

Part One

‘Police can’t help her now’

Mother mourns after Boxing Day blood bath

Jan 12, 2007

Pickett Powell

TORONTO BOREALIS REPORTER

Two weeks after the senseless shooting of 19-year-old Caroline Cruickshank, police are no closer to finding the shooter than they were on day one.

Cruickshank, who was doing some boxing day shopping with her friends, was caught in what police are calling a ‘gang related’ shooting. Witnesses say an altercation in a local entertainment venue spilled out into the streets at the corner of John and Queen’s.

Police are not commenting on the on-going investigation, but reports indicate that the victim was just ‘in the wrong place at the wrong time.’

Toronto Chief of Police, Thomas Richmond, said “Caroline Cruickshank was returning to the subway station after an evening with some of her friends when an on-going dispute that originated in the Club Anatnom spilled into the street. One of the suspects produced a firearm, and shot in the direction of the other combatant. The shot missed and tragically hit the young Miss Cruickshank, who was later pronounced dead at the scene.”

“The police are continuing to work tirelessly,” continued Richmond, “to find the men responsible and to bring them to justice.”

Caroline’s mother, Cynthia, 42, has appreciated the community’s response. “We would like to thank the City of Toronto, and the community, for their outpouring of support. We’d like to say we have faith in the Toronto Police Department, and they have assured us that they are doing all that is possible to arrest the men responsible for...”

Cruickshank was visibly emotional and took a moment to pull herself together before continuing. “We will get the men who did this.”

Mrs. Cruickshank concluded her address with support of the police’s efforts to find justice. “Our Caroline has been tragically and senselessly taken from us, and the world has lost a beautiful daughter, a beloved sister and a brilliant student. She will be missed. The police can’t help her now, but it’s not too late for all of the Caroline’s out there who still have a chance to lead wonderful and beautiful lives. We have to catch these criminals and stop gang and gun violence now, for the sake of our community.”

This is not the first time in the City of Toronto that innocent bystanders have been shot amidst gang violence. On Nov. 2, Allison Young, the mother of four, was gunned down near a west-end nightclub. Just earlier than that, in Sept. 9, 15-year-old Matty Brovonovski was shot to death as gang members fired at one another outside of

Alexandra Park in an apparent drug deal gone bad. Brovonovski died three days later in hospital.

Police chief Richmond said he is concerned with the increase in gang violence and gun violence. He said, "We believe that people who engage in high-risk behaviour such as selling drugs or carrying guns, increase their chances of becoming a fatal statistic."

As a result, local ministers have started calling for stricter gun control laws and tougher penalties on violators. Conservative MP Glib Monforton said, "It's high time that the Liberals quit dancing around this issue of gun and gang violence and really do something that protects the people." He continued, "All the Libs is doing is protecting the hammer and not the nail."

Liberal Minister of Justice, Dwight Hampton, said his party is drafting a bill that will make gun registration more difficult and involve a more lengthy and thorough background check. Said Hampton, "It's to all of our benefits to be as certain as possible that guns do not get into the hands of dangerous or potentially dangerous individuals."

Chapter One

Luc Lefevre sat back in his wooden office chair and took a sip of his black coffee. Its bitter aroma stung his lips as much as the temperature, and he sighed. It was still early, and the Bravo shift was the only crew in. Detective Lefevre arrived a bit early before each shift, around 6 a.m. The day shift started at 7:00.

He sat in his small office, behind his desk reading the latest edition of the *Windsor Borealis*, and there was a front page story that wasn't any good for the police station. 'Windsor cop arrested in sting,' didn't read too well.

"Shit," he spat out. "The commissioner's gonna' be pissed."

The cop in questions shouldn't have even been on the force, if you asked Lefevre. The guy was the cousin of a wife of a cop who retired three years ago. When blood flows thicker than water, you can imagine that complaints like this are sure to follow.

He wiped his hands over his face, cleared his eyes, pulled them down over his cheeks, and steepled them over his mouth, holding them there as he leaned on his desk in contemplation. The incandescent light from his office lamp stood motionless on his desk, and he took in a deep breath, assuring that this was not how he wanted to start off his morning. Yeah, the chief isn't going to like this.

Mickey Gordon poked his head into the Lefevre's office, creaking the door open just a shade.

"Hey partner, the chief has called an emergency staff meeting, and it's starting, like, right now."

"Right, alrighty, let's get over there, then," replied Lefevre. Luc heavily lifted himself out of his creaking seat before Mickey interrupted him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, partner," halted Mickey at the door. "What's up with you pal? You look terrible!"

"I'm fine, I just haven't been sleeping so hot," Lefevre said.

“That’s it? You’re just not sleeping? ‘Cause you look a whole lot worse than a bad night under the covers, Luc,” pried his partner.

“Believe it or not, Mic, this is what Luc Lefevre looks like in the morning – and I’m not sleeping as thoroughly as I would like. You going to be ok with that?”

“Yeah, man. I’m just busting your chops. So, everybody’s thinking this meeting has something to do with the article in the *Borealis* this morning, what do you think?” asked Gordon.

“I think if you’re right, and the chief’s not going to be pleased,” said Lefevre. He creaked out of his chair from behind his desk, picked up his old coffee mug and headed for the door.

“We’d better be on our way. I don’t want to keep him waiting. Not today,” said Lefevre.

In the three strides across his office, he passed by his desk and chair, some uniforms from the drycleaners, and a picture of the Queen of England on his way out into the brightly fluorescent hallway of the police station. The lights stung his eyes, and he groaned.

Already in the hall a commotion was headed towards the staff lounge. Over the grey, carpeted floor and past the white, decorated walls cops were filing towards the staff room. Batons, handcuffs, keys and other dangling items set off a cacophonous clicking through the staff room as officers filed through the columns of chairs looking for a seat. They balanced their coffees so not to spill, and murmured amongst each other. Some had read the article in question, some heard rumours beyond what was printed in the text itself, and for some, this was the first mention of the article that they’d heard.

And while the ambient noise of humans going through the formalities of seeing one another for the first time in day, Police Chief Hal Doric burst into the staff room, backhanding the door closed with an eruptive crash, and threw the last copy of the *Windsor Borealis* across the front of the room, into the wall. The impact disheveled a painting on the wall, enough to tip it, but not to knock it down.

“What the fuck is *this*?” he screamed with a red face and a stare that could stop a speeding car in its tracks.

In a heartbeat, all the officers that remained standing fell into their seats. Attention was undivided from the chief’s entrance, and few officers even looked up from the steam swirling up from their coffee cups.

“Did anyone know about this? Why is this the first I’m hearing about it?”

No one said a word.

“For the record, Constable Bradley Gregor has been suspended indefinitely pending an investigation. I don’t want a single one of you talking to the press about this. I will be in charge of communicating with them. I don’t want to hear anyone talking about this, nor do I want to hear any more about this from the goddamned newspaper!”

His voice exacerbated into a squeak at the end of the sentence.

The article indicated that the Ontario Provincial Police had received complaints about an officer on the Windsor Police force. A six month investigation had resulted in a sting operation to catch the offending officer red handed. The investigation had begun after several when members of the public had made complaints that an officer had been

pulling them over for speeding, but while questioning them, had extorted money and other valuables, which were referred to as “under \$5,000.”

Allegedly, the officer had pulled over a plainclothes officer and tried to extort money from them, at which point the OPP revealed themselves and arrested Bradley Gregor for violations of the Police Act, and criminal charges, including charges of discreditable conduct and neglect of duty.

Situations like this always percolated through the station causing low morale, shame and resentment. A damaged reputation always hurt, especially with civilian animosity crying foul and hypocrisy when those who are supposed to uphold the laws are found to break them.

“And I want to make this crystal clear,” said Doric, as serious as ever, “I don’t want anyone commenting or discussing the issues of *racism* that has been attached to this, case, whatsoever.”

What?! thought Lefevre. What was that about? This was the first time anyone had mentioned anything about racism involved with this case.

“Everyone, you’re dismissed,” said the chief.

Luc turned to face Mickey, mouthing the words ‘racism’ with a look of shock. Mickey shrugged and said, “I haven’t seen him this upset in ages, not since ...”

“Lefevre, you and Gordon, see me in my office immediately,” interrupted Chief Doric. “Let’s go, right now.”

“You really poured it on hard, there, chief,” said Lefevre. “I think you got their attention.” Lefevre took a seat in Chief Hal Doric’s office. Mickey Gordon was soon to follow. Doric sat in his seat behind his desk.

“You know how it is, Lefevre. If you don’t show everyone where you stand, then they walk all over you. I don’t suspect anyone will be unclear with what I was asking.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about the article, chief. I’ve never even heard of the reporter before, anyways. I don’t imagine anyone’s going to take notice. What was his name, anyways, N-something, right? Norman, or Newton? Seriously, are you that concerned?” said Lefevre.

“Luc, I don’t underestimate the power of the press, and especially in a case like this, where that fool Gregor is as guilty as the day is long. What the hell was he thinking?” fumed Doric.

“The thing that gets me the most, is that the fucker was targeting Asians,” sighed Doric. “This department does not need a blow to its reputation like the kind allegations of racist cops will bring.”

“What was he up to?” asked Lefevre.

“That dumb son of a bitch was pulling over speeders honestly enough, but the ones he was pressuring were the Asians, mostly women. He figured they were easy to intimidate, warned them that traffic violations could get them deported, could get them in trouble with the law. He was pushing them into giving him money, asking for it blatantly in some cases.”

Lefevre exhaled a damned breath, imagining what it would look like if reports of this were ever to get out. Mickey Gordon seemed unfazed, however.

“What’s the big deal, chief?” said Mickey. “We’ve got nothing to hide. Constable Gregor was a fool, we should hang him out to dry. Make an example of him – separate ourselves as much as possible from his conduct.”

Doric looked across his desk and gave Detective Mickey Gordon a coy smile, and then referred over to Luc. Luc met his look, and returned the smile, exchanging an agreement silently between the two of them.

“You’re a good cop, Mickey, but you’re still young,” sighed Chief Doric.

“Hey,” said Mickey, “I’ve been a cop for 10 years, and been here in Windsor for eight of ‘em. I’m no rookie, chief. And don’t pretend to treat me like one.”

“This is true, Mickey. You’re not a rookie anymore, and you’re a fast-tracked detective for promotion, but ... well, let me put it this way. Things didn’t start so smoothly for me around here.”

Chapter Two

In 1983, Hal Doric started his career a bit older than the average young constable. At 27 years old, he was mature among his class, and more so than even his older age would suggest. He was looked up to in his graduating class, and among the community at large. He wasn’t tall, but he was broad in the shoulders, and it didn’t hurt that he was a handsome devil, either.

Loved in the community for his philanthropy with the service clubs in the city, he was looked up to on the force and an inspiration for all those interested in being a cop.

The next year, he was married to his high school sweetheart, Annie Showalter, in a lovely ceremony with a large family turnout from both sides, and they moved into a nice home in LaSalle together.

Annie began a career at Century High, a public school known for its delinquents from around the city. Problem children filled the halls of the west end school, and Annie enrolled by choice. She was given to caring for youngsters and had the patience to do the job right.

But things didn’t start so smoothly for Hal Doric.

Constable Doric was cruising along the west end of Windsor late one January afternoon when he spied a suspicious looking man driving an unmarked van along Prince Ave., heading north. Doric began to follow the van, believing that the vehicle might be stolen.

The van pulled into a gas station just on the other side of some train tracks on College Ave. Once parked, three black men exited the van and walked east up the street towards some planned housing. Only the driver, a black male wearing a dark hat and yellow coat with short dreadlocks remained, pumping gasoline into the van.

Once the suspect was done pumping gas into his van, Doric decided to confront him and find out where he had got the van from. He quickly pulled up his vehicle and hopped out of his car, with the lights flashing. Doric walked up to the man.

“What’s going on?” asked the man at the van, with a notable Jamaican accent.

“Let’s see your license and registration for the van, pal,” said Doric, taking command of the situation.

“What have I done? Why do you want to see these things,” asked the black man, who was beginning to stutter and become visibly nervous.

“Where’d you get this van, buddy? You steal this van?” he asked.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said the suspect.

“Perhaps a ride downtown will make you more cooperative, eh sir? Is that what you’d like? Why don’t you get in your car and get me your license and registration, or you’re going to be taking a seat in the back of my cruiser,” said Doric.

The suspect began to dig his hands through the pockets of his yellow winter jacket, showing signs of panic. Doric’s instincts flashed into gear – what was he reaching for in his pockets? What was he carrying? Is he armed?

Doric jumped into action, slamming the man against his own van and went to turn him around to place handcuffs on him.

The suspect bounced Doric off of him, and shoved the officer away.

Stumbling in his first step, he regained his footing and sprinted off behind the edifice of the gas station, looking for an escape from the police officer.

Doric, embarrassed that the suspect eluded him so easily, and even more so that he had man-handled him as effortlessly as he did, he drew his baton from his belt and ran to catch up.

The young constable was quick, and covered the ground between the fleeing suspect easily, slamming his baton across the upper back of the black man, dropping him to the ground. Laying on the ground, staring up at Doric, the man continued to fumble through his jacket.

Doric drew his gun, pointed it directly at the man’s head and screamed, “Freeze nigger! Or I’ll blow your brains out.” Those words echoed through the clear winter sky, with an emphatic exhaust of breath into the cold air from his mouth. Those words would continue to echo in his conscience for years.

Uncertain whether the suspect was armed or not, he pepper-sprayed him into submission, turned him over and cuffed him, before dragging him back to the squad car and taking him downtown.

In the hospital afterwards, the doctors said that the man had been badly beaten, although Doric had only hit him the one time across the back. He had sustained injuries to his neck, his shoulders and his head.

It turns out the man was unarmed. Richard Staley had been a permanent resident of Canada since he was eight years old. The vehicle he was driving was his family vehicle, and Doric hadn’t even pulled him over, but rather approached him while he was parked at a gas station. It was chalked up as a case of DWB, or ‘Driving While Black.’ The incident became a case for the courts, and was the first major account of racial profiling in the court system.

Doric had deemed a black man driving a vehicle as suspicious. He hadn’t even pulled him over for a Traffic Act violation, and the case represented a succinct candidate for systemic racism and labeled the Windsor Police as inherently racist. It also called into question the colour of justice in Ontario and Canada. The case itself became a point of contest to revisit police procedures.

Doric was suspended with pay and became a pariah in the Windsor community. Because he had been so beloved, everyone who had appreciated or revered him felt betrayed. The community turned on him.

The press had sold papers with his name in the headlines for months. Making a mint off of his demise, local and national news coverage kept everyone up to date on the latest accusations, convictions, suspensions and reinstatements in Doric's career. His face was on all the covers, and just the image of him became a symbol of racial intolerance and guilt. With that kind of negative publicity and public scrutiny, marital complications would be inevitably.

His wife felt the pressure at her work. Century High had a large population of black and minority student population, and parents came in to the school to complain to the principal about having a known racist on the PTA. The PTA itself suspended her from the board.

Annie Doric's commitment to her husband started off devout, but after months of being shunned in the community and accused of racist motivations herself, she started to lose faith in him. The shame of her name turned to embarrassment, which turned to anger, which eventually resulted in her application for a divorce from Hal. The divorce would be final in 1988.

Left with nothing, Doric dedicated himself to his work, and wore his uniform with a sense of unworthiness. His career was all he had left, and even that came with a great deal of shame. When he returned from his suspension, he was a changed man. Weathered in the face, absent of a sense of humour, and still unpopular around the city, this was an ordeal that he wouldn't soon live down. Certainly, things did not start off smoothly for Doric and the Windsor Police.

But redemption was his. As part of his punishment he was required to attend workshops and clinics focused on racial sensitivity and racial profiling. He learned more than was required of him; in fact he became an expert on racial profiling and systemic racism, leading workshops all across Ontario on the subject. He never quit, and demonstrated remorse and sincerity in his every action.

It took a lot of work, and a lot of good work, but Constable Doric was promoted to Commander in 1992. His commitment and service was noticed, and he commanded with authority and with leadership. He regained the support he once had in the department, and some of the reputation he once exhibited with the community. While the Windsor community was vengeful, it was also forgiving, if it felt one were deserving. Doric made his case, not to be back in the community's graces, but rather to redeem himself in his own eyes.

For all the costs his actions had led to, his personal growth developed him into a man accountable to himself, to his community and to his own best judgment for the way he made up his mind, the way he thought, spoke and acted. By 1995 Doric was promoted once again to Deputy Chief, and later assumed his own boss's position by 1998. No one had been more worthy.

"You're a good cop, Mickey, but you're still young," sighed Chief Doric.

“Hey,” said Mickey, “I’ve been a cop for 10 years, and been here in Windsor for eight of ‘em. I’m no rookie, chief. And don’t pretend to treat me like one.”

“This is true, Mickey. You’re not a rookie anymore, and you’re a fast-tracked detective for promotion, but ... well, you still don’t know the history of this station. Things didn’t start so smoothly around here.”

Mickey didn’t understand, and Doric wasn’t the type of man to explain himself. He had rededicated himself to setting the right example for over two decades, yet didn’t lose sight of his past. He would never forget what he’d done.

Doric gazed momentarily at the 20-year-old photo of his ex-wife, Annie, which still sat on his desk. He thought back on all that he’d been through, and knew that it was the life he’d chosen. He thought to himself for a moment; he wasn’t necessarily satisfied, but he did know he was justified, and justice was a rare commodity in a world where he knew far too well that justice was not necessarily guaranteed.

“Mickey Gordon,” Doric began, “this police department does not have a perfect record, and the press have a detailed and thorough record of all that’s happened in the past. We have demons in our closet, and I’m not about to pull them out and introduce them to you. Believe me when I say, ‘Do not let the press get a whiff of the racist allegations of this one individual.’ Nothing good will come of it, and it would be ungodly unjustified.”

Detective Luc Lefevre was familiar with all that Doric had been through. Lefevre had joined the force in 1988, and was training to be an officer during the entirety of the public’s flaming of Doric. While he was uncertain what to think of him when they’d first met, he was proud to be on Doric’s team, and knew that there was no one better to lead the department into the future.

Mickey answered, “Alrighty chief, don’t worry about me. Whatever you say.”

“Thanks, Mickey. Now I wanted to discuss something along these lines with you two. Your ‘Gang violence’ and ‘Gun violence’ projects are illustrating a major prevalence of illegal guns and drugs in our community – but you’re going to have to rely on your research and intelligence for leads and progress. Random ‘stop and seizures’ are going to be unacceptable. You have better have corroborative evidence that your suspects are people of interest to your investigations. There’s no better time than all the time to remind you that approaching citizens of a minority background will not be tolerated without evidence and good reason, right?”

Lefevre agreed, “Of course chief.”

“Luc,” paused Doric. “There’s no one on this staff I trust more to handle the Gangs and Guns assignment. If there’s anything, absolutely anything, you need, you let me know, and it’s yours.”

Chapter Three

Detective Luc Lefevre and his partner Mickey Gordon were stationed in Ford City, parked at a YMCA parking lot on Drouillard Ave. It had been a quiet afternoon, and they were sitting quietly.

“... so I have to think,” said Mickey, “that we’re all doing what we’re meant to do. Everything happens for a reason, man. Seriously, had I not been held up at the dry cleaners, I wouldn’t have been six minutes late, and wouldn’t have been able to help that lady move her car. Moments later, a driver on the corner pokes his nose out into the

intersection, causing another driver to deke out of the way, resulting in him side-swiping her vehicle. She could have been crushed in the collision!"

"I don't know," disagreed Lefevre. "I just have trouble buying into all of that. I can't believe that everything that happens to us happens for a reason. I don't believe in the divine plan. Too many bad things happen to people, and we see that every day. We show up at domestics where women are beaten to degrees that I don't think *I* would even survive. Are you telling me these things are part of God's divine plan? You have a sick impression of what God is, Mic."

"Yeah, I guess that's why it's still a debate, eh?" Gordon paused for a moment, turned to his veteran partner and studied his face for a moment.

Lefevre met Gordon's gaze and shrugged. "What? Man, what are you looking at me like that for?" retorted Luc.

"Would you do it all again, Luc?" asked Mickey. "If you could do it all again, if you could go back to the moment you decided you were going to be a cop, would you do it again?"

Lefevre stopped and looked at Mickey, sitting across from him in his blue uniform, his seatbelt on, and his cheerful eyes opened wide enough that you could see his heart in them. The question was innocent enough, but the reasons Lefevre joined the force were far from romantic.

Before he had a chance to respond, the radio crackled and the dispatcher reported, "Calling all units, a sexual assault at Westcott park. Suspect is a white male, 5'8, early 30s. Last seen on foot heading northbound on Central Ave. Suspect is wearing blue jeans and a white windbreaker jacket and a black toque."

"This is Alpha 41, we're on it," said Lefevre into the radio.

Mickey pulled the police car out of the parking lot, and threw his lights on. Traffic slowed to let them in, and they took off, driving around the Ford Test Track and over to Central. Cars on the side of the road and homes lined up on either sides of the street. There were dozens of places to hide and they didn't spy the suspect en route to the Westcott Park.

Once there, they pulled up along the curb and found the woman sitting back against the fence. Their response time was just under two minutes, not bad. She seemed collected and unharmed and was on her cell phone. Mickey climbed out of his seat and approached her, his lights still flashing showing that there was now a police presence at the scene. Mickey started asking her what had happened, and she began recounting the confrontation with the suspect.

Luc remained seated in the vehicle. Mickey's question about whether or not he'd have joined the force all over again remained in the forefront of his mind. And this sexual assault seemed too eerily connected to his past to be a coincidence. His face was lost in thought, and his thoughts were jumping back decades to revisit his youth.

It was a cold winter day in Waterloo, Ontario, 1980. Early in the second semester, 18-year-old freshman Luc Lefevre marched through the snow back to his apartment after his second day of classes. Wearing his father's winter coat and the only pair of shoes he

had, a black pair of worn dress shoes, he carried his books under his arm, with a proud smile on his face.

His first semester as a Sciences Major had gone relatively well. His grades weren't outstanding, but he wasn't focusing on his marks so much as he was focusing on his varsity soccer. A walk-on member of the Waterloo Warriors, Luc the rookie didn't get much playing time, but enjoyed being on the team and the comradery of his teammates.

He had the opportunity to meet with his professors in a very personal nature, as well, with having to make special arrangements to be away from class to make the trips with the team to games across Ontario. Some of the professors enjoyed his youthful jump, and took the time during his visits to recollect their memories of when they were undergrads themselves, playing varsity sports. Tennis and track and field had been more popular back then.

He stayed in touch with his mother and father through the mail, writing letters regularly about his classes, his professors and the soccer team. Once soccer was over, he wrote about playing billiards down at the pub, and always asking questions about how his family was doing. Receiving mail from his folks always made his roommate Mark a little jealous. Mark didn't seem to get all that much mail.

A whiz at math, he quickly fired through his homework and examinations, but struggled in some respects to communicate his ideas during the Arts and Social Science courses, but those skills would develop with time. He wasn't certain, yet, what he wanted to do with his life, but wasn't in any real rush, either. He had the support of his family and a positive attitude that was sure to guide him towards his career path.

Most importantly, this was Luc's first time away from home, and his parents had saved a lot of money up to send him away. They also demonstrated a lot of faith in him, sending away their only child to school in another town to live on his own. He could sense the pride in their demeanor when he left for second semester, but he could also sense a type of fear that they had for him, worrying that he would be safe, that he wouldn't fall in with the wrong crowd, and ultimately the fear of letting their only child go. Letting go of him as a child, and realizing that he was now a man.

Luc stepped into his apartment and placed his wet shoes on the radiator to dry out, took his gloves off and placed them by the fire to warm up, and removed his scarf and plaid winter jacket, brushing snow from his trousers. He called out to his roommate.

"Hey Mark? How's it going? Any mail today?"

Mark appeared from another room and entered into the front den, the wooden floor creaking as he entered.

"Luc, your father called earlier today while you were out in class." Mark's tone was somber, almost soft. "He said you have to call him right away."

Luc was shocked. Long distance calls were expensive, and generally uncommon – it must have been very serious.

Luc Lefevre's world changed that day. He talked to his father, who delicately told him that his mother had been raped and beaten. Luc was on the next train back to Windsor the following day. He couldn't sleep that night, and felt pangs of panic every moment until he got back home.

When he returned to Windsor, he met his mother at the Hotel Dieu Hospital, and it brought tears to his eyes. Her face was swollen, her arm was in a brace, but she was

otherwise just resting in a bed for observation. Luc dropped out of school later on that week, with intentions to care for his mother until she was better.

His mother Colleen handled herself with great self-control and with an attitude believing that these things just happen, and it just so happened to happen to her. She dealt with the attack with over-rationalization and emotionally removed herself from the incident. She felt anger and hostility towards people who showed her pity and remorse, and expressed it privately towards her husband, Serge. When members of the neighbourhood and her family began visiting, she was embarrassed that they all knew what had happened to her, and each phone call, get well card, and visit turned her stomach. She wanted to let the whole thing be forgotten.

Luc had never seen his mother intoxicated, but it became a regular sight within the next month. It began as a casual exercise in the evenings, and she said it helped her to remain calm and get ready to sleep. But then she started drinking in secret and in the mornings, just to get the fear of being in public to level off. It took the edge out of her day, she said.

Luc's father, Serge, lost a real connection with his wife. Colleen wouldn't let Serge emotionally close to her anymore, and that pained him. He had been pushed away, and their intimacy all but disappeared. He didn't pressure her into anything physical, letting her be the one to instigate sexual relations when she was ready again. That time never came, and she withdrew into her own mind, being overly protective of who she came into contact with.

Serge turned elsewhere to cope with the absence of his wife's affection, but not to another lover. Rather, he too began drinking. But his drinking escalated into drug abuse, and that drug abuse escalated into him serving a brief jail term for possession. His drug problems bourgeoned from there. He lost his job at a machine shop for stealing as he was looking for more money to buy drugs.

All the while, Luc felt a new direction in his life. The attack on his mother pushed him towards making a difference in the community and to stop attacks like this from happening. He saw the damage that it was having on his family, and rededicated himself to joining the police where he could track criminals down and deliver true justice to those who deserved it.

Mickey Gordon was typing out the victim's statement on a laptop with his index fingers. His typing wasn't great, but his detecting was, so it was a fair trade off. The woman had made enough noise and commotion in the park to scare the attacker off, and she was lucky that he hadn't been armed. She described him as mentally unfit, and wiry, almost scrawny, yet still quite strong.

He explained to her how the electronic signature on the laptop worked, and how it secured the statement so that it was unalterable, and should the case go to court that it would be available. The woman understood and typed in the four-digit code on the laptop, securing her statement.

By now an ambulance had arrived and they had provided her with a blanket to warm herself with, and were evaluating the bruises on her arms and shoulders from when the man had held her down and groped her.

Luc was leaning against the squad car, still silent and observant. Sexual assault cases always gnawed at him, knowing that for all his effort, they're still happening, and the suspects are as difficult to find as ever. Where was the justice that he was looking for?

Just as Mickey was wrapping up the laptop and saying his final words to the ambulance drivers to release the woman, there were a series of cracking shots heard in the distance. It sounded like large fire-crackers exploding nearby, and Mickey quickly turned his face towards Lefevre, who had jumped out of his daze, and into action.

"Let's go!" he called to Mickey. Mickey ran across the street to the car and threw himself into the driver's seat. Lefevre grabbed the radio and called in.

"This is officer Lefevre. Multiple shots fired west of Central, we're on our way."

It was just after 3 p.m. and the shift change at the factory had hundreds of Ford vehicles flooding the streets. Sirens and flashing lights meant nothing when there was nowhere to pull over to. There was a time when cars and trucks wouldn't give an inch when a police officer turned on their lights. A year ago a police officer was shot and killed by an armed drug dealer, just around the corner from where they were stuck, now. After the shock in the community of the Windsor Police force's first officer shot dead in the line of duty, their cooperation on the streets took a whole-sail change for the better. The community really shared in the loss of the officer, and took it upon themselves to do their part when emergency vehicles were looking for space on the roads.

Large trucks, minivans and cars with V-8 engines blocked their route. Spinning their car over to Seminole, there was only one lane to get through to the downtown core, and the whole route was jammed. All the best intentions to cooperate with the police were useless when there was nowhere to pull over to.

"Fuck," swore detective Mickey Gordon. "This is goddamned ridiculous."

Dispatch updated the situation, "Attention all units, all units please respond. There has been a drive by shooting on the corner of Ottawa and Lincoln. Multiple guns fired. Police, fire and ambulance requested. Suspects were last seen heading west bound on Ottawa in a grey 2004 Ford Explorer. Four suspects all described as young black males, consider them armed and very dangerous."

"Jesus! A drive by?" said Lefevre.

A break in the traffic signals opened up some space on the street, and the vehicles were able to pull over just enough to open a free lane up the middle of the street, and Gordon accelerated towards Walker, taking the corner safely and continued on towards Ottawa. Once off of Seminole, the streets were more clear, and they were the third unit on the scene.

Officers were already containing the scene, putting up police tape and rounding up witnesses. There was a car accident across the street, where one vehicle was trying to flee the intersection once they hear shots fired, but they accelerated into the back end of a truck, instead. There were three injured in the accident.

There were six others that were receiving medical attention for gun shot wounds. A stray dog still on a leash whimpered on the other side of the street, probably searching for its owner. One gun shot victim was pronounced dead right away, while the victims were injured to varying degrees. Two officers were redirecting traffic from Ottawa Street.

As they got out of their car, Luc Lefevre and Mickey Gordon lifted the police tape over their heads and stepped through the crime scene to be brought up to speed.

Constable Dan Hallimut saw them coming and met them halfway.

"I'm glad to see you guys," he said, almost out of breath. "We've got one man dead, three injured in a collision, and five others injured from either stray bullets or broken glass. Witnesses are saying that the deceased man was the target," Hallimut indicated the bloody stump of a body that had been ripped up by gunfire. Hot black blood oozed away from him onto the interlock brick pedestrian cross walks.

"Apparently he was sent inside the bank to get some money, and then he returned out here and handed the money to another man. While that guy stepped away with the money, a truck came barreling through with the windows down and four men firing hand guns from across the street," said Hallimut.

There was glass everywhere. It was shot out of the windows of the corner shop and from the car collision. It was in gunshot wounds, it was in hair, and it was all over road and corner.

Hallimut looked across the crowd of on-lookers that was assembling, and groaned. While he was watching them, and the ambient commotion of sirens, flashing lights, traffic and banter filled the street, he suddenly became aware of a thin man in a long coat coming through the police line tape.

He was carrying a shoulder bag on his right side, and was squinting through a pair of round-lensed glasses. He stepped right through the glass, through some blood until Hallimut stopped him.

"What the hell are you doing? Get behind the line!"

The odd young man stopped and looked up at him, and pulled a tape recorder out of his jacket pocket, clicked the device on and started asking questions.

"Officer, can you describe what's going on here? I know people have been tragically injured, what do the police plan to do to capture the perpetrators?"

"Who do you think you are?," retorted Hallimut, get behind the tape.

"I'm Nathaniel Nardone, reporter for the Windsor Borealis, I need to ask you a couple of questions."

"No you don't. This is a crime scene. Stay *behind* the line, you got that?"

"Does this have anything to do with Constable Gregor being suspended by the chief earlier in the week?"

"With Constable Gregor? What the hell are you talking about? What would a drive by have to do with ... no more questions. I'm sure the Staff Sergeant will have a formal press release later on," he impatiently removed the reporter from the scene and turned back to his business.

Nardone put his recorder away and dug a digital camera out of his bag. He started snapping photos of the crime scene and flashes from his camera caught Hallimut's attention again.

"Seriously, man. What's your problem? You can't be taking pictures here! Go on, get lost!" Constable Hallimut raised his hands to block the lens of the camera from taking more pictures. His black leather gloves were flashing back and forth trying to intercept the shots. The reporter continued to snap pictures, anyways.

“WHAT?” was distinctly yelled behind the quarreling officer and reporter, interrupting them as they turned to see what was happening now.

“He said he was WHO?”

Lefevre was standing along side two women, employees of the bank, who had just stepped outside for a cigarette break when the drive by had happened. They were describing the events just prior to the attack, and how the man appeared to hand over a lot of money to another man before the Ford Explorer unloaded a four magazines of ammunition into the street corner.

Mickey called out, “Luc, hey Luc!”

Lefevre turned and looked at his partner, as he bounded across the glass-covered corner. His three-quarter length winter jacket bounding up and down as he ran.

“Luc, one of the guys on the other side of the bank is saying your name, man. He says he knows you!” said Gordon.

“WHAT?” said Lefevre. He was shocked and panicked that someone he might know was injured, and his heart began to pound.

Mickey raised his hands haltingly, “That’s not the whole of it, partner.” Mickey paused for a moment, unsure with what sensitivity he should say it, but ... “he says, he’s your father, Luc.”

“He said he was WHO?” Lefevre yelled, as he pushed Mickey aside and rushed around the side of the bank. Glass crackling beneath his feet and the tinny scent of blood in the air, he rushed over to the old man in a fetal position laying on the sidewalk.

The gun shut victim was laying motionless and unconscious. His right hand had been mostly blown off by a stray bullet, leaving behind just a bloody stump of phalanges. Another bullet had ripped into his stomach, and blood was pouring out of his mouth. His eyes were closed and deep weathered wrinkles twisted across his face.

There was no doubt about it, the man at Luc Lefevre’s feet was his father. Luc stood motionless and awestruck as the cold November air filled his nostrils. He hadn’t seen or talked to his father in eight years, and this was how they were to be reunited.

Flashes from a camera captured the moment, illuminating the crime scene like lightning streaking across the sky.

Chapter Four

Drive bys are incredibly uncommon in Windsor, but perhaps with the emerging gang presence that’s all going to change. Undoubtedly, the shoot up on Ottawa Street was instigated by a gang presence in the city, and a narcotic transaction. The intended target had been sent into a bank, according to witnesses. After withdrawing cash at the bank, the late 26-year-old Mark Fuhrman, walked down a block to a parked grey 2004 Ford Explorer, where he made a transaction with a black male, height and age unknown.

After the transaction, the vehicle pulled away, but returned shortly afterwards with the windows down, and at least three shooters fired approximately 23 bullets at Fuhrman, many of which missed. The gunfire caused a vehicle crossing the intersection to lurch forwards and rear-end the vehicle in front of it. There were three passengers in the vehicles, all of which were treated for minor scrapes and bruises.

The real damage was done by the stray bullets that buried themselves into a shopper, two employees leaving the bank, Marc Fuhrman, a man walking his dog, and Detective Luc Lefevre's estranged father.

Lefevre's father, Serge, now 63, was committed to the Windsor Regional Hospital, just a few blocks up the street from the attack. He had taken a bullet in the stomach, resulting in heavy internal bleeding, and he lost four fingers off of his right hand after a stray bullet blew most of it off in the lower phalanges. He wasn't in any pain because he was heavily medicated, but for him to make any useful statement towards the investigation, the doctors would have to alleviate his meds. There was little chance of survival. At his age, and in his decrepit health, his injuries were considered terminal.

Luc Lefevre sat with his father, looking at him during visiting hours at the hospital. The sterile beige room beeped with the monitoring equipment that provided his scheduled medications and measured his bodily functions. Nurses would come by to mark down his readings on a chart, sign their signature and make any necessary changes for his comfort. Serge lied still amidst it all, breathing regularly and saying nothing.

Commissioner Hal Doric appeared during visiting hours to show his respects.

"How're things looking in here, Luc?" he asked.

"They say it's a matter of time before he passes on – they're keeping him comfortable. His blood shows high levels of sustained crack-cocaine use for a prolonged period of time, so his old habits haven't dissipated." Lefevre paused, thinking back to the last time he'd seen his father eight years ago. Drug addicted and ashamed, his father had snuck out of town leaving an illegible note of chicken scratch as his last words to his only son.

"He's in no condition to comment on the drive-by shooting while he's on the meds he's on. They're keeping him alive, but they're also keeping him unconscious. If we're going to learn anything from him, we'll have to take him off his medication – we'll have to kill him."

As his next of kin, 'pulling the plug,' so to speak was Lefevre's call – and in a twisted way, the investigation that required his father's testimony was also under his jurisdiction. The coincidence between them both left him feeling abusive of his authority, and misguided as a son. But a son's last chance to speak to his father, however estranged, tempted him as well.

While it wasn't the only reason, Luc's last conversation with his father was largely responsible for his escape from Windsor. After Luc's mother was raped, familial relations fell apart in the Lefevre household. While Luc and Serge's life paths had the same inspiration and point of origin, they took their cues and started off on two very different paths. Serge started dabbling in drugs to deal with his emotional pain, and feelings of inadequacy, while Luc had dedicated himself whole-heartedly into becoming a police officer.

Starting off quietly, Serge's drug addiction grew slowly, but steadily. His wife Colleen was sexually unresponsive and emotionally vacant after the attack, leaving Serge

feeling heavily inadequate. Not only had he not been around to protect his wife, but she had lost faith in him.

The drug abuse became more prevalent, and in time, he quit hiding it. Paraphernalia lay strewn about, evidencing that he was progressing into stronger and stronger drugs and using them more and more often. He eventually lost his job, and started pawning off his belongings and then progressed to stealing things to exchange for drugs when he could not exchange them for cash.

By 1998, Luc was ‘celebrating’ a decade of service by being promoted to a drug trafficking beat and turning a blind eye to his father’s indiscretions became a shameful abuse of his authority. Rewarded with new responsibilities on a high profile case, he was already covering up details. When a drug trafficking case he was working produced a little black book with a list of meeting places and customers his father’s address and ‘street name’ of S.L. were on the list of frequent customers.

Later that evening, Luc approached his father.

“Dad, I want to help you get out of this funk,” he said with tears in his eyes.

“You think you know what it’s like to be me? What it was like to live with your mother after what that man did to her?”

“No, of cour.., Dad, you’ve got to get some help. I want to help you get better.”

“I’m *fine*. I don’t need anyone’s help and I can take care of myself.”

“I loved mom, too, dad. And I hate what that son of a bitch did to her, too. I miss her laugh, and I miss her smile.” He paused, tilted his eyes to the ceiling and waited till his throat could say the next words.

“I’m working on a drug trafficking case down at the station, now dad. We’re following a crack-cocaine dealer from Detroit who’s trafficking in Windsor... We found an address book that names names, dad.”

He stopped speaking, hoping that his father would understand what he was explaining to him. His father became more defiant and vehement than before.

“Are you *threatening me*? Do I need to remind you that I am *your father*! Who do you think you are coming in here and threatening ME? I am not a criminal on the streets that you can push around and extort.” Serge was shouting now, the veins in his 49-year-old forehead pulsing, standing out on his head like the Great Wall of China.

“I can’t hide your involvement with this case,” Luc plead. “I’m not the only one investigating what’s going on here, your name and address are going to come up! You don’t have a lot of choices, you’ve got to start correcting all of this, now,” he said.

“I don’t need you protecting me, I don’t want you protecting me, and I don’t want to see or hear from you again, ‘*son*.’ Get out of here! You and I are *through*,” he screamed, spitting venom out of his mouth.

Lefevre’s father had been gone for eight years, living up to his word. He had been through with his son. But why did he resurface here and now? And why were his last spoken words Luc’s name? His partner Mickey stood beside him, playing the foil while Lefevre came to terms with what he had to do.

“I have to find out what he was doing in town, Mickey. Jesus, I haven’t seen or heard from him in eight years. And my first chance to talk to him, he’s fatally wounded and unconscious,” he said in an exacerbad tone.

“What the hell was he doing here? What was he doing on that corner?” After a long pause, he said “Mickey, can you get the nurse in here?”

“Sure thing, won’t be a second.”

“I need to talk to him before he ... dies. What can we do to help him regain consciousness?”

“Detective, if we lower the medications he’ll wake up, but we won’t be able to do anything for the pain, and his body is in a heavy state of detoxification. He’ll be fighting the pains of withdrawal. These factors will cause his condition to deteriorate drastically. Do you understand this, detective?” asked the nurse.

“Yeah,” he said in an almost whisper. “I understand.”

Accordingly, the nurse turned down the morphine drip, and exited the pale room.

An hour later the withered and bandaged old man began to moan and toss back and forth. The pale-green walls echoed his audible discomfort, and Luc sat up from his seat. He stared at his father to see if he was awake, or if he was just tossing in his sleep.

“Are you there, dad?”

“Uuggghh, Luc,” he said weakly. “Luc, I had to find you.” Laying back with his eyes still shut, he lay motionless save for his mouth, which barely even twitched while he spoke.

“I was looking for you. You need to help her,” he said.

“Help who, dad? What are you talking about?”

“Drop dead,” he sighed. Pausing to gain strength, he more forcibly reiterated, “Drop dead, Luc.”

“Wh..what’s this all about! You come looking for me and ..”

“NO, drop dead.” He started panting, and coughing. Blood appeared in his mouth, darkening the colour of his lips as he struggled to maintain consciousness. Luc couldn’t take his eyes off his father’s mouth – the colour of death staining and blackening his teeth.

He struggled to lift his head off the pillow, “I came back to ... save her.” His strength faded, dropping his skull back onto the pillow.

“Save who, dad? You’ve never saved anyone in your life! Who did you think you were going to save?” said Luc, with escalating frustration.

“You’ve been a drugged-up zombie for 20 years, dad! You tore the family apart and wasted yourself to nothing, and you come back now? You come back to tell me to drop dead! You walked out on us! You had what it took to hold us together, and instead you just got fucked up until you were blind to anyone who cared about you.” He was yelling at him now, this was his chance to tell him what he thought – he never had the chance to show him who he’d become or what he’d done with himself after all these years, and he wasn’t going to let his father’s fading consciousness interrupt him now.

The hairs were standing up on the back of his neck. He was half-standing, fingers strung out and ready to grab onto anything.

“Son, son, so, s” Serge was fading, overwhelmed with exhaustion, blood freely flowing from his mouth now. He gurgled and choked for a moment, going rigid with the convulsion of swallowing blood.

“Son,” in a clear moment, “Luc. Listen, ... listen, listen, list..” he was fading in and out, too quickly to say anything clearly. “Ghosts of men ... suicide pacts .. empee, ... she’s alive, Luc.”

Luc stared, rigid and shocked. His eyes were full of tears that welled in his face, but did not fall down his cheeks. His father was dying right before his eyes, and the fear of being alone, the anger of being abandoned, and the pain of losing a loved one culminated in a petrified moment of inaction. He couldn’t move, just watch. Just listen.

His father’s last words echoing in the room, “Eemmpeee ... she’s alive Luc.”

Mickey Gordon heard the commotion from down the hall and jumped into the room, his face searching for an explanation. He looked at the suffering in Luc’s face and then swirled his head back towards the dying man on the hospital bed. With adrenaline rushing, he looked back at the motionless Luc sitting in his chair.

“Is everything alright here, Luc? What’s with all the racket?”

Luc didn’t move his head, just answered the question, “He died, Mickey. He told me to drop dead, mumbled some nonsense, and then died.”

“He’s not dead, Luc – the heart monitor shows he’s still working, right?” Mickey crossed the room and started referring from one instrument to the next, confirming that they were all still functioning. But soon enough the monitor began to take negative readings from the passing Lefevre, and started sounding the alarm to nurses, indicating his downturn in health.

The nurse rushed in and did what she could to stabilize his condition, but he was fading away. Serge’s heart was too weak to go on, and the blood that filled his mouth was increasing, oozing out and onto his neck.

“You’ll have to leave the room, sir,” said the nurse forcefully. She got up and started to usher Luc out the door, putting her hands on his frozen torso, and guiding him, then pushing him, out the door. “We’re going to do what we can to ease the pain, you’ll have to wait for us outside.” And then he and Mickey were outside the room.

Standing outside the hospital, Mickey Gordon was having a cigarette. There were a half dozen people, standing just outside the large glass doors. Some were visitors, bundled up in their winter jackets holding their smokes through fingerless gloves. Some smokers were patients still dressed in their green fatigues.

Luc Lefevre was irritated and pacing. What the hell was his father doing in town? Where had he been all this time? What the hell was he talking about? The cold air made his breath visible, and it trailed behind him as he paced back and forth.

“Can you make any sense of what he was saying?” asked Gordon.

“It all seemed like gibberish. After all the drugs and the meds, I don’t even know if he can put a sentence together. He tells me to ‘drop dead,’ then mutters something

about ‘ghosts, suicide pacts ... I ... I haven’t talked to him in eight years, Mic. This isn’t how this is supposed to be.”

“He came back for you, Luc,” said Mickey. “That’s what he was doing here. He was asking for you at the crime scene, man.”

“Then what is he trying to tell me? He comes back after all this time, what’s he trying to tell me? It’s not about ghosts and suicides. This is ridiculous.”

Pressure to find the answers went beyond the call of duty this time. A man that Luc had loved and a man that Luc had hated was playing games with his temperament. His dad taught him how to be a man, sent him to school, and loved him dearly – that was the man he loved and the man that he missed. But his father was also a drug-fiend who tore his family apart, lost his job to his addiction, and lost control of his life entirely. That was the man that Luc hated, and that was the man that he had to deal with now. His ears were near frozen from the dry November air, but he was impervious to his physical extremities. His mind battled back and forth, recalling the good moments of his father’s life, and the despicable habits and cowardice of a true loser. His mind was and mixing them together. His emotions were fluttering between compassionate forgiveness and unmoving resentment.

How could he still care so much for a man who had hurt him so much? How could he hate a man that had done so much for him? Indeed, his father’s life was dividable into two distinct men; a great man died the day the other was born, and that was when Serge’s wife, Colleen, was raped.

“Don’t worry, partner. We’re going to figure this thing out,” reassured Mickey. “We’re going to start with the vic from the drive by, then we’re going to get the rest of the info from your father, and we’re going to have lots to work with on this one.”

“Thanks pal,” said Lefevre. “I need somebody to settle me down – so much has happened all at once, ... but there’s something else that’s, hard to explain.”

Luc Lefevre paused. He’d never talked about this with anyone, and it was a sick twist that it would come up because of his father. He regrouped, trying to find the words to make the whole thing make sense.

“I think he ... I think he said my sister’s name.”

Mickey raised an eyebrow. He’d never heard of Luc having a sister. In fact, Lefevre hadn’t made any mention of any of his family the entire time they’d worked together. This was definitely the first he’d heard of a sister.

“I didn’t know you had a sister, man.”

“Yeah, well I haven’t talked to her in eight years, either,” said Lefevre. He laughed, in a distant kind of way. The kind of laugh that helps you deal with trauma rather than the kind when something’s funny. Where to start to explain his sister? “She ran away eight years ago ... after she had a big fight with my dad.”

Mickey looked at him, funny. “Eight years ago? What do you mean she ‘ran away’?” He studied Luc up and down to make some sense out of it all. “She’d be, like, 40-something, right?”

Chapter Five

Mickey looked at him, funny. “Eight years ago? What do you mean she ‘ran away’?” He studied Luc up and down to make some sense out of it all. “She’d be, like, 40-something, right? Isn’t that called ‘moving out,’” he scoffed.

Where to start? Lefevre took a seat on a bench just a few meters from the hospital entrance, and got himself comfortable. He patted the bench seat beside him and invited Mickey to join him. Mickey smiled a little, and sat down beside Lefevre. He lit up another cigarette, and just as he'd finished exhaling his first toke, he looked at Lefevre, encouraging him to go on.

"Gotta get comfortable for this one, eh?" remarked Gordon.

"I don't even know where to start, Mic. I guess you start at the beginning. My sister is 22 years younger than me. She ran away at only 15 years old. I haven't seen or heard from her in eight years, and she'd be 24 now. Her birthday was earlier in October."

Luc Lefevre's sister was the second most devastating thing to ever happen to his family – the first being the rape of his mother. Colleen Lefevre was attacked in her own home when she was raped. While Colleen was out shopping for some groceries on her day off from work a man broke into the Lefevre household and was looking for items he could steal. She would later be described as being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The details she recounted were blurry, and she never spoke of them to Luc. He had gleaned at the police report one day after he'd been instated as an officer five years later. The rapist had come in through a window, so there were no indicators that there was a prowler in the house when she came in through the garage entrance.

Carrying a load of groceries, she placed them on the kitchen floor. By the time she noticed that there was someone in the house, it was already too late. The attacker was upstairs, and he checked to see that she was alone through a bedroom window. He pulled the knife he used to cut through a window screen out and approached Colleen.

Armed, he jumped out from behind a corner and screamed at her. With a quick swing of his forearm into her face, he physically overpowered her. She fell to her knee, slipping in the melting snow from her boots on the kitchen floor. He grabbed her by the arm, and lifted her up with one hand. Flinging her across the room, he threatened her life, and showed he meant business with another strike to her face.

Pain streaked across Colleen's face, and she felt a concussing reverberation throughout her head. The shocking reality that was unfolding on top her slipped into an abstract and slowed-down observation. She almost felt as if she were viewing the whole thing from outside of her body. She could only watch, she could not move.

Crying and scared to death, she did as she was told. That's probably what brought her the most shame; that she did what she was told. She had always thought that she could have fought back more, that she could have stopped him – and she had felt that she was a failure. Shame burned at her whenever she thought back on the attack.

Three months after the rape Colleen had turned to alcohol to help calm her nerves. Her nerves were so bad that she was throwing up in the mornings. She was uncomfortable in her own skin, and every touch to her skin made her recoil in contempt. Each touch to her skin reminded her that she was raped, but more specifically, it would remind her that she let herself be raped.

Turns out the morning sickness wasn't related to the nervous tension that she lived with every day, but rather, it was because she was pregnant. She hadn't slept with her husband in months, she was just too sick to have physical relations again. And that meant that her child was the rapist's. Lovingly, her son Luc had moved back home and

was doing a terrific job caring for her. He was cooking meals, he was tidying around the house, he was doing all the chores, and he was working towards being a cop. He abandoned his future at the University of Waterloo and had found a direction for his life.

The burning shame that Colleen felt turned her cold and distant to her husband, Serge, who responded poorly. The two hardly would speak to one another anymore. He began sleeping in the guest room, trying to give her the space she needed. She didn't miss sleeping with him – but she did miss the partnership that they once shared. The first time she caught him doing drugs, she was shocked and she felt like he had been lying to her by concealing it. The second time she caught him, he shared the drugs with her. Weed was alright once in a while, but when he started to bring the crack back to their home, she felt an immediate rush. Was this the rush she had been waiting for? Was this the drug that was going to be able to help her escape her pain?

She knew that it was all bad for the baby, but who the fuck did this baby think it was? She didn't have the heart to abort it, but she wasn't going to do it any favours. She was disgusted that the baby belonged to someone outside of their family. She was disgusted that the rapist was going to be a part of her family. Every kick the child made in her womb shot the hot pangs of shame up her spine.

A perfect nine months later, October 10th, Colleen Lefevre lost her life in the maternity ward. She was only 44 years old, older than most mothers in the ward. The complications in the delivery set in shortly after her contractions began. The alcohol and drug abuse that she'd resorted to for the many months during her pregnancy escalated the problems that a smooth childbirth would like to see. Rather, her heart was unfit and her respiration was weak. She began bleeding uncontrollably, from the vagina, and her heart started pounding dangerously hard. Colleen died in a fit of panic and pain.

The obstetrician resorted to an emergency cesarean-section to pull the baby from the already-dead womb. The bloody baby girl was pulled out of a corpse, and what is generally a beautiful moment in the lives of any family, became a devastating tragedy for the Lefevres.

Serge and Luc wept that night, while there was no one to breastfeed the newborn. She cried openly, and the only responses were resentful and mourning glares. There was nothing that they could do for the latest addition to the family. Genealogically speaking, Serge had nothing to do with the infant, while Luc was the half-brother to the young child. What remained of the family unit that was called The Lefevres died in hospital that night.

Even though Luc was working as hard as he could to make it to the police force, his father was setting a different example. Serge named his 'daughter' Marie-Pierre, or MP. Drugs were a common site around the Lefevre household, and Marie-Pierre was exposed to illegal highs at a very young age. It was entirely common for Serge to be high when he was playing with the young girl. Each playful toss on his knee, he was unconsciously reminiscent that this infant killed Colleen.

Marie Pierre was a healthy young child, despite the impending complications that were promised by the 'Midwives of Canada' support group. She gasped for air when the doctors pulled her out, and she cried through the birthing process.

Serge honestly believed that MP was too young to understand the drug abuse that he had turned to, but her young exposure to that side of life ushered her into a world where substance abuse was a recreation of choice. MP grew up with strange men coming and going around her house as Serge had many dealers visiting. She was also regularly left alone at home, without any supervision, at a very young age because Serge would leave – eight to steal, to get more drugs, or to get some alcohol. He wouldn't think anything of it.

As MP grew older, she began going to school, and she was invited to birthday parties. It didn't take her long to catch on that her birthdays were significantly different from those that her friends were celebrating. She couldn't understand why all of her friends were receiving gifts and having parties – her birthday was a somber remembrance of a mother she never knew. On her birthdays her father was more drunk and more violent around the house than any other time of the year.

Luc would come to visit and make dinner for them regularly, and would bring cupcakes with icing sugar on them on her birthday. He always seemed distracted and distant on her birthday as well.

“One day she asked me what made her birthday so different,” said Luc to Mickey. “And I didn't know what to tell her. She knew that her mother was dead, but ... we'd never told her how she died.”

Mickey Gordon sat quietly, deeply absorbed with Lefevre's story.

“She was only nine years old when I told her. Even then she was able to connect the dots and figure why daddy behaved the way he did. She was able to understand the pain that we were going through when we remembered her birthday. She understood that we remembered Colleen's death when we thought of MP's birth. And she knew that we treated it very differently than her friend did.”

“While her friends all told her about the presents that they got, the cakes that they had, and the candles they blew out, she was aware of the stark difference in our household – and she directly correlated that with a deep feeling of not being loved. I mean, as far as I know, I guess.”

“She became very moody and started acting out in school, she started hurting children in the school yard. She was unresponsive to her teachers at school and easily found her way into the drugs that my dad had lying around his apartment all the time.”

“I had such a great childhood, Mic. I mean, my parents were there for me all the time and they took great care of me. I didn't have all these bad influences and I did great in school. But after mom died, well, dad resented MP so much. He didn't love her like a daughter. I can't imagine what it was like for her to be living in a household where you know you're not welcome.”

“Eventually, she was hanging out with a much older crowd while she was still a very young girl, and she quit coming home some nights. We were never all that close, I mean, I didn't know what to tell a 14-year-old! We were 22 years apart, and we hardly even had our parents in common. I ... I just didn't know what to do with her, how to talk to her.”

"I didn't know what crowds she was circulating in, and dad was so high all the time that he didn't care. I'd been on the force for a couple of years when she ran away and thought that I might hear from her again, but I hadn't. I remember when she took off. Dad said she'd been gone a few days when I showed up asking about her. Dad was so stoned he could barely put the sentence together to tell me that she'd run away."

"That *son of a bitch* didn't even *care* that she'd run away, Mic!"

Luc paused, and cleared the moisture that was building in his eyes with his left hand. He took a deep breath and readjusted his jacket to keep the cold out. He didn't stop staring straight ahead of him. He was avoiding making eye contact with Mickey. His nose began to run, partly because of the cold, but also because he was getting emotional thinking back on all of this.

"Dad was so relieved that she was gone. It was like he'd been trying to drive her out of the house all those years. He never told me what set her off, but all I could think of was such a young girl all on her own. I was also thinking how much better off she must have been not being anywhere near my father, though."

"... and a part of me was relieved that she was gone, as well. She was like ... the unfinished business of all the damage that had happened to us, and when she took off ... it was like closing that chapter. Dad didn't go looking for her, and ... well if I'd brought her back, where the hell would I put her?"

"And we let her go." Luc shrugged and exhaled. Those were the skeletons in his closet, and there was nothing else in there. He felt like a monster for letting her go, for having so much resentment for such a young girl. He turned to face Mickey, expecting to be judged like a monster.

Mickey just stared back at him, no words came to him. Mickey Gordon had known Luc since he transferred into the city in '99. As far as he knew, nobody on the force knew this story. He could understand why Luc wouldn't tell a lot of people.

Mickey thought about his own wife and kids. He couldn't imagine what any of the details that Luc had related would have been like – he couldn't imagine letting his little sister run away without searching for her. He also couldn't comprehend what sort of household that young child had grown up in with a drunken father, no mother, and an absence of love.

Detective Gordon placed his hand on Lefevre's shoulder. "I can't even start to express myself to you. I've never heard of anything like that in my life. Have you told anyone else?"

"No. I've never told this to anyone – frankly I've never had anyone to tell it to. But my father said her name. He said that she's still alive. He must have found her."

Serge's delirious ranting in the hospital included "Eemmpieee ... she's alive Luc." And that had to allude to Marie Pierre. Luc hadn't heard of her for ages. He hadn't heard of anyone named MP at all. But when his father came out of nowhere saying that she was alive, well, Luc paid attention.

"If your father had found her, then maybe that's what he's doing here. Maybe that's why he was looking for you!" said Gordon. "Let's get back upstairs and see if there's anything more we can get out of him."

Lefevre and Gordon headed back upstairs to the fifth floor to find the room locked. They went back to the front desk outside the elevators and tried to find out what was going on.

"I'm sorry, sir. Your father passed away while you were out." The nurse was speaking slowly and thoughtfully. She was experienced with delivering such news.

"We're making arrangements to transport him to the morgue, and we've locked him in his room until we get the gurney up here," said the nurse. "I'm very sorry for your loss, sir."

Luc had come to terms with his father's fate. He knew that he wasn't likely to return to consciousness after his last fit. He was too weak and so badly injured to ever have survived. Mickey his arm around Lefevre's shoulders to offer him some friendly support, but Luc seemed ok with the circumstances.

"It's alright, Mickey. I hardly knew that man in there – he's not the man that raised me or the man that married my mother. He's a person of interest in this investigation, and we're going to need his property that he checked in here with. Maybe we can find some clues to sort this whole drive by shooting out."

The nurse led the two detectives down the sterile hallway to his father's body. She unlocked the door, and she swung it open. The lights were out in the room, and only the light from window beamed in. The instruments that beeped and blinked only an hour earlier were silent and dark. The motionless body of his father was no longer struggling to breath or convulsing from his gun shot wounds. It was a peaceful change, and probably the first time his body had been at peace in the last 24 years.

"We're going to need his possessions," said Lefevre.

"Yup, they're right over here," responded the nurse, who ducked down to pick up a plastic bus bin by the intravenous medicine stand. "It's all in there. He didn't have much on him. I'll let you guys be."

As the nurse left the room, Mickey called out, "Thanks." His voice trailed off as she was already on her way to catch up on her other duties.

"So, what have we got here?" said Lefevre as he started digging through his father's possessions. "A plastic digital wristwatch, a filthy pair of track pants, a bloody ski jacket with a bullet hole in it, no undershirt," ...

"The surgeons probably threw it out after they cut it off him," said Mickey.

"Yeah. A pair of rundown sneakers, a blood encrusted toque," continued Luc. "In the coat, we've got ...a wallet, a lighter, one mitten – looks like it's been run over by a car – a crumpled up bus ticket. Aaannndd in the wallet we do have," said Luc as he set aside the jacket's contents, pulling out the wallet. "Jesus, look at this! He had a couple hundred dollars in here," said Lefevre.

"He was right outside a bank," added Mickey Gordon.

"No driver's license, no identification. Just a whole load of cash."

"Likely looking to pick up, eh?"

"I would think so. Buuut there's no transaction receipt."

Luc took the bills out of the wallet and leafed through them to count how much was there. The bills were worn out and crumpled.

"I don't know if these came from the bank. Banks usually give you new cash – this stuff is ... like *this* one is even taped together. He didn't get this from the bank. I would doubt he even *had* a bank account. You'd need a fixed address for that.

Amidst the twenties in there was a scrap of paper. Turned out it was a torn off piece of a cigarette written in blue pen:

“MP – November 16, 11 p.m. at the Mill.”

“Looks like he was supposed to be meeting my sister this Friday,” said Luc.

“Or maybe he was trying to get you to meet her then. He was looking to tell you something,” suggested Mickey. “If she’s in town, we could put out an APB with her description, could turn up something. Or put something on the news announcing her as a person of interest.”

“She was just a kid when she left, Mic. I haven’t the slightest idea what she looks like now,” said Luc disparagingly. “But it can’t hurt. If she’s in trouble, she could be looking for us, too. Perhaps she’ll see it and come forwards?”

“Yeah. See, things aren’t so bad,” smiled Mickey.

Chapter Six

Before Luc and Mickey left the hospital, the nurse reassured them that she would get his father’s body taken to the morgue and sent to a funeral home of his choice. When he was uncertain what he wanted to do, she had some recommendations, which he took kindly. He would just have to call the funeral home and all the complications surrounding his father’s burial would be taken care of.

With the nurse’s recommendations in mind, the two headed back to the station with a lead in the case, too.

Mickey recommended that they go see a police informant they called ‘Dougie.’ Dougie was a known drug offender that the police would turn to for information on the streets. Sometimes he’d help out, and other times he wouldn’t. Dougie’d been in and out of jail frequently enough. Often times they made bargains with him to keep him out of the pen if he ‘fessed up to B&Es so they could clear their books. They weren’t looking to charge him, they just had so many reported ‘break and enters’ that removing them from their books so they’d have less to worry about was a service done.

They called him ‘Dougie’ because he was scrawny, dark-haired and missing his front teeth, just like former Toronto Maple Leafs captain Doug Gilmour. The cops all thought it was hilarious – they weren’t sure if Dougie even knew what they were talking about.

Luc could remember the first time he was on the beat and he went to meet Dougie. He was trying to understand crack and its street value. When he asked him how long an ounce would last him, he laughed, saying ‘You really don’t know shit about this, do you?’ Luc didn’t.

“Let me tell you, man. Crack isn’t like a case of beer, where it’ll last you a week. Ha, na, man. If you sell me a hit, I’ll do a hit. If you sell me three, I’ll do three hits in a row. And if you sell me a pound, I’ll stay up for four days straight getting high.”

“But ... we, like, lock you up for three weeks at a time. Don’t you cut yourself loose of the addiction while you’re in there? What makes you come back?” asked Luc.

“Nah, it’s not a physical addiction, it’s a mental one. I’m fine while I’m in jail ‘cause I know I can’t get any – so I don’t worry about it. But as soon as you let me out, as

soon as I put one foot back out onto the street, I know that I can get it again. And I've got to do everything I can to get some," said Dougie.

These days the cops would stroll into his place and he wouldn't even flinch. It was routine for officers to visit. Sometimes Dougie was who they were looking for, and sometimes he wasn't. Sometimes he would know who the cops were looking for. Dougie got into their good books years earlier when they were on a case searching for a burglar.

Dougie had broken into a couple's place and lifted a military decoration that had been passed down through their family for four generations. It turned out to be a Congressional Medal of Honor, actually handed out in 1862 by Abraham Lincoln, himself. It was honoured for services performed during the American Civil War. The medal had tremendously high sentimental value to the family, but was shiny enough to catch a crack-addict's eye. As the police were searching for suspects, they eventually came across a Dougie.

While they were questioning him, they decided to give him a break if he could recover the war medal. It seemed reasonable to him. He hadn't been able to pawn the medal off yet, and didn't even know what he was carrying around with him. Bumping multiple charges of drug possession, drug paraphernalia and breaking and entering they cut him a break in order to recover the stolen medal. He'd been cooperating with the cops ever since. He was almost happy to see them most evenings, giving him a sense of value.

The two officers passed by his house that evening, but he wasn't around. The scum he was living with didn't know where he was or when he'd be back. They left a message with him saying they'd be back first thing in the morning.

Detectives Luc Lefevre and Mickey Gordon arrived at Dougie's address out in the 400-block of Tuscarora at 6 a.m. the next morning. His shanty house had a broken-down front porch and stained red brick. The roof was in severe disrepair and the yard hadn't been raked of its yellow leaves. The streets were lined with older models of cars, as there were no drive ways on any of the properties. Rather, there was a dirt alley that ran behind the properties, some of which had parking spaces. It happened all too often that, in this neighbourhood, suspects would run off down the unlit allies to escape.

They parked their car on the street, not bothering to pull over to the side. It was still dark this November 14th, and it was very cold now, as they were heading into the mid-November weather.

Stepping heavily up the ragged front porch steps, they knocked on the door, calling out Dougie's name. Luc was carrying a paper bag with some donuts in it.

"Come on Dougie. This is the police. Open up the door," said Gordon routinely.

When there was no answer, Luc reached for the door and let himself in. The door wasn't locked.

"Dougie, come on out. Time to wake up," called out Gordon.

They walked into the front of the house and began poking their heads in and out of each of the rooms, continuing to call out for their informant. The house was full of filth, but not as bad as things can be across the river in Detroit. There was half-eaten food all over the kitchen, there were clothes strewn about some of the rooms, but most

noticeably was the absence of a broom. Dirt, leaves, food and just general filth was all over the floor.

“Come ON Dougie!” Gordon called again.

The sound of rustling drew their attention to the back of the house, and they headed off in that direction. Looking into the back room, they saw Dougie still wearing all of his clothes. He might have been wearing them because he was too high to undress before he fell to sleep, or it may have been that he was too cold to undress. For this time of year, their heat was turned off, probably because they hadn’t paid their gas bill.

“Let’s go Dougie, rise and shine,” said Gordon, smiling.

Dougie rolled back and forth and swore. His gravelly voice protested.

“What do you want?” he rasped.

“We need some help, Dougie. Hey, we brought you a coffee and donuts,” said Gordon, luring him awake. “Come on, let’s have a little talk, pal.”

Dougie raised his head, wiped his face with his hand, and crawled to his feet.

“So,” said Dougie, “what can I do for you two gentlemen?”

“We’re running an investigation on that drive by the other day. You know anything about that?” asked Lefevre.

Taking a bite of a warm donut, he said, “No. I don’t know nothing about that, man. Honest to truth.”

“Really? It was two days ago, bunch’a guys in a Ford Explorer shot a couple Glocks after making a deal. They blew the guy away – name was Marc Fuhrman.”

“Ford Explorer, eh? Was it new and shiny? Sounds like Yankees. I’d go check with them,” said Dougie.

“Has there been a lot of traffic coming in from the States lately?” asked Lefevre.

“Nothing more than usual, officer. You got any more of those donuts?”

Handing Dougie the whole bag, Lefevre repeated, “So you don’t know anything about the drive-by the other day?”

“Cross my heart and hope to die, officer.”

“One of the by-standers mentioned a few things before he passed away. We were wondering if you knew anything about it,” asked Lefevre. “You know anything about ghosts of men or suicide packs?”

Dougie stopped to think for a moment, his eyes darting back and forth. He didn’t quit chewing his donuts, though, which were falling out of his mouth through the huge gap between his teeth. He started to giggle, in a raspy and almost childish sort of way.

“Do you mean ‘Ghosts of *Man*?’” he snickered? “You cops never know what you’re talking about. The Ghosts of Man are just a gang in Detroit. I seen ‘em around sometimes. They’ve got some nice wheels when they’re cruisin’ around.”

“Yeah? You think they’d come over here and shoot the place up?”

“Sure, if they’ve got reason enough. They bring over some scary stuff, man,” said Dougie.

“Scary stuff? What do you mean by that?” asked Gordon.

“They’re sellin’ suicide packs, man,” he answered. “Like, suicide packs. You never heard of ‘em. Also called ‘drop dead!’ It’s crack, but laced with some shit. It’s crazy stuff. It’s killing people all over the place, if they’re not careful.”

“Drop dead? Suicide packs. Jesus, *that’s* what he was talking about,” said Lefevre.” His father’s mad rantings were finally making some sense. “So what is it that’s being added to the crack, Dougie? We’ve gotta know.”

“I don’t know what it is, man. I swear to you,” said Dougie.

“Come on man, we’re treating you real good here, pal,” coerced Gordon.

“Hey, I just don’ know officers. I’d tell you for sure,” said Dougie.

“Alright. Thanks for your time. You stay out of trouble, you got that?”

“Yes. Thank you, officers. Don’t be strangers,” smiled Dougie.

The sun was coming up in the cold November sky as they slid back into their squad car on their way back to the police station. With a smile, Mickey couldn’t help but think to himself how smoothly the investigation was going. Usually they don’t make it anywhere, but their witnesses and informants had been leading them in the right direction. When they got back to the station, he and Lefevre were going to call up the Detroit Police Department and see if there was any information they could share, and the possibilities of getting a cooperative investigation was very probable. Extra manpower and the sharing of information was sure to put a dent into the field work.

They parked the car in the underground garage at the station, and headed up the elevator to the second floor where their offices were. Lefevre and Gordon split their ways and returned to their respective desks.

When Lefevre entered his office, he unlocked the door, and stepped into the dark room, waiting until he reached his desk lamp to turn it on, rather than using the switch at the door. He simply preferred the incandescent bulb and the glow it provided over the full illumination of the overhead fluorescents. The dimmer glow helped him to think, helped him to use his imagination. The bright lights distracted the use of his mind’s eye.

But his room wasn’t all that dark when he entered, as the red light on his phone was blinking, indicating that he had a message. He put his fresh coffee down on his desk and took a seat in his wooden chair. Lifting the receiver to his ear and typing in his code, he heard Chief Doric asking him to see him in his office, as soon as possible.

Erasing the message and sitting back into his seat, he said, “Sorry Chief. This is gonna have to wait till after my coffee.”

‘Ottawa Drive By’ body count rises

Questioning leads to detective's family

Nov 14, 2007

Nathanial Nardone

WINDSOR BOREALIS REPORTER

The death of Serge Lefevre, 63, last night has now raised the death toll to two after the Ottawa Ave. drive by shootings from last Nov. 12, which has left seven others injured. Serge Lefevre is the estranged father of Detective Luc Lefevre, one of the officers currently working on the case. He died after Det. Lefevre had finished questioning him at the Windsor Regional Hospital yesterday.

Police are saying that the ‘Ghosts of Man,’ a Detroit-based gang, is responsible for the drive by attack. The Ghosts of Man are believed to be introducing a drug being called ‘drop dead,’ and ‘suicide packs,’ into circulation in southern Ontario. The gang has been suspected of lacing their crack-cocaine and heroin with fentanyl, a drug that has a potency 80 times that of morphine. Distributed in patches, the drug can be either cut up and eaten, or removed from the patch and smoked.

The illicit lacing of the drug is leading to outbreaks of overdose deaths in cities like Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago.

26-year-old Marc Fuhrman, the intended target of the drive by shooting, was pronounced dead at the scene. Police are searching for any information on the three assailants who were driving a grey 2004 Ford Explorer with Michigan plates. The suspects are described as black males, between the ages of 18 and 30.

Police are currently searching for Lefevre’s younger sister, Marie-Pierre Lefevre, 24, who is believed to be in the city. She is wanted for questioning.

“Lefevre!” yelled Chief Hal Doric, “What the *fuck* is this!”

Red in the face, the chief was fuming. The *Windsor Borealis* had a new report this morning naming Detective Lefevre, his father and sister.

“Why are you sharing this information with the press, Lefevre?” yelled Doric.

Luc hadn’t read the article yet, but glancing at the brief report, it appeared that someone had learned all about what was going on. He took a moment to read the article, hoping that Chief Doric would calm down. It took only less than a minute to finish the snippet, unfortunately not long enough for the chief to defuse.

“Why is the press being briefed on your progress instead of me? You’d better have a good answer, detective.”

“I ... I have no idea how he got this information. I never talked to any reporter, chief. You *know* I don’t even like reporters – it doesn’t make any sense - where did he get this stuff,” said Lefevre.

“What’s all this about the ‘Ghosts of Man,’ and fentanyl, then? Is there any truth to any of this?”

“Well,” he cleared his throat before he answered, “to be honest, Mickey and I had just gone over to question an informant – we didn’t even know about the Ghosts of Man till this very morning. We hadn’t even identified the drug that was being cut into crack. In fact, we hadn’t recovered any drugs at all. I’m telling you chief, I don’t know where this guy, who is it? Nardone? I don’t know where he got his information for this thing...”

“What about this shit about your father and your sister?”

Luc exhaled, finding himself more and more frustrated with how quickly the case had fallen out of his hands. Everything was under control, until some reporter showed

him up and unveiled all the things he didn't want anyone to know about and all the stuff he hadn't figured out yet, too.

"It's all true, chief. I haven't seen my father in eight years, and then at the drive-by shootings the other day, he was one of the victims. Mickey and I interrogated him, but he passed away before we could make any sense out of what he was telling us. Turns out he was in town trying to find my sister."

"Luc, you know I can't leave you on a case that you're personally involved in. It's a severe conflict of interest that I definitely cannot overlook after it's been published all over the goddamned city!"

"Wh, what are you getting at? Are you saying I'm off the case?"

"Yeah, you're off the case! Not only am I bound by my duties as chief to not let rogue cops go chasing after personal vendettas, but I'm, in fact, motivated to kick you off because you were too goddamned stupid to keep this shit out of the paper!"

Luc stood speechless in front of the chief's desk. He'd never been chastised like this before. He'd never been so humiliated.

"I'm going to be moving Officer Hallimut up to fill in for you on this case, and you will be reassigned to another file until. You are to have no further involvement, is that clear?"

"Yes sir," said a dejected Lefevre.

In a softer tone, coming to Luc as a friend and not the chief, Doric said, "Take the rest of the day off, Luc. Have the day off and take care of the arrangements for your father's funeral. Find some closure in this, and know that we've still got two great cops working the case. We'll sort this thing out."

Chapter Seven

Defeated, Lefevre returned to his office, closed the door, and climbed into his seat. With his elbows on his desk, he buried his face in his hands to figure out what the hell had happened. How had that reporter figured everything out? How was he a step ahead of them? What was he going to do about his sister? He still had the note indicating that she'd be at the Mill on the 16th.

Still two days away, there must be some way that he can find her before that. Hopefully the All Points Bulletin that was broadcast the night before would turn something up. Hopefully she still had black hair, although what length it could be was a mystery. She might have tattoos and earrings, or nose rings or god knows what else. She was short and thin at 15, but that could all change. She might not even be going by the name of MP or Lefevre. Even with the APB, it's still a crapshoot.

Luc picked up his phone and dialed the number to the funeral home to see how the arrangements were being made. A woman answered the phone – she was wondering at what times he would like there to be a viewing and when the burial was. Luc told her that he didn't want a service, and that there was no need for a viewing.

She had already placed an obituary in the paper for him, and he was thankful. He looked it up in the paper, and it was neatly done, indicating the time and place of the burial. Arrangements had been made to bury Serge Lefevre first thing in the morning at the Country Meadows Cemetery in Amherstburg.

With that being the only real order of business for him after being relieved of his duties for the day, he threw on his overcoat and was leaving the station when he bumped into Mickey Gordon.

“Luc, I just heard that you were bumped from the case. What’s going on, man?”

“Yeah, did you see the article in the paper today?” asked Lefevre.

“What was that all about?” said Mickey wide-eyed. “How did that reporter know all that stuff?”

“Well, pal, we shoulda come back to the station and got our shit done last night instead of waiting ‘til this morning, I guess. But I’m as baffled as you are, I haven’t any idea how he got his hands on all of that information. It’s like espionage, ya know what I mean?”

“You shouldn’t have been pulled from the case, though. That’s not right,” said Mickey.

“No, it’s probably the right decision. The chief spelled it out for me. I’ve got to deal with these family issues, and we don’t need these things spilling into the investigation. It wouldn’t have been *my* choice, but that doesn’t mean that it’s the *wrong* choice, eh?”

“I’m going to keep you up to date, with your sister, with the case, with everything, ok man? You’re not going to be out of the loop, I promise,” said Mickey.

“Thanks, I appreciate that. I’ll catch up with you later.”

Lefevre changed back into his civilian clothes and left his gear in his locker at the station. If he was going to take the day off, he wasn’t going to tote his gun and badge around with him. He almost smiled to himself thinking that he was getting off so early that it wasn’t even noon yet. He’d have a good chance to unwind and decompress after everything that had happened. It was certainly a busier couple of days than the usual.

From the change room to the elevator, he swung down into the parking garage and found his ol’ Dodge Stratus. He pulled out from the underground parking garage and out into the midday streets of Windsor. Curling around the one-way streets and north towards Riverside he relaxed a little, and had the radio on.

Flipping from sports talk, to oldies to right-winged super anchors, he opted to ride in silence. The Detroit River looked cold and rough, but it still reflected the noon-day sun brightly, and reminded him of the beauty that lay only a few blocks away from him every day. He regularly forgot how enchanting the heavy and steady flow of the Detroit River could be, or how deadly it could be.

Cruising westbound down Riverside, he was heading to his LaSalle home, in a quiet neighbourhood. The traffic surrounding him thinned out as he passed underneath the Ambassador Bridge, and twisted his way through Olde Sandwiche Towne. There was a coffee shop just up the road, and he pulled over to pick up some lunch. He wasn’t in any hurry, so he decided to eat in.

While his dark green Dodge Stratus was parked in the restaurant side lot, a grey 2004 Ford Explorer slowly pulled up along side it and parked. A black man jumped out of the backseat with an aluminum baseball bat and took a swing at Lefevre’s passenger-

side rearview mirror. The vandal was wearing a red plaid jacket, similar to what you'd see a typical lumberjack wear, along with a black toque and a pair of loose jeans.

With a loud crack, the rearview mirror broke free from the side of the car and bounced off the ground. Small amounts of glass spread immediately below the car. The noise and motions of the attack caught the attention of onlookers, both outside the restaurant, and in.

Lefevre was finishing some chicken noodle soup, when a middle-aged woman said, "That man's smashing someone's car!"

The restaurant all turned and looked. Customers rose out of their seats and approached the window to see first, if it was their car, and afterwards, to see what would happen next.

The man with the bat took a second swing directly into Lefevre's side-panel, denting the door. A third swing came down on the backend near his trunk, but didn't cause as much damage.

Lefevre's instincts kicked in and he stormed outside and into the parking lot, when he realized he was unarmed and without identification. Shit. The men saw him come bursting into the parking lot, and recognized him.

"You're that cop, right?" said the man with the bat. "De-tec-tive Lefevre, right?" He broke the syllables down into an inner-city rhythm, showing disrespect to the title of his office and more so, to indicate that he was in control of the conversation.

He walked out from behind Lefevre's damaged car, and stepped out into sight to face him directly. He was threateningly smacking the ball of the bat into the palm of his other hand. He approached him further.

"You're the cop that has the funeral out at the Country Meadows Cemetery, tomorrow, right? The one that was listed in the paper?"

Luc remained silent, he didn't like where this was going.

"That old man been bumblin' around wit' our bizness for too long, man. And he was in da wrong place at da wrong time. But I'll tell you what, Luc," his staccato inflection on Luc's name carried the ebonic intonation of a seasoned gangster. "I'll tell you about how to *avoid* being at the wrong place at the wrong time – a little tip I'm going to give to you 'cause I'm a nice guy."

"What do you want?" he asked, firmly.

"I'd better not see you, or any of the other cops out there at that funeral tomorrow. I got a girl that wants to be there, and ain't nothing is going to disrupt that, you understand that?"

"What girl? Who are you talking about?"

"Oh ..." the man smiled, "I think you know exactly what I'm talking 'bout."

MP, this thug knows where she is. The mutherfucker knows where she is!

"Yeah, man! That's right. You do know what I'm talking about, don't you," he continued. And then he winked at him, coolly and confidently.

"She's gonna be there, you got that? And that mean's *I'm* gonna be there. And if *I'm* gonna be there, that means *they're* gonna be there."

He motioned his head over towards the Explorer, and there were four other men staring out the windows into Lefevre's eyes. They were fearless and aggressive – one of them flashed a gun.

“And I don’t think you’re going to want to bump into them tomorrow morning, Luc. It’d probably put a damper on your day, man. Shit, it might put a damper on your girl’s day, too,” he shrugged. “So you STAY CLEAR and don’t FUCKING come NEAR, you got that! An’ if you come lookin’ for us wit’ somet’ing to prove, I’d recommend against that, too. We don’t need any heroes showin’ up an’ making problems, man.” He paused to laugh at what he was about to say, “Tomorrow we’re honoring the life of a great man.” His voice was dripping with sarcasm. “Right? Best to let it be, Luc.”

He swung the bat around and laid it over his shoulder, and stood up straight.

“I’m glad we have an understandin’ detective. I’ll be seein’ you around.”

And with that the man turned his back on Lefevre and strolled leisurely back to his place in the Explorer. Shutting his door gently, the vehicle pulled out and cruised slowly by Lefevre who remained stoically motionless in the centre of the parking lot. The group stared out at him from their truck, while Lefevre stared right back, and they circles around him and out onto Sandwiche Ave., squealing their tires aggressively as they headed westbound and out of sight.

Lefevre stood motionless for a long while in that parking lot, feeling very alone and very troubled. The onlookers remained inside the restaurant, unsure of what to do next, while some of the employees at the restaurant had phoned the police. No one there was aware that Luc was a detective.

When the police arrived, he told them what had happened, but omitted the details about the funeral – he didn’t want to put his sister in any danger. While it took the police three and a half minutes to arrive on the scene, it took them an hour and a half to take a statement and report the damages done to his car.

Those bastards knew about the funeral from the obituary, they knew about his relationship to his father because of that article that came out this morning, and now they knew that he was related to MP, who they apparently were taking to the funeral.

This was all because of that goddamned reporter.

Chapter Eight

TWO DAYS AGO – Reporter Nat Nardone was stationed at the *Windsor Borealis* waiting for an assignment. It was a slow news day and he was still resting on his laurels after having received an excellent public response from his article written on the Constable Gregor case. He had a great ear for news, and when he caught breathe of the OPP setting up a sting on a constable who was known for extorting speeders that he’d pulled over, his eyeballs rolled backwards like slot machines, complete with a ‘ca-ching.’

He had included quite a bit in the article about Gregor targeting Asian women when he was pulling over speeders, and how there might be racial undertones to the investigation, but his editor, wisely, omitted that information. Accusing any part of the police force was simply asking to be sued, and his editor thought better of it.

That was Nardone’s style – tell it like is, but that didn’t lend itself to balanced journalism. His editors were constantly having to reprimand him for being far too leading and accusing in his work – even for the *Windsor Borealis*. He would shrug the stern tongue lashing off. Checking for libel and slander was an *editor’s* just, not his.

But his editors couldn’t stay mad at him for long, because despite the difficulties they had with his over-disclosure on sensitive issues, he still dug up major dirt on

important city officials and publicly funded branches of the government, so he kept his job. There was no denying that Nardone was very good at getting the dirt.

The police scanner was a great source of news on a slow day, and lucky enough he was listening at a little after 3 p.m. on November 12.

The radio said, "This is officer Lefevre. Multiple shots fired west of Central, we're on our way."

"Whoa! Here we go," smiled Nardone. He threw on his long overcoat, tossed his recorder into his pocket, and packed the digital camera into his shoulder bag and headed for the exit. His editor saw him taking off, and protested.

"There's something big's going on! I've gotta' roll."

"What the hell are you .." his editor's voice tapered off as Nardone spun around a corner and hit the stairs. Jumping down the two flights three steps at a time, the reporter race across Ferry Street and into car with Windsor Borealis decals all over it. The otherwise white vehicle jolted into motion, heading out towards Central Ave.

As soon as Nardone got his car rolling, as if on cue, the dispatcher updated the situation. "Attention all units, all units please respond. There has been a drive by shooting on the corner of Ottawa and Lincoln. Multiple guns fired. Police, fire and ambulance requested. Suspects were last seen heading west bond on Ottawa in a grey 2004 Ford Explorer. Four suspects all described as young black males, consider them armed and very dangerous."

Whoa!

Nardone readjusted the front of his car to make a right hand turn and get headed in the direction of Ottawa Ave. A *drive by shooting*? When did Windsor get drive bys? The mid-day traffic slowed him a little, but he managed to arrive on scene very shortly after the authorities had begun to put up police tape.

The first thing he noticed was how much glass there was everywhere. There was glass far beyond the simple area that was being taped off. A car accident on another side of the intersection had two vehicles stopped, with shattered bits of taillight and fiberglass on the streets. A storefront had its windows shot out in such an explosive way that it absolutely covered the sidewalk. It crackled under the feet of all the officers who were on site trying to preserve the crime scene.

Nardone had learned at an early age that you shoot first and ask questions later, so he grabbed the camera out of his bag and started flashing away. He had shot after shot of the initial chaos that he arrived upon. There was blood seeping across the sidewalks into the cobblestone cross-walks that lined up and down Ottawa Ave. He took an excellent picture of a dog that had been separated from its owner, as it watched from across the street with big droopy eyes. The expression on the terrier's shaggy little face vividly caught the 'big picture' of the surrounding circumstances.

All around people were gathering around, talking about what they saw, or asking what had happened. Some people were being immediately attended to by paramedics, while others waited on the ground for medical attention. There must have been a dozen people involved in the whole thing, and it takes just too long for that many ambulances to arrive.

Shortly, a fire truck parked itself at one end of the street to block off traffic, lending support to the team. A job like this was tremendously uncommon, and all the

Emergency Response Teams were on scene to pitch it. In a sense, it demonstrated a excellent cooperative effort of the municipality. That was a good angle for his article.

After a few pictures, he lifted the police tape and got started heading towards one of the officers to get an initial response. Rarely does a reporter get to a crime scene this fresh, and getting immediate emotional reaction can be priceless.

As soon as he started walking into the taped-off area an officer began to protest and came towards him.

“What the hell are you doing? Get behind the line!” said the officer.

Nardone stopped and looked up at the taller man. Time to get to work. He pulled the tape recorder out of his jacket pocket and began asking questions.

“Officer, can you describe what’s going on here? I know people have been tragically injured, what do the police plan to do to capture the perpetrators?”

“Who do you think you are?,” retorted the cop, “get behind the tape.”

“I’m Nathaniel Nardone, reporter for the Windsor Borealis, I need to ask you a couple of questions.”

“No you don’t. This is a crime scene. Stay *behind* the line, you got that?”

“Does this have anything to do with Constable Gregor being suspended by the chief earlier in the week?”

“With Constable Gregor? What the hell are you talking about? What would a drive by have to do with ... no more questions. I’m sure the Staff Sergeant will have a formal press release later on,” he impatiently removed the reporter from the scene and turned back to his business.

Back behind the police tape, he pulled the digital camera out once again. The sun was hanging late in the sky, casting long shadows across the ground. He had to switch the flash back on to catch any details of the scene. The flashes caught the officers eye, and he turned back around to continue to scold Nardone.

“Seriously, man. What’s your problem? You can’t be taking pictures here! Go on, get lost!”

Then that bastard cop started trying to block the shots with his hands. When Nardone got back to the office, he had a whole sequence of images filled with black leather gloves blurred all over the place – just great.

“WHAT?” was distinctly yelled behind the interfering officer, catching his attention. When the officer turned to see what was going on, Nardone twisted around him to get a better look.

The same voice yelled again, more exacerbated than before, “He said he was WHO?”

Nardone sensed that this story was going to take on a whole new direction, and he smiled.

Rule one of journalism, nothing is off the record. If a journalist decides to burn some bridges and report on something that’s going to damage a whole lot of people, he’s fully entitled to do so. A journalist can protect his sources, and leave them anonymous, but where’s the fun in that?

Eavesdropping becomes a tool of the trade, and excellent for picking up dirt and developing hunches. It takes a bastardly spirit, strong gut, and a social imperfection that leads a journalist to take a personal tidbit and develop it into the crux of an article. While columnists have much more liberty and freedom, journalists are required to report the facts and just the facts, and developing overheard rumours into a municipal scandal is a gift not all possess.

When Nardone discovered that the detective working the case was in fact related to one of the men that was shot down by a bunch of drive-by hooligans, he was inspired to dig. He had this hunch that the detective had personal links to the mob, and that the hit was personal. He dreamed that the detective himself might have ordered a hit, orchestrating the whole scene to make it look like an accident, or a hit gone wrong. Perhaps it was the conspiracy buff in him, but his imagination began to develop complicated tales of deceit and police corruption – and he was eager to tell it like it was.

He laid low at the crime scene, and watched when the paramedics carried the injured father away. Nardone followed the ambulance back to the hospital, got the room that the father was recovering in, and dug as much info as he could. The father had gone into surgery and Nardone had not access to anything further, so he decided to go back to the office, punch out his report on the drive by shootings, and then return the next day to see what he could find out about the Detective/Father relationship.

Nathaniel Nardone was lurking around the hospital when he spied to police officers approaching the injured Serge Lefevre's recovery room. No, Nardone wasn't admitted to visiting, but then again, he wasn't visiting – he was just nearby, standing around the hallway, going for a stroll – in any case, he wasn't technically there.

When he noticed the two police officers entering into the room, he took action. Pulling out his notepad and turning on his recorder, he stood outside the recovery room, overhearing the entire conversation between the two detectives and the patient. Taking notes, he jotted down 'Drop Dead,' 'Suicide Pacts,' 'Ghosts of Man,' and the vehement hatred between the father and son.

Unfortunately for Nardone, leaning against a wall jotting down notes outside of a recovery room looked quite suspicious, and when the son raised his voice and started yelling at his old man, the other detective came running down the hall to see what the commotion was all about. Nardone quickly realized how suspicious he indeed looked, and turned his back to the approaching detective in alarm. He scuttled down the hospital hallway, hoping he hadn't been noticed. It was a rare blessing that he wasn't. So much for detectives, he thought.

But the close call gave him reason to be more cautious, and he took a station further down the hallway to observe more carefully. Shortly afterwards the nurse pushed the two detectives out of the recovery room as the patient's life was taking a severe downward spiral. Nardone was pleased with himself that he'd remained discreetly concealed amongst the crowd in the ward's wing.

The detectives were on their way out, and Nardone waited to take the second elevator down, hoping that he could catch up with the two once they hit the ground floor. He shoved his notepad in his pocket and clicked off his recorder and stood impatiently waiting for the next elevator to arrive. Using his shirtsleeve, he wiped the lenses of his

glasses. With a ding, the deep and wide carriage of the elevator, suited for transporting patients on gurneys, opened and took him to the front lobby.

He scanned the immediate surroundings and couldn't initially locate the police officers, but when he stepped outside to see if they'd driven off, he found the two of them seated at a bench. One was having a cigarette, and the other was lost in thought.

Listening as closely as possible, he noticed they were still talking about the case, trying to decipher the cryptic information that the passing father was able to relate. It turned out that one of the words was the name of the detective's sister – what a twisted story this was all turning out to be.

He caught the names of the officers, Luc and Mickey, and a quick reference at the office would be able to give a background check on the both of them. But the story that 'Luc' was telling to 'Mickey' dispelled any conspiracies or shady dealings with organized crime. In fact, the story itself was heartbreaking, really. Nardone almost felt ashamed of himself for eavesdropping on such a very personal conversation between two partners.

After a while, Nardone felt so upset with himself that he decided to sneak back into the hospital to check on the father. Back upstairs he found the father dead in his hospital bed. Staring at the dead man lying in his bed, he instinctively reached for his camera. With his left hand, he pulled it out of his bag and turned it on, held it in front of him and paused – this wasn't something the public needed to know. The sight of the dead man's old and bloody body began to put all his intentions into perspective and ...

"What are you doing here, sir!" said a stern female voice.

"Wh., what?"

A nurse grabbed him by the arm and instructed him out of the room.

"I .. I'm sorry. I've got the wrong room. I'll be on my way," said Nardone.

As he walked away, the nurse pulled a set of keys out of her smock and locked the door, giving him an evil eye as he headed towards the elevators once again. He knew he deserved it. He pressed the button and waited for the lift. When the doors opened, he felt a moment of panic and the two detectives were waiting to step out of the elevator, almost bumping directly into him.

They looked at him directly in the eye, and then they passed him by, and headed towards the locked room. Nardone's adrenaline pumped heavily in a moment of panic, realizing only afterwards that they hadn't recognized him, and didn't even know what he was doing there. Then he thought of the nurse, and what she might tell the detectives now that they were here.

Nardone jumped into the elevator and escaped the hospital.

Back at the Windsor Borealis offices, Nardone rewound his tape recordings of the conversations, and pulled out his note pad to review what information he had. It was still early in the afternoon and he began researching with a quick browse through the database. 'Ghosts of Man' brought up a hit from the newswire. The AP had a story mentioning a list of gangs and gang names. Apparently Ghosts of Man was among them. Well, one item off the list – he had a gang.

He then typed in 'Drop Dead,' which came up with so many hits that he couldn't search them all in time for related material. Even if he did have the time, he couldn't link one mention of something 'drop dead' with anything conclusively. 'Suicide Pacts' didn't hit with anything in particular either.

He tried throwing them all into one search through the database to see if there was any cross-references between them all. BINGO!

[PDF]

[DPD: Crime Database](#)

File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat - [View as HTML](#)

Ghosts of Man in Metro Detroit Area by Mary Creek, 2006 (M CREEK) ... Young gang known for its imported shipments of fentanyl, commonly referred to by its street name, **drop dead**, and

suicide packs: ...

www.dpd.mi.us/library/gangs/ghosts_of_man.pdf - [Similar pages](#)

With that information, Nathaniel Nardone was well on his way to finishing his work, and got the feeling that he was on the verge of something big. Adrenaline rushed through his body, as he put his fingers to the keyboard. It was moments like this, the great scoop on a big story, that made all the lurking and eavesdropping worth while.

A policeman investigating a case which involved two members of his own family? Scandalous. An emerging gang pushing an incredibly deadly batch of heroin in Windsor? Criminal. Put those things together, and his story was going to be the most talked about article over the next week. Nardone let a smug smile of satisfaction creep upon his lips like a caterpillar across a maple leaf.

Chapter Nine

Luc Lefevre stood motionless for a long while in that parking lot, feeling very alone and very troubled. He didn't move any closer to his vandalized vehicle, and he didn't look at the people in the coffee shop that were stepping out to see if he was ok.

It was happening all too fast. This was *his* case, and now he was a victim filling out a report the very day that he's kicked off of it? He was giving statements to Constable Dan Hallimut, his replacement, on the truck the men were driving, the men in the car, what they were wearing and what they told him.

How absolutely surreal it felt to him thinking that only this morning he was working with an informant to gather more details about this case, and now there was someone else doing his job. It felt like it was only moments ago, and in a way, it seemed like it was ages ago. Like it was all in his past. Like it all had happened to someone else.

Lefevre's heart was still pounding irregularly; it accelerated at random moments almost reaching levels of panic while he was giving the statement while recalling the details. His hands were shaking, and he was disappointed in himself. He thought he was a pretty cool customer, unflappable and unflinching, but the truth was – he was scared. He was targeted, and the fear of knowing that there was someone out there who was looking to get you was uncontrollably troubling his mind. He mind was over run with a prevalent fear that at any moment the gang could return and do much worse than smash more bits off of his car – and worse still, they could do worse things to his sister.

What did his sister have to do with all of this? How had she gotten involved? His dad had told Luc that his sister was alive and that she needed saving. What kind of danger was she in?

“Look, Dan, we’ve got to find my sister,” said Lefevre to Const. Hallimut.

“Luc, we put out notice that went over the news last night encouraging anyone who’s seen her to report back to the police, and no one has said anything yet. But we don’t know what she even have a physical description, and we don’t know what name she’s going by. It’s going to be very tough to find her if she doesn’t want to be found.”

“I know, I ... I just, these guys say they know where she is. Do we have any more information on them, yet?”

“They just peeled out of here twenty minutes ago, so they can’t be far. So far no one has reported seeing the vehicle, either. It’s not going to be crossing any borders any time soon, that’s for sure.”

“What else is ...”

“Luc, we’re taking care of it. Ok?” Dan Hallimut looked Luc directly into his eyes, ensuring that he had Lefevre’s undivided attention.

“Go home and take a rest. You need it. We’re taking care of things, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah – ok,” said Lefevre.

After the officers at the scene finished taking some photographs of the damage done to his Stratus, he picked up the rearview mirror and put it in the backseat of his car and headed back home.

Luc sat in his living room with an open bottle of whiskey, watching traffic flow by his house, later that evening. It was after 10 p.m. and he’d been drinking since he got home. The headlights on the cars passing up and down the road in front of him were blurred streaks of yellow and red. His eyes were red and dry as he watched the cars flying by. Dizzily, he drooped his head and rolled his eyes around inside his head, feeling the heavy effects of the alcohol in his system.

No ice and no mix – just whiskey, straight from the bottle. He didn’t have a habit of drinking heavily, but tonight he wanted to get his as far away from anything that had happened to him in the last day.

His body was flushed and red, and leaned forwards to take another drink out of the bottle – the alcohol stung his mouth and throat and went down in a heavy gulp. His heart was pounding and his thoughts still raced violently around his head. He thought about returning to the police station, getting his gun, and heading over to the funeral in the morning and shooting each of those motherfuckers in the head. He thought about blowing bullets right through their skulls and kicking them in the teeth.

His upper lip curled into a sneer as he plotted all the things he would do. He could see with vivid clarity every punch he’d burry into the faces of those goddamned bastards. *Tell me I can’t go to my own father’s funeral?* His eyes stared outwards into his own imagination, and he leaned forward thinking more and more deeply. He gnashed his teeth and pictured himself kicking his boots so deep into their ribs that they cracked. He was furious. *Smash up my car right in front me ...* he put the bottle to his mouth once more, but it was empty.

Then he saw an image of his father’s face, full of youth and serenity. Luc saw his father’s deep dark eyes and a soft smile. His father wasn’t in any pain, and he appeared as

if he never bared the burden of the misfortunes that befell him and his family. He looked free. All Luc wanted was to be there when the custodians at the funeral put his father underground. There wasn't going to be a service and there was no one that was going to attend, it was just going to be a final goodbye from a son to his father. He thought about all the things that he would forgive him for. He would forgive him for the drugs, for the alcohol, for the pain and suffering, and he'd forgive him for the neglect he showed to his daughter and his wife.

Then he would thank him for his childhood, for marrying his mother and for giving him an upbringing that made him a man. Luc's youth was free of domestic abuse and financial burdens, things which he didn't notice then, but appreciated now.

And then he felt great pity for him. His father must have been so fragile and so weak. When Luc's mother died, Serge did his best to raise the newborn baby girl. But he was so alone and so sad. The drugs and alcohol must have worsened his already low self-esteem.

Luc Lefevre fell asleep in his chair, beside his alarm clock, which was set for 6 a.m. He had decided to go to his father's funeral no matter what. He would find his sister, and he was confident he could handle the gangsters if they'd tried to cause any trouble. He wouldn't remember passing out from all the alcohol.

He dreamt.

Luc's mind was not an uncomfortable place for him. But the tenacious affects of alcohol on a dormant brain can change all of that. While the body is asleep, the vasopressin levels in the mind crash back to normal, and those chemical changes seem to spark lucid imaginary sequences. Lefevre awoke in his dream, which was simply electric sparks of consciousness that were being stimulated by the chemical changes that his mind was balancing.

Luc stood in a simple room, the details of which were unimportant to his dream, and were indistinguishable to his thoughts. In which location he was in was not nearly as important as in whose company he was in. Luc panned his vision over to the man standing across the room, but he already knew who it was. He already felt who it was.

Serge Lefevre looked at Luc in a foggy vision. Though Serge said nothing, his presence represented a lot. Serge was only 20 years old at the moment, but that didn't surprise Luc, because he was 20 years old as well.

The two youngsters approached each other and stood side-by-side, but remained silent. Their age linked them to one another. They were more than just family now, they were possible friends, possibly equals. There wasn't any hierarchical labels conditioning how they could approach one another. Luc and Serge were on an equal playing field. Luc felt a connection between the two of them. His father was a fine man for many years but Luc's memories of him immediately turned to the tortured and addicted man of only days ago. But this younger version of his father was a man untainted by the cruelties that characterized his life. This man hadn't looked for an escape from his traumatic manhood, and he hadn't raised any children. He was a simple kid still, and Luc had never felt a connection with him like this in his whole life.

Luc smiled.

Then his father was the 68-year-old addict, whose pale skin and sparse hair appeared even more prominent than they ever did in life. All the possibilities Luc had to interact with his father as an equal vanished along with the appearance of his youth. Even in his own dreams, Luc lost the ability to trust his father. The old man remained silent, and so did Luc. And Luc knew that there was someone else in the room with them now, someone who wasn't there before Serge had suddenly aged.

The new entity in the room was the man from the parking lot. His black appearance wasn't as dark as Luc remembered. He appeared almost Spanish now, for some odd reason. The criminal who had demanded that Luc not go to his own father's funeral stood silently as well. No one said a word. The criminal's presence set Luc into a rage. While he didn't see any actual movement, his dream had incredibly strong representational emotions. Lefevre's heart rate increased and an intense sense of fury overwhelmed him.

Luc was suddenly beating the criminal savagely. He was throwing punches deep into his face with incredible force. He couldn't be controlled and pummeled the bastard. He buried his fists into the hardest parts of that asshole's head. He threw him around the room, slamming his body into walls. But his combatant remained motionless. He didn't fight back, and he didn't show any affects of the incredible beating that he was being given.

Luc threw him to the ground and crunched his boots through his victim's ribs. The man rolled over with the impact, and Luc stomped down on his shoulders and arms to maim and cripple the bastard. Images of the man swinging his baseball bat into Luc's car enraged him further, but this manifestation of that man was absent of any recourse. He didn't fight back, he didn't wince in pain, he didn't respond to anything that Luc did. For all of his frustration and anger, none of it was going to be relieved by smacking around an effigy. He needed to see remorse in the man's face, he needed to see fear in his eyes, pain in his every breath. All of this he did not get.

Without any pause he continued to pummel his hands into the man. His fists slammed into the man until his head became a soft pulp, but still he didn't respond. Momentary insanity overwhelmed him as he demanded the man respond to the thrashing, and he raked his fingernails across the motionless man's face. His fingers dug deep, and his stroke was slow and long, pulling as much of his face down as he could. Still his victim failed to satisfy him with a response.

Luc dropped the bloody body to the floor and jumped back in self restraint. Faintly aware of his delicate psychotic state, he paused to watch the blood and flesh on his hands fall away – reflecting on how ineffectual his attacks were being. He was failing to find justice even here in his own dream.

He stepped back, panting, still dripping with blood. He turned back to look at his father, who watched over the entire attack. Still, there remained no sound from anyone. Serge didn't say one word about the whole attack. Here was a man who was responsible for shooting Serge to death, and he doesn't react one way or the other.

Luc felt that he was split. He felt that he was outside of himself seeing the whole situation, yet uniquely aware that he was also observing his other self watching over him. It was like being haunted by his own self. He could feel his own cold judgments falling on him, while he stared the elderly incarnation of his father coldly in the eye.

“Why do you just stand there? Why don’t you help, or ... or tell me to stop? Why do you just stand there and not say a damned thing?” Luc yelled at his father.

“It doesn’t matter what you do to him, Luc,” said his father.

Luc was no longer holding on to his victim. He was standing erect and watching his father’s face move as he spoke.

“That man is not the man you wish to harm, and you know it. This is why you are not finding the answers that you want through this course of action,” stated his father.

Luc knew he was right.

“You also know that you cannot go to my funeral tomorrow for fear of your life. You think that it’s your last chance to say goodbye to me, but, come on. We both know that you’d just be talking to a cold piece of ground in a cemetery. Your last chance to talk with me was back in the hospital.” Serge’s entity paused for a moment, then he gave Luc a coy look. “You remember how you savored that moment, don’t you,” he said while he rolled his eyes.

Luc felt that his father, admittedly a figment of his own imagination, was laying the guilt trip on pretty heavy.

“I can still go to the funeral. I’m sure those bastards won’t do anything if I were there. Plus I could find MP. If she’s with them, she wouldn’t let them attack me, right?”

“The choice has already been made, Luc. It doesn’t matter what you decide, because the decision isn’t yours,” said Serge. “It has already been written in history, history just hasn’t caught up to it. You can’t change what will happen any more than a reader can change what will be written on the next page of a magazine that they’ve already picked up. The words are written, and it’s just a matter of time before someone reads them.”

“What is that all supposed to mean?” asked Luc.

“It means, you shouldn’t worry too much about going to the funeral tomorrow – the choice is already made. You just have to follow the choice. All your problems do is make you worry. The only reason you worry is because you think there is a right choice that you have to make, and that if you don’t make it, the worst will happen. The beauty of it all is, there aren’t any choices.”

“That’s bullshit. You know why that’s bullshit? Because you made the *worst* choices I’ve seen a man make, and I’ve worked as a police officer for 19 years. I’ve *seen* what the worst this city has to offer is – and it’s *you*. To think that you had no worries is bullshit. You’re washing your hands free of the responsibilities that you should have had, by suggesting that you were meant to be a drug-leech. It’s absolutely ridiculous,” Luc vehemently refused his incarnation of his father’s argument.

“Maybe I’m meant to give you this advice, and maybe you’re meant not to take it. Perhaps that is my ultimate purpose,” retorted the old man.

“Yeah, so I can go and get myself shot to death in the middle of Essex County on an early November morning? No, wait. Maybe it’s so I can murder a couple of gangsters and free the ever-so-important runaway MP? Face it, if there were a divine plan, *our* family would be as far away from being any part of it as it could be. *We* are not that special,” said Luc.

“I would imagine that any concept of being special is not for us to judge, wouldn’t you?” philosophized the image of Luc’s father. “I would imagine that divine intervention

doesn't follow any of the rules of humanity – I would imagine that divinity and humanity would share very little in common.”

Luc didn't know how to respond to that. He was ultimately frustrated knowing that it was in fact *his* mind questioning himself. Why was he arguing with his father? Why was this foiled side of his consciousness disguised as his father, when it was just him wrestling with himself?

The apparition of Serge Lefevre was no longer present. In a very dream-like way, there was no explanation for his exit, and there was no concern that he had left. It was as if it hadn't ever happened.

Luc, however, was not alone. He was with himself. What began as Luc looking at a reflection of himself inexplicably became him standing near himself. It was just the two Lefevres standing in the presence of one another. In the very essence of the concept of *being*, it wasn't odd that Luc was there with himself, he just *was*. It was so.

Luc thought to himself, what have we decided?

“I'm not sure,” he replied. We've either made the choice to go to the funeral, or we haven't. That much is clear. Are we worried about what our choice might be?” he asked?

After a moment of pause, he figured that, yes, indeed he was worried that he might be going to the funeral. But did he think that it would be destiny that decided whether he would go or not?

“I don't have any idea. I really can't imagine that all things in all of life are carefully crafted to result in one conclusion – that all actions lead towards a final outcome,” he said.

What if it really was like a book, though? He thought, what if life were simply just a story, that actually was already written. Perhaps the ending isn't carefully designed to be something incredible, but rather, it is just an ending. Perhaps there's nothing that's so complicated, but rather, it's all very simple. The difficult part wasn't understanding that the choices made have coincidental impacts in real time, but rather, that they have to add up because the ending has to come. What if the only real thing in life was actually the passage of time. It was the only factor that couldn't be manipulated and experimented with. What if all actions beyond that were inconsequential, and the only thing that did make actions and events sequential was that they had to occur in time – that was the only thing they had in common. If it weren't for time moving forward consistently and relentlessly, all actions of all time would coincide with one another, and the relationship between all things would be understood. All of the energy of all of the actions through all of time would exist in one place, that place being a single moment.

Worse yet, perhaps time was recoiling. Perhaps time was not moving forwards but rather moving backwards. Would this explain why you could envision the past with such clarity – because it was in front of you?

“I don't know about that Luc. That doesn't make any sense at all,” he said.

If time exists in the past, the present and in the future, energy could also already exist in all those times. It could be possible that all those times exist at once, and consciousness is just the movement through those times. Moving on to be conscious later in time, while the actions and energy are already there waiting for us.

“You’re sounding too much like my dad, now. You’re not making any sense, and you’re relying too much on fate and not taking any responsibility for your actions. A man of impulse and wantonness who lived without responsibility for his actions is a reckless animal,” said Luc.

Then we are at a disagreement, then? He thought to himself, we cannot decide whether or not we will be at the funeral?

“I think the question won’t be whether or not we’re going, but rather, why we are or are not going, wouldn’t you say?” he retorted.

The choice is already made – surely we need to just follow our gut and we will do what we must.

“You’re on your own, this decision is too important to allow for that to happen.”

Chapter Ten

Thursday, November 15th was a cold and clear morning. There weren’t any stars in the sky, and the sun was rising slowly. It was still dark at 6 a.m., but the daylight would be coming soon. The arrangements at the cemetery were underway, and the casket and hole were already dug. All that remained was for Luc Lefevre to present himself and then the body would be lowered. And on this cold and clear morning, Lefevre continued to sleep while his alarm buzzer sounded repeatedly.

He slowly faded into consciousness and hit the alarm. He panicked fearing that he’d missed the burial, but realized that the buzzer had only been on for a few moments. He sat up in the chair he slept in overnight, and immediately wobbled to the side. He held his hand out against the chair to keep himself from falling over – he was still intoxicated from the night before. His eyes felt dry, and his face was the same. He smelt sour from booze that had spilled on his shirt last night.

Taking a second attempt at rising from his seat, he felt his stomach turn as he stood up straight, and winced with discomfort. Bubbles of indigestion gurgled through his bowels and paused until the feeling passed. He looked up to the ceiling and knew that this wasn’t going to be a good day.

He shuffled to the kitchen sink and poured himself a glass of water, which he drank down quickly. Water ran down the side of his mouth, and wiped his face clear. He had till 7 o’clock to get out to the cemetery on time if he were going.

Pulling his clothes off he managed his way into the shower and got himself tidied up to the best of his ability.

His head was splitting, and he felt like a man apart from himself. All the motions he was going through seemed surreal, or like he’d done them a thousand times before. His head almost echoed with confusion, and the left side of his forehead felt like there was a constant thorn that he couldn’t wipe away. Dehydrated and disoriented from last night’s drinking, he was in rough shape.

Lefevre made the decision to head near the cemetery and to stake it out. Perhaps he could get a peek of who was there, and perhaps it wouldn’t be all that bad. If there weren’t any threatening people there, he’d not have any problems. Perhaps he could bump into MP and finally understand what was going on.

And if things were pretty rough looking, then he'd just keep his distance – that seemed reasonable enough.

He stumbled out the door, forgetting his jacket, and scratched the frost off of the windows of the banged up car. Just the sight of the broken rearview mirror and the dented doors reminded him of what dangers awaited him if things didn't go right at the cemetery. He was in no condition to be a hero, and he was mentally defeated anyhow. He knew he couldn't overpower a much younger man for long – and without handcuffs and backup, he wouldn't be able to restrain them. He certainly wasn't going to overpower more than one man.

He started off to the cemetery, realizing along the long drive that he had not taken his jacket. He readjusted the vents on his dashboard, as he attempted to redirect some heat towards his hands on the steering wheel, to warm up.

He fluttered his eyes and tried to remember anything from the night before. Granted he hadn't done much other than furiously stare out the window with a bottle of Wiser's in his fist.

It was a 30-minute drive out to the County Meadow's Cemetery. The roads were quiet out in the county on an early Thursday morning. There were cars on the road, but they were heading in the opposite direction, towards the city. Headlights shone in his eyes as cars squeaked by on the narrow roads. In the fields along the sides of the roads, cattle huddled among each other to keep warm, while horses ran and jumped on the early frost.

He approached the cemetery entrance, and didn't see anyone around. There were some farm houses on the opposite side of the road, and he pulled into one of their long front drives and left his car there. He buried his hand in his pockets to keep them warm and scuttled across the road and into the cemetery. There were many deciduous oaks among the cemetery's peripheries, which were losing their leaves, and provided very poor shelter. But there was also a wide collection of coniferous evergreens that would provide excellent shelter if he needed it.

He could see where a small industrial Bobcat vehicle was parked near a large mound of frosted black dirt, and he knew that was where his father's final resting place would be. He panned back and forth looking to see if he had any company around. He wasn't going to take any chances.

He walked along the edge of the cemetery, prepared to duck into the evergreens at any moment if he should have to. He exhaled hotly to try and warm his face with his own breath while he stalked along the tree line. Each vehicle that cruised by in the early morning perked the hairs on the back of his neck, as he cautiously continued forwards.

Keeping an eye out for that grey 2004 Ford Explorer, he was strangely calm when an older model of a Ford Topaz rolled quietly in the front gates. Luc ducked down and watched over the top of some low brush, unsure of what to expect. The car drove slowly to the back of the lot where Serge Lefevre's body waited to be laid to rest. The car parked, and three men along with a young woman stepped out of the vehicle. The three men were too far away to be positively identified, but they were surely the men who attacked Luc in the parking lot.

The young woman was being led to the pit by one of the men, wearing a red plaid jacket. He grabbed her upper arm and pulled her forwards, and she seemed sluggish or

defiant. She pulled her arm back sharply, but did not free herself from his grasp. Luc was peering over some branches now, and the quills from the pine needles were sticky with sap. His hands were uncomfortably tacky now. He was certain, though, that the young woman was his sister.

It had to be MP. Luc was sure of it. She didn't seem to want to be around with these guys. She seemed upset, but for what it was worth, Luc was so far away that he couldn't be certain of anything he saw. The man with the red plaid jacket let her go, and she took a noticeably stern step to the side. She wasn't dressed for winter, and Luc could see that she was wearing a tattered pair of jeans. She crossed her arms across her body for warmth.

From where Luc sat, he couldn't hear what the group was saying, but the man in the red shirt began pointing at the coffin and speaking loudly to MP. She was starting to protest, when he walked back to the Topaz. Luc deduced that the men must have ditched the Explorer after everyone in the city was on the look for it. The 15-year-old rust-bucket they were rolling around in now was a marked step down from the comfort they must have been accustomed to. That gave Luc some pleasure, to think that they're struggling to remain under the radar.

The two other men followed the first back to the vehicle, leaving MP alone at the grave. The sun was rising now, and its rays rolled over the cemetery casting long shadows from the tombstones. A cold gust blew the young woman's hair into her face, and she did nothing to interrupt it. She stood motionless for quite a while, and then she stepped forward to the coffin and knelt down to put her hands on the box.

MP leaned forward and pressed her head against the coffin. From where Luc sat, he couldn't make out much more than that. She was saying her goodbyes. All Luc wanted to do was go and say 'Hi.' He had wondered where she might be for a long time, and had never thought that she might still be so near. All this time she was probably over in Detroit.

Although the entirety of their visit was a brief ten minutes, or so, they all appeared to be ready to leave. The men sat in their Topaz waiting for MP to finish up. Luc watched carefully, being sure not to be noticed. The door to the Topaz opened, however, and one of the men got out and stood up, staring off into the bushes opposite of where Luc was hiding. The three men charged off into the woods, and one had pulled out a knife. They were yelling about something, but again, it was merely muffles from where Luc remained.

MP was alone now, and she didn't know what to do. She watched as the men ran into the trees at the back of the cemetery, and she gravitated back towards their car. She didn't appear to be trying to run away – perhaps she still had nowhere to run to. Luc felt sad for her, thinking about how very young she was when she ran away from her father. Luc wondered if she had seen him since that day. It would have been wildly unlikely that their two vagabond paths should cross.

She walked around to the other side of the grave and neared herself to a small shed that was closer to the back near the tree line. Was she going to duck away? She leaned in behind the shed, but didn't wander too far. Perhaps she was scoping out the area? Maybe she was looking for a washroom. He wished that he could just step out and talk to her, to show her that he was looking for her. He wanted to help her. But he just

knew that as soon as he stepped out from out of hiding that he would be discovered. So much time passed. He regretted not having tried.

The men eventually came back empty-handed. There must have been someone else out in the bushes that they spotted. Luc would have hated to be that guy, however he was; an unfortunate groundskeeper or farmer in the yard out back. They were all huffed up and posturing, throwing punches in the air, simulating what they would have done to whomever had they discovered anyone. Luc connected the dots, understanding that they were talking about punching and kicking him, had they discovered that he was around.

The leader of the bunch told the Bobcat operator to put the casket in the grave and to fill it in. He yelled at MP, telling her to get back in their car, so they could take off, but MP demanded that they stayed, ensuring that the grave was filled. She didn't want to leave the business there unfinished. It was closure to her relationship with her dad. Luc watched, realizing that he had made it to the burial, despite all the doubts that he had had in his mind. He certainly wasn't as involved as he thought he would have been, and he wasn't as close, but he did witness it.

While the dirt was being pushed into the ground, he said a prayer for his father, and then another for his sister. Though he didn't pray often, it seemed like the right time and place. While he closed his eyes and began to remember an old prayer from his childhood, he recalled the stabbing pain in his head from the liquor last night. Funny, he thought; though he turned to faith to ease his pain, all he was given was a reminder of how sharp his pain really was.

After he was absolutely certain that the Topaz was gone, he climbed out from behind the evergreens and walked to his father's grave. There wasn't much to it anymore, but he could envision his father lying on his back, with all that dirt between him and the world Luc lived in. He couldn't speak any words; he couldn't bring himself to say anything. There was an absurdity to speaking to someone who wasn't there. And if there was a super-natural realm in which his thoughts were to be shared to his father, would he necessarily have to speak them aloud for his father to hear them?

He crossed back to his vehicle as the sun continued to rise and the morning air began to melt the frost from the ground. The drive back to his house in LaSalle was melancholic, and he avoided the radio, so he could be left with his thoughts. Well, that and to avoid any further loud noises that would cause his head any more discomfort.

When he returned to his home he found his stupid jacket and put the damned thing back on. He was freezing, and the coat certainly made a big difference.

He had the morning off to take care of his family obligations, but now he had to swing back into work to report the new vehicle those gangsters were in, and to update the physical description of his sister. He'd made some progress, even while he was off the case, and that satisfied him.

"Mickey," said Lefevre once he'd settled in at the office, "I've got some updates on the suspects you're looking for."

“What are you talking about? You’re not supposed to be on this case, Luc. You don’t want to get into any more trouble, do you? The chief has been clear with you about this,” said Detective Mickey Gordon.

“No, they were at my father’s funeral this morning.”

“What! What are you talking about? What were they doing...

“I knew they were going to be there. They told me in the parking lot yesterday. They said that if I told anyone, or showed up myself, that they’d attack my sister. But I snuck around there this morning and caught a glimpse of their new car. They’ve ditched the Explorer and are using a banged up brownish 1999 Ford Topaz. They didn’t look happy about it either,” said Lefevre.

“Oookay,” Mickey said, as he spun around in his chair looking for a pen to start jotting the details down. He grabbed a piece of paper and scribbled down the new description. “Brownish Mercury Topaz .. anything else?”

“It was a bit rusty, an older model, I’m just guessing when I’m saying a ‘99. Then there’s MP. I don’t know what they were calling her, but she’s very thin right now, about 5’6, and is wearing ripped jeans and a black jacket. Her hair is black and a bit longer than shoulder length.”

Mickey wrote this all down, making sure he got it as accurately as Luc had given it to him.

“Mic,” said Luc, “you’ve got to keep me involved in this, man. You’re getting so close now. I want to find these guys, I want to be there when they go down.”

“Luc ... pal, that’s exactly why you *shouldn’t* be there, man. You *know* this. Listen, I want you to be there, too. It would make me incredibly happy to be able to bring you face-to-face with the guy who killed your dad. I want to get your sister back together with you as soon as possible, but ...” Mickey nodded his towards the chief’s office indicating that there would be some resistance to having Lefevre anywhere near a takedown on this case.

“The chief doesn’t have to know, Mic. You just call me up on my cell ... on my,” Luc was patting down his coat pockets, but couldn’t find his phone. “What the hell,” he groaned. It’d been in his jacket since last night, and he didn’t pick his jacket up until he got home. And after that he’d come straight to the office. It should be right here.

“No, not the chief. Yeah, he’s going to have a problem with anyone including you on this case, not just me, but .. well, he’s got that reporter in there right now,” said Mickey. Luc stopped checking his pockets. There were still a half dozen of them that he could still rifle through and find his phone – but the reporter? He was here, in the station?

“The ... the one who outted me in print? The guy who connected me to the victims and told that gang how to get at me? The one who took that picture of me and slapped it on the front page of the paper? He’s *here*?” Luc’s eyes widened like a cat’s that was ready to pounce.

“No, no, no, nononono ..” Mickey put his hands up on Luc’s shoulders and tried to calm him down. “I don’t think you should be talking to this guy, pal. Just let him go, don’t get yourself all worked up about this.”

“*He’s* the reason I’m stuck behind a desk pushing paper while you guys are hunting down the only criminal I really, really want to catch. Shit, this is the first drive-by in this city, and it’s *my* case until that goddamned reporter got involved. This is bullshit, Mickey,” Lefevre fumed.

Some other officers turned and glanced their way, trying to see what the commotion was all about. Lefevre wasn't usually this animated at any time. Now he was huffing up and down the hall, swinging his hands in frustration. He started pacing, and when he was about three meters away from Mickey, he paused.

Mickey Gordon looked at Luc and tried to guess what he was thinking. Lefevre was clearly thinking, and his head slowly looked over at the chief's office door. Mickey thought, *aw shit* and he lurched after Lefevre, who'd suddenly jumped into a sprint for the chief's office.

"Don't go in there," yelled Detective Gordon, two steps behind Lefevre. But it was no use. Lefevre reached the closed door and knocked twice, very firmly, and before waiting for someone to answer, he turned the knob and let himself in. His heart was racing from the excitement when he peered in over the shoulder of a tiny man seated at the chief's desk with a recorder in his hands.

Luc looked at the startled face of the bespectacled nuisance who was awkwardly turned around trying to make sense of what was happening.

"LEFEVRE .. what the HELL do you think you're doing!" screamed Chief Hal Doric.

"Is this the guy?" Luc pointed at the little man still sitting, whose worried expression grew into fear. The Chief was wasting no time, and was already standing, ordering Luc out.

"Out of my office now! This is completely inexcusable," he called out.

Luc ignored the chief's reprimands and pointed a solo index finger at the reporter and stared him right in the eye. He was shaking with fury, thinking of all that he'd been through in the last 24 hours. He was kicked off the case, attacked and had his car smashed, and left hiding in some goddamned bushes instead of attending his own father's funeral – and it was all because of this little idiot in front of him.

"Do you have any idea what I've been through because of you, you little..."

Nathaniel Nardone sat stunned in the office seat while Lefevre verbally barraged him. Adrenaline started racing through his veins, should he have to make a sudden escape or thwart some sort of attack. But out of the corner of his mind, he perked his ear and listened to hear if his tape recorder was still running. And he knew it was.

"... son of a bitch. If we were outside on the streets right now, I'd teach you a goddamned lesson about fuckin' with people's lives. I should strap you across the face right now!"

Luc paused, the sudden flares of anger sent pangs of pain to his aching head, reminding him of the intoxicants that remained in his mind from the night before. He covered his face with his hand to apply some pressure to where his forehead felt like it was swelling. He was sweating from all of the excitement. He was visibly irritated.

"You're article and newspaper put my name, and the names of my family into the hands of the gangsters I've been trying to find. Last night they followed me home and attacked me – warned me to stay away from my own father's burial or else they were going to kill me. How's that weigh on your conscience? Are you happy that you got your little story? Is making a name for yourself this important?"

"Lefevre!" yelled the Chief one more time. "Shut your ass up and get out of this office! Who do you think you are coming into my office like this?"

“Look, Chief,” said Lefevre. “I’ve got new information on the gang we’re looking for and a new physical description of MP – we’re going to find these guys. But we can’t have anymore of these exposés from the press or it’s going to ruin everything,” he said continuing to stare at Nardone.

“No, that’s none of your concern – you are off this case, if you haven’t forgotten, and it will *not* be compromised because of a vigilante cop. Do you want these guys to get off when we catch them? You *cannot* continue to be involved in this case, *do you understand this yet?*” said the Chief very firmly.

Detective Luc Lefevre paused and had a lucid moment of clarity. The Chief was right, as he has been for many years. Luc was jeopardizing the chances of a conviction with his continued involvement in a case that he was personally related in. He was so hot and bothered knowing that the reporter was around the office, that he just flew off the handle and overreacted.

“Chief ... I had to bury my father today, but I wasn’t even able to do that because of this gang. They, they have my sister right now, and I don’t know what they’re doing to her. Not being on this case makes me feel so useless right now, and ... and I ... I don’t want to stand in the way of justice here. I’m sorry,” said Luc. “The pressure is just getting to me. I haven’t been sleeping, and ...”

“Just take a break and I’ll talk to you more about this after I’m done with Mr. Nardone, here, ok? Just wait outside, ok?” said Chief Doric in a calm tone.

Lefevre put down his guard in compliance and agreement. He went to turn out of the office, when he returned to digging around in his trench coat pockets. On the inside there was a double pocket where he’d put things he didn’t want to misplace. It was an awkward place for his phone, but he hadn’t yet been able to find it.

“Just give me a call when you find something, ok?” asked Lefevre.

“You’ll be the first to be briefed when we have any further information, alright?” assured the chief.

Inside the pocket he felt an unusually large variety of items wrapped in plastic, or something. It wasn’t his phone and he had no idea what it was. Standing in Chief Doric’s office doorway he pulled out a very long clear plastic bag that was full of brown cylinders. He looked more closely at the odd package in his hands and recognized the cylinders as tightly wrapped units of heroin, rolled up and ready for sale.

Lefevre held the bag out in front of him, unsure of what to make of this discovery. Nathaniel Nardone watched carefully, recognizing the drugs in Lefevre’s hands and began wondering why on earth a Detective on the drugs beat would be carrying around heroin for sale. Chief Doric saw the way Nardone was looking at the heroin and its relationship to Lefevre and his sweaty demeanor, his moody reactions to everything and began suspecting that he was a user.

Hal Doric said, “What are you holding there?”

“I ... I have heroin,” said Luc.

“It would appear that you do,” said the chief, just moments away from flying off the handle. “Give me that thing,” he said grabbing the bag out from Lefevre’s hands. “Take your jacket off, what else do you have in there?” He pulled the coat from Lefevre’s body and rustled through his pockets, finding nothing.

“What the hell is all this?” demanded Chief Doric. “You come in here and start waving this around! What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

"I swear, I don't know what that's going in my pocket," pleaded Lefevre.

Nardone was picking the whole thing up on tape – he just sat silently, thinking of what an awesome story this was going to turn out to be. The yelling between the two of them was especially nice, considering the microphone often had difficulties recording noises that are too distant. He was happy with himself, but he didn't dare to smile amidst the allegations that were unfolding before him.

The Chief passed judgment on the situation immediately and with authority. "You're suspended indefinitely, Luc. You come in here showing all the signs of using, then you whip this out right in front of me and *the press*, to boot. What did you think was going to happen?"

"No, Chief, I've never seen this stuff before! I swear I have no idea..."

"Mickey!" called out the Chief, taking no notice to Lefevre's defense. "Get in here and escort Mr. Lefevre out of the building, will you?" Then he turned to Lefevre, "I don't want to see you in here again, is that clear? You will be called for a disciplinary hearing for the first Tuesday of next month, and you can plead your case then. Until then, you're out of here, Luc."

Mickey was just outside the office, and he overheard everything that had happened inside – everyone on the floor could hear it. He took Luc by the arm and began to guide him out.

Luc was in a state of shock, wondering what the hell was happening to him. He didn't know where the drugs came from, or did he? He was so out of it. His head was still groggy from all the booze last night, and he couldn't remember anything. Had he somehow come across the drugs before he passed out?

"What the hell were you thinking in there, buddy?" asked Detective Mickey Gordon as he walked Lefevre out of the police department.

"I swear, I have no idea where those came from. You believe me, right pal?"

"You've looked like hell and been complaining about not sleeping for weeks and you can't keep track of things as simple as your cell phone, man. Seriously, how long has this been going on?" responded Gordon.

"You *know* me, you know I'm not using, Mic. C'mon! You don't think I've been taking drugs from the cases we're working now, do you?" defended Luc.

"Yeah, well I wouldn't have thought that you'd pull ten thousand dollars worth of heroin out of your pocket, just for fun, either," Gordon dryly responded.

Mickey Gordon got Lefevre to the front lobby of the station. "Look, the Chief's orders are final – I don't want to see you back here until your hearing, you got that? If you show up here again, we'll charge you with trespassing and..."

"I *know* what you'll do to me, you bastard. I've been a cop here for twenty years," spat out Lefevre. "I can't believe you're doing this to me, man. This is bullshit. You're supposed to be my partner, man. What the hell happened to you?" Luc resorted to manipulating Mickey's sense of loyalty to gain an advantage on the argument.

Mickey paused and Luc thought that he had affected him, gained his attention. But Mickey had simply reached the door, and he was holding it open, waiting for Luc to leave. "You've gotta go."

“Jesus, Mic. I can’t believe you’re doin’ this to me,” surrendered Lefevre. He gave up appealing to his partner and headed out the heavy glass doors and out into the street.

“Luc,” called out Mickey, “I’ll keep you up to date. Find your phone ‘cause I’m going to check up on you soon, ok? In the mean time, just do as the Chief says and stay out of this, alright, partner?”

Lefevre stepped out into the cold street and felt the bitter, dry air blow into his face. He pulled the collar up on his jacket to shield himself from the bluster, and looked back at Detective Gordon, who was still standing with the doors open.

Lefevre was entirely lost. He had no family, no friends to turn to, was kicked off of his job, and was full of rage and injustice. His eyes burned in the midst of the cold gales that plowed between the buildings in the downtown core, but they also burned with anger and pain.

“Mickey, what am I supposed to do?”

Chapter Eleven

Luc had to return to his car in the parking structure across the street. He shook his head thinking back to how quickly things had escalated out of control. Three days ago he was just another detective working on a case – it seemed so long ago now. Without his career he was nothing. He was able to take the time to decompress. He had to clear his head, which was still pounding, and get it on straight.

Cop or not, he wasn’t letting this case go. He was going to find his sister just like any other civilian out there would. The only difference was he was unarmed and unaccredited. But he was still resourceful – he still had his wits about him, a mental library of informants to turn to, and his instincts that never failed him. Times were tough, but he was tough too.

He got home quickly, with a sense of purpose. While he felt useless moments earlier, he realized that the restrictions of protocol and police procedures were no longer inhibiting his use of diverse artillery.

He returned home quickly and found his cell phone sitting out in plain site, right near the front door. How had he missed that? He checked if he had missed any calls, and hadn’t. Looking around the rest of his home, and looked at the disheveled conditions he had left it in the night before.

There was an empty bottle that once contained whiskey lying beside his recliner. His recliner was facing the front street where he’d been staring out the window, and his alarm clock was sitting on its side and on the floor. There were stains of alcohol on the arm of his chair, and there were articles of clothing strewn around the chair, where he’d thrown them off.

He compared where he was last night to where he was now, thinking about how much worse his situation was now, but how much more directed he was with a course of action. He was mentally focused. He figured that he could find his informant Dougie and see if he couldn’t get a lead on the whereabouts of the Ghosts of Man, or find out who was carrying around large bundles of heroin that might have wound up in Lefevre’s possession.

But first he was going to call up Mickey and see if there weren't something more he could help with. Dialing the police station and typing in Detective Mickey Gordon's extension number, he reached him directly.

"Detective Gordon, hello?"

"Mickey, it's me. How's it going?"

Mickey sighed out loud, "Luc. I thought you were taking a day off, man. Seriously, just take a break for a little bit."

"Look, I wanted to apologize for freaking out. And if there was anyone that was going to walk me out, I'm glad it was you. I'd probably have torn a strip off of anyone else, eh?" said Lefevre.

"Well, so long as you're getting some rest right now – you looked pretty rough."

"Buddy, I swear – I was drunk last night and hung over today, but I wasn't anywhere near any heroin. Honestly, how long have you known me, and known me to do anything like that?"

"You weren't doing yourself any favours earlier today acting like a lunatic in the office. Granted it was an awkward situation to be in, but you were asking for it," explained Gordon.

"Fair enough. I'm sorry pal. I shouldn't have put you in that position," said Luc.

"Well," said Gordon, changing the subject, "as fate would have it, we actually had an anonymous tip with a whereabouts on your sister. We sent a unit over there earlier, but there wasn't anyone around."

"That's great news. You gotta give me the address. I can end all of this if I can find MP. She's my sister, man. You've got to give it to me."

"I was thinking about that, buddy. In the state you were in earlier this morning there was no way I could have shared *any* information with you. You realize that, right?"

"Yeah. I know Mic." And Lefevre did understand.

"Alright," he could be heard pulling out a sheet of paper over the phone.

The address was located in the west end of the city behind, west of the Ambassador Bridge where there were a lot of seasonal residents. While many residents in the area were students at the University of Windsor, there were many people living in apartment buildings and homes throughout the area. Hundreds of the homes in the area have been renovated to suit the needs of landlords, fitting more rooms for tenants than to improve their value. The student housing meant that there weren't any decorative gardens and very little maintenance on the physical appearance of the properties. The landlords weren't inspired to spend the money on the tenants, and then tenants weren't interested in spending their own to improve someone else's unit.

The west end was also a good place to set up a meeting place if you were crossing the border. A light police presence was stationed predominantly by a stanchion underneath the Ambassador Bridge. They waited there at the international border crossing to respond to calls for the bridge. If you minded your own business, it was easy to move around the west end without confronting the police. In the downtown core there were many officers, most of which were patrolling on bicycle or foot, but were also

cruising around in their vehicles. The west end was completely the opposite. You'd never see a police officer patrolling on foot.

It may have had something to do with the university's security guards, called the campus community police, which did cruise around. But they had no more authority to arrest someone than a common citizen. They also only serviced the peripheral locations of the university, at best. The rest of the west end was fair game.

It appeared that the Ghosts of Man had a unit that they were renting in the west end for when they traveled across the border. It served as a make-shift home base when they were moving product from the states into Ontario. The anonymous informant apparently had located this residence – it was highly probable in a location such as this that someone noticed the expensive Ford Explorer in the neighbourhood. Many of the vehicles were economically sized student vehicles. And if they weren't students, the homeowners weren't apt to be spending large chunks of their income on vehicles. Truth be told, vandals in the area were common – whether they be troublesome kids that went to the multiple high schools in the area, or drunken students returning to their rooms after a night out in Sandwich Town. Common enough that people didn't leave their nice things outside. The drivers in the area weren't particularly reliable either, many cars in the area bore the scars of unfortunate door openings in tight parking lots, slopping reversals and poor marksmanship when parallel parking.

The ways in which the Explorer stood out was legion. A smashed up green Dodge Stratus might not stick out so much in this area, but, as Luc was fully aware, it was easily identifiable if you were the ones who smashed it. Luc had to be wary, and parked his car a few blocks away before approaching the house.

He didn't see the Mercury Topaz that he had observed at the cemetery earlier, so perhaps there was no one home. He was going to be damned sure the place was empty before he walked up any closer.

It would have been common practice for the police to station a cruiser on watch at the location to see if anyone returned. But the tip identifying that location was from an anonymous source which didn't provide truly reliable information. The location was not a known place of interest in the investigation, yet. Though, Lefevre would have felt a whole lot safer with another officer backing him up.

After sufficiently circling the property and peeking through some windows, Lefevre concluded that there wasn't anyone around. He knocked on the door and got no answer. He went around back and found a fragile rear entrance, which was somewhat ajar. The door was certainly unlocked and he swung it silently open. Peering into the unit, there was a set of dark stairs that led into an unfinished basement, and in the other direction there was a filthy kitchen.

He heard no noise, and was confident that there was no one around. It was early in the afternoon, and it was unlikely that anyone was sleeping, but he remained cautious to not make any unnecessary noise.

He carefully walked through the kitchen and found himself looking into the living room, just beyond the front entrance. There was a lamp that was tossed to the side, and a middle table that was shoved out from the centre of the room. Indentations in the carpet suggested that the middle table was generally located closer to a set of couches against

the wall. Some plates that had been on the table laid on the floor, though they were not shattered. A glass of water had been dropped on the floor, and no one had tidied it up.

Luc quickly got the impression that there had been some sort of struggle here, and relatively recently, too. He noticed in the glass of water that there were still some remnants of ice cubes. Whoever had been here left quite a disturbance throughout the house. Luc didn't touch a thing, opting to not leave any finger prints.

Looping around the house and climbing up the stairwell in the front, he found a small bathroom and two bedrooms. In the first bedroom was a cot and a small pile of clothes. It would appear that the men there were using the unit sparingly while they were in town, but otherwise left it abandoned. There were no decorative personal belongings either.

The master bedroom was at the end of the hall at the top of the stairs with its door shut, and Luc stepped as softly as he could across the squeaky hardwood floor. Avoiding handling the banister as he crept forwards, he transferred his weight from foot to foot as delicately as he could. If there were someone in the front hall room, he didn't want them to wake up.

Pausing outside the room he listened as carefully as he could for the sound of motion or life inside. He waited as quietly as he could. Confident that he had heard nothing, he quietly turned the knob and pushed the door open just an inch. Still no noise. No response to his movements.

He pushed it open a little further, trying to limit his movement as much as possible so not to make any sound. Still he heard nothing, and satisfied that he had not aroused anyone, he moved into the room.

The first thing he noticed was how well lit the room was, there were broad windows across the front, and even a smaller side window, which illuminated the small bedroom well. The second thing he noticed that there was no one inside. There was another cot set up, which had sheets strewn about it, showing that it was clearly empty. Luc breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed. With no one in the house he felt free to creep around.

The third thing he noticed was that there was a huge wad of cash sitting beside a large black bag. The bag itself had nylon straps and was buckled shut. It looked like it could be toting a large gun, perhaps even two. And next to the money and the bag was a digital scale, a box of plastic baggies, twist ties, some balloons and other paraphernalia that might be used to cut up, divide, package and distribute any substance.

Luc unbuckled the heavy canvas bag and saw that there were indeed guns inside, though not as large as he'd pictured. Three black and worn Glock 29s, complete with a half dozen magazines and a few holsters were in the bag, a variety of folding knives, along with another firmly sealed opaque bag

He pulled out the plastic bag and used one of the knives to open it up. Inside there was a weighty amount of heroin and crack, separated into two different smaller bags. Though tightly wrapped in cellophane, the brown-sugar-like colour was clearly the heroin and the lighter package was the crack.

Luc looked around some more but didn't find any crack pipes or other drugs. Everything seemed to be in the bag. These guys were certainly dealing most of what they had, and there wasn't any evidence of using in the house. Standing back up, he scanned around some more, after palming the knife and putting it in his own pocket.

The colourful balloons struck Lefevre as eerily odd. The childish memories of the bouncing balloons juxtaposed against the grave amounts of drugs and weapons that they lied beside seemed to betray a sense of innocence long gone.

He went back down stairs and circled around until he was at the back entrance facing the basement. He threw on a light switch and headed down the cold steps. The basement had a junky shelving unit with some canned food on it. The ceiling was filled with heating ducts and piping that underscored the length of the house. The furnace was there, and running noisily and across the cement floor at the back of the basement was another room.

A frail wooden door was shut, connected to a crude room built out of drywall. The outsides of the wall had neglected mudding still crusting off of it, and the taping appeared to be unfinished.

Noticeably cooler in the basement, he could feel a draft coming in from the window frame to his left. What a slum – he was always astonished to see what landlords could get away with when they owned a house. Students were treated like scum, mostly because landlords all felt that students were scum. Scum with rent cheques and complaints.

He opened the basement door and looked into the dark subterranean room, seeing a dank carpet that was stained from flooding. Not much was in this room either, although instead of a cot there was a mattress lying on the floor. It wasn't a bed, just a mattress. There was a pile of clothes dumped to the side, but these were women's clothing. Small pairs of jeans, a few old bras and tiny socks were amongst some common tube tops, strapless shirts and faded t-shirts with the tour dates of rock bands on the back.

The mattress didn't have any sheets on it, and there were used condom wrappers up against one of the walls, where they mostly had missed a wastebasket. Given the conditions, the scene most closely resembled crime scene photographs from a crack den where women were pimped out for drug money. The sight made him shiver, thinking that the only woman he knew that was affiliated with these men so far, was his sister.

It was enough to make his stomach turn, and he flinched away as if his thought was a tangible hazard that nearly struck him straight in the mouth. A scowl stretched across his face, and he lurched out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Ducking to pass underneath the conduits above him, he ran up the stairs and jumped back into the kitchen. He couldn't shake the thought of his sister being passed around as a crack whore. It stung him in the heart. The grim reality struck him hard and he felt shock and anxiety. This was why he wasn't supposed to be working this case, because situations like this strike home too hard. He was emotionally unfit for this sort of thing, this was the type of case that he couldn't leave at the office when he went home. He felt even worse realizing that the chief was right in kicking him off the case.

Lefevre had sudden regrets of snooping around the house. He had been thinking that he might still be able to relate to his sister, but he was beginning to realize that he didn't know anything about her or the life she was living. He stared down at the floor to try and take his mind off of the subject, to clear his thoughts.

And while looking down he discovered a small handbag. He picked it up and looked inside. It had the common items that one would find in a woman's bag, including an American driver's license for Marie Pierre De Lacroix. Hhmmph.

The picture was grey and faded, but still resembled MP. She was thin and had dark hair, and brown eyes. But the birth date read on the license read 1981, which was a couple years off of MP's real birthday in October 1983. He was certain this was her – finally something to work with. The address on the license was on Jackson Ave., in south Warren, Michigan. But if her birthday was wrong, that meant that the ID was a fake. Her last name and address weren't necessarily real – who knows what her current address is.

But at least he had something that proved that she had been here. But it struck him as very odd that she wouldn't have taken her purse and identification with her. The more he thought about it, the more it looked in the room like it had been knocked around. The plates on the floor, the table pushed across the room, the lamp that was knocked over ... it all seemed to be a path from the front of the house to the back door, which he had found open earlier on.

Had she been chased out? Unlikely if she were living with them here. Who had chased her out? It wasn't the cops, Mickey reported that they didn't see anyone here when they came by the first time. So what was going on here? Where was MP and why had she had to get up and leave so quickly?

Lefevre scrambled for more clues, but didn't find much. He lifted the table back and found underneath it a small knife with blood on it. It appeared to have been used and then dropped, or thrown across the room, before the table was tossed on top of it. Looking more closely, he saw that there was a bit of blood on the table, although not much. Someone had definitely been injured here.

Believing that the rear entrance was the route of escape, he looked back checking to see if there were any further blood drops. When he entered the door was open, but he didn't check the opposite side of the door, or the side that faced in. But with the door closed behind him he could clearly see that someone had run up against it and rubbed blood on it while opening it.

He opened the door too and looked down and around the yard, seeing little trace evidence of a path that was taken, but it would appear that whoever it was being chased by someone from the front of the house would have run out through the back of the yard by going over the rear fence.

Checking around the back of the yard he didn't find any blood, but knew that he was on the right path. He was really hot on the lead now. He knew where MP was staying now, he knew what the Ghosts of Man were pushing, and he knew that they were armed.

The sound of a passing car on the street went from an ambient noise to an alarm as it slowed and began to pull into the driveway. The driveway ran all the way along into the back of the yard where there was a detached garage. Luc was standing right beside the garage by the fence in the back. The sudden return of the Ghosts of Man threw Luc into a panic. He began to hop over the fence as the doors to the beat-up Topaz opened.

As Luc bounded over the fence it made a jingling sound as the green fencing rattled against the steel posts that held it into the ground. He also shook the branches of the small trees that were in the back property. The sight and sound of his escape was betraying him.

“Hey! Who the fuck is dat!” yelled an angry voice.

“C'mon let's getim” yelled another.

Luc was over the fence, and falling to one knee on the other side, before setting off into a sprint. He sprinted out from the backyard of the adjacent house and out into the

leafy yard as he made his getaway. He could hear the others clambering over the fence after him.

“Hey! Come back here! I’m going to rearrange your face with a *toothbrush*,” screamed his pursuers.

Crossing the yard and breaking out into the streets, the cold air burned his lungs with every desperate inhalation. With the purse in one hand and full sprint, he feared he was going to be mistaken for a purse snatcher and have some ‘Samaritan’ trip him up or knock him down. Hell, they’d probably join in on beating him when the rest of the gang caught up.

He reached the end of the street and turned the corner, knowing that he’d be briefly out of their sight. Still running at full tilt he searched around for a hiding place. It didn’t have to be perfect, just deceiving enough that they would pass him, and he could break off in a different direction. If he could get them running in the opposite direction for even 20 seconds, he’d be in the clear.

There was nowhere. He didn’t want to just dart behind one of the cars that were lining up and down the old avenue. He wasn’t small enough to roll underneath and hide himself anymore. There wasn’t time to cross the street and steal away into another neighbourhood. He wasn’t going to be able to make it up a tree either.

He was half way up the block when he heard the heavy footsteps of the angry bastards behind him coming around the corner. *Shit*. He was out of time. Nearing an apartment building on the next corner, he set his sights there to try and spread the gap between him and his attackers. Hopefully he could buy himself more time when he got around the next corner.

Suddenly he was there, and he turned the corner running at a 45-degree angle, with eyes wide searching the latest available escape routes. There were more trees, more leaves on the ground, there were more cars to choose from. Apartment buildings had front entrances, but they were always glass and you needed a key or card to get buzzed in. He’d be trapped, no, he couldn’t stop in there.

He was burning out the rest of his energy, his legs weren’t going to last much longer. He had to make a choice here and now, he wouldn’t make it to the next corner, not at the speed he’d have to in order to get away. He ducked into the alley beside the apartment building, knowing that it would be an obvious place to search. They’d come around the corner knowing that the alley was the only hiding place close enough for their prey to escape to.

He knew it, but he ran there anyhow, he was desperate and needed to catch a break. The apartment building wasn’t too large, and he managed to get back behind it before he could hear the others, but it bent into a dead end. He jumped onto one of the rolling garbage containers and climbed up high enough to get over the fence easily. His legs burned, and he could hear the others entering the alley searching for him.

He cleared the fence and rolled through the leaves behind a dark concrete wall and stopped. His heart was pounding and he was sucking air to catch his breath. He knew that he wasn’t entirely visible from the alley he’d just jumped out of, but they were going to be able to hear him, he was certain of it. He listened to them as they entered the back area by the trash container. He could hear their footsteps but not their voices over his heavy panting. They had slowed down and were talking amongst one another.

Luc felt for the knife – but what was he going to do, fight off all three of them with one knife? He must have been 20 years older than all of them, and in half the shape of just one. He wasn't going to be able to defend himself for long. The footsteps came closer to the fence he was hiding behind, and he knew that they were right above him. He was ducked down trying to make himself as small as possible, but he was damning himself at the same time. His knees were tucked up against his chest, preventing him from taking deep breaths, causing him to wheeze noisily. *Goddamn it.*

They were right above him, as far as he knew they were playing with him, playing stupid to his whereabouts, catching their own breaths and coordinating an attack. He was screwed. He stayed absolutely still despite his curiosity to peek over his shoulder, around the corner and to see if they knew where he was, or if they were really lost.

"Look, he's not here," insisted one of the voices. "We're gonna lose him. Let's go, c'mon," and he ran off.

He heard two more sets of feet moving away.

Were they really gone? He still didn't move, he still didn't dare budge an inch to reveal his whereabouts. They were right there, just behind the corner of the building waiting for him to come out of hiding so they could nail him. Luc knew it. He waited and heard nothing. He waited some more. Maybe they were gone.

He relaxed a little, and took the big heaving breaths he had been needing, but had been too scared to take. He relaxed a little and let his knees down from his chest. He relaxed a little and slowly raised himself up to his feet.

He slowly and briefly poked his head up around the corner, and saw nothing. There wasn't anyone in immediate sight, so he quietly began strafing towards the street from which he came. His car was off in the opposite direction, but he wanted to be moving away from his assailants. He crossed the street and moved towards the Ambassador Bridge, where he hoped to come across the police officer that is traditionally posted in a University of Windsor staff parking lot.

Chapter Twelve

The suspended Luc Lefevre lightly jogged down Sandwich Street, heading eastbound to meet up where the Ambassador Bridge always had an off duty police officer in case of emergencies. It was a common practice to have the officer present, but the contract was set to expire in January 2008. Luckily for Luc, that wasn't for a few weeks, and there still might be someone present to help him.

Jogging through the cool air, with his heart still arrhythmically palpitating from his narrow escape, he scuttled past residential streets and debris-covered laneways until he reached a familiar fork in the road with a gas/service station on it. The towering green frame of the Ambassador Bridge eclipsed the sun as he continued down along the avenue.

He could spot the parking lot he was looking for, and sure enough there was the off duty unit positioned where Luc had hoped they'd be. It was just a solo officer, but that was all the help he needed.

Off-duty shifts were scheduled and systematized after there were complaints on the force that some officers were getting preferential treatment in downtown establishments and receiving more overtime pay than others. There was also a fear of corruption among some off-duty officers who routinely serviced the same bars. City

council took action and regulated the whole procedure. A year ago it would have been Constable Jenkins sitting there, but today it was a craps shoot.

Running up to the stationary vehicle, Lefevre recognized Carol Stevens. She didn't know what to think when she saw Lefevre approach her out of uniform and breath.

"Officer Stevens, how's it going?" panted Luc, smiling with a growing sense of security.

"What're you up to, Lefevre?" she replied.

"Can you take me downtown? I've got to get back to the station and talk to Detective Gordon. Is there any way you get me down there?"

"I can't leave my post. You know that. I can radio in and see what help is out there. It's been a slow day, but let me check here," she said. Stevens called it in on the radio, to see if anyone was available to give Lefevre a ride downtown.

After a moment she asked Luc, "So. What's this I hear about you being suspended, Lefevre? What're you doing out here?"

"Yeah, it's a bit of a long story – I probably shouldn't involve anybody else in it, if you know what I mean, Carol. Sorry."

"Sure thing. Just bein' nosey. We've got someone coming down to pick you up," she said. "In the mean time, how about those Red Wings? You see that game the other night?"

Lefevre groaned and rolled his eyes. While immensely popular among the locals in the city, he himself hadn't caught on to the fever that the rest of the city had for the Detroit Red Wings. He supposed suffering through another rant from another coworker on the subject would be tolerable, considering his other option of being beaten to death out in the streets.

Back at the station, Luc was quietly though not secretly led back to Mickey Gordon's office.

"Luc, what are you doing here again?" questioned Detective Gordon.

His newly reassigned partner Dan Hallimut was also present. The two were pleased to have received an anonymous phone call providing a possible residence of the suspects they were looking for, but nothing had yet quite panned out from it.

"Hey, I'm not trying to get you guys in trouble – I swear I'm not," Lefevre started. "But I went to that address, the one out in the west end. *That's* the place, man! I went in there, and snooped around a bit. They've got guns, they've got knives, they've got cocaine and heroin, they've got everything you could need to distribute, there's stacks of cash ..."

"Whoa! You went in there!" snapped Hallimut. "Come on, man! You could be jeopardizing our entire investigation. Without a warrant you're going to screw us over completely!"

"Listen, I'm just a regular Joe, now guys. I'm no cop, and I'm reporting what I've found. That's all," appealed Lefevre.

"It's still not smart. You know better than this," said Gordon.

"Yeah, well that's not really the important part. It looks like there was a struggle in there. I don't know what it was all about, but my sister is there! Look," and he handed

over the purse he snagged. “I don’t know if all this stuff is legit, but she left this behind when she ran out of there. Furniture was knocked over, there was blood on the door and the back door was left open. Someone went sprinting out of there, and I think it’s MP.”

“Well ... nicely done,” said Hallimut.

“Her identification is a fake,” said Lefevre. “I don’t know if she’s going by that last name or not, and I’m certain that the address is fake, too. I know ‘cause her birthday is wrong, she’s using this to look older – probably so she can buy smokes and alcohol. But it’s a start. We’ve got a picture of her, albeit a lousy driver’s license photo, and can confirm that it’s her. I think she’s trying to get away from these guys, and we’ve got to send out another APB, focused on the west end with the new information.”

Luc Lefevre stopped and let the two officers digest the information. They seemed to agree that updating the APB was paramount.

“If we can get MP, we can crack this case and catch these guys. We’ve got ‘em on two counts of murder, at least, reckless endangerment, possession with intent to traffic, possession of illegal firearms, assaulting an officer ... the list goes on. She’s the linchpin here guys – she’s needs to be saved and she’s our ticket to catching the rest of ‘em.”

“Alright, Luc, thanks for your help. You’re absolutely right about all of this. We’re going to do the best we can to catch up with your sister, but ... you know we can’t include you on this. You can’t be on this case,” said Gordon, coolly, slowly, and as a matter of fact.

“Mic,” responded Lefevre, “I realized that there are some parts of this case that are too much for me to handle. When I was walking around that house thinking about how my sister must be living, I ... well I almost threw up. I’m scared for her, but I know that I’m just going to be a danger to the case, and I don’t want anything like that to happen. I was angry before, but I truly understand now, I promise.”

“You really mean that, don’t you,” observed Dan Hallimut.

“I just need a ride back to my car and I’m going to be out of your hair, for sure. I just had the shit scared out of me, and that’s enough. Those guys are back there, and if they see me wandering around I’m done for. Do you think you can give me a hand?”

“Come on, Luc. What are we, a taxi service?” complained Gordon.

“I just thought we could swing by Dougie’s place and ask him a few more questions along the way, and then I’m out of here,” said Lefevre.

“You’re suspended Luc, there’s no way I can keep you involved in this,” retaliated Gordon.

“Look, I can’t handle these guys or my sister right now, I’ve got to leave that up to you, but no one has a better report with Dougie than I do. I can help you get the rest of the info we need and then be out of your hair,” argued Lefevre.

Hallimut added, “I don’t think it’s going to hurt, Mickey.”

“Alright then, but you’re going back to your car right afterwards, Luc. There won’t be any negotiation after this, you got that?” replied Gordon.

“Absolutely detective,” smiled Lefevre.

“Then, before we move out, the heroin we seized from you earlier today, Luc,” started Gordon. “It didn’t contain any fentanyl in it. This isn’t what the Ghosts of Man have been distributing. Either this isn’t theirs, or it’s an unfinished product. If it’s an unfinished product then it’s very possible that they’re making their Canadian product here on this side of the border.”

“There wasn’t any chemistry going on at the house I was just as,” said Lefevre. “There must be another location that they’re doing all the manufacturing.”

Gordon paused and looked at Hallimut. “Just another problem for us to solve, I guess.”

The three officers returned to their informant’s house looking for answers. The house that Lefevre had found was a simple one-stop on their production run, and nothing else. They certainly weren’t distributing to the locals around that area, not tens of thousands of dollars worth of product, which meant that they were sitting on that merchandise until they were meeting up with a major distributor. That would be a major drug bust, and it would look great on the department.

The Ghosts of Man, they already knew, was distributing fentanyl-laced heroin and cocaine, and while a majority of their trafficking was done in the United States, that was less of their concern. Whether they were arrested in Canada or the U.S., catching them and charging them would be a major interruption in their trafficking scheme. Once in custody, they could be extradited to the U.S. to face whatever charges may be waiting for them there. These guys were going down.

But what they were up to and who they were looking to sell their merchandise to was important. Dougie was the WPD’s inside man, and he had to know who was buying, where they were storing everything, if they were producing it in Windsor.

Dougie was in his filth-ridden home sitting in front of a television, watching reruns from a classic’s channel with a few friends. The group was drinking already, and were immediately intimidated by the presence of police officers at their place.

“Hey, what the fuck man? What’re the cops doin’ here?” said one of the addicts.

“Shit!” yelled another.

The group started to shuffle things around in their room darting things under the couches and into a cabinet, as they poured back whatever booze remained in their glasses. Lefevre and Gordon could see them panicking through the front window as they climbed the badly damaged front porch, and smiled.

Gordon knocked on the front door, and Dougie answered.

“Hello officers, this isn’t a very good time for a chat. I’ve got a few friends over,” he said nervously. As comfortable Dougie was with having the cops around, and as interested as he was in helping out every now and again, his ‘informing’ remained a sensitive point among his friends. They didn’t like that he was cooperating with the police, and threatened him frequently should he ever narc them out.

“Dougie, we’ve got to have a little chat, not too long this time. But we’ve got some questions we need to get answered, pronto,” said Gordon.

“Yeah, you see, I’ve got some pals over, and we’re watching the game, and ... I’m not sure I even know what you’re talking about anyhow, and...”

“It’s the middle of the day. I *know* you’re not watching any sports. Come on out here and chat with us, or we can slap all of your buddies in custody for possession right now, if you’d like. That’d make you pretty popular, wouldn’t it?” replied Gordon.

Dougie hummed and hawed about the whole request, but begrudgingly trod out into the cool front yard. He sat down on the busted up stairs and the officers formed a semi-circle around him.

“Alright. What do you want now,” he said defeated.

“The Ghosts of Man. Are they manufacturing here in the city?”

“I don’t know,” he said right away. “You’re asking the wrong guy, I swear.”

“Seriously? You knew all about the fentanyl earlier, laughed at us for getting the name wrong. You sure you don’t want to reconsider not knowing anything?” pried Gordon.

“Alright, look. I’ve only *heard* that these guys are cookin’ this stuff up somewhere in the county,” said Dougie in a low raspy voice. “I never met ‘em. They pick up their ingredients around here ‘cause it’s easier to get prescription drugs – it’s not simple, but it’s easier. They can get what they’re lookin’ for, they buy it up and then cook it.”

Dougie paused to think for a moment, perhaps considering how much more he should say. He stuck his tongue through the gaping hole in his mouth where he was missing two front teeth. He looked Detective Gordon up and down, and then Lefevre, who appeared troubled.

“Dougie,” said Lefevre, breaking his silence to this point, “my sister is involved in all of this and I’ve got to get her out. Do you understand, man? This is my family, I’m asking you to help me save one of my own. You know we take good care of you for your information – I won’t forget this if you can help us out.”

“Listen, wherever it is out in the county, they brew this shit up and then they distribute it from there. It’s nothing little, they bake up a whole shitload and then they have the dealers come and get it. Nothing small, they’re not pushing on the streets or selling it in small doses. They get it right to the big guys, the Bandidos, the families. Their customers are the big fish,” said Dougie.

“It’s cut into their cash a bit, because they *could* sell it in small, marked up and cut-down doses, but now there’s too much pressure in Toronto. All their pushers are being caught up and they don’t want any part of being named, so they leave it to the big guys to make the sales. The families can get in and out of a city, do all the shady work distributing, but even they are having trouble getting their business into Toronto. They’re turning to everywhere, else, though.”

Dougie started listing towns, “They’ll pass right through the GTA and hit the eastern area, up towards Bowmanville. Then they’ll get into Niagara, and they’re keeping a lot of the work in the west. I’m hearing stories that they’re cleaning up in Sarnia and Chatham and in the north, like the mining communities in Sudbury, Kirkland and Timmins, when they bother to push their stuff up there.”

Detectives Mickey Gordon and Luc Lefevre had been waiting to make sense of this drug investigation for months. The seizures at the border, the pushers in the streets, the emergence of all the product in the area, it all started to make sense. Organized crime was becoming so much more prevalent in southern Ontario, and it had only taken a year since Toronto started cracking down.

It seemed, however, that if Toronto could do it, that anywhere else could do it, too. But Toronto’s budget was enormous. Toronto is the largest city in the nation; more people lived in Toronto than in Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Quebec City, Hamilton, and

Winnipeg combined. Their financial resources were immense, and they had major monetary redistribution in their favour after the Boxing Day Massacre from late last year. Pushing to reallocate the funds necessary to box out drug trafficking of this nature would take a major investment from much more than municipal tax payers. It would require both national and provincial readjustments to their budget, and that was not only unlikely, but would take ages to push through.

Lefevre and Gordon, and the newbie Hallimut, had what they were looking for, though. The Ghosts of Man were establishing a new distribution circuit with new partnerships to continue their trade. Somewhere out in the county they were brewing and cooking who knows what up, and were preparing to distribute it from there. Returning to the office to investigate the types of power required to manufacture extreme volumes of drugs like methamphetamine, crack cocaine, heroin and their derivatives could lead to some possible leads.

“Let’s get back to the station and get this all figured out,” said Lefevre, as the threesome was heading back to their vehicle.

“Luc, you know we can’t do that,” replied Mickey. “We’re taking you back to your car. You’ve got to stay out of this. You have to trust me, I’ll keep you up to speed on everything, but you cannot remain involved in this. You could jeopardize the integrity of the investigation and we’d lose everything.”

Luc was promptly returned to his car, which remained waiting for him, untouched, in the west end of the city.

Chapter Thirteen

Out in Windsor Essex County in the hamlet of McGregor, the recently purchased estate off of Townline Road 8 and Walker was burgeoning with activity. The enormous 30 acre property had construction crews erecting a rolling front gate and perimeter fencing with eight-foot high walls, secluding it from the view at the street level. The solid stone fencing was rimmed with wrought iron spikes along the top. Unscalable and opaque, intruders were unwelcome.

Construction on the enormous fence coincided with major installations throughout the mansion drawing the attention of many passersby. Whoever had purchased the property and home was customizing it to fit their own purposes, and had a lot of money to do so. The property had been sold earlier in the summer, and construction and renovations started slowly, but shortly were heavily underway.

Short green and well-maintained grass was moist from the thawed frost, and small trees denuded of their leaves dotted the large property, standing in the foreground of the enormous residence beyond. After the vast renovations, a crew poured a white concrete drive way up the centre of the property that led around to an attached three car garage. The drive way was lined with small shrubs, creating a tunnel of coniferous foliage into the property.

The garage had an apartment above it, and a large peaked roof. There were windows all along its sides and its cavernous insides were loaded with mysterious equipment that neighbours speculated over for months.

Right of the garage, the house was attached to the main building, which itself had peaked roofs, a second story with wide circular windows and a large overhang that reached out over a spectacular front porch. The porch was fronted by massive grey

cylindrical columns. The red brick of the house had been plastered over with a dull mustard-like yellow, giving it a much more Mediterranean or South American appearance.

Further fencing was being installed in a back corner, of a wooden variety, close to the partial erection of a stable. Though no horses were actually present on the location, it appeared that some were planned for the future.

Arsenio con Pisco pulled up to his estate in a Mercedes S-Class sedan, admiring the great progress that he had made to this point. It had cost him a lot of money, but this residence would prove to be valuable, and necessary to protect. Con Pisco was a member of the Peruvian Ochoa family, members of an international drug cartel from his homeland, which had been operating for more than fifty years. He himself was a young man when he was first enlisted to traffic pure uncut cocaine to other members of the family in the southern United States many many years ago.

Back then, trafficking goods was easy, and affordable. Any authorities required simple payments for safe passage of any good that you wished to move. Whether it was cocaine, weapons, or even people, money was an international translator that everyone could negotiate with.

Arsenio con Pisco admired his family, and revered them with dignity and legacy. He was very proud of everything that they had accomplished, and could see the good that had come from their efforts. Their families were very well taken care of, and everyone involved with their operations was handsomely rewarded. Their careers had led everyone they shared their lives with to great fortunes and happiness.

Of course, their prosperity came at the cost of street urchins, heroin addicts, crack whores and broken homes, but those people were not who he set out to protect. He, and the Con Pisco *familia*, had originated in very modest and rural backgrounds, but found great fortune in harvesting opium and exporting it into Asian markets. Shortly after they began selling it to nautical merchants, the word of the great South American cocaine and heroin production became synonymous with places like Argentina, Columbia, Peru and Brazil.

The global schematics of international drug trafficking hadn't changed much in the many years that the Con Pisco *familia* had been involved. In fact, *la trafica con drogas* mostly involved lubricating one's way through the various jurisdictions with as little discomfort as possible. While the firepower and manpower to eliminate a threat was greatly available, it was much more amiable to purchase safe passage.

In the motherland, the empires of *Las Familias* reinvested their wealth into their surroundings. They built schools and churches for the villagers that lived in their midst. They provided support to the local farmers who oftentimes struggled to make ends meet. To their people, they were merciful and providing, and they were revered among them. International investigations often stayed their distance, knowing full well that the firepower and battalions that the cartels employed were dangerously powerful, and a full-out war would be highly possible. And there was no safe approach to them, either. The villagers surrounding the great *familias* protected their providers, sending out warning signals at any investigations or an assassin's approach. It was a symbiotic relationship that both entities treasured.

Arsenio con Pisco first arrived in the United States delivering goods to parts of the Ochoa family in Miami, Florida. His brothers, nephews, cousins and uncles all had their territories in which they operated. His uncle Ledher Ochoa established himself in Miami, decades ago and had become exceptionally wealthy and powerful. His older brother had moved himself into Albuquerque, New Mexico and had incredible success, too. But *Las Ochoa Familia* hadn't made the trek north in all their time.

Con Pisco married his way into the family in 1976, to Ledher Ochoa's daughter Carmen. She was very young and very beautiful. Having served him faithfully in Miami, Ochoa both graced Con Pisco with the honour of Carmen's hand in marriage, and also said that a man who provides for an Ochoa must be the master of his domain. He insisted that Arsenio move north and expand the family business.

Once in Michigan, Con Pisco found great success marketing their goods to the people of Detroit and the surrounding boroughs. Michigan was a hot spot for major drug use. Back in the early days, the manufacturing industry was booming. Assembly line workers, Tool and Dye shops and machinists were employed relentlessly with more work than they could handle. Yet all these men were unhappy with their jobs, and dreamed of careers away from the polluted environments of the factory.

The workers couldn't stand to work at their jobs much longer, but they were being paid tremendously for their efforts thanks the United Auto Workers union. Rather than taking a pay cut and moving into a field they would be more satisfied with, the UAW employees opted to find more expensive recreational activities to help them take the edge off of their dissatisfaction.

Con Pisco's business was never slow for a moment. He had a few business associates which helped him begin distributions throughout the metropolitan area, and he was pleased with the amount of business they drummed up. It was almost too easy. The drugs basically marketed themselves. Rock legends and hip hop stars graced the music scene in a market named 'Detroit Rock City.' The drugged-up images of rock and roll, blues, hip hop and jazz artists marketed Con Pisco's intoxicants better than he could have ever done by his own effort.

But, over the decades the market turned for the worse on Arsenio. The city had a downtown population over 1.5 million for many years, prospering along with the automotive industry, but in recent years there had been a grave downturn in productivity, sales and interest. While the Detroit Region still retained a comparable population to the '70s, the downtown core shrank upon itself down to under a million people. Not that 900,000 citizens wasn't a bountiful customer base, but the customers with the posh tastes who could afford to move out of town, did, and they took their money with them. The city was retracting, and they weren't migrating out into the boroughs, they were leaving town altogether. The only ones who couldn't afford to leave were those who were so heavily addicted that they didn't know where they were going.

So the move was on, and Con Pisco had to find a way to continue to make money and to expand his market. It didn't take long for him to realize that pushers were commuting over from Windsor and buying up crack, risking being caught at the border, and then marking the price way up. The pushers were making a mint off of Arsenio's goods, and he knew it was time to capitalize.

Once he started investigating the Canadian market he was shocked to find that the neighbour next door wasn't the quaint pansies that the American experience had led him

to believe. Canada had their vices, too, and southern Ontario had the highest population and the most money to be turned into an expansion into a financially rewarding venture.

Years later, he was still operating a tremendously successful drug empire out of Detroit where he had the municipal government under his finger. The first step of setting up a safe operating enterprise was to buy out the police. He had one of his own men running the city at the current time. He was a Detroit native, but someone who grew up near and dear to the Con Pisco's. After rigging an election, the mayor was running things as an entrepreneur rather than a civil servant dedicated to the electorate, and that was fine with Arsenio. In fact, national magazines would rank him among the worst mayors in all of America each year.

In the last election campaign, the mayor had a formidable competitor challenging him in the polls. All that changed quickly after Con Pisco sent his men in to the downtown campaign headquarters for the challenger to ransack his offices and steal his list of financial contributors. All his campaign information was destroyed and he had to start from scratch to establish financial backers to his run for the mayor. Not a single member of the regional media dared to suggest that the incumbent mayor had anything to do with the situation, and that was a good thing.

Arsenio con Pisco learned that corruption could run deep, but only if it ran quietly. It wasn't so much a conspiracy as much as it was simply good business. The cities still received their money, and they weren't subjected to any gunfights or shootouts. Things would run smoothly and quietly so long as each party lived up to their end of the bargain. Yes, money was the lubricant that made business run smoothly.

Con Pisco started shipping product across the Detroit River via Native Americans up near the Sarnia crossing, where the native land was free of tariffs and inspections. Initially used to import and export illegal tobacco and alcohol, Con Pisco started moving his product through the native channels. The reserves were out of the way and he had to share the profits, which he wasn't impressed with. He also had to move product under the native's terms.

Things took a turn for the more difficult after the Toronto crack-down on gang violence, gun control and drug trafficking. Their efforts did a formidable job discouraging major dealers from shipping guns and drugs into the GTA. With distribution and freight lanes interrupted, Con Pisco was having significant difficulties recruiting and maintaining good help that wouldn't drop his name if they were pressured by the cops.

The reliable pushers turned out to be the existing organized crime in southern Ontario. They were much smaller than what Con Pisco was used to dealing with in the United States, but they were no less organized. And they took care of all of the business, they just needed suppliers – and that was where Arsenio's idea to produce his goods in the region was born.

After importing his family's cocaine and heroin, he began setting up a makeshift storage unit inconspicuously located in the west end of Windsor, Ontario. It aroused little suspicions and was very affordable. It was going to serve as the perfect interim location until the finishing touches were completed at his production facilities in McGregor.

Con Pisco had briefly established a connection with the Bonnot family that moved most product up and down southern Ontario and the more organized Bandidos, who weren't overly popular by name, but were definitely intimidating to see.

The Bonnot family was every bit the French mafia Toronto, who had been operating throughout Ontario with secrecy and intimidation. They were the type to enter into contracts that they had no intentions of honouring, but because they were incredibly ruthless, it was strongly advised that you didn't bother trying to get reimbursed. It was easier to write off the account than it was to jeopardize the safety of your family. The Bonnots were the type to find your parents, your children, your relatives and your loved ones and give you a 'message.'

The Bandidos were equally dangerous, but in a much different way. Although they were rowdy motorcycling vagabonds, when they settled into a neighbourhood, they made it clear that gang-land bullshit was not tolerated. While their business was dangerous, violent and sometimes deadly, where they lived was peaceful – by force if necessary. Often living amongst each other in the same communities, their business didn't go home with them, and they patrolled their neighborhoods with a sense of security. If there were any problems around their homes, it was quickly discouraged or extinguished, depending on how their first meetings went. They were well liked in their communities, yet equally intimidating. They would do whatever they felt like, and if you didn't like it, well ... beware.

The Bonnot and Bandidos had their own networks and ways of doing things, and frankly, they had all the help they needed. What they didn't have was a reliable source to turn to for their drugs and weapons. Arsenio con Pisco, on the other hand, had an bold artery pulsing with both weapons and drugs, but needed the dealers. They were partnerships that couldn't have come too soon.

Once Con Pisco had his manufacturing lab and estate finalized, he would be protected, profitable and pleased – he foresaw a completion date early the next summer. For the time being, he was going to crank out a few test runs to gauge the performance of his latest acquisitions. Operating a half-capacity, he didn't have a large crew and didn't quite yet have all of the equipment he needed to convert and reduce tropinine for cocaine, extracting and purifying opium, and the more complicated chemistry involved with producing methamphetamines yet, to produce in the volumes that he had plans for.

He was specifically looking forward to meeting with the local and provincial police in the near future, to bargain with them. He didn't need any complications surrounding his work, and he knew that a few well-paid officers would ensure that things would operate smoothly. As in all metropolitan districts, the protectors of the people were really out to protect themselves. It had worked in Detroit, and he was certain that the Ontario Provincial Police would be just as pliant as their American counterparts.

Most beneficial to Con Pisco was access to prescription medicine. In the United States, prescription drugs were difficult to come by in large quantities. The hospitals in the Detroit area were particularly strict, and Arsenio had difficulty finding reliable sources who could acquire large quantities of Sudafed, kerosene, ammonia, morphine, lime, ammonium chloride, and other over-the-counter drugs.

But in Windsor, the opportunity for corruption was much greater. The federal government implemented a socialist medical care system that left practitioners at the government's mercy when it came to getting paid. It was especially discouraging when it was juxtaposed with the United States, where mandatory emergency surgeries would rake in exponentially higher revenues.

While it remained a tremendous breach of the Hippocratic Oath and a dodgy move to boot, it was still financially rewarding in many ways. Con Pisco wasn't clear how his pharmaceutical providers were obtaining the materials he required in such abundance and regularity, but he was satisfied. The *mulas* that he'd been having to use to cross borders were expensive, unreliable and they couldn't carry the quantities that he was looking for in their bowels. So this was a pleasant development. Plus it always disturbed him that all his drugs had to be shit out.

But the time was coming that he was going to have to meet up with the local officials to strike a deal. Whether it was the Commander in Chief of the Ontario Provincial Police, a high ranking officer in the RCMP, the Mayor of the City of Windsor, or the Chief of Police in the city, he couldn't have pesky investigations, allegations and attention involved with his operations. The time would come, and it would come soon. He had cash at the ready and was looking forward to it. It always pleased him on the inside showing a man \$10,000 in cash and watching his reaction.

He would watch the man's face, and he could see the ethical debate running through his mind. He could see him tackling the duties of his office, the explanations to his family about the sudden increase in income, how he could hide the situation from his colleagues. Then he'd wonder if \$10,000 was enough. Arsenio con Pisco had seen it over and over again. It was predictable now. It was also inevitable.

Chapter 14

Windsor detective suspended indefinitely

Detective who was reassigned due to a conflict of interest charged with possession

Nov 16, 2007

Nathanial Nardone

WINDSOR BOREALIS REPORTER

Windsor Police Detective Lucas Lefevre, 46, has been suspended indefinitely after he was found in possession with over \$10,000 worth of heroin yesterday. Lefevre was removed from the 'Ottawa Drive by' case only days earlier after it was ruled that his involvement in the case was a conflict of interest.

Lefevre is the son of the recently deceased Serge Lefevre, 63, who was murdered in a drive-by shooting on Ottawa Ave., earlier this week on Nov. 12. One other man was also shot dead in the fatal drive by and wounded seven others.

A day after being removed from the case, Police Chief Hal Doric caught Lefevre with a bag of heroin in his pocket that he was unable to explain. He was ordered to turn in his badge and his gun. Police suspensions are reviewed and charges are investigated by

an internal inquiry on the first Tuesday of every month. His court date is scheduled for Dec. 4.

26-year-old Marc Fuhrman, the intended target of the drive by shooting, was pronounced dead at the scene. Police are searching for any information on the three assailants who were driving a grey 2004 Ford Explorer with Michigan plates and are also searching for a brown, rusty 1999 Mercury Topaz last seen in the city's west end. Both vehicles are believed to be related to the case.

Suspects are described as black males, between the ages of 18 and 30, who are wanted for questioning in relationship with a gang called the 'Ghosts of Man.'

Police are continuing their search for Det. Lefevre's younger sister, Marie-Pierre Lefevre, 24, who may also be responding to Marie-Pierre De Lacroix, described as thin with dark hair and brown eyes.

Anyone with information is asked to call the police. Information can be reported anonymously.

It wasn't until the middle of the day when suspended Detective Luc Lefevre exited his LaSalle home and went out to lunch, that he saw the headline of the *Windsor Borealis*. Though he had been in the news several times this week, this was the first time that he had made the front page. He was impressed, but at the same time, further embarrassed. He'd always thought making the front page of the newspaper would be fun, but had matured to realize that the news business doesn't sell the joyous occasions in a city's life. There's no money in that.

He spent his morning sleeping in as best as he could. With all the stress from the previous couple days, he found himself dog-tired, and passed out almost immediately when he got home. And he stayed asleep for quite some time. He laid in bed dreamlessly for almost 12 hours before he rustled himself up out of his pajamas and into the day. He felt like going out and enjoying some of his suspension, but was crudely reminded of the complications in his life.

Lefevre was sitting a booth by himself in a diner just up the road in LaSalle, and was expecting to enjoy a black coffee and a simple breakfast while reading the paper, but had his interest in the news ruined along with his appetite. He stuck with the coffee, though, and watched the traffic moving up and down the main street.

Luc paused from watching for a moment and reached into a shoulder bag that he had brought with him, peeking inside to confirm that he had brought the things that he intended to bring. Checking the inventory, he mentally scratched the following items off a list in his head; the folding knife he's swiped out of the canvas bag from the Ghosts of Man, a lighter, a taser and a set of handcuffs that he'd lifted from the police department yesterday, as well as a canister of good ol' pepper spray.

He thought back to the note that he'd found on his father's cigarette pack, indicating that MP was going to be at the Mill at 11 p.m. on November 16, and he had what he needed to go out there and get some answers. What he lacked was the patience to wait till 11 p.m. that night.

Arsenio con Pisco sat in the large bay window of his ever expanding mansion out in the county. He was dressed in a fine Italian suit, a light tan colour that made the bronze of his skin shine brightly and healthily. His legs were crossed and he wore a comfortable pair of narrow, seamless black shoes. The heels were raised, giving him an additional 5 cm of height, just enough to give him an even further appearance of authority.

He sat smoking a narrow cigarette, and he enjoyed it slowly. He would have cigars in the evenings, but the midday was a time for cigarettes. His floor was carpeted with a plush and soft white carpet that made each step seem like a whisper.

He gazed happily at the continued construction on the perimeter fence that was being erected around his handsome property, and at the finishing touches that were being made on the gatehouse. He was definitely proud of his accomplishments and knew that the true rewards from his efforts were soon to come.

Con Pisco was expecting the arrival of representatives from the Bonnot family and the Bandidos today. Even though his production was not yet fully operational, there was no time like the present to secure business arrangements and social relationships. A man who trusted his partners was a man who lived in peace. Indeed, the Bandidos and Bonnot family had to be coerced into trusting him, but all intelligent people do.

He would offer them a tour of his facilities, samples of his wares, demonstrations of his security measures, and then show them a night out on the town. He was certain to prove that he was the power play her claimed to be. Tonight would be an evening to remember, and he was going to make it so. While he was entertaining his clients, he was not going to be available for a very important purchase down at the Mill in Sandwich Towne, which made him a little nervous. He was going to have to leave his first-hand man in charge of the pick up.

Chase Nguyen was still a young man, but his loyalty and tenacity made him a valuable ally. If Arsenio con Pisco was unable to be present at the pick up, Nguyen would be the next best choice. Chase was still a bit green to the business, but he came with great street cred from downtown Detroit. Con Pisco offered him work and good pay to saddle up with him, and Nguyen agreed. He wasn't the smoothest of characters, but he was strong at keeping brotherhood among his men and delivering a message. Con Pisco would sometimes refer to him as his general, although that was not a name he used to address him specifically. It was more of an inside joke for himself than anything else.

Nguyen was great at intimidating people into doing what he wished, had great speed in chasing people down, and was heartless when it came to retrieving loan payments and accounts receivable, but he still wasn't comfortable with murder. Perhaps that was a good thing, but the time would come when that discomfort would have to go.

The drive-by shootings earlier in the week were his first crack at shooting directly at people, and he had been very nervous about the whole situation. Once it was said and done, he and his boys didn't think much of it.

Of course, if he had to do it all again, he wouldn't have used his Ford Explorer! After having to ditch his wheels to prevent being identified, he switched over to the only thing else he could get his hands on right away – which was the old damned Mercury Topaz. Thinking back, he *should* have used the fuckin' Topaz instead.

Regardless, they were able to get in and get out in no time, and had shot their mark up as per request. They even hit their mark's wash-out letch, an old man who was always nearby when drugs were being sold. He was collateral damage, not worth the cost of the bullets, but a worthwhile takedown nonetheless.

It was a pure coincidence that he'd been the estranged father of the detective that was working the case, however. It was even more discomfoting knowing that it was MP's father. What an unfortunate turn of events. Nguyen and his men managed to take care of that situation as well. After getting the detective's name, it was a matter of time before they found him dawdling around the police station, and then it was just a stakeout before he hopped back in his car and went home.

Sure showing him their faces was a bit unwise but it certainly got the message across. They didn't see him at the funeral the next day, which managed to get MP to her father's burial without incident. As for shooting up her father, she seemed genuinely upset about it, but not too attached. Almost as if it ended any hope that they might be able to reconcile their past, something that she knew wasn't possible anyhow. It crushed that dream, but it allowed her to let it go. She had more important things to do than to get bogged down by draggin' her old man around all over the place anyhow.

For the time being, Chase was with his crew at the peelers. While cruising around in a Topaz was making him look foolish, at least here money could still get you treated like a man. Chase's cell phone rang, and it was Arsenio con Pisco.

"Chase, it's me. I have work for you tonight," said Con Pisco.

"Sure thing, sir. What do you wanna us to do?" answered Nguyen.

"The pick up at the Mill tonight, I am .. what's the word? *Divertido*, uh ... *entertaining* some guests, and I regret that I will be in dispose. You and your men will have to make the purchase. Are you ok with this?" said Con Pisco.

"Whatever you say, sir. Ma boys and I will make sure it gets done," said Nguyen.

"Do you need any more *dinero* before you head out?" asked Con Pisco.

"Na, we still have the most of \$50,000 with us right now, sir. I think that should be able to get the job done, what do you think?" responded Nguyen.

"I think you should return to me and pick up some more. We must pay *nuestro doctor* well. I do not want him to feel unappreciated, yes?" said Con Pisco.

"Of course not, I will return and make sure everything you've asked for is done," answered Nguyen. "I will be there shortly."

Nguyen closed his cell phone and smacked one of his men on the leg. He was laying down on his back, with some a Canadian coin in his mouth waiting for the stripper on the stage to come and give him a stage dance. Flashing lights and the stripper's music of choice beat repetitively through the dark dance club. The club itself was empty in the middle of the day, and it was just Nguyen and his two men who were sitting at the stage. He gathered them up before they could get personal dances from the ladies and stepped out into the bright day. Frustrated that they hadn't the chance to have some fun, they were especially unhappy that they had to climb into their rusted up Topaz.

Damn-it, Chase Nguyen was really starting to hate this car.

Within the hour, Chase Nguyen and his partners arrived back at the busy mansion where crews were still hammering and drilling at various different inclusions to the property. The stable in the back was coming along nicely, and the gatehouse and fence were also showing signs of improvement. Nguyen didn't come out to the property too often, as he was based down in the west end where he peddled small drugs for part of his pay.

He was looking forward to the completion of the mansion because he was promised a great room and space. There were plans for a barracks on the property later on after all the main construction was completed, and he and his men could stay there. It would serve as a guest house for body guards and hired help when visitors came, as well. Tonight, the visitors that Con Pisco had invited were all being housed in the guest rooms in the mansion, though they were still awaiting finishing touches. Con Pisco wouldn't be embarrassed though, he would instead be promising so much more for the next visit, hooking his guests with interest. It would certainly guarantee their return, and their return business.

It was approaching late afternoon, and the skies grew dark suddenly and early. Though only just after 5 p.m., the lights along the gates and surrounding the gatehouse were glowing a bright yellow, which cast across the gravel road before it. Windsor was generally overcast in the month of November, and rarely was there a star to be seen in the sky, which contributed to the early onset of darkness.

His Topaz passed through the unfinished rolling gates and up the white paved drive around the yard through the tunnel of trees and up to the external semi-detached garage. They rolled to a stop up against a very nice Mercedes S-Class sedan, an Audi A6, and a classic looking, chromed up Harley Davidson. They were all black and very clean. Soon enough the garage would be cleared and the cars could fit in there.

The three of them stepped out of their rusted-up vehicle with his companions and they entered through the garage doors. In the garage there were large industrial-like blowers that you might find in the kitchen of a restaurant. They were to be installed shortly, to keep the gases in the methamphetamine laboratory from collecting into dangerous levels. For the time being they weren't going to be cookin' up anything too seriously, so the blowers could wait.

Nguyen sidestepped the metallic gear from the blowers and found his way into the 'mudroom' beyond the garage. It was as nice as any fine washroom in a five star restaurant. They took off their shoes and left them in the tidy tiled room. Walking into a bright and well-stocked kitchen, they followed their way through the family room and into a study where Arsenio con Pisco was entertaining two guests.

The first was a Frenchman in a dark business suit wearing power colours. His shirt was a dark blue and his tie was a complementary dark blue. He sat crossed legged with a dark cup of coffee that steamed up from its rim. His hair was dark and freshly trimmed, and he had a long face with large lips. He was clearly a member of the Bonnot family, what they called *la famille Bonnot*. The tall and dark gentleman appeared to be cultured and comfortable in Con Pisco's home.

The second guest, on the other hand, seemed far more out of place. He wore a black leather jacket and tight blue jeans, and was undoubtedly representing the Bandidos. His hair was disheveled and he'd not shaved in two years, if ever. With a bright red beard and wild eyes, he had multiple earrings and a nose ring, to top it all off. He was a

renegade vagabond, the kind even Keith Richards would probably inch away from. He probably didn't want to take his boots off when he rode in.

Arsenio con Pisco welcomed Nguyen into the room with a warm smile and a polite gesture with his hand, offering him a comfortable seat. Chase sat down.

"Gentlemen," began con Pisco, "I'd like to introduce you to my first in command, Chase Nguyen. He takes care of any items in this sector that require his special attention." Con Pisco remained silent, apparently waiting for Nguyen to say something.

"Hi," he stuttered. "It's a pleasure." He knew when he was outranked by company, and he was certainly not in the same ranks as some of these guys. He was a henchman, but paid well enough to be serving for the military – which basically meant he did what he was told, no questions asked. He was still new at the whole gig, but knew a good deal when he heard one.

The two guests each acknowledged his presence, but merely out of respect to their host, and not so much because Nguyen impressed them in any way. Chase could feel the Frenchman eyeing him like a pool boy, or some other division of the hired staff. He didn't *like* being looked down upon, but he knew his role. He wasn't the man making the decisions and he certainly wasn't the guy with the money financing everything. He was ghost behind the scenes that made it all happen, and he crafted the name of this band after that.

The Ghosts of Man was his name, that didn't have so much a deep artistic meaning, but rather the fact that they did the things that people told ghost stories about. He knew that the ghosts of man had a history that was easily forgotten, which was perfect in his line of work. He wanted people years later to be making ghost stories up about the things that he had to do, much rather than have people quoting news articles about the things that he'd done.

No doubt, the news articles were not a source of pride. Often times you hear about psychotic killers who keep catalogues of information from the press on their killings and reports of what they'd done. They were tracking the impact that they were making on history – but that was not Nguyen's ambition. He saw success when nobody ever knew he was even there. He didn't measure success by what the popular opinion was, but rather whether or not his employer continued to ask for work from him.

In just this past week, he was instructed to make a man, Marc Fuhrman, disappear. It was his first kill - he wasn't comfortable with killing yet, but after raining bullets down Ottawa Ave., he was warming to the idea. Frankly, it was too easy. They had just blown the guy away and then put the pedal to the metal. While they had left that body behind for the coroner to tidy up, Chase knew that the time wasn't far from present that he would be responsible for disposing of a body himself. The thought made him uncomfortable, but if he wanted to be paid the money he was being paid, and if he wanted to continue to live the lifestyle that he was living, this was his option.

"I promise you that we will have everything under control. *Mi familia* is importing the fundamentals directly out of Peru, and we are acquiring local pharmaceuticals to complement our ambitions. In fact, my general here, Mr. Nguyen, will be picking up an order of drugs tonight from our connection here in the city."

Arsenio con Pisco rose from his seat and pulled a fat bundle of bills out of his pocket. Despite the \$50,000 that Nguyen had told Con Pisco that he had, it was insisted

that the pharmacist was genuinely rewarded to a level that he wouldn't think for a moment that he would be either betrayed or eliminated. The pharmacist was an integral part of the production process, and he was going to be recognized for being so.

Con Pisco handed him an additional \$15,000 for the pharmacist. He didn't flaunt it in front of his guests, but he wasn't hiding the fact that he was dishing out big money to ensure big production. Nguyen realized the he was part of the illusion that Con Pisco was creating, but that was part of his job, as well. Con Pisco probably wasn't intending on giving the pharmacist this much money, but if he showed his customers that he was dedicating this much cash into their product, they were much more likely to buy into his mirage. Not to say that his drugs were going to be bad, just to say that it was misleading to believe that the pharmacist deserved that much money each time they made a purchase.

The show was working, as Nguyen noticed the reaction from the Frenchman and the vagabond. The two of them were important customers to Con Pisco and he needed them to know that they were getting the best product that there was to be had.

"Listen," began Arsenio, "Chase, you need to be going. Thank you for stopping by. It is time that I show my associates the rest of the mansion and city. There is much to enjoy here. We have women who are available to you here right in the house, young ones who *know* how to please a man, or we can take you downtown where there are plenty of women available. We shouldn't bother them with the business details in their first visit to the area, yes?"

And on that note, Chase Nguyen took the cue and headed for the door.

"Good night, gentleman. Have a safe trip home, tomorrow," said Nguyen.

He thought that sounded like a good thing to say. He seemed concerned for their safety, and he was pleasant and polite. It would be great. He was feeling good for himself when he turned back and saw the look on Con Pisco's face. It was a heartless stare, the kind that no one else was picking up on except for Chase. It was apparently inappropriate for him to be socializing with the clients. At no point did Chase every lose sight of his rank in the hierarchy of the crime syndicate. Begrudgingly, he accepted his position and stepped out of the room.

Damn-it! Thought Chase Nguyen. He hated feeling like he was such a minor cog in the operations. But he knew that it was all part of the act – this was not how Con Pisco treated Nguyen generally. Arsenio would treat Nguyen like the valuable asset that he was when his customers weren't around. But tonight, it was all about control, power and wealth.

A more fragile man, who didn't understand the business, might have rebelled and jeopardized his boss's clients and future business. Not Nguyen – he was an excellent actor. He could play the domesticated thug, the inner city gangster and the mild-mannered diplomat. He was in charge for a reason.

It wasn't close to 11 p.m. when Nguyen was scheduled to meet with the pharmacist yet. He hoped that thing could remain quiet, and he knew that it was important that it went according to schedule. It had been decided quite a while ago that the Ghosts of Man was going to include MP Lefevre in the dealings. She had been around with the gang for years now, and she was becoming anxious, hoping to start earning money on the drug trade shortly. She wasn't satisfied being a whore on the side who had

sex for drugs. She wanted to earn her own money, and frankly, she was more than smart enough to become her own dealer – she just needed some protection. But that fell in conflict with service to Con Pisco. It was a difficult position for Nguyen who felt genuine hope for MP Lefevre – it would be truly unfair if a woman as genuinely positive as her didn't escalate herself out of the current conditions that kept her down and kept her high.

No matter – he was going to be happy to show her the ropes tonight at the pickup at the Mill. He didn't suspect that there was going to be any difficulties with the purchase, but for the sake of education, he was going to prepare for it the way he would for any much more dangerous transaction. MP would get a chance to see what's expected in these types of dealings, and perhaps someday soon she would be able to take on more responsibility of her own. She could move back to Detroit and continue to do the marketing on the American side of the border, alleviating any conflict that might arise from working in the same region as her older brother.

Nguyen went down into the large and unfinished basement, past the large stoves and scaffolds that were being used to produce some of the free-base crack that they were planning on selling to the Bonnots and Bandidos. There was a mild armory that would promise to be much more impressive in the future – but for now it wasn't even a locker room. A pile of pistols, rifles, knives and revolvers lay in a bunch in the corner of the room. It would be eventually dry-walled and sealed with a lock, but until that time, this was as good as the storage got.

It was a bit amateur, but he was ok with it for now. So long as there weren't too many people nosing around the house and poking around the basement where they shouldn't be, then it wasn't going to be a problem yet. He strapped on a glock with a sharkskin holster and packed an extra magazine just in case, equipped a secondary firearm as backup and placed a switchblade into his pocket. He wasn't going to need all this stuff, it was just for show and the purpose of giving MP a little more experience.

Chapter Fifteen

Luc Lefevre had been waiting anxiously all day, going over and over in his mind what might happen tonight. He parked his vehicle up the street in a grocery store parking lot and taken a seat in one of the west end bars, taking a shot and then a pint to try and calm his nerves. It was only a matter of that he'd be forced into action, and he was truly intimidated.

Amidst the noisy commotion in the bar, he closed his eyes and tilted his head back. He pictured the mill just two blocks away from where he sat right now. He thought about what he might see. He didn't know what his father had had to do with all of this, nor why there was a note in his pocket about the meeting. Lefevre considered that perhaps MP and he were to have a reunion, perhaps a reconciliation between the two of them. Either way, it was entirely possible that MP wouldn't return should there be no need for a meeting. On the other hand, perhaps she was going to be there for a reason – and Luc had to save her.

That was what his father had said – “I came back to save her... She's still alive.” Maybe this was what his father was waiting for. Perhaps this would be the opportunity to get her out of the situation that she found herself in. In any case, Lefevre was prepared with a small bag of weapons that he was prepared to equip before he walked over. He

would approach without a car, and he'd approach as inconspicuously as possible. It was a quiet area, but there was also a rear entrance to several apartment buildings – so foot traffic wouldn't draw too much attention, while his busted up Dodge Stratus was easily recognizable, even if it were dark out.

He ordered one more shot of whiskey to loosen his nerves. After that he would go put the pepper spray in his pocket, the handcuffs on his belt, the taser in his jacket and be ready to go.

Chase Nguyen was cruising back into the city in his ugly-ass Mercury Topaz. It was cold and his heater wasn't working. Damn-it, he wished he still had that cozy Explorer, 'cause this stupid car was awful. His two partners and MP Lefevre were squeezed into the vehicle, and although it sat four passengers comfortably, one of the seatbelts didn't work, and they were all uncomfortable sitting down with weapons in their pockets.

"What do I have to be here," asked MP. She was impatient, and seemed to have wanted to stay behind. Her thoughts appeared to be elsewhere.

"Listen, I want you to get some experience. I know you don't want to be stuck doin' what yo doin' forever. You'd think you'd be more appreciative. Jesus," he said. His matter-of-fact tone regarding her prostitution lacked the sensitivity she still felt towards it.

"I don't need your help," she snapped back at him.

"Yeah, I shoulda left you where I found you. You've been nuthin but trouble ever since, you know that."

"Yeah, well you *should* have. I don't need this shit .. you're not helpin' me with nothing. I don't know why I ever started followin' you in the first place," she spat back.

"You started following me, cause you're a strung out bitch with nowhere to go!" Nguyen yelled at her.

The car finally crawled onto Sandwich Street, and they were headed on their way towards the Mill. Street lights began flashing into the car and casting rolling shadows on the passengers. They rode in silence briefly, the passengers in the rear felt too uncomfortable to say a word while the front seats continued to argue.

When MP Lefevre ran away nine years ago, she was just a kid. She had ran into the arms of a 26-year-old 'boyfriend,' whom she'd been hanging out with at the time. He was a dumb lowlife, but he had drugs regularly and always some booze handy. She'd been hanging out with him and his friends for almost a year, and figured that she'd be able to crash on their couches at first.

As soon as she'd arrived at his place, he brought her in. He let her stay in his bed, and he slept with the girl who was over ten years his junior. They got high and they drank and stole when they had to get extra cash to get by.

Only a month later, her 'boyfriend' quit enjoying have a child around him all the time. She was cramping his style and he wasn't going to have some girl move in with him just cause they were fooling around. They had a huge fight, and he kicked her out. She was left alone, and she had nowhere to turn. She couldn't return home. She was so full of anger and was so certain that she couldn't turn to her family for support that she resorted to the only thing she could think of.

She remembered another man that was dealing in the city, but he was from Detroit. MP tracked him down and managed to hitchhike with him across the border. She made her way into the United States and resolved to work with the dealer while earning her stay with them. They were much better off than anyone she'd known. They had their own place that had a lot of rooms, and they seemed to have money at the ready at any time it was necessary. This was MP's first experience with the lifestyle of actually dealing drugs rather than consuming them. It quickly became the only lifestyle that she knew.

The men she started staying with and working with were members of the Ochoa *familia*, and the man who brought her over was Chase Nguyen. He was very young at the time, as well. He was just running product that he purchased in the States over into Windsor where he could mark it way up and make a handsome profit. He wasn't necessarily involved with *Las familias* yet, he was just taking small amounts to push. He didn't have the client-base nor a tested trafficking route. He would sweat buckets crossing through the tunnel those many years ago.

But the twosome seemed to be mostly embraced by the Ochoa family and they fit right in. They just didn't necessarily see eye to eye all the time. Some of it had to do that he wanted better for her like an older brother might. Some of it had to do that he pitied her and her situation. Some of it had to do with the sexual relationship that they had had early on.

For now, Chase Nguyen was trying to get her some experience, believing that he could prepare her for some solo work. Part of him wanted her to start taking care of herself, and part of him wanted her to quit being the so codependent. Days of late, she would absolutely anything to get herself some more crack.

Detective Mickey Gordon and Constable Dan Hallimut sat in an unmarked police car with the lights off in a parking lot down across the street from the Mill. They had been waiting for this evening to see what might happen. Both had adjusted their hours that day so that they could they would remain alert for the evening. No doubt, a 6 a.m. start at the station wouldn't have been kind to them 17 hours later that evening, especially if they had to jump into action.

They were unsure what sort of business was going down, but the note that they had recovered from Serge Lefevre during their investigation indicated that this was an important lead to follow.

"No offense, Dan, but it's a bit awkward not having Luc around these last few days," said Mickey Gordon.

"Nah, that's alright. You guys have been working together for ages," responded Hallimut. "This is just a temporary thing. Lefevre will be back in no time flat, and be totally acquitted of all this nonsense he's been accused of."

"It's not just that. It's like ... we knew each other so well that we could predict one another's moves. Backing each other up was a breeze, it was like we knew exactly what the other was going to do. I guess it's just a comfort thing," said Mickey.

"Hey, I'm sure we won't have to worry about that tonight," reassured Hallimut. "This is a simple stakeout. I'd be surprised if this lead goes anywhere."

“Well, we’ll find out soon enough, buddy,” said Mickey. “It’ll be 11 in another 15 minutes. We just have to sit tight and wait. I’ll be we readjusted all those ours for nothing. But this is part of being a detective, you gotta follow your gut, eh?”

The two shared a smile and turned back to their coffees that they were nursing.

Thomas Rayfield was a slender man who had never really played by the rules. Having spent most of his life in Calgary, Alberta, he was unhappy to have been reallocated back east to Ontario, and especially Windsor of all places. His parent company *Pfisaline* needed someone out east and he was the last one who wanted to move.

His company was doing research on the suspicions of higher cancer rates in the Windsor Essex region. Old buildings filled with decaying asbestos, tremendous amounts of carbon monoxide emissions, contaminated water and factory pollution were all suspects, but there wasn’t any truly outstanding statistics that warranted such an investigation. People seemed paranoid that they were living in a dangerous community, but the statistics told a different story – one that basically showed that more cases of cancer were being documented across the board, mostly because the techniques used to detect it were improving. All across the country, cancer was being diagnosed much more often. It wasn’t a simple Windsor phenomenon.

Yet here Rayfield was, wasting his time in this shitty town. His whole life he was out in the mountains, dirt biking in the badlands, and camping on weekends and now he was in the flattest part of southern Ontario and surrounded by farms. There wasn’t a decent provincial park for a hundred kilometers, and the provincial parks that were in fact there, were mostly cottage country and trailer park homes. It was ridiculous.

But Rayfield had found something to make the work a bit more rewarding, and that was a lot of cash. He was well respected in the Windsor community having come in as an expert. They didn’t know that he was lowest in seniority at his firm, and especially hadn’t picked up on just how much he detested this area. He had free access to all the drugs at his clinic and had found a way to turn that into major profits. Soon enough he could quit all this work and find a gig at a common pharmacy and work out the rest of his days in a region or town of his liking.

Until then he was going to be selling all the Sudafed, kerosene, ammonia, morphine, lime, ammonium chloride and other prescription drugs that his man asked for. He’d only begun to sell some of his wares to the crime syndicate, but he realized the awesome purchasing power that he had stumbled across. He could jack the costs up on them, and they’d still pay. Money was of little concern, and Rayfield knew it.

He had a large duffle bag filled with boxes of drugs on the passenger seat of his car as he cruised towards Mill Street in the west end. He’d been operating out of a hospital pharmacy in the west end, just a few minutes north up Huron Line, where he had to stop in briefly after hours to pick up all the drugs. He was going to earn more tonight than he would have all year in this crappy town. He smiled at that thought, and patted the duffle bag like a warm pet.

Arsenio con Pisco was taking his guests out for a night on the town. The three of them rode in the back seat of a posh limousine with red wine poured gently into their glasses. His French guest from the Bonnot family was named Francois, and he appeared impressed to be pampered – but used to it, as well. Con Pisco was pleased that he was able to wine and dine his guests so effectively. While much of his estate remained under construction, his sense of style and decorum was fully intact.

Reclined elegantly in his red plush seat, Bonnot's long face sipped the *Etienne Pochon Crozes-Hermitage* with thoroughness. In his other hand he had a smoking cigarette between two fingers with his wrists turned upwards. He was the picture of satisfaction.

His other guest, Jack Macpherson, was a bit more of a renegade, and seemed like he was out of place. He was used to riding with his long hair blowing in the wind on the open highway, not sitting still enjoying martinis. He knew that he was going to be showed a good time, so he was willing to put up with all the fancy décor and efforts that Con Pisco was putting into the evening.

He felt out of place wearing jeans and a leather coat while Con Pisco and Bonnot were dressed in fine suits. He felt even sillier with bright red beard – he truly didn't fit in with the rest of the experience. It was funny how they had so little in common, yet were all in the same line of work. Whatever, fuck'em. He'd rather be putting back a bottle of Jack Daniels than sipping on any wine. He'd have to invite Con Pisco back to visit his lads in Mississauga, and show him how the Bandidos have a good time.

The limo cruised to a halt by Casino Windsor and the gentlemen inside finished their drinks before the climbing out. Arsenio con Pisco knew men out on the town in Windsor would start at the casino to have some fun throwing their money around – men with real wealth didn't go out and spend their money and drugs and alcohol. Remaining in control and showing money off was far more important to be pounding back beverages and using the public facilities to relieve themselves. Well, Macpherson didn't care, he'd drop his trousers anywhere to relieve himself, but Con Pisco and Bonnot couldn't be seen stooping to that level. They maintained an illusion of control, wealth and superiority, which in a casino or any service establishment would draw the most attention. Tonight they were looking to impress women and have a good time.

Tomorrow they would finish their business, but tonight Con Pisco had to demonstrate how much power he could influence over this town. His drugs were prevalent in the downtown core. Dealers at tables, bouncers at nightclubs, the strippers and masseuses, and all the business owners were on his blow, and treated him like royalty. Tonight Bonnot and the other man were going to experience how much control he had on this town, demonstrating that he was going to be in business around here for a long time, and that they needed look anywhere else for their drugs. He was their one stop man, who owned the town, and there was nobody out there who was going to stop him.

Lefevre began marching down the cold back street behind the bars on Sandwich. While only one block over the streets were well lit and traffic was plentiful, back here all

that could be seen were the lights on the Ambassador Bridge, the dumpsters and rear entrances to the bars that lined the road, and the spot lights from the casino that streaked and swirled across the sky every night.

He had his head down and his hands buried in his pockets, trying to keep the cold off of him. He could still taste the whiskey in his mouth from the shots, and it was more of a discomfort than the balm that he thought it would be. Shit, it was cold. He wished he had brought a hat. A chilled subzero breeze carried off of the Detroit River, which could be barely seen in the extreme darkness. He could see the old Mill, whose blades spun slowly in the dark, and though it was ultimately a public restroom these days, it looked as functional as ever.

Lefevre hadn't been down here in over five years. He remembered it being much more close together, but in reality, the streets were bare and they separated the Mill from the parks surrounding it, the riverfront and the businesses by quite a margin. He'd thought that it was all much closer together. The sound of a lone goose honking echoed up into the sky.

The Mill must have stood forty feet high and it was surrounded by an ornamental garden of spruce bushes that meandered along a foot path. There weren't any lights on the artifact from the mid 1700s, and it stood in the darkness like it had for over two and a half centuries.

Lefevre was wearing a long overcoat with a high collar, which helped shield his face from the blustering wind, but it didn't stop his ears from stinging with chill. His eyes watered from the breeze blowing into his face and the cold winter weather was finally settling in on the region. But the frigid cold air seemed to be enhanced by Luc's proximity to the riverfront.

He stalked along near a bunch of bushes lining a relatively open park, all absent of any lights. It genuinely shocked him that there were no street lights or illumination of any kind. There were so many places that someone could lurk and jump out at someone, although he had to admit, this particular area likely didn't have very much pedestrian traffic, especially at this time of night.

He held up by a particularly opaque bush and waited to see if any action was going to take place after all. This was his only lead to finding MP for the time being. He didn't know what he would say to her when she arrived, and he didn't know what he would do if were with those thugs from before. He was sincerely insecure, but knew that he would definitely confront them this time, not as an officer of the law, and he certainly wasn't going to threaten them, but rather just say that he finally, after all this time, wanted to talk to his sister.

No sooner had he settled himself alongside that bush, when a pair of headlights beamed down the dark Mill Street road, and rolled down the mild grade towards the river basin by the waterfront. It was too dark to discern the make of the vehicle, but it appeared to be a four-doored older model, which cruised through the cross street intersection and out along a peninsular spit of land.

The car rolled to the back of the dirt road and turned around. It turned its lights off and sat silently. The incandescent filaments of the headlights still glowed in the darkness at the end of the strip. The moon's reflection off of the flowing river silhouetted the vehicle where it sat, and it slowly became unnoticeable in the dark.

Detective Mickey Gordon perked up in his seat.

“Here we go, buddy,” he said to Constable Dan Hallimut. “Looks like something’s going to go down.”

“Who knows, man,” responded Hallimut. “It could be just two fellas out on a date. Although it’d be awfully cold down there to get very intimate.”

“Come on, Dan. It’s the right time and the right place, I’m sure whoever that is has something to do with this. Let’s just wait and see if it’s MP. Let’s hope we can get our hand on her. She’s going to be the key to this whole investigation. If we can get her, we can blow the lid off of this thing.”

“We’d better cross our fingers, then, eh?” answered Hallimut.

The two squinted out into the dark from their haunt in the parking lot towards the stationary vehicle. Gordon’s heart rate quickened and he became anxious, waiting to see what would happen next. He certainly didn’t want to leave here tonight without some progress having been made.

Thomas Rayfield pulled his car down to the end of the lane and then turned it around. It was very dark back here, and he knew that no one would even notice him back here unless they were looking for him. He was right on time, but he didn’t see his contacts. They might be running a bit late.

He shut his car down and turned his headlights off. Luckily his older vehicle didn’t have automatic lights, and he could leave it running to maintain the heat, because Jesus it was cold down here. He rolled his window down and lit a cigarette. The red cherry of his smoke stood out against the blackness surrounding him. Rayfield took a long haul from his cigarette and held it deep in his lungs, closing his eyes and relaxing as best as he could. The deal was making him much more nervous than he would have imagined, but he knew that it was going to be very rewarding.

That his contacts weren’t already here, or were late got him to start worrying that they might not be coming. That he might have the wrong night or the wrong time. If he’d gotten the date and time wrong, they might be very upset. He didn’t want to get a bunch of drug dealers and weapons smugglers upset with him. He also didn’t want to have to sell his parcel for less to appease anyone. Rayfield continued to worry, unsure what to expect as mild paranoia continued to crawl under his skin.

Chase Nguyen and MP Lefevre sat silently as they moved eastbound along Sandwiche Ave., heading towards Mill Street. Their argument hadn’t been resolved and neither had anything further to say to one another. The backseat passengers felt that the whole situation was ridiculous and didn’t know why they were fighting, but ... they were too scared to say a word. Either Chase or MP could fly off the handle and pistol whip one of them for lack of a reason when they were this wound up.

Nguyen threw his left-hand blinker on and waited at the stoplights before moving turning the Topaz down the street. While positioned there he saw busy bars and a well lit street full of action. This end of town wasn’t always as positive as it is now. Not much longer than five years ago they were having a lot of difficulties with crime and undesirables in the area – crazy people with genuine mental problems. More money and more services reinvigorated the street and most businesses were fairing quite well, and the crazies, they’d either died, moved along or found somewhere else lose their minds.

There was a mural painted on the side of one of the corner establishments that depicted a man bringing black people into Canada via the Underground Railroad. In particular, he was standing between some white men with rifles and a destitute black family trying to escape from their Confederate masters of the south. It struck a chord with Nguyen, being of mostly black heritage. It especially moved him that a man was willing to risk his life out of principle to protect the lives of others.

It gave him a moment of pause, thinking that his life had taken such a drastic turn in a very different direction. A life of virtue had long left him behind, and he was left pursuing a very different life – one where violence and danger were to protect himself, his honour and his money rather than fighting for the social development of society. He sighed heavily enough to catch MP's attention. She looked at him with an annoyed and sharp eye, one that hadn't the patience to put up with his attitude.

"Well!" she barked angrily. "Are you just going to fucking sit there?"

He realized the light had turned green a few moments earlier, and embarrassingly pulled the car through the intersection and down onto Mill Street. It was a short jaunt down a low rise to the old Mill. His Topaz cruised to a quiet rest at the stop sign at the end of the line, and then he moved forwards onto the gravel path just on the other side of the road facing the Detroit River.

Now a second car had pulled up, and Luc was watching intently. He looked around, seeing where he would be able to get closer without being noticed. He was certain that they would be keeping an eye out for anyone who might interrupt their meeting.

He did see some more bushes up along the road and he quietly, and lowly, strafed nearer. His ears were burning with the cold and he was struggling to see clearly with the watery discharge from his eyes that was being caused by the cold and stiff breeze in the air. He blinked hard to clear his sight and to get a better view, realizing that it was the Topaz from the cemetery and the house earlier. He knew that any confrontation with these guys was going to require more courage than he'd had to muster in all his years as a police officer. Mostly because this would be the first time that he was approaching suspects of their caliber without backup or a firearm.

Staring fiercely into the dark, he watched carefully to see what would happen next.

Mickey Gordon became suddenly excited with the arrival of the second vehicle. This one was not as careful as the first, and had left its lights on. Whatever it was doing there, it seemed less concerned with hiding itself.

"You think these guys are related," whispered Gordon.

"Yeah, but these guys don't seem as worried about being discrete, do they? These are probably the dangerous guys, if you ask me. That other guy down at the end there is probably trying to keep as low a profile as possible, while this new car is looking to intimidate the other. Classic bullying tactics. They're showing they're not afraid of anything," said Hallimut.

"Where'd you learn stuff like that?" asked Mickey.

"I was bullied all the time when I was little, man. Why the hell you think I became a cop? I wanted to turn the tables for once," he said smugly.

Mickey scoffed, "Isn't that always the way. Well, at least you're not in denial about it, eh?"

"Real funny," said Hallimut.

Chase Nguyen parked the car and opened his door, standing with one arm up on the roof of the Topaz. The dome light from the car came on, and he didn't bother to shut the vehicle off. He apparently wasn't planning on staying long.

From up the drive, he could see the cherry red of a cigarette being smoked, and then heard a door opening. It was about 200 yards away, but he could see the interior lights of that vehicle come on as the door opened and a tall and thin man stepped out with a duffle bag in his arms.

He began walking up the drive towards Nguyen and his crew. Chase tapped the roof of the car, signaling for the others to get out of the car as well. The crew opened their doors and climbed out, including MP who was standing on the far side of the vehicle, the sight of her mostly obscured by car and the other men around her.

Luc stared at her with much difficulty. He wasn't sure if it was her, if it was even a woman, and he could shake the watery drops in his eyes from the wind. He had to get closer to be sure it was her, and only afterwards would he be able to step out and show himself.

The thin man with the duffle bag came closer, pulling back on his cigarette as he came closer. He rested the cigarette in his lips, and raised his hand to wave. It came across as more of a salute.

"Let's go Rayfield, I haven't got all night," called out Nguyen.

The pharmacist picked up the pace and finally stepped into the beams of the Topaz's headlights. He strolled up to the driver's side and handed the duffle bag full of the prescription drugs that Con Pisco had ordered to Nguyen.

Nguyen tossed it over to MP and instructed her to make sure that everything they'd asked for was in the bag, all the while he never took his eyes off of Thomas Rayfield. He didn't trust the guy yet, not because he felt that the pharmacist was going to try and burn them, but rather he didn't think he was smart enough to remember everything. He just didn't strike Nguyen as dedicated or perceptive, not good qualities to be without in this business.

"We're you followed here?" asked Nguyen, testing Rayfield.

"No, I'm sure I wasn't. Who's going to be following me, anyhow? Nobody knows what we're doing! This isn't a big deal, man. Do you think someone might be following me?" rambled Rayfield. His paranoia was apparent. It was also apparent that perhaps he wasn't going to be as reliable as the Ghosts of Man had been hoping for.

"Look," said Nguyen. "You have to be certain of these things. You'll be locked up for a long, long time, my friend, if you're caught selling us this shit. Us? We'll disappear. The cops don't find the Ghosts of Man, Rayfield. So you, *you* gotta start watching your own back, 'cause ain't no one else gonna do it for you. Ya got that?"

"Yeah, for sure. You don't think someone would be following me, though, right? They wouldn't catch on already, would they?" quivered Rayfield.

Shit, thought Nguyen. This guy's too screwed up. They were going to have to find a new supplier, which was bad. First off because they needed a consistent source now, not two weeks from now. Recruiting someone new was going to be trouble. Second, they

would have to deal with Rayfield. He knew too much, and if they cut him out now, there's no guessing what he might say or do, even accidentally, to rat them out. This guy was unreliable in the long run, and that was truly disappointing. He briefly touched the glock he had strapped to his back underneath his jacket, just reassuring that it was there. He wasn't planning on shooting anybody, not yet, but it was good to know it was there.

Plus, gunshots in this dark and quiet area would be reported quickly. There was a police station just up the street by a high school, not to mention the cop stationed under the Ambassador and the city jail just up on Brock Street. Not a good place to start firing bullets around.

"It's all good," said MP after rifling through the duffle bag. "He brought it all."

"You hear that, Tom?" said Nguyen, "sounds like everything's just fine. That's good news. And in such a case, I've got a little something for you."

Chase directed one of his men from the backseat to hand over another gym bag that contained the money. "You know this is more than you're worth, don't you?" he said to Rayfield as he handed it over. "We're treating you pretty good, so you be sure to keep up your end of the bargain. You watch your back and you keep the channel flowin', a'ight."

Grabbing the gym bag, he felt the weight of all of those bills. He had a sudden rush of adrenaline exciting him to be so wealthy so quickly. Things were going to change around for Rayfield, and he was excited. "Of course, of course. Things are going to be fine, I'm looking forward to doing this more often with you. And don't worry," he said bowing his head up and down submissively, "I'll watch my back, I'll take care of my end. Don't you worry about that."

Jesus, this guy wasn't going to be able to handle the pressure if it ever built up on him. And of course it would one day. Maybe not right away, but someone's going to get suspicious of all the missing drugs and Rayfield was going to have to have an excuse. He was going to have to explain all the nice things that he started buying, he'd have to be smart about where he put the money. Nguyen honestly didn't think this guy had it in him to cut it. Damn-it, he didn't want to have to sniff out someone new. But you gotta do what you gotta do.

Mickey Gordon was sitting straight up in his car seat watching the transaction. He hadn't expected there to be any transfer of goods or cash ... well he didn't know what to expect. But now that he had witnessed a deal go down, he had what he needed to take these guys down.

"See that, Hallimut? What do you think they're buying?"

"I couldn't tell ya, man. But that skinny guy sure didn't seem like the shady type to be moving blow or heroin. They must be using him in some other capacity. The guy seemed terrified, what the hell was he doing all caught up in this?"

"WAIT a minute! Who the hell is that!" said Mickey as a man began approaching from out of the dark heading directly towards the fivesome by the Topaz. He was strolling forwards at a casual pace, with his hands out in front of him, in a very non-threatening way.

The Ghosts of Man didn't notice him at first, but then the pharmacist spotted him and began saying something in a chattering voice. Mickey couldn't make it out. The four gangsters turned and started moving towards him quickly. The two others from the far

side of the car quickly jumped around from behind the Topaz and backed up Nguyen and his partner.

The approaching stranger stopped in his tracks and raised his hands up in the air in surrender. Only as he'd stepped close enough to the vehicle did the light shine on his face enough for Mickey to recognize him – it was Luc Lefevre.

Chapter Sixteen

Luc Lefevre was standing with his hands held up in the air, showing that he was not interested in getting into a fight. The three black men and his sister were rushing towards him and yelling in surprise that someone had snuck up on them.

"Whoa, whoa whoa," called out Lefevre. He was indicating with his hands to slow down and listen. "I'm not here to cause any trouble. I swear to you, I'm not looking to stop you, not looking to anger you ... I'm just here to see MP."

"This guys a *cop*," yelled Nguyen, as he drew the glock from out from under his coat and palmed it with one hand and thrust it towards Lefevre. "What the *hell* do you think you're doin' here, *cop*? Are you here to arrest us, hmmm?" he yelled.

"No, no. I'm suspended. I'm not on duty, I'm not carrying a badge, I'm not working with the police in any way," he pleaded. "I swear to you, I'm here on my own, I'm not here with the police, and I'm just here to see my sister."

MP stood back at the car, just staring out at him, her eyes dark and wet, but she didn't show that she recognized him in so many ways. It'd been so long since they'd talked. She looked sad, surprised and speechless, but not friendly, and didn't appear to be vouching for him. The darkness hid the signs of abuse on her face, which Luc couldn't see from his vantage point.

"What are you doing here, Luc!" she yelled at him. "You're not *supposed* to be here!"

The three men grabbed Lefevre by the shoulders and shoved him towards the car, patting him down and checking his pockets. They pulled the taser out from his pockets, they pulled out his handcuffs that were on his belt and they found the knife that he was carrying. They threw the stuff down on the ground away from them and shoved him up against the car. They were in complete control.

"Look," said Lefevre, shrugging, "I'm not going to stop you from whatever you're doing. I'm not here to take you in, I'm not here for any other reason than to talk to *her*." He nudged his head in MP's direction and looked her right in the eye. She was so uncomfortable and when their eyes met, she twitched and looked away impulsively, unsure of how to react to all of this.

"Do you *swear* you're not here with the cops?" said Nguyen firmly. "Because if I find out you're here with the cops, I will personally kill you, do you understand me!"

"Yes, yes I understand. There aren't any cops around. I'm here alone. I promise."

"MP, do you want to talk to this fool?" he asked, turning to Lefevre's sister.

Back in the unmarked police vehicle, Mickey Gordon and Dan Hallimut stared, unable to believe what they were seeing. They didn't know what Lefevre was doing there, and they were unsure how to handle the situation.

"What the hell is he doing here, Mickey?" said a shocked Hallimut.

“You don’t think he’s involved with all of this, do you? You don’t think he’s been dealing with these guys? We did find the heroin on him yesterday,” considered Gordon.

“They aren’t treating him like he’s one of them, though. Look at ‘em push him around,” said Hallimut.

“He’s going after his sister, Dan. *That’s* what he’s doing here. He’s trying to get back in touch with her.”

“We’ve got to do something! We gotta run in there and pull him out. We can get him and his sister out of there, perhaps even arrest the whole lot of them. We could put an end to all of this right now,” said Hallimut.

The oriental-looking black man put a gun directly at the temple of Lefevre’s head and that was enough for Detective Gordon. Responding to his instincts, he threw his car door open and drew his guy. The dome light on the car came on, and he started off across the street. Trying to keep up, Dan Hallimut pulled his seatbelt off and jumped out of the car as well, not thinking twice to radio the base for help.

“Hey, this is the police,” yelled Mickey. “Put your hands up and throw your weapons to the ground!”

Nguyen spun around quickly, noticing the emerging police presence. “You mutherfucker,” he said under his breath. Before Lefevre could say or do anything, Nguyen slammed him across the face with the butt end of his gun, sending Luc headfirst into the ground.

One of Nguyen’s henchmen darted behind the front of the car separating himself from the barrel of the officer’s weapons. MP spun around the side of the car, taking shelter behind the vehicle as well, ducking low beside the bumper. The second thug pulled a glock out from his own pocket and leveled directly at the approaching officers, but did not fire.

Chase Nguyen, after dealing the crumpling blow to Lefevre’s head, turned his weapon in the officer’s direction, as well. The pharmacist Thomas Rayfield began to panic and run back out towards his car at the end of the lane. It was blocked in by the Topaz and there was nowhere for it to go.

Nguyen yelled, “Stop right there! If you come any closer I swear I will start shooting. You didn’t come out this way to die tonight, so you just stay put!”

“Let the detective and his sister go, and nobody has to get hurt,” commanded Detective Gordon.

They were now directly across the street from one another. Detective Gordon and Constable Hallimut stood on one side with their revolvers drawn, and two gangsters on the other with their glocks cocked and ready. In the background they could hear the pharmacist starting his car as the engine turned over. Rayfield’s headlights flashed on brightly, shining to the eyes of the officers.

The one thug and MP saw that the pharmacist was panicking. His car lurched forward and the tires struggled to gain traction in the moist dirt at the end of the line. When the tires caught, the vehicle began to spin forwards towards the Topaz. MP fled to the shelter of the Mill as its long arms continued to ominously rotate.

Chase stepped back from the Topaz, seeing that the pharmacist was approaching too quickly to be safe, and the other thug started to flee from the motorist, as well. The

dumb-ass pharmacist was going to ram into the Topaz and try and to drive off. What the hell was he doing?

Lefevre was concussed and dizzy, laying in the cold dirt at the feet of Nguyen. His head was pounding from the impact of the weapon to his head, and he couldn't hear anything except for the pulsing thumps of pain. It hurt so badly that he couldn't open his eyes, and he couldn't do anything to even raise himself up from the ground. He felt someone almost step on him, and then stumble over his body. He didn't know what was happening.

He finally was able to open his eyes and get to one knee when he was blinded by a bright light, which took him almost by surprise. It was in fact the pharmacist plowing towards him. Lefevre jumped out of the way just a moment too late, as the car hit the Topaz, spinning it counter-clockwise into the intersection, all the while the side of the Topaz slammed into Lefevre sending him sprawling through the air. The pharmacist lost track of where he was going after the collision and overcorrected to straighten out his vehicle. It fired forwards directly at officers Gordon and Hallimut, sending them running for their lives.

Accelerating through the intersection, narrowly missing the officers, and directly into a parked vehicle on the side of the road, then Thomas Rayfield crashed to a stop. The impact shattered his front windscreen and he himself flew out of the driver's seat and out onto the hood of the car he had hit. He bounced directly off of the car in front of him, and rolled back onto the street, laying motionless and bloodied.

Lefevre could hardly move a limb, but he could taste blood and dirt in his mouth as spiraling dizziness made him retch.

Nguyen grabbed the taser from the ground where he'd removed all of the weapons from Lefevre, and shot it into the neck of Hallimut, who jerked to a stop and fell face first into the street. His forehead bounced awkwardly off the pavement and he spun and twitched on the ground from the electric volts surging through him. All the meanwhile, Detective Gordon was tackling one of the suspects and cuffing him. Drawing his baton, he started forward after the next nearest suspect. With two strong strides, Gordon was at full speed and the next suspect hardly knew what hit him.

Gordon was out of handcuffs, and called over to Hallimut for some backup while he was wrestling with the young man he'd tackled. When he heard nothing, he pinned the man down by stepping on his neck, and turned to see where Dan was. In a moment of panic, he saw Hallimut laying face down with blood pooling underneath his head, and most surreal, he was laying in the centre of a street light's beam, as if he were in the centre ring at the circus.

Gordon stuttered, unsure what to do or say. He called out long and loud to see if there were any response from Hallimut, to no avail. He crashed his baton down heavily, almost in hatred, on the back of the tackled man's head and stood to attend to his partner.

The engine was still on for the smashed pharmacist's vehicle, and its white noise filled the evening sky. He could hear the pharmacist moaning in overwhelming pain. He certainly had limbs broken, and from where Mickey knelt, he could see that he had severe facial lacerations from smashing through the windscreen on the car. He probably had a collapsed lung from the impact, as well.

Chase Nguyen began calling out for MP. She was fine, and squatting low behind some bushes by the Mill. She poked her head out and darted back into the street to reunite with Chase. He took her under his left arm, and kept the taser in his right. He was pleased that he hadn't had to shoot a gun and draw any more attention to themselves than he already had, and that he didn't have to kill anyone. Although, looking back at the two officers in the street, he wasn't sure that the one was going to make it. He looked severely injured from the face-plant he'd taken after the taser.

Looking to get MP and himself the hell outta there, he looked at the absolute mess his car was in. He hated that Topaz so much, and had wished that it were smashed into bits more than once, but he was certainly missing it now. It was completely ruined, the driver's side door was turned inside out and the steering column was shoved through the window. Completely undrivable. He decided he'd make a move for the unmarked police car in the parking lot. Its interior lights were still on and he was sure that the keys were in the ignition.

With MP under his arm he set off across the street, only to be stared down by Detective Mickey Gordon. They halted as the detective lowered his revolver directly at them.

"You're not going anywhere," sneered Detective Gordon. "I want you both, on the ground, *now*," he said, his voice escalating into a shout. He pointed his gun almost through the two of them, and he had a mad stare, the kind that indicated he could fly off the handle at any moment. Nguyen didn't know what to do.

"Wait," said MP stepping forward out from underneath Chase's arm. "Don't shoot me. *He's* the one you want." She stumbled away from Nguyen and towards the officer. Mickey lowered the gun, and used his other arm to indicate that she should get behind him, but at that moment, she lunged forwards and knocked the revolver to the pavement. It rattled hard against the ground and rested nearby their feet.

In the moment of confusion, Nguyen shot the taser once again. The stingers dug themselves into Mickey, and he recoiled severely with a shocked reflex. He doubled forwards so quickly his elbow caught MP in the head, knocking her hard. She staggered backwards and stumbled on her own feet, holding her hands to her head, before drooping lowly, and toppling over.

The electricity continued to flow through Mickey, who was too near the fallen firearm for Nguyen to trust. He crept forwards and snagged the revolver before stopping the shocking electricity. Mickey laid on his side, out of breath and motionless on the ground.

"Alright, get over to that car, and we're getting out of here," said Nguyen to MP.

MP didn't respond. She was down and out, unresponsive to Nguyen. He pocketed the taser, hefted MP up over his shoulder and laboured over to the parking lot where he threw her in the backseat. He didn't find the keys, but knew that one of the officers would have them. Nguyen ran back into the street and searched through Mickey's pockets. He found the keys to the car and to a set to the handcuffs.

He rummaged through the pockets of the detective a little longer, perhaps finding something more of value when he sensed there was someone coming up from behind him. Lefevre was lurching towards him, covered in vomit and bleeding from his head, he was muttering something, but it was too garbled to be understood. Lefevre wasn't moving fast, and Nguyen's initial sense of urgency dissipated a little.

Chase stood up to face Lefevre as he came forwards, and just before he was near, Luc pulled out the pepper spray and doused Nguyen for all it was worth. Chase jumped back in surprise and then in pain and the pepper spray dug into his eyes. He couldn't close them tight enough – it was like having shards of glass touching his retinas. He was in unbelievable pain, thrashing his head back and forth. His eyes were watering, trying to push the irritant out from him eyes, but it was near useless.

Lefevre was still nauseous from the concussing blow to the head, and was stumbling from the impact that the car had made when it slammed into him. He was walking wounded, but he was so close to putting a stop to everything. He was close to ending it here and now. Luc had also picked up the pair of handcuffs he'd been stripped of and was about to climb onto the thrashing gangster when he heard a commanding Hispanic voice.

“Stop right now, *hombre*. Your night is over. No more time for being the hero, alright?” as the one gangster that Mickey Gordon had clubbed over the head was back up on his feet, and armed with a glock.

“You hear that, Chase? I've got 'im,” he called out to Nguyen who was still rolling back and forth, rubbing his fists into his face, trying to do anything to stop the pain from the pepper spray.

Luc Lefevre was bound and gagged and tossed into the backseat of the unmarked cruiser with his unconscious sister, who was sprawled out into his lap. He couldn't move and he couldn't speak to wake her. Detective Mickey Gordon and Constable Dan Hallimut were handcuffed and left behind the mill, sitting in the cold. Gordon would come around shortly from the shock of the taser, but Hallimut was seriously injured from the fall to the ground. The two gangsters that accompanied Nguyen were beaten and bruised, but managed to get free and into their vehicle.

Nguyen insisted that they go back and take the gym bag containing all the cash from the pharmacist; no point in leaving it lying around for anybody to stumble across. And he *certainly* wasn't going to leave it for the cops to come and pick up. Thomas Rayfield probably wouldn't survive, he looked pretty bad after smashing his car and being ejected out the front. Nguyen knew that asshole was an idiot. Look what he did. He panicked, smashed his car all over the place, and jeopardized the whole deal. He ruined everything.

Back in the unmarked squad car, it was a tight squeeze, as the three Ghosts of Man had to cram into the front seat. Nobody was interested in sitting in the back with Lefevre and MP. But the beauty of the unmarked car was that they had a radio that they could listen in to the police with, and it was ungodly fast. Nguyen was still too bleary to drive, but his partner got the hang of the super-charged V8 that the dark Crown Victoria had stashed under the hood, and was blistering the road on his way back out to the mansion.

Chase Nguyen was stuck with a problem, though. Now he had Luc Lefevre in his custody and he had to figure out what he was going to do about that. Kidnapping cops never turned out well, but neither did killing them. Now that Lefevre was with them, there were two routes to take, make him disappear, or buy him out. Nguyen didn't really like either of those choices, though. He was stuck in a tough spot.

Chapter Seventeen

Luc Lefevre didn't know what was going to happen to him. He was incredibly nervous, and wasn't sure what had happened. He certainly wasn't expecting Mickey Gordon and Dan Hallimut to jump out of nowhere and interfere with everything, what a disaster. How did the three of them, with all their training, get overpowered? It certainly didn't help that Lefevre was slugged in the skull right off the bat?

Talk about bad timing, though. Lefevre was sure that he would have been able to get back in touch MP had Gordon and Hallimut not interrupted. She didn't seem too interested in seeing him, but then again, she must have been surprised. Still she hadn't seen him in almost a decade, and now here she was in his lap, unconscious.

It was very dark out in the county as the Crown Vic sped along the back roads. There were few street lights along the lines of fields. Every now and again they'd come across a small four-corners where there was a gas station, or perhaps a café at which there were some lights, which briefly filled the cabin of the car, and then fade away shortly afterwards.

Lefevre wasn't sure where they were going, but it seemed increasingly clear that they were taking him somewhere, not just hanging on to him as collateral until they got away. He wasn't just some insurance, in case they had to make a bargain. Which was bad. He didn't know where this was all heading, but he wasn't liking it.

If they actually took him back to their 'hideout,' he was certain that the only rational steps that they could take next were to make him disappear. With that thought came a sense of clarity, on exceptional focus. His life had no other worries and there weren't any further concerns other than finishing one objective, especially if it were the only thing left he could do. He had to speak with MP, to find out if she needed out of this situation, and if she did, he would risk his life to rescue her.

The car eventually slowed down about 45 minutes out into the county, as it approached a well-lit and impressive gatehouse on the side of the road. It appeared to border a large house on the back of the lot, which was accessed via a long, white driveway. The car pulled up to the gatehouse, in which there was a man positioned. He opened the gate and allowed the squad car in.

"Hey Jimmy, it's us. Let us in," said the Hispanic driver.

"What the hell happened to the Topaz?" asked the gatekeeper. "Where'd you get that? Is it a *police* car? What the hell are you doing with a.."

"Yeah, it's an unmarked squad car. It's cool – we needed a getaway vehicle. Shit sorta hit the fan, man. You know what I mean," replied the driver.

"Sounds crazy," said the gatekeeper. "Get in here quick before someone sees you pulling in with that thin, shiiiit." The gatekeeper stepped through the gatehouse and unlatched the large metal doors and swung them inward, giving the Crown Vic a wide enough berth to get through. The car slowly rolled forwards. The driver's style changed markedly as he entered onto the estate, he drove much more carefully and with respect for his surroundings.

Lefevre could see out the side windows that there were bushes lined along the drive and it twisted around and ended about 150 meters up at a large garage. The car was parked and the Ghosts of Man opened the rear doors dragging Lefevre out. Luc was pulled through a cavernously large garage filled with stainless steel machine parts that he didn't recognize. The garage must have been 24 feet by 34 feet, easily large enough for

three large cars. The thugs carried him over the threshold of the garage and into a mudroom, which was large, too. There was an obvious washroom and laundry room stationed right here, beside the garage and there was a vast collection of footwear. He noticed that the many shoes were of fine quality, mostly accompanying suits and formal attire, none were the steel-toed boots that his captors were wearing. This wasn't *their* place, which was certain.

The lights were dim, but that didn't hide the fact that the ceilings were incredibly high, the floors were tiled and smooth and the walls were all painted nicely. Entering the kitchen, he spotted grey stainless steel refrigerators and a heavy looking natural gas stove. The lights remained dim as he was moved deeper into the kitchen and then around a counter-clockwise corner to a large staircase. The lighting made it feel like they were the only ones home – else there would have been more lights on when they came in. Plus, they weren't turning any on yet; Luc was apparently their first order of business.

He didn't know where he was being taken and he didn't know where MP was being taken. She hadn't aroused from the bang on her head during the trip back into the county, and Lefevre was unsure how injured she was. Luc thought that she would have twitched and revived consciousness by now – but perhaps the injury was much worse than it initially appeared? He wouldn't know until he could get access to her.

The takedown and capture had happened awfully fast, and he was incredibly sore. He was thumped down the stairs to the basement and he didn't know why these guys wouldn't just lead him instead of carrying him. He winced as he was dragged into the large unfinished basement. It was much cooler down here, in fact it was cold. The insulation and drywall wasn't complete and the dark area left was unwelcoming.

There were bits of scaffolding throughout the basement, where contractors were still moving material in to finish the basement off, but they wouldn't be called back until some large stoves were finally installed. There was a garlic-like ordour in the basement, but he didn't realize that it was phosphine, and he could smell that there were multiple chemicals in the air. There was a lone source of heat from the basement was coming from the stoves across the concrete floor. They were obviously cooking up some free-base crack.

As they dropped him to the floor, Chase Nguyen skipped down the basement steps with a blue gym bag. He slid it across the floor and it rested up against one of the stove sides.

"Well, Mr. Lefevre," said Nguyen to Luc. "That was quite the stunt you pulled back there. Not the smartest approach I've ever seen, though. No gun, no badge, just your arms in the air, as a diversion so your partners could come storming in. Is that generally how you do things downtown?"

The gag was removed from Luc's mouth and he was leaned up against a wall. As soon as the mouth piece was removed, he spit the cloth away from him.

"That's not what was supposed to happen," said Lefevre. "I didn't know they were going to be there. I had found a note in my father's jacket saying that MP was going to be at the Mill tonight at 11 ... I just followed it. I didn't know who was going to be there, if anybody."

"Yeah? I'm supposed to believe that?"

"Believe it or not," sighed Lefevre, "that's what I was doing there. I'd just found out she was *alive* let alone that she was in town. And I wouldn't have even known that, if

you hadn't murdered my *father* the day be-fucking-fore," he spat out. "Look! I'm tied up. I'm not going anywhere. Why can't you just let me see her?"

Nguyen's eyes soften, as the scope of his impact on the Lefevre household affected him briefly. He turned his back on Lefevre and walked across the concrete basement towards the stoves. One of his henchmen picked up the gym bag and pulled out one of the boxes. It was full of the prescription drugs that Rayfield had 'sold' them before he crashed his car.

"Start fixing this stuff up. It's got to be ready to go before tomorrow morning, you got that?" said Nguyen.

"Well, detective. We were picking up our prescriptions at the Mill tonight, believe *that* or not. We needed this stuff to finish up an order we're supposed to fill by tomorrow. We've got some big customers that are looking for some good quality product, so I hope you don't mind if we get to work down here."

He started mixing hydrogen peroxide, tincture and muriatic acid together to create some iodine crystals. It was clear to Lefevre that he was going to start manufacturing methamphetamines. He had a counter full of mason jars, plastic tubing, rubbing alcohol and all the other ingredients to get the job done.

Lefevre laid low, noticing that the garlic-like smell was the faint hint of phosphine, an unintended byproduct of d-methamphetamine production. While minor levels of phosphine weren't anything more than undesirable, higher levels could become flammable, and even explosive, if they weren't vented properly.

Nguyen seemed satisfied with how things were rolling down here, despite the setbacks that they had faced earlier in the night. Ultimately, he wasn't happy with the pharmacist, and he was gone now. He wasn't happy with that piece-of-shit Topaz, and now that was gone, too. Plus he managed to save \$60,000 by not paying for the drugs. But ... beating up cops put you in the bad-books real quick, who knows what sort of evidence he left behind in the Topaz that they police could track back to his identity, and he was going to have to find another supplier to deal with.

A lot of these problems could be smoothed out if Arsenio con Pisco was able to make contact with the police department and was able to strike a deal. Con Pisco was notorious for being able to convince a man to do what he was told, and he didn't feel that Windsor cops were going to be any exception. He contemplated the evening's activities only a little while longer, and then shrugged. It was all in the past, not much could be changed about it now.

"Lefevre," he said, capturing Luc's attention. "I'll tell you what. I'm going to go upstairs and see how MP's doing. She's, ha, still in the back of the car right now. But I'm going to go and get 'er out of there and then afterwards, depending on how she's doing, you can go talk to her."

Luc said nothing. He didn't figure that this was something that he was going to be able to negotiate anyways. He just sat there.

"I'll come back and get you in a couple of minutes," said Nguyen.

Nguyen left Luc in the basement, taking with him a small sample of clonazepam from the pharmacist's duffle bag. While he would honour his agreement to allow Luc see his sister, he had no intentions of actually letting him speak with her. MP was out cold for the time being, and a few sleeping pills would keep her that was for the rest of the night.

Nguyen slipped them into his pocket, patting it gently as he headed back up the stairs to get MP comfortable in one of the guest rooms.

Half of an hour later, Chase Nguyen returned to the basement where he had left Luc Lefevre, hopping down the stairs with a youthful bounce in his step. He was energized, and apparently pleased with himself.

“Alrighty, Luc. You wanna talk to your sister, we’re gonna let you talk to your sister. We’re going to take you upstairs and let you see her, but after that, you’re coming back down here. No questions asked.”

Luc needed assistance getting to his feet without the use of his hands, which remained bound behind his back. He was slowly and carefully led upstairs so that they wouldn’t trip. Back into the bright kitchen and dining area, he crossed diagonally through the kitchen, past a room to the left and into a broad hallway. The hallway was decorated with paintings, mirrors and he led to a grand foyer. The foyer opened up to a open-concept two-story atrium with a massive empty space – the kind of space that a chandelier might hang in some time in the future.

Luc was being led out towards the large front door that were just below incredibly large panes of glass that rose high up towards the domed ceiling. Was he going outside? Why would they be taking him out there? What’s MP doing outside... Rather he was being taken towards one of the two semi-circular staircases that wrapped around the front foyer and led to the second story. They framed the front entrance with their red carpeted steps and solid wood balustrade lining the stairway.

He was led up the shallow steps up and around the tall stairs to the second floor. There were bedrooms on the right hand side and on the left there were more rooms, but directly in front of him was a simple railing that looked down onto a family room below. He could see the dark family room, full of soft couches and armchairs. There were tabletops and bookshelves, and it all appeared as if it were a doll’s room from up where they stood. Lefevre was literally phased by the lavish and spacious accommodations surrounding him.

Nguyen opened the next door on Lefevre’s left and he was allowed inside. He could see a master bedroom, another large room to the right, and beyond it all the master bedroom at the end of the large hallway. But through the door in front of him was a bedroom, similar to that of a decent hotel. There was a closet and bedroom at the very entrance, but then a broad space of almost 15 feet by 16 feet that had a soft looking bed, a table and chairs, and a lamp. MP was laying on her back in the bed, quiet and unmoving.

“You get 10 minutes, and then you’re coming back downstairs,” said Nguyen.

Chase then indicated to another member of the Ghosts of Man that he was to stay outside the bedroom and to bring Lefevre back to the basement afterwards. Luc was untied, and let into the bedroom.

“MP, are you awake?” whispered Luc slowly. The lighting in the room was dim, and there was a plush chair sitting beside the bed, and he took a seat in it. MP wasn’t responding, and appeared to still be unconscious from a knock to the head. He rubbed his hands down over his face, unsure of what to do or say.

“I ... I don’t know if you can hear me,” said Luc. “I don’t even know what to say, really. I’d expected you’d be happy to see me, or perhaps angry, but ... I didn’t plan to

find you like this. Jesus, how did you get caught up with these guys? Why didn't you come back home? ... Not that I can't think of a dozen good reasons why."

"I came looking for you. I mean, years ago, after you left. I was at the station keeping an eye on all the reports, checking to see if anyone had found you. For weeks at a time I would have my heart climb out of my throat whenever an unidentified body came in to the morgue. Over the years I've found you dead in my mind on my way over the morgue over a dozen times – and each time a bit of my memory of you dies, too. I've wondered what to do when I find your body for so long that I didn't know what to do when I found you alive."

"And now I've got you right here in front of me, alive at that, and we can't communicate. I haven't any idea if you can even hear me. This is just like my last meeting with dad, in a lot of ways. He was looking for you, you know? It had been very hard on us when you left us, MP. I don't know if you knew this, but shortly after you left us, dad ran away, too. Hmph, basically I chased him out of town. You know how he was ... drunk all the time and cracking up whenever he felt like it. Well ... I was new on a case, and we were pursuing some leads, and dad's name came up. I had to confront him, give him a chance to clean up before the investigation started pointing towards him. Basically, he blew up at me, and took off."

"He had a note in his pocket when we found him, when your 'boys' shot him up. He said he was going to be meeting you tonight at the Mill. What were you guys up to? Had you talked to him? ... Yeah, you can't answer. That's just how this week has gone, not an answer to be found. Dad was the one who told me you were still alive, did you know that? Yeah, when he revived at the hospital, he told me he was trying to save you. Now that he's gone, I guess, ... well I guess I'm trying to pick up where he left off."

"Man, when I saw you at the funeral the other day, I didn't know what to think! It's been so long and you've grown up so big from all those years ago. It was so surreal – I'd been so scared of finding you dead that when I saw you alive ... well I was just as scared. Scared for my life, because those thugs you're hanging with said they were going to stomp me down if they found me at the funeral, but at the same time, I was scared that you hated us still. I can't imagine what it must have felt like to be so young and to have no one you could trust, and nowhere to turn. You must have hated us so much, MP. I'm so, so sorry."

"Dad and I, we wanted to raise you right, to love you as much as we loved mom, but ... you reminded me of that bastard that had raped her, that had *killed* that ... god, sometimes I hated *you*. If you hadn't been born, at least mom would have still been alive. Well, maybe. You wouldn't know this, but she was doing drugs and bingeing on booze all the months that she was pregnant with you. God, even *she* despised you ... Only now do I think of how selfish we all were when it came to dealing with you."

"God, if I could do it all over again, MP I'd change it all. I swear I'd do it right if I had a second chance. I'm so sorry we treated you like that. I wish that we could give you back your youth, I wish we could have set better examples, I wish that you never had to live this life. I'd give anything to have saved you from this. If I'd known things were going to be this way, I'd never have let this happen."

MP started to rustle onto of the bed, but didn't necessarily acknowledge that she understood what was going on. Luc was immediately excited, sitting up in his seat, looking over her. He stood and reached over her head, combing her hair back out of her

face. Her lips were dry and chapped and there was an emerging bruise from where she'd been struck across the right side of her face. The tossing quit when his hands touched her, and she relaxed once again. Luc called out her name, over and over, trying his best to awaken her, but she continued to lay still.

The door to the bedroom knocked twice, and then crept open as the sentry stationed outside entered and indicated that time was up.

"She's just waking up! You've got to let me talk to her," plead Luc.

"That's not how it goes, pal. Time to return you to the basement," responded the guard.

"No! Come on, she's just coming to. She hasn't said a word to me yet, you've got to give me five more minutes," said Luc.

The guard pulled a gun out from a holster on his waist, and although he didn't point it threateningly at Luc, it did indicate that there wasn't going to be any bending on the rules.

"Turn around," he said, "and I'll tie your hands back up. I'm sure she'll come around, and when she does, she can come down and visit you on her own time. Eh? Doesn't that sound good?"

The man tied Luc's hands together and he was returned to the basement. Back down the circular stairwell, the grand foyer, the decorated hallways, the bright kitchen and into the dank of the basement. The fumes from the lab felt stronger now, and they stung his eyes. He was lowered against a far wall, and left to be still.

"The boss hasn't come back yet," said the thug, "but when he does, he'll have some idea of what to do with you. Until then, you stay here and don't cause any trouble, because I will not hesitate to kill you where you stand. Seriously, bro, this isn't a gamble you should be willing to take. You've got nothing to gain by tryin' ta be a hero. I'll be back shortly. I'll see if I can't find you something to eat around here."

He then turned to the meth-maker at the big stove who was absorbed in his work.

"You make sure that he doesn't try anything stupid, right?"

"Yeah, for sure. Don't worry 'bout it," responded the other man.

The fumes in the basement were getting stronger and Lefevre knew that he'd have to stay low if he wanted to remain clear headed through all of this. He saw the meth-maker laboring away, mixing new chemicals and concoctions. He had cookie sheets out to make crack, and all the items necessary to lace fentanyl into his cocaine and heroin.

Lefevre became starkly alert that the fumes in the basement were beginning to pool in the ceiling, and were not flowing out of the basement, which was beginning to lead to two problems. First, the gas could be highly concentrated leading to suffocation, and two, if highly concentrated, phosphine gas was also highly combustible. It had to be sufficiently cooled or else the toxic gases could lead to very precarious and unstable conditions in the household.

Generally, cooling the gases would be enough, or even setting up a crude fan that would move it out a window or perhaps even up the stairs would work. But those modifications hadn't been made yet.

"Hey, what's your name," said Lefevre to the cook.

"None of your bizness, pal. You just shut up back there, a'ight?" he answered.

“Look, you can *smell* the gas collecting down here, you know that’s not good, right? You’ve got to get us out of here. We could suffocate. You’ve got to open some windows or something,” said Lefevre.

“What are you, a fucking *scientist*? Shut up. I don’t need this nonsense,” he said. To show how uninterested he was in listening to Lefevre, he went into his knapsack, pulled out a walkman, looked directly at Lefevre, and put it on. It was so loud Luc could even hear it from the other side of the room. He nodding his head up and down to the beat for a moment, shot Lefevre the bird, and then returned to his work.

Lefevre knew he had to take it upon himself to get out of there. He started looking around, knowing full well that he wasn’t going to be able to interrupt the chef from his work. He awkwardly crawled from his position against the wall and searched the large empty basement. Scanning from corner to corner, he spotted the overflowing box of weapons in the would-be armory.

His eyes lit up, knowing full well that this was the break he was looking for. He’d bust his way out of the basement, scope out the rest of the house and try to get MP out. Once they were outside, he could radio for some help from the squad car and hide out until he could get picked up.

He inched his way along the floor to the opposite side of the cemented basement. It was cold and rough, and it scratched at his knees as he crawled. Keeping an eye on the chef in case he turned around, he moved as hastily as he could. On his way over he kicked over a modified propane tank that was yet to be implemented with whatever the hell they were doing. The impact rang out clearly, but not loud enough to disturb the chef. It made Lefevre worry, but also calmed him, in a way, knowing that the chef really wasn’t interested in listening to him.

He made it to the box and rustled through it as best he could with his hands behind his back. There was a hunting knife that was going to help him saw through the ropes easily. Getting the knife behind him, in his hand and in a position to make the cuts, was much more difficult, though.

He kicked the knife up against the wall and then inched up to get his hands up against the handle. Holding the knife up in his hands, he tried as best he could to start sawing, but he couldn’t apply the pressure and the appropriate movements to get the knife to start cutting the nylon rope. The knife clanked loudly on the floor whenever he dropped it, but again, it didn’t matter. However, it was merely a matter of time before the chef decided to look back at him, and he knew that he had to free himself.

Readjusting the knife in his hand, he tried poking it up through the knot to start working at the ropes from that end, but he wound up slicing the side of his arm fiercely with the serrated edge of the blade. *Shit!* He cursed. The slice made him flinch at first, but didn’t hurt too much. But within moments the laceration began stinging like a paper cut. He clenched his eyes shut to block off the stinging, but all it did was reinvigorate the concussion he’d sustained earlier in the night. His head got dizzy, be it from the concussion or the gases filling the room, he wasn’t sure. He had to get his hands free.

With his arm stinging, his head pounding and the blurring scent of phosphine filling the room, he grabbed at the knife again, twisting and contorting his wrists to try and get any kind of advantage. He was panicking, his chest was heaving, his arms and shoulders were aching from the twisting, and he was about to give up when the blade caught an edge, it dug deep into the nylon rope and started to fray the line.

Once the knife found a groove it could work in, it easily sawed through and loosened the knot. The rope fell slack against his arms, and he was able to pull one arm free, and then tore the rope off from around his wrists. He leaned back against the wall, and caught his breath. Inhaling deeply, he remembered the noxious gases filling the basement. His eyes widened as he remembered what he needed to do, and he picked the knife back up and crept towards the stairs.

If he could make it back up the stairs and out into the front drive unnoticed, he could radio for help. Breaking his hands free was a momentous step, but not the most difficult. What to do with the cook? Leave him be, or try and tackle him? If he could sneak his way out, he wouldn't have to enter into any altercation at all. That would seem like the best option.

Picking up the hunting knife, which was running with his own blood, he stalked across the basement floor, keeping one eye on the stairs, and the other on the back of the chef who was jamming away at the stove. He made it to the staircase, he made it on to the first step, he was slowly making his way up to the kitchen. The door at the top was closed, and he was unsure what was on the other side. Kitty-corner to the kitchen was the family room, full of soft leather furniture and chairs – the others in the gang could certainly be standing outside the door.

There wouldn't be any sneaky way to enter into the kitchen if they were right there, as soon as he opened the door, he would be exposed, and have to fight his way out. If he could make it to the door, would the chase him? By foot? How important *was* it that he remained here? Well – he was a police officer who knew the relative whereabouts of their drug labs, he knew what they all looked like, he knew what they were up to. *Shit*, they were going to take him out with lethal force if they caught him running – Luc knew it.

No other options now. He was about to pull the door open when he heard the chef downstairs start yelling.

“*Qué*, whatdafuck? Where did you go? Aaaaahhhhhh shit!”

Luc looked down the stairs and saw the chef desperately searching the basement, when he finally turned of the stars, and spotted Luc at the door. He started running at the stairs, yelling for Luc to stop. Luc turned to face him as he approached, and braced himself for sudden action.

The man began charging up the stairs. Luc crouched low to get his weight behind him, and then stomped down on him as he was climbing up. The blow slammed down on his left shoulder, and the man dropped to his knee, while straddling between several stairs. He swore loudly, and grabbed at his shoulder with his other hand.

While holding his shoulder, his right arm reached across his body, partially turning his body to his left side. Luc saw the man down, and kicked again, with the heel of his boot landing firmly on the back of the man's right shoulder. Luc shoved fiercely. The man seemed to fall backwards in slow motion, but once his weight was behind him, he toppled quickly down the stairs. Despite the initial moment of impact, the fall happened very fast. He slid down on his back, with the back of his skull bouncing quickly off of each step, until he hit the cement floor with a grotesque grunt, and then his body doubled overtop of him, and he landed face down.

He had winded himself, blowing all of the air out of his lungs when he hit the ground. His arms struggled to lift his torso off the floor, but he didn't have the strength to

make it far. Without a breath in his lungs, he was also without a voice. Luc wouldn't have much time, but this was his only chance. He turned and grabbed the doorknob. As soon as he turned it, he would be committed to fleeing.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and pushed the door open.

Stepping quickly out into the kitchen, the bright overhead pot lights caused him to squint. His boots sounded loud on the ceramic flooring, drowning out his ability to hear anything else. His heart pounded unbearably loud, and he couldn't make out if there was anyone else nearby. His retinas settled and he scanned around, looking to see if there was anyone immediately outside the door, and there wasn't.

He felt relief, and ducked down behind the centre island that was in the kitchen. Its granite counter top and deep cupboards held many pots and pans and provided plenty of counter space for anyone using the kitchen, but for Luc it provided shelter from sight. No one had seen him yet, but he knew that there were others around the house. He crept forwards, hearing the impact of his boots too loudly for his own liking. He knew that the garage exit was just around the corner, and once he made it around, he was home free to the outside, where hiding in the dark, in the bushes, in a car, his options were many. He heard someone start coming down the front stairs, heavily but not quickly, this was it!

Luc sprinted through the kitchen, crossing it in three strides, spun around the corner and leaped through the mudroom. The heavy door exiting to the garage was in his hands. He cranked the knob and swung the door open.

Standing immediately before him were two men having cigarettes out in the garage. The sight of them chilled him like the cold gust of air that shot into the house, and like the scent of tobacco that filled his nose with the sight of them.

The two men stood there, unsure of what to do at first. It took them a moment to register the thought that their prisoner was loose and at the door right in front of them. As the first man moved to take action, he was momentarily paused to put his cigarette out. In all the confusion and quick decisions that he was about to make, it was odd that the habit of putting out his smoke was the first action that he took. The other man with him paused to do the same.

Luc went to slam the door, but the two of them were shouting and charging through it too quickly. Lefevre backpedaled on his heels through the mudroom, watching the two thugs throw the door back open. Luc turned around to head for the front doors, when the man coming down the stairs came around the corner, shocked to see Lefevre moving freely about.

He dropped the newspaper that was in his hands, and put his hands up as if to block the way should Lefevre try to break through him for the exit. Lefevre turned back into the kitchen, where there was a second exit through the family room, that doubled around to the front of house. While he ran in, the two thugs from the garage stormed through into the kitchen, but the other man at the front of the house went to cut Luc off in the family room.

Luc dodged the first man, evading him by a hair, as he leapt over a sofa and went for the door. His foot fell between two of the cushions, causing him to stumble. That brief delay was enough time for one of the men to jump and wrap his arms around one of Luc's legs. Luc kicked wildly, catching the man half across the face, at which point he let go. But the delay slowed Luc down enough for the second thug to gain ground on him.

Pawing at the floor to get to his feet, he was slammed to the floor by a flying tackle, the impact of which tossed the two men up against a table with a lamp on it. The lamp fell to the floor, smashing to sharp shards of porcelain. During the impact, Luc rolled heavily into the man, winding up on top of him. He grabbed the man by the collar of his jacket and slammed his shoulders strongly into the floor, causing the man to gasp for air.

There wasn't time to throw punches, Luc leapt up off of him and grabbed the door frame to pull himself away. By that time, the other two were throwing punches at the back of his head. One flew past his ear, and he could feel the air brushing past him, but the second man's fist landed squarely on his upper spine. His head snapped back, but he didn't lose his forward momentum.

He was grabbed from behind by his left arm. It was slick with blood from moments earlier when he cut it with the knife. The man's grip was lost, but the pain shot threw Lefevre like a blast of fire. He winced and screamed aloud. The man who slipped off of Lefevre didn't lose much ground, and managed to get a second grip on him, and tossed him backwards into the family room once again. Lefevre flew overtop of the man who was on the floor, stepping on one of his legs. His full weight was looking to find somewhere to land, and came down awkwardly and heavily. The man on the floor responded with a yelp of pain, and Lefevre severely twisted his ankle.

He wrestled to get back to his feet, but the third man grabbed him by the hair, and lifted him by his head onto his knees. Luc was blinded with exhaustion, pulsing blood out of his left arm, and wheezing for air. The exhaustion was so great that he was blind to the punch the third man buried directly into the temple of his head.

Luc fell back, doubling over his knees, further twisting his legs. He squinted with discomfort and writhed over onto his side to stop the hyperextensions. He panted for air and curled into the fetal position, instinctively. He felt a pair of hands lifting him up, and then he felt two. He was helped to his feet, and they were going to carry him back down to the basement.

Lefevre was out of breath and ached all over. He couldn't put any weight on his one leg, and he was carried with assistance to the top of the basement stairs. The three men were arguing on how Luc had escaped from the basement, but when they opened the cellar door and saw their comrade laying facedown at the foot of the stairs, one of them jumped down to see if he was ok.

As the first man sent off down the stairs, Luc pulled himself together. With a final gust of energy, he shoved with all his strength to topple the two men holding him towards the open staircase. The first man on his right side stumbled on the top step and clung onto Lefevre to keep his balance, but the second man fell directly down, unable to cling to anything. He dove headfirst to the bottom of the steps, slamming into the first man heading down the stairs. The two of them collided into one another and crushed down on the chef who remained motionless in the basement.

The remaining thug clung to Lefevre's arm, but he was too heavy for Luc to hold, and the two of them began to tip over the edge. Luc tried to hold himself up, but his legs were swelling and his ankle was failing him. They twitched with effort, and then collapsed in a spasm. He winced and fell forwards and on top of the man before him. He landed on top of him with a hard thud, and rode him down the stairs, almost like a

toboggan. Lefevre wasn't necessarily injured from the fall, but was definitely shaken from the course of events.

He rolled off of the pile of bodies that wriggled and rolled across the cement floor trying to find relief from their injuries. Pushing himself up to his knees, Lefevre took in a huge breath, desperately trying to clear his head of the muddled up images of everything that was taking place. The overwhelming fumes in the basement continued to flood the atmosphere, and he could feel its dizzying effects.

He could hardly move his one leg, and his arm was still letting blood readily. He crept to the stairs once again, trying to make his escape. There were voices behind him cursing his name, vowing vengeance and moaning in pain. The chef appeared to have had a large wound opened up above his eyes, splitting across his forehead from the collisions at the bottom of the stairwell.

Lefevre started to hobble up the stairs, aware that the others remained alert and pursuant. Lefevre crawled at the railing, battling the pain he felt in his arms, legs, back and head, and pushed forwards to the top of the steps. He could hear some scuttling about behind him, but he remained uncertain to what his captors were doing. He could see the light at the end of the tunnel, which so happened to be the light at the top of the stairs.

Then there was the clear and unmistakable sound of a gun cocking and being prepared to fire. He immediately felt a tingle run down his back. The shivering thought that he might be shot rang through his consciousness and caused him to feel a very new sense of panic. He scrambled as fast as he could, but he remained horribly disabled from the fight, and he stumbled on the steps. He could put absolutely no weight on his leg and ankle.

He stumbled, and fell to his side, overwhelmed with pain and panic. He rolled onto his side and stared back down the stairs. He could see shadows at the foot of the stairs now, his vision was blurry and mixed. One shadow was lurching towards the steps. He came at Lefevre slowly, like a zombie, staggering ever forwards with one intention in mind. The stairwell became fuzzy and the edges began to fade out of Lefevre's shaky vision. Everything seemed to slow down, like it was in a dream, and darkness started closing in around him.

The man lurched forward, raising his hand in Luc's direction and pointed a gun directly at him. As Lefevre's body continued to fail him and his mind faded, he became vaguely aware of the gas that was accumulating all around them. The volatile phosphine swirled around them like ghosts from a different time, impervious to the mortality of man, and unaware of the fragility that comes with life. As the tunnel of vision that remained in Luc's path narrowed further into a fine point of light, all he could see was the inside the barrel of a gun, directed at him.

And with the most silent of discharges, the weapon fired dully into the corridor in which Lefevre sat. At the end of dark tunnel, Luc could see a light, the flash from the magnum that the man was holding. He didn't feel anything, he could barely see, and his hearing was fading into a peaceful sleep. The light at the end of the tunnel smothered him, enveloping his mind and his body, laying him peacefully to rest.

Chapter Eighteen

911 TRANSCRIPT

**Recorded by The Windsor Police Department
November 17, 2007.**

Transcript created by Dickey Barr

(*This transcript was done after the state "enhanced" the recording and is not accurate)

Time ID Conversation/Sounds

00:00:00 911 Operator #1 ...Windsor Police... police, fire or ambulance...
00:01:19 Jordan Kallio ...there's a fire...it's a huge fire...
00:03:27 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am...
00:05:11 Jordan Kallio ...it just blew up. It was like an explosion...
00:07:16 911 Operator #1 ...what...
00:08:05 Jordan Kallio ...my windows shook like they were hit by giant bird...
00:09:24 911 Operator #1 ...where...where are you...
00:11:12 Jordan Kallio ...there's fire everywhere...
00:11:25 RADIO ...(unintelligible) clear...
00:13:07 911 Operator #1 ...hang on ...hang on... hang on
00:15:03 Jordan Kallio ...hurry... (unintelligible)...
00:16:01 911 Operator #1 ...stand by for medical emergency
00:18:11 Jordan Kallio ...ma'am...
00:18:19 911 Operator #1 ...hang on ma'am...
00:21:26 Jordan Kallio ...ma'am...
00:23:00 911 Operator #1 ...fire emergency... rural route 5801 Walker Road ...
00:24:00 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
00:26:24 Jordan Kallio ...ma'am...
00:27:12 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am... I'm trying to get a fire truck to you... hang on a minute...
00:28:20 RADIO ...(siren)...
00:29:13 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God ...everything is burning ...
00:30:12 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
00:31:09 911 Operator #1 ...what's going on ma'am...
00:32:13 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible) ...oh my God...
00:33:49 RADIO ...(tone - signal broadcast)...
00:34:01 Background Voice ...(unintelligible)...
00:35:20 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible) everything's been destroyed ...oh my God...
00:39:08 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
00:39:29 Jordan Kallio ...I don't even know (unintelligible)...
00:40:22 911 Operator #1 ...attention 901 unknown medical emergency RR 5801...
00:42:23 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
00:43:15 Jordan Kallio ...I don't even know (unintelligible)...
00:44:04 911 Operator #1 ...Walker Road ...Box 283 ... just north of the 14th concession ...attention 901 medial emergency...

00:49:28 Jordan Kallio ...everything is on fire. The woods, the cars...
00:50:10 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
00:51:15 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible) are they still laying there (unintelligible)...
00:51:19 911 Operator #1 ...may be possible explosion ...RR 5801 Walker Road ...Box
283 ...just north of the 14th concession...
00:55:06 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God ...what do we do...
00:57:17 911 Operator #1 ...time out 2:32...
00:58:26 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God...
00:58:28 911 Operator #1 ...stamp me a card Clint...
01:01:02 911 Operator #1 ...80...
01:01:16 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
01:02:13 Jordan Kallio...oh my God...
01:03:05 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
01:04:07 911 Operator #1 ...need units going towards rural route 5801 Walker Road ...
RR 5801 Walker Road
01:04:07 Jordan Kallio...oh my God ...they're all dead...
01:08:11 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
01:08:22 911 Operator #1 ...hysterical female on the phone...
01:10:03 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
01:10:10 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
01:10:26 911 Operator #1 ...says there has been an explosion
01:11:28 Jordan Kallio ...I can see the fire ... it's enormous...
01:12:21 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God ...(unintelligible) ...get out here...
01:14:10 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am ...I need you to calm down and talk to me...
01:14:24 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
01:16:25 Jordan Kallio...ok...
01:16:26 SOUND ...(unintelligible)...
01:17:12 911 Operator #1 ...twice Clint...
01:18:26 Jordan Kallio...didn't you get the address...
01:20:19 911 Operator #1 ...RR 5801 Walker...
01:22:00 Jordan Kallio ...yes ...we need help...
01:22:03 RADIO ...(unintelligible) will be en route code...
01:24:20 Jordan Kallio...Darin ...I don't know who it was...
01:24:23 911 Operator #1 ...2:33 code...
01:26:15 Jordan Kallio...we got to find out who it was...
01:27:12 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am...
01:28:04 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am listen ...listen to me...
01:29:27 Jordan Kallio...yes ...yes ...(unintelligible)...
01:30:23 RADIO ...(unintelligible) I'm clear ...do you need anything...
01:32:08 Jordan Kallio ...(unintelligible)...
01:32:20 Jordan Kallio...oh my God...
01:34:00 911 Operator #1 ...(unintelligible)...
01:34:22 911 Operator #1 ...do you take the radio Clint...
01:35:23 911 Operator #2 ...yes...
01:36:12 Jordan Kallio...oh my God...
01:36:25 911 Operator #1 ...I...ma'am...

01:38:03 Jordan Kallio...yes...
01:38:17 911 Operator #1 ...I need you to ...
01:38:23 RADIO ...(unintelligible) start that way (unintelligible)... will revise...
01:39:28 911 Operator #1 ...I need you to talk to me...
01:41:21 Jordan Kallio...what ...what ...what...
01:44:25 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
01:44:28 Jordan Kallio...the neighbours are dead (unintelligible)...
01:46:20 RADIO ...go ahead and start that way ...siren code 4 ...advise...
01:47:10 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible)...
01:48:03 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible) do you want honey ...hold on (unintelligible)...
01:49:17 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am ...I can't understand you...
01:50:21 Jordan Kallio...yes...
01:51:18 911 Operator #1 ...you're going to have to slow down ...calm down ...and talk to me...
01:52:19 Jordan Kallio...I'm talking to my babies ...they're frightened...
01:55:03 911 Operator #1 ...what is going on...
01:56:29 Jordan Kallio...exploded while I was sleeping ...me and my little boys were sleeping downstairs...
02:02:00 RADIO ...(unintelligible) I'll be clear...
02:02:20 Jordan Kallio...all this fire ...all over ...it's burning all over ... it shook the house ...I woke up ...I was frightened ...blew up everything ... the whole house shookthey're dead ...oh my God...
02:14:23 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...stay on the phone with me...
02:16:11 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible)...
02:17:06 Jordan Kallio...oh my God...
02:17:29 911 Operator #1 ...what happened (unintelligible) dispatch 901...
02:20:15 Jordan Kallio...hold on honey ...hold on...
02:22:01 911 Operator #1 ...(unintelligible) who was on (unintelligible)...
02:22:26 911 Operator #2 ...it was (unintelligible) the white phone...
02:23:08 Jordan Kallio...hold on...
02:25:26 911 Operator #2 ...they were wondering when we need to dispatch ...so I sent a double team...
02:25:28 Jordan Kallio...oh my God ...oh my God...
02:28:08 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...thanks...
02:28:21 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God...
02:29:20 SOUND ...(unintelligible)...
02:30:01 Jordan Kallio...oh my God...
02:30:20 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am...
02:31:06 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
02:31:14 911 Operator #1 ...who's there with you...
02:32:15 Jordan Kallio...Michael ...(unintelligible)...
02:33:15 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am...
02:34:06 Jordan Kallio...what...
02:38:11 911 Operator #1 ...is there anybody in the house ...besides you and your children...
02:38:11 Jordan Kallio ...no ...my husband he just ran downstairs ...he's helping me ...but

they're dying ...oh my God ...they're dead...

02:43:24 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...ok ...how many people lived across the street...

02:46:06 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible)...

02:46:25 Jordan Kallio...there's a bunch of 'em ...they're new neighbours ...

02:48:18 RADIO ...what's the cross street on that address on Walker...

02:50:15 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God ...there were construction crews working overnight...

02:53:13 911 Operator #1 ...(unintelligible) listen to me ...calm down ...(unintelligible)...

02:55:06 RADIO ...228...

02:56:06 911 Operator #1 ...go ahead...

02:58:12 RADIO ...(unintelligible) address again (unintelligible)...

02:59:12 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

02:59:22 Jordan Kallio...when are they going to be here...

03:00:22 911 Operator #1 ...RR 5801 Walker Road ...5801 Walker Road...

03:03:28 Jordan Kallio...when are they going to be here...

03:03:29 911 Operator #1 ...going to be a fire...

03:05:20 Jordan Kallio...when are they going to be here...

03:06:20 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am ...they're on their way...

03:08:00 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

03:08:08 Jordan Kallio...I gotta just sit here forever ...oh my God...

03:11:14 911 Operator #1 ...2:35...

03:13:09 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible)...

03:14:26 911 Operator #1 ...(sounds of typing on computer keyboard)...

03:20:04 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

03:20:21 911 Operator #1 ...no...

03:23:08 Jordan Kallio...oh my God ...oh my God ...oh ...he's dead...

03:29:02 911 Operator #1 ...calm down ...can you...

03:30:27 SOUND ...(dog barking)...

03:35:02 911 Operator #1 ...is your name Jordan...

03:36:11 Jordan Kallio...yes...

03:36:26 911 Operator #1 ...this is her...

03:38:22 Jordan Kallio...yes ...please hurry ...God they're taking forever...

03:41:20 911 Operator #1 ...there's nobody in your house ...there was ...was...

03:44:05 911 Operator #1 ...you don't know who did this...

03:48:03 Police Officer ...lay down ...ok ...just sit down ...(unintelligible)

03:51:11 911 Operator #1 ...(sounds of typing on computer keyboard)...

03:54:09 911 Operator #1 ...(unintelligible)...

03:59:29 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible) phone is right there...

04:01:28 Jordan Kallio...(unintelligible)...

04:03:01 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

04:05:02 Jordan Kallio...ya'll look out from the garage ...look out from the garage ...you can see it all from there...

04:08:21 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

04:12:05 RADIO ...10-4...

04:15:20 911 Operator #1 ...who's out there ...is anybody out there...

04:16:07 Police Officer ...(unintelligible)...

04:17:06 Jordan Kallio ...I don't know ...I was sleeping...

04:18:14 911 Operator #1 ...ok ma'am ...listen ...there's going to be a police officer at your front door ...is your front door unlocked...

04:22:11 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

04:22:15 Jordan Kallio ...yes ma'am ...but where's the fire truck...

04:24:21 911 Operator #1 ...ok...

04:24:23 Jordan Kallio ...it's really burning ...

04:26:17 Jordan Kallio ...if they don't get it here they're gonna be dead ...my God they're (unintelligible) ...hurry ...please hurry...

04:31:13 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...they're ...they're...

04:32:18 Police Officer ...what about you...

04:33:06 911 Operator #1 ...is 82 out on Walker...

04:34:18 Jordan Kallio ...huh...

04:35:12 Jordan Kallio ...they took (unintelligible) ...they ran (unintelligible)...

04:36:28 911 Operator #2 ...(unintelligible)...

04:37:08 Jordan Kallio ...we're at Walker ...RR 5801 Walker ...my God and hurry...

04:41:03 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

04:41:22 911 Operator #1 ...82 ...are you out...

04:42:25 Police Officer ...nothing's gone Mrs. Kallio...

Jordan Kallio Jordan Kallio ...oh my God ...oh my God ...why would they do this...

04:48:03 RADIO ...(unintelligible) to advise (unintelligible) 200...

04:50:18 Police Officer ...(unintelligible) the problem Mrs. Kallio...

04:50:21 911 Operator #1 ...what'd he say...

04:51:29 Jordan Kallio ...why would they do this...

04:53:08 Jordan Kallio ...I'm (unintelligible)...

04:54:07 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...listen ma'am ...need to ...need to let the officers in the front door ...ok...

04:59:11 Jordan Kallio ...what...

05:00:04 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am..

05:00:22 Jordan Kallio ...what ...what...

05:01:15 911 Operator #1 ...need to let the police officers in the front door...

05:08:19 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...it's alright ...it's ok...

05:09:20 Jordan Kallio ...God ...I bet if we could have gotten the prints maybe ...maybe...

05:13:18 Police Officer ...(unintelligible)...

05:14:18 RADIO ...82 ...we'll be (unintelligible)...

05:17:12 Jordan Kallio ...ok ...it'll be...

05:18:08 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am ...hang on ...hang on a second...

05:19:09 Jordan Kallio ...somebody who did it intentionally walked in there and did it...

05:20:19 911 Operator #1 ...82 ...10-9...

05:21:23 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

05:22:28 911 Operator #1 ...received...

05:23:05 Jordan Kallio ...there's nothing touched...

05:24:12 911 Operator #1 ...ok ma'am...

05:25:13 Jordan Kallio ...there's nothing touched...

05:26:20 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

05:28:00 Jordan Kallio ...oh my God...
05:29:08 Police Officer ...(unintelligible)...
05:29:23 RADIO ...received...
05:31:19 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...
05:33:25 911 Operator #1 ...ma'am ...is the police officer there...
05:35:14 Jordan Kallio ...yes (unintelligible)...
05:35:23 911 Operator #1 ...ok ...go talk to him ...ok...
05:38:03 RADIO ...(unintelligible)...

Total length of tape is 5:44:28

Arsenio con Pisco was rolling in late with his two guests. They had an exquisite night on the town. The cocaine Con Pisco had been distributing from the Michigan side of the border had found its way into the downtown scene in Windsor many years ago, and he was a respected face to many a doorman. His money was no good anywhere they went, and they were served free drinks at all the locations they visited.

But the evening was drawing to a close, and his guests had an early morning. The limousine was casually traveling out into the county where each guest had a spare room waiting for them elaborately set up. The merchandise they were expecting to return home with would have been ready to go by the morning. After Con Pisco's men had picked up the final ingredients from the pharmacist, they would set to work putting together the heroin, crack, cocaine and meth that his new business partners would distribute. He was pleased to think that the arrangements were coming along so splendidly.

The tinted glass separator that allowed privacy for the passengers from the chauffeur began to roll down slowly with a posh electric zmmmm. The driver tipped his head backwards to ensure that his voice was heard clearly.

"Mr. Con Pisco, there's something you must see."

"Excuse me gentlemen," said Arsenio. "I must attend to business. What is it?"

"Sir, you must have a look."

The horizon was glowing like a hot piece of iron fresh from the fires. It had a hot red glow that made the early morning look like a sunset. A plume of black smoke expanded opaquely blocking out the moon and the stars. There was nothing to see but the red glow pulsing from the horizon.

Con Pisco's jaw dropped to the ground. The light attitude of the passengers in the back of the limousine became suddenly grave, as they all saw the ominous fire that they were heading towards. There was a certainty felt deep in Con Pisco's gut that told him that this was his estate, that this was his investments and pride that were burning up.

The Frenchman in his fine suit stopped drinking his shallow glass of wine, and the burly Bandido removed his sunglasses for the first time that evening. They, too, understood the grave implications that were upon them. The flames were so bright and the smoke blackened the sky so dark, that they could see the fire for 15 minutes before they finally arrived.

At the estate in McGregor, there were already two large fire trucks dousing the flames as best as they could. Luckily the flames were not spreading to any other properties, as most of the surrounding lands were crops. At this time of year, the crops didn't have the brush necessary to carry the flames very far. But there were vehicles in the driveway that were entirely smashed – the force of the explosion had destroyed the Bandido's motorcycle, and ruined the rest of the cars beyond recognition. Strobing lights flashed all across the site, blue and red lit the yards with paramedics and police officers waiting to see what answers they could get once they were allowed access to the burned rubble.

The gatehouse remained in tact, but the surrounding fence was shaken into bits where the mortar hadn't had long enough to dry. The concussion of the explosion leveled everything that wasn't cemented down, including light posts, telephone lines, some small trees nearby, and the cars were all shoved throughout the yard. The fire itself was burning bright, high and hot. Despite the fire department's best efforts, the flames were too hot to douse right away. The water was evaporating before it could extinguish anything, in some cases.

Ambulances were on hand, but the paramedics and firemen feared that there were no survivors. The explosion was so intense that the concussion itself could have killed a man, let alone someone who had been inside the house at the time.

Con Pisco instructed the limousine driver not to bother continuing any further as he lowered his windows. He cruised by his crumbled estate, but didn't dare to stop. Police officers were climbing all over the scene and there was nothing left for him to recover, in any case.

"Driver, take us back to Windsor. We'll settle into a hotel for tonight."

Detective Luc Lefevre once told his partner, Detective Mickey Gordon, about a boy he knew that worked at a local grocery store in the east end. One night the youngster, whose name was John, was walking along Ouellette Avenue when two men were driving along. The two men were drinking bottles of beer in their car. When they pulled around a corner, they saw John walking along, and the passenger decided to throw the beer bottle out the window. He tried to hit John.

The men in the car didn't know him. There was nothing premeditated about the attack, and although they had clearly thrown a bottle out the window of their car, there weren't any other bottles in their car to indicate that they had been drinking while driving. That bottle hit John in the face in such a way that it shattered, cutting his eye out.

The men ultimately were fined for their misdemeanor, and they never served any jail time. The fine was under \$5,000. John received \$10,000 in disability insurance which he put towards his education at the university later on.

"Mic, to this day I still see that kid at the grocery store packing bags at the end of the checkout line and see the scars on his face, and know that he's going to be forever disfigured with the loss of that eye because of those two bastards," said Lefevre.

"You want to talk to me about a *justice*? A 16-year-old kid has his eye ripped out by a beer bottle, his whole life is changed in the blink of an eye, and he gets \$10,000?" Lefevre stopped and reflected on his life. He remembered why he became a police

officer, he remembered his mother, his father, and his sister. He thought back on his career as a policeman.

“There’s no justice in this world, Mickey. Don’t try and tell me that everything happens for a reason - I just don’t have the heart for it.”

Part Two

Part Two

Chapter One

Abdul Rahman Al-Ansary, son of As-Failaka Sabiyah was a young king with a grand palace on the Mesopotamian lands near the Euphrates River. Al-Ansary spent much time being entertained with the people of his court, selecting the finest goods to his kingdom, and was married to many beautiful women, but his spirit was tortured by a terrible vision in his sleep.

At night he had many visions full of dying crops, locust swarms and great droughts that brought him much fear and discomfort. He became sad from his visions and searched for greater happiness. His wives' clothing was made of the finest fabrics, his palace walls were decorated with the most expensive wares that could be traded for in all the land, and he ate the finest foods.

But still he remained tormented by his dreams.

One night, after being awakened by another dark vision, he walked into the courtyard of his palace in plainclothes, unidentifiable to the common peasant. As Al-Ansary lurked through the streets, he came across a cat. The cat was purring while cleaning its paws, and it spotted him.

The cat took one look at the king and said to him, "Your disguise does not fool me. Nor can you hide your troubles from my sight. Why do you walk these filthy streets at night when you can be comforted in the luxury of your palace?"

"Small cat, I cannot find happiness in anything I do. I have riches and land, but I still have dark visions each night. I cannot find peace. How is it that you are so happy, although you have no property, no riches nor even a name? You spend your days sleeping and your nights grooming. You come out only for food. How is it that you are so content?"

The cat looked at him and smiled. "Happiness has been looking for you, young king. But you have not been looking for it. You spend your time gathering wealth and property, but spend no time gathering the wealth of your own character. Until you find what enriches your soul you will not be truly wealthy. A poor soul finds no happiness."

"A cat is happy because it spends its time connecting with the world around him, not by gathering the world around him for himself. A cat reflects on its needs and takes in moderation, and these things bring it peace," he continued.

The king invited the cat back to his palace where it spent its days reflecting upon life from the goose-down-filled silk-covered mattresses of the king's royal sleeping chambers, as evidence that peace can be found and that the king could strive for sleep free from visions someday. The cat purred contentedly.

Islamic astrology was hotly contested in medieval Christian circles, as its ideology and nomenclature featured heavy influences from pagan myths. As long as man

was aware of his surroundings, he looked to the stars for answers. The sky was a direction of aspiration, and in many cases, the celestial bodies represented a destination of a life well lived. Spiritually, one's life performed in service to their Creator would lead them to an afterlife full of rewards.

This destination became the object of one's destiny, where they could lead a life that would grant them admission to such a Kingdom in the Sky. Among the planets and the stars, the soul would become one with God. But astrology began to take notice that the planets and celestial objects were following a very specific path, one which could be recorded, repeated and even predicted. The motion of the planets was believed to be following paths of necessity, pursuing their own needs for their own purposes.

The soul was the penultimate image of Reason, and in the soul's greatest moment of achievement, one could become One with the Universe. It would be the ultimate enlightenment free from worries and material needs. Man was considered the flaw that resulted when a soul was given necessities, yet the soul would be able to abandon its needs, and become free from necessity, with deep spiritual contemplation.

As the celestial bodies, that inspired such thoughts and unities with God, became noticeably predictable, great philosophers and spiritual leaders began to consider that man was as predictable as the path of the planets. The motions of satellites in the medieval skies could predict when the seasons would change, when it would be best to plant crops, when to harvest crops and when to prepare for droughts. The indicators were all there to make reliable predictions for the future.

It was merely a matter of time before astronomy moved towards astrology, and the same indicators that were so reliable for their crops and livelihood were counted upon for spiritual guidance. The corporeal embodiment of the soul, Man, had physical needs that continuously required attention. How one mitigated their journey to satisfying those needs was a matter of personality. Personality was built by which necessities came easy, and which came with great struggle.

The destination remained the same, however. In order to meet one's destiny, they had to follow the right path. Just as the planets were on a determined course throughout the universe, so too, it was believed that the journey of one's soul was on a similar course, finding its way back to becoming One with God.

The concept that one true path would lead to one's destined purpose, which would gain him entrance into heaven, created a great schism in religious thought. Were people destined to enter into heaven? Did they each have their own course required of them to achieve their destiny? Were their actions satisfying a greater cause? Jesus told his Disciples that he was returning to his Father to prepare places for them. Those places were not already existent, but rather required preparation. To reach those places His Disciples had to follow a necessary path, and Jesus told them, "I am the way." By His example, Jesus showed them that service to a His Cause would lead them to their destiny.

Through history, the soul has spun from inside of man, around the moon and the planets of solar systems, and even further out into the great expanses of the universe. It has transcended any terrestrial plane that can be imagined. The soul has traveled to metaphysical planes, explored spiritual worlds and journeyed to other lands. Many Renaissance doctors even tried to find the precise organ in which the soul lived. Today they debate whether a soul is in DNA, the ovum or sperm.

One scientist has weighed a body just before it died, and then immediately afterwards and found a 21 gram difference. He postulated that this was a result of the soul leaving, and thus concluded that the soul must in fact weigh 21 grams. How fast could 21 grams travel through the universe or the skies? What if a soul had to float through the cold vacuum of space for millions of light years before it could reach its final destination? Would it fly through the churches and temples and mosques, or through the mind and body, or would it fly over an early morning strip of road? Would it enter into a family room with a man sitting in the window, sleeping while traffic passed him by?

Traffic streaked sporadically up and down the main street, with cars heading to work for an early morning at the school, at the factory, or at the office. In a dark and quiet room, with an empty bottle of Hiram Walker's aged whiskey laying on the floor, cold permeated through a front bay window and into a room tossed and awry. And on this cold and clear morning, Luc Lefevre continued to sleep while his alarm buzzer sounded repeatedly.

He slowly faded into consciousness and hit the alarm. It was 6 a.m. He sat up in the chair he slept in overnight, and immediately wobbled to the side. He held his hand out against the chair to keep himself from falling over – he was heavily intoxicated and blurrily confused. His eyes felt dry, and his face was the same. He smelt sour from the booze that covered his shirt.

Taking a second attempt at rising from his seat, he felt his stomach turn as he stood up straight, and winced with discomfort. Bubbles of indigestion gurgled through his bowels and paused until the feeling passed. He stopped his rise from the chair when he was struck with an overwhelming sense of confusion – what was he doing at home? Why was he drunk?

He shuffled to the kitchen sink and poured himself a glass of water, which he drank down quickly. Water overflowed from his mouth and ran down the side of his unshaven face. He wiped his chin dry. It didn't matter that he was splashing all over – he needed a shower. He felt a pang of pain on his arm and the flashing memory of slitting it with a knife while his hands were bound together entered into his consciousness. Instinctively he reached to place his opposite hand on the wound, but found nothing there.

He could vividly recall an injury on his arm, and he could in fact feel the pain, but didn't remember why. How had he been injured? Was it just a dream, a case of *déjà vu*? He was heavily confused, perhaps due to the looming hangover that he was sure to be labouring through shortly.

His ankle was sore, but not swollen. His knees creaked and ached, but appeared to be unharmed. Images of being tackled and of falling down came to him, but they weren't visions as much as they were the recollection of the impact and pain of sustaining injuries; injuries that he couldn't recall. Beyond what he could only imagine were psychosomatic symptoms, he seemed no worse for the wear.

Lefevre pushed the glass back on the counter so that it wouldn't fall to the floor, and went to step out of the kitchen to tidy himself up for the cemetery. But he paused in the doorway with a paralyzing sense of having done this all before. He'd already been to the burial – he had already seen the gang of men waiting for him, and his sister. Didn't he?

He looked around his house, wondering what the hell was going on. There was absolutely no way that he'd dreamt the whole thing! Could he? No, everything was so vivid, it had taken so long. He could remember going back to sleep and waking up again, he was certain that everything had happened.

He ran to the front of his house and looked outside. The sun was yet to rise over the eastern horizon, but its glow was already illuminating the sky. Why was the alarm set for 6 a.m. and why was he sleeping in the chair? He didn't remember any of it. It would make sense if this were two days ago, but ... but it couldn't be. The whiskey was still laying on the floor where he'd dropped it before, and the alarm was set for the right time for it to be the morning of his father's burial. He looked out the window and saw the daily paper wrapped in a pink plastic bag on his front yard.

He ran out to pick it up, still wearing the sour clothes from the night before. Picking it up he pulled the paper from the bag and opened it up. The *Windsor Borealis* said it was November 15. This was days old. He looked around to see if there were other papers that had collected in the yard, but there weren't any.

Could he really have imagined everything? It didn't make any sense. Another thing that troubled him was that his car was missing. Smashed up or not, he'd rather have the ruined Stratus than nothing. Shit. Where the hell would his car be? There were ice scrapings from the windshield laying on the ground in a silhouette of where his car had been parked overnight.

Luc ran back inside and tried to regroup. He threw his television on and checked the news network which always had the date and time at the bottom of the screen. Sure enough, Thursday, November 15, 2007 – 6:11 a.m. EST. He stood with his mouth open, not believing any of it. If it really were the 15th, he had to get out to the cemetery. He didn't have another car, but he did have a motorbike, which would be much colder than driving his car, but he would remember his jacket this time.

He threw himself together, throwing on a fresh shirt and a warm hat and gloves before digging his old dirt bike out of the garage. It was buried behind boxes of bric-a-brac and took longer than he thought. He knew he should have cleaned out the garage earlier. But the mess made for an excuse to not put up the Christmas lights yet, so he was happy with it.

It would be a cold run out to the county, but he had time to make it.

Luc had till 7 o'clock to get out to the cemetery on time if he were going. Pulling his clothes off he managed his way into the shower and got himself tidied up to the best of his ability. Not quite certain what was going on, or how it was possible, he continued to recall moments from the past, but not vividly. They were like vague memories, but they lingered in his consciousness.

He ran back out into the garage and rolled the motorbike into the front drive way before swinging his right leg over the top and bouncing himself on top to regain his balance. He hadn't ridden the damned thing in over two years – though he always meant to dig it out and use it again. It just seemed like something you did when you were younger, and he hadn't felt young in a long time.

Was there even gas in the tank? He throttled the engine and felt it turn over in an eruptive blast of the motor. It roared loudly, and then quieted down to a murmur after the engine caught. Luc remembered his helmet was buried deep in the basement somewhere, and he couldn't recall exactly where. He didn't have the time to go looking for it, and pulled out of his front drive and into the quiet street.

"Damn it," he thought. "If it's this cold out here just sitting around ..." and he headed out towards the county.

Cruising down the near-empty streets on his way out to the cemetery Lefevre felt almost naked outside of his car. The air whipped at his face and he could feel the cold penetrating into his skin and back, despite the layers of clothing he had equipped. His mind was still an insecure blur of memories he wasn't sure ever even happened. But he was in such a hurry to catch back up to where he was supposed to be, that he hardly had time to think about it.

Traffic passed by heading back into the city, where most of the jobs were. Few people who lived in LaSalle commuted out to the county for work, especially at this time in the morning. Most of them commuted to Windsor for work. With each car that whizzed by, Luc could feel the luminous sting of their headlights in his retinas; of course, whether it was the bright light, or the dark hangover that was polluting his mind, he wasn't sure.

The motorbike moved swiftly up the road and into the empty farmlands that had been harvested only weeks ago. Now the fields were empty, like the branches of the trees that lined up and down them, covered in a silvery icing of frost which caught the beams of the rising sun. Lefevre squinted forwards with his eyes watering, closing in on the vehicle that was about half a kilometer up the road.

As he approached, he recognized the burgundy coloured vehicle in front of him. The Michigan plates raised the hairs on the back of his neck even more than the chilling weather. His mind fluttered backwards into itself, trying to recall where he knew the vehicle from and why it was causing his heart to jump. He squinted even harder, in part to extinguish the ripping pain in his head, and in part to remember. Where did he know the Topaz from? He was close enough now to see inside the cabin, discriminating approximately four heads inside, three men and a woman. The woman turned her head, and he was close enough to see the profile of her face.

He slammed on the breaks, instantly dropped back six car lengths in a mere moment and shook his head. Still rolling, but without the gas on, he slowed and allowed the Topaz to pull away. "That was MP," he thought. "That's ... the Ghosts of Man, they were in a busted-up Topaz..." he tried to recall. It was vague, but he was convinced. He knew about the car, he knew about the guys, and he knew he had to get out and get away.

He took the next right he could find, and got off the road. There would certainly be an alternate route to the cemetery; there was no need to come riding in on their coattails. He had visions of a knife, recalling that they were armed and waiting for him – that gave him goose bumps down his already chilled back.

Lefevre finally caught sight of the cemetery and rode his bike up behind it. There was a minor concession that paralleled the main street, and there was a farm directly behind his father's final resting place. He laid the motorbike up against a wooden fence and crept towards the back of the cemetery, paying special attention not to make any

noise. The ground was crusted with frosted dew, and left a concerning trail of mild footprints behind him, but he didn't suspect anyone would be looking in his direction anyhow.

The sun was up against his back, and his shadow was casting a long ways down towards a crop of shrubs and bushes which marked the perimeter of his destination. They were thick and opaque, which pleased Luc, knowing that he would remain out of sight as he approached. Listening carefully, he could hear the odd vehicle passing by on the main road, but otherwise it was very quiet. Even the sounds of birds chirping seemed distant.

Over the white noise of the early morning Luc heard a vague masculine voice commanding something. It was coming from behind the trees and he knew that there were people in front of him. He slowed his pace, and reached the tree line with absolute silence. His heart was beating heavily, and it kept him warm. He pulled his jacket up over his head to keep his ears from the cold. He pushed his way through the trees, ever so gently, to peek in on what was going on.

Through the trees was a very familiar sight. It seemed like he'd seen it before. There was MP, standing right in front of him! She was knelt down at their father's casket. Luc found himself emerging right behind a small shed at the back of the cemetery just a few yards from where MP was saying a prayer for their father. When she was about to raise her head, Luc whispered something to her. MP didn't move her head, but did move her eyes. She stared directly at Luc, and right into his heart. The connection between them bridged over the silent and cold distance. The look in her eyes penetrated him.

He could see directly into the white of her eyes, and witnessed an overwhelming sense of sorrow for her, and joy for being reunited. She squinted her face into a threatening stare, and shook her head from side to side, indicating a negative of some sort. Luc stayed himself, ensuring not to move nor make a sound. He became aware that the Ghosts of Man were sitting in their vehicle just on the other side of the shed, and he didn't want to arouse their attention; apparently MP didn't want him to, either.

He put his index finger to his lips, and made eye contact with MP. She nodded, and remained knelt down. He silently scuttled to the other side of the shed and picked up a large branch. Using an arcing alley-oop, he tossed the large branch out around the side of the shed and into some brush a good twenty yards away, landing in a noisy rattling as it clattered through the brush of the surrounding trees.

The commotion was just enough to catch the attention of the three thugs sitting in the Topaz. Lefevre could hear the rusted door creak open, and stood glaring in the direction of the tossed branch. Within moments, Luc could hear them noisily slamming their doors and running towards the brush.

Luc swiftly ducked back to the corner of the shed and remained hidden behind its concrete walls. He heard one voice yell some threats, likely trying to flush his victim out in fear. It was a classic maneuver to draw someone out when their location was unknown. Lefevre had seen it in use a variety of times. When he was a younger man, just a sophomore on the force, he was privy to foot chases. Fleeing suspects were incredibly resourceful when taking cover, and would fit into the most astonishing places.

There was one time, he recalled in training, watching a video of a man hunt where the officers couldn't find a suspect who had escaped into a common field of long grass. It was shortly after a car chase, and the suspect had fled his car and retreated into the field.

A helicopter on hand had been radioing the officers, who had been pursuing on foot. Through an infrared camera they were able to locate the hidden man, who had buried himself under some grass and brush, but the officers on hand still couldn't find him.

Of course he was eventually dug up and arrested, but that he could hide himself away with as little as the dirt and grass around him served as a testament to the lengths these criminals would go to. Flushing them out required a series of different techniques, all of which came with personal preferences.

"I'm going to rearrange your face with a fuckin' *toothbrush*!"

Lefevre could hear the bastards yelling and kicking the bushes around trying to intimidate their prey into revealing themselves.

He scuttled back to MP, poking his head around the corner, but remaining hidden from sight. MP had stood up and stepped towards the car, peering into the distance to see where the men she was with had run off to. She returned to the grave, this time very close to the shed, and she leaned in close to Luc, coming face to face with her brother.

"Luc" said MP. She was almost speechless. She laughed awkwardly unsure of what to say next.

Luc stepped forward, his hands open, unsure of how to approach her. He was indicating a hug, but she stopped him.

"Luc, the others, they won't be long. There's no time to catch up, eh?" She laughed again, though there wasn't anything funny about the situation.

Luc was still squatting behind the shed unsure of what to do next. "When can we meet? I want to talk to you." A sudden wave of emotion overwhelmed him. It had been so long since he had seen MP, it had been so long since he had talked to her.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out large plastic bag full of tightly wrapped brown cylinders. "Listen, you have to take this." She handed the large bag to Luc, insisting that he take it. "There's no time to talk about this now, but you have to take this. Do you have a pen?"

"W..well," Luc started digging through his jacket trying to fi...a ah! "Yeah, why?"

"Ok, I'm going to give you two addresses, alright? We're using the one in the west end as a pit stop most days, but the other is a much bigger operation. You've got to stop all of this, ok?"

"MP? What's this all about? Why do you want to put an end to ..."

"Shut up! Keep your voice down! Look, they're coming back any second now. You just keep low and don't say a word." In a forced whisper she tried to be as clear as possible – "Take this heroine, and the address. We will be able meet up soon enough."

"But, when? Where?"

"Luc. Stay here until we're gone, and don't say a word, or they will kill you." Her last words were as clear and poignant as anything Lefevre had ever heard in his life. MP looked back at him and her eyes grew red and puffy. She took a deep breath and stared up into the sky to recompose herself. When she looked back at him, her eyes were moistened and full of pain. "I've missed you Luc. But they *will* kill you. Stay here."

As MP left Luc behind, she seemed to walk away in slow motion. The events unfolding in front of Luc like a snow flurry, delicately and beautifully falling to the earth. The fragile lifespan of each flake dodging and spinning, trying to avoid their terminal

destination at the end of their decent, where they were bound to melt and cease to exist. MP and the Ghosts of Man pulled out of the cemetery shortly afterwards, but it was a long, long while before Luc moved again.

Chapter Two

Luc fingered the packages of heroine in his jacket pocket. They were tucked away in a double pocket in his coat, a place where he meant to keep things that he didn't want to fall out. He didn't use it much, but then again, he didn't carry around a large parcel of heroine much either.

He headed back to his motorbike quickly and sped back home to warm up. The sun continued to rise up into the morning sky, and the frost underfoot was soft and moistened from the morning's emerging heat. He straddled his motorbike and sped home, as the whining whirr of the moped screamed into his mind, disrupting his thoughts and irritating his hangover.

When he arrived back at his house, he returned his motorbike to where he found it in the garage, and patted the seat, pleased that it had run after all these years – he hadn't even looked at it, let alone taken proper care of it. He felt a pang of urgency, fearing that he'd lost his cell phone, but with a quick pat to his side, he felt the device near in his pocket. He was glad that it remained.

It was fiercely cold, and Luc rushed himself back into his home. He jumped through the door and closed it carefully behind him. Though he was shivering, he became aware of how very tired he remained. He hadn't slept much the night before and felt he needed to take a small nap. He peeled his larger jacket off and tossed it over the back of a chair in the kitchen.

He looked across the room from his front door over at the bay window that overlooked the street. An empty bottle of Wiser's lay beside the whiskey-stained recliner he spent last night passed out in. The alarm clock that had awakened him was lying on its side at the foot of the chair beside some discarded articles of clothing which he had shed over the night.

Lefevre looked at what he'd done and took a big breath and closed his eyes. He was exhausted, and not proud with himself for his earlier alcohol abuse. It was something that he had observed in his father after his mother had died, and he mostly despised its misuse. Likewise, as a young officer at the same time, he was required to patrol the late night downtown core on weekends, where the most obnoxious misuse of alcohol was proudly on display. While the horrific terrorist attacks from September 11, 2001, that destroyed the Twin Towers in New York City, had curtailed much of the American traffic that populated the Windsor downtown strip, drunkards and visitors were reemerging in recent years. It would very likely not return to its most profitable peak for many years to come, but it was growing back.

He assured himself that he would tidy up after a small nap.

He reached into the pockets of his jacket which was draped over a chair, and pulled out the scrap of paper that he'd scrawled the addresses on, and his cell phone. Striding across the kitchen, through a small hallway, past his washroom, he entered into his bedroom. Sunlight was beaming out from beneath his closed blinds, casting a stark shadow through the room. The room was divided by the bright line, which streaked by the foot of his bed, where he had stopped.

Luc turned himself around, and sat down on the end of his bed, which gave way under his weight with a broad creak. His shoulders felt heavy and he was holding his eyes closed tightly. In his right hand he punched the number to the police station into his cell phone from memory. In his left hand he held the address that MP had helped him scrawl down. As the phone rang, he realized that only one of the addresses was on this scrap of paper, and that the other must still be in his pocket. He groaned and assured himself he would phone in the second address after his nap. He knew that he couldn't appear involved in the case, so decided to report the address anonymously.

After hearing an automated voice instruct him how to anonymously report information about a case, he made the appropriate selection on his keypad and suggested the address of a home in the west end of Windsor, merely two blocks away from the Ambassador Bridge. His hands felt heavy as he pulled the phone from his mouth. He squinted across the room and felt the full weight of his shoulders pulling him down towards his bed. Exhaustion overwhelmed him, and he softly laid himself down onto his mattress and lost consciousness.

Luc squinted out towards the window as an exceptionally bright glare caught his attention. He soured his face and turned away, as if his face stung. The light burned at his face like fire and he rolled onto his side to shield his flesh. He shook his head fiercely and jumped away from the bed, retreating from the heat. Looking back at the window he saw no cause for alarm, and he no longer felt the flash of intensity.

He took a deep breath, and realized his heart was pounding and that he was moist with sweat. His clock was blurry and he couldn't read the time, which squinting didn't resolve. He went to step closer, but the entire room felt like it was spinning, and Luc stumbled, grasping at the side of his bed to stabilize himself.

He felt coldness now up against the back of his neck where his perspiration was dampening the collar on his shirt. A shiver ran through him from the back of his neck to the bottom of his spine that terrified him in a way that he'd never ever felt before. And then an erupting fireball stormed out at him from the hallway with an enormous shock. The heat from the blaze scorched his face and he immediately smelt the burnt ends of his eyebrows, reminding him of seagull feathers on a campfire.

He fell to his knees to escape the inferno, and coughed as a dense cloud of smoke swirled above him. His eyes stung with the intense heat and he couldn't open them. He desperately began to crawl forwards looking for an escape, but in which direction he didn't know. He hadn't any idea where he was headed, he couldn't see, he couldn't think clearly, and he was panicked.

He felt a strong pair of hands grab him by the shoulders and lift him from the floor and onto his feet. His legs quivered and he retched from the smoke surrounding his head. Whoever had grabbed him from behind lifted him clear off of the ground, and he felt a sense of weightlessness before he fell back to the floor. Confused and disoriented, he yelled out for help from whoever was behind him, but he felt their presence no longer.

Luc coughed so hard it felt like he tore a hole in his throat, and he wheezed in pain, and refused to inhale. Breathless, Luc panicked and rolled onto his back, with his

eyes tightly shut. Lying in pain, feeling his heart throbbing so hard it hurt his chest, he was desperate for a breath of air, but couldn't fill his lungs.

A sharp grasp dug into his shoulders once again, and he was heaved up off of the floor like a rag doll. Again he was at the mercy of the great strength that was lifting him up to his feet. This time his legs felt strength, and he dug his heels into the floor. He stalked forwards at first, but then escalated into a sprint towards the exit of his room. The flames were all around him and the fire was incredibly intense, but if he didn't move now, he might not make it out alive.

Throwing himself through the doorway of his room he felt the floor drop away beneath him and he fell directly forwards, head over heels, and his chin slammed up against a jagged wooden corner. The weight of his body toppled over his head, and he landed on his back, before thudding onto a devastatingly painful jagged peak, and then roughly slid downwards onto a concrete floor.

He'd fallen down a staircase and was resting in a dark basement. His breath came back to him in a desperate gulp and his eyes watered with tears which pushed the soot and smoke out. Busted, broken and terrified, Lefevre screamed aloud for as long as his energy would let him. Sobbing to catch his breath, he screamed an inaudible exhausted scream of absolute terror, and began to shake.

Curling himself into the fetal position, he felt every body part ache. His back flamed with pain, his legs throbbed at the joints and his neck was fucking twisted in such a way that he couldn't move another inch. And so he lay on the concrete floor, sobbing with his eyes shut fiercely, gasping for breath, while his hands locked around his knees and his body convulsed in fear.

The roaring flames above him quieted to a whisper and discontinued to worry Lefevre. The fire stopped and he no longer felt the heat clawing its way down the staircase towards him. And in its absence, his skin felt clammy and cold. He'd not made a noise, nor made a move. Numb to his surroundings Lefevre let go of his legs and splayed out on the concrete beneath him.

He was panting now. His breath was short. Luc couldn't focus himself. All imperatives around him seemed optional, and rather than regrouping, he failed himself. He surrendered to his fate, knowing that no one could hear him. If his sister were around, she could have come to his rescue. If his father were alive, he could have saved Luc. If his mother were alive, she might have been able to call for help. They had all failed him.

Lefevre was alone – there was no one coming to save him. He couldn't build up an effort from within to even save himself. He willed himself to be helpless, to be pitied. For all his pain through all of his life, he wanted to be pitied, but there was no one to pity him. He pitied himself. He wept.

A figure from the top of the staircase began to descend towards him, and he squinted upwards upon hearing the movement. The figure was an opaque shadow backlit by an amber glow from the doorway. From where Luc lay, the figure was thick and blurred, but narrowed as it moved closer. The outline became more clear, the shape more distinguished, and as the small feet reached the bottom step, Luc realized that his sister was staring down on him.

With tear stained eyes he stared speechlessly up at her, while she appeared stoic at the sight of him. Even in his moment of greatest need, she refused to save him.

“Why won’t you help me, MP?” he whispered.

MP was wearing a black leather jacket, which was unzipped, showing a thin woman underneath. She wore an old black tank top beneath, and her jeans were worn and faded. Her hair was long and smooth and her eyes were piercingly icy. She tilted her head to one side, and looked down at Luc on the floor. Her pupils were almost needle points and they stabbed right into him.

She stared down at him and spoke, but her voice moved backwards in a demonic tone, which terrified Lefevre. The voice echoed in front of the ambient crackling of the fire above. Luc’s body shook not only because he was physically weak, but also because he was genuinely terrified. He was speechless in the presence of his sister, who remained motionless and unwilling to help him.

Luc’s life flashed in front of him, and he saw himself as a youngster, feeling cold and unwelcome in a broken home. He felt anger towards his father, a drunken drug addict who couldn’t care for himself, let alone his family. He felt shame for himself, feeling responsible for his mother’s death, and felt suicidal and unloved for the damage that he’d done to his family. Luc wrapped himself around the feeling of responsibility of his mother’s passing. He clung to the idea that he was the unfinished business and evidence that his mother had been raped. Then he came to terms with how it must have felt to have been Marie Pierre, his sister, growing up in a household empty of a soul, lost of love, and broken into a thousand little pieces.

It was only then that he realized that he wasn’t, in fact, the one lying on the floor crippled and emotionally terrorized, but rather it was his sister. She was the one that had been begging for help all this time, writhing in emotional pain that could only be relieved with forgiveness and love.

In a dark and chilling moment, Luc then realized that it wasn’t MP standing on the staircase, looking down on him, but it was him standing on the stairs looking down on her. She pled to be saved.

“Why won’t you help me?” she whispered.

A shiver went down his spine that was so cold and unsettling that he couldn’t move. His eyes stared out from his body. His pupils were needle-like, stabbing right into MP. He said nothing in the presence of his sister, and remained motionless.

“Why won’t you save me?” she wept.

A second piercingly cold shiver shook through Luc’s spine. It was so fierce it awoke him from a dark nightmare. Although awake, he shivered for a moment longer from its tremor.

“Why haven’t I helped her?” he said to himself. All through MP’s life, he’d observed her pain and struggle, and he’d done nothing. And even when she ran away, he hardly put up a fight to get her back. He realized what he had to do, and that was to get MP back.

Chapter Three

Police Chief Hal Doric had had a rough few days. Chiefly, he’d had to deal with the public humility of his department in the local paper, which infuriated him to a level

his whole department flinched at. People walked through the halls on eggshells, hoping not to be the thing that would set Doric off. While it was up to other people around the office to take care of the public affairs, Doric did have an appointment to meet with that rat-bastard, Nathaniel Nardone later on in the day.

It also didn't help that one of his best officers, Luc Lefevre, was out on leave for the day for his father's funeral. Hopefully Luc would be back refreshed and ready to pick the case up where he left off just the day before. For the mean time, an anonymous tip had been submitted to the department on the possible whereabouts of his sister, MP, which Doric was planning on responding to shortly.

Doric placed his hands on his face and pulled them down slowly, dragging his fleshy jowls long over his mouth as he contemplated what he'd do with Nardone when he came in. His face tingled from its manipulation, and returned to its common resting place after his hands pulled themselves to their limit, and returned to the desk for rest. Doric sighed.

Staring at a blank computer screen, whose screen saver had activated long ago sending winged toasters across the monitor at a geometric rate, Hal felt a growing sense of frustration. So many things seemed to have gotten out of his control, and when you're the one in charge, there's nothing more infuriating. The cop he was forced to suspend for extorting motorists just the week earlier pissed him off. The press coverage of incidents about the department was causing him to lose sleep at night. The drive-by shooting and all the questions that arose from that incident was another example of forces out of his control causing trouble for him and his department.

No drive-by had ever been recorded in the city, and none of the officers had any official training on such a situation, but now the public was inquiring about what they could have done better to prevent casualties in the future. City Council started grumbling about the response time and how it could have better dealt with the multiple victims most efficiently, as well. Situations like this seem to forget that there are real lives involved – victims, criminals, by-standers and then there are the emergency services that seem to be mere bargaining chips on political platforms.

No matter how EMS performs, politicians and mayoral candidates all seem to think that their personal involvement in city operations will somehow make their services even better. Some idiots on council were already discussing an investigation on the incident to see if lives could have been saved if there were better policies in place.

Jesus. Sometimes things just go wrong, and you can't point your finger at the cops or the ambulance driver, or the firefighters when tragedies strike. Doric had a little chuckle to himself when he thought back to when a fire truck tipped over and landed on its side just a few months earlier. He didn't laugh because it was funny, as he personally knew two of the firefighters who were taken to hospital with injuries to their heads, ribs and lungs after the crash. He laughed about how absolutely unpredictable things can be, and how you'd never expect the people who are rushing to someone's aid to suddenly become victims themselves.

Besides all of that, Doric had decided to let Constable Dan Hallimut fill in for Lefevre this morning. Hallimut could easily swing by the reported address and see if there was anything suspicious about the place. It'd just be a brief drive by to see if there was anyone around. If there were people around, Doric fully expected the SWAT team to be called in for the arrests – he wasn't taking any chances with a group of suspects

known to have fully automatic weapons. But for the time being, this was just a follow up on a lead. Further decisions would have to wait on what information Hallimut could return to the station with.

Chase Nguyen was pissed! First off, he didn't like having to wake up early in the morning. Second, this hardly even counted as work. The Ghosts of Man were riding back from the cemetery out in Amherstburg in the crappy Topaz, freezing their asses off. Driving MP out to bury her father had nothing to do with pushing drugs, nothing to do with the errands that he ran for Con Pisco, and he certainly was running short on patience with MP. Chase was becoming increasingly irritable.

"Where the hell is it?" he demanded to the others in the car with him. "Keep looking! It was right fucking here when we took off this morning."

While Chase was doing a poor job of keeping his eyes on the road, he and the other passengers in the car were searching for his bag of heroine that he was certain he packed before they took MP to the cemetery. He had expected MP to get out of the car and say her goodbyes to her father, leaving him some time alone in the Topaz where he could take a bump. He was looking forward to it, but now that the drugs were missing, he was starting to panic.

He made sure to pack them when he left this morning with MP to head out to the cemetery where her father was being buried. Sure enough, as soon as she gets out of the car to head over to her dead dad's grave, his fucking stash goes missing! What a piss off.

Now the Ghosts of Man were done with the cemetery, and were cruising south towards the city. Nguyen hadn't any idea until he'd spent some time in Windsor, that Detroit was actually south of Windsor. There aren't many places where you can actually stand south of the United States on Canadian soil, and he just happened to be working there. That wasn't the only thing fucked up about the city, but it was high up on the weird scale. These are the kinds of inside jokes the dumb-ass, unionized locals all thought was the funniest shit.

God damn it! Chase needed a bump right fucking now. His wits were on edge and he felt fucking bugs crawling through his skin. It was driving him so crazy he would put himself on fire to stop the itching.

"Christ!" he screamed while speeding the car forwards back to the city.

"What the *fuck* MP. Where the hell is my stash? I fucking put it in the car this morning," he yelled while sporadically correcting his steering on the road. "Where the hell did it go? This is fucking *bullshit*. Give it back to me!"

"I don't have your drugs, Chase," she responded coolly. Of course, she'd just handed them off to her brother moments earlier at the cemetery. She wanted Luc to use them as evidence to try and catch Chase. She was really starting to hate this bastard.

Chase started scratching his left arm with his right hand, while he barely continued to pay attention to the road. He had gotten it in his head that he'd have had a hit by now, and when those plans fell to the way-side, he started to panic.

The whole crew was smashed into the tiniest of cars, and he didn't like it. While he would prefer to be working out of anything else, he was relegated to the fucking confines of a stupid Mercury Topaz! God damn-it!

Nguyen twisted himself around to look in the backseat, checking if the bag had somehow got stuck underneath one of the car seats, while his passengers lifted their feet and patted through their pockets, hoping to find the drugs and bring some peace back to the car. Hell, even if they'd found a small amount to appease Chase for the time being would suffice. But they continued to come up empty handed.

While bent over his seat, pulling his seatbelt to its limit, Chase tugged the steering wheel down, accidentally, jerking the car sharply to the right. Everyone heaved to their sides as the car leapt onto the gravel shoulder of the road, and began tugging off towards the ditch. Chase fell in his seat as the car twisted and his heart jumped. Overcorrecting, he tried to get the car back onto the road, but all he managed to do was make the back end fishtail wildly, as they flew forwards in the direction of an upcoming telephone pole.

Everyone's voices rose to screams as they clung to whatever was near their hands, shielding their heads from knocking against windows and each other. Then they all jumped in a different direction, as Nguyen stepped on the breaks with all his weight, jamming the car into a stiff slide on the gravel. Everyone was leaning way forwards over their laps as the Topaz skidded to a halt. The car rocked backwards, threatening everyone with whiplash, but at least it was stopped.

MP was panting, trying to catch her breath and calm herself. She was enraged that Chase had so foolishly lost control of the car.

"You son of a bitch," she screamed at him, as she threw a punch through the Topaz's interior directly into Chase's jaw. His face flinched away as the slug came at him. Then his neck super-extended briefly from the firm connection she had made.

He looked over at her speechless, surprised that she hadn't pulled the punch even a little, and had laid so heavily into him. For a moment, he was speechless, but only for a moment.

"Who do you fucking think you are!" yelled Nguyen, drawing his backhand up across her face. His face was beat red, somewhat embarrassed that she'd smacked him in front of the others in the back seat, and somewhat furious that she'd hit him so hard.

He shoved the gearshift into park, pulled his seatbelt off and pushed the door open so heavily that it bounced back. He climbed out of the car and spun around the front of the vehicle charging towards the passenger side door. MP saw the crazed look in his eyes, the eye of a lunatic, and the way his lips were curled at the corners, like an animal baring its teeth.

She saw that he was charging over to get her, and threw her own door open to escape. As the door pulled away from the car, she gave it an extra shove to hit into Chase's chest, which provided a momentary boundary between them. He reached forwards over the door to grab at her jacket, but she dodged away.

By this time, the two men in the backseat had begun to get out of their seats, as well. The first started calling after Chase, trying to calm him down. But Chase had lost all sense and was going to have at her one way or another.

MP was stumbling backwards, never taking her eyes off of Nguyen as he came at her. Her feet shuffled along the cold gravel shoulder of the road, which dipped down into

a ditch. She could feel herself declining, and Chase towered above her. His teeth were clenched and she could see the absolute fury in his eyes.

He was within inches of her, his hands like talons ready to snatch her in a death grip, when he was hauled backwards by one of his men.

“Chase! Man, let it go,” he said, trying to assuage his leader. He reached his arm around Chase’s torso, and turned him around. In so doing, he managed to put himself between Chase and MP, and pulled him out of his entranced pursuit.

MP stumbled backwards further, falling down into the ditch, where she stared up, waiting to see what would come of it all.

“What the *fuck* man,” said Chase, trying to shake himself free for his partner’s grip. “She’s got the *fucking drugs* man! Where’d you fucking put them,” he screamed, while trying to climb, hand over hand, away from his restrictions. He couldn’t shake himself free.

“They’re not in the car, are they? Where’d you put them? Why’d you take them! Jesus, just give them back,” yelled Chase, desperate to get his heroine back, willing to do anything to get him back to normal. His heart beat so hard it almost ripped out of his chest, and he broke into a cold and damp sweat that sent shivers through his back.

He took a deep breath, and relaxed himself a bit.

Nguyen looked at his partner. “Dude, there’s more back at the house. Things are cool – we’ll be back in ten minutes, man. It’s fine,” said his partner. And he was right. Chase let his guard down, quit fighting his restraints, and regained the confidence of the Ghosts of Man.

“Maybe they just fell out of the car when we went running out into the bushes. I mean, MP was over at the gravesite the whole time. There’s no way she could have snuck them out. And where would she even put them? Man, you’re just getting paranoid about it all,” said Nguyen’s confidant.

Not wanting to admit that his partner was right, he thought back, trying to remember how it had all gone down. MP *was* by herself the whole time, and he didn’t remember her leaving her father’s grave at any time.

“I think,” Chase began to say, “that I’m getting’ a little freaked out about this whole situation, man. The drive-by the other day ... we shot a lot of people, and when it turned out that her *brother* is a cop, and he was on the case, it just freaks me out.”

Chase looked around, up at the still-early sky line, and over at MP who remained down in the ditch, keeping her distance from him. “MP – get up here. I ain’t gonna touch ya. I just ... had to blow off some steam. C’mon, it’s not like it never happened between us before. You know, it’s nothin’ to worry about.”

Chase shrugged the situation off, and went back around the Topaz to his seat at the front. He was going to be ok, and as soon as he was back at their spot in the west end, things were going to be fine.

MP was the last to get back in the car. She didn’t speak another word the entire trip back to the house, and didn’t move an inch. She just stared out the window in front of her, letting the hate she had for Nguyen simmer in her heart. On the left side of her face, another bruise began to bleed into her skin and swell out. It wouldn’t be as bad as some that she’d had before, but behind her swelling eyes boiled the determined spirit to get him back for this. She wasn’t going to take this shit anymore.

Constable Dan Hallimut cruised on by an address that had been anonymously reported into the Police Station earlier in the morning regarding the supposed whereabouts of MP Lefevre. It was just a little past 8:30 in the morning, and he was surprised that someone had phoned something in so early, but that also made him hopeful that there would be some answers. The rough looking house had a plain front yard with a ratty driveway. There wasn't much of a front yard so to speak, just a few bushes were by the front windows. The trim around the windows was chipped and dull, and the windows had cracks streaking up their panes.

The whole neighbourhood looked this way, and this yard was no exception. In recent months the company that operated the Ambassador Bridge had been purchasing properties as they became available in the region, then boarded the houses up. The idea was to let the property value of the area drop through the basement floor, and then snag the remainder of the properties as cheap as possible. With the property, the bridge was expected to be 'twinning' the Ambassador. By so doing, they would be able to double the volume of traffic that crossed the busiest international border crossing in the world.

What that also meant was the company would also be doubling their profits. All they had to do was gain the property to make the bridge expansion a reality. Whether that drained the equity out of the property owners in the west end was none of their concern.

Hallimut sat in his car inspecting the property. There wasn't any vehicle in the yard, and there weren't any indicators that there was anything else suspicious about the residence. It seemed very quiet. No mail had accumulated out front. Even the useless coupons that are frequently delivered each week were absent. It all indicated that someone had been there recently.

Hallimut stepped out of his cruiser and walked up to the front entrance. He knocked on the light wooden door, surprised at how flimsy it seemed. It didn't bother him, though. If anything, it'd be a cinch to kick in if he ever had to bust through. There was no answer at the door. He hitched his belt up a little bit, and then knocked on the door again. Still no response.

Climbing down the burgundy-painted steps from the front door, he walked to the side of the house and headed into the back yard. There was no way for him to see in any of the windows because they were too high up off the ground, so he decided he'd inspect the rear. As he turned around the side of the house, he felt a cold thrust of the wind, which surprised him, and almost blew his cap off. He reacted quickly, snagging his hat before it left his head, and pushed it down firmly, hoping that it would stay put.

In the back yard, there was an old hibachi barbeque that hadn't been used or cleaned in quite a while. The grass in the back yard hadn't been cut in quite a while, either. Whoever was living here, they weren't taking care of the place.

The windows in the back weren't any closer to the ground, and Hallimut sighed in frustration. Without being able to peek inside, and no answer at the door, he wasn't able to confirm anything for the case. He was really hoping that this lead could turn into something to help bust this case open. Dejected, he looked at the detached brick garage, and thought that perhaps he could see something inside.

The windows to the garage were jammed up against something, and he couldn't see through. Apparently it was being used for storage, and a large box was pressed up against the window pane.

Hallimut returned to his car in disbelief that no one was home. He would have imagined that he would have been able to bump into someone before they'd headed out to work, but that didn't seem to be the case. He put his seatbelt on and pulled away. On his next break he'd have to be sure to remember to put the details of his visit into his police log. He'd have to leave a message at the station to have someone return at another time to follow up on the lead, as he'd been unable to get any answers.

As Hallimut pulled away from the residence, the Ghosts of Man were climbing back into their car out in the county. Had they not been involved in their near accident on the side of the road, they might have arrived back home just as Hallimut was snooping around in the back yard. But that wouldn't be the case. Moments after the constable pulled away, a dented and damaged Topaz crawled into the drive way and came to a stop.

Chase Nguyen climbed out of the Topaz and stormed up the stairs to the front doors without waiting for anyone else to join him. His mind was on getting inside and getting a fix. He was still simmering with anger from losing the heroine that he was certain he'd packed before they left for the cemetery.

His hands were cold, causing him to fumble for his keys, which made him more anxious to get inside. These little things continued to create frustration and barriers to his next fix. He was sweating in the cold, evidence that he was on edge.

MP remained seated in the Topaz. She hadn't moved or spoken since Chase had attacked her. While the other Ghosts of Man got out of the car and had remained mostly silent, she didn't follow them. Furious flashes from her past scattered behind her eyes, as her mind reeled through the things that she'd done for Chase, the things she'd done for money and the things she'd done for drugs. All the injections, fucking and blow jobs she'd given for drugs and money left her feeling numb of everything except for the concentrated hate she continued to percolate through her veins.

MP waited until the men were almost in the house before she left the car. She had been a rebel for most of her life, and had great resentment for authority figures. She'd once trusted Nguyen, had followed him, had learned from him, but like every other person she'd ever looked up to, he had let her down and abused her. The revelation hadn't become clear until just a few days ago, when Chase had shot and murdered her father.

Her father wasn't a great man. He wasn't her father at all, as far as she was concerned. He was a deadbeat son of a bitch, who couldn't see past his own vices to see what damages he was doing to his family. While she never knew her mother, she knew from an early age that she was responsible for her death, but MP didn't run away until the day she discovered that she was actually the result of a rape. When she realized that her father was indifferent to her, that her brother was distant and that her mother was dead because of her birth, she knew that she didn't belong. Even worse, not a single member of the household made an effort to make her feel otherwise.

She realized what her father was the day she turned fourteen; that was the day she discovered that her mother died during childbirth to a child that didn't belong to the family. MP could remember the children in the house that were over that afternoon for her birthday – they brought her shitty dolls and board games as presents, things that she never used ever again. While there were a few of her friends' parents around, she didn't know where her father had gone. With one of the dolls that one of her friends had brought her, she began searching through the house to show off her favourite gift of the day, to her dad.

While she didn't find her father anywhere, she did bump into Luc, who was 36 at the time, lifting children up and down keeping them entertained through the day. Luc was a caring individual, and she knew that. What she didn't understand was why he went so cold on her so quickly.

MP found her father shooting up in his small bedroom, with a black balloon wrapped around his arm to make his narrow veins stand up. When she stumbled in on him, even though she didn't know what was going on, she could sense that he was troubled, sick, and embarrassed that she had interrupted him. Her father, Serge, told her moments later that she and her mother had driven him to heroine. He said that right to her face.

MP didn't know what heroine was on her fourteenth birthday, but could see the pain that her father was in. She observed the process of addiction that required an intravenous injection, believing that her father was trying to get better when she entered into his room. It wouldn't take long for her to learn that her father was really escaping from the tragedy surrounding her birth, and from the responsibility of raising the daughter of a man who had raped and consequently killed his wife.

She ran away before her next birthday arrived. To her knowledge, no one attempted to find her.

Stepping into the shell of a house that the Ghosts of Man required as a home base, MP couldn't lift her eyes from up off the floor for her sudden recollection of her shameful beginnings. The look on Luc's face when she saw him at the funeral just an hour before had given her an unfamiliar sense of hope that she might not always be stuck with these bastards.

She raised her hand up and touched the swelling bruise under her eye and had a sudden recollection of how she felt the first time Chase had struck her, the second time he'd struck her, and the ... fifteenth time he'd struck her. It took a moment to do the math in her head. When she settled on the mental calculation, she realized what she thought of that bastard.

MP placed her hand into her purse and rested it upon a small knife that she carried with her for self-defense. With her rough hands touching the handle, she sneered at Chase Nguyen and decided to make her stand.

"Chase, you dumb son of a bitch. You know what?" attacked MP.

Chase, dumbfounded at the sudden outburst gave her a look of disbelief, which slowly mutated into a coy expression. It looked as though he was amused with her eruption of emotion. He raised an eyebrow in her direction, but didn't say a word.

“You know what? You *did* take your drugs with you this morning,” revealed MP. Letting those words sink in, she readjusted her weight so that she would be in a good thrusting position, should she have intentions of using the knife.

“Yeah, when you and your thug buddies were off beating bushes to scare out some snoop, *I* went back to the god-damned car and snatched your score,” laughed MP. “It’s gone, and I’m *thrilled* that you were so worked up about it.” MP stared Chase right in the face, and waited to see his reaction.

Chase’s two henchmen paused in their tracks, unsure of what Nguyen’s response would be. They’d just pulled him away from beating MP within an inch of her life for just suspecting that she did something with those drugs. Now they were faced with the full brunt of his anger at her confession of deliberately dumping them. The shock of the situation kept them from reacting soon enough to protect anyone.

Chase stared blankly at MP for a brief moment, as his polluted mind took a moment to make sense of what MP had just yelled at him. But it only took a moment, and he grabbed a standing lamp that was next to him, and thrashed it across the small centre room. With a crashing bang, and the extinguishing of the light source in the room, MP’s heart leapt. Sparks briefly flew from the socket where the lamp had been ripped from, and everyone’s sight went blank as their pupils readjusted to the darkening of the room.

But in that dark and disorienting flash, Chase was already on the surge across the room to attack MP once again. The men went to hold him back, but were a step behind, and there was nothing separating MP from Nguyen to slow him down this time.

He raised his fist to hit her as hard as he could, when she produced the knife from her purse, slashing at him. The cross-body stroke slashed across his chest, and he reacted with an instinctive jump out of the way. It was good enough, as the blade cut shallowly into his pectorals.

MP could almost smell the blood that was moments away from producing itself from his chest, and it traveled through her nostrils and enraged her eyes. She looked at Chase with a feral glare and then leapt towards him. She crashed into the table in front of her as she surged towards him, rocking plates onto the floor, and spilling a glass of water. Chase caught her in her lunge, and weighing almost twice her size, easily resisted her advance.

Grabbing her by the wrists, he slammed her hand into the wall, causing her to drop the knife, and then slammed her hand against the wall once again just to see if he could break it. MP got one of her hands free and slammed her fist into Chase’s chest in an attempt to weaken or wind him. It worked, as her hands struck against the newly opened wound on his chest causing blood to spatter out, and judging by his reaction, caused a great pain in him.

MP had blood all over her hands as she fell to the floor and out of Nguyen’s grip. She scrambled in haste to reach the exit in the rear of the house, and grabbed the corner of the end table for leverage. Dropping her purse behind, she tossed the table over in an attempt to slow Nguyen down. Chase stumbled back as the cut in his chest stung him. The lateral laceration began to ooze with blood, and he took a moment to evaluate his injuries as MP escaped to the door. As she grabbed at the busted wooden frame of the exit she smeared Chase’s blood all over.

Freshly awake from his nightmare, Luc Lefevre had cow-boied up and got back on his motorbike. He was going to go find MP right now. MP had given him a west end address to find her at, and he was determined to go there now. Consequences didn't even enter his mind, though, en route to the house he considered that the anonymous tip that he'd given only about three quarters of an hour before should have yielded some response, and the suspects would be under close supervision at this point anyhow.

Streaking down through Sandwich Towne, Lefevre squealed his tires over the rough and worn streets. Darting in and around the traffic in front of him, Luc was making great time. His motorbike whined into a high pitch each time he burst forward to zip past each commuter. He knew full well that he was untouchable anyhow. Cops can drive however they want penalty free because they carry a badge. It was always considered incredibly bad form for an officer to give another officer a ticket – like it was impolite within the industry.

The street he was aiming for had a one-way entrance from Sandwich Ave., so he had to turn into the neighbourhood a street earlier, and as he did, the sight he saw caused him to almost jack-knife his motorcycle.

Out in the street was a skinny dark-haired woman stumbling around with her arms stretched out in front of her. As he spun onto the street, he dodged to avoid her and had his bike wobble almost out of control before he brought it to a rest up against a curb.

When he spun back around to see what the hell that woman was doing out in the road, he realized that it was his sister – and that she was covered in blood. For a brief moment, they stared at one another without saying anything. He was absolutely startled to find his sister right in front of him, in the middle of the street covered in blood. MP was equally startled, standing motionless in complete disbelief that the one person who would be able to save her had just stormed back into her life in the nick of time.

Chapter Four

MP stared blankly at Luc. Luc straddled his motorcycle staring back at her. For a fraction of a moment, he just took her in. Her hair was blowing past those dark eyes of hers, and she straightened herself up to her full height – much taller than he remembered her. She had a look of confusion and fear, but the face of a young woman. Luc panned over her, from head to toe, and the red blood covering her hands jumped out at him in the pale surroundings. Was she bleeding?

He pulled the accelerator and jumped the bike forwards, sliding it up beside her.

“Jump on! I'll get you to a hospital,” he yelled over the loud engine.

“It's not my blood!” she protested. “I'm fine.”

A black man, one of Chase Nguyen's partners, was coming over the green chain link fence. He looked up from his knees and at Luc and MP. She wiped her bloody hands on her faded blue jeans before climbing on the back of Luc's bike. With a lurch, the motorcycle pulled forwards with a ripping eruption from the engine.

Their pursuant villain yelled back over the fence, as he jumped back into their yard. He was calling to get back into the car – MP had taken off on a motorcycle. The Ghosts of Man piled back into the Mercury Topaz and screamed out of their driveway hoping to be close enough behind to catch up.

Luc could feel the warm and tight hands of MP clinging to him as he raced away from the Ghosts of Man. While he couldn't see them yet, he knew that they would be close behind. He had to escape them – if they caught him *this* time, they'd kill him for sure.

MP's grip remained tight to his midsection, and he was almost uncomfortable with how strong she was. It was leaving him short of breath. He came to a stop sign, and paused to ask her to loosen up a bit.

"Hey," he started. "You don't have to squeeze so tight, eh? I can barely breath..."

No sooner had he said that then the Topaz came flying over a lump in the road, the front axle completely off the ground. The front end crashed down heavily as the vehicle barreled towards them.

"Shit!" Without even checking the intersection for cars, Luc blasted the motorcycle forward. MP had loosened her grip just enough to be unprepared for Luc's sudden propulsion, and almost fell directly off the backend of the bike. Luc's front tire lifted up off the ground as he accelerated away from the Ghosts of Man, but began to panic when he felt MP lose her grip.

He flinched back to grab at her. She hadn't slipped far. MP clambered back onto the seat and snuggly clung to his midsection once again. He was short of breath with excitement now, and it wouldn't matter how tightly she squeezed him if he couldn't manage to get away.

The next intersection had a stop sign as well, and this time screaming through it wouldn't be an option. There were cars and pedestrians filling the street, and Luc had to find another exit. Scanning the streets ahead of him, he could hear the Topaz closing in on them. There was a parking lot of a variety store and pizzeria. He jumped the curb and bounced around their parking lot, and flew out the other side, riding along the sidewalk. He didn't look back for the Topaz. He could hear pedestrians screaming obscenities either out of shock or fury, but it didn't matter.

Just around the corner there was a park. It had a children's jungle gym that was empty, and a variety of old deciduous trees that he could dart around. There was no true path for a vehicle to travel on, and it was very unlikely the Topaz would be able jump the curb to get in, let alone navigate well enough over the soft grass.

Luc's moped whined through the trees. His legs clung very tight to his seat, and he could feel his thighs burning. He was too tense, and his legs were beginning to cramp. He had to get off the bike and stretch – the cramp was too intense. There was nowhere to stop, they weren't safe yet. His body was failing him and he was going to get them both killed.

The bike burst through another big intersection on Sandwich Ave. and erupted down a mild grade toward the Detroit River. He could see the old mill up on the right, and blasted the motorcycle toward it. He ran the bike up over another curb, ducked in behind the mill, tossed the vehicle beneath some shrubs and ducked himself underneath some of the dense foliage. MP was close behind him, but understood nothing of the severe cramp that was hindering his flight.

"What the fuck was *that*!" she demanded.

"Shhhh," he panted in response. "Stay low. They won't find us if we just sit still."

Peering through the bushes that they were hidden under, he could see the Topaz still at the top of the hill crossing through the intersection and driving away. The Ghosts

of Man hadn't spotted them, and for now, they were alone. Luc rolled over with exhaustion, and refused to climb out from under the bush for a few more minutes. The cramp in his leg prevented him from moving any sooner.

The Ghosts of Man would spend the next hour searching for MP.

MP's hands were freezing. She was significantly underdressed for the mid-November weather down by the riverfront. She puffed into her hands to heat them, and paced back and forth to try and keep warm. Luc, on the other hand, paced because he was shook up from yet another chase. Damn it, he thought. *He* was the police officer; *he's* supposed to be chasing people – not the other way around.

MP was watching Luc, and she smiled. He didn't notice.

"Thanks," she said.

Luc paused and looked at her. They were making a real connection. He smiled back at her and wondered what on earth she must have been up to for the last eight years. In the most awkward of tones, he tried to reopen a conversation with his sister that he hadn't done in almost a decade.

"No prob, MP," he shrugged. "So ... how's it going?"

"I don't even know where to start, Luc," MP offered. In MP's short life, she had seen and done a lot of things that she absolutely regretted. The men, the drugs and the lifestyle were crippling her emotionally. She was ashamed of herself and even considered suicide a handful of times. She'd never taken any genuine steps towards fulfilling those considerations, but ... she really saw it as only a matter of time.

Talking about what she'd been doing for the last eight years was not what MP was about to do. No doubt, MP hadn't grown up right, and all her experiences and choices in life were reflections of that.

"I don't want to talk about it, to be honest," she said after a long pause.

Without saying a word, Luc and MP walked side by side down the Detroit River, just feeling the cold gusts of wind blast at their faces. The stinging cold burned their worries away, and the noisy bluster muted their ears, leaving them in a cold but silent moment of peace.

For the time being Luc knew that MP was alive, that she was safe, and he knew where she was. How long had it been since he was able to say that? He didn't know what the future held for them, but he felt strongly that this was the beginning of something new. Luc wanted the moment to last forever – but he knew that they were running out of time. They couldn't hide by the river all day.

"MP," he started, slowly and as honestly as he could, "how did you get caught up with these guys? And ... and MP ... what did all this have to do with *dad*?"

As they walked along the river, MP reluctantly explained how she met Chase Nguyen. She left out a lot of details about their meeting, and gave Luc the barebones of their partnership. She omitted the abuse, the emotions and the mentorship that oscillated

through their relationship, and tried to explain that they were colleagues. As she did, she realized how pathetic and desperate she had actually been.

“Making it on your own as a fourteen-year-old isn’t easy, Luc,” she offered.

Luc said nothing. He didn’t have a response of any kind for a statement such as that. He knew that she had been run out of their household and he had no idea what it must have felt like. He hadn’t even the imagination to offer empathy for her situation.

“I guess ... before I can get to dad, I have to explain who Mark was,” said MP.

MP took Luc back to November 13, to the morning when the Ghosts of Man shot Mark Wholman down outside of a bank on Ottawa Ave. Wholman was a young man, only 26, and a recent graduate out of the University of Cincinnati’s College of Law. He’d been an articling student for an Ohio-based law firm, and then hired on to continue building a resume of experience with intentions of opening his own practice some day. But his bad habits began interfering with his work.

While doing drugs wasn’t anything specifically unique about Wholman, once he’d entered law school, things changed. Like most other law students, he felt that his discipline was more difficult, that his studies were more involving, and that he was fast-tracked to a better life. He had visions of grandeur for himself, including a wealthy lifestyle and a brilliant career. He wasn’t going to be one of those lawyers with the crappy home-made commercials; he was going to be a genuine success. He knew it.

He learned early that you dress for the job you want, not what you can afford. While most classmates were encouraged to dress as professionals, because dressing as a professional psychologically encouraged you to take your work like a professional, he extrapolated those philosophies into everything he did. He started living like a success prematurely, while waiting for his success to catch up with him.

Part of living the better life included not drinking domestic beers, but rather the expensive ones imported from Europe that came with green labels and German names. Part of that lifestyle included drinking red wines instead of beer at the bar. Part of that also meant that he didn’t do cheap drugs anymore, either. Instead of smoking dope like a common high-schooler, he had to start snorting coke, like the high roller he was sure to be.

Wholman knew the law well enough to ensure that his rights were protected, that he could hide his recreational lifestyle from any authorities, and would slam someone with a slap-suit quicker than they could label him a junkie, if they started causing him trouble. All in all, he became an aggressive, arrogant and problematic rookie at his law firm, and they were looking for a reason to let him go.

Mark was studying some old cases for a senior attorneys one afternoon when a call was redirected to him. It was a young Spanish sounding man who was looking for some legal advice. Wholman took it upon himself to take the case for himself, and agreed to further discuss the client’s issues off the books.

The client was a confessed drug dealer, and he was looking for legal advice about how to protect his operations and avoid seizures and random searches from the police, the FBI, or the CIA. Wholman was surprised with how direct his client was being with him, but was able to offer advice with little difficulty. Using his firm’s resources he found many strategic methods to disguise shipments, create fronts for shops and traffic goods

without arousing suspicions. He also offered proven strategies that delayed investigations while cover-ups could be implemented. Often times the law was about buying yourself time more than it was about proving your innocence.

Mark received some payments for his services, but because he couldn't officially offer legal advice as an intern, he had to keep it off the books. He still had to pass the bar exam before he'd even be licensed in Ohio, let alone anywhere else in the United States. Wholman was also excited to find a dealer he could trust to provide him with the more expensive drugs that he'd been searching for. Too often he risked approaching unfamiliar resources searching for cocaine. Now he had a client on speed dial with all the connections he needed. It was perfect.

So Wholman and his client had an agreement – he'd continue to offer legal advice with no questions asked in exchange for drugs and some small cash. But Mark wasn't as smart as he thought he was, and it didn't take long for the practice he was interning for to figure out that he wasn't working on the projects he was supposed to be. When they discovered that he'd been using their resources to service a personal client off of the books, they demanded his resignation, and left him with nothing but his debts and a bad drug habit.

This was doubly bad for Wholman because he'd accepted a large 'advanced payment' from his client. Of course, the money was already spent on clothing, knickknacks, tanning beds and almost all of it went directly up his nose. He decided to duck out of town and leaving the whole thing behind him.

While an undergraduate at the University of Cincinnati, Mark had made various trips out to Windsor to take advantage of their lower legal drinking age with his friends. It was no secret that the bar industry and the casinos were open for business for minors and it was advertised zealously throughout the area. Youngsters from Ohio traveled to Windsor by the busload each weekend over the summer months. The advantage was that the age of majority was merely 19, instead of the restrictive 21 prescribed by the United States.

Wholman figured that opening up a bar in Windsor would be a great start to a new life. Dressed like a success and looking for somewhere to runaway to, he was almost begged to open up shop in the downtown core. The real estate prices were at rock-bottom so relocating wasn't going to be any difficulty, and the region was so desperate for foreign investment they were almost on their knees offering him tax-breaks, incentives and loans. It was the easiest decision he'd ever made.

Success was finally catching up with him, and he knew it.

In just a year he'd purchased an existing location, renovated its exterior, hired new staff and marketed the place in the States as the preeminent weekend destination, for Americans. He wasn't so concerned with the locals, they weren't interested in spending their money – he was aiming for the vacationers who budgeted to spend all their cash.

"So why did you guys target him? What's Wholman got to do with *you* guys?" asked Luc.

"Here's where we get to the interesting part, I guess," continued MP.

"Our boss, Arsenio con Pisco, he's connected to a big family of dealers down in South America. It's a long story, but he winds up marrying into the family and been

operating in Detroit for decades. That family controls all the cocaine distribution from Peru. I know, that *sounds* big, but that's nothing compared to the total distribution out of South America; Peru is like a drop in the bucket," MP said.

"Wholman's bad habits followed him here to Canada, you could say. And of course he started purchasing from us not long after he arrived. In the family, though, the word traveled that he had skipped out of Ohio to escape his debts. Well, it turned out that his client that he abandoned back in Cincinnati was the nephew of Con Pisco, and they weren't going to tolerate his bad debt no more. Instead of writing him off, they decided to make an example of him." MP's voice dropped down a register, as she recalled that day when they drove down through Ottawa Ave. looking for Mark.

"He was already a client, so all we had to do was ask him for some cash upfront before we provided him with another order. Simple enough, we followed him to his bank, asked for the cash, and when he handed it over, bang, bang, bang," said MP.

"And that was another job for the Ghosts of Man, I guess," she continued. "It was supposed to be just another ghost story – 'The last guy who stiffed us on a deal wound up with 23 bullets in his chest in broad daylight' – something like that. It doesn't sound as poetic when you say it out loud, but that was the plan, anyhow."

Luc tried to refocus the conversation. "Yeah, you blew a deadbeat away, I *get* that. But what was dad doing there?"

"It's funny," she said, staring off over the river and into the smoking factories of Detroit. "He was working as some kind of odd-jobs employee with Wholman. I don't have any idea how they wound up together. He was doing minor repairs around the restaurant, tearing up tiles when necessary, washing the windows, changing the letters on the signs to read what the specials were. Just random stuff like that. He was strung out so bad when I saw him that he didn't even recognize me."

"Just after we'd talked to Mark to tell him we'd only deliver the next load once we'd received payment, dad approached us. He looked like a dirty skeleton with mange. It was horrible. He wanted to order something – he was going to try and steal some liquor from the restaurant to get the money to buy some crack. He promised to have it by tomorrow."

"Of course I knew that we were going to blow Mark away, so I told him to meet me at the mill tomorrow night. We're going to be meeting with a pharmacist, Luc. Now, the pharmacist is going to be supplying the ingredients we need to get the production up and running here in Canada. Anyhow, I figured I'd just get dad his fix then if he met us down there."

MP paused, and cleared her throat. "Luc, I didn't expect to see him at the bank the other morning. He *wasn't* supposed to be there ... and ..." MP choked up for just a moment. She looked up to the sky to hide her watering eyes from Luc. "I saw them blow him away, Luc. I watched as puffs of blood splattered through his hand. I watched him tumble to the ground after he'd been shot. I was there." Her voice was almost a whisper as she confessed her conscience to Luc.

Tears welled up in her eyes and she sniffed her nose to keep it from running. Speaking the words about her father's death made his shooting seem more real to her. It was like her involvement had just been an overreaction of her imagination, but saying it out loud, confessing it, made it real. She began to weep quietly. Luc hardly felt like he

knew MP, and felt very awkward about reaching out to her to offer support. He held her close, and then she hugged him back. A tear rolled down Luc's cheek.

MP struggled through only one more sentence; "The last thing he musta seen was me in the back of that truck." She sobbed. "I was screaming his name, and being held down by the other three in the truck as we took off."

The two of them sat on a bench near the river for a short while after that. They both thought about their dad. Luc's memories had more depth and fondness, while MP's were haunted by his decrepit image begging on the streets and injecting himself with drugs on her birthday.

"You know," said MP, breaking the silence, "that they weren't supposed to shoot dad. *They* were so scared when they realized that they had shot *my* dad. The one guy, the one who slammed up your car, his name is Chase. He's got a thing for me." MP appeared almost revolted by the statement. "He wanted to make it up to me, so he offered to take me to the funeral. Of course, there wasn't any service, just the burial, but he was going to escort me."

MP continued, "But I had to tell him that you were going to be there, eh? I warned them that you were a cop, so that they wouldn't blow you away when you realized who they were at the cemetery. If you'd of rolled up, Luc, and recognized who they were, and saw them at dad's burial, you would have tried to arrest all of 'em all by yourself – and you would have wound up dead. A matter of fact, those bastards wudda likely thrown you on top of dad and filled the hole in right then and there. And I'm not kidding."

The solemnity in her voice further underlined the gravity of his situation. They wouldn't hesitate to kill Luc. While he remained without a badge he couldn't call for backup; he was a regular everyman. Luc just watched her and listened, realizing that she'd actually saved his life already. He laughed at the irony, thinking that he was trying to save her.

An enormous freighting boat silently glided down the Detroit River, its size and grace captured both of their attention while it slowly parted the water in front of it on its way east.

"MP," Luc said, finally breaking away from the vision of the freighter, "it's time for me to return the favour – let me help you, too. You've got to come with me. We'll go down to the police station, we'll take a statement from you, and we can get you away from them."

He reached out and gripped her by the arms, and pulled her close to him. In a low voice, he said, "You don't have to stay with them anymore if you don't want to! Everything is going to be fine. Just come with me and we can put all this behind you."

MP stared back at Luc with a sad face. From this distance Luc could see the premature aging in the lines around her eyes and a black welt swelling up the right side of her face. He could see the chapping on her lips and the cigarette stains on her crooked teeth. Her thin body felt so light and frail. He pitied her. She knew it, too. She could read it in his eyes.

“I have to go back,” said MP, as she tugged away from him. She pulled her arms free from his grip with a firm jerk, and stepped back. Luc stood still, unsure of what set her off. MP became anxious and uncomfortable, as she swayed back and forth, almost as if she were pacing.

“Look,” she began, “I’m going back.” She began to walk away, but jaggedly, as if she wanted to return to him. Her steps were scattered, as if she were about to double back, and she looked out the corner of her eye and over her shoulder, back at Luc.

“I’m living the only way I know *how*, Luc,” she said, almost pleading for him to let her go. He took a few steps towards her, but she almost broke into a run as he did so. When he stopped, she slowed down, opened the distance between them, and then paused to face him from a few metres away.

“Nobody ever raised me to *be anything*. I don’t *know* what *I’m supposed* to do!” She was almost yelling at him, and redness grew around her eyes. Luc couldn’t see any tears, but knew that they weren’t far beneath her skin. MP was a fighter, and she fought the tears back like a gladiator at a coliseum.

“Nobody taught me how to make my own path,” she said, with a sense of forsakenness. “So I’ve had to make my own,” she shrugged, “and this is where it’s led me.” She continued to pace backwards as she rubbed her one arm and down the other, as if she were warming herself.

“Don’t go to the mill, Luc. We’re all going to be there, and I can’t promise that they won’t hurt you if they see you. *Please*, don’t be there.”

And with that final plea, she turned and ran up the hill, back towards their home down that dark west end street, and back out of Luc’s life.

Chapter Five

November 16 - - Police Chief Hal Doric rode the elevator up from the basement parking garage alone. It was early in the morning, and his eyes were heavy. As the elevator dinged past the main lobby and the second floor, he stared vacantly towards the sliding doors. As the elevator readjusted its speed before it came to a stop, Doric felt a brief wave of vertigo. Elevators always did that to him – he hated the damned things.

The doors slid open and he lurched out onto the ceramic floor, and heard the clicking of his well-polished shoes as he marched down the hall to his office. The station was quiet. The night shift was tired and clocking out, while the morning shift was drowsily making its way into the staff room for coffee. There was a television that played in the lobby reporting on the daily news. A woman’s deep broadcasting voice called out the weather for the next two days – but Doric wasn’t paying attention.

The fluorescent lighting glowed in a pale way that seemed to suck the energy out of him. He much preferred working outside in the daylight – the natural light that enriches everything it touches. Glancing at the window, he saw no light. Still too early for the sun to be up, and he sighed heavily in contempt.

As Doric reached his office he turned back to see Detective Luc Lefevre’s closed door, and sighed. Not having Luc around the office drained more life out of him than the lighting. Maybe he was looking for reasons to feel grumpy about work today. He didn’t feel up for it, anyhow. Maybe it was just the changing of the seasons, too. Doric had realized over the last few years that he grew quite depressed during the winter months.

What was that called – seasonal affective disorder? He wasn't sure, but whatever it was, Doric feared that it was starting to take its toll on him more and more each year.

He hung his jacket up on the hook behind his door and headed back towards the staff room to get himself one of those coffees, too.

Detective Mickey Gordon and his ad hoc partner Constable Dan Hallimut were already in the staff room stirring their coffees. They stared at the weather forecast together.

"How about that? Getting colder these days, eh" remarked Hallimut.

"Yup. Looks like we're going to have some weather today," replied Gordon.

They stopped bantering about the absence of anything interesting as the chief sauntered in. Dan leaned against a counter and rested his coffee, while Mickey stepped aside from the sugar and cream so the chief could season his coffee.

"Chief," started Hallimut, "'morning."

"Yeah. Good morning," he answered.

Hallimut said, "So I swung by that residence yesterday like you asked. Pretty quiet. I didn't see anything. No truck, no signs that anyone was home. Place was in considerable disrepair, but most the homes around there look like that, you know what I mean?"

"What a surprise. You found nothing," lamented Doric. "Man ... how can there be a ..." he paused, censoring himself from swearing so early in the morning. "How can a whole carload of thugs shoot up a buncha bystanders at a bank and then disappear without a trace? This whole case has been like this – just a dumb dead end."

Mickey chirped in, "Well, we got the evidence off to ballistics yesterday, so we should have a report on the types of weapons and ammo they were using in a couple of days, depending on their workload out there."

Windsor had a forensics unit, but they basically just collected evidence. All of the forensic science and tests had to be contracted out to a lab in Mississauga, Ontario, about 350 kilometres east of Windsor. Once the evidence was out there, it was processed and reported on quickly enough. It was a bit of a pissoff that they had to send everything out of town to be processed, but that was how it had to be. There just wasn't the money to open a full forensic unit down in Windsor. It wasn't all that uncommon, though. Hospitals had to do the same thing – in fact, there was only one ear, nose and throat specialist in the Windsor Region. Lucky they didn't have to wait in line at *his* office to get their tests done.

"That could get us a little closer – help match the weapons if we ever find them," he continued.

"That's a good first step," replied Doric. He sipped at his heavily sugared mug before continuing. "Well, we're going to have to get a break on this sooner or later. See if you can get a lead on any of that nonsense that was in that press clipping the other day – the one about fentanyl and all of that garbage. Check the States, too. They've got to have a lead on somebody that they can share with us. I imagine a takedown on this case is going to require some serious collaboration outside of just our department. I'll see if I can't get some of their help on the line later this morning."

“Well, we’ve still got the lead on the ‘Meeting at the Mill’ for tomorrow night,” offered Hallimut. “The note from the cigarette pack that we got off of that dead guy a couple days ago...”

“Hey,” interrupted Doric in protest, “that was Lefevre’s *father*, detective! Show some respect, will ya?” He paused. “We don’t even know what that means, anyways. You sure that’s a lead you want to follow up on?”

“We’re even readjusting our schedules to be out there, chief,” answered Mickey. “If there’s any development, we’re going to be on top of it.”

Doric took another sip of his coffee. “Okay,” he answered. Hal topped up his coffee and went to leave. While on his way back to his office, he told them to keep up the good work, over his shoulder.

“Man,” Mickey rasped under his breath, “he’s been in a pissy mood ever since he suspended, Luc, eh?”

“I wouldn’t want to get under his skin today,” agreed Dan.

Back in his office, Doric noticed a red flashing signal on his phone indicating a message was waiting for him. It must have come in the night before, because there was no one up this early to phone him already.

Sure enough, it was from the night before. It was a friend of his from the City Council who had heard that there was an application for a Disclosure of Information application on the police records, specifically looking at payroll. This was the second time this year that someone had started going through the payroll for officers.

The first time through it was regarding the City of Windsor and their intentions to allow officers equal opportunity at off-duty positions around the city. For much of the downtown core, it was absolutely necessary for some bars to have an off-duty officer present to help control crowds. It was also very common, and officers could rake in a boat-load of supplemental income while basically, just being present. Off-duty officers were like stop signs when it came to trouble – merely being visible to drunkards was affective enough to dissuade customers from causing a ruckus.

But favouritism was being played and some officers were getting a *lot* more overtime than others. There were also allegations and suspicions that some officers were beginning to scheme with the bar industry. For whatever advantage, having bar owners collaborating with the same officers all of the time was leading people to believe that the police were now doing favours for the bar owners; helping them dodge the law, breach fire codes, serve minors and other dishonest things.

Doric knew that all of that was just people’s imagination running away with them, but the fact remained that all officers should have an equal chance to earn overtime – and he supported the policy changes and legislation that followed. While it was still going to be a few weeks in the making before all of the changes would be official, it was basically a done deal.

Now, though, he was worried about what further information people could be looking for. His informant on Council said that it was the reporter, Nathaniel Nardone, trying to dig up information on officer salaries and payroll. The message infuriated Doric.

The reporter had been in his office just the day before to interview Doric, and he *knew* that bastard was up to something. There was such a snaky way that he asked questions.

The *Windsor Borealis* reporter, Nathaniel Nardone, came in looking for answers to the drive-by shooting from earlier in the week. He had ticked a lot of guys in the station off by writing about the details from the crime scene when the story first broke. The *Star* usually had their end of things taken care of. They'd wait for a press conference and they simply reported on what was being said. They waited for official releases and hardly ever dug up their own dirt. They had gotten lazy a long time ago and weren't all that troublesome normally.

It wasn't so much that there were lazy, but they were overworked. Oftentimes they were required from their editors to punch out three articles in a day, depending on where their travels took them. When they're that busy they don't have time to dig through documents and apply for a disclosure of information. And that was just fine with Doric. If they just showed up to the media release for half an hour and then were out of his hair, that was absolutely fine with him.

But a situation like this drive-by was a big news story and the paper was interested in keeping it in the front pages. If there was any new information of any kind, that was a new lead sentence, another new headline, and another newspaper sold. Doric had seen it too many times; the news were always in a rush to get the next tidbit out before their competition, and then use that in their headlines to gain viewers. It was more prevalent in the radio market in Windsor, as there were several stations that carried local updates, than it was in newsprint or on television, with only one daily, and only one local television news channel.

This Nardone character, though, wasn't satisfied with just the press releases and the conventional materials – he was a digger. He eavesdropped for information and he hid out in the back of his car watching people. He was more like a goddamned private investigator than he was a journalist. He even took the photos for his own stories. They didn't always run, but he was always snapping shots.

He had to be settled down, so Doric agreed to meet with him to discuss the information on the drive-by. By foregoing the usual avenues where the press directed their questions to the staff sergeant, Doric hoped that allowing Nardone to meet with him, the chief of police, would be satisfactory enough to have Nardone lay off the department for a bit.

The meeting had started off easily enough. Nardone wanted to go over the departmental procedures for following up on leads and processing evidence and what the preliminary evidence was. Then Nardone started asking more personal information about Detective Lefevre, and Doric refused to comment on any of that. Police officers were servants of the people, they were just doing their duties to maintain order – without which society would fall apart. But Doric and the police department were not going to comment on the personal involvement of Lefevre's family's involvement with this case.

Nardone began to get frustrated with Doric's refusal to answer questions, so he switched approaches, trying to find some way to loosen the chief's lips. Nothing worked. Nardone was sure that there was an interesting story involving Lefevre on this case, and he was just about to drop the subject, when Lefevre came storming in.

Damn it, thought Doric. What the hell was Lefevre thinking? The whole situation with him dragging a bag of crack into the office in front of the *press* was the most damning thing he could have done. Doric might have been able to negotiate the situation differently if Luc hadn't been attacking the journalist when it all went down. Either way, it had been a long, long while since Doric felt this bad about a decision he had to make at the office.

What was Nat Nardone doing now with a disclosure of information order for their payroll? What was he looking for? Doric didn't like it, and he knew that Nardone was up to no good. The only thing that you could get from the payroll was a record of payments to each officer. Sometimes the payments were a bit higher than others, but they usually correlate with overtime, and all of that was traceable.

If he was looking for dirty officers that were taking bribes on the side, he wouldn't find that from payroll. He'd have to do a lot more digging. But if he were looking for misappropriated funds or inconsistencies with payroll, then perhaps Doric could find it too, and find it first. There were options open to him, like hiring an internal investigation, to see what there might be to worry about, but ... until he knew exactly what Nardone was looking for, he wouldn't know where to start.

Nat Nardone was sitting in the driver's seat of his Sebring eating a puny hamburger he picked up from a drive through up the street. He wasn't a big fast-food guy, but he figured he was compromising by ordering something small from the menu. He had his digital camera with him on the passenger's seat, but it looked almost goofy with its large telescoping zoom. Doric wasn't exaggerating before when he believed that Nardone was almost becoming a private investigator. Nardone even had a long-range unidirectional microphone to pick up audio from considerable distances. He liked that they were nicknamed 'gun mics,' and they were great for picking up individual voices. It had a cone-shaped front where the pickup pinpointed audible targets cleanly and accurately.

It was risky of him to be snooping around the police department with gear like that, though. Pointing long narrow microphones at standing vehicles and the long lenses on his camera drew a lot of attention – so he had to be discreet with his business. He'd been intending on following Lefevre around initially, to try and dig up some more information on his sister and the drive-by case. But that got shot to sunshine shortly after Lefevre decided to go on a rampage in the chief's office.

Nardone still had goose bumps when he thought about Lefevre storming into the office and almost tearing him out of his seat. Nat had written a lot of stuff, but it had always been the truth, so people had little to argue with him about. Sure the stories weren't glamorous all the time, and sure most often the people he was reporting on didn't even know who he was, but every once in a while the subject to one of his articles came dangerously close to violently ending his career.

Lefevre was inches away from forcing Nardone's retirement, and he knew that for sure. If the chief wasn't there to scatter his attention and diffuse his rage, Nardone knew that he would have had at least a half dozen stitches by the end of the night, and at worst ... he didn't want to let his imagination get too carried away with what could have

happened. He took another sloppy bite of his hamburger and a slimy slice of pickle slipped out from between the buns and onto his shirt. It even had mustard on it, and was sure to leave a stain.

By now, he figured, someone at the police department must have caught a whiff that he was enquiring about the payroll. If it were only that simple, he scoffed. Picking the pickle off of his shirt, he saw an officer coming out the front doors of the station. He edged to the front of his seat, peering to see if it was someone of interest to him. He pulled himself forward with the steering wheel, only to not recognize the man sauntering out the doors.

If it were Detective Gordon or Hallimut, Nardone would have fired up the engine and slipped that microphone on to see what the hell they were up to. But this cop, he was some bulky stranger who hitched up his belt every couple steps. Hallimut and Gordon would be interesting leads for the drive-by follow-up that he was supposed to be writing. His editors had requested yet another article following up on the drive-by. Drive-by *this*, and drive-by *that*. It was all his editors wanted – and he was the only writer they wanted on the story. It was thrilling to be on the front pages for the first day or two, but he had bigger fish to fry, and he was becoming disgruntled on the beat.

While he could tap in a new quote and then recycle the whole other article, he had time to do research on his new work. Yeah, the payroll stuff was going to help out, but it was a *very* minor cog in the works of his next exposé. He wanted to see how much cops were making, and then if he could cross reference any suspiciously expensive purchases he'd be able to narrow down which cops might be on the take.

If he could find some officers who were taking bribes then that would suffice as evidence that a greater criminal presence had entered the Windsor-Essex Region. The evidence was just out of sight all of the time, too hard to grasp, and the rumours and observations weren't enough to report as fact. But cops being paid off would be evidence of much more than just an increased criminal presence, it would be evidence of the emergence of organized crime. And *that* was what Nardone was after. Yeah, for now he'd be stuck checking the known addresses of officers, seeing that their vehicles, their homes and their spending habits all corroborated with their incomes. But as soon as he could figure out who was spending outside of their income, *then* he could short list which officers could be in cahoots with someone outside of the law.

Unfortunately he stumbled across Constable Bradley Gregor about a week ago. Gregor was always buying little trinkets and such, but when Nardone started trailing him, all he discovered was an extortion racket on roadside pullovers. And before that Nardone uncovered a police officer who was trying to steal lawn furniture from a big box company's front display. He was getting tired of picking up the lousy criminals and sloppy cops. The infuriating part was he *knew* that each time he exposed one of these miscreants, he feared he was arousing suspicions among those he was trying to find. With every case that hit the news, the criminals he was after were taking extra precautions to ensure that they weren't the next name on the front page of the paper.

Nat readjusted his ass in his car seat. He had the car turned off, and it was cold, but his ass was hot. As he sat waiting in his car, his mind wandered back to almost a full year ago, when a very young woman was shot to death on the streets of Toronto. He could recall all the details of the articles that followed the story for weeks. He searched

each day for more news on the saga that began as a very young woman's life being cut short, into an inertia that drove the largest Canadian municipality into action.

It was a quintessential moment where the news can make meaningful change for the better. It was the kind of story that turned the entire city on its ear. Gang violence killed dozens of people each year in the city, but the murder of that sweet and innocent little girl stopped everyone.

She was a cherub. She was a messenger. In her death she became the instigator of change in a world that was slipping out of control, and for the weeks and months that followed her death, a new life was breathed into a downtown core teetering on the edge of no return.

To have been that man, thought Nardone. To have been Pickett Powell, the author that covered that story, would have been life-changing. Powell was like a Walter Cronkite or a Ted Koppel in newspaper form. He was depended on to cover the very best stories each day, and he was given time to pursue his own investigations because the editors trusted him. Powell was even going to get a sabbatical to begin working on a book – and he would find a publisher to pick up his manuscript without any difficulties because he was a reputable name in the journalism industry now. Yeah, Powell won the lottery that Boxing Day. Nardone knew that one day, that could be him.

The Toronto crackdown on guns and gang violence wasn't taken too seriously for the first few months, but then Toronto did something no one had expected – they made a serious difference. The crackdown put a lot of pressure on organized crime and pushed a lot of crime out of the city. But they weren't scaring people straight, they were just pushing people straight out.

The major infusion of funds, attention and attitude towards guns and gang violence slowed crime down considerably in the GTA, and when the reports were released by the end of the this December, there would be tangible results and statistical evidence of the successes of those efforts. Nardone knew, as many did these days, that the crime was just getting spread around, not cleaned up. It was like a child pushing the food around his plate trying to make it look like he ate it up. Toronto's response was unique in the country, and nowhere else in Ontario was able to mirror their efforts to combat crime. Simply, no other cities had the resources to follow Toronto's example. Well, not without their own messenger of change, and nobody was praying for another child to be shot dead in London, in Leamington, in Barrie or in Ottawa.

The odds of another young girl being shot down were increasing each month, though. The pressure that gang and gun violence faced in the GTA forced much of that presence into the peripheral cities, and down into the southern regions of Ontario. Windsor was a prime example of the struggles of police departments faced with the sudden presence of major gangs. Leamington, too.

And Nardone was going to find it. Nardone was going to expose it, and then it would be *his* turn to receive the awards, to get the sabbaticals, to get the television interviews and to finally get the recognition he deserved. Then he could finally get out of this shithole town.

Man, Nardone had only been in Windsor for a couple of years, and he'd already found himself fed up with it. He'd gone to school in Montreal at Concordia where he got his masters degree. The only place that had an opening was the *Windsor Borealis*, which was exciting at the time, but now Nardone was sick and tired of the people.

He didn't know exactly why everyone in the city was a cranky know-it-all, but it had been getting under his skin ever since he started interviewing citizens for his articles. They cried about the mayor, they cried about their neighbourhoods, they cried about land development, they cried about their jobs, they cried about the price of gas, the price of food, the price of clothes, their taxes, about each other. Nardone hadn't met so many cry-babies since he took his niece to preschool.

Nardone had a suspicion that a lot of the attitudes came from the heavy union influence in the city. The mentality was that if you had a complaint, you went to your union steward, and they would follow a long list of procedures to make sure that your grievance was handled properly. People were written up on their 'offenses,' given 'verbal warnings,' and reallocated until satisfactory resolutions could be met. Ultimately, it was like being in elementary school – except people are fighting for money and their jobs instead of sandboxes. It's funny, fumed Nardone, how absolutely *childish* everyone was.

Perhaps everyone was so up tight about the city because things weren't going well, and hadn't been going well for almost a decade. In the news it seemed like Windsor was the only city experiencing a depression. Then again, it was one of the only cities that were economically codependent on Michigan, one of the most economically dilapidated states in the U.S. Michigan was fairing more poorly than Louisiana, and *they* were still recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

The unions were never happy, and as a result, the private sector was never happy. The unions influenced enough people to vote for the New Democratic Party each of the last few election campaigns, which meant that all they heard from their political leaders were complaints about the Prime Minister *and* the Official Opposition. And the University of Windsor's reputation was caught up in all of that simmering bitterness. Their reputation was ranked among the lowest of the universities in country, but most of that was simply because when people thought 'Windsor,' they thought 'whiny crybabies' – not 'higher learning.'

The University of Windsor's reputation problems were not of their own making, they were a result of their proximity. Nardone would liken the argument to a student considering going to the University of Southern California or the University of Philadelphia. Without knowing a single thing about either of them, the connotative stereotypes of each of those cities would influence your interest in one before the other. Based on those stereotypes, Nardone strongly believed that the university's reputation was in the shitter because it was named after the City of Windsor.

The University of Unemployment.

The University of Bankruptcy.

That was the fight that the University was facing; how to brand themselves in a different light from the City without alienating themselves from the City (the largest source of their student population remained local commuters).

Just thinking about this damned city made Nardone's blood pressure rise.

He let out a frustrated sigh. It was almost a gasp. The cold November air made his exacerbation visible as a warm white cloud slowly faded away.

MP Lefevre strolled slowly away from Luc down by the riverfront, and trudged back to the hideaway where Chase Nguyen would be waiting for her. Her hands were buried deep in the denim pockets of her jeans, partly because they were very cold in the November air, and partly because she didn't want to draw any unnecessary attention to herself; her hands were covered with the dried blood from Chase's slashed chest.

In their line of work, and with their line of habits, mood swings were entirely common, but knife swings were not. As furious as she was with him, he was her reliable source for more crack if she needed it. Not knowing where her next hit might come from, or when she might get it, made her incredibly anxious. Her body almost broke out into a panic just imagining trying to do without the comfort of knowing how to get more drugs.

She wasn't just walking back to Nguyen, she was going back to all the bad habits that she couldn't escape; all the choices that she had to make as a youngster to survive. Now she had to make even worse decisions to be able to live with herself. MP couldn't life her eyes off of the leafy sidewalks block after block. Her hair fell long over her face, and she stared straight down at her feet – she was in complete submission.

The painted slab steps didn't look any less welcoming than they ever had. The car sat quietly in the laneway, not suggesting that there was any danger waiting for her inside. For all the grief and uncertainty that was causing MP to shake, there were no foreshadowing characteristics to the front of the house, and that made MP worry even more.

Her blood-encrusted hands turned the old cold doorknob and released the door from its frame. Her peripheral vision lost sight of the street and the front entrance, and was filled with the images of a kitchen table and a staircase. The door shut gently behind her. She stepped lightly across the floor towards the kitchen. Her arms felt heavy as she turned the faucet open and washed the crusted brown out from underneath her painted black fingernails. A salty tear streaked down her silent face. Shallow breaths half-filled her lungs. Shaking nerves scrubbed the blood more efficiently than the muscles in her fingers.

Without a noise, she pulled a towel from the door to the stove and dried off her moist hands. The moister underneath her many rings didn't dry as easily as her bare knuckles.

The sound of a heavy body moving across the weak wooden floor upstairs caused MP to go rigid. Without a movement of her head, MP's ears listened as the purposeful footsteps came down on successive steps on the staircase. The repeated sound of a boot connecting with the floor sent panic up her spine like meningitis. Chase Nguyen climbed out of the stairwell and into the doorway. He was backlit by the front bay window, casting a dark shadow across his narrow frame. He stood like a dark unmoving pillar. His silhouette acted as a totem of all the dishonest things that MP had done to scratch the itch of addiction she felt every single day.

Her eyes dropped to the floor. She slowly turned and stalked towards Chase, who still stood stoically before her. Her body coasted almost against her will up to him. Still without looking at him, she nuzzled her head up under his chin and gently wrapped her arms around his thin waist.

MP hugged Chase tightly. She grasped at him with a sense of desperation. To Chase, she was crawling back, just like he figured she would. To MP, she was healing the wounds she had opened earlier.

For the two of them, a relationship wasn't anything like what you or I would think a relationship would include. After the two of them had hugged for a little bit – they both silently sat down in front of the television. Chase turned the volume up on a station that had the baseball game on. MP and Chase began making love right there on the couch without any conversation and without any reconciliation. The sex wasn't consensual – but it wasn't rape, either. It was more like, after all of these years of physical and emotional abuse, like watching television. There was no laugh track, there was no commercial break, and there wasn't anyone dramatically interested in the outcome of their relationship – MP and Chase just fucked.

By tomorrow, MP and the Ghosts of Man were ready to finalize a deal that would supply them with the chemicals they required to make the major strides towards finalizing a deal with two drug cartels from the Greater Toronto Area and Montreal.

Chapter Six

November 17 - - Windsor can be a complicated place. In so many ways, it was a great town, but it seemed the more you knew about it, the more you wish you didn't know. On the outside looking in, it was a tourist attraction with a busy downtown core. There were a lot of fun activities and destinations, lit up and ready to entertain.

The casino was undergoing major renovations to bring in more customers than ever. Visitors had a great time and enjoyed their stay, but the employees at the casino were complacent and unhappy.

Everyone in the town seemed to have a new car; clean, shiny, domestic. Everyone got a good deal on their car because they worked for one of the Big Three auto manufacturers, or they were related to someone. But the employees were on the brink of losing their jobs, if they hadn't been laid off already. Some had been out of work for months waiting for the work stoppage to end – yet factories were shutting down. There was little hope of going back to work.

School boards were losing money, the municipal government was losing money, the major industries were losing money, and everyone was tense. Most disparagingly, the housing market was in a free fall, so people looking to relocate were stuck with properties they couldn't sell, or couldn't afford to sell. Entire lifetimes had been invested in real estate yet they couldn't be sold for 60 percent of what they were worth. Times were tough; the city almost seemed like she was tired and worn. She seemed like she had lost hope somewhere along the way.

Luc Lefevre sat in his home with the radio playing – but he could hear none of it. He was zoning out, looking deep into his mind's eye. He could see flashes of wide fields and casual car rides through the county side on his days off. There was a time when he was happy to hop behind the wheel and go for a cruise to enjoy the days. These days, however, there weren't any more fields or greenery – everything had been paved and 'developed.' Farmland and brush were plazas and Hooters. What little greenery that remained was city-owned and turned into parkland. That seemed fine enough, but the parks were full of homeless old men whose faces were weathered like the cliffs of a

canyon. They slept underneath blankets of newspaper, oblivious to the disgusted and repugnant glances thrown from passersby.

He stared blankly out through his window at the passing traffic, but he was really seeing the redness in MP's eyes as she walked back out of his life. He could hear her voice pleading for him not to go to the mill tonight, and he was compelled to honour her wishes. He could see the blood all over her hands, the blood that wasn't hers.

He pushed a tear out from underneath his eyelid with the back of his wrist. He held his breath to keep an emotional sob from breaking through the quiet of his home. He wasn't ashamed to cry for her, but he wasn't going to cry for himself. So many things pass our lives by, and so many things are beyond our control. How often do you pass by an old park and see that there are 40 new homes in a subdivision there that popped up without you ever noticing?

How often do you visit your childhood neighbourhood to find all the trees have been uprooted? Or your favourite spot at the top of an old maple tree has been razed and dragged away so a driveway could be extended, or a telephone line replaced. There were so many things that happened every day that change the world around us, that we are absolutely passive to. Mere observers of the world around us.

He stared deeper into his mind and recalled an old fire pit he used to sit around while he was a scout in his youth. The fire pit where they would roast marshmallows and present the skits they'd prepared all evening for the rest of the troop. And as Luc went deeper into his mind, the fire pit he was imagining roared up into a devastating explosion.

The flames of the great fire reflected in his retinas. Luc just sitting there, just remembering. And he recognized it from somewhere before. He recognized it from some time before. It was an enormous mansion burst into flames. Expensive and regal, the house was lighting up the evening sky brighter than the sun on a November afternoon. It was heating the air, too. A bead of sweat crawled down Luc's forehead and across his jaw, clinging to his chin as it scaled its way across the bottom of his mouth, before spelunking off of his head.

Luc shook his head, and a few more droplets of sweat were thrown from his hair. He blinked quickly, trying to clear the image from his mind. It was more than just an image, it was a memory. He squinted tightly, causing small yellow spots to appear before him. And as the fiery mansion left his view, a deadening image of Mickey Gordon laying face down in the middle of a cold dark street in the centre of a stage light slowly fading in.

Lefevre jolted up out of his seat. His eyebrows peaked as he searched through his memory to recall what the hell that all meant? Was it *déjà vu*? Was it merely his mind considering something with the wrong part of his brain, leading him to believe that it was a memory? Or was this a premonition? It seemed so real, it seemed like he had been there.

The image drained away and Luc was left standing by himself in his home, staring out into the street. The only thing that remained from the sight of Mickey's listless body was Lefevre's chugging heart rate. He swung around and grabbed at his telephone. His instinctive fingers dialed the switchboard at the police station, and he adeptly plugged in Police Chief Hal Doric's extension number.

"Hal Doric," the chief spoke, answering his telephone.

“Chief, it’s Luc. I need to talk to you,” started Lefevre. Doric grimaced and took a deep breath. Luc just wasn’t letting go of this case.

“Listen, it’s about Mic and Dan,” Luc blurted out. “I think something bad is going to happen tonight at the mill. I think there’s going to be trouble. You’ve got to warn them, let them to know to be careful. I’ve just got this feeling about it, man.”

Doric let the words sink in and considered what he’d say next. “That’s all, Luc? ‘Cause they were telling me they were just going out to check out the scene. That mill is a pretty wide open space – it’d be hard to set up an ambush. I don’t think Hallimut or Gordon are planning on any kind of a takedown.”

“Boss, you’ve got to get them to be careful, man,” stressed Luc.

“Alright, listen, I can talk to the boys and get them to be careful. They’re not rookies or anything, they should be fine.”

“I guess,” hesitated Lefevre. “I just have a really bad feeling. Like, almost a vision. I just can’t let anything happen to them without letting them know what’s going on.”

“I’ll tell you what, I’ll get the guys to promise me to be on high alert while they’re out there tonight. They should be careful anyways. I’ll make sure they call for backup before they go and try and be heroes. How does that sound?”

“I can live with that,” answered Luc.

“Alright. It’s a deal, then. Don’t you worry. Those guys aren’t going to get up to anything without the entire force backin’ them up.”

“Thanks boss. I’ll rest easier knowing I’ve got your word on that,” responded Luc. “I appreciate it, you playing on my hunch here, that is. I don’t want anything to happen to those guys.”

“Sure thing, I’ll see you in a few days, okay?”

“Yeah,” said Lefevre, with a weight of grief lifting off of him. “Thanks again.”

In Doric’s office, Hal replaced the receiver down on the cradle of the phone, and leaned back in his seat. There was a distinct creak which audibly carried through the room. Even that creak was audible to the gun mic that Nardone was pointing in the office window from his Sebring in the street.

With the unidirectional microphone aimed up at the chief’s office, Nathaniel Nardone sat with his eyes closed focusing on what Doric was saying. He couldn’t hear who was on the other line, but deduced it was Lefevre early. Doric made mention of a mill, and there was only one that Nardone was aware of – conveniently located at the end of Mill Street.

So that was it, then. There was something going on down by the old mill, and the boss was sending a few boys out there with instructions just to observe. Hallimut and Gordon, the chief had said. Well, Nardone knew of Detective Mickey Gordon, he was on the scene at the drive-by a few days earlier. Hallimut was the new guy that replaced Lefevre; Nardone still had to meet him – get a visual, get familiar with him.

Mickey Gordon shouldn’t be too hard to spot, though. He had big ears and freckles, kind of like a wide-faced redhead. Most people grow out of their freckles, but not Gordon. Nat remembered that. Well, the case was simple now – Nardone just had to wait out for Gordon to appear, and then tail him out to the mill.

Police Chief Hal Doric didn't have time to contact Dan Hallimut or Mickey Gordon just yet. He had to be present at a City Council meeting that was going on just up the street. The damned council meetings were always the longest days of his life. Doric rarely had to attend this sort of thing, but there was the odd occasion where he was required to attend Council to make a presentation regarding his department. He was paid quite a good salary, and was a servant to the city. It was his duty to appear at Council and present if they called upon him.

Doric was going to have to contact Hallimut and Gordon after his term with the city. The whole procedure was like children playing house. The local cable provider would have amateur cameras present that filmed the entire day's happenings, and made sure that the electorate had an opportunity to be informed on the goings-on of their municipal government. But to be fair, the filming was so weak, the cameras were so awful, and the local politicians were so poor at public speaking, that it hardly made for good t.v, and it certainly wasn't attractive to viewers.

But the monotone voice of the half-Lebanese mayor droned on. Citizens requested grants from the city for new festivals by the water-front and summer celebrations. Some film makers wanted donations for their work, and road closures so that they could continue making their magic. In almost every case, council turned them down. They had no interest in people who hadn't exhausted every option. They only seemed to give money if other institutions had agreed to provide funding before them. In so many ways, Council was a bunch of followers, not trend setters. That was too bad for Windsor. She almost deserved better. But hey, this is why she was fostering some of the nations' largest unemployment rates.

The day rolled on, while Doric rolled his eyes. Attending City Council was almost a penalty. He forced his troops to follow procedures and to live up to their code of ethics mostly because if they didn't, someone would call him to make a presentation to City Council. And then Doric had to sit. It was like waiting in the ER, but instead of having a general practitioner asking about your family history and health, it was assholes asking if a shake-up in management would have police officers obeying their superiors. Were officers not following orders because of systemic racism; was it because of a bureaucracy of incompetent managers that were training officers?

The questions weren't about the incidents that led to the internal investigation. Rather, they were attacking the underpinning of his organizational structure. And in these instances, simple 'yes' and 'no' answers are irrelevant. Doric had to stand in front of the city, on public television, and listen to all the accusations, the presumptions, the prejudices and the hate that the city fosters for the police officers who are in control of patrolling their city. Accusation after accusation, citizens recounted their personal confrontations with the police. Doric had to stop and listen while the chairman permitted or halted comments from the general population.

Nothing had to do with the drive-by shooting. Nothing had to do with the emerging drug, weapons, and gang presence in the city – all people had to complain about were the times when a cop was rude to them.

The time that they got a speeding ticket and weren't left off the hook, even though they cooperated.

The time the cops were called to their place because a noise complaint was called to their house.

The time they were caught urinating in public.

Doric sat vigilantly. He addressed each question as they were presented to him. After waiting all day for his chance to take the floor and address the community, he remained for an additional hour and a half. He never had a chance to contact Dan Hallimut or Mickey Gordon.

Police Chief Hal Doric was driving home from City Council – it was late, and he surely wasn't going to receive overtime for it, either. He was huffing and grumpy. He was in such a bad mood, and it wouldn't take much to set him off. And that's when it happened.

A bright red 2008 Mustang GT was in his rearview mirror. It was next year's model, out already. Even for this time of year, it looked shiny and waxed. Someone had put a lot of care into keeping that vehicle in tip-top shape. Its wide front end purred deeply as it gently cruised up into the lane beside him at a stoplight. There was a woman with beautifully kept blonde hair searching through her purse. She wasn't facing him, and all he could see was that her hair shined as brightly as her car's front end.

He smiled, until she turned back to face the road, and he realized it was his ex-wife. Annie Dori.. no, Showalter now. Annette Showalter. Her face hadn't aged a bit in all these years. Her windows were up, and she was tapping her fingers on the steering wheel to the beat of whatever song was playing in her car. Probably that latest song from that fucker-band, "Take Your Husband's Money," thought Doric.

Hal was still driving a piece of shit that he bought 15 years ago because he couldn't afford anything. He was still paying a mortgage on his home and he hardly took any vacations all because he was so damned broke all the time. Yeah, he was paid well by the city to be the chief of police, but he paid most of that money to his ex-wife. The worst part was, she took his money, *and* spent all her sugar-daddy's flow, too. She had two incomes rolling into her thousand-dollar-Paddington tote clutch bag, and no plans of remarrying. Why would the bitch? She couldn't *afford* to get married, not at the salary she was receiving. She was making *way* too much staying single.

Doric sneered and thought of nothing but getting back to his hole-in-the-wall and taking out a stiff bottle of whiskey. He'd taken enough abuse today – and abusing himself with a bottle of booze was his ironic reward for it. It's funny how we love the things that hurt us.

Glass in hand, Doric flicked through the channels on his television. He didn't have cable, just an antenna, and he got about six scrambled channels. He was okay with it because he got the major networks, meaning he was supposed to get some of the best television programming on the air. But even that disappointed him now.

The game shows were just ending, and the prime-time programs were just coming on – and it was all trash. The networks were supposed to be delivering quality entertainment. They were the networks, for God's sake. They had the money to put great shows and super casts together, but *no*, they've got reality shows, game shows, stupid

dramas all unscripted and ... man, it pissed him off. It seemed the networks just waited until something clever made it big in England or Japan, and then they bought the rights and made it themselves. In fact, a preview for another hit in Japan showed teammates in bodysuits jumping over rolling logs, climbing up mud-slicked inclines and dodging the spinning blades of a rotating fan, all for cash.

One contestant was smacked by the rotating fan and tossed into a pit of water.

Rotating fan...

The *mill*! Doric had forgotten entirely that he was supposed to warn Gordon and Hallimut!

Luc Lefevre had weighed the options in his head over and over – even though he had been a police officer for so many years, it still felt like he wasn't making a difference. He felt that the world kept on passing him by. Most importantly, he knew that in the life of MP, he finally had a chance to save *someone* in his family. Ever since that day he returned home from university to stay with his mother and father, he'd hoped that he was helping to heal the wounds of his mother's rape. But nothing he'd done brought his family any closer together. Nothing he'd done had spared his family any pain. Even his dedication to serving his community, protecting the City of Windsor, hadn't brought him any closer to a fulfilling life.

Luc knew that MP was the one person he cared for more than anyone. He knew that he was the only one who was going to risk his life to save her. He knew that his forlorn life was derailed the day she was conceived, and this was his chance to get his life back on track. He realized in these last few days that she was the one person he truly cared for. He realized that he'd never forgiven himself for letting her run away from the family. She was brought back into his life for a reason – he was meant to get her out of her situation. He could set her life back on track, as well. This was all that remained of their family. He had to bring it back together.

First things first – he was entirely unarmed. He needed to get his weapon back. Luc thought about heading back to the police station and getting his firearm, but no – that wasn't going to work. They'd never let him have his gun back and he couldn't break in and take it. He'd lose his job and face possible jail time, even if he was a cop. Damn it. Luc could recall that bag of weapons that the Ghosts of Man had tucked away in their house.

The Ghosts of Man were armed with Glock 29s, had plenty of ammunition, and even knives. Luc couldn't face them without some means to protect himself. He couldn't even think of someone whom he could borrow a gun from. Knives from his kitchen weren't going to help. The black canvas bag sitting on the floor in the Ghosts of Man's apartment stood out in his head.

Full of crack, heroine and other drug paraphernalia.

Full of cash and baggies and scales.

Full of more than enough guns, magazines and holsters.

It was just sitting there on their bedroom floor. Luc grabbed a jacket from the wall and stomped a pair of gym shoes on. He grabbed the keys to his Stratus and ran out into the driveway.

The door to his car creaked open, a side-effect of the damage that the Ghosts of Man had done to his car not too long ago. The rearview mirror still lay in his backseat from when that bastard had smashed it off. Jamming his keys into the ignition, he slammed the car out of the driveway and down the street. The rearview mirror bounced across the backseat and fell to the floor with his wild driving.

Lefevre ground his teeth and bared over his steering wheel. With his tires flashing down to the underside of the Ambassador Bridge, he was going to get his hands on that duffle bag. He was going to get his hands on those guns.

Nat Nardone caught Officer Dan Hallimut and Mickey Gordon pulling gently out of the police station's sub garage and glide out into the streets. Their car had a newly washed appeal to it, but the cold weather deadened any glimmer. While the car was clearly outfitted with all the official gear, a siren, the lights, a high-band antenna, the car was unmarked. Just a dark Crown Victoria hovering down the streets. The two were smiling as they pulled out, and took no notice of Nardone as he slopped his coffee down in the cup holder and slipped his car into gear. Nardone's Seabring nosed its way out into traffic, and fell in line behind the squad car. He was about three cars back from the police, and was certain they wouldn't notice him.

Nardone was so excited to see his stakeout had finally yielded some results, and was sure that he was going to get the lead he was counting on for the article. Yet, as excited as he was, the drive toward the west end of the city was ironically calm. While the winds were bitter and chilled, the streetlights glowed softly down onto the streets, and the ambiance of Detroit's skyline in the evening stood placid against the dark sky. All the best pictures of Detroit's skyline were taken from Canadian soil.

The squad car rolled gently under the dark Ambassador Bridge, reemerging in Old Sandwich Towne. The road meandered past some old buildings on either side of the street, and up to an intersection, where Hallimut and Gordon made a right, down toward the Detroit River. It was late in the evening, but not quite 11 p.m. Nardone could feel that they were nearing something big.

Watching the squad car pull into a bank parking lot and shut its lights off, Nardone pulled through the intersection, without making the turn down to the river. He drove past a few of the west end's bars and doubled back. He intended to find a good hiding place on his own. It didn't take him long before he found himself a quiet little spot under a tree about two and a half blocks down the road with a clear line of sight of the mill, the hill and the lights from the Ambassador Bridge reflecting of the waves in the dark river. He picked his coffee back up, and continued his wait.

Nardone's first major news story came back when he was in college in Montreal. He was so apprehensive at first about publishing details that were against people's character. He felt sensitive to what they might think if he published something that they'd done. It intimidated him, but encouraged him to be double-sure that what he was

reporting was the truth. Someone's reputation can be seriously damaged once it's dragged through the headlines. Nardone knew that well.

The first hard-news story he'd ever written was about for his student paper, *The Concordion*. Suspicions had arose that members of the engineering society had stolen student funds and purchased a car. The rumours were all Nardone had to begin with, but there were thousands of dollars unaccounted for from their budget, and friends admitted that the students were driving a new car. There were so many engineering students and they paid a hefty fee to their society – plus, the society had a history of hording its funds. There were tens of thousands of dollars sitting in their bank account, being saved for a rainy day. One year, the president had decided he was going to take some of that money for themselves.

Nardone could remember still how nervous he was after he'd submitted the story to his editor. He could remember how sick he felt writing something that could so negatively affect someone, and seriously get them in trouble. He immediately began regretting getting into the media. He wasn't sure that he wanted to pursue his interests in journalism after all.

All of that changed shortly after the article was published. He was sure that he was going to hear all about how the president was expelled from university and arrested. He already felt personally responsible for crushing someone's academic endeavours by reporting on their mistakes. But none of that happened. Rather, nothing happened. Nat couldn't understand it. How could it be that no one cared that these guys stole thousands of dollars? How was it that nobody called them on it? The president wasn't impeached, he wasn't charged, he wasn't questioned on it. Nobody did anything.

Nardone was baffled at how something like this could be overlooked. He started asking around some more. He asked the student leaders at the Concordia Association of Students, but they couldn't do anything unless students came forward. It was explained to Nardone that unless representative from the engineering students challenged their president, he was free to do whatever he wanted to do with the money. It was up to the engineering students to hold him accountable. And none of them did.

Nat was astonished and left feeling incredibly unsatisfied. He argued with anyone who would listen that he needed to see some change. He was warned by his editors that any involvement in the stories that he was working on was not only frowned upon by those in the media, but was more importantly considered to be a conflict of interest. He felt that justice was being ignored. He felt that there was more that he should be doing. Perhaps that's what youngsters in a liberal arts degree at a post-secondary institution were supposed to feel, before they matured and let their idealism fade away. It's funny how ideals seem less and less mature as a man grows older. It's funny how being idealistic somehow is associated with being naïve.

He realized shortly thereafter that he had a responsibility to be as dirty as he could. If he couldn't find the most compelling reasons to go after someone, he knew that the public would just be too apathetic to care. It was disappointing, because he originally felt that he would be genuinely making a difference.

All these years later, Nardone was still working the beat, exposing injustice when he could, and observing many unfavourable deeds, but now he kept his distance. Now he knew that his role was in reporting. All of the consequences were to be divvied out by public officials, and Nardone knew that now. He no longer stepped in to make a

difference, but rather watched on so he could report on it later. He took in details so he could add them to his stories – he was nothing more than a bystander when someone was robbed of their purse.

He was more likely to pull out his tape recorder and start taking quotes than he was to chase down a purse snatcher. Stepping in wasn't how he made a difference anymore.

Nardone sat patiently in his Seabring listening to talk radio. He hated listening to music, mostly because he had no sense of rhythm, and couldn't keep a beat for the life of him. He could dance like a penguin could fly. The radio droned on about the low attendance at Redwing games so far in the young season, and how the expectations for the Detroit Pistons was high once again. Nothing particularly of interest to him, but at least he didn't feel like an idiot trying to tap his fingers along with a song on his steering wheel.

Nardone hadn't been waiting for too long when the events he'd been waiting for began to fall into place. A dark vehicle passed Nardone and cruised down to the bottom of the elevation, and out past the mill. There was a narrow jettison of land that formed a gravel road. It helped to form a small pond off the river. Geese floated quietly in the isolated body of water. The car turned around at the end of the peninsula and turned its lights off. In the darkness, the car faded from view like an apparition.

And like an apparition, the Ghosts of Man appeared on the scene. A rusted vehicle slowly crept to the front of the mill and pulled to a stop. This car was full and no sooner had it stopped, a man climbed out and stood waiting. He stood with his car door open and leaned up against it. As if on cue, a red speck appeared at the end of the peer of land, and it bobbed up and down while it approached the new arrival. Whoever was at the end of the peer was smoking a cigarette.

The man stepped out of the darkness and into the light, and Nardone watched carefully. The group of assembled men began discussing something at length, and then the man from the Topaz handed the thin smoker a bag. The shadowy and obscure figures continued to communicate. The Topaz was still running – this wasn't apparently expected to last long. Nardone wondered what the hell Hallimut and Gordon were waiting for. Did they come to watch a show, or were they planning on performing a take-down.

Wait! What was that? Another figure began to approach the group, and the group went on alert quickly. All of a sudden all four doors to the Topaz flew open and the crowd from inside were on the street. The newcomer had all of their attention, and they weren't impressed. Nardone squinted to make sense of it all, and then he recognized the jacket, the posture and the haircut. It was Luc Lefevre. What was *he* doing here?

Lefevre's hands were up in the air, he was being submissive, he was being passive. He had already surrendered – but the assembled crowd was especially suspicious of his presence. Nardone noticed that one of the figures was being referred to, as the group talked. They all faced a figure behind the car, and Nardone realized that it was a woman. Why were they talking about her? Nat's head was spinning as he tried to make sense of what he was seeing. Then he noticed that the group of men was holding guns. The weapon was leveled at Lefevre's head, and the group of men looked like they were

about to execute him. A shiver ran down Nardone's back. He wasn't ready to see a man shot. He wasn't ready to see a man get killed.

A lump welled up in his throat, and knew that it was fear. It tasted like indigestion and felt like tonsillitis. A cold sweat climbed all over the back of his neck. He began to gasp for air, hoping that this wouldn't turn into a shootout. If these were the same guys who shot up bank merely a few days ago, there was no reason to think they'd have any reservations with shooting a man.

Just as it appeared that everyone was going to settle down, things went from bad to worse. Dan Hallimut and Mickey Gordon sprinted out of their unmarked squad car and out into the melee. Nardone couldn't believe his eyes. He was so scared he could hardly move. He didn't even take any notes.

With the butt of one of the guns, Lefevre was struck squarely in the head. He dropped down to the ground like a jacket thrown to the floor. The skinny smoker ran back to his car at the end of the peer to escape. He threw the bag onto the passenger side seat and jumped behind the wheel.

Now that there were police climbing all over the place, the Ghosts of Man scattered. The police had their weapons drawn, so they were ducking behind cars, bushes and the mill itself, looking for a shield from their aim. The two sides came to a standoff. Guns pointed at each other, they stared each other down. They started yelling demands out, but Nardone couldn't make out what the words were, exactly. It was like an old western, with the bad guys on one side of the street, and the law on the other.

The thin man who had hid in his car began spinning his wheels in the dirt as he looked for an escape. When the tires finally caught some traction, the car sped up the spit of land directly toward the Topaz and the shootout threatening to happen. Two of the Ghosts of Man saw the car barreling toward them, and darted away from the Topaz, fearing a collision.

A blurry looking man stumbled out in front of the vehicle. It was Lefevre. Nardone watched breathlessly. Lefevre hadn't realized that a car was bursting in his direction until the last moment, when he tried to dart away. With a shattering crash, the car slammed into the Topaz, sending the second car cart-wheeling away from where it sat. Spinning around, the Topaz slammed into the fleeing Lefevre, tossing him through the air and slamming him heavily into the ground. Nardone couldn't believe what he was witnessing.

The panicked driver was redirected after the collision, but he didn't correct his course of action. He just kept his accelerator down, and now he was blasting in the direction of the two officers. The cops darted to the sides, narrowly escaping the ominous path of the wild driver, who slammed immediately into the vehicle parked just beside Nardone.

The reporter threw his hands up to protect his face as the blaring lights of the crashing car blinded him. The sound of glass flying from the vehicles in front of him precluded a dark thump. While Nardone couldn't make out what the thump was from, he realized that it was the body of the driver crumpling over the hood of the car he smashed into. His body twisted and contorted, rolled off of hood and splayed out onto the dark street. His body was mangled and bloody, and eerily resembled the fate of Lefevre, just a hundred yards away, laying motionless beside the Topaz.

The collision was so close to him that Nardone could actually feel the impact of the crash. The shiver it sent through his body caused him to almost wretch. He could feel the hamburgers he'd been snacking on earlier in the day jumping up out of his stomach. But that wasn't the only the beginning of the tortuous sights he was about to witness.

Fighting back the bile in his throat, that was purging tears out of his water ducts, Nardone glared past the smashed car and the smashed motorist, to see the black Asian man pick up something from the ground and shoot it directly into one of the police officers. Nardone couldn't make out who it was, but he went rigid immediately after being struck. His back went straight, and he jolted back. Then he pitched forward, face-first, into the pavement on the street. There was a devastating sickness with the hard impact his head took to the ground.

Nardone glanced around to see where the other officer was. This one he could recognize. It was Mickey Gordon, and he was in action. He was beating one man with a baton and handcuffing him. Still on the fly, he charged after a second man and blasted him across the back of his head with the baton. The man crumpled to the ground. Detective Gordon raised up from the beaten man, and took a visual inventory of his surroundings. The sight of the motorists' destroyed vehicle and body gave Mickey a moment of pause.

Two of the Ghosts of Man were handcuffed and subdued, laying on their fronts, face down on the ground. The other two, the leader and the woman, were huddled together, looking for somewhere to escape to. They were fleeing to the smashed Topaz, when they were stopped in their tracks, staring down the barrel of Mickey Gordon's weapon.

The gun in his hands made Mickey seem like a giant, and he stood with presence and control. There were only three people left standing at this moment. One was Mickey, and the other two were on the short end of his patience. He stared levelly at the two, commanding their surrender. It gave Nardone an ironic sense of hope. He'd spent so much of his time with the *Windsor Borealis* trying to condemn cops. He was always dedicated to exposing the police as racists or dangerous or corrupt – he was never a fan of their actions. All his professional career he'd felt that the officers were unworthy of the public's admiration because they were cheaters, dishonest and abusers of the law, who couldn't be held accountable by the public.

The two Ghosts of Man held their hands up at gun point, and were out of places to run. Detective Gordon continued to order for their submission, when the woman broke away from the man. She appeared to be escaping from him, looking to turn to the shelter of the police. Gordon redirected the woman, indicating that he wanted her to get behind him, but as soon as he lowered his gun, she attacked him. Nardone couldn't see exactly what happened, but Mickey went down. During his collapse, his arm flared backward, knocking the woman directly in the head, very hard. She staggered from the knock, and then fell to the ground as well.

The black man gathered the weapons that were strewn about him, and called for the woman to follow him, but she was unresponsive. He hefted her up over his shoulder and carried her and began heading in Nardone's direction. Nardone panicked. What if these killers spotted him? What would they do to him? He ducked down low below the dashboard, and quivered.

They were heading to the abandoned squad car. The man tossed the unconscious woman into the backseat of the car and headed back to the officer in the street. Kneeling beside the body of Detective Gordon, the man began rummaging through his pockets. Peering over his steering wheel, Nardone noticed that Lefevre had gotten back up and was staggering toward the black man. When the man noticed Lefevre was approaching, he spun around to defend himself, but paused, at the dilapidated state of his attacker. Lefevre was wavering back and forth, and looked dazed. The man's sense of urgency dissipated and he almost laughed.

Then, Lefevre drew a can of pepper spray and drowned his attackers face with a chemical assault. Nardone once again felt that this night was finally going to end with the police prevailing. He felt a new sense of pride in his public guardians and a newfound sense of appreciation in their dedication to their jobs. Tears welled up in his eyes once again – this time because he was so relieved to see this deadly attack finally coming to an end. But no sooner had Lefevre climbed onto the blinded black man's back to arrest him, but one of the earlier-subdued Ghosts of Man had returned to the melee by pointing his gun into Lefevre's back.

And with that, the Ghosts of Man collected themselves, bound Lefevre and threw him into the back of the unmarked squad car, and escaped, leaving the motorist bleeding out and the two police officers face down in the street.

Nardone sat in shock, quivering with fear and unable to move or decide. Eye juice streaked down his face, and then he threw up all over himself.

Chapter Seven

Police Chief Hal Doric had jumped out of his recliner from in front of the television. He had thrown on his jacket and was already out the door. Doric lived out in Tecumseh, a few miles east of the City of Windsor, and certainly located about 35 minutes from the old mill. He had to get down there to ensure that everything was alright. He'd made the mistake of not communicating with his men after he'd been given a direct warning, and it was on his head should anything happen to them.

Doric was truly worried. The gravity in Lefevre's voice during their brief phone call earlier in the day didn't alarm Doric at the time, but something about it got under his skin when it came to mind. Police work often called for an officer to play a hunch, and Doric's feeling was bordering on panic. Hal leaned back in the driver's seat while he stormed down the expressway. He ran his hand through his graying hair, taking deep breaths. He was unusually concerned this time.

A laugh broke the tension when he realized what a relief it would be if he was caught for speeding. Of course he wouldn't get a ticket, but rather, he wouldn't even pull over. It'd be like having back up joining him while he ran down to the mill. He'd have some explaining to do later, but that's how things would've worked out. As far as he knew, though, this time of day, there weren't any cops waiting for speeders.

Instinctively, like a man double-checking his wallet, Doric patted his jacket pocket, ensuring that his firearm was with him. And, just as it always was, his gun was there. At least that offered him some relief.

Lefevre had busted his way through the rear entrance to the west end hideout of the Ghosts of Man. While his first journey through the residence was full of suspense and concern, he could tell from the dark windows that there was no one home. He hustled through the kitchen, the living room, around the stairs, through a hall and into the front bedroom. Just as before, laying on the floor, was a large black duffle bag, and inside, just like he remember, was all the guns, ammo and drugs from before.

He knelt down and pulled the bag open. Knives, guns, magazines, drugs all piled up on each other. He pulled a glock out and released the magazine to see if it were loaded, which it wasn't. He dug out a magazine and loaded it with a satisfying click. He checked the safety and then stashed it into his pocket. Referring back to the bag he considered the knives and drugs, and wondered how much ammunition he felt he should take with him. He was in a hurry, and just grabbed the bag and left.

Hefting it up and cradling it under his arm, he ducked back down the stairs and was about to dart out the door, when he slammed into a dish on the top of a table, knocking it and its contents onto the floor. The dish clanged down, while the sliding jingle of keys scraped across the hardwood.

Luc paused in his steps and peaked at the keys. He picked them up, and noticed the Ford logo. Tossing them and catching them in his fist, he flashed through the door and down the front stairs. He stood in the empty drive way and searched for the vehicle, but found nothing. Pressing the lock button on the keys, he heard a loud horn toot from the garage in the back of the lot. Luc ran to the back and poked his head in the garage, finding the black Ford Explorer they'd been looking for, for all this time. With a smile, he drew the garage door open, and climbed behind the wheel. Unlike his busted up Stratus, this was a new model and still had that new car smell. It also smelt like cigarettes, but that didn't matter after he felt the power that stormed out of the engine when he turned the ignition over.

With a smile, Luc grabbed the wheel and lunged the big truck through the drive way and down the street. It'd be mere moments before he'd be down by the river at the mill. The engine roared as he flew around corners. The truck hardly hugged the road, and he feared it might tip over, but he almost hoped that the truck would be ruined. These bastards had abused his sister, attacked him, threatened his life, trashed his car and murdered his father. Crashing their big expensive truck would be a pleasure. A dark smile sat on his chin, but just for a moment.

Nathaniel Nardone sat in a near catatonic state with drying vomit all over his shirt and pants. It smelled like sour fast food and bile-filled soda. He hadn't moved since the gang attack on the two police officers. He hadn't seen any of them move since they were left motionless in the middle of the street.

And he was motionless like their bodies – except for the cold quivers – and was unresponsive to any physical stimulation. The chunks of his late dinner still sat on his shirt and pants. The bile was drying on his cheeks and lips. He only blinked when his eyes became too dry to continue staring.

He was so scared that he didn't use his cellular phone to call for help and he didn't go out and check on the vital signs of the men in the streets. He didn't do anything. Nothing moved in the streets and only the ambient sound of traffic passing on streets a few blocks away lingered in the air. In all of that stasis, it was a small surprise to see a

large black Ford Explorer charging down the street and screeching to a halt. The heat of the tires caused the moisture on the ground to steam as it slid to a stop.

The vehicle was thrown into park before it had come to a complete rest, and the chassis rocked back and forth as the transmission was locked into place. And as the frame rolled from the front to the back, the driver's side door flew open, and Luc Lefevre erupted out. Without missing a beat, he flew to one of the downed bodies to see if he could help.

Rolling the man over, he immediately recognized Constable Dan Hallimut. He had an enormous gash in his forehead from where he face-planted onto the pavement. His eyes were rolled back into his head, and his mouth hung wide open. He had a pulse, but he was unconscious. His head had obviously taken a devastating blow. There was spittle surrounding his mouth and the front of his vest had dark burns on it. Luc recognized them as the marks left by a taser. He'd been shocked – and a lot.

Luc lifted his head like a deer on alert, scanning the area for any other victims. That's when he saw the red hair of Detective Mickey Gordon, obviously laying facedown in the street.

"Fuck!" swore Lefevre, and he desperately clawed his way over to the second downed officer.

"No, Mickey. Mickey, Mickey, Mickey ..." he called over and over again.

His partner was laying Mickey face down in a pool of his own blood, unresponsive to Luc's call. He lifted Detective Gordon's head off of the ground, and cradled it on his lap as he checked for a pulse. Mickey's was faint, and he had a huge gash above his eye, which had swollen up and almost darkened his whole face.

Mickey was breathing, but hardly. Luc had to get them some help, and reached for his phone.

"Fuck, damnit! Shit," he cursed. Where the hell was his phone? He was always forgetting this shit. Tears welled up in Lefevre's eyes to see Mickey in this kind of pain; in this kind of condition. The two of them had been partners for six years, and Luc never thought he'd see his partner in this condition. Why did this have to happen to Mickey? He was such a good cop. While other officers were romancing the ladies in dispatch, regardless of their marital status, he was one of the true gentlemen on the force. He hadn't been corrupted or tainted by the regular goings-on of the dark streets in the after hours. He hadn't been corrupted by the morally ambiguous moments police officers face on a regular shift.

"I'm going to stay right here with you pal. I'm right here," consoled Lefevre. He whispered to him, trying to remain calm. "Don't your worry, man. Things are going to be alright. Help is going to come soon, and I'm going to be here with you." Luc rocked him back and forth in his arms.

The air was quiet and dark. A bitter wind thrust itself down low to the ground, gusting through the hair of Lefevre and Gordon. The old arms of the mill creaked as they were accelerated around their pivot with the gale's guidance. The whining creak of the mill's old frame called down onto the huddled partners. The moment interrupted by the bright headlights of another car approaching the scene.

It was an old vehicle, and the headlights were dim, but they still lit up the intersection, and caused Lefevre to shield his eyes from their glare. As the car pulled to a stop, the door opened, and the obstructed sight of Hal Doric emerged from behind the beams of light. He hustled from out of his vehicle and took a knee beside Lefevre and Gordon.

“Jesus, Luc. What the hell happened?”

“The Ghosts of Man,” he said vacantly. “I missed the whole thing, but *they* did this. I can feel it. It’s just like I thought they would. Man, I wish I were here on time,” answered Lefevre.

“Is he alright? What did those bastards do to ‘em?”

“I don’t know, chief. It looks like they were both tasered. Tasered a lot. They’re both a mess. Have you got your phone? We’ve gotta call for help.”

Doric dug through his pocket and yanked out his phone. “Yeah, I’m on it. What are their vitals?”

“They’re both alive, but who knows how long they’re going to remain stable. Shocks from a taser like this can fry your insides, give you a heart attack, shit his blood could have boiled for all we know. We need an ambulance in here now,” Luc urged desperately.

The chief made it through to the switchboard. “This is Hal Doric, listen. We’ve got two officers down at the northern end of Mill Street and ... Luc! What’s that street over there? “

“It says Russell,” he called back.

“Russell and Mill, you got that? We’ve got two officers down. They’ve been tasered, get ambulances here, *now*. They’re unresponsive but showing vital signs. Let’s get this going, double time!”

“Chief,” called Lefevre. Doric looked up to see what Luc wanted. “There’s another body over there!”

“Shit,” scowled Doric. “Strike that. We’ve got *three* bodies down. Get some units down here *now*. I’m going to secure the scene,” and he flipped the phone shut.

Lefevre laid Gordon’s head gently back on the ground, and then hustled over to the newly discovered third body that was in a crumpled heap beside to destroyed cars. He was lacerated from the smashed windshield that he was clearly blasted through. His arms and legs were splayed out in horribly disfigured angles, and he was half naked from the blast. The collision had knocked his shirt open and his shoes off.

Lefevre knelt down to take a closer look at his injuries. The bloodied face was drooling dark blood down into the street. Luc neared his face to the fallen body, listening for breathing, when the man choked on the blood, and coughed a spurt of red phlegm up out of his throat. Luc jumped at the sudden noise, and looked the man directly in the eyes.

“What happened here? Can you hear me? Can you tell me what happened? Where did everyone go?”

The man snapped into consciousness, but began to panic. His pain exacerbated his breathing, and he sounded like he was going to hyperventilate. His huffing and sucking for air gave him a wild and desperate expression, and his eyes glared wide open, as he struggled to make sense of his surroundings.

“Settle down. Calm down,” Luc instructed. “Take short, deep breaths and calm down. Help is on the way,” he advised. But the man was unresponsive. He continued to

gurgled the blood in his mouth, continued to heave his chest searching for oxygen, and he started to make sporadic, audible choking noises. It took Luc a moment before he realized that the man was crying.

"Hey, hey, hey," Luc said trying to catch the man's attention. "Hey, look at me. Look at me, man. Just take deep breaths," but the man was inconsolable. In the next moment, the man's choking and whimpering snapped, as he drew his last breath and jerked in a weak convulsion. His dying body twitched for a moment and then became still.

Dropping his concern with the dead motorist on the road, Luc darted back to Doric. "Look, I'm going after these guys. They're out in the county, and I'm going to find them," said Lefevre.

"Do you know *where* these guys are?" asked Doric.

"I ... I bumped into my sister earlier. She gave me the address. That anonymous report to the west end apartment there, well that was me. I've got the second address, and I'm going to go find it."

Doric stood up and glanced around. There was a smashed Topaz, two crumpled cars just up the hill a ways, but there was no sign of a getaway vehicle. "Wait, wait, wait," slowed Doric. "Where's the squad car? Where's Mickey's car?" he observed. "Hey, I think they took off in the police car," deduced Doric.

"Yeah, and?" questioned Lefevre.

"C'mon Luc! You know that each of the cars have got a LoJack in 'em."

"Riiight," understood Lefevre. "Have you got a transceiver?"

"No, I brought my home vehicle. Believe it or not, I pried my ass off the couch to come out to stop something like *this* from happening," said Doric.

"Shit, I'm ..." Luc didn't want to reveal that he'd stolen a vehicle to the chief of police. "I'm not in a squad car either," he resorted to revealing, while guarding his commandeering of the Ford Explorer.

"It doesn't matter," resolved Doric. "I can call up and get dispatch the info on the car. They'll just have to plug in the data on the car and they should be able to find it in no time. C'mon! We can get a head start."

"Wait," halted Lefevre. "Let's take *my* car," he offered.

"Your car's a piece of crap, Luc. Even my rust-bucket is better than ..."

"Not quite, chief. I ... acquired a new set of wheels." He dashed back to the Ford Explorer and climbed behind the wheel. Pulling the door shut, he called out, "Climb aboard – let's go get these bastards."

The chief hustled over and climbed up into the passenger seat, with a questioning conscience that wondered where the hell Lefevre found this truck. Before he could get into the seat, he had to lift the heavy duffle bag that Luc had lifted from the Ghosts of Man. "Isn't this the vehicle that was reported from the drive-by?"

"Uh, yeah. I just found it a few minutes ago," he answered sensitively.

The duffle bag wasn't closed, and when Doric went to move it, he could clearly see the guns, ammo, drugs and knives that were stuffed inside. "And did you just find *this* minutes ago, too? I *just* suspended your ass for this shit," the chief said, fearing that his favourite detective might have an even darker side than he previously imagined.

“No, that’s not mine. I took that, too.” Luc pulled the car in gear and started to climb up the hill to the city. “I didn’t have a gun, right? So I figured I’d go borrow some of theirs. I happened to find their truck while I was at it.”

Doric looked Luc up and down, evaluating what to think of the situation.

“I swear,” plead Lefevre.

That was good enough for the chief. As they swung the truck around the corner and started heading down the Huron Line, they could see the glowing red and white of the approaching emergency vehicles responding to the scene. Mickey and Dan wouldn’t have to wait much longer for the help they needed.

Nat Nardone watched as the two police officers darted from one body to the next, checking for vital signs. After a few moments, they both rushed to a large, black Ford Explorer and pulled away. As the two officers left the scene, Nardone was brought back from his trance with the sound of sirens in the distance. The sirens went from ambient to alarming, and Nardone panicked once again. Not wanting to have anything to do with the scenario that had just played out in front of him, he turned the ignition over and escaped the scene.

He spun his Seabring around and sprinted down the street away from the bodies, smashed cars and evidence of the Ghosts of Man. His heart was pounding on his ribs as he sped away. He was so panicked that he almost ran into the back of the truck that was in front of him. Nardone pressed heavily down on the brakes, lurching his vehicle forward. His seatbelt tightened and held him back in his seat. As he cleared his mind and looked out his windshield at the truck he almost hit, Nardone realized that it was the Explorer that Lefevre and the police chief had climbed into.

It took the reporter a moment to grasp the significance of the Explorer being in front of him. But he slowly realized that they were pursuing the gang and they were heading after them right now. Nardone was almost ashamed that he’d done nothing to help the officers he just witnessed being attacked, and felt embarrassed that he acted like such a coward. Looking at the glossy black bumper of the Ford Explorer showed Nardone a chance at redemption and an opportunity to be a hero.

The story that he had come searching for wasn’t over yet, and the Explorer was his white rabbit set to lead him to his destiny. Nardone realized that he was clutching his steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles had turned white. His hands were closed so firmly that he drew them away as if they had been shocked. Nat accelerated his car once again to gain some ground on the truck. Encouraged with a new sense of purpose and resolve, Nardone was set to catch the rest of this story.

Police chief Hal Doric was on his cell phone with the communications room trying to locate the stolen police car the Ghosts of Man had escaped in. Each squad car was equipped with a LoJack transceiver, which was a simple recovery system. Once a vehicle was stolen, radio frequencies could be used to track it like an electronic bloodhound. Each transceiver had a unique code linked with the car it was installed on. It was a certain way to find the car no matter where it was. Thick walls or subterranean parking garages didn’t matter to the LoJack.

Doric and Lefevre were about 20 minutes behind the unmarked cruiser, but that didn't mean they weren't going to be able to find it. The communications room was sending updates on the vehicle's location as the Ford Explorer continued to blast its way out into the southern Ontario countryside.

"Keep heading out toward Walker – they've driven south into the county," said Doric.

Lefevre glanced over at Doric, who sat quietly in the dark. The big Explorer was quiet and spacious. The digital instruments illuminated a green glow on Doric's face as he listened to his cell phone. Looking back out through the windshield, he saw very little other than the dark road ahead of him, and the bright stars that were only visible once you got out past the city borders.

The large truck's motor roared as he continued to push out into the county. Luc felt tangibly uneasy with his destiny. Luc could feel an ominous disaster waiting for him out in the county. Latent images of his sister burning in a dream-like inferno caused a sweat to break out on his forehead. A guilty bulge crept up into his throat, and Lefevre tried to clear it. He was still feeling emotional over finally meeting his sister once again, and knowing that he hadn't done everything he could to protect her and help her when they were so much younger. He was more aware than ever of the shame he felt over that period of his life.

Lefevre stared determinedly over the steering wheel at the road that vanished off into the dark before him, and understood that he wouldn't rest until he could bring his little sister home. He was going to get her out, no matter what the cost.

"You know, Luc," started Hal Doric. "I saw my wife today." The statement stood quietly by itself between Lefevre and Doric. Luc didn't know how to respond. "I hadn't seen her in almost a year," Doric said eventually.

"You two don't talk anymore?" asked Luc.

"No – but our bank accounts chat pretty frequently," Doric answered with some distaste. "I've been paying her alimony for a long while – the whole situation has set me back a long ways in my life." The chief paused to reflect, but just for a moment. "I'm not a young man anymore, buddy. I had always envisioned having a family, having a couple sons, and spending weekends at a cottage. Ya know, stuff like that. But I'm telling you, Luc, I've had to pay for my mistakes. The decisions you make during your career can jeopardize your entire future. Do you know what I mean?"

And Luc did. Chief Doric's early concerns with the legal system while facing allegations of racism and the wrath of the entire city of Windsor overshadowed his entire career. The fallout had put so much pressure and strain on his marriage that his wife left him, and no lawyer was going to be good enough to protect his assets and earnings. The collapse of their marriage was his fault – and she milked him for everything he was worth.

"My life hasn't been an easy one, and it all stems back to that day," lamented Doric. "Of all the things I could have done and all the things I could have said – the choices I made that day, in that instance, have cost me almost everything. Even when people see me today, I can see in their eyes that they know who I am."

"I'm the racist ... I'm the abusive cop ... I'm all of the things that are wrong with the police department personified in one crucifiable, stout, ageing body. For years I had

difficulty lifting my eyes up from the sidewalk in my own neighbourhood.” There was a thick sensitivity to Doric’s tone that told Luc he was bearing his soul for the first time in a long, long time. Luc sat quietly – he knew Doric wasn’t looking for advice; he was looking for someone to listen to him.

“Of all the moments in my life, it has been that one that has defined who I am – even though I’ve dedicated myself so wholeheartedly into the only thing I have left, and that’s my job,” continued Doric.

“I guess what I’m trying to say is ... don’t do the same thing as me, Luc,” and Doric’s voice almost broke into a quiver. He’d never asked so much of any other man. “Don’t let your actions in haste determine who you are for the rest of your career, and for the rest of your life. Just a few days ago, I had to suspend you, man. I mean, *Jesus* Luc! You’re a great man, but don’t risk it all – your reputation and everything you’ve worked so hard for can be gone in a *moment*. Think about what you’re risking.”

Luc knew that Doric was looking for an answer from him, now. The chief didn’t have a family, he didn’t have any children, and he didn’t have a real social life away from the department. Like all men with hopes of being great men, he wanted to leave a legacy, and the greatest way to do that is to leave your impression on the men you care the most about.

Luc answered him.

“Chief ... I made one of the biggest mistakes of my life back when I was just a kid, and I didn’t realize it until just four days ago. My family was torn apart by a ... by the lowest bastard fuck I can even imagine,” Luc said with a darkening determinism. “The actions I took to combat the things that son of a bitch did led me to a career with the police. But I spent my time trying to become a cop so I could save everyone. I had these visions of people that I could help and people I could be a hero to. I was so hell-bent on preventing what happened to my family from happening to other families, that I lost sight of what was really important to me – and that was ... and that was my father. And that was my sister. And now I’ve lost them both.”

It was Luc’s turn to get choked up. “I ... I hadn’t spoken to my father in years and the last time we were to meet, it was on a fucking street corner where he’d been blown into a pulp. The last time I spoke with him I had to stop his morphine drip to get an answer from him for my *fucking job* and he died as a result. Separating what’s important to me and my job are entirely different things,” he spat out at his chief.

“I’m telling you this – right now, my career doesn’t mean shit to me,” Luc said emphatically. He turned to look Doric right in his eyes. “I’m not throwing my career away, chief. I’m saving my sister’s life. It’s something I could have done nine years ago. I could have helped to prevent all of this, but instead ...” and Luc’s voice was cut off by a sob of pain that overwhelmed him. “Instead I hoped that the problem would solve itself. I hoped that she was strong enough to deal with who she was. You think it’s hard to face the public because of your record of service?” challenged Lefevre.

“Try and be a little girl who has to face her family knowing that she killed her mother during birth, and was conceived during a god-damned rape,” he hissed.

Doric felt the criticism and retaliated. “I’m trying to tell you that I want to reinstate you, you son of a bitch. I’m trying to tell you I want you back. I’m willing to give you your badge and your gun, and we can take these guys down together! Stop acting like a god-damned vigilante and listen to me!”

Luc hadn't seen Doric's angle. He wasn't prepared to be lifted from his suspension. He wasn't sure how he should respond. He took a moment to think about what his boss had just offered him. He tried to weigh the consequences of taking his badge back and getting back to work. He tried, but instead, there was nothing in his mind except for a blank vision of whiteness. Luc couldn't compute what he was being offered. And from that state of confusion, his first reaction became his epitaph for the rest of the night

"No," said Luc.

"What the hell do you mean, 'No'?" stammered his superior.

"I can't do it," he answered. "I'm not out here as a protector of the peace, chief. I'm not here as a public servant and I'm *not* here as a police officer. I'm here as a man who has to make right a wrong. This is a personal duty that I cannot compromise. This is probably the most important thing I've ever done in my life."

Luc saw that his answer astounded Hal Doric. His commander sat silently, unable to rebut. Lefevre tried to make more sense of it. "Boss ... thanks for the offer. But there's too much red tape, too much protocol. Trust me, I *know*. Just as you do. I'm not out here doing my job – much more importantly, I'm out here trying to fix a problem that I let get out of control too many years ago." Luc saw that he was getting through to the chief.

"I'm sorry," spoke Luc softly. "But the answer is no."

Chapter Eight

The black Ford Explorer sped along a lonely dark stretch of road until the lights of an enormous mansion glowed over a high perimeter fence just before its two passengers. Luc Lefevre felt a confirmation in his heart beat that this was the place he'd been looking for. He slowed the truck down and pulled it to a rest on the graveled roadside.

He pulled the transmission into park and turned the ignition off. The truck's dashboard lit up briefly as it expected its passengers to disembark. Luc looked back over at his chief and reached his hand out to him.

"Chief, I don't know how this is going to go down, but I want to thank you for everything," he said softly.

Hal Doric took his hand and gave it a long and firm shake. "Luc, you don't have to do this on your own," Doric tried to suggest.

"Please, chief, stop. I've made up my mind. I'm getting her out of there. You can sit put and wait for the rest, but warrants and procedures are just in my way anymore. I'm not looking to read anyone their rights, and I'm not looking to arrest anybody. I just have to get my sister out of there."

"Yeah," sighed the chief. "I know. Be careful, then. I'll be here waiting for the rest of the boys. As soon as they arrive, we're going to have your back. Sit tight if you can, but if you can't, I can't stop you."

Luc couldn't wait. The vision of the mansion going up in flames at any moment was too vivid in his mind. "I'll see ya around, chief." And with that Lefevre climbed out of his seat and down onto the cold earth below the Explorer. The graveled ground was as firm as the cold breeze that hurled past Lefevre's face. The November weather felt somehow colder out in the county than it did in the city. Normally, the dark silence of the

countryside brought with it a harmonious pastoral feeling with it, but tonight Lefevre missed the comfortable familiarity of the city life.

Away from the comforts of the Ford Explorer, Luc felt vulnerable and oddly naked. There wasn't any steel surrounding him and there were no windows protecting him. There was little shelter as he darted across the dark and lonely road toward the large fence that lined the perimeter of the drug dealer's estate.

Luc had a childish feeling as he snuck up to the fence and placed his hands up on the top. It was entirely uncommon for a police detective to feel like this. Detectives were brave and confrontational – unafraid to ask the toughest questions or confront the meanest aggressor, he realized what it finally got what he was asking for: to not be a cop anymore.

With a spring, Lefevre leapt off the ground and threw his leg over the top of the fence, and then slid over the top like a cowboy would mount a horse. He landed heavily on the other side, feet first. The ground beneath him was rough and rocky. The site on the inside of the estate was still under construction and the earth was torn up from all of the heavy machinery that had clearly been driving from one end of the property to the other.

Deep ridges of earth were left in the ground from where the dump trucks and caterpillars had torn through it during the construction. While the ground was soft earlier in the months and in some cases, still soft in the morning, by this time of night, the ground is hard. Tonight the ground was frozen. The frost would settle within the hour. Walking across the twisted earth was difficult, especially in the darkness, but Lefevre could plainly see the lights of the mansion glowing out toward him.

Luc crept snug to the brick wall of the edifice and strafed up to a window, peaking in carefully. There was no one in sight, as he glared into a brightly lit and tidily kept kitchen. The floor was ceramic and the cupboards were all neatly polished wood. The entire room was clean and orderly. But there was no one in sight, which was more troubling for Lefevre. He'd rather see the enemy and avoid them, rather than feel that he was home free, and be surprised later. Luc crawled past the window and headed to the front of the house. There were bright lights and broad columns adjacent to a grand doorway, which centred the house.

Without exposing himself, Luc squinted through the windows on the doors and observed a great stairway in the front lobby. Still, no one was visible. Luc couldn't understand where everyone was. The LoJack had tracked the car here. Luc fumed that these bastards might be reclining in the basement with their favourite show on the television set after leaving his partner for dead, face down in the middle of the street. He ground his teeth, thinking that they could be laughing about the situation, while his partner is being rushed to a hospital. Lefevre cursed under his breath just thinking about it.

The deep thumps of someone descending a staircase emitted from inside the house. Luc froze, wondering what to do next, as he could see the legs of a man coming down the stairs through the windows in the doors. A casual dark pair of slacks bounced over the knees and legs of whoever it was, and Luc darted back behind one of the broad columns that adorned the entrance to the mansion. Luc's fears were escalated when he heard the doorknob handled and then the heavy front door creak open.

“Shit,” he hissed under his breath. He closed his eyes and concentrated on staying still and staying silent. In the quiet, he could hear footsteps come out onto the porch and the heavy door close behind him. Then there was a quiet moment of nothing.

Luc strained to stay still, and his lips curled with contempt. With all of the darkness that surrounded him, Luc felt like an idiot for hiding behind the column. Of all the places to get caught, he was trying to hide in the wide open beneath the street lamps of the largest house in the county. He loathed himself for his inability to dart away when he had the chance. This wasn’t how he wanted to get caught. It was just a matter of time before whoever it was noticed that there was a stranger standing right there.

Then there was a light snapping sound, almost familiar. The snapping was conjoined with a tiny grinding noise that sounded familiar. Luc didn’t realize that it was the sound of a lighter sparking to life until he smelt the sulphurous scent of a cigarette being puffed for the first time. The bastard was taking a smoke break. Luc couldn’t believe he was going to be stuck there waiting for one of these pricks to have a break.

With his right hand, Luc softly patted his jacket pocket and felt the gun he stashed reassuring himself that he was armed, if necessary. Luc could feel a cold sweat begin to moisten his forehead. He feared to move. He didn’t want to make a sound. The thought of his sister in the mansion somewhere raced through his head, and he all the grandeur that he had envisioned for himself, sprinting through the house, blasting away his foes and carrying his sister out to safety seemed so much more real all of a sudden with one of these men standing just feet away from him.

He scoffed at himself, wondering where that hero was now.

The Ghost of Man at the door wasn’t just any member of the gang. It was their leader, Chase Nguyen. After having the drug deal wind up in disaster, he was stuck in a tough spot. He’d kidnapped a police officer, and that sort of thing never ended well for anybody. His only two real options were to make the officer ‘disappear’ or buy him out. Neither option sounded like a route he was comfortable taking, and it bothered him even more knowing that the cop wasn’t likely going to take a bribe to keep his mouth shut. “Shit,” thought Nguyen, “I fucking killed his dad and banged his sister. No amount of money’s going to settle his problem.”

Chase leant against the door to the quiet mansion, taking his time with his cigarette. He inhaled deeply, knowing that he shouldn’t. He held the curling smoke in his lungs for a good long time, letting the smoke distill itself into his blood, and letting the doped feeling of smoke percolate through his veins. A brief moment of dizziness crossed over his mind, and that was what he was waiting for. He felt relaxed.

There were still some clonazepam in his pocket, and he might use it soon. He wasn’t usually into taking sleeping pills, but his nerves were worn to their end like fingernails in a movie theatre. After slipping a few crushed up pills to MP to ensure that she’d sleep through the night, he was taking a small break before wrapping up his responsibilities for the evening. Plus, he’d never get to sleep worrying about what he was going to do with Lefevre locked up in his basement.

As Chase finally exhaled the smoke from his lungs, he felt a wave of relaxation roll over him like gentle pulses of water washing across a quiet beach. The smoke poured out of his mouth, mixed with the hot air of from his lungs. All of that breath and smoke hit the cold November air, intermingling, creating a white plume of exhaust. Chase was exhausted.

His eyes shut with the exhaustion of his cigarette, and crows' feet crawled over the sides of his eyes like thin ice cracking under too much weight. He was so relaxed that the corners of his broad lips curled up resulting in an effortless smile. Nguyen twisted his neck around, stretching it out, and listening for a satisfying crack to demonstrate to him that he still didn't need a chiropractor. In a dopey state of peace, he took two jaunting steps forward, like a man who owned the land around him, and looked out into the clear dark sky. He felt like Christopher Columbus must have when he saw that there was a whole new world ahead of him to explore. Chase felt that his future was bright and he was just on the brink of becoming much, much more than he had ever imagined.

He felt a shiver pour down his back, which was his body reminding him how cold it was outside, and that he had only ducked out for a quit smoke. He didn't bring his plaid jacket with him, and it was time to return to the mansion. But as he spun around to return to the front door, he noticed something out of the ordinary.

There was what appeared to be a piece of fabric wrapped around the column of the front porch. Wait ... it wasn't a piece of fabric – it was a piece of a jacket. Had a coat blown into the yard and got caught on the pillars? Then Chase noticed a shoe beside the coat, and his heart startled him with a shot of adrenalin.

Chase finally realized that there was someone behind the pillar on his porch. Nguyen was so startled he lost a breath, and dropped what remained of his cigarette. There wasn't a full breath in his lungs when he gasped, and he began to choke. His hacking perhaps covered his surprise to catch someone sneaking on the property. He staggered back to the front door. He had decided to duck inside and get some help. Then they'd ambush the bastard and get them the hell off of their property.

Still choking, he took a few steps back to the door, never taking his eyes off of the man behind the pillar. As he stepped back, his changing perspective gave him a better idea of the man's size. He wasn't too big, and Chase could probably take him if he was unarmed. He was covering his face as best as he could to perhaps muffle the sound of his breathing, or perhaps to shield himself from the cold. In any case, Chase couldn't identify him. And then, just as he was about to turn the doorknob and recruit help, the man's head turned ever so slightly to spy on Chase. Their eyes met for a brief moment, and both panicked.

In the immediate moment just after Chase became aware that the cloaked intruder has spotted him, he recognized him to be detective Luc Lefevre. Chase's face went from terrified to befuddled in the mere amount of time it takes to flinch a muscle.

"What the fuuuck?" he stammered in complete disbelief.

In that moment of stasis and confusion, Chase Nguyen watched as the cloaked detective jumped out from behind the pillar on the front porch and began sprinting out into the darkness of the great estate.

Luc Lefevre was flying as fast as he could over the rough and corrugated landscape of the construction site. Even though it was entirely dark, he could see the faint outline of a structure just up ahead of him. The ground was brittle and uneven as he strayed across the earth. His feet were tumbling onto their sides and his ankles were aching as they struggled to stay straight underneath him.

Luc had been sitting as quietly as he could when he peeked at the man by the door. That's all it was, just to size him up, to see if he were done his smoke, something like that. What he didn't expect was to make eye contact with him. He didn't expect that the man would have spotted him. And the worst part was, it was that Asian looking son of a bitch who smashed his car up just a few days ago. The image of that bastard swinging a bat at Luc's car replayed in his memory as he struggled to get to that silhouetted structure just a few dozen yards across the property.

Luc could hear a cluttered commotion a ways behind him, and realized that he was being chased. He had to get behind whatever building was up ahead of him if he had any hope of finding shelter in which to hide.

Chase Nguyen couldn't understand what the fuck the detective was doing right in his front yard. For a brief moment he was absolutely frozen with confusion. That detective was supposed to be locked up in the basement, not running around out in the yard. Then Nguyen realized that if he didn't catch that cop now, he'd be long gone. The next thing he'd know there'd be every cop in southern Ontario on his ass pounding on the door. "Fuck," he said again.

Without a moment to spare, Nguyen was sprinting after Luc. He, too, was having difficulty reaching his top speed on the uneven earth, but was dead-set on apprehending the officer before he was able to radio for help.

Lefevre could hear that asshole chasing after him, but he had a strong enough lead that he could duck around the nearest corner, find somewhere to hide in the dark, and evade his pursuer. All he needed was to give him the slip for a moment, and he could double back and avoid detection. But he had to find somewhere to hide first. A piece of the frozen earth broke away as he slammed down on it, and he toppled down onto his knees. The hard ground and cold rocks stung his legs, and he feared that he'd cut himself deeply. There was no time to check. He just kept pushing himself forward to the opaque structure in the dark.

Luc darted around the corner of the building, and found that it was mostly unfinished in much of its capacity. White, translucent plastic was fastened to much of the wood, possibly to protect the site. The plastic gave the building the appearance of a hospital curtain surrounding the structure. But the beams and planks weren't closed in by drywall or wiring yet, and ducking in and out wasn't a problem. The lack of finished walls did mean, however, that there weren't as many hiding places as he'd hoped for. Being able to see right through much of the structure provided a significant challenge for Lefevre if he had any hopes of hiding himself. In that moment of confusion, he ran his fingers across his knees, checking to see if they were bleeding or injured. They were not, but they felt awfully cold.

Panting heavily, Lefevre scrambled behind a workbench in an enclosed room of the skeletal work in progress. He closed his eyes and tried to calm himself; tried to rest himself. He drew his gun from his pocket and held it in his hands, prepared to fire if

necessary. From his sheltered position Lefevre didn't have to curl up, and that allowed him to take deep breaths, rejuvenating his energy and bringing his heart rate down considerably. He still felt edgy, but he was also growing accustomed to the rate of his heart and the adrenalin pumping through him. He was feeding off of it. He was making his fear work for him.

Some firm steps landing on crunching earth raised into Luc's audible realm from behind the workbench. The sound of the steps went from a hurried pace down to a cautious walk, and he knew that it was his pursuer scouting the area for evidence of his prey. As Lefevre strained to listen to Nguyen, he could hear all of the sounds of the night. Gales of cold wind gushing through the unfinished structure caused whistling and howling. Screws and nuts on the floor were pushed by the wind into one another. Clanking and dinging softly peppered the ambient space around them.

Then there was a short click, and a series of lights beamed on. Luc was startled that power was running out here, and then not surprised. In his first vision of the structure, he saw that there were at least a dozen hood lamps hanging from the ceilings all over the building, swaying back and forth in the wind. Their light wobbled back and forth as they were pushed around by the cold gusty currents of air that plowed through the building. The light from the lamps wobbled too, like a mortally wounded ring master was knocking around a spotlight during his death throws. Long and dark shadows created a blurry and almost epileptic scene of light and dark with all of the lights bumping into walls and plastic.

The plastic that wrapped the site, hung to its wooden frame like tattered clothes on a zombie. It whipped around in the air, and crackled as it was pulled back by the nails hammered through its surface. At moments the plastic would fill with air like the sail of a galleon, but it never broke free from its frame. Lefevre continued to sit still, listening as Nguyen searched through the area.

Nguyen scanned the building trying to make sense of all the blowing shadows, spinning lights and whipping plastic. This was the barracks that he had been promised from Arsenio con Pisco for him and his men. While the mansion was nearly complete, Nguyen's barracks was still a long ways before it was even enclosed, let alone livable. But soon enough, the building would be ready, and he and the Ghosts of Man would have a place all to themselves. A nice place with a bar, a pool table, some big screens and all the amenities they could require. Nguyen was even hoping for a shooting range to practice at, some punching bags and a small gym. But that was all for later.

For now, he had to figure out where the hell that dumb cop had run off to. Chase was certain his subject was hiding in the barracks somewhere, but there were so many exits and holes in the walls that he was worried Lefevre would slip away into the night and escape. If Luc got away, all the work the Con Pisco family had put into integrating into southern Ontario would be lost, and they'd probably kill the Ghosts of Man.

Nguyen crept forward trying to remain as silent as possible, scanning from his right to his left. His ears were perked, waiting for a revealing noise to betray his prey. Enough time went by that Nguyen began to fear that Lefevre hadn't ducked into the barracks. He feared that he'd lost him entirely, and now that cop could be away and free.

That really caused Nguyen to feel some panic, and he glowered at the dark confusion all around him.

Then, as if by request, he heard some shuffling just beyond the barrier of the barracks. There was someone slinking around just on the other side of the white opaque plastic, and Chase pounced forward silently like a cat. His Asiatic eyes stared unflinchingly out into the darkness before him. Watching with all intent to pounce on his victim and overpower him in a flashing moment.

The figure approached the plastic and cautiously began to lift it up from the ground. Nguyen drew his gun and leveled it at the figure, waiting for his chance to command an unconditional surrender. And just as the figure appeared from the other side of the plastic drape Nguyen leapt forward and shoved the gun in his face.

“Don’t move a fucking inch,” he ordered. And then he realized that this wasn’t Lefevre after all. Who the hell was it?

“Who the *fuck* are you?” he hissed.

The aged face looked shocked and speechless. The man raised his hands in surrender and compliance. His mouth simply hanged open, surprised and terrified all at once.

“I ...” he stammered. “My name’s Hal Doric,” he finally admitted. Doric looked old and out of place with a gun in his face. He hadn’t worked the beat in over 10 years. He hadn’t confronted a criminal in the streets in all those years, and he certainly wasn’t expecting to be in a face off when he left the Ford Explorer to serve as Luc’s backup.

“What are you doing here? Are you a god-damned *cop*?” snapped Nguyen. When Doric didn’t respond immediately, Nguyen shoved the nozzle of the pistol up against Hal’s right temple, fiercely pressuring him into quick answers.

“I’m a cop,” Doric gasped, doing whatever he could to get the gun away from his face. “Just get the gun out of my face,” he pled. Doric had a panicked anxiety in his voice, but at the same time, disappointment. He was hoping to help Lefevre, show him that he couldn’t do this on his own, not get caught.

Nguyen pressed Doric up against a wall and rummaged through his pockets, procuring a city-issued firearm and a set of handcuffs. He flipped the cuffs open and locked them around Doric’s wrists.

“Who’s with you?” Nguyen asked as he twisted Doric back around.

“I’m on my own,” he answered dejectedly.

“Well,” Nguyen replied, “that’s not very clever of you, is it now? Did you hear that?” Nguyen spoke loudly and clearly, calling out for Lefevre, not Doric. “I’ve got one of your men, detective. If you don’t come out, I’ll shoot him.”

Lefevre swore under his breath. He didn’t have time to think about the consequences or consider alternatives to the situation. All he had time for was surrender, if he wanted to save the chief’s life. With a grievous sigh, Lefevre emerged from underneath the workbench with his hands in the air and his gun harmlessly hanging from his left hand.

Finally spotting Lefevre, Nguyen shoved his hostage in that direction, keeping both of his targets directly in front of him, where his glock 29 could watch over them with authority. As Doric stumbled forward from the shove, Nguyen ordered Lefevre to drop his weapon. Lefevre complied, and his gun rattled on the concrete floor.

“Alright. Turn yourself around and face the wall, Lefevre. Put your hands on your head and don’t move a fuckin’ muscle.” Then turning to Doric, “and *you*. You stand beside him and stay still.”

Lefevre placed his hands on his head and turned around, submissive to Nguyen’s demands. Doric sided with Lefevre and turned his back to their captor. Standing alongside each other, just inches apart, Doric expressed his regrets to Lefevre.

“I’m sorry, Luke. I was trying to help,” he spoke just above a whisper. Shame dripped from his tongue.

“Chief, it doesn’t matter right now. Just do as he says. We’ll figure this out,” Luke answered. Nguyen overheard.

“Chief!?” Chase shoved Doric. “You’re the *chief*?” Exacerbated, he spun around trying to regroup. A sudden expression of panic overwhelmed him. “What the *hell* are you *doing* out here?” he yelled rhetorically. “What the hell am I going to do with the fucking *chief of police*?” He stormed back toward them both, and shoved the chief heavily into the wall.

“Alright mutherfucker. Stand fucking still. I’m taking off your cuffs, and I’m going to chain you two to-fucking-gether. *Then* we’ll decide what to do with you!” His voice trailed off, continuing to voice his disbelief and concern with his situation. Nguyen grabbed Doric by the wrist and shoved it high up into his upper back, twisting the former officer’s shoulder around, inflicting considerable pain.

Doric’s old body gasped audibly from the force and his knees weakened. He’d subdued fleeing suspects with this maneuver hundreds of times, but it had been over 20 years since someone had done it to him. Nguyen had been subdued by this measure too many times for his liking, and to return the favour to the chief of police gave him pleasure. Shoving his hands into Doric’s pockets, he drew out a key chain and found the tiny cuff keys easily on the ring.

Nguyen unlocked the cuffs and freed Doric’s left hand, and then reached for Lefevre’s left hand. He would tie them together like Siamese twins. The cuffs were tight and rough on Doric’s wrists, and Nguyen wasn’t wasting any time being sensitive to their flesh. He grabbed Lefevre’s left hand like a hawk and tugged it firmly toward the handcuffs.

With a blinding flash of pain, Nguyen dropped to the floor and splayed out face first on the concrete. From out of nowhere the *Windsor Borealis*’s beat reporter Nathaniel Nardone had struck him over the shoulder with a stray brick that was laying about the unfinished barracks. Nguyen was stunned and concussed from the blow.

Laying in disbelief and pain, Nguyen remained unmoved for a few brief moments. With their backs turned, neither Lefevre nor Doric had seen or heard Nardone coming in.

Lefevre spun around. “What the fuck are *you* doing here?” he gasped.

Doric half glanced over his shoulder to make sense of the commotion.

“I’ve been following you all night,” panted Nardone, overwhelmed and over-stimulated from his heroic exertion. “I saw everything that happened at the mill. I saw your partners get attacked.” Nardone struggled to catch his breath. “I ... I had to come help,” he shrugged, and dropped the brick on the floor. Whatever had inspired him to leave his car and engage in combat to help the cops was beginning to wash away. He was shaking with adrenalin and fear.

Lefevre just stared at Nardone, with his mouth open. Luc's mind simply couldn't comprehend what had just happened to them. He couldn't believe that this son of a bitch reporter that had got his family involved in this mess, that had created all this trouble for him, was suddenly saving his life. The disbelief was prolonged by his encouraging sense of gratefulness to Nardone, but stymied by his intense hatred for him, as well.

"I ..." Luc was still speechless, when a flash of light and a deafening shot rang through the barracks. Nardone, still facing Lefevre and Doric, had his chest spasm for a brief moment, just before a geyser of blood choked out of his mouth. His eyes widened as if they were going to bug out of his head. With a wretch and weak cough, he staggered a half step forward before collapsing under his own weight. His head bounced disgustingly off of the floor as blood began to slide out of his mouth like his head was a broken bottle of molasses.

Laying on his back, half sitting, Chase Nguyen pointed his glock 29 in the air, still aimed at where Nardone had been standing. Nguyen had shot Nardone in the square of his back. The 10mm ammunition, usually used for hunting medium-sized wild game like boar and bears, slammed through Nardone. There was a heavy recoil in the gun, and his wrists ached. The noise from the gunshot deafened him briefly, and that was all the time that Doric needed.

While Nguyen was still in shock from being thumped in the head by a brick, and numbed from the gunfire, Doric dashed forward to intercept the weapon. Doric kicked at Nguyen's hands and sent the glock flying through the construction site. Chase was defenseless and on his back when Doric stepped down on his throat to prevent him from moving. Chase squirmed as best as he could, but he could squeeze out from underneath the chief of police's firm foot.

By that point Lefevre had picked the gun that he'd dropped on the floor earlier, and leveled it down at Nguyen. With the Ghost of Man's leader under their thumb, Doric released his strangle hold on Nguyen.

"It's your turn not to move, asshole," panted Lefevre.

Chase sat like an infant in a shitty diaper, heaving for air after getting his neck back from Doric's boot, lying flat on his back; submissive and desperate. He rolled onto his side to alleviate the pressure from Doric's stomp. Doric reached down and grabbed Nguyen by the collar and heaved him to his feet. Chase staggered with exhaustion and pain, still gasping to regain his breath.

Lefevre spun around to inspect Nat Nardone. The reporter was quivering with shock and drooled blood onto the dark concrete. His eyes darted back and forth searching for aid, but there was nowhere for him to be taken in time. He was bleeding out fast. The short and rapid breaths might even cause him to hyperventilate before he bled out. Luc checked his pulse and did his best to inspect the gunshot wound. There was no hope for the reporter.

On his side, Nardone looked at Lefevre and struggled to speak.

"No, don't say anything," Lefevre said gently. "Just stay still, shhhhhh. Take a deep breath now," he continued.

Nardone tried to sit up, but the pain shocked him. Luc placed his hand on Nardone's chest and eased him back to the floor. There was nothing Luc could do to comfort him or save him. Not from a shot from a glock at that close range.

Nardone still tried to speak. "I'm ss," he whispered. Luc leaned forward to hear him better.

"Sorry," struggled Nardone. He fell flat on his back after straining to speak. But his eyes never left Lefevre's. He was asking for forgiveness after all he'd done. Lefevre owed him as much. Luc leaned forward and gave him forgiveness.

Chase Nguyen watched as detective Lefevre knelt over the dying man that he'd just shot. Nguyen's mind was still blurry from the brick to the head, but he knew that if he didn't get out of this situation now, he'd be in jail for the rest of his life. And that was no place for guys like him – not after what he'd done to all these cops tonight.

He sized Doric up. Old, tired, probably half drunk, he scoffed. Nothing that he couldn't overpower. But Lefevre was a different concern. Younger and armed with a chip on his shoulder. There wasn't any time to contemplate further.

Chase tore himself away from Doric's grasp and threw himself at Lefevre while he watched over Nardone. In that moment, Doric called out a warning, trying to stop Nguyen and alert Lefevre at the same time. Luc swung his head around to defend himself, but it was too late. Nguyen thudded a devastating punch down onto Lefevre's head, and he twisted back onto Nardone's dying body.

Nardone choked up blood like a puddle being stomped in when Lefevre and Nguyen landed on top him. Nguyen grasped Lefevre with his left hand and pummeled him with his right fist as he worked to incapacitate the detective. Lefevre helplessly tried to shield himself as he twisted on top of Nardone's boney body. Doric was startled and motionless as this all went down.

Chase was lithe and very strong. He wouldn't take long to knock Lefevre out with a good shot. Luc was in no position to defend himself and was taking an unbearable beating at the hands of the leader of the Ghosts of Man. Blood stringed between Nguyen's knuckles and Lefevre's nose, spraying in all directions.

Nguyen furiously whipped fists at his opponent. There wouldn't be much more time before he'd have to bail from his attack on the detective and redirect his attention to the chief of police. That old man didn't stand a chance. Chase could only give two more punches, three tops, at Lefevre before he'd have to incapacitate the other cop. He smiled, thinking that moments ago he'd never have imagined that he'd get out of this situation.

With a pulpy thump like hitting an old pumpkin, Chase threw down another bomb on Lefevre's face. A smile curled onto the corner of his lips as he drew his tattered fist back. One more was certainly all it was going to take. He drew in a deep breath and swung a final time.

But that breath of air was burst out of his chest like an alien from an old movie. Lefevre had managed to pull his gun out and shoot his attacker high on his left chest. Nguyen's shoulder bounced back, and he toppled backwards over his own body. A bullet slammed through Chase's lung and left him unable to breath. He choked on the blood in his system. On its way through his chest cavity, the bullet blasted through an artery in his shoulder, leaving his arm limp and useless and a hole in his chest the size of a door on a bird house.

With a cold thump on the concrete flooring, Nguyen's life slipped away in a suffocated gasp. Nervous twitches still coursing through his panicked corpse involuntarily spasmed through his body, but for all intents and purposes, he was dead.

Doric continued to stand in utter disbelief in everything that had just occurred. In all his years, he believed field work was behind him, and he certainly never thought he'd see someone die in front of him again. Doric wasn't unmoved for long.

"Jesus, Luc," he said as he grabbed him by the hand and helped him to his feet. Luc's face was busted and swollen. There were gashes in his lip and cheeks that would certainly require stitches. Not yet black and blue, the beating he'd taken would bruise heavily in no time. His eyes might even close from the swelling. Luc's head spun as he was lifted to his feet, and he staggered on his feet.

"Shit," he said. "He fucked me up, man," Luc said as he wiped blood away from his mouth with the back of his jacket sleeve. He spat a gob of blood out onto the floor. It landed inches away from the twitching remains of Nguyen, and the now motionless wreckage of Nardone.

"Is he dead?" Luc questioned, looking down at Nguyen.

"Yeah, those are likely involuntary muscle responses," answered Doric. "The coroner is always talking about them. He thinks they're hilarious."

The body's fingers quivered.

"It's not as funny when you see it in the field, though," admitted the chief.

"Yeah. C'mon, chief. We've got to get MP out of there. If you came out to help, then let's get moving," said Lefevre.

The two police officers pushed a large plastic sheet aside and ran back out into the rough field. The lights to the mansion were like a lighthouse, warning that they shouldn't come too close. Lefevre's knees were sore and he ran with a limp. Doric's body hadn't run in ages, but he easily kept pace with his hobbled protégé. As they scrambled through the frozen knots in the earth, the large house seemed more and more forbidding.

Luc felt a hot panic running through him. His body was reminding him of something he didn't want to remember. He could feel an intense heat pouring out of the building. He could hear a flaming roar, but they were all just fears playing in his head. The house still stood as ominously as ever, without any noticeable damage. Luc tried to shake the feeling of dread as he closed the space between the porch and himself.

As they made it to the porch, Luc looked at Doric. "Are you ready for this?" the chief asked. "Do you have a plan? What do you want to do?"

"They've got her upstairs. I can feel it. I know it. Let's not waste any time. We just run in, we go directly up the stairs as quick as can be, and we snag her and get her out. If we see anyone else, just shoot. I just don't care anymore about these guys."

The chief worried. He was putting his whole career on the line by ignoring a legion of items in the police's protocol and he wouldn't be able to use any evidence he procured for an arrest. He tried to explain his hesitation to Lefevre.

"Luc, I don't know if we can do this. We don't have a warrant..."

"Hal!" Luc almost yelled. His voice was firm and commanding. "Shut up! We're not going in to arrest anyone. We're not going in to do any official police business. We're just getting my sister *out of there*. Jesus! Understand this! They aren't going to charge us with breaking and entering or any of that shit. They want nothing to do with the cops. This isn't about your job, this isn't about the department, and the sooner you get that through your head, the better. If you don't like it, you can stay put, but I've come too far

to stop now. I've been threatened, attacked, beaten and almost killed to make it this far, and *you're* not going to stop me. So stay put! I don't care, but this is it."

Luc pointed his gun at the front door with his right hand, like a general in the cavalry might point his saber when leading his troops into attack. He didn't wait for Doric's response. He didn't even look at him as he headed for the door. Behind Luc's back, Doric pulled out his gun, and followed up behind him in support. There wouldn't be any more questions.

Lefevre quietly opened the latch on the front door and gently pushed the door open. Immediately he could hear an intense commotion scrambling in the kitchen. They knew he was here already! He could hear thumps and crashing approaching the front of the house, and Luc drew his gun and pointed in the direction of the commotion. He could see down a hallway out the back of the mansion, and into a posh looking living room with soft couches and soft lighting. A man lunged forward and was tackled by three others.

Luc ducked back around a corner in the bright mansion to avoid being spotted. They were *already* chasing someone through the house! What the hell was that all about? Luc didn't have time to make sense of it all – he took advantage of the distraction and ran up the stairs. Doric followed him.

At the top of the stairs, their legs burned from all of the action and all of the steps. But Luc dug deep and continued to move forward. There were rooms and doors in every direction. By opening the wrong door Luc might interrupt a member of the Ghosts of Man, leaving his intrusion exposed. If he took too long, though, the wrestling horde downstairs would eventually discover them, and he'd have to face off against the whole crowd.

He left it to his instincts. One door open, nobody inside. A second door open, and he and Doric stormed in with guns cocked and ready to fire. Nobody inside. Nothing but empty beds, empty rooms and unfinished decorating ideas.

Lefevre spun around a balustrade on the railing and past a washroom and linen closet. Another hallway of doors. More doors opened, and nothing inside. Behind every door he could envision an army of men he'd have to shoot through – and he had to face that fear every time he pushed a door open. The intensity of it shot his nerves more than the two dead bodies out in the barracks. His hands shook with every turn of the knob. He was so spent of energy that he could barely run straight. He just kept pushing.

The next door. Nothing behind it.

Shit!

"What if she's not here!" he realized. "Chief, what the *fuck* are we going to do if she's not here?!" Luc was beginning to lose it. His panic was overwhelming him. His fear was turning against him. The adrenaline pulsed through his body, but all it was doing now was causing the open wounds on his cheeks and lips to ooze more blood.

Doric grabbed him on the shoulder with one of his old and guiding hands. He gave Luc a small but stiff shake and stared him directly in the eyes. "We're going to find her, Luc. Get a grip of yourself, and let's get her out of here."

That was all Lefevre needed.

Through the next door there was a dimly lit room with someone lying in bed. It was a woman; long dark hair filled her pillow. Luc ran up beside her, shoving a chair

aside. It was MP. His heart felt full for the first time. He reached down and gently raised her from the pillow. Her hair flowed down from her head like a dark waterfall, onto the bed. He whispered her name, he stroked her hair, and he did what he could to wake her up, but she was unresponsive.

He spun around to address his chief. "She's not answering. They've drugged her or something. We've got to carry her out of here!" And before he could get a response from his mentor, he'd pulled the bed sheets away from her and was heaving her off of the mattress. With MP in his arms, Luc's weak knees and open wounds make him look like Frankenstein's monster carrying away a woman to be his bride.

"Luc, wait," said Doric cautiously. "Do you smell that?" And Luc did. The scent of a gaseous mixture filled the house, and it was almost as alarming as the fighting men downstairs. Doric continued, "We've got to get out of here, man. And now!"

Doric and Lefevre scuttled back to the top of the staircase and began to climb down. Again, by entering into a new level, they had no idea who might be waiting for them. The struggle they'd overheard just moments before had quieted down. Perhaps it was finished? Doric had no idea. His gun was drawn and he was scanning the first floor. He inched down the stairs trying to remain quiet, but at the same time, they could see the front door. It was their exit, it was their escape to safety. It teased them with by being so close, but so dangerously exposed. They had to be especially careful. Luc could not defend himself nor hide now that he was carrying his sister. His actions were limited and his only option was to flee as best as he could.

Still, they saw no one, and were almost at the bottom of the stairs when they heard another crashing topple. It sounded like a man falling down a set of stairs, only more like it was a half dozen men falling down a flight of stairs. Doric froze in his steps listening to try and make more sense of what was going on.

"Just fucking go!" yelled Lefevre, a renewed panic in his voice.

The two officers ran down the steps as fast as they could. Doric grabbed the door and whipped it open. He made sure it was wide enough for Lefevre to get MP through the doorway with as little effort as possible. Then they heard a gunshot ring out. They hadn't even made it through the threshold of the house when the heart stopping sound of a bullet being fired caused them to flinch and dive for cover.

What happened next happened in an instant, but it seemed to take an eternity. After the gun shot, there was a moment of ringing silence. That silence was interrupted by the emergence of the deepest rumble neither Hal Doric nor Luc Lefevre had ever heard before. It was like the collapsing sound of an avalanche sweeping over them like the ripping sound of thunder.

The next thing they felt, as they strode through the front doorway, was an incredible blast of heat flare up, torching their backs. Their bodies flinched instinctively to twist away from the heat. Their muscles spasmed like they had been shocked as they unconsciously warped themselves to escape the painful flash of heat.

And as their bodies jumped and lifted away from whatever had licked their backs, an incredible force of energy blasted through the house, firing furniture through the windows like they were cannon balls. Glass almost incinerated with the impact of energy firing through the mansion. Lefevre's eyes were forced shut by the overwhelming power that blew by him. It was like he was beneath the strongest and hottest shower any man

had withstood. If his eyes were open, he would have seen fragments of glass sparkling across the sky, blasted from their resting places in window panes, and out into the atmosphere. They were reflecting the blue, orange and yellow flames that were flaring out of the mansion at that moment. If his eyes were open, he would have thought they looked like bubbles in a glass of champagne.

Lefevre would have noticed the dust that had been blown off of the bricks and concrete all around the worksite. He would have seen beams of timber blown into splinters and soaring through the night sky. He would have seen that the sky was lit up behind him like he was standing on the sun itself. If his eyes were open.

Detective Luc Lefevre lost his grip on his sister, and her unconscious body flew through the air. If his eyes were open, he would have seen her land like a rag doll on the hard and twisted earth. He would have seen her arms and legs pinwheel around like a stock car colliding with the wall at the Indy 500. If his eyes were open. Luc lost consciousness before his body ever returned to the earth.

Epilogue

After the explosion at the mansion, the cleanup required over three week's. Of all the bodies that were retrieved from the burned wreckage, only two were identifiable. They were both found in an incomplete structure about 20 yards from ground zero. The first was a man with outstanding warrants in three states in the U.S. and was known to police, Chase Nguyen. He had died of a bullet shot to the upper body. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The other body recovered was that of Nathaniel Nardone, a reporter from the *Windsor Borealis*. Nardone was recovered from the scene, still alive from a gunshot wound to his stomach. In a press release it was revealed that he was cowardly shot in the back. He never recovered from his injuries. He was awarded the Howard J. Gault Award for exploratory journalism and personal sacrifice. The Gault Award is usually bestowed upon journalists who are injured while reporting over seas in war zones. Nardone's life served as a reminder of the dangers journalists face, and his altruistic approach to presenting the truth served to inspire a new generation of young reporters.

Despite initial reports that there had been no survivors of the explosion, Police Chief Hal Doric was hospitalized for his injuries. Doric sustained burns to 25 per cent of his body, and was diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome, a dislocated shoulder and eight broken bones including his nose. He was hospitalized for just over two weeks. He was forced to retire due to his injuries and received a full pension. Doric requested at his retirement to have his alimony payments reduced, and the courts decided that he was no longer required to pay anything to his ex-wife.

The 19-year-old victim of the Boxing Day Massacre, Caroline Cruikshank, wouldn't have her attackers go to trial for another two and a half years. Two men were initially arrested on a subway just minutes after the attack. Six other men, and two

teenagers, were arrested in a police sting later on the next summer. To this very day the trials have yet to yield a conviction.

Constable Daniel Hallimut and Detective Mickey Gordon were treated for their injuries from the attack by the Ghosts of Man by the Mill on November 17, 2007. All known suspects on the case have disappeared off the face of the earth. While none of the bodies could be identified, it was believed that all of the perpetrators involved in the attack died in the explosion. They both received two weeks off to help heal their injuries.

Marie Pierre Lefevre was treated for minor first-degree burns and some other various bumps and bruises, and was released on a conditional discharged from Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital the next morning. She was entered directly into rehabilitation to help her cope with her history of drug dependency. MP signed an affidavit naming everyone she knew who worked in relation to the Ghosts of Man in exchange for immunity during the investigation. A new identity was being written for her by the witness protection program and the RCMP.

The road ahead for her remained a long and difficult one, but at least she had a future. She didn't know if the Ghosts of Man had sleeper cells elsewhere in the United States, but she did know that Arsenio con Pisco was a vengeful and dangerous man. Coping with the nerves associated with the pressure of testifying against the Con Pisco family and trying to deal with the pains of withdrawal from her addictions gave her a lot to worry about. The one thing that helped make it all possible was the frequent visits from her brother. Luc visited her in rehab each week during regular visiting hours.

Luc was reprieved of any wrong-doing regarding his involvement in the explosion at the mansion in the county. Many members of the community were willing to throw him to the lions, but the defense of the police chief cleared his name. Lefevre was granted a leave of absence which he spent reconnecting with his sister. After a year off, he reevaluated his priorities and resigned from the police force. This was despite rumours that he was being short-listed to replace Hal Doric as the Chief of Police. But Lefevre wasn't done protecting the public, nor was he satisfied that he had saved his sister.

Lefevre knew that the Con Pisco family was still at large. So long as they were still out there and his sister was testifying against them, he'd never feel safe. MP would never feel safe. But for the first time in their lives, they had a positive relationship with one another. MP still felt the pangs of withdrawal, but at least she knew that her brother loved her, and that he'd saved her. He'd finally saved their small family.

Luc had plans to open his own private investigation agency. He could see himself taking on cases and serving the public in much the same capacity as he did when he was an officer, but now he had the time to investigate the whereabouts of the Con Pisco Empire and track their moves. Until they were under his thumb, he'd never be safe.

What exactly happened after the explosion wasn't entirely known. The fire department's investigation had its theories. The public had their theories, as well. To this day Luc swears that he has no recollection of what happened leading up to the explosion. He'd sustained a concussion while battling in the barracks and couldn't recall anything after that. The only man who knew otherwise was Lefevre's state-appointed therapist who held the vivid dreams that Luc suffered through confidential to any inquisitors.

To this day Luc still has nightmares whenever his joints ache in the middle of the night. His weak knees and sore back serve as reminders of the explosion that nearly took his life. But despite the risks and the impact that those few days in November 2007, they also serve as reminders of the night that Lefevre finally had his redemption.

After the explosion, Arsenio con Pisco had to leave southern Ontario. He placed his guests from the Bandidos and the Bonnot Family up in a hotel for the evening, and the next day drove them to the Detroit Metropolitan Airport. Con Pisco vouched to replace the expensive car and motorcycle that were lost in the fire. That wasn't all that was lost in the fire, though. For now, Con Pisco would return to the United States. His operations weren't insured, and it was going to take a long time to rebuild the finances to try expanding into Canada again.

Con Pisco's English was second-rate, but the *Windsor Borealis* reported clearly enough. The man responsible for all of that destruction was Luc Lefevre, and Con Pisco wouldn't let that disservice go unpunished. Any man who interfered with Con Pisco's operations had to be punished as severely as possible. Arsenio wouldn't do it just to send a message to Lefevre; he was going to send a message any other man who might ever consider interfering in his business again.

Fin