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Canada

The Eight O'Clock Lead

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ABSTRACT

The Eight O'Clock Lead

Paul Headrick

The Eight O'Clock Lead is a collection of five short stories. The main characters in these stories are reporters working for CJLV, a fictitious radio newsroom in Vancouver, British Columbia. The reporters are affected by their work in several ways. They distance themselves emotionally from the stories on which they report, and as a result they tend to distance themselves emotionally from the world. They compete with reporters from other news organizations and with their colleagues, and some of them thoroughly absorb the adversarial model of human relations. The stories deal with these and other problems, not to expose the evils of reporting, but to explore how we are formed by the structures we create and how, in a broad sense, the political relates to the personal.

Contents

The Fresh Cove Slide

Marty parked near the water down by Troller's Pub and got out, hunching against the rain. A few lights shone on the distant terminal and he could make out the friendly white bulk of the first ferry waiting there. He opened the trunk to get his rain gear, but the trunk was empty. Wallace's call had come just after four, and in his drowsiness Marty forgot he had left the muddy gear in his basement after covering the fire at Byerson's Mills two nights before.

A guy in a yellow slicker stood on the dock. He'd be the one Wallace had hired over the phone.

"Hi. I'm Marty Betteson from CJLV."

"Okay. There's a small craft warning, but we'll make 'er."

Wallace had said the station used to hire this guy during the Salmon Derby, and the boat looked right for taking a few people fishing on a calm day. He sat on a seat behind the wheel in the small cabin, clutching his briefcase, as they chugged away from the dock.

"You wouldn't have an extra rain coat I could borrow, by any chance?"

"No. Ain't you got one? You're gonna get soaked."

He tried to sleep, listening to the drone of the inboard and the rain pattering on the windshield. Even a doze of a few minutes would have made him feel better, but the boat began to

pitch and screw when they left Horsehoe Bay and headed up Howe Sound. At least he would be out of pager range for the day, there'd be no competition while the highway was closed, and he'd only be responsible for one story. Surely the kids had already been rescued, but even so it would still take most of the day to talk to people, file a couple of voicers and return. It would be a break from the courthouse grind. When he got back he would sit by the window at Troller's, with a plate of fish and chips and a pint of home brew, and watch the Queen of Nanaimo coast out of the bay.

"Do you know anything about the slide?" he asked, to make conversation. The guy had said almost nothing, hadn't even introduced himself, but then he was probably as sleepy as Marty.

"Came down Allison Creek. Closed the highway." He didn't turn around, just continued to peer through the windshield, though there was nothing to see in the rain and the dark.

"Have you heard anything about the kids?"

"How the hell am I going to hear anything?"

That was true. Marty didn't say anything more, and concentrated instead on not being sick, glad he had passed up a donut breakfast. Maybe there would be a cafe at Fresh Cove, and at some point he would have time for a bite and some coffee. They turned toward shore after about half an hour on the sound, and he thought then of offering to buy the guy's rain gear, but it would make him sound like a jerk. Anyway, he didn't have very

much money on him.

"This is as close as I can get 'er."

He looked down at the small square wharf rising and falling a couple of feet away. He tossed his briefcase, it hit the mossy planks with a squish, and then he jumped, but his feet went out from under him when he landed and he smashed down on his tail bone. Water sloshed over the side as the wharf dipped with the impact. Marty's stomach lurched and bile filled his mouth. He coughed and spat, still on his hands and knees, then got to his feet and steadied himself, gazing up the sad ramp leading from the wharf. When he reached the top and turned, the boat was already out of sight. His breathing calmed and he heard the rain whispering on the sound.

One road sloped up out of the parking lot, and he trudged past secure houses set well back in the huge cedars and firs. He kept his head down and avoided the larger puddles, but he was soaked when he reached the top of the hill, where he paused and looked at the sky ahead of him, now turning soft grey at the horizon. The road continued down past a few narrow lanes. He went on, and after rounding a bend he came upon a small crowd of people and made his way to the front.

On the five, Wallace said the mud slide had trapped two children in a trailer, and Marty had imagined the thing half submerged in the shallow creek bed, a fireman pulling the kids out, and a group of concerned neighbors clapping and cheering.

Maybe he would exaggerate the seriousness just a bit to make the rescue more dramatic. He reached a rope barrier stretched across the road a few feet before the pavement came to a crumbling end.

He faced a gorge. It must have been fifty feet across. Almost directly below him a group of men worked with picks and shovels in grey-brown muck, but there was no trailer in sight. To his right the gorge slashed up the mountain, curving off into the forest, and to his left it dropped straight to the sound. Near the water on the far side he saw railway tracks sticking out sharply into space, and below them a car lay upside down in the mud. He watched the men struggling, shovelling at the slime, which closed in as they cleared it away. He could hear their grunts, the thock-thock of the picks and shovels, and the rain.

After a few minutes he checked the time, looked around at the faces near him, and approached a man in a grey slicker, who said he was a member of the volunteer fire department. His face looked haggard, but it could have been the effect of streaks of mud.

He wouldn't talk on tape, but he gave Marty the details he needed for his first voicer. The slide hit at three-thirty, knocking out great chunks of earth, leaving a few homes hanging over the gorge. Two children had been sleeping in a trailer beside one of those homes near the creek, having given up their bedrooms to visiting relatives. The children had been buried for more than two hours, and they hadn't even found the trailer yet. Marty

looked around again at the people standing waiting, then down at the rescue workers, and his chest tightened.

He followed directions to the only phone booth in the village, hurrying up a lane that cut back and forth through the trees and salal till meeting a road. At the intersection he paused to catch his breath and arch his back; the pain in his tail bone worsened when he bent over to walk up the steep lane. He turned to the right, his shoes wicking in water as he gave up avoiding puddles, his wet socks bunching at his toes Half a mile down the road he came to a store with a phone booth in the corner of a small gravel parking lot.

The story didn't need added drama. He just wrote what had happened and described the scene of the men working in the mud while the people waited. For once the desk would be happy with everything it could get, so he didn't have to worry about going over forty seconds. It was five to six, time enough to go on tape. He always screwed up live when Wallace was on the desk.

He dropped his voice several tones to read, but he would still sound like a soprano next to Wallace, who had been giving him a hard time since he started two months ago. Wallace seemed to drop his voice even lower before introducing his stories, accentuating the contrast.

"What about their names?" said Wallace when Marty had filed.

"They haven't been released yet." Marty looked out the

booth into the forest, which came up to the edge of the parking lot, and tried not to let Wallace get to him.

"I know they haven't been released yet. Ask somebody. Everybody in that town must know those kids."

"Okay."

"And get some actuality."

Marty put his face to the glass to look into the store. He didn't see any umbrellas, but they might have some out of sight.

They hadn't made any progress that he could see when he got back to the slide. He went up to a young man standing alone under a black umbrella.

"Excuse me sir. My name is Marty Betteson. I'm a reporter with CJLV. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?"

"What do you want to talk to me for?"

"Well, are you a resident of Fresh Cove?"

"Yes."

"Could you tell me whether you heard the slide, just how it affected you?"

He held the mike a respectful distance from the fellow's face and pressed Record.

"I live back that way." He pointed, but he couldn't be expected to be thinking about radio.

"We didn't know what it was till a neighbor called. The road is washed out so I can't go to work." He spoke like he was testifying in court, probably because of the shock. Marty thanked

him, tried a few more people and got similar responses. There didn't seem to be anything to do but stand with the others and watch the muck-covered rescue crew battling below them.

When seven neared he started back, then stopped by the driveway of the first house he came to. He considered knocking on the door and asking to use the phone, but he would be intruding, so he continued along the road, then the lane, resting and stretching several times, though now no posture relieved the pain in his tail bone. Rain fell in his eyes when he squinted up at the grey sky, and it looked like it would rain forever.

Under a cedar by the parking lot he sat and went through the tape, finding the longest complete sentence to work into his wrap-around. It would sound abrupt, but at least Wallace would know he had talked to somebody. Rain fell from the soaked branches in large drops, and Marty leaned back against the trunk for a moment and listened.

"Great actuality Betteson," said Wallace after Marty had filed. "Where are their names?"

"Everyone's been told not to say . . . because of the family."

"So talk to the family."

"I don't think they're . . . " Marty stopped. Wallace had hung up.

They still hadn't found the trailer, though now the rescue crew had moved further down the gorge. He took his Sony out again, thought, then put it back and turned to a woman standing

beside him.

"Do you know where the parents are?"

She gestured with her hand and he looked across the gorge, where another group of people had gathered, standing in twos and threes as on this side, sharing umbrellas. At the center stood a man and a woman, the woman holding the man's arm. He looked away and let his eyes rest on the forest undergrowth, then decided and started for the other side.

The mud came over his feet, sucking at his shoes. He tried standing upright at first, but after a few steps he slipped and fell, skidding on his back. He turned then to face the side of the gorge and half climbed, half fell the rest of the way. Mud covered his briefcase and clung to his jacket, and the deep ooze in the middle came up to his calves. He slogged ahead, pitching forward as he neared the rescue crew. Belkin would have pulled out his mike and interviewed one of them while he was swinging a shovel. Marty thought about it but continued to the far side and started climbing. His footholds gave way and he slid down with each upward heave. Finally by a combination of crawling and slithering he ascended. Cold mud slicked in through his jacket and shirt and up his legs. When he neared the top a man leaned over and grabbed his hand, hauling him up the last few feet.

Marty's body shook. The man who had helped him said "What the hell are you doing?" Marty fumbled with his briefcase and pulled out the Sony.

"My name is Marty Betteson. I'm a reporter with CJLV. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?"

The man described the work the crew had been doing. "There's still a chance," he said, and he looked at Marty then looked back down the gorge.

"The couple there, they're the parents?"

"Yeah, the Nielsens. The kids are Jamey and Leah."

"How old are they?"

"Jamey's ten and Leah's eight."

That was easy, thought Marty. He looked at the Nielsens. They stood in the same position as before, leaning on each other. He should talk to them, he knew, but not now.

Some of the men who had been digging stood nearby, drinking coffee. Marty asked if they could spare some. His hands were numb and sore. He held the styrofoam cup carefully while one of them poured coffee from a thermos.

There wasn't much time before the eight. Marty sat on his briefcase, found a good actuality from the interview, cued it up and wrote a voicer around it. Mud from his sleeve smeared the stenopad.

It was too late for Marty to cross back now. He walked down the road and knocked on the door of the first house he came to. No one answered. For a moment Marty believed that was it; he'd miss the eight entirely, but a woman came to the door of the second house. She said Marty could use the phone if he went

around to the back porch. He looked down at himself. He was muddy and sopping.

Marty leaned on the porch railing and pre-read the story. When he released the Pause on the Sony something went wrong. The man's voice began deeper than Wallace's, then sped into a squeak. The batteries had died.

He scrawled a few lines summarizing the actuality, then took the phone when the woman passed it to him through the kitchen window.

"Where's the actuality, Betteson?"

"Some water got at my Sony. It's screwed up."

"Fix it. Get the parents."

Marty asked the woman if she had some flashlight batteries he could buy -- at least the Sony took a standard size -- and she did. She wouldn't take any money.

They had found it; the top of the trailer was exposed. The men worked faster now, trying to reach a door or a window. Rain rattled off the aluminum, the shovels scraped and slurped in the mud, and, with this, Marty heard a painful inhaling: "eeeuh, eeeuh." From behind he watched Mrs. Nielsen's shoulders rise and fall. He got out his Sony.

"Excuse me. Mr. Nielsen, Mrs. Nielsen . . . I'm Marty Betteson from CJLV." The woman turned and looked at Marty with red eyes. Her husband's face was white and dead. "I've been . . . reporting all morning." Marty had his Sony over his

shoulder. He hit Record and held out the mike. "Our listeners . . . we're all hoping."

Mrs. Nielsen tilted her head forward to the mike. "We're praying." She stopped and sucked in air. "Tell them to pray for our children."

That was all Marty needed. He had time now to write a good story, building to the plea from the distraught mother.

On Marty's way back to the house he'd filed from earlier he passed two men walking toward the gorge. One carried two stretchers, the other a canvas bag.

The woman frowned when she answered the door for Marty this time. He knew though that she wouldn't refuse after letting him use the phone once already. He sat on the porch again and went through the story twice, polishing his delivery. Gust-driven rain hit the plastic porch roof like machine-gun fire. Marty filed the voicer with actuality of the mother. This time Wallace said nothing.

They had reached a window. One of the men crawled through, the Nielsens moved closer to the edge of the gorge; the men carrying the stretchers and the bag started down the side. Marty's teeth chattered.

The small bodies were handed out one at a time and placed on top of the trailer. Mud covered them. One of the windows must have broken when the slide swept the trailer away. The two paramedics went to work, pumping and pushing, mirroring each

other as they tried mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Then they stopped and looked up at the Nielsens, squinting into the rain, futility in their faces. Mr. Nielsen charged down then, flailing through the muck to the trailer. Mrs. Nielsen's gasps became a wail, and another woman went to her side. The father clutched at the bodies as they were put on stretchers. Marty had his Sony out and he punched Record, capturing the mother's cries for voicer background.

The rescue crew carried the bodies up the far side. Mr. Nielsen was helped back up to his wife, and the two held each other, then turned and walked back along the road, followed by the few people left on this side. Marty fell into step with one of the paramedics and asked if he could speak with him. They stopped.

The paramedic was angry, but not at Marty. He said it hadn't happened quickly. The children were shaken, were bruised and cut, but they would have been conscious when the trailer came to rest. They were buried alive, and they died when their air ran out.

"I saw them inside the trailer. They were holding each other."

"Is there anything else you think I should know?"

"You want to know something, talk to the mayor. He'll tell you something you should know."

Marty wanted to ask why he didn't tell him, but the man was

still angry, and he decided not to push it.

"You'll soon need help yourself. You're exhausted and you'll be hypothermic soon. Get inside and get dry."

Marty filed from the same house. He used the mother's cries and saved the paramedic's comments for later. "There's a couple more angles on this yet," he told Wallace.

He knocked on the back door when he was through, and when the woman answered Marty returned the phone and asked her where he could find the mayor. She told him his name, Barry Kearns, and said he'd probably be at the town hall, which was just past the store on the other side.

Marty stopped in the middle of the gorge and sat on the roof of the trailer, breathing hard. With an effort he could stop his teeth from chattering, but after a moment he would forget and they would begin again. He started toward the far side.

Twice he neared the top only to slide back down on his hands and knees. His dead hands wouldn't cooperate; his briefcase kept slipping from his fingers. He dug in with his elbows and squirmed, finally flopping onto the road and lying there, his cheek on the asphalt. When he got up he took off his useless mud-soaked jacket and dropped it by the road, then began to walk in a slow shuffle. The sandy mud ground in his shoes, scraping raw the skin at the back of his heels, and the pain in his lower back now pierced his spine.

Making his way along the upper road he saw a boy, wearing a

red raincoat with a hood and gumboots, riding toward him or a tricycle. He weaved back and forth to go through the middle of the deepest puddles, and as he neared Marty heard that he was singing.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you . . ."

He looked up at Marty when he was still about fifty feet away, then he steered to the other side of the road, passing by with a burst of pumping knees.

"Happy birthday dear Bobby, happy birthday to you."

Marty could see the store not much further down the road.

"Hi." The little boy had turned around and now rode beside him.

"Hello."

"I can't go to kindergarten today."

"Why not?"

"The road's washed."

"That's right, it is."

The boy rode ahead then circled back through a puddle, his head turned to admire his wake.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you."

"Is your name Bobby?"

"No. I can put any name I want. It's my favorite song."

"My name's Marty."

"Jamey and Leah are dead."

What could he say to this?

"Where are you going?" said the boy.

"I'm going to see the mayor."

The boy held his face up to the rain, his mouth open, then he turned another circle around Marty and headed off, and Marty heard him start singing again.

A middle-aged man with glasses answered when he knocked at the door of the small town hall.

"I'm Marty Betteson from CJLV. Is it possible to talk to the mayor?"

"We'll be through soon."

The man closed the door, and Marty sat on the top step and leaned against the wall. The pain in his back spread out through his shoulders. His shivering had stopped. He looked across the road at the trees there, tops waving in the wind, then closed his eyes.

"You wanted to speak to me?"

He woke in a panic, like a night driver finding himself on the wrong side of the road, a few seconds of the past missing.

"You wanted to see me."

It was the man who had come to the door before.

"Mayor Kearns?"

"Yes. What is it?"

He pawed his Sony out of the briefcase and held out the mike, but he couldn't think of a question. He just looked at the mayor, who looked back through the rain on his glasses, then began to

speak.

"They knew it was coming. We all knew. The Forestry Department called three days ago when it warmed up and the creek flow stopped, but it was the third year, and nothing happened before. They told the people next to the creek to get out. Three days ago."

Marty looked at the mayor, but still said nothing; he was so tired. He watched the mayor walk away.

He managed to cue the tape to the mayor's quote, but his pencil wouldn't stay in his hand. It was two minutes to ten, so he phoned the desk and said he'd go live, then sat on the floor of the booth, waiting for his intro. It wouldn't be a hard ad-lib. The story would tell itself. He could just give it straight, taking it up to the mayor: the slide, the destruction, the rescue crew, the parents, the children, then the mayor. He thought of the children hanging on to each other, suffocating. He thought of the parents and their knowledge.

"Marty, are you on the line?"

He had missed his intro. He began quickly, ran out of breath before finishing his first sentence, gasped, and continued.

"They tried to revive the children." He remembered the father running and falling down the gorge. "The parents watching . . ." He gasped again and his hand holding the phone shook in a spasm. "The children . . ."

He sobbed once, still trying to tell his story. "They

suffocated." His legs hung out of the folding door in the gravel and the rain slanted in on his lap. "The mud." He saw the mother's shoulders rise and fall, and he heard her. "The mother cried," he said, and he reached for the Sony, just let his hand fall against it, and listened to the rain, like distant applause against the glass booth.

Endless Lebanon

"Hey Ed, what do you think I should lead with on the major?"

It was fifteen minutes to noon, and Jim was thinking he should start sorting out his lineup. Saturdays, slow news days, made it difficult.

"I went with the fatal at eleven."

I shouldn't have asked, thought Jim. I guess I'll go with Lebanon.

Jim typed his lead sentence: THE CEASE-FIRE IN LEBANON HAS BEEN BROKEN. God this is stupid, he was thinking, one cast leading with the fatal, the next with Lebanon.

Ed was leaning back, with his feet up on one of the battered filing cabinets, watching Wide World of Sports on the small television set intended for monitoring newscasts. He was supposed to be doing the police phone checks for Jim's major, but had decided it would be a waste of time. There had been nothing on the scanners, and Ed knew Jim would make the checks for him when Ed was preparing the major at six. Jim was afraid of missing a story and having it noticed.

Ed said, "So, I bet you're going to bury the fatal and lead with Lebanon, right?" Ed amused himself by trying to guess what Jim was thinking and commenting on it before Jim had said anything. He was good at it. Jim was predictable.

"I do think it's a [illegible] more important than an old lady nobody's heard of getting taken out in an absolutely mundane MVA."

Jim continued typing. He touch-typed, but badly, not like Ed. Ed was always two fingers, two thick index fingers smacking the keys; fast. Jim was thinking, MVA, cars . . . cars . . . . His speed picked up, mistakes multiplying. He knew they would show up in his read: misplaced consonants, repeated words -- hesitations, stutters. Finally the keys jammed. He swore.

Ed had his back to Jim. He was still watching the sports, but the furious sprint of typing came in, the keys jamming, and the angry curse. He didn't turn around. Presenting only his back and his bald spot, he guessed. "Hey, how much has your Fiat hurt you for this week?"

"Three hundred and fifty bucks. He wants three hundred and fifty bucks to fix the transmission. This is the last time I get the thing fixed. It breaks again, I throw it away."

"You said the same thing the last time. Also the time before."

Jim kept typing. Ed tried a different attack.

"You still going with Lebanon? You know, you could probably take your lead for the report from last Saturday, and read it instead, and people wouldn't know the difference. They've been agreeing to cease-fires then breaking them for months now... years. It's endless."

Jim ignored Ed's attempt to distract him. He continued typing.

"It'll stop making the news when people get bored with it," said Ed, "not when anything ends. Look at El Salvador."

Jim resisted debate and stayed with his story. Ed stayed with the stock car racing on Wide World of Sports. The deejay was in the room now, commenting on the races in a high pitched voice with a bad Scottish accent. It was his Jackie Stewart imitation. Jim ignored him. The wires were all running, bringing in the news that Ed and Jim rewrote all day for their newscasts. The phone was ringing, but Jim wasn't going to answer it. That was also supposed to be Ed's job while Jim was preparing his news. The voices of the police and ambulance drivers were coming through the scanners, bored voices discussing minor accidents, grocery store robberies, nothing newsworthy. None of these distracted Jim.

He typed: THE MORTAR FIRE EXCHANGE LASTED SEVERAL HOURS. He thought: three hundred and fifty bucks. That Fiat guy is taking me. Probably isn't even Italian. Grew up in Surrey and fakes the accent to take schmucks like me. It breaks again, I throw it away. Next time I buy domestic, or Japanese. Probably get stuck again. Again! The keys had jammed.

Ed was over at the teletypes now tearing off the copy coming in from the wire services and sorting it into piles . . . UPI, CP, BN. He grabbed a long piece of yellow UPI copy.

"Here's your lead. I can't believe this! The militias are actually laying down their arms. They're talking about some kind of joint statement."

"Let me see that."

Ed gave Jim the copy. Jim read: EDDIE MURPHY'S NEW MOVIE SHOULD MAKE HIM THE BIGGEST BOX OFFICE DRAW OF THE YEAR. It was the Hollywood feature that always moved on UPI before noon on Saturdays. Jim looked up and saw Ed smiling. Right. When had Ed cleared the wires before someone else's cast?

The buzzer went, signalling two minutes to noon. Jim took his copy and went into the booth. He checked over the first few stories, using a heavy edit pencil to change "transmission" to "mission" in the Lebanon story. There are probably more like that, he thought.

Music leaked in from both sides, FM's Dylan and AM's Manilow fighting it out up to news time. In a few seconds both would end, and Jim would hear the three electronic tones that were his cue, but he was still thinking about his car, or he was thinking about Lebanon, or he was thinking he should quit his job. He had thought these things before.

The Eight O'Clock Lead

Jeff Belkin steered with one hand and punched across the radio, checking out the stations. Right. WX, NW, and OR were leading with the killings, but none of them had a new angle. He plugged LV back. Bradley's voice sounded tired. Better him than you. That's right, out all night rewriting police releases. He unhooked the two-way mike from the dash.

"Belkin's on. Listen, I'm missing the meeting. I'll get my assignments later."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, I've got an angle on the killings. Should have something for the eight or the nine."

"The nine?"

"It'll be worth waiting for."

He leaned across the seat and turned the visor around on the passenger side, cutting out the glare from the rising sun as he drove over the Lions Gate Bridge. The radio crackled with interference from the hydro cables. He sucked sweet coffee from his plastic mug. Driving up Capilano Road, he tugged his Sony from his briefcase, flipped it on its back and popped out the batteries. Without looking away from the road he fished four new ones from the briefcase and slipped them in. He hit Rewind and cued up the tape. Seconds saved, he thought. Maybe make

the difference between the eight and the nine.

The story had broken at ten the night before. Jeff wasn't on call, but he wanted it. It could run for months through the courts: leads without sweat and some national material for the reporter with the assignment. He was sign-on all week, six AM starts, but he had paced his apartment till one, waiting for the right question to come to him.

It came as he lurched awake with the five, Bradley leading from the scene. What if he doesn't live there? Okay, that's right. A guy blows away his parents . . . he's twenty-one, he doesn't have to live there. He could just show up. Jeff got out of bed and called the station.

"It's Belkin. What's our killer's name?"

"Can't use it. No charge yet."

"I'm not going to use it. I need to know."

"Chris Ackles. Friend of yours?"

"Bye."

He began with the white pages, and found four C. Ackles. He checked each one in his reverse directory -- purchased when the station wouldn't update the newsroom copy -- residences by address, occupants and occupations for each residence. Moffat Street's Chris Ackles was a lawyer, with a family. Twelfth Avenue was a Carol. Granville was retired. Ash Street, North Van, was a "driver," and he had a roommate, Harvey, Brian.

That's your answer. Okay. Bradley won't like it, but time he learned.

The news cruiser's giant red and black "CJLV" on a white background attracted too much attention, so Jeff parked a block from the Ash address. He checked himself out in the rear view, decided not to use the tie and left it on the passenger seat. He ran through his postures as he walked along Ash: head forward, tight jaw -- Don't Waste My Time; shrug, slouch -- Just Doing My Job; head to the side, furrowed brow -- You Can Tell Me. Probably You Can Tell Me. Get him confessing.

Outside the three story brick building he looked down the street -- no rival cruisers -- and checked his watch. Seven-ten. It would be tight for the eight if he got everything: short clips to lead through noon, feature-length stuff for the talk show and something to use for a magazine sale. If you work it, the TV guys will have to interview you. Okay.

He found the second floor apartment and knocked. The door opened a few inches on a chain. A slice of face appeared: an eye, a nostril, half a mouth. A young man's voice, sleepy, said "Yes?"

"Brian Harvey?"

"Yes."

"Brian, I'm really sorry to disturb you. My name's Jeff Belkin. I'm a reporter with CJLV. I need . . . Brian, I need to talk to you about Chris." Jeff waited, head to one side. He looked at

Brian. It was darker inside than in the corridor. He focussed on the single eye, unable to tell whether Brian's gaze met his.

"Okay. Just a second."

The door closed, Jeff heard the chain being unhooked, then the door opened, and he went in.

"Coffee?"

"Yes, please."

Jeff watched Brian walk across the living room into the kitchenette. He wore a brown robe, almost the same color as the shag rug. It reached to his knees. He was thin through the chest and shoulders.

Jeff sat on the couch and listened: traffic noise from Lonsdale, and a rattling fridge, but tolerable. He pushed aside some of the junk mail on the glass-topped coffee table to make room for the Sony and the mike, and he set the counter to 000. He won't relax with a hand-held, he thought. The sound won't be bad unless he's a mumbler. He watched Brian standing in the kitchenette with his back turned, leaning against the counter, waiting for the kettle.

"Excuse me, Brian, could I use your washroom?"

"It's around the corner."

He got up, found the washroom and closed the door behind him.

The medicine chest's three metal shelves were crowded: shaving things, soap, deodorant, Band-Aids, an empty diet-pill

bottle. There was nothing he could use. When he heard Brian come back he flushed the toilet and returned to the living room.

Jeff took two packages of sugar from the bowl -- taken from the McDonalds down the street, he thought -- opened them and dumped them out in the mug on the table.

"When did you hear, Brian?"

He checked to see if the counter was turning over, checked to see if Brian was ready.

"I'm going to ask you some questions about Chris, okay? If you feel uncomfortable with a question, or just don't want to answer, say so, and that'll be fine."

Remember, You Can Tell Me. Okay.

Jeff bit his lip, put his hand to his forehead and exhaled.

"Tell me about him. How long have you known him, and what's he like?"

Brian stared at a point on the rug and began talking. Jeff took a pen and stenopad from his breast pocket, but he didn't write anything. He checked the time again -- seven-twenty -- and tried to be patient. He nodded his head, said "hmm," checked the counter and the Record level and drew lines across the pad, till he heard his entry.

"You said 'up until recently,' Brian. You'd noticed a change?"

You can't file from here, and the two-way isn't air quality from North Van. Make it the booth on Lonsdale. Okay.

The roll of quarters was heavy and comforting in his left pants' pocket. He began noting key words with their counter numbers: ANTISOCIAL -- 318, INSOMNIA -- 390.

Start on a lead. No charge yet, so watch the libel. Okay.

He wrote: THE YOUNG MAN HELD IN CONNECTION WITH THE SHOCKING KILLINGS IN KERRISDALE UNDERWENT A STARTLING PERSONALITY CHANGE IN THE WEEKS PRIOR TO THE SLAYINGS.

Brian was slowing down. Jeff sipped coffee.

You're still drowsy. They never give you enough sleep on sign-on.

"Brian, this is all disturbing . . . very disturbing." (That's hollow. Well he's hooked now anyway. Look at his face. He's glad you're here. He wants to talk.) "But, is there anything more, anything . . . that would explain, account for what happened?"

Seven-thirty. THE MAN HELD IN THE KERRISDALE KILLINGS WILL PROBABLY NEVER GO TO TRIAL.

No, no. That's a mistrial, if it gets that far. God he's really spilling, Jeff thought. Say something short, something for the eight. TELEVISION MESSAGES -- 418 BIBLE -- 430, VOICES -- 444.

That's it. Voices, that's great. That's about fifteen seconds. You can do a wrap-around under sixty for the eight.

THE SUSPECT IN THE KERRISDALE KILLINGS HEARD VOICES IN THE DAYS LEADING UP TO LAST NIGHT'S

TRAGEDY.

"Listen, Brian, I've bothered you enough." (God, he's crying.) "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry. Look. Do yourself a favor. You don't want to do this again, Brian. Take my advice and find somewhere else to spend the day. Tomorrow it'll be old news. Thanks for the coffee. I'm sorry, I really am."

Seven-forty-eight. Jeff jogged down the block to the cruiser. He fought through the morning traffic, one hand on the wheel, the other cueing up the "voices" clip. He grabbed the two-way mike.

"Belkin's on. Be ready to take me live off the top at eight. I'll call in a minute."

"Off the top?"

"Has World War Three started?"

He ran the car up the curb and parked on the sidewalk beside the booth. People waiting at the bus-stop stared.

Get your lead. Okay.

He jammed a quarter in the pay-phone, punched out the newsroom number and pulled out the pen and stenopad.

"It's Belkin. Put me on auto-cue and I'll go live."

Write: THE KERRISDALE SHOOTINGS SUSPECT HEARD VOICES THAT SPOKE TO NO ONE ELSE. Okay.

He scrawled a few words to take him through the ad-lib while the reader did the sponsor and the weather: ROOMMATE. PERSONALITY. TELEVISION. BIBLE. PSYCHIATRIST.

Slow down. You're always fast on the ad-libs. Okay.

The reader cued him: "LV's Jeff Belkin has a new development in the family slayings in Kerrisdale." Jeff read his lead and made it to the clip with three short sentences,released the Pause on the Sony, hit it on the clip out-cue, ad-libbed four more sentences (Stay slow Jeff), then his own out-cue, "Jeff Belkin, North Vancouver."

He waited till he heard the end of the newscast before coming on the two-way.

"Belkin's on. I'll be in for assignments in twenty minutes or so, depending on the causeway traffic."

"Have you got more of the same for the nine?"

"Yeah, I can do it through noon."

"I guess it'll stand till then. Can you come up with some kind of lead for the nine? Nothing so twilight zone?"

Jeff turned off the radio and turned up the volume on the scanner. At each silence the frequency changed, police to ambulance to police, police, fire, police; the red indicator light stopping, running ahead, stopping, going ahead one channel. The causeway traffic was heavy. He pulled out his stenopad and pen, propped the pad on the automatic gearshift, noted addresses and translated crime codes: lots of two-tens -- drunk drivers; four-oh-eights -- B and E's.

That's a suicide attempt. Useless. There, that's a man with a

gun. You might be able to use that.

Okay.

A voice on the two-way cut out the scanner.

"Jeff, the talk show wants you for some stuff they're doing on this."

"Yeah?"

"It's the pre-noon segment. They've got Bradley from the scene, a psychiatrist -- why it happens -- then you."

The scanner light had halted on a police channel, but there was no sound while Jeff held the mike button down.

That's great. That's just what you want.

"Okay."

A Distorted Picture of the Country

I spot Helen waving and smiling as I pass through the doors from Baggage Claim, but Cam has broken his promise. Helen hugs me, laughing as my backpack prevents her arms from going all the way around.

"Where's Cam?"

"He couldn't get off work after all."

"Well, thanks a lot for meeting me."

Cam is at their house when we arrive. He is wearing bleached cutoff jeans and the light blue cotton shirt I gave him before he left Vancouver. It shows off his dark skin. Cam's arms go over mine and around my upper back, squeezing me in a bear hug. With my head turned against his chest I look off to the side at Helen, who looks at me and shifts her weight from one leg to the other. I close my eyes till Cam lets go.

"So, you've followed us to Toronto," says Helen.

"I haven't got the job yet."

"You're set up in the study upstairs," says Cam. "There's a chunk of foam on the floor. It's pretty comfortable."

"That'll be fine. You look good. You too Helen."

"You look great," says Cam.

"We're a good looking trio," says Helen, and she chuckles. "Let's have a drink to celebrate your arrival."

We drink beer and order pizza, and I talk about reporting, the

latest problems between the woodworkers and the forest companies.

"What happens when you're gone?" says Helen. "Does some other reporter get all the glory?"

"Belkin's got the assignment . . ."

"Yuck," says Helen.

"But he probably won't do much with it. He's pretty good with cops, I admit, but he can't talk to union leaders."

"What if something big happens, if they go on strike, or settle things?"

"That's why Bradley's moving up," says Cam. "He can talk with anybody."

"How did you get this job offer?" says Helen. "I mean, you don't have any experience in television."

"I know an assignment editor at CBC in Vancouver."

"Oh," she says.

"And I haven't got a job offer. I've got an interview. They'll probably be talking to about fifty others."

"What are your chances?" says Cam.

"It would be great if you could move out here," says Helen.

"I don't know, but probably not good. They don't know me, and it's true I don't have any experience in television."

"So, let's hear about Dave," says Helen.

"And sometimes these things are a sham . . . they've already picked out the person they want. They just have to put on a

show."

"But there's a chance," says Cam.

"Sure."

"So, let's hear about Dave," says Helen.

"There's not a lot to tell really. It's not that serious."

We're sitting on the floor. I'm leaning back against the couch and Cam and Helen are cross-legged, facing me. Helen reaches over and shakes my knee and says, "Oh, come on." Cam looks at the wall over my head.

"He's a banker, like Cam." Cam looks at me and uncrosses his legs. "Really, it's not that serious."

"I put your things upstairs, and the red towel in the bathroom is for you," says Cam.

By the time we are ready for bed I have had enough beer to know that I will not sleep very well. Cam gives me another hug when I get up from the couch.

"I'm glad you're here," he says.

He goes upstairs and Helen says, "I'm glad you're here too, you know." She rubs her palms back and forth on her corduroy pants, the sign of nervousness unchanged since our grade five spelling bees. It's as though they left only a few days ago.

"I guess I'm a bit tense," she says.

"I guess I am too. We'll get over it."

"I think about you a lot, you know."

"I should have written you more often."

She stops rubbing her hands for a moment. "So, it's not serious with Dave?"

"No, not really."

"Well, that's too bad, I guess."

The morning paper has nothing on the IWA, not even a report that talks are continuing. If something has broken it isn't news in Toronto. We spend the morning strolling along a boardwalk on Lake Ontario, people-watching, comparing this scene unfavorably with the sea-wall. "I miss the mountains," says Helen. "It feels like there's nothing to hold things in, like my soul can spill out in any direction and disappear."

"Helen's become a poet since moving to Toronto," says Cam. Helen boots a pebble in her path, then Cam says, "I miss the mountains too."

On our way back we stop for ice cream at an Italian place with tables on the sidewalk. While the waiter puts down the glass dishes, two men sit at the table beside us. Their conversation, audible when they approached, intrudes now that they are near. They are both tanned, one with short dark hair, the other blond of the same length. There is nothing obvious about them, but they pull out their chairs and sit and smile, and the quality of the attention they pay each other is distinct. They are lovers. Helen concentrates on her ice cream, looking down and smiling. Cam gets his stern look -- his dark eyebrows come together -- and he eats quickly. It is clear. Because I am here, they are embarrassed

by this.

We lie around in the evening, watching TV. Helen suggests a game of hearts and we play for a couple of hours before going to bed.

I have trouble getting to sleep. I am not really sleepy, still on west coast time. The sheets are damp. I lie on my stomach, with my arms out and bent, the edges of the foam meeting my elbows and my hands holding the sides. I can squeeze the foam and touch my fingers to my thumb.

After breakfast Cam and Helen borrow a bicycle from a neighbor, so I can join them on their matching yellow Norcos for a ride to High Park, where we walk, where Helen sits and reads while Cam and I throw the frisbee. Cam throws forehand, a technique I've never been able to master. He flips it casually, and it hums. Once more he tries to teach me, with the same comical results. I need a couple of steps in my backhand windup to cover the distance. After a while Helen joins us, and we throw it to Cam in a relay. I throw it most of the way to Helen, and she manages a wobbly forehand imitation of Cam, who sails it back to me.

If something big does break, it probably won't be today. Harris hasn't given any signs, hasn't done his angry union boss act. He could do that: call a news conference to yell a bit, let the members know he's on the job. It would be tough for Belkin to botch it, unless he tries to analyze. He'll probably say a strike is

imminent and make us all look like fools.

We take showers when we get back, then head off by streetcar to visit their new friends, a woman Helen met at the university, and her husband. Someone's pager goes off on the streetcar and my hand goes to my hip. Helen sees this and laughs. "That radio station really has you trained," she says, and she gives my hip a bump.

We tell Andrea and Julian the story of Cam, Helen and Bradley, with recent history severely edited. Andrea is lively and outgoing. "Lots of fun," Helen said on the streetcar.

"So," says Andrea, "be honest. Weren't you a bit jealous when she fell for Cam right after you introduced them? I bet you had a secret crush on Helen all those years."

"Well, as a matter of fact . . ."

"Oh, he did, but his pride wouldn't let him admit it," says Helen. She blushes and turns her attention to her food.

"I believe I'll have some more wine," says Cam.

I look at Julian, who is looking at Helen's hands. She grips her knife and fork and cuts a piece of chicken.

We go to a play after dinner, a comedy, and we laugh hard in the air-conditioned theater, and laugh some more afterward, talking about how funny it was. Cam remembers all the good bits of dialogue, and his timing is as good as the actors'.

"Don't worry about getting up with me," says Cam when we're home. "I leave at seven-thirty. Bankers' hours aren't so

great." He goes upstairs. There's nothing on CTV on the wood talks, which probably means that Belkin didn't file anything; the networks would have matched it by now. I hear Cam in the morning in the kitchen, breathing. He is gasping. I can picture him in his shorts, a towel on the tiled floor, doing his sit-ups. I can see a bit of sweat on his chest and forehead. He pauses, then more gasps at shorter intervals. I count them. Thirty push-ups. I hear him come back up, footsteps light on the stairs. He showers, goes down, eats breakfast, washes his dishes and leaves.

Helen takes me to Kensington Market, where we shop for vegetables and cool off with strong ginger beer at a Caribbean cafe. Some of the tension does begin to ease. She talks about Toronto, and I give in and tell her about meeting Dave at Robson Square, the worrying early steps in the romance.

"You know," she says, "at one time, I mean way back in high school, I did wonder if you were interested in me. I was disappointed."

"Oh, I think you're very interesting."

"I'm serious. I told myself I was glad you told me, I was glad you chose me to confide in, but I was disappointed."

"I'm sorry I disappointed you."

"Bradley, are you still angry at me and Cam?" Helen is looking down at her glass and clinking her ring against it.

"No," I say.

She looks up. "Things haven't been perfect with us you

know." Now she has stopped tapping the glass and holds it at the base with both hands. "We're seeing a counsellor." The waiter comes by and takes her prop away.

"Bradley, do you think, do you know whether . . . when you and Cam . . . " She rubs her palms on her thighs, stops, folds her hands in front of her.

"You know what he told me, in front of the counsellor? He said I placed too much importance on sex. I was shocked . . . and he couldn't tell me alone . . he waited till we saw the counsellor. It's not like we make love all the time either, and so, I wanted to ask you . . . Cam says he's not interested in men . . . that he never really was. Bradley, I know this is unfair." The waiter comes by again and I order another ginger beer.

"He's not." She looks at me. "He's not interested in men."

"That doesn't make much sense coming from you."

"I'm not going into all the details, Helen."

"Maybe it was just you he wasn't interested in." She is looking down at the table again.

"If that's what you think, what's the point in asking me about his preferences?"

"He never tells me what he's thinking, or what he's feeling."

"He never tells anyone. It doesn't mean he doesn't have feelings." She takes a sip of my ginger beer. "It was his first time with a man, and he didn't like it much. Lots of men have one homosexuai experience."

"Yeah, at fourteen, not twenty-six."

"So, maybe he's just not that interested in you, Helen."

"Bradley."

"I'm not serious."

"If he hated it so much, how come it kept on?"

"I didn't say he hated it. Why do you think it kept on? You think he didn't feel anything for me . . . we were either screwing all the time or there was no reason?"

"No." She sips my drink again. "Bradley, I didn't seduce him, you know. I mean it's not like . . . "

"I know. You're not the seductive type."

"Thanks. You are still angry, aren't you?" I take back my ginger beer and sip at it. "I really miss you, you know? I miss talking to you, the way we used to."

"Well, I miss you too."

"And Cam."

"Yes. I miss Cam."

"You look the part," I say to Cam when he finds our table in the Chinese restaurant. He is wearing a dark blue suit, carrying a briefcase.

"I don't feel the part."

"Cam needs a course in method acting if he's going to be a big banking success," says Helen.

We decide to see a movie. It gives us more to talk about. We

discuss what movie to see, see the movie, discuss what the movie was like. Cam and Helen hold hands when we walk to the subway afterward. It's hot to be holding hands. There should be something from Vancouver by now.

I go through the paper when we get back. There's still nothing, in the news or business section, nothing at all from B.C. It's not like Harris to be silent this long; but it's not that long, only three days.

We sleep in, and pass the morning quietly, reading and listening to the radio. In the afternoon Helen opens the entertainment paper she has picked up at the grocery store.

"There's a good band at the El Mocambo tonight, and the cover will be low this early in the week. Want to go dancing?"

Cam needs some convincing. "Oh, come on," says Helen. "You've got the rest of the week off -- let's enjoy it. You know you like to get out there on the dance floor and show off that bod." She punches him hard in the stomach. Cam grins. "Sit-ups," says Helen.

"I know."

The El Mocambo is crowded enough to make it easy to get up and dance, and the band is loud enough to make it difficult to talk. So, after we've each had a drink, and we've shouted at each other for a few minutes, we dance. Cam is wearing a tight T-shirt. He does like to show off his body. He's a good dancer too, energetic and funny, running through the jerk, the swim, the

mashed potato when the band does a rave-up sixties bit. We all twist together. After a few songs the band begins a slow number.

"I need another drink," I say. "I'll sit this one out."

From our table I can see Cam and Helen intermittently between the other dancers, holding each other, shuffling to the music. I'll have to watch the local news the next few nights. I can't go to the interview Friday without having seen the show. If there's something big from B.C., it should make the six o'clock here.

When the first set ends, and we are sitting down, the canned music is still too loud to permit conversation. We dance again when the band resumes, and soon they play another slow song. Before I say anything, Cam says "My turn," and goes back to the table.

I put my right hand on Helen's waist, take her hand in my extended left, and for a moment we dance at a comfortable distance, but she lets my hand go, puts her arms around my neck, and we're shuffling back and forth in a sweaty clinch like the other pairs. When we turn, I can see Cam at the table, smiling as he orders another drink from the waitress.

Helen is wearing heels, making her as tall as me. Her cheek touches mine, and as we move her breasts shift against my chest. I am relieved when the song ends, but Helen is still holding on. I am able to turn my head slightly before her lips can touch mine squarely, our teeth clicking together with the motion. I step

away. She turns and hurries back to the table, and I follow. A smear of lipstick feels sticky by the corner of my mouth.

Cam seems to enjoy it when Helen flirts aggressively with him, mussing his hair, leaning over to "tell him a secret" and kissing him in the ear. I excuse myself and go to the men's room. I see in the mirror over the sink that there is no lipstick on my face. When I return Cam and Helen are dancing. After the end of the second set Cam suggests we leave.

With my head turned sideways and my ear pressed into the foam I hear again Cam's heavy breathing as he does his morning calisthenics in the kitchen. He comes up the stairs, I hear Helen get up, and they go into the bathroom together. I hear the shower and Helen's giggles.

"I'm stiff from all that dancing. How about you Bradley?" Helen says at breakfast.

"Brad," says Cam, "I hope you don't mind, but Helen and I are going to leave you on your own for a while this evening. We . . ."

"I already told him about it," says Helen. She turns to me. "We have an appointment with our counsellor."

Cam and Helen leave at six. The news is dull. There is a story from St. John's and even one from Yellowknife at the end of a national package, but nothing from Vancouver. I have a craving for ice tea -- real, not a mix. I brew the tea strong, then

weaken it and cool it by adding ice. It is still too warm. I leave the pot in the sink with cold water running over it, and listen to Helen's records. An entire industry is on the brink of shutting down, millions of dollars at stake, really the province's entire economy, and there's nothing.

When Cam and Helen return we drink the tepid tea with ice and lemon and play cards. Helen looks sly and pleased with herself; she and Cam make meaningful eye contact and play badly.

At breakfast Helen says that she has to go to her statistics class in the evening.

"Boys' night out," says Cam.

"I've got to get some studying done too," says Helen,"so I thought I'd head to the university this afternoon and eat supper at the caf."

"Okay," says Cam.

The morning drags. Cam gets out the vacuum cleaner, and the noise makes it easier not to talk. Helen leaves right after lunch.

"What would you like to do?" says Cam.

"Know any good gay bars."

"That's not funny."

We play raquetball at his "club," which turns out to be the YMCA. Like the first time we played at the Burrard Street Y, Cam wears white socks rolled down on his ankles, and I watch the light "V" of brown hair on the back of his thighs as he steps into

his first serve and drives it into my backhand corner. I fish for the ball too late as it comes low off the side wall and rolls out.

The entire match is like that first one, and the ones that followed. I stay with Cam through the middle of each game, forcing myself to concentrate. He tries for kill shots at every chance, giving me points when he misses. He plays with a minimum of discipline at the end of each game, and wins, just by hitting the ball too hard.

By the third game we're both tired. The walls give off heat, and Cam isn't as fit as he looks. I can smell his sweat. When he untucks his shirt and brings it to his face to wipe sweat away from his eyes, I can see his stomach muscles as he exhales.

"Ready," he says, and with the grip loose and wet in my palm, I hit a lob serve.

I make the game last as long as I can, stretching to extend each rally. Clumsier with fatigue, we collide several times. Finally he steps up to take a badly timed drop shot and smacks it past me for game.

"Good shot. Good game." We're gasping, leaning over with our hands on our knees. I put my arm over his shoulder, his goes over my lower back. His arm is warm, his shirt is damp and his shoulders are warm. "Cam," I say. Cam removes his arm to pick up his racket.

"Let's get going," he says. He used to insist on starting a fourth game if we had a few minutes court time left.

We go to a pub. "So how does it feel," I say when we are sitting with our beers in front of us, "one year later?"

"It hasn't been easy."

"So I've gathered."

"I hate my job." He pauses and looks at me, then at his beer. They both have a problem with looking at me. "They gave me the impression I'd be dealing with people, but I'm not. It's analysis and more analysis." I wait till he is looking at me again. "Maybe you should have checked it out first, instead of taking it and moving here so suddenly."

"I come home too tired to want to go out . . . the only friends we've made have been through Helen."

"And such friends."

"It's been hard on her. She has more people to miss in Vancouver, and I haven't been very good company sometimes."

It occurs to me, looking at Cam's hand on his glass, that it's perfect. It is a banker's hand.

"Do you get your nails manicured?"

"What?"

It has not come out the way I intended. The inflection is not mine. "Sorry, I was only joking."

"You're not listening, are you? You don't care about any of this."

"Sure I do. You hate your job. Helen misses more people in Vancouver than you do. Me, for instance."

"That's right. That's exactly what I mean." Cam takes a long swallow and finishes his beer. "Let's get something to eat."

We have hamburgers at a diner near the pub. Cam is still angry and he gives short answers to my questions about his job. We eat for a while without saying anything.

"It's not easy for me either, is it?" I say.

Now Cam's avoidance of eye contact is pointed. He reaches for the mustard, drinks some water, and speaks without looking up. "You made a choice."

"It's not a choice, it's me. You had the choice. And anyway, that's not what I'm talking about. It's not easy losing you, you and Helen."

"Look, you never had me to lose, okay? You make it sound like we were in love."

Cam says this while he's putting dressing on his salad. I say nothing, and finally he looks at me and says, "Oh, God."

The national package at the end of the news is shorter this evening than yesterday's, and there is still nothing from British Columbia. If Harris needs something to get him going, someone should tell him how unimportant he is in Toronto. When Helen comes home Cam and I are still watching TV.

"I hope you haven't been here all day."

"No," says Cam. "We played raquetball and ate downtown." He walks into the kitchen. "Want a beer?" he calls.

"Sure."

"Tomorrow's the big day," says Helen. "Nervous?"

"No."

Cam comes back with three beers, and we sit on the floor.

"What time does your plane leave again?" he says.

"Three."

"I guess we won't have time to do anything after your interview."

"I don't know how long it will go, but probably not."

"Didn't you used to say, you know, that you never wanted to work in television?" says Helen.

"Yeah, I'm still not sure I do."

"So why come all the way out for the interview?" she says.

"When do you two think you'll be back in Vancouver again?"

"Christmas, if we can afford it," says Cam.

"What is it you don't like about TV?" says Helen.

"He doesn't like the idea of being a star," says Cam.

"Your job isn't going well, Helen misses Vancouver . . . how long are you going to stay?"

Helen says, "I'm going to finish my degree here, so that's another couple of years at least."

"Haven't we got some pretzels to go with this?" says Cam, and he goes to the kitchen.

"You could transfer to U.B.C."

"You're going to get fat," Helen calls to Cam. She is tearing the label off her beer.

"I couldn't get a job like mine in Vancouver," says Cam from

the kitchen.

"You hate your job."

"You're applying for a job you know you'll hate."

"You should probably leave here around ten to get to the interview in plenty of time," says Helen. "What are you going to wear?"

"I've got a banker's suit."

I lie on top of the sheets this night, hoping for a breeze from the open window. I hear murmurs from Cam and Helen's room, then unsuccessfully stifled giggles and moans. Their bed, at least, does not creak. It's possible there has simply been nothing to report on in the wood talks. Harris must call a news conference soon, or charge out of a meeting yelling and swearing. The trick is to know what it means. When a settlement is close, he gets angry so the members don't think he's given in too easily. When they're stuck, he gets angry because they're stuck. When things are just going along, he gets angry so the members know he's working. The loggers demand an angry leader. I grip the mattress. Now no sounds come from Cam and Helen's room. The idea at a CBC board is to praise the show at the same time as you come up with suggestions and new ideas, then praise the show some more.

It's too hot to be wearing a suit, even in an air-conditioned building. When I'm called in I take off my jacket; it gives me

something to do with my hands as I walk to the one empty chair. I shake hands with them, a woman and two men. We sit at a square table, each occupying a side. They are more casually dressed than I am.

The woman, the producer, is in charge of the interview. We begin by joking about why anyone would want to leave Vancouver, then she puts on her glasses and looks at a file.

"It's an impressive application," she says, "but for your lack of experience in television. How do you think you'd handle the transition?"

Cam and Helen will not come back to Vancouver, I know. Cam couldn't get a job like his outside of Toronto. When he advances he'll be doing more of what he likes.

"Well, I don't think it would cause much difficulty. Television is really just radio with pictures."

The producer looks at the man on her right and says, "Bob?"

"Tell us what you think of the show," says Bob. If I moved to Toronto, I'd know no one. Just Cam and Helen.

"Well, the first thing one notices is the technical polish. The presentation, the production values, are very good." The man on her left takes notes; she and Bob just listen.

"From what I've seen, local issues get covered thoroughly, and you don't just follow the papers."

Harris angers whenever he wants. He simply works himself up, yells, swears, and soon he turns red, and he's angry. It's

impressive.

"I think, however, there's room for more coverage of the regions. For instance, I believe you've had nothing in the last few days on the forest talks in B.C."

"We are a Toronto show," she says.

"You can't expect us to send a reporter to Vancouver," says Bob.

"No, of course not, but I think it's an indication of an overall bias in the Toronto media. It's a distortion . . . a distorted picture of the country."

"I can see your point," says Bob. "What would you suggest we do, considering that nothing has been filed from Vancouver all week?"

"Nothing has been filed?"

"No."

We review my application; they ask questions to which they already have the answers. The man on the left stops taking notes. When a polite amount of time has passed, the interview ends.

"How did it go?" says Helen when I come through the door.

"They said they'd be in touch with me."

Cam is lying on the couch, Helen on the floor. "Yeah, but how did it go?" says Cam.

"It'd be great if you could move out here," says Helen.

"I won't be moving out here."

"What happened?" says Helen. Cam sits up.

"I told them TV was like radio with pictures, which to them is like . . . well they think it's completely different."

"That's it? That's not so bad," she says.

"I guess I'd better get ready to go."

"Why did you say it if you knew they wouldn't like it?" says Cam to my back as I'm walking up the stairs.

"I don't know."

Cam comes part way up while I'm in the study changing. I don't have time to shower.

"Why did you come if you don't want the job?"

"I didn't say I don't want the job."

"You're gutless, you know that?" I hear Cam going back down. I stuff clothes in my backpack. There must be a break soon. Harris will call a news conference right after I get back. He'll begin calmly, sitting behind a long table, but in minutes he'll be furious. He'll stand, wave his arms. The hot television lights will show the sweat stains on his blue shirt. His face will turn red. I hear Helen and Cam talking in lowered voices. Sweat drips into my eyes.

"It was wonderful to see you," says Helen when we're standing at the door. Sweat pools on my back, trapped by the pack.

"It was," says Cam.

"I don't think I'm more gutless than anyone else."

"You're not," says Helen.

"I'm just irritated in this heat," recites Cam.

It will be at the Hotel Vancouver, where the talks are being held. I'll have my story written and the quote picked out before it's over.

"You don't mind us not going to the airport with you?" says Helen. Cam looks at his watch.

"Of course not . . . in this heat."

"We'll see you at Christmas," says Cam.

I'll walk up to the table and grab my Sony, beat NW and WX by an hour. "If you need somewhere to stay, I've got lots of room in my new place."

"That would be great," says Helen.

They've been without a contract for months now. They'll settle this one, and Harris will start yelling about the next.

"Bye," says Helen.

"Bye," says Cam.

"Bye."

The Secret Speech of Billy Wallace

Wallace finished giving the day's assignments to Solecki, the early reporter, and hung up the phone. He had already gone through the overnight news run, and he began putting together his first cast, the seven. The consultant Carter had brought up from L.A. was starting that morning, so Wallace wanted something new. He had known for a couple of weeks that a programming review would be done in response to the terrible numbers in the last ratings book, and some people would probably be let go, but he hadn't minded -- until the previous afternoon. Leaving the building at the end of his shift he had passed Carter's office and seen the consultant's back as he sat talking to Carter. Carter had looked up and seen Wallace and then looked back too quickly at the man sitting across from him.

Some local material survived from overnight, and he spread the dupes out on his desk. KEARNS QUITS would be good to lead through the eight, then he could drop it down before giving it a last shot at noon. ACKLES BEGINS and HARRIS REJECTS would do it for local stories. The night beat had produced nothing, so all the copy came from the papers. Wallace grasped at this to help him work up to the plateau of rage on which his days had come to rest. But now, as he scanned the national stories, he imagined conspiracy in the angle of the consultant's back as he leaned toward Carter, and this vision weakened him and frustrated his

attempt to call up anger.

He looked through the fresh wire copy for a kicker, but found nothing catchy. He tore off a CP story, just a glorified "This Day in History," but at least new: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO TODAY NIKITA KHRUSCHEV BEGAN HIS FAMOUS "SECRET SPEECH," DENOUNCING THE HORRORS OF STALINISM.

Wallace stopped reading after the first sentence, and looked at his right hand holding the copy, and rubbed the dry paper under his large thumb.

Billy Wallace's father had explained that the bricks needed to soak in the water for at least five minutes, otherwise they would draw the moisture out of the mortar, which wouldn't set properly. They were making a new fireplace to surprise Billy's mother when she returned at the end of the week from her summer trip to Winnipeg. Together they had scraped the old mortar off the bricks they had picked up at a construction site. Now it was Billy's job to keep putting more bricks into the pail as his father took them out, slapped the mortar on and put them in place, scraping off the excess mortar with the trowel. The wet grinding sound sent shivers up Billy's spine, and he curled his toes. His fingers were satisfyingly raw and red from the cold water and the rough bricks. Billy's father hollered along with the radio, which was turned up so they could hear it from the kitchen.

If your baby leaves you,
and you've got a tale to tell,
Just take a walk down lonely street,
to Heartbreak Hotel.

Billy usually got home from camp at about the same time his father arrived from the plant, and they ate corn on the cob, bacon and tomato sandwiches and potato salad almost every evening, then started work, and it took most of the week, including finding the bricks, cleaning them, and tearing out the old fireplace, to complete the job. They finished on Thursday afternoon, Billy's father standing on the footstool, reaching up and putting the bricks in place on the final row, snug against the ceiling.

"Are you cold?" said Billy's father.

"No." It was a hot day. Billy looked at his father, waiting for the explanation he knew would come.

"I'm positively freezing. It feels like the middle of winter." Billy's father put his hands to his mouth to blow on them. "I can't believe you're not cold too. You must be cold."

Billy caught on. He folded his arms across his chest and shivered, and laughed while he said, "It is cold. I'm positively freezing."

"Well, I guess we better have a fire then. Come on."

They went to the basement and gathered the wood scraps from around the circular saw, then returned and built the fire. Billy, cooled by his faith in his father, held his hands out to warm them.

On Friday Billy ran all the way home from the bus stop and up the back porch steps into his mother's arms.

"How do you like the fireplace? Isn't it great?"

"It's wonderful, dear. Billy, why don't you play outside till supper's ready. Daddy's reading his magazine."

Billy unlocked his hands from around his mother's waist, and she stepped back into the kitchen. He stood in the doorway a moment, one foot inside on the linoleum and the other on the wood of the porch. Across the room through the entrance to the den he saw the back of the easy chair, the reading light, and the back of his father's head.

Because of the fact that not all as yet realize fully the practical consequences resulting from the cult of the individual, the great harm caused by the violation of the principle of collective direction of the party and because of the accumulation of immense and limitless power in the hands of one person, the Central Committee of the party considers it absolutely necessary to make the material pertaining to this matter available to the twentieth congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union.

Wallace usually wrote his stories in the order he would read them, but he left the local material for the moment, noting that the dupes weren't much better than the wire copy, and began typing a national story.

"Have you made the police checks yet?" he said to Smith.

"Coming up."

When he finished the story he tugged the yellow copy from the typewriter, slipped out the carbons, held the paper down with his left palm and with a quick rip trimmed off the extra paper against the metal desk edge. Sometimes these actions lent their precision and certainty to Wallace's sense of himself and his world, but this morning they gave him nothing. Wallace's wife, Peggy, had left him three months ago, and he found himself backdating his unease to that time, but he rejected this connection. He told himself he just needed more sleep. He glanced at Smith, who was chatting with the watch officer of the first R.C.M.P. detachment he called. Smith took everything so casually, like the happy-talk way he read the news, but Wallace hadn't caught him on anything yet. Smith hadn't missed a thing.

He started work on the lead, typing the first two sentences, then reading them over, moving his lips to silently enunciate each word, checking for potential trouble spots: THE MAYOR OF FRESH COVE HAS RESIGNED. BARRY KEARNS TOLD REPORTERS LAST NIGHT THAT MONTHS AFTER THE MUD SLIDE THAT TOOK THE LIVES OF TWO CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY, HE STILL FEELS RESPONSIBLE.

Billy's mother had returned from Winnipeg a few days before her son's tenth birthday. Billy didn't know anyone he wanted to invite, but they still had a party in the back yard with the family

and two of Billy's cousins.

After dinner Billy stopped in the hall on the way to the kitchen and heard his parents whispering as they did when they disagreed.

"I'm waiting for the meeting. I'm waiting to hear what Tim Buck says," said Billy's father, "then, if it's true . . . if it's true . . ."

"Then what? Then the world will come to an end?"

Billy retreated, regretting the carefully planned invitation to his dad to join him at the schoolyard and try out his new baseball bat. He lifted his feet to stop his new running shoes from squeaking on the hall linoleum, and he held the knob when he shut the front door, so it would close less noisily, and walked down Balaclava Street to the school.

When Billy returned his mother was sitting at the kitchen table, reading, and she looked up and said she had just made some lemonade, then turned back to the magazine. Billy could hear his father at work in the basement. He helped himself to the lemonade, then went downstairs to say good night.

The saw was running, but Billy's father was kneeling on the cement floor, using a claw hammer to pull long nails out of the two-by-sixes in a half-constructed bench. Billy watched, taking in the smell of cut cedar. His father made no sign he had noticed him, and continued wrenching out the nails. One withdrew with a screech Billy heard over the noise of the saw.

"What are you doing with the bench, Dad?"

His father looked up. He wore his safety goggles, which were fogged up, so Billy couldn't see his eyes clearly.

"I'm taking it apart."

"Why?"

"We'll want to use the wood in the fireplace."

Billy waited for his father to explain why he was giving up this project, but he said nothing.

"Can I help?"

"Isn't it your bedtime?"

Billy didn't know what to say. His father should have said, "Well, it's your bedtime, but I could use a hand pulling out a few of these stubborn nails." Or he could have stopped and taken off his goggles and wiped sweat from around his eyes and said, "Well, I tell you what we're going to do, but we're going to do it tomorrow." Instead he stood up, passed one of the boards through the saw three times and threw the short pieces into the corner.

"Well, good night," said Billy.

"Good night."

Billy stopped at the stairs and turned around. "See you in the morning," he said. His father didn't answer him.

Billy looked into the kitchen on the way upstairs to his bedroom. His mother was still reading.

His persecution mania reached unbelievable dimensions. Many workers were becoming enemies before his very eyes. After the war Stalin separated himself from the collective even more.

Everything was decided by him alone without any consideration for anyone or anything.

Wallace kept glancing at the dupes, but the faults he found failed to drive his anger; his rewrites would not become reprisals against the overnight deskers. He drained the last of his coffee, first swirling the liquid around in the bottom of the cup to catch any grounds, then finished the story: TOWN COUNCILLOR SUSAN SHERMAN SAYS SHE UNDERSTANDS THE MAYOR'S FEELINGS, BUT HE'S LEAVING THE TOWN LEADERLESS AT ITS WORST MOMENT.

He went into the coffee room for a refill. A pot had just been made and when he removed it a drop fell and sizzled on the burner. The can of condensed milk was still half full, but he couldn't stand the look of the congealed milk around the rim, so he opened a new one.

"Get anything?" he said to Smith when he returned. Smith was dialing another number on the list.

"Nothing yet . . . MVAs, nothing serious."

"We need something new," said Wallace. He turned up the volume on the scanner. "Make sure you don't miss anything from the next voice feed."

Wallace looked at the rest of the stories. Normally nothing separated his reading them and the process of ordering according to locality, importance and hour of origin. His lineups were the

standard. When he dropped a story from the run, or promoted one to the lead, the competition followed an hour later. He had his lead, but there didn't seem to be any natural second story. He hesitated, then looked for something to fill this dangerous empty moment. He sipped his coffee, but he didn't need a refill. He looked to his left, and his eyes met Smith's.

"I guess KEARNS QUITS will lead through the eight," said Smith.

"Yeah."

"You're going from there to ACKLES BEGINS?"

"That's right."

"It's not an easy lineup."

"Hmm."

Smith dialed another number. Wallace looked at ACKLES BEGINS. Smith was right. All the stories had originated at the same time, and none offered an easy transition. ACKLES BEGINS was simply the most important after the lead. Then the rest fell into order. Why hadn't he seen it? He really needed to get more sleep. He wrote: THE MURDER TRIAL OF CHRIS ACKLES BEGINS IN B-C SUPREME COURT THIS MORNING. ACKLES IS CHARGED WITH KILLING HIS PARENTS IN A BLOODY SHOOTING IN KERRISDALE LAST SUMMER.

With an Exacto knife Bill cut the heavy cardboard into pieces to fit the bricks, then glued them in place so the bricks wouldn't

scratch the two cedar boards that he had hand-sanded and varnished. Now that his bookcase was done all he had to do was make a bed, and everything in the converted attic room would be his work. He had spent one weekend painting over the off-white walls with a lime green and had lugged his small chest of drawers down to the basement, replacing it with four Coke crates stacked on top of each other. He flopped onto his bed, picked up Riders of the Purple Sage and opened it to the bookmark -- he couldn't stand it when people turned corners down -- and reached over to the top of the crates to turn on his transistor radio. He read a page, then he recognized his father's footsteps on the stairs and his knock on the door.

"Come in."

"Hi."

"Hi."

"You finished your bookcase."

"Yup."

Bill's father stood with his hands in his pockets. He looked at the radio, and Bill turned it off.

"Well, I'm off in about an hour."

"Right."

"So, what's your next construction project? Am I going to recognize this place when I get back?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe when you get back you could give me a hand with the bed?"

"You don't need any help. You're doing fine. Um, I've got some time before I have to be at the station. I thought perhaps we could take a walk and do some talking."

"Sure."

Bill wasn't aware of disappointment at his father's reply. Over the past few years his periodic attempts to get his father building again had become automatic, and he expected failure. They left the house together and walked up Balaclava toward the park. Bill saw that he could make his strides as long as his father's, even though he was still five inches shorter.

"I'm not really looking forward to this trip."

"I don't really understand why you're going. I thought we didn't believe in elections."

"I don't. You're free to believe what you want."

Bill let his stride shorten. He counted and found that he took four steps to every three of his father's.

"So why are you going?"

"Sammy -- you remember Sammy -- he visited a couple of summers ago -- he thinks he has a chance to win. They need every body they can get."

"But it's an election . . ."

"I know. Sometimes you have to make strategic compromises. And your mother thinks it will be good for me to try to get involved." Mr. Wallace held out his right hand in front of him, as if to try to punctuate his comment in some helpful way,

but the gesture failed and he let his arm flop to his side. Bill tried to think of something to say but could not.

They walked diagonally across the park to the wading pool and drank from the fountain, then turned back. Bill thought about offering to join his father, but that was stupid. It was too late to arrange, and he was too young to help. When they passed Thirty-fifth Avenue he saw some guys he knew playing yards. A long punt went over someone's head and the football bounced off a car windshield.

Bill's mother was standing at the front door when they got back.

"You're going to miss the train," she said. His father grabbed his bag by the door. His mother looked at Bill, then her husband, then back at Bill.

"Well, bye Dad," said Bill. His father put a hand on his shoulder, then Bill went inside and up to his room. He picked up his book and flipped the pages with his thumb. A minute later he heard the front door close. He turned on the radio. The news was on. Bill lay on his bed with his arms folded behind his head, and he tried to comment the way his parents used to when they listened to the radio while eating dinner. "Exactly what the bankers want," he said. "When America says jump . . . And they pretend there's a real difference." But his comments did not work. He didn't understand the secrets the news was hiding.

His parents didn't listen to the news very much anymore, and

when they spoke with a neighbor, they no longer exchanged knowing glances. Bill had understood those looks meant his mother and father knew better, and at school he imitated his parents, keeping himself apart and his family's superiority a secret. He said nothing when his classmates talked about the TV shows they watched. He didn't know what he should say, but he knew those shows hid something, and his parents understood what it was. Now his feeling of privileged membership was gone, but it was too late to learn how to join in the discussions of television.

Bill listened to the entire newscast, but he stopped commenting when the announcer began reading local stories.

"Three people were killed in an accident early this morning on the Squamish Highway. Police say a car left the road at high speed when the driver lost control. The vehicle crashed through the guard rail and plummeted forty feet. The three people in the car were killed instantly. No names have been released."

THE CASE BEGINS FOLLOWING A PSYCHIATRIC EXAMINATION THAT FOUND ACKLES WAS FIT TO STAND TRIAL, wrote Wallace, and he tugged the paper out of the typewriter.

He sorted through his lineup again. The tones signalling BN voice sounded. "No stories this transmission." Wallace looked at Smith, who was punching another number.

"Call Surrey and see if they've ID'd yesterday's fatal."

"I've called. They haven't."

"Oh. Okay."

"It would be nice to get something new for the morning run, what with Carter's L.A. man listening in, eh?"

Wallace looked at Smith to deny he had been thinking of this. Smith resumed his calls.

Wallace glanced at the kicker and put a heavy pencil line through "denouncing" in the first line, replacing it with "on": TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO TODAY NIKITA KHRUSCHEV BEGAN HIS FAMOUS "SECRET SPEECH" ON THE HORRORS OF STALINISM.

By the second week on the job Bill's wrists and elbows burned as he tugged his boards off the green-chain, battling to get his sizes and grades cleared before they went by. When he missed them the puller in the next spot would take them off himself and fling them along the floor at Bill, shouting "Pull your fucking lumber." Bill told himself he could stand anything for a summer, and anyway none of the others were as big as he was, and in a week or so he would be pulling better than anyone on the chain. The money was worth it -- seven-fifty an hour. Couldn't beat the IWA. By the fall he would be at U.B.C. starting his engineering degree, and these guys would still be stuck in Tahsis. After work he went back to his room in the trailers, took some aspirin and lay

on his bed waiting for the cook-house to open, trying to will his arms to stop throbbing.

There was nowhere to go after dinner. The pub would be packed with men from the two mills; the cafe would be empty. He walked back down the road to the maze of trailers and made his way to his room. The small square window looked directly over Tahsis Inlet. Mountains on both sides walled in the water, and log booms crowded the end of the inlet between the mills. He gazed out the window for half an hour, till it grew dark, when he could bring in CJLV from Vancouver on his transistor radio. The signal was not strong, and sometimes it disappeared entirely, but he could get the news on time instead of waiting to pay triple for a two-day-old Sun.

By Friday his wrists and elbows throbbed constantly, so he stayed up till eleven when the rates went down and called home collect from the booth by the drugstore. His mother answered the phone. She listened without interrupting while Bill told her about Tahsis and about how hard the work was, exaggerating the difficulties, lying and saying he was catching on quickly, but telling the truth about the pain in his arms. She had little to say. She sounded tired.

"Can I speak to Dad?"

"Oh, he's just managed to get to sleep, dear. I don't think we should wake him."

"No, no, if he's asleep don't wake him. How's he doing?"

"Well, he's all right. He misses you, you know. If your wrists are bad and you have to quit, you can always come back. You know we could find the money for you for next year somewhere . . . you certainly wouldn't get any complaints from your father."

"He hasn't gotten any worse, has he?"

"He's the same, Billy. The doctors say we're just going to have to be patient with him."

After he hung up Bill wondered what he had expected,and he took some more aspirin for his pain when he got back to his room.

On Monday Bill had the easiest position on the chain, near the front where the boards he pulled were long and wide and heavy but the flow was manageable. The weekend's rest helped, along with the aspirins he had gobbled before the shift; his wrists ached less.

When he was close to finishing off a two-by-twelve stack an eighteen footer with a great wow in it came by. Bill got it rolling and heaved it up, but the bend took its weight to the side and it fell off between his stack and the first one in the next position down. He checked to see that nothing else was coming and hopped down on the yard to retrieve the board. The next puller down was also off the chain, adding slats to his long stack of two-by-fours to keep it stable.

"What the hell do I do with this?" said Bill, pointing to the bend as he held the board by one end. The other puller glanced behind him, then turned to face Bill.

"Better get the board-straightener from the millwright."

Bill did not actually turn, but he shifted his weight before he stopped himself and looked at the other puller, who stared back at Bill, deadpan, and said again, "Yeah, you'll need the board-straightener," then looked over Bill's shoulder. Bill dropped his board, took one short step and with his palms shoved the other puller in the chest, slamming him into his stack. He took another step and before the man could recover slammed him again then grabbed him by the shirt and pushed him down, leaning over him.

"Funny," he said. "Real funny."

"Fuck off, can't take a fuckin' joke," said the other puller.

"Yeah, I can't take a fuckin' joke," said Bill, still holding the front of the man's shirt. He gave another shove. "I can't take a fuckin' joke."

When Bill climbed back on the chain platform, the puller two positions down lifted some boards by one end. He ran a few steps then gave the boards a shove and they skidded toward Bill. "Pull your fuckin' lumber!"

"Fuck yourself!" Bill replied, and he dragged the boards back to his position and levered them onto his stacks. He worked, not lifting his eyes from the chain, listening to hear if anyone was saying anything. He heard nothing, but then the crashing inside his head had not subsided.

When the whistle blew he grabbed his lunch, and instead of going into the coffee room he sat on a stack and ate, then stretched

out on his stomach, his face resting on his folded arms. The resilience of the cedar boards felt good against his ribs; their familiar sweet smell was strong so close to his face.

Lying on his bed that night before the sun went down, Bill held on to the feel of the contact of his palms against the man's chest and the impact transmitted through the muscles of his arms into his neck and jaw, but he also remembered the boards against his ribs, and the smell of the cedar was the scent of guilt. He lost the joy in his anger and violence to the memory of seeing his father from the foot of the basement stairs, slouched against the saw, weeping. Bill had stood watching for what seemed now too long a moment before going to him, holding him, and helping him up the stairs. His father had come home from the hospital only a week later, and two months had passed after that before Bill left for Tahsis, but still he felt irresponsible. He turned on his radio and waited for the news to distract him with a present in which he was not involved.

The last of the local items made him edgy: "Forest industry talks have broken down again. An official with the Council of Forest Industries says the companies simply can't afford the union's demands. Members of the IWA have been without a contract now for more than a month."

Wallace sipped his coffee, then started on HARRIS REJECTS. It was coming up to seven and he didn't have much time. He

wrote: THE LEADER OF THE I-W-A HAS REJECTED A LOCAL PROPOSAL THAT THE UNION BUY ITS OWN SAWMILL. JACK HARRIS SAYS THE UNION ISN'T GOING TO BECOME MANAGEMENT.

"Is everything okay for your seven?" said Smith. "Need anything done?"

"No."

"I checked the wires and there's nothing new moving."

Wallace took another sip of coffee before he finished the story. He stacked up the carts, all national material. Usually he checked each one to ensure it was cued up, but he didn't have time; he had been too slow on his rewrites. He would read one or two international dupes after the carts, then the wire copy kicker.

"Nothing from the cops?" he said to Smith.

"Sorry."

"Don't forget to monitor OR and NW."

On his way into the newsbooth Wallace grabbed a format sheet with that hour's sponsor attached. He sat down, put the carts into the deck and put on the headphones. He cleared his throat and ran through the format twice to warm up, lowering his voice the second time, but he was missing urgency and he sat up straighter in his chair. Forty-five seconds. He tried to think of thousands listening, not a single man overhearing and judging. He flipped through the cast, grabbed one of the edit pencils by the cart machine and went through the kicker, crossing out words and

phrases to clean it up, while telling himself the carts were cued; Smith wouldn't have forgotten to cue them. THE RELEASE OF THE SPEECH COINCIDED WITH AND WAS INFLUENTIAL IN WHAT POLITICAL COMMENTATORS DESCRIBE AS A BRIEF THAW IN THE COLD WAR BETWEEN EAST AND WEST became THE RELEASE OF THE SPEECH COINCIDED WITH A THAW IN THE COLD WAR.

Bill caught the last ferry at Nanaimo, and by the time he arrived at the downtown depot the buses had stopped running for the night. He didn't have nearly enough money to make it through school, and no one thought the lockout would end soon, so blowing five bucks on cab fare wasn't going to make a difference. He caught a taxi on Cambie and got home at about three in the morning. The back door had been left open for him and he entered the house and took off his shoes, then walked quietly up the stairs to his room.

When Bill went downstairs in the morning only his mother was up. They talked about Bill's father -- there hadn't been much change since Bill had left for Tahsis -- and they were finishing breakfast when Bill's mother asked him about his plans.

"I don't know. I guess I need to talk to you and Dad about this. Everyone says there's not much chance of a quick agreement, so I'm going to have to get another job, but all the jobs will be taken now, all the good summer ones, anyway. I guess I need to

talk to you about next year, about our agreement on rent and stuff."

Bill's mother started clearing the table. She was putting dishes down by the sink when she said, "A real estate agent called us last week."

"Yeah?"

Bill expected his mother would turn around then, but she continued with her back to him. "We found out that your father isn't going to be able to get disability."

Bill waited for his mother to continue, then he understood.

"You're going to sell the house," he said.

"We don't have much choice." Now she turned around. "But we wanted to talk to you about it. We thought we could get an apartment. If we went to the West End we could get one big enough for the three of us, and the rent would be lower than our payments and taxes. The house will be too big for us soon, anyway."

"Where will Dad work? Where will he put his tools?"

"We can sell his tools."

Bill got up from the table. When he looked at his mother she turned her back again.

"This is your idea, isn't it?" he said. "What does he think of all this? Or have you got him too doped up to think?"

His mother said nothing and began to fill the sink with water. They were selling the house. Bill got up and went to the phone.

The union hot line number was in his pants pocket, and he pulled it out and called. The recorded message said there was no change, and he hung up.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean that."

"It's all right dear. Everyone's a bit upset," said his mother, but she continued with her back to him, washing the dishes.

"How late has he been sleeping in?"

"Till noon sometimes."

"That's good?"

"The doctors say to let him sleep. He has such a tough time getting to sleep at night, and last night, knowing you were coming back, I don't know when he got to sleep. He feels terribly guilty, you know."

Bill dried the dishes, then told his mother he was going out for a ride and would be back for dinner. He went down to the basement. He looked at the circular saw and the workbench. They might as well sell the tools. Bill was the only one who used them now. It was stupid to believe his father might start building things again. His bike was leaning against the wall by the basement door, and he wheeled it outside. He would start looking for a job on Monday. There was no point in beginning a job hunt late in the morning on a Saturday. And he needed to clear his head.

He rode downtown, racing down the King Edward hill, then along the beach and over the bridge. He was on his way along

Georgia to Stanley Park when he passed CJLV, its large red sign getting his attention, and he stopped.

The front door of the station was locked, so Bill walked through the parking lot to the back of the building. He found another door, also locked, but through a glazed window he saw some movement, so he knocked. A man in his fifties, smoking a cigar, opened the door.

"Yeah?"

"Um, I'm sorry to bother you. Is there anybody in the newsroom in? I was just passing by, and I've got a news tip."

"I'm the guy you want. What have you got?"

"Well, it's not really a story, but I thought you might be able to use the IWA hotline number, the number they're using to keep workers informed during the lockout, if you didn't already have it."

"Come in for a second."

They went into the newsroom. A built-in desk ran the length of one wall, with a bank of tape recorders in front of it. A man sat in front of a typewriter at the far end of the desk. The man who had answered the door walked to the near end and picked up a pencil to take the number from Bill. Then he called.

He hung up the phone after a second.

"You just got yourself ten bucks for a news tip, but we won't announce this one -- maybe the competition won't get the number for a while. How did you get it?"

"I'm locked out. I was working at a mill in Tahsis, up till yesterday."

"What's your name?"

"Bill Wallace. You're Perrin Carter."

"That's right. We've met?"

"I listen to the news."

When Bill returned home his father was in the den, sitting in the easy chair watching TV. Bill went in and sat on the couch, but his father got up immediately, so Bill did too, and they embraced.

"How've you been doing?" said Bill.

"Not bad, not bad I guess."

"That's good."

They sat down and continued speaking, but Bill's father didn't turn off the television.

"I'm really glad you're back," said Bill's father. "We're going to need your advice about the house."

Bill went to his room to have a nap before dinner. He hadn't had much sleep after getting in so late. He turned on his radio first to get the news, and he heard Carter: "Most mills and logging operations around the province are shut down today, as members of the Council of Forest Industries have locked out their I-W-A employees. No contract talks are scheduled."

Wallace turned his head at the end of HARRIS REJECTS, to inhale off mike, then he read the intro to the first national story.

He hit the cart on the last syllable for a tight start, listened on his headphones to see if the cart was cued, and it was. He flicked off his mike. The cart ran 36 seconds. He stepped out of the booth and yelled at Smith. "What's their lead?"

"Same as us. KEARNS QUITS."

"Anything new?"

"NW's ID'd yesterday's downtown fatal."

"Shit! What's the name?"

"Ed Cline. 19."

Wallace went back into the booth, sat down, put on his earphones to hear the Toronto reporter's out-cue, flipped on his mike and intro'd the next story. He considered adlibbing the ID, but it would be awkward after the internationals, and NW was sure to be monitoring, so they would know. The consultant would know too, but it wasn't Wallace's fault if Solecki was asleep at the morning police meeting. He would page him when he got out. Relieved to find this source of anger, he used it to get some push into the rest of the cart introductions and the international stories, but by the time he reached the kicker it had already dissipated and he felt only relief that Smith had seen to the carts, and something like shame with the recognition of his gratitude. He read his out-cue: "Next news on CJLV when it happens; next scheduled news at seven-thirty."

Bill took the bus home from the station; it was still too early

for rush hour traffic so it didn't take long to get from downtown to his basement room in Kits. When he got in he rewound the tape recorder he had set up with a timer and played through all his newscasts. Then he phoned Peggy.

"You were great!" she said.

"How many did you hear?"

Peggy laughed. "I was too excited to sleep. I heard them all."

"How will you be able to get through work?"

"I called in sick. I was just staying up till you called, then I'm going to bed."

"I wasn't bad, was I?"

"You were great, you didn't sound nervous at all. And the last one was the best."

Bill had thought the same thing. He had noticed a more authoritative tone in the final newscast. He had been tired, but the deejay had started making faces at him through the glass, trying to break him at the end of his first day, infuriating him instead.

"Well, I guess we both need to get some sleep. I'll see you tonight," said Bill.

After he hung up Bill called his parents. His mother answered the phone, and she congratulated him on his announcing. She had heard the first newscast, at midnight, then had gone to bed. Bill's father had heard the next one as well, then he had gone to bed too, and of course they hadn't gotten up till

after his last one, so they hadn't heard any more.

"My last one was the best. Practice I guess."

"I hope they gave you a raise now that you're actually announcing."

"Sure. What did Dad say?"

"Well, of course he's proud of you dear, but I think he's also concerned. He thinks you've completely given up the idea of going to U.B.C. to do engineering."

When Bill got off the phone he rewound the tape a bit and listened to his last newscast one more time.

"One person was killed early this morning in an accident on the Squamish Highway. A car travelling east went out of control and crashed head-on with a semi-trailer travelling west. The driver of the car was killed instantly. The driver of the truck was uninjured. No names have been released."

Wallace put the carts by the bulker for Smith to erase and then picked up the billboard from his typewriter, where Smith had left it for him. The fatal ID was the only thing they had missed. He started to dial Solecki's pager number when Smith said, "I called Bradley to le him know NW had the ID. He said he'd call back with a voicer."

He got another cup of coffee and started work on the major for eight. It would be thin, as usual, so he went through the wire copy again and pulled out more international material to bring it

up to ten minutes. He stacked up the carts he would use and rewrote the intros, then he began working on new versions of the local stories. With a cut or two from Ottawa on the next BN feed he would be fine. The phone rang, but before he could answer it Smith took it, and he already had a cart in to take Solecki's voicer. Smith was working on his seven-thirty, and usually the desker who had the next cast let the other take any incoming stories. Wallace noticed that Smith had most of his cast written. The copy -- fresh rewrites -- was lined up beside his typewriter.

When Smith hung up the phone he chuckled, and Wallace looked at him.

"You've sure got Solecki spooked," said Smith. "He was afraid to talk to you because NW beat him on the story."

Wallace stood up and went to the wires, but when he looked down at the story moving on BN his eyes did not focus. He struggled not to feel deflated by Smith's cheery observation of what he wanted and knew to be true.

"Anything new I should have for seven-thirty?" said Smith.

Wallace had been staring into space and he looked back at the wire -- just the latest summary.

"No. Nothing."

"Thanks for checking for me."

Wallace went back to his chair. He fed some paper into his typewriter and looked at ACKLES BEGINS, and forced himself to start a rewrite for eight: TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD CHRIS

ACKLES WILL FACE TWO MURDER CHARGES WHEN HIS TRIAL BEGINS IN B-C SUPREME COURT THIS MORNING. ACKLES IS ACCUSED OF SLAYING HIS PARENTS IN THEIR KERRISDALE HOME LAST JULY.

Peggy was disappointed when Bill told her he had to work over Christmas yet again, but he was glad he would miss the holiday. He would be expected at his parents for dinner. Peggy would mope, missing her family in Prince George. His mother and father would pretend they had happy Christmas memories and with looks and shrugs suggest that Bill's refusal to share them was perversity.

His mood improved as he drove over the Burrard St. Bridge, whipping by the rush-hour traffic beginning to crowd out of the downtown. The afternoon shift was an important promotion. It wasn't the morning drive, but he got to read important casts around the six o'clock major and do his own major at ten. Some of the stories he had originated by phone had lived through the next morning's eight, and he knew Carter would notice that, and recently when he had asked one of the new beat reporters to do a story over again he had heard fear in the response.

O'Brian looked up at him as usual when Bill came in at three and sat down to spend an hour going over the day's run, but that was fine; he could hardly complain about Bill coming in early, even if he didn't like it. Bill did what he could to feed O'Brian's

suspicion that he was critical. He raised his eyebrows or put his hand to his forehead in case O'Brian should look his way, but he never looked up at O'Brian.

When he got home at the end of his shift Peggy was waiting up for him, even though she worked the next morning. She said she wanted to talk.

"Can it wait till I've gone through my casts or does it have to be now?"

"Oh, I meant after."

Bill sat down to listen to the tape, but he stopped after the first two newscasts. Knowing Peggy was waiting for him disrupted his concentration, and his pleasure was ruined.

"Okay, what is it?"

"Bill, I can wait. I know you need to listen to yourself."

"No, it's okay. Really."

Peggy sat down on the couch facing Bill.

"Well, I don't want to sound like I've been planning or anything, but I've been thinking lately, you know you said we couldn't be making any big moves until things were more certain at the station, and now that you're on afternoons . . . I know it's not that much more money but you said yourself it showed they had plans for you."

Bill waited. Peggy looked at the rug in front of Bill, then continued.

"I was thinking we could start talking about having a family,"

she said.

Bill wished Peggy wouldn't look like she expected him to hit her. He didn't say anything.

"I know it's not that much more money, but I could keep working right up to the end, and I know my family would help us out."

"We'll have a family when we can afford a family, not when your mother wants grandchildren."

"You know that's not what I mean, and anyway, I don't see why we can't get help from my parents; lots of people do."

"We're not lots of people, and we can't afford it. We can't afford to buy a house and we're not going to raise a kid in an apartment. That's no place for a kid."

"I know, but Billy I'm just saying can we start to talk about it, not can we start a family now, just can we start to talk?"

"There's no point in talking about it when we can't do it."

Bill hit Play again. Peggy got up and left the room.

"In Paris, the army has been called in to quell riots by students demanding more control over the universities."

The phone rang again while Wallace was finishing ACKLES BEGINS, and this time Wallace answered it. It was Belkin, with a story for the seven-thirty. Wallace plugged in a cart to take the voicer, and turned up the monitor so he could hear. Belkin said "In five, four, three, two, one," and after "one" Wallace hit

Record and Belkin started: "The lawyer defending Chris Ackles will move for a dismissal immediately when the murder trial begins this morning. Jeremy Schelling says media coverage has prevented his client from receiving a fair trial." Wallace wrote a label and taped it to the cart, and when Belkin was through he let the cart cue up, then gave it to Smith.

"Did Belkin say if anybody else has this?" said Smith.

"Nobody. It's his." Belkin wasn't wasting any time trying to make an impression, thought Wallace. That was the first time he had filed for the morning drive in a couple of weeks. He would use a rewrite as his new lead for eight, and move KEARNS QUITS down, but the opposition would have caught it on Smith's seven-thirty and matched it by then. Belkin probably got the story from the lawyer the previous night, and sat on it for the morning. He should have sat on it for another ten minutes to make it fresh for eight.

Smith held out the cart. "Look, I'm full for seven-thirty, and if nobody else has this why don't we hold it for eight? It'll be a fresh lead for the major." Wallace did not know what to say. He took the cart. Smith got up, gathered up his newscast and went into the booth.

Wallace sat, defeated, looking at his typewriter, unable to control his thoughts. He saw Carter and the consultant crossing names off a list. Why couldn't he sleep? He told himself he did not miss Peggy very much; it wasn't as though they had been

getting along before she left. Why would Smith give up the fresh voicer to make him look good? He switched the monitor over to the air feed and heard Smith reading KEARNS QUITS, singing the news as though every listener was his good friend. "The forest ministry warned officials in Fresh Cove of the possibility of a slide, but they did nothing."

When Bill got home from work Peggy was in bed, but his father was still up. He was playing solitaire at the kitchen table.

"Hi Dad. Who's winning?"

"I am, but I cheat." Bill's father gathered the cards together. He had been staying with Bill and Peggy for two days, and planned to stay for four more, till Bill's mother got back from Winnipeg. "What's happening in the world tonight?"

"Nothing," said Bill. "The Socreds are going to win the election." Bill put a couple of slices of bread in the toaster. "Have you noticed that the toilet's been running? You wouldn't know how to fix those things, would you?"

"Well, I tell you what I'd do." Bill's father cut the cards and shuffled them a few times.

"So, tell me."

"I'd call the janitor."

"Right." Bill rewound the tape in the cassette deck sitting on the counter and hit Play.

"You sure sound like you know what's going on," said Bill's

father while the first newscast was playing.

"That's the idea."

"I wish I knew what the hell was going on."

Bill looked at his father. "What do you mean, Dad?"

Bill's father tried to shuffle the deck once more, but the cards didn't mesh. He looked up from them. "You know, I think your mother is going to leave me."

Bill was standing, leaning back against the counter. He turned off the tape. "Dad, what are you talking about?"

His father's face had lost its color. He held half of the deck of cards in each hand.

"I, uh, she says we've got to make some changes. She says I'm to think about that while she's gone."

"What's going on? You've been back at work for more than a year."

"Yeah, well that's part of it, I guess. She says we've got money now, so we should get out and do things -- I don't know what she wants to do -- she wants to travel more."

"Well, she's right, you should be doing more."

"Uh-huh, but I guess it's not that easy. I guess . . . she says she wants things to be different. I . uh . . ." He put the two halves of the deck together, but back to back. "She says she's tired of waiting for me. Bill, I don't know what to do."

Bill tried to think of something to say, but could not.

"What am I going to do?" said his father.

Bill sat down at the table. What could he say?

"Dad, I'm sure it's not that bad. I'm sure Mum's not going to leave you. Look, did she say that? Did she say she would leave?"

"Yes."

"Well, if she said it she said it, but look, she hasn't left you; saying it doesn't mean she will, right? I'll, uh, I'll talk to her when she gets back. I'm sure it's not that bad."

After a few minutes Bill went into the living room and pulled out the hide-a-bed. His father followed him and began undressing, and Bill waited, sitting on the edge of a chair, till his father was in bed, then they said good night.

Bill went back into the kitchen, closed the door, and turned on the tape. But he turned it off after hearing only the out-cue from his first newscast: "Next news on CJLV when it happens, next scheduled news at four-thirty."

"Are we expecting anything from the beat for nine?" said Smith when he was back at his desk.

"No, nothing's on till Solecki's conference at U.B.C., and that starts at nine."

"Say, are you all right? You don't look all that great."

"I'm fine."

Wallace looked at his copy. He had to get moving for the eight, he had to write, but he got up, checked the wires and cleared some international copy. His stomach had started to burn, but

this familiar sign failed to comfort or invigorate him. The BN feed came in and Smith took the cuts, labelling each one while he was taping the one after, then stacking them by Wallace's typewriter so he could check which ones he wanted for the major. Wallace knew Smith hadn't made it down to Surrey on the list yet, so at twenty to eight he said, "Don't forget to check for the ID from Surrey." He went through the fresh carts, picking out the best from the usual Ottawa stuff. His lineup was still thin. He would have to fill it out at the international end.

"Still nothing from Surrey," said Smith.

"Check again just before the hour."

"They don't expect a name till tomorrow at the earliest."

"Check before eight," Wallace said, but he felt as though he was mimicking himself. Behind his typewriter he had stacked the six carts he would use. To the right were the local stories he had rewritten, to the right of them he had lined up the national and international stories. He looked at the local copy and realized he had forgotten to pull his rewrite of ACKLES BEGINS out of the run when Belkin subbed it. He did this, then remembered he had not yet written a lead for Belkin's voicer. And most of the last half of the cast was still wire copy, a potential disaster of long sentences and the past tense.

"Everything under control for eight? Anything I can do?"

"Just finish your checks."

"They're done. I'll just call Surrey again before eight."

Wallace looked at the two carts he had rejected for eight; Smith was writing leads for them to use for eight-thirty. Perhaps he had been too quick to set aside the South African story. Where had his power to decide gone? He began typing a lead for ACKLES DISMISSAL: THE TRIAL OF A YOUNG VANCOUVER MAN CHARGED WITH KILLING HIS PARENTS IN KERRISDALE LAST SUMMER IS SCHEDULED TO GET UNDERWAY THIS MORNING. BUT IT MAY BE OVER BEFORE IT BEGINS, IF THE DEFENCE HAS ITS WAY.

Peggy was out of town visiting her family in Prince George for the week, so Bill called his parents and they invited him over for Sunday dinner. After dinner Bill's father asked him if he would like to take a drive out to Van Tech. He had just found out that the school board was hiring him to teach another night class in woodwork, and he was preparing the course material.

"They've got great equipment. It's really something."

They drove across town to the high school in Bill's new Falcon. Bill's father had a key, and they entered the shop off the parking lot.

Bill's father walked from one piece of equipment to the next, pausing at each one to run his hand over a motor housing or test the sharpness of a saw blade with his thumb.

"I'll have about twenty students, if it's like last year. I think this time I'm going to be more ambitious. We're going to do lawn

chairs for our majcr projects. Last time we did spice racks."

"That's great."

"It will mean more money for the wood, but I don't think that will be a problem. I checked on Friday night. Cedar is still pretty cheap."

Bill could hear the fluorescent lighting humming when they stood in silence for a moment, looking around the shop.

"You know, teaching the course last year saved me. I'm lucky you talked me into it."

"I should probably sign up for it," said Bill.

"Right. You really need to learn how to saw straight."

"So why don't you teach a more advanced course too? I could take that."

"No, I like the beginners. You should see the looks on their faces when they've really put something together."

Bill drove his father back. On his way home he caught Ed, the new kid, reading the ten. His lineup was a total mess. Bill squeezed the wheel thinking of the memo he would write. Ed led with a Vietnam story and ended the cast with what should have been the lead: "Residents of communitics along Howe Sound are demanding the government do something about the Squamish Highway. A new study done at the University of B.C. shows the road is the most dangerous in the province. Fresh Cove mayor

Barry Kearns calls it the killer highway."

Wallace had given up writing and was simply checking over the wire copy when Carter called on a local line and asked if it was slack enough for him to come into his office after the eight.

"Smith can handle things for a few minutes, can't he?"

"Sure."

Wallace still had five minutes, but he took the stories he had written, the carts and the wire copy, grabbed the format and went into the booth. He would quit before he was fired. He turned to this resentment to drive his newscast, but it would not work. He had too much time to sit, waiting to hear his cue. He had forgotten to remind Smith to monitor the opposition. He hadn't checked the last few wire stories. His stomach burned and he only wanted it to stop. Finally he heard the three tones on the headphones, then a second of dead air, then he began: "I'm Bill Wallace. This is the CJLV world report at eight."

It was after one of her trips to Prince George that Peggy left Wallace. She had threatened to leave before, and though Wallace didn't doubt she was unhappy, he had not believed she would actually go. But it made sense that it would be after visiting her family, he thought, and he was more angry with the family than he was with Peggy. He hadn't said anything, but he had actually been thinking of leaving her. She had stopped talking about

having children a long time ago, but lately he had started to wonder whether he could trust her, and, whether it was that or something else, he had lost any desire. They hadn't made love for months.

But he found it difficult to sleep.

He didn't tell anyone for a few days. Then he told his parents. His father suggested they go out for a beer that night, and they agreed to meet at Stamps Landing.

Wallace parked in the lot for visitors to the False Creek complex. It was raining and he had forgotten his umbrella, so he ran along the sidewalk by the water to the pub. His father was a few minutes late, and Wallace had started on a beer when he arrived.

"I'm really sorry," said his father when he had joined him.

"It's okay, Dad."

"You never said anything. We never had any idea anything was wrong."

"Peggy wanted children and I didn't, that's all."

"Is there any chance you'll get back together?"

"No. I imagine Peggy will want to get divorced pretty quickly."

"You're only thirty-five. You're a young man. You'll find someone else."

"It's okay, really. I'm okay."

That night Wallace did not fall asleep for a long time. When

he did he had one of his recurring dreams. He was reading the news, and everything was fine, but after the first few stories he began to fear something, and as he continued he realized that there was something terrible about the final story in the newscast. In the dream there was no reason he could not just look at the last story, or pull it out of the newscast, but he simply could not. And as he continued to read, his fear became so strong that he lost control over his voice, but he had to go on, stuttering and gasping through the newscast. Finally, his heart slamming against his chest, he awoke. He never saw what the final story told.

Wallace hit the first cart, ACKLES DISMISSAL. What was the point of checking on the opposition? He read through the local copy without difficulty and without conviction. When he played the first of the national carts and flicked off his mike, Smith entered the booth. He put a piece of yellow copy down on the desk without saying anything and left.

Wallace had no time to check the copy before the cart ended, so he left it aside and continued with the cast. At the next cart he looked it over. It was the Surrey ID. The sentences were short and the copy faultless. When the cart finished Wallace said, "CJLV news has just learned the name of the young man killed in a motor vehicle accident in Surrey yesterday," and read the story. Then he went back to the national material and continued picking his way through the wire copy, hesitating, emphasizing the wrong

word, losing the meaning.

When he was through Wallace returned to his desk. He stapled the newscast and stamped it.

"Any trouble with the Surrey story?" said Smith.

"No."

"It was a good thing you asked me to check again. Nobody else had it."

Wallace hit the spacer bar on his typewriter a few times. He looked at the black typewriter ribbon, at his coffee mug, at the screws holding the metal band to the edge of the desk, the stack of yellow newscasts, but these objects owned no stability anymore; they gave him no answers.

"Um, Carter told me you had to step out for a few minutes. I can handle it."

Wallace looked at Smith, but he saw no satisfaction in his face.

"Uh, Bill? Look, I know . . . everyone knows, they're going to ask you who you think should go. Could you put in a word for me? Tell them I've been holding up my end of things?"

Wallace got up and left the newsroom. He thought of the question -- who should go -- and recognized that now he was growing angry, but at the same time he could no longer deny his memories and his fear of whose wrongs they would expose.