



**The Hole**  
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## The Hole

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### PREFACE

The stain on the cement stared back at me. I wanted to go home and get a pail of hot water and wash it off. Several ants were grazing on it. I looked around. Everything was the same as it had been a few days earlier. The telephone booth. The newspaper boxes. The Six Points Plaza across the street. The plaza was empty. Business was bad. Several of the stores were abandoned. The stain was the only sign that something terrible had happened.

"You all right, mister?"

I turned around. A young boy looked up at me. He was about ten years old, with a lock of red hair falling over his eyes. He looked like Johnny at that age. The resemblance startled me. He was bundling newspapers into his carrier's bag.

"You come to pick up your newspapers?"

He nodded.

"I used to have a paper route," I said. "*The Telegram*. Pink newspaper. Ironic for a conservative newspaper."

"What are you talking about, mister?" the kid asked.

"An old man died here yesterday." I pointed to the stain on the sidewalk.

The boy looked down at the stain. "Is that all that's left of him?"

"He made that stain when he died. His bowels emptied."

"He shit his pants!" the boy gasped. "That's gross! Was he shot?"

I shook my head. The boy looked disappointed.

"Did you see him die?" the boy asked.

"I heard him die," I responded. "My back was turned."

The boy thought about that for a moment.

"What did it sound like?"

"A whistle. Like a balloon deflating."

"Our cat gave birth to some dead kittens. They were stiff. Was he stiff?"

I sat down on the curb of the street.

"What are you crying for, mister?...It wasn't you that died."

## CHAPTER ONE

### First Drink

Mary Hendrix smiled as she warmed the glass of white wine in the palm of her hand. With the other hand, her long spider fingers traced the glass's edge. Her painted blue eyes rose. Frank Sinatra crooned one of his standards, "The Lady is a Tramp," from speakers hidden in the ceiling of the bar. She raised her glass to her lips and took a sip. A smudge of lipstick lay on the glass like a stain. *Why does Sinatra make me feel like I belong in bars?*

"The first drink of the day," she said with a smile. An old joke. The bartender looked up. Long threadlike hairs fell over his eyes. He hadn't been listening. *My God, he is ugly.* Mary glanced around the small narrow room. She could have sworn there had been another customer in the place. Perhaps they'd gone downstairs to the washroom. *Strange how people keep disappearing.* It was one of the signs of alcoholism, she'd read somewhere. Thinking people around you were disappearing. Short-term memory loss. *That's what Hank had said, and wouldn't he know.*

"That's quite an accomplishment," Jack said with a laugh, the gaps in his teeth stained with cigarette smoke.

Mary nodded toward the bartender, accepting his accolades. He had been listening after all. Mary liked Jack. Everyone liked Jack. He never seemed to rub anyone the wrong way. But then, wasn't that what made a good bartender? And Jack never made advances toward Mary. It was a relief to be able to talk to a man and not feel he wanted to sleep with her. And it was comforting that he wasn't attractive. *You don't want to sleep with your bartender. You can always find a lover. A good bartender is hard to find.* Mary laughed to herself. *Wasn't that another sign?* The bartender looked at her, waiting to hear what she found amusing.

"Well, it's almost three o'clock, Jack." *I wonder if it's started to rain?* "That's better than yesterday. Two thirty. Everything in baby steps, Jack. Got to wean myself off this stuff one drink at a time. Inside two weeks

I'll be stone sober. Doesn't do no good to go cold turkey. Just increases the appetite. That's the trouble with all these diets people go on. Crash diets followed by binges. I lost twenty pounds, Jack. And how did I do it? Baby steps. And I've kept that weight off."

Mary slid off the stool and modeled for Jack. Jack smiled appreciatively. Mary laughed and climbed back on her stool. *Still got my looks.*

"They say it's going to rain," Jack said with a smile, cleaning a glass. Jack was always polishing glasses.

"First the waistline. Then the drinking. Cigarettes will be next. One battle at a time." Mary smiled, taking another sip of wine. *Did he say I still had my looks?*

"Slow at the office today?" Jack asked.

"Mr. Brennan don't mind if I leave a little early on Friday. I mean, I'm in there six days a week. We got this new girl to look after the phones. She spends a lot of time talking to her boyfriend, but I don't say nothing. The more incompetent she is, the more I'll be appreciated."

Jack shook his head. "You've got all the angles covered, Mary."

"You better believe it." Mary nodded and laughed heartily, a smoker's laugh with a cough added periodically for parenthesis.

"Brennan likes me." Mary took out a cigarette. Jack grabbed a lighter from beneath the bar and lit her up. Mary liked that. She looked at Jack from beneath the first smoke of her cigarette. She wondered for a moment about Jack and shook her head. *You can always find a man, but a good bartender is a real diamond.*

"A lot of men like you, Mary." Jack placed the polished glass daintily on a shelf. He took his rag and polished the bar.

"I know what men like." She smiled, tapping her cigarette on the edge of an ashtray. The cigarette dangled like an acrobat in Mary's fingers. "And it isn't a long list."

"You still got your looks," Jack said with a smile, shaking his head.

"You seen my kid in here lately?" she asked. Mary was always keeping tabs on Terry. He wasn't going to be like his father. *You can put that in the bank.*

"You know I don't serve minors," Jack replied.

"I'll let that one pass," Mary looked around the bar, swinging slowly around on her stool. Deep in the corner, one of Jack's regulars nursed a beer as he watched a tennis match on the television. How had she missed him? Did he just come in or had he been there all along? *What about the one that had gone downstairs?* Maybe he had left. The front door of the bar opened and a flood of light poured into the darkened tavern. Mary

shielded her eyes. Every time someone entered the bar it was like having your picture taken with a flash camera. Mary smiled.

"Who's that?" Mary asked.

## The Hole

Jack set the scotch down in front of the officer who laid his hat on the bar.

"Tough day?" Mary smiled from several stools away. She'd seen the cop before. He was a regular, though the two of them had not exchanged more than pleasantries. Jack had told her he was a cop, but even without a uniform Mary could tell. There was the cut of his hair, and the shoes he wore, and the cheap suit, and the way he always scanned the place when he took a seat at the bar. *Tall and lean. I fancy that type.* There was a nobility about the officer's face.

The detective smiled politely and downed his scotch. Jack took a bottle of Red Cap out of the cooler under the bar and snapped it open, pouring half its content into a glass and setting the glass and bottle in front of the police officer.

"I thought I was having a near death experience when you opened the door and all that afternoon light poured in." Mary laughed and added as explanation, "Walking toward the light." *Near death experience.*

The officer nodded with a smile, then took a long sip of the beer. *He never looks at me. It's like I don't exist. Would it be such an effort to glance my way? Other cops look. I'm not a bad-looking woman. And they'd laugh at Jack's stories. He never laughs.*

Jack was a great storyteller. If a customer told Jack about something that had happened to them, that tale became Jack's story for the day. It was as if his whole life was a collage of other people's experiences. The week before, Jack had told a real wild tale to one of the rookies on the force. *The rookie swallowed every word Jack uttered. I almost died laughing.*

"The white light at the end of the dark tunnel," Mary repeated—then wished she hadn't. "People say that's what you see when you're dying. Like the escalator at the airport. Don't believe any of that myself. When you're dead, you're dead. No heaven, no hell, just a lot of nothing." Mary swept the long blonde hair away from her eyes with her long painted fingers. *Lauren Bacall, they used to call me.*

"You're not religious, Mary?" The detective furrowed his eyebrows impatiently.

*He knows my name. That surprised Mary. Jack must have told him. He must have asked.*

"Nothing against religion, Detective. I was baptized myself but I just can't see that there is anything else. You do what you can in this life and then you're gone, swatted off the planet like a mosquito on your arm."

"I went up to the Mackenzie farm," the detective said to Jack, ignoring Mary's remark.

"Joe Mackenzie?" Mary asked. *Wonder if he's married.*

The detective nodded.

"Up by Echo Valley?" Jack added. "I thought they closed the place down. Passed there the other day and it looked boarded up."

"Nope. Still occupied. They're letting old Joe live out his last days there. Hydro bought it off the Mackenzies years ago but they had some kind of agreement with the old man about letting Joe live out his days. Joe's not the sharpest knife in the drawer but looks to me like he pulled one over on the commission. Free rent for life."

The detective and the bartender shared a laugh.

"Joe Mackenzie," Mary declared. "I went to school with Joe. He was in grade eight, a couple years older than the rest of the class. Nice-looking fellow. He had a scar on his left cheek. Something he picked up from his old man. The father was always whacking those kids around. I was in his younger sister's class. Joe was pretty smart. Everybody said so. Just didn't take to school."

"Police business?" Jack asked.

The detective nodded, glancing over at Mary, expecting her to add something.

"Joe's complaining that his neighbors have been dumping garbage down his well."

The bartender wiped the surface of the bar. "A well? Doesn't Joe have running water?"

The officer nodded. "Doesn't use the well for water. I'm surprised that the city hasn't forced Joe to fill it in."

"Didn't Joe get married?" Mary asked.

"Don't you remember?" The bartender turned to Mary. "His wife disappeared about ten years ago. Folks figured she ran off with someone. She was pretty wild as I recall. One of the Hare sisters. She'd been sleeping around on Joe ever since they tied the knot. Used to come in here when I first started, came on to any pair of trousers that walked in the door. Nice figure. Loved to dance. Put a dime in the jukebox and ask

anyone who was available to dance. Women like that are asking for trouble."

"Nancy Hare?" Mary asked. *Women like what?*

"June, her name was June," Jack replied, then turned back to the detective. "So people are throwing garbage in Joe's well. Why the hell would they do that to Joe?"

"Joe said they've been doing it for months. Started during the garbage strike last winter. I checked out the well. You'd expect it to be overflowing with garbage, but I couldn't find anything."

"No garbage?" Jack asked.

The detective shook his head.

"There wasn't even the smell of garbage," the officer continued.

"Maybe Joe's lost whatever marbles he had," Jack suggested. "Just looking for attention. Pretty lonely up there all by yourself."

"That's what I figured," the detective said, rubbing the side of his nose with his finger. "But Joe was insistent. I took a stone and dropped it down the well. Figured to hear a splash, or a thud if the well was dry."

"And?" Mary asked.

The detective shrugged. "There wasn't anything."

"What do you mean, there wasn't anything?" An ash dropped off the end of Mary's cigarette.

"Silence," the officer replied.

"It would have to be one hell of a deep well if you can't hear a rock hit the bottom." Jack slid Mary's ashtray closer to her cigarette.

"I asked Joe how deep the well was. Joe didn't know. Said his father hadn't dug the well, that it had always been there. Joe couldn't recall if there had ever been any water in it."

Mary ground her cigarette out in the ashtray.

"That doesn't make any sense," Mary said. "You don't dig a well if there's no water."

"I asked Joe why his father didn't fill the well in if there wasn't any water."

Jack nodded as he reached over to light Mary's fresh cigarette.

The detective smiled. "Joe told me his father had tried to fill the well in but after several days of trying and no discernible change, he gave up. He figured the well was too deep."

Mary smiled. "I remember June Hare. She got knocked up in grade seven. Haven't thought about her in years. Funny how that happens. Someone in your past whom you could never remember suddenly pops

up in your head. Makes you wonder what else is hidden in your head. Like the memories of a life you've clean forgotten."

## Assassins

Detective Kelly toured the walls of Joe Mackenzie's kitchen. The walls were papered with newspaper clippings that had long since yellowed or faded. Some clippings overlapped others with no design or recognizable pattern. The detective stepped up to the wall and read one particular article, a description of two assassins, identified as Puerto Rican nationalists who had attempted to murder President Truman. *Didn't even know there were such things as Puerto Rican nationalists.* Another clipping announced that Pope Pius XII had declared the Assumption of Mary as Roman Catholic dogma. *All this nonsense about Mary ascending into heaven. People just don't disappear off the face of the planet.*

"Pa thought we should be up on our current events," Joe Mackenzie said as he placed two coffees on the kitchen table. Joe was a small man with a few wisps of hair on a bald head. There was a faint scar on his cheek. A black stain filled in the gap between his teeth.

"Who's that a picture of?" Detective Kelly asked.

"William Faulkner," Joe responded, then added, "You take sugar?"

Kelly nodded. *Looks like a bank teller.* "Is he important?"

"He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950," Joe replied.

Kelly smiled. He'd been led to believe that Joe was retarded. He'd been misled. *Didn't that blonde in the bar say that Joe was smart?*

"No, 1949," Joe corrected. "Bertrand Russell won in 1950, although I don't know why a physicist would win in literature. Have you read *The Sound and The Fury*?"

"No," the detective responded, taking a seat at the table. *Everything looks familiar—like I've been here before.*

"I could lend you a copy," Joe offered.

Kelly shook his head. The last novel the detective had read had been in high school. He couldn't remember anything about the book except its title—*Mr. Blue. Solve the homeless problem by having people live on rooftops. Wasn't that Mr. Blue's great insight? The suicide rate would soar.*

Joe added, "I've got a pretty good library upstairs if you'd like to browse around. Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Thomas Hardy, Camus. You should read *Crime and Punishment*. Right up your aisle."

"I'm not much of a reader," Kelly confessed. "Maybe you could give me a tour some other time."

"I guess solving the mystery of disappearing garbage isn't exactly what you hoped for." Joe spoke so softly that the detective found himself leaning over the table to hear.

"What do you mean?" Kelly asked.

"The crowning achievement of a long career," Joe explained. "I heard you were retiring."

The detective nodded.

"I'm sorry I couldn't offer you something with a bigger bang," Joe added.

"No one goes out with a bang." The detective smiled. *Everyone wants to make my life more interesting.*

Joe smiled uncomfortably as if he had touched a nerve with the officer and regretted it.

"So how deep is it?" Joe asked.

*Didn't the blonde say something about a younger sister?*

The detective looked past Joe at the wall behind him. He'd seen walls like it in 52 Division when there was a big murder case going on. He'd never worked on a big case.

Joe smiled. "Pa used to quiz us every week on the new clippings. He was a self-taught man. Didn't think too much of the educational system. Said it produced morons and lawyers. Some say there's not much to choose between the two."

The detective laughed.

"Do you know a woman named Mary Hendrix?" he asked.

"Should I?"

"She knew your wife." *Did she say that? Or was it something about a sister?*

Joe rubbed his finger across his nose. *He's going to lie, Kelly thought.*

"Possible," Joe responded. "June had a lot of friends before we were married. Can't remember anyone named Mary Hendrix."

The detective wondered if he should mention the unwanted pregnancy. Perhaps Joe had never been told. *Must have been years before he knew her.*

"What did she say about June?"

The detective tapped his finger on the table. It caught Joe's attention.

"Said she didn't like school."

Joe laughed. "That sounds like June. She hated books. I think the house tortured her. She told me that books were a collection of lies and wishful thinking. June believed in reality. She liked to have a good time. June was unfaithful. I didn't like it but not much I could do about it.

Maybe it was my fault. Never had any ambition. Never wanted to become anything. June wanted me to become rich. You ever feel guilty for being yourself?"

"Can I ask another question?" Kelly ignored Joe's inquest. *Don't get sidetracked. Don't let someone else set the table.*

Joe nodded.

"It strikes me as odd that you have all these electrical outlets, lights, and appliances. So why are we using a Coleman lantern to light up the room?"

"I like the smell."

"Do you have a television?"

Joe shook his head. "No radio or toaster. Hooked my refrigerator up to a battery when I could no longer buy ice. Got nothing against technology. Just don't see why we have to keep changing it." Joe took a sip of his coffee. "Tell me about my well."

"I lowered a rope down the hole," Kelly began. "I had about a hundred feet. Didn't reach the bottom. I'll have to get some more rope but there's no telling if the line hasn't just curled up on the bottom without me knowing." *Left the rope out by the well. Got to remember to get it back.*

"Wouldn't the line go slack if you'd reached the bottom?"

"Possibly," the officer answered. *Of course he's right. The blonde was right. Joe is no moron.*

"There's got to be a bottom," Joe said.

Kelly stirred his coffee. "Doesn't it bother you, Joe, that you have a hole next to your house that is that deep? Aren't you afraid of falling in it?"

"Pa built the brick wall around it to keep us kids away. I think he called it a well to alleviate our fears. We got used to it being there. He used to tell us that the night sky was also a hole. If you look up at it, it goes on forever. Pa never saw much use in space flight. 'Going to the moon,' he used to say. 'Might as well throw money down a hole.' The hole did bother June. She'd have nightmares about something crawling out of it. 'The gates to hell,' she used to say. June had a hell of an imagination. Talked about shadow people. Ever heard of them, Detective?"

Kelly shook his head.

"June saw figures around the house in the shadows. Not people, but blobs that resembled humans."

"Teenagers," the detective suggested.

Joe nodded. "That's what I told her. Always after me to move. Wouldn't stay home alone. Scared her to be here by herself. Maybe that's

why she ran off. I guess I should have moved, but she married me when I was living here and I figured that was part of the bargain. And I had all these books. I could never bring myself to pack them up in boxes. They were like children."

"Did you have children?"

Joe took a sip of coffee then reached over to the cupboard and pulled out a bottle of brandy. He poured a few drops into his coffee and offered some to Kelly. The detective accepted. Joe reached behind him and grabbed a cup for the officer.

"Two kids." Joe passed the cup to Kelly. "One of each. The boy was as smart as a whip. The girl was slow, but quite a beauty, like her mother. She took them with her when she left. June never wanted kids but she took them. Never had much use for them while she was living here. Let them run wild. Maybe she was too young for kids and I was too old. I miss them. June wasn't a happy woman, Officer. She was miserable when she married me and I guess I wasn't the type to cure her of that. You got any kids, Detective?"

Kelly shook his head.

"Can you stop my neighbors from dumping their garbage into my well?" Joe asked.

"Yes, I think so. It might be easier if we put a lid on the hole though."

"I tried that," Joe responded. "Teenagers took it off. June said it was the shadow people."

"I mean seal it permanently," Kelly suggested.

Joe finished his coffee. "Permanently?"

"Well, we could try to fill it in," Kelly said. "But if it's as deep as it seems that could be quite an expense and I'm not sure the city would pay for it. But they might go for a cap if I can prove that it's dangerous."

Joe leaned across the table and smiled.

"I know that this is going to seem rather odd," Joe said, "but I've become attached to that hole. It's like an old friend. After June left with the kids, I used to go out in the evening and sit beside it, smoke a cigarette and talk to it. It was like an ear for me. It's the closest thing to church that I've ever had."

"But it's a hole, Joe," Kelly responded. "It isn't anything at all."

Joe laughed. "If you think about it, it isn't even that."

The Apple Tree

Joe Mackenzie didn't see the giant at first. Afterward he wondered how he could have missed him. Joe had never seen a human that large in his life. He thought his boyhood friend Jack Funk had been big, but Funk would have been dwarfed by the creature. The giant was standing by the apple tree, his head in among the branches, eating an apple.

"I hope you don't mind," the giant said. "It was on top of the tree and I figured you'd never get to it. If you want, I'll pay you for it. Delicious apples."

"That's all right." Joe stepped off his porch and walked toward the stranger.

"There used to be huge orchards in this area," the giant said. "Developers cut them down when they started building these homes. Paradise lost. It's a crime."

"Is there something I can do for you?" Joe asked.

"Just out for a walk," the giant responded. "Getting a lay of the land. Any place around here a fellow could get a drink?"

Joe mentioned the Zig Zag and gave the giant directions toward the Six Points Plaza. The giant began to move down the long lane that led away from Joe's house. He turned.

"You ever hear of a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses who disappeared in these parts?" the giant asked.

Joe shook his head.

The rough beast nodded, turned, and slouched toward the Six Points.

## CHAPTER TWO

Snow

"The snow twisted and curled around his feet, throwing the young boy onto his back. Each time he tried to lift the bag of newspapers onto his shoulders the weight of the bag threw him off balance and the icy sidewalk threw him back on the ground.' "

"That's you?" Cathy said, stretching her naked body out on the bed, her breasts swaying to one side as she reached for a cigarette on the bedside table. Cathy's skin was pale, colored in spots with blotchy pink rashes, her body still retaining the plumpness of childhood while awaiting the voluptuousness of middle age.

"Ya," Terry responded, smoke rising up into the blond curls that dangled down his forehead. "Did you figure that out all by yourself?" Butting out his cigarette, Terry sat up in the bed, his thin caved chest

hairless and his skin yellow like wet putty. A sheet was loosely draped over his bare midsection.

He continued, “ ‘The snow was coming down so hard it seemed as if the young boy operated inside a white bag. And then from outside the curtain of snow that fell over him, he heard a laugh. A great bellowing laugh. A roar.’ ”

Cathy slid over on her side, perpendicular to Terry, her head in his lap. She sucked on a cigarette, her legs dangling over the edge of the bed.

“ ‘The boy looked around.’ ”

“Why do you have to speak in the third person?” Cathy asked, two horns of smoke rising out of her nostrils.

Terry continued, ignoring her remark. “ ‘Between the curtains of snow, a large black face hovered. The boy almost swallowed his tongue. He’d never seen a black person before. The rest of the figure emerged. He was huge, a giant of a man—if indeed he was a man.

“ ‘ ‘Having some problems?’ ” the large black man asked.

“ ‘ ‘I..’ ” the boy began to respond.’ ”

“Quit playing with my cock!” Terry barked at Cathy.

Cathy removed her hand from between Terry’s thighs and sucked peevishly on her cigarette. She muttered, “It didn’t bother you before.”

“We can fuck later,” Terry said. “I’d like to read this.” Terry took a deep breath. “I thought he was God,” Terry said.

“You thought a black man was God?”

Terry nodded and continued.

“ ‘The great black man lifted the bag of newspapers off the boy as he helped him to his feet. Then he helped the boy place the bag over his shoulders and sent him on his way. As the boy walked off into the distance, the black figure once again slid behind the curtain of snow. But still, through the snow and wind, the boy could hear the giant’s laughter.’ ”

“Why did you think he was God?” Cathy wondered when Terry’s mother would show up. “Sounds more like the grim reaper.”

“Something about him,” Terry replied. “Something bigger than life.”

“I don’t get it.” Cathy turned her head, her cigarette only inches away from Terry’s penis. She thought that if she concentrated she could make it stand up. “What’s a black guy doing out in the middle of a snowstorm?”

Terry sighed. “That’s the point, stupid!”

“Don’t call me stupid! I got an A in biology. What did you get, smart-ass?”

"Look, Cathy, there weren't any black people living around here at the time. I mean none. The only black people I ever saw were the natives in the Tarzan movies. It was like this guy appeared out of nowhere. It was like he wasn't real. A mirage."

"You said that this was a true story," Cathy pleaded.

"It was true. A big black guy did appear in the middle of a snowstorm while I was getting my papers. It was so weird. I never saw him again."

"Never?"

Cathy passed her cigarette to Terry, who drew on it lightly. She blew smoke toward Terry's penis that now rose beneath its tent.

"Never! I asked around. My friends thought I was nuts. Nobody had ever heard of any blacks living in the area. I figured he had to be God. Anyway, I think it works for the story."

Cathy shook her head.

"There are no giants."

"I was a kid. He was huge. When someone is almost twice your size, he's a giant."

"Did you make this up or did it really happen? You're always making stuff up, Terry. I never know what to believe."

Terry passed the cigarette back to Cathy.

"That's exactly the way it happened. You can believe it or not. I don't give a shit. It happened and it stuck in my head."

"One more thing," Cathy added, "God isn't colored."

"Why not?"

Cathy was silent for some moments. Terry stared up at the ceiling, smoke slipping out of his mouth in halos. Cathy didn't want to disturb him when he was drifting off. It pissed him off. She wondered if she could make Terry come if she concentrated enough.

"It may have happened. Okay, it did happen exactly the way you said, but no one is going to believe that some dude who looked like Isaac Hayes appeared to you in a snowstorm. You can make him a huge guy dressed in solid black and forget about the color of his skin. Then it's more believable."

"But that isn't the way it happened." Terry sulked. He took Cathy's cigarette and sucked on it. Why did she have to be so picky? "You think it would be better that way?"

Cathy nodded. Terry thought about it for some time. For a while Cathy remained silent before she asked Terry a question.

"Do you think I'm fat?" Cathy looked over her body.

"No," Terry was getting very annoyed. "Why do girls always think that they're fat?"

Cathy was silent. She was about to ask Terry if some other girl had asked him the question.

"Do you think I'm a slut?"

"What?" Terry thoughtlessly combed Cathy's hair with his fingers. He was thinking about his story. Cathy repeated her question.

"I hate that word—slut," he responded.

"Ya, but boys use it, don't they?"

"Well, I don't," Terry said. "And if I did, I wouldn't say it about you."

"I don't know." Cathy sighed, retrieving her cigarette from Terry. "Sometimes I think I'm some kind of freak."

"Everybody feels that way. Only the real freaks think they're normal."

Cathy was quiet for a moment before she sat up and butted her cigarette out in the nearby ashtray.

"Do you think it's natural to like sex so much?" she said, rolling over and kissing Terry on the stomach, then adding, "for a girl, I mean."

Terry laughed. "How would I know?" He placed the sheets of paper on the nearby table. His erect penis slipped from the sheet into the open air.

"Don't your friends talk about girls?" Cathy asked, looking indifferently now at his penis.

"Sure, but what do they know? Anyway, you can't believe anything those idiots say. Wiggy complains that when he gets an erection it doesn't go away for hours. He skipped school one day because he couldn't get the thing to lay down flat."

"You're kidding," Cathy said with a giggle, her fingers playing with Terry's pubic hairs.

"Hard in his hands for hours," Terry responded, rubbing the palm of his hand over one of Cathy's nipples. "The guy is full of shit. Him and Frank are still virgins, but they won't admit it. Well, Wiggy won't admit it. Do you think your mom likes being with your dad?"

Cathy screwed up her face. "I don't even like to think about it. Besides, they're always yelling at each other. I wouldn't blame my dad if he was screwing around on my mom. She is such a bitch! How about your mom? She always seems to have a new boyfriend."

"Maybe you're right," Terry said. "Maybe I should just make the guy a dark figure, dressed in black. Ya, that might work better. More believable."

Cathy was silent for several moments. Terry looked down at her.

"Now what?"

"I have a history assignment this Friday. Where am I going to find information about the War of 1812?"

"Jesus!" Terry laughed, slapping his forehead.

Cathy giggled and reached for Terry's penis.

"Now look what you've done." Terry grinned.

Cathy giggled. "My little soldier is at attention. Let me give him a kiss."

Terry grabbed her wrist and listened.

"What?"

"Shit! It's my mother."

The two lovers scrambled to their feet and started pulling on their clothes.

"I thought you said she wouldn't be back for hours," Cathy cried, throwing her bra and panties into her purse as she pulled on a sweater and jeans.

## Precautions

"What were you two doing up in your room?" Mary asked, hands on her hips, standing in the frame of the kitchen door.

"Nothing," Terry said, standing by the counter and making himself a peanut butter sandwich. He poured himself a glass of milk. The tap dripped. A centipede scurried unnoticed up the side of the sink and slid behind the refrigerator. Terry hated skim milk but there was nothing else to drink.

"Your girlfriend sure took off in a hurry."

"She has a history assignment." Terry made a face. "This stuff tastes like mucus."

"Don't get that little slut pregnant. Her parents may be as rich as skunks but you know who'll get left holding the bag. I'm not up to raising another rug rat."

"She's not a slut," Terry barked. He grabbed his sandwich and milk and slumped down in a chair by the table.

Mary stepped over to the refrigerator.

"It's not easy raising a teenage boy by yourself," she said, opening the refrigerator door. "God, at least you're not a girl. But please, Terry, for my sake, keep it in your pants."

"How can you talk like that to your son?"

Mary smirked. "Give me a break, Terry. I was a kid myself."

"She ain't a slut," Terry muttered. His sandwich stuck to the roof of his mouth. He took a swallow of milk. "Why do you have to use words like that?"

"I can't believe her parents bought her a car," Mary continued, glancing back over her shoulder. "Who has that kind of money? It's a bed on wheels. What can they be thinking? No daughter of mine would have her own car, at least not until she'd graduated from high school. You be careful with that girl. I don't want you catching anything."

Mary grabbed the sliced ham, lettuce, and mayonnaise and placed them on the counter. "Shit!" she cried, opening the breadbox. "You ate the last two slices of bread."

Terry bowed his head and muttered, "What am I supposed to do, starve?"

"I guess I can use these hot dog buns. They'll get a big laugh at the office. I can hear the wiener jokes now." She made her sandwich, wrapped it in plastic wrap, and placed it in a paper lunch bag with an apple. "I may be home late tomorrow night, Terrence. I don't want to come home and find that girl in my bed again. God, I'll have to change the sheets. You could at least use your own room. I hope that you're using precautions."

"I thought you were going to come and watch me play soccer." Terry looked up at his mother.

"Oh shit! Is that tomorrow night? I'm sorry. But we really need the extra money. There's Kraft dinner in the cupboards. And hot dogs. This is the last bun. Improvise."

"Are you going to the Zig Zag again?"

"I might."

Terry finished eating his sandwich. "Why do you have to hang out there?"

"Are you afraid that I'll catch you and your friends drinking there—and don't tell me that's never happened. I've talked to Jack and told him that you fellas are underage. He's seen your photograph. Anyway, there's nothing wrong with the Zig Zag except maybe the name. It's a quite respectable place. And I need to unwind. You're not much company. You need a haircut."

"There was a call from the dentist. You've got an appointment next Tuesday at seven."

"Shit! I'll have to cancel. If Brennan weren't such a cheap prick we'd have a dental plan. When was the last time you saw the dentist?"

"I'll need some money," Terry responded. "There's a class trip to the art gallery next week."

"Art gallery! What the hell does art have to do with education?"

### A Strange Hobby

"And you call that a hobby?" Mary laughed. She put her gin down on the bar and reached for a cigarette. The tall dark gentleman beside her smiled with his gallows face, and flicked out a lighter to light the cigarette waiting in her lips. She sucked the flame into her long white cigarette. He slipped his lighter back into his pocket like a gunslinger, adjusted his bow tie, and gestured to the bartender for another round. Mary liked the way he looked. A man dressed in black had always appealed to her. And he was tall. God, he must be seven feet. Mary glanced at his hands and smiled. His name was Hank. *Why doesn't he use Henry?*

Hank turned and smiled at her. "Detroit won the Stanley Cup in 1950 against the Rangers who had to play all their home games at Maple Leaf Gardens. The circus had taken over Madison Square Garden in New York. Imagine not being able to play your home games at home."

"I don't know much about sports, Hank," Mary confessed, smoke curling seductively out of her lips.

Hank smiled, his mouth salivating as he glanced at the cleavage in Mary's dress.

"What is it that you find so interesting about 1950?" Mary asked, leaning on her elbow as she stared up into the dark deep eyes of her companion. *How can anyone's eyes be that blue?*

Hank shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "I think everyone should know something about something and I chose the year 1950. You wouldn't have thought it was much of a year. Just another number. But a lot happened. Maybe a lot always happens."

"Well," Mary smiled, "I find it very interesting. Tell me more."

"Rex Ingram died in 1950. He was the director who reputedly discovered Rudolph Valentino. He directed the great screen idol in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. His family name was Hitchcock but he adopted his mother's name. Although he was married it was rumored that he was gay. His death was suspicious. Some say he was murdered."

"Oh my!" Mary gasped, tapping her cigarette gently on her ashtray. "Murdered! Why is it that people's lives are so much more interesting after you find out that they were murdered?"

"It was hushed up. Rumor had it that William Randolph Hearst murdered him in a fit of jealousy, thinking that Ingram was having an affair with Hearst's mistress."

"Who was William Randolph Hearst?"

"One of the most powerful men in America. He owned a string of tabloid newspapers."

"And no one was charged!"

"It happens. People disappear under suspicious circumstances all the time and no one does anything about it."

In the background a Billie Holiday song about strange fruit played. The dishwasher under the bar changed gears. A package of cigarettes tumbled down inside the cigarette machine.

"My husband disappeared," Mary said, glancing over her shoulder to see who had bought cigarettes.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Dead

"I like the dead," Hank said, nursing the glass of beer on the bar in front of him, staring at the bubbles piled on top of each other like eggs. "They don't talk back."

Jack nodded and looked around the bar. He grabbed a package of cigarettes from under the bar and offered one to Hank. Hank shook his head. Jack flipped a cigarette into his mouth, tossed the cigarette package into a small nook beside the cash register and pulled out his lighter, which he twirled in his fingers before lighting his cigarette.

Hank watched with marvel. "That's quite a trick."

Jack shrugged his shoulders modestly.

Hank sipped at his beer. "Don't smoke. Made me dizzy when I tried it as a kid so I never took it up." He laughed. "Didn't want to stunt my growth. Don't regret it. Can't see what good it does you and then there's all the money you spend. Figured it's cheaper to marry and divorce, pay alimony and child support, send the kids to college than to smoke for thirty years. Once had an interview with Philip Morris down in the States. Five-figure position. Membership at the golf course. They have their own golf course. You should see the clubhouse. There's a lot of money in weeds. In the end I had to turn them down. They insisted that I smoke their brand. I tried to tell them that I didn't smoke anyone's brand. Those were the days when nine out of ten doctors recommended

one of their brands and so they couldn't understand why I wasn't fond of good old St. Nic. I had my principles, and like I say, smoking made me dizzy. And if that don't convince you, think about the loss of time. We're only allotted so much grace. I could feel the grains of time slipping through the mouth of the hourglass and I didn't want no weed in that mouth. Take Olaf Stapledon, for example."

Jack took a dry cloth, his cigarette hanging from his lips, lifted Hank's beer and dried the bar. Then he replaced the bottle on a coaster. "What was that first name?" Jack asked, a faint wisp of a smile on his face.

"Olaf."

"Olaf?" Jack considered. "What kind of name is that? Danish? Dutch?"

Hank shrugged.

Jack shook his head, took his cigarette from between his lips and laid it in an ashtray. He smiled. "Okay, who the hell was Olaf?"

Hank smiled and leaned over the bar like a fisherman who has felt a tug on the end of his line. "He was an English writer and communist sympathizer in the thirties and forties. No one remembers him now. Wrote quite a few bestsellers, which no one reads anymore. Supported causes, which no one remembers. Just wasted his time as far as I can see."

"Well," Jack said, his eyebrows furrowed like parenthesis, "you remembered him."

"Ah, that don't count." Hank straightened up, raising a finger for emphasis, "I'm a collector. Pointless hobby I admit, but it keeps my mind out of the traffic. I'm like a stamp collector, collecting stamps that he never intends to use on letters. Funny that no one collects the letters. But, back to our Danish subject. You see, our friend Olaf has been reduced to information. Useless information for most folks. He's not an important figure in history, or literature, or anything. I suppose he was important to his kids, but they didn't amount to much. One became a lawyer but that's about where they topped off. You see where I'm heading? How many people will be remembered from the twentieth century? Einstein, Freud, Picasso, Gandhi, Hitler? A handful in a population of billions. Getting the lay of the land yet? Olaf in his time was considered brilliant, dedicated, even charismatic. Today he'd be doing the circuit of talk shows. They might make a made-for-television movie about him. It would all lead to a familiar end. Anonymity. This century will be known for its gadgets—the telephone, the automobile, the computer, the electric guitar, the A-bomb, the paper clip. We won't be remembered for our insights, our great minds. We are the literate dark ages. Have you got the

picture, Jack? We're just replaceable parts in the machine called Modern Living."

"Well," Jack muttered, "that's pretty depressing. What's the point of striving for something if you're going to take it to the grave with you?"

"Vanity, Jack. We're filled with our own sense of self-importance. Each of us thinks that we're the center of the universe when we're no more important than the plant that produced that cigarette you're smoking or the drink I'm enjoying. It's that vanity that keeps the machine working smoothly."

Jack straightened up, and taking a deep breath, declared, "I like to think I'm of some use. People need someone to listen to them."

"Listening to people who have nothing to say." Hank smiled knowingly, but realizing that Jack might take offense to his remarks, backtracked. "But I suppose comfort is not to be underestimated. Someone has to hold the hands of the beloved during their last hours on this sphere. Bartenders and priests—we couldn't do without them."

The door of the bar opened and a couple stepped into the room and took a seat at a table near the cigarette machine. Jack excused himself as he went to serve his new customers. After he had taken their order and delivered their drinks he returned to the bar.

"I suppose this Olaf is dead," Jack suggested.

Hank nodded. "In 1950. September sixth." Gesturing with his head to the new couple seated at the table in the corner, Hank added, "Take that young couple that you just served."

"What about them?"

"What does life hold in store for them?"

Jack shrugged. "Don't know much about them. I've seen him in here a couple of times with his buddies. I think they're in some kind of softball league. Come for a few beers after the game. I don't think I've seen the girl in here before. Not much to look at but she seems nice enough. They look like they're courting."

"He's got his hand on her knee," Hank said.

Jack stared across the room.

"How can you see that from over here? The bar's too dark. And your back is to them."

"I'm looking at them through the mirror behind you." Hank sipped at his beer. "He'll be trying to slip into her panties later in the evening. The vulgar groping of the lower classes."

Jack looked behind him into the mirror and smiled.

"I guess we were all young once," Jack said, shaking his head. A new customer stepped into the room and took a stool by the bar. Jack moved down the bar and took his order, reaching under the bar into a cooler for a beer.

Hank raised his own beer to his mouth and stared into the mirror. He saw the young man's hand slide up the girl's skirt. She playfully rapped his hand and smiled. *Not here*, he could read on her lips. The door of the bar opened again and in stepped Mary. She looked around, spotted Hank, and crossed over to the bar and took a stool beside him.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long?" she asked, giving Hank a kiss on the cheek. "Boring Jack with your stories?"

"Do you know who John Andrew Kenney was?" Hank asked before Mary had a chance to catch her breath. "In 1944 he was chosen by the Harmon foundation as one of the United State's most prominent Negroes."

Mary laughed. "You are the most remarkable man I have ever met. I suppose he died in 1950."

Hank smiled. "You got it, sister. Tell me now, why did they give an award to the most prominent Negro? Why would you give an award to any prominent member of any ethnic background? Doesn't it reek of an inferiority complex? Were any awards given to the most prominent Englishman of 1940? The upper classes never award themselves. They don't have to. They're in charge."

Mary shook with laughter as she gestured to Jack to bring her the usual.

"Do you know what this big lug told me this morning? That the world ended in 1950, that we're—what did you call it?—the flotsam of time's demise. Isn't that the craziest idea you ever heard?"

Jack shook his head and looked at Mary's dress, smiling with approval.

"That's a lovely dress," he said.

Mary blushed and turned to Hank.

"How come you didn't notice?" she asked.

Hank leaned over and whispered in Mary's ear. "I was concentrating on what was underneath it."

## A Young Couple

"Why did you ask me out for a drink, Joe?" the girl asked as she sipped at her Coke. *This place is so dark.*

"I like you, Helen," Joe said, his teeth flashing in a neon smile. *Why do you think I asked you out, honey?* "Everyday I come into your office, I see you sitting behind that desk, typing away. You look so efficient. Professional. I've always admired that in a woman." *This shouldn't be too difficult. I'll probably be able to get back to my place in time to catch the ninth inning.*

Helen blushed. *He's so sure of himself.* "I'm taking courses. I'd like to better myself. I think that's important. Please take your hand off my knee, Joe."

"What courses are you taking?" Joe asked. *A couple more drinks and I'll have her panties off.*

"Bookkeeping," Helen said, gripping Joe's wrist, attempting to push his hand away. *Why does he have to be like this?*

"Just let me feel what you've got up there." Joe chuckled good-naturedly. "What we need is a little music."

Joe got up from the table and stepped over to the jukebox. He dropped a few coins in the slot and returned to his chair, putting his arm around Helen's shoulder.

"Please," Helen cried in a low voice. "I thought you would be a gentleman."

Elvis Presley's "In the Ghetto" began to play.

"It's dark in here," he assured her, his fingers grazing the shoulder strap of Helen's dress.

"Later," Helen whispered in desperation. "That man over there is watching us."

Joe looked up and took his hand off Helen.

"Where?"

"By the bar," Helen replied.

"His back is to us," Joe said with a smirk.

"In the mirror," Helen whimpered. "He's watching us in the mirror."

"The pervert," Joe said with a laugh. "I should go up and give him a piece of my mind."

"Don't make a scene," Helen pleaded.

"You're sure? I could box his ears for you." *The guy is a giant.*

"He's awfully big."

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall." Joe laughed, taking a second look at the fellow at the bar. *She goes for the tough guy look.* Joe jerked his neck and straightened out his shoulders in a bravado posture.

Helen squeezed Joe's arm. "Please don't. I appreciate the gesture but I don't want anyone to get hurt on my account." *He'd kill you.*

Joe turned and looked at Helen. There was a pleading look in her eyes. *This is too easy.*

"You're all right." He smiled and took Helen's chin between two fingers and playfully squeezed it. "A lot of girls would love to see their man defend them but you're not interested in showmanship. You really don't like to see people get hurt. And I would have hurt him. Don't you think for a moment I wouldn't have cut that fellow down an inch or two. I've got quite a temper. And I can take care of myself."

Helen smiled. "Yes, I believe you can. But he is awfully big." *Look at the size of his head.*

Joe's smile left his face momentarily. She had repeated that particular observation. *Shit! I think she wants me to take him on.*

"You think I couldn't take him, don't you? Sure he's big. I've been in a few donnybrooks in my time. I played professional hockey for a while. I didn't tell you that, did I?"

Helen shook her head.

"Semi-professional," Joe added. "But I figure I've got a little left in the tank if they'd give me a chance. Sales is just a temporary thing, to hold me over until the big money starts to roll in. I'm waiting for the phone call. I heard they're putting a new team in Vegas. I'll have to quit smoking, though."

Helen smiled. *He's lying through his teeth. That's kind of sweet.*

"I could tell the first time you stepped into our office to see Mr. Brennan that you had a certain swagger. That's why he bought all that ink from you. We could run the presses for months on the ink Mr. Brennan bought. But he trusts a man with confidence. He told me that."

"Ya." Joe shook his head with a smile and leaned back in his chair, basking in the adulation of the woman beside him. "That was a pretty good sale. Did he really say that about me?"

Helen nodded. *Oh God, I have to pee.*

Joe smiled. "Old man Brennan really ate up my story. I've always had the gift. Things have been going real well for me. I'm not sure I'd want to play again even if they called me. Do I need the aggravation? And if I get a few more commissions like the one off Brennan, I don't know if I could take the pay cut."

"Your story?" Helen finished her drink. *Do I put my hand up and ask permission to leave?*

Joe gestured to the bartender for another round.

"That's what sales is all about," Joe explained. "You don't sell products—you sell a story. You've got to let people think that they're

buying a bit of you. It's all about selling yourself and a story is the best way to sell yourself. Okay, you don't always tell the complete story. You exaggerate, maybe even lie, but as long as you're entertaining, the customer is happy."

Jack stepped up to the table. Joe looked up.

"Another beer for myself and a glass of white wine for the lady."

"I shouldn't," Helen protested.

"Ah, you only live once," Joe said with a wink at Helen. Then he turned back to the bartender. "And tell cupid up at the bar to keep his eyes to himself."

When Jack returned to the bar, Helen turned to Joe.

"You promised you wouldn't make a scene," she pleaded.

"Ah, that wasn't a scene." Joe moved closer to Helen. He put his arm around her. "You've got to make sure that people understand the boundaries. You weren't fooling when you said that thing about later, were you?"

Helen smiled. "I have to go to the ladies' room."

Joe ignored Helen's request. "I don't like to be told one thing now and another later."

Helen patted Joe's hand. "I really have to go to the ladies' room."

Joe got to his feet and let Helen pass in front of him. He tapped her on the bum as she left and watched her move across the room. The door of the bar opened and Mary stepped inside. She looked around and spotted Joe sitting alone. She smiled. Joe nodded. Mary turned and walked over to the bar.

*I know her, Joe thought to himself. Mary climbed onto a stool beside the giant. What an ass. Recognition flashed across Joe's face into a smile. One night in here after a ball game. She got real hammered. We danced. She could hardly keep her hands off me.*

Helen stepped back into the room and walked across the room toward Joe. She noticed he was watching the blonde at the bar. Once seated, she took a sip of her drink. *He can't take his eyes off her. It's Mary.*

"I work with her," Helen said. *I hope she doesn't see me.*

"Oh, ya?" Joe turned back to his date. "How come I didn't see her in the office?"

"Maybe you show up at the wrong time. She spends a lot of time in Mr. Brennan's office."

Joe laughed. "I'll bet she does."

"No," Helen protested. "It's not like that."

"Baby, you are so naive. I like that in my women."

## The Jazz Singer

"I wish you could be a little more respectful." Mary cleared the breakfast dishes off the table. "You hardly said a word to him this morning before he left. I can't keep friends if you're not going to be at least a little accommodating. Hank probably thinks you're a real snob. That's not the way I raised you."

Terry did not respond and continued to fill his mouth with corn flakes.

"I like Hank," Mary continued, lighting up a cigarette.

"I thought you'd quit." Terry's words came out muffled.

Mary looked at the cigarette in despair. "I forgot."

"You forget a lot of things," Terry muttered.

Mary ignored her son's remark, tightening her housecoat. She filled the sink with hot water and dish detergent and began to do the dishes. "Someday I'm going to get an automatic dishwasher."

"Why is he always talking about dead people?"

"What do you mean?"

"Last night he came out here to get a snack and I had to listen to all this shit about Al Jolson. Some dead guy who sang in the twenties. Like he expects me to go out and buy all this guy's CDs. Who the hell is Al Jolson?"

"Before your time," Mary said.

"And before your time too, Mom," Terry said with a laugh.

"Thank you for that."

"Jolson made this movie, *The Jazz Singer*. It was one of the first sound pictures."

"You see," Mary said, cleaning out the sink and placing the washcloth to one side. She dried her hands, took the cigarette out of her mouth, and tapped its ashes into the sink. "You can learn something new every day."

"He sang this song 'Mammy' for me," Terry said, shaking his head. "What's wrong with that guy?"

Mary shook with laughter. "He actually sang that song?"

"On one knee," Terry added, puzzled that this gesture would bring such happiness to his mother. "I think he's a pedophile."

"Oh," Mary sighed wiping the tears from her eyes, "I needed that."

"Didn't you hear what I said? I think he's a pedophile."

"Don't be ridiculous! You can't even spell the word."

"Why would he go down on his knees in front of me?" Terry hated it when his mother didn't take him seriously.

"That was part of his act, Jolson's act," Mary explained, a cloud of smoke slipping between her teeth. "Like Michael Jackson's moonwalk."

Terry was puzzled. He was sure his mom had gone off the deep end.

"Who the hell is Michael Jackson?"

Mary turned away, thinking about the night before. It had been a long time since she had been with a man. She'd been nervous. She wondered if it showed. She hoped she could make it up to Hank in the future although she had noticed he didn't seem disappointed. And then there had been the terrible dream she had had about lawn bowling. She was watching the American national championship in Los Angeles when one of the competitors, Edward McGee, mistaking her head for a ball, had thrown her across the lawn, with the effect that she had lacerations on her chin and a chipped tooth. She'd woken up laughing and then had been scared out of her mind when she saw Hank's face above hers staring down at her.

"Do you think that you could turn on the radio the next time you have a guest over?" Terry suggested.

"You were listening to us?"

"Not by choice. Holy cow, who wants to listen to his mother and her lover talking about the lumber industry? Who cares that there was an increase in the production of species formerly little used or neglected?"

Mary was silent for a moment, wondering if Terry had heard everything that had been said last evening.

"Hank asked about your father," Mary said.

Terry turned and looked at his mother. "What did you tell him?"

Mary shrugged. She finished the cup of coffee on the table. The coffee was cold. She dropped her cigarette in the cup.

"I told him the truth."

Terry pushed his cereal bowl into the middle of the table.

"Why do you have to talk about Dad?"

Mary shook her head. "I don't know."

"Does that guy ever stop talking?"

Mary shook her head.

"Tell him to stop asking me so many questions."

"Okay." Mary smiled. "I'll tell him."

"I never thought I'd see my mother dating a giant."

Mary broke out laughing. She stepped up behind her son, hugged him, and laughed some more.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Spy Camera

Hank leaned over the counter and looked at the various cameras. A slightly overweight teenage girl dressed in a modest blouse and skirt stepped up opposite him.

"Can I help you?" she asked. The braces that sparkled in her smile slurred her speech. Hank looked down and grinned mischievously.

"Am I speaking to the owner?" he asked, keeping his eyes riveted to the girl's.

The girl blushed, then giggled. *Was that supposed to be a joke?*

"No, I'm not the owner. Mr. Leblanc is out of the shop right now but I'm sure I could help you." *Why does Mr. Leblanc always pick the worst time to leave? I think he does it on purpose.*

Hank liked the girl. There was an openness and lighthearted assertiveness that was appealing. How old was she? Sixteen maybe. She was not like his daughter who had long ago left home complaining that life there was too dull.

"What's your name, young lady?"

"Adelle," the girl replied, staring across the counter at the huge figure. *Look at the size of his hands! Gives me the creeps. It's like he's a different species. I hate it when middle-aged men think they are being charming.* She wished that Mr. Leblanc would come back soon. She didn't like being in the shop alone. A girl in one of the dress shops at the Cloverdale Mall had been abducted the previous summer. It had been midday and there were other customers in the shop. No one had noticed her disappearance. *We had to go to a special Mass to pray for her safe return. Her parents were there. Her father cried like a baby. It was so sweet.*

"Are you in high school?"

"Yes," Adelle replied. *Does he think I chose this as a career?* She wondered if she should be giving out information to a stranger. Perhaps she should excuse herself for a moment and phone the police. *What would I say? That a customer is making me feel queasy?*

"I noticed your uniform." Hank smiled, his eyes running over the length of her blouse and skirt. He'd sent his own daughter to a Catholic school in the middle of the city. She revolted against the uniform. There were constant calls from the nuns that his daughter was wearing her skirts too high. Adelle's skirt was rather short. He wondered what Mr. Leblanc thought of that. *Bastard probably can't keep his eyes off her.*

"Oh." Adelle giggled. "I go to St. Joseph's." *I shouldn't have said that. What if he starts to hang around the school? How would I explain that to the nuns?*

"That's a Catholic girls' school," Hank said, his eyes dilating.

Adelle nodded. *He's got that same goofy look that Mr. Leblanc has sometimes. Men are such slimeballs.*

Hank returned to his appraisal of the cameras on display.

Adelle sighed. *I hope he buys something soon. I've got to meet the gang.*

Hank glanced at her with a puzzled expression. *She wants to meet her friends.*

Adelle held her breath and prayed that he wouldn't ask what the sigh had meant. His eyes lowered to the glass counter. Adelle looked up at the ceiling. *Make him go away!*

"I'm looking for a particular kind of camera," he said.

"Well, we have lots of cameras to choose from." Adelle gestured to the contents of the shop. *Mr. Leblanc will kill me if I lose this sale. But what the hell do I know about cameras?*

Hank stood up again and looked down at the girl. Adelle looked up at him sheepishly. *She's afraid of me.* The thought pleased him.

*I hate it when middle-aged men think they are being intimidating.*

He continued, "This was a camera tested at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland by the US Military. It takes pictures at one-hundred-millionth of a second."

"Is that fast?" Adelle asked. *Do I sound stupid or what?*

Hank nodded with a smile. "Very fast. They were placed in special balloons that were floated over enemy territory. They were spy cameras."

"Oh," Adelle said earnestly. *Why would anyone need a camera like that?* "I don't think we have anything like that." *Unless he's some kind of pervert.*

Hank smiled with pleasure at the girl's naivety. "No, I didn't think you would. But, I was hoping that your boss might be able to get hold of one for me."

"Mr. Leblanc isn't a spy," Adelle said with such seriousness that Hank burst out laughing. *I hate it when middle-aged men think they are being ironic.*

"No," he said shaking his head. "These cameras have been out of circulation for some time. I was hoping that he might be able to find one in army surplus. Perhaps there is a catalogue he could look in."

"Well, I wouldn't know anything about that." Adelle sulked. *I hate it when middle-aged men are being smart-asses.*

"No, I didn't think you would," Hank replied. He had gone too far. Something had upset the girl. Young people were so thin-skinned. Hank turned to leave the shop.

"Excuse me, sir," Adelle said, her voice now bold and insistent, "what would you need a camera like that for?"

Hank looked back at the girl with disappointment. He could see the type of woman she would become.

He said, "I want to take a picture down a deep hole."

## Dead Languages

Terry leaned against the wall of the storefront. Already on his third cigarette, he coughed and then coughed again. He cleared his throat. The tickle was gone. He sucked on his cigarette again. *Where the hell is everyone?* People walked up and down the covered sidewalk of the Six Points Plaza, in and out of the shops, dragging their kids with them. Walking down the front of the shops, two of his friends, Frank and Wiggy, approached him. Frank was the shorter of the two. Quiet in manner and burly in appearance, Frank was the more down to earth. *Boring.* Wiggy was tall and gangly and loved to talk. There was nothing in the world more pleasant to Wiggy than the sound of his voice. *Asshole.* Greetings were extended and accepted. Wiggy lit up a cigarette.

"Adelle should be out soon," Terry explained. *She'll be late for her own funeral.*

"Where's Cathy?" Frank asked.

"She's getting us some booze. Her older brother promised her he'd get us some gin."

"Gin!" Wiggy screwed up his face. "I can't stand that stuff. Tastes like scotch tape."

"You can't stand the taste of alcohol—period," Frank said with a sneer. "You're a weed man. I prefer bourbon."

"Bourbon!" Wiggy laughed. "Do you like your martini stirred or shaken, Mr. Bond?"

"Bourbon ain't a martini," Frank responded. *What an asshole!*

"Well, what the hell is it?" Wiggy cried. *What a smart-ass!*

"Cut it out!" Terry interrupted. *Morons!*

Wiggy waved his hand at Frank. "I get so sick of this guy's pretensions. Thinks he's a man of the world."

Wiggy stepped back and banged his shoulder against the wall.

Frank laughed. "You really got the twitch tonight."

"F you," Wiggy said dismissively.

"If you guys don't knock it off," Terry declared, "people are going to think you're married." He coughed and spat on the sidewalk.

"Nice," Frank responded, turning away. *I really want to look at his mucus?*

"You see," Wiggy pleaded with Terry, "he's got to comment on everything. Like Howard Fucking Cossell. Next time you fart he'll be evaluating your brand."

Terry laughed, then asked, "Did you get any weed?"

Wiggy tapped the breast pocket of his jacket and smiled with pride.

Frank looked around with trepidation. "Makes me nervous standing here like this. Couldn't we get going?"

"Relax," Terry said. "Cops got better things to do than hassle us."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," Frank muttered. "Remember Joey Artibello."

"Joey is an asshole," Wiggy said and laughed. "Joey tells everyone he's selling. What does he expect?"

Frank pointed at Wiggy and laughed. "You've got a bigger mouth than Joey."

Wiggy shook his shoulders and straightened up. "Joey goes around telling everyone he's got underworld connections. His f'ing father drives a hearse."

Frank waved Wiggy off.

Wiggy changed course. "Did you see that documentary on Derringer last night? What a cool guy. Robbing banks. All the chicks he had. What a life! Did you know he had plastic surgery to change his appearance? Wanted to disappear from the public eye. In the end he was betrayed by a woman in red outside a movie theater in Chicago. I read that J. Edgar Hoover had the other agents hold Derringer down while he put a bullet in his head."

Terry shook his head. "I didn't see it. What channel was it on?"

"How would you disappear if you wanted to?" Wiggy asked.

"We live in an age of information," Frank said. "I'd have all my records, dental, medical, changed."

"Ya," Wiggy cried, sucking on his cigarette, "but people could identify you from your photographs. You'd still need the plastic surgery."

"Change the photographs," Frank argued. He stepped back to let a woman and her two children pass.

Wiggy turned to Terry. "Can you do that?"

Terry nodded.

"Jesus!" Wiggy cried. "I don't know how I'd disappear. Even with plastic surgery and changing all your ID, there's a chance someone would recognize you. I'd go to some south seas island maybe. Some place where no white man has been. I've seen pictures of the chicks on those islands. Topless, man. And they've got nothing else to do all day but fuck. It would be paradise, man. I heard about a guy who went to Mexico and got laid using Canadian Tire money."

"Right," Terry responded.

"With your face, you'd stand out like a sore thumb," Frank said then turned to Terry. "Got any ideas on how old Wiggy here could disappear?"

"We could drop him down a deep dark hole," Terry responded, flicking his cigarette into the parking lot. Frank and Terry laughed.

"Very funny." Wiggy released a cloud of smoke and coughed.

A moment later Adelle exited from the camera shop. She shuffled up next to the boys and asked for a cigarette. Terry handed her one.

"Sorry. I had this strange dude in the shop who wanted to buy some kind of spy camera and then when Mr. Leblanc returned I had to explain what kind of camera this guy was looking for. Mr. Leblanc was thinking of calling the police."

"Spy camera!" Wiggy exclaimed.

"Old man Leblanc is always keeping you late. Did he come on to you again?" Frank laughed.

Adelle turned and glared at Terry.

"You didn't expect me to keep that a secret, did you?" Terry responded.

"You don't have to advertise it," she said angrily. "If my mom hears about Mr. Leblanc, she'll make me quit the job. I like the work and it's easy and I can handle Mr. Leblanc. He's just lonely."

"Horny too!" Wiggy responded with a laugh and a cough. "Can you imagine an old guy like that? Probably got bigger tits than you."

Adelle smacked Wiggy in the arm. He cried out.

Wiggy winced. "What was that for?"

"For being an asshole!" Adelle said with a smirk.

"I like it when you hit me," Wiggy countered. "Do it again!"

"Fuck off!" Adelle cried.

In the distance thunder rolled. They looked up into the sky.

"Man!" Frank cried.

The four friends moved along the plaza, forcing other pedestrians to move around them. Adelle choked on her cigarette smoke.

"You smoke too much," Terry said to Adelle as he cleared his throat.

"Are you my mother now?" Adelle cried.

"So old man Leblanc is groping you, eh?" Wiggy gargled with laughter. "Fill us in on the details, mama."

Adelle glared at Wiggy.

"There are no details," she said.

Wiggy shook his head, sucking on his cigarette and snorting with each breath.

"There are always details. Man, you could blackmail him. We take a few pictures next time and you're set for life. Won't want the little wife at home to see pix of him groping the hired help."

"He lives with his mother," Terry added, then turned to Adelle. "Wiggy just wants some pictures to wank over."

Adelle laughed.

"Oh," Wiggy responded and thought for a moment. "I don't need to wank. I can get all the pussy I need."

"Ya, right!" Frank laughed. "Hell, the only pussy you see is your mom's."

Adelle laughed. Wiggy turned to her.

"Frank is so funny. In his own mind!"

"Did you tell your mom you got expelled?" Terry asked.

"Not expelled—suspended!" Wiggy grinned proudly. "Shit, no. Why should I upset my old lady? They said I skipped too many Latin classes. Dead language. You gotta be dead to attend those classes."

"How does a language die?" Frank asked. "Did everyone die who was using it?"

Adelle smirked. "People stopped speaking it."

"Whaddya mean? Did they stop talking? Can you imagine if we stopped speaking English? There would be chaos."

"My mom says we don't speak English," Terry responded.

"My mom says things are a mess." Adelle dropped her cigarette to the street and ground it out with her heel. She asked Terry for a cigarette. He was out. She turned to Wiggy again. Wiggy shook his head.

"What do I look like? A bank? You're the one with a job. Why don't you buy your own?"

"Give her a cigarette," Frank barked. "You're giving me a headache."

The friends moved out of the plaza and moved west along Bloor Street toward a nearby hydro field. After continual pestering, reluctantly Wiggy offered his package of cigarettes to Adelle.

"There's your mom," Wiggy said.

Across the street Terry's mother stepped into the Zig Zag bar.

"Ya, I see her." Terry turned his head away.

"She spends an awful lot of time in there," Wiggy said. "My mom says—"

"Can't you ever shut up?" Frank interrupted.

"Can't you ever stop criticizing?" Wiggy responded.

Disappeared

Detective Sam Kelly shook his head. Jack, the bartender, nodded as he placed the tall glass of beer in front of the policeman. Sam lifted the glass to his lips and in one long swallow, downed it.

"The thing that gets me," Sam said, "is that no one is talking about it."

Jack reached behind him and grabbed two shot glasses. Into each he poured two fingers of whiskey. He placed one in front of Sam and took the other for himself. The two men tapped glasses and downed the contents. Jack shook his head.

"God, I hate that stuff."

Sam laughed. "You say that every time I'm in here. Why do you drink?"

"Takes the edge off the day," Jack said. "Ah, I was never made to be a barkeep. This place gets to me sometimes, Sam. The people get to you. I hear the same conversation each time someone sits down here. And I have to listen. Or pretend to listen. Not you Sam, of course. You're the only real person I talk to. I could have been a schoolteacher. Never knew that, did you? Went to teacher's college. Actually taught for half a year up in the Saulte. Kids got to me. And there wasn't much to do in your free time. Except drink. And I never did like to drink."

Sam shook his head.

"I never knew that, Jack. You, as a schoolteacher. Well, we all have regrets. I always wanted to be a cop. And when I became a detective, I thought I'd really made it."

"I think we're both going through that midlife crisis," Jack said with a smile on his face. He poured Sam a second draft and placed it in front of him. "That's what the wife tells me. Thinks I'm running around on her. Who has the time? Or the energy. I'm telling you, Sam, once women reach the menopause, it's like they become sex-crazed. The wife won't leave me alone. I ain't a young man anymore. Takes me time to recuperate. And even after that, she thinks I'm running around. I'll tell you the truth, Sam, I don't have that much interest in sex anymore."

Sam laughed, moving his glass of beer in a small circle on the bar.

Jack grinned. "Good to hear you laugh, Sam."

Sam smiled. "Too many sad stories," he said. "I need a vacation. Do you know how many husbands are walking out on their wives these days?"

Jack shook his head.

"I can count at least five since Christmas just in a six block area around the Zig Zag. A couple of them have moved in with other women in the area, women whose husbands fled their homes. It's like musical beds. But the other three just disappeared. Left their wives, their kids, mortgages, debts, even their cars for Christ's sake. Just disappeared. And I have to sit at their kitchen tables listening to these women. They're a mess and they have no idea why hubby left. Can you believe that? It was like a shot out of the blue for them. You'd think they would have suspected something."

"No idea?" Jack said, shaking his head.

"None," Sam replied. "And then the kids start running off. What is it the kids find so alluring out there? We find most of them downtown, living in cardboard boxes. Squalid. Selling their little asses to feed themselves. How bad could life be at home? And worse, there are some of them we never find. Never. Some days I think I'll wake up one morning and find that everyone on the planet has disappeared."

Sam took a swallow of beer.

Terry stepped into the bar and looked around.

"Shit!" Jack said. "Kid's looking for his mother."

Sam turned and looked down the bar at Terry.

Jack moved down the bar and spoke to Terry for a minute. The boy left the bar. Jack returned to Sam.

"Poor kid. He's locked himself out and he can't find his mother. Didn't have the heart to tell him where she is. Left earlier with a tall drink of water. Probably shacked up at the Islington House. Guy must be seven feet. Fella named Hank. Strange hombre. Dressed in black like Johnny Cash. The guy is obsessed with the year 1950. A regular encyclopedia on the subject."

"Didn't she lose her husband a few years ago?"

Jack nodded. "Ten years ago."

"Has it been that long? Didn't people think he ran off with Joe Mackenzie's wife?"

"I don't know anything about that. Crazy Joe's wife could have run off with a dozen different guys. Did I tell you the time I found her out back

in a snowbank, drunk out of her mind, getting ploughed under by some guy? She was one crazy broad. Mary's husband, I can't remember his name, only came in here a few times. Nice guy. Quiet. Not the sort of fellow to run off on his wife. He was real close to Terry. Used to see them everywhere together. Very sad. Mary took it bad but it was worse for the kid. Started acting out in school. What a handful he became. Getting in fights. Skipping classes. Mary started sleeping around. A woman raising a son by herself gets lonely."

"He's not a bad kid," Sam said. "I've had a few run-ins with him. Teenagers are difficult. It's a tough time in your life and then to lose your old man..."

The two men were silent for several moments. Sam sipped at his beer. Jack turned and looked up at the television. Championship Darts was on.

"What do you know about this Hank fellow?" Sam asked.

"Nothing more than I've told you. Talk to him for five minutes and he'll bore you to death with information. But he does seem to have mesmerized Mary. Talking about disappearing, did Mary ever tell you what happened to a girlfriend of hers?"

Sam shook his head.

"This is going back quite a few years. Twenty years. Before your time. A group of them, kids really, went down to Echo Valley, near the Mackenzie farm. Drink a little wine, make out—you know the ritual. I guess they got pretty hammered one night. Mary passed out. When she awoke the next morning, one of the kids was missing. She woke the others. They didn't think too much of it at the time. Figured the girl had gotten up and taken off home. Later that day, the girl's parents started phoning around to all of her friends. She had never come home. There was a big search. Her friends were all taken down to headquarters."

"And they never found her?"

Jack shook his head. "That's what I heard. It was like she fell off the edge of the world. Cops put it down as a runaway. Doesn't make sense for a kid to run away when she's out partying with her friends."

"Where do her folks live?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "After a year or so, they moved away. That's what I heard. Went out west someplace. I think those kids knew more than they were saying. Mary doesn't like to talk about it."

Sam stared at Jack for some time.

"What did I say?" Jack smiled.

"I don't know," Sam replied. He shook his head. "Did you ever get the feeling that something was going on around you, but you have no idea

what? Like a blind man standing on the edge of a precipice with an urge to dance.”

Jack looked at Sam and smiled.

“Did you just make that up or did you read it somewhere?”

## Haircut

Hank’s legs stretched out over the barber chair and across the room. George snapped his gum and draped a white sheet over Hank’s chest.

“Hell of a big man,” George said, snapping his gum. “It’s like your feet are in a different time zone. My brother-in-law was pretty tall, but he’d look like a dwarf next to you.”

Hank smiled.

“Guess you’ve heard all the tall jokes?” George said with a smile.

Hank nodded. “Ad nauseam,” he responded.

“What’ll it be then?” George asked. Hank described how he wanted his hair cut.

George took his scissors and began to trim.

“Had a guy in here last week who had a bald spot on top. Said he wasn’t bald. Just had outgrown his hair.”

George laughed. Hank grinned.

“Height don’t matter to a man,” George continued. “But you don’t like to see a tall woman. Looks freakish. We had a woman working over at the drugstore who was close to six feet. She used to come into the shop here for a haircut. Wouldn’t let her in a salon. What brings you to the Six Points?”

“Is that what they call it?” Hank replied, his eyes closed.

George nodded. “Crossroads of three main streets—Bloor, Kipling, and Dundas. Been a village for over a hundred years. Not that I’ve been here that long. Married the daughter of a barber and inherited this place. Not that I’m complaining. Hair’s been good to me. My father-in-law worked in here with me for years.”

“Did your father-in-law ever hear stories about strange disappearances in the area?”

George stopped for a moment and thought.

“That’s an odd question.” He paused for a few moments to think. “Mentioned something about disappearances in the thirties. During the depression. Lot of folks moved through the area. No one paid much attention. And then there was a time right after the war. There was a slew

of disappearances when Shipp started throwing up the houses around here. Lot of rumors. Why do you ask?"

Hank smiled and closed his eyes.

"Just making small talk," he said.

George snapped his gum and laughed.

Margaret

"What did you do?" Adelle asked Cathy, her eyes wide with anticipation.

Cathy leaned across the restaurant table in the booth the two girls occupied. "I kissed it!"

Adelle clapped her hands, leaned back, and laughed. Cathy smiled.

"You didn't!" Adelle cried.

The waitress arrived at the table to take the girls' order. With her hair pinned up, her thin bosom-less body, and the low sarcastic voice that slipped out of the side of her mouth, she was, for the girls, the anti-female. Her name was Margaret. The girls looked up with disgust. Couldn't she see that they were talking? The girls ordered.

"You dragged me over here for a Coke and two straws?" Margaret said with a snarl.

Cathy looked up and smiled with as much charm as she could garner.

"We are having a conversation," Cathy said, enunciating each word as if she were speaking to someone who did not understand the English language.

Adelle turned and raised her eyebrows, giving parenthesis to Cathy's declaration.

Margaret tapped her pencil on her ordering pad, leaned to one side, and smiled. "We are running a business," she replied. And then leaning over the table, added, "And if you ladies give me any more of this snotty business, you'll no longer be welcome in this establishment."

The two girls were silent for a brief moment before Adelle added, "I'll have toast."

Margaret returned to the counter.

"Where is she coming from?" Adelle cried.

"What a bitch!" Cathy whispered.

"No wonder there's never anyone in this place," Adelle added, her eye on Margaret. "I would never talk to a customer like that. Mr. Leblanc would fire me on the spot. She must be going through the change. My mother's like that. The other day she went into a rage because I used a

bit of her makeup. There was hardly anything left in the tube of face cream and she blames me because it's all gone. Like it's my fault that she didn't buy more. She uses my tampons and I don't scream at her. Why do women become such witches? If I turn out like that, promise me you'll have me put down."

Margaret returned with the girls' Coke and toast. Both girls smiled at the waitress. Margaret shook her head.

When the waitress left, Adelle turned to Cathy.

"What happened next?"

## The Fight

Sam Kelly sipped at his coffee as he sat on the stool by the counter.

"The blueberry pie is fresh," Margaret said. She'd always had a soft spot for a man in uniform—although technically Sam wasn't in uniform. Still, he was a cop. Her ex-husband had been a fireman.

"Well, then I'll have a piece." Sam smiled.

Margaret turned away, returning a moment later with a slice of pie and a fork. Sam took a piece and smiled.

"This is good," he said, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

Margaret leaned against the counter and lit up a cigarette.

"I didn't make it so you don't have to pretend that it's good."

"It's not bad," Sam reiterated.

"You don't mind?" Margaret gestured to the cigarette.

Sam shook his head.

"The boss is out. It's the only chance I get to steal a puff. If he shows up the cigarette is yours."

She put an ashtray on the counter.

"I thought this place was nonsmoking," Sam said.

"Only when a cop walks in." Margaret laughed.

Finishing the pie, Sam wiped his mouth with a napkin and pushed the plate away. He took a sip of coffee.

"Tell me about the fight."

"Isn't much to tell," Margaret began. "They were sitting at one of the tables when suddenly their voices were raised. I turned and was about to go over and ask them to keep their voices down when I saw Terry lunge across the table and plant one on the kisser of the other kid. He had a strange name. Piggy or Wiggy—something like that. The other kid lay on the floor. There was blood coming out of the side of his mouth. Terry

stood over him and the kid on the floor started laughing. Then they got up and left together like nothing had happened."

"Do you want to lay charges?" Sam asked.

Margaret shook her head. "There was no damage. And the boss wasn't here. And Terry is Mary's kid. Mary's a good friend of mine."

"I'll have a talk with those boys," Sam said.

"What's wrong with kids these days?" Margaret cried. "It's like they're angry at the world."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Disappearance

Wiggy lay in the tall grass, raised the bottle of gin to the moon, and made a promise. "I shall buy the most expensive functioning automobill in the world once I get a whale paying job." *The moon isn't yellow.* Lifting himself from the grass, he bowed. He glanced out over the valley at the creek moving like a silver snake through the trees. *God, it's pretty.* A laugh spurted out of his mouth as he collapsed once again onto the tall lush grass.

Cathy howled with laughter, smoke splattering out of her mouth. "What's a fuctioning automobill?"

"What's a whale paying job?" Terry added, holding his stomach, his laughter tied in knots in his abdomen. *Why do they say the moon is yellow?*

Frank lifted himself off the grass into a seated position, his sobriety a wonder to his friends. "What is the proper use of shall?"

Cathy looked at Frank with a puzzled expression. *Are you real?* Wiggy was about to untangle himself from the tall grass and address the group again when Adelle grabbed him by the sleeve and passed him a joint.

"Don't say another word," Adelle pleaded, looking at her other friends lying around on the long grass, laughing in gasps, holding their stomachs, tears running down their cheeks. "You're going to hurt someone."

Wiggy shrugged his shoulders, a bottle of gin in one hand, a joint in the other. He looked up into the sky where clouds were huddling around the moon. *Where's my other hand?*

"The moon looks like a scalper outside the Gardens."

"What happened to the word shan't?" Frank asked. "It's completely disappeared from the language. Are there any other words that have disappeared?" *Maybe whole languages have disappeared.*

Adelle looked at Frank. *Why do you always problem solve when you get stoned?*

Frank looked back. *Are you asking me a question?*

Wiggy pointed into the sky. "The moon looks like a child in bed and someone is putting a pillow over its face."

"That's certainly a cheerful insight," Terry said.

Adelle wiped the tears from her cheek. "Whose got the joint?"

Wiggy passed the bottle of gin to Adelle who looked at it, shrugged, and took a swallow. *Tastes like scotch tape.*

"It sure is getting dark," Cathy said as she moved closer to Terry. Terry smiled and put his arm around her shoulder. She stared at the tall pines, their heads softly swaying in the night.

"The tree tops look like the Supremes." She pointed at one particular tree and added, "That one is Diana Ross."

Wiggy turned to Cathy. "Looks more like Van What's-his-name."

"Van Gogh," Adelle offered. "The Dutch painter. His paintings are all curls and streaks like someone took an electric blender to nature." *Beauty is loneliness come to fruition.*

"Didn't he lose an ear?" Frank asked. *Can you still hear if you don't have ears?*

"Cut it off himself," Terry added.

"He did those weird sunflowers," Adelle said. "My mom has a calendar with them on it. June, I think. My mom told me that he never sold a painting during his lifetime."

"That's right." Cathy nodded then began to giggle. *They should teach business management at art school.*

"Never sold a painting?" Wiggy cried, sitting up. "Some artist, eh? What did he do for dough? Sell dope? I heard about guys who got stoned on sunflower seeds. It must be a special recipe 'cause I could never get off on them."

"Didn't he kill himself?" Adelle asked. "Didn't I read that on Mom's calendar?"

"Don't look at me when you ask questions," Frank responded.

Cathy took the bottle of gin from Adelle and swallowed a mouthful, made a face of indescribable distaste, and handed the bottle to Terry.

"Shot himself," Terry said, pointing his finger at his forehead like it was the barrel of a gun.

"I don't doubt it," Wiggy said, shaking his head. "Never sold a painting? Man, he must have been one pretty depressed dude. If I'm not a

millionaire by the time I'm twenty-five you can check your local river because I'll be floating in it."

Frank grinned. *Looking forward to that.*

"And now his paintings are worth millions," Cathy said with a sigh, falling back on the tall grass and once again gazing into the sky. *Why is emptiness always black?*

Wiggy laughed. "Wouldn't that burn ya, eh? Enough to make you do yourself again. Don't you just love it when these famous types off themselves, eh? Did you hear how Catherine the Great of Russia died?"

"We heard," Adelle responded, "and we don't need to hear it again."

"But, it's such a weird death. Who would think that someone who was royalty could be so perverted? Being crushed by a horse while you're getting porked."

"We know the story," Adelle repeated impatiently. "No matter what you discuss with guys, it always ends up in the gutter." *Why would she fuck a horse? They stink.*

"Did you ever feel totally happy and depressed at the same time?" Cathy asked.

"I always wanted to play the banjo." Frank sighed.

"On the one hand you feel completely free," Cathy continued. "Being here, being stoned, with your friends. At the same time, you have a knot in your stomach. Too much fun. Fun don't last. Friends don't last. Weed goes up in smoke. One afternoon while you're taking out the garbage or you're opening a bill, you turn into your parents. Fat and responsible. Hate what you're doing. Hate who you are."

"Live for the moment!" Wiggy laughed and passed the joint to Cathy.

"That's what our parents did," Cathy cried. *My dad and his toys.*

"There was a murder in this valley," Terry blurted out.

There was silence.

Cathy sat up. *Don't!*

Adelle's mouth dropped. *What?*

Frank choked.

Wiggy fell to the ground. "Say it isn't so, man!"

"Not that story," Cathy pleaded, passing the joint back to Wiggy.

"Who was murdered?" Wiggy asked, took a puff off the joint and handed it to Frank who smiled, sucked on it, then passed it on to Adelle.

"My mother told me about it," Terry said. "It was one of her friends. They were down here partying one night."

"Hey, I heard about that," Frank said. "Didn't they all get drunk, pass out, and when they woke up the next morning, one of them was missing?"

"That's what they told the police," Terry said, smiling smugly.

Wiggy leaned forward, almost whispering. "What's the real story, man?"

"This isn't going to scare me, is it?" Adelle asked, looking around at the darkness. "We should make a fire."

"I'm so hot," Cathy responded. *Don't tell it, Terry.*

"Take your top off," Frank suggested with a grin.

"You wish," Cathy said, punching Frank in the arm.

Frank winced and laughed. "Hey, that hurt." Then sat up. "What's the story?"

"Ya, man," Wiggy added, chewing on a long stem of grass. "Don't leave us sitting here wondering."

Terry sat up. The others huddled closer to him, except for Cathy who found a large leaf from a wild rhubarb plant and was fanning herself.

Terry began. "They were drinking wine behind the barn over there." Terry pointed to a dilapidated structure up the hill. "One of them had a deck of cards and they started playing strip poker."

"I ain't taking anything off," Adelle insisted. She took a puff of the joint and handed it to Cathy.

"Your mother told you she used to play strip poker?" Frank asked.

"They were kids too," Cathy suggested.

"I know, but...God, I'd gag thinking about my old lady stripping."

"We should have brought some cards," Wiggy added.

"They were getting pretty drunk," Terry said. "Laughing, drinking, and playing their hands. They made a fire so it was easy to read their cards. There were three girls and two guys and one of the girls lost her bra. When she hesitated to take it off two of the boys held her down while the other two girls took off the girl's bra and tossed it into the darkness. They all thought this was great fun except for the girl who was now almost naked. She started to cry. 'I don't want to play this game anymore,' the girl whined. She got up to find her clothes and collapsed. She was too drunk. They all laughed except for the topless girl. She continued to cry, curled up in a ball to hide her nakedness. 'I always lose,' she complained. 'Somebody better get her clothes before she freaks out,' one of the boys said. He tried to get up but he too was too drunk to attempt a search. One of the other two girls rose."

"Your mom?" Wiggy asked, his eyes bulging with a thirst for details.

"No," Terry said. "Anyway, the girl, I think her name was June, staggered into the darkness to find the clothes the kids had tossed. Some time passed. *June's been gone a long time*, one of the boys noticed. Just then they heard June scream."

"I don't want to hear anymore," Cathy cried, putting her hands over her ears. "I hate these stories. You promised you wouldn't tell any more of your stories while I was stoned. I get too freaked out."

"Sobered by the sudden scream," Terry continued, ignoring Cathy's pleas, "all four rushed into the darkness. They heard another scream like June was begging someone to let her go. They couldn't quite make out what she was crying. And then..."

"Yes?" Frank asked.

"No!" Cathy insisted and crawled over to Adelle, burrowing into her side for protection. *Don't say it! Don't!*

"There was nothing." Terry smiled and looked around.

"Nothing?" Wiggy asked, his mouth dropping.

"Silence," Terry added.

"Holy shit!" Frank gasped, dropping the bottle of gin to the ground and then immediately grabbing it before what was left of the gin spilled into the grass.

For several minutes Terry did not speak. Instead he soaked up the delicious silence around him. And then when the time was ripe, he began to speak again, softly, almost inaudibly.

"They waited a long time, huddled together. When it was clear that June was not going to return, they gathered all their clothes and dressed. How were they going to tell their parents that they'd gotten drunk, played strip poker, than lost one of their friends? Who was going to believe them? The police would think that they'd done something to June, that some terrible accident had befallen their friend and that the rest of the friends were trying to cover it up. They made an oath among themselves never to tell the truth, the complete truth."

Cathy began to weep. "You know I hate these stories, Terry. You know I get nightmares..."

"Did they ever find the chick?" Wiggy asked.

Terry shook his head.

"Holy shit!" Frank gasped, raised the bottle of gin to his mouth and forgot to drink before he placed it back at his feet.

"So, like, they never found who grabbed the girl?" Wiggy added.

"Nope!" Terry responded. "And for all we know whoever dragged the girl off could still be out there in the darkness tonight."

"Jesus!" Wiggy said, his head swiveling as he searched the darkness.

Adelle started to laugh. Cathy wiped the tears from her eyes and glared at her friend.

"He made it up," Adelle said to her friends.

Cathy turned from Adelle to Terry. Terry looked at her for a moment then started to laugh. Except for Cathy, they all began to laugh.

"I knew you were putting us on," Wiggy said with a chuckle.

Everyone looked at him skeptically.

"Well, I did," he added.

## The Spy

With an elbow on the bar and her head leaning on her hand, a cigarette stuck between her fingers and smoke twisting and turning through the curls of her hair, Mary watched Jack polishing the bar. There was something safe and secure about a man working.

"You worry too much about your kid, Mary," Jack said.

"I'm a mother," she sighed. "Maybe not a good one, but a mother nevertheless."

Jack slipped the towel over his shoulder and leaned on the bar as if he were getting ready to do pushups.

"You're doing your best." He turned and wrote something down on a pad. "They don't give you a manual when these kids are handed to you."

"You got that right, Jack." Mary looked affectionately at the bartender. "You got kids, Jack?"

Jack held up two fingers.

"And two grandchildren," he added as he turned around. "Greatest kick in the world, having grandchildren. You get all the good stuff and when they get tired and cranky, you hand them back to Mom."

"I didn't know you had grandchildren." Mary rubbed her cigarette hand on her forehead. She drew lightly on her cigarette. "I'm looking forward to that. Right now I've just got the boy. It's the attitude that gets to you. How do they know everything? When did they suddenly get so angry? Sometimes I'm afraid I might be living with a serial killer. He says I pry. I'd like to know a few fundamental things, like whether he's healthy. God, he hasn't been to the dentist in two years. And how's he doing in school. I haven't seen a report card since grade nine. I ask a question and Terry makes me feel as if I'm acting like J. Edgar Hoover.

Terry tells me nothing. I can only guess what he's up to. And I'm so tired. Do you ever get plain tired of everything, Jack?"

Jack nodded. "Oh ya. My dogs get so fatigued they fall asleep on me while I'm standing still."

Grinding her cigarette out in an ashtray, Mary sipped her Bloody Caesar. She played with the stock of celery that stuck out of the glass and then bit off a piece.

"Sometimes, Jack, I just want to have a little fun. You know what I mean? Let my hair down and really let it all hang out. Like when I was a kid. God, I'm getting too old too fast."

"You're still a young woman." Jack looked at Mary and smiled. *She's getting old fast.*

"Almost forty," Mary smiled sadly.

"That's not old." Jack smiled, patting Mary on the hand. "You're just a baby, and an attractive one, I might add. Why, if I wasn't already hitched to a wagon, I might take a little gander your way."

Mary laughed and slapped Jack affectionately on the hand.

"If you weren't married, I might rope you in myself." Mary laughed again. She stopped. "I lied. I'm forty-one."

"Well, there you go." Jack laughed. "You look ten years younger."

"Oh, you know how to keep your regulars happy." Mary smiled as she took her package of cigarettes out of her purse. Jack reached for a lighter under the bar and lit her up.

"How's it going with your new fellow?" Jack asked.

"Hank?" Mary drew deeply on the cigarette, her eyes closed.

"The tall long drink of water I saw you in here with yesterday," Jack said.

Mary sighed. "Did you see the size of his hands? Like sides of beef hanging on the ends of his arms. Things are up and down."

Jack laughed.

Mary smiled. "You have a filthy mind. I love it."

Mary drew on her cigarette and released a sigh inside a cloud of smoke.

"The other night he told me that the world ended in 1950."

Jack shook his head. "He's a strange one."

"I have so much trouble reading men. One moment Hank seems really interested in me and the next... It's like he's off somewhere else on some distant planet. The first night I met him we were all over each other. Oh, I don't know if I should say this..."

"Don't worry, love," Jack said. "I've heard it all."

"You know where my apartment is. Over the variety store. God, we were like young kids all the way along the street. I guess I'd had a few drinks. He pushed me into a telephone booth and had his hands up my pants. Oh, God, it was wonderful. And the funny thing is, the phone was off the hook and some guy was on the other end asking who was calling, and I was moaning like a cat in heat. He must have thought we were a couple of perverts. I always make that mistake with men."

"What mistake is that, Mary?"

Mary sucked deeply on her cigarette.

"Mistaking lust for affection. I always think they like me when what they want is between my legs. God, I wish I could do without them. Men have brought me nothing but tears. I adore my lovers but I get treated like an old dishrag. Just once I'd like to be the one who is adored."

"You think he's lost interest?"

Mary shrugged her shoulders. "Hank is different. I don't think he's really interested in the sex. He doesn't seem too concerned with...getting off. Once I've been satisfied, he gives up. I'm willing to... you know. But he tells me that it's all right. He'd rather talk."

Jack nodded and stood erect. *Back is acting up again.* He looked at Mary with concern.

"What do you know about this fella, Mary?"

Mary butted out her fresh cigarette absentmindedly and took a sip of her drink.

"Not much. Now that I think of it, I don't know anything about him. I don't even know his last name. I know it sounds loose but I'm beyond caring. God, sometimes I feel so lonely. I can't stand being alone. When I'm in the apartment by myself, the television or radio is always on. Silence terrifies me. Without another human voice, I feel vulnerable. I've never been really alone. I know that there are people who need their space. I hate space. The here and now scares the hell out of me. I get so angry at Terry when he leaves the apartment and he turns off all the lights. I walk into the apartment and am immediately traumatized. I run around turning everything on. I don't care about my electrical bills. Can you imagine living in the middle ages? All those noises. Crickets, the wind, animals. I need the cocoon of twentieth-century technology. Remember that blackout we had a few years ago? Lasted for hours. I spent the whole time in my girlfriend's car listening to the radio." Mary stopped to take a breath. "The first time I met Hank, I felt safe. Maybe it's his size. And as you know, Hank likes to talk. He can go on for hours. Puts me to sleep. It's boring and comforting at the same time."

Jack laughed, then added, "He's certainly got something for the year 1950."

Mary said, "Last night he told me about two Englishmen who stole state secrets for Russia. Files for nuclear weapons, H-bombs. How would he know about that? Do you think Hank could be a spy?"

Jack chuckled. "I doubt that. There wouldn't be too many top secret plans to be found here in the Six Points."

"He asks a lot of questions though. Isn't that what spies do?"

"What sort of questions?"

"He asks me a lot of things about my ex, Terry's father. Of course, there's not much to talk about there. The guy just walked out on me one day and never returned. At first I thought that Hank might be jealous. But he wasn't interested in any particulars about my ex. Just wanted to know about the night the bastard ran off."

"Just that night?" Jack sighed.

Mary smiled. "What? What are you thinking?"

"Did he ask about any other disappearances?"

Mary stared at Jack for a moment and thought. She took a sip of her drink.

"He asked me about an incident that happened when I was a kid."

"Incident?" Jack asked.

"A friend of mine disappeared. Now that I think of it, a lot of questions that he asks are about people who have disappeared. Do you think he might work for the police?"

"I know most of the cops," Jack said, shaking his head. "Sam Kelly would have mentioned something about him."

Mary reached into her bag for another cigarette but then thought better of it.

## The Bed

Mary sighed with relief as Hank released his grip of her shoulders and slid off to one side of the bed. For a moment she remained on her hands and knees, her face pressed into the pillow.

"That was nice," Mary purred. She turned over and burrowed under Hank's arm. "Can we do it some more?"

Hank chuckled. "Just give me some time to recover. I'm not eighteen."

Mary slid closer, leaning her head on Hank's chest.

"Do you think my breasts sag?" she asked.

Hank ran a finger around Mary's ear. She moaned with delight.

"Your breasts are perfect."

Mary moaned softly. "I could do this all night."

"Don't you have to work tomorrow?" he asked.

Mary giggled. "Fuck work! Oh, Hank, you make me feel so alive. I haven't felt this good in years. We could take pictures."

There was a long pause.

"Why would your husband leave a sexy woman like you alone in bed to get a package of cigarettes?" Hank asked.

Mary played with the short hairs on Hank's chest.

"That's a question I've asked myself a thousand times. My ex had a wandering eye. Variety is the spice of life, I suppose."

"Were you faithful?" Hank asked.

Mary hesitated. "No. But he deserved it. Why are we talking about my ex anyway? I've got a Polaroid camera in the dresser. We could have a little fun."

Hank ran his hand down Mary's arm. "What if he didn't leave you? What if something else happened to him?"

## The Incident

"I don't know who he was," Jack said. "But he came in here the other afternoon, asked for a drink and downed it, and then asked for a second."

Sam Kelly nodded, scribbling notes on a pad.

"He was sweating, Sam," Jack said, "and pale as a ghost. After his second drink he stares at me and says, 'I just let a man die.' It gave me the willies. I've been tending bar for a lot of years but this was one for the records."

Jack paused for a moment, reliving the conversation with the stranger.

"He said he killed someone or he allowed someone to die?" the detective asked as he scribbled away with a short stubby pencil.

Jack took a breath. "He said he was standing at the corner just outside here, at the corner, and he was bending over to buy a newspaper. I don't know which paper. Is that important?"

Sam Kelly shook his head.

Jack continued. "He was bending over the newspaper box when he heard something behind him. He turned around. An old man was lying on the sidewalk, his feet in the telephone booth, his mouth open. The old man seemed to let out a small cry. Oh yes, and the receiver on the phone was dangling loose. 'I let him die,' he said over and over."

"Did he notice the old man before that moment? Did he drive or walk to the newspaper stand?"

"Walked, Sam," Jack replied. "Said he lived in the neighborhood, but I've never seen him before. He didn't notice the old man at all. He told me that the corner was empty when he arrived. Sam, how could you miss an old man lying on the ground? Oh ya, he said that the emptiness struck him as odd because usually there was always someone in the plaza or walking along the sidewalk. There was no one on the street or in the plaza. He used the word empty. There is always someone coming in or out of the drugstore. It's open twenty-four hours. And the Canadiana Restaurant has a do on every night. But he used the word empty. The landscape was empty. And it was dead quiet. Sam, you can always hear Highway 27 from here. It's constant. Like living next to the ocean. That roar is always there and yet he said he couldn't hear the highway."

Detective Kelly looked up from his pad.

"Couldn't hear anything?"

"Do you think that's important?"

The detective shrugged. "It is strange. You get used to the roar of traffic but it's always present. But he noticed the silence. There's nothing else that stood out about this fellow, no scar or accent, no tic, no idiosyncrasy?"

Jack thought for a moment. "He was upset. And he sweated a lot. Real sweet smell. And his clothes."

"What about his clothes?"

Jack shook his head. "It's so obvious, Sam. I don't know why I didn't notice it before. He was wearing shorts. On a cold fall day, this guy was wearing shorts. And one of those ugly Hawaiian shirts."

"Maybe he was jogging," the detective suggested. "You mentioned that this guy called for an ambulance. There should be a record of that. And a squad car should have been sent as well. I'm surprised I didn't hear about it."

"An old man's death can't be that uncommon," Jack suggested.

Detective Kelly scribbled a few more notes in his pad before placing it back in his pocket.

"People die everyday, but not in the streets. I'll look into it," he said.

"I appreciate it, Sam. Been preying on my mind. The police talked to him. He told me that. A few minutes after the ambulance left, a squad car arrived and a cop asked him a few questions. It seems that the old guy was on the line to the police. He'd had an argument with someone."

"The police questioned him?" the detective asked.

Jack nodded then blushed with embarrassment. "Didn't I tell you that, Sam?"

The detective reached for his pad.

## CHAPTER SIX

Johnny

Wiggy leaned against the wall of George's Barbershop, smoking a cigarette. Occasionally he took the cigarette out of his mouth to spit tobacco juice onto the street where it sizzled on the asphalt.

"I guess they call that hot," he said, glancing over at Terry who was silently drinking from a can of soda. Wiggy nudged Terry's shoulder with his hand. Terry ignored Wiggy.

"I thought that was all ancient history?" Wiggy said, looking out over Bloor Street. Above the bank an airplane descended from behind a cloud. Wiggy spat again. The plane was carrying a sign behind it. *Mild, isn't it?* The spit sizzled again and Wiggy laughed.

"Apparently not," Terry responded, wiping his chin with his arm.

"When's Johnny getting back?" Wiggy asked. "I'll bet he has some awesome tales about college. Man, those college parties! Dudes zeroed across the floor. Chicks upchucking in the toilet. Dope passed around like bubble gum. And the pranks. So cool. Tying people naked to flag poles. Hoisting the wheels off professors' cars. Panty raids. Man, I can't wait until I go."

"You ain't going to college," Terry said with a smirk.

"Who said I ain't?" Wiggy demanded.

"You've got to graduate from high school first," Terry answered. "Where'd you hear all that shit about college?"

"I heard it," Wiggy responded defensively. He stepped several feet to his left. The sound of the airplane was louder now. Wiggy looked up. The sign that the plane had been dragging behind it had disappeared.

Terry laughed. "Where'd you hear it?"

"I just heard it," Wiggy repeated. "Jesus, who got your shorts tied in a knot?"

Terry spat on the sidewalk. There was no sizzle. He took another drink. "You don't know shit, Wiggy."

Wiggy fidgeted. His cigarette fell out of his mouth onto the ground. For a brief moment he considered not picking it up. Terry watched Wiggy pick up his cigarette and place it back in his mouth.

"Jesus!" Terry said, his face squirming. "I just spat there."

"It was my last cigarette," Wiggy replied peevishly. "Besides, we're buds." *Why you all over my case?* "I was just talking. How's my talking harm you? Okay, wrestling is fixed. I'll grant you that. And maybe there is a God, maybe there isn't. But don't tell me we haven't been visited by aliens. They've got proof. And don't tell me that they don't have drunken orgies at college. It's a rite of passage. I've seen movies. And they don't go making up stuff like that."

Wiggy moved away from the wall and flicked the cigarette he'd just picked up off the ground back into the street. He looked up and watched the plane begin to descend. *Shit! It's going to strafe the street with machine gun fire.* Wiggy flinched. The plane pulled up and climbed toward the midday sun.

"What the hell!" Wiggy cried.

Terry grinned.

"When did you say Johnny was coming back?" Wiggy kept one eye on the sky.

Terry emptied his drink onto the ground and flipped the can into the street. A passing car flattened it. Terry smiled with satisfaction and looked up into the sky. *If only that plane would crash.*

"He's back. Arrived in town on the weekend."

Wiggy jumped up and gestured with his arms, crying out, "The weekend! This is Wednesday. Where's he at? We're supposed to be tight. Why hasn't he called me?"

"What are you, his girlfriend?" Terry said with a smirk.

George, a balding middle-aged man of small stature stepped out of his barbershop. He pointed to the crushed soda can on the street.

"Is that yours?"

"Ain't mine. I'm allergic to sugar," Wiggy cried.

George turned to Terry. Terry shrugged his shoulders. Looking both ways, George stepped out into the street and picking up the can, tossed it into a nearby bin.

"Why do you want to make the place look like a dump? Why don't you fellows move on, eh?"

"Free country," Wiggy cried. "Besides, you're interrupting a very important conversation I'm having with my friend."

"Hey, you're scaring off my business!" George snapped. "It's slow enough without you two hanging around the entrance. You're discouraging people from entering the shop."

Wiggy laughed. "Look, man, either they want a haircut or they don't. It ain't like we're out here mugging folks."

George examined Wiggy. "You look like you could use a trim."

"Ah hell, George, I'm letting it grow long," Wiggy said, brushing the short stubble on his head with his hand. "I want to look like one of The Beatles."

"Why do you always have to be a smart-ass?" George asked. "I remember you. Your father used to bring you into my shop. You were a nice boy then. Very polite. Your dad used to boast about your hockey. Said you were the next Big M. He must be disappointed you turned out to be such a bum."

"He's disappointed with a lot of things," Wiggy replied. "He's dead."

George lowered his head. "I'm sorry. I haven't seen him in a while and..."

"Airplane crash," Wiggy said and winked at Terry. "Outside Chicago. One of those prop planes. He was dusting crops. Hit a hydro line."

"That's terrible," George said, his voice turning contrite and sad.

"There wasn't enough of his body left," Wiggy continued, "so we buried his barf bag."

George looked at Terry then back at Wiggy. The two boys began to laugh. George's face turned red as he realized that the boys had been toying with him.

"Get away from my shop!" he barked, waving his arms. "Young punks! You got no respect for anything. Talking about your father like that! It's a sin."

Still laughing, the two boys wandered off, crossed the street, and headed for Terry's apartment.

"Sucker," Wiggy muttered.

The boys walked across the hydro field. The airplane appeared again, flying low over the towers. Wiggy looked up. *That asshole is going to hit the hydro lines!*

"Jesus!" Terry laughed.

Once again the plane turned and disappeared over the horizon.

"My old man never bragged about me," Wiggy said. "He must have been talking about your dad."

Terry shrugged. Terry didn't like to talk about his father, especially with Wiggy. There was always a joke attached to any comment Wiggy made.

"Sometimes... I can't remember what my old man looked like," Terry said. *It's like his face disappeared into a hole in my head.*

“Shit! I wish I could forget what my old man’s puss looked like. It’s always in my face like some indelible ink. I can’t remember when that bastard hasn’t been on my case.”

The boys stopped in front of Duke’s Sporting Goods and looked in the window.

“How can Duke charge these prices?” Wiggy asked. “There should be some kind of law. It should be criminal to sell things that expensive.”

“Don’t buy them,” Terry responded.

“That’s not the point, Terry,” Wiggy moaned. “Look at those skates! Two hundred bucks! If I had a pair of those I could have made the school team.”

“You can’t skate,” Terry said.

“My equipment was too heavy. Okay, I wasn’t the fastest guy out there. But those guys were such pussies.”

“The coach kicked you out of the first practice,” Terry said, shaking his head. “At least I made the first round of cuts.”

“The guy hooked me. So I hit him on the head. He had a helmet on. Fucking broke my stick. It was practically new.”

“He was the coach’s son,” Terry reminded Wiggy. “What did you expect?”

Wiggy shrugged. He bummed a cigarette off Terry and leaned against the shop window, tapping on the glass with his elbow and wondered how much of a blow it would take to break it.

“How come you quit the team?” Wiggy asked. “Did you quit because they gave me the boot?”

“Why not?” Terry responded.

“I knew it. Told Frank that you quit on account of me and he said I was nuts. But we’re buds, right? One for all and all for one. But I gotta be honest, I don’t know if I would have quit if the positions had been reversed. I mean, my old man would have killed me. He was pissed that I got cut until I told him what happened. Called the coach a pussy. Right on the phone. I heard it myself. My old man may be an asshole but he’s my asshole.”

“Very touching,” Terry responded.

“Ah, don’t worry about old George there,” Wiggy began, pointing back at the barbershop where the barber remained in front. “George ain’t such a bad guy. He’s just pissed off because he doesn’t have any customers. Being a barber—that’s one thing I would not want to be. Can you imagine all the filthy disgusting things you’d find in people’s hair? Grease, lice, scabs. Disgusting! Frank Nitty, Al Capone’s right hand man,

was a barber. Did you know that? He slit a few necks in his time. How can someone do that? Maybe you get used to it after the first few times. Like working down at Canada Packer's. My uncle kills the cows down there. Did I tell you that? Pops them in the forehead with this gun. Doesn't fire bullets, just knocks them senseless. Has to carry a hammer with him at all times in case the animal doesn't go down right away. That must be quite a rush, eh? Killing something?" There was a long pause before Wiggy continued. "I can't believe that Johnny's back and I haven't seen him. We're supposed to be buds and he doesn't call me." Wiggy looked at Terry. "Hey, what's wrong? I told you not to sweat old George."

"It's Cathy," Terry responded.

"She late?"

Terry shook his head. "I told you, Johnny's back."

"So? I thought she was your girl now. Her and Johnny were tight last year before he took off for college, but that's over. Right?"

"I thought so," Terry said. "She forgot to inform Johnny that they were no longer an item. He thinks he's still got property rights."

"He's still banging her?" Wiggy asked.

Terry grit his teeth. Wiggy raised his hands in apology.

"What does Cathy say?"

Terry shrugged.

"Jesus," Wiggy said, exhaling a cloud of smoke. Wiggy was silent for several moments before he continued. "This puts me in a difficult position, man. I like Johnny. He's got that cool '57 Chev. We went up to Wasaga Beach last summer and I'm telling you, it's a real babe magnet. Did I tell you about those chicks from the Saulte?"

"You told me," Terry sighed.

Wiggy turned and faced Terry. "We're buds, man, but Johnny has the Chev and you've got to have wheels to get the chicks." Wiggy continued on for several minutes until he noticed that Terry was glaring at him.

"What?" Wiggy cried.

"You ever heard of loyalty, Wiggy?"

Wiggy nodded. "But chicks come first, right? We agreed to that."

"Johnny ain't a chick."

"But he's my supply line. He's like a warehouse for chicks. No explaining it. Johnny and I were talking about going to California. He says the chicks down there are all tanned, and blonde, and beautiful, and they drop their panties if you wink."

Terry looked at Wiggy. "Johnny is the enemy. He's trying to steal my girl." Terry sighed. "Why do I bother with you?"

Terry put his arm around Terry's shoulder. 'Cause we're buds."

## Dacchau

Sam Kelly rapped on the front door several times. He was about to give up when the door opened. Joe Mackenzie wiped the wisps of gray hair that dangled over his eyes back across his bald head. He rubbed his eyes and let the police officer in. A moment later they were in the kitchen. Joe told the detective to take a seat. As Joe prepared some coffee, Sam glanced at the wall papered with clippings, now yellowed and frayed. One article caught his attention. It was about Dacchau, the former German concentration camp. It had been cleaned up to provide temporary housing for displaced persons. How could anyone have lived there? What had the residents told their children?

"Unbelievable, eh?" Joe said, recognizing the article that Sam was reading. Joe set a cup of hot coffee in front of Sam. "I hope you like your coffee black. Out of milk and sugar. Working the afternoon shift and I just didn't get around to getting in groceries."

Sam nodded. "Black is fine. People actually lived there voluntarily?"

Joe nodded. "After the war there were a lot of refugees—Poles, Russians, Germans. There was no other housing. I guess you put up with a lot of things when you're desperate. Must have been terrible for the kids. Even if you don't believe in ghosts the kids probably overheard stories. You know how kids talk among themselves."

The detective sipped his coffee. It was too hot. He put it to one side.

"Must be difficult to forget something like that," he said.

"You know what was the worse thing the Nazis did," Joe continued, "next to exterminating all those people? They tried to erase their existence from history, as if all those people had never truly been. I read somewhere that Hitler got his idea for wiping out the Jews, the Gypsies, and the Slavs from the history of the wild West in America. Open up Eastern Europe as a frontier for the Germanic people by making the people there disappear. Isn't that what we did to the Indian? Imagine Hitler in a cowboy hat and lasso and all those brown shirts on horses singing country and western songs. Sometimes I think there's another history written in invisible ink that no one ever reads. But you didn't come here this morning for a history lesson."

"I came by yesterday afternoon, but there was no one home."

"I was at work," Joe replied, then corrected himself. "No, I was here. Must have been asleep. That's what getting old is all about. You forget things. Faces, places, but especially names. Parts of your life just disappear on you. I should have taken more pictures."

The detective leaned over the table and sipped his coffee again. It was drinkable this time.

Joe continued. "Imagine all the photographs that have been taken since the camera was invented. Billions of 'em. Where are they? Forgotten in drawers. Buried in dumps. Disappeared. If you had all those photographs, I'll bet you could wallpaper the planet."

The detective nodded. "Went ahead without you, Joe. I hope that was okay."

Joe took a swallow of his coffee. The heat didn't seem to bother him.

"I got a special measuring tape from the Ministry of Natural Resources," the detective continued. "They use it to measure old wells just like yours. Joe, I let it all out. Two thousand feet. And still it hadn't reached the bottom of your well."

Joe took another swallow. He shook his head.

"Ask me if I'm surprised."

The detective leaned back in his chair. "I've been thinking that maybe we could lower a video camera down and see what's there."

"Won't it be too dark?"

"Ya, I thought of that. Maybe we could strap a flashlight to it. I've been doing a little research. There's a hole like yours in Sweden. That's what they did. Lowered a camera."

"What did they see?"

"Not much. But when they reached what they figured must have been the bottom, they saw a tunnel leading off in another direction. And they saw what they figured was the remains of animals that must have fallen down there. They went down almost twenty-four hundred feet."

Joe was silent for several minutes. He sipped at his coffee, then took a pouch of tobacco and filled a pipe that he retrieved from his back pocket. The officer waited in silence. He knew that Joe needed a few minutes to mull over the problem. He read another clipping on the wall. The United States had defeated Britain in a World Cup championship match played in Rio de Janeiro. In another article he read about the rise of suicides after World War II. It had been especially noted that the rise was chiefly among young men who had returned from active military service.

"The first problem I see," Joe began, "is weight."

"The camera is fairly light," Sam responded. "I figure we can use some of that test line that fishermen use to catch marlin."

"But once you get that far down," Joe went on, "most of your weight is the line itself. You think there might be something down there?"

"We know your neighbors have been dumping garbage," Sam responded. "Who knows what else they dropped. If we can find something suspicious then we can get some authorization to spend more money on investigating the hole."

"June used to say she could hear the screams of hell coming up from the hole. Of course she was half in the tank most of the time. You think that someone might have fallen down there?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders as he swallowed a mouth of coffee.

"Maybe," he replied.

Joe relit his pipe that had gone out.

"I have to find out, Joe," the detective said.

"Like an itch you have to scratch," Joe responded with a laugh.

The detective nodded.

"Your wife drank a lot?" the detective asked.

"Like a fish. My fault," Joe said, shaking his head. "She was young and lonely. And I wasn't much company. Foolish of me to marry her, but I couldn't keep my hands off her. I've never been a man who needed it much but something about June brought it out. In the beginning, I was as randy as a jackrabbit. If only she hadn't been so stupid. Dumb as a doorknob."

The detective smiled. "She was in love with you?"

Joe shrugged. "She never said she was, never said she wasn't. Didn't seem to matter."

## Shot Glass

Jack tilted the glass slightly to one side as he eased the draft beer down its throat. Just before the beer reached the top he released the throttle on the keg he was drawing from, then placed the glass of beer on the table. The foam rose above the lip and briefly threatened to spill over the top before it finally settled down to a perfect head.

"So you were saying, Sam?" Jack smiled.

The detective picked up his beer and sucked softly on its head, the foam sticking to his thick black moustache.

"Well, I haven't found out much. I checked with the hospital records at Lakeshore and Etobicoke, and I checked our records. You said the guy talked to a cop, but I asked around. Nothing. No one knows a thing about a man dying out front."

Jack stared at Sam. "Well, I didn't bloody make it up!" he cried.

Jack was angry. The detective couldn't remember the last time he'd seen Jack angry. There was no one more congenial than Jack Anderson. Of course it was his job, but over the years there should have been some crack in the façade. The detective had never seen it.

The detective patted Jack on the hand.

"Don't believe you did," he said. "But no one can remember any such incident. Ah Christ, I think we're all going a little mad. I've spent most of the week up at Joe Mackenzie's place trying to find out how deep his bloody well is. I got no answer to that one either. Lost a video camera the other day. The line broke. We're going to try one of those big spotlights they use sometimes over the city. What worries me is that the hole might not go straight down. But I ain't giving up on your case, Jack. Officer McSherry said he heard of a death on the corner but it was before his time. Herb gave me the name of a retired cop, Ed Kaye. I'll ask him. Lives around the corner here in the retirement home."

"But this happened the other day, Sam," Jack responded.

Sam Kelly said nothing. After a few moments of silence he asked, "What do you know about Joe Mackenzie?"

"Not much," Jack said, shaking his head. "His wife used to come in here quite often before she took off."

"Did you know that he was a graduate of Harvard University?"

"That big college in the States?" Jack asked.

The detective nodded.

Jack shook his head. "Well, I'll be."

The detective said, "He works as a night watchman at the plaza across the street. A little overqualified for the job, don't you think?"

"He must be getting up there in years, Sam. His wife used to complain that he was too old. Harvard, eh? Maybe it's just a job to pick up some extra cash. Not easy for seniors these days."

"As far as I can tell, he's never had any other job, Jack. And the walls of his house, the walls that aren't covered with bookshelves, are covered with newspaper clippings. He told me some story about his father putting the clippings on the wall to educate his kids in current affairs. Trouble is that as far as I can tell, all the clippings are from one year."

Jack's mouth dropped.

"What did I say?" the detective asked.

"What year?" Jack asked, taking a small shot glass from beneath the bar and pouring himself a shot of whiskey.

"The year?" the detective replied. "Jesus, I think it was—"

"Nineteen-fifty," Jack said.

Sam looked at the bartender, grabbed the whiskey from Jack's fingers, and swallowed it.

## The Office

Mary Hendrix plucked away at the typewriter. She stopped occasionally to take a puff from the cigarette that tightroped on the edge of an ashtray. A woman entered the office. Mary turned.

"You're early," she said.

"I was bored," Margaret replied.

"Let me finish these invoices first," Mary said.

"God," Margaret said, "are you still using a typewriter?"

Mary nodded. "Brennan hasn't forked out for a computer yet. Worries about every nickel."

"I thought what's-her-name did this stuff?"

Mary smirked. "She went out to lunch with her new boyfriend. Remember that asshole I told you about, the one that couldn't keep his hands to himself?"

Margaret nodded.

"Apparently he was in here the other day and chatted it up with our favorite secretary. I spotted him. Kept myself hidden in the back room while he was here. Anyway, maybe the girl will have better luck."

Mary looked at the pile of papers in front of her. "Brennan needs these invoices today. I don't know why I'm protecting her ass."

Margaret picked up a magazine from a nearby rack and took a seat.

"Jesus, these magazine are ten years old," Margaret said with a laugh. "Look at these prices."

"Brennan won't replace them." Mary continued her typing. "God, I wish I hadn't booked that hair appointment."

"It'll do you good." Margaret leafed through the magazine. "Look at these dresses."

"I keep thinking about the money."

"You can't take it with you."

"My hair?" Mary said.

Margaret laughed. "Your money!"

Mary stopped typing and turned toward Margaret.

"Do you ever worry about getting old alone?"

Margaret looked up from her magazine.

"As long as you're breathing, some man will take a run at you."

Mary laughed and returned to her typing.

Margaret picked up a second magazine.

"Has he asked you yet?" Mary asked.

Margaret shook her head. "And he's a detective! You'd think he could pick up on the clues. I've been tossing enough of them his way. Sometimes I think I could serve him his coffee and toast stark naked and he wouldn't notice."

Mary laughed.

"Look at all these ads for cigarettes. Nine out of ten doctors recommend Lucky Strikes. If he doesn't ask me out soon, I'm going to do the asking. Only one thing bothers me."

"What's that?" Mary asked.

Margaret looked up from her magazine. "What if he says no?"

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Missing Persons

Sam Kelly waited patiently in the Canadiana Restaurant for his blueberry pie. Several customers stood at the cash register, paying their bills and talking to the waitress. Margaret smiled warmly as she handed back their change, glancing apprehensively toward the detective. Completing the transactions, she turned to the kitchen and picked up several plates. She moved confidently across the room and delivered them to another table of guests. When she returned to the police officer she apologized. The detective sipped at his coffee. Margaret remembered the pie and moved over to a nearby refrigerator.

"Been looking forward to this all morning," Sam Kelly said.

*Me too!* Margaret smiled.

"Did you pick the berries yourself, Margaret?"

Margaret giggled and slapped the detective's hand playfully as she slid the pie onto the counter.

"Is it always this busy here in the morning?" He looked around the room.

"Some days," Margaret sighed, "it's dead in here. But if there's a funeral over at Our Lady of Peace we can get pretty busy. I like it

busy—not that I wake up hoping someone has died. But time passes by faster when it’s busy.” *Dirty shirt collar. Good sign.*

“You don’t have any other help?” Sam made sure to keep his mouth closed as he ate.

“Susan comes in mornings. But she’s got kids and there’s always some emergency or other that makes her late. Or so the story goes. But the boss likes her. She’s a single mother and he thinks that he might get lucky. She doesn’t have four kids for nothing. That’s what the boss tells me. Men are such optimists.”

Sam shook with laughter. *Have to tell that one to Jack.* Shaking his head with delight, he smiled as he washed down the pie with a swallow of coffee.

Margaret took an ashtray out and set it on the counter.

“You don’t mind?”

The detective shook his head and continued to eat his pie. Margaret watched. *Love to watch a man eat. Tells you something about how they touch a woman. Meticulous and tidy. Finishes what he starts. I like that.*

When Sam finished he pushed the plate aside, wiped his mouth with a napkin, and sighed.

“Wonderful,” he said with a smile. “A pie like that deserves some kind of prize.”

Margaret drew deeply on her cigarette and slowly let out several smoke rings. *Do I have to bat my eyelashes?*

The detective sipped at his coffee and watched in wonder as Margaret’s rings rose toward the ceiling and dissipated.

“Never could do that,” he said.

“It’s just one of my talents,” Margaret responded with a wink.

The detective blushed. Margaret laughed and patted his hand.

“You lived in this area all your life?” he asked.

Margaret nodded. “Mostly.”

“Ever been married?” he asked.

“Once. No kids. No prospects.” Margaret sucked on her cigarette.

“Sorry,” the detective apologized. “Hazard of the job.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Being nosy.” He smiled.

Margaret smiled. “I like people who are curious. Some people. What about you, Detective?”

“Call me Sam. No on all charges.” He smiled, bowing his head.

Margaret laughed. “Well, it ain’t a crime to be single! Not yet anyway.”

The detective smiled. He liked Margaret. She seemed down to earth, lacked any pretensions. When she smiled, she was quite pretty.

"I like it when it's quiet," he said.

"Well, you picked a great place to be a cop," Margaret said, butting out her cigarette. "Nothing ever happens here in the Six Points. You could be born, live, and die in this area without making a ripple."

"You sound disappointed," the detective said.

"Well," Margaret smiled, reaching for the coffee and topping up the detective's cup, "I like a little excitement. Gets my juices going."

"How come you haven't moved into the city?" he asked.

Margaret smiled. "Always intend to, but I never get around to it."

The detective smiled and stared into his coffee. There was a long pause. *Should I ask her?* A customer stepped into the restaurant. Margaret moved down the counter. The detective shook his head and laughed to himself. *God, I'm acting like a teenager.*

Duke's

Cathy backed away from Terry. She shoved her hands into the back pockets of her jeans and leaned provocatively against the variety store's front. "I think you should go upstairs. By yourself. I'm not going to let you talk me into going up with you. I just couldn't handle it. You, Johnny, my parents, your mother. It's too much. I need some space. I can hardly breathe."

"Why couldn't you just have told him?" he cried. About to smash his fist on the front door leading up to his apartment, Terry turned away angrily.

"Keep your voice down," Cathy pleaded, her voice sliding into the accent of a southern belle.

"Jesus!" Terry complained. "The accent."

"You know I get that accent when I'm nervous," Cathy explained. "And I'm not being histrionic."

"I didn't say a thing." *I hate this melodrama!*

"No...But I know how you think, Terry." *Quit sulking!*

"You think you know me? You should get real, Cathy. Little rich girl fucking with everybody's head. You're an actress, Cathy. You love this shit!" *Fuck! Why did I say that!*

"I do not like this," Cathy responded angrily. "Why do you always bring up my parents' money? You're the one who's preoccupied with it."

And I'm not trying to fuck with your head. I love you, Terry. I just need some time." *I need a cigarette.*

"You should have written Johnny. I thought you guys had an arrangement before he left. Christ, I'm crazy about you. Can't you see that? I've been fucking the guy's girlfriend for months and now I'm supposed to disappear. He's the one that should get lost. You think he's been an altar boy at college? You think he hasn't been double-dipping into every pussy coming his way?" *I'm driving her away. I can feel it. Got to shut up.*

Cathy bit down on her lip. "If you don't keep your voice down, Terry, I'm leaving."

Terry took a deep breath. He fell back against his front door and slid down to the ground where he sat shaking his head.

"This is so fucking unfair," he moaned. "I can't stand..." *I'm losing her.*

Cathy sat down on the sidewalk beside Terry. *Please stop acting like a baby.*

"It's not all about you, Terry. How do you think I feel having the only two men I've ever loved tugging from both sides at me? I'm being torn apart. Sometimes I wish—"

"What? That you'd never met me?" Terry looked at Cathy then turned his head away.

"That I'd never met either one of you." *Didn't mean that. Yes I did.*

Terry turned back to Cathy. Tears ran slowly down Cathy's cheek. Terry wiped them away with his finger. All his anger seemed diluted in her tears. He tried to kiss her. She moved away.

"That's not going to help!" She spat out each of her words.

Terry sighed, putting his face in both of his hands. *If we could go upstairs, if we could fuck, this...would go away.* Climbing to his feet, Terry stepped away, his back to Cathy. Abruptly he turned back on her.

"I can't take this, Cathy. I'm aching for you. You don't know what it's like to have your body aching so much for someone. Like you're going to be sick to your stomach. I can't think straight. If only I could relax for five minutes, just time to think. It's like my own body is torturing me."

"What do you want me to do—give you a blow job so that we can have a reasonable conversation?"

Terry said nothing. *Yes.*

Cathy sighed deeply. *Fat chance!*

A police car, its lights flashing, raced along Bloor Street past the couple.

Terry stepped back toward Cathy. He looked down at her. "We could get married."

Cathy remained silent for several minutes. And then in a voice barely audible she said mockingly, "That's so pathetic."

"What?" *What did she say?*

*Nothing.* Cathy shook her head.

Terry took a package of cigarettes out of his pocket. He offered one to Cathy. They both lit up. For several minutes neither spoke.

"What are you going to tell college-boy?"

"I'm not sure yet. Johnny's going through a bad time. He screwed up at school. He was on probation to begin with and then he flunked a couple of classes. Latin and Greek, I think. He always hated Latin. Barely got through high school in Latin and then he signs up for the course. What an asshole! Never went to class. What a jerk! His parents don't know yet. They're going to throw him out when they see his marks. He needs a job and a place to live."

"Don't tell me he asked to live with your folks?" Terry said, shaking his head.

"Where else is he going to go? My parents have always liked Johnny. He's personable. And our place is huge. Johnny could stay in the basement apartment. Now that Grandma is in the home, she doesn't need it."

"They hate me," Terry cried, flicking the ashes of his cigarette on the ground. "Your parents hate me and they love all-American Johnny. The guy is such an asshole and your parents like him. Have they got dog food for brains?"

"They don't hate you," Cathy said. *My mother thinks you're a loser.* She coughed, then took a puff on her cigarette. "You don't say anything. I think they're a bit afraid of you. It would help if you smiled once in a while and spoke to them. My dad is real keen on eye contact. He's a lawyer after all. And they definitely don't like the way you dress. And your hair." *My father is surprised that you don't have a police record.*

"And my mother?" Terry asked.

"Well," Cathy hesitated, smoke slipping through her teeth. "If she was a little more discreet with her personal life..."

"Shit! They hate me. They hate anyone who doesn't have a Mercedes in their future. And they love good old Johnny. They don't mind if he gets kicked out of college. He'll get the Mercedes the old-fashioned way. He'll inherit it. Christ, is this going to come down to who your parents like? Have you had sex with Johnny?"

"No!" *Like I'd tell you.*

Terry turned and looked at Cathy.

"Well," Cathy hesitated, her eyes dropping, "what was I supposed to do?"

Terry ran his fingers through his hair. He gritted his teeth angrily. "You're supposed to say no! I'm your boyfriend!"

"He was crying. I didn't know what else to do. He needed me so much. It's terrible when someone needs you so much."

"He was crying? He begged you? And you didn't find that pathetic. Funny how his entreaties work while mine fall on deaf ears."

Terry angrily walked in circles. He kicked at a newspaper box, sending it into a pirouette before it landed back on its legs again.

"I need you!" He turned on Cathy. "You enjoyed it, didn't you?"

Cathy looked up, cigarette smoke rising up through her hair, a tear running down her cheek.

"Oh shit!" Terry said, looking down Bloor Street. "Who's that?"

## Hydro Towers

Mary staggered to one side, then grabbed onto Hank's arm.

"Steady girl." He swung his arm around her shoulder, his fingers straying over the straps of her dress.

Mary laughed, her face falling into Hank's chest. "It's these shoes," she said.

"It's the gin," Hank responded with a laugh, slipping a finger under one of her shoulder straps.

"Listen!" Mary looked up at the hydro towers above them. "You can hear the electricity in the wires."

"Electricity doesn't make any sound," Hank replied.

"What's that sound then?"

They both listened.

"Hell, I've never noticed that before." Hank laughed.

"I wonder if it's in code." She began to giggle.

"Quiet," Hank said. "I think I can make out what it's saying." Hank's finger slipped along the strap over the edge of Mary's shoulder.

Mary could barely contain her laughter.

Hank smiled. "It's asking who the good-looking blonde with the great knockers is."

Mary broke out laughing, falling into Hank's arms. He bent down. Their lips met. His finger slid under the edge of her dress and tapped on her nipple.

"You sex maniac," Mary whispered into his mouth.

Their tongues met.

"I hope you have air-conditioning," he said.

"I have fans." Mary slipped out of Hank's arms. "It's not too bad if you open all the windows. Bloody landlord won't put in air. Anyway, I'm on the rag so there won't be any tonight." She laughed and punched Hank playfully on the arm. "But if you're a good boy, I—"

"That's all right," Hank said, rubbing Mary's shoulder as if he were trying to warm her up. "I'm not in the mood. The heat. We could talk."

"Not about my ex again," Mary moaned, slipping back under the wing of his long arm around her shoulder. "I don't mind going dow—"

Hank placed his finger gently on her lips.

"I can wait. They say that the greatest spice to a meal is appetite."

Mary laughed. "You are sweet."

"And I'm curious," Hank said. "It's like a mystery novel. You've told me the ending but I don't know how you got there. You're husband walked out one night and didn't come back. Why would he do that?"

"He went out for cigarettes. Or the paper. Or a quart of milk. Isn't it always the same story?"

"You had a fight? Am I right?"

Mary nodded. She pulled the strap of her dress back over her shoulder.

Hank laughed. "What was the fight about?"

"We were always having fights. It was what we did best."

"It must have been a pretty serious fight if he didn't come back."

"I don't remember. Maybe it was about money." Mary took a package of cigarettes out of the small bag that hung over her other shoulder. "We never had enough. Bill was a professional hockey player. I guess I never told you about that. He was always coming home with bruises and cuts. Most of the time he was so hurt he couldn't get it up. Played for the Toronto Toros. What kind of name is that, eh? Toros? Like the team was Mexican. We were always moving around from town to town. I guess I've been in every bus station from Tulsa to Hamilton. He got cut the winter before. I don't mean injured. He got fired. We'd pretty well gone through all his money. Terry was only about five or six at the time. He adored his dad. But Bill couldn't find any other work."

Hank took a lighter from his pocket and lit Mary's cigarette.

"He was a fringe player," she continued. "And those long bus trips with the team can be boring. All the players fooled around, or drank, or both. Bill was good-looking so it's not surprising that he had a little something on the side. Well, I forgave him that. I was no angel myself."

But when we moved back to Toronto to play for the Toros, I thought we'd be able to put down roots. But Bill was just fodder for the cannons. After one season they didn't need him anymore. Twenty-nine years old and at the end of his career and I was still a kid myself. I was fifteen when we got married. I was so naive. Marrying a hockey player—well, I thought I'd struck gold. Turned out to be fool's gold."

A cloud of smoke billowed out of Mary's mouth and disappeared into the night.

"We were always at each other's throats."

Mary leaned over and kissed Hank on the lips. Hank brushed Mary's hair from her smile.

"What happened that night?"

"Bill lost another job. Working for the township. I got him a job with the parks department, cutting grass, marking ball diamonds. They let him go. He said the job was boring. I found out later that they caught him in a park under a tree, sleeping. He was probably drinking. He accused me of fooling around on him with this guy Jimmy that got the job for him. I wasn't fucking Jimmy. He was just a friend. But Bill was so bloody jealous. Or else he needed to blame someone like he always blamed the referee when he had a bad game. Anyway, I accused Bill of messing around with Joe Mackenzie's wife, June. She was always in the Zig Zag picking up someone. June and I were old school friends. It was no stretch to imagine that June and Bill were doing the horizontal tango. Not that I cared. But I couldn't stand the idea of him spending money on her, money that was rightfully mine."

"Did he hit you?" Hank asked.

Mary looked up at Hank and smiled. "Why would you ask that?"

"He sounds like the type."

Mary shook her head. "No, he never hit me. Not that I would have blamed him. I could be a real bitch. Bill was an enforcer when he played hockey, but with me he was a little teddy bear. He would just whimper. God, I hated that. Drove me nuts when he'd start whimpering. I could have handled the occasional slap, but being around him when he sulked drove me through the roof. We had rent to pay and he'd be sitting at the kitchen table sniffing away, whining about the tough breaks he'd had. A rough tough hockey player crying like a baby. I felt like hitting him. And I did one time. He let me. Said he deserved it. I think he liked being slapped, but I never had the heart for it."

Mary put her arm around Hank's waist and leaned on him, her head against his shoulder as they continued to walk toward her apartment.

"Sometimes I just get so tired," Mary said. "I want to forget everything. Just throw my cares down a deep well and start over again."

Mary stopped and moved away from Hank.

"Who's that?"

"Where?" Hank asked.

"In front of my door," Mary said.

### Leem's Nursing Home

The old man dragged himself up so that he was sitting up in his bed. Sam Kelly pulled a chair closer to the bed and sat down. Light filtered through the sheer curtains, exaggerating the lines on the old man's face. On the wall opposite the window were a series of pictures, some of police officers, one of Jesus Christ. There was a plaque with a set of fire regulations. The detective looked at the old man. *God, he must be a hundred years old.*

"Kids put me here," the old man muttered, a drop of spit running down his chin. There was a gap in his smile where his words seemed to whistle, giving the impression that the old man lisped.

"Seems like a nice place, Ed," Sam looked around the sterile room, swearing that he would never allow anyone to put him in such a place.

"It's my old beat," the old man said, gesturing with his head to the world outside. "Kinda funny, ain't it? I look out the window here I can see myself in the squad car passing along Bloor, never imagining that I'd end up here. Who the hell thinks they're going to get old? I don't know what we think we're going to turn into, but this isn't it. And now someone from the force shows up. I thought you fellas had forgotten all about Corporal Kaye. Hell, why should you remember? That's what you realize when you get older. Old people forget because there ain't no reason to remember. The history books don't tell the story. The story is too big with too much pain. Eventually we're all forgotten. My world is dead, Detective, on a slab in the coroner's office."

The old man's thoughts drifted away. His eyes glazed over for a brief moment. Then he was back. "Don't get many visitors. The kids never show up, but I can't blame them. They got their own lives. My grandson, Jeremy, doesn't like the smell in here. He hates the smell of bleach and the smell underneath—me, rotting." The old man coughed, then cleared his throat and swallowed. "But he comes anyway. He's a good boy. Once a month he shows up with magazines and chocolate bars. I don't read them. Teen magazines, the latest gossip on the latest one hit wonder. But

I never tell him that. We eat the chocolate bars together. Told him I didn't have much to leave him but I promised him he could have my badge. He wants my gun. Wish my Ellen was here. She was a great gal. Boy, could she dance. Would love to have seen her grandchildren. She died before we knew Jeremy was on his way. It's a terrible thing to pass on and not know if you're going to leave anyone behind. It's like part of her history had been kept from her. Like her existence had been erased. But what does that matter anyway?"

Detective Kelly nodded and reached into his pocket for his cigarettes.

"Better not," the old man said. "They got their rules here. And they enforce them. Did you see my nurse? Big Negro woman named Sally. She'd have made a good cop. You light that cigarette and she'll have you out on the sidewalk in no time at all. Never met a woman that strong. Tosses me around in here like I was a doll. Ellen wouldn't have approved. Didn't approve of Negroes. Don't think she ever met a Negro, but she didn't approve. Jeremy likes Sally."

Sam Kelly moved his chair closer to the bed.

"Ed, I've come on police business."

The old man's eyes lit up. He struggled to sit up straight. The detective rose and helped him to adjust his pillows. Then he turned and looked out the window over Bloor Street. The sun was going down. He spotted Joe Mackenzie crossing the street and entering George's Barbershop.

"It's an old case, Ed," the detective said, turning around and taking a seat again. He took out a pad from the breast pocket of his jacket. "I'm hoping you can help me."

"Well, my memory ain't that great anymore." Ed grinned. "But fire away and I'll see what I can dredge up. Wish I had a smoke. Helps me think."

The detective nodded, then related the tale that the barkeeper at the Zig Zag had relayed to him. The old man listened quietly. The detective hoped he hadn't drifted off.

"Could have been a practical joke," Ed said. "I knew fellows who'd say anything if they thought it might get them a free drink."

"Jack's been around awhile. He's heard just about every con. I don't think he would have been taken in."

Ed rubbed his chin with his right index finger.

"Jack?"

"The bartender in the Zig Zag."

"Don't know any Jack. Hell, I never heard of the Zig Zag."

The detective described the location of the Zig Zag.

"A couple of doors over? Wasn't that a drugstore?" Ed asked.

The detective nodded.

Ed laughed. "Maybe I could get old Sally to take me over there for a drink some time. We'd make an odd couple. Do you think they'd serve a Negro?"

The detective nodded. "Been the law for years."

"The law and the way people are... are two different things."

"They'll serve her," the detective said with a smile.

The old man nodded with satisfaction. "So, where did they find the body?"

"The corner of Bloor and Botfield."

"Where the kids pick up their newspapers?" Ed asked.

"Ya," Sam responded. "But they don't make deliveries anymore."

"Don't make deliveries?"

"Haven't for years," the detective added.

"God!" The old man thought for a moment. "What do kids do for money?"

The detective shrugged.

Ed shook his head. "No paper routes. Negroes being treated like human beings."

"There's no record of any deaths there," the detective continued. "Fellow said an ambulance and a police car showed up. A policeman interviewed the fellow. That could have been you."

Ed shook his head despondently for a moment, then waved his index finger in the air as if he was trying to catch a memory.

"Ya, there was an incident that sounds similar. It was my birthday. I showed up a few moments after the ambulance drove off. We passed each other on the street. A guy was standing near the telephone booth, smoking a cigarette, and staring down at the sidewalk. He looked like the last man on the planet. I pulled the squad car up to the curb. Didn't look like he noticed my arrival. When I spoke, he looked at me with a startled expression. I asked him if he was the gentleman who had phoned for an ambulance. He nodded. Looked pretty shaken up. I took down a name and an address but..." The old man shook his head. "I can't remember it. He was standing there staring at this brown stain on the sidewalk. Like someone had spilt coffee. That sort of stuck in my head. He kept muttering, 'I could have saved him. I should have done something.' God, I wish I could remember his name. But that was years ago. And he couldn't have gone into the Zig Zag and talked to that bartender. There was no bar then. It was a drugstore, right?"

"Who was the deceased?" the detective asked.

Ed said nothing for several minutes. "No one knew."

The detective looked up from the pad where he'd been taking notes.

"The fellow didn't have any ID on him when the ambulance picked him up," the old man explained. "A John Doe. No one ever claimed the body. We asked around but no one knew any old man. I asked here at the home, it was under different management then, and they weren't missing anyone. I wish I could remember the fellow's name who found the old man."

"It should be in your report," the detective said.

"Good luck in finding that," Ed said with a smile. "We didn't keep very good records in those days."

"Did you investigate further?"

"I—," the old man hesitated. "I can't remember."

The detective smiled and put his pad away.

"Miss the force," Ed said, his energy spent, drool running down his cheek. "Wish I'd died in action instead of wasting away in this place."

Sam Kelly rose and shook the old man's trembling hand. As he was about to leave, a thought occurred to him.

"Your wife..."

"Ellen," the old man answered.

"She didn't disappear by any chance, did she?"

"Ellen? No, she died from the big C. Lung cancer. Never smoked a day in her life. Secondhand smoke, they say. I guess that's my fault too."

## Shadows

Cathy stopped to catch her breath. She peeked out from the shelter of the Zig Zag entrance into the night. She looked back down Bloor Street. There was no one there. She looked across the street at the Six Points Plaza. Old Joe Mackenzie walked his beat along the store fronts. She was being paranoid. It was the fight with Terry. It was Johnny. It was everything. She was overwrought. Her imagination was working overtime. She looked back again. The street was empty and except for the streetlights, dark. She took a deep breath and dashed out of the shelter and headed for her car. When she turned into Botfield where her car was parked, she bumped into something and fell to the ground.

"I'm sorry," a giant of a man said. "Are you all right?"

He reached down to help her up.

She waved off his gesture, climbed to her feet, and ran to her car. Once inside, she locked all the doors and started up the engine. It stalled. On her second attempt, the engine roared. She sped out of the parking space, squealing around the corner, just missing a cab, and raced down Bloor Street.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Mazda

The red Mazda slipped easily in and out of traffic along Dundas Street. Music blared from the radio. Wind swept through the car, tossing Johnny's hair back and forth. Wiggy looked at Johnny and wondered if he shouldn't let his own hair grow. Perhaps his image was too severe. Chicks weren't deep. They didn't see into you. *Don't want to look. I'm too deep. Brooding chicks don't like brooding.* Maybe he should grow his hair long. He hated his hair, hated the color, hated the receding hairline. *I ain't going bald!* Wished he could shave his head like a bowling ball. A brush cut just wasn't short enough. Wasn't worth thinking too much about yourself. *Too much to worry about.* What about the chicks? Johnny never seemed to be short of women. He had that light wispy blond hair that flowed over his shoulders. Girls were always asking to touch it. What else did they want to touch? *There ain't anything else. Just chicks and cars and rock'n'roll.* Johnny turned up the radio. Beach Boys. Johnny smiled and continued to talk. Wiggy couldn't hear a thing he said. It was better that way. Johnny never had anything very important to say. *What did Terry know? Writing his stories. Talking about the meaning of life. What difference did it make?* Wiggy smiled. It was comforting to think that the chicks didn't listen to Johnny either. Johnny just had to be Johnny and the chicks came running. He was like Mecca for chicks. *They don't want deep.* Johnny leaned against the driver's door, one arm along the back of the seat, the other straddling the window, a couple of fingers steering the Mazda. Wiggy shook his head. *Johnny is just too cool.* He smiled at Wiggy. He was always smiling. *How could you not like the guy?*

"I can't hear you," Wiggy yelled.

The car slid onto a ramp and sped up as they moved north onto the 427.

Johnny turned the music down. "Don't you just love The Beach Boys? Sun, sand, and babes. Man, that's the life."

"Ya, that's the life." Wiggy nodded, leaning back in the seat, taking in the sun. "Where are we going?"

Johnny grinned, tapping the steering wheel with one of the two fingers that was steering. "What difference does it make where we're going? You can't get all caught up in destinations. You've got to focus on the journey."

Wiggy never understood Johnny's philosophizing but it seemed to make Johnny happy that he listened.

"Your old man let you drive his car?" Wiggy asked.

"It's my old lady's," Johnny yelled, his voice still barely audible over the wind. "Dad won't let me near his BMW. Oh man, you should feel that thing move. It's like sitting in your living room couch in a wind tunnel. I want to take it up to Wasaga. You could get any babe you want with a car like that. They love to feel their bare asses on the leather upholstery."

Wiggy laughed. "Bet you got a lot of pussy at college, eh?"

Johnny smiled and pointed at Wiggy. "Believe it," he said.

"How do you do it?" Wiggy asked. "Attract so many babes, I mean."

Johnny laughed. "Good breath," he said.

"It can't be that easy," Wiggy responded. "I brush my teeth half a dozen times a day. I set my alarm so that I can wake up in the middle of the night and brush them. And I'm very conscious of body odor as well. I heard that chicks can smell you coming from a mile away. It's some kind of evolutionary skill. I shower constantly. My folks are always complaining that I use up all the hot water. And I always carry around a stick of deodorant." Wiggy took a small plastic container from his back pocket. "I figure I smell as good as the next guy. Frank says that you have to change your clothes a lot, that clothes carry your stink as well. I'm always changing my clothes. I got more underwear than Zellers."

Johnny laughed at Wiggy, leaning over to push in the lighter. With one hand on the steering wheel, he retrieved a package of cigarettes from his pocket and jiggled a cigarette out of the pack and into his mouth. A moment later, he grabbed the lighter and lit up.

"Motivation," Johnny said, turning his head from Wiggy to the road and back again as he talked. "You've got to figure out why girls are where they are. If a chick is at the beach with her parents then you can be pretty sure that you ain't going to become more than acquaintances. But if she's with a girlfriend then your chances improve as long as you are with a buddy. If she's with a group of girls then she's either a tourist or she's looking for it. Understand?"

"Ya, well, I keep running into tourists," Wiggy said, keeping his eyes on the road. He wished that Johnny would slow down when he talked.

"And," Johnny turned to point at Wiggy, "you've got to read messages. Chicks are always giving off messages. If a chick is on a bar stool sitting beside some dude and she keeps swiveling on her stool then you know she wants to be rescued. If she's smoking a cigarette, she wants to talk. If you make eye contact then she wants you."

"I guess I'm illiterate, man. I think I'm a pretty decent-looking guy, with average intelligence, no genius but average intelligence, funny, charming. I don't know what it is but I'm in a real slump. I had a girlfriend for a while. Well, not actually a girlfriend. We fooled around a bit but her parents got too upset so she got grounded. They said I was too old for her. She looked sixteen."

"How old was she?" Johnny laughed.

Wiggy looked puzzled. "What?"

Johnny pushed a button to roll up the windows.

"How old was she?"

"Lisa? Thirteen," Wiggy cried.

"Jail bait!" Johnny laughed.

Wiggy continued. "She's got a twin sister, Lilly. Those girls are wild. Always hanging out at Plantation Bowl. Terry told me that they were giving blowjobs in the back parking lot one Saturday afternoon. I was working that day. Can you imagine the luck? I can't buy a break."

Johnny nodded. "He was jerking you around. I know that guy. He's always jerking people around."

Wiggy responded. "He's a friend."

"Who needs friends like that?" Johnny rolled down the window, spit, then flicked his cigarette out. "Where are you working?"

"McCall's Bakery. I make doughnuts and meat pies." Wiggy laughed. "We cook the meat in big pans in the ovens and let it cool off outside the back door. One day I saw a dog come up and piss in the stew. I laughed my ass off."

Johnny laughed. "You're kidding. You had to throw it all out, eh?"

Wiggy shook his head. "No way, man. I wasn't going to make that shit again. Fuck old man McCall anyway. I'm underpaid. People sure love those pies."

Johnny choked on his laughter. When he recovered he asked Wiggy if there was any chance of getting a job in the bakeshop.

"You need a job?" Wiggy asked.

Johnny nodded.

"I'll ask. Old man McCall has been pissed off recently. Him and his wife aren't getting along. They work beside each other all day and hardly speak. I'll tell you one thing, I ain't ever getting married. All the married people I meet seem pissed off with each other. Who needs it?"

"It wouldn't be so bad," Johnny responded. "You'd have someone to cook for you and you'd have sex any time you wanted it."

Wiggy laughed. "You haven't met my parents. And my mom cooks like shit. She burns everything. Terrified of food poisoning. My old man ends up doing most of the housework. She has her volunteer work. I think she just wants to get away from the house. My old man's always threatening to walk out on us. Mom says that if he walks out, he leaves with nothing but the shirt on his back. That's why my sisters moved out. They couldn't take it anymore."

"You have sisters?"

"Two. Ugly as sin. Monica is a dike. She's built like one. Gwen moved to Vancouver so who knows what she's up to."

"Didn't Terry's old man walk out on them?" Johnny asked.

Wiggy nodded. "That was years ago, man. Why you asking about Terry?"

"Are those stories about his mom true?"

"What stories?"

"You know the stories." Johnny punched Wiggy playfully in the arm. "I wouldn't mind having a little bit of that. She's still pretty good-looking. Older women can teach you stuff."

Wiggy was silent.

"I remember when we were kids, how she'd wear those low-cut dresses and lean over so you could have a peek. Remember when I had the motorcycle? Mrs. Hendrix asked me to take her for a ride. I had an incredible boner all the time I was riding her around the block. Her arms were tight around me and every time I changed gears I could feel her breasts against my back. When I dropped her off at her house, she said the next time we should go farther. Man, I was clueless. I never gave her another ride. What an idiot, eh?"

"I don't like to talk about her. She's Terry's mother and he's a friend."

Johnny smirked. "I didn't know you were so sensitive. You should use that, man. Chicks dig sensitive guys. A few tears drop and before you know it they're dropping their panties."

Wiggy turned to Johnny. "You've done that?"

Johnny smiled. "Works every time."

## The Canadiana

"I'm sorry to call on you at work like this," Detective Kelly said as he lifted his coffee mug to his lips.

Mary smiled and stirred her coffee. She wondered what the police officer wanted with her. She prayed it wasn't about Terry.

"Would you like to order something to eat?" the detective asked. "It's on me."

Mary shook her head. "I'm trying to lose a little weight, Officer."

The detective smiled. "Call me Sam. You look fine if you don't mind me saying. I've seen you in the Zig Zag."

Mary nodded then whispered, "To tell you the truth, Sam, I can't stand the food here."

The detective laughed. "I would have talked to you at your office," he continued, "but I thought we'd have more privacy here. And the air-conditioning is better."

Mary smiled.

"I understand you know Joe Mackenzie?"

"Old Joe? Not very well. His wife and I used to be friends when we were kids but I don't know Joe too well. Only what June told me. They didn't have much of a marriage, but that ain't news. Joe works as a security guard at night here in the plaza if that helps."

The detective took out a pad and pencil.

"I'm just going to take a few notes if you don't mind," he said. "My memory isn't what it used to be. Do you know any of the other Mackenzies?"

"June said that there were a couple of other brothers and a sister too, I think. I never met them. They all left the area. I think one of them lives in Winnipeg. June said he got married to some farm girl. June wasn't the type to talk much about Joe's family. She mostly complained about Joe."

"They fought a lot?"

Mary nodded. "June did most of the fighting. He was several years older than her. I don't know what she saw in him but to each his own. She hated living in that old house. All Joe wanted to do was read his books. June liked to dance. And Joe wasn't much good in the sack according to June. They hadn't been doing it for years."

The detective looked up. "Why did they get married?"

"He was smart," Mary responded, lifting her cup to her mouth and blowing over the hot coffee before sipping it. "She liked the fact that he was so smart. June had always gone out with stupid men and Joe was a

genius. She figured that they'd get rich some day. June wasn't the sharpest knife in the drawer. Women always marry for the wrong reasons. June fooled around a lot."

Mary took a package of cigarettes out of her purse. The detective fished in his pocket for a match but found nothing. Mary smirked and handed him her lighter. He leaned over and lit her cigarette. There was a smell of lilac.

"I like your perfume." He smiled and stared a little too long at her.

Mary sucked slowly on her cigarette, looking the detective in the eyes. *Is this a date?* she wondered. She'd seen Sam Kelly in the neighborhood for years and had never thought of him as anything other than a police officer. Was he married? How old was he? *Get that thought out of your head, girl.*

"Is that all?" she asked, smoke lazily slipping out between her lips.

The detective cleared his throat and diverted his eyes from Mary. He looked down at his pad. Mary almost giggled. *He's embarrassed.* It was the first time she'd seen the little boy in Sam Kelly. She began to see what her friend, Margaret, found so appealing. *Must remember that he's Margaret's.*

"Did she ever feel threatened by her husband?"

"Did you really ask me out for a coffee to talk about police business?" Mary asked. *Why not put it right out there?* she thought. *Margaret will kill me.*

The detective swallowed deeply and looked up from his pad. "Yes," he said apologetically.

Mary stubbed her cigarette out into the ashtray. She was angry. *Once a cop, always a cop.* "Joe was a chump," she said, blurting out her words. "He paid the bills and never asked questions. He was steady. June was spoiled. If I had met him first, I would never have left him. He was the gentlest and kindest man. June was a fool."

Mary looked around. She saw Margaret over at the counter staring at them. Mary smiled. *God, I hope she doesn't think I'm trying to steal him.*

"You liked Joe."

"I still do," Mary replied. Then quickly added, "Not romantically. Not now. But Joe wasn't a bad-looking man fifteen years ago."

The detective scribbled in his pad. Mary leaned back in her seat and sipped at her coffee, staring at the policeman on the other side of the table from her. Margaret came by and offered to refill their cups. Mary nodded. Margaret did not look her in the eye. "You haven't touched your coffee," Mary said.

"It keeps me awake."

"Isn't that the idea?" Mary asked.

"I'm an insomniac," Sam confessed.

"I sleep like a log. I'm always tired. Some nights I could fall asleep in my working clothes."

"I have no such luck," Sam replied with a smile.

Mary looked across the room at Margaret who had returned to the counter. Margaret wasn't smiling. *She's pissed.* Mary turned to the detective.

"What do you think about when you can't get to sleep?"

Photos

Cathy moved uneasily in her seat. Adelle looked at her and then peeked behind her.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Terry's mother. She's sitting across the room. I don't want her to see me."

Adelle turned around again.

"Don't look!" Cathy whispered hysterically. "She'll notice us. I hate that woman."

"Who's she sitting with?" Adelle asked.

Cathy shrugged. "One of her boyfriends, I guess. If she comes over here, I'll die."

Adelle sipped at the tall Coke in front of her.

"God, you don't have to have a stroke over it. Why are you so paranoid about her?"

"She thinks I was snooping in her bedroom," Cathy said. "Terry and I were fucking in her bed and she must have noticed something."

"You did it in his mother's bed!" Adelle giggled.

"She's got a fan in there," Cathy smiled, "and her bed is bigger."

"And it was dangerous," Adelle added.

Cathy nodded sheepishly.

"So did you snoop?" Adelle asked.

Cathy was silent.

"Well!" Adelle insisted.

"A little," Cathy finally confessed. "Terry went out to get some smokes and there was nothing else to do. I was looking at some of the magazines on her bedside table. *Cosmo* and *Vanity Fair*. I opened the drawer of her

dresser. Checking out what kind of lingerie she bought. I came across these pictures.”

Adelle leaned forward, her mouth open, the straw in her drink hanging out of her lips.

“Pictures!” she cried.

“Keep your voice down,” Cathy insisted, then leaned over the table and whispered, “It was like a porno show. You should have seen them. All sorts of poses. And her looking so slutty. There was even a pic of her... ”

Cathy whispered in Adelle’s ear.

Adelle gasped, slamming her drink on the table.

“Quiet!” Cathy whispered, then giggled.

“Did you recognize the guy?” Adelle asked.

Cathy slapped Adelle’s wrist playfully.

“How would I know? Don’t they all look the same? But it was huge.”

“You think it’s the guy she’s with now?”

“Maybe. There weren’t any pics of his face. Just her face and you know...”

“No!” Adelle responded.

The two girls began to giggle. Cathy put her hand over Adelle’s mouth, which only made Adelle laugh louder. Tears began to run down the girls’ cheeks.

“The thing is,” Cathy continued, “the pictures looked different. In some she had a different hairdo.”

“You mean they were with different guys? Different...?”

Cathy nodded.

Adelle leaned back in her seat and tried to catch her breath. She picked up her glass and sucked on her drink until the straw began to rattle in the glass. Cathy slapped Adelle on the arm. Adelle put down the drink.

“Would you ever do that?” Adelle asked. “I mean, let some guy take pictures of you?”

“Of course not. Anyway, I think she knows that I’ve seen them because the next time I was in the room, I couldn’t find them.”

The two girls were silent for some time.

“I’d do it,” Adelle said. “It might be fun having someone take pictures.”

Cathy slapped Adelle’s wrist playfully. “You are a pervert.”

The girls continued to giggle for some time. Then the conversation turned to Cathy’s problems with Terry and Johnny.

Adelle shrugged. "Maybe. You have to feel sorry for Terry. Are you going to tell him?"

"Why would I do that? I got enough problems."

"Have you made a decision yet?"

Cathy shook her head. "Sometimes I think I'll go with Terry. But then Johnny looks so lost. I mean, we went out for a year and a half. I owe him something. Then I think I'll go back to Johnny but I feel so bad about Terry. He is a real neat guy. And we have a lot of fun. Or at least we used to. Why don't you take one of them?"

Adelle shook her head. "No thank you. I can get my own boyfriends. Besides, I can't stand Johnny. You can't trust him."

"How can you say that?"

"And Terry is crazy about you."

"Why don't you trust Johnny?"

"Open your eyes, kid!" Adelle then glanced over at the door of the restaurant where Detective Kelly and Mary Hendrix were leaving. "There they go."

"Isn't that guy a cop?" Cathy asked.

### The Barbershop

"Kids these days have no respect, Sam." George snipped gingerly around Sam Kelly's ear.

"They're not all bad," Sam responded, his eyes closed. *God, if George stopped talking, I could fall asleep.*

"I'm not saying all," George continued, chewing on some gum as he talked, "but they have no fear. We're leaving the world in these kids' hands. They'll wreck it in no time. Civilization is coming to an end. Dark days ahead. Like the other day I asked a couple of kids to move away from the shop. They scare off my other customers. And you should have heard their language. If my old man caught me talking like that to my elders I would have been dragged out to the woodshed."

The detective laughed. George pulled his scissors back and, looking into the mirror, continued to speak.

"I know I sound like an old crank, Sam. But why aren't these kids in school?"

"Summer vacation," the detective offered.

"Working then? Why aren't they working? Too damn lazy. Everything handed to them. And they always seem to have money. They'll never get a job if their parents keep throwing money at them."

The detective opened his eyes and looked around the shop. It was empty.

"What do you know about Joe Mackenzie?" he asked.

"Joe Mackenzie." George thought about the name for a few moments. "Old Joe. Not too much. He comes in here once a week for a trim. Works over at the plaza as a security guard. Nice old guy. Doesn't talk a lot. Had some kind of trouble with Ontario Hydro a few years ago."

"What do you know about his wife?"

"Has old Joe done something illegal, Sam? Doesn't seem like the type of fellow to break the law."

"Neighbors have been throwing trash down his well," the detective said.

"You don't say," George responded as he returned to the meticulous manicuring of the detective's head. "Why would they be throwing garbage down old Joe's well? Did he do something to piss someone off?"

"Not that we know of."

"He never talks about his wife, Sam," George added, snapping his gum. "Jesus, I didn't even know the old guy was married. Does he have any kids?"

"A couple. His wife ran off with them years ago."

George loosened the apron around the detective's neck as he measured a straight line across the bottom of his hairline.

"Ran off on him. Old Joe didn't seem like the sort. I figured him for a boring past. Old Joe has a history. Who'd she run off with?"

"We're not sure," the detective replied, speaking to the reflection of the barber in the mirror opposite him.

"What's the garbage in his well got to do with his wife running off?"

"Nothing," the detective replied. *An interesting question. Must remember to jot that down.*

George, snapping his gum, reached for a brush and swept the loose hairs off the detective's neck. Then he briskly flung the apron off and shook it over the floor.

"That's quite an investigation you're running," George said with a smile and snapped his gum. "Where's it headed?"

The detective smiled. *Another good question.*

## CHAPTER NINE

Apache Burger

Cathy sat on the hood of the car. She looked out over Lake Ontario, her hair waving in the light breeze that blew off the cold gray water. Johnny leaned against the side door of the Mazda, his back sheltering a match as he lit up a cigarette.

"You want to get back in the car?" he asked, flipping a used match into the sand and making a second attempt, this time successfully, to light his cigarette. Weren't they down here to get some things straightened out between them? *I hate this melodrama. Flowers, sunsets, waves crashing on the shore. Let's just get in the car and do it.*

"Doesn't the water look like molten steel?" she asked, smiling and shaking the wind from her hair. "It looks solid. I can almost imagine walking across it. It's looked this way for hundreds, even thousands of years. Isn't that mind-boggling?"

"Fascinating," Johnny muttered, spitting out smoke. *Fucking fascinating!*

Cathy turned and gestured to Johnny for a cigarette. He took one out of his package, lit it off his, and still leaning across the hood of the car, handed it to Cathy.

"It's like time traveling when you look out into a body of water," she said, turning back to the lake.

"Time traveling," Johnny muttered. He turned and looked back over the sight of the now defunct psychiatric hospital. All boarded up. *Where'd they put all the loonies?* The hospital was being transformed into a community college. *Better dressed inmates.* How was he going to tell his parents that he'd been kicked out of university? The best thing would be to take the Mazda and disappear. Go to California. Make a life someplace warm. But he didn't have enough money for that. *Cathy must have some dough.*

Cathy turned to Johnny. "Don't mope. I told you that we weren't going to mess around when you asked me to go for a ride."

"Why'd you come then?" Johnny demanded, his petulant voice beginning to irritate her.

"I wanted to talk. You've been gone a long time and I think there are issues we should address." She was careful with each word. She didn't want her voice to slip into the southern belle accent she fell into when she was anxious.

"Well, you didn't have that attitude the other night." Johnny shot the words out of his mouth like he was a gun. *Giving me a hard-on thinking about it.*

"That was a mistake." Cathy slipped off the hood and onto the beach, her arms crossed. She stepped toward the lake. "I had the nightmare again last night."

"What?" Smoke came out of Johnny's nose and tossed and twisted in the wind off the lake. He added with a shrug, "Maybe you should see a shrink."

Cathy stepped back and leaned on the car. She sucked on her cigarette. Smoke seeped through her clenched teeth, softly swirling, framing her face. Johnny reached into the car and turned on the radio. *I can't stand this shit. Better to listen to some tunes.*

"Everything seems quite lovely at first," she began. The Beach Boys song "Good Vibrations" drifted out of the car. "The long grass is waving back and forth. Butterflies are slow dancing in the wild flowers. It's dark but the full moon is creamy soft. I am holding someone's hand. I can't see who it is but I feel so happy. And then I trip. The hand releases me. As I fall to the ground, the earth opens up and I begin to fall down this dark hole. Falling slowly back and forth like a leaf floating from a tree. I try to scream but instead of my cry coming from my throat it rises from deep inside the hole. It's as if I am falling into myself. I fall and fall."

"And then you wake up," Johnny added impatiently as he climbed onto the hood of the car, his legs dangling over the edge. *How many times do I have to listen to this shit?* He slid off the car and attempted to put his arm around Cathy but she shrugged it off, continuing to stare out at the water.

"I was scared," Cathy said, her shoulders trembling.

Johnny smacked his hand on the hood of the car. The sound jolted Cathy as if she'd been slapped on the back of the head.

"The dream doesn't mean a thing," he said. "Dreams never do. It's what happens when your eyes are open that counts. When I was at university there were all these inbreeds walking around analyzing each other." He grabbed Cathy's chin and turned it to his face. "Everyone is a fucking cripple, they'd cry. She blames her mother. He blames his father. Everyone's got to find someone to blame. We're all damaged goods. So what! Let's just get on with what's left of our lives. Who knows when the expiry date will appear? Let the party begin." He kissed her hard on the lips.

Cathy pushed Johnny away. "I can't be that way." She turned her back on the car. The Animals' "The House of the Rising Sun" began to play.

"What way?" Johnny grabbed her arm and twisted Cathy around. "Look at life honestly. Look at it right straight in the eye. We're all living

on the *Titanic*. This time, there are no survivors. No time left for mourning."

Cathy pulled Johnny's hand off her arm and glared at him.

"Honesty! What do you know about being honest?"

"So this is the way it's going to be?" he asked, biting down angrily on his lip.

"Did you get a job yet?" Cathy shot back.

"I'm trying," he responded defensively, his eyes dropping momentarily. "It isn't as easy as you think. Just because you've got that shit job at Apache Burger, you think anyone can get a job. And look at your parents. If you were stuck, they'd give you anything. My folks are counting the days until they can get rid of me."

"You're not trying hard enough," Cathy screeched. "And it's not a shit job. I like it. People come from all over the city to eat the onion rings at Apache's. Last week a couple of players from the Maple Leafs showed up. We took pictures of them with the staff."

"Losers," Johnny muttered. *This isn't working!* He took a deep breath and lowered his voice. "Ah, shit, Cathy, what am I going to do? When my parents find out that I screwed up, they are going to go ballistic. It was just so boring. I had a psych class in this auditorium with a thousand other students. I could never stay awake. Half the class was dozing off. You should see the number of essays they expected. I had this philosophy prof who gave us an assignment the second day of class. What is the meaning of nothing? That's what he wanted and he wanted it in less than thirty words. What are you going to say in thirty words about nothing? I could have said it in one word."

"You've got an excuse for everything." Cathy flicked the ashes off her cigarette then drew smoke deep into her lungs. *Terry was right.*

Johnny flicked the ashes of his cigarette into the air. The breeze blew it back at him.

"Shit!" Johnny swept the ashes off his trousers.

Cathy laughed. "You're such an idiot."

Johnny smiled sheepishly, then climbed back onto the car. Cathy loved Johnny when he didn't try so hard to be cool. She loved the little boy in him. She wasn't so sure about the man he was becoming. *Maybe he will never become one.*

"Sometimes I wish there was just you and me and the highway," Cathy said wistfully.

Johnny was about to respond but did not. Somewhere inside him he knew that Cathy would not be going with him down the highway.

Something told him he didn't want her in his future. He wanted her now, on her back.

"Everything is too complicated," Cathy continued, the southern belle accent slipping into her voice. "You, and me, and school, and my family, and the whole fucking world. Stop. I want everything to stop for a few moments so I can catch my breath."

Cathy sucked on her cigarette. She looked into the sky.

"Are you going back to school next year?" Johnny asked.

Cathy shrugged her shoulders. "My parents want me to graduate from high school, but I don't know. What's the point? The cook at Apache's is this Egyptian guy. He's got a degree in Engineering. He went to school in Moscow. He says the people there are lonely. Drowning their emptiness in vodka. The women laughed hysterically when he touched them. The children bruised their knees on the cobblestone. Every night the men were passed out in the streets. He told me that you could hardly breathe with the desperation"

*What the fuck does that mean?* He drew on his cigarette. "I heard that you and Terry were an item after I left for college."

Cathy turned away. "Who told you that?"

"I just heard it. Well, is it true?"

Cathy bowed her head and moved slowly away from the car toward the edge of the lake. "What if it is? It's not like we're married."

"I thought we had an arrangement."

"You're the one who said we could see other people," Cathy responded, turning sharply around and looking at Johnny.

"Then it's true," Johnny cried.

"And you didn't see anyone?" Cathy replied, her shoulders stiffening.

"That kid is such a slug," Johnny said, his jaw clenching like a fist. "I'll deal with that little motherfucker."

"You'll do no such thing," Cathy screamed at Johnny. "You will not touch Terry and he's no slug. He's real smart. He's on the honor roll at Michael Power, which you never were and he writes stories. Interesting stories." Cathy turned back to the lake. "He wrote this story about meeting God when he was a little kid."

Johnny fell back on the hood of the car laughing. "God!"

"I liked it," Cathy said.

"He's just trying to get into your pants."

"He doesn't have to try," Cathy responded angrily, walking down the beach toward the water.

"Wait a minute!" Johnny cried, following behind her. Grabbing Cathy's arm, he swung her around.

"That hurts!" she cried.

"Have you been doing that little slug?"

Cathy pulled away.

"That's my business," she said, sucked deeply on her cigarette before flicking it into the water.

"You slut!" Johnny cried. He threw her onto the sand and began to undo his jeans. "You're my girl!" *I'm taking what's mine.*

## Ginger Cookies

Detective Kelly knocked on the back door of the house at 36 Botfield Avenue. He waited. A moment later a middle-aged woman in a brown smock answered the door. He introduced himself and showed his badge.

"I rang the front buzzer," he said.

"Oh." The woman smiled. "That hasn't worked for years. I keep telling Frank that we should get it fixed but he keeps putting me off. Something about a box being hidden behind the walls of our basement."

The woman explained that she was doing housework and invited the detective in for a cup of tea if he didn't mind a little mess. He stepped inside the house and was escorted to a small kitchen. The woman put a kettle on the stove.

"Mrs. Gray," the detective began. She insisted that he call her Ruth.

"I'm Sam," he added.

Ruth smiled. "Sam. That's a lovely name. We had a dog once named Sam. A collie."

"I was hoping that I could talk to your husband."

Mrs. Gray explained that her husband was visiting their daughter that afternoon. He cut her grass. It kept him busy now that he was retired.

"Do you have any other children?" he asked.

"A son. We lost him when he was a child."

"I'm sorry, Ruth."

"That was a long time ago, Sam." She smiled, though he detected a break in her voice as she spoke. "He was always rebellious. The police said that he would return but he never did. I know that we weren't to blame but I can't help wondering if there wasn't something I could have done, something I could have said. You don't have any word on him, do you, Sam?"

The detective shook his head. "How old was your son when he disappeared?"

"Nineteen."

The kettle whistled. Ruth got up and filled the teapot. She placed two cups on the table and then brought out a plate of cookies. Kelly took one of the cookies. It was stale.

"I hope they're not stale. Frank buys them. Always trying to cut corners. It's not easy since Frank retired, making ends meet. Thirty years as an accountant. Most of our savings were used up trying to find Johnny. He would be in his forties now. It's hard to believe."

"You must have married young," the detective said with a smile.

Ruth blushed. "Yes, I was. Eighteen years old when Johnny was born. We had to get married. Nothing to be proud of, but I never regretted it. If only we could live those days again. I would have done things differently."

The detective nodded. "I guess we all would."

"Frank's not in any trouble, is he?" Ruth asked.

"No, Ruth," the detective responded, shaking his head. He sipped at his tea then took another bite of his cookie. "I love stale cookies."

The woman smiled apprehensively.

The detective spoke. "We have a report, actually it's quite an old report, about a man dying up the street. Heart attack. He was discovered by someone named Gray. The writing was pretty messy so I think it was Gray. Couldn't make out the first name. I'm checking out all the Grays in the neighborhood."

Ruth shook her head. "I can't remember Frank mentioning anything. But then he's pretty quiet. Doesn't tell me everything. I wish he told me more. Men keep too much inside. I read that in a magazine at the doctor's office. The article said that it shortened their lives, keeping everything inside. Do you believe that, Sam?"

Sam took out his pad and scribbled something down.

He looked up. "I don't know, Ruth."

"Do you talk to your wife about your work?" Ruth asked, then apologized. "I hope I'm not being too personal, Sam."

Sam smiled. "Not married."

"Oh," Ruth responded. "My, Sam, you don't look like a bachelor."

Sam laughed.

"Frank and I were downtown on Saturday if that helps." Ruth looked across the table at the detective.

"This happened years ago, Ruth," Sam said.

"If this death happened so long ago, why are you looking into it now?"

"Doing it for a friend." He smiled. "We like to think that every case can be solved."

"I see. Does that mean that our Johnny's file could be reopened?"

"Would you like me to look into it, Ruth? It's not likely that I could find anything but I'll have a look if you want."

Ruth shook her head. "No. I mean it's terrible to say, but we went through so much at the time and over the years, I don't think we could take that again. I pray that he'll come home again some day on his own." Ruth smiled, her voice weakening. "He'd just finished his first year of college. We had such plans for him. Frank was hoping that he'd get his CA and join him in the firm. Frank was working with a partner then. But Johnny hated school. I warned Frank about pushing him too hard. A boy needs time to sow his wild oats. Sometimes there would be fights. Johnny always threatened to run off to California. He was going to be some Hollywood star. We looked there. Had a detective on the case for over a year. He didn't find anything. I can never watch movies. I keep looking at the extras hoping to see Johnny's face in a crowd. It's put a hole in my heart. Do you know what that's like, Sam? To have a void inside you that can never be filled?"

Gin

Jack leaned over the bar. "How are things going with your fella?"

Mary smiled and flicked an ash off the cigarette that dangled in her fingers into the ashtray on the bar.

"Do I have *mat* written on my forehead?" Mary asked.

"That bad?" Jack emptied Mary's ashtray and replaced it with a clean one.

Mary continued, "If I could write a book about everything I've learned about men over the years, I wouldn't have a thing to say. You'd think some lesson would sink into my thick skull, but every time I meet a new guy, it's like I'm falling in love with a new species. Hank must be the coldest fish in the sea. A girl likes to be romanced. A candlelight dinner. Soft music. Slow dancing. Hank told me that modern romance was an industry. That's what he called it—an industry. From movies to lipstick, restaurants to lingerie, chocolates to diet pills, the whole thing is about capital venture. What the hell is capital venture? Hank says that women have a fatalistic obsession with romantic delusions. What the hell does

that mean, Jack? The other night I made this pork tenderloin meal. It's a recipe I learned from an Italian girlfriend. I have everything set up to seduce him—soft music, good food, an expensive bottle of French wine, and candlelight. Hank arrives and the first thing he does is turn on the light. Tells me that he can't enjoy his food unless he can see it. I'm in the mood for an evening of long caresses, wine, and passion. Once we're in bed, it's slam, bang, thank you ma'am, and he's asleep. It's the middle of the night and I'm left wide awake with nothing to do but watch television. Do you know how boring those infomercials are? I think I've seen every piece of exercise equipment in existence. Last night I watched the shopping network, women's answer to pornography. I ended up spending fifty dollars on skin cream. It would be laughable if it wasn't so pathetic."

"You actually phoned in to one of those commercials?" Jack asked.

"I needed to talk to someone," Mary responded, picking up her drink again and swallowing the remainder. She put down the glass and tapped the brim with her finger. Jack produced another gin and tonic.

"Do you know why I order gin?" Mary asked. "I probably told you but I'm going to tell you again because it always brings a smile to my face. I went to college. You didn't know that, did you, Jack?"

Jack shook his head.

"I had to quit after the first year. I was on probation and I just partied my way right out of school. I had this boyfriend and we broke up. Well, I'm never long without some man. I met this lovely long-haired red-headed guy. My ex labeled him *puppy dog*. He was like that, very sweet, following me around everywhere I went. He adored me. You can only take so much adoration. So I dumped him and went back to my old boyfriend. We were at a basketball game when my boyfriend spotted the red-head across the court. 'There's your puppy dog,' he laughed. The red-head was sitting with a couple of his friends. He could hardly keep his head up he was so drunk. And then he looked up and our eyes met. He stands up, and right in the middle of the game, he staggers across the court. The players all stop. The referee blows his whistle. Still, my puppy dog keeps advancing toward me. At the last moment, he passes out at my feet. You could smell the gin off him like it was a fellow traveler."

Mary took a sip of her drink and laughed.

"What happened to Puppy Dog, Mary?" Jack asked.

Mary shrugged. "Never heard from him again. But gin always reminds me of him. Every time I walk into a party and smell gin, I look around for him. God, he was a sweet guy. But that was a long time ago."

He's probably bald, fat, married with kids, and incredibly happy. Or maybe he's dead. Funny how people that were so important in your life just disappear."

"You ever think of looking him up, Mary?"

Mary shook her head.

"Why not?" Jack asked.

Mary looked up at Jack and smiled. "What if he still adored me? What would I do with him? Or worse, what if he didn't remember me? What if I no longer existed in his memories?"

Mary took a tissue out of her purse and wiped her eyes. She looked up at Jack. There were tears in her eyes. "What happens to us, Jack? Why do we end up so fucked up? What happened to all the sweetness in life?"

There was silence for some time. Jack polished the top of the bar. Mary sat staring into her drink, smoke from her cigarette curling up toward the ceiling.

"Maybe you should go home, Mary," Jack said kindly.

Mary looked up at Jack, her makeup streaked with tears.

"Home? A tiny little hole in the wall with a kid that hates me. Jack, sometimes I feel as if I don't exist. Like the young girl that was me, filled with promise and dreams, walked out of my life one evening and never returned, leaving a lonely middle-aged woman behind...I hate feeling like this. I watched a show the other night, when Hank passed out on me, on black holes. You ever heard of them, Jack?"

Jack shook his head. The door of the bar opened and a couple stepped in. Jack moved off to serve them. Staring into her drink, Mary didn't notice his absence.

"There are these holes in space that suck everything in. Nothing escapes them. I got one of those black holes inside me. It's sucking my life away."

Mary looked up and then around the bar. Jack was in the corner serving his new customers.

"God, I hate gin," she muttered, dropped her cigarette in the glass, and left.

## Montgomery Inn

Hank looked around the old inn, now preserved for future generations as a museum.

"Can I help you, sir?" a young woman asked.

Hank looked down at the young girl, her long red hair framing a generous smile.

"A beer?" he said.

Before the girl could explain that the inn was no longer an operating tavern, Hank asked, "So this is where the Rebellion of 1837 began?"

"Yes, sir." The girl nodded.

"Hard to imagine that this neighborhood gave birth to revolution," Hank said.

The girl looked puzzled.

"The Kingsway being rich and privileged," Hank explained. "Not exactly a womb of discontent."

The girl shuffled uncomfortably. Hank grinned. *Don't they teach history in school anymore?*

"I'm looking for some records," he said. "Births, deaths, crimes. That sort of thing."

"I don't think we have anything like that," the girl responded. "I could ask Mr. Grant. He's sort of an amateur historian. Maybe he could help you. Was there something in particular you were interested in?"

"Missing persons," Hank said with a smile. "I'm looking for stories about citizens who have disappeared."

"I don't understand, sir. Why would you be looking for missing persons?"

"Don't you think it's about time someone found them?"

The girl smiled, puzzled.

"Can I speak to Mr. Grant?"

"He's not in."

"When will he be in?"

The girl shrugged. "I don't know. He's on holidays."

"Will he ever return?"

The girl laughed. "Of course. Why wouldn't he return?"

## CHAPTER TEN

### Abandoned Car

Detective Kelly stepped out of his car and walked along the shoulder of the road. Cars slowed down as they passed by. A uniformed policeman kept the traffic moving. Two other police cars had bracketed the bright red Ford pickup. Several policemen were milling about. When

another plainclothes policeman spotted the detective, he advanced toward him.

"Sounded like it was up your alley, Sam," Detective Adams said. Detective Adams was small for a police officer, but as everyone at the precinct reluctantly admitted, he dressed well.

Detective Kelly looked around. A few neighbors had come out to investigate the scene, and were standing on their lawns chatting. Some kids on bikes had been more daring but one of the uniforms was moving them back across the street. Sam looked at the pickup. It did not look damaged. The shoulder of the street ran up onto a lawn backed by a small batch of trees that then fell off into Echo Valley. There were no houses on this side of the street. Across the valley, Detective Kelly could see Joe Mackenzie's house.

"Been here for three days," Detective Adams said, shrugging his shoulders as if he were trying to adjust his suit. "No tickets. Can you imagine that? A no-parking zone and we haven't ticketed it. How do those guys down in parking keep themselves busy? Don't they have quotas? We should have known about this shit box days ago. Neighbors say that it's been here for three days. Did I tell you that? It's listed as belonging to a Helen Kraft. I sent Forman over to pick her up and meet us at the station."

"They don't," Sam Kelly said.

Detective Adams looked puzzled.

"They don't have quotas," Sam explained.

Detective Adams nodded. "Ya, right."

"Kraft? Should I know that name?" Detective Kelly asked.

"I don't know," Detective Adams responded. Then he added, "Does this look like a place someone would abandon a truck? That was the first thing that struck me as odd." Detective Adams checked his notepad again. "Miss Kraft was contacted. She started bawling. She hadn't reported the truck missing. Neighbors said the passenger door was open for two days until one of these kids closed it."

"The door was open?" Detective Kelly asked.

Detective Adams nodded as he adjusted his tie. "Until one of the kids closed it. Probably after he looted everything inside and made a mess of any fingerprints."

"Fingerprints?" Sam Kelly asked. "Why would we take fingerprints?"

"It don't smell right, Sam." Detective Adams loosened his tie. "Just to be on the safe side. In case there was a crime."

"You think there was a crime?"

"It don't..."

"...smell right," Sam Kelly finished.

An hour later Detective Kelly was sitting across the table from the young Miss Kraft. A plain-looking woman, Sam guessed she was in her mid-twenties. A cup of coffee in a Styrofoam cup sat in front of her. She never touched it. Miss Kraft kept sniffing and softly weeping as she told her story.

"So I walked home," she said. "I know that I should have phoned the police, but I was upset."

Detective Kelly stared in silence at the woman for several minutes. He wanted her to relax. He looked over his notes.

"His name was Joe?"

She nodded. "Joe Begin. He's a salesman. Printing supplies. Ink, paper, that sort of thing. He asked me out for a drink. I don't normally accept invitations from men at work but Joe seemed nice. He was funny."

"This is important, Miss Kraft. I want you to be honest. Did you go into the woods with Mr. Begin?"

Miss Kraft sniffled again, hesitated, then nodded.

"It was his idea. That does sound stupid. I'm sorry. I'm so embarrassed. I don't normally go into woods with men. He said there was a beautiful view of the valley. I didn't believe him but I went anyway. Joe could be very persuasive. We walked into the woods. It was dark. He walked in front of me. I held his hand as we walked and then his hand slipped out of mine. He slid down the hill into the valley. I caught the branch of a tree or I would have gone down as well."

The detective took a deep breath.

"Why didn't you call the police?"

"He wasn't hurt," Miss Kraft replied. "He was laughing. I could hear him laughing from the bottom of the hill. He yelled up that he'd landed in a pile of leaves. He told me to wait, that he'd find another way up the hill."

"But he never returned?" Sam asked.

"Should I have called the police?" Miss Kraft asked.

Sam smiled faintly. "I don't know."

Miss Kraft shook her head. "I waited for about an hour. Maybe it wasn't that long. I was upset. I would have checked my watch but I didn't have one on. Should I have been wearing my watch?"

"It would have been helpful."

"He had the keys to the truck and here I was alone at one o'clock in the morning."

"How did you know it was one o'clock?"

Miss Kraft looked puzzled.

"You didn't have your watch," the detective explained.

Miss Kraft smiled faintly.

"And so you walked home?" the detective asked.

Miss Kraft nodded, then blew her nose into a tissue. "I thought that he would eventually get back up the hill and drop the truck off at my work. It was a long weekend. I'm not in any trouble, am I?"

"Did you leave the keys in the truck?"

Miss Kraft looked at the detective with a puzzled expression.

"How was he supposed to drop off the truck without the keys?" the detective prompted.

"I told you. Joe had the keys."

The detective said nothing. He looked at his pad. They'd been drinking at the Zig Zag. That would be easy enough to confirm. She worked at Archer Greene's Print Shop. The name sounded familiar.

"Am I in a lot of trouble, Detective?"

"You live alone, Miss Kraft?"

"With my mother. I can't let her find out about this. She's bedridden. Turned her ankle last week at the Cloverdale Mall trying on shoes. Things always happen in threes. Why do things always turn out like this for me? Why can't something good happen for a change?"

"What's the third thing?" Sam asked.

"The third thing? It hasn't happened yet. Do you believe in God, Officer?"

"Why do you ask, Miss?"

"If He does exist," Miss Kraft replied, her jaw clenched in anger, "He has one sick sense of humor."

"One more question," the detective said.

"Yes?"

"Why did you leave the passenger door open?"

Miss Kraft looked up at the detective with a puzzled expression on her face.

"I didn't," she replied.

## The Storm

Wiggy and Frank shared a cigarette outside the camera shop. In the distance thunder could be heard. Small bursts of lightning could be seen to the south.

"Shit!" Wiggy cried. "That's quite a storm headed this way. I don't want to be caught out tonight. If Terry wants to meet us, he could at least show up. Let me have a puff."

Frank passed his cigarette to Wiggy.

"Why can't you buy your own smokes?" Frank asked. "I'm down to my last three. I need them to get to sleep." Frank had made a ritual of one cigarette and a couple of aspirin to get to sleep each evening.

"Jesus." Wiggy pointed to the horizon. "Looks like a war's going on. Artillery fire. Imagine being out on the lake on a night like this. I hate thunderstorms. When I was a kid lightning struck our house. Came in one end and traveled right through our place. Melted half our appliances. Scared the shit out of us. You could feel it running through the walls like it was alive. I thought the whole house was going to explode. Do you get depressed?"

"You're all over the map tonight, man. What has being depressed got to do with anything?" Frank asked.

"Something Johnny asked me. Do you get depressed?" Wiggy asked.

"Everybody does," Frank responded.

"I thought so too," Wiggy said, passing the cigarette back to Frank. "Johnny told me that he never gets depressed. He said the feeble-minded get depressed."

The lights of the camera shop turned off. A minute later the store door opened and Adelle exited. She joined the two boys.

"Terry not here yet?" she asked.

"Do you know what's going on?" Wiggy asked.

"He's worried about Cathy."

"Cathy?" Wiggy asked.

"He's been trying to get hold of her all day," Adelle explained. "They were supposed to meet at his place and she never showed up. He phoned her house but her mother said she wasn't home. She'd gone out someplace with Johnny. That was around noon."

"What are we supposed to do?" Wiggy cried impatiently. "I ain't roaming around on a night like this looking for Cathy. We don't even have a car. Besides, she's probably at home by now."

"I've got my parents' car," Adelle said. "And she's not at home. I phoned. Her mother sounds pretty worried. Something doesn't seem right. I don't trust Johnny. She should have phoned someone by now."

"What are you saying?" Frank asked.

"She was going to tell Johnny that it was all over," Adelle explained. "Who knows how he reacted?"

Wiggy laughed. "Johnny ain't like that."

Adelle turned on Wiggy. "How would you know?"

"He ain't, that's all," Wiggy responded. "A guy knows things about another guy."

"Isn't getting smacked serious enough?" Adelle said, her voice angry and impatient. "He's hit her before."

The sky above the plaza lit up. A few moments later the calm was shattered with thunder.

"Whoa!" Wiggy trembled. "That was close."

"You're such a wimp," Adelle cried. "I keep thinking that Cathy is out there in this storm with that creep."

"Where are we going to look?" Frank asked.

"Down at the lake," Adelle responded. "Cathy told me they liked to go down there sometime."

"To the lake!" Wiggy cried. "That's like sending troops to the front. Just look at the sky down there. Nature doesn't take prisoners. I'll go down but I ain't getting out of the car. Our house was struck by lightning once and—"

"We've all heard that story before," Adelle interrupted impatiently.

"Wiggy's got a point," Frank added. "Besides, Cathy can take care of herself."

"You too!" Adelle spat out, jabbing her finger into Frank's chest. "It's our friend out there and we're all going." She turned to Wiggy. "Understand?"

"Okay." Wiggy cowered. "But if you get fried, don't say I didn't warn you."

Thunder rolled in the distance.

"Look," Adelle said pointing to the other end of the plaza, "here comes Terry."

Beaten

As Mary jiggled her keys in the lock of her building's front door, Hank stepped up behind her. Mary jumped.

"Shit!" she cried. "You scared the life out of me."

Hank smiled. "Give me your keys. I'll unlock it for you. I dropped in at the Zig Zag. Jack said you'd already left."

Mary handed her keys over to Hank. The effects of the gin made her feel uneasy on her feet. "Where the hell were you all night? I waited. You know how I hate waiting."

Hank smiled. "That's not much of a reception." He took her in his arms and kissed her. "You've been drinking."

Mary pushed Hank away. "What the hell did you expect me to be doing? I'm a little drunk and really pissed off."

Hank reached out for her again. "Come to daddy."

Mary relented, falling into Hank's arms. She let him kiss her again, his hands roaming down the back of her dress and squeezing her ass. She put her arms around his neck as he slowly lifted her dress, his hands moving between her legs.

"You missed me." He grinned.

Mary moaned. "Let's go upstairs where the neighbors aren't watching."

Hank opened the door and followed Mary up the stairs, slapping her bottom playfully. At the top of the stairs, Mary turned around.

"By rights, I should push you back down," she giggled, her hand reaching into his trouser pocket. "Seems you missed me too."

Hank took her in his arms.

"Hurry!" Mary said, taking Hank's hand and leading him through the darkness of the living room toward her bedroom. Someone moaned. Mary cried out. She turned on the light. Terry lay on the couch, his face bloodied, holding his stomach.

"What..." Mary rushed over to the couch and examined her son.

"I'll call an ambulance," she cried.

"No," Terry muttered. "I'm okay. Just got to get cleaned up."

"But what happened to you?"

Terry looked up at his mother sitting on the couch next to him and then up at Hank standing behind her.

"Nothing," Terry said.

"I'll bet the other guy looks worse than you, eh," Hank laughed. Mary turned and gave Hank an ugly look that knocked the smile off his face.

"Couple of guys tried to mug me," Terry said.

His mother looked at the bruises on his face. Then she touched his side. Terry winced.

"I think you might have broken a rib," Mary said. "I really think you should see a doctor."

"Please, Mom, I'll be all right."

Mary looked at her son. "We should phone the police. But first, let's get you cleaned up. Rest easy now. I'll get a face cloth, some cold water, and bandages."

Mary smiled at her son then quickly left for the bathroom. When she had departed Hank moved closer.

"Mugging, eh?" he said.

Terry nodded.

"Your mother can't hear us from the washroom. What really happened, kid?"

Terry did not respond.

"Look, kid. I like your mother. I don't want her to be facing a lot of pain because of you. If you're into something over your head, maybe I can figure a way out of it."

Terry looked up at Hank. His figure, silhouetted by the room's lights, gave him a menacing appearance.

"I can take care of myself," Terry said, wincing as he attempted to sit up on the couch.

"That's right." Hank smiled. "You can really take care of yourself. Look, kid, I've been in a few scrapes myself and I know a little more about the world. Don't be a fool. Whoever did this to you, I can do a lot more to them. And their friends."

At that moment Mary returned with a basin of water, a face cloth, and some bandages.

"Look, Hank," she whispered, pulling him to one side, "maybe you should leave. I can take it from here. I'd feel a whole lot better talking to the police if I was alone with Terry. They might start asking you questions about us and..."

Hank nodded. He looked at Terry.

"Remember what I said, kid," he said, then let himself out of the apartment.

Mary sat down on the couch and started to clean Terry's wounds.

"Now that Hank has gone, would you like to tell me what really happened, dear?"

"Are you going to marry that guy?" he asked.

Mary smiled. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because," Terry said, "that guy gives me the creeps. What do you know about him?"

## Dark Alleys

Joe Mackenzie stepped behind the bank and into the shadows. Turning off his flashlight, he leaned against the wall and began to urinate.

When he was finished he turned around and almost walked into the figure standing behind him.

"Jesus!" Joe cried.

"Gave you quite a fright, eh, Mr. Mackenzie?" Wiggy said, laughing. "It's the Indian blood in me. I can sneak up on just about anyone."

"You know what happened to the Indians," Joe responded, as he turned his flashlight on and checked the alley to make sure there weren't any other surprises.

Wiggy thought about Joe's remark for a minute then laughed.

"Oh ya," he cried. "Good one, Mr. Mackenzie. Just relieving the old bladder, eh? I won't turn you in."

Joe Mackenzie ignored Wiggy's remark and walked down the alley behind the plaza. As he walked he shone his flashlight into the dark crevices and loading docks of the stores. Wiggy walked beside him.

"You ever find anyone back here?" Wiggy asked.

"Besides you?" Joe asked.

Wiggy nodded.

"No," Joe responded. "But they pay me to check out the back of the stores here so I do it."

"You think people are going to break into the paint store or that new picture framing shop? What's there to steal?"

Joe ignored Wiggy's question.

"What are you doing out at this hour?" he asked.

Wiggy shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing. Couldn't get to sleep. Thought I'd come and talk to you. Didn't mean to scare you, Mr. Mackenzie. I wanted to thank you for not calling the cops the other night. I hope we didn't wake you up. Just having a little fun with some girls back of your place. Nothing bad, Mr. Mackenzie. Just drinking a little gin and smoking a little weed. We gotta go someplace, right? I guess we were a little loud. I saw your light go on all of a sudden and we kind of panicked. I mean the girls panicked. But I told them you wouldn't call the police."

"I didn't hear a thing," Joe replied. "I didn't turn on any light."

The two were silent for some time as Joe continued to flash his light at the back of the shops. When they reached the back of Apache Burger, which was not attached to the plaza but was situated near its southern end, Joe sat down on a tree stump. Wiggy asked if he could borrow a cigarette. Joe informed Wiggy that he didn't smoke. Wiggy took a seat on a tree stump a few feet away.

"You like this job, Mr. Mackenzie?"

Joe shrugged and turned off his flashlight.

"I guess you get lots of time to think about things," Wiggy suggested. "I like to think about things. Not school stuff. Real stuff. The night makes you feel so small that you figure your questions can't hurt anyone. Like if you think about those questions during the day, people think you're queer or something. One night I was out on our back lawn staring up at the sky and imagining that with all those stars, there must be zillions of planets and with all those planets, there must be some guy just like me on his back staring up at the heavens looking right up at the sky at me. It's possible, right? There might even be more than one guy. There might two or three guys. Maybe a hundred guys. With all those stars there could be a million guys just stretched out there on their backs staring up at each other. All of them wondering if they were the only guy. And then I get this feeling, a really sick feeling in my stomach. Maybe I am the only guy."

Joe sighed. Wiggy laughed.

"I think you need to get yourself a job," Joe said as he rose to his feet.

Wiggy remained on his stump, looking up into the sky. When he turned his attention back to the plaza, Joe had turned the corner of the building and returned to the front of the plaza. Wiggy stood up and ran over to the dumpster behind the camera shop where Frank and Terry were waiting.

"I thought that you'd never get rid of him," Frank said.

"Come on," Terry said. "Give us a hand with him before he wakes up."

"Ah, hell." Wiggy laughed. "I'll just knock him out again."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Puppy Dog

Sam Kelly stood up and shook his visitor's hand. He gestured to the chair opposite his desk. The stocky middle-aged man flirted with a smile. Sam took a seat. His visitor sat.

"I could have come to your home," Sam said, sweeping some papers he'd been looking at off to one side of his desk. "Thanks for coming to see me, Mr. Gray."

"It's Frank. Ruth said you'd been at the house." Frank smiled uncomfortably, looking around the detective's office. "She was concerned that I was in some sort of trouble. I've never been in any trouble with the law."

"Relax, Frank. This isn't an interrogation. Just a friendly interview," the detective said.

Frank seemed to jerk slightly as he nodded. He ran his hand through his thinning hair.

"Not like television?" the detective asked.

Frank shook his head. "Neater," he replied, his smile flickering on his lips. "Police shows have messy offices and filthy streets. There are more filing cabinets than I expected. And I expected to see pimps, hookers, drug dealers lining the walls. You have someone come in here and clean up?"

The detective chuckled. "I like to clean my own office. It gives me time to think. Most of the time there isn't much else to do."

"I thought the police were overworked."

"Traffic is. We don't get too many homicides out here in the suburbs. Can I get you a coffee?"

Frank declined, his eyes still darting around the room as if he were looking for a quick getaway. The detective stepped out of the office into the hall and grabbed himself a cup of coffee. Sugar and cream were nonexistent. He was getting tired of drinking coffee black. He glanced into his office. Frank Gray was still fidgeting in his chair. Probably scared out of his mind, the detective thought.

"Let's see what we have," the detective said as he wheeled into his chair and looked down at his notes. "Did Ruth tell you anything about our conversation?"

"Some," Frank responded, looking into his lap like a schoolboy who has forgotten to do his homework. "Didn't make a lot of sense. Ruth was upset. She thinks I'm in some kind of trouble. You know the way women fret."

The detective rubbed his chin with the end of his pen.

"I didn't mean to upset your wife, Frank. But there are a lot of leads we have to follow up on and... Why don't I give you a brief outline of the case."

For several minutes the detective entertained Frank with the tale about a man dying on the corner of Bloor and Botfield and the police report on the fellow who had discovered him and how his name was the same as Frank's. Frank listened attentively but said nothing. The detective waited. The two men looked at each other for some time.

"When did this happen?" Frank asked as he straightened up in his chair, leaning slightly forward.

The detective smiled uncomfortably for a minute and shook his head. "Why would you ask that?" He tapped the end of his pen on the desk and then, noticing that Frank had become mesmerized by the pen, put it down. "That's my problem. A fellow, we don't know who he was, came into the Zig Zag last week and reported to the bartender that a man had just died on the sidewalk only a few yards from the front door of the tavern. We have no record of anyone dying on that corner that evening, or any evening that year. But we do have a record of someone dying on that corner thirty odd years before."

Frank stared at the officer.

"This is a joke, right?" he cried.

Sam Kelly shook his head.

Frank took a deep breath, his nostrils flaring, his complexion growing red. "You have a guy dying on the sidewalk thirty years ago, and some guy who saw the incident reported it to a bartender a week ago. And someone with my name is mentioned in the case and you don't think this is a colossal joke?"

"I don't know what it is," the detective confessed. "Do you know Joe Mackenzie?"

Frank, still agitated, moved about his chair like a caged animal.

"What do you mean you don't know what it is? You upset my wife and dragged me all the way down to your office for this?"

For several minutes Sam Kelly sat silently in his chair and let Frank blow off steam. Although he'd stopped ranting, Frank's rage seemed to move inside, like a brush fire running under the forest canopy. Sweat ran down his forehead. His breathing grew shorter and labored. The detective left the room and returned a minute later with a paper cup of water. Frank took a few swallows of water. When his breathing began to relax, Frank took a small container of pills from his shirt pocket and popped one in his mouth. He finished off the water. The detective offered to get him some more water but Frank declined.

"It's almost gone," Frank said wiping the sweat off his forehead and neck with some tissues he found in a box on the officer's desk. "I'll be all right now."

"You sure?" the detective asked. "We could continue this some other time. I wasn't trying to get you upset, Mr. Gray."

"No, I'm all right. Sometimes I overreact to situations. Doctor tells me that I've got to monitor my rage. I know you're just doing your duty, Officer. And you have your procedures. I was so laid-back when I was a kid. Can you believe it? People said I had ice water in my veins. But

now... I just can't be sure that at any moment I might explode. I'm like a bomb."

Frank chuckled as he continued to wipe the sweat off.

"Used to be as cool as a cucumber."

The detective smiled politely and returned to his chair. God, he didn't want someone dying in his office. He'd interrogated many prisoners, for minor offences in the main, but he'd never had someone implode right in front of him.

Frank leaned forward, and spoke to the detective in a whisper as if he were sharing a personal anecdote. "Are you afraid of dying, Detective?"

"I'd like to avoid it," Sam said with a smile.

Frank did not. He was in earnest.

"I figure that when you die, you end up in a room. The room is empty. No windows, no furniture, no door. And it's dark. Not pitch black, but the darkness just before complete nightfall. Just enough light to see that you are alone in a room."

"Like being buried alive?"

"Ya, in a way," Frank said, nodding, "except you're not horizontal and you don't have trouble breathing, and you can walk around. But you're in the room and you wait."

"Waiting for what?"

"Do you mind if I smoke?" Frank gestured to the pack of cigarettes on the officer's desk. Although the detective didn't smoke himself, he found it helpful to have a pack around for interviews. It helped to loosen tongues.

Sam nodded. Frank grabbed the pack, removed a cigarette and the matches that were tucked inside, and lit up.

"Haven't smoked in years," Frank sighed, the smoke swirling out of his nostrils. "Doctor's orders."

The detective was about to suggest that Frank might want to put the cigarette out when Frank insisted that they continue the interview.

"Do you know Joe Mackenzie?"

Frank thought for a moment. "Didn't he live in that old farmhouse in the hydro field near Echo Valley?"

"Still does."

"I thought that place had been abandoned for years."

The detective leaned back in his chair for a few minutes. He opened a drawer in his desk and took out a pad and scribbled something in it.

"You live around here all of your life, Frank?" he asked.

"Most of it. Lived in Windsor for a while. That's where I met Ruth. At college."

Frank stopped talking. The detective looked at Frank and waited.

"I had more hair then," Frank said, running his hand through his thinning hair.

The detective smiled.

"Red hair if you can believe it. Ruth was a great beauty on campus. Long black hair. People used to call us Sonny and Cher. After the singing duo. We sort of fell in love at first sight. Been together ever since. I was kind of a quiet kid. Didn't have many girls. Ruth had a boyfriend when I saw her the first time. I don't think I'm being of much help. I just don't have much to say that amounts to anything."

"I don't know what's helpful. Continue, Frank." Sam knew that Frank had to talk. Perhaps it would reveal more than Kelly's questions could elicit.

Frank smiled. "Her boyfriend gave me a nickname."

"Red?" the detective asked.

Frank shook his head. "Puppy Dog. What a name, eh?"

"Well," the detective smiled. "You got the girl so I guess the dog got the last bark."

Frank laughed quietly.

"Did you know June Mackenzie, Joe's wife?" Sam asked. "Her maiden name was Hare before she married."

"There were some Hares that went to school with us. One of them was a girl, I think. Can't remember her name. What does she have to do with the fellow dying outside the Zig Zag?"

"She disappeared," the detective replied.

"Didn't she run off with some fellow?" Frank asked. "Some ex-hockey player."

The detective nodded. "How about a Joseph Begin? Have you heard of him?"

Frank shook his head.

"What's all this about, Officer?"

"Missing persons."

Frank's eyes dropped. "Our son disappeared," he said, his voice tentative.

"Yes, I know." The detective spoke softly now. He didn't want to go through another meltdown with Frank.

"Ruth, she never got over it. Keeps thinking Johnny will come back. He ain't coming back, Detective. We would have heard something from

him, if for no other reason than to bum money off us. Johnny was a loser. He was never good at anything. Looks and personality, but no character. He was my son and I loved him, but he was a bum."

Margaret

"What did you do?" Adelle asked Cathy, her eyes wide with anticipation.

Cathy leaned across the restaurant table in the booth the two girls occupied. "I kneed him in the balls!"

Adelle clapped her hands, leaned back, and laughed. Cathy smiled.

"Nobody is going to try that crap on me." Cathy's voice was sharp and bitter. "You were right though. The guy is a creep and to think I let him touch me. God, it makes me feel so sleazy to think that I touched... ."

Margaret arrived at the table to take the girls' order. With her hair pinned up, her thin bosom-less body, and the low sarcastic voice that slipped out of the side of her mouth, she was, for the girls, the anti-female. The girls looked up with disgust. Couldn't she see that they were talking? The girls ordered.

"You dragged me over here for a Coke and two straws?" Margaret said with a snarl.

Cathy looked up and smiled with as much charm as she could garner.

"We are having a conversation," Cathy said, enunciating each word as if she were speaking to someone who did not understand the English language.

Adelle turned and raised her eyebrows, giving parenthesis to Cathy's declaration.

Margaret tapped her pencil impatiently on her ordering pad, leaned to one side, and smiled. "We are running a business," she replied. And then leaning over the table, added, "And if you ladies give me any more of this snotty business, you'll no longer be welcome in this establishment."

The two girls were silent for a brief moment before Adelle added, "I'll have toast."

Margaret returned to the counter.

"Where is she coming from?" Adelle cried.

"What a bitch!" Cathy whispered.

"No wonder there's never anyone in this place," Adelle added, her eye on Margaret. "I would never talk to a customer like that. Mr. Leblanc would fire me on the spot. She must be going through the change. My mother's like that. The other day she went into a rage because I used a

bit of her makeup. There was hardly anything left in the tube of face cream and she blames me because it's all gone. Like it's my fault that she didn't buy more. She uses my tampons and I don't scream at her. Why do women become such witches? If I turn out like that, promise me you'll have me put down."

Margaret returned with the girls' Coke and toast. Both girls smiled at the waitress. Margaret shook her head.

"Why did you go to the beach with him?" Adelle asked once Margaret had departed.

"I didn't go to the beach. We just ended up there," Cathy explained as she placed her straw in the Coke. "I was feeling sorry for the guy. It was kind of obvious what he had in mind once we got there, but I felt this obligation to be fair with him. Why do we bother? No matter what I said, he wouldn't let up. At least when I ask Terry for space, he gives it to me. But Johnny thinks he's owed something. Like I should drop to my knees and do him. I am not his right hand."

Adelle giggled. "You are terrible. Not his right hand. I'll have to remember that one."

"We started to argue. You know how boys are. He thinks he's the one being reasonable and I'm being this incredible bitch because I want to talk about certain issues. What is a relationship if you can't discuss things like adults? He starts telling me I'm yelling. Trying to paint me as hysterical. I was just so bloody frustrated trying to get him to talk. And then he gets physical with me. Pushes me to the sand and starts to undo his pants. When he tried to fuck me, I gave him the knee. He barfed. I rolled away but still got some on my hair. Yuck! What an asshole! How could I have ever let that slug between my legs? You warned me but I couldn't see it. It's like you're so in love with someone that you don't see them for who they really are."

"You're love blind," Adelle added, pushing the toast to one side. Taking the second straw, she placed it in the coke and began to sip.

"Exactly." Cathy nodded and paused to take a mouthful of Coke. "It makes you think that you can't ever trust them. No wonder some chicks become lesbians. Women understand women. But men! It's like you're dealing with an alien species."

"I could never do that," Adelle said.

"What?"

The two girls sucked on the drink, their foreheads pressed against each other.

"The lesbian thing," Adelle explained.

Cathy laughed. "You didn't think I—"

"Of course not," Adelle interrupted. "Just a point of information. We're stuck as heterosexuals. Like, I don't care how desperate I was, I couldn't become a lesbian. I'd rather enter a convent. Anyway, I'm still sort of a virgin."

Cathy giggled. "What's sort of a virgin?"

Adelle blushed, then whispered in Cathy's ear.

"You don't swallow!" Cathy roared with laughter.

"Not so loud," Adelle cried with tears of laughter in her eyes.

When Adelle had recovered from laughing, she asked, "What happened next?"

"After Johnny upchucked?"

Adelle nodded.

Cathy continued. "He drove me home. He didn't talk. He looked kind of sickly to tell you the truth. I was really pissed. I guess I laid it on kind of thick on the way back. He deserved it. Even after he dropped me off, I was in a state. Then my mother starts yelling at me about how she didn't know where I was and all of my friends were out looking for me and that she had half a mind to ground me. I told her she had half a mind."

"You didn't!" Adelle gasped.

Cathy shook her head. "But I felt like it. God, she can be so annoying. Your mother can't hold a candle to mine in the nagging department. Sometimes I wish my father would slug her. I took a shower and washed Johnny out of my hair. And then I phoned Terry."

"You didn't!"

Cathy nodded. "I had to tell someone. He said he was going to kill Johnny. Fat chance of that, eh. Johnny was on the college wrestling team. Until he got kicked off for drinking at a meet."

"Don't you feel kind of guilty now?" Adelle asked.

"About what? Terry getting beaten up? I warned him not to go after Johnny. He is so stupid sometimes. I can take care of myself. I don't need Terry going around acting like Sir Lancelot."

The two girls leaned over the table and finished their drink. They looked at the toast.

"I am definitely not eating that," Adelle said, making a face of complete revulsion. "It's dripping with calories."

Cathy grabbed the toast. "I'm famished," she said.

The Fight

Detective Kelly sipped at his coffee as he sat at the counter.

"The blueberry pie is fresh," Margaret said. She'd always had a soft spot for a man in uniform, although technically Sam wasn't in uniform. Still, he was a cop. Her husband had been a fireman.

"Well, then I'll have a piece." The detective smiled.

Margaret turned away, returning a moment later with a slice of pie and a fork. The detective took a piece and smiled. *Love to watch a man eat.*

"This is good, Margaret," he said, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

Margaret leaned against the counter and lit up a cigarette.

"I didn't make it, so you don't have to pretend that it's good." *Pretend.*

"It's not bad. Pretty good in fact."

"You don't mind?" Margaret gestured to the cigarette.

The detective shook his head.

"The boss is out. It's the only chance I get to steal a puff. If he shows up, the cigarette is yours."

The detective laughed. Margaret put an ashtray on the counter.

"I thought this place was nonsmoking," he said.

"Only when a cop walks in." Margaret laughed. *Does someone cook for him?*

Finishing the pie, the detective wiped his mouth with a napkin and pushed the plate away. He took a sip of coffee.

"Tell me about the fight."

"Wasn't much to tell," Margaret began. "The blond kid, Johnny I think is his name, was walking along the sidewalk out front. Good-looking tall young man. Reminded me of an old boyfriend I had. God, they're all old now." Margaret laughed before continuing. "Then Terry comes out of nowhere and stops him. Terry's mother, Mary, and I are old school friends. Do you know her?"

The detective nodded. "She asked me to look into this."

"I can see through the window that they're having an argument," Margaret continued. "Terry started pushing Johnny. Big mistake. He's about a foot shorter than Johnny. Johnny levels him with one punch right in the side of the head. Terry just drops. I can see Johnny standing over him, yelling down at the sidewalk. Terry gets up off the sidewalk and kind of tackles Johnny. I can see that there's blood on Terry's forehead. He must have hit his head on the sidewalk. Johnny puts two punches into Terry's stomach and that was it. Johnny walks away. By the time I got out there, Terry was already on his feet, bent over in pain but on his feet. I asked him if he was all right. He brushed me off and staggered away. I guessed he was going home."

Margaret flicked a few ashes into the tray before continuing. "Mary must be pretty upset. It isn't easy raising a teenager. Not that Mary was any angel when she was a kid. She told me once that Terry was God's way of punishing her for her wild youth. That was about it."

Sam Kelly shook his head.

"Are charges going to be laid, Sam?" Margaret asked.

"No," the detective responded. "Terry won't talk to me about the incident. My hands are tied. All I can do is warn Johnny, maybe talk to his parents. That pie was delicious."

Margaret picked up the plate and placed it with other dirty dishes. She took one last puff of her cigarette and ground it out in the ashtray and then removed the ashtray from the counter.

"Any idea what it was about?" Margaret asked.

The detective shook his head. "With teenagers, who knows? Could have been over money, drugs, a girl, a perceived slight. Maybe Johnny looked at Terry the wrong way. Or just male hormones."

"I guess you didn't need this on your plate?" Margaret smiled. "Especially with that salesman disappearing."

"You heard about that?"

Margaret nodded. "You hear a lot of things in this place. What do you think happened to him, Sam?"

The detective shook his head. "Don't know. Maybe he's out of town, maybe he woke up the next morning with a hangover and took off on his route again. We're trying to put a trace on him. Ever see him in here?"

"Could have. We get everyone passing through the Six Points area in this place. What did he look like?"

The detective gave a description that he'd received from Helen Kraft.

"That could be any of a dozen guys that walk in here every day. Sounds like a real loser."

The detective finished his coffee and dug into this pocket for change to pay the bill.

"It's on the house," Margaret said. "We were going to have to throw the pie out. It was stale three days ago."

"I thought you said it was fresh," he responded.

"The only thing fresh in this joint is the customers," Margaret responded.

The detective laughed. "You're too much, Maggie."

The detective climbed to his feet to leave then turned again to Margaret.

"Do you know anything about a tall gaunt fellow? About seven feet. Dresses in black. Asks a lot of questions. Has an obsession with the year 1950."

Margaret nodded.

"I thought he was trying to hit on me. Filled with all kinds of useless information. Asking me a lot of stuff about Mary's ex. Him and Mary are an item. Seemed very interested in any stories about people who have gone missing over the last few decades. Gave me the creeps, to tell you the truth. But he's a good tipper."

The detective smiled, reached into his pocket and threw some change on the counter.

"I can take a hint." He laughed.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Wheelchair

Detective Kelly pushed the wheelchair up to the edge of the sidewalk looking across Bloor Street to the Six Points Plaza. Ed Kaye, his passenger, sat mutely in the chair. When the traffic thinned out, Sam pushed the chair across the street and into the plaza. The two men moved leisurely through the plaza past the bank and a video store. When they reached the Canadiana Restaurant, Sam wheeled in. A few minutes later the two men sat at a table by the window with a cup of coffee.

"Ya think that they would have torn this place down by now," Ed said, his eyes wide and excited like a child's first glimpse of Niagara Falls. "Haven't been over here in years. Ugliest damn strip mall west of the Humber, and I miss it."

The detective smiled. He sipped at his coffee, stealing a glance at the counter where Margaret served a customer. She spotted him and smiled.

"Where did all that time go?" Ed sighed. "Like it all happened yesterday. Like it never happened. Like I was always a surly decrepit old man. Program the other night on the television about black holes. I thought they was talking about manholes. Scared the bejesus out of me." The old man scratched his chin. "Seems that if you get caught inside one of these holes there ain't no escape. Even time itself gets caught. Everything happens at the same time. Sounds like old age."

The old man shook with laughter, his voice gargling. Choking with phlegm, he cleared his throat and swallowed. Rolling his head around as if he were rolling dice with his memories, the old man spoke again.

"Remember one winter we found an old man... God, I can't remember his name. Kids called him Captain Hook. Lost his hand in the war. We found him in a car, there in the driver's seat. Dead. Car was buried under about three feet of snow. No one knew the car was there."

Something caught the old man's attention at the other end of the room. It was Margaret. The old man smiled.

"And then there were the fights between the Catholic kids and the Protestants," he continued. "Pitched battles just around the corner in the hydro field. We had reform school then... I sent a kid named Ernie O'Connel up there. God forgive me." The old man's voice broke. He bowed his head for a moment. Then he looked up with a smile as if his previous melancholic thoughts had been totally erased from his mind. "And then there were hot rods. Teenagers used to race their cars up by Richview Side Road. They changed the name to Eglinton Avenue when they built... I can't remember why they changed the name of the street." The old man stopped. He looked up into Sam Kelly's eyes. "You ever wonder where all those troubled boys went, Sam? All those lives lost at such a young age. Disappeared into prison or alcohol. And nothing I could..."

Sam Kelly looked at the old man. He wondered if it had been a good idea to bring the old man over to the plaza. Sam sipped at his coffee. It was too hot. The old man started to shake again. And then he laughed.

"And there was the time," he continued, "the Queen rode along Burnhamthorpe Road, and The Beatles landed at Malton Airport. And Trudeaumania..." The old man took a deep breath. "I guess they'll bury all those memories in the same hole they drop me in."

The detective stirred his coffee slowly with his spoon. "Sure you don't want some pie? They have real fine pie here."

Sam drank his coffee.

Ed shook his head. A drop of drool ran down his lip. The detective was about to wipe it off with a napkin when Ed slid the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Nothing ever lasts," Ed said, his eyes drifting off into other memories. "What was the point of living them? I have regrets, Detective—"

"Sam," the detective interrupted.

"Sam." Ed smiled briefly with a puzzled expression on his face. "I forgot. I don't regret big things. Don't regret that I didn't climb no goddamn mountain or travel to some godforsaken place, or gamble my money on some woman dressed in red. Regret things I didn't say. Those mornings I could have told my wife she was still beautiful. Or that I

didn't tell that tough-looking kid sitting in the station, scared out of his mind, that it was okay. He'd survive the experience. None of us survive life. You regret anything, Sam?"

Sam was lost in a daze, watching Margaret carry two plates across the floor. He didn't hear the old man's question. He gestured to Margaret. Ed stopped talking, his voice trailing off into his mind. When Margaret arrived at their table, Sam asked for a refill on their coffees. Margaret smiled and moved off.

"That your girl?" Ed asked, a sly smile flashing across his sunken face.

"Just a friend," Sam responded.

"Looks like more than that," Ed responded. "Especially the way her eyes are on you when you're not looking."

Sam smiled uncomfortably.

"No women will ever look at me that way again," Ed added wistfully, dropping his eyes. "You ever wake up feeling guilty, Sam? Guilty for something but you can't remember what. And you're afraid to remember. Afraid to see that lizard crawling inside you. Afraid to look at your soul. You know what the soul is, Sam? It's time. Dripping like acid from a leaky faucet inside. Eating your flesh. Until there's nothing left but bone and memories."

Ed stopped for a moment.

"Sometimes I get a bit weepy," he said. Ed took a napkin and blew his nose.

"That's all right," Sam responded. "I have my moments too."

Margaret came by with a coffee pot and filled up their cups. She smiled at the detective and nodded secretively toward the old man. The detective nodded back. As she walked away, Sam watched her with a smile.

"Just a friend, eh?" Ed chuckled slyly.

Sam blushed.

"Any luck finding my files?" Ed asked.

"Not much, I'm afraid. Actually, I was hoping you might be able to help me on another case."

"Hope I can be of more use than that last one," Ed replied.

"A boy named Johnny Gray disappeared one summer. At the time everyone assumed that he was just another runaway."

"A kid?" Ed asked.

"A teenager. He was almost twenty so you could say he was an adult. The kid had been under a lot of pressure. From what I've learned, he

flunked out of college. His parents didn't know about it. And he was having trouble getting a job."

"Blond kid? Good-looking? Something of an athlete?" Ed asked.

The detective nodded.

"Knew that kid from when he first started riding a bike. Always trouble. Stealing from stores when he was no more than ten. Looked like an angel but was a real hellion. His parents couldn't control him. There were a series of break-ins that we suspected he was involved in but we could never catch him at it. He was a track star at the local Catholic high school, Michael Power. An article in the paper about him. Broke all these Ontario records for the mile. What a waste of talent, good looks, and charm. Never saw him without a pretty girl on his arm. No character. No spine in the boy. Put his parents through hell."

"You knew about him disappearing then?" the detective asked.

Ed nodded. "Wasn't surprised. He was up on assault charges."

"I didn't know that," the detective replied.

"One of his girlfriends," Ed added. "Never could take responsibility for his mistakes. Always blamed it on someone else. Taking off was exactly what you would have suspected from him. He'd be about your age now, Detective. Maybe a few years younger."

A crowd of teenagers stepped into the restaurant and fell into a corner booth. Ed watched them and smiled. He turned back to Sam.

"You ever meet a kid you just couldn't like? Johnny was that kind of kid. Everything came too easy for him. Haven't thought about that boy in thirty years. You think he didn't run off?"

The detective leaned back in his chair.

"Ed, I'm not sure of anything anymore."

Ed laughed then looked across the room.

"What?" the detective asked.

"The waitress," Ed replied. "Your girlfriend. I know her."

Gone

"This isn't a good idea," Frank cried, his lip fluttering nervously. He could feel that something terrible was going to happen. He leaned on the trunk. "I don't care what kind of shithead he is, what if no one finds him?"

Terry moved Frank gently aside and opened the trunk of the Chev.

"He fucking tried to rape my girl, Frank. What more do you want?" Terry grabbed one end of the sleeping bag that lay tied up with rope in the trunk.

"Gobble, gobble, gobble." Wiggy laughed as he danced around the car like a chicken.

"I thought you were a friend of Johnny's?" Frank asked, grabbing Wiggy's arm. "Can't you see what's happening here?"

Wiggy brushed Frank off. "The fucker ain't no friend of mine. You heard what he tried to do to Cathy. And then beats up on my boy, Terry. Johnny deserves what he gets. And what do you care? He wasn't no friend of yours. You said he was an asshole."

"Will you two shut up and help with this fucker," Terry cried.

The two boys helped Terry lift their prisoner out of the trunk and set him on the ground.

"When does old man Mackenzie get home from work?" Terry asked. "I gotta get this car back to Cathy."

"We got lots of time," Wiggy said, pointing at the sleeping bag. "Hey, look, the bubble boy has come back to life. It's good I gagged him. The bastard would be screaming like a banshee."

Johnny began to wiggle around in the sleeping bag.

"Hold him down!" Terry barked at Frank.

Reluctantly, Frank grabbed Johnny's feet.

"This is some serious shit you guys are getting us in," Frank whined, trying to restrain the wiggling sleeping bag.

"We're just going to lower him down old man Mackenzie's well," Wiggy explained. "He won't drown, Frank. There hasn't been water in it for years. It'll take him a couple of hours to wiggle out of these ropes. College boy will learn who the real bosses around here are. Sometimes you've got to put guys in their place and right now that place is at the bottom of this well."

"He'll go to the cops," Frank added. "And we'll be facing charges."

"He ain't going to charge anyone with anything," Terry responded. "Not unless he wants Cathy to press rape charges."

"She didn't say he raped her," Frank responded.

"Did you see the bruise on her cheek?" Terry replied.

"Like she's going to tell us about being raped," Wiggy added, then laughed. "Not that I wouldn't mind hearing the details. Hey, don't look at me that way."

Terry laughed and turned to Frank.

"Remember that time we caught Wiggy reading Dear Abby?"

Frank nodded with a smile.

"He was always a pervert," Frank said.

"What's your point?" Wiggy responded. "Anyway, I like Dear Abby. She gives a lot of good advice to teenagers—especially about relationships."

"And you need all the advice you can get," Terry howled.

Johnny continued to squirm inside the sleeping bag. Wiggy kicked him.

"Shut up!" Wiggy turned to his comrades. "I wish we had a wheelbarrow. It's going to be tough dragging him over to the well."

Wiggy knelt down over the sleeping bag.

"I know you can hear me, Johnny. You'd better settle down or you'll get a lot more boots."

Wiggy stood up and kicked Johnny again. He stopped squirming. Wiggy smiled.

"See," he said, "I got a way with words."

The three boys picked Johnny up and carried him across the long grass, past Joe Mackenzie's house toward the well. When they reached the well they dropped him on the ground.

"Why'd you drop him like that?" Frank pushed Wiggy back as he knelt beside the sleeping bag. "He banged his head. What if you killed him?"

"My arms were getting tired," Wiggy responded, straightening out his trousers. "And we didn't kill him. And don't go pushing me like that. I don't take shit like that."

"Will you guys shut up!" Terry cried. "Did anyone bring a rope?"

"Tell him to apologize!" Wiggy insisted.

"Fuck your feelings, Wiggy. Did you bring a rope?"

Wiggy shook his head. Terry turned to Frank. Frank dropped his eyes.

"Shit! You guys are totally useless. Look around. Maybe there's something we can use."

The boys fanned out. Johnny continued to squirm in the sleeping bag. A few minutes later Frank gave a shout and returned to the well with a long rope. Wiggy bent over Johnny and checked the ropes binding the sleeping bag.

"Shit! He almost got himself loose."

"I thought you said that it would take him a couple of hours to loosen those ropes," Terry demanded, pushing Wiggy aside as he knelt over the sleeping bag and tightened the ropes around Johnny.

"It's been a long time since I was a boy scout," Wiggy said in his own defense. "And I warned you guys about pushing me."

A few minutes passed before Terry was satisfied that all the ropes were secure. He attached the new rope to the binding.

"Okay," Terry said. "I tied the rope around college-boy. We'll slowly lower him down the well so he doesn't break his neck in the fall and then we'll drop the rope down. He should be loose by the time old man Mackenzie comes home from work."

"This has got disaster written all over it," Frank said, shaking his head. "Are you sure that rope is long enough?"

"There's got to be a hundred feet of rope there," Wiggy cried. "Plenty of rope. Trust me."

As the three boys lifted Johnny up onto the edge of the wall that surrounded the well, he continued to squirm.

"Quit squirming, asshole," Wiggy insisted and punched the sleeping bag.

Frank and Terry grabbed the rope as Wiggy nudged the bundle over the side. The body began to slowly descend into the hole, each boy releasing inch after inch.

"Shouldn't we have reached the bottom by now?" Frank cried.

"Almost there," Terry responded.

"Man, my arms are getting sore," Wiggy added. "Johnny's heavier than he looks."

"It's slipping!" Terry cried.

"Hold it!" Frank added.

The boys gripped the rope trying to slow Johnny's descent. Their hands burned as the rope raced through their fingers. And then it was gone.

## Missing Persons

Hank waited patiently for his blueberry pie. Several customers stood at the cash register paying their bills and talking to the waitress. Margaret smiled warmly as she handed back their change. Then she turned to the kitchen and picked up several plates and confidently moved across the room and delivered them to another table of guests. When she returned to Hank, she apologized.

Hank sipped at his coffee. Margaret remembered the pie and moved over to a nearby refrigerator.

"Been looking forward to this all morning," Hank said. "Do you pick these berries yourself, love?"

Margaret smiled as she slid the pie onto the counter in front of Hank.

"Is it always this busy here?" he asked.

"You should have been here an hour ago. I've never seen such a breakfast crowd like that before. A lot of cops. Something's going on at the Mackenzie farm. And wouldn't you know that this is the day the boss decides to go golfing."

"You don't have any other help?"

"Susan comes in mornings. But one of her kids is sick. She's useless anyway. Screws up all the orders. But the boss likes her. Thinks he's going to get a little action on the side. Four kids and the boss thinks Susan's got time for a little dalliance. Men are such optimists."

Hank began to eat his pie. Shaking his head with delight, he smiled as he washed down the pie with a swallow of coffee.

Margaret took an ashtray out and set it on the counter.

"You don't mind?"

Hank shook his head and continued to eat his pie. When he finished he pushed the plate aside, wiped his mouth with a napkin and sighed.

"Wonderful," he said with a smile. "A pie like that deserves some kind of prize."

Margaret drew deeply on her cigarette and slowly let out several smoke rings. Hank sipped at his coffee and watched as the rings rose toward the ceiling and dissipated.

"You lived in this area all your life?" he asked.

Margaret nodded. "Mostly," she said.

"Do you know a woman named Mary? I've come in here a few times with her."

"We were school friends," Margaret replied with a nod. She kept her eyes on the other customers and on the front door. "Still good friends. She's told me about you."

"Don't believe everything you hear," Hank said with a laugh. He sipped at his coffee then reached over to the sugar container and poured some more into the cup.

Margaret smirked.

"What do you know about her ex-husband?"

"Nothing," Margaret replied. "And if I knew anything I don't think I'd be telling you. Why do you want to know about Mary's ex?"

Hank finished his coffee and asked for a refill. Margaret got the coffee and an extra cup for herself. She filled both.

"Did you ever get an itch," Hank explained, "and the more you scratched it, the bigger the itch got?"

Margaret raised her cup to her lips. She did not respond.

"I'm a writer. Maybe you've seen my articles in *The Sun*. Crime stuff. Always looking for material."

"So you're a writer," Margaret said with a shrug. "Mary didn't tell me that. She thinks you're some kind of private eye."

Hank laughed and almost choked on his coffee. "Me a dick? In a way, I am an investigator."

Margaret shrugged as she sucked on her cigarette.

Hank continued. "Maybe you don't know, but most of this land was owned by Timothy Eaton. He used the produce from the farms, mostly apples, pears, and rhubarb, to stock his downtown stores. In 1950 a man named Shipp bought most of the land and began to clear the farms in this area to build low-cost housing for middle class families, the families of soldiers who had returned from the war and were working the factories and warehouses. The houses were built on the assembly line model. Similar projects were initiated in other surrounding areas of the city—Scarborough, Don Mills, North York. It was a great housing boom."

Margaret stared at Hank, tapping the ashes of her cigarette into an ashtray.

"Fascinating," she said with an air of indifference.

Hank smiled. "I'll try and get to the point. A lot of statistics were kept in those days. Hydro, tax records, the police, the census. Maybe it was the aftereffects of the war. Everyone wanted to know everything about everyone. While browsing through all of the paperwork, I noticed that the Six Points area had a disproportionate number of missing persons."

Margaret, who had been keeping an eye on her other customers, turned to Hank. She put down her cigarette.

"Got your attention?" Hank smiled.

"Continue," Margaret said.

"It started shortly after the Shipp homes were finished. Large numbers of people moved into the area. People started to disappear. Husbands, wives, kids, people just passing through. A young fellow who read gas meters disappeared one day on his route. Foul play was suspected but no one was ever arrested. A couple of Jehovah's Witnesses were reported missing. A little girl went swimming over at Memorial Pool. She was seen going into Central Park. That was the last time she was seen. Other cases were reported to the police, written up as husbands running out on

their families, or teenage runaways, or people avoiding their debts. Not every case was reported to the police."

"Wait a minute," Margaret said. "Why is this the first time I'm hearing about this?"

"I don't know." Hank slowly stirred his coffee. "It makes you think though."

"Think about what?" Margaret asked. "What exactly are you implying? You can't go around saying things like this unless you know something."

"Weren't you reported missing?" he asked.

Margaret coughed. She put down her cigarette and took a swallow of coffee.

"When you were kids up by Echo Valley," Hank continued. "There was a police report. A bunch of you were drinking and playing strip poker."

Margaret leaned over the counter.

"Exactly," she interrupted, "what are you up to?"

## Purgatory

"What about this heat, Sam?" Jack asked as he polished glasses and placed them on a shelf behind the bar.

Detective Kelly smiled. He finished his beer. Jack brought him a second.

"Goes right through you, eh?" Jack said with a laugh. "What's this I hear about the gang of police dining over at the Canadiana this morning?"

"The Mackenzie place," the detective responded.

Jack stopped polishing the glass in his hand.

"We got a warrant to look the place over. I did some more spade work on Mrs. Mackenzie's disappearance. She made a complaint about Joe the previous year. She said that he had threatened her life."

Jack's mouth fell open.

"You hear stuff like this when there are domestic problems. But Joe's mother also disappeared shortly after she complained about Joe's father. He used to beat her."

"I never heard that before," Jack said, his mouth still hanging. "You think the father and the son committed..."

"Did you ever hear what happened to Joe's father?" the detective asked.

Jack shook his head.

"Neither has anyone else. I checked out all the local graveyards and there are no records of a James Mackenzie. Nor can we find any trace of Joe's brothers or sisters."

"Maybe they just moved on."

"Maybe. There were a lot of people who moved around before and after the war looking for work. Most of the people who lived in the area at the time are dead so it's been difficult to come up with much evidence. I've talked to a retired cop but his memory is pretty suspect. And then there's the hole in Joe's backyard."

Jack put the glass in his hand back on the bar.

"You think old Joe dropped them down that hole?"

"We're bringing in some heavy equipment tomorrow. I don't know what we'll find. If we don't find something, I've got some explaining to do with my boss. You know about the big fight Joe had with hydro. He threatened some people from the government when they came on his property. Fired a gun over their heads. Charges were never filed. Hydro wanted to make a deal with Joe. They didn't want people thinking that they were bullying him. A lot of people have disappeared over the years in this area and Joe is the only constant. Everything points his way. And then there's that hole—"

"Jesus!" Jack cried. "Old Joe. You like him."

"He's an odd fellow but ya, I like him. And that other matter we discussed before—"

"The guy dying on the corner? You think Joe had something to do with that as well?"

The detective shook his head.

"No, I think Joe's clear on that one. But I've talked to someone who fits the description of the fellow who came in here. You have to add a few years on him, but he sure fits the bill. He denies knowing anything but I took it for granted that he was lying."

"You said you had to add some years. This happened a couple of weeks ago, Sam."

The detective nodded, then cradled his forehead in the palm of his hand.

"I can't explain that. I've been looking over old records and there are several other incidents that are baffling. I have a college kid who disappeared over thirty years ago. And recently I have a salesman who has gone AWOL. The more I dig, the more bodies I find."

"No shit!" Jack exclaimed.

The detective ran his fingers through his hair. "Do you believe in purgatory, Jack?"

"Purgatory?" Jack asked.

"Where the souls of the dead have to repent until they are allowed into heaven."

"Sounds like jail," Jack replied.

The detective finished his beer.

"All the cases I'm studying are filled with these odd coincidences. Detectives are supposed to look for coincidences. You join all the dots together and things make sense. But none of this makes sense. Maybe life is purgatory."

Jack asked the detective if he wanted another beer. Sam shook his head.

"I have to get up early tomorrow. We're going to lower a cable into the hole. Do you know Margaret over at the Canadiana? Did you know that when she was a kid, a teenager, she was reported missing?"

Jack shook his head.

"I talked to her about it. Her and some friends were out back of the Mackenzie house. They were drinking and horsing around, teenage stuff. I guess she got pretty drunk. She wandered off from the group. When the other kids woke up from their drunken stupors, they panicked when they couldn't find her. They went to her house, searched the neighborhood, finally reported her missing to the police. Margaret told me she woke up in a bed in the Mackenzie house. Old Joe had found her passed out on his lawn and put her up, then went to work. The next morning Margaret woke up to the sound of voices in the house. Of course, she had no idea where she was. She snuck downstairs toward the kitchen, toward the source of the voices. When she stepped inside the kitchen, the voices stopped. The room was empty."

Jack's mouth dropped open, but then he laughed. "You're jerking my chain."

The detective did not smile.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### In Our Midst

"I can't believe it," Margaret said, leaning against the counter, a cigarette dangling out of her lips. "And to think that I once slept in that house. Sends shivers down your spine."

Mary stirred her coffee, her other hand holding a cigarette. "God, I forgot all about that. You woke up in June's bed. That should be good for a lifetime of nightmares. I might look into professional counseling, dear. Hell, we'll all need counseling long after this is over. To think that we've had a murderer living in our midst all these years, and we never suspected a thing. Makes your skin crawl. Poor June. We all assumed she ran off on Joe. Hell, I thought her and Bill had been messing around. The hatred and spite I hurled at her. Do you think I can ever forgive myself? You don't think Bill could be...?"

Margaret shrugged. "They've spotted a lot of bodies down there, Mary. Maybe Bill was among them. You can't let yourself dwell on it."

A tear ran down Mary's cheek. Margaret took a tissue box from beneath the counter and handed it to Mary. Mary stubbed out her cigarette and took a tissue.

"I'm never going to get over this," Mary sniffled, dabbing at the tears that streaked her cheek. "I just can't."

"It's so gruesome," Margaret said, a series of smoke rings swirling out of her lips. "Sam thinks it'll take weeks to dig up everything. Pretty dangerous work down there. They're not even sure if they're at the bottom of that hole. Think the stuff is just jammed in, that it might cave in at any moment. People have been dumping garbage down that hole ever since I can remember. When you think back to all of the people that have disappeared in this area, it gives you pause. Remember that Gallagher girl, the one who lived over on Prennan? She was a grade behind us at school."

"Didn't they blame that on an uncle?" Mary asked, taking a second tissue and blowing her nose. "God, we said prayers for her every day for weeks. Her uncle tried to run, didn't he? I think they caught him in Vancouver. Never heard what happened to him after they sent him to prison."

"You know what they do to that sort in prisons," Margaret added.

Mary looked at Margaret with a startled expression on her face. "You think he was innocent?"

Margaret nodded. "I wouldn't doubt it, sweetheart. And those Jehovah's Witnesses. They were a pain in the neck but I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. God, we used to throw our empty wine bottles down that hole. Probably landed right on one of those bodies. Remember that Gray kid, the one they thought ran off to Hollywood? He was in your biology class, remember?"

"The one that looked like Tab Hunter?" Mary asked.

Margaret nodded. "He could be down there. Jesus, I just remembered. I lost my virginity behind the Mackenzie place."

Mary laughed.

"Don't give me that look, Mary. I was a virgin at one time." Margaret chuckled as she took a deep draw on her cigarette. "Can't remember who it was."

The two women both started laughing.

"Well, they won't find your chastity down any hole," Mary muttered through her laughter.

Margaret choked on her cigarette smoke.

"Oh, we shouldn't be laughing," Mary said, tears running down her face.

"What else can you do, dear?" Margaret responded after taking a sip of Mary's coffee to clear her throat. "It makes you think about everything you knew in a different way. Sam said that as soon as they are able to get the bodies up, they would be looking into dental records. Most of the... I'm sorry, Mary."

Mary wiped her eyes with her tissue.

"It's okay, kid," Mary responded.

"Sam says that they've got plenty of video but are being as careful as possible with what's down there. They don't want to lose anyone trying to raise the dead. God, I hope there aren't any recent additions."

"A salesman disappeared," Mary exclaimed. "Helen in our office was dating him. God, I knew him myself. Remember that asshole I told you about that couldn't keep his hands off me."

"That would be a long list," Margaret giggled.

"You know the one," Mary's tone was impatient. "He tried to tell me that he was going to the NHL, like that would be a selling point to me."

Margaret nodded. "Ya. The one with the cowlick."

Mary laughed. "He was just a kid. Don't think he'd started to shave yet. The police have been talking to Helen. She's scared. But I'm sure he'll show up again. Assholes like that always come out smelling like roses. Probably just wanted to get away from Helen. She's very clingy."

"That's what Sam said," Margaret responded.

Mary paused for a moment. "You and the detective..."

Margaret sighed. "I wish. He likes blueberry pie and his coffee black. That's about as intimate as we've gotten so far."

"Is he married?"

"I don't think so." Margaret paused for a moment. "I can't get the image of all those bodies out of my mind. I liked Joe Mackenzie."

Mary nodded. "I liked Joe too. He seemed like such a gentleman. Most of the men I have met have been such creeps, but you could always talk to Joe. He was a wonderful listener."

"Maybe he had nothing to say." Margaret smirked.

"Hank left," Mary added sadly.

"Good riddance," Margaret responded with a snarl. "He was using you."

"Well, he could be sweet. I can't believe that he's a writer. I thought he was something exotic, a secret agent or something. I must have been mad. He wasn't even very good in bed. But he was a warm body on a cold night. Do you think he was a writer? I mean, why was he so obsessed with these disappearances?"

"Makes you wonder, doesn't it?"

Mary looked up at Margaret. "You don't think?"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders. "He comes out here doing research on a book and everything goes to hell. Police don't like coincidences. I'll bet the police will be talking to him. They'll be talking to all of us."

"But we don't know anything."

"Everybody knows something." Margaret butted her cigarette out. "They just don't know it."

"Did Sam say anything about Joe, about how he reacted to all of this?"

Margaret smirked. "Joe denies everything. Of course, you'd expect that, wouldn't you?"

Mary was silent for a moment.

"If he is innocent, what else would he say?"

## All These Years

Ruth Gray sat in the couch of her living room looking out the front window and softly weeping. Her husband, Frank, sat next to her, his arm around her shoulder, comforting her.

"After all these years," she sniffled.

"We couldn't have known," Frank replied.

"I'd always hoped that he'd run off to Australia. Run off somewhere to start a new life. Every day the mailman showed up at the door, I prayed that we would get some news."

"I know," Frank responded in a soft, comforting voice.

"I dreamed that we had grandchildren," she continued. "I could see them in my dreams running around a backyard, playing games, sitting on my lap, telling me stories, coming up to me when they had skinned

their knee or when their father had spoken too harshly to them. Oh Frank, they were such lovely dreams. And I would see you, Frank, lifting your grandson high above your head, taking him to soccer games, babysitting for..."

Frank nodded, squeezing his wife's shoulder affectionately. "You talk in your sleep, dear."

Ruth looked up at her husband. "This is worse than the first time."

Frank nodded.

"I wish that we had never found out. I wish I had died first. What am I going to dream about now, Frank?"

### Returning to the Grave

Jack pushed the drink across the bar to Hank. Picking up the glass, he took a sip and put it back down.

"I guess we won't see much of you now," Jack said.

Hank shook his head. "The itch has gone," he said. "I'll go back to my desk. Mostly it's just working through my notes, getting everything in order. God, it feels like I'm returning to the grave. If the book does well, I'll make you famous, Jack." The big man laughed. "What was it that Warhol said about fame? Each of us is allotted fifteen minutes. What do you do after your fifteen minutes are used up?"

Hank gestured toward his glass. Jack poured him another drink.

"What would I do with fame?" the bartender asked, handing the big man his drink.

Turning on his stool, his back to the bar, Hank looked around the room. He knew that he would never see it again. What would be the point?

"I wish I'd spoken to this fellow Mackenzie," Hank said as he turned back to the bar. "To think that a serial killer was working in the plaza over there and I never met him. Strange, isn't it, how you can be right next to someone who will change your life and yet you never meet them? Life is filled with irony and odd coincidences."

"What about Mary?" Jack asked.

"That was ending." Hank smiled as he sipped at his scotch. "She bores easily. That's why I never told her who I was. I could tell right from the outset that the only thing that intrigued her about me was not knowing who I was. She loves strangers. More romantic. I guess we're all intrigued by what we don't know. We're not cut out to be gods. It would bore us to death. Mary will get by. She's still got her looks."

"She's had a tough life," Jack replied. "That kid of hers has been a trial. And now finding all this stuff about her ex, him maybe being found in that hole. Makes you question everything about your life. Nothing is what it appears. Mary will struggle through a lot of sleepless nights."

"But not alone, I suspect." Hank smirked and swallowed the remainder of his drink.

Helen

"I've never sat at a bar before." Helen smiled.

Jack grinned and handed her a glass of white wine.

"There's a first for everything," he said, polishing the top of the bar with a chamois. "No use sitting over in the corner every night by yourself."

"I always thought that women who sat at a bar were advertising, asking to be picked up. But it's sort of nice up here. I've got you to talk to and I can watch what's going on in the bar. I love to watch people. My fiancé would be so surprised if he saw me up here. He's such a prude. Thinks a lady shouldn't be in a bar by herself. I bought this new dress for him."

"It's very pretty." Jack returned her smile.

"Thank you, sir."

"Call me Jack."

Helen giggled. "Well, call me Helen, Jack. I'm expecting my fiancé to show up. He's late. I'm sure he'll show up. And if he doesn't, I might just chat up some other gentleman. Isn't that what you do in a bar?"

"Yes, Helen, that's one of the things you do."

"My fiancé was an ex-hockey player."

"You don't say." Jack smiled. "What's his name? Maybe I've heard of him."

"Joe Begin."

Jack shook his head. "Haven't heard of him. Did he play for the Leafs?"

Helen giggled and sipped at her wine. "To tell you the truth, he might have been telling me a little tale, to earn my favor. He's quite a storyteller. Well, that's his job, isn't it?"

Jack smiled.

"He's a salesman." Helen giggled. "That's how I met him. He came into our office one day and sold my boss a shipload of supplies. He's very handsome. You might have seen him in here a few times. We were here

together one night. There was a giant sitting at your bar with Mary. Mary works with me in the office."

The smile left Jack's face.

"Wasn't he one of...?"

Helen shook her head. "Oh, no. He wasn't one of the bodies. He left town for a few days. He has a regular route. I'm expecting him back at any time. That's why I bought this new dress. I'm sure tonight will be the night."

Ed

Ed sat in his wheelchair by his window and stared out into the bright sunlight of the afternoon.

"So it's come to nothing?" he asked.

Sam Kelly leaned against the wall beside the window, his hands in his trouser pockets. "Someone had dumped an old bed down there at one time and it had lodged itself against the walls. Everything else just piled on top of it. We thought for sure we'd hit bottom. All on tape. You could see bones, lots of bones underneath the garbage. It was the most hopeless feeling watching on the monitor. Two fellas went down there on ropes. Volunteers from 22 Division. Herb and Jimmy. I don't even know their last names."

"It's tough," Ed said, shaking his head.

"One of them had just grabbed onto a sleeping bag when everything started to shake. There was a gurgling sound and then a pop. And it was gone. The whole mess disappeared into the depths of that hole. One of the ropes snapped. Frank was gone. Felt like the bottom of my stomach had dropped out. Jimmy held onto the sleeping bag for a moment and then it unraveled like a role of Christmas ribbon into the darkness."

"You got...?" the old man asked.

The detective nodded. "We pulled Jimmy out."

"And now?"

"Nothing. We're left with nothing except what we have on tape. The captain doesn't want to spend any more money. There's talk of trying to retrieve Frank's body, but who knows how deep we would have to go."

Ed began to laugh, coughing phlegm, then choking. The detective smacked the old man on the back.

"Thanks," Ed said with a smile. He looked up at the detective. "Well, that's a hell of a way to end a career. What are you going to do now that you're retiring? Got any hobbies?"

Sam shook his head.

"And your girl?" Ed asked. "The waitress in the restaurant."

Sam shook his head and smiled.

### Cloverdale Parking Lot

"What if they start asking me questions?" Wiggy cried, sucking on a cigarette, unable to stand in one place, twirling around the cars in the parking lot, slamming his fist on their hoods, clenching his fists.

Terry leaned against the hood of the Chev.

"Calm down," he said. "I'll call Frank later and let him know how things stand. They've got no reason to suspect us of anything."

"That was my little brother's sleeping bag we wrapped him in," Wiggy pointed his cigarette at Terry. "Johnny was a friend of mine. I didn't want nothing to do with it. I just went along for the ride."

"I told you to steal a bag from the Sally Ann," Terry cried.

"Well, they didn't have any. What was I supposed to do, knit a bag?"

"If you hadn't let go of the rope," Terry barked. "If you had just held on."

"My arms were sore. That fucking faggot was so heavy. We shouldn't have gotten him drunk. The bartender is sure to remember that we were drinking in there that night... He should have checked our ID. What's he doing serving minors? How am I going to explain this to my mother? She's already pissed off at my suspension from school. And my old man will have a field day. He'll be ranting on me. *I told you so, I told you so, didn't I tell you so?* That's all I'm going to hear... Jesus, it's not like we intended to kill Johnny... You know, he wasn't such a bad guy once you got to know him."

Wiggy collapsed on the hood of the Chev. Terry looked at him.

"That hole sure was deep," Terry said, dropping his cigarette on the asphalt and grinding it out with his shoe. He looked around the parking lot. There were always security guards to worry about. They were going to have to return Adelle's Chev.

"We should fill the Chev up before we return it," Terry added.

Wiggy looked at Terry with a puzzled expression on his face.

"That hole was deep," he said. "Did you hear Johnny hit the bottom?"

"What are you getting at?" Terry asked.

"Maybe there ain't no bottom. Maybe Johnny just kept on dropping." Wiggy flicked his cigarette high in the air over a nearby Volkswagon. There was a look of terrible optimism in his eyes.

Terry looked at Wiggy, stood up, and snapped his fingers. "That's it! You're a genius. All we gotta say is that we left Johnny after the pub. We can say we went over to Adelle's. She'll give us an alibi. They're not going to suspect a bunch of teenagers of murder."

"You think that'll work?" Wiggy asked.

"Why not?" Terry responded. "As long as we keep our stories straight and no one talks too much. If they don't find a body, there ain't no crime."

"I never liked Johnny anyway," Wiggy stated, climbing to his feet. "He didn't have any respect for women."

Good-bye

Sam Kelly pulled the car over to the curb. Margaret turned toward him.

"Thanks for the lift home." Margaret smiled.

Sam nodded.

"Is it all over now?" she asked. "Are they still going to try and find out what happened to all those people?"

Sam stared out the front window of the police car.

"Nothing is ever over," he said. "Too much has happened to drop everything. But it's over for me. I'll put in for early retirement. The way I've handled things, there won't be any argument."

"What will you do?"

Sam laughed bitterly. "Don't know. Don't really know anything but police work. The future," Sam hesitated for a moment before continuing, "seems pretty dark."

Margaret smiled and patted Sam on the hand.

"The future is supposed to be dark. It hasn't happened yet."

Sam looked at the woman sitting beside him. He took her hand, squeezed softly, and then released it. "Thanks," he said.

Margaret waited for a moment, then opened the car door. She turned to the detective.

"Would you like to come in for a coffee?"

Sam paused, then smiled.

"Another time, maybe."

Margaret nodded then stepped out of the car. About to leave, she turned back to the car and leaned in the open window.

"Sam, you be careful. If you need someone to talk to, you know where I am."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Telephone Booth

"Why are you so sure it'll work?" Frank leaned against the side of the telephone booth, gripping the receiver in his hand.

"Where are you calling from?" Terry's voice asked.

"A telephone booth," Frank responded, turning to look out across Bloor Street. "Across the street from the plaza. I didn't want to talk in my house. My mother's always listening in on the other line. If my parents even get a whiff of what we've been doing, I'm a goner. No college. Heck, they'll kick me out of the house. I don't know why I let you guys talk me into it in the first place. Maybe if we told them it was an accident. The rope slipped. We only wanted to scare... "

"Look," Terry said, "just keep the story simple, just like I told you. Don't elaborate on it. No extra details. If the cops try to probe deeper just say that you'd had a few beers and you were out of it. And whatever you do, don't go telling them about any accidents."

"Terry?" Frank asked, his head bent as if he were looking into the receiver.

"Ya."

Frank hesitated. "Did you know Johnny's folks?"

Terry was silent for a minute.

"No."

"I wonder how they're taking it." The volume of Frank's voice began to decrease. He was now almost whispering. Frank looked around again to make sure that no one was listening. "My parents would be pretty upset. I don't know if my folks could stand up to it. My dad's had heart problems. Are Johnny's parents strong enough? I don't want any more bodies on my conscience."

"I told you, Frank, I don't know Johnny's parents. We've got to stay focused on our plan."

"Maybe the cops won't even talk to us," Frank said.

"They'll be talking to everyone," Terry said. "This is real big, Frank. Johnny's parents are going to want answers. We just gotta wait it out. What's wrong, Frank?"

"Nothing. Just having trouble breathing. My stomach is in knots."

"Calm down. Take a deep breath."

"Okay," Frank replied. "I'm trying. You're sure Adelle will give us an alibi?"

"I already talked to her. We won't have any trouble there."

"Do you trust Wiggy?" Frank asked. "He ain't going to be able to keep his mouth shut. You know what he's like."

"Wiggy will be quiet. For now. He's just as scared as we are. Later, we can take care of him."

"What?" Frank asked. "What does take care of him mean, Terry? Should we go to the funeral to see Johnny's body? I don't think I could do that, Terry. I couldn't look at that face again. I just couldn't."

"Stay calm, Frank. There won't be any body. Nobody is going to look down that hole."

"Terry?"

"Ya, Frank?"

"Does this make us murderers? I don't know if I could live thinking I was a murderer. I want to have kids some day. How could I raise kids knowing that I was a murderer? How could you keep a secret like that from your wife? It would come out. Eventually everything comes out."

"No, it doesn't. Some things disappear. You'll forget about it, Frank. One day you'll have trouble even remembering that all this really happened, that it wasn't just a bad dream. But for now you've got to bury it some place deep inside. You've got to put it some place where no one can ever find it."

"Oh, shit!" Frank cried.

"What?" Terry asked.

"That cop, the detective. The one that's been asking questions."

"What about him?" Terry asked.

"He's right in front of me," Frank said. "With his back to me. He's bending over to get a newspaper. He's beginning..."

Frank knelt down and smiled. The receiver slipped out of his hands and twisted at the end of its chord. His face turned pale. Suddenly there was no more guilt. He smiled. His last breath slipped out of his lips in a low whistle.

"Frank!" Terry's voice cried from the receiver. "Frank, what's happening? Frank!"

The End

Jack straightened out the glasses on the shelf. He turned around.

"You were saying?" the young officer sitting at the bar asked.

"You didn't know Sam?"

The young officer shook his head.

"Sam had your job for years around here. Knew almost everyone. Was always a regular here. After hours. Never drank on duty. You want a refill?"

The officer glanced around the empty room and nodded. Jack drew a draught of beer and placed it on the bar.

"I guess it was his biggest case. He was never the same afterward. Who would be? He retired a few months later. It was Sam's habit to walk up the corner there, pick up the paper, come in here for a drink. We'd discuss whatever was making the headlines. One day he comes in here, white as a ghost. Doesn't say anything. Just asks for a drink. Downs it, then asks for a second. Tells me he just discovered a body on the sidewalk. Not half an hour before. The guy, an old guy named Frank Gray, was lying on the sidewalk, his mouth open, his lips barely moving. Sam hadn't noticed him standing in the telephone booth. A whistling sound had attracted Sam's attention, which is why he turned around. The receiver was dangling. Sam looked down on old Frank. He said he was as gray as the sidewalk. He knelt down to feel his pulse. He couldn't find one. There was someone yelling on the receiver. Frank grabbed it and called for help. Whoever it was, hung up. Sam phoned emergency and waited. Sam kept blaming himself for the old man's death. Said he should have used mouth to mouth, but instead he just stood there, frozen, waiting. Sam said it felt like he waited an eternity. After the ambulance left, a cop car showed up. They questioned Sam. I guess they didn't recognize him. After the cops left, Sam said he stood there alone for the longest time, just staring at the sidewalk. There was a stain on the cement. It was all that was left of the old man."

The young officer shook his head. "I never heard that story before."

"Well," Jack said, "you're new to the area. It's mostly a quiet peaceful place except for that one summer. Most of the young officers that come in here complain that there isn't enough action. I don't tell them about those times. I figure they'll hear about it sooner or later."

"Why did you tell me?" the officer asked.

Jack shook his head. "I don't know."

The officer took a swallow of beer and then stepped away from the bar.

"By the way," he asked before he left the bar, "whatever happened to Sam?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. After that day with the old man, I never saw him again."

THE END

#### About the Author

David Halliday graduated from the University of Windsor with a Master's degree in philosophy. For several years he lived in Belgium where he married, and with the assistance of his wife, gave birth to their son, Michael. He has since returned to Canada, and now lives in Toronto where he and his wife are blessed with two more children, Katrijn and Natasha.

Mr. Halliday has published poems, short stories, plays, art works in reviews, and publications across the United States and Canada. He has published several books including: *murder* by Coach House Press (the 2002 EPPIE winner for Poetry), *The Black Bird* by Press Porcepic, *Making Movies* by The Porcupine's Quill, and of course *Sleeping Beauty* by LTDBooks, the 2004 Independent Publisher Award winner and EPPIE Award winner in the Best Horror categories.

If you enjoyed this book then have a look at his award winning book *murder*

## From the same author on Feedbacks

murder (2010)

Before there was the Simpson trial, before there was Judge Judy, there was murder. Murder is a book that unwinds like a movie with each poem a scene. We open with an introduction to the killer followed by the killer's introduction to the victim at the murder scene. We read a report on the victim and then are introduced to the murder scene, the body at the morgue, the meeting of friends and relatives at the funeral. The police round up a group of suspects. An innocent man is charged and brought to trial. The judge, the prosecution, the defense lawyer, the spectators in the courtroom are introduced. Witnesses are brought forward who reveal their version of the events surrounding the murder. A judgment is brought down. The judge washes his hands of everything to do with the accused and turns him over to the mob who crucify the innocent man. After this horrendous lynching, the mob disbands and the world returns to its innocence.

THE ADVENTURES OF FRED AND ME Episode 1 DIVORCE AND KITTY LITTER (2011)

A surreal comic novel (in the tradition of magic realism) about a young writer in the throes of a messy marital breakup and his subsequent drifting into madness. Plus his talking cat, Fred. This is a series of four books, each one an exciting episode.

THE ADVENTURES OF FRED AND ME Episode 2 THE END STARTS JUST BEFORE THE BEGINNING (2011)

A surreal comic novel (in the tradition of magic realism) about a young writer in the throes of a messy marital breakup and his subsequent drifting into madness. Plus his talking cat, Fred. This is episode 2 in a series of four books, each one thrill packed.

THE ADVENTURES OF FRED AND ME Episode 3 REALITY STRIKES BACK (2011)

A surreal comic novel (in the tradition of magic realism) about a young writer in the throes of a messy marital breakup and his subsequent drifting into madness. Plus his talking cat, Fred. This is episode 3 in which me finds himself the main suspect in the murder of a young girl.

THE ADVENTURES OF FRED AND ME Episode 4 LIFE IS ALL ITS CRACKED UP TO BE (2011)

A surreal comic novel (in the tradition of magic realism) about a young writer in the throes of a messy marital breakup and his subsequent drifting into madness. Plus his talking cat, Fred. This is episode 4 in which me (that's his name disguised as David Halliday) follows Nick Charles (of Thin Man fame) into the bowels of the earth, faces death, and something worse.

Making Movies (2011)

The magic of film is recreated, taken apart, examined and lovingly satirized in an unusual work of fiction. David Halliday imagines a BBC documentary about 'the well known Canadian film maker Samuel Bremmer'. We see moments of the films themselves; we hear the words of the actors, the designers and the commentary of the director, Samuel Bremmer. The illusion of film, and how it is created against a backdrop of money problems, personality clashes, jealousies, ambitions, love and vanity. Originally published by Press Porcepic.

Bicycle Thieves (2011)

It was the nineteen fifties. The suburbs. Septic tanks. Cape Cod houses. Row on row. New schools. Bullies. Mad boys. Black and white television. Aerials. Dogs running free. Pond hockey. Cigarettes. Teenage crushes. Bicycle Thieves. And death.

Somewhere in the 1970s (2011)

No one was going to tell them what life was about. Or tell them how to party. They were free. And arrogant. And young. It was the 1970s and everyone was lost.



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