

Book Excerpts from “**Soda Lake**” John C. Hampsey

From Chapter Four-- “Father Fenton’s Friday”

It was Father Fenton’s Friday, all along the streets of the town and beyond the big box stores, and into the valley fields beneath the brown hills. On Friday he could do anything--he had the car all day--so he could make his rounds like an old-time doctor would, or like a priest might still do if he was willing to give up his free time for just one day. ...

- ¡Padre! ¡Padre Fenton! ... ¡Padrecito! ¡Enrique no respira! ... Salvalo, Padre Fenton.
¡Enrique no respira!

The old man now had his head on Diego’s lap, and Father Fenton wanted to help but couldn’t quite understand what Diego was saying. He considered finishing his recitation and then seeing what was the matter, but he had lost his place again.

- Padre Fenton, ¡Enrique no respira! ¡Salvalo! Diego cried out again.

Soncia appeared from outside the shed and rushed toward Diego. She hugged the fallen man and yelled to one of the workers—

- Anda, ¡llama a una ambulancia!

She turned toward Father Fenton...

From Chapter Five-- “The Garage Wall Man”

As I reached the stairs, I heard some of the gravel shift behind me. So I looked back and stopped breathing to listen, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the dim light. Gradually, a darker

shadow grew out of the gray shadows, and an outline emerged—the rough shape of a body lying against the bottom of the garage wall...

“... you have to keep living right through the sudden black blood of things, because the earth is never quiet like McCuade promised... Not nearly quiet enough, for just two men... with sharp wings fighting against the descent while I hear their hearts beating... until the nerves are beaten flat in the sky and you can finally be at peace.”

From Chapter Six-- “Helena”

- What did he give you? Henry asked, standing close behind her.

Helena showed him the card, creased and smudged on the corner where the man’s thumb had touched it. The words-- **Bicyclette Erotica**--were in the center, and below an insignia of a tiny heart at the center of a spoked wheel. On the bottom right, a phone number.

- He’s from France, Henry said...

... Because, like Sister Regina said, He will lead you to someone else in His name.

...and it will feel like I’ve always known him. He will whip the bright air for me until I can breathe light, that arcs for a moment allowing me to pass through, before the sky and clouds turn to stone...

From Chapter Seven-- "McCuae"

And I said—"I will find McCuae for you," believing, somehow, that if I went to Donegal I would recognize him. Believing, in that same moment, that Praxilla and Heraclitus could just fade away for a while, back into the kitsch of history... while McCuae stands firm at Dungloe, Donegal. McCuae, no doubt a poet and a philosopher; the sheer flesh of him equaling the Irish Cosmos. McCuae Quidditas. McCuae, the universal man... ..

I closed my eyes for as long as it took to feel the thread of time unraveling, and when I opened them I could see his wavering body, like the shimmering lighthouse itself, moving across the water toward me, ahead of even Him, who was sure to follow.

But he was enough.