

Systems and Corridors

By Andrew James Paterson

Nancy Leonard had almost finished making her final course choices as a mature second year student at The University of Toronto. This being only her second year; she still did not have to make a final choice concerning her major. So, she decided to split her course load between English Literature and Communications.

In her first year; Nancy had taken a *potpourri* of introductory courses - History 101, Philosophy 101, and Political Science 101. Sociology 101; and Communications 101. She had also carried a sixth course - a 20th Century English Literature survey. The English-Literature and Communications had not necessarily provided her best grades; but they had been the ones that had really sustained her interest.

Nancy resisted a temptation to avoid concentrating on relatively specific subject areas; because she knew her decision to continue her post-secondary education was not just a holding pattern but rather a life decision. At twenty-nine; she did not feel all that much older than the other students. But, she *did* feel that she had almost left a completely different life behind her. STRIPES AND SPOTS - the grrrl-rock band for which she had been the lead singer and for which she had also written most of the lyrics - had disbanded acrimoniously over generic arguments over finances, musical direction, and drugs.

She had also survived failed relationships with members of *both* official genders; and she felt that she might learn something from younger students and faculty members who were challenging both existing labels and the need for any labels at all.

In her first year at U.of T.; Nancy had become friendly with a younger gay male student named Jeff Talbot who had previously been a friend of hers in Vancouver. Their relationship had become strained in Vancouver because Nancy had had an affair with a man. But the week before registration; Jeff had called to say hello and to inform her that he had become rather infatuated with a young man named Derek Lee. Derek was originally from Halifax and he was going to be majoring in Anthropology. Nancy gathered that Jeff and Derek had become a definite item; and this was pleasing to hear- even though it reinforced her own loneliness. She was looking forward to meeting a new person from somewhere other than Vancouver.

A fascination with language was the common thread linking the English Lit. And Communications courses she found herself selecting. She decided to enroll in a 20th Century Drama course- not because of any great interest in theatre but because of her fascination with strained communications. A heavy reading list with a lot of Beckett and Pinter confirmed her hopeful expectations. She also decided to take both 20th Century Prose and Poetry. She knew she would have to come to terms with poetry

some time in the none-too-distant future. A Communications course dealing with primarily Innis and McLuhan was an obvious choice; as was another course on The Languages of the Mass Media.

This left her room for one more course; and Nancy decided to take a chance on a Literary Criticism and Theory course offered by Professor Barry Ferguson; who had become a cult-celebrity as a result of the popularity of his volume of essays published as THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE. Nancy had been warned by her friend Jeff Talbot - who had taken Professor Ferguson's course the previous year - that the professor's lectures were hardly as flamboyant or as confrontational as his public persona.

However, Nancy decided to surrender to her curiosity. Professor Ferguson was notorious for his disdain and dismissal of *anything* smacking of leftover identity politics; and he was loathed by activists such as her friend Jeff and his primarily male activist crowd. It seemed that Professor Ferguson had indeed hit a nerve; and this appealed to her. She was attracted to a course taught by somebody who might indeed prove to be full of shit but who would at least be provocative.

Having finalized her course selection; she opened a beer and lit a cigarette. After a year of relative abstention from booze and complete abstention from nicotine; she was now finding herself partaking again. She tried to avoid intoxication; and she set herself a limit of two cigarettes a day. By and large she had been able to adhere to these limits; but she knew that the cigarettes would again become an addiction if she were not careful with herself. She was also amused by the manner in which nicotine consumption could ensure that she kept a distance from non-smokers.. Sometimes distance was *useful*.

Nancy Leonard was quite looking forward to beginning her second year as a mature student at the University of Toronto.

The University of Toronto had not been altered one iota from the previous year's model, Nancy noted as she passed through the quadrangle on her first day of classes. Most of her courses were to be held in a close proximity to one another. She had not intended this to be as such but it certainly would prove convenient, she smiled to herself. Her Modern Lit. Course was to be held in a room on the west side of the Sidney Smith building - this was to be her only course on the west side of St. George St., which roughly divided the downtown campus. As all of her courses were affiliated to her own University College, she would not be spending very much if indeed any time at Trinity, Victoria, and St. Michael's or even New and Innis Colleges. She would be using the Robarts Library, which was not only on the west side of St. George but also just north of Hoskin Street - the street which morphed into Wellesley Street on the east side

of Queen's Park and the provincial parliament buildings. Nancy knew she would not only be reading extensively but also consuming coffee and cigarettes in the University College Refectory, the Junior Common Room, and the Hart House Arbour Room. Her physical itinerary was practically predetermined; her academic trajectory would hopefully allow room for greater spontaneity.

She did not have another class for an hour after the Modern Lit. Course, so she decided to have tea and a sandwich in the Arbour Room. As Hart House was somewhat more of a public space than the University College main building or the Sidney Smith building or any of the specific faculty buildings; members of the non-enrolled public occupied the Arbour Room cafeteria in an officially unacknowledged agreement with students and even some faculty members. While Nancy stood in the cafeteria's service line-up she recognized a young man whose name and persona she was now recalling. Warren Sanders had once been a poet - a friend of her younger brother Mark's. Warren Sanders had not only become addicted to heroin but he had also completely snapped mentally around the time when Nancy had moved to Vancouver - roughly seven years ago. She could tell that Warren was homeless. She hoped that he would not see and then recognize her. She knew her brother had long passed his saturation point regarding Warren Sanders; but it was the intersection of the academic institution and the homeless, probably psychotic poet which she was unable to reconcile. She decided to sneak out of the line-up and then relax with coffee and a cigarette in the nearby Refectory.

She had resumed her education not only to build some sort of future for herself but also to get away from brain-damaged junkies and the chronic self-promoters who flourished within the superficially anarchic world of 'alternative' rock music. One of the girls in STRIPES AND SPOTS had developed a serious heroin problem and she herself had been a borderline alcoholic. Yet she also felt guilty about removing herself from the Arbour Room in order to avoid contact with Warren Sanders. She wished to feel comfortable in a public space where academics sat at the same tables as non-students without or with interaction. Nancy disliked people who hid behind the privileges of institutional employment and/ or enrollment and now here she was behaving exactly in such a manner. It was not as if she wished to bond with the other students to any great degree- she was older than most of them and had already lived one life.

She entered the Refectory and was relieved to see an anonymous body of first or perhaps second year students sitting opposite one another, gossiping over coffee and bagels. This was a comfortable relaxing space for her - away from chemically-dependent poets and self-styled performance artists. She found herself a table in the Refectory's smoking section and then took her place in the line-up.

After finishing her coffee and her cigarette Nancy decided to kill half an hour browsing in the U.of T. Bookstore. She had already seriously drained her bank account by purchasing her essential course reading materials - those publications which she would be returning to on a weekly if not daily basis.

The periodical racks at the front of the bookstore were her immediate destination. Browsing through periodicals which she rarely if ever purchased had been a staple of her life for nearly as long as she could remember. On some browsing sessions Nancy would prioritize the weekly or bi-weekly mainstream magazines which she almost never bought.- Newsweek, MacLean's, SPY, and even FRANK. On other occasions she was more than likely to privilege cultural and political periodicals such as FUSE, or art glossies such as C., FRIEZE, or ART FORUM. Deciding which sections of the periodical racks to stand at was taking her a longer time than was typical. She was still upset about seeing the presumably homeless Warren Sanders in the Arbour Room.

Then she looked up and recognized her friend Jeff Talbot who was holding up a copy of the latest FUSE. She decided to talk to Jeff, but he noticed her first.

'Killing *time*, Nancy?'

The issue of FUSE was practically hot off the press. Nancy could read the cover story's headline- FLAGGING CULTURES. This cover story was promising a critical examination of a recent exhibition of Japanese art from a socio-political rather than purely aesthetical viewpoint. FUSE had never been a magazine concerned with unadulterated aestheticism, Nancy noted not with disapproval. She found herself wondering when had been the last time her notorious Lit.Crit and Theory professor Barry Ferguson had read through an edition of FUSE - if indeed he ever had at all.

'That looks like a new issue. Am I correct, Jeff?'

Jeff nodded. He unfolded the magazine so he could now hold onto it with his right hand- having decided to buy it. Nancy knew her friend had at least one friend on the periodical's editorial collective but she herself knew none of that particular clique. She didn't know any cultural critics or writers; she was an ex-riot grrrl who had decided to resume her education.

'Do you want to meet for drinks after classes today, Jeff? I'm finished at five.'

He scanned the rack in search of other immediately essential reading material. Then he shook his head.

'Not *today*, Nancy. I'm meeting Derek at The Second Cup and then there's a march on Queen's Park. This fucking Conservative government is even worse than the NDP fence-sitters. *Way* worse.'

I know that, Jeff. I forgot all about the demonstration. Sorry.'

She blushed. She could barely remember the last time she had marched in or even attended a demonstration.

Jeff smiled at her condescendingly, she thought.

'We'll go for drinks some other day- the three of us. You'll like Derek and he'll like you.'

Nancy hoped that she would meet and then find herself liking Derek Lee, since Jeff was clearly enthralled by him. She knew that after the demonstration the pair of them would be returning to Derek's apartment and then playing with each other. Knowing Jeff as she did she assumed that everything would be safe but raunchy - that Jeff and Derek would in all likelihood be fucking each others' brains out. She tried to hide her jealousy but she was probably unsuccessful as Jeff excused himself, leaving her alone to kill time in the periodical section of her choice.

Professor Barry Ferguson introduced himself to the freshly assembled students in his Literary Criticism and Theory class, and then proceeded to outline the prerequisite reading list for his course. Nancy recognized a few of the names - Roland Barthes and even Linda Hutcheon as well as of course *herself*. Not that Nancy had ever been much of a Canadian nationalist; but she suspected Hutcheon and Ferguson to be the only Canadians on the reading list.

Barry Ferguson was a short man, balding but with rather long hair surrounding the unmistakable bald spot. His receding hairline accentuated a very large forehead- quite likely the biggest such forehead Nancy Leonard had ever seen in all of her almost thirty years. Professor Ferguson wore an early-seventies double-breasted black velvet suit - the sort somebody like John Lennon might have worn to the Old Bailey when appearing before the court on typical drug charges. The professor's brogues were also appropriately stylish. Nancy could indeed see that the man definitely placed a high premium on his wardrobe as well as his public persona.

It was the professor's *accent* that initially put her off. The accent was neither Oxford nor Cambridge - it was in fact peculiarly mid-Atlantic. Nancy was not so put off by the fakery of Barry Ferguson's accent - she herself had frequently sung in an affected Cockney accent. But the professor's accent kept slipping in an irritating manner. What exactly was the point of pretentiousness if the man was incapable of maintaining his pretension?

But of course pretentious always reveled themselves sooner or later. That was a charm of pretentiousness as well as one of its problems. Nancy's other lecturers were relatively lacking in pretentiousness and they were also relatively devoid of personalities - with the partial exception of Professor Elizabeth Beverley who taught Communications. But Professor Beverley was so reliant on the prerequisite texts, as were the others. They never strayed from let alone questioned the sanctity

of the texts on their curricula. Barry Ferguson was already commenting upon both his own and others' texts. While Nancy could see how other students might find this trait annoying she was finding it oddly endearing.

Of course Barry Ferguson's best-seller THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE was going to be primary required reading for his course. To have not made it so would have been a type of pretentious that Nancy had always found it difficult to stomach. This would have been a very smug manifestation of false modesty. She allowed herself a smile. Perhaps she herself had not yet shed all of her own pretensions - the ones which had motivated her to assume a stage or a podium and then proceed to play with audiences' expectations. Perhaps she did still retain an admiration for individuals who valued performance for its own sake - despite her intellectual and political disdain for exhibitionism. Self-promoters existed in the academic world as well as in the entertainment industry; and Nancy was quickly realizing that she had enrolled in a course being offered by one of the canon's great pretenders.

'Hey! *Mature student!*'

Nancy turned around upon recognizing Jeff Talbot's voice. 'Mature student' was hardly a phrase she would have used to describe herself with; but the phrase itself was not particularly demeaning.

Jeff was accompanied by a young Chinese man whom she assumed to be Jeff's new friend who had become more than just a friend or fuck-buddy.

'Mature student, my ass. I'm still shopping.'

Derek Lee grinned at Nancy mischievously.

'Jeff informs me that you're taking Barry Ferguson's course. You'll have to join us for martinis and tell us all about everything.'

'You are *forbidden* to decline.' Jeff was literally blocking her path.

She was tempted to feign another engagement but then she decided to join the boys for a drink and meet Derek for the first time. And she could not deny a peculiar curiosity about Professor Barry Ferguson.

She walked beside Jeff and Derek as they decided to imbibe at a local student pub rather than any gay or 'alternative' bar. Not that Barbarella's was anything besides 'alternative'. But Jeff and Derek considered this local watering hole to be *kitchy* enough for them without being too overbearing. They decided to avoid the Licensed Library as that watering hole tended to be filled with students unable to decide whether they were studying or drinking.

'Barbarella's will be fine.'" Nancy approved their choice.

'Even though the art director must have dropped *acid* before making the floor plans.'

'But the art on the wall isn't as dreadful as it usually is, Jeff. I like Ben Jefferson's collages.'

'They're *okay*, Derek. But let's not get too carried away.'

At Barbarella's Nancy felt less than enthusiastic about Ben Jefferson's collages but she refrained from commenting upon them since the artist seemed to be a friend of Derek's. She had more than a feeling that she would be seeing quite a bit of Derek Lee - with or without Jeff.

'So, Nan. We're not going to talk about the art. Nor sex. Nor anything or anybody except for Barry Ferguson - who has nothing to do with either art or sex. Three martinis please?'

Jeff placed this order with the waiter without consulting either Derek or Nancy. She would have preferred a draught, but Jeff had always been snobbish about alcoholic beverages. His Dad had been a serious beer guzzler and Jeff had long detested his Dad.

She regarded Jeff and Derek from across the table.

'Well, what can I possibly tell you guys about Barry Ferguson? I mean, you took his course last year, Jeff. You're the one who's been prone to ranting about the man ever since we became friends. So maybe I'm here to get the dirt from you guys.'

The cranberry-flavoured martinis arrived and Jeff paid for the round. Nancy herself had not been anticipating an expensive evening. She resisted the temptation to light a cigarette as neither Jeff nor Derek were smokers and their table was inconveniently situated in the non-smoking section of the bar.

'But we are very curious as to your first impressions of the notorious professor, Nancy.' Derek was clearly expecting to receive an erudite dissertation.

'Well', she sipped from her sugary martini, 'He's not terribly different from what I was expecting - on the basis of one introductory class which hardly constituted a lecture. He seems to be an old-school aesthete who has tapped many nerves by vehemently despising all forms of realistic literature - including but hardly exclusively writings with overt political agendas. He sees anything not aesthetic enough for him as being philistine and devoid of any imagination. He seems to loathe pretty well everything American as only a Canadian anglophile can. But so far I find the man at least entertaining and I get the feeling that he doesn't mind being contradicted as long as your contradiction is witty and entertaining and academically-grounded. I've only really peaked at the book; but I suspect I will enjoy reading it.'

'You make him sound like a sophist, Nancy.' Derek remarked.

'And the problem with sophistry', Jeff sipped on his martini. 'Is that nobody is ultimately a complete sophist.'

'Everybody has their limitations when it comes to apolitical aestheticism. Barry Ferguson's cutoff point is political activism - especially gay liberation of any sort.'

'You will find, Nancy, that *underneath* his libertarianism - his everything is wonderful as long as it's beautiful or witty aestheticism - Barry Ferguson is a transgressionist. Transgressionists of course ultimately prefer conservative structures or else what would they have to transgress.' Derek had by now almost finished his crantini.

The drinks were quite strong, and Nancy had already decided to forego another round.

'I know all that, Derek.' Her tone became harder and more deliberate. 'I have been sampling THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE. I know for example he idolizes Jean Genet for his eroticization of all that is evil and forbidden. I know that he has to be after something *illegal* in order to get a hard-on. He's not at all typical of a lot of men -or, for that matter, women - of his generation.'

Jeff glared at her for a moment.

'But Barry Ferguson is this insidious reformed fag. He's been widely quoted ranting about how today's fags and dykes are not aesthetically correct enough for him - about how they are a betrayal of his Victorian aestheticism.'

Nancy was becoming quite annoyed with her drinking companions.

'It's not as if I wasn't aware of his reputation before enrolling in his course. I don't think he's a lunatic, as you guys seem to think he is. I think he's a *provocateur* - often full of shit but also interesting. And I certainly don't disagree with his loathing of fixed or essential gender construction.'

Jeff Talbot became livid.

'I think Barry Ferguson is hopelessly locked into essentialist gender definitions. Masculine hardness and feminine softness.'

'I disagree, Jeff.' Nancy finished her drink and shook her head when Derek signaled the waiter for another round. 'That drink was too strong for an empty stomach.'

'They have food here.' Derek now informed her.

'Sort of food". Jeff smirked. Nancy knew he was referring to unappetizing pub grub.

'I need a nap before making myself dinner, if you don't mind. I'll see you guys later. And thanks for the drinks and conversation.'

Nancy stood, grabbed her purse, and then walked straight out the front door. She did not turn around to look at Jeff and Derek, who were now ordering seconds for themselves while shaking their heads.

Approaching her top floor apartment, Nancy could hear the telephone ringing. She realized that even if she were to accelerate her pace and literally burst through the door she would never reach the phone before her answering machine would kick in.

She was not expecting any particular call so she was curious as to the caller's identity. As her key turned the front door's lock open she could recognize her brother's voice. She and Mark had not been in touch with each other for a while and his voice sounded desperate and lonely. He sounded disappointed that his sister either was not home or else not taking his call.

Nancy decided to let Mark's message play through rather than intercept it and take the call. She needed to pee and then make some coffee before talking to Mark. She realized there might be mail for her on the floor by the slot in her front door, so she picked up the mail so she could decipher it while peeing.

She read through a letter from her friend Christine in Vancouver. Christine Benning had been the bass player for STRIPES AND SPOTS. Nancy's former colleague had finally been admitted into a methadone programme and she was pleased about this. Nancy

had always heard that methadone maintenance was simply a substitute addiction for heroin dependency - that methadone users tended to remain on methadone forever or else revert to intravenous heroin use. She was glad that she personally had managed to avoid needles - unlike Christine and unlike her brother Mark.

Nancy buttoned up her jeans after flushing the toilet. Then she lit a cigarette and began preparing her coffee. That cranberry martini at Barbarella's had only made her drowsy, hardly as exuberant as it had made Jeff and Derek. But they were younger gay men in love with each other and she was a single woman of ambivalent sexuality approaching middle age. She drew on her cigarette and then watched the exhaled smoke forming half-developed patterns in her poorly-ventilated kitchen.

The kettle now whistled and she was pleased that it hadn't taken so long to boil. She had decided to return Mark's call as soon as coffee was ready. She wanted to reach her brother before he went out again. Hopefully, he was working with his friend Doug, who had a recording studio. Mark had genuine musical talent and he sometimes supported himself by composing independent film or theatre soundtracks. She hoped Mark was at least temporarily employed on a contract job but she feared otherwise. She took a drag of her cigarette and then grounded it out.

Mark loved composing and recording but he loathed most of his contracts or employers. She shook her head. Her brother had to make up his mind. Compromise was all too necessary in the music business - not that she had set any sort of example for her brother to follow. She had left her band rather than adapting to market demands like sweetening the sound and making it more 'accessible'. Nancy considered the word 'accessible' to be one of the most meaningless words in the entire English language. So she didn't feel particularly *qualified* to tell Mark to hold his nose and stick to his guns.

She poured her caffeine, sweetened it with a splash of milk, and then dialed Mark's number. After two rings he answered.

'Hello?'

He sounded stoned, she thought.

'Hello. Mark.'

Upon recognizing his sister's voice, Mark's tone became urgent and demanding.

'What are you doing tonight, Nan? Do you want to meet for drinks?'

She was put off by the sudden shift in tone. She decided she did not feel up to meeting her brother tonight. She did have required reading that she needed to get started with, so she apologized to her brother and begged a rain check.

Mark was not sympathetic. He didn't seem to believe her excuse. Nancy was annoyed by his contempt.

'Well? You've often talked about going back to school?' Nancy sipped from her coffee which was still too hot to drink.

'Only when I'm depressed.' was his lethargic reply.

She was convinced he was depressed now. She decided not to prod him.

'You're not depressed now? I'm glad to hear that.'

'There are other things I consider doing when I'm depressed.'

He almost bit her arm off over the telephone.

Nancy took a deep breath, and then admonished her brother.

'Yes, I know. Prostitution. Selling drugs.'

'Well, those are options.' Mark replied methodically.

She was now exasperated with her brother, whom she was positive had relapsed with heroin. If he had relapsed this would definitely affect his work. Heroin had affected Christine's concentration and her energy.

'You're so moral, Nan.' Now her brother was lecturing her. 'You say you're not moral but you are. Always.'

She sipped from her coffee and then took a deep breath.

'Maybe I *am* moral, Mark. Maybe there are a lot of people who sell their bodies who aren't doing so because they're fucked up on junk or crack or whatever. And maybe some of your friends who are fucked up made perfectly rational decisions to do so and in fact they are in relative control of their lives. But not you, Mark. You've lost control again. I can tell.'

There was a dead silence at the other end of the line. Then Mark responded.

'Thanks, Nan. I really needed to hear that. I was hoping we could meet somewhere and talk face to face, rather than get lectured by you over the fucking telephone.'

'I really think you're simplifying things, Mark.'

'I'm sure you think so.'

Then Mark hung up the receiver.

She sat still for a moment, staring at her receiver and her coffee before deciding that this conversation with her brother had ruined her evening. She decided to eat at a local greasy spoon - feeling unable to concentrate on rudimentary cooking let alone any further serious reading.

Returning home from the greasy spoon, Nancy encountered her younger male neighbor who was taking out his garbage.

This reminded her that she had to do the same before retiring for the evening. Not that her younger male neighbor - whose name was Danny - was retiring for the evening. Either Danny had just arisen or else he had been up for the last few days. Nancy could not really distinguish between these two possible explanations of her neighbor's timetables.

She did occasionally talk to Danny. She knew he was a recording engineer, a disc jockey, and a rave enthusiast. Nancy could not herself imagine maintaining such a lifestyle without considerable chemical assistance. Probably young Danny spent many

of his working and waking hours under the influence of Special K or Ecstasy or perhaps old-fashioned drugs like coke or speed or various combinations. Still, Danny was not at all an unpleasant sort of neighbor. Whatever possible chemical combinations he ingested seemed to help rather than hinder him. He was quiet and respectful of his own and other's privacy. He did not seem at all *paranoiac*. She wondered if perhaps he had any grass for sale as she felt like chilling out after her argument with Mark.

But she resisted calling after Danny. She had decided to salvage what remained of the evening before calling it a night. She opened up her 20th Century English-language poetry anthology to Yeats' AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN. She read through the poem and wondered if Yeats had inadvertently anticipated rave culture with his inability to tell the dancer from the dance. Then she read the poem again and now she decided she could see why it belonged to a canon. The poem was imaginatively instinctive yet formally tight and controlled. It communicated something indeed foreboding and extraterrestrial.

Nancy found herself meditating about modernism and mysticism and futurism and fascism. There was a kind of mystical fascism which was highly *poetic* - unlike the anti-poetic machine-worshipping fascism of Marinetti and Futurism. This poetic fascism was not anti-religious. On the contrary it literally begged the existence of some Supreme Being and, unfortunately, some self-appointed representative of that Supreme Being on Earth. Nature was not conquered or usurped as advocated by the Futurists; rather, it was worshipped. Nature was a divine supernatural force clearly beyond human comprehension or manageability.

Nancy was imaging her young neighbour Danny at his nocturnal raves. She herself was curious to attend one but she knew she was already too old. She would feel uncomfortable and unwanted and thus unable to immerse herself in the crowd; which would be her intention in participating. Young Danny was practically an elder among the rave crowd and he was five or six years her junior. She didn't feel she had access to any possible crowd immersion and this pissed her off. She didn't feel the alternative rock world offered any real possibilities. That world to her was characterized by clear distinction between performer and audience - not unlike proscenium theatre - an artifice which seldom gained let alone sustained her attention.

Her gay male friends- Jeff and presumably Derek as well as many she had had in Vancouver, experienced similar immersions on good nights in their favourite dance clubs. Toronto's exclusively women's nights or women's nights in straight clubs had never done *anything* for her.; but the rave scene seemed to offer the sort of immersion she wished to access and experience.

But she knew she would feel far too self-conscious at a rave. Her body at her age would no longer allow her to stay up too late without serious chemical assistance on top of serious dietary overhaul. So, she read through some additional poetry by modernist fascists such as Yeats, Eliot, and Pound and then

called it a night. Her eyes were tired and her body completely exhausted.

Nancy found her mind wandering as Barry Ferguson lectured on and on about satire and science-fiction. Barry felt that most such novels - indeed most other artworks that pronounced themselves satirical - were redundant. Practically everything satirized in these works of art parodied itself without any external assistance. There were, of course, some exceptions to his general rule. GULLIVER'S TRAVELS - for example. Nancy found herself in agreement with her professor but she wished the man would move to another, less obvious target.

Perhaps the other students were not in agreement with the professor. She looked around the lecture hall, gauging reactions. However, reactions were difficult to gauge or read, particularly among the lethargically polite students. Not one of them appeared either excited or bored or visibly restless. There were perhaps seventy students in the hall- almost equally proportional with regards to gender. The class included students of East Asian, Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, Latino, and Caucasian. But not Native North-American descent. She registered one young man as definitely being queer but she detected no obvious dykes. Nancy wondered if the campus homophile associations were perhaps actively discouraging enrollment in Professor Ferguson's courses.

As Barry moved through his dismissal of most overt satire to declare a personal enthusiasm for some of the edgier science-fiction writers; Nancy now picked up some fermenting discomfort. She herself was pleased to hear Barry extolling sci-fi writers including Michael Moorcock, Ursula LeGuin, and Philip K Dick himself as being more articulate about the arbitrariness of fixed physical identities than renowned literary types were - with the partial exception of Virginia Woolf. She grinned mischievously as Barry now added William S. Burroughs and J.G. Ballard to his little canon of inspired edginess. She expected all of the female students to strongly register displeasure at the mere *mention* of Burroughs' name. All her old grrrlfriends in Vancouver had appropriated Burroughs as a transgressive move of sorts. The curmudgeonly writer may have had no use for them but they certainly had many uses for him.

And it was Burroughs who led Barry back to the subject of science-fiction and political satire, To him, Burroughs and Swift formed a circle rather than a line. Barry almost randomly leapt from the future -satire of Burroughs' WILD BOYS to the utopian novels of Zamiatan, Orwell, and Huxley - WE, 1984, and BRAVE NEW WORLD. And then Barry cited Margaret Atwood's HANDMAID'S TALE as an example of a novel which systematically and far too literally satirizes that which was already a one-liner-

namely 1984. Barry suggested Anthony Burgess' 1985 as a far more constructive response to Orwell's novel than THE HANDMAID'S TALE. which he felt merely replicated the original's structure even while attempting to reverse the gender dynamics.

'But Atwood doesn't really reverse the gender dynamics beyond a literal model at all.' Nancy heard her own voice protesting. 'For example, in THE HANDMAID'S TALE the lesbian character doesn't ultimately mind incarceration because prison is where all the girls are kept.'

As she spoke she became aware of other students turning towards her and glaring. If they weren't glaring then they were just staring at her - as if she were not quite right in the head. Even the young man who telegraphed queerness was sadly shaking his head.

She felt more of a sympathetic curiosity emanating from Barry Ferguson. He seemed to have been caught off guard by her intervention but also pleased that one of his students had shown even the slightest indication of life

. 'Miss Leonard? Am I right? Nancy Leonard? While I don't think it's constructive to explicitly label both the novel and the writer 'homophobic', you have inadvertently anticipated my next point. Namely, that the politically-satirical or anti-Utopian novel tends to suffer from one of the fundamental problems that plagues the totalitarian societies they purport to critique - a puritanical revulsion of bodies and of bodily pleasures. In WE and 1984 romantic love - which itself is unwittingly contextualized as a moral justification for sexual desires - is clearly a catalyst for potential revolutionary and counter-revolutionary agitation and therefore it must be regulated. And even the stupidest puritans, whether they be of the Religious Right or the politically correct Left, must realize that making something forbidden only serves to make that very something transgressively exciting - as well as creating a market demand. Although perhaps the aforementioned puritanical censors don't get it - because they never seem to vary their thoughts or change their tunes. Do they, Miss Nancy Leonard?

For a second she was searching for an appropriate retort. Then she realized that Barry Ferguson wasn't expecting one and that she should thus resist temptation. Her chance had now passed but she felt no regret. She avoided the eyes of the students who were still staring at her as if she were some sort of sci-fi monstrosity, but she followed Barry as he now proceeded to denigrate Aldous Huxley's deployment of 'sex weekends' in BRAVE NEW WORLD as being merely a temporary solution to 'the body problem' in Utopian or Anti-Utopian fiction.

This ghettoization of the libido and the ego is only the same old tiresome Cartesian mind and body split which Orwell and Company are so hopelessly locked into.

Barry then proceeded to praise his science fiction canon, which now included William Gibson, as being at least committed to problematizing mind and body separation. Nancy looked up at the clock and realized that Barry had only fifteen seconds remaining in his lecture. As the professor concluded by reinforcing the Required Reading list, Nancy was quite aware that

Barry was smiling at her. The students who considered her comments on Atwood to have been stupid comments did not matter to her. But Professor Barry Ferguson *did* matter.

Although she intended to fix herself a sandwich and then proceed with her evening's required reading; Nancy could not resist stopping off at the U.of T. Bookstore before walking home. She scanned the periodicals' racks for new editions and then, not finding anything new enough to demand her immediate attention, she decided to kill a few minutes browsing through the bookstore's Film and Video section.

She found a couple of anthologies of film writing she had considered buying but then subsequently resisted. One was a collection of writings by a local film journalist who had unfortunately passed away three summers ago. This writer had definitely possessed a flair for the *bon mot* but most of the reviews published in this volume had been just that - reviews. Hack journalism, Nancy decided, albeit with a personal *panache*.

She was about to browse through an anthology on Canadian video art and its problematic distribution history when she became aware of Jeff and Derek who stood further along the aisle, appropriately cruising the Cultural Theory section. Nancy decided to acknowledge them, since they were likely to notice her and then be offended by her abrupt departure. So she abandoned the Canadian Video anthology and strode over to the Cultural Theory section.

'Hi, guys.'

Derek Lee looked up from the volume he was avidly reading from - an anthology of writings from black U.K. cultural theorists working out of Birmingham and London.

'Hello yourself, Nancy. Finding anything today?'

She now stood beside Derek and Jeff.

'Not today, Derek. How about you?'

Derek nodded enthusiastically.

'I'm going to buy this book.'

She scanned the cover.

'Required reading?'

'For me, it's required reading.'

Now Jeff Talbot pointed towards the top shelf of the Cultural Theory section, drawing her attention to a copy of THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE by Barry Ferguson.

'Barry Ferguson may well be the only writer whose books are available at university bookstores as well as at W.H. Smith and Sons.'

'Unless, of course, we count Camille Paglia.', Derek nudged his boyfriend.

'Oh, right. I'd forgotten about her.' Jeff grinned but not sheepishly. 'How's Professor Ferguson's class going for you, Nancy?'

She regarded the pair of them deliberately.

'I'm rather enjoying Barry's class. I made my presence felt earlier today.'

'Really?' Derek was all ears.

'Yes. I brought up what I perceived as lesbophobia in THE HANDMAID'S TALE by Margaret Atwood and Barry definitely responded.'

'How?' Derek now looked puzzled.

'One demerit for political correctness and two points for moving the lecture forward towards his next point - the corpophobia of politically-satirical literature.'

Jeff smirked.

'Well, good for you, Miss Nancy. But... I'm warning you... with Barry it's rather difficult to tell the difference between points and demerits. He finds some students entertaining; but he still gives them poor grades. He probably considers points and demerits to be interchangeable - depending on whether he paid for good or bad sex the night before.'

'Whether he paid for a nightmare or for an *ecstatic experience*.' Jeff topped off Derek's sarcastic pronouncement.

'We're going for martinis. How about you, Miss Nancy?'

She shook her head. She did have reading to do and she'd already had enough of Jeff and Derek for the day.

'Well, then. A rain check, Nancy? Please? Derek smiled at her. 'Come on, Jeff. I'm definitely buying this book so we'd better queue up.'

Derek and Jeff walked towards the cashier without further exchange as Nancy departed towards the bookstore's front door. As soon as she opened the door she decided a cigarette was necessary. Fresh air and cigarettes, she laughed ruefully. Not two things she would usually associate with one another but, at this moment, the association seemed to be an appropriate one.

As Jeff and Derek approached Barbarella's they found themselves speculating as to whether or not their friend Nancy Leonard really did have pressing scholastic assignments or whether she was giving them the brush-off. Derek was all for allowing Miss Nancy the benefit of the doubt while Jeff was convinced she was angry at the pair of them - that she was losing her sense of humour.

'Well? You're more likely to read her correctly than I am, Jeff. You two go back a while, right?'

'I've known Miss Nancy for a long time it seems. She's older than I am; but she's really like my little sister. Where shall we sit?'

Jeff and Derek searched around the bar upon arrival.

'Definitely *not* in the smoking section. As far away from the smoking section as possible. Okay?'

This was okay with Derek. They found a table near the bar and away from the section which encouraged smoking. Derek flagged the waiter as soon as they were seated. The waiter

responded immediately to recognizable customers whom he assumed would be requesting cranberry-martinis.

Jeff was grimacing and Derek asked what the problem was.

'There is somebody smoking cigars, Derek Can't you smell it?'

Derek looked around.

'You're right, Jeff. There's a boyfriend and girlfriend stinking up the corner. And then there's two older faculty types attempting to eat at the next table, Mind you, their dinner consists of Barbarella's Steak and Kidney pies.'

Jeff's grimace expanded so that his forehead almost cracked open.

'Oh, shit, it's Radclyffe Hall herself - Professor Claire Wilkinson!'

'I'm afraid she looks more like Winston Churchill in drag. Who's her escort, Jeffrey?'

'I don't know and I don't want to know.'

Derek sipped on his martini as he observed Claire Wilkinson and her unidentified male companion attacking their pub grub.

'What is the story on her, anyway?'

Jeff swilled his martini.

'She is a highly renowned Chaucer scholar. She is also an 'official spinster', he paused to clear his throat,' I think her gentleman companion is a member of The Philosophy Department, but I'm not really sure. I know they're not a couple.'

Derek nodded.

'Well, I think you've adequately explained the steak-and-kidney pie twosome. So, how far do you go back with Nancy Leonard?'

Jeff counted his fingers.

'Four, five, almost six years. We knew each other in Vancouver, and then she looked me up almost as soon as she moved to Toronto last year.'

Derek allowed this to sink in,

'Nancy had to get out of Vancouver.' Jeff continued. She used to sing in this band STRIPES AND SPOTS.'

Derek shook his head.

'You know me, Jeff. I know good dance music and I'm afraid that's it.'

'STRIPES AND SPOTS were part of the alternative rock scene - riot grrrl division. Confrontational, not at all easy listening. Also drugs and booze, you know.'

Derek silently nodded.

'She also got involved with this strange, somewhat older man.' Jeff continued on Nancy's trajectory from Vancouver to Toronto.' But she broke off with him shortly before moving here. His name was Bernard Griffiths, and I don't really know what the story was with him or with the breakup.'

Derek sipped his martini and then turned to Jeff.

'I thought Miss Nancy was a dyke.'

Jeff sighed.

'She is. Or, she was. I don't really know anymore. Suddenly she was spending most of her time with this man -this somewhat effeminate but rather asexual schoolteacher type - but then one night she confessed to me that she and Bernard were fucking. *Strange* relationship, I thought.'

'Did you know Bernard at all, Jeff?'

'Not really. I mean, I met him. I had dinner with him and Nancy once.' he sipped on his martini which was almost finished. '. Couldn't for the life of me figure out the attraction, unless one wants to be too obviously Freudian.'

'Well, let's not do *that*, Jeffrey.'

'It wasn't money, either. Nancy's not interested in money - not for its own sake or as an end in itself.'

Derek turned to face Jeff.

'I like her; but I'm worried about her. And I can tell you're really worried about her.'

Jeff sighed.

'You're right, Derek.'

They sat silently with their drinks for a moment. Out of the corner of his left eye Jeff recognized Professor Claire Wilkinson and her mysterious academic male friend paying up their tabs at the cash register.

Jeff shook his head as that pair walked slowly towards the front door.

'So, Jeff,' Derek's expression had brightened.' We of course will be attending this upcoming panel. Right? What is that title again?'

'SEXUALITIES; THE BINARY AND THE BEYOND. Oh yes. I'll be there.'

'Too bizarre a panel to pass up, methinks.'

Jeff concentrated.

'Well, we have a pretty good idea what Bruce Devlin will have to say because Bruce is an obsessive - although I'd rather he be on my side than against me. And we all have at least some idea what Barry Ferguson's presentation will be like.'..'

'Barry Ferguson thinks he's beyond but in reality he's *prehistoric*.'

'Not bad, Derek. Barry Ferguson would like to have everybody believe he's radically post-queer but actually he's a closet case. And I more than suspect Sharon Vernon will be the token orthodox feminist lesbian of the group, who feels threatened by genderfuck and everything anti-essentialist etcetera.'

Derek sipped at his drink.

'Well? A balance is necessary - on a panel, that is. And then we have Miss Brenda Carpenter.'

Yes'. Jeff finished his crantini. She will be representing the Other Other as well as herself. Very smart woman, as she *delights* in making sure everybody knows.'

'I would not wish to be in her shit-book.'

'Nor I, Derek. His panel is scheduled for October 11th?"

'That's the date, Jeffrey. And we will be there.'
Derek finished his drink. 'And so will our friend Miss Nancy and a lot of other queers and even their curious friends. Maybe even a few post-queers and a few pre-queers.'

'Like Barry.'

'I was wondering more about Professor Claire Wilkinson. Derek reached for his wallet. 'Garcon? The bill, if you please?'

The waiter smelled money and made an immediate beeline for Jeff and Derek's table as they donned their fall jackets. As they looked towards the door they noticed customers entering with either wet hair or with umbrellas. But they decided against another round. Jeff and Derek wished to play with each other before settling down to their required readings for this particular evening.

On the bulletin board located just outside the Refectory; Nancy's attention was drawn to a poster advertising an upcoming panel titled SEXUALITY; THE BINARIES AND THE BEYOND. Four panelists were indicated on the poster - along with the moderator who would presumably have to be on her toes especially during the obligatory question-and-answer session.

The moderator-to-be was Louise Livingston, a sociology professor at York University whose name was unfamiliar to Nancy. But a couple of the other panelists' names were familiar- notably that of Brenda Carpenter, who had developed into one of Canada's foremost transsexual activists over the last couple of years. Brenda Carpenter had serious axes to grind with *all* of those who she felt were locked into essentialistic male/female. masculine/feminine gender binaries - whether the biological essentialisms were heterosexist believers in 'nature', gay male clones who insisted upon banishing 'the feminine', or lesbian separatist leftovers who believed in strict rules of limited interaction between men and women and who advocated separate existences for the two clear-cut genders unless absolutely necessary. Brenda Carpenter's critique of limited binaries was straightforward but thorough; and Nancy had been impressed by Ms. Carpenter's published articles in various periodicals. Brenda Carpenter was also of Afro-Caribbean descent and highly critical of the predominantly-white queer community, which she felt tended to assume that all people of African or Afro-Caribbean descent were essentially homophobic.

Brenda Carpenter was to share the SEXUALITY; THE BINARIES AND THE BEYOND panel with three other co-panelists. Another name Nancy recognized was that of Bruce Devlin- who had been a prime figure in the now-defunct Queer Nation and who was a friend of Jeff Talbot's. Nancy thought that Bruce Devlin talked a lot of rhetoric about inclusion as opposed to exclusion but in

reality he had little time or tolerance for anybody not well-built, short-haired, blue-jeaned, and combat-booted. Bruce's uniform-regulations applied to both male and female genders as well as presumably to any alternatives to male or female orthodoxies.

She did not recognize the name Sharon Vernon but the poster briefly described Ms. Vernon as a Philosophy Professor at the University of British Columbia. Perhaps Nancy might recognize her on the day of the panel and perhaps the woman might prove to be a complete stranger. She guessed that Professor Vernon had been selected for this panel in order to counter Ms. Carpenter. She made this assumption on the basis of the fourth panelist, who was none other than Barry Ferguson - professor of Literary Criticism and Theory at the University of Toronto and the *celebrated* author of THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE. She decided that observing Barry Ferguson in action alongside a young male queer activist, a presumably politically-correct lesbian academic, and a transsexual activist with little if any respect for limited identity-politics ought to be an event truly *not* to be missed. She noted the date of the panel in her personal calendar and then decided to tackle Harold Innis, with the assistance of a coffee and a cigarette.

After concluding her required reading assessments for the evening' she found herself staring at the photograph of Barry Ferguson at the top of the hard cover jacket-flap of THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE. The celebrated professor had been vain enough to have insisted upon a photograph of himself when at least twenty to twenty-five years younger than his current age.

Nancy was amused by Barry's cravat and his flowing locks. She looked at Barry in his later twenties or whenever the photograph was taken and she could anticipate the man's current baldness and severely receding hairline. But then, Barry Ferguson was an unrepentant throwback to an earlier age when large foreheads actually were associated with large brains.

She could see how Jeff and Derek could get away with referring to Professor Ferguson as resembling an unfortunate cross between Oscar Wilde and Pierre Trudeau - Canada's mildly controversial former swinging-bachelor prime minister. But then, Jeff and Derek would arrive at some sort of derogatory description of Barry Ferguson no matter who or what the professor actually *did* look like.

Barry's portrait of course dominated the flap. Barry's biography was uncharacteristically brief and to the point. It provided no further information about the author besides the fact that THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE was indeed the first publication for which Barry had been the sole author - although of course the distinguished academic had been published previously in numerous appropriate journals. Nancy noted the mainstream publisher's -

none other than Random House's - distinction between academic journals and 'real world' publications or credits. Clearly, Random House considered Barry to be a major discovery.

Oh and there was also a throwaway concluding line that Barry Ferguson resided in Toronto with his cat - Mr. Plato. Trust Barry to name his pussycat after none other than the man who had played Boswell to Socrates' Dr. Johnson - while posthumously becoming synonymous with 'the philosopher king'. Famous male masochists were renowned for their obsessive relationships with cats. Nancy was quite aware of this indisputable historical fact. Baudelaire, Gide, and Sacher-Masoch himself all enjoyed the dominating company of their 'pets'. Nancy was certain that Barry would be very aware of this dynamic and doubtlessly would see himself as continuing a proud and noble tradition.

Nancy arrived at the site for the panel-presentation roughly half a minute before the event was scheduled to commence. Although panels and symposiums had never been renowned for their punctuality; the larger-than-typical lecture room was already jammed to near capacity.

Her eyes circled the room until she found herself a solitary seat near the back of the room. She barely recognized anybody in the audience except for Jeff and Derek, who were seated among a predominantly male contingent positioned near the front of the classroom.

Jeff and Derek were schmoozing with one of the panelists who had not yet seated himself alongside his colleagues on the panel. This panelist was Bruce Devlin, a Queer Nation veteran whom Nancy had met once and immediately disliked. For somebody who talked a lot about how 'queer' was an inclusive rather than exclusive term; Bruce seemed to have very tight and fixed definitions as to who and what were queer and who and what weren't.

Nancy's eyes moved up towards the podium where the panelists were flanking the moderator. Barry Ferguson sat on her far left- impeccably turned out in an expensive navy suit, a white dress shirt, and a bright red cravat. Barry appeared to be impatient.

On her far right she recognized Brenda Carpenter, an Afro-Caribbean transsexual activist whose writings some of which Nancy had read and been impressed by. Brenda Carpenter was stylishly decked out in a mauve sweater over a pale-yellow blouse. She wore a maroon felt hat strategically angled on top of her head. She wore reading glasses and appeared to be about as impatient as Barry Ferguson did.

Nancy did not, recognize either Sharon Vernon - who appeared mid-fourtyish and stereotypically bookish - or Louise Livingston- the well-coifed moderator. Sharon definitely registered respectable academic dyke while Louise registered ambiguity. Perhaps she was a lipstick lesbian or perhaps she was a neutral professional who had been available for duty on this particular afternoon. Whatever her constituency or constituencies might have been; this afternoon her assignment was to prevent chaos and the monopolization of the panel by any one or combination of the panelists.

Louise was now ringing a moderator's bell and requesting silence in the auditorium so that the panel could commence. The impatient audience and the seated panelists - who now included among them the black-leather jacketed Bruce Devlin, obliged.

'Good afternoon, and thank you all very much for coming. If we can keep the fire exit clear, let's please do so. Not that we are *expecting* any fires but, who knows, some rapid

exits might indeed become necessary since today we have gathered here four very highly-opinionated panelists.

'I won't waste everybody's time by introducing our panelists because bios have been provided for you on the one-sheets which should be on all of your desks. If anybody doesn't have a one-sheet, please wait until the panel's conclusion.

Nancy glanced at her one-sheet and then placed it on the table directly in front of her.

'Today's format is as follows: quick personal addresses by each individual panelist and then hopefully a combination of inter-panel discussion and questions from the audience. Please step up to the microphone positioned in the central aisle so that you can both be heard and recorded as this panel is being taped for archival purposes. Try to make your questions brief and to the point as we do only have one hour and we are filled up to room capacity,

The sequence of speakers will be as follows: Sharon Vernon, followed by Bruce Devlin. followed by Brenda Carpenter, then finally by Barry Ferguson.'

Nancy wondered whether this sequence had been agreed upon arbitrarily by the panelists, whether it had been decided by Louise Livingston, or whether at least one of the panelists had insisted upon a particular slot for themselves. She wondered specifically whether Barry had evoked some sort of star clause.

As Sharon Vernon reached for the microphone on the podium's table while taking a long sip of water; Nancy observed a young man with a prematurely receding hairline and a well-worn blue velvet jacket entering the lecture - room and standing on the right side in front of the entrance. Nancy found herself tuning out as much of Sharon Vernon's personal statement as she possibly could. Her suspicions had been correct - that Sharon Vernon was wary of moving too far beyond any of the acceptable binaries: male/female, hetero/homo, etcetera. Although aware that many people did have the not-necessarily confining option of multiple points-of-identification; Sharon Vernon was definitely apprehensive about any possible erosion the categories 'straight' and 'gay'. Nancy noted that the panelist avoided even *mentioning* the biological categories 'male' and 'female' after her introductory sentence - it seemed that Professor Vernon was painfully aware that biological essentialisms were practically heretical for audiences demographically a generation younger than herself.

Although Sharon Vernon painstakingly stressed that many people did not fit neatly into the hetero/homo binary categories; Nancy picked up a definite biphobia from the woman. She scanned the hall and registered a general indifference among the audience. Jeff and Derek were having difficulty stifling yawns' and the moderator Louise Livingston was none-too-subtly sneaking glances at her stopwatch.

Okay, okay, Nancy thought. This woman is worried that certain vogues for idiosyncratic individual personalities make the one hundred percent lesbian an endangered species. She should

just lighten up. A lot of people talk about 'bisexuality' or, better yet, 'polymorphous perversity' but how many of those people truly practice anything that they are so fond of talking about? Not very many, Sharon. So *lighten up*.

Sharon Vernon looked at the moderator as if on cue and Louise Livingston professionally thanked the event's leadoff panelist - reminding the audience that if any of them had specific questions for Professor Vernon question period would take place after all of the panelists had spoken. Louise then announced Mr. Bruce Devlin as the next speaker. Sharon Vernon gratefully handed Bruce Devlin the microphone - definitely aware that she had been a warm-up act for a warm-up act.

Bruce Devlin immediately announced the title for his little discourse- QUEER/ WHO ISN'T?. Actually, a lot of people weren't *really* queer - according to Bruce. Although he of course identified himself as being *a priori* queer as opposed to a gay man - explaining that his sexuality was by choice at least as much as by biological determination; Bruce had harsh words indeed for those who claimed to be queer even though their dominant sexual impulses and practices were in fact heterosexual.

And Mr. Bruce Devlin pointedly related an anecdote about drinking by himself in an 'alternative' bar in which he overheard an intoxicated, early thirtyish woman explaining to the gay male bartender that he was only 'gay' because he did not 'do it' with women. The bartender had informed the customer that she was full of shit not necessarily as a result of excessive libation. Bruce then emphasized his point that 'queer' was not at all synonymous with 'bisexual' - even though he of course was careful to refer to both official genders as well as to those who challenged gender orthodoxies.

Nancy sighed. This token inclusivity was all very nice and all of that but what the fuck was with Bruce's biphobia? She remembered Jeff Talbot taking her to a party at Bruce's apartment last year and not being at all impressed with the man. Bruce had regarded her as if she were some sort of Martian - it had seemed that her hair was too traditionally feminine, that her appearance had not been boot-camp enough to satisfy his criteria for women.

Bruce droned on and on about those heretics who take the word 'queer' in vain - the dilettantes, the apolitical mad artists, and their ilk. It wasn't that she even particularly disagreed with the man - her problem was that she'd heard his dissertation before several times. She recalled a similar dissertation at a conference she had attended three years ago at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby - a conference called QUEER SCENARIOS. And of course she had felt ill at ease during this one male superstar's presentation because she had been sleeping with Bernard Griffith - that sweet and shy older schoolteacher whom she was positive also paid for sex with male hustlers in Vancouver's East End.

As Bruce Devlin flailed towards his conclusions, Nancy could not gauge any clear-cut divisions among the audience. There was a raucous applause for the second of the four presenters, and

not only from male spectators. She could clearly witness Jeff and Derek and many of their predominantly male cohorts applauding their spokesperson; but there was also a group of younger women allying themselves with Bruce Devlin's antipathy towards 'straight' people who were labeling themselves 'queer' at the expense of those who were merely 'gay'.

Now Nancy was seething. It wasn't so much a case of her disagreement with Bruce Devlin and his support contingent; it was their herd mentality which was so fucking *irritating*. She could even concede what seemed to be the man's main point—that many individuals and no individualists with no politic beyond their selves were calling themselves queerer and more transgressive than hard working activists such as Mr. Bruce Devlin himself. Or, for that matter, her friends Jeff and Derek. Jeff was always hinting to her that she had abandoned her community, and not only because she fucked men.

Community, community. Definitely one of the most over deployed and *meaningless* words in the entire English language, she cursed to herself. Right up there with that other moralistic adjective ''accountable'. As Brenda Carpenter routinely but coldly accepted the microphone from Bruce, Nancy knew the word 'community' was about to receive a truly royal undressing.

Brenda Carpenter immediately launched into her dissertation by problematizing Bruce Devlin's and Sharon Vernon's reliance on singular identity despite their most honourable efforts at acknowledging possible pluralisms. She had harsh words for all of those who claimed marginalized status strictly on the basis of sexual preference, gender, racial identity, or any other singular point of reference or identification.

They may talk a good talk; but our previous speakers are still hopelessly locked into a very traditional identity-politic that cannot allow space for the possibility of multiple identity or points of identification. First of all, how many people can truly wear their 'identities' on their sleeves every minute of their working and sleeping days. Not too many people are 'out' in every single aspect of their working or non-working lives, none too many can afford to be. Not everybody has the necessary leisure time to be a full-time activist and I have nothing but respect for dedicated full-time activists but there are many individuals who are just as committed as, why our own Mr. Bruce Devlin, who cannot afford to be out there on the barricades all day and all of the night. Not everybody can afford to be not working at some form of employment where the workplace may or may not be homophobic. It just might be that one's sexual practices may have sweet fuck all to do with the job and its criteria .

Bruce Devlin's troops had been effectively silenced. Bruce himself was clearly uncomfortable - helping himself to water from the pitcher on the panelists' table. Nancy also observed Barry Ferguson's expression shifting from appreciation to apprehension.

The only spectator whose expression was fixed belonged to the youth who stood silently by the doorway. The young man

with the prematurely receding hairline was mentally somewhere else. His mind was not at all in the same location as his static body.

Brenda Carpenter now shifted to focus on the white-breadedness of traditional gay-liberation politics and the feminist herstories and how little their memberships had really changed over the last almost four decades despite a lot of sympathetic liberal rhetoric. She had particularly scathing words for economically-privileged white feminists who could not understand why many working-class women (many of whom were not white) have remained in physically and emotionally abusive relationships and have often been willing to give their husbands and boyfriends second, third, and two hundredth chances. What those liberals didn't seem to understand, Brenda stated sarcastically, was that economic factors were actually the primary determining factors in many working-class women's decisions. *'It's the economy'*, she smiled icily - omitting the qualifying word *'stupid'* and thus emphasizing it in the process..

Nancy was really beginning to enjoy Brenda Carpenter's presentation. The panelist was sticking it to everybody and taking no prisoners. She herself had always wanted to lash out at privileged white feminists who seemed to think that for example all black men were like O.J. Simpson or Ike Turner or whomever might be Monster of The Week. Abusive behavior crossed racial and economic boundaries as well as boundaries of sexual preference. She'd known a few relationships that she felt certain would qualify as having been abusive.

She noticed Barry's face becoming flushed. Barry may well have been married once - the majority of men of his generation had been. She recalled reading an article about Barry in which the reporter had information that Barry had once been not only a husband but also a father. The reporter either did not or could not elaborate further. Barry himself claimed in his interviews to be actively bisexual - unlike most other humans who were only latently bisexual. That word itself did not move beyond the binaries; on the contrary, it wallowed in them. Some gay men she had known who had never in their lives *'done it'* with a woman had expressed curiosity about the possibility. And the men she considered biphobic had uniformly once been heterosexual. Nancy tried imaging Jeff Talbot as a testosterone-fueled sixteen-year old het but her imagination failed her.

Brenda Carpenter was now pulling punches as to the white maleness of queer nationalism and other activist groups which she felt excluded as much as they included. Rigid identification, she paused for a sip of water, denied fluidity.

Very few people, if indeed any, are 100 % hetero or homo. Even after many individuals declare themselves to be hetero or homo; they will still play with their older or earlier preference. Dykes who fuck men have been a thorn in the side of lesbian solidarity for years now, haven't they- even before AIDS emerged as this threatening bogeyman or monster. And I am convinced that there are gay men who occasionally do it with girls. It's not a lifestyle thing that they feel comfortable

bragging about- unlike, say, recreational anonymous sex. But I more than suspect it happens even though it's borderline taboo. My ultimate point is that there are a hell of a lot of us who see and also practice sexual activity in a continuum rather than from a fixed or rigid point of identification. I used to be Brian Carpenter., a gay man who had once been a straight man who still occasionally fucked women because I didn't live - I didn't feel welcome - in an identity ghetto where such a relatively insignificant form of pleasurable activity was this Big Fucking Taboo. For a while I was a chick with a dick. I could have remained so - many do because they want to as much as because the costs and criteria for surgery can be very prohibitive indeed. And now I'm Brenda Carpenter - a transgendered dyke who fucks men. And this does not affect my dykiness, honey., when I'm doing with a woman that and that only is what I am doing at that particular divine moment. You are what you do, girlfriends, not necessarily what you talk and talk and talk about

Brenda moved on to proudly proclaim herself one who had made a choice or decision. She had challenged biological determinism not on the basis of some pathetic excuse of 'having been born in the wrong body'. She had identified across her biological gender without then becoming some sort of monomaniacal essentialist separatist. She had not made her decision on the basis of believing she would have more power as a woman than she had enjoyed as a man. Nancy found herself recalling a documentary about female-to-male transsexuals who had gleefully bought into the perceived advantages of being men without mocking or challenging those advantages. As Brenda's dissertation reached its conclusion- not on any particular ideological point but on a signal from the passive moderator Louise Livingston; Nancy found herself full of a very deep respect for Miss Brenda Carpenter.

Brenda's troops among the audience were now egging her to cut into Barry Ferguson's designated time and to just keep on talking. Barry, Nancy could see quite clearly- had become nervous. She had never seen him appear out of control - in a position where he would have to work the room in order to regain control. She could see Barry registering the fact that some audience members - perhaps ten or twelve - who had come to listen to Brenda were deciding not to stay for his presentation. These audience members were now making their way towards the front exit, from which the youth with the large forehead and receding hairline was moving away. Nancy observed the tight-lipped young man walking towards her, scanning each different aisle in search of an available seat. She was relieved that there were no vacant seats in her row.

Barry savored a thirty-second sip of water, defying Louise Livingston's impatiently watchful eye. Then he cleared his throat and came out firing on all cylinders.

He immediately turned up the heat by declaring binary labels such as hetero and homo to be both limited and dated - as a parallel to the collapse of conventional male and female biological categories which had been problematized well before the advent of the previous panelist.

Gay liberation peaked a long time ago - practically at its inception; and it has been in decline steadily ever since its briefly relevant peak. Perhaps it did have its moment of necessity - like all nationalisms; but it quickly became a xenphobically restrictive movement - again , like all nationalisms. Point of fact: We began with the drag queens who were the ones who had the guts to stand up to the police and to the heterosexual, mob-owned gay bars which routinely paid off the police and The Law. The drag queens who were then rudely pushed out of the picture by the ever-so-respectable gay and lesbian activists craving assimilation. 'Places at the table' or 'equality'. The drag queens who challenged fixed gender-identity were usurped by others who flaunted and, in many ways, profited from the fetishization of essentialistically-static concepts of masculinity and, as a reaction, femininity or 'wymynliness'. As much as I loathe her hysterical moralism - her advocacy of censorship and denial of free speech, her philistinism etcetera etcetera; I find myself agreeing with Andrea Dworkin's characterization of gay men as those comprising the ultimate patriarchy. I think here Dworkin, of all fucking people, is actually right on the money, That is, until I begin accounting for all of the men who may or may not declare themselves to be 'gay' or 'queer' who practice same-sex activities - whether for pleasure or for profit or perhaps for some idiosyncratically personally-negotiable combination of the two.

The hush that had now fallen upon the audience was interrupted by some soft but choreographed hissing. Nancy scanned the room and her eyes confirmed that the hecklers included Jeff and Derek - along with their friends. She particularly focused on one of Jeff and Derek's friends named Sean Cummins, who appeared both very emaciated and very angry.

'Buy my book! Buy my book!', Sean Cummins exhorted the audience while mimicking Barry's idiosyncratic mid-Atlantic accent.

Enough!', barked Louise Livingston, who had clearly been unprepared for the possibility of committed hecklers.

Yes. Buy my book. There, I said it'.. Barry swallowed the water he had imbibed during the militant little interruption.

During the last few years there has been debate and alarm over Simon LeVay's so-called discovery of the so-called 'gay gene'. This little gene apparently has the power to predetermine our sexual attractions - it provides an orientation which biologically determines actual preferences and practices. LeVay's exhortation of the gay gene - his victim mentality which cries that we came into the world this way so we can't help ourselves boo hoo hoo - has been rightly condemned as yet another example of stupid victim-mentality. LeVay's biological determinism has of course been embraced by gay men who have never overcome their own internalized homophobia and who thus need to lash out at everybody else in the world excluding themselves and their own special interest group. It is significant that LeVay's allies have tended to be gay male separatists who deny any other points of identification for individuals and who fear and hate women as well as their own potential bi or tri or even poly-sexuality. LeVay himself has obviously never heard of lesbianism,

although his clone apologist Dean Hamer is pathetically obsessed with attempting to prove that lesbians do not exist biologically and thus are not deserving of any special-interest status. Simon LeVay, for his part, may not have even heard of women - let alone alternative genders.

And how much better are the gay men who brag about their progressive and inclusive politics but who scorn bisexuals, transsexuals, intersexuals, and who ghettoize drag queens as being good entertainers for their AIDS fund-raisers and their endless Red Ribbon specials but consider them to be off-limits when it comes to sex? Not any better, I would say. Not any better at all.

Barry glared at Louise Livingston, who was attempting to rein him in. Nancy glanced at her watch and her suspicions that Brenda Carpenter had spoken for a longer duration than the other panelists was confirmed..

I'm being reminded that tempus fugit. I'd like to wind down by stating that Ms. Carpenter has indeed brought up many valid points around the limitations of binary stereotypes such as straight vs. Gay - pointing to other points of personal identification such as race or class status. What may well have begun as a liberationist and emancipatory culture in the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies has become a club with a very strict criteria for membership - white, able-bodied, middle-class with considerable disposable income or else. I know that this is an educational panel and not a book launch; but if you wish to read some of my own writings on what has all been lost by our lingering gay-liberation movement then please refer to my book THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE. The U.of T. Bookstore of course carries it, as do popular bookstores such as Smithbooks and Chapters. This book is selling. It has hit a nerve, to put it bluntly. Thank you.

Louise Livingston addressed her watch and then announced there were only ten minutes for questions from the audience. Evidently the other panelists had mutually agreed to forego inter-panel questions and answers during Barry's presentation. They had agreed to disagree, Nancy smiled wryly to herself.

Louise requested that those with questions please use the microphone positioned in the centre aisle and also identify themselves along with any political or organizational affiliations. Nancy now frowned. Supposing somebody didn't have any such affiliations? Supposing somebody might be an individual? She suspected very few among the audience seriously qualified as individuals.

She could not help noticing Jeff Talbot striding up to the designated interrogator's microphone. Fast on the draw - like always. Jeff's Doc Martens provided a steadily rhythmic irritation until he reached his destination.

'Jeff Talbot - queer, anthropology student, member of AIDS ACTION NOW. I don't have a question per se. I have comments specifically for Professor Ferguson. You, sir, are the sort of post-queer reactionary who manages to sneak into the limelight

under the rubric or umbrella labeled 'queer'- here meaning its flippant opposition to politically-engaged fags and dykes.

'Now here is a question for you, sir. Namely, where do you get off saying that gay liberation peaked over twenty-five years ago - that if achieved its purposes and that all identity-politics -I mean, anything remotely to do with identity-politics - have become redundant when we are still in the midst of the AIDS-pandemic. Which here in Toronto anyway has affected ninety-five percent gay men, is still ravaging our bodies as well as our general zeitgeist. Yes. If you glance at XTRA magazine you will notice that the Proud Lives section is getting smaller and smaller. Some men are living longer, perhaps as a result of trials with protease inhibitors. It is still too early to tell. So where...'

Louise Livingston cut in, demanding that Jeff make his point as there were others who were becoming impatient and who wished to speak.

Jeff glared at the moderator.

'I guess I have made my point, which was simply to put onto the floor or enter into this travesty of a debate everything which was omitted by the panelists - the very real fight against this wretched epidemic which is a long way from cured yet and that gay men cannot help but be primarily concerned with unless their minds are completely out of touch with their bodies - like Professor Ferguson's is. Thank you.'

Jeff abruptly turned and marched back towards his seat. Louise Livingston coldly proclaimed personal insults such as the one Jeff had just leveled at Barry to be completely and inexcusably out of line. Barry cut her off.

'I think in point of fact the gentleman, who hasn't changed since he was one of my most inattentive students last year, has answered his own question.'

'Next, please". requested Louise.

A dyke in a plaid shirt with curly black hair was now positioned at the microphone.

'Debbie Rubin- International Socialists.'

An unidentifiable heckler loudly boomed but did not attempt to prevent Ms. Rubin from speaking.

'Professor Ferguson, again. I don't have a question per se because you, and for that matter, everyone else on this panel is hostile to the very concept of questions and answers. But I will put this to you, sir. The sort of liberal pluralism you advocate under the delusion of post-binarism is nothing but popular market-capitalism. Pop culture success stories have always been those who market multiple identities to different markets or 'communities'.

A chorus of boos now drowned out Debbie Rubin's tirade. Nancy grimaced. While she had no time for Debbie Rubin's leftover Marxist phobia concerning the terrain of popular culture; she was not unsympathetic to the woman. Many of the same criticisms Ms. Rubin had begun to accuse Professor Ferguson of could also in fact be thrown at The International Socialists. Nancy actually admired anybody who could simultaneously identify themselves as

queer, feminist, and Marxist and not feel they were necessarily contradicting themselves. She knew there was no way she herself could ever be able to negotiate those contradictory labels but she respected those who felt there were no problems.

As Debbie Rubin droned on about how the false pluralisms of popular culture and its various markets trivialized truly complex questions concerning multiple identifications; Barry suddenly cut in sharply.

What is this leftover puritanical seventies phobia about popular culture? I mean, I'll admit I separate art and pop culture from the classical canon for precisely the reason that popular culture and its artifacts are meant to be disposables - they're meant to be here one minute and either co-opted or rejected the in the next . Popular culture, if it takes its own ambitions and its codes seriously, encourages multiple and often contradictory readings; and what the hell is wrong with that? Nothing, except that seriously reading popular culture is obviously beneath the intellectual capabilities of moralistic advocates of rigid belief structures or ideologies. The left - and some still believe in these anachronistic terms left and right - has always had difficulty dealing with popular culture and, for that matter, with pleasure because they are free-flowing. And, if markets are created and developed as part of that fluidity, that is fine. Choice and consumption are hopelessly intertwined and interwoven. Choice and consumption are as symbiotic as they come, my dear.

'Are there any more questions for Professor Ferguson? Or for any of the other panelists?', Louise added almost as an afterthought. Many audience members were already leaving or had left in order to reach their next classes. Nancy could not see the young man with the receding hairline, so he too must have slipped out either during Barry's presentation or during the non-question period.

'Yes?', Louise addressed Sean Cummins, Jeff and Derek's friend who now stood weakly at the microphone stand.

'Professor Ferguson, are you queer?'

Barry angrily shifted his eye line directly towards Sean Cummins and intoned the word 'Yes.'

Sean calculatedly smiled,

'How, Professor?'

Barry Ferguson defiantly responded that if he chose to identify or label himself queer then how dare anybody disbelieve him - that the point of queerness was that it circumvented stupid and rigid definitions.

But Louise cut him off. Louise was declaring Sean's question to be facetiously *redundant*; and at this point Nancy decided it was finally time for her to get out of the fucking auditorium before the concluding stampede. She wished to avoid Jeff and Derek and Sean Cummins and their old Queer National friends. She wished to avoid Professor Barry Ferguson.

She wished to walk by herself and smoke a cigarette. Her classes were finished for the day and she felt like having a

drink by herself - somewhere where the post-panel drinking crowd was unlikely to patronize.

5 **NIGHTLIFE**

By the time Nancy arrived at the 360 Club on Queen Street West, Jeff and Derek were already on their second beers and the first out of the four bands had just concluded their set. She nearly turned right around and retreated towards the front exit upon seeing the crowd. They were all younger than her and both official genders were decked out in either regulation Levi's with combat boots or camouflage with combat boots. She too was wearing blue jeans and Combat boots - now she wished she'd worn something more imaginative.

But Derek had already sighted her. She could see Derek pointing her out to his and Jeff's friends - two stocky-faced short-haired girls to whom she knew she would get introduced to and whose names she would be forgetting before they forgot hers. Nancy - such an easy name to remember. Certainly enough, now Jeff was introducing Nancy to Jennifer and Karen and also to Stephen and David - two queer punk types whose parents had also been devoid of imagination when it came down to nomenclature.

'You're just in time for *Maggie's Farmers*.' Jeff was informing Nancy.

'Good', she intoned without enthusiasm. How nineties - to name a rock band in reference to a sixties icon while simultaneously mocking all neither urban nor urbane.

Stephen and David barely registered Nancy and then left to join the lineup in front of the bar. Nancy became aware of Jennifer and Karen staring at her as if they had seen her somewhere before. She was on the verge of obliging them with the biographical details before the two clones could pop the eternal question. But the pair of them beat her to the punch.

'You really look familiar.' said Jennifer.

'Are you from *Vancouver*?' Karen needed to know.

'Yeah', Nancy replied while retrieving her cigarettes and searching the auditorium for an apparently non-existent waiter. 'I did live in Vancouver for six years and I used to sing for a band.'

'What band?' Jennifer persisted.

'I'll let you mull that one over. Okay?' She then lit her cigarette and turned away from Jennifer and Karen. She looked towards the bar.

She decided she couldn't deal with standing in line, finally buying a beer, and then returning to these two stupid girls from Vancouver. She took a final look at the queue for the bar and then decided to get the hell out of the 360 club - before whoever constituted *Maggie's Farmers* took over the environment

and made it even more unbearable than it already was. She turned around and glanced at the bi-genderal band. They looked like members of the crowd - without personalities or dynamics. She had paid her five dollars which hopefully would go directly to the Rape Crisis Centre and not to any of the bands or to the bar itself. She had made her contribution and thus there was no reason for her to hang around and play godmother to a bunch of kids who would persistently esquire as to why she no longer played music in stupid rock bands not unlike the one she was now walking away from

She felt relief as the sound of Maggie's Farmers became swallowed up by the sounds of the Queen and Spadina street cars and buses and also the sounds of the squeegee-kids who offered their services to the motorists at this as well as other major Toronto intersections. These kids didn't bother her particularly - she didn't have a car. She conceded that really aggressive squeegee-kids might annoy her if she were driving and she had the green light as well as some sort of important deadline. But the Metro councilors and provincial politicians who complained about the squeegee-menace were of course myopic to the *real* issues involved - namely youth unemployment and homelessness. Not that these issues were unique to youth, she took a final drag of her cigarette and then hurled it against the curb.

And how was she herself dealing with the looming employment issue? She was arguably evading or at least postponing it by returning to university on money made by singing in a rock band not terribly different than the one she had just left behind - one whose lyrics had in fact been just as relentlessly witless. Nancy found herself thinking about a Vancouver friend who had finally succumbed to AIDS, James had definitely played a role in her decision to leave the band and the grrrl- rock world. He had, in his inimitably performative manner, convinced her that good rock lyrics were oxymoronic in comparison to those written by librettists such as Cole Porter and Lorenz Hart. An older, gay male tradition to be sure; but one containing wit definitely lacking among the earnestly confessional alternative rock lyrics. Nancy smiled at the sidewalk beneath her feet as she now walked up Spading Avenue

She had caught herself sounding not only like her friend James but also of Barry Ferguson - an aesthete, a representative of a tradition which was contemporarily designated arcane and irrelevant but which always seemed to be reviving itself. *Why*, she wondered.

As she now walked north through the Kensington Market area she could hear a harder, more self-consciously anarchic rock music being played in a local laundromat where hard-core and queercore bands regularly practiced. Nancy almost felt as if she were these kids' secretly approving godmother. She had seen and even met many of the young musicians volunteering in a nearby

anarchist bookstore which homaged Emma Goldman - one of the truly endearing figures of the anarchist left. She was grateful for such homages in what to her often seemed an age dominated by an anarchist right of weapons-fetishists and militia nutbars who loathed governments for strictly selfish reasons. This largely straight white male movement stood diametrically opposed to the communitarian or even socialist-inclined anarchists who correctly critiqued the state for being merely a legitimizer of multi-national capitalist interests. But Nancy herself thought anarchy - a state beyond needing governments and their enforcement forces - was impossible without the elimination of the money system of personal exchange.

She laughed out loud. How was she going to begin making money again when this became an absolute necessity? Probably by becoming a teaching assistant of sorts in order to subsidize her further studies, by becoming more of a committed academic than she had been so far after deciding to resume her post-secondary education. She shook her head.

At least she hadn't felt as threatened by the anarchist punks in the laundromat she was now passing as she had not only by the bands at the 360 club but also by Jeff and Derek's friends. The punks in the laundromat probably had no idea that Nancy had once been the singer for STRIPES AND SPOTS - they had probably never heard or even heard of the band. And if they did know her previous identity by some fluke, they didn't make her feel like she owed them anything. She had done her time and then moved on, just like thousands of others. They would not demand the inevitably unsatisfactory explanation as to why she, Nancy Leonard, no longer sang at least in public. She realized there would be no point in her even briefly returning to Vancouver until STRIPES AND SPOTS were either completely forgotten or else officially designated Historical Interest Only.

North of College Street and outside of the market area she found herself recalling her friend James' pot shot at rap lyrics - that they were all too *unfortunately* reminiscent of Alexander Pope's poetry because they were comprised of exclusively relentless iambic-pentameter. Nancy knew James' dismissal was simplistic but nonetheless she found it amusing. She wondered what, if anything, Professor Barry Ferguson would make of alternative rock and hip-hop lyrics. She wondered how the professor might react to their citation in any purportedly serious literary thesis.

Her building seemed to offer her a perfect silence. The traffic outside was non-existent, her landlords downstairs were undoubtedly sleeping, and her young neighbor Danny was either out

at work or at play. She looked at the digital clock sitting on top of her living-room bookcase. It was only five to eleven so she decided to enjoy the beer she had been denied at the 360 club. She opened a bottle of Red Baron and then sat down to savour five minutes of uninterrupted silence before winding down with the late-night news.

At exactly eleven o'clock she turned on the CBC late night broadcast. Sipping on her beer she could not help noticing that the top five stories were all connected to a long unresolved murder case for which a suspect had finally been taken into custody. Now that there was a credible killer for Case One; the same man was also prime suspect for cases two, three, four, and five. Nancy shook her head. The police were too desperately attempting to make up for a lot of lost time. They had been caught *flat-footed* when it came to sensationalist serial-killers Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. If the cops had bothered matching Bernardo's profile with that of the serial Scarborough rapist; then arguably the latter murders could have been in fact prevented.

She sipped her beer. If only the left hand had been communicating with the right - not only with regards to criminal investigations but with other unpleasant bureaucratic concerns as well. Life would not only be easier for the officials in question, it would also be easier for those potentially at risk from official incompetence.

Then the telephone rang. Nancy was not used to receiving calls this late in the evening - at least, not since she had resumed her post-secondary education. So she decided she'd better answer the telephone - even though she had a strong sense of the caller's identity.

The voice was Jeff's

'You just walked away and left?'

She stifled a yawn.

'Yes, Jeff. I took one look at the bar line-up and made a decision. Sorry.'

'Well', his voice became sharper. 'We were all wondering what came over you.'

'Nothing, really. I just walked home and now here I am.'

She was beginning to wish she had pretended not to be home by not taking the call. She felt like retrieving a cigarette from her pack in the kitchen and, in the process, hanging up 'accidentally'.

'Why did you just cut out like that, Nan? Were you pissed off about something?'

'Not really.' Then she realized Jeff would only keep cross-examining her, 'Well, those two girls you guys introduced me to were beginning to annoy me. They didn't mean to, of course. But I really didn't feel like talking about STRIPES AND SPOTS and it seemed that was what the pair of them wished to talk about. So, I figured I wasn't going to enjoy their company and I left.'

Jeff was the one who was now pissed off.

'They ask you a question. So, you just answer it without turning the whole affair into a federal case; and then more likely than not you will then find a new topic of more interesting conversation. You have to let go of STRIPES AND SPOTS, Nancy. Which means, you have to stop denying it. The band was your public image for a considerable portion of your life and you were a good band. So stop being *ashamed* of it!'

'Whether we were good or not is a matter of opinion, Jeff.'

'Jennifer and Karen are good company. You need to make some new friends in Toronto, especially girl friends. What's with you these days, anyway?'

'Nothing, really'. She really wished to terminate this conversation. 'I'm just restless.'

'Well, get over it, girl. It doesn't make for good company.'

'Lately, Jeffrey, I've been preferring solitude. In case you may have noticed.' she finished her beer. 'Sorry, I guess I shouldn't have accepted your invitation to meet you and Derek and listen to some stupid rock bands. Sorry'.

He was silent. She knew she could finish up and then get off the phone.

'Look, Jeff. I know I'll see you soon. Okay? Good night.'

And, then she hung up the phone before he could say anything further. There was one more bottle of beer in her refrigerator so she opened it. *Why not*, she thought. So Jeff Talbot was worried about her. That was so considerate of him - so nice and condescending. She took a large swill from her beer bottle.

She did not need Jeff Talbot to inform her that she needed new friends. But at this particular moment in her life new friends - not to mention emotional involvements - were a potentially complicated factor she didn't feel capable of dealing with. Strictly erotic relationships interested her but not with any emotional ties. She was half-tempted to finish her beer and then head out to a Thursday-night dyke bar. Perhaps she might get very drunk and then lucky. Or maybe there was some sexually-confused young boy to be found and then picked up in one of those interchangeable 'alternative' bars scattered throughout Toronto. She could even deal with the dreadful rock music - perhaps boys were her best bet for now. Not that she had any desire to become emotionally involved with some young boy.

She wondered about her brother Mark. She made a note to call him and to find out for herself if he was staying clean. She had no problem with his prostitution except for Mark it was symbiotic with his on-and-off junk habit. Thank Christ she had never become a junkie. She had smoked heroin very occasionally but she had never attempted to overcome her fear of needles. The risk of HIV transmission through shared or dirty needles had helped her maintain her fear. Observing not only her brother but

also her former band mate Christine had also been a preventing factor.

No, she was not at all opposed to prostitution. If she were not so damn tired she would have been tempted to seriously pursue the personals. Professional arrangements were not unappealing to her - aside from the financial sacrifice probably involved.

Yes, *money*. Money was not something she had a great deal of to fall back on. If she were to continue her education by supporting herself as a teaching assistant, then good grades were a necessity. Nancy sighed wearily. She had by now resigned herself to the fact that she would not be going anywhere tonight, except to bed. Alone.

Aside from the fact that Genet's florid prose is almost too florid - it's on the verge of being extremely purple - Genet's excess should be seen in the context of the French leftist intellectuals who patronized the Notorious Literary Thief. Sartre, ever the theoretical philosopher rather than the committed writer, struggled with fictional language as if it were an occupation rather than a seductive pleasure. Let's just say Sartre had that typically leftist suspicion of beauty. Camus, basically indebted to Hemingway and the American tough-guy sub-genre, is practically monosyllabic. Genet, in contrast to those two typical male leftists of their period, is all about excess and artifice. Perhaps this might explain his unfortunate decision to write for the theatre after his flair for prose apparently dried up.

Jean Genet of course is the patron saint of transgressionism and of the transgressives. Genet was notorious for his impatience with those such as the liberal patrons who rattled on and on about freedom of choice. Genet of course thought only those who had spent practically an entire lifetime in the French penal system had any right to even mention the word 'freedom'. Genet's writings are about restrictions and boundaries. He fetishizes restrictions and boundaries - they arouse him erotically precisely because they are forbidden. The illegality of his activities and his writings, and Genet's journals were daringly radical in their time, itself aroused the man. Here of course he, like descendants such as the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, stands in contrast to liberals and to social democrats. Jean Genet is far too Catholic an artist to ever fit in comfortably with leftist ideologies- even though class is a much more important factor throughout his writings than sexuality is. But any man erotically stimulated by a Nazi prison guard, as in *Our Lady of The Flowers*, would never be capable of towing any party lines.

Nancy had been looking forward to this lecture, although its terrain was hardly unfamiliar to her. Jean Genet was for her a highly unique albeit problematic writer for many of the reasons Barry Ferguson was outlining. Of course, when Barry talked about Genet he was really talking about Barry. She was convinced that Barry required very specific boundaries in order to get a hard-on. She wondered just how far he would go in his pursuit of the forbidden and the erotically exciting. She was becoming quite curious about Barry's personal life and she wondered why this was so.

After her Literary Criticism and Theory lecture had concluded. Nancy could not help picking up on the fact that Barry Ferguson's departure had been extremely abrupt. Usually Barry

lingered after the lecture, so that he could hold court. But today he had raced through his lecture on Eliot's PRUFROCK, which had been a more perfunctory presentation than Nancy had been expecting and hoping for - considering the subject. Two full minutes before the hour Barry had officially announced that he needed to make a fast getaway and that the students were themselves free to leave early.

Instinct persuaded her to shadow her professor - to get some sense of where he might be running off to and in whose company. Barry's stride was so uncharacteristically swift that he seemed to have no sense of being followed. He practically ran towards a curb at the front of the sidewalk leading to the circular road surrounding the University College football field. Waiting for him by the curb was a very impressive-looking black Cadillac. As Barry approached the front passenger-door Nancy could now register the woman in the driver's seat. The driver positioned her profile towards Barry and commanded him to move faster - placing what seemed to be an unusual emphasis on the name *Barry*

Barry thus ran towards the car and scrambled into the front passenger seat as the driver was already moving her car out of park and into drive. As the car sped along the circular road which eventually led to a street running south and away from the university campus, Barry's gaze avoided the right window. Nancy rested assured that her gaze had remained undetected by Barry.

But she had certainly registered the woman behind the wheel. The woman behind the wheel had definitely made an impression on Nancy. The driver had worn a very serious black suit and her blondish hair had been so perfectly swept that Nancy wondered if the woman was wearing a wig - or perhaps a hairpiece. Whatever the accessories, the driver's manner had telegraphed something very urgent.

What could possibly be so urgent for Barry and who was this formidable-looking woman so determinedly positioned behind the wheel of a very expensive car?

She had gone out to a movie which had engaged her but also left her unsatisfied for *one* particular reason. The movie had been titled PASOLINI: AN ITALIAN CRIME - it had been a documentary focused on the contradictions surrounding the 1975 murder of the Italian film director and poet. Had the young man who had killed Pasolini been acting on his own or had he been an agent for neo-fascist elements threatened by the queer and Marxist artist? The economically self-endowed Pasolini as well, Nancy thought, cruising for rough trade in his flashy sports car. Class issues were barely hinted at in the relatively unembellished documentary. Class issues were as usual relegated to the cutting-room floor. Well, what else was new?

She decided to walk past the Central Downtown YMCA on Grosvenor Street, towards Queen's Park, and then along Hoskin

which would lead her to Brunswick, on which she could then walk north to her apartment. She realized that on Grosvenor she might well witness Toronto equivalents of Pasolini and his killer Pelosi - *albeit* not as flamboyantly schematic. But certainly enough, she saw motorists as well as pedestrians cruising the Boystown track; and the boys were favouring the cars as the drivers were presumably worth more money. Here we go again, she thought. Class issues.

As she walked along Grosvenor towards Queen's Park she noticed one boy with a rather large forehead and a prematurely receding hairline. She stopped for a moment, stared at the boy, then realized she had to be looking at the same boy who had been at the sexuality panel - standing in the corner and standing out from the remainder of the audience because he didn't seem to be taking any sides in the animosities. He hadn't even seemed to be listening.

Nancy realized the boy was now staring at her; she quickly resumed walking away from him and towards Queen's Park. So, the strange young man who was losing his hair so early in life was a *prostitute*. Then he had better make as much money as possible before all of the johns denigrated him too old for the profession; or at least too old for the streets. The men in the cars were clearly driving past the boy with the large forehead and gravitating towards younger looking boys. Nancy saw one driver in a Chrysler glide right past the boy who was losing his hair and then fixating on a younger-looking Latino. Nancy wondered about her brother Mark, who had worked this Boystown track not so long ago and who might still be working it at least occasionally. She couldn't see her brother tonight. If Mark had indeed returned to hustling, she guessed he would probably be looking elsewhere for tricks.

Almost at the corner of Bay and Grosvenor - towards the Women's College Hospital - she saw the boy with the receding hairline again. Then she relaxed. It couldn't have been the same young man. The boy she saw now was older than the first. The first boy had been wearing a non-descript black T-shirt and green dungarees; and the young man now almost directly in front of her was wearing a many-times recycled early-seventies floral-patterned shirt. Nancy stared at him in utter disbelief. *This* was the young man who had stood in the corner at that panel - not the other young man.

And this young man was even more likely to be ignored by motorists and pedestrians alike. If the first boy was being scorned by the johns; this one wasn't even registering with them. Perhaps it was his shirt which was so wonderfully inappropriate for the neighbourhood and for the young man's presumed income bracket; although the shirt was glaringly wrinkled and faded. Nancy had seen seventies-revival fashions decorating the windows of second-hand clothing stores on Queen Street West as well in Kensington Market. But she had never seen this sort of dandified shirt-meant to be worn under a crushed velvet jacket. Yes, a Lord

Fauntleroy jacket. Fashions went out and then came around again, just like political philosophies.

She laughed out loud while trying not to stare at the second young man, who starred intently at the pedestrians but not at the motorists. Suddenly Nancy became aware of drivers staring at her staring at the young man in the ridiculously dandified shirt. She realized that a honking car horn had been addressed to her and this was *not* an address she had intended to acknowledge. She decided it was high time for her to resume her walk home as she was not working in this particular neighbourhood. Rather, she was a pedestrian who was negotiating the traffic, and who was fascinated by the contradictions of the particular neighbourhood. Such as, who fit in with the scenery; and who did not.

Nancy knew she had to stop believing in her natural ability to fake her way through her Communications courses. . She knew that she had gotten off to a weak start in her Modern Poetry and 20th Century Fiction courses; and after all it wasn't until after this second year that she would have to select her major. She knew the Communications courses were more than merely credits.

However, the Literary Criticism and Theory course -or, rather, its instructor - had become the centrepiece of her second year course load. It had become the yardstick by which she weighed the relative importance of all her other courses. . This development was annoying her. The presence of Barry Ferguson's cult-star status had elevated this particular course well beyond proportion. Barry Ferguson's *persona* was defining and influencing her perspective towards her other instructors and also affecting her choices of extracurricular reading and viewing materials. She had to assert herself. She felt she was getting lost.

The telephone interrupted her thoughts. Nancy reached for the receiver but then refrained from picking up the receiver. She didn't have a call-screening mechanism and she wanted to know who was calling before deciding whether or not to take this call.

The caller was her brother Mark, whom she had not spoken to for some time and whose previous call had been a disturbing one. Mark had been threatening to burn bridges which he knew damn well he couldn't afford to burn. Mark was always threatening to burn bridges; and this time Nancy feared he would make good on all of his threats.

'Hello. Mark. How are you?'

His voice was hesitant.

'All right, I guess. I'm going to need some work and the film I thought I'd be scoring is now on hold.'

'Why?'

She feared personality issues her brother would have to learn to work around.

'It's a *money* problem. The director didn't get his arts-council grant. It seems that system is completely collapsing.'

'That's a drag", she nodded into the receiver. "Can't you find something else?'

'That's easier said than done, Nan. I want to talk about that English prof of yours. Barry Ferguson.'

She felt her muscles tensing.

"What about him?'

'The guy gives me the creeps.'

How the hell did Mark know Barry Ferguson? Then Mark provided the answer she was afraid of.

'I had sex with the guy once.'

Nancy reached for a cigarette and then checked herself.

'How long ago, Mark?'

'Last month - give or take a few days either way.' He paused and then continued. I'm not going to give you all the details but the guy *scared* me. I think he's a real control freak.'

She reached for her cigarettes and took one.

'Where did you have sex with Barry Ferguson, Mark, and what exactly were the circumstances?' She lit the cigarette and quickly exhaled.

'In a park. Trintiy-Bellwoods Park - in the West End'.

'I know where it is, Mark. Did he pay you?'

'No, that park is theoretically a hustler-free zone.'

'Look, Mark. I'm not being judgmental about whether or not you're turning tricks or whether Barry buys sex. I'm interested in what exactly *bothered* you so much about the man.'

Mark cleared his throat.

'It felt to me like the guy really needed to prove something for himself and he wasn't going to let me go until he had proved it.'

She drew on her cigarette, attempting to decipher her brother. Had Barry insisted on doing something that hadn't been part of whatever negotiations had taken place between the two of them? Had he perhaps wanted to fuck Mark without a condom and been belligerent about it?

'Look. Mark. Did he physically hold you against your will?'

Her brother hesitated.

'Well, no. He didn't. But I had this eerie sense he was going to follow me after I'd sucked him off; and that he was going to attack me.'

Nancy frowned.

'Did Barry threaten you? What exactly made you feel the man was going to become violent?'

Mark almost stuttered.

'Just this gut *feeling* I had about the man. What more can I tell you, Nan?'

She clenched the cigarette between her teeth while moving the receiver to her other ear.

'I don't know what to tell you. Mark. I don't know what else I can say.' She exhaled and then continued. 'You don't need me to tell you to be careful. That's your business if you want to have sex with strangers for money or for the thrill of it or whatever. Sometimes I wouldn't mind having the opportunity to take more chances.'

'What?'

'I think you heard me, Mark. Maybe you and Barry Ferguson might have a very different sexual encounter somewhere else under different circumstances. Maybe the dynamics might be completely different.'

Mark was silent for a moment. Nancy could hear him lighting a cigarette at his end of the line.

'Barry Ferguson gave me the creeps, Nan. I know you think your professor is interesting. Just be careful, for fuck sakes.'

'Thanks, Mark. I love you too.'

Then she slammed down the receiver before her brother could retort. She drew on her cigarette and then butted it out angrily. *Fuck* her brother! Damn him for acting simultaneously like an over-concerned big brother and like little boy whining to his mother. What gave him the right to be so worried about her life when his own life had been such a fucking disaster?

She attempted to resume her required reading but conceded defeat after only two paragraphs. Damn her brother anyway!

Now, let us briefly consider or touch upon what is known as 20th Century American realism, or tough guy writing. Very male, very mooatonic and monosyllabic. Characterized by a need to tell stories rather than spend too much time describing scenery let alone anything in the realm of psychology. This loosely-designated genre needs to form narratives characterized by means of actions rather than through psychological chess-matches or astute observation of codes and manners. This variety of typically American realism - with its rejection of all that is stereotypically English and upper-class- is fetishized in turn by French existentialist-types such as Sartre and Camus precisely due to its tentative elimination of character and psychological motivation.

This American realism also came to the literary forefront in the 1930s - the decade of The Great Depression - so it was reactive against the romanticism of the Jazz age. It reacted against F. Scott Fitzgerald and his overbearingly symbolic green light metaphors. An economy of style matched the desperate economy of the depression. Writers wrote as if they were paying by the word rather than being paid by the word.

And yet, some interesting cracks certainly do appear in the armors of the quintessential he-man writers. Let's look at Hemingway himself. The male codes of honour and the restrictions inherent to those codes checkmate the writer's own hysteria and

hysterectomies. Both the feminine and the effeminate are repressed - barely. Old Papa Hemingway had to keep the traffic moving - he had to keep his tone clipped and his sentences brief and right to the point or else the considerable excess baggage would have leaked considerably more than it already did.

And let's now play peek-a-boo with Raymond Chandler -who embraced the American tough-guy styles of Hemingway and Dashiell Hammett as a method of self-protection. Chandler is of interest because he was never quite able to reconcile his blue-bloodedness and his repressed Englishness with his affection for American tough-guy realism and its macho codes of honour. Chandler, unlike both Hemingway and Hammett, was actually a terrible story-teller. The legendary anecdote of William Faulkner, who was working on the screenplay for the film adaptation of THE BIG SLEEP, asking Chandler who killed the chauffeur and Chandler himself being unable to remember this detail, is hardly unusual for the man. Despite the American crime novel's declared oppositional stance towards excess; Chandler was chronically prone to florid descriptive passages which actually reveal a promising writer of good prose. The man's true forte is ornamental description. And Chandler had a definite tendency to get carried away with his descriptions of criminals and their hunky bodyguards - the man was rabidly homophobic but clearly protested too much. The homosocial and homoerotic aren't even barely repressed within Chandler's narrative closures - they all but blow the man's cover wide open.

Nancy found herself checking her watch before Barry checked his and decided he didn't have any further time to brutally deconstruct American novels of the 1930s which became source materials for American movies of the 1940s. She resisted a temptation to corner Barry as to just why he was clearly obsessed with writers and novels he affected contempt for. Privileging the homoerotic but repressed at the expense of what was at least attempting to move beyond repression was so typically Barry. Nancy knew Barry's paradoxical reverence for writers such as Hemingway and Chandler was not unrelated to his passion for and identification with Genet. Jean Genet was still and would probably forever remain the patron saint of transgression. A taste for the forbidden was sexy and thus permissive societies were not sexy because all was permitted and therefore nothing was illegal and by extension sexy. This paradox was ancient and would remain so. It was also irresolvable and thus very sexy.

Nancy thought it so typical of Barry to prefer 'edgy' repression as opposed to all that was blandly permissive. But she herself did not disagree with this binarism. She thought about male friends who needed to cruise toilets and parks even while living within committed semi-marriages. Barry was right, as were so many others. Repression would never be eradicated because so many different people had vested stakes in its preservation.

Her 20th-Century Literature class had just finished and she was already walking down the main corridor towards the refectory. Today's lecture had been on F. Scott Fitzgerald, who did not particularly interest Nancy. The Jazz Age or The Roaring Twenties had of course led to The Great Depression. Cause and Effect - Nancy already knew this trajectory. Barry hadn't even bothered to deal with Fitzgerald in his course - Barry probably had nothing to say about the man. Not enough *slippages* to sustain Barry's interest - or her own.

On the left side of the hallway there were a succession of cubicles which served as personal offices for individual staff members. Nancy noticed a fiftyish, heavy-set woman locking the door of her office and then walking on the opposite side of the corridor, approaching her. Nancy knew who this woman was. Professor Claire Wilkinson was a Chaucer scholar who also held a student-advisory position within University College's Department of English Literature. Nancy wasn't quite sure exactly what constituted Professor Wilkinson's jurisdiction. She more than suspected Claire Wilkinson to be an 'official spinster' - one of those grating reminders of the days in which a distinguished woman's lesbianism was tactfully never acknowledged because after all the woman was very distinguished and therefore above such derogatory labels.

She realized Professor Wilkinson was regarding her with a bemused curiosity as the two women were about to pass each other in the hallway.

'Good morning.', Claire Wilkinson greeted her.

Nancy managed a reciprocal 'good morning'. When she was not accustomed to being addressed by a particular individual she was usually unsure how to respond.

'You are in your second year. Am I correct?'

'Second year English lit. And Communications. Nancy Leonard.'

Claire Wilkinson's right hand held an unlit cigarette. Nancy assumed the professor was on her way out to the courtyard for a smoke. Either smoking had become illegal in the offices as well as in the hallways or those cubicles were too poorly ventilated.

'I'm Claire Wilkinson - Faculty Advisor of the University College English Literature Department. Mature students are an important component of our department so I like to get a sense of how they are making out. How they are interacting with the younger students as well as with their faculty.'

Nancy stared at the older woman. Why had Claire Wilkinson stopped to talk to *her* specifically?

'My office is just down the hallway-number 124. If you ever feel you might need to talk to me about anything, please feel free to drop by and make an appointment. Have a nice day, Miss Leonard.'

'Nice meeting you, Professor Wilkinson.', Nancy managed unconvincingly.

Then the professor resumed her itinerary towards the courtyard and Nancy continued her march to the refectory. The Fitzgerald lecture had induced drowsiness so caffeine and a cigarette were necessary.

And Claire Wilkinson had upset her. Nancy felt labeled - sexually ambiguous mature student. Well, so what? Mature students came in all shapes , colours, and sizes. And ages, not to mention sexual orientations or preferences or practices.

Nancy wondered if Professor Claire Wilkinson ever practiced. Not bloody likely, for whatever it might be worth.

She had been struggling with Harold Innis' 1952 essay THE BIAS OF COMMUNICATION for over an hour and now she decided she had put in enough required reading for the day. Her Communications courses were proving to be more difficult than her English literature courses. Her required reading for the Communications courses was demanding more labour and greater concentration. Nancy was becoming convinced that she was very unlikely to exceed her limitations.

She rose from her chair and then departed from the Reading Room, walking out into the hallway. She had made vague plans to meet up with Jeff and Derek later in the afternoon but these plans had yet to be finalized. In a way, she was relieved nothing had been firmly scheduled. She had been becoming increasingly estranged from Jeff Talbot. Things had not been the same between her and Jeff ever since her affair with Bernard Griffith; even though she knew Jeff better than anybody else in Toronto with the exception of her brother Mark.

Despite all of Jeff's rhetoric about being queer rather than 'gay', he still held onto separatist tendencies. Men should restrict their sex to other men and women should follow suit with strictly women, although men and women should of course be committed partners in activism. What *bullshit*, she scowled. The homo/hetero binary was as limited and as problematic as the male//female binary. As long as people remained locked into such either/or, black/white modes of 'thinking', nothing was ever going to change. Nancy was sick and tired of everything that continued to continue - AIDS, breast cancer, spousal abuse, spurious racial and class-based essentialisms and, above all, poverty.

As she progressed down the hallway she became aware of Barry Ferguson closing the door to his study. He had not noticed her. Thus it was up to her to draw attention to herself. At least his course was working out for her, so it made sense for her to develop a less formal and more conversational relationship with Professor Ferguson.

Why not, she thought. *Why not indeed.*

'Hello, Professor Ferguson.'

Barry Ferguson placed his reading glasses up against his eyes, stared at Nancy for a moment, and then smiled.

'Hello, Nancy Leonard. How are you doing, anyway?'

She pondered the question for a second and decided to be non-committal.

'Comme-ci. Comme-ca'.

Barry's gaze was now quizzical. He wasn't sure exactly what he was regarding but he was curious.

'I'm not particularly engaged for a couple of hours, Nancy. Perhaps you might like to join me for a drink at Barbarella's?'

She thought why not join Barry for a drink but definitely *not* at Barbarella's. Suppose Jeff and Derek were to turn up and then insist on joining tables? That would be a disaster, she knew that for a fact.

'I'd like to have a drink, but somewhere else. Somewhere off campus. Besides, Barbarella's always has dreadful art on the walls.'

Barry laughed. He agreed with Nancy's dismissal of the art 'curated' at Barbarella's.

'Do you have a car, Nancy?'

She didn't. She knew how to drive but did not own a car.

'Do you have a car, Professor Ferguson?'

He smiled at her bemusedly.

'I don't drive, Nancy. I've never driven in my life, aside from on one occasion early in my life which was nearly a fatal disaster.'

She was relieved Barry didn't drive. She couldn't imagine the professor maintaining the necessary concentration.

'The Living Well Cafe on Yonge Street isn't too far for a walk.' She found herself thinking of a safe, anonymous destination.

'That would be fine.', the professor agreed. 'We're not expecting any rain, so why not let's take a little walk.'

Why not indeed, thought Nancy to herself.

She walked with Professor Ferguson past Hart House and along Wellesley Street - past the north side of the Ontario parliamentary buildings and then the MacDonald-Cartier building which processed drivers' licenses and other government-authorized certificates. The Boystown track was only a block south but, since it was still late afternoon, it appeared as respectable as the major street that she and the professor were walking along. Her brother Mark had made a point of telling her that Barry frequented the nearby track, and why would Mark be inventing such information?

'The Living Well is actually a good choice, Nancy. It has a mixed clientele.'

She nodded. The Living Well meant nothing more to her than a generic alternative to Barbarella's or any of the watering-holes in the Church -Wellesley gay ghetto.

'For a period I couldn't bring myself to go there because I associate The Living Well with a young man who died not too long ago. But one has to move along.'

'AIDS?.'

Barry walked a couple of blocks before assenting.

'Yes, unfortunately. William died in 1993'.

'I'm sorry to hear that, Professor Ferguson.'

They now walked up Yonge Street, silently. Nancy refrained from pursuing any further conversation regarding William; but she did wonder exactly who he had been. She had an impression he must have been a younger man than Barry - perhaps a former student? Then she realized she had no basis for this assumption. William might easily have been a contemporary of her professor's. William - not Bill or Billy or Liam or a nickname - William.

Nancy and Barry continued walking northwards on Yonge Street's west sidewalk. When passing the official gay bookstore, Glad Day Books, she wanted to pause and check out the display window but she was aware of Barry's disinterest. Barry probable had not purchased a book from or even browsed through Glad Day Books for eons. And she also suspected the bookstore did not carry THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE. Bad politics, of course.

She decided to prod Barry - banter with him.

'Aren't you curious as to how THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE is doing at Glad Day, Professor Ferguson?'

Barry shook his head.

'That's Random House's job, not mine.' Barry looked at Nancy derisively. 'That bookstore's selection committee had a major debate over whether or not to carry THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE and the nay side won the 'debate'. Can you believe it! I mean, it's all so stupid. You'd think they realize that controversy generates sales?'

She nodded in agreement as they now entered the Living Well Cafe.

'Upstairs or downstairs, Nancy?'

She preferred downstairs as the music upstairs was louder and she did not wish to deal with loud music.

'Right then'. Barry continued. 'And you do smoke, right?'

Yes, she *did* smoke. Cigarettes had again become an essential component of her personality.

'If you don't mind, Professor Ferguson, I'd like to have the option of a cigarette.'

'Only one?' he laughed. 'I used to smoke, Nancy, so I remember what it was like.'

She could not imagine Barry Ferguson smoking, except possibly with the assistance of some ridiculously-large cigarette-holder. They found a table in the smoking section and almost immediately an attractive, definitely gay male waiter bounced over to their table to take orders.

'Is the house red wine acceptable to *you*, Nancy?'

Barry posed the question to her in a manner which implied her answer could not possibly be a negative one. She herself would have preferred beer but she did not insist. She did wonder if he was going to be treating her or if they would be splitting the tab.

She realized she did have money in her purse and thus she should not be concerned. And red wine was an occasionally pleasant alternative to draught beer. She had no intention of getting drunk with Professor Ferguson.

Barry and Nancy each sipped from their wine glasses and agreed the half-litre of house red wine was indeed palatable. Nancy had never exactly been a wine-connoisseur but she could tell this beverage had been distilled with loving care.

'So. Here's to your continuing education Miss Nancy Leonard. Both on and *off* campus.'

She grimaced and clicked glasses with Barry. She wondered whether he still considered himself capable of learning things despite his tenure and his celebrity-status.

Barry sipped his wine and then addressed her.

'You are somebody who might reasonably describe yourself as being a mature student.'

She shrugged. 'Mature' was actually one of Nancy's least favourite words in the entire English language. She considered the word to carry condescending psychological overtones.

'I suppose so', she measured her words carefully 'if 'mature' refers to my having had some sort of other life in my early twenties before deciding to resume my post-secondary education.'

'This is interesting.' Barry's curiosity was apparent.' So, what did you do with your life in your early twenties? He grinned mischievously. 'Or what did you *not* accomplish that prompted you to resume your education? Did you travel around the

world, or at least across Western Europe, in the manner of far too many polite little Canadian boys and girls?’

Nancy felt her neck muscles tensing.

‘No...not really. Actually, Professor Ferguson, I’ve never been off of the North American continent during my entire life. I’ve been to Mexico, but not professionally.’

He sipped from his drink.

‘It sounds to me like you’ve traveled to the United States professionally. So, what exactly are you referring to by ‘professionally’?’

She reached into her purse for her cigarettes.

‘I used to sing in a band.’

Now Barry stared at her with a peculiarly perplexed expression on his face.

‘Why is that so surprising, Professor Ferguson? That’s something many people – of both official as well as trans-genders do with their lives when they are younger.’

She lit her cigarette and watched him. She wondered if he were secretly upset by her smoking.

‘With your appearance and your dress – yes, that does make sense. But, Nancy, you seem far too literate to have ever been a rock singer. You are far more *articulate* than most of the ones I’ve seen on television. I’m afraid they’re all rather monosyllabic and frequently under the influence of narcotics.’

She bristled, and then regained her composure.

‘Some may conform to that stereotype but not all. Many pop or rock stars – I myself like to blur those distinctions – are or have been very literate in the visual arts, in film, and even occasionally in their writing.’

She sipped her wine. Barry had by now consumed roughly half the amount in his glass. He stared at her, confused.

‘Nancy, when I used to teach secondary school – in the 1960s and early 1970s – I used to receive requests for song lyrics to be added to the curriculum. So, I had to teach Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Leonard Cohen – well, *he* began as a poet and a novelist so he was more tolerable than the others. Who was the one who was so damn obsessive about bridges – Paul Simon? Dreadful lyrics. *Unforgivably* dreadful.’

She drew on her cigarette and made an effort to inhale away from Barry’s face.

‘I’m afraid all those people are before my time, Professor Ferguson. My favourite music could be classified as post-punk, which led me back to punk and then to glam-rock.’ She observed his face but she didn’t register any reactions. ‘I mean, I was eight years old when Patti Smith recorded her first album.’

Barry said nothing. Nancy wondered if he knew who Patti Smith was - let alone P.J. Harvey or Hole or Garbage or Pansy Division. He didn't seem to be placing the name.

'The earlier rock music that does anything for me did so because it played around with gender - at least, up to a point. Like Patti Smith, Lou Reed, David Bowie, T. Rex.'

'David Bowie.', Barry nodded. 'He I am aware of.'

Nancy extinguished her cigarette.

'How?'

'Not personally or anything', Barry had almost drained his glass, 'Not his music. I'm not actually very interested in music aside from Italian opera and certain string quartets. But I do know that David Bowie, whatever his state of mind and his motives may well have been, did bring pansexuality into the realm of popular culture as much as anybody else did.'

Nancy thought Barry was being somewhat hyperbolic.

'I love Bowie, but only abstractly.' She sipped from her glass of wine as Barry helped himself to what remained in the litre. 'I also dislike the man. I mean, he *did* arguably reduce bisexuality to the level of just another marketing strategy.'

Now Barry frowned.

'Please, Nancy. I had almost forgotten about your puritanical market-phobia. Popular culture's marketability is one of the prime reasons it's so adaptable to multiple interpretations. It's a main - if not *the* main - reason why popular culture is so resistant to restricted readings.'

She sipped her wine and then looked at him.

'I don't know if I entirely agree with your generalization.'

Barry signaled the waiter, who did not seem to share Barry's sense of urgency

'Oh come now, Nancy. *I* would. In my opinion academics can only learn from popular entertainers and from popular culture at large. Not particularly from the music or the art or the whatever; but from the popular artist's ability to achieve the attention of very different and conflicting audiences and then maintain - hell, *manipulate* - those attentions.

She sipped her wine, realizing that she might end up getting drunk with Professor Ferguson.

'That's what so many successful pop stars do, Professor Ferguson. Or, for that matter, pop artists. Jeff Koons, Warhol of course. Etcetera, etcetera.'

The waiter now arrived with another litre of the house red wine.

'Thank you, sir.' Barry expressed gratitude to the waiter. 'I see, Nancy. So your group considered yourselves to be some sort of 'meaningful alternative' to the viciousness of pop art and of popular culture?'

'In some ways, we did.'

'But...you also played with 'gender-fuck' or androgyny?'

She lit another cigarette.

'Yes again. We did play those angles up. I still do up to a point in my personal compartment even though- at this moment anyway- I no longer perform. But... we didn't have gobs of money to throw around. None of us had generous friends let alone lovers in the fashion industry, if you know what I mean.'

Barry pursed his lips.

'So, you were poor. You were 'starving artists. You probably played at benefits for all the required politically-correct causes. Yet you were obsessed with glamour.'

She exhaled towards the ceiling.

'It's quite possible to be androgynous without being obsessed with glamour - without having to spend a fortune on your wardrobe.'

'Androgynous by default, perhaps. But not by *design*.'

She turned her head towards Barry's face and stared at him.

'All of a sudden, Professor Ferguson, you sound like a tired and bitchy drag queen.'

He patiently topped off her glass of wine after doing so with his own.

'You realize, dear Nancy, that what you just accused me of resembling is not necessarily insulting?'

Barry now raised his glass, expecting her to play her part in the unspecified toast. She felt she had no option but to play along with him.

'So. I presume your group-- what the hell was the band's name, anyway?'

'STRIPES AND SPOTS, sir.'

'What? Oh, *right*. *Cats*.' Barry groaned. 'Anyway,, I presume your band STRIPES AND SPOTS performed at fundraising events for AIDS research and animal rights and reproduction rights and native land claims etcetera - incidentally, *none* of these causes I am opposed to despite what certain individuals like to gossip about me. But, why did the band dissolve? Were some of your colleagues more materially ambitious than you seem to be? Were drugs involved? Or was it simply a matter of artistic differences' or 'personality clashes'?''

She drew on her cigarette and then drew away from her face.

'We were just another stupid band and we knew it. We were flogging a dead horse so we called it a day.'

Barry nodded.

'Any regrets? Did you write the lyrics, Nancy?'

She nodded.

'Yes, I did. I felt constricted by having to write for song structures', she took a drag from her cigarette. 'I write for myself but I haven't published anything. Prose, not poetry.'

'Have you sent your manuscripts to any publishers yet? Major publishers?'

'I don't feel I'm at that stage yet.'

She also didn't feel prepared to discuss her writing with anybody else. She hoped Barry would pick up on this and change the subject.

He did, unexpectedly.

'Nancy? What did you make of that panel - the one with myself along with Brenda Carpenter and those two other boring people?'

She butted out her cigarette.

'Well, for starters, I hardly found Brenda Carpenter boring. I found her provocative.'

He turned to face her directly.

'I liked her, too. I meant to convey that I found the other two to be excruciating.'

She sipped from her glass, which was almost twice as full as his.

'I don't really know what to say about that panel, Professor Ferguson.'

'Barry. Please, call me Barry.'

'Yes- Barry.', she cleared her throat. 'I felt quite *angry* about that panel. I thought it was rigged so there would be limited time - make that no time - for any inter-panel debate or at least discussion. Let alone any half-intelligent questions from the floor. I guess I'm saying the whole thing was a travesty.'

Barry nodded.

'We would have definitely benefited from omitting that first panelist - the woman from Simon Fraser. Perhaps the second as well, although he then would have functioned as a set-up for Brenda and myself.'

Brenda and his self? Nancy hadn't had any previous impression of Brenda Carpenter and Barry Ferguson being on any sort of friendly first-name terms.

'I wish it had just been yourself and Brenda Carpenter, Barry. Then the panel wouldn't have been positioning the pair of you together against essentialist identity-politics, which you and I myself are so tired of.'

He sipped his drink.

'I think you're right, Nancy. Do you mind if I ask you a question?'

'I suppose not.' she attempted to convey some visible wariness.

'Do you have a cigarette you could spare?'

'Uh.sure.'. She reached into her purse for her pack of Player's Lights. 'I thought you quit smoking?'

Barry grinned.

'I lapse *occasionally*.'

She passed him the cigarette. She wondered if these occasions were special occasions.

'Your lighter?'

'Allow me, Barry'.

She lit his cigarette for him.

'So.', he exhaled awkwardly. 'Your band - STRIPES AND SPOTS - I'm an old cat-lover from way back you realize - you were a lesbian band? You are lesbian, right?'

'I'm bisexual"', she studied him. 'Which does not mean that I'm not a dyke?'

'But you do have sex with men?' he puffed on his cigarette and coughed.

She nodded.

'Then why label yourself a dyke, Nancy? Why *restrict* yourself? If you are so able to conceive of sexual identity so beyond subject/object specificity; then why limit yourself with such a reductivist label?'

She sipped her wine and then cleared her throat.

'I will not deny being a lesbian, Barry, even though it is such an awkward pseudo-medical term parallel to 'homosexual'. Throughout my almost thirty years on this planet, I've probably had more wonderful sexual encounters with women than I've had with men. My fantasies seldom involve men. However, sometimes men are simply more convenient. I'm also attracted to sexually ambivalent men and women- although I've never had sex with a transsexual I certainly wouldn't be closed to any possibilities. I don't think my attraction to androgynous individuals is tied in to any intellectual fetishization of all gender-fluidity or 'transcendence of gender' or anything else that is weird and wonderful but which sounds ridiculous when you attempt to put a label on it.'

Barry coughed again. When Nancy looked at him, he interpreted her look as being one of concern and he quickly butted out his cigarette. She refrained from lighting another one for herself.

'Well spoken, Nancy. At the rate you're developing you may well have some sort of bright future on the Beyond Restricted Gender academic circuit.'

She shook her head.

'I don't think so, Barry. I don't claim to be my own spokesperson - let alone anybody else's.'

He sipped from his glass of wine.

'But you are very good at explaining why groups and positions are ultimately redundant - why, in the long run, there are only *individuals*. Some are interesting and most are boring- because they don't realize they are individuals'.

'I don't think I would want to declare groups or, ahem, identities to be completely redundant, Barry. The great thing about the word 'queer' - even though I'm sick to death of hearing it used by people who are really dull and conventional - is that it allows room for not only different sexual practitioners but

also for individuals with different and maybe even self-contradictory positions. And the word is not gender-restricted. 'She reached into her purse for her smokes. 'I will not deny lesbianism because I am a practitioner; even though I'm not involved with any women right now and my last relationship was with a man.'

'Here? Or back in Vancouver?' Barry sipped from his glass which was again almost empty.

'In Vancouver - with an older man. Bernard was bisexual when I was involved with him and now I hear he's exclusively gay.'

'Why does the man *have to be* exclusively gay?' Barry demanded angrily. 'Why does he or you or anybody else have to be one way or the other? That's not how people are, for God's sake.'

She lit her cigarette and blew the smoke away from his face.

'There are many factors which enter into play besides dominant sexuality - if there even is such a thing. Many of my personal tastes in music and film and in literature are common as mud among my own generation. But a lot of older women's bars and bookstores or whatever despise my tastes. They consider me to be 'male-identified', which really pisses me off, Barry.'

'Well? That kind of stupidity pisses me off too, Nancy. It pisses me off when I hear it from lesbians and it pisses me off when I hear it from gay men. And I still hear it constantly.'

She drew on her cigarette.

'I've noticed my gay male friends whom I consider 'bi-phobic' were once straight, although usually very briefly and in their teens. While gay men who have never had sex with women are much more likely to respect a person's right to fuck whomever they feel like fucking.'

Barry signaled to the waiter.

'That proves my point, Nancy. To be one way or the other is an arbitrary decision - one which doesn't ever need to be made.'

'I don't know if I'd say that about everybody.'

'Oh why not, for Christ's sake. I think everybody is perfectly capable of doing it with anybody in the dark, when you eliminate all of the other extraneous *crap*.'

She giggled.

'Not just anybody, Barry. I mean, they do have to be attractive. Unless we're talking about either blindfold parties or about blind people?'

Barry ordered another litre from the waiter, even though Nancy wasn't even close to having finished her glass.

'Surely an individual as stridently politically-correct as you, Nancy Leonard, is not being 'looksist'?''

She broke out laughing.

'I stand accused. I plead guilty.' she drew on her cigarette and wondered how fussy he was about his casual partners - the hustlers he gravitated towards when he had a choice. Probably very particular, she suspected.

'Well. I'm sure you know damn well that people whose bodies seem available and therefore quite fabulous in the dark can be pretty unappealing when the lights come back on.'

She sipped from her glass, declining a refill from the litre the waiter was delivering to their table. Every gay man she had ever known would have dropped their drawers for the waiter - if opportunity were to knock.

'This all sounds familiar from male friends of mine who go to the baths and just take a locker. They cruise the dark rooms, have a few gropes, and then, when they're getting dressed to leave, realize that the guy they blew or whatever in the dark is the really unappealing guy who's getting dressed three lockers down .'. '

Barry nodded. Nancy wondered why he patronized the tracks - why he needed to always either be buying sex or seeking it out in parks. Barry probably considered himself too old for the baths, but that was ridiculous. There were definitely *other* factors at work here besides age. And, then, surely he was at least tempted by Internet possibilities?

She took a final drag on her cigarette and then butted it out.

'My point, Nancy, is that sexual activity can take place before one identifies one's partner or, for that matter, partners.'

She nodded.

'But.... coming back to that stupid panel, Barry, why is it that whenever people talk about polymorphisity or multiple sexualities. the debate always gets stuck on bisexuality?'

That's easy, Nancy. It's because everybody really is bisexual. Freud was frequently correct.'

Barry laughed.

Nancy did not laugh.

'Were you.....or, are you still....*married*, Barry?'

His face reddened.

'Yes. I have been married...once.'

'Are you now divorced?'

Barry shook his head, and then coughed. Even occasional social smoking seemed to disagree with him, she more than suspected.

'My marriage is still unresolved.'

She sipped from her glass of wine, which was by now almost finished.

'Were you a practicing bisexual during your marriage? And what about before it?'

Barry glared at her.

'Yes, *damn it*. My wife knew very well that my sexuality involved both men and women. I've always been convinced that everybody's sexuality does and thus everybody should practice accordingly.'

'Was your wife bisexual, and is she now lesbian?'

'You sound so fucking clinical sometimes. No!'

'Are you sure, Barry?'

He coughed again.

'Monogamy and exclusive heterosexuality were not part of the marriage contract that I distinctly remember agreeing to. Her memory is more traditional than mine, if you must know. So was her sexuality. She may have experimented on a couple of occasions in her life but - who hasn't?'

So you don't see her? At all?'

'No!' he almost choked on his drink. 'I don't know where she is and I don't wish to know. Why is somebody who is an interrogative as you are, Nancy Leonard, enrolled in a generic mishmash of English and Communications courses when you would probably do very well for yourself as a bloody lawyer?'

Now she felt her facial muscles tensing.

'I have never been interested in the law, Barry. I was arrested once for disturbing the peace but I was reprimanded.'

He regarded her with a look somewhere between curiosity and frustration.

'But you do have a very effective manner of putting people on the defensive and then maintaining that power position. In tandem with your literary flair and your budding polymorphousness; you have a great deal going for you. The world is your oyster, Nancy. So, do not *limit* yourself.'

'I hardly think I'm limiting myself,' Now she was on the defensive.

Barry moved to pour more wine from the fresh litre into Nancy's glass but she shook her head.

'I haven't eaten dinner yet, and I'm beginning to get a little fuzzy.'

He looked at her incredulously.

'Then why don't we order some food, for God's sake? The menu here actually does cater to many different taste buds.'

She shook her head again.

'Why not, Nancy. It's still early. Why don't we make a night of it?'

'I don't think so'. She reached for her cigarettes. 'I have some reading in one of my Communications courses I should at least get a jump on.'

'You do have a nicotine habit. Don't you, Nancy?'

She nodded.

'I kicked it for a year, and then I lapsed. I thought I could keep two-smokes a day regime; but now I'm back up to a pack-a-day. When did you quit, Barry?'

'When my wife and I stopped living together.'

'So. She must have smoked.' she exhaled after lighting her cigarette. 'But...or does your wife have a name?'

'I don't wish to discuss that woman any further.' Barry snapped. 'Do you understand?'

She understood without verbally indicating that she did so.

'Good, Nancy. Now that rock band of yours.... STRIPES AND SPOTS? LIONS AND TIGERS or whatever..... NASTY BIG CATS..., did they make any money? Records and all the rest... royalties?

She nodded tentatively.

'Up to a point. We made a record but we were ripped off by the distributor - although I do pick up the occasional writer's royalty cheque.'

'And you're paying your own way through university?'

'Yes.'" she drew on her cigarette. 'Which doesn't leave me a great deal of disposable cash? I did have to borrow some money from my mother, who's out in Halifax.'

Barry sipped from his glass.

'Is there a father?'

'There hasn't been for years.' Nancy did not wish to discuss her family with Barry Ferguson.

He again sipped from his glass which was by now almost half-empty.

'But, Nancy, you still haven't chosen your major. And it doesn't seem you're in any great hurry to do so, which is far preferable to choosing it too quickly and then regretting the choice later on.'

'I agree, Barry. But money is tight.' She drew on her smoke and exhaled. 'I have a savings account which I can't access with my bank card but which I do access when I need to. That account won't last me forever.'

He now regarded her severely.

'Then you will have to find other sources of income. When you've decided upon your major you will become a teaching assistant-if you decide to study for your Masters. I suspect you'd make an excellent Teaching Assistant. But that's at least three years down the road.'

She nodded silently. He wasn't telling her anything she didn't already know.

'You are going to require another source of income. And pretty damn soon.'

'Like what, Barry. Waitressing, drugs, prostitution?'

'Well?' he stifled a cough. 'Why not?'

She glared at him.

'It's hardly as if you're suggesting anything I haven't already debated internally. Waitressing, drugs, prostitution...I'm far more likely to be a consumer than a purveyor when it comes down to sex.'

'I'm like that too, Nancy. We are very similar.'

'I wouldn't jump to that conclusion. I have boundaries which I doubt are your boundaries. I'm not much of a fetishist about anything. I'm not very interested in street prostitution - I have a brother who's worked the track and who cruises parks. Sometimes he tries to solicit and sometimes he doesn't',

His face reddened again.

'Your brother worked the track. How long ago?'

She pursed her lips.

'Last year he worked mostly on Grosvenor and Bredalbane. I don't think he's shifted over to Maitland - well, maybe occasionally. I think he likes certain parks, and then seeks out closeted men who he can hit up for cash. He lives near Allen Gardens; but I don't think he's all that fond of that place. He likes Trinity-Bellwoods Park, David Balfour...'

'David Balfour Park? That's near my house in Rosedale. That's not a cruising zone for *closeted* men?'

'I know that, Barry.' She motioned to the waiter for a glass of water

'If your brother is demanding cash in certain parks then he is out of line. David Balfour Park certainly does have a reputation for park sex but *not* for prostitution.

Exceptional people often account for exceptions, she thought to herself. Etiquette can change radically when the park isn't as crowded as it usually was.

'You say you're a consumer and not a vendor; but I'm not so sure.', Barry continued. 'You seem to me far too selective - far too particular- for a *consumer*. I really think you need to loosen up, Nancy.'

She regarded him apprehensively.

'What exactly do you mean by that, Barry?'

'Have some *fun*. You're so much smarter than all the stupid idiots in my class because you've already had a life - you've already spent some time out in the real world outside of campus. So please, do not turn into some earnest, boring travesty of an academic who makes false separations between her work and her play between scholarship and pleasure.', He sipped from his glass of wine and cleared his throat before continuing. 'You flirt with polymorphousity but you're still far too control-oriented. Sex isn't *like* that, Nancy - unless your contract is for something very specifically involving control. You know you're so much smarter than essentialist lesbians and gay men, who righteously prattle on and on about their stupid communities, unaware not only of their leftover separatism but also of their complicity in the capitalist economy they claim to be opposed to. Have some more wine, for God's sake.'

'You're *drunk*, Barry'..

'Of course I'm drunk. And the night is still young.'. He leaned forward. 'What do you have to do that's so damn important. Why can't we make a night of this?'

'*What?*'

'Oh come on, Nancy. You heard me. There are many possible interpretations to my suggestion and now the ball is in your court. Isn't it?'

She sipped from her glass of water and then took a deep breath before addressing him.

'The ball *is* in my court, Barry, and I think it's time I went home and fixed myself something to eat so that I might

still have enough energy and focus to get a bit of required reading accomplished tonight.'

She stood up and threw her jacket over her shoulders.

'Oh, sit down.'

'No, Barry. I have to go. I think we've *both* had too much to drink.'

Now his voice became sharper and angrier.

'So now you're going to become moral with me. Because you have some pressing assignment that absolutely cannot be put off until tomorrow. You have to fix some stale fucking sandwich so that your relatively limited brain power can salvage this evening which it seems that I've hijacked and sabotaged. You are such a control-freak, Nancy. You are going to have to loosen up and let all that *go* if you are going to experience any sort of truly well-rounded, physical, intellectual, and emotional life.'

She remained on her feet.

'I don't disagree with much of what you've been telling me, Barry. I learn from your course, your book, and from you personally. I'm bored shitless with all my other courses and I have to make some serious decisions about them and about my future. But I would rather not blur the distinctions between your being faculty and my being your student.'

'Oh Jesus, Nancy. You must get beyond those types of simplistic binaries.'

She wheeled towards him angrily.

'Look who is talking! You are the one who can't get a hard-on unless there are forbidden boundaries are involved in the equation!'

He glared up towards her.

'You don't even know me, Miss Leonard. You have no right to make that sort of accusation.'

'I think I know you very *well*, Professor Ferguson. I will see you in your class.'

She walked abruptly towards the front door and then out onto Yonge Street. She could walk west along St. Mary Street. Back through the University campus, and then towards her apartment. Fresh air was exactly what she needed.

Except that a light rain had begun to fall harder. She realized she had enough money in her purse to afford a cab home. As she flagged down a cab and conveyed instructions to the driver she realized that she and Barry had never formally agreed that he would be picking up her share of the bar tab.

Her 20th Century Poetry class had been terribly uninspiring, as its focus had been upon the poetry of Stephen Spender. Spender's poetry bored her and also bored her poetry professor, who made it quite apparent that he considered Spender to be a lightweight contemporary of Auden and Isherwood. So, then why was Spender a mainstay on the standard modern poetry curriculum? Why was he such a distinguished member of the canon?

She shook her head. If one wished to avoid the canon; then one either sought out some form of alternative education or else one considered alternatives to education. She felt she had failed in her earlier alternative to education so now here she was - aimlessly walking through the corridors of University College towards the Refectory. Here she would then consume sandwiches and coffee. High fat and low expense dining - the story of her life up until this point.

In front of the staircase descending towards the refectory. Nancy recognized Barry Ferguson chatting with Claire Wilkinson. The pair of them appeared to be sharing a joke. The pair of them would share a sense of humour, Nancy angrily clenched her teeth.

Since their drinks at The Living Well cafe, Nancy had tried her damndest to be just another generic student in Barry's course. She hadn't experienced difficulty refraining from challenging any points in any of his dissertations. Barry simultaneously encouraged and ridiculed questions - after all, they were by definition earnest and sincere and thus *naive*. She had already made her impression on him and she had resolved to keep her distance from the man. She did still find her professor to be a provocateur, and this more than maintained her interest even though she was committed to avoiding all but the most perfunctory contact with the man.

Probably Barry and Claire's little joke was at her expense. She was after all such an earnestly repressed mature student. Barry had more or less called her such right to her face after a few too many glasses of wine. This was how he was likely describing her to his colleague, who had also singled her out for individual attention. Repressed individuals had always been adept at labeling other individuals 'repressed'. Time-honoured strategies never failed those in a position to consistently deploy them.

At least Nancy would not have to say anything more than a perfunctory 'hello' to Barry Ferguson. The tweedy-as-usual Professor Wilkinson was unwittingly providing her with an excuse to walk past the pair and ignore them. After all, interrupting one's elders was plain old-fashioned bad manners. Even she remembered this edict from her typically uneventful childhood.

'Good morning, Miss Leonard.', Barry addressed her as she now approached the descending stairwell.

'Good morning, Professor Ferguson', she mumbled without looking up at either of her two learned elders. She wondered what exactly Barry had told Claire Wilkinson about their extracurricular drinks at The Living Well Cafe. As Nancy marched down the staircase without looking back, she could hear Barry and Claire sharing another joke. She was convinced that the pair of them were laughing at her - behind her back.

At almost seven o'clock the telephone rang. Since her rice required at least fifteen more minutes to steam she mechanically walked towards the phone and de-activated her answering machine before picking up the receiver.

The caller was Barry Ferguson

'Hello, Nancy.'

How had he tracked down her number, as she had specifically never given it to him? There were a few other Leonards in the telephone book - there were actually three N. Leonards. And one of them also lived in The Annex - Norman Leonard or somebody like that. She cringed. Probably Barry had access to student directories. Damn.

'What do you want, Professor Ferguson?'

'It's Barry. Please, call me Barry.'

'What is it, Barry? *Why* did you look up my number and then call me?'

She could hear him swallowing some sort of drink.

'Nancy, look. I need to talk to you.'

'Yes?'

'I'm sorry that you misinterpreted a rhetorical question of mine the other night when we went out for drinks.'

'A *rhetorical* question?' she bristled.

'Yes, I distinctly remember everything I said to you that evening was in a rhetorical tone.'

'That's not how I remember it, Barry. I feel....when one keeps harping on a particular hypothesis; then that hypothesis becomes more than rhetorical.' She paused and cleared her throat. 'You hypothetically suggested we might 'make a night of it' twice so I no longer took it as a hypothetical suggestion. I took it as a come-on; and I decided it would be foolish for me to sleep with you. So I left; and I've decided not to have any further relationship with you aside from continuing with your course.'

'There's a major difference between a hypothetical suggestion and an imperative, Nancy. I'm sorry that you seemed to have confused my suggestion with a 'come-on'.'

Barry's voice level had increased dramatically. She was momentarily tempted to hang up on him, and then she bit her tongue.

'I suppose I'll accept your apology for my confusion, Barry. But, you did manage to disturb me.'

He swallowed something before replying to her.

'Well, quite frankly I don't feel I said anything literal enough that evening for you to be upset about. But, if you were offended by my hypothetical suggestion; then I have no choice but to believe you.'

'I...'

'Listen, Nancy. I'm meeting some friends for drinks later on this evening and I thought you might wish to join the party.'

'No, Barry. I don't think so.'

'No? It's not for a couple of hours. So, that allows you at least a couple of hours to do your required reading.'

'No, I have a lot of reading I need to get done tonight.' If he contradicted her once more she was going to lose it and curse at him.

'All right, Nancy. You win. But...if you do change your mind we will be at The Epicure. Do you know that theatre bistro on Queen West between Bathurst and Spadina? Please change your mind, Nancy. You'll like my friends and they'll like you.'

'You mean they'll find me *interesting*?' her temper flared.

'Yes, I'm sure they will.'

Nancy felt certain that she would not enjoy Barry's friends, although she was curious as to who they might be and what they might be like. Probably Barry's little drinking party would include somebody like Professor Claire Wilkinson -as well as some theatre types. Definitely *not* her idea of interesting drinking company - thank you very much.

'Thank you very much for the social invitation, Barry. However, I'm not going anywhere tonight as I have work to do. Besides, my rice will overcook if I don't look after it immediately, so, have a good night, Barry, and I'll see you at your next lecture.'

She hung up the receiver before he had a chance to respond. Then she looked at the clock on her dresser. She realized that she could safely ignore the rice for at least another ten minutes. Then she laughed out loud to herself as she reactivated her answering machine. She had no intention taking any further phone calls on this particular evening.

She again struggled with the required reading for her Communications course - Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. It was an ironic twist that U.of T. had only recently moved to implement a Commutations programme, considering Harold Innis' and Marshall McLuhan's own distinguished tenures at the institution. Considering that one of the university's own colleges was named after Innis, she snorted.

Considering that Nancy was finding concentration impossible after Barry's social invitation. She closed her book and then managed to resist a nicotine urge. The very idea of being an amusement for Barry and his friends was so unappealing she had half a mind to turn up and tell the entire party what she fucking thought of them. The idea of over-imbibing at that stupid Epicure bistro and then completely losing her marbles might be fun. But she only considered this option for a second before dismissing it.

She could now hear a repetitive music originating from her neighbour Danny's apartment- a trance-like synthesizer pattern anchored by an extremely danceable bass line. Her neighbour Danny knew a lot about music - far more than those 'alternative' musicians she had previously worked and struggled with. Danny knew a lot more than her previous collaborators about possible co-existences of mind and body.

She knew there was no way she would be able to resume her reading until the music upstairs became inaudible; but she did not yet wish for Danny's music to stop.

She also associated Danny with something she now knew she wanted - something that would assist her in the relaxation department and something that would provide her with an excuse to seek out her neighbour's company. She now had a serious urge to call on her younger neighbour to see whether or not he was a pharmacist or an alchemist. Nancy had decided that a joint was exactly what she needed for herself at this particular point in time.

She slipped out of her slippers and into her red Docs. Then she quickly walked upstairs after locking her own door. At the top of the staircase, she knocked. She knocked five times and still there was no answer. Either he had no intention of answering his door or else he literally couldn't hear her knocking over top of his hypnotic music.

But suddenly the music stopped- just as soon as she was on the verge of turning around and returning downstairs.

'Just a second!' she heard Danny's voice.

Nancy shuffled her feet in the doorway until Danny opened the door and recognized his downstairs neighbour, who had always been friendly to him but had never previously called upon him.

'Hi? I hope my music wasn't distracting you?'

She hadn't been anticipating this question. She had certainly not called on her neighbour with a complaint.

Nancy lowered her voice.

'I was wondering...if you might have a joint.'

Danny regarded her quizzically for a moment, and then smiled.

'Sure. I mean, I was just about to take a break anyway.'

She looked around his kitchen with its pile of unfinished dishes, imagining the rest of his apartment as

consisting of a studio-bedroom and a toilet. She knew her neighbour did not encourage visitors.

'Why don't you come downstairs and visit me, Danny?'

He nodded.

'Sure. Can you allow me a couple of minutes to shut everything off?'

She nodded. She resisted suggesting that he keep the music going by whatever possible means he might have at his disposal. Then she turned around and walked downstairs to her own apartment. She looked around her own kitchen and declared it to be tolerable. She could never imagine letting her dishes pile up the way he had allowed his to; although she'd known many girls who were just as enduringly sloppy as Danny was when it came to domestic habits.

So, Danny smoked dope. This confirmed her suspicions; but now she wondered what else her neighbour was fond of imbibing. She assumed that Danny would use 'club drugs' both recreationally as well as practically - considering his hours, She was curious as to what other pharmaceuticals besides Special K or Ecstasy might comprise his regimen. She could tell he wasn't a junkie- she would not be seeking out his company if she suspected he was.

She heard his knocking on her door and she let him in immediately. He was wearing a red sweatshirt and green dungarees. It occurred to her she had never seen him wearing anything else - never black leather or Levi's or anything so much older.

'I have something for you', Danny smiled.

'Well, then. Please make yourself at home and then we can smoke it together.

Danny now sat down opposite her bookcase. He glanced over her library without particularly registering any particular titles until he saw a copy of Marjorie Garber's book- VESTED INTERESTS; A PLITICS OF CROSS- DRESSING.

'Are you a practitioner?' Danny was rolling a joint in front of her almost overflowing ashtray.

'What?'

What was his question? Then she looked up and shook her head.

'No, Danny. I'm only a light reader. How about you? '

'Sometimes. ', Danny lit the joint and passed it over to Nancy 'Sometimes I was a summer skirt and Docs.'

She enjoyed a deep toke. An intuition about Danny was proving to be correct.

'You want to be a lesbian.'

'What?'

Nancy giggled. "The summer skirt and the Doc Martens. Very *regulation* of you, Danny boy.'

He took the joint back from her.

'It's *regulation*, I know. It's a moderately anti-fashion statement.'

He toked and held the smoke in.

'This is really good grass, Nancy. I have some more in case you're interested.'

She took her hit and decided she was interested - but not at this moment.

Danny smiled at her.

'I have to go out in about an hour.'

She looked at him - all ears.

'Where are you going?'

'To a private party', he passed the joint back across to her. 'I'm DJing. I do the ambient, chill-out room while my friend Terry spins the heavy techno and industrial. '

'Sounds great', she took her hit and coughed slightly. 'I think if I were to get really stoned I'd probably love it. But I don't have that kind of stamina any more.'

'No?' he shrugged his shoulders. 'It's just some work and I could use the money. Are you relaxed now?'

Nancy nodded. She was relaxed, although now feeling slightly hungry. She looked over her neighbour, whom she considered to be quite sexy. Danny was smart and very body-oriented - a very appealing combination indeed.

'Are you perhaps a touch *too* relaxed, Nancy?'

She giggled. She declined another hit from the joint as it was burned almost down to the roach and she had never enjoyed getting her fingers burned.

'Would you like a beer, Danny?'

He shook his head.

'I rarely drink alcohol; and besides, I have to work tonight. Don't you?'

She crossed her legs very slowly.

'Not really. But perhaps I don't need to have a beer right now - I can wait until later.'

She zeroed in on his face.

'I was invited out for drinks with my Lit. Crit. and Theory professor and some friends of his whom I don't think I know.'

Danny laughed. Nancy wondered if Danny knew who Barry Ferguson was.

'I'm sure you wouldn't really want to get drunk with your professor. Besides, that doesn't sound to me like it would be very much *fun*. A lot of talk and very little action.'

She laughed.

You're smart and you're funny. I *like* that.'

For a second Danny looked like a young intern - not in uniform.

'You are relaxed. Do you feel that now you've become a touch *too* relaxed?'

She watched Danny, now reaching into his huge right trouser pocket.

'I don't know, Danny. I can't be taking anything that will keep me up all night.'

'I know that.' he nodded. 'You have classes tomorrow. But a little toot won't keep you up too much longer?'

Nancy paused for a second.

'Sure. Why not?' She hadn't done cocaine for almost two years so why not?

'Do you have a surface, Miss Nancy?'

She scanned around her apartment. No, she didn't have any good surface.

'Sorry... Hey, Danny. Can you please not call me Miss Nancy? A couple of friends of mine, who've really been getting on my nerves lately, call me that. Do you mind refraining?'

She wanted him to agree with her. She wanted Danny to be her friend.

'Of course I don't mind. Hey, don't worry. I have my own little mirror- it turns out'.

She watched while Danny laid enough white powder onto his little pocket-mirror to carve out two long lines.

Danny imbibed and then gingerly passed his mirror across the table. Nancy took a deep breath, snorted half-a-line through the left nostril and then the other half through the right. She then sneezed due to pressure on the right nostril. I was like two years had never passed.

She lit a cigarette after placing a pinch of coke on the end of the cigarette.

'When we had the band in Vancouver we always had drugs-usually cheap speed but we'd buy coke when we could afford it. But I was the resident boozier. I got arrested for public drunkenness one night.'

Danny looked impressed.

'How'd you manage to do *that*?'

She crossed her legs again.

'The cops tried to lay overcrowding charges against this bar we were playing in. Completely lost it; and told this lady cop to go fuck herself.'

'Fuck *herself*?'

Nancy exhaled.

'She looked like she really needed to fuck herself. Or have somebody stick a big *hard* cock up her asshole. You like getting fucked, right?'

It wasn't a question.

'I've known I was queer since I was ten. But I can't stand the *ghetto*. It's all business fags with wretched taste in music.'

She giggled.

'It's okay for me to get off on the subversive irony of clone music - because I'm a girl.'

Danny shrugged.

'Each to their own, girlfriend.'

Nancy stood and crossed over towards her neighbour, who was laying out more cocaine.

'Are you strictly homo, Danny? Not polymorphously perverse or just plain *sexual*?'

Her snorted his line and gestured to her. She snorted her line. She wanted him. She wanted his cock in her mouth - badly.

He looked up at her.

'You fancy me. Right?'

She nodded. She didn't lie.

'I've never had sex with a woman. I could be curious; but this is not good timing.

'What are you saying, Danny?'

'Sit down. Please.'

She crossed back to her seat across the table from him.

'It's nothing personal. But, for starters, I don't have a rubber on me. Do you?'

She shook her head.

'What about a strap-on?'

'What?' Could Danny only imagine sex with a woman if it involved his being penetrated? 'I had a nice one in Vancouver but I seem to have misplaced it.'

Along with her lesbianism. she could almost hear him thinking.

Danny looked at her, taking a deep breath and waiting to make eye contact with her.

'I'm also waiting for the results of my HIV-Antibody test. I don't get the results for another week, so I'm nervous about it.'

'Do you think you're positive?' she lit another cigarette.

'It's possible', he gathered up the coke paraphernalia so he could put it back in his pocket. 'I need to know for sure what my status is. A lot of guys I know don't think about HIV - it's part of the *landscape*. You know what I mean?'

'I think so', she exhaled.

'People test positive; and then nothing happens for years. But I need to know as soon as possible.' he tried to smile. 'Then I can relax. Fuck, I mean *celebrate*.'

'I'm sorry if I'm making you nervous'. Nancy again drew on her cigarette and exhaled.

'It's not your fault, Nancy. Okay? I don't mind a little flirting; although I've never had a girl flirt with me. But, if you were making me uncomfortable; then I would have left by now. You understand?'

She nodded. She wanted to understand.

'That coke made both of us a bit nervous. Let's smoke another joint and then I have to get moving.'

She nodded again, as Danny began rolling another joint.

'This is really good grass. I can give you a bargain, if you're interested.'

She stared at him, becoming frustrated.

'I am interested; but not *tonight*. Okay? '

Danny pulled back.

'I hear you. Let's perhaps not smoke any more tonight. Let me just give you this - to smoke at your own convenience.'

Thanks.'

'I'm sorry, Nancy, but I lost track of the time. I have to get moving.'

She winced.

'Whatever you say, neighbour.'

And then he stood and said nothing further. He opened her apartment door and abruptly marched upstairs to his own apartment.

She was mildly upset at his abruptness, but not *too* upset.

After he had gone, she unbuttoned her jeans and began to play with herself - in her own time and in her own rhythm. She felt under no obligation to perform - as she was neither watching herself or imaging any other partners or spectators. Masturbation, a joint, and a beer. Then to bed and hopefully to sleep. She wished to fall into a deep sleep - one so deep that dreams would not register and thus be remembered

At eleven o'clock the next morning she was attempting to focus on her Harold Innis essay; but she was finding concentration all but impossible. She should have been in bed earlier. After her younger neighbour had left for Club Land or Rave Land; she should have called it a night. Then she *might* have been fresher for this particular day.

But concentration had been an uphill battle for some time now, particularly since her drinks with Barry.

He had upset her; and he had upset her again by crossing a line which had been tacitly negotiated between them. Nancy was one of his students - nothing more and nothing less. He was her professor in his course. And his course at least provoked her, which she couldn't claim about any of the others.

She decided she needed caffeine and nicotine. She thought about trying to quit smoking again during the not-so-distant Christmas holiday period. She needed a cigarette at this moment. A cigarette might well help her alter her thought patterns simply because she had to change her immediate environment if she wanted to smoke. She needed to get out of the Reading Room - because she was unable to do any serious reading this morning.

As Nancy approached the Refectory- with her unlit cigarette in her hand - she suddenly halted. Jeff Talbot was drinking coffee. Jeff was sitting on the boundary between the Non-Smoking and Smoking sections of the refectory. He had already seen her approaching; and it was clear to her he wanted to talk to her. There was no way Nancy could avoid Jeff without making matters worse between them than they already were.

Since he was sitting next to the smoking sexton , she decided to sit down at the next table to his and smoke her cigarette.

'Hello, Jeff.'

Jeff moved to her table. He too appeared to have not slept very well.

'Good morning, Nancy. Have you heard about Barry Ferguson?'

'What about him?'

. She nervously puffed on her cigarette. What involving Barry Ferguson might have happened; and why would Jeff Talbot know about it.'

'So you haven't heard?'

'Heard *what* ?'

'Professor Ferguson is dead, Nancy. He was *murdered*.'

She felt her body becoming numb. She felt she was becoming paralyzed.

'The suspicion is that Barry Ferguson was killed by a hustler.'

'A *hustler*?'

Do you know Derek's and my friend Sean?'

She nodded. She remembered Sean at the recent panel - how emaciated he looked then.

'Derek was talking to Sean this morning and Sean told him the news. Barry Ferguson's body was found and then identified in the alleyway running south between Grosvenor and College. Word has it that Barry was something of a regular in the neighbourhood.'

'That isn't a particularly shocking revelation, Jeff.', she nervously drew on her cigarette. 'But why would a hustler *kill* Barry? I don't believe this!'

She exhaled, and then a horrible thought occurred to her.

'Self-defense?'

Jeff finished his coffee and looked at her from across the table.

'Look, Nancy, there are some unfortunate facts about rough trade. I strongly believe - and I know you also believe - that most sex-trade workers are smart about what they're doing. They've made personal decisions and they're probably more in touch with their bodies than any other part of the population. But that's the majority. There are guys working the street who are very fucked up - on drugs, or just emotionally or whatever. And there are some johns who are really fucked-up - control-freaks who lose control of a particular situation and then act out.'

'Do you think Barry might be one of those johns?' She bit her tongue from telling Jeff what her bother Mark had told her, because Mark's account of his encounter with Barry seemed confusing to him as well as to her.

'I don't think Barry appreciates losing control of *any* situation. That's my opinion, and others share that opinion.'

'I know, Jeff.', she drew on her cigarette and then butted it out. 'I don't know what to say, and I need to be by myself..

Jeff nodded and then stood silently. He looked at her, hoping she might make eye contact with him. But she was already looking down towards the table. She remembered she had needed caffeine, but now she didn't wish to deal with the line-up and the staff behind the counter.

She was grateful for Jeff's relative restraint. He hadn't gloated about Barry getting his comeuppance or anything like that. Barry's murder - if it indeed had involved a sex-trade worker - would be upsetting to Jeff and his activist friends because of the politics involved. Whenever something went wrong on either the boys' track or the transsexual stroll or with female prostitutes; a predictable assortment of conservative politicians and residents' groups and religious fanatics were prone to becoming involved and making everything much worse than it already was..

The problem was that she *herself* had a sense of how Barry might antagonize another person enough to make the other person completely lose his -or her - temper and then act out. Barry had made a nice career for himself by claiming to be beyond any lingering identity politics; and he was hardly the only academic with a fascination about hustlers - how they weren't gay but would be 'gay-for-pay'. Of course, unlike other academics with hustler-fetishes; Barry was personally incapable of letting the boys speak for themselves.

Maybe Barry, quite frankly, had been asking for it? And maybe somebody had finally called his bluff?

Maybe Barry, for all of his tenured privilege and his surface arrogance, had been in such deep denial that he could only be aroused when he felt physical danger was involved. Maybe Barry Ferguson had finally pushed the envelope too far. And had *taken the consequences?*

She needed know what the fuck had happened to Barry. She needed to find out as soon as possible.

She recalled Barry's telephone call to her the previous evening - prior to the murder. Barry had invited her to the Epicure Bistro - for about ten o'clock - to meet some friends of his whom he thought would find her *interesting*. She had angrily declined his invitation. She had felt he had made a pass at her during their previous social date - even if he had not only denied it but also accused her of being a prude about it. But she had decided any further social interaction between herself and Barry would be ill-advised. She had vowed to herself that she would not talk to any of her friends about Barry's indiscretion as long as the man tacitly agreed to maintain his distance.

Well, he would be maintaining his distance now. Or, *would* he be? Nancy drew on her cigarette and shook her head angrily. She had made a decision to minimize the importance of Professor Barry Ferguson in her life and now some fucking psychopath had immortalized the man. Barry Ferguson would now become required reading - he would be canonized to an extent far beyond what he had enjoyed during his life. The contradictions in his philosophy had bled over into his personal life; and now his life had been terminated. The man hadn't been killed - he'd been immortalized.

Nancy checked herself. Jeff had not informed her of particular details - like the time of Barry's murder. Had Barry met with his friends earlier the previous evening, consumed a few drinks, and then excused himself before heading towards the track?

Or had he even met his friends at all?

Nancy now realized that Barry's itinerary for the night of the murder - his schedule and his spontaneous decisions - would all be investigated by the homicide police. His personal telephone directory might well have been on his person; and it might have even highlighted her own telephone number. She shuddered.

It occurred to her that, having declined Barry's invitation, that he might well have talked to his friends about her. He might have talked behind her back at considerable length. Hadn't she been certain that Barry and Claire Wilkinson had been laughing at her on that one day in the hallway leading towards the refectory? Barry had quite likely over-imbibed and then told things to his friends - things which should have remained unspoken.

Possibly at least one of Barry's drinking companions might already be informing the police about her and, in the process, inaccurately inflating her own importance in Barry's personal life. Possibly Barry had been carrying her number on his person - with an intention of calling her for a nightcap after his little soiree to the Boystown track?

Nancy wondered if Professor Claire Wilkinson had in fact been one of Barry's drinking companions last night. Surely Claire Wilkinson would at least know there was no personal involvement between herself and Barry? Or had Barry lied to Claire; or did Claire have some peculiar agenda of her own?

Nancy was now convinced that it was only a matter of time before some earnestly ambitious homicide detective would be phoning her or even knocking on her door - wanting to know everything she knew about Barry's personal life and habits. She did not need this murder and this investigation, which would now become an investigation into her life as well as Barry's. Somebody had killed Barry for whatever reason - not necessarily a personal reason or motive. What the fuck could she possibly know about this horrible event, which had nothing whatever to do with herself - aside from the fact that she knew the man, was one of his students and, despite her personal ambiguity about the man, did learn things from his writings and his teachings?

As she butted out her smoke and prepared to leave campus for the day, she realized she needed to see Barry's murder confirmed in print. She decided to buy both The Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail. Not only would there be stories in the crime pages; there would probably be obituaries and eulogies. After all, the dead man had already been notorious during his lifetime

Nancy knew she would be spending the remainder of the day reading about Barry and the known as well as suspected details of the murder. She knew she would be watching CITY-TV's live-eye investigation. Tabloid television always flourished when handed a good and sleazy celebrity murder case. Fuck the national and the international news; what viewers really want to see and hear about are murders - crimes of passion and of insanity.

She walked along the lower corridor of Hart House towards the nearby canteen, where she would be buying her newspapers. She felt numb and disgusted - with the world outside as well as with herself.

The Toronto Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, and even NOW - Toronto's weekly 'alternative' newspaper - all published obituaries for Barry Ferguson. All three were 'hot off the press'; and all three could have been written by the same hack under different pseudonyms. All three obituaries described Barry as being brilliant, controversial, and bisexual. None of the writers had any hard information about Barry's death, aside from the fact that foul play had been declared and Homicide was making this case a priority.

What puzzled Nancy was the absence of any death notices. Then she surmised that there was no particular person in place to look after these sorts of details - as Barry's death had not been any sort of foregone conclusion or inevitability. It seemed as if none of his blood relatives - if he even had any who

were still alive - were in contact with him. Had Barry completely broken off *all* communication with his former wife? Or, for that matter, any brothers or sisters or even cousins?

Either these individuals - if they did in fact exist - had been banished from Barry's life or else they had chosen not to rush things. Barry's death was highlighted in the context of the papers' crime sections; so, perhaps, whoever was in charge of his estate was letting the negative publicity die out before placing any death notices?

She shook her head, impatiently. Death notices were part and parcel of the procedure - even when there were extended families involved rather than nuclear families. This had been so with her friend James back in Vancouver, who had finally succumbed to AIDS-related complications. His prime caregivers had looked after the obituaries and the funeral and the memorial.

Barry's biological and extended families had either yet to make any arrangements; or they were out of the picture. Something peculiar was going on, as far as Nancy was concerned.

Was there, in fact, going to be a funeral - as well as a memorial. She guessed that there would have to be some sort of semi-public memorial. Barry was well-known - if not well-liked. He would have wanted a public memorial. He had a very public profile and persona.

The funeral was more likely to be a private affair, Only a few close fiends and associates would be present. But who were those friends and associates? Who would be organizing a funeral and a memorial?

Nancy wondered if Claire Wilkinson would be involved, and in what sort of capacity? Who were Barry's other companions on the night of the murder - if indeed Claire had been one of them?

Who was that woman with the Cadillac and the immaculately swept blond coiffeur, who had whisked Barry away that day after his lecture had been rushed to its conclusion?

Who were Barry's friends? Were they professional associates; or did they have nothing whatever to do with his professional life and his career?

She guessed that her upstairs neighbour was either sleeping or had already gone out for the evening. *Shit!* Some of that grass Danny had for sale might be useful precisely because it would destroy her ability to focus. She wondered whether he had anything more numbing. Heroin would be nice, she thought for a second. But Danny was definitely not a heroin person.

She also needed to talk to him about last night. He was her alibi; and he probably had even less respect for the police than she did. But they would need stories - as he might well be asked to corroborate her alibi. They didn't have to say anything

about drugs - they were having a beer together and talking about music. Simple as that, she told herself.

Her phone rang. She sat up, alertly. She decided she'd better answer the phone, so she moved quickly to prevent her answering machine from kicking in.

The caller was her brother.

'Mark. What's up?'

Her aggressive tone was not one he seemed to be expecting.

'Have you heard about your professor?'

Her professor? She took a breath and then composed herself.

'Have I heard what about Barry Ferguson? That's he's dead? That he was apparently killed by some male prostitute - possibly in self-defense?'

'I need to...'

'Yes, Mark. I've heard about the murder.' she cut him off.

Mark cleared his throat.

'Can I ask how you heard about it?'

'A friend of mine told me - at least I think he's a friend. You know Jeff Talbot. Whatever you probably think about Jeff; I appreciated his telling me about the murder before I would see it in the paper.'

Mark swallowed.

'This is bad news for a lot of reasons.'

Nancy did not want to hear a litany of reasons.

'It's bad news because the man is dead. Okay, Mark. Barry Ferguson may well have been a seriously flawed individual; but the world is a lot worse off now that he is dead.'

'You knew him differently than I did, Nan.' She could hear Mark lighting a match.

'You didn't know him, Mark. He was a trick.'

'You can get to know a trick pretty quickly, especially if your impression matches other peoples' impressions.'

She refrained from screaming at her brother.

'So, maybe Barry did have a reputation for being a bad trick. Maybe his manner was coercive. On the basis of getting drunk with the man on one single occasion; that is possibly true. It still doesn't justify somebody killing the man.'

Mark exhaled smoke from his cigarette.

'I'm not sure that's what happened, Nan. Jeff Talbot often shoots his mouth off before he knows the facts.

Cops often do the same thing.'

'Mark. Listen. I really can't talk about this any more tonight. It's not you personally. I just don't have anything further to say about Barry's murder because it's happened and I don't really give a shit how it happened and I'm just really pissed off that it happened. Okay?'

'Then goodnight, Nan. Okay?'

He hung up before she could reassure him that she wasn't angry at him particularly. Mark always wanted and demanded that reassurance - not that he ever believed it

She lit a cigarette and then opened a beer from her refrigerator. She felt badly about losing it with her brother. She did care about what happened to Barry and Mark could tell she did. Just as Barry's life had been far more complex than many people had been willing to credit him for; so was his death. She felt convinced that his murder hadn't any cut-and-dried case.

The beer was nice and cold. But she wished there was something stronger than beer in her apartment - safely stashed away for occasions when painkillers might be useful.

She had not wanted to attend any of her classes today; yet she took a chance that they might provide a healthy distraction. Twentieth-Century literature didn't fare too badly - just as she was capable of tuning in and out of D.H. Lawrence's novels, she was capable of treating the *subject* of his novels in the same manner.

But her subsequent Communications lecture - in the course where she was the furthest behind with regards to her required reading - was impossible for her to deal with. Her growing suspicion that the professor - Elizabeth Beverly - considered Nancy to be something of 'a case' was confirmed. Professor Beverly singled her out on her way out of the lecture hall.

'Miss Leonard? I can't help but noticing that you seem under the weather today. And this is hardly the first time I've had this impression.'

Nancy squirmed. She did not feel at all like having any sort of argument with Professor Beverley, whose course she knew she was doing poorly in. She had nothing to say to this professor except to tell her to please go fuck herself, so she held her tongue.

'You are frankly an enigma to me, Miss Leonard. I can sense you have a lot to contribute; yet you contribute practically nothing. Mature students specifically have chosen to resume their education because they have ambition.'

Now Nancy flared at Professor Beverly.

'A friend of mine was murdered the other day - *Barry Ferguson*? Does his name ring a bell? So, yes your observation that I seem 'under the weather' is not entirely inaccurate.'

Elizabeth Beverly flushed.

'I'm truly sorry to hear this, Miss Leonard. Of course I knew Professor Ferguson by *reputation*; although I only recall meeting the man on one occasion. I knew you were enrolled in a course he taught but I didn't know you and he were *friends*.'

Elizabeth Beverly let the last word hang for a distinct second. Nancy had chosen to use the word to describe Barry and

now she was wishing that she hadn't. Professor Beverly extended an invitation for Nancy to talk to her if there were something she needed to talk about, and then excused herself.

Nancy angrily watched her Communications professor walk ahead of her in the corridor. Although the woman was definitely in her upper-forties, she attempted to convey a younger image. Elizabeth Beverly was not a person whom Nancy felt she could ever confide in. She seemed to be the sort of tenured academic who spent more time working on her own prolific contributions to various periodicals than she spent being available to her students and to her faculty associates. Nancy could tell Elizabeth Beverly had not thought highly of Barry Ferguson and had not been terribly upset by his death.

Nancy decided to leave campus for the day. She could spend the remainder of the day sleeping and then listening to music. She hadn't brought very many CDs from her collection with her to Toronto; but she knew where to find the one she wished to play after a deep sleep. She wished to hear Klaus Nomi's recitation of Henry Purcell's death aria - a piece of music she had played before in tandem with the deaths of friends.

She strongly felt the need to engage in some sort of private ritual for Barry. There still didn't seem to be any sort of public service scheduled. And there was still no obituary. Perhaps none of Barry's friends knew who should be the one to start the ball rolling? This was unsettling to her.

Nancy wondered if Danny would be awake by now, as she let herself in the front door of her building and then walked up the stairs. She realized he must still be asleep or else she would have heard music. Danny often supplied her with chill music - morning-after music. Except Danny's mornings were other people's afternoons. Nancy was hoping Danny could provide her with a soundtrack and perhaps even some drugs

She had received no mail and no phone calls; and this was a relief. There was nothing impeding her from taking her shoes off and then making herself horizontal on the bed.

And, when she did so, sleep came to her easily. She fell into a deep sleep in which Barry Ferguson dominated her dreams. Barry had morphed into a minister for The Church of Satan or some variant; and the minister had selected *her* as the body required for a human sacrifice. She had felt too powerless to escape from the minister and she hadn't even wanted to. She had wished to be transported or teleported to whatever promised land the minister designated her new abode.

The ringing telephone shocked her. While still in her dream, she thought it was a fire alarm. Then she heard Jeff Talbot's voice leaving a message on the machine. She looked at her clock and saw it was four-thirty. She decided she's better wake up or else she would have problems falling asleep later that night.

She lit a cigarette and then decided to return Jeff's call.

'Hi, Jeff. How are you?'

'How are you, Nancy?'

She adjusted her posture.

'Well, I've had better days.'

She waited for a response, and then realized he expected her to elaborate.

'I think, for starters, I managed to upset my Communications prof; who considers me to be a 'case.''

'How did you manage to do that?' Jeff's ears were clearly positioned at high alert.

'I informed Elizabeth Beverly that a friend of mine had died, when she singled me out and informed me that I appeared to be 'under the weather'.

'Elizabeth Beverly? I hear she's another semi-official spinster?'

'I really don't know and I don't give a shit, Jeff", she angrily puffed on her cigarette and exhaled. How typical of Jeff - any professor or public figure who doesn't wear a T-shirt proclaiming the word 'Queer' he considers to be a closet case. For all she knew or cared, Professor Beverly might have been another example of a mid-life convert or she might actually be-gulp- *bisexual*. Nancy really didn't give a shit who the woman fucked - the woman annoyed her.

'I didn't mean to upset you, Nancy.' Now Jeff had modulated his tone of concern.' I was surprised to find you at home - let alone returning calls. I merely swished to leave a message saying hello and telling you to call me back at your convenience.'

Well, that was very nice of Jeff, she snarled to herself as she took another drag of the cigarette.

'I should sign off now, Nancy. I'm going over to visit Sean Cummins.''

As Jeff hung up Nancy tried to place the name 'Sean Cummins'. Then she remembered he was a friend of Jeff's and Derek's who had looked quite emaciated as he heckled Barry Ferguson at that symposium he had been a panelist on - along with that transsexual Brenda Carpenter. She shuddered. It sounded to her as if Jeff's friend was bedridden with something HIV-related.

Illness, death, murder, suicide. She did not want to hear anything further. She was grateful that Jeff had let her guess the details rather than bombarding her with them as he was usually inclined to do.

Now she wanted nothing more than to return to her dream in which Reverend Barry Ferguson was presiding over her bodily sacrifice, which would then free her to exit from this planet and thus find peace and quiet for herself on another one.

She didn't feel like listening to music just yet, so she returned to her newspapers for the day. Not the local section

and especially not the crime section - she wished to scan the national and international news.

Nancy found she could register most of the contents by virtue of speed-reading. The Reform Party of Canada was now attempting to silence their most overtly racist and homophobic members in order to attract some more mainstream voters for the looming federal election campaign. This was hardly a fresh strategy, she noted. The National Action Committee for the Status of women was mired in a power struggle between activist 'women of colour' and high-powered Rosedale lawyers, who probably couldn't give a flying fuck about issues involving race let alone *class*. This wasn't exactly a new conundrum, either. Nancy shook her head as she barely managed to read through the article about the upcoming NAC convention.

The telephone rang again. Her intuition told her this was to be an official call. She knew this caller would only be persisting until he or she reached her; so she sighed, turned the answering machine off, and then picked up the receiver.

'Nancy Marie Leonard?'

Only an official would know let alone use her second name.

'Yes?'

'You are a friend of Professor Barry Ferguson's?'

'Who am I speaking to?'

'Brian Connors, Department of Homicide. '. The man's voice was not very deep and he was attempting to sound as official as possible.

'I was one of his students and an acquaintance of his. I did not consider him to be a friend.'

'Oh?' Detective Connors raised his voice slightly. 'Your name was given to me by friends of Barry Ferguson's who he'd been drinking with prior to his murder?'

He didn't believe she and Barry were not friends. Had Barry told his friends - whoever they were - that he was meeting her somewhere for a drink.

'These people were drinking with him on the night of his murder?'

'Yes, Miss Leonard.'

Nancy couldn't name any of Barry's friends, although she strongly suspected one of them had been Claire Wilkinson. She allowed herself a beat to compose herself, and then she responded cautiously.

'Barry Ferguson obtained my number from somewhere - I suppose a student registry or maybe the phone book, and invited me to join him and some friends whose names he never told me for drinks that night. I declined his invitation. I didn't know Barry Ferguson socially - with the exception of one occasion the previous week at The Living Well Cafe on Yonge Street - between St. Mary and Irwin Streets.'

The detective's voice did not question her. The detective merely continued with his assignment.

'I'm afraid you're going to have to come down to headquarters, Miss Leonard, and give us a statement.'

'That's fine.'

She tried not to sound hesitant.

'I can come down now. Central Headquarters?'

'Fourty College Street - just west of Yonge. I'll expect you shortly, Miss Leonard.'

Then the detective hung up. Now she had no choice but to quickly freshen up and take the streetcar to police headquarters. This business shouldn't be very complicated, she tried to assure herself. She had been at home on the night of Barry's murder, alternatively working on an essay and reading in her living room. Danny had joined her and they had listened to music. She didn't have to tell any cop about the drug aspect of her alibi.

Barry had called her and invited her to join a group consisting of himself and some friends - how many friends - at the Epicure Cafe on Queen Street West. She had declined his invitation. End of story.

But it would be her word against the police's. Supposing Barry's friends had vehemently insisted he's left their company in order to rendezvous with Nancy - at some mysterious location perhaps near the Boystown Track? She felt her neck muscles tensing.

Even if she and Barry were to have hypothetically met for some sort of nightcap or other encounter; why should there necessarily be any connection between their rendezvous and the murder? Presumably a police coroner had established a time of death; so how would there have been enough time between his departure from the Epicure Cafe and the time of death? Nancy did not wish to be entertained by any possible scenarios the police might be kicking around - at the expense of their witnesses.

She merely wished to answer the few necessary perfunctory questions concerning her own alibi on the night of the murder. Then she would want to get the hell out of the interrogation room, before this over-enthusiastic detective could entertain any more half-baked theories about Barry Ferguson's final hours.

Nancy walked towards the downtown police headquarters on College Street - between Bay and Yonge. She didn't take the street car because she thought the freshly brisk wind might help her focus but it didn't help at all. She could only resolve to say as little as possible without creating any impression of hostility.

College Street depressed her. As she passed the university buildings she found herself approaching the Women's College Hospital, which was the provincial government was threatening to close. The government was running amok with their hospital closings under the transparent guise of 'fiscal

responsibility'. Downtown Toronto needed clinics and care-units like those at Women's College and the nearby Wellesley Hospital, which was about to close down and lose its HIV/AIDS unit to the Catholic St. Michael's hospital. St. Michael's was too far south of the gay ghetto for gay men who need to get to the nearest hospital as quickly as possible. Her friends Jeff and Derek were vehement about this and Nancy could see their point in this case.

The city was collapsing, and yet some things never seemed to get condemned or even be altered. In front of police headquarters there was a sculpture - a small bronze depiction of a citizen fighting an absurdly uphill battle. Jeff often ranted about this particular work of art and the cynical artist responsible. Nancy wasn't sure that Jeff was reading the work as the artist had intended. She thought the sculpture's ridiculous anti-realism was a clue to a satirical intention.

Humour may indeed have been present in the sculpture; but it certainly wasn't apparent once she was inside the building. Nancy announced herself at the reception desk and she was brusquely directed toward a room down a corridor to her left. The room contained a chair for her to sit down and wait. The chair was positioned in front of a desk which, at this moment, did not have a person sitting at it.

She saw the inspector who would presumably interrogate her through the doorway- receiving a briefing from whom she guessed to be an immediate superior. She knew they were talking about her - the interrogator was being provided with character description and a profile. Biographical information which she had frequently laughed about when among friends was not going to be so amusing today, she could tell by observing the two men.

Inspector Brian Connors entered the interrogation room and greeted her cordially enough, closing the door behind him. He was rather short and stocky. He did not look like a man she would wish to deal with when he was in an ugly mood.

'Your name, please.'

He had known her name when he called on the phone, for Christ's sake.

'Nancy Marie Leonard.'

'Age?'

'Twenty-nine.'

'Address?'

'Fifty-seven Howland Avenue.'

Inspector Connors presented a thin smile.

'Your occupation, Miss Leonard?'

'Student.'

'You don't have a source of income at the moment? Do you have a student loan?'

She recalled her conversation with Barry about possible sources of income - that night at The Living Well Cafe.

'I don't have a student loan, Inspector.'

He leaned forward towards her, after previously having loomed over his desk

'You are a 'mature student'. Am I correct?'

'Yes.'" she answered reluctantly.

'What did you do for a living before resuming your education, Miss Leonard?'

She took a breath.

'I used to sing for a rock band in Vancouver. I was the lead singer, and I wrote most of the lyrics.'

He smiled at her.

'That's very interesting.'

She didn't think it was. She knew that he already knew the answers to all of his questions.

Inspector Brian Connors decided it was time to move things forward.

'Where were you on the night of Wednesday October twenty-fourth, Miss Leonard?'

'I was at home. I had reading assignments so I decided not to go out that evening.'

His eyes narrowed.

'You had an invitation?'

She swallowed.

'Professor Ferguson invited me to join him - along with some friends if his - for drinks that night at the Epicure Cafe on Queen Street at about ten o'clock that evening. But I declined.'

'You were to join him at ten o'clock? Or was that the time he called you?'

'He phoned closer to eight o'clock.'

'Was this typical - for Professor Ferguson to be inviting you to meet him socially, Miss Leonard?'

'No, Inspector. I don't know how he had my telephone number.'

'I see. There must be some reason why he felt he could call you and invite you for a drink. Surely he didn't do this with just any of his students?'

'No, Inspector Connors.', she paused but then continued before he could cut her off. 'Professor Ferguson and I had gone for drinks on one occasion. That was on Thursday October eighteenth- at the Living Well Cafe on Yonge Street - between Irwin and St. Mary's.'

'So you declined the professor's invitation on the night of Wednesday the twenty-fourth. Did you know any of his friends?'

'No. He didn't name any of them when he called me. Because the invitation was for the Epicure, it's likely that they might be theatre people. Perhaps they had gone to a play first, I don't know.'

'Yes, that is possible. There are some theatres near that restaurant.'

Nancy was certain that Inspector Connors had already talked to at least one of Barry's companions that evening. She had strong suspicions that the companion was a certain *professional* colleague.

Inspector Connors took a breath and then shifted his line of questioning.

'Is there any person who can verify your alibi - that you were indeed at home on the night of Wednesday October twenty-fourth?'

She swallowed while trying to appear calm. She knew this line of questioning would kick in sooner or later.

'Yes. There's my upstairs neighbour.'

'What is your neighbour's name?'

'Danny.'

The inspector expected her to continue.

'Danny? Just *'Danny'?*'.

'I'm sorry, Inspector. I only know my neighbour's first name.'

The inspector now regarded her harshly.

'You're friendly with your neighbour; yet you don't know his last name. This is interesting, Miss Leonard.'

It probably was, she told herself.

'So. What were you doing with Danny. How could he possibly verify your whereabouts for the evening?.'

She took a breath and then composed herself.

'He was taking a break from his work and I was taking a break from mine, so we had a beer together.'

'You had a beer together. Is this something you frequently do with your neighbour, Miss Leonard. Is this an arrangement?'

She really wanted the man to just give up on her.

'Actually, this is the first time we've really sat down and talked.'

She unsuccessfully attempted a smile.

'What sort of work does your neighbour do, Miss Leonard?'

'He's a musician.'. This was true.

'I see. And, Miss Leonard, at what approximate time did Danny excuse himself from your company and return to his work?'

'About eleven?', she looked up at the inspector.

'That's an estimate. After Danny left, I read for a while and then went to bed.'

'You're *sure* about that, Miss Leonard?'

'Yes, Inspector.'

She could tell he didn't believe her. It was her word against his.

'What time was Professor Ferguson killed?', she asked him suddenly.

'Roughly eleven, we think. This has yet to be confirmed. But why do you ask, Miss Leonard?'

He did not expect her to answer. He let her curiosity remain unsatisfied.

Inspector Connors now strode towards the interrogation room's door and opened it. It seemed that this session had come to its conclusion - this one, anyway.

'Thank you for coming down so promptly, Miss Leonard.'

She acknowledged his gratitude.

'You're not planning to leave town by chance, are you?'

'Not until the Christmas break.' she answered hesitantly. 'I might go to Montreal for a couple of days during the Christmas break.'

He smiled.

'I hope this business will have been resolved by Christmas, Miss Leonard. But, in the meantime, please don't leave Toronto without my permission. Do you understand?'

'Yes, Inspector.', she did understand.

'Now, have a nice evening. And thank you for your prompt response.'

She walked away from the interrogation room and towards the front entrance of the headquarters building. She had no further obligation to say anything to Inspector Brian Connors until-and if- she was summoned again.

Thank you for your prompt response, Miss Leonard. As if she had any choice in the matter.

She was too angry to go directly home after her interrogation. She felt Detective Brian Connors suspected that she knew more than she did about Barry's murder. She felt the detective had disbelieved her when she insisted she'd had no contact with Barry that evening after his eight o'clock phone call.

She hadn't yet eaten, so she decided to grab a light meal at a delicatessen at the corner of Yonge and College. She knew she could order some simple Thai food - such as a curried or ginger chicken on steamed rice - and then wash it down with a beer. Nancy was angry enough that she was tempted to get drunk; but then she decided this would not be a wise course of action. Drinking alone was too often depressing; drinking with others could be either fun or very depressing. She decided against calling up Jeff and Derek. She decided it was best that she not discuss her interrogation session with anybody else.

She ordered curried chicken on rice along with a dark ale and then realized she had no cigarettes. *Shit*, she was smoking too much. She couldn't imagine finishing her beer - or perhaps ordering a second - and being without cigarettes. She promised herself that she would make a serious attempt to quit smoking- after the uncertainty around Barry's murder became resolved. In the meantime, she informed her waiter she would be returning in a couple of minutes as she needed to go buy smokes.

She knew there was a smoke shop a block or so north on the west side of Yonge Street. She walked past the various wholesale home-entertainment outlets and the sex stores towards Grosvenor Street. As she looked up she caught sight of a young

man emerging from a bar further up the street - a gay male snooker bar the name of which was at the moment escaping her.

The young man couldn't have been much more than twenty; but he already possessed a particular worldliness in his look and in his stride that seemed oddly familiar. Although she could now only see him from behind; Nancy felt *certain* the young man also had a pronounced receding hairline.

The young man was walking quickly and insistently - barely registering approaching pedestrians. His long brown hair almost covered his view; and his eyes gave observers an impression of somebody who had been imbibing substances. Nancy could see approaching pedestrians almost colliding as a few of them turned to look at the young man.

Then, a car's horn suddenly honked and the young man turned around to look behind him. He then abruptly changed his direction. He now ran towards the car that had addressed him. The car was a greenish-blue Oldsmobile which appeared to be almost good as new. Nancy could now see the driver opening the right passenger door for the young man, who *did* have a receding hairline. The driver was an older man - white, slightly stocky but otherwise nondescript.

A young man jumping into a car driven by an older man hardly constituted an unusual event in this particular neighbourhood. But she felt the older man's passenger - or trick - was one of the two young men she had seen standing around on Grosvenor Street on that night she had walked home via the track, after watching the documentary about Pasolini and the unresolved case of *his* murder.

Shit! Nancy realized she had failed to register the driver's license plate number. Not that she would ever be able to trace the license plate number of a generic greenish-blue Oldsmobile. She remembered she had slipped out to buy cigarettes; so she bought a pack of Player's Lights from the nearby smoke shop and then walked south - back to her probably too cold dinner and her dark ale.

Five young white men stood in a line against a white wall in a padded room at the downtown Toronto Police Headquarters building. The young men were all approximately between eighteen and twenty-three. Three of them were wearing baseball caps of different colours and all of them had at least the beginnings of receding hairlines.

The five young men stood facing Chris Ellis, locker-room attendant at the Central downtown YMCA who had volunteered information about Barry Ferguson's murder to the police. Chris Ellis had seen one of these five young men running down Grosvenor Street towards Yonge just as he was finishing his nightly shift at the YMCA.

Chris Ellis scanned each of the five suspects - from left to right.

Not this one on the far left - that one looks too young. Too innocent - there's always one thing about the guilty one that doesn't look innocent. What about the second one to the left? Looks older, looks tougher. No... the forehead is too small. The forehead was larger. It was also wider. *Much* wider.

The one in the middle is the tallest out of the five. That's why he's in the middle - he's too tall. What about the next one towards the right? Yes.

Yes. That's him

.His eyes give the boy away. Vary green eyes - he's the obsessive type all right. Also, He has the largest forehead. Yes, *that's the one.*

Chris Ellis gave the youth on the far right a perfunctory glance and then indicated to Inspector Brian Connors that he had made up his mind.

'The second one from the right. That's the one, Inspector Connors.'

Brian Connors now indicated that all of the young men except for the one identifying himself by the name 'Kevin' were free to leave. He then thanked Chris Ellis but warned the locker-room attendant that he should remain in Toronto until receiving further instructions. Then, Inspector Brian Connors instructed his assistants to escort the youth calling himself 'Kevin' to confined quarters downstairs in the building.

'You've got the wrong guy!' Kevin shouted as he was guided to the solitary room. But the homicide detective was not listening.

The preliminary interrogation room was classically timeless - without windows, the lighting remained absolutely consistent. No sounds from outside the room were permitted to distract the proceedings. Inspector Brian Connors was still getting *nowhere* with this young man whose name was not 'Kevin' but who refused to grant any identification - let alone information or facts. All the youth would give the detective to work with was 'the fact' that he had finished his business with the track at around ten o'clock on the night of Barry Ferguson's murder; and this meant he could not possibly be the killer because the killing happened close to eleven o'clock.

The youth carried no personal identification. Although he insistent he was not living on the street he refused to provide an address and he also had no keys on his person. The only metallic object in his possession had been a pocket-knife, which had immediately been labeled and taken to a laboratory for blood-analysis? No blood had actually been apparent on the blade or on the handle; but Brian Connors was *positive* that traces would be detected.

Although there was no clock in the preliminary interrogation room; Connors could tell it was getting late. Time was steadily ticking away and no progress was being made. The boy wasn't answering questions. He was talking as little as possible and therefore he had to be concealing something. He kept reiterating the same old story for which there would be no alibi to back him up on.

Connors was convinced that 'Kevin' was guilty as hell. He wasn't even a good liar, since he kept to his improbable story. Lying was a skill acquired by professional criminals and this kid was barely even an amateur.

Eric didn't feel he'd be able to hold out for much longer. He knew damn well there was nothing he could tell this homicide detective without there being serious consequences. He couldn't tell Inspector Connors that he was temporarily living with his friend Gary on Berkeley Street - just south of Gerrard. He couldn't tell the Inspector *exactly* where he was at eleven o'clock on Wednesday October the twenty-fourth. He'd been at Gary's at that hour -shooting up heroin.

Doubtlessly the inspector had registered the relatively fresh needle-marks on his left arm and categorized him as a junkie. That was surely why the subject hadn't even been raised during the course of his interrogation - at least, not yet. If the inspector were truly observant; he would have noticed that there weren't very many puncture holes on his left arm and none on his right. Eric only shot up occasionally. He didn't have a habit; but Gary had a serious habit and Eric did not want to be directing the police towards Gary. Gary dealt in order to finance his habit. He was at the bottom of a pyramid and therefore highly

vulnerable. Small-time dealers were easy marks for the drug squads. Busting small-time dealers and users created an impression that law-enforcement agencies were actually accomplishing something in their ongoing battle against 'the drug problem'.

Eric silently glared up at Inspector Connors. If the cop had him pegged for a junkie who had intended to hold up the victim but who then wound up killing the man when he resisted; then why hadn't any *money* been taken from the man's wallet? Why hadn't the wallet left on his person been rifled through and why weren't useful items stolen from it? The murder victim's identification had been found in his wallet - he had been identified immediately upon discovery of the body. The dead man had many credit cards in his wallet - the man had been well-off. Barry Ferguson was a well-known academic, according to the newspapers and the television newscasters. He'd been a bisexual English professor with a good-selling book and a reputation for seeking out rough trade.

Barry Ferguson had been a controversial academic gentleman who could well afford to satisfy his taste for working-class contracted sex. The sleaziness of it all was what turned the man on. That was what all of the media had been saying - that had been the word on the street. Eric had never heard of Barry Ferguson before being hauled in as a suspect - by a locker-room attendant at the YMCA who he'd seen leaving work but whom he had never talked to. Eric remembered Barry's face - he'd definitely seen the man cruising the track on at least a few occasions. He had heard *rumours* that Barry had been a bad trick and was to be avoided. Eric had never serviced the man. He could say that to the homicide inspector and he would be telling the truth.

Barry Ferguson had been some sort of minor celebrity and he was just a rent boy whose street name wasn't his birth name. Eric had left home at fifteen and he wished he's done it earlier. The *last* thing he needed was for his father to be looking for him again. He had been relieved that Dad had written him off; but now Dad would probably be coming looking for him again. Eric Cunningham - junkie rent boy. Dad would have to get him off the street and into some *safe* place - like a psychiatric institution.

Eric was prone to depression. When the knife would be coming back from Forensics; the only blood traces they would find would be his own blood. He did carry it with him for self-protection if it were to become necessary; but he had never used it on any body except for his own. He had slashed his left wrist earlier last Wednesday - the day on which he was suspected of killing Professor Barry Ferguson. Surely Inspector Connors had registered the scar and was biding his time about it?

Eric knew technically he was under no obligation to say anything more than his basic story until he had a lawyer; but he also knew he couldn't have a lawyer until charges were formally laid against him. He didn't want to be represented by some hack merely performing a function for The Crown. He wanted a real

criminal lawyer - one who could quickly break down that closet-case attendant until the poor dupe admitted he had been making a snap identification under police pressure. He wanted a top-notch lawyer who would aggressively tell the Crown their evidence was *circumstantial* - to put it mildly.

He knew damn well that high-powered lawyers cost money he certainly didn't have. So where was the gang from Maggie's - an activist organization of and for sex-trade workers? Where were representatives from Prostitutes Rights? He hadn't been charged yet - the cops were going to keep everything hush-hush and avoid any negative publicity. The cops had already been accused of jumping the gun too quickly when prostitutes were involved - unless of course prostitutes were the victims.

Shit. Eric realized the inspector was reaching the end of his rope. He didn't feel he could hold out much longer without talking about Gary - without mentioning his illegal alibi. And without telling the inspector about this other guy he'd seen on the track - who looked like himself except a few years older.

He wanted to tell the inspector about this *other* man. But he knew the cop wouldn't believe him. Why would the cop *want* to?

Inspector Brian Connors sat impatiently in the office of his immediate superior. He knew why Superintendent John Sutcliffe had summoned him and he wished the older man would come quickly to the point.

But Superintendent Sutcliffe was still not speaking. The superintendent was methodically pacing the floor behind his desk with his hands folded behind his back. Not beat cop or even junior homicide detective would be allowed to maintain such an unofficial posture. John Sutcliffe, however, used this particular combination of sloppiness and strained formality to *considerable* effect.

Then Superintendent Sutcliffe unfolded his hands before sitting down at his desk.

'You realize, Brian, that there's no point in laying charges against our little suspect until we've heard something applicable from forensics and from DNA.'

Yes, Inspector Connors had been expecting such a reminder. However, he did have a credible enough witness who had seen 'Kevin' in the vicinity of the crime. And the youth's manner made it obvious he was guilty. Connors could tell 'Kevin' was a street name; and he couldn't get another name out of the boy. The kid was definitely hiding something; so why not persist until the kid broke down and confessed? Time and time again this approach had been successful; so why change tactics *now*?

He could tell the suspect was hiding something; but whether the boy had acted alone or had done the dirty work for somebody else - that was what had yet to be determined. Either

way it looked like there was an open-and-shut case against the boy. A closeted or reckless older man with a lot of cash to throw around meets his match with a drug-damaged hustler. Probably the client had tried to pull some sort of a fast one on the youth and the youth had lost it. Connors knew it was only a matter of time until the boy lost it *again*; and that was what he was after.

'You can't keep that boy in custody for very much longer unless you're prepared to lay charges, Brian.'

John Sutcliffe was now cutting the tip off of a Cuban cigar before toasting it. Clearly the superintendent wasn't going to be detaining Inspector Connors for much longer.

Brian Connors took a deep breath, and then responded to the superintendent.

'I think one more *extended* session should nip it in the bud, Superintendent. I think -especially if he's covering for somebody else - he'll be cracking soon.'

John Sutcliffe seemed at least temporarily appeased.

'Then one more and that's it, Brian, unless he does confess. If you can't get a confession from him before forensics and the DNA test results are in; then we'll have to let the young man go. And then we can follow him - never letting him out of sight. Do you *understand*, Brian?'

Brian Connors understood. He knew this particular session had now concluded as he rose and then walked out into the corridor.

Inspector John Sutcliffe lit the cigar and then shook his head with an angry frustration.

Nancy had finally finished reading Virginia Woolf's ORLANDO and she found herself particularly impressed by the fact that in Woolf's novel Orlando's gender-switch seemed to occur outside any realm of psychological causality. In the film adaptation Orlando had realized he was a she because he had never been able to stomach war; and Nancy had been put off by the simplistic essentialism of it all.

She was on the verge of opening a beer when she heard knocking on her door. She decided to ascertain the caller's identity before opening the door. But this strategy would of course deny her the option of pretending not to be home.

So, she took a chance and she was in luck. Her visitor was Danny from upstairs. Nancy was now in the mood for a distraction, so she eagerly opened her door and invited Danny to come in.

'Break time?'

'Good timing, Danny. What can I get you?'

What could he offer her was more to the point.

'Feel like smoking a joint, Nancy. I feel like celebrating.'

She paused for a moment, and then remembered what had been on her neighbour's mind.

'You're negative?'

'You're damn *right* I'm negative.'

She sat down across the table from him.

'Then we should celebrate.'

At the same time, she resolved that this evening's drug intake should not exceed one joint.

Danny finished rolling the joint. lit it, and then passed it across the table to Nancy. She enjoyed a good toke and she felt the effects immediately. She had noticed that ashes had spilt onto her green dungarees, which were practically identical to her neighbour's apparently sole pair of trousers. She wished she had a spare pair of slacks to offer him - not that he would fit into any of her clothes. He was skinnier than she'd ever been.

'So, Nancy. Tonight I'm celebrating. I don't have to work.'

'Well, what's your itinerary?'

She watched him take a hit from the joint before he passed it back over to her.

'You're stop number one. Then I'm off to a rave out somewhere - St. Clair and Lansdowne. I dropped a hit of E; but it still hasn't kicked in.'

She savored the joint before passing it back to him.

'I haven't done Ecstasy for years, Danny. I was never much for club drugs.'

'Right. You were a rocker type.' he smiled but not condescendingly. 'And then, my plan is to get myself royally fucked.'

For a second she wished she could oblige him. But only for a second.

'Danny?' she very consciously altered her tone. 'I I have to talk to you about something.'

'What?'

He passed the joint back across the table to her.

'You are my alibi for the night of Wednesday, October twenty-fourth.'

'What the fuck are you talking about, Nancy?' Suddenly Danny became visible agitated. 'What *happened* that night?'

'That's the night when my English professor was murdered. You came down and visited me, right? We listened to music and had a beer, right?'

He was both curious and nervous.

'Your English professor?' He finished off the joint, placing it in her ashtray so it could burn out on its own.

'That professor who was killed on the track? *Barry Ferguson?*'

She nodded, reaching for her cigarettes.

'Danny, do you remember I told you he'd invited me to meet him for drinks - along with some friends of his whom he didn't name?'

'Yes, Nancy. I remember you told me you turned the invitation down.'

'Well', she lit her cigarette. 'My name was given to the police. Possibly he'd mentioned me to these friends of his; and they thought I might have seen him later.'

His eyes narrowed.

'You're a suspect?'

She exhaled smoke away from him.

'There's no way they could be that dumb, even though the cop who interrogated me was pretty fucking stupid. But he suspects I know a lot more than I do.'

'Is there a suspect?'

'Not that I know of, anyway. ', she drew on her cigarette. 'What if there were a suspect and the cops thought there was some connection between that suspect and her?'

'Shit, Nancy. This is really bad.'

'You're telling me, Danny.' She could see his knees tensing up as he sat across from her. 'I had to tell the cops that you visited me, so I could have an alibi that I was home. She took another drag. 'Obviously I didn't say I was doing drugs with my neighbour.'

'Did you give them my name?'

'Only your first name. And they think my alibi's fishy because I couldn't give them your last name.'

'They *know* my last name, Nancy. It's Bailey. Daniel Edward Bailey - age twenty-three.'

He looked at her, worried.

'Nancy Leonard.'

'I know. I see your mail sometimes.' Danny stood up.
"Nancy, I have to get going. I don't want to hear any more about murdered English professors and amateur hustlers and cops, okay? I want to have a blast tonight and this has definitely brought me down.'

She shook her head while drawing on her cigarette.

'I have to get back to my reading so I can forget about Barry Ferguson and the cops for the rest of the evening- at least. But it's hard, Danny. It's really hard. Sorry I brought you down.'

'It's not your fault, Nancy.'

He kissed her gently, and then he remembered something.

'Hey, are you still interested in buying some of this grass? I can give you a bargain.'

She decided she needed some grass available for whenever she wanted to smoke by herself.

'Yes, I'll take you up on that. But only a dime.'

He nodded.

"Then, let's make this transaction now. While nobody else is watching.'

'Definitely, Danny. I'll be back in a second.'

He had the correct amount all measured out and wrapped for her by the time she returned from her dresser drawer where she kept petty cash.'

'This is great, Danny. This should last a while - it's not as if I'm a major pothead.'

'No? ', he was now smiling again. 'But there are worse things one could do with your life than to be a major pothead, Miss Nancy Leonard.'

She took a final drag from her cigarette and then butted it out in the ashtray, beside the joint.

'Thanks for everything, Danny. Thanks.'

He walked towards her front door. She walked to the door behind him.

Then he turned.

'Wish me luck, neighbour. '

She gave him an enormous hug. Right at this moment Danny Bailey made more sense to her than anybody else she knew on the planet. She wanted her neighbour to salvage this evening and have a truly wonderful night of it.

I wish you a *bon voyage* and a wonderful *fuck*. How does that sound?'

' Like music to my ears, Nancy Leonard. I wish you happiness. I think you deserve it.'

Then he left. Nancy could hear her perfect neighbour walking up the stairs before his imminent departure for Club Land and Rave Land. Oh - to be younger and sexier and not upset about murdered professors, whose murders made no sense to her at all?

She walked back towards her dresser drawer and cleaned out a distinct storage space for her drug stash. Then she decided to watch the late-night news before packing it in.

But, there were no further reports or updates on the Barry Ferguson murder case. Nancy suspected the police had some sort of hot lead they were keeping secret - a hot lead that was completely wrongheaded and futile.

She finished her cup of coffee and then prepared to leave the Arbour Room. But, as she was buttoning up her jacket she noticed -over her right shoulder - a fortyish and rather heavy-set man whom she had seen at home among the students and the homeless people who came to the Arbour Room for relatively cheap meals and coffees. Nancy had never seen this man before - at least, never on campus.

He certainly wasn't a street person - the suit was too recently pressed although it was not an expensive suit. At first she feared this man might be a predator of sorts; but then it occurred to her that the man was an undercover cop attempting to pass as a downtrodden citizen.

She realized that the Homicide Department or, at least, Detective Brian Connors - expected her to lead them to their man. Unfortunately this plain-clothes cop resembled nothing more than a boys' hockey coach trying to pass for either an unemployed eccentric or an absent-minded professor.

Too bad the undercover cop hadn't been tailing her when she'd spotted the youth she'd seen standing around on the track - not too long before the night of Barry's murder. Too bad the undercover cop hadn't been present to jot down the license plate number of the car the young man suddenly climbed into.

Where had that car been going, anyway? And who had been the driver?

Nancy gritted her teeth. So she wasn't a de facto suspect herself; but she was considered a suspicious character with suspicious associates? The absurdity of the police employing this stupid-looking man to follow her did not amuse her. Whenever she felt like smoking a joint; she would have to pull her curtains closed - probably such an action would titillate the cop to an end.

She scowled as she left the building and walked out into the chilly late afternoon. She didn't turn around to see whether or not she was being followed.

Then she stopped for a moment. Something had hit her - something more disturbing than the cops' absurd suspicions about her being connected to Barry Ferguson's murder. Nancy cursed at herself for not clueing in earlier.'

The cops didn't give a shit about *her*. She was only useful to them because she would soon be leading them to her neighbour. It was *Danny* they were interested in - not her or Barry Ferguson's murder. She had been making things too damn convenient for the cops. Of course the Homicide Department and the Drug Squad compared notes. Shit!

She quickly decided not to go straight home. She would go to the Cineplex Odeon at the Carlton complex and find a movie she could make herself curious about. She owed that much to Danny.

She struggled with her essay on Beckett's WAITING FOR GODOT. The different dialects respective to particular characters was throwing her off. She wanted to believe Lucky The Horse's scatological monologue was either Beckett's homage to Joyce or else his scathing parody of the same writer. However, she was all too aware that proof was necessary and that footnotes were important. They were not impressive for their own sake; but they were mandatory or else an essay would appear to be incomplete.

Then the telephone rang. Nancy let the receiver ring three times before deciding she should take the call.

'Nancy Leonard.'

The caller's voice was female and not quite English. Nancy decided to let the caller identify herself first.

'I'm sorry to be bothering you, Miss Leonard. It's Claire Wilkinson.'

"Yes?"

Nancy's tone was hesitant. She could hear Professor Wilkinson clearing her throat.

'There's something I need to talk to you about.'

'Well? I'm here', Nancy wanted Claire Wilkinson to speed things up and get to the point.

'I would really prefer to speak to you face-to-face. One-on-one, if you'd prefer. Is there somewhere we could meet?'

Nancy thought about this for an extended moment. She decided it would be wise to hear Claire Wilkinson out.

'I'd prefer somewhere off campus if you don't mind, Professor Wilkinson.'

'Not at all. Where do you live, Miss Leonard?'

'In the Annex. The not so *upscale* part of the Annex - on Howland.'

Claire Wilkinson again cleared her throat.

'I'm not far from you. What about the Idler Pub?'

Nancy wasn't sure about the Idler. She'd never been before; but she thought it was all right to go on a Monday - when there weren't any bad poetry readings to deal with.

'You don't have to drink if you don't want to, Miss Leonard.'

Nancy wasn't sure if she wanted to drink alcohol with Claire Wilkinson. The woman was after all practically a stranger. But by now she had become quite curious as to whatever the Chaucer scholar wished to discuss that couldn't be discussed over the telephone.

So, Nancy agreed to meet Claire Wilkinson at the Idler Pub - in about a half-hour to forty-five minutes time.

She would drink some coffee before heading out to this rendezvous.

Claire Wilkinson was already well-installed at a table by the time Nancy arrived at the Idler Pub. The Chaucer scholar was sipping on what appeared to be a stout and puffing on a cigarette. Although there was no evidence of any meal she might have eaten; Nancy wouldn't have been surprised to learn that the professor had enjoyed a Shepherd's pie - meat and potatoes with a great deal of starch.

'I hope I haven't kept you waiting, Professor Wilkinson/.'

'You haven't. And please, call me *Claire*.'

Nancy nodded without responding further.

Claire Wilkinson drew at length on her cigarette and then extinguished it.

'Order whatever you would like to drink, Miss Leonard.''

"Nancy", she cut in, unsure as to why.

'This is on me, Nancy.'

Nancy refrained from commenting that she was perfectly capable of looking after her own tab. Then she flagged the waiter and requested the lightest beer on draught. If she found herself becoming unfocused; then she would be switching to coffee.

Claire Wilkinson regarded Nancy curiously as the waiter quickly delivered the light draught beer.

'Nancy, the reason I need to speak to you face-to-face is because I feel you should know that I was one of Barry Ferguson drinking companions on the night of the murder.'

Nancy did not speak because she wished for Claire to continue. She had more than suspected Claire Wilkinson to have been one of the group at The Epicure because she had sensed that Barry and Claire were campus colleagues of a sort - birds of a feather. She wondered what exactly had prompted Claire to divulge this information to *her*.

'You had been invited to join our party but, according to Barry, you declined his invitation. Probably a wise decision - in retrospect. Excuse me for a second, Nancy. I have to pee.'

Claire Wilkinson stood and then walked in the direction of the ladies' facilities. In her herring-boned tweed trousers and flat-topped brogues; the professor looked androgynous in a rather English-boarding school sense of the word. Nancy shuddered. She realized that in another twenty years she herself

might come to resemble Claire Wilkinson if she were not careful with herself - all right angles and somewhat filled out.

She lit a cigarette and sipped on her draught. She could tell Barry and Claire were cohorts that day in the hallway, when the pair of them had appeared to be laughing at her expense. What she needed to learn was whether or not she had been the absent subject of ridicule or speculation among the drinking party the night of Barry's murder - whoever the other members of the group might have been. And how and why did the cops have her name and phone number? Had it been on Barry's person when his body had been stumbled upon? She hadn't received any follow-up calls from Barry that evening; but perhaps he had been carrying his number on his person in case he felt like trying to persuade her to join him for a nightcap - whatever might have constituted a nightcap for him.

Claire returned to the table and sat down. Nancy could not believe the size of the older woman's shoulders as Claire eased her way into her chair.

'Yes, Nancy. I think you made a wise choice in staying home on that particular evening.'

Why? Had *something* occurred that triggered Barry off - that caused him to suddenly leave the others behind?

'I appreciate you telling me all this, Claire. But I don't really understand why you need to?'

Claire lit another cigarette.

'You made a smart decision not to pursue any further relationship with Barry Ferguson. In many ways, Barry was a *horrible* person.'

Nancy became incredulous

'But I thought the two of you were friends?'

The older woman now laughed angrily.

'Of course Barry and I were friends. Helen and the other two members of our party were also friends of Barry's - as far as Barry Ferguson would ever allow anybody to be his friend.'

Nancy drew on her cigarette for a second, and then exhaled.

'Who is *Helen*?'

'Helen Bingham has been my partner for nearly twenty years. And the others in the party were Jeremy Rowntree, who teaches History up at York University; and Dave Townshend, who is Jeremy's partner and who has some involvement in the theatre. Which is why we chose to meet at the Epicure. Dave is acting in some wretched play around the corner from the bistro.'

Nancy was trying to place the name 'Bingham'. She felt certain that she had known somebody with that surname in Vancouver; although it was not a terribly unusual surname.

'I would like to order another stout. How are you doing, Nancy?'

'Sure. Why not?'

Claire motioned to the waiter to bring another pint of stout and another light lager to the table. She drew on her cigarette and then exhaled towards the ceiling.

'Nancy, did Barry make a *pass* at you?'

Nancy said nothing. Why was Claire Wilkinson asking this question? Had Barry confessed or bragged to his friends? Had Barry derogatorily labeled her as being a flirt - a lot of talk but ultimately no action?

And what exactly constituted a 'pass' according to Claire Wilkinson?

'That's not really a word I would use to describe a minor incident, Claire.' Now Nancy could hear herself speaking very clearly - as if she were walking on eggs. 'He did tell me found me attractive - twice on that one particular evening at the Living Well Cafe. After the second time; I informed him that I was uncomfortable. Earlier that evening, he had asked me if I was strictly lesbian or whether I was bisexual; and when I said 'bi' that set him off. ''

Nancy butted out her cigarette and finished her first draught as the waiter delivered a second.

After the waiter finished his business, Claire looked at Nancy quite intently.

'Barry thought *everybody* was really bisexual, Nancy. So, if you indeed did label yourself as such; then in his mind you were further advanced than the majority of people. You were his type - as far as women go.'

Nancy sipped thoughtfully on her draught.

'I know, Claire. I'm quite aware of his position that heteros and homos do not really exist and that people should stop referring to themselves by those labels. I've read this in THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE and I've heard him reiterate this several times - on and off campus.'

She nervously slurped her beer.

'Claire, did he *tell* you that he had propositioned me or something? Did Barry really have a thing about me?'

'After mentioning to the four of us that you had declined his invitation to join us, Nancy, I don't recall him mentioning your name for the remainder of the evening. But, let's just say that Barry Ferguson was extremely familiar to me. Let's just say that he was locked into some rather unpleasant patterns of behaviour.'

'What sort of patterns, Claire?'

'Good Lord! Barry had managed to convince himself that he coveted young women when in reality he only coveted young men. Barry wasn't a pedophile; but the young men had to be in their early twenties or even their upper teens. And of course they had to be strangers, whose names he would never learn. Barry was incapable of relating to men *emotionally*. He thought he could relate to women; but he couldn't really do that, either. The man's mind and body were unfortunately more than slightly out of synchronically with one another- to put it mildly.'

Claire took a last drag on her smoke and then butted it out quickly before Nancy had time to articulate any reaction.

'I am worried about what *could* have happened between you and Barry, Nancy, because you are *definitely* his type, you

are attractively androgynous - if you don't mind me saying so - and you are intelligent. And you also have an ambivalence about rigid identities and identity-politics that, for whatever it might be worth, Barry would find tempting and inviting.'

Claire Wilkinson became silent. How could Claire have tolerated Barry for so long, Nancy wondered? Probably with a great difficulty; or by turning more than a few blind cheeks. Claire herself had probably lived a lifetime of tolerating those who considerately tolerated her.

Claire took a large sip of stout and then cleared her throat.

'I hope you don't get the impression that Barry would have hit on you if you had chosen to join us on the evening of his murder. When Barry excused himself at about ten-thirty; we all knew damn well where he was off to. But he never really talked to me about his anti-social or non-social lives. I've known the man for years and certain subjects were always out of bounds with him.'

Nancy shook her head, and then tried another tack.

'My brother, who turns tricks, once told me he had unpaid sex with Barry in a park.'

Claire lowered her head and her voice.

'Which park? David Balfour?'

'No, Trinity-Bellwoods.'

Did your brother tell you this after seeing Barry's picture in all of the papers, Nancy?'

She shook her head.

'No. He knew I took his class. He knew I found the man interesting and he was worried about me. He thought Barry was dangerous - his encounter with him had been risky.'

'How?' asked Claire. "Did Barry refuse to use a condom?'

"Mark didn't really tell me anything specific, unfortunately. He told me he felt Barry might stalk him afterwards - he feared Barry might become violent.'

Claire disgusted this information and then nodded silently.

'I don't think we should be drinking any more tonight, Nancy.'

Nancy did not disagree, but she wondered why Claire had suddenly arrived at this decision. Had the older woman ran out of information to convey' or was she afraid of conveying any more?

'Finish your beer, Nancy, and I can give you a lift. Is that all right?'

Rain had been mentioned during the six o'clock forecast, so Nancy decided to take Claire Wilkinson up on this offer. She also remained silent while Claire paid the tab, since the older woman had made it clear that she would be doing so.

It certainly had started to rain outside. And Nancy suspected that Claire Wilkinson had already been drinking prior to their meeting at The Idler Pub. Still, she herself had not driven a car for some time - since her move from Vancouver. So, she methodically fastened her seat belt and took a chance on Claire's driving. It wasn't as if they were embarking on a vacation together.

'A small warning, Nancy. Smoking is *forbidden* in my car.'

'Just as well". remarked Nancy.

"You sound almost relieved?'

'I'm finding myself smoking too much, Claire. When I lapsed last summer I thought I could keep it down to a two-cigarette per day habit. I haven't been exactly successful.'

Claire started the ignition and eased her way onto Davenport Road.

'I'm afraid I've given up giving up. But, I do refrain from smoking in the car and in our living room. Helen has asthma, as well as her boundaries.'

Claire's partner probably had many boundaries, Nancy thought to herself.

'Where is your house, Claire? I'm presuming you own a house.'

'In the East Annex. Are you familiar with Tranby Street?'

Nancy wasn't familiar. The East Annex, a stone's throw away from the Idler Pub, was well beyond her means as well as those of everybody else she knew in Toronto - with the probable exception of tenured faculty members.

'It's not as *toney* as you probably think it is, Nancy.". Claire turned to face her passenger as the car sat for a moment at a red light. "I've been teaching for twenty-five years, so I haven't managed too badly . But Helen's income is modest. She's writer; and that field is definitely rather hit-and-miss.'

'What is Helen's last name again?'

'Bingham.".

Nancy attempted to place the name 'Bingham'. There had been somebody in Vancouver's grrrl-rock scene with that name. *Somebody's* real name - as opposed to stage name - was or had been 'Bingham. Linda Bingham? Sarah Bingham?

Nancy wished to resolve this little mystery; but this did not seem to be an opportune moment.

The traffic light changed to green.

'Claire?

"Yes?'

'Where did Barry live? In Rosedale, right?'

Claire looked at the curving road ahead of her, and then turned towards her passenger.

'Yes, in Rosedale. On Glen Road..

Significantly tonier than The East Annex, and not too far away from David Balfour Park.

'What was his house like?'

Claire was signaling her turn from Davenport onto Dupont.

'I wouldn't know. I was never invited.'

'What?'

They rode silently for a moment.

'I don't believe this. I don't believe you.' Nancy took a breath. 'How can you possibly be friends with somebody for years and years and never once be invited to their house?'

Claire shrugged her shoulders.

'People have their boundaries. You're on Howland, right?'

Nancy nodded.

'Look, Claire. It's *poor* people who don't entertain socially because they can't afford to. They don't have enough space to entertain. Rich people who have lots of space have to do at least *some* entertaining - unless they're hermits. They have all this room they feel compelled to fill up.'

'I don't think you know very many rich people, Nancy.'" Claire drove slowly and carefully in the rain. 'Barry was comfortable - although that wretched book of his had definitely boosted his income before his death.'

Claire slowed down, anticipating an imminent turn.

'Left or right on Howland?'

'Left.'

'Thank you. What you don't realize, Nancy, is that Barry was always being invited to other people's homes; and therefore he didn't feel at all compelled to entertain.'

'But you can only keep that going for so long, Claire. People have limited tolerance for parasites.'

Claire smiled icily after making the turn.

'A lot of people had a high tolerance level when it came to Barry Ferguson. .The man was *entertaining*; and that's the only thing that matters to many people. You have different values than many people whom I know; and so do people whom I know are friends of yours. Jeff Talbot, for example, strikes me as being entirely deficient in the sense of humour department.'

Nancy chose not to respond. She was almost home and she had one question remaining.

'Claire, did you know Barry's wife and their son?'

Claire drove slowly- keeping track of the house addresses.

'No, I didn't.'

Nancy wasn't getting anywhere. She looked at Claire Wilkinson, angrily.

'Well, damn it, did Barry ever talk to you about his ex-wife - and about their son? Was he at all in contact with his son? And what about his wife?'

' Not that I know of. You see, Nancy, if Barry made it clear to me that a certain subject was out-of-bounds; then how the hell am I supposed to know one way or the other?'

Nancy shook her head

'Believe what you want, Miss Leonard. I've known Barry for longer than I've known Helen. I knew him when he was married; but I never met the wife. They lived separate lives. Many couples live that way; and that is why their relationships endure. Obviously Barry was an individual exception to that truism. Are we almost there?'

'Five more down on your left.'

Claire stooped the car, then drove slowly into a parking spot which was available.

'Look, Nancy, I realize that you were and are curious about Barry. Perhaps you are even infatuated with him. But...you have to move on. Things are different now than they were when Barry and Helen and I were young; so I think you should frankly you consider yourself to be *fortunate*. I must be off now. I have work to prepare before Helen arrives home. If you need to talk to me about your situation at the university; please don't hesitate to drop by my office. Good night, Nancy, and thank you.'

'Thank you, Claire.'

Nancy helped herself out of the passenger seat and then walked towards her building. As she walked up the staircase she wondered why she had automatically thanked Claire Wilkinson. For *what*, she muttered to herself. For telling her things that ultimately didn't clear up anything? For confirming everything she had always suspected about Barry Ferguson as well as about herself? For being a liar?

She checked her answering machine and was relieved to find no messages. The two beers and the conversation with Claire Wilkinson had worn her out. They had made it impossible for her to attempt any further required reading for the night. Nancy knew this without opening up any of the books waiting for her on her working table.

Modern Poetry class had been irritating and frustrating. Nancy had always heard rumours that Eliot's WASTELEND was one of those canonical masterpieces that always seemed to turn up on required reading lists, whether or not one wished to be exposed to the poem yet again. Alas, Eliot's masterpiece had been the subject of a lecture she had barely managed to endure.

Sipping a coffee and smoking a cigarette in the Refectory, Nancy again found herself preoccupied about relationships between Modernism and Fascism. Even though Germany's National Socialists had proclaimed themselves a worker's party; Hitler and the Nazis had enjoyed widespread support among the English aristocracy. All too typical, she exhaled in disgust. The anti-Semitic upper classes, who had never abandoned their preferences for feudalism, were all too willing to allow mad artists like Hitler and Mussolini to front for them and then subsequently take the fall. And, especially in Hitler's case, to personify a hysterically vulgar anti-Semitism that would popularize their own genteel protectionism.

'Nancy? '

She looked up to see Jeff Talbot approaching her table. There was no chance for her to pretend not to have heard his voice calling her name.

'Nancy, do you remember my friend Sean Cummins?'

Surely it hadn't happened already? Surely he wasn't yet on his death bed?

'Yes?' she managed.

'He's come down with pneumonia.' By now Jeff had seated himself at the table.

'Are you *sure* it's pneumonia?' Now she managed to sound at least concerned.

'Yes, fuck it, it's PCP. It took the doctor a while to make the diagnosis because Sean's white T-cells count isn't as low as it usually is for PCP.'

She drew on her cigarette, squirming uncomfortably.

'How is he now?'

'Still very weak.'" Jeff looked at her as directly as she would allow him to. 'Derek and I are cocking for him tonight. Why don't you drop by and visit, or maybe even for dinner?'

Nancy digested this sudden invitation, and then shook her head.

'I don't really know Sean very well. So, it wouldn't be good for him to have somebody like myself imposing on him.'

Now Jeff regarded her with a clear disapproval.

'He remembers you, Nancy. He often asks about *you*. Getting to know a new person would probably be good for Sean - as well as for yourself.'

She held firm.

'Well, please say hello to him on my behalf. But I more than suspect the last thing Sean needs is for his abode to be transferred into Grand Central Station. I think he needs specific physical and emotional support from his immediate close friends. Does Sean have a boyfriend?'

"Yes, Nan. Don't you remember meeting Chris? Chris Nelligan?'

'Oh, right. I'm sorry, Jeff. I forgot his partner's name.'

"Well, Chris is holding up pretty well - considering the circumstances. But he can't stay home *all* the time, Nan. Chris has to work. And Sean's been having trouble with his drug plan.'

"Yes", Nancy absently nodded. "Money.'

'You do seem to be a bit under the weather today, don't you Miss Nancy. Are you hung over?'

Jeff really should be majoring in medicine, she thought to herself as she butted out her cigarette. Or, even worse, psychiatry.

"You really do look tired, Nan. You smoke too much.'

'It's an *addiction*. Jeff. ', she glared at him. 'We all have our addiction, okay. If you must know what I did last night; the answer is relatively fuck all. Early in the evening I met with Claire Wilkinson for a couple of pints at The Idler. Then I went home. That's been pretty well the story of my life... lately'.

Now Jeff's eye-sockets were truly on the verge of exploding.

'You met *Radclyffe Hall* for a couple of pints. Whatever for?'

'I did indeed. ", Nancy was now enjoying his discomfort. "My first impression of Professor Wilkinson was not unlike yours; but she's not really like that. If you pry her a little bit; she's actually rather vulgar in this sort of English way.'

'Yes. *Sort of* English.' Jeff smirked. 'Claire Wilkinson and Barry Ferguson. Conservative closet cases with truly annoying fake English accents.'

Nancy declined to swallow the bait regarding the closet issue.

'Claire and Barry are both in a dandified tradition.' she asserted. 'I don't understand it and I'm not terribly attracted to it; but I *do* find it occasionally amusing.'

'I think the pair of them were and still are ridiculous", Jeff protested loudly. 'Weren't Barry and Claire formerly married?'

Now she had heard everything.

'That's what I've heard, Nancy. She was his beard and he was her 'husband'.

Nancy snorted contemptuously.

'Barry was very definitely bi. He had sex with both men and women, although I doubt he liked either official gender very much. This perhaps brings up some very interesting questions about the man; or perhaps it doesn't. And Claire. For her part, I doubt the woman's ever had the slightest interest in penises or anything male.'

'I've heard she likes younger women, Nancy.'

She lit another cigarette.

'I can tell she's attracted to me. I don't find the woman at all attractive so, believe me Jeffrey, nothing is likely to happen between us sexually. But, since you do seem to have some mysterious source of false information, we did talk at length about Barry. Claire, her girlfriend, and two gay men were all with him before he excused himself on the night of the murder. Probably he went somewhere else at first, but then he went to the Track. Claire knew that Barry was attracted to me and she needed to hear it from me that I didn't see him that night. He called and invited me to join his friends for drinks; but I declined the invitation. Does this make sense to you, Jeff?'

Jeff had heard her. She had effectively deflated him.

'I'm sorry if I've upset you, Nan. You clearly need to find out for yourself what happened to Barry Ferguson that night - what was the sequence of events. I've heard rumours that the cops are holding a guy who works the Track pretty regularly.'

'Really?' she starred ahead angrily.

'Another example of the cops going the obvious route. Prostitutes Rights and Maggie's are trying to get this confirmed - that the cops are holding a guy with fuck all evidence against him.'

'Great', she drew on the cigarette. " Just fucking great. Just fucking typical.'

'If this is confirmed, then there's going to be a demonstration.' Jeff was clearly attempting to enlist her.

'Great.', she clenched her teeth as Jeff walked away from the table. "Say hello to Sean Cummins for me, Jeff. And let me know if these rumours are true.'

She puffed on the cigarette and decided against buying more coffee as Jeff walked away. A lot of fools were making stupid decisions; and they were all stepping all over each other. Nancy needed this stupidity like she needed a hole in the head.

Mark Leonard decided that he'd browsed for long enough at Glad Day Books - Toronto's own official gay and lesbian bookstore. He was feeling resentment from the cashier. Obviously, Mark lacked the necessary disposable income to buy any of the books he had been so avidly reading.

He'd been absorbing various anthologies in the Entertainment and Popular Culture section. He had enjoyed GAYS

AND FILM - edited by Richard Dyer, an English queer cultural observer and theoretician. A former friend had once lent him an article by Dyer - in an anthology of writings from the magazine JUMP CUT. The article was on gays in *film noir* - about why gay characters seemed to pop up so frequently in the paranoid Hollywood thrillers of the later forties and the fifties. These films, along with the Freudian suspense-thrillers by Alfred Hitchcock, were probably intended to be read as 'homophobic'; since they pitted mentally unstable and often queer criminals against representatives of The Law - of course employed by the Nuclear Family. However, the family was always depicted in these films as being safely boring and the criminals - although neurotic and even psychotic - were exciting and even occasionally sexy. Mark wished to immerse himself further in Dyer's writings; but he had become increasingly aware of hostility emanating from behind the cash register.

He now walked south on the west side of Yonge Street, towards College. At College he intended to turn east and keep walking towards Seaton Street - on which he was living. He planned to walk past and ignore streets and neighbourhoods he had long grown tired of - those on which Toronto's official Gay Ghetto awkwardly blended with practicing sex trade workers. He would walk past the Boystown track and Tranny Alley over on Homewood, where one transvestite and one transsexual prostitute had been killed by some deranged creep not long enough ago.

And The Track was where a guy with the street name 'Kevin' allegedly killed Barry Ferguson, that academic who had been his sister's professor and possibly her friend. He remembered the professor - one of his more disturbing tricks. Barry had been a paranoid control freak if Mark had ever met one. The man had insisted on fucking Mark without a condom and not even acknowledged that such a demand had to be negotiated - for a higher rate than just a blowjob.

Mark knew 'Kevin' to say hello; and nothing seemed particularly off-centered about the guy. He seemed bit scattered and definitely suspicious of strangers; but what was so unusual about that? Mark knew that "Kevin" lived or crashed with Gary Flood and he could tell that the rumoured murder suspect was at least chipping heroin. But then, who was *he* to be judgmental about drugs?

It was still daylight outside. Mark guessed that the time was only about four o'clock. Standard time had just kicked back in and was briefly permitting maybe another hour of daylight. He walked past where he knew the Parkside Tavern had once stood - an early gay bar which had often been raided back in the seventies. What was once the site of the Parkside now housed a fast-food outlet. And, inevitably, a few doors south of MacDonald's there was yet another Second Cup coffee franchise -near Sneakers.

He looked to his right, through the window of the Second Cup. There he saw a boy who resembled 'Kevin'. But what the fuck was 'Kevin' doing - being back out in the street? Had he

been released, and on whose bail money? Did the cops feel the boy might be useful to them not in custody?

Mark knew enough about criminal investigations to know that investigators often played with their suspects for a long time before either obtaining a confession or the technically -necessary evidence required to press any charges. But it was still too soon after 'Kevin' had allegedly been pulled in for the cops to be releasing him.

Mark decided he needed to talk to ''Kevin'. He needed to know what the fuck was going on. He only knew the guy on a first-name basis but why not talk to?

But, as he walked into The Second Cup and walked towards "Kevin"; Mark stopped in his tracks. The youth sitting at a table by himself, staring ahead at the wall rather than towards the street, was not 'Kevin'

Between classes Nancy found herself listlessly walking down the central corridor of the massive University College main building. She was attempting to make a decision whether to refuel herself in the Refectory or else spend an hour in one of the upstairs cubicles - reading. The Arbour Room was out of the question today. She was in no mood for either homeless junkie poets or conspicuous undercover policemen.

Since she was not looking ahead of her as she walked; she managed to collide with Claire Wilkinson who had just emerged from her own office.

'Good day, Miss Leonard.'

'Uh....good day'. Nancy paused for a second. "Sorry.'

If she were going to be absently colliding with another person in the hallway; the other people would have to have been Claire Wilkinson.

'You really should look up and ahead of yourself when walking. You might have bumped into some perfect stranger who would be completely unaware of what exactly is troubling and tormenting you.

Nancy glared at Professor Wilkinson.

'I'm just rather tired. It's nothing deeper than that, okay?'

'Oh come now, Nancy.'

Claire, realizing that she had insulted Nancy, apologized.

"I'm sorry, all right?', Claire paused. 'Look, where exactly were you walking towards, anyway?'

Nancy fidgeted.

'I was agonizing over whether to go to the Refectory for a coffee and a smoke or whether I had the stamina to find myself a cubicle and get some serious reading done.'

Claire, who had probably been on her way out to the courtyard for a smoke herself, admonished her.

'You and I have at least one thing in common - we both smoke too much. Look, why not drop into my office for a little chat?'

Nancy didn't exactly see any choice in the matter.

Claire Wilkinson's office was indeed quite tidy. It had terrible ventilation, but it was at least tidy. Everything was obviously where it was supposed to be because it had in fact been there for years - neatly and systematically organized. Nancy noticed a paperback edition of Raymond Williams' KEYWORDS in one of the bookcases - surrounded by volumes of thesauruses in addition to the expected medieval reference books and anthologies. There were also several huge, forbidding titles attributed to one M. Claire Wilkinson.

'Please close the door, Nancy.'

The younger woman obliged.

'Now please sit down and listen to me. You must *stop* being preoccupied with Barry's murder. Barry is dead; and dwelling on whatever the possible details involved is not going to bring him back to life.'

Nancy was tempted to argue that such platitudes were easy for the likes of Claire Wilkinson to be pronouncing; but she bit her tongue instead.

'Nothing seemed at all different or unusual about Barry that evening. Neither Helen nor I, nor the male couple who were with us thought anything was 'off'. Barry did not drink any more than usual that night.'

Claire cleared her throat and then continued.

'Barry did mention that he had invited you to join us but please do not flatter yourself by assuming that you were a prime subject of conversation between us.'

If Claire Wilkinson were attempting to rub it in; she was not succeeding

'Frankly, Nancy, I can't say that Barry's death threw me for much of a loop. Barry's being murdered by a demented hustler is after all such a perfect scenario. Doubtlessly the man himself would have been impressed by the cause of death.'

'I'm not convinced Barry actually was killed by a deranged or in fact any kind of hustler, Claire.'

The professor's eyes now shot wide open.

'What the hell are you insinuating?'

'Listen to *me*, Claire. I've seen another young man - hanging around the track - who looks a lot like the one I've heard the police have in custody. Except this young man is at least two or three years older.'

Claire's eyes narrowed.

'So...you're convinced the police are holding the wrong suspect?'

'Yes. I am'.

'Hmmm. Why are you so sure of yourself, Nancy?'

Nancy took a deep breath, and then spoke slowly.

'I was walking home from a movie one night- this was a couple of weeks prior to the murder - when I saw two different

young men, who could easily be mistaken for one another. The younger one - presumably the one the cops are holding - was turning tricks. It didn't look to me as if the older one was, Claire. I had more of an impression that he was hanging out and waiting somebody - make that expecting somebody.'

'A *particular* somebody?'. Suddenly Claire seemed to become defensive.

'Yes.'

Claire Wilkinson's eyes widened again before she consciously narrowed them.

'Well, then the investigation into Barry's murder will follow its course, won't it. And of course all the prostitutes' rights groups will be sure to be getting their two cents in, won't they. Yes?'

Nancy's temper flared. How did Claire Wilkinson know that she herself wasn't an advocate for prostitutes' rights? For that matter, how did the professor know that this mature student, whom she had taken a curious interest in, wasn't herself a prostitute?

'The police are infamously incompetent when it comes to crimes committed in disreputable neighbourhoods, Nancy. They're far more comfortable in Rosedale or in the suburbs. Aren't they?'

Nancy wanted to remind Claire that Barry had *lived* in Rosedale but she refrained.

'The idea of the wrong suspect being held in custody pisses me off, Claire. It really pisses me off.'

Now the older woman regarded Nancy as if she were still a child incapable of grasping some of the painfully obvious facts of life.

'Barry Ferguson is *dead*, Nancy. And now that he is; I really don't give a shit about who killed him or why this particular somebody or somebodies did it. You must stop dwelling upon Barry's murder. I'm not saying it wasn't a horrible event to happen; but it *did* happen. And nothing is going to bring the man back to live so let's just get on with our own lives. Do you understand?'

She nodded unconvincingly.

'You have so much going for you, Nancy. You're far too bright to allow yourself to get all caught up with Barry's murder.'

Claire Wilkinson stopped in her tracks.

'I really do have nothing further to say about this subject. I must get back to work.'

Nancy did not need to be commanded to rise and then leave Claire's little cubicle of an office. Once back in the corridor, she checked her watch and found she still had time for caffeine and a cigarette before her next class. Marching toward the Refectory, she bared her teeth.

Like hell Claire Wilkinson had nothing further to say about Barry Ferguson's life and his murder. Like hell she didn't.

Nancy sat at her work table and again attempted to confront the T.S. Eliot problem. The poet did nothing for her except give cats a bad name; yet she knew she had to be able to articulate a credible critique of the man's writings or else she would have nothing to work with except her distaste for the man's reputation and political affiliations. Such biographical information was usually considered inadmissible by conservatively-minded scholars who hold tenured positions - like her Modern Poetry professor.

Her ringing telephone allowed her to procrastinate further. Now that her call-indicator was working again - thanks to the electronic genius who lived in the apartment upstairs - Nancy could recognize her brother's number. She quickly decided to take Mark's call - in lieu of recent strained conversations she surmised he wouldn't be calling her now unless he had something specific to say.

'Hi, Mark. How's it going?'

'Fine, Nan. I'm fine.'

She declined challenging his self-emphasis and its implications.

'Hey', Mark continued. "I didn't call to rant about our fucked-up personal lives. I saw something about an hour ago I think you should know about. Or rather, *somebody* you should know about.'

'What are you talking about?'

Mark coughed and then composed himself.

'There's a guy hanging around the Track area who looks a lot like our friend 'Kevin'. But it's a different guy..

Nancy perked up.

'You've seen him, too?'

'Yes. When you get closer to him you realize he's at least two or three years older than the guy the cops have in custody..

'He has less hair?'

'Yes, Nan. He's going bald. I saw him today - at the Second Cup around the corner from the Central YMCA, about an hour ago.'

Nancy juggled her receiver.

'I saw a young man matching your description when I was walking home from a movie at the Carlton a few weeks ago. I didn't think the guy was working, Mark. I got the impression his mind was somewhere else.'

'You could be right. Anyway, I just thought I'd let you know I've seen this guy.'

'I'm also quite sure I saw the same guy getting into a car one night last week - two nights after Barry's murder.'

'Hey, Nan. If I see him again I'll definitely call you. Got to run, okay?'

She hung up the receiver almost simultaneously with her brother. Symbiosis indeed, she laughed as she walked over to

the refrigerator and opened a beer. Mark had had something to say and he had spoken quickly and to the point. Her brother had confirmed for her the existence of the young man she had seen scrambling into this greenish-blue Oldsmobile.

Shit! She had forgotten to get the fucking license-plate of the Oldsmobile. She took a long swig of her beer and shook her head. She had to remember to always be observing the obvious details if she wished to get anywhere.

But, she believed Mark. There was no reason for her brother to be leading her on - to be sending her off on some sort of wild goose chase. Surely Mark thought the cops were holding this 'Kevin' boy under false pretenses? Surely he wasn't covering for 'Kevin' ?

Nancy knew she needed to see the older youth again. She needed to see him in operation, whatever his operation might be.

She still had another fifteen minutes to kill before her Communications lecture. Not that she was looking forward to it - Innis and McLuhan were barely registering. She knew she had to crack these two particularly hard nuts or else risk forfeiting the course and the accompanying credit; but the course and its terrain were frustrating her. Technological utopias had only resulted in a word in which speaking had become a lost art.

She decided more caffeine was necessary. Temporarily leaving her cigarette unattended in the ashtray; she almost ran over to the counter and demanded a refill. The cashier glared at Nancy. Her impatience had upset another customer; so the cashier waived protocol and demanded an extra dollar for the refill. Guiltily, Nancy complied and then tipped the cashier fifty cents.

She returned to her cigarette and enjoyed a long drag. Oral fixations were often indicative of oral persons. Technologies and human speech, when they didn't seem absolutely oppositional to one another, certainly did form some uneasy alliances. Often she thought she might as well be communicating on disc rather than by mouth or voice. On disc, she would then be able to present seriously contradictory sentences before some other unimaginative dullard would rudely interrupt her in order to complain that her sentence was contradictory. On her own personal computer Nancy usually ignored the Grammar Check's suggestions. Of course she deployed incomplete sentences - she frequently preferred to be writing in a conversational or hypothetical or *performative* tone.

Not that conversing with Jeff Talbot had been very pleasurable lately. Even before Barry's murder; Jeff seemed to have given up on her. She didn't think this was due to Derek's arrival; although now having a boyfriend meant Jeff had less idle time on his hands. No, Jeff seemed to oscillate between wishing to cut her off completely and enrolling her into some sort of

Twelve-Step Recovery Programme. Smokers Anonymous. Or something equally trite, like perhaps Neurotic Bisexuals anonymous. Fuck it and fuck *him* ! She took a long final drag of her smoke and then ground it out.

Yes, conversation seemed to her like it was becoming a lost art form. Who had she known who knew how to *talk*? James, but he had died. Who did she know in Toronto? Barry, but he'd been murdered. Who else? Claire?

God, Barry and Claire. What if those two curious individuals actually had once been married? Barry had admitted to her a previous marriage but he had chosen not to tell any stories about it. His wife, whomever she might have been, had been deleted from the author's bibliographical history. No ex-wife had been mentioned in any of the scant tributes and obituaries. Nancy realized that some of the upcoming academic and publishing periodicals would be likely to have lengthier tributes for Barry Ferguson.

She finished up her coffee and then she organized her books for the dreaded Communications class - with the annoying Elizabeth Beverly, who had not seemed terribly upset by Barry's death. What, if anything, might have once been between *them*?

Barry Ferguson had indeed lived many lives; and there sequence had not been all that linear -unlike a cat's. Barry had loved cats. Hell,he probably believed he had once *been* a cat in some other reincarnation; but his lives had definitely been more parallel than linear. Unfortunately for him, in the long run.

There was no way Barry and Claire could have ever been married - not even platonically. Claire might well have once or even still been married to some man; but the man was either asexual or homosexual. Not bisexual.

So, then. *Who had been Barry's wife and where was she now? Was she still alive, and in Canada?*

Nancy remembered the quickly-terminated lecture, after which Barry literally ran out of the classroom and jumped into a Cadillac driven by a formidable-looking woman with an immaculate blonde coiffeur. *Who was she; and where was she now?*

After he had finished talking to his sister; Mark lay back on his bed with his head against an upright pillow. He alternated between listening intently to the new Massive Attack CD and ignoring the music. Sometimes, the music would be speaking directly to him; and sometimes the music was just more unremarkable wallpaper.

Wallpaper music was preferable to *no* music. Mark needed sound. He had a difficult upstairs neighbour whose musical tastes were locked into the 1960s - specifically The Rolling Stones and Motown. Even worse, his neighbour insisted on singing along to her CDs in her weak and wavering voice.

Mark's musician friends tended to prefer instrumental music. They were suspicious of divas and of theatrical lead-singers who craved stardom. His musician friends preferred music reflecting their communalist anarchist politics. Mark enjoyed their music only up until a point; because he knew *something* was missing.

Pain, that was the missing ingredient. Pain and any awareness that pain might just be the prime factor in a person's life. The techno and club music his friends favoured rarely if ever acknowledged pair and painful emotions. Anger was to be banished and transcended. Well, that was easier for some individuals than it was for others.

He recalled an article he had recently read about 'straight-edged' hard-core kids and their musician role-models. His composer friend Doug had pointed this article in the weekend Globe and Mail out for him. Young 'straight-edged' punks were rebelling against the excesses of their older influences. 'Straight-edged' lifestyles allowed no room for any drugs or booze or smoking or meat-eating and, in some cases, sex. He was guilty of all designated offenses except for meat-eating; but the idea of avoiding sex really bothered him. It was by definition homophobic, because queers had always been the ones who believed in having sex simply because they felt like having sex.

Mark could imagine pleasure without drugs or booze or nicotine. Those were habits that only beginners or fools could possibly find admirable. But sex - whether for money or for fun or whatever possible combination - was something he could never even think of abstaining from. He only wished he could experience sexual pleasure more frequently.

He let the Massive Attack CD play through to its conclusion. He wanted to move on to something harder but he realized that it was time to make a phone call. A brief call; but one he absolutely *had* to make.

She sat by herself in the Refectory with a current copy of XTRA - Toronto's biweekly gay lesbian bisexual transsexual etcetera tabloid. She had just concluded reading a short item, written by a staff reporter who specialized in covering youth sexualizes - particularly in relation to the police crackdown on intergenerational sex and other nasty hot potatoes.

The article was really more of a dispatch - three short paragraphs if that. It was certainly no obituary for Barry. Barry had hardly been a *bona fide* member of 'the gay community'. The article noted that the professor had been killed in the alleyway near the Central Downtown YMCA on the night of Wednesday October 24th and that the deceased had been described by sex-trade workers as being a frequent customer in the neighbourhood.

The second paragraph mentioned that a young man, known only as 'Kevin', was being held at downtown police headquarters in connection with this case but was yet to be charged. This particularly upset the reporter, who correctly emphasized that suspects can only be held in custody without charges for very limited duration.

The purpose of this dispatch had been to alert sex trade workers and activists about yet another example of police hysteria - that Barry's murder was all too likely to be used by the cops as an excuse for an increase in the number of soliciting charges and loitering charges and other nuisance charges.

Nancy sighed wearily. She listlessly flipped through the remaining pages of XTRA - past the movie reviews written by drama queens incapable of relating seriously to movies which featured neither untalented hunky young male actors nor screen goddesses of the masochistically heterosexual variety. She glanced at the music reviews and cringed upon picking out a favourable review of that dreadful Toronto band MAGGIE'S FARMERS. As she closed the paper and looked toward the clock on the wall, she registered Jeff Talbot approaching her table. She was in no hurry and she had already blown any opportunity of pretending not to have seen him approaching.

Jeff sat down at her table.

'Did you see the little blurb about Barry Ferguson?'

She glared at Jeff.

'It's *not* about Barry. Barry, as far as XTRA is concerned, is merely a statistic. He's just another john who may or may not have been killed by some angry young hustler. I don't believe he was, myself.'

'You must realize, Miss Nancy, that XTRA only writes obituaries or tributes for those they consider to be their own. Barry's life did not fit their definition of a proud life.'

'Barry Ferguson is just as much a Famous Queer as Derek Jarman or Michael Callen or Jeffrey Dahmer or Freddie Mercury or every local 'community member of distinction' who receives a

respectful acknowledgment upon passing away - regardless of how he or occasionally even *she* might have passed away. Okay, Jeff?'

Jeff shifted his gaze toward the take-out counter for a second, then decided not to buy coffee for himself.

' Exactly how well did you *know* Barry Ferguson, Nancy?'

She shifted her sitting position and stared at him, exasperated.

'In some ways, very well. And, in some ways, obviously not very well at all. My brother told me he had sex with Barry once and that he was a weird trick - although you know how weird Mark can be. Right? But it still doesn't make sense to me that some young hustler would kill Barry. It just doesn't, Jeff.'

'I don't know either, Nancy. It's possible that Barry was demanding something that hadn't been negotiated and the guy snapped and attacked him,. It pisses me off that the cops are holding this guy until they have some convenient evidence against him. If they haven't found anything by now, they should let him go.'

Nancy lit a cigarette.

'You and Derek know sex-trade activists. What have you - or your friends - heard about this guy 'Kevin'?''

Jeff shook his head.

'This and that. It's all contradictory, Nan. Barry *did* have a reputation for being a bad trick; which meant a lot of guys working the Track would be avoiding Barry like hell. But I don't know anything about the guy in custody that makes him very different from a lot of other guys working the Track.'

'I've seen another young man who looks almost *exactly* like the guy in custody.'

"What? Are you *sure*?' .

Nancy nodded.

'I've seen him twice.', she drew on her cigarette. 'Before Barry's murder I saw the guy on Grosvenor Street one night. First, I saw 'Kevin' and then I saw this other guy I could have sworn was the first one's older brother. The second guy wore really weird clothes - seventies shirts with really big and pointed collars.'

'A lot of people are wearing those clothes now, Nancy. Was there a second occasion?'

'Yes', she nodded. 'Just after my little session at police headquarters - which itself was a real laugh riot - I saw the guy walking up Yonge Street, around the corner from the Y. I saw him climb into this greenish-blue Oldsmobile, driven by some older man. I didn't get a clear view of the driver; and I didn't get the car's license-plate number.'

Jeff was almost transfixed.

'This is useful and important information'.

'I know, Jeff. And I'm confused about what I should do with it. I don't want to go to the police?'

'For fuck sakes, no!'

'The cops are following me, anyway. There's a guy who's been hanging around campus, who can't seem to decide whether he's passing as a young professor or a borderline street person.'

Jeff snorted.

'They're following *you*.'

'As ridiculous as it sounds, it makes sense for them to do so if they think I wasn't telling them something.' She lowered her voice. 'I think they're interested in my upstairs neighbour; but this guy doesn't exactly look like drug squad material.'

'What are you on about, Nancy. *Who* is your neighbour; and what does *he* have to do with Barry's murder?'

'My neighbour Danny is my alibi that I was home for the evening, Jeff. Of course, I didn't exactly tell the cops *how* we were spending the evening.'

'Okay, Nancy. Nice to hear you have at least some sort of a life.'

'Thanks, Jeff.'

'But look', he snapped at her. 'This information you have - the existence of this other guy - only makes it obvious as hell that the cops are holding this guy for nothing at all. Did this other guy seem like a prostitute to you?'

'I don't think so', she puffed on her cigarette and exhaled away from his face. 'I had the sense he was meeting somebody.'

'You can't keep this to yourself, Nancy. You should talk to Maggie's. Or Prostitutes Rights.'

She shook her head.

'At first I thought so. But now I think it's still too early to do that. Too much negative publicity or media will force *the other guy* into hiding, which is the last thing that needs to happen.'

'But, Nancy, the fucking cops have no right to be holding the guy known as 'Kevin'.

She ground out the cigarette.

'Look, Jeff. 'Kevin' must be aware of his double? He must have been mistaken for him on at least a few occasions. What *I* don't get is why wasn't the *other* guy in the police lineup - if there even was one? That doesn't make sense.'

Jeff shrugged.

'Maybe the older of the two got wind of what was up and made himself scarce. If *I'd* committed a murder; I wouldn't exactly hang around.'

'Some do', she shook her head. 'Something is definitely going on, all right. Sooner or later 'Kevin' is going to crack.'

'It depends on *whom* 'Kevin' is protecting, Nan. .The sooner some one at either Maggie's or Prostitutes' Rights knows about the second man; then the sooner the cops have no choice except to release 'Kevin'. Isn't that number one priority?'

She shook her head slowly.

'I agree it's a priority. But making what I've just told you public will only fuck everything up. The other guy will

just go into hiding; and then how will he then be any use to the guy in custody?'.
Jeff stared at her.

'Just trust me, Jeff. And be careful. Don't spread this around, okay?'.
Jeff looked at her without saying a word. Then he left the table. Now she wished she hadn't confided in him. He was likely to talk to his political friends - maybe the reporter from XTRA even though the next issue wasn't due on the stands for a couple of weeks.

But she had needed to talk to *somebody*. She wanted Jeff to have digested her information and her reasoning, and then agree with her that discretion was advisable.

She looked at the clock on the wall and then threw her jacket over her shoulders. She wanted 'Kevin' to be back on the street as much as Jeff did. She also more than suspected that Barry's murder ultimately had little to do with either the whores' rights community and their vociferous reporter; and she feared their involvement would only fuck matters up further.

'Admit it, Kevin. You killed Barry Ferguson.'

Eric denied the accusation for what must have been at least the one hundredth time. This cop - this singularly unpleasant Inspector Brian Connors - didn't even have the *slightest* doubt about his guilt. The Inspector oscillated between accusing Eric of being the killer and accusing him of being an accomplice - a hatchet boy for some mysterious other person - somebody with a large disposable income who had it in for Barry Ferguson.

Eric didn't know anybody with that kind of disposable income. He'd probably serviced a few; but that hardly constituted any sort of friendship.

'Come on, Kevin. How could anybody else have been the killer? You were seen in the neighbourhood just prior to the time of the murder. You have a drug problem, right? You turn tricks to support your habit, right?'.
'I don't have a drug problem', Eric stammered defiantly.

'Bullshit you don't have a drug problem. I suppose you're also going to bullshit me that you're not a prostitute?'.
Eric took a breath.

'Yes. I turn tricks. So what?'.
Inspector Connors almost smiled at the boy's insubordinance.

'Thank you, Kevin. Thanks for telling me what I already know. And, by the way, your name isn't 'Kevin'. Right?'.
Eric stiffened.

'Am I right, son?'.
Eric stiffened.

'Yes! Okay?'. Eric composed himself as much as he could. 'My name is Eric Cunningham. That's the name I was born with.'

Inspector Connors didn't pause for a breath. He now paced the interrogation room like a caged tiger.

'Where do you live, Eric. And don't lie.'

'On Berkeley Street", Eric mumbled.

'The Inspector continued his pacing.

'Berkeley Street. Lower Berkeley Street? That's a *fine* upstanding neighbourhood, isn't it ? Do you live alone? Do you have a girlfriend ? Are you only 'gay-for-pay', or do you have a boyfriend? Or maybe some Sugar Daddy who wanted you to pay off your outstanding debt by taking out Barry Ferguson? Tell me all about it, Eric Cunningham. Tell me *everything*.'

Eric stood and faced Inspector Connors.

'I don't have to answer any of your questions. You haven't charged me with anything yet. You have no evidence against me. That locker room attendant was a joke.'

Brian Connors face reddened but then relaxed.

'You'll be charged, Eric. Don't kid yourself. You'll be charged with either first or second degree murder - depending on whether or not you were acting alone and whether or not Professor Ferguson aggravated you enough to justify your little homicidal tantrum.'

Eric glared at the cop but kept his mouth shut.

'It's one or the other, Eric. So, why not tell me which one? Why not just get this over with, son?'

Inspector Connors again started pacing the floor.

'You want to go to prison, don't you. You thought you had a meal ticket out of Toronto but you blew it because you want to be taken care of. Prison will provide you with a good, solid roof over your head. Not just a roof like the one you will lose whoever the slime-bucket that you're protecting - your low-life pimp or dope dealer or whoever has you under his thumb.'

Eric felt a tear falling down the right side of his face.

'Confess, Eric, and then you'll have a home. You'll always have regular food and shelter, as well as sex and drugs. Think about it, son. Why do you think so many career criminals keep coming back for more? You've already made your choice, Eric. It's too late to salvage your wretched excuse for a life. Confess now, if you have any idea what's good for you!'

Eric now heard a key turning in the door to the interrogation room. The door slowly opened to reveal Superintendent John Sutcliffe, who glared at Inspector Brian Connors.'

'That will be all, Brian.'

Brian Connors clenched his fists.

'I almost had him, Superintendent.'

Superintendent Sutcliffe entered the room and stood directly in front of Connors.

'You lack *evidence*. We don't have enough to go any further with this boy; so we have to release him. In case you are unaware, Inspector, the force has a serious image problem and railroading suspects does not exactly help matters. Get it, Brian. We still haven't heard from Fingerprints. We still need the DNA evidence.'

Connors shook his head.

'It was only a matter of time until Eric here - not 'Kevin' but Eric Cunningham - confessed.'

John Sutcliffe regarded the suspect with a hard stare.

'Is that right, son?'

"No!'

'Like hell it isn't!' roared Connors.

'Shut up, Brian!'

Sutcliffe stood in front of his subordinate

'We've recently had a few too many well-publicized examples of railroaded confessions that didn't stand up in court. This kid might have been *nothing* himself; but a lot of our recent fuckups involve prostitutes and that community has become too damn well-organized. They can get this kid a sharp lawyer who can get this case thrown out of court before you can blink your goddam eyebrows. We need another case like that like we need a hole in the head. Do you hear me, Brian?'

'I hear you, Inspector.'

'Good. So release this boy immediately and then proceed with some brains instead of just brawn. I think you need a vacation, Brian.'

Inspector Connors glared at his superior; but refrained from retaliating. Then he addressed Eric.

'Follow me to the door, son. And don't even *think* about leaving town. You're protecting somebody and we'll find out who. Okay?'

As Eric followed Inspector Connors toward the street door; he could distinctly hear Superintendent John Sutcliffe mouthing the words 'fucking moron'.

As soon as Nancy returned home from classes with her essential groceries, she checked her phone messages. Or, rather, her one message. It was from her brother, so she dialed his number immediately.

'Mark?.....Oh, good. You're home.'

'Hi, Nan. I have a bit of information for you.'

'Yes?'

Mark realized his sister was anticipating something serious.

'It's information, Nan. Nothing much, but at least something.'

'Well, what is it?'

She tried to relax, unsuccessfully.

'I'm convinced our friend Eric Cunningham, known on the street as 'Kevin', had nothing to do with Barry's murder...'

'I've suspected that all along, Mark. *What is your point?*'

Nancy could hear Mark lighting a cigarette and sniffing. She hoped this indicated nothing more than a typical seasonal flu.

'If you would please let me finish, Eric Cunningham is covering for somebody but *not* in connection with Barry's murder. Eric lives with this heroin dealer named Gary. Gary is his only alibi; and that's who he's protecting by saying as little as possible.'

'Shit. '

'I learned this from a friend of mine who works at Maggie's '

'Yes. Maggie's', Nancy nodded absently.

'Rick.....my friend at Maggie's.....also knows nothing about Eric having a brother.'

'Shit, Mark!', she wanted a cigarette but her pack wasn't in front of her , ' If Eric turns tricks under a pseudonym he won't be telling people all the details of his nuclear family!'

'I hear you. Okay, Nan. But listen to me for a minute. Rick *knows* Eric Cunningham. You and I are hardly the first people who've wondered if this guy has a brother, who doesn't look *exactly* like him but could easily be mistaken for him.. I mean. Eric's had tricks who've made that mistake.'

'So?'

"So, Eric's also been wondering who the fuck his not-quite double is - to put it mildly. He'd been wondering about this other guy long before he was hauled in for Barry's murder.'

Well, Mark. That makes three of us. And then what?'

Mark sighed.

'Not a hell of a lot, unfortunately. I think we can rule out the brother angle.'

Nancy remained unconvinced.

'Look, Nan. The best thing either of us can do is keep our eyes and ears open for this guy. If I see him; maybe I can come up with an angle.'

'What kind of angle?'

'Fuck, Nan.', Mark snapped at his sister. 'Like maybe deliberately mistake the guy for 'Kevin' and see what happens?'

'Yeah, maybe.', Her voice was quiet and unenthusiastic.

'What do you mean, *maybe* ?' If I can get the guy talking it can't hurt. Can it?'

'I don't know, Mark. I just don't know.'

There was silence for an extended moment. Then Mark decided to sign off as cordially as possible. He would call Nancy the next time he saw the young man - the one he was convinced was *not* Eric Cunningham's older brother.'

After Mark signed off Nancy found her smokes and lit one. She turned on the news. She was almost hoping that she would

be able to turn on the news and witness footage of an angry demonstration on behalf of 'Kevin'.

She did turn on the news. The international news was practically identical to the last newscast she had sat through. The local news was also terribly similar, except for the crime bulletins.

There were no bulletins at all concerning the murder of Barry Ferguson and the police investigation. She drew on her cigarette and exhaled, angrily. Either the case had been clandestinely resolved and there was a news gag; or the case itself was being relegated to the back burner for some or other ulterior reason.

Shit!

As Nancy walked home late in the afternoon she could see that precipitation was imminent. The temperature was probably near the freezing mark - perhaps even below - and she realized she would need to be purchasing some winter boots in the near future. She had made it through her first winter in Toronto with a cheap pair that had developed a hole in them and would thus not be wearable this upcoming winter.

She grinned as she remembered avoiding the winter boots issue out in Vancouver. Whenever it *did* snow in Lotus Land; the entire city would grind to a standstill. Nobody ever bought snow tires for their cars. Very few people ever shoveled snow out of driveways. Many people, such as herself, dealt with the weather by becoming conveniently agoraphobic. Blizzards could be fun to watch but never to get caught in. Nancy hoped the temperature was still warm enough for the upcoming precipitation to be rain - not even wet snow.

Messy weather was something she did not need right now.

Approaching her building, Nancy saw a car she did not recognize. It was a used Dodge and she *did* recognize the man sitting behind the steering wheel - it was the already familiar undercover cop. She wondered bemusedly if the poor man was going to be parked outside her building all night. What a waste of time, she snorted as she walked up the stairs to her own apartment.

She picked up her mail. There was the phone bill, there was her cable bill, and then there was a letter from her former band mate Christine in Vancouver. Christine was now teaching music lessons as part of her rehabilitation programme and she was actually enjoying it. Nancy could not imagine Christine, who had never respected the rules and regulations of rote professional musicianship, enjoying the process of teaching scales to more than likely reluctant young students.

Still, obviously it meant something to Christine that she was now in some sort of responsibility position. This could do wonders for her self-esteem, which had always been perilously low. Nancy associated her former bass-player's lack of self-esteem with her addiction. Some of the junkies she had known had low self-esteem but some were just the opposite. *That* had been their problem, they thought they could control and even manipulate their habits. Nancy snorted. Habits weren't known as habits for nothing.

She decided to open a beer for herself before fixing some sort of functional dinner. As she looked over the refrigerator she realized she needed to buy some basic groceries. Shit.

Even before she looked out her window she could hear wet tires driving past her building. Then she looked and saw the

wet snow. Well, if she had to go out in it then she had to go out in it.

As she walked towards the sidewalk she noticed that the old Dodge had moved on. She smiled to herself. The idea of her being some sort of lead to whomever Barry's killer might be now amused her. The idea of this detective, who Nancy now decided looked like the sort of loser who would spend his life coaching little-league hockey, being able to learn anything that might be useful to his superiors seemed absurd. If his real target was actually Danny Bailey; then surely the man had completed his little assignment. Then there would be somebody who actually looked like Danny, tailing Danny.

And speak of the devil. The wizard of electronics and technologies and music itself was walking toward her on the same side of the street.

Too bad the undercover cop has called it a night, Nancy laughed to herself.

'Hey! Danny! How's it going?'

'Hey, Nancy. You going to a movie or something? Night classes?'

She stopped as he walked toward her.

'No. I'm just going to the store. Bread and cigarettes. I'm not much of a consumer tonight. Do you want to drop by and smoke a joint when I get back from the store?'

Danny sweetly shook his head.

'Not tonight. I've got work to get done before I go out for the night.'

'Fair enough. See you later, Danny.'

As Nancy resumed walking in the opposite direction from his, Danny suddenly remembered something.

'Hey, Nancy, come back.'

She did.

'I saw something last night which makes no sense.'

'Yes?'

'I saw this guy who was almost the spitting image of the prostitute the cops were holding for the murder of your professor.'

'Were holding?'

'Oh yeah. The cops had to let the first guy go as they don't have their necessary evidence in yet. But, anyway, I saw this other guy at a rave - out at St. Clair and Lansdowne. This guy's older than the murder suspect. I couldn't tell if or what he was on - he was standing on one spot and staring at me. Creeped me out, to tell you the honest truth.'

Nancy digested all of this. Eric Cunningham had been released. Well, about time he was. And of course the reason the cops would finally release *him* was so they could follow him. Then they would realize that the guy wasn't a murderer but only just another runaway kid with a minor drug problem.

And then there was the other young man. Danny had seen him too. Her heartbeat accelerated.

'Hey, Danny. I'd better get to the store before this snow starts staying on the ground. If you ever see this guy again; please tell me immediately. Okay?'

'For you, immediately. Chow.'

She walked towards the variety store in the increasingly heavy snow. Something was definitely happening with the young man who had not been detained by the police. The way Danny described the young man's presence at the rave was consistent with the way he had been standing still that night when she had first seen him on the Track.

He hadn't been working. He had been waiting for somebody. Last night, he hadn't been dancing; he'd been staring at *Danny*.

As she walked toward the main street, Nancy again saw the used Dodge. It was definitely the same car, with the same stupid driver behind the wheel.

Inspector Brian Connors was officially off-duty. He was out of uniform and casually sipping a Coors' Light in a west-end sports bar. He impatiently waited for the plainclothes operative to check in as he watched The Maple Leafs going down to yet another routine defeat at the hands of another mediocre team.

'Another meaningless statistic", muttered Brian Connors to himself.

Plainclothes Operative Harvey Johnson walked in the front door and stopped off first at the bar. The plainclothes cop ordered a Coors' Light for himself and then he joined Connors at his rear-corner table.

'What's the score, Brian?'

'Rangers 4, Leafs 1'.

Harvey Johnson scowled.

'Well, Brian. I'm afraid I'm not doing much better than The Leafs.'

'What are you telling me, Harvey?'

'I mean, dammit, the Leonard girl isn't leading me anywhere. She doesn't *do* a fuck of a lot besides attend her classes, drink coffee and smoke cigarettes, and eat lightly. Sometimes talk on the phone, and either read all night or work on her computer. And then she goes to bed and pretty well repeats the same pattern the next day. She doesn't go out much on the weekends either.'

'Come on, Harvey. Nancy Leonard has friends?'

Johnson scowled into his beer.

'Not really - her telephone calls aside. Sometimes I see her hanging around University College with these two obvious homos. One of them - Jeff Talbot- apparently has a record for disturbing the peace at some AIDS demonstration. Small potatoes, Brian. Do you know what I mean?'

Connors glared at the plainclothes detective.

'What else, Harvey? Come on?'

'I don't know, Brian. You're convinced there's some serious drug angle; but I don't really think so. Sometimes I know she smokes grass - either by herself or with her upstairs neighbour.'

'Danny Bailey.', Brian Connors nodded. He had already talked to Narcotics about young Daniel Edward Bailey.

'But Nancy Leonard and Danny Bailey have very little interaction. They keep different hours. She's a college student and he's a rave kid.'

'I know that, Harvey.'

Connors finished his beer.

'Nancy Leonard does talk on the phone quite frequently. But that's not my department, is it.'

Brian Connors glared at the operative

'Let's get two more. Shall we, Harvey?'

Connors summoned the waiter. Then the two men silently watched their hockey game. Toronto had managed to score another goal but New York still had a four-to-two advantage.

Connors scowled at the television screen.

'Somebody should put Wayne Gretzky out of his misery. Thanks', he acknowledged the waiter who delivered the beer and then left the pair of them alone in their corner.

'The Leonard girl knows that Wilkinson woman, Brian. It's not just a student and faculty relationship.'

'That is odd. Claire Wilkinson is odd. She insisted to me there was nothing unusual about Barry Ferguson on the night of the murder; but I think she's full of shit.'

Johnson nodded silently.

'Claire Wilkinson told me she offered Ferguson a ride home; but he declined.'

'Because he wasn't going directly home.'

.

'Very good, Harvey.'

Harvey Johnson sipped from his Coors, and then lowered his voice.

'Nancy Leonard has a brother. I suspect that's who she talks to on the phone.'

Connors nodded.

'Keep this under your hat; but we are definitely following Mark Leonard. We think he's the interesting member of the family'.

Brian Connors lit a cigarette without offering one to Harvey Johnson.

'Mark Leonard has a minor record-for loitering. We do know he's a part-time prostitute. Also, he was or he still is a junkie. He hangs around with anarchist musician-types - lots of piercing and tattoos. Also, he has a few friends who are Prostitutes' Rights activists.'

'Maggie's?'

'Yes, Harvey. Anyway, we're really watching Mark Leonard. We're breaking you in on his sister.'

'So, you want me to stick with her?'

Brian Connors swore to himself as The Rangers scored another goal - making the score five-to-two.

'Fuckin' Gretzky just scored. Why doesn't that guy just pack it in and retire.....Yes, Harvey. Sooner or later, Nancy Leonard is going to crack. The girl's walking on broken eggs to begin with; and she thinks she knows something we don't. So we do have to keep an eye on her in case she *does* find out something we don't know. Got it?'

'I have to get moving. This game's a write-off and my wife's expecting me. I'll pick up the tab. Okay, Harvey?'

Harvey Johnson again nodded silently. He understood that if he stayed and consumed another beer then it would be on *his* tab.

After Eric Cunningham had been finally released from police custody and no other obvious suspect seemed to present himself to the Homicide department; the Barry Ferguson murder case all but disappeared from the printed and electronic media. The professor hadn't *quite* yet become yesterday's news - he himself was too notorious for such an outright dismissal. But the mysterious circumstances of his death were no longer a prime concern to the media. Somebody had killed the man; and perhaps that was what the man had wanted in the first place.

The hot crime story of the moment was now one involving a wealthy developer and his wife. The husband stood accused of murdering the wife, according to The Crown and to character witnesses. Marital infidelity, drugs, and of course domestic violence all factored heavily in The Crown's case against Carl Dawson. And of course Joan Dawson's own promiscuity and substance abuse had to enter into play. Such character issues always did. Nancy was convinced the husband was guilty, unless there was some mysterious unknown evidence proving the contrary. However, she was not all that preoccupied with this particular murder trail. She had not known the couple; and she did have first-term essays she had to prioritize.

As the weather had again become unusually warm for early November; there were many students and faculty-members taking their breaks outside in the Quadrangle. Walking through The Quadrangle, Nancy could see Claire Wilkinson seated and smoking a cigarette in the company of an older man Nancy believed to be in the Department of Philosophy. She waved at Claire, who waved back and then resumed her conversation and her cigarette.

Nancy shook her head. She could not decide for the life of herself whether Claire was a pathetic relic or a subtle parody of a pathetic relic. Claire had been close friends with Barry, despite her pronouncement that Barry had in so many ways been a horrible person. And she had not really described any of the details of her prior-to-the murder drinks. Five people, all of whom were fairly used to each other's drinking company, enjoy a

few rounds. Then the unattached and bisexual member of the group excuses himself and heads off to the Track. There must have been more to the top of the evening that Claire had told her about, Nancy gritted her teeth.

Why had Claire Wilkinson been so damn certain that Barry had made a pass at *her*? Did Barry habitually court women he believed were dykes and thus count upon a rejection? Did Barry have a compulsion for hitting on lesbian-appearing women who admitted to bisexual behaviour? If such behaviour was habitual for Barry - and Nancy suspected it was - then why did Claire and her partner tolerate the man's company?

History, Nancy suspected. People remain friends with other people even though they have long despised each other. That was her cynical perspective regarding marriage and indeed all long-term relationships.

Nancy didn't yet feel like fixing dinner, so she turned on the six o'clock news. She'd been avoiding the news lately - it had been all the same old irresolvable international stalemates. The Middle East was as tense as ever, Bosnia was as horrible as ever, the American president was as sleazy as ever. The world was a mess and there was fuck all she could do about it.

When the news shifted to the local front there was nothing on the Barry Ferguson investigation. Instead, the trial of Carl Dawson was the centrepiece of the crime report. This was the first day of the high-profile trial and all the cameras were at the courthouse.

Carl Dawson appeared to be an archetypal middle-aged and middle-class man who had done well for himself as a developer. Nancy could look at the close-ups of the man's face and see a barely-contained cruel streak. The man clearly wished to be somewhere else; and she could also surmise he's had more than a few serious hangovers during his lifetime.

And the captioned snapshots of his dead wife telegraphed tragedy. Nancy drew on a cigarette and wearily exhaled. Joan Dawson had been a strikingly beautiful woman in her younger days; but she looked haggard as all hell in the last snapshot. She had allegedly been physically and mentally abused by her husband, who was now on trial for the ultimate wife-abuse. Nancy cursed Carl Dawson. He'd done it, all right.

Then the reporters cut to melee of sorts-outside of the courtroom. The crown prosecutor was being interviewed and Nancy nearly jumped out of her seat. The female prosecutor who was calmly reiterating the facts that would ensure her a conviction wore an expensive black suit and wore her very blonde hair in an impeccable coif. This woman looked very familiar to Nancy.

This was definitely the same woman who she'd witnessed picking up Barry Ferguson that day when Barry had run out of his lecture so quickly. The hair and her overwhelmingly regal bearing

were a perfect match. And why was her name familiar? *Who* was Sarah Lloyd-Matthews?

Nancy clenched her cigarette in her teeth and checked her class schedule for the next day. She faced a relatively light day - Literary Criticism and Theory with Barry's perfunctory replacement and Modern Drama, which was still stuck on Chekhov.

She decided she was going to attend the Carl Dawson murder trial, observing the legal proceedings from the public spectators' gallery. She wanted to observe Sarah Lloyd-Matthews at work.

She butted out her cigarette and switched the television off. She didn't care about the next day's weather because she was going to be mostly inside. Then the telephone rang.

She recognized her brother's number. Her brother had actually been at the same address for a few months now. This meant he had either stabilized or else his situation was very convenient.

She answered the phone.

'Hi. Nan. I'm just touching base.'

'Any news? About the young man with the receding hairline?'

'None. I haven't seen him.'

She paused for a moment.

'You haven't seen him around the Track area. But you don't stake out the neighbourhood all day long, do you, Mark?'

'Of course not.'

Nancy shifted her seating position.

'My guess is that our friend is going to stay away from the scene of the crime now that Eric is back on the street. I'm surprised he was still hanging around when we both saw him.'

She could hear Mark lighting a smoke, or perhaps a joint. .

'Maybe he had business with the guy you saw driving the Oldsmobile?'

She nodded.

'Maybe. Probably, I don't know. My neighbour saw him at a rave -out St. Clair and Lansdowne- the other night.'

'At a rave?'

Why would this be startling to Mark, Nancy wondered. Mark was seven years younger than her - he would still have the energy for raves unless he was back on junk. She wanted to suggest to Mark that he keep his eyes and ear out for rave events and go to a few. Surely Mark could dance and keep his eyes open for the young man with the hairline simultaneously?

'Who's your neighbour, Nan?'

.'Danny Bailey. He's a DJ, and do you know what? I have yet to ask him what names he uses.'

'Danny Bailey?'

Nancy could tell Mark was trying to place the name and wasn't getting anywhere

'Danny was upset by this guy. It's not like there was any physical or verbal exchange; but the guy kept staring at Danny. It unnerved him.'

'So, if Danny sees him again he'll tell you.'

'Oh yes, Mark. Danny's my friend.'

Mark digested this, and then decided to sign off.

'I'll keep my eyes and ears open. But he probably will stay clear of the Track area. Maybe the guy with the Oldsmobile is a Sugar Daddy?'

'Maybe, Mark. You be careful. Okay?'

She hung up before he could counter her. Then she walked over to the refrigerator and the bread box and made herself a couple of sandwiches. She would eat quickly and then get down to her reading; as she planned to get up early the next day and go straight to the courthouse.

The courtroom was practically full; and Nancy didn't know a soul. She hadn't been in a courtroom for what seemed like eons - the previous occasions was in Vancouver when a friend of STRIPES AND SPOTS' bass player Christine's had been arrested for shoplifting. That trial had resulted in a reprimand and a consignment for a drug treatment programme. The Dawson trial was going to be something else entirely, Nancy could feel it. She felt conspicuous in her jeans and her wind-breaker, being surrounded by power suits both male and female.

There were also women not in power suits but rather wearing more office-type clothing - beige and brown slacks and moderately expensive sweaters. These women looked even more serious than those in the power suits.

The judge appeared positively genial; but Nancy could tell that was a facade. The opposing lawyers appeared more than capable of rattling the judge if it were to suit their purposes. Mike Newton, representing the defense, looked sleazy. He looked like the typical high-priced lawyer who took pride in getting the most reprehensibly guilty clients off the hook. He looked like he knew his technicalities; but so did the Crown's prosecutor. Sarah Lloyd-Matthews wasn't afraid of Newton, Nancy could see that clearly.

The defendant sat as impassively as possible in the prisoner's box. Maybe he had lost all of his emotions by this point. Maybe he hadn't had any to begin with - except for anger and jealousy.

Nancy didn't give a shit about the defendant. She watched Sarah Lloyd-Matthews with a perverse respect as she introduced the court to the prosecution's first witness.

Anna Milroy was a close friend of Joan Dawson's, who testified to Carl Dawson's emotional and physical abuse. Joan had sought refuge with Anna on more occasions than Anna had cared to keep count of; and Anna told the court that Joan had filed for

divorce on grounds of physical and emotional cruelty. The prosecution's intention was clear as crystal - the husband couldn't bear to lose the wife so he killed her.

'Your witness, Sir.' Sarah Lloyd-Matthews made way for the defense's cross-examination while making her contempt for the defense attorney quite apparent.

Mike Newton immediately went on the offensive. He tried to paint Anna Milroy as a hostile witness whose own experiences with men had been negative and who was therefore incapable of seeing a point of view other than that of the deceased. Newton tried to coerce Anna into admitting to character flaws of her own, such as a history of alcoholism and substance abuse. He was clearly upsetting the witness when Sarah interrupted the proceedings sharply.

'I object to this entire line of questioning, Your Honour. I fail to see how the witness' own lifestyle has any bearing on this case.'

'Sustained!'

The judge, whose name Nancy had missed, reprimanded the defense attorney and made it clear that inadmissible evidence was to be avoided absolutely.

Mike Newton backed down. He couldn't think of another approach to this witness now that intimidation had been ruled out.

'I have no further questions for this witness, Your Honour.'

'Then the witness may be excused.'

Anna Milroy gingerly stepped down from the witness stand, regarding Sarah gratefully.

Nancy could see the other women in the courtroom audience looking at Sarah, cautiously but also appreciatively. They appreciated Sarah's focus and her power.

At this moment so did Nancy. But when the judge called for a fifteen minute break; she decided that she had seen enough. She decided that she was in no hurry to ever return to a courtroom.

She did return to campus for her one Modern Drama class, which was still stuck on Chekhov. She really wished this class wasn't necessary. Drama bored her to begin with; and naturalistic drama even more so. *Brecht* she could deal with - his ideas had effected not only theatre but also film. *Beckett* she could more than deal with - his language and his humour were wonderfully scatological. But Chekhov bored the shit out of her.

Before leaving campus at the end of the day; she decided to stop in at the bookstore and do some browsing. There might even be something worth *buying* like a new periodical. New reading might be just what the doctor ordered, except it had to be a periodical. She had no time for fiction until at least the Christmas break - unless it was required reading.

A new FUSE jumped out of the periodicals' rack, because it featured a Courtney Love look-alike performance artist on its cover. Right then and there she decided to skip this issue. Attempting to target the disaffected Gen. X motor mouth junkie market at this late date was beyond pathetic.

She scanned across the rack until she laid eyes on a new ALPHABET CITY, with its theme issue titled FASCISM AND ITS GHOSTS. This looked much more like it, she thought. The Magazine's editors and the contributing writers assumed their readers would be anti-fascist; but then the contributors proceeded to identify fascist residue within institutions which considered themselves to have purged themselves of everything considered fascist. At least this sort of rigour was promised by the editor in the editorial preface.

She decided that ALPHABET CITY could indeed prove a worthwhile investment, even though the magazine's design- more vertical than horizontal- begged the question of storage. As Nancy walked over to the counter with her purchase; she found herself standing in line behind Jeff Talbot.

She tapped him on the right shoulder from behind. Jeff wheeled aggressively but caught himself.

'Nancy! How the hell are you?'

'I'm fine, Jeff. I guess.'

'What are you buying?'

'The new ALPHABET CITY'. She hoped he'd approve.

'Hey. Good choice.'

Probably Jeff was friendly with at least one member of the editorial collective, if not any of the outside contributors.

'It's a good magazine, Nancy, and it's been going through a rough time. It's a wonder they even got this issue out. *Everything* non-profit is going through a rough time.'

Nancy could only nod her head in a glum agreement.

'Hey", Jeff changed the subject while paying for his issue of DISEASE PARIAS NEWS. 'Sean's almost getting healthy.'

'Oh?' Then she recognized the name. 'I mean great.'
'Those protease inhibitors are really starting to kick in.'

'I'm glad to hear that, Jeff.' she replied as she paid for her magazine.

'Which way are you walking, Nan?'

Nancy shrugged.

'I was going to walk home; but I don't have to.'

'Why don't you join Derek and I for drinks?'

'Where?'

'Barbarella's. Only a short walk.'

She paused for a moment. She didn't wish to walk too far in a direction opposite to the one home.

'Barbarella's is fine, Jeff. But I hope the art has changed.'

Jeff grinned at her

'It has, dear. You are now at liberty to dish the art if you feel compelled to do so. The artist is mercifully *not* one of Derek's oldest and dearest friends.'

'Good.'

But. you won't be able to dish the art because you won't even see the art.'

'Really? Now Jeff was sounding mysterious. 'Is there no art on the walls?'

'No', Jeff laughed.' Barbarella's has temporarily become a home for colour abstractionism. A good formula for *restaurant* art but not good for much else, I'm afraid. Even though aging hetero male art critics love colour abstractionism because they consider it to be the last bastion of pure art before their world was invaded by feminists and faggots and other minorities.'

That is giving colour abstractionism far too much credit', Nancy laughed. It had been a while since she had laughed with Jeff Talbot, and it felt good.' Ooops, I'd better be careful. Maybe the artist is here.'

'May well be'. Jeff nodded. The man *does* drink a lot.'

Nancy digested this revelation as she looked up and caught Derek Lee, visibly pleased at her unexpected company. Of course, since Derek had been expecting Jeff by himself he hadn't picked out a table in the smoking section.

'Nancy Leonard. Long time no see. Martinis?'

'Sure, Derek. Why not?'

'I was just telling Nancy how Sean Cummins is feeling a lot better since the protease inhibitors began kicking in.'

Jeff sat down and immediately tried to flag the waiter.

'Sean', Derek addressed both Jeff and Nancy 'is becoming a party animal again. Two o'clock on Sunday afternoon. If you can make it, Nan, you would be more than welcome.'

'Fifty-one Alexander. Apartment nine-zero-five', Jeff chimed in.

'I'll try guys. I might just have to prioritize my schoolwork. Black November, anybody?'

The martinis were delivered and Derek paid for the round.

'Is there something else keeping you busy, Nan? Nudge nudge wink wink?'

She flushed. She reached into her purse. Then realized they were seated in the no-smoking section.

'I went to the Carl Dawson trial today, guys.'

Derek looked baffled. He seemed to be attempting to place the name 'Carl Dawson'.

'Nancy! Don't tell me you're becoming a murder mystery groupie?' Jeff filled him in thoughtfully.

She angrily turned on Jeff.

'I recognized the prosecutor last night - on television,'

'Sarah Lloyd-Matthews?' Derek had recovered quickly.

'Yes, Derek. That is the woman's name.'

Now Derek's expression shifted from one of incredulousness to one of alarm.

'Did you know that she is a high-profile member of LEAF?'

'The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund?'

'I know who LEAF are, Jeff. I'm not a completely uninformed apolitical moron. Okay?'

Derek allowed both Nancy and Jeff a couple of beats.

'Why are you so interested in Sarah Lloyd-Matthews, Nancy?'

She looked at Derek, avoiding Jeff.

'I recognized her as being the same woman who whisked Barry Ferguson away one day after his lecture. She has an extremely powerful composure, even when she isn't driving that car of hers. When I saw her on the news last night; I knew this was the same woman.'

Derek looked puzzled.

'But *why* would this high-powered *feminist* lawyer be picking up *Barry Ferguson*? I don't get it?'

'Maybe Barry needed a lawyer, Derek. Maybe having a high-powered feminist lawyer provided him with some badly-needed credibility? I wish I knew.'

'Yes, Nancy. I do too.' Derek finished his martini. 'Are you aware of any *legal* difficulties he might have been having?'

'No.', she finished her drink and resolved not to have another. 'I went out for drinks with the man once; and he didn't tell me a lot about his personal life. You might say he was evasive.'

'Perhaps Sarah was his divorce lawyer?' Derek speculated.

'It's possible.'

Nancy considered the possibility that Barry had never gotten around to getting divorced from the wife - prior to shortly before the murder.

'Barry and Claire finally decided to make it official.'
Jeff interjected.

Nancy turned on him.

'You fucking well know those two were *never* married. It isn't funny now; and it wasn't funny in the first place.'

'Okay, okay. Do we want another round, girls?'

Nancy glared at Jeff.

No, I don't!'

Before she could add anything further she stood up and made a point of informing Derek that it was high time she returned home and got down to work. As she stomped towards the front door Derek called after her.

'Perhaps we'll see you at Sean's on Sunday?'

'We'll see', she addressed Derek over her shoulder. She was not anxious to be interacting with Jeff any time in the near future.

As soon as she was out the door, she lit a cigarette and shouted out the word 'Fuck'!

The six o'clock news was saturated with coverage of the Carl Dawson trial. A verdict had just been reached and that verdict was being announced to a chorus of reporters and cameras and spectators. Since the Bernardo and Homolka media circus that had held Toronto in its grip back in 1995; the city and indeed the country had been on the verge of surrendering to the expectations of American-style television justice. Nancy shuddered at the very idea of serious life and death issues being reduced to the simplistic level of professional spectator sports.

Carl Dawson had been found guilty; and Nancy was hardly surprised. Her brief visit to the spectators' gallery had convinced her that the husband was as guilty as hell. It now seemed that, towards the trial's conclusion that the slimy defense lawyer had tried to argue a temporary insanity exemption on behalf of the client. Dawson had temporarily lost his marbles because his wife had long ago lost hers - Nancy could easily visualize that lawyer Newton trying to pull that one on the jury. Well, the jury hadn't swallowed any of that crap and good for the jury.

And Sarah Lloyd-Matthews had been the undisputed star of this courtroom drama. Sarah had been relentlessly precise - leaving no room whatever for any tricky maneuvering by the defense team. She had made the first-degree murder verdict seem a foregone conclusion; despite all the ultimately irrelevant evidence about Joan Dawson's booze and drug problems and the marital infidelities of both her self and Carl. Nancy thought this was all for the better. Murder trials always did seem to lose their focuses and degenerate into soap operas. The fundamental question of *did he do it* would become usurped by character allegations and other volatile issues that lawyers

would always be harping on for their ultimately self-serving purposes. And Sarah Lloyd-Matthews had stood her ground. Carl Dawson was now to be sentenced and locked up; although of course there would be at least one serious appeal by the defense.

The telephone rang as the news broadcast shifted from the outcome of the Dawson trial to yet more evidence of racism among the Canadian armed forces. Nancy didn't recognize the incoming number; but she decided to take the call. As she picked up the receiver, she killed the volume from the television.

'Nancy. It's Claire Wilkinson.'

'Oh...Hello.' She hadn't been expecting any particular calls but she was surprised that Claire was calling her.

The older woman cleared her throat.

'There's something I need to talk to you about. Are you available this evening?'

'Tonight?' This was Friday but she wasn't committing herself to anything just yet.

'Yes. Were you by any chance watching the CBC news, Nancy? About the Dawson trial?'

'Yes? I mean, I was?'

'Then, if you haven't already made any other plans; why not join me for drinks at The Senator?'

The Senator? She knew the name; and The Senator was a restaurant and entertainment venue to which Nancy had never been. Wasn't the Senator a rather upscale establishment - with jazz singers?

'It's my treat, Nancy. Make yourself something to eat first and then get yourself dressed. You don't have to wear a *dress* or a *suit*; but they don't admit people wearing jeans..

Nancy cringed. She had one pair of pants which weren't either jeans or dungarees. She could wear her old black leather pants with a Brooks Brothers' shirt and a man's tie. But she didn't really feel like getting herself changed.

Why *the Senator*? But she chose not to challenge Claire on her choice of venue.

'Would you like me to pick you up?'

Evidently Claire assumed Nancy would be getting herself nicely fixed up.

'No, I'm fine. I can meet you there, Claire. It's on Victoria? Just south of Dundas?'

'That's right, Nancy. Meet me in front of The Senator. You'll be my guest for the evening; so it's best that you enter with me.' Claire laughed into the receiver. 'It's not as dreadfully formal as I'm making it out to be. Don't worry, just be there at eight.'

'About eight.' Nancy confirmed. 'I'll be there.'

Nancy hung up her receiver abruptly. She looked at her digital clock and saw that it was now six-thirty. She had time to make and eat a few sandwiches, drink a strong cup of coffee, and get changed into clothes she had not worn for quite some time.

She was feeling nervous about the evening ahead; and she realized that, unless she ate *something* before meeting

Claire, she might manage to become seriously impaired and then have to deal with the consequences tomorrow.

A light wet snow had begun falling by the time Nancy arrived at the corner of Victoria and Dundas. She could see a crowd of people entering a door which was located beneath a sign announcing THE SENATOR. This uniformly well-dressed and definitely middle-aged crowd was destined for the top of The Senator; where the jazz was not anti-social and where the drinks and cigars were good and expensive.

Claire Wilkinson did not look too out of place among this crowd. She looked more traditionally feminine than Nancy had ever seen her - a cashmere dress coat and black slacks were actually a pleasant switch from the ancient tweeds. However, Nancy hadn't seen any other obviously gay people among the crowd entering THE SENATOR.

'Come, Nancy. We must get out of this snow.'

Nancy followed Claire up the stairs to a landing where there was a coat-check. She detected a definite hostility from the man at the coat-check counter.

'Your coat please, madam?'

She could tell the man wasn't impressed by her coat, which was beginning to wear thin at the elbows. She could tell the clerk regarded her as some tree-hugger who would sit and listen to the music, rather than do so while consuming single-malt scotches or whatever.

A tree-hugger - that's what he was classifying her as. As if tree-huggers would wear leather pants!

'So, Nancy. *This* is your concept of upwardly-mobile? Black leather trousers, Brooks Brothers, and a tie? Can't take you anywhere?'

Nancy laughed at Claire. After all, they were safely out of the clerk's earshot.

The room was already three-quarters full, with the generic crowd of middle-aged jazz fans already enjoying their scotches and their cigars. Nancy was definitely going to need an ashtray; but the odor of cigars was not one of her favourite fragrances.

This will do. Okay?'

The table was as good as any of the others in the smoking section, Nancy decided. The bandstand was visible and nobody too close to them was smoking cigars.

Claire sat down.

'I'll have a Glenfiddich. What about you, Nancy. And it's my treat.'

She looked around the room, then made her decision.

'Beer. Red Baron, if they have it.'

'You don't have to, Nancy.'

'It's okay, Claire. I prefer beer.'

Claire placed their order while Nancy registered the musicians on the bandstand. The musicians were on the verge of commencing their pre-set. There was a pianist bassist, a drummer, and a saxophonist - uniformly attired in white shirts, black bow-ties, and black trousers. The shoes varied, without distinction.

Nancy noted the unattended but meticulously-positioned microphone occupying centre-stage. There had been a singer's name advertised on the marquee outside - Antonella Matthews. So where was the singer, Nancy wondered to herself. She was probably poisoning herself to make a grand entrance in the tradition of far too many minor divas.

Nancy shook her head. She did not enjoy easy-listening vocal jazz.

'I didn't realize the music was about to begin *this* soon'. Claire remarked as she retrieved her cigarettes from her purse. I get the impression you dislike jazz.'

Claire's suspicions were not inaccurate, Nancy nodded. So why exactly had Claire insisted on their meeting at a restaurant featuring jazz?

'I'm not that fond of it, myself', Claire lit her cigarette. 'It's too *macho*, too *aggressive*. I do like Billie Holliday, though. And also Peggy Lee.'

Somehow this figured. These were fairly standard tastes that Nancy herself didn't mind. She suspected that Claire - if she had any great interest in music - had a preference for perhaps light opera, or maybe baroque classical.

Then Nancy almost bit her tongue.

Sarah Lloyd-Matthews had now entered the Senator. Sarah Lloyd-Matthews was now walking toward a specially-reserved table in the company of Police Superintendent John Sutcliffe, that very English police officer who had doubtlessly alerted that Inspector Connors to her own petty record in Vancouver.

So *this* was the man in Sarah Lloyd-Matthews' love life! Nancy was having a lot of difficulty believing what she clearly saw with her own eyes; but she had no trouble believing that Sarah would be a *copfucker*.

'What on earth has come over you, Nancy?'

Claire Wilkinson had slipped back into her Faculty adviser role.

'Do you see what I see Claire?'

'No?', Claire's eyes followed the smoke from her cigarette, 'Oh, my God! I do see. It's our celebrity feminist lawyer, enjoying a night out on the town with a police superintendent?'

Nancy retrieved her smokes from her purse.

'You know this gentleman, Nancy?'

'As much as I need to. He supplied some petty character evidence against me to the cop who grilled me about my whereabouts on the night of Barry's murder.'

'What?'. Claire coughed after drawing on her cigarette.

'He told the interrogator about my arrest, conviction, and subsequent dismissal for public drunkenness and disturbing the peace at The Malcolm Lowry Bar in Burnaby, B.C.'

'Oh. I mean, how *literary*.'

Claire chuckled rather heartily, seemingly quite impressed by Nancy's delinquent credentials.

Nancy said nothing, as she watched Sarah and John Sutcliffe ordering their beverages while John was firing up a presumably expensive cigar.

'What the fuck are they doing here, anyway?' Nancy now demanded to know

Claire exhaled patiently.

'I'm not quite sure yet as to why this apparent couple are at THE SENATOR tonight; but I would suggest that if we were to control ourselves and keep an eye on the pair of them then everything will eventually fall into place.'

What the hell was Claire blathering about? *Why* did Claire always seem to know something that she was completely incapable of expressing directly?

Nancy drew on her cigarette while watching Superintendent Sutcliffe lighting up his big cigar. The jazz quintet on stage finished one tune and promptly began another. Nancy noticed that the second tune sounded very similar to the first - at least to *her* ears. The singer must be in the dressing room, she thought - touching up her make-up prior to her grand entrance. Or perhaps powdering her nose.

'Nancy''.

Now Claire Wilkinson was drawing her attention to the Lloyd-Matthews and Sutcliffe table, where a photographer was escorting Sarah over to a designated neutral zone to the right of the stage; where a young woman was already perfectly in position.

The two women were obviously biological mother and daughter. Looking at Antonella Matthews, Nancy could see how daughter would eventually replicate mother.

Then something else struck her. 'Antonella Matthews' was obviously Sarah Lloyd-Matthews' daughter; but the newborn jazz singer had previously been a member of a Vancouver grrrrl-rock band called METEOROLOGICAL METHOD. She remembered Antonella as *Terri* Matthews; and Nancy had not liked her at all.

Terri Matthews had been the resident druggie in the band; which had made her the odd girl out in terms of *that* band's general demeanor. METEOROLOGICAL METHOD had disdained STRIPES AND SPOTS largely due to the former's disapproval of bisexuality and messy polymorphisity as opposed to good old-fashioned lesbianism. Nancy had not liked any of METEOROLOGICAL METHOD very much, except for one of the guitarists who had always acted professionally and who had clearly had a mind of her own.

And now here was Terri Matthews, coifed not unlike her mother and singing jazz. Probably Terri was quite clean and sober; and probably a recovered heterosexual as well - Nancy more than suspected this.

Antonella finally made her entrance to an enthusiastic but subdued response. This was upscale, after all; and restraint was expected from the audience. Antonella's wardrobe was also coordinated with her band's -she wore a white blouse with black slacks and stylish gold high-heeled shoes. Androgyny was not part of her equation, anymore. It may have been in METEOROLOGICAL METHOD but it certainly wasn't tonight.

Her first tune was one of those lazy ballads of which Nancy could never remember titles - STORMY WEATHER? SPOHISTICATED LADY? She thought Claire might know but she decided against asking.

Claire read her mind.

'I don't think she's such a wonderful singer either, Nancy. But Helen's daughter told me about this former associate of hers and I became quite curious. I realized she must be referring to Sarah Lloyd-Matthews' daughter.'

Helen's daughter ?

Nancy reached for another cigarette.

'So, who's Antonella's father, Claire?'

Claire looked over towards Sarah and her date with the fine cigar,

'Dennis Matthews. Now, Nancy, you're from Vancouver so surely you do recognize *that* name?'

Nancy lit her smoke and taxed her mental resources for a long moment. Then she felt her eyes rolling.

'Dennis Matthews. Provincial politician who was discovered to be a chicken hawk.'

Claire nodded, appreciatively.

'You are right. Quite the little scandal, if I may say so myself.'

Nancy drew on her cigarette and exhaled.

'Well, Claire. That just might have been a major factor in Sarah's becoming involved with LEAF.'

'LEAF?' Claire looked startled.

'Women's Legal and Education Fund - or whatever the acronym. Dennis Matthews just might have been a factor in her apparently becoming a copfucker.'

Claire Wilkinson roared.

'Such a uniquely derogatory word - *copfucker*.

Nancy now tilted her head back toward the Lloyd-Matthews and Sutcliffe table.

'So then. What the hell was Sarah doing picking up *Barry Ferguson* in her expensive car one day after Barry's class ?'

Claire began to reach into her purse, and then pulled her right hand back.

'Sarah and Barry were married, Nancy.'

'*What? Sarah* was Barry's wife?'

'Yes indeed, dear. The pair of them were married.'

Nancy stared at Sarah Lloyd-Matthews, who was making sure the photographers weren't watching before lighting a cigarette. She could not believe that this high powered and

professional feminist lawyer had once been married to a bisexual academic male who had advocated the breakdown of traditional gender distinctions and labels; even though the man's personal practices had ultimately been at odds with his free-falling philosophies.

'Well, Claire. *This* definitely qualifies as a bombshell.

Nancy took a drag on the cigarette and then butted it out.

'I had figured Sarah to have been Barry's lawyer - maybe in his divorce case or maybe in relation to *something else*. I would have never thought them man and wife.'

Claire smiled.

'Only a wife could pick somebody up like that after class and take them away to wherever. Obvious power dynamic, Nancy. But I admit, the fact of their marriage is pretty damn unbelievable.'

'Did you know them during their marriage?'

Claire shook her head while now retrieving her cigarettes.

'Not really. I met her a couple of times, by accident. I was never *meant* to meet her, Nancy. I mean, Barry did acknowledge her existence when he was among his friends. But, we never thought there was anything wrong or peculiar about Barry and Sarah having such separate lives.'

Claire lit her cigarette.

'A lot of couples live that way, as I've told you before. That's how they maintain their relationship - by *not* having the same friends.'

Nancy shook her head, as she sipped her beer. Antonella Matthews' voice was really beginning to grate on her. She had never tolerated Terri Matthews *personally* but -as a member of METEOROLOGICAL METHOD - she had grudgingly respected the woman's music. She had no respect whatever for the mush the woman was presenting to these obnoxious rich people this evening - reformed junkie adult muzak.

'Claire?'

'Yes, what is it?'

'Can we get out of here?'

Claire Wilkinson regarded Nancy with what appeared to be a twinkle in her eyes.

'Would you like to drop by the house for a nightcap? Meet Helen and her daughter?'

'Her daughter?' Nancy strained her face attempting to remember the daughter's name. *Something* Bingham.

'Sure. I mean, why not?'

She was in a mood for a few more bombshells. Sure, why not.

'Then finish your beer; and we can leave.'

Nancy finished her beer and then stood.

'I doubt Helen and I have any beer in our refrigerator.'

Then Claire remembered something.

'But wait a minute. I'm sure Amanda has some beer you can drink.'

Amanda. That was Helen's daughter's name.

Amanda Gene. The guitarist for METEOROLOGICAL METHOD hadn't used her actual surname professionally. Many boys and girls and intersexuals in the punk scene hadn't.

Amanda Bingham. Yes, Nancy remembered her. The quiet one. The one she had *not* disliked.

'My coat, please', Nancy addressed the clerk as she and Claire approached the coat-check.

The clerk quickly retrieved Nancy's coat as if it were some sort of toxic waste that had rubbed shoulders with everybody else's coats.

Nancy and Claire did not look back at the clerk or the singer or the singer's mother with her date.

'Oh, Nancy. Smoking is a no-no in the house - except for in my study. Is this a problem?'

Nancy shook her head.

Claire's sedan was parked not too far away from THE SENATOR; and within fifteen seconds they were safe and warm in the car. The wet snow had begun to fall harder and the temperature itself was dropping. Nancy wished she had had a pair of boots to wear.

'So? You thought Sarah Lloyd-Matthews was Barry's lawyer?', Claire chuckled as she turned left onto Dundas Street. 'Barry always used to explain that his wife was a lawyer - this explained why she didn't mingle socially. But I more than suspect she represented herself during divorce proceedings.'

'He contested it?'

'Well,'. Claire turned to look at her as they stopped at a red light. 'There was the custody issue.'

Custody/ A child/

Nancy stared at the wet road ahead of the car.

'Sarah and Barry had a son. Sarah of course won custody.'

Of course. Nancy digested what she had just heard. She was now unsure whether she could digest anything further this particular evening.

But she saw no opportunity for herself to tell Claire to *stop the car and let her get out.*

Nancy remained silent as Claire turned off of Dundas Street onto Church. The snow was beginning to accumulate on the sidewalks; and the roads were becoming slippery. She was glad that Claire had only consumed the one Scotch.

It looked like she would not be watching the eleven o'clock news. The victorious aftermath of the Dawson trial would be highlighted; but Nancy wondered about Sarah Lloyd-Matthews'

night on the town after the successful verdict. And who were those photographers at THE SENATOR; and where would their pictures surface?

Now Claire was wondering whether something was wrong.

'I wasn't expecting this much snow", Nancy replied offhandedly. But not offhandedly enough to satisfy Claire.

'Oh, come now. Surely you're not one of those meteorologically-dependent individuals who lets their emotions and indeed their lives be completely predetermined by the bloody weather?'

As Claire drove up church street Nancy decided to tell her something - as simply as possible.

'I have a chequered history in Vancouver. Okay, Claire? Although The Senator for starters is hardly my cup of tea; the combination of 'Antonella" Matthews, Barry Ferguson's ex-wife who is also Terri's mother by another man with a nasty reputation; and then Sarah's apparent liaison with a *police superintendent* is all quite a lot to stomach in one evening, if you know what I mean?'

Nancy continued before Claire could intervene.

'I never did like Terri Matthews. And now I'm about to reacquaint myself with Amanda Bingham, who is your partner's daughter and who also played in a band with Terri- a band which I disliked. I liked Amanda Gene; but the others really got on my nerves. They were so fucking self-righteous and 'politically-correct. METEOROLOGICAL METHOD used to drive STRIPES AND SPOTS up the wall!'

The traffic light was red at the intersection of Church and Carlton; so Claire stopped the car and looked directly at Nancy.

'People *change* when you allow them a couple of years. Some people change a lot. I suspect that *you* have.'

Nancy shook her head.

I don't really think I have. And I don't think a lot of people change all that much by the time they're in their twenties either.'

'Well, then. Your Vancouver period will always be a part of your history. So, why deny it?'

Nancy was angry at Claire's assumption, but she refrained from any further argument. As Claire drove cautiously up Church Street towards Wellesley; Nancy looked out her window and recognized Jeff and Derek, who were probably on their way to Woody's for drinks.

Claire also recognized the couple.

'Should I honk my horn, Nancy?'

For a moment, Nancy was mortified by the possibility. Then she laughed.

'Sure. Why not?'

Claire honked as the traffic light at church and Wellesley was changing to green. Derek waved as Jeff covered his face in not-quite mock horror.

'So much for Boystown", Claire pronounced as she drove north toward Bloor. "Listen, Nancy. I think Amanda Bingham is a wonderful girl - a lot like her mother. I've also grown to like Ken.'

A brother?

'It's only recently that Helen and Ken have regained contact with each other.'

'Slow down a minute, Claire.'

'Yes?', Claire could see the lights would change at Bloor so she took her foot off of the gas pedal.

'Ken is Amanda's brother? So, is this another nasty custody situation?'

'Aren't most of them?', Claire stopped the car. 'Helen's ex-husband just might be my least favourite person on this entire damn planet.'

'Who was he, then. Or who is he?'

'Helen was formerly married to a prominent used-car dealer named Albert Moffat.'

Nancy tried to place *that* name. It seemed familiar; but she decided against pursuing further - at least for now. She was already having enough difficulty keeping her Vancouver family trees straight and intact.

'Ken and Amanda are sharing an apartment in Vancouver - near Main and Broadway. Ken went through a rough period but he seems to have come out of it. We're almost there, Nancy. See?'

Claire had hit all green lights for remainder of their ride; and now Nancy could see the house. It was deceptively small on the outside; but she could see how at least two people could share this accommodation without stepping on each other or even being aware of each other.

Again, Claire reiterated that smoking was only permissible in her study. Helen had asthma; or was it boundaries in addition to the asthma.

Whether or not she could smoke was, at this moment, the least of Nancy's worries.

Although Claire Wilkinson had let Nancy and herself into the house with her key; Helen Bingham was standing in the vestibule to greet them. Helen wore a pleasantly quizzical expression on her face. She hadn't really been expecting Claire to have returned from THE SENATOR so early. More than likely, she hadn't been expecting her partner to be returning with a visitor.

Helen Bingham was a tall, thin woman who almost towered over her girlfriend. Helen smiled, demanding an explanation and an introduction.

Claire had no choice but to oblige.

'Helen, this is Nancy Leonard. I believe I have mentioned Miss Leonard to you previously and I did tell you that we would be meeting at THE SENATOR for drinks and conversation.'

Helen and Nancy shook hands.

'Well, Nancy, you don't appear to have had too much to drink. Therefore I can assume you and Claire enjoyed a good and fruitful conversation. Why not take that coat off and come into the living room?'

Claire took Nancy's coat as Nancy followed Helen into the living room. Helen sat down in an armchair and she invited Nancy to choose between another armchair and the sofa. Nancy chose one of the other armchairs while Claire walked through the living room and into the adjoining kitchen. Nancy noticed there were no ashtrays in the living room and presumably none in the entire house - with the certain exception of Claire's study.

'Well, Nancy. The two of you talked for almost two hours. Surely *the music* couldn't have been the subject of extended conversation?'

Nancy wondered if Helen was referring to the singer's personality or to her previous musical incarnation. She wondered if Helen Bingham knew Terri or any of the other METEOROLOGICAL METHOD girls.

She shifted her position in the armchair.

'The music wasn't loud enough to distract us; and it was too boring to demand our concentration.'

Now Helen chortled.

'Teresa, or Antonella Matthews as she is now advertising herself as, used to play in a rock band with my daughter.'

'Yes.', Nancy nodded. 'I remember your daughter.'

Helen smiled.

'Terri Matthews desperately needed to reinvent herself. So out went the noise and the drugs and in came the jazz and the new sobriety.'

'Yes.', Nancy again nodded. 'That is a common trajectory.'

What about the heterosexuality that she assumed was a part of Terri's self-reinvention?

'Claire tells me you are rather literary at heart.
Claire?'

'What?' Claire shouted somewhat harshly from the kitchen.

'What concoctions are you mixing up for us?'

'What do you mean 'mixing'? I'm having a Glenfiddich neat. What do you wish for yourselves?'

'Glenfiddich with ice suits me, Claire. What about Nancy?'

Nancy shrugged.

'Beer?'

Helen smiled at her.

'Amanda has beer. I'm sure she won't mind.'

'It's Upper Canada dark ale." Claire called out from the kitchen. 'Is that acceptable?'

'Sure.'

'Upper Canada is apparently Toronto's equivalent of Granville Island - a micro-brewery.'

Helen Bingham was observing Nancy but not at all clinically. Upper Canada was actually more or less equivalent to Granville Island, Nancy remarked to herself.

'So, Helen. Where is Amanda tonight? Claire inquired as she finally emerged from the kitchen with the drinks.

'Out watching some band. I believe the band's name was MAGGIE'S FARMERS.'

'Oh, no', Nancy could not conceal her alarm.

'I don't think Amanda's too wild about them either, Nancy. I think this is really more of a social obligation. Cheers.'

Helen Bingham initiated a toast as the three women raised their glasses into the air more or less in synchronization. Claire had sat herself down in the armchair adjacent to Helen's while the sofa remained unoccupied. Nancy could not help thinking that Helen seemed quite a bit younger than Claire - both physically and mentally. But, surely Amanda was only a couple of years younger than herself- at the most?

Nancy was distracted by a mackerel-patterned cat which leapt onto the unoccupied sofa and began preening for her captive audience. Occasionally she still considered obtaining a cat similar to the black cat who had been her companion in her early teens; but she always managed to resist this particular temptation.

'Bathsheba! Off the sofa!' Helen commanded the cat which of course ignored the command. 'Bathsheba' seemed somehow to be an appropriate name for a cat 'belonging' to Claire and Helen; although not as obviously suitable as 'Mr. Plato' had been for Barry's cat. Nancy wondered what had happened to Mr. Plato; but she refrained from asking Claire who either would not know or would *pretend* not to know the answer to her question.

'I'll give her some kibble, Helen. That should get the cat off of the sofa.'

Claire abruptly disappeared into the kitchen and Nancy heard the sound of dry cat-food being poured into a bowl. Then she recognized the sound of the cat requesting to be let outside - a request Claire was pleased to grant her.

'I think she's in one of her hunting moods, Claire.' Helen suggested.

'That's fine.....as long as she doesn't come back with any presents.'

Nancy recalled Blackie with her mice and her songbirds. Now she often felt that domesticated animals and humans were a tragicomic mismatch. She frequently wished for domestic cats to morph into lions or tigers and then put their wretched humans out of their miseries. But she was not feeling so misanthropic with regards to Claire, Helen, and Bathsheba.

Nancy heard the sound of a key opening the front door.

'That must be Amanda', Helen announced.

Almost as soon as Nancy shifted her eye line toward the vestibule; Amanda Bingham strode into the living room area. She was as tall and as auburn-haired as Nancy remembered her being in METEOROLOGICAL METHOD; but she was walking far more confidently than in her previous incarnation. Amanda had, in fact, made a diva's entrance without forcing it - unlike Terri Matthews, Amanda had casually been quite aware that her entrance was what the others in the room had been anticipating.

'How are you, Nancy? I'd heard you'd moved back to Toronto.'

Well, here I am - Nancy thought to herself. And here *she* is.

'I've been here for almost two years - taking English lit. And Communications at U.of T., leaning more towards the English Lit.'

Amanda nodded.

'You always were the literary one in the band. But you knew that, Nancy.'

Yes, Nancy had heard herself referred to as such before on several occasions.

'Visiting Mom?'

The tall girl nodded.

'Just for the weekend. Then I'm back to Vancouver. I leave Sunday night so I can get back to Emily Carr on Monday morning.'

'So you also went back to school?'

'Uh huh. Media Arts and Photography. It seemed like the obvious thing to do.'

'Would you like a beer, Amanda? Should I bring you one?' Helen had stood up.

'Thanks, Mom.'

'I had a beer at the 360 - I didn't stay very long there', Amanda informed Nancy.

'MAGGIE'S FARMERS?'

Amanda accepted a bottle of Upper Canada from her mother.

'Cheers. I had to meet two transported Vancouverites there. These two acquaintances of mine are much fonder of that band than I am.'

'I also dislike that band. Half a song was enough one night.'

Nancy hoped that Amanda's transplanted friends were not those two nosy parkers she had walked away from that one night at the 360 that now seemed so long ago.

Nancy sipped her beer, trying not to drink too rapidly.

'So, Amanda. Your mother's girlfriend and I left before the end of the first set by your former band mate. *She* has certainly turned over a new leaf.'

Amanda snorted.

'Terri was a fucked-up person when she was a junkie and now I suspect she's even worse. I hear she's become a Scientologist.'

Nancy and Amanda giggled.

'A Scientologist?' Helen Bingham cut in. '*That* has to be one of the stupidest of all organized religions.'

'I'll bet these two girls have a lot of other nutty friends in common whom they need to catch up on.'

Claire had returned from the kitchen but had not sat back down.

'I'm going to excuse myself and do a little reading in my study, if nobody minds.'

She looked particularly at Nancy, who could tell Claire needed a cigarette.

Helen also stood to leave.

'I'm going to get back to my writing, if that's all right.'

'It's all right, Mom. You have my permission.'

With a guffaw, Claire trudged off to her study on the ground floor while Helen headed upstairs towards a small den beside the master bedroom.

After Helen and Claire were safely out of earshot; Amanda whispered.

'Which other nutty friends do we need to catch up on?'

'Perhaps Claire and Helen?'

Nancy and Amanda both giggled.

'I don't mean Claire and Helen are fucked-up in the way Miss *Antonella* Matthews is fucked-up.'

Nancy clarified this to Amanda. 'Your mother seems really pleasant but Claire is, uh, *eccentric*.'

'That is a good word for Claire, Nancy. So is 'dotty' \.

'Actually, I think Claire is a riot. She tries to be secretive and yet she is consistently obvious. But, Amanda' Nancy sipped her beer.' Do you know who *Terri's* mother is?'

Amanda scratched her head. Terri Matthews had never talked about her nuclear family when they'd been in the band together.

'No, I don't. Who is Terri's mother?'

'Sarah Lloyd-Matthews, this hot high-powered feminist lawyer - a member of FEAF, no less - who used to be married to Dennis Matthews who...'

'Was a former British Columbia MLA who got caught with his pants down.'

'In the company of chicken. And, prior to Dennis Matthews," Nancy paused.' Sarah Lloyd was married to *Barry Ferguson*. !'.

'Who was one of Claire Wilkinson's oldest and dearest fiends...?'

'Who was my Lit.Crit and Theory professor and who was murdered on the track near the Central Downtown YMCA.'

Amanda held her breath for a sustained moment.

'Oh. My God! So, it appears that Terri's mother has a habit of getting involved with men whose sexual preference is for young boys?'

'I don't know if she's locked into that kind of pattern now, Amanda.'

'What do you mean?' Amanda shook her head.

'Earlier tonight, at THE SENATOR, Terri's mother appeared to be on a date with a high-ranking Toronto police superintendent. John Sutcliffe is the name. When the cops interrogated me about my whereabouts on the night of Barry's murder, John Sutcliffe was the man my interrogator was working under. Somehow, I doubt that John Sutcliffe is a chicken hawk!'

Nancy looked at Amanda, and then continued.

'But...Sarah being Terri's mother is only the *least* of tonight's revelations. Sarah having previously been married to *Barry* and then their having a *son*, those were the bombshells!'

'How old is the son, Nancy?'

She shook her head.

'I don't know. I only found out about this marriage tonight; although Barry did tell me he was once married. When I asked Barry his wife's name; the man clammed right up. He became quite defensive and hostile.'

Amanda finished her beer and walked toward the kitchen

'If the son is over twelve, or in his early teens; then he may not be in Sarah's custody any more. He may have already left home. Maybe he's on the street, maybe he's in a band, maybe he's a model - who knows?'

'I'd like to know, Amanda. I *need* to know.'

'Guess what?'

Amanda returned from the kitchen, empty-handed.

'I have beer at my place, as well as some drugs. Why don't you come over?'

'Drugs?'

'Only grass.'

Amanda looked relieved.

'Sure. I'll see if I can borrow Claire and Helen's car. I guess Claire *would* have the keys.'

Nancy looked out the window. The snow was beginning to accumulate quite seriously.

'Are you a good driver, Amanda? I'm only over on Howland.'

Amanda looked out the window.

'You're right. Let's call a cab.'

Nancy scratched her head for a second.

'Shit. I can't remember Co-Op Cabs' number. It used to be DOGS-111.'

'That may be true, Nancy. But your government changed that. Your government's even worse than ours.'

'Don't remind me.', Nancy grimaced. 'I look up the Yellow Pages and then make the call.'

'Then I'll say goodnight to Mom.'

'And I will to Claire.'

Amanda looked at Nancy

'Well, Claire did take me out on the town and tell me things tonight, you might say.'

'Make the call, okay.' Amanda laughed. 'We'll probably have to wait a while in this weather, anyway.'

Nancy had found the cab company's number, so she made the call. The dispatch promised a cab in about five minutes. Her experience had taught her five meant more like fifteen.

This allowed Amanda to spend a few minutes with her mother - up in the writing den. Meanwhile, Nancy hung up the receiver and walked toward Claire's study. She felt obliged to thank Claire for the drinks and the revelations.

Mark walked home in the steadily-falling November snow, through Moss Park towards his rooming house on Seaton Street. He had initially been shopping - unsuccessfully - for second-hand furniture on Queen Street East and then he had run into an older friend who lived on Sherbourne - just north of Queen.

Dave Conroy had once been a fairly successful artist but his career had nose-dived in tandem with aspects of his personal life. His once discreet heroin use had become glaringly obvious and he had also begun to publicly disdain the art business. The artist stopped churning out his formerly-marketable paintings and now patronized younger, neo-anarchist and neo-pagan performance artists, who performed rituals or ceremonies rather than making art objects or commodities. This transformation was of course the final nail in the coffin, as far as Dave Conroy's art-dealer was concerned.

Mark knew Dave Conroy through musician-friends, who provided soundtracks for shamanistic performance-pieces. Mark himself still picked up the odd bit of work scoring experimental films and videotapes. He had ambivalent feelings about most of this particular crowd. Despite their anti-materialistic beliefs; many of the neo-anarchist composers and performers Mark knew were extremely competitive when it came down to just who had the most impressively modern technologies and accessories. And compared to

most of the other members of this little community; Mark's own equipment was pretty well obsolete. So, Mark was hardly in demand, to put it mildly.

Dave Conroy claimed to be clean but Mark could tell that he wasn't. He could see Dave becoming itchy and unfocused during their conversation and this was Mark's cue to get moving before the snowfall matured into some kind of early-seasonal blizzard. So he thanked Dave for the beer and conversation and then proceeded to cut through the Moss Park housing complex and then walk up Berkeley Street toward his own abode.

Between Dundas and Gerrard streets there was a laneway between Berkeley and Seaton that Mark often walked through. The alley itself had no particular associations - it was a means of access to rear entrances which were accessible to tenants but not to regular pedestrians. Mark disliked staring at the facades of the neighbourhood houses. They were all too damn interchangeable and similar to the facade of what was now his residence.

He tripped on the pavement and then regained his footing. Then he looked down at the pavement, wondering *why* he had almost tripped over.

He recognized the dead body. 'Kevin' or 'Eric' or whatever the guy's name lay still on the pavement. An overdose, Mark could tell.

He knew the youth lived over on Berkeley. He knew the young man had not wished to die at home - that he was protecting his friend right up to the end. Mark knew sooner or later - in due time- somebody in authority would either be informed about the corpse or else stumble over it himself.

There was no need for Mark to become officially involved. It was the last thing he needed to do. He knew that too damn well.

But he needed to tell *somebody*. He ran home through the snow, violently inserted his key into the rear side entrance and then called his sister on his old rotary telephone.

'Fuck, Nancy. I think you're home. Please, pick up the phone!'

But she didn't pick it up. He had no way of knowing whether or not she was home. He decided *not* to leave a message. He needed to talk to *her* - not her fucking machine.

After doing so, Mark threw off his wet shoes and jammed a Nine Inch Nails CD into his ancient deck. Then he lay down on the mattress with his eyes closed. If any of his neighbours complained he would tell them to go fuck themselves. If the landlord complained; he would get the same message. And if anybody besides his sister were to call him any time in the near future; he would scream at them until their ears fell off of their heads and onto the floor.

'Well? Here we are.'

Nancy pushed the door to her apartment open to reveal her functional living-space to Amanda, who did not seem at all shocked by the relatively diminutive dimensions.

'It's barely big enough for one person, Amanda - let alone more than one.'

'No pets?'

'None"', Nancy laughed at the unexpected question.

'There's beer in the refrigerator. Just let me check my phone messages.'

Amanda sat down and waited for Nancy to check the answering machine.

The call-indicating light was flashing; so Nancy rewound the tape back to where she remembered it being before she had gone out. Whoever had called her this evening had not left a very long message.

In fact, there were *no* messages. Somebody had called her and then hesitated whether or not to leave a message. There was an extended tone and then the sound of somebody hanging up their receiver.

'Shit. I hate it when people do that.'

'I can't say I appreciate it either, Nancy. But you have to remember that some people just aren't comfortable talking to machines.'

Nancy now walked over to her refrigerator.

'If somebody were trying to get in touch with me I'd prefer to know *who* that somebody is.'

She paced the floor before opening the refrigerator door. She wondered if the caller had been her brother.

'Hey, Nancy. How about that beer?'

Nancy laughed. She opened the refrigerator and pulled out two bottles of Red Baron, which she carried back to where Amanda was sitting.

They clicked their bottles without announcing who or what they were toasting.

'I need a cigarette.'

Nancy sat down in the chair opposite Amanda's and pulled out her pack of Player's Lights.

'Did you quit, Amanda?'

'Uh huh.' Amanda sipped her beer. 'Well, I lapse very occasionally.'

'I wish *I* could say that.'

Nancy wondered what exactly constituted Amanda's occasions.

'I'm sorry I don't have any music.' she lit her cigarette and exhaled. 'Sometimes my upstairs neighbour provides the sounds I need to hear. But he doesn't seem to be home tonight.'

'What kind of music does your neighbour play?'

'Techno, jungle, drums 'n' bass.....all the shit we old rockers are supposed to look down on but which I was always a closet aficionado of.'

'Really?' Amanda was curious. 'I don't mind *some* techno.... Have you lived here long, Nancy?'

'Since I moved back to Toronto.' She drew on her cigarette and then her beer. 'It's what's referred to as a functional student apartment- nothing more and nothing less.'

Amanda smiled.

'It's a lot like mine, except mine's in the basement and I share it with my brother. Got any drugs?'

'Sure.'

Nancy immediately walked toward her bedroom, where her dresser-drawer and her drug stash.

'I though you hated grass and hash.' Amanda called to her.

'I probably did say that once - probably when drunk.' Nancy returned with the marijuana and the rolling papers.

'Hey, Amanda? Did you ever know Barry Ferguson?'

Amanda shook her head.

'Not really. I mean, I met him perhaps three or four times. He was more Claire's friend than my mother's. And both my mother and Claire had a tendency to separate their social friends from their biological families. Do you know what I mean?'

Nancy drew on her cigarette while rolling a joint.

'That's sort of how Claire put it to me - not that Claire has a family. Or, does she?'

Amanda watched Nancy roll the joint.

'She has a husband. A lot of older dykes are married, but only formally - or for immigration-related reasons. There aren't any children, if you're curious about *that*.'

Nancy almost choked on her beer.

'Claire is married? To whom?'

'An American philosophy professor. Another distinguished bachelor in everything but name.'

'And...they've never bothered to get divorced because...'

'They never really considered themselves to be married. How are we doing with that joint?'

'Fine.'

Nancy lit the joint, took a deep toke, and then passed it to Amanda.

'I think I've seen the gentleman. He has a crusty face - not unlike that of W.H. Auden.'

Amanda took a hit.

'That's him. His name is Tim. He's actually a very nice man; but he *does* have a drinking problem.'

'It's so fucking nineteenth century. Isn't it?'

Nancy and Amanda both laughed. The drugs were having their desired effect.

Then Amanda's expression became serious.

'Claire says you're beyond obsessed with Barry Ferguson's murder.'

Nancy butted out the cigarette while taking a hit from the joint.

'I guess she's right.....Look, I know this might sound irrational; but I'm convinced the cops were way off the beat right from the word go. They had this prostitute in custody whose alibi seems suspect only because he's protecting somebody else who has nothing to do with Barry or the murder.'

'Really?'

'Yes, really. I'm convinced Barry's enthusiasm for rough trade is a red herring.'

'Well", Amanda took a hit and passed the joint back across to Nancy. 'He was found dead on the Track'.

'I know. But that's all too damn neat.' Nancy took her hit and passed the joint back to her guest. 'I've seen this *other* guy who looks almost exactly like the guy the cops had in custody- except this guy's a few years older. I saw this guy -he's probably in his early twenties - on the Track one night *before* the murder, as well as after. My brother's seen him too. Mark and I are both convinced that this young man is *not* a prostitute. And then, Danny upstairs saw the guy one night at a rave - just staring at him.'

'Staring at Danny - your neighbour.'

'Yes, Amanda. There is definitely something weird going on with this guy.'

Nancy lit another cigarette and offered one to Amanda, who declined.

'Have you seen this guy recently, Nancy?'

'Not for a few days", she exhaled. 'I suspect he may have left town. Shit, I'll bet that call was from Mark.'

'Maybe you should try calling your brother?'

Amanda's tone was suddenly blunt.

'You're right.'

Nancy abruptly stood and walked toward the telephone, leaving Amanda to savour the rest of the joint. She clenched her cigarette between her teeth and quickly dialed Mark's number.

After three unanswered rings the machine kicked in.

'Mark. This is Nancy and it's about midnight. If you're there, please pick up the phone. If not, call me back either very soon tonight or else tomorrow morning. I hope everything is all right.'

She returned to her chair angrily. For all she knew, Mark might have been home and had chosen not to pick up the receiver. He might have had a client. Or he might have been too fucked up on smack to deal with any other people. He might be any combination of the above.

Nancy quickly realized that Amanda was not angry and she did not want Amanda to *become* angry.

'Hey. Guess what, Nancy?'

Amanda was tilting her right ear up toward the apartment above.

'Your neighbour is home.'

Amanda patiently waited for Nancy to hear the evidence, then she cracked up.

'Oh yes! Danny is definitely home.'

'Along with a play-mate.'

Nancy exhaled and giggled.

'It sound is me like my neighbour is getting quite royally fucked.'

'Now you seem pleased.', Amanda finished her beer and walked toward the refrigerator to retrieve two more bottles.

'I'm very fond of Danny. I'd love to fuck him myself but I'm aware that scenario would be highly unlikely.'

Amanda returned with two beers.

'He's strictly gay, Nancy?'

'Uh huh.'

'Are you dating anybody in Toronto ?'

'I haven't got time.' Nancy shook her head while listening to Danny being penetrated by some probably gorgeous male visitor.

'No?' Amanda laughed. "I would guess not. Between your school work and your detective work you wouldn't have much time for recreation. Right?'

Nancy drew on her cigarette and then extinguished it.

'My turn. How about you, Amanda? Do you have a girlfriend these days?'

Amanda's face tightened slightly.

'Not for the last four months. I was dating. I mean, Michelle and I were an item of sorts but then we called it off. There wasn't a painful break-up or anything like that.'

'I hope not.' Nancy suspected that there had been some pain involved; but she chose not to pursue this any further.

Amanda looked across the table while sipping from her beer bottle.

'But you like girls and boys. That makes your situation different.'

Nancy bristled.

'Does it? Do you mean 'different'?''

'That's not what I meant, Nancy.'

She relaxed, and then cleared her throat.

'I barely know the local lezzie scenes here. And I'm no longer interested in picking up young boys who are just using me in order to find out whether or not they're queer.'

'Let alone older men.'

Nancy now recalled that Amanda had known Bernard Griffiths - back in Vancouver.

'One Bernard was quite enough, thanks.'

'What about Barry Ferguson?', Amanda sipped more beer.

'Never! Barry did *sort of* make a pass at me. I mean, he implied that everybody really could fuck everybody and anybody when the lights were out and therefore the two of us could hypothetically have a go at it. But I did not take him up on this, Are you sure you didn't know Barry?'

Amanda shook her head, rather vehemently.

'No, Nancy. I mean, I met the guy a few times and that's about it. With my Dad being such an asshole; it took a long time for me to meet any of my Mom's friends. It's only relatively recently that I've gotten to know *Claire*.'

Nancy now laughed.

'Yes, your mother's girlfriend. I thought she fancied me.'

It was Amanda's turn to laugh.

'I'm sure she *does*, Nancy. But it's a crush. Claire's crushes remain crushes, trust me. I mean, Claire Wilkinson has to be the most indirect person I've ever known. Even more than *you*, Nancy Leonard.'

Nancy attempted to look at Amanda as directly as was possible.

'I would love it if you would spend the night with me. How's that for being direct?'

'Not bad at all. I was hoping for such an invitation.'

'I mean, the weather's really shitty so you don't want to go outside again. Right?'

Nancy now walked over to Amanda's chair and leaned her face in towards Amanda's. She wrapped her arms around Amanda's shoulders. Then she began tonguing her guest who immediately reciprocated. She couldn't hear Danny and *his* visitor making any sounds right now.

It was now *their* turn to make noise.

'I think it's time you showed me your bedroom.'

'No argument from me, Amanda Bingham.'

Nancy stood up and turned off the lights in the living room area. Then she showed her new friend the bedroom, immediately tearing her own clothes off and throwing them down onto the floor.

The morning sun awakened Nancy prematurely. She attempted to go back to sleep, after registering that Amanda Bingham was lying perfectly still on the right side of the bed. Amanda was obviously lost in some probably wonderful dream.

But Nancy couldn't get back to sleep. She had far too much on her mind. She would have loved it if her overnight guest was to bolt wide awake at this very moment but she realized this was almost beyond unlikely.

She knew patience would be rewarding. Not only did she wish to have sex with Amanda again; she wished to have an affair with her.

Shit. She lives in *Vancouver*; and she goes back tomorrow night.

Nancy again tried to drift back into sleep. After a good rest she and Amanda would then be able to seriously play -even though she herself had a hangover, which was not helping her to relax her forehead muscles. Morning sex had always been great sex for her, especially when there was no great rush to get out of bed. This was Saturday. There was no school. She had not made any plans for the day.

The phone rang. She was stunned for a second; then she realized the caller had to be Mark.

She rushed over to the phone where her call-indicator confirmed this. As she turned off her answering machine and picked up the receiver; she could glimpse Amanda stirring in bed.

'Morning, Mark.'

'Morning, Nan.'

'Did you try to call me last night?'

'Yes. Were you *home*?'

'Not until after midnight. What's wrong?'

She could hear Mark swallowing and composing himself.

'That guy.....Eric....or 'Kevin'or whatever his name is.....He's dead.'

'What?!'

Amanda bolted upright in the bed.

'I almost tripped over his body, Nan. It was in a laneway...between Berkeley and Seaton. It was an overdose.'

'Over.....Oh.'

So this had *not* been a *murder*?

'Eric didn't want to kill himself at home. That's the way I read it.'

'Hmmm', Nancy digested Mark's theory. Eric's home was really Gary Somebody's home. Gary was a drug dealer whom Eric had been protecting. There was loyalty and then there was loyalty.

'Do you want to meet for breakfast, Nan?'

She didn't want to. She wanted to catch at least another hour's sleep and then spend time with Amanda. Except, she knew damn well she had no choice in the matter.

'I guess so, Mark. I mean, I have a hangover and I have a friend staying with me. But, I guess so.'

'Please, Nan?'

'Where do you want to meet?'

'Tom's Open Kitchen.'

She'd never been there before. She couldn't remember the exact location.

'Sherbourne, south of Queen. In an hour, Nan?'

'An hour and a half. At eleven o'clock.'

'Okay. See you then.'

She heard Mark hanging up before she could say anything further. The extra half hour allowed her time for a shower and a good strong cup of coffee; as well as an explanation to Amanda as to why a pleasant leisurely and sexy morning would not be possible today.

Nancy returned to the bedroom where Amanda was by now wide awake.

'Was that your brother?'

'Yes.', Nancy kissed her before shaking her head. 'I have to go out and meet Mark at eleven. I have to. What are your plans for today?'

Amanda's face seemed frozen for a moment.

'I haven't really made any. I have a friend in Toronto I was going to call up.....maybe go to a movie this afternoon.'

Nancy looked at her.

'I should hope I've finished talking to Mark by, say, three o'clock at the latest. What movie are you going to?'

'I don't know. It depends whether Stephen feels up to a movie.'

This was not the answer Nancy had been hoping for. And who was Stephen; and why might he not feel up to going to the movies.

She walked into the kitchen and retrieved her smokes. She needed a nicotine fix before preparing to meet Mark.

'I have to meet Mark, Amanda. You *do* understand.'

Amanda nodded.

'So, then. Call your friend, figure out what you're doing, and then either leave a note or a message on my answering machine?'

Amanda nodded again.

'That's fine, Nancy. But you and your brother really need to talk; so take as long as you have to. Don't cut it short to accommodate me. Okay? We'll meet up later.'

Nancy drew on her cigarette and then almost managed to smile.

'I have an idea. Let me finish my coffin nail; and then we can take a shower together.'

Amanda walked over to Sauna and kissed her.

'Hurry up and finish your cigarette. And then, brush your teeth.'

Tom's Open kitchen was a generic greasy spoon - nothing more and nothing less. Nancy did not remember ever having eaten there before but that didn't necessarily mean that she hadn't. She just had no association with the place. She vaguely remembered somebody whose face and name escaped her telling her the place was a prime hangout for trannies and junkies and others. But that description hardly jibed with the tiny spoon where she quickly picked out her brother, who had himself just arrived.

'Hi. I assumed you'd want coffee.'

'Thanks Mark.'

Nancy sat down at the table - opposite her brother.

'How are you feeling?'

'I've had better days.' Mark's eyes were noticeably red. 'It's not as if I knew the guy personally; but Eric's death really bothers me.'

She sipped her coffee and allowed a moment of silence before addressing Mark.

'You're sure it's a suicide?'

Mark nodded.

'I don't see how it could be anything else. I mean, it's not like the works were lying right beside him on the pavement; but I could tell by his face. There's no reason for anybody to kill Eric Cunningham. He wasn't protecting anybody connected to Barry Ferguson's murder; he was only protecting Gary.'

'His alibi"', Nancy reached for her cigarettes 'Shit, Mark. This is *really* bad.

Mark shrugged.

'His story's depressing but hardly unique. When my breakfast comes; could you please put your smoke out?'

She nodded while puffing on her cigarette.

'Well, Mark. Now the cops will completely shut down their investigation into Barry's murder. They had fuck all evidence against Eric; but now he must be guilty otherwise why would he commit suicide? Shit!'

Mark glared at her.

'Maybe being held in custody with fuck all evidence against him put the guy over the line. Do you know what I mean, Nan?'

Mark toned his voice down as the toast was delivered to the table.

'I suspect you're right that they'll call off the investigation. You're not eating, Nan?'

'No"', she sipped her coffee which was already too cold for her. 'I'm hung over.'

'You had overnight company?'

She looked at her brother.

'Yes. I did.'

'Girl or boy?'

'A girl'.

Mark was almost smiling

'Is it anybody I know?'

'I don't think so. Her name is Amanda Bingham; and she's from Vancouver-unfortunately. She used to play guitar for this band - METEOROLOGICAL METHOD. And the ex-junkie former lead singer for that band was singing jazz last night at The Senator - you know that really toney....'

'Stop!'

'Sorry, Mark. I'm still digesting what all happened to me last night; and you've just told me about Eric being dead in this alleyway. Are you sure it's a deliberate overdose?'

Mark had almost finished his hard toast.

'Of course it is. For starters, the guy wasn't a hard-core junkie. So it would be all too easy for him to overdose on anything too strong - he could easily cook up too much for himself and then...bang. I doubt it was an *accident* .and, if he had nothing to do with Barry's murder; then why would anybody want him dead?'

'Maybe somebody *thought* he knew something, Mark?'

Nancy re-lit her cigarette now that Mark had finished eating.

'Eric's death is too fucking convenient. For the person or persons who killed Barry; as well as for the cops.'

'Well, what can we do about it *now*? Mark shook his head. 'That guy's now history.'

'And what about the guy who looks like but isn't Eric's older brother? Have you seen him lately?'

Mark shook his head.

'My neighbour Danny saw him out at this rave; but that was last week. I'll bet that guy's either left town or else he's holed up somewhere.'

'That guy might also be history. You have to admit it, Nan. That's a distinct possibility.'

'I know"', She drew on her cigarette. 'I know.'

Mark and Nancy faced each other silently until the waitress arrived with their bill.

'I'll get this, Mark.'

'You don't have to?'

'It's okay.'

Nancy did not wish to argue about the bill.

'What are you going to do for the rest of the day?'

He shook his head.

'Try to get some *sleep*. I wish I still had a keyboard or at least a cheap guitar. I feel like making noise.'

She smiled at Mark

'Make some noise. You'll find a way to do it.'

He nodded.

'You're going to make some noise with your friend?'

'Uh huh. After I catch up with my sleep. Call me if you want to talk. Okay, Mark?'

'Okay, Nan.'

He walked up the street-north from the greasy spoon. She waited for the street car - not in a hurry for it to arrive. She needed Amanda's company but first she needed some time by herself. She hoped there wouldn't be a busload of noisy children along for the ride that would take her home and back to bed.

Immediately upon arriving back at her apartment; Nancy glanced at the answering machine. However, the power was on but the message light wasn't flashing.

Shit! She had wanted there to be a message from Amanda that she could digest *before* taking a nap.

She had to pee. She had to get the caffeine out of her system - not to mention the depressing facts of Eric Cunningham's suicide. She hadn't even *known* Eric and already this was shaping up to be as horrible as any other death she could remember. Suicides were definitely the worst - with AIDS or cancer or whatever other long-term illness the friends and acquaintances always knew that someday it was going to happen. Suicides, unless they involved somebody close who had at least exhibited suicidal tendencies, often came out of *nowhere*

. Most of the suicides Nancy had known or even known of had been sudden - almost spontaneous. Some people she had known in Vancouver had argued that people committing suicide went out on their own terms. With most of the examples she recalled; Nancy did not believe this was so. She hadn't known Eric Cunningham; but she felt there was no way *he* could have ended his life on his own terms. Eric had committed suicide because he felt there had been no other damn choice.

She tried not to think about suicide and Eric. She managed to focus on Amanda Bingham. She wanted nothing more than to experience a short and intensely erotic dream starring Amanda.

She had been sleeping without being in the state in which the dreams were observable when the telephone rang. It took several rings for Nancy to realize that the phone was not in her dreams; and that she had taken the machine off.

The caller was Amanda. Amanda was calling from Helen and Claire's house in the Annex; informing Nancy that Stephen hadn't been up to having visitors let alone going out to a movie. Stephen, whoever he was, was in the late stages of AIDS - Nancy could tell.

Amanda was depressed about her friend and she herself needed some time alone. This suited Nancy; and they agreed to meet at three o'clock at the Carlton Cinemas. If they met on schedule; they would be able to take in either LILLIES or BASQUIAT - either movie would be fine.

Then Amanda instructed Nancy to go back to bed and to please stop thinking about whatever depressing news Mark had informed her about. Nancy realized she had yet to tell Amanda about Eric's suicide; but she decided this was not the appropriate time to do so.

After hanging up she immediately fell back into a deep sleep. She did not need to willfully block out Mark and Eric and Barry and Death. When the phone rang again; the time was two-thirty. The caller was again Amanda; and now she was ordering Nancy to get herself out of bed and get her ass over to The Carlton; or else she would miss the beginning of BASQUIAT.

Nancy barely made it in time for the opening credits of BASQUIAT, which was a somewhat less than fabulous movie about the Haitian-American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. The artist had been a darling or *wunderkind* of the international art world until his star fizzled due to both patronization and heroin. The only amusing sidebar in the movie consisted of David Bowie playing Andy Warhol in one of Warhol's very own wigs. Nancy and Amanda found it hard to contain a raucous laughter during this movie, which was almost a comedy even though it purported to be a tragedy.

After the movie it was time for dinner. They decided to eat upstairs at PINTS - in the Church-Wellesley village but hardly a boy's bar. Thai pair of them found a booth where they could alternate coffee with draught beer in addition to eating food. Amanda ordered a ginger stir-fry while Nancy was desperate enough for a hamburger.

It was difficult keeping the conversation away from Eric Cunningham, Barry Ferguson and the mother and daughter combination of Sarah-Lloyd-Matthews and 'Antonella'; so they made no rules of conversation and thus did not break any rules. The abrupt reappearance of Terri Matthews as 'Antonella' and the revelation that her mother was both a member of LEAF and a former Mrs. Barry Ferguson was enough fodder for discursive conversation, without that conversation becoming fixated on Barry's murder and that at least tangentially-related suicide of Eric; who had been known on the street as 'Kevin' and who could not logically have been Barry's killer.

'If I were the child of Sarah Lloyd and *Dennis Matthews*; I'm certain I would also be in and out of rehab'.

Amanda ordered more coffee after finishing her ginger stir-fry.

'*Moi aussi.*' Nancy concurred.

'And Barry and Sarah have a son?'

Nancy sipped her coffee then reached for her cigarettes.

'That's what Claire told me last night. Barry would never talk about his wife - let alone any children.'

Amanda shook her head.

'It's too damn weird how people who always talk about the stupidity of fixed identities are always the ones who clam up when asked about specific biographical details.'

Nancy drew on her cigarette and decided the subject of conversation needed to be changed.

'What do you want to do next, Amanda? Do you want to go back to my place?'

Amanda shrugged.

'It's still early, Nancy. I know a party. But, that band that neither of us are exactly nuts about is going to be there.'

Nancy almost panicked.

'Maggie's Farmers? *They're* going to be playing there?'

'No, it's not going to be that painful. It's just a little house party-on Shaw Street. It's some people I know from Vancouver.'

'More transplanted Vancouverites.' Nancy exhaled with a frown.

'It's this younger couple. Jennifer Lawrence and Karen Tschak. They'll know who you are.'

'I don't know if I can deal with that.'

'You'll have to sooner or later, Nancy. Just get the recognition factor over with quickly; and then move on to other topics. Let's order two more draughts; and then at least put in an appearance. Okay?'

If Amanda was going to be so gently insistent; than Nancy was not about to argue. She did feel any more booze was out of the question after these two draughts; so she and Amanda agreed to restrict themselves to juice at the party

And the little house party was not at all unpleasant. Jennifer and Karen were the same two transplanted Vancouverites who had rubbed Nancy the wrong way that night at the 360 club last month; but that had been last month. By restricting themselves to soda water; Nancy and Amanda maintained their energies and equilibriums.

There were actually people whom Nancy could talk to. Many of them were from York University and not from the U. Of T. Amanda introduced her to Stuart Makkhan, a Jamaican-born video artist who taught at York. The three of them talked about a field of work that Nancy only had a passing acquaintance with but that she had never really bothered to research.

'Video artists have this bad reputation which I don't *understand*, Nancy. They're either supposed to be cranky formalists or else aspiring mainstream film hacks. Needless to say, most of us are neither.'

Nancy found Stuart to be both a good talker and a good listener; and she specifically resolved to see some of his own work. She gave him her phone number and mailing address, in case he had any screenings in the near future.

And when Stuart observed to Nancy and Amanda that the party seemed to be winding down and that he knew a place where

there would be good music and good dancing; Nancy and Amanda thought *why not*. Compared to Stuart; they were practically spring chickens - even though the three of them would be markedly older than the club kids they would be dancing beside.

'Do you guys feel like going somewhere for coffee first?'

Nancy really did need a caffeine fix.

Stuart shook his head.

'We're going to The Liberty Bell. And they'll have smart drinks; which do *not* include beer and coffee, girlfriends.

'.

Nancy and Amanda giggled. They were willing to abstain - at least from beer and from coffee. They had smelled marijuana at the party but they had not been offered any. Nancy wished she had brought her own stash out with her.

Stuart Makkhan laughed melodically.

'We can take the long route.'

Nancy looked at Amanda. It hadn't exactly warmed up since the previous evening's snowfall; but what the hell. The railroad lands would supply fresh air and a place to smoke grass with Stuart.

'Why not? I don't think we're in any rush.'

The railroad lands were bordered by warehouses, one of which would house The Liberty Bell. Municipal politicians were constantly arguing about the zoning status of these lands - were they strictly commercial or were they some hybrid of industrial and residential? Nancy knew of production facilities in these buildings but not studio apartments; with the exception of one notorious building on Hanna street in which the 'tenants' still frequently had to conceal their futons whenever the building inspectors came by to check out their various 'studios'.

Stuart's dope was good. In fact, it was almost two good. It was much stronger than the grass Nancy had bought from Danny - her upstairs neighbour who had also been having sexual fun before she and Amanda had broken the steadily-melting ice.

The drugs enhanced their hearing facilities, which could now pick up the techno music emanating from the Liberty Bell, which was now located straight ahead of them.

Almost as soon as Stuart, Nancy, and Amanda had paid their five dollar admissions and passed through the coat check area; Stuart immediately rushed towards a neatly-bearded South Asian man who was dancing alone on the edge of a committed circle. Upon recognizing Stuart, the gentleman moved away from the circle and the pair of them found their own more intimate dancing space.

Stuart had already been beyond friendly and generous. And now the juice bar was within Nancy and Amanda's sightlines. There was a serious lineup but, then, wasn't there *always*?

'Yes, Nancy. Let's get some smart drinks.'

They brushed past the poly-gendered dancers toward the juice bar. But before reaching the circumference of the dance floor; Nancy recognized one of the dancers.

'Nancy Leonard! Of all fucking people!'

Danny Bailey was decked out in heavy pan make-up and a suburban paisley dress. And Danny was not sweating.

'It's always summertime on the dance-floor? How else can I explain it?'

Nancy hugged Danny and then introduced him to Amanda.

Please to meet you, Amanda. So you're the one who was making the noise downstairs last night?'

Amanda nodded.

'Guilty as charged. Mind you, you and some boy were sure going at it before we took our turn.'

'Also guilty and proud of it. Hey, surely you two don't have the patience for this lineup either.'

Nancy shook her head.

'Then follow me''.

Danny quickly looked around him. Then he instructed Nancy and Amanda to follow him-outside onto a fire escape through an unlocked door. Danny obviously knew the baggy-panted youth guarding the fire escape; so passing through was not an issue.

'We can't stay out here too long, girls.'

Nancy and Amanda nodded as Danny quickly pulled out a pocket-mirror and laid out three lines of cocaine.

'Take my straw and go for it'', he commanded after snorting his line.

Nancy quickly followed him and then passed the mirror and straw over to Amanda, who looked at Nancy for a moment before imbibing. Nancy remembered that Amanda always had been the quiet member of METEOROLOGICAL METHOD.

'Thank you, Danny.'

'For you, Amanda, anything. Are you from somewhere else? I mean, somewhere other than Toronto?'

'Vancouver.'

'I've been there. I'm going to be going away for a while.'

Now Danny was talking to Nancy.

'I'm not sure where I'm going. Maybe New York. Maybe San Francisco.'

Nancy was still for a moment. She did not need any further bombshells.

'It's probably a good idea for me to get out of town. Some guy I know is a cop has been following me. He may even be here. So, see you later. And good luck - to both of you.'

Danny abruptly ran down the stirrers of the fire escape and into the adjacent alley.

'Great'', Nancy now intoned without enthusiasm.

'What's wrong?'

'Close the murder case. Pick up the drug case. *Shit!* Well, so long Danny boy'.

Amanda laughed.

'Cheer up, sweetie. That boy knows all the right fire escapes.'

Now Nancy laughed again.

'Shall we dance?'

'You bet we can. We have to. I can't stand still.'

Nancy and Amanda found a spot on the dance-floor. Within sight of Stuart Makkhan, who grinned at them while enjoying the company of his dancing and presumably sexual partner.

'You realize, Amanda, that we can only stay here for a flash because I may want to dance with you but I absolutely have to *play* with you. All these smart and stupid drugs serve a purpose. They have made me *ravenous*, so let's do it before everything wears off and I get depressed again.'

I hear you, Nancy', Amanda spoke directly to her. 'Let's just work up a bit of a sweat. Because this music is really great and I love being here with you - right now.'

Nancy nodded. In case of any emergency; there was always a fire escape.

Amanda had requested to her mother's girlfriend that the waiting time at Pearson International airport be kept to a minimum. No snacks or cocktails in overpriced restaurants, no tabloid reading in order to kill time and avoid conversation. No time for anything but facts and plane - Nancy and Amanda would call each other weekly on Sunday nights and they would attempt to visit one another in either Vancouver or Toronto sometime in the not-too-distant future.

Helen Bingham was also flying to Vancouver in the company of her daughter. She specifically wished to spend some quality time with her son Ken.; whose life seemed to have stabilized despite his depression and his HIV serio-positivity. Ken and Amanda were sharing a basement apartment - not too far away from the hotel in which Helen would be staying.

When Claire drove Nancy back into the city, neither of them said anything for several minutes. Then, Claire broke the ice.

'Amanda is special, you realize. Like her mother is special.'

Nancy nodded.

'I know she is

But she also lives and goes to school in Vancouver?

'You're going to have to go *there*, Nancy. If you want to see Amanda again; you're going to have to go where she is.'

'I know, Claire. I wish I could fly out right *now*.'

Again, they drove in silence. Fresh snow was beginning to fall, forcing Claire to concentrate on her driving. The airport strip, with its Constellation Motels and tacky heterosexual strip-joints, gave way to Highway 400. It took Claire a while to find a zone on the highway in which she could cruise comfortably.

'The highway is busy tonight.'

'Yes, Nancy. The airport was busy tonight..

Claire passed a cumbersome-looking truck and then turned to Nancy.

'Do you wish to drop by the house for a drink - before you go home?'

Nancy tossed this invitation around in her head for a minute and then decided to decline.

'I really should at least do some preparation for classes tomorrow. I mean, for the entire weekend I was either having an absolute blast with Amanda or else I was depressed about Eric Cunningham?'

'Who is Eric Cunningham?'

Nancy realized that Claire didn't know the name of the young man who had been held by the police on suspicion of Barry's murder; who had then been released from custody and who had responded by taking his own life. Nancy remembered that Claire didn't give a shit about the details of Barry's death - at least, not officially.

Claire drove silently. At least, she had the sense to realize that Nancy didn't really wish to talk. Claire had never been one for straightforward conversation and everything that Nancy felt like saying to anybody at this moment was pretty damn straightforward.

Damn Eric for committing suicide and giving the cops a feeble excuse to close the door on any further investigation of Barry's murder. Praise be to Amanda and damn it that she lived in Vancouver- a place from which Nancy had escaped and to which she could not afford to travel to at this particular moment in time.

Damn pleasure for not lasting forever. Damn!

After a Communications lecture during which she could barely even *pretend* to stay awake; Nancy automatically dropped into the U.of T. Bookstore before heading home to fix her functional supper. The periodicals' rack had not significantly altered from her previous visit. There was still that latest issue of FUSE- the one with the Courtney Love wannabe on the cover. She scowled. She could see the same current issue of ALPHABET CITY which she had purchased and which she hadn't had time to even superficially read.

Well, the holidays were approaching and then perhaps she might have time for periodicals' reading. Especially if she were going to be spending her Christmas break alone.

No, the U.of T. Bookstore was not unpleasantly consistent. And now Jeff Talbot and Derek Lee had wandered over to browse at the periodicals' rack.

'Nothing new for you today?'

Jeff wasn't asking a question; but she could only smile.

'You look down today, Nancy.'

Jeff and Derek started to walk away from her and from the magazine rack.

She called after them.

'Don't go guys.'

Jeff and Derek stopped.

'I could use a drink. How about you guys?'

'Why not?' Derek looked at Jeff, who nodded.

'Barbarella's?'

'Well, I don't know. Would you believe there's yet *another* colour abstractionist's work up on the walls?'

Nancy laughed.

'You guys know me. I consider wallpaper to be usually harmless. So, shall we go?'

Without any glances back at the periodicals' section; Nancy, Jeff, and Derek walked out of the bookstore and out toward St. George Street, which would take them to Willcocks, which would take them over to Spadina and directly to Barbarella's. Nancy recalled that she had seen Jeff and Derek - presumably on their way to Woody's - on Friday night. But, then she had been Claire Wilkinson's passenger; and she hoped to avoid any negative conversation about *that* particular association.

Jeff had something else to tell her about.

'Did you know there will be a memorial for Eric Cunningham? Tomorrow night in Allen Gardens?'

No, she didn't know this. But it did make sense to her.

'Nine o'clock', Derek added.

'She noted the time and the place. But, she did not wish to commit herself yet. She also didn't wish to be admonished by Jeff and Derek.'

'I'll try to make it. I guess I should call Mark.'

"I'm sure Mark already knows.' Jeff looked at her quizzically. 'I mean, didn't he find Eric's body?

Nancy turned to Jeff abruptly.

'How do you know that?'

Jeff shrugged.

'That is what I heard.'

Nancy decided not to press any further. She was sure that her brother had hardly been the only person who had walked through that particular laneway and seen Eric's body. And she knew there was no way Mark would have told the cops.

As they approached Barbarella's, Nancy decided to lay down the law.

'You guys do realize that I need a cigarette?'

Jeff and Derek looked at each other. Then, they looked around the somewhat crowded bar and picked out a table in the smoking section.

'Martini, Nancy?'

'Cranberry martini?'

'I'll stick to beer - if you guys don't mind. Look, Jeff, how would you or anybody else - except the cops - know that Mark was the person who found the body? How do you know that other people didn't nearly trip over Eric's body and then find themselves completely unable to deal with it?'

'I agree, Nancy.' Derek answered before Jeff could.

'I'm fairly sure it was a *neighbour* who called the cops.'

The waitress delivered two cranberry martinis and a pint of draught ale to their table.

'Thanks",

Nancy acknowledged the service while lighting a cigarette.

'My brother just figured that somebody else would do it sooner or later. Look, you know people with Maggie's and Prostitutes' Rights. I presume those are the people organizing the memorial?'

'Yes. My friend Rick is in charge.' Derek answered.

Nancy was trying to place all of the 'Ricks' she might have ever met in Toronto - unsuccessfully.

'People are really split about Eric's death", Jeff informed her. 'Some people think Eric must have killed Barry and then completely cracked up. And some think Eric was a victim of police harassment, which *made* him crack up.'

'Mark told me that Eric was innocent. Eric was protecting his friend Gary, who he'd been staying with. Gary's a small-time dope dealer.'

Jeff sipped his martini and frowned.

'Well, Nan, if this is true; then this Gary is pretty well the last person who's likely to be attending the memorial tomorrow night.'

'How is Mark?' Derek changed the subject, slightly.

Nancy exhaled.

'I had breakfast with him on Saturday and he seemed to have gone through the worst of it. Of course, with Mark there are always delayed reactions.'

She puffed on her cigarette again.

'It's weird, Derek. Barry's murder has made Mark and I close again. Aside from my *neighbour*; Mark and I seem to be the only two people who've seen - or who are willing to talk about- this *other guy* who we're convinced the fucking cops mistook Eric for.'

'I know of the young man you're referring to, Nancy. I don't know him; but I have heard about him.' Derek turned to avoid her exhaled smoke.' When was the last time you or Mark or your neighbour saw this guy who looks like he could be Eric Cunningham's older brother?'

She shook her head.

'Over a week ago. He's definitely gone AWOL.

Nancy decided to change the subject.

'Hey, guys. I had some *fun* on the weekend- despite everything else that took place.'

Jeff's eyes popped.

'Sex?'

She nodded

"A boy or a girl?'

'A grrrl. But, she would have to live in Vancouver.'

'Oh, dear.' Derek sipped his cranberry martini. 'The long-distance syndrome.'

'Anybody I know, Nancy?'

'Maybe?' Nancy smiled at Jeff. 'Amanda Bingham, who used to play guitar for METEOROLOGICAL METHOD? Amanda's mother is Claire Wilkinson's girlfriend.'

She butted out her smoke.

'Oh, and guess what?'

'We have no idea, Nancy.'

She was grateful for Jeff's temporary lack of awareness.

'On Friday night, Claire took me to see this woman who used to sing for Amanda's old band. Her name used to be Terri; but now she bills herself as 'Antonella' and she was singing jazz upstairs at The Senator - which is neither here nor there. But *she* is the daughter of our power lawyer babe Sarah Lloyd-Matthews.'

Her? '

Jeff was incredulous, remembering the lawyer who had almost single-handedly convicted the wealthy wife-killer Carl Dawson.

'And Sarah used to be married to fucking Barry Ferguson!'

'I don't believe this, Nancy.'

Derek looked at his boyfriend.

'Why not, Jeffrey? Remember, Sarah Lloyd-Matthews is also a member of LEAF. And, wasn't she also married to some chicken-hawk BC politician?'

'Yes", Nancy smiled at Derek 'Dennis Matthews is Terri's father. Having been publicly disgraced; we can assume Dennis is out of the picture. But, Sarah looked pretty tight with this police superintendent named John Sutcliffe. Sutcliffe's in Homicide. He knows who I am; because Homicide interrogated me as to my whereabouts on the night of Barry's murder.'

'So, our power-babe lawyer is dating a cop?' This interested Derek.

'I still don't believe this. ', Jeff finished his martini and searched for the waitress.

'Well, Jeff. You didn't *seriously* believe Claire Wilkinson was Barry's beard?'

'No, Derek", Jeff grinned sheepishly. 'I remember Amanda Gene -from METEOROLOGICAL METHOD. I don't remember ever talking to her - she always seemed rather standoffish.'

Now Nancy's smile was an icy one.

'That's the *last* word I would use to describe Amanda. I should be moving on, guys. Here's the money for my beer. Maybe I'll see you tomorrow night; but I'm still not sure.'

She waved at Derek and shook her head at Jeff. She made sure her scarf was wrapped up tightly before heading out into the cold fresh air. She had a lot of work to get done; and she could not afford to get sick.

On Monday night after returning home from Barbarella's; Nancy checked her answering machine and there was a message from Mark. Her brother was telling her the time and place for the memorial to Eric Cunningham. It would be a simple affair according to Mark - a wreath and a few speakers. Also, at least one petition, Nancy angrily assumed.

She hadn't yet made up her mind whether or not to attend. She hadn't known Eric; and she didn't know any of the whores' rights activists who were the organizers of the memorial. She knew the activists would set the tone, with angry speeches denouncing police malice and police incompetence.

Well, *she* didn't disagree. The cops had been holding Eric on suspicion and, for other reasons involving possible legal consequences; he hadn't been able to provide a convincing alibi. Nancy wondered if the locker-room attendant who had made the quick and lazy identification would be at the memorial, atoning for his stupidity. If *she* were him; she would stay away.

And she knew Eric's friend Gary would be nowhere near Allen Garden's. There would be at least one undercover cop present; and Gary would now be wanted for at least serious questioning. Gary would definitely be somewhere else on the night of the memorial. Unless he was very stupid; he would already be somewhere else. He would have immediately abandoned the house where he and Eric had been living.

But Gary wasn't the last person Nancy would expect present at Eric's memorial. That person would have to be Eric's older double - the one with the prematurely receding hairline and the recycled seventies foppish clothing. Even if *that* young man hadn't blown town - and Nancy felt certain that he had either left Toronto or else was hiding out somewhere in one of the suburbs; he would not be there. If he had wanted to surrender; he would have done it by now.

She wasn't sure if she would be able to deal with a memorial for somebody she hadn't known but whose death was too damn familiar in its circumstances. But she had better return Mark's call.

She dialed the number; but he either wasn't home or he wasn't taking calls for whatever reason. So, she left him a message acknowledging that she'd picked up *his* message. Then she informed her brother she still wasn't sure whether or not she would be attending; and that she would probably not know her plans until tomorrow evening.

As she hung up; she realized that there were no sounds emanating from her upstairs apartment. She hadn't heard any the entire day before; when she and Amanda had spent most of the day in bed smoking dope and having a lot of sex.

Shit! Surely he hadn't blown town already?

By the end of the next afternoon, Nancy had decided she would not be attending Eric's memorial. She hadn't known the young man and thus she didn't really have any idea why he had reacted to his situation the way he ultimately did.

Why had Eric been so absolutely loyal to his friend Gary? Why had he evidently returned to Gary's immediately after finally being released? Of course Gary was offering a roof over his head; but if he was protecting Gary then the best move Eric could have made would have been to relocate.

Maybe Eric wanted nature to take its course? Maybe Eric had believed in 'nature' or something inevitable?

Eric's death was in many ways terribly similar to Barry's. One had been a suicide and one a murder; but there were parallels beyond the fact that one was a prostitute and the other a john. Neither Eric nor Barry had made plans for their immediate afterlives. Eric had killed himself away from home in a final act of loyalty to his friend. Barry had not *planned* to die; even though he may have been aroused by homicidal possibilities.

Barry Ferguson had believed in his own immortality; even though murder was one of his prime erotic fantasies.

Nancy doubted that Eric Cunningham had believed in immortality - his own or anybody else's. The young man had likely not believed in anything except his day-to-day survival. Then the repetition of it all became too much for him, with the assistance of Toronto Homicide Division. This memorial was for those who

personally felt threatened by police harassment of prostitutes and drug-users and the homeless. It was not for her. If she were to attend; she would see Mark. Mark knew the activists but did not ally himself with them. Mark had his own life to deal with.

For a moment Nancy felt she should be there for Mark, but she changed her mind. She would get together with him one-to-one, somewhere where they could talk rather than alternatively curse and cry for somebody who would not be coming back to life- no matter how angry the mourners might become.

Eric was dead. Barry was dead; and now what about the investigation into his murder?

She sat down at her work table and turned on her computer. She had assignments she had to crack the nut on; or else she would be putting her grades at risk. She was *alone* now, which meant that her priority was now her work.

Eric Cunningham was more than just a statistic; although he is another statistic too many. Eric Cunningham was more than just a case-study or a case-history; although all the ultimately ineffectual liberals and do-gooders will recognize the patterns and conveniently file Eric under the all-too-typical. Abandoned by his father, left his small-town home in his early teens, lived on the streets for a while, supported himself by turning tricks, sporadic substance abuse, etcetera.

But, also, held on suspicion of a murder on the basis of only the flimsiest piece of coincidental evidence. Held in custody beyond the point where there might be any possibly justification for his detention. And people wonder why Eric Cunningham deliberately overdosed within hours of his release? Well, keep guessing- in case you don't know.

Now we would like to pay tribute to Eric, with a silent candlelight vigil. There have been a few too many of these vigils lately; so I can only presume everybody here knows the procedure - everybody knows how to conduct themselves out of respect for yet another life that didn't have to end so damn early.

Mark had been to a few too many vigils himself; so he knew this was now the time to stand as still as possible and either look at the flickering candles or else close his eyes. He chose to shut his eyes, as he no longer expected his sister to turn up. Nancy would have arrived on time if she had been planning to attend.

He had registered the crowd during Rick Turner's exhortation. He had recognized many of the Prostitutes' Rights activists and their friends. That queer student friend of his sister's was here, along with a Chinese guy he appeared to be tight with. He recognized some of the medical team whose presence had become a given at many warehouse parties and raves; even though Mark seldom attended any of these events. He recognized one prominent activist from Toronto's LesBiGay Youth line and he picked out a prominent local film maker. He didn't see a lot of Church and Wellesley gay-village clones but then, he never did

see many of them at these vigils. Prostitution and street drugs and murders and suicides were too fucking depressing for the business-as-usual village clones.

He did pick out a guy he could tell was an undercover cop. He stiffened. Probably the cop had been expecting Eric's friend Gary to show up at the memorial. As if Gary Flood could possibly be that stupid! Mark knew Gary would be conducting his own private memorial and grieving- in his own space and in his own manner.

He wished Nancy had come. He was fed up with her indecisiveness - her on-and-off attitude to anything and anybody besides herself.

As people drifted out of their silent reveries; Mark made the decision to get away from the vigil and out of Allen Gardens. There were petitions circulating and he did not wish to be signing anything tonight. He did not wish to become enlisted in anything he could not seriously commit himself to. He had come alone and he was leaving alone. He had his own problems to deal with.

Nancy decided that her best course of action for the final week of November would be to resume being a serious and full-time university student. She did have several written assignments due by the end of the first term and she had barely begun preparing her notes - let alone saved anything on her computer.

Focusing all of her energies onto her assignments was the only way she could distract herself from the events surrounding the murder of Barry Ferguson and from her wonderful weekend fling with a girl who unfortunately lived three thousand miles away in that other city.

Modern Poetry was the first course to now receive her undivided attention. Fortunately, the course's curriculum had moved beyond Yeats, Pound, and Eliot - the three mystical fascists. The course had highlighted the American beats, especially Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's hot and often angry free-jazz influenced cadences were *such* a relief from Eliot's repressed rigour that Nancy realized her essay subject had been presented to her on a very golden platter. Allen Ginsberg, who had recently died and who had been an outspokenly proud member of N.A.M.B.L.A. - Allen Ginsberg, despite being Camille Paglia's ideal gay male role model alternative to that dreadful Frenchman Foucault; was, in many ways, a revolutionary figure. And Nancy now relished the thought of getting down to her Modern Poetry essay, despite her previous frustration with the course and its ineffectual instructor.

And, with Modern Poetry now printed out and stored safely in her hard drive; her other courses were now beginning to fall into place. Even Communications was proving tangible simply because it was so damn demanding. And even Lit. Crit. And Theory, now being presented by Barry's barely competent replacement; was allowing Nancy the opportunity to posit positions without locking herself into any rigidly set positions. She did, however, resist the temptation to write an essay titled *The Problematic Position of The Lesbian in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*.

By Sunday evening Nancy had completed at least first drafts of all of her required essays. So, she treated herself to a movie and then she called Amanda long distance. Eleven o'clock in Toronto was only eight in Vancouver.

Amanda was home, although planning to go out later.

'Ken wants to go to a movie; but we're not sure which one yet.'

'I just saw *Lilies*', she lit a cigarette. 'It's worth seeing, even though you can tell it started life as a play.'

'Hey, there's nothing *wrong* with that! .I mean, look at Fassbinder!

'True', Nancy exhaled. 'But *his* work was about confinement - and control.'

'And about audience masochism. I wish you were here.'

'Me too, Amanda. I've spent practically the entire week doing my essays. Without you here to distract me; I've been writing up a storm.'

Amanda allowed Nancy's declaration to hang for a moment.

'So? You haven't missed me?'

'Fuck, yes. Now that I've got such a good jump on all my essays; I need to celebrate. In bed, and on the town.'

'Me too', Amanda asserted. 'I've been a committed media-arts student all week. This old fart who 'teaches' media arts be damned. He's going to have to give me an 'A' when she sees my homework.'

'Fuck him. I want to see your homework.'

'Well then, Nance. Hurry up and get your ass out here.' Nancy tensed.

'That's easier said than done.'

'I know. I know'. Nancy could almost hear Amanda shifting her sitting position at her phone - whatever her apartment actually looked like. 'So, what's happening with Eric's suicide and Barry's murder?'

'Nothing', Nancy drew on her cigarette. 'Nobody here gives a shit; except for myself and I guess my brother; whom I haven't heard from since the night before Eric's memorial. I should call Mark - later.'

'My brother thinks the guy who looks like Eric except older is out here - in Vancouver.'

'Really?'

'Ken's not certain. I mean, he has only my description of what Eric looked like.'

'True'. Nancy assented. 'I guess this means I have to get out to Vancouver myself. But...I'm broke.'

'Well? Save your money! Hey, Nance. I'll call you next Sunday so please be home at the same time. Okay?'

'I'll be home, sweetheart.'

Nancy hung up the receiver before she found herself promising to do something which was currently impossible - namely, making a vow to visit Amanda in Vancouver.

She extinguished her cigarette and then dialed Mark's number. Mark was not home or not answering; so she left a brief message. She was certain Mark was mad at her for not going to Eric's memorial; and she knew the air between Mark and her had to be cleared as soon as possible.

Harvey Johnson's maroon Plymouth didn't appear too conspicuous in Parkdale. The car's wear and tear, in tandem with Harvey's generic windbreaker, created an impression of just another middle-aged man with groceries and beer in the trunk of

the car. Harvey would in fact be enjoying his groceries and his beer - after successfully completing his immediate assignment.

When Gary Flood was a predictable no-show at the Allen Gardens memorial for Eric Cunningham; Harvey figured Parkdale to be a strong possibility as to Gary's current whereabouts. A younger friend of his in the Drug Squad, who had been following Gary since it became apparent that Gary was the person Eric had been covering for, had sighted Gary in Parkdale. And now, it was time to make the move.

Harvey *hated* Parkdale. This was easily one of Toronto's worst areas - one where the junkies, the crackheads, the hookers and their pimps all mingled and became frequently interchangeable with the homeless and the nut-cases from the nearby nut-bin. His daughter, who was studying Sociology at York University, had become a serious liberal whenever anything involved mental illness or homelessness or addictions. Harvey was finding his daughter harder and harder to take and now he only saw her maybe every other month.

He drove casually along Queen Street, past the liquor store at the corner of Brock, until he sighted Gary Flood. The young man was walking briskly, as if he had an urgent appointment.

Harvey kept his distance behind the pedestrian, until he saw Gary enter a restaurant called THE TENNESSEE - not a restaurant where food was the prime attraction. As he saw Gary enter the greasy spoon and sitting down at a table with a young woman; Harvey pulled over and pretended to read a map of Toronto. But he only had to stall for about two minutes.

Harvey's unshaven drug squad friend was sitting three tables to Gary's left. The undercover cop in the restaurant had already observed Gary handing the young woman a business envelope which didn't fool anybody. When Harvey received his signal; he quickly bolted out of the Plymouth and into the restaurant.

They could haul the girl in for possession; but his assignment was to bring in Gary Flood. And now was the time to pounce. The customer didn't exist; and not only had Gary been witnessed making the transaction - nickels to dimes, he had more of the shit in his pockets.

'Hands up and face the wall, kid!'

Gary had no alternative as Harvey and his accomplice had completely blocked him. Harvey was in luck, as Gary's jeans pockets had yielded another envelope containing what damn well looked like heroin.

Harvey resisted a temptation to kick the goddam drug dealer in the butt as he hauled him out onto the street and into the Plymouth, after he and his assignment partner had handcuffed their target.

He smiled into his rear view mirror as he drove towards the nearest convenient precinct. He was going to dump this fucking junkie scumbag off, stick around to witness the booking procedures; and then watch the afternoon sports. After tying one up; he was now going to tie one on.

Nancy decided to take a break at roughly ten-thirty. Her concentration was wandering but, since she had already put in a good three hours of work, she felt she could afford to lose her concentration for awhile.

She decided to smoke a joint. As she walked over to her dresser-drawer she realized her stash was almost finished. This was inconvenient. She wanted to buy another good ounce for herself and there was absolutely no sign of her illustrious upstairs' neighbour.

She quickly rolled the joint, then lit it; and then she tried to retain the smoke. Grass and hash in small amounts were relaxing drugs - unlike chemicals and definitely unlike coke. Heroin had also been relaxing; but only if the body didn't need the drug in order to relax. She wondered if Amanda ever indulged in special drugs on special occasions. Nancy doubted it. Amanda was smart; and she liked to be capable of reading while she was playing.

The telephone rang and jolted her. As she looked at the call-indicator; she immediately recognized her brother's number. She knew this was not an appropriate time to pretend she wasn't home.

'Hey, Nancy. You're home.'

She took a final hit of her joint and then let it die out in the ashtray.

'Yes, Mark. It's serious homework time.'

She could tell he was annoyed at her.

'You weren't at Eric's memorial.'

It wasn't a question. It wasn't *quite* an accusation. Nancy wished that it had been an accusation so that she would have had the opportunity to directly refute it.

'I wish you'd been there, Nan. For Eric but also for me.'

Nancy took a deep breath.

'I apologize. Okay, Mark. I didn't *know* Eric. But....the fact that I chose not to attend the memorial doesn't mean his death didn't move me because it *did*. Okay?'

It probably was okay, as far as Mark was concerned. But he chose to leave his verdict hanging.

'Gary Flood has been busted, Nan.'

'Gary Fl....Gary!'", she nearly fumbled the receiver. 'Not at the memorial?'

'Jesus, he's not *that* stupid! '

Then Mark lowered his voice.

'Our undercover friend - the one who looks like a hockey coach - *he* was at the memorial. Definitely the odd person out.'

Nancy shook her head.

If Gary was smart enough not to be anywhere near Allen Gardens that night; then where did he get busted?’

‘In Parkdale.’

‘Fucking hell.’

She now realized that the undercover cop and his cohorts had been onto Gary all along. Probably Eric had led then to Gary - as soon as Eric had been released.

‘So, Mark. The cops are holding Gary. Is it strictly on drug charges?’

‘Fuck, Nan. You can be so uninformed, sometimes. They’ve hauled Gary in on trafficking charges - I mean, they caught him red-handed, but they’re convinced he knows a lot more than he can tell them. They think he’s their man for Barry Ferguson’s murder.’

Now she seethed.

‘How can they be so fucking stupid? They thought Eric was protecting somebody so they bust the guy Eric was protecting; who’s nothing more than a bottom-of-the-barrel dealer. I don’t believe this.’

Mark paused to clear his breath.

‘I don’t disagree that the cops are out to lunch. But they’re stuck on the whole hustlers and rough trade and bad tricks and drugs scenario. They think Barry was a bad trick who pushed whoever did it to the brink and then...’

She scowled.

‘Barry was a bad trick. But that isn’t why somebody killed him.’

‘I agree. Okay?’

Mark coughed after raising his voice.

‘Mark?’

‘What, Nan?’

‘If I was being followed - which I was for at least a few days - then I inadvertently may have put the cops on to you. Just as I may have had as much to do with Gary getting busted as Eric or anybody else did.’

‘Don’t be absurd, Nan.’

She took a breath.

‘I’m not. Mark. I think you’d better be really careful with yourself.’

‘I’m clean; if that’s what you need to know.’

She was silent. She wondered if her brother was telling the truth. She wondered if he were off *all* drugs - if indeed he were off junk.

‘Hey, Mark. You know my neighbour Danny. Don’t you?’

He paused for a moment.

‘I know who you mean; but I don’t know him. Why do you ask?’

She reached for her cigarettes and lit one.

‘He seems to have left town. He warned me this was a possibility; but I didn’t expect it to happen so abruptly.’

'It makes sense to me, Nan. From what I know about Danny; he has this naive anarchist attitude to drugs which could easily land him in shit.'

'I know, Mark. I just miss him.'

Mark finally seemed to be reading her between the lines.

'Sorry, I haven't seen him. Sorry I can't help you.'

;It's okay, Mark. Thanks for informing me about Gary - even though it really pisses me off. And sorry I wasn't there for you at the memorial. Really, Mark. I apologize.'

She was relieved when he didn't challenge her apology. She was relieved when he hung up. Now she had the choice of either calling it a night or else trying to resume her assignments

She chose the latter and was surprised that she could actually regain her previous level of concentration. Then she opened a beer for herself before calling it a night. Sometimes, nothing helped her concentration as much as bad news which she needed to alleviate.

She sipped on her beer and resisted a temptation to phone Amanda and inform her of Gary's arrest - this terrible new development in the investigation of Barry's murder. She doubted that Gary's arrest would be in the next day's newspapers. It was, after all, officially just another drug case. Nothing more and nothing less.

Sarah Lloyd-Matthews and John Sutcliffe sat together in a quiet corner of Hy's Restaurant in Yorkville. They had just enjoyed a rare roast beef dinner together and had just ordered another litre of red wine for themselves. Sarah was still in a somewhat celebratory mood herself, She was basking in the glow of having almost single-handedly secured a fast conviction for prominent wife-murderer Carl Dawson; and her rehabilitated daughter Terri had changed her music and persona and was doing very well as a jazz singer who did *not* sing for downwardly-mobile drug addicts.

Aside from his budding relationship with Sarah Lloyd-Matthews and his just-finished excellent roast-beef dinner; John Sutcliffe was not a man with much to celebrate.

'You enjoyed your dinner, Sarah?'

She assured him that she had enjoyed it. She wished he would just relax. After all, she was treating him on this particular evening. But, his position on the police force was irritating him. There were a couple of low-profile homicide cases which the force was not getting anywhere with; and now there were complications regarding the investigation into Barry Ferguson's murder.

Barry Ferguson - that professor who couldn't just stay away from Boystown.

'Care for a cigar?'

Sarah laughed.

'No, John. I hope I've made it clear to you that I'm determined to quit smoking *cigarettes*.'

'Right', John muttered as he unwrapped a Churchill and began to toast it.

She sat silently as he began his ritual. She actually enjoyed the aroma of good cigars and she appreciated the fact that they helped John relax.

The waiter delivered the fresh litre of red wine and poured glasses for both Sarah and John. He also provided an ashtray for John's cigar.

She let him savour the cigar for a minute before addressing him.

'You do realize, John, that the force can only hold this Gary person - this bottom of a pyramid drug dealer - for only so long unless you can *prove* he had something to do with Ferguson's murder.'

John Sutcliffe's face now glowered.

'Don't tell me how to do perform my job. Please, Sarah.'

She altered her tone, trying to sound less harsh and more sympathetic.

'I'm just making a simple point. There's no need to be so defensive, John. If you *can* connect this Gary to Ferguson's murder; then you will have made a definite break. But how do you know that the other kid - the one who presumably killed himself-.....'

'Eric Cunningham.'

'How do you *know* that Eric Cunningham was covering up anything about Gary besides the drug dealing?'

John drew on his cigar for a second and then blew the smoke away from her face.

'This *could* be a break, Sarah. Then again, it could be another bloody dead-end. I'm afraid Detective Connors has become something of a specialist at dead-ends. But it would make life so much easier if this hunch were more than just a hunch. The sooner we solve this Ferguson case, the better. And good riddance to Barry Ferguson. Cheers, Sarah.'

John raised his glass towards hers and they clicked their glasses.

Sarah sipped on her wine for a second.

'John? Perhaps if you were to offer Gary some sort of leniency *that* could get him talking? Perhaps he might wind up being a useful witness against his suppliers?'

He puffed on his cigar, frowning.

'That might be quite useful to Narcotics; but not necessarily to Homicide. Narcotics has its own internal logic which I'm damned if I can figure out. They always wind up catching people like this Gary Flood, who are only dealing on a very immediate level to feed their own little habits. Homicide

and Narcotics have always had this strange, dysfunctional relationship - ever since I came on the force, anyway.'

She shook her head.

'Not always, John. It just might be that whomever Gary is protecting might have something to do with Ferguson's murder.'

He exhaled angrily.

'Dammit, Sarah. There's no evidence of any robbery any sort of profit motive with regards to the Ferguson case. There's no evidence of Ferguson having been involved with drugs. There is evidence that he was a regular patron of borderline teenage boys in that particularly nasty neighbourhood. So, if the boy who committed suicide was *not* the killer; then who the hell was? Maybe Eric Cunningham was the bottom person of *this* pyramid, Sarah. Maybe Eric had to payoff Gary who had to payoff somebody we don't yet know about?'

'Keep thinking, John, you'll crack this one - sooner or later.'

He sipped on his wine.

'Even if this scenario were true - that Cunningham killed Ferguson in order to pay off some debt to Flood or whomever; then why *Ferguson*? Was he specifically a target? Or, was he simple the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time?'

John drew on his cigar, frowning intently.

'This particular crime has never seemed like a hit. It's not *calculated* enough to be a hit.'

'I agree, John. It's too damn messy.'

Sarah sipped her drink; then decided to change the subject.

'I have to go out of town for a couple of days - to Vancouver.'

John appeared baffled.

'What for? You just spent time *here* with your daughter, who seems a lot better than you say she was.'

Sarah shook her head as gently as she could.

'It's *Neil* I need to see. My son from my *first* marriage. He was here for awhile and we weren't in touch. Now he's moved back to Vancouver and he's written to me. So I have to go to him.'

She paused and sipped her drink.

'I know you've never met my son and it's possible that you never will. But, it sounds to me like he also may have turned his life around. I hope he has.'

'Your son from your *first* marriage'' John repeated to himself, attempting to keep the details straight.

'Look, John. I have two very different children by two different men; and I'm not on speaking terms with either of those two men. I know where Dennis is in Vancouver; not that I have any desire to ever see him again. And as for my first husband; I don't know where he is and I really don't give a shit.'

She laughed at her vehemence and her vulgarity. John didn't laugh. He was curious. If Dennis Matthews was nothing more

than a petty criminal; than what was her first husband, who didn't even seem to have a first name?

'Again, John. I'm flying out tomorrow and I won't be back until Sunday night. It could be a good sign that he moved; and I think it is a good sign that he has contacted me.'

'Yes, I suspect so', John drew on his cigar.

'He's working in some restaurant-owned by some friend of his. At least he's working. I don't know how he supported himself in Toronto; but I can guess.'

So could I, John Sutcliffe said to himself but he held his tongue. He and Sarah had been dating for almost a month now and discretion was still a priority. Certain subjects were understood to be off limits, without any contract needed to be drawn up by the pair of them. Certain things were best unspoken. That was the way people got along with each other - by respecting privacy.

His own first marriage had dissolved because he had not respected his wife's privacy. He had been convinced she had been having an affair when in fact she had been confiding in a friend of hers whom he later found out to be homosexual. He could *rationalize* as to *why* women so often confided in homosexual men but he had remained suspicious. She had confronted him regarding his lack of trust; and then she had left him. Just like that.

So, even though John could tell Sarah was withholding information from him, he bit his tongue. If she did not wish to discuss her two failed marriages then that was all for the better. He was not anxious to talk about his failed marriage either.

But Sarah must have *absolutely* loathed her first husband if she could even bring herself to refer to him by name. If Dennis Matthews had initially seemed an attractive prospect to her; then her first husband must have in comparison been the devil incarnate.

John wanted to confront Sarah. He also knew there was no way she would bring the subject up herself. So, he backed off - even though he knew something would have to give if he was going to keep on dating Sarah.

'Shall we order another litre. John?'

She smiled at him as her glass was by now almost finished.

'Sure, why not'. He nodded. 'This will be our last time together until Sunday night. But only one more litre.'

Sarah laughed heartily.

'Don't worry about me. I've always been a good driver.'

Dinner with Mom had not been all that unpleasant. He hadn't obviously needed to borrow money - he had given her an impression that he was making things meet. The move to Vancouver had made sense to her. Nicky hadn't been getting anywhere in Toronto so why not move back to Vancouver - especially when an old friend of his was offering him employment ?

Tips weren't too bad at all at The Steam Rail. The name of the bar cracked him up. His friend Roger had always planned to run an establishment that would do nicely for himself by appealing to different clienteles. It would be queer-positive without being 'a gay bar' - polygenderal and therefore comfortable for all. Nicky didn't mind waiting there at all - except for the occasional impaired asshole who after all did constitute an occupational hazard.

He was more comfortable with mixed crowds than in a cruisy all-male environment. Not that there wasn't a heavily gay-male contingent frequenting The Steam Rail. That moniker cracked him up. When Roger had first told him the name; Nicky wondered whether he was hearing about a backroom-oriented bar or a licensed bathhouse.

It was good for Nicky that business and tips were good at The Steam Rail. He didn't have to augment his income by either selling drugs or turning tricks. Neither of these two entrepreneurial activities were worth the risks involved. The dope scene had too many random factors in Vancouver - not that it hadn't in Toronto. Too many people selling the shit with their right hands while sticking it into their left arms. As far as Nicky was concerned; the smartest people in the drug business were the ones at the top - the ones who never even *looked* at the shit let alone used it.

Turning tricks was also something he was glad he could avoid having to do. There were too many weird closet cases. He smiled as he recalled reading about an aging Toronto bathhouse queen who didn't go for hustlers because hustlers gave as little as possible for as much as possible. Well, Gramps, that one works two ways. If the john can't keep it up or comes too quickly because of some guilt about what they've gotten themselves into; then that's the john's fault - not the worker's. Not that a lot of self-loathing johns ever managed to figure that one out.

Like his Dad. Look what happened to his *biological* father. Not that self-loathing provincial politician whom Mom left Dad for. Dad was a very complex and complicated man but Dennis was nothing more than scum. Nicky had tried his damndest to warn Mom; but of course she'd never listen to *him*.

Now she did - at least, superficially. Nicky laughed at how Mom had believed his story about going back to school. Maybe she believed him because the story wasn't complete bullshit. He

was seriously thinking about upgrading his technical skills and then returning to his music. Club music. Film music - now it was all composed and recorded with computers so he could only benefit by upgrading his technical skills.

Mom had gone back to school - so to speak. Fucking a cop - how typical. After years of celibacy she was now fucking a cop. After Dad and then Dennis Matthews now she wanted a real man. Not just a beat cop of course; but a superintendent - a *powerful* man. She'd drink fine red wines while reading LEAF propoganda and he would smoke his expensive cigar and stink up the room. Yes, Mom had gone back to school with a vengeance.

Nicky looked at his watch. It was almost time for his shift at The Steam Rail to begin, so he decided to pick up some Chinese food from the restaurant across the road and also to put the hot water on. He phoned in his food order, which he would cross the street to pick up in about ten minutes. He washed his hands in the sink and then smiled into the mirror above him.

Moving back to Vancouver seemed like a perfectly logical course of action. He had no reason to return to Toronto - none whatsoever.

He leafed through the Vancouver Yellow Pages - attempting to differentiate one trade school from another. Practically all of these schools advertised new electronic media courses - not like the theoretical ones at art colleges such as Emily Carr but, rather, practical courses which involved applied skills. Non-linear and digital editing was mandatory at all of the trade schools; but which ones offered MIDI and digital *recording* courses?

Nicky lit a cigarette and scowled. He didn't feel like making phone calls to each and every one of these educational institutions. Maybe the idea of resuming his technical education was just a line he had handed his mother in that posh Kitsilano restaurant. But, now every time she talked to him she would be asking about his progress. And he *did* wish to get back to making music - in a contemporary and marketable format. It made sense to him. Get involved with music again - reinvent your life. It's obviously the smart thing to do - become somebody else not only nominally but practically. Nicky felt like he'd already suffered enough impractical education just by having been Barry Ferguson's son. In Toronto, he'd snuck into some stupid sex panel at the University of Toronto; where that black male-to-female transsexual blew all the other panelists including Barry right out of the fucking water. His Dad hadn't changed one iota from

the way he'd been when Mom had won exclusive custody - when he'd been eleven. Nicky had been hoping that his Dad would have learned something in all those years; but fat fucking chance. He was still full of the same barely-concealed self-loathing - the same disgust for bodily functions and bodily pleasures. Endless verbal hot air could not disguise anything. Sooner or later he'd be on the prowl - seeking salvation. Poor Dad - he got what he'd been looking for.

Nicky knew all too well that he was just a chip off of the old block; but that knowledge *could* be useful. It could help somebody make up their minds early in their lives to *work* at being different - to *not* get locked into hopelessly irresolvable contradictory positions.

He decided to smoke a joint and then go out to a movie before his shift at The Steam Rail. He could always return to the Yellow Pages tomorrow. But, he was definitely on the right track. He would save all that tip money and then learn to make music with the current technologies. In the age of the machine; technological illiteracy was fatal. Even worse; it was a form of prolonged suicide.

It was only three in the afternoon, which allowed ample time for a movie. The Granville Mall cinemas were the closest to his workplace, so he checked out the listings. He was in luck. . CRASH was the one he really wanted to see. He'd read bits and pieces about this latest feature by David Cronenberg, which had been adapted from a novel by some strange English science-fiction writer named Ballard. Nicky picked up that humanist critics and even movie directors all seemed to loathe this movie because of its inhumanity - its literal auto-eroticism. This definitely made him want to see this movie for himself.

Nicky didn't drive - he'd never had the opportunity. But he often fantasized about driving a car - especially a sleek model with manual transmission.

The movie was *okay*, although at least half an hour too long. Its characters were all sexually stimulated by real and simulated car crashes. There were car crash survivors who ritualistically revisited the sites and the circumstances of their accidents. There were car crash survivors who were aroused only by other scarred or marked bodies. And, to top it off, there was an entrepreneur who staged sensational re-enactments of celebrity fatal accidents or automobile-fixated assassinations. Jayne Mansfield and of course John F. Kennedy were the two recurring favourites of the car crash set.

But Nicky was relieved when the movie was finally over. He could detect a familiar puritanical undercurrent running beneath the calculated outrageousness. He recognized a very *Canadian* need for bodies to be dependent upon machines; and for bodily pleasures to be almost interchangeable with bodily denial.

For a second, he wondered what his biological father would have made of this movie and the controversy surrounding it. Dad would have loved it - probably.

Nicky decided he had *disliked* the movie. As he walked out of the Granville Mall cinema four and then let the escalator take him up to street level; he caught sight of a young woman who was entering Cinema Five in order to see another Canadian movie - LILLIES. The young woman's name was escaping him but he remembered her as being a former member of his half-sister Terri's former band - METEOROLOGICAL METHOD.

Her name definitely began with a 'A'...Anna? Alex? Amy? It was *something* beginning with the letter A. Whatever her name was; he knew this was an old girl musician friend of Terri's. This girl had been the quiet one - the one who had always stayed out of trouble.

Nicky was relieved that the young woman - whatever her name had been - had not seen him or recognized him.

Nicky's shift at The Steam Rail began slowly, as it usually did. Roger was preoccupied with cutting up lemons and limes in preparation for the expected crowd and Nicky didn't really feel like talking to Roger. So he crossed the street and bought himself a newspaper -The Vancouver Sun - to read casually by himself at a table.

On page six he registered an article in which former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was arguing in favour of coast-to-coast bilingualism as opposed to Quebec unilingualism. Nicky guffawed, loudly enough so that Roger overheard him.

Some people just *never* give up, he gritted his teeth and remarked to himself. Trudeau's talking coast-to-coast bilingualism for English and French and here Nicky was now living in Vancouver where Mandarin Chinese and Japanese were more likely candidates for principal languages-in addition to English. His antenna detected very few French-Canadians and Francophones. Pierre Trudeau was another of those early-boomer types like his Dad who never quite adapted to changing times, no matter how desperately they tried.

He thought about the movie he's just seen - CRASH. The director and the writer - Cronenberg and Ballard - had fetishized the John F. Kennedy assassination as being one of those landmark historical occasions - what were you doing when Kennedy was shot, as if everybody in the world required an alibi. *Somebody* on television, perhaps one of those self-styled 'Gen-X' pundits - had divided boomers from post-boomers on the basis of their attitudes to the Kennedy assassination? *Did you think this event dashed hopes for some utopian 'new frontier' or did you not really give a shit because it happened before your time?* Nicky had been born a decade after Kennedy's assassination; so it had never exactly been one of the turning points in his life.

Kennedy, Trudeau, his Dad - all false idols or icons. Assholes like that Hollywood film director Oliver Stone actually believed that Kennedy would have spared the Vietnamese people the bombing when in fact Kennedy was a major if not *the* major war criminal of the entire fucking lot of them. Pierre Trudeau is still seen by many leftover hippies and some of their academic apologists as being 'Canada's legendary progressive politician' when, in fact, he was a serious closet case with a dangerous fetish for the military and their power. Trudeau loved men in uniform; so he authorized the War Measures Act. This too all happened before Nick's birth but both of his parents had talked obsessively about the War Measures Act and whether or not it had been in fact necessary. He though his Mom and his Dad were both full of shit - just like Pierre Trudeau.

His Dad had spewed out the same post-nationalist bullshit that Trudeau had and still was advocating - in this article in today's Vancouver Sun. His Dad had applied this anti or 'post'-nationalism to sexuality. Gays and straights were 'obsolete'- everybody was in reality *bisexual*. Everybody was born and should spend their lives being polymorphously perverse. What the fuck was so perverse about being nothing more than a rich john? *Nothing*. What was the difference between Dad and J. Edgar Hoover or Senator Joe McCarthy? Well, Dad had his weird sense of personal fashion and he did have more respect for women, in his own way and then only up to a point. And then....

'Nicky?'

He looked up from the newspaper.

'Oh.'

Roger was jerking his head to indicate that there were two young women who had seated themselves at the far end of the bar and who were expecting service. Nicky now walked toward the bar, picked up his tray with his float in a clean ashtray; and then tried to put a smile on his face for the benefit of the customers.

Nancy was enjoying a catnap late on Saturday afternoon when the telephone awakened her. Although she could have let the machine take the message; she decided it was time that she woke up and took the call.

Her caller was Stuart Makkhan, the video artist who had greatly endeared himself to Nancy by taking her and Amanda to that warehouse party which now seemed to have occurred eons ago. Stuart had called to inform her about a screening of one of his videotapes at a fairly high-profile local art gallery.

Stuart also invited Nancy to a party at his apartment after the screening. Nancy promised that she would try to make it to both the screening and the party; bus she allowed that she

might be too tired to go out at all this evening. She could tell Stuart really wanted her to attend at least the screening.

So she made the effort. And Stuart's videotape did not help to sharpen her mental facilities - not because it was any sort of obvious one-liner but because it was both visually stunning and intellectually demanding. About half-way through the tape's duration; Nancy resolved to watch Stuart's work again - at a future date and in a more intimate viewing situation. She liked what she could grasp and interpret; but she was too tired and also preoccupied with personal conundrums to really concentrate.

She had hoped to slip out discreetly and avoid being asked by Stuart for reactions to the work. But he personally requested her presence at his party and, since his apartment was not all that far away from *hers* - she decided to make a brief appearance.

Her resolution to stay for just one beer wasn't difficult for her to adhere to. Aside from Stuart, who was in the company of that attractive South Asian man he'd met at that *fabulous* warehouse party; Nancy knew only those two transplanted Vancouverites who remembered her from STIPES AND SPOTS. She found the two girls tolerable tonight; because they were aware that she didn't want to talk about redundant old rock bands and they had some grass they were being quite generous with. But, after declaring herself tired but not unpleasantly stoned; she kissed Stuart goodnight and then escaped into the very chilly fresh December air.

Amanda checked the clock above her stove, made sure her present to Christine was intact and properly wrapped; and then dialed Nancy's number in Toronto.

'Hi!', Nancy had recognized the number of the incoming caller.

'You're home.'

Amanda's tone was more energetic than Nancy's

'I thought you'd be calling me later?'

Nancy sounded like she was either exhausted or hung over.

'I have a social obligation later tonight', Amanda patiently explained. 'It's your ex bass-player, Christine Benning.'

'Really? How is *she* doing?'

'She seems pretty healthy.' Amanda sipped from a beer 'Tonight's her birthday - soft drinks only. She doesn't mind other people drinking alcohol if they're in a bar; but she won't have booze in her apartment.'

'That sounds rather severe', Nancy frowned. 'I thought *heroin* was her problem?'

Amanda allowed a beat. She sipped again on her beer, and then changed the subject.

'I told Christine about us. She thinks it's great and she wishes you were here. She'd love you to be at her birthday party.'

Nancy lit a cigarette.

'Well, if I were there then I would go.'

'I wish you were here. I'm up to my neck in work. That videotape - the one I have to make for the dirty old man who teaches Media-Arts at Emily Carr - is driving me up the fucking wall.'

'I'll bet it is", Nancy exhaled.

'I wish I could show the tape to you - get some feedback. Try to come out here for the holidays?'

'I'll try"', Nancy tried not to snap at Amanda. 'But I won't make any promises that I can't keep.'

I hear you"', Amanda sipped from her almost-empty beer bottle. 'How's your neighbor- Danny?'

'Danny's definitely flown the coop. He may have gone to Vancouver.'

'I haven't seen him. But then, I haven't had time to go out much at all. My brother knows the clubs and the rave scene - maybe he would know Danny to see him.'

'Maybe?'

Nancy was curious. She drew on her cigarette for a moment. Maybe Danny was spinning discs or CDs or whatever in Vancouver - if that was where he had gone?

'What about the investigation into Barry Ferguson's murder?' Amanda finished the beer and decided not to open another one.

'Nothing. The case has been completely swept under the carpet. One convenient suicide and one irrelevant drug bust. And the guy who *wasn't* in the police lineup seems to have also blown town.'

'Not good, Nancy. What else have you been doing?' She inhaled and then exhaled.

'Homework, schoolwork. I went to a screening last night; and then to a party at Stuart Makkhan's'.

'Oh, *Stuart*. Our friend from The Liberty Bell. They have one of his tapes in Emily Carr's collection. It's pretty dense work - rigorous.'

'Stuart is a very sweet man.'

'Yes'. Amanda cleared her throat.' A lot of people in Vancouver ask about you, Nance. They want to see you.'

'I know. I know.'

Nancy tried not to sound irritated. She wanted to visit Amanda. She did not wish to be on display in the town she had moved away from.

'I don't mean to be pressuring you, Nancy.'

'I know you don't *mean* to.'

Amanda decided to wind down her long-distance call.

'Have you seen my Mother? Or, at least, my mother's girlfriend?'

'I haven't seen Helen. I have seen Claire - on campus of course. She's always been busy whenever I've run into her.'

'That's her style. Mom's thinking of coming out again at Christmas.'

'Oh?'

Nancy butted out her cigarette. It was her turn to call Amanda next Sunday - at the regular evening time rather than in the middle of the afternoon.

'I'll call you next week - at the regular time. Maybe there'll have been some movement by then. Bye for now, sweetheart.'

'I miss you, Nance.'

Amanda hung up the phone and then stared at it, dejectedly. She knew Nancy's financial situation was strained-as was her own. She also knew that unless Nancy could come out to Vancouver and visit her soon their relationship would dissolve and their fabulous weekend together would have been nothing more than yet another intense but unfortunately passing fling.

Nicky wasn't in any great hurry once he reached the Granville Mall. He wished he had never entered the Vancouver Art Gallery, even if it had been on cheap Sunday. He enjoyed making things by himself and on his own. He liked drawing and sometimes he even enjoyed looking at paintings. But most 'capital A' art pissed him off.

All those old Fluxists and retro-Dadaists with all of their stupid sixties and seventies *noms de plums*. The whole lot of them thought they were so clever, so terribly *avant-garde*; and they were all so fucking bourgeois. They all now held tenured teaching-posts at Emily Carr even if they weren't academic enough for Simon Fraser or UBC.

Emily Carr. The totem-pole queen herself was permanently installed up on the gallery's third or fourth floor - he couldn't remember which it had been. The only thing more boring than dear old Aunt Emily was those ridiculous academics who ranted on and on about whether Emily was an original or a thief. Nicky had actually sat through one of those panels two or three years ago, when he had previously been in Vancouver. His Dad had been one of the panelists; and Nicky had sat incognito in the very back row with his head buried down. Dad had argued that Emily *had* been a thief; and that was *why* she was important. *Of course artists stole things- that was why they were artists*. Artists were *criminals*; and Dad had always been obsessed with criminals.

The mall area was as quiet as it usually was on a December Sunday. It would get busier after the first movies of the day let out and after people's hangovers began to wear off. Nicky walked into a peep show and stared at the pictures. Two of

the eight booths in the arcade were for men to look at pictures of men. There were a few good-looking men; but nobody outstanding. None of them gave Nicky a hard-on.

As he walked out of the seventh booth; he looked past a fat man, who seemed to covet him, to register a youth - perhaps two or three years younger than himself - apparently obtaining change from the cashier. *Kenny* - that was the young man's name. He remembered having non-eventful sex with *Kenny* on one occasion three or four years ago. They had gone to a convenient hotel and then nothing really had happened. They'd both tried too hard; and Nicky more than suspected that *Kenny* had been on drugs. Not junk, but probably psychiatric drugs. Not at all a pretty picture.

Nicky quickly hid behind the curtain in the eighth booth. He had no more quarters in his pockets and anyway this booth had pictures of naked girls. But he stood still until he was certain that *Kenny* had gone into one of the other booths - presumably the seventh or else the other boys' one. Then, Nicky made a break for the door and now walked along the mall's main street.

There was a good record and CD store across from the peep arcade. Nicky decided to hang out there for a while, just listening to CDs he couldn't buy because he still had nothing to play them on. Music was something still relatively missing from his life; and this situation would have to be rectified sometime in the fairly near future.

On Sunday night, after having concluded her telephone conversation with *Amanda*, *Nancy* found herself with nothing to do and nowhere to go. She was angry at herself for not being able to make a definite commitment to *Amanda*. She could not promise to be in *Vancouver* for Christmas simply because the funds did not exist. Even if she were to fast for a week - beer and cigarettes in addition to food - the cheapest flight would probably be beyond her means.

She had to start making *money* - that was all there was to it. How could she do this while continuing her education? The obvious possibilities did *not* appeal to her.

She looked out her window towards the street - towards the spot where the undercover cop had so often parked. The man was not there now. She didn't see any younger strangers sitting in their cars pretending to read newspapers or best-sellers. Neither Homicide nor Narcotics were staking out her apartment any more. *Barry's* murder had been put on ice. The Homicide Department

- including that English superintendent whom she had seen at The Senator with *Barry Ferguson's* ex-wife - seemed to consider the Ferguson case locked up. Either Eric or Gary - in tandem or acting separately had done it alone or in tandem with a mysterious somebody else. Eric was dead and Gary was in custody on clear-cut drug charges. Nancy scowled at the stupidity of the whole damn thing.

The telephone rang; and Nancy decided to at least check out the caller's number. The indicated number seemed familiar but she couldn't quite place it. She decided to answer the phone.

The woman's voice was neither quite English and determinedly not Canadian or American. Claire Wilkinson urgently needed to talk to Nancy - face-to-face. She wanted to meet at The Idler Pub which was conveniently around the corner from Claire's and Helen's house on Tranby Street. Claire felt obliged to attend some former student of hers' poetry reading. Nancy recognized the name - Lisa Dempsey. Claire's former student was sharing the evening's programme with a gay male prose writer named Richard Critchley; whom Jeff and Derek sometimes argued about.

Nancy was relieved that Claire did not expect her to endure the readings before the requested one-on-one conversation. Nancy was seldom if ever in the mood for public readings. And she would have preferred to be meeting Claire along with Helen. Exactly *what* was so damn urgent and important?

Nancy realized she could kill time intelligently - by reading an essay in a book about censorship she had borrowed from Derek Lee. One of these days she knew Derek would be needing this book returned to him - it was a reference book as well as a stimulating read. So, she decided to dig in and read voraciously until nine-thirty. Claire was expecting her at ten - after the readings had concluded and after the kitchen had closed.

Nancy resolved to fix a sandwich before meeting Claire. She had a feeling Claire might be drinking while pretending to listen to her former student's reading.

When Nancy arrived at The Idler; Claire Wilkinson had already been there for at least two good hours. She was seated by herself in a remote corner of the pub, where she could chain-smoke and where she could tune in and out of the readers without being too conspicuous about it.

'You've been here quite a while, Claire.' It really wasn't a question.

'At least an hour too long. So, I'm drunk.'

Claire laughed as Nancy sat down across the table. The two readers for the evening had finished their presentations; but they were still lingering on the premises.

'Yes, Nancy. We should have agreed to meet earlier and at another venue.'

Claire looked around the pub and then lowered her voice even further.

'Lisa Dempster hasn't changed for years. I thought she had potential - when she was my student - but I guess I was being overly optimistic. Her writing is just so set, so lifeless - it bores me. There's nothing formally wrong with it - it's just very perfect and very dull.'

'Oh", Nancy glanced around the pub conspiratorially. 'Is that her over there?'

She tilted her head toward an intensely thin young woman who sat opposite a slightly pudgy and ruddy-faced gentleman - safely out of their earshot.

'How could you miss her, Nancy? Your typical anorexic poet. Mind you, Richard hardly has that problem now, does he?'

The chubby fellow sitting with the poet was the evening's other reader, then. Claire didn't seem to have much of an opinion of *him*, either.

'What are you drinking, Nancy? This is on me.'
She made a decision.

'Light beer.'

'How predictable. Can you go to the bar, order yourself your light beer and another stout for myself, and tell that prissy bartender that they're both on my tab?'

Nancy nodded. As she watched Claire light a cigarette, she had more than a feeling she would be in for a long night. She herself would have appreciated Claire to hurry up and come to her point - whatever *that* might actually be.

The male bartender took her order with a clear concern. This was probably unnecessary- after all, Claire did live around the corner and she was quite unlikely to be driving tonight.

'Here's your Guinness, Claire. Are you sure you don't also want a coffee or a tea?'

'Good Lord no! Not at this hour - it would keep me awake all night!'

Nancy suspected other factors might play a role jeopardizing Claire's sleep.

'Richard Critchley", Claire again lowered her voice almost to a whisper.' bothered me even more than Lisa did. Lisa was dull; but Richard was almost offensively bad. Richard used to be one of Barry's students, you know. Barry thought Richard had a lot of potential; but now he's this happy gay community gossip writer with only *slight* literary pretentious. He writes soap-operas about well-off perfect male bodies and their cars and their pedigreed dogs and I really don't give a shit about any of those people. They call themselves 'queer'; and they're so bloody *normal!*'

Nancy shuddered. She tried to change the subject.

'Where's *Helen* tonight?'

Claire shook her head.

'At her lesbian writing group. It's mostly younger writers; and they sit around and take turns reading and then talking about their work. It's all very private - Helen never

talks to me about the other girls. Probably, they all write like lesbian Richard Critchleys! Perish the thought!

'Do you read Helen's writing?' Nancy reached for her smokes.

'Whenever she lets me read it. Cheers.'

The two of them clicked their glasses as Nancy lit her cigarette.

'I can't imagine why Helen would be so damn secretive - not about her own writing but about the girls in her group. It can't be any more boring than what I've had to endure tonight.'

Claire looked around to the evening's readers, who were themselves imbibing heartily and smoking cigarettes.

'Richard Critchley used to have potential to be far more than what I'm afraid he's become. He used to be very critical of conservative and misogynist gay men; and now he's one of them himself. He would like to be Edmund White; but David Leavitt would be closer to the mark. Men are men and women are women; and never the twain shall meet.'

Claire butted out her cigarette and took a hearty sip of her Guinness.

'I really can't comment on those writers, Claire. I've made a point of *not* reading most of them.'

She drew on her own cigarette and glanced around the room. Most of the crowd appeared to be friends of the two writers-neurotic-looking female university-types and literary-looking gay men. She noticed an older man sitting by himself and smoking a pipe. Also wearing *pince-nez*.

'Nancy, the older man with the pince-nez is Edward Thackery - Faculty of English Literature at York. An annoying man - very pompous.'

'Men who wear pince-nez usually are, Claire'.

Claire sipped her stout.

'I used to wear pince-nez - occasionally. Barry and I used to play what the kids today call 'genderfuck'. Sometimes we *wanted* people to think he was a woman and I was a man. Sometimes that was the *last* effect we wanted to have on people. And, as part of the ruse, I wore pince-nez. I also took up pipe-smoking. But Helen dislikes it; so I only smoke my pipe in the study and when she's out of town.'

Nancy shook her head, trying to distract herself from the writers and the students and the English professor with the pince-nez and the pipe.

'So. What is on your mind this evening, Claire?'

Claire stared at Nancy for what seemed like an eternity before answering the question.

'Barry. Why did Barry have to *do this*?'

'Do *what*?'

Nancy looked at Claire, apprehensively.

'Get him killed.'

Nancy took a long drag of her cigarette. Then she butted it out angrily.

'We've had this conversation before, Claire. Suppose Barry did have a death wish? Maybe Barry was painfully aware that his fame - or notoriety - was all bullshit. Whose isn't, for Christ's sake?'

'I could see it coming", Claire sipped her Guinness. 'Tim and I could both see it coming.'"

Nancy refrained from asking her who 'Tim' was because she already knew. 'Tim' was the name of the man who had been or who still was Claire's nominal husband.

'Were your husband and Barry friends?'

Claire was shocked by the question; but she recovered her composure rapidly.

'Barry and Tim used to be the closest friends. I wanted then to become lovers; but I feared that this could never happen. Barry loved penises; but disliked men.'

Claire lit another cigarette.

'There are lots of men like that, Claire. Not only older men. There are lots of men who distrust other men because of unpleasant adolescent experiences or whatever - who may remain *emotionally* bisexual or even heterosexual, who may or may not ever take a male lover while compulsively seeking out anonymous sex. Barry promoted himself as being radically post-queer- whatever the fuck that possibly could mean. Barry's death was a terrible loss; but I doubt very much he wished to die and to do so in such a horrible manner.'

Claire took a long drag on her cigarette.

'I disagree, Nancy. I know he did. He knew that book and his whole persona was an impossible fabrication to live up to and to live with. You wouldn't understand this, Nancy. You did not really know the man.'

Nancy sipped slowly on her draught, which was by now almost finished. She counted to ten before speaking.

'Shall I order two more draughts, Claire?'

'Sure", Claire unenthusiastically nodded.

Nancy walked over to the bar and placed an order with the same cynical bartender; who thoughtfully included two glasses of water along with the light lager and the stout. As she walked back toward the table; she realized that Claire had gone to the washroom.

Nancy lit another cigarette and sipped her draught. She wondered whether Helen Bingham had been particularly close to Barry Ferguson. Probably not, she guessed. She now agreed with Claire that couples who remained together for lengthy relationships managed to accomplish this by having almost exclusively different friends.

If she did manage to visit Amanda in Vancouver; would she fit in with Amanda's friends? And what about her old friends who had disdained Amanda's band - METEOROLOGICAL METHOD? Did she want to see any of her old friends again, anyway?

She looked up to observe Claire returning from the ladies' loo - walking somewhat awkwardly. It wasn't as if

Claire's trousers were too long for her, although they arguably were.

'Six stouts and sooner or later you'll have to pee', Claire informed her.

'I think perhaps you should drink some of this water the bartender has thoughtfully supplied us with.'

'Calm down, Nancy. You can really be so damn maternal, when you come down to it.'

Nancy decided to ignore that barb - although it was difficult.

'I'm getting a definite sense that you would rather be in another place or at least with different company", Claire lit another cigarette and exhaled. 'So, I *will* get to the point. I was hoping that we could talk seriously before showing you just how generous I - and not to mention Helen - can be.'

Nancy now held her breath.

'Helen and I - Helen in particular - frequently travel Air Canada and thus we have accumulated a considerable amount of travel points. This means that we are in a position to offer you a two-way round trip to Vancouver and back; which can be available to you on the day of your preference.'

Nancy sat speechless for a long moment, before responding.

'Yes, I will take it! Thank you, Claire! How can I ever repay this?'

'By occasionally respecting your bloody elders", Claire snapped. Then she laughed uproariously.

Nancy could not fathom let alone understand her benefactor's mood swings. She could imagine Claire and Barry drinking together, viciously feeling the need to one-up the other one while being terribly afraid to simply relax and *listen*.

'The ticket is yours, Nancy, for whenever you wish to use it. Obviously you need to spend some time with Amanda; whether or not you decide to continue this affair. You can go for one, or two, or perhaps three weeks.'

'It has to be a multiple of seven?'

'Yes. Is that a problem?'

Claire had almost finished another pint of Guinness.

'There's *no* problem, Claire. When I get up tomorrow; I'll make my reservation for the eighteenth.'

'The day classes break", Claire smiled at her wryly. "I don't suppose you're ready for another draught, are you?'

Nancy shrugged affirmatively. Claire Wilkinson had earned her company for a while yet tonight.

'Sure, But don't you think Helen's reading would be finished by now?'

'I doubt it", Claire snorted. 'They'll keep going until at least midnight. *You'd* better procure the drinks; because I'll bet that bartender won't want to serve me. He's a real stick in the mud - that one.'

Nancy decided to pee first before ordering the two draughts. She was by now feeling a bit tipsy herself; but she was elated.

'Another round, please"', she requested from the bartender after returning from the loo.

The bartender narrowed his eyes.

'Neither of you are driving, I hope?'

'No', Nancy answered emphatically. That must have been good enough; for the bartender poured them quickly and then added the total onto Claire's running tab.

'Claire. I trust you're not driving?'

Nancy sat down and looked at Claire

'I don't thick so, dear. *Helen* has the car tonight. Mind you"', Claire lowered her voice. 'Helen might be too stoned to drive.'

Helen too stoned?

'Oh, Nancy, I know those younger girls all sit around really doing nothing except smoking dope. I doubt they do any serious analysis of their probably wretched writing; because they're probably too stoned to do so. And I know Helen partakes - despite her bloody asthma.'

Nancy shook her head. What a weird couple - one who drinks too much and one who's a closet pothead. She wondered if Helen and Amanda had smoked dope together at an earlier age.

She thought about Danny, who had definitely skipped out if Toronto. Her own supply was finally gone. She had put in a call to Jeff Talbot who had a friend who sold grass.

'Well, I smoke dope. I wish I had some to go home to.'

'Don't look at me, dear.' Claire shook her head.'

Helen never smokes marijuana at home; or I would invite you over for a nightcap.' Claire tipped her glass against Nancy's. 'Mind you, Barry and I used to smoke marijuana - before it became such a youth culture thing. But, I've always preferred a good drink.'

Nancy tried to imagine Barry and Claire smoking dope. Barry at least made sense, but *Claire*. It was so strange - these two old hippies who had rejected the seventies and wound up reviving the twenties.

Nancy lit another cigarette and exhaled.

'Again, Claire. I can't thank you and Helen enough.'

Well? Don't worry about it, then"', Claire sipped her Guinness. 'Mind you, the turning point in my relationship was when she decided she had to move to Toronto. There was no bloody way I was ever moving to Vancouver!'

Nancy decided to call Claire's bluff.

'And why not?'

'Because that city is too damn full of stupid old hippies and potheads with minimal capacity for retaining information, that's why. If you want my advice, Nancy, you'll stay inside and have sex all day. That way, you'll be with your girlfriend. You won't have to deal with the city and with Amanda's stupid old friends.'

Nancy laughed. Sex was obviously a priority; but she had other reasons to go to Vancouver as well. She now intended to have a pleasurable *working* vacation.

The Sunday night shift at The Steam Rail was low-key. Which mildly upset Nicky? Usually Sundays were more lucrative; but the even rainier than usual December weather probably persuaded many customers to stay home for the evening.

Stay home, watch television, catch-up on your E-mail - all those homebody things to do for people who had the necessary hardware and software. Or, stay home and read an old-fashioned book - like a murder mystery or a similarly-stimulating time-killer.

Oddly enough, the one customer who had been making his shift financially worthwhile was that man who sat alone in the far corner - reading poetry anthologies and what appeared to be Literary Criticism. The man was a voracious reader and also a steady drinker. He liked scotch and water on the side; and he was generous.

Nicky did not know this gentleman's name because the gentleman never talked to anybody. Nicky felt sorry for him; although he seemed to come and go as he pleased without being lonely. Nicky registered him as a gay literary type who probably did not seek out anonymous sex in baths or parks because he had no confidence in his looks. There were a lot of men like that and here was another - the man had to have *some* release mechanism that served him at least adequately.

Nicky hoped the man wasn't driving to his house or to wherever he went after hours; because he was quite drunk. But he didn't get too concerned about the man; because he was almost a regular repeating customer. He was probably either a writer or a schoolteacher or some combination - he definitely had some sort of income.

The other table that characterized Nicky's shift seemed to be either low income or else stingy. This was a table full of musicians - girl musicians. He recognized some of them from a now-defunct rock band -METEOROLOGICAL METHOD. He realized that a member of this group he had seen at the movies was not out with her colleagues. That girl, whose name began with 'A'--Alison, Annie? - was somewhere else. Probably *that* girl was home reading - she had always seemed too much a bookworm to be in a rock band.

One of the musician-girls was drinking endless soda waters and *not* tipping. She was really pissing him off - if she could afford five soft drinks then she could fucking well afford to tip. It appeared to be the soda-water girl's birthday. Probably she'd taken her drugs before coming to The Steam Rail; and she most certainly wasn't mixing them with booze.

Nicky remembered METEOROLOGICAL METHOD as a boring, earnest lefty rock band. He also remembered they were too fucked

up on drugs to be taken seriously politically. The birthday girl-*Christine* - she'd played in another band. Nicky now remembered STRIPES AND SPOTS; who'd been the bad girls in relation to METEOROLOGICAL METHOD being good and sincere and boring and all that crap.

But they were all a bunch of druggies and boozers. He recalled the lead singer for STRIPES AND SPOTS. *Nancy Leonard*, that had been the girls' name. Always angry - always wanting to be somewhere else. Literary pretensions, little if any sense of rhythm. Nicky hated rock bands. They were all an anachronism. Geriatrics who couldn't count let alone dance so they indulged in this pseudo-significant tuneless drone music. Good for junkies and inarticulate masochists.

Nicky delivered quite a lot of beer to two former METEOROLOGICAL METHOD. Kathy and Mary - those were *their* names. They weren't tipping either - perhaps they'd spent all their royalties on drugs. Nicky wasn't completely anti-drugs; although he thought junkies were beneath contempt. He hated rich cokeheads; but he didn't decline when Roger occasionally offered him a toot. At least that shit kept him awake for about ten minutes at the most.

Nicky's favourite drug was cheap pharmaceutical speed. None of this designer crap appealed to him - he could stay awake for a long time with cheap amphetamines. Black beauties and yellow jackets - German drugs. Technical rather than organic drugs. The kind these cheapskate rockers wouldn't touch with ten-foot poles.

At least that girl -that *Christine*- didn't seem to remember him. When he'd been in Vancouver three years ago; Nicky had had more time for noisy rock bands than he did now. He'd gone out to see METEOROLOGICAL METHOD and STRIPES AND SPOTS and boys' bands like LAVENDER PILL and FRUITOPIAN COCKTAIL. Now he hated them all. They thought they were so clever and subversive and queer; when they sounded just like Nirvana who sounded too much like fucking Black Sabbath - loud and rhythmless and shrill.

They all thought they had something to say and they said *nothing* to him. He wanted the table of girl rockers to finish their drinks and get the fuck out of his sight. They were cheap and they were obnoxious. At least one of them was probably bisexual - the one in STRIPES AND SPOTS. Yes, *Christine* the birthday girl herself seemed to fancy him; and yet she wasn't tipping.

Nicky was relieved when he could clean up their table and then give the solitary male reader a few extra glasses of water. The man was the last customer remaining after last call; and he was certain to reward Nicky's thoughtful concern for his equilibrium.

Nancy walked home in the cold December fresh air. A light snow had been accumulating and it was threatening to accumulate more. Just as long as there wasn't a blizzard on the date of her flight to Vancouver, she smiled to herself.

She worried about Claire. She knew Claire would walk very slowly to her home around the corner from The Idler; and then she would probably drink more unless Helen *had* returned from her writing group.

She walked briskly along Dupont - past the auto-garages which comprised the bulk of that street's businesses. She turned left onto Howland and had that street all to herself except for the occasional passing car. The older and poorer sections of The Annex had remained primarily residential; and the houses were largely rooming houses geared toward university students such as her.

In Toronto she was a college student. In Vancouver she had been a grrrrl-rock singer. *And she would be returning to Vancouver - in a matter of days.*

Seeing no indication of any messages on her answering machine; she immediately sat down and phoned Amanda.

Hopefully Amanda would be home from now. Hopefully she hadn't stayed too long at Christine Benning's little birthday party.

Nancy was in luck.

'You're home!'

Amanda was surprised to be hearing from Nancy so soon after their last call.

'I just got in. Everybody else at Christine's party went off to The Steam Rail; but I decided against it.'

'Well, that's very telepathic of you.'

'Nancy? Are you drunk?'

She laughed heartily.

'Yes, I'm drunk. Not nearly as pissed as your mother's girlfriend.'

'Claire?', Amanda seemed slow to grasp. 'You went drinking with *Claire*?'

Nancy retrieved her cigarettes.

'Claire invited me to meet her at The Idler. She had an obligation - to one of her former students who was reading there. I met her *after* the readings were over; and she was already quite royally lubricated. She phoned and told me she had to speak to me - one on one - and, in her usual roundabout manner, offered me a round-trip airline ticket to Vancouver.'

'Fabulous! I'd been refraining from suggesting you try to hit her up for the tickets; but Mom and Claire do accumulate a lot of travel points.'

'Mostly your Mom - from what Claire tells me. So, sweetie. I'll be arriving in Vancouver on the eighteenth. That's a Wednesday.'

'Well, I can't wait.'

Amanda opened a beer from her refrigerator.

'So, Nance. You'll make the arrangements first thing tomorrow? Do it as soon as you get up - no matter how bad your hangover. Do it before Claire realizes she made a mistake when she was pissed out of her gourd!'

Nancy lit her cigarette and exhaled.

'Is that her style, Amanda? Do you seriously think she might renege? Do you think these travel points really do exist?'

'Oh yes. They exist all right. Mom is a very frequent flyer. She was just out here - primarily to see Ken. But then. Ken and I do share an apartment - you realize.'

Ken. Nancy would soon be meeting Amanda's younger brother.

'Yes, Nancy. You'll get to know Ken; and Ken's a happy camper these days. He has a boyfriend - name of Randy would you believe.'

Nancy laughed. She wanted to meet Ken and Randy. She also hoped they spent a lot of their time at Randy's place.

'You realize there's no avoiding at least some of your old grrrrlfriends; so you'd best be prepared.'

Nancy drew on her cigarette.

'I want to see *Christine*. I don't really need to see Kathy or Mary; although I won't make a scene or anything if I do.

'They're okay, Nance. I mean, they went off to The Steam Rail and they were already drunk when they left with Christine.'

'Christine was drinking?'

'Fuck no. Unless you count endless soda water?'

'I don't. What is the Steam Rail?'

Amanda sipped her beer.

'It's this new bar on Hastings - further west than the heavy drug strip. It's arty - it has DJs. It's *queer* because it's not a men's bar or a women's bar.'

Nancy puffed her cigarette.

'Sounds fine. Let's go *there* for drinks.,

'We will, dear. We will. Christine will want to meet us there. I hardly go out, of course.

'You will when I come to visit you. I can't wait, Amanda.'

'I can't wait either. I need to see you, Nance. Hey... I'll try to borrow Randy's car so I can pick you up at the airport. I love you.'

'I love you.'

Nancy hung up the phone and extinguished her cigarette. She turned on the very late news as a pacifier before attempting to fall asleep. Nothing on the news disturbed her - all the atrocities dutifully recited by the anchor were not exactly fresh atrocities; and there were no horrible murders - at least intended for the viewing public's ears. There was, of course, no news about any breakthroughs in the Barry Ferguson murder investigation.

When she killed the television and changed into her sweats that she slept in; Nancy found it difficult to fall into a

good comfortable sleep. It wasn't because she was still drunk. It was because she was very excited.

A few pleasantly uneventful days after receiving Claire's present and then making her necessary arrangements; Nancy found herself with time on her hands so she browsed at the University of Toronto bookstore. But, now she wasn't doing this simply to kill time or to avoid going home. She was actively seeking out interesting reading material, which would keep her occupied during a five hour cross-country airplane ride.

A new FUSE jumped out of the arts-periodicals' rack. She picked it up and quickly realized that this was the long-awaited twentieth-anniversary issue. She flipped forward through the magazine and realized that it was sequenced chronologically.

'Hey, Nancy. If you scan the time-line; you'll notice just how much labour issues become less and less a priority.'

Time-line? She turned to find Jeff Talbot and Derek Lee standing behind her. It wasn't *quite* as if the two of them had been eavesdropping over her shoulders.

'At the end of this issue; there is a very good time-line or chronology of events. Plus a detailed examination of *who* came on and of the editorial board along with *when* and *how* the magazine's design format changed - without literally having to spell out *why*.

'Very good, Derek. I couldn't have summed it all up more succinctly if I had tried to.'

Jeff seemed to be in a good mood - Nancy noted to herself. Perhaps he had managed to get all of his assignments satisfactorily completed without having to miss any fabulous parties.

'Hey. Guess what, guys?'

Nancy decided she would purchase the new FUSE while Derek stared at her in suspense.

'Did you win the lottery?'

'Almost! I'm going to Vancouver - to spend some time with Amanda!'

'Fabulous. Miss Nancy.', Jeff beamed at her. 'And may I ask *how* you can now do what your heart desires?'

Nancy moved forward in the lineup at the cash-register.

'The fairy godmother came through for me. *Radclyffe Hall herself.*'

'I'll bet there were strings attached.'

Derek grinned while she only squirmed slightly.

'There weren't really any strings, unless getting drunk with Claire counts. I met her at The Idler Pub - of all fucking places.'

'Poetry night?'

Nancy nodded.

'I came *after* the readings. They were Lisa Dempster and Richard Critchley; and by the time I arrived Claire was totally pissed.'

'Claire is so literary', Jeff smirked.' Still- if she got drunk enough to give you her travel points; then she can't be all bad.

.'I am fucking her girlfriend's daughter, guys. The three of them walked out into the soft snow which was falling outside. 'Anyway, I made my travel arrangements on Monday morning. They're perfectly valid; although I still feel this is all too good to be true. Do you guys feel like going to Barbarella's?'

Derek lowered his voice and addressed her.

'We have a better plan. Why don't you come over to our apartment; and then we can smoke a joint?'

Her face lit up.

'I'd love to do that. I didn't know you guys indulged?'

Jeff laughed.

'We rarely indulge. We thought we'd buy some from Sean - help him out financially.'

Nancy smiled. It made sense that Sean Cummins would have a good supply of medical marijuana; and that he might also sell his surplus to friends for a little extra cash. She would remember this upon returning from Vancouver - she knew Amanda would get a bargain from her brother when it came to drug supplies.

'Let's go, guys.' Nancy's tone became clipped-almost militaristic. 'You know I'm not all that fond of your favourite martinis.'

'I take it you're joining us?'

Derek led the way as they trudged across the soccer field toward University Avenue.

'Remember, Nancy. No smoking in our apartment - except for the dope.'

She laughed as she kept her pace with Jeff and Derek. She was perfectly capable of containing her nicotine addiction for at least a couple of hours. And she would make it known to Sean Cummins that she would be becoming another discreet customer of his.

Unless, she were to not use the *return* portion of her airline ticket!

Sarah Lloyd-Matthews shook her head angrily as she stood up out of the bed and began to get dressed. She felt free not to disguise her anger; because John Sutcliffe had fallen back to sleep for another half-hour. They had agreed he should do this; after it became apparent that John was still too exhausted to feel interested in any possible sexual play.

She threw on her khakis and then her sweater. She had come over to his place the previous night intentionally dressed more casually than she usually did - she felt this might unwind

him. John had been very tightly wound up; especially since she had returned from Vancouver.

It was his work that was preoccupying him; and then *his* work was hardly the kind somebody could just leave at the office at the end of their working day. Not that hers was simple work either - she had to begin preparing for another serious trial. The Dawson case had straitjacketed her - there were other feminist criminal lawyers who were at least as skilled as she was. Yet she knew she could never turn down any of her clients. They were *her* clients.

As John began to snore; Sarah looked at the photograph on his dresser. His wife had been an attractive woman - Carol, that had been her name. Sarah wondered if Carol Sutcliffe - or whatever her maiden name had been - had remarried or was at least dating. She was a good-looking woman, well-poised and well-dressed. John never talked about her - not that she talked about Dennis let alone *Barry*. But she couldn't help wondering why John and Carol might have broken up.

Was she more sexually active than him? Sarah was beginning to wonder if that might have been the case. Last night she had made it plain that she was in the mood - she had been aggressive because she had previously sensed that this turned him on. But he had been distant and inattentive to her. He had fucked her; but not for nearly long enough. It was as if he couldn't concentrate - he couldn't seem to function except by forcing himself to. It had not been pleasurable for her.

Had John been abusive to Carol - either physically or emotionally or both? She dreaded the possibility; but she doubted this could have been the case. Too distant and not trusting - that sounded more likely.

She put the kettle on so there would be hot coffee by the time she awakened him. John looked so peaceful when he was sleeping - even lightly. He looked like a man with no greater ambitions. Yet, Sarah knew he was working very hard on *something* that he was not talking to her about. She hoped to hell that the something preoccupying Superintendent Sutcliffe was not the investigation into Barry's murder. John would not tell her any daily developments with the heroin dealer whom they had arrested. John seemed to have guessed that the drug dealer was nothing more than that - a relatively harmless scum.

It would have made Sarah very happy for John to be able to avoid going to work this morning. She was in a position to take her time - most of her preparations could be undertaken at home and they would keep her occupied until about ten o'clock. This had been a pattern lately -work at home until ten and then come to John's house. She did not want him to come to her house; and this had so far not been an issue with him.

The water for the coffee had reached its boiling point. Sarah kissed John on the lips before striding over to the stove and turning off the element.

She wished she could persuade him to take a day off; so that he could wake up slowly and then make love to her. The first

time - he had been firm yet gentle. She did not want to be aggressive, unless it was a way to make *him* more aggressive. She sighed, without shaking her head.

'Coffee's ready, John. You'd better wake up or you will be late for work.'

Sarah poured the hot water through the filter into a pot. She would now drink her coffee with John too quickly since he had allowed so little time for themselves. Then she would drive home, read the newspapers for at least a couple of hours; and call her son in Vancouver.

She knew Neil wouldn't be at work so early in the morning. She hoped that The Steam Rail really was a restaurant and not a gay bathhouse. She was prepared to accept that Neil might be gay; but she worried that he still hadn't completely sworn off promiscuity and probably prostitution.

Still, he had made sense when they had eaten dinner together in Kitsilano. Terri was doing fine; and Neil seemed to be doing better than he had been. Sarah was encouraged by his renewed interest in music even though electronic dance music sounded to her like it was the *antithesis* of music.

'John, get up for Christ's sake. Your coffee is already getting too cold.'

Still, John slept. Sarah poured a cup for him so that she could personally deliver it to him. She resolved that she would have the story about her first husband prepared; so that she could open up to him and break the ice. She just had to make her story tighter; so that she could toss it off quickly and nothing would sound fuzzy.

Her first marriage was to *Thomas Lloyd*. Her name had been *Sarah Lloyd*; which was actually her maiden name. Her mother had been Anne Lloyd; but her father had been Thomas *Anderson*. Father had been a nasty piece of work and - when her parents had divorced and she had gone to live with her mother - she had taken her mother's surname. Her driver's license and passports presented her as being *Sarah Lloyd*. She would have loved to drop the name *Matthews* after Dennis' public disgrace; but she was already too well known in her practice.

'Here you are, John. You'd better drink this quickly and then get yourself dressed.'

Nancy again tried to call Mark. But, if he were in fact home, he wasn't answering his phone so she declined to leave yet another message. She put her receiver back in place and then angrily lit a cigarette.

Something had definitely gone wrong. She hadn't talked to Mark since before Claire had offered her travel points to Vancouver. It was very unlike Mark to have gone out of town without calling her first. He had done this when the two of them

had not been speaking; but that hadn't been the case between them recently. They had been allies - of a sort.

She sat down on the sofa and silently smoked her cigarette. Mark was the one person in Toronto she wished to connect with before she left; and her flight was only in a couple of days. Her message that she had left on his answering machine informed him that she would be spending the Christmas break in Vancouver and she had also provided Amanda's address. It didn't make sense that he hadn't called her - first, to congratulate her and second, to ask her to say hello to people they both knew in Vancouver.

Was Mark still living in the same house - on Berkeley Street? Had he been evicted and then why? Rent problems, drug problems, animosity with either the landlord or either tenants? Nancy feared the worst.

Then the phone rang and she leapt to her feet. She did not recognize the incoming number; but she decided to take the call.

It was Mark

'Hi, Nan. Sorry I didn't get back to you earlier.'

'Where the fuck are you?'

'In a phone booth', her brother snapped. 'Just in a phone booth.'

Nancy took a breath.

'Okay, Mark.'

She could hear street noises while Mark was composing himself - a street car and some sort of barely audible argument.

'Nancy.'

'What?'

'I'm going into rehab. I'm checking into the Donwoods.'

'The Donwoods?'

She knew the Donwoods Institute was a detoxification centre somewhere out in East Toronto. She didn't know the details pertaining to its success rate.

'It's worked for friends of mine so I'm going to try it. I was clean for a period; but then I lapsed.'

'I'm not surprised.'

She wondered how Christine was going - out in Vancouver.

'What do you mean by *that*?' his tone was angrily demanding.

She took a deep drag on her cigarette and then ground it out.

'Without sounding too much like Mother Superior; I had my suspicions that you were using again.'

'Well, you were right.'

Nancy was relieved that he wasn't belligerently challenging her.

'Hey, Nan. Do you ever hear from the bass player in STRIPES AND SPOTS? The one who got really fucked up on junk?'

'Yes, I'm going to see her when I'm out there. I've had a couple of letters. Christine's teaching music lessons as part of her rehab programme.'

'Huh?' Mark snorted. 'That could be quite the joke - *me* teaching music lessons.'

'Why is that a joke?'

Nancy thought this might be good for Mark - when he would be ready. It would give him some focus.

'Because I don't believe in fucking music lessons', Mark retorted angrily before calming down again. 'Actually, it's my friends who I make music with who've persuaded me to check into the Donwoods.'

'Good for them.'

She decided to shift the conversation.

'So, you got my message? That I'm going to Vancouver for the Christmas break?'

'To see that girl you spent a weekend with last month?'

'Yes, Mark. I *need* to see her.'

Nancy decided not to tell Mark about Amanda's mother and about Claire Wilkinson. She also decided against inquiring after both Danny and the young man who looked like Eric Cunningham but who was at least two or three years older than Eric had been. She did not want to talk about Eric or Gary Flood or the dormant investigation into Barry's murder Mark didn't know anything that she didn't know. He'd been too busy getting fucked up and missing out on the bigger picture.

'I will definitely look up Christine. Amanda says she's doing fine - drinking lots of soda water and giving music classes.'

'If *I* had to teach scales to a group of stupid kids I'd shoot up first to alleviate the boredom.'

'Shit, Mark', she bristled. 'You've made a decision; so now go through with it. Don't fuck up!'

'I won't, Nan.'

'Take whatever you need to take to get you through until you check in to the Donwoods. When's that, anyway?'

The 20th. Friday.'

'Well, be careful. I'm with you, Mark.'

'I know, Nan.'

'I'll send you a postcard. Give me the Donwoods' address before you hang up.'

She wrote down the address while he dictated it. Then she hung up the phone and retrieved a beer from the refrigerator. She would have preferred a joint but she didn't have any grass.

Amerada had called her the night before - promising to pick her up at the airport. Ken's boyfriend Randy had leant his car; which would save both her and Amanda a hefty cab-fare.

This was too good to be true. And Mark was now making an effort to get off junk. This was a relief to her. It hopefully *wasn't* too good to be true.

But everything was happening to her too damn quickly.

Amanda was waiting for her at the Vancouver International Airport. Nancy could see her friend and her hostess; waving to her as soon as she became visible among the crowd swarming around the baggage conveyor.

'Hey, Nancy. Your plane's late. Hurry up, get your luggage, and let's make it to the car before my parking fee skyrockets!'

Car? Parking fees? Already Nancy felt she had arrived in Vancouver - the city she had indefinitely left behind her two years ago.

'Hey, girlfriend''.

The two women embraced each other; then Amanda threw Nancy's flight bag over her shoulder and began marching toward the parking lot without glancing back.

Amanda really was monitoring the parking meter, Nancy noted.

'Where's the car? What does it look like?'

'It's a deep green VW, belonging to Ken's boyfriend. Ken's been seeing this very sweet man who can actually afford a car; and I borrowed it for today. Here it is. '

Amanda opened the trunk, indicated where to throw the luggage, climbed into the driver's seat and threw the car into reverse in almost record time. Nancy sat in the passenger seat, watching over Amanda's left shoulder. She felt like driving a car almost as much as she felt like stopping off in one of the tackier airport motels and having sex with the car's driver.

'You'll meet Ken and Randy later, Nancy. Randy really wants to meet you; and he *doesn't* remember you from STRIPES AND SPOTS.'

I like him already, Nancy thought to herself. And somehow his first name seemed very appropriate.

'I don't suppose we can afford to stop off at one of these hooker motels and have sex? What do you think, Amanda?'

Amanda laughed without taking her eyes off of the road.

'Keep your seat belt on. It's not *that* far to drive.'

And it wasn't such a long drive. Suburban Vancouver hadn't really changed all that much over the last two years; although it had definitely sprawled. Nancy was pleased that the car was almost predictably hitting all the green lights while steadily approaching the city core along Cambie Street.

'Where's your apartment again, Amanda?'

'East 8th- a bit around the corner from Main and Broadway.'

Nancy recognized the corner and could almost visualize the basement apartment. She had lived further downtown - a bit too close to the nationally notorious East Side strip.

Amanda's apartment was closer to the airport than hers had been. Any minute now she would be throwing her flight bag

onto Amanda's floor and then throwing her clothes onto the floor beside it.

'There's a chance that Ken will be home.' Amanda must have been reading Nancy's mind. 'I mean, we have our own rooms. But this *is* a basement apartment.'

Not too tiny, Nancy hoped.

'I presume you know the house's owner?'

Amanda now turned right onto Broadway.

'Of course. I sublet the basement from Liz Echols - this video artist who teaches at Emily Carr.'

'Not the one who's been driving you up the wall - every time I've talked to you?'

'No', Amanda laughed. 'That's Jerry Norville - a *guy*. I'd never have a dirty old man like *that* for a landlord.'

Nancy smiled, and then placed her arm on Amanda's right knee as they moved smoothly along Broadway toward Main. She didn't mind hitting the occasional red light now that they were clearly so close to their destination.

Amanda only drove a block down Main Street, and then turned east on 8th. She drove past The Western Front Lodge - one of Canada's very oldest artist-managed galleries and media-arts centres.

'They're still here?'

Amanda smiled patiently.

'Some people will never die; and therefore neither will their institutions.'

Nancy nodded silently as Amanda drove east for another three blocks and then pulled into the driveway of a completely anonymous house. As they scrambled out of the car, grabbed the luggage from the trunk; and then carried it along the sidewalk leading toward the rear entrance serving Amanda's apartment; the two of them looked at each other and then cracked up laughing.

'I think your brother is home, sweetheart. I think he and presumably Randy are *fucking*.'

23

SHADOWS

Amanda and Nancy made the decision that they had better get themselves up and out of bed or else they would both *never* make it out of the bedroom.

After they had both thrown on their respective pairs of jeans and their winter top-clothing; they sheepishly stumbled out of the bedroom and found Amanda's brother Ken cheerfully grinning at them while seated comfortably at the kitchen table.

'Hey, Nancy. Welcome back to Vancouver. You realize you two must have been at it for over an hour?'

'Jesus, Ken"', Amanda groaned. 'Were you outside the door with a stopwatch or what?'

Nancy took up the offensive.

'Where's Randy? Is that his real name?'

Ken poured himself a glass of orange juice.

'Ha ha. Randy had to go to work.'

'Randy is a social-worker", Amanda explained.

'That's why he can afford a car", Nancy found the kettle and plugged it in to an outlet on the wall. 'Thanks for the car, Randy.'

'I'm sure you'll meet him later", Ken sipped his orange juice. 'Nancy, I remember you - from STRIPES AND SPOTS.'

She grimaced.

'I can't deny it, Ken. Everything is true.'

'Don't even try to. You were a great band and it's too bad you broke up too soon. Do you still play music?'

Nancy snorted.

'I was the singer - right? So what does that ever have to do with music?'

Ha ha. I hear you'.

Ken grinned at Amanda as she kept her eye on Nancy.

'I was the literary one. And, so was Amanda in *her* band.'

'Which may or may not have something to do with why we are now dating.'

Amanda's pronouncement was intended to be the last word on the subject of music - at least for a while.

'I see.'

Ken was now seated at the table with vials of pills laid out sequentially in front of his orange juice.

"Don't mind me, girls. It's medication time.'

Nancy realized why Ken was taking the medications laid out on the table.

'You look pretty healthy, Ken.'

He looked up at her, defiantly.

'I *am* healthy. In fact, my white T-cell count is so high that I'm getting cut off my HIV-disability money; which is a real fuck-up because that money pays for the drugs that are keeping my white T-cell count *relatively* high.'

'That's how it seems to be everywhere - with HIV', Nancy assented. She wondered how Jeff and Derek's friend Sean - the one with the medical marijuana - was doing.

'I guess so", Ken swallowed 'It's still way too early to jump to any conclusion about these protease inhibitors; but of course the mainstream media has already done so. *The End of AIDS!* Ha ha.'

'Are you volunteering tonight?' Amanda asked her brother. Ken volunteered at a PWA support group on a frequent basis.

'Uh huh. Then I have to look for a job. But, not until tomorrow?'

Ken swallowed his regimen and stared ahead, not at Amanda or Nancy.

The hot water was boiling; and Amanda took care of making the coffee.

'Are you up for a movie, Nance?'

Nancy looked at Amanda and nodded. The coffee would provide her with at least a second wind.

'Sure. Your choice.'

Amanda glanced at a nearby copy of one of the Vancouver dailies and flipped through its pages toward the movie listings.

'BOUND is on at seven-at the Granville Mall complex. You seen it?'

Nancy shook her head. She hadn't yet checked out this particular movie.

'I guess we'd better get moving, then"'.
'I guess so, since Randy took back the car. See you later, Ken"'.
Nancy followed suit by inhaling her coffee and then throwing her coat on. When they arrived at Broadway; they decided they could afford to split a cab.

Nicky's shift at The Steam Rail began slowly enough that he could order some curried shrimp from the Chinese restaurant not quite across the street from the bar. He could then eat his dinner while Roger fiddled about with the inventory details. Later on, business would surely be picking up and then he would be earning some cash for himself.

He ate carefully - trying not to spill curry sauce onto the black slacks and white shirt that he wore as a uniform of sorts. Nicky wasn't required to wear this outfit; but he made a point of combining different white shirts with his one pair of black trousers. His collars were small and not overly-pointed - unlike those retro- seventies neo-psychedelic and neo-disco shirts he had worn to death in Toronto. Now that a retro-seventies look had become so *de rigueur* among low-budget club goers; Nicky was grateful for any opportunity to dress himself differently.

About two hours into his shift; business did begin to pick up. People had come out to drink now that their dinners had been digested and early-evening chores had been completed. Five tables in The Steam Rail's southwestern corner had been reserved for a birthday party and the revelers were now arriving accordingly. As the birthday girl was a friend of Roger's; a deal had been worked out for the partygoers to run up a sizable tab at discount prices and then tip the staff handsomely. So, Nicky resolved to remain charming and affable; as he would receive good compensation for this sacrifice later in the evening.

A disc-jockey now arrived and proceeded to set up at around ten o'clock. The DJ had been advertised as DJ DUSTY ANGEL; and Nicky had expected to find some drug-addled youth arriving with the necessary CDs along with the necessary trashy seventies

disco platters. The youth now setting himself up did not seem addled. Rather, he seemed perky.

He also looked *familiar*. He was definitely from Toronto. Nicky had seen this young man before. He was a player in the rave scene that he had occasionally haunted. *Danny* somebody - wasn't that the young man's name? A specialist in trance or chill-out music intended to reassure those who had taken too many drugs to be dancing? And also a supplier of those same drugs?

Nicky recalled seeing *Danny* once - at a rave in Toronto's St. Clair and Lansdowne area. The two of them had never met; but he recalled this young man staring at him as if *he* were a ghost or some other unsettling apparition. As if he resembled somebody who was supposedly off the streets - safe in custody and being held on suspicion of *Barry Ferguson's* murder.

'Hey, *waiter*. Over here. We have a *big* order for you.'

Nicky clenched his teeth for a second and the drinks on his tray rattled and almost spilled. The Birthday-Girl's table had become impatient for the order they had placed what seemed like eons ago. Nicky now composed himself and focused on the party tables. He decided to concentrate almost exclusively on these tables and encourage the remainder of *The Steam Rail's* patrons to deal directly with the bar and thus keep *Roger* in a good mood. He could avoid staring at the disc-jockey; who had definitely been observing *him*. *Danny* or *Dusty Angel* or whatever his fucking name was could also go to the bar for his complimentary beverages - not that the boy hadn't already ingested at least some sort of stimulant before arriving for *his* shift.

This was to be the first Wednesday nights on which DJ DUSTY ANGEL was to be featured at *The Steam Rail*. This usual nightly DJ was a woman calling herself *Rosy Parker* who played lounge music instead of dance music; which was much better suited to raves than to conversational or social environments. Nicky hoped that DJ DUSTY ANGEL would not end up becoming a *Steam Rail* fixture. Without seeming too neurotic; he was going to have to speak to *Roger* at the end of this shift. He was going to have to invent some reason why he needed to exchange shifts with some other waiter; who *Danny* or *Dusty Angel* or whatever the guy's name was didn't know from a hole in the ground.

Back at *Amanda* and *Ken's* apartment after the movie's conclusion; *Nancy* was quite prepared to just crash out. She had been up for an extended three hours and she had slept poorly the night before. She had never been able to trust alarm clocks; and the movie had been a bit too generic for her taste.

'You do look tired', *Amanda* registered.

Nancy nodded.

'Do you mind if I stay up a while longer and read?'

Nancy shook her head.

'Do you mind if I just fall asleep. We can have fun in the morning.'

Amanda kissed Nancy; and then Nancy walked into the bedroom and closed the door.

'There's lots to read, dear.' Amanda called after her

Amanda's cat, who must have been out when Nancy had arrived earlier in the day, now tried to follow the stranger into the bedroom. Nancy closed the door too tightly for the cat to manipulate it open; and this motivated the cat to let out an angry whine. Amanda was expecting a rude present any moment as Patience had never been known to live up to her name.

'Your girlfriend's allergic to cats?'

Ken entered the kitchen area and immediately plugged in the kettle.

'Are you two too pooped to go dancing?'

'Uh huh"', Amanda answered her brother while yawning.

'Well, I'm not. I'm meeting Randy at a warehouse party where this new DJ - DUSTY ANGEL - is going to be supplying the audio, I can't remember if he's from New York or from Toronto; but I hear he is *fabulous*. He's been spinning at The Steam Rail occasionally; but this is a *dancing* party so he'll play much more intense stuff than he would in a bar.'

Amanda wondered just *how* intense Ken and Randy were planning to make their all-nighter.

'With a name like ANGEL DUST, Ken; I'll bet *he* can't remember if he came to Vancouver from New York or from Toronto. Are you leaving already?'

Ken practically inhaled his very instant coffee.

'I'm going over to Randy's first.'

She smiled at her brother. Sex always made more sense before the *whatevers* kicked in.

'Careful with your medications, Ken? '

'Ha ha.' he looked at his sitter with a mischievous grin. 'Say goodnight to Nancy for me. I think *she's* a catch.'

When Nancy and Amanda arrived at The Steam Rail; Christine Benning was waiting for them. She was nonchalantly sipping a soda water and smoking a cigarette.

Christine looked pretty healthy.

'Oh, my God. It *is* Nancy Leonard!'

Nancy was not believing how relatively fresh-faced and energetic her former bass-player was looking. Having to explain rudimentary rock-music to those kids did not seem to have driven her back to the needle - as Nancy had feared it might.

'You look great, Christine. Make that *fabulous*.'

'Hey!' Amanda good-naturedly cut Nancy off as Christine wondered what her two friends might want to drink.

'You two sit down and order whatever you want to drink. This round's on me.'

Nancy looked doubtfully at Amanda.

'You're sure about this, Chrissie? You're off booze too?'

Christine Benning smiled.

'Oh yes. Players' Lights are my only vice these days. But get as drunk as you want to - I don't mind.'

So, Christine was assuming that Nancy was still a borderline alcoholic?

'Beer, Nance?'

Amanda elected to go directly to the bar, where Christine was running a tab.

'Sure. Granville Island Lager.'

'I'll go get it"', Christine cut in while grounding out her cigarette.' This waitress is *really* slow.'

After Christine was out of earshot; Amanda jerked her head toward the absent-minded waitress.

'She's also really cute.'

'Hey!' Nancy lit a cigarette. 'So is Christine; now that she's cleaned up her act. I wonder who *she's* dating.'

Amanda lowered her voice.

'If she is dating somebody; she doesn't talk about it. I've heard that she's dating a man. But don't ever quote me on that.'

Nancy nodded as Christine returned to the table with the beverages.

'I see you still smoke, Nance.'

Nancy exhaled.

'I quit for a year; and now I'm a fucking chimney all over again.'

Christine lit another smoke herself.

'So, how is Toronto. How's life at the U.of T.? Amanda tells me you were taking a course with Barry Ferguson - before he was murdered.'

'Oh yes. Barry Ferguson was a real character.', Nancy kept her tone level as even as possible. 'His murder is still an open case - still unsolved.'

'According to you, Nancy.', Amanda qualified her girlfriend's pronouncement..

'The cops may think this case is closed; but the cops are full of shit as they usually are.'

'How do you *know*?', Christine exhaled away from Nancy's face.

'They were positive they had the killer - a young guy, a prostitute with a smack problem', she took a drag and quickly exhaled ' although the evidence was suspect - to say the least. They let him go - finally because of Prostitutes' Rights etcetera etcetera. The cops finally realized they had fuck all evidence; so they let the kid go and then he ODs. It was suicide.'

'You're sure about that?'

Christine's face was as pale as a ghost's.

'Oh yes. And *then* they haul in the kids' roommate - his dealer. This is the guy who their first suspect has been covering for all along. And they don't realize the guy they're holding now is just another bottom-line dope dealer - nothing more and nothing less.'

Nancy took a long sip of her lager and then drew on the cigarette.

Amanda now took up the story.

'And Nancy's also seen this *other* guy, who looks a lot like the guy who deliberately overdosed.'

'Yes.', Nancy exhaled. 'There is this other guy. He's a couple of years older but easily mistaken for the first suspect; especially if you're looking for a quick indictment and conviction and not terribly concerned about who all gets fucked around in the process. I used to see the guy they *didn't* detain or arrest down on the track near the Central YMCA; and my brother also saw him. And a neighbour of mine - who may have moved out here - swears he saw the guy at this warehouse party. But he's definitely left Toronto.'

'Really? Maybe he's *here*?' Christine looked directly at Nancy.

'Maybe', Nancy exhaled. 'But then, *where* ? This city keeps getting bigger and bigger- doesn't it.'

Christine nodded.

'It's much easier to get lost in Vancouver than it used to be. It's also much easier to avoid people you don't wish to see - or who you don't wish to see *you*.'

Amanda sipped her beer and then addressed Christine.

'Did you know that Terri Matthews' *mother* used to be married to Barry Ferguson?'

Christine Benning's eyes almost fell out of their sockets.

'You're fucking pulling my leg!'

'It's true, Chrissie', Nancy affirmed.

'Christine drew on her smoke and then butted it out.

'Terri's mother is a famous lawyer, right. Sarah Lloyd-Matthews ?'

'Uh huh', Amanda sipped her beer.

'Wait a minute!' Christine shook her head in disbelief. 'I could swear I saw her with Terri. We're talking about a very well-coifed blonde woman- driving a black Cadillac?'

'That would be her', Amanda confirmed.

'So, then Terri's really cleaned up *her* act.'

'Hardly', Nancy snorted 'unless cleaning up your act refers to becoming a Scientologist jazz singer?'

'That is what I meant, Nance.' Christine almost lit another cigarette but then she checked herself. 'Well, *I'm* becoming an electro-dance-pop junkie. Here I am - teaching rock'n'roll to school kids as part of my rehab programme. And I can't stand rock'n'roll! I've been clean for almost two months now; and I'm teaching kids how to play stupid junkie music.'

Amanda now looked up from a copy of a weekly newspaper which must have been left behind by a previous customer.

'Well then, Chrissie, here tomorrow night we have a DJ named DUSTY ANGEL - spinning sounds tomorrow night here at The Steam Rail. That's the guy my brother is raving about. Ken and Randy went out to some rave last night; where this guy was playing.

Christine shook her head.

'I never go to that kind of thing. That's all just another drug culture. And I have something else I must do tomorrow night.'

Nancy and Amanda nodded to each other. They weren't inclined to come to the Steam Rail on a consecutive night . Perhaps they might check out this DJ DUSTY ANGEL at a later date.

'Shall we order another round?' Nancy looked at Amanda and Christina. "Where is that waitress?"

'Probably in the ladies' loo - doing coke.' Christine shook her head. 'Just go up to the bar. Roger - the bartender - seems like a nice guy.'

Nancy walked up to the bar to order two lagers and one soda.

'There's another waiter here - who's much better. I think his name is Nick, He seems a bit weird; but he's a good waiter. Remembers the orders - realizes to make money you have to offer good service.'

Nancy returned to the table with two beers and a soda.

She lit a cigarette and looked at Christine.

'You say you saw Sarah Lloyd-Matthews here recently? I mean, in Vancouver?'

'Definitely, Nancy. Like mother like daughter.'

'I saw Sarah Lloyd-Matthews when she was prosecuting this rich wife-killer. And then , I saw her at The Senator - when Terri was doing her *Antonella* act. Claire took me there that night.'

Christine recognized *that* name.

'Your mother is *still* with Claire, Amanda?'

'They're practically married"', Amanda responded curtly.

'I wonder what Sarah Lloyd-Matthews was doing in Vancouver?' Nancy cut in sharply.

'Probably something to do with LEAF - as well as visiting her successfully- rehabilitated daughter.' Amanda's tone was somewhat dismissive.

Christine raised her soda glass.

'Your guesses are as good as mine. Cheers, girlfriends.'

Nancy raised her bottle of Granville Island.

'Cheers. Shit, Chrissie, you look pretty good.'

'I am"', she snapped. 'Okay?'

Christine glowered for an extended moment; then regained her composure.

'I don't know how badly you need to hear this, Nancy; but I've seen Barnard Griffiths recently.'

Nancy's face clouded.

Really? Like, *where?*'

Christine looked around the room; then continued without lowering her voice.

'*Here*. Of all places.'

Amanda mulled this information over; and then chose her words selectively.

'Bernard, I remember, preferred the company of younger people - of both official genders.'

'Well, he's not *that* old himself., Nancy cut in. 'Late thirties, if I remember correctly. Did you talk to him, Christine?'

'Just for a minute - if that. I've seen him here a couple of times. He sits alone - drinking single-malt scotches while reading quite voraciously.'

'Preparing the next day's lessons while getting pissed out of his brain.'

Nancy shook her head. Bernard Griffiths did not seem to have particularly changed.

Christine lit another cigarette and exhaled.

'He's only teaching part-time now. He didn't tell me *why* this came about. And he's no longer living alone. He has a flat-mate - a girl, Named Jennifer Something-Or-Other.'

A *girl*? Nancy could not believe what she was hearing.

'I very much doubt it's any sort of sexual relationship, Nance. Mind you, I don't know anything about this woman he shares his flat with. But I can tell he has eyes for one of the waiters here.'

'The mysterious Nick?', Amanda looked at Christine.

'Yes", Christine drew on her smoke. "You know the guy I mean?'

Amanda shook her head.

'Afraid not, Chrissie. I rarely come here - I've been quite busy with school.'

'That's right. You're at Emily Carr and Nancy's at U.of T. So how are you going to manage?'

Nancy extinguished her cigarette.

'We'll work something out. Do you know what I mean, Chrissie?'

Christine did not really know what Nancy meant but she nodded in agreement. Then the three of them agreed that another round was not a good idea but that they should get together again over the Christmas break - possibly for a movie date or even a live band.

They pulled on their coats and walked out to the sidewalk. Christine lived to their west; so she moved off in the opposite direction from Amanda and Nancy.

'Christine looks pretty good, Nance", Amanda remarked after Christine was beyond earshot.

'But, I don't know how healthy she *is*. Do you know what I mean?'

Amanda had a good idea what Nancy meant.

By the time it was last call the next night at The Steam Rail; DJ DUSTY ANGEL had already packed up and gone. The DJ had left the building; presumably because his services were contracted at another building. The Steam Rail engagement, which had again been a substitution for the regular Friday night DJ at The Steam Rail, was a warm-up for something bigger - more spectacular. It gave Mr. Dusty Angel something to profitably kill time with until the drugs *really* began to kick in.

Nicky was glad the DJ had left early. It had been a busy shift; and he had fallen behind with a couple of tables and thus drawn inordinate attention to himself. Not that The DJ cared about the floor-service; as he had his own arrangement with the bar. The bartender had probably provided other services as part of the young man's contract.

But the DJ was interested in *him*. During some of the lengthier music selections - when the DJ did not have to be preoccupied with searching for his next segue-way or the particular CD itself - Nicky had been all too aware of the DJ looking at him.

It was the same basic stare Nicky had first encountered out in Toronto's Central West End - on that night in October. That had been the look of somebody believing they had matched a face with a description. *Somebody else* had told the young man about Nicky - the guy looks like *this*, he looks like *him*.

After last call, Nicky prioritized cleaning the tables which were now deserted and then he counted out his tips. At least the night had been busy; so he had made some useful cash for himself. He had Roger verify his count and then he cleared his throat before addressing Roger.

'That DJ's been playing here almost every night. Aren't there any others?'

Roger counted the beer bottles in the refrigerator.

'There're been a few cancellations; and Mr. Dusty Angel has been available. I think he's good, myself'.

Nicky shrugged.

'I think it's too much of the same thing - personally.'

Roger looked at him, slightly surprised.

'I thought you liked electronic music, Nicky. I thought you disliked old lounge music and trashy rock music.'

Nicky did not wish to argue with Roger about music. He had merely wanted to note that DJ Dusty Angel seemed to have moved in on an almost permanent basis.

'I think he's good, Nicky. And he's easy to deal with - quite personable.'

That was Roger's drug-induced opinion. Nicky knew there was no way he would ever be able to change Roger's mind.

He did not find the young man personable; he found him to be threatening. He stared too much at the waiter. *What was his problem?*

Still, even if DJ Dusty Angel did recognize Nicky from the track in Toronto or the rave circuit or any other demimonde; what could he *do* about it? What exactly could a drug-damaged musician and DJ have to offer the cops without incriminating himself in the process? Nothing, Nicky snorted to himself as he signed his time-sheet for the shift he had just completed.

A young man like Dusty Angel would not be having anything to do with the cops; unless he was working for them. Or, unless he *was* a cop.

Nicky accepted his after-work complimentary beer from Roger and sipped on it slowly. He drank his beer very slowly.

Nancy and Amanda awoke to yet another day on which they had nothing *specifically* that needed to get done. They had seen Christine; and they had agreed to get together in a few days or so to see a movie or meet again at The Steam Rail, which was so convenient for her.

There were no other pressing social obligations. Nancy did not give a shit about any of the other members of STRIPES AND SPOTS. For all she cared; they could have also found religion and taken up jazz - just like Terri Matthews had. Or, sorry, *Antonella*. Amanda hinted at meeting up with her former METEOROLOGICAL METHOD friends - Kathy and Mary- but Nancy was not interested. She was interested in Amanda and not in any of the others. She knew this would have to be dealt with some time down the road; but she was not in any hurry to come to terms with this problem.

And Amanda was not pressuring her at all. Amanda knew better than to do so. They had a few days on their hands to do little except have sex, smoke dope, read a lot, and maybe go out to a movie.

'Have you seen BREAKING THE WAVES, Amanda?'

Amanda took a hit on the joint they were sharing.

'Yes, I have. I don't need to see it again; but *you* would love it. Kathy and Mary think it's grotesque and misogynist; but they're out to lunch. It's allegorical - it's *melodrama*.'

Nancy smiled at Amanda. This movie definitely sounded up her alley; but it was still playing in Toronto so she could go see it by herself upon returning.

Not that she particularly wished to return to *Toronto*.

'Do you know what we should get a jump on, Nance? Christmas shopping.'

Nancy groaned. She had always managed to avoid Christmas shopping. She was an atheist and so were her Toronto friends, except for Mark. Mark flirted with paganism - only

because it was fashionable and atheism was not, at least in *his* circles.

What could she get Mark for Christmas that would do something good for him? A keyboard - or recording equipment. Something that would give him something to *do* and keep him off heroin.

'Yes, Amanda. I guess we have to deal with Christmas.' Amanda passed the joint across to Nancy.

'Well, there's the two of us. And there's Mom. And Claire.'

'Yes, Claire''.

Claire had given Nancy airline points; so something should be purchased for her. But *what*?

'And then there's Ken and Randy. They like giving each other presents.'

Which meant they would be expecting presents from Nancy and Amanda. Nancy was beginning to think about her dwindling bank account.

'Then there's Christine?'

Why would she expect anything for Christmas. Nancy hoped Christine hadn't found God or done anything silly like *that*.

'Can you think of anybody else, Nancy?'

She took a deep toke. Amanda had managed to score some grass from her brother; before Ken had gone off somewhere with Randy for two or three days.

'Nobody, I'm afraid.'

'Well, Nancy, we will have to deal with Christmas shopping. It can be fun. It's not just a chore.'

Amanda correctly sensed that Nancy considered Christmas to be an obligation which she had long stopped living up to. Nancy never talked about her family, except for her brother. And her brother was in rehab - hopefully cleaning up his act.

Nancy passed the joint back to Amanda, who took a last hit and then let it die out.

'But it's okay. We don't have to start making lists right now. Or, even today.'

Nancy nodded. She did not wish to think about going outside - let alone actually doing so. Outside things were rainy, damp, and confusing. Inside, things made *sense*.

The somewhat older gentleman who had been drinking by himself all night was definitely going to be the last customer to

leave. Not that he was too drunk. Nicky had been serving the man single-malt scotches for nearly five hours; but the solitary man had been careful not to inhale his drinks and he had also consumed two cups of coffee.

Besides, the man had been tipping very handsomely so Nicky felt he was entitled to get as drunk as he felt like getting. Just as long as he didn't become sick, violent, or verbally abusive - everything else was quite permissible.

The well-dressed, late-thirtyish man had not mixed with any other customers - he never did when he drank at The Steam Rail. The man as usual had been reading rather voraciously in the corner; and then making notes. He was a teacher or some sort of academic - Nicky could tell. He could also tell the man liked boys. Not that the shift now winding down had offered the gentleman much if anything in this department - the busy crowd had been mixed and rather heterosexual. And this apparently gay older gentleman had been by far the most generous tipper.

Nicky could now distinguish the front cover of the man's paperback. He could see that the man had been steadily reading a slim, paperback copy of Conrad's LORD JIM.

'Not one of my favourite novels, believe me.', the gentleman remarked to the waiter when he became of the waiter staring at the cover.

'Can't comment, sir. I've never read it.'

Nicky emptied the man's ashtray into his metal container. The avid reader was still smoking a cigarette; so Nicky gave the man back his ashtray rather than take it back to the bar and rinse it out at the end of the evening.

Now the gentleman looked up - at the waiter.

'Really? But I thought all waiters were really writers?'

Nicky shrugged.

'Or actors. Or musicians, I'm a musician; although I don't perform.'

The gentleman finished his Scotch and then chased it with a sip of water.

'That sounds rather theoretical to me - a musician who does not perform.'

Nicky laughed. He decided the customer could benefit from another glass of water.

'For you, sir.'

He quickly returned from the bar area after pouring another glass of water.

'Bernard, thank you. My name is Bernard Griffiths.'

'Pleased to meet you, Bernard. I'm Nicky.'

'No surname?'

Nicky shook his head and then he walked back toward the bar; where he still had to help Roger with the nightly inventory. Roger looked up from his inventory sheets.

'You're not *driving* I hope, sir?'

'I don't think so, my friend.' Bernard Griffiths laughed heartily.

He looked toward Roger and then spoke to Nicky.

'You're not driving - are you?'

Nicky walked over to Bernard's table to take his glasses off the table. All of the glasses had to be washed before Roger could turn off the power.

'No, Bernard. I can't drive. If I *could* drive - and afford a car - then I would offer you a ride. But I'm afraid I can't help you.'

Bernard smiled at Nicky.

'Perhaps we could share a taxi. How about a night cap, anyway?'

Nicky regarded Bernard and then shrugged.

'Sure. I mean, *why not?*'

'Well, Nicky? Here we are.'

Bernard Griffiths opened the door to his second-floor apartment; which was notably larger than what Nicky had been expecting. The furniture was tastily sparse and, aside from an unappealing abstract painting hanging centrally on the north wall, there wasn't too much to look at except for the many books in the many book cases.

Yes, Bernard had a *lot* of books.

'Nice apartment. All yours?'

'I'm afraid not.'

Nicky realized that somebody else lived in Bernard's apartment - that Bernard had made his apartment appear as autonomous as possible.

'But. Jenny is definitely out for the evening; or we would be able to hear her.'

'Jenny?'

Nicky scanned the hallway and recognized two distinct bedrooms in addition to the washroom. *Jenny* had always been a *woman's* name.

'Jenny's a friend of mine whom I'm living with. Or rather, she is living with me.'

'Your *bi*?'

Nicky immediately regretted using this word as well as asking Bernard this question. He himself despised the expressions '*bi*' and '*bisexual*'.

'Who isn't? Bernard laughed nervously. 'But....for whatever it's worth to you; Jenny and I do not sleep together. She has a girlfriend at whose house she probably is at this very moment as we speak about her. And her girlfriend never comes *here*.'

'Why not?'

Nicky's tone became apprehensive.

'I really don't know and I don't pry. Don't ask and don't tell", Bernard shrugged. 'Single malt scotch? Glenfiddich?'

'Sure'.

Bernard Griffiths excused himself and moved into the partially-enclosed kitchen area to pour the two drinks. Nicky rose and decided to check out Bernard's reading materials. Some of the names he recognized without ever having read the books - Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud himself. He registered an intriguing title - THE SEXUAL FIX by a man named Stephen Heath. Sex was not unlike a fix; and his latent addiction was beginning to assert itself at an awkward moment.

Then he picked out a title a few volumes to the right of THE SEXUAL FIX.

This title was THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE, by Barry Ferguson. Nicky now felt his face and his knees and his guts all swelling up and threatening to burst.

Just because this gentleman owns and has presumably read Dad's book does not make him like Dad.

Suddenly Bernard returned from the kitchen- carrying two scotches.

'Here you are, Nicky.'

Bernard *must* have picked up on both Nicky's anger and the focus of it; but he chose not to say anything. Bernard was expecting Nicky to initiate conversation

'You have a lot of books, Bernard.'

'Mostly reference books', Bernard again shrugged. 'But I'm only supply teaching now; which means I have far greater time for personal reading.'

Nicky realized why Bernard needed a room-mate.

'You used to teach full-time?'

'The school I taught at amalgamated with another school; and thus I became expendable.'

Bernard had already almost finished his drink.

'You taught English Lit.?'

'You can tell...Cheers.'

Bernard toasted his profession and then returned to the kitchen. Nicky did not want Bernard to become *too* drunk. He began to suspect that the schoolteacher was experiencing second thoughts.

Nicky slowly sipped his Glenfiddich.

'Bernard - do you really believe that *everybody* is bisexual?'

Bernard sat back in his reclining chair and then cleared his throat. Nicky noticed there was a pipe in an ashtray on top of the drinks' cabinet. He hoped that Bernard was not going to fill up his pipe and then proceed to smoke it.

'Yes', Bernard looked directly at Nicky. 'I think that everybody is capable of bisexuality so then everybody should make the effort to be so in *practice*. People should not restrict themselves to being entirely heterosexual or entirely homosexual. It's limited and, I also feel, dishonest. You don't agree?'

Nicky felt that he was expected to agree.

'I don't know - really. I don't.'

He did *not* wish to discuss the subject of bisexuality or dykes who fucked men or hustlers who did it with everybody as long as there was money involved.

'I'm certain that everybody can do it with anybody in the dark - when you come right down to it.'

Nicky squirmed. Why did Bernard need to know what his opinions were concerning switch-hitters?

'I don't know.', he took a sip of his Scotch, 'a lot of gay men...it's like women don't really register.'

'Yes, Nicky"', Bernard downed his Scotch. 'Most gay men are misogynist; and I loathe gay misogyny. In fact, I believe Andrea Dworkin is quite correct. Gay men constitute the ultimate patriarchy.'

Bernard retreated to the kitchen to pour another drink for himself. Nicky recognized the name 'Andrea Dworkin' - his mother had often talked about her when on the telephone to some of her other lawyers and friends. He thought that Andrea Dworkin was completely against women fucking men; so why wouldn't she be grateful for men who only fucked men?

When he finished his drink; he did not request a refill.

'I think I've made a mistake, Bernard.'

'What do you mean, Nicky?'

The older man was now glaring at him.

'I could have sworn that you were a faggot.'

'Oh I am, damn it.', Bernard swilled his drink. 'I mean - I like younger men. I relate to younger men who haven't yet been indoctrinated into this stupid and separatist gay-male lifestyle. But I also like girls. I had a girlfriend two years ago; but she left me. I haven't seen her for almost two years. I know Nancy went back to school in Toronto. She used to sing in a rock band - STRIPES AND SPOTS.'

Nicky recalled that band and their singer. He'd always had the impression that the singer had been an angry dyke who didn't like people very much - regardless of their gender.

'Nancy Leonard is bi?'

'She's a dyke"', Bernard snorted. 'God, Nicky. You must know the type. They fuck men in order to be bad.'

'I can't really comment"', Nicky refrained from commenting. 'Do you have a boyfriend?'

'Had one before I took up with Nancy...he couldn't deal with my being bisexual. Do you want a refill?'

Nicky decided he *did* need a refill.

'Sure. Cheers, Bernard.'

Bernard ducked into the kitchen, returned with the bottle of Glenfiddich; and poured one for Nicky.

Bernard poured himself another refill.

'Jenny and I are best friends because she is not in the slightest attracted to me sexually. I doubt she's attracted to any men.'

Nicky felt his muscles tensing.

'I thought, Bernard, that you believe everybody can and also should be able to have sex with everybody - regardless of their fucking gender?'

Bernard shrugged - disdainful of Nicky's question.

Well, then perhaps she is attracted to men after all. Maybe I will have to get her alone with me - in the dark.'

Nicky pretended not to have heard this.

'I can't stay all night; so what do you want me to do, Bernard?'

'I'm not in a hurry. So what is your big hurry, Nicky. Why don't we keep on talking?'

Nicky bit his tongue and sat still.

'I seriously think it's important that men *not* be exclusively homosexual. Maybe in the seventies men had to violently separate themselves from women; but those days are long over - they're *history*. Many of those men are also no longer - they're dead. Smart women have rejected separatism; so should smart men.'

Nicky sipped his drink before responding to Bernard.

'Everything you're talking about, Bernard, I've heard before. Everything you're ranting about is before my time. Get it?'

He wanted to address Bernard as being a fucked-up closet case; but he managed not to do so.

'You are so uninformed. Nicky. You are either stupid or else naive. The majority of gay men today are misogynist separatists. The men's situation is different than women's. Men don't have to *declare* themselves separatist because they already are in control of the entire fucking world. They have all the power; except for the token amounts they grant to male-identified women.'

Nicky couldn't listen to Bernard Griffith's ranting any longer.

'You are a cocksucker? Right, Bernard?'

Bernard took a breath

'Yes?'

'You did not really invite me to this apartment so you could yell at me about men and women and their stupid politics that I don't give a flying fuck about because I've been subjected to them all of my life by my fucking parents. But...if you still want to have sex with me; I am still negotiable. Okay?'

Bernard's eyes flared angrily.

'I think you are being just a little presumptuous, young man.'

Nicky rose immediately.

'Then I'm out of here. Jesus Fucking Christ - I am out of here!'

Suddenly Bernard rose to his feet and blocked Nicky's path to the front door.

'Where do you think you're going?'

Bernard stood in front of the door, blocking Nicky's access to the door handle.

'I've treated you very nicely tonight, young man. Very civilly. I have provided you with drinks and conversation; and what the hell have you given me in return. Quite frankly - nothing.'

'Get out of my way, Bernard.'

'Oh sit down, Nicky, just finish your drink.'

'Get out of my way, you fucking asshole. God, I hate guys like you. You want to suck me off and then you get cold feet. You hate yourself so much. You hate your *body*; so you blather on about how much you don't like men when really all you want is a big hard cock either in your mouth or up your anally-retentive asshole. You are pathetic, Bernard. You want to kill yourself. Go ahead - I'll help you; because you don't even deserve to breathe. *Asshole!*'

Nicky swung his right fist at Bernard's face and caught him on the top of his nose. Then he tried to choke the man; but suddenly checked himself. He pulled his hands back and glared at Bernard, who was quivering.

'Now open the fucking door, Bernard. Or I will *kill* you!'

Bernard opened the door tentatively as Nicky was standing over him with his foists still tightly clenched.

'I have opened the door for you, Nicky. So please get out and leave me *alone!*'

Nicky stood still with his fists clenched. *How dare Bernard talk to him that way!* He could strangle the bastard right now. He really could do it.

He remembered that Bernard could scream. He suddenly took off down the stairs and out into the street. He ran several blocks before running out of breath and slowing down. He walked until he reached the bathhouse at Club Vancouver. From here, he would take a taxi home.

Yes, he had taken a taxi from the Club Vancouver. *That* was where he had gone last night after his shift was over. He had never met Bernard Griffiths.

Or, if anybody did ask, he had left Bernard's apartment when it became clear that nothing was going to happen. *Nothing had happened* - between himself and Bernard. That was why he had suddenly run out of the man's apartment; because Bernard had had *nothing* to offer *him*.

It was four in the afternoon; and Nicky was still hung over to hell. It wasn't that he had drank all that much at Bernard's; although he had chased the Glenfiddichs with a couple of beers after finally arriving home. It was the fact that he couldn't *sleep*. The booze made him feel hot even when the temperature outside was too cold for the season.

He decided to phone in sick. He still had time to take a few more aspirins and then chase them with coffee; but he knew that would not be enough to kill the hangover. If he notified Roger now; then that would provide Roger with a couple of hours to find another waiter for the evening's shift.

Nicky dialed; and Roger picked up the receiver in this office upstairs from the Steam Rail.

Roger could tell something was wrong. Roger was feeling apprehensive about *something*.

'I'm feeling a temperature, Roger. Could you please get somebody else to work for me tonight?'

'Sure"

Roger took a breath and Nicky knew something else was coming.

'Nicky, we have to talk.'

'Talk about *what?*', Nicky could feel the muscles in his left hand gripping the receiver.

'A cop called me here earlier today. He asked some specific questions about you.'

'What?'

'Your real name. Your S.I.N., Your hours.'

'Shit!' Nicky muttered. That fucking schoolteacher had gone to the cops - the fool!

'I gave your name as Nicholas Turnbull; and I didn't have your S.I.N. I also lied to him and told him you didn't have a regular shift.'

'Thanks, Roger"', Nicky swallowed.

'No thanks, Nicky.'

He could hear Roger sneezing at his end of the line. Cocaine was a bad drug for Roger to be using. It made him crazy and paranoid.

'You lost it with that guy last night. Didn't you, Nicky?'

'No!' Nicky shouted. 'I realized he was too drunk for anything to happen; so I tried to leave. *He* blocked the door.'

Roger took a deep breath.

'So, you had to push him out of the doorway perhaps. You had to use force. Well, he went to the police and the cops are looking for you. If your alibi is solid, Nicky; then there *shouldn't* be any problem.'

If his alibi were solid?

Fuck!'

Roger took another controlling breath.

'I don't give a shit if you charge money for sex so long as you don't do it at The Steam Rail. But I don't want to be employing somebody who's looking for tricks after work. Get it?'

'Yes?'

Nicky's hands were shaking rabidly.

'It's nicely convenient for *both of us* if you are sick. Get it?'

Nicky was really beginning to get it.

'Your immature tantrum at that loser's apartment may have been just an excuse for the cops to pay a visit to The Steam Rail. A lot of neighbours consider this bar to be quite the eyesore, Nicky. So the cops will pick up on *any* excuse to hassle us and then close us. I don't need that.'

Nicky said nothing.

'Couldn't you see me giving you a very obvious negative signal about that man last night? I mean, it's hardly the first time you must have been aware of that wimp ogling you.'

'Yes, Roger!' Nicky snapped. "But I ignored you and took a chance on the guy. Okay?'

No, it was *not* okay

'Nicky, you can be such an asshole sometimes. If I were you; I would make myself very scarce right now.'

He realized that Roger was referring to his accommodation as well as to his job.

'Shit, Roger. You're the only friend I have in this city.'

'That's nice of you to tell me that. But you hardly expect me to put you up while you figure out what to do next? That's just out of the question. I don't know why you suddenly wished to return to Vancouver; and I'd prefer *not* to know why. So don't get any ideas about me putting you up - about me hiding you. Do you understand?'

'Fuck.'

Nicky understood.

'You can call me from *somewhere else* in a couple of weeks. Maybe this will all blow over But don't phone me for at least a couple of weeks. Got it?'

'Good-bye, Roger.'

Nicky slowly placed the receiver back onto the rotary telephone. Then he walked over to the refrigerator. He opened a beer bottle and took a very long sip.

Nicky knew that he had to get out of his rooming house immediately. He knew that Bernard had been the one who had told the cops where he had *worked*; but he didn't trust Roger not to give them his address. Why would Roger have any reason to protect him - Roger would sell him down the river to protect his own ass.

He quickly packed together all the minimal bare essentials and then slipped out the back door of the house; without even leaving a letter for the landlord. It might actually be a good idea for the landlord not to know that he had moved out. Perhaps that nice quite young man in Room Three had gone out of town - on a Christmas holidays *vacation*.

He left most of his clothes and all of his few books behind. Whenever the landlord finally gave up on his possible return; there would be presents for whomever the new lodger might indeed be. Why not be generous?

Nicky knew there was no way he could live anywhere except in one of those interchangeable flophouses down on East Hastings Street. This was not good. He would easily be able to disappear into the neighbourhood; but he loathed the idea of having to live among junkies and prostitutes - never mind the

possibility that he might himself have to turn tricks again in order to make some cash for himself.

He grabbed a teapot on his dresser and started to throw it against the wall he was facing. Then he restrained himself. His temper was about to land him in more trouble. It had cost him his job at The Steam Rail and his friendship with Roger.

Now he was going to slip out the back - just tiptoeing down the fire-escape stairs and cutting through the lawn of the house behind the one he was abandoning. Then he was out on the street - with a small suitcase and nothing else.

He walked briskly toward the Army and Navy department store. Nicky realized he needed winter boots as well as a woolen cap he could pull down over his forehead. This was December - there was nothing unusual about wearing toques or hats pulled down low over the forehead. He could actually afford to buy two toques - one army green and one grey. His used but untorn Montgomery in tandem with these two toques would provide him with anonymity - conservative clothing but not *too* conservative.

He paid for the boots and the toques and then walked east on Hastings - past the once-legendary Only Fish And Chips and toward the interchangeable flophouses. Nicky made the decision to stop shaving- at least until had amassed a considerable facial growth. He *loathed* facial hair; but now realized it was essential. His Dad had loathed facial hair - his Dad had tried never to even reveal the slightest trace of any five o'clock shadow.

And look where his Dad's obsession with androgyny and foppery had landed him. In the fucking morgue - that's where. If you are a man; *then why deny it?* Why postpone it? Nicky laughed at the idea of growing a beard and looking scruffy without looking *too* decrepit - more like a heavy-metal kid than a derelict. Yeah, looking like a heavy metal kid was the right way to go. He could fit into the neighbourhood without trying too hard to fit in.

He walked past a youth selling street drugs. Nicky had no interest in smack or coke; but cheap amphetamines often came in handy. He anticipated spending more than a few nights without being able to sleep because of uncontrollable neighbourly noise. If you can't lick them ; then just fucking join them. He laughed out loud as he bought ten dollars worth of cheap speed - probably stolen by the kid from some half-witted doctor.

The approaching King Henry advertised a vacancy. This hotel he had never known before; but it didn't look like one which only accommodated hookers and at exorbitant prices to boot. No, the King Henry was one of those hotels for kids and disenfranchised adults who needed to stay off the streets when they weren't working on it.

The King Henry would do.

Nicky quickly remembered he needed another name before checking in. He paused for a second before entering the lobby. He remembered the name Tom Evanson from his time in kindergarten;

and he decided that it would be his name from now until whenever he might need to change it again.

Metropolitan Toronto Police Chief Clifford Westlake studied the composite face and pondered how on earth his own Homicide department could have been so damn sloppy.

If only Inspector Brian Connors hadn't browbeaten that YMCA attendant into making a false identification from a hastily assembled suspect lineup. If only Connors hadn't been so damn convinced he had the right man and that wrapping up Barry Ferguson's murder case was simply a matter of breaking the suspect down; rather than seriously addressing the *lack* of concrete evidence.

And now the initial suspect, who had clearly been innocent, had committed suicide by overdose and all the entire department had to show for itself was the low-end dope dealer whom the initial suspect had been protecting all along. No wonder Prostitutes' Activist organizations, professional civil libertarians, quasi-anarchists and leftover Queer Nationals were all calling for some heads to roll - including his own.

Here was the obvious killer; right on the computer screen and staring at him very directly. The Vancouver Vice Squad had wanted some background on 'Nicholas Turnbull'; and they had wound up giving Chief Westlake a very valuable present indeed. The face on the screen belonged to *Neil Ferguson: Prime Suspect* for the murder of Barry Ferguson.

Chief Westlake was not looking forward to the next move he had to make. After alerting Forensics and Fingerprinting to their next urgent assignments; he had to call in Superintendent John Sutcliffe and confront him. Sutcliffe would have to be shown the composite of Neil Ferguson and then dismissed from the investigation. Chief Westlake did not wish to do this; but there was no choice in the matter. Sutcliffe had always been an excellent superintendent who had up until now been above anything but the pettiest criticism - due to his fastidiousness and his penchant for discretion. But he had been myopic regarding the investigation into Barry Ferguson's murder. Not only had he been far too slow in blowing the whistle on Connors; he himself had made a very serious error in his personal life which now placed him in a hopelessly conflicted situation.

The Superintendent's fetish for discretion and privacy had led him to respect another individual's privacy at the expense of his mandate to *investigate* and therefore *detect* compromising situations. Superintendent Sutcliffe had to go. There was no room for any argument.

Prior to paging Superintendent Sutcliffe; the Chief decided he had better transmit portraits of two possible witnesses in the eventual trial to the Vancouver police. The two Torontonians were Daniel Edward Bailey - designer drug enthusiast and disc-jockey; and Nancy Marie Leonard - student of Barry Ferguson's who may or may not have been sexually involved with

the deceased. He knew that the Leonard girl had taken a Christmas vacation to Vancouver in order to spend some time with Amanda Jane Bingham; who was the daughter of Helen Bingham who was the life-partner of Claire Wilkinson who had been one of Barry Ferguson's drinking companions on the night of the murder - before the victim had excused himself and paid his final visit to the male prostitute's track.

The chief sent off these two composites to Vancouver's Homicide Department. The Leonard girl was definitely in Vancouver. He wasn't sure about Bailey; who had at least vacated his Toronto address which had been upstairs from Miss Leonard's. Chief Westlake cursed at the computer monitor. Damn these academics and their hopelessly dysfunctional children. No wonder so many of them became prostitutes or drug-addicts or political shit-disturbers.

The Chief proofed his memos to Fingerprints, Forensics, and DNA. He expected a quick confirmation of what should have been immediately obvious at the onset of the investigation. If only that fucking Brian Connors hadn't been so hot to trot - so eager for a promotion that he had botched the entire damn case in the process.

Sutcliffe was about to be asked to take a personal vacation. Connors was in line to be taking a *permanent* vacation.

Chief Westlake swallowed and then picked up his phone. He dutifully commanded Sutcliffe to come to this conference room in exactly an hour's time. The Superintendent dutifully agreed to be there.

Everything was now falling into place for Chief Westlake. Everything that needed to be done was going to get done.

Nancy and Amanda were tired from first shopping at Little Sister's bookstore and then visiting Vancouver's parallel galleries. The galleries were almost all concentrated on the West side of Hastings Street - still a few blocks away from the heroin and crack trades. They would have preferred to be going home and then watching some movie on the VCR; but they had agreed to meet Christine at The Steam Rail.

'Just one drink', Nancy reminded Amanda as they entered the bar and spotted Christine at a table with her soda and her cigarette.

'Hey, girls. How ya'doin'? Dusty Angel's gonna be DJing tonight.'

Nancy and Amanda both glanced at their watches. Suddenly they weren't as tired as they had been.

'My brother's hero.' Amanda informed the others.

'And mine too!'

Nancy saw him first. The evening's DJ was arriving, carrying boxes full of CDs, seventies disco records as well as a

few glam-rock classics. Danny now had spiky green hair; but the restlessly sparkling eyes had not changed one iota.

'Hey, Danny'

Nancy called out to her missing Toronto neighbour.

He stooped right in his tracks; but only for a flash-second.

'*Holy shit!* I knew you'd make it out here sooner or later. How the hell are you?'

She looked at Danny as he prepared to carry his DJ supplies over to the turntables which awaited him.

'I could be doing a lot worse.'

Mr. Dusty Angel grinned at her mischievously.

'Looks like it. Two girlfriends; or only one?'

'God, I've missed you!' Nancy observed Christine now standing at the bar, presumably placing an order.

The young man with the spiky green hair leant over and whispered to Nancy.

'Please call me *Dusty*.'

Nancy swallowed.

'Oh. I see.'

Dusty then returned to the Steam Rail's front entrance; where he had temporarily parked more boxes containing CDs.

Nancy looked at Amanda; and Amanda seemed to have recognized Danny from that wonderful night at The Liberty Bell back in Toronto. Nancy walked over to the table and sat down beside Amanda while Christine was still waiting for her order at the bar.

'Let me get set up and everything; then I'll put on a long tune so I can talk to you'

Danny stopped briefly in front of the table before retrieving yet more CDs.

'That's him.' Amanda confirmed.

'It's the one and only *him*.'

Christine returned with a refill of soda water. Presumably she was *not* buying a round.

'You know the DJ, Nancy? Is he from Toronto?'

Nancy lowered her voice to a near whisper.

'It's my wonderful neighbour, Christine. Always good for music and for drugs.'

'Drugs?' Christine appeared alarmed.

'Grass...mostly.' Nancy looked around to see if there was an active waiter or waitress. 'He left town very suddenly.'

Christine looked at Nancy while she lit a cigarette. She was hoping for further elaboration.

'I've missed him. I think he's really smart and rather sexy.'

Nancy laughed but not loudly

'I think we should pick him up and then get out the old strap-ons. My antenna tells me Dusty would *love* that.'

Christine wasn't laughing. She alerted Nancy to the DJ's booth; where Mr. Dusty Angel was now making signals to their table.

Nancy looked up, read the signals, and then whispered to Amanda.

'Back in a flash. Do you want to join us?'

Amanda shook her head as Nancy almost ran toward the men's washroom

Christine frowned at Amanda.

'Since your girlfriend and the DJ obviously going to the john to do coke; you think they might at least try to flag the waitress. I wish *Nicky* was working tonight.'

'Maybe he quit his job?' Amanda was herself becoming thirsty.

'I hope not"', Christine ground out her cigarette. 'I'd better go to the bar. Two Granville Island Lagers?'

'Sure'.

Amanda nodded as she watched Christine walk up to the bar and place and order. She herself could take or leave drugs; and Christine still had a ways to go before reaching that stage for herself.

'Hey, Roger. ', Christine called out to the bartender. 'Two Granville Lagers and another soda-water.'

'Coming up"', Roger opened up the refrigerator behind the bar.

'Doesn't Nicky work here any more?'

'Nicky has the flu.' Roger informed her icily.

'That's too bad?'

'You often catch the flu at this time of year if you don't take care of yourself.'

Roger poured her soda and handed it to her.

'I know what you mean. Thanks.'.

Christine handed Roger a ten-dollar bill and implied that he should keep the change. Since this did not leave much of a tip; he did not return her thanks as she carried the drinks back to the table.

'Nancy not back yet?' Christine asked Amanda nervously.

Amanda shrugged.

'Old friends always have a lot to catch up on.'

As if one cue' Nancy and Dusty Angel slipped out of the men's washroom after making sure Roger wasn't watching. The DJ returned to his booth while Nancy returned to the table.

She sat down, sipped from her beer, and then spoke in a very low voice.

'*Nicky* sounds very interesting.'

Amanda froze for an extended moment. Christine leaned in toward Nancy - expecting some juicy gossip.

'Danny knows Nicky?' Amanda whispered.

'Not personally. But he knows him - just like *I* do.'

"Oh", Amanda nodded. 'Nicky's sick tonight. The bartender says he has the flu.'

'That's interesting.' Nancy reached for her cigarettes and took one.

Christine observed Nancy and Amanda, whose conversation was passing her by. Nancy made a decision to say nothing further about Nicky while still in Christine's presence.

She sat back and smoked her cigarette, absently listening to Amanda and Christine discuss old Vancouver grrrl rock bands - which ones were still intact and which ones weren't. -Who was in rehab and who had found God. Nancy had a hard time feigning interest in a world that for her was old. She had no interest in reviving her music career, unless it involved making noise with somebody like Danny or Dusty Angel or whatever moniker he would be choosing next for himself.

She butted out her cigarette and decided that one drink would be enough for her after all. She really wanted to connect a few dots between disc jockeys and waiters with convenient flu who occasionally haunted warehouse parties and raves with their frozen eyes and their deathly pallor - the same way the waiter known as 'Nicky' had haunted the track in downtown Toronto.

The taxi moved swiftly across Broadway and then along East 8th. Nancy and Amanda were grateful for the quietly professional cab driver. Nancy did not wish for conversation - she was attempting to digest the information that Danny, or rather *Dusty Angel*, had provided her with. She was finding it difficult to relax; so she let Amanda gently give directions to the driver who already knew where he was going.

Amanda paid the driver upon arrival and tipped him quite generously. As they entered the basement apartment; they were both relieved that Ken had gone out. He had probably gone over to Randy's for pre-warehouse party sex.

Those boys! Where *did* they find the energy to fuck like a pair of rabbits and then dance all night- while still functioning at least somewhat effectively within the nine-to-five world?

Neither Ken nor Randy drank booze. Nancy guessed that had to be the secret of their stamina. As they took their coats off and then sat down at the kitchen table; Nancy found herself wishing she were reliving her teenage years. She would do it all over again - with smart drinks and smart drugs.

'Nightcap?'

Nancy mulled it over.

'Not beer. But I'd love a brandy.'

A bottle of brandy was visible on top of the refrigerator. Brandy was a good winter drink that would take the edge off from the cocaine.

'I thought you might go for the brandy.' Amanda poured two glasses. 'So *Nicky* is our mysterious murder suspect from Toronto; who you're *convinced* is Barry Ferguson's son?'

'Unless Danny was hallucinating on God knows what. I didn't make the father and son connection at first myself; but now it's obvious. Not only do Nicky and Barry have very similar foreheads; they have other similar tastes.'

'And problems. Cheers, Nancy.'

Amanda clicked her glass against Nancy's.

'I remember the first time I ever saw Nicky. He came to this gender panel that Barry was on- at U. of T. He was the only person present who wasn't either listening or arguing. He stared at Barry for quite a while; and then slipped out early.'

Amanda shook her head.

'So, what do we do now? Check out every other bar in Vancouver where he *might* be working?'

'Come on, Amanda. The odds of Nicky - or whatever his real name is - working in a restaurant or bar is very slight; especially if the cops are looking for him.'

'What about Davie Street?'

Amanda took a sip of brandy while rolling a joint.

'I don't think Nicky - or Barry's son - hustles. I mean., he stood out on Grosvenor Street not only because he looked so much like Eric but also because he *wasn't* turning tricks. He must have been waiting for his Dad.'

She accepted the joint, took a deep hit; and then passed it back across the table to Amanda.

Amanda took her hit and frowned.

'Maybe he's now out there somewhere - waiting for *somebody else*?'

'Maybe'', Nancy nodded grimly.

'Does Danny know whether or not Nicky was fired from The Steam Rail?'

Nancy took a hit and shook her head.

'No. It's possible that the waiter quit because he recognized Danny.'

'What's the connection between Nicky and Danny?'

Nancy sipped from her brandy, which she had almost finished.

'I doubt there really is one - aside from mutual recognition. Danny told me he saw the guy staring at him at this rave out in West Toronto; and he told me this because he matched the description I'd given him.'

She finished her brandy and decided against a refill.

'Are you *tired*, Amanda?'

It wasn't exactly a question; and Amanda knew it.

'Fairly. I assume *you're* not.'

Nancy took the last hit of the joint.

'Not yet.'

'You did coke.'

'You *could* have.'

'I know.', Amanda teased. 'I didn't want to be *too* obvious.'

Nancy kissed her girlfriend.

'I feel like being obvious.'

'I'm not too tired for that", Amanda finished her brandy. 'Let's go to bed.'

Superintendent John Sutcliffe absently read the sports section in his office. Sports had not been helping him to relax lately. The Toronto Maple Leafs would in all likelihood not make the playoffs this year with their haggard roster of inexperienced rookies and fading veterans. The goaltender was still one of the city's true sports heroes; but goaltending alone had never made a team great or even functional.

He had barely seen Sarah over the last week. She had thrown herself wholeheartedly into another high-profile case involving another murder which had followed years of domestic violence. This particular case had practically fallen onto Sarah's lap. She had become LEAF's number one prosecutor; pornography had been the impetus and subsequent violence leading to an inevitable manslaughter had followed. This was all true of course; but the prosecution's case was hardly air-tight. No, Sarah would be working long days and then well into the nights. She needed to work *alone* - without any distractions.

John, for the most part, felt that Sarah was avoiding him. *Why*, he increasingly needed to know.

He pored over the Maple Leafs' abysmal individual statistics and then crumpled the newspaper before throwing it into the waste-paper basket. He had no further time to kill before the appointment with his superior - Chief Clifford Westlake: The Chief of Police Himself.

The Chief had chosen *not* to inform him over the phone just exactly why a face-to-face meeting was so essential. John had his suspicions; and they were all related to different homicides. Several cases were still not satisfactorily resolved and it was almost Christmas.

John poured himself a small shooter of brandy from a flask which he kept in his desk drawer. He rarely drank outside of social situations; but he needed to steel his nerves before meeting Chief Westlake. The Chief had always respected him enough to let him operate as independently as possible. So *why* was he being called in?

Chief Westlake was waiting for him in his chamber conference room. When John arrived and greeted the chief; he immediately registered advanced computer technologies which were not usually present in the chamber. John immediately realized he would be looking at scanned composite mug shots.

'How are you today, John?'

He seated himself, guardedly.

'Frankly, Chief, I have had better days.'

Chief Westlake laughed.

'I think we all have. There are too many things which just aren't jelling. You know what I mean. Too many dots which are not connecting.'

John nodded. The Chief expected him to agree without any further elaboration.

'I have something I want you to take a look at, John. Or, rather, *somebody*.'

Chief Westlake clogged on a mouse and then a digitalized face slowly formed an image on the monitor screen in front of him. The face belonged to a young man - white, early twenties, clean-shaven, with a prematurely receding hairline and thus an unusually large forehead.

'Does *this* young man look familiar to you, John?'

Familiar was too easy a word, John muttered to himself. The young man on the monitor looked to be a couple of years older than Eric Cunningham. This young man looked like one who *should* have been in the lineup on the night when that stupid locker-room attendant had picked out Eric Cunningham.

'He looks like Eric Cunningham; but a bit older.'

'He sort of looks like Eric Cunningham. Take your time, John. Who does he *really* look like?'

The superintendent stared intently at the face on the monitor. Then he suddenly froze.

'Barry Ferguson. It's Barry Ferguson, when he was in his early twenties.'

Chief Westlake scowled.

'It's Barry Ferguson's son, John. Actually, the young man looks more like his mother but don't strain your eyes. At least, not yet.'

As Chief Westlake now killed the monitor image John sat back into the chair. He now felt he was in an unforeseen situation where he had nothing to say but was nevertheless expected to say *something*.

Unfortunately, the Chief at least temporarily relieved him of his obligation.

'The young man we have identified as Barry Ferguson's son is a young man Vancouver police have been watching. He calls himself 'Nicky'; but his real name is Neil Ferguson. Now, up until last month Neil Ferguson lived in Toronto - exactly where we're still unsure. We think he had some sort of sugar daddy in Scarborough; and therefore spent very little time downtown.'

'Downtown? You mean, in the track neighbourhood?'

'Neil Ferguson is not a hustler.- at least, not a *street* hustler. '. Chief Westlake now stood and paced the floor of the conference chamber. 'I think he does occasionally support himself by being a 'rent boy' - for fairly affluent suburban clients.'

'May I smoke, Chief?'

Chief Westlake calmly shook his head.

'Vancouver Headquarters have transmitted his composite to us. As I said earlier, John; they've been looking for him. It seems that the young man assaulted a schoolteacher - male - who

picked him up in a bar where he had been working as a waiter - The Steam Rail. There's no physical evidence of assault; and the complainant is hardly one-hundred percent reliable. Neil Ferguson only has a minor record - for shoplifting. No drugs, nothing violent.'

'And he *is* Barry Ferguson's son?'

Yes, John. See?''.

Chief Westlake again clicked on the mouse.

'Neil Ferguson was in Toronto until sometime in November.'

'Damn it!', John Sutcliffe gritted his teeth. 'We should have had the bastard!'

'You *should* have had the bastard. You are absolutely correct' Chief Westlake now sat down opposite Superintendent Sutcliffe and looked at him directly. 'I'm ordering you to remove yourself from this investigation, John. Not only because you and Detective Connors have made a mess of the investigation; because there is a far more serious conflict of interest for you personally.'

Conflict of interest?

'Look at the young man's face again' John. And hold onto your seat.'

The Chief allowed John a few seconds to stare at the face before leaning forward into John's face.

'Do you realize that you have been dating this suspect's *mother?*'

John's face became white as a sheet.

'Sarah's first husband.....*Jesus!*'

Chief Westlake allowed this bombshell some time to sink in.

'Your friend has already unwittingly provided us with the suspect's last known address and telephone number. And Neil Ferguson - a.k.a. Nicky - is still on The Steam Rail's payroll; so Vancouver is poised to make an arrest. Except, John, our suspect has gone AWOL. The Steam Rail's owner, who we know has a cocaine problem and therefore zero credibility, is covering for him - we suspect. But only up to a point. The owner says Nicky is off with the flu; but we're sure he told the young man to make himself scarce after the Vice Squad came looking for him.'

'Maybe he has another sugar daddy?'

Chief Westlake glared at John

'You're off this case, remember? But you might have a point. Or, there are other possibilities. It's still early; but we'll find him. And....this is not my business; but I would be careful with Sarah Lloyd-Matthews.'

'*You don't say!*' Now John Sutcliffe exploded. 'I believe I am quite capable of coming to the conclusion by myself that I cannot trust that woman. Thank you very much, Chief.'

'Sorry, John.'

'I mean.. she goes out to Vancouver to visit her son - who is now the prime suspect in a high-profile murder case - and she doesn't tell me that she used to be married to the victim.'

The son's goddam *father!* No, I don't believe I can trust Sarah. I don't need you to be telling me to never see her again; so thank you for your concern!

The Chief allowed a second before patiently responding.

'Neil Ferguson was *not* a suspect when Sarah visited him in Vancouver.'

'So what? She knew damn well that I was supervising the investigation into Barry Ferguson's murder. Damn it to hell! I did not pry into her previous relationships because I am a gentleman. I wish I hadn't been. *To hell with her!*'

John Sutcliffe abruptly rose from his chair.

'I can leave now, Chief. Right? I'm no longer involved with this wretched case and these wretched people.'

Chief Westlake also rose.

'Yes, John. You are free to leave. But, please be careful.'

'I will be very careful.' John Sutcliffe snapped.' I will be going to London for the Christmas holiday after all - by myself. But first, I will be leaving a very cryptic message for Miss Sarah Lloyd-Matthews, Queen's council indeed. It will read - Thanks, Sarah; but no thanks. End of message. No love, John.'

And then he abruptly turned, slammed the chamber door, and then stormed down the hallway - making as much angry noise as he damn well felt like making.

26 **CHECKMATE**

Out of the nine other tenants on his floor; he was on speaking terms with only two. The other ones never showed their faces; perhaps they didn't *have* faces to show. He was not very anxious to meet any of them so this suited him quite conveniently.

However, a very fucked-up gentleman named Ray was his immediate next-door neighbour. Ray had been living at the King Henry for years. Ray must have been pushing fifty; although hard drinking might have made the man look older than he really was. Neil had no idea how Ray made any living but the man definitely had *some* source of income. Perhaps he was truly adept at manipulating the welfare system or else he had an inheritance that he was now just pissing away.

Ray was seriously alcoholic and also a crack-smoker. Once he had offered the pipe to his younger neighbour 'Tom'; but Neil declined. Cocaine he didn't mind occasionally but crack was not for him. Crackheads were too paranoiac and hyperactive to be good neighbours.

Ray was also a conspiracy theory nut. He was always babbling about the type of conspiracy theories routinely satirized in popular-culture and on various web-sites: Courtney

Love killed Kurt Cobain., Yoko Ono commissioned John Lennon's assassination as a business investment; an unholy alliance of Fidel Castro, Lyndon Johnson and one of Marilyn Monroe's jilted lovers killed JFK. The obsession with the Kennedy assassination placed Ray in the fucked-up boomer category for certain.

Neil realized that the only way to get away from Ray would either be for him to move out of The King Henry or for him to completely lose it and kill the guy. But if he were to follow the latter course of action; then he would wind up immortalizing the guy for himself. Not an advisable course of action; although extremely tempting.

He had lost count of the number of occasions on which he had told Ray to do the world a huge fucking favour and commit suicide. Ray never took the hint - needless to say. Ray was completely oblivious to any possibility that young Tom next door hated his fucking guts or his lack of them. Ray was absolutely immune to the venom of others. But Tom's outbursts had endeared him to the other neighbour with whom he was on conversational terms.

She was a very skinny girl named Heather. Heather was obviously a runaway - part-Dene, probably about sixteen if that. Heather turned the occasional trick; but she was not a capital P prostitute. She did not appear to have a pimp and she did not transport herself in a manner designed to communicate her profession to those who diligently sought out the obvious. Heather was really quite friendly - although shy. One day she told her neighbour Tom that she wanted to be a writer after making enough money to find a better place for herself. But she was afraid of her Dad, who was trying to track her down. Her dad did not sound like a nice man - to put it bluntly.

Neil could see that Heather frequently became angry and depressed enough to slash herself. Her slash marks were visible among her many tattoos. He felt that this particular girl was probably not too long for this world; but he felt some compassion for her. Unlike Ray; Heather had a purpose in life. She did not simply occupy space and then monopolize the conversation.

He cared about Heather.

Sarah Lloyd-Matthews again tried to leave a message for her son in Vancouver. Although Neil had not yet obtained his own phone; he had assured her that the landlord was a very nice man who would be glad to take messages.

Neil still had not been seen; and the landlord could not remember the last day on which he had seen him. Perhaps Neil had gone somewhere for a little holiday - the landlord suggested.

Sarah thanked him politely and then hung up in frustration. She had been frantically trying to contact Neil ever since she became aware that her son was now the prime suspect in the murder of her first husband. When Superintendent John

Sutcliffe had angrily confronted her about that first husband; he had at least let it slip that Toronto and Vancouver homicide departments were closing in on Neil. Since Vancouver's Vice Squad had been summoned to the Steam Rail; it was only logical that they would have been given his address. The manager of The Steam Rail would have provided it to the police - what other choice would he have had?

Neil must have slipped out of Vancouver - unless he was *already* in custody. Sarah hoped the hell they hadn't already caught him. She wanted to talk to her son - to suggest he disappear to either Seattle or San Francisco or somewhere in the United States and *then* try to straighten out his life.

Damn it! Neil had been making progress - with his renewed interest in music and in upgrading his all-round technical skills and literacy. And now this manhunt! She believed that only *she* could talk sense to him - that he had again *lost the plot*. How else would he have gone off with this pathetic gay schoolteacher in the first place - let alone become violent at the man's apartment?

She threw aside her paperwork for the case she had been preparing. That was under control; she could now think about nothing else except her son. Neil must have already left Vancouver. She hoped he had - she hoped he had quickly realized just how extensive the search for him would be.

She decided to not call her daughter in Vancouver - at least not yet. Neil and Terri had not yet resumed contact with each other - there had never been any great love lost between them to begin with. There was no way Neil would come to Terri - the police themselves might be stupid enough to expect him to do something so obvious.

She lit a cigarette and then phoned her travel agent. She had decided to fly out to Vancouver herself. She quickly booked a flight for the next evening; which would give her time to tie up some of the looser ends on the case she would be prosecuting after the Christmas break. In the meantime; she had a plan for Vancouver

Sarah dialed the home number of Doctor James Newman; who worked at Vancouver's East Side Medical Clinic and who had been instrumental in helping Terri recover from her addiction. Sarah had an idea that he might be able to help her with Neil as well.

She butted out her cigarette and tried to regain her concentration on her upcoming trial, but her mind was already in Vancouver.

Nancy and Amanda arrived home at about ten o'clock in the evening; after touring the Vancouver Art Gallery and then enjoying a pleasant East Indian dinner. They felt satisfied but also tired - a little too much Emily Carr, a little too much West

Coast Neo-Fluxism, and perhaps a beer too many in tandem with their spicy dinners.

Noting that Ken had gone out for the evening' Amanda was hoping there were no phone messages. However, the machine was telling her otherwise. She recognized her mother's number in Toronto and she decided to take down the message.

Helen had decided that she was coming to Vancouver for a few days over the Christmas break. Helen wished to take Ken and Amanda and their respective partners out somewhere for dinner. Amanda thought this would be fine and she had always trusted her mother's judgment with respect to restaurants.

'Claire is definitely not coming. They rarely spend Christmas together. Claire gets together with her *nominal* husband; and they get very drunk.'

Nancy nodded silently. Somehow it figured that Christmas would bring out the more morbid aspects of Claire's personality. And she knew Claire disliked Vancouver. She wanted to know *why*.

'We still haven't bought her present, Nance.'

Nancy agreed this should be a priority' although again she would defer to Amanda as to what to buy Amanda's mother.

'A book, perhaps?'

'Sure. But we just went to Little Sister's the other day?'

'Well, Amanda, there are other good bookstores in Vancouver. Do you remember the titles we thought about buying when we were at Little Sister's? We can surely pick one of those anthologies out - perhaps at Duthie's?'

Amanda nodded. Duthie's had always been a fine upstanding bookstore.

'I should tell Ken to set aside some dope. Mom will want some.'

Nancy smiled. She tried to imagine her own mother becoming a pothead in her fifties, and couldn't.

'There are no other phone messages, Amanda?'

Amanda shook her head.

'Shit. I was hoping there might be one from *Dusty Angel*.'

'No, and we don't know where he's living - do we? We know where he sometimes works.'

Nancy frowned.

'Yes, we do. But I don't feel like going to The Steam Rail tonight. Let's go to bed.'

Vancouver Drug Squad undercover policeman Doug Boyd sat down in front of the low-end PC in his own apartment and began inputting a report on his evening's activities.

Followed the Leonard girl to a bar - THE STEAM RAIL. Leonard girl made contact there with disc jockey calling himself

DUSTY ANGEL; whom she addressed as 'Danny'. D.J, Dusty Angel matches description of subject Daniel Edward Bailey as much as possible; since Dusty Angel frequently dyes his hair alters his face with piercings etcetera.

Followed Dusty Angel after closing time to studio apartment on Commercial Drive. Dusty Angel seems to be sleeping and working in this studio - still uncertain as to owner of studio's identity. Studio on Commercial Drive strictly for work but people living in them - for whatever that might be worth.

Detective Boyd paused for a second after spellchecking his routine dispatch. Then he decided to pose an additional question.

Do I forget about the Leonard girl; or should somebody else stick with her?

.

Nancy sat in Amanda's kitchen- disinterestedly leafing her way through ANGLES. Vancouver's alternative to XTRA West was not queer enough for her - it was quite painfully earnest. Amanda had gone out for tea with another former member of METEOROLOGICAL METHOD - the keyboard player whose name was Julie. Julie did not hang out with Kathy and Mary - she had not been a social person at all during her tenure with the band. Nancy declined an invitation to join Julie and Amanda because she knew she would have no idea what to say to this musician.

The phone rang and she moved to take the call. Amanda had instructed her to take calls whenever possible.

She recognized Danny's voice at the other end of the line.

'Nancy?'

'Oh, my God. How the fuck are you?'

There was a pause at the other end of the line. She could make out the sound of passing cars.

'I could be better.....I've been lying low.'

Her neck tensed.

'You're not sick, are you?'

No!' he almost snapped at her. 'Maybe I have a slight flu. Look, Nance, I can't talk long. '. He lowered his voice which was already bordering on being inaudible. 'I'm being followed - by a guy who looks like a college student. He was pretending to be a customer at The Steam Rail - on the night you and Amanda were there with that other girl.'

Her heart sank.

'He'd been following me?'

'More than probably. I'm in a phone booth right now.'

Nancy could tell. She could barely hear him because of the busy traffic.

'Is there something *else*?'

'I no longer am working at The Steam Rail.'

'Oh", Nancy didn't feel any need to ask why not. 'Did you ask the manager about our *friend*? Like, what was *his* problem?'

'Roger wouldn't talk to me after I gave him notice. He was really pissed off about it.'

'Oh.'

There was dead silence-not even any cars.

'I have to get out of here. Be careful now.'

'You too. Bye.'

Nancy abruptly hung up the receiver and reached for her cigarettes which were lying on the counter. It dawned on her that Amanda's phone might very well be tapped. Perhaps Danny had been killing two birds with one stone. He might have been informing his tail that he *knew* he was being followed. He might also have discreetly inviting his shadow to keep following him. Maybe Danny actually knew exactly where Neil Ferguson happened to be holed up.

She lit the cigarette and exhaled angrily. She wished she knew where Neil Ferguson was hiding out. She was worried about Danny; and she had no way of warning him to be very careful.

27 **SLIPPING**

He was lying on his bed at almost ten in the evening - slightly drunk and listening to borderline industrial metal music on his cheap cassette player. At first he couldn't distinguish the insistent knocking from the programmed drums which characterized the music; but then he realized there was somebody outside - insistently knocking.

Police! Open up!

He froze. There had been a warrant for him and now here they were.

Then he realized that it wasn't *his* door the cops were pounding on. It was *Ray's*.

'Raymond Joseph Shenstone. Police. Open up! We *know* you're in there!'

If Ray was home; he certainly wasn't so-co-operating. Neil could hear two cops' voices as they began breaking down the door to Ray's room.

Then he overheard a very convincing explanation for why Ray had neither co-operated nor resisted.

'Shit, Pete. He's definitely gone.'

'Overdose. Here's the works. I don't see any note.'

Overdose? If Ray had been a heroin user; it certainly hadn't been an addiction. Booze and the occasional crack binge were closer to the mark than heroin.

'Fuck the note, Pete. It's suicide. Rapist bastard knew his days were numbered.'

'I guess you're right, George. But these are the only tracks on his arm. He could have taken himself out without having to overdose.'

'It's just about the easiest way to go if you're *not* a user. But...it smells, Pete. Ray Shenstone smelled. It would have been nice to bring him in. Throw the asshole in the slammer; and then see how enjoyable *he* finds rape.'

Nicely put, officer. Neil actually agreed with a cop. Ray had been a rapist and somehow Neil hadn't been surprised.

Holy shit! No more of fucking Ray! This called for a *celebration*.

Neil decided he had to tell Heather. There was still time to buy a twelve-pack and then tie one on. Maybe Heather had some fun drugs as opposed to necessary drugs.

Maybe Heather wasn't home. She would have heard the knocking and then probably responded. She would have needed to know what the fuck was going on with Ray and the cops.

He knocked on her door anyway. She was home; but she wasn't going to be answering the door. He could hear Heather negotiating with a trick.

After Danny's call; Nancy sat down and attempted to distract herself without any success. She inserted a CD into the CD player and then realized that what she was listening to was music made by Amanda's old METEOROLOGICAL METHOD friends Kathy and Mary. The girl Julie, who Amanda had gone out to reacquaint herself with, was not involved with this CD.

Nancy found it boring enough that she didn't immediately eject it. The music was average enough that it went in one ear and out the other. The lyrics weren't as didactic as METEOROLOGICAL METHOD's had been - that at least was a relief. But she was glad Amanda had at least stopped making music with Kathy and Mary and their collaborators.

She wished she were at least six years younger and that she could then find a collaborator who knew sampling and technologies and *beats*. She wanted to have a collaborator like *Danny*.

Where the fuck had he been calling from anyway? She wished he had dropped at least a clue; although obviously he couldn't convey such information over the phone. She wanted to know if Danny in fact knew where Neil Ferguson was hiding out; and then whether Danny was himself searching for the youth or avoiding him like hell.

She had a feeling that Neil Ferguson was also looking for Danny. She had a feeling that Neil was obsessed with the DJ who had stared at him at that West End rave last October - back in Toronto.

She heard Amanda's key in the latch and she quickly ejected the mediocre CD.

'Nancy?'

Amanda peered around the corner and detected Nancy emerging from the living room.

'How was your friend Julie?'

'Too weird for me. She's also gone back to school - law school.'

'Oh".'

Nancy sat silently for a moment. Barry Ferguson had accused her of being more of a lawyer than any sort of artist. Amanda opened a beer for herself; and then sat down at the kitchen table.

'Guess who phoned, Amanda?'

'I don't know.....Mom?'

'Danny.'

'You mean *Dusty Angel*.'

Nancy sipped her beer.

'Not any more. He's no longer working at The Steam Rail.'

'Why not?' Amanda frowned. 'Because of Nicky - or Neil? But Neil's no longer there?'

'Something else must have happened. Can we smoke a joint?'

'Sure.'

Amanda retrieved her drug stash and rolling papers and began to prepare a joint.

'The cops are definitely looking for both Danny and Neil Ferguson. So Danny's keeping a low-profile. He called me from a phone booth - *where* I don't have any idea.'

Amanda lit the joint and passed it across the table to Nancy, who took a light hit.

'Look, Amanda. Vancouver has sprawled way beyond what I remember; and I've only been gone sixteen months. Both Neil and Danny are holed up. They may be hiding out miles away from each other or they may be holed in the same fucking flophouse.'

'Or... they may at least cross paths.'

Nancy nodded.

'I hope Danny's avoiding Neil but I suspect something else is going on. I'm really worried about Danny. The warehouse party scene is *magnetic* - it was a rave where Danny saw Neil staring at him before.'

Amanda took a deep toke, thinking for a second.

'Danny himself might be staying away from warehouse parties. I guess he didn't tell you any new moniker he might be using.'

'Fuck no"', Nancy scowled. 'How could he? You know, *this* phone might be tapped.'

'Don't you think you're being just a bit too paranoiac, Nancy?'

'No", she reached for her cigarettes. 'Whoever connected Danny to the manhunt for Neil Ferguson would also know me. They would know I'm in Vancouver and that I'm staying with you. I think I'm being *logical*.'

Amanda sat sullenly for a moment.

'Something happened at The Steam Rail, Nance. Neil may have quit his job because of Danny. Or maybe there were other factors involved.'

'We don't know if Neil quit; or was *fired*. Danny couldn't get any information from the bartender.'

'It doesn't make sense that Neil would worry about Danny going to the cops. Something else must have taken place.'

Nancy took a drag of her cigarette and blew the smoke away from Amanda's face.

'I wonder if he did something that caused the bartender - who is also the manager of The Steam Rail..... right?'

Amanda nodded.

'I wonder if Neil Ferguson seriously fucked up on the job - like maybe he lost it with a customer.'

'Something that would have been reported to the police. I don't know, Nance. The manager himself is such a cokehead.'

Nancy sat silently for a moment, watching Amanda take a final hit from the joint.

'Suppose, Amanda, that Neil did something to a *customer* - who went to the cops?'

They looked at each other intently. This possibility made definite sense; but *what* might Neil Ferguson have done at The Steam Rail that would have warranted somebody's calling the police.

Detective Boyd again sat down in front of his PC after a hard and futile day. He poured himself a shot of Scotch and then began inputting his report. Or, rather, his non-report .

Apologies; but I have lost track of Dusty Angel or Daniel Edward Bailey, or whatever he is now billing himself as. He seems to have a network of warehouse party-promoters who are aware of his need for secrecy. Also, he seems to have a support-structure of gender-freaks or whatever.

I will keep eyes and ears out for DJs with new monikers who may in fact turn out to be Daniel Bailey. Please find somebody else more capable of infiltrating rave or warehouse party scene. This is easier said than done; and I do not look the part. Again, sorry.

The undercover cop lit a cigarette and drank his Scotch. He could shadow a college student like Nancy Leonard without too much difficulty - even if the girl looked and acted more like a punk-rocker than a budding academic. But the rave

scene - with its drugs and its late hours and its frequent disdain for gender categories and its very youthful fashion sense - was out of the question for him.

He knew the Leonard woman had been up to very little - at least visibly. Since neither Neil Ferguson nor Danny Bailey were employed by The Steam Rail now; she and her girlfriend had no reason to be patronizing that bar. But Detective Boyd knew that periods of inactivity were always preludes to periods of frenzied activity. There cannot be a storm unless there is calm first.

He puffed on his cigarette as he shut down his computer. Damn it anyway. Danny Bailey couldn't have left Vancouver without being detected. At least, he hoped this hadn't happened.

Amanda checked the incoming messages on her answering machine after she and Nancy had returned from their dinner. There had only been one message and it was from neither Danny nor Helen. There was a message from Christine Benning - addressed to Nancy Leonard.

It's been wonderful seeing you again, Nancy - especially with Amanda. The pair of you seem to be looking out for yourselves. I need to look out for myself; so I'm afraid that I'll be going away for a while again.

I have some information I think should very much concern you. The waiter at The Steam Rail - the one who called himself 'Nicky' - was fired by the manager. Roger told me something he shouldn't have told me; and now I am passing it on to you. Nicky was fired because of an incident - not on the Steam Rail's premises - involving a customer who had taken the young man home with him.

Again, Nancy, I hate to be the one telling you this. But it is better than you learn this from me rather than any other possible source. The customer whom Nicky assaulted was your ex-lover - Bernard Griffiths. If you wish to talk to me about this; please call me tonight at 879- 2045. Again, I will be indefinitely out of circulation as of tomorrow morning.

Nancy and Amanda both listened to the message without saying anything. Then they mutually and independently decided that drinks were necessary. Amanda poured two shots of brandy from the bottle on top of the refrigerator. Then she addressed Nancy.

'Are you going to call Christine?'

'No", Nancy lit a cigarette. 'If she had anything else she needed to tell us; she would have left it on your machine. . And I *still* think it's possible that your phone may be tapped. And neither of us have e-mail. We really should take the plunge and reconnect with the world!'

"Yeah, probably", Amanda nodded.

"It's too bad Christine doesn't know where Nicky is; then she could have told us and maybe - in the process - told the cops.'

'I don't think Christine knows anything about Nicky - aside from the fact she had a slight crush on him.'

'Maybe she tried to pry that out of Roger - I don't know.'

Nancy wondered how Christine had gotten Roger talking in the first place.

Amanda sipped her drink and passed one over to Nancy. 'It sounds like Christine's lapsed.'

'Yes. *That* seems apparent.'

Nancy sat morosely with her cigarette and her brandy. Then she spoke slowly.

'I'm going to call Bernard. I hadn't been planning to call him; but now I *have* to.'

She picked up the ashtray from the kitchen table and carried it with her over to the telephone. Then she dialed Bernard Griffiths' number; which was still the same one she had frequently called two years ago.

A woman's voice answered.

'Hello?'

'Hello, I want to speak to Bernard Griffiths.', Nancy drew on her cigarette. 'Do I have the right number?'

The woman seemed to be choosing *her* words carefully.

'Yes, he lives here. But he's out of town for the Christmas break. Do you wish to leave a message?'

Nancy hesitated.

'Are you looking after the apartment while he's out of town?'

She then registered Amanda signaling to her.

'No, I live here.' the woman corrected Nancy. 'I've been sharing this apartment with Bernard since September. My name is Jennifer Fraser.'

'Hello...Jennifer. I'm Nancy.'

She hoped this woman was *not* romantically involved with Bernard.

'Is there a message, Nancy? Or a number he can reach you at when he returns?'

Returns from where, Nancy wondered. Although she didn't feel there was any purpose in pursuing this point. She noted that Amanda was telling her that it would fine to leave her number with Bernard's room-mate.

Nancy shook her head very slowly so that Amanda would clearly read her intentions.

'It's okay, Jenny. Please - if you remember to - tell Bernard that Nancy from Toronto was in town over the holiday break and called to say hello and to wish you well.'

She hung up the phone before Jenny Fraser could respond to her. She butted out her cigarette and then returned to the kitchen table.

'I could use another shot, Amanda, How about you?'

While returning from the washroom down the hallway on his floor; he suddenly registered his neighbour Heather - walking down the hallway *toward* the washroom and shaking violently.

He could tell that she had been slashing herself again. He could see fresh marks on her left wrist and further up her left arm. She was carrying her pocket-knife in her right hand - intending to thoroughly rinse it clean.

Without physically blocking the girl; he intercepted her.

'Heather! What the fuck are you doing?'

Heather froze. She attempted to compose herself. She half-managed to smile.

'It's okay, Tom. I cut myself. Just a little accident.'

'Don't *lie* to me, Heather!'

The slash marks were very recent - perhaps two or three minutes old. Neil could see the remnants of her earlier marks; which now seemed like long-term bruises.

'Don't insult my intelligence - okay? Talk to me, Heather.'

She stared at him - not quite tongue-tied.

'I can't talk, Tom. That's why I get angry enough to slash myself. I'm not unique - I'm like a lot of other people I know. Everybody runs out of things to say; and then they have to do something.'

He'd heard this excuse before. It sounded to him like Heather's library was full of bullshit. It sounded like she'd been reading far too much pseudo-psychological theory and not concentrating on her own writing - on her poetry.

'Yes, Heather. People do certain things when they run out of words. But they don't have to kill themselves or make like they want to kill themselves. They go out - they make things. Maybe they make music...or, go dancing. The ball is in your court, Heather. You have a lot going for you.'

She nodded. She agreed with him even though she'd heard his words before.

'Tom?'

'Yes, Heather?'

'After I rinse this knife; can you please hold onto it for me? So that I don't have it looking at me?'

Neil looked at her for an extended moment. He was now pleased with her. She was going to be all right. She was offering him her weapon.

'Hold onto it for me, Tom. And....if I ever ask for it back; just tell me to fuck off.'

He smiled at her.

'Let's hope it never comes to *that*. Okay, Heather?'

He watched her as she washed her blood stains off of the knife's blade over the washroom sink. When she had finished doing this; she handed the pocket-knife over to him. It was almost as if she were begging forgiveness. *Father Tom, I have slashed myself again. I am weak; please deliver me from my weapon so that I can no longer trespass and transgress.*

'I'll keep your knife in a safe place, Heather. I promise.'

'Thank you, Tom. Thank you.'

She turned and almost ran down the hallway back toward her room- audibly crying.

'Go to sleep, Heather. Have a long and deep sleep.'

He knew she had heard him; even though she slammed her door shut without turning back to look at him.

Yes, Heather. I will hold onto your knife for you. I will keep my eyes on it at all times.

He folded up her pocket-knife and placed it neatly in the right pocket of his jeans.

Late the next afternoon he saw Heather in the hallway. She was looking completely relaxed and almost cheerful. He could not believe the change from the previous day.

Heather must have taken *something* that had helped her fall into a very deep sleep; but he chose not to pry.

'Hey, Tom. How are you doing?'

Neil shrugged. He was in a better mood because she was in a better mood.

'If you're looking for something to do tonight, Tom; I have a pass for *this*.'

She held out a small flier-black lettering on bright pink paper. The flier read: DELIRIOUSLY DEMENTED with DJ GLITTERBUGGER.

DJ Glitterbugger? That was a name that he hadn't yet encountered.

His heart began to jump.

'I *am* interested, Heather. But...I can't deal with calling this number in order to find out the address.'

She smiled at him.

'221 Commercial Drive.'

Neil returned her smile. He was familiar with this particular address. The warehouse had previously hosted parties and local rock concerts; but it had progressed with the times.

He decided that he needed a musical fix. Something *pagan* for Christmas. He needed to hear some serious electronic music bolstered by a mammoth sound system; and he still hadn't taken his cheap but powerful amphetamine tablets.

Tonight would be the night. He was going to be there.

'You're not going, are you Heather?'

Heather shook her head.

'It's not really my taste in music at these things. A stranger on the street gave me the flier - I don't even remember what he looked like. But techno, jungle, drums 'n' bass - they're not for me. I'm a poet, remember?'

Neil remembered. Heather was a poet. Words and music had never made for a very good blend.

'I'm going to be reading tonight, Tom.'

Reading? What venues beside warehouses would be open on Christmas?

'An open mike thing. I think it's at The Steam Rail.'
His face clouded.

'No, Tom. Not the Steam Rail. I can't remember; but I can tell you later.'

'Slip it under my door, Heather.'

He didn't wish to hurt her feelings. He knew there was no way he could possibly be in a mood for poetry - Heather's or anybody's. He knew he could make himself get in the mood for a rave or an event of whatever the promoters liked to call them.

Heather hadn't yet asked her for the pocket-knife. If she had asked for it; he would have lied and told her he had hidden it somewhere where it was safe.

DJ Glitterbugger. Yes, *this* would be the night.

When Nancy and Amanda arrived late at the Japanese restaurant; Helen was already comfortably seated in a booth along with Ken and his partner Randy Crawford. The three of them had yet to order anything aside from tea as they chatted among themselves.

Although Nancy had herself only met Randy in passing; Helen had yet to meet him. This was why Nancy and Amanda had not been overly concerned about arriving on time. They knew Helen would appreciate some time with Randy - without having to include *them* in the conversation. Randy Crawford was at least half-Dene and probably in his mid-twenties. He seemed much too young to be a professional social worker; but that was how he kept himself busy making a living. With all of the duties Randy was patiently outlining to Helen - condom-distribution, needle-exchange supervision, one-on-one counseling- Nancy could only marvel at how Randy - and Ken, for that matter - found any time left for recreation let alone a relationship. Then she remembered that neither of them *drank*. Ken used to have a booze problem; but he had kicked it.

She also found herself wondering when Ken was going to be moving out of the basement apartment he shared with his sister and then moving in with Randy. The pair of them really did seem like a couple who belonged together - she thought to herself. Perhaps it was their lengthy and variable working hours that made it more practical for them not to live together.

Nancy could not imagine *living* with another person. If she were going to be moving back to Vancouver and committing herself to her relationship with Amanda; she would insist on living separately. She did not feel relationships which involved *always* being with the partner were for her; and she realized that she might need to be broaching this subject with Amanda not too far into the near future.

A waiter finally came to their booth to take their order and everybody agreed on sushi. After the waiter wrote down the order and them moved out of hearing range; Ken cracked up laughing.

'What's so funny, Ken?'

Helen wished for her son to pipe down; but he persisted.

'The three of you are I presume familiar with the term 'sushi-eater'?''

'Oh, please Ken.', Randy mockingly poked his boyfriend.

'No. I've never heard that term during my entire fifty-six years.'

Helen paused for a moment; and then it was the entire booth's turn to roar.

'So, is there anybody at this table who considers themselves to be a Christian?'

Nancy observed that Helen was seriously curious about this subject.

'Not I', Nancy was defiant.

'Not I"', Amanda was quiet yet firm.

Ken looked around the booth before speaking.

'We're all atheists here except for Randy. Randy's a pagan.'

'Really?'

'I am a raving pagan"', Randy beamed at Helen. 'I'm attempting to convert your son.'

'Just because I have a fetish for ceremonies, Randy'

Ken cracked up again.

Randy faced everybody else in the booth.

'On *Sam Hain*"', he referred to the pagan holiday without explaining it to the heathens. 'You should have seen Ken. He wasn't faking it - he was just as carried away as all of my pagan friends.'

'It wasn't difficult, Randy. I always love group behaviour. Speaking of which-- we are going to DELIRIOUSLY DEMENTED later tonight. Right?'

'Right, Ken.'

'I'm worried about you, Ken. You should take care of yourself.' Amanda mocked her brother unconvincingly.

'I'm not"', Helen snorted. 'Ken, I think you look as healthy as a horse.'

Ken beamed at his mother.

'Better living through chemistry. As long as I can afford the cocktail I think I'll be healthy; unless some weird complications set in.'

'Well, let's hope not."'. Helen nodded as a bottle of sake arrived at their booth. 'I believe this is the right time to open our presents.'

Heather arrived as early as she could at The Wordsworth for her sound check. She couldn't remember if the poetry-reading's organizer had specified six-thirty or seven-thirty; but at quarter-to-seven it was already apparent that she had come too early. When she asked the bartender if he had seen either the reading's organizer or the bar's sound operator; the bartender merely grunted at her.

The bartender's look also made it plain that if she were going to be haggling around waiting then she should be drinking something more appropriate than water. And obviously there was no way she could charge her beverage to the performers' tab.

She reluctantly ordered a Kokanee and sat down at a table directly in front of the television screen - trying to ignore the sports report segment of the evening's news. Country and western music playing over the bar's sound system made the announcer all but inaudible; although previous evening and even a few Christmas day sports-scores were being character-generated onto the bottom of the television frame.

When the sports report concluded; it was succeeded by a trailer for the anticipated eight o'clock feature. Heather recognized Clint Eastwood as yet another overly enthusiastic FBI agent in yet another White House melodrama. She hoped the reading's organizer and the sound technician would arrive soon so that she did not have to drink more beer and endure some stupid Clint Eastwood movie.

Then the evening news returned. The anchor introduced the nightly crime report while a succession of wanted faces was matted into a frame-within-frame up in the upper right corner.

The first face was that of a high-profile serial killer whose face Heather recognized from all of the news stands she had passed during the previous two days. But the *second* face caused her to nearly choke on her beer.

It belonged to her neighbour- the young man whom she knew as *Tom*. That nice man who had actually listened to her and helped her calm down.

Tom was the *only* person she knew in that damn King Henry Hotel who gave a shit about her.

'Why is that man's face in the Crime Report?'

Heather addressed the surly bartender, who glared at her.

'That man is wanted for murder back in Toronto. He killed some famous university professor.'

As the bartender returned to rinsing off draught glasses; a shaggy-haired man in his early twenties walked over to Heather's table and stood almost directly in front of the screen.

'That guy is wanted for killing his Dad '.

She looked up at the man while attempting to look at the screen behind him. Tom's face was still positioned in the upper right hand corner of the frame.

'He's wanted for the murder of his father. His Dad was killed on the male prostitutes' track in Toronto. The cops were

holding another guy - who was innocent who then committed suicide.'

Get away from me!' Heather screamed at the intruder. The shaggy-haired man backed away- afraid of the teenage girl.

She looked ahead at the television screen. Tom's face had now been replaced by that of a local developer suspected of commissioning his wife's murder.

She stood up suddenly. She ran toward the front door of the Wordsworth. She ran out into the street - as the shaggy-haired man called after her.

'Hey! Do you know this guy or what?'

She couldn't hear him calling after her. She was already well down Hastings Street - trying to decide whether to talk to the cops before moving out of The King Henry or move out first.

Then she remembered that she had given her pocket-knife to Tom. Tom had promised to keep the knife in a safe place.

The sushi had been fabulous. Nancy, who ate out at Japanese restaurants far more infrequently than any of the others of the group, had positively ravished her dinner. She wanted more; but nobody else seemed particularly hungry.

Everybody also seemed genuinely pleased with their presents; even though both Ken and Randy winced when they opened up the smart dress shirts that Helen had given them. It wasn't as if the shirts themselves weren't appreciated; it was the price tags. Randy was nervous about appearing to be more affluent than any of the kids he worked with.

Nancy had pleased by Helen's reception of the book she and Amanda had given her. Their present had been the most recent edition of HERSTORIES; and Helen insisted that she did not already have this anthology. Nancy knew that Claire looked down on all forms of what she perceived as 'identity literature'.

With the exception of the dress shirts for Ken and Randy; all of the presents were both literary and queer. Better to play safe than to be sorry - Nancy noted to herself. When she would come to know all of the others better than she would be able to shop more imaginatively for them.

After more sake and tea was imbibed; Ken and Randy excused themselves. They had at least one other soiree to attend before heading out to their warehouse party out on Commercial Drive. Ken and Randy winked at Nancy and Amanda - expecting to run into the pair of them dancing much later into the night. Randy gently pushed a flier into Nancy's right hand. She read the card so that Amanda was also able to read over her shoulder.

DELIRIOUSLY DEMENTED: with DJ GLITTERBUGGER

Helen excused herself from the booth and gracefully walked off in the direction of the women's washroom.

'I think we'd better check this party out, Amanda.'

Amanda stared at the flier.

'DJ *Glitterbugger*?'

Nancy nodded.

'That definitely sounds like our boy. Why else would Ken and Randy be going us invitations?'

Amanda shook her head.

'I don't know if I can take an all-nighter, Nancy. Like yourself - I *am* almost thirty.'

'What's this about the pair of you being almost thirty?'

Helen had returned from the powder room.

'We're going to a Christmas party after all, mom. The same one Ken and Randy will be winding up at.'

'We'll be winding *down*, Helen.'

'Oh, you'll be *fine*', Helen scolded them mockingly. 'Stop drinking sake and start on the juice. I could use some *caffeine* myself.'

Helen halted the waiter, who politely took an order for three coffees.

'Ken seems fine - doesn't he, Amanda. Except perhaps *financially*.'

Helen watched as Nancy lit a cigarette.

'Well, the HIV disability is a serious issue.' Amanda replied slowly, 'but he is making *some* money while Randy's quite secure with his job.'

'Yes. I like Randy.'

Nancy and Amanda agreed as the waiter returned with strong coffee as opposed to weak tea.

'Nancy? Would you mind not smoking?' Helen looked at her matter-of-factly.

Nancy nodded and then butted out the cigarette.

'Sorry, it's the asthma. I can tolerate cigarettes in larger rooms but this booth is too tiny. I have lived with Claire's smoking for almost thirty years.'

'I'm sorry, Helen.'

'You don't need to be sorry'.

Helen cleared her throat and continued.

'I'm taking a month-long vacation.'

Amanda gasped. This seemed either unprecedented or else something Helen hadn't done for herself for ages.

'With *Claire*? Amanda asked her.

'No'. Helen spoke slowly. 'Claire's busy with her teaching and I *need* some time away from her.'

'Oh', Nancy bit her tongue.

Helen sipped her coffee which was still too hot for her - then spoke in a carefully measured tone.

'Claire has been very depressed since Barry's murder. This has made living together in the same house very difficult for me.'

Nancy and Amanda remained silent.

'Claire and Barry were - in many ways- soul mates. Much more than Claire and I are. We're *partners* - we have our differences and we agree to live with them.'

Nancy frowned.

'I knew they were close; but I didn't realize they were *that* close.'

'Oh, they were.' Helen shook her head 'I mean they were so close that they had serious disagreements. Not practical ones you understand; but serious philosophical differences. Claire loathed Barry's book - his big *magnum opus*. She thought THE AESTHETIC IMPERATIVE was a very cynical piece of work and very dishonest scholarship - to put it mildly.'

Nancy felt her neck muscles tensing. She almost asked Helen for permission to smoke; but she refrained.

'On the night when Claire gave me the airline points - when she was *really* drunk - she speculated that Barry *wanted* to get killed. And once on a previous occasion she put that to me.'

'I know she feels that way", Helen became angry. 'But it's bullshit. I *hate* it when Claire goes on like that.'

'I find it hard to take as well', Amanda interjected. 'But I think she seriously *does* believe that Barry intentionally aggravated some street hustler and that was how he was killed.'

'I don't swallow that explanation", Nancy's tone was aggressive. 'That's what the cops think - if you can even describe it as thinking.'

Helen sipped her coffee slowly.

'I don't know if Claire actually believes that theory about Barry's murder or if she *needs* to believe it. She's been drinking far too much and becoming seriously depressed. So I need to get away for a while.'

'Where are you going to, Mom?'

Amanda saw a chance to shift the conversational tone.

As did Helen

'Dublin for two weeks, London for one. Amsterdam for another, New York for three days, and then back to Toronto. I have friends who've offered me accommodations and I have so many things to see and hear - art, readings, music. That's what I do with my time in Toronto; so I need to do the same but in other places.'

'I hear you, Helen. I really hear you.'

Nancy's respect for Helen Bingham was on the verge of becoming love.

'I've sold a couple of stories over the fall.' Helen grinned at her daughter and her daughter's girlfriend. 'One to Malahat Review and one to Descant. So, I have some expenditure money and I'm getting out of fucking Toronto.'

Helen laughed as she realized her voice had crescendoed.

'Congratulations, Helen. Those are two very selective publications.'

'I think it's great, Mom. *You* need a vacation.'

Nancy drank her coffee.

'I wouldn't mind getting out of Toronto. I think it's served its purpose.'

Helen seemed taken aback but then she composed herself.

'You're not as grounded in Toronto as Amanda is here, Nancy.'

'I know I'm not.'

Nancy refrained from remarking that ever since Barry's murder she hadn't felt any rapport with any of her lecturers or tutors; but she refrained. She knew that Helen had disliked Barry and she herself had been angry with the man at the time of his death

Helen observed Amanda and Nancy. She had finished her coffee and she wished for them to finish theirs.

'What are you two doing with yourselves - before this mysterious party?'

Nancy and Amanda looked at each other.

'We haven't really made any concrete plans.'

'Then would you like to come back to my hotel for more coffee and a joint. I brought some very good grass out with me - one of the girls in my writing group grows her own dope and grows it very well indeed.'

Nancy laughed.

'I'd love to, Helen. But how do you reconcile smoking dope with your asthma?'

Helen Bingham smiled mysteriously.

'Well, we all have our contradictions. Don't we?'

.

The nearest precinct was just around the corner from the bar - in fact it was almost inconspicuous among the hotels, pawn shops and drop in centres that were open for business as usual on Christmas Day. Heather was relieved by the precinct centre's surface informality. She had never set foot in an official police station before; but she had seen enough counseling centres for herself to last her a lifetime.

A Chinese or Korean secretary greeted her - politely inquiring what could be done for her.

Since the reception area was devoid of other civilians; Heather had no qualms about talking to the friendly receptionist. Heather had been casually watching the news on television in the bar around the corner. She hadn't been able to hear the sound but she had recognized the image of a man wanted by the police. Both the bartender and another customer had pointed out for her that this man was wanted for an unsolved murder that had taken place in Toronto. Heather wanted to inform the police that this man was her neighbour at The King Henry hotel and that the neighbour she had known as 'Tom' was armed with her own pocket-knife.

'Inspector Beattie will be able to talk to you very shortly', the receptionist attempted to calm Heather down. 'Would you like a cup of water?'

Heather nodded assent; and the receptionist immediately obliged her.

Heather reached for her cigarettes. Then she became aware of the NO SMOKING sign on each one of the reception room's walls.

A door was opened and an older policeman instructed her to enter a room past the reception area.

'Please come in and sit down, Heather.'

She walked into the office and sat down in a chair opposite the inspector; who appeared to be in his upper-fifties. The inspector seemed to be the type of cop who could be kind one second and then stern the next.

'How can you help us, Heather?'

It took her a few seconds to recognize the inversion.

'You've already told Jean that you have information about Neil Ferguson.'

Neil Ferguson?

'Do you mean my neighbour at The King Henry? Do you mean the one I know as 'Tom'?''

Inspector Ronald Beattie looked at the girl without visible condescension.

'Heather, you are probably the only resident of The King Henry who uses the actual name on your birth certificate.'

The Inspector was clearly unaware that Heather's childhood had involved being constantly shuffled between different homes and families where her name was constantly subject to change. But she chose not to contest his observation.

She took a long sip of water before speaking.

'I have talked to 'Tom' on many occasions. He is somebody I've felt able to talk to. He has been a great help to me, Inspector.'

Inspector Beattie's eyes now indicated frustration.

'What do you know about 'Tom'? Does he ever talk to you about his family? His employment history? About *why* he suddenly checked into a hotel like The King Henry?'

Heather shook her head, still swallowing the water.

'I know nothing about him. He doesn't talk about himself. He *listens* to other people.'

Inspector Beattie scowled.

'This is all touching, Heather. But it doesn't give us much to work with. Do you know if your neighbour is at home now? Do you know if he went out *somewhere* for the evening?'

She shook her head.

'I don't know where he is right now. He usually goes out for dinner; but I don't know where. I don't know what's open tonight.'

She paused for more water. Then she remembered something.

'I know where he might be going later tonight. Somebody on the street gave me this card; and I passed it onto 'Tom'.

Inspector Beattie's eyes narrowed.

'Do you have another card - besides the one you gave Neil Ferguson?'

She shook her head.

'But I remember the address. The party's at 221 Commercial Drive.'

The inspector hastily copied down the address. He was familiar with this address.

'Thank you, Heather. Thank you for your co-operation.'

Heather looked at the policeman.

'He has my knife. Do you understand?'

Heather was not about to elaborate as to why her neighbour had been given her knife and why she even had one to begin with. There was no way she was going to allow a cop to see the scars on both of her arms.

'Yes, Heather. I *do* understand.'

Inspector Ronald Beattie spoke slowly and deliberately.

'Thank you again for your co-operation; and please under no circumstances return to The King Henry. Your life may well be in danger if you do. Go with Jean; who will arrange for temporary accommodation for you until further notice. Do you understand?'

'Yes''.

Heather understood

.

Helen Bingham lay down on the hotel bed. She felt pleasantly stoned and inclined to do nothing further for the evening than watch the news and then fall asleep. Dinner and subsequent conversation had left her both satisfied and exhausted. Each of her children's respective spouses were wonderful but impossible to keep up with - not that she wanted anything less for her children.

Helen knew that calling Claire back in Toronto was pointless - especially with the three hour time difference. Claire would have all too probably had dinner with Tim and become angry that Barry couldn't join them this year. Claire would have a miserable Christmas for lapsed believers rather than a pleasant one for atheists or pagans.

No, she would see Claire upon returning to Toronto next week. They would be spending three days together before she would be embarking on her vacation - three crucial days.

She wondered whether Amanda and Nancy had gone home before heading out to their late-night dancing party. The grass they had shared would have to be countered by some damn strong coffee - that was for sure. Maybe the pair of them *did* occasionally indulge in different and stronger drugs. She trusted her daughter's judgment and she didn't get the impression that

Nancy had any addictions besides nicotine. Perhaps she did overindulge with particular substances on special occasions; but Helen wasn't worried.

'Shit.'

She cursed to an empty room as she switched on the television. The Queen of England herself was still blathering on about nothing of any possible relevance to her or to anybody else whose company meant anything to *her*. Not even *Claire* had any time for the fucking monarchy, she mused to herself.

She decided to roll another joint as she killed the volume to avoid listening to the stupid Queen. The grass she had brought out to Vancouver with her - the drugs she had bought from one of the younger women in her weekly writing group - was almost finished gone. She made a note to contact her son tomorrow. She *knew* how Ken supplemented his relatively paltry income.

Helen lit the joint and felt a good buzz. She giggled at the television. The Queen was still blathering but without volume she was actually amusing. Helen coughed but the cough was not related to her asthma. She was coughing because she thought everything was funny. Becoming a pothead in her fifties was a little bit of fun she was having. She found the drug relaxed her and it was certainly preferable to alcohol - especially with her girlfriend being a borderline alcoholic.

She took a deep toke and looked at the television. The Queen of England had finally been succeeded by the regular nightly newscast but she still didn't feel she needed any volume. Helen wished her room had a CD player. She would have preferred listening to pleasant music rather than casually watching the news.

The newscast's images were the too familiar ones - Bosnia, Somalia, Washington. Helen took another toke and cracked up laughing again. There was that stupid President of The United States - the one who had never inhaled marijuana but who had certainly inhaled pussy.

And now the president was also gone - replaced by the late-night local anchor.

The next face in the television screen's upper right-hand corner now leapt out at her. Her joint slipped out of her right hand and missed the ashtray. A young man with a prematurely receding hairline was being profiled and a police telephone number was being character-generated onto a roll bar at the bottom of the frame.

Anybody who has seen this young man should call this number immediately. They will be rewarded.

Helen recognized the wanted man as being Barry Ferguson's son. Claire had once introduced the young man to her and she had taken an immediate dislike him. Claire had once described to her an incident on campus when Barry's son had angrily confronted his father.

She quickly turned on the television's volume as the anchor reiterated that anybody seeing this man should then contact the police immediately. She held her breath for a moment - stifling a cough. She hadn't heard *why* the police were looking

for Barry's son; but he had to be more than just another missing person.

He must have been wanted for the murder of his father.
Why else would the police be searching for Neil Ferguson?

She cleaned the roaches from her bedspread and then called Amanda. If Amanda and Nancy hadn't left for their party yet; she wanted to tell them about this manhunt. She knew they would both be interested in this recent development.

But her call was answered by the machine. *Shit!*

The cheap amphetamines were beginning to kick in. He had always been impatient with the delays that came with different drugs but now he was beginning to feel a payoff. Good *practical* drugs always demanded patience and discipline - unlike stupid recreational drugs and their designer cousins.

Neil's antenna told him that all those who were up and dancing would have either taken Ecstasy or Crystal Meth or else retro-drugs like cocaine. He had spotted the Special K casualties along the hallways leading to the warehouse's washrooms - alone and pathetic in their little K-holes as the party raved on all around them. A lot of money for fuck all, he scowled. Sooner or later all of their bubbles were going to be bursting. Speed, on the other hand, was a *productive* drug - unless one foolishly became addicted. Addiction was the exact opposite of productivity.

Neil only took drugs when they served specific purposes.

The speed was not only providing energy and stamina; it helped him appreciate the hard, metallic techno music. It was fast and repetitive - not deep and spiritual but hard and immediate. What you heard was what you got - no layering, no history you needed to know about *or else you were nobody*. Neil had once watched some television programme on which some stupid English academic had ranted on and on comparing techno to Mod-era rock'n'roll or 'power-pop' music. Although there was almost thirty years time separation between the two musics; Neil could detect some similarities from the examples the man used to prove his point. The *drugs* involved were similar. Speedy drugs were essential to both make the music and then to enjoy it. Speedy drugs, rather than hallucinogens or aphrodisiacs or downers - especially heroin.

Neil bounced up and down to the relentless tech beats. He felt comfortable in the crowd because he could pick out other people who were dancing by themselves and not making any effort to find partners or circle groups. There were others who were just as alone as he was.

Occasionally he was aware of a few dancers staring at him but he wasn't bothered by this. His jeans weren't right - they weren't the baggy style that was not only functional but intended for dancing. But his eyes detected other dancers whose jeans and whose tops didn't look right.

The music changed on top but the beat remained consistent. That *DJ Glitterbugger* certainly knew what he was doing when it came to keeping the feet happy. But...it was that shit he was mixing *on top of* the beat - *that* was beginning to piss him off. Glitterbugger was mixing in *trash* - intended for people whose tastes were trashy. It was retro and campy. DJ

Glitterbugger was layering samples of English glitter-rock of almost twenty-five years age on top of the beat

It was the DJ's big statement on *Genderfuck* and Androgyny and all of that shit that Neil had never been able to stomach. DJ Glitterbugger himself was safely positioned up in his own bubble - he was working in a booth raised high off the ground. He was unapproachable unless you knew the password - unless you had the right drugs. Neil could see him at work - with his spiky green hair and his sparkling blue top and his pearls.

Neil clenched his fists. Danny or Dusty Angel or Glitterbugger or Whatever His Fucking Name Was thought he was Number One - the centre of the entire universe. Well, let's see how long he sustains his gravity. Not very long, he vowed.

Neil tried not to stare too blatantly at the DJ booth. He resumed dancing. At least DJ Glitterbugger didn't fuck around with the bottom - with the beat; no matter how drug-addled his little brain might be at this particular moment in time.

But Glitterbugger was fucking around with *nature* and he was going to be punished for it. Just like *Dad*. What went on in the young man's mind had nothing to do with his *body*.

Nancy and Amanda grudgingly paid their five dollar cover charges and then eased their way into the cavernous warehouse space. Everybody they could see shared one thing in common - they were uniformly younger than either of themselves. The dancers were all over the map with regards to race and even gender. Nancy could detect many sizable pockets of serious genderfuckers - all because the DJ's name had provided strong clues.

'Let's pick a spot where we can look at the DJ, Amanda.'

Amanda looked at Nancy- frustrated

'That *might* be easier said than done.'

She had a point. The DJ's booth was visible; but it was rather high up off of the ground. There were stairs leading up to the booth and the stairs were guarded by the only large people Nancy's eyes could detect through the entire space.

But she could identify the DJ without having to see him. Nancy's ears recognized samples from vintage Roxy Music and David Bowie - layered on top of more percussive danceable samples on top of the consistent techno beat. Nancy suspected that there was also a chill room with cooler music - for those who had peaked too early in the proceedings.

In Toronto, Danny had often worked the chill room. But tonight, he was the feature attraction.

She could not pick out Neil Ferguson among the crowd. But she knew that - no matter what facial hair or headgear he might throw over top of his oversized forehead - she would have no difficulty recognizing Barry Ferguson's son.

'Nancy. Just dance with me, please?'

She looked at Amanda for a puzzled second and then obliged. There really wasn't anything else for them to do at this moment.

Except.....the chill room was a *possibility*. There wouldn't be too many people in it at this time because it was still too early for anything too chemically-excessive to have completely kicked in - at least for the overwhelming majority of dancers. Everybody seemed to be enjoying their *speedy* drugs. She wished she hadn't smoked so much grass with Amanda's mother - not that Nancy disliked anything about that woman. Hell, if she had been in any sort of extended relationship with Claire Wilkinson, she would have long become a hardened junkie.

'I need a drink, Amanda. A *smart* drink.'

'Now you're talking.'

Amanda's alert eyes quickly directed Nancy to the long lineup for beverage tickets. They could buy tickets for Smart Effects drinks or fruit juices; and the absence of alcohol was not an issue to either of them. She would have liked nothing better than to be drooping in on DJ Glitterbugger; who had always been good for fast drugs. But that was easier said than done - because of the security guards at the foot of the stairway to the DJ booth and because Danny would probably be keeping his pockets clean in the event of a police raid.

Danny would have consumed everything before reporting for work. *Everything* - she laughed out loud.

'What?' Amanda demanded.

'Okay. Let's take our places in the fucking lineup.'

'Yes, Nance. *Relax*.'

Nancy realized she was making her girlfriend nervous; but those side-effects were an occupational hazard. She wished for Amanda to become a little more nervous herself because the smart drinks would increase their energy levels. And where were Ken and Randy? Hadn't they been planning to arrive fairly early and then stay for a long duration? They had been planning to honour another invitation after the dinner with Helen; but that invitation had been for earlier. It didn't seem *right* to Nancy that Ken and Randy weren't here yet - unless they were in yet another area of the warehouse, or still at Randy's place having sex, or whatever.

She needed to connect with somebody else besides Amanda. Amanda was acting cautious and she was hyper. *Something* had to give.

'Hey, Nance? '

She took a long second to react.

'What?'

Amanda held onto her right shoulder and indicated a figure standing near the front of the lineup for drink tickets.

It was *him*. Nancy could see the beard and the grungy clothes. But the clothes themselves were a dead giveaway. She knew she was looking at the only other person present who looked too old to be there. It was definitely *him*.

They would not let him out of their sight for the rest of their time at the warehouse party - they both resolved to do so silently. Once Neil had finished purchasing his drink ticket then Nancy would take a place in the beverage lineup. Amanda would remain in the purchase lineup and buy two tickets and then join Nancy - unless Neil Ferguson had some other plans.

And, speaking of other plans, Nancy couldn't pick out anybody who she thought might be a cop. Either somebody had successfully fooled the admission takers - who had regarded her and Amanda so disdainfully - or else the event's organizers had successfully managed to prevent any cops from entering the premises.

She lit a cigarette - keeping her eyes fixated on Neil ahead of her in the beverage lineup. The line was moving too slowly; and *something* had to break.

Neil decided that he had better pee before taking a place in the lineup for beverages. He scanned the warehouse area for directions and he was unable to make out any.

He attempted to get a sense of which direction people were moving in and he felt lost. He could see Danny Bailey, who for the night was calling himself DJ Glitterbugger and who was protected not only by the level of the DJ booth but by the muscleman security guards positioned at the foot of the stairway to the DJ's booth.

He would have to seize an opportunity whenever Danny might choose to slip out of the booth - for whatever possible purposes. But Danny probably had all of his supplies either on his person or somewhere safe up in the booth.

Shit!

Neil thought he could ascertain a passageway leading from the far left; and he decided to take a chance on it. He gingerly negotiated the dancers with relative ease - managing not to ingratiate any of them by invading their individually drugged-pot orbits.

He curses the brain-damaged party organizers for their lack of signage - for their stupidity in not having the bar and the bar tickets as close to the public washrooms as possible.

Now he walked past the outer rim of the dancers toward the passageway. He found it strange that nobody else was walking along this particular hallway. Was he walking on territory that was unofficially or officially *out of bounds*?

But he appreciated the respite from the herd of dancers. He was relieved that they were neither walking toward or beside him.

Then he heard footsteps.

He did *not* turn around to look.

A male voice demanded that he *stop and raise his hands*.

Neil walked faster without yet running. He could see an open door directly ahead of him - leading out of the building rather than to a washroom.

He took a deep breath; and started running.

'Stop! I'm warning you!'

The undercover cop also began running in pursuit. For some reason; the cop did not shoot He *couldn't* have been unarmed - Neil rationalized as he ran faster.

More likely, the cop wished to make the arrest as silently as possible in the isolated area and avoid provoking any sort of riot.

Whatever. Neil was in luck. He had achieved such a good jump on the undercover cop that he was now almost outside.

Neil pushed the door open and realized that he was now in a back alley. He made the quick decision to *not* run but rather hide behind the now open door.

He could momentarily lose the cop; who would either automatically run out into the alleyway in pursuit or else wait for Neil to make the next move.

When the cop walked out the door and into the alleyway; Neil jumped him from *behind* the door. He quickly stabbed him in the stomach. Neil had moved so quickly that the man had had no time to scream in pain - let alone yell out for any possible reinforcements.

He kicked the dead body out into the alleyway and then *locked* the door. This was good. He was way past the point of giving a shit about footsteps or anybody else's body; and he was pleased that he had locked what had in actuality been the party's token unlocked fire escape.

It would be quite some time before anybody literally going outside to pee would literally stumble over the undercover policeman's dead body.

Nancy had managed to lose Neil in the crowd. After obtaining his ticket; Neil had not shifted over to the actual beverage lineup but had probably decided that he needed to pee. He had managed to negotiate his way through a circle of particularly exuberant dancers over by a hallway that seemed to lead to the public washrooms.

Of course - if she hadn't so stupidly *assumed* he was going to the washroom; then she wouldn't have lost him.

As she crossed the floor she realized how far from the bar area the washrooms were. The hallway looming ahead of her was long and dark and without any signage.

Nancy decided to take a chance on this hallway. Perhaps it led to the chill room, or to some area where the safe drug

people and their medical units stored their winter coats and their backup supplies.

She had no flashlight so she lit another cigarette. The long hallway did not seem to be leading her *anywhere* - it was dark and it appeared to be endless. Danny's blend of techno and vintage glam-rock had faded in volume but it poignantly reverberated with a particularly distant echo.

She was expecting to discover the chill room because of the increasingly baffled sound; but she could not see any doors except for one she could now distinguish at the end of the long hallway. There had to be *something* on the other side of that closed door. As she approached it; she realized that it led *outside* - to an alleyway rather than to a mainstream. There wasn't any traffic audible behind the closed door.

There were no sounds at all.

She tried to push the door open. But there was nobody on the other side - there was nobody who could hear somebody trying to open it and then pull from outside. The door was locked and there was no visible means of unlocking it.

She drew on her cigarette and realized that her only option was to return to the main space of the warehouse. Either Neil had returned to the main space and the dancing floor; or else he had slipped out to another place - somewhere *unknown* to her.

Nancy did not know why this door - which allowed people to leave the building - would be locked. Whoever had organized this party could be accused of disobeying fire regulations; which was not the brightest strategy.

As soon as she entered the building of 221 Commercial Drive; the woman with her blonde hair swept up into a severe bun revealed her nurse's uniform. She wasn't expecting any difficulty with either the door people or the medical unit itself; but it was best for her not to take any chances.

Her association with LEAF and her friendship with Dr. James Newman of the East End Health Centre had helped her acquire necessary identification. Dr. Newman himself had spoken glowingly of her to the on-site unit; and who were they to doubt *his* word. James Newman had been a good doctor for her daughter during her addiction; and he was sympathetic to the situation involving her son.

Sarah had no difficulty with the girl who was selling admission tickets. The medical unit had informed the gatekeepers that they were expecting a blonde psychiatric nurse who was tallish, blonde and in her fifties. The girl scanned her badge; which identified the nurse as being SARAH LUCAS. The picture on the card was easily compatible with her appearance. The girl

smiled at Sarah and stamped her right wrist with the word DELIRIOUS.

Sarah could see the medical unit, which included the young doctor James Newman had instructed her to contact upon arrival, from the entrance to the party space. She could see the reveling crowd - probably uniformly under the influence of designer and more old-fashioned drugs. She resolved to keep her opinions of drugs and their culture to herself - at least for *tonight*. James Newman had warned her that some of the people she would be working aside knew a lot about drugs because they themselves were users. She clenched her teeth and decided she needed a cigarette - something calm before the storm.

She lit her cigarette and reminded herself that she would only be *pretending* to work alongside the medical unit which specialized in raves and drugs and related psychosis. She would have to convincingly go through the motions if she were asked to help stabilize any drug casualties; but she was there *for her son*. It was crucial that Neil *not* have to deal with the legal system. Sarah believed Neil could avoid conviction on murder charges on psychiatric grounds. She would not be able to be his *official* lawyer; but she would be able to retain for him a team of crack attorneys who would all be working together for her.

She needed to convince Neil to plead insanity; and then persuade the judge and jury that her son was indeed quite treatable. If Neil could learn to control his temper; he could eventually mature into an ideal citizen.

She had come to persuade him to surrender peacefully. If he were to resist arrest; then he would appear to be guilty of Barry's murder. If he were to give himself up peacefully; then there was hope for him. His illness could then be treated; and his prison sentence would be minimal.

She puffed on her cigarette. She nervously scanned the dimly-lit dance hall; but she could not see her son.

She wondered if he had arrived yet; and then she wondered if he already left Vancouver.

Although escaping Vancouver might buy Neil a *small* amount of time; he would be caught eventually. It was better for him to surrender and co-operate with her legal team.

Sarah took a final drag of her cigarette and then walked toward the medical unit. It was now time for her to report for work

Inspector Ron Beattie almost smiled to himself as he carefully poured his coffee. He felt quite confident that he had made the right choice - he had decide not to send a conspicuously large and armed posse of homicide cops to the warehouse at 221 Commercial Drive.

Since he *had* to believe that girl Heather's story that Neil had planned to attend a warehouse party at this well-known

address; he had been forced to consider the force's own disastrous history with warehouse parties, raves, and all of the accompanying baggage. Over the preceding summer; the force had tried to exterminate the warehouse party scene with no success. In fact, there had been a riot at one such event. Chemically charged-up youths were the last nuisances the force needed to be dealing with- at least for this particular evening.

One man was to be apprehended and one man was to be taken into custody - as quietly and efficiently as possible. Nobody else was to be hurt in the process.

One undercover cop on the premises would be sufficient - until he were to request reinforcements. Doug Boyd was a promising young operative who tended to underestimate his considerable skills. He had followed Nancy Leonard, who had led him to Daniel Bailey who had been instrumental in leading him to Neil Ferguson. Doug Boyd would do a good job and then call in when he needed to.

Inspector Beattie was certain that Neil Ferguson would have by now altered his appearance. No wanted criminal- no matter how benign the crime - wants to look too much like a face that's been profiled on the crime reports of the nightly newscasts. His operative would have to infiltrate the crowd; and then identify the fugitive.

And there was still the possibility that the girl - Heather - had been deluded about her neighbour whom she had felt able to talk to in confidence. She was a troubled girl - that was pretty damn apparent. A pair of sensitive misfits did not make for a reliable combination - at least never in his considerable experience.

Inspector Beattie looked at the clock on the precinct wall. He should have at least *heard* from Doug Boyd by now. The undercover agent had been instructed to call upon spotting the fugitive and to call when reinforcements were necessary to *make the arrest*. It didn't seem too early for the fugitive to have been identified and then tailed; unless Neil Ferguson had some other mysterious business to take care of *before* going to the warehouse on Commercial Drive.

Inspector Beattie decided it was now time to page Detective Boyd - to just touch base quickly. He wasn't worried about making the call - he knew that many of the dancers and organizers would be receiving important calls on their cell-phones.

He let the detective's pager ring several times; but there was no answer. Something was not right. If Detective Boyd had followed the fugitive to another location; he would have immediately reported this to the precinct.

This was not at all a good situation. Reinforcements would have to be sent to 221 Commercial Drive - *immediately*.

Danny had anticipated having to make at least a *temporary* exit from the DJ's booth. There was no point in taking any foolish chances; and he was aware of two different people who weren't dancing enough. One of the non-dancers had been just a bit too reserved on the dance floor; and Danny smelled *cop*. Whether the cop was out for him or out for Neil Ferguson he could not ascertain; but cops in all shapes and sizes were to be avoided at all costs.

Especially because the other person staring at him rather than dancing to the music was Neil Ferguson.

He hadn't seen either Neil Ferguson or the cop for some time; but this was as good a time as any to make himself scarce. There was a public chill room; but the public was unaware of there also being a *private* one. Obtaining the key to the private chill room would be as easy as ABC - all he had to do was ask Mr. Delirious himself to give him the key and to spell him in the DJ booth.

Mr. Delirious - better known to Danny as Duncan McGregor- was perfectly capable of continuing the beat; especially if he adhered to the cues and segues that Danny had written down for his own reference. Duncan would of course lack Danny's *panache*; but only a few connoisseurs would notice - let alone be upset.

Duncan was only too eager to spell Danny for an indefinite break; and Danny had no difficulty obtaining the key to the staff chill room. He clandestinely slipped down the stairs from the booth and then skirted the circumference of the ecstatic dancers.

He felt dejected for a moment. The dancers were in heaven; and *he* was about to chill out in purgatory.

But he felt he had no other choice; even though his eyes detected neither the cop nor Neil Ferguson. This was odd - too odd.

Unless the cop had *already* made his move regarding Neil Ferguson?

Danny followed Duncan's directions and recognized the intentionally anonymous door. He turned the key and entered the chill room.

He was pleasantly surprised by this room. It only seemed to have *three* walls. It seemed to continue indefinitely into some mysterious unlit territory; and Danny noted that this territory might eventually be worth exploring - if it became necessary to do so.

Nancy had already learned the hard way that the washrooms were *not* somewhere down that long hallway that led to the locked fire exit. But she decided that there was no way she could hold out any longer and she suspected Amanda was in the same condition - now that they had both finished their glorified fruit juices.

Nancy decided to ask the medical unit for directions to the loo. If *anybody* in this cavern theoretically knew the necessary directions and procedures; it would be the medical unit. This was not an irrational assumption; so she set her sights towards a young nurse who - except for her badge - didn't look terribly different from any of the customers.

The nurse with the pierced nose cordially provided the requisite directions. As Nancy thanked the young nurse; she and Amanda both noticed a woman who appeared at least twice the age of anybody else who was a component of the medical unit.

'Somebody's *mother*?' Amanda whispered as soon as they were out of the medical unit's hearing radius.

'Maybe a shrink?'

Amanda laughed at this conjecture.

'I don't think so, Nance. You'd think there'd be a *younger* shrink to handle a younger crowd.'

Nancy agreed. Perhaps the older woman was some sort of instructor - keeping a watchful eye on her students who were learning their skills on site. But the older woman had definitely looked like she belonged *elsewhere* - with her formal bearing and her blonde hair swept up in a bun.

However, Nancy and Amanda's priorities were reaching the washroom and then using it. They ran furiously until reaching their destination; and then they decided to each spend a good five minutes purging themselves so that they could avoid the facilities for the remainder of their time on the premises.

After washing their hands; Nancy and Amanda made their way back toward the dance floor. Nancy walked ahead of Amanda without intending to. As she passed what she recognized as an anonymous door; she was suddenly greeted by a young man with emerald green hair who had peered out from a window to the left of the anonymous door.

'Nancy Leonard! Grab that girlfriend of yours and come and keep me company!'

It took her a delayed second to recognize Danny. How could he be here when the music was still playing without any discernible change in format?

'Hey, Amanda. Great to see you. Come in and close the door!'

Amanda joined Danny and Nancy in the deep and empty room.

'This is the *staff* chill room. You're my guests. Okay?'

Nancy and Amanda nodded their consent

Neil momentarily considered getting the hell out of the warehouse building. Hanging around the scene of the crime was not exactly the brightest strategy - he had vanished so quickly after killing his Dad that he hadn't even been in the suspect -identification lineup - let alone been *arrested*.

But... nobody else besides him yet knew about *this* crime. Nobody was trying to break down the fire-exit door - because there wasn't any fire. He knew that sooner or later Vancouver's Homicide Department would realize that *something* must have happened to their operative or else they would have received a report from him by this point. But Neil still had time on his hands; and he still had work to do,

He resisted a temptation to find some way to go out into the alleyway and revisit the scene of his crime. He wished he hadn't had to take out the undercover cop; but what other choice was there? The poor guy was obviously a rookie - he looked more like a college student than like somebody's Dad. He was the right age but still the wrong type. He looked better dead than alive.

Neil decided that he *did* need a drink. His hands were a bit shaky and a drink would stabilize him. He wished the tickets could buy him *beer* rather than 'smart' drinks or fruity juices. The long lineups for tickets and then the drinks would ground him - they would allow him to blend back into the crowd without having to dance to DJ Glitterbugger's horrible music.

He hadn't meant to kill any cop. He had only come with an intention of confronting DJ Glitterbugger. But what was done was now history; and he had to make his next move quickly - but as efficiently as he had taken out the cop.

Nobody else was aware of the crime. What crime?

He took his place in the lineup for tickets and realized that buying grape juice could take at least a half-hour. Neil didn't mind the wait He could discreetly stare at his nemesis - Mr. Glitterbugger himself. The boy who didn't want to be a man - the boy with the shiny green hair who so cheerfully attempted to do the impossible and defy biological nature.

There had been no shift in the music since Neil had had to confront the cop who had been following him down that strangely isolated hallway. Retro glam-rock samples were being spliced over top of the machine-friendly techno rhythms. The radical faeries were awakening from their lengthy beauty sleeps and sabotaging the machines. Neil snorted. Pansy Pewee combined with Chemical Paradise - it was time to knock some *reality* into that green-haired boy. Time to do the kid a favour.

Neil was temporarily distracted by two fags in front of him who were attempting to determine whether their Ecstasy hits had truly kicked in. Were they yet in heaven or still lingering in purgatory? They were also concerned about their friend Wayne

who was stuck in a K-hole. Neil wished these two queens would just *shut the fuck up*. The speed he had taken was providing energy to spare; but he needed a drink to take some of the edge off. He wasted the lineup to move faster. Probably some drug-addled fairy was too stoned to find his money - he snorted.

Neil looked up again at the DJ booth. The music was still pumping out and the dancers were still in their deluded purgatories. But ... *Danny* was not visible. Neil could see another guy behind the turntables and the CD players - a guy who had been at the building's entrance when he had arrived.

One of the party's organizers was now the DJ. *Danny* had slipped out somewhere; but *where?*

All of a sudden; Neil didn't need to have a drink all that badly

Detectives Jack Duffy and Pete Kennedy were both on the verge of calling it quits for the night - even though both of them were officially on call. Their respective dry Christmas dinners with their families had been routinely frustrating.

'If we have to avoid the sauce; then we might as well go to work', Pete declared to Jack as they contacted each other immediately after being paged.

'I really don't need another rave assignment, Pete', was Jack's terse reply.

Since last summer's riot; Vancouver's finest had been ordered to go easy on the rave and warehouse party scene. Illicit drugs and other illegal revenues were small potatoes in comparison to force morale and image.

But why was *Homicide* also sending in reinforcements?

Just take it easy and be as discreet as possible; Pete and Jack reminded each other as their respective cars pulled up in front of 221 Commercial Drive. Just act as discreetly as possible without intending to be anything more than a posse of *Morality* and *Homicide* cops.

'Easier said than done', grunted Jack. "Let's just get this over with.'

Jack and Pete waited for six other reinforcements to join them. Then the posse walked up to the admissions table where a young Korean girl was having difficulty staying awake.

Badges were clearly redundant

'Police. We're coming in.'

Pete Kennedy led the determined posse past the dazed girlfriend before she could have any sort of reaction.

Jack Duffy now assumed control.

'Okay, guys. Let's all split up. Let's each of us take a corner. You look after the fire escape, Pete.'

Each cop immediately went about his particular assigned area of the warehouse - the washrooms, the DJ booth, the lineups

for tickets and for booze itself, the medical unit and the dance floor itself. All of these possibilities had to be cased

Doug Boyd must have stumbled onto *something*; or why else would he have been unable to call into headquarters? Something or *somebody* must have impeded him from doing so.

Pete let another cop take care of the washroom area and then he walked down the long deserted hallway toward the door leading to the alleyway behind the warehouse. *There* was the token fire escape and it wasn't even marked as such. He realized that his flashlight was on the verge of losing its battery power. He couldn't see worth shit and he resented these damned club kids for their dreadful lighting in addition to their dreadful music and their drugs which he could both see and smell even from the unoccupied hallway. He could barely see the door at the end of the hallway; which course was *closed* rather than open.

And, when he finally arrived at the end of the hallway, the door was *locked*. It was *jammed*. This alone was a clear-cut violation of by-law whatever the number, Pete scowled. Arrests would have to be made.

This business with the fire regulations was a pain in the ass. He only wanted to locate Detective Boyd and then get the fuck out of this damn warehouse. The building itself was a fucking fire hazard - *a disaster waiting to happen*.

Pete decided that reinforcements were necessary. He radioed the officers casing the easy areas like the washroom and the medical unit. If Boyd were in either of those jurisdictions; he would have been informed of this by now.

He wanted to bust the door as wide open as possible; and then bust the entire event. He wanted to prevent another stupid drug-addicted rave warehouse party from ever taking place again in Vancouver. Hell, in the whole fucking world!

Jack Duffy himself appeared and the two burly cops promptly hurled themselves at the jammed door. They did this three times without any luck. They were on the verge of pulling their guns when the door finally cracked and they were now able to push it wide open.

When the two cops marched into the back alley way; they narrowly missed tripping over the dead body of Inspector Doug Boyd.

'Holy fucking shit!'

Jack and Pete stared at each other in suspended anger. Then Jack contacted Homicide Headquarters while Pete ran to the medical unit's station as fast as his legs would permit him to run.

Detective Pete Kennedy left his cohort Jack Duffy guarding the door and the dead body while he ran to the medical unit's station. Not that there was any hope in reviving Doug

Boyd; but a competent doctor was required to verify the corpse and to do at least a preliminary examination prior to the coroner's arrival.

The medical unit did not look very promising. Either they looked as if they wished to be somewhere else or they *were* somewhere else. Pete saw a girl who appeared to be all too familiar with the drugs she was supposed to be helping the party goers come down from. There was a young Chinese doctor who at least appeared to be a doctor. He would have to do, Pete grunted as he approached the medical unit's headquarters.

And then there was an older woman; who must have been at least twice the age of every either member of the medical unit. This woman wore a nurse's uniform and her hair was severely swept up into a bun. She stood aloof from her co-workers.

It was if she had no connection with them at all - she appeared to be an older registered nurse but in a different movie than everybody else.

Who the fuck was she?

Pete now introduced himself to Dr. Lim who quickly grasped the urgency of the situation. Dr. Lim quickly mobilized members of the unit into a small posse that would initially verify and then identify the corpse - not that these procedures were anything more than a necessary formality. But the medical unit also included a young woman whose function was to photograph the scene of the crime - in addition to the corpse.

As Pete followed this enthusiastic team; he realized that the older nurse was following him. Not her unit; but *him*.

Pete turned and addressed the woman.

'Who are you? How can I help you?'

The older nurse waited for Pete to stand still. Then she raised her voice slightly.

'I am Neil Ferguson's mother.'

Pete Kennedy now stopped dead still. He stared at the woman, who glared at him impatiently. He knew Neil Ferguson had strongly resembled his father whom he had murdered in Toronto. But the woman's face - particularly her cheekbones- was consistent enough with the suspect's.

The woman was not granting him the time to procrastinate or to ask for any second opinion. He decided that he *had* to take a chance on her.

'Follow me, lady.'

'Get in *quickly*, girlfriends. And please close the door.'

Nancy and Amanda followed Danny past the doorway to the anonymous chill room - making sure to latch the door tightly behind them.

'You do realize that other party staff members might need to use this room?' Amanda cautioned Danny.

'Then they can knock and say the password. Right?'

This made as much sense as anything else had made to Amanda and Nancy. They could only now hear an extremely muted echo of Danny's musical selections; which Duncan had been directed to strictly adhere to during Danny's 'break'.

'And what *do* you possess in your wonderfully deep pockets, Danny Boy?' Nancy beamed at her absolutely favourite specimen of the male gender category.

'Something the two of you can help me get rid of - if you are so inclined.'

'Well, let's *all* be partners in crime. ', Nancy looked at Amanda.

Danny retrieved a very tiny mirror from his left pocket and then poured out a considerable mound of cocaine onto the mirror. He and Nancy snorted up four lines each - leaving another two for Amanda.

'That's all I have left. Sorry, Amanda.'

'It's okay, kids.' Amanda was unconcerned about the unequal distribution of the wealth. 'Don't you *love* the echo? I think the music sounds even more wonderful with the echo this cave is putting on it.

Danny walked over to the door and strained his ears in the dance floor's direction.

'What *echo*?....*What music*?'

And now there was a very insistent knocking on the door to the staff chill room. Since the music had mysteriously stopped; there was no way Danny could pretend that he hadn't heard the knocking. Somebody must have come to drag him back to the DJ's booth; so that he could fix the sound problem quickly and get the party back onto its feet.

'It's Scott. We need you back up in the booth, Mr. Glitterbugger.'

Danny looked warily at Nancy and Amanda. He didn't know anyone involved with this party whose name was *Scott*; but the guy wasn't going to stop knocking until he responded.

He braced himself; and then opened the door.

The music had *indeed* stopped. Headquarters had directed their on-site operatives to first kill the music and then clear out the premises of 221 Commercial Drive. A squadron of eight additional reinforcements had been summoned and there were now two cops manning each entrance and exit to the warehouse; detaining and then frisking everybody looking suspiciously under the weather or the influence.

But really they were watching out for Neil Ferguson. The searching and frisking was just for display.

The DJ was no longer the youth who had advertise himself as DJ *Glitterbugger*; the androgynous boy whom the cops thought might lead them to Neil Ferguson. There was some unknown and mysterious connection between these two youths - Danny's presence at The Steam Rail had set Neil off when he had been employed there as a waiter.

Either Neil was hiding from Danny or else out there looking for him. And Danny was hiding out somewhere himself.

None of the drug-damaged club kids now angrily streaming out of the warehouse looked at all like Neil Ferguson; who had grown a beard since his abrupt dismissal from The Steam Rail. That strange girl who had been his neighbour at The King Henry had provided the description - bearded and with a gray or green toque. But Neil Ferguson had been granted more than ample time to lose the beard - a good fifteen minute shave would have done the trick with no side-effects as long as the youth was careful with his razor-blade.

Bearded or clean-shaven; none of these kids resembled Neil Ferguson.

Pete Kennedy looked at Jack Duffy with resignation. It was appearing too damn likely that - having killed Doug Boyd - Neil Ferguson had made his getaway.

Except....*nobody* had seen him leave. There were no footprints leading away from Detective Boyd's body; which meant that Ferguson must have reentered the warehouse building. So how the hell had he slipped away? Neither Pete nor Jack knew of any other exits besides the front one; and if the organizers knew of any other exits, they weren't sharing the information.

Ken and Randy had grabbed a taxi to deliver them quickly to the party over at 221 Commercial Drive. This was going to be Randy's fare and he didn't care how expensive the ride was. He and Ken had wound up becoming sexually carried away and, as a consequence, had *completely* lost track of the time; so caution was simply *not* a part of the evening's vocabulary.

'Well. Mary Christmas indeed", Ken jubilantly exclaimed as Randy paid the grateful driver.

'It doesn't look too Mary to *me*, dear. This party looks like it's over.'

'Almost; but not *quite*'

Ken couldn't hear any music but he could recognize some of Vancouver's finest on duty at the warehouse's entrance - urging everybody to go home and then searching those who refused to comply.

'So. *Where* are Amanda and Nancy?'. Randy's extended hand blocked Ken's path for a second.

Ken looked up at Randy.

'Your guess is as good as mine. And what about *DJ Glitterbugger*? Did he kill the music; or did the cops force him to kill it?'

'Your guess is as good as mine. Ken. I have a plan. Follow me.'

Baffled but trying hard not to so appear so; Ken followed Randy into the warehouse building.

'Hold everything, there.'

A ruddy-faced cop confronted Ken and Randy.

'You might have observed that people are *leaving* the building rather than *entering* it?'

Randy stared at the cop for a moment. Then, he produced an identification card. Vancouver's East End Medical Centre served its purpose.

'What exactly is *happening* here, officer?'

'Your colleagues in the medical unit can bring you up to speed. Is this guy working with you?'

Randy vouched for Ken and they moved into the warehouse quickly before the cop could change his mind. As they approached the medical unit's station; Ken noticed a young woman with a loaded camera - moving rapidly toward the fire exit.

'Oh, my God. This appears serious, Randy.'

'It does indeed", Randy affirmed. "Let's follow the woman with the camera. I think she knows where she's going.'

'*You're no friend of Duncan's!*'

Danny gasped as he looked into Neil Ferguson's eyes. He knew he should have trusted his initial impulse - to *never* open that door!

Neil recognized the two lesbians from those ancient and now defunct Vancouver grrl-rock bands. He thought he'd seen the shorter of the pair in Toronto; but where she and her friend came from didn't matter at this moment.

What the fuck were *they* doing here? He had no idea what their connection was with Danny Glitterbugger; but somehow it figured that they would be allies of his.

Danny hated real men and the two dykes hated real women. The three of them all belonged together - in hell!

'Just get your hands up against the wall behind you - all three of you! Keep moving backwards against the wall. Don't any of you dare move in any other direction!'

Amanda turned quickly and registered the wall behind her.

'Don't look back. You do that one more time and I'll cut you up.'

Neil hadn't expected having three people to have to deal with. He'd been hoping to catch Danny alone and then cut him up quickly.

Shit!

He wished he had handcuffs so that he could tie up the two dykes together. That would be something they'd enjoy - right? Being tied up together and then having to watch him cutting up their very special friend?

He didn't have a gun. He didn't have any rope. He only had the pocket-knife.

It was now or never.

It was time to lunge at Danny - while the three of them were still too dazed to see him coming at them.

He pulled himself back and then lunged forward.

'Stop!'

Neil turned around quickly and there were several cops behind him. There was a whole goddamned squadron of armed cops.

'Neil! Listen to me - please!'

That was no cop's voice. *It was his mother's.*

What the fuck was she doing here - protected by a whole squadron of cops and wearing some surrogate nurse's uniform? His mother didn't even know how to cure a fly - let alone a human.

'Get out of here, Mom.! Just get the fuck out of here!'

Sarah now stepped forward - flanked by Detectives Kennedy and Duffy.

'Listen to me, damn it Neil. I can't defend you myself; but I'll get you the best possible lawyer. I'll get him or her to plead insanity of the moment. You lost it with your father; please don't lose it again now! There's still hope for you!'

Hope? Like where, Mom? In prison for at least ten to fifteen years? In an institution? What the fuck was she talking about?'

'I'm beyond hope, Mom! Get it? My life is over and I have no regrets! No regrets whatever - *do you understand?'*

Neil glared at the two cops who flanked his mother.

Kennedy and Duffy counted three and then moved in on Neil. They waited too long to make their move.

Neil Ferguson pulled out the pocket-knife and stabbed himself in the heart before either of the two cops had taken a step

.'Get the medical unit. They're all in the back alley - with Boyd. Hurry up!', Kennedy screamed at Duffy who got moving on the double

'Sarah! You stay here!'

Detective Kennedy turned to face Sarah Lloyd-Matthews who was now bawling at a very high-decibel level. He made no effort to calm her down aside from offering her a shoulder so that she didn't have to look at the surrounding throng of onlookers.

When Pete Kennedy looked away from Sarah and toward Neil's dead body; he suddenly realized that Danny Bailey and his two girlfriends had managed to disappear. They had magically slipped away - through the cavern's mysterious fourth wall.

The entire medical unit - with the exception of the older nurse named Sarah Lucas - was still gathered around the dead body of Detective Doug Boyd. Not that there was anything further that could have been done for *him*.

An autopsy would have been almost redundant. And the weapon was *not* at the scene of the crime. The weapon had either been discarded somewhere else; or else it was still on the killer's person.

'Your guess is as good as mine"', Dr. Lim was informing one of his assistants.

The assistant now tapped Dr. Lim on the shoulder.

'Do you know these two gentlemen, Doctor?'

Dr. Lim nodded. He recognized Randy but not Ken. Nothing about Ken worried him.

'The party's clearing our, Randy. But you've probably deduced that already. It's too bad - except for whoever killed Detective Boyd here - the kids have been well-behaved tonight.'

Randy stood directly in front of the doctor.

'Who is this dead cop?'

'A set-up man in the force's search for a young man named Neil Ferguson; who's wanted for the murder of his father back in Toronto.'

'Neil Ferguson?' Ken insistently tapped Randy on the right shoulder. 'Did Neil Ferguson kill this cop?'

'We suspect there's a connection. Or the police suspect there is"', Dr. Lim looked at Ken curiously. 'They were tipped off that Neil Ferguson might be coming here tonight. They didn't want to immediately swarm this warehouse; so they sent this rookie cop in as a set-up. But....., events didn't quite turn out the way they'd been planned.'

No. Obviously - they hadn't.

'They didn't want to start any riots like the one last summer"', Dr. Lim shrugged. 'Well, subtlety often fails.'

A wailing ambulance siren now prevented any of the medical unit from commenting upon the doctor's observations. Ken and Randy quickly realized that the ambulance was heading for the very building they were now gathered in.

'This siren isn't for our undercover cop here. *It's for a more serious emergency.*'

Randy looked at Dr. Lim; who didn't disagree with him.

'Come on, Ken. '

Randy and Ken almost started before any of the others. Then they realized that a cop was providing the doctor with directions to the next corpse.

Her son had blown it. He should have listened to her. She could have arranged for the best damn lawyers available; and then he could have pleaded insanity of the moment. He had lost it at one particular moment - otherwise, Neil hadn't been doing all that badly. And he would receive a relatively light sentence; or maybe a period of psychiatric confinement.

Her son needed therapy - not punishment. And, after intensive therapy, then he would be able to see things more clearly. He would be able to start his life again - with a clean slate.

She shifted her eyes away from Neil's body and then glared at all of the policemen and doctors and parasites. Then she looked at her son again.

Her son had died on his own terms. He may not have lived by them; but he had died by them. He had understood that, by crossing one particular line, he would have to eventually cross the line that followed.

If you kill somebody; then eventually you kill yourself.

She understood why Neil had felt compelled to kill Barry - it wasn't as if she herself had never wished for him to die. But it was unfortunate that Neil had followed through on his desire to kill. Eventually Barry would have been killed by a stranger - probably a bad trick- because that was how Barry had wanted to die. Sooner or later, Barry would have been granted his wish without her son's having to intervene.

If only he hadn't strayed from her. If only he had listened to her advice and banished his father from his life along with all of the man's excess baggage - prostitutes and sexual confusion masquerading as some kind of bullshit utopian philosophy. But her son - in contrast to his father had found himself - if only in his dying moments.

Yes, his final moments.

Sarah focused on Neil's body and began crying. She couldn't give a damn about any of the official and unofficial parasites who were all staring at her.

They had been unable to contain her son; and now they would be unable to contain her.

Ken and Randy saw an ambulance crew with a gurney barging past the front entrance and being greeted by Detective Jack Duffy; who provided directions to the staff chill room. This room was one unknown to most of the remaining partygoers as well as to the medical unit and the police.

In the chill room; Detective Pete Kennedy was consoling Sarah Lloyd-Matthews. Sarah had stopped crying and was now being aggressively sullen. Pete decided to let her stare morosely at the medical unit - whose presence was now a formal and

meaningless necessity - and at the cops whom she obviously blamed for being unable to prevent Neil's public suicide.

Randy managed to catch a private moment with Dr. Lim.

'Who is that woman?'

The doctor lowered his voice.

'She presented herself as Sarah Lucas - a psychiatric nurse. We didn't know her; but her identification and references were fine and James Newman at the Health Centre had informed us she would be coming tonight. Then....she told the police her real name.'

'Yes?, Ken interjected loudly enough to draw a stare from Detective Kennedy.

'Sarah is Neil Ferguson's mother. She is actually a renowned lawyer.'

Ken and Randy were now speechless. And nobody else in the room had anything to say as well. The remaining partygoers registered the dead body that was being hoisted onto the gurney. One of them asked Detective Duffy how the youth had died and the detective had informed him that an autopsy still had to be made. The young woman who asked the question then gathered up her army of friends and they all cleared out of the room. They probably assumed that Neil's death had been routinely drug-related.

As the medical unit began moving the gurney toward the front door and the police squadron directed the remaining partygoers out of the building; Ken tapped Randy on the right shoulder and indicated an almost invisible passageway leading to another mysterious room.

'Look, Randy. *It's the fourth wall.*'

'*Holy shit!*' Randy exclaimed but not loud enough to be overheard by the departing officials. 'It's like a tunnel!'

'And I'll bet that's where Nancy and Amanda took off through.'

Randy hugged Ken.

'I'll bet you're right. And I'll bet there down there with Danny Glitterbugger; so why don't we do a little exploring for ourselves.'

And - with no further ado - Ken and Randy slipped behind the fourth wall and into what now appeared to be an endless labyrinth unknown to the city of Vancouver and indeed to the world; except for Amanda, Nancy, and Danny. The three of them were now audible - laughing hysterically as if they had swallowed bottles of helium and now calling Ken and Randy to hurry up and join their party in their delirious underworld.

Nancy and Amanda didn't make it home until after eight o'clock in the morning - not until after Ken and Randy had excused themselves for further erotic purposes and not until Danny had clandestinely returned to the scene of the crime so that he could retrieve his CDs and vintage records.

'I know where I can leave my CDs and records in storage.' Danny announced to his coterie of admirers in the tunnel - that magical safety zone to which the five of them had miraculously escaped to and then remained in until well after the authorities had deserted the premises. The tunnel *did* have its limitations - Randy knew that it eventually led to another warehouse at 201 Commercial Drive in which absolutely nothing was happening at this time. But... the tunnel had not only spared them from the stakeout and the shoot-out and the necrophiles and the *authorities*; it had provided a welcome sense of *temporary* invincibility.

Danny knew all too well that he was hardly invincible. Even though he had not unwittingly serviced the police by leading them to Neil Ferguson- by being a sacrificial piece of bait; he knew he wasn't safe in Vancouver. Not only might the cops still haul him in and find something to book him on; even though his pockets were unfortunately empty. He might easily be a convenient target for certain members of 'the drug community'.

So Danny was adamant about taking advantage of his available storage space and then using his cash flow to quickly get the hell out of Vancouver.

'San Francisco - probably', he answered vaguely when Nancy demanded to know his destination. 'San Francisco. Sydney. Berlin, Sao Paolo, and Tokyo, anywhere'.

She wondered just how flush he might be tonight and she speculated to herself that he might more realistically be relocating to Seattle - not San Francisco.

'Well, wherever you end up; don't you *dare* become a stranger!'

'To Glitterbugger! *Bon voyage, Mr. Glitterbugger!*'

Everybody raised their arms to Danny - for there were no drinks in the tunnel for anybody to be toasting with. Then everybody gave Danny the biggest possible hug; with Nancy's being the grandest of the lot.

Then Danny set out to reenter the 221 Commercial Drive warehouse and break into the DJ's booth if he had to in order to retrieve his records. Nancy worried that he might be asking for trouble; but Danny laughed it off.

'I'm within my legal rights - even if the place is either locked up or else still surrounded.'

Then he was gone.

And when Amanda and Nancy finally made it home; they realized that they should check the phone messages. There was only one - from Helen. Amanda's mother had been very worried about their possible confrontation with Neil Ferguson.

'Mom thought *Barry* was psycho. So what could that possibly make *his son*?'

Nancy shook her head. She was too tired by now to answer any rhetorical questions.

'Disconnect the phone, dear. We'll call Helen *tomorrow*.'

Amanda obliged. The telephone had to be unplugged; or else deep beautiful sleep would not be possible.

She passed through the tunnel which was *not* a free-fall zone but rather infested with people who did not belong in a free-fall zone. Neil Ferguson was in the tunnel - he held command in the tunnel. Had Neil escaped into a delirious purgatory? No, he held a knife and he stood beside his mother. Sarah Lloyd-Matthews was pleading *No! I can get you off on legal insanity No, Neil. Please don't do it!* Her son was cackling in her face - pitched somewhere between Lon Chaney Jr. and Margaret Hamilton. And those Vancouver cops all stood in line while that Chinese doctor came and went and now Randy was telling her not to scream *Don't fuck things up, Nancy, things are unfolding as they were intended to unfold* and she despised his smug rationality his naive level-headedness. See, Randy, things are out of control. Just look at Sarah - that psychotic nurse and the entire medical unit gaping at her horrified yet fascinated hell *transfixed!* And now...here's Barry. He's come to kill Sarah no he's going to kill his son. *It's too late, Neil. I had such hopes for you but you've blown it and it's too late!* Yes, it was too late. Neil plunged the pocket-knife into his heart before Barry could possibly save his life by converting him to polymorphous perversity. Typical Barry - pretending to be the Angel when really he was the Devil! But...where had *Danny Glitterbugger* gone? Danny Glitterbugger the Real Angel? The real *polymorphous pervert* whom she wanted to fuck up the ass while Amanda went down on him. *Where was Amanda?* Has she somehow *not* made it through the tunnel? Had she passed through into some other plane? Had she?

Nancy? *Are you all right?*

Nancy opened her eyes. *Where was she?*

'It'd all right, sweetheart. You were looking for me and I've been right beside you all the time. Okay?'

Nancy nodded and then Amanda took hold of her outstretched hand and held onto it.

Amanda said nothing further; but she maintained her lateral sleeping position so that Nancy could fall asleep while holding onto her left hand.

Nancy decided to count sheep. On *one hundred and fourty two* she lost her count and then fell into a very deep and peacefully uneventful sleep.

At about five in the afternoon; she began to stir consciously enough that she climbed out of bed and took a look at the time. She was not surprised to see that Amanda was already up and dressed and scanning through the Vancouver Sun.

'You passed out like a light so I just let you sleep in. You were having some weird dreams.'

Amanda kissed Nancy as she opened up the refrigerator to retrieve a bottle of orange juice.

'Is there enough *tea*?' Nancy sat down at the kitchen table.

'I'd better put some more hot water on.'

Amanda turned on the front element of the stove on which there was already a full kettle.

'There's only a perfunctory story about last night - I mean, Neil Ferguson's death.'

Nancy lit a cigarette.

'Well, I guess he barely made the paper's deadline. Does it say anything about *Barry*?'

'Nothing aside from the fact that Neil was wanted for his dad's murder? Do you want some honey in your tea, Nancy?'

She nodded her assent. She wished she could sleep through the remainder of Boxing Day but that was now out of the question.

'We could use some drugs, Amanda. Some *grass*.'

Amanda nodded.

'Mom wants some, too. She wants us to visit her at her hotel - tonight.'

Nancy drew on her cigarette and exhaled.

'I don't feel very social today.'

'Neither do *I*. But, if we want to buy some drugs; then I'll have to call Ken.'

Amanda passed the newspaper across to Nancy while she dialed her brother's number. Nancy scanned the obituaries but found nothing on Neil Ferguson.

It's too early; and it's technically a holiday.

Still, *who* would place an obituary for Neil? *His mother* - that would be *who*. *Sarah Lloyd-Matthews*; who was quite possibly the most bizarre person on the entire fucking planet.

Amanda hung up the phone as Nancy decided she'd smoked enough of her cigarette.

'Ken and Randy are going to a Boxing Day soiree at some friend of Randy's - Kevin Somebody. The easiest thing we can do would be to meet Ken at this party and then go see Mom.'

Nancy looked at Amanda for an extended moment. She considered herself fortunate to be in the same room as Amanda - as friend and as lover. She wondered if Amanda Bingham would understand something she was about to say to her.

'I don't feel like seeing anybody today.'

Now Amanda frowned.

'Not even Mom?'

'Not today. I don't feel like seeing *anybody* today - nothing against anybody personally. I can't deal with going to some stranger's party; and I can't really talk about everything that happened last night - because I'm still trying to make sense of it all *myself*.'

Amanda poured a cup of tea for Nancy.

'Helen will be upset.'

'What are you saying, Amanda?' Nancy's blood-pressure tightened. 'Do you mean that she'll be offended" That she'll think I'm anti-social or some sort of a fuck-up?'

'Helen really likes you, Nancy. *It's that simple.*'

Nancy nodded and leaned back in her chair. She would attempt to understand that it might be possible for friendships and relationships to be that simple or direct.

'Listen, Amanda. I'll call your mother tomorrow. Is that okay; because I just need some time alone.'

She sipped her tea which was still too hot for her.

'You do understand, Amanda?'

Amanda nodded. She gave Nancy a big and silent hug and then proceeded to get organized while Nancy attempted to find something worth reading in the newspaper.

Dear Mark,

Beleaguered Season's Greetings to my brother - not that either of us have ever given a shit about Christmas. I just realized that Amanda and I bought presents for friends and her family; but not for each other. What could this possibly mean? Why do people need some stupid date on the calendar in order to encourage their generosity? People should be generous all the time - depending of course upon their financial situations.

How the hell are you doing anyway? Do you feel confidence in the doctors and the nurses and the people in charge? Are the other patients serious about kicking and then staying clean? It's hard, Mark. I never got strung out myself but I know it's hard. Christine - who used to play bass in STRIPES AND SPOTS - was doing fine. Or so it seemed- now she's back in rehab. It's difficult. I know I'm not telling you anything you don't already know.

But...now I will.

Neil Ferguson - Barry Ferguson's son - the young man who's actual existence you were the first to verify for me - took his life early this morning or whenever it was. He did a few things here in Vancouver that alerted the cops to his whereabouts and the cops finally pieced everything all together. Finally - a few lives later. Neil managed to kill an undercover cop before the major league final confrontation happened. I guess that is unfortunate but then that kid in Toronto - Eric - he could still be alive and reasonably functioning if the damn cops hadn't been so fucking sure of themselves.

It's weird being back in Vancouver. I haven't really seen that much of the town that I lived in for seven years. We did go to the Vancouver Art Gallery and to movies in the Granville Mall and to the Steam Rail - the bar where it turned out that Neil Ferguson had been working as a waiter. One night - we weren't there - Neil got picked up by Bernard Griffiths and

Neil assaulted Bernard. That's what tipped off the cops - they checked him out with their computers. I left a message for Bernard Griffiths but I'll be back in Toronto by the time he returns from wherever he's gone for Christmas.

I love Amanda right now; but I can't project too far into the future. I don't wish to be pessimistic; but there are factors that will likely change the dynamic between us. I'm going to try to transfer to either Simon Fraser or UBC next year; partly so I can be in the same city as Amanda and partly because I've had it with Toronto. I'm going to have to become more serious about my education. Amanda is serious about her courses at Emily Carr; which is good.

I haven't discussed this with her yet; but I feel that we should live separately in the same city. Long distance relationships between people who prefer living alone can be dicey - to say the least. Amanda has a brother you would really bond with and love - except he has a boyfriend who is perfect. They don't live together for various reasons. Ken - Amanda's brother - lives with her and the apartment's too small for two people. Amanda's mother is out here taking a breather from her girlfriend before embarking on a longer vacation overseas next month. There are many couples who remain together for too long and therefore they grow apart. I think you know what I mean, Mark.

You were there for me when I wasn't there for you. I wish to thank you and then apologize to you. In a weird way; I really liked Barry Ferguson - despite his being such a major league fuck-up. I wish that I'd known his son. Neil wasn't a monster - he did some horrible things but he himself I don't think was horrible. Neil had his music like you do and like my fabulous former upstairs neighbour Danny does. Danny is wonderful even though he's had to leave Vancouver for parts unknown. You should get serious about your music, Mark. I mean it

I've begged out of drinking tea and smoking dope with Amanda and her mother. I need time by myself and Helen smokes tons of dope to compensate for all the years when she never touched the stuff. People making up for lost time can be scary; although Helen is the sweetest woman in the world - aside from her daughter.

I guess I should be signing off. There are a lot of other things I could tell you. But...we should have breakfast together when I get back and you get out. Where are you going to stay when you get out, Mark? My wonderful upstairs neighbour has flown the coop but the landlord has recently moved some other body into that apartment - somebody I feel no need to become acquainted with. Maybe you need a partner - a support partner who checks in on you and you check in on him. Or her.

When I return to Toronto; I'm going to become a hermit. I'll talk to my friends at U. of T. - Jeff and Derek - but I won't go out with them. I'll have neither the time nor the money but, please, Mark, you can call me anytime you need or want to. Amanda and I will be exchanging calls every second Sunday night; but you don't need to adhere to any schedule.

I feel that I am making up for lost time. I feel that I don't have a lot of time to waste or to lose. I know you understand.

Love,
Nancy.

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