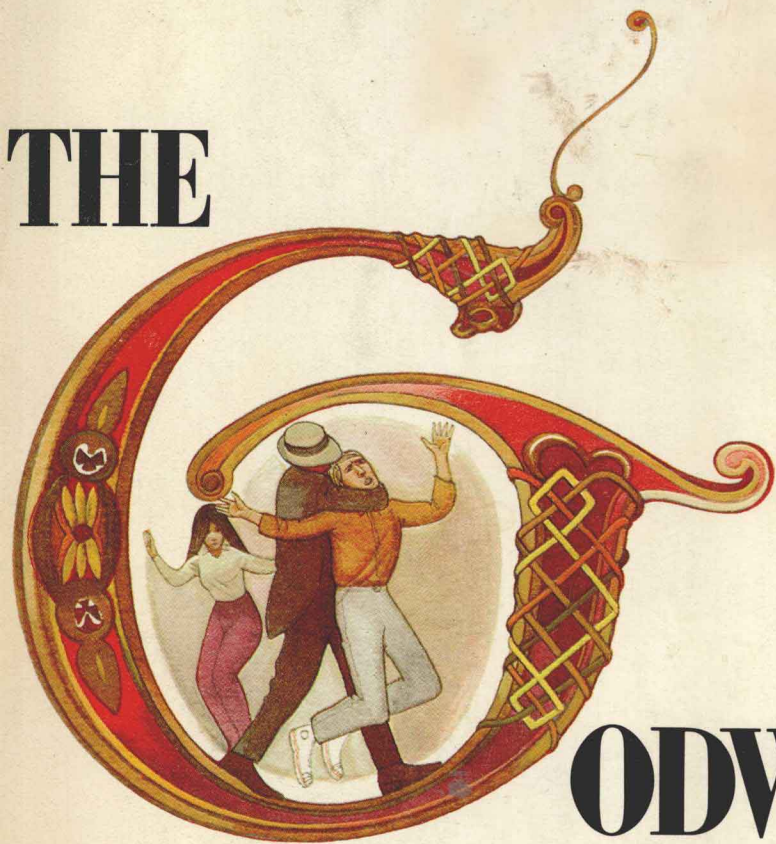


THE



**ODWULF
MANUSCRIPT**

ROBERT B. PARKER

**THE
GODWULF
MANUSCRIPT
ROBERT B. PARKER**

Houghton Mifflin Company Boston

*This, like everything else, is for
Joan, David, and Daniel.*

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The Godwulf Manuscript

THE OFFICE of the university president looked like the front parlor of a successful Victorian whorehouse. It was paneled in big squares of dark walnut, with ornately figured maroon drapes at the long windows. There was maroon carpeting and the furniture was black leather with brass studs. The office was much nicer than the classrooms; maybe I should have worn a tie.

Bradford W. Forbes, the president, was prosperously heavy—reddish face, thick, longish white hair, heavy white eyebrows. He was wearing a brown pin-striped custom-tailored three-piece suit with a gold Phi Beta Kappa key on a gold watch chain stretched across his successful middle. His shirt was yellow broadcloth and his blue and yellow striped rep tie spilled out over the top of his vest.

As he talked, Forbes swiveled his chair around and stared at his reflection in the window. Flakes of the season's first snow flattened out against it, dissolved and trickled down onto the white brick sill. It was very gray out, a November grayness that is peculiar to Boston in late fall, and Forbes's office seemed cheerier than it should have because of that.

He was telling me about the sensitive nature of a college president's job and there was apparently a lot to say about it. I'd been there twenty minutes and my eyes

were beginning to cross. I wondered if I should tell him his office looked like a whorehouse. I decided not to.

"Do you see my position, Mr. Spenser," he said and swiveled back toward me, leaning forward and putting both his hands palms down on the top of his desk. His nails were manicured.

"Yes, sir," I said. "We detectives know how to read people."

Forbes frowned and went on.

"It is a matter of the utmost delicacy, Mr. Spenser—" he was looking at himself in the glass again—"requiring restraint, sensitivity, circumspection, and a high degree of professionalism. I don't know the kind of people who usually employ you, but . . ."

I interrupted him.

"Look, Dr. Forbes, I went to college once, I don't wear my hat indoors. And if a clue comes along and bites me on the ankle I grab it. I am not, however, an Oxford don. I am a private detective. Is there something you'd like me to detect or are you just polishing up your elocution for next year's commencement?"

Forbes inhaled deeply and let the air out slowly through his nose.

"District Attorney Frale told us you were somewhat overfond of your own wit. Tell him, Mr. Tower."

Tower stepped away from the wall where he had been leaning and opened a manila file folder. He was tall and thin, with a Prince Valiant haircut, long sideburns, buckle boots, and a tan gabardine suit. He put one foot on a straight chair and flipped open the folder, no nonsense.

"Carl Tower," he said, "head of campus security. Four days ago a valuable fourteenth-century illuminated manuscript was stolen from our library."

"What is an illuminated manuscript?"

Forbes answered, "A handwritten book, done by monks usually, with illustrations in color, often red and gold in the margins. This particular one is in Latin, and

contains an allusion to Richard Rolle, the fourteenth-century English mystic. It was discovered forty years ago behind an ornamental façade at Godwulf Abbey, where it is thought to have been secreted during the pillage of the monasteries which followed Henry the Eighth's break with Rome."

"Oh," I said, "that illuminated manuscript."

"Right," Tower said briskly. "I can fill you in with description and pictures later. Right now we want to sketch out the general picture. This morning President Forbes received a phone call from someone purporting to represent a campus organization, unnamed. The caller said they had a manuscript and would return it if we would give a hundred thousand dollars to a free school run by an off-campus group."

"So why not do so?"

Again Forbes answered. "We don't have one hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Spenser."

I looked around. "Perhaps you could rent out the south end of your office for off-street parking," I said.

Forbes closed his eyes for perhaps ten seconds, inhaled audibly, and then went on.

"All universities lose money. This one, large, urban, in some ways undistinguished, loses more than most. We have little alumni support, and that which we do have is often from the less affluent segments of our culture. We do not have one hundred thousand dollars."

I looked at Tower. "Can the thing be fenced?"

"No, its value is historical and literary. The only market would be another university, and they would recognize it at once."

"There is another problem, Mr. Spenser. The manuscript must be kept in a controlled environment. Air-conditioned, proper humidity, that sort of thing. Should it be kept out of its case too long it will fall apart. The loss to scholarship would be tragic." Forbes's voice sank at the last sentence. He examined a fleck of cigar ash on his

lapel, then brought his eyes up level with mine and stared at me steadily.

"Can we count on you, Mr. Spenser? Can you get it back?"

"Win this one for the Gipper," I said.

Behind me Tower gave a kind of snort and Forbes looked as if he'd found half a worm in his apple.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"I'm thirty-seven years old and short on rah-rah, Dr. Forbes. If you'll pay me, and do your Pat O'Brien impressions somewhere else, I'll see if I can find the manuscript."

"This gets us nowhere," Tower said. "Let me take him down to my office, Dr. Forbes, and lay it all out for him. I know the situation and I'm used to dealing with people like him."

Forbes nodded without speaking. As we left the office he was standing at his window, hands clasped behind his back, looking at the snow.

The administration building was cinder block, with vinyl tile, frosted glass partitions, two tones of green on the corridor walls. Tower's office was six doors down from Forbes's and not much bigger than Forbes's desk. It was done in beige metal. Tower got seated behind his desk and tapped his teeth with a pencil.

"It's really slick how you can charm a client, Spenser."

I sat across from him in the other chair. I didn't say anything.

"Sure," he said, "the old man's kind of a ham, but he's a damn good administrator, and a damn fine person."

"Okay," I said, "he's terrific. When I grow up I want to be just like him. What about the Godwulf Manuscript?"

"Right." He took an eight-by-ten color print from his manila folder and handed it to me. It showed an elegantly handwritten book lying open on a table. The words were in Latin and around the margins in bright red and gold were drawn knights and ladies and lions on their

hind legs, and vines and stags and a serpentine dragon being lanced by an armor-clad hero on a plump and feminine horse. The first letter at the top left on each page was elaborately drawn and incorporated into the design of the margins.

"It was taken three nights ago from its case in the library's rare book room. The watchman punched in there at two and again at four. At four he found the case open and the manuscript gone. He can't say positively that it wasn't there at two but he assumes he would have noticed. It's hard to prove you didn't see something. You want to talk to him?"

"No," I answered. "That's routine stuff. You or the cops can do that as well as I could. Have you got a suspect?"

"SCACE."

"SCACE?"

"Student Committee Against Capitalist Exploitation. Revolution at the far-left fringe of the spectrum. I don't know it the way courts want it known; I know it the way you know things like that if you're in my line of work."

"Informer?"

"Not really, though I've got some contacts. Mostly though it's a gut guess. It's the kind of thing they'd do. I've been here for five years. Before that I was with the Bureau for ten. I've spent a lot of time on radicals and I've developed a feel for them."

"Like the late director developed a feel for them?"

"Hoover? No, he's one reason I quit the Bureau. He was a hell of a cop once but his time came and went before he died. I got enough feel about the radical kids not to classify them. The worst of them have the same things wrong that zealots always have, but you can't blame them for getting rigid about some of the things that go on. That ain't Walt Disney World out there." He nodded out his window at the blacktop quadrangle where the slush was beginning to collect in semi-fluid patterns

as the kids sloshed through it. A thin and leafless sapling leaned against its support stake. It was a long way from home.

"Where do I find SCACE? Do they have a clubhouse with college pennants on the wall and old Pat Boone records playing day and night?"

"Not hardly," Tower said. "Your best bet would be to talk to the secretary, Terry Orchard. She's the least unpleasant of them, and the least unreasonable."

"Where do I find her?"

Tower pressed down an intercom button and asked someone to bring him in the SCACE file.

"We keep a file on all college organizations. Just routine. We're not singling SCACE out."

"I bet you've got a thick one on the Newman club," I said.

"Okay, we don't pay as much attention to some as others, granted. But we're not persecuting anybody."

Tower's door opened and a post-co-ed blonde in high white boots came in. She was wearing something in purple suede that was too short for a skirt and too long for a belt. Above that was a scarlet satin long-collared shirt with puffed sleeves and a deep neck. Her thighs were a little heavy—but perhaps she thought the same of me. She laid a thick brown file folder on Tower's desk, looked me over like the weight guesser at a fair, and left.

"Who was that," I asked, "the dean of women?"

Tower was thumbing through the file. He extracted a typewritten sheet.

"Here," he said and handed it across. It was a file on Terry Orchard: Home address, Newton, Mass. College address, none. Transient.

"Transient?" I said.

"Yeah, she drifts. Mostly she lives with a guy named Dennis Powell, who's some kind of SCACE official. She also used to live sometimes with a girl over on Hemenway

Street. Connelly, Catherine Connelly. It's all there in the file."

"Yeah, and the file is a year old."

"I don't have the staff. The kids come and go. They're only here four years, if that. The real romantic radicals like to think of themselves as free floaters, street people. They sleep around on floors and sofas and Christ knows where else. Your best bet would be to get her after class."

Again the intercom, again came purple skirt.

"See if you can get Terry Orchard's schedule from the registrar's office for me, Brenda." All business. Competent. Professional. No hanky-panky. No wonder he lasted ten years with the Feds.

She was back in about five minutes with a Xeroxed copy of an IBM print-out of Terry Orchard's schedule. She had a class in the psychology of repression that ended at three in Hardin Hall, fourth floor. It was 2:35.

"Picture?" I asked Tower.

"Right here," he said. He looked at the massive watch on the broad snakeskin band that he wore. It was the kind they call a chronometer, which will tell you not only the time but the atmospheric pressure and the lunar cycle.

"Three o'clock," he said. "Plenty of time; Hardin Hall is two buildings away across the quad. Take the elevator to the fourth floor. Room four-o-nine is to your left about two doors down the corridor."

I looked at the picture. It wasn't good. Obviously an ID shot. Square face, rather thick lips, and hair pulled tight back away from her face. She looked older than the twenty her file had said she was. But most people do in ID shots. I reserved judgment.

"Okay," I said. "I'll go see her. How about a retainer? Forbes telling me how indigent you all were has me nervous."

"One will come to you in the mail from the comptroller. A week's worth in advance."

"Sold," I said. I gave him back the file and the picture.

"Don't you want it?"

"I'll remember," I said. We shook hands. I left.

The corridors were beginning to fill with students changing classes. I pushed through into the quadrangle. The thin elm sapling I'd seen from Forbes's window wasn't as lonely as I thought. Five cousins, no less spindly, were geometrically spaced about the hot top quadrangle. Three sides of the quadrangle were bordered with gray-white brick buildings. Each had wide stairs leading up to multiple glass-door banks. The buildings were perfectly square, four stories high, with gray painted casement windows. It looked like corporate headquarters for White Tower Hamburgers. The fourth side opened onto the street, where MBTA trains rumbled.

Under one of the saplings a boy and girl sat close together. He was wearing black sneakers and brown socks, flared dungarees, a blue denim shirt and a fatigue jacket with staff sergeant's stripes, a Seventh Division patch, and the name tag Gagliano. His thick black hair blossomed out from his head in a Caucasian afro and the snow streaked the rose-colored lenses of his gold-rimmed glasses. The girl had on bib overalls and a quilted ski parka. On her feet were blue suede hiking boots with thick corrugated soles and silver lacing studs. Her blond hair was perfectly straight and halfway to her waist. She wore a woven leather headband to keep it out of her eyes. I wondered if it was a mark of advancing years when you no longer wanted to neck in the snow.

A black kid in a Borsalino hat came out of the library across the quadrangle. He had on a red sleeveless jumpsuit, black shirt with bell sleeves, high-heeled red patent leather boots with black laces. A full-length black leather trench coat hung open. A Fu Manchu mustache swept to the chin on each side of his mouth. Two kids in football jackets exchanged looks as he went by. They had necks like pilot whales. A slim black girl in an Angela

Davis haircut and huge pendant earrings trailed a gentle scent of imported bath soap past me as I went into Hardin Hall, the third building on the quadrangle.

The elevator that took me to the fourth floor was covered with obscene graffiti that some propriitious soul had tried to doctor into acceptability, so that phrases like "buck you" mingled with the more traditional expletives. It was a losing cause, but that didn't make it a bad one.

Room 409 had a blond oak door with a window in it, just like the other six classrooms that lined the corridor on each side. Inside I could see about forty kids facing a woman seated up front at a table. She wore a dark maroon silk granny dress with a low scooped neckline. The dress was covered with an off-white floral design that looked like hydrangea. Her long black hair was caught back with a gold barrette. She wore large round horn-rimmed glasses, and was smoking a corncob pipe with a curved amber stem. She was speaking with great animation and her hands flashed with large rings as she spoke and gestured. A number of students were taking notes, some watched her closely, some had their heads down on the desk and were apparently asleep. Terry Orchard was there, back row, looking out the window at the snow. She looked like kids I'd seen before, the real goods, faded Levi jacket and pants, faded and unironed denim shirt, hair pulled back tight in a pigtail like an eighteenth-century British sailor. No make-up, no jewelry. On her feet were yellow leather work shoes that laced up over the ankle. She wasn't built so you could tell from where I was, but I would have bet my retainer that she wouldn't be wearing a bra. There are kids that get their anti-establishment milkman's overalls in the Marsha Jordan Shop with their own charge card. But Terry wasn't one of them. Her clothes exclaimed their origin in Jerry's Army-Navy Store. She was better-looking than her picture, but still looked older than twenty.

• 2 •

THE BELL rang and the teacher stopped—apparently in midsentence—put her corn-cob pipe in her mouth, folded up her notes, and started out. The kids followed. Terry Orchard was one of the first out the door. I fell in beside her.

"Excuse me," I said, "Miss Orchard?"

"Yes?" No hostility, but very little warmth either.

"My name is Spenser and I'd like to buy you lunch."

"Why?"

"How about, I'm a Hollywood producer casting for a new movie?"

"Get lost," she said without looking at me.

"How about, if you don't come to lunch with me I'll break both your thumbs and you'll never play pool again?"

She stopped and looked at me. "Look," she said, "what the hell do you want anyway? Why don't you go hang around down the convent school with a bag of candy bars?"

We were down one flight of stairs now and turning toward the next flight. I took a card out of the breast pocket of my jacket and handed it to her. She read it.

"Oh, for crissake," she said. "A private eye? Jesus. Is that corny! Are you going to pull a gat on me? Did my old man send you?"

"Miss Orchard, look at it this way, you get a free lunch

and half a million laughs afterward talking to the gang back at the malt shop. I get a chance to ask some questions, and if you answer them I'll let you play with my handcuffs. If you don't answer them, you still get the lunch. Who else has been out with a private eye lately?"

"A pig is a pig," she said. "Whether he's public or private, he works for the same people."

"Next time you're in trouble," I said, "call a hippie."

"Oh, crap, you know damn well . . ."

I stopped her. "I know damn well that it would be easier to argue over lunch. My fingernails are clean and I promise to use silverware. I'm paying with establishment expense money. It's a chance to exploit them."

She almost smiled. "Okay," she said. "We'll go to the Pub. They'll let me in dressed this way. And this is the only way I dress."

We had reached the ground level and headed out into the quadrangle. We then turned left out onto the avenue. The buildings around the university were old red brick. Many of the windows were boarded, and few of the rest had curtains. Along the avenue was some of the detritus that gathers at the exterior edge of a big university: used-book shops, cut-rate clothing stores featuring this year's freaky fashion, a porno shop, a school of astrology-reading in a storefront, a term-paper mill, three sub joints, hamburgers, pizza, fried chicken, a place selling soft ice cream. The porno shop was bigger than the bookstore.

The Pub was probably once a gas station. It had been painted entirely antique green, glass windows and all. The word Pub was gold-leafed on the door. Inside were a juke box, a color TV, dark wooden tables and high-backed booths, a bar along one side. The ceiling was low and most of the light came from a big Budweiser sign in the rear. The bar was mostly empty in midafternoon; a group in one booth was playing cards. In the back a boy and girl were talking very softly to one another. Terry Orchard and I took the second booth from the door. The

table top was covered with initials scratched with pen-knife and pencil point over a long period of time. The upholstery of the booth was torn in places and cracked in others.

"Do you recommend anything?" I asked.

"The corned beef is okay," she said.

A fat, tough, tired-looking waitress wearing sneakers came for our order. I ordered us both a corned beef sandwich and a beer. Terry Orchard lit a cigarette and blew smoke through her nostrils.

"If I drink that beer you're an accomplice. I'm under twenty-one," she said.

"That's okay, it gives me a chance to show contempt for the establishment."

The waitress set down two large schooners of draft beer. "Your sandwiches will be out in a minute," she said, and shuffled off. Terry took a sip.

I said, "You're under arrest." Her eyes flared open, and then she smiled, grudgingly, over the glass.

"You're nowhere near as funny as you think you are, Mr. Spenser, but you're a hell of a lot better than I figured. What do you want?"

"I'm looking for the Godwulf Manuscript. The university president himself called me in, showed me his profile, dazzled me with his elocution, and assigned me to get it back. Tower, the campus cop, suggested you might help me."

"What is a Godwulf Manuscript?"

"It's an illuminated manuscript from the fourteenth century. It was in the rare book room at your library; now it isn't. It's being held for ransom by an unidentified campus group."

"Why did Super Swine think I could help?"

"Super Swine—you must be an English major—he thought you could help because he thinks SCACE took it and you are the secretary of that organization."

"Why does he think SCACE took it?"

"Because he has an instinct for it, and maybe because he knows something. He's not just a storefront clothes-horse. When he's not getting his nails manicured and his hair styled with a razor, he is probably a pretty shrewd cop. He didn't tell me everything he knows."

"Why not?"

"Sweetie, no one ever tells me everything he knows; it is the nature of the beast."

"You must get a swell view of life looking at it through a keyhole half the time."

"I see what's there."

The waitress brought our sandwiches, large, on dark bread, with pickles and chips. They were sweet pickles, though. I ordered two more beers.

"What about the manuscript?" I asked.

"I don't know anything about it."

"Okay," I said, "tell me about SCACE, then."

Her face was less friendly now. "Why do you want to know about SCACE?"

"I won't know till I've learned. That's my line of work. I ask about things. And people don't tell me anything so I ask about more things, and so on. Now and then things fall into place."

"Well, there's nothing to fall into place here. We're a revolutionary organization. We are trying to develop a new consciousness, we're committed to social change, to redistribution of wealth, to real liberty for everyone, not just for the bosses and the rip-off artists."

Her voice had become almost mechanical, like the people who do telephone canvassing for dance studios. I wondered how long it had been since she'd actually thought about all those words and what they really meant.

"How do you go about getting these things instituted?"

"By continuous social pressure. By pamphleteering, by marching, by demonstrating our support for all causes which crack the establishment's united front. By refusing