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Evidence

Stephen J. Szigeti

A Thesis in
The Department of English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 1994

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ABSTRACT

Evidence

Stephen J. Szigeti

As a literary genre, detective fiction is defined by the numerous explicit and implicit rules by which it operates. The genre's epistemological inquiries permeate the text at all its narrative levels, using the very separation of narrative and story to manipulate its audience. Hence the tacit understanding operating between author and reader: the author hides the story of a crime behind the complexities of a narrative that purposefully misleads, while the reader's task is to uncover the story. An awareness of the devices and techniques used by the author imbues the text with metafictional qualities. The reader, denied passivity, is asked to perform an active role in the epistemology of the narrative. Detective fiction is implicitly connected to its literary lineage, with an audience conscious of its literary devices. The genre represents an almost limitless arena within which to consider not only the telling of a story, but the questions which arise regarding the manner in which it is told.

For Rhonda

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Evidence

Darkness clings to the walls of the city. A steady rain falls, collects in puddles, forms rivulets that flow in endless patterns. There is a distant echo of passing cars and the rattle of a truck, stopping, then moving again. The air brakes hiss along the walls of an alley haunted by an forlorn emptiness. There is an ache of neglect. From a distance footsteps slap the wet pavement. The sound, hitting the brick walls, is sharp, like clapping. Two men, hats pulled over their foreheads, hands holding overcoats at the throat. turn the corner. In the alley their steps are sonorous, like growing applause. One man raises a fist as they reach a door, but he does not knock. From inside there is an explosion. Two shots from a gun. Someone screams. The men turn back towards the street and emerge from the alley.

They are running.

There is a confusion that tumbles from the shock. Realizing what has happened, they become motionless. A split second when no one moves, when the mind pauses. A stillness born from fear. And then the scream.

Piercing. Like a bullet entering the head.

And then chaos.

That moment, that instant of time when the senses fuse, neurons fire and the mind begins to assemble details, in this time immeasurable is born a story. Before the crush of bodies at the exit, before the table is overturned and drinks are upset, before the body reaches the ground with a sickly wet slap, there emerges a thread that spools

endlessly. Yet, at the point where all this begins, there is nothing except death.

But follow the thread. The woman who screams has also dropped her tumbler and splinters of glass spray across the hardwood floor. The door snaps open with the weight of bodies tumbling into the alley. One man, tripped, loses his teeth as another man reaches the street, only to turn back into the crowd. He thinks he has left his wife behind, forgetting she is at home.

Thus the saloon clears, leaving only a few men standing near the walls. In the noise they have been spared the sound of the victim's face slapping the floor, wet with blood.

They saw the killer step behind the bar. They saw the pistol raised. The explosion. And then the impossibly slow fall. A collapse choreographed with such painstaking detail that they will never forget what they were witness to. Slowly and carefully the body vanishes behind the bar, coming to rest on the bloodied floor.

He is already dead.

Contagious.

That's what the first detective to arrive thought of death. Like an illness, it started in the head, manifested in a sensation of lucidity. The intellect withered as the hands grew clammy. The vision blurred. In the mouth, a taste of metal. Then the smell, like the body announcing its intentions. Death was a virus, and he would never go near the body. Leaning over the bar with the other two men, he wondered when Latz would arrive to take the photographs. It made him nervous just to be in a room with someone dead.

The saloon entrance is in an alley running between Pearl and King Street. Although there is no sign on the door, its location is known by many. The absence of signs adds to the saloon's allure. It arrogates both a sense of danger and an element of the elite, a synthesis of speakeasy and private club.

A short man whose wide face spills from a fedora enters the alley with a large black case in his right hand. His left hand grips a wooden tripod. He walks into the saloon, waits until his eyes adjust to the light, and nods to the other men inside. The chairs remain overturned, the floor awash with glass. Lights along the walls give the room a yellow haze and the men who stand by the bar look jaundiced. Cigarette smoke hangs in the air around them.

He's behind the bar.

Messy?

Hope you're wearing rubbers.

The short man places the black case on the bar, shakes hands with the other men, and glances at the dead body. It lay between the bar and the rear counter, the left hand draped across the stomach, the mouth open as though about to speak. Its eyes focus on a point hidden from view. The blood around the head has congealed.

What time?

Eleven o'clock

Get a description?

Room full o' customers. Maybe one o' the O'Shane boys. Johnson's been taking statements all morning. This shouldn't be difficult.

The short man pieces the tripod together on the sides of the camera and steps behind the bar. It wouldn't take more than five minutes, but the quality is crucial. It might reveal something unseen. The photograph removed the personal from the image, reduced the humane, created space for the scientific. The body recorded in two dimensions becomes less real. It ceases to be a tangible reality. Replaced by the image on the photograph, the body is further removed from the observer. Stared at long enough, the face becomes an object, like the wine glass on the bar. The photograph records what the eye cannot see: the disappearance of the soul, the body bereft of consciousness.

The other police stand by the bar, joking and finishing their cigarettes, as two caretakers walk into the saloon. The room quiets down as if out of deference or respect. The short man finishes setting up the camera in silence.

The tripod legs mark the points of an uneven triangle. As they approach the edge of the frame they begin to blur, becoming transparent. There is an optical illusion at play. What object is foregrounded? Which moves back?

The tripod legs are maple, a solid wood, lacquered so as to avoid stain. In appearance they look not unlike a wooden crutch, supporting a camera weakened by what it has come to witness.

* * *

Witness A

It wasn't always like this here. It was never a classy place, don't get me wrong, but nobody ever got hurt. You could bring a lady and it'd be fine. There was a guy, Lucky Lemaire, used to play the fiddle on Saturday nights. Some folk even took to dancing back then, over by those tables. They'd sprinkle the area with dance wax and off they'd go, quick steps polishing the hardwood. But things, they change. Some of the boys that come back from Europe were not the dancing type. The drinks was cheap and it was always open late - so they came. One night Lucky paid one woman too much attention. Not that she was pretty, but she could dance. Was as though she was a marionette, the strings stretching from her body to Lucky's bow. The harder he played, the harder she moved. Everyone got into it that night, watching her dance. But the fella she was with didn't see it that way. He got mad at her, which I imagine he could do even if it weren't right. But when Lucky told the fella to take it easy, he took it all wrong and pulled a blade. Cut Lucky clear across the face and then vanished, went the way he came. Johnny Madison, who owned the place, tried to track the guy down but couldn't. Lucky ended up alright, except for the scar. I think that night things changed. Lately it's felt wrong. Tense. Everyone always seems wound tight.

* * *

There isn't much room between the bar and the sink, but he'd worked in tighter spaces before. The one tripod leg rested near the victim's chin, on a floor slippery with blood. Another he placed by the sink, in a trough that ran beside the hardwood floor. The third he slid by the dead man's hip, careful not to move the bloodied apron. Stepping back he opened the shutter.

A man stood nearby, watching with bucket and mop in hand. He is anxious to forget, to clean the evidence as though nothing had occurred. Another photograph and it would be done. The morgue would take the body, the mop would take everything else.

Except this image.

Number 153 Edward Street. Where MacDonald had lived. A wood cottage webbed in clotheslines. Sheets hang like flags, inches from the muddy earth.

Latz can hear the sound of children, but they are not here. A knock at the door brings no response so he tries the knob, turning and then opening. Inside the room is narrow and dimly lit.

A woman sits with needle and thread, darning.

Mrs. MacDonald?

She's out.

When do you expect her back?

Not my business. Who're you?

Detective Latz. It's about her husband.

The woman shrugs but does not look up from her work. The needle drawing thread. Latz closes the door behind him. The laundry in the yard is stained, mud splashed across the bottom. Even the air smells dirty, like sulphur or wet leather. He walks back to his car and waits.

The Head

How 'bout a kiss, luv?

Spoken beneath the sugar maple that grew from the sand. So close to the lake, now violet blue from the late summer sky. The sun, trying not to fall, danced above the horizon.

They had walked slowly across the afternoon, stopping at Jilly's for a sugar ice, and reached the water as the evening drew near. The boardwalk was cooler on the feet than the sand and the air hung motionless and expectant. He took her hand, the sweat on her palm meeting his, her skin rough from work. He thought then of how, in the dusty church basement, he had handed her a glass of lemon water and had brushed her fingers. He asked if she would go for a walk with him after next Sunday's service, and she agreed. The walk was short and he remembered it well. As he did the next one. And the next. Until now, under the long shadow of the maple, he asked for that kiss. That one token that their friendship had become something shared. A recognition of mutual desire. And when her lips, thin and parched, touched his, he was overwhelmed by an almost limitless resolution, a predilection not to let such emotion escape. He felt himself more a complete man than he had ever before and could only think of it in such terms: completeness, as though there had been an absence. Under the maple as the shadow dissolved, the sun's red brilliance sinking into the lake.

The Hands

Watch how fast they moved. At times in harmony, at times diverging like a pianist's counterpoint. They knew where everything was and he knew he could have done this blind. Wine glasses were before him, tumblers both to the left and behind. Brandy and palinka bottles to his right, with the liquor resting just inches further. Beer taps hung left. Behind him the sink and the soda water. Facing the room, his back to the wall, it all fell like clockwork around him. He could talk as his hands danced and some would come just for this. To listen to his stories, his jokes, and to watch. And he was quick until the drink touched the bar. Then his body would relax. He talked about the weather. The war. How hard things had become. And when an order came again he'd move. Turn. Quarter right. Whisky at two o'clock. Soda at six. He smiled as he placed the drink before you. Noon.

The Legs

You've got to be fast if you don't have the buck fifty admission. Joe "Quick Fist" Findley never come up here to fight before. The papers been talking about it for weeks. Quick Fist Findley against Sean Nichols the Irish kid (although he's Canada's own now, ain't he?) That boy is something, so fast with the right hand. This'll be a good one, hell, he might even take Quick Fist to the floor, set him up with the left as he's getting tired, take his head back and then cut with the right. Send Quick Fist home with a crown of stars. Can't miss it. It'll be a long fight, a drawn out match between two o' the best. If you ain't got the money boy, you've got to be fast.

He spent the day with Buddy, walking around the Arena on Mutual Street.

Looking through the glass doors, memorizing signs, doorways, and directions. Once in, they'd have to turn right, where the hall opened up and then to the second concession stand. That's where Mike would be and he'd get them in.

Got to be fast, Mike said.

They were there as the sun set, as the crowds started to appear. Once it grew busier they moved closer to the doorway, always watching the men collecting tickets and the cop that stood just inside the door. Buddy put his cap in his pocket as the two of them waded in looking as confident as if they had tickets, had a reason to be there. At the door the crowd was almost ten men wide, narrowing to reach the four turnstiles. It was just inside the door that they started, finding the space between two men and clearing the turnstiles, hands clutching for their arms, voices yelling. Suddenly he felt alone, not sure if Buddy was behind him. He could hear the sound of curses and cheers, the rap of footsteps. He kept moving, spinning right, finding gaps in the crowd. More yelling as he passed the first concession, around him a blur of colour. He found space along the wall and hit the ground at the second stand, sliding beneath the counter as the voices, footsteps, ran by. A blanket fell over his body as a voice told him to keep still and silent, knowing they'd come looking.

You got a kid here?

Sorry, all we got is sausages and drinks, no kids. I hear they cook 'em at the other stand.

They left like that, seeing nothing. Surrounded by laughter. The crowd had seen the kid, but in him they all saw themselves. And after all, they couldn't turn in someone who only wanted to see Quick Fist work his magic on the Irish. Magic.

Buddy never made it. His feet hit the turnstile and he fell with his legs in the air. Apart from the cut above his eye though, he missed nothing. Inside the Arena, when they saw Quick Fist Findley, chants of Doughboy started to fill the room. He was American, it was during the war, and he was a disgrace. Inside the ring the Doughboy's overweight frame took one right from the Irish kid and it was done.

All that running for a twenty second fight. But what a right. Robert would tell that story for years. Shadow boxing the head fake and then coming home with the right.

You gotta be fast, he'd say.

The Back

Picking raspberries along the CN line, north of the city near the Rosedale Station, where the tracks turned from east to north. There were always berries here, along the incline that sloped to the tracks. They always seemed at their ripest on Sundays. He loved Sundays, the way its calm seemed to lift his shoulders. The saloon was always closed and he could avoid the coarse laughter, the drunken posing, and the bawdy humour. He had always tried to let Sunday work magic, an escape from the other six days.

He held a tin in his hand, half filled with berries. Emma was bent over behind him, their oldest daughter at her side. Beside him stood the youngest, working slowly, careful not to prick her fingers. He tried to let this content moment wash over him, but

slowly he grew distracted. His eyes were not even focused on the berries and his hands, so important to his work, began to snag on the thorns. His hands feeling almost numb as he let his mind wander. It was money. Slapping itself back into his mind when he knew better. It was money he thought of as the faint whistle blew across his ears. His hands deep in a raspberry bush as the ground started to tremble. And it was Emma who yelled, who saw her youngest daughter on the tracks. She was sitting, singing to herself, her tin of berries balanced on the rail, shaking from the vibration of the coming train. Now a hundred feet away. Emma's voice in his ear and the whistle, low and angry. He dove through the bush, its thorns like nails shredding his bare skin. He clasped her wrist and pulled. The whistle now a scream as he fell back down the slope, against the bush, the branches digging into his back. The cuts like a road map. But in his hand, crying, was his daughter. The rumble of the train like a rattle of gunfire. He lay in the bush, afraid to move, clutching his daughter to his chest. It was Emma who helped him up, after he refused to let his daughter go. He could only mumble sorry as Emma yelled. As the whistle faded, her voice slapped his ears. You should have watched her. You shouldn't have let her get close to the tracks. What were you thinking?

They walked home in silence. Emma with the two girls. In his back hung clusters of thorns and he could feel the warm blood gathering at his belt.

The Penis

Beneath the weight of his wool trousers, beneath the cotton drawers, he could feel it move. It was Lucky Lemaire's wife, Christine, sitting up at the bar while Lucky practised, that always did that to him. She was very young, maybe not even seventeen, and her skin was fresh and pale in a way that he'd always found uncomfortable. Her

presence made him feel weak, like he couldn't quite control his body. He shouldn't desire another woman, but he did. Behind the bar his trousers could bulge without anyone noticing. As Lucky ran through a few jigs and reels, Robert thanked God Lucky's wife attended a different church. He was horrorstruck considering what would happen if she ever came to St. Andrew's. He didn't know why he thought of this, knowing she was Catholic. But there, in church, with his wife and daughters, there in the house of God, he couldn't bear to feel it move, slithering along his thigh, immune to his control. He feared his corrupted prayers would issue forth like a confession. Ring hollow from the belfry. Each word, far from withering as it left his mouth, would grow, proclaiming his impiety.

Hello, Robert, she would say. Can I have a soda, please?

And then, as he scooped the ice, pushed the handle on the soda bottle, careful as he turned so as not to betray his wickedness, she would ask.

How's Emma?

Such guilt. Handing the drink to Lucky's wife, the fiddle echoing some Maritime gaiety, Robert thought of last week when, in bed with Emma, he almost called her Christine. In that instant, the moment before he came, her face had grown pale and fresh. Her appearance once again young and innocent.

The Stomach

Only a block from his house he had been caught. The drunk's breath smelling sour and his voice angry. Another minute and he would have been home.

You're the kid who jumped the turnstile, ain't you?

The drunk held his arm, his grip tightening and mad. Another man stood nearby.

Come on ya asshole, let the kid go.

You're the one, ain't ya? The one who made a fool of me, eh?

Come on, he's just a kid.

Now where ya gonna run, eh? Feckin' arse.

The drunk drove his fist into Robert's stomach, striking upward towards the chest. The air driven from his lungs, he could feel the heat in his face. Then another punch. His vision blurred, he could hear yelling. A chorus of drunken voices. He felt the grip on his arm loosen and he fell. Hitting the ground he threw up. His hands clutched his stomach as he stared at the wet earth. Waves of heat passed across his face and he threw up again, a pool of bile on the ground before him.

A group of men found him.

You alright?

His stomach tight like a fist, throbbing with a pain he had never felt before. He never thought he'd be alright again.

The Feet

Through the gauze curtains a sunlight dull and tired fell in nebulous patterns on the yellowed wallpaper. In a chair sat a woman, needle and thread in hand, a mass of grey cloth on her lap. This was Mrs. Anderson, who shared the house with Robert, Emma, and their two children.

In the kitchen, the windows held open with blocks of wood, sat Robert cleaning his boots. He applied the Waters & Co. polish with a soft brush whose every bristle had deflected with age. With the boot between his knees, he moved the brush in concentric circles, spreading the polish carefully and evenly. This had become a ritual before each night at work, a moment of peace before the noise of the saloon. That night Robert thought about money owed, wondered where it would end, not yet knowing the answer awaited him at work.

Already the sun had moved past the kitchen. Soon he would have to light the lamps, but that night he'd leave it up to Mrs. Anderson, her chair creaking in the other room, sharp against the faint rustle of his brush.

There is a sorrow in her walk that Latz knows can only grow from loss, each step careless and without purpose, as though she were a somnambulist. Her arms hang limp at her side and her steps brush across the muddy road as if wanting to sink, to slowly

vanish and be forgotten. Latz climbs out of his car and places his hat atop his head. He calls out her name softly, as if not wanting to interrupt her slumber. Seeing his uniform, her eyes widen. The look of fear is unmistakable.

The children?

They're fine, Mrs. MacDonald. I wonder if we could talk about Robert.

Her face collapses as she looks to her feet. Turning towards the house, through the grey hallway of laundry, Latz follows. How often he has seen the image of beauty undermined by sorrow, the countenance brooding and dark, the eyes points of despair.

Inside, the other woman still sews, the needle moving in circles towards her, then through the cloth she holds. She looks up briefly, then turns her gaze back to the work. Mrs. MacDonald and Latz walks into the kitchen.

She places a kettle of water onto the stove.

What now?

For a moment Latz isn't certain if she's referring to herself, or to his being there, until her gaze falls on him.

Please sit.

Just a few questions.

It isn't easy to do this. Talking about someone who should be here, now. Getting ready for work.

We need your help to see that justice is done.

He knows this cliché, is ill-timed. He can see any anger she may have felt towards the killer has turned inward, no longer focused. But he also knows it will make sense later, later when she needs someone to blame. It wouldn't be the police department, he would be certain of that.

Did he owe anyone money?

He owed the grocer eight dollars.

I mean larger debts.

The grocer came by yesterday demanding his money. Do you believe that?

Did he have any arguments with anyone?

We hadn't even had the funeral and he wanted his money.

Yes, I understand. Maybe at work, a customer?

The funeral's tomorrow. My family helped with money, so did Mr. Madison who owns the saloon and St. Andrew's church. Will you be there?

Yes, Mrs. MacDonald. I'll be there.

Notes from a Police File

Date: April 9, 1927

Name: Robert William MacDonald

Address: 153 Edward Street, Toronto

Religion: Church of England

Race: Caucasian

Born: March 10, 1898, Toronto, Ontario

Height and Weight: 5'11"/160#

Occupation: Bartender

Marital Status: married to Emma Jane Motherwell, 2 children

Cause of death: .35 bullet entered the left side of the head, just above the ear. Time estimated at eleven pm

Eleven o'clock, like he was putting a drink on the bar.

Eleven o'clock, when Emma finished work.

Witness B

Maybe in them fancier hotels they got 'em better. But I ain't never seen them. From what I'd seen he was the best. Fastest son of a bitch there was. It might not mean much to you, but he was something to watch. You shoulda seen the place Saturday nights, you could hardly move and he'd be working by himself back there. Place was steaming hot - too hot sometimes - but he broke nary a sweat. Those nights were the best. We had Lucky Lemaire playing again, his scar getting more and more red as the night wore on. And Bob worked like a juggler behind the bar. I think some guys came just to watch him. What a night. You'd have Wayne Coates sitting over there, not far from the bar, blasting any guy who wanted to talk about unions. Tiny Bones Olson, always coming in from the gambling houses, going on about how he was getting set to retire. He'd say that, every week: Well boys, I'm cashing in the chips and headin' south. Who's comin'? And Bob would always have a line for him and every week a different joke. Clean, but funny. Don't know what'll happen now, seems a shame for it to end. Don't imagine it'll be the same again.

Bob MacDonald's Joke

I'm working one night when this fella and a giraffe walk in. They both order a pint and before long they're having another and then another. After a few hours, the fella decides its time to go. The giraffe also calls it a night, but as he gets up he's too drunk and collapses on the ground. As the fella reaches the door I yell after him, "Hey, what about your friend lyin' there?" He just starts laughing, "That ain't no lion, that's a giraffe."

Latz returns to the saloon. He's left the photographs in the darkroom to dry.

Even with the door open the daylight seems hesitant to enter. The yellow haze from the night before remains. There are no windows here; only the glow of lights along the wall.

Two men sit at the bar, one a detective Latz knows, the other an older man, well-dressed and lean. His face is hollow and severe.

The detective turns towards Latz.

I'd like you to meet Mr. Madison. This is detective Latz.

Sorry about your barkeep.

He was the best, Mr. Latz. Can't replace men like that.

Anything you could tell us?

Nothing you haven't already heard from the other men. I wasn't here that night and I don't think Bob had any enemies.

Latz walks behind the bar, but everything is gone. No body. No blood. He stands where MacDonald would have, looking out at the room with his back to the counter. The killer had come from the crowd and around the left side of the bar, firing, quickly, before MacDonald could turn. Or was his back to the room and the killer came from the right side? Latz looks at the ground, shifting his feet and turning. He tries to picture the body and work backwards, hoping to see where he was standing before he fell. But there are too many permutations.

Maybe you'd be interested in working as a bartender?

The two men laugh as Latz looks at the floor.

Latz leaves the saloon uncertain. If not for the witnesses, there would be nothing. Why kill a man before such a crowd? A point was being made and it had nothing to do with MacDonald. He was just a body.

Outside two cops share a cigarette, smiling at Latz as he walks by, an echo of an unheard joke hanging in the air. As Latz leaves the alley, the image of the dead body lingers in his mind. Drawn toward the body, he is unable to joke like the two men smoking. He can't bring himself to find the humour, that space where he could hang above all that has happened.

Maybe at the station. In the darkroom, where the photos are drying, waiting for him to return.

Leafing through a book of photographs, why did I stop here? How did this image surround itself with a story?

Once I was a bartender. Once I shot a gun. This image a dull pressure on the temples, like a lost identity finding a home.

The main room at the station always seems a little too narrow, more a large hallway than a room and the grey walls only work to heighten the claustrophobia. Latz sits at his desk, looking at the photograph.

They're picking him up today.

Who?

John Williams. One of O'Shane's men.

He's pretty high up to pull something like this.

We got loads of witnesses.

Witnesses who'll talk?

The other detective shrugs his shoulders.

That part's up to the lawyers.

Who was Robert William MacDonald?

Latz stares at the photograph, trying not to let it supplant his memory, but it was fading. He had contemplated the picture for so long that the horror of the incident escaped him. The photograph has become an object into itself, denying a past or a future outside of its frame. All that had occurred leading up to the taking of the picture was conjecture. The moment of the photograph seemed so absolute that it cast doubt on everything not recorded.

It wasn't just the victim's life that vanished (and of it Latz really knew nothing) but the act of murder that ultimately produced the image: the left leg bent at the knee, the arm folded gently over the stomach, the open mouth and eyes silent, and the legs of the wooden tripod, vanishing as they reached the edge of the frame.



A Murder Sweeter Than Candy

In from the cold wind of late October pushing leaves, newspaper, and flyers through the town; the first call of winter. A gust of air through the open door. Opaque glass framed in deep green wood. The paper sign, placed against the window, reads Open. Walking to the back of this tavern, he moves past booths arranged before a cinnamon wall to his right and round wood tables configured in a straight line to his left. On each a porcelain vase containing nothing. At the last table a woman sits reading, a plate of crumbs and a cup of coffee before her. She looks up as the shuffle of footsteps on hardwood creates an expectation. Looks hard come by, she might think. Eyes trace the arc of his jaw. There is little sublime. Skin, catching the light from outside, tough. Hardened. He moves to the bar, leaves her alone, deflecting her gaze. He is comfortable here.

Even though she (behind the wood) might know, she will ask. The light fragmenting his face. A puzzle of light and dark. His hands, always manicured (some fetish), always clean. No rings.

“What will it be today?” she asks.

“Glenfiddich.”

He looks at the dish of candies, individually wrapped, that rests on the bar. His jaw sore from the thought of sweets. Red, stained mahogany. The other three stools are empty, in this space he is alone. She places a coaster on the wood, then the drink. First of the day.

The woman at the table he has never seen before - but behind the bar Blue Hair is as familiar as the cinnamon wall. Her hair always dyed. In the faint overhead light a

glint of blue like some comic book heroine.

“They told me I could find you here.”

The candy, red and white striped and sweet. There were times when it was prudent to mask the redolence of alcohol, when such odour carried with it a portent of moral decay, of a man not to be trusted. But for him the equation reversed itself. How do you trust someone who doesn't drink? Even so, when the bank account dropped like cement shoes such moralizing rang bankrupt.

It always boiled down to money. The great uninhibiter. Everybody could be bought. He was no exception.

This wasn't a case of good cop opposed to bad cop. No diametric opposition to contend with. He was simply fallible. He'd spent enough time in this small town to succumb to boredom and avarice. It never paid enough to play it straight. So he made deals on the side. Working on the sly. Keep the pocket open and see what lands there. Strong arm a man who squelched on a bet. Say nothing when a man needed to disappear. To change coats. He could draw a crooked line and make sure he knew on which side he stood.

But two teenagers with a taste for a thrill. Such greed had seemed too much. He hadn't wanted it to blow open, like a bottle shaken for too long.

The glare of afternoon light.

Fading as one moves back. Shifting space.

The woman, over his right shoulder now, rummages through her purse. The sound of paper and metal. She removes a package of cigarettes, already open. The woman only smokes when she drinks, borrowing a drag, if not an entire smoke, from another. But today is different. She cannot wait for the sun to set and for the cool sting

of draft in her throat to create need. The warmth of the first drag, smooth like mint and the muscles relaxed. This could be the beginning of a habit. Like desire. Ambition. He watches this. Her form dark against the outside light. A silhouette that creates déjà vu, but different. He knows where he has seen this before. The images tumble, scatter like so many unbound lithographs shuffled and reshuffled. This - above all - he dreads, the implacable redundancy of memory. A trace of her body suspended in this movement of air. His memory still vivid after the passing of a year.

A year ago this very day the phone rang as he sat with a drink before him. Blue Hair was here then. Her hair shorter, cut in a bob. She passed him the phone. It was Sean Marley. He was the other cop who worked out of the Highway 11 station. Employed by the province, they worked for the town. Marley's voice was calm, deadpan no matter how startling the news. Even on that day, when he should have been startled, the tone in his voice was relaxed, like he'd called for nothing more than to say hello. They'd found a body. Out by the Rideau place. Looking like it'd been cut to pieces. One thing for sure, it wasn't a hunting accident.

He finished his drink and left. The drive to the Rideau place, on Trout Lake, took only twenty minutes. Marley was already there with an ambulance. The place was unmistakable. A large chalet painted with so many colours it looked made of candy. The gingerbread house.

Harriett Rideau was the last of the family, living alone in what was left of a family fortune.

“What did the family make money in?”

“Don't know for sure. Food, I think.”

A year later he knew this could have been the first clue. It wasn't just food, but something more specific. A year ago it remained only a fact, one that was further complicated by a strange woman walking into the tavern.

Her face darkened. A figure like Norma Jean. Walked towards him straight. Heel, toe, heel, toe. They were right, she could find him here. Moving past the tables, past hunters sharing a pitcher of draft, past teenagers collecting shot glasses. The walls not yet painted cinnamon. Still a horrid emerald green.

He lied, said he was busy.

"His tab's on me," she said, sliding a yellow card across the mahogany. "And a glass of Cinzano."

She could do that, order what would be foolish from another. She thought it was time to notify the police and she'd heard it was easiest to find him here. She wanted him involved, not Marley, because he was known for his thoroughness and discretion. So the story went.

"Said I was busy."

She poured the brown liquid with a gaze of indifference, absent of any suspicion.

"I need you to find someone for me."

Or was it another line? Time blurred the memory. The dialogue fading at the edges. Maybe a lost sister, he guessed. Or a connection to inheritance, the wealthy having attuned themselves to any potential for increase. He feigned disinterest. This fluid image. This narrative shifting.

Blue Hair restocked the shelves. A box of liquor. Bailey's. Creme de Menthe. Grand Marnier. Curricao. Each bottle turned face out. A husband - no, ex-husband. Grimm. Robert. Kahlua. Frangelico. Triple Sec. Creme de Cacao. It had been five years

since she'd left and it wasn't so much him as it was her kids. Two of them. Then the vermouth bottles. When did he drink his last martini? I'll write down his name. He worked at Northern Telecom before. Management. Will you help?

"To file a missing person's?"

"To find my two children."

He watched the glass in her delicate fingers. Smelled the faint basil in her perfume.

"Where can I find you?"

She pulled a business card from her purse and placed it on the bar. But he just watched her face. Such beauty.

"I'm usually out at the station, on Highway 11. If you need to get in touch, you can reach me there. If I'm here, I'm off duty."

"Is there such a thing?" she asked, finishing her drink. "An off duty cop?"

Robert Grimm. German? Probably. The double "m." He hadn't even left the tavern, using a pay phone by the door. Outside the window the movement of people, squinting as they passed. The room transformed in their gaze like a circus tent. The voyeurs preparing for winter, expecting the worst. But the fall was always longer in this town; snow rarely fell before December.

His call to the station came up empty. The name had nothing connected to it. Grimm, just grim. Marley had wanted to call more police. Bring in the OPP, or the RCMP, or the whole fucking army. But that wasn't the answer. Not yet. Why let things burst open like that? Why let the situation become more complex than it was? This might be simple.

Blue Hair asks if he'd like another. He knows her name is Ruth. Something biblical, echoed in the deep male voices of the cooks and waiters looking for tables. Her name like syrup always slipping and somehow sweet. She is younger than he is, although she knows this small town can expose her to little that she didn't already see as a teenager. Her face soft and round. Cinnamon lips that matched the walls. Eyes beneath brows dark and wide, untouched. She wore little makeup, just on the lips. Something in her manner, a poised confidence. A comfort in being defined by her presence. Her expression allowing that there was nothing to hide.

"The same?"

Did you hear of the case involving the German children?

And that woman from a year ago. Her breasts moulded beneath her blouse and light shadow of her nipples. The scent of her skin like basil and the taste; a bead of sweat quivering on the tip of his tongue. Such desire.

Blue Hair put on a tape. Nino Rota. Soundtrack. The voices in the kitchen lost in the hush of strings. The sound of black and white and somewhere the purr of a projector. A warmth in the stomach. A hint of cider.

He had never slept with a suspect. The very question of its being appropriate had brought a tightness to his stomach. But such recourse to self-discipline was bound to collapse. The result fraught with unpredictability. The unknown. Life as the mathematics of chaos. He raises his glass towards Blue Hair, her back turned to wipe the bottles. Maybe she would understand. Her beauty was of a different nature. Like a niece or a daughter's friend. Something illicit.

Why had she married this Grimm? How did his shallow frame impress? And his

voice? Sharp as finger nails. Maybe her ability to dominate. The need to control. She had been beautiful in that; so confident in each situation, moving through environments with absolute self-assurance. So much had happened a year ago in so short a time.

Another man walked into the tavern, dressed in jeans and black T-shirt. It was cool outside, almost autumn. But it's hard to forego the love for the passing season. He walked with a slight bounce, unkempt hair dancing on his narrow shoulders until he took a seat at the bar. Car keys, wallet, and cigarettes placed on the mahogany.

"Pint of Old Jack." 7%. Premium. The voice spoke with a slight accent that couldn't be placed. This was the only place this far north that he knew served it. The owner's favourite.

He started by visiting Robert Grimm. A murder and he elected to look for two kids. Marley could sort out the mess at Trout Lake, but he hoped it wouldn't take long. He drove north, along Highway 11, north to Swallow Lake. From there he took a sideroad. The rumble of gravel beneath his car vibrating. Around the lake to the public docks, and then to a driveway leading into the woods. The Grimm's. Routed wood sign hanging from a wrought iron post. The cottage hidden by the length of gravel drive and the disorder of trees. Here the sweet smell of pine and faint cedar.

He parked his car at the top of the drive and decided to walk the rest of the way. A slow approach to the house might reveal something. The rot of maple and elm leaves beneath his feet. Sunlight played on the forest to either side, the wind swaying the branches. Turning a corner he saw the sweep of beach and the house. Two stories of wealth. Decadence. The drive opened to a circular park. An assortment of cars like

some luxury dealership. Voices rose from out of view. The clank of glass. Something seemed off. Maybe it was just the smell, the wind coming up from the lake like stale fish. The market in the summer.

He walked up to the door, knocking the brass gargoyle against the wood. The sound sharp, echoing through the woods behind him. He could hear a dog bark from somewhere inside, then watched a man, dressed in golf shirt and shorts, open the door.

“I’m looking for Robert Grimm?”

“Who wants to know?”

He flashed the badge.

“O.P.P.”

“I’m Mr. Grimm. What could I do for you?” No invitation inside.

“I’m looking for Hans and Greta. They here?”

“Haven’t seen them in some time.”

“Any idea where I can find them?”

He shuffled his feet.

“They’re old enough to set their own schedules, wouldn’t you think? I don’t keep track of them.”

“They are your kids, aren’t they?”

“Look pal, I don’t care for your attitude.”

“That’s alright, it ain’t for sale.”

His face flushed, like some courtier from the days of Louis XIV; fat, pasty, and pink. (What did she see?)

“A woman who claims she was your ex-wife came by today to ask me to find her kids.”

Something changed in the eyes. The pupils dilated slightly. The eyebrows shifting.

“Jean is in town?”

“She’s worried the kids are missing. Gave me your name. You know anything about the kids?”

“Tell her I haven’t seen them for awhile. They’re probably with friends. What else can I tell you?”

“Do you know where they were on the night of October 3rd?” A long shot, meant only to startle. “That’s two nights ago.”

“I know when it was. And no, I don’t know. But if you think they’re involved with that woman who they found dead, you’re getting a bit over your head.”

“That what you think, Mr. Grimm?”

“Maybe you’ve been spending too much time at the tavern. Can I get your badge number?”

“Sure thing.” He gave it to him. Watched him write it down. Was this intended to intimidate?

“You’d better keep off my property and away from my family. The Grimm name isn’t going to be dragged through the mud by some two-bit cop. Good night.”

Grimm slammed the door. The bolt turned, then the chain. (What did he expect?) He turned, past the ruby red flowers along the walk, past the luxury cars, and up the driveway. The wind still blowing through the trees, whistling the leaves. Then he saw the car, sporty and low to the ground. Something foreign.

So she married him. Her lips on him. What would he care? But he missed the

sign. The warning like a hollow tip through the roof of his mouth.

He parked the car and walked back to the tavern, past the black and white photographs on the emerald wall, and ordered a drink.

By now the swelling over his eye had subsided, enough to see. His lip still purple, but he could get a drink by it. Something to help him forget. Did she have a desire for wounded men? The appearance of vulnerability. My God! But that was later.

He orders another Scotch. The woman with the book finishes her coffee and motions for another. With brandy this time. Another cigarette. It was still only the three of them. Overlapping. All this time watching. The gaze. The light slowly revolving, composing new colours. The cinnamon becoming grey red. Reflected light adding another hue. The woman, cigarette in the corner of her mouth, scribbles notes in the margin of the book. Drawing lines. Like some student. He looks at the new glass. Candy dish. Traces a line with his finger on the mahogany bar. Dividing past and present. That's all there was and there is no other way for it to be remembered. Like a million hardboiled stories, the ending would emerge from thin air. The solution beneath the final overturned rock. Somehow everything would fit into place. Somehow.

"Are you a friend of Robert's?" she asked, raising her sunglasses for a better look. Squinting for the slivers of light through the trees. The branches creating a shimmer. This moment seemed frozen in a tableau. The sports car, new, grey, low to the ground. The red haired woman climbing from the passenger side and a slab of beef climbing out from the driver's side. The door coming to his feet.

"I'm looking for two kids."

The beefy one, dark moustache, standing beside the car.

“You a cop?”

“Yah, why?”

Three punches to the head (maybe more, things became blurry fast). Then awakening by his car. The taste of blood, wet on his face. Burgundy on his jacket. His head felt as though he had woken from some long sleep swollen and throbbing. He could feel each beat of his heart like a thumb pushing on his forehead.

They hadn't liked that question.

He shook himself off and stumbled back to the car, then back to town. It was time to rethink things. Where was this going? His head pounding. Eye swollen and growing darker.

“My God!”

Now the ivory blouse and deep red skirt and jacket. No bra. The soft shadow. Take me home.

“What happened?”

“I asked the wrong thing.”

“He didn't..., (how could he?) hit a cop?”

“It was her. In a manner of speaking.”

“And the kids?”

“That was the question.”

“Finish your drink, you're coming with me.”

It was that easy. Where did he think they would go? What did he think would happen? A few punches to the head and his thinking was thrown. His vision a cloudy cylinder. Looking through a telescope backwards.

Come with me.

He didn't need her, but then... Violence some drug. He could acquiesce to this moment only because he'd lost the ability to think straight.

Outside, the taste of whisky in his mouth and the smell of exhaust. A passing pickup truck, its windows projecting the setting sun, crossed beneath a grey violet sky. The movement of traffic and tumble of people. A man with a case of beer crossing the road. Another truck. The plant must have changed shifts. Somewhere the whistle blew. Past brick buildings painted yellow, painted cobalt, painted the crimson red of blood. Almost brown.

Her car a cream Mercedes. Into the passenger side like a dog, tongue out expecting a country ride. But she had only taken him across town. North to Number 3 Sideroad. Near Tarmac River. Then left. (He could find it today if there was any use).

"Are you off duty or on?" she asked (smiling) handing him a drink. Inside her house she became perfect in her comfort. So at ease that he felt an intuition of dread. He should leave, but he couldn't read the sign for the second time that day. Blinded. She removed her jacket, unbuttoned her blouse and took a sip from her glass. Nails unpainted and perfect. Her neck faintly freckled. This was a seduction that felt outside of his control.

The next morning he sat overhearing conversations. Hunters argued about their rifles, complained about the beer (it was never too early). And beside him, at the bar, Old Jack, fingering a set of car keys, talked to Blue Hair about last night.

"Sorry, I didn't know it was that way."

What doors open with those keys? What apologies attained? Then he had to

answer his cell phone.

“Just a minute.”²

Maybe another woman. Gold on his hand. Around his wrist. What does she see in him? This always remained a mystery. What rules of attraction? There must be something inside.

“Yes,” he says. “I understand.”

What?

The fine hairs on her ass. The taste. A thin rivulet of sweat between cheeks and the salty odour of skin. His tongue darting between swollen lips. A bite to taste his own blood. A low moan of expectancy; manipulating with sound.

He had been taken. The next morning, sitting with his coffee, it had become a memory. When the papers came out the next day, he realized how much he had missed. The reporters sharper than him. They’d made the murder into a sensation, weaving stories from details he hadn’t known existed. Not that they necessarily did. That wasn’t as important. But that night he hadn’t seen the papers. He degraded himself, oblivious of all else. Pursuing some pathetic need to masticate himself. Oh, how we fail. He wanted her to remain on her stomach forever. You don’t want this space between you. This aloneness. This nothing. You can’t lick yourself to union yet there is something in placing your mouth there. And then there. Mmmmmm (she moans deep.) Lower. Touch it. The erection almost painful.

It was a memory that still remained poignant.

This time of quiet was important. Sitting with a drink, the instruments of a circus

band draping the room in three innocent rings and the warm comfort of the cinnamon wall. Colours of the earth always soothed him, much like the warm scotch. Blue Hair brought a bowl of soup up to the bar and began eating, her slurping hidden behind the bass growl of the tuba, like the careful steps of an elephant entering the ring.

“How long have the walls been painted?” he asks, looking towards her.

She waves her hand before her mouth. He can see steam rising from the bowl.

“Last month. You miss the emerald green?”

“It would suit the music better.”

Or the memory of the murders. The crimes seem, after a year, to be so child-like and naive; acts carried out by selfish children. Like a twisted fairy tale. Beyond the emerald wall.

The tuba fades. Blue Hair slurps like a flautist inhaling.

Then the kettle drums begin the next song.

Old Jack, with cell phone in hand, left the tavern. His shadow drawn long on the emerald wall.

“I’ll call,” he told her. Behind the mahogany she only mumbled. Fuck off.

Sipping his scotch he felt embarrassed to be a witness. Watching Old Jack leave. He had avoided Blue Hair’s eyes, trying to vanish. But it seemed too awkward.

“Have a drink. It’s on me.”

She looked from side to side and poured rye into a coffee mug. What was there to say?

“Some things aren’t meant to happen.”

The next day he jacked himself off in the shower thinking about Norma Jean. How she tasted. The basil skin.

It had been such a long time. Why would she pay him attention (such self-doubt). That's the question he should have considered carefully, instead of writing it off as self-deprecation.

He returned to the tavern. To the tourists and hunters, the furry fish and Blue Hair. He tried to hide his smile, but she was faster.

"Good night?" She placed a cup of coffee on the bar.

"This calls for something more. How about a Grand Marnier?" But before the drink reached the bar, he heard that sentence again. In hindsight, it seemed almost scripted.

"They said I could find you here."

This was the other woman. Always the same tired line. Red hair burning from her pale face. She wore a loose summer dress, although the leaves were calling for winter. Pretty soon hockey season and parkas. But he figured she'd never wear a parka. Not the type.

She came to apologize, taking a seat beside him. He let her talk. Watching her face. Then his drink. Back and forth.

"Marcel, the chauffeur, is so quick tempered. He just knew it was bothering me; you see, we'd just had a fight and - Baccardi and soda please - and well I should start from the beginning. Robert's two kids are hardly kids. Hans is already nineteen and Greta seventeen. Both of them are, in fact, little more than sponges sucking their father's money. Our money. You understand? They should be on their own, I told him, especially now after having lost so much on those bad investments. We couldn't afford

to help them any more. So we told them they had to fend for themselves. The free ride was over. It was time they learned the meaning of money for themselves. The fight that ensued was tough on Robert. They were his kids after all - but he knew it was the right decision. Mind if I smoke? So they left, but not without threatening me and Robert. It was horrible. Robert decided that we should take time off, go up to the cottage and recharge. I went up ahead of him with our chauffeur. On my way up, Robert called to tell me that someone had been snooping about asking for the kids. Some cop on behalf of his ex-wife. His ex-wife! She'd been gone for years and then suddenly, with no warning, she shows up. Nothing but trouble, I thought. Anyway, you could imagine the state I was in when we saw you walking up the driveway yesterday afternoon. What with Robert's warning and all. And Marcel, God bless his caring soul, was only trying to make me feel better. So you see it was something of a misunderstanding. I'm hoping that you'll accept my apology and take this token of my sincerity."

She slid an ivory envelope across the bar and beneath his coaster, then finished her drink.

"Do you think those two kids are involved in the murder of that old woman? Robert said you were asking about it and I'm terribly afraid that you might be right. I was thinking just this morning about how much they stood to gain. You do know she had stocks in the same company as the children? An awful relationship they had - really. Never got along very well, but I imagine you know all that. After all, it is your job."

He felt a waltz of questions in his head. Was it wise to play this as if he had already known what she'd told him, or to start asking questions? He figured he'd wait, knowing he could always find her later.

"Whatever's in the envelope I don't want."

She put her sunglasses on, left a blue fin on the bar.

“Don’t be foolish. You’re a smart man. Do what’s right.”

She turned and wiggled to the door and out. He knew he could arrest the woman for what she’d done. And her chauffeur. But what good would that do at the time. Maybe later.

The envelope had a packet of money. He didn’t count it, just slid it to the Blue Hair. It was for the drink, he told her.

“Give the rest to charity.”

“Which one?”

“Policeman’s Fund.”

Old Jack never came back and Blue Hair only mentioned him once. But that would be later. Cleaning her bottles and restocking in silence. How often did she think of him? His tan arms and manicured nails. His voice deep with assurance, mysterious in its accent. No doubt he ended things. That voice saying it wasn’t meant to be. Had the relationship fallen to a tumble of images yet? Some gut feeling. The emotion of mistake. Her face always so inexpressive. Nothing, indeed, to hide.

She came into the tavern the next day. A tight black dress made for a body half her age. Or was he blind to subjectivity?

“Hi,” she said, her tongue slipping into his ear.

“Why would his wife want me to drop the case?”

“His wife?” She ordered a coffee. “Is she beautiful?”

Fire and dye.

“Look, there’s too much unsaid here. What is it you want me to do?”

The coffee mug clattered on the bar.

“Do you know how it feels to lose your children?”

“Never had any.”

She tore open a sugar pack without dropping a grain, pouring it all into her mug.

Stirring with a spoon.

“Did you read about the murders?”

He nodded.

“If you were quicker at finding the children, this may not have happened.”

“Why would they commit the crime?”

“Who else?”

Who else indeed. Maybe somebody unnamed. An outsider. A back door man.

“They stood to gain.”

“That’s twice I’ve been told that, but I have no idea how.”

“The old woman. She owned stocks in the company.”

“But how would they gain by killing her?”

“You’re the detective.” She took a noisy sip from her coffee mug. “Maybe we should play a little game. What do you think? I’ll make you work for every question you ask.”

“Work?”

“Oh, don’t worry, it’ll be fun. Something involving a four post bed.”

“Withholding evidence is not a bright idea. Let’s leave last night where it was.”

“Ahead of us, or behind? You should lighten up - isn’t tension dangerous in your line of work?”

The newspapers waited for him when he returned later that day. Beneath the emerald wall. A photograph of a colourful house, maybe a cottage. *Woman murdered in her own home*. The first murder in the Huronia area since the mid-seventies. *Foul play certain. Details A7*.

There was no connection.

Hans and Greta. He need only give them word their mother was looking for them. He needn’t make sense of the rest. Like how did the wife fit into this? Or that Slab of Beef? Why not arrest him? What was it she didn’t want him to know? Where were the kids? None of it made sense.

Those two kids. What would they gain by killing the old woman? Was this about satisfying a sweet tooth, some craving? The spontaneity of human desire frightened him. Without logic. In the absence of reason there could only be chaos. This was beyond existential. It was ludicrous.

He took a candy from the dish and sucked its sweetness, rolling it around his mouth, feeling its syrupy coating.

Hans and Greta.

The woman orders another shot of brandy, this time walking to the bar, stretching her body. Hands in fists extended before her. Her face in a grimace. She smells of perfume. Musky. He looks to the back of the room, to a doorway that leads to

the washrooms, avoiding sight of the transaction. Sound of glass on the bar, of brandy pouring, rattle of change. Then more music like a circus. The trapeze suspended from the ceiling, pointed toes in a harlequin outfit. The breeze as the body swings by his head. And the tuba blowing on the two and four. Drums playing a march. Like he's stepped into a circle. Standing beneath a big tent, but not understanding why, only to find that it's all familiar.

The woman returns to her table, he to his drink.

Although the walls had shifted in colour, all else remained unchanged. The stasis is comforting. There isn't even a clock on the wall to distract, to remind one of how this town is absorbed in time. To escape the ticking is a pleasure too few cared to understand.

Those kids. Murderers. Make no mistake. They killed the old woman. Grisly. The newspapers jubilant in their reportage. It even made the Toronto papers. The horror. The depravity. Colour photographs of the wood stove, diagrams of the house and what was left of the body. *Elderly Woman Killed by Thrill Seeking Punks*. And they were on the loose. Even Blue Hair had talked about it, shaking her head.

"I don't understand."

The emerald walls had been abuzz with chatter. The warble of voices. No one had ever heard of such a thing. To be burned in a stove. Cut up first, then each piece incinerated. But it wasn't hot enough. This on the front page. Dental records confirm... Done in her own house. Unbelievable. Just consider the meticulous thought involved. Such an obsession with the grim task at hand. There is such wonder in evil. Such mystery.

Blue Hair placed the paper on the bar.

“You don’t know who killed the woman?”

“I don’t even know why she’s dead.”

Bobby might know. At least he might have directions. He needed something to exploit, now that the news had broken. The bottle ready to explode. Bobby. The Answer Man. Not who killed the old woman, but who the ex-wife was. The other woman. He should have thought of it earlier, in the gap between the sex and the violence. In this age no commodity greater than information. What was she about? Skin of basil.

Bobby ran a joint in town. There were favours owed, favours that needed to be called. He cleared his tab and started up the cruiser. There were no messages back at the station, so he headed straight for Bobby’s. A narrow line of cedars growing to the right of the road. Beyond them the lake. The land here pristine. He liked taking the cruiser along this road. The pavement smooth beneath him. His mind could wander. That envelope. He couldn’t figure out her angle. Or any of the angles. A puzzle where nothing fit. Poker with the face cards wild.

Then the body.

He slowed the cruiser hoping that it was some drunk, but he recognized the frame. Like a slab of beef. But this time half his face had gone missing. He left the cruiser on the shoulder and walked back to where the body lay. Dumped at the side of the road, the lower body in the uncut grass. Sloppy. He looked for tire treads in the gravel, but there was nothing depressed. There had been no quick escape. He could feel the bottle shaking. A tight feeling in the stomach, as though he had lost control. Things were slipping fast.

He called Marley on the radio. Then he called the ambulance.

Sitting in the cruiser, he listened to the white noise of the radio. He needed a drink. The mickey in the glove compartment empty. His watch told him Marley would be here before he could reach the liquor store. He slumped back, blurring the white lines on the highway that stretched to the crest of a hill. Cedars to the right. Then the lake. He sat up, trying to focus on the horizon. Cold air through the open window. The realization came as a sharp pain, but this one he welcomed. Of course! There were no tire treads because there was no car. He climbed out from the cruiser. Footprints around the dead man's head, except in a line to the road, as though they had been erased. He crossed the highway and saw it there: a trail in the gravel shoulder. Coming from the cedars. From the lake. From the Grimm place. A nickel dropped. A connection between Hans and Greta disappearing and the two murders. He took a deep breath.

A siren in the distance. Just beyond the crest of the hill. As he waited for Marley, he took stock of what he needed: a motive and the suspects. Both still missing. Somehow this would fall into place, that much was certain. It always had.

The woman's chair squeaks. Sharp like a fingernail. How much have you drunk, my sister? What memories to forget. But then we also drink to remember. To create memory. Remember the time? Ya, sister, but why that and not something better. Things don't turn up roses, in case you didn't know. But that assumes you couldn't read the signs. Assumes you're like me. Fuck-blind. Pussy-whipped. Or is that something else? Crude expressions are always hungry for meaning. They devour too much. Do you know what I'm saying, sister? Do I? All this from a dish of candy and the graceful parade of tiny elephants, dressed in pinks and blues. And the desire for an ending tight as a snare.

Back at the tavern (the body taken by the ambulance), Marley bought the first round. Draft. Northern Ale. Along the emerald wall Blue Hair was talking with some tourists, teasing them. Americans by the lazy drawl. An insult to the language, the way they spoke. She was pointing to a fish mounted on the wall. Instead of scales, it was covered in rabbit fur. So cold up here, even the fish grow fur. Tourists weren't sure what to believe. It's amazing how stupid they could be.

"Anything on the kids?"

"Not a trace. Their mother thinks they're involved in the murder. Go figure."

"Hans and Greta Grimm." The beer cold. And flat.

"I'd like to find them and finally talk to them. I've heard talk about stocks and how they'd stand to gain from the old woman's death."

"Looking for Hans Grimm?" asked Blue Hair, back behind the bar, pouring draft for the tourists.

The two looked up from their drinks. Expectant.

"He was here yesterday. You bought me a drink after he left, remember?"

He was that close. Sat beside him.

"The guy with the cell phone?"

"That's him."

"You and him -." His voice trailed off. She nodded, her hand on the draft tap.

Old Jack.

They left their drinks.

Taking Marley's cruiser, they followed Blue Hair's directions. Out by Last Lake. Late afternoon. The red sun severed the clouds as it fell, dying. Such patterns in the sky.

The feeling like lead in the stomach. Too much was happening on the outside of the margins, beyond what was known. Slab of Beef's body had fallen from the heavens. And the Grimm kid vanished from beside him.

No surprise. The house at Last Lake was empty. No cars. Curtains closed. Door padlocked from the outside.

"Take me back to the tavern. I should ask the waitress a few questions."

"Ruth?"

Blue Hair.

"This guy's more tricky to catch than late April trout."

"All depends where you throw your line."

They detoured to Bobby's. Out by Highway 11. The sun washed the sky red. Should be windy tomorrow, if the folk tales hold true.

Bobby's had been here for longer than anyone in town could remember. Booking acts and tending bar. Running card games in the back rooms on weekends. He never bet though, as if it would keep his hands clean.

Through the dark wood doors, to the right. Downstairs behind the bar. The air smelled of a hundred other bars. Beer and cigarettes. Stale as death. His hand came across the bar.

"What could I do you for?"

He placed her card on the table.

"Problem?"

"No. I need to know what she does. Where her money's from."

He took the card, reading it, turning it over.

“How soon?”

“Yesterday.”

(Of course).

Still only three of them. And the carnival that dances between the tables, above the chairs, and across the bar.

Blue Hair, impatient with his thinking, asked:

“Trouble again?”

He smiles.

“Not since last year.”

She thinks, leaning against the bar.

“The murders?”

“It was a year ago today.”

He returned to the emerald walls. The booths almost full. The tables centres of ostentation and complaint. A college crowd on Tuesdays. The tavern becoming fashionable with students on this one night of the week. Voices blurred, the language confused. Was that German? *Ruhest du auch*. From a book somewhere (you too will rest.) Poetry. His stool, empty at the bar. Blue Hair had been replaced by another woman. New. He gave her his order, twice. The music now monotone. A steady thump. Like elephants, he thought. Shaking the jungle. Tap, tap. Another drink, then a tap on the shoulder (or was it the other way around?) Blue Hair with her jacket on.

“That woman - Ms. Grimm? She came by to see you. Said she'd be in tomorrow morning.”

“Thanks.”

“And the cook says your radio’s been hollering for you.”

“Hollering?”

“When he took out the garbage. Someone’s trying to reach you on the car radio.”

Why couldn’t someone like her always work behind the bar?

The noise, the crush of bodies. The colours confused. A dance before the emerald wall.

He paid for his drink and left. He could feel the anxiety rising in his throat, his thoughts slipping to that woman: Norma Jean. Grimm. He wasn’t certain of her first name. It wasn’t Norma. What did her card say? Why hadn’t he read it? He could taste the doom, bitter through his nose. His stomach sore, testicles tight. These are small details, he thought, but fundamental. Her fucking name. Like he could dig a hole right here on the sidewalk and vanish. But her name? What other details were there that he couldn’t remember or had missed? He hadn’t lost the trail because he never had the scent. All he could smell was the basil of skin and the sweat from her ass. Doom was approaching like a bullet misfired. He walked to the cruiser in a daze. His fear turning to anger, incensed with this carelessness he surprised even himself.

He raised Marley.

“You trying to reach me?”

“Remember Grimm’s wife? She’s dead.”

It was in the paper the next day. The photo blurry but it was her. Sunglasses on a sombre face, hair drawn up in a bun. Recent. Grimm’s wife. The one with the slab of beef.

She was dead.

The editorial demanded action. He didn't need to be reminded. In three days, three dead. All he had was a pair of missing kids. It was time to reach Norma Jean. He suddenly remembered the ex-wife's name. Jean. It had been there all along. Minus Norma. He'd remember her smell of basil long after her name had vanished.

He went back to see Bobby. Grinning as he walked in, his teeth glowing with answers. It boiled down to one word.

“Candy.”

The family ran a lucrative candy trade. Everything appeared above the boards, but the motives lay with the stock structure and inheritance provisions. There was a complex system in place that controlled who would receive what stock in the event of a death. Rights of first refusal further complicated the picture.

“Think of an almost infinite number of possibilities, all depending on who passed away when. It wasn't enough to die - the order would be crucial to the living.”

Bobby grinned as he placed the newspaper clippings onto the bar. As if he'd just placed a key onto the table. Turn it and you will see all.

“What happened to your eye?”

He'd almost forgotten about the hit he took. All three of them.

“Hit a door. It's nothing.”

“Looks like the door weighed more than two hundred pounds.”

“Don't matter. The guy's dead.”

Bobby grinned again.

“Have you figured out how that death will affect the family stocks?”

The lucrative candy trade. Sweets. Nothing illegal there, but it did provide a motive. Greed. He looked at the newspaper clippings and the diagram Bobby had found concerning the transferral of stock. All from a computer net.

“How’d you manage this?”

“It’s a public company.” He scooped the clippings off the bar. “Does this mean I get to be a deputy?”

“We don’t have deputies here. At this rate you’ll have your computer paid off thanks to the police budget.”

“That’s the idea. Is that all you need? I didn’t realize candy could lead to such madness.”

The woman walks up to the bar, still steady although she must concentrate on each step. The soft rush of brandy rising to her eyes. There is something beautiful in her manner, he thinks. As though she presents some unattainable situation that is, finally, attractive. She faces him a crooked smile, then asks for another coffee. Up, down, up, down. She’s seen him here before, he knows. Although he hadn’t thought of her, the circumstance has prevented her from fading. Their three bodies.

Blue Hair serves up the coffee.

“I’ll take one of those,” he says.

The woman might well wonder about his story. What he could tell. But she returns silent. Uncertain of the unexpected - maybe it’s better to imagine.

Another coffee on the table.

“Much action lately?” she asks. Blue Hair.

He shakes his head. Not since last year.

She nods. It’s familiarity that brought out that question.

“Hunting season starts next week. We’re due for an accident.”

He drove out to her place. The jigsaw had started to make sense. Out by Tarmac River. Then left. He pulled into the driveway, rising slowly from the road, and then parked up beside a Ford pickup. Where had he seen the pickup before? An F150 with a roll bar and fog lamps, in deep blue. Where? Before the truck, her Mercedes. He unclipped the holster and quietly walked up to the house. His hand was on the bell when he heard it.

A scream. Then a gunshot.

He knocked open the door with his third kick. Adrenalin driving him forward. She lay in the living room, holding her leg. He could smell the gunsmoke.

“Out the back. He went out back.”

The sound of an engine starting and the tear of gravel. He saw the pickup vanish down the road as he ran back down the front steps. Front of the cruiser was scratched. Then he remembered where he’d seen the truck: at the tavern. It was Old Jack. He’d come to pay his mother a visit. (Nice family.) He raised Marley again on the radio. Told him what direction the pickup was heading, although it would be miles away by the time Marley even started his car. Then he called an ambulance. He’d done that too many times.

Inside Jean Grimm still held her leg. The carpet bloodstained. Her leg red and skin shredded.

“I’ll be alright.”

“You’ll need to be, where you’re going.”

“What are you talking about?”

He found a bathroom and brought out some towels. Sitting beside her, he began binding her leg, covering the wound. It looked worse than it was.

“You murdered Grimm’s wife.”

“I didn’t know she was dead.”

“It all had to do with stocks, didn’t it?” He knotted the towel at her thigh. “That damn company your ex-husband ran, and the inheritance clause. It took a little digging but it wasn’t difficult. The motive turned out to be the easy part. Predicting who would die next was the problem.” He put her leg up onto the table, spreading the remaining towels beneath her.

“So Hans was next in the inheritance?”

“My son was drunk and we’d argued. I hadn’t seen him in years. These transitions are tough.”

“Why stick up for him? He came here to kill you, didn’t he?”

The blood began to soak through the towel. She looked up at him.

“What about the other night?”

In the distance a siren grew. Soon the sharp flash of red and white light.

“If I hadn’t made that mistake, Grimm’s wife might’ve stayed alive.”

“I’m thinking of those murders last year. The Grimm children, remember?”

She shook her head.

“Old woman killed.” This from the other, standing at the bar, cigarette in hand. Hair fallen over one eye. Seductive, like an older woman from a different time.

He turns his head, grinning. Of course, she’d remember. Anyone who was in town did. It was all so horrifying.

“She thought her brother was in danger, so she did what she could.”

“Killed the woman?”

“Pushed her into a stove - she cracked her head. To hide the evidence they cut her up and tried burning her. Unfortunately her dentures survived.”

Except it was more complicated. The candy trade.

The song ends. The lights come on as the credits slumber across the screen. He hadn't been to a film in too long, but he remembered some woman's hand on his wrist, her palm growing clammy but she held on, his fingers tense when the screen flashed violence. Suspense. How long ago? And how curious that memory should announce itself. His last date. Probably ten years, if not more. Now there were only women he paid for - or empty exchanges of desire. Bartering lust. But Grimm was different. Jean. For her it had nothing to do with lust. Her desire stemmed from greed. And when it came time to play that card, he wasn't there. He couldn't turn the cheek. Murder was too large in the scheme of things. Suddenly the smell of basil turned sordid. He'd been taken at an age when he should have known better, or maybe it was now that he was the most susceptible. Who was the woman he had seen the film with? Ten years had passed and taken her name.

“Somehow,” Jean said, “I always get bad luck.”

That was the last thing she said to him before they took her. Down to Gravenhurst. Her trial was still pending. There was evidence to collect. Angles to cover. Maybe she'd even go free. What had there been to blind him? Desire and need. Like two cogs in an engine we still ride.

“The ex-wife tried to kill her children, didn’t she?”

He didn’t blame her for not having it right. The newspapers created their own story. A parallel narrative. He knew he should leave it at that, but Glenfiddich had loosened his tongue. Or was it this woman? Or the circus that had kept him company. And what harm?

“Actually,” he said, sipping coffee. “It’s simple. It involves candy.”

Kids killed the old woman because they stood to gain her shares in the family company, until the long absent mother shows up to make noise. Grimm’s new wife and her Slab of Beef tried to divide the kids from their father. She’d have more money when she moved to divorce. Then the kids killed the Slab of Beef. Left his body on the shoulder. A visible lesson to scare off the step-mother.

“Then they killed the step-mother?”

Their mother did that instead. Turns out she had first rights to the old woman’s stock, so the kids decided to off her. But he got there in time. Then again, maybe it wasn’t simple. Too much happened behind the scenes. And what did it add up to?

Two dead women. One dead man. A mother and her kids in jail. And a husband who emerged untouched. The candy business his. It was the last thing the old woman and her family wanted. But they’re not around to witness what happened.

“Was it really that clean?”

“The facts were all there. The characters, the motive and the means. It just needed to be pieced together.”

Blue Hair smiles uncertainly. Her eyes suspicious.

“Plus the hindsight of a year helps.”

The conclusions always emerge as this one did - fresh and wet from the preceding chaos. Where there was nothing - now an answer.

And?

Nothing. Only more questions.

He orders a round. Blue Hair foregoing the coffee cup for a highball. The other woman offering cigarettes. Like this they talk, around them an empty room, deep cinnamon walls, deserted chairs, the sound of the wind and the faint echo of a circus band as the tape clicks, turns over, and begins.

The Manuscript, or The Mysterious Death of Nicodemus Marlowe

The death of my colleague, under the most perplexing yet credible circumstances, was prefigured in a series of manuscripts which came into my possession over a short period of six days prior to his death. Of the circuitous route by which they arrived I have only sparse details (and this after many solicitous inquiries). It should be stated that, although the manuscripts arrived in six separate parcels, they are in fact parts of a single whole. The reason my colleague had divided the manuscript became evident only after his death, and I have elected to discuss this peculiarity at a time appropriate to the consideration of the work.

My colleague, who resided in New York City, had purchased the manuscript for a hundred florins at a Milanese bookstore, whose owner was rather careless in placing its origin in Dubrovnik, circa the early 1960's, because postal demarcations on the accompanying envelope indicate its presence in Koristan, Ukraine, dated 1963. Marginalia on the first page further suggest the manuscript had been in the possession of a Hungarian scholar whose political sentiments intimate a date prior to 1948, although this is admittedly conjecture. Certainly well travelled, the manuscript would appear not to have left the continent until it came into my colleague's possession. Its point of origin remains as uncertain as its destination, yet by dint of its possible authorship, it was probably written in London, England.

A scholar familiar with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's writing would be better situated to discuss the peculiarities and significance of this find with regards to the author's oeuvre, but my colleague appears to have sent me the manuscript as a curiosity. Neither of us are academic scholars, nor have we ever been considered

writers, excepting sundry casual reviews and catalogue introductions (as well as some minor revisionary scholarship regarding early twentieth century Canadian painters). We are instead recognized as artists: painters and sculptors of some modest repute. My colleague, whose work had twice been the toast of New York City and had found success at last year's Venice Biennial Exhibition, left behind a reputation both estimable in its achievements and poignant in its conviviality. I had considered him a well liked man and was aghast to discover the media's reluctance to accord him his due respects. Very little mention was made of his passing (and often what notice there was had been relegated to the netherlands of some hackneyed section devoted to television listings and thinly veiled remonstrances regarding the behaviour of film actors). Two exceptions nonetheless emerged: The Times devoted a half page, including reproductions of his work, as a laudatory memorial; The Globe and Mail, whose obituary ran only an insulting single column, even though the deceased had resided at various times in his life in Montreal and Toronto, nonetheless managed a surprising eloquence, largely by its referring to the deceased as "a calculating visionary - excepting his banal collaborations - who transcended the presumptive limitations of his peers." Greater men have been less fairly written of.

Of the six days preceding my colleague's death, I have little recollection except for my keen interest in the manuscript. That I had been at work on some project at the time seems inevitably true, yet I'm at a loss in remembering its particulars. To appreciate the manner in which I received the parcels, it is best to discuss them separately, leaving consideration of the entirety as a conclusion. The first parcel was wrapped in soiled brown packing paper and was comprised of a series of notes, both typed and handwritten. The order I assumed to be intentional, shuffled though they may

have been throughout their journey. I have elected to preserve the order as it came into my possession.

My interest in the first package was superficial; the reason behind my colleague sending them to me was uncertain. They bore no relevance to my work either as an artist or as an amateur scholar and news of his death vanquished any intentions I had to contact him. I had yet to entertain the notion that there might exist a connection between his death and the manuscript's arrival, although further reading of it would support the probability of this hypothesis.

My studio, in which I undertook the reading of all my correspondence, is a simple affair that had, in a previous incarnation, existed as an automobile garage and was separated from my house by a narrow lawn covering a distance of almost twenty metres. The garage is properly insulated against the winter cold and a small air conditioning unit ensures that, when the summer is at its most humid, my work may continue unimpeded. One cannot work if not comfortable and I believe no expense is too great in guaranteeing serenity and solace. The 50 square metres of space allows me the flexibility I require and the replacement of one of the garage doors with a window of double-pane glass, along with four skylights, ensures proper light. Behind the garage runs a narrow alleyway and then an open yard, blessing the space with sufficient light for at least five hours every day. I could not ask for better and I will certainly miss this space when I leave.

A harvest table, which runs almost half the length of one wall, and which was a gift from a friend with whom I had often collaborated in projects involving printing types, served as my reading table. Since I no longer keep an assistant, I gathered the morning mail from the front of the house, poured a fresh cup of coffee, and took a seat

at the harvest table with no expectation that I would have contact with my colleague. The first parcel he sent included no note. Even the envelope presented the impartiality of a typewritten face, each character appellative and perfect in its anonymity. Only by its return address did I recognize its origin, lacking as it did a name. 205 West 15th St. #4F, New York, New York, 10011. Although I had not corresponded with my colleague in some time, it took me only moments to recognize the address. I remembered the apartment for its exiguous dimensions, hardly befitting an artist of his stature, yet he had always appreciated its location and maintained what he considered a comfortable level of disarray. It was the address he held when we had collaborated in the mid-seventies.

Inside the parcel were four sheets of paper. Two of them measured 3" by 6" and were of a heavier bond as befits a notepad. The ink of the script was smudged and faded and the paper itself stained in areas a dark, woody brown. The paper was covered with jottings, names and addresses, quotes from a dictionary, from Ronald Arbuthnott Knox, and - perhaps of greatest relevance - a quote from Edgar Allen Poe, written in 1844 and drawn from The Purloined Letter. The challenge of the story, a mystery in which the discovery of an important letter eludes the constabulary of Paris, is resolved when the detective finds the missing object not hidden, but in the most obvious of locations. The quote is extracted from the explanation given to the narrator. The story, written by the man credited with systematizing (even inventing) the rules governing detective fiction, was the basis for Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, two fictional men better known than the identical precursors Poe had introduced, C. Auguste Dupin and the nameless narrator. I wondered how this might bear on the package I had received. My colleague and I had pursued similar goals in our work. Did he feel somehow

cheated from his due credit? Or did this quote represent an apology, an atonement or penitence for his past wrong doings? For I had surely played a disparaging Poe to his embittered Conan Doyle. Within the context of this first parcel, the question of his intentions remained unresolved.

As I have already indicated, I have elected to preserve the order of the manuscript's pages. They are presented here without the marginalia that had been added over the years; in this way I hope to disclose them in closest proximity to their original appearance. Square brackets indicate the beginning of each new page, the first of which follows:

[1] detective /di'tektiv/n. & adj. - n. (often attrib.) a person, esp. a member of a police force, employed to investigate crime. - adj. serving to detect.

These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident.

- Edgar Allen Poe

Model of the process of production. Story/narrative/narrating

Artist murdered in Parc Lafontaine or in Square Saint Louis: ...

Question: Accident or Murder? Found with his head split open. Fracture.

“Did he, had he missed something?”

Father Knox's Ten Commandments

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course
3. No more than one secret room or passage is allowable. I would add that a secret passage should not be brought in at all unless the action takes place in the kind of house where such devices might be expected.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No chinamen must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers and doubles generally must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

- Ronald Arbuthnott Knox

[2] I had been seeking escape from the drudgery of marking papers for the university when I received a most welcome letter from my good friend William Knox inviting me to spend a few days in Montreal. I packed my clothes and papers, made arrangements at the university, and found myself on a train the next morning. It had been some six months since I had last spoken to Knox and I spent my time travelling not only marking papers, but reminiscing about this great man. I pictured him sitting in his favourite oak chair beside the western-facing window of his office, stroking his narrow grey beard with one hand, while with the fingers of the other he tapped on the nearby table, striking with peculiar strength as he embarked upon a point of particular relevance. Our discussions would continue in such a manner for hours, with the only sense of passing time inferred from the constant tapping of Knox's fingers, like a metronome accompanying a pianist. To William Knox the procurement of knowledge, whether arcane or of some profound importance, was essentially his *raison d'etre*. He approached this task aided with the gift of an infallible memory and a talent for keen observation. Obscure details, passing unnoticed before a less discerning eye, represented the very foundation upon which Knox's cognitive abilities flourished. Among his colleagues there existed a deference, at times even an awe, however reluctant or guarded, of the talents Knox brought to bear upon his position with the police department. Although holding the rank of lieutenant, he participated in neither the politics of the office he held, nor the daily drudgery that the other policemen quietly struggled against and hoped to one day transcend. Rather, he was called upon only on occasions when all other attempts to unravel a mystery had failed, or in instances when a particular case excited his interests and affected his curiosity. His freedom within the department, although envied by some, was without dissension recognized as an

unequivocal asset to the constabulary and all its efforts.

When I arrived at his address, just east of Mount Royal, I was confronted with a flood of memory.

[3] The sight of Knox's greyish-brown stone apartment, and the wrought iron steps which led to the ruby red door filled me with an almost childish sense of comfort and security. I had always, since my first visit to this address over thirty years ago, felt immediately at ease, and as I rang the bell I looked forward to the pleasant greeting that Knox always bestowed upon his visitors. I was not disappointed. Knox's manner was genial. He greeted me with a broad smile that had the consequence of fanning his grey, wiry beard. His handshake, refusing to betray his age, was firm yet not aggressive, and as I entered his apartment I felt as though I had returned home, although I had never spent more than a scant few days at a time within Knox's residence. The room into we entered was tastefully decorated with an overabundance of books and shelves hiding all but one of the walls. It was along this wall that Knox's desk and chair rested and it was here that he sat after offering me a chair, which I imagined he had brought into the room in expectation of my arrival.

[4] Three techniques for disguising clues: (i) The separation of two clues that are only relevant when connected. (ii) Divert the reader's attention with another event, such as a gunshot or a scream.

Leave at 1, murder at 1:30, Y.L. leave at 3:30 finds body in alley at about 4:00. State of body? Travel along similar route Party Virginia Wells, Yves Letourneau, *Jeremy*

Upton, Margaret May, Rimbaud, Remy Sfistak, Willy Grukhim, R.K. Contant

The arrival of the second parcel did little to alleviate the mystery surrounding its existence. It had been mailed, as the first had been, from Manhattan. Its packaging differed only in that it offered no return address, and contained a note, written in my colleague's unmistakable handwriting on grey note paper, which read, "Dear friend, I thought you might enjoy. Regards, M-." Cryptic in its brevity, it reveals nothing of the mind of its author. The script is clean, the lines narrow, crisp and black. The capital "D" and "R" are large circles, effortless and liberated. The characters, tilting ever so slightly towards the right, betray nothing of the author's conscience so close to his death.

The script recalled, in its exuberance, a series of collaborative woodcuts we had produced years before, when we both resided at the Chelsea. Using the sixteenth century Garruchian technique of cutting wood, we inscribed upon the printing blocks a series of truisms with the intention of subverting their previous contexts. Using the tenets of Pop Art to liberate the language from the weight of its existing tropes, we reduced the sentence not as structuralists, but through what we termed Anshauungism, from the German. For it was in the perception of context that meaning resided and could be disrupted and forced to dissolve beneath a myopic gaze. Twenty such prints were produced, after which the blocks were destroyed (in a ceremony worthy of its infamy we burned them in an oil drum on the corner of Canal and Thompson Streets). The work, on display at The Factory alongside a series of silk-screen portraits, was met with critical acclaim. Geoffrey di Punta in the following day's Times newspaper, referred to the prints as "fresh", "enigmatic", and "sound". Unfortunately the collectors, as is too

often the case, were overwhelmed and unable to recognize our intentions. It was three years later that the Antwerp Museum purchased them through a federal grant program. Although their subsequent increase in value cannot even be guessed at, it is sufficient to suggest that we found ourselves ultimately vindicated with regards to the collectors' initial delay. Now with my colleague's death, the value has certainly witnessed a commensurable increase. Tragedy often begets such advantage. I could hear my colleague lamenting from his deathbed, "if only we could exist outside the pressures of the market." That is a noble goal, indeed. As to what value this manuscript might hold I am at a loss to answer. Its authenticity is uncertain (scholars may fill their journals with arguments either way), and the introduction of the artistic community in the second group of pages is fascinating. Now the motives behind my colleague's posting of the manuscript appeared.

It should be noted that the remaining pages in the parcel were larger in dimension and contained the auspicious beginnings of a Conan Doyle story. I had long assumed myself familiar with all of the published exploits of Sherlock Holmes, yet the manuscript I had received was related to no published story. Its recognizable trademarks were there: the Watson narrator, an example of Holmes' observational genius to initiate the story, and the familiar tone of Conan Doyle's prose. Yet I had never seen this story before. While the enormity of this find was not lost on me, the reason that it came into my possession was. I read it a number of times that morning and jotted into my notebook, "received package from New York, its contents baffling."

[5] "I see you're keeping well, Dr. Gardner," remarked Knox, "Although perhaps your work at the university has become somewhat taxing upon your time."

“Indeed,” I answered. “Although I’m at a loss to recognize how it had become so apparent.”

“As you certainly remember, I take pride in observing what others overlook. While only a few would notice that your rather unpleasant train ride was spent marking papers, not many would fail to recognize the dilated blood vessels on the peripheries of your eyes, certainly a result of inadequate sleep.”

“Quite so,” I replied, “But how would you guess that my train ride, which I normally enjoy, was unpleasant, or that I was marking papers?”

“It’s quite simple. My deductions are based on both the dab of red ink on your left index finger and the mustard stain on the very edge of your right shirt sleeve. The red pen is used, is it not, in marking papers, and I imagine your trip was uncomfortable because of the accident you had with your food. The mustard stain must surely have been the result of your attempting to use the mustard dispenser that one is obliged to employ with one’s meals. It is a small wonder that train passengers did not find themselves, upon arrival at their destination, painted yellow with such stains. I make it a point to avoid eating while I travel; it eliminates the occurrence of such accidents.”

“Your skills remain most impressive.”

“Dr. Gardner, I would argue that if this city’s police department relied more on observation, not only would we have less crime to contend with, but a profitable improvement in the relationship between the citizens and the constabulary. Careful observation and intelligence will always overshadow a recourse to the vulgarity of intimidation. The apprehension of truth is ultimately gleaned through the faculties of pure reason.” Knox lifted himself from his chair and walked towards one of the bookshelves, where he kept an assortment of bottles.

"My apologies," he began, "I have neglected to offer you a drink. Perhaps a few fingers of scotch would assist you in forgetting your rather uncomfortable journey?"

"Indeed." I answered, taking the glass he offered.

"I was, just before your arrival, pondering a rather intriguing case that the local police department has asked me to consider. It is one that may interest you, involving as it does the death of an artist from New York. Although the incident in question appears to be an accident, it was considered sagacious to entertain the possibility of foul play. Two nights ago, in Square Saint Louis, the body of a Mr. Nicodemus Marlowe was discovered dead.

[6] The discovery was made by a gentleman who goes by the name of Yves Letourneau. He had chanced upon the body during his early morning walk."

"Early morning?" I asked.

"Four o'clock to be precise. The body was found prostrate in an alley beside a stone building and the skull of the deceased was fractured. The autopsy, performed on the body later that afternoon, found pieces of dirt and brick along the fracture, but more importantly revealed a large quantity of cocaine within the blood stream, enough to have caused an overdose. There were no bruises found on the body, nor any other marks which would occasion suspicion.

"It seems plausible that it was an accident," I said. "Having seen the effects of narcotics first hand, I would hazard a guess that he fell and fractured his head on the edge of the stone building. In such a state his death would result not from the narcotic, but from an unrecoverable loss of blood."

"I would say that you are a little quick in forming your conclusions. The police

have reached the same conclusion, yet there remains enough doubt to warrant my involvement.”

“What are your suspicions regarding the gentleman who found the body?”

“It is best to suspect everyone connected with the crime, and at times even those who are not. Yet I reserve doubts with regards to Mr. Letourneau, even though he was familiar with the deceased.”

“Yet he notified the police?”

“Yes. But we need a motive and we need a method by which the murder was accomplished. Otherwise concerns regarding the presence of foul play are unfounded. It certainly would appear that no foul play had taken place, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Indeed.”

“There is an article regarding Marlowe in this issue of *The Artists’ Quarterly*,” Knox said, pointing to a magazine on his desk. “which paints him as a man consumed by the excess and intemperance of his recent financial success.”

[7] Although he had lived for a number of years in this city, he had in the last three years made his home in New York, where, we can assume, he placed himself in a position to contact the wealthiest of art collectors and procure inspiration from his peers. His three years there were successful by any measure: three sold-out shows and acclaimed collaborations with fellow artists.

“As with most who find their success accelerating, Marlowe attracted more than a few enemies. It is perhaps only human nature to envy another’s prosperity, and the flippant manner with which Marlowe conducted himself towards this success ensured a growing legion of those who would have liked nothing more than to see him fail.”

"And that is the reason he left New York?"

"No. I imagine that, even if Marlowe was not oblivious to the envy of others, it concerned him little. His return to Montreal was occasioned by the opening of an exhibit, organized by his old art dealer, Miss Virginia Wells, involving a fellow New York artist by the name of Jeremy Upton. The two men were, for some time, friends, although the nature of their friendship was uncertain of late."

He passed me a copy of another magazine, opened to a page on which there were a number of advertisements.

"You will notice in the top right corner an advertisement for the opening of Upton's exhibition. The show which Marlowe had hoped to attend."

The advertisement was comprised of the gallery's name, *Galerie Neuf-cent*, the artist's name, the date of the exhibition, and finally, a small black and white illustration of his art. The photographed piece belonged to that most mundane and dull-witted of sculptural types: an assemblage of materials, perhaps wood or plastic, placed one on top of the other in a haphazard pile. Before this chaotic structure were placed two lines: a row of eleven rectangular squares and a row of fifteen cylinders. The photograph's small size denied a more accurate observation of the sculpture, although I had seen enough to judge the piece worthless.

"Why the disdainful expression?" asked Knox, smiling as he watched me.

"You know well my view of modern art."

"What a shame, Dr. Gardner. I have taken quite a liking to such art, having too long neglected to acquaint myself with its merits. Perhaps before you leave you might have a different opinion. After all, one must always be open to change."

Knox sat down in his chair. He began tapping the desk with the fingers of his

left hand.

“It would be a prudent course of action for us to visit the gallery. I assume you’ve not made any plans for this afternoon?”

“Certainly not,” I answered. “I am here as your guest.”

Our work at The Factory and our collaborations with Warhol resonated with each arrival of Conan Doyle’s manuscript. That my colleague had uncovered something in his reading seemed impossible to dispute and puzzling in that (a) he sent me the original papers as opposed to copies and (b) they had arrived staggered, not in their entirety. This third parcel also began with a smaller sheet of notepaper, on which had been scribbled what I took to be a continuation of the list of techniques informing the writing of detective fiction. A second sheet of paper contained only the vulgar colloquialism “No shit, Sherlock.” Its presence was mysterious and I was unwilling to hazard a guess as to what purpose it might serve. Had it been penned by Conan Doyle, or added at some later date? What interested me the most about the manuscript was that the story it contained was set in Montreal. I had not been aware that the author had ever travelled to Canada, although the detail he provides clearly indicates that he had. The murder had taken place “[t]wo nights ago, in Square Saint Louis, [where] the body of Mr. Nicodemus Marlowe was discovered dead. The discovery was made by a gentleman who goes by the name of Yves Letourneau, who had chanced upon the body during his early morning walk.” Written in the familiar prose of Conan Doyle, it is unique only in setting. Although I profess not to be an expert of any manner with regards to Conan Doyle’s writing, I have long taken an interest in his work and have drawn inspiration from its exactitude and singleness of purpose. A puzzle is presented to

a reader which, in due time, is resolved. What the reader may not realize is that some piece of the puzzle is withheld. Conan Doyle does not always play fair.

I had first read Conan Doyle rather late in my youth. It was on a visit to a distant aunt in New York City, my first visit to the metropolis I would later call home. At a second hand book shop on Fifth Avenue, near 23rd Street, I purchased a collection of his stories. I remember very little of the stay itself, apart from being overwhelmed by the size of the city, and spending most of the three days in my aunt's apartment while she entertained friends. Relegated to the small library she kept, I became enamoured of Dr. Watson. In many ways he was a most believable character, around whom the stories spun their fantastic web. His rather common concerns, his poignant questions, even his morality mirrored my own. How exquisite a fictional creation was this narrator of the Sherlock Holmes story. I carried the collection with me for years, rereading the stories each time as though I were visiting an old friend.

Sadly, a fire destroyed our family home in Connecticut when I was sixteen. Among the casualties was The Collected Stories of Sherlock Holmes. I would return to Conan Doyle later in life, but not until I went through a many years when I considered such fiction trivial. I understood detective fiction as a genre of fancy, as nothing but entertainment, and I entered art college in New York riding the loaded hand wagon of the Beats. While I knew the writers' names, I read little, preferring to spend time with my paints. It was at this same college that I met my colleague, and in this city, between classes, we both met Andy. It was the summer of 1970.

Looking at this manuscript I am touched by memories of that time. Perhaps my colleague felt the same way and decided to share it with me? The next two packages arrived on the same morning, although their postal demarcations indicate that they were mailed on consecutive days.

[8] (iii) Bury the clue in a lengthy list.

pieces of cloth, metal, stone, plaster, tile, glass, shingle, siding, cement, brick, wood, timber, lumber, copper, pasteboard, drywall, cork, brass, silver, ceramic, string, gold, nickel, asbestos, paper and what might have been plastic or other fibres.

arbitrary /'a:bitreri/adj. 1. based on or derived from uninformed opinion or random choice; capricious 2. despotic.

[9] No shit, Sherlock.

[10] It was half past four when we left Knox's apartment. We decided to take a route which passed through Square Saint Louis. The park, gaily decorated with wrought iron fences and a delightful stone fountain, was populated by groups of men whose dress betrayed their lower class. It was a shame that such a public place, so whimsical in appearance, should be overrun by riff-raff, and it struck me as no great surprise that a man, passing through the park after dark, might find himself confronted by some unavoidable danger. Even in the late afternoon I felt uneasy, although in this I differed greatly from Knox, who not only felt at ease, but greeted some of these men by name. I was considering how best to question Knox about such acquaintances, when he directed my attention to the place where the body had been found. The alley Knox pointed to was the only passage between a row of at least twelve apartments, two of which, immediately next to the alley, were under reconstruction or repair. The front of the apartments were covered with wood scaffolding beneath which lay building materials

kept in orderly piles. There existed no indication that a crime had occurred in the alley.

Our walk to the gallery gave us the opportunity to discuss Knox's work with the police department and in no time we had arrived at our destination.

Galerie Neuf-cent was located only blocks from the *Musee des Beaux-Arts* along Sherbrooke Street, a rather busy thoroughfare which bisected the city. From the outside, the gallery appeared modest, with posters, similar to the advertisements in the magazine, placed in the two narrow windows which faced the street. We walked up a short flight of stairs and Knox tapped on the front door.

We were shown into the gallery by a young woman whose long hair was drawn tightly into a bun, thus exposing a shiny scar located on her temple. Not wanting to appear rude, I looked elsewhere, while Knox asked to speak with Miss Wells. The room, although narrow, extended almost forty yards back from the entrance through which we had arrived. A number of sculptures were placed throughout the room. Paintings hung on the walls to the right and the left.

"Virginia Wells is very busy with the opening," I heard the young woman tell Knox, "But she'll be out in a moment if you don't mind waiting."

"That will be fine," answered Knox. The young woman walked to the back of the gallery, disappearing behind a grey curtain.

"Well Gardner, this appears to be a good opportunity for you to acquaint yourself with some modern art," declared Knox.

"Heavens," I exclaimed, swatting at a fly that almost alighted on my nose.

"Perhaps we've brought uninvited guests with us?" joked Knox, as a woman walked towards us from the back of the gallery.

[11] She appeared a few years older than the woman who had first greeted us and walked with a precision betraying superior education. Her brown hair, speckled with strands of grey, was pulled into a large black bowler which, although stylish by some standards, rested awkwardly upon her narrow head.

“My apologies,” she said, noticing the fly. “It is an almost impossible task to remain rid of these pests.” She extended a slender hand to both of us in greeting. “What might I possibly do for you?” she asked Knox.

While they spoke I strolled about the room trying to make sense of the exhibition, hoping to find some kernel of meaning that would impart the value of these childish diversions. The wall immediately to the right of where I had been standing held five paintings, each of which was lit by lighting suspended from the ceiling. The paintings appeared to be appalling hybridizations of painting and sculpture. To the canvas of each work were affixed various materials, pieces of cloth, stone, glass, brick, wood, copper, ceramic, string, paper and what might have been plastic or other fibres. Across the room hung three larger paintings, one of which extended almost twelve feet towards the ceiling. The painting was comprised of a field of royal blue paint to which had been attached rivets, small pieces of sheet metal, and the wings of birds in various stages of decomposition. The wings appeared real and at the bottom of the canvas ran bifurcated slashes of brilliant violent paint. The work was titled *The Return of Icarus (Trust)*, according to a small paper tag tacked onto the wall. I swatted at another fly before turning my attention to the centre of the room. There I noticed, with particular curiosity, two sculptures among the nine that stood there. The first appeared to be the work photographed in the advertisement I had seen earlier in the day. It was titled *Vacillation of Love*. The piece consisted of a complex interweaving of materials, similar

to those that were attached to the paintings, and a row of twelve bricks and fifteen cylindrical cans of paint. One of the rectangular bricks had two flies crawling upon it, and it suddenly appeared certain that the uncleanness of this gallery was absolute. It seemed a small wonder that anybody would consider purchasing any of these works, for the filthy condition of the room was clearly a comment upon the art itself. Next to where Knox and Miss Wells were standing rested a work made up of five iron posts between which there were stretched nylon string and fragments of rusted metal. To the string were attached, at varying intervals, small teeth. The work was titled *Contempt*.

I listened to the conversation between Knox and the woman, comfortable in the knowledge that my distaste for this art remained uncompromised.

“I’m to understand that Jeremy and Nicodemus both left the party at the same time?” asked Knox, his right hand stroking his beard.

“Yes. At about one o’clock. Jeremy was hoping to show him some recent works. But I understand there had been an argument between them and they both went their own way.”

“When did you leave the party, Miss Wells?”

[12] “Did you leave the party, Miss Wells?”

“You leave the party, Miss Wells?”

“Leave the party Miss Wells!”

“The party: Miss Wells.”

“Party! Miss Wells!”

“Miss Wells?”

[13] "About an hour later."

"You went home?"

"No. To a girlfriend's house, the party was getting dull, although I wasn't ready to call it a night."

"You stayed at your friend's the rest of the evening?"

"Yes," she said, nodding her head. Her eyes returned Knox's gaze. Straightening her hat, she asked: "Was I of some help?"

"Perhaps," said Knox, glancing at the sculptures which surrounded them. "What can you tell me about Jeremy Upton? Have you dealt with him since his leaving New York?"

"Yes. He needed a change from the city, and knowing he had a number of friends in Montreal I encouraged him to stay."

"Do you mind me asking how you met Mr. Upton?"

"Through a mutual friend, a well-known artist in New York."

Knox slowly nodded his head, his hand still at his beard. Wells swatted at a fly near her face.

"You see, Jeremy had been rejected. He thought it best to leave the city."

"I hope all goes well with the opening tonight," said Knox, observing the sculptures. "We have certainly taken enough of your time, Miss Wells. Thank you for your cooperation." I followed Knox to the front door feeling as though we had gained little from our visit. Perhaps something had transpired in the conversation that I had not overheard.

[14] The sky had darkened considerably in our absence. We began to stroll along the street, both of us engaged in some private thought. The air had become decidedly cooler, and we faced an uncomfortably brisk wind.

“Well Knox, what did you find out while I was wandering about the gallery? I feel as though we profited little from our visit.”

• “On the contrary, we are but inches from the answer, and I daresay that foul play is the operative word in this case. I had neglected to mention that the deceased had, on the night of his murder, attended a small gathering of artists at Mr. Upton’s flat. Virginia Wells was in attendance, as well as Mr. Yves Letourneau.”

“The gentleman who found the body?”

“Precisely. This gentleman was also involved in the dealing of narcotics with Marlowe. I am to understand that Marlowe was in arrears in his accounts with Letourneau, who took it upon himself to enquire about collecting the money.”

“Then you suspect Letourneau?”

“As I said earlier, I suspect everyone in this case. Yet Miss Wells assured me that not only did Marlowe and Letourneau appear to settle their differences and their accounts, but that Letourneau remained at the party until the early morning and did not vacate the apartment until after three a.m.”

Knox suddenly stopped, the corners of his mouth slowly curling into a smile.

“Pray Dr. Gardner, would you happen to have the time?”

“Five thirty,” I replied after glancing at my watch.

We walked for another block, entering a shop with a public telephone.

“If you would be good enough to lend me a nickel we can finish up our bit of detective work. I must place a call to the police department.”

I reached into my pocket.

"My goodness Knox, have you solved the case?" I asked, offering him the coin.

"Indeed."

Of all the crimes perpetrated by the acolytes of Andy Warhol, none were more hideous than the imposition of a hierarchy largely encouraged by Andy himself. Existing within this pecking order was all too often an ordeal. Although acceptance in this circle guaranteed a certain fame or notoriety - at least in the short term - it became for most of us a matter of immortality. The junkies and cross-dressers for the most part had little to offer except their oddity, and time would see to their disappearance. But the artists who worked with Andy, the filmmakers, actors, musicians, painters and sculptors, they had a chance to emerge from the towering shadow of Andy's Brillo boxes and soup cans. This I know. As it has been said elsewhere, why create if not to be assured immortality.

When Tobias Young, in the Village Voice, questioned my collaborations with Warhol, it was not difficult to dismiss him. But when I came across the disparaging remarks of Robert Hughes, in a national magazine no less, I grew suspicious. I questioned my judgment and felt betrayed. Had I mistaken Andy's intentions? Had I been duped into believing everything he touched turned to gold? I resolved that it would be best to leave New York and continue my work in isolation. The next day I sublet my studio, informed my dealer of my intentions, and arrived in Montreal. In this artistic backwater I could focus on the task at hand. Using what money I had saved from past shows, I began to work on a Herculean task: the illustration of The Complete Works of Arthur Conan Doyle.

I researched older print-making techniques, experimented with computer technology and enrolled in book binding courses. Consumed in this project, I found a joy in working that had long eluded me. For ten months I avoided contact with the city I had forsaken, until, having finished "A Scandal in Bohemia", I contacted my colleague I sent him a copy and awaited his response. In a state of suspense, I was unable to produce anything meaningful in the ensuing month. I felt insecure about my work in a way I had not since my youth. When his response finally arrived I realized my foolishness in worrying. He was overwhelmed and I still remember parts of his letter as though I had read it this very morning. "Marvellous work," he'd written. "You've really reached back and reclaimed a lost voice. This work recognizes that there may be no more space to consume, that progress is not infinite and that a time may have arrived when nothing remains but to revisit what has already been traversed, thus moving art into the area of redrawing or repainting." He concluded by remarking that, "my work with Andy is moving in a different direction - we keep trying to subvert the hierarchy! We're still framing the world outside and selling it back to them." This was the first I'd heard of the two of them collaborating, but it didn't diminish my joy in his response.

Each package I received contained such memories and I still feel stricken by loss at his death. I remain certain I will not be the only one who will miss his work.

[15] During our walk back to Knox's apartment he remained reluctant to discuss particulars of the case. He promised he would answer all of my questions once we had returned to the comfort of his library, and it was this promise alone which kept my exasperation in check. I had not been able to piece together the elements of the puzzle, as though I had failed to observe an element from which the greater whole was to be

understood. Such mysteries are solved only through the careful construction of facts and details and the application of reason. Since I remained, at this point, baffled by Knox's assurance of success, I must certainly have missed some fundamentally crucial detail.

Upon our return, Knox poured me another drink and took his customary place in the oak chair, his fingers immediately began to tap on the desk.

"Think of it as a puzzle. All the pieces are before you. You need only the patience to sort them out and to construct them so that they may provide you with the answer."

"All one needs to rely on is his facility of reason."

"Precisely. For what is it that separates us from the kingdom of the animals? In the likeness of God we were created."

"The gift of reason."

"Jeremy Upton," he said, grinning once again. I held up my hand before he could proceed further.

"Pray, allow me to construct this case," I pleaded. "Upton left the party with Marlowe, therefore he had the opportunity to commit the crime. I imagine the motive comes about as a result of an argument they had while walking."

[16] "Almost. Their argument would not appear to be a strong motive for murder, but envy might. You will remember that Marlowe lived with another artist in New York. Meanwhile Upton had been scorned by this same artist, whom Miss Wells called well known, even though she did not use his name. Apparently, in the world of art if one commanded this man's attention, then success was almost guaranteed. Marlowe had his

attention, but Upton was denied it. He felt so slighted as to leave the city and move to Montreal.”

“So therefore he pushed Marlowe into the wall, and...” The expression on Knox’s face indicated that I was wrong.

“It would appear that Upton used a brick to murder Marlowe. A brick which he would later place into the work of art he dedicated to love itself. You remember that the photograph in the advertisement showed a line of eleven bricks, whereas the piece at the art gallery contained twelve bricks. It would appear that Upton’s desire to make an artistic statement overwhelmed any rational common sense.”

I am being coy. To write that my colleague’s collaboration with Andy did not affect me is being dishonest. In actual fact, it troubled me in a manner I found surprising. What concern of mine should it be that they worked together? Andy had long worked with younger artists and there was nothing unique in their collaboration, or so I believed. The truth became clearer as time went on. I realized my absence from New York was something they both intended to use to full advantage. The work I had completed with my colleague almost a decade ago now became the focus of their collaboration. It became evident that my absence gave them license to plagiarize my work. Their collaboration concerned itself with notions of context. The first projects were somewhat derivative of the Colour-Field artists: the colour red was placed next to blue, then green, then yellow. Each time the red colour literally changed. The presence of a shifting second colour created a dialogue that dramatically altered the original coupling. The same pigment of red was, in fact, a series of pigments, all dependant on the context. Their approach was different, but technically they were covering old

ground. What came next was different. By incorporating language, they produced work that screamed of plagiarism. Had my colleague and I not produced such prints a decade earlier? The response was startling. Not only did the critics ignore the work I had done in this field, but the collectors - who had paid no attention to my work - opened their wallets as though they were witness to history being made. Reading about their success in the newspapers and art journals became intolerable and enraging. Other Montreal artists would comment on the success as though I had no hand to play in the events. I felt cast aside, betrayed. Work on the illustrations became all but impossible. Realizing I had little choice, I decided to return to New York to set things straight, although I had no idea how I would achieve this end. It was at this time that I first received news of Andy's death. Deciding to suspend any ill feeling I had, I returned to New York for the occasion of his funeral. There would be time to settle scores later. The loss of such a man demanded respect.

The horror that awaited me was unimaginable. My colleague had shown our mutual friends the illustrations I had sent him and instead of complimenting me - as he had in his letter - they made a mockery of my intentions. My work became a sort of joke to them, as though book illustration was some lowly art and, by living in Montreal, I had fallen off the edge of the earth. The laughter was unbearable, but I was unprepared for what was certainly worse: my colleague, far from defending me, joined in the buffoonery. Sitting at the Milbury Cafe, where I had so many fond memories of comradery and instances of inspiration, I was humiliated. It was too much. I left New York the next day, vowing never to return.

Instead of allowing my anger to paralyze me, I elected to channel my energies into something creative. I put the illustrations aside and began work on a new project

*with the intention of preparing a show in Montreal. The theme I already knew: context.
I would reclaim what they had stolen.*

[17] I decided that the only way to dispose of Knox's body was to set the apartment ablaze. Reaching into my pocket I withdrew a match and pulled a book from the shelf beside me, and in short order set it aflame. The sharp odour of burning paper filled my nostrils as I cleared a shelf of books with which to feed this ingenious disguise. First the books and then Knox himself would burn into oblivion.

What has happened in the manuscript has almost completely confounded me. As I reread the seventeenth page, I find myself imagining the scene (one that Conan Doyle appears to present as a hurried sketch). Once again I am at Thompson Street in New York, the smell of burning printing blocks sharp in my nostrils. It is a smell I will never forget. More sinister than the destruction of a book is the obliteration of the means by which it may be reproduced. Yet from such action arises art; by destroying we create. Conan Doyle's intentions must have been the same. By sketching such a plot twist he has created something different. With no concern for what he had previously written, he has changed the terrain on which his fiction rests. The narrator is bound by convention to a set of predictable behaviours, yet from the first sentence we are struck not only by the violence of his actions, but by the violence performed on the narrative itself. Nietzschean in its nihilistic splendour, the author has captured a spontaneity through which his very existence may be defined. I destroy, he reasons, therefore I exist. Circumscribed by his actions, he becomes self-aware. Would scholars of Conan Doyle's work agree with such a reading? I fear they would argue that the very brevity of this

unusual section (seventy-five words) is proof of it being only an aberration in the manuscript. But such thinking is inexcusable; it tries to ignore what is written, instead of trying to reach an understanding of its purpose. Conan Doyle will not wrap this story up with a bow, it remains in pieces before us, unfinished, chaotic, and more alive with the presence of its author than anything he has previously published.

[18] An oriental gentleman and his twin brother emerged from what had been a previously unobserved passage at the rear of the gallery.

“It was you, Mr. Knox,” said the man, who I could see was not a man at all, but rather a spirit of some sort. His body, as well as that of his twin, was composed of some ethereal substance.

“Yes,” answered Knox. “That’s right.”

“How?” I stammered.

“Intuition, Dr. Gardner. It was through the use of a poison that I had created myself and which is yet unknown to mankind.”

[19] “How did you think to count the bricks?” I asked.

“Because of the presence of a number of flies on the one brick. Flies were attracted to the blood, which led to suspicions that I believe will ultimately prove correct. The police will of course have to match the blood on the brick with that of the deceased, but I have no doubt concerning the results.”

I raised my glass in Knox’s direction.

“Well then, here’s to the successful work, and to a smashing beginning to this weekend.”

Knox grinned as I drank from the glass, his hand still tapping the desk.

“But what if the blood does not match that of the victim? Or what if the flies were attracted to something other than blood?” I asked, holding my glass in such a manner that Knox might offer me another drink.

“Why, of course it will match,” said Knox, his lips curling into a smile. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“But what if?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, Dr. Gardner, reason would tell us otherwise. It is of great importance for you to recognize the implications if that were ever not to be the case.”

“Why you’d be incorrect,” I answered. “Certainly it would mean nothing more?”

“How wrong you are, Dr. Gardner.”

[20] I stood on the boulevard opposite the apartment and watched the sheets of flame rise skyward from the narrow windows. The ruby red door began to blister from the rising heat inside and a brisk wind, which I had not noticed earlier in the day, blew from my back to drive the flames ever higher. Within moments the second floor was ablaze and I could feel the heat against my face. A crowd of pedestrians began to form a half circle - their bodies maintaining an intuitively measured distance from the burning apartments. Even when the fire department finally arrived, their presence long forewarned by the wail of sirens, the crowds appeared reluctant to part. I remember thinking how very odd that was.

As I turned, walking from the chaos, I tried to picture Knox sitting at his oak desk, slowly tapping his fingers. It was an image I knew I would carry with me forever.

Staring at the manuscript which has captured my working table I cannot make sense of it. The pages, spread across the table, remain a mystery. Now I even doubt their authorship. If it is Conan Doyle, it is not good Conan Doyle. Perhaps it should remain unpublished. How does the eighteenth page of the manuscript have any bearing on the whole? And what of the ending? The apartment burns to the ground, the narrator is uncertain, the criminal revealed but not apprehended? A world understood on the tenets of reason has long left us. Even Conan Doyle lived long enough to see the emerging chaos. Perhaps his manuscript speaks most credibly as it is, unfinished and in fragments - as though the apprehension of the criminal is no longer the umbilicus of the story. Morality has become a relativism, order a fallacy. That much is clear to me now, but what of the rest? What did my colleague see in this story that made it worthy of my reading? And on the eve of his death?

The reading of the manuscript leaves me confused. I feel as though having looked at a cracked mirror I have come to understand the fragments at the expense of the whole. Even my belief that certain sections should be read in a particular manner is undermined by recognizing the presence of a chaotic inconsistency. I have been denied answers to all the questions the manuscript has asked me to hold. I have details that add up to nothing.

This will be the last section I will write before leaving. I have placed my belongings in storage. Whatever I deem essential for my travels have been packed in the two suitcases which await me at the front door. I have not notified the landlord of my intentions because I do not propose to return. The death of my colleague has, in many ways, become a point of departure. My work seems complete here and I feel, again in ways I have trouble articulating, that my colleague is responsible. There is little left to

say about him other than voicing, with some difficulty, my thanks.

Of my colleague's infamous drug dependence I've not written, but the omission only strikes me now. Among the people I've known it is common enough not to warrant much attention, and I lack the facilities of judgement. It would be hypocrisy.

The death of my colleague, in a drug related accident, is well documented. He wasn't the first to die in such a manner and certainly will not be the last. The details are no mystery. He is gone. Perhaps there is no better place to end than when, confronted by such an absence of mystery, there remains nothing left to say.

J.U., Toronto