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Leaves, playing cards, Harleys: Signs of Kerensa circle Michael

Chapter 4. Michael decides which way to go.

Last week, Michael and Sarah, distraught over Kerensa's disappearance, walked at night through the park to the coffee shop.

The Emerald is printing "And the Dew is Our National Treasure" in serial form, with an installment every Tuesday in the Pulse Relax section. Earlier installments can be found at www.dailyemerald.com.

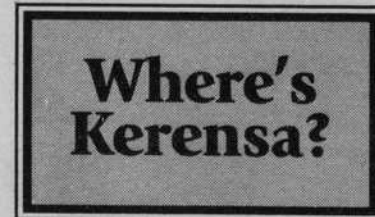
We arrived at Marsee's coffee house at 6:30 a.m., just as it opens, just as the waitress wipes the morning dew from the tables. She tells us we are in luck, that the first coffees of the day are free. "Thank you," we say, and decided we'll return later and pay for the scone.

Sarah asks, "Why not let go, Michael. It's Saturday. You can't talk to Kerensa's friends anyway; they're on the mountain."

I lean back in my chair and tilt my head to the sky. I hear the Harley slip around the corner. It taunts me with its freedom. A part of me yearns to have the wind in my face. "Yes," I say to myself, "I want scenery that doesn't remind me of Kerensa..."

Sarah's round, young face, as weary as mine, ekes out a smile. "Go, Michael."

I hold my fingers to my temples. Small sounds become large: a fly buzzes; a chair drags on the sidewalk;



someone laughs. "Where am I going?" Sarah's fresh face glows beneath a mane of wavy, black hair. Her small, wide-set eyes are quiet. Her high cheekbones and small nose are soft. It's so peaceful. It's the tranquility of her face that I resent. I hate the way stillness has power over me. I want results, now! And results come from action. Now! "I need to know," I say, grabbing the table with both hands.

Sarah lifts her cup and sips. "Which way?" I plead. "The signs will lead you. You'll know them when you see them."

I stand and turn away from the table. From my left comes the roar of commerce; from my right come the caw of crows and the chortle of a Harley. I turn back to Sarah and drain the last cold drops of coffee. "The Harley," I say lamely, pointing west.

At the corner, the shadows of the trees form patterns on the sidewalk. Do these mean anything? Maybe Kerensa's disappearance is a tea leaf in a bigger pattern? Are all lives signs of a bigger plan? A green playing card lies on the pavement. I pick up the King of Diamonds. Around the corner, a man in black sits side-sad-

dle on a Harley. A jade-colored scarf hangs from his handlebar. Is green important? What is relevant and what is irrelevant? I look back. Sarah sits at the table, and turns toward me the moment I look. Proof of a force? Or mere coincidence?

Suddenly I feel foolish. Ambition cannot be advanced by my reading leaf shadows! I see another green playing card. Coincidence or significance? I pick up the King of Hearts and stand on the curb staring at the two kings; both are looking west. A green Continental, horn blaring, passes within inches of my thigh. I look west toward the river. Below me are brush-covered trails and tangled paths and impassable wetlands where only the homeless go.

I pause, and look back. Sarah's gone. I look to the green woods. "Green?" I ask. "Is that the sign, indicating Kerensa's love of Nature?" At that instant, a joy comes into the pit of my stomach. Yes! I duck beneath the blackberries. I can smell the damp earth; I can feel the wildness. I run along the trail. I feel free, but in my mind I hear a whisper: "Ambition, once derailed by authentic experience, never regains its track."

Peter Wright is a printer living in Portland. He received his bachelor's degrees from UC Berkeley, served in the U.S. Navy, worked as a stock broker and taught at Stanford University. © Peter Wright, 2002. All rights reserved.

Bene!

continued from page 6

was paid to its presentation.

Next, I had a medium pie with

four different varieties of pizza (and eight slices overall). The "Pomodoro Bianci," is a cheese-less, vegan pizza, but there's plenty going on here for non-vegans: marinated eggplant, fresh basil and garlic among other things. The "Melanzoe" has many of the same ingredients, but adds cheese and portobello mushrooms. The "Mediterranean," was a variation I would call "busy" — there are too many ingredients to mention.

Finally, I sampled a specialty — something off the menu, which won't leave meat eaters in the cold: "Cristobal's Greca." This had pepperoni, linguica, three types of cheese, black olives (these are real olives, not the ones

out of the can) and fresh tomato. The restaurant also uses locally-grown organic produce in their food whenever possible.

Bene!'s slowest hours are 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. It still serves slices for a reasonable \$2.50, and by then, the lunch crowd will be cleared out. Also, during lunch, the aforementioned specialty slices are in their prime. A favorite of mine that pops up frequently is the "Asiantico."


The only complaint: For food as edgy as Bene! serves, they don't provide a very diverse music selection. Every time I've been, I've heard only one type: classic rock.

Contact the Pulse reporter at aaronshakra@dailyemerald.com.

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