

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30

chapter 1

“Where is she?” Arthur looked at the phone, expecting it to ring.

Lane looked at the clock; it read 3:30 AM. “I have no idea.” He rubbed at the remains of his ear lobe. A drunken, abusive husband had bitten off the rest during a domestic dispute call.

Arthur pulled the curtain back and looked out the window of their front-to-back split-level home. The light outside the front door highlighted his pear-shaped silhouette. “Matt didn’t shovel the sidewalk.”

“Want me to do it?” In an attempt to wake up, Lane rubbed his face with his open palm. *Matt must be hoping the sun will come out and clear away the snow. There’s warmer weather in the forecast,* he thought.

Arthur let the curtain close and turned to face Lane. “No.”

Roz’s nails tapped the floor. She looked at Lane, yawned, and stretched with her paws way out front so that her back and tail curled. Lane rubbed her head and the thick fur behind her ears. She wagged her tail in thanks.

“Want me to make some coffee?” Lane asked as he went into the kitchen.

“Sure.” Arthur sat on the couch. Roz moved over and sat next to him.

When the knock came, the volume and the force of it told Lane what and who to expect.

Unfortunately, Arthur opened the door before Lane could get to it. “Oh no!” His face paled as he stepped back from the door.

Lane moved past Arthur. He looked at Christine's face, or, actually, the top of her head and its fresh dye job. Today, her natural black was a silver azure. There was no makeup on her face. Lane put his hand on her shoulder.

She looked at him.

He studied her eyes to read what words might not tell him.

Christine looked back at him with a mixture of embarrassment and rage. She shrugged his hand away.

Good, no permanent damage and no drugs, Lane thought.

He recognized the officer dressed in his blues. Noted checked his nametag: McTavish. Lane looked at the officer's face. The intense lights at the front door illuminated McTavish's salt and pepper hair. "Come in," Lane said.

Christine brushed past Lane. McTavish handed Christine's backpack to her uncle.

"Are you okay?" Arthur asked her as she unlaced the combat boots she'd bought with money from her first job.

Christine didn't answer. Instead, she sat on the couch and glared at each of them in turn.

"Cup of coffee?" Lane asked McTavish.

"That would be nice," McTavish said.

"Please, sit down." Lane indicated the living room. "Christine? You want a coffee?" He moved into the kitchen.

"Yep. And, by the way, this is bullshit!"

Lane poked his head back into the living room to glare at Christine.

She closed her mouth.

A minute later, Lane brought out a tray with four coffees, milk, brown sugar, and spoons. He set the tray on the coffee table so each of them could doctor their drinks. Then, they sat at opposite corners of the living room and studied one another.

"Well, now that everyone has talked my ear off." Arthur

attempted to make a joke and shrugged his round shoulders when it flopped.

Lane looked at McTavish, remembering their last meeting. Lane thought, *He's probably remembering the same thing. He looks a little greyer since the blockade.*

McTavish said. "When I asked her where she lived, and who she lived with, I remembered your name. What's the relationship?"

"I'm her uncle." Lane nodded at Arthur, who was getting some colour back in his face. "We're legal guardians."

McTavish nodded, gripping the cup. It disappeared in his large hands.

"Christine, what happened?" Lane asked.

Christine crossed her arms under her breasts then crossed one leg over the other.

"The facts," he said.

"I was in Kensington. I took my can of paint out and tagged a dumpster. He," Christine nodded in McTavish's direction without making eye contact, "cuffed me, put me in the back of his car, asked me some questions, and brought me here."

Lane looked at McTavish.

"That's exactly what happened." McTavish went back to sipping his coffee and watching.

Lane looked at Christine. *What do I say next?* he thought.

"How come this is bullshit?" McTavish asked, recalling Christine's earlier words.

"The whole idea is." Christine looked at Lane to gauge his reaction.

"What idea is that?" Arthur leaned forward.

Lane noted the dark circles under Arthur's eyes.

"The idea that you can't say what you think. Can't write what you think. Somebody is always telling you what to say. What to think. Usually it's hypocritical men telling me how to live my life. That's bullshit." Christine took a sip of her

coffee and looked over her cup at the men, daring one of them to disagree.

“You and I agree so far as restrictions on freedom of speech go,” McTavish said.

Arthur turned to McTavish. “You agree with her?”

“Of course. Saying what you think, especially when you write it down, is probably the best way for anyone in our society to get into trouble.” McTavish put his empty cup on the tray.

Lane looked at McTavish, then at Christine. “So, what are our choices?”

“We’ve had lots of complaints from Kensington businesses about graffiti. Most don’t like having their property tagged. If Christine wants to clean up her tags, there won’t be any charges. If she chooses to leave them, then she’ll be charged.”

“See what I mean? It’s bullshit!” Christine shook her head. “You guys don’t understand a damned thing!”

McTavish stood up. “What’s it gonna be?”

“Saturday morning okay for us to clean up?” Lane asked.

“No problem.” McTavish turned to Christine. “How many did you tag?”

“Twelve or thirteen.”

McTavish went to the door. “Thanks for the coffee.” He opened the door and stepped outside.

Lane followed him. He shivered and tucked his hands under his armpits. “McTavish?”

The officer turned and smiled.

“Thanks.” Lane held out his hand.

McTavish shook it. His grip was firm. “Thank you. I’ve seen what happens to kids who end up on the street. One of my nephews ran away last winter. It was the coldest night of the year. He got frostbite. Almost lost all of his fingers.”

The officer stepped down to his car. He turned as he got to the car, looked back at Lane, hesitated, and went back up the steps. "Might be a good idea to keep your eyes and ears open the next little while."

Lane cocked his head to one side. "What's up?"

"Looks like we're getting a new chief." McTavish looked past Lane to see if anyone was hanging around the front door. "You know him. The guy who lives to network."

"Smoke?" Lane watched McTavish's eyes.

McTavish nodded. "Watch your back." He turned, walked down the steps, got into the car, and drove away.

Lane came inside just in time to see Christine run up the stairs and slam the door to her room. "What happened?"

"I said, 'When are we going to talk about this?'" She yelled at me and ran upstairs." Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "What time do you have to be at work?"

Lane looked at the grandfather clock. "A couple of hours."

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The phone rang as Lane pulled on a shirt. He picked up the receiver before it could wake Arthur. "Hello?" Lane looked down and saw water soaking through the blue fabric of his shirt where he hadn't completely dried after the shower.

"It's me," Harper said. "We've got a missing woman."

"Any specifics?" Lane pulled on socks, then grabbed his keys and cash from the dresser.

"She's twenty-one. Reported missing by her parents. She left for work Monday morning. That's the last time they saw her. She phoned home at lunch to say she'd be home for supper. When her parents drove to her office, the daughter's car was there. The first place we need to go is a dental office a few kilometres from your house. It's called Rockwell Sedation Dentistry."

Lane looked out the window. The sky was gradually turning from purple to pink. "That's right next to Kuldeep's coffee shop," he said. "We need to pay both of them a visit. Is the dentist open yet?"

"In an hour. I'll pick you up in twenty." Harper hung up.

Lane put the phone down.

"What are we going to do about Christine?" Arthur was facing away from Lane, as if he were speaking to the wall.

"Sorry I woke you." Lane pulled on his sports jacket.

Arthur rolled over. "Well?"

"What time does she get home from class?"

"Four-thirty or five." Arthur put his feet on the floor.

"We'll sit down when I get home." Lane made for the door.

"Better put your pants on." Arthur rolled over.

Twenty-five minutes later, Lane and Harper pulled up in front of Kuldeep's coffee shop. Lane turned and looked at the mountains as he stepped out of the Chev. They were heavy with snow, waiting for the spring sun and resultant runoff.

Inside the shop, Lane closed his eyes and imagined the first sip of coffee. *Kuldeep makes a good cup*, he thought.

"The usual?" Kuldeep had her black hair pulled back into a bun.

"Yep," Harper said.

Lane looked around. The shop was empty. He sat down next to the front window where he could keep an eye on the comings and goings outside. "Do you go to the dentist next door?" Kuldeep poked her head around from behind the espresso machine. "What?"

"Do you go next door for dental work?"

Kuldeep's smile died. "No way." She went back to making coffee.

Harper sat down. He studied Lane's face. "What happened to you?"

“Remember McTavish?” Lane rubbed his eyes.

“The tactical guy?”

Lane nodded. “He brought Christine home this morning at about three o’clock. She’d been tagging dumpsters.”

Kuldeep brought them their coffees. “There you go.” She set them down on the table.

“Do the people who work at the dentist’s office come here?” Harper asked.

Kuldeep paused and looked at each of them in turn. “A few.”

How come her defenses are up all of a sudden? Lane wondered. She must hate going to the dentist.

“Apparently, a dental assistant named Jennifer didn’t make it home last night.” Harper looked at Lane, then looked away.

He notices the change in Kuldeep too, Lane thought.

“Jennifer?” Kuldeep looked outside at a patron getting out of his Cadillac.

“Yes,” Lane said.

“She came in around three o’clock yesterday afternoon. I could see that she had been crying. She ordered a large coffee and went back to the office.” Kuldeep watched the patron adjust his tie, button his blue suit jacket, and approach the door.

“How come you don’t send your family next door for their dental work?” Lane asked.

Kuldeep’s eyes opened wide. “I’m not crazy.”

The door opened. The patron in the navy blue suit stepped inside. Kuldeep went back behind the counter.

A black, late-model Mercedes pulled into the parking lot and stopped to the west of the coffee shop. Lane watched as the driver got out. He had a goatee, round face, and close-cropped blond hair.

“What’s happened to the chief?” Lane waited for an answer as Harper put down his cup.

“She’s going in for a bypass. Smoke’s the acting chief until she’s back.” Harper shook his head.

“What’s the long face about? Last night I was told Smoke was the new chief and got a warning to watch my back.”

Harper frowned. A crease ran across his forehead. He rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth. “Smoke’s a climber. Well-connected politically. Meets regularly with Bishop Paul, local businessmen, and like-minded cops. They have a scotch drinkers’ night once a month. Cops who join the club have been the people getting all the promotions lately.”

“I ran into him once or twice when I was starting out,” Lane said.

“And?” Harper waited while Lane looked out the window.

“My first year on the force we were trying to catch this guy on a motorcycle. He would bait cops by stunting right in front of them. A chase would ensue. He’d escape down a bike trail or he’d go cross-country. Most of it happened on this side of the river. One afternoon, the rider got caught. I was late getting there. I could see Smoke holding back traffic and bystanders. When the arresting officers brought the rider back, he had a bloody nose and one of his eyes was swollen. He was holding his ribs. The officers took him to the hospital and two of his ribs were broken. The officers said he fell off his bike while trying to escape. I looked at the bike. There was no evidence of recent damage to it.” Lane continued to stare through the window into the past.

“So, you think the arresting officers laid a few licks on the motorcycle rider?” Harper asked.

Lane nodded. “And the rider refused to lay charges.”

“What’s this got to do with Smoke?” Harper asked.

“I went to him and explained about the bike. He shrugged it off and said, ‘Don’t ask too many questions.’ A few years later we were both up for a detective’s job. I got it. A week later, I was outed.” Lane looked directly at Harper.

“You think it was Smoke?” Harper looked across at a customer who was waiting for his coffee.

Lane nodded. “I was being taught a lesson for getting the job he wanted.”

“How do you know it was him?” Harper asked.

“You know when you go into a room and someone has been smoking, but no one has a cigarette? No one will own up to it. It’s like that. There’s the smell of smoke in the air but everyone’s acting innocent. Still, it stinks, and it smelled strongest around the new chief.”

Harper chewed at his lip. “When I worked in the chief’s office, Smoke had a partner who quit the force. The chief interviewed her. It was one of those rare times the chief confided in me. She said, ‘Smoke’s partner was too scared to tell me why she’s quitting. She just said she wanted out.’ By that time Smoke had made quite a few political connections. He was on his way up.”

“There always seems to be the scent of back-room deals, good ol’ boys, and twelve-year-old scotch around Smoke,” Lane said.

Harper turned his head and watched Kuldeep. “There you go,” she said and handed a customer his coffee. As the customer left, she leaned to look out the window. Kuldeep made eye contact with Harper then cocked her head to the right. Harper lifted his chin. “Come on,” he said to Lane. “Our man’s arrived.” He stood and picked up his coffee.

Lane followed Harper out the door.

The driver of a black Mercedes wore black gloves and a black leather jacket. He pointed his key at the lock of the dental office.

“Hello.” Harper waited until the man turned.

Lane watched the man’s eyes.

“I’m Detective Harper and this is Detective Lane.” Harper pointed at Lane with his coffee cup.

Lane tried to study the man's reaction, but there wasn't one. *Interesting*, Lane thought.

"Dr. Joseph Jones." Jones turned his back, opened the door, stepped inside, and hooked his foot around the metal doorframe to hold it open. "Come in."

They followed him past a copper waterfall stretching from floor to ceiling. The carpets were burgundy and the walls sea foam. Paintings of idyllic homes surrounded by flowers and white fences were carefully aligned on either side of the waterfall. The scent of lavender and aftershave followed in Jones' wake.

Lane watched Dr. Jones as he threw his shoulders back to walk tall at five-foot-six. He opened an office and stood outside as Lane and Harper went inside. Jones followed them in, closed the door behind them, hung up his jacket, and sat behind a polished black mahogany desk.

Putting us in our place. Next he'll try and show us how busy he is by making us wait here, Lane thought. Before Jones could play the waiting game, Lane said. "We understand that Jennifer Towers is one of your employees. Are you aware that she's missing?"

Jones smiled. "Yes, to both statements. And we're really worried that she might have been hurt. She really is a nice young woman. A real asset to the practice."

"We would appreciate any information you can give us." Lane stared at Jones, who looked back with an expression Lane couldn't decipher.

Jones smiled. "There's not much to tell, I'm afraid. I didn't see her leave work. I saw her briefly Monday afternoon. She seemed fine. I didn't see her leave. I worked late." His smile was replaced by a puzzled frown.

Lane watched Jones' eyes. *Something doesn't add up here*, he thought. *The eyes and the voice are sending different messages.*

"Her parents reported her missing. Her car was found

parked outside in *your* parking lot.” Harper used ‘your’ on purpose to see if it would provoke a reaction.

Jones frowned some more. “She’s one of our best assistants. We’d be lost without her. We’ve really come to rely on her. I hope she turns up soon.”

It all sounds rehearsed, Lane thought.

“Do you have any idea where she might have gone after work?” Harper asked as he lifted his nose and sniffed the air.

“None. I saw her during the course of the day, and noticed nothing unusual.” Jones leaned back in his chair, crossing an ankle over his knee.

“Was anyone working late with you?” Lane asked.

Jones smiled. “No. I sometimes work alone to get my paperwork done. It was one of those nights. I got home around eight. My wife and daughters can vouch for me after that.”

“We’d like to wait and interview your staff.” Harper made it sound like a *fait accompli*.

“Of course. The staff should be here within the next fifteen minutes. We’ll do everything we can to help get Jennifer safely back to her family.” Dr. Jones stood up. As he shook Harper’s hand, Lane studied the puzzled half-smile on the doctor’s face.

Harper asked, “What’s that smell? It’s sweet.”

“I don’t smell anything. You must be mistaken.” Jones smiled.

Lane headed for the waiting room. He sat down and Harper sat next to him.

“Picking up odd vibes?” Lane asked.

Harper nodded. “You betcha.”

They turned at the sound of a key opening the lock. A woman dressed in yellows and whites stepped in. She was approximately five-foot-four, with short brown hair and a sumo wrestler’s physique. She locked the door, turned, and let out a tiny chirp as her hand went to her mouth.

“Sorry we startled you.” Lane stood and offered his hand. “I’m Detective Lane and this is Detective Harper.”

The woman kept her hand over her mouth. Her eyes blinked several times, revealing yellow eyeshadow.

Lane read her nametag. “You’re Ramona?”

Ramona took her hand away from her mouth. “How’d you know that?”

Harper pointed at her nametag.

She covered her tag with her hand. “Jennifer lied.”

“About what?” Lane asked.

“About Doctor Joe. Jennifer strutted around the office, advertising what God gave her.” Ramona leaned closer to Harper. “She was only here a month, you know.”

“Do any other dentists work here?” Lane decided he’d wait for Ramona to tell them what she thought Jennifer had lied about.

“Dr. Stephen. He and Dr. Joe have been working together for five years.” Ramona walked over to her receptionist command centre. It provided an effective barrier between her and the detectives. She took a breath, put her hand to her throat, fluttered her eyelashes, and smiled at them.

“What time did Jennifer leave Monday?” Harper stood up and set his pocket computer on the counter.

“I don’t know. She wasn’t talking to me. She was still here when I left.” Ramona sat in her chair.

“How come she wasn’t talking to you?” Lane stood next to Harper.

“Because I told her to button up her blouse. Some of the male patients were becoming quite distracted.” Ramona pursed her lips and shook her head.

“You had complaints about her from the patients?” Lane asked.

“No. But you could see the men’s eyes when they came in. Watching the way she traipsed around here in her tight

little uniform.” Ramona rolled her eyes. “That’s why I knew she was lying.”

“About what?” Harper looked up from his computer.

“About what the patient said.” Ramona looked at them as if they should already know what she was talking about.

“What did the patient say?” Lane looked over his shoulder as a patient opened the door.

“I’m not talking about that!” Ramona looked over Lane’s shoulder at the man who was shutting the door.

“Could you tell us what time Jennifer left here on Monday?” Harper smiled at the patient, who attempted to smile back.

Ramona flipped pages in her appointment book. “Don’t know exactly, but her last appointment was at three.”

“Was it for a cleaning?” Lane asked.

Ramona stuck her finger on the page. “Yes.” She looked away and addressed the patient. “Now, Mr. Francis, it’s time for your appointment.”

“One more question.” Lane held eye contact with Ramona. “How long would that appointment have taken?”

Ramona said, “Forty minutes.” She flapped a hand at Mr. Francis. “Come right this way.”

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“Madeline?”

She felt his hand on her shoulder and was immediately awake. Maddy looked around. The classroom was empty. Sunlight drew a line through the room. Dread almost overwhelmed her. She felt her eyes filling with tears.

“You fell asleep and class is over.” Mr. Hugh watched her closely.

Maddy hated it when he looked at her like that. *He can see right through me. I’m afraid he’ll make me talk.* Maddy sat up. She stood up and reached for her black jacket. “Am I late for my next class?”

“Don’t worry; I’ll write you a note if you need one.” Hugh stepped back, still watching her.

Maddy picked up her books and stuffed them into her bag.

“How come you’re so tired?” he asked.

“My little sister...” She stopped herself and thought, *Don’t go there!*

Hugh waited for her to go on. He scratched his white beard.

You’re just too smart for an old man, she thought. “I’m late,” she said.

“Take care,” he said. “And get some sleep.”

“Whatever you say.” Maddy hefted her bag and left.

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“How did rehearsal go?” Lane asked.

Matt blew his nose and put the tissue in his pocket. He shrugged, put on his seat belt, leaned his head back, and closed his eyes. “Fine.”

“Feeling okay?” Lane stopped the car, waiting for traffic at the exit to the high-school parking lot to clear.

“I’m getting a cold. The first performance is next week.” Matt leaned forward to wave at a girl wearing a white winter jacket and blue jeans.

Lane pulled out into the street. He glanced at Matt, who wore a scarf, a tight-fitting grey toque, a black greatcoat he’d purchased at a secondhand store, and blue jeans. Matt had gone through a wide variety of styles over the last two or three months as he tried on an actor’s skin.

Lane said, “Can’t wait to see the play?”

“Really?” Matt looked at Lane.

“Of course.” Lane stopped at the lights. “Who’s the girl?”

“Carol.” Matt looked away.

“She in the play?” Lane tried not to notice Matt’s sudden

nervousness, or the embarrassment that shaded his neck and worked its way to his scalp.

“She’s one of the crew.” Matt’s breath fogged the passenger window.

“Do you miss hockey?” Lane accelerated as the light turned green. He turned north on Shaganappi Trail. *Traffic is lighter now that it’s almost seven*, he thought.

Matt looked at Lane. “Do you?”

“I miss seeing you on the ice.” *Now, that surprised me*, Lane thought. “And I miss how I feel when I’m skating.”

Matt smiled. “Never thought you’d miss hockey.”

“Supper should be on when we get home. It’ll be nice to relax for a few minutes.”

“Good luck,” Matt shook his head.

“What do you mean?”

Matt shook his head again. “There’s always some kinda drama at home.”

They walked in the door fifteen minutes later.

“You’re gonna kick me out anyway, so I might as well leave!” Christine pushed past Lane and Matt as they took off their shoes.

They looked at one another.

Christine hooked the backpack over her shoulder, shoved her feet into running shoes, and slammed the door behind her.

“She failed a Math test.” Arthur’s eyes told the sad story of his evening. He focused vaguely on Lane.

Lane shrugged. “That’s not so bad.”

“She came in the door about two hours ago.” Arthur sat on the couch.

The dog scratched at the back door. Matt went to open it. He bent to wipe the snow from her paws.

“Aren’t you going after her?” Arthur asked Lane.

“No.” Lane took his winter coat off and hung it in the closet.

“But it’s cold out.” Arthur stood up, pulled back the drapes, and looked outside.

“Maybe she’ll cool off sooner.” Lane rubbed his hands together to warm them.

Arthur didn’t look convinced. “Supper’s ready,” he said.

Roz scampered inside, followed by Matt.

Five minutes later, they sat down to dinner. Arthur’s pattern was to take a mouthful, look at the back door, look at Christine’s empty chair, and begin chewing. “Aren’t you worried?” he asked.

“She left her stuff here. She’ll be back,” Lane said.

Roz barked.

They heard a key in the front door lock.

Arthur stood up.

Christine stepped inside. Her face was red from the wind.

“The food is still hot.” Lane felt his stomach twist into knots. His appetite disappeared.

Arthur took Christine’s coat. She washed her hands in the kitchen sink and sat down at the table. “I want to try to get in touch with my father.”

Arthur handed her the chicken. Lane passed the rice. They ate the remainder of the meal in silence.

THURSDAY, MAY 1

chapter 2

“Recently, she and her boyfriend broke it off. Apparently, he’s been hanging around after work waiting to talk with her.” Harper wrapped his hands around the steering wheel as they coasted down the hill. His kubasa fingers gave the impression he was incapable of being delicate. His black hair was greying a bit. He wore sunglasses to shield his eyes from the white glare of sunshine on melting snow. Harper turned on the wipers to clear the spray left by the vehicle in front of them. Outside, the river valley stretched west and east. The spring snowfall had painted the grass on the far side of the valley in an emerald green that peered out from under a layer of white. “You look like hell, by the way,” Harper said to Lane.

Lane closed his eyes, hoping they’d stop for another cup of coffee before meeting the ex-boyfriend. “What’s his name?” “James Sanders. Works at City Cycle in Bowness.” Harper turned left, then left again. They paralleled the railway tracks before turning onto the bridge.

Lane looked down into the water. It was running brown. The shrubbery on the island in the middle of the Bow River leaned with the current. “Water’s pretty high.”

“It’s snowing and melting in the mountains.” Harper looked ahead to the three-way stop on the far side of the river.

It took another five minutes to get to the motorcycle shop.

Lane opened the front door of City Cycle. The inside smelled of rubber, oil, leather, and freshly machined metal. They looked around at the motorcycles and four-wheelers on display.

Garry Ryan × 25

Toys for boys, Lane thought.

“Always wanted one of these.” Harper said as he walked over to a touring bike.

“Can I help?” asked a woman wearing jeans and a sleeveless red blouse. Her hair was shoulder-length and black.

Lane noted the hitch in her walk. He looked for tattoos but couldn’t see any. “I’m Detective Lane, and this is Detective Harper.”

The woman put her hands on her hips.

“And, you are?” Harper asked.

“Carley.” She shrugged as she said her name.

Lane studied her as she put her weight on one leg.

“We need to talk with James Sanders.” Harper said as he moved to stand next to Lane.

“He in trouble?” Carley’s tone of voice had gone from welcoming to challenging.

Lane thought, *It’s time to change the way this conversation is going*. “How did you lose your leg?” he asked.

Carley cocked her head to one side. “How’d you know?”

Lane shrugged. *I just know*, he thought.

“Motorcycle accident on the highway. I was eighteen. Lost it just below the knee. Want to see?” Carley bent over to lift her pant leg.

“We would really like to see James.” Lane kept his tone even so there was nothing but sincerity in his voice.

Carley stood up and stared back at Lane. “He’s upset. He had nothing to do with Jenny’s disappearance. You won’t believe me, but that’s the truth.”

“We need to hear that from him,” Harper said.

“You can use my office.” Carley turned and they followed her to a metal spiral staircase. She took the stairs one at a time. At the top, they stood eye-to-eye with antique motorcycles lined up along a balcony outside of the office. Once inside the office she said, “Have a seat. Coffee’s there.” She

pointed at a carafe sitting atop the counter running under windows that looked down on the sales floor. "Help yourself. I'll get James."

Lane and Harper fixed their coffees. Lane sat. Harper stood so he could look down at the motorcycles.

Harper said, "It's awfully quiet all of a sudden."

Lane took a sip of coffee and closed his eyes. *I hope I can get some sleep tonight*, he thought.

"Here he comes."

There was the ring of feet on the metal steps of the stairway.

Harper stood to one side as a young man walked into the office.

Lane stood. "James Sanders?"

James nodded. His hair was close cut. A black T-shirt covered a barrel chest. He wore black jeans and stood a head shorter than either of the detectives.

Harper closed the door.

James' face flushed red as he looked up at Harper.

Lane read James' reaction and nodded at Harper to sit down.

James sat on the edge of the desk.

"I'm Detective Harper and this is Detective Lane." Harper sat, took a sip of coffee, and studied James.

"You had a relationship with Jennifer Towers?" Lane studied James' body language and read the tension there.

James nodded. "Yep."

"The relationship ended recently?" Lane watched as James leaned back on the desk.

"We had a fight."

"You're aware she's missing?" Harper seemed to be studying his coffee cup.

Lane thought, *Listen carefully for a change in James' tone of voice.*

James scratched his head like he wanted to strip away bits of flesh. “We were going to make up. But that’s not why you’re here, is it?”

“We want to locate her.” Lane watched James’ eyes fill with tears.

“And you think that because I’m the ex-boyfriend I’m responsible! That I couldn’t accept the fact that she broke up with me. You know, the old stereotype—if I couldn’t have her, then no one could.” James stood up. “You cops are so stupid!”

Harper began to stand.

Lane saw James’ eyes switch from rage to fear.

James lunged at Harper with the palm of his right-hand pushing forward, propelling Harper back into his chair.

Harper leaned into the blow, all arms and legs, trying to get back on his feet without spilling his coffee. James shoved him back into the chair again.

Lane grabbed for James’ arm.

The right angles of the back of Harper’s chair hit the safety glass. It bowed and sang before exploding and cascading into pebbles.

James was off balance, but managed to kick Lane in the face and Harper in the belly.

Coffee splashed against the wall.

James ran out the door.

Stunned by the blow, Lane fell back into the corner. He sat up, put his hand to his face and crawled to his feet.

Harper was on his back, taking in great gulps of air. Lane offered his hand. Harper pushed it away. Lane rushed down the spiral staircase. There was no sign of Sanders below.

Lane hit the floor at the bottom of the staircase, and his knees nearly buckled. He regained his balance and ran down a hallway leading to the back of the shop, where he found a door opening to the alley. Outside, two men looked at each other and then at the detective. A woman on a bicycle coasted

past them. Lane could hear the high-pitched acceleration of a motorcycle racing toward the city centre.

Harper came out the door. He leaned against the wall, looked at Lane, and they ran in opposite directions.

Carley was sweeping up glass when they returned several minutes later. Harper stood at the bottom of the staircase and shook bits of glass from his hair and shoulders.

Lane walked up to Carley, who handed him a bag of ice. "Comes in handy around here. Always keep some in the fridge." She leaned on the push broom.

Lane eased the ice up against his eye.

She smiled at him. "You probably still won't listen to me, but here's the truth. James loved that girl. I know all about the kind of men who hurt women. James isn't that kind. He'll tangle with you two, but there's no way he would have hurt her."

"Tell that to him." Lane took the ice from his eye and pointed at Harper.

"You guys cornered him," Carley said.

"And what would he do to Jennifer if she cornered him?" Lane asked.

Carley leaned to sweep the glass into a pile. "I knew you wouldn't listen."

To Lane, her voice sounded more resigned than accusatory.

"We need his address," Harper said.

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"It'll take a week to get that glass out of your hair." Lane drove as Harper looked in the mirror and picked crumbs of glass from his clothing and scalp and flicked the bits out the window.

"Should've seen it coming." Harper rolled a booger-sized bit of glass between his thumb and forefinger.

"My hindsight is very accurate too."

“There’ll be more than a few laughs about this. Two cops beat up by one suspect. And that eye of yours is going to be plenty of pretty colours in a day or two.” Harper looked at the swelling above and below Lane’s left eye.

“Still think we should go see the parents, looking like this?” Lane stopped at a red light just below the Children’s Hospital. The building’s red and yellow squares gave the impression that it was constructed of a child’s building blocks.

“I already phoned the parents. Just after we put out the call on James Sanders. Don’t see how we can put it off.” Harper straightened his collar.

The Towers’ residence was a brick bungalow just north of a golf course. Lane parked out front. The driveway was filled with two late-model Fords. One was a sedan, the other a pickup.

Harper got out, gingerly removing more glass from his hair. He looked at Lane. “How do you want to handle this?”

“At this point, we probably need to listen more than anything else.” Lane knocked on the front door.

Harper stood behind him on the bottom step.

Lane looked down on Harper to see particles of glass reflected in his hair and on his shoulders. The door opened. Lane turned.

The woman studied Lane through the glass of the storm door.

“I’m Detective Lane, and this is Detective Harper. We’d like to ask some questions about Jennifer Towers. Are you her mother?” *She looks like she hasn’t slept in weeks*, Lane thought.

“Yes, I’m her mother, MaryAnne. Come in.” She stepped back into the shadows as Lane opened the door.

It took a moment for Lane’s eyes to adjust to the lack of light in the front room. MaryAnne stood nearly five feet tall. Her short black hair was flattened on the left side.

“Is there any news?” she asked.

Lane heard emptiness in her voice. “Not yet.” He looked around the living room, where pictures of Jennifer’s life covered one wall. He looked at MaryAnne Towers as it dawned on him that Jennifer was an only child.

“Tea? Coffee?” MaryAnne asked while walking toward the kitchen.

“What is easy for you?” Harper asked her.

“My Jennifer back.” MaryAnne didn’t bother looking back.

They followed her into the kitchen.

Lane looked back as an oak floorboard creaked.

“Who are you?” The man in the hall stood over six feet tall. He had a full head of red hair.

“They’re detectives, Don.” MaryAnne turned on the tap to fill the coffee pot.

“Any news?” There was hope in Don’s voice.

“Not yet.” Harper shrugged.

Don sat at the kitchen table. “Sit down.”

Lane and Harper sat on either side of him. The coffee maker sputtered. The scent of arabica beans filled the room.

MaryAnne turned around. “This is not like her. She always phones.”

Don asked, “Did you talk with her boyfriend?”

“James Sanders?” Harper asked, then looked at Lane.

Don nodded. “That’s right.”

“Less than an hour ago,” Lane said.

Don got up, then returned with spoons, sugar, and milk. He sat down, got up again, and returned with four coffee cups.

“It didn’t go well.” MaryAnne said.

Lane noticed that it was a statement rather than a question. He looked closely at Jennifer’s mother.

“You have swelling around your eye. Your partner’s got bits of glass in his hair and on his clothes.” MaryAnne sat.

Harper checked one shoulder of his sports jacket then the other.

“What was their relationship like?” Lane asked.

Don and MaryAnne looked at one another.

Don said, “I didn’t like his short temper.”

Neither did I, Lane thought. He looked at MaryAnne.

“He’s kind. He’s angry. He and Jennifer would have arguments. She’s as stubborn as he is. As far as I know it never got physical. I think he loved her.” MaryAnne looked at the coffee machine.

Don got up to grab the pot and pour coffee for each of them. “Jennifer was mad at me after her last argument with him. She asked me what I thought of James, and I told her. She didn’t like the answer.” Don put the coffee pot back and sat down.

“What did you tell her?” Harper added sugar and milk to his coffee.

“The same thing I told you two about his temper. She said I should mind my own business, then she stopped talking to me.” Don looked out the window when he heard a car drive by.

Looking to MaryAnne, Lane asked, “What was he angry about?”

“Being rejected by his family. They kicked him out right after high school. I think he’s looking for a home. A family.” MaryAnne lifted her coffee and took a sip.

“Do you know where we could find him?” Harper asked.

Don stood up and stepped into the front room so he could see out the front window. “He lives down in Bowness with a couple of other guys. They are all into motorcycles. Sometimes, they go racing in the summer.” He grabbed a piece of paper and wrote on it. “Here’s the address.”

“He talked about visiting some friends out on the west coast once or twice.” MaryAnne looked at the coffee inside her cup as if trying to read the future.

“She should never have hooked up with James.” Don’s head turned as a car drove by.

MaryAnne shook her head. “He is just a kid. I find it hard to believe that he would hurt Jennifer.”

Lane and Harper left after assuring Jennifer’s parents that they would provide them with daily updates.

Inside the Chevy, on their way down Shaganappi Trail, Harper asked, “How are Christine and Matt doing?”

Lane shrugged, remembering what he’d be up to on Saturday morning. “At each other’s throats.”

“Still?” Harper eased into the centre lane.

Lane nodded. “You bet.”

“Think they’ll ever get along?”