The Foundations of the Bowling Alley

A Story by **Glenn Bergen**, *Altona, Manitoba*

A Prefatory Note

Sometime between 1967 and 1968 the building that housed the 5-pin bowling alley in Altona was not demolished, but removed. The hollow corpse of the building was communicated, hauled several blocks away, then renovated and reborn an apartment building. For unstated reasons—presumably nothing more scandalous than declining interest in the sport, the resulting unprofitable business—the pins no longer fell and no one ever broke the local record of 380.

Architecture places these kinds of limits on what we can and cannot do. A designed, ordered space structures our actions; it is built for a specific purpose, to a particular end. An empty space can have the opposite effect; the bare foundation suggests that no one will ever again bowl in Altona. Yet the removal of the structure also opened up new possibilities for action. Over a decade later, the cement floor, the last remaining mark of the bowling alley was quoted verbatim without a citation to make another argument. That is, it was incorporated seamlessly into the main parking lot of the adjacent shopping mall.

I suggest that we read the bowling alley as a preface, a precursor to the continuing desires of a community—expressed here through economic devel-

opment - for convenience, consumption, and more generally, for the urbanization of a rural town. Culture, like the parking lot, is never complete or self-contained. In this way, a rural Mennonite community cannot be entirely itself, regardless of its customary exclusions, its intended distance from the world—boundaries which become particularly tenuous in an age of electronic communication. From economics to fashion, rural culture blends with urban; without much variation, city and country, we can all buy the same brand names, watch the same cable channels and dress in the current style.

A preface sets limits on what it precedes, gives definition to what comes after. An early attempt at bringing the city to the country, the bowling alley anticipated the shopping mall. Only a century earlier, the prairie town which now conveniently accepts transition did not graft so easily onto the newly surveyed landscape. Early difficulties aside, settlement in Western Canada altered and arguably defaced the land, yet the people and the landscape that met and were effected by these new immigrants also helped shape their displaced lives. As in a preface to a work of fiction, historical details can only make vague, reductive gestures towards the whole story. In order to say any one thing other possibilities must be excluded.

By participating in the discourse of Mennonite literature we subject ourselves to another set of limits, definitions, and expectations. Note the reputation which precedes the artist working in this tradition; the tradition has it that he or she writes, often with much justification, to exorcize and expunge a painful, guilty past. But as this voice developed, particularly from the mid-1970s on, it became both popular and easily identifiable; in short, the rage-filled Mennonite artist became something of a stereotype, an expected, available role.

The narrator of "The Foundations of the Bowling Alley" accepts his place in this well-worn tradition. In the collection of stories from which this work is drawn he attempts to play the old role, to remove himself from a rural past and its heavily accented vernacular. Quite intentionally, he chooses the urbane language of literature—more specifically, the language of the 18th-century English novel—as an escape route to the city. The obvious tension results when these lines cannot be maintained, when the past encounters the present and the rural identifies itself with the urban. A world founded on both consumerism and movable type in the end seems as ephemeral—and ineluctable—as the words that describe it.

The Story

> [A shopping centre] appeals instead to a dream of plenitude and of a paradoxically absolute yet expansive self-sufficiency: a country town (if not 'male') paranoia seeking reassurance that nothing is lacking in this one spot.
>
> *Meaghan Morris, "Things to do with shopping centres"*

> The first contingent of Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde immigrants arrived at the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers, near the present-day town of Niverville, on 15 August 1874. Their journey had lasted six weeks. After several days of shopping in Winnipeg, the group returned to the convergence of the rivers.
>
> *Esther Epp-Tiessen,* Altona: The Story of a Prairie Town

The shopping mall, an image of avarice, the hoarding place of society's riches, a contemporary cave of the forty thieves, *over forty shops and services*—for good reason this is the site from which I choose to speak. Deriving from a quest earlier outlined, one of a decidedly personal nature, my prose, so rooted, is intended to emerge from behind my humble autobiographical confines to speak with a broader Public Voice, an intention which you, Discerning Reader, will surely come to identify.

I don't mean to make of this image more than it is. The reader is most certainly familiar with this sight in the suburban landscape, the monolithic fortress with cathedral ceilings and labyrinthine passages lined with wares of all description. By bringing the shopping centre into the realm of well-made and readable narrative, I tend toward an old model: the besieged maiden in the castle tower. In this case, as you'll see, she'll be gone before the construction is complete.

"Oh, god. Get back down to earth." This was the voice of Carrie commenting on an earlier version of this, her story, before she had even told me the ending. "It's not really much of a story—you're already blowing it out of proportion," Carrie protested in her understated way, the characteristic reticence to admit what was already visible,namely, the earnestness, resonance, and obvious centrality of her character. These sensibilities, precipitated by her presence to the surrounding scene, had once attracted my attention, and much before that had prompted all the improbable events which would follow.

"I'm not the only one for whom life meets melodrama," I responded, recalling for her her own bout with theatricality. As she had already told me, Carrie, in her final year of high school, had developed a taste for fabrics which would hang in thick, sculptured folds over the contours of her body. She had periodically appeared in such statuesque poses, at school, and later, on the Main Street sidewalk, mystifying the old men habitually watching traffic from the window of Clae's Restaurant.

She accepted the reminder with visible embarrassment, admitting, "It was all I could think of at the time. Kind of a cheap way to make myself special."

I can still trace—despite her denials—the vestiges of neoclassical beauty in Carrie's face. She no longer tries to make such a spectacle of herself. There really is no need for it, especially considering her employer's strict dress code. But it was through this veil of fortrel slacks and an equally functional permairon shirt that her beauty—the subtle shaping of her arm and the curve of her breast—first struck my eye. At that time, when I stood before her as I ordered a muffin and small coffee (for she was employed to sell such items), my thoughts were as follows: the vision of a medieval sculptor with an eye for the Art of Antiquity, or better yet, the epiphany of a Burne-Jones or Rossetti upon spotting a classical goddess among the London working-class. For them, I seem to recall, big hands were the thing. Carrie's hands are nothing special—in fact, it wasn't physical beauty *per se* that caught my attention; her striking impression was created simply by way of posture, the calculated and practised manner in which she carried herself, a stance which, as was clear to me, represented her intrinsic individualism. She walked with not so much grace as confidence, a posture I identified when, on her coffee-breaks, she strode up to where I sat. Here, at what became our usual location in the food court, at one of the awkwardly arranged tables with built-in seats, the whole structure bolted to the floor, we conversed, or I wrote and she read, often having arrived with reading material under her arm, a book fantastical and futuristic—*Earth Factor X*, or something of that sort.

Before I go any further, I must make explicit my motivations, if for no other reason than to meet the ends of equanimity. I say *equanimity*, owing to the fact that the story told is not the story of the teller—a fact which necessitates that a balance and an understanding be sought between the two, a distinction made.

Having ensured my distance from the remainder of the narrative, at most symbolic of my own experience, I free myself to put forward these details: This story takes its origins from a chance encounter, an instance of an all-too-common crossing-of-paths with an individual who later becomes a principal in the on-going drama of one's existence, if only for a brief, but portentous, time. This was the case with the intriguing and lovely character to whom you, Dedicated Reader, have already been introduced, the beguiling and free-thinking Caroline, or Carrie.

Our first encounter produced in my mind such a malady as will often strike young men of an imaginative temper. The problem arose as follows: I could not get her out of my head. By no means do I want to insinuate with this admission that I was caught up in anything so base as Blind Obsession; the complexity of her character and the limitless depth of her beauty called for more than a superficial fascination, as these immeasurable qualities still do. As such, my interest in her was an all-encompassing absorption in an individual with whom I could identify, around whom I could speak unabashedly, and yet a figure elusive enough to hold rapt, for the time, my attention. This state of mind, this

Romance, as one might call it, ended simply enough at the very instant she told me much more than I ever would have wished to know.

"You shameless shit," Carrie said accusingly, looking up from my manuscript. At these meetings, she would not cease her relentless criticisms, even after I assured her that what she had seen was not a final draft. At the moment she was dwelling on the ease with which I appropriated actual events, twisting them, as she said, to suit my own ends. "Just slap on the *any-resemblance-to-actual-persons-living-or-dead-is-coincidental* clause and go your merry way?"

I replied, as only I could, that what she suggested was my plan exactly. "It's the writer's prerogative and my saving grace," I added as an afterthought. Then half-jokingly, for it wasn't my place to question the origin of someone's name, particularly one changed to suit her own desires, I asked Carrie why she didn't choose Princess Leia instead of Carrie Fisher, "Caroline, Lynne, Leia... It would seem to be a logical progression."

"I just liked the sound of it. Caroline, Carrie. As simple as that. A brighter vowel, a big improvement. Nothing deeper."

Receiving this noncommittal reply, I pressed her further on the issue, and in so doing crossed a self-imposed limitation, a line drawn before I began this project. What I had pledged to do was avoid the annoying inquisitiveness of a persistent journalist; by steering clear of this position, sustain the tone of a sympathetic, ever-compassionate narrator, not stooping to haggle over facts, sources, and motivations as much as possible. In any case, this is when I got out of Carrie the whole story, or at least that part of which concerned itself specifically with her name and the origin and selection thereof.

This is when she filled me in about *Star Wars* with a degree of proficiency in the minutiae of popular culture which I would never have guessed she possessed. "There's this scene, you see, near the end when Mark Hamill—playing Luke Skywalker—gets confused. In character he calls Leia 'Carrie'. The continuity editor missed it completely. Totally hilarious." As she spoke Carrie twisted her fingers through her hair, lifting the dishevelled fistfuls over her ears. Again the unfathomable smile appeared on her lips, her eyelids a little weary, before she concluded, "It's the character mistaken for the real-life actress that really gets me."

On the day of the unveiling, the maiden voyage of her new appearance, Carrie began by remarking that, "Lots of people get their names from movie stars," a train of argument by which, as I am told, she convinced everyone that she had actually been named after Carrie Fisher. She had practiced the stance for weeks, watching herself in the mirror behind the door of her parents' bedroom—her weight concentrated on one firmly planted leg, the other poised lightly to the side. Now not one person realized the obvious anachronism, the historically verifiable fact that her mother had chosen the name *Caroline* at least a decade before the release of *Star Wars* and the first appearance of Ms. Fisher as Princess Leia. To compound the confusion, not one person had been adroit enough to make the simple connection between the futuristic neoclassi-

cism of the science fiction epic and the clearly inspired posture which Carrie had assumed.

"It's Carrie, actually," she replied without hesitation to those who addressed her by her now-discarded Given Name.

"What's the diff?" friends asked, "it's really the same thing," then adding, to complement their puzzled looks, "Why are you standing so funny?"

Teachers repeated their questions with the revision, "Alright, then, *Carrie...*," obliging what they assumed to be adolescent flightiness, insolence, or the following of some obscure fad.

No one would acknowledge the new depth, the all-encompassing change in Carrie—her posture and clothes, her new-found self-confidence, and, the most radical change which had already begun to take effect, the unmistakable glow radiating from her once-plain complexion. Perhaps this, the most striking revision, was the hardest to accept. A young woman could change her clothes, even buoy up her emotions with positive thinking, or more likely by a pleasant turn of events—but flesh remade into spirit, a once average-looking girl with a countenance resembling the finest of sculptures, was too much to be believed. Perhaps this is why no one had let on their unsurpassed astonishment.

Of course the entire town knew of the suspicious circumstances of her birth, and, being the eminent gossips they were, suspected the worst. The small facts of their unexplained whispers, condescending gazes, and the unbearably slow service from the drug store cashier only intensified the isolation Carrie already felt—her distance from the city, the inadequacies of the prairie town, and the terrible compulsion to remain within those bounds. To make matters worse, surely she and I were the last to be let in on the secret. It was a haggard, old woman who lived in the Altona Units, a woman Carrie had always known as her Grandmother, who spilled the beans at the mention of my name.

She is my sister. That's the long and the short of it. Anyone would take such a revelation with surprise, even shock; it gave me pause, but that was all. How should I be implicated by actions over which I had no control, by a forgotten, grafted, gnarled branch of the Recksiedler family tree, and by a similarly twisted Miscalculation of Fate, the consequences of which were hidden from my sight? As for Carrie, having already lived the entirety of her life without this knowledge, its late introduction seemed, aside from a brief, understandable outburst, to have made little change in her routine. Having absolved myself of any guilt in the matter, I find it nonetheless symbolic that she who was unknown to me has become, for all intents and purposes, the fountain-head of this story, the source of it all. Again, in the interests of equanimity, this is merely background information. Just so you know with whom you're dealing.

"It's the same deal, your standard case of mistaken identity," Carrie told me, nodding her head, as if I should agree without hesitation. In light of the strange coincidence, our obscured familial connection, Carrie suggested that her relationship with me was just another version of what had already

happened. "Either you're Boba Fett or Luke Skywalker," she persisted in her argument, "I can't decide." It was clear to me that the subtle circularity of her youthful experiences perpetuated their influence. I told her this.

Carrie ignored my comment, unwarrantedly, bringing me further into her guilty circle. "You'd probably look good in one of those old suits," she added, patting my shoulders like she was taking measurements.

She eventually gave up her accusing tone when I admonished her for implicating me in the ill will she had once felt. I asked Carrie, rhetorically, whether I had ever done anything to harm her, for I was certainly not part of her story, one of that number who had tried to isolate her, take away her autonomy, as she seemed to imply. My story was not dependent on hers, and in return, I was not about to be dressed up as a model of her unpleasant memories.

Gliding up to the doors of the Post Office, Carrie, in her new dress, passed a family friend, a Mr. R—, whom she greeted with her brighter-than-usual smile. At that hour of the afternoon the Post Office was the meeting place for all manner of local residents; her presence there was unavoidable—as duty dictated, weekdays after school Carrie was expected to pick up her Grandmother's mail.

"I see you're sporting a new look, young Miss Giesbrecht," he replied, unobservant of more than cosmetic, superficial concerns.

It was a local businessman, a few steps behind Mr. R—, who perceived her revamped form as a disturbing foreignness, alien to what might be expected. He looked Carrie in the eye as he approached, displaying a wry half-smile, as was expected behaviour in the familiarity of the small town. If he would have followed through on these expectations he should have turned away at the appropriate moment, just before offering a greeting, so as not to acknowledge her presence too fully, thus encouraging arrogance and pride. Instead, the respectable gentleman's gaze remained on Carrie as she passed, even to the point of requiring him to turn his head to watch her enter the Post Office doors. It was he who later began the murmurings which became the widespread criticism of Carrie's New Look, what was horribly misinterpreted, and commonly labelled, her specious appearance, her over-stretching of propriety; she was called a show-off, a city-slicker in the making—terms which would resurface only a day later at a meeting of the Altona and District Chamber of Commerce. Her demure, saintly expression, equated with the cosmopolitan world of the Big City, would shake fear into the hearts of community leaders and local politicians.

"As we can see, the temptations of the world, the city, are so great that our children are moving away from town before they finish High School. Not in body, but moving away in their heads." So read the minutes, dated Monday, June 24, 1985. As recorded, one Mr. F—, our previously mentioned businessman, had stated the problem precisely in a question, "If this trend isn't stopped, who will be left for our future?" This pointed comment brought to the table the matter of local young people, their loyalty to the area, and incentives for them

to stay, a discussion which periodically returned to the recent transformation of our protagonist, Carrie.

The meeting closed with the general agreement that something had better be done about these encroaching foreign sensibilities.

"Find a way to tame their rebellious spirits."

"We've got to nip this in the bud before it gets out of hand."

These suggestions became a final motion, the last order of the evening, accepted with an immediate and unanimous response, which proposed that a series of special meetings be arranged to deal specifically with this unique and urgent issue. And hence, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the Reeve, the Mayor, and Councillors from both the Rural Municipality and Town alike would fume, scheme, debate, and plan during Monday evening meetings at the Red Carpet Restaurant for fourteen straight weeks, beginning in July, 1985. What initiatives, they would ask, could keep the young people whose minds—indeed their very souls—were set on higher goals, from leaving a community which could admittedly offer few of the luxuries and extravagancies provided by city living, such as movie theatres, roller rinks and chain restaurants with all-you-can-eat menus?

"Those assholes," she revealed, meaning *the community of her birth*, "turned me into whatever they wanted to see." Though a mere misinterpretation of style had started everything, Carrie tried to assure me that her choice of wardrobe was no rebellious gesture. "I was just trying something different," she suggested.

Upon uttering these words she had not yet realized the special something which sets apart the true individual. Her surface features were indeed an unconscious expression of a beautiful soul. In short, it was by way of style that Carrie aspired, however inadvertently, to bestow her physical form with the exquisite garments and delicate expression which would lift her body from the murky, dun-coloured world of small-town Manitoba.

"You know for yourself I'm no fashion model," interjected our protagonist. As I had come to expect, Carrie again expressed without hesitation her reservations about my manuscript, particularly with respect to my characterization of her as a shining symbol of purity, a damsel beset by *Plautdietsch* dragons. "Nope... *no*. It wasn't like *that*." To these protests I responded, glibly, I'll admit, that she should let her hair down, not get so defensive about a story.

"You're quite demanding for a character who has already selected her own name," I added.

This is the history of a long mistake, this which I unfurl before your eyes. Imagine a detailed time-line, a fold-out chart, which, upon close analysis repeats itself, swallows up its own progression in self-consuming vainglory. That's the lesson: that which goes nowhere has kept going for far too long. I hope it is not too bold of me to say, I am the free-spirit escaped from such a strain of endless repression. What I speak of is exactly what I've left behind.

The summer of Carrie's transformation was in no need of another extraordinary and important event; yet for some reason it was then that young people, teenagers, obliged themselves to add to the confusion. They forwent their accepted clothing, some quite stylish and up-to-date in its own right, and began wearing what can best be described as Old Order Amish, dark clothing, staunchly cut and fastened with hooks and eyes instead of buttons and zippers.

The story went that the local thrift store had received a surplus of these dreary suits, enough to fill all available hangers and racks, while many more, a tincture of age lending them a delicate tinge of green, remained in storage. Nor were matching hats in short supply. From this storehouse came an unprecedented stench of mothballs, mingled with an age-old smell, the stale, fading remnants of body odour radiating from the arm-pits and crotches of so many heavy wool jackets and pants. The medicinal smell of a grandparent's washroom, a collage of Raleigh products, Wonder Oil and greasy-smelling salve, led this olfactory assault.

The strange shift in youth style, a phenomenon not uncommon in rural areas, was, for once, accepted graciously by most parents and community leaders. A question was nonetheless raised over coffee at the Valley Grill whether these costumes, comparable to the dress of American sects, were actually a good influence on the youth of the community? A retired farmer, lifting the brim of his cap, readied himself to express the fears of many of those present. "Where is the connection to our own Russian-Mennonite heritage?" he wondered aloud.

This doubt was silenced by a voice of reason from among those present, the voice of a pastor from one of eleven local churches: "The clothes which we identify as Amish," he mentioned, "are in actuality, through a strict adherence to biblical principles and an adamant refusal to be swayed by worldly fashions, the authentic dress of a seventeenth-century European farmer. This knowledge," the pastor concluded, "should allow us to see the movement among our young people as a highly intuitive return to roots deeper than even we generally acknowledge." His authoritative words reassured those who had once doubted, a feeling which pervaded the entire community when the style of the dark suits spread from town to the farm youth themselves.

In no time it was all the rage for those between the ages of fourteen and eighteen to purchase an Amish-style suit which they would wear, understandably, religiously, even under the infernal July sun. Hearing this part of the story, I expected that a style observed with this scrupulousness and attention to detail must have had consequences—surely this costuming reflected changing attitudes, a new commitment to traditional ways. It came as no surprise when Carrie intimated as much. "All the kids started bad-mouthing me, calling me *weltlijch* or something. Then telling me to put on a suit.

"They totally picked up on this look—a parental thing—when they started dressing-up." With this introduction, Carrie took on an age-old expression, one which I must confess momentarily returned me to a purposely misplaced

souvenir, a memory of guilt. It was this disheartening face, ingrained in the memory of a culture, which I had seen countless times worn by people of like background, though separated by years and geography, a face which transmits exasperation, disappointment, and the expectation of contrition with a clarity far surpassing the most powerful of radio stations. It went like this: a ponderous inhalation, followed by a downward glance, an optional blink, all of which wound up to a final, knock-out look of consternation. I was taken aback for but a moment, when I realized that Carrie was merely impersonating those who had once opposed her.

"I didn't think you had it in you," I said.

It would be safe to assume that for weeks community leaders had been masked in the same troubled expressions. Meeting endlessly, the Special Committee on Economic Development continued to take its bearings from the image of the speciously-cosmopolitan young woman in the midst of their town.

"I've heard she thinks she's in a movie," a Mr. F— reported.

In the space of a month, a general agreement had been reached that, in order to keep the youth at home, they would have to be kept satisfied. "We've got to bring what they want right here," said Mr. J—, tapping his index finger on the table. "What we need," he continued, raising himself slightly out of his chair, "is a shopping centre."

A rural councillors, Mr. H—, appealed to rural sensibilities. "Why should we encourage them to come to town? Maybe the problem will take care of itself. These kids know what's right."

As was clear to all those present, he was referring to the newly-sprouting conservatism, the farmer-style of dress among a growing number of young people.

Our Mr. J—, not to be outdone, responded that, "Unless we go to town on a shopping centre, there won't be anybody left on the farm."

The social division between town and country, the bane of any rural community, and bar to all social progress, left the question of the encroaching city unanswered. And so the next editorial page of the *Red River Valley Echo* took up the cause of human progress, heralding the new spirit of united efforts of local businessmen and their determination to revamp the town's shopping district. The shopping centre plan was called *a big surge forward* for the cultural and economic development of the area, the fruits of the spirit of financial cooperation. To further excite public interest, the paper reported that the plan for the mall even involved a bowling alley, making the site into a self-contained shopping and entertainment complex. Suitably, the chosen land included a property which had held an earlier version of a local bowling alley. Long since demolished, the foundations of this forgotten structure remained, and one day would become incorporated verbatim into the new parking lot.

As fantastical as these developments may seem to you, Gentle Reader, do not let them distract you from the greater aims of this narrative. Keep prominent in your thoughts the illustrative nature of this tale, that this almost

implausible reality speaks of experiences greater than merely those of the protagonist, however extraordinary she may be in her own right.

With these cautions in mind we return to that now distant time and place to see the lovely Carrie that late-August evening enjoying her after-supper walk. Her pronounced steps would have displayed more gaiety and sprightliness than usual as they brought her nearer the parking lot of the Co-op Store where, to her surprise, she beheld a gathering of those in dark suits. Our heroine's battery was certainly levelled at those who contested her actions; though, I believe, she herself scarce yet knew her own intention; but if she had any design of spurring her antagonists on, she now succeeded.

The dissemblers had been awaiting her arrival, surrounding her now in a collective motion which produced a curious scene, the image of which can only be described as poetic, an image which reduces the necessity of my explicatory intrusion. "Change from your dress of vanity," they called out to her, "and put on the suit of goodness."

A few specifics say it all: the homogeneity of the suited-ones, the marked contrast of the *many* to the *one*, a contrast which served to accent the resplendent face in the centre, itself highlighted by the glowing diaphanous gown worn by our heroine. Clearly, Carrie was up against an entire lineage of domineering fathers, of silent guilt in all its varieties, and a measureless contempt for all things corporeal. By extension, this symbolism implied an endless succession of Progressive Conservative re-elections, unscrupulous business practices by supposed church members, unchecked use of soil-destroying fertilizers, along with any number of related vices sanctioned by tradition. The whole lot there assembled were no exception. For the time being they exhibited the precise, but anachronistic, image of their fathers.

Harsh words echoed their severe countenances. "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you," they could be heard saying in voices growing raspy with a shortness of breath commonly associated with old age. They spoke words once forgotten, *ootreeme, schacht jäwe*. At this signal, many of the suited-ones pulled forth from hidden folds and inside pockets all varieties of the implements and devices of discipline, most popularly, leather belts, hair-brushes, and wooden spoons. Again words of admonishment arose from between strained breaths, "We don't want to have to do this," and less mercifully, "but you're not too old for it yet."

A country-gospel group was, at that very moment, setting up their sound system behind the Credit Union. Their presence downtown on a Friday night was a regular occurrence, common knowledge to which several of those in dark suits appeared oblivious, watching suspiciously as microphone stands were adjusted. On this evening alone, it was said, the group omitted its standard meditation which detailed the Workings of The Lord *and* The Way to Salvation, an omission made with respect to the particularly pious appearance of those assembled. Instead, the guitarist, likewise dressed in Sunday-best, announced that cassette copies of their music would be available for purchase

after the performance, then turned to count off four down-beats with his right hand to bring the group into their first number.

The patient, black cloud of perturbation, all the walled-up energy, the force of tradition, admonition, chastisement, gentle correction, all the removed belts, the unsparing rods; all of this held back as they awaited Carrie's repentance from her worldly ways.

"Lord Vaders," Carrie addressed this stern-faced bunch quite matter-of-factly, "I'll never reveal to you the location of the Rebel Base." Despite her strength of will to humour them and the determination with which she spoke, those in the back of the quietly watching crowd could not hear her pointed words because of the relentless strains of amplified music.

Those who had heard Carrie's words reacted with stifled laughter at her ill-timed quotation, a phrase which fit the mood of the moment less than Carrie herself blended into the crowd. The bewildered faces of the suited-ones who had missed the daring joke shifted back to their now standard stern expressions. They wasted no time condemning foolish grins. Tempers rose and jostling forearms reinforced verbal barbs. All pacifistic ideals were forgotten as clenched fists emerged from the long sleeves of ill-fitting suits. The violence unleashed in the struggle that followed only dissipated after several of those involved experienced an unremitting flow of blood from noses duly served with severe blows.

No mention of this altercation was made in the local press. The only known witnesses watched incredulously from sheltered seats in cars parked along Fourth Avenue, East between Main and Second Street, North-East, as was the accepted place and posture to eat ice cream on a Friday night.

News of the above scene added an urgency to the agenda of the weekly committee meetings. These young people, dabbling in their adolescent frivolity with ideas and a style of dress more serious than they acknowledged, were not what they had once appeared to be. The President of the Chamber of Commerce expressed his dismay, echoing the public temper in a heart-felt speech: "As is clear from recent events, our youth these days are beset by a legion of temptations, temptations our forefathers would never have imagined as they stepped off the steamboat at the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers so long ago." Having gathered the attention of those present, he resumed his harangue, listing relevant examples of temptations, among them: Secular Humanism in the classroom, Illicit Drugs infiltrating school-yards, Violence and Licentiousness in movies and television, Acid Rock albums available in the local record store, and Minor Hockey tournaments scheduled on Sundays. To demonstrate the effectiveness of this campaign against the children he went on to cite, for the record, observable ramifications of these evils: declines in Sunday School attendance, rampant materialism, lack of discipline, and general rebelliousness.

"How can we allow these seductions and abominations to continue in our midst?" the President of the Chamber of Commerce asked. Pausing for a

moment to allow all those present to consider his question, he concluded with an example purposely left to the end for concerns of rhetorical conviction: "Yes, even Demonism and the Worship of Satan goes unchecked in the basement of our own High School."

This final comment swayed the few remaining dissenters and secured the future of a downtown shopping centre, the first of its kind in rural Manitoba. These words which instigated such an innovative, even revolutionary, gesture were no exaggeration. As Carrie assured me, all that the President of the Chamber of Commerce had suggested was true: Demonism and the Worship of Satan had, and in all likelihood were still taking place in the basement of the High School. "A janitor once found a dead rat with a crucifix stuck through its heart," she said.

That's how everything ended. The *Red River Valley Echo* records that a few weeks later, on October 7, 1985, the promise was fulfilled, relevant documents marked with the required signatures, the future secured for the first shopping centre in rural Manitoba. The meeting had to adjourn early, for several of those present were attending a production of live theatre—an adaptation of *The Shunning*—which began at 7:30 p.m., but the consensus had already been reached. Undeniably, this sprawling suburban monolith, an obvious image of all worldly excess, the shopping centre, would be tamed, domesticated, and brought safely into the country.

Carrie and I were strolling down a wide corridor as she finished her story. As she described these final scenes we continued to play one of her favourite games: *spot-the-country-people*, as she called it.

"There's one," she said, interrupting herself to point at a sharply-dressed woman walking out of Eaton's. "That's Forty-Love—you're not doing so well this round."

The fact of the matter was that at this game she had much greater expertise than I, not to mention the value of her recent experience as a rural expatriate. "If you see somebody trying really hard to fit in," she had once said, "then you've got one." Carrie had been outlining for me her taxonomy of mall patrons. "They've got to look *too close* to what you'd expect, but not overboard. Country people just in for a shopping trip are too easy."

We continued walking and Carrie went on to describe how she had moved to Winnipeg that Fall. "Everything calmed down," she confessed, "but I could tell that nobody was about to forget. So that's when I picked up and left."

What I wanted to reply was that, considering the evidence, it was obvious to me that she had always been intended for the city. But I held my tongue, for I had come to understand her sensitivities, the remaining youthful memories which had not yet been overshadowed by her difficult reality.

"That's it, finished. That's the story," Carrie turned to me to speak these, her concluding words. Pausing unknowingly in front the window of a women's clothing store, she assumed her customary posture. She seemed to look to me for some response, a wide-eyed request for reassurance from her older brother,

the *pater familias* of sorts, the only one she knew, that all was well, perhaps an implied apology for what she assumed from the start to be a story lacking in appeal.

"You've got me all wrong," she said, misinterpreting my look of concern.

At a loss for words, I pointed Carrie towards the sharply-dressed mannequins standing behind her. She grimaced and shook her head at the apparitions of herself in earlier days. After a few moments of an uncomfortable silence she reminded me again to make the changes she had suggested for the story. Then, pulling back her cuff to glance at her watch, she said, "I guess I should get back." With this Carrie waved a curt good-bye and returned to finish her shift.