up decorating his wardrobe, stated, "Say what you want, the devil took him and sent that bastard back in his place."

Harrison guzzled coffee and agreed, "Can't be the same man. Not with a rod through his brain. No way, no how."

"I never believed I'd say this, but I almost wish Jesse was back," Edward said.

"That's going too far...oh, what the hell, I got to agree with you on that," Jeremiah said as he picked a wayward bean off his plaid shirt and popped it into his mouth.

Phineas stood up, stretched. He walked back toward his men, whistling as he did so, as easy-going as his old self. "That's what I like to see. A strong team, one that can get me to the bend at Ferry Bridge by Friday," he said as he passed by. The men glanced at each other, bewildered.

"TF", short for Two-Faced, is what the workers began to call Phineas, though never to either of his perceived facades. For the week that followed, the wage earners did their utmost to concentrate on the task at hand and tiptoed around their boss's paradoxical and contradictory behavior, outbursts and unreasonable demands, peppered between periods, albeit brief ones, of good-natured moods and

friendliness. Several of the crew grouched, swearing they would quit, but for men that didn't farm or have enough of an education to go into fields such as the law or medicine, employment was scarce. No one actually made good on their threats. The situation came to a head on one bitterly cold, overcast afternoon.

The back line of the rail crew congregated at a spot, away from their posts. A runty man, who wore a proper dark suit and a humorless expression to match it, stepped out of a buggy and made his way toward the front line. Mr. Clancy Giles, bespectacled railroad vice-president in charge of human resources, witnessed all of the men encircling something, but could not make out what the object of distraction was. Tommy, who wandered near the front blast hole, saw the head honcho coming and ran towards him. "What's this I hear about an impasse," the administrator demanded to know.

"It's...it's not an impasse, sir," Tommy said jittery. He had often become tongue-tied in the presence of authority figures, with the exception of his formerly admired foreman, whom, like most of the workers, he had come to regard as a crony.

"Then what, by Jesus, is it?"

"Let me show you, sir."

The blast assistant led Mr. Giles to the front, to a sight that, upon initial inspection, the boss doubted he had perceived correctly. For all of the laborers – not merely considered as part of Phineas's crew, but, since he was in charge of Phineas, men he deemed as entirely his crew – were struggling to use wedges and picks to roll a formidable boulder aside.

Phineas stood there, Tamping Iron in hand, good eye wide open,

breathing heavily, adrenaline flowing. He barked orders, a general leading a battle against a stone nemesis. "You're not putting your backs into it," he hurled.

The men groaned in disagreement. None bothered to verbally object, aware that the determined foreman would only push them even harder.

Mr. Giles, however, would not remain silent. "Phineas?"

Phineas turned to the well attired man, serious yet cordial, "We'll roll this beast aside in two shakes." He shouted to the men, "Push, damn it!"

Mr. Giles surveyed the situation. He was no engineer, but he had a basic knowledge of how the laws of nature, in that circumstance, that of gravity, operated. Taking stock of the situation and especially the laborers, covered in a sweaty layer of grime, who worked the boulder with all their might, to no avail, he bellowed, "Hold it!" The men collapsed in total exhaustion. Irked, the V.P. pointed out, "Phineas, that rock has to weigh twenty tons."

"Nah," was all Phineas muttered, more intensely focused on the insurmountable boulder.

"Phineas! Look at it. You can't move it."

"Sure we can," Phineas said optimistically.

Stephen, a recently hired worker, confident and brash – ironically, the one who complained the loudest about quitting the railroad – wiped sweat from his brow, and divulged, "All he had to do was curve the track, but he wouldn't listen to none of us."

Mr. Giles initiated a thought, "Phineas..."

Phineas remained fixated on the rock foe. The damn thing mocked

him, teased him, reminded him of a schoolyard bully. He would show the object who its master was. "Get up, men!"

The gelatinous lump the workers had morphed into - laborers that had spent forty-five minutes of precious autumn sunlight in the battle to move the obstruction - were drained of energy and will.

Stephen spoke up again, even more forcefully, a mouthpiece for all the frustrated workers. "He ain't right since the blast," he said. "He's a ornery cuss that can't see right from wrong."

"Don't fret none," Phineas calmly said. "Just a tick of a wait and it'll be clear."

"It's all right, Phineas," Mr. Giles mirrored the deluded man's tone. "Come with me and let's talk about this."

"No sense in losing time over chit-chat. Talk while I watch my men work."

Mr. Giles scrutinized the crew. He knew instinctively, even if it ran counter to what his heart felt, what had to be done. After all, he had a railroad to operate, one that was being developed into New England's finest. "Please Phineas, join me for a walk." To the exhausted workers, he said, "You men can relax."

Reluctantly, Phineas treaded in the footsteps of his supervisor, obeying but not understanding why he was needed for such a private conference. The men observed as the two managers came to a standstill. A majority of them had a sense of what was about to transpire. Many of them regretted that it had to happen. However, they understood. "TF" was no longer an effective foreman. From their vantage point, they watched as, in a swift action, Phineas shoved the smaller man aside. As the men rushed over to prevent bloodshed,

Phineas stood ready to strike, hissing, "Like hell I am. Bastard!"

Reclining on one of the scant possessions of his late father's that he had inherited - a beautiful sweet corner chair fashioned from walnut wood on turned spindle legs with elegantly carved back slats and an embroidered cushion - furniture that pop had rested on after returning from work in the slate mines (and often dozed off on only to remain there until time-to-go-back-to-work dawn), Phineas bathed in the sound of silence around him, holding his companion, the Tamping Iron, in his fingers like a delicate flower. He pondered the rocky road that fate had led him down. He questioned, why. "Why me? Why the monstrous injury? Am I a wicked person that deserved such hellish destiny? Did not going to seminary school to train for the priesthood like mother had planned for me anger a divine force in the universe?" Kindred spirits, Alfred Gage and his only son attended Sunday services at the insistence of the family matriarch, Hannah, believing it easier to spend a few hours in church than be incessantly nagged and questioned about it by her and their devout neighbors. Phineas did not have the fire of faith inside him like most others. He contemplated why the Lord would punish him so. Then the idea rushed in, with the sudden propulsion of a torrent, permeating his mind, that "what the hell was the significance of building a rail line in comparison to serving the Almighty?" But, if a divine force had wished him dead - surely, the rod could have been directed a fraction of an inch to the right, causing eternal damage - why would it let him suffer, not to complete the task? Would a loving, benign God let a good man agonize? Or, would a vengeful,



spiteful God turn a blind eye to him? Phineas's inquisitive nature was stirred up. If a deity did exist – a big if – it surely didn't give much of a damn about ordinary Joes.

A knock sounded at the door. Phineas ignored it. The door nevertheless swung open – nobody in town bothered to secure their entrance – to reveal Elisa, dressed snugly in her winter coat. She ran to him. "Oh, Phineas, my darling. I heard what happened. I am so sorry." Elisa, her golden tresses tied in a braid, hugged her beau, yet he remained as motionless as the sculpture of town founder William Cavenish, Duke of Devonshire, that stood proud in the town square. "It's so awful," she continued in distressed tone, "it's so awful. A great miscarriage of justice." She paused to take a deep look at the silent man. "Phineas, dear, are you all right? May I get you something? Soup, perhaps?"

At last, Phineas stirred to life, to faintly say, "I would rather remain here, just me and my trusty companion."

"Surely a rod can't provide comfort, or hugs, or meaningful conversation."

"If a man can't count on his tamping iron, who can he count on? Certainly not a railroad."

Elisa had never seen her man so down in the dumps. Caring soul that the woman was, she was determined to help cheer him up. "You are one of the most experienced, respected foreman in the state of Vermont. Any silly old railroad would call it an honor to have Phineas Gage leading one of its crews."

Phineas continued to stare straight ahead, caressing his precious Tamping Iron.

"I know," the pretty girl upped her cheerfulness decibel, "it's a lovely evening and the autumn leaves have turned the most wonderful shade of color. It would do us good to take a stroll and enjoy the fresh air."

"I shall not," came the lethargic reply.

"My darling..."

Phineas interrupted, "At work, they say Gage is no longer Gage."

"That is silly talk, to be banished far away."

"Gage is no longer Gage," Phineas repeated in an undertone.

"I will hear none of that." She took his hand. "Gage is very much Gage. My darling Gage." Elisa glanced at the rod. "That cussed iron", she thought to herself, "why would he retain the object that had caused him so much harm?" She did not ask her flame that question directly, not desiring to upset him, in his fragile state, any further. "Come, Phineas. Please."

"No!" came the response of a little child.

"We can pay a visit to the market and enjoy a cream biscuit."

Elisa, clever as well as radiant, believed that the ploy of the treat - his favorite sweet - an effective one.

"No!"

Elisa sighed, the sad face of a porcelain doll. "Then, I think it best I be on my way. Will you be all right?"

"I will survive," Phineas said apathetically. "I have already."

Elisa was on the verge of weeping. She wanted to leave swiftly, before the waterworks began. The difficulty of seeing her boyfriend in such a state was too much to bear. "Very well then. I will call on you tomorrow." She embraced Phineas's still torso, then left as a not

insignificant tear slid down her soft cheek.

Phineas cradled the Tamping Iron. "Yep, if a man can't count on his tamping iron, jus' who in the hell can he count on?"

Mere days later, Phineas was calling on Elisa at the residence she continued to dwell in with her parents and two younger siblings. The salary of an assistant to the schoolmarm was not very adequate to pay one's living expenses, nor was it customary in that era for a lass to move out of her childhood home until marriage. It was a comfortable house afforded by the family patriarch, Elmer, an anvil smith. Blacksmiths traveled from all of southern Vermont to gobble up the high quality anvils and hammers that he forged. The annual Cavendish Ball festivities, held on a vacant lot of impressive size just off Main Street – real estate once rumored to have belonged to the Pennacook Indians – was a joyous event attended by nearly every inhabitant of Windsor County. The soiree was also about the only occasion that many of the straight-laced church-going God-fearing simple country folk let their hair down to have any fun.

"Phineas!" Elisa hugged her date at the door. He was on time, but of more importance, he had shown up. He had stated vigorously that he had no wish to attend the dance. Elisa, who had managed to convince him otherwise, sighed at the sight of the metallic article that accompanied him. "Phineas, really," she asked, "is that necessary?"

"Where I go, it goes," Phineas flatly stated.

"Perhaps if you left it here, just while we're out," Elisa suggested.

Phineas would have none of that. "Can't do. If it stays, I stay. You might as well ask me to leave what's left of my brain behind."

Knowing it was a quarrel that she could not be victorious in, Elisa, decked out in a dazzling evening gown worn off the shoulder,

featuring a wide hem, which the ravishing woman supplemented with a shawl and opera length gloves – dress she had specially commissioned for the Ball, costing a full two weeks wages – counted her blessings, which included her escort's touched-by-an-angel recovery. Phineas, who never liked to get fancied up, no matter what the event, was, as usual, attired in the simple garb of trousers, white shirt and waist coat.

“I reckon, you do look the sight of a blooming flower,” Phineas said as a way of compliment. For someone who had so strongly resisted going out that evening, the unemployed railroad foreman appeared to be in relatively good spirits.

“Thank you kindly. Shall we?” Elisa's cloaked hand took his hand as they began to walk towards the commotion in the distance.

The sugary melodies of the musicians' orchestra, consisting of fifes, jaw harp, clavichords and french horn, surrounded the attendees before they reached the official entrance, where Mayor Herbert G. Fletcher stood to greet them with an inviting smile and a hearty handshake. He snatched Phineas's hand with gratefulness, acknowledging Cavendish's most noted man. “Phineas, my dear boy, I speak on behalf of the whole town when I say how delighted I am that you join us. Welcome,” the politician said, clearly meaning it.

If Phineas had harbored any reservations about showing up at the public event, they dissipated, fears that dispersed like the smoke from the cigarette that Rye dragged on. “Howdy, Phineas, and you ma'am,” he addressed the young couple. “Good on you, Phineas. You appear in better shape than at our last face to face. I was prepared to fashion you a right box, I was. Comfy one too. Yep, you would of

enjoyed it so."

"Thank you," Elisa said as she pulled Phineas away swiftly. She had always been creeped out by the mortician. Whether it was because of his chosen profession or his peculiar appearance, she did not know, or care. She simply did not relish the vibes that surrounded the undertaker. Happiness, however, filled her heart when a good many townsfolk came up to greet her boyfriend to express their best wishes for him, stating how glad they were to see him out and about. Mr. Taylor, the merchant who had donated the evening's refreshments, joked, "Phineas, you look decent enough to make that walk to Proctorsville."

"I might just do that, sir," Phineas replied.

Elvin positioned himself next to the punch bowl, as he did every year, though he would show up zonked, having gotten a head start earlier in the day on the mission of raising his alcohol-blood level. Some citizens argued it proper that he be banned from the Ball. Mayor Fletcher decided otherwise. "If we outlawed everybody with a flaw, we would scarcely have a person present," the mayor stated at a town council meeting where the issue had been raised.

As the lively band struck up the popular tune, The Jolly Raftsman, Phineas and his companion bumped into Rose and her beau. "Hey there, partner, I see you dusted the cobwebs off yourself for a spell," Harrison laughed, a feeble attempt at humor that landed with a thud.

"Harrison, you're terrible," Rose said affably. She wore an ornamental brooch that damsels admired.

Numerous rail line employees, many of whom had worked with

Phineas, were accounted for on that pleasant fall night. None had held a grudge nor cast any bad words toward their former boss.

Bygones were bygones. People wanted to simply have a merry time, a break from the grind of daily life, a recess before old man winter soon blanketed Vermont once again.

Phineas's mood abruptly changed to that of one that matched his friend's sunless eyes. "Ain't got no cobwebs like you lazing traitors on the Rutland Burlington," he tersely said. The foreman, who was steadfastly convinced that his former employer would be calling him back to work, had malice over the situation and the men that he considered had acted disloyal towards him.

"Remember, honey bear, we agreed to not bring up railroad matters," Elisa said in a valiant attempt to keep the mood light.

Phineas was not in compliant mode. "I ain't never said that."

The band, all local musicians, many of whom comprised the Sunday worshiping choir music-makers, launched into an uptempo waltz.

Rose, a splendid dancer, tugged at her boyfriend's coat. "Oh Harrison, we must!"

"Excuse," Harrison announced, "when a lady's got to dance, she's got to dance." He took his gal by the hand as they entered the waltzing area – wooden planks laid down, courtesy of the Cavendish Lumber and Mill Company – packed tight with swinging pairs.

"Oh, Phineas, let's dance," Elisa pleaded. "It'll be fun. Please."

"Don't feel like it," her date disappointedly answered her.

"Are you going to let a thoughtless comment ruin our whole evening? Harrison didn't mean nothing by it."

"Don't matter none," Phineas said as a familiar figure

approached. "There's one them traitors."

"Phineas, pleased to see you in the flesh," Edward said, holding a cup of Mrs. Kerling's flavorful punch, spiked with "special ingredients". All the jovial fellow received in return was a push aside from a tamping iron.

"He don't mean nothing," Elisa said. "Everything will be fine." The sparkling girl hurried after her moody guy.

The refreshment stand always remained popular. With it's selection of home-made biscuits, cheeses, pies and puddings, there was ample reason for that. Phineas stuffed a cream biscuit into his mouth. Then another. And another. "That's good Phin, perhaps you're just hungry-like. Food will set you right." The voracious man continued his consuming, with disregard to making a mess of himself.

The music went silent. But a voluminous cheer rang out on that perfect autumn star-drenched night when Harrison stated, "Everybody, all my friends, listen up real good. I got a huge important thing to ask my lady." Rose, after going with him for so long, which involved sincere discussions of a life together, was not surprised at what transpired. She had indeed been itchy for it to happen. Harrison, traditionalist that he was, got down on a knee and declared, "Rose, we been going together for long enough now. And, there ain't no woman in this world I could want to spend my life with more than you. Will you become my missus?"

Luke Dewey and his brother, Lamar, freely partook of Mrs. Kerling's fruity punch, ingesting it like they'd been Robinson Crusoes recently rescued from the remote tropical island. The brothers, 21 and 19, respectively, were known as troublemakers, with



Luke being the primary instigator. At least the junior Dewey sibling helped out on the family farm. The senior sibling, who didn't much like getting out of bed early or anything else relating to the agricultural lifestyle, wouldn't even do that. For a time, via his dad's connection with childhood mate, Mayor Fletcher, Luke had been employed as clock setter for the county, but that was also a lost cause, lasting barely two months. Nobody in Cavendish knew what occupied the hooligan's days, but most guessed it wasn't honorable. "You ain't fit to pour piss out of a boot," Luke taunted the sloppy former railroad man.

The townsfolk held their bated breath, awaiting the prospective bride's response, though most could guess its outcome. Elisa, ears perked up, excitedly placed a hand to her lips in anticipation.

Lamar greeted Phineas's silence as an affront to his kin. "My brother say, you ain't fit to pour piss out of a boot. You deaf as well as arse-ugly?"

"Yes!" Rose cried out, tears lubricating the brooch. A circle of applause sounded, a round-robin of back slaps on the soon-to-be groom's back.

As soon as the band struck up appropriate celebratory music, Beethoven's masterfully composed Ode to Joy, people went back to rejoicing by dancing. Elisa, so full of pleasure for the newly engaged couple, turned around to the horror of witnessing her long-term partner wielding his rod like a ninja would a sword. The offending brothers may have acted tough, but their fighting skills were nothing to brag about. Lamar found himself on the receiving end of a whack to the jaw, shedding two front teeth in the process. The

elder Dewey felt the Tamping Iron connect with his chest, then, most damaging, his family jewels, which he cradled as he fell to the ground, whining like a knobby-kneed schoolgirl. "NO, Phineas!" Elisa forcefully said, as if admonishing an unruly bulldog. By that point, the evening of gaiety interrupted, the decent guests, appropriately shocked, pushed back in terror, causing a ruckus. That didn't much matter to the adrenaline-filled out of control man. He savagely swung his tool at Lamar, rib cracking as easily as a three-minute hard boiled egg.

"For Heaven's sake, somebody do something!" Mrs. Denule, a prominent socialite, member of one of Cavendish's oldest clans, who wore an impressive ostrich-feathered hat, begged.

Considering the vulnerable state the brothers were in, it was fateful that Big Wayne was close enough to wrap his bulky biceps, in a bear hug, around the madman. "Phineas!" he said, only to be met by the agitated man's squirming. "Phineas! It's me, Big Wayne. Your friend from the Rutland Burlington."

Phineas mellowed down enough to reply, "I ain't got no friends on the Rutland Burlington."

"You better make like the wind, Phineas. The sheriff see what you done, he's likely to throw you in a holding cell, or worse," Big Wayne warned.

After casually stepping over his foes to grab one last cream biscuit, Phineas headed towards the exit. The Ball would continue, but, needless to mention, it would be one talked and gossiped about for many years to come.

Under what was believed to be the most ancient maple tree in

Cavendish, Elisa sat, sorrowful, evening gown bathed in tears. Beside, Phineas rested, his face devoid of any human emotion. He regretted nothing, harbored no pangs of guilt, sure he had the right to defend himself, even against attacks that were solely verbal. After an uncomfortably long period, Phineas finally spoke up. "I reckon you hate me?"

"I don't hate anybody for what they are," Elisa, through sniffles, said.

Phineas wasn't sure what to make of the remark. "You mean like, I gots the devil in me?"

"No, I don't believe that true."

"I'm glad to hear it. Some of the folks 'round these parts think I do. Probably lots more now," Phineas resignedly said.

The beauteous woman slid off an opera glove, a makeshift handkerchief. "There's lots of silly superstitions in this town," she said. "You have changed Phineas. Since the accident. Sometimes I feel like I don't know who you are anymore."

"I reckon I don't know who I am anymore either."

"The man I knew, if he got riled, he would find a way to deal with it gentlemanly. Making humor, talking it out in a calm-like manner, bringing peace between arguing folks. Never a man to resort to violence." Her eyes had dried, but the stormy emotions endured. "Never that."

"I don't know what come over me. When those fellows started up, it like my brain won't let me speak. A feeling jumps up in me and tells my hands to act. It was like I was standing far away watching it happen."

"When the children act unruly, Miss Foley will have them read poetry. Often, create their own," Elisa reported. "Miss Foley always says, 'Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted'."

"Poetry? Don't know what it is," Phineas admitted.

"It's using language, verse, in imaginative ways to express thoughts, emotions, the shedding of one's inner soul. Beautiful things, sad things, happy things, it doesn't really matter. It's not only what you say, it's how you say it."

"I reckon I lost you."

Elisa was not to be deterred. "A poem Ms. Foley introduces to each class is William Blake's Love's Secret. It's a lovely piece." She closed her eyes, concentrating on the flowing words, "Never seek to tell thy love, Love that never told can be; For the gentle wind doth move silently, invisibly. I told my love, I told my love, I told her all my heart, trembling, cold, in ghastly fears. Ah! She did depart! Soon after she was gone from me, A traveller came by, Silently, invisibly. He took her with a sigh."

"I don't know what it mean, but it sure sounds pretty."

The fetching lady let a smile slip as she said, "Poems can have different meanings. I always thought this one was about the mysteries of love."

"Mystery is a right word for it," Phineas said without sarcasm.

"I possess a book of poems. You may have it. The more of poetry one reads, the more clear it becomes. Thus, to create by your own hand is a heavenly endeavor. I believe it a blessing for you."

To Phineas, that was what he found the most painful about the whole damn ordeal – what Elisa had been put through, even if he could not express that to her in words. The couple who once had had such a promising future together had been two ships that hadn't just passed in the night, they had docked in a ballet of affection. Then, Phineas's vessel had sprung a leak and he knew, that in his condition, it would be only a matter of time – whether weeks, months, possibly even a few years – that the mortal vessel that carried him daily would end up resting on the bottom of the sea. To take Elisa with him on that fateful journey would be unconscionable. Even a tormented man with a hole in his head knew that.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN  
March, 1849

On the sizable maple table in his study, Dr. Harlow had numerous papers spread out, each one depicting either a drawing or journal entry about his most well-known case. He painstakingly studied them, organized them, studied them some more, then organized them again. Charlotte carried in a pot of freshly brewed tea, placing it down on the table. "John, you hardly slept a wink all evening. You must feel a wreck."

Moving the tea pot to the little writing desk (lest an accidental spill occur), Dr. Harlow continued the examination of his papers. "I shall be fine. A man can subsist on minimal sleep, if need be. The body adjusts."

"Do you think it wise to be traveling to Boston?" Charlotte poured tea into a cup. "What if you are publicly mocked?"

The devoted husband raised his eyes, though not his head. "I had

no documentation prior. I possess conclusive evidence now. My findings can not – will not – be denied.”

“I...I would not desire to see you ridiculed further.”

“Your concern is noted, my dear. I am a grown man, quite capable of fighting my own battles.” He carefully packed the papers up, gently placing them in his travel bag.

Charlotte poured a cup of tea for herself. “Oh, how I wish I was joining you in Boston. Such a lovely city. I will forever cherish the memories of my travels there as a young girl,” she hummed as she watched her spouse reach for his overcoat. “No, you don't. Not without good hot tea to warm you.”

“Charlotte, it is a lengthy journey. I should be going.” He placed on his overcoat.

Determinedly, she placed the cup of tea in his hand; he sighed and took it. That was an argument he was not going to win.

“One day I can imagine us residing there. You have spoken of the great medical institutions located thus,” Charlotte said.

“I do suspect, that one day, perhaps in the not so distant future, you and I may outgrow Cavendish and decide a more cosmopolitan city might suit us.” He sipped his tea.

“To think of Boston's cultural diversity,” Charlotte swooned like a schoolgirl experiencing her first crush. “And, such a progressive city. Opening the first medical college devoted for female students to study. How impressive.”

“The curriculum is focused on midwifery. A promising start, I suppose. I am aware of colleagues who do not hold confidence for women training in the medical profession.”

"What rubbish! Why shall not every town hold title to such an institution? And, why shall only men have the right to vote? Explain that to me. Women are not monkeys nor dogs nor frogs nor any other type of such creature. We are people too."

"Perhaps that day will come. However, I wouldn't advise one to hold one's breath." Dr. Harlow put down his tea. "I really must take my leave." He kissed her. "Goodbye, my dear." He grabbed his travel bag and exited.

She peered out the front window to watch her husband's buggy speed off in an easterly direction. "In this land of steady habits, the day must arrive when there will be equality for all. Even if it falls on my shoulders to help lead the charge."

The following day, after mare and physician enjoyed a night's rest in the approximate half-way mark location on the one hundred-sixty mile trek, Manchester – Dr. Harlow staying in a hotel, equine in the hotel stables – trustworthy Jefferson, the steady rhythm of his shoes kicking up dirt, led the buggy at sundown into Boston city limits. Dr. Harlow would then check into one of the flourishing city's fine hotels and rest early for the important day that lay ahead. Enjoying the pleasure of a refreshing after-supper stroll that evening along the Harbor, with it's berth of impressive steamships, the warmly-dressed visitor admired the scenic vistas of the metropolis, the River Charles and the architecture so unlike that of rural Vermont, awed by the sight of the recently built Custom House, Boston's first skyscraper. Construction commenced in 1837, to take



twelve years and the staggering sum of \$1,076,000 to complete. Few men of that era could conceive of such a figure, especially when the average wage earner's salary was a paltry sixteen dollars a week. Dr. Harlow stopped to gaze at the praiseworthy structure with the Grecian Doric exterior situated at the head of the dock between Long and Central Wharves. He studied the portico of six columns on each side, the high flight of steps, and an order of engaged columns around the walls, twenty in number. As his retinas sucked it all in, he mulled over the notion of him and his lovely wife relocating to the City on the Hill. Yes, he firmly decided, this would be an ideal place to practice medicine, with it's mix of cutting-edge hospitals, medical research and generally progressive attitude. Boston, he reminded himself, was also the established center of the abolitionist movement. Another reason to admire it.

Seeping from a nearby alley, Dr. Harlow heard what at first he assumed to be the low agonized moan of...what exactly was it - a cat? a cow? a coyote? He didn't pay much attention to it until he heard the definite articulate sounds of a human voice, words that seemed to say, "Damn...damn...scalawags." He moved closer to the darkened pathway and peeked around a brick office building, only to not be able to make out a thing in the absence of adequate illumination, the sole light arriving from the quarter moon that hung protectively over a clear sky. Was this a ploy to burglarize him, a hapless passerby? He was aware that such evil goings-on happened in the city, things that were, for the most part, unimaginable in the Green Mountain State. As someone who had taken the Hippocratic Oath, he had no choice but to act. Carefully he made a path into the narrow back

street, his pupils slowly adjusting to what little moonlight existed. He discovered the source of the groans - a man lay on the ground. Dr. Harlow cautiously approached. "Sir, what ails you?"

The man, who held his right hand to his left shoulder, moaned some more, and, in a thick Irish tongue, answered, "Damn border ruffians. All I was doing was enjoying me self a brew in the old pub, that's all. Scalawag went and called me a white nigger, right to me face. I slugged him one good, then one of his muckers, a real lushington at that, rushed with a broken bottle. You a rozzer?"

"No sir, I am a doctor. And, it appears that you could use one now." The healer knelt down. "Please, let me take a look at the wound."

The hurt man moved his hand to reveal a deep gash in the shoulder, one that had had much blood drain from it. "I be all right. Just need to rest myself."

Dr. Harlow made a careful examination of the laceration. "Why were you insulted so?"

"Listen to me voice. I'm an Irishman, proudly so. I come over to escape the Great Famine. Some blokes don't like all us Irishmen around. We're just wanting to make an honest day's pay. Feed our families. That's all. None of us looking to meet trouble."

"Time and again, partaking of spirits and narrow-mindedness do not make for good bedfellows. Do you wear a sock?"

"Yeah."

"Please, remove it."

The Irishman did as instructed and handed the short stocking to

Dr. Harlow, who proceeded to snugly tie it around the man's wound. "This will help suspend the bleeding," he explained. "I do not have my medical bag with me. You require care."

"I shall be fine, doctor."

"The hospital employs staff for such emergency measures," Dr. Harlow said.

"All I need is to get me bones home. My lass will be worried sick. If you could help me to me feet."

Dr. Harlow wrapped his arm around the man's waist and, while it was a bit of a challenge, involving groans from both parties, the deed was duly completed. "I do implore you to seek care..."

"I shan't do so," the stubborn man replied. "If I showed me Irish face, the rozzers would follow, blame me for what happened, throw me in the slammer. That's how it rolls in this town. Not to worry, a neighbor of mine is a nurse. Of good Irish stock, too. She'll fix me up proper." He limped out into the shine of the whale-oil burning street lamps. Before vanishing, he stopped. "It warms me soul to know there's good men who care. Thank you, doctor." He continued on, an apparition that would never cross paths with the physician again.

Resting in the comfortable hotel bed, entering the slumber state, Dr. Harlow reviewed the evening's odd turn of events in his mind. As a fairly new practitioner in the field of medicine, he was still trying to serve his patients in the best manner possible. He posed key questions to himself. Had he done enough to help the injured man? Had he needed to be more forceful in getting the man the medical care that was called for? Should he keep his medical bag with him at all

times, in case of such an emergency presenting itself? What most astonished him, as he dozed off into dreamland, was the fact that he did not learn the name of the man he had helped. On no occasion did he think to introduce himself to or ask for the injured person's name. To treat a patient anonymously would have been unthinkable back home. Not only would he be well acquainted with their name, but likely the names of all their kin as well. Dr. Harlow vowed that he would not let an impersonal connection with a patient occur again.

Jubilant delight – that was the feeling Dr. Harlow felt flowing through his body upon waking and enjoying a tidy breakfast of egg, biscuit and cup of tea in the hotel's ornate dining room. It wasn't only the medical conference he had anticipated, of course, but the chance to be redeemed when it came to the most unusual case of Phineas Gage. At precisely nine o'clock, Dr. Harlow, clutching the small wooden crate that held the precious cargo of vindication, summoned his buggy for the short trek to North Grove Street and the Massachusetts Medical College of Harvard University. Upon arrival at the lecture hall that was hosting the gathering, he saw the mostly familiar faces of colleagues, including Vermont native Dr. Edward Williams, along with a few faces of freshly licensed physicians sprinkled in, milling about. Many of the men smoked tobacco. Dr. Harlow had his opinions about the ill health effects of the habit, but, he figured, it was not his place to bring up an argument about that subject. At least, not when other more pressing business awaited to be resolved.

A familiar voice called out, "John, glad you could make it," Dr. Banner took his hand. "This conference should be quite engaging. So many wonderful advances in the field."

Dr. Harlow responded, "Thank you for the welcome, Marshall. I couldn't agree more. Dr. Morton's recent experiments with ether anesthesia are proving revolutionary. To think of performing surgery whereas the patient can feel no pain. Remarkable."

"Though, I should think some of the patients much prefer the old fashioned way of getting inebriated. Old habits die hard," Dr. Banner chuckled.

One of the newer attendees, a Dr. Francis Page, a baby-faced young man whom had recently graduated from Brown University Medical School interrupted, "Hey, speaking of which, I'm standing dry. Where the hell's the refreshments?"

Dr. Harlow and Dr. Banner glanced sideways at each other, knowing what the other was thinking. Every year, they would see various new faces of healers who, they believed, had attended the conference more for it's supposed "fun aspect" than to add to their knowledge of the profession. And, each subsequent year, a few of those faces would not be present. This guy had that vibe about him.

Dr. Harlow put out his hand for the introduction. "John Harlow."

"Francis Page," he introduced himself and took the doctors' hands in a friendly gesture. "Brown, class of '47."

"Brown, one of the finest," Dr. Banner said. "I have found many of the best in our occupation have attended Brown."

"That still don't wet my whistle none," Dr. Page retorted.

"We save that for later on. A group of us meet in the pub for

supper. Business first, I always say," Dr. Harlow educated the young doctor.

"Where did you graduate, Harlow?"

"John Adams Medical College. Class of '44," Dr. Harlow proudly stated.

Dr. Page wasn't impressed when he said, "Guess somebody had to. Just glad it wasn't I." Then, like a proud peacock, strutted away.

Both Dr. Banner and Dr. Harlow were stunned by the man's pretentious attitude. "Let us pray this is that man's first and only attendance at the conference," Dr. Harlow stated, taking an unusual and immediate disliking to another member of the human race.

"Amen to that," Dr. Banner added.

The finely attired guests were called into the lecture hall's general seating area. The conference was to be divided into a morning section, presided over by Oliver Wendell Holmes, dean of the Massachusetts Medical College, also a noted literary figure, followed by a meal break, and finally an afternoon segment that would give the practicing healers an opportunity to present their own research and findings to their peers. Holmes, who had studied medicine in Paris and himself a graduate of Harvard Medical School (class of 1836), notable Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, was one of the first educators to introduce microscopy to medical education. Possessing the reputation of a wise man, he was much respected in the field, though more than one in the medical profession considered his novel ideas far-fetched. It was for said reason that he had enjoyed addressing the annual conference, an open exchange of new concepts.

"I think that," Holmes, a short person who measured five feet,

three inches when standing in a pair of substantial boots, but tall in intellect, opened the proceedings, "it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived. Hence, we all share the passion of the field we have dedicated our lives to – none more so meaningful than the act of helping our fellow citizens in the treatment of illness. We join together at this fine institution in the exploration of new thoughts, original fancies, unique conceptions. For one's mind, stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions. Six years prior, I had penned *The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever*, arguing that the fever, contracted by women during childbirth, was passed from patient to patient by their doctors and nurses. I am fortunate, in that I have had the blessings to have learned of new research being conducted on my extensive travels through Europe. For instance, when my Hungarian colleague and friend Ignaz Semmelweis observed that women who had just given birth had a high death rate. Ignaz observed, additionally, that doctors were handling dead women in the mortuary and then delivering the babies on the maternity wards without washing their hands in between. He concluded that they were transmitting infected matter from the bodies, and ordered all doctors and nurses on the ward to wash their hands in chlorinated lime. My dear friends, let me tell you now of the dramatic results. The death rate fell from 30 percent to 1.5 percent within twelve months time." The speaker continued on, highlighting current advances in the medical field.

Dr. Harlow was captivated by the knowledge he was being presented with, truly convinced that it would revolution medicine. Oh, what a

glorious time to be practicing medicine. Holmes spoke eloquently - Dr. Harlow felt, this was an ideal speaker, a dedicated physician, witty, absorbing, well-regarded, open-minded - to serve as master of ceremonies. Topics covered, in addition to the aforementioned use of anti-septic precautions, included breakthroughs in anaesthetics using various gases and chloroform, experimentation with blood transfusions (blood poisoning and bleeding to death were all too common lethal outcomes of surgery), how to improve care for the masses of the poor who were treated in hospitals, which were considered little more than charitable institutions (the wealthy were always treated in their own homes by trained doctors) by inadequately, if at all, trained nurses, and even the curative powers of mercury. One worrying aspect of the morning, Dr. Harlow calculated, was the sheer tidal wave of dissenting opinion voiced exclusively by the older conventioners. Was it simply human nature that the more aged one became, the more closed-minded one became to new ideas, new ways of doing things? Dr. Harlow made a vow that, in his advanced years, he would not think in such a way, whether it related to the medical profession or anything else for that matter. After all, he entertained the question, would mankind not still be occupying caves if revolutionary ideas were forever dismissed out of hand?

Listening to the frequent, and, he was sure, unjustified arguments that some of those geezer physicians voiced, Dr. Harlow scratched his head in bewilderment when one old-time attendee stated his opposition to anaesthesia on the grounds that it was unnatural, since pain was a natural phenomenon which should not be interfered with, therefore went against the wishes of God or the ancient



physician who opposed the use of chlorine of lime as an anti-septic because it irritated the skin (to which Holmes good-naturedly responded, "I do not venture about you, good gentlemen, but I would prefer suffer itchy hands rather than an early visit with our Maker", causing a cheer from most, but not all).

At twelve o'clock, Holmes called the meal break. He acted graciously as the audience pelted him a cheer of appreciation. The men filed out into the nearby dining hall, where a generous lunch, but no spirits, had been set up. The doctors ravenously dug into the meal of boiled beef, stewed rabbit, plum pudding, fresh baked bread, savory vegetables and root beer, served on the finest porcelain. Many continued to debate the morning's topics, while a few eagerly enjoyed the break to make small talk or gossip with friends. Dr. Harlow felt a calmness, mixed with a righteousness, about his fast approaching presentation, which had been scheduled first post-meal, ducking out early to prepare for it.

At the front of the lecture hall sat a podium, blackboard, and, on a nearby table, several objects, which included a tamping iron, comparable in size and shape to Phineas's, as well a human skull. Dr. Harlow, preparing for the presentation in part by organizing his papers, and Dr. Williams, stood alone in the cavernous room.

"The entire frontal lobe, removed. And still the patient can walk and talk," Dr. Harlow, cradling a model skull he revolved in his hands, spoke with great enthusiasm.

"Yes, though...", Dr. Williams tried to interrupt, but found it almost impossible to get a word in.

"What I find equally fascinating, and surely as important, is his

inability to balance, or make choices that even a simpleton could make. The first test I performed..."

"John," Dr. Williams was finally able to forcefully suspend his associate's words. "I cannot agree."

Dr. Harlow was taken aback. "But you saw him. You're witness to his injury. Not the moment of injury, but his actions immediately thereafter."

"I saw a man who claimed a rod passed through his skull," Dr. Williams explained in his trademark monotone, "but was clearly in so much pain, his words could not be trusted."

"But, but this alters everything we know about the human brain," Dr. Harlow pleaded.

Dr. Williams cautioned, "Think about what you're doing. You're ridiculing yourself, John."

"My presentation is based on carefully documented fact."

"Your presentation could ruin your standing within the medical field and I cannot be part of it. My greatest favor would be to remain silent. If you include my name in your presentation, I shall mock you."

Dr. Harlow was dismayed at what he heard. Perhaps he should have expected no better from the older man - a man whose mind had likely stayed at the same dimensions since the eighteenth century. The letdown medicine man glanced out the open door, to his peers, many of whom did not consider his proposed findings in a serious manner. There was, however, a strong buzz that had built up throughout the day regarding the nature of what new "evidence" Dr. Harlow had brought with him from Cavendish; therefore most of the attendees were

at least willing to hear him out. A chime sounded, signaling the doctors to take their seats. Oliver Wendell Holmes sat in the back row, so as not to be a distraction.

With trepidation, though confident, Dr. Harlow strode to the podium. As the room turned silent, Dr. Harlow began, "Good doctors, thank you for your time." He looked out onto the ocean of faces, the majority distinguished with their precisely trimmed facial hair, which seemed to already challenge him with their smiling eyes. He told himself his paranoid imagination was getting the best of him and shook it off. He continued, "On September 13, 1848, in Cavendish, Vermont, I treated a patient named Phineas Gage, who, while working as a railroad foreman, set a gunpowder blast that blew a thirteen pound iron through his skull and out an opening at the top. And yet the man lives today."

Murmurs of disagreement - a waggle of discontent - disrupted the room. Dr. Harlow picked up the tamping iron with one hand, a stack of drawings with the other. He went on, "Mr. Gage lost a cylinder of brain tissue that in all our understanding should have rendered him an idiot, or comatose. None of his daily functions, save losing his eyesight in the one eye, could be observed missing. The case I recorded down to the finest detail. My drawings and papers will be made available for your scrutiny for exactness and honesty."

Dr. Banner, who sat near the rear, stood and left. Dr. Harlow stalled, taken aback. He reasoned, however, that the man simply needed to heed the call of nature. He resumed, "I shall start by reading an introduction of the case and then several accounts of the accident and it's aftermath from signed statements I have collected

from witnesses who can best attest to what had happened. After that, I shall present my evidence and take questions. The accident occurred upon the line of the Rutland and Burlington Railroad. The subject of it, Phineas P. Gage, is of middle stature, twenty-five years of age, shrewd and intelligent. According to his own statement, he was charging with powder a hole drilled in a rock, for the purpose of blasting. It appears that it is customary in filling the hole to cover the powder with sand. In this case, the charge having been adjusted, Mr. Gage directed his assistant to pour in the sand; and at the interval of a few seconds, his head being averted, and supposing the sand to have been properly placed, he dropped the head of the iron as usual upon the charge to consolidate or tamp it in. The assistant had failed to obey the order, and the iron striking fire upon the rock, the uncovered powder was ignited and the explosion took place. Mr. Gage was at this time standing above the hole, leaning forward, with his face slightly averted; and the bar of iron was projected directly upwards in a line of its axis, passing completely through his head and high into the air. The wound thus received, traversing the cranium in a straight line from the angle of the lower jaw on one side to the centre of the frontal bone above, near the sagittal suture, where the missile emerged. From this extraordinary lesion, the patient has quite recovered in his faculties of body and mind, with the loss only of the sight of the injured eye."

A hint of noise hit the speaker's eardrums. He tried to ignore it, focus, focus, focus on the task at hand. However, he couldn't help but sneak a glimpse out of the corner of his eye, to watch

rotund Dr. Kittridge, whom had pushed back his chair to stand. Dr. Harlow, his left brow tap dancing to its own beat, moved on, demonstrating the rod's trajectory in relation to Phineas, using the model skull. When Dr. Harlow looked down again, he saw the plump doctor nowhere in sight, the scene cutting through his psyche with the precision of a razor through flesh.

The Vermont physician with the infamous case was chagrined but pressed forward to read eyewitness accounts – firsthand, signed and notarized reports! – what he had considered his trump card. The models were important, to be sure, but how would, how could, any doubting medical professional brush off the stack of affidavits that had been collected? Dr. Harlow first read one from Tommy, the blast assistant, detailing the events relating to the accident, in all its gory detail. Further sworn statements followed from Harrison, Edward, Shorty, additional railroad laborers, Joseph Adams, innkeeper, Cavendish townsfolk (like Adam, who had rode off to fetch Phineas's kin), shopkeepers, anyone who might have been able to contribute direct knowledge of Phineas on that day of September 13, 1848. Dr. Harlow had meticulously canvassed the area for witnesses, searched far and wide, proud of the information he had archived. As he proceeded, he occasionally heard the stir of a colleague's exit, but did not take his eyes off of what he read. This was his moment – and damned if a handful of immature, closed-minded boneheads were going to ruin it. Presentation complete, he glanced at the audience, shrunk down to about half its original size. "I could bring the man here so that you can observe him yourself," he offered to the remaining physicians.

A doctor, Alfred Sporeman, from the western Massachusetts

county of Hampshire, spoke up. "If the wound on his skull healed, then how could we prove that the injuries were the result of the rod passing through his brain without opening the wound and killing him?"

A reasonable enough question, Dr. Harlow thought, as he replied, "You couldn't, but his first hand account should answer any doubts. I'm sure that he will oblige. Any other questions?"

Only silence greeted Dr. Harlow in return. Upon collecting his belongings and taking his seat, the conference visitors whom had shown their objections to his presentation by childly, he was convinced, exiting the hall, returned to take their seats. That afternoon, only one other presenter, Dr. Roger L. Crawford, a young doctor who had recently completed an apprenticeship to learn the trade (medical examinations and a degree were not yet required to practice) was mocked when he proffered his notion of how human organs or, possibly, animal organs may be conceivably transplanted into ill patients to replace diseased ones, an idea Dr. Harlow was intrigued by, yet even that concept failed to receive the negative reaction that the Phineas Gage case did.

Outside the Massachusetts Medical College, Dr. Harlow, who had decided to take his leave and journey home, instead of being present for the customary dinner that the attendees gathered for, awaited his carriage, wooden crate of non-vindication resting beside his feet. A passing carriage came to a stop in front of him, its occupant a familiar face. Dr. Harlow summoned a weak smile.

"I regret your embarrassment," Oliver Wendell Holmes said in a heartfelt manner.

"Then it's obvious, my fellow, that you have never been struck

with an epiphany of medical discovery."

"Nor have I ever been struck with a glove."

Dr. Harlow smirked and thought before answering, "The sting of the glove fades quickly. The memory of one never lifting theirs to defend what is true, however, lasts a lifetime."

"Controversy equalizes fools and wise men, and the fools know it," Holmes offered.

"Sage advice."

"Dr. Harlow," Holmes continued, "I was, regardless of the response from others, impressed with your presentation. I think you have something of importance there. You must continue on with your research. In time, whether it be a month, a year or perhaps a decade, your work will be acknowledged. Every calling is great when greatly pursued." With those words of wisdom and a lash to his horse, Holmes's carriage sped off.

Only one other person greeted the disgraced physician before his departure – Dr. Page, who informed him that he had found his case "interesting" and "possibly significant." Perhaps, Dr. Harlow reconsidered, the Brown University alumni wasn't such a bad guy after all.

The sun was close to slipping under the horizon as Jefferson pulled the buggy to a halt in front of what to him was a familiar landscape. For a weary Dr. Harlow, the long hours of the journey gave him pause to reflect on what had transpired. What was it about the majority of human minds that were so biased against new ideas, fresh challenges to one's way of thinking? Was it simply easier to accept

the status quo? Did nature wire the brain that way for a reason? How could he relate to his beloved the disappointment he had felt?

Stepping down from the carriage, he was surprised to see a man whose face was hidden mostly by his big hat, sitting on the ground, his back hunched over as he leaned against the picket gate. As the homeowner approached, he realized exactly who it was by the Tamping Iron that he held in his hand. In the ensuing time since the tragic accident, Dr. Harlow had seen Phineas for checkups, and, while the patient had never expressed it verbally, he had the impression that this living wonderment had come to consider him somebody that he could trust, a confidant, a mate. He knelt down at Phineas's side. A certain kind of sadness was reflected in the two faces. "Phineas? Are you all right?"

"Am I?" a strained voice replied. "I don't have the...the mind to know."

Dr. Harlow seemed to immediately understand his feeling. He slumped down a bit. "If mind was all it took."

"A friend says, he says," the volume of Phineas's voice grew louder, "Gage is no longer Gage."

"I understand completely, my dear friend," Dr. Harlow empathised. "The doctors who know me best, say it is not like me to be so reckless in my career. So I do believe that humiliation is our shared hell."

"I could hurt people," Phineas said, removing the hat to reveal his face.

The healer placed his hand on Phineas's shoulder. "As could I.



With scalpel or theory, many more than you could."

Phineas did not hesitate to respond, "But I would have no feeling either way." With downheartedness, he said, "They fired me. Can't make...can't make decisions...simple God damn decisions." He paused and added, "And I cuss. I never cussed."

"What are you going to do?"

"They laugh when I leave the store, the salon and hotel."

"Phineas, listen to me. You are a walking miracle."

"I won't let them treat me like a freak," Phineas said with conviction. "I'll work hard, if they let me. I'll stay quiet, if I'm left alone. You went to Boston. To the doctors. Do they know?"

Upon hearing the question, the weary traveler's face dropped. "They disbelieve. I present a radical discovery that might lead to relief for everything from seizures to paralysis – and they mock me."

"But they don't call you a freak?"

In a pain-tinged expression, Dr. Harlow responded, "No. They call me reckless. Foolish. And charlatan is not far behind." Dr. Harlow glanced at the Tamping Iron. "Always with you now?"

"It's part of me," Phineas said as he got up easily, ignoring the doctor's helping hand. "Can't stand it out of my hand."

"Comforts you?"

"Like'n it was my dog, I reckon." Phineas raised his "pet" to eye level and addressed it, "You and me." Turning to Dr. Harlow, he repeated the refrain, "You and me."

"Yes, Phineas." Dr. Harlow felt deeply touched.

"I suppose one person that understands is better than none."

Phineas offered his hand; the physician firmly shook it. "I'm going

where they don't know me."

"I envy you your anonymity."

The young man with the hole in his head ambled off, alone into the darkness. Dr. Harlow watched him do so with mixed feelings. Feelings of a sadness for him, feelings of the relief at his being alive, feelings of the cloudiness of when or where they would cross paths again. He walked to his front door and disappeared inside the house. A deer darted across the lawn – had it peered through the front window, it would have seen a man and woman embracing.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN  
New York City

Squatting on a horse's water trough, Phineas, a river of meat juices streaming down his face and onto his shirt, devoured a turkey leg, purchased for a dime from a corner market. He didn't pay no attention to the variety of stares – a few disgusted, a few amused, a few pitiful – from pedestrians. The sloppy man finished and tossed the bone to a hungry canine that had heeled patiently for just such an act of charity. Phineas leaned over the water-filled trough with the intention of cleansing his hands, but paused when he saw his reflection staring back at him. He raised a hand to touch the pronounced scar that decorated his forehead, then gently felt his closed eye. Since the accident, Phineas hadn't looked – hadn't had the desire to look – into a mirror. The sight of what he now saw for the virgin time mesmerized him, as if he were witnessing not his own being, but glancing into a portal that displayed a different entity in an alternative universe. Phineas took notice of the reflection in the liquid of a small child. He glimpsed at the boy, who grasped a

rope tied snugly around the neck of the bone-munching dog.

"You from the museum?" the boy innocently asked.

"What museum?" Phineas, edges of his mouth covered in turkey bits, asked.

The boy pointed to an imposing building perched at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street. "That museum, a museum for freaks."

Illuminated by limelight that befit the huckster's show palace, the whole block of the city it occupied came alive. The imposing building bore the name, BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM. Since its opening in 1842, P.T. Barnum's creation was a huge, gaudy advertisement for itself, with illuminated panels, banners and flags, painted animals and showmen planted outside to help excite and bring in potential customers. Prior to the Central Park Zoo, it was the best place in New York to view exotic animals, which included grizzly bears, crocodiles, tigers, anacondas, a sloth, manatee and a hippopotamus. Wildly successful, its attractions made it a combination museum, freak show, wax museum, lecture hall, zoo, theatre that took a prominent place in American popular culture. Phineas soaked up the atmosphere, enthralled by the way people gawked at the posters that advertised human curiosities. He eavesdropped as a finely-dressed man of considerable height read the aloud for his wife and two primary school-aged children, "The only genuine Zulus ever exhibited in America. Don't be fooled. Other circuses' Zulus are costumed Southern negroes. Our Zulus are real uncivilized superstitious and idolatrous specimens from where a white man never trod before." As the family moved along, Phineas followed close behind to listen. "Jo-Jo, the

Dog-Faced Russian Boy. A creature so grotesque that no mere mortal can stand the sight of it for more than brief periods. Is it man or beast? You decide." The kids squealed in anticipatory delight.

"General Tom Thumb, world's smallest person. Watch him sing, dance and do impersonations for your pleasure. So cute, you'll desire to take him home."

Due to the ever growing crowd, Phineas became separated from the family, but he sensed the stares of others raining down upon him. With a numb expression on his face, he boldly held up his Tramping Iron to his jaw, but said nothing.

P.T. Barnum, whom the Washington Post only slightly exaggerated when it referred to him as "the most widely known American that ever lived", sat at his over-sized desk, jotting down memos, forever scheming to add interest and luster to his wide-ranging enterprises. The short, balding man, for whom his celebrity was his life's work and his prize possession, was a ball of energy who rarely sat still for long. He glanced up to see an unfamiliar man standing in the shadows of the doorway. "You got something for me?" Barnum asked in his hurried form of speech. "Step up, boy. I got a show to give. Suckers are waiting. What do you got?" He studied the stranger, who drew closer. "What? A scarface? What the hell am I looking at?"

Phineas lifted the Tramping Iron high and proudly announced, "The only living man with a hole in his head."

"Take a little more care with the plow," Dr. Harlow said to the injured adolescent whom he was treating for the deep gash in his right forearm. "You don't want to lose an arm over a crop, do you?"

"No sir," said the young man, whose worried mother had rushed him in for treatment.

Dr. Harlow bandaged the arm. "I don't know what it is with plows. They appear to be the root of the majority of injuries that I see. Is it that they are dangerous in use or is it that their use is so widespread in this county?"

"Probably both, sir," the teenager grimaced as the physician placed his arm in a sling.

"All done, Johnny," Dr. Harlow said.

The youth jumped down from the high table. Dr. Harlow escorted the visitors to his front door. "Thank you kindly, Doctor," the boy's mother showed her appreciation as they left.

Before the physician could close the door, a messenger rode his horse to a stop. He dismounted and trotted up to Dr. Harlow. "Telegram," he said, trying to catch his breath.

Dr. Harlow took the message and read it aloud in the open doorway. "Have read your papers on review in Boston. Stop. Remarkable and believable. Stop. Might support your claims with my own research. Stop. Send telegram confirming interest and letter adding latest discoveries. Dr. Henry Jacob Bigelow, Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Harlow felt a rush of excitement, a gale of hope. Without notifying his wife, he raced to saddle up Jefferson, then proceeded to gallop into town, a dozen thoughts fluttering through his neocortex, his face lit with conviction for the first time since Boston.

After hitching up Jefferson, the roused doctor stormed into the

newly opened office of the Vermont & Boston Telegraph Company. There, he was greeted by Mott, the gregarious telegraph operator. "Dr. Harlow, how may I help you? Sending or receiving on this visit?"

"Sending, my dear sir. Sending a glorious telegram," Dr. Harlow could hardly contain his excitement.

"You're in a fine mood. Wish that were true of everyone who came in here." Mott handed him a paper and a quill. "Fill this out and I'll get it out in a jiffy."

Dr. Harlow earnestly jotted down a response to his colleague's unforeseen correspondence: "Dear Dr. Bigelow, received your wonderfully and highly unanticipated letter. Read with admiration your recent essay regarding ether and chloroform anaesthesia in Boston Medical Surgery Journal. I confirm my interest in working with you. Will send further correspondence on Gage case shortly."

Mott was handed the intended telegram content and had a Seated Liberty Half Dollar coin pressed into his free hand. He looked at it and said, "Thank you, sir. I'll make change for it just as soon as I get this on the wire." But before he could start tapping out the Morse code, Dr. Harlow was busy unhitching Jefferson. "Sir, it don't cost a half dollar to send this out," he waved the paper in the air.

"Keep the balance as a tip, my good man," Dr. Harlow yelled out as Jefferson carried him back towards his residence.

Under the cover of nightfall, after enjoying one of Charlotte's delicious suppers, and finishing his journal on the day's medical cases - a daily practice to keep accurate records for future reference, no matter how serious or trivial the injury or condition may have seemed - Dr. Harlow, basked in candlelight, composed a

longer, more detailed letter for Dr. Bigelow. His quill burned with gusto, his fingers barely able to structure the words with adequate swiftness: "Dear Dr. Bigelow, I am pleased, as promised, to provide you with further updated notes on the Gage case. The patient has continued to improve steadily, until on January 1, 1849, the opening in the top of his head was entirely closed, and the brain shut out from view, though every pulsation could be distinctly seen and felt. Gage passed the proceeding winter months in his own house and vicinity, improving in flesh and strength. In April, he visited me, and presented something like the following appearances. General appearance good; stands quite erect, with his head inclined slightly towards the right side; his gait in walking is steady; his movements rapid, and easily executed. The left side of the face is wider than the right side, the left malar bone being more prominent than its fellow. A linear cicatrix, length two and one-half inches, from the nasal protuberance to the anterior edge of the raised fragment of the frontal bone, is quite unsightly. Upon the top of the head, and covered with hair, is a large unequal depression and elevation – a quadrangular fragment of bone, which was entirely detached from the frontal and extending low down upon the forehead, being still raised and quite prominent. Partial paralysis of left side of face. His physical health is good, and I am inclined to say that he has recovered. Has no pain in head, but says it has a queer feeling which he is not able to describe. Applied for his situation as foreman, but is undecided whether to work or travel. His contractors, who regarded him as the most efficient and capable foreman in their employ



previous to his injury, considered the change in his mind so marked that they could not give him his place again. The equilibrium or balance, so to speak, between his intellectual faculties and animal propensities, seems to have been destroyed. He is fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity (which was not previously his custom), manifesting but little deference for his fellows, impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicts with his desires. Taking all the circumstances into consideration, it may be doubted whether the present is not the most remarkable history of injury to the brain which has been recorded. Anxiously wait your response and hopeful of possibility of meeting with you at your earliest convenience. Warmest regards, Dr. John M. Harlow."

At eight o'clock sharp in the a.m., Dr. Harlow arrived at the local office of the Vermont & Boston Telegraph Company to greet Mott with the dispatch to be forwarded to Boston. On the way home, Dr. Harlow marveled at the breakthrough technology in communications that was the telegraph. What, he pondered, could ever possibly top such a wondrous apparatus? An exciting era to be living in, to be certain, and one in which bode well for advances in the medical field as well.

Early, just after dawn, before the American Museum opened for business – and what a business it was, open fifteen hours daily and welcoming fifteen thousand visitors a day – like a carnival show, a few of its more helpless freaks lived in a special wing of the building that had been built for them. Practical as always, P.T. Barnum was more concerned with protecting his "assets" than anything else, the housing conditions enough to make any slumlord proud. The

resident freaks, some of whom joined up voluntarily, having few other options to earn a living and some whom were placed as children by their parents, are led into the mess area by the mean-spirited hungover men who help exploit them.

A group of Pinheads, always a standard attraction at any halfway decent circus or freak show, was shoved in by their handler, a rather peevish man with flat dark eyes, Mr. Farteney, who collected children with the disease as might a man collect stamps. He promised their heartbroken parents, that instead of putting them into an institution for life, they would have a happier, more productive existence as "performers", as well as provide income for the family. Needless to say, the only person who really made any revenue was Mr. Farteney himself, who leased the small-headed, intellectually-challenged Pinheads to Barnum, a tiny pittance ever reaching the families. They were promoted as "Aztec children", performing dressed in tunics decorated with sun rays and sun faces, and would dance around as they spoke "the lost Aztec tongue".

"Where the hell are you going! Damn idiots," Mr. Farteney raged against a Pinhead who had strayed from the rest. He forced the frightened and cowering Pinhead, a boy of no more than a day over eleven, into a seat. "Don't you move," he waved a fist in the Pinhead's face before heading to the food line. He addressed the cook in his usual caustic tone, "A bowl of gruel for the pinheads."

"I know when I got to go," Prince Randian from British Guiana, otherwise known as the Human Caterpillar, who had no limbs and crawled on his belly like a reptile, pleaded. "I'm a grown man. You

shouldn't make me beg like this."

"You shit in your pants again and you're sitting in it all day long, ya' hear?" his handler, who was in charge of a number of the freaks, told him.

Sitting in a corner alone, surveying the tepid and dreary scene with a forlorn, lonely look filling his face, Phineas grasped the Tamping Iron. One day a man could be the well-respected foreman on a railroad line, the next day a freak amongst freaks. Keeping company with the likes of The Tattooed Man, the Bearded Lady, Chang and Eng — the celebrated Siamese twins, a dog-faced Russian boy, Australian cannibals, the Human Torso, the world's fattest man and the never-ending menagerie of oddities that Barnum proudly exhibited. He thought about going back to the railroad — the industry was booming, surely somewhere was one that would required an experienced foreman — but he knew he needed to get on his feet, save some money, get right in the head, if only, if only... A few lines of prose flooded his brain, he would jot it down later, but Phineas noticed, to his surprise, that since the accident, his memory had become keener. He now recalled almost every piece of information that crossed his path a number, an address, a name, a fact — no matter how important or trivial, with ease. He had mentioned that fact to Dr. Harlow, who had no explanation for it. He went to the food line. Other freaks studied him, not in a welcoming manner.

The cook, a big black man who wore his official once-white now heavily food-stained chef hat, informed him, "No worker men."

"I'm new," Phineas responded.

"You eat outside and pay for it," the cook coldly said.

"I'm a new attraction."

The cook eyed him suspiciously. "Let me see your pass."

"My what?"

"Your pass, your pass," the cook tensely spit out. "Ah, shit, you another idiot."

"I'm not," Phineas insisted in a flat, but defiant tone.

"Here." The cook threw slop onto a plate. They weren't paying him enough to argue with idiots. "Hash."

Phineas raised his Iron. "This iron went through my..."

"Yeah, yeah, tell it to the Zulus," the cook, who didn't give a damn, remarked.

Phineas turned away from the food line, unsure where to sit. The obese man shoving food into his mouth, frequently belching, he found repulsive. The bearded lady he found too queer for his taste. He placed his plate down on the table beside two – or was it three? – of Barnum's freaks and sat down. "Is the cook always such a rotten egg?" he asked, more as an attempt to make conversation.

Chang, one of the conjoined Siamese twins (they were fused together at the sternum), spoke first, "We don't mix kindly with your kind."

"But, I'm part of the show like you," Phineas said while wondering about how their merged bodily functions worked.

The popular attraction known as the Lizard Man, with the horny, scale-like epidermis that covered his entire body, sided with the twins. "Like us? Not even close."

"A metal rod don't make you different, it just makes you ugly,"

Eng added.

Feeling stung, or at least near the bottom of the freak hierarchy, Phineas got up and sought another place to enjoy that which masqueraded as a meal. He approached a table where Jo-Jo, the dog-faced Russian boy sat with other attractions, but when he tried to find a seat, they moved to take up space in a non-hospitable manner. Finally, the unwelcome man with the iron took a place at the end of a long table all by himself. While he ate, Phineas received hostile stares from everyone he set eyes on.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN  
Boston

Eleven days! A mere 264 hours after receiving that glorious first

wire from Dr. Bigelow, Jefferson was transporting his owner towards the state of Massachusetts. Due to the opening of a new rail line, this journey, however, Dr. Harlow merely had to travel to and hitch his horse in Brattleboro, where he would board a train to enjoy the comfort of rail to reach his destination. To the doctor, another evidence of how progress was making peoples' lives better.

Upon arrival at the Boston depot, he was met by a carriage and driver that had been graciously sent by his host. Carrying his drawings, models and journals, he was incredibly anxious to arrive at Dr. Bigelow's office located at Massachusetts General Hospital, which was affiliated with Harvard Medical School. It was a Thursday, early afternoon, and the narrow unpaved streets were filled with the traffic of buggies, pedestrians and street vendors hocking their wares, everything from foodstuffs to scarves to pots and pans. Dr. Harlow took note of how the metropolis, even since his last visit, seemed to be more populated and vibrant.

At last, Dr. Harlow arrived at the hospital with the reputation for excellence. No sooner had he stepped out of the carriage, then he was greeted by the person who had invited him.

"Dr. Harlow, I presume?" an unfamiliar voice asked.

The guest turned around to see the eminent man whom he recognized from having had viewed his daguerreotype numerous times in medical journals. "Dr. Bigelow, sir, what a great pleasure to meet your acquaintance," he gushed.

"No doctor, the pleasure is mine. Please, the name is Henry. My father is Dr. Bigelow," the thirty-two year old man with the old soul

chuckled, referring to the fact that his parent was Jacob Bigelow, also a prominent physician who taught medicine at Harvard. "Please, let us retire to my office, where we can talk more comfortably."

In the lovely and well furnished room, the two men quickly got down to the business at hand. "I have studied your case notes on the Gage case. I am quite fascinated by what they reveal," Dr. Bigelow offered.

"You are a minority in that regard," Dr. Harlow said.

"Be that as it may, I really must express my gratitude to Oliver Holmes for bringing it to my attention."

"And I mine," Dr. Harlow uttered as he enviously scanned the shelves that cradled the vast medical library his host had accumulated. "He acted in a wholly charitable manner towards me. I am most appreciative of that. You are fortunate to have had such a learned mentor during your studies at Dartmouth."

"I thank my lucky stars every day for that, Doctor Harlow."

"Doctor...Henry, it would gratify me if you simply called me John," Dr. Harlow, never one for formalities with patients or colleagues – maybe that was a benefit of practicing in friendly Vermont – said.

"Very well. What have you brought, John?"

"May I?" Dr. Harlow gestured to a dazzling maple table. Getting the okay nod, the invitee proceeded to lay out his papers, drawings, model skull and rod on it.

Dr. Bigelow, who had entered Harvard College at the tender age of fifteen, began to study the materials. "I have treated various head injuries. None so as dramatic as Mr. Gage's. But, I have noticed how

resilient the human brain can be."

"It is remarkable. To think how little we know about its functioning, its structure, its deepest mysteries." Dr. Harlow grinned, "I believe we possess more knowledge regarding wine-making than about the bodily part that most makes us us."

Dr. Bigelow laughed, adding, "And perhaps grapes themselves."

The two physician-researchers, kindred spirits in seeking truth, whatever that truth should turn out to be, discussed the intricacies of the case. Dr. Harlow, brow complacently hushed, enthusiastically answered his peer's probing questions to the best of his ability. They compared notes, studied the drawings, drew diagrams on the model skull. When the resident doctor took a bathroom break, Dr. Harlow again admired the room's impressive book collection, which included foreign titles and tomes on every conceivable medical subject, vowing to one day build such a collection for himself.

Leading his guest down to a basement lab, Dr. Bigelow undraped a human corpse – from the appearance of it, a middle-aged woman – and the two men proceeded to re-enact the projection of the tamping iron through the cranium, a thoroughly grisly affair done in the name of science that seemed to end with inconclusive results. His clothes red-stained, Dr. Harlow demonstrated how he had to delicately pick brain out of his patient's pools of blood, as well as how he had placed shards of bone back in its rightful bodily position. The sun had set, but the men of science were having such a grand time, that they had barely noticed that evening was upon them. Dr. Bigelow suggested that they call it a day and enjoy a supper – a token of his



hospitality – at a favorite Cambridge restaurant, the Continental Bistro. They did so, feasting on fresh quail, conversing late into the evening.

Back at the Massachusetts General Hospital office, with the well-endowed literary collection, before Dr. Harlow's scheduled afternoon departure, the doctors, garbed in fresh shirts, re-convened. "More tea, John," Dr. Bigelow offered.

"I am quite fine, thank you."

"We are in the rare situation, that our greatest obstacle seems to be that our patient is still alive," Dr. Bigelow said as he glanced at the drawings of Phineas.

"The thought came to me many times," Dr. Harlow sighed, "that only his skull could prove it happened as he claims."

Dr. Bigelow, a natural a ball of energy, paced the floor. "I support the whole brain theory, as you know. This case merely proves my point. That is why it is so important to promote it as true."

"It supports the whole brain theory and the phrenologists," Dr. Harlow pointed out. "We must be careful not to demand people take sides yet."

"Understood, John. But, I shall be driven to emphasize my opinion."

"As you are entitled."

Dr. Bigelow sat in his comfortable chair. He asked, "Do you have any idea where Mr. Gage is at present?"

"I do not. I have recently sent his mother a letter. She has promised to keep me informed." Dr. Harlow paused in reflection. "Lord only knows where he is now."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

With the arrival of the Purple Martins, on return from spending their winter nesting in South America, a decidedly warmer climate than Vermont, the state's citizens anticipated the arrival of spring. Charlotte especially welcomed it, that time of the year being her favorite, when flowers bloomed once again, the air ripe for lengthy walks, such as the one she had undertaken in the morning to town to pick up a few staples. In the month that had passed since his visit to Boston, Dr. Harlow had kept busy, productively treating patients, his practice thriving as his reputation as a fine healer spread. Always harboring an interest in the inner workings of democracy, he had also joined the local town council, having faith in the belief that a good citizen took an active role in his community, something he had learned from his late father, who had also taken an active role in his local town council.

Dr. Harlow sat in his study reading a book that he had special ordered by writing to a book distributor in Philadelphia, a volume he found gripping, entitled, *Typhoid and Poor Relief*. When he was not seeing a patient, he was usually keeping himself up on the latest advances in the field, which often involved a liberal amount of reading.

The front door creaked open – maybe one day he would oil the hinges like he had been asked to do so many times, but that thought

always was crowded out by more pressing ones – but Dr. Harlow did not notice. A minute later, Charlotte, appearing radiant in her favorite yellow spring dress, entered, holding a letter. “Something from the mother of Mr. Gage. I thought you would want to see it right away.”

Putting down the book, her husband said excitedly, “Thank you, dear. Yes.” He delicately opened the letter, to make sure it wouldn't be accidentally damaged, and read as his spouse stood by. “He's living in New York.”

“He must be feeling well then,” Charlotte cheerfully stated.

“He found work on the railroad,” Dr. Harlow continued, “but was fired two days later.”

“How sad. He was so good at foreman before the accident.”

“Yes, indeed.” Dr. Harlow flashed an expression of concern, “Oh no, this is not right.” He stood up in a sudden motion.

“What is it, John?”

“I must go to New York at once.”

P.T. Barnum had many critics, but one thing no one could condemn him for was not giving his patrons their money's worth. At twenty-five cents per ticket, half price for children under ten, nobody felt cheated. Barnum especially liked to cater to the children. He baited parents with the promise to “exclude anything calculated to corrupt the mind or taint the juvenile imagination.” The great showman ran irresistible ads such as the one that read: NOTICE TO BOYS – 1000 living mice wanted for the Baby Anacondas. In 1850, the Museum asserted that children composed fully one-third of its audience,

youths naturally drawn to the fairy-tale dramas, afternoon matinees, the hugely popular Feejee Mermaid (little more than the upper torso of a monkey sewn to the lower half of a fish), the aquarium (featuring a white whale), ventriloquists, flea circus, dioramas, Ned the learned seal, reptile rooms, wax figures and none more celebrated than the "What Is It?" exhibit, in which a black man was displayed as the "connecting link between man and monkey", an attraction supposedly captured by hunters in deepest, darkest Africa. Strolling through the massive structure, the sightseers were overwhelmed with the drone of carnival barkers standing in front of the stuffed dead freaky animals, wax figures, posters, live exhibits, along with many other things that assaulted their senses.

Walking with an urgency, navigating his way through the crowd, Dr. Harlow was repulsed by what he saw. As he passed an exhibit entrance, he heard its barker, a rubbery-faced man who stunk of moonshine, spit out his pitch, "Experience the world's one and only treasured Feejee Mermaid. Wonder at her body. Find out why to the astonishment of thousands of naturalists and other scientific persons, whose previous doubts of the existence of such an astonishing creation were entirely removed. But, whatever you do, don't look into her eyes." A long line had formed to take the barker with the blood-shot pupils up on his offer.

Another barker, a tweed-jacketed man who also was employed on the animal clean-up crew, pitched another exhibit. "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls of all ages, presented here exclusively is Captain Constantenus, the world's most tattooed man, his body covered with an incredible three hundred and eighty-eight Oriental designs. View the

man who was captured by the Khan of Kashagar and forcefully tattooed as his only alternative to death. You won't forget him anytime soon, I guarantee you that."

A sweet odor, unlike anything the visitors to the American Museum had experienced before, permeated the air – Fairy Floss (known half a century later as cotton candy). Children and adults alike flocked to the carts selling the stuff. Dr. Harlow was hungry; he stopped and considered trying whatever it was, but no, he decided, his craving for food could wait. He was on a mission. The place, with its throngs of flesh and noise and bombardment to the senses seemed endless. Would he ever find his prey? He turned a corner into another vast exhibit hall, another hard at work barker, with slicked-back hair and the affable air of a born salesman, who extolled an exhibit with the offering, "Step right up folks, because right here we got Noah Orr, The American Giant. Yes siree, the world's tallest man. Height eight feet, three inches, weight five hundred-fifty pounds. A man tall enough to reach into a second story window..."

At the far end of the hall, was it? Could it really be? The sickened doctor's heart raced as a sign came into view: PHINEAS GAGE: THE ONLY LIVING MAN WITH A HOLE IN HIS HEAD. A smaller crowd than was present at the other displays stood in front of the low stage where the attraction sat serenely in a chair. He was not as expressive as the other humans in their freak show get-ups – he's just being Phineas, calmly talking to people, including an angelic-looking family, the type that was no doubt of good church-going, worthy to be featured in a magazine advertisement for a hearty wheat, Nordic

stock.

"Who pulled it out?" the father asked as his small son and even smaller daughter stood wide-eyed.

"The blast sent it clean through," Phineas answered.

"Landed...oh, about as far away as that post."

The children let out exclamations of "wow", but seemed more interested in other exhibits. "Daddy, can we go see the Zulus now?"

"Of course," he chirped, leading his brood away.

Another clan, this one obviously with less class, by way of raggedy dress and their gruff mannerisms, but also the variety likely to feel self-entitled and reach out and touch an attraction without cause or warning, looked on with amusement. "Can I feel your head," asked the pubescent lass.

"If you're gentle," Phineas responded to a question he was all too familiar with.

The girl reached out, but was fearful until her father took hold of her petite hand and guided his daughter's hand to the exhibit's hair.

"Yucky!" the child shrieked.

The father handed Phineas a dime, who took it and methodically dropped it into a jar partially filled with spare change. Phineas, obeying P.T. Barnum's instructions, lobbed the pitch, "And for another dime, you can part my hair and see my brain move."

Acting with spunk, the close-to-teen girl parted Phineas's hair, peering at the thin flap of skin and what pulsed just beneath. "Look, daddy," she called out. She touched the soft scar tissue over the hole. "Is that your brain?"

Phineas remained still as he answered, "Doctors say no. My brain is gone from there. It's just a hole now."

"He's a moron now," father rather insensitively said.

"I'm not a moron," Phineas disputed, "I can do exactly like I did before."

The mother, an unwashed woman with a homely appearance, chimed in, "Open your eye so we can see it don't work."

"I can't open it."

"Try again," the matriarch insisted.

As he glanced around the broad hall, trying to open his bad eye, his sightline landed on the Vermont physician. Instantly, he became oblivious to the gawking spectators. Dr. Harlow wormed his way through the thin crowd, his gaze likewise locked onto Phineas.

"Open up your mouth so we can see the hole," the young girl coolly insisted.

The father fixed his eyes on the Tamping Iron, "That there the rod?" He attempted to unlock it from the former foreman's grip, but Phineas only held it tighter. "Let go, you freak," the oafish man ordered.

"You are no freak, Phineas" Dr. Harlow spoke up, scarcely restraining his tongue from lashing out at the vulgar family.

"You wants to see a real freak, son?" the mother asked. "See the dog-face boy."

The family members cackled like imbeciles, until the father got rough trying to pull the rod from his opponent's grasp. "Gimme the damn bar, freak!"

Phineas, whose fuse could only burn for so long without igniting, erupted in anger. He powerfully shoved away the crass father, waved the Tamping Iron and revengefully bellowed, "You want to see my Iron, how 'bout I shove it up your arse real good till it come out your mouth? That give you a good enough looksie?" The tourists screamed and ran for safety.

"You don't belong here," Dr. Harlow appealed to him.

Phineas fired back, "What the hell do you know? They laughed you out of Boston?"

Phineas violently swung his iron in a wild manner around him. Horrified spectators ran squealing for cover, but jelled as a gawking crowd in a distant hallway. Only one man, the caring Vermont healer, braved the danger. He tried to reason with the fiery man, "Your emotions...you're a good man, Phineas. Try to remember who you are."

"I AM THE ONLY LIVING MAN WITH A HOLE IN HIS HEAD!" Phineas yelled at the top of his lungs, raising the rod high over his head like it blasted off. He proceeded, in a fit of pure, unadulterated rage, using the Tamping Iron, to smash a coat rack in half.

Dr. Harlow rushed toward him. "But you are NO FREAK."

P.T. Barnum, master of spin and one with an uncanny ability to turn lemons into lemonade no matter what the situation, rushed up the hallway. "Wonderful, wonderful," he clapped. "More of that. More of that, Mr. Gage." Even more jovially, he added, "See the raging man with a hole in his head!"

The enraged sideshow attraction eyed his balding employer, the consummate showman in front of a man that was as mad as a lion, and just as deadly. Phineas reached for Barnum's lapel but Dr. Harlow



wisely shoved the boss aside with a meager second to spare. Phineas stormed down the hall toward the exit, causing the paying customers in his path flee screaming.

Outside the American Museum, where a back loading dock resided, Dr. Harlow and Phineas, rage burning in him, paced in circles around each other. It was not in the physician's nature to pace, but he was just as upset over what had happened as his patient. All around them, recently acquired, novel exhibits were being clamorously unloaded from freight wagons. Barnum employed a team of agents to continually scour the world for oddities and curiosities for his one-of-a-kind institution, more items to keep his well-lubricated publicity machine churning. Dr. Harlow broke the ice. "Outside my house, you said you were not a freak and now I find you here?"

"What else am I good for?"

"You still have your soul."

"What kind of soul?" Phineas blasted back at him. "Last week, a boy teased me real good. I ran after that boy and if I'd a caught him, I don't know what I've have done."

Dr. Harlow, realizing that if he acted with serenity, Phineas might model such behavior as well. He stopped moving and uttered, with the smoothness of silk pajamas, "A good soul. You are a man, a worthy man, with a strong back and mind."

"What mind? My mind's half gone." Phineas blurted, still agitated. Holding out the iron, he continued, "I want the part this thing took back. I want who I was!"

"And so do I," Dr. Harlow concurred. "I want who I was. But we

will never be left alone by this. Like your tamping iron, we will carry it for the rest of our lives. It is up to us what we do with this burden."

Phineas calmed down, suddenly the infuriation that had engulfed him fizzled, as he spied a horse that was being whipped by its owner. The change was so dramatic that Dr. Harlow observed more carefully than made conversation. "I never used to like horses," Phineas said tranquilly.

"But now you do?" Dr. Harlow never more so wished to have a blank journal and quill with him, but in lieu of that, would need to keep mental notes of an utmost reliability.

"Like them more than people."

"Phineas, we cannot choose the path that God has us walk. We can only make of it what is humanly possible." The one man Phineas trusted paused – he looked around and momentarily wondered what other oddities and exotic creatures were hidden in those freshly arrived crates. Funny how the mind can wander, ping-pong, from one thought to another so quickly, then back again, even in mid-chat. "Help me to make this possible. There is some goodness to come from this."

"Namely?"

"I have found some support, from Harvard Medical School. Doctor Henry Bigelow, whom I have met with, believes the fact of your injury. He has studied my papers on the case."

"About the only ones who believed are you and my boys on the rail crew," Phineas, acting as gentle as a puppy, suggested. "But none of them will have nothing to do with me no more. And rightly so."

Dr. Harlow was not deterred. "With Dr. Bigelow's help, I can get

us before an assembly of doctors and surgeons."

"I thought they laughed at you," Phineas reminded.

"They can't once they meet you."

"They'll find a way."

"The human ability to inflict cruelty is always eclipsed by the human ability to rise above it, Phineas. I suffered humiliation. You suffered it. In this, we might find redemption."

The present former sideshow attraction fretted, "I could make it worse, Doctor. You saw me inside."

"Your change in personality is a consequence of the accident, and part of what I am attempting to prove." Dr. Harlow was hopeful that the significance of his words were being wholly understood.

Something deep inside Phineas's fragile psyche snapped like a twig – he became again agitated, waving his Tamping Iron in a threatening manner in front of the astute doctor's face, who, while he shrank from the fury, did not believe that Phineas would, or could, do him any harm. "You want a freak show just like Barnum!" Phineas woofed, a rapid dog drooling.

"No! No, Phineas. Not like Barnum," Dr. Harlow ventured to reassure him.

"Show me what's different! Huh?" Phineas yelped in his confrontational frenzy. "God damn it! You want a freak. Hell, I'd a be better off as cold as a wagon tire."

"I want people to believe. To understand."

"Believe I got half my brain?"

Dr. Harlow chose his words as carefully as a police detective

would inspecting a crime scene. "I have to make them believe it happened. If they believe, they will use my records to cure people who suffer like you suffer."

"You can't cure a walking dead man!"

"But we might cure seizures and headaches and mental decay," Dr. Harlow stated buoyantly, his passion for the subject shining through. "We might...through understanding you, Phineas. It's a divine possibility."

The moody atmosphere turned placid. Phineas sat down on an empty crate, ruminating over what the home-town visitor had said, forcing himself out of his rage. Dr. Harlow took a seat on a crate adjacent, facing his friend. He spoke earnestly from the heart, "It takes a special kind of man to want to improve life through science."

"I'm just a foreman. Plain. Simple."

"You don't believe that. Not any more." Dr. Harlow was sure he had seen a tear in the damaged man's eye, but did not mention it.

"Don't tell me what I believe," Phineas said in a neutral tone that was tinged with the flavor of fatigue.

"Then at least allow me what I believe." Dr. Harlow moved in closer to his cohort. "Selflessness survives beneath your suffering. Of that I am sure."

The two men silently sat there, facing each other, oblivious to the world and all its activity as it moved around them.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN  
Boston  
November 10, 1849

Jittery and uneasy – that's how Dr. Harlow felt on that misty morning as he lingered outside for the guest of honor to arrive at the Harvard Medical School. He had desired to travel together, but Phineas had insisted that he could make it fine by himself. In the

few weeks since they had seen each other in Manhattan, the doctor was not quite sure what his former patient had been up to – he suspected that Phineas had kept exhibiting himself in Barnum's Museum (perhaps the money was too good to walk away from, just yet) or possibly he traveled to Proctorsville to see his family – whatever the case, he was late and it was not a good omen. Mentally kicking himself for not sending a carriage to meet his visitor at the railroad depot, Dr. Harlow, with an assembly of members of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement, graciously invited by Dr. Bigelow, waiting inside, he could do little but wait – and pray. He obsessively checked his pocket watch – it read 10:05 a.m. Five minutes late. "Damn!" he cursed the circumstances, "will I be played the fool once more?"

Dr. Bigelow stuck his head out from the hall window, "John, we are ready."

"Yes, of course, be in shortly." Dr. Harlow's stomach sank. He repeatedly ran various scenarios through his head – did Phineas change his mind, not wanting to subject himself to examination by strangers? Did he find employment that prevented him from travel? Did he simply forget? Did he... A fit of sneezes overtook him. Charlotte was correct when she told him he was coming down with a cold. Thankfully, she was not present to see him without his overcoat.

A gravelly voice sounded a couple of steps behind the nervous man, "Doctor, it is foolhardy to be standing in this weather exposed as you are."

Dr. Harlow knew the vocal sound well. His mood brightened as he turned to say, "Phineas, my dear Phineas, you have made it."

"Of course I made it, you ninny," Phineas, who was bundled up

appropriately for the detrimental weather, phrased with a trace of humor.

"Of that I am most grateful."

"If it takes a special kind of man to improve life through science, well...reckon I can be that man."

"You're relaxed?" the physician studied Phineas for any sign of apprehension.

"I reckon."

"There may be as many as thirty of them," Dr. Harlow cautioned.

"Don't matter," the soon-to-be test subject assured him.

The two comrades who shared in this important scientific adventure entered Harvard Medical School together, strolled into the welcoming hall, adorned with rather grand oil paintings of past Harvard Medical School boards of directors, administrators and presidents, then approached the entrance of the examination room that had been set up on behalf of Phineas. Dr. Harlow paused, nervously peering at the closed door. "If they ask you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable..."

"Doc?" Phineas appeared as calm as a New England Christmas Eve.

"Yes, Phineas?"

Phineas fixed his good eye on the doctor. "It's me that's on the table being examined, but I know it's you they're judging. So how's you feel, doc? Relaxed?"

"Yes, thank you, Phineas." Dr. Harlow was taken aback by the injured man's concern for his feelings. Once again, he made a mental note to jot that fact down in his journal later on.

"Then let's let them fellows with the beards go and have a time with me."

Opening the entry, they walked into the room filled with two dozen mostly young doctors, all men, most sporting cropped facial hair in the fashionable style of the day. Dr. Harlow was not acquainted with any of them, but had had the sensation nonetheless of being at peace. He would later write in his chronicle the reasons he had felt that was the case, mainly the circumstance that Phineas was actually in person to be examined, as well as the trust he had in Dr. Bigelow, who had sent word prior that the invited examiners were showing up with genuinely open minds, interested only in the advancement of science, not in the mocking of sincere healers. In the center of the well-endowed room with the latest cutting edge medical equipment, sat a neat row of chairs, plus lay an examination/operating table, made of wood, covered with a blanket, that was situated right beneath a skylight (a necessity in the era before electricity), but also supplemented by a chain of whale oil lanterns securely fastened to the walls.

Dr. Bigelow kicked things off by stating, "Gentlemen, may I introduce Dr. John Harlow, who has kindly traveled from Vermont to be here with us today. And this, of course, is Mr. Gage." He then introduced the fellowship of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement, all but one of its fraternity accounted for, one member having been called away on urgent business.

Dr. Bigelow began, "Mr. Gage, if you can please comfort yourself on the examination table by relaxing in a horizontal position." He had decided earlier that, so as to be of no influence on his



colleagues, he would not ask any of what could be considered leading or biased questions of the invitee.

"That mean lay down, like I was a going to sleep?" the examinee asked.

"Precisely," the host replied.

"Yes, siree, doctor." Phineas hopped up on the table, reclining on his back.

The doctors formed a half circle around the examination table. Dr. Bigelow instructed, "Mr. Gage. If you could hold still while the doctors examine you."

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Harlow stood at the rear while the others leaned forward to inspect Phineas's cranial area. As the physicians scrutinized the patient, Dr. Harlow thought about what he had learned from Dr. Bigelow, himself a member, concerning the men whose presence he was in. It was impressive indeed. The Boston Society for Medical Improvement was birthed with a beautifully written constitution and by-laws on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 1828 under the direction of Dr. John P. Spooner, an active member still. Eleven young gentlemen, to expand to a membership of twenty-five within the course of a year, recently established in the practice of medicine, would meet together on a sort of medico-social basis twice a month. The first regular meeting for the discussion of medical topics was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 1828. They began by having a regularly appointed subject for discussion (in addition to the more informal communication), with the first important topic discussed, "What are the earliest diagnostic

symptoms of croup?", the members called in alphabetical order for their communications. Men of this lofty-minded organization had been responsible for many momentous advances in the field, and had also founded the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, of which Dr. Harlow was an avid reader and secretly harbored the idea of becoming a regular contributor.

"Mr. Gage, could you open your mouth," Dr. J. Mason Warren, a physician supremely confident in his own curative abilities, Society member since 1836, inquired. Phineas did as instructed, watching the doctor hold a mirror up so as to reflect light into his mouth. Several of the examiners took turns peering into the oral cavity as others touched the scar on his head.

Dr. James M. Whittemore, original secretary of the Society, old-fashioned but not close-minded, requested, "Dr. Harlow, could you please hand me the Tamping Iron?"

"With delight," Dr. Harlow said as he passed the tool forward.

The committee, led by Dr. Warren positioning the rod against the subject's skull, muttered amongst the others remarks that Dr. Harlow could not readily decipher. That went on for what, to the Cavendish doctor, seemed considerably longer than the six minutes it actually was. At last, Dr. Warren addressed him, "I would like to see his position at the time of the accident."

"Yes, and without any guidance from you, Dr. Harlow, I'd like to hear it in Mr. Gage's own words," Dr. James Jackson, Sr., Society member since 1838, chimed in.

Dr. Harlow had anticipated such a request – he had spent so much time in the past weeks preparing for the current engagement, that

Charlotte informed him, with a healthy dose of sarcasm, that she didn't even recognize her husband anymore – using a block of wood nailed to a floorboard, he had had a replica hole made by George, a Cavendish carpenter.

Phineas sat up, took the Tamping Iron in his fist. Crouching on the encaustic floor tiles in the center of the circle of Society constituents, he braced the Iron between his legs as he expounded on the injury. "The hole is about three inches around," he spoke with authority, the affection for all things railroad warmly occupying a place in his heart. "Thirty inches deep or so. Narrow. Like a gun barrel. Make it with chisels. I tamp down the gunpowder after my assistant puts in the sand. Like so." Phineas set his knees around the base of the tool that had since become an extension of his own being. "Only this time, I got careless and looked away. I thought the sand was in, but it weren't. When my iron dropped into the hole, it hit granite and gunpowder. BOOM!" Phineas erupted with the sound so fast that the onlookers scattered back from him. Dr. Harlow only grinned at their fright. "The rod shoot like a bullet right up," the bygone railroad crew leader added.

"Didn't the blast blow you backward?" Dr. Whittemore dryly asked.

"And out of the way?" Dr. Edward Reynolds, a healer with a deep interest in the study of ether's usefulness as anesthesia, Society member since 1839, wanted to know.

Phineas remained in a steady mood as he tried to make them understand what was involved in the sad happenings of that late summer day. "Before the blast hits anything, it has to clear out that

hole. The iron flies up, the point enters under my cheekbone, and goes out my head so fast it's gone before I hit the ground."

Dr. Reynolds glanced at the iron with a sense of misgiving. As one of the field's foremost researchers into pain (part of his experiments with ether), he was well versed in the human threshold for discomfort. He asked, attempting to not sound his skepticism, "You didn't feel it?"

"Nope. Felt something. Didn't know what. Smelled awful. Burning skin. Only I couldn't tell it was mine," Phineas offered grim details.

Dr. Harlow observed how Phineas was handling himself, feeling a sense of easement. He knew there had existed a germ of a chance that, at a point, maybe after too many prying questions had been asked or a disrespectful comment or an utterance taken in the wrong way, the patient could lose his cool. Phineas was, however, acting like perhaps "the old Gage", flooding Dr. Harlow with a sense of pride for the damaged man.

Dr. Reynolds pressed on, "You're sure it didn't just enter your open mouth and exit the cheek?"

"Yes sir, I am sure."

"But no one saw it go through your skull?" Dr. Warren brought up a concern that numerous members of the Society harbored.

Phineas was unfazed. "When a blast happens, the first thing you do is close your eyes. By the time everybody opened 'em, there's my brains stuck all over that hot Iron."

"Interesting," more than one reviewer mumbled.

An attending medical examiner, Dr. Henry I. Bowditch, Society

member since 1834, known throughout the metropolis as the wunderkind who developed "soothing syrups" for disobedient children (in later years, various members of his profession, and the press, would consider it questionable to give a product with ingredients made up mostly of narcotics to youngsters) phrased his astonishment carefully, "You maintained consciousness the whole time, yet felt no pain?"

"Nothing more than usual. But I lost my eye. It don't work no more."

"That could have happened with the Iron exiting the cheek too, though, with the right path," Dr. Whittemore clarified.

"And otherwise you have recovered fully, the same man?" Dr. Warren jumped in. The questions were piling up, which Dr. Harlow took as a good sign.

"No, sir," Phineas would lend weight to his situation, "I act up awful. Scare people. I never used to scare no one. I get headaches, bad ones, like never before. And I can't..."

Dr. Warren, never without a freshly pressed monogrammed handkerchief stuffed in the side of his tight fitting coat, a show-me, don't-tell-me type if ever there was one, interrupted, "We're only interested in what we can prove."

"Oh, ask anyone. I was the top foreman, and they fire me after I come back on account I can't reason." Phineas possessed a self-depreciating awareness that Dr. Harlow couldn't decide was a healthy thing or not. He kept careful notes of it in his journals.

Dr. Warren, without missing a beat, retorted, "Blasting never

demanded much reasoning skill, though, Mr. Gage, did it?"

The men of the brotherhood chuckled, a lighthearted moment to help ease the formal atmosphere. Dr. Harlow studied Phineas's facial gestures and body language for any hint of change in attitude, none forthcoming. "So far, so good," he breathed a sigh of relief.

Dr. Francis G. Higginson, welcomed by the Society as an element of the group in 1829, pioneering specialist in matters of the cardiovascular system, whom had found the club its initial accommodations, over the shop of Smith & Clark, druggists, on Washington Street, the price paid being \$25 a year, held a notepad filled with his own probing notes on the case before him. He addressed the testee, "Dr. Harlow wrote in his medical journal of being able to insert one finger in your upper wound, one in the lower, and of touching his fingers inside of your brain. What do you know of such?"

Phineas shot his original caretaker a baffled look, but replied, "Maybe so."

Dr. Harlow, anxious to jump in to elucidate the facts, bit his tongue, honoring his word not to unduly influence the proceedings.

"While you were awake?" Dr. Higginson quizzed.

"I felt a lot of strange things in my head that day," Phineas said as he lifted a drinking glass of water. "That might have been one of them." He sipped from the glass, then continued, "If you part my hair, you can see the thin skin over my hole. Under it, you can watch my brain move."

A good portion of the doctors crowded around their subject.

Dr. Higginson double-checked with the patient, "You don't mind,

Mr. Gage?"

"Ok with me. Hell, I was earning a dime a pop for letting folks do that to me in that Barnum museum, but you fellows, seeing how you're all professional, I let do it for no charge."

"We all thank you for that, Mr. Gage," the heart authority said gratefully.

The Society members paid attention as their colleague parted the hair on the impaired man's head, eliciting from the onlookers a collective gasp, nearly the sound of a burst if steam escaping from a steam engine valve. Dr. Higginson himself didn't seem much swayed when he concluded, "That could be from another wound."

"But it ain't" the railroad man held firm.

Seeking to keep the momentum of the investigation rolling forward, Dr. Warren spoke brusquely, "May we now inspect your eye?"

"Can't see how it could hurt. It don't work."

"Very well, Mr. Gage, if I could get you to position yourself just so," Dr. Warren guided Phineas's body so that the skylight was concentrating the sun's output on the subject's right eye.

Crowding even tighter around Phineas, the Boston natives made note of the blind eye. Dr. Harlow nervously observed them observing Phineas.

The examination went on another forty minutes, with the esteemed alliance of the Boston Society for Medical Improvement, having finished their physical inspection to satisfaction, thoroughly grilled Phineas on his pre and post-injury family history (health-related and otherwise), relationships (particularly the one with

Elisa), work experience, even preferred foods and sleep habits. Perplexed by what this all really had to do with the case, Dr. Harlow yet remained in the shadows.

Sitting in comfortable adjacent chairs in the impressive welcoming hall, by themselves, the two sojourners overheard muffled speech that seeped through the all too scrawny door of the examination room. A fair percentage of the words were indecipherable, but Dr. Harlow could make out a few – more than enough, for his taste of the remarks. The dialogue that he eavesdropped on consisted of the comments, "...Worthless speculation...", "...Unsubstantiated and preposterous, without a whit of use...", "...Could do more harm than good...", "...My fear exactly. It upsets the very nature of phrenology...", "...I am surprised that someone as savvy as Dr. Harlow would risk a public presentation of this sort...", and the one that cut through him like the iron that injured the man who rested beside him, "...It was good for a laugh"

Studying his friend's face diligently, the physician was not sure if Phineas was cognizant what was being said. The examinee, who offered no indication of it, appeared withdrawn, subdued, close to slumber. It had been a drawn-out day for him, Dr. Harlow knew. Should he suggest that they move to outside – possibly to bring attention to the matter – or simply let, indeed hope, that Phineas dozed off?

Chatter, this time more pronounced, sprinkled with chuckles, was heard. If he had really focused, Dr. Harlow would likely have been able to put voice with name, but his energy waned, the comments more important than the who. "...He's dug himself into a hole...", "...And



threw out the shovel. His next presentation will suffer a credibility issue, that much can be sure...", "...In this era, where through the discovery of ether, we have conquered pain, this sort of seminar sheds an unfavorable light on our profession...", "...Can I buy you gentleman a whiskey?" The sound of chairs being pushed back echoed. The examination room's door swung open. Dr. Harlow was ready to go home, the fine vintage of enthusiasm he felt earlier that day having turned to vinegar.

The Society clan shuffled out, the men talking merrily amongst themselves. The person they had spent so much time sufficiently surveying searched their eyes for any clue as to how the forum went, the signs not being good. Dr. Harlow noticed how many of the doctors made it a point of looking away from their subject, a few even gave him a doubtful shrug. The last man to exit the room was a gloomy-faced man, sad eyes to match those of his guests. Dr. Bigelow was direct, "John, a consensus appears to have been reached. A significant portion..."

"No words are required, Henry. I know," Dr. Harlow said softly as he stole a peek at a dejected Phineas, "we both know."

"How?"

"Well, perhaps if Harvard Medical School invested as much in quality doors as in their decorative artwork."

"It had basically come down to the lack of firsthand eyewitnesses. Nobody actually saw the iron pass through the man's skull."

"True. But the written statements from the people who were there,

my treatment of the wound, as well as..."

"I am regretful, John."

"Why so?"

"Things hadn't gone as planned."

Dr. Harlow's mood brightened a bit. "Henry, for the fact that a physician of your caliber has not only gone out on a limb for me in setting up this meeting, but has also published a detailed report on the case, with personal backing, I am forever in your gratitude. One day, well, we are both relatively lean in years. I do not believe that even with our untamed imaginations, we can foresee what the good Lord has in mind for the future of our profession."

"Whatever that may be, John, no doubt you will be leading the charge." Dr. Bigelow spontaneously gave his comrade a hug, receiving mutual affection back. He turned to a vanished Phineas.

Pointing to a silhouette of a figure holding a rod, slumped over in the space where he had spent a section of his day, Dr. Harlow said, "He'll be fine. I'll see to that."

Dr. Bigelow placed his dark hat on his follically challenged head. "As a friend is fond of saying, controversy equalizes fools and wise men, and the fools know it."

"In fact, Dr. Holmes is surely one of the wisest," the discredited healer said to the departing man.

Before departing the building, Dr. Bigelow expressed one last thought. "Please give your lovely wife my regards. I most look forward to making her acquaintance."

Dr. Harlow walked over to the penumbra presence, crossing into the chamber. He forced a smile that faded as quickly as the mist from

a breath drawn on a wintery day. He was about to speak, but to fully collect his thoughts – what would be the most appropriate words to say to the melancholic man – he decided to first gather his papers for transit. The skylight illumination was growing dim, a spattering of the oil lamps burnt out, casting an engulfing dullness to match the mood in the room.

“Where was God on that day?” a bleary-eyed Phineas at last spoke. “Nowhere I can tell, guess maybe he took off a spell, as my rod crashed through my brain. That’s one of them poetry I created. Elisa says it could help my manners.”

“She may be correct,” Dr. Harlow fragilely uttered, forcing a weak grin.

“I failed the test, didn’t I”, Phineas said, rarely expressing himself in such personal terms since the injury.

“No, my friend,” Dr. Harlow, his head drooping south, said. “It grieves me to confess, it is I that have failed you.” He painfully attempted to maintain a stoic face, but cringed when he saw his detailed drawing of the accident. He rolled the sketch up. “They could not accept my notes, or your testimony, because we had no witnesses.”

“The other doctor, Williams,” Phineas said with a distinct lack of energy.

“Williams was smart to distance himself from me. And Henry came in too late, and has been ill received before, when it comes to research. Besides, he is not a direct witness to the accident.” Dr. Harlow finished the task of packing the papers safely into his

carrying case. He expounded, "The only way to convince them was if you had died and I had your skull here, perhaps with the Iron Rod still protruding through your brain. But of course, that would render this this whole issue worthless. The remarkable, noteworthy factors all lie in the fact that you are indeed alive, fully functioning. They chose to laugh at me, rather than learn from what I have discovered."

"You came here knowing they'd do this?"

"It was the probable outcome."

"And you still came," Phineas, visibly sulking, showed a dribble of warmth.

The healer simply nodded yes. He managed a smile and patted Phineas on the back. "Don't fret. Two steps forward, one step back. Science has advanced that way for centuries. Come on, let me buy you a supper. I know of an inviting restaurant in Cambridge."

When, later that evening, the two men, feeling fully satisfied – at least in the gastronomic department – left The Continental Bistro, they were in improved spirits, smiling, even feeling a bit tipsy, having allowed themselves to indulge in a sampling of the fermented grape. "Where would you like me to take you." Dr. Harlow moderately slurred his words.

"To the coach station," Phineas articulated more clearly.

"Then so be it", the slightly, and for him, unusually besotted loyal husband, said, "to the coach station we go. Luckily, for me, it's close by." Dr. Harlow donned his hat.

The stage coach station was mellow, most of the travelers to and

from the city preferring to arrive or depart during more cheery hours. Phineas, waiting to board a carriage, held a small tattered bag with him. His companion suspected it was the only bag he owned, possibly representing all of his worldly belongings, but Dr. Harlow was too much of a gentleman, even with a higher than normal blood alcohol level, to consider questioning his friend about it. Whenever a horse came close to him, Phineas backed away in a knee-jerk reaction.

"Don't like horses"? Dr. Harlow inquired, making note about the matter for later journal entry.

"Never trusted 'em."

"You're sure you would rather go to New York than to your mother's in Vermont?"

Phineas momentarily took in the scene of the two scantily clad working girls who were loitering across the street, giggling. He winced resignedly, "I trust myself less than I trust horses. I could hurt her, or anybody else close to me, and not even know why."

"I don't think you'd hurt anyone you love that much," Dr. Harlow reassured him.

"What I need is work. It sets my mind right. I get fired pretty regular these days. But New York's big enough, it's easier to find some place they ain't heard of me. I don't know who I am, Doctor. I might turn worse. Might not. This here bar," Phineas stroked his metallic significant other, "when it shot through me, well...I felt it set off some kind of timepiece in me. Don't ask me how I know, I just do. And, it ain't going to let me see the far side of forty. No

matter what, I'll try to make you proud you saved me."

Perceiving a glimmer of human understanding in the patient turned ally, a quiver of emotion rushed through the physician's body. "I am proud, Phineas. I am. This affair with my peers couldn't change that. A man struggling to understand his life is always a man worth respecting."

They stepped back, studied each other's faces, as if remembering how many hours they had stared at each other during recovery.

"Never forget who you are, Phineas."

"And who is that?"

"A man with a hole in his head," Dr. Harlow said in an aim to jolly the mood. Mission accomplished, since both men burst out in laughter. "You are, you are a man who has been spared death. For whatever reason, we do not know. But we do both know, you live on borrowed time. Make each day count."

"And what of you?"

Dr. Harlow smirked, "My reputation will not recover until after I've published in journals on a field of medicine that has nothing to do with brains, that much I do know. I've always had an interest in politics. My heart, however, will always be wed to medicine."

"You'd be a fine politician," Phineas volunteered, shaking the caring healer's outstretched palm.

A stage coach pulled up to the station platform. Phineas, raggedy bag and iron mate in tow, ambled towards it. Dr. Harlow walked in the other direction, secretly praying that that would not be their last meeting. The damaged man stopped after only moving twenty feet, turned halfway around, seeming to not have the desire to face his

confidant. "Doctor?," he spoke. His friend turned. "I owe you my life."

"You owe me nothing."

Phineas peered into the coach at the well-to-do family that occupied the inside of it. He looked up at the rough hewn driver. "Mind if I ride up top?"

"I don't talk much," the driver informed him, just prior to wetting his whistle courtesy of a flask.

"Me neither." The traveler climbed up on top the carriage.

Dr. Harlow raised a hand to wave, but it closed in a fist, as if he were making an effort to give Phineas a dose of his strength to take with him. He forcefully stated, "You will change what we know of the human brain, Phineas. I swear to it."

"Ain't you embarrassed yourself enough over me, Doctor?" Phineas teased.

"They laughed at Copernicus, too."

"Who?"

"Another man with a hole in his head," the physician said in a rollicking tone. "And he filled it with new ideas of the universe that almost got him executed."

"I wouldn't take it that far, Doctor," Phineas smiled.

A stage coach hand closed the buggy doors. The chauffeur took the reins and snapped them back. Dr. Harlow watched as the horses pulled forward; Phineas nodded and raised the Tamping Iron high, a fitting final farewell. Dr. Harlow felt a drop of moisture slide down his cheek. At that moment, the image of Charlotte flooded his mind, a

defense mechanism to prevent him from sobbing like a newborn. Happy thoughts, pleasant dreams...

Being a morning type of person, in synch with Benjamin Franklin's philosophy about "early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise", one his own father, admirer of the founding father and statesman, wholeheartedly subscribed to, Dr. Harlow spent the evening in a hotel, to awaken up at dawn, ingest a light breakfast of bowl of oatmeal, corn griddle cake and tea, then begin the journey home. In the late afternoon, he arrived back at his residence in Cavendish, Mother Nature wasting no time in dropping a blanket of velvety snow on the ground. Charlotte was busy sewing in front of the cozy fireplace when she heard the front door creak open. She gasped when she saw her husband stomp the snow off his boots. Quickly her sewing materials were on the floor as she rushed to his welcoming arms. "I was worried about you, dear."

"That I'd fallen ill?"

"That you'd stay with him."

The good hubby tittered, "We are bonded. However, only as doctor and patient. My heart is here with you." He removed his drenched footwear.

Charlotte settled on the plush sofa in front of the fire, her spouse uniting with her. "How was she," he asked.

Dr. Harlow squeezed his wife's hand affectionately. "Haunted. Lost. Truly tormented."

"Poor man."

"I didn't expect to ever see him alive again."



Charlotte stroked his hand in a comforting manner only the way a wife could, "You did more for him that any surgeon could. Additionally, you remained his friend."

"When he had his more peaceful moments, he was gentle as a kitten. And compassionate," Dr. Harlow said as he tossed an unspoiled log onto the fire. "He asked me what I intended to do, medicine in Cavendish aside."

"I know what you told him," Charlotte flashed a schoolgirl smile. Her mate was surprised. "How so?"

"John, somebody speaks politics and you come alive. It's no secret."

"You wouldn't mind moving to the capital?"

"I've been waiting for the day that you'd outgrow this town."

"Would your heart be joyful removed from the only town it's ever known?"

"It would, if it was with you, my dear."

Dr. Harlow hugged his love, never more thankful to have found his soulmate.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN NEW YORK CITY

On a frigid Monday morning, Phineas, devoid of any warmth generating outer garments, huddled with other hopeful construction workers around Ryan, the burly foreman who was second generation of

the well-connected family run business. And business had never been better. As the city population exploded, so had the need for new buildings. Ryan addressed the men, "Haggard and Sons are about to start a major project for the city, the mayor personally choosing us because he knows we can get the project done on time and on budget. It don't have a name yet, but it's gonna to be a major transportation hub. I need good men, men that don't get tired easily, ain't scared of putting in long hours, ain't no stranger to hard work. In return, you'll be paid handsomely. More than any other crew in the city. Only thing, I don't want no damn limeys on my crews." The waiting men nodded their heads in agreement.

Phineas wasn't sure what the foreman meant by "limey". He wondered, was he himself a "limey"? How would he know? What if he was later found to be one? He was too prideful to ask for further detail on the matter. He was encouraged when informed that he would be part of the crew, starting the very next day. He had only been in the city in a few days, vowing to himself that he would never again be employed as a side-show freak, wishing rather to starve in the gutter than reduce himself to that vocation.

Tuesday, seven in the a.m., Phineas showed up as instructed at the Eighth Street location, pleasantly surprised to find it was a railroad depot he would be part of the building crew on. The New York and Harlem Railroad, a street railway that used horse-drawn cars with metal wheels and ran on metal tracks, which, soon after the Vermont native joined the work corps, would metamorphose into a line comprising 593 omnibuses that traveled on 27 Manhattan routes. It was

a far cry from being foreman on the Rutland and Burlington, but being around the railroad gave Phineas a not insignificant baby-sucking-on-a favorite-pacifier comfort.

The prideful recipient of employment, Phineas had decided to seek a more permanent lodging than the rundown foul-smelling, rotting thin clapboarded, hole-ridden flophouse he had been sleeping in. He pounded the pavement, faithful iron companion at his side, always gathering stares from passerby due to his lack of adequate winter garb, scanning the neighborhood diligently in the vicinity of the train depot. Most of the quarters he inquired about were out of his acceptable price range. He had some cash saved up from Barnum's, but not a whole lot, the new job not paying him until fourteen days proceeding his start. About to call off his search, to settle for the time being, at least, for his current situation, Phineas noticed a five story boarding house that, from his exterior perspective, did not appear too bad. The primary thing that caught his one good eye was the sloppy sign posted that read: "Ruum imedate openn. Ask forr Mrs. Beasley." Phineas had no knowledge of the accommodations, but he was certain that, even with his limited education, he was a more able speller than whomever had scribbled the message. Phineas waded through the usual layer of street debris, peppered with the sludge of human and animal manure, broken up furniture, rotting fruits, chicken bones and dirt (referred to by residents as "corporation pudding"), the city at that time being one of the dirtiest in the world with death rates to rival that of medieval London. He climbed the handful of steps to the propped open front door, entered the dark hallway. There he witnessed a the backside of a woman of advanced age sweeping

the hall. A good sign, he felt. Pride of the tenant and/or landlord.  
"Excuse me," Phineas stuttered, "I, I am seeking a Mrs. Beasley."

"You found her, bub," the woman, who moved slow as molasses, continued with her cleaning.

"I, I was kindly interested in the room you have."

That's when Mrs. Beasley spun around to reveal to the hopeful renter the most repugnant, witchy-looking woman he had ever laid a wholesome pupil on. Perhaps she had known — or been employed by — P.T. Barnum? Phineas studied her features — orange-tinted skin that hung loose on her face and arms, a scattering of teeth amongst barren scarlet gums, blood-shot eyes in wrinkled rotted sockets, gray stringy hair and to top off the feeling that he was in the presence of a sorceress, a row, running along the left side of her face, sloping down unto her neck, of chalk-white warts. The sole omission was the pointy dark hat. Phineas was taken aback, but he was not one to judge, as he himself had so often been of late. He did, however, find it fitting that she was wielding a broom.

"You got a job, bub?," the hag inquired.

"I do. With Haggard and Sons working on the new train depot. It's going to be..."

"Save the drivel." The ogress stopped her tidying long enough to notice the Tamping Iron. "What's that?"

"My iron. I like'n to carry it with me."

"I like my gas stove, but you see me lugging it 'round. Rent is twenty-three dollars a month, payable on the first. If not in my hands on the first, you're out. I take currency, no checks, no IOU's,

gold is fine by me. You know what's happening out there in California territory? Lot of young men striking it rich. Why is a young fella like you sticking round here?

"I feel more that I could..."

"I'll tell you something, bub. If I was a younger woman, I'd be out there getting my share."

Phineas flashed a rare grin, thinking to himself how the woman might possibly use that broom, should it be the flying kind, to make such a journey.

Mrs. Beasley – none of her tenants ever did see a mister around the premises, and no one dared ask about the matter – continued, "I keep a good Christian house. After ten, it's quiet time. Lots of the people who live here rise early. Ain't you going ask me, bub?"

"Ask?" Phineas was lost.

"Don't you want to know why I got a room available? It was Lonnie's room. He was a real good tenant. Seven years, never once late on his payment. Lonnie, bless his Christian soul, well, he was a night-soil man. One night last week, he was doing his rounds as usual, collecting up what he was collecting, from the proper persons that don't just dump it in the streets. If you ask me, that's animals do. Not us civilized people. Lonnie then took all them buckets he had down to the pits where they dump that stuff. Well, Lonnie, bless his Christian soul, he liked to hit the bottle. You a bottle hitter?"

"I hardly ever drink."

"Good," Mrs. Beasley said. "You'll live right and proper. Anyways, Lonnie hit the bottle hard that night, became a right lushington making the rounds – usually only did that on his day off

or after the work – well, let's say that drowning in a cesspool of shit ain't a pleasant way to go. None of 'em bastards there even wished to pull him out. Poor Lonnie. Bless his Christian soul.”

The lodgings were nothing more than a fourth floor room, cookie-cutter square, of roughly two hundred-fifty cramped square feet, furnished with more than slightly used rough to the good eye shade of faded bare essential olive green furnishings, with the shared toilet facilities down the hallway (one per story), home to an extended family of brown rodents. To its newest tenant, in spite of the circumstances, it was still better than the prior flophouse.

The construction on the New York and Harlem depot was initiated that Tuesday Phineas showed up at seven a.m. Much needed to be done before the various components – baggage rooms, mailroom, ticket windows, telegraph office, superintendent's office, to name but a few could be fabricated. Phineas was promptly assigned to the team that would be responsible for the clearing and leveling of the ground in preparation of the laying of the foundation. An important task. The former foreman gallantly went about his assigned tasks, the ten hours of daily physical labor feeling like a salve to the soul. He said little to the other wage earners, but most of the men, unlike back on the Rutland and Burlington, were a reserved bunch, uniformly quiet even on breaks. Which suited Phineas fine, being that he wasn't there to make friends. “Just earn an honest day's pay and go the heck home”, as he had put it to his mother in a letter. The work periods whizzed by for Phineas. It was the one weekly day off, always Sunday, that dragged.

Ryan, making inspection rounds on the seventh day, complimented Phineas on a job well done. Admiring the foreman, Phineas harbored thoughts about how his current overseer reminded him of himself during the time spent with the Vermont rail line. Mr. Haggard, whom a clique of the men had fostered an idea that he was only present because of nepotism, was, to at least one of his men, an able, capable boss. On the plus side, he never did get snooping about the Tamping Iron. Come day twelve, a Monday, fate threw the laborers a curveball. While managing the unloading of materials from a wagon convoy on a windswept rainy, hence muddy, morning, Ryan slipped, snapping his ankle like a twig in the worst manner possible. He screamed in agony, the doctor who arrived not able to do much but set the bone, administer morphine and make a primitive cast. Before the men could even enjoy a tobacco break, one leader was out, a new one in. And, in this instance, new did not equate to improved.

Wade Rowley was second cousin of Ryan's, but that seemed to be all they had in common. What the man lacked in height or any appearance of physicality, he made up for with his tough talk, all business, all the time. Without hesitation, he came to the verdict that more men were needed to complete the job on schedule.

The day following, an additional work gang of fourteen men were brought in. Phineas didn't pay much heed to that development until at break, when a new crew member, Jim Bob, an oversize mess of a guy who possessed a deceptively appealing smile as if listening to his own off-color jokes in his mind, and ordered the men to refer to him by his nickname of "dog", successively trash-talked each workman in the nastiest terms possible, using ample racial slurs and personal

putdowns. Some men treat other people that way out of insecurity – “I’ll sting them before they can sting me” – some are assholes by nature. The latter was true of Jim Bob. Unlike the majority of the gang, who fancied chewing tobacco, Jim Bob was accompanied by a fat cigar, which he dragged on in short regular intervals. He mocked a worker relentlessly, a man who had been as reserved as Phineas. “I don’t know, Leslie sure sounds like a woman’s name to me. You sure you ain’t a girlie?” he taunted, earning a limited amount of amusement from his co-workers. Jim Bob maliciously flicked ashes onto the reluctant object of ridicule. “Shit, why don’tcha prove to us that you’re all man, huh? I mean, what do ya got to hide, Les-lie?” When the shy man didn’t play along, Jim Bob’s tone turned from semi-serious to one of frustration. “I said, why don’tcha show us your manhood, huh? Or, wills I have to do it for ya?” Jim Bob grabbed the man.

Phineas, who had been listening, could not be a fly on the wall any longer. He courageously spoke, “Let him alone.”

It worked. The bully’s attention had been deflected. “What the hell did you say to me?”, he asked in his southern drawl.

“You heard me clear as the sky,” Phineas, who did not partake of tobacco products, said. “We’re all here to do a job peacefully, then go on home.”

Jim Bob towered over Phineas. The Iron caught his eye. “What is that for, big mouth?”

“He always have that thing with him. Ain’t never use it for work,” a bystander butted in.



"I asked you, what you do with that?"

"None of your damn business," Phineas retorted.

Jim Bob, who was not used to being challenged, now felt the need to launch escalated verbal warfare. "Hey, everybody," he announced, "mister smarty mouth here got a queer sex partner. I bet he sticks that thing where there ain't no sun shining."

An assortment of chuckles drifted on the gentle breeze toward the insulted's eardrums, but Phineas kept his eyes glued to his tormentor. Ire was building up, but he wanted – desperately needed – to hold on to the job. Work set his mind right, he knew all too well. And, work he shall do as industriously as possible.

Then the petty tyrant made a not inconsequential misstep by bringing his mark's parent into the mix. He crowed, "That there bar what your momma uses when ain't no man around? Why, I bet that thing's your pop. Ain't it so?"

The Mount Vesuvius inside Phineas erupted, and with no less force. Bracing the Tamping Iron, he put it to effective use, striking Jim Bob across his jawbone, instantly drawing lip blood. The hit man heaved and gloated, "You gonna get it real good, boy. I used to hunt down escaped slaves in Georgia. I'm gonna teach you a lesson like I taught them niggers." He lunged, his oversize hands now balled into lethal fists, swinging away. Phineas, most of his life a gentle soul, would be no match for his opponent's brute power. Taking a punch to the chest, the weaker man fell to the ground. As the pursuer came at him, Phineas, by way of trusty iron partner, managed to whack him in the groin.

Alerted by the catcalls of the squad, Wade, who sat in his

makeshift office out back, rushed to the scene. "Break it up," he demanded. When the plea was ignored, he physically got between the combatants, pushing them apart. The onlookers quickly dispersed. "What in God's name is wrong with the two of you?, the Boss roared. "I ought to dump you knuckleheads right now. I want both of you to go home, cleanse yourselves up and think about what you did today. Be back in the morning. I'll let you know if we can still use men like you around here."

Phineas spent a sleepless evening in his room staring at the water-stained ceiling above him. He showed up, promptly at 7.a.m., at the work site. As he entered, Jim Bob passed him on his way out, shooting him a snarky stare that burned with hatred.

Wade cornered Phineas. "Gage, after the incident between you and Fleming occurred, I researched the matter. From what I learned, you were not the instigator. Therefore, you are the one I'm keeping on. Let me ask you this, why do you bring the iron? It is not a company issued tool."

Phineas tried to think up a good excuse, but could only speak the facts, "I reckon I do because I had an accident involving this here rod, I kind of feel like it belongs with me."

"Be that as it may, I am requesting you not bring it. This is the last day I will see you with it," the crew leader emphasized. "Understand?"

"Yes, sir." Phineas meekly replied, his heart sinking faster than a sailing ship in a squall.

During the day, Phineas found himself something of a hero. Many

of the men came up to him and patted him on the back, a few men even shook his hand. The brave man didn't feel worthy of the praise or understand it. He only did what had to be done when his mother's honor was insulted.

In the morning, he left his petite quarters, and, in the one instance since that fateful day in September, 1848, the Tamping Iron, behind. On Phineas's way down the steps, passing Mrs. Beasley, she commented, "First time I ever see you without that iron of yours." He could swear the gaps in her gums had grown wider. Not sure what motives she may have had regarding his tool, he fibbed, "Lost it." "Awful cold day to be without a coat, Mr. Gage," were the last words he heard as he left the building.

An apprehensive work shift followed. Phineas was fixated on the absence of his constant companion, experiencing a separation anxiety as never he had. He felt exposed, lonely, naked. In the split second the rod was physically a part of him, they had bonded. They had fused. He considered feigning illness – perhaps he could sneak a finger down his throat to induce vomiting? A bit of a nick on a finger to facilitate the ruse? Best not to risk it, he decided, so soon after the skirmish. He obsessively focused on devising a means to covertly have the object with him. He could get a coat, hide it in that, he pondered. He had never worn one before, so would that raise suspicions? When the warm seasons arrived, what then? Additionally, the entire crew removed their coats during labor. Keeping his on may raise a red flag. Could he secure the object of desire to his back? Phineas spent a good part of two hours mulling that particular scenario over. Again, too fraught with jeopardy. Even assuming an

oversized shirt garment, the outline would surely be seen, or the thirteen pounds of mass rupturing it's fastenings to create a potentially embarrassing scene, not to mention his sacking. At shift's end, the distraught hired hand rushed home, greatly relieved to find the Iron safe and sound in the location he had left it, hidden beneath the mattress.

The only option that made sense to Phineas was the one executed. Turning up at the train depot that was taking shape, he breathed easier when he got to work with no one the wiser to the fact that he had the contraband secured, with a series of cords, around his left leg, nearly a perfect fit in height for him. As long as he stood erect, which he had done every day on the job thus far, things would be fine.

The prep work for the foundation came in a week ahead of schedule. That was one indication of why Haggard and Sons boasted of being the best in the city, and why they never lacked for projects. The greasing of palms at City Hall didn't hurt either. Subsequently, a fortnight after the ban on toting his metallic implement to the job site, Phineas was advised that he would be part of the foundation crew, beginning that Monday (Phineas was really starting to dislike Mondays), to set the depot's stone foundation. He knew it was a compliment to be put on the squad, but posed a dilemma nonetheless, for to do the task meant crouching down on one's knees. Wade gave the men a set of instructions to follow; the firm had it's own signature style of doing the job. A separate supply gang was put into place to pass the needed materials to the crew. Every member of

the base crew kneeled in place – except for one.

“Gage, what the hell's the problem?” Wade impatiently wanted to

“No, no problem,” the man in the quandary said. “Just, just getting my bearings, that's all.”

“We got a job to do, Gage. Understand me?”

“I hear you. You see...I fell, hurt my knee a bit.” Maybe that excuse would get him transferred over to the supply crew, whose members would stand as they performed their tasks.

The boss eyed him with contempt. “Way I see it, Gage, if you could make it here on your own two feet, then your knee ain't hurt that bad. Unless you done take a carriage. That the case?”

“No, sir,” Phineas wasted no time in answering, then cussed himself for not saying the opposite.

Wade strode over to Phineas. “I'll call for the doctor.”

“No, don't do that, sir,” Phineas pleaded. “He no doubt has more important cases awaiting him.”

Wade threw up his arms in a sign of frustration. “Look here Gage, you already wasted enough of my time. You either get in damn position or you're gone.”

Seeing no way out of the hornet's nest, Phineas felt he had no choice but to roll up his left pant leg to reveal it's unusual content, untie the cords and remove the offending item. After doing so, he hunkered down with the foundation crew.

“Goddamn it, Gage!” the supervisor was livid. “What'd I tell you about that thing? You disobeyed me. You're outta here. Now!”

“I reckon you're right. But, you don't under...”

“Now, Gage!”

Phineas, standing defiant, felt the pressure of a geyser of raw emotion taking hold. Oh, it would be so simple to use his partner, in one fell swoop, to teach that mean bastard a lesson in civility, just one nice smack across the jaw, like done with the bully. Bet the workers would really cheer him for that. He had an instant to decide which path to take. One would likely land him in handcuffs. As if a portal suddenly opened, an early poem he had written flashed through his mind:

Lo and behold, there are people who can't know,  
what it was that happened on the railroad,  
they will just stare and call you a freak,  
being as lucky as they are to be their self,  
we who live with injury do not have that wealth

Phineas limped away, one more humiliation added to the plus column that formed the ledger of his existence.

CHAPTER NINETEEN  
1855-1856

"Dear, did you already pack up the last of the garments?"  
Charlotte, adorned in a favorite hoop dress, queried her husband.

Dr. Harlow busied himself fastening shut a rather impressive collection of pine trunks and wooden crates. "Yes. All packed up, ready to journey. Why do you so ask?"

"Oh, I was thinking this wear may be too formal for travel," his wife explained. "Perhaps a gown with better comfort would be more tolerable."

Smiling wide, after more than a decade of blissful matrimony, the physician knew his spouse all too well. He could predict with a

skillful accuracy what was coming next.

"Yet, it is Boston – thee Boston. Can any dress be too formal?" she flip flopped. "Land of fine culture, fine arts, fine theatre."

"And fine hospitals."

"Only to get finer with the addition of a certain likely healer."

"That is my wish," the doctor smiled. "Sweetie, your enthusiasm for the idea has inspired me more than I could ever have hoped for. I know we have spoken about a move to the capital for so long, but I suspect my heart has been residing in that great Massachusetts city for even longer."

"John, my heart will reside with yours wherever it rests," she beamed. "I have many desires in our new life. First will be to lead the crusade against those loathsome corsets. Really? Girls from as young an age of five forced to suffer those cages around their bodies. Simply dreadful. You yourself have said they could stunt growth and do much harm."

"Doctor, sir, ready for you and the missus," an amplified man's voice from outside rang out.

Dr. Harlow went to an open window, peered out. "Good day, Calvin. The belongings are here in the study, set to go."

"Be up in a right jiffy to load 'em all onto the carriage," the stage driver who would take the couple to the train depot cheerfully shouted back.

"Oh dear, I was thinking..." the lady of the house started to express a thought.

"That the hoop gown is perhaps a bit formal. It will be dandy,"



interrupted the man of the house good-naturedly. "Calvin is on his way up."

A scant twenty-five minutes later, the pair's travel-worthy possessions (the larger ones had been shipped ahead) were loaded safely on top of the the buggy. Calvin, helping the damsel into the buggy, couldn't resist throwing a compliment her way. "What a lovely dress, Miss Charlotte. My wife used to have one just like it. Splendid. You'll be the envy of all Boston."

"Why, thank you, Calvin. Thank you kindly," Charlotte was flattered, pleased that she kept on the current frock. She was sad for the driver, whose wife, Maggie, a lovely woman she had attended church with, had passed away eight months prior, another victim of the dreaded tuberculosis.

Jefferson had been donated to an animal-loving neighbor whom Dr. Harlow knew would take well care of him. Moving into a townhouse in the crowded metropolis would leave no room for a horse. Had he sold the aging equine, Dr. Harlow believed it probable that his cherished friend would soon end up on a supper plate.

The wagon pulled down the path where New England spring flowers were popping out of the warming ground, many of their seeds planted by gardening enthusiast Charlotte, a carousal of the candy pinks of wild geranium, the twinkling purples and oranges of New England Aster, the banana yellows of Black-eyed Susan and the green leaves of bunchberry with it's brilliant red berries. The soon-to-be newest residents of Beantown did not look back, did not say a word to each other, only kept their vision focused on the path that lay ahead.

"Varmint," the insult was spit by an eyes burning with fire Phineas in the face of the big bruiser with the bloodied nose who threw another hard blow to his opponent's body. The large man's friend tried to grab a hold of the slippery smaller man's body, but the unshaven Phineas in his pitiful state knew how to effectively use the iron he had had with him for the past four days on the construction site. What had caused the clash? It didn't really matter at that point. Phineas, his social skills having deteriorated, for some time had been bumping from odd job to odd job, none of them lasting very long, crashing at a series of flophouses, each one progressively more depressing and run-down. The bloody fist fight came to an end when other workers pulled back the one good-eyed demented man. Another job, another firing. Such had become the life of the man with a hole in his head.

In the entry of the handsome three-story Cambridge row house that would be called home, Charlotte orchestrated the delivery of trunks and crates into the duo's new residence. Dr. Harlow felt an affinity for that section of Boston, close to many of the city's medical institutions he would be involved with, since he had first laid eyes upon it, instantly feeling at home. If he had believed in reincarnation, the thought of having lived there in a past life would have held credence. Charlotte, an avid walker, anticipated enjoying leisurely strolls along the scenic Charles River. Both were enamored with the ground floor sitting room, Charlotte to enjoy it as a knitting space/reading room when her husband was not welcoming

patients into the planned adjoining examination room. The zealous medical practitioner had made prior arrangements to have the tools of the trade - padded high table, changing screen, medical desk, a whole array of medical devices - delivered and setup in advance of his arrival. Dr. Harlow admired it's organization, all too ready to leap into service. With much still needing to be done to get the space prepared, he pried open a crate that held the smaller equipment - bandages, stethoscope, lancets, splints, stomach pump, urinometer, metal and glass syringes (unspoiled bloodsucking critters would be picked up in the morning at a local medical supply house), to name just a handful.

Charlotte, hoop dress appearing fresh even after travel, entered the soon to be home office. "John, have you found things to your standards?"

"Very much so," he responded, absorbed in his unpacking.

"Perhaps we should see about the upper stairs, my dear," she caressed her husband's hair, clearing having more in mind than moving chores. "Inspect it for our own satisfaction."

Opening the seal of an undersized crate, from inside it, Dr. Harlow pulled out the drawings of Phineas. He smiled warmly upon viewing them, but then his smile dropped as he let out an audible sigh.

Charlotte also sighed, for a different cause, "Perhaps I shall unpack the chinaware." She headed up the narrow stairway.

The sober-faced man placed the papers back inside the wooden case, closing its lid. He carried it into a spacious closet and gently placed it down.

Poor men, single and with families, encircled a homemade fireplace along the wall of a squalid brick warehouse building, doing their best to keep heated on the cool moonless autumn evening.

Resting on the filthy dirt ground, Phineas sat solo, cradling his head in his hands, rocking, in discomfort. He lifted his head up enough to glance around. The down on his luck guy had been experiencing headaches every so often. Not having sought any doctor's care, he surmised that they had to do with the injury he had survived seven years earlier. At times, the pain in his head was mild, other times it began that way but soon was in major migraine territory. When it got that awful, all he could do was ride it out. On this episode, the pangs and throbbing that danced the salsa as a couple in his head was so severe, it distorted what his only decent eye could see of the surrounding people. Their faces became warped, hideous. With Herculean effort, Phineas stood up, able to make out human forms that cringed away from him as he veered their way.

"Stay away, freak," a woman's high-pitched voice bitterly cut threw him. Others joined in by lobbing taunts, the unschooled minors especially gleeful as they did so.

The ill man staggered in the direction of a dark corner, where the warehouse transport horses were hitched. One friendly animal, a pretty brown horse spotted with patches of white, halted its noshing on a mouthful of grass to eye him with understanding sympathy. If Phineas was ever sure that a non-human entity had a soul, it was the one he now leaned against. He patted his non-judgemental companion.

Then he lied down on the hay, between the horses, to sleep.

In the Boston State Building, housing City Hall, Dr. Harlow addressed a delegation of the municipality's elite. Oliver Wendell Holmes, his well-regarded reputation as a healer and author growing in stature with each passing week, had helped arrange the forum. Wise medicine men, Holmes had advised his friend, made assiduous effort to curry favor with public servants whom can help prevent, with passed legislation, many more cases of illness than a single physician can treat. In attendance was newly elected Mayor Alexander Hamilton Rice, a politician of pleasing address and steely resolve who had run his 1856 campaign on the promise of making it a priority of bettering the city's public institutions, improving the streets and public lands, and addressing the day's health care concerns for its all citizens. Dr. Harlow, whose practice had exceeded his optimistic projections, made it a point to curry favor with the city's leaders, especially the like minded Rice.

On that salty afternoon where the atmosphere was humidity dense, the concerned physician was pleading his case about reforms needed to help curb the widespread, deadly cholera epidemic that gripped the city. "With regard to the contagious nature of epidemic Cholera, the preventive measures which I recommend are founded on the opinion that the disease is in some circumstances infectious. I state, with the utmost confidence, that, where proper attention is paid to ventilation and cleanliness, the risk of cholera spreading by infection is comparatively small. It will be best for the Boston Board of Health to advise persons of all ranks to go as little out as

night as possible during the prevalence of the epidemic, to clothe themselves more warmly than usual when compelled to go out after sunset, to take care to keep their feet always dry and warm, to wear at all times, but in bad weather particularly, a broad flannel belt round the belly. The Board should recommend that, during the prevalence of the epidemic, all assemblages of large bodies of the working classes, unless at church, should be suspended or avoided. In particular, too, the Board should insist on the abandonment, for the present, of the common practice in this city of crowding to watch over the bodies of the dead and to attend funerals; since in the towns hitherto visited very many cases of cholera have appeared to arise from such exposure. In every case of death from cholera, the house must be kept as free as possible from all unnecessary visitors. The interment should take place as early as possible."

Dr. Harlow lost track of time as he pressed forward with his research findings on the subject, which also included the importance of disorders of the stomach and bowels in relation to the feared malady. Originally slotted for thirty minutes, Dr. Harlow's discourse lasted nearly twice as long, to nobody's dissatisfaction. When completed, he received a toasty round of applause. He was making his mark in a field of medicine that had nothing to do with brains.

The heat was sweltering in the poverty-stricken Five Points neighborhood of lower Manhattan, adding to the misery of one of the world's most impoverished, crime-ridden slums. Phineas, devout loner, whose own mother would have had a difficult time recognizing her

offspring underneath the layer of muck - an additional piece of earthen attire that many in the hellish environment of the makeshift encampments with the wild dogs that roamed its alleys, adorned due to a lack of clean water, or any adequate sanitation - tilted against a post, watching Irish immigrants fight, a nightly event that passed for entertainment. Saddened by such spectacle, he questioned why the police did not break up the pugilistic battles, which often evolved into gang warfare - the police surely knew about it - but he was not aware that the law was overwhelmed by crimes of a more serious nature on a daily basis, not having proper resources.

A skinny young man, appearing far older than his time on Earth, nasty with filth as the others, who sported a persistent cough that would soon enough lead to pneumonia and premature death, nailed a poster on a stake.

"Keep your damn coughing inside you," Phineas grumbled just loud enough to be audible. Inquisitive as to why any fool would post such a notice in the devilish playground, he stumbled over to pivot his functioning retina on it. Besides the illustration of a man on a horse charging into battle, Phineas could make out the words:

CAVALRY!

TO THE FIELD!

20 RECRUITS WANTED

1<sup>st</sup> BATTALION N.Y. MOUNTED RIFLES!

COLONEL DODGE.

THE SECRETARY OF WAR HAS ORDERED THAT THIS EFFICIENT  
BATTALION BE INCREASED TO A REGIMENT AT ONCE.

Young, able-bodied Men will be sent to the Regiment.

Horses, Arms and Equipments are ready and waiting for us.

PAY FROM \$13 to \$23 PER MONTH!

HEADQUARTERS, STATE ST., OPP. BIVEN'S HOTEL.

Capt. A.K. PATTON, Recruiting Officer

Phineas re-read the line concerning pay. He sure would've liked to take them up on their offer, but he was aware that, besides a physical test, an eye examination would follow. No way he'd pass scrutiny on that one. If he could fake it somehow, the idea fluttered in him. The unsettled former railroad foreman didn't bother to give it serious credence.

"You're as thick as manure and only half as useful," a slurred voice in a thick Irish brogue pointed out to fellow sloshed man. Another street corner, another fistfight, likely another unclaimed corpse buried in a potter's field.

Dr. Harlow exited the State Building after a rendezvous with James Cornwall, professor of literature at Newtown Theological Institute and member in good standing of the Massachusetts Governor's Council. The men, who met to discuss proposed health ordinances, were in gregarious manner. "John, I must say, your lovely wife is quite adept at stirring the pot," Cornwall jovially stated, taking a puff on his always present cigar.

"Yes, she has found her element, to the chagrin of many."

"My wife has inquired of me to seek out what is found offensive about certain female garments," the professor with the hooked nose (his students had nicknamed him "eagle beak") asked.



"Possible health issues. That's a whole other day's discussion," Dr. Harlow replied, not wanting to mix a relatively trivial issue with the crucial one of the meeting, that of a sanitized city water supply.

"Next, your lovely wife will be insisting on women having the right to vote," Cornwall playfully slapped the physician on the back. "Heaven forbid the day that happens to our glorious republic."

"John?," a familiar voice rang out.

Both men swiveled around, spotting the as always dapper Dr. Bigelow.

"Henry. What a fine turn of fate," Dr. Harlow shone with delight as they patted each other on the shoulders and shook hands. "I understand you and James are well acquainted."

"Wholly. Good day, James," he shook Cornwall's hand. Addressing the healer, he said, "I heard you had entered politics."

"I am simply representing my district in assembly now. But I must admit, I plan to extend my influence, should the public support me. And you? What brings you to the State Building?"

"Raising funds for new additions to the hospital near Harvard."

"A good cause."

"And what of our poor friend, Phineas. Any word?" Dr. Bigelow inquired.

"His wonderful mother has kept in touch, but for lately I have not received any correspondence. I plan on writing her this week with just such a request."

"I dearly hope that life has not gotten the best of him."

"You speak of him gravely."

"My concern is that he is functioning in a healthy manner and making his own in the world."

"Phineas is a fighter, in body and spirit," Dr. Harlow reinforced his own belief. Yet, he could only guess as to how his friend was getting along. He vowed to write Hannah Gage a letter that evening.

Gotham, like the majority of metropolitan areas in the young nation during the Industrial Revolution, was being flooded by citizens from rural villages and newly arrived immigrants seeking, along with fresh starts, their fortunes, or at least steady wages. In Manhattan, construction buzzed like frantic bees on almost every street corner. The era of industrialization coupled with the new means of transport of a rapidly expanding network of canals and railways made it possible to produce building materials on a grander scale and move them over greater distances. Thus, wondrous substances, what would become the backbone of modern cities – iron and steel – played an increasingly important role in society. The old wooden hotels and warehouses, fire hazards galore, stood beside the more modern structures going up, one day to be rendered obsolete by them.

The American Museum's former morose exhibit, a perfect picture of squalidness, whose tattered clothes appeared as worn out as he did, lazing on the stoop of a decrepit wooden building that would have been considered to be about as sturdy as a handful of matchsticks glued together, amid the city's usual sea of rotting debris, Phineas Gage had been reduced to begging for the meager scraps of food required to satisfy his malnutrition. With the lackadaisical energy

of a snail, sympathetic Tamping Iron nestled on his lap, he threw out his wobbly sideshow pitch, "Come see The Only Living Man With a Hole in His Head. See where this bar shot plain through my brain. Ain't no one ever lived to tell my tale. For a dime, you can part my hair, see the hole with your own eyes." There were no takers.

A mysterious stranger stopped in front of the doorstep. Odder still was, that on that warm day, the man was bundled up like it was winter, hoodie and all. He spoke directly to Phineas, "You look like an able bodied man."

"I reckon I am," the desperate attraction answered, glancing up, hardly able to make out the stranger's features with the midday sun flooding his cornea.

"Down on your luck, son?"

"What I need is work, it sets my mind right."

The stranger shoved a piece of paper into Phineas's clammy hand. "Come down to the docks tomorrow, fifteen on the bottom side of noon, Pier Four," he urged the piteous man, then moved on as abruptly as he had arrived.

Phineas studied the message, best he could make out it was some sort of advertisement. Squinting, he read aloud, his choice method to help himself focus of the words, "Stage coach drivers needed in Chile, South America. Good pay. Concord Stage Coach Company hiring." He folded the paper, placed it in his pocket as a shadow enveloped him. Obliquely looking up, having trouble focusing on the silhouette against the zenith of the sun, Phineas recognized...was he having a hallucination? Really losing what had been left of his mind, after

all? For it was a more mature, but no less exquisitely beautiful woman. All the more shocking because Phineas had, except for retention of rail line experiences, purged nearly every memory of his former life.

"Phineas, is that really you?" Elisa, her wavy reddish-brown hair, cropped shorter than in the past, spoke.

"I reckon it's me. But, is my mind playing tricks on my eye?"

Elisa released a whiff of palliation, "Mother and I have traveled to New York for my auntie's sixtieth birthday festivities, special occasion and all. Word in Cavendish is that you been staying here, so I had the notion to inquire passerby if they had seen you, and well, it didn't take long for a kindly gentleman to steer me in this direction. You took off so sudden. I've been worried sick about you."

"I'm just another freak in the big city. Ain't nothing special," Phineas said, appearing unmoved at seeing his one-time girl anew.

"You are special to me, Phineas," the pretty lass, whose hair shimmered in the glow of the sun like royal jewels on a priceless tiara, stated with conviction. "You shouldn't be living like this. Come back to Cavendish."

"I'm headed to Chile South America. Gonna be a stage coach driver," affirmed the man whose life path had been turned in a flash by an unknown person. Whereas some men may have had questions about such a life changing decision (work conditions? wages? housing? why Americans? would there be even be molasses muffins?), Phineas didn't give it a second guess.

"I thought you hated horses."

"Always did. But that changed. Now I like them. Can't explain why

it changed, except maybe they can see the old me and people can't. The iron rod took out the good part, left the bastard in me, I reckon."

"You think you can handle a team of horses?" Elisa asked.

"I reckon."

"They speak Spanish in Chile."

"That would sit fine with me. Won't get into fights with people I can't talk to."

"Phineas, are you sure that traveling all the way to Chile to take a job that you can get here in New York is a good idea?" she argued, not agreeing with the choice her former lover had made, but neither wanting to express it directly to the broken man.

"Feel it's what I should do," Phineas was unswayed.

"If you go, please stay in contact with me."

"I reckon I'll write my mother regular."

"If you don't mind letting her know to expect a letter or two from me," Elisa said with a hint of sorrow.

"I'm sure that would be fine," Phineas said. The sun had shifted its position enough of a degree to allow him to clearly see the face of the lovely person he had been having a conversation with. "I read through some of that book you gave me."

"The poetry book?" Elisa smiled.

"Yes, ma'am. It was right pretty, with all them lakes and butterflies and flowers and all. But I reckon I just couldn't understand much of it."

"Poetry is not everyone's cup of tea. The important thing is, you

gave it a try."

"I did create myself a poem. Ain't sure if I did it like I'm supposed to. I'll tell it to you, if you want."

"I'd be delighted to hear it, Phineas."

"Alrighty," Phineas affirmed. "Those hazel eyes glitter with suns of happy, reminds me of new spikes on the Rutland Burlington, her smile I think of when I'm down, oh Elisa, oh Elisa." With that, though, feeling the pangs of a terrible headache emerging, Phineas flinched, let out a groan.

Elisa was not sure what to do. After an awkward, at least for the simple gal from New England, moment of silence, she said, "Are you all right, Phineas?"

"Don't worry none about me. Get a headache now and then. Doctor said that's to be expected."

"I should be going. Mother is expecting me at the station. You take care of yourself, Phineas." She tearfully gave him a light hug, adding, "The poem is a treasure. Thank you."

Pained, he did his best to maintain a composure to enunciate the final words he would to her, "Elisa, somewhere there's a feller waiting for you. Hell, any guy would be the holder of a might lucky straw be in your company. It just can't be me."

"I know...I know, Phineas." She hurried off from their bittersweet encounter. What she hadn't bothered to mention was that she was already engaged to be married to a wonderful blacksmith named Addison. That would be the final time the two of them, who had so forged a distinctive bond since puberty, would cross paths. Elisa forever held a distinctive sympathetic place in her heart for

Phineas, eventually naming her third born son in his memory.

As soon as she was out of view, Phineas doubled over, repeating to himself a verse he had recently come up with in the dead of a moonless night, one that acted like a salve to help him deal with the discomfit:

"Damn damn devil's ache in my mind  
Go away, back to where you come from  
Damn Damn you left me enough brain to hurt  
but not enough to live  
I banish you out of me."

#### CHAPTER TWENTY

Punctuality – if there was one thing, essential for a railroad man - Phineas had always prided himself on, it was being a good keeper of time. Though he owned no timepiece, he had an innate sense of the passage of time. The few instances that his crews remembered the foreman becoming rankled usually had to do with one of his men showing up late to the job, claiming to have lost track of time. Phineas, his own internal clock just as good as any gold watch, never bought that as an excuse. At 11:40 in the a.m., he hobbled into the harbor area. Possessing no train fare, he had walked the distance of nearly two miles, but he didn't mind, A new adventure, a fresh life, a chance to be around benign horses, awaited.

The docks bustled with the energy of progress. To Phineas, it appeared as if half of the city's inhabitants were nuzzled amongst the many steamers, freighters and substantial fishing vessels that

lined the wharf and it's many piers. He moved in the confusion of porters hauling baggage in what seemed like every direction all at once, fishermen unloading the morning's catch, street vendors hawking drinks, the crush of travelers and roasted chestnuts, herons and seagulls perched atop wooden beams on the lookout for an opportunity to swoop down and snatch a snack from the sea or, deviously, from the angler's stock. The piers did not appear to be numbered. Phineas, only sighted in the one eye, had an even tougher go of trying to make sense of the environment. He awkwardly bumped into a vendor's cart, almost overturning its tray of neatly organized glass bottles of flavored soda water. The melodies of a flute player wafted over them.

"Watch the hell you go, you break it my bottles, you pay them," the angry Greek proprietor snapped. "What the hell wrong you?"

"Four, I need Pier Four," Phineas, who had been feeling dazed from a lack of sleep, managed to get out. The pissed-off beverage impatiently waved an index finger toward the west end. Within minutes, the eager employee was in front of a small wooden stand with a handmade sign that indicated he stood in the correct place. "I'm here for my job," he announced, laying out the notice paper.

A narrow-faced attendant, dressed in a double-breasted brown suit, who stood stooped behind the stand, looked the man up and down. "You are, are you. Name?"

"Phineas Gage."

Making note of the name on a pad of paper, the man, who did not appear to be a week over twenty-one, said, "You ever lead a coach before?"



"No sir, but I like horses. More than people, in fact," Phineas stated as a matter of pride, while staring at a bit of sausage skin the attendant had stuck between two front teeth.

"I got to give you an examination."

"Oh, I had some of those in school. Of course, I dropped out on count of my father..."

"Not that kind, you damn fool. The physical kind. How's your health, you tire easily?"

"No sir. I worked on the Rutland and Burlington Railroad long time. Before they made me supervisor. You can't be the tiring kind to do that kind of work."

"How's your eyesight?"

"Fine, with what I got," Phineas said, not bothering to elaborate.

"How many fingers I holding up?"

"Two."

The "herder", who, like the mysterious stranger who canvassed the streets for coach men, was what the man Phineas was dealing with was known as in the trade. He earned a commission for every body he got on a ship. He was no doctor – if a body was standing upright and drawing breath, it passed the "physical", few, if any questions asked. "You pass. Here," he stamped and handed Phineas a document.

"See that there vessel over that way?" the attendant nodded.

Phineas glanced in the direction of the many ships anchored in the harbor. "I see lots of 'em. If you mean that white one with the fancy blue flag, yeah, I reckon that's a real nice boat."

"That one." he icily stuck a finger out. "The brown one. The

freighter. You ain't going to Chile on no damn Cunard."

Following instructions, Phineas was, moments later, ambling up the ship's gangplank. A crew member asked to see his paper, and, inspecting it, satisfied, let him board.

The fresh batch of rugged coach men, roughly thirty in all, were stashed away in a below deck holding area until the twelve-hundred ton vessel launched. To bide their time, they smoked, told bawdy jokes and played cards – activities they would occupy themselves with for the majority of the fourteen day journey. Phineas kept to himself, wishing he was holed up with horses instead. The men were boarded in the steerage compartment – the most crowded, unsanitary and miserable section of the ship, the porthole-less chambers so narrow that there was just enough room for a stool to stand between the edge of the two-foot wide berth and the wallmere closets.

The day after launch, though the ocean that day was as smooth as glass, seasickness overtook Phineas, who had never been on anything more than a paddleboat on a lake with Elisa, like the hail of a Vermont winter storm. The meager amount of food in his system didn't stay down for long. Many of the passengers experienced the same gastrointestinal fate. To make matters worse, the ship was a "side-wheeler", which had the two oversize paddles on each side to propel the ship. However, in lack of any consideration for the third class passengers, the steerage area was located where the motion of the sea and the constant thudding of the paddles were most apparent, thereby giving Phineas a more serious case of insomnia than usually held his hand at nights.

The fifth day of sailing, the unpleasant odor of thirty men crammed together in so compact a space with no adequate plumbing and no baths to be obtained, began to have the men referring to their lodgings as "the shithouse." Even though they had the run of the entire ship, the berths were where they slumbered. The group of brutes decided that they would, as the decks were being washed in the early morning, come dressed for the occasion for an impromptu cleansing. Every coach hire would go, no one exempt. Phineas may not have had much left in the plane of Earthly existence, but one thing he hadn't lost was his dignity. And, he'd be damned if he was going to let the boatswain hose him down as if he were a mooing, snorting, oinking livestock pulled from its barn. From that nightfall hence, Phineas spent the voyage deep in the dark cargo hold, his only bedding planks of dank cedar. Except for the familiar scent of tobacco, what the goods were, he did not know, nor care. He would sneak out to the mess hall for its soupy, tasteless grub once a day, limited appetite he entertained, when he figured it was slowest, right before closing, then slip back into his own crucially needed solitude. If he was found out, the Captain would likely drop him at the next port, perhaps toss him overboard, for all he knew. No one, however, invaded his space. Not a soul on board noticed he had vanished. That was the way he preferred it.

The ninth day on a stormy sea, shortly after leaving a supply docking at the port of Caracas, another intense headache gripped the solitary man. Slumped on the cold hardwood floor, rolling back and forth against sacks of cargo labeled "grains", Phineas aimed his Iron at his cheek, where it had went in so long ago, and groaned out his

pain, trying in vain to keep the volume down. He growled:

"Damn damn devil's ache in my mind  
Go away, back to where you come from  
Damn Damn you left me enough brain to hurt  
but not enough to live  
I banish you out of me."

Juan, stage coach manager of the Concord Stage Coach Company office/station in Valparaiso, a former driver bumped up to dispatcher/overseer of that branch, handed over papers and maps to the fresh arrival who stood before him. "The first trip, you'll get half pay. Keep your eyes open. You'll ride behind Chappy. Marteen speaks both Spanish and English. He'll explain everything."

"Yes, sir." Phineas replied, adorning the pair of threadbare boots that accompanied him on the afternoon of the injury, digging them into the dirt floor of the rustic, stucco building.

"Now I don't know nothing 'bout you. Most hombres come down here, trouble followed 'em. If it didn't, you'll find plenty here. Stage coaches are easy dinero for banditos. If you coach gets stopped, we don't want no dead man riding the reins. Hand over what they want." Juan gave his standard orientation speech to all new drivers. The job demanded toughness, but also common sense.

"Yes, sir," the new employee said, not really listening to what he had been told, instead listening to the sweet sound of the neighing horses outside.

"The most important cargo we got is the passengers. If we lose

'em, we go out of business," Juan clarified as men attired in dusty clothes went about their labor - arriving, departing, barking orders amongst each other, as carriages come and go at this busy location. "Understand, amigo?"

"Understand."

Juan, who had been riding horses even before he could walk, lit up a fat cigar. He cautioned, "The coach you're on is worth more than a dozen horses. It's got wheels made of pure steel and oak. You can ride over anything. If you crash it, you're fired. If you're drunk, you're fired. If you shoot off your pistol for no reason, you're fired. If you steal, you're fired. If you steal a horse, you're hung. If you manhandle the whores, you're shot, usually by the whore. That's all I got to say about that."

"Yes, sir."

"And don't be talking to the passengers," the boss admonished. "You'll have your hands full enough with what you're doing."

"I ain't too sociable," Phineas admitted the truth.

"Good. Keep it that way." Juan blew a ring off smoke in Phineas's direction. "You wonder why we bring Americanos to Chile?"

"No, sir, I wasn't wondering."

Juan chuckled. "You have good humor. Hombres down here respect the Americanos. The way you fight off the Indians, how you conquered your western lands. Americanos, how do you say, take no shit. Chile also fights with Peru now. Many of our hombres fight, they think it's their honor to do. So, we're also short of good strong men here."

"I ain't never fought no Indians," Phineas observed.

Juan laughed with gusto. "Not yet, amigo."

The roads, little more than wide dirt trails that zig-zagged over the mountain passes and scenic countryside leading out of Valparaiso, the main stopover for vessels crossing between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, a city that had gained significance supporting the mad stampede to the California Gold Rush, which still attracted strike-it-rich dreamers from all nationalities – would have been considered primitive even by Vermont standards. The carriage that speeded along was a hulking monster, a buckboard twelve feet, wheelbase similar in length, wheels of a shoulder height, the firm springs giving passengers a smooth ride inside, but on top, the riders swayed in spite of the newly installed coils.

Phineas held on the suitcases and trunks that he sat on. Beside, the coach driver, a man with muscular arms developed over years in the occupation, grasped the four reins in each hand, eye lens converged on the trail ahead.

"You see his foot, always on the brake," Marteen, a petite man who sat shotgun, spoke over his shoulder as loud as he could so as to be heard above the wailing of the wind in their ears.

Phineas studied it. "I reckon."

"The other brake," Marteen, who had married at sixteen and had five young children at home, continued, "it is on his left side. Every muscle in your body will hurt the first time you drive a team." He pointed to the Tamping Iron. "What did you bring that for?"

"Bad luck."

"You'll find plenty of that. He-yah!"

The trainee flew back as the coach hit a big rock in their path.

Congressmen from all the New England states convened in Boston's Old South Meeting House for their bi-annual bipartisan assembly to discuss pending legislation, exchange ideas and mingle. Dr. Harlow, his beard taking on a salt and pepper shade, always tirelessly pressing the legislative flesh in his quest for better health regulations, was a familiar sight to the attendees. The tension between the northern and southern states was getting more contentious, few men doubting that a spark at any moment could ignite the tinderbox into an out of control blaze. This was ominously demonstrated, when on May 22, 1856, a member of the house of Representatives entered the Senate chamber and savagely beat a senator into unconsciousness. Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts antislavery Republican, addressed the Senate on the explosive issue of whether Kansas should be admitted as a slave state or a free state. He identified two principle culprits – two Democratic senators most accountable for the "crime against Kansas" – and characterized them as "not a proper model for an American senator", the other as taking "a mistress, who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him, though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight – I mean, the harlot, Slavery." Such blasphemous speech did not sit well with Representative Preston Brooks, South Carolina Democrat, who proceeded, after the Senate had adjourned for the day, to enter the chamber, slamming his metal-topped onto the unsuspecting Sumner's head, striking him viciously and repeatedly. The victim survived. Overnight, both men became heroes in their respective regions.

"War is inevitable," Congressman James G. Hatfield (Republican, New Hampshire) said.

"As is the outcome," Congressman C.J. Patch (Democrat, Rhode Island) uttered, a stout supporter of the Union.

"The only question is, how long it will last. What do you think, Dr. Harlow?" Patch wanted to know.

Dr. Harlow was flattered when such important political matters were put to him. It was one thing to be asked by the lawmakers how best to treat a bruised arm or a sore throat, but to be solicited his opinions on pressing government matters made him truly feel a sense of belonging. He had a ready response. "I believe that war is like surgery."

"How so?" Hatfield said.

"No matter how quickly the war is won, or how exact the surgery, the greater battle is how well we recover." The medicine man's mind wandered. For his medical training included studying battle injuries, the damage that a man can inflict upon another man, the marvelously sickening technologies of killing and maiming, of rendering a man limbless in the most effective way possible, of snuffing the life force out of an enemy en masse – with the goal of developing means to help the victims. It was a cat-and-mouse proposition, most physicians were well aware, the cutting-edge treatments they would come up with soon to be overtaken by new and improved methods of the war machine. His thoughts flashed back to the daguerreotypes he had viewed of men who had had arms blow off as if frail twigs, the holes that had been blown in their guts so big it seemed buggies could be driven straight



through them, the rotting corpses stacked up like driftwood. Upon the reflection, he gently said, "Survival, in itself, is no guarantee that it was a pleasant victory over death."

The sound of squirted metal echoed between the mountains of the pass, the distinctive sound leaving its calling card. Regrettably for Phineas, the bullets were aimed at his coach. Now a seasoned driver, in which he felt that his "mind was set right" with the steady work, even with periodic visitations from the migraines, Phineas drove the teams hard, never spoke to the passengers and was content enough. He had been informed by Marteen that a confrontation with the banditos, for any driver who had been on the job long enough, was inevitable. For Phineas, that day had arrived. He let up on the reins, signaled the equine team to go faster, as their carriage sped by a clump of sauced up criminals. "You think a bullet in my head can kill me?" he ducked as he shouted back, holding his always present Tamping Iron up, in his fist, defiantly. "Not if this won't." Inside the carriage, the travelers cowered in fear.

Passengers having safely disembarked at the Concord Stage Coach station, Phineas, as part of his responsibilities, guided his horses inside the barn and its dozens of stables for the evening. Juan, having been briefed by the coach assistant, a teenager named Jorge, whom Phineas spoke to as little as he did to the passengers, on the day's events, tailed the driver. "If you know the rules, why do you no atop and give them what they want?" the manager said lividly.

Phineas kept about his work, the boss's words barely registering with him.

"I want to know, why you not give the banditos what they want?", Juan repeated.

"Don't like people."

"You were lucky this time."

Phineas unbridled the horses, animals he considered friends. "Luck is something you don't know nothing about."

"I know about running a stage line and I know about hombres who drive for me and how they got to follow my rules," he fumed. "Can't go and get the customers killed. Word get 'round real fast. Soon, there be no more customers. One more time, you'll be packing up your things, Gage." As he hurried out, he muttered, "Ornery bastard." Juan desired to can him right there and then, but the reality was that Phineas was a good driver, he had no one to replace him.

Leading the last of his horses into the large stall, big enough for each team to occupy, feast on their steady diet of hay, and rest, Phineas, like a bolt of lightning, a furnace of fiery torment in his head that caused him to double over. He fell onto the ground. In seconds, he was experiencing full seizures, convulsing and spitting foam – a development that did not bode well for the future.

"I shall be fine, dear," Charlotte tried to reassure her concerned husband.

"The thought does not sit well with me," Dr. Harlow insisted.

"Police Chief Coburn said he would have an officer on patrol all evening. You need not worry. You must not cancel your engagement."

Traveling south on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Dr. Harlow

was having second thoughts about taking the trip down to the nation's capital. He recalled their conversation that morning over breakfast. A week prior, in the middle of the night, a goon, or goons, had thrown hefty rocks at the Harlow household, shattering the first floor windows. The vandalism terrified both residents. The couple was personally persuaded by Police Chief Daniel J. Coburn, whose ten year old daughter had been treated successfully by the physician for a bout of the measles, that he would stop at nothing to locate the culprits and personally guarantee their safety. As the locomotive made a stop at the Hartford station, Dr. Harlow recalled more of the conversation with his beloved.

Charlotte, wracked with guilt, said, "Oh dear, oh dear, I just know I am to blame. It is my activities that are responsible. My darling, I have dragged you into the muck."

"No such thing. Do not forget, Charlotte, I too have been active on the woman's suffrage front."

"Why is it that women are considered so second-class citizens?"

"Why is it that a nation built on the presumption that all men are created equal so holds four million of them in bondage?" Dr. Harlow mused. "I suspect that once that issue is resolved, though it appears with each passing day, only by armed conflict, the rights of women will be rightfully addressed."

"John, you have labored months to get the bill prepared for Congress. To neglect your appointment with the Public Health Commission in the Capital on account of a scattering of smashed glass panes, well, that would be impairing to many more than myself."

Only after Charlotte gave word that she would stay with close

friend, Elsie, that evening, did Dr. Harlow feel at ease. His spouse could be stubborn at times, but he loved her all the more for that trait. No sooner had he arrived in the District of Columbia on that fateful date of June 1, 1857, than the glum event had unfolded that would prevent the doctor's scheduled meeting from being held.

A variety of "political clubs" (in reality, what were little more than street gangs) with colorful names as the Plug Uglies and the Rip Raps, descended from Baltimore on the seat of government. The rowdies arrived to assist local politicians in controlling the polls on municipal election days. When word got out that they had arrived, different factions with competing agendas began to riot. President James Buchanan called out United States Marines from the Navy Yard to quell the fighting. At one of the polls, the Marines clashed with citizens. They opened fire. A curfew was enacted, the city going into a lockdown.

Dining alone in a cafe, mere blocks from the violence, Dr. Harlow found it hard to comprehend what was taking place when the sound of gunfire, bodies clashing and total chaos blanketed the usually impregnable city. Mid-meal of a sumptuous roast, he dropped his fork and, without consideration of his own security, dashed to the grisly scene. Identifying himself as a doctor, he went immediately to work. Ten men lie dead, shot down in cold blood, numerous others wounded. Marines, in their neatly pressed blue uniforms, stood by, doing nothing to help.

"Call for any assistance available," Dr. Harlow, kneeling beside a badly hurt citizen who laboriously breathed, demanded of a Marine.

"My orders are to stay here," the baby-faced soldier unpityingly

replied.

Nothing ticked off the doctor more than a human being – if such a person could indeed be referred to as a human being – who so callously stood by while another person suffered. He spewed, “To hell with your drafted orders. These men need doctors, ambulances, care off the reel.” Gunfire rang out in what sounded like mere hundreds of yards distant. “Who is your commanding officer? I want to speak with him.” The Marine remained a statue. Dr. Harlow had begun to treat the man, who was sprawled on the ground, convulsing intensely due to a nasty head wound. The injury appeared eerily skin to Phineas's, the result a 13mm musket, not a wayward tool. “I won't let you die,” Dr. Harlow made the promise. The harmed man came out of his fits, just long enough to look his physician in the eye.

Lying on his back, Phineas watched the head of a horse that, in its curious nature, nuzzled her nose to his face to sniff. Phineas took the head of the obedient horse in his hand and studied it. “What use is a man with a hole in his head?” he asked of it. No answer was forthcoming.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE  
1868  
Boston, Massachusetts

The hulking iron horse chugged into its depot, miraculously, on time, considering the standardized time system of four time zones for the United States would not be adopted until 1883. The locomotive's squeaking brakes signaled to the riders that they would shortly be de-boarding. With the growth spurt in travel by train, the depot had been recently updated, taking on a modernistic appearance, comparable to grand stations of forward-looking cities like London, New York and Paris.

Disembarking with the mass of fellow passengers, Dr. Harlow, who still had had to journey on three different rail lines to arrive at his destination, carried his hat box and satchel as a porter pushed his trunk on a rolling cart. Boarding a waiting carriage to go directly to Harvard University's Massachusetts Medical College without bothering to stop at home to greet the Mrs. after his sustained absence (knowing her increasingly busy schedule, she was probably well occupied just the same), Dr. Harlow, precious cargo in hand, after tipping the driver a half-dollar, sprightly ascended its steps. Since he had relocated to Beantown, the Medical College had become a well acquainted friend, where the Vermont native spent

copious amounts of time attending lectures, making use of the research labs and hobnobbing with colleagues. Once inside the medical hall, he headed directly for the lecture hall. This visit felt different from all others, a vibe that pulsed with mission. Dr. Harlow pulled the skull from the hatbox, more than worth its weight in precious metals to him, slowly placed it on the front table. From his satchel, he removed the Tamping Iron, using it to point at the cranium. "At last, the skeptic shall become the student."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO  
Chile  
1858

Concord Stage coaches, the first one built thirty-one years prior, were supported on leather strap braces holding up the body of the carriage, which served as shock absorbing springs. Some, like the one Phineas led, were equipped with compact wood stoves inside to provide essential warmth in winter months. Most drivers understood that the real profits for the stage coach concerns were made from the contracts for carrying money between bank branches and delivering the mails. Post Office contracts demanded regular schedules, and hence, became a reliable service for travelers. This attracted men of a certain character trait – the robbers who saw stages as easy pickings with scant risk. Using a network of paid informants to alert them as to when a stagecoach had a shipment of cash payrolls, gold or rich passengers, the thieves became folk heroes – the John Dillingers of their era – to the impoverished folks that constituted the majority of the populace. None was more widely admired or feared than Rattlesnake Jake, a reference to the trademark boots he always



sported. Jake, an outlaw of forgettable size, and his outlaw gang, riding muscular stallions, operated with impunity for years throughout South America, was all business. They were in it to get rich, and wouldn't hesitate to resort to murder if that's what needed to be done. Leaving a coach without a damn healthy score was not in the cards for them. None of that mattered to Phineas on that dry late spring day. He was driving his team of horses, beginning that morning at the Valparaiso station, making a pit stop along the way for the relief of his horses, to be swapped out with a fresh team, with the planned final destination the southern city of Puerto Montt, a town settled by German immigrants, many of them well-off.

The roads in that remote outpost of the country were as rough as one continent-wide strip of sandpaper. The seats were unpadded and in spite of the leather strap braces under the stage coach giving it a swinging motion instead of the jolting up and down of a spring suspension, the riders innards were rattled. More than one experience a motion sickness that would rival any born on the high seas. As the carriage rounded a rather impressive set of boulders, Rattlesnake Jake and his merry gang, who had been hiding, pounced, firing warning shots in the air that would have halted any sensible coach driver in his tracks. Not so Phineas Gage. Whether the advice of his boss ever popped into his consciousness, no one would know for sure.

Reacting instantaneously, slapping the reins for all they were worth, Phineas let out a "Damn bastards!", the team of skitterish four-legged engines kicking it up a notch, as if they were also aware of the danger that lurked so nearby. The Gang gave chase across the

vast wilderness, riding to intercept their slippery prey. The passengers, perched on three unpadded bench seats, squeezed into a space of sixteen inches apiece, mail pouches tucked beneath their feet, screamed as they were tossed around the cramped inside space like rag dolls. Up on top, pimple-faced Jorge dropped down to lie on top of the bags. Phineas pushed the team of horses ever faster.

The coach, gunfire zinging in all direction, barely negotiated the road, its impressive wooden wheels becoming locked in furrows cut from recent heavy rains. Yet, the driver pushed the coach onward. "Death don't scare me none!" he said in a tone way too calm for the jeopardizing situation.

Rattlesnake Jake, his double-wide mustache flapping up and down in the wind, was having a hell of a time. To him, the chase was just as good as the catch. With his fearsome reputation what it was, most drivers would simply stop on cue, hands high in the air, willing to hand over the bounty without a word. The legendary outlaw was salivating at the chance to see what type of fool would try and outrun him.

Kiliero Pass, better known to people in the region as Dead Man's Curve, was one of the passes that, because of its thin switchback trails, was extremely treacherous. Passengers – males, never females – were sometimes compelled to walk to help push coaches uphill or when the coach had to be lightened to keep its downhill velocity from becoming precariously dangerous. Swooping down the mountain range, the fully loaded coach barely navigated a tight corner.

"Senor Gage, we go too fast," Jorge breathed heavily, gripping onto the luggage for dear life.

"Shut up, I'm in charge," Phineas snapped back. There was no arguing with him when he set his mind to a course of action.

After another hairpin turn, the speeding carriage hit a boulder on the trail's side, causing it to go airborne, an unnatural awkward bird without wings. Within seconds, its two left wheels, touching back to Earth, hit a rut in the ground; suddenly the vehicle flipped halfway on its side, but righted itself as its chauffeur was thrown off into the dirt. Without a driver, reins dangling loose, the stage quickly ceased movement. High pitched shrieks of well-bred women permeated the air. The bandits' horses surrounded them, pistols fired into the air. Rattlesnake Jake, his serpent boots somehow managing to stay spit-shine clean throughout the ordeal, cackled. His men followed suit.

Shocked but conscious, Phineas staggered to his wobbly feet to notice the bandits encircling the stage – the coach he had become protective, even possessive, of. On long runs, when passengers would spend the night in one of the company owned cozy coaching inns along the route, Phineas always had preferred to sleep in his cramped carriage. He ran toward the predators, disobeying one of the posted rules in the coach for passenger behavior: Gentlemen must refrain from the use of rough language in the presence of ladies and children. He raged, "Bastards! Damn you shitasses."

The wayfarers, who were given an orientation prior to their journey, did as they had been instructed to do in the event such a situation should arise. That is, if they valued their lives more than their worldly assets. The men and women threw their valuables onto

the dirt, creating a glittering carpet of jewelry, watches, cuff links, silver, precious stones and gold coins.

Rattlesnake Jake, the shell of a grownup with the beating heart of a youth, who clearly enjoyed the indulgence that accompanied his chosen profession, said in a neighborly fashion, "My amigos, you make me proud with your fine donations. A show of generosity that would warm my mother's heart, if she were alive." His cohorts laughed at the thin humor. A jackrabbit scuttled in the distance, oblivious to the human drama being played out.

"Dang scalawags, I'll make dead meat out of you all," Phineas blurted.

"Shut up you fool," Heinrich, an immigrant traveler of advanced years, advised.

"You can't fight eight of them," Ignacio, sole Peruvian on board, who had been journeying for business (land speculation) chimed in.

Phineas, brandishing his iron, not able to make any kind of rational judgement, moved swiftly towards his adversaries, a butterfly soaring on the wind of hatred. "I'll make dead meat of you."

None of the desperadoes made a move, confident in the fact that their fingers rested snugly on their triggers of their weapons. Before the crazed hero got close enough to cause any real trouble or get himself shot, he stopped dead in his tracks. For a moment, Phineas stared at the terrified passengers and armed robbers. Then, just as rapidly, he dropped to the foul ground in a strong spell of convulsions. The men with the dark hearts guffawed grotesquely as they witnessed the coach leader flip and squirm like a salmon out of

water, the acorn trinket his mother had sent him (forever certain of it's magical powers) falling from his coat pocket, spit turning to foam around his mouth. The coach customers recoiled in horror as they watched the carcass that had lost all control over itself resemble a dying animal in the dirt.

Jake nods to one of his henchmen. The ruthless subordinate tramped over and kicked Phineas in the back. Another bandito, Gerardo, one who proved that being a merciless felon and a God-fearing soul were not mutually exclusive, scared that Lucifer had taken hold of the sick driver, kissed the cross that adorned his necklace. "Jesucristo es el Salvador."

Jake, who only worshiped spoils of the trade and fancy footwear, wasn't about to make an exit without making sure he wiped the linings clean of all. He shouted, "Give! Or we kill!" Gang members methodically ripped apart the luggage.

The paroxysm of the coach driver had lasted longer, in a more intense manner, than any other that had come before it. As a bunch of travelers "found" additional booty hidden amongst their persons, the seizure that had gripped Phineas slowly subsided. Lying on his side, sweaty, panting through foam, his good eye barely focused on his patrons that were being robbed. As a final insult, the lawbreakers all walked past, spitting on him. His vision blurred in and out of blackness. Phineas Gage would never again guide a coach.

### CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

On the seesawing motion of the open ocean, a seasick traveler hung over the railing, losing his lunch in a succession of heaving. Phineas had not taken to sea travel any better than in the past. With no possibilities of further coach employment in Chile, and sensing that the acute seizures would soon seal his fate, the one time rail foreman decided it was time to go be with family. His mother, sister and brother-in-law, an agreeable sort of fellow who practiced law, had relocated (mostly due to David Shattuck's profession) to San

Francisco. Hannah had been delighted with her new digs, smitten with the moderate climate. The voyage would be shorter on that return trip by four days, but that was no consolation. Having spent the very last of his meager savings for passage to California, Phineas spent a good portion of his days resting on his bunk in the claustrophobic third class section of the ship, Tamping Iron nestled beside him.

"Ain't never seen nobody so seasick in my life," one tobacco-chewing Canadian sailor commented to another.

"How long he been asleep?" the other sailor, a Chilean man who was traveling to the United States to seek his fortune, asked.

Between spewing mouthfuls of black juice onto the deck, the Canadian answered, "Three days now, except for meals and the crapper."

"Let's hope it ain't the catching kind of sickness."

"Why does he always carry that iron around with him?"

"Maybe he's got a stash of gold he's protecting."

"He don't look like he's got two nickels to rub together," the Canadian sneered.

On a clear Friday morning, the steamer docked in the bay of largest city west of the Mississippi River. The wharves, extending out into the sea, resembled small cities crowded with shops, wagons, horses, carts, miners and merchants. Phineas had never been so relieved to step foot on solid ground. He vowed that he had taken his last sea journey.

David had offered, Hannah had written in a letter that had arrived after her son's departure from the Southern Hemisphere, to

send transportation. For the best, since Phineas likely had had enough of any association with buggies. He had an address, one committed to memory, located in Rincon Hill, south of Market Street. Passing a book shop, he noticed a map of the city posted to a wall inside. Ducking in, pretending to be in the market for a good read, his useful eye studied the chart. He wandered nearly three hours, mouth dry, the taste of salty ocean air stuck on his tongue. He did not know San Francisco was so damn hilly. Pride prevented him from stopping to rest or ask a kindly merchant for a cup of refreshment. When he found the handsome house with the number 117 painted on the side, he summoned what was left of his strength to bang on the front door.

A pleasant-looking woman in her mid-thirties opened the door to greet him, her smile fading as concern overtook her. Phebe was saddened at the sight of the weak brother she had not laid eyes upon for so long. "Phineas," was all that poured out of her mouth.

"I'm all right," her brother sickly uttered.

"No, you're not," she responded, then called out, "David!"

"Just seasick," Phineas clutched the doorknob, possibly the only thing keeping his body upright. "Never took well to sailing the ocean."

David appeared at the doorway to gingerly assist their newly arrived relative into the abode.

"MOTHER!" Phebe called upstairs into the house.

Phineas staggered back, dropping his iron partner. David kindly placed it back into his brother-in-law's hand, but the visitor is too weak to hold it. It drops out again. It is left, at least



temporarily, on the porch.

In the parlor, a perspiring Phineas panted for breath as he was helped to lie down on the decoratively-patterned sofa. Phebe, loving sister that she was, stroked her brother's cheek and requested of her husband, "David, dear, get me some water and cloth to clean him."

From the top story of the comfortable home, a familiar woman's voice rang out, her excitement palpable. "Phineas? Is that my Phineas? Oh Lord! Oh Lord!" Hannah descended the stairs quickly – a little too quickly in her exuberance – she tripped and almost fell, but recovered enough to dive to her knees alongside the sofa. "Phineas. Oh Phineas. My son." She kissed, hugged and petted his wasps-nest jumble of hair. "I knew today was going to bring something good. Last night, I dreamed of a white cat. Can only mean one thing, you know."

"We thought you died," Phebe said, tears welling up.

"We haven't heard from you for months," his mother fretted. "Oh, you are so sick."

Phineas was unmoved. "Bad voyage. Never took well to sailing the ocean. I'll get better."

David rushed in with clean wet rags. Hannah took them from him, immediately positioning one on her son's forehead. "Make some weak tea for him," she instructed her son-in-law. He went to the kitchen to do so. Phineas shook so hard in his feverish state that Hannah wept.

That initial evening of Phineas's reunion with his family, surrounded by an assortment of memories his mother had accumulated –

framed daguerreotypes of family and friends, drawings her children had done early in their lives, wedding china, hand carved dolls her daughter had played with, her son's baby teeth saved and beaded, her late spouses favorite work shoes – Hannah sat beside him, wiping his forehead down with cloths. At two in the a.m., Phebe, worried about her parent's mental state of mind, said, "Momma, go get some rest. I'll watch over him." Hannah, weak from fatigue, feebly tottered to her bed, a talisman secured to the wall overhead, just in case any evil spirits had the wrong intentions of coming around.

Hannah busied herself preparing her favorite meal of the day. Though she had drifted off to sleep in the middle of the night, she rose promptly at her usual waking time, sans alarm, of seven-thirty. As she cut fresh melon, picked from the local farmer's market, Phebe helped Phineas sit at the eating table, where delectable goodies awaited. "Glad to get back to some good American cooking," Phineas said in a voice stronger than the one he had possessed the previous nightfall.

Pouring her son a mug of freshly brewed tea, Hannah said, "Now that you're back where you belong, you'll get right. You been away far too long. God only knows the way you been mistreating your body." She situated her body next to his. "Don't push. You always push too hard and too fast. Take your time. Even the good Lord enjoyed a rest after he created Heaven and Earth. You're very sick, Phineas. Treat every day like it's a blessing."

"I want to work," Phineas replied, weakly feeding himself.

Phebe picked up a warm biscuit. "You don't have to prove anything

to anyone."

"Got nothing to do with it," the newcomer suddenly lashed out, causing his loved ones to cringe a bit. He continued, "I like to work! I'm good at it. Let a man do what a man can do!" The outburst sapped Phineas's store of energy; he struggled for breath to keep going, ironically that helped him to calm down. Noticing the concerned look on the faces of his kin, he offered an olive branch, "I'm sorry. I'm...I'm difficult to be around, I know. Animals is the only ones who can stand me. But, but I'm...I won't hurt hurt nobody. Except myself."

Hannah, under any circumstance, would never feel detestation toward her offspring. She expressed in a no-nonsense manner, "Phineas, you are my son and I love you. I always will."

"I know, mother," Phineas said faintly.

Phineas made himself at home, taking over an extra bedroom upstairs. It had been painted a bright shade of yellow. Phineas never bothered to ask the reason why. David, whom had met his wife at a dance when he was visiting a mate in Proctorsville, had, upon completion of his law apprenticeship, become a one-third partner in a law firm in the Mission District. He hadn't really desired to leave his upstate New York hometown of Rochester, but his two partners, long term friends both, convinced him otherwise. With the gold rush in full swing and the recent discovery of the Comstock Lode silver mine in Virginia City, one of the most abundant strikes in history, backed by many San Francisco investors, meant rivers of currency, new

suppliers and a fresh wave of immigrants into the bursting-at-the-seams metropolis. Lawyers were needed to help sort out innumerable claim disputes, land conflicts and business trade issues. It was too good an opportunity to pass up.

Blessed with a caring heart, David put his relative to work lending a helping hand in the office. Delivering legal papers to court, copying documents, taking messages, picking up lunch for the busy partners, were all in a day's work for Phineas. David and Phebe both strongly agreed that their relative would be best served by keeping busy. Hannah at first disagreed, but came around to their way of thinking when she saw her son's health improving, save for the occasional seizure (which the family physician, Dr. Jonas Winslow, declared he could do nothing about). When a convulsive episode came on, Phineas bravely rode out the pangs of distress, always with a loved one by his side.

During a spring-has-arrived block party, Phineas discovered that it was not animals who were the only ones who could stand his company - kids took to a shine to him as well. Between bites of a roast, Phineas, who stood in a corner solo, was asked by Noah, a clever eight year-old, "what's the deal with that metal thing you got?" The stranger hadn't had any desire to attend such a get together, but his family insisted it would be good for him - and the homemade food would be irresistible. Phineas mumbled an answer, "Rod went through my brain."

"No way!" the lad's grin widened.

Phineas, whose impolite experiences with youths in the past

twelve years included being taunted, mocked and the repetition of the word "freak", was intrigued when a child showed a genuine interest in him, and of course, his iron significant other. "Yeah, this here rod was shot through my head, took out chunk of my brain." He made a gesture demonstrating the trajectory of the iron.

"Neato!" Noah said so wide-eyed that it attracted the attention of the various other neighborhood children, who gravitated toward him. "Wow! Did it hurt?"

"I reckon it stung a bit. But no, didn't hurt much."

The boy, whom, with his prominent front teeth, smooth complexion and deep-set blue eyes, resembled a young Billy the Kid, spilled the beans to his friends. "Hey, this man had this here metal bar ruin his brain."

As if being drawn to the Pied Piper, the juveniles surrounded their new friend. "Mister, do you really have no more brain?" one gapped-tooth lass naively asked.

"I still got a brain, it's just got a hole in it."

In a collective gasp of respectful eewws, the kids grabbed at the Tamping Iron, to touch the object capable of an act their unworldly minds could barely comprehend. Phineas, always so possessive of his companion, didn't seem to mind.

Frederick, a pudgy ten-year-old redhead, his belly nearly bursting out of his shirt, asked, "how did it happen?"

And, right there and then, Phineas, who for so long had kept his distance from society, from normal everyday human interactions, let the tale of that fateful day and the injury pore forth, in as graphic detail as possible. The kids ate it up, listening to the injured

newcomer as if he were the greatest storyteller in the world. Hannah and Phebe, rolling their eyes, would smile at each other while they observed from the parlor.

From that day forth, children, in ever increasing flocks, would stop by house number 117 to hear the splendid adventures of "the man with half his brain" (as Phineas became known to the munchkins). Animated, always with iron in hand, he would hold court, keeping his innocent mates spellbound. He regaled them with tales of experiences in South America, intuitively punctuating – often embellishing – elements of danger at a critical juncture, always leaving them wanting for more as they were called home for chores or supper. "Six horses, charging down the mountain like a locomotive," he recounted, "The reins in my left hand, my iron in my right. 'Stop or we'll shoot!' them bandits yell at me. I hold up my iron. Bang! Bang!" He flashed his iron about. "Zing! Zing! The bullets hit the iron and fly off to the rocks." Phineas, in a masterful performance, stood tall, "I shout, 'I'm Phineas Gage, and if this here iron can't kill me, no bullet can!'" The underage audience invariably would cheer.

Sundays after church services, it became a routine of David's to unwind by chopping wood. Most men likely considered lazing around in a hammock or on a sofa a far superior method of relaxation, but Phebe's husband enjoyed the physical workout that he had no time for during the week. Besides, the family needed the wood as fuel for the fireplace. No matter what the season, evenings in San Francisco remained on the chilly side. On one flawless May noon, Phineas picked

up the freshly cut pieces to carry them inside. David kept occupied splitting the next log when he was startled by a scream. It sounded like his wife's, yowling "DAVID!" He dropped his ax, sprinted into the house. Rushing in, David stopped dead in his tracks when he viewed his brother-in-law suffering a horrifyingly violent seizure. His initial thought was, luckily Hannah was not home to bear witness. His second thought was, best to send Phineas's sister to summon Dr. Winslow without delay.

Ninety minutes later, Phineas, groggily lying on his stomach, rested in bed. Dr. Winslow, originally from the State of Indiana, tended to the patient by placing leeches on his back. Phebe wiped down her brother's brow with a damp cloth. When finished, Dr. Winslow stepped aside to pack his bag. "Prognosis, doctor?" David whispered.

The doctor led him out of the bedroom. "Spasms are of a very serious nature," he said. "Haven't quite seen anything like it, you know."

"But, you do think he'll be all right, Doctor?" David optimistically asked.

"I heard something recently. Exactly where escapes me now, but fascinating just the same. That we – by we, I mean, mankind, scientists, human beings, the whole lot – know more about what is under the sea than we do how the human brain works. A scary notion, if you think about it. Phineas has come through the other attacks. I suspect he will with this one as well. I will check back tomorrow. Good day, David."

"Thank you, Doctor." David went back into the bedroom to comfort his wife.

Four days later, Phineas appeared to have recovered. Against his family's wishes, he had gone to work in David's office. He had been taken out to lunch by his brother-in-law to a favorite restaurant, Tadich Grill. Phineas ate heartily, enjoying beef ribs, a food he had recently developed a taste for. Before retiring for the evening, at nine and a half o'clock, the men of the house sat down in the parlor to play the game that was rapidly gaining in popularity – chess. David had even belonged to a local chess club, one that counted men from all walks of life as members. Though Phineas had no apperception of the contest, David was stunned by how fast he had become a whiz at it. While most people took extended durations to acclimate themselves to the amusement's various rules and regulations, Phineas only needed to have them explained to him once.

"I must say, my good boy, you have taken to this as none I have seen?" David said more in frustration as he stood to lose yet another bout to the man who seemed to anticipate his every strategic move. "What's your secret?"

"I reckon I don't have no secret."

"I hardly explained the rules of the game to you," his opponent said, as he moved a bishop. "It takes years to master chess."

Phineas counter shifted a queen. "Don't know. See them little figures and in my brain I just kind of know where they should go."

"I'd sure like to get you down to the club," David said as he pondered his next move. "Teach the guys down there a lesson or two in humility. Some of them act like they invented chess."



Phineas twitched. He tried to stutter out a sentence, but only got out, "I...I...I..." David did not notice until, in a dead-fish-out-water fluttering about, the distressed man knocked the chess board, with all it's many wooden game pieces, to the ground.

David took notice. "Phineas...Phineas?"

Another violent seizure gripped Phineas, who in his convulsions fell down, noisily echoed the sharp pangs of misery. Hannah came running down the stairway. "No, no, dear Lord no," she wept into her son-in-law's shoulders.

"Hannah, I'm going to call for Dr. Winslow. He'll know what to do," David gently said. "Should I wake Phebe?"

The woman, her soul wounded as she watched her only son suffering so terribly, nodded her head up and down. David kissed her on the cheek and sprinted up the steps to wake his wife.

In the same year as a former attorney named Abraham Lincoln would be elected sixteenth president of the United States and organized baseball would first be played in the city where he would inhale his final breath, The Only Living Man With A Hole in His Head would loose the battle he had been fighting for twelve years.

On May 21, 1860, two months shy of his thirty-eighth birthday, at 5:00 in the P.M., as his doting family looked on helplessly, Phineas grunted, drooled and frothed at the mouth, limbs uncontrollably twitched and jerked (why the doctor had secured him with cable), teeth clenched, bladder control was lost, breathing was temporarily halted and he exhibited wild mood swings of sudden anger then laughter. Phebe cried hysterically as her husband held her snugly.

Hannah appeared unusually, admirably, calm.

The attending physician had administered the aid he had trained to do in such dire situations – the cushioning of the head, loosening of any clothing, especially around the neck area, the turning of the person on his side so that if vomiting occurred, it was not inhaled into the lungs – all to no avail. Dr. Winslow, considered one of the foggy city's finest healers – boldly attempted to pry the Tamping Iron from the patient's fist, but it was an impossible task with Phineas's continuously firm grip, despite the spasms. Dr. Winslow had noticed something else, never a good sign, and one he hadn't dared mention – the odor of decay, like a blend of milk and disinfectant gone sour.

10:12 P.M., the Tamping Iron fell out of the bed, rolling into a dusty corner, emancipated from its handler at last. Dr. Winslow, as a formality, checked for a non-existent pulse on the stationary body. The part he most dreaded about his profession, he turned to the family members, "I'm sorry." Nothing more needed to be said.

Phebe was inconsolable. David, knowing he needed to be a pillar of support, hugged her. Hannah remained calm. Had she expected the death of her son? Was she in too much shock to show any emotion?

The physician delicately said, to David, "Shall I make arrangements?"

"Arrangements shall not be made until I say so," the parent of the deceased finally spoke.

"Mrs. Gage, I realize what a difficult time this is for you," the Doctor uttered.

Focusing her steely gaze on her son, Hannah asserted, "I'm not stupid. I hear stories about the people who were laid to rest before they supposed to be. Like that poor young girl few years back whose family thought she passed from diphtheria and they went and stuck her in a masoleum. Then, a few years later when their son died and they opened that tomb, the girl's skeleton was found on the floor just behind the door. That ain't happening to my darling Phineas. We'll wait a spell."

Dr. Winslow was not surprised at what he had heard. There was a universal fear in that era of being buried alive. Even George Washington had ordered his servants to allow his corpse to remain in bed for three days, to be jabbed with needles to verify his death before being laid to rest. He simply said, "If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to let me know." He left the grieving relatives.

Four days hence, with Hannah sufficiently satisfied as to her son's fate, in a simple ceremony officated by her priest and attended only by the family, Phineas was interred in the Laurel Hill Cemetery. The tears shed by his mother could have watered every plant in the city.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR  
October, 1867  
Boston

Residing in a grand manor in Boston's desirable Beacon Hill, within sight of the Massachusetts State House, and home to friends the Oliver Wendall Holmes, both Sr. and Jr., Dr. Harlow was embodying the existence of a distinguished physician and blooming politician. Yet, for all his success, he had remained the same humble country doctor he had been as a young man in Vermont. He tended to patients, no matter what their economic situation, no matter how trivial or serious the injury.

On this special autumn night, Charlotte's birthday, her husband had a lovely evening planned – dinner at a favorite eatery followed by a romantic carriage ride. Whilst Dr. Harlow was not a nostalgic person – holidays, anniversaries, birthdays – these were always occasion for him to think about the passage of time, reflect on life and how quickly it all passed by. Sometimes, when he had viewed

himself in a mirror, he had to pinch himself and ponder, "Am I *really* forty-nine years of sge?"

Walking into the expansive library/repository, the wing of the domicile he was most proud of, which housed a collection of medical reference tomes to rival the most prestigious university, Dr. Harlow sat in his favorite cushioned reading chair. There was nothing special about the seat, except for the fact that its contour fit the healer's derriere perfectly. He had spare moments as Charlotte readied herself. He browsed the shelves for a book to read in the meantime; however, he decided, he simply wasn't in the reading mood. He opened a cabinet that contained bundles of files stuffed with medical papers (he had been meaning to get more organized, but, with his hectic schedule and all, never did seem to fulfill the task), detailed reports, notes, scribblings that he had written down on his cases through the years. Randomly, he glanced at a few of the contents, then, almost instinctively, reached below those top papers to pull out the drawings of a long gone acquaintance. A sad smile crossed his face as a piece of correspondence falls from his hand. He picked the wayward aged letter, one that had been written by Hannah Gage, up to read its contents.

"John dear, I am prepared," Charlotte called out from the foyer.

Dr. Harlow placed the letter down with a respect that might be afforded a fine jewel, before heading downstairs. He had lost touch with Phineas's mother, having last received word shortly before she had relocated to California. Odd, he mulled. She was well about keeping in touch, updating him as to Phineas's whereabouts and

health. But, he realized, he hadn't been too tenacious on his end (with his hectic schedule and all).

Upon returning home at midnight, the well respected man marched straight to the library, parked himself at his walnut desk, picked up his quill. Charlotte, who was used to falling asleep with a vacant space at her side instead of the flesh of her mate, but not on her special day, commented, "John, what is the urgency?"

With a gleaming smile, he responded as he wrote, "Need to compose a quick letter. If I don't do so at present, it will accompany me during my dreams. Be right in, my dear."

"Really?" Charlotte huffed as she turned to leave.

Dr. Harlow vigilantly scrawled, "Dear Mrs. Gage. It has been some time since we corresponded, therefore excuse my intrusion if this brings you any sorrow. Throughout all of my medical career, no person has so intrigued me and moved me more than your son, Phineas. Your last letter to me mentioned his move to Chile. In the time since, has he stayed in touch? Has he remained in Chile? My wishes are with you that Phineas has stayed healthy in body and mind and has found a peace within himself and with the universe. I will keep this letter of a brief nature and await (hopeful) a return from you. Farewell. Have a blessed day." The letter was folded and addressed, to placed in the mail first thing in the morning.

Twenty-four days later, on a Saturday, as he arrived home from a particularly overlong day, which had included a protracted meeting with a local congressman whom he had considered as dumb as a brick, Dr. Harlow was pleased to find correspondence awaiting him, much more

so when he noticed the San Francisco postmark. He sat on the front deck, anxiously reading, "Dr. Harlow, much gratitude for your recent correspondence. Knowing I have been slack in my writing, please accept my remorse. The lonely life of the stage coach fit Phineas rightly. He said so in his letters. He entertained us with the most fabulous recitals of his wonderful feats and hairbreadth escapes. But he refused to tell me of his fits, which became more violent. By the time he reached my house in San Francisco, the doctors said he was beyond help. He had fits almost every week, until one day, the Lord reached down to take him from his painful days. My dear Phineas passed on to a more peaceful life on May 21, 1860. As for me, I am enjoying life in San Franscisco with my daughter and her husband. I can't say I mind the mild weather. Blessedly, Hannah Gage." Dr. Harlow could not help but shed a quiet tear.

Preparing their traditional after-church Sunday brunch, Charlotte felt her husband's pensive vibe. "What is it that consumes you, John?"

"Phineas's passing," he released a sigh of weariness. "So long ago, I was not aware. How did that fact escape me?"

"You must not blame yourself," Charlotte said as she brewed the tea and mixed the oatmeal.

"I reflect on what good may have been achieved by...by procuring certain items." Dr. Harlow twirled his fork.

"May those certain items happen to be a skull and an iron?"

"If I had been on top of the situation..." Dr. Harlow put his head down.

Charlotte had rarely seen her spouse in so depressed a state, not since his own mother had passed on four years prior. Forever the optimist, she suggested, "Perhaps a remedy is at hand. Perhaps Mrs. Gage would, for the good of all of medicine, allow her son's body to be examined."

"That is asking too much of a woman who has lost her only son," Dr. Harlow argued.

"From what you have informed me of Mrs. Gage, she is a sound woman, a woman who would see the merit in how her son's experiences could help humanity." Charlotte sat beside him.

"I wouldn't even know how to broach such a request of Mrs. Gage," Dr. Harlow, the eyes of an innocent sleep-derived puppy, raised his head to look at his significant other.

"The direct way is always the best way. I remember, after the presentation you made at the medical conference not long after Mr. Gage's injury, you said you weren't concerned for your own ego. Your concern was how the findings and conclusions on the injury, which you personally observed and reported, could help masses of people with a variety of sickness. If there is any hope of such help, then you must, for the good of humanity and of all medicine, make the inquiry of Mrs. Gage. The worst she could do is say no." Charlotte stood up and abruptly left.

To where, Dr. Harlow did not know nor question. With the inviting sumptuous odor of a meal resting under his jaw, he hadn't had any appetite. He stared into the porridge, the blob of white most hypnotizing. Glimpsing at his spoon, a strange event occurred – the utensil morphed into a tamping iron, the level handle becoming the



flat end of the rod, the shallow bowl the pointed part. The hallucination continued as the lumps of oatmeal distorted into chunks of brain matter. It all seemed so real. Was it a sign that the physician, with his never-ending commitments, had been laboring too hard or possibly suffering a nervous breakdown? In the dreamscape, Dr. Harlow was transported back to a clear-skied autumn day in 1848, the simple life of a young country doctor, uttering the words to a gravely ill patient, "No Phineas. Fight them. Fight them like the Devil himself...If you must take him, take him with dignity and peace."

No sooner had his wife walked in and plopped down a fountain pen and letter writing paper under his delusion feeling-sorry-for-himself schnoz than he snapped back to reality. Dr. Harlow took the hint, without hesitation penning a letter whose words flowed organically through his fingers. He expressed his belated solace, the wish that he had spent more time with her son, summarized the exciting new advances in the medical field that were taking place, and, most of all, fervently shared the story of James Edward Hanger, a Confederate States Army veteran who, after being struck in the leg by a cannonball, became the first amputee of the Civil War. Deeply dissatisfied with the inadequate prosthesis he had received, Hanger went on to design and manufacture innovative prosthesis for other wounded soldiers, starting the company J.E. Hanger, Inc. in the process. One man who made a lasting difference in the lives of so many. Her child also had a major contribution and awesome legacy to contribute, if only she would agree to the exhumation. He did not

desire to sound pushy or preachy, only laying bare the facts. When done, he kissed his wife, whom he loved more passionately than ever.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE  
December, 1867  
San Francisco

After five days of travel, and four different rail lines, Dr. Harlow at last deboarded the Southern Pacific rail car to view the hills of the San Francisco skyline for the first time. A scenic city, was his initial impression. Fog drenched also, as he had expected. He commissioned a carriage, planning on visiting with Mrs. Gage right

away. It had only taken twelve days to receive a response to his plea. It had come in the form of a wire not from Hannah, but rather her son-in-law, David, who suggested that, should the good doctor ever be in San Francisco, to please make it a point to visit to discuss the proposal further. The good doctor telegraphed back that, by coincidence, he would soon be making a journey to the West Coast. He failed to state the true purpose of the sojourn.

When the buggy, led by a horse that looked remarkably like Jefferson, arrived at the house numbered 117, Dr. Harlow tipped the driver, instructing him to wait, and, satchel in hand, wearing a determined expression, lightly knocked on the front door. A woman, older and more frail than when he last saw her, but still feisty, greeted him in good charm, "Dr. Harlow."

"Please, Mrs. Gage, call me John."

"All right, John," Hannah said, taking her guest's hand, leading him inside to escort him to a sofa. She took his overcoat to place on a brass coat hanger. "My house isn't much for company."

"It's fine. I do not need much, Mrs. Gage."

"A man of government now? And a doctor?," Hannah smiled, her face still as radiant as two decades prior. "I should have tea and cakes. I'm so unprepared. Tea? I can make some."

"No, thank you. I'd like to get right to the point of my visit," Dr. Harlow stated skittishly, anxious to receive an answer for which he had treked so far for.

"Please do," Hannah simply replied.

"Mrs. Gage, I know that this might be difficult for you, but I

pray that you recognize the medical significance of your son's tragic experience."

"Oh yes. I do."

Dr. Harlow was glad to hear that, but wasn't quite sure to what extent she had. He resumed, "The good that Phineas hoped would come from his accident may finally become a reality, but it would require the most unkindly act of exhuming his body from its resting place."

"Oh dear," gasped the parent who had been through so much already, a tinge of uncomfortableness displayed by body language.

Moving in close to her, he sensitively said, "I know it is a ghastly thought, your son being deceased already for so many years. However, Mrs. Gage, if you could hear out my plans, I hope that you might consider this, for the benefit of all mankind."

"Of course, John. If it were any other person, I might object," she loosened up. "You clearly devoted your life to helping him save his. I am willing to listen. Pray go on."

From the satchel, Dr. Harlow removed the now yellowed, but clear, drawings that he had made of his patient so long ago. "Mrs. Gage, these are the sketches I had presented to my colleagues while Phineas was alive, not long after he sustained his injury. I had as well commissioned a cast of his cranium, post accident. In that presentation and an additional one, which your son graciously had agreed to be present at, the conclusions arrived at were the same. The full extent of the injury to the brain could not be verified, in part because the top of the head wound had healed. With a fresh presentation to the medical community and to my peers, which would include the display of Phineas's skull and, of course, Tamping Iron,

the magnitude of damage could be viewed for the first time by all." He was so thrilled at the possibilities as he laid them bare, that he nearly leaped off the sofa. "No practiced healer could deny the facts nor my published findings. More than anything, Phineas wanted to understand his condition, and wanted others to understand it too."

"Yes," Hannah agreed, "I think that the old Phineas would want this as much as the Phineas we had after the accident."

"Your compassion and generosity will never be forgotten in the medical world, Mrs. Gage. Thank you so very much."

Spontaneously, in a burst of emotion, Hannah gave him a hug. The visitor stood, and with the help of his host, put on his overcoat. She said, "David will contact you tomorrow at your hotel to make the arrangements. Sometimes," she grinned, "it is convenient to have a lawyer in the family."

"No doubt," Dr. Harlow's eyes twinkled. "Thank you once again," he said as he walked to the waiting carriage.

Within forty-eight hours, despite the inclement weather, Dr. Harlow, galvanized, found himself standing on the sandy ground with its view of the ocean, in Laurel Hill Cemetery's park-like setting. David had pulled strings to get the legal paperwork expeditiously processed. They would be met there by Judge Johnson and two gravediggers. Dr. Harlow wired his faithful wife the positive news.

"God heals and the doctor takes the fee," Dr. Francis Page quoted Benjamin Franklin, eliciting laughter from the gathering of doctors who awaited the start of the Massachusetts Medical Society conference. Dr. Page, whom so often mentioned his alumni that more than a few doctors over the years began to refer to him simply as Dr. Brown, had built up a reputation as a fine doctor and innovator, especially in the field of antiseptics.

North Grove Street and it's Massachusetts Medical College appeared much as it had a generation earlier. Back then, Dr. John Martyn Harlow had been a wide-eyed optimistic physician determined to make his mark in the world. Twenty years hence, he was eternally that wide-eyed optimistic physician determined to make his mark in the world. The finely attired guests were called into the lecture hall's general seating area. The conference had followed its well worn path of morning section, presided over by George Cheyne Shattuck, current dean of the Massachusetts Medical College (and a founder of the Boston Medical Library), followed by meal break, and finally an afternoon segment that would give the practicing healers an opportunity to present their own research and findings to their peers.

Dr. Page initiated the afternoon section of the symposium with a brilliant presentation on the eminent British surgeon, Dr. Joseph Lister, whom he had recently observed in England, and his cutting-edge techniques in antiseptic surgical methods using carbolic acid to clean wounds and surgical instruments. Though he rubbed more than a few colleagues the wrong way with his pompous attitude, Dr. Page received an ardent response. Dr. Harlow, however, had taken a shine

to the still very much baby-faced physician.

The following speaker, Dr. James T. Chadwick, a rarity in the crowded hall for the fact that he was clean shaven (his wife's insistence), a man approximately the same age as Dr. Harlow, spoke rather eloquently on matters pertaining to war injuries. The memory of the Civil War was freshly seared in the collective consciousness. It was a seldom found physician that had not treated veterans of the horrific conflict. As tragic as it was for both Union and Confederate soldiers, Dr. Chadwick reported on the conflict's valid results finding it's way into medicine, using the example of how doctors were better understanding amputating damaged limbs safely. Concluding with the Hippocrates quote, "War is the only proper school of the surgeon", the smooth-faced medical practitioner proved a skilled speaker.

Then came Dr. Harlow's turn at the podium. He had not previously made public what he had had in mind to present. As a frequent speaker at the conference on a variety of medical subjects, recurrently discussing political battles in his bid to get beneficial health-related legislation passed, many attendees, based upon his track record, should have expected much the same.

Taking a mental stock of the audience, the Vermont native noticed how numerous the mugs leftover from the 1849 debacle were present and accounted for. There were fresh visages sprinkled amongst the customary attendees. With the passing of a handful, including the obese Dr. Kittridge (not shockingly, via cardiac arrest), and the retirement of a skimpy few, the main contingent of physicians had

remained intact.

Positioning the mileage-laden hat box beside him, Dr. Harlow ousted the skull from it's temporary housing, placing it next to the Tamping Iron. Also laid bare on the table, were detailed drawings, many of them approaching their twentieth birthday, and another uninjured cranium. Taking a deep breath, the doctor, feeling more like an athlete who had trained his whole life to arrive at the current moment of truth, began, "I have the pleasure of being able to present to you, today, the history and sequel of a case of severe injury of the head, followed by recovery, which, so far as I know, remains without a parallel in the annals of surgery. The case occurred nearly twenty years ago, in an obscure country town, was attended and reported by an obscure country physician, and was received by the Metropolitan doctors with several grains of caution, insomuch that many utterly refused to believe that the man had risen many eminent surgeons regarding such an occurrence as a physiological impossibility, the appearances presented by the subject being variously explained away."

"Dr. Harlow, this matter has been decided quite some time ago," Dr. Banner, sitting with his arms crossed, said impatiently, proving that his mind had remained stagnant at its same dimensions since 1849. "A man of your standing..."

"Dr. Banner, please," the presenter curtly said. "New evidence to support my claims has become available."

Interrupting, Dr. Grant said, blatantly for all to hear, "Marshall, if you give a man enough rope..."



The thorn in his colleague's side responded with mock graciousness, "Very well. Proceed."

The speaker resumed, "Your grace in allowing me to prove shall improve our understanding of the human brain, how it functions, heals, and decides how we evolve and socialize." Dr. Harlow dispensed, for the ensuing ten-minute block of time, a full description of the injury, detailing, from his extensive journals, treatment rendered as well as sophisticated depiction of the exact physiological consequences of Phineas's injury. The language used was so technical that it was doubtful lay persons would have absorbed much of it. The physician could not help but reference comments written by his friend and mentor, Dr. Henry J. Bigelow, on the case that had been published in the American Journal of Medical Sciences in 1850. So far, so good. Dr. Harlow had the committed attention of his audience. He stood behind the hurt skull. "It has been said, by Dr. Bigelow, and perhaps justly, 'that the leading feature of this case is its improbability'. This may be so, but I trust, after what has been shown you today, that the most skeptical among you have been convinced of its actual occurrence – that it was no Yankee invention, as a distinguished Professor of Surgery in a distant city was pleased to call it. I shall like to invite you all to inspect the real and actual skull, which in itself tells so much of the case that words cannot."

Members of the conference rose to their feet to inspect the pale object. As Dr. Harlow lifted the top cranium off it, the doctors murmured, gasped, clucked and otherwise reacted to the amazing specimen. Most of them, that is. A small cadre of old-timers,

including Dr. Sporeman, who still practiced medicine in Hampshire County, but planned on retiring in the near future, remained on the sidelines, unimpressed.

"John, what is the meaning of this?" Dr. Sporeman pressed. "Had this can of worms not been laid to rest?"

"My good sir," Dr. Harlow unaffectedly stated, "may you refrain comment until the reveal is complete. Please do join us."

As the master of ceremonies clutched the Tamping Iron in his right hand, the Phineas skull in his left, the doubtful physicians coalesced with the others in time to witness Dr. Harlow pass the rod through the head, letting all view where the iron bored through the bone behind the cheek.

"Remarkable!" a first-time attendee, Dr. Alfred Quincy, hailing from the suburb of Peabody, borrowed a favored word from the presenter.

Dr. Harlow resolutely took two large shards of cranium bone from the table, placing them like puzzle pieces inside the skull. "Though I could not see precisely what I was touching through the blood, here I present significant pieces of skull that I pressed into place from within the brain surface itself, as documented in my post operative notes." He proceeded to pass out papers diagramming the deceased patient's braincase, mapped out in zones according to personality traits. Anticipating that his meager amount of original copies would hardly suffice, Dr. Harlow had employed a copy clerk, at great expense, to produce additional duplicates. A grand gesture, for the attendees eagerly studied them. The keen physicians would need to

patiently wait until the traditional period arrived for questioning, towards the finale of the speaker's oratory. "Our current understanding of the brain," Dr. Harlow spoke, "which we call phrenology, divides the brain up into organs, each one representing a different aspect of personality." Pointing to a brain map, he continued, "The organ of Veneration, and the organ of Benevolence, both were stricken and nearly removed by the iron rod. However, if our map of the organs of the human brain are correct, how then did Phineas walk and talk? Dr. Bigelow, as well as myself, believes in the whole brain theory, that every part is connected to the other parts. This recovery supports both. And therefore must be considered for the future of healing."

Acting the role of brilliant salesman, Dr. Harlow, who had his customers sucked in to the reality of what Phineas had experienced, who had allowed them to actually handle "the merchandise" (in this case, skull and iron), was ready to close the sale. Feeling the energy bouncing off the members of the Massachusetts Medical Society on that day exhilarated him, which in a robust cycle, fed his being with more zip, filling the crowd with a larger force, and so on. Dr. Harlow had gone over his allotted time; nobody seemed to notice.

The doctors began to feverishly make their own notes as the speechgiver took, from the table, the undamaged prop skull. He said, "If phrenology indeed decides the functioning of the brain, then Phineas would be dead, or immobile." Dr. Harlow dramatically illustrated his point by simulating the injury via driving the iron through it. "The case has been cited as one of complete recovery, without any impairment to the intellect. His contractors, who

regarded him as the most efficient and capable foreman in their employ previous to his injury, considered the change in his mind so marked that they could not give him his place again. The equilibrium or balance, so to speak, between his intellectual faculties and animal propensities, seems to have been destroyed. He is fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity, which was not previously his custom. In this regard, his mind was changed, so decidedly that his friends and acquaintances said he was "no longer Gage". Mentally the recovery certainly was only partial, his intellectual faculties being decidedly impaired, but not totally lost. They were enfeebled in their manifestations, his mental operations being perfect in kind, but not in degree or quantity. This may perhaps be satisfactorily accounted for in the fact that while the anterior and a part of the middle lobes of the left cerebrum must have been destroyed as to function, its functions suspended, its fellow was left intact, and conducted its operations singly and feebly. It is my hope that this tragic accident that ultimately took Phineas's life, shall reveal a new understanding of the brain, for decades to come. I now open up the floor to questions."

The flurry of questions, both in intensity and in quantity, that were lobbed in his direction was a surprise to Dr. Harlow. What most stunned him, was that the initial queries came from his nemeses. "What of the fissure leading anteriorly through the orbitar plate of the frontal bone?" Dr. Banner quizzed. Almost before the speaker had a chance to complete his response, Dr. Grant, actively practicing well into his eighties, an inspiration to all, asked in a sincere

manner, "What of his great fondness for children, horses and dogs?" The volley came fast and furiously. Questions about physicalities of the case, inquiries about the changed behavior of the patient, grilling about Phineas's time spent in the American Museum, about family history. Spirited discussion grew amongst the audience, clearly with many, but not all, being won over. Even those healers who weren't convinced of the conclusions, had to respect Dr. Harlow in his convictions.

Dr. Harlow, finishing his presentation, said, "I indulge the hope, that surely but little if anything was done to retard the progress of the case, or to interfere with the natural recuperative powers. Nature is certainly greater than art. Some one has wisely said, that vain is learning without wit. So may we say, vain is art without nature. For what surgeon, the most skillful, with all the blandishments of his art, has the world ever known, who could presume to take one of his fellows who has had so formidable a missile hurled through his brain, with a crash, and bring him, without the aid of this vis conservatrix, so that, thereafter, he would have been walking in the streets again? I can only say, in conclusion, I dressed him, God healed him."

Thunderous was the most apt word to describe the applause Dr. Harlow received that afternoon. So moved by the reception was he that his eyes welled up with emotion. He could have gloated with a school-boy vindictiveness. Yes, he could have done that, possibly without reproach. Dr. Harlow, however, was too classy to do so. He was the recipient of so many congratulatory pats on the back, he was sure he would wear the permanent imprint of a hand. Dr. Grant flashed him an

approving wink.

Dr. Banner approached with his hand out. "John, I am not entirely convinced of your conclusions, but...let me just say, sometimes an old dog can learn new tricks."

That evening, the man of the hour would savor the roast he feasted on almost as much as the customary supper with his colleagues. Before the banquet, though, Dr. Harlow would stop by the Western Union office to send a cheery wire to his beloved wife.

Most telling of all, at no point during the whole ordeal, did his brow squirm.

Aware of the importance of the skull and Tamping Iron in his possession, and, after receiving permission from Hannah Gage ("another rather selfless gesture in the name of science", he informed Charlotte), Dr. Harlow donated the most unusual items to the Warren Anatomical Museum, located within Harvard Medical School's Countway Library of Medicine. On the morning the historical objects were placed behind a glass display case, Dr. Harlow was accompanied by Dean Shattuck, Dr. Bigelow, and a delegation of physicians from Boston (including many who had witnessed Dr. Harlow's by then legendary oration).

"John, you must feel quite proud," Dr. Bigelow said after the internment. "A man of your stature who had to wait so long to find closure on the matter."

"Henry, my dear friend, it is Phineas Gage whom I believe has indeed found closure," Dr. Harlow responded.

That silky summer evening, Dr. Harlow, having obtained a key from the dean, entered the tranquil space. He felt a duty to pay a visit in private to his old friend. He sat, alone, in a chair across from the display case, the oil lamp casting ethereal illumination on the earthly remnants of the railroad foreman. In some ways, it seemed so recently he had first become acquainted with the man, upon who spoke the words, "Here's work enough for you, doctor" (an understatement for the ages, Dr. Harlow mused). In other ways, it seemed long ago. Perhaps much in life was perceived in such a manner.

"Where was God on that day?" Dr. Harlow spoke directly to the display case's contents, "I remember you asking. I also am aware, that an educated man is one who has finally discovered that there are some questions to which nobody has the answer. Perhaps, my good Phineas, you have fulfilled the purpose for which you were placed on Earth. Perhaps, it was simply an accident with no deeper meaning than that which it appeared. I choose to believe the former. Wherever you may be, Phineas, I hope you have found the inner peace you had so much desired. You have made a difference, and one I suspect will be felt for many years to come. Your mother, wonderful lady she is, forever will bear my gratitude. As for me, I am considering declaring my candidacy for U.S. Senate seat, representing Massachusetts. I find politics intoxicating, not for the reasons, I suppose, that many do. More than a few politicians I have met appear to like it simply for the power it gives them over people's lives or to enrich themselves. For me, combined with my knowledge of medicine, it is a way to make a profound difference. I do get to do a bit of traveling, and, whenever I board a train or hear a locomotive whistle off in the distance, I

always think of a very brave soul." He stood. "Take care, my friend." As he exited, Dr. Harlow blew out the oil lamp, flooding the space with darkness. Every time the calendar hit September 13, he would pay a visit.

#### EPILOGUE

Dr. Harlow's report was a milestone in the development of modern neurology, the first scientific study of the relation between personality and the function of the front parts of the brain. The case gained prominence when it was referenced by Dr. David Ferrier as part of the first modern theory of frontal lobe function in the 1870's. The Gage case has become a classic case in neurology with a majority of introductory psychology textbooks mentioning the case. Phineas Gage became the most famous patient in the history of neuroscience because his case was the first to show a link between brain injury and personality change. In 1994, two neurobiologists, Hanna and Antonio Damasio, used computer graphics and neural imaging techniques to plot the trajectory of the tamping iron as it shot



through Phineas's brain. The results were published in *Science*, in 1994. They discovered that most of the damage was done to the ventromedial region of the frontal lobes on both sides. The part of the frontal lobes responsible for speech and motor functions was apparently spared, so they concluded that the changes in social behavior observed in Phineas Gage were likely due to this lesion, because the researchers had noticed the same sort of change in other patients with similar lesions, causing a defect in rational decision making and the processing of emotion. "Gage's story was the historical beginnings of the study of the biological basis of behavior," said Antonio Damasio.

The Warren Anatomical Museum on the Harvard Medical School campus continues to house Phineas's skull, tamping iron and a plaster mask of his face made while he was alive, items that have proven to be very popular with visitors.

Dr. John Martyn Harlow gave up his practice in Cavendish in 1857, settling in Woburn, Massachusetts in 1861 to establish a successful medical practice. Elected to the Massachusetts State Senate for the 1885 term, he served as a member of the committees on Education and Metropolitan Drainage and chairman of the Committee on Public Health. He also stayed deeply involved in Woburn's civic affairs, serving on the School Committee and as a trustee of the Woburn Public Library. Dr. Harlow passed away in May, 1907, being called by *The New York Times* "one of the oldest and most prominent physicians and surgeons in New England." He is buried in the Woburn cemetery. Charlotte Harlow died on July 5, 1886.

Dr. Henry J. Bigelow made important contributions to medicine. In

1876, he published a highly influential paper entitled, "A History of the Discovery of Modern Anaesthesia", which helped extend the use of anaesthesia in surgery. Another essay, "Lithotrity by a Single Operation", published in 1878, helped revolutionize the treatment of bladder stones. In addition, Dr. Bigelow described the structure and function of the Y-ligament of the hip joint, which still carries his name. He died at Newton Creek, Massachusetts on October 30, 1890, at the age of 72. He is buried at Mount Auburn Cemetery.

In 2009, a daguerreotype of Phineas Gage, a portrait, was identified – the first likeness of him known to exist. It shows a disfigured but still handsome man with one eye closed, scars clearly visible, holding his iron.

Phineas's remains had been laid to rest in Lone Mountain Cemetery in San Francisco. Created in 1854, the complex of four cemeteries was renamed Laurel Hill in 1864. Until Golden Gate Park was built, its grounds served as a park where families would picnic. By the early part of the Twentieth Century, with pressure on land within the city limits, plus the neglect of the older graveyards, voters decided in favor of moving the site. What was left of Phineas's body was removed, together with the remains of his mother and brother-in-law, on May 17, 1940, through a contract made by the Board of Trustees of the Laurel Hill Cemetery Association with the Cypress Abbey Company of Colma. A total of 35,000 bodies were dug up, taking sixteen months. The remains were placed in storage in the Cypress Abbey Company's mausoleum, pending the construction of the Laurel Hill Association's memorial mausoleum and Pioneers mausoleum in Colma.

Construction of that was delayed by the advent of World War Two in 1941, leading to the bodies being held in Cypress Abbey's mausoleum. On September 24, 1946, Phineas and his mother were placed in vault number 962 of the huge underground facility, marked by the Laurel Hill Mound and the Pioneer Monument atop it – “the final resting place for approximately 35,000 San Francisco pioneers.”

In 1998, 150 years after the accident, the town of Cavendish, Vermont held a medical seminar and festival to honor Phineas Gage. A memorial plaque was dedicated to the man who helped change our understanding of the human brain forever.