



*down in the dirt*  
revealing all your  
dirty little secrets

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Scars Cover art of the Senate Square  
Cathedral in Helsinki, Finland.

## Between the sheets

Vincent Spada

So there she was  
between the sheets  
and on the other side  
an empty spot  
just waiting

# The Wilcox Mystery

Pat Dixon

3

Seven children, two boys and five girls, giggled their way up the patched, uneven blacktop drive to the lighted side door. The two boys, brothers, were pirates with numerous scars, bruises, sores, and wounds painted on their hands, necks, cheeks, noses, and foreheads. As for the girls, they were a ghost clad in a stained tan flannel sheet, a burglar in a pullover with black and white stripes, a ninja in dark blue tights, a witch with green food-coloring on her face and hands, and a Catwoman or, given the fact she was but seven and a half, a Catgirl. The smaller of the pirates—he with the eye patch covering half of his left eye—pressed the doorbell five times in quick succession and stepped back, clutching a large plastic bag of day-glow orange with both hands.

At the foot of the drive, one of three young mothers shivered and glanced at her wristwatch.

“Are we having fun yet?” she asked her companions.

“Push it again, Michael!” said the blonde beside her. “Sometimes they’re in another part of the house and don’t hear you the first time!”

Michael reached for the doorbell with his right thumb and suddenly leaped backwards with a squeal of fright. The six other children also started and backed up slightly, then began to laugh.

The blonde was halfway up the drive by the time Michael joined the laughter and stepped forward with his goody-bag spread open.

“What is it, Tam?” said a young brunette in a short fox-fir jacket, exhaling a cloud of mentholated smoke.

Tammy, the blonde, waved her hand without looking, indicating that things were all right and she would explain in a minute or two.

“Trick or treat, mith-ter!” said the ninja, jumping around on the drive as if she were karate-chopping a dozen invisible enemies.

“Trick or treat, mister!” called out four other voices.

“Candy will rot your teeth and make you fat—and totally hairless,” said the balding man who squinted at them toothily. “I didn’t know that when I was little, and look what happened to *me*! And *I’m* only twelve years old!”

“No! No, you’re not! No!” said three voices with uncertain laughter.

“Yup—only twelve—I just turned twelve last week! Candy—my birthday cake and candy—they did this to me!” he said, grinning.

They looked at him uncertainly, while he frowned theatrically and reached into the right side pocket of his tweed jacket.

“Anybody here care for—quarters?” he asked, grinning again.

“Me, mister! Me—me—me!” came the answering chorus of high voices.

Tammy, her arms folded, smiled as her daughter said, “Four quarters is a dollar, mister!” stepping forward with her orange bag wide open.

“What sort of tricks did you have in case I didn’t have a treat for you?” asked the balding man.

“Thoaping your th’creen door, mith-ter,” said the ninja.

“T-P-ing your house!” giggled the taller pirate.

“And repainting your car, my pretty one! Bright pink! And your little dog, too!” snapped the witch.

“OoOOooh! OooOOooOOooh!” moaned the ghost. “Salting your flower beds—so nothing will grow in them—ever again!”

“Well,” said the balding man, dropping four quarters into each child’s bag, “*that* certainly is a wonderful array of tricks! I guess I’d better pay you all pretty handsomely to protect my property, don’t you think?”

Tammy grinned. “What do you say, Amber?”

“Thanks, mister!”

“Thank you! Thanks, Mr. Wilcox! Thank you, thir! Thank you! Thanks, mister,” echoed the others, almost in unison.

At the end of the drive, the smoker tossed her half finished cigarette onto the Wilcox lawn, exhaled, and asked, “So why did they scream when he opened the door, Tam?”

“He had a rubber gorilla mask on—you know the kind—with all sorts of long black and gray hairs attached to it.”

“Hunh! Ol’ Wilcox always was a weird old—cluck.”

“I s’pose so. But the kids seemed to enjoy it once they got over the first shock.”

“Isn’t his wife some kind of cripple or something?”

“Yeah, car wreck, I think.”

“No—it’s MS. She’s been going downhill for the past six years,” said the other blonde, who had not yet spoken.

“Really? How would you know, Steff? You live—oh—three blocks away.”

“My husband works in Doc Wilcox’s department over at Witherspoon,” said Stephanie.

“Oh. Did you know eating apple cores causes MS? One of the girls in my high school was always eating her apple cores, and *she* got MS,” said Tammy.

“Hunh—I’d heard some place it was measles germs that caused it. That’s really interesting,” said the brunette.

Stephanie darted glances at each of her companions and said nothing.

“I bet a bunch of things cause things, an’ scientists really don’t have a clue,” said Tammy.

“*That’s* for damn sure. Anyways,” shrugged the brunette, “I say we just do three more houses and wrap this up for another year. What d’y’ say?”

“I say let’s make it just *two* more, Heather. Okay by you, Steff?” said Tammy.

2

“How many children were there, Harold?” asked Brenda Wilcox as her husband reached in his shirt pocket and retrieved his glasses.

“Four this time, Hon—each one cuter than a bug’s back molars.”

“Do you still have enough quarters in case any more come by?”

“I got twenty rolls of ‘em at the bank last Friday, special for tonight. If I ever run short—and there’s little danger of that—I can always hand out pennies, dimes, and nickels. Lord knows, we have enough loose change around the house. And then, if I run out of that, I can start handing out dollar bills.”

“What kinds of costumes did they have on?”

“Oh—one was a devil, and one was a hobo—not much of a costume, just jeans and a torn sweater and a ball cap, with a little mud on her cheeks—and one was a ghost—that’s twelve ghosts tonight—big night for the ghosts, y’know—and one was—umm—a cowboy! Now there’s something you don’t see every day—a cowboy trying to scare people in Connecticut. Sounds like something Mark Twain might’ve dreamed up. And—oh—a Godzilla monster. That was the best costume of the batch, for my money. Get it? For my money? And—I don’t know—they’re all blurring together at this point. But they were all cute, especially when I slowly opened the door an’ then poked my head around with my King Kong mask on—an’ gently roared at ‘em.”

“You don’t think it would be too scary for the littler ones, Harold, do you?”

“Too scary? Why would I think that, Brenda? Nah. Kids love this sort of thing. Later on, they’ll be paying twenty bucks at the movie theater just to get half the joy of a good scare or two. Whoa—duty calls yet once more!”

In response to an insistent ding-dong-ding-dong-ding-donging, Harold Wilcox took off his eyeglasses, donned his gorilla mask, and crouched behind their side door.

When he returned to the kitchen where Brenda sat in her wheelchair, he said, “I’ve shut off the porch light. It’s getting dark now, and the only ones that’ll be out are the teens in high school who aren’t supervised an’ who don’t have any costumes on or any real business being out, to my way o’ thinking. Oh—beans!”

“What is it, Harold?”

“My damned glasses! I don’t have ‘em here in my pocket where I always put them! Cripes Almighty! All I can think is they must’ve fallen out of my pocket into one of the damned candy bags this last batch o’ kids had. You know, when I bent over to drop quarters into their bags, my glasses must’ve fallen out.”

“Maybe they fell on the carpet—or on the doormat or the step. You could check,” said Brenda.

“Always the optimist. Well, I think I would’ve heard them fall, but I’ll go check, just to see if you’re right or not.”

A minute later he returned.

"Nope. No luck tonight. And those damned things'll cost me maybe \$50 to replace. Cripes! Lucky I've got an old pair to tide me over till I get the new ones."

"Maybe you put them in one of your other pockets. Did you check them?"

"Did I check them? No-o-o-o. Why would I do that? I am in the habit of putting my glasses *only* into my shirt pocket, Brenda. Invariably. No—other—pocket. But here, right before your very eyes, I *will* check my other pockets—just to see whether you're correct—or not."

He elaborately patted his trouser pockets and then reached inside all of them, even removing his billfold from his left hip pocket to check inside that.

"Wouldn't your jacket be a more likely place to start?" asked his wife as Harold put away his billfold.

"More likely? I don't see why. Oh—oh—this suspense is almost unendurable, Brenda. Will I or won't I find my glasses inside my jacket pocket—inside *one* of my jacket pockets?" He lowered his voice to a soft nasal monotone. "Well, sports fans, as Professor Wilcox approaches the fifth pocket, the crowd all crane their collective necks to ascertain the outcome of his endeavors. No! Nothing in the fifth pocket! The bald professor pauses to consider his next move. Will he try the sixth pocket? Yes! His left hand is moving in that direction and—and—*no!* Nothing there either! Just two more pockets, sports fans—the outside left breast pocket and the inside right breast pocket. Gosh, fans, we *hope* the F.C.C. won't fine us for saying 'breast' on television. Wilcox's hand is slowly approaching—"

"Harold—is this amusing to you?"

"Brenda—you mean it's *not* amusing to you?"

"I get the impression that you're somehow mocking me with this performance of yours."

"Perhaps you're just a little paranoid, Brenda. I'm just—I'm merely venting some of my justifiable frustration at losing a \$50 pair of good glasses—and losing the time it will take me to get them replaced. Do you know what that represents?"

"About two hours? One for your salary and one to make the phone call and then make a little stop-off after work?"

"Well—yes. But I hate throwing good money away like that. It's one thing to hand out fifty bucks to little kids—or five hundred to the—the charity—for research. I guess Oscar was right—'No good deed goes unpunished.' Just thrown away, plain and simple. Ol' plain and simple, that's me!"

"Maybe one of the mothers will bring your glasses back tomorrow when they're found inside one of the candy bags."

"Maybe—? Yes, I suppose there is that optimistic view to take. About one chance in fifty, I'd say. Even if they find the glasses, how many people would be conscientious enough to track down their owner? Not blooming likely, I'd say."

"Maybe you're right, Harold. Time will tell, I guess."

"Let me get a pen and write that down. Hmm. 'Time—will—tell.' Hmm. I

really like that expression. I surely do not want to forget that one.”

1

“Brenda—I’m home,” called Harold dully from the side door as he entered their house four days later.

“In here, Hon,” said Brenda Wilcox from the bathroom.

Harold glanced at the half-open bathroom door and thought, *I could almost have guessed that.*

“I ran into two of your ol’ pals, Doug Gould and Nick Keating, in the parking lot at school, Brenda. They both asked me how you’re doing these days—and then asked me to be sure and say hi to you for them.”

“Thanks, Hon. That was nice of ‘em. What did you tell them?”

Harold paused, recalling that he had said things were getting worse and that Brenda was “one of the roughly ten percent that get, you know, really—difficult—emotionally—in fact—a bit paranoid much of the time—and now she thinks I’m, well, having affairs with other women—like three or four of the young mothers that brought kids by our house on Hallowe’en—and Lanie Golden here at the library—and even that Korean, uh, woman—Lee—that works at the News Depot—where I buy us out Sunday New York *Times*.” And then Brenda’s former colleagues, professors in the Engineering Department, had both expressed brief words of ambiguous sympathy.

“Oh—I just told them you’re bearing up bravely, of course. Why do you ask?”

“Just making conversation from the can, Hon. I’m almost done.”

“I picked up my new glasses on the way home. I’m trying out a new kind of lens that’ll act like sunglasses when I go outdoors. Maybe it’ll save my old peepers so I can grade another fifty-thousand essay exams before I retire—if I live that long.”

“Be with you in a minute,” she said. “I’ve got some good news for you, Harold.”

*Like you want us to have sex again in December—to celebrate the coming of the winter solstice?* he thought.

“What is it, Honey Pet? Did my publisher phone and say they want me to do a third edition of my *Intro to Physics* text? That would give us a few much needed jingles for our jeans, what with all the Christmas charity drives coming up and all.”

“Almost that good, Harold—I found your glasses.”

“Found them? You mean somebody returned them? Do tell. Just in time, too. Now *they* can serve as my back-up pair for when I lose or break these new ones.”

“No, nobody returned them, Harold. They were here all the time. We just didn’t see them.”

“Really.”

“Yes. The mailman was knocking on the side door around one o’clock today,

wanting me to sign for something, and when I was there by the door doing that, I happened to look up—and there they were.”

“You looked ‘up’ and saw them?”

“Yes. Through the glass shelf of the *étagère*—right beside our big Rosenthal rabbit. I asked the mailman to hand them down to me, and he did. You must have put them there when you were answering the door for the last trick-or-treaters—when you were going to put on your gorilla mask for them. Isn’t that great? It’s like found money, isn’t it?”

“I always put my glasses into my shirt pocket when I take them off, Brenda. I’ve told you that. It’s almost a reflexive action. It’s invariable.”

“Well, maybe it’s invariable *most* of the time, but *this* time was an exception.”

“Really—wasn’t it one of those snotty, overly pampered, manicured, pedicured, botoxed, and silicone-implanted wealthy young mothers that came by in a fit of—a fit of unaccustomed honesty—and unaccustomed charity—after nearly a week?”

“Do you want me to lie to you, Harold? If that’s what you want me to do, just give me a minute, and I’ll make up a really good one for you.”

“No, no, no, pet. No, I don’t know what got into me just now. Some days I get to feeling a teensy bit cranky—in my old age.”

“Oh, Harold—you’re only forty-two. That’s not old.”

*And you’re only thirty-eight, he thought, and we live like a couple of elderly non-\*\*\*\*in’ celibates year in, year out—PET. And I KNOW I put those glasses in my shirt pocket—but what I don’t know is why the hell you’d LIE to me about something as simple an’ insignificant as how they REALLY got back home.*



# THEY SAY MY FATHER IS A SERIAL KILLER

Mel Waldman

They say my father's a serial killer. It's a damn lie! Yesterday, he swore to me he's innocent. Of course, he's innocent. My father's the gentlest man I know. A sweet, kind human being. He's been framed! I know. He'd never kill Baby!

It happened before. Years ago, when my older brother died, they suspected that Father murdered him. Of course, there was only circumstantial evidence. That's all there ever was-is. But in the end, they could not charge him with anything. The medical examiner deemed my brother's death a suicide.

It also happened when Mother died in a car accident, a year before my older brother's death. They suspected Father. Claimed the brakes had been tampered with. Yet there was no proof that Father had altered the brakes.

Now that Baby's dead, there's just the three of us-Father, my twin brother, and I. If Father goes to prison, what will happen to my twin and me? What shall we do?

Father's on trial for Baby's murder. There's no evidence...it's all circumstantial. Right?

The prosecutor announces the discovery of new evidence. The knife that Baby was stabbed with has been found. Father's DNA is on it. Of course, it was Father's knife. So what? But they've got Father's blood on the weapon too. He's been framed!

Father is convicted of Baby's murder. He will spend the rest of his life in prison unless... They will try him for the other alleged murders. They plan to seek the death penalty.

We visit Father in prison. Disheveled, he looks like a Bowery bum. He has fallen into a deep depression. My twin and I reassure him we believe in his innocence. We see a faint smile on his face that instantly vanishes.

At home, my fraternal twin and I smile wickedly at each other.

"My beautiful sister," he whispers.

"My handsome brother," I reply.

"My lover," he adds.

"My lover," I echo.

"What shall we do?" he asks.

“Make love!” I reply. “Again and again and...”

When Mother threatened to reveal our delicious, dirty secret, my twin brother *fixed* her car. He’s a mechanical genius!

Then a year later, our older brother caught us in bed together and threatened to tell Father. I love guns! Always enjoyed playing with my toy guns. When I got older, I learned how to shoot a real gun. Yeah. I’m a tomboy. And a femme fatale too!

I met with my prudish brother alone and pretended I wanted to talk with him. We talked. And then I shot him point blank in the head. Made it look like a suicide. I’m good at such things.

It was tough killing Baby-only 13 years old. He was becoming a man and would have been an Adonis too. But he caught us in bed! Pretty Baby threatened to tell Father too.

We killed him together. My twin restrained his arms, as I stabbed Baby to death. It was quite thrilling! I had this spontaneous, explosive orgasm!

Tomorrow, we’ll plant new evidence against Father for the other two murders. We’re quite good at this. Father will get the death penalty!

In 30 days, we’ll turn 18. We’ll be free, without any parental or adult restraints. In the meantime, Grandmother will live with us for a month. She’s as dumb as Father. She’ll never figure it out. Doesn’t have a clue. Deceiving her will be a piece of cake. Life is beautiful! Sexy and beautiful!

#### POSTSCRIPT I

This morning I discovered I’m 2 months pregnant. Shall I abort *it*? Kill *it* at birth or later on? Or shall I love *it*? I’m a bit ambivalent about Motherhood.

Well, it’ll be a joint decision. My twin will know what we must do about the baby and the seedy doc who knows.

#### POSTSCRIPT II

Tomorrow the trial continues. We’ll be there-to give our beloved Father our Janus-faced support.

We know he’s innocent. Of course, we have perfect knowledge of his innocence, just as we know he’ll be spending his final days on Death Row.

We know!

# PAULINE AND MELISSA

J. J. Brearton

## I

Melissa Adzu thought she was wild. She thought she was hot stuff. She owned a soda machine, had kissed a boy, and was only 13 years old.

Melissa didn't know wild, though, until she met Pauline Meltdown. Of course, Meltdown was not her real name. But then, what was her name? And who knew it?

Pauline was the answer to the question of whatever happens to those child stars. They run away.

Pauline had run away.

Pauline met Melissa when she checked into the C-Nick Motel in Bell Harbor, Maine.

Melissa's parents owned the motel. She was keeping an eye on the office while her father was out cutting the grass. Her mother was in town shopping.

Melissa's mother never left her in charge of the office by herself. She was afraid of what might happen. But as Melissa often said, to no avail, "What can happen?"

Her father would sometimes ask her to watch the office when Melissa's mother was not around. It was usually only for a few minutes. Sometimes he'd be called away to fix a pipe, an air-conditioner, or something else. He really didn't like working in the office.

It was a cool morning, the first of July, and Melissa was in the office, trying to remember what to do if someone came in, making sure her hair looked O.K., and ready to say, "Yeah, I know. I'm young looking for 18. Everybody says that. I'm going to Dartmouth in the fall." She rehearsed this in the mirror. Then she straightened out the postcard rack near the front door.

She had just finished the bottom row, and spun the rack around, when a dark haired girl in sunglasses rushed into the office and went past her up to the front desk.

"You got our reservation?" the girl said, to no one in particular. She looked behind the counter and rang the bell twice.

"Yes?" Melissa said, a bit unnerved, as she hurried behind the counter. "And your name?"

"Blakely. There are three of us."

"Three of you?" She fumbled through the reservation cards for a moment. "I don't see any Blakely. No B's at all. When did you call?"

"Well, my father called. He said he did. He's forgetful. He's been so busy. I see your 'vacancy' sign is up. Do you have a room?"

Melissa looked over the keys. There were five left. The calendar showed two reservations, "Yes, I think we—"

She stopped short. The girl had gone to the door and was saying something to somebody outside. Melissa couldn't see who it was. The girl came back in.

"So, do you have anything?" she asked.

"Yes," Melissa said. "A nice room with two single beds. But you said you had three in your party."

"Yeah, but I'll just use a cot. You have a cot, right?"

"Sure," Melissa said. "We can have a cot put in."

"Great," the girl said. "How much?"

"Ninety-eight dollars, plus tax."

"O.K."

"Just fill this out," Melissa said, handing her a registration card. "Cash or credit?"

"Cash," the girl said. She pulled out two one hundred dollar bills from a tiny black sequined handbag and put them on the counter.

"One night?" Melissa asked.

The girl was staring out the window.

"Oh, yeah," she said. "Here." She pulled out two more hundred-dollar bills. "Three nights." She paced the office from the counter to the door and back.

Melissa handed her the key to number 5. The girl grabbed it and rushed out the door.

"Hey," Melissa said. "Your change!"

Before Melissa could run after her, a very tall well-dressed man stepped into the office. He was an albino. He was handsome, but yet at the same time, there was something very scary about him.

"I need a room," he said. "Got any vacancies?"

"Sure," Melissa said.

"I need a room for 2 girls. Friends of mine."

"Oh, sure," Melissa said. "Just fill out this card."

In a few moments he had filled out the registration card and handed it back. It listed two people, "Tawny Dawn" and "Bunny Welcome," as the guests. No car was listed.

"No car?" Melissa asked.

"No," the man said. "I'll be back to get them in a few days."

"Oh, sure," Melissa said. "How many days?"

"Three days."

She figured out the charge, and he gave her a credit card. In a few moments, he was gone.

Melissa's father came in from the game room downstairs.

"So, how did it go?" he asked.

"Great," she said. "Two rooms. Three nights each."

"Wow," he said. "You did great!"

Melissa bit her lip.

“What’s the matter honey-bunch?”

“One of the guests, in number five, forgot her change. Oh, and she wants a cot.”

“Bring her the change. Bring her the cot. What’s the problem?”

Melissa brightened up. “No problem. No problem at all!”

She grabbed the money and ran out the door. Frankly, she was glad to get out. The office thing was a headache. She wanted to get outside and back to her usual jobs, skimming bugs off the water in the pool and keeping the soda machine full.

## II

### The Cot

Melissa heard music when she got to the storage room. She couldn’t figure where it was coming from. It started getting louder as she rolled the cot down the sidewalk to Room 5. When she got to the picture window of Room 5, through a little break in the curtains, Melissa saw the girl she had given the key to. She was dancing, by herself, in front of the full length mirror hung up on the outside of the bathroom door. She was a very good dancer. The song ended and a disc jockey from one of the local radio stations came on. Melissa knocked on the door. The radio went silent, and the girl answered the door.

“Your cot!” Melissa announced.

“Awesome,” the girl said. “Thanks.”

Melissa got it through the door and wheeled it near the front of the room. “Want me to open it up?”

“Open it up? No, I can do that.”

“O.K., great,” Melissa said. “See you.”

“Wait a minute,” the girl said. “Here.” She handed Melissa a \$10 bill.

“Wow,” Melissa said. “Thanks.” She skipped out the door down to the pool. Suddenly, she remembered the change she was supposed to deliver—the money left over from paying for the motel room. She ran back to the room and knocked on the door. The girl opened the door.

“Your change. I forgot.”

They both laughed as Melissa handed her the money.

“See you.” Melissa said, and ran back to the pool.

## III

### Bug Skimmer

Momentarily startled, bug skimmer in hand, Melissa stood by the side of the pool while Tawny and Bunny came through the wire fence door. Their spectacularly curvy, gorgeous bodies were clad in skimpy bikinis. They headed for the plastic lounge chairs.

Bunny waved and said, “Hi!”

Melissa waved back and said, "Good morning."

Within a few minutes, the doors of some of the other occupied rooms began opening.

Baldheaded, wrinkled old men, part of the usual cast of characters at the C-Nick Motel, carried their beach towels to the pool, with a little spring in their step, and a sparkle in their eye.

#### IV On The Rocks

Pauline was out on the rocks, well into the ocean, and had a canvas propped up on a boulder. She painted a glistening sea while the sun rose. Far off to her left, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, she saw someone else. It was a large black man. He had an easel. He was also painting.

Pauline worked for an hour but was distracted by her curiosity. She put her canvas and painting supplies in a plastic bag and walked down the rocky coast. Coming up behind the man she saw that he was painting an ocean scene. Of course, she thought to herself, what else. But his painting was magnificent. He was a gigantic man. She estimated that he must be six foot six or ten, something like that, and big, maybe 300 pounds. He painted with a tiny brush, with careful, light touches. She noticed a boat in the painting and looked out to sea. There was nothing there. She walked up next to him.

"Where's the boat?" She said.

He looked up at her with not much surprise and said, "Nantucket Sound."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes. Just getting the colors. Same colors. Same ocean. Same sun."

"Right," she said. She stood for a while looking at the painting, looking at the ocean. He had the colors right.

"Would you take a look at what I've done?"

"Sure."

He stopped what he was doing and put his brushes in jars placed on the rocks. He turned to her and waited.

Slowly, carefully, she pulled her painting out of the plastic bag.

"May I?" he said.

He picked her painting up by its edges and looked it over.

"Very good," he said. "Painting the ocean is very difficult. You've got a Turner look to this."

Her painting was a bit foggy in spots.

"I prefer people in my paintings," he said.

"You do?" She looked at his painting. "I don't see any in your painting."

"You don't?" He smiled. "Look closer."

She bent over and now focused on the boat. It looked like a ferry. She could see some specks. "What is this, a ferry?"

“Sure,” he said. “It’s the ferry to Martha’s Vineyard.”

“And there’s people on it?”

“Sure, of course. Can’t you see them?”

She looked at the specks. “Yes, I see them now.”

“Without people in your painting, it’s like, there’s no life. I mean, I don’t like painting fish or rabbits, you know, dumb animals.”

“Yeah,” she said. “You’re right.” She shrugged her shoulders. She suddenly felt she was missing something. She didn’t know what.

“I have to go,” she said. “Thanks.” She took her painting and put it back in her bag.

“Keep painting,” he yelled, as she walked away.

## V

### Nothing But Basketball

Pauline was just getting up to the road from the rocky coast with her art supplies, now heavy, in a plastic bag, when she saw two black limousines parked in front of the C-Nick Motel. She saw Melissa hand a tall, rather familiar looking man a soda. The man smiled, gave Melissa a playful salute and got into the back seat of one of the limos.

In a second the cars left. Pauline walked across the road to Melissa, who was standing next to the soda machine, waving goodbye.

“Do you know who that was?” Pauline said.

“Sure,” Melissa said. “It was George.”

“George? You call him George?”

“Sure. What else? He’s the only reason I keep Dr. Pepper in the machine. He says it’s the only place he can get it.”

“That was George Bush. Don’t you know who George Bush is?”

“Sure I do, honey. He’s lived around here for years. Want a cola?”

“A cola? Well, yeah, but I think I don’t have any money on me. I just went down to the beach.”

“Hey, no problem. You can pay me later,” she said, handing her a bottle.

“No. Come on. I’ll get it.” Pauline motioned for her to follow.

Melissa and Pauline walked over to the motel rooms.

“So you’re a painter,” Melissa said.

“Yeah. I like to paint.”

“My uncle’s a painter. You might have even seen him down there.”

“You mean on the rocks?” Pauline said.

“Yeah, he goes down there.”

“Not the big black guy.”

“Yeah. That’s Uncle Rick,” she said with a big grin. “He played for the Patriots for a year and a half. He’s big isn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Pauline said, “he’s real big. He’s nice though.”

“Rick? Oh, Rick is great. You met him?”

“Yeah, I was talking to him.”

“Say, I forgot your name.”

“Pauline,” she said as she got to the door.

“Do you have a C.D. player?” Melissa said.

“Yeah, sorry. Was it too loud?”

“Oh, no. I just don’t have a C.D. player. I was wondering how it sounded.”

“Want to hear it?”

“Oh, really? That would be nice. Yeah.”

They went into Pauline’s room and Pauline put on a C.D.

“Your parents are gone?” Melissa said.

“What?”

“I said are your parents gone?”

“Uh, yeah,” Pauline said. “Let me get you that money.”

Pauline started pulling on a dresser drawer but couldn’t get it to pull out.

“Let me try that,” Melissa said.

Melissa grabbed the drawer, grunted a few times, and suddenly it came unstuck and pulled out, throwing clothes, money and a gun up in the air. The clothes, the money and the gun fell back in the drawer.

Melissa stared at the gun.

Pauline pushed the drawer shut. “That must be my Dad’s.”

“Geez. I don’t know,” Melissa said. “I don’t know if you’re supposed to have guns in here.”

Melissa got up from the floor where she had fallen when the drawer pulled out. She headed for the door.

“Wait. Here,” Pauline said, handing Melissa a 20-dollar bill. “This is for the cola. I really would appreciate it if you didn’t say anything.”

“You’re giving me 20 dollars not to say anything?”

“No. For the soda. And future sodas. Like a fund or something.”

“A fund for sodas? I don’t know. That’s a lot of sodas.”

“I know, but you don’t know how thirsty I get. That’s as long as you don’t say anything.”

Pauline thought about this for a minute. “I don’t know,” she said. “I’d want to ask my dad.”

“What? You have to ask your dad every time you go to the bathroom.”

“No. It’s just. . . I don’t like guns. We don’t like them. Ever since. . . ever since...well, forget it. Here. Take the 20 bucks. The soda is on me.”

“Wait a minute. Hold it. What if I was your friend?”

“Your friend?”

“Yeah, like I was your friend. Would you try to get your friend kicked out?”

“What do you mean kicked out?”

“Am I your friend?”

“Well, I just met you.”



“So?”

“I don’t know. I guess you could be my friend. I actually don’t have any friends, except maybe if you count the boy in 18, and I just kind of talked to him twice, and he’s leaving in...leaving in...” Her voice trailed off.

“So, am I your friend or what?”

“Well, am I your friend?”

“Sure. You’re my friend.”

Melissa was staring out the screen door of the room. She was watching the boy from 18 who was walking toward the basketball hoop near the pool, bouncing a basketball. He took a few shots.

“If you’re my friend,” Melissa said, “would you play basketball with me?”

“Basketball?”

“Yeah, basketball.”

Pauline now could actually hear the basketball bouncing.

“O.K. sure,” she said.

“O.K., come on.”

Melissa headed out the door. She paused a few steps away. Finally, Pauline came out.

“Come on,” Melissa said, walking towards the basketball hoop.

At the edge of a 3-point shot circle that had been painted on the pavement, she stopped. The boy from 18 barely looked over, just kept shooting short jump shots, getting his own rebounds, and doing fancy lay ups.

Finally, the ball bounced over to Melissa.

She said, “Me and. .Me and.”

She paused and ran over to Pauline. She whispered in her ear, “What’s your name again?”

“Pauline.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Melissa threw the ball to the boy from 18. “Me and Pauline will play you to 11. What’s your name?”

“Jed.”

“I’m Melissa,” she said, then reached out her hand to shake his. When he stretched his hand out she pulled hers back quickly. “Got ‘cha. You take it out.”

Melissa whispered to Pauline, “Cover him. I’ll play under the basket.”

“Is this a 3 pointer?” Jed said, pointing to the 3-point line.

“You guessed it,” Melissa said. “Let’s go.”

Jed blew past Pauline, stopped just short of Melissa, and put up a short jumper. It was good. “Nothing but net,” he said.

Melissa grabbed the ball, passed it to Pauline, and said, “Take it out.”

Pauline passed it to Melissa, who dribbled once, took a look at the basket and passed back to Pauline. Pauline drained a three pointer.

“Wow,” Jed said. “That’s good for being cold.”

“I’m never cold,” Pauline said, and giggled slightly. Laughing, she thought,

maybe for the first time in weeks.

Again Jed blew past Pauline, stopped short of Melissa, pulled up for a shot, and Melissa knocked the ball out of his hands before he could put it up. Melissa grabbed the ball and quickly took a shot. It went in.

“O.K.” Jed said. “Good one.”

He took it out. This time Pauline backed off a bit, but stayed with him, pushing him off to the right. He put up a hook shot that hit the side of the backboard.

“Nothing but backboard,” Melissa said, as Pauline got the rebound. Pauline quickly passed it to Melissa, screened off Jed and Melissa put up an easy lay up.

“Nothing but backboard and net,” Melissa said, after she banked it in.

“You’re a talker,” Jed said, as he received the ball back.

“Who’s talking?” Melissa said, “I’m not saying anything.”

Before they could get set, Jed put up a 3 pointer and sunk it.

“Good shot,” Melissa said, and passed it to Pauline to take out.

Pauline passed it in to Melissa. She dribbled once, faked a pass to Pauline and as Jed backed up slightly, launched a shot that went off the rim.

“Nothing but rim,” Jed said. He grabbed the rebound and quickly dribbled out beyond the 3-point arc.

“Cover him,” Melissa said.

Jed gave Pauline a head fake and dribbled by her. Melissa cut him off about 5 feet from the basket. He tried to stop, put up the shot, and knocked Melissa down. The shot went in.

Melissa quickly got up, brushing off the back of her shorts. She grabbed the ball and dribbled it slowly out beyond the 3 point circle. “Kind of a charge there,” she said.

“You were moving. Could have been a blocking foul,” Jed said with a smile.

“I’ll take it out,” she said.

Jed had Pauline covered so closely that all Melissa could do was loop it over her head towards the basket. Pauline made an awkward leap and grabbed the ball. Jed cut her off just short of the basket and she dribbled away to the left. Melissa got back down under the net. She liked to play there. At 5’ 11”, she was almost as tall as Jed.

“Shoot,” Melissa said.

Pauline put up the shot and missed. Melissa boxed Jed out with her rear end.

She got the rebound and tried a quick turnaround jump shot from the right side. Jed blocked it and knocked the ball away. The ball bounced once on the pavement and Pauline grabbed it. She tried to put up a shot but Jed was there, holding his hands up. Her shot grazed the top of the backboard and bounced away.

Melissa ran it down and dribbled slowly in. They were all out of breath now. Jed came out to meet her, holding his hands up to prevent a pass. Melissa turned around and backed him in, bumping him twice, hard, on purpose. The second time, he was a little off balance and she threw a bounce pass to Pauline, who put in a lay up.

Jed grabbed the ball and walked it out beyond the three-point line. His cheeks

were red. Sweat was pouring from his face. He just had a flimsy trace of beard.

Melissa and Pauline stood with their hands on their hips, breathing hard, smiling at each other. "Now we got him," Pauline said.

"Not just yet," Jed said, as he put up a 3 pointer. It hit the rim and backboard and the rim again and rolled out. "Nothing but backboard and rim," Melissa said. She grabbed the rebound and dribbled out to half court. Jed tried to steal the ball but she eluded him and passed it in to Pauline, who tried to bank it in. It bounced around a few times, swirled around the rim and finally went in.

"Nothing but all three," Melissa said.

"You're talking again," Jed said, wagging his finger at her.

"What?" Melissa said, with a big grin. "I didn't say anything." She passed the ball to Jed. Before Pauline could get back, he put up a 3 pointer that was good. Melissa dribbled out to half court.

She passed it in to Pauline. Pauline passed it back. Jed was winded. He was slowing down a bit trying to cover both of them.

Melissa passed it back to Pauline. She dribbled in for a lay up. Jed just got back in time. Pauline drove her shoulder into his chest as she put up the shot. The collision jarred her and she missed everything.

"Nothing but air," Jed said as he grabbed the ball and put up his own shot, which was good.

"O.K.," Pauline said. "Nice play."

"Sorry," Jed said, as Pauline walked to the half court, holding the ball in one hand, and rubbing her shoulder with the other.

"Let's try that again," she said, and passed in to Melissa. Melissa dribbled once and passed it back. Pauline faked a shot and passed to Melissa. Melissa dribbled and started to back in. She threw a bounce pass to Pauline. Pauline dribbled in to try a lay up and Jed cut off her lane to the basket. This time Pauline put out a forearm with her shoulder and knocked him down. She tripped over his legs, put up the shot and landed on top of him. The ball went through the net and landed on her back. Pauline scrambled to get off him.

Melissa grabbed the ball just in time to hear a woman's voice call out, "Jed! It's time to go."

They all looked around to see Jed's mother leaning over the front seat of a station wagon, looking at them. "Come on," she said. "We've got to pick your father up at the golf course."

Jed got up, brushed himself off and walked slowly away. "Nice game," he said, with a grin.

"Tomorrow, maybe," Melissa said.

"Leaving tomorrow," he said, as he got into the car.

"Well, bright and early then," she said.

He waved as he got in the car and his mother drove off.

## VI At The Pool

Melissa and Pauline stood near the basketball hoop, hands on hips, a bit out of breath, watching the car disappear around a corner.

“Jeez,” Melissa said. “That’s what always happens. As soon as I meet a nice guy, he takes off.”

“Yeah,” Pauline said, “I know what you mean.”

“Didn’t you think he was a nice guy?”

“Yeah. He was a good guy.”

“Yeah. I liked him,” Melissa said.

She stared at the traffic on the highway for a moment, and then turned to Pauline. “Hey, I’m hot,” she said. “Want to take a dip in the pool?”

“I don’t know,” Pauline replied. “I’m kind of wiped out.”

“Oh, come on.”

“I don’t know,” Pauline said, and headed over to her room. “I might just lie down.”

“Suit yourself,” Melissa said. “I’ll just ask my Dad about that gun thing.”

Pauline paused. “You know,” she said, “I think I will take a dip.”

“Great,” Melissa said. “See you in a few minutes.”

When Pauline arrived at the pool, Melissa was swimming laps. Melissa saw Pauline looking around for a chair. Tawny Dawn and Buffy Welcome were sunbathing there. The place was packed.

“Hey, over here,” Melissa said, standing in the pool, wiping water from her face. She pointed to a lawn chair with a striped towel over it. “I got you a chair. The one with the striped towel.”

Pauline forced a smile, went over to the chair, a chaise lounge, and sat down. Melissa got out of the pool and walked over, dripping wet. She grabbed the striped towel and dried herself off. She then spread the towel out on the concrete and sat down. “You take the chair. After all, you’re a guest.”

Pauline looked bored.

“Why don’t you go in?” Melissa said. “It’s pretty good. Not too cold.”

“Maybe in a minute.”

## VII Tawny Blows Pauline’s Cover

Bunny Welcome was 37 years old—almost old enough to be Tawny Dawn’s mother. Tawny was 21.

“You know I’ve only been doing this stuff for my son,” Tawny said.

“I know, but this movie thing is a lot of money. A good opportunity.”

“I just don’t like the junk they do in them. It’s not the real movies. I want to get in the real movies.”

“You want to start at the top? Forget it,” Bunny said. “A lot of girls cross over. In any event, it’s good money. You just pretend. Pretend it isn’t happening.”

“I don’t know.”

“You better make up your mind soon. Rocky’s coming back tomorrow morning.”

“The heck with Rocky.”

“You owe Rocky.”

“I’ll pay him back.”

“Rocky doesn’t like getting paid back.”

“Hey,” Tawny said, “isn’t that Pauline Meltdown?”

“Who?”

## VII Autograph

“Pauline Meltdown,” Tawny said. “She’s on that T.V. show.”

“Never heard of her,” Buffy replied.

Tawny leaned over and grabbed a tiny, sequined purse. She pulled out a mirror and checked her makeup. She adjusted her sunglasses, pulled out a tiny brush, and ran it through her hair.

Tawny took a deep breath. She got up from the chaise lounge lawn chair by the side of the pool and headed towards the shallow end, snapping her bikini in place, adjusting her top, and just driving the old men seated along the edge of the pool wild.

She was a little nervous, and walked completely oblivious to their staring eyes.

“Miss Meltdown,” she said, as she stepped up to Pauline, “I really admire your work. Could I have your autograph?”

Pauline strained her eyes in the glimmering hot sun and saw Tawny standing there.

“Sure,” she said. Tawny handed her a pen and a small notepad.

“You must have a great agent,” Tawny said.

Pauline handed the pen and pad back, after writing her name, and “Best Wishes.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Pauline said.

“I’m going to be doing a movie soon, and I just wondered, who is your agent?”

“Bobbie Greene.”

“Really? Where’s he from?”

“Bobbie’s a woman. From Studio City.”

“Could I say you recommended me?”

“Sure. What’s your name?”

“Tawn—,” she stopped herself. “Tawn Du.”

“Tawn Du?”

“Yeah, Tawn Du. I’m part Korean.” Tawny was getting a bit more nervous now.

“That’s nice,” Pauline said, not knowing what to say.

“Well, thanks,” Tawny said. “I’ve got to go.”

“Good luck,” Pauline said.

She watched heads turn as Tawny walked back to her chair writing “Bobbie Greene, Studio City” in her notepad.

“Who the heck was that?” Melissa asked.

“Tawn Du, I guess.”

“I mean, why did she ask for your autograph?”

“I don’t know. Must have me mixed up with somebody else.”

“Wow, that’s funny. But who’s that agent?”

“Oh, I just made that up.”

Melissa’s eyebrows crinkled up, while she considered all this information.

Pauline decided to change the subject.

“What’s this stuff about the gun?” she said.

“The gun?”

“Why’s everybody so touchy about that?”

“Well, to tell you the truth, I really don’t want to talk about it.”

Melissa sat in silence for a few moments. Pauline raised an eyebrow, and just stared at her.

“O.K. I’ll tell you,” Melissa said with a sigh.

“My sister Sue killed herself. Or that’s what they figured happened. That big black guy, the artist, my uncle, was married to her. He said she asked for the gun for protection. They were often on the road, for away games. He was playing for the Patriots. I probably told you that. Anyway, if he had told us, we wouldn’t have allowed it, because Sue always had...always had...I don’t know, things like, nervous breakdowns. My Mom, you know, she was...she was... well, Sue was my half-sister. She had a tough time. Her dad died when she was young. She kept running away. Went to Alaska. All over. We knew she was real fragile, and we just thought, they never should have had that gun around. Room 8. That’s where it was. We can’t bear to rent it out, but now, it works out, because my uncle stays there. He was away at the time. We all love him. He was just devastated and lost. I can understand. Because Sue was like my only friend. The only friend who went away, but would come back. My only friend.”

Tears were really rolling now. Down her cheeks. Pauline noticed one splash on the concrete. Melissa quickly got up, and ran for the office building and her room upstairs.

“I’m your friend!” Pauline yelled, as she saw Melissa run up the wooden outdoor stairs to the second floor. “I am!”

Melissa disappeared through a door.

Pauline noticed a few people staring at her. She felt so hot!

She threw off her sunglasses and dove into the pool. She swam under the surface, in the blue, cold, chlorine-tinged water, all the way to the deep end. She felt she just had to get away. But she needed air. She surfaced at the end of the pool and got out. Dripping wet, she noticed Tawny Dawn and Bunny Welcome staring at her. She headed out through the gate, and back to her room.

IX  
Clem's

When Pauline got back to her room, her first thought was that she had to get rid of the gun. The next thing that occurred to her was that she was absolutely, completely starving. She pulled the gun out of her dresser drawer, put it in her purse and headed out the door.

Hopping in her car, an ancient, 20 year old Chrysler 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, she cranked the engine a few times until it finally started. It had way over 100,000 miles on it, a bad muffler, and blew hot air out of the air conditioning. One window out of four went up and down. It was supposed to have power windows, but just the driver's side worked.

The best thing about the car was that it cost only \$900.00, cash. Incredibly rusty, it had impressive dents on all sides, but, as the young kid who sold it to her said, it was inspected.

When she got to the road out of the C-Nick parking lot, she wasn't sure which way to go. She took a left, drove down a hill and came to a bay. There were fishing boats tied up and a few wooden shacks built on the rocks. They looked like boathouses.

Then she saw "Clem's," a little neon lit diner across the road from the bay.

She couldn't get inside fast enough. She had barely enough time to remember to shut off the car as she skidded to a dusty halt in the tiny parking lot. As she opened the door to the diner, she had to hesitate slightly, as it seemed like the car was still going. There were a few crackling noises, then a wheeze and with a little puff of blue smoke, it finally stopped.

She quickly made it to the counter and squeezed herself in between two fairly hefty old ladies. She reached to her right to grab a menu wedged between a sugar canister and an ashtray. She glanced at it for a second. She knew what she wanted. She started waving her hand at the short order cook. He didn't look over. He was busy making breakfast, lunch, dinner, eggs, bacon, grilled cheese sandwiches, steaks, home fries, French fries, everything, all the while manipulating the 8 slice toaster.

Finally, after watching him for a few moments in amazement, she said, "Clem! Hey, Clem!"

Sure enough, he looked over, and grabbed the towel slung over his shoulder, wiping his hands.

"What can I get you?" he said.

"Well done hamburger, fries and a cola, please."

She watched him put on the hamburger and throw fries in the basket. He put a glass of ice on the counter, and wiped it off a little with the towel.

"Malarkey's Cola O.K.?"

"Sure."

He put down a can of Malarkey's. She looked at it for a second and, read-

ing the label, noticed it was made in Canada.

“His brother works for Malarkey’s, so you can’t get a coke or a Pepsi here,” the old woman to her left said with a smile.

Pauline downed the Malarkey’s almost immediately. When he put the fries out she asked for another. He brought the hamburger and took a pencil from behind his ear. He made a few notes on a pad.

“Anything else?” he said.

“No,” she replied. “I’m O.K.”

## X

### THE YELLOW LOBSTER

Melissa was in her room just looking out the window. The sun was shining brightly over the glistening blue water, but she didn’t feel bright, she felt blue.

“Why does everything have to end? Why does everything have to die?” She asked herself, as she looked at the dusty, abandoned restaurant across the street, surrounded by bright green maple trees. It was called the Yellow Lobster. It had an old sign out front with a barely discernable picture of a lobster on it, painted yellow.

“Why can’t things be like that maple tree?” She thought to herself. The maple trees lost their leaves in the fall, but in the spring, the leaves came back, like newborn babes. Even the plants in Florida changed, she noticed, in the middle of winter, but they came back, or, rather, stayed there.

She looked at the ocean and the sun reflecting off of it. Both the sun and the ocean were always changing, but always the same. “Why can’t everything be like that?” She asked herself.

As she looked at the Yellow Lobster, she felt sad. She used to love going to breakfast there and talking with Mrs. O’My, but this year, just like last year, she didn’t come back. Mrs. O’My had asked Melissa’s father to keep an eye on the place and he had delegated that duty to Melissa.

So, now, she thought of that, and decided to go over to inspect.

She knew her father had a key, but she didn’t want to go look for him, so she just headed over. She knew a good way to get in.

She ran across the road and around to the back. A big enclosed porch wrapped around the back of the building and the kitchen. A short flight of wooden stairs led up to the back door, but that was securely locked.

Nope. That wasn’t the way to get in. The way was how she’d always get in, just to scare the cook. She went to the top of the stairs, climbed up on the edge of a window to the right of the stairs and grabbed the tin roof with her hands. Then she headed around the corner to her right, across the back of the porch and the windows to the north edge of the porch, then, not looking down, because it was about a 30 foot drop, she inched toward the last window. She took out her comb slipped it through the crack in the middle of the wooden and glass window, and pushed the latch up and open. The window swung out from the middle. It was a little rusty,



and took a good, careful push to open, but then, as always, it did. She inched over and as usual, with a little sigh of relief, she crawled in the window.

The porch was filled with junk. She tried the door to the kitchen which led from the porch, but she was surprised to find it was locked. She decided to try the back stairs. An old stove was shoved up against the back of the stairs, and it's "secret" door. Secret that is, to practically nobody who knew anything about the Yellow Lobster. The door had no doorknob, and was hidden in the woodwork, but she knew, if she could just move that stove away, if you pulled on the bottom of the door, where there was a little space, it would open.

With a few hard pushes, she moved the stove, and not without a little difficulty got the door to the back stairs open. She felt her way forward to make sure of the steep, curving stairs, which wound around the chimney, all the way up to the Widow's Walk and the trap door there.

When she got to the second floor, she pushed open the door. Luckily, it was open a crack. There was a lock, but it had been left open somehow, like it was, probably, half the time. The door opened up on an upstairs guest bedroom, and the door was to the right of the fireplace, hidden in the white painted paneling.

She walked through the sad, sad, lonely house, and wondered why Mrs. O'My didn't come back. She went downstairs to the restaurant and went into the bar and looked around. All the stools were upside down on the bar. The chairs and tables were pushed against the north wall, probably, she figured, when they shined the floors, though now, she had to admit, they looked a little dark and dusty.

She said, "what the heck," and headed back upstairs, through the hidden panel door and up the back stairs to the Widow's Walk.

She pushed open the heavy wooden trap door, covered with tar paper on top, and felt and breathed the strong sea air. She climbed up, took a deep breath, saw something to her right behind the chimney and screamed.

## XI Still At The Diner

Pauline got up off her stool to pay the bill. She didn't want to look through her bag for money right next to the people sitting nearby. She was afraid they would see the gun.

Now, as she looked through her purse, she became almost frantic. It seemed she had left her money in her small bag...the one she had left back in her room, when she'd discovered the gun wouldn't fit in it. The big old bag she had now didn't seem to have any money in it. She looked through the side pockets.

"Something wrong Miss?" Clem said.

The women sitting at the counter looked over at her.

"Well," she thought to herself in an exasperated, silly way, "maybe I could just pull out this gun and hold the place up."

Just then, to her relief, she found a credit card in a small, zippered inside pocket. "Take credit cards?" she said.

"Sure do," Clem replied. He grabbed it and headed down the counter towards the cash register.

Pauline let out a sigh, and smiled as the women turned back to their meals.

"I've got to get rid of this gun," she thought to herself again. She looked out the window and saw the bay. She decided she would go across the street and see if she could toss the gun in the ocean.

## XII

### Widow's Walk

On the widow's walk, on top of the Yellow Lobster, a man with shiny sunglasses had suddenly appeared from behind the chimney.

Melissa ran down the stairs. At the second floor she went out the wooden fireplace doors and through the bridal suite. She heard loud footsteps coming after her. A man shouted the words "Wait! Hold up!"

She now ran even faster down the hall. She grabbed the banister. It bent towards her as she swung down the stairs to the first floor.

She heard the man running after her. She slammed into the front door. Furiously she fumbled with the dead bolt, the lock, the front door—the wooden screen door.

She heard a voice yell behind her: "Melissa! Hold up!"

She skidded to a halt in the parking lot. She was stunned. "That voice," she said to herself. "Who was that?"

She saw a golden yellow corvette parked in the front lot. She kicked at the stones and white broken clamshells that paved the lot.

It was Robert.

Robert, the man she loved.

She ran across the road.

What a jerk she was to have screamed and ran, she thought. She ran faster. Her clothes were covered with dirt and soot. She looked terrible!

## XIII

### Boathouse Art Gallery

Pauline walked across the road and climbed over the guardrail. To her right was a boathouse that seemed like it had been converted into an art gallery. To the left of the boathouse there was a canvas roofed display area, with paintings hung on wooden stands.

She thought she'd stroll through the paintings, just to take a look. They were mostly seascapes, boats and harbors, blues and reds and greens.

Rick stepped out the open boathouse door. He recognized Pauline, but was

surprised to see her there.

“Well, hello,” he said. She was surprised herself. She stepped back a little.

They both then heard a loud scream coming from up the hill, near where the C-Nick Motel was.

“Just a second,” Rick said as he turned and headed towards the road. Pauline saw him drop two paintbrushes that he held in one hand.

He walked up the road at a brisk pace. Pauline felt uneasy. She followed him as he hurried up the gentle incline.

On the crest of the hill Rick and Pauline saw Melissa. She had stopped at the side of the road in front of the Yellow Lobster and glanced down the hill towards them. Then she ran across the road.

Rick was now running. So was Pauline. When they got to the crest of the hill, just in front of the restaurant, they saw Robert running through the parking lot.

“What’s going on,” Rick said.

“Nothing,” Robert said. “I guess I just surprised her. She got scared and ran.”

Rick and Pauline looked at him dubiously. They then headed across the road towards the C-Nick. Robert followed them.

Rick and Pauline went around the back of the motel office building. Pauline saw Jed near the basketball hoop.

“Did you see Melissa?” Pauline said.

“Your friend? She went in there,” he said, pointing to the back door of the Motel.

Rick and Pauline went in through the back door that led to the kitchen.

When Rick got inside the kitchen he yelled out, “Melissa—Melissa, are you O.K.?”

They waited a few moments, but heard nothing.

They heard the screen door open and Tawny Dawn appeared before them, slightly out of breath.

“Miss Meltdown,” she said, “You’ve got to help me.”

“What?” was all Pauline could think to say.

Suddenly a tall, well-dressed man, an albino, came into the kitchen from the back door.

“Let’s go, Tawny,” he said.

Tawny ran behind Pauline.

“I’m not going,” she said.

“You are going, kid,” the albino said. He reached around Pauline to get a hold of Tawny’s arm.

“Hold on here,” Rick said.

The man pulled at Tawny and knocked Pauline away. The contents of her handbag, including the gun, spilled out on the kitchen floor.

Tawny grabbed the gun. The albino backed off towards the back door.

“Just get out of here,” Tawny screamed through her tears.

“Now, hold on,” Rick said. “Let’s everybody calm down.” He motioned to Pauline. “Stay back.”

Tawny held the gun in both hands. “Get out,” she said to the albino. Instead, he stepped closer.

“You’re not going to shoot that,” he said. “You haven’t got the guts.” He could see Tawny trembling. He quickly moved forward and snatched the gun out of her hands.

Holding the gun in his right hand, he grabbed Tawny with his left and pulled her to the door.

“Don’t move,” he said to Rick, pointing the gun at him.

“Let that girl go,” Rick said. He started to move forward.

He then watched in horror as he saw the albino pull the trigger three times. He heard nothing but clicks, no gunshot. The albino pulled the trigger three more times. Three more clicks.

In that instant, Rick recognized him. Of course, how many mobster albinos are there? It was the same guy. The same guy—an albino—had the room next to him years ago. Next to Rick’s wife. He knew it now. The man killed her.

Rick rushed toward the albino but the man threw Tawny in his way. Rick chased him out the back door. The albino ran around the side of the motel and bumped into Jed, almost knocking him down. Rick pushed past Jed and ran after the albino. Pauline followed. Then Jed.

George W. was a Dr. Pepper aficionado too. He was just taking a long sip when he saw an albino run around the corner of the motel with Rick in pursuit.

As the man ran past him, George W. put out his foot and the albino went sprawling. Rick pounced on him and started pounding him with his fists.

“Hey, boys,” George W. said, signaling to two secret service officers leaning on their black automotive equipment, “mind taking a look at this? Maybe get this under control.”

Within a few moments the secret service men had Rick and the albino separated. The albino tried to get away.

“Not so fast,” George W. said.

Pauline and Jed stood breathlessly next to him.

“He tried to shoot somebody,” Pauline said, pointing to the albino.

#### XIV ROBERT

Robert was 17. His grandfather, Pop, someone he admired most in life, died the previous December. Pop ran the Yellow Lobster. It took a strange sense of humor to name a restaurant the Yellow Lobster, and that’s what Pop had. Robert’s grandmother decided she couldn’t run the place herself, so she moved back to Troy, in upstate New York, to live with Robert’s parents.

This was a bad July for Robert. The girl he had a crush on and whom he had called up about 10 times, without success, for a date, he discovered had a

boyfriend. What an idiot he felt he was. He thought he was lucky they didn't arrest him for stalking. He just had to get out of town. The Maine coast, where he usually went every summer, was a place he really loved, so he borrowed his father's Corvette and headed there.

The first place he went was the Widow's Walk on top of the Yellow Lobster. On a clear day you could see New Hampshire.

The Yellow Lobster stood on gigantic high rocks overlooking the coast. He used to come up on the Widow's Walk with Pop and his telescope, to look for large ships heading for Boston, or a whale or an iceberg. But Robert now thought Pop must have been kidding him. Icebergs? Whales?

Robert was thinking about this when the trap door sprang open. Melissa appeared, screamed, and ran.

He figured he better go across the street to see her parents, just to let them know it was only him—that he was back and would be staying there for a while.

He actually got a kick out of seeing Melissa. She was always up to something, acting tough, selling sodas, and running her basketball tournaments.

Melissa was his younger sister Gloria's friend. He kind of liked Melissa, but he had to face it, she was jail bait. Heck, practically every girl was jailbait to a 17 year old, except ones his own age or older. And they all seemed to ignore him.

He tried to catch Melissa to let her know who he was, but she just ran faster. Now, Rick ran up the road to him.

"What's going on?" Rick said. He was with a young girl about Robert's age. She was very, very sharp looking.

"I don't know," Robert said.

Rick and the girl crossed the road and went around the back of the motel. Robert figured Melissa must have run up to her room inside the motel, so he went in the front door.

"Robert!" Mrs. Adzu exclaimed.

She was behind the front desk of the motel office.

"Yeah. Hi, Mrs. Adzu. Say, I think I scared Melissa. She went running. I guess she didn't know I was over there."

"You're back?"

"Yeah. Back for the summer. Do some work over there, I guess. Maybe get it ready to sell. I don't know."

"Come to dinner tonight."

"Tonight? I don't know."

"What is that racket?" Mrs. Adzu said, turning around. "Is that Melissa's radio?"

She now saw Rick through the side window of the office. He was chasing someone across the parking lot.

Robert turned. He heard voices out in front of the office. He went to look out the window near the front door. Then he went out the door.

Mrs. Adzu could tell something was going on. But before she could check on it, Melissa appeared at the bottom of the stairs, near the counter.

“How do I look?” she said.

“You look...you look...”

She was not sure what to say. “What are you doing with makeup on?”

“You like it? Is it too much?”

Her mother didn’t answer, but instead, edged towards the front of the office.

“Stay here, Melissa,” she said, and went to the front door.

“What?” Melissa said. “What’s happening?”

## XV

### Secret Service

Melissa’s mother went out the front door just in time to see Governor Bush’s father’s secret service men separating Rick from a tall albino man.

In a few minutes, Bob Sneed, a special agent for the secret service, said he’d have to go in the motel office to call the local police.

Melissa sat on the stairs while her mother stood by, silently, as Special Agent Sneed made the call.

The police were there in less than five minutes.

Melissa went out to see both Rick and the albino man lying on the ground with handcuffs on.

Robert and Pauline were also there.

Robert turned to Pauline and whispered, “What happened?”

“That albino guy...he tried to shoot Rick. The big black guy,” Pauline said.

Robert got closer to her. A secret service agent had his hand on his holster watching the two men on the ground. Governor Bush got in the back seat of his limo and he and his chauffeur drove off.

When Special Agent Sneed came out of the motel office, he looked around for a moment. He then said to Pauline, “O.K., where’s the gun?”

“It’s in the house,” she said. “I’ll show you.”

At this point Pauline wasn’t actually sure the gun was still in the kitchen. Looking around, she noticed Tawny was nowhere to be found.

Pauline walked Sneed around the back of the motel and went up to the back door.

At that moment, Melissa’s father arrived with a rake in his hand.

“What’s happening?” he said.

Sneed took his I.D. out of his jacket pocket and showed it to Mr. Adzu.

“Secret Service,” Sneed said. “Is this your place?”

“Yes,” Adzu said. “What’s happening?”

“This young lady says there’s a gun inside. We just need to check it out. Is it O.K.?”

“O.K.?” Adzu said. “Sure it’s O.K. There’s no gun in there.”

He opened the back door and went into the kitchen. Sneed and Pauline followed. To Mr. Adzu’s surprise, he saw a handgun lying on the floor near the back

door of the kitchen. The kitchen table was pushed back against a wall. One chair was knocked over.

Things were in disarray.

“Stand back over there.” Sneed said to Pauline and Mr. Adzu, motioning for them to stand near the sink, away from the gun.

“Anybody shot?” Sneed said to Pauline.

“No.”

“Anybody hurt?”

“I don’t know,” Pauline said. “Maybe not.”

“O.K.,” Sneed said to Mr. Adzu. “Got any paper towels?”

“Sure,” he said, and turned to get a roll.

Sneed put a pen in the barrel of the gun, picked it up, and wrapped it gingerly in the paper towel.

“You’ll have to wait for the local police to get here,” Sneed said to Pauline.

He led her out of the kitchen. As they walked around the back of the motel they heard sirens.

Two police cars from the Ogunquit Town Police Department arrived.

A large uniformed police officer jumped out of his car and headed over to the men handcuffed on the ground. The policeman was sandy haired, about 6’3”, 300 pounds.

“What’s up?” he said to the secret service agent watching the men.

“He killed my wife,” they heard Rick blurt out.

“What do you mean he killed your wife?” the Ogunquit officer said.

“I never killed nobody. I want a lawyer,” the albino said.

“Some young girl said that albino guy tried to shoot this black guy,” the secret service agent said to the policeman.

“There she is now,” he said, as Pauline and

Sneed rounded the corner of the motel office.

## XVI

### Ogunquit Police

Rick was sitting at Detective Ron Blair’s desk inside the Ogunquit Police Station.

“I heard this scream,” Rick said. “I knew it was Melissa, my niece. I got worried and went up the hill and saw her running across the road. I was with this girl. Or, actually, I wasn’t with this girl. She was just there, and followed me. I don’t know why. Then I went into the motel, the back of the motel, the apartment. I’m thinking now the girl must have known Melissa, maybe was a friend of hers or something, anyway, I get inside the kitchen and this girl...wait a minute. Then this other person...”

“What other person?” Blair said.

“I don’t know. Never seen her before. She starts saying, ‘Help me, help me,’ to this girl and then this albino guy comes in...”

Melissa watched Pauline being put in a police car. Then she was driven away. The albino went in the other police car.

Melissa started pacing the floor of the motel office. She heard her parents talking and went into the kitchen.

Her mother sat at the table and her father leaned against the counter.

"They said this guy," her father told her mother, "an albino guy, pointed a gun at Rick and pulled the trigger."

"Oh, no!" Melissa's mother exclaimed.

"They found the gun in the kitchen."

"What kitchen?"

"Our kitchen."

"Our kitchen?"

"They said some girl dropped it. The girl they took away." Mr. Adzu turned to Melissa. "Who was that? Do you know that girl?"

"Know her?"

She stalled for time. "Let me think. Hold on."

She went out the front door of the office and walked over to the soda machine. She was thirsty. Then she saw her bike. She decided she better get some answers herself, before people started asking more questions she didn't want to answer.

She headed out for the Ogunquit Police Station.

## XVII

### What Happened To Susan

"Melissa! Hi," Officer Dooley said when she got to the Police Station. "What's up?"

"Can I talk to them?" she said.

"They're busy," he said. "Have a seat."

Melissa sat on a wooden bench in the front of the Police Station.

She could see Rick sitting at one desk. Pauline was at another. They were there for about an hour. Two policemen typed up papers. She didn't see the albino.

Finally she saw Rick make a phone call and he and Pauline came out to where she was.

"What's going on?" Melissa said to Rick.

"He's under arrest. He has some murder charges from the Combat Zone in Boston. A couple of murder charges. He jumped bail."

Pauline was looking at some papers in her hands.

"What's that?" Melissa said.

"I got these tickets," Pauline said. "One says carrying a concealed weapon."

"Oh, brother," Melissa said.

"Your dad is coming to pick us up," Rick said.



In a few minutes Melissa's father arrived. "You'll have to ride your bike back," he said to her. Rick and Pauline got in the car and they drove off.

When Melissa got back to the motel, Rick was just leaving the office. She went inside and saw her father at the front desk.

"What happened, Dad?"

"Rick thinks that albino guy killed Susan. Your Mother is not taking it too well. Maybe you should go in and see her."

Melissa found her Mother in the kitchen, sitting at the table, crying quietly, with a balled up tissue in her hand.

"Is it true?" Melissa said.

"I don't know, honey. We'll just wait and see."

Melissa stared out the window, looking at the pool. She knew her mother didn't want to talk.

"I'll get the chairs," Melissa said. "Looks like a storm."

Looking out the window, she saw it was overcast. The wind was throwing a light mist around. She decided to stack up the chairs before they blew all over the place. She went out the back door and headed for the pool.

Melissa felt just a tinge of relief in finding an answer to her sister's death. It took some feelings of guilt away. She always wondered if there was something she could have done differently.

It got more windy, cold and rainy, so she went up to her room. From her window, she looked out at the Yellow Lobster. She didn't know what to think. At about 7 p.m. the sky cleared and the sun came out. She heard her Mother call for her downstairs.

Melissa decided that she had to talk to Pauline.

To see how she was.

"Later, Mom," she said, and rushed past her Mother on her way out the back door.

Pauline heard a knock on her door. She pulled the curtains back. It was Melissa. She opened the door.

"Come on in."

"What are you going to do?" Melissa said.

"I'll have to call my agent. Just putting it off as long as I can before I get back into all that."

"Your agent?"

"Well, yeah, Bobbie. Sorry, Melissa. I wasn't straight with you. I've got an agent, a job, whatever, in Hollywood."

"Yeah," Melissa said, looking around. "Hey, I'm starving. Want to go out someplace?"

XVIII  
The Whale Country Club

“Want to go to The Whale?” Melissa said to Pauline.

“What’s The Whale?”

“It’s a miniature golf place. They have food. It’s great. Right next door.”

“O.K. Let’s go.”

It was a two or three minute walk to The Whale Miniature Golf and Snack Bar. Melissa and Pauline went up to the counter. “Maybe after we eat we’ll do nine,” Melissa said.

“Nine? Nine what?”

“Nine holes. Miniature golf.”

“Oh. Miniature golf,” Pauline said, leaning to her right to look over the course. In the middle of nine green fairways, fake ponds and storybook figurines, was a gigantic blue plaster whale, advertising the location.

“Yeah, maybe,” Pauline said. “Let’s get something to eat first.”

In the back of her mind Pauline thought of all the fancy restaurants in L.A. and Beverly Hills she had eaten at. Now, at a picnic table garishly lit up by a yellow fluorescent bug zapper, at a snack bar in Maine, it looked like she’d be dining alfresco.

“Hey, Snarky!” Melissa yelled into the vacant snack bar.

In a moment they saw Snarky, a 16 year-old local resident, nephew of the owner of The Whale. He came out of the back. He had been busy lining up the putters and counting the golf balls in the starter area of the Miniature Golf Course. All the kids in the area needed him about working in the “pro shop”, as if he was on a real golf course.

“We’re starving out here,” Melissa said. “Got any fried clams?”

Snarky put on an apron and looked in the freezer. “Think so, Melissa,” he said.

“Get the fried clams,” she said to Pauline.

Melissa saw that Pauline seemed a little down. She figured she might try to cheer her up. In the process, she thought she might brighten herself up.

She couldn’t stand thinking of the albino, her sister, and the whole thing. She just had to get away from the motel. Had to do something. Keep busy. Just to get her mind off it.

Pauline sensed that Melissa must have been almost as stressed out as she was. She had to smile at her grit.

“Sure. Fried clams it is. I hope they got tartar sauce.”

“Best tartar sauce this side of...this side of...the Mississippi.”

They were finishing up their fried clams when Melissa saw Robert walking up the path to the snack bar.

“Oh, wow!” she said. “Here comes Robert.”

She quickly wiped her face with a napkin.

“How do I look?” she said to Pauline. “Anything in my teeth?”

Pauline looked closely as Melissa bent down and gave a toothy grin.

“Looks O.K.,” Pauline said.

As Robert walked by he stopped at their table. “Everything O.K.?” he said to Melissa.

“Oh, yes,” Melissa said. She had a little squeak in her voice. She had to take a sip from her straw.

“Just getting something to eat,” Robert said, looking at the snack bar and then at Snarky, who was now sitting with Melissa and Pauline.

“Sure,” Snarky said. He got up and headed for the snack bar.

Robert went over to the window and ordered.

“I think I could use some French fries,” Melissa said. “Want some?”

“No, I’m good,” Pauline said.

Melissa went over and ordered French fries. She was a little disappointed when Snarky said, “I’ll bring them over when they’re ready.”

She had no reason to hang out near the window to see if Robert would talk to her.

“What’s the matter?” Pauline said.

Melissa was unusually quiet, glancing over at the snack bar window.

“I don’t know if I have the guts to ask him over.”

“You know him, don’t you?”

“Well, kind of.”

“Ask him.”

Melissa now saw Robert getting his soda and hot dogs.

“Come on over,” Melissa blurted out. “Sit with us.”

Robert looked over and eyed Pauline—probably the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

He walked over slowly with his tiny paper tray in his hand and sat down next to Melissa, just so he could look straight at Pauline.

Snarky brought over the French fries and sat down himself.

“What,” Melissa said to Robert, “are you ...uh, doing here at the coast? Maine. Here, I mean.”

“Just checking things out,” he said. “Thinking of opening the restaurant. For breakfast and lunch.”

“You’re kidding? The Yellow Lobster?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Why not?”

“Right,” she said. “Why not?”

“I think I have to hire some people. Like a waitress or something,”

“I could be a waitress,” Melissa said.

“Gee, I never thought of that. Maybe you could.”

He looked off in the distance, thinking. He took a sip from his soda. “I couldn’t pay much.”

“Well, I know that,” Melissa said.

“I’d have to cook.”

“You know how to cook?” Snarky said.

“Well, I can make scrambled eggs and sandwiches.”

“You’d need a license,” Snarky added.

“I think we’ve got an old license.”

Melissa and Pauline looked at each other. Snarky nodded.

“Yeah,” Robert said. I think it could be done.”

That night Pauline and Melissa talked for hours in Pauline’s room. They tried on makeup, painted their toenails, and read movie scripts. They laughed, listened to the radio and talked about Robert, Pauline’s T.V. show, and how much she hated taking orders from a thousand people, getting up early, working long hours, feeling like she was in jail. Melissa talked about her sister, her mother, her father threatening to go to the jail to kill the albino somehow, and Robert and his restaurant. They both agreed they just wanted a simple life, with a little excitement thrown in, but nothing like what they’d seen recently.

Melissa went home late but had a hard time getting to sleep. She woke up a few times and just couldn’t get things out of her head. She got up early and went out to the pool. She worked the surface with the bug skimmer.

She saw Pauline walking up the road.

Melissa waved and Pauline came over.

“I can’t believe it,” she said. “I totally forgot about my car. It just dawned on me this morning. They towed it away. Towed it!”

“How do you know?”

“The guy in the diner. He saw them.”

“Oh, yeah. It must be Rich. Richey-Rip-Off. He tows all the cars for the police. It’ll be big bucks.”

“Where is it?”

“No problem. I’ll get you a bike. We’ll ride down there.”

Pauline went to get her purse and Melissa got two three-speed bikes.

They headed out for Richey’s near the police station. It was only 10 minutes away.

When they got there, Richey was in his grimy office, listening to a police scanner. He told them it was \$75.

Pauline paid him the money and she and Melissa followed him out of the office to go unlock the gate. Suddenly, Pauline’s parents appeared.

They jumped out of their rental car, ran over and started hugging her.

“You’re O.K.! Honey, we were so worried,” her mother said.

“Pauline! Why? Why didn’t you let us know?” Her father said.

This went on for a few minutes. Melissa felt she had to leave. She rode away on her bike.

Later that day the rental car pulled up at the C-Nick motel. Melissa was shooting foul shots.

Pauline got the bike out of the trunk and walked it over to Melissa.

"I guess I'm going," Pauline said.

"O.K.," Melissa said.

She ran over to her bag lying near the basketball hoop and pulled out a pen and a scrap of paper.

"Here," she said, scribbling something down. "Here's my number."

Pauline looked at it for a second and jammed it in a pocket of her shorts. "Come to L.A.," she said. "Really. I'll pay for the flight."

"No kidding?"

Melissa brightened up.

"Yeah, sure," Pauline said. "Anytime."

They could hear Pauline's parents calling for her.

"Well, yeah," Melissa said. "And anytime you're in Maine, stay here."

"Yeah," Pauline said.

In a few moments she was gone.

## XIX

### Back To The Soda Machine

Melissa watched Pauline drive away. Like so many other guests, Melissa figured she'd never talk to her again.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw someone at the soda machine.

It was a boy. No, wait, maybe a young man. Was the soda machine full? What if he wanted a 7-Up and there wasn't one there?

Yes. That's what she had to do. She had forgotten about the soda machine. It might be half-empty. She quickly strolled over to the machine.

She saw some people unloading their car and figured he must have just got there. How old was he? He seemed to be about 15. He was looking over the selections.

"See what you want?" she said. "I mean, is it there?"

# I'm Sure We Killed It

Janet Kuypers

on the Galapagos Islands  
new species of animals develop  
to accommodate their immediate surroundings  
and everything fits with nature

think of trees around the world:  
there seems to be a tree  
for the needs of every animal:  
the eucalyptus and the Koala Bear,  
woodpeckers to make holes in trees,  
even think of the leaping and traversing of monkeys in the trees  
or that even certain dead grasses are needed for locusts  
animals thrive around trees producing food they can eat

in nature, every tree has its niche  
and everything fills its need

unlike animals, we humans don't have a single tree:  
we cut them down for building and heating our homes  
we cut down rain forests to plant more orange groves  
(you know, so our orange juice can taste worse, but cost less)

we cherish some for food, but destroy others:  
we destroy the rain forests  
which counteracts the human effect on global warming  
we destroy the rain forests  
that possibly possess the natural cures  
for diseases that help us kill ourselves

maybe that's what we get

and maybe there once was a single tree for humans

I'm sure we killed it

# dog eye variations

David McLean

I.

there is no love but a slowly drying ground  
where the vast sea went down,  
no love but a bloody baneful strangeness  
and pain lying there,  
nothing but a name and a face  
and their traces where i saw her;  
a charred gladness and sad burning, a total absence.

there may be justice, more certainly punishment,  
at least there's a nothing;  
a plain so loveless, a grief and a greyness.

i have seen this great desiccation, i have been it;  
have suffered untouchedness  
and heard the roaming finger of lonely  
scrape the naked surface of days without growth,  
have dreamt of grace and woken to ageless roman pain,  
only been myself in this caravan of changes,  
dreamt of someone else,  
and woken faceless.

II.

the dread certainty of suffering is bone-white  
and salt-clean with rinse of fears,  
sneezing catharsis and gross weakness -  
a prehistoric artefact as dry as a tear is.  
my arrayed armies of failure in golden harness  
have prayed this awakening,  
and pay its price in habit unbecoming,  
true armies of loving.

### III.

the cold rails beneath the trains are friends together  
conjoined in dismal separation,  
both aware of their place,  
each aware of her destination -  
trapped by the lonely isolation of their respective stations.

### IV.

how can a moist gland encase such a totality,  
or an arid kindness be a monstrous cutting,  
a hurt, an unexplained vector of torment?  
the forests have lived for ages  
without feeling lonely or knowing beauty,  
without these strange rages of emotionalism,  
they are placid in their passivity:  
our active pain is the possibility that makes us happy,  
the double outcome of the loving function.

### V.

the dog eyes of affection are abraded and chafed  
by empirical factuality,  
the dog heart nobody wants,  
the unmasked chemical life of glands and violent hormones  
leads to the casual brutality of the unloving loved  
leads to Anna's bazooka of smack

this is a dog life for the fish-eyed boys,  
the wide-eyed eaters of figs,  
inglorious inheritors of the lies of love  
and disbarred from contentment,  
seekers after the vain and receding truth  
behind the broken-trumpet stutterings,  
splinters of disharmony are the psalms we have left  
from our inherited lies,  
we fragments of metaphysics so desperate to be clever,  
eager imitators of genius, broken down clowns,  
ignorant and well-educated,  
we displaced our love with our ethics,  
our lives are wasted.



VI.

the houses just exist and stand there  
so blankly offensive;  
there's no spirit behind their numbly outrageous being, their need,  
just as there's no soul behind her predetermined choices  
that reject me and leave me loveless,  
there's no goodness here  
just the nightmare sprinklings of free awareness  
conscious of their own absurdity,  
of being higher than facticity though imprisoned there:  
terrified by encroaching nonentity, and dreaming,  
the god-seeing self survives *in spe*,  
entrenched in grace.

VII.

where a name was emblazoned such wide banners flew  
openly and graciously embracing an empty madness,  
a proud and daily expression of honour  
engraved over the night's own homely flavour,  
a warm and brave enclosure there  
when things lay so much nearer,  
when one could touch the saviour.

# Calling Card

*Benjamin Green*

Darkness was falling fast as the four boys hurried for home. All of them wore breeches, knee socks, and newsboy caps. A horse-drawn wagon clopped down the street, oil lanterns fixed to the side of the coach.

The boys stopped to stare at it. Horse-drawn carriages were becoming an increasing rarity. Electric trolleys had dealt the first blow, and Ford's Model T had sounded the death knell. More and more people in the tenements they lived in were getting flivvers, and Henry Ford kept cutting the cost of his cars.

However, the boys's minds were on more immediate concerns. "I want to get home. I don't want to get eaten by the monsters," Davy said. He was the youngest and shortest of the group.

Tommy crossed his arms over his chest, and said, "Don't worry. I won't let the monsters get you."

He was the oldest of the group at eight, and he boasted not only smoking a cigarette, but also having drunk some of his dad's whiskey. All the other boys looked up to him.

Davy's eyes went wide. "Really?"

Tommy nodded. "Really. Do you think the monsters would mess with me?"

Tony wished he could have the others's confidence. He had the curly black hair and olive complexion of his Mediterranean ancestry, which made him suspect in the other boys's eyes.

Added to that Tommy had expressed skepticism that the fact that he had been born with his head in a caul was significant. His grandma told him it meant he had the second sight. He would be able to see things his fiends wouldn't.

Tony was a quiet, introspective child, so he was tolerated as part of their gang. He had a sense that something was about to happen, but he didn't know what. It would be pointless to challenge Tommy anyway.

They walked by a woman who was hanging laundry up on a clothesline. "Why, if I saw a monster..."

A drilling shriek made them turn around. What they saw made their blood run cold. A large white shape was fluttering after them. There was no discernable head, but they could see the monster's gaping mouth in the top of the torso. A pair of tentacles waved in the air, reaching out for the boys.

Tommy's eyes went wide, and he screamed, "Run, run!"

The other boys needed no encouragement. They ran as if their lives depended on it, because they were sure it did. The cool evening air was like knives in their heaving lungs. A cold breeze, like monster breath, urged them on.

They were panting from fear and exertion, and a burning feeling began to creep up their arms and legs. None of them dared slow down though, because a quick check over their shoulders showed the monster was gaining.

Meanwhile, Davy was falling behind. He couldn't yell for the fellers to slow down, because he didn't have the breath. He knew it was a pointless exercise anyway. The specter of his own impending death made him want to cry, but that would be babyish.

Then the form engulfed him, and he went down in a heap of arms and legs. He found enough breath for a howl of pure terror. Tony stopped, and pivoted around. What he saw turned his blood to ice.

Davy's head had been smashed, like a melon that had been dropped from the roof. He was covered with mud and blood, and shards of white could be seen poking through his lacerated skin.

Tony felt cold and hot at once, and he couldn't draw enough air into his lungs. He was rooted to the spot, while a storm of complex and unfamiliar emotions raged throughout him. Though he had a dim idea what they were, he had no name for them. The word CALLING CARD was branded on his mind with styluses of fire.

Then his paralysis broke, the vision faded, and a force seemed to impel him forward. He saw his hand reaching out for the monster, but it was like it belonged to somebody else. He was fascinated by this. He didn't think of himself as being brave in any real sense. His emotions were anesthetized.

As soon as his fingers touched the monster, the truth dawned on him. Ralphy began laughing like a hyena. He whacked the smaller boy on the back. "Davy, you wet end! That's a shirt!"

He scowled, and crossed his arms over his chest. "I am not a wet end!"

Tommy hooked his thumbs into his belt loops, and scoffed, "Aw, I knew it was an old shirt. I was just seeing if you guys would fall for it."

Despite his protests, it was clear he had fallen in status. They all turned toward Tony. He felt their eyes on him, and a death glower from Tommy. If he wanted to, in that moment, he could take over the gang.

A second premonition came to him at that moment. It came as a gentle wave this time, instead of a violent lightning bolt. A feeling of futility came over him. He would never quite supplant Tommy. His gift made him different, and sooner or later, the fellers would turn on him.

He wouldn't be able to save Davy anyway. He was foreordained to die. He heard himself saying, "Excuse me, fellers. I have to give Mrs. Raoczy her

shirt back.”

Until that moment, he hadn't known the woman's name. Yet, as soon as he said it, he knew it was correct. He walked away, feeling their eyes on him, like a leaden weight. He knew he would never be part of their circle again.

Six months later, the boys were running home for dinner. The heat of summer was giving way to the balmy temperatures and bright leaves of fall. Tony hadn't been seen since the fateful shirt incident, which nobody brought up anymore.

Tommy had regained the fellers's esteem by teaching them a couple new swear words. A couple new guys were allowed to join the gang. They only knew of Tony by reputation. The only one who had talked to him since then was Davy, who had pestered him to know what he had seen.

At first, he had refused, saying it didn't bear repeating. However, under Davy's relentless badgering, Tony had given in, and told him.

When Davy repeated it to the rest of the fellers, they thought it was uproariously funny. He had become quiet and sullen, though. Tommy was laughing and joking as he told the new guys about it. They laughed on cue, as expected.

Soon, school would begin, but they were enjoying their freedom to the fullest right now. They were approaching the intersection, when the toot of a car's horn alerted them an automobile was coming. Tommy's arm shot up at a right angle, to signal them to stop. All of them did, except Davy.

His eyes were glazed, and his legs were pumping. They screamed, and tried to grab him. Of course, their hands were unable to find any purchase on his clothing. He stumbled, his arms windmilling, and he landed on the street. The Tin Lizzie didn't even slow. It ran over his ribcage with a series of twiglike snaps.

He writhed like a bug stuck on a pin. His feet drummed on the cobbled street. Blood poured out of his mouth. He tried to scream, but all he could force out was a liquid mewling sound. All pretenses of humanity were gone. All that was left was a struggling organism, seeking release from its agony.

A demented response to its prayer came when a truck came barreling around the corner. There was no time to stop. It crushed Davy's head with its left front tire.

When it passed by, they saw his head lying on the road, to the left. It had taken on an oddly deflated look, his brains having burst out of the top of his head. A fan of yellow cerebrospinal fluid surrounded it, like a gruesome halo.

They stood, staring in horror a moment. Then Tommy shouted, "Run! Run!" In that moment, they were glad Tony was gone. Nobody wanted to know what horrible fate he would predict for them.

# PLANNED VACATION #1

Chad Newbill

After gobbling down their customary dinner of fried ham, collard greens  
and cornbread-  
the children grudgingly started their homework while they argued.

Mother did the dishes.

Dad settled into his green chair- left center of the television.

His concerned gaze at the TV flickered back his own reflection.

He broke a Camel cigarette in half, lit up, then balanced a six pack of

Pabst on his lap-  
plucking beers from their plastic holsters.

One beer.

Two beers.

Half way through his sixth, he straightened his back and leaned forward  
in his chair-

he looked like he would stand up at any moment.

You could see his restlessness under the yellow glaze of his eyes.

When his vices were depleted, he got up and walked with an indecisive  
gait to the bathroom.

He washed his hands and face.

He had the look of a man who wanted to say something- but didn't  
know how to word it.

He perched a smelly, winter cap on his head and stomped on his shoes.

He made the offhand comment that he was going out for cigarettes- and  
quietly closed the door behind him

in a wake of non responsive roommates.

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