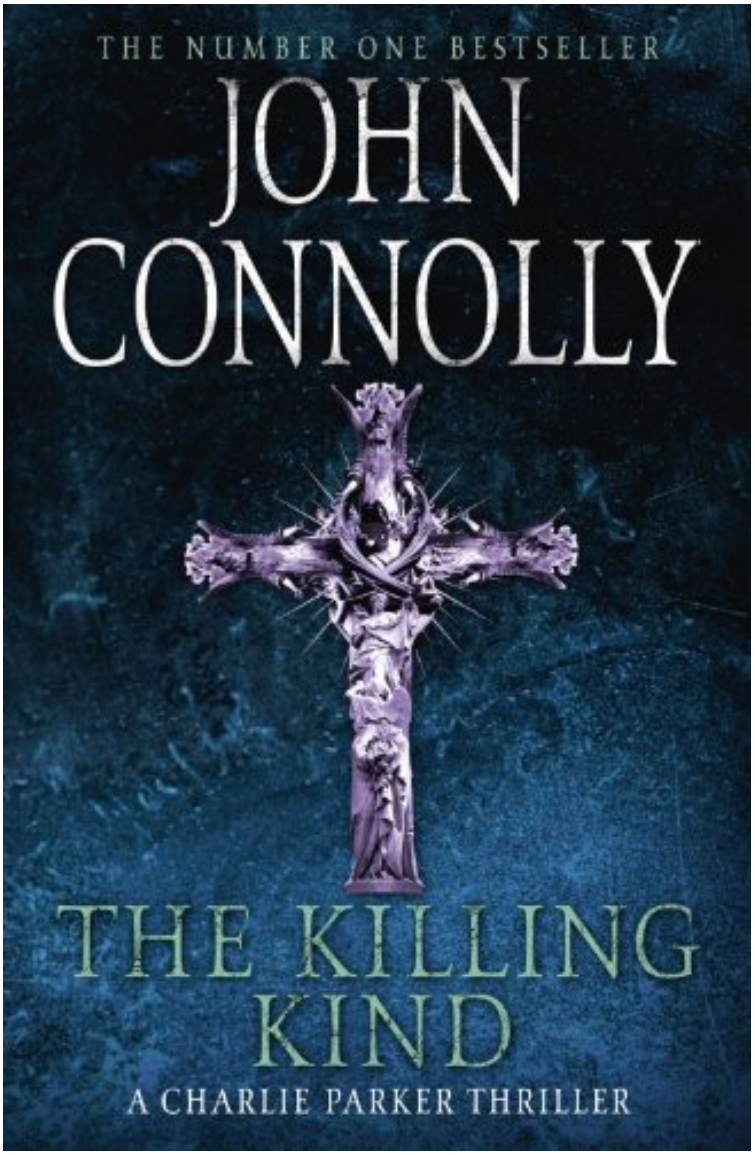
The Killing Kind: A Charlie Parker Thriller: 3



Par John Connolly
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Par John Connolly : The Killing Kind: A Charlie Parker Thriller: 3 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Killing Kind: A Charlie Parker Thriller: 3:

Description : Description du produit His two previous novels, Every Dead Thing and Dark Hollow, were international bestsellers. Now the "compulsively readable" (Publishers Weekly) John Connolly confirms his position as one of our leading crime novelists with a story of superb menace and style. The body of Grace Peltier, a brilliant Ph.D. candidate, is found in the front seat of her car on a back road in northern Maine. No one wants to believe it was suicide -- not her father, not former U.S. senator Jack Mercier, and not private detective Charlie Parker, who has been hired to investigate the young woman's untimely death. But when a mass grave is accidentally discovered nearby, revealing the grim truth behind the disappearance of a religious community known as the Aroostook Baptists, Parker realizes that their deaths and the violent passing of Grace Peltier are part of the same mystery, one that has its roots in her family history and in the origins of the shadowy organization known as the Fellowship. Soon Parker is drawn into the dark world of

this zealous religious group that has already consumed every person who has dared confront it. When a relic is discovered, one capable of linking the Fellowship to the slaughter of the Aroostook Baptists, Parker is forced into violent conflict with the Fellowship and its enigmatic leader. Haunted by the ghost of a small boy and tormented by the demonic killer known as Mr. Pudd, Parker is forced to fight for his lover, his friends...and his very soul. "This is a honeycomb world. It hides a hollow heart," writes John Connolly. In The Killing Kind, he has once again created a world of love and hate, of tenderness and violence. Hailed by critics as "one of the best of the genre" (Toronto Sun), his intense, poetic prose and his terrifying clan of characters are sure to thrill even the most discerning suspense reader.

Prsentation de l'diteurCharlie Parker returns with a thrilling case - perfect for fans of Michael Connelly and Jeffery Deaver.Did Grace Peltier commit suicide? When a mass grave in northern Maine reveals the final resting place of a religious community that disappeared almost forty years earlier, private detective Charlie Parker, hired to investigate the circumstances of her death, realises that their deaths and the violent passing of Grace Peltier are part of the same mystery, one that has its roots in her family history and in the origins of the shadowy organisation known as the Fellowship. Aided by the genial killers Angel and Louis, Parker must descend into the depths of a honeycomb world populated by dark angels and lost souls, a world where the ghosts of the dead wait for justice and the unwary are prey for the worst kind of creatures.The killing kind. . ..co.ukSpider-bites are a nasty way to die, and there is a man out there with an unusual taste for insect venom of all kinds and for the deaths of those who disagree with or affront him. John Connolly's sleuth Charlie Parker is free of the ghosts of his slaughtered wife and child, but sooner or later new ghosts come to him demanding silently that he avenge them. In The Killing Kind, it is not Grace, the ex-girlfriend whose faked suicide he is hired to investigate, so much as the dead fanatics she was killed for writing a thesis on. The Aroostook Baptists disappeared into the gloomy woods of North Maine in the sixties and nothing more is known until road workers find a mass burial. Connolly provides his usual excellent combination of snappy one-liners (many of them from Parker's gay assassin sidekicks Angel and Louis) together with scenes of the utmost terror. Parker soon realises that the spider killer, Elmer Pudd, is only the tool of someone far worse, a sanctimonious artist in intolerance and mayhem--and it is only by carefully measured doses that we come to realise just how bad that is going to be. --Roz Kaveney ExtraitChapter OneIt was spring, and color had returned to the world.The distant mountains were transforming, the gray trees now cloaking themselves in new life, their leaves a faded echo of fall's riot. The scarlets of the red maples were dominant, but they were being joined now by the greenish yellow leaves of the red oaks; the silver of the bigtooth aspens; and the greens of the quaking aspens, the birches, and the beeches. Poplars and willows, elms and hazelnuts were all bursting into full bloom, and the woods were ringing with the noise of returning birds.I could see the woods from the gym at One City Center, the tips of the evergreens still dominating the landscape amid the slowly transforming seasonals. Rain was falling on the streets of Portland and umbrellas swarmed on the streets below, glistening darkly like the carapaces of squat black beetles.For the first time in many months, I felt good. I was in semiregular employment. I was eating well, working out three or four days each week, and Rachel Wolfe was coming up from Boston for the weekend, so I would have someone to admire my improving physique. I hadn't suffered bad dreams for some time. My dead wife and my lost daughter had not appeared to me since the previous Christmas, when they touched me amid the falling snow and gave me some respite from the visions that had haunted me for so long.I completed a set of military presses and laid the bar down, sweat dripping from my nose and rising in little wisps of steam from my body. Seated on a bench, sipping some water, I watched the two men enter from the reception area, glance around, then fix on me. They wore conservative dark suits with somber ties. One was large, with brown wavy hair and a thick mustache, like a porn star gone to seed, the bulge of the gun in the cheap rig beneath his jacket visible to me in the mirror behind him. The other was smaller, a tidy, dapper man with receding, prematurely graying hair. The big man held a pair of shades in his hand while his companion wore a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses with square frames. He smiled as he approached me."Mr. Parker?" he asked, his hands clasped behind his back.I nodded and the hands disengaged, the right extending toward me in a sharp motion like a shark making its way through familiar waters."My name is Quentin Harrold, Mr. Parker," he said. "I work for Mr. Jack Mercier."I wiped my own right hand on a towel to remove some of the sweat, then accepted the handshake. Harrold's mouth quivered a little as my still sweaty palm gripped his, but he resisted the temptation to wipe his hand clean on the side of his trousers. I guessed that he didn't want to spoil the crease.Jack Mercier came from money so old that some of it had jangled on the Mayflower. He was a former

U.S. senator, as his father and grandfather had been before him, and lived in a big house out on Prouts Neck overlooking the sea. He had interests in timber companies, newspaper publishing, cable television, software, and the Internet. In fact, he had interests in just about anything that might ensure the Merciers' old money was regularly replenished with injections of new money. As a senator he had been something of a liberal and he still supported various ecological and civil rights groups through generous donations. He was a family man; he didn't screw around -- as far as anyone knew -- and he had emerged from his brief flirtation with politics with his reputation enhanced rather than tarnished, a product as much of his financial independence as of any moral probity. There were rumors that he was planning a return to politics, possibly as an independent candidate for governor, although Mercier himself had yet to confirm them.Quentin Harrold coughed into his palm, then used it as an excuse to take a handkerchief from his pocket and discreetly wipe his hand. "Mr. Mercier would like to see you," he said, in the tone of voice he probably reserved for the pool cleaner and the chauffeur. "He has some work for you."I looked at him. He smiled. I smiled back. We stayed like that, grinning at each other, until the only options were to speak or start dating. Harrold took the first option."Perhaps you didn't hear me, Mr. Parker," he said. "Mr. Mercier has some work for you.""And?"Harrold's smile wavered. "I'm not sure what you mean.""I'm not so desperate for work, Mr. Harrold, that I run and fetch every time somebody throws a stick." This wasn't entirely true. Portland, Maine, wasn't such a wellspring of vice and corruption that I could afford to look down my nose at too many jobs. If Harrold had been better looking and a different sex, I'd have fetched the stick and then rolled onto my back to have my belly rubbed if I thought it might have earned me more than a couple of bucks.Harrold glanced at the big guy with the mustache. The big guy shrugged, then went back to staring at me impassively, maybe trying to figure out what my head would look like mounted over his fireplace.Harrold coughed again. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to offend you." He seemed to have trouble forming the words, as if they were part of someone else's vocabulary and he was just borrowing them for a time. I waited for his nose to start growing or his tongue to turn to ash and fall to the floor, but nothing happened. "We'd be grateful if you'd spare the time to talk to Mr. Mercier," he conceded with a wince.I figured that I'd played hard to get for long enough, although I still wasn't sure that they'd respect me in the morning. "When I've finished up here, I can probably drive out and see him," I said.Harrold craned his neck slightly, indicating that he believed he might have misheard me. "Mr. Mercier was hoping that you could come with us now, Mr. Parker. Mr. Mercier is a very busy man, as I'm sure you'll understand."I stood up, stretched, and prepared to do another set of presses. "Oh, I understand, Mr. Harrold. I'll be as quick as I can. Why don't you gentlemen wait downstairs, and I'll join you when I'm done? You're making me nervous. I might drop a weight on you."Harrold shifted on his feet for a moment, then nodded."We'll be in the lobby," he said."Enjoy," I replied, then watched them in the mirror as they walked away.I took my time finishing my workout, then had a long shower and talked about the future of the Pirates with the guy who was cleaning out the changing room. When I figured that Harrold and the porn star had spent enough time looking at their watches, I took the elevator down to the lobby and waited for them to join me. The expression on Harrold's face, I noticed, was oscillating between annoyance and relief.Harrold insisted that I accompany him and his companion in their Mercedes, but despite their protests I opted to follow them in my own Mustang. It struck me that I was becoming more willfully perverse as I settled into my midthirties. If Harrold had told me to take my own car, I'd probably have chained myself to the steering column of the Mercedes until they agreed to give me a ride.The Mustang was a 1969 Boss 302, and replaced the Mach 1 that had been shot to pieces the previous year. The 302 had been sourced for me by Willie Brew, who ran an auto shop down in Queens. The spoilers and wings were kind of over the top, but it made my eyes water when it accelerated and Willie had sold it to me for $8,000, which was about $3,000 less than a car in its condition was worth. The downside was that I might as well have had arrested adolescence painted on the side in big black letters.I followed the Mercedes south out of Portland and on to U.S. 1. At Oak Hill, we turned east and I stayed behind them at a steady thirty all the way to the tip of the Neck. At the Black Point Inn, guests sat at the picture windows, staring out with drinks in their hands at Grand Beach and Pine Point. A Scarborough PD cruiser inched along the road, making sure that everybody stayed under thirty and nobody unwanted hung around long enough to spoil the view.Jack Mercier had his home on Winslow Homer Road, within sight of the painter's former house. As we approached, an electronically operated barrier opened and a second Mercedes swept toward us from the house, headed for Black Point Road. In the backseat sat a small man with a dark beard and a skullcap on his head. We exchanged a look as the two cars passed each other, and he nodded at me. His face was familiar, I thought, but I couldn't place it. Then the road was clear and we continued on our way.Mercier's home was a

huge white place with landscaped gardens and so many rooms that a search party would have to be organized if anybody got lost on the way to the bathroom. The man with the mustache parked the Mercedes while I followed Harrold through the large double front doors, down the hallway, and into a room to the left of the main stairs. It was a library, furnished with antique couches and chairs. Books stretched to the ceiling on three walls; on the east-facing wall, a window looked out on the grounds and the sea beyond, a desk and chair beside it and a small bar to the right.Harrold closed the door behind me and left me to examine the spines on the books and the photographs on the wall. The books ranged from political biographies to historical works, mainly examinations of the Civil War, Korea, and Vietnam. There was no fiction. In one corner was a small locked cabinet with a glass front. The books it contained were different from those on the open shelves. They had titles like Myth and History in the Book of Revelation; Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry; The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire; and The Apocalyptic Sublime. It was cheerful stuff: bedtime reading for the end of the world. There were also critical biographies of the artists William Blake, Albrecht Durer, Lucas Cranach the Elder, and Jean Duvet, in addition to facsimile editions of what appeared to be medieval texts. Finally, on the top shelf were twelve almost identical slim volumes, each bound in black leather with six gold bands inset on the spine in three equidistant sets of two. At the base of each spine was the last letter of the Greek alphabet: W, for omega. There was no key in the lock, and the doors stayed closed when I gave them an experimental tug.I turned my attention to the photographs on the walls. There were pictures of Jack Mercier with various Kennedys, Clintons, and even a superannuated Jimmy Carter. Others showed Mercier in an assortment of athletic poses from his youth: winning races, pretending to toss footballs, and being carried aloft on the shoulders of his adoring teammates. There were also testimonials from grateful universities, framed awards from charitable organizations headed by movie stars, and even some medals presented by poor but proud nations. It was like an underachiever's worst nightmare.One more recent photograph caught my eye. It showed Mercier sitting at a table, flanked on one side by a woman in her sixties wearing a smartly tailored black jacket and a string of pearls around her neck. To Mercier's right was the bearded man who had passed me in the Mercedes, and beside him was a figure I recognized from his appearances on prime-time news shows, usually looking triumphant at the top of some courthouse steps: Warren Ober, of Ober, Thayer Moss, one of New England's top law firms. Ober was Mercier's attorney, and even the mention of his name was enough to send most opposition running for the hills. When Ober, Thayer Moss took a case, they brought so many lawyers with them to court that there was barely enough room for the jury. Even judges got nervous around them.Looking at the photograph, it struck me that nobody in it seemed particularly happy. There was an air of tension about the poses, a sense that some darker business was being conducted and the photographer was an unnecessary distraction. There were thick files on the table before them, and white coffee cups lay discarded like yesterday's roses.Behind me the door opened and Jack Mercier entered, laying aside on the table a sheaf of papers speckled with bar charts and figures. He was tall, six-two or six-three, with shoulders that spoke of his athletic past and an expensive gold Rolex that indicated his present status as a very wealthy man. His hair was white and thick, swept back from a perma-tanned forehead over large blue eyes, a Roman nose, and a thin, smiling mouth, the teeth white and even. I guessed that he was sixty-five by now, maybe a little older. He wore a blue polo shirt, tan chinos, and brown Sebagos. There was white hair on his arms, and tufts of it peeked out over the collar of his shirt. For a moment the smile on his face faltered as he saw my attention focused on the photograph, but it quickly brightened again as I moved away from it. Meanwhile, Harrold stood at the door like a nervous matchmaker."Mr. Parker," said Mercier, shaking my hand with enough force to dislodge my fillings. "I appreciate you taking the time to see me." He waved me to a chair. From the hallway, an olive-skinned man in a white tunic appeared with a silver tray and set it down. Two china cups, a silver coffeepot, and a matching silver creamer and sugar bowl jangled softly as the tray hit the table. The tray looked heavy, and the servant seemed kind of relieved to be rid of it."Thank you," said Mercier. We watched as he left, Harrold behind him. Harrold gently closed the door, giving me one last pained look before he departed, then Mercier and I were alone."I know a lot about you, Mr. Parker," he began as he poured the coffee and offered me cream and sugar. He had an easy, unaffected manner, designed to put even the most fleeting of acquaintances at ease. It was so unaffected that he must have spent years perfecting it."Likewise," I replied.He frowned good-naturedly. "I don't imagine you're old enough to have ever voted for me.""No, you retired before it became an issue.""Did your grandfather vote for me?"My grandfather, Bob Warren, had been a Cumberland County sheriff's deputy and had lived in Scarborough all his life. My mother and I had come to stay with him after my father died. In the end, he outlived his own wife and

daughter, and I had buried him one autumn day after his great heart failed him at last."I don't believe he ever voted for anyone, Mr. Mercier," I said. "My grandfather had a natural distrust of politicians." The only politician for whom my grandfather ever had any regard was President Zachary Taylor, who never voted in an election and didn't even vote for himself.Jack Mercier grinned his big white grin again. "He might have been right. Most of them have sold their souls ten times over before they're even elected. Once it's sold, you can never buy it back. You just have to hope that you got the best price for it.""And are you in the business of buying souls, Mr. Mercier, or selling them?"The grin stayed fixed, but the eyes narrowed. "I take care of my own soul, Mr. Parker, and let other people do as they wish with theirs."Our special moment was broken by the entrance of a woman into the room. She wore a deceptively casual outfit of black pants and a black cashmere sweater, and a thin gold necklace gleamed dully against the dark wool. She was about forty-five, give or take a year. Her hair was blond, fading to gray in places, and there was a hardness to her features that made her seem less beautiful than she probably thought she was.This was Mercier's wife, Deborah, who had some kind of permanent residency in the local society pages. She was a Southern belle, from what I could recall, a graduate of the Madeira School for Girls in Virginia. The Madeira's principal claim to fame, apart from producing eligible young women who always used the correct knife and never spat on the sidewalk, was that its former headmistress, Jean Harris, had shot dead her lover, Dr. Herman Tarnower, in 1980, after he left her for a younger woman. Dr. Tarnower was best known as the author of The Scarsdale Diet, so his death seemed to provide conclusive evidence that diets could be bad for your health. Jack Mercier had met his future wife at the Swan Ball in Nashville, the most lavish social occasion in the South, and had introduced himself to her by buying her a '55 Coupe de Ville with his AmEx card at the postdinner auction. It was, as someone later commented, love at first swipe.Mrs. Mercier held a magazine in her hand and assumed a look of surprise, but the expression didn't reach her eyes."I'm sorry, Jack. I didn't know you had company." She was lying, and I could see in Mercier's face that he knew she was lying, that we both knew. He tried to hide his annoyance behind the trademark smile but I could hear his teeth gritting. He rose, and I rose with him."Mr. Parker, this is my wife Deborah."Mrs. Mercier took one step toward me, then waited for me to cross the rest of the floor before extending her hand. It hung limply in my palm as I gripped it, and her eyes bored holes in my face while her teeth gnawed at my skull. Her hostility was so blatant it was almost funny."I'm pleased to meet you," she lied, before turning her glare on her husband. "I'll talk to you later, Jack," she said, and made it sound like a threat. She didn't look back as she closed the door.The temperature in the room immediately rose a few degrees, and Mercier regained his composure. "My apologies, Mr. Parker. Tensions in the house are a little high. My daughter Samantha is to be married early next month.""Really. Who's the lucky man?" It seemed polite to ask."Robert Ober. He's the son of my attorney.""At least your wife will get to buy a new hat.""She's buying a great deal more than a hat, Mr. Parker, and she is currently occupied by the arrangements for our guests. Warren and I may have to take to my yacht to escape the demands of our respective wives, although they are such excellent sailors themselves that I imagine they will insist upon keeping us company. Do you sail, Mr. Parker?""With difficulty. I don't have a yacht.""Everybody should have a yacht," remarked Mercier, his good humor returning in earnest."Why, you're practically a socialist, Mr. Mercier."He laughed softly, then put his coffee cup down and arranged his features into a sincere expression. "I hope you'll forgive me for prying into your background, but I wanted to find out about you before I requested your help," he continued.I acknowledged his comments with a nod. "In your position, I'd probably do the same," I said.He leaned forward and said gently: "I'm sorry about your family. It was a terrible thing that happened to them, and to you."My wife, Susan, and my daughter, Jennifer, had been taken from me by a killer known as the Traveling Man while I was still a policeman in New York. He had killed a lot of other people too, until he was stopped. When I killed him, a part of me had died with him.Over two years had passed since then, and for much of that time the deaths of Susan and Jennifer had defined me. I had allowed that to be so until I realized that pain and hurt, guilt and regret, were tearing me apart. Now, slowly, I was getting my life back together in Maine, back in the place where I had spent my teens and part of my twenties, back in the house I had shared with my mother and my grandfather, and in which I now lived alone. I had a woman who cared for me, who made me feel that it was worth trying to rebuild my life with her beside me and that maybe the time to begin that process had now arrived."I can't imagine what such a thing must be like," continued Mercier. "But I know someone who probably can, which is why I've asked you here today."Outside, the rain had stopped and the clouds had parted. Behind Mercier's head, the sun shone brightly through the window, bathing the desk and chair in its glow and replicating the shape of the glasswork on the carpet below. I watched as a bug crawled

across the patch of bright light, its tiny feelers testing the air as it went."His name is Curtis Peltier, Mr. Parker," said Mercier. "He used to be my business partner, a long time ago, until he asked me to buy him out and followed his own path. Things didn't work out so well for him; he made some bad investments, I'm afraid. Ten days ago his daughter was found dead in her car. Her name was Grace Peltier. You may have read about her. In fact, I understand you may have known her once upon a time."I nodded. Yes, I thought, I knew Grace once upon a time, when we were both much younger and thought that we might, for an instant, even be in love. It was a fleeting thing, lasting no more than a couple of months after my high school graduation, one of any number of similar summer romances that curled up and died like a leaf as soon as autumn came. Grace was pretty and dark, with very blue eyes, a tiny mouth, and skin the color of honey. She was strong -- a medal-winning swimmer -- and formidably intelligent, which meant that despite her looks, a great many young men shied away from her. I wasn't as smart as Grace but I was smart enough to appreciate something beautiful when it appeared before me. At least I thought I was. In the end, I didn't appreciate it, or her, at all.f0 I remembered Grace mostly because of one morning spent at Higgins Beach, not far from where I now sat with Jack Mercier. We stood beneath the shadow of the old guest house known as the Breakers, the wind tossing Grace's hair and the sea crashing before us. She had missed her period, she told me over the phone: five days late, and she was never late. As I drove down to Higgins Beach to meet her, my stomach felt like it was slowly being crushed in a vise. When a fleet of trucks passed by at the Oak Hill intersection, I briefly considered flooring the accelerator and ending it all. I knew then that whatever I felt for Grace Peltier, it wasn't love. She must have seen it in my face that morning as we sat in silence listening to the sound of the sea. When her period arrived two days later, after an agonizing wait for both of us, she told me that she didn't think we should see each other anymore, and I was happy to let her go. It wasn't one of my finer moments, I thought, not by a long shot. Since then, we hadn't stayed in touch. I had seen her once or twice, nodding to her in bars or restaurants, but we had never really spoken. Each time I saw her I was reminded of that meeting at Higgins Beach and of my own callow youth.I tried to recall what I had heard about her death. Grace, now a graduate student at Northeastern in Boston, had died from a single gunshot wound in a side road off U.S. 1, up by Ellsworth. Her body had been discovered slumped in the driver's seat of her car, the gun still in her hand. Suicide: the ultimate form of self-defense. She had been Curtis Peltier's only child. The story had merited more coverage than usual only because of Peltier's former connections to Jack Mercier. I hadn't attended the funeral."According to the newspaper reports, the police aren't looking for anyone in connection with her death, Mr. Mercier," I said. "They seem to think Grace committed suicide."He shook his head. "Curtis doesn't believe that Grace's wound was self-inflicted.""It's a common enough reaction," I replied. "Nobody wants to accept that someone close might have taken his or her own life. Too much blame accrues to those left behind for it to be accommodated so easily."Mercier stood, and his large frame blocked out the sunlight. I couldn't see the bug anymore. I wondered how it had reacted when the light disappeared. I guessed that it had probably taken it in stride, which is one of the burdens of being a bug: you pretty much have to take everything in stride, until something bigger stamps on you or eats you and the matter becomes immaterial."Grace was a strong, smart girl with her whole life ahead of her. She didn't own a gun of any kind and the police don't seem to have any idea where she might have acquired the one found in her hand.""Assuming that she killed herself," I added."Assuming that, yes.""Which you, in common with Mr. Peltier, don't."He sighed. "I agree with Curtis. Despite the views of the police, I think somebody killed Grace. I'd like you to look into this matter on his behalf.""Did Curtis Peltier approach you about this, Mr. Mercier?"Jack Mercier's gaze shifted. When he looked at me again, something had cloaked itself in the darkness of his pupils."He came to visit me a few days ago. We discussed it, and he told me what he believed. He doesn't have enough money to pay for a private investigator, Mr. Parker, but thankfully, I do. I don't think Curtis will have any difficulty in talking this over with you, or allowing you to look into it further. I will be paying your bill, but officially you will be working for Curtis. I would ask you to keep my name out of this affair."I finished my coffee and laid the cup down on the saucer. I didn't speak until I had marshaled my thoughts a little."Mr. Mercier, I didn't mind coming out here but I don't do that kind of work anymore."Mercier's brow furrowed. "But you are a private investigator?""Yes, sir, I am, but I've made a decision to deal only with certain matters: white-collar crime, corporate intelligence. I don't take on cases involving death or violence.""Do you carry a gun?""No. Loud noises scare me.""But you used to carry a gun?""That's right, I used to. Now, if I want to disarm a white-collar criminal, I just take away his pen.""As I told you, Mr. Parker, I know a great deal about you. Investigating fraud and petty theft doesn't appear to be your style. In the past you have involved yourself in more...colorful matters.""Those kinds of

investigations cost me too much.""I'll cover any costs you may incur, and more than adequately.""I don't mean financial cost, Mr. Mercier."He nodded to himself, as if he suddenly understood. "You're talking moral, physical cost, maybe? I understand you were injured in the course of some of your work."I didn't reply. I'd been hurt, and in response I had acted violently, destroying a little of myself each time I did so, but that wasn't the worst of it. It seemed to me that as soon as I became involved in such matters, they caused a fissure in my world. I saw things: lost things, dead things. It was as if my intervention drew them to me, those who had been wrenched painfully, violently from this life. Once I thought it was a product of my own incipient guilt, or an empathy I felt that passed beyond feeling and into hallucination.But now I believed that they really did know, and they really did come.Jack Mercier leaned against his desk, opened his drawer, and drew a black, leather-bound folder from within. He wrote for a few seconds, then tore the check from the folder."This is a check for ten thousand dollars, Mr. Parker. All I want you to do is talk to Curtis. If you think that there's nothing you can do for him, then the money is yours to keep and there'll be no hard feelings between us. If you do agree to look into this matter, we can negotiate further remuneration."I shook my head. "Once again, it's not the money, Mr. Mercier -- " I began.He raised a hand to stop me. "I know that. I didn't mean to offend you.""No offense taken.""I have friends in the police force, in Scarborough and Portland and farther afield. Those friends tell me that you are a very fine investigator, with very particular talents. I want you to utilize those talents to find out what really happened to Grace, for my sake and for that of Curtis."I noticed that he had placed himself above Grace's father in his appeal and once again I was conscious of a disparity between what he was telling me and what he knew. I thought too of his wife's unveiled hostility, my sense that she had known exactly who I was and why I was in her house, and that she bitterly resented my presence there. Mercier proffered the check and in his eyes I saw something that I couldn't quite identify: grief maybe, or even guilt."Please, Mr. Parker," he said. "Talk to him. I mean, what harm can it do?"What harm can it do? Those words would come back to haunt me again and again in the days that followed. They came back to haunt Jack Mercier as well. I wonder if he thought of them in his final moments, as the shadows drew around him and those he loved were drowned in redness.Despite my misgivings I took the check. And in that instant, unbeknownst to us both, a circuit was completed, sending a charge through the world around and beneath us. Far away, something broke from its hiding place beneath the dead layers of the honeycomb. It tested the air, probing for the disturbance that had roused it, until it found the source.Then, with a lurch, it began to move.THE SEARCH FOR SANCTUARY: RELIGIOUS FERVOR IN THE STATE OF MAINE AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE AROOSTOOK BAPTISTSExtract from the postgraduate thesis of Grace Peltier, submitted posthumously in accordance with the requirements of the Masters Sociology Program, Northeastern UniversityTo understand the reasons for the formation and subsequent disintegration of the religious group known as the Aroostook Baptists, it is important to first understand the history of the state of Maine. To comprehend why four families of well-intentioned and not unintelligent people should have followed an individual such as the Reverend Faulkner into the wilderness, never to be seen again, one must recognize that for almost three centuries men such as Faulkner have gathered followers to them in this state, often in the face of challenges from larger churches and more orthodox religious movements. It may be said, therefore, that there is something in the character of the state's inhabitants, some streak of individualism dating back to pioneer times, that has led them to be attracted to preachers like the Reverend Faulkner.For much of its history, Maine was a frontier state. In fact, from the time when the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in the seventeenth century to the midpart of the twentieth century, religious groups regarded Maine as mission territory. It provided fertile, if not always profitable, ground for itinerant preachers, unorthodox religious movements, and even charlatans for the best part of three hundred years. The rural economy did not allow for the maintenance of permanent churches and clergymen, and religious observance was oftentimes a low priority for families who were undernourished, insufficiently clothed, and lacking proper shelter.In 1790, General Benjamin Lincoln observed that few of those in Maine had been properly baptized, and there were some who had never taken Communion. The Reverend John Murray of Boothbay wrote, in 1763, of the inhabitants' "inveterate habits of vice and no remorse" and thanked God that he had found "one prayerful family, and a humble professor at the head of it." It is interesting to note that the Reverend Faulkner was given to quoting this passage of Murray's in the course of his own sermons to his congregations.Itinerant preachers ministered to those who lacked their own churches. Some were outstanding, frequently having trained at York or Harvard. Others were less praiseworthy. The Reverend Mr. Jotham Sewall of Chesterville, Maine, is reported to have preached 12,593 sermons in 413 settlements, mostly in Maine, between 1783 and 1849. By contrast, the Reverend Martin

Schaeffer of Broad Bay, a Lutheran, comprehensively cheated his flock before eventually being run out of town.rdOrthodox preachers found it difficult to achieve a foothold in the state, Calvinists being particularly unwelcome as much for their unyielding doctrines as for their associations with the forces of government. Baptists and Methodists, with their concepts of egalitarianism and equality, found more willing converts. In the thirty years between 1790 and 1820, the number of Baptist churches in the state rose from seventeen to sixty. They were joined, in time, by Free Will Baptists, Free Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Unitarians, Universalists, Shakers, Millerites, Spiritualists, Sandfordites, Holy Rollers, Higginsites, Free Thinkers, and Black Stockings.Yet the tradition of Schaeffer and other charlatans still remained: in 1816, the "delusion" of Cochranism grew up around the charismatic Cochrane in the west of the state, ending with charges of gross lewdness being leveled at its founder. In the 1860s, the Reverend Mr. George L. Adams persuaded his followers to sell their homes, stores, even their fishing gear, and to pass the money on to him to help establish a colony in Palestine. Sixteen people died in the first weeks of the Jaffa colony's foundation in 1866. In 1867, amid charges of excessive drinking and misappropriation of funds, Adams and his wife fled the short-lived Jaffa colony, Adams later reemerging in California where he tried to persuade people to invest money in a five-cent savings bank until his secretary exposed his past.Finally, at the turn of this century, the evangelist Frank Weston Sandford founded the Shiloh community in Durham. Sandford is worthy of particular attention because the Shiloh community clearly provided a model for what the Reverend Faulkner attempted to achieve more than half a century later.Sandford's cultlike sect raised huge sums of money for building projects and overseas missions, sending sailing vessels filled with missionaries to remote areas of the planet. His followers were persuaded to sell their homes and move to the Shiloh settlement at Durham, only thirty miles from Portland. Scores of them later died there from malnutrition and disease. It is a testament to the magnetism of Sandford, a native of Bowdoinham, Maine, and a graduate of the divinity school at Bates College, Lewiston, that they were willing to follow him and to die for him.Sandford was only thirty-four when the Shiloh settlement was officially dedicated, on October 2, 1896, a date apparently dictated to Sandford by God himself. Within the space of a few years, and funded largely by donations and the sale of his followers' property, there were over $200,000 worth of buildings on the land. The main building, Shiloh itself, had 520 rooms and was a quarter of a mile in circumference.But Sandford's increasing megalomania -- he claimed that God had proclaimed him the second Elijah -- and his insistence on absolute obedience began to cause friction. A harsh winter in 1902-3 caused food supplies to shrink, and the community was swept by smallpox. People began to die. In 1904, Sandford was arrested and charged on five counts of cruelty to children and one charge of manslaughter as a result of that winter's depredations. A guilty verdict was later overturned on appeal.In 1906, Sandford sailed for the Holy Land, taking with him a hundred of the faithful in two vessels, the Kingdom and the Coronet. They spent the next five years at sea, sailing to Africa and South America, although their conversion technique was somewhat unorthodox: the two ships cruised the coast while Sandford's followers prayed continuously for God to bring the natives to him. Actual contact with potential converts was virtually nil.The Kingdom was eventually wrecked off the west coast of Africa, and when Sandford tried to force the crew of the Coronet to sail on to Greenland, they mutinied, forcing him to return to Maine. In 1911, Sandford was sentenced to jail for ten years on charges of manslaughter arising from the deaths of six crewmen. Released in 1918, he set up home in Boston and allowed subordinates to take care of the day-to-day running of Shiloh.In 1920, after hearing testimony of the terrible conditions being endured by the children of the community, a judge ordered their removal. Shiloh disintegrated, its membership falling from four hundred to one hundred in an incident that became known as the Scattering. Sandford announced his retirement in May 1920 and retreated to a farm in upstate New York, from which he attempted, unsuccessfully, to rebuild the community. He died, aged eighty-five, in 1948. The Shiloh community still exists today, although in a very different form from its original inception, and Sandford is still honored as its founder.It is known that Faulkner regarded Sandford as a particular inspiration: Sandford had shown that it was possible to build an independent religious community using donations and the sale of the assets of true believers. It is therefore both ironic and strangely apt that Faulkner's attempt at establishing his own religious utopia, close to the small town of Eagle Lake, should have ended in bitterness and acrimony, near starvation and despair, and finally the disappearance of twenty people, among them Faulkner himself.