

The Spencer Weston Parkway winds down through the Mirror Lake Hills, across the flood plain of the Parleron River, before dropping down the side of the west coast range where it spills out onto Highway 71 and disappears. Depending on who you talk to, it's either the best thing that ever happened to Ralston and the Lakes District or the worst example of political ego in the western world.

The Parkway is named after Spencer Weston, a member of the Assembly who could have been premier had it not been for his insatiable appetite for alcohol, which led him to all things illicit. His life could have been reduced to myth were it not for the many, many eye witness accounts of his debauchery. It speaks to his prominence and unassailable electability that no one ever put on the public record any of the raucous things he'd ever done, with all manner of humanity and at least a couple of lower life forms.

The Parkway is anything but the shortest distance between two points, something that's attributed to Weston and his political meanderings.

Through influence abuse, patronage, threats and bullying, he forced surveyors and contractors to move the highway, alter its routing, to add more than three dozen scenic viewpoints along its 94 mile distance. Originally designed to carry traffic 58 miles from Ralston to 71, Weston's fawning added 36 miles to the route and more than \$60 million to its cost. It wasn't just the raw distance covered, but some very expensive real estate had to be expropriated and some stunning engineering feats accomplished to keep several of the viewpoints from sinking into one of the links of Mirror Lake. Weston's fans, and indeed, even some of his detractors point to the steady stream of tourists through Ralston, Pitway, Glendale and Reed Creek as the legacy of a great regional leader. Most people snicker and talk about his dalliances, his bizarre personality and especially the final weekend of his life, possibly the most exaggerated tale ever to originate in the region.

While everyone appreciates the tourists, who pay for all of the amenities in the communities that dot along the Parkway, they also curse the drive down to 71. It was shorter before the Parkway was built and the old highway, while narrower, allowed for a substantially higher average speed. It measured exactly 58 miles and a good driver could cover it comfortably in 65 minutes. The Parkway was a challenge to cover in three hours. Three beautiful hours in the daylight, of course.

But at night, it was a series of twists, turns, humps and bumps, filled with hiding places for what seemed like an endless supply of suicidal wildlife. So Andy Robertson was just a tad trepidatious as he slid his locker bag behind the seat of Coach 815 and tried to mentally prepare himself for the next six and half hours. He'd herd the Lakes & Trails Limousine down the

Parkway, then along 71 until he hit the Valley Expressway. If Dan was there at Crester, he'd get off and wait for his return ride. If Dan didn't show, he'd be on for another four hours to the city, returning God knows when and how. He was relieved when he saw it was 815, since it was easily the nicest bus on the fleet. A 1980 MCI MC-9, it had a smooth running 8V-71 driving new tires with an automatic transmission. Most of the other buses were standard shifting units, with worn out linkages that meant many missed shifts. Miss one too many and the big unit would have to come to a complete stop, endure much grinding and swearing, before starting over, God forbid, on one of the Parkway's many steep hills.

But 815 always let loose a beautiful roar when it fired up, then sat there and throbbed while Andy loaded luggage and the passengers filed on slowly and found their favourite place to sit.

Andy walked through the freight room at the Mirror Lake Mirage, a spacious restaurant attached to a 32 room motel on the southern edge of Ralston. He checked a few parcels on the shelf by the door, shook his head when he found one that should be making its way to the bus and plunked it down on the back of the parcel cart.

He pulled the big door open and shoved the cart toward 815, walking alongside as it glided along, then pulled on the web strap hanging on its side, to stop it near the back wheels. He pulled up on the handle of the lower bunk and clicked the door in place. He looked over the cart and decided which packages would go in first.

It took less than five minutes to sort and stack the packages in the bin under the bus floor, which meant he had time for a quick smoke before he went in and called the passengers out. He was looking for a light when Sandra, the Lakes & Trails agent stuck her head out the door. "Wait for me, I'll join you," she said, pulling on a gabardine jacket and pulling out a package of Brown Owl cigarettes. She slipped one between her lips and held up her lighter to light Andy's cigarette first.

"Big bunch tonight, Andy," Sandra said. "Seventeen getting on here and there's one waiting at Broder Road."

"Holy shit! Seventeen? Where'd they all come from?," he asked. It was rare more than half a dozen got on in Ralston for the night run. "They all stayed on to see the play after supper and the dipshits at the tour company didn't tell the driver you weren't leaving until 12:25," she said. "That accounts for a dozen of them. The other five are pickers from Gendron's place, heading to the city for a rest, I guess."

"Who's the guy on the highway?," Andy asked. "I dunno. Just got a call about an hour ago, said he'd be waiting and he'd have the fare in cash," she

replied. "He counted out his money right there on the phone, so unless he gets mugged or runs into that hooker, he's probably good to go," she said smiling. The hooker at Glendale was a bit player in one of the many Spencer Weston stories, although no one had ever met her and there wasn't much of a clientele in either the small town or the surrounding hills.

"So, how's your Mom doing?," Andy asked, more out of courtesy than genuine concern, since he'd only met her once and she'd not left much of an impression on him. "She must be fine," Sandra replied. "She's been in Reno all week at that f'in' casino again. She says it's like bed rest, playing the slots. It is cheaper than the hospital, unless she's lyin' about how much she's gambling away."

Andy hardly heard her response. He was watching a conversation take place just outside the back door of the tiny waiting room of the Mirage. A male, young, rough looking, seemed to be coaxing a female into joining him on the bus. It was a scene he'd witnessed many times, and odds were, she'd build up his hopes, then slip away just before the bus door closed. At least Andy hoped that's how it would play out tonight.

"Well, maybe she'll be on the bus when I come back up, if I'm on the run tomorrow," he said, hoping that didn't sound too out of place for what Sandra had just said. She looked at him a little hesitantly and then said, with a flat voice, "I imagine she'll fly back, Andy, she bought a return ticket." He was embarrassed as they walked back toward the waiting room, but he thought he'd cut his losses and just keep his mouth shut.

He opened the door. Eight people sat in the eight plastic chairs bolted to the concrete floor. Six others stood in the remaining open space and Andy could see people standing in front of the magazine rack in the back of the mini-store they'd added to the Mirage. "Lakes and Trails Limousine southbound express will leave in ten minutes. If you're traveling to Glendale and points beyond, please bring your luggage to Coach 815 now," he said, turning slightly red as he realized he still didn't have the announcement from the manual properly memorized. He was supposed to call out all the names on the express route so people were sure it was their bus and departure time. He no sooner got that thought completed, when an elderly man sitting right in front of him asked, "Does this bus go to Pitway?" Andy assured him it did and then asked, "Are you going to Pitway tonight, sir?" The man's eyes narrowed. "Hell no, my sister-in-law lives there with her asshole husband. Why the hell would I want to go there?," he spat. "Maybe we can honk as we go through," Andy said as he turned and headed out to the bus.

His passengers filed out in an orderly manner and he helped each one with their luggage, as they climbed up into the bus. He stepped up the stairs and

looked back at the nearly empty bus. While the seventeen were spread out from front to back, he was relieved to see no one was sitting in the front row. It would likely be a peaceful run down the Parkway tonight, he thought and he held out his hand for a ticket from a woman in the fourth row, the closest occupied seat to the front of the coach.

He had to walk all the way to the back, where a pair of pickers from Gendron's were converting the seat beside the restroom into a bedroom. They had trouble finding their tickets, and after a minor delay, Andy headed back to the front, realizing the tough guy and his companion hadn't been part of the group of seventeen getting on at the Mirage.

He stepped down out of the bus and strolled over to the waiting room. "That's everybody, Sand. Just the one guy at Broder Road?," he asked. "Just him," she said. "Drive safe now."

Andy took off his jacket and hung it across the back of his seat, then sat down and fired up the bus. It hummed a loud fast idle as he took the stuff out of his jacket pocket and placed it strategically around the driving area. He had the ticket book and pen for the guy at Broder Road, a leather wallet that contained his license and the registration information for the Lakes and Trails Limousine license and a small clip on flashlight.

Once he had everything set up, he reached over and pulled on the handle that swung the big door closed. It clicked with a solid clunk when it latched and the sound of the bus got much quieter. He stabbed at the accelerator, dropping the idle back and it seemed like the engine had stopped altogether. Then Andy pulled it into gear and revved it up and the 40 foot coach slid backward out of the bay in the Mirage and Andy started cranking on the big steering wheel, reaching down with his right hand and slipping the stick into drive. The bus rocked from side to side as he idled it past the Mirage and he leaned forward to see out into the parking lot.

As he rounded the end of the building, he spiked the brakes as a tiny blue car sped in front of him. Andy recognized the driver, it was the rough looking teen he'd seen earlier. He was alone in the car, which gave Andy a private sense of satisfaction. "Sorry about that folks," he said, to no particular response. He worked his way through the parking lot and over to the edge of the highway. He waited as one, two, three cars came by from his left, then a couple from his right, before he hammered down the accelerator and steered the bus out onto Spencer Weston Parkway, flipping his lights onto high beam and turning on a pair of fog lights that were aimed into the ditches to search out deer, elk and moose.

He could see the edge of the clouds just ahead and could tell there was a moon lurking straight above him. In all likelihood, it would slip out in the open and turn the lakes into dazzling ornaments for the whole trip south. Andy did a quick scan of the cockpit area of the bus, reading all the gauges in order, looking at each switch that was lit up in the big panel to his right. Satisfied all was in order, he reached down and twisted the rheostat to the left, softening the lighting in the gauges and switches until they looked like ghostly renditions of their physical selves.

He looked up at the broad rectangular mirror above the windshield and did a quick mental head count – all seventeen passengers were settled in and seemed comfortable. He dropped his gaze to the road ahead and balanced the big wheel in his hands so he could glide the big bus through the curves without taking his fingers off the smooth, hard surface.

Just south of Mirror Lake he tapped the brake as he sailed through Boyson Junction, smiling as he did every time he went through. His first ever date, first ever girlfriend, was from Boyson Junction and he'd had to hitchhike out to see her on a Saturday afternoon. He remembered the day with incredible clarity, her sweater, her perfume, her makeup, waiting at the front door of her parents house, which he'd just passed by.

His girlfriend's family had moved on about a year later, which was six months after he'd moved on from that first relationship, something he'd done, it seemed, countless times since. As he sped up the highway, he remembered the girl, Donna, and her sister and brother teasing them. Donna grabbed his hand and lead him out the back door and down into the yard, where a double seated swing sat. The two of them sat in the swing and heard Donna's mother tell the other two children they were forbidden to go out the back door and torment Donna and Andy. Andy remembers how warm and soft she felt, and how beautiful she was.

He chuckled when he remembered she was actually 12 years old at the time, but in his mind's eye, he saw her as a voluptuous young woman. He'd learn more than he ever imagined about humans over the next six months, before he learned that Donna dated other 'men'. Heartbroken, he'd moved on, but with a soft spot in his heart for Boyson Junction.

A shard of light shot into his left eye as he swung the bus into a right bend in the road and Andy realized he had a vehicle right behind him. It disappeared as he straightened the bus out coming out of the curve, which meant it was tucked right in behind him. There was a series of tight curves coming up before the next straight stretch, so Andy nudged the accelerator to keep ahead of the vehicle and prevent a pass until it was all clear. The 8V-71 was

responsive and pushed the unit ahead nicely, the big Michelins grabbing the asphalt and handling the twists very capably.

Passengers that enjoyed a little performance likely leaned with the turns, and others could be forgiven for thinking he was driving a bit aggressive. As he drew the wheel to the left into a tight turn, the vehicle came out around the rear quarter and started to accelerate up beside the bus. Andy could see the road was clear ahead, no lights seemed to be beyond the second curve, but it still was a really stupid and dangerous pass.

He dimmed the lights and switched off the fog lights as the little car that had darted out in front of him back at the Mirage whipped in front of him and sped on down the highway, using both sides of the road to negotiate the curves. Hopefully that's the last we'll see of him, Andy thought. A few seconds later, the tail lights disappeared and Andy lit up the highway with his high beams and fogs again.

The next curve took him back toward the lake and the moon cleared the cloud bank just as the bus swung south again. It spread a reflection all down the shore and cast a long shadow down the near shore as the hills on the other side of the lake came into clear view. He could see the lights of Pitway at the south end of the lake. It'd be 25 minutes before they got there, even though they only seemed a few miles away. Actually, they were only a few miles away.

If you were standing on the side of the road right now and the bus was already long gone, you'd be able to hear the diesel at the Pitway power plant. And you would also hear the putt-putt-putt of the Pitway ferry, if the night was still. But Andy could only hear the throaty throb of the big diesel pushing him and his seventeen soul load south, so he did another circuit through his gauges and switches, ending up with his eyes on the mirror, searching the darkness in his 24th headcount of the trip.

His fog lights picked up some eyes in the ditch and he stiffened as he peered in to see what was waiting to jump out of the road. A dark shape turned and vanished into the blackness, never revealing what it was. Too short for a moose, Andy thought. Moose were the only ones that worried him. He could whack a deer and not even slow down and elk didn't seem to have the same propensity for jumping out suddenly. Moose just lumbered out without a care, as if the bus would recoil at the sight of them.

He'd hit deer several times and moose only three. Twice they'd glanced off the side of the bus and he'd had to call the wildlife people to come and finish them off. He hit a moose head-on only once. It buckled the passenger door on impact and broke the tie rod holding the right wheel, sending the bus

careening into the ditch. Five of his passengers were injured, one of them seriously, thrown from his seat behind Andy down into the stairwell. It seemed to take an eternity for the police and ambulance to arrive and the other passengers had to crawl out a window to safety as Andy tried to tend to his injured and unconscious passenger. When he returned to work three weeks later, there were seven letters waiting for him, saying he was a hero. And his boss made sure he was paid for a trip a day, all the time he was off. Andy relived that accident every time he crossed the bridge at Reed Creek. He remembers looking to his left at a truck parked on an access road, and when he looked back, the moose was on its way into the front of his bus. But he had more than two more hours this night before that scene would replay in front of his eyes again, so he settled down, imagining the little blue car in the ditch on every curve.

Halfway down the bus, someone turned on a reading light and Andy's eyes unconsciously kept pivoting up, marking off the steps back to that row. Then he saw a woman getting up and moving to the back of the bus, to the restroom, he imagined, guiding herself with her hands on the back of each row as she went. When she opened the restroom door, the light inside came on and Andy saw her silhouette, looking down into the farthest back seat, the bedroom for the Gendron pickers. She closed the door with a bang and Andy thought how it really didn't need any extra energy, the latch grabbed the door nicely and it didn't need to be slammed.

He was still peering through the next curve when he saw the light again, and saw the passenger slowly coming forward. When his eyes hit the mirror again, he was startled. The woman was standing at his right elbow, holding on tight to the steel bar that ran from floor to roof and supported the partition behind Andy's seat. "I think you better go check on those guys, driver," she said.

"Are they all right?," Andy asked. "No, they're all wrong from what I saw," she said, before turning and walking back to her seat. "Ah shit," Andy thought, "there's no place to pull over safely 'til we get back over the lake." He thought of calling out to the woman, to get her to come back and explain herself, but he had at least a dozen sleeping passengers, who had just dozed off.

As he pulled out of the next turn, he realized the shoulder was quite broad, so he braked quickly and reeled the bus off the pavement and stopped, set the parking brake, turned on the flashers and headed to the back of the bus. On the back seat, two men, in their forties, lay sleeping, one with his head on the other's chest. Andy nudged one of them and he woke up. He looked at Andy, then his seat mate, and embarrassed, moved over to the other side of

the seat. "You okay partner?" Andy asked. "Yeah, fine," he said, not looking at Andy. The other guy woke up and said, "What's goin' on? Where are we?" and Andy assured him everything was alright and headed back to the front of the bus. The woman was glaring up at him as he walked by and Andy decided he'd just keep going, not bother to explain to the woman that the guy had likely slipped over there when they were going through the curves just south of Ralston.

He sat down in the driver's seat and pulled out a package of gum. He felt like going out and having a smoke, but decided to wait until Pitway and if the woman got off the bus, he'd tell her the guys weren't gay. Brothers maybe, but not brothers in arms.

He tossed the stick of gum in his mouth, released the parking brake, pulled the bus onto the pavement and started heading up the hill. When he hit 45, he snapped off the safety flashers and settled back in with a quick circuit of the gauges and mirror.

The run along the lake into Pitway was relaxed, the road wasn't straight, but the curves all ran together and the bus swayed its way down the centre line, its lights spreading out over the water, then lighting up the ditch. By the time the Pitway Shell sign came into view, Andy had forgotten about the woman suckering him in and just thought about having his first pull off his Marquis as he walked around the unit.

He pulled up close to the building and parked. He lit his cigarette as soon as he'd closed the bus door, snapping the key ring off his belt and opening the side door to the service station. A stack of parcels stood in front of the counter, already sitting on a furniture dolly, so he wheeled them out to the bus. He opened the front bin and slid the parcels in, closed and latched it and walked down two more bins and gathered up a set of brake drums on rope sling and two small but heavy parcels and set them on the dolly. He slid the dolly up next to the counter, stepped out and locked the door and headed back to the bus, flicking his butt out onto the highway before getting back aboard.

Once he was back underway, he ran down in his mind what the next few miles would likely bring. There was a long run up the side of Johnson's Hill, pitch black since it was all in shadow, then a nice coast down the other side, with a stop at the bottom to pick up the fare at Broder Road. "What kind of a guy waits up until 1:30 in the morning to catch a bus out in the middle of nowhere?", he thought. "Why wouldn't he take one of the day buses?" There were three of them and one was an express, just like this one. He'd have to wait another 50 minutes for the answer to that question, 35 of them with an 8V-71 running right on the governor.

Chapter two – Just call me Theo

Andy contemplated announcing a smoke break for Broder Road, thinking that the fare might have luggage and it looked like a few more people had turned on their reading lights. Maybe if they had a smoke, they'd relax and sleep through to Crester, where they could smoke all they wanted after breakfast. The bus would stop there for 40 minutes and either Andy would continue on to the city, or find something to do until the return bus arrived at 10.

But as the miles went by under 815, the reading lamps were one-by-one extinguished and Andy decided Broder Road would be a quick stop. As he did his 37th gauge and mirror circuit, he unconsciously checked his change wallet, remembering the fare had told Sandra he'd have the right change. Andy smiled. A lot would go down between his phone call to Sandra and the pickup on the highway, he thought. He wouldn't be the least bit surprised if the guy was ten bucks short and promised the balance when they got to Crester. Official policy was to leave no one stranded on the side of the highway at night, whether they had the fare or not. Years before Andy started driving, a native woman and her two kids were left near the reserve because they didn't have the cash, but promised to rustle it up from the government office in Crester.

Two weeks later, their remains were found in the bush in behind the Reed Creek campground. Their murders were never solved, but 21 passengers testified at an inquiry about the exchange that had taken place at the door. Two of them claimed to have offered to pay the fare, something the driver steadfastly denied.

Andy pulled the lever back to shift the automatic down and slow the bus up as he looked around at the intersection to Broder Road coming up. There was a cardboard box sitting right beside the pavement, but no sign of its owner, something that gave Andy a bit of a chill, given that he'd been thinking about the native woman and her kids.

He pulled 815 right up and stopped beside the box. A slightly built man carrying a small back pack in his hand came out of the bush, down through the ditch and up toward the bus, his sleepy eyes overshadowed by a huge grin. "Right on time!" he called out as Andy opened the door. He tossed the back pack on the floor next to the drivers seat and then reached down to pick up the cardboard box. Although the box wasn't that big, it seemed to be taking a lot of energy to get it off the ground. The guy juggled it a bit, then pulled it to his chest and headed up the stairs into the bus.

“Anybody sitting there?” he asked, nodding his head to the left toward the front seat to Andy’s right. “Nope, it’s all yours,” Andy answered, hoping the guy would drop the package and then move further back to sit. He didn’t like people sitting in the shotgun seat, especially at night. They often wanted to talk and it usually woke people up and made them surly. More than once, a conversation was halted by a loud “Shut the fuck up!” from the back of the bus, which had the additional effect of waking everyone.

The guy dropped the box on the seat and shoved it over against the wall. He reached down and grabbed the back pack, put it on the seat and unzipped one of the pockets. “Twenty-six seventy, right? One-way to Sig Harbour?” the man said, more telling than asking. “Right on the money,” Andy replied, as he filled out the ticket, tore off all but the pink and yellow copies and handed them to the fare, taking the money with his left hand.

The coins slid out from between the bills, two quarters and two dimes. He slipped them into the change pocket in his wallet, counted the six singles and two tens and slipped them into the empty pocket for paper currency. He waited while the guy sorted out his seating arrangement, finally lifting the heavy box down onto the floor behind the barricade and placing the back pack on top of it. “Good,” Andy thought, “He’s going to stretch out and sleep.”

“Starting to get cold out there,” the guy said. “I was snoozing in the bush there for a few minutes, but I heard you gear down back up the road a bit.” Andy didn’t recognize the fare at all, even though he was obviously a regular traveler. First-timers would have called it a one-way to Port Callais, not Sig Harbour, the part of the port city where the bus stopped. He also had the right fare, and had it ready – most people had to get settled in, then start working on paying for their ticket. He was also comfortable sleeping in the bush, which amused Andy. Growing up in Milton, they used to joke about the hillbillies in the mountains around Mirror Lake and how they only slept inside in the winter, preferring the company of their livestock on warm summer nights.

“Yeah, I guess the leaves’ll start turning pretty soon,” Andy answered, mentally calculating that it would be at least another six weeks before the first signs of fall colours would appear. “Nah, it’ll be at least another six weeks,” the fare answered, almost causing the bus driver to laugh out loud at the fare’s prescience. “It really starts to cool down after midnight,” the fare said. “But if you hunker down into the roots of one of those big walnut trees, it’s still pretty warm.

Andy thought about hunkering down into the roots of a tree for shelter and sort of figuratively shook his head at the thought. Hunkering down into the

roots of some nice babe in Ralston or Crester was more his style, he thought. While the fare continued to settle in, turning the reading light on and off, digging stuff out of his back pack, taking his jacket off and rolling it up like a pillow, Andy thought about what he'd do in Crester, if Dan showed up to run the bus down to the city.

He'd made arrangements a couple years before, to rent a room from Angela, a woman from Crester, whenever he had a layover on the route, which happened three or four times a month. He paid her \$20 a night for a place to sleep and freshen up, or just hang out if it was a daytime run. The arrangement had caused a problem right off the bat – Angela's boyfriend was sure Andy wanted to sleep with her, and he was right, but she told him to bugger off and to learn to trust her.

Andy awoke one night, shortly after he'd started renting the room, to see Angela's boyfriend looking in his window, trying to see in the dark whether Andy was sleeping in his room, or upstairs, with Angela. When he left the window, Andy got up to see if he was going to the door – he wanted to be dressed if there was going to be trouble. The guy went back to his car, parked in the alley, and sat there in the dark. Andy couldn't sleep, contemplating what the guy was up to. About a half hour later, he saw him get out of the car, sneak back toward the house and look back in the window. Andy had climbed back in the bed with his clothes on. The guy watched for about five minutes, then went back to his car. He finally drove away about six-thirty, evidently satisfied Andy was asleep, alone.

Up until that incident, it was just a rental arrangement, but it triggered a fantasy that Andy just couldn't shake. He wanted, in the worst way, to spend the night in a sweaty frolic with Angela upstairs, while her boyfriend checked on a pile of blankets in the downstairs bed. Sometimes it was the sex that drove the fantasy, other times the sense of retribution and always more than a hint of the disdain he felt for the stupid, untrusting bugger.

"Theo Verkerk's the name," the fare said, an unwelcome intrusion jolting Andy back from a full frontal vision of his landlady. "Theodore Wouter Verkerk. That's my full name, but people call me either Theo, Ted or Teddy. I prefer Theo. Only my mom called me Theodore and that usually meant I was in shit for something," he said. After a pause, Andy said, "How do you do, Theo?," not because he wanted to chat, but to end the uncomfortable silence that replaced Theo's statement. "And you are?," he asked Andy. "Andy Robertson," he replied. He wasn't going to say that his friends called him Andy, that his mother called him Andrew, whether he was in trouble or not and that Sheryl called him Drew. Well, she called him that right up until she told him she was leaving. She called him Andy that night and it still

brought him down whenever he imagined her calling him Drew. It was a complete surprise when, after what he thought was two idyllic years, she'd said she had to get away and find herself. It broke his heart when he found out she'd actually found herself three weeks earlier, underneath one of his friends. Andy figured he was sixty miles south of Milton, just pulling into Ralston, when Sheryl made that realization. He still shuddered whenever he approached Ralston from the north, something that usually happened at least a couple times a month.

He realized that Theo had just asked him something and he hadn't heard a word he said. He also hadn't scanned the gauges or the inside of the bus since he'd he first thought about Angela, either. Better shake this off and get focused, he thought.

"Sorry, buddy, I didn't catch what you just asked me," Andy said, apologetically. "I just said I had a brother living in Glendale," Theo said. "He's my little brother Wim. If he was Canadian we'd call him William, but our folks missed the old country so they named us all Dutch names, even though we were all born here, except me and Wim." Andy thought, "Aw shit, this guy's probably from a family of twelve and he's gonna want me to remember them all."

"Yep, Wim owns the hardware store in Glendale, Vic's. He bought it from Vic Talsma, another Dutchman, about ten years ago. Kept the name, though, 'cause everybody really liked Vic and he thought Wim's was a shitty name for a hardware store, I guess, eh."

Andy knew the store well, but he didn't remember ever seeing anyone there that looked like he could be Theo's brother. There was a big woman that ran the cash and an East Indian guy that seemed like the only clerk. In fact, Andy always thought that was Vic. He even called him Vic a couple times, he thought. He got another jolt when Theo said, "There's a Paki that works there named Vic. A lot of people think he owns the store and that pisses Wim off. I don't know why he's called Vic, his real name is Rajinder or something like that."

All Andy could think was this Theo guy was a freaking mind reader. "What brings you to the city?," he asked. Theo was brushing the crumbs off his jacket from a granola bar that fell all apart when he'd bitten into it. "If I tell ya, I'd have to kill ya," he said, before started laughing. His laugh started off with a crackle and then softened up to a breathy, 'hu-hu, hu hu', that trailed off like an echo.

"I thought ya'd never ask. I've got something in the box here that I can't show ya, 'cause it's a serious secret, but I've invented a thing that's gonna make me so God-damned rich, I'll never have to ride a flippin' bus again,"

he said. He caught himself, realizing that Andy might be offended that a bus would be a second or third choice for travelers. "Actually, I really like the bus, but I'd take a limo if I had the kind o' scratch I'll have when this baby starts to sell. I been working on this for about eight years and this is a prototype, but I don't have it patented yet, so I can't really tell you what it is. But you'll be able to tell people you knew Theo Verkerk when he didn't have a window to throw it out," Theo said, again rolling out his signature laugh. "You could say that now, but they'd say, 'who the fuck is Theo....Oops, pardon my French there, Robert,'" Theo said. "It's Andy. And yeah, you gotta be careful what you say, we don't want to offend the other passengers," he said. "In fact, best you just keep your voice down a bit, it's 2 o'clock in the morning."

Theo was quiet for a few seconds, before Andy realized he was out of his seat and crouched on the floor right behind his right shoulder. "I'm meeting a guy in Callais this afternoon, who's going to help me rewire this thing. He'll figure out what I've done wrong and it should work perfectly. Then we'll get the fucker patented and the money is just going to roll in. I've patented other stuff. I've actually invented a bunch of stuff. You know them boxes they hang on buildings to keep keys in? Those are mine. God damn Charleston Locks stole that one from me, but I learned my lesson. I invented those clip-on blinds for the back seat of cars, too," Theo said, lowering his voice.

"I need you to sit back in your seat, Theo," Andy said, realizing that if he had to swerve, the little Dutch inventor would be down in the stairwell on his head in an instant. Just as Theo sat down, Andy looked up and saw three deer, one of the right side of the road, two right in the driving lane, staring back at 815 bearing down on them at 120 km/hr. He spiked the brakes and reached down and snapped off the fog lights in one motion, then flipped the fogs back on and dimmed the main lights. The two deer on the highway bolted across and the deer on the shoulder turned back into the ditch. They vanished like road signs in the red glow of the taillights.

"Nicely done there, R-Andy," Theo said. "I know it's Andy, I just got the R in there by mistake," he said, before his laugh floated out over the partition. The 'hu-hu, hu-hu' reminded Andy of the sound of the trucks on a freight train as they faded in the distance, clipping the joints in the tracks as they went by. He wondered if something was really funny, just how long Theo would go on, before his laugh faded completely.

"So, what does your invention do?, Theo," Andy asked. "I can't really say, Andy. But once it's out, you'll know. It will be in every Radio Shack catalogue they print. You'll probably buy one right away, it's so cool. At

first they'll be expensive as hell, but once we start making them in China, they'll be so cheap, everybody will want one. Even people that don't listen to music..." his voice trailed off and he realized he was giving his secrets away again, the story of his whole life. If Theo Verkerk was famous for anything, it was wearing his heart on his sleeve and not closing his mouth until he'd vacated every thought from his overactive imagination.

"I listen to music all the time," Andy said. "The only time I don't is when I'm driving, because the company doesn't allow us to listen to the radio. It's funny, all buses have radios, but we aren't allowed to listen," he said.

"You might have heard of my sister," Theo said. "Her name was Jo-jo Rose. He real name was Johanna, but that's a crappy name for a country star."

Andy had, indeed heard of Jo-jo Rose. She'd played at the Crester rodeo dance at least twice that he knew of, and the Crester radio station played a song she'd recorded, but several years before. Hardly a country star, he thought, but he did know who she was.

"What's she up to now?," Andy asked. "She killed herself. About five years ago. Got involved with some junkies in Callais, we tried to get her to come home and clean up, but she just couldn't leave the stuff alone. It's all over the music business, eh. We knew something was wrong when she didn't finish her second record. She didn't seem to give a shit anymore and we all figured she was getting ready to really make it big. Killed my mother, too. She just went downhill after Jo-jo did herself in, told me she was going to see J-jo and make sure she was okay in heaven. Died the next day," Theo's voice faded and Andy could tell he was completely subdued.

"I'm really sorry about that, Theo, I didn't know," Andy said quietly, starting his 48th scan of the gauges and bus. "Ya, well, we all got a number, eh. When it's there, we're done. Gone on to better things, I suppose," Theo said.

"So, Andy," Theo said a moment later, all his energy returned, "When did you start driving for Lakes and Trails? I never seen you before and I been riding this bus for a long time." Andy did a quick calculation. "I've been driving for Lakes and Trails for 12 years, started in Poulsen in '79. They moved me up to Milton, where I grew up, about five years ago. I've been headmanning this run ever since. I like the night run when I can get it," he said.

"That makes sense, I usually just travel in the daytime. I know Dan Bowers, Tony Spillette, Jimmy Greer and that other guy, Bobby, whatever his name is," Theo said. Andy knew all the other drivers well and told Theo that Bobby Thompson had replaced him on the Poulsen-Port Callais run when he'd moved back to Milton. "He was kind of a grouchy son-of-a-bitch,"

Theo said. Andy chuckled – Bobby Thompson had a magnetic sign he kept in his brief case. It said ‘Please do not speak to the driver, once the vehicle is in motion’. He’d stick it above the sunvisor over the driver’s seat, but took it down anytime a pretty girl sat in the front seat. The drivers used to laugh about the time he did that, not realizing an ugly, drunk old crone had taken the seat right behind him. She started propositioning him within minutes of leaving Reed Creek, much to the entertainment of a beautiful woman who had just gotten on for the run down to Crester.

Andy used to sub for Tony Spillette when they were both on the Poulsen-Port Callais run. Tony was a tremendous trumpet player – people couldn’t believe he played part-time and drove bus for a living. Everyone thought he would be a star if he ever quit and did music full-time. But Tony knew the music business was flash-in-the-pan; he played the best clubs in Callais, was the first horn guy called, did plenty of session work, but went long spells with nothing, as well. He was grateful for the bus driving job – he said it gave him a chance to think out his horn lines and concentrate, not be distracted by missed notes or other players.

He told Andy that when disco hit, there’d be enough musicians out of work to keep the buses running forever and he wanted to make damn sure he could bring home the bacon. The last time Andy had seen Tony was at the Poulsen legion, playing there for a Remembrance Day dance.

Theo was digging around in his backpack for something and kept holding things up to the light, then tossing them back in, and fishing around again. Andy couldn’t see what he was doing out the corner of his eye, but noticed when Theo stopped and shut the reading light off. When Andy looked over a few minutes later, Theo was asleep and wearing a set of headphone– an empty cassette case lay on the seat beside him.

Andy swung the bus through a curve to the right and then up a little rise before it dropped down and swung harder to the right. The cassette case slid across the seat before clattering to the floor beside Andy’s seat. As he sped up a straight stretch he reached down and felt around until he found the case and picked it up. In the glow of the dashboard lights, he could see the headline – Jojo Rose – The Rose of the Rockies. He placed the cassette case in his lap as the bus rounded a curve and the lights of Glendale appeared below. They had climbed more than 700 feet since he picked up Theo Verkerk and they’d lose every one of them in the next ten minutes as they came down off the mountain into the popular tourist retreat. The moon was out over the middle of a lake so still it looked like a second planet was lodged in the sky. It was a sight that would make a newcomer gasp, but Andy had seen it many times before. The moon was either a picture-perfect

reflection, or an avant-garde painting, depending on the wind and tonight's stillness made Glendale seem twice as big.

The big diesel would be holding the bus back all the way down, but Andy rode the brakes and steered 815 through what seemed like a hundred bends. He'd driven the route so many times, he'd unconsciously enter a turn wide, knowing he'd miss a skiff of washboard or come in extra tight to avoid a hump in the middle of the road. The bus swayed like a tall ship fighting its way through a squall and when it finally found upright again, they were running along a flat stretch of shore and into the main drag through Glendale.

Andy would have to make a stop here, to pick up some freight and drop off a few packages. With everyone asleep, he'd also slip around the back of the strip mall and have a smoke, as he usually did. There was a bench there and he could see the whole bus in a reflection in a pizza shop window. No one could get on or off without him seeing them.

As he unlocked the door on the Glendale bus depot, he was aware of a person standing in the shadows beside the building. "Can I help you with something?" Andy asked. A woman stepped out, holding the hand of a small child beside her. "How much does it cost to ride down to Crester?" she asked. "How old's your child?", Andy asked. "He's three," she answered. "Well, he rides free and your ticket will be \$11.85," he said. "C-c-an I pay you when we get there?", she asked. "Sorry, ma'am, I'm not allowed to have people on the bus that haven't paid. It's an insurance thing. Until you have a ticket, I don't have insurance coverage for you," Andy answered, getting more uncomfortable by the moment. The woman was crying and pulled the child back in the shadows. "I have to get out of here," she said in a coarse whisper, "He's going to kill us."

"Maybe you should call the police, Ma'am," Andy said, feeling like it was as lame a thing to say as the insurance excuse. "He is the fucking police," she said. Andy was flummoxed. He hated getting caught in the middle of these things, but he could tell he was already sucked in so far there was no backing out. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a ten and a five dollar bill. "Here, you can pay me back when we get to Crester," he said.

"Oh, shit, thanks, thank you so much. You have no idea what this means," the woman said, sniffing and wiping her eyes. She took the bills and pulled Andy by his sleeve, into the shadow. "Here, take my son onto the bus. Drive down to the boat place beside the sawmill. Open the door when you pull away from the stop sign and I'll jump on. He's out here somewhere and he'll be watching who gets on."

“He’ll see me take the kid on the bus,” Andy said. “Put Kyle on first, then do your packages. He won’t figure it out,” she said, before she slipped into the darkness. Andy couldn’t see her but could hear her feet running in the gravel down the side of the building. The little boy stood silent beside him.

Andy reached down and took the child’s hand. He walked him back in front of the depot toward the bus, looking all around for a police car, or a person on foot. The place was absolutely still, with no vehicles and only the sound of the bus idling. He took Kyle up into the bus, put him in the seat behind his and told him to stay right there until he got back. When he left the bus, he latched the door; he didn’t want Kyle to be able to get off, or anyone else to get on. He quickly dropped off the freight he was carrying for Glendale and loaded the picked up packages into the front bin. He stepped into the shadow and pulled out his cigarettes and closed his eyes as he took the first drag. “What have I got myself into this time,” he thought.

When he got back into the bus, he walked all the way to the back and checked to be sure everyone was still there. When he got back to the front, Kyle was gone. When he looked closer, he could see that he was hunched down on the floor, in front of the seat, completely concealed in darkness. Andy got down on his knees and told Kyle he’d have to get up on the seat before they could leave. Other than shaking, he didn’t move. Since it wasn’t cold, Andy knew that it was fear that made Kyle quake, so he reached down and picked him up. He gave him a hug, momentarily, then placed him on the seat. he knew by the time he sat down in the driver’s seat, before he’d even reached for the door latch, that Kyle was back on the floor tucked in to the darkness.

His mouth dry and his mind racing, Andy tried to get himself through the routine to launch the bus back into action. He felt like he was speeding away and only the switch lights on the dashboard convinced him he had closed the bin doors and wasn’t strewing freight all down Glendale’s main street. He could see the stop sign from almost a block away. He could see how she was going to be able to step out from behind the big billboard at the boat place and onto the bus without being seen. If she was quick, it wouldn’t look like anything but a routine stop at a stop sign and Andy would start feeling a hell of a lot better, even if he would be checking his rearview mirror continually to Reed Creek.

He slipped the bus up to the stop sign as smoothly as possible, he’d popped the latch about 75 feet back, to not arouse any attention and to be sure the door would swing wide at the stop so she’d have no trouble jumping on. He peered into the darkness as the door hit its outer range and saw nothing. He waited. Still nothing. There was no one there. No one at all.

A light snow was falling as Theo Verkerk stood looking out the window, hoping for a glimpse of Father Christmas. He stood in his spot, tucked in behind the living room drape, with a heat register under his feet blowing warm air up his pyjama legs. Half a mandarin orange sat on the window sill, the peels at his feet.

Behind him, his brothers Wim and Paul played, Wim helping the tiny Paul put wooden blocks into the cargo cars of a small, crudely made toy train. The sound of his sisters singing Coat of Many Colours wafted in from the kitchen where they were making Christmas cookies with their mother, Magda. His three sisters sang in flawless harmony, a natural skill enhanced by weekly practices in the choir at the Christian Reformed Church. They'd sing a verse, then repeat the chorus over and over, each time with a tag line so, in birth order, the three of them could each hit the highest note. Margreet, the oldest, would sing it first, then Johanna, then Marta, who often needed help, would finish and then they'd start the song over again.

Their mother called out, "Wim, Theo, Paul, come clean up this dough," then turned to the girls and said, "Leave some dough for your brothers, now, girls. And save some for after the dishes." Theo stayed looking out the window, even though he loved eating cookie dough. He knew if he went to the kitchen now, he'd miss Father Christmas, he just knew it.

"Come Theo," Wim said, "Bring Paul." Theo looked down at Paul, still struggling with his blocks. The vision of the Verkerk living room was perfect, the light coming in the large picture windows, the Christmas decorations, the smell of Christmas pine and cookies baking, but Paul, just two and half years old, was wearing safety goggles and a blue hard hat. Theo shook the vision off, realizing that Paul wore this equipment at his job at the refinery, but was still just more than a baby in the dream. He ran down the hall to the kitchen, where Wim stopped him and sent him back for Paul who was standing at the other end of the hall, crying at being abandoned, even when he didn't know he was missing his rightful share of cookie dough. Theo's mother admonished Wim and told him to stop eating the dough until both Theo and Paul were present.

The girls were wearing their nightgowns, neck to toe flannel outfits made from the same pattern, but different cloth. Except Johanna wore a leather half jacket with long stringy fringe over a black lace camisole and a matching black leather mini-skirt, again fringed with leather thongs that reached down to knee-high western boots. Her hair was jet black and her

pale face emphasized the stark black mascara, a broad stroke eyeliner, that made her eyes light up like blue crystal stars.

Theo wasn't disturbed by the incongruity of the image, as this was a dream he'd enjoyed many, many times before. It was warm and comfortable, the kids were all together with their mother, who was still healthy and they waited for the arrival of father, in this case, toggling back and forth with Father Christmas.

The girls sang, line after line of the choruses of hundreds of songs, all distinct and all together. Little Paul laughed, then cried, then laughed again as he alternately hugged his father, then stood peeing his pyjamas, then hugging father again. Theo knew that when Paul was set down, his father would then pick him up, hug him firmly, plant a kiss on his neck that ended with a fart sound and ask him what hills he'd climbed today.

He hated the next part, where his father sets him down on the floor in the kitchen. When his feet hit the cold floor, the kitchen becomes his parents' bedroom and his mother lays there, tears pouring from her big red eyes, down cheeks that have gone past white to grey. "I have to see Johanna. I have to help her in Heaven, those bastards can be so mean and cruel to girls that make mistakes. Can I go to heaven now, Theo?," she asks, as the dream comes to its inevitable ends and Theo scrambles for an image that will hold her for just a few seconds more. The image comes, first she's climbing in the car, then she's at the top of the step ladder, reaching into the attic, then digging a huge pot out of the kitchen, then the car disappears, turning left at the end of the street and she's gone, once again.

Theo's eyes open momentarily and he can see Andy crouched down across the aisle from him. Andy is talking in a quiet voice and Theo looks away, thinking momentarily that Andy is saying his prayers and that Theo is intruding. He closes his eyes and walks through the freshly cut field at his uncle's farm, watching for mice looking for cover. His father calls out, "Come Theo, come Johanna, time for soup," and the two of them run, hand in hand, to catch up with a truck laden with grain, heading in to Hans Verkerk's beautiful farmhouse.

Theo sat upright, suddenly, the small of his back very cold, his neck stiff and with a slight headache. He looked out the windshield of the bus, which was crawling up the street. He looked around and realized they were on the outskirts of Glendale, approaching the hill that would take them back up the mountain. He couldn't understand why they were going so slowly. The bus should be hurtling toward the first rise, trying to get enough momentum to carry it up through the first set of curves, instead it seemed to be pulling to a stop.

Theo looked over at Andy, who was looking intently into the outside rearview mirror. “Did we hit something?,” Theo asked, although he wasn’t sure why he thought that. Andy jumped, looked at Theo, then back out the windshield, punching on the high beams and the accelerator at the same time. “Ya needed a run at it,” Theo said, a little surprised that Andy’s response was to hit the left turn signal and answer, “Yeah, I better pull ‘er around and take another go.”

He pulled the bus down a narrow residential street, crowded on each side by parked cars and trucks. When he got to the end of the block, he realized he had to take it left, through a right angle corner than looked tighter than 815’s turning radius. He watched in the side mirror as the left rear tires sunk into the ditch and a stop sign scraped the side of the bus. He had to keep going, stopping now would be disastrous. He crept down the side street, wondering when they’d have a chance to swing back toward the highway. Sensing that Andy was in unfamiliar territory, Theo said, quietly, “Head right down to the end, it’ll take you back to Railway avenue, right beside the tracks. You come out on the highway right by the lumber yard, you’ll have lots of room to gun ‘er from there.”

Andy expressed his relief at Theo’s advice by speeding up and had to catch himself – he was going 45 miles an hour down a narrow, dark residential street he’d never been on before, with wall to wall cars and no ready escape route, if anything went wrong. “What am I thinking?,” his mind screamed. “Where the fuck is that woman? What the fuck is going on?”

“Is something wrong, Andy?,” Theo asked. “No, just need a little more distance to get up the hill is all. Should have punched her harder at the stop sign, I guess,” Andy replied. He eased the bus around the corner of Railway Avenue, grateful that he cleared the left hand curb. Had the back wheels run up on it and then crashed down, everyone would be awake and wondering what the hell they were doing off the highway. Andy was wondering the same thing himself, straining his eyes and praying that by coming back, the God damned woman would be there. He slowed down, well back from the stop sign, just in time to see a police cruiser, emergency lights flashing, slow up, then blow through the stop sign by the lumber yard and head up the hill, flat out.

Andy didn’t know what to do. They were obviously onto him, the cop must have caught the girl and she told him where the kid was. He considered driving back to the Glendale police station, getting them to call the cruiser back, turning the kid over and hoping they could just quietly continue on his way. But he knew that wasn’t going to happen. They’d seize the bus, at least for a few hours. Andy would be suspended and likely fired. The company

had a low tolerance for employees bucking policy and he already knew, from his reduced hours, they had too many drivers going into the off-season. “We’ll have to ride this one out,” he thought, as he flicked on the left hand turn signal. “Hang on Theo, we’re gonna get the jump on this hill.” “You okay, Andy?,” Theo asked.

Andy didn’t answer, but concentrated on wheeling the bus through the first set of turns, listening to the 8V-71 screaming as 815 assaulted the hill. Andy never let up and soon found himself through the twists at the bottom and climbing up the straight stretch with the needle bouncing over 120 km./hr and the lights of Glendale disappearing over his right shoulder. Through a slight bend, then another long straight and the bus shot by a huge viewpoint that looked back over Glendale and all the way to the lights of Pitway. He knew that from the run back up the Parkway, but it was something he wouldn’t even think of tonight, much less see.

As he ran along the top of the mountain, he didn’t have to worry much about game, or even snaky corners. the road was relatively straight and the wildlife at the top was limited to squirrels chased by the occasional coyote. Andy quietly contemplated what he’d do next and wondered how long before the police cruiser turned back. He thought about shutting off the buses clearance lights, so the police wouldn’t recognize him until they were right beside him, but thought better. They’d just turn back and have more reason to stop him and more questions to ask. He had to figure out a way to make his story stick together.

He figured if he told them the mother and child got on in Glendale and then feigned surprise when she wasn’t still on the bus, they might buy it. Nobody was awake when he brought the kid on the bus, he thought. If he was the only witness, he might be able to convince the cop to take the kid and let him and the passengers continue on.

He looked in his left hand mirror and froze. There were two cop cars right behind him, lights blazing. Suddenly there was a maniacal whoop from the front car’s siren. Andy hammered his brakes and flicked on his turn signal. The first vehicle popped out of the darkness and shot by, followed immediately by the second. Andy had to watch the shoulder of the road to make sure he didn’t lay 815 over in his panic. The second vehicle was an ambulance and the two zoomed up the highway and off into the distance. “Jesus, that scared the shit out of me,” Andy said, to no one in particular. “I wonder what’s going on up ahead?,” Theo answered. They stared glumly out the windshield at the emergency lights disappearing into the darkness, both stiffened by anticipation. Andy’s pulse was racing. “I am so screwed,” he thought. “What the hell am I going to do?”

Dozens of scenarios flashed through his head, none of them completing before another one would start each one had a fatal flaw, except the possibility that Andy could cite the disappearing mother. That could be bulletproof with no witnesses to the kid getting on the bus. He was trying to figure out what to ask Theo, to confirm he was asleep, without sounding like he was on a fishing trip.

“Have a good sleep, Theo?” Andy asked. “Ya, slept real well there for a bit. I was hoping to see Wim’s store when we passed by, he’s added a garden centre since I was there last and says it looks real nice,” Theo said. “Yeah, it does,” Andy said quickly. “Looks really good, makes the place look way bigger.” He was lying. He hadn’t noticed anything. His pulse started racing again, “What if this prick is testing me?” he thought. “What if he saw me bring the kid on board?” Theo was silent. Andy was sweating and it felt like he’d ripped a layer of flesh off his tongue on the roof of his mouth as he tried to get some saliva flowing. “God, why did this day have to turn out like this?”

A flat voice behind him startled him so bad, he jerked on the wheel and had to correct. “Whose kid is this?” the homophobe from halfway back the bus asked, grabbing onto the bar beside Andy to regain her balance. “How come you’re picking a kid up in the middle of the night? And why isn’t he sitting on his seat?” Andy didn’t know how to respond. “He’s just a passenger, Ma’am,” he hissed. “Well, where the hell are his folks? He’s way too little to be traveling by himself.”

“He’s not by himself, his mother will be waiting in Reed Creek. He’s riding with me,” Andy said, realizing he was painting himself into a corner. A tight corner, Reed Creek was just 40 minutes up the road and she was wide awake. She’d be up on him the minute they pulled in, Andy could tell.

“You have to take your seat, Ma’am. It isn’t safe for you to stand there while we’re underway,” he said, mustering up some authority in his voice. “It would be if you laid off the gas pedal a little,” she shot back. She turned to the tiny shape in the darkness behind Andy. “You come sit with me little fella. I’ve got some Graham Wafers and apple juice and a nice little book I bought for my granddaughter. C’mon, I’ll read it to ya.”

She turned to Andy, her voice suddenly soft. “Poor little bugger, I’ll see if we can make this into a little happier trip for everybody. You’re doing a good job son, I’m sorry for what I just said.” The little boy didn’t want to leave his hiding place and the woman didn’t want to drag him. Theo leaned over and said, softly, “You go sit with the nice lady, now son and we’ll get you down to meet your Mom.”

The child then reached up and took her hand and they went back into the darkness of the bus. Her reading light came on and Andy could see her lips moving as she read to the little guy, who was hidden behind the seatback.

“What the hell does Theo know?, Andy thought.

He backed off the throttle as 815 headed into a broad curve that would take them downhill and back to the lakeshore. On the left was another huge viewpoint and Andy saw the flashes of red on the guard rail. He got on the brakes as the bus tipped down the hill, then pulled the shifter back a notch as the lights came into clear view. The police cars sat in the middle of the lane, with flares stuck in the pavement indicating a turn to the left lane. The ambulance sat sideways, its spotlights shining down into the ditch on the right hand side. Tires stuck up in the air from a car laying on its roof. An officer stood, waving a flashlight, signaling Andy to pass on the left. Andy reached down and popped the quarter window by his seat. The cop’s face appeared and he looked in. “Just a rollover. I think they guy’s okay, he’s talkin’. We’re waiting for the fire department from Reed, they’ve got some gear to cut him out,” he said.

Andy felt a flush of relief flow through his body as he guided the bus past the ambulance. Out of the corner of his eye, he recognized the little blue car upside down in the ditch. “Thought so,” he said aloud. As he shifted back up and started down the hill he realized he still had the kid to deal with, but with two more witnesses, each with some sort of story to tell. “Oh shit, I should have said something to the cop,” he thought. “But what if he’s that cop?”

He let the big diesel hold the bus back all the way down the hill, all Andy had to do was steer. He hadn’t looked as his gauges in several kilometers and he stopped himself, recognizing he still had seventeen passengers to deliver safely and how he had to start paying more attention. It wasn’t easy, but he forced the situation out of his head and for five minutes was just a bus driver again.

He did it by recalling his instructor’s words, years ago – you have to focus on the bus and the road, to the exclusion of all else. They can be partying behind you, but your job is to keep eight wheels firmly planted on the tarmac. When he got back to the edge of the lake, he pushed his foot down and felt the big pusher kick in and he started doing his gauge and mirror circuit. There was only one light on, halfway back and he had to turn his head to the right to see if Theo was asleep or not. He was sitting upright, staring at Andy.

“You sure his mother’s gonna be in Reed Creek, Andy,” Theo asked, acting like he’d been waiting for the driver to turn and meet his gaze. “I’m not sure

of anything right now, Theo,” Andy said. “I sure as hell hope so, though.” It was folly, of course. He’d be completely surprised if she was waiting by the Esso in Reed Creek. If she was, it would have to mean she’d left Glendale ahead of them, since the only vehicles that passed 815 were the police cruiser and the ambulance.

Andy was grasping for ideas about what to do about the next crisis – how they would deal with the Esso in darkness and no one there to get him off the hook. He had about ten minutes to figure out what to say to Theo and the woman. The kid didn’t know where Reed Creek was, so it wouldn’t mean anything to him if they breezed right through. On a good day it was a whistle stop and he didn’t have any freight to drop.

He ran several scenarios through his head and finally decided he’d just tell Theo she’d be waiting in Crester, hoping the old woman kept her head in the book and didn’t notice the tiny settlement slip by. He thought about telling Theo what was going on, maybe enlist him to help keep the woman under control. The last thing he needed was a loud discussion twenty minutes up the road, with the daylight starting to seep in the windows and waking the rest of the passengers.

But he waited too long. He swept the bus up a small rise, crested it and headed down past the Esso toward the bridge over Reed Creek. As he rounded the curve, he saw a red glow and when he could see the Esso, he could plainly see a car in front of it, headlights blazing, driver’s door open and a shape stepping out toward the road. As his lights filled the drive into the station, he could see a man, middle aged, wearing a log jacket and ball cap, waving for him to stop.

He pulled back on the shifter, tapped the brakes, then stepped down steadily on the pedal and reeled in the speeding bus. As he pulled up beside the man, he popped the big door, pulled on the parking brake and stopped. A woman was getting out the passengers side and coming around toward the door and Andy was relieved he hadn’t said anything to Theo.

The guy asked the fare to Port Callais and the woman stepped up into the stairwell. She wasn’t the child’s mother. She was fifteen at best, but had an uncanny resemblance to the woman from the shadows, and Andy’s heart sank again. The guy asked again what the fare was and whether he needed exact change. “It’s \$17.20 from here, sir and I have change for up to a fifty,” Andy replied. The guy passed Andy a \$20. “Her aunt will pick her up down in Callais,” he said, waiting for Andy to dig out the change. “She knows the stop is in Sig Harbour, eh?” Theo asked. “Yeah, that’s where they live,” the man said. “Okay, Caroline, you have a good trip now, we’ll see you when you get back. Jessie will bring you back Sunday.” The girl waved, more

interested in her new surroundings than the man that dropped her off.

“G’night Daddy,” she said.

“God, I need a smoke,” Andy said to Theo, who answered he needed a little air himself. Andy walked over past the Esso station, turned around to watch the car pull away and keep an eye on the bus. He could hear Theo on the other side of the station, farting loudly, and he silently thanked him for taking it off the bus. The last thing he needed was passengers waking up and thinking he was responsible for that smell.

Theo walked up to him and made some juvenile comment about breaking wind that Andy ignored. Then Theo looked at him and asked, “What are we gonna do about that kid, Andy? On second thought, what are we gonna do about the woman. She’s gonna be wondering when we get back on why the kid’s mother wasn’t waiting for the bus. I think maybe you inherited a son, there, Andy-boy.”

“Christ Theo, don’t say that. I’m hoping she’s waiting in Crester. Shit I’ll buy her breakfast, if she is.”

Don’t bullshit a bullshitter, Andy, you know she’s long gone. I been reading that on your face for the last 30 miles. You been a different guy ever since Glendale, for that matter.”

Andy drew back hard on his cigarette, blew the smoke out, and drew back hard again. He coughed out the hot smoke from the second drag, realizing he’d ruined this smoke break, so he threw the cigarette down on the ground and crushed it with his foot.

“Okay, Theo, what should we do?,” he asked. “We?,” Theo replied, then looked at him intently, “We?” “Okay, what the hell should I do? Shit, figured she was going to get on the bus. What the hell’s going on?”

“I figure she’s heading north, Andy and you’re headed to Child Welfare come daylight, if you’re smart. I’ll back you up. I’ll say I saw her hand the kid over to you and then bugger off,” Theo said.

“Thanks, Theo, I appreciate that. The office isn’t that far from the depot in Sig Harbour, now that you mention it. We’ll have to bullshit that woman a bit, but we should be able to carry it off. She’s off in Crester, anyway,” Andy said.

They headed back to the idling bus, Andy pulled the door back and let Theo climb the stairs first. As he got settled in, he looked back in the mirror and only the new fare had her reading light on. As he released the parking brake, he noticed the light breaking at the top of the hills behind him. “Shit, she’s probably running in daylight already,” he said, almost inaudibly.

The run from Reed Creek to Crester was going to be quick, as it always was. Once they’d crested the top of the hill, 10 miles west, it was all downhill and

pretty much straight running on Highway 71. Spencer Weston had blown his wad on the Lakes District and the electoral boundary was the top of the hill. It was amazing how the dollars stopped and the sense returned, once you headed down 71.

Each mile got more picturesque as the early morning light moved across the western slopes toward the ocean 60 miles away. A huge bank of fog slid in off the coast and changed from ghostly to billowy white as the land around the bus slowly came back to life. By the time 815 pulled into Sig Harbour, the fog would have burned off and the folks of Port Calais would be welcoming a blue sky and another flawless August morning.

For a few moments and even a few miles, Andy's troubles seemed to have stayed back in the mountains and the darkness.

After traveling nearly 70 miles with almost no traffic, cars and trucks were appearing from everywhere it seemed. Each time they'd pass a road, someone would be waiting to pull out. Practically every bend had a slow moving vehicle around it and Andy would either glide right past, if it was safe, or have to reel 815 in quickly, if there was traffic or a bend coming up in the road.

It wasn't long before he could see the signs coming up before his lights fell on them and soon the lights fell on nothing at all. It was turning into a nice morning as Andy and his bus full of troubles slowed down to stop at the bus stop in Crester. Andy would empty the rear cargo bins in Crester, since all the Callais packages were in the forward hold. There wasn't much to drop off and only a couple of passengers leaving, so he'd have time for breakfast and maybe even a few minutes to think before they headed up through the interchange and onto the Expressway to the coast.

He pulled into the first laneway at the depot, popped the door and shut the bus down. "Welcome to Crester, folks. We'll be continuing on to Port Callais in forty minutes, so you'll have time to enjoy breakfast. You're welcome to leave, but please be back on board, with your tickets stubs by 7:10. For those of you leaving us here, thanks for riding the Lakes & Trails Limosine, it's been our pleasure to have you," he said, stumbling on the last part, forgetting to add "as our guest" to the end.

He could see the woman straightening her jacket and looking down at the seat beside her. She gathered her purse and a couple of packages and came forward. "I thought his mom was going to be at Reed Creek," she said to Andy. She was standing at the top of the stairs, he was waiting at the bottom. Before Andy could speak, Theo said, "She's actually here in Crester. She'll pick him up at 7. Is he awake?"

“He wasn’t when I left him there. I can’t believe people send their kids off alone on a bus like this. he can’t be three years old yet,” she said, clucking her tongue. “Are you going to help me with my suitcase?” she asked Andy as she shunned his outreached hand to help her on the stair. “Yes, Ma’am, I’ll look after that,” Andy said, finally relieved that something was breaking his way. he didn’t have to explain anything to her to get rid of her. When he turned around, she was talking to a man about her age, who Andy thought might be her husband. That was confirmed, when, unsmiling, he walked over and took the two suitcases from Andy’s hands.

Theo came out from the coffee shop and walked over to Andy. “I’m gonna eat when I get to Sig, over at my sister’s place. I’ll watch the little guy while you have your breakfast. I’ll sit with him and make sure he doesn’t get off the bus, but bring him some toast or something, for when he wakes up.”

Andy agreed and went into the freight room to get a dolly to carry the packages from the back bins. He loaded the stuff up and headed back in to the depot. He stepped into the washroom and washed his hands, then headed in the kitchen door of the restaurant and sat at a small table, just inside the door. “Just coffee, Joyce,” he said to the waitress who poked her head in the servery window. She returned a moment later with a mug and two creamers and set it down in front of him.

“Pretty good crew you brought down, Andy, a lot for this time of week,” she said. She stood beside him and watched through the servery window until a customer looked up, then headed off and grabbed a coffee pot. She did the rounds of the tables, then the counter, then came back through the door to refill Andy’s mug. “Not hungry this morning?” she asked. “Nah, I’ll eat later. This job’s making me fat,” he said, in a gesture that was completely self-congratulatory. He was 36 and in excellent shape. No signs of the gut that had grown on most of his buddies.

He got up and shoved his hand in his pocket, but Joyce waved him off, “I’ll get you next time, when you have steak and eggs again.” Andy headed out the door and walked over to the bus. Several passengers stood around, stretching their legs before they got back on for the run to Port Callais. Seven passengers were boarding here and he helped them with their luggage, then headed back in for a dolly filled with freight. Once he had it loaded and had secured the bins, he walked toward the front and started closing and latching the front bunks. As he held the door open and the passengers filed back in, he tried to see if Theo was in the front seat or still back with the kid. “Shit, I forgot the toast,” he said out loud. A passenger, right in front of him said, “Huh?” and Andy had to apologize then ran over to the kitchen door. “Joyce, can I get a quick order of toast for a kid on the bus?” he asked. She

waved and headed out to the front. Andy stood and watched bus, trying to figure out just which seat the kid was in.

He glanced back to see if Joyce had the toast ready and when he looked back, Dan Bowers was coming around the front of the bus, in a freshly pressed uniform, carrying his briefcase. "Sorry I'm late Andy, I tried to call you last night in Ralston, but you'd already left.."

Andy walked over and climbed up into the bus, walking down the aisle to where Theo was sitting. The little boy was curled up in the seat, sleeping soundly. "Sorry, Theo, the gigs up. Dan's gonna take the bus down to Callais, so we better wake the little fella up and take him up to welfare." Theo looked up and held his finger to his lips. "I'll take him with me. My sister'll get him set up with the folks in Callais, she works in the same building as welfare there. He'll be fine. You head back to Glendale and find the twat that dumped him on you. Here. Here's my number at Sig Harbour, phone me and let me know where she is. He'll be alright with me," Theo said.

Andy was going to put up an argument, but Dan was standing beside the driver's seat waiting for him to take his stuff off the bus. He knew if he said anything more, there'd be another person to explain this to, and he wasn't sure, he, nor Theo, could do a convincing job of it. He grabbed his jacket, stuffed his wallet and flashlight in the briefcase and headed down the stairs. "See you tonight, Andy, " Dan said.

Andy walked to the back of the depot and waited for the bus to pull out. Once it was gone he headed up the alley, turned on Third Avenue and walked to the end of the block. He turned and walked up the street a block and a half and into Angela's driveway, pulled out his key and let himself in to the side door. he was headed down to this room in the basement when he heard Angela call out, "Hello? Andy?"

"Hey, Ange, just me. Gonna catch some shuteye and take the bus back up to Ralston tonight." "Can I make you a mug of Ovaltine?" she asked. Andy thought for a second and then decided a mug of the frothy malt liquid would settle him down and help him sleep. "Thanks, that'd be nice," he said. He left his stuff on the landing and slid into a chair in Angela's kitchen. He watched as she reached up in the cupboard and got down a mug, then reached again, higher, for the Ovaltine. In fact, he watched every move she made as she filled the kettle, plugged it in, lifted the Ovaltine powder out and dropped it into the mug, tapped the spoon on the side to shake of the last bits.

In the livingroom behind her, a newscast started on the television. Andy was sure he heard the news anchor say, "The three year old grandson of a New

York Senator abducted on Tuesday, is believed to have been spirited into this country...

Andy stood up to see around Angela's bum, since she was standing between him and the television, only to have the news anchor say there would be more about the abduction later in the news cast. When he looked back at Angela, she had a confused look on her face. He stood speechless for a few seconds, then asked, "Did you just ask me something?"

"I asked if you wanted milk in your Ovaltine. Boy you must be tired this morning. Rough run down from Ralston?," Angela asked. "Yeah, milk would be good. Nope. Pretty quiet actually," Andy said, realizing that he was lying through his teeth and would likely have to explain that to Angela, if the kid on the bus surfaced. And if the kid was the abducted New York grandson, it would be even harder to explain.

Angela poured the hot water, then the milk, into Andy's mug, then walked over and picked up the remote, shutting off the television. Andy stood silently at the counter, drinking the hot liquid, wondering how to handle this dilemma. Angela put some dishes in the dishwasher, then headed downstairs. "I'll get this laundry finished, so the washer doesn't keep you awake," she said over her shoulder as she stepped through the doorway and headed down the stairs. A couple minutes later he heard her slam the dryer door and then her footsteps coming back up to the kitchen. "I put fresh sheets on your bed yesterday, so you should be comfortable," she said. "I'm heading down to the office for a couple hours. Are you taking a run back up to Ralston tonight? Do I need to wake you?," she asked.

"Yeah," Andy answered, "I should be leaving about 7, I think. If you could wake me by four, that would be great," he said. "I'll try to keep Brittany quiet when she gets home from school," Angela said. "Have a good sleep." "Hey. thanks for the Ovaltine," Andy said, walking toward the stairs, knowing that he'd likely not sleep, but could get up and check the news once he heard Angela leave. He stepped into his room and walked over to pull down the roller blind. he looked out over Angela's back yard and pondered the last 10 hours, wondering what it meant and what would be waiting for him when he returned to the depot tonight. The company didn't have Angela's phone number, something he'd done deliberately and at the recommendation of other drivers. If they can't find you, they can't pull you out of bed with a couple hours sleep and send you on another run. He also didn't think Angela needed the heat. She was a single mom, worked hard, was devoted to her kid and had never implied that Andy could ever be anything more than a part-time roomer.

He pulled the blind down and stood in the dark, taking off his uniform and laying it across the chair beside his bed. He slid his underwear down to mid-thigh and then thought better of it. He had a hunch he might be waking up prematurely, so he pulled his Hanes back up and climbed into bed, pulling himself into a fetal position, squeezing his eyes shut and saying, “Holy, shit, shit, shit shit....”

His mind ran through the details, in disjointed fashion, of each of the events that unfolded from the time he pulled into Glendale. He clearly saw each chance he’d had to change the outcome and quietly cursed himself for each bad decision. Before he knew it, he was asleep and his pulse and blood pressure relaxed as his breathing became more shallow. He stretched out his legs and rolled over on his back, pulling his arms up behind his head, murmuring something over and over, sleeping soundly.

A crack of bright light shone directly on his right eye and he looked up into a silhouette just inside his door. He opened both eyes, realizing Angela was coming over to shake him and wake him up. What a pleasant surprise, he thought, so much nicer than rapping sharply on the door. As she came up close to the bed, he realized she was wearing only a brassiere and panties and rather than waking him, was pulling back the covers to join him.

He reached his arms out and she slid into them, pulling herself up on his broad chest and kissing him gently, first on the chin, then his lips. He gently slid his hands up and down her bare back, carefully slipping over the thin strap of her brassiere below her shoulder blades. Angela pulled herself up firmly, forcing her mouth down on his and searching with rapid strokes from her tongue and answer to a burning, but unspoken question. She pressed her pelvis down, squirming to centre herself over him and reached back with her right hand and deftly popped the fastener on the back of her brassiere. She raised herself up and pulled the bra out dropping it on the floor and Andy felt Angela’s soft breasts spread across his chest. He slid his hand down her back and over the waistband of her panties. He felt around softly, then slid his hand under the waistband with ever increasing strokes until he cupped her right buttock in his hand.

He heard a sharp rap at the door and Angela said, “It’s four, Andy.” He groaned, first at an overwhelming sense of entitlement denied, then started to recall what was in his mind as he lay down earlier today. He lay there in the dark, wondering what had transpired while he slept. Was the riddle solved? Was Theo at his sister’s, putting together his invention, while the little guy’s mother played with him in the next room? Or was this day just sinking further and further into contention for the Shittiest day of the Year Award?

He pulled on his pants and shirt and headed upstairs. “Do you mind if I have a shower, Ange?”, Andy asked. “No, go ahead. Here, I’ll get you a fresh towel,” she said, walking toward him and opening the linen closet door. Andy couldn’t help but notice that Angela’s breasts seemed a lot smaller than in his dream, but caught himself and was reminded that this was his reality for today.

He took the towel and placed it on a chair. He went back downstairs and took his toiletry bag out of his duffle bag by the bed and headed back up for his shower. When he walked past the kitchen, he noticed Angela’s daughter at the table, reading a comic book and enjoying a glass of juice. “Hello, Mr. Robertson,” she said. “Hey, Brittany, how’s it going?,” Andy asked, with a lot more enthusiasm than he felt at the moment. “Goo-ood,” Brittany replied, her voice lilting up on the second syllable she added. “I don’t have school tomorrow and Mom doesn’t work.”

Andy slipped into the bathroom and breathed in. It smelled so good. It reminded him of Simmons Drug Store in Milton and how he’d stop in on his way home from school, usually just to breathe in the smell of herbs, soaps, perfumes and medicines that made up an aroma that always seemed safe, protective and clean. He set his toiletry bag in the sink, since there was no room around it to place anything. The vanity was filled with the accoutrements a woman needs to feed her womanhood, to re-establish her beauty and femininity each day before facing the world. He wanted to open the huge medicine cabinet behind the large mirror over the sink, but knew that would be an encroachment on Angela’s privacy, an unforgiveable embarrassment if he were caught. But he imagined it filled with the keys to her intimacy, particularly given the hints left laying out everywhere. he dropped his clothes on the floor by the toilet and limped into the tub, fumbled with the shower curtain and finally turned on the water. It seemed to take five minutes to get the temperature right, only to have it scald him once the shower kicked in. He leaned back as the jet of water cooled, not realizing his bum was holding the shower curtain open and the water was splashing out on his clothes on the floor.

He got out, dried off and put on his damp clothes. The shoulder of his shirt had a large soaking wet spot, as did the knee on his pants. As he combed his wet hair, he wondered if they’d be dry before he headed back down to the bus depot.

Angela laughed out loud when he came out of the bathroom. “I can throw those in the dryer if you want,” she said. “I’ve got some clothes you can wear while they dry.” “Nah, that’s okay, Ange, they’ll dry fine on me. Nobody’s gonna see in the dark on the bus anyway,” he said, smiling

sheepishly. “Do you wanna have supper with us? We’re just having spaghetti,” Ange asked. Andy was actually grateful for the offer. When he gave the woman the \$15 in Glendale, he’d left himself with less than \$5, thinking he’d be going to the city and stopping at the bank. he didn’t have a friendly branch between Milton and Callais and he hated paying a buck and half to take out \$20.

While Angela made supper, Brittany watched a kids’ show on television. Andy wanted to change the channel and see the news, but he didn’t want to impose on Angela and her daughter, but the curiosity was eating away at him. When Brittany’s show ended at 5 o’clock, Andy quickly asked if he could check the news. Angela grabbed the remote and deftly switched to the same news channel they’d been watching earlier in the day. Andy didn’t have to wait long for his answer and a lot more questions.

Theo sat quietly, watching the people getting on the bus, hoping he’d have enough seats around him so he could talk to the kid without his seatmates knowing there was something amiss. He kept looking to the front, hoping Andy would come up the step, close the door and get them out of Crester. Once they were on the Expressway, they wouldn’t stop until they pulled into Sig Harbour and Theo could get the little guy over to his sister’s. He was pretty confident she’d be able to solve the riddle and get the kid safely back to his family, whoever they were.

The child sleeping beside him reminded him of his nephew and Theo was pretty sure he could win the little guy’s trust, but was worried the child would come completely unglued if he woke up all alone on the bus, surrounded by strangers and no sign of his mother. Theo looked down at him again, and when he looked up, Dan Bowers was standing beside the driver’s seat, putting his jacket across the seat back, and shoving a canvas satchel behind the seat with his left foot.

Dan turned and looked back on the bus, counting passengers as he went. When he saw Theo, his face lit up into a big smile and said aloud, “Mr. Verkerk, nice to see you!” Theo nodded and wondered if Dan noticed he was sitting halfway back, not in the front seat as he usually would. Dan strode back, waiting while a man finished folding his coat and took his seat, then stepped over, hand outstretched. “How you been, Theo?”, he asked, as he looked down to Theo’s right at the little boy curled up on the seat. “One of yours?”, he asked. “No, no,” laughed Theo, “Just a little fella I’m bringing to my sister. She’s a social worker and the little guy needed a chaperone,” he lied.

Dan leaned on the seat ahead of him and they chatted a minute. Looking around at everyone seated, he patted Theo on the shoulder and said, "I've gotta get these tickets, great to see ya, again." Theo grabbed his arm, a little harder than he should have, and Dan turned back. "I still have a box up on the floor in the front seat beside you. I was sitting there, but I think I'll stay here now. Don't throw it out, eh?" he said, laughing, with just a little more energy than necessary, trying to neutralize the tug on Dan's arm. As he walked to the back, he chuckled as he heard Theo's trademark, "hu-hu, hu hu, hu-hu, hu hu, fading away behind him.

Theo leaned back and relaxed when the bus pulled out onto the Expressway and noticed the little guy beside him start to stir. he left him alone and couple minutes later, the child squirmed around and opened his eyes. He lifted his head and his eyes filled with tears and his lip started to quiver. A very faint moan was all that came out when he opened his mouth. Theo lowered his head down to look into the child's face. "You're okay little guy, I'm taking you to your momma, we'll be there soon, you're all right," he said. He slid down off the seat and knelt on the floor, so he wasn't towering over the kid. "Are you hungry? Want a granola bar?" he asked, feeling around in his back pack on the floor. He pulled out a granola bar, reflecting with regret that it was the last chocolate chip bar of the trip – he'd been saving it until the last as he always did, but he knew he also had a raspberry bar, not his favourite, that he'd rather give the kid.

The little boy sniffed hard and wiped his eyes and reached out for the bar. Theo tore the end off the wrapper and handed it to him and he started eating it aggressively. "Probably missed supper last night, too," Theo thought. As he ate, Theo quietly explained that when they got to Port Callais, that he'd take the little boy to his sister's house where he could play with the other kids until his mother arrived. He leaned down beside his head and whispered, "What's your name?" The little boy looked at him and said nothing. Theo whispered the question again and the little boy whispered back, "Tylah, I'm fwee."

"Wow," Theo thought, "That was easy. He made a point of calling him Tyler each time he spoke, hoping it would relax him and also reinforce their relationship. They talked and played all the way down the highway; every now and then, Tyler's eyes would tear up, his lip would quiver and he'd say "Momma?" almost inaudibly. Each time, Theo would reassure him, then distract him. The trip to Callais took less time than usual Theo thought, as they pulled down off the Expressway and headed down the street toward the Sig Harbour bus depot.

Dan pulled 815 into the end bay of the depot and stood up, announced Sig Harbour and advised passengers headed for the ferry terminal to stray in their seats – the bus would leave for the cross town depot in less than five minutes. Theo noticed only a few people getting off and for the first time realized there were folks sleeping in the back seats. he remembered thinking the bus was only carrying eight passengers when he got on at Broder Road. Since he'd not left the vehicle since, they all had to be there when he got on, he surmised.

He reached down from the aisle and picked Tyler up off the seat and carried him to the front. Dan was already at the bottom of the stairs, helping passengers, when Theo came down, one arm around Tyler, the other on the hand rail. His backpack on his back. “Dan, I have to come back for my box. Can you take it in and get them to hold it at the parcel counter? I’ll only be ten, maybe fifteen minutes,” he said. “Yeah, sure, Theo, I’ll grab it now,” he said. Dan stepped around Theo, who was looking around the bay. Several people were milling around, including two men, one of whom was looking directly at Theo. He stepped forward as Theo tried to get around the front of the bus. “I’ll take the kid, now, Bud,” the guy said, reaching out for Tyler. Theo looked at the man’s menacing face and he knew something was terribly wrong. “Not just now, fella,” Theo said, ducking under the mirror and around the front of the bus. When he looked down he saw a handgun sticking out of the guy’s belt and his partner was reaching under his jacket. Theo jumped forward, gripping Tyler, tightly, then ducked around the corner of the depot and started running down the narrow alley that separated it from the paint store next door. He ran, shielding the child, as his shoulders scraped the brick walls of the building, first one side, then the other. The alley was barely wide enough for a full grown person to walk through comfortably and a challenge to run in carrying a child and a 15 kilogram backpack.

He could hear a scuffling noise behind him and a gruff voice said, “Stop!” Then, as an explosion erupted all around him he felt himself launched forward, kicked by a huge force, right between his shoulder blades. The force threw him off balance and he swung his right leg out to keep from falling on the child. His leg contacted the wall right at the corner and Theo shove hard to his left, trying to clear the building and get some protection between him and the man chasing him. He hadn’t even put it together that he’d been shot, when he heard a loud popping sound and his field of vision turned entirely red.

Theo was airborne, floating high over a street scene, with a crowd gathering beneath. As he floated down, he saw his mother, reaching up to him. “Oh,

Theo, you are the good son, you've brought Johanna to me," his mother said, her face coming into clear focus. Standing beside her was Johanna and all around, people were rejoicing and welcoming him. He looked down, wondering where Tyler had gone. "Tyler's safe now," his mother said, without being asked. Johanna reached out for his hand and said, "You saved him, too, Theo, you are safe with us now, come, come and be with us here." The red was fading quickly through pink and everywhere Theo looked everything glowed with a pearlescence and seemed to be fade from transparency to opacity, from liquid to solid to liquid. he seemed to have no weight and would, at the blink of an eye, be 40 feet off the ground looking at a crowd gathering below, then sweeping through an endless crowd at ground level, his mother on one arm, Johanna another, pulling him along. "Am I dead, Mother?," he asked. "No, Theo, you're finally alive. You're back with us now."

Maureen Fuller stood at the front door of the donut shop, looking across the street. She'd seen the bus slide by and was watching to see how many people would come out of the Sig Harbour depot and head over for coffee. The depot was just a waiting room and a parcel pickup, so Maureen's shop did a brisk business, pretty much anytime a bus pulled in. She played a little game: if more than four people came out the front door at once, she'd head back and start a fresh pot of coffee. Four or less, she'd assume she had plenty on hand.

She heard a loud bang and immediately saw a man come flying out of the alley, holding a child up high near his shoulder. There was a second bang as the man's head exploded and he pitched forward, falling in front of some parked cars and on top of the child. Reflexively, she threw the door open and started to run to aid the child. As she stepped off the sidewalk, a second man stepped out of the alley, spotted her running toward him and raised his gun. Maureen barely raised her arms as she tried to stop, turn and duck behind a car, when the slug from the pistol slammed into her forehead.

She heard faint, melodic whistling sound as she floated away from the crowd forming under her on the street below. The shooter bent down and pulled Theo back, by his still smoking backpack. Underneath him lay the unconscious child, crumpled face first into the dirt of the gutter beside the curb. He reached down and grabbed Tyler's collar and yanked him up, spinning around and running toward the front of the bus depot. His partner came out of the alley and slammed into him and both men fell to the ground, the shooter crushing Tyler for second time.

He lept up, still dragging the child by the collar and his partner slowly got to his feet and ran, limping heavily. He turned his head and shouted, "Get down, I'll bring the car. Get down!" He ran up to a beige sedan parked close to the depot's front door. He fumbled to get the keys out of his pocket, then pulled the driver's door open and jumped in behind the wheel, contorting his face in agony as he stretched his injured right leg.

He cranked the key and the engine roared and he pulled the shifter down into reverse. The car shot back and slammed into a police cruiser pulling up, catching its driver completely by surprise, he'd been looking at the corpse on the street in front of the donut shop and reaching for his microphone when the sedan slammed him. He pressed the button and screamed for backup and jumped out of his cruiser. He looked first at the woman laying on the street, then the guy getting out of the beige sedan. He didn't see the guy getting to his feet in front of the car about 30 feet to his right.

Alice Robertson shielded her eyes as she looked down at the boat pulling up to the dock. She could see three people in the boat but couldn't really tell who each was. When a man jumped out and started pulling the boat ahead with a short rope, she knew it was her husband Larry, which meant the other two people would be her sister, Betty and Betty's friend Loretta.

The four of them had come to the beach for a picnic and Larry had borrowed the boat from the guy that ran the marina. He was a customer of Larry's and was pleased and a little proud that Larry chose his place for the picnic and his boat to borrow. Alice didn't want to go boating, she was already feeling woozy and bobbing around in the bright sun in the lake wasn't going to make things any better.

Alice was also annoyed at Larry. She thought he was paying special attention to Loretta. In fact, she thought Larry paid special attention to every other woman except her and had done so pretty much from the day they returned from their honeymoon. They'd been married less than a year and Alice was having grave doubts about an arrangement that was supposed to last the rest of their life. She was sure she'd seen Larry looking in the rearview mirror several times on their way to the lake – he'd be talking to Betty in the back seat, but looking at Loretta beside her.

For a while, she'd thought about asking Larry if he wanted the marriage to end. She felt like she was just there to wait on him and that wasn't how it was before they'd gotten married. But she hadn't had the courage and now, she was pretty sure she was pregnant. Her period was late, she felt different in many ways and she felt a pervasive nausea that didn't let up until after

noon. She had an appointment with her doctor for Monday afternoon, so they'd know soon enough. For now, she felt she had to protect her marriage and her husband from her sister's admittedly pretty friend.

The three of them walked back to the picnic table where Alice sat. Loretta came over and sat beside her and told her how much fun the boat ride had been and what a great driver her husband was. Larry laughed and turned away, sitting across from the two of them and looked back out over the lake. "Someday, I want to have a cabin right here, so we can sit on the porch and watch the sun set. Maybe take our kids waterskiing," he said. Loretta let out a little squeal and asked how many kids they were going to have. Larry answered like he'd known all along. "We're having four, two boys, two girls. First the boys, then a pair of beautiful little gals," he said.

Alice was relieved to hear him say that. It was the first positive thing he'd said about marriage in months. It was funny, she'd thought a month ago, they wouldn't have a family, that she'd grow tired of his distance and they'd just go their separate ways. She didn't realize how prophetic Larry's words were and wouldn't for nearly a decade. Their first child, Andy, was born in March of 1954. Loretta and Larry's first child, Tim, was born in 1958 and then they had twin girls three years after that.

Alice and Andy lived in Milton in a tiny but comfortable apartment above the drug store where Alice worked. Larry and Loretta lived in Poulsen, in a large bungalow, overlooking Skagit Sound, close to the marina. He owned a large power boat and spent most of his spare time either running up and down the sound in it, or working on it in the huge garage attached to the bungalow.

Andy had seen the boat many times, had played underneath it when it sat in the driveway on a trailer, but had never set foot inside it. He saw his three half-siblings fairly often, but he was treated like a cousin or a family friend. Andy often wondered if it made Larry uncomfortable when he called him Dad.

By the time Andy started school, his family included only Alice and his world centred on Milton's downtown. Alice was devoted to Andy and lived her life as though her only purpose was to ensure his success. She was always awake before him, had his breakfast on the table, his clothes neatly pressed and ready on a chair beside his bed, a nice lunch in a metal lunch kit by the door. When he came home from school he'd report to the store, where Alice would direct him. A couple days a week, he spent from 3:30 to five in the library across from the drug store. He'd do his homework first, then read books selected from a list that Alice had prepared.

By the time he was fourteen, he was spending an afternoon each week helping out at the old folks home, again, within sight of the drug store – he'd usually take a big bag of prescriptions and other merchandise over to Gladys, the manager, and she'd have a list of things for him to do. He'd read to the old folks, set up the record player and play them records, help set the big table for them all to have supper, then go home.

Alice always came up the stairs just before six and whenever Andy stepped through the door, there was always already food cooking and his mother, already changed into a sweater and slacks, would sit down at the kitchen table and ask how his day went. It was a routine that made Andy comfortable. He remembered, when he was about 10, going to Larry's house for a vacation during summer holidays. Loretta was always very nice to him, too nice he thought, but after only two days he just wanted to go home. By mid-afternoon, he wanted to be by himself, with some task, like setting up the record player, to keep him focused. And he wanted to sit and visit for a few minutes before he ate supper. At Larry's, the kids would be busy in a game of some sort, supper would be called and he wouldn't feel ready to eat, even when the food was good.

When he got home, he told his mother he didn't want to go to Larry's again, unless she could go with him. Alice laughed and told him she'd never set foot in Loretta's house. And she never did. Alice always put Andy to bed, tucked him in and then sat in the livingroom, right outside his door, reading a book while he went to sleep. She folded down the couch after he went to sleep and always had it reassembled in the morning when he woke up.

Andy spent almost no time alone in the house without Alice there – she always had something for him to do to ensure he wasn't unsupervised. He never noticed any of that, even as a teenager, when solitude was what he craved the most. If he was going to find a place to be alone, it was always away from home.

One day, heading back from the old folks home, he walked past two guys working on a car. They had the hood up and were feverishly yanking on something near the back of the engine. One guy was cursing, the other looking around and telling the guy under the hood to hurry it up. Andy walked over and asked if he could help. The guy under the hood whirled around and grabbed his jacket and shoved him back, then pulled him so close Andy could smell a sickening mixture of beer and chewing tobacco as he said, menacingly, "Fuck off, kid. Just fuck right off." He threw Andy on the ground and horrified, he scrambled back toward the old folks home. He couldn't go past the car to get home, so he circled down a block. As he walked down toward main street, he saw a police car parked in a driveway.

As he walked by, a policeman came out of the house and headed toward the car. He looked up, saw Andy and said, "How you doing, Andy?" and Andy realized it was one of his mother's friends, who Andy knew only as Constable Edwards. Andy started to cry. The guy had scared him badly and he was sure people weren't allowed to just shove kids around. He told Constable Edwards what had just happened and Edwards told him to get in the police car. They whipped around the block and as they pulled up, one of the guys grabbed a canvas bag and ran, yelling something at the first guy, still under the hood. Edwards jumped out and yelled something Andy couldn't understand at the guy under the hood. He ran over to him and grabbed him, but the guy hit Edwards in the right temple with something he had in his hand. Edwards crumpled to the ground and the guy ran down the street and followed his partner into a driveway. They ran past a garage and through a garden and disappeared.

Andy got out of the car and ran over to where Edwards lay. He was writhing on the ground, caught under the front bumper of the car. When his head swung out into view, his eyes were completely rolled back in his head and blood was pumping out of his temple in spurts. He was grinding his face into the gravel in front of the car and making a frightening gargling sound, his mouth wide open.

Andy ran down the street to main street, then across to the drug store. He couldn't speak, he opened his mouth and tried to tell his mother what had happened between gasps for breath, but nothing came out. Everyone's voices became garbled and then everything went black. When Andy came to, his mother and her boss were both kneeling beside him, asking him what was wrong. Between sobs, he managed to get enough information out to get them to call the police and Alice's boss ran out the front door of the store. Andy stood up and leaned against his mother and looked down at a huge, warm wet stain growing on his right leg. He'd peed his pants and was completely confused about what had just happened to him.

When he stopped sobbing and got his breath back, he told his mother the whole story. She turned white and went and stood looking out the store window, trying to see up the street past the houses there. She kept asking Andy if Bruce was okay, but Andy didn't know who she meant. He kept saying "I don't know," until she turned around and slapped him, really hard and screamed "Then go find out! Get away from me!".

Andy was stunned and stumbled out the front door of the drug store. he crossed the street, but couldn't see anything – his eyes were overflowing with tears, he was sobbing so hard he couldn't catch his breath and then he fell down hard, striking his knee against the curb. He lay on the ground and

then tried to get up, but his leg wouldn't support him. He fell again and again as he tried to make it to the corner. When he finally turned up the street where Alice's boss was, he was regaining his composure. He had to find out how Edwards was, not because he cared, but because he needed the information to be able to speak with his mother again.

When he got to the front of the car, he could see Edwards head resting in Alice's boss' lap. He was conscious again, but not completely coherent. Andy couldn't understand what he was saying and when he stepped over closer, Edwards looked up at him and said, "That little fucker set me up." Andy turned and ran, limping, back toward the drug store. he fell twice more and his knee was now hurting more than he'd ever hurt before. When he got to the corner, he could see his mother, standing on the sidewalk in front of the store. "Call the doctor, call the doctor," Andy said, sobbing, over and over.

His mother went back into the store and he could see her talking on the phone through the window. Andy slumped down on a bench in front of the store to get his weight off his injured leg. His mother stood inside the window and stared at him, with an expression on her face he'd never seen before. Andy was worried that he had somehow injured Constable Edwards and he didn't know what he'd said to make his mother so angry.

After a few minutes, and ambulance went by, missed the turn, went up the street, turned around and came back. When it turned up the street toward where Edwards lay, the driver gave a blast on the siren, then skidded the vehicle to a stop. Andy half walked, half dragged himself to the corner, so he could see what was going on. The ambulance driver and Alice's boss loaded Edwards on a stretcher and put him in the back of the ambulance, which roared off, lights flashing, siren screaming.

Alice's boss, glared at him when he walked by and went into the drug store. By the time Andy dragged himself back inside, Alice was walking away from her boss, crying. She grabbed Andy by the arm, out the front door and up the long set of stairs on the side of the building to the apartment above. She didn't say anything to him, just shoved him in his room and told him to get his wet clothes off and put on his pyjamas and get to bed. Andy was old enough that his mother no longer saw him naked, so he slipped on his pyjama bottoms, before he went out of his room to go to the bathroom. His mother was sitting with her back to him and screamed, "Get to bed I told you!!"

Andy started to cry. "What did I do? What did I do?," he asked. "You know goddamned well what you did you little son of a..." Alice caught herself mid-sentence when she saw the blood seeping through Andy's pyjama

bottoms. She got up and grabbed him, shoving him into the bathroom. She held him up while she leaned over and pushed the plug into the tub and turned on both faucets. She held her left hand under the stream of water and when the temperature seemed right, pulled Andy to the edge of the tub. She yanked his pyjama pants off and pushed him over into the water. She grabbed a face cloth and started swabbing his injured leg.

“What did you hit Constable Edwards with?” she asked. Andy looked up at his mother’s face, she had black streaks all the way down to her jaw line on both sides and tears still streamed from both her eyes. “I didn’t hit him. Some guys that were working on a car hit him. One of them hit him with a piece of steel,” Andy said. Her grip on his arm went limp. “Why did he say you hit him, then?” she asked. Andy started to cry again, not because he hurt, because he did, not because he was afraid, although he was, but out of relief. His mother was back to normal, back from a state he’d never seen before and never wanted to witness again.

They sat in the bathroom and cried for a long time. The water, now red from Andy’s seeping wound, was only luke warm. Andy climbed out of the tub and his mother wrapped a towel around his waist to cover his privates, then wrapped his knee with a gauze bandage from out of the medicine cabinet. they went back to the kitchen and Andy got clean underwear to replace the towel. He sat in the livingroom and watched television while his mother went back downstairs. It was the first time he remembered being alone in his own house and for a few fleeting moments it felt warm and comfortable. His mother came back in and started making them supper, just soup and toast. They ate quietly and then both went and sat in the livingroom and watched television again. The phone rang and Alice picked it up. She said, “Yes” a half dozen times before she asked, “How’s Bruce doing? Will he be all right?” Then Andy heard her say, “Okay, okay, yes, okay, okay,” and then she said nothing for a long time. Finally she said, “Yes, you can come and talk to him now, he’s okay.”

A few minutes later, a policeman came to the door. He came into the livingroom and sat down next to Andy on the couch. Without introducing himself, the policeman started asking Andy questions, which the boy answered dutifully. Then he realized that the policeman had the story wrong and was trying to get Andy to agree with his version. The way he told it, Andy was standing beside the car with the hood up and flagged down Constable Edwards as he drove by. he told Edwards to look under the hood and when he bent over, Andy hit him in the head with something.

Whenever Andy tried to tell the whole story, the policeman would interrupt and ask him one of his questions over again. Andy finally stopped talking.

The policemen went into the kitchen and Andy couldn't hear what he said to Alice. The policeman left and Alice stayed sitting at the kitchen table.

"You're going to have to tell the truth eventually," she said. "You might as well start now. They're going to put you in jail if you don't tell them the truth.

Andy went into his room and sat at his desk. He took a clean sheet of paper and with a pencil, wrote down the events as they'd happened to him that afternoon. When he was finished, he went out to the kitchen, but he could see the light under the bathroom door and knew his mother would be there a while. He left the paper on the kitchen table and then went out the door, carefully lowering his damaged leg, step by step until he was safely on the ground below. He went down the street to the library, walked past the librarian's desk and down through the stacks to the children's reading area. He curled up on a huge bean bag cushion and fell asleep.

When he woke up, many hours later, the library was in darkness. He went to the front door and was about to turn the latch and let himself out. He looked up the street to the drug store, where a police cruiser was sitting. He looked up the stairs and could see there were no lights, not even the porch light lit. His mother thought he was still in bed, he thought, and went back to the bean bag. He didn't really sleep again, just drifted in and out until he heard the latch click on the library's front door. He watched the librarian come in, take off her coat and go into the back office. Andy slipped away before she came back to her desk.

His leg was still very sore and the walk even to the drug store seemed daunting. The police car was gone and the store was open, which meant his mother would be at work and he was late for school. He ducked into the alley halfway up the block and circled round back, so he could go up the stairs without walking in front of the store. He struggled to the top of the stairs and rested before he went into the apartment. When he got to the door, he realized it was locked and his key was inside in his other pants.

He sat at the top of the stairs for a long time, wishing his mother would come up and let him in, then wishing he didn't have to face her. He waited until almost lunchtime, then struggled back down the stairs and headed off to the old folks home. When he walked in the door, Gladys was surprised to see him. He helped her serve lunch, then sat down and ate with her as he explained what had transpired the day before. He could tell that Gladys knew something about the police officer spending the night; by the end of the afternoon, Andy felt his family was finally down to one.

He met his mother as she came up the stairs after work. They had supper together, she changed his bandage, but said nothing of his absence that

morning. She didn't say anything more about the incident and when Andy asked about Constable Edwards, all she said was that he'd be okay. She didn't apologize for not believing him and never mentioned the note he'd left on the table.

He'd thought about that day often, but mostly when he was challenged or when he felt he hadn't been completely honest about something. That wasn't very often, he was a pretty straight ahead guy in how he managed his life. But he was thinking about it when he headed upstairs at Angela's – he knew he had to deal with the kid on the bus and didn't relish telling any story, true or otherwise to the police. First, he wanted to know of the kid on the bus was the kidnapped kid from New York state.

To the right of the news anchor were the words 'Gunman kills two' and the shows theme faded as the announcer read, "Police have identified the second person gunned down in a Sig Harbour shooting this morning. Theodore Walter Verkerk, a 38 year old carpenter from Pitway, was shot and killed along with Maureen Fuller, owners of Moe's Dough and Joe, a popular Sig harbour coffee shop.. An American man remains in custody, but police are being very close-lipped about the circumstances surrounding the incident in front of Fuller's donut shop. FactsFirst News has learned from a Verkerk family member that the killer didn't know either of his victims. Marta Goldwin, Verkerk's sister, says her brother was on his way to visit her and was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Diners at Fuller's coffee shop say she appeared to be going to Verkerk's aid when she was shot. FactsFirst News will update this story as details come in. Verkerk and Fuller are the city's 21st and 22nd homocides this year.

Andy stared at the television in horror and disbelief. "What about the kid? Who's got the kid?," he asked excitedly. Angela and Brittany were both staring at him. "Oh, Christ, I was just talking to Theo this morning," Andy said. He turned and headed out of the livingroom, then abruptly came back to see if the kidnapping story would come on later in the newscast. Angela came over really close to him and said, barely audibly, "Can I talk to you for a sec?"

Andy was sitting on the end of the couch, his face in his hands. "Brittany, can you set the table and get the water ready for the spaghetti? I need to talk to Andy for a minute," Angela said. "Are you okay Andy? Can you tell me what's going on? Who is Theo Verkerk? Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh, God Angela, where do I start," Andy said.

“Some woman dropped a kid on me in Glendale and then took off. The kid was still on the bus, with Theo, heading down to Callais. That news report is talking about a three year old kidnapped in New York being up here. The kid on the bus is about three, I’d say. I’m hoping I’m not in deep shit, but I think I probably am,” he said, dolefully. “A woman put her kid on the bus? A three year old?,” Angela asked, incredulous. “I thought you had to be ten to travel by yourself.”

“Actually, you’re supposed to be twelve. She said there was a guy, a cop, that was going to kill her if he caught her. She said she’d sneak on the bus down the street, but didn’t show up.” Just then, the word ‘Abduction’ appeared on the screen and the news anchor started his updated report. “The child, Tyler Marley Richardson, was abducted from his parents’ summer home, near Geneva, New York in the early hours of Tuesday, August 19. A ransom, believed to be more than \$5 million, was paid Thursday, but the child wasn’t where his kidnappers said he would be. A security camera in the Calgary airport caught what appears to be the Richardson child and an unidentified woman as they entered a convenience store. Police have circulated the video to media in the hope that viewers can identify the woman and lead thm to the child.”

Andy stepped over beside Angela as the video clip came on the screen. There was no question, it was the child from the bus. He was wearing the same jacket, same pants and the woman appeared to be the woman that Andy saw in the shadows beside the Glendale depot.

“That’s them,” Andy said. “Do you know the number for the police here?,” he asked. “Shit, I’m gonna get fired for this, I bet,” he said. Why would they fire you?,” Angela asked. “I should never have let the kid on the bus without her. If Lakes & Trails name gets mentioned, I’m betting I’m done,” Andy said. He thought about the last time one of the drivers had done what he thought was a good turn, and ended up giving an escaped convict a lift. When the guy slipped away outside Poulsen, the police told his boss they thought the driver was in on it. After a couple of weeks, he stopped getting routes to drive, then just disappeared. Andy could see himself suffering the same fate.

“Well, we have to do something and I think I can help,” Angela said. Andy knew she worked dispatch for the local EMS service, but wasn’t sure what influence she’d have with the local police. “I’ll call my boss and set up a meeting with Don Simpson, he’s the local corporal. Let’s figure out why you couldn’t go straight to them when you got in this morning.”

They sat silent through supper as Angela waited for Simpson to call her back. She sent Brittany in to watch television right after supper and she and Andy knew if he told the truth, he'd be fired. If he didn't say anything about the kid, there was a good possibility they couldn't connect the kid to Theo. Or he could say that Theo brought the kid with him at Broder Road. Finally, he said, "We can't talk to the cops yet, Angela, I have to talk to Dan Bowers and find out what happened after I left the bus depot this morning. He should be bringing 815 back for tonight's run. It would be best for you, if you say nothing, if you forget I told you what I just did. I'll call you when I get to Ralston and we can take it from there.

Angela said that was a bad idea, that they were digging themselves deeper and she could lose her job for withholding information about the missing child case. "Hang this with me for a bit, Ange, I need some time and more info. I'll call you, honest." Angela agreed, but as he walked back down the hill to the bus depot, he wondered if she was already on the phone. He wondered what she'd tell Simpson when he called back.

Andy walked through the front doors of the Crester depot and went straight over to the parcel room. He opened the door and was surprised to see Jimmy Greer standing there. "Howdy, Andy, brought you up an antique for the night run," Greer said, a broad smile across his face. Through the door, Andy could see the front of a Lakes & Trails bus. He didn't even need to look at the number. It was the 1966 GMC, the first bus he'd driven and one he had hoped had retired from the route forever. It had a six cylinder diesel and a four speed Spicer transmission, and it swooped and swayed up the road like a rank bull coming out of the chute on the last day of the rodeo. "Hey, Jimmy, how you been? What happened to Dan? He find something smelly in Callais?" Andy asked, pretending to not be profoundly depressed at the prospect of driving back up the Parkway, wondering what the hell was going on as he fought his way through the gears.

"He spent the afternoon with the police. That shooting was right in front of the depot, ya know. They think the dead guy came off Dan's bus," Greer said, not realizing that Andy had turned the bus over to Dan that morning. "That's tough about Maureen. Man, she was the nicest person you could ask for and that guy shot her right between the fuckin' eyes. And they think there was a bomb on the bus, too. 815 is down at the impound, that's why I brought up this old piece of shit," Greer said.

Andy walked over to the parcel shelf, with Jimmy right behind him. "I've already loaded ya up, Andy. You don't have a drop until Pitway and there's six of us including me. I'm just going to Glendale, though, then you're on your own," he said.

Andy walked out and around the bus which was sitting still in the bay. He had 10 minutes before it was time to leave, but he wanted to jump on and drive now, before anything else could happen. And, knowing that Theo's invention in the cardboard box was what they thought was a bomb, Andy knew something else was going to happen and soon.

As Andy thought about the peculiar chain of events that brought him to this point, heading home, confused, concerned, freaking out even, he had no inkling that elsewhere the twists and turns were just beginning and short of Theo's murder, dwarfed anything he had to worry about for the next 24 hours.

In Port Callais, Tunny Mastois interrupted telling his family about the massacre at the bus depot, to hit the mute button on his remote and bring the audio up on the news. "What the...., what the...., what the....., What the f....., No, no, this is fucked up," he said. The news reader had just said the Port Callais police had released the American suspect they had in custody for the day's murders. The police had said he was unarmed and had no connection to the shooting, the news reader said.

Tunny looked at his brother and said, "Unarmed my ass. He had a fucking cannon in his pants and they pulled a smaller gun out of his pant leg. He was better armed than the cop arresting him."

"Hold it," he said, as the newscast shifted to another story, "The police are lying. This is a cover up. Maybe the suspect's a cop. Maybe the cop shot the donut shop chick," he said. He went over again with his family everything he'd seen and heard when he walked out the front door of the bus depot after hearing shots outside. When he came out the door, the beige sedan was ramming the front fender of the police cruiser. He walked over and stood behind a pine tree planted in the boulevard, about 50 feet from the front of the police car. He saw the cop get out of his car, look around, then draw his hand gun and walked toward the drivers door of the beige car, gun pointed to the ground. When the driver opened the door, he raised the gun up beside his head, holding it in both hands and ordered the driver to get out with his hands raised, and put his hands on the roof of the car.

When he saw the gun in the man's waistband, he pointed his straight at his head and screamed, "Get down! Lay down! Keep your hands up!" He walked over and stood over the man, pointed the gun right at the back of his head and said, quietly, "Lie still. Don't move or I'll shoot you right in the head." In the distance you could hear sirens and seconds later a police van screeched to a halt in front of the donut shop. Another cruiser came in from

the south. It slid in at an angle, almost hitting the other police vehicle. Two officers jumped out, sidearms drawn and came running over, ducking low. They, too, pointed their guns at the prone suspect and started peppering the other officer with questions.

Tunny heard him say he was just driving down the street when he saw the woman laying beside the curb. He pulled past and was looking back when the sedan slammed into his right front fender. When one officer stepped back, he told them the guy on the ground had a gun in his pants. The cop immediately went over and kneeled between the suspect's shoulder blades and started barking questions at him. Another police car came up and a photographer was running up the sidewalk from Tunny's left. He held the camera to his face and was just mindlessly shooting everything in every direction. He hadn't seen the woman across the street and he jumped back when he realized there were three handguns trained on the guy laying on the ground. One of the cops yelled at him and he ran back down the street, and ducked into the alley where Theo drew in his last breath. He stood in there, panting from the sprint he'd just done and the excitement. He didn't have a clue what he'd just witnessed, but he was pretty sure this takedown was going to make the front page. The photographer continued down the alley and around the back of the bus depot. If he came out on Bridger Street, he'd be right across from the crunched cruiser and could get a perfect shot of the damage. When he stepped around the corner, the two police had the suspect on his feet and were holding his arms back and steering him toward their squad car. He was talking to them but neither he nor Tunny could hear what he said. He was pretty earnest, but calm, like he'd been handcuffed and arrested before.

Tunny slipped out from behind the tree and headed down the street looking at the cops in front of the van. He caught a glimpse between two parked cars, of a figure laying on the ground, but he couldn't really see what it was. He asked his older brother what he thought he should do. "Call the TV place. Tell them they got their facts wrong. Tell 'em what you saw." The two of them sat down and tried to find the tv station in the phone book, they had almost given up, when they found a yellow pages ad. It had a news tip phone number, so Tunny dialed.

The phone rang several times and Tunny stood watching the television and his brothers. He let it ring more than a dozen times and was about to put it down, when a woman's voice answered. She asked for his name and then his news tip. When he told her what he saw, she told him to hold the line. Tunny recognised the next voiced as the on air reader. He listened to Tunny and asked him several questions. Finally, he asked if Tunny had any evidence

that what he was saying was true. Tunny could only answer that he'd seen it all with his own eyes. The voice asked him to come to the station. Tunny hung up the phone and headed for the door.

He'd never seen a television station before and was surprised at how luxurious the lobby was. He'd been met at the door and escorted down a long hallway. Halfway down, a door was opened and he stepped into a dark room with a small brightly lit stage set up through one corner. On the stage, the newsreader was sitting at his desk. Tunny sat in the chair provided by the desk and the reader proceeded to ask him all the same questions again. Then he said, "Are you ready to go with this? Just give me the same answers as you gave me just now, nothing more.." He turned to a woman standing near the desk and gave her some directions. She stepped into the shadows and the news reader started asking the questions again. Tunny didn't even realize that at home, his family was watching everything, running around the room and screaming with excitement.

At the police station, a detective was dialing a number as he watched Tunny perform. "Chief. Big trouble,, we got an eyewitness to the takedown. Says he saw guns on the suspect. Well, we released tonight that the guy was unarmed and released him from custody. This guy says he saw the guns. Described them perfectly," he said. He was silent for a second, then hung up the phone. "Find out who the witness is and go talk to him. and run his name for priors," he said to another detective as he pulled on his jacket, "I'm gonna go down and talk to those assholes at PCTV."

Tunny had left the station before Det. Ken Graham walked up to the door. He had headed back down to the depot, to relive some of the excitement and check out some of the details he'd missed that the television folks told him about. Graham walked over to the woman standing in the lobby, flashed his badge and asked to speak to the program director. "Actually, the PD isn't here. It's just Randy the cameraman, Josh the tech and Barry and me here right now," she said. "Good, let me talk to Barry, then," he said abruptly. "He's on air, but he'll take a break in a couple minutes. What do you want?," she asked.

The detective raised his voice and complained that the station had gone to air with details from an investigation and had several facts wrong. He said Tunny was a dope peddler and had good reason to say the guy was armed, although he didn't say what those reasons might be. The girl was upset, afraid they'd screwed up. Only moments before she was so proud of how she and Barry had come up with good up to date coverage when the PD wasn't even in town. She started to freak out and the red light went off over the door, She pulled the door open and called Barry out of the studio.

The detective told Barry what he'd told the woman, although in a calmer, less demanding voice. Barry told him they'd checked Tunny out and that he doubted the cop's claim about him being a dope dealer.

The detective insisted his information was good and as they stood there arguing, the woman went to let someone else in the front door. Moments later, they were joined by Ed Winters, Port Callais Police Chief. He walked up, introduced himself to Barry and told him they'd be going on the air with an important statement. Barry, taking umbrage at his attitude said that he'd decide what the station would air. The Chief threatened legal action, Barry told him to call his lawyer.

The Chief's tone changed appreciably and Barry listened to what he had to say. The Chief explained that they had checked out all witnesses to the event and that none of them had associated a firearm with the American suspect. "He's just an ordinary guy, a family man from Tacoma, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time," Ed Winters said. "Tell 'em that on camera, then," Barry challenged, opening the studio door. "Why, I'd be glad to," the Chief said and the two men disappeared through the doorway.

Once inside, Ed Winters started complaining that the media had the story wrong, details were being reported that were incorrect and as a result, a guilty party was still at large. Barry, who'd been at the station nearly a decade, had little time for what he saw as a corrupt and inept police chief. If he wanted to cover his ass, Barry didn't care, but he was beginning to sense there was much more going on, since Winters had to understand his complaining and accusation could jeopardize his interview on the late broadcast, something that would doubtless be picked up regionally, if not nationally by morning.

"So, what do you know about the shooter, Ed?" Barry asked. "If this ordinary guy from Bellingham or wherever didn't gun down Verkerk and Fuller, who did?" Ed Winters stopped in the hallway. He waited until Barry, now several feet ahead of him, turned around. "Look. I don't answer to you. I don't answer to that peckerhead who runs this place. I don't answer to anyone in this whole fucking city except the mayor. So, open that door, sit your ass down and turn on my microphone and I'll tell the city why they don't have to worry about who shot anyone," Winters hissed.

Barry stood silent for a second. "Hmmm, only answer to the mayor, you say? Great, then chief, let's get the good mayor on the phone and you can tell him who your mystery gunman is," he said, smiling what had to be the most nervous smile of his career.

As he tried to walk past Winters, the chief grabbed him, and shoved him against the wall. "Don't you fuck with me, kid, you don't have anywhere to

hide. You'll be out of this job so fast you won't know what hit you. And you won't be working anywhere else any fucking time soon," Winters bellowed. "Well, Ed, you crooked old prick, as my father used to like to say, 'I was looking for work when I found this job,' so, fill your boots," he said, shoving the police chief aside. "I'm going to call the mayor. We'll have you both on the 11 o'clock news."

He walked out the door and past the detective standing in the corner of the reception area, watching commercials on a monitor up in the corner. Barry stepped over to the receptionist and said quietly, "Call the mayor, Tom McKnight, at his house. When you've got him on the line, let me know, I'll be in here," he said, walking into the PD's office off the reception area. Barry closed the door behind him and, reflecting, turned and locked it. He walked over to the PD's desk and pushed the button on a telephone directory pad, searching through a list of names for the station's lawyer. He knew by now that the PD wouldn't be back until long after this situation had come completely unwound and he also knew a call to the lawyer, even unanswered, was a necessary part of covering his back. He looked down the list and finally saw Jim Morning's name on the typewritten list, with a second number scrawled in ballpoint beside it.

He sat down, picked up the receiver and dialed the number. A youthful voice answered. "Is Jim Morning in?" Barry asked. "Thanks," he said as the respondent yelled out, "Da-a-ad! You're wanted on the phone!" After a brief pause, he heard someone pick up the receiver. "Jim Morning," a flat voice said at the other end of the line. Barry introduced himself and explained the purpose of his call. Morning thanked him for calling and said he would come to the station and meet with Barry and stay there and witness the interview on the newscast. As Barry hung up, he saw the light flicker on the intercom. "Tom McKnight on one," a female voice said. "Your worship," Barry said, half mocking, "Thanks for taking my call."

"You're very welcome, Barry. What brings my favourite newscaster calling?" a deep, smooth voice said. Barry got to the point. He explained that Winters was more than animated and was nervous about how he might handle the interview and wondered if the mayor wanted to send someone to coach him, or even attend on his own. McKnight thanked him for his interest, asked a few questions, then paused. "I just got home from the raquetball court, Barry, and we went for a couple cool ones afterward. I'm not drunk, but think I'd better call a cab, just to be safe. I'll talk to Chief Winters there, if you've got someplace we can talk privately and we'll decide how we want to handle it. It might be best if we didn't go on the air

tonight, though, if you have something else you can use, just in case,” he said. After a polite salutation, he hung up the phone.

Barry cursed quietly. He had hoped to get Winters on the newscast and then bait him to say something that would blow the story open. He knew the chief was hiding something; he knew the police were trying to buy some time and were trying to find someone they could hang the shootings on. He was dying to know why they were covering for the guy in the beige sedan. Was he a cop? Was he a relative? Was he connected politically? He hoped he hadn't blown his chance to find out.

Inside a small, well-kept bungalow in Benton, New York, a small lithe, blonde-haired woman was drying herself outside her shower when the telephone rang. She cursed quietly, pulling a dressing gown down of a hook on the door and pulling it around her, ran for the phone. She tucked herself in behind the door, so she could see out through the tiny window, but not be seen, as she picked up the receiver. “Katy?,” a voice on the line said. “Daddy,” she said, her voice shaking, “What’s happening? Is there any word?” She stood quietly, while the voice at the other end explained something to her. “Why can’t they find him? Why didn’t they leave him?,” she said, frantically, biting her lip and looking around the small foyer of the house. She spied her cigarettes on the dining room table and stretched herself out, holding the receiver at arms length and reaching her fingers out, barely touching the package of cigarettes. She pawed at it over and over until it flipped closer to her and she could grab it. She put the phone back to her ear as she walked across, back to the foyer. She placed a cigarette between her lips and dug around in the package for a lighter. She looked back at the table and could see her lighter sticking out from under some papers. “Wait a second, Daddy,” she said, dropping the phone in a chair and walking over to the table. She lit her cigarette, dropped the lighter on the table and went back, picking up the phone and sitting in the chair. “Why can’t they find my baby?,” she cried. “What the hell’s going on?” Her father said he was sending a car to get her, to bring her to his office, where they could talk in detail. “I can take the train, Daddy, and get there faster,” she said, looking at her watch to see how close she was to a scheduled departure.

“I don’t want you on a train. I don’t want you anywhere in public. I need my people to be with you all the time. The car is outside, right now, just step out the door and Marty Bellows will take you to the car. You’ll be here in less

than an hour,” he said and the phone clicked dead. As she headed to the bathroom, she looked out the door and realized that as she reached for her cigarette, she’d given a full frontal show to two agents sitting in a car on the street in front of her home. She didn’t care. All, she cared about was a tow-headed three year old that had been snatched from her father’s summer home on Seneca Lake. She didn’t like the tone in her father’s voice. She was very afraid he was going to tell her they’d found her son and he wasn’t alive. She warded off panic by thinking how a mother always knows and her instincts kept telling her he was still alive.

She went into her bedroom and gathered up some clothes, heading to the bathroom to dress. She pulled the towel off her head and tousled her short-cropped blonde hair. She looked in the mirror and gathered up some makeup off the vanity and headed out the door. She grabbed her coat at the front door and pausing briefly to look out the tiny window in the door, swung it open and stepped outside, pulling her coat over her shoulders. She’d seen Bellows through the window, standing beside the door. “Morning, Ms. Richardson,” he said, as he followed her down the walk to the waiting car. Two agents sat in the front seat and bellows opened the rear door on the passenger side to let Katy in. Once seated, he close the door, looked around and circled the car, getting in the back seat behind the driver. The car, a beige Ford sedan, swept up the street, paused at the corner, and sped off. Katy pulled out a mirror and started doing her makeup. No one spoke. She knew her hair would be dry by Millport and wondered if she’d be flying out of the Elmira airport. She asked Bellows and he told her they’d be driving the whole way, but likely changing cars when they pulled into Pennsylvania. “Why are we going into Pennsylvania?,” she asked. “We’re meeting your Dad there. Until they’ve found your son, they don’t want you at your father’s office. It’s safer if we keep you away from places they think you’d likely meet with him,” Bellows explained. “Why is this happening? They got their money, why haven’t they given me back my son?,” she yelled at Bellows. “I’m not allowed to discuss it, Ms. Richardson, but your Dad will. We’ll be at our meeting point in about an hour.”

Katy sat silent and looked at the driver in the rearview mirror. Every now and then, he’d glance at her nervously and his face would redden. “Hah,” she thought, “I was right about the peep show. Hope they enjoyed it.” She looked out the window at the landscape flying by, wondering how her little boy was, wondering if her father was going to lead her to him this morning and end this nightmare. She was pretty sure she’d fallen asleep the night before, but seemed also to remember every minute of every hour.

It wasn't long before the car pulled into a service station and around the side. The agent in the passenger seat got out and opened Katy's door. By the time she was standing beside the car, Bellows had the back door of a sedan beside them open. "Slide all the way across please, Ms. Richardson," he said, closing the door as soon as she was safely in the car. He walked around to the passenger's side, the other agent got behind the wheel and they quickly pulled away, heading back up the street they'd just come down. The car swung down a street to the right, then took a left onto an on ramp. She could tell they were headed east toward the lake and was alarmed that they weren't heading to Pennsylvania, as Bellows had said. "Why are we headed toward the lake?" she asked. "We aren't at liberty to tell you, yet, Ms. Richardson," Bellows said quietly.

The lake came into view in a few minutes and they headed straight down toward the shore. They pulled to a stop beside a limousine and Bellows got out and opened her door. The driver of the limousine stood beside the open back door of his car, looking back up the road they'd just come down. Katy looked in the back and recognized her father's oxfords before she could even see his face. She stepped in and the door closed beside her. Her father kissed her on the forehead and reached for her hand. "What's happening, Daddy, have they found him?" she asked, her voice breaking. She was frightened with this heightened security. She was starting to lose confidence in her own intuition and was afraid her father was bringing the worst news.

"No, we haven't found Tyler yet, but we're getting more confident that it will be soon. They caught one of the kidnappers and he's given us some good information and we're pursuing that right now," her father said calmly. His demeanor settled her down instantly. If he'd seemed nervous, she'd have been very frightened, but when he exuded this kind of relaxed confidence, it meant he knew a lot more than he was telling. "So, why didn't they leave Tyler, when they got the money?" she asked. "Well, sweetheart, he claims they did. It looks like they dropped Tyler where they said they would and someone else picked him up before our people got there. Our people were late. They came across an accident and it held them up for just a few minutes, but enough to make them miss the drop. They're pretty sure that a woman grabbed Tyler and took him up to Canada, like I told you, but she's not with the kidnappers we paid off. We've just received word this morning that he's on the west coast up in Canada and the people holding him want money and an airplane. They swear he's okay. We've asked for a tape recording and we need you to listen to it when we get it, to make absolutely sure it's Tyler. If it is, we'll have him back today, I promise."

The senator looked at his daughter's face and smiled. "These guys only want a half million and it's already secured in Port Callais. For all we know we could have him back this morning, this hour even. They'll call us on the car phone, as soon as they have the tape. They'll play it to you here," he said. Katy started crying and her father reached around and held her closely while she sobbed. She was still crying softly when the car phone buzzed. The driver nodded to the senator, who picked up the receiver in the back seat. He spoke quietly to someone on the other end, then handed it to Katy. At first there was silence, then some clicking and static, before she heard Tyler distinctly say, "Mommmy, Mommmy, come and get me Mommy, come get me now," before the line went dead. A voice said, "Can you confirm that this is your son, Ma'am?" A shaky Katy said, "Yes, yes, yes! It's him, where is he?, where is he? Have you got him?," she said, crying hard again. "We don't have him yet, Ma'am, but this recording is only a few minutes old. We'll call you back very soon," and the line went dead. The phone buzzed again and the driver nodded to the senator. He picked it up and listened, saying nothing. Finally, he said quietly, "All right, then," and hung up the phone.

Andy pulled out a fresh package of Brown Owls and thought how they weren't his favourite brand. He'd give what was left to Sandy when he saw her in Ralston later. He hoped she'd be there when he pulled in, as she'd likely as anyone know what was going on. He couldn't believe he hadn't heard from the company yet. An abducted child is found on his bus and they haven't called him in or chased the police his way.

He stood behind the bus and lit the cigarette, being careful not to lean up against the back of the vehicle. Like any aging diesel rig, it had a thin coating of oil on it that would stain the tan uniform permanently. He often wondered if they were the only busline with uniforms that showed every stain, no matter how small. He had more pants hanging at home that he couldn't wear any more, just from kneeling on a bumper or touching the engine cover when he had to check the oil.

He squashed the cigarette butt on the pavement and looked at his watch. He walked to the front of the bus then headed back, getting out another Brown Owl. He smoked about half of it, then screwed his face up at the disgusting taste and tossed it on the ground, grinding it with the sole of his shoe, before heading in to check his passengers.

As he asked for tickets, one of the passengers asked if they'd be stopping for a smoke, obviously tipped off by the smell coming off Andy's uniform.

“Yeah, you’ll get lots of chances to smoke,” he said. he headed up to the drivers seat, with Jerry Greer right behind him. “So, what do ya think’s going on Andy?,” Greer asked. Andy just sat down, organized his stuff and looked around the cockpit of the bus. “I dunno much, Jimmy, probably less than you. I’ve been sleeping pretty much ever since I turned 815 over to Dan,” he said.

he checked his watch and looked at the back door to the Crester depot. No sign of anyone, so it was safe to leave. He’d had a peculiar thought that he’d wished Angela had been there, to call him back off the bus, to tell him something. But he wasn’t sure if it was just the residue of a fantasy he’d very much enjoyed until it ended abruptly. He hoped this wasn’t going to mean the end of staying at Angela’s house, something he was growing to look forward to more and more, each time he came down through Crester. Leaving the front door ajar, Andy fished around until he found reverse and slowly backed the bus out of the bay. Happily, without a hint of a grind, he put it in first and headed round the side of the station. He headed down the street and took the first turn out onto 71 and before he knew it, was whipping the old GMC up the tarmac and watching the sky turn orange behind him.

The passengers were all sitting in the middle of the bus, except for Greer, who sat to Andy’s right. After asking a bunch of questions that Andy either didn’t ort couldn’t answer, Greer got off the topic of the shooting and Andy was relieved. he didn’t want to attract any more attention than he had to and he didn’t want to appear as if he knew any more than he did. If Greer figured Andy knew what was going on, he’d be on the phone in Glendale, spreading the gossip, gloating that he knew more and sooner than anyone else.

Traffic was normal for this time of night, which meant pretty much everyone headed toward the Parkway was passing the tired old bus. Andy continued his gauge and mirror routine and marveled at how well the old GMC was holding up. Inside, it looked pretty clean and smelled more like a bus than like diesel fuel, the sign of a well maintained unit. Lakes & Trails was more inclined to spend money on maintenance than on replacing the fleet and Andy was surprised at how smooth the unit was shifting, something he was starting to rally appreciate, with countless shills and turns lurking in the mountainous terrain just a few miles up the highway.

“She’s shifting real nice tonight, Jerry,” he said. Greer looked over and nodded. “They filled her up with grease before I left Callais. I bet with the way she leaks, it’ll be grinding a pound a mile by Pitway,” he said, adding, “They’ve put a lot into this old girl this year. When I first drove this bus, it was ready for the wreckers. But it’s got new brakes, tires and some electrical

work, som it's going pretty good." Greer then launched into a story about the time it had caught fire four years earlier. Andy had heard the story many times before, but welcomed it, since it kept Greer away from talking about Dan and Theo. While Greer talked, however, all Andy could think about was the child. What the hell had happened to him? Why didn't anyone mention the fact that a three year old kid was missing? Then it dawned on him that Theo had been met by the woman and had delivered the little guy. Maybe whoever was with the woman was the shooter.

As he pulled up to the summit, Greer said, "Andy, let's pull over and check the tires." Andy slipped the bus into a pullout and when his feet hit the ground, Greer was already pointing a cigarette, an Avante, Andy's brand, his way. The two of them walked around the bus, looked at the tires and smoking their cigarettes. They'd make up some time by not stopping in Reed Creek, Andy thought, and maybe get a coffee when Greer got off in Glendale. the rest of the trip would be pretty much night shift stuff until he pulled into Ralston at 11:30.

He'd find out then when is next shift would be, kind of hoping he'd have a couple of days of layover before he went back down to the city. Greer kept up a running patter once they got in the bus and before he knew it, they were pulling out of Reed Creek, winding it up along the lake to make a run at the first serious hill. the speedometer was resting on 140 when they hit the bottom of the hill and he dropped off 70 km. and two gears in what seemed no time at all. It was all up and down to Glendale and Andy enjoyed punching it on the downhill stretches, taking it up to 140, then trying to wring every possible k out of it heading up the next hill. He looked sideways at the lumber yard and again into the shadows of the bus depot, hoping against hope to see the mystery woman there.

When he stopped the bus and opened the door, before he could stand up, a man was on the stairs and started speaking to him. "Does this bus go to Milton tonight?" he asked. "No," Andy replied. "This bus stops in Ralston, but another bus leaves Ralston about two hours after we get there and it goes through Milton. I can sell you a ticket that will take you right through, though." "What time does it get into Milton?" he asked. "Not until 2:15 a.m. It doesn't leave Ralston until 1:30." "Where does this bus go then?" he asked. Andy stood up and by walking toward the top of the stairs, backed the guy down off the bus. He explained that this bus stopped in Ralston and then headed back to the city in the morning. Lakes & Trails didn't have route rights from Ralston to Milton, just as Prairie Lines ended all their routes at the Ralston depot.

The guy walked over to the front of the depot and spoke to a person in a car parked there. The driver got out and opened the trunk and the guy started lifting out a suitcase. Andy walked in through the depot's back door to get a dolly to move the freight in from the bus and Jerry Greer opened the front bin and started moving luggage around. Andy could hear a lot of activity in the depot, so he walked over and held the freight room door open a few inches. There were about a dozen soldiers sitting in the coffee shop and several other people standing around. When he turned, Jerry was behind him, satchel in hand. When Jerry opened the door, he put his satchel on the shelf. "Here, I'll give you a hand with these folks, looks like you've got quite a crew going north," he said.

Andy walked in and went up to the ticket counter. "We doing some business tonight?" he asked Rose, who ran the Glendale depot. "You've got twenty-one heading up to Ralston. Fourteen are going on to Milton. Those eleven forces guys are on a maneuver or something, no luggage and they've all got guns and stuff. Don't know what you're going to do about that," she said. "Which one's the commanding officer?" Andy asked. "I dunno, but that guy standing at the magazines bought the tickets."

Andy went over and introduced himself. The soldier explained that their bus had mechanical problems and was being repaired in Milton. Since Glendale didn't have a place for them to stay, they were heading up to where the bus was. Andy asked about the guns. "They'll be unloaded and checked like luggage, but two officers will be wearing sidearms. These guys are all too bagged to be any trouble anyway," the soldier said. Andy and Jerry were twenty minutes getting the bus squared away and all the tickets checked. Heading north out of Glendale, he immediately noticed two things: twenty-one extra people made a hell of a difference in the performance of the old bus, and the guy who'd asked about Milton was sitting beside him, looking like he wanted company. Andy wished he had Bobby Thompson's magnetic sign.

"You been driving this route a long time?" he asked. "Twelve years," Andy said. "I thought so. You're the guy that hit that moose, aren't you," the guy said, not asking a question. "Yes, I hit a moose once, but I think most of us have. But I hit one at Reed Creek one time that put us off the road, if that's which one you mean."

"Yeah, I was on the bus that night. I was the guy that got the windows open so people could get out, remember?" he asked, expecting Andy to recognize him. "Actually, I don't remember much except the guy in the stairwell. He was pretty banged up," Andy said. "We had several people injured that night."

“So, how come you couldn’t miss that moose? It was standing in the middle of the road. You could have gone around it. Were you kind of a rookie then?” the guy asked. “We came into a turn, the road was angled pretty hard. If I’d gone around to the left, we might have laid it over and we’d be on the wrong side of the road coming out of the turn. If I’d gone to the right, we’d have run right off the road,” Andy said, barely hiding his impatience. “Ya did run right off the road. That’s how the guy got hurt. Did he sue ya?” he asked snidely. “No, he wrote me a letter and told me I was hero,” Andy said. “I woulda fuckin’ sued ya,” the guy said, giving Andy an official excuse to end the conversation. “If you’re going to use that kind of language, sir, I’ll have to put you off the bus. Perhaps it would be best if you didn’t talk to to me at all.”

“What are ya talkin’ about. There’s nothin’ but guys on this rig. Yer ears tender or does the truth hurt?” he asked. Andy didn’t answer, but he could feel the guy staring at him. “Please take a seat further back in the bus, sir, you’re distracting me from driving,” Andy said. The guy said nothing, but made no motion to move. He just sat there, right on the edge of Andy’s peripheral vision, and stared at him. Andy decided to do nothing, to concentrate on his driving and deal with the guy when he pulled over in Pitway. Besides, the bus was starting to be a handful, keeping the revs up as they ran up hill after hill.

The soldier that Andy had spoken with in the Glendale depot came up to the front of the bus. “Can I be of assistance here, sir?” he said to Andy, then turned to meet the guy’s icy stare. “Mind your own business,” the guy said, barely getting the words out before the soldier started speaking again. “My business is the safety of my men, sir. I believe talking to the driver of this bus interferes with my responsibilities, sir. I’ll ask you now to take a seat further back in the bus so the driver can concentrate on his duties, sir,” he said, sternly. “Ha, ha, ha,” the guy laughed. “You and whose fuckin’ army are going to make me move? This is my seat.”

“Well, I’m glad you asked, sir. That would be me and my army, sir. Now move at least six rows back or myself and several of my men will take no small pleasure in relocating you.” “Bring it on, Rambo,” the guy said, reaching into his pocket. Andy didn’t see what happened, he just heard a deep “Ooomph” from the front seat and the soldier call for assistance. When he looked around, two soldiers were dragging the guy’s unconscious body down the aisle to the back of the bus. “I don’t think he’ll be any further trouble, sir,” the soldier said.

Andy’s pulse was racing. Normally drunk people just threw up or crapped their pants or were belligerent when they woke up. But that was usually at

their destination, so he only had to help them off the bus, where they ceased to be his problem. He hoped the soldiers would still be around when they emptied the bus at Ralston.

He remembered the guy was ticketed through to Milton, which made him wonder what other axe the guy had to grind. If he knew Andy from Milton, dumping him off in Pitway, which is how he'd normally handle the situation, might not be a good idea. In Ralston, he could have the police meet the bus. Company policy dictated that the police be called to investigate any altercation on the bus. He called the soldier back to the front and explained that he was to call the police. The soldier said he had no trouble with it and would look after things with the police in Ralston. Andy reached down and flicked on his CB radio and put out a call to the Ralston depot. After a couple of minutes, he heard Sandy's voice on the speaker above his head. He quickly asked her to have the RCMP meet the bus to pick up the unconscious man. She asked if he needed an ambulance and Andy said he thought just the police would be fine. They were still an hour and a half south of Ralston and he was pretty sure the guy was already awake. Sandy said she'd have an officer at the bus when he arrived and Andy turned the volume down on the speaker.

When he pulled into Pitway he stopped the bus and immediately went back to the seat where the guy was sprawled. With soldiers sitting in seats all around him, he was quiet, but glared at Andy and hissed, "I know where you live, mother..." One of the soldiers told him to shut up and Andy went further back to wake up a sleeping passenger who was supposed to be getting off in Pitway. He stepped out and got the guy's bags out from under the bus, then lit another Brown Owl while he waited for him to step down. While he stood there, a car pulled up and a couple got out. They walked over toward Andy, but stopped when the passenger, obviously who they were looking for, stepped out on the ground.

They gathered his luggage, put it in their car and left. Andy finished his smoke and got back in the bus. "Well," he thought, "at least it kept my mind off the kid and Theo." He looked up in the mirror and seeing everyone seated, put the bus in gear and headed back out onto the Parkway.

Jim Morning came to the station's front door and rang the night bell and Shelley let him in and took him to the PD's office, where Barry was waiting. They discussed the possibilities of the upcoming newscast and decided if Morning was actually on the set, neither McKnight nor Winters was likely to be willing to go ahead with the interview. Morning suggested he watch the

broadcast from the PD's office and note anything he thought could be problematic. He coached Barry on some obvious pitfalls, but could tell from Barry's response the newscaster was already way ahead of him on how the pair should be handled.

Barry walked down the hall from the PD's office, heading back to the studio. The detective had moved into the reception area, and sat reading a magazine and Ed Winters was talking with someone on a cell phone. Barry went in to the studio and sat down, looking through the material he had to assemble for the late newscast. Nothing new had come in, as he suspected, so he'd be re-running the nine o'clock show if the mayor and Winters weren't on. He was talking to his cameraman when the intercom on his desk lit up. "The mayor's here," the receptionist said.

Barry headed out to meet McKnight and see what would develop. When he stepped into the reception area, McKnight stepped over, hand extended.

Barry ushered the mayor and Winters into a small interview room off the reception area and went over to talk to the receptionist. "If they'll go on air, we're going to have a banner night. I think Winters is over the edge and McKnight's half-pissed. This could be a lot of fun," he said. "I just hope we don't both get fired," the receptionist said, looking at Barry dolefully.

"Not to worry, Shelley. When Evan gets back, this will all be done. Besides, there's no love lost between Evan and Winters. His only regret will be that he didn't get a few shots in before we went on air," Barry said. He understood Shelley's concern. Evan, the PD, had dressed down the whole staff before he left and Shelley was the lowest on the office totem pole. Evan was unhappy with the progress the station was making in getting its ratings up and in particular how the sales people were faring selling against the local newspaper. Three weeks in a row, he'd picked up the paper Monday morning and found stories the new department at the station hadn't covered. The problem was simple – the news crew used up all their hours during the week on mundane things viewers never watched, then took off on the weekend. Evan didn't have the budget to hire an assistant to chase them down and Barry had made it clear that his job was to package the news and read it. That meant, in this case, Evan was on the hook and he was out of town, as usual, visiting his girlfriend while this story played out. He obviously wasn't even watching his station or he would have called in by now. Barry was just handling the interview as blood sport. Winters hated everyone in the media and while Barry might not beat the newspaper with the story, he sure had more fun fighting with the police.

McKnight stepped out of the interview room and came over to Barry. He asked him for a list of questions he'd be asking Winters, saying that was the

condition Winters placed on doing the interview. “Why don’t you and I do the interview, Tom? You know that Chief Winters hates our guts, so it would be a waste of time to give him the questions first. He’s just going to refuse to do it if we ask anything about the case at all. If you think he’s got a handle on the case, then I’ll let you say that and we can put this one to bed. The public has a right to know why witnesses say there was a gun on the guy and the police seem to be covering that up,” Barry said.

McKnight asked Barry a few questions about what he knew and what they could avoid talking about. He didn’t want to identify the suspect or the fact that he was American. McKnight said he’d stake Winters’ job on the fact that the guy they let go wasn’t armed and wasn’t involved in any way with the Verkerk and Fullerton shootings.

McKnight went back into the interview room and closed the door. Barry could hear loud voices and obvious disagreement. After a period of silence, the door opened and McKnight and Winters stepped back into the reception area. McKnight came over and told Barry they’d like to go on air, but needed Barry to agree to not ask about where the alleged suspect was from, nor his name. Barry reluctantly agreed, but was confused about why that was so important. They’d already said on air that he was an American and was just an ordinary guy. Why would his identity cause a problem now?

Barry agreed, then headed into the studio. He had twenty minutes to prepare his newscast, half of which would be taken up getting the stories slated and the crew organized. he quickly sat down and jotted some questions on a note pad. he was still writing when the receptionist, clip board in hand, came up to the desk and said it was two minutes to air. “Holy shit, Shelley, get those two guys in here then. This is gonna run at the top of the segment,” he said, stepping in behind the set to check his tie and hair. When he stepped back out onto the set, the mayor and police chief were being seated.

Shelley did her countdown, Barry looked over and saw the red light come on on camera one. “Good evening and welcome to FactsFirst News. Mayor Tom McKnight and Port Callais police chief Edward Winters join me for an update on yesterday’s shooting in Sig Harbour, but first, this:,” he said, turning to look at a monitor off the set.

As the newscast switched over to repeat footage of the nine o’clock broadcast, he turned to Ed Winters. “I’m going to start with you, Ed. Tom, you jump in whenever you want. Let’s try to stay tight to the questions, though, This is live and we’ve only got 2 minutes, fifteen seconds,” Barry said.

The two men nodded agreement and Barry looked down at his questions, looking up every few seconds at the monitor just off the set. Shelley held up

a clenched fist and unfurled her fingers counting to five and the light on camera two lit up. "Police are still looking for a shooter that gunned down two Port Callais residents yesterday at a Sig Harbour bus depot. Theo Verkerk, 38 and Maureen Fullerton, 56, died in what witnesses say was a burst of gun fire. Witnesses claim a man in a beige sedan was captured by police after ramming their cruiser and trying to escape. Police now say that man wasn't involved in the shooting and has been released without charges. Police Chief Ed Winters denies reports that the man was armed when apprehended by his officers." Barry turned to look at Winters and asked, "Several witnesses have come forward to say they saw your officers arrest a man armed with not one, but two handguns at the scene of yesterday's shootings, but today the department says their observations are incorrect. How do you account for this discrepancy, Chief Winters?"

"Well, Barry, first off, let me say how much we appreciate you giving the mayor and I the opportunity to bring some clarity to a situation that has tremendously upset many people in our city. As you know, we've taken several initiatives to reduce violence involving handguns, just in the past few weeks. As our investigation continues into these two tragic deaths, two things have come to the surface. The first is an eyewitness who we feel might have an axe to grind with our force and whose criminal background makes him pretty unreliable. The other witnesses we spoke with were very rattled, understandably, by two fellow citizens being gunned down right before their eyes in broad daylight. Each of them have said, on subsequent interviews, that they're not sure what they saw. The arresting officer, one of our finest young policemen, says the arrest went very smoothly, the alleged suspect cooperated fully with police and wasn't armed in any way, nor did he threaten or confront police when accosted."

McKnight then started to speak, talking about how the incident was isolated and may have involved criminals from another city settling a score with one of the dead. Barry broke in, "Are you saying, mayor, that either Theodore Wouter Verkerk or Maureen Fullerton, had criminal ties?"

"No, not at all, Barry. At this point we think Mr. Verkerk got in the way of some criminal activity and paid for it with his life. We think the shooter then killed Maureen Fullerton, God rest her soul, because he realized she'd witnessed the killing of Mr. Verkerk."

After a brief pause, Barry said, "So, you know the killer was male. What else can you tell us about the person or persons you are pursuing in this case?" Winters immediately blurted, "Nothing! At this point in the investigation, we need our citizens behind us and not attacking us. We're working hard to find the killer and every piece of evidence we put on

television just makes it harder to get accurate information and helps the killers escape. The media has to start helping us and stop trying to solve this case on the air.”

“Well, folks, there you have it. The police and your mayor believe the eyewitnesses have the story wrong and that the suspect they released was innocent, unarmed and has returned to his home, in a city they’d rather not disclose. In fact, the mayor said earlier that he’d stake police chief Ed Winters’ job on the fact the man the police found on the scene was unarmed and not involved in this horrible crime in any way. In other news, ratepayers question whether they’re getting good value from an economic study done last year, pegging growth at 3%.”

Barry looked up at the monitor as the segment came to air, but couldn’t help notice Winters staring at McKnight, who was looking at his feet. “Are we off the air?,” Winters asked. “Yep, you’re done, chief. I’ll be finished here in about seven minutes if you want to talk outside,” Barry said, switching his gaze to camera one. Shelley came over and said, “That’s it for live until signoff, Barry.” She helped the mayor and police chief take off their microphones and escorted them back to the reception area. Barry refused to look at Winters as he left, refused to let him try to intimidate him one more time before the day’s broadcast was done. After the news, Barry signed off and the station switched to its affiliate for sports and he unclipped his mic and headed for the door.

When he got to the reception desk, Shelley handed him a slip of paper. Scrawled on it was, ‘Call me at the house, Tom’. Barry crumpled it up and tossed it in the wastebasket. Shelley told him that Morning had stepped out as soon as the broadcast ended and would call Barry the next day. He walked into the PD’s office, closed the door and sat down behind the desk. He scanned the front page of the Port Callais Province, wondering what they’d have in tomorrow’s paper, which would be coming off the press in about three hours. Too late, he thought, to catch the mayor’s promise. But early enough to offer up some stories for his crew to fill tomorrow night’s newscast, just in time for the return of the PD.

He dialed McKnight’s number and, holding the receiver to his ear, tugged at the knot in his tie, pulling the silk band out from his collar and snapping it across the desk. McKnight wasn’t as unhappy as Barry expected. He thanked him again for having them on the air and promised he’d have Winters call with an update in plenty of time for the next night’s broadcast. Both men talked about how good it would be, if they had a killer in custody by then. “Fat chance,” Barry thought, as he hung up the phone. This killer is either so long gone they’ll never pick up a trail, or so well buried, Winters would be

saved again. He thought it was interesting that McKnight hadn't commented on Barry divulging his promise to fire Winters, but thought it had slipped his mind. If he'd been sitting in the press room at the Province at that moment, he'd be scanning a photo of a man being held by two Port Callais officers, a large handgun clearly visible in the waistband of his slacks. Above the photo was a headline that read "Sig Harbour shooter?" and below it a story quoting Tunny Matois about the officers disarming the man, cuffing him and taking him downtown. If Barry could have turned the page, he'd see the second photo, of Theo Verkerk, face down in the gutter, with his backpack blown apart.

The limousine pulled past the hangar at the Elmira airport and headed across the tarmac toward a Lear jet, sliding up past the wing, stopping with its rear doors beside the aircraft's cockpit. The senator and his daughter climbed out of the limousine and walked quickly to the plane's open door and climbed inside. The door had barely closed when the aircraft started to move slowly away from the open hangar doors. It would soon lift off and arc northward, then west flying over first Lake Erie, then Superior, making a beeline for the west coast. Senator Richardson was nervous. His office staff hadn't contacted him in more than two hours and he had no idea who he'd be dealing with in Port Callais. His contact earlier had been with an RCMP constable working in an office in Port Callais, and he was receiving information from a smaller centre in the province's interior.

He wasn't comfortable with the way the FBI handled the kidnapping. He didn't know whether the child had been grabbed by persons unknown or what he strongly suspected, was never picked up in the rendezvous where the cash was left. He couldn't understand how the kidnappers got the cash before the FBI negotiators had Tyler safely with them. The FBI told him they'd delivered the ransom and had significant information about the individuals involved.

The RCMP told him a rescue was imminent and a second reward was about to be paid. He didn't ask for any money and gave a number where he'd be available later in the morning. It bothered the senator a lot that his contact wasn't actively involved, but simply reporting what he was told. Richardson didn't have the option of ordering the RCMP to do anything. And he was very concerned that the kidnappers would be flying off with this jet, his money and his grandchild, if the police handled it as badly as they had the first incident.

He and his daughter sat in facing seats, near the front bulkhead, two FBI agents sat at the back of the jet. One was speaking on a cell phone and looking out a window, his face close to the glass, so the senator couldn't see nor hear what he was saying. The other agent, a very young looking man sat quietly looking at the floor.

Katy sat quietly across from him, looking earnestly at him and literally wringing her hands. She'd asked him everything she could in the limousine, but wasn't satisfied by what she learned. There were too many gaps.

Everyone was so certain how the kidnapping would play out, then it took a peculiar turn. She turned and looked at the agent on the phone, once the plane got to altitude, she could move to a seat right in front of his, facing him. If she peppered him with questions, maybe she'd feel better about what lay ahead on the coast. As Katy looked at him, he folded up his phone, unbuckled his seat belt, placed his hands on the back of the seat between them and pulled himself over into the seat facing the senator. "They have your grandson, sir. He is safe and being taken to a hospital for examination. The kidnapers dropped him off in Poulsen and appear to have abandoned the ransom. I've been ordered to turn the aircraft around and return to Elmira Corning."

"Are you nuts?," the white haired senator bellowed, his temples shaking.

"We're taking her to get her child, who the hell said we're turning back?"

"I've been ordered to return the aircraft. It's considered part of the ransom, since the kidnapers were going to use it to escape. It's the property of the insurance company and they say, since the child is rescued the plane must be returned."

The senator held his hand up as the agent tried to step between them and speak to the pilot. "Find out from the insurance company where they leased the plane. I'll get my office to call them and rent the bloody thing from them. Then we'll talk to the pilot." The agent went back to his seat, buckled up and dialed a number on his cellular phone. As he spoke to someone on the ground, the senator unbuckled and kneeled on the floor of the cockpit, his face right beside the pilot's head.

As he took his seat again, the aircraft leveled off. He grabbed Katy's hands and said, "Our little angel is safe and waiting for us. The RCMP have him and they're bringing him to Port Callais. Hang on there, honey. We'll be there as quick as we can."

Katy leaned over and put her arms around the old man. She was crying and he pulled her in close. The agent continued to talk in an animated way on his cell phone and his partner leaned forward to look out the window at the expanse of Lake Erie below

The agent returned to the front of the plane and told the senator he'd been cleared to accompany him to Port Callais to collect the child before returning to Elmira. "I already made those arrangements with the pilot. You and your friend will take this plane back. Katy and I will stay on in Port Callais for a day or two," the senator said. The agent looked confused but returned to his seat and said nothing. He and the other agent sat at the back of the plane and watched the senator and his daughter, who rarely spoke to each other. Katy looked pale and drawn. At one point she fell asleep briefly. After what seemed like an eternity to each of the four, the Learjet banked to the left and descended through the clouds. Finally, it punched out into the clear air, a lush green valley beneath it and slowly maneuvered its way onto the tarmac at a small airport.

The senator and Katy gathered their coats and stepped out onto the ground. There was no one there to meet them and they walked to an office on the corner of the closest hangar. The senator opened the door and motioned Katy to go in ahead of him. Inside, a woman sat at a desk, talking on the phone. When she hung up the phone, she turned and asked the senator how she could help him. He handed her a business card and asked her to call the number written on the back of the card. She complied and handed him the phone. He had to ask her where they were. "You're at McKinnon Expediting," she told him. He then had to ask her where that was. "We're at the Langley Airport." The senator repeated the information over the phone.

The senator stepped aside and spoke quietly for a short time. He handed the receiver back to the receptionist, thanked her and took his daughter by the arm and led her outside. "The FBI have a car coming to get us now. Tyler is still in the hospital. He's been injured, but he's fine. He'll be ready to travel by morning and the local police, the RCMP will help us avoid the media and get back home. The consulate is putting together a place for us to stay tonight and they think Tyler can come stay with us. They think we should fly home separately," he said. Katy asked if they'd caught the kidnappers. "Not yet, sweetheart, but that's not our problem now. Let's just get Tyler and get home," he said.

They waited less than five minutes before a car pulled into the parking lot beside the hangar. A well-dressed man stepped out of the car and came up to the senator. "Nice to see you again, sir. I worked on John McCain's staff when you were preparing the Madison Brief. We rode to La Guardia together. I'm Allan Biscombe," he said. "Of course, Allan, how have you been? What the hell are you doing up here?," the senator asked. "I'm seconded to the consulate here, it's a terrific posting, actually. You must be Katy, so pleased to meet you. You'll have your little boy back in about

twenty minutes, he's not far from here at all. I'd prefer you not discuss anything to do with him or the kidnapping in the car. While I'd trust this driver with my life, I need to eliminate any possibility of any information becoming public before we want it to. Here folks, get right in," he said, opening the back door to the sedan.

The driver headed down a narrow paved road, then turned onto a two lane highway. After a very short ride, they pulled up an on-ramp and headed down an expressway. They passed two exits, then pulled off at the third and headed past a shopping mall and into a suburban community. They didn't pass any signs to indicate where they were, but they pulled into a parking lot where a large sign announced 'Ladner Hospital and Care Centre'. They pulled up to the front door and Biscoombe jumped out, opening the back door. He stuck his head back into the car and said something to the driver, then accompanied the Katy and her father in through the hospital's main doors.

They walked past the admitting desk and headed down a corridor to a nursing station, where Biscoombe told the nurse he knew where they were going. They went down a hall, turned a corner and stepped up to a door where two men in sports jackets stood. Biscoombe pulled out a small leather wallet and opened it, presenting it to one of the men. He then introduced the senator and Katy and the man quickly opened the door. The other man stepped forward and requested identification from Katy and her father. When Katy protested, he pointed out the child had been grabbed twice and he wasn't getting grabbed again by another stranger. Katy dug in her jacket and pulled out a wallet and opened it. The senator protested. All he had was his business card. "Go ahead and go in. But you're not coming out until this man can properly vouch for you," he said tersely.

Katy was in tears and lost her balance going through the door. Biscoombe held her up and led her to the bed where a small, blonde haired child lay. The right side of his face was swollen and badly scraped. His right eye was swollen shut. His left eye looked fearfully up at Katy and he cried out. Katy shrieked, "That's not Tyler! What the fuck, what the fuck, what are you people doing?" She collapsed on the floor beside the bed and the little boy in the bed started to wail. "What's happened here, Biscoombe? Where's my grandson?" the senator bellowed, before one of the plainclothes officers stepped in and tried to usher them out of the room. Before they got to the door, two nurses stormed in and demanded to know what was going on. Katy lay unconscious on the floor. A doctor stepped in, then the other plainclothes officer, who ordered everyone but the doctor out. The doctor bent down and checked Katy's pulse and she started to come around. She

tried to get up and he told her to lay back and relax. he then reached up and put his hand on the little boy's shoulder and tried to comfort him, but he was in a state of terror. He called for another nurse and a gurney to take Katy to the emergency room for treatment. The doctor stayed with the little boy, whose scream subsided into deep sobs, then whimpering, then sleep.

The nurse that took Katy, who was now fully conscious, tried to console her, but didn't have any ideas what was going on. Katy kept saying, "Who's got my baby? Who's got my baby?," over and over again.

The senator and Briscoe and one of the plainclothes officers stood in an alcove, while the officer spoke to someone on a phone hanging on the wall. "There's a car on the way," he said to Briscoe and then went back into the hospital room. Briscoe turned to the senator. "It looks like the kidnappers dropped off a second child to cover their tracks. We need to get to the consulate and find out what's happening. The RCMP say this child looks exactly like the photos we provided of your grandson."

"Oh, he looks like Tyler alright," the senator said. "Where in hell do we go from here?" The old man looked broken, and tears welled up in his eyes. He leaned back on the wall and pinched his fingers over the bridge of his nose, to squeeze the tears away so he could see. He tried not to look at Briscoe and turned, still leaning against the wall and headed down the hall in the direction they'd taken Katy. "Where in hell are we?," he cried, his voice breaking.

Tunny Matois was screaming at Ed Winters on the television. "You lying prick! You scum!," he bellowed. "This is a coverup. This is Orley Patterson all over again. This time you're going down, you slimy bastard," Tunny said, turning away from the television and staring out the window into the darkness of the street in front of his home. Orley Patterson was where Winters' career should have ended, but he won and the whole community backed him up in the end.

Patterson was a fisherman with a reputation for drunken brawling when he'd come into port with a big catch. He was regarded locally like a pirate, someone who'd go out and ply the seas fearlessly, bring back a huge catch and take his crew down to a local pub, buy drinks for everyone and then revel when the place got turned upside down in one of his infamous brawls. Tavern managers talked of him with a reverence normally reserved for heroes, since when Orley came in, the cash register was always filled, the cooler emptied before he left. For the price of a few broken chairs, they'd

have the equivalent of a full hold, often on a quiet week night when pickings were typically slim. And the weekend after an Orley Patterson brawl, the pace was always packed, always a little wilder than usual, but business would be brisk.

One time one of Orley's crew beat up a Port Callais police constable really bad, almost killed him. When the backup arrived, no one knew what had happened. Orley knew his men would keep it to themselves, so he taunted the cops and being drunk, went overboard on them. They wanted to take him in for questioning, but they knew he'd have a cover story. In fact, the bartender told them Orley hadn't left the bar and couldn't possibly have witnessed the beating in the alley just outside.

The police didn't forget. Word got around and they started listening on the radio for the mention of Orley's name. It was an unwritten agreement that they'd all converge the next time Orley got out of hand and look after him. They didn't have to wait long. Three weeks after the incident where the officer was beaten, Orley and his boys were at the Bluefin, a popular bar close to the docks. By eleven at night, his whole crew was so drunk they could barely walk. One of them tried to grope a woman on her way back from the bathroom, right in front of her boyfriend, with a predictable result. Within seconds there were fistfights all over the little bar room. Everyone was fighting except Orley. He leaned against the back wall, laughing hysterically at the mayhem, laughing so hard he didn't even notice first one, then two, then three, then a dozen policemen come into the bar. He just leaned back and roared until one of them came up and grabbed his left arm and slapped a handcuff on him. Before he could even protest, he was on the floor, with his other wrist clamped in the tight steel ring. Two officers picked him up and headed for the back door, but realized everyone in the room had stopped and were staring at them. They'd dragged the protesting Orley out the front door, put him in the back seat of the cruiser and took him downtown. They put him in the drunk tank, and following procedure to the letter, took his cuffs off. They headed up to the front of the detachment to call their sargeant and get directions on how to handle their catch of the day. Orley was leaning against the bars of the holding cell when the night guard walked by. He told him to find a policeman and get him out of there so the night guard complied and soon a young officer appeared. Orley, who had tired of the night's activities and just wanted to go somewhere and sleep it off, turned on his charm. The policeman took him out of his holding cell and into a small telephone room, where Orley got him to look up his lawyer's number. The constable dialed the number and handed Orley the phone. As soon as the lawyer answered Orley told him to get down there and bail him

out. The lawyer agreed and Orley hung up the phone. The young cop put him back in the holding cell, locked the steel door and headed down the hallway. Moments later, the other two cops and a third man, in civilian clothes, stepped into the holding cell area. The civilian walked over and closed the hallway door and locked it.

He opened the holding cell and the three of them went inside. Orley knew he was going to take a beating, so he threw the first punch, but he was flat on his face without touching a soul. The three took turns beating him and kicking him. At one point, one officer held him up, while another kicked him in the head. He'd lost consciousness after the third strike from the baton, so he likely entered death without even feeling any pain. When the three propped him up in the corner, he wasn't recognizable and he wasn't alive. One of them went to check his pulse and the civilian pulled him away. "Leave the prick alone. Let the medics look after him in the morning," he said, and the three of them left the holding cell and headed back to the front. When they got there, Orley's lawyer was waiting and demanded to see his client. Foolishly, they said they hadn't seen him and that the lawyer was likely at the wrong station. The civilian, who hadn't attended the Bluefin, said he hadn't seen him all night.

Then the young constable burst through the door. "The guy in the holding cell is dead. Holy shit, somebody murdered him!" he blurted, before noticing the lawyer standing there. The two uniformed cops held the lawyer back and the young constable called for an ambulance. While he was making the call, the two uniformed cops said they'd picked him up, badly beaten, outside the Bluefin. They both swore he was awake and lucid when they put him in the cell. When the constable got off the phone, before he realized what had happened, he said Orley didn't have a mark on him when he let him out to call his lawyer.

That wasn't how he testified, almost three years later, when Orley's death finally went to trial. All three officers were acquitted and a drunk, picked up the same night downtown, was convicted of manslaughter, based on a bogus jailhouse confession. He was happy to get five years; his problems were solved until he'd hit the streets again. Tunny Matois attended all of the hearings and each of the court cases; Orley Patterson had been Tunny's pal and although he knew he was a handful, he also knew his gentle side and was determined his friend not be remembered as a dead drunk. In the end, Winters and his band of bad apples prevailed and Port Callaius wrote Orley off as better off dead. Tunny made a silent pact with himself that night that someday, he'd make Ed Winters feel the same way.

It was while he was mulling that over that he remembered the Province photographer. “Just a minute, just a minute,” Tunny said and started looking for a paper. He’d find a photo and check the credit and call them all until he found him. He didn’t have to go to all that trouble, of course. The next day, there was no possibility it was anyone else. The front page was like he’d seen it with his own eyes. This was the evidence Barry was asking for, but by the time he’d called the station, Barry was already on the phone to the mayor.

The sun broke over the hill and turned the grey mobile home into a pale, cheap green. Wisps of fog hung in the evergreens around the building and indistinct shapes in the yard were quickly transforming into discarded logging tools, barrels and appliances. The only sign of activity was a new minivan, parked close to the trailer’s door, several yards from the end of a driveway that had degenerated into a pair of weed filled ruts.

Inside, two men and a woman slept on mattresses on the floor of the livingroom. The kitchen, bare except for a table and single chair, was the source of the appliances strewn around the yard. Down a darkened hallway, a small voice was softly singing one line of an old nursery rhyme; “Daddy’s gonna buy me a mock and bird, Daddy’s gonna buy me a mock and bird, Daddy’s gonna buy me a mock and bird.....”

As the sun opened the room up, a little shape, wrapped in an old ratty sleeping bag, looked around and continued to sing, ever so quietly. One of the shapes in the living room started to stir and a woman stumbled to her feet, walked over to the door, went out and down the steps. She stepped in front of the minivan, pulled down her black Spandex tights, squatted down and peed on the ground. She stood up and headed for the trailer’s back door, pulling it open and pulling herself up and into the building. She entered the room with the child in it and went over, cupping his head in her hand, running her fingers through his hair and pulling him to her breast. “How you doin’ little guy?” she asked. He just looked up and said nothing. “Are you hungry? Want to go get some food? Come on, baby, come with me,” she said, reaching inside the sleeping bag for his hand. he recoiled and started to cry. “Oh, I’m sorry, baby, did I grab the wrong hand?,” she said, pulling the sleeping bag back. She realized he was cold without the bag, so she tried to take him by the right hand and to bring the bag with him. He started to moan in pain, so she let the bag slip off his shoulder. She looked at him, trying to figure out what his injury was. He kept his left hand pulled up tight against

his chest and his shoulder and neck had a deep purple bruise covering it. She had tried to touch his collarbone before, but he wouldn't let her near.

Shivering, he reached up with his right hand and they headed to the door. She jumped down, then carefully helped him down to the ground, realizing she hurt him again when she steadied him on the ground in front of the door. She distracted him by taking his hand and heading for the minivan. She slid open the side door and lifted the lid on a cooler in the back. She reached in and took out a plastic bag that contained several wieners. She pulled one out and bit then end off the plastic wrapper, then pulled the weiner free of the plastic skin. She broke it in half, gave half to the little boy, stuffed the other half in her mouth. She pulled out a bag of potato chips and looked inside, then tipped it up and poured some crumbs out in her hand and then offered them to the boy.

She pulled out another bag and dug around inside it, pulling out a couple of cheese slices. Again, she gave half a slice to the child, then stuffed the other half in her own mouth. She discarded a couple more bags from the cooler then closed the lid. "That's breakfast, little guy. Sure sucked didn't it? Let's go down to the creek for a drink of water. She grabbed a beer can off the floor of the minivan, shaking a few drops of stale beer out of it as they walked across the open ground toward a small bridge across the driveway about 50 yards from the front of the trailer. She dipped the can in, pulled it out, shook it, and drained it. She repeated that, then filled it again and handed it to the little boy. Realizing he couldn't hold it with one hand, she held it to his mouth and he drank and drank, like a suckling calf, oblivious to the icy water running down the side of his shirt. She drank some her self, then offered him some more. he said nothing, but when he didn't drink, she figured he'd had enough. They walked back to the trailer and sat down on the front step, warming in the sun. She could here one of the guys inside snoring loudly and contemplated making them up and making a run for it. After a few minutes, the little blonde boy started getting figdgety, the sun went in behind a cloud and the step cooled down. She stood up, tousled her curly hair, turned and opened the door. "Piggly, let's get going, wake up. We're cold and starving and there's no food left in the cooler. Come on, wake up!" she said impatiently. In due course, a rough looking man, with thin, bristly reddish hair and a ruddy complexion stuck his head out the door. "Leave the kid here and go get us some grub," he said. He dug in his pocket and pulled out a handful of paper money. He sorted through it like he couldn't read the denominations, moving his lips as he counted out three bills and handed them to her. "Grab us enough food for today and bring back a bunch of coffee. And pay attention. Don't let anyone see you turn off

coming back,” he said gruffly. “I want to take the little guy to a doctor. I think his collarbone’s broken,” she said. “Don’t be stupid,” he answered, “His collarbone was broken when we picked him up. You go see a doctor and we’re done. We should hear from Sybil today and be out of here tomorrow. Just bring back some decent food,” he said, and he handed her another bill.

“You go inside with Piggly and I’ll go get us some food. You want some milk? You want some more chips?,” she asked, not waiting for an answer. She started the minivan and backed out past the front of the trailer and turned it around so she could see her way down the driveway and not drive into the ruts. As she headed down the logging road toward the highway, she straightened her hair and smoothed out her wrinkled clothes as best she could. She looked at the bills where she’d tossed them on the passenger’s seat, counting out \$55, enough for plenty of food and drink. It took 25 minutes to get to town. She went to a grocery store and bought a bunch of junk food, careful to save enough money to buy a large coffee carafe. She stopped at a gas station on the edge of town with a small coffee shop in it, and got the carafe filled with fresh, hot coffee and then headed back the way she came. She had only driven a couple miles when she looked up and saw a police car in her rearview mirror. She panicked and started trying to make up a story, but the cruiser pulled past her. She looked out of the corner of her eye, but the cop at the wheel never even glanced her way. He pulled in in front of her and was soon out of sight ahead of her.

She found the side road and turned down it, watching for the break in the trees where the logging road came out. She drove past it and found another approach, something she thought was a good idea, rather than risk leaving a trail behind her. She pulled into the trailer and Piggly, the kid and the other guy were sitting sunning on the front step.

She got out and handed Piggly the carafe. He unscrewed the cap and took a deep whiff of the coffee inside. “You are one fine fuckin’ waitereress, Wiggly,” he said, “this is the most wonderful smelling stuff! Man, yes!,” he said. “Did you get any cream and sugar?”

“There’s some milk in the big bag, but make sure there’s some for the kid. There’s probably a couple packs of sugar in that bag in the truck, but I didn’t get any on this trip,” she said, squeezing past him and through the door.

When she came back, the second guy was sitting, eating and had the big bag tucked behind his back. “For Christ’s sake, Squiggly, don’t hoard the food. We all have to eat. I’m heading the other way tonight, to that place by the river. The store there had vegetables and stuff, so we’ll have plenty later. Did you guys give the little guy anything? You’ve gotta be the greediest

kidnappers I've ever worked with," she said. Squiggly surrendered the bag and she dug around inside and pulled out a bag of cookies, and handed a couple to Tyler. She took the milk from Squiggly and held the carton so Tyler could get a drink.

After they'd eaten, the trio stepped inside, leaving Tyler on the step.

"They're supposed to be here in a couple hours to pick up the kid," Wiggly said. "When they leave with him, they'll tell us what time we're going to meet up with them tonight, and where. We have to get rid of this minivan and split up. They've promised enough cash to keep us for about a week. Then we either get together and get our shares, or they'll figure out a way to reach us. I'm not real game to get back together. I'm hoping they'll hook up with us alone, since this gig has taken way too long. The longer we're together, the better chance we get caught, I figure," she said quietly. Piggly stuck a chocolate bar in his mouth, bit it in half and handed her the remainder. "Aw, that's sweet. Thanks, man, when this is over I promise to never call you Piggly again," she said, laughing. He grinned, his teeth completely obscured in chocolate, "You'll always be Wiggly to me," he said, chomping so he was barely understandable.

Squiggly said he didn't trust the others, that he wanted his share tonight. He said he'd prefer he got his money before they turned over the kid. "You guys are just accessories, but if we get caught, they're gonna know it was me that did the shooting. I can't ever come back," he said. "If Blake talks, we're all fucked and I don't trust him either."

All three were uneasy about the driver that got caught at the bus depot. He was just hired to drive and it was his first job as far as any of them knew. He also knew where they were holed up. "If he was going to talk, they'd have found us here by now, I figure," Piggly said. "If he talks, he loses his share. I'm thinking he's gonna lay pretty low for a while." The trio weren't aware that the driver had been released. They assumed he was caught because he hadn't shown up at the trailer. The last Squiggly saw of him was when he looked back after coming out of the alley by the depot, and he was headed the other way.

They had a greed that once they each had some money, they'd go their separate ways and neither knew where the others were headed. The only stipulation was that it had to be somewhere they'd never been before, to eliminate any chance of being recognised by anyone. Wiggly had her own plan and unlike the others, she wasn't leaving the country. The best way of being detected, she thought, was in an airport or crossing a border. And, she'd had a lifetime of laying low. Tomorrow was going to be a day like all the others. She was also still angry, recalling the exchange she had with

Squiggly when they arrived at the trailer. When the job was planned, no one was supposed to get killed. The kid was supposed to be protected. If Squiggly had chased Verkerk down, the kid would have been in the minivan and out of Port Callais without anyone knowing. Firing off the cannon in the alley was where the whole plan came unwound. She resigned herself to the fact that when she got her share, just shy of a million in cash, she'd head off into the sunset and never see any of these people again.

She went back outside and sat down beside Tyler, who sat on the top step, enjoying the morning sun. She talked to him a bit, and wished she could do something about his shoulder. She was amazed that a three year old could handle this much pain with as little complaint as he'd given. He only cried when someone forgot about his collarbone and either bumped him or tried to pick him up. She got up and walked around to his right side and put her hand on his shoulder. She knew what he needed most of all, besides being rescued, was a nice, warm, long hug.

They sat for a long time, basking in the sun's warmth. Tyler started to talk more and leaned into her until her left hand rested on his left hip, cradling him. Piggly came out and interrupted, asking Wiggly how she'd go back for food and stay undetected. They talked back and forth for a while and when she looked down, she realized Tyler was asleep. She softened her voice and continued the conversation with her partner. Squiggly came out and walked down the steps past them and out into the yard. He headed over and was looking at a stove laying on its side in the yard. He tugged on the oven door, which fell off the stove with a screech and a crash, which startled Tyler and woke him up. He started to cry, but turned his face into Wiggly's chest, moaning and sobbing quietly. Wiggly was going to berate Squiggly, but caught herself, realizing she'd just disturb the child more and aggravate the already uneasy gunman.

Suddenly, Squiggly looked up, peering down the driveway. "Shut up!", he said. "Get the kid out of here, someone's coming." Piggly glanced at his watch. It was more than an hour early for the pickup, so he feared the worst and sprinted down off the step and off into the woods. Within a few seconds, he had completely disappeared, but could still see the front of the trailer clearly. He couldn't see down the driveway, but could hear the sound of a vehicle approaching slowly, its tires crunching in the gravel.

In the daylight, the next stretch would be the nicest part of the run up the Parkway. At night, it was just another highway, except when a strong moon lit up the lake and turned the shadows into mountains. Andy had seen it so many times, he usually didn't even look to his right anymore. He was

thinking about that tonight, remembering one trip where the northern lights were unbelievably bright and a fresh snowfall made the whole valley into an eerie wonderland. He could hardly keep his eyes on the road, instead gazing at a scene like he'd never seen before. That night a man came up and asked Andy if he would pull over on the next viewpoint so everyone could see. As Andy protested that regulations prohibited that sort of sightseeing, he could hear the gasps of the passengers behind him and decided he'd better make an exception. Maybe he'd check the tire pressure or some other maintenance duty as an excuse for the stop. When he had pulled up to stop, the man had offered him a business card and asked Andy to unload one of the cases from the bus. The man turned out to be a famous photographer and insisted on capturing the scene. Andy explained that he couldn't stop that long, nor get the case out of the cargo bins. The man said, "Put me off the bus then. Say I went into a drunken rage. And that's what I'll present you with, sir, if you don't comply. So besotted am I by this delicious nectar of nature that I'll be delirious and violent should I not get it on film.

Andy stared at him a moment, then thought better of asking him to repeat what he'd said. By this time, the passengers were pressing by them and lining up along the guardrail looking at the vibrating and pulsing display that filled the whole sky. He walked over beside the bus and swung open the door. The man, who it turned out was Pierre Montagne-Pilote, directed him to pull out two small cases and a longer one and proceeded quickly down toward the end of the view point. "Extinguish those headlamps and shut off that engine," he barked as he feverishly set up his gear. "That light and exhaust is a contaminant we can all do without." He then herded the passengers away from him and proceeded to take exposure measurements, move his equipment, change lenses, and shoot hundreds of frames, muttering all the while. He finally relented almost an hour later, when the Aurora Borealis had all but subsided and the passengers started to protest about the cold.

When they were back on the road and safely underway, Montagne-Pilote came up and sat in the front seat to Andy's right. "You'll be well and properly compensated for your good judgement back there, my good man. Please tell me your home address so I can send you a print from tonight's experience." When they'd gotten to Ralston, Andy helped him with his bags and then wrote down his address. He didn't hear a thing for months, but one day, a large tube arrived. Andy opened it and inside was a huge print, measuring almost three by five feet. It was absolutely stunning and when it was unfurled, a sheet of paper dropped out. The paper was a cheque, printed on a full page, with a note scrawled across the top. "Please use this to pay

for a fine frame and keep a little for yourself, a fee for putting me off your bus.” The cheque was for \$1200. Andy was stunned. He thought he’d better fess up and give the money, at least, to the company. But when he called the head office to do so, he was told the company had received prints for all of its offices and depots and he was to keep the money for himself.

The next time he walked into the Ralston depot, he was taken aback by a huge poster print that filled almost an entire wall. It was a magnificent shot of the lights over the lake, perfectly composed, with Andy’s bus, and he and the other passengers standing at the guardrail, gazing up in awe. Later, he saw still another photo in a magazine, then saw a series from that evening in National Geographic while he waited in his doctor’s office.

Until tonight, Pierre Montagne-Pilote was the last person he’d considered putting off his bus.

He rounded the bend and headed down into Ralston and his tension started to rise. Every time he neared a depot, he thought about the prospect of the company questioning him about Theo Verkerk and the child. Tonight, dealing with the police was just going to be and added aggravation. He desperately wanted to not be a bus driver anymore, but to live somewhere far away, to have a normal life and come home to a warm waiting woman who would make him soup and wonder about his day.

He turned off the parkway and looked up into the mirror when the depot came into view. Everyone was seated and he could see a police cruiser sitting in the no parking zone in front of the depot. He pulled the bus around the north side of the Mirage and down the back side, sliding it into the bay and to a gentle stop. He shut it down and popped open the door, stepping quickly down the stairs. He looked up as his feet hit the pavement and saw a familiar face. Bobby Masters, one of the local constables, was walking toward the bus. “Unhappy traveler, Andy? We’ve got a room for him down at our motel if he needs it,” Masters said, stepping up the stairs and onto the bus.

The removal of the unruly passenger was uneventful, but Andy remained uneasy. Since he didn’t recognize the man and couldn’t understand why he was so intense about an accident, clearly not Andy’s fault and so long ago. In the end, the guy barely acknowledged Andy as he was being escorted away. Masters came back to the depot before Andy left and said they’d turned the guy loose, but would charge him if he gave Andy or anyone else at lakes & Trails any further grief. He said the guy had sobered up and was mostly interested in finding a way back to Milton. Andy laughed, saying he’d wave if he passed him out on the highway. he took masters aside and asked him what he knew about Verkerk’s murder. He could tell by his

response that the constable was uneasy. He told Andy they'd been advised not to say much because of an ongoing investigation. While he talked about the shooting, he made no mention about a child and drew no connection to the bus line.

Andy was confused, but in a way, relieved. The further they got away from this, the better chance he could deal with Lakes & Trails, should they come asking questions. But he had a lingering doubt about the woman from Crester. He couldn't imagine her remaining silent and she'd most assuredly draw him into it.

He went back into the freight room and filed a bit of paperwork and grabbed his satchel and jacket and headed for the door. His car was parked at a service station down the street and he was looking forward to making the run up to Milton and being out of sight for a few days. He opened the freight room door and almost walked into Sandy. "Andy Robertson, how are you doing?," she said, with a little more enthusiasm than Andy expected. "Great sand, you?," he replied. "I'm good. You done for the night?," she asked. "Yep, heading home in a few minutes. I'm off now 'til Friday, when I start a run of days," he said. "I'm just about finished. I just have to file those weigh bills. Wanna go for a quick drink? I need to talk to you," she said. Thinking she'd know something about the Port Calais situation, he was happy to join her. "You bet, Sandy. Where do you want to go?," he asked. "We can go to the lounge here at the Mirage. You go ahead, I'll only be five minutes," she said. "See ya there," he said, heading through the lobby and out the door. He walked into the tiny lounge which was all but deserted. There was a bartender behind the bar and a waitress sitting at a video game in the corner. "With you in a sec," she said, as Andy headed for a table in the opposite corner.

She continued to play the game, glancing up at Andy and asking "What can I bring ya?," before looking back down at the game, pulling on a joystick and tapping at some buttons. "I'll have a Gold Star, please," he said. She kept playing, but called out, "Billy, bring this guy a Gold Star, kay?," without taking her eyes off the screen. The bartender took a tall brown bottle out of the fridge behind him and asked Andy, "Ya want a glass?" "Nah, the bottle's fine," Andy said. As the bartender stepped up to the table, Sandy came through the door and walked up behind him. "Vodka seven, Billy, tall, no ice.," she said.

She sat down across from Andy, stretched out and reached into her purse for a package of Brown owls, when Andy remembered the pack in his jacket. "Here, have these," he said, "I bought them in Crester when they didn't have any Royals." He dropped the package in front of her and called out to Billy,

“Can you bring me a pack of Royals, Billy?” The bartender returned and Andy gave him a twenty and he walked away, returning shortly with his change.

Sandy lit a smoke and then looked intently across the table at Andy. “Some chick called the other night looking for you. She asked a whole bunch of questions about you. I asked her who she was and she wouldn’t say. She’s sure interested in you, though,” Sandy said, grinning. Andy thought for a minute. It couldn’t have been Angela, he’d just spoken to her, he thought. “What kind of questions?” he asked. “I think she wants to jump your bones, Andy. She asked if you were married, whether you had a girlfriend, where you lived and stuff,” she answered. “Why would she call here? You’re about the only one in Ralston that even knows my name,” he said. “She knows you drive this bus and this is the end of the line, she said that. When she wouldn’t say who she was, I stopped telling her stuff,” Sandy said. Andy was trying to detect if there might be a little jealousy, since he had a marginal interest in Sandy and this incident might provide a clue. “Any idea how old she was?” Andy asked. “Well, I can’t really tell, but not old old and not a kid. Probably our age, I think. I told her you were in the book in Milton if she wanted to talk to you and she said she might call you there,” Sandy said. “Then she asked if you lived with your mother, which I thought was kind of strange. You and Alice parted ways a long time ago, didn’t you?” Sandy said.

“Well, Mom rented my place in Milton for a while, but that was a long time ago. I was living with my girlfriend then and Mom quit at the drug store and needed a place to move. But she bought Darby’s house, hell, it must be almost ten years now,” he said wistfully. He was always saddened when he thought of how his relationship with his mother changed. One day, she was the centre of his universe, the next she was as distant as Larry, his father. Even when she rented his house, she treated it more like a business arrangement than a son renting to his mother. When she bought Darby’s, they’d go months without speaking, unless they ran into one another in a store.

The only exception was when she decided to learn how to drive. She got Andy to give her lessons for about a month, which she offered to pay for, which hurt his feelings. What kind of a kid charges his own mother for driving lessons?, he thought. But that was because Alice didn’t seem to think of him as a son anymore, Andy felt. He had hoped, once her relationship with the policeman faded away they’d get closer again, but that never happened.

“She wanted to know how often you came through Ralston a Callais and if you stayed in the city. I told her you were here a lot, but I didn’t know what to tell her about Callais. Where do you stay there?” Sandy asked. “I rent a room from a woman in Crester, actually. Usually, if I make it down to Callais, I end up bringing the next bus back, either to here or Crester,” he said, not realizing Sandy might be fishing around for some more information on Angela. After a long pause, Sandy asked, “It’s that your girlfriend’s place, in Crester?” “No,” Andy said, “I don’t have a girlfriend. She’s just a woman with a kid and an extra room she rents to me when I lay over there,” he said. His interest was piqued. Andy asked her more about the woman who had called, but she’d told him pretty much everything she knew. Andy asked how she’d known to ask for Sandy. “She asked for the manager and Ted was away, so they gave her to me,” she said.

Andy lit another cigarette and tried to figure out what sort of interest Sandy had in him. He was thinking maybe tonight would be a lucky night and the start of something new. It conflicted him a little, though. He still thought there was a pretty good chance he’d be sleeping upstairs one of these trips through Crester and the last thing he needed was a pair of women in his life. But then he thought, ‘Hmmmm. I wonder who this other chick is.’ He was still wracking his brain to think of any incident involving a woman other than Angela and Sandy over the past few weeks when it hit him like two by four between the eyes. “When did you say she called,” he asked. “The day the guy got shot at Sig Harbour. You know Dan’s in a shitload of trouble over that, eh? It was his passenger that got shot, eh. Dan changed his story and the cops called in the company and he had to go to a bunch of meetings and stuff. He hasn’t been back up since then and the bus is still in the impound, I think,” she said. “Yeah, that’s why I’m driving that old Jimmy, ‘cause 815’s still locked up. Greer said Dan wasn’t back on shift ‘til this weekend anyway. Did you hear anything about a bomb?” Andy asked. “It was just a bunch of electronic stuff in a box,” Sandy said. “Nobody could make any sense of it.”

Andy wasn’t getting any signals from Sandy that she was interested in an overnight, so he started to get anxious, partly to just get out of Ralston and back on the road, partly to get home and see if there was a message on his phone. He asked her if she wanted another drink, but he knew she’d say ‘no’ and he’d be on his way. She did say ‘no’ as suspected, but she asked what he wanted her to say if the woman called back. “Get her name and number and I’ll give her a call,” he said. “I already asked. She said she was calling from a pay phone, but she wouldn’t say her name,” Sandy replied.

Andy got up and grabbed his jacket and satchel and headed through the door. He walked out on the sidewalk and down the street until he got to the service station then walked in behind the building to where his car sat. He pulled his keys out and unlocked the front door, dumping his stuff into the passenger's seat and climbing in and closing the door. He sat quietly thinking for a while, then slipped the key in the ignition and fired up the little sports coupe. It made a satisfying growl when it fired and once the oil pressure came up, he slipped it into gear, dropped the clutch and steered it slowly around to the front of the station. He drove it down Ralston's main street, keeping the revs up and watching the temperature gauge rise into the comfort zone. As the highway loomed ahead, he started to wind the engine out a bit and before long he was shooting through the first curve and into the darkness of the countryside.

For the first few miles he just enjoyed driving, the little car responding to his touch and biting hard into the asphalt. He'd pull it down into third for the tight turns, punching it early and letting the rear wheels drive it through the turn, letting up and shifting as he cleared the curve and headed up the straightaway. In time, he settled into a rhythm with the car and reached over and clicked on the stereo. He hit the scan button and let the radio tune its way up the dial, tapping the button lightly when he heard a Don Henley tune starting. He thought of nothing but an escape as the little car ate up the highway and the lights of Milton started popping up on the horizon.

It was late when he pulled into town and his idea of grabbing a burger before bed evaporated when he noticed the big sign on the Burger Barn in darkness as he pulled onto his street. He thought for a moment about turning around and running back downtown for a bowl of won ton soup, then changed his mind again, and drove the rest of the way down to his apartment building. He cursed when he pulled in, as a Dodge pickup sat in his parking stall. He hated to make a big deal of it, but he'd be parked in someone else's stall and likely facing an angry neighbour in the morning. He wheeled out and down a side street and parked in the first spot he found.

He walked around to the back of the building and headed up the back stairs to the third floor. As he approached his door, he could hear his phone ringing inside. He got his key in the lock as fast as he could and dumped his stuff on the floor as soon as he came in the door and half-ran over to the phone. He could tell from ten feet away that the ringing had stopped and the dial tone only underlined his disappointment. He cursed the owner of the Dodge and went back and picked up his jacket and satchel. He went into the kitchen and flipped on the light. There was a note pad on the table and he walked over and looked at the top page. Finding it blank, he reached into his

jacket and pulled out a pen and wrote: "If you steal my space again, I'll get this ugly truck towed away." He tore the page off and walked back down and stuck it under the drivers side windshield wiper and as he walked back up the stairs he was hoping he'd hear the phone start to ring again. He was still holding that hope when he fell asleep 20 minutes later.

"Call your fucking lawyer," was all Ed Winters would say when the Port Callais CAO told him to turn in his keys, badge and gun. He walked out the door without surrendering any of the symbols of his position. He walked down the hallway, softly cursing under his breath, planning how he'd force McKnight to drop the order for him to resign and how he was going to finish off the editor of the Port Callais Province. He turned into the security office and walked past the counter, reaching for the knob on the inner office door. "Hey Ed," the security guard said. "Looking for Simon?" "No, I'm not looking for fucking Simon, I'm looking for a phone!" he snapped. The guard said, "Here, use this one," he said, jumping up from his chair. "I want in this office. I want to make a private call," he said, gesturing toward the locked door. "Sure, Ed, here I'll open it," he said, struggling with a huge ring of keys. He got the door open only to have Winters slam it in his face. he could hear Winters fumbling around looking for the light switch but made a good decision by not opening the door to help. He made another decision, to place himself where he could hear what was said inside, something he'd often done in the past.

He didn't know who Winters was yelling at at first, but was aware the person would soon be showing up at city hall on Winters' orders. He listened as Winters made call after call, finally connecting with the editor at the Province. He yelled obscenities into the phone, then at the phone, when he discovered the line was dead and the editor had hung up. He called back but couldn't connect. He was still dialing numbers and swearing when a man in a well fitted suit stepped into the outer office. "Is Ed Winters in here?" the man asked. "Just inside," the guard said, getting up to open the door. He sat back and listened as the man and Winters spoke. He could hear Winters swearing and protesting but couldn't hear the soft spoken man's side of the conversation. After a few minutes, both men emerged from the inner office. The man in the suit said, "I'll call you," and walked out and left. Winters looked like he was going to go back into the office, but changed his mind and also left, walking quickly down the hallway and out of the building. He strode through the parking lot and got into a sedan, quickly maneouvering the car through the maze of stalls and out the main gate. he

drove aggressively through traffic, narrowly missing other cars before pulling up in front of the Port Callais Province building. Ignoring signs that prohibited parking, he left the car and strode in the front door of the building, past the large customer service counter and into a large open office area. A woman stepped up and asked if she could help him. "I'm here to see Paul Jackman," he said. The woman, realizing that Winters, whom she recognized easily from his almost daily exposure in the media, was sweating, breathing heavily and noticeably upset, decided against directing him to Jackman's office. "Right this way," she said leading him toward the newspaper's security office. She was trying desperately to decide what she would do when she got there. The office was populated by a pair of security guards, who would likely just direct Winters to Jackman's office. Although they were trained in security, the most insecure event at the paper in the previous decade was an elderly gentleman dying of a heart attack while placing his wife's obituary at the front service counter. Even that event was handled badly, and finally resolved by one of the accounting staff, who restored order by directing staff, including the on duty security guards, on how to deal with a medical emergency.

Also troubling the woman was the absence of options. She couldn't call the police, since Winters was the police chief. She couldn't take him to Jackman's office because it would expose the editor, who would have no way of avoiding a confrontation with Winters. She hadn't even considered that Winters might injure or kill Jackman, but she was thinking about her own interests, bringing this man directly into her editor's office. Just before rounding the corner near the security office, she spun to her left and pointed out the window. "Oh, there goes Mr. Jackman now. Here, sir, have a seat and I'll run and get him," she said, gesturing toward an empty chair at a desk in the advertising department. Winters looked at her and snarled, "I'll go get him myself, how the hell do I get out of here?" She directed him back the way they came, telling him to go down a long hallway and take the emergency exit into the parking lot. As he bounded away, she realized he'd be setting off the alarm, and security would be running down to check it out and she'd have enough time to warn Jackman of what she'd seen.

She ran past the security office and through a doorway beside the elevators and ran up the three flights of stairs leading to the building's third floor and the newspaper's executive offices. She was completely winded when she stepped through the door and into the foyer, which aroused the interest of the receptionist sitting at the desk in front of her. "I need to see Paul immediately," she said, "It's really urgent."

“Just a sec,” the woman replied and punched down a button on an intercom. “Marilyn Barston from circulation is here to see you, and says it’s urgent,” she said, lifting her finger to hear the response. “I’ll be a couple minutes,” she heard Jackman say, then in an irritated voice, “what does she want?” Barston walked past the desk and down the hallway, ignoring the receptionist telling her to wait. She walked up to Jackman’s office and threw open the door. “Ed Winters is in the building looking for you and he seems deranged. I’m afraid he’s going to hurt you. he looks positively evil,” she said excitedly, still gasping for breath. “Holy shit,” Jackman said. He looked around the office as though looking for a place to hide, then bolted out the door and down the hall to the boardroom. Barston sat down to catch her breath, then realized she didn’t want to be there if Winters walked in, so she followed Jackman, only to find the boardroom door closed and locked when she got to it. She instinctively kept walking, down a hallway away from the reception area and was relieved to find herself at the door to the washroom. She pushed it open and walked in, leaning against the wall. Her chest heaving, she stumbled into a stall, sat down on a toilet locked the door and started to cry.

Jackman was sitting in the boardroom, feverishly punching numbers into a telephone on the long, brightly polished hardwood board table. “Tom McKnight, please. Sorry, it can’t wait. It’s an emergency and I need to speak with him immediately. It’s a matter of life and death,” Jackman said. He sat, silent for what seemed like a long time, but was only about 40 seconds. He heard a telephone click and Tom McKnight say, “Tom McKnight here”, in a flat voice. “Tom, it’s Paul. Winters is here at our offices apparently looking to do me some physical harm. What the hell’s going on?,” he asked excitedly. McKnight paused, then told him they’d fired Winters just minutes earlier, but that he’d fled with a police car. The deputy chief was out of town and the third in command hadn’t come in yet. They were waiting for him to arrive and go apprehend the deposed chief. “Yeah, well I hope you aren’t apprehending a murderer by the time he gets here. Why the hell is he after me? We haven’t said anything about the stupid prick for weeks,” Jackman said. “No,” McKnight answered, “But you published a photo on your front page of an armed man that Winters swore, on his job, wasn’t armed when his men arrested him. We’re still trying to get to the bottom of that, as you know.”

Jackman paused, then asked, “So, what’s going on there? Who is this guy that Winters released? I’m hearing now, he’s a CIA operative. Is that true?” “We don’t know Paul. We think now he may have been involved in this kidnapping from down in the states, but Winters hasn’t told me shit. That’s

where his 2IC is, in Seattle talking with the FBI. We're trying to raise him there, but he's in a meeting and they won't break in. I've got people calling them now and asking them to call him out of the meeting and direct his people in bringing Winters in. How can I get hold of you?," McKnight asked. "You aren't going to get hold of me, Tom. I'm watching Winters out the window and he's heading around to the front door. I'm heading down and out the back. Tell you people to patch me through when I call, I'll phone as soon as I'm somewhere safe," Jackman said, slamming down the phone and heading toward the boardroom door. He turned and ran down the hallway, shoving open a door that lead to the back stairwell and a set of stairs to the rear of the building. As he tore down the stairs, he was thinking of what he'd do once outside. His own car was in a lot close to the front door, nearly a block away. He'd have to sprint across a huge parking lot, a busy street and into the strip mall on the other side. he wondered where he could go there that would provide him protection and not endanger people that were around him. Maybe the dry cleaners, he thought, as he threw open the door. As he dodged the parked cars in the parking lot, trying to crouch down so Winters couldn't see him, should he have come to this side of the building, Jackman saw a city bus pulling up to the bus stop. It stopped, its door opened, then closed and the bus started pulling away. Jackman leapt over a concrete barrier and dove for the door, slapping the side of the bus as he got to it. The bus driver spiked the brakes and the big vehicle shuddered to a stop. The door opened and Jackman jumped inside and up the stairs. "Get going, I'm being chased," he said, gasping for breath. The door closed and the vehicle surged ahead. The bus rocked from side to side and crossed first one lane, then another. Jackman almost slid off his seat when it rounded a corner to the left. He turned and looked back, almost expecting to see Winters chasing the bus with his gun out, the way it would be on television. But all he saw were two little old women, one wearing dark wrap around safety glasses as sunglasses, the other a disgusted expression staring back at him. His first thought was the glasses were protecting him from a second disgusted stare and he felt compelled to explain. Instead, he dropped his head, still trying to catch his breath and tried to figure out where he was going and what he'd do next.

"Senator," the grey haired man in the brown suit said, "We have to move ahead and try to get a resolution. I understand your reluctance, but we need to try to pay these people off and get your grandson back. We need to be able to meet their demands as they give them or risk losing him altogether.

They want two million and I recognize that won't be easy for you to do, but we must do something and, I think, soon."

"How the hell is this happening? What the hell's going on? We delivered \$5 million. We came up with another half million and a fucking Learjet and you still haven't gotten the kid back. What are you people doing?," Senator Richardson said. The senator's skin had taken on a pallor that went well beyond white. He looked like his veins were filled with fresh concrete and the deep wrinkles on his forehead appeared to be setting permanently. A man who had delivered a fiery speech just three days earlier that had made the national news, now looked like he was turning into a statue.

"To be honest, sir, we just don't know. We think they put up the demand for the jet and the half million either as a ruse or because the kidnapppers are having an internal revolt. We thought they needed the half million to hold them over until they could get their hands on the five million we paid out initially. We thought the boy was grabbed by a second set of kidnapppers, unrelated to the first, but now we're not so sure. We have no idea why they decided to cancel the jet, but we suspect they've reconciled and are trying to get back to their original plan. This is the first time we've seen a second kidnapping like this and then a third to buy time. We still don't know who the little boy at the Ladner Hospital is. Nobody's reported him missing," the agent explained. "I have access to two million in cash, but I need you to approve using it. The kidnapppers have given us a drop time of 5 p.m. today and will announce an exact location 30 minutes before hand. That's all they told us, so we're assuming they're close by."

"When do we get the child? We need the child this time, before we drop the money," the senator said. "We can't take a chance...." He was interrupted by a phone ringing. The agent picked it up and listened. He said nothing for several seconds, then said, "I'll call you back." He set the receiver down and looked at the senator. "They want your daughter to do the switch. She'll carry the money and hand it over when they give her the child. They said they'll call later with specific directions."

The senator picked up the phone and dialed a number, then asked for room 2314. After a pause, he spoke with his daughter, telling her the plan and asking her to get ready to come down to the office where he and the FBI agent were. When he hung up the phone, the agent and an RCMP officer started briefing him on their plans to resolve the kidnapping and trying to figure out all that had transpired over the past week. The RCMP officer explained that they hadn't been part of the investigation until well after the child was seen at the Calgary airport because the FBI had kept them away from the case, claiming they were close to a resolution and didn't want to

interfere with a potential rescue. The FBI advised him that they had changed their focus and were now intent on getting Tyler back and were less concerned with capturing the kidnappers. They were confident that the kidnappers would make a mistake in the near future and expose themselves. When they said they thought the kidnappers weren't very well organized, the senator exploded. "I'll tell you who's not organized you bunch of dip shits. You've had three chances to get my grandchild back and you've screwed up each one. If you'd had your shit together in the first place, I'd be at home and so would the rest of my family. The border's just an invisible line on the ground, but to you guys, it's the difference between being detectives and being travel agents."

A long silence was eventually broken when the RCMP officer picked up the phone and dialed a number. He asked for one of his staff to send a car to pick him up, then hung up the phone. "We'll be ready to go in an hour, Ted," he said, and walked out of the room.

"Is there another phone I can use?," the senator asked. "I need to get in touch with my office and I don't want to tie up this line." The agent directed him to another desk at the far end of the room. He walked over and placed his coat on the back of one chair, then sat in another beside it. He took a small leatherbound book out of his breast pocket and spread it open on the table in front of him. He put on his glasses, picked up the receiver and following along with his left hand, dialed a number with his right. He spoke quietly, seemingly to prevent the others in the room from hearing him and made several calls.

The phone in front of the agent rang. He let it ring a second time and then picked it up. He immediately started writing on a pad beside the phone. After a short time, he hung up and picked up the pad. "Senator, we need to get your daughter ready to go," he said, then picked up the phone and dialed a number. "Corporal Sendyk? Ted Moses. We've got a contact, we're ready to move," was what the senator heard.

The agent explained that his daughter was to get on the Skytrain at the Midtown station and ride it to Clairmont, where she would change to the north trunk. She was to hold the ransom package in her right hand and stand at the front right hand door of the car. She was to stay there until someone took the package. She would see her son before she let the package go. If she didn't let the package go, the person with her son would leave by the other door. The agent added, "If the person leaves, after your daughter sees them, she won't see her child alive again."

The senator left the office and headed over to the hotel where Katy was staying. She was waiting for him when he arrived and was eager to do the

exchange. The agent arrived and the three of them carefully went over a detailed map of the transit system so Katy would know where she was. He explained that their best estimate was the exchange would take place at Edgeworth station, but it could happen further up the line at Mosely. These were the only two stations where both doors opened on the same single platform and three stations would be between Edgeworth and Mosely. He cautioned her to not panic and to concentrate only on the bag in her hand and to look for her child and to not get distracted trying to figure out who the kidnapers might be.

He assured the senator that there would be people on the train ready to grab the kidnapers, but they wouldn't move until Katy had the child safely. They'd also try to have people in the stations, but they had to keep their distance and be discreet so as not to chase the kidnapers off before the exchange. Before Katy left the car, they went through the instructions carefully. She stepped out and walked up onto the platform and looked in both directions, with no trains in sight. Then came a rumble from the east and she turned her back while a train pulled up and stopped at the platform across from her. As it pulled out, a second train, this one eastbound, roared in from the west, stopping just feet away, its door opening. The senator watched as Katy stepped forward into the car. A woman stepped up to her, handed her a shopping bag and stepped back. Katy stepped on, the door closed, she disappeared from view and the train lurched ahead, then picked up speed and headed away from the station.

Barry Castles walked into the reception area as Shelley and the PD were talking about a newscast they were doing downtown. "Oh, good," Shelley said, "Barry's here now. Maybe he can go instead." The PD looked over at Barry and said, "I need you to do a standup down at the bus depot for this followup on the Verkerk-Fullerton story. I've got a camera headed down there now. You can ride down with me and we can figure out how to put it together. I want it to air at 5 and we've got plenty on our plate this afternoon, so let's head down there right away."

Barry grabbed a copy of the province off the coffee table and headed for the door. On the way, they were strategizing how to tie the murders to Winters' firing. But Barry wasn't comfortable. "I think it's gonna be trouble. I don't trust those bastards to actually follow through and let him go. If we go to air and they change their mind, he'll be suing, but more important, he'll use it every chance he gets to say we never give him a fair shake. I'd rather wait for the city to announce his firing. I don't give a shit if Jackman gets the jump on this one. He's lead every step of the way and we know we're

getting plenty of eyes every night. Let's leave that out and focus on this guy they released. That bothers the shit out of me, you know?," he said.

The PD parked his car behind the PCTV van just down from the coffee shop. The camera man was setting his gear up on a tripod, so the front of the bus depot would be in the background and a quick pan would bring him to the spot where Maureen Fullerton lay. He checked to see if he had room to swing all the way around and bring in the donut shop and was satisfied he could, if he needed it.

Barry had jotted down a set of notes, updating the story with what they knew and leaving it open ended for viewers, since they didn't know what else was happening. Barry was sure there was a tie-in to the kidnapping story he'd heard about, but didn't know what that tie-in was. he'd have to leave it for now. Just as he went to start the newscast, a truck pulled in and stopped in front of the depot, blocking the background for the shot. "We can wait a couple. It looks like he's just got some freight to drop off," Barry said, flipping over to a clean sheet and jotting down more notes. He went back to the PD's car and grabbed the newspaper and quickly re-read the front page story, before flipping over to page two to finish it.

He wrote more notes on the pad, then flipped over a new page and built a whole new set. *This will be a good spin on this*, he thought, as he walked back over to the position. Behind him, the driver was pulling the door down on the back of the truck and would soon be headed up the street. The cameraman set up a test shot and checked the mic again, before giving Barry a thumbs up.

"Unanswered questions remain about a man apprehended by police last week right here on this street corner. An unknown man, possibly a witness to two murders, was released without charges and the Port Callais police investigation remains shrouded in mystery.....," the report began. Up the street, a city bus pulled up to a bus stop and a man in a suit and then two old ladies got off and started walking toward the bus depot. Barry was slightly distracted by the guy in the suit, who looked familiar. As she got closer, Barry was thinking of abandoning the shoot, as he recognized him as Paul Jackman. Jackman looked up at Barry and smiled and started to walk toward him. Suddenly behind him, as the bus pulled out, a car came sliding around the corner, tires squealing. It made a loud crash as it caught the front of the delivery truck, bounced off and hit a parked car. The driver jumped out and started running toward Jackman, who was looking back. He turned and ran toward Barry, who was in turn, trying to get out of the way. Jackman ran across the intersection in front of the donut shop and the cameraman swung his camera around to follow the action. He caught Jackman run out of the

frame and Ed Winters running into the intersection, waving a pistol over his head. A taxi, its driver distracted by Jackman, hit Winters in mid-stride, throwing him through the air and over the parked cars into a store front across from the donut shop. He rolled on the sidewalk and started to get up, then faltered and fell, the pistol still in his hand, pointing at his forehead. The cameraman zoomed in until just the pistol and Winters' head filled the frame. *Pull the fucking trigger*, the cameraman thought, then looked around, hoping he hadn't just said that out loud.

People came from every direction and crowded around the sprawled police chief, who appeared to be bleeding from several parts of his body. His pants were torn nearly off and one leg was oozing blood from hip to shin, while the other stuck out at an unnatural angle. He lay on top of his left arm, but his left hand was sticking out from under his hip, again at an odd angle to his body.

"He's dead," one man said. "That's Ed Winters," said another. The cameraman, his camera on his shoulder pushed through the crowd with Barry. Paul Jackman stood back, across the street, dazed and wondering if he was safe to stay or whether he should keep running. He went into the donut shop and told someone to call an ambulance and the police and as they tried to dial the phone, he grabbed the receiver, held down the cradle and then redialed. "Yeah, give me the newsroom," he said, when someone answered. "Get Teddy down to the bus depot quick.... and a photographer. It's a fatal and it's big. Oh yeah, call an ambulance and the police, once those guys are on their way." He dropped the phone onto the cradle and headed out the door. He looked across the street at the crowd, then disappeared around the corner. He walked right into the two old ladies, knocking one of them off balance. "Haven't you killed enough people already today?," she said, with a thick Scottish accent. "This place just keeps getting worse all the time. I don't know why I still live here."

Andy rolled over and moved his eyes out of a tiny intense triangle of sunlight that shone in beside his bedroom blind. He lay still for a moment, trying to get himself back into the dream he was having when the light finally broke through his eyelid. When he couldn't remember where he was or what he was doing, he decided to roll over and open his eyes. He looked down at his watch, then closed his eyes again. Did he want to get up at 8:20, or try to get a couple more hours of sleep. *Ah, screw it*, he thought, and rolled over and out of bed. He went in the bathroom, took a leak, then checked his face in the mirror. No need to shave today, he thought, before he

climbed in the shower. He dried off and went out in the kitchen, opening the fridge as he walked into the room. He squeezed the pout out on the milk carton and took a whiff, screwing up his nose and pouring the contents into the sink drain, turning on the tap to wash the sour milk away.

He walked back down the hall, putting on a fresh t-shirt and underwear and grabbing his sweat pants off the bottom of the bed. He reached in his drivers uniform pants and pulled out a wad of bills, some change and his keys, slipped his feet into some old runners by the door and headed out and across the street to Melody's Munchies. When he walked in the door, he silently complimented himself on his good judgement. The rich smell of fresh coffee filled the place and there was an empty booth right by the window, where he'd have an excellent view down the street in one direction and an even better view of Melody in the other.

She came over with a big smile and a jug of coffee. "Good morning, baby! Nice to have you brighten up this fine mornin'! Can I bring you a menu?," she said. He just loved the way she was always so happy to see him and the warm feeling was only tempered a little by the fact that she greeted everyone the same way. Even Derek the drywaller, a complete jerk, got a big smile and was called 'baby' when he came in. Melody sold a lot of coffee with that smile and damn good coffee it was, too.

"Just bring me your Good Good Morning, Melody, I'll save you the trip," Andy said. He let her walk all the way back to the counter, watching the rhythmic roll in her lovely backside, before he asked if she sold cigarettes. She turned and walked over to the table and pulled a pack of Crimson Crest out of her apron and dropped them and a lighter on the table. "Have a couple of mine Andy. I'll come join you for one when these guys leave," she said, gesturing to a table of men near the front door.

Andy took a big slurp of the coffee and let out a satisfied, "Ahhhhh," when he was done, partly because he felt like it, partly so Melody could hear. He opened he cigarettes and pulled one out, stuck it between his lips and lit up up, taking a big pull on it and blowing a big cloud of smoke up toward the ceiling. Life was starting to be okay, he thought, in spite of all that had happened the week before.

He sat listening to the guys in the far corner talk. One of them was asking where the hell he was supposed to park and wondering who the jerk was that left the not eon his truck. Andy could feel his blood pressure rising and figured he'd better go tune the guy in, just to be sure he'd find his space empty next time he came home. As he went to get up, Melody rounded the corner with a big glass of orange juice and Andy decided to leave things be and just let the day continue to get better.

He took a big sip of the orange juice, then another pull off the cigarette and exhaled as he drew another big gulp out of the mug of hot coffee. He stretched out and watched the four guys get up and walk over to the till, paying for their breakfast and saying 'so long' to Melody. She went in the back for a minute and then came back with Andy's breakfast, dropped it off and grabbed the coffee pot and a mug and returned and sat down.

"So, how you been, Andy? You been working a bit, eh? Haven't seen ya in a week," she said. She watched while Andy ate, making small talk about the goings on in Milton, asking him how his breakfast was and what was new in his life. He didn't really know how to answer. He actually didn't know the answers to most of the questions, since he didn't know why Theo Verkerk was killed, didn't know who the chick was that phoned him, what happened to the rude guy from Milton on the bus and for the moment, really didn't care. Except for the chick that phoned. That was something he was till curious about.

He asked Melody how she managed, working the long hours, every day of the week, mostly by herself. "Well, I get a couple kids from school help me with the evening stuff and we close by eight most nights. I don't work Sundays at all. I usually go sailing. I went all the way down to Reed Creek one Sunday. Had to take the bus back and go down the next week and pick up the boat. It was worth it though. Not a cloud in the sky or a worry in my brain. It's the same thing, most days," she said. When Andy made reference to the menu, she laughed. "No, I mean when I don't have a worry in my brain it's like having a sky with no clouds, Andy." She laughed again, then pulled out a cigarette and lit it up. "Whatcha doin' this week? Stayin' around Milton? Come down to the Legion Wednesday and play some cards with us Andy, we have a hell of a good time," she said. Andy asked what card games they played and who was playing and a bunch of other details, trying to decide whether it was the sort of thing he'd enjoy.

They sat until quarter to ten, gabbing about all different things, before Melody, jumped up. "Holy shit, the Highways guys'll be here in ten minutes and I haven't even cleared off breakfast," she said, sauntering off to the kitchen with Andy's dishes. Andy left a ten dollar bill on the counter, thinking it should cover breakfast, the extra coffee and smokes and a tip. "Remember Wednesday," Melody called out when she heard the bell on the door jingle as Andy left.

Wiggly picked Tyler up and headed behind the trailer. he was protesting but she told him he had to be completely quiet. They got to the back of the

trailer and she put him down and positioned herself near the corner so she could hear what was going on. She heard Squiggly talking to someone and then call out, "Let's go you guys, the ride's here."

She stepped around the corner and saw a second minivan parked down the driveway with Squiggly standing near the driver's door. She carefully held Tyler's right hand and lead him down past the front of the trailer and out across the yard to the driveway. She could see the driver and a passenger in the van, but couldn't see into the back seat. She recognized the driver immediately, as her partner, Stan, who had planned the kidnapping with her. She walked over and asked how he was and how it was going. "We're just about there, Wiggly. A couple more hours and I'll never have to call you that again. We've got some work to do, though and we've had to change the plans a bit," he said. Just then Piggly came back out of the woods. he walked up, laughing. "Ya gave me a start there, Starman. I wasn't expecting you until later. I thought maybe Wiggly'd been followed by the stink."

Stan got out of the car and told his passenger to sit tight. He beckoned to Squiggly and the four of them, plus Tyler, went into the trailer. He explained that they'd have to change a couple of things and how the strategy for the exchange would be different than what was planned. "Squiggly has to stay under wraps. We're not sure, but we think somebody made him, either at the bus depot or the donut shop, one of the cops, maybe. Anyway, Wiggly, you'll pick up the cash, Piggly, you'll drop the kid. We've brought you a real good disguise and Wiggly needs to see you in it, so she can recognize you. Squiggly will drive the other van, like Piggly was going to and be waiting to pick you up after the drop. I'll pick you up," he said, gesturing to Wiggly. "You just walk right off the platform and behind a truck that's there. We'll get you from there."

"We're dividing the cash now, so we don't have to meet after the drop. In fact, when we leave here, we're done. Wiggly and I will split the second payment and go our separate ways from the station. By the end of the day, nobody here will know where anyone else is. The kid's mother is doing the drop. We made sure no cops were involved in the transaction and she's gonna be so wrapped up in getting her kid, she won't even see any of us. The cops don't know where it's gonna happen, but they sure think they do, and I like it that way. I like it that way a whole lot, actually. We've created a pretty good diversion, actually. Ed Winters is gonna die an hour and half before we do the drop. Just enough time to get the cops really disorganized. His 2IC is still in Seattle and the guy running the show is a desk jockey that's afraid of his own pistol. And he should be, since he hasn't ever used it."

Stan went out to the van and brought in a couple of suitcases. He went to work on Piggly, transforming him from a porcine middle-aged man into a homely, and very pregnant mid-twenties woman. Piggly was making jokes and having a good time when Stan stopped him. “Don’t piss around Piggly. I’ve got twenty minutes to teach you to walk properly and get into this character. You have to nail it with no rehearsal. If you look or act anything but like Becky Babymaker, they’ll grab you and the kid long before Wiggly gets the cash. If that happens, Squiggly’s gone with your share and he’ll spend every cent before you get out of jail,” Stan said. “And if Wiggly and I don’t get our share, you don’t want to get out of jail.”

He opened the second suitcase and handed Wiggly her outfit which included a wig and a bag of makeup. She took Tyler and headed down the hallway to the bedroom, where she changed. She stopped in the bathroom and worked on her makeup, then joined Stan in the front room for his inspection.

“Okay,” he said, “now we do the little guy.” He had stopped and picked up some medical supplies which he pulled out of the suitcase. He and Wiggly took Tyler out to the van, where the passenger waited. The passenger stepped out and opened the side door and helped Tyler in. He cut Tyler’s shirt off and examined his bruised shoulder and neck, then his ribs. Tyler patiently but cautiously let him do his prying and prodding before he started wrapping his chest, then his arm and shoulder in a tensor bandage. When he finished, he fitted a jacket on him, then pinned his sleeve to his chest and the sleeve to the tensor bandage, making a slick but unrecognizable sling. He pulled a dickie over his head and tucked it down into the top of the bandage. He wrapped a towel around his shoulders and started combing a liquid through Tyler’s blonde hair. After a couple minutes, he lifted the towel, wrapped it around Tyler’s head and tussled him around. When he pulled the towel back, Tyler was transformed into a little boy with dark brown hair. A few strokes with a brush and he looked ready for a trip to town.

Wiggly looked in the back and saw the back seat had a child seat strapped in and knew intuitively she’d be riding in the other van. She walked over to Piggly and put her arm around him and gave him a squeeze. She walked over and picked up Tyler, who didn’t protest at all. For the first time since Theo fell on him, he felt like his injuries were mending. “I’ll see you on the train, little guy. Don’t be afraid of Piggly, he’ll take good care of you. He’s gonna take you to your Momma now. You be good, kay?” she said softly, kissing him on the forehead and carrying him back over to the minivan. She put him carefully in his car seat and though he winced a couple times he didn’t cry out. When she stepped back he raised his right hand and wiggled it to her, waving. “Bye, Wiggly,” he said in a tiny voice.

Wiggly watched as Piggly climbed in the back beside Tyler and strapped himself in. She slid the side door closed and stood back and watched as Stan climbed in the front, started up the minivan and backed down to a flat spot, turned around and drove away. She walked ahead to the other minivan and around to the passenger's side. Squiggly was sitting in the driver's seat. She climbed in buckled her seat belt and reached out and pulled the door shut. "It's funny," Squiggly said, "I'm the only one not wearing a disguise and I'm the only guy they can recognize."

"You want me to do some makeup on you, Squiggly? Maybe make you into a drag queen for the drop?," she asked. "Ya better not," he replied. "If I'm caught on the news, my dear old Mom could live with me bein' a crook and a murderer, but I don't know about transvestite."

He started the van and backed it across the yard, down the driveway and turned it around, carefully avoiding the ruts and then guided it back to the highway and headed off toward the city.

Tunny Matois sat at the Bar at Ernie's Wreck Room, his favourite hangout. He was watching a Three's Company rerun, eating handfuls of salted peanuts, drinking beer and chatting with Ernie. They were making disparaging remarks about Chrissy and Jack and generally congratulating each other on their sophisticated humour. Tunny had already worn himself out telling Ernie about the guy at the bus depot. Ernie was getting to dread when Tunny came in, since he'd become a one track pony since the incident. He was relieved the subject hadn't come up yet. Suddenly, the audio got reeal loud on the television and the programming changed to a tight shot of Barry standing outside somewhere. He was announcing a breaking news story and both men shifted their position to be able to see and hear what was going on. Barry warned viewers what they were about to see would be graphic, then the program switched to the scene on the street. The first few frames were Barry talking, although you couldn't hear what he said, just the screeching of tires and a huge crash, then another. The camera swung around and zoomed in on Winters getting out of his car, raising his gun and running toward the camera. The cameraman drew back as the chief came forward and you could see the top of Paul Jackman's head in the bottom of the frame. Then the taxi slammed into Winters and he went flying out of the frame, with the cameraman catching him as he hit the sidewalk, then zooming in. Barry's voice came up and he started to describe how it was Port Callais' police chief that had been struck and that he had died instantly. Tunny fell backwards off his stool, sloshing his beer all over the floor beside him. He jumped up and looked at Ernie. "Ernie, did I just see....." his voice

trailed off as the camera zoomed in on Winters' face, then his crumpled body and bloody leg. "Holy fuck. Holy fuck. Holy fuck," Tunny kept saying over and over. Ernie was holding himself up at the bar, staring at the television, saying nothing. The newscast immediately repeated itself, including the warning and both men steadied themselves and stared intently as it played out again. Tunny didn't fall down this time, but took three drinks out of a dry beer glass, before he said, "Ernie, I really need a beer. Holy fuck."

Katy looked ahead around the speeding light rail car. There were a couple dozen people spread around the car and she looked at each one as though they had a role to play in the return of her son. She had to keep pulling herself back, realizing she was the only one here who knew anything about the kidnapping and was hopeful it would end in just a few minutes. She desperately tried to remember the map with the station names and started to panic when she realized she was drawing a blank, couldn't remember the directions she'd been given. She looked out the window at the streets, buildings and traffic flying by and it had a calming affect. She started to remember where the first stop should be. She started to shake and looked around the car again, then realized there was a map of the Skytrain line right above her head. She stared at it intently, putting the stations back in their correct order and remembering the agent's voice.

She remembered him talk about the shopping bag and for the first time, she looked down. She could see a red leather case inside the bag and was starting to noticed how heavy the bag was. It was straining the thick string handles of the shopping bag and distorting its shape. She realized it was cutting into the palm of her hand and she started to experience a searing pain. She looked up and reached over with her left hand, taking some of the weight off her right and lifting the string handle out of the deep grooves it had pressed into her soft flesh. She looked own again, trying to see what the red leather bag looked like and then startled herself, looked around the car then back up at the map. As she worked her way through the station names, she felt the train start to slow, first slowly, then abruptly. She lost her balance, then caught herself and the heavy bag and looked up to see 'Clairmont' on a signpost whiz by. When the train stopped and the door opened, she got out and looked around. She bit her lip and tried hard to concentrate on what the agent had told her.

There was a train arriving when she stepped onto the platform and she headed toward it. She had to think about it a couple times to assure herself the train was northbound and then walked in the back door, heading up to

the front doorway. She held the bag in her left hand, resting her right, and wedged herself up against the handrail in the front doorway. As the train picked up speed she looked up for the route sign and realized it was on the other side of the train. She looked over and saw first Edgeworth, then Mosley. She wanted the exchange to happen at Edgeworth, so the whole drama would be over. Her heart was racing and she was so afraid she would make a mistake and lose Tyler forever. Her mother's intuition wouldn't let her believe he could really die, but a consuming dread was starting to take hold as she accepted, more and more, that she alone, had Tyler's interests foremost in her heart and mind. As staggering as seven million dollars was, all she could think about was having her three year old at home with her again, where she'd never let him go.

The train slowed for the first station north of Clairmont. Katy had seen it on the map, it was called Bolton Station. She hoped the stop wouldn't last long and she closed her eyes and imagined Edgeworth on a sign. She tried to imagine Tyler, but his image kept fleeting away, never really crystallizing. Suddenly, she heard his little voice, right beside her, to her left, screaming, "Momma, momma, momma,!", then a screaming cry. She looked to her left and there he was, right at her shoulder height holding out his right arm. She swung her arms up and grabbed him, oblivious to the tug that pulled the shopping bag from her right hand. "Oh baby, baby, baby, baby," she cried out, sobbing and falling to her knees in the doorway of the lightrail car. She squeezed him, then held him out and looked at him and then pulled him close to her again. She fought hard to keep from losing consciousness and she fell back hard against the partition as the train accelerated out of Bolton Station. Other passengers crowded around and one reached up to pull the emergency brake. "Leave it!", a loud voice commanded. "We're in Antrill in a couple minutes!"

Katy and Tyler stayed in their tight embrace, both sobbing and laughing, sobbing and then laughing, until the train stopped suddenly at Antrill. The door opened and Katy half walked, half crawled out onto the platform with Tyler under her arm. She sat on the platform, in front of a bench and held her boy, ignoring the crowd of people that stood around her talking and asking questions.

Wiggly watched the train pull up and looked in the window. She could see Piggly walking toward the door, hiking Tyler up to shoulder level as the train stopped and the door started to open. She stepped forward and hearing Tyler scream, grabbed the bag out of Katy's hand. She was surprised at its weight, but pleased as she walked away in a fluid movement, thinking even

a careful observer wouldn't have seen her put her hand inside the door. She strode confidently across the platform and down the stairs, holding her head high and wearing the smile of a real estate agent off to show and sell an important property. She stepped past a cargo van and heard the side door of a minivan open beside her. As she turned and sat in the van's back seat, the door flew closed and the van sped out of the parking space.

They continued down the block and she slung the shopping bag up onto the seat beside her. She reached in and pulled out a small red leather suitcase. She flipped it flat and popped the lid. "Just take off the top deck and put it in the shopping bag. The rest belongs to you now," Stan said. She did as he said and then adjusted the remaining bundles of bills so they'd fill the bottom of the case when she carried it upright. She snapped the locks closed and the passenger handed her a plastic cover that fit snugly over the suitcase and covered it all except the handle.

The van pulled to a stop at an intersection and before the light could turn green, the door popped open and Wiggly hit the sidewalk in full stride. She didn't look back, but heard the van pull away when the light turned. She walked three blocks before she saw a silver Volkswagen Rabbit sitting at the curb. She walked over, pulled a key from her pocket and opened the car's trunk. She dropped the case inside and then stepped forward and climbed into the driver's seat. She fired the little car up and headed down the street until she came to an intersection with the highway to Poulsen. There was a phone booth at the corner and she pulled the Volkswagen up beside it. She got into the booth and pulled out a scrap of paper and placed it on the little metal shelf. She deposited a quarter in the phone, then carefully dialed a number.

Andy walked up to his apartment door and burped, thinking about the stiff buzz he still had from the coffee that morning at Melody's. He was thinking about Angela as he dug his keys out and slipped one into his apartment door. Before he could turn the lock, he heard the phone ring. He struggled with the lock, but grabbed the receiver on the fourth ring. He picked it up and said, "Hello?"

A voice, intimately familiar said, "Hello, Drew. Remember when you said we should just catch a flight from Poulsen, start over and never look back?"