A Novel by MICHAEL CURNES

<u>WHITEWASH</u>

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WHITEWASH may initially appear to take cruel and pointless liberties to tell a seemingly irrelevant story. However, the author believes, not in the reincarnation of a political assassin, but rather in the dangers of acceptance without examination.

The political assassinations of 1978 were an obvious culmination of social pressures and ideological collisions that had bled a city for several decades. Weakened and severely disoriented, San Francisco had become so drastically liberal in her thinking and so far left in her ways, that an event, such as that which eventually transpired, seemed almost justifiably necessary in order to shock and revive her citizens back to the respectable right of center.

Dan White recognized this. He had spent a year hanging by his toes, dipped headfirst in the stench of San Francisco politics. He had waltzed on the fringe of tradition while the liberals discoed in circles of change about him. And when the time came to take the action that the whole city seemed to beg for, Dan White strapped on his holster and tucked the solution into six chambers. In minutes, the mayor, George Moscone, and his perceived political sidekick, Supervisor Harvey Milk, were dead, having blindly wandered into the path of nine bullets.

Months later, Dan White was tried, convicted on two counts of voluntary manslaughter and handed a candy cane prison sentence while he sat, almost celebrated, on the lap of Bay Justice.

By design, San Francisco changed overnight. Progress and new direction that would have normally evolved in the time period of decades and centuries, were adopted as quickly as the chambers of a .38 caliber Smith and Wesson emptied. It is not to say that change and growth did not have a blessing for San Francisco. In her recovery, she matured and she learned. It is safe and somewhat ironic to assume that the same taking of human lives, would pack stiffer sentences in California today, whereas Dan White had been merely spanked by the same liberal hand he had murdered to strengthen.

San Francisco Gays and Lesbians took the most defeating bullet of all when their closet door was blown shut, catching them square in the face. It had been a solid door, jammed tightly in its frame, that had taken them a century of suffering and determination to pry open in the first place.

That same liberal movement, for all its criticisms and all its opponents, managed to birth a homosexual politician who spoke, for the first time in American History, uninhibited and unashamed of his homosexuality. He based a campaign on gay awareness and served an elected year defending and promoting the rights of gay and lesbian citizens around the country. Harvey Milk was not necessarily a hero, eventhough his assassination naturally attributed heroic weight to his efforts. Harvey Milk was, instead, a spokesman; - a single voice employing the vocal cords of millions. The words he spoke and the phrases he sang in every landmark speech, were shouted first by the times The changes for which he sued, were the logical he lived in. demands of the decade. And the progress made during Harvey Milk's lifetime, would have eventually been progress regardless of his contribution. It was not Harvey Milk as much as it was what Harvey Milk embraced, that was gunned down and silenced on that rainy day in November, 1978. Ideally then, the advancement should have, and eventually did continue with new escorts and other spokespeople who functioned out of responsibility and, to a certain extent, out of martyrdom. They were interrupted, even if only for a very short time, not by the assassination of Harvey Milk, but rather by what that assassination represented.

WHITEWASH attempts to reopen some of these old wounds that seem to have healed prematurely under an effective hetero-BandAid of gauzed deceit and widespread, adhesive endorsement. The sudden deaths of these men, including the publicized suicide of Dan White after his release from prison in 1985, like the demise of all men, rob us, -the survivors, of the opportunity to understand the senseless motivations of hatred and supremacy.

So, in light of the outrageous and blatant support of Dan White by his cronies in the San Francisco City Police Department, who raised well over one hundred thousand dollars for his legal defense, the fact that Dan White would not have survived on the outside without becoming the object of a similar assassination himself, and the jarring realization that homophobia is still alive and breeding, shore to shore and beyond, Dan White also lives; -between the covers of WHITEWASH.

Michael Scott Curnes Colorado Springs, Colorado November 27, 1988 In memory of

Harvey Milk and George Moscone

If ever homophobia carried a proper name, it was Dan White.

And if ever anyone believed homophobia had been punished, checked or eliminated from the planet, it was WHITEWASH.

-Michael Curnes



(hwīt'wosh', -wosh')

THE FIRST COAT

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n. 1. A mixture of lime often with whiting, size or glue added, that is used to cover walls, concrete, or the like.

CHAPTER ONE

"This is it. Just like we rehearsed. We've got our John Doe."

"Jesus Christ! I didn't think it'd go down this fast. What about my wife? Is my wife alright?"

"Just like I said. Everything went according to plan. Lochran's in a brown panel van waiting for you around the corner and across from the Chevron. Use the backstairs, now!"

"Jesus, Chief..."

The phone clicked dead in his ear. He looked around the trashed hotel room with the fleeting satisfaction of knowing his registered alias at the front desk was his ticket out of there. He grabbed his blue windbreaker, wrapped it around the door knob and broke a sprint down the hall for the back stairway. He had used the backstairs once before and seven years later, he was still running. He burst into the rain-splattered alley as the squishing slap of his tennis shoes echoed off the steep bricked corridor to freedom.

The night could not have been any blacker nor could it have any more facilitated his masterminded getaway. He slipped undetected through the streets of the sleeping city. He ran with the pent-up determination from five years spent behind bars and of an additional year sentenced to undignified exile, and he ran with a mighty vengeance. His pace was unforgiving as it pounded out the justice that was long overdue. Rounding the corner of the building, full of breath, he hurdled a garbage can that for him, embraced the essence of this decadent city; -a city he had fought for and a city for which he had killed.

The headlights of the van rushed the muted darkness under the red and blue Chevron sign. He jumped into the passenger seat, slamming the heavy door. Tires squealed before actually gripping the wet pavement that would lead them out of The City and out of the haunting decade that had turned its back and imprisoned its hero.

"Climb in back!"

"Ah, come on, Lochran. What's the harm?"

"Don't argue, Lucky. Just do it!" The driver half yelled. He reluctantly climbed behind the seat and into the convenient void of the windowless panel van. He had resented the nickname. It wasn't luck and it had never been luck. It was duty; -his duty. The City, afterall, had plummeted into moral decay and lay there, rotting, unchecked. In his Irish eyes, only two men had blocked The City's path to complete and honorable restoration, -the faggot and the faggot mentor. Once removed, once annihilated, he had reasoned on that rainy November day not so long ago, there would be total recovery for The City and he alone, would be ultimately responsible and infinitely regarded. But even without confirmation of this certain transformation, those Irish eyes were smilin' as the van headed north for the bridge. The Legend would embrace every hope for the next generation.

"How about a little radio? Maybe we can catch the news or something. It nearly drove me crazy not having a TV in that hotel room. Has it happened yet? You know, my suicide?"

"Oh, it's happened, Lucky. -About nine this morning."

"Hot damn!" He clapped his hands together. "I just wish my wife didn't have to fall for the whole thing to make it work. There should have been a plan to get us around involving her like this." He thought a moment. "Jesus! I must have led that poor woman to Hell and back these past seven years. We should have come up with a way to make it easier on her."

"You know we couldn't risk theatrics on lousy acting. She has to think it's the real thing or she blows the whole goddamn mission. You know that, Lucky. We've been over all of this before. I, for one, think it was a big enough gamble bringing your brother into the fold. I'm still not entirely comfortable with that, you know."

"Shit. A fucking mission. Now, how do you like that? Why in the hell couldn't we just stay in The City and live like normal folks? I served my time."

"There's nothing normal about you, Lucky. You wouldn't have stood a five minute chance back here. Have you forgotten this past year of death threats? They would have gunned you down within a week out in The City."

"Hell, Lochran. Faggots don't carry guns."

"But Liberals do, Lucky, and the Liberals will get ya every time. Remember that." Lochran violated the darkness with a Bic lighter that he held at the end of a crumpled Marlboro.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. How 'bout that radio?"

"Sure." The driver dodged static and disco to tune-in a news report, as he crossed the bridge out of The City. Lucky cracked a window liberating the captive smoke that tried his basic tolerance.

"...of carbon monoxide asphyxiation. Sources have now confirmed, The City's most famous assassin, has indeed committed suicide, apparently 21 months after his release from the state penitentiary. The body was discovered early this afternoon by the victim's brother in the garage of his home just blocks from The City College. Friends and neighbors say the ousted couple had recently returned from their self-imposed exile in Ireland and the southern half of the state, to re-establish an existence in The City. A spokesman for The City Police Department has said forensic data would establish the time of death to be between eight this morning and two this afternoon. Investigators on the scene have recovered a twelve foot section of garden hose that led from the exhaust pipe of a late model Buick and into the driver's window. Again, early reports have confirmed the apparent suicide ... "

"That's enough, Lucky. We have a long trip ahead of us tonight and a lot of material to cover. Are you comfortable back there?"

"Yeah. I feel great! I can drive when you get tired."

"That isn't likely." The driver hit his bright lights to further reveal the deserted and winding highway that crept through the black canyon. Lochran suppressed a yawn. "If you feel up to it, we can get started with the background review." Lucky nodded his head and raised to his knees on the carpeted floor of the van's cargo hold. "There's a dozen roast beef sandwiches in that mini-fridge and just about as many sodas. Don't be shy, Lucky. Help yourself."

"Thanks, Lochran. You've made this just like home." He unwrapped a sandwich.

"Home? You mean just like prison, don't you? I'm telling you, I've never seen anyone more spoiled and pampered in my goddamn life!" Lochran laughed.

"Pampered?" Lucky yelled spitting mayonaise and lettuce. "I've been a fucking fugitive of The People when I should have been honored with a statue on the grounds of City Hall. Prison may have been a Marriott compared to this past year hiding on the outside. But don't tell me I'm spoiled, Lochran. -Not when you have no idea what it's been like for me." Lucky took another ferocious bite from the sandwich and fiddled with the tab of a Pepsi can.

"Look, I'm trying to understand what it's been like for you and your family. Hell, if we didn't understand and believe in what you did, we couldn't have staged this whole suicide thing to get you the peace you deserve. All of us knew when we first talked about the hits, that we would run up against the liberals and come face to face with

judicial opposition. Jesus! Five years and you've nailed your obligation to that fucked-up sector of society that couldn't see the necessity of your actions. We're here now to make sure you get the bennies of your heroism. I'm just sorry it took us a year to get our act together."

"And I'm grateful for all you and the chief have done for me and my family. I didn't mean to snap at you or sound ungrateful."

"Alright then. I'll run through the entire file and then we'll spend the rest of the trip reviewing the facts. Let's see here..." Lochran mumbled. The driver thumbed through the notepad he had propped between the steering column and the dash. "You're gonna like the new name, Lucky. The chief picked it our special for you. Thought you might appreciate it after all you've been through."

"Well, what is it?" he asked impatiently.

"Cavanaugh. -Lucky Cavanaugh. Of course, Lucky is just your nickname. Your confirmation name is Patrick Michael Cavanaugh."

"Then we'll stick with that. I hate the nickname, Lochran. I don't ever want to be called that again. Not by anyone," he demanded nearly jumping back into the front seat.

"Okay. Alright. Settle yourself down. From

this moment on, it'll be Patrick or Pat. Whichever one you like."

"Make it Paddy. Paddy Cavanaugh," he announced, getting used to the new sound as it rolled from deep in the back of his throat. Lochran caught him grinning in the rearview mirror.

"Okay. Paddy, then."

He did like the new name. It rang true in the Catholic belfrey and it rattled proud in the thicket of his Irish roots. The chief had been right again, as he had been from the very beginning of this ordeal. He was going to miss the chief and even The City. Ol'Paddy was arrogant about his accomplishments eventhough he may have been a little disturbed by the manifestation of their consequences. But all that was behind him now. The chief, The City, the two dead politicians, the prison and most of recent history, all faded just beyond the tail lights of the missionary van.

CHAPTER TWO

"Where are we?"

"Just north of Eureka. You've been asleep just over two hours."

"Is it my turn to drive?"

"Not likely. I'm just fine, other than the fact I've got to take a leak and we could use some more gas."

"Well, pull this heap over and we'll stretch our legs."

"Alright. Next chance we have, but we're not out of the state yet and until we are, we're just asking for trouble."

"Any news updates worth knowin' about?"

"I can't pick up The City anymore but you're still a hot news item out of Santa Rosa. Seems the body's been taken to The City Coroner for immediate undertaking at the family's request. Guess they want a lid on this pretty darn fast, -so to speak," Lochran realized his pun.

"Jesus, Lochran! We put my wife through all this?" "Had to,"Paddy. Had no choice. You know that." "How about if I call her now, just to let her know the plan, so she won't be worrying."

"'Fraid not, Paddy. She's still got a funeral to pull-off and we need to get you settled in deep. Speaking of your cover, we'd better review the 'new you' a little more."

"I thought you had to pee."

"It'll wait. Tell me about your wife, Paddy, -where you met, your kids..."

"Ah, give it a rest, will you? That's what put me to sleep two hours ago."

"We've gotta run through the drills, Paddy. Too much money and too many lives are at stake if this thing folds on account of some careless character slip. Now give me the goddamn poop and quit arguing about it! Jesus, you're an arrogant sonuvabitch!"

Lucky considered the statement. "Okay. My wife's name is Gillian and we met in high school."

"Where?"
"St. Louis, 1962."
"Marriage?"
"Not at first. I, uh..."
"You what?"
"I worked for the Peace Corps until 1965."
"And then Vietnam?"
"No." Paddy fidgeted between the seats. "I mean,

yes! Lochran, I hate saying I dodged. It's such a coward's tale. The truth is I served in Viet Nam and I'm damn proud of that fact!"

"The facts are obsolete Paddy. This doesn't fly with wings of the past. Now we've got another good twelve hours in this van, and if you don't start swallowing this story pretty damn soon, I won't be stopping in twelve hours and you <u>will</u> find your ass in Canada! So, you dodged dammit, and then what?"

"I sent for Gillian and we settled in Vancouver." "Manitoba?"

"British Columbia, ass wipe."

"And then you married?"

"And then we married off the coast on a fishing boat in 1968. I worked for a local fish cannery at the time."

"Did you have kids?"

"Not at first. I could hardly support the two of us on my salary, but we talked about a family. I guess it wasn't until six years later that Chuck finally came along."

"Dammit all to hell! Your kid's name is Michael! -Michael. 'Got it?"

"Fuck you, Lochran! I've called him Chuck all his life. You try and change your goddamn life in twelve hours. As for me, I can take care of my own." "You change, Paddy, or you die. It's that simple." "Well, I'd just like to see you try it. That's all."

"Alright. We both agree this is tough, but it's not going to get any easier. -At least not for a long time anyway. So go on with your story."

"Well, five years ago this fall, Gillian had little Jonathan who is nearly as big as his older brother."

"And is there a problem with little Jonathan?"

"Back off, Lochran! I'm warning you. He's just slow, that's all. He'll grow out of it, you know. People are saying he's that way on account of the things I did, but he's just slower than Chuck was, and it's nobody's fault."

"It's Michael, not Chuck! And I'm sorry for bringing it up. It's just that other people are bound to ask and you have to be prepared for that, but you'll have to drop your convict conscience. Nobody's blaming you, Paddy. Go on."

"He's just slow, Lochran."

"I know he is. Tell me about Kimberly."

"My youngest? Kim was born two years ago in January. She really looks the most like me. We'd talked about coming to the States after Jonathan was born, and with Carter's Pardon of all evaders in '77, it was just a matter of paperwork. We had grown somewhat partial to the west and especially to the Pacific Coastline

and we looked for a spot to raise our kids. Seaside, Oregon was the only logical choice once we considered size and location. It seems like a decent place to start a business and raise a family."

"And you know, Paddy, it is a decent place. The fact is, I'd even consider settling there myself, if it weren't for the force and all my relatives back in The City. I really fell in love with the town last month when I went there for the first time to set things up for you. You know, The Lewis and Clark Trail ends in Seaside, and so does your conscience. You and Gillian can walk down the streets and attend church potlucks on a regular basis, but you have to forget where you came from and what you did. 'No doubt there are millions who are better off because of you, but this generation just isn't programmed to celebrate our advances."

"You live in The City, Lochran. How much has really changed as a result of the assassinations?"

"Ah, you remember The Seventies, Paddy. -The decade that told queers they could come out of their closets. You showed 'em they could also get shot standing in front of them. That practically restored occupancy overnight. Yeah, Paddy. The Eighties are a helluva lot more promising on account of you."

"Thanks for saying that, Lochran. It helps to

know that. So, tell me more about Seaside. What will I be doing there?"

"Besides loving every minute of it, you mean? We used most of the Force Action Fund to buy you a chunk of real estate that just happens to have a twelve bedroom house squatting on it! We thought you and Gillian could turn that monster into a bed and breakfast by the sea. With all the touist popularity of Seaside, you should have a real money maker in your hands."

"That's fantastic! I have always wanted to open my own restaurant. That's a perfect cover."

"Yeah, the chief knew you could turn a buck with this venture. At least it'll get you out of the hot french fry grease for a change. The loan was secured in your name to help you establish credit under your alias. There's really no way this can fail. You know, in a way, this has kinda been the perfect crime."

"How did the Seaside press handle the assassinations six years ago?"

"Well, I looked into that. The Seaside Signal is the local newspaper and it didn't even carry the story back then. In fact, it just recently incorporated a sort of Northwest Briefs column. Like many small towns, I imagine, they could care less about The City or the future of anything outside of their little coastal tourist trade." "What about the political structure of this town? Who pulls the strings?"

"A mayor by the name of Donaldson. Very pro-business, pro-family and pro-American, just like you as a matter of fact."

"Yeah, just like me, isn't it? You're beginning to sound like some of those books I've been reading that were written about me! Kinda makes me mad that they all make me out to be a queer-basher. Why can't they just tell it like it was? There were problems in The City and I took steps to solve them. Come to think of it, I'll be glad to put all this shit behind me and leave it in The City where it flows freely through the gutters!"

Lochran lifted his head acknowledging the statement. Coming off a corner, the lights of a state patrol car lassoed the side-view mirror.

"Mother of God! Lucky, get the fuck in back! We've hooked a trooper!"

"No kidding, Lochran?"

"Get in back and do it now, goddamnit!" Lochran broke into a sweat high on his forehead as he pulled the van onto the rough shoulder of the highway. He knew he couldn't have been anymore than thirty minutes away from the Oregon Border, and though it probably didn't make any difference at all, he had banked on the ignorance that thrives in the sticks. His heart practically bounced

the shirt right off his chest. The crunch of gravel beneath the trooper's boots made Paddy queasy under the blanket where he prayed in the fetal position. With the window rolled down to greet the officer, the cool October pine air defeated the heater and defined the sweat on Lochran's brow. He reached into his back pocket and balanced his badge on the side-view mirror where it promptly caught the attention of the trooper's mag-light.

"Looks like you're a few blocks out of your jurisdiction this evening, officer." The trooper put his gun back in its holster and examined the badge and accompanying credentials. "Officer Lochran, what brings you out of The City and into our neck of the Redwoods?"

"I've got a rebel daughter attending the University of Oregon who has decided to move out of the dorms and out on her own, mid-semester, no less. I must have half of everything from our house in back, just to get her started. You know, Daddy's girl and all."

"I do know. I've got two of my own. Alright then. You'll want to keep the speed down, though. Oregon isn't near as merciful as we are and rain's washed out parts of the road in another ten or fifteen miles."

"Thanks for the warning. Good night." Lochran held his breath waiting for the gravel to give way to

the chirping of crickets or to the prelude of another thunderstorm. With the trooper tucked inside his unit, Lochran edged the van back onto the roadway and monitored the U-turn of his good fortune in the side mirror.

CHAPTER THREE

"Won't be long now before the sun stretches over those trees, Paddy, and then you'll see what I mean when I say there is no place like Oregon for you and your family."

"Does it ever stop raining here?"

"Sure it does. -The second week in July, just like The City." Lochran smiled. "We'll stop for gas up here in Gold Beach before folks get up and start milling about town. Remember, we're still not far enough out of The City for my tastes, but it's early yet." Lochran pulled into the first road side store he saw, dimmed the lights and cut the engine. "No more than five minutes in there, Paddy. You take a leak and get back in the van." Lochran was uneasy. There was indeed much at stake and he'd go down with the rest of them if Paddy blew the cover now. Just eight more hours, he reminded himself, and he'd have Paddy tucked in for good. Eight hours couldn't come fast enough. His heart raced as the gas gurgled inside the large tank. Lochran was hurting for a cigarette by now. He hadn't been this uptight since the trial five years ago. Even then, he remembered how odd it felt to lose his cool in light of all he'd been through on the force. But he was a wreck during that trial and he was beginning to think he hadn't recovered still, until it dawned on him just how much control he actually had, both then and now. There were several who had Lochran to thank for their safety, their lives and their piece of mind. He was the unsung hero who had fund raised a hundred thousand dollars for Paddy's defense in 1979 and he was Paddy's paladin of freedom now, as they headed north in secrecy.

He'd served twenty-two impressive years in The City Police Department, received the Medal of Valor twice, and sported the scars from one gunshot wound and one near-fatal stabbing. He boasted well-over eight hundred felony arrests during his patrol career and graduated to inspector in the late Seventies. And with the posthaste administration following the assassinations, came a new police chief, dedicated to the rebuilding and remoralizing of The City. Lochran quickly bid for a spot on the bandwagon and was promptly recognized and appointed the director of community relations. It was a thin line upon which Director Lochran teetered. He could not afford to alienate the homosexual population he so blatantly despised, and yet, he now ushered The City's most famous homophobic vigilante out of the state and

into the undercover world of Seaside, Oregon.

Lochran had begun mind-writing the keynote address he would deliver to the homosexual faction upon his return to The City. He thought of how he would make it ring with promises of change and new opportunity. He knew to appreciate the irony of it all, -offering false hopes to the homosexual population while he delivered the real freedoms to its number-one enemy.

But Lochran was a damn good cop, despite his somewhat bizarre interpretation of the law he was christened to uphold. What had always set guys like Lochran and Paddy apart from the masses, was the assumption, albeit belief, that good conscience had license to act and patrol outside normal parameters of the written law. They swore by this creed. So help them, God.

The gas nozzle clickly loudly in Lochran's hand and caused him to jump. "Jesus!" he proclaimed, instantly embarrassed and blushing. He realized his tractor may have been cranked too tightly and he reached for his pack of cigarettes to finally unwind. He hadn't seen Paddy duck into the small store to retrieve the bathroom key, so when he rounded the back of the van and spotted his cargo in front of the counter talking with the clerk, Lochran blew a dozen blood vessels and dropped the matches in a mud puddle. "Shit!" This was it, he thought nervously. They'd be taken down in Gold Beach. He fumbled unsuccessfully with the gas cap, dropping it twice. He slipped into the store behind Paddy and monitored the conversation already in progress.

"I really can't convince myself that those assassinations were entirely wrong anyway, and I'm a Christian," the clerk said matter-of-factly hanging the restroom key back on the hook. "Someone had to do something, I suppose."

"I know what you're saying. -You hate to make the guy out to be a hero but he really is," Paddy added picking up a newspaper from the rack. "What else is in here today?"

"Interstate 84 has washed out again. I'm telling you it's been a hassle improving that stretch of highway in all this rain. And now it looks as though they won't even have it finished come winter. That'll be another mess."

"How much do I owe you for the paper?" Paddy caught one of Lochran's distress signals from behind a box of Lucky Charms.

"Just a quarter, and I hear there's talk about raising that," the clerk said, naturally resisting any change. Paddy tossed a quarter on the counter and thanked the elderly man, who seemed just as anxious to return to his coffee.

"How much for the gas?" Lochran placed the box of cereal on the counter. "And this, too." The sound of the Chevy engine diverted Lochran's attention, but only a few blocks from the gas station, he slammed the cereal box flat into Paddy's stomach demanding an explanation for his recklessness.

"Ease-off, Lochran. The ol'fart wouldn't even recognize me from the Prince of England."

"That's not the point! The Prince of England isn't supposed to be dead, you asshole. I asked you to play it cool and you run off like Barbara Walters on a goddamn interview for 'Twenty/Twenty.'"

"I'm just curious, Lochran. That's all, -just curious."

"You make me real nervous, pal. I'll tell you that much." Lochran lit a cigarette.

"Yeah, so do green plants, I imagine. You're headed for a heart attack, Harry. Just relax and I'll read you the paper while you drive." Paddy positioned the paper where it caught the street lights of Gold Beach and the first sun of the morning. "It says here, -the smoker of 1995 will likely be segregated from society, forced to practice his habit alone or outdoors."

"Come on, Paddy. Cut the crap."

"No, I'm serious. Says here the surgeon general predicts a smoke-free society by 1995. Studies show that sidestream smoke actually contains more noxious material than mainstream smoke, which means, you're killing me!" "It wouldn't be the first time this week. What's it say about your suicide?"

"What's this? I'll be damned if the Bears didn't do it again! They went and beat Green Bay. That makes them seven and O, I think."

"Is that your picture?" Lochran craned his neck.

"Yeah. But it's an old one from my campaign brochures. I really think with this new perm and my hair dyed black, my hairline doesn't look quite so receeded, does it?" Paddy twisted his statement into a question.

Lochran eased his vanity. "I think you're right. You know, it's no accident that old photo got slipped to the press. I prepared that press release nearly a month ago."

"Let's see what it has to say. 'Killer of The City Mayor and Supervisor, commits suicide.' -Catchy." Paddy readjusted in his seat and continued. "'Former Supervisor,' -that's me, '-the assassin of The City Mayor and a fellow City Supervisor, committed suicide in the garage of his family home Monday, just one month short of the seventh anniversary of the sensational slayings. Police say his body was discovered about 2 p.m. by a younger brother. The victim had called his brother asking him to come over in the afternoon. When his younger brother arrived, he found the victim's body inside a white sedan in the garage, with a garden hose running from the exhaust pipe into a partially opened window. Police say neighbors reported hearing an engine revving earlier that morning, eight hourse before the body was actually discovered. Three handwritten notes were found taped to the car, one addressed to his brother, another to his mother and a third to his wife, who is 43.

"The City Police Chief, Stephen Ross, said the victim's letters contained no reference to The City Hall killings but rather mentioned arrangement for his funeral and for his family.

"On November 27, 1978, the victim had gunned down the mayor and The City's first homosexual supervisor in their City Hall offices. At his murder trial, the victim used a controversial diminished capacity defense and was later convicted of the lesser counts of voluntary manslaughter. The verdict on these reduced violations and the light sentence that followed, triggered a night of fierce rioting in The City.

"In the years since the killings, the victim had expressed no public remorse.' -What do they want?" He jabbed Lochran in the ribs. "Tears on <u>Live at Five</u>?" Paddy laughed at his own joke and tried to recover. "I like the way this refers to me as the 'victim' for a change." He read further. "'The victim's wife of nine years, was informed of the death by police officers. She was teaching on the naval base at the time of the suicide.

W Ross said the victim had recently returned from Ireland. While serving his five year sentence at the state prison, the victim had often talked of taking such a trip. Apparently he had spent four months or so in Ireland and had recently returned to The City, Ross said. "We had been told that he was in Ireland and that his family was preparing to relocate there with him. So this came as quite a surprise."

"The slain mayor's widow declined to comment. The widow, according to friends, still has not recovered from her husband's assassination nearly seven years ago.' -What about that queer's widow? What did she have to say?" Paddy laughed at his comparison and returned to the artical.

"'Yesterday's victim's nine gunshots in November of 1978, not only killed the mayor and The City's leading gay politiican, but left the entire community reëling.

#Seventeen days before the murders, the victim, a former police officer and firefighter, as well as a political conservative, resigned as supervisor, saying he wanted to devote more time to his private business. But he suddenly changed his mind, encouraged by real estate giants who needed his conservative vote on the board, and asked the mayor, a liberal Democrat, to reappoint him. The mayor refused and the gay supervisor was said to be among those who urged the mayor to deny the victim's request.

#Avoiding metal detectors by slipping through a basement window of City Hall, the victim walked into the mayor's office and methodically pumped four bullets into the mayor at close range. He then coursed a long hallway, reloaded his .38 caliber revolver and fired five more shots into the

gay supervisor.' -You know, the way this paper makes it sound, I didn't even pause to say good morning or nothing." Lochran rolled his eyes and Paddy skimmed down the page to where he had left off. "'The victim's defense during his murder trial, was based on severe depression, in part by eating large quantities of junk food. That diminished capacity theory led to the conviction of voluntary manslaughter.' -And that's all she wrote."

"That's all I wrote, you mean. Well, there's another artical for your scrapbook."

"I suppose, but there's nothing in here about my wife and kids. I don't know how they're dealing with this and that makes this tough."

"Tough but necessary. Eat your breakfast." Lochran handed him the box of cereal.

"Lucky Charms?" Paddy whined. "-Dry?"

"It's that or roast beef again. The choice is yours, free man. The choice is yours."

CHAPTER FOUR

"Come on, Lochran. Pick him up, why don't you? You're really starting to get on my nerves and I could use the conversational diversion." Paddy watched as the van sped past the shivering hitchhiker and then slowed to stop. "Thanks, Lochran," Paddy conceeded.

"I'm not stopping because I think it's the smart thing to do and I'm only transporting him a hundred miles or so, and that's on the condition you keep the converstation generic and to a minimum." Lochran ground the butt of his cigarette into the ashtray. "Is that understood?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Paddy slid the panel door open and the hitchhiker crawled inside positioning himself and his backpack next to the refrigerator. He blew warm air into his cupped hands and the stinging red of his cheeks seemed to pale slightly. "Where ya headed?" Paddy asked pouring the last of the day-old coffee from a red-plaid thermos. He offered it with a smile and the steam condensed on the hitcher's
wire framed glasses. Even now the red didn't escape his cheeks completely. He took off his glasses and reached nervously inside his wool-lined denim coat. In a lightning flash he produced a tarnished hunting knife and waved it awkwardly.

"I need to get to Seattle. But if that's going to be a problem, let me out now."

Paddy and Lochran both drew down on him in synchronized perfection and two separate .38's cocked in eerie unison. The hitchhiker jumped where he sat and dropped the knife.

"Anymore questions?" Lochran snapped.

"Look," the hitcher trembled, "I'm not looking for trouble. I just need a ride." He paused to replace his glasses on his nose. "I'm sorry about pulling the knife. It was stupid. It's just that it's been a rough night for me and I'm tired."

Paddy reached for the knife and holstered his gun inside his jacket. Lochran had retrieved his famous Smith and Wesson from evidence storage and had presented it to him just one week before the suicide as a sign of good faith. He protected it like a trophy. Paddy motioned Lochran to retire his piece. The hitcher watched as Lochran tucked his gun back inside his coat.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" the hitchhiker asked.

"Go ahead," Lochran volunteered permission fully intending to join him.

"Uh," the hitchhiker paused. "Do you mind if I smoke a joint? I've got to relax before I hurt myself."

Paddy laughed. "Yeah. You and Lochran both. Go ahead. Light up. Lochran, you could probably use a hit of this, you know." Lochran growled slightly and turned on the windshield wipers.

In another few seconds, it was raining hard and the patter of rain on the van roof was nearly deafening inside. Paddy and the hitcher took turns dragging on the joint while Lochran puffed nicotine in flagrant protest. Paddy hadn't smoked pot since Vietnam, which, when he thought about his new identity, didn't officially happen anyway. He carefully inhaled the mind-altering smoke deep into his lungs. Spent ashes collected on the beards of the two passengers as they fell further and further away from their respective predicaments. Paddy watched the hitchhiker get inside himself and forget. Paddy tried to close his eyes but his head started to spin and he opened them. He passed the joint as Lochran shook his head most likely wondering what he had gotten himself into. Paddy smiled.

The hitchhiker leaned back against the mini refrigerator stretching his long legs.

"What made your night so rough?" Paddy asked the hitcher.

The hitcher opened his eyes and exhaled. "Are you asking because you wanna know, or are you just asking to make conversation?" He passed the joint.

"I want to know, that's all." Paddy negotiated his careful grip on the shrinking roach and took a final gulp.

"Well, down around Crescent City, I quess it was, I took a ride from this trucker who said he was doing a straight haul through to Seattle. I was pretty tired 'cause I'd been hitchin' since the night before last." The hitcher paused to straighten his posture and widen his gaze in preparation for the story he was about to tell. "Well, when I woke up, the trucker had his hand on my crotch and was feeling me up. Fuck if I didn't have a hard-on too, so the trucker keeps palming me thinking I like it 'cause I'm up to it, if you know what I mean. I told him to knock off the fooling around and I'd catch a ride with someone else, so he slows down to pull off the road. Well, no sooner had he stopped and thrown the rig into neutral, he pulled that knife on me!" The hitcher gestured in Paddy's direction. "Anyway, he had the knife at my throat and he was tugging on my buttonfly. Next thing I knew he had his mouth all over my dick."

Instantly disgusted and perhaps a little intrigued, Paddy asked the obvious question; "-What did you do?"

"Anything that sick mother fucker told me to do. I have this thing about scars and I was more scared than I've ever been; -that is, until I got real pissed. I knew I couldn't cum under that kind of pressure, which would have been the obvious way out, so I just sat there and obeyed."

"Obeyed what?" Paddy pressed further. Lochran didn't understand why Paddy didn't just drop the whole story. It must have been the dope.

"Well, he told me to feel him while he worked on me which was a mistake because he got an instant hardon that I had to contend with. I was getting madder by the second. That's when he got this idea that he was going to fuck me right there in the cab. I'm tellin' you, this puppy was sick and there was no way he was poking his chubby cock up my ass, so I made like I was going to bend over the bunker for his convenience and as he prepared to make his grand entrance, I grabbed the knife and turned the fucking table on that bastard. I stripped him down the rest of the way and tied him to the steering column of his truck, rolled down both windows and pissed on him. I hit the hazard lights, threw his clothes in the forest and headed up the highway. It's been about two hours now." "That sick fuck," Paddy empathized with the hitcher.

"Yeah, now that I really think about it, I should have planted his asshole on the gearshift. Then he really would have been a piss-popsicle on a stick!" Paddy and the hitcher exploded in laughter and fell promptly asleep, obviously under the influence of the grass. Lochran just kept driving. Through Coos Bay and up past Florence and into Newport, he forced himself to concentrate on the winding coastal highway. He felt increasingly uncomfortable about the additional cargo and he still had several things to go over with Paddy before they pulled into Seaside, so in Lincoln City, the hitcher and the fugitive parted company.

"I didn't even catch your name," Paddy spoke through the passenger seat window.

"Is it even important?" the hitcher asked as he waved them past. That disturbed Paddy but Lochran was prepared to give him other things to think about. Three hours later, the duo slipped into Seaside just as they had slipped out of The City seventeen hours earlier. Inside the sprawling twelve bedroom house on the sea, Lochran and Paddy threw some spare sheets on a couple of beds and slept for two days as Seaside counted down to their formal introduction.

La contra de la co

CHAPTER FIVE

Paddy woke to a beautiful Oregon sunrise and to noise somewhere in the house that he was unable to pinpoint due to his baffling surroundings. He had bounced around from room to room between naps and runs to the bathroom, but all the tension, confusion and drain of the last several weeks, certainly took its battering toll on Paddy and his only defense had been sleep. But the sunrise and an incentive to discover those surroundings that had held him captive in his own freedom, beckoned his exploration and begged his conquest. He threw back the bedding.

Lochran was nibbling on a doughnut and sipping stale coffee from the thermos, downstairs.

"I've got to get back, Paddy. You're on your own," he said catching a crumb that bounced off his baby blue sweater.

"What do you mean, on my own? Who's supposed to help me set up housekeeping? -The whales and the seals?" "Believe it or not, for the first time in your adult life, somebody's not going to be planning your next footsteps. As for the housekeeping, at least you recognize your first objective. In fact I mailed flyers two weeks ago when I was here, announcing the opening of 'Cavanaugh's' November 18th. You have exactly three weeks from this Monday to open this monstrosity." Lochran tipped the styrofoam cup and the last of the coffee rushed down his throat. "Oh, and, Paddy- This is a bed and breakfast. You might consider buying groceries, too."

"Fuck the patronizing, Lochran. Why the November 18th deadline if you are truly through calling the shots. Why couldn't I open this with the help of my family and on my own time schedule?"

"Because I remember you from your years on the force, Paddy. Procrastination is one of your stronger suits. Besides, I'll be delivering Gillian and the kids next Monday. Dig in, Paddy. Don't fight the deadline. Just be aware of it and meet it head -on. Seaside is your new world. It might as well be a complete universe, considering your crime and the degree of this freedom. There's roughly ten thousand dollars remaining in your trust fund. It has been laundered and transfered to the Bank of Astoria, Seaside Branch." He reached for his billfold. "This is a funds access card. You take this card to either the Bank of Astoria or to the US Bank, both on Avenue E, insert the card in the Automated Bank Teller and enter your personal identification number and follow the instructions on the screen."

"And what might my personal identification number be?" Paddy mimmicked his technical airs.

"Who's being patronizing now?" Paddy shrugged his shoulders, standing there in a T-shirt and briefs. "When's your birthday, Paddy?"

"September 2, 1946," he replied.

"Numerically, -0246. That's your personal identification number. You'll most likely want to open a checking account in person sometime this week for 'Cavanaugh's' operational needs. But remember, you only have ten thousand dollars. You have to be making money before this runs out. There is no more where this came from. Those supporters think you're dead."

"God." Paddy pondered. "I understand, Lochran."

Lochran placed the bank card on the table. "I've got to hit the road, Paddy. I'll see you in about a week. Good luck." Lochran hugged Paddy. It was a short hug. Lochran closed the giant oak door behind him.

Paddy fingered the bank card and then carried it

onto the giant deck outside. The french doors rattled, startling a seagull off the railing. Goose bumps popped up on Paddy's bare legs. It was a deceptive, sunny good morning with the temperature struggling to push its chin over the forty degree bar. Everything considered, Paddy came from California, where November didn't mean the advent of winter. This was to be the first of a host of adjustments confronting Paddy in his quest for anonymity.

All the while, the Pacific Ocean seemed to roar his secret just beyond the fence and even Paddy wondered how long he would be able to guard the yard.

Inside the inn, a shopping list near the size of Seaside lay on the dusty wood floor and under the poor mattresses and behind empty cupboard doors. Not a single shower stall in the inn's three bathrooms boasted a shower curtain and the spare sheets on his and Lochran's beds had been the only sheets in the house. The soap used for his shower, the first in three days, read 'Shilo Inn' and he had to dry himself with a sheet from his own bed. That grand old house by the sea was desperately hurting alright and somehow, ten thousand dollars had to be a sufficient dressing.

For hours, Paddy juggled what to buy with what could wait and the ocean breeze rearranged the dust around him. He realized he knew next to nothing about motel management but he was determined to figure it out.

His first managerial duty was an official bounce test on each of the fifteen beds, which revealed, at a minimum, ten needed replaced. Linen and bath towels were next. God, he wished his wife were already there. She was good with this sort of thing and he needed her now. For the last year and a half on the outside, he had definitely taken Gillian for granted and he recognized it now. He had practically forced her to conceive Kimberly while he was in prison, and Gillian most assuredly conceived in pain. The task of raising children who would ultimately know of the sins of their father, cursed her and she often wondered how much more she could be expected to take. She was one woman, afterall. She knew of no one who had borne half of what she carried with her from day to day; and now, the suicide. The final act that basically ratified her lonliness and promoted her pathetic singularity. As far as Gillian understood, he was finally gone. He wasn't locked up somewhere or hiding somewhere else. He was actually gone this time. Now everyone would accept what she had known all along. She was on her own.

Paddy had to call. He had to talk to her, comfort her and let her know once and for all, he was on the up and up and he wouldn't forsake her again. He raced through the giant house, exploding into one room after another in search of a telephone. Damn Lochran! He had to get to a pay phone. Paddy would call his wife. He threw on his jeans and corduroy jacket and bolted from the inn. It was still nippy and the sun seemed to hang in the sky as a decoy. The gravel and dirt road under him, still wet and spongy from earlier rains, led him to the edge of the city. He spotted a telephone and sprinted toward it.

"Yes, operator. -Collect call from-" Jesus, he thought. From who? "Uh, collect call from her husband."

"I'm sorry sir. I must have a first name, at least." "Paddy!" he yelled. "Collect from her husband, Paddy." "One moment, sir."

Paddy tapped his foot unknowingly in the mud, one hand in his jean pocket.

"I'm sorry, sir. The number you have dialed has been disconnected."

"Try it again, will you?"

"I can try, sir. One moment please." A car zoomed past on the street and Paddy put his free hand over his ear to block out the noise. "Sir, I get the same recording. I'm sorry."

"Dammit. Can you check for a new number?"

"I'm sorry, sir. You will need to dial Directory Information yourself."

Paddy slammed the receiver against the phone. That bastard, Lochran! He knew Paddy would try to call. It - 4- 2 ^{- 7}

wouldn't dawn on Paddy that the telephone number had been disconnected due to the volume of crank calls his wife was sure to have received in celebration of her husband's recent and long awaited demise. Paddy's comprehension thrived on a very superficial level, but for the most part, he couldn't get much deeper than that.

He headed further into town on North Prom. Hotel after motel after restaurant after curio shop practically edged out the sand on the beach. Kids screamed from a swingset anchored in the dune grass of the public beach. Gillian would have to register Michael for school as soon as she got here. Sixth grade would be an awkward time for Michael. It was for Paddy. Alot had been said about his adolescene in the past several years. Experts spoke of Paddy's underdevelopment and lack of positive role models, but no one seemed to zero in on Paddy's failure to ever achieve any sense of identiy he could be proud of. And it had truly been a life long struggle. He had been wrongly labled a fairy in junior high. Paddy wasn't queer! Yet he lived with this injustice and rather defined it as he grew. He was the last to sport pubic hair in gym class. He was the last to achieve ejaculation behind the church dumpster. He always got hurt in sports activities and he was never chosen first for a team. He was increasingly popular with girls, which should have been to his credit, but it wasn't.

He was clearly attractive, which should have worked in his favor, but it didn't. And he was smart. But he might as well have been a leper for the amount of male recognition he never received. And Paddy craved male recognition. Fortunately, he learned not to depend on it.

• •

In college, Paddy discovered muscles, discipline and salvation. He worked out constantly, enjoying the sweaty macho gymnasium atmosphere. Until that moment, Paddy had been a victim of comparison, often illustrating the negative example. Now, he was suddenly the subject of comment and he measured up and beyond. Admiration was around every corner and respect grew and blossomed through a concrete sidewalk under him. Paddy was so taken with his transformation and the attention it rated, that he latched onto the first girl that took an interest. They married soon after he returned from his disappointing stint in Vietnam. In the military, Paddy was constantly accused of having muscles and not knowing the first thing about what to do with them. He bungled operations and risked the lives in his outfit because, once again, Paddy had concentrated on the package and remained oblivious to its contents. He was honorably but quickly discharged.

Paddy never met with an easy lesson. Every revelation came to him as a shocking, grotesque side of reality and everything took Paddy by surprise.

1969 brought with it the opportuity to join The City Police Force and he did, hoping to regain his lost sense of machismo. It worked for a short while. His wife had a son and that helped, but still, something was not quite complete for him. He bailed out of the police force, after deciding there was more gusto associated with being a firefighter. That worked for three more years and Paddy had his staged moments as a hero, but The City had fallen apart and he could either allow the whole place to burn down, or he could rebuild it. The bright lights of public office appealed to Paddy and in 1977, he ran as a conservative candidate for The City Board of Supervisors. It was a tough campaign, but vowing to clean up the liberal elements of The City, agreed with his voters. He certainly had his work cut out for him with exacting scissors. The problems had been neatly labeled and he had practically entered the race armed with a broom and dust pan. Paddy set out to rennovate the morals of a crumbling citadel. Nothing could be more noble.

But the homosexuals were a problem that caught Paddy mid-sweep. He had always known they were out there. He had been mistakenly labled one himself, in junior high, which fueled his rage and disgust for this combustible sector of society. But like everything, the degree of their infiltration and the blatancy of their ritualistic

display, was a collision of reality and confusion for Paddy. It turned his stomach while it intrigued his soul. But his campaign took careful aim with the broomstick and Paddy vowed to make good on every promise. -He was elected and his first challenge came from the newly elected faggot supervisor who opposed him on every board vote and provoked him on every social issue which threatened Paddy's precious God-fearing constituency. Paddy was a politician now, though he seemed to have a problem distinguishing between being elected to serve the interests of all people with protecting the interests of his people, which had evolved into a shrewd collection of real estate moguls and anti-gay components of the conservative machine that Paddy was dedicated to jump start with old cables of political thought. He knew how he felt about the issues and he knew that what he felt was conscience and therefore, right, always right. He acted, voted and administered his term on the premise of that conviction.

At first, it seemed the mayor was on Paddy's side, but shortly after the first months in office, Paddy detected a break in allegiance. The mayor had turned out to be a leaning liberal who increasingly spent more and more time bending to the infected sector for support. They gave it to him up the ass, too. The mayor was advocating their sickness and they took gut-splitting advantage of the arena. There were parades of pride and passed amendments of moral contradiction that spoiled all hope for Paddy. He had failed again.

After one year, Paddy resigned from office fed-up with the inconsistencies of government and the ineffectiveness of his contributions.

Paddy was racked with frustration, unable to achieve even the simplest of his goals. Psychologists say that aggression is almost always a consequence of frustration. His marriage suffered. He had stopped sleeping with his wife and he ignored his son. Days passed and the anger mounted an unbridled steed galloping toward a wall of imminent disaster. The same psychologists say aggression directed inward often results in suicide while aggression directed outward can quickly lead to homicide. Paddy didn't really blame himself. He had tried, afterall. He legitimately blamed others for his frustrations. He blamed the faggots and he blamed those who were sympathetic toward them. Day after day he would load his .38 caliber Smith and Wesson and then unload it before placing it back on the shelf in his clothes closet. Finally, Paddy asked the mayor to disregard his earlier resignation only days after submitting it. He had received terrific pressure and support from the business community to stick it out. So, in listening to these crys of endorsement, Paddy halfexpected to be welcomed back into the political fold

with outstretched arms. This wasn't the case. The mayor had met with the faggot supervisor from District Five and it was obvious the two of them had decided to appoint another pro-faggot to replace Paddy. Being replaced by a pro-faggot was almost as bad as being mistaken for one in high school. Paddy went to his closet. Shakespeare once said, "How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds, makes ill deed done."

Paddy didn't like to remember the rest; -the by-products of his actions. But Lochran had said things have improved in The City. There was some comfort to be taken it that.

Paddy walked onto the turnaround at the end of Broadway that jutted twenty feet out and over the sandy beach. An American flag flew from the monument in the center of the turnaround marking the end of The Lewis and Clark Trail. From there, Paddy looked south to Tillamook Head. Paddy remembered passing Haystack Rock just on the other side of The Head on their way into Seaside. Lochran had said that Haystack Rock is an island during high tide. Paddy knew he was an island as long as the surf was in and covering his past. Haystack Rock would be his trademark. He would make a point to hike out there this week, between errands, for geological fellowship. Paddy hopped down the steps of the turnaround, past the woman's restroom and onto the beach toward the ocean. Seagulls fed in the bountiful surf and the breeze lashed the beach like a training whip. Paddy bent over to examine a broken sand dollar on the wet sand. He spotted bubbles coming from a tiny hole in the beach to the left of his find. Balancing on his haunches and waiting, he experimented plugging the hole with his finger and then taking it away. The bubbles continued. He stood upright and jabbed his heal into the sand. The bubbles stopped and then started again.

"That's no way to go clamming!" A voice shouted from behind him over the roar of the ocean. Paddy marked the bubble hole with the toe of his shoe and turned to meet the voice. A young guy with a bucket and a shovel was jogging up to him. Paddy looked back at the bubble hole content with his discovery of the breathing earth.

"Ever been clamming before?" the jogger asked out of breath.

"-Clamming?" Paddy asked pushing wet sand over the hole.

"You know, digging for clams? Here. Watch." The jogger moved Paddy's leg away from the bubble hole and positioned his shovel at a forty-five degree angle. The moment the bubbles started, the jogger jammed his shovel into the wet-hard sand and flipped his dig into the moist air. Three feet away, an oblong shell splashed down in the shallow surf. The jogger hopped to retrieve his catch. "See? This is a razor clam," he handed the shellfish to Paddy. "And I'm Justin. Justin Winter." The jogger held out the shovel, realized his hand was full and laughed. Paddy tried to shake hands anyway.

"Patrick Cavanaugh. -Paddy," he decided, correcting himself. "A razor clam, huh? 'Never heard of such an animal."

"Well, you have now. Nine or ten more of these pups and you'll have the makings of one helluva chowder, -Oregon style. Here, you try." The jogger handed Paddy the shovel and placed the first clam in the metal bucket.

Paddy took a few steps with the shovel in hand and searched the silver glistening sand for another bubble hole.

"The blow holes are easier to spot right after the wave retreats. Wait a second," the jogger coached. Paddy watched the wave sprint up the beach to his shoes. He followed it back toward the ocean several yards. "That's far enough. Look! There!" the jogger pointed. Paddy aimed his weapon and jabbed mercilessly into the sand. Half of a broken clam balanced on the end of the shovel. "Oh, shit!" Paddy exclaimed. "Shit! I ruined it."

"You're not taking it home for a pet, Paddy." Justin laughed at Paddy's sensitivity. "That's not bad for a first shot," he reassured him. "They can be pretty tricky. Clams burrow in the sand using water they store inside the shell. They act as a giant muscle squishing the water out of the shell which either propels them through open water or pushes them deeper in the wet sand. It's really their only defense."

"Let me try again," Paddy demanded.

"Be my guest. Remember, dig as deep as you can. You're trying to head them off at the pass, not pass them off at the head!"

"Gotcha." Paddy stalked the bivalve beasts. His hands were bright red from exposure to the cold water and biting wind. His nose ran and he sniffled frequently. There was something about his morbid concentration and unwavering dedication to the hunt that amused the jogger. Paddy flipped his quarry into the retreating surf where it tumbled just out of his reach and was swallowed by the onrush of an infant wave. "Fuck! Why can't I get the hang of this?"

"Perhaps you're trying too hard," the jogger offered.

"And perhaps you make it look too easy. Let me try again." Paddy carried the shovel in search of another bubble spout. Upon finding one, he smoothly excavated his catch to the applause of the jogger. Paddy gloated just a bit too impressed with his newfound expertise. "Are you a

native of Seaside?" Paddy spoke while searching out another shelled victim.

"Not really. I haven't lived in Oregon that long. Certainly not long enough to qualify as a resident, much more, a native."

"I'm the same way. Just moved here, actually." Paddy poked the sand trying to provoke an air bubble.

"They are very shock sensitive. If they even feel the slightest pressure from the sand they burrow deeper. -Kinda like night crawlers, I imagine. Where ya from?" Justin asked.

"Vancouver, BB.C. "Ha! [] caught another one!"

"Are you here alone?"

"You sure do ask a lot of questions. Are you a cop?"

"No, not at all. I'm sorry for prying."

"Oh, I don't mind," Paddy clarified. "No other way to get to know a person, is there?" Justin shook his head. "My wife and three kids will be here sometime next week. We bought the old Walker House. Plan to turn it into a motel."

"Yeah. Cavanaugh's, isn't it? I saw a flyer about it opening. In fact, I'd made it a point to track down the owner to inquire about employment. A place that size is going to need an extra hand, I figure. I don't mean to be presumptuous, mind you. It's just my observation." Justin snagged a shallow clam with his bare hands and tossed it toward the bucket.

"And a good observation at that. What have you done?" "In the past? Mostly cooking but I've done some work in

retail and I have a limited accounting background." Justin pulled his hair back and looked thoughtfully toward the horizon, regretting having dropped out of college.

"So, Justin, is it?"

"Yeah, Justin Winter," the jogger repeated.

"There's got to be something to a name like that."

"Actually, there is. I'm an only kid and my mom told my dad that she would only carry one child for him and that she would carry it 'just in winter.' She wasn't about to miss a summer at the beach on account of being pregnant."

"I suppose that makes sense. Well, I could use a hand if you're looking for a job. I'm not sure what I can pay you and I can't guarantee when the first check will be signed, but I'll make sure you're taken care of, at least."

"Mr. Cavanaugh, you've got yourself an employee. When can I start?"

"Right now, I'd say. If you're a cook, let's see some of that clam chowder you've been bragging about."

"Sure thing!"

Justin grabbed the pail and they headed back into town.

CHAPTER SIX

Paddy made his first ATM withdrawl.

The world had changed its face while he lounged behind bars for five years trying to keep up with it. For most convicts, there was an adjustment period; -a time when they struggled to integrate with a society that now views them quite differently than before. But those entrusted with Paddy's care took great measures to bring Paddy along with the times. Paddy had studied the daily newspaper delivered with coffee and orange juice every morning of his one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-four day internment. He wrote letters to the editor of most every major newspaper in The City, though he was never published and never answered. He studied law and he studied agriculture. Paddy even organized a strong pre-election mailing drumming up support for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and again in 1984. But he was never brought into contact with other inmates for fear of the abuse such an arrangement might provoke. Paddy was revered as celebrity ass in that state

prison and there was plenty of talk about violating that homophobic facade of his. Paddy, remarkably confused as ever, saw all that behind the scenes attention as a comforting sign of his increasing popularity and influence. Partly due to his confinement and largely due to his mixed-up sense of ethics, Paddy was never exposed to the truth. The fact that ninety-nine percent of the prison population had never seen him, and the same ninety-nine percent still knew enough to despise him for his benefits and Marriott-class treatment, was never brought to Paddy's attention by the corps of guards who switched schedules and worked overtime for the chance to engage Paddy in political discussion or a heated round of Trivial Pursuit. Paddy was protected and Paddy was praised, at least in his own mind. And that was probably the true and ultimate confinement. Paddy never ventured out of Paddy's world. He never once gazed beyond the fence of his own skull and it never dawned on him for a minute that he might be different, -dangerously different.

Justin could not have been anymore opposite. Being an only child, he knew where to get attention and he knew how to sustain it. Justin knew how others thought and in most cases, precisely what motivated them at any given moment. And he had this sixth sense about him. -A theory, if you will, that human beings act and broadcast secret clues of their very inner core, every minute of

their existence. Justin not only recognized this human flaw but he carried the ability to interpret these clues and this provided him with an edge. Too many times, this edge proved to be a frightening brush with the little-known realities of the dark side, and sometimes, this edge sprawled far beyond Justin's ability to control it. So far, Justin was having a mental hay day with Paddy's warped mind.

The two of them bought-up nearly every pot and pan in Seaside. Strangely paired, they argued over a stoneware pattern at Rhoem's Furniture and placed an order for the new mattresses to be delivered directly to Cavanaugh's in three working days. Paddy was quickly frustrated by his two hundred dollar daily withdrawl limit at the ATM, and by the time they reached Tym's Market around four that afternoon, Justin had to spring for the chowder fixings with the very last of his billfold change. Paddy had told him he would take care of him. Justin had no option but to count on that.

Fortunately for these two carless wonders, Tym's Market offered free delivery. Tym even consented to a stop at Rhoem's to pick up their purchases before transporting the truck-full of odds and ends, including Paddy and Justin, to Cavanaugh's, just north of town. Paddy vowed he would set up an exclusive account at Tym's rather than patronize the commercialized convenience and lower prices of Seaside's Safeway. Tym didn't know what to make of that Cavanaugh character, but she knew to appreciate his business, especially during the lean winter season.

Justin began peeling potatoes the moment they walked into the inn. They had scared up quite an appetite clamming and shopping. Paddy continued his exploration of the house, discovering the secret provisions Lochran had stockpiled. Paddy found various cleaning supplies that he then assembled in the center of the large living room. From there, they would wage their cleaning assault on the inn.

"Don't you want to take a break from that cooking to see the rest of the house?" Paddy was anxious to show it off.

"I looked in the windows a few days back. I imagine I've already seen most everything there is to see." Justin wiped his tearing eyes, aggravated by the onions he was busy dicing.

"I see." Paddy paced the hardwood floor sizing up the task before him and trying to pretend as though Justin's overly curious nature didn't disturb him, but it did. Not that Paddy would ever acknowledge his criminal conscience, but it existed, malignant and tangled around his shallow soul. A syringe would sooner draw paranoia before it ever hit blood in this mixed up man.

Justin kept an eye on him for several minutes and observed his nervous pacing and rocking. Aside from the somewhat intelligent dialouge they had shared all afternoon, Justin would have sworn he was watching a psychotic. "Okay, this whole mess needs to cook a couple of hours or so before it's done. What do you want to do in the meantime?"

"Order out?" Paddy was famished. He'd lived off coffee and doughnuts and the last of the roast beef sandwiches for the past four days.

"Very funny, old man. You can wait a few more hours."

"Thirty-nine does not make me an old man. Besides, I'm still your boss. One, if not both counts, should garner some respect around here." Paddy grabbed the straw broom and began escorting dirt toward the front door.

"I suppose you're right." Justin felt truly reprimanded and all of a sudden uncomfortable in Paddy's presence. For all the gusto Paddy apparently had draped around his shoulders, Justin could now tell it was not going to be a consistent presentation. He knew his boundaries would most likely never be defined with Paddy and that he might as well expect them to change regularly. He stirred the chowder and hummed to himself. The same question that came to everyone's mind when they chose to tango with Paddy, now stumped Justin. What had he gotten himself into?

Paddy swept his dirt pile onto the front porch and into the driveway that looped in front of the inn. He was twice Justin's age and he had a son who was half of that. Paddy began to doubt he would live as long as his own father had and he had died honorably at fifty-five. No, Paddy knew this if he knew anything, regardless of the staged suicide, -he would be killed before biology really had a chance

to kick in, and this would keep him looking over his shoulder the rest of his days. He could see that Justin was schooled in smartass tradition and that he would probably never take a stand on anything like Paddy had at City Hall so many years ago. He would take the world as it came and accept all things in it, the perversions and deviations, the immoral and offensive, the sick and corrupted. But Paddy had a feeling he could help Justin inspite of these things that laid the foundation for this public relations preoccupied generation, as Paddy saw it. He knew his children would never be caught defenseless and clinging to the coattails of this unacceptable philosophy. They would be carbon copies of their father and they would learn from the trials society imposed unfairly upon him. Paddy's kids would grow with the advantage of decent instruction and proper guidance. Paddy would see to this amid the grassroots and upstanding church steeples of Seaside. Paddy knew Gillian shared his wishes and endorsed his picture of the world.

But Paddy wasn't about to rule out all hope for Justin nor did he view him as simple, available labor. Being aware of the biological clock that most likely wouldn't tick in his favor, as well as the youth and unpreparedness of his own children, Paddy needed to work on someone tangible. And as always, Paddy had to see his own progress and sense his accomplishment. Otherwise he toiled in unjustifiable vain. And to Paddy, Justin seemed to wander around aimlessly and obviously in search of some hero to idolize. Paddy knew he would fit Justin's bill. He rushed back inside the house to solidify the bond his instruction would eventually require.

As the pot bubbled under him, Justin thought out his next psychological confrontation with the man he was determined to break one way or the other. But he could wait. He needed the job and he needed to get along with his boss, for awhile anyway. Justin tasted the chowder from the stirring spoon. He would respect Paddy.

"We'll lose our health rating before we open if you pull that tasting stunt in front of an inspector." Paddy's molding commenced with another unintended reprimand.

"We should have gotten some beer or whiskey so you could relax and act like a normal human being tonight. You're too tense to enjoy my cooking, much more, life," Justin mistakenly rambled, losing track of his plan to play along with Paddy's idiosynchrasies.

"You're about as untame as they come, aren't you?" Paddy threw in his towel before he ever had the chance to use it constructively. He stormed through the kitchen and outside onto the back deck. Justin cursed the damned wooden spoon and slammed it on the counter. He followed Paddy outside.

"Look. We're just two different guys, that's

all. I know we can make this place work. We just have to accept that we are different. I'm easy-going and you're..." Justin didn't mean to say it, "...uptight."

"Jesus, kid!" Paddy exploded before he realized Justin was probably right. "You've got a lot to learn. You know that?"

"Yeah, I know that," Justin conceeded. "But you don't know it all, Paddy. Do you know that?"

"What are you saying, kid?" Paddy confused easily.

"I'm saying give this teacher-bit a rest for tonight. Put away the chalk and eraser and let's just hang out. You know, two guys with a pot of clam chowder between them?" Justin spoke softly. "You can be my boss tomorrow when we really start to whip this place into grand opening shape. But tonight, let's just try being two guys." He propped his long arms on the deck railing and watched the orange crown of the waves fade as the sun gave up on their conversation.

"Is it ready? -The chowder, that is?"

"Yeah, it's ready. Come on."

Paddy followed Justin into the kitchen. They unpacked enough stoneware to accomodate their basic needs. Paddy poured white wine into tall flutes and Justin heaped chowder into ready vessels. They stood

on opposite sides of the breakfast bar facing each other. Paddy proposed a toast.

"Here's to Cavanaugh's."

"-And to life, Mr. Cavanaugh," Justin added.

"-And to things to learn." Paddy smiled.

"-To hot chowder," Justin suggested, "-that stays hot!"

"Alright." Paddy got the message. "Cheers."

Justin tapped on the oak door precisely at seven o'clock. It was an impressive hour of the morning considering the amount of work that lay in store for them. Paddy had been awake for nearly two hours mapping out the day and listing two columns of assignments. Appropriately he had designed the day to keep him busy in town running errands and placing orders while Justin attended to the dirty work around the inn. Neither party argued when it came time to part company. It had already grown rather tiresome constantly readjusting those chips on their shoulders.

Justin tuned in KSWB and tackled the kitchen. The refrigerator needed a surface overhaul before he would feel comfortable about storing another leftover. The clam chowder sat alone on the center of the bottom shelf in the same pot Justin had cooked it in last night. He readjusted the lid and hoped Paddy would remember

the Rubbermaid. It was a rare, sunny morning for Seaside and Justin opened every window downstairs to air out the inn. He took a short break to dance to Tina Turner''s "What's love got to do with it," on the spacious wood floors. He felt rather silly and hoped Paddy would remember the window coverings when he passed by Rhoem's Furniture.

Paddy stopped by to see Tym, place another grocery order and explain that Justin would be at the inn to accept the delivery when it was made. He also asked Tym to wait a few hours in case there were other purchases from his trip to town that he wanted to smuggle on the truck. Tym just smiled thinking to herself that she was beginning to figure out this Cavanaugh character.

Yvonne at Rhoem's, mad matriarch in full charge of this family owned furniture dynasty, grew impatient with Paddy when it came to selecting furniture and accessories for the inn.

"Why didn't you bring that young man with you that was in here yesterday? Now there was a bloke who could make a decorating decision. I sensed it right away, Mr. Cavanaugh." Yvonne harped. "He went straight for the most popular stoneware pattern we carry..."

Everywhere Justin looked, there was dirt or a nick or a dent that needed his attention. It wasn't

a matter of just sweeping or just arranging. It was complete and consuming renovation. Justin couldn't help but feel a little prostituted as he slaved away, enkindled with rage while Nero shopped.

Avenue E might as well have been a dead-end ravine, as far as Paddy was concerned. He dreaded going into the bank but he knew he couldn't meet the minimum down at Rhoem's without an increase in his daily allowance. Lochran hadn't come right out and said he couldn't go inside the bank. -Or did he? Paddy greeted everyone on the street of Seaside, introducing himself and acting genuinely neighborly as a test of his anyonymity. The folks of this tiny beach town welcomed him to the business community and wished him prosperity. One gentlemen even walked him to the bank.

"I'd like to open a checking account with funds from my savings, please."

"I'll need to see some identification and I can help you at that desk." The bank teller pointed across the quaint lobby. Paddy shuffled out of line and reached for his billfold with nervous hands. He would have to explain to the teller that he had changed his mind or that he had left his driving license at home in a pair of pants, becuase he was reaching for his wallet, not Paddy's. In a flash he decided to plead the lost I.D. story. He opened his billfold to act as though he was confused.

And he was. An American Express card caught his shocked eye like the three dimensional contents of a pop-up greeting card. At first he thought he might have forgotten to remove the phony wallet stuffers of a new billfold, but he'd had this for years. Patrick Michael Cavanaugh, member since '82. Paddy could have screamed. Instead, he kissed the green plastic and praised the centurion posed on the numbered face.

. . . .

"Sir, do you have that identification?"

Paddy's thumb confidently pulled a British Columbian driver's license from the leather tuck. Lochran had prevailed again. There wasn't a single remnant of his past in this, the most personal, of his belongings. "Here you are."

"Mr. Cavanaugh, I remember doing the transfer work on your account myself over the phone last month. Let me welcome you to Seaside." The teller oozed syrup from every pore. Paddy lapped it up.

"Why, thank you very much. You were very helpful on the phone," he bluffed. "About that checking account?"

"Yes. Will this be personal or business, Mr. Cavanaugh?"

"Mr. Cavanaugh," Justin practiced his formalities as he scrubbed the floors, the fourth item on his side

of the assignment sheet. The more he thought about it the more it disturbed him to be so subservient to Mr. Cavanaugh. -Doing his scrubbing and polishing while he shopped for a goddamn gown for the ball, prompted Justin to wing the brush across the floor where it slammed into the wall and splashed soap everywhere. Justin knew he was nothing more than a minimum wage beachcomber to Paddy. Someday, Justin would bring about a meaningful change to that narrow perception. But for now, it was still Mr. Cavanaugh.

Paddy walked out of the bank with shoes of quicksand arrogance and blindly walked right into Seaside's Chief of Police.

"I beg your pardon. I'm very sorry. I wasn't even looking where I was headed." Paddy spewed nonsense upon recognizing the uniform.

"No harm. No harm. Hell, it happens to me all the time."

"And you're..." Paddy prompted.

"-Chet Mathias, Chief of Police. I'm afraid I don't know who you are."

"Cavanaugh. Paddy Cavanaugh." He reached for the chief's hand.

"You bought the Walker place, didn't you?"

"That's right. And Cavanaugh's is opening on schedule in two weeks," he boasted.

"Now that's an inn or something, isn't it?" The police chief queried.

"Yes. A bed and breakfast, actually."

"Fulltime restaurant?"

"I really hadn't thought about it. I guess I'll see what the market has in store for us."

"I'm not the business sort or anything, but Seaside could use a decent restaurant and the Walker place is a perfect location. Then again, I'm a cop and I get pretty tired of the same lunch specials. Maybe I'm promoting my own interests. You're probably wise to check out the market, like you said." Paddy didn't respond and the chief caught him staring at his gun. "It's a Smith and Wesson .38," the chief volunteered. "Shoot much?" he asked Paddy.

"No."

"I see. Well, I'll pop out your way from time to time to see how Seaside's treating you."

"I appreciate that."

Paddy wandered home in a daze.

Justin spotted Paddy on the beach below the inn from where he stood on the deck ringing out a wet rag. Desperate for company, even Paddy's company, Justin scrambled off the deck and down the rocky embankment
into the dune grass that bent with the northern wind. He found his T-shirt inadequate on the open beach and the ocean air pinpointed each drop of sweat that existed on both sides of his face. Paddy tossed a sand dollar back into the surf, oblivious to Justin's approach.

"Hey?" Justin asked. "Why do you look beat? You haven't done anything." Paddy looked at him and said nothing. "Look, if last night's still eating you, I'm real sorry, okay?" Paddy stopped to pick up a rock. Justin was leaking all the diplomacy he had left for the man. "The inn's not looking half bad now. Wait 'til you see it. You'll be amazed at how much I actually accomplished by myself. -You will." Paddy threw the rock at a seal feeding in the surf but missed it by several yards. "That brings up an interesting point, -you know, working by myself, that is." Justin decided to take advantage of the free forum and spoke his mind. "I don't know if this splitting up is really worth the time we're supposed to be saving. Seems to me we could get a lot more done working together and I won't let you get to me and I'll stay off the last of your functioning nerves. What do you say?" Justin wrinkled his forehead.

"Yeah. Let's try that." Paddy threw his arm over Justin's shoulder.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It would have been convenient to blame Lochran for the headache and the backache that broke Paddy's determination to work any further preparing Cavanaugh's for its formal presentation to Gillian and the kids. During the past week, he and Justin set new records in endurance and perseverance, working around the clock to the tune of Paddy's demanding and ruthless schedule posted each morning with a magnet on the kitchen refrigerator. As he became more and more anxious for the arrival of his wife and children, Paddy became more and more outrageously demanding and insisted that Cavanaugh's be ready for grand opening a week earlier than scheduled. All outward appearances suggested they had accomplished their objective, but inside, Paddy knew they were still a week away from their first guest. It wasn't Lochran's fault and it wasn't because of the perceived lack of cooperation he received from Rhoem's and it wasn't because Justin's heart just wasn't in it, eventhough Paddy used each of these to support an excuse as the

week whizzed past. Paddy had attempted the impossible and could not accept the disappointment of having run short on time and materials. To Paddy, this failure had to be a keen result of having depended on too many different people, which only reinforced those screwed-up directives of perserverance and autonomy.

In his bewilderment, Paddy couldn't focus on the inn about him, but it was indeed ready for opening. Justin had seen to every last detail and had Paddy not given him the day off, you would have smelled bacon cooking in the kitchen and the haphazard chatter of guests would have filled the tableclothed dining room. Every last square inch of solid wood had been oiled and polished and now reflected the ocean sun that streamed through the white lace draperies that dressed the giant windows overlooking the choppy Pacific. Pine green cushioned chairs planted firmly about the immense lobby and registration area begged for the butts that would break them in. The stately rugs had been combed and positioned and even fresh flowers stretched their stems to meet the non-existent noses of Cavanaugh's clientele. Upstairs, the beds were complete with hospital corners and feather down-pillows. The kitchen cupboards buldged with groceries and extra linen swallowed space in every available closet. Justin had placed a great deal of emphasis on designing the printed materials which included the open

house invitations, the breakfast menu and the registration forms. Justin had been so headstrong in pleasing Paddy and gaining his respect, that it would have taken his boss a week to uncover all those unseen tasks that had never dawned on Paddy and certainly would have never debuted on any of the assignment lists. Sooner or later, Paddy would eventually recognize the priceless contribution of his beachcombing hire. Justin happened to have the patience and good sense to realize that full awareness was a much longer process with Paddy Cavanaugh. Considering his investment, he could wait.

For all of its provisions and all of its special details paid to decor, the one thing the inn was missing was a sense of home. Both Justin and Paddy carried an awareness of the one thing they couldn't put the last of their ten thousand dollars on; -a woman's touch. The inn managed an atmostphere capable of sustaining business but it lacked the warmth and coziness of home. Paddy took a shot at rearranging the furniture, but that wasn't the answer. Justin brought in more fresh flowers and plants, but that didn't satisfy the question either. What in the hell was missing? -A woman!

And Paddy's woman with his three children had to be somewhere on Highway 101 closing in on Seaside, if Lochran was operating according to schedule. It was Monday.

The kids had fought near the length of California and Lochran counted the miles left in this escapade. It had already been close to eight thousand miles more than he ever felt he had bargained for. No human on the planet could possible owe this much to another man.

Days before, he had coerced Gillian into believing he was going to take them to his parents' guest house in Seattle where they could forget the past and assemble the jumbled pieces of their lives. Gillian had been extraordinarily receptive to the idea, obviously too tired to coin another option for herself. It had been four days since her husband's funeral which had nearly errupted into a block party of homosexuals at the cemetery. Lochran had been extremely comforting and protective during those rough days after the suicide and Gillian pledged her last remaining thimble of trust in the man who had once ridden the beat with her dead husband. Without a word or a question, she had packed up her children and any belonging not subconsiously monogrammed with the memory of her husband, and bade farewell to The City that had held nothing but tragic misfortune for her. r,

The children had been so brave at the funeral that it had reminded Gillian of the Kennedy clan in 1963. Newsclips of JFK's children and grieving widow ran through her head. She wanted to share Jackie's heroic grief, but John F. Kennedy was a hero who's children were never raised

to believe otherwise. Gillian may have buried a hero in the eyes of her young children, but she vowed that was where any similarity stopped. Michael, the oldest of her children, would be fed the detestable truth about their father the moment he was old enough to digest it. Michael already had questions she couldn't answer about the time his father had spend in the state penitentiary. He understood the result of suicide as well as any fifth grader might, but he may have still been a little too young to understand why. Gillian's wing extended almost solely to protect Michael. Jonathan had more problems than his father ever ventured to admit and Gillian would mother those separately. It was quite possible that a complete explanation of his father's doings might never be necessary unless Jonathan improved physically and mentally. But her love didn't waiver. She had never accepted Jonathan as the punishment Paddy thought they deserved for his transgressions against God. Paddy felt Jonathan would teach them strength and reward them with understanding. Gillian knew another lesson in strength would be wasted on her. Redundancy in this instruction had paid a visit to Gillian's mental classroom throughout her marriage to Paddy and strength was hardly a platform she cared to build upon any longer. Baby Kim had cried in her mother's arms the entire service. Was there any hope in the world this innocent and unsuspecting child could ever leap from her shackles to become a debutante

to believe otherwise. Gillian may have buried a hero in the eyes of her young children but she vowed that that was where any similarity stopped. Michael, Jonathan and Kim would be fed the detestable truth about their father, the moment they were old enough to digest it. Michael already had questions she couldn't answer about the time his father spent in the state penn. He understood the components of suicide as any fifth grader would, but he may have still been a little too young to understand why. Gillian's wing extended almost solely to protect Michael. Jonathan had more problems than his father ever ventured to admit and Gillian would mother those separately. It was quite possible that a complete explanation of his father might never be necessary unless Jonathan improved physically and mentally. But her love didn't waiver. She had never accepted Jonathan as the punishment Paddy thought they deserved for his transgressions against God. Paddy felt Jonathan would teach them strength. Gillian knew another lesson in strength would be wasted on her. Redundancy in this instruction had paid a visit to Gillian's classroom throughout her marriage to Paddy and strength was hardly a platform she cared to build upon. Baby Kim had cried in her mother's arms the entire service. Was there any hope in the world this innocent child could ever become a cheerleader

or a homecoming queen? Gillian had dried her powder blue eyes and wondered.

Lochran knew the time had come to tell Gillian the truth about what faced her in the miles to come. The children had finally given into their exhaustion and now slept peacefully under blankets in the cargo hold of the van. He knew this to be the cruelest part of his plan, to ask Gillian to recant her grief and to some extent, her relief, to conform to his and the chief's perception of what was best for her. He fought silence to come up with the right series of words.

"I know we haven't spoken much this entire trip," Lochran began, "but I need to tell you some things about your husband that you are not aware of yet."

"Please, Harry. Not now. I couldn't stand to hear another revelation about my late husband. Frankly, at this point I don't see what difference anything would make to me. I have used up every cell in my brain to comprehend what he has done to The City, to me and my children. Believe me, please. I don't need anymore information, Harry."

Lochran's fingers turned white from squeezing the steering wheel. He looked over at her page-boy profile as it stared coldly at the road in front of them. The thought actually stumbled into Lochran's mind that

he should drive straight through Seaside, drop Gillian off in Seattle, and then return to kill Paddy himself, just to make good on the story he had concocted and forced this poor woman to swallow. He honestly believed he had thought out and rehearsed every blasted detail of this cover-up. He was wrong. He had no clue what to do next. His silence obviously led Gillian to believe he had dropped his insistence for the time being. But there was less than two hundred miles remaining in the trip. He had to act. He had to act pretty damn well. Driftwood Beach was coming up on the left hand side of the highway. Lochran decided to park there and he and Gillian would take a quick walk on the beach while the kids slept in back. As he reached for the ignition, he wondered how he might best get away with Paddy's murder and he shook. The news he had to tell her was going to kill her. In Lochran's mind, it quickly became a choice of homicides, -physical or mental.

"Let's stretch our legs."

"Harry, I really am not up for any of this. Maybe after a few days in Seattle, I'll have some of my resistance back and I can handle whatever it is you feel you have to tell me. Right now, I feel like Saran wrap stretched from wall to wall of the Grand Canyon holding back the Colorado River."

"God, dear. I know this has to be difficult, but

I also know you have the stuff it takes to confront this thing. Besides, it's like acid inside me. For my sake, let's get it out in the open."

"For your sake, Harry?" She half-laughed. "Whatever you say." She unfastened the seat belt and opened the door. The serrated wind carved a notch right through her. "Will the children be alright?"

"Lock your door. I have the keys and don't worry. They'll be fine." Lochran came around to her side of the van and put his cowardly arm around her neck. "Here, take my coat. This sweater's enough for me." He wrapped his goose down jacket around her and held it on her shivering frame. They walked through a narrow passage between two sand dunes. With the back of her hand she shielded her eyes from the airborne beach. On the other side, the grizzly blue Pacific churned tirelessly heaving kelp and vacated shells high onto the shore. She cleaned her eyes of loose sand and looked amazed that there, foaming before her, was something actually larger and more powerful than her consuming grief. She took a wonderful, encompassing breath for the first time since burying her husband, and smiled. There would be peace for her. She closed her eyes and exhaled.

"Well, Harry. What is it? What is this information that I can't seem to live without?"

Lochran looked at her through slits of skin and brow. "You look comfortable," he told her. "-Almost reprieved."

"You know, Harry, I don't think I realized it until just now, but I'm going to be okay."

"Let me tell you what..."

"No, Harry. I mean it. Maybe I just needed to get out of the van and out here in the open to appreciate just how far I've already come with this thing. My God, Harry. I'm 43 years old. I think I missed menopause and even if it's still ahead of me, what can it do to me now? I've already been through everything life can throw at me and life has been one helluva shot." She laughed out loud until she started to cry. Lochran moved to hold her but she broke free of his grip. "I don't want your pity, Harry. I'm so far beyond the point where I could use it anymore. Give me time to heal or give me a drug to cope, but save the pity this time around." She walked ahead of him.

"What if I gave you back your husband?" he blurted out.

"What did you say?" she spun around pulling the hair from her eyes.

"What if I gave your husband back to you?" he repeated, somewhat pleased with his clever presentation.

"What kind of a sick question is that, Harry?

Why don't you ask me if you can do medical experiments on my children? But don't bring up my dead husband just now. I'm still a little close to that issue."

Lochran grabbed her shoulders to steady her.

"He's alive. Your husband is alive."

She stared into his blue eyes that seemed to turn as gray and as sensless as the sky.

"The suicide was an act. I'm sorry."

The color drained from her cheeks and she lost the breath she had just trapped in her lungs. She opened her mouth to speak but her chapped lips, chalk white in the salty air, could not manage the simple movement of saying "no." She tried again but the sound of her own voice choked her. Finally, without releasing Lochran's eyes, she wailed as if making the very first sound of mankind after ages of cold silence.

"No-o!"

The tiny blood vessels of her temples, blue with age and splintered by tribulation, popped out as she screamed again. With bright red fists she beat Lochran in the chest. In her rage she hooked his chin. His head snapped back out of reflex and his hands slipped off her shoulders. She seized the opportunity to run from him and his trumped-up scenario, but tumbled in the wet sand a few feet away. Lochran scrambled toward her but she clawed her way in the surf with the frantic speed of a newly hatched sea turtle. To her, Lochran must have seemed like a reptile-hungry seagull with an empty stomach swollen by saltwater. She splashed foolishly in the tide and her crawl evolved into an upright sprint.

She hadn't wanted the mayor killed in 1978 and she didn't have anything out for the gay supervisor. She didn't want to bury her husband either, but now that he had been dead for four days, she was even more reluctant to spring the lid on his casket. For nine horrendous years, she had been the prescribed Catholic wife, standing by and supporting her demented husband through the fleeting good times and certainly during the more pronounced and lasting bad. But as she bounded down the beach, wet and out of breath, she realized her husband's suicide had released her from those obligations and given her an inner peace. To have that relief and that release snatched back from her, must have seemed the grandest travesty of all she had encountered. She stopped dead in the sand. She was, once again, her husband's most repeated victim. With her head in her hands, she sobbed without control as she thought about her pitiful, indian-given life.

Lochran leaned on a chunk of weathered driftwood twenty feet away and let her hysteria play itself out. He had always found her attractive and watching her now, though ashamed at having entertained such thoughts at the peak of her weakness, brought it all back to It was a rainy night in The City two years ago, him. the evening before Paddy went before the parole board. The press had downplayed his chance for an early release and the new district attorney had written recommendations trying to block the parole process on the grounds Paddy had not even received five minutes of psychiatric evaluation in the five years at the state penitentiary. It didn't look promising for Paddy and his wife was a mess. She called Lochran around eight o'clock that She had found a sitter for the kids. Lochran night. raced across town, legitimately thinking she might do something radical and foolish. When she answered the door, the smell of bourbon arrested his senses. She had been drinking for a couple of hours and she had never been so bold in the ten years he'd known her. She poured him a drink from the bottle left over from her husband's election victory party seven years earlier. They sat and drank in the cushioned bay window as the clouds emptied over The City. One cocktail led to another and one bottle led to a drunken kiss that sent an empty glass crashing to the floor. She couldn't face another two years without a man, and Lochran was a man who couldn't suppress the temptations of the flesh. She pulled him on top of her right there in

the bay window. Lochran had never been more amused by such tiny breasts. Maybe it was the alcohol. Maybe it was the rain streaming down the giant window. She moaned when he placed his mouth on her nipple cupped gently in his large hand. He circled it with a pointed tongue and her pelvis began to raise under him until it made contact and rubbed against his own groin. He had started to sweat. She had wanted it, he later reasoned. He gave it to her. He jerked her delicate panties off her scrawny legs and pulled the button down dress over her head. He remembered grinding his teeth like an animal as he tugged at his flannel shirt. He ground his teeth now, remembering. She had both hands on the fly of his trousers but she was clumsy and unsuccessful. He knocked her hands out of the way and tugged at his pants, shoving them and his underwear down his muscular thighs. He had begun to growl and she moaned in anticipation of having a man inside her for the first time in over five years. Lochran precipitated his entry and she gasped and then screamed. He had been too large for most of the women he had tried to screw in college. His wife mated only once in splitting agony, and eventhough Gillian had given birth twice, she too, was going to protest his insistence to continue. It was too late for second thought and Lochran craved being surrounded and relieved by her vaginal walls. He thrust deeper

and his nerve endings went berserk. Again she screamed, scratching and clawing his stomach. He grabbed her flailing arms and pinned them behind her head as he drove his wide shaft deeper still. "For Chrisake, relax!" he yelled at her. It had been nearly as painful for him. When she didn't cooperate, he shoved himself the rest of the way in and her head bumped against the glass of the bay window. She relaxed some. With one foot on the wood floor and the other leg raised over her, he worked every muscle of his groin for fifteen minutes before shooting his hot cargo straight up inside her. She was whimpering but she had never had it like that before. Neither had Lochran.

Seven weeks later, without having spoken to her after that night, Paddy announced, during one of Lochran's visits to the prison, that his wife was pregnant. She was going to have his third child. Lochran went flush and nearly dropped the phone receiver that linked him and Paddy through the protective glass of the prison visiting room. Then Paddy explained how he had been extended conjugal priviledges for his good behavior and that his wife had relieved him several weeks ago in a special room at the prison. Lochran had wanted to press for an exact date to pinpoint his degree of participation in the making of this third child, but Paddy was ecstatic about the prospects of having fathered behind bars. Lochran dropped the subject until eight months later when Paddy asked Lochran and his wife to be the godparents of their newborn. Lochran went to the hospital maternity ward with sweaty palms. Paddy had been paroled during the third month of her pregnancy.

Gillian had never given any indication that she believed Lochran could have been remotely responsible for the child. Then again, Gillian never mentioned the incident nor did she ever look at Lochran in the eyes again until just minutes before now when he had told her her husband was still alive. He pressed his memorial hard-on against a chunk of upright driftwood and waited.

The poor woman was like a pail tipped on end and the last of her emotions poured out onto the sand. She dried her eyes with the bulky goose-down sleeve of Lochran's coat and looked over at him.

"You bastard!" she screamed. "Haven't you done enough to me?"

"I understand your anger. But I want you to understand our actions. It was the only way we could guarantee his survival. Right now, it may seem like the cruelest guarantee humanly conceivable, but in time you'll see our desperation and you'll appreciate what we've done."

"How can you stand there and tell me I should be thankful? You, of all people, should know better than to expect anything from me." "We're talking about two separate issues here, aren't we?" Lochran moved out from behind the stump. "Look lady. As sensitive as I am trying to be about the news I've just had to tell you, I am not going to stand by and take the rap for that incident two years ago. You brought that on yourself and you've been blaming me ever since. You treat the whole thing as if I got a kick out of getting off with my partner's wife, but I have to live with that one too, or had that ever occured to your poor victimized mind?"

"It amazes me how easily you can justify an assault, Harry. I was practically raped!" She turned her head.

"Raped? You're the amazing one, lady. You wanted me there!" he screamed. "Practically raped? You practically begged me to crawl inside you. You remember how it was, don't you?" He grabbed her arm and she struggled. "Pulling me on top of you like you did. Grabbing for my cock like a half crazed animal in heat. You remember my cock don't you?" he yelled in her face gripping his crotch for emphasis. He pushed her away and she fell in the sand. "Don't tell me you were raped, bitch! You were satisfied; -probably for the first time in your miserable life, so pin your frustrations on somebody else. You somehow managed to sleep with your husband barely two weeks later in prison so I'd say you recovered nicely."

"I do remember, Harry. I think about it day and night and I live with the regret, believe me, I do. It was nearly a month after that night when I agreed, or rather insisted to sleep with my husband at the prison. I wasn't recovered, Harry. I was pregnant."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lochran hadn't said a word for over one hundred miles. He felt as though his intestines had knotted about his stomach and his head throbbed with the awareness of his compounding predicament. Little Kim, blond hair in matching ponytails, played with her half-brother in the rearview mirror. Little Kim, the by-product of that forever-damned bay window, redefined everything that Lochran believed in and defended.

The relief was gone from Gillian's face, surely there in the first place only because she thought she would no longer need to explain nor account for her infidelity. She had been a receptacle not only for Lochran's phallus, but much more so for the incredible pressures and persistent doubts of the world that she took deep inside her that night. It had been those same debilitating factors that she had rebuked with her unwaivering Catholic faith for all those years, that now muzzled her belief and unleashed her cynicism. There had been no rewards for living the good life, as far as Gillian could tell.

An hour later, they tumbled into Seaside. Gillian read the giant wooden welcome sign as Lochran reduced his speed to the posted limit.

"Welcome to Seaside, Oregon. Population 4,402. Thirteen feet above sea level. The end of the Lewis and Clark Trail."

City workers balanced on ladders and scaffolding where they strung lighted garland along the streets and seven bridges that crossed the Necanicum River. Cedar wreaths hung from most every streetlight and the kids spotted a nativity scene in front of the First Baptist Church of Seaside.

"That's Jesus and Mary," Michael tried to explain to his younger brother.

"Now you kids sit back in case Uncle Harry has to stop suddenly," Gillian warned them, looking at Lochran who raised an eyebrow at her selection of proper titles. She quickly looked the other way and began recording the names of restaurants and motels in her mind in an attempt to crowd out all other things she chose not to think about. 'Oregon Coast Realty, The Mariner Inn, Holladay Motel...' Lochran stopped at the light, then turned left down Broadway. He crossed the Necanicum River that flowed North through Seaside creating a penninsula before rushing the frothy waves to join the Pacific on the other side of Cavanaugh's. Gillian noticed the Tuesday night bingo announcement on the front lawn of The American Legion up the street. There was Dooger's Seafood and Grill next to the Pig-n-Pancake and a sandwich board counting down the fifty remaining shopping days before Christmas in front of Anita's Corner. They passed The Times Theatre and a Chinese Restaurant before turning right in front of the Shilo Inn. Lochran pointed toward the turnaround.

"Ever heard of two chaps named Lewis and Clark, Michael?" he asked, seeking the appoval of Gillian with his eyes and soft tone of voice. Michael popped back up between the two front seats.

"Yeah. They discovered the Pacific Ocean with Sac--, -Saca-something, this Indian lady who showed them how to get there," Michael recited.

"Sacajawea," Gillian corrected him.

"You're both right and over there where the American Flag is in the center of the street is where they probably saw the Pacific Ocean for the very first time."

"Really?" Michael feigned interest before returning to the back of the van where his siblings had surrendered to another nap. Another block and Michael joined them.

Past the Seashore Resort Motel, The Seaside Acquarium that was closed Mondays and Tuesdays, The Ebb Tide Motel, Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church, The Fourwinds and the Tradewinds Motels, Lochran buzzed along a series of side streets that paralleled The Pacific, closing in on Cavanaugh's. Past the new sewage treatment plant, the pavement ended and the van disappeared into a forest of cedar and pine trees. The road climbed slightly before turning toward the ocean and Cavanaugh's rose before them like the Northwest sun over the Cascade Mountains. Lochran cut the engine.

"Is he here?" Gillian managed to force a whisper, breaking her self-imposed silence.

"He should be anyway. Look, he's going to call you Gillian. Call him Paddy. -Paddy Cavanaugh. I'll stay here with the kids and let him fill you in. I'm sorry this is so painful. Now, go on."

She wanted to reach for Lochran's extended hand. She wanted to hold him and she wanted to forgive him. But, in her heart, she couldn't honestly figure out what he had been guilty of in the first place. She unlocked her door and edged out of the seat. She looked back, scared and confused, as she stood on the front steps of the inn. She reluctantly reached for the doorhandle and vanished on the other side of the heavy door. Lochran closed his eyes still holding the steering wheel.

"Paddy?" Gillian felt as though she had walked unannounced and ininvited into somebody else's home. She had, she realized, and she trembled.

"Gillian?" Paddy appeared at the top of the grand stairs to her right, wiping his freshly shaved face with a towel. It was as though she'd been tackled by a ghost. He looked so strikingly identical to those carefree days before the assassinations and before the campaigns. His hair was even straight again, rid of that disguising permanent, and parted on the side. He smiled and those classic dimples she had always known, always expected, dragged her back nearly ten years. He draped the towel over the wood railing and bounced down the stairs. She couldn't move from the spot she had claimed only minutes before when she first walked into the strange but beautiful front parlour. She was horrified by so much life packed so tightly into, what should have been, a decaying memory. She had buried him, hadn't she? His body should have been surrounded by the damp soil of the military cemetery back in The City, blessed by the Holy Requiem Mass, incensed, watered and escorted by fervent prayer to Purgatory and beyond. But instead, it stood half-naked and gloriously alive in front of her. She issued tears without knowing it. Paddy raised his hand to her cheek.

"Oh, baby. I'm so sorry you've been through all this, but I'm here now; -forever. And no more games. I promise." He put his bare arms around her and hugged her cautiously. Her arms hung limply at her sides. If it wouldn't have been for her collapsed heart that lay deflated and plugging the drain of her soul, all of her life would have rushed out and onto the rug beneath her. She sobbed, helpless and tired, against his hairless chest.

"I'll tell you what. Let me throw on a sweat shirt and we'll go for a walk down to the beach. I'll explain what I can." He tilted her chin, bringing her eyes to his. She nodded.

Lochran stared at his fingernails and then at Kim who stirred suddenly in a pile of half-brothers and opened her eyes. He smiled, winking at her.

"Do you want to sit up here with me?" he encouraged that little bundle of controversy strapped inside a pair of pink Osh Kosh overalls. She flopped her head up and down, too tired to control her neck. He held out his arms. She rose, walked to the front seat with her head down exposing the silky pink ribbons on each side of her head that attempted to keep all that blond hair under dippity-doo-ed management, and crawled onto his lap. "Hi Kimberly." He really looked at her for the first time. "You have sleepy eyes, don't you?" Little Kim nodded, scratching her nose on Lochran's flannel chest. He pulled the hair back from her face with a giant hand that couldn't give back what it had been

handed. He was a father again, and he had a daughter. Pulling out of the driveway and heading home for The City, would never change this biological fluke, he thought to himself as a tear lept from his eye and fell on his daughter's forehead. She was fast asleep. Lochran looked at her and wondered how he would ever know when she became a cheerleader or that she had been crowned homecoming queen. The tears were going to last a while, like the rain that slapped against the bay window that reckless night two years ago.

Paddy led Gillian through the french doors onto the deck and down the stairs to a trail that cut between the cedars.

"All of this is ours honey. It's part of the arrangement to give us new lives." He stopped, taking her hands in his. "God, I've missed you."

"You have? I really hadn't noticed, to tell you the truth. You were released from prison a year and a half ago and you took off. Los Angeles and Ireland and back to L.A. You did a pretty good job of extending your sentence to stay away from us, from your own children. I'm telling you, I just don't know about this. At least, when you were dead, I had something I could accept, even deal with, but now, now nothing makes sense to me." She took her hands back and crossed them under her arms.

"We've talked about this, you know. I had some adjusting to do and besides, my parole officer was in Los Angeles. I had been encouraged to spend my time outside The City, for my own protection."

"Your family didn't encourage that. Your family had some pretty drastic adjusting ahead of them too. They needed you. I needed you." She puckered up to cry but caught herself. "No, I certainly wouldn't have encouraged that after five years without a choice. Maybe that's what made your suicide almost manageable for me. At least the kids didn't really know who you were. Paddy? Is that what you're calling yourself? Did this arrangement of yours include explaining to my children how you've returned from the dead to be the father you never could be when you were alive?"

"That's really not fair when you consider that Michael was barely a year old when I went to prison."

"Michael?" She questioned the new identity.

"I may not have spent a lot of quality time with my children but I'm still their father just like I'm still your husband."

"Till death did we part?"

"Look, Gillian. I beg you to understand that I needed you, too. That's why I would do anything to be with you. -Even come back from the grave. This

past year, I've lived with death threats on my life and threats against my family and my home. The City wasn't a safe place for us anymore. The children wouldn't have been safe going to school and I couldn't bear that. Not after what I did to change things for the better. I just couldn't bear the thought of any of you getting hurt on account of what I did seven years ago at City Hall."

"Do you even hear what you're saying? Do you think for one minute that we haven't hurt, that we haven't been scarred by what happened at City Hall?"

"Of course not. But none of us is destroyed by it either. We have the pieces in our hands and with this business here in Oregon, we'll put everything back together. Everything, Gillian."

"Stop calling me that hideous name and stop assuming that I am buying any of your arrangement. I am a much stronger woman than you remember. I still don't know why you did what you did at City Hall and I don't know if you ever once asked yourself what it would do to me or to your family. I can't even tell if you've ever been sorry for it. But I know this. I'm in no shape to work your puzzle."

"Don't ask me to apologize for what I did seven years ago, please."

"Because you can't feel sorry or because you won't

feel sorry?"

"Dammit! Because I am not sorry. It upsets me to see you like this and I'm distressed by the effect this has obviously had on you and the kids, but I am not sorry for turning things around for the City. I'm not sorry for cleaning up The City for my children and for everyone else's children and I'm not sorry for the time I spent in prison, because I'm stronger too. But most of all, I will never be ashamed for standing by my morals and for protecting them at all costs to ensure the well-being of my family and the love we have always had for each other. In fact, I'm proud of what I have done in my lifetime to improve my lifetime. I imagine a lot of people would be proud of that, too."

"You still scare me." She admitted shaking her head. "The first time in my life when I can remember not being afraid was last week when that box was lowered six feet below the surface of the earth. But now, I'm losing it all over again."

"Nothing's lost and there's no need to be afraid here in the middle of the wilderness. Nobody knows us and nobody knows anything about our connection to The City. We have a business that can work and we have a family to raise. What could you possibly be missing?"

She shrugged her shoulders still shaking her head. "I think I might be missing ten years of my life. I

uh, I need to be alone for a few minutes to sort things out. Why don't you go see your children and I'll join you back at the house in a bit. Okay?"

"Yeah. Sure. Are you warm enough?"

"I'll be fine."

He raised her head with a hand to her chin. "I need you."

"You must." Gillian walked through the dunes to the mouth of the Necanicum River. The Pacific Ocean seemed to swallow just about as much as she had.

CHAPTER NINE

Margaret Sheridan, shy of middle age, cognizant of her purpose on this planet and a breath away from satisfaction, professional and physical, stood half-frocked in a Liz Claiborne housecoat and a blue Kansas City baseball cap, in the center of her early American kitchen, up to her Estee Lauder night mask in bacon grease and pancake batter.

It was a quarter before seven on a rainy, Seaside Tuesday morning, and having yet to recuperate from a startling and predictable Monday in the saddle, she was in no spirit to don her war paint and trot off to another certain battle at the Seaside Heights Elementary School. It was two weeks before Thanksgiving and even the slightest hint of pilgrims and turkey had touched off an enthusiastic holiday vacation wild fire that she couldn't seem to contain even with some of her more progressive Stanford behavioral tactics. So she straddled the halls of this institution aiming her liberal PHD when she would have been further ahead

packing a corporal B & A, -bow and arrow! She flipped the first wave of pancakes and realized she could almost justify visible weapons by declaring "Thanksgiving Costume Week," but that would likewise arm all the little buggers with muskets and daggers, and that could be altogether unhealthy.

As it was, she'd strategize survival for the remaining 27 days of the Fall semester by removing all sugar from the hot lunch program and by implementing long distance endurance running in all P.E. classes. She'd been a principal for three years after teaching for six, and Margaret Sheridan was wising up. Seaside Heights Elementary would become a prep school for West Point before she'd endure another Monday before vacation.

"I don't know about my new boss, Margaret." Justin blurted out, sitting at the breakfast bar.

"You've only worked for Cavanaugh two and a half weeks. What's to know at this point? Maple okay?"

"That's fine. I'm just saying I haven't figured him out yet and that's real strange for me. Usually I'm inside someone's soul within hours; -a day at the most." He teetered on two legs of the barstool.

Margaret presented his breakfast on a baby blue placemat. "We've been housemates almost a month now and I'm still learning about you. Justin, give yourself

and the second second

some time to make proper judgements and give that boss of yours a chance to make a decent impression. I think you expect too much of yourself. Here, drink the rest of this milk." She emptied the carton into a tall glass and joined him at the counter.

"Is this some kind of new syrup? It's not sweet." Justin wrinkled his nose.

"Sugar is bad. -Bad, bad, bad!" she drilled.

"Sugarless syrup?" Justin's voice flew into falsetto. "That's like, -like voltless electricity. It's absurd!"

"Studies have shown a sharp reduction in sugar makes things more manageable," Margaret recited, hoping she'd meet with far less resistance in the school cafeteria.

"And what do studies show about that tofu lasagna you tried to pass off last night? I'll take over the cooking for a while and get us back to the basic food groups. I don't know anything about lab rats but humans need bloody red animal meat and refined sugar, large amounts of chemically refined sugar. Only organized religion keeps us from being totally anthropophagic."

"Alright. Equal time then, Justin. That's our arrangement in this house that we share. You've got the next week in the kitchen entirely to yourself, starting with breakfast tomorrow morning." "Uh, I can't tomorrow morning. I'm back to work at Cavanaugh's tomorrow. Supposedly his wife and three kids arrived yesterday. That should help with my mental picture. shouldn't it? I mean, women can't hide anything. That's my experience. They just wear their emotions on the sleeve of any old blouse." Justin spoke with a strip of Sizzlean dangling from his smiling lip.

"Hell, we shouldn't even bother wearing clothes at all if men can see right through us."

"You've got a point there, Peg. So anyway, breakfast is off, but I'll do dinner tonight. -Something beefy. I'm going to head up the beach and stop in at Tym's Market this morning. 'Home by five?" he wiped his mouth on a napkin.

"I've got a faculty meeting at four, so I probably won't be home until after six. But then again, I can't very well expect the male faculty members to pay any attention to a female for more than twenty minutes, can I?"

"Right again. Dinner at five, it is," Justin proclaimed clearing his plate.

"Make it six. Oh, and Justin, -I take back what I implied earlier when I said I'm still learning about you."

"What do you mean?" Justin rinsed his plate

in the sink across from her.

"Remember the night we met in Lincoln City after that Russian History Lecture? I had you pegged for a misogynist in the short time it took us to drive back to Seaside, so I guess you don't have an exclusive on in-depth perception." She carried her plate to the sink.

"A what?" Justin asked defensively.

"A misogynist."

"And what does that mean?"

"You can sling around a word like anthropophagic and you don't know the meaning of misogynist? Look it up, Einstein."

"Anthropophagic is another word for cannibalism, if that's what this is all about."

Margaret laughed. "That's not what this is about at all. Look it up. That's your assignment for today." She took off the baseball cap and shook her reddishblond hair. "I'm off to shower, -not that I expect it to improve my standing in this Man's World, mind you. Have a good day, Justin. I'll see you at six."

Justin grabbed his red Windbreaker from the coat rack and spotted the open dictionary on the coffee table. He tried to sound out the word to aid in the location of it on the page. Hatred of women? No, he must have the wrong spelling. He'd check again later.

He hopped off the porch of the yellow house with green shutters that stretched its five bedrooms north and south on a skinny tract of land bordered by Beach Drive on the east and by the Lewis and Clark Salt Cairn National Marker on the west. It was a spooky back yard neighbor, proclaimed by the Oregon State Park Service as the official site where members of the famous expedition boiled sea water to obtain salt in the winter of 1806. Now, the reconstruction of that famous landmark, lurked just beyond Margaret's white, decorator cynder block wall inside a rot-ironed reminder of the hardships faced by that early exploring team. Margaret will recall, in private, that enlightened evening several years ago, soon after her divorce from the then-mayor of Seaside, when she sat straight up in bed and swore she heard the sound of boiling water coming from the back yard. When she reluctantly tugged at the venitian blind, an orange glow poured into the room from qhost flames that danced hellishly from both ends of the Cairn. The hauntingly likelike aberations of those first explorers, stoked the fire and periodically stirred the water in the five copper kettles atop the Cairn. Margaret may have wet herself on the spot, though this does not enter into her version of the story. She frantically dialed the Seaside Police Department and units responded, prepared to arrest the ghosts of expeditions past. There had been no rationalizing with the mayor's ex-wife over the telephone. Shaking, Margaret
watched from the window as the red cherry lights from the squad cars merged with the orange glow of her bedroom. At first, it still seemed rather odd that Seaside's finest appeared to be having dialogue with these phantoms and suddenly, one of the police officers pointed to Margaret in her bedroom window and everyone stopped stoking and stopped stirring and broke into uncontrolled laughter. Moments later, Captain Meriwether Lewis and Captain William Clark, along with Captain Chet Mathias, rang Margaret Sheridan's doorbell. She gawked through the peel hole, still shaking, and finally opened the door. The three introduced themselves and Margaret shook their hands, knowing this was going to make for one helluva show-and-tell. Captain Mathias explained that the other two men were participants in the first annual Lewis and Clark Pageant, staged to recreate Seaside's role in that early Pacific expedition. The Chief was surprised to discover that the mayor had not explained these details to his wife, but the process of divorce plays havoc with the communication process. Red faced, Margaret invited the entire expedition inside for hot toddies. She received an honorary appointment to the Pageant Committee and it has been hot toddies and boiled salt water every year thereafter.

Justin shook his head, dodging the puddles as he walked past the monument. It had rained since early morning and it had rained hard. The clouds separated now only long enough

to taunt the shimmering flat beach at low tide. Tillamook Head, on Justin's left, was crowned in thick fog, and he was met on South Prom by diehard surfing enthusiasts heading for the Point where waves always peaked highest before slamming into the rocks along the sandless beach further out. Cocker Spaniels and Toy Poodles were strolling in their knitted best at the ends of leashes held by Seaside's most typical winter citizen, -the senior. Justin had been in town nearly a month and Tym was the only inhabitant he had found even close to his own age. It was clear the moment Seaside youth reached the age of legal severance, they split for Portland and Seattle. Margaret had reassured Justin that the summer situation was not nearly so dismal when all the truly beautiful people returned from Portland and Seattle to bask in the resort decadence of the Northern Coast. Margaret and Justin counted the long days 'til summer.

Lochran had babysat the children while Gillian and Paddy organized the forged school documents and drove out to Seaside Heights Elementary School. Registering Michael was the only immediate concern as Jonathan and Kimberly were too young to meet school age requirements and would stay with Gillian at the inn. With Jonathan's deficiency, it would be awhile before he found placement in any public atmosphere, so resigned Gillian. The school principal, Margaret Sheridan, introduced herself to the senior Cavanaugh's and invited them into her office. She offered coffee but her offer was politely declined.

"Let's see here," she skimmed. "Michael's records appear to be in order and I really don't anticipate any curricular adjustments from the Canadian school he is accustomed to. Last I heard, Canada instructs its students about seven continents and not five." Margaret intended this to be somewhat of a joke. The Cavanaugh's appeared so tense and only Gillian's mouth raised slightly indicating she may have been aware of the attempt at humor, if not the humor itself. Margaret recommitted her attention to the file before her. Paddy stared out the large window behind her desk at the leafless trees. Their gray and rust branches gave definition to the early morning fog that blanketed the hillside. The setting, even the building itself, was such a drastic and far cry from the gray brick P.S. #8 that he had remembered from his childhood in The City.

"These records show that Michael was previously enrolled in the fourth grade in British Columbia. I was under the impression you intended to register him in the third grade, but I must have misunderstood." Margaret looked at the figeting couple for clarification. Gillian started to speak but Paddy, sensing a paperwork oversight, interrupted his wife and tried to cover the blunder.

"-Well, acutally the staff in B.C. felt Michael may have been more advanced than some of his peers and because of his sixth birthday, which occured just after he began first grade, the decision was made to place him in the fourth grade at the end of his second year. So far, it seems to have been a decision that was well made."

Gillian, the educator, held her breath and had to wonder which unconnected nerve in her husband's brain, wouldn't be satisfied until everyone around him was as screwed up as he was. And if playing with the destiny of his children was the price he had to pay for his own cover-up, Gillian saw his demented billfold on the table. Lochran had miscalculated Michael's grade status when he forged the records. And now, Michael, who already had to carry his father's past on his eight year old shoulders, must now champion the burden of being jerked a year ahead of his ability in school. Seemingly, there was no line between cause and effect. Everything valuable would be sacrificed for her husband's noble cause and she knew better.

"Then I don't see any reason to discontinue that schedule." Margaret fed Paddy what he wanted to hear eventhough her own professional inclination called for testing and personal evaluation of the child to determine the appropriate action. "We appreciate that." Paddy reached for Gillian's hand. "You know, Gillian was a grade school teacher, herself, in British Columbia. She can be a tremendous factor at home if Michael begins to have trouble with this placement." Gillian squeezed Paddy's hand to the point he was forced to retract it.

"I didn't realize you taught, Mrs. Cavanaugh. Perhaps we can work you into reserve status as a substitute after the holidays. Have you thought about returning fulltime?" Margaret inquired professionally.

"I still have two little ones at home. Maybe once I get them both into school, I'll consider it again." Gillian had basic conscience and experienced great difficulty with herehusband'secharades. She generally had enough trouble with the day to day realities that confronted her to ever willingly venture anywhere beyond the pain and disappointment, from which, she drew her strength. But God, she missed working and she'd only been gone since the suicide. But she knew she couldn't return now. She had vanished from her vocation and there wasn't an apparent trail of breadcrumbs back for Gillian.

"Well, you bring your certification in sometime this week and I promise to take advantage of your education next semester. It'll get you out of the house now and then."

"We'll discuss it at home," Gillian stated coldly. "But, thank you, Mrs. Sheridan." Margaret found that somewhat odd. A teacher teaches or she becomes a principal, but she doesn't just quit teaching; -unless of course, she has a string of Mondays like her own yesterday. Then, she takes up skydiving or mercenary work, but she doesn't settle for barefeet on kitchen tile. Margaret could almost wade her perception in the underlying current of independence she sensed in Gillian. What kept it from gurgling to the surface? Undoubtedly, her husband, like all husbands, had capped the well with his undisputed dominance. She smiled at this philosophy and wondered if there was a word for male hater. "What do you say we take a quick tour of the facilities just to give you an idea of what we are going to be offering Michael."

The Cavanaugh's didn't seem to object to her suggestion though they were somewhat pressed for time as Lochran had a flight out of Portland at 2:00.

"At Seaside Heights this semester, we have 326 students and 18 teachers. That's a teacher-student ratio officient to eighteen which is one of the best in the state of Oregon," Margaret bragged as she lead them down the hall from her office to the gymnasium and cafeteria. "Will Michael be taking the bus up the hill?"

"No," Paddy said abruptly. "To be quite honest, Michael is already having some problem adjusting to his new environment and we feel we should lessen some of CURNES WHITEWASH Page 105

the severity. We'll bring him to school for awhile." He looked at Gillian.

"That's fine but I do encourage complete peer exposure as soon as possible as this is often much more effective in coping with change." Margaret smiled. She'd have to remember to ask Justin if Mr. Cavanaugh was using any drugs. She'd never seen anyone so uncomfortably nervous. "We are proud to offer a complete class A lunch program." Margaret was not in the mood to promote the school on this particular day. It was not unlike conducting a guided tour of Bastogne, Belgium the day after the Battle of the Bulge. They walked. past a faculty member enroute to the library. "Good morning, Mr. Bergman," she acknowledged.

"Mrs. Sheridan." The teacher nodded respectfully.

"Our library is quite modern which we credit to the young age of the school. We have a complete resource room for the learning disabled." She knew she probably didn't sound very convincing but she was proud of the institution.

"Uh, looking at the time, Mrs. Sheridan, we've really got to cut this short. Gillian's brother is watching the children but he has a flight out of Portland this afternnoon and we must get going." The family reference to Lochran made Gillian uneasy, but she thanked Mrs. Sheridan and excused herself politely. "Mrs. Sheridan, we are having the grand opening of our bed and breakfast next Monday evening. We'd be honored if you would join us." Paddy reached for her hand.

"I'll put it on my calendar right now," she assured him. "It sounds like quite the place from what I'm told." She eluded all reference to Justin at this point. Her living arrangements had already raised enough local brow. "I look forward to meeting Michael tomorrow and it has been my pleasure meeting both of you."

The Cavanaugh's walked out arm in arm. Margaret leaned against the center door frame and waved. Something unspoken, almost understood, told Margaret to expect a problem child in Michael.

Lochran and the kids were behind the house at the banks of the Necanicum River. Michael's jeans were wet to the knees and Jonathan hid from Lochran and Kimberly behind a chunk of driftwood.

"Daddy!" Kimberly screamed as she jumped from Lochran's arms. Gillian contended with the pit in her stomach. She selfishly guarded Kim from Lochran. Why had she told him? How could she have allowed herself to sleep with him, to take him inside her? Already she claimed this to have been the weakest moment in her life and yet she knew she would crawl back into those arms again, if she could. She had been safe there once and she had been able to forget everything in her world. On Lochran's rocketship she had blasted from that past and onto a new domain where she was unthreatened and respected. She had floated there long enough to never forget the feeling and she had loved there hard enough to spend the rest of her life unable to match the sensation. And now it was only natural to hate him, to resent him for pulling her back into her own atmosphere where her lungs were choked daily by the suffocating reality about her. And she knew how to hate like she knew how to remember and the events that shaped her life, collaborated to insure she would die the matrix of all suffering.

Paddy set the cruise control as they left Seaside. "Gillian's really going to miss you, Harry. She's grown to depend on you over the years. And the kids, Jesus, you've been like a second father to them. I've really never been one to vocalize my blessings but I'm not above saying thank-you from time to time either. You're one special friend, Harry." Paddy reached for his knee.

"It's nothing you wouldn't have done for me, Paddy, and you know it." Lochran purposely set his gaze out the window.

"I've never fully understood the plan, but I have a feeling this is goodbye, isn't it?" CURNES WHITEWASH Page 108

Lochran shook his head. "Well, if we're not going to communicate for awhile, I have one last favor. It's for Gillian, actually."

"Shoot." Lochran exclaimed. The two men looked at each other, realizing the command and laughed. "You name it," Lochran clarified.

"I let it slip this morning that Gillian was a teacher and now the principal of Michael's school wants to use Gillian as a substitute, but we need a teaching certificate with Gillian's name on it."

"Sheridan, right?"

"Yeah. Margaret Sheridan. How do you know her?"

"She doesn't know me from Adam but we spent one helluva night in the garden," Lochran grinned.

"You mean to tell me you screwed my son's principal?"

"I took a giant bite of her juicy apple, yeah."

"You have fewer scruples than I do. They should lock you up."

"Being locked up wouldn't be so bad. I hear a man's ass is tighter than a woman's monkey. You tell me, Cavanaugh. Is it true?"

"Fucking rot in hell, Lochran! You're sick! So goddamn sick." Paddy turned colors with cinnamon hot rage and shook behind the steering wheel of his recently acquired van.

"Settle down, will you? I was just trying to get

a rise out of you."

Paddy focused a cold stare at the road in front of him. "Maybe you can get a hard-on from that kind of talk but it reminds me of the faggots back in The City." Paddy took a deep breath and remembered. "When I was a cop, I used to daydream about taking one of those faggots down on the sidewalk and driving my nightstick through his ass and out his mouth. I used to imagine the sound that would make." Paddy smiled, turning onto Highway 26 at Cannon Beach Junction, three miles south of Seaside. "-Especially when the stick knocked out those shiny white teeth! Christ," Paddy thought out loud. "Then I became a fireman and well, the daydream changed a little. We'd get this call and I'd axe my way into a burning Victorian on Castro, two and a half inch national standard thread fire hose over my shoulder, and I'd bust in on a couple of queens going at it in the smoke." Paddy glanced over at Lochran excitedly. "And I'd ram that male coupling past someone's colon and signal for flow. You know, I could never figure out if the pressure would force water through that queen's thing and into his faggot partner's ass. Locate, confine and extinguish." Paddy laughed. "I'd just be following policy." He laughed even louder.

"It's hard to believe you've never spent a constructive minute in psychiatric e-val." Lochran was amazed. "And then you became a politician," Lochran prompted. Paddy thought silently about the election, about the gun and the nine shots, and about the bodies slumped against the bloody wall of City Hall, and he asked Lochran to drop it. "Just forget it, okay?" An hour later, a United 737 left Oregon behind to wallow in her ignorance. In Harry Lochran's mind, this coverup was alot like canceling the orbit of a renegade satellite leaving it to lose itself and eventually burn out in the vastness of space.

> Justin crossed the Necanicum River on the 12th Avenue Bridge, once washed out by the Alaskan Tsunami tidal wave of 1964 that pushed a ten foot wall of frothing terror deep into the heart of Seaside. But the river was placid today and low during the lesser tide of mid-morning. Seagulls and ducks skimmed the glassy water looking for the accustomed handouts of summer and had to be as disappointed as Margaret and Justin by the absence of breathing tourists.

Tym's Market clearly reflected itself on the river's face and the brilliantly colored neon of the beer signs in the front windows of the store, sliced through the cloud gray backdrop of this winter town, where everything happened just a little bit slower and human metabolism took a thoughtful winter recess from the bloodletting tourist season. Only Tym's maroon Toyota pickup with a matching shell for rainy day deliveries, sat in the eight space parking lot. Justin opened the front door and a single note chime sounded above his head.

"I'm in aisle five if you need anything." Her strong voice rose above the Del Monte canned vegetables and Top Ramen to greet the first customer of the day and as a statement of the winter economy, she'd been open for three hours.

"It's just me, Tym," Justin hollered back as he pulled a shopping cart from the grip of seven others. It became obvious to Justin the store had a customer capacity of eight. Tym would be quick to point out that was a simultaneous capacity and not a daily capacity as the day was beginning to suggest.

"Justin Winter? Is that you?" Tym emerged holding a feather duster and a price gun. "It has nearly been three days since you've been in to see me. Did you lose my telephone number or what?" She laid her things by the cash register and put her arm around Justin's shoulder and together they headed down the short produce aisle.

"You have my telephone number too. You could have called."

"I just think we owe it to each other, being Seaside's only claim to youth this side of thirty, to organize and be seen." She grabbed the spray hose and doused the carrots and lettuce. Justin snatched a head from its shower and CURNES WHITEWASH Page 112

placed it in dry plastic. "I thought about calling your house but I don't think that principal roommate of yours likes me too much."

"Margaret? She's a pushover! Besides, what's not to like?"

"Well, she never shops here. What am I supposed to think?"

"Oh, I don't know," Justin said faceitiously. "Perhaps she lives six miles from your store and two blocks from Safeway. But I'm not saying that's an excuse for bad manners." He snatched a can of Oregon blueberries from the shelf behind him.

"I just think that maybe Mrs. Sheridan has taken a few of this town's rumors a bit too seriously. It amazes me these old farts have the energy to open their mouths to gossip, but they do." Tym pulled another can of blueberries from the back to replace the can in Justin's cart.

"Rumors about what?"

"Oh, you know. The typical shit: Tym Green's dad bought her this store and has exiled her to the coast to manage it. 'Keeps her away from that no-good motorbike riding lesbian back in the City of Roses. Yeah, Tym's old man would rather see Tym turn a boyfriend than a profit with his investment. -That kind of shit."

"That's a pretty detailed rumor, if you ask me."

"Oh, don't think for a second there aren't a million splintered versions out there. That's just an example." Tym threw a box of apple cinnamon tea bags into Justin's cart. "I like this brand in case you and the principal ever have me over for tea."

"Is it true? The rumor, that is?"

"Yep. I'll give 'em that. They're accurate."

Justin inadvertently ran his cart into the Bumble Bee Tuna Pyramid and tuna cans scatered for yards. "No shit?" Tym burst out laughing. She began to reconstruct the display as unseen cans rolled to clanking stops all over the store. "No, I'm serious," Justin insisted. "You're a lesbian?"

"Yes, Justin. May I have your attention please," she immitated an intercom, "Tym Green is a lesbian. Isn't that a hoot? And all this time you probably thought I was coming onto you everytime you and that boss of yours came in here. Oh, don't be embarrassed. Your boss thought it too. In fact, I remember once last week he leaned over the meat counter and whispered that he thought you had the hots for me. I dropped a pound of bulk weiners on the floor. I hate touching weiners in the first place and I'll admit, dropping them was not quite as dramatic as toppling a seven foot display of stacked tuna, but I was surprised nonetheless. Knockwurst, I don't mind. At least that's something to hang on to, but weiners are absolutely CURNES WHITEWASH Page 114

disgusting."

"I suppose, to a lesbian, they would be." Justin couldn't resist making the connection. "But hey, I'm with you when it comes to weiners. In my line of work, I'd much rather handle a knockwurst, but then, size has always been relevant to my tastes," Justin cleverly disclosed.

"You mean to tell me you're one too?"

"I'm not a lesbian, no. Gay? -Definitely. And knockwurst? Well, let's just say they're my life!"

Tym lost complete balance from laughter and tumbled into the revised tuna tower she had just finished. Justin's eyes teared with amazement and surprise and neither of them could stop laughing for several minutes. Tym eventually started the stacking process again but gave in to convulsive laughter, tossed a can in the air and opted for a break. "Ah, fuck it! Let's lock up this mortuary and head for the beach. I could use the air."

The two of them left the Necanicum for the Pacific to discuss tuna a weiners. Seaside, in their eyes, had just taken a turn for the better.

CHAPTER TEN

Justin Winter was a beautiful man at 26. His bluish gray eyes perched on endless cheekbones and his smile reached well into his sideburns throwing dimples in its path. A nose of English prominence lent definition and character to his face before it ever detracted from it, though Justin would occassionally voice the contrary in conversations uncomfortably directed at his perfectness. He worried foolishly about a solid hair line that wouldn't court recession for days after he was buried, but fretting publically made him human and sincere and, not to mention, completely endearing. Justin was quick to fabricate physical deficiencies in the company of others to set his company at ease, but it was always doubtful whether or not this was ever actually accomplished. For example, Justin would introduce a teenage problem of acute acne when it was literally clear Stridex never made a penny from treating But it helped others, in the short run, to envision him. him going after blackheads in the bathroom mirror. Justin seemed unaware he was a round one knockout, but he had to

notice the obvious recognition that sparred with his ego in and out of the ring of physical contention.

But it hadn't always been like that. Justin had been nothing remarkable growing up. In fact, he considered himself a popular outcast in high school, fitting in but working damn hard at it too. Football. God, he had disliked football, but all routes considered, football was the one activity that met all eligibility requirements for instant peer acceptance. So, with the grace of athletic ability, Justin didn't need good grades, teen guilt or any of the prescribed social aspirations to mask his inner struggle with identity. He was a jock right down to his athletic supporter and captain of absolutely no inner awareness whatsoever.

His parents had contributed little directional influence having been unusually obsessed with mediocrity and virtually paralyzed by the fear of standing out. But Justin knew he was different simply by the exhausting realization that he worked too hard to be like everybody else. It was no revelation to Justin that his father's generation had invented carbon paper.

By the time Justin entered the university, his two older cousins had already passed the bar specializing in environmental law and his father had signed-on as legal counsel for the EPA. It dawned on Justin one afternoon as he sat in Biology Lab and felt the teeth of the hinged trap of destiny dig into his ankle, that the neurons that bombarded his brain weren't identifying pain, but a need for radical change.

He was able to embrace his homosexuality overnight. In the 1970's when most young adults his age couldn't choose between protesting Vietnam, growing their hair long or dropping LSD, Justin's choice was simple. He'd move west and champion the gay cause he had been reading about in Life magazine. From that decision on, Justin always gave himself more credit for learning the bandana color code in the gay bar scene than he had ever taken for comprehending the phylum association of all living organisms. It was a tough code. Blue: blow-job. Gray: bondage. Yellow: water sports. Red: fist-fucking. Green: hustler or John, (depending on the pocket of occupancy.) Black: heavy S & M. Purple: piercee or piercer, (again, depending on the pocket.) Orange: anything at anytime. Light Pink: dildo. Lavender: likes drag. Dark pink: tit torturer. Hell, it was the most practical thing to happen to fashion since Garanimals and the hues went on. And amyl nitrate, "poppers" as they called them; -the only substance that could actually enhance the smell of sweat on denim and leather, was a mainstay.

And there was Justin, spinning in the center of the dance floor mesmerized by the ballroom light, the CURNES WHITEWASH Page 118

breathing inspiration of Levi 501's and the desired conquest of every faqqot within earshot of Donna Summer, getting stoned on Ecstasy. Screw around? Justin was barely nineteen and at nineteen you screw around or you explode. Looking back on it all, Justin knew he probably should have contracted that AIDS that everyone's been talking about, but he didn't, and that made him feel that much more sorry for those hemophiliacs and babies that did. It wasn't a fair disease but Justin, for one, was sure thankful he steered clear of the primary colors and had only dipped his brush in a few watered-down pastels. Being cute, aside from being horny, kept him somewhat elusive and untouchable. Justin thanked God. And as the first wave of that dread disease crashed into everything he had stood for, Justin took to the rolling hills of denial and tried, once again, to alter his fate.

He bounced around from resort to ghost town in Colorado for several winters operating ski lifts and mine shaft tours until he was convinced that living the straight life was far worse and even more detrimental than dying from gay life. And there were those dying from it. Just 30 cases in 1980, the year Justin turned 21, had rampageously evolved into 20,000 fatalities by the summer of 1984. When Justin came down from the mountain, the gay community was greatly diminished and racked with bereavement. Nobody hummed Donna Summer and there was suddenly something worse than leaving a cake out in the rain. Heroes were dead. Friends were missing. Drugs weren't working. Ballroom balls weren't spinning. And bandanas were burned and buried. Justin fingerprinted his memories for a trace of his past and lifted a smudged reminder of his own recklessness. He thanked God and apologized.

It had been five years since he had spoken to his parents. They had ignored him for dead, convinced they had raised the latest statistic of that West Coast disease. They had rung their hands raw those first months after Justin dropped out of college, afraid Justin's convictions would bring attention to their anonymous and newly found prestige in Washington, as if another queer in the District would rate any attention. But Justin honored their sense of territory and normalcy and disappeared from familiarity. Even the relatives lost interest in the inquiry after his whereabouts took on the reputation of the lie-of-the-month club, never the same story twice and never verifiable to the contrary. But the time had come to go home. It was the only thing left of Justin's past that could be guaranteed to have withstood change. And as hypocritical as it sounded to him, Justin had been betrayed by change.

Justin's "don't look back" tour, aimed for home and was well financed by substanital savings stockpiled in the Rockies. Unable to sell himself the concept of going straight, Justin had hustled the resorts, actually quite by accident. Free lessons and stolen attention from the instructors, turned Justin into a veritable pro on the course. He even slipped into the amateur racing circuit and hobbled away with honors and tendonitis. Recuperating in the lodge next to a creek rock fireplace with his meal ticket propped on a pillow, discouraged Justin but lured alternatives. The place was sticky with sugardaddies who had flown into the high country on corporate Lears looking for a sweet tooth. If, indeed it were possible to look provocatively helpless, Justin had invented the science and if there were a common denominator among rich, enterprising men, it was the fear of eating alone. And so it happened that Justin was wined and dined and clothed and boarded and pensioned through the winter without unbuttoning his Levi's.

This trip home was intended to be an exercise of connect the dots that had been compiled in his resort business ledger of profitable acquaintances. Calling on these wealthy blue chips now, could only build his courage and specify his horizons. Justin was ready to settle down and he had the means to interview, eliminate and choose from dozens of proven applicants who had already invested substantial interest. Justin liked to think of it as "ultimate economics." He would be a cutthroat broker.

The journey was designed to concentrate on four

key players: the lumber and shipping tycoon in Seattle, the '88 Winter Olympics promoter in Calgary, the Burlington Northern Railroad executive in Chicago and the casting agent in New York City. Justin's ducks were in order and coincidentally, sitting. He stuck out his thumb.

California was magnificent in late September. He studied wine and vintner in the Sonoma Valley acquiring rides with visiting tourists in search of qualified, late season inebriation. He learned tree identification from a darling forest ranger while he held up in the rain at Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. And he caught wind of a Russian Lecture Series up the coast in Oregon. He was nearly prepared intellectually for his first major stop in Seattle when he ran into a bad stretch of asphalt. The driving youth of California yielded the road to the perversions of the depraved North and Justin found himself up to his thumbs in troubled transport.

Even an encounter with a rusty truck driver could have been added to Justin's traveling syllabus, but the headline in a newspaper on the carpet floor of a brown panel van and the unforgettable memory of two gun barrels pointed at his face by two of the most nervous characters he had ever seen, jammed the brakes on his Seattle Express.

"Killer of mayor, supervisor in SF commits suicide."

THE SECOND COAT

n. 2. A concealing or glossing over of flaws or failures.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The doorbell was barely audible over Justin's new age version of Pachelbel's Kanon. He stormed the ivory of Margaret's Grand initiating nine years of classical training for which he had landed a musical scholarship and the opportunity to study abroad. But like most contributions to his perfection, he denied these talents for the most part, playing only when exposed, usually by his mother or by an unearthed stash of sheet music. Neither threat existed in Seaside. He practiced now for as long as Margaret kept her tongue in check. Her inclination to sing the vocal scores and to laud the classics were confined by the raw pleasure of just listening, out of sight. She was acutely aware of Justin's preference to exist unsung. She had noticed the same trait in dozens of children who carried an aversion to praise while remaining completely dependent on attention. It fell under the infamous fucked if you do, fucked if you don't Stanford principle of child psychology.

Margaret held a finger to her lips and she and Tym crept to the kitchen.

"Would you care for some apple-cinnamon tea, Tym?"

Tym smiled. "You've been coached. Thank you. I would." Tym sat on a barstool at the counter. "Is there anything I can do to help with dinner?"

"Actually, Justin claims everything is already done. I'm forbidden to peek so we'll just have to take his word on that."

"I barely dropped him off here two hours ago. I've never heard of anyone whipping up Beef Wellington."

"Well, dear, if anyone can-"

"Justin can," they said together. Margaret filled the teapot and placed it on the stove. She rinsed her hands in the sink and dried them on a towel looped through the refrigerator handle before sitting down and across from Tym at the bar.

"You're really quite pretty, Tym."

"For a lesbian, you mean?"

"Not at all," Margaret recoiled. "For a woman."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Sheridan. I've gotten so used to being on the immediate defensive in this town. I didn't mean to compromise the compliment. Thank you."

"Please, call me Margaret." She brushed a crumb from breakfast off the counter. "I imagine it is extremely difficult for you in Seaside. Do you know anyone here?" "Other than Justin? No. I've always thought the way this town talked, I'd get a bead on anyone else they cared to flush out of hiding, but I haven't, or they haven't, or something. I do know that I'm made to feel like the freak of the coast, though."

"Honey, you shouldn't think like that. I've always considered ignorance and tradition to be the largest obstacles for feminism. The fact that you would have gained more respect for submitting to that asshole and being vicitmized by him than you ever gained by fighting him off, going public with a positive identification and pressing charges against him, says a great deal for the citizens of this town, and they have nothing to be proud of, as far as I'm concerned. And I am concerned because that could have very well been me on the beach that night, and I'm not sure I could have defended myself and that scares the ovaries right out of me. I have more respect for you than you will ever know. I'm

"I appreciate that and especially from you. God, you must be the sole woman of prominence in Seaside and an educator to boot. I had you pegged as a sympathizer for the infalible faculty."

"Don't kid yourself. I'm as much of a misfit here as you or Justin. The point is, this town is full of misfits, each one no more accepting of others than others are accepting of them. Nobody can claim nativity here. No one person represents the philosophy of Seaside and no one belongs here by divine right or otherwise. Everyone packs a transitory license because no one can commit to stay. Look at Lewis and Clark. They got here, took one look at the place, boiled a few gallons of salt water and split. It's a great place to discover, but you wouldn't want to settle there. But if you have to find yourself and if you need to prove yourself, it doesn't hurt to spend a night or two. That's all we're doing, really. Just sleeping over until we can face a bigger challenge and move on. It's sort of the dogma of any resort town, I suppose, enacted the moment you unpack your soul."

"Are you for real?" Tym finally asked.

"Here, pinch me." Margaret extended her arm. "-More reality than most are prepared for, I have to admit. But I'm real alright, and I'm on your side. That bastard may have been a high school coach and teacher, but I would have held him down for the castration if you hadn't kicked his balls into his throat. I'm just sorry that the trial had to bring out your lesbianism for public scrutiny."

"What else could I have said? The D.A. had the jury convinced I had provoked the jerk's advances. Shit, all I did was agree to a walk after closing one night. Why in the hell would a lesbian provoke hetero-intercourse? I shouldn't have been called to formulate my defense, but there it was." Tym shifted on the stool. The teapot began to whistle.

"Well, at least the trial was in Astoria and Greg Bush is behind bars in Salem for another six years. You should be able to face your next challenge by then." Margaret steeped the tea bag in boiling water. "Sugar?"

"No, thank you."

Justin moved to some of his original compositions.

"Justin doesn't know about the attempted rape, does he?" Tym sipped cautiously.

"Not by me, anyway. He could have only heard about it from his boss who's too new in Seaside to be trusted with much exchange of information. Besides, it's been close to a year now. You just concentrate on your own healing and let the gossip burn itself out. In the meantime, we prepare and repair. You know, Sunset Parks and Recreation is conducting that four week course in self-defense in the Cannon Beach City Hall basement starting next Thursday night. I could use a partner if you're interested." Margaret carried her own cup and sat down again.

"Yes. I would like that. I'd be happy to drive," Tym offered.

"Do you have a tape deck?"

"What lesbian with a pickup doesn't?" Tym smiled over the top of her mug.

"I won't be subjected to the complete collection of Holly Near, will I?"

"Now what do you know about Holly Near?"

"I went to Stanford. You pick up these things." Margaret clanked her mug against Tym's and smiled back.

Justin paused on the keyboard. "What's keeping Tym, Margaret?" hegyelled.intotheskitchen.

"She's on her way," Margaret yelled back taking advantage of her time alone with Tym. Justin picked up where he had left off. "So, what do we do about Justin?" Margaret asked softly.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know why he feels compelled to stay in Seaside, but I don't think he'll hang out for long without some type of love interest, if you know what I mean." Margaret raised an eyebrow.

"I know exactly what you mean and I'm already a step ahead of you. Justin and I are going into Portland tomorrow to my dad's warehouse to pick up supplies for Cavanaugh's grand opening next week. I thought we could make a day of it and take in a little nightlife, just to get his heart pumping again. Why is he here in Seaside, anyway?"

"He doesn't say much. The night we met in Lincoln

City, he took an immediate interest when I told him I was an elementary school principal in Seaside. He asked me about a new bed and breakfast that was supposed to open soon and wondered if I thought he could get a job working there. I told him that Cavanaugh's seemed like a pretty big place and there might be a chance, but I don't know how he ever heard about it in the first place. I told him I had extra room in the house if he wanted to come to Seaside to try his luck and he accepted instantly. I remember asking him when he thought he might have his things together and he pointed to this backpack in the corner of the classroom. After the lecture, we threw it in the trunk and drove back here. He cased out Cavanaugh's for a few days, finally met the owner and landed a job."

"That's kind of strange, don't you think? I mean, where did he come from?"

"Beats me. I remember him mentioning folks in D.C. but I have no idea what brings him out here. That is so odd, too. For as well as we get along, I don't know one thing about him. You?" Margaret kept her voice low.

"Not really. We talked awhile on the beach this afternoon. I know that he's been out of circulation for a few years. I think he's been hitchhiking but from where? I don't really know. The way he talked about missing the gay bar scene, I just assumed he meant "I noticed that today when he and his wife came to the school to register their son, Michael. They both seemed unusually nervous."

"I haven't met his wife but I hope she takes over the grocery shopping." Tym and Margaret laughed.

Justin suddenly stopped playing and hollered across the house.

"Do you think we should give Tym a call? We need to be eating in another twenty."

"She'll be along. Relax," Margaret assured him, patting Tym's arm across the counter. They laughed again once Justin resumed playing.

"There is always that fine young Science teacher at Seaside Heights," Tym volunteered the morsel of information knowing it wouldn't satisfy Margaret's ferocious appetite.

"Who?" she demanded. "Mr. Bergman?"

Tym just smiled.

"Certainly you can't mean Steven Bergman." Margaret nearly scolded her.

"That's precisely whom I mean. He's obviously the perfect suitor for Justin. They've got to be the same age and Mr. Bergman is every bit as adorable as Justin. He's single."

"Obvious to whom? It's certainly not obvious to his principal. You mean to tell me Bergman's gay?" "I thought you went to Stanford. I thought you pick up on these things." Tym acted as though she'd known her for years.

"How can you be so sure of this information?"

"There's this bar in Portland called The Embers. I've seen him there. He's quite a dancer, you know."

Margaret fought the urge to protect her faculty and tried to objectively match Mr. Bergman with Justin in her own mind. "Do you really think they'd be interested in each other?"

"There's really only one way to find that out, isn't there?" Tym finished her tea.

"You mean-"

"I mean, bring him to Cavanaugh's grand opening next Monday and we'll watch to see if they notice each other and they will. You'll see."

"Mr. Bergman will be Michael's science teacher for the rest of this year. He shouldn't feel too awkward there." Margaret's head was caught in a somersault.

"He can hardly refuse the invitation of his superior, now can he?"

"This is practically coercion." Margaret admitted.

"But coercion for a good cause. We want Justin to be happy don't we?"

"Of course, you're right. I hope he doesn't have other plans." Margaret was getting into the scheme. "It's a school night in sleepy Seaside, Oregon. What plans could he possibly have?"

"You've got a point." Margaret conceeded and reached for Tym's hand. They shook signifying their unified design.

Justin approached the kitchen, talking to himself in the hall. "I just hope she remembers to bring the horseradish, like I asked." Tym dramatically reached into her purse and set the jar, with a thud, on the counter. "You are here. Hi." He hugged her and walked around to the kitchen side of the counter and kissed Margaret on the cheek. "Dinner in ten, you two. Can you find something to talk about in the other room?" They smiled and moved to the dining room.

Justin opened the oven door and pulled out the Wellington. The pastry dough steamed a flaky golden tan and the rare juices of the tenderloin sizzled inside a cozy blanket of rich liver-cognac pate. Big deal, Justin thought to himself.

He couldn't seem to get past the preoccupation that, more than likely, he was wasting his time, held up in Seaside. He had already waylaid for two weeks and for what? He needed to play his hunch that the newspaper headline on the floor of the van, the flyer for Cavanaugh's stuck on the mini-refrigerator door and those two frightened men with guns, carried

some significance aside from common coincidence. He had been so sure the two men in the brown panel van were somehow responsible for the killing and staged suicide of The City Hall Assassin of 1978. More uncanny than his theory was the implausibility of that reported suicide. The trigger man at City Hall had had it far too easy to simply turn the barrel on himself after all those years of hetero-endorsement and star treatment at the state penitentiary. Anyone who was around at the time of those two murders, certainly would tell you the trial and the sentences that followed, contradicted every inch of gay progress ever claimed by the new movement for freedom and equality, and Justin had been around. No matter how loud he screamed, Justin could not capture the attention of Justice, who was not only legally blind, but substantially deaf and questionably just, to have returned a verdict of two counts of voluntary manslaughter. And what, then, was the slaughter of man? -Okay? -Alright? -Acceptable? -Excuseable? -Evidently, thought Justin. Seven years, eight months and all is forgiven, all debts are paid. And what an exchange rate that was at only three and a half years per corpse. The mayor had been 49 years old. The gay supervisor, Justin's John F. Kennedy, was gunned down at 48. Both of these men could have been expected to live another twenty years, based on the average life expectancy for two healthy males. So there it was, jumbled in Justin's mind. You could take away forty

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years and only pay for seven. That was the advertised bargain in The City six years ago. 'Butcher's Choice,' some called it. If it didn't come scot-free, then it certainly came scot-discount. So, there wouldn't have been any reason for him to kill himself six years later. Hell, the assassin was out in five years, as it turned out, thanks to a carefully thought-out provision for good behavior, as if anyone present at the trial, or accountable in that decade, could have rationally predicted or planned for good behavior from a man who had just iced two defenseless politicians with nine hollow-point bullets. But he was out.

There wasn't a homosexual in the country who didn't want him dead. But he celebrated life. At one point during the parole period in Los Angeles County, one vengeful gay activist in the Bay Area claimed to have been tipped on the location of the safe house in L.A. A handful of progress-minded homosexuals banded together to form an impressive surveillance team that kept a round-theclock watch on the house for two weeks, before a new and revised tip, along with the obvious absence of a tennant, pinpointed the assailant abroad enjoying his freedom in Ireland. Well, who in the hell was he reporting to over there? -The I.R.A.? What happened to a parole officer and why did this killer operate free of restrictions and limitations? There were no answers.
At least none for the gays and lesbians who grew hoarse from asking. It seemed everyone had taken advantage of the assassinations to finally ignore the homosexual faction for awhile. Before those bullets had severed the vocal cords of a generation, The City's growing polulation of homosexuals had wrestled for the liberty to be outspoken. They'd managed to pin the opposition to the mat where it wiggled and squirmed, while gays and lesbians wore their medals of advancement and tremendous progress around their necks. Hands were held on the sidewalk, news footage of their blooming lifestyle was practically reserved time on the nightly broadcasts, and fanatics who rather aided the gay cause by appearing ridiculously opposed, scooted their soap boxes in front of anyone who gathered to listen. Anita Bryant tipped over her glass of Florida orange juice to redefine her lifelong mission and get in front of a television camera where she spoke out against gay and lesbian existence, period. Nevermind their crys for advancement. In Anita's crossed vision, they were an abomination with no business in God's creation. And there was John Briggs, California's state-level authority on gay rights denial. Briggs introduced an anti-gay legislative proposition just about as often as Bryant cracked her worn Bible in search of another verse she could bend to back her case.

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But neither of these anti-gay activists were quite as effective as the man who took the queens by their crowns and his gun by its grip.

Justin and the participants in the stakeout in Los Angeles, were the remaining fragments of the celebrated Bay Area Resistance Team, or B.A.R.T., as they proudly referred to themselves. They were quick to recognize and tickled to claim they were more widespread and effective than the original B.A.R.T., -The City's 'Better Area Rapid Transit System.' Organized that horrid night of the assassinations, they had raised some legitimate hell in their day, and though none of the active members could agree on the ultimate objective of their organization, under the roof of the clubhouse and between the lines of their unwritten charter they knew they could never disband until the free assassin was a dead assassin.

In May of 1979, the group tested the scope of their strength on the night the verdict was returned in court. They had closely observed the court proceedings, sustained two contempt charges for outbursts during defense testimony and staged regular protests outside the courtroom to disrupt the absurd course the trial had taken. But 'The Big Night Riots', their first organizational triumph, shocked The City and energized the Homosexual Community; -a community who had always acted so peacefully and so responsibly by comparison to the violence and destruction that B.A.R.T. introduced. America wasn't about to notice another queer rally on the steps of City Hall. A killer of two men had been honored and rewarded by the political and law enforcement bodies of his hometown. Ten verses of "Blowing in the Wind" fell short of the true expression of their anger and outrage that washed through the streets of Gay America.

It all began with a few provocative rocks through the second story windows of City Hall and strategically advanced to setting fire to a dozen police cars. Gas tanks exploded, glass shattered and night sticks thumped the pavement in percussion overload while tear gas settled over the crowd like a wet goodnight kiss from Madame Justice. B.A.R.T. had concentrated on the frontlines of violence and was unable to scatter into the shadows and side streets when the police riot squad began to gain the upper hand. Armed with a landscaping stake he had pryed from the wet earth in a garden on the grounds and a pocketful of rocks he had collected earlier that morning, Justin penetrated the mayor's office with remarkable aim and drove The City's Leader further into the center of the edifice where it all began the November before. Justin managed to avoid the police by hiding behind a shrub but the ranks of B.A.R.T. were not as collectively illusive. Justin's friend, Sam, the perceived leader of B.A.R.T., and four others from the membership fell into police handcuffs. Sam was beaten senseless as an example to others and the other four sustained various, less severe wounds of battle, but all were medically neglected, booked and jailed bleeding, only blocks from the action that continued without them, late into the night. When the riot finally lost fighting momentum, the 10,000 protestors and agitators retreated to dozens of bars in the Gay Neighborhood where they regrouped and evaluated their accomplishment. Justin nursed a cut above his right eyebrow while selfappointed leaders sprung up around him offering their reprimand for the use of violence. Justin tirelessly defended his jailed commrades and accused his peers of cowardness and passivity and lack of conviction. No one was quite sure what to make of the damage that was broadcast on

every network, but the publicity soon realigned the community. Within hours, off-duty police officers infiltrated the Gay Neighborhood Bars to take retaliatory action against the faggots who had made them look so embarrassingly bad on national news.

The glorified martyrs of B.A.R.T. went to trial within the week. Two of the clan bargained for misdemeanors under Penal Code 594-A, for malicious mischief, but Sam and the others took a more severe lashing when they were found directly accountable for excessive destruction to public property. By the very strictest of interpretations, testimony and admississions finally provoked, what those in the legal profession call, a wobbler; -a court decision that can fluctuate between a felony and a misdemeanor. Sam, orginally apprehended for the destruction of a single police car, proudly admitted, under oath, to the destruction of seven police cars. The other two wisely admitted to nothing and were assessed stiff fines. Sam, again made the model for swift and tangible punishment, was ultimately held personally responsible for fifty thousand and one hundred dollars of damage to public property, intentionally appraised one hundred dollars over the felony line of Penal Code 594. He was sentenced to eight years in a state prison; four months longer than the assassin's sentence he had protested. Justin felt helpless. The Gay Community had been warned that any further attempt to destroy property, obstruct justice or block a speedy recovery for The City, would result in neighborhood curfews and the closing of every gay-operated liquor establishment in The City. Justin found it extremely difficult to recruit under this impending doom. Sam was driven, under heavy guard, to the state penitentiary.

In The City, evidently nobody messes with police cars. You'd be sooner free gunning down two human beings in cold blood. Justin wasn't stupid. There was a funny thing about the California Penal System and Justin knew it. He studied it and he would have fought it, too, had he received any indication that fighting accomplished anything for homosexuals anywhere. Look what fighting did for the gay supervisor and Justin's friend, Sam. There's no point expounding on the popularity of gay ass in a male prison and only a fool would think Sam received the consideration of protective segregation.

What Justin, and thousands like him, discovered about gay existence in the late Seventies, was that they could get further ahead by staying behind. It seemed the end of an era that had only begun ten years earlier. And now, there was AIDS bringing an efficient end to more than just an era.

Justin knew he had to be one of the last of the Bay Area Resistance Team, but why he commuted his loyal membership now, to follow this hunch after all those covert and therapeutic years, he couldn't exactly say, except that it just couldn't have been a suicide, that's all. It had to have been murder, fittingly proper, but equally bizarre. The two men in the van that morning, didn't quite seem the type that would have avenged homosexuals by killing The City Hall Assassin. So why did they want him dead? Justin wrestled with that question day and night. That, and why he couldn't break Paddy Cavanaugh. It had been a foggy, early morning drive on Highway 26 for Tym and Justin. Paddy had met them on the front porch of Cavanaugh's with a handful of twenty dollar bills, obviously the harvest of another daily crop at the ATM. Justin had looked forward to abbreakfast invitation to meet the other members of the Cavanaugh clan, but Paddy had insisted they were still sleeping. Justin drove to the edge of Portland while Tym fixed her hair and painted her nails. There was nothing typical about Tym Green and Justin was perfectly comfortable with her beauty. He imagined the two of them made a striking and misleading pair. The City of Roses spent the entire day lending credibility to Justin's imagination.

At Columbia Distribution, Zac Green's professional empire, Tym captured the praise of her father for topping outlet projections for the third quarter in a row with her store by the sea. Justin's presence watered his fatherly optimism and weeded his conscience of doubt. He had been wise sending Tym to the coast. Zac took Justin by the arm and showed him the giant warehouse operation while Tym entered her bi-monthly grocery order into the computer, including the specialty items she and Justin would need for the grand opening less than a week away. She hoped Justin didn't mind her father's misguided dowry tour. He meant well. Declining her father's invitation for lunch and against her own better judgement, Tym humored Justin's desire to eat at the Fish Grotto, just down from Henry Weinhart's Brewery where they had just completed a guided tour and tasting. The city was putting color back into Justin's cheeks and they walked around town and along the riverfront the rest of the afternoon. At a downtown pub they sipped Bloody Mary's as the setting sun splashed a vibrant pink wash on the snow of Mt. Hood rising eleven thousand feet to the east of the city. Justin liked Portland.

"I thought you had a girlfriend that lived here." Justin introduced the topic when it seemed Tym wouldn't.

"I do. Well, I did. We haven't talked much since my breast reduction surgery last Spring."

"You're what?" Justin screamed dropping the celery stalk from his mouth.

"You heard me. They were too big. They got in my way and I just got plain tired of packing the two of them around." Tym looked casually down at her shirt, somewhat reminiscent of the greater loss her smaller bra size represented. "I saw her once last month at the Club 927. It's a lesbian bar not far from here. She seemed to have grown quite comfortable with our distance. I think her new friends helped her get over whatever it was she needed to get over." She chewed nervously on the cocktail straw. "You know, though, we never actually called it quits. My father reacted and I reacted and Tara reacted, but none of us could bring ourselves to admit that it was over. Who knows? Maybe it isn't."

"Her name's Tara?"

"Yeah. I've always liked that name."

"You need to resolve this. It isn't healthy to walk around with loose ends. What's her number?"

"Her number?"

"Her telephone number," Justin insisted. "We'll have her meet us tonight for a drink and you two can figure this out."

"You mean, spend the evening here? -Out?" Tym let Justin take credit for the idea of staying long enough to taste the gay night life of Portland. Besides, she wanted to see Tara. "That's fine with me if that's what you want to do."

"Need to do, is more like it. I've been in Seaside too long, and that's not healthy either. Is there a mixed place in town where we could go together?"

"There's the Embers. It's the biggest bar this side of Mt. St. Helens."

"Well, go call her. Set it up!" Justin ordered another round of Bloody Mary's.

Paddy lead his oldest son behind the house to the Paddy needed to speak to Michael before Michael river. was confronted with an opportunity to speak to anyone else. The ground fog turned to drizzle as large sections of sand collapsed into the Necanicum along its banks. The tide had peaked a few hours earlier setting a high water mark for the month of November. Tides would gradually increase during the winter storm season but hibernating Seaside most likely wouldn't take notice. Like every winter, the coastal mountain range held every storm a western prisoner that did its time in the lower atmosphere above Oregon's north coast. It was the miserable season in Seaside when drapes were pulled and firewood was stocked and dry goods fell off overloaded pantry shelves. Paddy moved to place his arm around his son's shoulder but Michael jumped ahead to save a sand dollar from the greedy surf.

"Come here. Let's talk. You know it's been awhile," Paddy admitted.

"I know."

"You must have a thousand questions, don't you?"

"About what?" Michael didn't need to act naive. He was. The events of his young lifetime had instructed him to operate with little outside influence. He had learned early that the more he knew the more he was accountable for and he couldn't answer for his father's CURNES WHITEWASH Page 145

actions. It was easier to ignore his mother's attempts at explanation and her updates of prison status than to be responsible for the entire knowledge of his father's transgressions. But Michael had spent two years in a semi-public school on a naval base in The City and he learned, through peer instruction, of the awful acts of his father. He had visited his father in prison. He had celebrated his return and he had attended his father's funeral. A thousand questions? Michael could only ask himself one and that was -Why?

"About me, your new school, your new name."

"So?" Michael tossed his sand dollar back into the ocean. He'd been used to having things taken away. He wasn't about to commit any new feelings of possession now. "Why do I have to change my name?" Michael squinted at his father with eyes that wouldn't trust what they saw for a long time to come.

"You understand why I was in prison, don't you?"

Michael shook his head. "Because you killed two men after I was born."

"Yes. I killed two men who had been doing very bad things for The City and for America. But I was punished and had to spend many years in jail. Do you remember when I came home from the prison?"

Michael thought a moment. "We had a party. Then you went to Ireland for the longest time. Now, were you still being punished then?"

"No, Michael. Not really. But you see, by doing what I knew was right, by killing those two men who were doing bad things to the rest of us, I made some enemies and they said they wanted to kill me. I spent two years hiding from these people. I stayed away so these people wouldn't hurt you or your mother when they tried to kill me. Does this make sense to you?"

"I guess so." It had never been explained quite like that but it was an acceptable explanation by an eight year old's standards.

"When I got tired of hiding, your Uncle Harry came up with a plan to get our family back together like it should be."

"He's not really my uncle." Michael stated with confidence. "I don't know why we've always called him that."

"Well, he might as well be family for all he has done for us. I love him as a brother. We have a lot to thank him for."

"Mom doesn't think so."

"What do you mean by that?" Paddy said reprimandingly.

"Nothing." Michael shrugged.

"You remember how you and your brother and sister and mom thought I was dead? That was Uncle Harry's plan. He made everyone think I was already dead so that we could be together and nobody would ever hurt us. We all have new names so we can stay together. Do you understand all of this, Michael."

"I think so."

"Do you like being called Michael?"

"I know a lot of boys from my old school with that name. I guess it's okay."

Paddy knelt in the wet sand in front of him. "It's very imporant that you never use your old name again. Do you understand this?"

"Yes."

"If you forget, it could mean that we wouldn't be able to stay together as a family, and you know how important that is don't you?"

"Yes."

"Alright then. Did you notice the nice sign on your bedroom door?" Paddy quizzed his son.

"Yes. It says Michael and Jonathan's room."

"That's right. And what about the sign on your sister's room?"

"It says Kimberly's room." Michael smiled.

"Very good. That will help you remember. And what is our last name?"

"Wh-"

Paddy interupted him. "-Our new last name?"

"It's hard to say." Michael looked away from his dad.

"Not really. Here, look." Paddy took a stick and wrote in the sand. "It's real easy to sound out. CAV-A-NAUGH. Now, you say it."

"Cav-anaugh," Michael repeated. "Cavanaugh," he recited with confidence.

Justin and Tym reached The Embers a little after eight and were forced to park nearly two blocks away. It was Wednesday night in Portland and show night at The Embers. The hundred seat mini auditorium inside the club's entrance was packed in anticipation of the nine o'clock curtain. Tym and Justin edged their way to the bar stretched along the bricked wall to their right. Once they got within shouting distance of the bartender, Justin ordered two Henry Weinharts and Tym snagged three seats close to the stage. The bar, itself, was a sprawling tropical fish acquarium with hundreds of brightly colored fish and a mannequin submerged in a studded leather wet suit. Justin's heart pumped faster than it had in weeks. The special lights, the noise, the smells of cigarettes and dance floor fog, the sight of Levi's and rolled up T shirt sleeves, blondes with blue eyes, brunettes with moustaches and wall to wall muscles. Almighty God, were the bodies ever

developed in this place. Whether it was to the glowing credit of long winter workouts or to genetic blessing, Justin was thrilled with the buldging abundance. He carried the beer to his seat grinning.

After the hour-long extravaganza of live performers, Justin wandered by himself deeper into the club where he discovered three additional bars and an oversized dance floor all buzzing to capacity after the main event on stage.

There was some sort of gay sophistication in the Northwest that simply out-classed the usual gay meccas of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Female impersonators took more time with their make-up, the decor didn't incorporate a shred of silver lame, and not one singer stooped to lip-sync. Justin quickly learned that everybody said hello to everybody and he found it hard to identify a single head game in progress. It was a healthy environment and a remarkably new experience for Justin since he had prepared to settle for the normal, seasoned bar scene. He leaned against a brick column at the edge of the dance floor. Under a soft light he sipped his beer.

Justin didn't wonder how the light illuminated his blue eyes or how his button down shirt hung on his broad shoulders or about the position of his crotch in faded Levi's. He didn't worry about the jaded stares that came from the empty eyes and teeming shadows that surrounded him. He must be getting older, he thought silently. Yeah. That was it, alright. He smiled at a passer-by and eventually followed him to the bar to order another Weinhart.

"Can I get that for you?" the man asked him. "It's not necessary, but if-"

"I'd like to."

Justin nodded, as it was his custom to be on the receiving end of countless drink offers in the past, and thanked the man. The bartender took his time with the transaction content in watching the familiar scenario act itself into the ground. The man smiled and returned to the shadows without saying another word. Justin looked to the bartender who had clearly witnessed the same maneuver before.

"He does that sometimes, but not often," the bartender reassured him. "Frankly, I'm not sure why he pulled that routine on you, though. You don't strike me as the type that stays on the hook, if you know what I mean. In fact, I'd call you a wriggler, myself."

"A wriggler?"

"You know. The worm that wriggles off the hook to pursue other interests." The bartender smiled.

"I'd say thank-you but bait is bait I'm afraid."

"Please, I meant that as a compliment," the bartender tried to retrieve him.

"Then thanks," Justin yelled over his shoulder and returned to his spot next to the dance floor. For no reasons other than raw attraction and admitted curiosity, Justin visually searched the shadows for any recognition of the character who had purchased his drink. The bar was peaking with activity and it seemed unlikely that Justin could positively identify anybody. Then the black lights flashed to his assistance drawing the white hooded sweat shirt out of the dark. Justin smiled and raised his beer in reinforced appreciation. The sweat shirt looked away instantly and vanished into an adjoining room. Justin shoved his way in the direction of the last sighting determined to wage a cruise of attrition. When his reconnaissance proved fruitless he circled back to his primary position and eagerly waited out his next appearance. Bingo! -On the dance floor in front of him, the sweat shirt danced with a bearded partner to some Madonna medley of hits. His dedication to the beat was admirable as he spun and rocked his body to the delight of his partner who would have been wise to leave the dance floor to those more qualified in interpreting the music and using the space. Justin was a great dancer and while the DJ in the elevated booth ran through his musical inventory trying to come up

with the selection that would get Justin on the floor, Justin personally resolved to decline all offers to dance except the one that would eventually come from the hooded sweat shirt. He remained confident.

After a lousy record mix, the floor cleared in awkward protest. Justin watched his man disappear into the bathroom; -sweat check, he deducted. He suddenly emerged too soon after entering to have relieved anything other than his doubted appearance which had held steadfast in Justin's opinion. His hair hadn't lost control, his eyes remained invitingly brown and the pursuit continued. He walked back to the bar for another club soda and the bartender, desperate to recover points with Justin, informed the sweat shirt that his drink had been taken care of in advance. They both looked at Justin who was being distracted by another would-be prospect with the oh so-clever opening line, "how does somebody get the opportunity to meet you?"

Justin always extended superficial courtesy, taking every obtrusion as a form of flattery, but by the time he could redirect his attention to the bar, the sweat shirt had slipped away. Justin poured the last of the beer down his throat and walked to a trash can. Upon returning to his claim, he found it invaded by the sweat shirt. That was subtle, Justin thought. "How's it going?" the sweat shirt asked. "Great," Justin confided, "and with you?"

"I'm having a super time."

"Yeah, I bet you are. Enticing young men with proffered liquor, psycholgically persuading them to submit. -It works."

"What can I say?"

"You can say your name so I can stop referring to you as the white sweat shirt."

"Glen Getty, and you're-"

"Justin. Justin Winter." Contact. Shake.

Relax. Justin walked himself through the formalities.

"Another beer?" he offered.

"Doesn't work now that you've been exposed but thanks anyway."

"What does work?" Glen persisted.

"Tell you my vulnerabilities? Not on your life! You need to figure out somethings by yourself, you know."

"Would you like to dance?"

"Have you rested?"

"I've had a breather. What do you say?"

"Let's dance." An audible sigh of relief came over the DJ microphone and a thumbs-up rose from behind the bar. Justin felt he had conquered Portland. Portland trembled under seige. It was a powerful good feeling.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"You'd better go upstairs and get ready, you two. Gillian and I can handle the rest of this by ourselves," Tym thoughtfully advised Justin and Paddy as she carried the last of the rented chafing dishes to the buffet table. She had yet to get ready herself, but it seemed to her much more imporant for the proprietor and his assistant to be on hand when the doorbell rang, than the village dyke who just happened to be catering Seaside's most talked about social event of the winter season.

Paddy had flip-flopped all week and finally reversed his dinner buffet to a brunch theme that would highlight actual menu items from the new bed and breakfast. Justin had remained flexible enough to oblige his every whim and manipulating enough to get what he wanted in the first place.

Tym wasn't exactly at ease with Mrs. Cavanaugh as they had only functioned once prior to this grand open house, as Paddy referred to it. She and Margaret had would ever provoke a hard-on at his age, regardless of the improvements he could stand to investigate. Justin touched up his black shoes with a rag as Paddy showered. He had always hated formal shoes. Of all the designers in the world, why couldn't one invest some effort in fashioning realistic formal footware. Formal shoes looked absolutely, well, - retarded, to Justin, though he hated to use that word anymore after learning about Cavanaugh's middle child's special situation, but it was true about the shoes. Justin glanced at the children's pictures on the dresser across from the bed. That Michael was sure a sharp kid, though. Justin had taken him to the aquarium on Sunday; -a creepy place really, but Michael had found it fascinating.

Originally built in the mid-Twenties to serve as one of the several resort natatoriums in Seaside, it became an official tourist trap in 1937 when the pool was converted into individual tanks and ponds. A six inch pipe was laid underbeach to a pump seventy-five yards out in the surf, which churned several hundred gallons of fresh seawater through the tanks during high tide. The barnacled pump, three feet above the sand at low tide, was now about as much of an eyesore as the acquarium itself. Entirely black inside, to accentuate the lighted tanks, specimens lurked eerie and old behind glass and in sunken pools in the concrete floor. One exhibit in particular, had raised the hair on Justin's CURNES WHITEWASH Page 157

genitals. It was the Giant Pacific Octopus, dangling in three feet of sea water, in a hole in the floor, without a lid. If properly motivated, Justin quickly deducted, it seemed it could flop one of its giant tentacles on the slippery concrete and pull a child or nonsuspecting adult right in there on top of him. Justin guarded Michael and steered clear of this aspect of that acquatic dungeon. While Michael fed smelt to the playful harbor seals in the front tank, Justin managed to introduce himself to Keith, the resident oceanographer, and promptly catalogued that male specimen in his file of Seaside residents under thirty, -just in case his Portland connection was ever severed.

But as it turned out, Glen Getty, Justin's Portland acquaintance, was on his way to Cavanaugh's opening gala, at Justin's invitation. They had learned so little about each other on their walk to Tym's pickup and during their subsequent romp in the back of it, that Justin felt this might be the perfect opportunity to cosummate the non-sexual aspects of their budding relationship. Tym disagreed offering her personal lecture series on common sense and Justin's sudden lack of it. And to make matters more interesting, Glen was to be the celebrated first guest at Cavanaugh's Bed and Breakfast by the sea. The reservation had been confirmed by telephone only hours before by Paddy who committed the secondary master suite for the occassion, not knowing the relation between his first guest and the chef of his establishment. Justin reassured Tym he would play everything by ear. She had commented how that would be a change from his usual conducting of activity by penis.

Tym had become a little too protective of Justin for his normal parameters of operation and he'd noticed the same extended wing on Margaret. They must be up to something, he figured. He'd come across manipulating women before and he knew the signs like he could read their monthly menstual maps, and he took the detours prescribed by years of rough roads through both imposing territories.

Paddy emerged from the steamy bathroom drying his hair with a towel that only covered his eyes. Justin copped his peak.

"Your turn, Sport," Paddy said through mounds of terrycloth. How are we doing on time?"

"Short," Justin blurted out, and he wasn't referring to the time. He stripped to his skin in confidence and walked past Paddy to the bathroom. It was simply astounding he had ever turned a crop with that meager excuse for a hoe.

"Ta-dah." Paddy yelled at the top of the stairs. He and Justin were decked out in their black and whites, red ties and cummerbunds, and -dorky formal shoes. Tym and the Cavanaugh clan clapped enthusiastically from the lobby below.

In her new red dress, Gillian led Tym to the guest bathroom while Paddy instructed the child labor on the importance of party manners. Justin inspected his culinary spread of potato crab cakes, peach and oat bran muffins, grilled grapefruit and assorted juices prepared to install their services in the making of wonderful champagne mimosas. It was a simple spread but it freed Paddy and Justin of the laborious tasks of serving to the hundreds they expected.

The doorbell rang.

In another hour, Cavanaugh's was alive and breathing with borrowed lungs. Paddy was indeed thankful for this opportunity of freedom and prosperity. Seaside had the cleanest air he'd taken inside him for nearly half a century and he held every breath with gratitude. Finally, he would be able to enjoy the good years he had worked for most of his life. They were earned. He knew that much.

Justin had met most of the City Council and Mayor, David Donaldson, inside the first hour. The mayors of neighboring towns mingled with local business interests, and the general manager of the 112-room Shilo Inn made small talk with the corporate developer from Holiday Inn who planned to build a larger resort high rise on the other side of the turnaround. Since early last year, The Shilo had enjoyed the reputation of new kid status on the Prom, but Holiday Inn had long had its eye on the block. The Shilo G.M. underplayed his occupancy statistics, fudged on his average daily rate and complained about winter revenues in a sorry attempt to discourage the man from Memphis who knew better. He'd just spoken with the mayor.

Justin quickly tired of the shoulder rubbing and resort town chatter. He gave up on his attempts to corner Paddy for The Signal photographer and slipped out to the back deck. Tym retired her punch ladle and followed him.

"I wonder what's keeping Glen," Justin thought out loud. "It's just as well he doesn't show."

"Tym Green! You've said enough on this topic already. I happen to like him."

"Justin. Dear," she implored him. "He's just too shallow for your intellect."

"And what do you know about him that qualified you to disqualify him?" Justin thought he may have confused her but Tym picked up the question.

"His sole ambition in life is to design furniture." "The world needs furniture," Justin reasoned. "And that gives him a purpose on the planet, I suppose?" Tym didn't want to argue, really. It's just that Margaret and her escort were due any minute. In fact, they'd just walked through the front door of Cavanaugh's and were speaking with Gillian and Paddy about Michael. Tym couldn't help but feel Steven Bergman better complimented Justin's karma. And karma was important. Tym knew a great deal about Hinduism and the successive phases of one's existence. It was obvious Justin had transcended many lives to be with Mr. Bergman. His aura was pink and signaled collective mergers in all facets of his being. Or did pink mean he was pregnant? Tym admitted confusion when it came to the aura code but she meant well.

Back inside the inn, Gillian sincerely asked how her son was dong after the first week of classes at Seaside Heights Elementary. Mr. Bergman had hoped to avoid that issue until he had spent more time with his confused student, but Paddy pressed him for his evaluation.

"To be completely frank, I know your child has a great deal of potential locked up inside him. I hope to draw that out beginning next week when I start a new project at the school rejuvenating a closed stream-bed for eventual spawning by the coho salmon." Mr. Bergman tried to listen to himself as he spoke and could not shake the fact he was coming off like the stereotypical elementary-science-teaching-nerd. He shook the hair out of his eyes and adjusted his delivery. "Of course, it's going to take a lot of work but I want to target Michael to be my teacher's aid with the project. My guess is he came from a much larger school in British Columbia and all he needs here is a little responsiility to offset the drastic change environment. As I remember myself, Fourth Grade is tough on any kid. He'll come around." Mr. Bergman looked at Margaret who was extremely pleased with the confrontation.

"Mr. Bergman's coho project," she contributed, "has already received state supported attention. The stream he speaks of, runs through a ravine on the school grounds. On the nicer days, he will begin the great task of clearing the brush and creating spawning ponds." She smiled at the senior Cavanaugh's. "It's only educated speculation at this point, but all of us are optimistic that once the first batch of coho eggs leave the stream for the ocean, we'll have a reoccuring cycle each year when they return by instinct to spawn at our school."

"It's a roe of eggs, if I may correct you, Mrs. Sheridan. -Not a batch." Mr. Bergman placed his arm around her shoulder. "If we're ever to be perceived as expert biologists in our field," he reminded her, "we'll have to start using proper terminology."

"A roe of coho eggs, then." She took the correction gracefully. "Isn't he a firecracker?" She pinched Mr. Bergman's cheek and smiled. CURNES WHITEWASH Page 163

Gillian hadn't heard a word either of them had said. After the mention of British Columbia, her mind involuntarily scrambled with the confusing details of their cover-up. She shook nervously, anticipating a direct question for which she would certainly supply a contradicting answer. "May I take your coat, Mrs. Sheridan?" She disappeared upstairs in the bedroom where she splashed water on her face. She took her time re-applying what little make-up she used. A lot of good her attempt to keep life simple, had done her. Life had a vicious mind of its own and it didn't take suggestions for improvement. Gillian had abandoned all hope of ever influencing her own destiny. Above the laughter from downstairs and beyond the guardrails of deceit, she was steering dangerously out of control. She actually looked forward to the eventual impact of her lies with the foreboding reality of her rotten luck. That was the one event she knew to count on.

Tym gave up on Justin's warped perspective of Glen's contribution to society. Justin wasn't a fool but Tym wasn't convinced he had returned from Portland with both feet on the floorboard. She knew he was a desperate romantic. Most single people in Seaside, were. If only she had the chance to pitch him another option. He'd already swung his bat once with closed eyes in the back of her Toyota. Steven Bergman would either improve his vision or his batting average. Tym spotted Margaret and Steven in the dugout. She rushed inside to explain the line-up.

"You two are certainly fashionable this evening, and late at that," Tym scowled in jest.

"We had a bite at Dooger's. The razor clam special with fries." Margaret patted her grease-lined stomach.

"There is a ton of food here." Tym accepted no excuses. Margaret took a look around. "There's tons of breakfast here. We're working adults and we require dinner."

"Here. Then at least hold a muffin. Justin would be crushed. He's been baking since five o'clock this morning."

"Alright, Dear. For you, I'll display a muffin." Margaret reached for a napkin. "Where is Justin?" She passed a muffin to Mr. Bergman.

"He's on the back deck."

"Tym, you know Steven, don't you?" Margaret suddenly realized she had allowed the shoulders of their plan to carry the assumption that all parties concerned were all parties introduced. She apologized. "This town is so small, I just assumed..."

"Actually, we do know each other," Tym rescued her blubbering pardon. "Mr. Bergman was kind enough to coach me to the woman's first place finish in the Trail's End Marathon last February."

"And my muscles still feel all twenty six miles and 385 yards of that blasted race! I'm lucky to get through a wimpy 10K anymore. We worked hard for that one, didn't we, Sweetheart?" Steven kissed Tym on the cheek as they hugged in remembrance of the long hours they had logged training for that event. "And may I say, you still have the nicest pair of legs on the coast." Margaret cleared her throat. "-Present company exluded," Mr. Bergman added acknowledgingly. "Are you still running, Tym?"

"I started training for the Cascade Run-off this Spring but I twisted my ankle running on the beach and had to scrap my plans."

"What have I told you about running on the sand?" Steven held a frown but gave in to an eventual smile.

Margaret wanted to get mating season underway and blew her bugle of intention. "I'd love to leave you two to discuss shin splints and blisters but I can't find the powder room on my own. Tym, do you mind showing me the way?" Margaret flashed her a wink as Steven reached for the champagne.

"Of course not. Steven, if you'll excuse us, we'll catch up to you on the back deck in a few minutes." She sketched a mental diamond for her team. Batter up!

Steven shook his head and took a bite from the

peach and oat bran muffin. Tym's and Margaret's dresses spun in a blur of pastel color and raced up the stairs.

At least one hundred people took up introductory space around the inn. Paddy and Gillian started one walking tour after another and the children took turns answering the doorbell. Michael introduced them by name as he had been instructed, never wandering from his practiced spiel:

"Good evening. Welcome to Cavanaugh's. My name is Michael Cavanaugh."

Justin stood alone and leaned on the deck railing. The Necanicum River rushed diligently across the beach under the guiding eye of the November moon. It bothered Justin that Paddy could openly entertain in this innocent and undisturbed setting, glued, as he certainly was, to conspiracy or murder, Justin hadn't decided. But Paddy had his hands full with a cover-up. British Columbia? A seafood packer? Not in this lifetime. Cavanaugh was riding a wave in Seaside. -A wave Justin planned to beach. He smiled at the moon and silently asked for gravitational assistance. He knew the moon had turned its share of waves.

"Excuse me." Steven made his presence known. "Is this railing taken?"

Justin broke his lunar trance and turned toward the

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open french doors. "Not at all," he said casually. Their eyes widened. "There's always room for one more." Justin straightened his posture and inflated his chest with one long, admiring breath. Steven's hazel eyes had just upped the ante and Justin showed his hand. "I'm Justin." Steven shook it.

"-Steven," he offered.

Margaret and Tym crossed fingers with white knukles as they watched from their vantage perch in the bedroom window directly above the deck. Tym chanted in a whisper. "Hey batter-batter, swing!"

"Are you from here, -in Seaside?" Justin grabbed at the chance for small talk.

Steven shook his head. His dark eyebrows raised slightly and the evening breeze tossed a curl of his brown hair onto his forehead. "-You?"

Justin buried his hands deep in his tux pockets. "For the time being, -yes."

"Cavanaugh's is a nice place. Your tuxedo suggests you might work here of that you just overdress for small occassions." Steven smiled without looking away.

"Employed and overdressed," Justin admitted to both counts.

"Well, you look good in a tuxedo," -Steven pitched.

Paddy's voice rose over the crowd inside the lobby to announce the arrival of Cavanaugh's first official overnight guest.

"I'm sorry, Steven. Please excuse me." Justin patted his shoulder as he walked past him through the doors. Tym cursed in the bedroom above them.

"Strike one!" She and Margaret tripped over their dresses running to the stairs. From the landing they saw Justin making his way to the front desk to join his boss for the announcement. Steven leaned on the railing, kicked the post and went inside to join the crowd.

"If I can have everyone's attention for just a moment, please." Paddy waited for the crowd to settle. Glen stood by in a linen suit unsure of all the attention. "I want to thank each of you for coming to the mouth of The Necanicum this evening to help us celebrate our grand open house. Cavanaugh's is a bed and breakfast. My wife, Gillian, and our three children hope you will remember Cavanaugh's when you have company in town or when you want to treat yourselves to a weekend alone. We're thrilled to be in Seaside." Paddy hadn't spoken in public since his days as a politician on the board of supervisors. He had missed the sound of his voice as it influenced the masses. He had always held speaking as a power second to none until that November when speaking failed him, when ears refused to listen and when those who couldn't see his viewpoint were reduced to those who would never see again. He lived to command a crowd,

if not by words, then by his actions.

"So help me welcome Cavanaugh's first overnight guest, Mr. Glen Getty from Portland."

Justin smiled at Glen from across the desk, Tym's mouth flew open and the crowd clapped. Glen accepted the pen Paddy handed him and signed his name on the registration card. Gillian took an imprint of his credit card and little Kimberly handed him the key to his room. Glen walked directly to Justin and threw his arms about him in an unexpected display of affection. Margaret watched Steven's forehead wrinkle. Tym watched Paddy's eyes grow tight with embarrassment and everyone sensed the sudden awkwardness of the moment. Paddy struggled to clear his throat and announced "There's still plenty of champagne. Help yourselves." He escaped quickly up the staircase and placed the turntable needle on the first groove of the same Irish Folk record that had played all evening. Gillian passed Margaret and Tym on the stairs. She had to defuse her husband. His anger always lurked a spark away from his rage. Gillian nudged the bedroom door and entered the room.

"What in the hell do you suppose that was?" He raised his voice. Gillian shut the door behind her.

"It was probably nothing. Just someone he knows, that's all." She had never said the right things. She wondered why she even tried anymore.

"Or maybe they're faggots! I won't have faggots under my roof! He owes me an explanation."

"Justin didn't do anything wrong. There's really no reason for you to be this upset about it."

He knew his wife could be infuriatingly forgiving. It was a wonder he'd never hauled off and hit her for it. He expected her mind to remain narrow and subservient by marital proxy, but she could be so damned open about things. He suddenly realized that was likely the reason they were still married. "Maybe it wasn't wrong," he conceeded. "But it was damn stupid!"

Downstairs, Glen introduced Justin to his companion for the overnighter to Seaside. Justin tried to mask his shock and to a great extent, his fallen pride. Tym had been right about the furniture bastard. What fucking gall, Justin thought. He had been a suckered trick and he had been replaced, at that. There was nothing special about the queer Northwest. They had their rule-less games like anyplace else. They'd just been playing them better. Justin damned Portland. Where was Steven?

Tym said a hasty good night to Margaret. "They did notice each other," she tried to comfort the principal. Steven walked ahead down the driveway. "Game's called on account of inclement weather. We'll get our rematch." They hugged quickly on the porch. It had turned chilly. Justin happened upon them. "Margaret! I haven't even said hello and you look like you're fixin' to leave."

"One too many razor clams for dinner, I think." She fabricated her exit when it was really Steven who had originally used the upset stomach routine. "I'll see you in the morning, Sweetheart." She kissed him on the cheek.

Tym gloatingly helped Justin package the leftovers as the party dwindled and the lobby emptied. There had been no sign of Glen or Rin-Tin-Trick. They must have gotten an early start breaking-in Cavanaugh's. Justin avoided Paddy who spent much of his time in the driveway thanking departing guests for their support. Gillian put the children to bed. It was a school night for Michael. Paddy wandered into the kitchen.

"Thanks for all your help tonight, Tym. We couldn't have done it without you." Paddy had received information about Tym during the evening in the of-course-you'veheard-about-her style of gossip spoken behind a raised hand to the mouth. The Seaside Thrift Way had an advertised special on Thanksgiving Turkey. Tym Green's 12th Avenue Grocery didn't. The switch was inevitable. "-But Justin and I can handle the rest of this. Why don't you get a jump on the evening. We can take it from here." Paddy reached for the Rubbermaid bowl in Tym's hand. "I don't mind staying." Tym surrendered the bowl. Justin was embarrassed by Paddy's forwardness.

"I'll walk you to your car," he told her, hoping to jam-up Paddy's plans to ball him out.

Justin returned to the kitchen minutes later.

"The party went well, don't you think, Justin?" Paddy set the mechanism on his verbal trap.

"Real well, yes."

"You didn't mention knowing our first guest." Paddy pretended to concetrate on rinsing the suds from the dishes.

"Just an acquaintance, Paddy." Justin lowered a plate into the sink.

"Your acquaintance is up in C-7 and I don't think he's alone. I suppose the fella he's got up there is just an acquaintance too?"

"I couldn't tell you, Paddy. I have no idea."

"Do you think you could tell me that one of them is sleeping on the floor?" Paddy raised his voice with each word.

"If you want to make an insinuation, make it for Christ's sake! I don't have the confirmation you're looking for. What anyone does in those rooms upstairs is none of my business. I just cook breakfast."

"I bet you do," Paddy snarled sarcastically.

"Look, Paddy! What in the fuck do you want me to say? You're the innkeeper here. If you don't like what's
going on there, whatever that is, you have the reserved right of eviction." Justin shook a sudsy finger in his face and instantly regretted what he suggested.

"You're absolutely right, Justin. How 'bout we both go up there and kick those faggots out? How's that sound to you?" Paddy's face was red and sweat ran from his crinkled forehead.

"You're going to kick them out for being gay?" Justin tried to clarify the situation to avoid a confrontation with their first guests.

"Damned right I am." Paddy yelled at full voice storming through the dining area to the front desk where he grabbed the master key from the cash drawer. "Watch me, Justin!" He stomped up the stairs. Justin shook his head unable to believe this turn of events. Paddy pounded on C-7 turning the key. He exploded inside the room. Glen sprang to his feet from on top of his partner, to face Paddy Cavanaugh, in the nude with a very substantial hard-on."

"What the fuck?" Glen yelled.

"Get the hell out of my house!" Paddy's heart lodged behind his Adam's apple. "Move it! Now!"

Kimberly started to cry in her room across the hall. Paddy thought of his children while he scanned the naked bodies as Glen shoved his engorged genitals into his underwear briefs. Paddy was disgusted but Paddy watched every move. CURNES WHITEWASH Page 174

"Bite this!" Glen grabbed his crotch with his right hand and sent an uppercut to Paddy's jaw with his left. Paddy stumbled backwards and Glen's half dressed date slipped past and barreled down the stairs to the front door. Justin wanted to defend his interest but realized he no longer had one. Glen Getty had already proven he could think for himself when he walked through that front door with someone else on his arm.

Justin heard another discernable blow and moved to interfere with this queer bashing in progress. He started up the stairs. There was another punch, another groan and then a thud. Glen must have gone down. Justin skipped some stairs getting to the top. Suddenly, Glen pushed past him on the landing. Paddy was the one on the bedroom floor.

"Thanks for the fucking invite, Justin."

"Listen pal. I didn't hear anyone singing 'It's my party, you can trick if you want to." Justin constricted every muscle in his face and waited for the door to slam below. And slam it did, shaking the walls of the giant house.

Paddy sat on the edge of the burning bed, rubbing his jaw and shaking the sting from his head.

"Are you alright?" Justin entered cautiously.

"Yeah. I'll be fine. That faggot carried one helluva punch, though."

"Well, who'd you expect to find, storming in there like Rambo? -Peter Pan and Wendy?"

Paddy started to shake his head affirmatively but Justin issued a quick reprimand. "Don't even start this bullshit up again. You've done enough crusading for one evening. Even Anita Bryant needs her sleep." Justin helped him to stand and walked him across the hall to his bedroom. "I'll see you tomorrow. I guess I won't have to show early to cook breakfast for our guests," Justin added sarcastically.

"Go home," Paddy grunted.

Ol Cavanaugh didn't kill The City Hall Assassin to avenge homosexuals in San Francisco, that was certain. Justin shrugged his shoulders; -another theory dispelled. Why then, Justin tried to reason on his walk home. Was it a bad debt? A prison hit, maybe? Political motivations or an accident? Justin was more confused than ever and he wasn't certain his sanity would outlast his quest for the truth. Determination and impatience played cut-throat handball inside his skull. It was an even match.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Justin peddled up the gravel driveway leading to Cavanaugh's. The personal relationship between he and his boss had taken in borders of distrust and resentment in both camps. At least their suspicions of one another could boast some sense of occupancy. The business outlook since the grand opening two weeks before, had been nothing more than a grand disappointment. Nobody seemed able to take the off season into account. The lousy weather and the upcoming Christmas holidays reinforced the depressed hibernation of this coastal town. The omened circumstances surrounding the first unofficial guests, who didn't even last until the posted check-out time, clearly seemed to jinx the guest room aspect of their operation. But breakfast had snagged an impressive first week showing.

City councilman, Mark Tresselhoff, had suffered a fatal heart attack over the weekend and though Justin didn't fully understand the correlation, it had been extremely good for business. Mayor Donaldson had practically proclaimed Cavanaugh's his personal Camp David, meeting there every morning at eight o'clock sharp.

Justin had cooked breakfast for everyone who was anyone in Seaside, by the end of the first week. While bussing tables one morning, he had overheard Council President Meek suggest a mayoral appointment of Paddy Cavanaugh to the vacant council seat. The mayor confided his consideration and endorsement of the idea. Paddy had campaigned for no apparent reason since the day he arrived and it had gotten him noticed. Paddy on the council made political sense to everyone but Justin.

Gillian placed a ticket on the counter. "Will you consider frying the police chief a cheeseburger?"

"It's not even ten o'clock," Justin argued. He and Paddy had hammered out a lunch menu and extended the hours of the kitchen in response to the high traffic they had enjoyed during breakfast. Justin knew they would go to three meals a day by the first of the year to offset the deficit created by empty beds, and the idea of working the kitchen around the clock didn't much appeal to him. "Can't the chief wait until eleven like the rest of Seaside?"

"He's sitting with your boss if that makes any difference," Gillian kidded him. Justin had grown fond of

this sort of thing before. But the children, without knowing any of the circumstances, were very effective in eliminating many of the adult stories.

British Columbia was out. Not one of them could provide a single verifiable statistic of their existence as Canadian citizens. Michael conveniently failed to remember anything about his school in Vancouver. He didn't know the Canadian National Anthem nor the date of Canadian Thanksgiving, -two dead giveaways in Justin's detective notebook. He had Margaret squeeze Gillian for her teaching credentials. If she had indeed taught, Margaret agreed, she should be able to turn over some certified proof. None had crossed the principal's desk.

A stab in the dark call to British Columbia Directory Assistance, uncovered eleven listings for Cavanaugh in the Vancouver area. Nothing significant, Justin thought, until the operator told him that only one carried the initial P, for Peter. If they had just moved, he reasoned, the listing should still be on the books. When pressed for the location of their nearest relatives, Gillian tossed out Chicago, most likely off the top of her head. When Justin dialed area code 312, the operator, though intially coopertive, had to admit his inability to count the six pages of Cavanaughs in the remaining two hours of his shift. Irish-rich Chicago wasn't about to provide clues for Justin. Still, he began to rule-out the last name of Cavanaugh.

In three separate spelling quizzes, eight year old Michael failed to spell his last name correctly. When he finally sounded out the monster apellation on paper, he transposed the A and E of Michael. This was not a name he had known his whole life.

There was one other workable clue. Who was Paddy's accomplice? Who had been the driver of that getaway van? Justin guessed Michael knew. He was eager to please Justin, whom he admired, after the flunked spelling tests. He'd talk and then Justin could comlete the straight line border of his puzzle. He already had three of the four corners; a homicide, two suspects, and the cover-up. But he still lacked the motive. Justin decided to focus his attention on the means, for the time being. Asphyxiation. How do you coerce a victim into participation in an asphyxiation? You don't. The assassin had to be dead or sedated before he was placed in the car. In Justin's meticulous deduction, he realized the autopsy of the assassin would open things up, as it were. The medical examination would show significant traces of carbon monoxide in the blood only if the victim were still breathing once he was placed in the car. Justin

distinctly recalled the official cause of death, publically reported, as carbon monoxide asphyxiation. Justin had traveled two weeks away from The City before the press took guardianship of the facts. He needed several clarifications. Justin decided to send for the medical examiner's report. Afterall, that was permanent public record and accessible. Justin was discovering how uncommon public information was in the Cavanaugh household.

It was the 27th of November, a seventh year anniversary for Paddy, a date engraved on two tombstones and a poignant memory for thousands of friends and disciples of the dead leaders. The commemorative candlelight march was scheduled for later that evening in The City. The annual participants were faced with the challenge of gathering qualified support for the cause. Even the memory had been hooked up to some sort of life support system, leaving everyone with the personal decision of sustaining the traditions for which a great many of them weren't even around to accurately remember.

Justin had been folding napkins and setting silverware in preparation for the lunch rush at the Bay Wolf Restaurant where he waited tables acting like the last straight waiter in The City. He was

nineteen in '78. He'd been in The City a little less than a year, had waved the flag of freedom at his past and had known the exhilaration of progress and of respect. But the Bay Wolf Restaurant never opened its doors to a lunch crowd on November 27, 1978. By lunchtime, the mayor and the gay supervisor had been removed from their political offices, dead and in bags. Justin had rehearsed his grief and his shock just nine days earlier when he had joined much of the world on a stage of disbelief and wonder as the deaths of Jim Jones and his nine hundred followers made the lightning quick news wire journey from the jungle of Guyana to the concrete hills of The City. Jim Jones, who had served as a housing commissioner in the mayor's administration, who seldom found he had anything in common with anyone, suddenly, nine days later, had something undeniably in common with the mayor. They were both dead. And the first, openly elected homosexual to any public office in the country, became the first openly homosexual politician to be assassinated while holding office.

The whistle was blown and the gay freedom float slammed into the back of the motorcycle precision riding team of "Dikes on Bikes." The parade of progress had marched blindly onto a dead end street.

Justin remembered November 27th, alright.

Gillian wasn't herself on that anniversary morning. She didn't joke about slinging her husband's hash, she was short with her children and she snapped at Justin's attempt to cheer her up. She knew where she was seven years ago on the longest day of her life. The anniversary reminder was pointless in light of her indelible memory. She paid her daily homage to the incidents regardless of the date.

She had gone to work early to get a jump on the inventory and ordering that needed completion before the end of the month. Their specialty food stand on the waterfront was a political acquisition as well as an attempt to supplement the meager income her husband earned as a city supervisor. He had resigned from his office two weeks earlier and Gillian looked pessimistically forward to supporting their first child with the profits of fast food. Her husband had asked for his job back with the board of supervisors. He had assured her that very morning that things looked good for his reappointment. She drove to the waterfront somehow doubting that claim. Still, she supported her husband. They had been through worse times.

No they hadn't. Six hours after she arrived at work, the phone rang. It was her husband.

She rushed to St. Mary's Cathedral, fighting snarled traffic and the assault of police cars and ambulances on City Hall. He had given her no information on the phone. She drove from the waterfront without listening to the radio. She thought he had actually been reappointed to the board and he had called to celebrate the news. She saw her husband in the front of the sanctuary. He heard her steps and turned to greet her.

"I did it," he told her.

She remembers trying to smile, all the while sensing this meeting had nothing to do with the board of supervisors appointment. "You did what?"

"I made them listen to me," he had bragged in fragmented speech. "I shot them. I think they're dead."

Gillian dropped a breakfast plate on the kitchen floor. Justin bent to help her pick up the shattered pieces of glass. "It's my fault," she admitted. "I'll clean it up," she vowed. When would God clear her mental slate, she wondered?

Justin didn't expect his boss to celebrate the anniversary but he did hope to pick up on some clue of date recognition that would link Paddy to the assassin. The owner of Cavanaugh's had stayed upstairs in bed through breakfast. With his head on a pillow, he retraced his fluid steps of that morning seven years ago. He hadn't thought they would actually stop him at the front doors of City Hall even if the gun on his hip was detected, but he opted for the ground floor lab window anyway.

He'd never killed before, he remembered thinking on the way to the cathedral twenty minutes later. Most men his age had killed plenty. Vietnam had been nothing more than a frustrating excercise in phantom confrontation and he had never killed. He spent seven some-odd years on The City police force and he had never killed. He had seen death on countless occassions and he had thought of people he would like to see dead, but he had never been responsible for it.

The nine shots he fired inside City Hall, were the loudest he had ever remembered hearing. He had now killed for the first and the second time in his life.

"Do you understand each of these rights as I have explained them to you?"

He shook his head.

"Having these rights in mind, do you wish to make a statement at this time?"

He did.

Like a polished speech he had rehearsed in front of a full length mirror at home, like saying the Pledge of Allegiance, or the Lord's Prayer, he calmly and articulately layed out his motive in a twenty-four minute confessional. The short time he spent at the Northern Station where he had turned himself in, was the closest he would ever come to being celebrated with a ticker-tape parade. The question of the year, throughout The City, had been -who's going to get the mayor? The pats of congratulations on his ass and the cheers of support ringing through the station, told Paddy he had answered that question and then added the faggot explanation point. -He had iced the queer supervisor. It had been the biggest day of his life.

The twenty-seventh of November, the day after Thanksgiving, also signified the first day of the Christmas celebration in Seaside. Gillian had cut an artical out of The Signal explaining the process of obtaining tree and firewood permits from the Crown Zellerback Office on Mainline Road. She had already expressed the early morning idea of pine garland throughout the inn with a giant Christmas tree in the lobby.

"And how do you propose we transport the trees your scheme requires?" Justin asked her logically.

"Why, the van in the garage, silly. I didn't expect you to carry a tree in the book grip of your tenspeed." She laughed out of character having moped around the house for the duration of the breakfast onslaught. Thoughts of Christmas were drawing her out of the Seaside Winter Blues. For a split moment, Justin thought her change in attitude might have been contagious, but he took a brief look around and he was still in Seaside.

It hadn't occured to Justin to consider the origins of their current transportation. He'd never known Paddy to drive in the four weeks he'd been there. Justin walked outside to the garage and lifted the heavy door. There it sat like a familiar classmate from the school of life. Justin ran his fingers down the side panel to the driver's door. He could have never imagined, sitting on the floor of that van over a month ago, that he would eventually finagle his way behind the wheel to expose the conspiracy it had originally transported. But he was getting closer each day. It wouldn't be long now.

The line had moved quickly at the permit office and Justin headed back to the inn. At the intersection of 16th and Franklin, he found himself behind two school busses packed with children. That seemed rather unusual on the day after Thanksgiving, which had practically been a day-off since Plymouth Rock. Justin took advantage of the slow traffic and the time he had saved obtaining the Christmas tree permits to explore the van while he had it out of the garage. While Justin knew the van most likely was not the answer, it had once carried it. He signaled, pulled the van to the curb and shifted into park. He remembered shoving the end of his roach behind the small appliance though he didn't need this evidence for a theory conviction. He mostly wanted to verify the van had undergone a deep cleaning. There were Oregon plates on the van where California plates had once been mounted and Justin had discovered two holes on the back door where the insignia of a California dealership had most likely been removed. He pulled the refrigerator away from the wall of the van. Someone had failed to dust behind the refrigerator. Not only was the recognizable tip of his joint there, but a manila file slid to the floor and opened before him. He examined its contents. His premonition surrounding the pseudonym of Cavanaugh had panned out and sparkled between those manila flaps as demonstrative evidence, not only of fraud, but of a deep seeded need to exist undercover after an obvious struggle living under suspicion. The Cavanaugh family resume meticulously spelled out every discussible fact of their fictious background. Certain items had been underlined or circled indicating repetitious drills and memorization. This file served to eliminate much of the guessing and compromising interrogation to which Justin was prepared to resort. He replaced the file and hurried back to confront the lunch hour.

Cavanaugh's parking lot was stocked to capacity with lunch patrons and those same two school busses had parallel parked along the driveway. Jesus! Justin thought. Were the school busses here for lunch? He raced inside the back door and threw on an apron. He looked over the saloon doors into the dining area pleased to see the normal crowd, most of whom seemed busy eating the daily special which Justin had prepared in advance. His Pacific Club had already become a requested favorite with turkey and smoked salmon on rye. Gillian entered the kitchen.

"Sorry I'm late," Justin apologized.

"No problem. All specials so far. We're low on chips though. I thought I might run by Tym's this afternoon and pick up a few things."

"Great. I'm sure she'd be glad to see you. Paddy up yet?"

"He's out there having lunch with the mayor. You know, I hate to say this but it looks like he might land that city council appointment afterall."

"Does he have any experience in politics?" Justin asked.

Gillian though a moment. "No," she said, comfortable with the honesty in her answer. "No successful experience anyway." She smiled uneasily.

"You mean, he's never actually ran for anything?" "Ran-from, is more like it," she mumbled to herself. CURNES WHITEWASH Page 189

Justin wondered what that meant.

Plate after plate rolled into the kitchen as the dining room emptied and Cavanaugh's patrons returned to their Seaside preoccupations. Paddy strolled into the kitchen and boasted the mayor's decision to support him for city council at Tuesday night's scheduled meeting. Justin couldn't help but roll his eyes and Gillian's conscience aimed below the belt, for her memories had balls to even consider repeating themselves. Paddy went to the cash register at the front desk and made out the day's deposit skimming off a little overhead for a new suit and his political re-entry.

Justin opened the kitchen window above the double sink and finished the last of the lunch dishes. Michael yelled with all of his lungs from among his staggered classmates down on the beach. "Justin!" He waved frantically. Justin had completely forgotten the school busses in the driveway. He untied his apron and pulled the rubber stopper out of the sink.

I'll be back in a minute, Gillian," he told her as he walked through the french doors and onto the deck. He saw dozens of children milling about the mouth of the Necanicum. Six or seven faculty members tried to keep them away from the crumbling river's edge as they watched the tide creep mysteriously back into the

Pacific. He walked along the trail and stood at the top of the dune grass ridge, five feet above the beach. He recognized Margaret's red hair blowing in the breeze. She took time out from her field trip supervision to wave to him as she herded Michael back toward the group. Justin squinted. Was that Steven from the party the other night? The man watched Justin on the sand wall from a hundred yards away. It was Steven! Justin sat on the ledge and dangled his long legs over the bank. It became obvious that Steven was conducting this tour to the beach as the wind carried pieces of his oratory across the sand to where Justin sat. He had thought about Steven for the past two weeks and about his foolishness for abandoning him at the party. He didn't dare ask Paddy if he might have known him by description and it never dawned on him that Margaret would have had association with that polished and handsome man from the deck that evening. But there he was. His red windbreaker rippled in the breeze and he cupped his hands over his mouth in competition with the surf for the attention of his students. Nothing distracted Justin now except the distance that stretched along the beach between them. Steven monitored Justin's position as he spoke of the instinctual spawning mechanism of the Coho salmon who would magically remember to leave the Pacific at that

very location to swim upstream to their emelentary school to have their babies. The children scribbled notes and sketches of the riverbed in their notebooks. A teacher; Justin romaticized the notion.

Margaret kept silent score of their awareness watching as they consciously removed their necklaces of missed opportunity. She folded her hands across her chest and tried to remember when she had witnessed anything more rewarding. She so wished Tym could share her front row seat as the anticipated drama of it all unfolded on the beach before her.

Justin had a feeling he hadn't felt since he had left The City for the first time. A feeling of physical assurance and mental sufficiency that was about to merge in a supernova explosion that would reduce the properties of desire and conquest into love and commitment.

Steven had been unable to sleep for the past two weeks. Justin had been the first man ever to provoke the demolition of his straight and weathered facade. The night they met, the wrecking ball took a mighty swing leaving a painful dent that, after a week, Steven had even considered repairing. But he prepared himself to topple all remaining false hopes, exposing his inner willingness to love another man. Steven knew it was now or it would be never. But while the six guardian chaperones engaged in the supplemental attraction at hand, rambunctious Michael Cavanaugh tripped and fell headfirst into the Necanicum River. Justin sprang to his feet as Steven jumped into the river after his student. Michael was laughing too hard to help himself out of the water and though he was probably never in any real danger, Steven's reaction was commendable in the eyes of Justin; commendable and consequently soaking wet.

Margaret instructed the other faculty members to round up the rest of the students and load up the school busses. She and Steven would walk Michael to his parent's inn for a change of clothes before returning to Seaside Heights Elementary for the remainder of the special school day called in honor of the Coho Project.

Justin met the trio halfway down the beach. "So do you think you're Greg Louganis, or something?" he asked the junior Cavanaugh.

"Who?" Michael replied somewhat embarrassed and with chattering teeth.

"I'll take Michael inside," Margaret winked at Justin. "Do you think Mr. Cavanaugh might have something for Mr. Bergman to borrow?"

Justin smiled at her. "Actually, I still have a change of clothes here from the other night at the grand opening. They might be a little closer to Mr. Bergman's size." "What would the rest of the faculty think if I returned to class in a tuxedo?" Steven asked realistically.

"They'd think you overdressed for small occassions," Justin grinned.

Stories of hetero-bricks and plaster collapsed into the basement around Steven. He was a little startled by the dust the crushing impact created and thankful for the ocean breeze that carried it away.

The four of them walked into the kitchen and were greeted by Gillian.

"What do we have here?" Gillian asked calmly, no longer shocked by the daily occurances in her life.

"A field trip casualty, I'm afraid, Mrs. Cavanaugh," Margaret reported.

"Was Michael not paying attention to what he was doing?" Gillian asked the general question.

"Actually," Mr. Bergman volunteered, "Michael was probably paying plenty of attention to the river which was the purpose of today's field trip."

Michael smiled having been bailed out for the second time, by his favorite fourth grade teacher.

"Run upstairs, Michael, and get out of those wet clothes." Gillian patted him on the bottom.

"You too, Mr. Bergman," Margaret scolded.

"I'd recommend that we consider this holiday field trip concluded today," she added. "Justin, are you able to run Mr. Bergman back to the school?"

Justin looked at Margaret now aware of her direction, and tried to hold back a giant smile. He glanced at Gillian. "I'm not sure we have a vehicle," he half asked, half stated.

"Paddy walked into town. The van's outside and you're welcome to it," Gillian offered.

"Well then, that's taken care of. I'm going to hop the bus back to school. Have a good weekend everybody." Margaret headed for the front door.

"Thank you Mrs. Sheridan," Gillian walked her through the lobby.

Justin took Mr. Bergman upstairs.

"You can change in here," Justin instructed him. "I've got a sweat shirt and a pair of Levi's. Thirty-ones, okay?"

"They should be perfect." Steven closed the bedroom door.

Justin raced down the hall to a spare bathroom and brushed his teeth with a finger and Michael's toothpaste. This was going to be their first unofficial date after his first official screw-up at the party. Mr. Bergman wouldn't be upstaged a second time. There was a reason he had returned to Cavanaugh's, just like the Coho salmon who would eventually know to return to the Necanicum River. Justin knew better than to question fate.

Justin grabbed the keys from the top of the refrigerator and hollered goodbye to Gillian who was upstairs wrestling wet pants off Michael. Steven and Justin said nothing at first. Justin wanted to show Steven the file behind the little refrigerator and tell him about his suspicions of the Cavanaugh clan, and Steven wanted to impart his enthusiasm about his massive science project to introduce Coho salmon to the tributaries below his classroom, but neither man dared to verbally assume that trust and mutual attraction were already working components of their new relationship. After their first encounter resembled more of a slash and burn technique than a nurture and cultivate method of growth and progress, both remained unusually cautious.

"Steven, I want to apologize for the other evening. I didn't mean to make things seem so awkward between us. And by the time I had gotten up the nerve to say I was sorry, you had left."

"It's as much my fault. It was obvious to me that Mrs. Sheridan and Tym had set the two of us up and I had just assumed you were aware of it too. So, I'm afraid I may have been too anxious to play along with it all. Steven found it suddenly difficult to make eye contact with Justin.

"Really?" Justin asked sincerely.

"Yeah. Really. I was pretty forward," Steven admitted blushing. "No. I meant Margaret and Tym really set us up?"

"Sure they did. I mean, as easy going as Mrs. Sheridan is, it's still unusual to function socially with your principal, and no sooner had we arrived at the party, she and Tym had directed me outside to the back deck where you and I coincidentally pumped into each other under the November moon. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the two of them weren't spying on us from an upstairs window!"

Justin hit the steering wheel in disbelief. "I'll be damned. It's just like the two of them too, and you know, I have been seriously racking my brain for the last week and a half trying to figure out where in the hell you came from and where you went to and most importantly, how the two of us could share the moon again. And those two knew it all along."

"Evidently, they did know alright. I wonder why they gave up so quickly though. A while back I ran into Tym at The Embers in Portland but that was right after the accident, I guess, and I figured Tym and I had a common interest in keeping our sexual preferences under raps. But that's the only way Mrs. Sheridan could have possibly found out about me. Tym had to have told her I was gay."

"Wait a minute. Back up. What accident? Justin almost missed the sum of Steven's equation. Steven bit his lip. "I suppose it's no worse than her telling Mrs. Sheridan about me, but Tym was raped a few years ago by the assistant football coach from the middle school."

"No kidding?" Justin asked.

"Everyone in town said Tym provoked it until everyone in town learned Tym was a lesbian, but that came out in the trial. I didn't say a word."

"Don't worry about Margaret knowing about you. It's not as though she's free of controversy, herself, living with me. She'll protect you if it comes to that, but it won't." Justin implied he'd protect him as well.

"Thanks." Steven said looking at Justin for the first time since they had climbed into the van.

Justin turned up Spruce Drive that curved its way through birches and pines before opening into the elementary school-parking lot.

"Turn left here," Steven pointed. "My classroom is right there."

Justin parked the van and turned off the ignition, determined not to leave the parking lot until arrangements had been made for them to meet again.

"It's not a school night, Teach. What do you have planned?" Justin decided it was his turn to be forward and daring. Passively waiting had gotten him nowhere the last time he had seen Steven. He was going to make damn sure there'd be a next time this time.

"I was debating whether or not to take in the Christmas celebration tonight at the turnaround, but there's no argument if you'd like to go."

"That sound's great. I could use some Christmas spirit." Justin was ecstatic.

"So could Seaside. I'll swing by Mrs. Sheridan's place around six. We can walk up the prom to the celebration from there." Steven patted the seat and opened the passenger door.

"Should we invite the girls?" Justin wrinkled his forehead.

"We'll see them there. Everyone in Seaside goes if only for the distraction from winter."

"Alright then."

"See you at six." Steven closed the door and walked toward the outside entrance to his classroom. He had the nicest butt Justin had seen in years and it was in his jeans!

Justin hurried back to Cavanaugh's, jumped on his tenspeed and raced the seagulls along the prom. This was clearly the most spirited he had been since arriving in Seaside. It was almost easy to forget the reason he ended up in Seaside in the first place. One can find love anywhere, he was convinced. The four men he had planned to visit, hoped to impress, and wished to solicit, weren't the only men in the world worth Justin's attention. Even in Seaside, after weeks of walking the streets and waiting for a glance from someone of his generation, he had finally discovered potential for companionship. He saluted the American Flag as he whizzed past the Turnaround. "Steven Bergman," he thought out loud. "In Seaside at that! "I'll be damned."

The doorbell rang three hours later startling Justin where he sat on the piano bench in the living room. He'd been ready and afraid to move for the past forty-five minutes. He stood, pulled his faded blues out of his crotch and straightened a red cardigan sweater over his belt. He stole one last peek in the entryway mirror and opened the door, satisfied with the overall effect. Steven was as well. Dressed in jeans, a white turtleneck and the same red windbreaker from the beach earlier that afternoon, Steven dominated the doorway with his broad shoulders resting squarely on a six foot frame. Eventhough Shakespeare's lovers were always costumed in matching colors, Justin feared that on the streets of Seaside, they might be mistaken for members of a traveling drill team. He greeted Steven and offered to change clothes.

"You look fine," Steven reassured him.

"Sure I do. I look just like you."

"I think we look good together. Don't be silly."

"We'll look just as strikingly appropriate as soon as I put on something else. Make yourself at home. I'll just be a second." Justin disappeared down the hallway. Perhaps it was a little silly, but Justin had nothing to lose by exposure in this small town. Steven, on the other hanger, could lose his shirt. So public wardrobe was important and worth consideration. Justin emerged from his bedroom in a heavy rugby shirt toting his jean jacket.

"There. I feel better already." Justin grabbed his gloves and knitted white scarf off the couch. The temperature had dipped into the low thirties and there had been late afternoon talk of possible snow flurries by midnight. It wasn't the most desireable weather for Christmas Caroling, but residents of the Northwest knew not to expect any better.

Steven dragged his gloves out of his windbreaker front pocket and the two of them left the house locking the door behind them.

"Did Mrs. Sheridan say anything to you about tonight?" Steven asked him, zipping his windbreaker to his chin.

"She asked if I wanted to go with her to the Turnaround but I told her I already had plans. Why?"

"I think she and Tym were at it again this afternoon. She asked me to go with them tonight. I told her I had plans too. Won't they be shocked that we could arrange something on our own?"

"Really!" Justin looked toward the ocean not really knowing what to talk about. The prom was crowded with celebration attendants making their way north to the Turnaround. It was tough to extract any romanticism out of the rigid processional, so Justin kept his conversation to informal inquiries. "How was the rest of your afternoon, Mr. Bergman?"

"Encouraging, actually. I don't know if you're familiar or not with my project at the school to restore a stream bed for eventual salmon spawning," He allowed Justin time to acknowledge the project.

"Michael Cavanaugh has told me all about it. Well," Justin reconsidered, "he didn't tell me his teacher was the cute man from the grand opening party that happened to get away from me. And I take it today's field trip was an examination of the spawning course." Justin anticipated an "A" for his report.

"Very good, Justin." Steven rewarded his perception. "Anyway, Weekly Reader called this

afternoon and they have made arrangements to come to Seaside next weekend to do a feature artical on the project."

"Congratulations. You must be pretty excited."

"Yeah, I am. When I dreamed up the program this past summer, I really had no idea how popular it would be. And the kids are more excited than I am! The only problem with this, though, is that Weekly Reader plans to take several pictures and wants to devote the issue's theme to the life cycle of salmon and the intervention by my classes to improve their spawning environment."

"What's wrong with that? It's a great angle." Justin shared his enthusiasm and felt his pride.

"We only started to clear the stream two weeks ago. Right now, there isn't a whole lot for them to take pictures of, I'm afraid. There's still a shitload of work to be done before next weekend." Steven enjoyed the opportunity to use more descriptive language on weekends when he was away from his students.

"It looks like you made a new friend just in time." Justin threw his arm over Steven's shoulder and pulled him close for a brief moment.

"I think you're right." Steven beamed on the inside, thrilled with the prospecting challenge of becoming closer to Justin. It was turning out to be

everything he had waited for. Always knowing he was gay, carried little consolation in Seaside where he was isolated from validation. His occasional lopsided forays into Portland, only served to improve his desire and magnify his frustration. And Steven Bergman knew frustration. He had been raised in Marion Forks, Oregon, just south of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, in the shadows of Mt. Jefferson to the north and the summit of Three Fingered Jack to the south. His father was the regional supervisor of the Willamette National Forest, until he was killed by lightning while touring a damaged lookout tower during a storm. Steven was sixteen when he attended his father's funeral, seventeen when he accepted his homosexuality, and eighteen when he made his first overnight trip to the City of Roses. The entire episode should have been chalked up to disaster but Steven preferred to credit his patronage at the Olympic Baths to experience.

He wandered down the steps of the discreet 4th Street entrance, rang the doorbell and was buzzed inside the reception area. He had been shaving a substantial beard for nearly a year and was not asked for identification. He took a locker and edged his way past the lounging area and the weight machines to the dressing room. It had been a usual crowded Wednesday night, in pre-AIDS 1975, as Steven fumbled with the padlock, struggling to keep the towel secured about his waist. He was shaking.

Taking a direct path to the steam room, he passed the showers without shower curtains, excusing his passage through dozens of naked men. He pulled the heavy door and slipped inside. Steam barreled through the opening and his eyes took several seconds to adjust to the wet darkness. He sat on a tiled bench and held his breath. The concave rock ceiling dripped with moisture and Steven imagined it to be like the roof of Hell. It was only after minutes did he realize the presence of other men enjoying the steam bath around him. Groans issued from across the small room and Steven sensed the first tinglings of his own erection. The door swung open and the proprietor's voice cut through the steam.

"Extra towels are a buck a piece if you get that one wet." The door closed as suddenly as it had opened. Steven did not say a word. His towel was already wet. To Steven, a reprimand was ridiculously out of place in this basement of immoral commerce. But he, alone, had been purposely singled out, not for his misuse of the terry cloth, but for his use of it in the first place. There was a strict, unposted dress code, and it didn't include towels. Steven stepped outside and threw his security blanket over a sagging clothesline before resuming his spot on the tiled bench, next to the door.

Closing his eyes, he leaned back taking long, methodic breaths. His legs relaxed apart as the therapeutic humidity seeped into his muscles. His guard slowly evaporated into mist. The clanking and complaining of the copper pipes as they expanded in the heat, loaned an interesting percussion accompaniment to the audible sounds of pleasure that lifted with the steam to collect on the ceiling.

Steven didn't flinch when the first hand worked its way up his slippery thigh. In fact, he was relieved it came to him as it was quite possible he was too shy to actively seek the gratification that surely awaited his developed body.

Sweat trickled down his arched back and he licked his lips as the boiler sent another blast of steam from its cranky pipes. He kept his eyes closed tightly not wishing to visually witness or acknowledge the service extended him. A warm mouth impaled itself on his ticking penile shaft, which was ready to explode, unleashing the stores of his youth. Steven suddenly realized he had been mistaken. He hadn't wanted it to be like that. He wiped the perspiration from his eyes and strained them to identify the stranger bobbing between his legs. It was a tubby, bald headed man with fat CURNES WHITEWASH Page 206

hanging off the tiled ledge where he spread himself to hold his position like a suction cup on wet glass. Steven was instantly disgusted by his indiscretion. He pushed his fat head away and excused himself. The steam had dissipated inside the balmy room and Steven could see everything clearly as he headed for the door. He didn't belong there.

Outside, naked bodies participated in a popperlaced dervish. Men teamed up in the shower stalls attracted to raging hard-ons like moths to a patio light bulb. Steven rushed through the long hallway where three hundred pound men lay beached on their frail cots with doors wide open, pumping their limp penises with chubby hands. A man with snake-bite suction devices on his nipples, a leather contraption around his balls to trap any blood that ventured there, and a double headed dildo the size of a baseball bat, tried to block the hall, but Steven apologized as he forcefully shoved him out of the way.

He ripped the elastic key strap off his wrist and freed the padlock. Someone slapped him on the ass as he bent over to retrieve his clothes but he persevered knowing in minutes that he would take the steps out of the underworld and walk freely on the streets above ground, above suspicion and above the decadence that rotted souls below. He must have walked close to an hour, convinced the old man's acidic saliva was eating away at his genitals inside his underware, before he happened upon a McDonald's where he washed himself in the bathroom sink.

He adjusted himself now, while Justin referenced the mighty waves of winter that threw themselves sadistically onto the unforgiving beach.

"They calm down a little during the summer season," Steven answered him. "Maybe we can go surfing sometime off the Head. It's pretty exciting."

"I imagine it is." Justin fiddled with small talk. He wished he could find some way to relax with Steven. It didn't make much sense, obviously being the only hope either one of them had for companionship in Seaside, to be so nervously worked up about it.

They worked their way into the candle bearing crowd on the turnaround. Remote broadcasting from KSWB lead the carolers in a contagious version of "Come all ye faithful." Steven and Justin blended in with full voices. Large cedar wreaths hung on each of the light posts connected by long garland chains. Lanterns dotted the beach below the turnaround as citizens from every household in Seaside converged on the celebrated architectural center of the remarkable 8,000 foot sea wall, erected in 1921.

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Steven crossed his arms on his chest and tickled Justin's side with his fingers. The crowd pressed in to sing "Silent Night." Justin crossed his arms and linked his fingers with Steven's. Even in Seaside, he marveled, squeezing Steven's hand tightly.

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"-All is calm, all is bright."
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It was a typical rainy overcast day in The City for December. Peter Rancott took the early morning express train from across the bay. It was usually a twenty-five minute commute but there had been a delay in the tunnel, stopping all traffic forty feet under the surface of the bay for approximately thirty minutes. Peter wondered why Hollywood hadn't yet capitalized on the basic commuter fears of being trapped underwater in a subway tunnel. It worked for him. He tried to concetrate on the morning's headlines. Another artical on AIDS, he noted. This time the angle veered toward the medical community and the paranoid dangers of caring or handling of AIDS infected patients. That concerned Peter Rancott, but that printed news artical had not been the first time he had thought about the risks of contacting the dread disease. He was a medical examiner at the coroner's office in The City and he remembered his first AIDS-related case. He had been asked to compose the register page describing, in sordid

detail, the history of the corpse. He had not been at ease with his findings of promiscuous homosexuality. Forensics simply had not prepared him for an acute identification with the victims he examined. He hadn't been actively gay for the past several years, but he knew his latent abstinence now, wasn't a guaranteed reversal of his own indiscretions in the mid-Seventies. Someday he'd lay on the slotted metal gurney of the Medical Examiner's office in the Hall of Justice. He prayed he would arrive there the freak victim of a terribly dismembering car accident. He couldn't bare the disgrace of his family if they ever had to face the ramifications of his sordid past.

A punk rocker in the front of the subway car pointed out his window to the wall of the tunnel.

"There's water running out of a crack!" he screamed. The car rocked in terror as passengers scrambled to verify his claim. The punk couldn't contain his acting and exploded in obnoxious laughter. His friends, next to him, punched him in the side for his prank. Peter thought he should be tied to the tracks. But it was of no consequence as the train began creeping up to speed.

Peter walked in the department doors forty-five minutes behind schedule and was greeted by May, the coroner's receptionist. "Running behind, Mr. Prescott?" she asked in a steadily crescendoing voice.

He mumbled some derogatory comment about public transit and tried to smile at the wrinkled lady who was nearly due for an appointment inside, herself. May was tough as iron and probably tipped formaldehyde to stay on the living ledger of the appointment book sprawled open on top of her desk.

"What have I got this morning?" Peter asked.

"Nothing until 10:00, sweetheart."

"Is the coroner in?" It was Monday morning and the coroner usually golfed with the mayor until noon.

"Got here before I did this morning. Must have been rained out," she chuckled. "Here, since you're headed that way, be a doll and take the mail in for me." Her bony fingers reached into the wire basket to snag the rubberbanded bundle. "Inquiries on top as usual."

"No problem. Have a good morning, May." Peter pushed his way through the double swinging doors. His office was down the hall, past the hematology lab on the left. He deposited mail on the desks he passed, throwing the stack of inquiries on his own desk before formulating his tardy excuse and knocking on the coroner's door.

"Good morning, Dick."

"We running a bank this morning, Prescott?" the coroner growled.

"Subway-" Peter moved to explain.

"Yeah, yeah. I was going to mention that to the mayor this morning, but our appointment was canceled."

Peter tried to hide a smile. Everyone in the department shared common knowledge of the weekly golf challenge between the two city officials, but the chief coroner kept a suture on the lips of his secret. All things considered, he was still a politician and he protected his interests.

"Your mail, Dick." Peter handed him the remaining manila envelope.

"Thank you. Oh, by the way, I'd like your help on a Jane Doe after lunch. The preliminaries have me baffled."

"Sure." Peter returned to his desk to sort through the inquiries. Of the seven medical examiners under the coroner in the deparment, Peter was the youngest. And though he'd been with The City Medical Examiner's office for nearly four years, he was still considered an apprentice clerk. But the reams of paperwork for which he had been made responsible, gave him a remarkable mental catalogue of most every case handled by the department since he arrived. This gave him a clear edge over the seasoned examiners who considered themselves ahead by unloading their casework on Peter, who didn't really mind. He stopped by the coffee station for his early morning reminder of where he worked and what he did for a living. The coffee station arrangement had long been May's attempt at office humor and was therefore, understandably macabre. Stirring spoons were stored vertically in a beaker, test tubes filled with cream were stuck in a pan of crushed ice and lion-jaw bone-holding forceps rested on the sugar cube box.

Peter had made a habit of handling record inquiries by the intrique provoked by the postmarks on the envelopes. Today's weren't terribly interesting; four from Los Angeles, one from Cloverdale and one from Oregon. Big deal, Peter thought, as he opened the white envelope from Seaside, Oregon. The applicant expressed an interest in Case 1419. That was odd. 1419 had never been requested to Peter's recollection and it had been a relatively popular case two months ago. Peter understood, however, the relief of The City in having 1419 proclaimed dead by suicide. It had been enough to satisfy The City's craving for resolution after the assassinations of the mayor and the supervisor six years before. Peter had not been a member of the medical examiner's team at that time but he had read the records carefully.

1419 had used nine bullets to complete his executions. Dick Anderson had lectured on the ballistics of these particular bullets as he had been the acting chief coroner at the time of the assassinations. He hadn't been invited to play golf with that mayor. And Peter remembered 1419. He had heard about the suicide October 21st during his lunch break and he looked forward to the arrival of the victim as it was his turn on the rotation to conduct the examiniation. He went home that afternoon reflecting on the life of 1419. He returned the next morning anxious to begin the examination procedure only to find the examination had been completed during the night by Dick Anderson. His notes, in longhand, were sitting on top of Peter's desk for processing, and the body had already been turned over to a funeral director. Peter had never understood the rushed actions of his colleague. 1419 had been cremated by noon the following day.

Peter walked to the Department of Records, in the basement, and pulled the file. He scanned the pages as he copied the four separate reports that comprised the medical examination record; the register page, the autopsy report, the pathology report and the toxicology report. The photocopier jammed with paper and Peter knelt to free the equipment. He examined the last page he had attempted to copy and noticed a

difference in typeset on the same page. As far as he had known, he had exclusively prepared the documents on his own desk typewriter. His signature appeared at the bottom of each page and he remembered the casework vividly. He thumbed through the remainder of the report. On several pages, the different typeset appeared at the bottoms of paragraphs and each addition commented on the same issue. "-Examination of the deceased revealed mild cherry-red discoloration of the skin about the body." "The fingernail beds show a cherry red discoloration." "The pleural and peritoneal surfaces show a bright cherry red discoloration." "The dural sinuses are intact and patent," the period had been corrected to a comma and "contain bright red liquid blood," was added to the end of the sentence. Peter was dumbfounded. There appeared to be no reexamination of the body before it was released and yet there were definite additions to the report he committed to the file. He flipped to the diagnosis page where cause of death was listed as "APPARENT ASPHYXIA DUE TO CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING." Subcategories of this cause were listed; "A. Acute pulmonary edema and congestion," and "B. Cerebral adema and congestion." Added in secondary typeset were "C. Cherry red lividity of skin," and "D. Cherry red discoloration of liquid blood."

Peter completed his photocopying, walked the report upstairs and addressed the envelope to Seaside. He took the file with him to lunch where he mailed the copy in a postal box outside the Hall of Justice.

Retracting his umbrella to fit inside the door of his favorite deli, Peter ordered his usual Pastrami and sauerkraut on rye bread and sat at a table next to a rain streaked window. He propped the open file between his large Coca-cola and a ketchup bottle.

It didn't disturb Peter to encounter the documentation of cherry red blood and skin discoloration in a monoxide asphyxiation case. That was to be expected with any carbon monoxide saturation of the blood over 50%. But he wondered why he didn't think about the obvious absence of these characteristics when he prepared the original report. Clearly, someone else had missed these characteristics the first time as well. That. someone had been Chief Coroner, Dick Anderson. If the coroner had completed the autopsy alone, as Peter was lead to believe by the overnight processing, it was entirely possible he had failed to list these characteristics of asphyxiation. He would remember to bring it up during their Jane Doe after lunch. Peter was proud to have been singled out of the other six medical examiners to assist the coroner.

He was joined in the examining room by the coroner less than an hour later.

"Have you had a chance to take a look at our mystery lady?" the coroner asked Peter who had prepared the surgical tray to the right of the covered cadaver.

"Yes, I have. When did she come in?"

"She was pulled out of Recieving this morning. Time of death must be figured around midnight last night according to the police reports.

"She's pretty badly beaten. Do we have anymore information?"

"I'm afraid not. That's why she's our mystery lady of the week. If it was a rape, we might be able to extract some residual seminal fluid. Shall we begin?"

"Ready when you are, Doctor."

"Be my guest," the coroner handed Peter the scalpel. Peter executed the usual Y-shaped incision and paused to scrath his nose with the back of his rubber gloved hand.

"You know, I had an inquiry for Case #1419 this morning. I thought we'd seen the last of that one, to tell you the truth."

"1419 huh?" The coroner stretched his leg under the bi-level and slotted examination table but could not reach the foot controls of the examination tape recorder. "Let me take a better look," he repositioned himself and place his foot square on the large pause button. "Where was this inquiry from, exactly?" he asked.

"Somewhere in Oregon, but when I was making the necessary copies, I noticed that the report had been altered by a second typewriter on several pages and each entry had something to do with the blood discoloration from the carbon monoxide."

"Well, of course there's discoloration from an asphyxiation like that. 1419's blood showed close to 85% saturation if I remember correctly," the coroner rambled nervously.

"You're absolutely right and I don't know, for the life of me, how I missed it the first time I prepared the reports." Peter handed Jane's liver to the coroner for weighing. He hoped the coroner would explain why the report had been changed.

"Normal at 1700 grams, smooth, intact capsule." The coroner dictated as if the tape recorder were still running. "I think I overlooked some things in my notes of 1419's examination and I remember asking May to correct the report, if I'm not mistaken."

"Well, that makes sense. After we're finished, I'll ask May if it rings a bell." Peter handed him the heart. The coroner placed it on the scales and stepped back from the table.

"Peter, I just remembered an appointment I have

with the police chief. If you'll excuse me? I'll check in on you later this afternoon."

Peter nodded a bit confused. The coroner was leaving him with one of his own cases? Again, Peter was honored by the trust bestowed upon him by his superior, eventhough it struck him as a little strange.

The coroner left the examination room and ran to his office at the end of the long hall. He pulled open his desk drawer and reached to the back for his bottle of prescription valium. He popped two or three and washed them down with the remainder of his cold morning coffee. He called the chief.

"We've got a problem. I need to see you right away."

"Well, what is it? I just can't pick up and leave."

"It's 1419. We may have a leak." The coroner was sweating.

"I'll be right over." The phone clicked on the other end and the coroner laid his head on the desk begging for the activation of his valium. He'd been hooked for years and he didn't treasure the telltale abrasions that would certainly riddle his liver and kidneys. But that was the lesser preoccupation. He couldn't afford to have one of his assistant medical examiners littering the remains of 1419 for public examination. He buzzed May and instructed her to take the remainder of the afternoon off. "Start your weekend," he told her. "And take everyone with you. As soon as Peter wraps up his Jane, I'm closing up shop."

May was most appreciative of his offer. She had relatives coming in from the Midwest and a house to clean. She rounded up the other examiners and relayed the verbal memorandum. The coroner rested on his desktop and monitored the collection of yelps and crys of celebration as the news spread through his department. As a rule, his subordinates were not an emotional bunch but their weekend had just been prematurely granted an hour early, and in this business, weekends and valium were the only affordable salvations.

Harry Lochran made the short walk from police headquarters to the Hall of Justice. The chief had simply told him to handle it.

"Harry?" The coroner struggled to lift his head off the desk. "What brings you here?"

"The chief has a late afternoon T-time with the mayor now that the weather has finally broken. He thought I might be able to assist you."

The coroner was disappointed. He had never really liked Lochran. He had been terribly pushy the night of the staged examination. In fact, he had made the coroner so nervous, it was no wonder he had neglected to adequately record true-to-death characteristics of an alledged asphyxiation. It was hard to ignore the bullet wound in the center of that John's forehead. They had waited weeks for an untraceable John Doe and Lochran's impatience had compounded daily. The coroner had since wondered about the actual origins of their John. Lochran had been desperate enough to ice someone off the street and this particular John matched Cavanaugh's likeness in every way. He had either been worth waiting for or arrangements had been made to eliminate the waiting. After they patched the bullet hole and recombed the hair, his own mother would have been stumped by the likeness. When his brother had arrived at the scene, as planned, to discover the body, he hadn't been one hundred percent certain that a John had been substituted afterall. The coroner was proud of his work and just a little leery of the coincidence of it all. He didn't trust Harry Lochran.

"I suppose this can wait until the chief is free. I just thought I'd bring it up if he had a second." The coroner struggled to appear relaxed. Even with the dulldinfluence of his valium, the coroner was a mess in front of this six and a half foot giant.

"Bring what up, Dick? The Chief would like me to address any problem you have." Lochran sat on the corner of the desk, clearing a space with an oversized hand.

"Well, one of my assistants received an inquiry this morning for 1419."

"And?" Lochran smiled.

"Well, there's a problem that I thought I had taken care of, but my assistant came across it when he was making copies of the report to send out."

"And what problem is that?" Lochran had been completely certain of the perfectness of his organization. It seemed inconceivable to run across an oversight now.

"I guess I was so nervous writing the report and so anxious to get that John into the crematorium, that I overlooked a basic characteristic of carbon monoxide asphyxiation, and that's the cherry red discoloration of the skin and blood. I remembered that several days after my assistant had typed the report and placed it on file, so I made all the necessary revisions and refiled it."

"I'm not sure how something so basic was overlooked in the first place, but you seem to have covered your tracks, so what's the problem?" Lochran's impatience resurfaced.

"I typed the additions on my office typewriter while the original report, typed by my assistant, was

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done on his typewriter. Evidently the typesets are different and he noticed, that's all."

"That's all?" Lochran screamed. He lowered his voice to a forceful whisper. "What kind of fucking operation has a different typewriter for each office, you moron? Where's that assistant now?"

"He's performing an examination down the hall." "Can he hear us from there?" Lochran inquired.

"Prescott usually has the radio blasting so loud he couldn't hear an explosion in the hall." The coroner appeared cooperative. "In fact, I sent everyone home early nearly an hour and a half ago. No one could hear us until Monday." The coroner smiled.

Lochran walked behind him where he sat. "Isn't that fortunate?" he asked the coroner. He reached behind his sport coat for a gun, half-concealed in a plastic bag. "You know we'll have to kill him, don't you?"

"I suppose we don't have a lot of choice considering what's at stake here."

"Smart man, Dick. Do you want the honors?" Lochran extended the revolver. When he noticed the cornoner's reluctance to accept responsibility, he added, "It's your mistake we're covering up here, isn't it, Dick?"

The coroner reached for the gun in the plastic. He carefully removed the wrapping but the moment he threaded his finger around the trigger, Lochran grabbed the coroner's arm, held the gun to his temple and forced a single shot out of the chamber. When Lochran opened his eyes after a reflexive blink, the coroner's head had flopped forward on the desk. Blood had splattered on a framed print of The City on the wall across from the desk and a chunk of tissue balanced on the rim of a styrofoam coffee cup. "Smart man, dick," Lochran repeated, removing the plastic bag from the discharged weapon still in the coroner's hand.

Lochran sighted the distance to the office door, propped the dead man's arm on the desk and dialed the examination room.

"This is Prescott," Peter announced.

"Peter? -Dick. If you're at a stopping point, bring me the file on 1419. I want to discuss it with you further," Lochran immitated.

"Sure, Dick," he responded. "On my way."

"Lochran replaced the phone on the receiver and took the cold gun hand of the coroner and wrapped his own fingers carefully around the hand of his dead accomplice. Peter walked through the door and looked up.

"Hello, Prescott," Lochran said calmly. "We seem to have had a little accident here. "Seems Dick bought the farm. Is that the file on 1419?" Lochran referred to the obvious folder in Peter's hand and asked a second time when he received no answer. "I don't understand. What's going on here, Lochran?" "I told you. We had a little accident. Who's asking for the file on 1419?"

"Some guy in Oregon." Peter noticed the gun aimed at him from the desktop. "Look. I don't know what you're looking for-"

"Where in Oregon?" Lochran interrupted him shaking the gun slightly. "Where?" he yelled.

"Uh, Oceanside or something like that. I'm not sure. Maybe it was Seaside. I'm not familiar with Oregon."

"Thank you, Peter. You've been a great help." Lochran raised the gun above the wire baskets on the coroner's desk.

"Please, Lochran. I don't..."

He fired once and then a second time from his right hip where he had elevated the coroner's arm. Peter tumbled backward into the office door. Lochran checked the wrists of both dead men and carefully left the room carrying the file from Peter's hand.

He had just bettered Paddy's double assassination by one victim. He recalled his first hit for the cause the evening before the suicide. Talk about a dead ringer for Paddy Cavanaugh, he remembered boastfully. But Paddy had actually killed the coroner and his assistant by snooping around for that goddamn report. Lochran figured Paddy was after the life insurance policy naming Gillian sole beneficiary. The insurance company would require a copy of the autopsy listing the official cause of death. That was what that bastard was after, but Lochran had trapped him in the alley with nowhere to run. Lochran planned to intercept the insurance payoff himself, forge Gillian's name and pocket the settlement. It had been his motivation all along. Nearly three hundred thousand dollars would finally even the score for the incredible risks he had taken to provide Cavanaugh with the freedoms he enjoyed in Northern Oregon. He'd be damned if Paddy acted greedy now, after all he had been handed.

Lochran drove directly home and dialed telephone assistance for Cavanaugh's.

Justin had spent every spare hour helping Steven clear the littered stream bed in preparation for the Weekly Reader exclusive that weekend. When the sun went down, the two worked on the hatchery boxes in Steven's classroom. Margaret had granted the final two hours of each day for stream restoration for all fourth graders and limb by limb, bend by bend the mighty army forged a half mile through the overgrown brush to the Neawanna Stream that weaved its way through the inland meadow below the elementary school. Margaret wore a pair of her ex-husbands

General constructions and ten it is in

fishing waders to the afternoon sessions where she supervised the upper half of the stream from the culvert twenty feet below the school access road to the first bend in the stream some 75 yards below the culvert. Justin took control of the mid-section of the salmon run, directing kids 50 yards in either direction and Steven had the task of widening the lower expanses from the Neawanna to Justin's posta Once the kids left the stream to catch buses back into Seaside, Steven and Justin spent the remaining daylight hours in each others company, creating spawning ponds and natural fish ladders over the rougher spots of the stream. Sandcastle Landscaping had donated time and materials to improve the trail that snaked down the steep grassy embankment from the weather equipment across the drive from Steven's classroom to the project floor next to the giant culvert. Embedded railroad ties contained the trail as it curved over the culvert and descended to the eventual location of the hatchery boxes. It had rained most every day and a common cold epidemic took hold of Seaside Heights. Justin and Steven were not immune and carried handkerchiefs in their back pockets. It was routine for the two to retire in front of the fireplace at Steven's Sandhill Apartment and devour a large Canadian bacon and pineapple pizza, as

they compared notes to arrive at the actual number of times Michael Cavanauch had fallen into the narrow stream for attention. And each night for the past week and a half, Justin had casually signified the proper hour for Steven to take him home. And each night they had leaned across the cab of Steven's pick-up for a good night kiss. But this particular Friday evening, they both secretly hoped they would break the overnight barrier. Justin vowed to relax his transportation reminder at ten o'clock and Steven would stubbornly refuse to find his car keys and then pledge his adherance to the Seaside curfew of midnight. As it happened, Justin began his dissertation on his suspicions of the senior Cavanaugh to Steven's amazement. Steven graphically remembered the feelings of substantial loss and setback he experienced with The City Hall assassinations of 1978, alone and suddenly uninspired in the middle of rural America. He slowly eased the door shut on his private closet. But he shared Justin's confusion now as they attempted to provide an explanation for why Paddy Cavanuagh, or whoever he was, wanted the original assassin, dead. They couldn't come up with the motive that would coincide with what they knew about the man who ran the newest and most successful bed and breakfast in Seaside. Justin told Steven of the autopsy report he had ordered from

The City with the hope of learning something new about the case. Justin had no idea his inquiry had left two people dead.

"What in the hell are you up to?"

"Lochran? Is that you?" Paddy asked, instructing Michael to turn down the sound on the television.

"You bet your goddamn life, it's me!" Lochran yelled into the mouthpiece. "I'll repeat, what in the fuck do you think you're doing up there?"

Paddy instantly assumed Lochran had caught wind of his acceptance of the city council position; -an awareness he had not looked forward to explaining. "I'm bored, that's all. I sit around this giant house with nothing to do, and I get bored."

"Well, let me be damned for forgetting to leave behind a monopoly board to keep you entertained. Now, listen to me, pal and listen with both of your goddamn lucky ears. I didn't put everything on the line, for you to stroll along and fuck it up with some careless stunt like this. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?"

"I'm playing it low key. You have my word. No stunts. I promise you." Paddy rattled off guarantees.

"There's no insurance like the coverage we gave you by hiding you up there. Don't be a stupid fool chasing policies that don't exist!"

Paddy took a moment to digest Lochran's metaphorical warning and decided to add to the profoundness of it.

"Don't worry. I'm not planning to run out in the open. I'll stay good and hidden."

Lochran was convinced he had delivered his intended message and Paddy was certain he had understood it. The two men hung up their phones with a greater mutual comprehension for the complexity of their tender situation.

Mr. Bergman kicked off his muddy tennis shoes and took Justin by the hand.

"I don't think I've ever shown you the bedroom," Steven realized somewhat dramatically.

Justin ran his hand over the living room light switch leaving their shattered inhibitions behind in the dark.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Justin stirred from under Steven's hairy leg as the alarm clock beeped its early morning discovery of two homosexuals between the sheets. Justin reached for the snooze button when it appeared Steven wouldn't. Steven did make the effort to press his morning erection into Justin's hip, for which Justin issued an acknowledging groan.

"False alarm," Steven mumbled. "I've got to pee."

"Put your bladder on snooze," Justin commanded directing his own hard-on into Steven's leg. "I'm up for a little review."

"You haven't convinced the teacher that you gained anything from the original lesson."

Justin turned his prominent crotch into Steven. "I think its obvious what I've gained, don't you?"

Steven kissed him on the forehead and disappeared into the bathroom. Justin lifted the mini-blinds behind the bed. It was stilledark the

"Why are we getting up so early on a Saturday?"

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Steven flushed the toilet. "It's a big day for us. You'll see," he promised.

"My first Saturday off in five weeks and I'm forced to start it before the sun does. Isn't that something?" Justin threw the sheets back and got out of bed to stretch.

"What came over Cavanaugh, anyway, for him to give you a Saturday off?" Steven talked in spite of the toothbrush ridding his mouth of the only unpleasant souvenir from the evening's venture.

"He's having his city council rehearsal breakfast this morning. He gets sworn into public service this Tuesday night." Justin joined him in the bathroom.

"I see." Steven took a gray bath towel and looped it over Justin's pelvic flagpole. "I'll start the coffee," he grinned. Justin was somewhat proud of his ability to carry the object without his hands. He started his shower.

Steven filled a plaid thermos with rich coffee, reserving enough starter fluid for the two mugs on the dining room table. Justin rounded the corner with the towel tucked around his waist. Steven patted the front of the towel.

"Half mast? Something die?"

"Yeah, -vour second chance." Justin arched one of his eyebrows. Justin arched one of his eyebrows. "Evidently, in vain," Steven admitted, carrying his coffee cup into the bathroom. Justin followed him as far as the bedroom where he searched his closet for a fresh set of clothes. The sweat shirt and jeans he had loaned Mr. Bergman were clean and on a hanger. He borrowed socks and underwear and waited for Steven on the bedroom deck overlooking the Neawanna Tributary.

The sun stubbornly pushed daybreak over the mountains and into Seaside. There was nothing extraordinarily special about this Saturday unless you happened to be a Seaside Heights fourth grader. Steven and Justin drove to the school, put the finishing touches on the hatchery box and carried it down the trail where it eventually sat on level cinder blocks five feet from the stream bed. Sixty children with assorted parents began arriving on the hill for the special ceremonies and final clean-up before the anticipated arrival of the staff from Weekly Reader and the Coho fingerlings from the Oregon State Fish and Game Department. Steven carefully assembled the network of PVC piping that would carry fresh, oxygen-rich stream water continuously through the hatchery box. A larger PVC receptacle pipe fit below the slightly lower end of the hatchbox for water drainage and the scheduled release of the fingerlings early in the new year. This large pipe led directly to the first man-made pond on the stream. Justin supplied

a small padlock for the release door to prevent an unscheduled and vandal-oriented discharge of the developing Coho fingerlings. But other than this safeguard, the plans called for a public-accessible project and even the hatchbox lids were openable for viewing.

Steven walked through the giant culvert to the other side of the elevated road where the intake pipe that had been secured to the inside of the culvert, waited for the official uncapping. Justin stood on hand at the hatchbox to witness the proper operation of the piping.

"Steady as she blows," Steven hollered down the long culvert. Justin and a few students patiently waited for the first signs of success. Even Justin felt as though it may have been taking a bit too long for the results but slowly, water began to rise through the nylon mesh secondary floor of the hatchbox. Steven splashed through the culvert in time to witness the box fill to its nine inch depth capacity before spilling over the protected lip and gushing through the outtake pipe on its return to the stream. Steven led the group cheer as he looked into the eyes of Justin who had shared the hard work and sensed his pride. A combination of the night he had just spent with Justin and the ultimate success of the Coho Project which he could now share with a significant other, made for the happiest moment in Steven's life. Wonderful red color lept into his cheeks and his eyes began to water as slowly as the stream had filled his hatchbox. Justin nodded his head and understood the emotion.

Above them on the road, a green pick-up from the Oregon State Fish and Game Department honked its horn announcing the arrival of the hatchbox's first three hundred residents. The children raced through the trees and up the path to the parking lot. Their principal rode stately in the front seat between two officials of the service. She left the truck waving as the kids yelled for her like a throng awaiting royalty. She gave an all-knowing glance to Steven and Justin as if to suggest she was entirely aware of the evening's accomplishments between them. Around the curve of the road came an impressive motorcade led by Mayor Donaldson and the entire city council. Steven pointed to Tym's maroon pick-up amid the procession as car doors opened and shut in the parking lot around them.

Even Steven hadn't expected this incredible display of civic support. He'd seen nothing like it since the Seaside High School Seagulls completed their undefeated football season a month earlier. And all for a 2 x 10 hatchbox made of pine and plywood. It had been such a simple idea, really, but Steven had nursed it into an environmental issue that would shape the minds of his sixty fourth grade science students. Steven knew this would be the first tangible contribution he could claim for education. This would be the difference in herding child statistics through the chutes of formality. Steven had managed to corral their youthful imaginations long enough to impart a responsible influence that would have them pass through the gates with a new respect for their surroundings branded on their impressionable and collective conscience. He couldn't help but become a little preoccupied with his objective.

Mayor Donaldson walked across the lot to shake hands with Margaret and Steven. Paddy Cavanaugh followed closely behind, careful not to lose his position amid the impressive group of city council members. He barely acknowledged Justin as he passed by him. It had never been like Paddy to share his civic spotlight. Someday he'd be running this outfit called Seaside which made following, at this point, a bit difficult to master convincingly. But he'd been watching the mayor closely and his dealings with that developer from Holiday Inns was about to nail the lid on his political coffin. Paddy scrambled for a hammer. If he could prove the receipt of substantial kick-backs and the arrangement of zoning loop holes to facilitate the construction of Seaside's newest resort hotel, Paddy could place his name on a November ballot. He relished the thought of a hard campaign and a certain victory.

The Fish and Game Officers heaved a giant plastic tank from the back of their truck. Its pale pink contents sloshed against the sides of the container as they walked it down the path toward the hatchbox. Fourth graders and their families closed in around the mayor who prepared to speak.

"On behalf of the city of Seaside, I would like to offer a special good morning to all the fourth graders of Seaside Heights Elementary, to Mrs. Sheridan, your principal, and to Mr. Bergman, your science teacher." The mayor looked over the sizeable crowd from his slight point of elevation next to the giant culvert. Birds chirped with exictement in the trees above them as the stream gurgled past their little ceremony, unable to stop and watch, but participating nonetheless. The mayor cleared his throat. "Today is a special day and a day to be very proud of your accomplishments. In a few moments, the fingerling salmon in that plastic tank will find a new temporary home in your hatchbox. And in the weeks to come, they will be released into this stream where they will swim through Seaside to the Pacific Ocean. When they are full grown and ready to spawn, they will return to this stream to deposit their eggs in the pools and ponds you have created. So this stream is

very important. As human beings, we are in the habit of naming important things." The mayor reached for the rolled document Paddy Cavanaugh was handing him. "This morning, at a special city council breakfast, the leaders of Seaside proposed a proclamation hereby proclaiming this tributary, Coho Creek, on this, the Seventh day of December, 1985." The mayor untied the red ribbon and unrolled the scroll, displaying it to the crowd. The children clapped with pride and Steven accepted the document from the mayor, shaking his hand vigorously. The Signal photographer snapped a quick photo and then requested a group photo of the students with the City Council. As the group huddled about the culvert, Justin watched Paddy Cavanaugh slip awkwardly to the back of the group where he eventually slouched behind two of the taller members of the council. The flash of the camera bounced off the surrounding pine trees. Justin was certain that Cavanaugh had deliberately avoided the camera. That simply wasn't like his boss, Justin thought. But for one reason or another, he didn't want to be photographed. Justin remembered the same Signal photographer at the grand opening of Cavanaugh's. Surely pictures were in existence from that evening. By Paddy's obvious attempt to avoid recognition, Justin could deduct there were those who could recognize him for the deeds he had done. He made plans to stop by

The Signal Office first thing Monday morning. He still had a few friends back in The City worth tapping and if he could get his hands on a photograph of his boss, one of them just might make the identification Justin needed.

The Fish and Game officers balanced their tank on the intake end of the hatchbox while Steven allowed half of the detained water to escape over the lowered lip. The spout on the plastic tank was slowly opened and a steady pour emptied the Coho fingerlings into the hatchbox. The children cheered once they saw the two inch salmon swimming around the box. The mayor initiated the applause that rose from the forested ravine floor and echoed through the culvert. Steven stared at the wiggling specimens he had requested months before and found it hard to believe the day had finally arrived.

"I would like to make an announcement since this is a day to be proud." Margaret Sheridan rose her hand to get the attention of her students. "Mr. Bergman has done a lot of work on this project and it started last summer with an idea. He had to convince many people that the project would work in the first place, including me. In the weeks to come, as these Coho fingerlings mature into young salmon and are released into the wild, Mr. Bergman will have convinced all of us. I had planned to make this announcement after we returned

from Christmas break, but now is as good of time as any and perhaps even more appropriate. Based on the proposal Mr. Bergman sent the State Board of Education four months ago, which outlined his plans for this project, along with a visit to this hatchbox site three weeks ago by members of the nominating committee," Margaret paused to catch her breath. Steven looked up from the hatchbox. "Mr. Bergman has been selected as National Teacher of the Year by the National Association of Council Districts!" Steven gasped raising his hand to his mouth. Justin's smile broke into impromptu laughter as Steven moved to shake Margaret's hand and ended up in her arms. Again, the enthusiastic clapping of the crowd outdid the rambling of the stream beside them. Justin felt so much an emotional part of Steven at that moment that Steven's watery eyes were fed by Justin's tears of happiness and Steven's racing pulse was augmented by the overwhelming love in Justin's heart. Margaret held him while he intimately shared the moment with his lover.

"Did you know?" Steven mouthed the words more than he spoke them.

Justin shook his head negatively, raising an eyebrow and smiling. Steven just found it necessary to stare at him with eyelids lazy in love. He had to wonder if it were possible to overdose on elation.

Parents led their children back to cars in the

school parking lot and Tym, after spending much of the ceremony, out of public sight behind a tree, retreated to the restrooms inside the school. Accustomed to having her reputation preceed her and being aware of guilt by association, she knew when to keep her distance. It had been Steven's day, afterall. She wouldn't have shown up in the first place if it hadn't been for Margaret's insistence that all hang-ups are nonsense and life is too short for insecurities. She waved at her friends from under the eaves of the building. It had started to sprinkle.

Paddy Cavanaugh made it a point to publicly congratulate Mr. Bergman before loading the city council members in his van and heading down the hill. Steven thanked him, ruffling the hair of his oldest son.

"I probably wouldn't have gotten this far on this project without the help of Michael. Now, here's a kid who's not afraid of getting his feet wet!" Justin laughed, Michael blushed and Paddy tried to figure out why that was funny.

Margaret yelled at the boys as she unlocked the trunk of her car. Tym joined them.

"Don't you have something you want to give Steven?" Margaret whispered into Justin's ear.

"That's right! I nearly forgot."

"You did forget!" Margaret corrected him.

She and Tym provided a distraction while Justin prepared to extract his gift from the trunk.

"Mrs. Sheridan, I can't tell you what an honor it is to have been selected Teacher of the Year. My God, I've only been at it four years!"

"It just goes to show, you don't have to be plagued by irregularity and gray hair before you get recognition in this field. You deserve the honor, Steven. You really do." She pulled him into a hug. "And you know, the National Convention is the first week in January. It's in Sacramento, but it's all expenses-paid. You can't have everything, I guess."

Steven smiled. "All expenses paid? For one?"

"For two, silly. You and Justin could use a break from this town anyway." Margaret watched his face lift with emotion. "Of course it's for two. You think if old man Sullivan would have been selected he would have left behind that fossil of a wife? As sure as there's oil in the tar pits, she would have been by his side when he received the award."

"I was up against old man Sullivan?"

"No, dear. You do not get to be Teacher of the Year by spying on your students through two holes in an opened newspaper while they take a Social Studies test."

"Are you serious?" Tym asked Margaret.

"Quite." She replied.

Steven shook his head in agreement.

"Okay." Justin sounded. "Face him South and make sure his eyes are closed." Justin walked the surprise around the car and positioned it in front of Steven. "Before you look, I'd just like to say, this is a stream-warming present from the three of us, just in case Mother Nature could use a little help in traffic control."

Steven opened his eyes. On a short stake in front of him, two white pickets had been attached. One read "Pacific Ocean" and pointed West and the other read "Coho Creek" and pointed East. Steven's face birthed a smile that escalated into uncontrollable laughter as he hugged each of his special friends.

"Weekly Reader isn't due for another hour. We could hike down to The Neawanna and submerge it in the intersection." Justin suggested.

"That's a great idea. You two care to join us?"

"Thanks anyway. We promised Gillian Cavanaugh that we'd pick her up by noon for the Seaside Craft Fair at the convention center," Margaret explained.

"But good luck with the shoot this afternoon," Tym added.

As the last car left the hill, Justin and Steven scrambled down the trail to the hatchbox.

"Don't you want to hug each one of them?" Justin tried to understand Steven's emotions.

"Yeah, but I can't. The natural oils of my hands would clog their tiny gills and they'd suffocate."

"I meant that figuratively, Steven."

"I know you did." He placed the lid securely on the hatchbox to protect the fingerlings from dangerous ultraviolet rays. "I wouldn't mind hugging you again, though."

"Not until you wash your oily hands, mister," Justin warned.

The two of them ambled down the banks of the stream. The late morning fog blindfolded the tall pine trees, almost sparing them witness as the men stole long and passionate advances from inside the institution of Nature. All of their inhibitions rushed past them, carried away by the desperate fury of the cleansing stream. Atlas hardly noticed their engagement as he proudly tilted the planet toward the sun. They looked no more conspicuous there than the wet moss clinging to the rocks and trees; no more odd than the presence of the sun on a rainy day and no more baffling than the clever bark configurations on the giant Ponderosas. Their love was a fixture of awe and a component of their environment. It had not been a freakish import or a careless introduction upsetting the delicate balance. It was the
fulcrum of all existence, the definition of understanding and the reward of faith. The Nature within them embodied the Nature about them. And so they endulged gratefully amid the dew-dusted grass of natural splendor having known the unnatural, criminal and conspicuous contempt of Man. Even they would return to hating, return to warring, to survive outside of Nature. Bliss be damned for being bliss short-lived.

Justin held the stake in knee-deep water as Steven pounded it into the sandy bottom of the larger stream. They had no success in stabilizing their claim.

"I suppose we could set it in a coffee can of concrete and teather it to the shore." Justin was disappointed by this discovery.

"Or I could hang it in my classroom," Steven suggested.

A horn honked three times on the street behind them.

"Excuse me! Can you tell me how to get to Spruce Drive?" the passenger yelled. It was The Weekly Reader Van, their logo of learning sprawled neatly on the side.

"I'm Steve Bergman," he yelled with excitement. "What?" She screamed back.

"I'm Bergman!"

The driver cut the engine and a crew emerged from

a sliding door.

"Whatcha got down there?" The cameraman inquired. "Come take a look," Steven beckoned.

The city dwellers of publishing fame, waded through the shallow marsh below the bridge where they had parked. Holding the sign at his side, Steven introduced himself.

"We're down here at the mouth of Coho Creek to install a little stream-warming present." Steven boasted of his lover's handmade gift.

"Is that perfect, or what?" the female said, lighting a cigarette. "We'll shoot that upstream, Bart."

"Gotcha," the cameraman replied.

"Now you two, I'm sorry. I didn't catch your name?" The lady pointed to Justin.

"I'm Justin Winter, but I'm not a teacher."

"That's fine, Justin. We'll still use you in the shot with Mr. Bergman. You may not remember back that far, but Weekly Reader is an abstract publication. We don't like to bombard the children with meaningless clarifications. They're not going to know a teacher from a hole in the wall, though I must say, you are definitely the more viable consideration. Now. Hold the sign at a slight angle without distorting the actual directions. That's perfect. Justin? Be a doll and move a little closer to Mr. Bergman and angle your hammer."

Justin moved closer to Steven. "Do you mind me being in the shot? I really don't think it's right," Justin confided.

"Are you kidding?" Steven whispered. "If these turn out, we'll use 'em for wedding announcements. Smile," he said between his teeth.

"Alright. Now, Bart? Get out there in the water and see if you can shoot more toward the bank. I'd like to see a little more of the creek. Let's highlight the convergence, if we can. Okay?" The lady moved behind Justin and Steven to better position them for the new angle. Her cigarette had served its purpose and she allowed it to drop from her fingers into the stream. The butt floated between Steven's legs and he and Justin watched it drift away, beyond their ability to salvage, or much less, comprehend her disrespectful action.

Bart was up to his waist in water and clearly, not the least bit thrilled about it either. He shot a few more pictures, nonetheless, before everyone loaded into the van for the drive up the hill to the school. They wound a few more shots of the hatchbox and the fingerlings, asked for a copy of Steven's illustrated life cycle of anadromous fish, and they were on their way back to the van.

"Should be one of the summer's premiere issues.

We'll send you some advance copies. Otherwise, I'd look for May or early June. Mr. Bergman, it's been our pleasure." They shook hands through the passenger window.

Paddy had tended to the inn through its Saturday lunch crowd. Gillian had run off with the principal of Michael's school and that dike from the market across the river. Paddy had discouraged Gillian's affiliation with those two who always seemed to provoke some new strain of independence in Gillian's otherwise docile and submissive behavior. Gillian had established her destiny earlier that very morning.

"Just because you're out of prison doesn't mean my jail term starts here," she argued. "I'm not the one who needs to stay hidden. You're the one walking around like Jesus Christ after the Resurrection. Don't expect me to live undercover when you won't get within ten feet of a blanket!"

Paddy reasoned her monthly emotion index must have encountered greater severity as she aged. After this week, she'd be fine through Christmas.

The mayor arrived at Cavanaugh's a little after two that afternoon. He re-introduced J.P. Morris, the corporate developer for Holiday Inns out of Memphis, Tennessee. Paddy had agreed to participate in the meeting with the hope of turning solid evidence that would indict the mayor and topple all plans for the ground breaking of Seaside's newest resort hotel. The three men walked through the inn to a patio table on the back deck facing the ocean. Paddy offered coffee.

"Now, Cavanaugh, I've decided to take you under my wing of confidence on this one. You're a smart man and a man in a position to swing some council votes for me." The mayor paused to stir cream into his cup. "J.P., here, represents a very influential business venture that will bring revenue to the area and competition to the Turnaround. We have got to promote good will and opportunity here, or J.P. will head down to Lincoln City to build his high-rise hotel."

"What's preventing progress here?" Paddy asked intelligently, having bowed to real estate interests before, as a politician back in The City.

J.P. lowered his coffee cup and cleared his throat. "Frankly, very little stands in our way. We have purchased the lot across from The Shilo Inn and we're prepared to build, but City Council introduced new zoning laws last semester, that limit any structure on the beach to five floors. You see, it's not even worth our while to make the investment for anything under eight and the blue prints shoot for ten. The Shilo has 112 rooms. We have to double that if we're even going to meet the debt service in our first year."

"If you're on the Turnaround, at the edge of the beach, what advantage is height? Can't you get your two hundred rooms from a sprawl-complex?" Paddy asked.

"The lot is too narrow. -We have to head straight up. There isn't an option." J.P. hit his fist on the table.

"Council feels they have to establish a ceiling on high-rise development and since The Shilo already exists with five floors, that is the ceiling. Unless we can sway the council to think otherwise."

"The lot is so tight, we have to take the building within three feet of the Prom just to squeeze in the three story parking structure behind it. Unless we can hope for ten floors with twenty-two rooms a piece, and that's oceanside, we have no deal at all." J.P. struck Paddy as a man of shrewd tactics. Paddy admired that, most of all.

"So, how do we persuade the council?" Paddy asked.

"We've tried impact studies demonstrating the amount of commerce such a structure would attract. We've twisted the arm of local proprietors for their pressure on the council, but nothing seems to work. Of course, The Shilo has done their share of lobbying against us. The mayor leaned closer to Paddy. "You see, there's plenty for everyone during the summer months, but you'd rob your own mother to survive here in the winter. It's tough to get past that basic obstacle to progress."

J.P. stirred in his chair and tossed a pine needle off the deck. "We're just asking you to re-introduce it as old business. I'd like one more chance before I'm forced to pull out altogether."

"That's it?" Paddy asked.

"It doesn't get any easier than that," the mayor assured him.

Paddy thought for a moment. He wondered why they weren't cutting him an inside deal. Under the table arrangements had been the talk of the council. The meeting just couldn't conclude without him getting something on the mayor. His design for the future built or crumbled on that certain premise.

"Anything in this for me?" Paddy blurted out, a little panicked that his sources may have been misled.

"What are you looking for, Cavanaugh? Half-price on weekends?" J.P. stared at him, amused by his insinuation. "I'm on the up and up. Holiday Inns doesn't operate on some kick-back principle. Frankly, they don't have to. So, if you'd like to help us, fine. If you're looking for some sort of compensation, then I'd say you misunderstood my intent." J.P. prepared to leave. "Just think about it, Paddy." The mayor rose from his seat as the Developer made his way through the lobby. "I'll give you a call later and provide you with some of the impact studies we talked about. But J.P. is right. There's nothing underhanded about this project or it would have been built and opened for business by now. It's good for Seaside, Cavanaugh. It really is. But Seaside's an ironic little town. We revel in the tourist trade and we're comfortable with our exploitation, but we have this strange duty to our concept of natural preservation and unless we resist change in the beginning, we feel betrayed by it in the end. Think it over."

The front door of Cavanaugh's was pulled shut behind the mayor who hurried to catch up to his associate already in the driveway. Paddy overturned the patio table and stormed into the house. He paced back and forth through the kitchen as his rage boiled under the surface. He habitually committed so much detail and optimism to each of his schemes that he tagged himself for disappointment. He had already jotted notes for the eventual direction of his mayoral campaign. Paddy had practiced the control he would exert over this town, but his reign had been cancelled before he ever tried out the throne.

Paddy Cavanaugh thrashed through the kitchen cupboards. He was craving sweets.

THE FINAL COAT

Informal. 3. A defeat in a game in which the loser scores no points.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Christmas had been a tidy affair at the Cavanaugh Inn. -Tidy and tight. Paddy had sank any profit he had managed to float, on Christmas decorations for the Inn. The entire week preceding the holiday had been dedicated to a city-wide open house of the five B & B inns in Seaside. It had been Paddy's idea and it worked. He clearly out-decorated them all, winning the Chamber of Commerce commercial award for best decorated establishment.

Gillian had answered the door and smiled a thousand times during that week. And what did she have to smile about? -The gift wrapped boxes under the giant tree in the lobby? Empty. -The good cheer and holiday spirit that suffocated the household? Synthetic. -Her three loving children? Disoriented, dumb and illegitimate. -Or her certain future allied with a born-again political psychotic? Masochistic. No, the only thing in Gillian's life worth ownership was her unfailing pain. And you didn't smile at pain without encouraging it. She fantasized her escape, accepting that it would never happen.

Paddy had taken the one hundred dollar prize money from the decoration contest and purchased token gifts of appeasement for his family. He could afford no more. He had already spent a month ignoring the American Express bill that squatted inside a basket on the kitchen breakfast counter. Paddy had cursed out loud once he realized any purchase with the card amounted to nothing more than a twenty-five day lay away. And having no concept of food cost percentages or restaurant management in general or specific, he could barely afford to send Justin home with a weekly salary and still swing his daily luncheons with the mayor. He had been sworn into the City Council but would receive little compensation and Cavanaugh's hadn't turned a room in eight weeks. He scrambled to uncover any financial option before him to support his family and struggling business. He would have liked to see Lochran get by with this lousy set-up. But Harry had been right about one thing. There wouldn't be anymore money from The City. Supporters find new causes when old ones die, -or kill themselves.

And on New Year's Eve, it finally hit him. He remembered taking out the substantial insurance policy in October of 1978, one month before The City Hall Assassinations. The premiums had been automatically paid during his incarceration with funds generated by The City Police Department. Now, that he was considered dead, his wife was certainly entitled to a pay-off. In fact, he reasoned, if she didn't make a claim, immediate suspicion would be hurled in the direction of their cover-up. Paddy practiced forging his wife's signature, drafted a letter of inquiry to the insurance company and prepared for a trip back into The City where he would post the letter and check his post office box for any notices. Airline tickets were the one item he could charge on his credit card and leave there for an extended period. Paddy couldn't believe Lochran had overlooked something as basic and profitable as his insurance policy.

But Lochran hadn't overlooked this detail at all. The insurance policy had already been processed, signatures forged, and his special reward of \$300,000. was on its way to a certain post office box in The City, for which Lochran just happened to know the combination. He checked the box daily sorting through Gillian's mail. The bank account he had kept active under Gillian's original name proved a useful depository for Gillian's final paycheck from the elementary school where she had spent the past fifteen years teaching. In her good name, Lochran had applied for retirement and the monthly checks from her pension plan began to arrive on schedule just as the final insurance check would surely debut in the weeks to come. Lochran had requested a duplicate ATM card when he set up the personal account for Gillian while her husband was in prison. He could now make deposits and

withdrawls without ever having to appear in front of a human teller in person. Lochran's police experience had taught him the cameras inside the ATM locations were activated by card and filmed on a restricted video loop. The tape, itself, was never viewed unless an ATM had been vandalized or if somebody was obviously trying to decode the personal identification number of a stolen money card. Lochran knew the rules and it didn't bother him to break them once in awhile. Gillian's silent abuse after the bay window incident had sanded down his conscience to the smooth justificaiton that Paddy's freedom and a fresh start for his family, seemed a fair exchange for any benefits Lochran happened to extract for his assistance and the great risks he had taken along the way.

And just when he began to think he had lessened the risks by silencing the two medical examiners and destroying File #1419, another player called and asked Lochran for an appointment.

"Pier 27, Ten o'clock tonight." Lochran whispered into the telephone. A meeting during daylight with Paddy's kid brother was a measure worth postponing. Lochran wondered what could possibly be so urgent that he couldn't wait. He fidgeted the remainder of the afternoon in the giant leather chair behind his City Hall desk.

Paddy had cussed-out Justin for being five minutes late that morning. Paddy had a political agenda, afterall. Justin just shrugged his shoulders and set about peeling and shredding potatoes for the morning's hashbrowns. As his boss hustled Michael out the front door for the ride to school, Justin gave himself a two week deadline to bust Paddy Cavanaugh for what he was and for his involvement in the staged suicide of The City Hall assassin. Justin knew he wouldn't be able to take the stress of the job and the pending obligation of justice much longer. He had to accelerate the process. If only that medical examiner's report would arrive and provoke consideration in new areas of conviction, Justin could prepare his final bill of retribution. Paddy's account was past due. It had already been two weeks since Justin had requested the file. He wondered why his inquiry had been delayed. After breakfast was finished, he'd try to remember to call The City from a pay phone in town.

Paddy said good-bye to his oldest at Seaside Heights Elementary before heading back downtown to the Pig-n-Pancake Restaurant on the west end of Broadway. He had been tipped by Mayor Donaldson that the Pig-n-Pancake was the prime A.M. locale to meet and mingle with the citizens of Seaside, at least until breakfast at Cavanaugh's caught-on, the mayor had added.

Paddy swung open the glass door and the smell of maple

syrup, cigarettes and coffee slapped him on his unshaven face before colliding with the fishy-surf smell of the wet air outside.

"Good Morning, Paddy," Jennie yelled from behind the breakfast counter. Paddy smiled. With only four morning appearances, he had been recognized as a regular. That warmed his attention-dependent heart. "Looks like the only spot left this morning is right here next to Hank." Jennie placed a menu in front of the empty swivel stool.

"That's fine, Jennie. Thanks." He turned to the postman next to him. "I don't believe we've met. I'm Paddy Cavanaugh."

The postman laid his fork in a lake of blueberry syrup and shook his hand. "I'm Hank Flood. I have the southern route of town. I haven't had a chance to get up your way yet, but I understand you did a nice job with the old Walker place."

Jennie poured fresh coffee into Paddy's upturned cup.

"We sure put a lot of work into it," Paddy boasted. He reached for a sugar packet but they were all stuck together. He ripped one from the conglomeration and stirred it into his coffee. He took a caution sip and added three more packets.

"The usual?" Jennie asked her patron. "No. Not today, Jennie. I'll take a Belgian waffle with strawberries and extra whipped cream," he announced.

"Going on a binger, are we?" Jennie separated the ticket from her pad and hung it on the spindle in the kitchen window. "Order up!"

"So, Hank," Paddy slapped him on the shoulder, "Seaside native?" he asked.

"Who of us are? Folks around these parts dispute if there is such a thing." He returned to his orange juice.

"What makes you say that, Hank?" Paddy added another packet of sugar to his coffee, stirring as he listened to the old timer.

"I'll tell you what. Give me the name of somebody you know in this town and I'll prove my point." Hank wiped his hands on a paper napkin.

"Alright. How about David Donaldson?"

"The Mayor? Most of his mail comes from the Midwest. Predominantly Chicago. He mails colored envelopes back there too, before Mother's Day. They always need extra postage." Hank smiled.

"Okay. How about Chet Mathias?"

"Now the police chief is a strange bird. He gets mail from everywhere, but if I had to make a guess, I'd say he has folks or an ex-wife in Miami."

Paddy laughed at his technique.

His waffle arrived. Hank placed a five dollar bill on top of a grease-stained ticket and prepared to leave.

"What about Margaret Sheridan?" Paddy asked raising a loaded fork to his mouth.

"Funny you should ask."

"Why's that?" Paddy spoke with his mouth full.

"With the principal's house, it depends on whether the mail is for Ms. Sheridan or for that Winter kid she's sharing her house with. What's funny is I've got a manila envelope for the kid, from The City."

"The City?" Paddy choked and took a gulp of coffee.

"Yeah. Got it right here as a matter of fact." Hank extracted the envelope from his canvas shoulder bag.

"Well, Hank, you know, Justin works up at Cavanaugh's for me. He's there right now. I'm headed back after I finish here, and I don't mind giving it to him. I know he's been expecting this." Paddy caught a glimpse of the return address and nearly swiveled off his stool. He wiped whipped cream from the corner of his mouth and stared at the envelope.

"Well, if you're headed back, I don't see the harm. You're on City Council now if I need to find you." Hank surrendered the envelope from The City Medical Examiner's Office. "It was nice meeting you, Mr. Cavanaugh."

"Pleasure's mine," Paddy waved.

He spent much of that day reading through the examiner's report and trying to reason why Justin would have known to request it. Justin must know who he was, Paddy thought looking up from the graphic reports of his death and feeling somehow like Mark Twain amid the exaggerations. It was a little spooky reading the cover page.

"...Further investigation revealed, in the resident basement garage, a 1973 Buick, license #819GLB, which had the engine running. The victim's brother then found a note taped on the drivers side window of the above car, addressed to him. The victim was then observed to be sitting unresponsive behind the driving wheel."

Dear God, Paddy realized. His own brother actually went through all this, never to hear from him again. He read further.

"...A towel was stuffed in the opening created in the window where the green garden-type hose fed exhaust into the vehicle. Found in the deceased's hands, were pictures of his family. Extensive water condensation was noted inside, on the closed automobile windows. Examination of the deceased revealed mild cherry-red discoloration of the skin about the body."

Paddy flipped the page, amazed. There was more.

"...The body is that of a well-developed, wellnourished white male appearing the recorded age. The head contour is normocephalic."

Paddy wondered what that meant exactly, but he found himself appreciating the well-developed notation. He adjusted the pages of the report as the breeze rode piggy-back on the grayish waves before sliding up the beach to where he sat on a grassy sand dune. It was starting to sprinkle but Paddy didn't budge from the depression his butt left in the sand beneath him.

"...The breasts are those of a normal male." Normal? Paddy grimmaced.

"...The abdomen is flat. There is a remote transverse surgical incisional scar which measures 6 cm in the right lower quadrant of the abdomen. There is a green tatoo in the shape of a kite on the left deltoid region."

A kite? It was a four leaf clover, for Christ's sake. Where had they come up with a kite? Paddy remembered the pictures he had posed for, standing in his underwear in Lochran's office. It was obvious the medical examiner was going from a bad photo.

"...The external genitalia are those of a normal adult male."

"Well, that was nice considering his crotch had been the brunt of several Tiny Tim-like jokes. He was glad he'd left his underwear on for the pictures in Lochran's office.

Paddy spent the next several hours studying the eleven

photocopied pages from the manila envelope. By the time he reached the inn, Justin was certainly off for the remainder of the work day, but Paddy was no longer concerned with Justin. He was more preoccupied with the notion of death and of his own eventual mortality and the fact that one day, his body would undergo the examination he'd just read about. It gave him the creeps.

"We've got to talk," Gillian announced walking down the staircase after putting the children to bed. Paddy looked up from his cherry turnover.

"So talk," he commanded.

She moved a pillow on the couch and sat across from him. "Suddenly," she whispered, "things seem real familiar to me."

"Familiar? What are you talking about?"

"Like the months leading up to the-" She stopped. "Before the trouble at City Hall," she finished. "You're back in politics, you're never around the house, you haven't touched me in weeks."

"Jesus! What are you saying?"

"I just can't help but think we're heading for a rerun of some sort. I mean, how safe can we be here? How do we know Michael hasn't let something slip at school, for instance? Where does it all stop? When will this paranoia vanish and where do you draw the line?" she asked him frankly.

"Draw the line?"

"To what extent will you take this to protect your secret?" She reached for the corner of her eye hoping to conceal the stress tears that welled up there.

"What kind of question is that?"

"It's a damn good question if it makes you think about something before you haul off and do it!" Her voice began to crescendo when she remembered the children upstairs. She returned to a harsh whisper. "Just think about it. What guarantee do we have?" She gave him a split second to contemplate her question. "That's right, Mister. We still don't have any guarantees."

"This is Seaside, Oregon. Relax," he instructed her, trying not to think about the manila envelope he had stashed under the cushion of the couch where she sat. "No one is going to find us here." He remembered Justin. "I promise you that," he struggled to sound convincing.

"It doesn't make any difference anymore. Too many of your promises have backfired." She raised her hand to her mouth as if to stop herself from saying anything more, but she took her hand away and spoke. "I'm taking the kids and going to my parents for awhile. I haven't seen them since your-" She stopped again. "Since your suicide. I talked to them this morning. They're already expecting me." "Oh, Jesus, Gillian. Why is it everytime I need you the most, you bail out on me? -Huh?"

"Because by the time you realize you really need me, it's generally too late." The veins in her eyes felt as though they were disintegrating from the pressure she focused there. "My parents put the tickets on their credit card. We can pick them up in Portland tomorrow before our flight. I'm going upstairs to bed."

"Gillian, wait!"

"Give it up. I heard my real name again for the first time in months today and it helped remind me who I really am." She contemplated the thought. "As if this make-believe hideout of yours ever gave me a chance to truly forget. I'm going back now."

She punished every step of the staircase and disappeared into a spare bedroom where she had spent the last several evenings and where her bags were packed in anticipation of a destination that would not betray her.

Her parents had been so worried for lack of contact, but she had used the Seattle sabbatical with Dochran's parents to buy a chunk of time between the funeral and the present. They seemed to understand.

She had pulled Michael out of school earlier that afternoon and he said good-bye to his favorite science teacher.

"When will you be back?" Mr Bergman asked him.

"Before you release the Coho," Michael replied, fighting a tear of his own. He'd been yanked from his environment before. Somehow he recognized the grip on his wrist and knew he wouldn't be back.

His mother thanked Mrs. Sheridan and pleaded marital differences. Mrs. Sheridan, of all women, had understood.

And she collapsed on her bed. It would be so much easier to bury the past now that she had some practice at burials. She wouldn't relinquish the shovel this time.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Distant lights were tossed across the choppy bay through a weak fog. Technically the sun had gone down hours ago but it had accomplished little that day as a heavy winter front had moved in off the Pacific to obliterate any sense of blue the sky could ever hope to boast on such a miserable, rainy day in The City.

Lochran was late for his evening appointment eventhough he had dwelled on it most of the afternoon. Lately, his appointments with members of the cover-up team had carried somewhat of a fatalistic reputation and Paddy's brother was the wild card of the deck. Lochran had urged the chief to cut him out of their secret plan but the chief insisted on using a member of the family for added credibility. For the record, Lochran maintained his premonition that it would be the mistake of the operation. As it turned out, Lochran should have spent more time worrying about the coroner's disposition.

He tossed the stub of his cigarette to the ground and prepared to crush it with his foot but it fell through two planks of the pier and undoubtedly hissed when it met the salt water that lapped against the barnacled pilings. Lochran walked between two warehouses and squinted toward the end of the pier. The fog had thickened and Lochran began to think twice about this particular rendezvous. He couldn't see to the abrupt endeof the dock but he remembered it didn't venture much beyond fifty yards from the shore. He'd met there in secret on several occassions with people he had trusted. He didn't trust Lucky's brother.

A foghorn bellowed off the point beyond the bridge, cautioning Lochran to slow his approach and watch his steps. Seagulls cried nervously overhead, weary from flight and unable to see land. Lochran walked past the post at the end of the pier and stopped in a dim cone of light. The heels of his boots had made a deliberate sound as they knocked along the wooden dock, but silence now competed for the fidelity of the evening and nearly succeeded. Then, the foghorn wailed again, spinning 360 degrees in the soupy vastness, followed by the clanging of an iron bell atop some buoy teathered in the bay. And it was quiet again.

He looked at his watch. It was twenty past the hour. Perhaps the meeting had been called on account of diminished importance. Maybe Lucky's brother had confused the piers. There had to be close to seventy accessible piers along the leading edge of the bay. To Lochran's right, the fog flickered and darkened as the lights on Pier 39 were shut off. God, he had seen The City change so quickly, it stunned him. It seemed just like yesterday that Lucky had opened his snack hut on the then-developing Pier 39. Now between it and Pier 41, The City and its tourists enjoyed hundreds of specialty shops and easily a dozen international restaurants right on the water. Growth had ignored the emotional aggravation of the late Seventies and prospered, having been distracted by real estate interests and shrewd investments. Paddy would have been on the inside by now, so fertilized by wealth and so watered by opportunities, that the decay and stench only blocks away, would have no longer stunted his potential.

And you couldn't talk about The City's growth without reflecting, however detached, on the accelerated, biological decline of the homosexual infrastructure that had once stood as tall as any high-rise and had threatened the skyline in the Sixties and Seventies. Lochran supposed Lucky had merely shaken his gun at the windmills in his mind, when all the while something much bigger was mutating to destroy the problem from the inside. Even Lochran was more inclined to look away from the astounding toll AIDS took on The City, but so far, it seemed to be infecting all the right people. Lucky was going to be sorry that he couldn't wait. AIDS would have finished the queer supervisor and probably would have started working on that liberal, ass-licking mayor.

Lochran turned to leave the pier when he thought he might have heard a sniffle come from behind him. He turned his head. There it was again. "Casper? Is that you?"

"Yeah, yeah. Down here." Lucky's younger brother had been born prematurely and is said to have arrived into this world, white as a ghost. The nickname was posted on a white index card and scotch taped to the incubator. Casper had been measuring up ever since. He was a male anemic, before anemia turned into a fad, never held a tan longer than it took to wash mud from his face and lacked the basic resilience to excel in anything beyond breathing, (which he regularly augmented with an asthmatic inhaler.) But he managed alright within the boundaries of his ailments, while his older brother repeatedly failed time and again with no physical handicap to speak of. Casper enjoyed superiority by sibbling default. Straight A's and his father's fireman pension had floated him through college. In three short years with The City National Bank, he was named finance vice president. But that's not how he made the operating bulk of his money and Lochran knew it. As of late, Casper embellished his nickname running a major cocaine distribution network downtown, supplying yuppies with the competitive edge they just couldn't get from aerobics. Casper wisely agreed to participate

with a staged suicide in exchange for increased police ignorance when it came to his little coke outfit. Lochran protested this by-product arrangement, but once the chief had announced the cover-up during their first organizational meeting, Casper had the department over a barrel. If he didn't get his cut, it was clear he'd expose the operation. Lochran had warned about the security risks of going to the outside for assistance, but the chief had been adamant about involving a family member. Nevertheless, the chief respected Casper's expressed concerns and Casper agreed to cooperate with the cover-up. Each faction felt secure in having something on the other. It seemed to strengthen the pact, but Lochran wasn't convinced it was fail-safe. When multiplied participants equaled multiplied knowledge and multiplied risk, Lochran resigned himself to short division. He had already reduced the original players from five to four. He wouldn't hesitate to commute the equation to its lowest denominator if his stake was jeopardized. Lochran eased down the wooden plank to the boat landing on the water's surface.

"Toot?" Casper offered the giant man facing him.

"Christ, Casper. I'm a cop." Lochran gestured wildly with his hands.

"Yeah? So was my brother. You two never once stepped above the precious law?" he asked faceitiously.

"Why am I here?" Lochran demanded impatiently.

"Just meeting with an associate for a good time, that's all. Here. Relax." Casper handed him a converted nose-drop container. Lochran knocked it out of his hand and it splashed in the black water several feet from the dock. "Fuck! You think that stuff's easy to come by?"

"Plastic floats, Casper, if you need it that badly. Now, what in the hell do you want?"

"Hold on just a minute." Casper raised from his squatted position and moved toward him. "What kind of talk is that from the head cop in charge of public relations? I'm your public, man. Relate to me."

"Get to the point, Casper. I don't have all fucking night!"

"Why'd ya bother coming out here then, if you don't have time to visit? Jesus!" Casper swerved slightly before bumping into a support post.

"I'm sorry," Lochran obliged him. "How are you, Casper?"

"I'm fine and thank-you for asking. I do have one problem though. Seems The City's finest is getting real close to my downtown lemonade stand."

"Stop serving sour lemonade," he advised him.

"Come on, Harry. We both know that's a drastic solution to a problem we agreed to solve jointly. I need you and the chief to make good on your promise. Call off the dogs, Lochran. They're pissing in the lemonade!"

"Call them off, or what?" Lochran challenged him.

"Oh, Harry. We're more intelligent than this." He paused to wipe his running nose. "We have an arrangement," he reminded Lochran.

"You and the chief have an arrangement, Casper. Why didn't you call to meet with the chief?"

"You look better in Levi's, Harry. Don't be stupid."

"What's that supposed to imply?"

"Come on, Lochran. You didn't think cocaine was my only vice, did you?" Casper smiled and sat down indian-style facing him.

"Jesus Christ, not you. -Not after all this."

Casper started laughing and found he couldn't stop. His laughter cut through the fog about them, disturbing Lochran's haven of secrecy.

"Shut-up!" Lochran yelled. Casper laughed louder. "Knock it off, you asshole!" Lochran moved closer and when Casper didn't stop, Lochran backhanded him across the face and he stopped. Lochran helped him to his feet. Casper stared into his eyes. After a few moments he began to undress before him. Lochran took a step back and watched in disbelief. "What are you doing?" Lochran climbed into falsetto.

"Going for a swim. My coke's out there thanks to you." He took off his underwear and stood there. The choked light above them on the pier, highlighted his translucent skin. Lochran gawked at the aberation before him in the fog, trying to convince himself it was not an object of beauty nor a prelude to his own arousal. But he had never seen skin so white, so perfect or so pure. He couldn't recruit the control to look away and in the seconds that followed, confused anger flooded his awareness and inhibited any honest reaction he might have chosen to carelessly pursue.

"Come on, Casper. Give me a break and put your clothes back on before you freeze to death." Lochran folded his hands over his own crotch.

"What's wrong, Harry? Does it bother you to see another man naked? Or does Harry have a boner?"

"Shut-up! This is crap! I don't have to put up with this." He turned to leave.

"Okay," Casper reasoned. "And just what happens when I get busted walking out of the bank next week? And what if I decide I can't condone the actions of my brother? And what happens if the world finds out the famous faggot killer lives? Then what, Lochran?" Casper's voice turned hoarse in the wet air.

·Lochran stopped half way up the ramp leading to the pier, as the questions slapped him on the back, one by one. Lochran knew he had more to lose than anybody. Hiding Cavanaugh had been a non-criminal objective but the ways and means, the murders of the John Doe, the coroner and the medical examiner would not go unpunished. "What do you want from me, dammit?" Lochran eased his stance somewhat, but kept his back to Casper.

"Come here," the white man said softly. Lochran refused to move. "Come here," he repeated. Lochran slowly turned around and returned a half dozen steps toward him. And once again, he found himself fascinated by Casper's perfect brilliance, the simplicity of his presence and the almost angelic force of their encounter. Lochran suddenly gasped for air that seemed as elusive as the reasons for his intrigue and the components of his attraction. Casper's eyes controlled him. Such innocent pale blue eyes with the stare of a madman and the captivation of a thousand shackles, paralyzed Lochran's resistance where he stood. The bay breeze tossed Casper's fine blond hair. He had started to shake slightly.

"I need your protection," he sniffled. "I need your assurance I won't go down in some bust. I'm scared, Lochran. I'm really scared. I want out of the coke thing, except I need it and I can't do without it. I can't live with myself knowing I'm helping to protect my brother who killed two innocent men, and one, a homosexual, like me." Before Lochran had a chance to verbally protest, Casper added "Now, I know that's not going to sit well with you, but that's my business and I have to deal with it. What my brother did seven years ago has made it nearly impossible for me to come to terms with my own homosexuality. And because of the media, I can't risk finding an outlet for my sexual energy with anyone who knows who I am, so I work at the bank and I do coke, to take the edge off my frustrations. I swear to you, Lochran, I'm a desperate man and I need your help. Please," he almost begged, stepping closer to him.

"I'll do everything I can," Lochran promised sincerely, confused and moved by his naked pleading the fog.

Casper sniffled repeatedly as the cocaine that had successfully numbed his nose and the back of his throat, could now claim the revitalization of his atrophied psyche. He drew a deep breath that lifted his pale chest. "Now what do you need, Harry?" He exhaled dramatically, as he spoke, brushing Lochran's Levi crotch with the back of his hand. When Lochran didn't flinch or back away, Casper's hand returned to the denim bulge to trace the obvious outline of Lochran's heightened interest. Lochran felt obliged to verbally protest Casper's advances but when he tried to speak, the words were somehow lost in the wilderness of his curiosity. Casper popped the button-fly. Lochran's genital periscope had already emerged from the depths of his boxer shorts and Casper lunged on top of the task in hand.

Lochran had never been blown, not by his wife, not during some sexual foray in his younger days and not by any of his extra-marital conquests. But the albino's expertise guaranteed the implementation of this future regimen. He shifted his towering body, leaning against one of the pier support poles, and arched his back into Casper's face. But even Casper's best could only accomplish the preliminary inches of Lochran's elephant-man abnormality, and Lochran grew impatient. Having been accustomed to vaginal envelopment, or the proven ability of his own hand, Lochran supplemented the sensation with his hands assisting the back of Casper's head. That's the ticket, Lochran realized as he watched more and more of his drill disappear into the faggot skull mine. Biting his lower lip and intermittently scanning the bay around them, Lochran failed to recognize Casper's silent, choking resistance as he gained momentum and purpose. His arms began to ache ecstatically and he suddenly realized he wasn't assisting the albino, he was supporting him! Lochran grabbed the crown of thin blond hair and pulled him off his cock. Casper dropped lifeless on the rotting dock at Lochran's feet. Lochran took his member and pumped frantically, salvaging the ejaculation as dallops of white cum hit the planks like steamy oatmeal.

Lochran collapsed onto his knees, entirely spent. His hands pressed deep into his eye sockets. When, at last, he pulled them away and opened his eyes, the albino hadn't moved. A thin, cocaine drool escaped from the open corner of his mouth, while the fog horn seemed to tattle the ill-fated escapade from its vantage far out on the cape. Lochran's trembling hand begged a pulse from Casper's neck. Not even the most subtle twitch of life would have escaped his panicked detection. Lochran threw back his head and screamed into the foggy night. "You fucking cocksucker!" His voice bounced back at him and echoed wickedly inside his head.

He quickly covered all signs of foul play and vanished from the pier before anyone caught him holding the dripping brush.

The cost of whitewash was climbing ladder-high.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Steven stared down at the crumpled, pink telephone message in his hands. "The coast is clear. STOP. Five seagulls have flown east for the weekend. STOP. Grounded tending shop. STOP. Dinner at six o'clock. STOP-by." Steven smiled for the fifth time after as many readings, since Margaret had handed it to him after his third class period. He thought briefly about another message Margaret had received moments ago, from the same pink pad. Her Mother had suffered a stroke early in the morning hours. Margaret had rushed home to grab a suitcase before driving to Portland and flying on to Kansas City. She had left him the plane tickets for his Monday trip to Sacramento and the Teacher's Annual Conference, just in case she didn't make it back in time.

Steven bent down to lift the hatchbox lid to inspect the growth and activity of his fingerlings. He took the small net hanging on a hook, and scooped out a diseased victim that floated belly-up by the
outtake screen. Steven felt each death as a personal setback and it took an optimistic concentration on the hundreds of lively, healthy fingerlings, to bring him back to the constructive side of reality. Natural selection, he reminded himself. He replaced the lid and jogged up the path to his pickup.

Justin hustled around the inn, lighting every candle he could find, pre-setting Streisand in his cassette player and checking on his Florentine Souffle, that had miraculously maintained its oven-inspired fluff despite his panicked romp to insure the perfection of the evening. He knew how forward Steven had looked to their week in Sacramento, their side trip into The City for fact finding and fun, and he knew he had to tell Steven, he couldn't go now that Paddy had left for a week, unexpectedly. Justin wished he could muster more disappointment for Steven's sake, but they still had the entire weekend ahead of them, and Justin never ventured much past the moment when it came to committing emotions and trust. They had the weekend and the inn to themselves. Not surprisingly, not a single reservation was penciled in the book. The moment the Cavanaugh's had cleared the driveway enroute to Portland, Justin set to work on his latest flyer that cleverly announced Cavanaugh's New Year's Sunday Brunch.

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Eventhough the first day of 1986 was Wednesday, Brunch fell, traditionally, on Sundays, and in Paddy's absence, Justin would prove himself and he would demonstrate the capacity of the inn, which had been under-utilized since its conception. And Justin didn't do this for Paddy Cavanaugh. No. Justin did this for Justin. And Justin did this for Steven, whom he could no longer deny loving. Regardless of the uncertain fate of Paddy Cavanaugh, Justin and Steven were obligated to a common future. -Justin was through kidding himself. He was 26 years old, hobbies were changing and past habits of division and conquest, begged him to give it up. He was ready.

Gillian was irretrievable. It was that goddamn sixth sense of Justin's, but it was true. she wouldn't be back and he'd read it on her face since late November. She found an out and it was obvious to Justin, she took it. When he returned from the Seaside Signal Newspaper Office, where he'd placed his ad for Sunday's Brunch, he rummaged through the inn for evidence to support his claim, and it was scattered everywhere. It, was nothing. She'd taken everything that belonged to her or her children. Not a spare pair of underwear in the back of a dresser drawer, and not a savagely crayon-colored Rembrandt remained on the giant refrigerator door. CURNES WHITEWASH Page 284

She'd pulled out of whatever it was she had gotten herself involved in. Paddy's belongings lay on the floors and in the closets and on the bed. He'd be back, but he'd return alone, to confront those circumstances that had driven his wife and children away from him. Justin likewise sensed the danger his affiliation with the man, might bring his way. Justin was close to breaking him. It now became an art of standing far enough away to avoid catching a fatal shard of the broken and desperate man.

Lucky had watched his family board a plane to Nebraska before jumping his own spontaneous flight to Sacramento. There, he rented a car with his falsified identification and Amercian Express, and drove two hours toward The City. From a payphone, he called Lochran and told him he was on his way.

"You idiot!" Lochran had screamed into the phone. "What in the fuck do you plan to accomplish by coming back here? No! I'll meet you outside of The City, but I'll kill you first before I allow you to waltz in here where you'll risk everything."

"That's fine, Harry. Where should we talk?"

"Uh?" Lochran had mentally abandoned the pier on the waterfront for all future rendezvous consideration. "I'll meet you at Point Reyes National Seashore. There's a lighthouse at the end of the Point. I'm about an hour and a half away from there, so I'll meet you a little before midnight." Lochran was breathing heavily.

"I'm calling you from Fairfield. I can cut across at Novato, can't I?" Lucky clarified directions.

"Yeah. Midnight, Lucky," Lochran reiterated nervously, and hung up the phone. He must have heard about his brother, Lochran realized. He called the chief.

"...Swing by my place, Harry. I'll follow you up there and back you up. We should have counted on the snap, you know. He snapped before. We should have better prepared for that."

"Yeah? How? The only guarantee we would have had is if his head would have been under that military tombstone in Golden Gate National Cemetery. That would have been our only security."

"Maybe so, but we owe him, Harry. We do. Now, I'll see you in a bit."

"Yeah," Lochran mumbled, hanging up the phone. He carefully cinched his shoulder holster for a snug fit under his down coat. Lochran didn't owe anybody anything, and murder by murder, he canceled all outstanding debts. He knew it was mad, but you protect yourself first, and in pursuit of that, there are no alternatives and everything is justified. Lochran left his sleeping wife and rolled the car out of the garage in neutral. But Paddy had not learned of the death of his younger brother until he left the pay phone; and used the gas station restroom. When he returned the men's key to the attendant, the headlines from the Sacramento Bee, showcased the apparent murder of his kid brother. Paddy offered to buy the paper with his American Express Card, as he had no cash, but the attendant gave him the paper.

"Saturday's edition is just minutes away from replacing it, anyway," the attendant had explained.

Paddy sat in his car with the door open, reading by the overhead dome light. "Drug related," he asked himself? That didn't seem right. "Obvious asphyxiation, complicated by a long medical history of asthma, have been the findings of the coroner's prelimary report. Sources have been unable to confirm the presence of pubic hairs in the victim's mouth, which would suggest the pre-mortem act of fellatio. However, early reports have verified high levels of cocaine in the victim's bloodstream. The body was recovered from the Bay by The City Police Department around 7:00 A.M. this morning, in the commercial district by Pier 39. The ingestion of large amounts of salt water, have diluted the chances of recovering any seminal traces in the victim's system, experts say."

"Impossible!" Paddy slammed his fist into the

But Paddy had not learned of the death of his younger brother until he left the pay phone and used the gas station restroom. When he returned the men's key to the attendant, the headlines from the Sacramento Bee, showcasing the apparent homicide of his kid borther, tripped him as he walked out the door. Paddy offered to buy the paper with his American Express Card, as he had no cash, but the attendant gave him the paper.

"Saturday's edition is just minutes away from replacing it anyway," the attendant had explained.

Paddy sat in his car with the door open, reading by the overhead dome light. "A drug-related asphyxiation," Paddy read aloud. That just couldn't be possible. "Complicated by a long history of asthma, the victim appears to have been internally choked by an object in the mouth that impaired normal breathing. Sources at The City Police Department have been hesitant to release any of their findings though they will confirm that the body was recovered from the bay by City Police around 7:00 a.m. this morning, in the commercial district by Pier 39. A police detective was quoted as saying, 'I wouldn't be surprised to find that cocaine was a major component of this homicide.' It has been learned that the victim did coordinate a major cocaine network in downtown."

"Impossible!" Paddy slammed his fists into the

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dash of the rent-a-car. Why hadn't Lochran told him, Paddy wondered? Unless Lochran was responsible, he deducted. Paddy returned to the pay phone and charged another telephone call to his home phone.

"Yes operator, I need to be connected to the residence of Dick Anderson, in The City, please."

"I have a Dr. Richard Anderson," the male operator offered.

"That's him!" In seconds the telephone was ringing.

"Hello?" A woman answered groggily.

"Is Dick there, please?"

The woman paused. "You must have the wrong number." "Wait, June!"

"Who is this?" she demanded to know.

"June, it's not really important who I am, right now. I need to talk to Dick. It's urgent."

"Richard is dead, whoever you are, and if this is your idea of a sick..."

"What do you mean, dead?"

"Richard committed suicide two weeks ago, apparently after murdering one of his medical examiners. Next time, you might consider reading the newspapers instead of upsetting a widow, you bastard!" She slammed the phone in his ear.

"Dead?" Paddy asked himself again, still talking

into the silent telephone. Two weeks ago? He'd talked to Lochran since then. He hadn't mentioned that, either. What in the hell was going on?

Paddy got back on Interstate 80 heading west for some answers.

"Dinner was great, Justin. I'm stuffed." Steven patted his belly.

"Thanks. I hope you're still up for a run on the beach. I need to get out of the inn for a few minutes of fresh air."

"I think we can accomodate that request. I'll finish the dishes while you change into some sweats."

Justin was about to accept the invitation when the telephone rang. "Let it ring. They probably want a room." Justin snapped.

"A room?" Steven asked doubtfully. "How many rooms have you actually rented since you've been open?"

"You've got a point and it might be Cavanaugh checking if I'm here like I'm supposed to be." Justin grabbed the phone. "Hello?"

"Justin? Tym. I have to talk to you right away. Can I come over?"

"Sure. Bring your running shoes. Steven and I were just about to hit the beach. We'll wait for you at the inn." "Thanks." The phone went dead on her end.

Justin turned toward the kitchen. "That was Tym. Something's bothering her. She's on her way over."

"I just talked to her about the Hood to Coast Marathon yesterday. I wonder what's eating her?"

"Beats me. I sent her into Portland today, to pick up chafing dishes for the brunch on Sunday. She would have seen her father. Well, it doesn't matter. We'll know soon enough," Justin dismissed the topic.

"So, you're sure Cavanaugh won't be back before I leave on Monday?" Steven wanted to hold out some hope that Justin's announcement of not accompanying him to Sacramento, was somehow reversible.

"I don't think so, Steven. He had me call Mayor Donaldson, this morning, to tell him he wouldn't be back in time for Tuesday's City Council Meeting."

-Steven looked down at the hard wood floor, tracing the grain of the polished wood with his bare toe. "You know what that means, don't you? It means I will be forced to sit through one boring teacher seminar after another. We will discuss relevant topics to our profession and we'll play that stupid group survival game to establish a ranking of importance for the various items we discover after being ship-wrecked on the moon. I'll waste twenty minutes explaining the uselessness of matches in a survival kit on the moon."

"Why's that?" Justin asked blindly.

"No oxygen, dummy! And I'll spend just as much of my time reasoning the importance of two .38 caliber revolvers for propulsion in zero gravity. At least if you were there, we could skip out and go for a coke. Now, it's truly hopeless."

"There, there." Justin consoled him, joining him in the kitchen. "You'll go to Sacramento, collect your prestigious award, be the envy of every teacher there, split for The City, and come up with something we can use to hang Cavanaugh. There won't be a minute to feel sorry for yourself. Trust me."

There was a rap on the door and Tym showed herself into the front lobby of the inn. "Hi, Steve. Wait 'til you guys here what I saw today. It should point us in a couple specific directions."

"Go on. What did you see?" Justin begged.

"Well, I was on my way into Portland and I noticed a State Trooper had pulled someone over ahead of me. I slowed and realized it was Cavanaugh's van. Guess he was snagged for speeding. Anyway, I passed him, pulled off, onto a dirt road about a mile down the highway, and waited."

"Waited for what?" Steven asked exitedly.

"For Cavanaugh to drive by, of course." Tym grew impatient with their interruptions.

"I'm dying to ask. Did he drive by?" Justin smirked. "Alright," Tym exclaimed throwing her arms up in the air. Let's just go running, then."

"We're sorry, Tym. Obviously there is something else to this story, and we are missing the point," Steven admitted.

"I'll say there is. He did drive by and I followed him into town, several cars back. He drove straight to the airport. I tailed him inside the terminal and his family boarded a plane back east."

"That's not news, we knew they were going to see her parents." Justin finished putting on his running shoes.

"I said his family boarded a plane. Cavanaugh boarded another one." Tym was proud of heresurveillance.

"No shit?" Justin asked.

"No shit," Tym answered. "Gillian took the kids to Nebraska and Paddy hopped a plane, get this, to California. Omaha and Sacramento to be more precise."

"Sacramento? What's that do for us?" Steven turned to Justin.

"There's something I noticed about Paddy a few weeks ago, and that's he avoids cameras. For some reason, and it doesn't jive with his egotistical personality, he's afraid of being recognized. First, it was the grand opening of this place. Newspaper photographers were here from The Signal and from The Astorian. This was his event and he's not in a single picture. I checked at the newspaper office, and I'd swear I remember posing with him for a picture. Then there was the hatchbox christening. He showed up sporting the entire city council, but he avoided the cameras again. He would fly into Sacramento, if he wanted to avoid the hometown crowd in The City's Airport. Sacramento is only a couple of driving hours from The City. I say he went back for some unfinished business."

"I don't believe this," Steven laughed. "This is worse than Nancy Drew meets The Hardy Boys. I can't believe you actually followed them right into the airport."

"But it makes perfect sense," Justin added. "Here's another thing. Gillian's left him for good, as far as I can tell. It's just a feeling, but I think she's had it with maintaining his little secrets."

"I think you're right. Something she told Margaret and I at the craft show a couple weeks ago, sticks with me."

"Margaret and me," Steven corrected her grammar, lovingly.

"Margaret told us," Tym emphasized, "that Seaside

just wasn't anything she expected it to be, and if it wasn't for her husband's business...then, she stopped herself short of the full statement of her obvious disappointment. She hasn't been happy, that's for sure."

"Omaha, huh?" Justin thought out loud.

"Oh, and Tym," Steven forced himself to point out, " "I think correct usage with the subjunctive tense, would be, if it weren't for the business, and not if it wasn't for the business."

Tym shook her head. "Don't you give it a rest on weekends?"

"She is bound to have called her parents since she has been here. The number has got to appear on a telephone bill. If we could reach her, she just might be willing to tell us what she knows, now that she considers herself out of whatever it is."

"What?" Steven and Tym asked in unison, confused by Justin's complex statement.

"I'm saying, if we tell her we know her husband is in trouble, maybe she'll feel obligated to fill in the blanks."

Steven expressed obvious concern. It's a big gamble. What if she is coming back? What if you've misread her discontent and she is still protecting her husband? Then we're good as...well?"

"Good as what? -Good as dead?" Tym asked. "This whole mess is a goddamn gamble. Whether Cavanaugh has actually killed before or not, is the biggest gamble we have to consider for the future. He's certainly been associated with those who haven't hesitated to murder those they've viewed to be in opposition. And it's almost a certainty that Cavanaugh can be personally recognized as one of the players. I say we take the risk and contact Gillian, if contact is even possible. It's the only lead we've gotten in months."

"We owe it to The City and we owe it to the mayor and to the gay supervisor. Hell, we owe it to ourselves." Steven formulated the pep talk as he spoke, and corny as it may have sounded, it rallied their doubting spirits.

"You're right," Justin said jumping off the kitchen counter. "So, the object of this scavenger hunt is a telephone bill. Turn the place upside down!"

Paddy finished the last of the powdered sugar doughnuts from the mini-pak on the seat next to him, washing it down with a swig of Hawaiian Punch. He couldn't seem to get over the deaths of his own brother and of the two coroners. Lochran had been terribly short with him the last couple of times they had talked on the telephone, and even threatening. He'd always been a nervous wreck. Paddy wished he had his gun, just in case.

Damn if it hadn't started raining again, just as Paddy had convinced his bladder it could wait. The rain on the windshield was rather convincing to the contrary and Paddy pulled the car off to the side of the road, to relieve himself.

The chief followed Lochran inside the gates of the park. They drove south, down the Point to the lighthouse. The chief ditched his car in the trees and cautiously joined Lochran at the base of the white tower. "Is it manned?" The chief referred to the lighthouse.

"No," Lochran answered. "-Automatic. Let me take care of this. I can handle Lucky. You'll know if I need help."

"Alright. I'll be back in the trees with my car." The chief disappeared into the shrubs and Lochran sat on the hood of his own car, holding his knees and waiting. He followed the path of the spinning light above him as it stretched over the surf and vanished in the vast darkness of the Pacific void.

After a half hour had passed, the beams of two foreign lights entered the park. Lochran slid off the hood of his car and walked around the lighthouse to confront the visitor.

"Hi, Loch," Paddy said with a low voice, getting out of his car. He walked to Lochran and motioned a hug. The two men moved into a friendly embrace. Lucky worked his hand inside Lochran's coat and extracted the revolver from its holster. "Don't say a word, Harry. I know the big chief is here somewhere and I smell a set-up."

"The chief isn't here. Don't be ridiculous." Lochran fumbled for the words that would convince him. They weren't there.

"Don't be stupid, Harry. I watched him follow you inside the park. Now, why did you kill my brother?" Paddy remained remarkably calm.

"I didn't kill him, Lucky. Honest, I didn't."

"Your lying, Lochran. I know you did it. Now, why?" Paddy jabbed the gun into his ribs and walked him around to the surf side of the lighthouse. "While you're confessing, why don't you throw in an explanation for Dick Anderson. How about the John Doe, Harry? Natural causes? And how about my brother? Huh? What about my only brother, you fucking asshole?" Paddy raised his voice.

"You're making a mistake blaming me, Lucky. You really are. You're brother killed himself with cocaine." The big man couldn't control his shaking. Where in the hell was the chief, he wondered.

"My brother wouldn't have even known where to get drugs. The cocaine was your plant, wasn't it?"

"The hell he wouldn't, Lucky. Just like the rest of downtown knew where to get their coke. -From Casper! He used his involvement with your cover-up to get protection for his distribution service." "That's bullshit, Harry! Why are you lying to me?" Tears began to issue from his eyes. The pressures from losing his wife and children, not for the first time, his dead brother, and now the lies of his best friend, robbed him of the control he had over the situation. Lochran sensed his debilitation and tried to compound it.

"Yeah, well here's something else you're not going to want to believe, but it's true. Casper was a fruit."

"No!"

"Yes, Lucky. Casper was a cocksucking queer."

"You should know, it that it? What the papers said about Casper's condition is true? They said they were investigating the possibilities he performed oral sex before he died. Did you force my brother to blow you, Lochran?" Paddy screamed.

The chief was hustling toward the back side of the lighthouse, praying the surf was drowning out his clumsy footsteps on the rain-wet sand.

"It wasn't like that, Lucky. I swear to you," Lochran blubbered awkwardly.

"What was it like, then? It's not like you to put your cock in a man's mouth, is it Harry? My brother wasn't a faggot! You must have forced him. What's wrong, Lochran? Couldn't you get Dick Anderson to suck you off? Is that why you killed him too?"

"You're wrong, Lucky! You killed Anderson and his

assistant by asking for that goddamn coroner's report." Lochran nearly yelled at full voice, hoping to startle the chief out of the bushes. But the chief was edging his way around the lighthouse with his own revolver drawn. Paddy caught a slight glimpse of his shadow moving toward them.

"I didn't send for that fucking autopsy, you fool!" Paddy didn't take his eyes off the growing shadow as it neared. He waited an extra second, then pushed Lochran out into the open. The chief, sensing an attack and assuming Lucky was making a run for it, instinctively fired his revolver three times at the stumbling object. Two bullets ripped through Lochran's down coat and the third nicked his ear. Lochran fell to the hard sand with a profound thud. The message dispatched from the chief's cold eyes could not make the short trip to his brain. Paddy moved out onto the sand with his gun trained on the chief, who hadn't yet lowered his own revolver. "Now you've killed too," Paddy congratulated him. "Now you're just like one of us. We've all killed a faggot. Kinda feels good doesn't it?"

The chief managed to redirect his aim in Paddy's direction.

"Might as well retire your revolver, Chief. There's no point in killing a dead man, is there. How would you explain killing me a second time? That would be the end for you." The chief just listened but didn't hear anything other than the waves that crashed against his eardrums. His mind scrambled to realize he would have to kill again before the night was over, if he was to make it off the Point, alive.

"It's really just down to you and me, isn't it, Chief? The coroner's gone, my brother, and now, you've taken care of Lochran. Our secret seems to be given another life everytime we take a life. That's interesting, isn't it?" Paddy squeezed the trigger twice. The chief fell backwards, discharging a single shot into the free air. Paddy took a deep breath and checked the pulse on both men. He dragged the dead men into the bushes next to the chief's car and returned the revolvers to their respective owners. Paddy fled into The City.

"We're in business!" Justin yelled from the top of the stairs. Steven and Tym halted their individual searches for the elusive telephone bill that Justin waved at them.

"Well?" Steven asked.

"It's on here. A single call to area code 402. But that's not all. Take a look at this."

Steven and Tym jumped up the steps and followed Justin into Paddy's master bedroom. There on the floor next to the dresser, Justin had the bottom drawer extracted. He reached into the cavity and pulled out a tiny address book. Steven pulled the telephone bill out of his hands to examine it for himself while Justin leafed through the pages of the book.

"There's nothing in it!" Justin exclaimed. "Wait! I take that back. Eureka! Lochran. That was the name of the van driver the morning they picked me up. I have been racking my brain trying to remember what he looked like, what Paddy might have called him...Lochran, that's it. There's a number, too. But he's in on it. We can't just call him for an explanation. But the police will find this interesting when they attempt to nail the conspiracy, whatever that is."

"Anyone else?" Tym asked curiously.

"No. -Yes! Chief. No name, just chief, and a telephone number. The City's area code, just like Lochran's. The chief of what, I wonder? The chief of police?" Justin looked at his other partners in investigation. They shrugged their shoulders.

"This is giving me the creeps," Tym admitted. "Let's go for our run. Too late to call anyone now."

"She's right, Justin." Steven sat on the edge of the bed.

"Wait a minute. We're not finished here." Justin reached insidë for a large manila envelope, also hidden beneath the lower drawer of the dresser. "God Almighty!"

"What is it?" Steven watched Justin's face lift in pale horror.

It's my coroner's report!" Justin held the envelope toward them, his name and Margaret's address clearly scribbled across the front. "How did he intercept this?"

"Jesus, Justin. That means he knows that you know!"

"I've had it! This is more creepy than a Ouija Board at a ninth grade slumber party. We're going for a long run on the beach. Let's go you two. Come on!" Tym snapped.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Come on, Answer the goddamn phone!" Justin tapped his foot on the hard wood floor impatiently. He must have dialed the Nebraska number five dozen times that day with no results. It was late Saturday night and this was to be his final try before he and Steven went to bed. He had grown desperate for information throughout the day. Studying the coroner's report, to the point of memorization, had conceived several new theories that Justin was eager to prove or dispel. "Come on," he coached the repetitive dial tone. "Ah, shit! It's no use," he exclaimed hanging up the phone. But Justin heard a slight click of recognition. "Did you hear that?" he asked his counterpart propped on the bed, reading the coroner's report for himself.

"Hear what?"

"I think somebody answered just as I hung up!" Justin frantically redialed the eleven digit sequence. "Please, please," he begged as the automatic switch routed his telephone call over the Rocky Mountains. "Hello-"

"Hello! Who's this, please?" Justin's face lifted in relieved enthusiasm.

"Mich- I mean..."

"Michael! This is Justin. I need to speak to your mom, please."

"She's outside in the car. I'll go get her, okay?"

"Okay! Go get your mom." The phone hit a countertop in Nebraska and Michael was heard yelling through the house for his mother.

Steven looked over the top of the report.

"Justin?"

"Gillian! Thank God, it's you! I think I'm in serious trouble here. It's your husband-"

"Dear God, what has he done?"

"I'm hoping you can tell me that."

"Justin, you've got to get out of there! Take what money you can from the inn, and make a run for it. My husband is a very dangerous man, right now. There's no telling what he could do next."

"Can you tell me what he has already done? Please Gillian. I think I know, but I need to hear the facts from you."

"I can't talk on the telephone. My folks-" "Can you get to a payphone?" "Where is he now?" she half-whispered into the mouthpiece. "He didn't come back from Portland, yesterday. I thought he was with you, but Tym saw him at the airport yesterday and he hopped a flight to Sacramento."

"Sacramento?" she repeated. "Dear God! He's gone back into The City! Justin! Pack your things and get out of Seaside. Do it now!"

"Gillian! You've got to tell me what he's done."

"Get out of Seaside first. Uh, can you come to Omaha? I'll explain everything to you in person, but you've got to leave Seaside."

"Alright. I'll leave Seaside and I'll take the first flight to Omaha tomorrow afternoon."

"Fine. There's only one flight a day. United flight #178 leaves Portland at 4:30 every afternoon. I'll have my parents watch the kids and I'll borrow their car to pick you up. You can stay here."

"Alright. I'll do it! I'll talk to you tomorrow night, then."

"Okay, Justin. Be careful."

"Good-bye."

Steven laid the report at his side. Justin reached for a telephone book.

"Omaha?" Steven asked.

"She's afraid, Steven. She won't talk about it on the phone. She says it's dangerous for me to stay here. I'll just be gone a couple days. We can leave together after the brunch tomorrow. What time is your flight, again?"

"It leaves at five tomorrow night."

"Perfect. We'll just lock up the inn and split after I pocket any money we take in tomorrow. If Cavanuagh ever does come back, I hope he remembered to take his keys." Justin dialed the phone to book his reservation. "I'm holding."

Steven rummaged through his briefcase. "Here, write this number down. It's where I'll be staying in Sacramento. -(916) 338-5800. Got that?"

Justin repeated the number, before the United reservationist came on his line. Steven returned to the last few pages of the coroner's report and jotted some notes on a seperate piece of paper. Justin thanked the reservationist, hung up the phone, and joined his lover of one month, in bed.

"You know, it's twisted, but the physical description of this character, pretty closely matches that of Cavanaugh. What that has to do with anything, I don't know. It's just strange. Something else here, it says the body was identified by his brother. I just might try to look this brother up when I'm in The City Monday. Maybe he remembers something that wasn't included in the report."

"While you're at it, give these numbers a call

and see what you come up with." Justin handed Steven Cavanaugh's tiny address book. Steven wrote the numbers next to his notes. "Be careful with that Lochran character. He's in on it as sure as there's something to be in on."

"Alright, alright. That's enough. We need our sleep if we're ever going to make it through that brunch tomorrow. What time is the alarm clock set for?"

Justin squinted his eyes in fear of retaliation. "4:30," he mumbled through his fingers. Steven hit him on the head with a pillow. The two settled into each other's arms and quickly fell fast asleep under the supervision of the relaxing surf outside their open window.

Paddy turned the headlights down to the parking lights as he entered the driveway leading to Cavanaugh's. It had been a long day waiting for nightfall. He had slipped into The City, paid his respects to the grave of his father and the plot of his recently deceased brother, saluted his own military tombstone, (under which, the John Doe rotted,) and raided the post office box of the insurance check that had arrived that same morning. He realized Lochran had beaten him to the paperwork, but he was entitled to the insurance settlement just the same. That three hundred thousand dollar check, would insure Gillian's calculated return to Seaside. He patted his shirt pocket where the check resided. She'd be back.

He quietly opened the front door and entered the giant house. Paddy was oblivious to the moon that bounced off the silver lids of the chafing dishes in a row and awaiting commission. He weaved through the batallion of set tables under a roof of mylar-teathered helium balloons and climbed the stairs to his bedroom on the second floor. He crept down the hall attempting to muffle the creaking floor with gentle, sock-covered steps. He laid his shoes by his bedroom door and continued down the hall to the secondary master suite that Justin occassionally occupied. As he neared the door, his senses picked-up on a slight snore that struggled to immitate the growling surf through the open windows. Paddy pushed on the door and squinted his eyes to focus his night vision. Sirens went off inside his bearded head as he walked closer toward the foot of the The snoring stopped. Justin opened his eyes in bed. horror and made out the frame of the man standing at the edge of his bed. Under the sheet, he reached for Steven with a trembling hand. Without waking, Steven turned onto his back with his face toward Cavanaugh. Justin tried to control his shaking but all he could remember at that moment were Gillian's warnings of evacuation and danger. After Justin failed to jump to his naked feet, Paddy seemingly lost patience and

ran from the room. Justin left the bed and chased him downstairs to the front door, but by the time Justin had pulled on underwear, Cavanaugh was gone. Justin raced upstairs to replace the coroner's report and the address book under the bottom dresser drawer in Paddy's bedroom.

Justin climbed back into bed with Steven and sat against the headboard registering every sound he heard.

The alarm clock jarred him awake two hours later. He cursed his slumber and instantly wondered if Paddy had re-entered the house while he slept. He eased out of the bed and slipped on a T shirt. Steven stirred but didn't waken.

Justin wandered past his empty bedroom and down the stairs. The moon was flush with the ocean horizon and still the only source of light in the early morning darkness. Justin looked out a front window into the driveway but didn't see the van. He returned to a chair in the lobby and watched the front door.

Paddy slept on the floor of the van several miles away in the parking lot at the base of The Elmer Feldenheimer Forest Preserve on Tillamook Head at the end of Sunset Drive. He was startled by a sudden thud on the roof of the van. A squirrel had knocked a pine cone from a branch above the van and scrambled down the trunk of the towering tree to stake his claim. Paddy looked at his watch in the early morning prelude of a sunrise and left the van to take a walk.

Justin iced the champagne while homemade guiche crusts baked in the oven. He wanted to abandon the whole affair and escape from Seaside with Steven. Paddy was out there. Confrontation was inevitable as long as Justin stayed at the inn. If he could just get through the day's brunch, he ventured, he would probably clear close to eight hundred dollars, which he desperately needed in lieu of his neglected wages. As it measured up, they couldn't make it to Astoria on what Justin had in his billfold and Justin needed guaranteed security from the perceived wrath of his employer. Justin made the conscious decision to play it out through brunch, and then make a run for the airport in Portland. With eight hundred dollars, he could purchase his tickets to Omaha, fly to The City to join Steven, gather the hanging evidence against Cavanaugh and celebrate the lynching. Just a few more hours, Justin convinced himself. "You can make it," he whispered. "It will all be made worthwhile."

Steven reluctanly dragged himself downstairs to the kitchen. He didn't remember ever sleeping quite that well before. He kissed Justin on the back of the neck. Justin nearly jumped through the kitchen ceiling, spinning around with a butcher knife he had been using to dice vegetables for the quiche. Steven hopped out of the path of the knife with eyes as big as the red onions Justin had just quartered.

"God, I'm sorry," Justin dropped the knife and pulled Steven into a frantic hug. "We had a three-way last night. It's made me so nervous!"

"A three-way?" Steven knew he hadn't consented to a menage-a-trois, and what's worse, he didn't remember it.

"We had company last night. Cavanaugh is back!"

"He caught us in bed?" Justin shook his head. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"I was too scared to move. Cavanaugh ran out of the house and I spent the rest of the night in a chair in the lobby, waiting for him to come back to kill us both."

"Come on, Justin." Steven expressed his disbelief.

"I'm serious. Remember the couple from the grand opening. I'm convinced he would have killed them if it weren't for the abundance of eye witnesses. I saw the burning hatred in his eyes. I saw the same look last night. He just stood there at the end of the bed, staring at us."

"It probably gave him a hard-on, -not that you would

have noticed it, from what you've told me."

"You can joke all you care to, but he's still out there and he's coming back. Brunch starts in two hours. Tym should be here any second. As long as there are people around, he won't try anything. But we're out of this creepy mansion with the last brunch guest. I'm flying to Omaha this afternoon when you leave for Sacramento. I'll catch up with you in The City on Tuesday."

"What about Tym? She's really not safe by herself. He'll go looking for her when he finds us gone." Steven was suddenly consumed by Justin's run-away panic.

"I hadn't thought that far ahead, but you're right. We'll have to talk her into hiding out in Portland until we get back with the evidence and the authorities to put him away for whatever he's done."

The doorbell rang and the two men held their breath. Tym walked into the lobby and they exhaled.

"What's with you two? You look like you've seen a ghost or something." Tym laughed at the two underwear clad men. "Of course, I've never seen this much of you before, but I've never seen anything more white, either."

"Then you should have seen Cavanaugh last night when he caught the two of us in bed together. He turned whiter than the sheet that covered us!" Justin explained. "That's just before he turned bright red and stormed out of the house," he added.

"He's back?" Tym asked.

"He was. Then he disappeared and he hasn't been back since, but he's somewhere in Seaside. When it clicks that he ran out of his own house, leaving two queers in one of his beds, he'll be back to establish proper domain, we can count on that." Justin carried the conversation and Steven slipped upstairs to put on some clothes. He returned with a pair of running shorts for Justin, who had just finished a lengthy explanation of the post-brunch plan of evacuation to Tym.

"I suppose I can get my part-time checker to open and close the store for a few days. She's been begging for more hours. I can't believe that bastard is already back." Tym readjusted her large purse on her shoulder. "I'm going to hang up my dress in the bathroom upstairs. I'll be right back."

Justin set about designing the elaborate garnish for his buffet line and Steven began the greasy task of frying bacon and sausage links. Tym returned to arrange the fruit and pastry platters and the telephone began ringing non-stop with last minute reservations for Seaside's one-of-a-kind New Year's Brunch.

Paddy tromped along the muddy trails that weaved

through the dense forest on Tillamook Head. Despite the chilly morning temperatures, he was sweating industriously. His hair was wet and the clothes stuck to his body. Green moss seemed to choke the misty landscape around him, blanketing rocks and decorating tree limbs. At a fork in the trail, Paddy passed an erie landmark; -a dead cat floating in a rain-filled litter box. Paddy wasted ten minutes trying to make sense of the peculiar grave only to realize that it was just that and nothing more. He hiked on. He could have never imagined a forest so confining and damp, so mysterious and yet so revealing, for in this darkness he saw himself draped in moss, a haven for slugs and snails, -a perfect and balanced environment. And he saw the outside world lying face down and dead in a pool of its own waste. It was right there on the trail before him and he understood his destiny. Faqqots were absolutely everywhere he turned, in The City, -all over The City, in Seaside and probably on the moon for all he knew. He was sure there must be queer astronauts if there were queer policeman, and he had read about those in The City Chronicle. He wondered why Lochran hadn't done something about them. But Lochran must have been queer too. And his own brother died in the rotting crotch of this abomination, forced there, undoubtedly by gunpoint. "My God," Paddy screamed in the forest, falling to his knees in the mud of the trail. "What more can I do," he prayed.

God just stared at him from the litter box.

Paddy rose to his feet and continued his ascent of the mountain that dared to establish a costal deterrent. He paused to consider the moral intersection of his own youth; -his road not taken and his deliverance from all he grew to despise. In his way of thinking, his manner of belief, it all came back to right and wrong and the simple, obvious choice between them. But sixth grade had existed to confuse and test the faculties Paddy's pubescent mind struggled to organize. He fell in with two progressive classmates from his neighborhood. The trio instantly combined to excel in track and field and in adolescent popularity. Paddy so reveled in the attention and success of his association that severence of any kind would have been synonymous with death itself.

Late one afternoon just before dusk, the three of them ventured into the construction site of a new trailer park. The leader of the troupe, Skip Serandeau, had recently boasted of achieving ejaculation. Paddy was fascinated and prepared to call him on his claim. The three boys disappeared into a ditch and began to publically masturbate. Paddy had marveled at Skip's technique of using an entire hand when Paddy had only previously considered using three fingers. Then again, as Skip pointed out, he needed his whole hand. The boys pumped furiously. Skip suddenly

arched his back and the convulsions that followed, produced creamy white pearls of passage. The other two boys had halted their attempts and watched out of respect and "That's great," Paddy remembered congratulating him awe. with a slug in the arm. Paddy would not accomplish a similar feat until eighth grade. Some might say he tried too hard. But his line of destiny was cast into a pond of underachievement. Nobody ever told Paddy that Skip had flunked sixth grade and had been held back a year to catch up. In Paddy's idolizing mind, he would have never accepted Skip's deficit in anything. Even after Skip was forced to break ties with Paddy in the eighth grade, when Paddy's friendship began to impede his dating frenzy; Paddy continued to worship him, his coaching and his remarkable abundance of pubic hair. Ultimately, Skip was reduced to joining the ranks of Paddy's peers that accused him of being a fairy and a faggot. Paddy had left Skip no choice.

He screamed again, into the stoic woods that proudly cared less.

Confetti was sprinkled on every table and thin paper streamers were tossed about the room in an organized manner. Seaside began to convene at the prosperous confluence of the Pacific Ocean and the Necanicum River.

Only five miles away, Paddy broke into a clearing near the top of his immediate quest. The winds picked up rambunctiously and the sun had forgotten any responsibility to the day. Paddy craved the view off the ocean side of the mountain but as the ancient pines gave way to the leafless newcomers on the summit, the fog had obviously rallied to prevent the visual satisfaction of his climb. Wet clouds raced past him as he planted his feet squarely beneath him. He could not see ten feet beyond his position on the grassy clearing and his uncomfortable exposure on the summit hastened his retreat under the lush forest canopy. He ventured a few steps further up the steep slope that dramatically angled high above the frothy Pacific. He encountered a large wooden marker anchored in six hefty poles. The faded white letters at the top of the sign had been erased by several seasons of foul weather, but Paddy squinted in the fog and read aloud.

"For the return of Tillamook Head to its pristine state, as it was when so richly endowed by Lewis and Clark with our Nation's History. TILLAMOOK HEAD, Elevation 1,130 feet above sea level."

Paddy traced the depression of the last few characters with a cold and red index finger. He thought of Lewis and Clark, retrieved his pocket knife from his jean pocket and carved his own initials, alongside the names of those true
men, undaunted by temptation, driven by faith.

Justin struggled to replenish food and champagne while Tym hostessed with renewed confidence in her recovering prominence in the city. Steven poured coffee and champagne and mingled with the parents of many of his students who were eager to congratulate him on his teaching achievements. All three of them remained on guard for the arrival of Paddy Cavanaugh which would surely be the unannounced climax of the entire event. Justin was extremely thankful and pleased with the city-wide turnout and continual full house of ablebodied witnesses.

Hours later and just before the last seating at two o'clock, the three evacuees took a moment to meet and reflect on the success of their efforts. Tym had recently counted over twelve hundred dollars in cash, and around four hundred dollars in personal checks. It was decided that all checks would make up the bank deposit to satisfy Cavanaugh's financial suspicions, but all cash would leave the inn with them in another hour. Another hour, they reminded themselves, before returning to their brunch assignments.

Justin was in the kitchen when the front door opened with such force that Tym gasped and Steven knocked over a champagne glass. Paddy Cavanaugh stood in the doorway, crazed and muddy, the attention of every man, woman and child in the lobby and dining area. A baby, strapped into a highchair began to cry with lungs it had obviously been working out regularly since birth. Paddy took a look around and managed to apologize for his appearance.

"I had to change a flat tire. It's raining outside. Excuse me, please." He wandered through the brunch crowd and went upstairs to take a shower.

Justin, Steven and Tym looked at each other and mentally singaled the end of New Year's brunch. Tym presented checks on the remaining half a dozen tables while Steven helped Justin extinguish the sterno flames and return the leftovers to the kitchen. Tym made her way back to the front desk which she had used as a cashier station, and began to deposit all cash into her purse and pockets. Justin sneaked upstairs to retrieve his clothes and Steven's suitcase. He ran into Paddy in the hallway.

"Raining hard out there, huh?" Justin stuttered.

"Yeah." Paddy replied curtly. "Where you headed with a suitcase?"

"Uh, Steven leaves this afternoon for his teachers conference in California. I was going to ask to borrow the van so I could run him into the airport, but after last night, I'm probably better off keeping my mouth shut." Justin prepared to recieve his walking papers, which he would have gratefully accepted at this point. But Paddy tightened the towel around his waist and walked toward his bedroom.

"I'll take Bergman to the airport."

"What?" Justin snapped.

Paddy turned around to face Justin. "I said," he smiled devilishly, "I'll be taking Steven to the airport in Portland." He allowed time for the horror to overtake Justin. "I'm going to Portland anyway, for a two day conference with the city council. I'll need you to stay here and run the inn."

Justin saw terror behind his eyes and felt the blood rush from his own head. Paddy turned back around and disappeared into his bedroom closing the door behind him.

Justin coaxed his feet to take him down the stairs. He ran straight to Tym.

"Tym, he's fucking everything up. Where's the money?"

"Some of it's in my purse and the rest is in my pockets."

"Give me everything except five hundred dollars. Leave now. Drive to Portland. You're flying to Omaha. Your flight information is on this slip of paper. Gillian will meet you at the airport in Omaha. Go! We don't have much time." Justin rushed her to the front door.

"Are you sure about this?" she asked.

"No. Now get out of here!" Justin hurried across the lobby to the kitchen. "Steven! Oh, Jesus, baby. It's Cavanaugh. He insists on taking you to the airport himself. He's making me stay here to watch the inn. 'Some conference he has in Portland for two days."

"What? You've got to be joking," Steven insisted.

"I'm not. Tym is already gone. I sent her to Omaha to meet with Gillian. We've got to know either way about him."

"Knowledge does us little good if we get killed in the pursuit of it, you know."

"That's very profound, Steven. Now take this money. I have no idea how much is here. Be careful. And Steven, please hurry back. His conference in Portland only lasts two days."

"I'm not going anywhere," he stammered. "I wouldn't leave you now."

"You go now and we buy ourselves a few more days or that fanatic will blow us away in this kitchen where we stand. Yeah, we have a lot of choices right now."

"Alright. But you listen to me. The minute we leave the driveway, you take my truck, go to my house and get the gun I keep under my bed. Do you hear me?"

"Okay. I love you, Steven Bergman." Justin felt a tear jump from his eyes before a blink could catch it.

"I love you, too. I'll be back in a few days and I'll call when I get something on Cavanaugh." The two managed a quick hug before Paddy ambled down the staircase. He stopped on the bottom stair to put on his cowboy boots.

"Steve, I understand you have a flight you need to catch this afternoon? I have to be in Portland, myself. I'll give you a lift into town. Are you about ready?" Paddy looked him square in the eye.

"Yup," Steven answered, walking past Justin with a pat on the butt.

"Justin, do you have a deposit you want me to drop off at the bank?" Paddy surveyed the abandoned mess in the dining room.

"Actually, nothing is counted or reconciled. I can swing by there later this afternoon and place it in the night depository."

"We're going right by there on our way out of Seaside. Makes little difference if it's counted. We'll just drop it all in there. Money's money and I trust you." Paddy smiled.

Justin scrambled toward the front desk where

the personal checks and a small amount of assorted cash lay scattered among the brunch tickets. Out of sight, Justin reached into his pocket to extract the two or three hundred dollars he had set aside for himself and added that to the deposit, leaving him practically penniless. He handed the pile to Paddy.

"You guys did a decent job today by the looks of this stack. See what a good night's sleep can do for ya? Let's go Bergman." Paddy opened the front door and motioned Steven out to the van. "Mind the fort, Winter. Keep it safe from Indian attack." Paddy conjured up a spooky laugh from his tightened diaphragm. Steven waved good-bye from the steamy passenger window of the van that had brought Paddy and Justin together, in the first place. Justin cursed his intuitions and waved back at his lover.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"Tym, you don't understand what I'm trying to tell you. Paddy is the City Hall Assassin from 1978."

"Oh my God. This is a picture of Paddy Cavanaugh! The fucking City Hall Assassin is Paddy Cavanaugh."

"I'll be goddamned! That little nosy shit was the hitchhiker along Highway 101."

Tym tried to balance her coffee cup with an elbow resting on the chrome-rimmed Formica table in the cramped rural kitchen of Gillian's parent's home in the country. Gillian placed a cream and sugar set in the center of the table. She hoped the children would go right to sleep.

"You know, after all this time wishing I could just blurt it out, I really don't actually feel comfortable telling someone about my husband. Then again, informing the public about the antics of my husband, was never really my responsibility, anyway."

"I want to understand, Gillian. Take your time."

"You really don't need to call me Gillian anymore, but we'll get to that soon enough. Where do I begin?"

"Wherever you feel most comfortable," Tym tried to smile.

"Well, of course you are aware of the political assassinations in The City in 1978." Her hands could barely hold the coffee cup.

"Yes. I mean, Justin told me what happened. I think the mayor and a gay city supervisor were murdered, if I remember correctly."

"That's right, they were. Two months ago I attended the funeral of the murderer who had ended up committing suicide. I stood by the grave with my children, the widow of the deceased, and cried during all the appropriate spots. The children cried too. I felt ashamed just knowing that deep down inside, I was relieved to stand there, to see the shovels of earth heaved upon the wretched past of The City."

"That makes perfect sense, though. It was a terrible thing that happened to those city officials. It's not wrong to sense relief with the passing of the man who was responsible for those deaths." Tym put a hand to her forehead wondering when she would be shown what she had traveled to Omaha to find.

"Tym, you don't understand what I'm trying to tell you. Paddy is the City Hall Assassin from 1978." She nearly upset her cup placing it on the table top. Tym cocked her head and considered the statement. "Paddy killed them. He never committed suicide. Don't you see?" She reached a hand across the table.

"Yes, but why?" Tym took her hand and squeezed it encouragingly.

"The death threats, the pressure. I don't know. And I didn't know until I was transported to Seaside after the funeral. Once he was released from prison, he told me he wouldn't survive in The City. Homosexuals hadn't been satisfied that he had ever been punished for what he did. I wondered about that myself. The short time he was in jail, time seemed to fly by. I had a baby and it seemed he was released. But he left for Ireland and spent several months there. I had grown used to having him gone. That's probably why I was so accepting when I thought he had committed suicide. I saw the body before it was cremated. I'd swear it was my husband. I remember arguing with Harry over the cremation. I had been raised Catholic and was always told that cremation went against the Church. Lochran spoke with the Bishop who told me that that stance had been reversed in 1979 as long as the

body was in tact for the Requiem Mass. Lochran compromised and postponed the cremation until after the Mass. I never understood the need for a casket and burial. That was Lochran's idea too, -the military burial and all."

"Who is Lochran?"

"Are you ready for this? He's the father of my youngest child. I've had to live that down, too. I became pregnant while my husband was in prison. But Lochran worked with my husband on The City Police Force. He had raised a great deal of defense money and I suppose, that probably bought my husband the short prison term he eventually served. Harry kept money flowing into my house every week for the five years my husband was behind bars. And then he pulled that suicide stunt."

"How did you explain your pregnancy to Paddy?"

"Lochran made arrangements at the prison for, what they call, conjugal visits. I was a month and a half pregnant with Harry's child when he forced me to go to the prison to have sex with my husband. I don't ever remember being more humiliated, but I suppose it was necessary to justify my conception."

"Does this Lochran know you've left your husband?"

"No. I tried calling a few times but his wife always answers and she never quite understood his interest in my situation."

"Will Paddy try violence or threats to get you

back? Is he still dangerous?"

"I'm prepared for everything and that's why I tried to lure Justin away from the inn and out of Seaside. If Paddy suspects anything at all, he'll react and violence has been very much a part of his past."

"I need to warn Justin, then. He's got to get out of there fast. Paddy has him practically imprisoned at the inn. Justin will have to make a run for it."

"Get him out of there, Tym. Then turn my husband in, please, -for the safety of me and my children. That's why I'm telling you all this."

"I will. You've been a friend to me and that's rare where I come from lately. I'll do everything I can. We all will."

"Would you like to use the telephone?" The suddenly revitalized woman, with all the tension and fear flushed from her face, pointed energetically to the phone on the wall. It was if she reached out to touch her life for the first time in years and it touched her back.

Tym rose from the table and dialed the number to Cavanaugh's from memory. The line was busy. She rifled through the yellow pages and dialed the airlines.

The reservationist took a long, audible breath, bracing herself for another frantic passenger trapped in the grasp of this winter storm. "It's been snowing since Five this afternoon. Another twelve inches by morning and that will CURNES WHITEWASH Page 328

ground anything needing a runway." The reservationist seemed to mock Tym's ignorance.

"Please. I've got to leave tomorrow. Can you please make the reservation and I'll take my chances with the weather?"

"Go ahead, ma'm. It's your dime."

Steven quickly remembered what it was like to drive a car in The City, found a garage and opted for public transit. Riding the train, next to an empty seat, he thought about Justin, wishing he could have escaped Seaside with him. The line has been busy at Cavanaugh's each time he had attempted to call his lover. He'd try again closer to noon after he finished up at the library. The train dropped him off near the intersection of Larkin and McAllister, and he jogged, in the rain, to the granite steps of The City Library. Steven felt dwarfed beneath the high vaulted ceilings and the swooping grand staircase before him. Every step he took, echoed off the travertine marbel that surrounded him. On the second floor, he passed a dozen murals of the California landscape by Gottardo Piazzoni. He followed directional signs to Periodicals on the third floor and approached the reference desk for assistance. A man and a woman sat behind the sprawling counter and Steven held back until the man was free to help him.

"Excuse me," Steven cleared his throat. "I hope you can help me. I'm looking for the edition of The City Newspaper the day the City Hall Assassin committed suicide."

"No problem. That would be back in October. -The twenty-first or twenty-second, if I remember right. Just one minute and I'll be right back." The tall librarian rose from his swivel stool and disappeared through a narrow arched passage. Steven politely smiled at the female behind the counter. The librarian returned carrying a newspaper. "I'm afraid we're a little behind transferring print to microfiche. I hope you don't mind," he said smiling at Steven.

"Not at all. Thank you." Steven smiled back, showing his membership in their exclusive club. He moved to the cleared end of the counter and examined the newspaper. Right there on the front page, "The City Mayor's Killer Dies in His Garage," was subtitled with "Brother Finds Body, 3 Notes." Steven scanned the artical and inadvertently wandered into another artical, ignoring the "Black Mobs Battle in Soweto Over How to Fight Apartheid" -headline. He recovered the previous artical by turning the page. Under the new headline of "Slayer Kills Himself," Steven's eyes zeroed in on a picture of the assassin.

"Oh my God. This is a picture of Paddy Cavanaugh! The fucking City Hall Assassin is Paddy Cavanaugh." Both counter attendants flashed a startled look at Steven. "I'm sorry," Steven apologized for disrupting the silence with profanity. "Can you come here?" he motioned to the male behind the desk. The tall man looked at his co-worker and walked toward Steven. "My name is Steven Bergman. I'm from Oregon. What would you say if I told you he wasn't dead at all." Steven pointed at the picture in the newspaper.

The librarian cleared his confused expression and said, "You know, it really wouldn't surprise me one damn bit as much as that bastard was protected. Why do you ask, though?"

"Because he is. He is alive. The suicide must have been a fraud to protect him."

"You're sure he's alive? I mean, do you know what The City will do when they find out?" The librarian couldn't contain his excitement in the discovery of ultimate dirt.

"I'm sure it will cause quite a stir, but- Jeffrey," Steven read his nametag, "I beg you to keep quiet on this until I get back to you in a few days. My lover is in danger in Oregon. This creep," he tapped the photograph, "has him held captive and now I know why. My lover knows too much. I'm afraid if the story blows now, I'll be burying my boyfriend. Do I have your word? I promise to get back to you as soon as my boyfriend is safe. Okay?"

"I promise Steven. But I want to help, if I can."

"You can. Do you have any better pictures of this guy? I could use a decent picture to convince the authorities in Oregon."

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The librarian darted through the passage behind the counter without saying a word. Again, the female behind the desk looked at Steven as though she teetered on the edge of a reprimand. Steven could no longer smile to appease her. He was worried about Justin. He had to get back immediately. He had to call Justin.

Jeffrey returned with an excellent photocopy, enlarged and obviously, Paddy Cavanaugh.

"Are you heading back to Oregon now?"

"As soon as I can. I don't think I have much time left."

Jeffrey looked down at the still-open newspaper on the counter. "Can't you call the police in Oregon from here?"

"I don't think it would do any good. You see, this killer is in with the police department in Oregon. Fuck! He's on City Council." Steven pounded his fist on the counter. The female clerk raised her head to object but Jeffrey intercepted her glare and she returned to her reading.

"That's just the way it was here in The City, too. He was in with everybody and in the end, everybody supported him. Well, everybody but the Gay Community." "Is there anyone on The City Police Force I can talk to here?" Steven asked suddenly.

"Well, there was." Jeffrey looked under the counter and produced yesterday's paper. "But unless you have connections in Hell, there's no talking to them now. Murdered, two nights ago."

Steven traced the preliminary lines of newsprint with his index finger and came across the name of Harry Lochran. "Justin's mentioned this name."

"Justin's your lover?"

"Yes." Steven felt an actual pain in his chest and asked directions to a telephone.

Jeffrey looked around and seemed satisfied that his co-worker had returned to her reading, and produced a telephone from under the counter next to him. "Call him, dear. You won't be able to think straight until you know he's okay. Go ahead." Jeffrey patted Steven's hand and pushed the phone toward him. "Dial eight to get out."

Steven dialed the number. "What about the brother who found the body?" Steven asked reviewing the first newspaper.

"Dead too. Murdered on the waterfront last week."

Steven got another busy signal in Oregon. "Damn! Who can be on that phone?" Steven began to slam the phone on the counter but Jeffrey caught his hand. Steven took a deep breath. "What about the coroner who prepared the body after the alledged suicide? He must be in on this, too."

Jeffrey half laughed out of disbelief. "You won't believe this, but he committed suicide after killing one of his assistants, three weeks ago."

"Coincidence?" Steven asked faceitiously.

"Are you kidding? I don't even think straight society would buy it this time around."

"I've got to get going. We have a deal?" Steven reached to shake his hand.

"Of course we do. I'll walk you out."

Paddy had dropped Steven off at the airport and then went to register at a hotel in downtown Portland. He had daydreamed throughout the commencement banquet of his three day city government conference, unable to put the disturbing thought of Justin and Steven in bed, out of his mind. For the second time, in his own house, queers had taken advantage of him, in Oregon, no less. Paddy was never one to neglect his little corner of the world and if that corner needed improvement or cleaning, he would see to it. Late Sunday night, Paddy had driven back to Seaside to cut all telephone access to the inn. After snipping the lead wires outside the inn, Paddy had crept inside while Justin slept upstairs. He quietly rummaged through the kitchen for a bite to eat, and ran across Justin's wallet laying open on the kitchen counter. In the moonlight, he examined the contents to learn more about the employee he now planned to terminate, one way or the other. Paddy held a drivers license to the light at the french doors and stared in disbelief at the bearded picture on the California document. He raced from the house without a sound and jogged down the driveway where he had parked the van. He jumped in and slammed his fists onto the steering wheel. "I'll be goddamned! That little nosy shit was the hitchhiker along Highway 101."

Paddy turned the ignition and surpassed the speed limit all the way back into Portland. All day Monday he gorged on candy and sweetened coffee as he darted into one seminar after another. He failed to actively participate in group discussions and he was short with his fellow council members, until he suddely realized the conference would be the perfect alibi. His attitude changed instantly and even the mayor, David Donaldson, commented on his metamorphosis after Paddy's heated contribution to a discussion on resort tax. Paddy was suddenly the vital life of the party that evening at dinner and even insisted the group go dancing afterward. It was then he slipped out of the crowd unnoticed a little before ten o'clock.

Steven had been disappointed to learn the first flight he could possibly get out of Sacramento was not until

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Eight-ten that evening. He decided to attend the awards dinner, at which he was to be nationally honored. He went to his hotel room to call Oregon and discovered the message light illuminated on his room telephone. He called the operator immediately.

"You have a message, Mr. Bergman, to call Tym Green As soon as possible, in Omaha. She says it is urgent." Steven scribbled the number on the notepad next to the telephone and called.

"Yes, Tym Green, please."

"I'm sorry, Tym's just left for the airport. Is this Steven?"

"Gillian-?"

"Well, no. Yes! Steven, Tym thinks she might be able to get on a flight around Six tonight. We've been snowed-in most of the day but they've opened a runway at the airport."

"Do you know what time she gets into Portland?"

"No I don't. Wait a minute. If I can read her writing...it looks like she gets into Portland at Ten o'clock this evening."

"Great. Hopefully I can catch her at the airport."

"Please be careful, you two, and call me as soon as you can." Gillian hung up the phone and stared at the snow falling outside the kitchen window. She bowed her head to pray. Breakfast and lunch had been signifcantly quiet on Monday since all of Seaside's elected officials were away in Portland at the conference, but Justin enjoyed the slower pace and tried to relax. He wished Steven or Tym would call. He couldn't help but dwell on his solitary confinement.

He nibbled on some leftover quiche from Sunday's brunch as the setting sun streamed through the trees and curtained windows of Cavanaugh's.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Justin stared at the telephone recalling his childhood fascination with Uri Geller and his remarkable powers of concentration. There were bent spoons inevery home in America except in the Winter household. Once, Justin had aimed his spoon during a television broadcast, and the force he must have exerted with his grip, flipped the spoon across the living room where it hit an antique clock snapping the minute hand in half. Justin jumped to his feet and hustled to repair the clock before his parents returned from work. Though he knew he could blame Uri Geller, he somehow figured he'd encounter paternal skepticism in his attempt to recruit a psychic explanation for the broken antique. This hunch held, and Justin was grounded for life, (which was later reduced to solitary confinement for a week.) Justin never pursued justice as an only child. He always felt he had more to learn and experience from mistreatment and oppression. He was usually right.

But now, as he focused every brain cell into a

telepathic message to Sacramento, and as he summoned the sweetsandsunbridled force of the universe to cause that telephone to ring, the inn mocked his concentration and seemed to snicker behind a black veil of silence.

For an hour he sat there, in the cold lobby of the rejuvenated mansion, staring at the telephone and sending useless brain waves to his lover. He realized there was really no point in staying at the inn since nobody ever checked in, but on the chance Steven or Tym might call, he had squared off on the couch and vowed to wait. It had been clear negligence to send Tym to Omaha with the slip of paper bearing Steven's telephone number in Sacramento, and the telephone bill along with the autopsy report and the address book, had been removed from beneath the dresser drawer. The more Justin dwelled on his predicament, the more frightened and uneasy he became. Paddy must surely know he knew, Justin admitted in the darkness. And if Cavanaugh would think to strike, it would be now while everyone was away, he reasoned, springing to his feet. Justin grabbed the telephone and began to dial information for the Times Theatre. A movie would surely settle his nerves. The line was dead. Justin tapped the receiver and slapped the switch hook. He dropped the phone on the counter. He was going to get the gun at Steven's apartment. Justin snatched a jacket from the back of the couch, fumbled for

the keys to Steven's pickup truck and opened the front door of Cavanaugh's. Looking down at the keys, he ran flat into Paddy Cavanaugh who stood in his path.

"Jesus Christ!" Justin managed to scream once the breath had returned to his lungs.

"Whoa! Where do you think you're going?" Paddy looked dead in the blue moonlight.

Justin stuttered an answer to his question. "I'm going, -We're out of milk. I was just going to run over to Tym's." Justin's heart had exceeded discernible beating and raced like a stock car in a demolition derby inside his chest.

"Tym's is closed. The sign on her door says she's out of town for a few days. I checked." Paddy's stance didn't change.

"Then I'll have to go to Thriftway. I didn't realize she was out of town."

"I thought you and the dike were pretty close. I think she would have told you she was going out of town."

"Well, she didn't," Justin struggled to maintain his story. He began to consider his chances of making a run for the truck.

"You and I need to talk and we need to talk straight." Paddy considered his statement and laughed. "Kinda impossible for a faggot-queer to talk straight, isn't it, Justin?"

"Knock it off, Paddy! I've had it with your

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closed mind. If you have a problem with me, you can work it out in your own narrow head. As far as I'm concerned, you're history. I quit!" Justin thought about what he said, realizing he was giving up before he had found out what part of history, Cavanaugh actually played.

"You quit, huh?"

"That's right, asshole. I quit," he repeated. "Run your own goddamn cover-up here in Seaside, but you've got no family and you have no friends." Justin pushed his way past Cavanaugh, relieved by the opportunity to leave.

"But I have a gun." Paddy cocked the hammer by Justin's ear as he passed. Justin stopped cold. Slowly, he turned around to face the revolver aimed at his forehead. "I said you and I need to talk and I meant it."

"Alright, Paddy. Take it easy, okay? We'll talk." Justin didn't take his eyes away from the gun pointed between them. He didn't entertain full-blown shock, always knowing it would eventually come to this one on one confrontation. Instead, he began to plot his survivial. He bought time by cooperating. At least he hadn't been shot yet. It was a ploy worth pursuing.

"In the truck," Paddy demanded waving the gun toward Steven's pickup. "Let's take a ride." He reached around Justin to secure the front door to his inn. He grabbed Justin's arm with his free hand and forcefully directed Justin to the driver's side of the cab. Paddy popped the door handle and entered the pickup pulling Justin in by the sleeve of his windbreaker, after him. "Drive," he commanded.

"Where are we going, Paddy?" Justin started the truck, stalling it twice out of nervousness.

"I guess you could say, we're headed for the edges of awareness. Just drive."

Justin steered the truck down the long driveway from Cavanaugh's, half-expecting Steven or Tym to speed into the scene to his rescue. He knew instantly, he had seen too many hour-long mini-dramas on television. In real life crisis, you don't break for commercials and you don't pause for station identification. Justin's foot shook on the gas pedal as Paddy clarified the presence of the weapon by nuzzling it under hismarmJusJustin considered jamming his arm backward from its raised position on the steering wheel. At best, he could hope for the gun to discharge into the padded seat. At worst, he could anticipate a secondary shot as he tried to jump free of the moving vehicle. Justin continued driving. The pickup headed south on Franklin, took a jog on 9th and picked up the southerly direction on Downing. At the intersection of Columbia and Broadway Streets, the pickup met Chief Mathias' patrol car.

"Wave," Paddy demanded. "Wave!" he said as the

two vehicles passed from opposing directions. Justin managed a half-wave, hoping the Chief would recognize a foreign driver in the science teacher's pickup, but their breathing had caused the windows to fog. Justin tried to react by awkwardly hitting the hazard lights as he reached for the defrost lever, but Paddy was quick to rebound, wired enough to recognize the foolish maneuver for what it was. Justin watched desperately in the rearview mirror for some indication that the Chief had been alerted. Justin was not blessed with the brake lights for which he silently prayed. They continued south on Beach Drive, past Margaret Sheridan's darkened home and beyond the Lewis and Clark Salt Cairn. Paddy instructed Justin to turn up Sunset Boulevard and they started to climb high above Seaside, along Tillamook Head.

The sweat from Justin's palms bonded his hands to the steering wheel. They passed the final street light and the cab of the small pickup darkened with distance. Justin could no longer see the gun that he assumed was still pointed his way. The road curved again and emptied into a shallow parking lot with no other vehicular outlet. Justin braked with the headlights shining on a plaque that marked the boundary of the Elmer Feldenheimer Forest Preserve.

"Where now?" Justin seemed unable to produce the much-needed saliva his dry throat craved. He tried to

control his shaking and appear outwardly calm while every cell in his body prepared to foreclose on any remaining chance of survival. Justin knew he had taken it too far this time and already began to regret that any lesson learned from this gamble, would most likely not see any future applications. He waited for Cavanaugh's answer.

"Cut the engine. We'll walk from here." He looked at Justin and then waved the gun for emphasis. Justin turned the ignition and grabbed the keys. "Go on. But get out of the truck nice and slow."

Justin fondled the key chain, a replica of the four masted Peter Iredale, that had run aground during a storm in 1906, just north of Seaside. Justin had purchased the key chain for his lover at Fort Steven's State Park. Justin closed his eyes tightly and a split second distress prayer summoned God and His ability to save him. He opened the door and slowly eased out and onto the wet asphalt next to the pickup. Paddy scooted across the front seat and emerged outside the driver's door to stand next to It had evolved from a drizzle into qualified Justin. rain and Cavanaugh hustled Justin under tree cover. He pushed Justin onto the trail ahead of them. Justin caught the barrel of the revolver in his back and jumped ahead of it. His feet struggled to gain traction in the deep mud of the rutted trail.

Thunder signified the start of Justin's race for survival. He knew he had to overpower the gunman behind him but he also felt that familiar commitment to his original task of breaking the identity of this lunatic. Justin realized he was sticking out his tongue at the face of Destiny, but he had to know.

"I thought we were going to talk," he hollered over his shoulder, watching his muddy step.

"What?" Cavanaugh yelled above the thunder.

"I said, I thought we were going to talk." Justin stopped on the trail.

"Keep moving," Paddy motioned with the gun. Justin turned back around and promptly tripped on an exposed tree root that had captured his foot. He went down, chest-first in the cold mud. He raised his head as lightning flashed overhead to reveal the rain-filled litter box in front of him. When Justin raised to his feet, he saw the dead cat floating in the box and gasped. It was such a disturbing sight and Justin hated cats. He despised them. But Justin had recognized the fatal breath of Death on Tillamook Head before him. He had to avoid running into it again.

"Get going," Paddy shouted.

Justin willed a fall for his captor. One slip and Justin could take him. He kept a prepared guard.

The trail climbed steadily and water now trickled

down the path to fill the depressions of Justin's staggered steps. Once, Justin paused to negotiate the route before him, but Paddy pushed him in the back and shouted. Justin squinted in the rainy darkness, enlisting branches and balance to guide his plight. Periodically, lightning would flash in the sky above the tall trees, lost in the churning clouds that had rammed the coast. His feet weighed more with each muddy step but he forged on at the repeated command of his one-time boss. "Hurry!" Cavanaugh screamed. "This storm is not letting up."

Justin had a feeling his haste would not benefit him in the long run. It wasn't as though they were out to pick huckleberries and when they had a pailful, they could retreat to some fireplace and sip hot chocolate milk. Justin knew Cavanaugh planned to kill him and Justin wasn't about to accomodate the process. There were still options and Justin's soggy mind raced to indentify them. He suddenly went down again, this time on top of a portruding rock which knocked his breath clean out of his chest. He gasped lifting his face from the cold mud. Cavanaugh wiped the rain from his eyes and waited for Justin to resume the fatal lead. Just a few more yards, Paddy reminded himself.

Justin raised to his knees and then to his feet. He slowly turned his head around to pinpoint the position of the gun. It was still in Cavanaugh's hand. Paddy raised his arm somewhat mechanically, bringing the gun level with Justin's eyes.

"I'm going! Don't shoot, Paddy," he caught himself begging. He turned to face the trail before him, fully expecting a bullet to slam into the back of his head and rip through his brain, splattering his last options where they would mix organically with the mud of the forest floor. He braved a few steps before lightning exploded in front of him. He fell to one knee and then slid between two giant rocks before disappearing off the slippery cliff.

Paddy rubbed his eyes and inspected the precipice, finding it to his planned satisfaction. It had been easier than he could have ever imagined. Now that Justin had vanished to his certain death below on the rocky beach, Paddy was left to hike down the mountain and back to his van in Seaside. A quick commute back into Portland for the convention and he had his alibi sewn up with exacting thread. He turned back into the trees that had given way to the exposed point of Tillamook Head.

The thunder crashed about him as Justin clung to the young tree rooted on the edge of the cliff. His legs dangled silently, helplessly in the storm. He waited several minutes, concentrating on his condition. To the best of his inventoried capabilities, he had deducted that he had not been shot afterall. He tightened his grip and pulled himself onto the jagged rock. The rain intensified its assault on the point and Justin, a veteran of the storm, indebted to fate, followed Cavanaugh back into the timber. The thunder stuttered overhead and the lightning illuminated Justin's playing field. He left the trail and gained some elevation on his prey. When he had reached the end of a small bluff which overlooked a switchback on the trail, Justin lept through the night onto the back of the gunman, driving him into the ground.

Paddy's first thought was that a giant tree had d fallen on top of him, but sthat was quickly dispelled by Justin's fist as it pounded into his ribs time after time, hitting the mark he had been aiming for these past few months with the precision of a trained marksman. A gift of lightning pointed out the glistening revolver a few feet away and Justin lunged for it.

"Get up!" Justin commanded.

Paddy pryed himself from the grip of the mud and struggled to stand upright. He held his side. "Where did you come from? I thought I was the only one who could come back from death."

"What? What are you talking about?" Justin waved the gun slightly to let him know he wasn't particularly in the mood for jokes.

"You know what I'm talking about Mr. Hitchhiker. That's why I had to kill you. You know all about my resurrection, but you see, I knew all about you, too." Justin walked a few steps toward him, provoking him to step back as well. "You knew I was the hitchhiker from that day in the van? But how could you have known?" Justin continued to back him out onto the cliff.

"How could I have known," Paddy mimmicked his question sarcastically. "I knew just like you knew I killed the mayor and that queer supervisor back in the Seventies. Face it. We had each other figured out from the very beginning." Paddy bluffed his way through his confession asking himself the same obvious question of why he didn't recognize his employee as the hitchhiker.

Justin tried to mask his shock. It had never occurred to him that Paddy's involvement in the suicide was that of the guest star, himself. As Cavanaugh neared the edge of the cliff, Justin sat on a wet, mossy stump and relaxed his gun arm cautiously. "You know, after all this time, I have to ask you why. Why did you do it? Why did you kill the mayor and the gay supervisor?"

Paddy shook his head and thought for a moment. "To make a difference in our situation," he stated. "To make things better for everyone, really. Between the two of them, they had legislated us back into the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. It had gotten to the point where we couldn't raise our children without the fear of having them recruited by some fairy. And they were everywhere. They paraded up and down our city streets and their escapades were plastered on the front page of The City newspaper every other day." Paddy paused to wipe his nose that had started to run in the fierce rain. "You have no idea what it was like for me and my family and for other decent citizens in The City back in the Seventies. You have no idea."

"I was there. I don't need any idea. I relive the nightmare every night in my sleep. The day you assassinated our leaders seems just like yesterday and I'll never be the same again. I don't imagine any of us will."

"What do you mean you're not the same? You're still queer unless you've miraculously converted since the other night when I caught you in bed with one of the educators of my son. I'm really beginning to wonder if what I did accomplished anything at all."

"What you did, for whatever reason, could not have changed the facts. Gay and Lesbian People are everywhere, and all the bullets from all the guns of all the scared people in this world, who are afraid of understanding these facts, couldn't wipe us out. Look at you! Are you going to stand there and tell me you never once touched another man's penis or wondered what it might be like to truly know another man?"

"I most certainly have n-" Paddy started to blurt out.

"Then you're a fanatic and a liar!" Justin accused the homophobe before a jury of Nature. "You see, when you think about it, we always manage to do the most harm in life when we insist on changing something we know nothing about. Take Vietnam. Americans were so pig-headed they couldn't admit defeat nor accept the fact they were faced with a situation they could not correct. So in our ignorance and with our unwillingness to observe, and rather than just admit we'd lost, we let the damn thing drag on for years and years and lives and lives. What did we accomplish in the end? -Defeat. And your fucked up notion that you could somehow change the world by murdering one homosexual, is no different. That's like setting out to eliminate all left-handed people because they write funny and you don't understand why. If you would have taken one objective moment to recognize that we've spent decades marching up and down your streets because we just wanted and deserved the same rights that you have. -Those unalienable rights guaranteed by the constitution that you somehow felt justified in denying us. That's all. We didn't want to convert your children. We weren't even crazy about your neighborhoods. We just wanted all the Bible-thumpers to close the Book until they were prepared to exercise the love and compassion it was written to teach in the first place. Sure. We wanted to shove 'the light' right up Anita Bryant's holy ass just as she tried to cram it down our throats, but we never claimed she was

damned for expressing an opinion. That was her right. She just happened to exercise it until her own testicals fell out on the soapbox beneath her. And John Briggs? There was a frightened bastard. Who gave him the bad blow job, anyway? And then there's -Paddy Cavanaugh? That's a campy alias. Did you you. come up with that all by yourself or did your boyfriends on the police force chip in their creative talents?" Justin walked away from the stump to block the only exit from the cliff. "What's your story? I understand those who silently disapprove and maybe mumble something under their breath or thank God they aren't queer, but those of you who feel this fucked-up drive to actively campaign against us and to eradicate us, must really have one foot in the closet. So, what is it with you? Did you get hard-ons in the shower during P.E. in junior high? Have trouble keeping it up with women? Or maybe with you it's just old fashioned penis envy, -wanting something you really haven't got. Huh?" Justin grabbed his own crotch and lifted his soaked blessing.

Paddy made a drastic move to recover his gun but he slipped in the mud at the edge of the cliff and disappeared feet first without a sound. Lightning struck nearby and was followed by an immediate clap of thunder. Justin carefully looked over the edge and tried to make out his body on the rocky beach below, some three hundred feet straight down. Justin strained his eyes as the lightning provided split second glimpses of salty, white capped waves that waged war on the treacherous coast, but he couldn't focus on the body that he imagined was mangled among the jagged rocks and sharp driftwood.

Justin plopped down on the stump and, after several minutes, asked himself what it had all accomplished in the end. What the hell had he possibly gained by this? Perhaps it was the satisfaction of having questioned in the first place or maybe just the chance to speak with the ghost that had changed his own liberal past. There was that. But Justice? -No. Revenge? -Not really. Restitution? Change? Progress? Justin laughed in the rain. He guessed not. Because in the end, the past was dead and it was dead again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"Toss it again!" Justin screamed for the third time since the sun had made its debut above Tillamook Head. Except for an hour in the shower and a change into dry clothes, Justin had spent the entire night on the stump in the rainy fog. Steven and Tym had alerted police after their arrival in Portland but it wasn't until they recontacted Seaside authorities that Chief Mathias remembered seeing two men driving Steven's truck toward the point. After confirming the location of the pickup, state police and local citizens combed the Head, scoured the beach below the cliff and searched the area with Coast Guard helicopters, but the body of Paddy Cavanaugh simply had not been found.

"Justin, we've thrown the dummy off the cliff four times and each time it's landed in the same place, just shy of the driftwood. We've had dogs down there and they can't pick up the scent. We have to face facts. Cavanaugh's dead, carried away by the storm tide. You know it peaked at eleven and a half feet last night." The Chief of Seaside Police was wearing in his attempts to convince the Winter Kid his boss was dead.

"Yeah. Well, they said he was dead once before and left it at that. Because of that ignorance, five others have been killed according to our reports out of The City. Throw it again!" Justin refused the coffee Steven had just poured from a thermos.

"Justin, we've been over your theory about The City and frankly, we can't even get the authorities in The City to swallow it. It just doesn't make sense, you see?" George Mathias tried to reason with him.

"And nothing's conclusive without a body. I said throw it again!" Justin was losing patience.

"One more time," the Chief consented.

The weighted dummy was released off the side of the cliff and Justin watched it tumble through the air before hitting the rocks below. Steven rolled his eyes at the police chief, acknowledging his efforts. For the fifth time, the dummy rolled to a stop against a blockade of graying driftwood.

"Just tell me how your storm tides would have plucked him from that mess of driftwood, will you?" Justin squirmed out from under Steven's grip on his shoulders and returned to his stump. "Without the body we'll never prove he was The City Hall Assassin. Everyone involved in this coverup is dead, I'm telling you." Justin turned to the reporter from the Oregonian. "It's true, you know. The City's Police Chief was involved. He'd dead. Some public relations officer from the force drove his family up here. He's dead. The City Coroner that said it was a suicide-"

"We know." The reporter took a pen out of his mouth. "They're all dead. Ruled a coincidence. We've checked your story against our own sources back in The City. Nobody's biting."

"This is ridiculous! What about Gillian? What about his wife in Nebraska? Tym was just there. She spilled the whole crazy story. She can back me up!" Justin exclaimed with renewed enthusiasm.

"She's not talking. We called," the reporter added with obvious pessimism.

"Besides," the chief added, "folks in The City say she disappeared shortly after the suicide to collect on the insurance, but there were some problems with the policy and paying-off a sucicide. Eventually, the insurance company gave in and mailed a settlement check but according to their records, it was never cashed. So whoever Gillian Cavanaugh was, she didn't have any interest in The City or the insurance money."

"That's not true! Don't you see," Justin grew hoarse. "Gillian is the assassin's wife."

Tym nodded in agreement but added, "We've told

them everything we know. That's all we can do until they find the body."

Justin looked into Tym's eyes as though he'd been diagnosed insane. Steven sensed his helplessness and threw his arms about his lover and squeezed.

The Chief looked out over the calm Pacific and shook his head while the specialty dogs from the canine unit tugged at a strand of kelp on the disappointing beach below them.

"He lives," Justin mumbled. "Nothing's changed. He's still out there. He's alive." In San Francisco California on October 21, 1985, Daniel James White committed the act of suicide at the age of 39 by inhaling carbon monoxide fumes piped through the driver's window of a 1973 Buick.

He was survived by his wife Mary Ann, three children and anyone who paused to reflect on the horrific assassinations at San Francisco City Hall in 1978.

In all probability, Dan White is dead. But like the components of his quiet suicide, Dan White left the engine running on several unanswered questions. To consider the probability of his death, one must examine the probability of his survival and the circumstances and statistics that support both possibilities.

Dan White was a protected assassin; supported by public opinion, heralded by the law enforcement community and grazed by the liberal swipe of a weakened judicial system. And though in the shadows of the medical examiner's report, we should encounter reason plenty to subscribe to the finality of Dan White's suicide, we must also be weary of the scope of his living legacy.

The shroud of our imperfect world provides a regular glimpse of our grotesque travesties. The hatred and contempt that coursed through Dan White's veins and pumped his crazed heart, were but an irrigation channel diverted from the wild and homphobic river that flows just beneath the surface of humanity. And in that current that gives life, swim those somehow ordained to take life. So-ordained was Dan White.

So-ordained was born-again Christian, Sean Patrick Flanagan, who, in the Fall of 1987, took to the streets of Las Vegas to dismember James Lewandowski and to strangle Albert Duggins as a service to society to rid it of homosexuals.

So-ordained were Douglas Sheets and Robert Eugene Jackson, members of Identity Christianity, who shot and killed three men and wounded two others before fire bombing an adult bookstore in Shelby, North Carolina in the Fall of 1987. The two defendants, acting on the white supremacist teachings of their religion, had begun their spree vowing to avenge Yahweh by putting homosexuals to death. The absence of physical evidence, (destroyed by fire,) and the lack of identifying witnesses, (murdered during the rampage,) resulted in the acquittal of both men in 1989. So-ordained was Stephen Roy Carr, who opened fire on two camping lesbians on May 13, 1988 in Pennsylvania. After having apparently followed the hiking couple for nearly a day, he witnessed their private lovemaking then began shooting. Rebecca Wight was shot in the head and in the back and died by a stream near the Appalacian Trail. Her lover, Claudia Brenner, was shot in the head, face and upper arm and twice in the neck, but managed to walk 3.7 miles in the dark to find help. The attorney for the defendant maintains that the lesbian couple provoked the attack by making love.

So-ordained were Sean Burke and Marcos Perez, who, on May 15, 1988 in Hartford Connecticut, repeatedly bludgeoned the body of Richard Reihl with a log of firewood, left the scene of the crime and returned several hours later to insure their victim was dead. Both pleaded not guilty, though Perez admitted to police that he and Burke had killed Reihl because they "hated fags." It has only been recently established that the two will be tried as adults for their crime eventhough Sean Burke was 17 and Marcos Perez was 16 at the time of the murder. Burke is free on bond awaiting trial. Perez remains in custody.

So-ordained were Richard Bednarski and several of his college friends when they drove into the Oak Lawn section of a predominantly gay neighborhood in Dallas on May 15, 1988 and fired a gun into the mouth of Tommy Trimble three times before emptying the revolver into the body of John Griffin. According to the 1988 National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Report on Anti-gay Violence, Dallas judge Jack Hampton sentenced Bednarski to a 30-year prison term instead of the maximum life sentence because the victims were "queers."

So-ordained were 70 other individuals in 1988 who took the lives of gays and lesbians in anti-gay or gay-related homicides. So-ordained were 20 reported gay assassins in 1985, 80 reported in 1986 and 64 reported in 1987, according to the 1988 NGLTF Report. Add these acts of anti-gay homicide to the statistics of verbal harrassment, physical assaults, vandalism, bomb threats, arson and police harrassment and you have the pathetic sum of 7,248 incidents of anti-gay behavior in 1988 alone.

So ask yourself if Dan White could still be out there. Then ask yourself, who would notice if he were. .