

thereafter

(Or, The crows of Wicker Park)

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Excerpt pages 23-24 ~ Ice and Leitch go for a Chicago walk ...

Ice walked from the west-side art loft to downtown; he didn't leave until 5:30 p.m., so he got downtown around 9:00. It was a beautiful evening; his trip took him to "Center-Camp" (Wicker Park's six-corners) for a cup of coffee, down Milwaukee Avenue to Blommer's chocolate factory, then east on Kinzie Street, which slopes downhill to railroad tracks, an underpass, and then a bridge over a branch of the Chicago River. That's where "It" began ...

Ice had been thinking of Major Andrew Leitch, KIA 16 September 1776, and how he "needed" Leitch in his life. Ice would get stubborn with the Unknown (overly doubtful Ice could be); the Unknown sent the spirit Leitch to watch his back. It's a place in Ice's mind where Leitch is real. Ice thought of how the Quran says if you die fighting in the Unknown's way (in Allah's way), you don't really die. Major Leitch fits that definition: rebel volunteer from Virginia, fighting in New York, and taking three bullets to the chest in the battle called Harlem Heights. The battle is remembered (not all battles are) as the first day the British Redcoats turned and ran from the rebels. Ice was thinking these things and about how Major Leitch never got a homecoming – just like the dead Illinois Vietnam veterans Ice was walking to visit at the downtown memorial. (He goes there to read the engraved names aloud.) Ice also thought of the name of Leitch's daughter, Sarah; he said her name and even shed a few tears. Ice continued to the memorial and read the names aloud for the last three months of 1967. The last engraved name from '67 has an asterisk – which means the body didn't return to Illinois. As Ice finished his ritual a family approached the wall and fountain – the father splashed the children with water and the mother told them to stop. Classic. Ice imagines/sees the dead vets sitting on the terraced grass as the family plays. He has a thought of soldiers seeing their deaths in

meaning – a peaceful death dream. Ice leaves the memorial and heads-up to see the statue of George Washington (Leitch’s commanding officer, the one who ordered him into battle and to his death), and then back on the trail home. Ice has thoughts of walking to the House of Blues to see if anything is happening; the thought had been on his mind and he even looked for the bridge on his way to the memorial. He walks several blocks to find the bridge to the House of Blues. Upon finding it he notices some activity; two hippies are on the bridge, as well as two “moderates” standing to the side and talking on cells. The hippies are frantic and something is wrong; the male hippy, in brown dreads, is waving his hands over his head and exhibiting all the signs of a crazy hippy (which won’t work for long in downtown Chicago). The female hippy is pleading for her friend to calm down, but he can’t. Ice approaches and decides to get involved; he catches a glimpse of her eyes – *“Hey, can I help?”*

The woman spins and is bewildered.

“What’s up?” Ice asked.

“He’s having a diabetic low!” she rushed, *“He doesn’t know what he’s doing!”*

“I have a cookie – a cannabis cookie?”

“Great!” was her response.

Ice pulled a bag of cookies from his cargo-pocket and gave her one; the woman took the cookie and grabbed her friend by the arm – *“Here Michael! Eat this!”* Michael stopped waving his arms and paused. He looked at her, the cookie, Ice, and then grabbed the cookie; he tossed it into his mouth and took-off toward the House of Blues – once again waving his arms, screaming in agony and pulling his dreads. The woman began after him; Ice said go and that he’d watch the bags.

“Michael! – Michael!” she yelled as she nodded yes to Ice. He waited on the bridge for a couple of minutes. He thought of the moment, how he had thought the hippy was freaking out from a drug – just hadn’t thought it would be sugar. The woman returned without Michael. She tells Ice Michael’s run-off and she should follow him, that they’re in from out of town and Michael is embarrassed to take his insulin in public. Ice and the woman pick-up the bags and cross the bridge to the House of Blues.

She asks his name: “Ice,” he says.

“Sarah,” she replies.

(Ice learned that day just how fast *It* happens: from Sarah Leitch to “Sarah on the bridge.”)

The two walked down to Kinzie and then Michael found them; he was shaken but no longer ranting and raving. He remembered Ice and the cookie and thanked him for it. The three parted ways, with Ice walking west on Kinzie to the chocolate factory – that’s when he remembered he had been crying shortly before about a woman named Sarah he had never met – Major Andrew Leitch’s daughter Sarah.

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