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We underwent quite an extensive period of discussion, CW's publisher Andy Cox and I, about whether or not we should publish photographs of our contributors alongside their stories. 'It helps with reader identification,' Andy told me, and I agreed that it might, but added the obvious objection: it is no secret that successful writers are not generally possessed of conventional physical beauty. Compared to, say, sickly baboons.

Evolutionists are well aware of this phenomenon. Simply, the gene which enables an individual to write magnificent stories in this decade's most significant literary form, and the gene which enables individuals to possess faces which do not resemble miscarriages of justice, are only rarely discovered cohabiting. 'Do we not owe our readers a duty of care?' I asked.

Besides, I pointed out, I once heard of a cri-fi magazine that printed photographic reproductions of its contributors' facial areas, and was then sued for defamation by those very same contributors. True! (Or, to quote Frank Muir, 'If not exactly true, then a lie.'). The point being that writers — no matter that they fill their houses with mirrors to dispel rumours concerning their crepuscular routines — have really no idea what they actually, truly look like. And (the point's point being) if shown, are liable to react with a combination of anger, disbelief, denial and correspondence.

In the end, as you will see, we decided not to use authors' photos, but instead to decorate our columns with images of gargoyles, lifted from out-of-copyright cathedral postcards. 'I'm uncomfortable about this,' Andy still says. 'What if people just plain don't like gargoyles? It could sour the whole magazine for them. Without subscription income, CW cannot hope to survive.' I reassure him: 'Gargoyles are big right now.' Which is not, technically, a lie. Gargoyles *have* to be big, you understand, now and at all times, otherwise you wouldn't be able to see them from downstairs.

Mat Coward

front cover: 'Iced Maiden'



by The Unknown Artist
& Wendy Down

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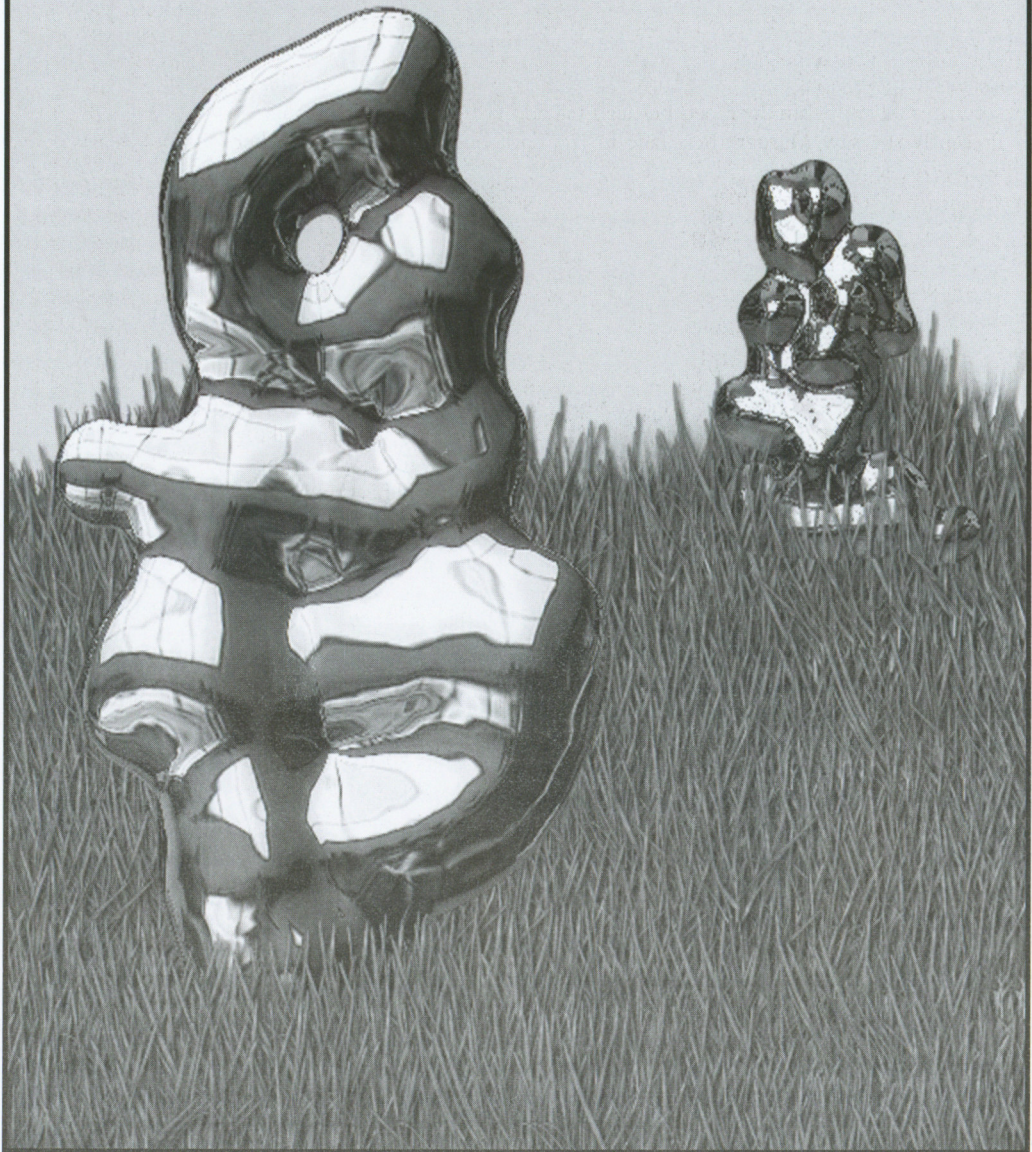
NO DROWNING MARK

Martin Simpson

*artwork by Wendy Down***SPECIAL OFFERS**

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JULIAN RATHBONE
UP YOURS



MARGARETHE SCHMIDT HAD A SERIOUS CONFRONTATION WITH HER MOTHER OVER the sculpture exhibition in the Tiergarten. Frau Schmidt was sure that the sculptures had not been put there so young children could climb over them. Margarethe, nine years old, thin, pert and fey, hair long like Alice's and in a cotton gingham dress, was quite certain that her mother was wrong.

The eight shapes invited interactivity. Irregularly rounded blobs of bronze, each about a metre and a half in diameter, thickening towards the bottom, their surfaces were scored with interesting textures and folds which suggested the cracks and crevices of fat humans — which was why Frau Schmidt felt it inappropriate for her daughter to climb and sprawl on them. They were set on small concrete plinths in the grass just a few metres north of the Café am Neuen See. When Margarethe began to stoke her rage up to a tantrum Frau Schmidt offered a boat ride to take her daughter's mind off her distress.

"No, no," cried Margarethe, and ran off into the shrubberies. She had a lithe, thin, innocent body — she took private dancing lessons, ballet and modern — and for a moment she looked like an airy sprite before the dark green leaves beneath the tall trees closed around her.

Frau Schmidt was not bothered. Three o'clock on a bright day in June, surely no one would molest her daughter in such a small area. One scream and everyone would come running. Margarethe would work off her fit of pique, and would soon be out again, smiling shyly, thumb in her mouth, claiming the boat ride. In the meantime Frau Schmidt sipped her iced tea and crumbled a macaroon.

Presently she saw Margarethe's face in the dark bushes. Contrary to her expectation the little pixie did not scamper across the grass to demand the promised treat. Instead she stood where she was with a dark leafed shrub filled with red flowers, a hibiscus perhaps, shielding most of her body. She looked pale and pensive. Suddenly she gave a shake of her long blonde hair (long and no fringe in keeping with Madame Fonnteyn's strict instructions) and turned back into the shrubberies.

Then she screamed. Not loud and long out of extreme fear or pain, but a short scream that carried frustration and perhaps some fear.

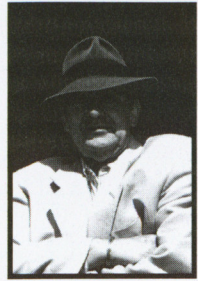
Frau Schmidt pushed her way through the bushes, expecting at any moment to be reprimanded by some caretaker or guardian for leaving the grass and walking on soil covered with woodchips. Presently she found herself in a tiny clearing.

There was a dead man in the middle of it. He was naked and his skin had the leaden whiteness of someone who has been dead for some time — a night and most of a day perhaps. He was a fat man between forty and fifty years old. When Margarethe found him he had been folded over his knees with his spread buttocks furthest from the ground above the steep slope of his broad plump back which sloped down to his thick neck.

A child could have mistaken him for a plaster cast of one of the sculptures Margarethe had been told she must not touch. Pleased to have found one out of her mother's sight she had been about to climb on his buttocks but had been put off by the clammy soft coldness of his skin in contrast to the hard sun-warmed bronze of the sculptures. There was also a line of ants moving in and out of the dead man's natal cleft. She had returned to the edge of the shrubbery meaning to claim her boat ride instead, but on seeing her mother felt she still had a point to make. She had run back to her sculpture determined to make a go of it this time. She had tried to climb up again but the body had fallen over on to its side, spilling her with it and landing partly on her. Hence her scream.

Frau Schmidt vomited. Margarethe wondered why. While her mother was vomiting she noticed that the man had lost the middle finger from his right hand, and that he had long blond hair, tied into a pony tail, but was going bald on the crown of his head.

Her mother grabbed her hand and hauled her away out of the shrubbery, hollering at the top of her voice for guardians, police, gardeners, ambulance, doctors, whatever else she could think of.



Julian Rathbone is very big in Germany. He's pretty bloody big in Britain too, where he has twice been nominated for the Booker Prize, and in 1993 won the CWA's short story Dagger. His first book was published in 1967. Since then, he's written nearly thirty novels and one work of non-fiction: Wellington's War. Rathbone lives in Dorset, but his latest crime novel is, like this story, set in Berlin: Brandenburg Concerto (Serpent's Tail) is a thriller featuring 'eco-cop' Renata Fechter.

Photo credit: Arthur Pollen.

All duly turned up. Among the first to arrive was the two-person patrol who had been on the other side of the lake. They quickly cordoned off the area with tape, told the small, horrified but morbidly curious crowd to move on (no use asking for witnesses, the corpse had clearly been dead for several hours, possibly since the previous evening) and of course RT'd for a unit from the Landes-KriminalAmt.

While they waited, the female half of the patrol pointed out to the male half that the victim had lost the middle finger of his right hand. "I wonder where it is?" she mused.

He was younger than her, was desperate not to appear weak. He scratched his chin, then nature got the better of him and he too vomited.

The woman held his forehead to make it easier, and as she did so she thought of how, far away on the other side of the Tiergarten, four kilometres away, the scaffolding was up again on the Reichstag as a team under the direction of two old, mad Americans prepared to wrap it in plastic. In the name of Art. She looked back down at the corpse. In the name of decency, she said to herself, that ought to be wrapped too. But we'd better leave well alone until the experts arrive.

Thus it was that neither of them noticed what the newspapers the next day dwelled on in as much macabre detail as they could. They paid doctors to explain how it could have been done, psychiatrists to explain why it may have been done, and clergymen to comment on the propriety or otherwise of removing it before cremation or burial: the missing finger had been pushed, with the aid of KY jelly, up the man's arse.

ALTHOUGH KLAUS KOGEL WAS VERY WELL KNOWN IN BERLIN ART CIRCLES, ERSTER Kriminalhauptkommissar Werner Gerlach of the LKA 41/13 who was put in charge of the investigation, backed by a team of Kriminalkommissars operating out of the station in Keithstraße, had absolutely no idea who the victim was. If the killing had occurred anywhere else, or if Klaus Kogel had not been a vain man, it might have taken several days to identify him. But every evening for the previous ten days or so the victim had been a familiar figure in and around the Cafe am Neuen See — for he was the sculptor who had designed the bronze lumps little Margarethe had wanted to play on.

Werner Gerlach was in his fifties, a grey man with a grey past and not much of a future. He was stocky, thickset but not fat — not that is until you saw him with no clothes on. And not even Frau Gerlach had that privilege any more. He was methodical, went by the rule book — perfectly happy to take on new procedures so long as they were clearly presented, logical, and produced results.

First he went down to the morgue to sort through the results of the autopsy. As usual he was overcome by nausea at the smell of the place, a smell those who worked there no longer noticed. He smoked a cigarette on the threshold and then joined the autopsist. Kogel's cadaver, now decently reassembled in the normal posture of a dead man lay between them, covered with a sheet that concealed the incisions and holes through which the autopsist had removed most of his major organs.

"Time of death?"

"Never easy to guess, especially with an outdoor corpse. Cool night, warm day. Rigor mortis began to wear off almost as soon as we got him back here. Give or take a few hours either side I'd say about seven o'clock Wednesday evening."

"Cause?"

"His heart stopped."

"Why?"

"Because someone had terrorised him into taking all his clothes off and made him kneel down with his buttocks spread. His left hand was flat on the ground, wood chippings and earth in the palm, and under his finger nails. He

dug them into the earth while person or persons unknown dislocated the middle finger of his right hand at the third joint. This was done with a violent twisting motion. The finger was then severed with the point and blade of an ordinary small knife like a kitchen devil. Indeed it must have been much like how one severs a wing from an uncooked chicken...”

Gerlach shuddered. He was a fastidious man. “Why didn’t he cry out?”

“He was dead before the knife went in. The shock and pain would have been very considerable. The victim had a fatty heart and I would guess high blood pressure. He used cocaine and from the state of his liver drank too much. He was overweight. Take all these things together and it’s not surprising he died.”

Gerlach grimaced, allowed himself a small sigh. Grievous bodily harm. Manslaughter. But not murder. Damn... Gerlach liked things to be tidy. Murder was tidy — short of murder you were liable to get into a maze of lesser charges which generated hectares of paperwork. “Anything else?”

“Slight contusions and signs of pressure round the nape of the neck.”

“Caused by?”

“Well I know what caused them. But I can’t prove it. Muzzle of a pistol pressed firmly, sometimes jabbed into the man’s neck. Reason why he did as he was told.”

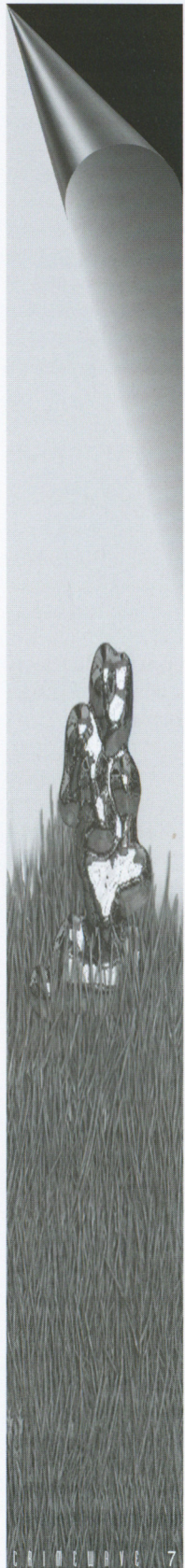
GERLACH DROVE THE SHORT DISTANCE BACK TO KEITHSTRASSE AND AT ELEVEN O’CLOCK met his team in the briefing room. There were six of them: two women, four men. One of the women and two of the men were routinely sound investigators. They’d plod round the Tiergarten, working out its daily routines, endlessly questioning and collating their results. Later, if leads presented themselves, they’d follow them up with methodically correct procedures.

The other two were different. The woman, Anna Schuster, was from the East: lean, hard, with a square chin and greying hair she brought with her a reputation that no one had dared to confirm of having been the terror of both prostitutes and drug-pushers — literally the terror, since criminals who went into interrogation rooms with her came out sadder, wiser, and in pain. But all that was, of course, before the Wall came down.

The other was Ernst Prützmann. He was in his thirties, and had been an athlete, a shot-putter of not quite national standard. He was large, had a big red face beneath cropped ginger hair, wore snazzy suits which could not quite keep up with his steadily growing girth. He was addicted to weissbier and weisswurst. His hands were huge and as red as his face. He used them to beat his broken wife and two small children, who hid on the rare occasions he came home before their bedtime. Gerlach did not approve of him but admitted he had his uses — Prützmann had a cheerful bullying relationship with a handful of petty criminals who grassed for him, and he knew how to put on the frighteners when needed.

Gerlach took the only chair with arms at the end of the long oval table and called them to order. “Not enough yet to build up a profile of the killer, anyway not one with any sense in it. So we’ll concentrate on the victim. Frau Schiller?” His palm unfolded to open the meeting to the shy, blond woman who was clever and actually liked doing research: files, archives, records, even old newspapers frightened her less than people did. But that was something she kept to herself. Outwardly she was an efficient, effective police person.

She cleared her throat, shuffled some papers, then because sunlight filtered through a Venetian blind to fall across the back of her neck, she sneezed. Gerlach’s squared fingernails drummed on the table-top. She blushed. “Klaus Kogel,” she began, “was really quite well known. He was a leader of the soft left in the late sixties, always at the front of rallies and demos, produced a magazine, the usual stuff. Took a couple of raps for cannabis possession and so on. In the late seventies, when all that was no longer the fashion, he moved into the music industry as a producer and had two hits that actually got quite





high in both the US and British charts. He already had some private money and these records left him really quite solidly rich.”

“Pinko bastard turns into capitalist swine,” Prützmann muttered, glowering at the intertwined fists that lay like hams on the table in front of him.

“He next ventured into the art world. Bought a shop close to Ku-Dam and converted it into a gallery. He also bought one of those old town houses south of Lietzenburger Straße, you know they’re all apartments now or pensions, and gave free housing to artists he thought would do well, on condition he managed them for ten years at least. He gutted the place, rebuilt the inside and lived there with his proteges. He had a good eye for art or fashion, the first lot did well, moved out, and a new lot came in straight out of the Art Schools, four or five at a time. It’s gone on like that ever since, in fact it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy — if he picks out a young painter or sculptor, because she or he has been picked by him, she does well.”

“Printing his own money,” someone remarked.

“Five years ago he went into film production. The new Fassbinder...” She looked round the room. Had any of them heard of Fassbinder or remembered him? Judging from their deadpan faces, probably not. Though Anna Schuster contrived to look knowing. “Quite serious porn inside absurd stories that mocked Christian Democrat politicians, industrialists and so on. They’re marketed as videos, so they get copied. He probably lost money on them, even quite a lot, but he could afford it. Maybe one of these offended someone important? Maybe he was threatening to make a truly revelatory film...”

Dear God, let it not be political, Gerlach prayed.

“And finally, with the help of one of the artists who lives with him, Conrad Brenner, he’s produced his own sculptures. Because he has always been an entrepreneur, an impresario, an editor, what he calls an ‘enabler’, he’s done very little creative work of his own. He was terribly proud, vain about his sculptures and visited them everyday.”

“Where are they?”

“In the Tiergarten. Close to where he was found.”

GERLACH TOOK SCHUSTER AND PRÜTZMANN TO THE HOUSE SOUTH OF LIETZENBURGER. The facade was grey stucco; the windows, five stories of them, shuttered; there was a big double front door, dark wood. A Turkish concierge who was expecting them let them in and then disappeared back into her basement.

The first floor had been removed, though the sweeping staircase which dominated the huge tall room they were now in had been left intact. The result was like an upended theatre set. Swathes of fabric hung from different levels, coloured lights glowed, flashed, came on, went off. And everywhere there were objects, statues, posters, dolls, old pieces of machinery some of which moved, weapons. The icons of both left and right were there: Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, Hitler and Mussolini. Dresden burned and the corpses were stacked in Bergen-Belsen. It was a sound and light show too — as the lights picked on a sky filled with bombers, Lancasters and Halifaxes, the ground trembled with the roar of their engines and sirens wailed. Hitler ranted at Nuremberg, Lenin in Red Square, and a vast crowd outside the White House chanted ‘LBJ, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today.’

There was a new addition. They presumed it was new. None of them thought to question when it had been put up. A model of Klaus Kogel made out of nylon tights and stockings stuffed with pellets of latex, cunningly tied into the position Margarethe had found him in, twisted slowly above the last flight of stairs. Beneath it four big black candles burned and the air was filled with the scent of frankincense.

The noises faded, the light-show became less frenetic, then to the strains of a recording of the Grand March from Tannhauser made on 78s in the late twenties, a woman appeared at the top of the staircase.

She wore a coronet that came to a high point above her forehead. A full veil of gauze trailed behind it. The rest of her body was bare but painted white down to her pelvic girdle from which swung long skirts of white samite, cut low so her sex was only just concealed. In front of her she carried a big silver, medieval sword, the cross of the guard at a level with her waist. Behind her and flanking her were two men in the uniforms of early nineteenth century Hussars — curlicued and crested helmets above deep blue jackets much encrusted with bullion, white leather breeches above thigh high boots. They too carried swords, tasselled sabres this time, in front of them.

They halted four steps above the policemen.

“Herr Erster Kriminalhauptkommissar Werner Gerlach,” the woman’s voice rang clear but deep, a true contralto, “we know why you are here. We are ready to assist with your enquiries.”

THE LADY PUT DOWN HER SWORD AND WITH A SURPRISING PRACTICALITY IN ONE SO skimpily and romantically dressed removed the candles from the corners of a large old blackened oak table with carved details. Meanwhile the two hussars sheathed their sabres and with some awkwardness since they were unaccustomed to the swinging scabbards, pushed an appropriate number of ill-assorted chairs around it.

“You will be wanting to ask us questions about dear Klaus.”

Schuster opened a notebook, Prützmann set up a recorder, one of the hussars killed the light-show apart from one bare bulb above the table, the other snuffed the candles. Prützmann told the recorder where they were, who they were, the date and the time. A beam of sun slid past the curtains of a high window and cast a tawdry spell over everything.

Werner Gerlach cleared his throat, looked at the lady. “Your name please?”

The ‘Lady’ crossed ‘her’ legs and put out ‘her’ hand for a cigarette. One of the hussars provided ‘her’ with one, the other lit it for ‘her’.

“Conrad Brenner,” and he blew smoke into Prützmann’s face. His voice was lighter than before, but no longer falsetto, definitely a man’s. He was not as naked as they had thought — he wore a flesh-coloured body-stocking with built-in female breasts.

Prützmann looked ready to vomit. It was not the smoke. The vision on the stairs had stirred him in many ways. Sexually certainly. But also there had been the imagery, the music. Little there is that exceeds excess so much as the rage of a man who has been duped in the psychic areas which mean most to him.

Gerlach, apparently unruffled, completed the opening formalities and continued. “When did you last see Klaus Kogel?”

“At six thirty on Wednesday evening.”

“You can be so precise?”

“Yes. Every day since the poor dear’s sculptures were put in the Tiergarten he has visited them. Quite early on he decided that the late afternoon or early evening was the best time — the light still strong but the sun throwing meaningful shadows. So yes, six thirty precisely.”

“Everyone in this...er, household knew that? When he went and where he was going?”

“Everyone.”

“Was there anything special or different about that evening?”

“Yes, dear, there was. He was high.”

“High? On drugs. On cocaine?”

“Oh, he always had a whiff of Lady about him, but this was special.”

“In what way?”

“He’d just had a really wonderful review of his exhibition in *Der Spiegel*. It really cheered him up, even though he probably paid for it. When he went out he was bursting with it, carrying on like Super Man looking for new worlds to conquer. Isn’t that right?”

“Look,” she went on, “We should get to Keithstraße at just about the time of day Kogel parked his car. It might be an idea to see what goes on there at this time of day...”

STILL IN THEIR COSTUMES, BUT DROPPING THE ROUTINE THEY HAD INVENTED FOR the occasion of the LKA unit’s arrival, Conrad and the two women took Gerlach, Schuster and Prützmänn all over the large house. First they had to climb the twisting and apparently freestanding staircase. It swayed and grumbled beneath their combined weights. Schuster muttered that such a rickety and clearly unsafe structure would never have been allowed under planning directives in the East. Up here the icons, posters, weapons and the rest looked tawdry and blemished the way a much used and unlit set does in a theatre. They could see the wires, ropes and pulleys, the uncased speakers and so on — there was no magic up here, not even artifice. Just gadgetry.

A door took them on to a narrow flight of wooden steps which opened on to the floor above. This was the workshop area. Each room was quite large with floor to ceiling windows. Four of them were, Conrad explained, the personal studios of the artists in residence. Each was different according to the personalities, drives of each artist and the media they used — but all had in common a daylight lack of mystery: pots of paint, camera equipment, simple small-scale welding units, an old fashioned printing press, dyed fabrics hung to dry, sketches, maquettes, work in progress, multimedia CD-ROM units. The smells varied from the pleasantly organic: wood, turps, and vegetable dyes, to the viciously poisonous, like those used in welding or colour photography — but they all suggested work.

The investigators asked inane questions and made notes in their notebooks.

The top floors were living quarters and here the personal and exotic returned. They were untidy, littered haphazardly with trash interspersed with objects, paintings, furniture which to the investigators’ eyes could have had real monetary value. It was a maze without doors, linked caves but none with any proper privacy, though here and there a space had been taken over by the possessions of one particular person like a nest in a big tree shared by birds of other species who built different sorts of nests. There was an eating and drinking area which suggested that more was drunk than eaten, and what was eaten was fast-food bought in from outside — kebabs, Thai takeaway, Chinese and pizzas. The packaging overflowed from big black bin-liners. To Prützmänn, at least, a generalised pervasive atmosphere said — drugs. But since their arrival had been expected he supposed they’d have to tear the place apart to find any.

The tour ended in a bigger area than the rest where the furnishings and decorations were more sumptuous and eclectic. It was easy to suppose that this was the centre of Kogel’s living space. Gerhard turned to Conrad. “Did Kogel have a serious relationship with any of you?”

Conrad was puzzled. “You mean one that excluded the rest of us?” he asked.

Gerlach, weighed down by a lifetime of conformity which he prided himself on, was also puzzled, gave it some thought. “Yes,” he said. “I suppose I do.”

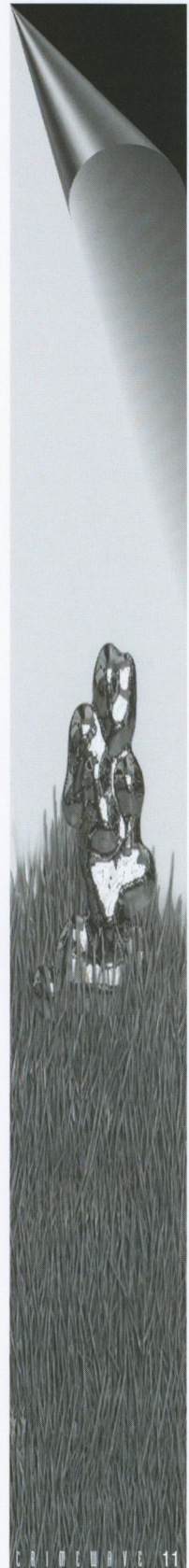
“No.” Conrad was tempted to deliver a short lecture on the sickness of the nuclear family and how it needs the structural violence of the police amongst other evils to maintain it but thought better of it. “We were, are, a community. We share each other.”

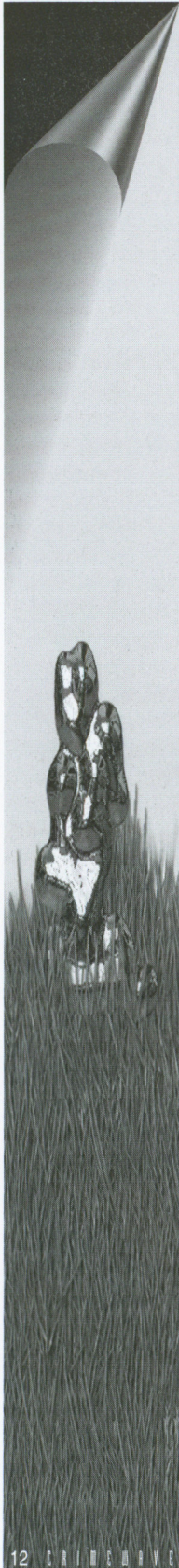
Prützmänn snorted with disgust. Shuster cleared her throat. “You don’t seem much bothered about Kogel’s death. None of you shows emotion. You answer our questions calmly and rationally. Do you not feel his loss?”

“What we feel, and how we choose to express it, is not your business.”

“Are you not anxious that the person or people who did this vile thing to your friend should be apprehended?”

“What we feel about the poor disturbed person or people who did this thing is not your business.”





There was a crash. One of the Hussar women had kicked over a low hexagonal table made from carved lattice work. It, and the possibly valuable Japanese urn that was on it, were irreparably shattered. "Make the bastards go," she screamed. "Make the bastards go."

They went.

Out in their unmarked Opel they held a brief conference. Prützmann sat in the driver's seat, the other two in the back.

"What did you make of all that then?" Gerlach asked.

"Domestic," Prützmann was adamant. "Never met such a dodgy bunch. Did you notice all the occult stuff? Black magic, tarot cards, black candles. Ritual murder, I reckon. Coven of witches. Finger up the arse symbolic."

He found a sausage-filled roll with pickled cucumber under the dashboard, began to eat it.

"Anna?"

"Politics. Or drugs. He got on the wrong side of his supplier, reneged on a big payment, something of that sort. Mode of killing retributational and deterrent to others."

Gerlach allowed himself a slight but hard smile. "You're both wrong. The killer didn't mean to kill him. All he wanted to do was pull his finger off and put it where he did."

The mobile burred. Prützmann uncradled it, handed it to Gerlach.

Presently he handed it back.

"Schiller," he said. "They're in Keithstraße, not the HQ, but the street outside. They've found Kogel's car..."

THE THREE FROM THE TIERGARTEN WALKED ROUND THE CAR. THE MEN ADMIRED ITS sleek, wide but thin boxlike shape, the leather upholstery exposed by the folded roof. It had been resprayed in bright purple metallic with glittering flames along the panels. Inside their heads they fantasised driving it through Death Valley in California, with a couple of randy short-skirted chicks. Schiller thought of Dallas and petrol consumption.

"Nice wheels," said Johann.

"Apart from the one that's flat."

Like Byron with a club foot, thought Schiller. "Why hasn't it been towed away?" she asked.

"Who knows?" Johann shrugged.

"Backhander to the guys that do the towing round here?" suggested Hans.

"Or maybe he was a shareholder in the firm."

They looked up and down the sunlit street, the doors of their HQ two blocks away, the lights where it crossed Kurfürsten Straße. The traffic not heavy, the sidewalks not unduly busy.

"Some of these people come by at this time every day."

"And some don't. How do you tell who's a regular?"

"That boy might be."

Thirteen-year-old on an undersized beat-up old MX, doing wheelies from door to door delivering handfuls of handouts into every mailbox from a battered satchel. Baseball cap worn sideways, cut down jeans, old Iron Maiden T-shirt too big for him. He wove through the few pedestrians, never quite touching them, but putting a scare into the elderly every now and then and getting cursed for it.

"Too self-absorbed," said Schiller. "He wouldn't notice a bomb going off. We've jumped too far down the story. He got out of this car, walked to the Tiergarten entrance, and on the way was joined by a fat man in a suit. Let's walk back, do what he did."

The men sighed, looked at each other.

"We've just done that."

"But the wrong way round."

Hans gave a last look into the interior of the wonderful car. “This has been halfway trashed, you know?”

The other two turned back. There were trainer footprints over the upholstery and other marks less easily identified — deep grooves in the leather but not puncturing it, candy bar and chewing gum wrappers all over the floor, empty cans and bottles of soft cheap drinks.

“Come *on*,” cried Schiller. “We’ll get the timing wrong.”

But at that moment a small flock of youngsters turned out of the side street between them and the way Schiller wanted them to go. There were seven of them — five girls and two younger boys — brothers tagging along because Mummy had said they should. Four of them were on roller blades, the boys and one girl on bikes like the one they’d already seen. The girls had cropped hair or punkish spikes. The black one had an afro. Their clothes attempted to be outrageous but they were too young for the full gear, the sort of stuff you can buy outside the Europa Centre. Instead they had improvised with black bin liners, real safety pins, face paint, feathers, beads, anything. They were as bright and as noisy as macaws.

They cruised effortlessly, the ones on roller blades eating crisps or drinking from small plastic bottles. Ignoring the investigators they swooped to a halt round the Lincoln, and the three eldest, regardless of their roller-blades, almost vaulted into it. The oldest, maybe fifteen, landed in the driving seat, put her hands on the wide wheel, made with the gear shift. In contrast to the rest she wore a black beret and now she pulled bright blue, round shades off her forehead and over her eyes. With elbow on the door she looked up at Hans. “You the fuzz?”

“Er, yes.”

“Got him yet?”

“Who?”

“The fat prick who killed Kogel.”

Schiller and Johann closed up behind Hans. Most of the kids were now in the car, the rest continued to cruise round it in overlapping orbits.

“Nah, you haven’t.” Black Beret hunched over the wheel and all her passengers made a huge noise imitating the sound of a powerful car at high speed. In unison they lurched one way then the other, screaming like locked tyres.

Schiller walked round the car, got her face as close to Black Beret’s as she could and hissed: “You’re coming down the nick with me, and we’ll keep you on bread and water until you tell us all you know about this fat prick. Right?”

For a moment Black Beret was fazed, then she leant back, took off her beret, shook out blond tresses, took off the shades, and grinned.

“I’ll tell you now.” Then she screamed: “For fuck’s sake shut up. Can’t you see this nice lady wants to talk to me?”

The kids quietened down, clustered round, their interest, for a moment or so at least, well caught.

“Go on then,” said Schiller.

“Klaus Kogel parked his car here every evening same time, and as soon as he left it we played in it. He didn’t mind, said it was just a toy for him as well.”

“Honest, he really did say that,” the black girl chipped in. “Didn’t?”

The rest all assented.

“How long has this been going on for?”

“Week, ten days.”

“And the fat man?”

Black Beret thought, then spoke slowly but firmly, anxious to get it right. “Three evenings ago, Klaus, we called him Klaus, he told us to, was going to park just up there when Fat Prick beat him to it, cutting across the road. Klaus was angry, and gave him the finger. Fat Prick was angry and followed him to where he did park, and gave him an earful. Didn’t hear what he said — ”

"I did, I did, Miss, I heard what he said." This from the youngest boy, not more than seven with chocolate all over his face, arms and legs like sticks, a runny nose even though it was the middle of June.

But they ignored him, for at that moment Gerlach, Schuster and Prützmann arrived in their Opel. Most of the kids took one look at them and turned back to the car but two of them remained facing the newcomers and went into a quiet whispering huddle.

"Then two evenings ago the same thing happened, but this time the other way round."

"What do you mean?"

"Klaus got the space they were both going for, this space. He seemed very happy, put his fists in the air and shouted 'Yes', then as he got out he gave Fat Prick the finger again, and Fat Prick just double-parked and went after him. Klaus ran, but Fat Prick caught up with him, took hold of his arm, but like went on the same way but keeping hold..."

The two at the back who had been whispering passed their message through the flock and soon they were all looking at Prützmann. He went red then white, then, heedless of grammar, they all chorused: "That's him."

He ran up the street with Johann and Hans after him. Gerlach stayed where he was. "Too old for this sort of thing," he muttered.

Johann and Hans chased Prützmann into the Tiergarten and for almost a kilometre towards the Reichstag. Then the outer edges of the huge crowd gathered to see the last stages of the Wrapping slowed him up. Johann got a grip on his shoulder which he shook off. Then, before they could grab him again he turned on them, gun in hand. They shrank back, hands hovering towards their own police issue Walthers.

"Come on, Ernst. Don't be a fool," said Hans.

"Justifiable homicide, I'd call it," said Johann and he wasn't joking.

But Prützmann scowled, bit his lip, then stuck the muzzle of the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

BACK AT KOGEL'S LINCOLN, THE SEVEN YEAR OLD BOY WITH A RUNNY NOSE AND RICKETS, pulled on Schiller's sleeve and whined: "Don't you want to know what Fat Prick said to Klaus?"

She looked down at him, pulled a tissue from her bag and wiped his nose. "All right," she said.

The little boy beamed, cleared his throat, spat tubercular phlegm onto the pavement. "Here's what he said: 'Give me the finger again and I'll pull it off and stuff it up your arse'."

The magazine which sparked The Golden Age of the detective story is back.

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When asked for autobiographical notes, Ian Rankin offers the comment 'blah, blah, blah'. He adds that he lives in Edinburgh, the city he writes about in his Inspector Rebus novels, and that he has twice won the CWA's short story Dagger. There are quite a few prize-winning, critic-pleasing, book-shifting crime writers active in Scotland just now, but none of them win as many prizes, please as many critics, or sell as many copies as Ian 'blah-blah-blah' Rankin. There'll be another story from Ian in issue two.

MARK WAS MY BEST FRIEND AT THE JUNIOR HIGH.

I kept out of trouble, while managing not to be branded a 'poof', a 'pansy' or a 'wimp'. I suppose I got on okay with everyone, fitted in. The real hard cases seemed almost to respect that I had 'brains'; at any rate, they weren't worried enough to give me a kicking. The school had its share of outsiders, boys who just didn't fit right from the word go. They looked weak, or awkward or just wrong: pale-faced; dark eyed; underfed. Maybe their clothes failed them, or their playground abilities. They were picked on all their schooldays, and made only gestures of defiance — which is why they kept getting picked on. And I'd be on the side of the bullies, the hard men, grinning and goading as they pushed and prodded the victims. Well, it was one side or the other.

Mark was a bit of a victim. His parents went to church and didn't own a television, and he had to be home by nine o'clock. He had a big brother who was going to study Divinity at the university in Edinburgh. There was enough to mark him out. But while I was seldom a victim — and it wasn't just my brains: I'd lived all my life next door to two of the hardest boys in the town, and somehow a tanger of *their* strength gave me a certain stature — I was still an outsider. I preferred to stay at home, shut in my room, listening to records and writing stories, trying to draw comic book heroes. I liked reading, too.

There was one time I *was* a victim. I can't remember how it started, but it ended with me being thrown into some bushes. My side hurt, and when I lifted my shirt to look, I saw all these splinters like bleeding thorns in my side. The nurse had to take them out. The Deputy Head asked what happened, and eventually I gave him some names. All that afternoon, boys were pulled from their classes and taken to him. I'd only grassed the weaker boys, the hangers-on, but they'd done some grassing of their own.

I think the ringleader was one of my next door neighbours, but I can't be sure now.

Mark and I shared a taste for kung fu. I'd sit through those dreadful TV programmes for three quarters of a bored hour just to take in half a minute of slow-motion kicks and chops. The town's cinema — this was before

THE MISSING



IAN RANKIN



it became a bingo hall — showed a lot of the cheap early kung fu films, and Mark and I would lie about our ages (even though the woman on the desk was another boy's mum, and knew we were underage) and sit glued to the screen, marvelling at thirty-foot leaps and severed arms and heads. Outside in the darkness, we'd practise our own moves on the way to the chip shop.

This was in the early '70s. I couldn't keep up with the trends: fashion, music, violence. Docs and turned-up Levis and Crombie coats became moccasins and Sta-Pres, Harringtons and Target shirts. Haircuts got short, then longer, then really long at the back and really short at the front. There were gangs all around — our town boasted three, but would unite for battles with the neighbouring gangs. The football terraces were riot grounds. I was scared to travel to the next town to visit an aunt, for fear the gang there would spot me. I'd get off the bus and head for back alleys, garden walls, keeping off the streets. Inside my head I was a kung fu master with rippling muscles, indestructible. And I was a pop star with deity charisma. I was a disco dancer, surrounded by awestruck girls — the good-looking ones in the school, not the sad faces I ended up with, their palms damp and smelling of stovies.

I lived inside a dream, that's the truth, and to this day I can't say if it was a defence mechanism. I know my town was probably a depressing place to live, but I only ever heard one person say so. His name was Iain Hughes, and half a dozen of us were lying in the park one evening. My parents had just walked past, out for an evening stroll. I was deep in thought about that, slightly embarrassed, even though they hadn't said anything or stopped to watch. But still, my world was no place for parents. Then Iain Hughes, a length of grass hanging from his mouth, said he hated the town.

Someone asked him what was wrong with it.

"Take a look," he said.

We looked. The pit bing in the near-distance was sending up wisps of smoke. They'd knocked down the actual colliery back in the '60s, and these days the bing looked more like a big hill, covered in weeds and small trees. Lying on the grass, we couldn't see much further, couldn't see the houses or shops. But there was a pavilion in the park, where teams got changed for games of football. It had been covered in spray-paint, gang names mostly, plus the usual Prod/Paper stuff. That was about it.

"So?" someone said.

"I just fucking hate it."

I don't think Mark was there that evening — it had probably gone nine. He always did go home at nine, seemed to know the time without asking or ever glancing at his watch. I asked him once what would happen if he stayed out, but he just shrugged. There was a youth club we sometimes went to, in a ramshackle building behind the church next to the school. One of the school hard men, Deek Wright, would bounce all over the place on a Space Hopper, though he was about four years too old and a couple of stone too heavy for it. He'd shout over to Mark in a kind of singsong.

"Time to go home, time to go home, Andy is waving goodbye."

Deek Wright was probably a maniac, but he didn't bother me. He'd been in a fight with the younger of my next door neighbours and had come off worst. Then one day, when we were running out to the sports field — the teacher was back in the changing rooms — he whipped his shorts and shirt off and did a streak around the field, waving his clothes in the air. He was a sturdy bastard, but with a smaller cock than I'd been expecting. Mark was standing next to me, wearing a baggy shirt which had belonged to his brother. It was frayed at the collar and had hoops around it, like a rugby shirt (though we didn't play rugby at my school). A few of the boys — Deek's henchmen — were laughing and whistling, but all the time keeping their heads half-turned, watching for the gym master. As Deek came trotting back, he saw that laughing loudest of all, laughing out of all proportion to the event, was Mark. I saw the glare on

Deek's face, but didn't touch Mark, didn't try to shut him up. Instead, I took a sideways step away from him. He had his face up to the heavens, Adam's apple bobbing, hands slapping his chest. Then he bent down and was coughing, choking, but still laughing. Laughing and shaking his head. Deek didn't say anything, just grabbed him by the front of his shirt and hauled on it, started turning in a circle, taking Mark with him. Then he let go, and Mark rolled across the ground, but still laughing.

"Get up," Deek said.

I hoped Mark wouldn't.

"Get up and show us some moves."

By moves he meant kung fu. Mark and I had taken our fantasies into the playground. At break time we called ourselves the Disciples of Death and mimed slaughterhouse fights with one another and with anyone else who wanted to join in. Deek was standing there in a parody of our mime. He gave me a sideways glance, and I held it, but he knew I wasn't going to step in.

Then Mark got up, and Deek punched him. Mark looked startled, took one step back, but he didn't fall, didn't even look hurt. Just surprised. That seemed to do it for Deek. He moved in with fists and feet, and this time Mark did go down.

"What's going on?"

It was the roar of the gym teacher — a man we all feared. He'd given me three of the belt once for skipping games. He was marching towards us. Deek saw that he had forgotten to put his kit on, so started pulling on his shorts, glowering at Mark like it was all his fault.

"I'll get you for this." The universal threat, almost worse in itself than the reality which might follow it. Mark got up. His nose was bleeding, dripping onto his shirt. He wiped a smear of it down his sleeve. His eyes were red-rimmed, a blush on both cheeks where he'd been hit.

"What's going on?" the teacher demanded.

"Nothing, sir," Deek said. But the teacher was looking at Mark, waiting for him to say something that would give him an excuse to belt Deek. Mark wiped his nose again, then looked at me. I looked down at my feet.

"Where do you think you're going?"

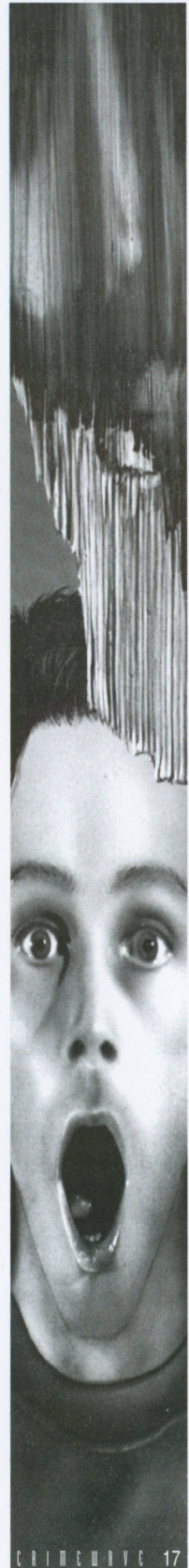
Mark was walking, his back to us. He walked off the field and across the playground, his football studs suddenly noisy on the tarmac, then silent again as he reached the school building.

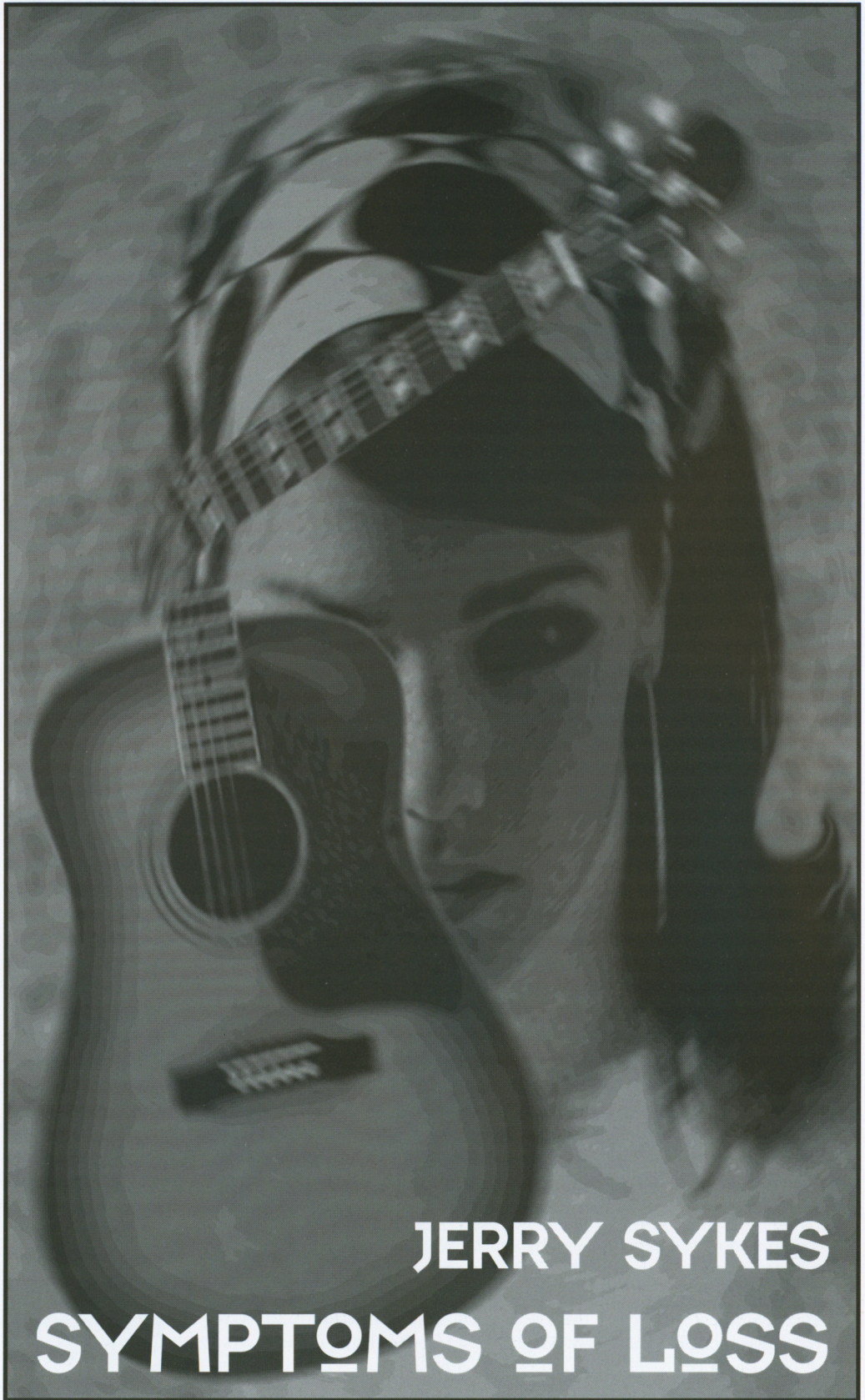
He didn't just walk out of our lives that day, he seemed to walk out of the world. No one saw him leave the school, and his parents couldn't be sure if he went home or not. They both worked; Mark had his own key. His mother thought some clothes might be missing. The police became involved. They talked to the gym teacher, to Deek Wright, to me. They wanted me to take them the same places Mark and I used to go, so I took them. My parents told me to. Mark's mum wanted to see me too. She was crying, and wanted me to tell her what had happened, what had made Mark do it. I shrugged, said I didn't know, told her I was sorry.

His photo was in the papers and on TV. They made up posters, and for a few months I saw them on noticeboards. But either they got taken down, or were torn off, or just disintegrated. There were sightings of Mark, but the police never tracked him down. They even had divers in the river and the loch. They asked people to look in their cellars and coal-bunkers and garden sheds.

I still went to the pictures, thinking maybe I'd find him sitting there one night. But they stopped showing kung fu films, and then stopped showing any kind of films. I've thought about Mark many times since, wondering what happened to him. Even now I think I may bump into him in a pub. Maybe he'll recognise me and want to stay. Maybe we'll talk about the old days. Maybe I'll tell him I'm sorry.

Sorry for what? I wonder. But I'll tell him anyway.





JERRY SYKES
SYMPTOMS OF LOSS

WHEN I WAS A KID IT SEEMED LIKE EVERY RADIO IN THE COUNTRY WAS TUNED TO THE same station.

Walking home from school on a hot summer afternoon I would catch the loose fragments of a song as they drifted through a stream of open windows and listen as they would roll into another three-minute twist of sound and emotion. It was as if each radio was a tiny speaker connected to an invisible jukebox loaded with all the hits from down the years, the music that had become as much a part of the atmosphere as the air we breathed.

Like most people I remember many of the songs from my childhood, although very few hold any special significance. It is only later, in adolescence, that we begin to attach certain records to defining moments in our lives, the heartfelt playlist invariably displaying symptoms of loss. As a child music is very much in the background, a soundtrack to our eddying emotions.

The radio in our house sat in the kitchen and the abiding image of my childhood is one of my mother, hands plunged deep into suds and staring out across the rumpled back garden, providing whispered harmonies.

She had been a professional singer back in the early sixties, nothing fancy, just one of a stable of backing singers contracted to one of the major record labels, but she had sung on a number of top thirty hits. Photographs of her at the time show that she had mastered the look, all solid hair and panda eyes, but she was destined never to make it out of the chorus.

My mother first met Greg Price, a skinny kid with dreams of stardom who would practise his Elvis swivel in the mirror until his legs ached, in September 1961 when they shared backing vocal duties on a Christmas record for some starchipped crooner. By the time the single hit number five the week before Christmas, my mother was pregnant and they were living together in a cold and damp fourth-floor bedsit in Hornsey. They were married on the first Saturday of the New Year.

In May 1962 my father was killed in a hit-and-run accident as he walked home from a late night recording session. His body was found slumped against a lamppost early the following morning by a man out walking his dog, the dog walking in lazy circles around my father and barking in his face.

My mother never remarried, although she was only seventeen when I was born in July that year. I remember a number of boyfriends, but none of them seemed to be around for more than a couple of months. Not that she was lonely; she had a wide circle of friends and my Aunt Celia would often come and stay with us for long periods of time, usually following a break-up with her most recent husband (four at the last count).

My mother loved the sweet soul music of Philadelphia and Motown, Curtis Mayfield and The Isleys, and I would often lie awake at night listening to her singing along with the radio in her tobacco-deep voice. I would imagine her standing in a pool of warm moonlight, hips moving in rhythm with the music, and my heart would trip with joy.

A few days before she died, I sat at her bedside and listened as she told me she had asked the minister to play a song at her funeral and he had agreed. She would not tell me the name of the song and in the days immediately following her death I hid from grief in trying to figure out what it might be. She had a black sense of humour and I soon narrowed it down to a shortlist of three: the first two on the list — Harold Melvin's *If You Don't Know Me By Now* and The Chi-Lites' *Have You Seen Her?* — were a bit too obvious and in the end I settled on Marvin Gaye's *Abraham, Martin and John* with its poignant and telling refrain '...only the good die young'.

But nothing could have prepared me for that moment when the minister hit the play button and the cool morning air was filled with the hiss of the small tape recorder giving way to a galloping drumbeat that roared across the small church like a parade of wild horses.

It took me a while to place the song but after a moment I recognised it as The Tornados' *Telstar*, an instrumental from the early sixties that was a hit on both



Jerry and his wife Julia live in north London, and run the small press Revolver, which specialises in lovingly-made chapbooks of short stories by leading British and American crime writers. He is also the editor of Mean Time, a millenium-themed cri-fi anthology (see p59). His own short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and books, including Cemetery Dance and The Year's 25 Finest Crime and Mystery Stories.

sides of the Atlantic. There is no doubt that my mother would have known the song, but as to why she had chosen it to be played at her funeral...

I glanced around to check the faces of the other mourners. At my mother's request it was a small crowd, mainly friends she had known for a long time, people I had grown up with, crossing paths every couple of years. I saw no trace of recognition as the tape poured out the remains of the song. Most of the faces seemed to stare straight ahead, heads gently tilted back to stop the tears from falling, mouths tight in concentration.

Except for my Aunt Celia.

She held her face up to the ceiling and I saw a knowing smile grace her lips, crinkling the corners of her eyes. I stared at her, willing her to look over, and after a moment or so I was rewarded as her eyes flickered in my direction. Her smile seemed to jump out at me and I found myself smiling back at her.

It had been four years since I had last seen Celia, since my mother had moved out to Kent, and I had only spoken to her briefly before the service, but as I turned to face the front again the years slipped away and I caught a glimpse of myself in grey flannel shorts and knotted hair, always knotted hair.

Telstar returned to the rumbling of the turntable (my mother had made the tape herself, not even the minister had been allowed a preview) and the minister pushed the stop button on the tape recorder. After the service I thanked him for his kind words and for carrying out my mother's last wish and invited him back to the house for a drink.

A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER I DROVE INTO LONDON TO VISIT MY MOTHER'S SOLICITOR.

It was a cold March day and the grey sky was filled with rolling clouds as I drove through the City and up into Islington. I left the car in Sainsbury's car park and walked through to Upper Street where the office was located over a remainder bookstore.

The stairwell smelled of paint from the DIY store next door and as I reached the first floor landing I felt a little light-headed and my vision briefly rippled in and out of focus. I pushed the door to the outer office open and entered a small reception area. A heavysset woman of around forty lifted herself from behind an old wooden desk and smiled, running her hands over her hips.

"Mr Price, so sorry to hear about your mother. A lovely woman. You must forgive me for not coming to the funeral but we only heard the news yesterday when Mr Rhodes got back from holiday." She came around the desk with both arms extended and for a moment I thought she was going to hug me.

"That's okay, it was only a small affair," I said, holding up my hands in a calming gesture to keep her at arms' length. "I'm sorry, Mrs..." I pursed my lips, slowly shook my head.

"James," she said, stopping so close to me I could smell her perfume, or maybe the paint fumes had penetrated this room as well. "Audrey James. I knew your mother quite well, although of course we didn't see each other much since she moved out to Kent."

"No, she seemed to lose touch with a lot of her friends."

"Anyway," she continued, "Mr Rhodes is expecting you; you can go straight through." She gestured to a door to the rear of her desk. "Can I get you anything?"

I nodded, still feeling the effects of the paint fumes. "Just a glass of water, thanks."

"A glass of water," she repeated, committing it to memory, and headed through the outer door.

I knocked on Rhodes's door and walked into his office.

He was standing at the window looking down at the traffic on Upper Street but turned as he heard me enter the room. He was a tall man, over six-six, and uncomfortable in his frame. To compensate he had developed a stoop, his head hanging low as if his neck stuck out horizontally instead of vertically from his



torso. A navy pinstripe suit hung from bony shoulders and his long fingers looked like fleshy links of chain protruding from the cuffs.

“Ah, Jeff, how are you doing? Bearing up okay?”

I shrugged. “Fine, I suppose. As good as can be expected.”

“Good, good.” He spread his arm out in front of him. “Take a seat, make yourself comfortable.”

I lowered myself into the dark green leather sofa set to the side of his desk.

Rhodes placed his hands above his hips and arched his back before settling behind the dark mahogany desk. He began riffling through some papers, slipping them back into blue folders. “If you’ll just bear with me... How’s Nancy?”

“Fine.”

“Kids?”

“They’re okay. A bit young to understand, you know, although I do feel I should try and explain...heaven and hell and all that.”

“Heaven and hell, yes, good,” he mumbled, distracted. “Ah, here it is.” He pulled a file from the stack at the side of his desk, read the label. “Er, no, not that one. Sorry...”

Rhodes continued to look through the files.

My mind drifted back to the day of the funeral. “Presumably you’ve looked over my mother’s file since...since her death,” I said. He peered up at me through twisted eyebrows, nodded imperceptibly. “I don’t suppose you came across anything about *Telstar* — you know, the record from the sixties?”

Rhodes leaned back in his chair, a grin spreading across his face. His huge hands grasped the edge of the desk. “She told you?” he said.

I shook my head, puzzled. “It was played at the funeral, she asked the minister...”

He frowned, the lines in his forehead forming a deep V. “So she *didn’t* tell you?”

I didn’t understand and raised my hands in submission, shook my head again. “Tell me what? She told me she’d asked the minister to play a song at the funeral, a tape she’d made. *Telstar*. I never heard her mention it before.”

Rhodes hunched over his desk, threaded his long fingers together. He looked like a vulture sitting on a rock. “In her will your mother left you just short of a million pounds in performing royalties from the recording of *Telstar*.”

I looked at him blankly, trying to get a hold on the information he had just imparted. I searched for a betrayal of the words in his eyes but all I could see was true pleasure at the delivery of the surprise.

“Performing royalties? I don’t understand. My mother, ah, performed on *Telstar*? She was a singer, a backing singer. *Telstar*’s an instrumental.”

“Well, as far as I am led to believe — and all that I have to go on is a letter from your mother — it was in fact your father who performed on the recording. And therefore, quite naturally, upon his death the royalties transferred to your mother, his wife.”

Although we had never been poor, my mother and I had never had the sort of lifestyle that a million pounds could bring. “So where has the money been all this time?”

“A trust fund was set up in your name. To be realised upon your mother’s death.”

“And you didn’t know anything...”

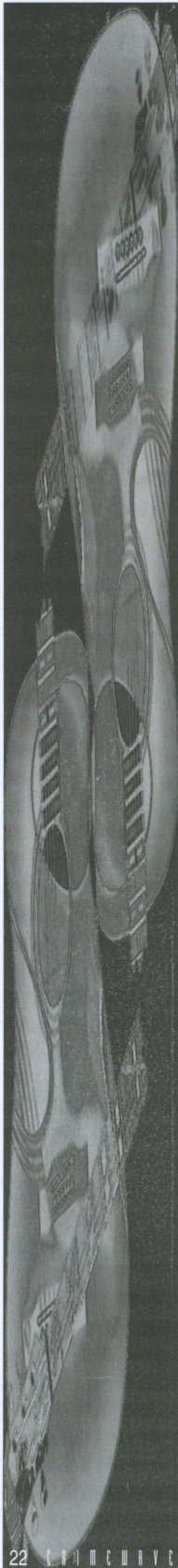
Rhodes cut me off with a shake of his head. “The first I knew of this was when I opened the letter yesterday morning.”

“Did she mention anything else about my father?”

“No, nothing. She never talked about your father.”

We sat in silence for a few minutes, absorbing the news. Rhodes eventually began detailing the remainder of the will but I had wandered into the shadows and alleys of my childhood and his words broke apart and disappeared before reaching my ears.





I knew very little about my father and had often wondered about him, but every time I thought about asking my mother I would be overcome with a terrible guilt, as if the very act of asking about him was to admit to my mother that her love was not enough. I had not even seen a photograph and over the years my image of him had developed into one featuring a blond Elvis pompadour dripping over a handsome face twisted and scarred by the elusive bittersweet taste of success.

The revelations about *Telstar* brought the image a little more into focus and with it a new determination to find out more about him.

JUST NORTH OF HOLLOWAY ROAD STATION I PULLED OVER BEHIND A DARK GREEN VW van and climbed out of the car. I waited for a break in the traffic and then ran across the busy road. I stood on the edge of the pavement to avoid the crowds of people shuffling through the morning and took in the building before me.

The ground floor now formed part of a bicycle shop that sported a huge yellow sign running the length of three storefronts. Rows of bikes from kids' to professionals' were lined up outside the shop and neon-glow shirts filled the windows.

The circular blue plaque fixed to the wall between the windows on the first floor read:

JOE MEEK
RECORD PRODUCER
'THE TELSTAR MAN'
1929-1967
PIONEER OF SOUND RECORDING TECHNOLOGY
LIVED, WORKED AND DIED HERE

There are maybe a couple of hundred similar plaques scattered throughout London, each commemorating the life and work of people who have lived in the capital and located on the buildings most famously associated with them. Because of a twenty-year-dead rule the majority were for people of whom I had never heard or had little interest. I had seen the plaque in Holloway Road on many occasions and it didn't tell me anything about Meek that I didn't already know.

An independent record producer before the term was invented (he had often been dubbed the British Phil Spector), he had created a number of hits in the late fifties and early sixties before the worldwide success of The Tornados' *Telstar* (named after the first communications satellite) in 1962 had made him a household name. A promiscuous homosexual, the more famous he became, the more terrified he became of being involved in a scandal that would jeopardise his career. The terror had eventually led to his suicide in 1967, ironically the year in which homosexuality had ceased to be illegal.

I ran back across the street and pointed the car in the direction of the Central Library.

A HUGE VICTORIAN SLAB OF WEATHERED STONE, THE INSIDE OF THE LIBRARY LOOKED more like a video rental store but I managed to locate a couple of books that touched on Meek and *Telstar*.

I could find no mention of my father although I did come across a listing of the musicians that had played on *Telstar* — guitar, bass, keyboards, drums — so unless my father was working under a pseudonym then something strange was happening. And while it was true that many singers at the time had their names changed to conjure up images of hot and rugged masculinity, the same could not be said for the backing musicians. That was certainly the case with *Telstar*.

As for Meek himself, there were a couple of interesting facts concerning his extracurricular activities. In 1963 he was arrested and charged with importuning

in a public place, an event that served only to fuel his paranoia and lay him open to threats of blackmail. Even more interesting was the fact that prior to his suicide, Meek had shot and killed his landlady in a tormented rage over the possibility of being questioned by the police over the murder of a teenage boy. There was no suggestion that Meek himself had been involved in the murder in any way, but this time the fear had obviously been enough to push him over the edge.

Perhaps the most telling item of all, and certainly from my perspective, was that in the early sixties musicians (including those in successful groups) were simply hired hands and as such were paid a flat Musicians' Union rate for any recording sessions they played on, regardless of the outcome, demo or record, hit or no hit. The record company or, as in Meek's case, the independent producer, would retain all the rights to and subsequent royalties from the performances.

I left the library and wandered up to Highbury Fields where I sat on a bench and watched two men in suits kicking a football around, their red faces bubbling with perspiration. I thought about the million pounds and tried to retrace its route back to my father, but whichever way I turned it was an immediate dead end.

On the way home I drove through Camden Town and stopped in at Tower Records. As I expected, there was nothing under Meek or The Tornados but there was a whole pile of sixties compilations, mainly from '63 and The Beatles onwards, and I managed to find one that contained *Telstar*.

As I listened to the track over and over I began to hear a kind of wailing sound hiding behind the drums as the song faded into darkness. The sound was not quite human but it was the closest thing to a vocal on the record and I wondered if it was in fact the sound of my father's million-pound performance. And then again, maybe it was just the sound of the silent scream of frustration in my head.

THE FOLLOWING DAY THE GIRLS BEGAN ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR GRANDMOTHER. Since she had fallen ill and moved down to Kent a few years earlier they had spent a lot of time in each others' company and now, a week after her death, the girls were beginning to sense that something was wrong. Nancy could see I was still a little shaky and offered to break the news to them for me. I gratefully accepted and left her to it.

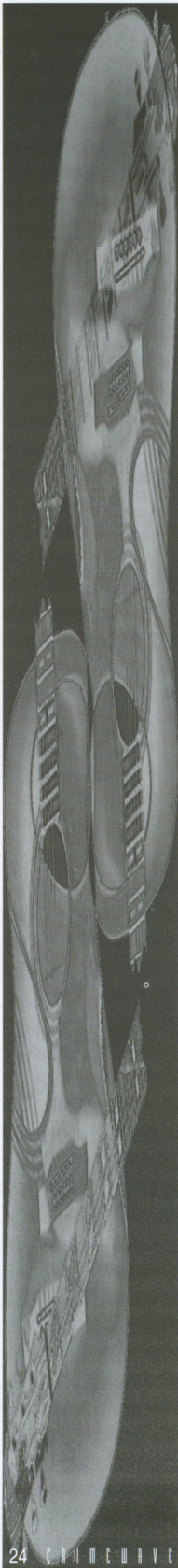
I drove over to my mother's house with the intention of sorting through her belongings. We had put the house on the market and the place needed to be cleared. Most of the stuff would be going straight to the charity shop but I wanted to sort through everything first to see if there was anything personal that I wanted to hold on to.

My mother had moved from a cramped two-bedroom flat into a spacious three-bedroom house and as she had never been a hoarder, her belongings rattled around the cold house.

I spent a couple of hours moving all the items intended for charity into the front room; all personal items I stacked into a cardboard box on the kitchen table to be taken home and sorted through later. As I worked I had a feeling that I was being watched, as if someone was looking over my shoulder, a sense of being temporarily haunted.

I left the bedroom until last believing that that would be the place where I was most likely to come across anything concerning my father. But my mother had never been one for sentiment and the only thing of interest I found was an old shoebox containing twenty mint copies of *Landing Lights*, the first record she had sung on, a stack of ten-by-eight promotional photos turning brown and curling at the edges, and a reel of tape from an old reel-to-reel tape recorder. I put the shoebox in the cardboard box on the kitchen table and then carried the box out to the car.





CELIA DRAKE EMERGED FROM THE PATIO DOORS CARRYING TWO COLD CANS OF BEER. She handed one to me and pulled the tab on the other, pouring the beer into a long glass before settling on the wooden bench and tucking her feet up under her thighs.

She offered me a cigarette and when I shook my head, she lit one for herself, tossing the match into a glass ashtray on the table between us. Her green eyes were violently alive in the sunlight.

I popped the tab on the beer and took a long swallow.

“You never met my father, did you?”

Celia shook her head. “No, that was before my time. I didn’t meet Meg until, oh, sixty-four, I think. Sixty-four, sixty-five, sometime around then.”

“My mum ever talk about him?”

A frown creased her face. “Not really. Maybe in the abstract, as if he was an interesting place she’d once visited or something.” She fixed me with a stare. “Why, you keen to find out about him now?”

“Yeah, well, I always felt a little awkward before, you know. But I thought that now mum’s dead...” I shrugged. “Besides, I always got the feeling she was making it up as she went along when she spoke about him.”

She lifted her face to the sun and smiled. “I know what you mean.”

My mother would often make up stories about my father, romanticising him, bedevilling him, weaving him into tales that I myself had read in the Sunday papers or seen on TV.

Celia pulled on the cigarette and blew a streamer of blue smoke into the air over her head. She looked at me with a directness I had never seen before and said, “You’re going to find out sooner or later so you might as well hear it from me. Your mother and father were never married.”

For some reason this did not shock me as much as I thought it would. Or Celia. She saw the lack of response in my eyes and said, “You don’t seem surprised.”

“No. I guess I never really thought of my mum as having been married. I mean, it was all over before I was born, and...well, I’ve never even seen a wedding photo or anything like that.”

“Your father was just a kid who only ever wanted one thing in his life. To be a pop star. So what’s he gonna do when he finds out your mum got herself knocked up? Put on a suit and go out and get himself a regular job? Besides, the way I understand it Meg was not the only one to fall for his charms.”

“But she still used his name.”

Celia shrugged her shoulders. “It was 1962. They were still locking up single mothers in mental hospitals back then, you know.”

I took a sip of beer and looked out across the lawn; purple and yellow crocuses poked through the faded grass. I had not mentioned my inheritance to Celia; I wanted to piece together the story of my father without any prompts or false leads.

“You remember how he died?”

“Sure, he was hit by a car when he came out of The Rainbow one night. He’d been to see Billy Fury or one of those other guys he always wanted to be and stepped right out in front of a car. I heard he was a little drunk.”

“Did anyone see it happen? Anyone with him?”

Celia shook her head. “I don’t know. Meg never really talked about it.”

“Would he have made it, do you think?”

“As a singer? Well, she always said he had a good voice and I think he did have some sort of deal with Joe Meek lined up when he had the accident. You know, the *Telstar* guy.”

I nodded, a loose smile of recognition playing on my lips.

She pointed at me with her glass. “Bill Jackson, that’s who you want to talk to. Shared a flat with Greg round about the time he was killed.” She leaned forward and added, “Knew your mum, too. She had an affair with him right

after you were born. Didn't last long but they were pretty close and stayed friends afterwards."

"So he's still alive?"

"Had a card from him just last Christmas. He lives down your way on the coast somewhere near Deal." She gently tapped me on the arm. "I'll go get the address for you," she said and lowered her feet to the ground and walked into the house.

The thought of my mother being in love filled me with an unbearable feeling of sadness and when I moved to hug Celia before I left I felt a tear squeeze from my eye and my heart swell with warmth and pride at my mother's selfless devotion. I knew that she had had boyfriends, but how could my young heart have known if she had truly been in love and had put that love aside to care for me.

DEAL WAS ONE OF THOSE OLD SEASIDE TOWNS THAT HAD DIED WITH THE ADVENT OF cheap package holidays in the mid-sixties; it seemed appropriate that a musician whose career had been all but over when The Beatles were still in Hamburg should have chosen to retire there. As I drove through the outskirts of the town I tried to imagine what the place must have been like in its heyday, but none of the images that flickered in my head had any connection to the sad grey buildings and sad grey people that slumped along the side of the road.

I drove along the seafront past the pier. A number of people braved the cold wind blowing off the sea and a cafe at the end appeared to be open, but the whole place had the feeling of having been abandoned: a commuter town where everyone had forgotten to go back home again.

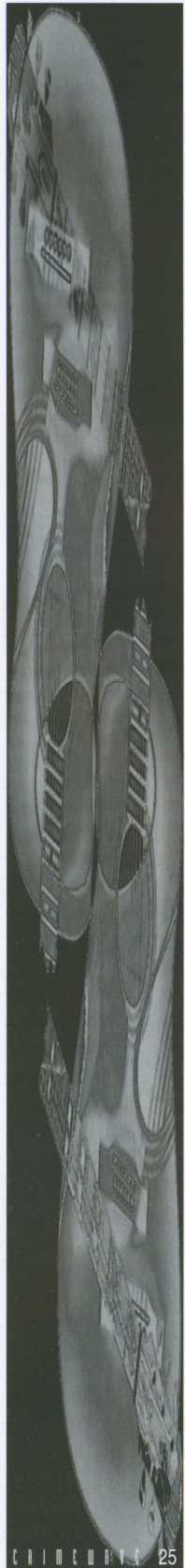
I headed out towards Kingsdown and as I moved into the countryside colour began to bleed back into the landscape. I found the village without much trouble and, after stopping to ask directions in the village store, followed a narrow lane down to the coast road. Between the road and the sea a dozen or so wooden chalets kept watch across the channel.

I left the car on the road and walked up the narrow pathway to the sky blue chalet in the centre of the row and knocked on the door. The chalets appeared to consist of a single room and I wondered how safe they would be in a storm; only fifty feet of pebbled beach separated them from the sea. The pastel paintwork only added to the sense of fragility.

Jackson was home and after I introduced myself he ushered me through the front door. I scanned the room: partitions in the two far corners isolated what I took to be a bedroom and a bathroom; a kitchen crept into the living area from the wall directly to my right. A battered acoustic guitar was the only sign of his past.

Jackson was a wiry man with his hair brushed back in a threadbare DA, drainpipe jeans, and a fisherman's smock. His eyes still held a boyish light and I wondered what had brought him to this isolated corner of the country. He made a pot of coffee and settled into an old armchair below the rear window. I pulled out a chair from the small dining table and sat facing him.

I started to ask him about my father but he held up his hand and stopped me. A dark sadness befell his eyes and he took a deep breath. "Joe Meek didn't used to write songs; he used to hear the completed record in his head and then try and capture that sound on tape. His flat, his studio, was always full of musicians: there'd be the rhythm section in the living room, guitar and vocals in the bedroom, keyboard in the loo, strings out in the hall and the brass section lined up down the staircase. Joe would be in the kitchen with his equipment pulling it all together. And if he didn't hear the sound he wanted, well, he'd try something else. I once saw him stamping on the bathroom floor to get just the right drum sound he wanted. He wasn't afraid to take risks and try something new. It was that same 'out-there-ness' that pushed him to take risks in his private life and leave him open to predators.



“Your father wanted to be a star. He thought Billy Fury was the greatest singer he had ever seen, *Halfway to Paradise* the greatest song he had ever heard. He was like that, Greg, everything was big, he had no time for anything less. Fury was greater than Elvis, greater than Buddy Holly, and Greg Price was going to be bigger than all of them.

“He had some kind of deal with Meek to record a couple of songs with The Tornados — Greg liked the idea that they’d originally been Fury’s band, as if he’d stolen them from him or something. But then Meek changed his mind. He had the idea for *Telstar* and wanted the band to become some sort of keyboards-led Shadows; the Shadows were incredibly popular at the time and Meek wanted a piece of the action. Greg was furious. He tried to blackmail Meek about his homosexuality, but Meek was already being leaned on by a bunch of goons and when they got to hear about it...” He drew a finger theatrically across his throat.

I stared at the man, incredulous. “Are you saying my father was murdered?”

“Well, it’s more of a gut feeling, I don’t have any proof.”

I nodded for him to go on. I could feel my heart beat against my ribcage and my face felt numb. Suddenly a man who had been killed before I was born was the most real person in my life.

His shoulders had slumped and he stared out of the window. A watery redness had seeped into his eyes. “I remember him telling me that he’d been threatened by a couple of thugs one night, guys he’d seen hanging round the café near Meek’s flat. I just thought it was another one of his stories, even after he was killed. There was nothing to suggest that the accident had been anything but an accident.

“But then a year or so later, when I’d been seeing Meg for a couple of months, Meek’s assistant Johnny Wood asked me why I was still working, why didn’t I just get hitched to your mum and retire. When I asked him what he meant, he said something about Greg having been sacrificed for her benefit.”

“Sacrificed for her benefit? You know what he meant by that?”

Jackson shook his head.

“Did you ask my mother what he may have meant?”

He shook his head again. “She wouldn’t talk about it.”

“Did my father play on *Telstar*? Is that what this guy Wood meant, do you think?”

Jackson looked at me with a puzzled expression on his face. “Your father was killed before *Telstar* was recorded,” he said.

“Yes, of course,” I said, the words drifting away from me.

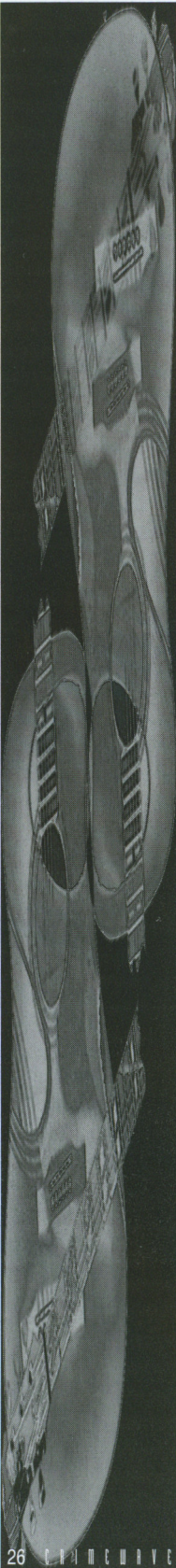
My head was beginning to feel a little foggy and I suggested we take a walk along the beach and for a couple of hours he chatted about the early days of the British pop scene. Time had dulled his memory and there was only real feeling in his voice when he spoke of his old friends.

I could smell salt on the air and the rhythm of the surf breaking on the pebble beach had a calming and refreshing effect on me. I felt at ease for the first time since my mother’s death.

As we walked back along the pathway and stopped in front of his chalet, Jackson said, “Greg was a ruthless man and a great user of people. He used your mother, dumped her the minute he heard she was pregnant. But he didn’t deserve to die.” He looked out across the flat grey expanse of the sea, his face heavy with a sadness that had been buried for a long time. “He was a good friend to me.”

I drove home with the feeling that at last my father was becoming a real person, with flesh and blood and hopes and ambitions and a mean streak as wide as it was long.

I was still no clearer to finding the truth about *Telstar*, but Jackson had told me that Johnny Wood still lived at the flat in Holloway Road.



THE FOLLOWING MORNING I STOOD OUTSIDE THE BIKE SHOP LOOKING UP AT THE windows on either side of the blue plaque. It was almost eleven and the blinds were still drawn. I rang the bell and waited.

The features on Wood's large face were bunched close together and large patches of tired skin reflected the dull light emanating from the naked bulb hanging from the ceiling of the hallway. Strands of brittle grey hair covered his scalp.

He closed his eyes and nodded as I introduced myself, as if he had been expecting me. He turned and I followed him up the stairs.

I refused the offer of a drink and sat on the edge of the sofa and waited for him to speak.

"I first met your father back in January '61," he began, a new energy in his eyes. "He was just a kid — nineteen, twenty — and like every other kid who came around he wanted to be a star. Joe used to let some of 'em hang around, helping out, running errands, that sort of thing. Good-looking kids, Joe always had good-looking kids hanging around, especially if they didn't mind staying over." He raised his eyebrows and looked at me knowingly. "Greg could sing a little, he even played on a couple of records, I think. He was never gonna be a star, but he kept on pestering Joe to let him make a record.

"One morning, right out of the blue, Joe tells me he's gonna let Greg do *Walk Her Home* with The Tornados backing him. I think Greg must've stayed over the night before..."

Wood paused to light a cigarette and let the full meaning of his words sink in; I let his words hang in the air.

"Told me to call in the guys, we were gonna do it that afternoon. Anyhow, a couple of hours later, Joe changed his mind, told me to scrap it. Greg was furious. He came around late that night smashed out of his head. It was around ten and I was in the kitchen recording some overdubs with Joe, who was in the living room. The two of them got into this huge argument, a fight — I could hear it all through the speakers in the kitchen — and Joe hit him over the head with a guitar. I heard this awful scream and ran into the living room, but Greg was already dead, just lying there with his head in this pool of blood. Joe was standing over him with the guitar still in his hand. Next thing I knew Meg was in the room — she'd been staying with Mrs Harvey downstairs since Greg had walked out on her — pushing everyone around. She sent me out to the kitchen and told me to sit tight and I just sat there shaking, I was shaking so much I could hardly light a cigarette.

"When I turned up the next morning Joe was sitting in the living room just staring at the spot where Greg had fallen. He'd been up all night and his eyes were sunk deep in his face. He told me that they'd bundled Greg into the boot of his car and gone and dumped him in the road up behind The Rainbow someplace. Made it look like an accident." He pulled on the cigarette. "And then your mother asked me for a copy of the tape."

"The tape?" I said.

"Yeah, the tape. I'd left the machine running and got the whole thing down on tape."

I remembered the tape I had found in my mother's house. "You still have a copy?"

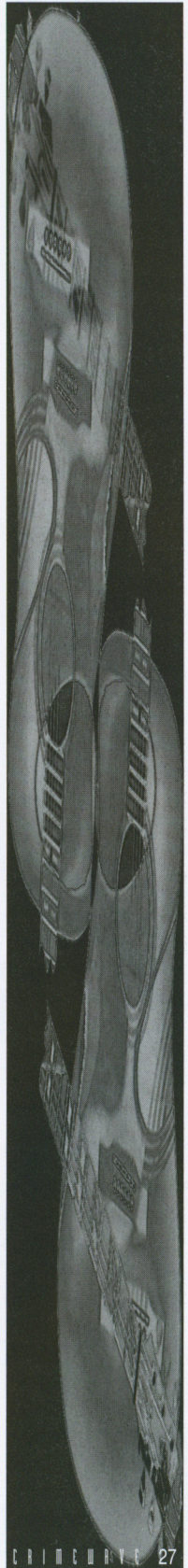
He shook his head, no.

It now seemed pointless asking whether or not my father had played on *Telstar*, the royalties had obviously been the pay-off. "You know what happened after that?"

"Joe never mentioned it again. I think he went to the funeral, though."

"And you have no doubt that she was blackmailing him?"

"Joe was always getting blackmailed, he said it was the curse of the famous queer. I think he just dealt with it the same way he did any other threat — he paid up and hoped that she wouldn't come back for more."



A pained expression of satisfaction came over Wood's face and I had the feeling that he had been waiting in the flat for nearly forty years to tell me the story.

Over the next few days I tried desperately to hold on to the image I had of my mother. But it seemed that the more I learned about my father, the closer I came to knowing him, the further she slipped away, drifted into an alien darkness; the rasping angel of my childhood had become a dark and vengeful siren.

I had no intention of going to the police and I had no problem in reconciling myself to the money. Theoretically, it belonged to my father and whatever reservations I may have harboured about it being blood money soon dissolved when I told myself that because my mother had taken herself out of the loop (by creating the trust fund) it was a legitimate inheritance.

My acceptance of the money was also the acceptance of my father the star and his posthumous number one.

The beautiful irony of this did not strike me until a couple of months later. Nancy and I had stolen an early summer break from the kids and were enjoying a weekend in Brighton. Browsing among the junk shops in the Lanes on the Sunday morning, I came across an old tape recorder and I immediately thought of the reel of tape that I had found in my mother's house. After my meeting with Johnny Wood I had tried to forget about the tape but a primal curiosity got the better of me and I put down two crisp five pound notes on the glass counter and walked out of the shop with the tape recorder under my arm.

As soon as I got home I dug the shoebox containing the reel of tape out of the attic and set up the equipment. The tape had faded over the years and there was a persistent hiss but it was still possible to make out what was happening.

I listened with calm detachment as the sound of two men arguing broke into violence, cries of pain riding a backbeat of flesh being struck. And then there it was, the final heart-wrenching scream of my father as the killing blow of the guitar connected with his head.

But it was the realisation that the cry was exactly the same cry that rode the fade-out of *Telstar* that brought the cold smile to my lips.

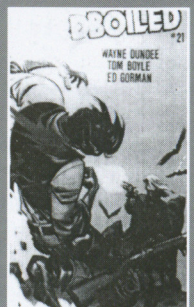
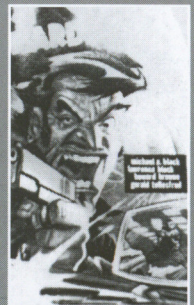
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Michelle Spring was born and raised on Vancouver Island, and studied at the Universities of British Columbia, Victoria and Essex. An academic, she has worked in Cambridge since the early 1970s, where she lives with her husband and their two children and where she sets her acclaimed detective novels featuring Private Eye Laura Principal. Her first novel *Every Breath You Take*, featuring Private Investigator Laura Principal, was published to critical acclaim in 1994, followed by *Running for Shelter* in 1995 and *Standing in the Shadows* in 1997.



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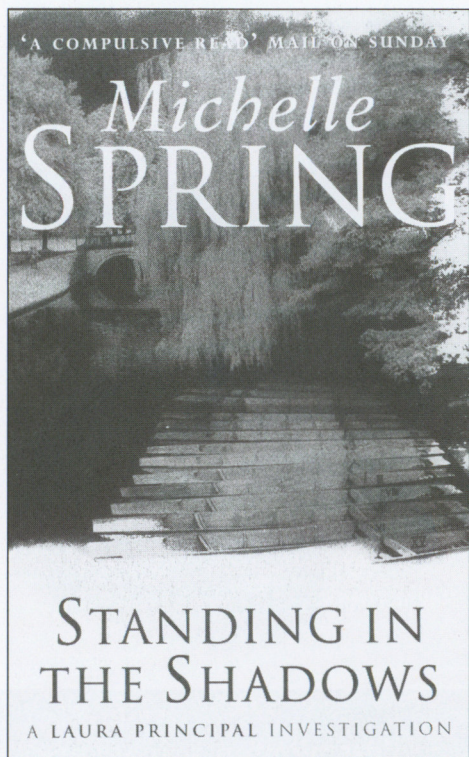
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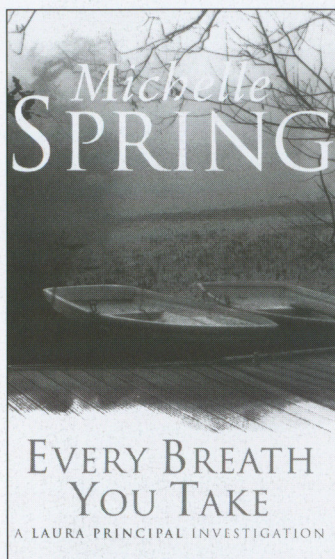
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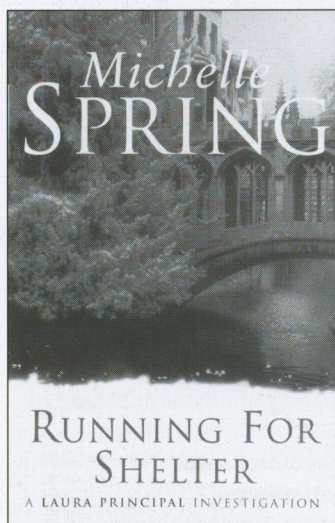
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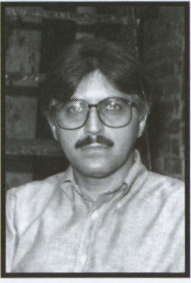
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Market Street



O'Neil De Noux

JOHN RAVEN BEAU WATCHED TWO LARGE BLACK MORGUE ATTENDANTS HAUL THE BODY bag up on the stainless-steel autopsy table, unzip the bag and pull out the most important piece of evidence in any murder case — the body of the victim. It flopped on the table. The attendants stepped back. It wasn't a complete body actually. It was a torso.



O'Neil De Noux is a former homicide detective, and it shows in his work. His increasingly popular stories of cops and killers in New Orleans positively stink of authenticity. The latest novel in his LaStanza series is The Big Show (Pontalba Press, 1988), and his short stories have appeared in Britain, the USA and several other countries. O'Neil also teaches mystery writing at the University of New Orleans. What happens to those of his students who turn their homework assignments in late, I dread to think...

Photo credit: Debra Gray De Noux.

Beau pulled off his red flowered tie and shoved it in the pocket of his blue blazer. He took the blazer off and hung it on the beat-up coat rack next to a cabinet with a glass front. The cabinet held glass jars inside with pieces of organs — like something from a Frankenstein movie.

Beau pulled his note pad and pen from the blazer's inside pocket and jotted the date and time on his note pad. He tried his best to ignore the sharp acidic smell of formaldehyde and whatever other chemical odors swirled around the poorly ventilated autopsy room of the Orleans Parish morgue, a medieval cutting room lovingly known to New Orleans homicide detectives as 'The Chamber of Horrors'.

An overweight crime lab technician stepped forward and photographed the torso from different angles, including close-ups. Beau wrote a description in his notes: 'Torso of a white female, twenty to twenty-five years old, dark brown pubic hair, no visible scars or marks'.

The technician then donned rubber gloves and pulled out a magnifying glass and examined the torso up close. The pathologist came in. Wearing a white smock with yellow stains, his own rubber gloves and magnifying glass, Dr SR Goode stepped up to the autopsy table to begin his own examination.

Beau leaned back against the wall and waited.

Perched on a stool a few feet away, Detective Sergeant Dennis Merten rubbed the stubble of beard on his chin and said, "I don't fuckin' believe this shit." A six foot bowling-ball of a man, Merten's skin was so black it seemed to shine. Hunched over, the big man turned his weary eyes to Beau and shook his head. Merten's dark brown eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep. "Fuckin' maniac," Merten said and began to rub his eyes.

Beau brushed his own dark brown hair from his eyes. At least Merten was too weary to remind him he needed a haircut. He had to keep up his rogue reputation, after all. The long hair was part of it. Although he shaved every morning, he delighted in the fact he had a perpetual five-o'clock shadow on his lean face. It made him look unkempt.

Beau fought back a yawn. He wanted to scream but was too tired to do anything except write the number 4 atop his notes. Hell, even his fingers ached.

He looked at the number 4. This was the fourth torso. Back when the second torso was found, the wonderfully creative New Orleans media named the killer 'The Maniac'. The media liked monikers like Son of Sam and Jack the Ripper and The Slasher. They liked simplicity. It showed in their stories.

Beau watched Dr Goode take out a white comb to carefully comb the torso's dark pubic hair, collecting the debris on a sheet of white paper. Even more carefully, he slid the paper and debris into a large envelope before he took out a pair of tweezers to pluck several pubic hairs to collect in another envelope.

Beau didn't watch that. It gave him the chills, although he knew the torso felt nothing. He looked away again when the doctor swabbed the victim's vagina and then swabbed her anus, collecting each swab in a separate test tube for analysis. To check for seminal fluid — Beau knew the routine. He'd seen it enough times in the nine months he'd been in Homicide.

Bone tired, his own eyes burning from overwork, Beau went through the motions, carefully noting pertinent details for his report. In Homicide, the pen was more important than the bullet. Pens got used.

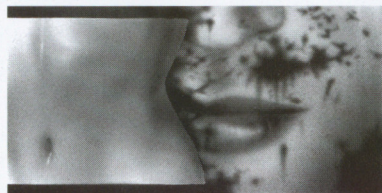
The attendants flipped the torso over for the tech and the doc to examine the backside. Then the tech took his magnifying glass over to the body bag for a closer look.

Dr Goode rinsed off the torso with a water hose and collected debris from the strainer in the drain of the stainless steel table. He put the wet debris in a brown paper bag so it could air dry without mildewing. Beau watched Goode slice open the torso, watched the razor scalpel lay open the flesh as quickly as Beau's mother used to filet catfish. A large 'Y' incision starting from each shoulder met just above the torso's breasts and sliced all the way down to the top of the vagina. Beau held his breath momentarily to avoid that initial stale smell of a body freshly laid open.

As soon as the smell subsided somewhat, Beau stepped up to take a closer look at the wounds. Hacked. The head and limbs were hacked off with a long sharp blade. The coroner speculated it was a machete.

Beau stepped back as Goode snipped the ribs around the sternum and pulled the sternum and ribs away. A close examination of the interior followed, including the removal of each organ. Goode sliced each organ on a dicing board, collecting a piece of each in a tube for later analysis, along with whatever blood was left in the torso, urine, bile, and stomach matter.

Leaning against the wall again, Beau narrowed his eyes and let his mind drift. He remembered...the time his grandfather told him about men slaughtering women and children. He told him the story of Sand Creek and Wounded Knee, about how the white eyes had murdered the women and disemboweled children and blew old men up with cannon fire. Beau was so scared, he shivered. Later his grandfather told Beau about the Little Big Horn where his great-great-uncles led a storm of brave warriors against the pony soldiers, leaving their carcasses naked under the bright Montana sun. For a moment Beau saw his Cajun father's dark face, the drooping moustache as his father smiled at him. Sometimes, at night, his father would return to him in a dream. Dead ten years now, his father came back again and again. Sometimes, when Beau woke he would try to go back to sleep right away, to see his father again. To go fishing with the old gentle man. To feel his father's large callused hand on his shoulder as they climbed into their pirogue to go hunting in the swamp.



“Hey!” Beau blinked and saw Merten standing in front of him, stretching. Merten looked at his watch and said, “Go get some sleep. I’ll call ya later.”

It wasn’t like Merten to be nice. He must be dead tired.

Beau grabbed his coat and tucked it under his arm. It was going straight to the cleaners, if he could ever find time to get to the cleaners.

“Um, the manner of death is homicide,” Dr Goode declared, his eyes bobbing. “Cause of death — she lost her head.”

The lame joke died there in the autopsy room.

Beau and Merten took a roundabout way out of the old concrete criminal courts building to avoid the TV cameras waiting outside the coroner’s office.

BEAU SMELLED THE BLOOD AS SOON AS HE STEPPED INTO THE ABANDONED WAREHOUSE at the corner of Market and Tchoupitoulas Streets. The superheated air in the large brick building was thick with the coppery scent of blood. Beau stopped and fanned the short-sleeved dress blue shirt he wore over his black tee-shirt. But that did little to help. Perspiration immediately formed along his temples and down the small of his back. *How the fuck did anyone ever find this dump?* he thought as he stepped over a pile of rubble. He was glad he’d worn blue jeans and tennis shoes, even if they were white. He knew it would piss off Merten, but that was nothing new. He had to keep up his rogue reputation.

Beau ducked under a fallen rafter. At six feet, two inches, he still had his quarterback physique even at thirty. He flipped off his portable police radio to shut off the incessant static, just as his sergeant called out: “It’s about fuckin’ time!” Merten glared at Beau from the other side of a large pile of rubble near the center of the warehouse. Merten’s dark face was flush with sweat. His usual scowl seemed exaggerated in the heat. “You didn’t hear me callin’ you on the radio?”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” Beau shot back. He was going to explain how his radio was on the fritz, but fuck it. He stepped around the large pile of two-by-fours, broken glass and roofing material to where his sergeant stood with another detective and a crime lab technician.

Beau moved out of the darkness into the glare of police spotlights — and into a slaughterhouse. It took a few seconds for the scene to register. Off to the right were two human torsos, three arms, five — no, six — legs, all lying in a pile on the floor, all smeared with blood. They looked orange under the bright lights.

Directly in front of his sergeant were three human heads propped up on a large wooden crate. Dark stains of blood streaked the front of the crate. Beau felt his stomach turn, not at the sight, but at the smell, at the strong acrid smell of blood.

"What a fuckin' night," Merten said behind Beau. "Cop shot in Algiers. Fuckin' double killin' in the projects. A dumped body in Gentilly. A floater in the fuckin' lake. And now *this*."

"Weren't we at an autopsy this morning?" Beau said sarcastically. He'd actually gotten about eight hours sleep after the autopsy. He'd also taken a quick trip back to the levee where body number four had been found for another fruitless search before all the calls came in.

He felt his sergeant tap him in the back with his knuckles. "Where were you?"

"At Charity." Beau turned and looked at his sergeant. Merten looked worse than beat. His standard-issue K-Mart brown suit looked as if he'd slept in it. His tan tie looked like a dead tongue. "I was at Charity. The cop's gonna be all right," Beau said.

"I know he's gonna be all right!" Merten ran his right hand over his face then wiped the sweat on his shirt.

Beau turned and took a step closer to the bodies. One torso was male, the other a young female barely in her teens. He leaned closer. The flesh had been hacked, just like the others, the bones neatly sliced.

"This is the most un-be-fuckin'-lievable crime scene," Merten said, stepping next to Beau. He waved at the bodies and said, "It's a fresh kill. I want you to canvass the fuck outta this neighborhood."

Beau nodded, his stomach burning sour now. "What kind of demented mother-fucker...?" he heard himself ask aloud.

"That's the million fuckin' dollar question, ain't it?" Merten snarled. "And where the fuck is your tie? We wear ties in Homicide, boy."

"I sweated so much, it fell off."

"Real cute, Beau." Merten let out a tired cough and put a friendly hand on Beau's left shoulder. In a lower voice he said, "How is it you always know the right night to wear jeans and tennis shoes?"

"My feminine intuition, I guess."

Beau wasn't sure, but he thought he saw a hint of a smile cross Merten's exhausted face before the big sergeant pointed to the other detective and said, "Talk to Sam before you hit the bricks." The big sergeant moved over to the crime lab technician to fuck with him now.

Beau spotted two patrolmen gawking from the background. He recognized the taller of the two — Irish by the name of O'Rourke. Meeting O'Rourke's eyes, Beau shook his head. "This fuckin' city," O'Rourke said.

Beau turned to Sam Hayhanan who stood about ten feet away near the center of the warehouse. Writing furiously on his clipboard, his prissy face dripping perspiration, Hayhanan looked too neat to be a detective. He wore off-white suit pants with a white shirt and pink tie. Like Beau, he had his gold star-and-crescent New Orleans police badge clipped to his belt, but unlike Beau his gun wasn't on his belt. Not that Beau gave a fuck, but he felt like fornicating with Hayhanan, so he asked the know-it-all dick, "Where's your gun?"

Hayhanan let out an impatient sigh, the kind little girls let out when a boy asks a silly question like 'Curtains? Why do we need curtains in a tree house?'

"We have two complete bodies here. Three heads. We haven't canvassed anything yet. So go." Hayhanan waved Beau away as if he was dismissing him. Beau hated when he did that so he stayed put, which quickly annoyed Hayhanan even more. "My gun's on my ankle," Hayhanan said. Then he said in a louder voice, "Where's your tie? This ain't the reservation, you know."

"I must have left it at your house, when I visited your wife."

Hayhanan glared at Beau. He looked like he might throw a punch. His right cheek actually quivered.

Come on. Please. Throw a punch.

Hayhanan's face reddened. He huffed and held his breath, but threw no punch. The prissy detective looked over at Merten too see if he'd heard, or would help, but Merten was too busy telling the technician how to triangulate measurements from each head to three fixed points in the warehouse. Hayhanan went back to his notes and stammered, "You don't know my wife, asshole."

That was true. "But I know you, you needle dick bug-fucker."

Hayhanan looked up again and said, "Why don't you just take your Injun ass outside and canvass like Sarge said?"

Beau stepped closer and said, "What'd you call me?"

Hayhanan continued writing in his notes.

"Come on." Beau egged him on. "What did you call me?" Hayhanan wasn't biting. So Beau stepped even closer and put his right index finger in Hayhanan's face. "There's an old Lakota saying, 'Don't go looking for your own grave. You may find it'. That's Sioux. My mother is Oglala Sioux. Not Injun. You got that, pink boy?" Beau reached over and flapped Hayhanan's Pepto-Bismol pink tie.

Hayhanan closed his eyes and stood very still.

Beau turned and made his way out of the slaughterhouse back into the steamy summer night. Crossing the broken sidewalk to the blacktop street littered with pot-holes, abandoned cars,



washing machines and a doorless refrigerator, Beau pulled his black police Kel-light flashlight from his left rear pocket and slipped his portable radio into the same pocket. He adjusted the holster at the small of his back. The weight of his new stainless-steel Beretta 92-F felt reassuring. He pointed his flashlight at the blue and white street sign at the corner. *Market Street. A fuckin' slaughterhouse on Market Street. Only in New Orleans. Fuck!*

Beau pulled the pad and pen from his dress shirt pocket and started his notes with the date and time: 31 August, 11:25 PM. Then he wrote the numbers 5, 6, and 7 atop his notes. He looked to see if there was an address on the warehouse. There was none, but this had to be the four hundred block. He wiped sweat from his brow with his left hand and fanned his shirt again, trying to capture whatever breeze there was on that dark street. But there was none. The street smelled of coffee grounds, rotten bananas and decay.

Across from the warehouse stood another, smaller red brick warehouse. Beau stepped over and pointed his flashlight through a window frame with no glass. The warehouse was completely empty, although its floor was littered with assorted trash, paper mostly.

With the help of the bright moon, Beau checked out each abandoned car parked along Market Street. He copied the license plate number of a black Chevy that looked like it might run. He flipped on his radio again and played with it, but could only get static now. He slipped it back into his rear pocket and made a mental note to get it fixed tomorrow.

Tapping his Beretta with his right hand, he smiled to himself. He'd just bought the new 9mm semi-automatic, took it to the range twice already. It fired smooth as shit. With fifteen semi-jacketed hollow points in the magazine and one in the chamber, the Beretta was a vast improvement over the old six shot revolver Beau used to carry. At least he felt that way.

Beau walked up the street to Tchoupitoulas Street, found four cars parked there and copied each license number, checking the interiors out with his flashlight. He checked their hoods to see if they were warm. They weren't. Then he checked out two more abandoned warehouses along this dilapidated area of town. The only life he saw was one huge wharf rat hustling across Market Street and a nest of cockroaches swarming over some rotten garbage. Beneath one of the few yellow street lights that worked, the pile of slick, brown roaches seemed to boil as they climbed over the garbage.

Checking the back of the slaughterhouse, Beau's flashlight picked up a small shiny puddle near where part of the wall of the warehouse was missing. It had an

iridescent sheen to it. Oil. Stepping back, he swung his flashlight around on the ground and picked up another shiny spot. This one wasn't iridescent. He went down on his haunches. It looked black. Beau tore a sheet out of his note pad and dipped the corner in the liquid. It was red. He sniffed it. Blood. He felt the hair stand along the back of his neck. Rising, he swung his flashlight in an arch back and forth until he spotted more blood. Two steps beyond he found more drops.

Beau looked back at the hole at the rear of the warehouse. The blood drops seemed to lead away in a straight line. He followed that line, going down on his haunches again and again to make sure the drops were still red. Moving slowly around the building back to Market Street, he followed the drops down the block toward the giant electric plant at the end of the street next to the dark wharf and the river. He remembered something his father told him when he first started hunting: 'Take your time, boy. Take your time and make it last. You'll only have this time once'. Beau always remembered that first hunting trip in the swamp. They tracked coons for hours but only wound up shooting a nutria and a rabbit.

Wiping sweat from the sides of his face, drying his hands again and again on the sides of his jeans, Beau worked his way along the blacktop until the drops ended. To Beau's left was a vacant lot. To his right stood the carcass of another warehouse, in worse shape than the slaughterhouse. The doors of this warehouse were missing, so were the windows that faced Market Street. The building was made of rust-orange brick, crumbling from age. Even from the street, Beau could see most of its roof had caved in. What remained of the roof was supported by large round black wrought-iron pillars. Searching carefully, he found a drop of blood near the doorway.

Pausing to catch his breath, Beau realized he was breathing heavily, his heart racing. He flipped off his flashlight and eased through the doorway. Standing just inside the door, he closed his eyes and listened, letting his eyes adjust to the darkness.

He heard something. He heard a scraping sound, distant and faint and straight ahead. Opening his eyes, Beau took a cautious step forward and followed the moonlight through a maze of fallen timbers and portions of tarred roof until he saw more light ahead. He stopped and listened again. He heard nothing for the beating of his heart in his ears. But he knew something was there. He felt something there. Slowly, he reached around and pulled the Beretta from its holster, carefully flipping off the safety.

Inching forward he spotted an open area straight ahead and heard something again. He stopped and strained to hear. It was a voice. Someone was talking ahead and off to his right. Beau tried to swallow but his mouth was too dry.

Creeping now, Beau moved around the last timbers and peeked over to his right, to the wide expanse of open sky above and a clear, moonlit view of a naked man about thirty yards away. The man stood in the center of the roofless part of the warehouse. Covered in blood, the man was talking to a torso of a young woman propped up on a pile of rubble. The woman still had her right arm.

Beau squeezed the Beretta's rubber grip, now damp with perspiration. The rubber felt tacky and sticky in his right hand. Slowly, Beau bent his knees and put his flashlight down. He cupped his left hand around his right hand, in a standard police-grip and squeezed the rubber grips tighter.

Crying now, the man rubbed his hands over his chest and down his sides, over his ass and then up to his neck. The man's dark stringy hair dripped blood, his white skin dulled with dark red blood. He said something, but Beau couldn't understand what it was.

Rising on his toes, the man screamed. Beau felt himself jump. Raising his Beretta, he stepped away from the timbers and raised his arms to aim at the man.

The man reached over and rubbed both hands over the stump of the corpse's neck, pulled back two freshly blooded hands and began masturbating.

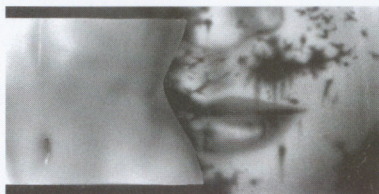
Beau looked around carefully to make sure no one else was present. Darting his gaze from the man to different areas of the warehouse, he saw they were alone. When he looked back at the man, the man was staring straight back at him. The mouth on the blood-streaked face opened and a maniacal laugh cut across the

room. It was a low pitched, driving laugh, a deep guttural laugh. The man took a step to his right and looked down at the debris that littered the floor of the warehouse between him and Beau, as if he was measuring the distance.

Beau pulled his left hand away to wipe the sweat from his eyes. Focusing on the man again he saw the man reach down and pick up a machete. Still laughing the same guttural laugh, the man bent his knees and leered at Beau.

The laughter stopped. Beau heard his heart thundering in his ears.

The man screamed so loudly Beau took a half step back. It took a second to realize the man was running straight for him. Beau bent his knees, aimed the Beretta, blinked, took in a deep breath, let half of it out as he trained his sights on the man's chest and squeezed the trigger. *Nothing!* He squeezed again. *The safety!* Beau flipped the safety switch again, trained his sights on the screaming man, saw his aim waiver, re-set his aim and squeezed the trigger. The Beretta recoiled smoothly shutting off the screaming with its loud report. Beau squeezed off another round and saw it strike the man in the belly, but the man continued forward. Squeezing steadily, Beau fired round after round. He saw the rounds hit the man, saw his strikes rise as he allowed his hands to rise with the recoil of the weapon, watched his shots work their way up to the man's chest, throat, mouth and forehead. The man's head snapped back, a fine mist of blood exploding behind him as the man stumbled and fell face first not three feet from Beau, the machete clanging on the floor next to Beau's left foot. As the echo of his final rounds died, Beau heard his grandfather's gravelly voice whisper in his ears, "Don't go looking for your grave. You just may find it."



Sucking in a deep breath, Beau trained the Beretta on the back of the man's head and stepped forward. His hands were shaking. He tried to steady them, but couldn't. He looked at the back of the man's skull, at the bloody mass of hair, at the white bone and gray brain splattered in the hair. He looked at the man's back and saw two more perforating wounds, dark with blood. Releasing his left hand, he reached down and pressed his fingers against the man's throat.

There was no pulse. When he pulled his fingers away, they were bloody. Beau rubbed the blood between his fingers. It was warm and sticky. It smelled sweet, even with the strong scent of cordite still in the air. Beau wiped the blood on his jeans, returned his Beretta to its holster and pulled out his radio. Flipping it on, he pushed down the transmit button and said, "3128 to 3125." He steadied his voice and tried again, "3128 to 3125." His voice echoed through the warehouse. "3128 to Headquarters." He played with the buttons. "3128 to anyone." *Fuckin' piece of shit!* He slipped the radio back into his rear pocket. *Didn't anyone hear the shots?* Beau looked down again at the man he'd just killed, at the blood streaked body, at the bent arms, the open palms on the killer's hands, the twisted filthy feet.

He found that he was breathing normally now. *Fuck, they'll find me sooner or later.* He wasn't going to leave this scene. Not now. Like his daddy said, 'You'll only have this time once'. Beau closed his eyes and craned his head back. He tried to hear his own heartbeat, but could not. He heard something else. He heard the faint chant of his ancestors dancing around a fire, their tomahawks raised. He saw their dark faces painted for war. He remembered, at the Little Big Horn, how his cousins the Cheyenne washed their spears with the blood of the pony soldiers.

Kneeling next to the corpse, Beau reached over with both hands and pressed his fingers against the man's back. Fresh blood oozed from the wounds. He dabbed his fingers in the blood, pulled them away and rubbed the blood over his hands, washed his hands in the blood.

He smelled its strong coppery scent. His stomach wasn't sour anymore. Looking up at the wide moon, he reached his hands up to it and smiled. He had seen the face of death, had felt its stinking breath in his face — and he had slain it.

Don't go looking for your grave. You may find it.

Beau reached down, grabbed the man's hair and lifted the head. He turned the dead face toward him and said, "I found *your* fuckin' grave. Didn't I, asshole?"



Maureen O'Brien is an award-winning actress: she was Vicki in Dr Who, and has appeared in Taggart, Cracker and Jonathan Creek, as well as on radio, in films and on the stage. Ten years ago she took up writing. Her novels featuring DI John Bright (Mask of Betrayal is the latest) are amongst the best psychological mysteries currently published, and she's also written for radio and the theatre. She's at work now on the screenplay for a feature film based on her second book, Deadly Reflection. What she does on her day off, I can't guess; perhaps she is a peripatetic neurosurgeon, or perhaps she just spends the time putting her record collection in alphabetical order, like the rest of us.

*Photo credit:
Sophie Baker*

SHE WASN'T PRETTY. BUT SHE HAD A NICE QUIET FACE WITH PALE BLONDE HAIR AND she wore those American kind of glasses with no rims. She was Canadian, in fact. She told me that when I commented on her accent. Later I found out that her husband was American. He came from Manhattan and he was always eager to point this out, not wanting to be taken for a Canadian.

She was my neighbour. We were new there. This was our third house in as many years. Ralph and I were always moving. Always looking for a place to settle. I'd first met her several weeks ago in the street. We always met in the street and stopped to chat. She was nice. Chatty. It seemed possible she might become a friend. But then she came to the house. She came to bring me some flowers. A pot of hyacinths. Dark, dark blue with a heavy heady smell.

She came with the flowers because my cat had been found dead in her garden. She was phobic about cats and felt, she said, that the death was 'somehow' her fault. I felt this too but could not say so. The loss of my cat was the severest I had ever known. He was my friend. My familiar, really. We understood each other to a perfection that few humans seem capable of achieving, and certainly of sustaining.

You can see why I resented these strong smelling dark flowers. I took them from her hands murmuring thanks. I carried them to the windowsill and placed them there. Then I returned to the doorway. And that's when I caught the look between her and my husband, Ralph.

After the introductions she said hurriedly, Well I must be going, I have to pick up the children from the art club. But I am really sorry and hope to see you soon. Nice to meet you, she said to Ralph. Ralph muttered some words hastily in his shy way, like, Yes that would be nice. And I said, You must come for a drink some time.

Now that there isn't a cat here any more, I added.

She looked appalled. I myself was appalled. At the truth of what I had said. And at the fact that I had said it. But the look I had caught the tail of between her and Ralph. That's what did it. I was in shock.

You see, when the doorbell rang I went to the door and opened it. There stood my neighbour, Joyce, with the pot of flowers. And I took the flowers and she was saying how sorry she was about the cat, etcetera, and I was back at the door saying, Oh no not at all it's not your fault at all, etcetera, when her eyes changed. She caught sight of something behind my left shoulder in the hall. And that was Ralph. Ralph came downstairs and crossed behind me and he must have looked towards the door to see who was there and he stopped and they looked at each other.

Well, there's nothing in that. That's all quite natural and normal. That's what anyone would say. That's what I would say. Only it wasn't natural and normal. There was something funny about it. Her eyes opened wide and even through the expensive glasses I could see the pupils went big and black and it was as though she stopped breathing. Just for a second she forgot how to breathe. And don't forget I've known Ralph for sixteen years, sleeping and waking, inside and out. I know Ralph like the back of my own hand. He stopped breathing, behind me, also just for a second. I could tell he didn't know whether to stay or carry on into the sitting room as though nothing had occurred.

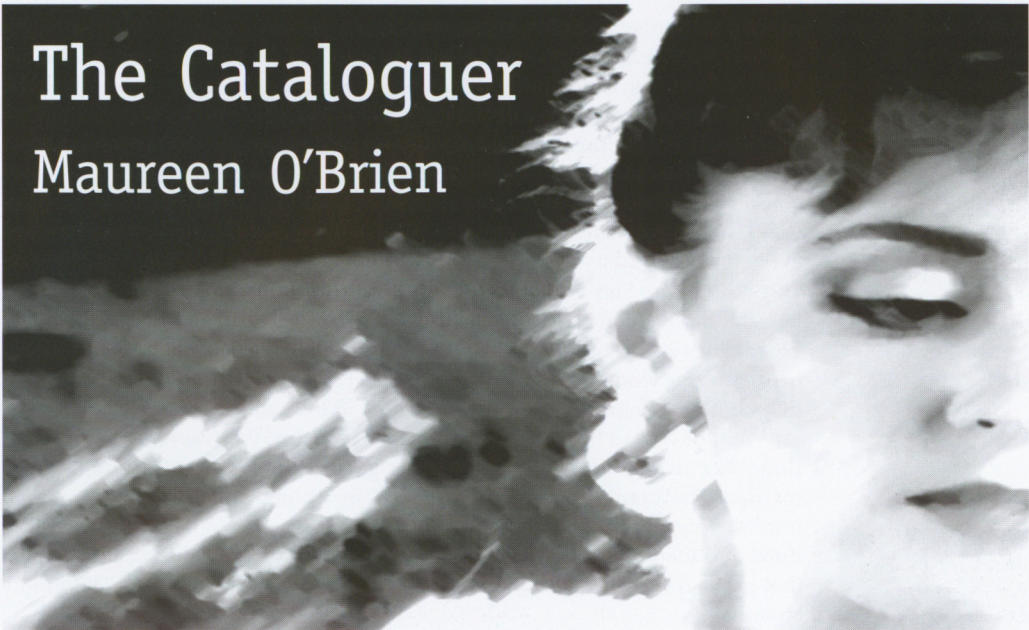
Well, what had occurred? You're going to think I'm an insanely jealous woman who had just lost her cat, the dearest thing in life to her, who now had to have something to occupy her mind so had decided that her husband and her neighbour had just fallen madly in love. Love at first sight. So that, on top of her cat as it were, she had lost her husband too.

You would be wrong. They had not fallen in love at first sight. That was not it. What I knew at once and what they at once decided to hide, was that they knew each other already.

Now why should they decide to hide that? Both of them. Without discussion. They made the decision to pretend they were meeting for the first time. I

The Cataloguer

Maureen O'Brien



introduced them. They shook hands. No sign that they knew other. The silly thing was they thought I was deceived. Why do people think it's so easy to deceive? It's certainly not easy to deceive me. I pick up all the vibrations. I may not always get them sorted out immediately but eventually I understand the meaning. I get things connected up.

This is Ralph, I said.

Hello, Ralph.

This is our neighbour Joyce.

And they shook hands.

Then everything went into normal mode. But normal with a kind of rush on it, if you know what I mean. A lot of laughter. More than you would have expected in the circumstances. I mean in the *pretend* circumstances. Then she went. To collect her children from wherever it was.

I closed the door. Ralph had gone. It was strange standing in the heavily scented hallway with this knowledge, carrying this knowledge carefully, as I had carried the pot of flowers in my hands. I carried it though the house looking for Ralph.

Want some tea? he said.

He was in the kitchen, standing at the sink waiting for the kettle to boil and reading the *Guardian* folded small.

She seems a nice woman, I said.

Mmmm.

Nice of her to bring flowers.

Mmmm.

After all, it wasn't her fault Tati died.

Ralph looked round at me. Something in my voice. I'm better at hiding than he is; normally he wouldn't have heard that slight note of bitterness, that infinitesimal acerbic edge.

I KNOW I'M AT A FUNNY AGE. I KNOW I'VE LOST RALPH'S ATTENTION. EVERYBODY'S attention really. My reaction has been to go very quiet, creep about, keep myself to myself. What choice is there? Only Tati loved me as I used to be loved. As Ralph loved me once. Eyes lighting up at the sight of me. Rolling over with delight just to be in my presence. Loving the sound and the sight and the scent of me. And my touch. That's the way it was with Ralph once.

It was like that for seven years. And then he went to Canada. He went there for a conference to do with the broadcasting of music on radio. The conference took place in Toronto. I couldn't go because I was going into hospital to have a...miscarriage. I have to call it that. I don't like the other words. It had to happen. The scan had discovered really nasty deformities — well, it was a late baby, you see, my last chance — and Ralph — well, both of us, if I'm fair — chickened out. He was guilty at not staying to be with me, but I said no, you go. Hoping of course, in the way that women do, that he would cancel everything to stay.

So he went. And I came back from hospital to the empty house. And when he came back seven days later he was different. He walked about in a dream. He said it was jet lag but I knew it wasn't that. It was months later he told me he'd met this woman at the conference. She was an interpreter for the French delegates and Ralph and she had just fallen in love and he couldn't forget her.

Well, of course he couldn't forget her. How are you supposed to forget a thing like that? I said, Why don't you go to her then? And he said, She's married. She's only just got married. And she thought she loved her husband until she met me. But she can't wreck what she's only just begun for a kind of holiday romance. That's what she said. And she wouldn't write to him or let him get in touch with her. So he was left with this hole in his heart. This empty space.

And I was alone with this empty space where there had been the baby, the poor deformed product of my relationship with Ralph. So we were both alone. Cradling our empty spaces. I used to look at him in the chair on the other side of the room and think there should be a sign over his head saying 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here'. I expect I had the same sign over my head. But mine didn't show so much. Women are better dissemblers. Looking on the bright side. That became my forte.

THE KETTLE BOILED AND RALPH Poured THE WATER ONTO THE TEA AND STIRRED THE tea and put the lid on the pot and placed the tea cosy over it.

I said to Ralph, That was her, wasn't it?

And he said, What?

What? He had that pink bewildered look of all liars who are not used to lying. What?

You know, I said.

He looked at me foursquare through his dark rimmed spectacles and said, I don't.

I don't know, he said. What do you mean?

If he had admitted it, it would have been okay. I know it would. Even if he'd said yes it was her and it was still the same, they still felt the same, I could have managed. I could have managed by going away and having nothing and learning to live with that, with nothing. But I'd have retained my dignity. People will do a lot to retain their dignity. Pride. Whatever you call it. They'll do almost anything. I have proved that, I think.

The next few weeks I kept my eyes open. I couldn't say for certain that their movements coincided. But Ralph took to going for walks by himself. Just going out for a breath of air, he called it. Or just going out to post a letter. I didn't follow him. That would have been beneath me. But one day I saw them from the bus. I had been shopping and was laden with bags. They were conversing by the post box. He was holding her hand. And bending his head towards her in that way I recognised. I got off the bus and walked right past them and they didn't see me. Just another middle-aged *hausfrau* struggling with her bulging carriers. Why should they notice me?

THREE DAYS LATER HER DAUGHTER WAS HAVING A BIRTHDAY. WE WERE INVITED TO the party, a tea party in the garden as it was May and the weather fine. There



were bluebells in the dark corners of the garden and scarlet tulips in the brighter patches. Roses were budding. And Daisy was nine. Just the age my... *termination* would have been. I made her a cake. A rich cake. Rich with fruit. The fruit of my thoughts, the fruit of my labours. A heavy dark cake, delicious with the aromas of nutmeg and cinnamon and allspice. Sweet and moist with dates and raisins and blood red glace cherries. Crunchy with almonds and walnuts. All the textures and flavours so relished by those who like things sweet in the mouth, sweet on the tongue.

I did not carry the cake out to the garden with the other gifts. I left it on the table in the hall behind some coats. They would discover it after the party, tuck into it the next day perhaps, Sunday. Just the thing when lunch has worn off and supper still hours away. The accidental nature of the plan, the element of happenstance, made it attractive to me. So like life.

And on the Sunday Joyce rang up. We have just found your cake, she said. So sorry we missed it yesterday. Do come round and help us to eat it. It looks absolutely scrumptious.

The whole family was there. The nice plump husband Max from Manhattan, the gentle pale Joyce, the sweet daughter Daisy exactly nine years old, and her little brother whose name was — guess what? — Ralph. Oh yes. What a coincidence. How we marvelled and laughed. There was a lot of laughter as we all drank the tea and they ate the cake.

I got the proportions precisely right. Which is amazing as I had only guessed. I used the stuff they found inside my cat Tati when they opened him up at my insistence after his death. The gentle Joyce said the poison was down for rats, they'd had rats in the shed and round the dustbins. When they opened up my dear Tati all his internal organs had congealed. And it works for humans in just the same way. They discovered this when they opened up Ralph and Joyce and Max and little Daisy and little Ralph.

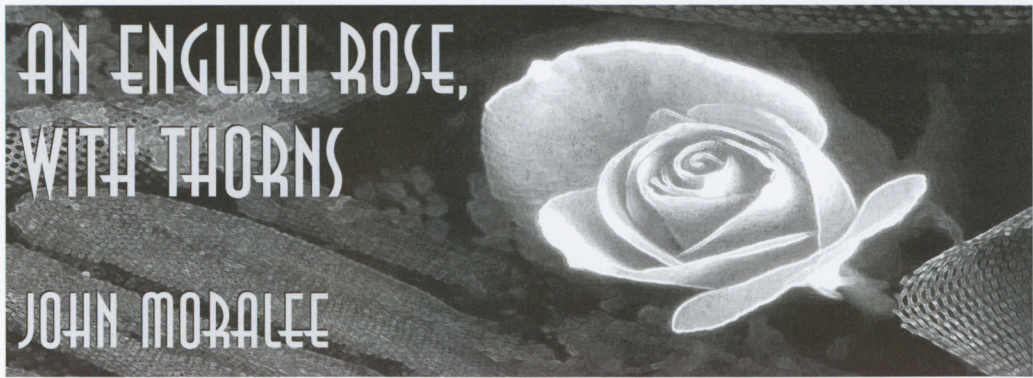
I TOLD THE POLICE AND EVERYBODY THAT I HAD MADE A MISTAKE. THAT MY TIME OF life had made me absent minded and I must have shaken in rat poison instead of flour. They didn't believe me. A psychiatrist interviewed me while I was on remand, and decided I was suffering from paranoid delusions. Little did she know. At least it meant they sent me here instead of an ordinary prison. And I'm sure it's better here. We're an odd bunch but some are not at all unlikeable in their better moods. And none of us ever expects to get out. That has a calming effect, I find.

I'm really rather happy here. They have given me duties in the library. Most of the women are not that keen on reading, and none has any idea of librarianship. There was nothing approaching a catalogue when I arrived, and now I have nearly all the books catalogued and am developing a superb cross-referencing system. The woman I share my 'room' with is young and rather sweet. She's always stoned — the dope goes around this place like confetti at a wedding, there's a seemingly endless supply; an endless supply of suppliers I suppose — so she's no bother to me at all.

And yesterday the governor's cat came into the library. He's a small ginger tom with yellow eyes. I held my hand down to his nose and he sniffed my fingers cautiously, then began that almost silent secret purring that Tati used to do. Then he sat on the top of a pile of returned books and began to wash himself. That's always a sign a cat is at ease. He did not stay long. Just an hour. He went off tail in the air when the supper bell rang. But he's bound to come back tomorrow. The library will be on his rounds from now on.

I've been vegetarian in here. The vegetarian food is always best in places like this: they don't have to make it in such enormous quantities so they use more invention and better ingredients. But I think from now on I might take a little meat. Cats are so wonderfully susceptible to food. Yes, I believe I'm going to have everything here I need.





CANDID PHOTOGRAPHS, SPREAD OUT IN A FAN. THEY WERE ON THE COFFEE TABLE WHEN Natalie came home. The man who had taken them sat on the leather couch, one hand holding a cellular phone, the green light blinking. It was Kyle Rampton, her husband's business partner and supposedly his best friend. He grinned, exposing more teeth than appeared natural. His light grey eyes shone like mirrors. He looked at the photographs and shook his head. "Guess who's been a naughty girl?" he said

Natalie felt light-headed and sick. She slumped on the nearest chair, looking alternately at the accusatory pictures and Kyle Rampton. *Why did I do it?* she thought. *Why did I have a stupid one-night stand with a guy I'd just met?* She had never been unfaithful before, but recently she had been so bored with her life that it had just seemed like a change, a little buzz of excitement. And now that night had returned, like all mistakes did.

"Guilt is a wonderful thing," Rampton said. "You do know Richard will leave you if he ever found out about this?"

"Yes," she said.

"Maybe I should call him?" His hands hovered over the phone.

"No," she said. "What do you want?"

"Why, you make me sound like a blackmailer, just because I happened to be opposite the motel room with a telephoto lens."

So he had sent the man to seduce her. What a cold, ruthless man he was. Rampton had known her marriage was in difficulty, and had used that as leverage. No wonder he was quite brilliant at business. Richard, on the other hand, was the creative partner, the ideas man, the dreamer. Natalie realised something awful: Rampton was jealous of Richard. To have control over his wife would be a victory; it would prove he was better than Richard was. This wasn't really about her. It was a power struggle. "What do you want?" she repeated.

"I want you to convince Richard to retire," he said. "Get him to sell his share of the business to me. I am willing to pay a reasonable price. Say half the value of the shares. Then the pictures will go away."

Could she believe him? "What's stopping you using the pictures later?"

"For what purpose? I only want the company."

Natalie considered her options. She could refuse, but then her marriage would be over. Alternatively, she could accept Rampton's terms, but that thought twisted her stomach. She knew she could persuade Richard to give up the business for the sake of their marriage, but she also knew that to do so would ruin her husband. He loved his work. To take it away would be cruel. He was too young to retire, just when he was being so successful.

"I need a drink," she said. "I can't give you an answer just yet, Kyle."

"Sure. Take your time." A smug smile flashed. "You have ten minutes to say yes."

Natalie entered the kitchen. Rampton swaggered in behind her, putting his hot hands on her bottom.

"Don't touch me," she said.

"Come on, I know you like this. I've seen you, remember?"

"Don't touch me." She pulled away.

He laughed. "Suddenly you're a virgin. Oh, well, please yourself."

Natalie's hands shook as she searched the drinks cabinet for something to release her nerves. A fog had come over her thoughts; she could not remember where her favourite drink was kept. She prayed Rampton would leave her alone, but he was watching her, leering.

"Anyway," he said, "I'll have a beer to celebrate our forthcoming deal."

"Get it yourself. They're in the fridge."

"From now on you'll show me the respect I deserve, understand?" He opened the door. White light and cold mist poured out. He hunched down, reaching inside, telling her with a sneer how agreeing to his demands was in Richard's best interest. She nearly believed him. But he was a liar. He would never let it rest. Seeing him crouched down, his back to her, she had never hated anyone so much. For the first time, she noticed he had a bald patch the size of a coin on his crown, like a bull's eye.

The rolling pin was in her hands. She had no recollection of picking it up. It swung at his head, making a painful thud. He fell down. Dead.

"YOU LOOK TIRED OUT," RICHARD SAID. "WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING TODAY?"

"Nothing important," she said. "I've been doing some aerobic exercises off that Jane Fonda video you bought me for Christmas."

He looked at her strangely.

"What?" she said.

"There's dirt on your chin."

"Oh, I did some gardening too."

"You hate gardening."

"I fancied a change."

Richard turned around. He was heading for the door that led onto the patio, and the garden. "Tell you what, I'll give you my humble opinion."

"That's okay, forget it."

"Forget it? Don't be silly. I want to see what you've done."

He went outside.

Panicking, she followed. She caught up with him near the greenhouses. She could smell the fresh earth. Taking his arm, she tried to redirect him back into the house. "There's no need to look; it's nothing."

"Nonsense," he said. Already, he was standing beside the freshly-planted plot of rose bushes. He studied the flowers she'd planted. The soil was a rich, dark coffee colour. The plants were just cuttings at the moment, but they would grow into large bushes given time. Richard got down on his knees and stared.

She could not read his expression.

"Hmm..."

"What?"

"I like it. In the summer it'll look fantastic."

She breathed again.

He stood up, brushing off the dirt. "You haven't seen Kyle, have you?"

"No, why?"

"He said he'd come over. Some business."

"He probably forgot. You know Kyle."

"Well, I'll call him." Richard pulled out his phone.

"Let's go inside," Natalie said.

Richard dialled Kyle's number as she led him towards the house. "There," he said. "It's ringing."

Natalie could hear it.

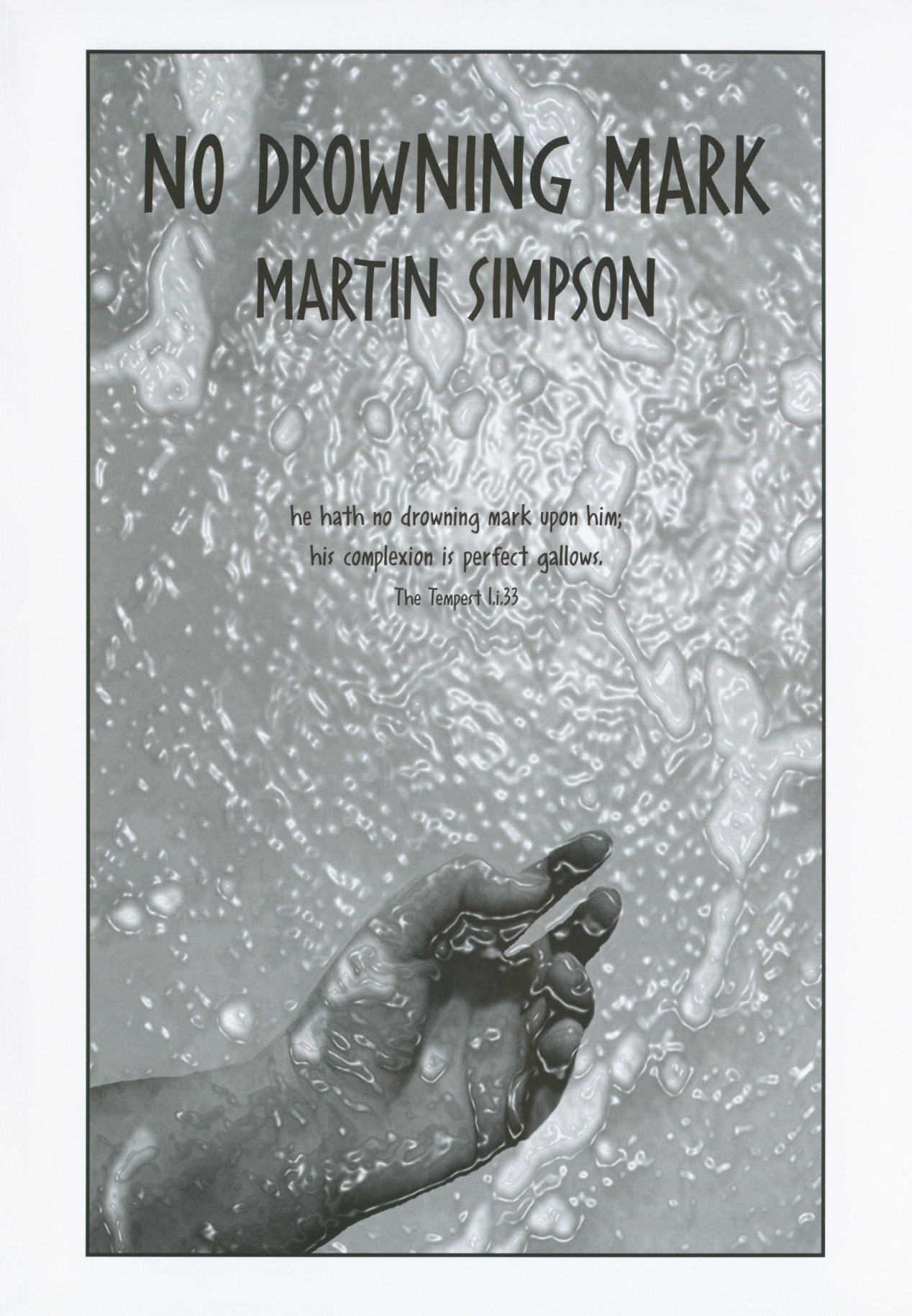
Richard looked at her. "Natalie, why is the ground ringing?"

Sweat dripped down her face. "I can explain," she said.

But, somehow, she doubted it.



Born in 1973, John Moralee of Washington, Tyne and Wear, is a pure mathematician by training, but admits to being 'more interested in pursuing a career in writing'. His stories have been published in a number of magazines, and he has twice been shortlisted for the Ian St James Short Story Award.

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a pen over a surface of water with ripples. The hand is in the lower left, holding a pen horizontally. The water surface is covered in numerous small, concentric ripples that catch the light, creating a shimmering effect. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a book cover or endpaper, with the same rippled water pattern. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

NO DROWNING MARK MARTIN SIMPSON

*he hath no drowning mark upon him;
his complexion is perfect gallows.*

The Tempest li.33

THE SUN HAD NOT YET BEGUN TO BURN OFF THE MORNING FOG WHEN ZACK MILLER and I dragged the body up onto the shore and looked it over. The young woman was college-aged, dressed in a white T-shirt, baggy gray shorts, white socks and tennis shoes. Her wet hair looked brown, but it would probably be dark blonde when it dried. A dark circle ringed her left eye. There was an ugly, raw-meat chunk missing from her left calf, and another high up on the left shoulder.

“How long you think she’s been in?” I asked Zack.

“Not very. She’d be a mess if it’d been any longer than a day.” In his late fifties, Zack had been on the Gainesville police department for almost 25 years, but he still looked like the Marine he’d once been: short gray hair in a crew cut, the build and sinewy toughness of an aging light-middleweight, the tenacity and facial expressions of a pit bull.

The two of us looked the body over more closely. I said, “Did she die from the bites, or drowning?”

“I’d have to go with drowning, Raymond,” Zack said. “Usually a gator’s gonna clamp onto his prey, get a good grip, then dive to the bottom until the prey stops struggling. Then he’ll take it back to his nest and start eating a little bit at a time.”

“I don’t think she’s been on the bottom,” I said, and lifted the pale, long-fingered hand. “The nails are in good shape, and there’s no silt or water weeds under them. Plus there are no serious scratches or abrasions like there should be if she was dragged under and drowned. The black eye is the only mark on her, other than the two bites.”

Zack nodded. “So you think she was dead when she went in?”

“We’ll know more when Hodges is finished with her.”

Zack turned her hand over to examine her fingernails again, then stopped. “Look at this.” There was a faint black mark on the back of the hand. “Looks like a hand stamp.”

“The kind that bars use?”

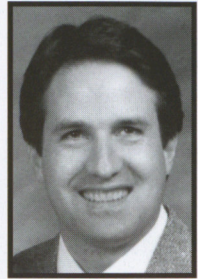
Zack nodded. “It doesn’t look like much now, but if Hodges can clean it up enough to read it, we’ll have a place to start retracing her steps for the last day or two of her life.”

LATE SUMMER IS A TRIAL IN GAINESVILLE. THE NEARLY FORTY THOUSAND STUDENTS who attend the University of Florida struggle across campus and around town in weather that varies from muggy to downright soupy. Every day it rains for fifteen minutes between 2:30 and 4:00 without discernibly changing the humidity. Smart locals get up early to take care of their walking or jogging or dog-walking before the temperature hits 90 degrees.

That’s why a frat boy was walking his pocket-sized dog along the banks of Lake Alice at sunrise on the second Monday of the fall semester. The dog sniffed and snorted and yapped his way around the fog-laced lake until he caught the scent of the body floating in the short cattails. The dog’s owner looked closely enough to see the jagged gator bite on the girl’s pale leg, then ran back to frat row and called us.

THE UNIVERSITY AND CITY OF GAINESVILLE SHARE A MEDICAL EXAMINER, DR SAMUEL Hodges. An unusually affable man as ME’s go, Hodges was only in his late thirties, with almost ten years of experience. He had fled cold, violent Detroit for hot, violent Miami before settling for warm, generally peaceful northern Florida.

By the time Hodges arrived at the lake, two UPD uniforms had taped off the crime scene and the steady stream of cars was flowing along the two-lane road toward campus. While the driver of the coroner’s van got the rolling stretcher out, Hodges nodded at Zack and me and walked past us toward the water’s edge. Behind him came Mark Thompson, one of GPD’s two crime scene photographers. Hodges said, “Who’s running this show, city cops or university cops?”



Martin Simpson made a huge impact in Britain and in his native America with his first published short story 'Last Rites and Resurrections', and again with his second story 'Dancing About Architecture' which won the 1997 British Fantasy Award. As well as fantasy/slipstream fiction, he also writes clever crime stories, another outstanding example of which will appear in a future issue. He lives, as you might guess from this story, in Gainesville, Florida.

"It's a joint effort until the higher-ups make the call," Zack said. The three of us followed Hodges until he knelt beside the body and examined the gator bites. "Where'd you find her, Daniels?" he asked.

I pointed to the spot. "In the reeds there." Zack led the photographer over to take pictures.

Hodges glanced at the shoreline, then returned his attention to the corpse. He rotated the head gingerly, opened the mouth and looked inside with a tiny flashlight, examined the arms, hands and fingers. He eased the body up onto its side, looked up and down the length of it twice, then returned it to its back.

As he went about his job, Hodges carried on a conversation. "I guess you haven't come across this kind of thing before, eh Raymond?"

Hodges is just about my age, and we've got a lot in common. I moved to Miami from Chicago about the same time he left Detroit, and I beat him to Gainesville by a year. Both of us had risen through the ranks quickly, and had taken some crap from veterans because of it.

"Sure I have," I said. "Couple of years back, down in Dade, a retiree came out of his garage to find a gator sitting beside his Buick. Only the old guy was nearly blind, thought it was a neighbor's dog. He tried to chase it away with a broom."

"Let me guess," Hodges said without looking up from the body. "His bite was a hell of a lot worse than his bark."

I snorted agreement. "The old guy lost a foot. Would've bled to death, but bad circulation in his legs saved him."

Hodges said, "It's worse somehow, when the victim is this young. Kids are the absolute worst."

I said, "Six months before I came south I had a call where a drug dealer's pit bull had gotten hold of a three year old. One of the uniforms wanted to let his police shepherd loose on the drug dealer, but his sergeant stopped him."

"Sounds like a bad command decision to me." He stood up and looked at his watch just as Zack and the photographer got back. "I'm pronouncing at 7:10," Hodges said. "Mark, get some pictures taken so we can move her." He scribbled some notes on the clipboard he always carried.

"Did you notice the mark on her hand, Sam?" Zack asked.

"Of course. And the answer is I won't know until I can get her dried off and under the magnifying glass."

"When will that be?"

"Give me an hour."

Hodges's office was in a brick building that used to be the police station until the new one opened downtown five years ago. The facility was roomy and well-lit, but what went on there always made me feel a little claustrophobic. We found Hodges just as he finished dictating the autopsy report into a tape recorder beside the stainless steel table that held the girl's naked and now cut-up body. He unclipped the microphone from his lapel and nodded to both of us.

"I'll know more in a day or two, when toxicology and stomach contents reports are in, but I can give you some preliminary stuff now. The gator didn't kill her, and she didn't drown. She was dead when she went into the water."

"Are you sure?" Zack asked.

Hodges looked offended. "There's no water in the lungs, ergo she didn't drown. The gator bites are very clean, as gator bites go, and there are no abrasions or signs of struggle on any of the girl's limbs. Ergo she was dead weight when the gator found her and clamped on."

"And I had the gall to question your judgment, ergo I'm a dumbass," Zack said. "So what was the cause of death?"

"Broken neck. I'd guess that the same blow that blackened her eye also cracked the second cervical vertebra."

"And that killed her?"

“Okay. Well, you know where to take him, right?”

He scowled, but nodded. “You know what I wish?” He said it pouty, like a little kid. I shook my head. “When you catch the guy who killed that girl, put him in the cage with this fella for an hour or so. Then, whoever wins, go ahead and slit his belly open.”

“Dan,” I said, “I don’t know what the legislature will say about that idea, but you’ve got my vote. Listen, Zack and I are planning to put on some waders and look through the reeds on the shore, see what we can find. Will that be safe?”

Dan spat again. “Unless you find some coed swimming around and take a bite out of her ass. Then some damn bureaucrat is liable to come along and slit your belly.”



Zack and I waded in with a small crowd of gawkers and one local TV camera crew watching. We started where the frat boy had found the girl’s body, then moved in opposite directions along the bank from there. Zack found a plastic cover for a car’s taillight floating in the reeds twenty-five yards away. After some close inspection, we could see where dirt from the shallow bank had collapsed in two spots. The reeds had parted and sprung back into place without marking the car’s passage into the lake, but eight inches of tread pattern were visible where the bank had collapsed.

“I’ll call for a diver and a tow truck,” Zack said.

IT TOOK THE DIVER FIVE MINUTES TO LOCATE THE CAR AND HOOK A TOW CABLE TO IT. It was a red eight-year-old Mazda hatchback, and greenish water gushed from the two open windows when it broke the surface and was yanked and jerked up the bank backwards. I heard someone cry out behind me and turned to see a college girl being escorted through the crime scene tape by a UPD uniform. She was bleary-eyed and disheveled. She said, “That’s Jenny’s car,” then clamped her hands over her mouth and turned away.

The uniform put an arm on her shoulder and steered her off to one side, and Zack and I examined the dripping car. It was in pretty good shape: no obvious damage to the body other than the missing right taillight. I tried to crank one of the windows up, and it worked. So someone had rolled the windows down before pushing the car into the lake. Zack opened the glove box to find smeared registration papers and a soggy owner’s manual. There was some change in the ashtray, and cassettes and a fast food bag on the floor. No clues leapt out at us.

When we were finished with the car, the GPD tow truck took it to the city garage. The girl who had recognized the Mazda was in the back seat of a squad car, and the uniform who talked to her filled us in.

“Her name is Rebecca Sanders. She says the dead girl was her roommate, Jennifer Morrison. They’re both sophomores at UF. Sanders went home to Miami for the weekend and didn’t get back into town until seven or eight last night. Morrison wasn’t around, but Sanders figured she was probably out with friends or her boyfriend. She goes to bed around eleven, and when she gets up this morning there’s still no sign of Jennifer. She calls the boyfriend and then all of their friends, but nobody’s seen her. So she calls UPD to report Jennifer missing and I bring her out here.”

“All right. Take her back to HQ and get a list of everybody Morrison knew. We’ll be along in a little bit.”

TELEVISION STATIONS ALL OVER THE STATE LED THE NOON NEWS WITH THE MORRISON story, all of them playing up the gator angle. The ABC affiliates had the film shot by the local ABC station of Gator Dan doing his job. The other stations

had to make do with reporters doing stand-ups in front of the lake and student-in-the-street interviews with the dog-walking frat boy and assorted other lakeside gawkers. The general consensus was that swimming in the lake wasn't a safe thing to do, and getting bitten by a gator must not be pleasant.

By the time my boss, UPD Chief Fletcher Mason, watched the noon newscast the case was already our top priority. Mason had completed a conference with GPD head Alexander Cockburn and the turf situation was clear: even though Lake Alice was on the border between university and city property, it was officially a part of UF, so UPD had jurisdiction. I was officially put in charge of the case and given three uniforms to do the investigative footwork, with more where that came from if I asked. Zack Miller and two GPD uniforms were taken out of their normal rotations and assigned to me for at least the rest of the week, assuming the case lasted that long.

ZACK AND I TALKED TO REBECCA SANDERS THAT AFTERNOON AT THE APARTMENT THAT she had shared until last night with Jenny Morrison. She let us in and sat down on the couch with her hands in her lap and absent-mindedly stroked an enormous gray cat that never moved from the couch. She told us that Jenny's parents were on their way up from Tampa, and she didn't know what she was going to say to them. She came close to tears then, but pulled back from it.

"I know this must be hard for you," Zack said, "but we've got some difficult things to talk about, and you need to be strong now. For Jenny, and for yourself." Before we came in we had decided that Zack would do most of the talking. He had a daughter around this girl's age, and the fatherly persona he adopted now was no act. "Rebecca, someone killed Jenny. They killed her and put her in her car and rolled it into the lake."

That got through her mental fog. She stopped petting the cat and looked at Zack, then at me. Tears started leaking from the corners of her eyes, and her shoulders began to shake. Zack offered her a tissue but she wouldn't take it. After a moment, she inhaled deeply and pulled back again. She rubbed her eyes with her knuckles, then looked Zack straight in the eyes. "Have you talked to Robby yet?"

Zack glanced at me and shook his head. "Who is Robby?"

"Robert Livingston," Rebecca said. "Her boyfriend. And the son of a bitch who killed her, I'll bet." The sudden venom in her voice surprised me, and to cover my reaction I pulled out a notebook and tried to keep up with her.

Livingston and Jenny had been going out for a little over a year, but the way Rebecca told it, he wasn't Jenny's type. "He's a senior this year, and he thinks he's God's gift. His dad owns a car dealership in Daytona, so Robby gets a new car to drive every year. He's some kind of officer in his frat, too."

"Does he live at the frat house?" I asked. I caught Zack's glance; Lake Alice is about two-hundred yards from the edge of frat row.

Rebecca nodded. "Chi Alpha."

Zack said, "What makes you think Robby would want to hurt Jennifer? Were they not getting along well lately?"

"Not as far as I know. Jenny thought she was in love with him. But they had their first fight soon after they started dating, and they never went more than a month without another serious blow-up."

"When you say they fought," Zack said, "do you mean physically?"

"He hit her at least once that I know of, but mostly they just yelled and slammed doors."

"What did they fight about?"

She shook her head. "Lots of things. Mostly because Robby's an arrogant jerk who liked to play with her head. I mean, no matter how trivial an argument might have been to start with, he'd fight dirty, push her buttons. Jenny's folks don't have much money and Robby knew that she felt self-conscious about that, so lots of times he'd make fun of her clothes or her car or her apartment

because they weren't as nice as his stuff. Sometimes he'd accuse her of going out with other guys."

"So he's the jealous type?" Zack asked.

She considered that. "I don't think so. I mean, to be jealous he'd have to really care about her, and I don't think he did. But he knew it bothered her, so he'd say it just to hurt her. Like I said, he fought dirty."

"Tell us about the time he hit her."

"It was the beginning of spring semester, after Christmas break. She came back after a date with a big welt beside her eye. She admitted that they'd had an argument, but she swore that she'd fallen and hit her head on the side of a bookcase."

"That was the only time he hit her?"

"That I know of," Rebecca said. "But there might have been other times. She knew what I thought of Robby, so we never talked about him much."

WE LEFT THE APARTMENT AND HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE CHI ALPHA HOUSE. ON THE way there, Zack said, "What do you think about this?"

"Well, I know that when a woman ends up dead the first one we look at is the boyfriend or husband. So this guy is the best suspect we have."

"On the other hand?" Zack said, feeding me the line.

"On the other hand, he's the *only* suspect we have. And the roommate certainly doesn't like him, which means that she could be putting her own spin on the Jenny-and-Robby relationship."

Robby Livingston was a good-looking kid: tall, dark-haired, clean-shaven, wearing shorts and a T-shirt and a baseball cap on backwards. We found him in a TV lounge in the frat house, and he wasn't surprised to see us. When we told him who we were, he led us out onto a porch overlooking museum road.

"I saw the story about Jenny on the news," he said. "I can't believe it. I guess I'm in shock or something."

"We're sorry for your loss," Zack said. "And we hope you understand that we have to ask you a few questions."

"What kind of questions?"

I opened my little notebook. "When was the last time you saw Jennifer?"

"Why? An alligator killed her, right? That's what they said on the news."

"That's right," Zack said, "but we still have some investigation to do, even in a case like this. We'd like to find out how and why she drove into the lake, if she'd been drinking, if she'd been upset about anything lately —"

"You think she might have committed suicide?" Robby asked.

"We don't know what to think right now," I said. "That's why we're investigating."

He nodded at that. "Okay. I saw her Saturday night. We went to a movie." He told us the name of the movie and the time and location of the show.

"Did you go anywhere afterwards, like to a party, or a bar?" Zack said.

"No. She was getting tired, so I just dropped her off at her apartment."

"Had you two been getting along well lately?" I asked.

Robby looked at me with slightly narrowed eyes. "Why do you want to know that?"

Zack had already established his paternal good-cop tone, so the role of bad cop had fallen to me. "Humor me," I said.

Robby looked at Zack, then back at me. "Maybe I should get a lawyer, if you're going to treat me like this. I mean, an alligator killed her for God's sake, not me."

Zack stepped in. "Listen, Robby, I know this is a difficult time for you —"

"You're damn right it is."

"— and Mr. Daniels here doesn't mean any offense. It's just that we need to ask a bunch of routine questions so we can type up the routine answers and close the case."

Robby glowered at me, then talked to Zack. “All right. Jenny and I hadn’t been having any big fights or anything, but I don’t know if we would have lasted much longer as a couple.”

“What was the problem?” Zack said.

“It was no one thing. We just weren’t that compatible, I guess.”

“How long had you been going out?” Zack said.

“A little over a year. But we were just getting to the point where you either get serious or break up. We were headed toward a breakup.”

“Both of you felt that way?” Zack prodded, softly.

“I don’t know about Jenny, but I did. She was a nice girl, don’t get me wrong.” He frowned and folded his arms over his chest. “I’m sorry, but I don’t feel comfortable saying anything bad about her now that she’s dead.”

“Okay,” Zack said, “we understand.”

“So you never saw her yesterday?” I said.

He looked annoyed. “No.”

“Didn’t talk to her on the phone, either?”

He hesitated. “I may have. I usually... Yes, in fact, I did call her, early in the afternoon. Just to see how she was doing.”

“But you didn’t see her?” I pressed.

“No. She didn’t feel like doing anything.”

“Did she mention any plans for the evening. Going out with some friends, going to a bar?”

“No,” he said, “she didn’t.”

I considered quitting, but something in his posture felt like a challenge. I said, “Was she seeing anybody else?”

The little muscles high up in his temples flexed, the way they do when you clench your jaw. “No.”

I returned to my notebook and pretended to write, while softly saying, “Not that you know of, then.”

“I would have known,” he snapped.

“I think that’s all we have for now,” Zack said smoothly. “Thanks for your cooperation.”



ZACK WAS QUIET AS WE WALKED OUT OF THE FRAT HOUSE AND DOWN THE SIDEWALK TO the squad car. After we pulled out onto Museum Road he said, “Well, the son of a bitch killed her.”

I said, “You got that impression too?”

He held up his hand and ticked off the points on his fingers. “One, he talks about her in the past tense with no problem. Two, he leaps at the suicide theory when I bring it up. Three, he says he’s in shock, but he’s completely calm until — four — you suggest she was screwing around.”

“At which point he comes real close to taking a swing at me,” I said.

Zack nodded. “And five, he wants to deny talking to her yesterday, but he’s not sure whether we have phone records or not, so he admits it.”

“And six,” I said, “he wears his baseball cap backwards. Only catchers and bent guys do that.”

“We’ll add that to the charges,” Zack said. “So what’s our next move, Raymond?”

“We’re a step ahead of him already, because as far as he knows we don’t suspect she was murdered. For the next couple of days we’ll feed the media the killer gator story while we talk to her neighbors and everyone she knew, and every bartender in town. Somebody from a bar will remember her, or some neighbor will put Robby and her together or at her place some time Sunday. When we’ve got her last twenty-four hours put together we’ll take another run at Robby.”

“Let me guess,” Zack said. “You’ll get hot, slap him with all the evidence we’ve got, throw the lies he’s told back in his face. Then I’ll send you out to

cool off and approach him like a sympathetic uncle: I know it didn't happen like Ray thinks it did. She did something to set you off, maybe she even took a swing at you. You might have just been trying to get her to settle down. I know you didn't mean to hurt her. The coroner says it was a fluke thing that her neck broke. Talk to me, Robby. Get it off your chest."

I said, "This could be the start of a beautiful partnership."

That was Monday afternoon. By Wednesday evening, Zack and I were getting sick of each other's company. The canvas of the bars had turned up nothing. No bar in town was busy enough on Sunday night to have a cover charge and stamp hands. Eleven places had been stamping hands on Saturday night, but seven of those had their own distinctive rubber stamp, and one of the remaining four used a green marker. That left three places where the dead girl could have picked up that mark on her hand: two popular dance clubs down-town and a country bar that her friends said she'd never been to.

Zack and I and the GPD and UPD uniforms talked to everyone who worked in those three bars on either Saturday or Sunday, from the managers and bartenders right down to the busboys. We showed them pictures of Jenny Morrison and Robby Livingston. Most of them recognized Morrison from the television coverage of the story, but no one could remember seeing her at a bar. Nobody recognized Robby Livingston.

We also struck out at Jenny's apartment complex. No one could remember seeing Robby and Jenny together within several days of her death, and no one had seen Robby's new Mustang in the parking lot for at least a week. So Zack and I agreed to meet back at Lake Alice Wednesday night.

The sky was metamorphosing in the dying daylight: low bands of orange clouds west towards the Gulf, deep blue overhead, early dark with the first, faintly glowing stars east towards the Atlantic. When we neared the bank a small gator slipped into the water and glided away toward one of the small islands in the lake, a rippling wake spreading serenely behind him. We spent the next half hour doing what we'd done Monday morning: walking the site and discussing how the car got into the water and why. By the time the stars were out and the insects and night noises had established themselves, our mood was darker than the night sky.

"He's going to get away with it," Zack said. "We've got no witnesses, and the only thing that might have been a piece of physical evidence is probably a mark she accidentally made on herself with a felt tip pen."

"On the back of her hand?"

"Why not? We know it wasn't put there at a bar."

We both looked out across the lake. A car drove past behind us on Museum Road. As it rounded the curve, its headlights turned the lake's surface from black to silver for a few seconds.

"Should we take another crack at Robby?" Zack asked.

I shrugged, then realized he couldn't see me. "Probably not, but we will. With no more evidence, all we can do is tell him that we know she was murdered and then push for a confession."

Neither of us thought much of that possibility. Finally Zack said, "Let's go to the garage and take another look at the car."

And because I had no better idea of what to do next, we did.



THE CITY LEASES PART OF ITS IMPOUND LOT TO THE UNIVERSITY. MOST OF THE vehicles sitting outside under the sodium lights in the fenced-in lot had been impounded for traffic or parking offenses and didn't stay there very long. Inside a cavernous, four-bay garage sat several city vehicles undergoing main-

tenance or repairs. Jenny Morrison's red Mazda huddled in the northwest corner of the garage.

When we opened the doors a faintly musty odor came out. We crawled around, through and under the car. One of the scene techs had put the detached taillight on the driver's seat, and I picked it up and looked it over. It was rectangular, with three bands of colored plastic from its outer edge inward: red, white, yellow. I carried it behind the car, knelt and lifted it into the hole where it belonged.

Zack stood behind me. "I still can't figure how that thing came loose. The car hasn't been rear-ended, and there's not a mark on the taillight."

"Doesn't make sense, does it?" I said. It had never made sense, but we'd overlooked it because it didn't seem important. I pulled the light from its hole and placed it on the bumper beside the left, intact taillight. "Does it look like a different color to you?"

Zack knelt beside it and looked closely, then checked the angle of the glare coming from the garage's overhead lights. I stepped back five yards, and from that distance the difference was visible, if you looked for it.

And something clicked in my mind. I picked up the taillight and turned it over. Its edge was hard black plastic, and smeared along the plastic — in uneven, rubbery globs — was a black, faintly tacky substance that I hadn't noticed before.

"I know where that mark on her hand came from," I told Zack. "And I think we can nail Robby Livingston."

Zack pressed me for an explanation, but I put him off until I could confirm my theory. He dropped me off at my office on campus, and I told him I'd meet him there first thing in the morning. Then I spent the next hour making phone calls and paying a visit to the person I hoped would give us Robby Livingston.

THE NEXT MORNING WE PICKED ROBBY UP AS HE LEFT THE FRAT HOUSE. I RESISTED THE impulse to twist his baseball cap around the right way. Zack resisted the impulse to wipe the smirk off the kid's face.

"What do you two want?" Robby demanded. "If you're going to ask me any questions I'm calling a lawyer."

"Why so defensive?" Zack asked.

I said, "You've got it all wrong, Robby. We're not looking for information. We're here to share information with you."

He looked at both of us uncertainly. "It's Robert."

"What?" I said.

"My name's not 'Robby', it's Robert."

I gave Zack a 'this-is-going-to-be-fun' look, but he ignored it. "Okay, sorry. Robert. Just come with us, and if you still want to call your lawyer you can do it from the station."

I drove the cruiser, with Zack in the passenger seat and Robby in back. When I was on 34th Street headed north I looked at Robby's sullen face in the rearview mirror. "We got the autopsy report back yesterday, and you'll never guess what we found out."

He crossed his arms across his chest and stared back at me in the mirror.

"Try," I said.

"What?"

"Try to guess, Robby."

"Robert."

"Whatever."

I had to take my eyes off his because we were coming to the point where 34th goes from four lanes to two. After the merge I looked back at him. He was still staring. "You don't want to guess?"

"I don't know what you're —"

“She was murdered, Robb-O,” I interrupted. “And not by the gator.”

Surprise and confusion made very brief appearances in his expression. He opened his mouth for a second, then closed it. He was thinking as fast as he could.

“You don’t find that shocking?” I asked into the mirror.

“Yes, of course,” he stammered, “I just can’t believe — ”

“Yeah,” I interrupted, “some jackass punched her in the face hard enough to break her neck. Then he put her in the car with the windows down and rolled it into the lake.”

“Are you sure?” he sputtered. “Maybe she hit her head when she drove into the water. That probably could have broken her neck, if she was going fast enough.”

I made the turn onto NW 43 Avenue. “Nope. Her lungs didn’t have any water in them, which they would have if she’d been alive when she went into the water. No, some scumbag hit her hard enough to kill her.” I looked back into the mirror to make eye contact. “Do you know anybody who’s ever hit her, Rob?”

He went through the open-the-mouth-and-snap-it-shut routine twice more, then said, “I didn’t kill her. I want to talk to a lawyer.”

Zack said, “Just as soon as we get back to the office.”

For the first time, Robby looked around him and noticed his surroundings. “Hey. You said we were going to the office.”

“We’re taking the scenic route,” I said. We turned onto 13th Street at the far north edge of town. When we’d gone half a mile and turned onto a gravel road, Robby got noticeably more agitated. The cruiser crunched and bobbed down a pothole-filled lane between walls of chain-link fences that surrounded and separated a row of hard-scrabble businesses. Several of the fences had ‘Beware of Dog’ signs on them, and the metal sheds and quonset hut buildings looked like the dogs: tough and low-slung and mangy, with no definable color or breed.

Under his breath Zack said, “This is the scenic route?”

“It gets even more scenic,” I said.

I parked the cruiser and we stepped out into a dusty heat that smelled of motor oil and sweat. When I opened Robby’s door he stepped out, uncertain and pale. Zack had his poker face on; he didn’t know what we were doing, but he saw that Robby didn’t like it, and that was good enough for him. I opened the trunk and pulled out the taillight from Jenny Morrison’s car. Robby blanched when he saw it.

We walked along the fence until we reached a booth beneath a sign that said, ‘U-PULL IT’. A thin woman with gray hair and leathery skin sat on a stool inside, a small rotating fan blowing on her, conversation chattering from a radio somewhere out of sight. There were sliding windows on both sides of the booth, and a dirty white shelf beneath the windows on three sides.

I pulled three bills from my wallet and gave them to her. “Hello Marge. Could you tell my friends here how your business works?” She nodded and took the ones I pushed toward her, looking past me at Robby the whole time. He didn’t meet her eyes.

“It’s a dollar to get in,” she said. “Anything you find on any of our cars, you take it off with your own tools. On your way out, you pay for it. Prices are in the book.” She pointed to a plastic-covered sheaf of papers hanging on a metal hook beside the window. “Gimme your hands.”

And suddenly Zack understood. I held my hand out, and Zack did the same, and Marge made a swipe across the back of both of them with her black magic marker. I nudged Robby. “Hands up, Bob.” He glared at me, but stuck out his hand. Marge made her mark, and the three of us went inside.

The U-PULL IT lot was a medium-sized outdoor junkyard, with thirty or forty rows of wrecked cars, fifty to a row. Domestic cars came first, then imports,

then vans and pick-ups. The cars had undergone varying degrees of cannibalization; some were little more than skeleton frames sitting on cinderblocks, while others were close to intact, bearing only the scars and body damage of the wrecks that had landed them here.

We walked past rows of domestic cars until we reached the imports. The eighth row in had the Mazda in it. It was blue instead of red, but it was the same make and model as Jenny Morrison's car. The three of us edged around behind it, and I held the taillight in the plastic evidence bag up to the hole where the car was missing its light. Then I moved it over beside the left light; the colors matched perfectly.

"This is where you got it, isn't it Rob?" I said.

"I don't know what you're —"

"I talked to several of Jenny's neighbors last night," I interrupted, "and they all remember that her car had a busted taillight. So the two of you came here Sunday afternoon, and you pulled this light," I held the evidence bag up in front of his face, "out of this car and put it into her car."

"No. I didn't see her Sun —"

"Marge was working the booth on Sunday, and she picked your picture and Jenny's out of a photo line-up. She said that you two were here together Sunday afternoon. She's got a copy of the receipt for the taillight."

"She's wrong," Robby said. "It was probably someone who just looked like us."

In a quiet voice Zack said, "When we pulled Jenny's body out of the water, she still had the black smear from Marge's marker on the back of her hand."

Robby shook his head.

"Some time that afternoon, after you put her new taillight in for her," I said, "you got into a fight. It was probably over some stupid little thing. But you got angry, and you hit her. Harder than you meant to, maybe. And she died."

He shook his head more violently. "No."

"So Sunday night, when it was completely dark, you drove her car to the lake, propped her in the driver's seat, and rolled the car down the bank and into the water. You waited until it sank, and you figured that by the time anyone found it, no one would be able to connect it to you."

His lower lip shook for a moment, but he bit it and crossed his arms over his chest and kept shaking his head.

Zack said, "You got a few bad breaks, though. The car caught a gator's eye, and he pulled Jenny out through the window that you left down to make sure the car sank. So we found the body sooner than you expected."

I said, "And the rubber sealant you used to put the taillight in needed more time to set up. In the water it came loose and floated to the surface. So we found the car, too. And the mark on Jenny's hand, along with the unglued taillight, pointed us straight here, where Marge remembers seeing you two together."

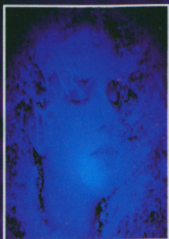
Robert Livingston turned and ran. Zack and I stood there for a few seconds, stunned. Zack grabbed a heavy, round distributor cap from the top of a dis-emboweled engine block in the old Toyota next to us and threw it at Livingston. As a young man, Zack had been a pitcher in triple A minor leagues before he joined the Marines. The cap caught Robby high on his right shoulder.

He said, "Ow," but kept running.

I turned to Zack. "You really think you were going to drop him with a distributor cap?"

Zack shrugged and pushed me in Livingston's direction. "Hey, it's a million degrees out here. I'd rather not chase that idiot through a damn junkyard if I can help it."





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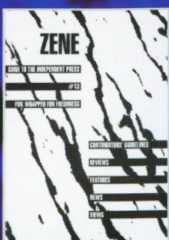
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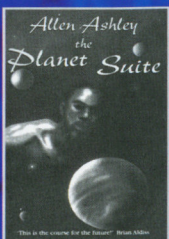
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