

“Your parents were selfish,” was Milt’s opinion.

He had called the Wednesday after the Lammerville weekend and, following Valerie’s advice, Maureen had him over for lasagna.

“I haven’t had such a good dinner for weeks,” he complimented her and then they walked from her duplex to a bench at Como Lake.

Wondering about his mother’s cooking, Maureen said that she started cooking Italian food in junior high when her mother worked evenings at the library.

“Your parents had four children?” he asked.

“I have a sister and two brothers. I’m the youngest. My brothers were pretty much gone when I was cooking.”

Then Milt appraised her parents as selfish. That stymied her as if he had netted something from the depths of the lake. No one had ever said this and for the moment, he was a hero.

“Of course many adults are selfish. Me, for instance,” Milt laughed.

That made him more valiant. Maureen settled back against his arm and said, “Do you think that people should stay together for the sake of their children?”

Milt’s eyes glinted like the lake. “If everyone made what you did out of a bad situation, this would be a better world. But you couldn’t say it was a good situation, could you?”

Maureen wanted to sit indefinitely in Milt’s good opinion. But he might be the illusion that the city lake was to a swimmer. “If the world’s so bad, then why do you keep traveling in it?” she asked.

“To shake a pattern, I guess, and to form another pattern. Researchers have found that it’s all about patterns. What should I do? Go to medical school? Or enter a graduate program so that I can get paid to talk? So I try to get published, having the gift of gab like my father, afraid of the pattern.”

She didn’t mind being adrift with him, without a definite destination. If Milt made commitments here, he would soon be as confined as a lake within a public park.

“I had insomnia in childhood,” Maureen mentioned. “Does that mean a child of mine would have insomnia?” She was still losing sleep because of him.

“My father would probably give you a pill and regret it later. He’s not the best doctor around, you know. But the question is, what would you do if your child had insomnia and you hadn’t solved yours?”

“My parents didn’t know what to do because they weren’t insomniacs. So do the researchers only talk to people in patterns or do they find people who broke the pattern? Like the teetotaler whose father was an alcoholic? Or the guy whose father beat him up learning restraint?”

“The uncharted,” Milt said in a pleased, older voice. “That’s the goal, breaking a bad pattern. I’ll bet you’ve never met a researcher. I knew there was a reason why I kept calling you.”

She wasn’t configured in the patterns he was in. “I might get divorced like my parents.”

“So they say. So they say.”

“I’d wonder about you but I guess that’s nothing to worry over.”

“Too bad I don’t know.” Milt scratched her thigh. Then he admitted that his attempt to get published in the *Christian Science Monitor* was out of rebelliousness. “I wanted to see my father’s face if *The Monitor* published me. He’s a hard man to see sometimes. It was the article about my train trip in Russia. But I was interested in the common cold and that got me wondering about a country having a national disease in the same way they have literature. *The Monitor* doesn’t like the word *disease*. The Soviet Union has good doctors but they tried to treat the sick or wrong thing about their society with Communism. That broke other patterns, like their pattern of publishing great novelists.”

“That’s like saying that Germany is manic-depressive. They make toys and had a mania for music. But their photography is severe and depressing when they aren’t an impoverished nation.”

Milt laughed at that and then he asked Maureen to go on a trip with him.