

## Camille T. Dungy

### A Shade North of Ordinary

ON OUR FIRST AND ONLY MORNING IN PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE, CALLIE and I ventured to the Presque Isle Conference Center and Hotel's breakfast lounge. I ate the complimentary breakfast. Callie ate rice cereal mixed with the pureed peas and Asian pear I'd brought from California. The breakfast lounge attendant asked me how we were, what we were doing in Presque Isle. I told her I was passing through on the way to give a presentation at the university in Fort Kent. The breakfast lounge attendant asked how we were finding the town so far, and I told her I knew about Presque Isle because of my interest in Maine's history and looked forward to exploring the town once we had eaten. The breakfast lounge attendant asked if we found our room okay, what we thought of the snow, what we thought of the cold, and I answered all of her questions. The special attention meant the baby and I didn't have to eat alone.

As we left the restaurant, the desk clerk asked how we were enjoying our stay so far, if we'd been able to adjust the thermostat to our satisfaction, if we'd enjoyed our breakfast, if we would be staying in Maine for long. It seemed this hotel specialized in personal attention. Closer to our room, both of the hotel maids we encountered in the hall stopped folding towels so they could ask me if my room was all right, how long I'd be in Presque Isle, how I was liking Maine so far, if I was bothered by the snow. "Isn't that baby precious," said the blonder of the two housekeepers. "Would you just look at all her hair!"

This degree of inquisitiveness, directed at me, reminded me of a trip I once took to Achill Island, off the west coast of Ireland. I'd gone to visit friends who were living for the summer in the Heinrich Böll Cottage, a space that had been converted after Böll's death from the writer's family residence to a visiting artists' studio space. My friends, the Irish and American artists Helen O'Leary and Paul Chidester, both had major shows they were preparing, and they wanted to make the most of their time in the Cottage. While Helen and Paul worked into the early afternoon, I'd stroll to the pub to drop letters into the postbox. This round-trip journey would have taken Helen or Paul twenty minutes, but it never failed to be a full morning's adventure for me.

All along the path, island residents emerged from their whitewashed raised gable houses. "How are you today?" they'd ask. "Staying up at the Böll House, are you?" they'd ask. "How are you finding it on Achill?" they'd ask. "You're only visiting us five days, are you? Can't stay longer?" they'd ask. What are they feeding you? Have you tried the black sausage? Have you tried the soda bread?

How do you find the black sausage? How do you find the soda bread? Heading down to the pub? Fancy a bit of Guinness? Have some postcards to send, do you? Want to tell your family about Achill? The wind gets so bad here some winters it could carry away a young child. Did you know that? Fancy a bit of Harp, do you? All down the lane and back again this continued.

Toward the end of my stay, Paul took me to a family home for dinner. As the meal was prepared, my hosts set me up at the table, a Harp lager in hand and some cheddar cheese and soda bread on a cutting block nearby. The resident children and their friends, ages four, six, seven, seven, and nine, crawled and climbed and wove themselves around my chair, peppering me with questions. This was 1998, and visitors were still rare in that part of Ireland. The children were friendly and inquisitive. They wanted to know all about America. What was New York City like? They found it hard to imagine I'd never been, that New York was as far from my home in California as it was from their home on Achill. What was California like? Did I know any movie stars? Had I ever been to an NBA game? What was an NBA game like? Did I know any rappers? Was I wearing makeup?

I do not, as a rule, wear makeup, so this final question, raised by the four-year-old, threw me for a moment. Then I put his question in context with the other questions. Just as these kids had never met a person from California, they had never seen a real live black person. They'd only seen black people on TV. Either I was wearing makeup that made me black, or I was something equally unreal, a rapper or someone who personally knew movie stars.

"No, I'm not wearing makeup," I told the kid. "This is the color of my skin." He was too young to hide his disbelief. "We all have different colored skin," I assured him. "Your sister's eyes are blue, aren't they?" The boy and his sister both nodded. "And yours are brown, and your friend's eyes are green."

"My mother's eyes are gray," said one of the seven-year-olds.

"Those are pretty rare in some parts of the world, gray eyes," I said. "But some people have gray eyes, and it's normal for them. It's the same with skin. Some of you have freckles, some of you don't." The youngest boy looked at his arm as if he were noticing his own freckles for the first time. "I have brown skin. That's the way I've always been. It doesn't come off." He reached for my arm to verify my assertion. Soon, all the children were rubbing my arm, and it wasn't long before they were also playing with my hair, which was braided into the pencil-width, shoulder-length braids that were popular among African American women in the latter part of the twentieth century. The children touched my extensions and asked how long it took to braid my hair, if I washed it, how often I washed it, how I washed it, what my hair would look like if I let out the braids.

The adults had turned from their kitchen tasks. Two of them sat down at the table and pretended to be interested in the cheddar. They looked sheepish at first, listening in a falsely nonchalant manner, but soon enough the four-year-old's mother asked, "How long does it take you to undo all those braids?" and I found myself giving the whole household a lesson about the care and styling of black hair.

It occurred to me, then, that the adults who slowed my progress from the Böll Cottage to the postbox had been asking me questions about wind and black sausage instead of what they really wanted to know. What they really wanted to know was whether a black person like me was put off by Western Ireland's brutal weather. They wanted to know about my hair, which seemed so different from their own. They wanted to discuss the ways I was different from them without having to say the word "black." They wanted to know who I was, and what I was doing on their island, and how long I would stay, and if I would bring other people like me. They did not want to know all these things out of malice. They were simply curious, and they were looking for the most polite ways to express their curiosity. I didn't look like the ordinary visitor, after all. And so it was, as I moved through the Presque Isle Conference Center and Hotel at a reduced speed due to all the questions I was fielding, that part of me wondered what the breakfast host, and desk clerk, and housekeepers wanted to know besides what I thought of the weather.

I stopped long enough to let the housekeepers get a good look at the baby. Callie does have marvelous hair. The morning she was born, her hair was so thick the OB needed three attempts to successfully secure the cranial monitor they used to track her progress through the birth canal. When she finally emerged, Callie's eyes were wide open and she didn't cry. They cut the cord, and she didn't cry. The nurses washed her body. They showed Ray how to wash and comb her hair, and she didn't cry. Only when they covered her hair with a cap did Ray say, "That must be what she sounds like when she cries," and she kept crying until the cap was off her head and out of sight.

By the time she was three months old, Callie had a mass of full silky curls that had once caused a woman to ask if I used pin curlers in her hair at night. That morning in Presque Isle, I'd combed the nine-month-old's hair into the style one friend refers to as "Callie's Jew-fro," several inches of black curls through which you could just barely catch a glimpse of scalp near the spot at the back where she rubbed her head while fighting sleep.

The less blond of the housekeepers plunged her hand into Callie's hair, all the while telling my baby how darling she was. Callie smiled up at the woman, talking back to her as best she could. "Ma, ma, baba, da," she said. More than once, the housekeeper looked from the loose curls that slipped through her fingers to my dreadlocks and back wondering, I assumed, how I came to have a daughter with hair so lustrous and fine.

My mother bristles when people comment on Callie's hair. "They've clearly never seen a black baby before," she says. "Black babies are born with hair."

She's right, though the rule isn't universal. Some black babies are born bald and some white babies have lots of hair at the outset. It's not the science of racial differences in infant hair growth that intrigues me about my mother's reaction to people's responses to my daughter, but what her frustration reveals about her reactions to other people's expectations of beauty. It's as if my mother is annoyed that people are surprised to look into a black baby's stroller and find

beauty. It's as if my mother is saying that she understands black beauty to be an original truth, and she is angered by people who have yet to acknowledge this reality. Sometimes I can't help but see where my mother is coming from, but if I thought like this all the time, I'd find the world a colder place. Usually, I choose to believe people are simply overwhelmed, not by the surprising beauty of a black baby, but by the beauty of my *particular* child.

"I had hair just like hers when I was a baby," I said to the housekeeper. I have the photographs to prove it. "My mother says people used to tell her I should be a baby model, but she wanted me to have a normal life."

The women seemed to accept this comparative backstory as proof of maternity, and Callie and I and a couple extra bottles of hotel lotion were sent on our way. Into yet another normal day.

It was nearly 10:00 AM, and our ride to Fort Kent wouldn't arrive until one. Callie and I had flown from Oakland to Boston the previous day, and from Boston to Presque Isle, a nearly fourteen-hour journey. Rather than driving the several hours to Fort Kent right after our long flight, I decided the baby and I would get a good night's sleep and walk around Presque Isle in the morning. The town published a self-guided walking tour online (I love historical tours) and I'd printed it before we left Oakland. Fortified by breakfast, I bundled Callie in her snowsuit, put her in the car seat, put the car seat in the stroller, covered her hands with mittens, pulled tight the snowsuit's hood, added two more blankets, pulled the car seat's canopy down to shield her from the wind, donned my parka, and headed down the half-mile hill into town.



The Aroostook River and Presque Isle Stream form the peninsula that gave this town its current name. Before Dennis Fairbanks claimed the land in 1828, naming the town Fairbanks, the area was occupied by the Micmac, a nation from the Algonquin language group that lived along the Northeastern Atlantic seaboard southeast of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and throughout the Maritime Provinces.

In 1838 and 1839, the area around Presque Isle was part of a territory dispute between the United States and Great Britain. The dispute, known unofficially as the Aroostook War—and even more unofficially as the Pork and Beans War—ended in 1842 with the signing of the agreement known officially as the Webster–Ashburton Treaty. United States Secretary of State Daniel Webster and British diplomat Alexander Baring, 1st Baron Ashburton, established the location of the Maine–New Brunswick border; established an agreement to share the use of the Great Lakes; reestablished a border at the 49th parallel in the westward frontier; established the location of the border between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods that was originally, though somewhat ambiguously, defined in the 1783 Treaty of Paris; and called for direct American involvement in the final suppression of the slave trade off the coast of Africa.

Let me repeat that last bit. A bloodless border skirmish between lumber

jacks in far northeastern Maine (or southeastern New Brunswick, depending whom you asked) led to a treaty that called for the United States to “effectually at once and forever” commit to curtailing the demand for African slaves.

A community with a nearly negligible black population had, as it turned out, played a very important role in the fate of black people all over the world.

With a population that is 95.4 percent white, Maine is the second whitest state in America. The county Callie and I were visiting, which is the size of the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined, has only about five hundred black residents. Largely because of all this whiteness, when I tell people I am visiting Maine, they invariably wonder about my reason. My reason is that, despite what a cursory look at demographics might suggest, Maine’s history is my history, too.

Portland, Maine, for instance, is the site of the third-oldest black church still standing in America—the Abyssinian Meeting House established in 1828 by abolitionists and former slaves. There are two things that are interesting to me about this fact. One is that Portland, Maine, once had a black population large enough to build and sustain a relatively substantial church. The second is that Maine has a population that remains interested enough in this aspect of its history to ensure that the building is still standing.

During the week, the Abyssinian Meeting house was the site of one of the first public schools for blacks in the country. In these and other ways, Maine established itself as a place where black people could find supportive communities, seek education, and build better lives. In 1826, two years before the founding of the Abyssinian Meeting House, John Brown Russwurm graduated from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. He was the third African American to graduate from a US college. When Macon B. Allen completed the Maine bar exam in 1844, he became the first black person in America to pass a state bar. From 1866 to 1868, my own relative, John W. Dungy, a former slave from Virginia, studied at Bates Seminary in Lewiston, Maine. But I wouldn’t learn about this until later.

What I knew when I set out to explore Presque Isle was that Maine served a major role in the preamble to the Civil War, and I wanted to witness a part of this history with Callie.

Back in 2003, I had paid a visit to a friend in his house in Pittston, Maine. The point of the trip was to take a break from the book I was writing, a series of poems about African American life in Philadelphia and Virginia from 1830 to 1850. But writers never really take vacations from our obsessions. I must have mentioned my research at a social gathering, because during my visit I was taken on a tour of two buildings: a doctor’s office that had once been a ship captain’s home, and a house that was still a private residence. Located in Gardiner and in close proximity to the Kennebec River, which was once a major channel for hauling ice and other precious commodities, both homes had served as stops on the Underground Railroad.

The doctor’s office had been remodeled so thoroughly that I could no

longer see firsthand evidence of its role in the Underground Railroad, but the private home still boasted a trap door in the attic over the L-shaped hallway that connected the house to its outbuildings. This trapdoor led to a crawl space where runaway slaves, smuggled from the nearby river, were hidden until they could be safely transported farther north. The house stood on a quiet residential street in what appeared to be a guileless Maine town, but crouching in that crawl space, I understood the state's role in American history in a more radical light.

It is almost as if the entire Civil War was started and ended by the people of Maine. While her husband professed at Bowdoin (about twenty-five miles south of the Underground Railroad sites I visited in Gardiner), Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote a significant portion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first serialized in 1851. In the years after its publication, the novel was outsold only by the Holy Bible.

It is reported that Abraham Lincoln once called Stowe the "little woman" who started "this Great War," by which he meant the American Civil War. An interesting coincidence is that Joshua Chamberlain, a Bowdoin College professor like Stowe's husband, could be considered the man who ended the war. As Brigadier General, it was Chamberlain who accepted the surrender of arms of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia on April 12, 1865, in Appomattox, Virginia, effectively ending major combat and, by commanding his men to salute the surrendering Confederate troops, introducing traditions of honor and forgiveness that would direct the course of Reconstruction.

Maine was heavily invested in the war and its outcome. Proportionally, the state committed more combatants to the conflict than any other state in the Union, as many as eighty thousand men. Over 250 men came from Aroostook County, a sparsely and recently settled territory. With so many men engaged in combat, the state of Maine was destined to sustain heavy losses. On June 18, 1864, an ill-advised charge across an open field toward Confederate forces resulted in the death of more officers and men in a single day than was incurred by any other Union Regiment in the war. In the Siege of Petersburg, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery Regiment lost 67 percent of its 900-man unit to death or severe injury. Though he survived that charge, the commanding officer, Colonel Daniel Chaplin, a merchant from Bangor, later lost his life to a sharp-shooter, thus joining his fate with those of the 681 men who died in combat or from disease during the 1st Maine's muster.

Sometimes these sorts of data points seem unconnected to the world in which I live. But when I visit Maine, even the most quirky facts connect back to me. I get lost in Maine's history, finding myself inside it.

Hannibal Hamlin, whose son briefly served as an officer in the 1st Maine before being promoted to a significantly less fatal rank, served in the Aroostook War in 1839, a war whose key fort gave its name to the university to which Callie and I were headed.

In 1861, Hamlin was elected Vice President of the United States under Abraham Lincoln, a post he would hold during the Civil War. Though Hamlin

stayed in Bangor with his family for much of the conflict, and though he is reported to have called himself the least important man in Washington, like many of his fellow Mainers, Hamlin helped to stir the pot that boiled over and brewed a war.

In Hamlin's day the Republican Party was America's radical, liberal party, and Hamlin was, in a substantial way, responsible for that. Formed in 1854 in opposition to the extension of slavery to Kansas and other free territories, the Republican Party of the 1850s and 1860s supported free enterprise and talked about protecting farmers and small businesses. Some things don't change. But by "free" the Republicans of the 1860s meant "not enslaved." The Republican party of the 1860s wanted to expand the free territories of the country, thus forcing the collapse of the system of slavery with which the average man could not compete. The farmers and businessmen they wanted to protect were yeomen farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen whose small-scale output was no match for plantations and shops run on slave labor.

In 1860, there were about 4,500,000 black people in America, roughly 3,700,000 of whom were slaves residing in the Southern states. This might lead you to believe that the nation, particularly the South, was awash with people who had direct access to this enormous unpaid labor force. In fact, this is far from the truth. Fewer than 2 percent of the entire US population and just under 5 percent of the Southern population owned even one slave, and a significantly smaller percentage owned more than twenty. That means that the majority of America's slave labor force was owned by a very small—but very powerful—minority. Consider that Jay Leno owns more than a hundred cars and John McCain more houses than he can count. When I visited Maine with my daughter, our family only owned one of the first and none of the latter. It happens like that in America, this unequal distribution of wealth. Hannibal Hamlin and his more radical supporters wanted to do something about that. The Civil War was as much about wealth distribution as it was about freeing black people from bondage.

Hamlin was part of the reason Maine was the first northeastern state to join the Republican Party. In opposition to the 1854 signing of the Nebraska–Kansas Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise and would allow slavery to migrate north and west to Kansas and other free territories, former US Representative and then Senator Hannibal Hamlin withdrew from the Democratic Party. He believed that the progression of slave economies into these new territories would make it harder for free enterprise to compete. As a Republican candidate for governor of Maine, he won a majority vote and was inaugurated in January 1857. Apparently preferring national politics to local, Hamlin withdrew from the office of governor later in the year and returned to the US Senate, where he stayed until becoming Lincoln's VP.

Hamlin was selected as Vice President because his presence in the cabinet created regional balance between the Northeast and the American West (represented by Lincoln). Lincoln had not met Hamlin before the election, and

by many accounts didn't much care for him afterwards. In order to achieve a different sort of cabinet balance for Lincoln's second term, the Republican Party jettisoned Hamlin and chose, instead, a Southerner by the name of Andrew Johnson.

Hamlin's term in office expired on March 4, 1865. Thus, America was just forty days shy of having an anti-slavery president from Maine making decisions about the end of the Civil War and the implementation of Reconstruction. I daresay, the presence of Maine-born Hannibal Hamlin as Vice President at the time of Lincoln's assassination, rather than the "Tennessee Tailor" Andrew Johnson, would have garnered a vastly different historical trajectory for the United States.



I was confronted by the notion of alternative histories as I pushed Callie's stroller through Presque Isle.

If the Pork and Bean War had turned out otherwise and it was Britain who got these 7,015 square miles of contested territory, the day's stroll might have been undertaken in Canada, and the received history of white settlement in this part of Aroostook County might have less to do with the War Between the States and more to do with Peter Bull, who came to this area from New Brunswick in 1819 to set up a sawmill.

Mostly gone from the accounts are Bull's name, the names of the twenty or so other families who settled the area around the same time, and the individual identities of the Micmac who named the river and once called all the land around it home. History is little more than a record of disputed erasures. It was an American, Fairbanks, whose claim on this land was recognized, but even his name was pushed aside by 1859 when the incorporated township officially dubbed itself Presque Isle.

It looked like the baby was sleeping. The sun beat through the clouds, so the March day was warming. I pushed her stroller as the walking tour's map directed. Past a wool carding mill, lumber mills, a grist mill, several mansions, a furniture factory, a tinware factory, and halls where the Masons, the Odd Fellows, a Grange, the Knights of Pythias, and members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union could meet. The baby and I strolled past the substantial home of James Phair, postmaster, hotelier, and brother of "The Starch King" Thomas H. Phair, who owned twenty of the sixty-two area starch factories. Potatoes were the crop of the land, but without reliable roads, Aroostook County farmers took to selling their product to these starch factories, converting a perishable product into a marketable resource. In 1894, James Phair sold his hotel to the railroad company to make room for the train station that the potato brought to Presque Isle, and with that railroad line came the promise of more wealth.

But much of what the potato built was no longer there for us to see. Fires, including the "Big Fire of 1883," which destroyed much of Main Street, ravished the wooden buildings and boardwalks of Presque Isle. Major railroad lines and

shipping channels and interstates and airline routes all flirted with Presque Isle, but then passed it by, while a potato blight crippled the cash crop, and starched collars became a thing of the past.

I pushed the stroller through the old downtown district, and turned right onto Church Street, where I stopped in front of Presque Isle's white-columned First Congregationalist Church, pastored, for six months in 1879, by Harriet Beecher Stowe's son, Charles "Charley" Stowe. There I discovered, via an informative plaque, that the building where Charley Stowe preached was gone.

This new building, larger than the original, replaced the first one, which burned in 1909.

It was snowing by this time, the first snow Callie had ever experienced, but bundled in her snowsuit and blanket, with a hood and oversized mittens, she looked completely disinterested in the picture I snapped in front of the church. As if, despite all the connections I'd discovered, nothing we'd experienced mattered to her.



In one of our correspondences about the details of my trip, the woman who invited me to speak at Fort Kent recommended we visit Main Street's Sorpreso Café during our Presque Isle layover, but Callie and I had been delayed leaving the hotel, and I'd taken my time on our tour through town, so now we didn't have the leisure to sit. What I did, instead, was duck into Governor's Restaurant for takeaway.

But nothing happened quickly while we were in Presque Isle.

I often find it easier to carry Callie's stroller up a set of stairs than to push her to Saturn and back on some long, windy access ramp, but the stairs at Governor's Restaurant were crowded with patrons.

Soon, the ramp, too, was crowded with patrons.

These new patrons stopped to look into the stroller. "Isn't she a doll!" one said.

"Would you look at all that hair!" said another. Even with a hood, Callie displayed quite a crown.

A third woman wore a coat emblazoned with the local campus's logo: The University of Maine, Presque Isle—North of Ordinary. "Would you look at those eyes?" the woman said. "I bet she doesn't miss a beat, does she?"

The women asked, "Where are you visiting from?" "How are you liking Maine?" "What do you think of all this snow?"

The first woman asked, "How long do you plan on staying in Presque Isle?"

I smiled. I said, "Thank you." I said, "It's a lovely town, but I'm just here for the morning." The three kept peering into the stroller, smiling at me, then peering into the stroller again as if Callie and I were an inconceivable anomaly. I said, "I better get the baby out of the cold."

Inside the restaurant, I ordered a lobster roll. I ordered a whoopie pie, too, because there was no one there to tell me I shouldn't. I love these Maine treats.

Their dark-chocolate cake-like cookies surrounding marshmallow cream fillings always seem like a good idea at the outset.

After I'd placed my order, I waited on the bench in the restaurant's foyer, rocking the stroller and trying to read a real estate brochure, curious what it would be like to live in a place where property was so cheap. I retracted the stroller's canopy and removed the snowsuit's hood so Callie wouldn't overheat.

"Would you look at that baby!?" said the hostess.

"Have you ever seen so much hair on a baby before?" asked a patron.

"You're not letting her get cold, are you?" asked somebody's grandmother.

"Were you on the plane with my boyfriend last night?" asked a young waitress who'd rounded the corner and cut through the crowd. By this time I'd put down the real estate brochure and was free to focus on the wall of words that was coming my way. "Driving home from the airport, my boyfriend told me all about this baby who flew in the seat next to him. He said she was really sweet, so quiet." She said this as if Callie's calmness in the restaurant explained how she knew my baby was *the* baby her boyfriend had come to admire. "He must have told me three times that he wished we'd gone back inside the airport so I could see her. This is that baby, right? Cute as a button. Cute as can be. He told me she was a darling." The waitress smiled into Callie's stroller, tickling the top of her snowsuit in a manner that resembled the chuffing of a chin. "I can't believe my luck, bumping into you like this," she said. "I was just in the kitchen dropping an order and one of the waitresses told me there was a cute little baby out here I had to see. I can't believe it's the same baby my boyfriend told me about last night. He said she was the sweetest baby he'd ever flown with in all his life."

"How's that puppy of yours?" I asked, remembering her boyfriend had bought her a lab because he thought she needed company while he was away working oilrigs off the coast of Louisiana.

"Oh," she smiled. "She's the sweetest little thing in the world." She chuffed Callie's snowsuit and started to turn away. "I can't wait to tell him you came in to the restaurant. What are the odds of running into you this way?" She headed back to her tables.

"One lobster roll," the cashier called.

I grabbed the sandwich and tossed my black-and-white treat into the brown paper bag.

The route back to our hotel was steeper than I'd remembered, and I had to trudge uphill in as close to a jog as I could muster wearing boots and a parka and pushing thirty pounds of baby and stroller. Callie had fallen back to sleep, cozy and protected from the biting snow. Rounding the corner into the driveway of the Presque Isle Conference Center and Hotel at about 1:10, I saw an official-looking vehicle with a woman standing by it, smiling and waving in my direction.

"Hi! I'm Lisa. I'm the student who's gonna drive you up to UMFK," the woman said.

I paused near the rear of her car long enough to catch my breath and tell her

I had to run into the hotel to go to the bathroom, change the baby, and collect our things from the bell stand. “Actually, it might be a little while. I should feed her too,” I said.

“Oh, no problem. I’m happy to wait as long as you need. I’m just glad I found you,” said Lisa. She helped me haul the stroller up the five stairs leading to the lobby. “My cell phone battery died, and I wasn’t sure how we’d make contact when I got here,” she said, settling into one of the upholstered chairs to wait. “But I shouldn’t have worried,” she sighed, clearly comfortable in the place where she sat. “I spotted you two right away.”