

Ann McArdle
from *Harbor the Harborless*

At Out of Town News in the Square, Beatrice stopped and rubbed her hip while she searched the crowds, trying to see past the pedestrians to the doorways beyond. There was quite a group at the entrance to the Harvard Coop. “Could he be over there?” she asked Jingo.

He shook his head.

“In the Yard?” she asked, pointing at the gates to Harvard Yard. She didn’t think they put up with homeless people in there.

Again Jingo shook his head. Beatrice tried not to show her growing exasperation. Now every minute that passed piled on top of all those years. She couldn’t stand more delay.

Jingo started down JFK Street.

Of course, she thought. Gordon must be at the river. He loves the Charles and when he was first back from the war he would walk the Cambridge side from one bridge to the next, then cross to the Boston side and continue to the next bridge, then he’d cross back to Cambridge. Once he told her about the group of homeless men who lived at the foot of the Harvard Bridge. He had said he felt like he knew them.

By the time they reached the river the streetlights had come on and snowflakes filled the air. The gathering of men was rowdy and Beatrice was scared. Her hip was screaming, her toes were numb, one heel was bleeding, and a pain in the small of her back was beginning to radiate down the backs of her thighs. Her right knee buckled and she slumped to the pavement at Jingo’s feet.

“I just can’t walk any more. But we’re so close.” She searched the gang of men but couldn’t see Gordon. “He’s there, isn’t he,” she said.

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“No,” was all Jingo said as he helped her scoot out of the middle of the sidewalk. He sat down beside her on the damp grass, reached into his pocket and pulled out crumpled bits of paper.

Beatrice’s resolve crumbled. She had been silly to get her hopes up, silly to think this man could lead her to Gordon, silly to think, even, that if she found Gordon he would want to come home with her. Oh she was an old fool and she was making a spectacle of herself.

She touched Jingo’s hand. “We can’t sit here,” she said, “but I have to rest.”

Again his eyes focused and he looked coherent.

“Come,” he said and got to his feet. He hoisted her up, keeping one arm around her while they shuffled together downriver, away from the Harvard Bridge.

The next bridge was the Weeks. Beatrice had always loved this one. It was as wide as a road, but designed for foot traffic only. Stone steps on either side were the only access.

Here Jingo led her off the path, down to the water’s edge, and underneath the bridge. He eased her onto a pile of rags and newspapers and covered her with an oily jacket that smelled of cigarettes, dust, and sweat.

She was grateful for the warmth and as her shivering began to subside she watched Jingo. Clearly, this was his home and he seemed to have it to himself. He pulled a rusted barrel away from the wall and dropped in the bits of paper from his pockets. He lit a match and held it to them until they caught and flared. Then one by one he tossed in odd bits of broken branches from a tidy pile against the bridge. He stood warming his hands for a minute while the flames settled down, then he pulled a bottle from his pocket and upended it, taking the last drops into his mouth.

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He stretched out on the pile that was his bed and curled his body around Beatrice. She moved to protest, but he was almost instantly asleep. She closed her eyes. Just a moment's rest was all.