

*Other books by Jack Finney*

FIVE AGAINST THE HOUSE

THE BODYSNATCHERS

THE HOUSE OF NUMBERS

THE THIRD LEVEL

ASSAULT ON A QUEEN



*I Love Galesburg*

*in*

*the*

*Springtime*



*Jack Finney*



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"I LOVE GALESBURG  
IN THE SPRINGTIME"

*" . . . and in the summer when it sizzles,  
and in the fall, and in the winter when the snow lies along  
the black branches of the trees that line its streets."*

—Lines tapped out on his typewriter (when he should have been writing up the Soangetaha Country Club dance) by Oscar Mannheim, Galesburg, Illinois, *Register-Mail* reporter.

I didn't make the mistake—he'd have thrown me down the elevator shaft—of trying to see E. V. Marsh in his room at the Custer. I waited in the lobby, watching the coffeeshop, till he'd finished breakfast and was sipping his second cup of coffee before I braced him, walking up to his table smiling my lopsided, ingratiating, Jimmy Stewart smile.

When he learned I was from the paper he tried to fend me off. "I've got nothing for you," he said, shaking his head. He

was a heavy man in his fifties, with straight thinning hair. "There's no story. There just won't be any factory of mine in Galesburg, that's all. I'm leaving this town on the first train I can get."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that," I said untruthfully, and dragged up a chair from an adjacent table. Straddling it, I sat down facing Marsh across the chair back, chin on my folded arms. "But that's not why I'm here," I added softly, and waited. I'm a tall, bone-thin man; my pants legs flop like sails when I walk. I have a bony face, too, more or less permanently tanned, and straight Indian-black hair; and I'm still young, I guess. People generally like me all right.

But Marsh was mad now, his face reddening, his jaw muscles working; he knew what I meant. I glanced quickly around the room; it was still early and there were only a few people here. We were at a corner table looking out on Kellogg Street; no one was near us.

Leaning closer to Marsh's table, my chair legs tilting forward, I said, "I'd rather get the story from you as it really happened than try to piece it together from a lot of half-true rumors floating around town."

He glared. Then he leaned toward me, voice quiet but furious. "I wasn't drunk. I can tell you that!"

"I'm sure you weren't. Tell me about it." And because I'm a reporter, he did.

He sighed a little, going through the motions of reluctance, but actually—and this is usually true—he was glad to talk now that he had to or thought he did. Ilene brought over the coffee I'd ordered when I walked into the room and I picked up my cup and tasted it; the coffee's good at the Custer. Then

I dropped my chin to my folded arms, feeling alive and eager, anxious to listen. Because the only reason I was here, the only reason I'm a reporter at all, was simple curiosity. Haven't you ever wished it were somehow possible to cross-examine an absolute stranger about something none of your business but damned interesting all the same? Well, think it over—if you're a reporter, you can. There's no law says it has to be printed.

"I had two drinks before dinner," Marsh said. "We all did. We ate up in my suite—the property owner, a Chamber of Commerce man, an attorney from the city, and a couple of councilmen. If you want a list of their names, ask them for it. After dinner most of us had a brandy. But we sat at the table from seven till ten and whatever drinks I had were spread over a considerable time; I wasn't drunk or even close." Marsh shrugged impatiently. "We worked things out—the price of the factory site, option terms, the probable contractor. Both councilmen and the attorney assured me there'd be no trouble about changing zoning restrictions, if necessary, or running my trucks down Broad Street to the Santa Fe depot. All friendly and pleasant." Marsh took a cigar from the breast pocket of his suit coat and offered it. I shook my head and he began pulling off the cellophane wrapper. "But I like to sleep on a deal of any importance and told them I'd think it over. They left about ten and I took a walk."

Marsh stuck the unlighted cigar in his mouth, bulging one cheek out, and leaned toward me. "I always do that," he said angrily. "I take a walk and go over the facts in my mind; then home to bed, and when I wake up in the morning I usually know what I want to do. So I left the hotel here,

walked up Kellogg to Main Street, then over to the Public Square, and when I came to Broad Street I turned up it. Not because the proposed factory site was on Broad; it's way out near the city limits, a dozen blocks or more, and I wasn't planning to walk that. Besides I'd been all over the site that day and I couldn't have seen anything in the dark anyway. But Broad was as good a street as any other to walk along." Marsh brought out matches, prepared to strike one, then sat staring at the tabletop instead. "At that, I walked a lot farther than I meant to. Pleasant street." He struck his match and looked up at me for comment, sucking the flame onto the cigar end.

"It's beautiful," I said, nodding. "All those streets—Broad, Cherry, Prairie, Kellogg, Seminary, and all the others—are beautiful," and I was remembering the day my father, mother, sister, and I got off the train from Chicago at the Q depot. We rode through Galesburg then, in a taxi, to the house my father had bought on Broad Street. The driver took us up Seminary first, from the depot, then along Kellogg, Prairie, and Cherry—a few blocks on each street—before turning onto Broad. I was six and as we rode something in me was responding to the town around us, and I began falling in love with Galesburg even before we reached our house. It happened completely, love at first sight, just north of Main Street when I first saw the thick old trees that line the streets of Galesburg, arching and meeting high overhead as far as I could see. We moved along under those new-leaved trees and the first warm-weather insects were sounding and the street was dappled with shade and sun, the pattern of it stirring as the trees moved in the late spring air. Then I heard our

tires humming with a ripply sound that was new to me, and saw that the street was paved with brick. I guess that's not done any more; nowadays, it's concrete or asphalt, never brick.

But a great many Galesburg streets are still brick-paved, and some of the curbing is still quarried stone. And in the grassways beside those brick-paved streets there still remain stone curbside steps for entering or leaving carriages. Near them—not added for quaintness' sake, but remaining from the days when they were put there for use—is an occasional stone or cast-iron hitching post. Back past the grassways and the sidewalks (of brick, too, often), and beyond the deep front lawns, rise the fine old houses. Many are wood, often painted white; some are brick or time-darkened stone; but—there along Cherry, Broad, Prairie, Academy, and the other old streets—they have the half comically ugly, half charming look, made of spaciousness, dignity, foolishness, and conspicuous waste, that belongs to another time.

I mean the curved bay windows with curving window glass; the ridiculous scroll and lathework at the eaves; the rounding, skyrocket-shaped tower rooms with conical roofs; the stained-glass windows (one of them, on Broad Street, I think, an actual pastoral scene); the great, wide front porches; the two stories with an attic above; the tall, lean windows beginning just over the floor. You know what I mean, you've seen them, too, and admired them wryly; the kind old houses of other and better times. Some of them are sagging and debauched, decrepit and in need of paint. Some have been modernized, and there are new houses among them. These aren't museum streets but streets where human beings live. But many of the

old houses here in Galesburg stand as always, occasionally the families living in them descendants of the families who built them in the deep peace of the eighties, nineties, the turn of the century, and the early twenties.

"Broad is a nice street, all right," I said to Marsh and he nodded.

"Very attractive. Last night, when I walked along it the crickets were buzzing in the trees." They weren't crickets, of course, but I didn't correct the man from Chicago. "A lot of living-room lights were lighted, and now and then I heard voices murmuring from front porches. There were fireflies over the lawns and bushes, and all in all I walked a lot farther than I'd meant to. So when I saw a streetcar coming toward me I decided I'd ride back to Main Street." Marsh leaned toward me, his cigar between thumb and forefinger, pointing its butt end at me. "You hear what I say? I said I saw that streetcar and I heard it, too, I don't care what anyone tells you." He sat back in his chair, regarding me bitterly, then continued.

"It was still a long way off when I first noticed it. But I saw the single round headlight moving slowly along toward me, swaying above the track down the middle of the street. Then I saw the light begin to glint along the rails, and a moment later heard the sound—there's no other sound just like it; a sort of steady, metallic hiss—of a streetcar moving along the rails.

"I saw it, I heard it, and I stepped out into the street to wait for it; there was no other traffic. I just stood there in the middle of the street beside the track waiting and thinking absently about the new factory. Down the street somewhere

a phonograph was playing. I recognized the tune; it was 'Wabash Blues,' and it slowed down for a few moments, the notes growling as they got slower and deeper. Then someone wound the phonograph and it speeded right up.

"Now, that motorman saw me; he must have. I signaled to make sure as the car came closer, stepping right up beside the rails to get into the beam of its light, and waving one arm. So he saw me, all right, and I saw him, very plainly. He had on a black uniform cap and wore a large mustache. He had on a blue shirt with a white stiff collar and a black tie, and a vest with flat metal buttons, and a gold watch chain stretching from pocket to pocket. That's how close I saw him but he never so much as glanced at me. I stood right there in the beam of his light waving my arm; it made a big swaying shadow down the street past us. Then all of a sudden, that car right on top of me, I saw that he wasn't going to stop; he hadn't even slowed down.

"The car swelled out at the sides the way a streetcar does, protruding well past the rails, and I was right next to the tracks. I was about to be hit by that car, I suddenly realized; *would* have been hit if I hadn't dropped back, falling to the street behind me like a ballplayer at bat dropping away from a badly pitched ball. Right back and down on my haunches I went, then lost my balance and sprawled out flat on my back on the street as that car rocked past me straight through the space I'd been standing in and went on by like a little island of light swaying off down the rails.

"I yelled after it. I was badly scared and I cursed that guy out. Still lying on my back in the dust of the street, I shouted so he could hear me, and a porch light snapped on. I didn't

care; I was mad. Getting to my feet, I yelled after that guy some more, watching him shrink and disappear down the rails, his trolley sparking blue every once in a while, as though it were answering me. More porch lights were coming on now, and several men in shirt sleeves from the houses up beyond the lawns came walking toward me. I heard their feet scuffle as they crossed the walks.

"Well, I expect I was a sight, all right, standing in the *middle of the street shouting and shaking my fist* after that streetcar, the entire back of my suit covered with dust, my hat in the gutter somewhere. They asked me, those men, stopping around me—speaking pleasantly and politely enough—what the trouble was. I could see women and children standing on porch steps, watching. I answered. I told them how that streetcar had nearly run me down. This might not be a regular stop, I said; I didn't know about that. But that was no excuse to run a man down without even clanging his bell to warn me. No reason he couldn't have stopped, anyway; there were no other passengers, no reason to be in *such a hurry. They agreed with me, helping me find my hat, dusting me off.* I expect it was one of the women who phoned the police—one of the men signaling to her behind my back, probably. Anyway, they got there pretty quickly and quietly. It wasn't till I heard the car door slam behind me that I turned and saw the police car, a sixty-two Plymouth with white doors, the two cops already out in the street and walking toward me.

"'Drunk and disorderly,' or something of the sort, was the charge they arrested me on. I argued, I protested; I wasn't drunk. But one of the cops just said, 'Show me the streetcar

tracks, mister; just point them out and we'll let you go.'"

Marsh looked at me, his face set and angry. "And of course there aren't any tracks. There haven't been any on Broad Street since—"

"Since they tore them up sometime in the thirties," I said. "I know."

Marsh was nodding. "So of course you don't believe me, either. Well, I don't blame you. No one else did; why should you? I had to phone one of the councilmen to come down to the jail and identify me, and, when he arrived, he had the attorney from the city with him. They vouched for me, and apologized, and got me out of jail, and kept their faces *straight.* Too straight; I knew they were laughing inside, and that it's a story I could never live down here, never at all. So I'm leaving Galesburg. There are plenty of other towns along the Santa Fe to build a factory in."

"I didn't say I didn't believe you." I leaned toward him and spoke quietly. "Tell me something. How big was that streetcar?"

Marsh squinted at the ceiling. "Small," he said then, his voice a little surprised. "Very small, actually; wouldn't hold much more than a dozen people or so."

I nodded, still leaning over the tabletop. "You saw the *motorman up close, you said, and it was a warm night.* Did you happen to notice his cap? What was his cap like, besides being black?"

Marsh thought again, then smiled. "I'll be darned," he said. "Yes, I remember; it was wicker. It was a regular uniform cap, just like any other in shape, and with a shiny peak and a stiff hard top. But the top was made of wicker—actual

wickerwork—dyed black. I never saw a cap like that before in my life.”

“Neither did I; nowhere else but here. But that’s the kind of cap streetcar motormen used to wear in the summer in Galesburg, Illinois. I was just a little kid but I remember them. What color was that streetcar, red or green?”

“It was yellow,” Marsh said quietly. “I saw it pass under a street light just before it reached me, and it was yellow.”

“That’s right,” I said. “The streetcars in Galesburg were painted yellow, and the last of them quit running years ago.” I stood up and put my knuckles on the tabletop, resting my weight on them, leaning down to look Marsh in the eyes. “But you saw one last night just the same. I don’t know how or why but you did, and I know it and believe you.” I smiled, straightening up to stand beside the table. “But no one else ever will. Of course you’re right; you’d never enjoy living in Galesburg now.”

Do you see what I mean? Do you see why I’m a reporter? How else would you hear a story like that at first hand? I never turned it in, of course; I just wrote that Mr. E. V. Marsh, of Chicago, had considered but decided against building a factory here, and it ran as a little five-inch story on page three. But it’s because of occasional stories like Marsh’s that I expect to continue reporting for the *Register-Mail* as long as I live or can get around. I know the town laughs at me a little for that; it’s been a long time since Galesburg took me seriously, though it once expected big things of me.

I was first in my high-school class, in fact, and was offered a scholarship at Harvard. But I didn’t take it. I went to Knox, the local college right here in town, working my way through

—my mother was alive then but my father was dead and we didn’t have much money. That’s when I started reporting for the *Register-Mail*, full time in the summers, part time during school, and I graduated second in my class, Phi Beta Kappa, *summa cum laude*, and could have had any of several scholarships for postgrad work, or a job with American Chicle in South America. The town thought I was going places, and so did a girl I was engaged to—a junior at Knox, from Chicago. But I wasn’t going anywhere and knew it; and I turned down every offer that would take me from Galesburg, and when she graduated next year the girl turned me down and went home.

So there’s my trouble, if trouble it is; I’m in love with a town, in love with the handful of Main Street buildings that were built in the last century and that don’t look much different, except for the modernized store fronts, from the way they do in the old photographs. Look at their upper stories, as I always do walking along Main, at the tall slim windows with the rounded tops, and maybe, just maybe, you’re seeing at least one of the buildings Abraham Lincoln saw when he was in Galesburg. Yes; he debated Douglas on a wooden platform built over the east steps of Old Main at Knox, something the college never seems to get tired of reminding the world about. And Old Main, too, stands very little changed, on the outside, anyway, from the day Lincoln stood there grasping his coat lapels and smiling down at Douglas.

There’s sordidness and desolation in Galesburg, and just plain ugliness, too. But in so many other places and ways it’s a fine old town, and I move through its streets, buildings, and private houses every day of my life, and know more about

Galesburg in many ways than anyone else, I'm certain. I know that E. V. Marsh really saw the streetcar he said he did, whether that's possible or not; and I know why the old Pollard place out on Fremont Street didn't burn down.

The morning after the fire I was driving by on my way to work and saw Doug Blaisdel standing in the side yard, waist deep in yellow weeds. I thought he'd finally sold the place—he's the real-estate man who was handling it—and I pulled in to the curb to see who'd bought it. Then, turning off the ignition, I saw that wasn't it because Doug was standing, fists on his hips, staring up at the side of the building, and now I noticed half a dozen kids there, too, and knew that something had happened.

Doug saw me stop, and as I opened the front gate he turned from the old building to cut across the front yard through the weeds to meet me. The place is on a great big lot, and there's a wrought-iron fence, rusting but in good shape, that runs across the lot in front by the sidewalk. A small gate opens onto a walk leading to the porch, and a larger taller pair of gates opens onto what was once a carriage drive to a portico at the west side of the house. Closing the small gate behind me, I was looking up at the house admiring it as always; it looks like an only slightly smaller Mount Vernon, with four great two-story pillars rising to the roof from a ground-level brick-paved porch, and there's an enormous fanlight above the double front doors. But the old place was at least five years overdue for painting; the heirs live in California and have never even seen it, so it sat empty and they didn't keep it up.

"What's the trouble?" I called to Doug when I got close enough.

He's a brisk, young, heavy-rimmed-glasses type from Chicago; been here about five years. "Fire," he said, and beckoned with his chin to follow, turning back across the yard toward the house, the kids trooping along.

At the side of the house I stood looking up at the damage. The fire had obviously started inside, bursting out a window, and now the white clapboard outside wall was scorched and charred clear to the roof, the upper part of the window frame ruined. Stepping to the window to lean inside the house, I saw there wasn't much damage there. It looked as though the dining-room wallpaper, peeling and hanging loose, had somehow caught fire; but outside of soot stains the heavy plaster wall didn't seem much damaged. Mostly it was the window frame, both inside and out, that had burned; that was all. But it was ruined and would cost several hundred dollars to replace.

I said so to Doug, and he nodded and said, "A lot more than the owners will ever spend. They'll just tell me to have the opening boarded over. Too bad the place didn't burn right down."

"Oh?" I said.

He nodded again, shrugging. "Sure. It's a white elephant, Oscar; you know that. Twenty-four rooms, including a ball-room. Who wants it? Been empty eight years now and there's never been a real prospect for it. Cost twenty thousand bucks to fix it up right, and just about as much to tear it down. Burned to the ground, though"—his brows rose at the



thought—"the site empty, I could sell the lot for an apartment building if I could get it rezoned, and I probably could." He grinned at me; everybody likes Doug Blaisdel; he insists on it. "But don't worry," he said. "I didn't start the fire. If I had, I'd have done a better job."

He glanced up at the blackened strip of wall again, then down at the ground around us, and I looked, too. We were standing on what had been the old graveled carriage drive, though the white gravel had long since washed away and it was just dirt now; it was trampled and soggy.

"Somebody put the fire out," Doug said, nodding at the damp ground, "but I can't find out who. Wasn't the fire department; they never got a call and don't know a thing about it. Neither do any of the neighbors. Nobody seems to have seen it."

"I heard the fire bell," one of the kids said. "It woke me up, but then I fell asleep again."

"You did not! You're crazy! You were dreamin'!" another boy answered, and they began wrestling, not serious but laughing.

Doug turned toward the street. "Well, back to work!" he said brightly. "See you around, Oscar. You going to put this in the paper?"

I glanced up at the house again and shrugged. "I don't know; not much of a story. We'll see."

The kids left, too, chasing each other through the weeds, horsing around, no longer interested; but I stood in the old driveway beside the house for a few moments longer. Old Man Nordstrum, as he's been called since he was thirty, I guess, lived in the house next door; and whoever had put

this fire out, he'd heard it and seen it, maybe done it himself, no matter what he'd told Doug Blaisdel. I looked over suddenly at the side windows of his place, and he was standing watching me. When he saw that I'd seen him, he grinned. Doug was in his car now, the motor started; he flicked a hand at me, then glanced over his shoulder at the street, and pulled out. Smiling a little, I beckoned Nordstrum to come out.

He came out his front door, buttoning an old tan-and-brown sweater, walked to his front gate, then turned into the old Pollard driveway toward me. He's about seventy-one, a retired lawyer with a reputation for grouchiness. But it's less grouchiness, I think, than a simple unwillingness to put up with anyone who doesn't interest him. He's rich, one of the best lawyers in the state; he's bald and has a lined face with smart brown eyes; a shrewd man.

"Doug Blaisdel tells me you didn't see the fire last night," I said as he walked toward me.

Nordstrum shook his head. "Blaisdel is inaccurate, as usual; that's only what I told him. I saw it; of course I saw it. How could I sleep through a fire right outside my bedroom window?"

"Why didn't you tell Doug about it, Mr. Nordstrum?"

"Because he's a fool. Has it all figured out what he's going to believe for the rest of his life; it takes a fool to do that. But I don't think you're a fool, Oscar, not that kind, so I'll tell you; glad to tell somebody. What wakened me—this was just at three-fourteen this morning; I looked at my luminous alarm clock—was a sound." Eyes narrowing, choosing his words carefully, he said, "It was a combined sound

—the hard crackle of growing flames and just the touch of a clapper on a brass fire gong. I opened my eyes, saw the orange light of flames reflected from my bedroom walls, and I jumped out of bed and grabbed my glasses. I looked out my window and saw the fire next door here, the flames and sparks shooting out the window in a strong updraft, licking the eaves two stories up; and I saw the fire engine a dozen yards away toward the street, and the firemen were tugging at the hose, unreeling it just as fast as they could pull. I stood and watched them. Best view of a fire I ever had.

"They worked fast; they got their hose connected to the hydrant out at the curb, and they had a good stream on the fire, the pumper at work, in no more than a minute. In five minutes, maybe less, they had the fire completely out and wet down good. Then they packed up their hose and left." Nordstrum stood there in his old-style button sweater, looking at me over the top of his glasses.

"Well, what's so hard to believe about that?" I asked.

"The fire engine, Oscar, had a tall, upright, cylindrical boiler made of polished brass, narrowing at the top to a short smokestack. It looked like a boy's steam engine, only a thousand times larger. Underneath that boiler was a fire made of wood and coal; that's what heated the water that supplied steam pressure for the pump. The whole thing, my boy, along with hose, axes, and all the rest of it, was mounted on a low-slung wagon body with big wooden spoke wheels, painted red; and it was pulled by four big gray horses who stood waiting in the light of the fire stomping their hoofs in the soft dirt now and then and switching their tails.

"And when the fire was out and the hose reloaded, the

firemen climbed onto the fire engine—two in the high seat up front, where the reins were; the others on the low step in back, hanging on—and the horses pulled it down the driveway, turned onto Fremont Street, breaking into a trot, and that's the last I could see of them. The firemen wore helmets and rubber coats, and they all had large mustaches, and one had a beard. Now, what about it, Oscar? You think I don't know what I saw?"

I shook my head. "Hard to see how you could be mistaken about what you saw unless you've suddenly gone crazy."

"Which I have not," said Nordstrum. "Not yet. Come here." He turned to walk down the old carriageway toward the street, then stopped and pointed. "Here's where the horses stood," he said, "well away from the heat of the fire."

I looked down at the dirt and saw the horseshoe marks sharp and plain in the damp black earth, dozens of them, overlapping. Nordstrum pointed again with his foot and I saw the manure and, deeply imprinted in the earth at the edges of the carriageway, the long, indented ribbons that were wagon tracks.

That was just under a year ago. Two months later, in September, Doug Blaisdel sold the Pollard place—cheap, as he had to, but still he was glad now that it hadn't burned down—to a retired farm-equipment dealer from Peoria who'd grown up in Galesburg. It took all last winter and I don't know how much money—the farm-equipment business must have been good—to get the old place fixed up; but now it looks the way it always used to, clean and white again, the lawn and iron fence and the burned window restored, and the inside of the house is beautiful. They've got an unmar-

ried daughter, and last Friday they gave a dance in the old ballroom. It was a big affair, and walking up the path to the house—the daughter had invited me—I saw the house all lighted up, heard the music, and saw all the people at the windows and out on the huge porch, the big old house white and fresh and alive again, and I was glad it hadn't burned down and the site sold for an apartment building.

Do you see? Do you understand now what's happening in Galesburg? If you do, then you know why the phone rang late one night last fall out at the old Denigmann farm. It's one of the finest of the farms just past the city limits; a wonderful place. There are a half-dozen acres of fine woodland including some nut trees; there's a small but deep stream that winds through the whole farm and is wide enough for swimming in several places; and scattered over two acres of corn land are a dozen regularly shaped mounds which the kids out there have always believed were Indian burial mounds, and around which every generation of Denigmans since they've owned the place has carefully plowed.

A lot of the neighboring farms are gone without a trace, the land covered with new houses. That's necessary, of course, and some of them are nice ones. But you wonder why so many of the houses we build nowadays are so tiny, so lightly built, and so nearly identical. And why it's necessary to lay them out in indistinguishable rows alongside raw concrete streets without even sidewalks for children to play on. And why they've simply got to be jammed together a few feet apart, on what was once Illinois prairie with an unlimited horizon. Can you imagine some of the houses we build today lived in and loved a century from now?

Carl Denigmann was going to sell his place to the subdividers, too, a big Florida outfit that was reaching up into the North. It was a good offer; he was fifty-nine years old, a widower, his children all grown and gone; why not? Late one night, he told me—this was last November, about the middle of the month, after all his crops were in—he was sitting alone in the farm kitchen thinking about it. Carl's a small, strong man with black heavily grayed hair, all of which he still has, and he was probably smoking a pipe there in the farm kitchen.

Now, the Galesburg telephone company is an independent, and in the fall of last year it brought various country phone lines up to date including Denigmann's—putting lines underground and installing dial phones. And in many a place, Carl's included, the company didn't bother removing the old out-of-date and now useless wall phone, unless the customer insisted on getting rid of it.

So Carl sat in his kitchen—there's a ninety-year-old fireplace in it, and he had a fire going—staring at the fire and thinking, smoking his pipe, I'm sure. And when the telephone rang—the stuttering, uncertain grumbling ring of an old hand-crank phone—he simply got up, stepped to the wall, and answered it as he'd done hundreds of times all through his life. The conversation, then, was ordinary enough; it was just Billy Amling asking Carl if he wanted to go rabbit hunting with their twenty-twos in the woods after school next day, keeping one eye open, as usual, for arrowheads. Carl listened, half nodding, ready to agree, as always, before it came back into his head that Billy had been killed in the war in France in 1918; and the telephone receiver lay

dead in his hand, not in the way of a phone when the other party has hung up, but in the completely lifeless way of a telephone that is connected to nothing any more and is just hanging on a wall without even wires leading away to the outside now.

Nearly all the rest of the night Carl Denigmann sat up thinking of all the farm had been to him, and Billy Amling, and many others, including Denigmanns who were dead long before he'd been born. And this spring Carl is out plowing it again and he expects to keep farming for at least a few more years. By then, he told me, he'll have figured out what to do; he thinks maybe Galesburg might accept the old farm as a sort of park or preserve, with picnic tables, maybe, but mostly leaving it pretty much as is for kids to hunt through with their twenty-twos, and swim in the creek, and prowl around the old mounds, and pretend, at least, that they're Indian graves. Carl doesn't know, exactly, what he'll do about the farm; he just knows he's not going to let them subdivide it.

I'm glad about that; just as I'm glad the old Pollard place was saved, and that there won't be a great big factory right out at the end of Broad Street, and about a lot of other things I haven't got time to tell. I'm glad because here in Galesburg, and everywhere else, of course, they're trying—endlessly—to destroy the beauty we inherit from the past. They keep trying, and when they succeed, they replace it—not always, but all too often—with drabness and worse. With a sterile sun-baked parking lot where decrepit, characterful, old Boone's Alley once ran; rechristening the asphalt-paved nothingness (as though even the memory of old Boone's

Alley must be blotted from mind) with the characterless title Park Plaza. And with anonymous apartment buildings where fine old houses once stood. With concrete-block ugliness sprawling along what were charming country roads. With—but you know what they're doing; wherever you live, you see it all around you. They even want to level Galesburg's ancient Public Square into—well, a parking lot, of course, as though there were nothing more important.

And who are "they?" Why, "they" are us, of course; who else? We're doing these things to ourselves as though we were powerless to stop; or as though any feeling for beauty or grace or a sense of the past were a kind of sentimental weakness to be jeered down. So what has been happening in Galesburg? Why, it's simple enough.

Galesburg's past is fighting back. It's *resisting* us, for the past isn't so easily destroyed; it's not simply gone with yesterday's newspaper. No, it is not, for it has been far too much—we are all products of it—to ever be completely gone. And so, somehow, in Galesburg, Illinois, when it's been necessary as it sometimes has, the past has fought against the present. When the need becomes desperate enough, then the old yellow streetcars, or horse-drawn fire engines, or abandoned wall phones can and do flicker into momentary existence again, struggling to keep what I and so many others—Carl Sandburg, for one, who was born here—love about Galesburg, Illinois.

It's hard to say whether it's succeeding; they did, after all, chop down a lot of fine old Galesburg elms to widen Losey Street; Boone's Alley is gone; and last year the library burned down and the townspeople voted against rebuilding

it. And yet—well, I'd hate to be responsible for turning the old square into a parking lot, I can tell you that much. Because just last night, for example, I learned that those twenty-odd old elm trees on that big corner lot on north Cedar Street will not, after all, be chopped down. The man who was going to whack down with a power saw these trees older than himself—he was tired of raking leaves every fall, he said—is in the hospital instead, with a broken leg in traction. It's strung up in a wire-and-pulley contraption like a broken leg in a comic strip. The neighbor who saw what happened told me that the man was standing out in the street last night looking up at the old trees and estimating which way they'd fall when he sliced through them this weekend. All of a sudden he was struck by a car that appeared out of nowhere. The police report calls it a hit-and-run accident, which it was, and the chief has assured the *Register-Mail* that they'll find the car very soon. It shouldn't be hard to find, they feel, because the neighbor who saw it happen got a good look at the car and furnished a complete description. It was a 1916 Buick roadster with a red body, varnished spoke wheels, and big polished brass headlights each the size of a small drum.