

Men Who Tripped and Fell

Andrew James Paterson

Barry

Barry Ferguson composed himself , and then left a message with Claire and Helen that he would be joining them at their friend's play that evening . Barry had to wind down after that enervating panel , at which a well-known black male-to-female transsexual had challenged him on every single one of his points and forced the panel into seriously unnecessary overtime. Obliterating the Johnny one-note queer activist and the leftover essentialist dyke had been easy as pie; but trading barbs with Brenda Carpenter had definitely been an uphill battle.

Life on campus had become stressful for him lately. He had been hoping that he could coast on profile if not exclusively than at least predominantly. But his obligations had not been co-operative. He had insisted on being the star speaker at the panel and star billing can bring out the vultures . It can encourage target-practice for the no-talents who chronically need to punish talent and intelligence.

And that panel occurred shortly after the afternoon when he had made the mistake of inviting that Leonard girl for drinks. Nancy Leonard was nearly thirty , a mature student in his Literary Theory class who had once sung with a drug-addled Vancouver riot grrrl group. Nancy herself was far too intelligent for any of that sordid world and for any those simplistic binaries such as homo or hetero or even male or female. After three too many drinks , Barry had divulged a personal attraction to Nancy and she had abruptly hailed a cab. She was highly unlikely to accuse him of harassment ; but she had stopped talking to him even though she remained one of his brighter students.

He was too exhausted to begin any reading and he had already prepared for the following day's lecture and tutorials. Barry Ferguson was a star , so he could afford to coast when the occasion demanded it. The *Aesthetic Imperative* had crossed over into the mainstream publishing market. Barry Ferguson was now of an elite few whose name registered in both the academy and the best-seller lists .

Barry

He didn't want to be alone at the moment but he wished to avoid any demanding company. Attending a play with Claire and Helen would be a good way to kill a few hours. Barry generally detested the theatre because so much of it was in fact anti-theatrical. Mainstream theatre and mainstream film were both unfortunately dominated by real people earnestly pretending to be real people. But Claire had described her girlfriend's friend's play as being only a one-act work , which meant that they could go for drinks after the play and still call it an relatively early night. Both Claire and Helen had avoided that dreadful panel and therefore the subject would not be discussed tonight .

Barry had definitely glimpsed Neil lurking in the far right corner of the auditorium. It had been Neil who had jolted his concentration and made him vulnerable to Brenda Carpenter and her sycophants. The Brendas of the world he could handle in the long run. When one becomes famous there will always be those who yearn for comeuppance. But Neil was another story . Only the previous day Barry had felt confident that Neil was alive and safely far away in Vancouver.

He craved a shot of Scotch or perhaps Irish , but then Barry checked himself. Drinking before going to the theatre was never a good idea. The pleasantly time-consuming too easily becomes the irritatingly prolonged when bladders and stamina become involved. He checked his alarm clock and set about dressing himself. He felt no need to be too extravagant tonight , but he did feel compelled to dress smartly. Claire would wear her typical tweed trousers , Helen would wear jeans as she had begun to habitually affect lately , and Barry would sport a royal blazer with a subdued ascot.

Barry straightened his ascot and then requested a taxi. He had never learned to drive a car and he was well past the point of possibly learning. While he waited for the cab , he tried his damndest not to think about Neil being alive and unwell in Toronto.

He wasn't in the mood for predictability after all. The play had bored him and Helen Bingham's theatre friends , who had tagged along to the bistro for after-show beverages , were a

Barry

dull pair indeed. Barry drank at twice the pace of the other four , who prattled on about the dynamics of the production and the romantic liaisons between people whom he did not know and whom he had no desire to become acquainted with.

When he asked Claire if he could borrow a cigarette , Claire nodded to him . She knew that Barry only smoked when he was either bored or restless. Barry wondered whether Claire and Helen still enjoyed a sexual relationship . He suspected that they only celebrated on their respective birthdays. Claire had once confided to him that Helen considered her to be more than a borderline alcoholic ; and that Helen had for her part taken up pot-smoking at her twice-weekly women's writing group.

He had heard the rumours about his self and Claire once having been married . These rumours amused , rather than angered , him. Claire had once actually been married to that seriously repressed Math professor Tim Burrige ; although Barry doubted that Claire had ever been sexually tempted by any man. Barry had in fact once been married to Sarah Lloyd , who had left him for Dennis Matthews , who had developed a serious taste for chicken . Sarah was now dating a police superintendent , which seemed highly appropriate. Sarah was still in contact with Neil and that was probably, if anything , making life even more confusing for the poor confused kid.

Barry excused himself from the table as he had to relieve himself . As he passed posters for stupid plays that he never had and never would see ; he decided that the night was still young and that it demanded redemption. He vowed to finish his drink and then hail a cab that would take him to The Track. Barry detested the ghetto but revered The Track.

It might have been the threat of rain combined with the descending temperature ; but The Track was more sparsely populated than usual this evening. Most of the boys were favouring the men with cars . Yes , they are fools , Barry muttered to himself . Drivers theoretically had more money but only theoretically. There were always potential johns who didn't drive for various

Barry

practical reasons . Barry had never learned to drive but he had never seen why that failure should disqualify him from participating in life.

He froze for a moment. There he was again , that young man with the receding hairline who looked so much like his son Neil. Almost a month ago , Barry had been cruising The Track and been jolted when confronted with this youth. At a closer angle , the young man was probably five years older than Neil and not at all healthy . Definitely a heroin or crack user, Barry grimaced.

He was relieved to watch the boy who resembled Neil successfully engage a john in a red Plymouth , who immediately drove him away. The driver was probably taking the boy to a hotel possibly a mile away , somewhere in another neighbourhood. Barry wasn't interested in comfortable neighbourhoods or controlled environments - not tonight .

But the street was practically deserted , and it had to be more than just the ominous weather. Barry was quite familiar with the trade bar around the corner from the Central YMCA. But that bar was too easy for him. He would typically order a drink and then the boys would cruise by and ask him how he was doing tonight. He was not in the mood for lazy rhetorical questions .

He decided against dropping into the trade bar and being blatantly competed for. There was always that wrinkle bar nearby , a bar with really bad drag shows at which he could probably kill half an hour . He decided to walk up the alley to the first street north and then over to the main street where the wrinkle bar was located.

Barry's ears detected a rustling behind a car parked in the lane-way. He turned around , attempting to trace the sound to its source . He saw nothing and so continued to walk north to the side-street.

Now he heard another sound behind him . This time it was that of shuffling feet. As soon as he turned he felt the knife enter his heart. Barry Ferguson fell to the sidewalk and heard nothing further.

Barry

Chris Temple was on the verge of checking out of the news room for the day when his editor at *The Toronto Ringer* motioned him over into his office and closed the door.

‘This just in’, remarked Ray Wildridge.

Chris read the e-bulletin on Ray’s monitor:

Former British rock star Roy Fullerton, known professionally as Troy Ventura, was found dead last night in his Sherbourne St. apartment. A hypodermic syringe and eye -dropper was found on the table beside the sofa, when he was found dead by his girlfriend , Mary Henry.

Fullerton played in a minor British rock band called The Debonairs before being retained by glam-rock superstar Alex Wonderful to play guitar in his backing band. Wonderful changed the guitarist’s name to Troy Ventura, and the guitarist remained with Wonderful’s band until leaving in 1975. Fullerton then vanished from the music industry, living anonymously in Toronto until his death.

Chris looked up at the arts editor.

‘It’s practically written already, Ray. When do you need it for?’.

Ray Wildridge snarled.

‘Within the next hour.’.

Chris shrugged and returned to his own cubicle. He knew that he could add a couple of paragraphs and keep the obituary within two hundred words. He had even once met Roy Fullerton, sitting among a group of semi-retired Toronto rockers in a notorious Kensington cafe called The Arkestra one afternoon last summer. Fullerton had been obviously nodding off along with the coterie of has-beens and wannabes at the table. Fullerton as Ventura had been an archetypal glam-rock guitarist who probably only played in public a tiny fraction of what he actually knew how to play.

Chris remembered The Debonairs but couldn't remember any of their tunes - he guessed that they had been a typical try-anything band with no particular sound or image. Alex Wonderful must have needed another guitarist and taken a shine to Mr. Fullerton. This was hardly unusual. He remembered Alex Wonderful hiring and firing many guitarists- all meat-and-potatoes rocker types first recruited then dolled up and then re-christened. Troy Ventura's successor, Robin Fantastic, had come into the world as Robin Belcher.

Writing the formula obituary was a piece of cake. But, when Chris walked past the Arkestra cafe where he had once met the dead guitarist, something began annoying him. He could recognize a few of the other washed-up rockers who drank their remaining lives away at the marker cafe. Many of them were one-hit-wonders at best, and the others not even that. A pseudo-Brit named Terry Mark was holding court. Terry Mark was always holding court, in the manner of all glorious has-beens.

Chris thought about one of them- Ken Slater- and he actually liked the man when not too drunk or stoned. He knew that there was a whole side to the man his boozing buddies never saw. He suspected the same might well be true about Roy Fullerton.

After feeding the cat and checking his E-mail, Chris searched for an Alex Wonderful website. He had to cruise through seventies English rock and the New Music Express to find one, and he had to read through a lot of Alex Wonderful propaganda before locating any mention of Troy Ventura. Troy had come and gone from Alex's band within the space of sixteen months, and had resigned over 'musical differences'.

Troy Ventura was briefly mentioned as being merely one of many. Alex Wonderful was quite the Svengali, a specialist at making brief somebodies out of nobodies and then making them nobodies again. Chris realized that very few of Alex's 'discoveries' ever resurfaced in the pop world, let alone became anything resembling stars. He guessed that all the dissatisfied musicians became branded as losers by the pop press, and that most of them didn't help their causes by not immediately forming their own supergroups or quickly finding other high-profile employment.

Working for Alex Wonderful was probably no piece of cake. Megalomaniac pop stars are often notorious for wanting to control every aspect of their sidemen's lives as well as their musicianship. But Alex's sidemen, at least Roy Fullerton formally known as Troy Ventura, had become unable to control his own life. This of course was hardly unusual but Chris was irked. Roy Fullerton couldn't have just left England and settled for a borderline anonymity in Toronto. There had to have been other factors in this decision, if it even was a decision.

Chris decided that he would undertake a larger story about the life and death of Roy Fullerton. Trajectories from anonymity to stardom and back to anonymity fascinated him, because they were all actually quite different from one another. He could pitch this story to a couple of potential publishers, and his schedule wasn't exactly overflowing with serious assignments.

He opened a beer and rolled a joint for himself. He wondered about Roy Fullerton's girlfriend, who had found the body. He recalled a couple of women among the old rockers who Roy had hung out with at the Arkestra cafe. Was Mary Henry one of those girls, or was she somebody completely different? Who was she, and what sort of relationship did she and Roy share?

Mary Henry was at least a decade younger than Chris had anticipated. She also appeared to be extremely healthy.

'I met Roy at the methadone clinic where I work. I guess I became his live-in nurse.'

Mary poured more coffee for herself and her visitor.

'He never talked about Troy Ventura and his glam-rocker days. At least not to me. He probably did play the old rocker hero for his user friends down at that cafe he always hung out at.'

Chris asked for permission to smoke and it was granted.

'Go ahead. I'll get you an ash tray. I still lapse occasionally, so being in a room with a

smoker is a good test for me.’.

The apartment was almost spotless and the books on the shelves were not for light readers.

‘I work at the methadone clinic so I can study film and cultural theory at night. It’s going to be tight without Roy. I might have to find a room-mate.’.

Chris shook his head. He wouldn’t have suspected Roy Fullerton to be financially stable, unless he had perhaps been dealing drugs.

‘Roy still received performer’s royalties from Alex Wonderful. And while it’s true that he gave up performing a long time ago, he never stopped *playing*. He built himself an entirely new career as a session guitarist and he was doing quite nicely by it.’.

Chris tried to imagine Troy Ventura sitting around with a group of session-types and couldn’t. But The Debonairs had been basically a cover band, and he guessed that Roy had ‘chops’ that had been irrelevant to Alex Wonderful’s glam-rock formula.

‘Roy didn’t do session work under his own name, and he never really talked about it. I suspect he never talked to his market junkie-friends about playing sessions, because that sort of anonymous work is the opposite of glamorous.’.

Chris nodded. In England, ‘session-player’ was often used negatively to refer to any musician with zero personality or stage-presence. Troy Ventura had nearly upstaged the famous Alex Wonderful, and that was probably why he had become so expendable.

‘One of the stereotypes about session musicians is that they snort too much coke.’.

Mary Henry looked at him angrily.

‘That’s such an LA stereotype. Any musician obviously using would be doing it at the expense of their career.’. She poured more coffee for herself. ‘Roy blew his career in the last month of his life by relapsing. I knew that he couldn’t hang around at Arkestra drinking with all those assholes without relapsing, but I couldn’t be managing his life for him.’.

‘Sorry.’, muttered Chris.

‘He could take his methadone on schedule and be completely discreet about it. But the

methadone clinic is also where he met Terry Mark and Ken Slater and all those other seventies losers. The whole lot of them were such nothings, and they all sat around convincing themselves that they were somebodies. They were all too good for the industry and for the audiences, except they were somewhat deficient in the talent department.’

Terry Mark had once been a seventies Toronto punk icon, along with his band The Vipers. Terry Mark was now an old ghoul with a fake English accent and a nasty heroin habit.

Chris decided that he’d bothered Mary Henry long enough. As he stood to leave, he remembered to ask her what had been Roy Fullerton’s session-player name.

‘Jeff Tierney. You’ll see that name on many Toronto pop and even funk-fusion records. Roy was a really good guitarist - way too technical for a poseur like Alex Wonderful.’

‘Thanks for your time, Ms. Henry. I’d better get going.’

Mary Henry nodded , and then showed him out.

‘Can I possibly bum a smoke from you?’

Chris handed her one and then walked toward the market area.

He decided that his cat could wait a bit longer for her supper and then walked past the Arkestra Cafe in the Kensington market. It would have been unusual for Terry Mark and Ken Slater and their cronies to not be still holding court; and he knew that they would likely be drinking in memory of Roy Fullerton aka. Troy Ventura.

Sure enough. the gang was all there. Terry Mark was acting particularly boisterous, raising his pint glass to Roy not once but more than several times. Chris was debating whether to walk past the old rockers’ table when Ken Slater called out his name.

‘Chris Temple, you old wanker. Sit down and join us.’

Chris took the hint and ordered a pint. When the beer came, Terry Mark slapped Chris’ hand and told the waitress to add it onto the tab.

‘You gonna write something respectful about Roy or Troy or our friend? Something more

than that useless blurb in the morning's paper?'

Chris sipped his draught and nodded.

'Well then', Terry coughed. 'You should mention that Terry Mark considered Roy to be the fucking guvnor. Fucking Alex Wonderful couldn't hold a bloody candle to the man. You may be aware that Alex Wonderful's career went kaput after Roy gave him notice.'

'Roy had to be dropped so that Alex could go Vegas.', Ken Slater stared at Chris, daring him to disagree. Ken was not as extroverted as Terry, but he was at least as demanding.

'Alex Wonderful used his accompanists. This isn't exactly news, guys.'

Terry blew a raspberry.

'Alex Wonderful was the biggest rip-off artist who ever existed. And Roy was a total gentleman. Roy had too much class to vent spleen about Alex. But you didn't need to be Einstein to figure out that Roy hated the fucking asshole.'

Chris lit a cigarette and bit his tongue. He would have preferred to have heard Roy Fullerton speaking on his own behalf, but that was somewhat difficult now that the man had overdosed.

Ken Slater was attempting to order another round when Terry's cell phone rang. Terry abruptly stood and left the table, walking with his phone toward the doorway.

From the corner of his right eye, Chris could see that Terry's manner had become completely different. The old rocker was registering what seemed like commands from the voice on the phone. He practically stood at attention, making sure that he heard his orders correctly.

Chris had heard from other sources that Terry Mark had long stopped making money from his old band's residuals and was now a bottom-line heroin dealer. He guessed that Terry had been Roy Fullerton's supplier, but he needed proof. He wondered just how aware Mary Henry had been about the details of Roy's habit, especially the relapses.

Chris decided to finish his draught, leave a contribution for the round, and then sit down at his computer. He wanted to talk to Mary Henry again, but not immediately.

After making some coffee and a sandwich for himself, Chris switched on his I-Mac and began searching old music sites. He passed by Iggy Pop and David Bowie and Nine Inch Nails before landing on Alex Wonderful.

He opened up the Alex files and recognized a few of the titles. *Careening Wildly*, *The Stars Move Too Fast For You*, and *Love You On Glide* were all titles that Chris associated with Troy Ventura. Roy known as Troy had been the lead guitarist of these vintage Alex Wonderful tracks from the star's most-legendary period.

He clicked on *Love You On Glide*. He recognized the oddly orchestrated space ballad and didn't hear any guitar parts that justified Troy Ventura's reputation. *Love You On Glide* was pop with an weirdly echoed production, and it had been a hit for Alex.

The Stars Move Too Fast For You was more what Chris was looking for. The track sounded not unlike space-boogie or demented rockabilly, and Troy's guitar was well up in the mix. Despite the typical early seventies glam-rock distortion, Chris could hear a seasoned rockabilly player blasting it out with near abandon. *Careening Wildly* was a similar song, with a psychotic guitar solo that mixed up rockabilly and even free-jazz. Chris could visualize Alex Wonderful and his producer and his manager arguing about whether that solo was the ingredient that would make the record jump out like a sore thumb and then sell, or whether the solo was simply 'too much'. And he also could have done without Alex's faux lyrics about Oscar Wilde and Outer Space. Alex's Sci-Fi 101 lyrics had always been an accidental comedy of manners but such details had never prevented him from becoming a mega-star at the expense of his crucial collaborators.

Chris heard the phone ringing and decided to answer it. There was no particular call that he was expecting.

He did not recognize the incoming caller and he picked up the receiver

The voice was familiar. It was male and fake English and it belonged to one of Terry

Mark's friends from the Arkestra Cafe.

'You don't know me, but I know you.'

Chris swallowed.

'Yes?'

'I know you're writing an investigative article into the life and times of Roy Fullerton. I have something for you, but don't use my name. Got it?'

'Got it.' Chris could tell the man was calling him from a phone booth.

'One. Terry Mark sold Roy some extra strong shit. Two. Terry Mark and Mary Henry are good friends.'

Then the caller hung up.

Chris decided to open a beer. As he lit a smoke, he realized that it was too late to abandon his article. Whether or not anybody would be willing to publish it would be another matter. He couldn't see Ray Wildridge touching it with a ten-foot pole. He couldn't imagine any of the national or even international pop press going near it, either. Alex Wonderful was a tiresome but durable old-star who kept pseudo-reinventing himself, and buying out the press was essential to Alex's endless self-reinvention.

Whether or not he should write the thing using characters' real names was also another matter.

Yes! He quickly looked up the number for an old friend of his who ran a small desktop-publishing company. He would meet Tim Reynolds and pitch a pulp-murder mystery based on the Roy Fullerton case but not using any real names.

Good! Tim Reynolds agreed to meet Chris for drinks in forty-five minutes. Tim lived a good distance away so Chris quickly finished his beer and got moving.

As he walked toward the nearby subway, Chris looked over his right shoulder. He did not notice any unusual cars driving behind him.

Idol
10/17/09

Dr. Howard Townshend was relaxing with an after-dinner glass of red wine when he became distracted by an insistent knocking on the front door.

‘Sorry to disturb you, Dr. Townshend. It’s Betty Savoy!’.

Betty Savoy managed a generic apartment complex about ten minutes west of Dr. Townshend’s residence, and thus Howard was unofficially the doctor on call. Many of Mrs. Savoy’s tenants were elderly and in precarious health.

The doctor wondered why Mrs. Savoy hadn’t telephoned first, then he realized that he’d been on the phone with Gloria up until fifteen minutes ago. He and Gloria talked for centuries on the telephone now that they had agreed to separate.

Howard opened the door to Mrs. Savoy, who was describing to him how she had become concerned about one of her long-term tenants, so concerned that she had broken into the gentleman’s apartment and subsequently found the man unconscious on the floor.

There was no hope of reviving the elegantly but also prehistorically-dressed gentleman who had fallen from his smoking chair onto the floor. Dr. Howard Townshend suspected that this was not the elderly man’s first heart attack.

The coroner confirmed that the man’s heart had stopped beating.

‘Well, Howard, now we have to start making reports. Let’s see if he has any ID on him.’.

Howard looked at Ross Lansdowne for a second and then searched through the dead man’s left and right trouser pockets. The maroon smoking jacket did not have pockets, which Howard thought to be unusual. In the right trouser pocket he came across a TD Bank Green Card bearing the name Louis Morgan.

‘I guess that’s his name, Ross. Louis Morgan.’

The coroner nodded glumly. He didn’t need to tell Officer Townshend that the dead

Idol
10/17/09

gentleman's landlord would need to be interviewed as procedure.

'Well, when Frank gets here we'll take him over to the morgue. He doesn't smell like booze, although he has classic nicotine breath.'

Yes, Howard nodded. Nicotine breath. The not-quite distinguished looking old gentleman had died with his smoking jacket on. The jacket had been well maintained, but the socks and shoes were another matter entirely. The shoes were a pair of what once might have passed for spats. Maybe Louis Morgan had once been a gangster or a dancer or something thirties. But now he was dead.

'Luke was my oldest tenant.', Betty Savoy informed Howard Townshend over croissants and coffee.

Luke? Louis? Lou?

'Very nice man, because he was very quiet. Never had company. I don't believe I ever registered any visitors for Luke.'

Howard frowned. So, if Luke or Louis had relatives of any sort they weren't on speaking terms or they all lived somewhere else?

'Smoked all the time, but then I'm also an unapologetic chimney. Luke did drink, but he was never obnoxious.'

Betty finished her croissants and lit a cigarette. Luke Morgan never had any problems with his rent and he received very little mail. Betty just assumed that her tenant had been retired and collecting a minimally functional pension.

'One other thing', Betty exhaled. 'He never had company, because he never needed it. Not as long as the VCR was working.'

'The VCR?', Howard scratched his head. 'What was he watching on it?'

'Old movies. All sorts of old movies. A lot of musicals.'

That might have explained the smoking jacket. But surely the man must have enjoyed some

Idol
10/17/09

sort of audience?

‘Luke Morgan used to be a tour guide for me’, Sally Mengers jerked her head toward the demonstration both where a young black girl was enthusiastically explaining how facial mugs were first captured and then manipulated into composites by state-of-the-art computers.

Howard was perplexed. He hadn’t seen any computers or other modern technologies in Louis’ bedroom and the idea of the song and dance man explaining technology to young children was too bizarre to be believable.

‘He didn’t last too long, mind you. He could never memorize the speech, let alone stick to the script.’.

Sally Mengers was an almost buxom woman who would have made more sense as a bartender in a burlesque bar. She glanced over again toward the earnest tour guide and smiled at Howard. He had the feeling that Sally had tolerated Louis’ improvisations but that somebody higher up had intervened. Too many complaints from members of the public and that’s it.

‘Miss Mengers, did Luke ever talk about his previous employment? What about his resume?’

She frowned. Howard guessed that Sally or even her superiors hadn’t looked at Louis’ resume all that closely.

‘He told me that he’d been a singer. When he applied for the job he was wearing a smoking jacket and a pair of two-toned buck shoes. I had to persuade him to wear the white shirt and tie, and that was frankly quite the uphill battle.’.

He nodded. He had the feeling that she was hiding something, despite her friendly demeanor. But what?

When Sally invited her to join her for further conversation after the conclusion of her shift, Howard nearly declined her invitation. Then he realized that further conversation might not be such a bad idea after all.

Idol
10/17/09

Donald Mengers was definitely a member of the family but he was also a member of a different church. Donald made it clear within minutes of introduction that he knew every significant and insignificant piece of movie trivia that anybody else might need to know. Donald's need to know these facts and details had nothing whatever to do with the practical world, even though his *Memories Are Made Of This* boutique was obviously doing quite nicely for itself.

'I have just the photograph you might be looking for, Inspector Howard.'

Sally lit another cigarette and sipped her Collins. It occurred to Howard that Sally might be entertaining the idea of making him drunk.

'Here we go, sir. Look at this production still from *Camels Walk Tall*. Study it, spend a little time with it and then describe it to me.'

Donald borrowed a smoke from his sister and then the siblings actually kept their mouths shut so that their new pupil could do some serious studying. Their restraint was, in turn, appreciated.

Howard recognized Betty Grable and Judy Holliday, although none of the male actors were familiar to him. Then he found himself staring at a large-foreheaded man dancing up a storm in the lower left-hand corner of the picture.

Yes, that was Louis ! The small-time song and dance man was indeed dancing up a storm, especially in comparison to the other extras.

You've located our friend.', Donald wasn't asking a question.

Howard nodded. It almost appeared as if the film's director had been trying to keep the over-exuberant chorus dancer out of the shot but , alas, to no avail.

'That was Louis' entire career right there in as nutshell, Mr. Townshend. It seems that he made a tidy little living for himself until he violated protocols.'

'How?', Howard frowned at Sally as she sipped after exhaling.

Donald looked at Howard as he might have to a problem student.

Idol
10/17/09

‘He actually talked to the director, that was his mistake. Rule number one, never talk to the director. Louis, shall we say, never did quite comprehend his relative insignificance when it came down to the big picture.’.

On that note, Howard realized that it was time for him to move on. He’d had enough of Sally Mengers and her trivia queen brother. But he needed to buy the photograph from Donald and then try to contact the film studio, if not the photographer who was more than likely also deceased.

Sally had provided him with the name of an ancient tavern where Louis had once sang, at least according to Louis. Sally had therefore outlived her usefulness.

‘You’re leaving us already?’, Donald did seem insulted.

‘It’s not even sundown yet’, smiled Sally.

Howard stood at attention, facing the pair.

‘Yes, it is.’.

Howard drove home *very* carefully and then fixed himself a strong coffee. He checked his telephone messages and they included a call from Gloria. He decided to return his ex-wife’s call later, perhaps tomorrow.

So Louis or Luke Morgan had once been an over-enthusiastic movie extra who had subsequently become a singer in some bar and then probably exhausted that source of relatively paltry revenue. Perhaps Howard would visit the bar whose name Donald had thoughtfully provided for him. Perhaps he would avoid the bar. It wasn’t as if Luke or Louis’ life was terribly mysterious.

But there was something mysterious about Louis’ transition from performer to member of the audience, although it seemed that Louis had been completely uninterested in watching any performers other than himself. He must have been living on some sort of pension left over from his tour guide job, although Howard wouldn’t have trusted Sally Mengers not to be bending the

Idol
10/17/09

rules in her own favour at the expense of disgraced former employees. But.....Luke Morgan probably paid his rent to Betty Savoy from that pension and possibly from additional work he might have done for his landlady. But what sort of work? Somehow, Howard didn't imagine Luke Morgan being any sort of conventional handy man. He couldn't imagine Luke being able to concentrate on anything mechanical.

Betty Savoy herself had been rumoured to be a former stripper or burlesque entertainer. Miss Savoy's career (had there ever been a Mr. Savoy or Mr. Anybody?) had supposedly bottomed out years ago and then she had invested wisely. She had supposedly played the stock market with savvy and then bought herself some properties. There were at least two other rooming houses that Betty Savoy kept and managed.

Howard had occasionally wondered how organized Betty was about her lodgers..... did she keep records and did she claim rental incomes on her taxes? But then Howard himself was no great admirer of the government and its taxation systems and other red tape.

He decided to call the film production photographer.... Roy Madison..... and make an appointment for the next day. He then considered returning Gloria's call, but then decided against it. Gloria could wait until at least tomorrow.

Roy Madison had not done badly for himself as a production photographer. In fact, he'd made enough money to have retired comfortably for nearly a decade. In the nineteen forties he had known the right connections and become steadily employed on the sets of Grade A Hollywood musicals.

'Do I have stills from *Camels Walk Tall*? What kind of question is that, Mister Townshend? I mean, was Errol Flynn a swashbuckling junkie?'

Apparently Errol Flynn had been as so described, and it certainly wasn't any time for Howard to be contradicting the older gentleman. Roy Madison opened up one of his many file cupboards and retrieved several chorus shots that did include a 'special business' extra with the

Idol
10/17/09

name of 'Louis Palmateer'.

'This is indeed the same man, Mr. Madison.

'Of course it is,' Roy Madison beamed proudly. 'Louis was a grand old gentleman when it was never his job to be one. He liked a drink, and he liked to sing.'

But did he?

'Louis sang all the time, when he was on the set. Or rather, he tried to sing all the time. Not the best approach for a special business extra, I'm afraid.'

Roy Madison poured himself a brandy and looked at Howard, who declined. If Louis Morgan had indeed exhausted his 'Louis Palmateer' alter-ego so early on in the game, then the man must have held down other small-time jobs such as tour-guide or whatever.

But where? And for who?

Howard poured himself a glass of red wine and then activated the VCR. He had stumbled upon yet another movie in which Louis Palmateer was a conspicuous extra.

Musicals had never been Howard's cup of tea. Movies themselves had never been of that much interest to him. When he had been married, he and Gloria had enjoyed the theatre - nothing too intellectual but pleasant. Comedies of manners were the preferred term for the entertaining evenings he and his former wife had spent at the local playhouses.

The phone rang and Howard registered Ross Landsowne as the incoming caller. *Why would the coroner be calling him now?*

'Howard, this does concern you.'

Ross was as cordial as usual. *What did concern him?*

'Did you inquire as to whether Betty Savoy has any witnesses?'

'No'. Why should he have pursued this line of questioning at a time when the dead man's landlady had been so clearly upset about her tenant? Obviously Luke Morgan or Louis Palmateer or Mr. Whatever had died of a heart attack.

Idol
10/17/09

‘Bad form, Howard. You’ve made this slip-up before. *Never* trust anybody who’s too eager to call the doctor.’

Howard’s entire equilibrium sank. Luke had died of a heart attack, all right. However, the man had never experienced even the slightest coronary problems until his death.

So how had Betty pulled this off? And why?

Mrs. Elizabeth Savoy was formally charged with the first-degree murder of not only Luke Morgan (a.k.a. Louis Palmateer) but also of two previous tenants , Dick Irving and Barry Constable. The two previous cases were also aging gentlemen whose deaths were correctly assumed to be of the coronary variety but whose heart attacks in fact had been provoked by some method of insistent harassment by Mrs. Savoy.

Howard had known Betty Savoy on a casual but professional basis for almost five years. He had been a doctor conveniently practicing in the neighbourhood , a doctor who had been on call for her and her tenants. He had never sensed anything unusually malicious or manipulative about the woman. She smoked like a chimney and enjoyed a few drinks and so what then made her different from any other rooming house operator?

He wondered how many other deaths in Betty Savoy’s rooming house, not that they had ever occurred in rapid succession, had been provoked heart attacks. And what evidence did Ross Lansdownne possess that could prove that Betty Savoy had been standing over top of Luke and the other two gentlemen and provoking them? Who were the tenants who had moved into the units vacated by Dick Irving and Barry Constable and thus benefited from their premature deaths?

The telephone rang and now his ex-wife Gloria was calling to ask him to join herself and her boyfriend at an eight o’clock performance of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Playing third fiddle while watching a play about elderly ladies who were in fact serial killers disguised by their genial senilities somehow seemed to be the most appropriate manner for Howard to spend this particular evening, as well as the remainder of his perfectly dysfunctional life.

Idol
10/17/09

Idol
10/17/09

Dr. Howard Townshend was relaxing with an after-dinner glass of red wine when he became distracted by an insistent knocking on the front door.

‘Sorry to disturb you, Dr. Townshend. It’s Betty Savoy!’.

Betty Savoy managed a generic apartment complex about ten minutes west of Dr. Townshend’s residence, and thus Howard was unofficially the doctor on call. Many of Mrs. Savoy’s tenants were elderly and in precarious health.

The doctor wondered why Mrs. Savoy hadn’t telephoned first, then he realized that he’d been on the phone with Gloria up until fifteen minutes ago. He and Gloria talked for centuries on the telephone now that they had agreed to separate.

Howard opened the door to Mrs. Savoy, who was describing to him how she had become concerned about one of her long-term tenants, so concerned that she had broken into the gentleman’s apartment and subsequently found the man unconscious on the floor.

There was no hope of reviving the elegantly but also prehistorically-dressed gentleman who had fallen from his smoking chair onto the floor. Dr. Howard Townshend suspected that this was not the elderly man’s first heart attack.

The coroner confirmed that the man’s heart had stopped beating.

‘Well, Howard, now we have to start making reports. Let’s see if he has any ID on him.’.

Howard looked at Ross Lansdowne for a second and then searched through the dead man’s left and right trouser pockets. The maroon smoking jacket did not have pockets, which Howard thought to be unusual. In the right trouser pocket he came across a TD Bank Green Card bearing the name Louis Morgan.

‘I guess that’s his name, Ross. Louis Morgan.’

The coroner nodded glumly. He didn’t need to tell Officer Townshend that the dead

Idol
10/17/09

gentleman's landlord would need to be interviewed as procedure.

'Well, when Frank gets here we'll take him over to the morgue. He doesn't smell like booze, although he has classic nicotine breath.'

Yes, Howard nodded. Nicotine breath. The not-quite distinguished looking old gentleman had died with his smoking jacket on. The jacket had been well maintained, but the socks and shoes were another matter entirely. The shoes were a pair of what once might have passed for spats. Maybe Louis Morgan had once been a gangster or a dancer or something thirties. But now he was dead.

'Luke was my oldest tenant.', Betty Savoy informed Howard Townshend over croissants and coffee.

Luke? Louis? Lou?

'Very nice man, because he was very quiet. Never had company. I don't believe I ever registered any visitors for Luke.'

Howard frowned. So, if Luke or Louis had relatives of any sort they weren't on speaking terms or they all lived somewhere else?

'Smoked all the time, but then I'm also an unapologetic chimney. Luke did drink, but he was never obnoxious.'

Betty finished her croissants and lit a cigarette. Luke Morgan never had any problems with his rent and he received very little mail. Betty just assumed that her tenant had been retired and collecting a minimally functional pension.

'One other thing', Betty exhaled. 'He never had company, because he never needed it. Not as long as the VCR was working.'

'The VCR?', Howard scratched his head. 'What was he watching on it?'

'Old movies. All sorts of old movies. A lot of musicals.'

That might have explained the smoking jacket. But surely the man must have enjoyed some

Idol
10/17/09

sort of audience?

‘Luke Morgan used to be a tour guide for me’, Sally Mengers jerked her head toward the demonstration both where a young black girl was enthusiastically explaining how facial mugs were first captured and then manipulated into composites by state-of-the-art computers.

Howard was perplexed. He hadn’t seen any computers or other modern technologies in Louis’ bedroom and the idea of the song and dance man explaining technology to young children was too bizarre to be believable.

‘He didn’t last too long, mind you. He could never memorize the speech, let alone stick to the script.’.

Sally Mengers was an almost buxom woman who would have made more sense as a bartender in a burlesque bar. She glanced over again toward the earnest tour guide and smiled at Howard. He had the feeling that Sally had tolerated Louis’ improvisations but that somebody higher up had intervened. Too many complaints from members of the public and that’s it.

‘Miss Mengers, did Luke ever talk about his previous employment? What about his resume?’

She frowned. Howard guessed that Sally or even her superiors hadn’t looked at Louis’ resume all that closely.

‘He told me that he’d been a singer. When he applied for the job he was wearing a smoking jacket and a pair of two-toned buck shoes. I had to persuade him to wear the white shirt and tie, and that was frankly quite the uphill battle.’.

He nodded. He had the feeling that she was hiding something, despite her friendly demeanor. But what?

When Sally invited her to join her for further conversation after the conclusion of her shift, Howard nearly declined her invitation. Then he realized that further conversation might not be such a bad idea after all.

Idol
10/17/09

Donald Mengers was definitely a member of the family but he was also a member of a different church. Donald made it clear within minutes of introduction that he knew every significant and insignificant piece of movie trivia that anybody else might need to know. Donald's need to know these facts and details had nothing whatever to do with the practical world, even though his *Memories Are Made Of This* boutique was obviously doing quite nicely for itself.

'I have just the photograph you might be looking for, Inspector Howard.'

Sally lit another cigarette and sipped her Collins. It occurred to Howard that Sally might be entertaining the idea of making him drunk.

'Here we go, sir. Look at this production still from *Camels Walk Tall*. Study it, spend a little time with it and then describe it to me.'

Donald borrowed a smoke from his sister and then the siblings actually kept their mouths shut so that their new pupil could do some serious studying. Their restraint was, in turn, appreciated.

Howard recognized Betty Grable and Judy Holliday, although none of the male actors were familiar to him. Then he found himself staring at a large-foreheaded man dancing up a storm in the lower left-hand corner of the picture.

Yes, that was Louis ! The small-time song and dance man was indeed dancing up a storm, especially in comparison to the other extras.

You've located our friend.', Donald wasn't asking a question.

Howard nodded. It almost appeared as if the film's director had been trying to keep the over-exuberant chorus dancer out of the shot but , alas, to no avail.

'That was Louis' entire career right there in as nutshell, Mr. Townshend. It seems that he made a tidy little living for himself until he violated protocols.'

'How?', Howard frowned at Sally as she sipped after exhaling.

Donald looked at Howard as he might have to a problem student.

Idol
10/17/09

‘He actually talked to the director, that was his mistake. Rule number one, never talk to the director. Louis, shall we say, never did quite comprehend his relative insignificance when it came down to the big picture.’.

On that note, Howard realized that it was time for him to move on. He’d had enough of Sally Mengers and her trivia queen brother. But he needed to buy the photograph from Donald and then try to contact the film studio, if not the photographer who was more than likely also deceased.

Sally had provided him with the name of an ancient tavern where Louis had once sang, at least according to Louis. Sally had therefore outlived her usefulness.

‘You’re leaving us already?’, Donald did seem insulted.

‘It’s not even sundown yet’, smiled Sally.

Howard stood at attention, facing the pair.

‘Yes, it is.’.

Howard drove home *very* carefully and then fixed himself a strong coffee. He checked his telephone messages and they included a call from Gloria. He decided to return his ex-wife’s call later, perhaps tomorrow.

So Louis or Luke Morgan had once been an over-enthusiastic movie extra who had subsequently become a singer in some bar and then probably exhausted that source of relatively paltry revenue. Perhaps Howard would visit the bar whose name Donald had thoughtfully provided for him. Perhaps he would avoid the bar. It wasn’t as if Luke or Louis’ life was terribly mysterious.

But there was something mysterious about Louis’ transition from performer to member of the audience, although it seemed that Louis had been completely uninterested in watching any performers other than himself. He must have been living on some sort of pension left over from his tour guide job, although Howard wouldn’t have trusted Sally Mengers not to be bending the

Idol
10/17/09

rules in her own favour at the expense of disgraced former employees. But.....Luke Morgan probably paid his rent to Betty Savoy from that pension and possibly from additional work he might have done for his landlady. But what sort of work? Somehow, Howard didn't imagine Luke Morgan being any sort of conventional handy man. He couldn't imagine Luke being able to concentrate on anything mechanical.

Betty Savoy herself had been rumoured to be a former stripper or burlesque entertainer. Miss Savoy's career (had there ever been a Mr. Savoy or Mr. Anybody?) had supposedly bottomed out years ago and then she had invested wisely. She had supposedly played the stock market with savvy and then bought herself some properties. There were at least two other rooming houses that Betty Savoy kept and managed.

Howard had occasionally wondered how organized Betty was about her lodgers..... did she keep records and did she claim rental incomes on her taxes? But then Howard himself was no great admirer of the government and its taxation systems and other red tape.

He decided to call the film production photographer.... Roy Madison..... and make an appointment for the next day. He then considered returning Gloria's call, but then decided against it. Gloria could wait until at least tomorrow.

Roy Madison had not done badly for himself as a production photographer. In fact, he'd made enough money to have retired comfortably for nearly a decade. In the nineteen forties he had known the right connections and become steadily employed on the sets of Grade a Hollywood musicals.

'Do I have stills from *Camels Walk Tall*? What kind of question is that, Mister Townshend? I mean, was Errol Flynn a swashbuckling junkie?'

Apparently Errol Flynn had been as so described, and it certainly wasn't any time for Howard to be contradicting the older gentleman. Roy Madison opened up one of his many file cupboards and retrieved several chorus shots that did include a 'special business' extra with the

Idol
10/17/09

name of 'Louis Palmateer'.

'This is indeed the same man, Mr. Madison.

'Of course it is,' Roy Madison beamed proudly. 'Louis was a grand old gentleman when it was never his job to be one. He liked a drink, and he liked to sing.'

But did he?

'Louis sang all the time, when he was on the set. Or rather, he tried to sing all the time. Not the best approach for a special business extra, I'm afraid.'

Roy Madison poured himself a brandy and looked at Howard, who declined. If Louis Morgan had indeed exhausted his 'Louis Palmateer' alter-ego so early on in the game, then the man must have held down other small-time jobs such as tour-guide or whatever.

But where? And for who?

Howard poured himself a glass of red wine and then activated the VCR. He had stumbled upon yet another movie in which Louis Palmateer was a conspicuous extra.

Musicals had never been Howard's cup of tea. Movies themselves had never been of that much interest to him. When he had been married, he and Gloria had enjoyed the theatre - nothing too intellectual but pleasant. Comedies of manners were the preferred term for the entertaining evenings he and his former wife had spent at the local playhouses.

The phone rang and Howard registered Ross Landsowne as the incoming caller. *Why would the coroner be calling him now?*

'Howard, this does concern you.'

Ross was as cordial as usual. *What did concern him?*

'Did you inquire as to whether Betty Savoy has any witnesses?'

'No'. Why should he have pursued this line of questioning at a time when the dead man's landlady had been so clearly upset about her tenant? Obviously Luke Morgan or Louis Palmateer or Mr. Whatever had died of a heart attack.

Idol
10/17/09

‘Bad form, Howard. You’ve made this slip-up before. *Never* trust anybody who’s too eager to call the doctor.’

Howard’s entire equilibrium sank. Luke had died of a heart attack, all right. However, the man had never experienced even the slightest coronary problems until his death.

So how had Betty pulled this off? And why?

Mrs. Elizabeth Savoy was formally charged with the first-degree murder of not only Luke Morgan (a.k.a. Louis Palmateer) but also of two previous tenants , Dick Irving and Barry Constable. The two previous cases were also aging gentlemen whose deaths were correctly assumed to be of the coronary variety but whose heart attacks in fact had been provoked by some method of insistent harassment by Mrs. Savoy.

Howard had known Betty Savoy on a casual but professional basis for almost five years. He had been a doctor conveniently practicing in the neighbourhood , a doctor who had been on call for her and her tenants. He had never sensed anything unusually malicious or manipulative about the woman. She smoked like a chimney and enjoyed a few drinks and so what then made her different from any other rooming house operator?

He wondered how many other deaths in Betty Savoy’s rooming house, not that they had ever occurred in rapid succession, had been provoked heart attacks. And what evidence did Ross Lansdownne possess that could prove that Betty Savoy had been standing over top of Luke and the other two gentlemen and provoking them? Who were the tenants who had moved into the units vacated by Dick Irving and Barry Constable and thus benefited from their premature deaths?

The telephone rang and now his ex-wife Gloria was calling to ask him to join herself and her boyfriend at an eight o’clock performance of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Playing third fiddle while watching a play about elderly ladies who were in fact serial killers disguised by their genial senilities somehow seemed to be the most appropriate manner for Howard to spend this particular evening, as well as the remainder of his perfectly dysfunctional life.

Idol
10/17/09

Idol
10/17/09

Nicky

Nicky slowly walked up the escalator and out into the mall. He had started off really liking the movie and then finally hating it. The controversial *Crash* was too damn long and arty - it was just auto-pornography masquerading as some radical statement about marked bodies and technocratic fetishism.

He walked along the mall and of course it had started raining. But the rain didn't bother him because he was only going to be walking for a few more minutes. The combination of the stupid movie and the Emily Carr exhibition at The Vancouver Art Gallery had to be countered by some hot abstract sounds from his favourite local music store.

Both Emily Carr and *Crash* were too worried about coherence, despite their protests to the contrary. Nicky needed to tune into something wonderfully irrational and unaccountable. Only music could do this for him - music often in conjunction with abstract visuals. Nicky had heard his dead father pontificate about art and aesthetics; so he knew that abstract expressionism and techno music were natural partners. They both managed to be simultaneously spiritual and relentlessly physical.

Nicky walked into *Hi-Octane Records* and found himself a private booth with headphones. He was aware of the counter-clerk's annoyed expression, but irritable clerks were part and parcel with the territory. When he could afford to take a course in music production and then make successful records; then he would be a regular customer rather than a parasite. Everybody went through the parasite stage at least once in their lives - this was known as survival.

He picked out what appeared to be a really hot new record and it came through for him. The beat was monstrous and yet the top end threw enough curves at him so that he never knew what was going to be hitting him next. This was good drug music, although Nicky hated drugs.

Idol

10/17/09

He'd seen enough of every which variety of druggie to know just how unproductively evil drugs were in the long run.

He remembered recognizing that aging punk girl in the lineup for another movie at the Cineplex and being relieved that she hadn't appeared to have seen him. He knew that that girl - Amy or Anna or something like that - was now involved with that Nancy Leonard girl who used to sing for *Stripes and Spots* in Vancouver but who now lived in Toronto and had been so fucked up about his Dad. Nancy had been his precocious bisexual student - exactly the type whom Dad always wound up hitting on. And Nancy was convinced that Dad hadn't been killed by an irate street hustler. Nancy Leonard and her radical-fairy DJ friend were in way over their heads and they should both just back off before things got even uglier.

The counter-clerk glared at Nicky as he reached for another promising record that he had no intention of buying - at least not today. Nicky knew that, after savouring this record, that he should get going and not return to *Hi-Octane Records* for at least a couple of days. Probably there would be a less anal clerk on duty by the end of the week. There was no need for him to be panicking but he could do without the attitude from behind the counter.

He checked the clock in the adjacent window and decided that he didn't have time to take in the nearby peepshow arcade. He had to be at work at five o'clock; and this meant cleaning himself up so that Roger wouldn't be on his case all night. Roger had come through for Nicky when he had called about needing to get out of Toronto ; but Roger also really bugged him. Paranoid druggies were no fun to be working for; but Roger had bypassed several people on a long waiting list so that Nicky could grab a shift at *The Steam Rail*. So, Roger's coke habit and mood swings unfortunately had to go with the territory.

Mood swings. The territory. Nicky was already quite sick of this record but he knew that he couldn't afford to change it.

Idol
10/17/09

His mother seemed to have turned over a new leaf along with finally turning fifty. She had just seen her daughter Terri singing jazz at the *Top Of The Senator* in Toronto and enjoyed it. Nicky knew it was the fact that Terri had looked healthy and had reinvented herself as somebody other than a junkie that had pleased Mom. Music had never been one of Mom's interests, to put it mildly.

Nicky hadn't kept in touch with his stepsister. They both had different fathers and their mother had long stopped speaking to either of them. He had observed his dad in his element back at the University of Toronto - when he had been competing for space with that black transgendered woman who had been at least as provocative as he had been without the obnoxious grandstanding. Dad had cheated by insisting on being the last panelist to speak - *Barry Ferguson: Academic Superstar*

Yeah, right. And now there was a new man in his mother's life - a cop no less. A police superintendent, not a low-end beat cop. John Sutcliffe was a quiet thoughtful man who didn't bring his work home with him, according to Mom.

He had difficulty swallowing this line. A high-profile feminist prosecutor like his mother and a police superintendent would never be able to avoid talking about their respective cases and careers. Mom smiled when she informed her son that John Sutcliffe smoked cigars. After disastrous marriages to men who had both turned out queer; the formidable Queen's Counsel Sarah Lloyd-Matthews was going to be making sure that her new beau would be a real man. Mom considered gay men to be the ultimate boys club.

He was relieved that she didn't ask about any love interests in his life. She could tell that he occasionally did it with men and probably for money but then things might change as he was committed to resuming his education and his lifestyle. Nicky did want to study music recording

Idol

10/17/09

and production - he just couldn't afford to start classes just yet. But he was able to convince his mother that these music courses were indeed on the horizon and she seemed satisfied.

She asked if there was anywhere that she could possibly drop him off since she was now planning to have a drink with her daughter Terri, who now sang jazz standards under the name of *Antonella Matthews*. Nicky wondered why Terri had retained her father's surname as Dennis Matthews had been even more of an asshole than Barry Ferguson. Too bad Dennis was probably alive somewhere, even though his chicken scandal had ruined what had looked like a promising career in provincial politics.

At least his Dad's eventual demise had been consistent with the man's reputation and accompanying persona. *Notorious Bisexual Academic Murdered In Hustler's Alley* - why, it was almost as if his Dad had planned his own swan song.

Nicky requested that Mom drop him off at the mall as he was going to try to catch another movie before his shift at *The Steam Rail*. This made sense to her so Nicky hopped into the passenger seat of Sarah Lloyd-Matthews' Chrysler and enjoyed a smooth ride with little unnecessary conversation.

He'd barely had time to inhale his curried-chicken dinner before *The Steam Rail* began filling up almost beyond capacity. A surprise birthday party was being thrown for a friend of Roger's and the organizer was intending to buy lots and lots of booze. So Nicky helped Roger put out some candles and mood lighting and then the work rhythms became frantic. Every party guest was already tripping over each other in order to buy the birthday girl martinis.

When the birthday party crowd began drinking more slowly and then thinning out; Nicky felt that he could pay more attention to the other customers. One table's patrons concerned him - a rather obese man in his late thirties was drinking single-malt scotches while a rail-thin younger

Idol

10/17/09

woman sipped one soda water. The man tipped quite generously but his general demeanor was off-putting. The man appeared to be one of those old-fashioned gay men who disliked other gay men. Nicky knew the type and he knew it well.

The girl was also too familiar. Nicky knew that her name was Christine and that she had once played in a grrl-rock band called *Stripes And Spots*. The singer for that band had been Nancy Leonard, who had moved to Toronto and become his dad's pet student before becoming a troublemaker who was absolutely convinced that Barry Ferguson hadn't been killed by some drug-addled but completely justified hustler.

Nicky knew that there had been an arrest followed by a suicide. Well, then wasn't that an admission of guilt on the suspect's part? The young man had known that he didn't have a hope in hell of being acquitted so he had done the honourable thing?

The effete scotch drinker ordered another Glenfiddich and smiled at Nicky. Nicky returned the smile while maintaining distance. He could see that the girl - Christine Benning - telegraphed recovering substance abuser. That band - *Stripes And Spots* - had broken up acrimoniously and drugs were really the main cause of the break-up. Heroin as well as booze had been a mainstay of the local riot grrl scene as well as its grunge counterpart.

These old rocker types just didn't get it - especially the DJ who had been hired specifically for the now concluding birthday party. When the waif wasn't playing early-nineties grunge he was playing seventies glam. The only thing worse would've been late seventies punk and that was probably coming next.

'Nicky! Get out there and do a busing! We need glasses!'.

Often when Roger yelled at him to bus the tables it wasn't anything resembling an emergency situation. But Nicky bit his tongue and picked up as many empty glasses as he could fit on his tray. Then he emptied the ash trays into a hideous-looking old apple-juice can.

Idol

10/17/09

'I see you're also *Maitre'D* material", the aesthetic man smiled at him. The man was definitely not with the girl, who took another minuscule sip of her soda water.

There was another forty-five minutes before last call and the birthday party crowd was now leaving. The tips were generous and now Roger asked Nicky to cover the bar while he looked after business in his office. Since it wasn't frantic; Nicky didn't mind mixing the drinks while Roger blew more holes in his nose. He poured himself a draft and sipped it slowly - as he was allowed two complimentary beverages at the end of his shift.

But he was relieved when the schoolmarmy gentleman left with his student or patient or whatever she was to him. He was quite relieved that those two fuck-ups were not the last remaining customers for the evening.

He'd seen Nancy Leonard's paramour - *Amanda* - in the lineup for some movie. Now he'd been required to serve that Christine person who used to play in *Stripes and Spots* with Nancy Leonard. Nicky knew that it was time to get away from *The Steam Rail*; but he knew that he couldn't afford to quit his job.

The same anal-retentive clerk was seated behind the cash register at *Hi-Octane Records* so Nicky decided to avoid the record store. He was more in the mood for checking out the peepshow booths in the arcade, anyway.

There were eight booths - six featuring women and two featuring men. Nicky didn't consider himself to be gay because professional respectable gay men drove him right up the goddamned wall. But he wasn't at all interested in looking at any girlie pictures because they'd never done anything to his groin. He wanted to look at the boys and the men - especially military men. Soldiers and sailors appealed to him because they were strong and authoritative. Cops were another matter entirely, but military gentlemen were the cream of the crop.

Idol

10/17/09

There was a naval officer on display who Nicky would've loved to enjoy a session with and there were a couple of younger chaps who would have been even more impressive in uniforms rather than in the nude. But the peep show was exactly just that - it was all about peeping. He looked at his watch and decided that he had better grab the bus that would take him to *The Steam Rail*.

There was a young man standing at the bus stop whom Nicky recognized. He could place a name with the face and the body - Kenny Somebody. Nicky remembered himself and Kenny once picking each other up and then checking into a downtown hotel. But what had promised to be a hot little encounter turned out to be an annoying non-event.

Kenny had not been able to perform on that day. Nicky had suspected that Kenny had been under the influence of psychiatric drugs - not junk or downers or whatever. Kenny didn't look particularly under the weather today but he did appear to have lost a lot of weight. Nicky suspected that Kenny had AIDS and felt sorry for the young man. But he still did not want the guy to see and then recognize him.

Bernard Griffiths' apartment was typically West End compact but still spacious. When Nicky went to take a leak he could see evidence that Bernard shared the apartment with a woman.

'Jenny's not home tonight. Don't worry about her.'

Nicky guessed that Bernard's relationship with this Jenny was strictly platonic and that Jenny was sleeping over with her girlfriend.

'A refill, I presume?', Bernard presumed correctly and slipped into his kitchen where he kept the single-malt scotch.

Nicky took the opportunity to look over Bernard's bookcases. He could recognize a section devoted to books by gay male writers who shared a contempt for the conservative gay

Idol

10/17/09

mainstream. Nicky scowled. All of these learned gentlemen detested the gym bunnies and the circuit partygoers and the bourgeois assimilationists but they themselves were not only so fucking bourgeois they were all nothing more than chatty old nellies.

And here was his Dad's magnum opus, right at the end of the shelf where Bernard could retrieve it any time he needed to. *The Aesthetic Imperative, by Barry Ferguson*. Dad had become quite a wealthy man on the strength of that extended piece of computer-abuse. Dad had been so convinced of his own immortality that he probably hadn't even made out a will.

Bernard returned with the drinks and proceeded to explain at length about how he was *bisexual* not *homosexual* and why the strictly homo or heterosexual was an obsolete entity. Nicky really had no opinions on this general subject whatever. Surely Bernard had not invited him back to his apartment just so that he could function as an audience or a student?

Surely Bernard had deduced that Nicky really hated fucking academics - that Nicky had been singularly unimpressed by all of the erudite wankers whose volumes of theoretical word-processing cluttered up his living-room bookcases?

Surely Bernard knew damn well whose son he had picked up at The Steam Rail?

Evidently not. Bernard now droned on and on about how exclusively homosexual men were uniformly misogynist. What did this rant have to do with anything? Why was Bernard doing this to him?

If Bernard had invited him home for sexual purposes; then it was far too late. Bernard had blown his opportunity. Nicky wanted to get the hell out of the apartment, even if he would have to serve the man again and again at the bloody *Steam Rail*.

'You're leaving?', Bernard was now alarmed.

'What does it look like, Bernard? I'm tired and drunk and I didn't come here to listen to you rant about how much you hate faggots when you obviously wanted to have sex with me.'

Idol

10/17/09

Bernard moved in front of the door as Nicky tried to open it.

‘Get out of my fucking way, Bernard!’.

Bernard refused to move over. Nicky suddenly clenched his right fist and punched Bernard just below his left eyeball.

‘Now will you get out of my way? Before I *really* beat the fucking crap out of you?’.

‘Why did you do that, Nicky? *Why?*’.

When Nicky clenched his fist to hit Bernard again the older man opened the door and stood aside. Nicky pulled back his fist and then ran down the hallway to the elevator.

Out on the West End street Nicky lit a smoke and began walking east. He knew that he shouldn’t have accepted Bernard’s invitation in the first place. Hadn’t he been aware of Roger discouraging him?

Nicky knew that his shifts at *The Steam Rail* were now a thing of the past. Even if Bernard did not go to the police then he would certainly speak to Roger. And he would certainly be drawing further attention to himself at the bar.

It was time to quit the job even if he didn’t get fired first. It was also time to move out of the rooming house and into another one - under yet another name.

Norman Desmond , when both alive and productive , had been the greatest star of all stars . Norman had been light years more fantastic than Elvis or Cobain or Bowie or Dracula and probably even Christ. But then he'd bottomed out into yet another multi-millionaire Howard Hughes clone and stopped reinventing himself , and this typical aging pop-star convalescence had merely been the prelude to the event that reclaimed Norman Desmond for the Pantheon of Serious Immortality .

Norman had been shot by his look-alike manager , who had also been the star's lover. The butler of course looked like Norman playing Erich Von Stroheim . The accepted theory was that Norman's nameless butler/manager could only achieve immortality through Norman's death ; but the man had also been shrewd enough to realize that he would have been the obvious suspect .

So , then , Norman and the butler's deaths had been a lazy coroner's dream . Open and shut murder suicide, that had been the instant verdict .

Not so fast , sweetie darlings. Nobody had ever *seen* either of the bodies . That rent boy pool-cleaner who had supposedly heard the shots - well , who could possibly take that leech at his word ? That slutty pool- cleaner with the gruesomely Nova Scotia parody of a Tennessee Williams accent had immediately phoned Norman's publicist , who was more than a tad too eager to declare her employer dead. In case you have all forgotten , there was never any funeral because no bodies were ever found.

There were certainly enough pseudo-wakes , but since when can there be any kind of proper wake without the body being present and visible. There were so many vipers claiming Norman Desmond . Like that photographer dude who admitted that Norman rarely even spoke to him but who claimed to have known the star better than anybody else had because, after all,

Norman didn't relate to people but rather to cameras. And what about that wardrobe specialist who conveniently fled to Denmark and got married to Mr. Right and Very Rich? Not to mention the durable chauffeur, who never lost his job despite everything only because Norman Desmond thankfully never learned how to drive.

The scum of scums was that music-video director. Claiming that Norman's last video the promo clip for *Because Of The Weather* was autobiographical. Hah! So The Butler is singing the song to Norman and then vamps out on the word 'murder'. It was all acting, you dear stupid boy. You weren't even the lucky man behind the camera - you were nothing more than Norman's salaried employee so just lose those delusions of grandeur okay?

All those pretenders - none of whom had even known the man or, for that matter, the butler/manager. The various versions of Norman's death event all seemed suspect to many fans and aficionados, so many of them also with their own highly contradictory agendas. I mean, did any of you actually watch that awful MTV documentary to the very bitter fucking end? That one third-tier rock critic with the cowboy hat - he's just as on the take as the music vid director and the necrophiliac photographer and all the others who were so happy to testify in front of the almighty camera. Like I say, darlings, it's pretty difficult to prove somebody's dead when nobody has actually seen the corpse or corpses.

About ten months after Norman and the butler/manager's much-publicized deaths; an aging male academic type began to habitually populate the Official Pop Culture circuit. This cross-over pop academic's name was Martin Endicott and Professor Endicott became quite the nerdy little celebrity. The learned professor was chronically full of astonishing quotations - he would cite Genesis P. Orridge on how punk-rock was reactionary because it was structurally dependent upon bent notes which had been filched from the same old blues records that had been plundered to death by dinosaur rockers. He would elaborate on how Kurt Cobain's master stroke had been the realization that Sid Vicious and John Lennon had actually been one and the same

person - both closeted mother-fixated junkies. He insisted that Malcolm McLaren was a serious Situationist art-radical rather than merely a sleazy hybrid of Warhol and P.T. Barnum . He argued for the rehabilitation of carpetbagger biographer Albert Goldman's reputation - Professor Endicott insisted that Goldman was in fact a radical deconstructionist .He liberally quoted all the pop demi-gods on their rivals and their clandestine lovers. Martin Endicott was more living proof that academics and gossip-queens need not exist in opposition to one another.

Martin Endicott knew *everything* about the life and times of Norman Desmond. The man swore to the exact dates of Norman's career and facade changes and the motives for these particular career transformations . He could pinpoint the exact moment when Norman decided that glam and tinsel were yesterday's look and then pledged allegiance to Buccaneer Rococo. He demarcated the exact dates of Norman's various drug phases and he swore that Norman had never been fucked by anybody besides the butler/manager . He knew so well the sordid truths half-heartedly concealed by Norman's late re-emergence as a 'professional all-around family-oriented entertainer'. A lot of fans and aficionados soon began wondering who exactly was this Martin Endicott person who had seemingly materialized right out of the very blue , and how *did* he become was he such a walking encyclopedia on the subject of the legendary Norman Desmond.

After roughly another ten months , Martin's media-stardom began to short-circuit. A huge advance that he had received from Doubleday for a definitive Norman Desmond biography was being curtailed , after the publisher's background check-up on the author revealed some maddening contradictions. Martin constantly evaded all biographical questions , insisting that they were immaterial . Doubleday's in-house editors of course begged to differ.

Fact-checking procedures forced matters to a head. The senior editor insisted on acknowledgment of all sources and Martin was unable to meet her demands. Martin would , quite rightly , point out other celebrity biographies in which many of the information sources were anonymous and in vulnerable positions that could only be protected by anonymity. The senior

editor bluntly informed Martin that this situation was unacceptable . Sources had to be veritable or else the book would have to be relegated to the back burner.

'You never know, Martin .', Doubleday's senior editor Katherine Woodcock was admonishing him . 'Former boyfriends or girlfriends or even illegitimate children might well emerge from the woodwork and cause legal difficulties for us .'.

'Trust me, Kate .', Martin's face seriously reddened . ' Your fears are nothing more than run-of-the-mill paranoia .'.

'Well, Doubleday's had legal problems here before , so let's please face reality and deal with this conundrum . We have to be 100% certain that we're on certifiable legal ground , or else we will be unable to proceed any further with this book.'

Katherine Woodcock stormed out of the Upper East Side bistro angrily. One week later , Martin Endicott was discreetly offered a 'kill fee', which he reluctantly accepted in the presence of the publishing firm's CEO..

Martin Endicott now relocated from New York to Toronto , and switched his profile from the newspapers and the broadcast media to Toronto's downtown west bars and night-clubs. Martin became quite the regular at Super-8 film screenings and mixed-media film and musical performances . The mavens of Toronto's experimental film and video scenes would witness Martin watching and listening quite attentively several times a month . He'd recognize all the tunes played by Reid and Danny's Motion Machine in tandem with the duo's own super-8 documentations. He'd chain-smoke in the back aisles of The Cameron House during Peggy Anne Berton's neo-beatnik Super-8 soliloquies. He'd argue with experimental filmmakers about how any film with synchronized sound and professional actors was nothing more than just another Hollywood movie. He even submitted his own Super-8 movie to Toronto's annual *Splice-This* festival ; although it was rejected not necessarily because the soundtrack contained an over-familiar song from Norman Desmond's latter career as a versatile heterosexual entertainer.

Martin boycotted the alternative film scene for about six days because of this rejection by low-budget formalists who didn't understand his use of classic irony ; but soon the professor again became an enthusiastic fixture within Toronto's DIY-media arts communities .

Tonight was Halloween Friday , which meant that the El Mocambo's monthly queer-rocker 'Vaseline' night was being billed as 'Vasoween'. This was the place to be or not be for every young and even middle-aged queer rocker , gender-fucker , and dilettante occultist-dabbler.

Alex and Jason had been planning their Vasoweens for nearly the entire month of October. Alex was tottering on his pumps as 'Alexis Harvey' and Jason was turning both eyebrows and tricks as 'Screaming Jane Hawkins '

Alexis and Screaming Jane paid for their cocktails and then dutifully made the rounds of hastily-designed celebrity coffins . RIP- Vincent Price , RIP- Lord Sutch , RIP- Johnny Thunders , RIP- all of the ghoulish enough dead rockers and Gothic matinee idols and heroines. Alexis and Screaming Jane paid their respects to Bela Lugosi and Marc Bolan and Anton LeVay and then stopped dead right in their tracks.

There immediately before them was the man well-known to the queer punk and experimental film communities as Martin Endicott , authority on pop culture who had reputedly been ordered by Doubleday publishing to cease and desist with his unauthorized biography of the late Norman Desmond. Martin was decked out in an angora sweater and non-gender specific plaid trousers , topped by a mousy dirt-blond wig and oversized reading glasses.

Martin Endicott was down on his knees and praying to Norman's Vasoween coffin , onto which he had reverently placed a bouquet of flaming crimson flowers.

Alexis and Screaming Jane gasped at each other and then ran toward the DJ's booth.

'Stop the music and bring up the lights! This is so wonderfully unexpected! Our mad

Professor Endicott is presenting an inspired spectacle!'.

As the DJ faded the volume on vintage Black Sabbath and her assistant pivoted the follow-spot over toward Norman Desmond's coffin ; Martin Endicott's prayers had become audible to the entire crowd who now focused on the learned professor. More than five hundred pairs of eyes were now fixated on Norman's coffin and the randomly-attired middle-aged man who was repeatedly bowing down to his personal favourite shrine .

'I am not dead. Please believe me , everyone . I am not dead.'

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Alan heard his voice operating on automatic pilot yet again. His voice and his mind were operating at serious distance from his body, and he was not in control. This was becoming an addiction, and he knew that he was making an utter fool of himself.

The guest of honour politely excused himself and walked back to the sofa from which Mark and David were observing the dynamics of the house party . Alan realized that the couple were discussing how to deal with ‘the Alan problem ‘. He decided that he was in fact seriously intoxicated and that now it was time to leave the party , so he walked over to the coat rack and apologetically nodded in Mark and David’s direction. The host couple ignored him and then Alan slammed their door behind himself. And the cooler air outside didn’t help matters, if anything it was making his spinning head feel even more detached from the rest of his body.

The phone was ringing. Was this sound real or in his dream? It kept ringing so Alan Benson decided that it had to be real. But he wasn’t about to try and answer the call, even if he were to find the energy to do so.

This is Mark. I’m calling you to tell you about a dinner party David and I are hosting this evening, before you hear about it from anybody else. You are not invited, so please don’t crash it. We’ve tolerated this behaviour before but we won’t tolerate it again. You are no longer welcome in our house, Alan.

He had blacked out the night before. He must have made a fool of himself again. He must have finally crossed a line. He’d been aware of his friends losing patience with him but he must have put his foot in his mouth or just simply insulted everybody present with no concern for consequences or ramifications.

Do not crash our party or we will literally throw you out!

Alan tried to go back to sleep but knew that this would be impossible. He thought about

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

staying in bed and listening to music.

He rose slowly to his feet and scanned through his CD rack. He saw nothing that would work for him - that would be able to distract him while pleasing his ears.

He decided to walk to the nearest grocery store and buy a newspaper. By doing so, he would be able to strain his eyes to the point of being able to fall asleep again.

He decided that he should attend Jill Farnsworth's book launch and even quietly buy a copy of her short-story volume. Jill had also pretty much stopped calling him but at least she was still polite whenever they bumped into one another. So he found a stool at the Imperial Pub's bar, next to an unattractive stranger who probably wasn't even attending the launch. He ordered a soda water and found a moment when the lineups at the publisher's table weren't overwhelming.

Then he decided to slip out before the reading began. He did not need to have Jill Farnsworth sign a book that he would more than likely never get around to reading.

Alan felt too tired to read further but not tired enough to call it a night. He had entertained hopes for the detective novelette but it wasn't panning out for him. He looked toward the shelf reserved for his CDs and there was no music that he wished to be listening to.

He opened the dusty guitar case in front of his central bookcase and retrieved the Telecaster. He plugged the guitar into his amplifier and turned on the power to a very low volume, as if he were afraid of awakening a sleeping neighbour.

Alan began to play a slow blues without the constraining blues structure. He wasn't playing with or for anybody else, so to hell with playing by the rules.

He stopped playing for a second, as if he could hear his own echo and appreciate it. For all those years he had been dead wrong. When he played his Telecaster the results were *not* strictly therapeutic and therefore of no possible interest to any other person, let alone an audience. What

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

he had just played and now continued to play was beautiful. It was wordless and beyond any need for words. It made sense to him because it didn't have to make sense. If an audience were to consider his music beautiful than that would be that, and beauty would be the only thing that mattered..

Alan had been so wrong to have abandoned music. Right then he decided to return to it.

From now on, he would keep his big mouth shut because his big mouth had been the primary factor in his unofficial ostracization. Divulging particular names along with irrelevant anecdotes had done a lot of damage, both to the named individuals and then to himself.

He would move a few miles north to Barrie , and not speak unless spoken to . He would only answer the simplest but safest questions. He would go by the name of Victor Watson, since neither Victor nor Watson were unusual names with any particular connotations or insinuations. Victor Watson could be a lawyer or a writer or a musician or a dishwasher. 'Victor' fell in near the opposite end of the alphabet from 'Alan' and he could not remember any 'Victors' whom he had ever felt one way or the other about.

Victor Watson. A man who speaks through his instrument. A man of few words and wonderful sounds. Victor Watson , here I come. To play real music with genuine emotions for people who are sick and tired of chatter and gossip and self-promotional monologues and indeed pretty well all verbal bullshit.

It had been so long since Alan had received any significant amount of royalties from Cobbler's Press that he decided leaving his ex-publisher a forwarding address would if anything be a mistake. He knew that his about-to-be former-landlord would be only too happy to write no longer at this address on every envelope with the name Alan Benson on it, except that his

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

landlord was often too lazy to retain grudges. But he felt confident enough that royalties from his ancient volume of short stories would be so minimal that it would be counterproductive to maintain any contact with Cobbler's. They hadn't ever given a damn about him when he'd been in town, so why would they give one now?

Before making a final check of his packed knapsack, he stood in front of the plastic garbage bag still wrapped around the inside apartment door and retrieved his Interac card. If Alan Benson were, from this moment on, to longer exist; then surely all traces of his identification had to be shredded. But then he decided against destroying his bank card. He still intended to live as much as possible within a cash economy. He would have no identification for Victor Watson so he really had no alternative but to do so. But there were arguments for keeping Alan Benson's bank account at least occasionally active. He did not wish to draw undue attention to himself and he certainly did not wish to become an Officially Missing Person.

So he let the bank card remain in his tiny wallet and then locked his door. He smiled as he realized that it would take the landlord at least a few days to realize that he had left the building.

He recalled reading the obituaries for a well known blues guitarist, who had unfailingly insisted on cash payment since he had been unable to sign contracts. Perhaps Victor Watson might assume an illiterate identity, as a means of ensuring privacy and avoiding unnecessary paper trails?

Finding accommodation in Barrie was much easier than he had anticipated. He noticed that there were rooms for rent above a local bar, he sought out the landlady and he was accepted. She introduced herself as Jean Walcott and he as Victor Watson. Victor paid first and last month and that was all the landlady wanted from him. She didn't request that he sign any leases or contracts. So far, so good.

She could see that he was a musician so she didn't have to ask stupid questions about what

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

did he do for a living. Jean smiled when she saw his guitar case, because she knew that he would be good for a little extra cash on top of his monthly rent. There was indeed a practice studio in the bar's basement that he could use in return for an additional fifty dollars.

He realized that Jean must be at least sixty-five and he realized that he could endear himself to her by taking on a few chores. Just by looking over the upstairs hotel, he could sense that there was nobody in charge of maintenance. He could tell that Jean would cut him some slack if he were to change garbage bags daily and then made sure the garbage was ready for pickup in front of the building.

Victor Watson opened up the room that Jean had given him a key for. It was small but clean with burgundy walls. That colour was as good as any other and so was the bed. He immediately hurled himself across the mattress and fell into a pleasant sleep. Tomorrow he would pay a visit to the local musical instrument store and buy himself a small but efficient amplifier. He would test it out and thus announce his presence in town.

Jesus! You're a fantastic player, man. Are you new in town?

Victor nodded as he continued working out on the blonde Telecaster that he had picked out from the rental rack. He wondered if the swarthy stranger was a musician or just an extrovert. He decided to play along with the man.

Yes, I've just moved here. I'm Victor, and thanks for the compliment. I haven't been playing much lately, so I'm afraid I'm a little rusty.

The man snorted. The man told him to stop being so goddamned modest. Then the man introduced himself as Steve and said that he was looking for an act to play in his new bar. Was Victor interested?

Victor was definitely interested, but he told Steve that he needed to find a rhythm section and that since he was new in town therefore he didn't know any musicians.

Steve smiled at him and told him about a rhythm section that came along with the bar.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Then Steve requested that Victor start immediately if that was possible.

Victor agreed to start immediately. He then returned to his lodgings and began making up a list of identifiable standards. He didn't need Steve to inform him that he was expected to play what the customers wanted to hear.

He felt quite comfortable with his sidemen Stan and Frank. Neither of them were loquacious and neither of them expected him to be. He realized that it would be a mistake not to at least make a little small talk and the weather, the business, and especially music provided him with safe subjects. Stan had a flair for dealing with club owners and needling a few extra draughts out of them.

Not that booze mattered to Victor. He'd convinced his sidemen that he'd never really been much of a drinker and now he was a complete teetotaler. Frank and Stan were at least borderline alcoholics and Victor knew that Frank was a bit of a coke-head. He suspected that Frank had some sort of drug racket happening with Steve the bar owner, but if Frank wanted to waste his meager profits and ruin his sinuses then that was his problem. Victor speculated that his sidemen pigeon-holed him as being a reformed addict or alcoholic or combination of the two. People who wish to change their lives often relocate and then keep to themselves as much as possible. Well, the musicians were probably at least half correct with their assumptions.

It wasn't so difficult for himself and the other musicians to arrive at a repertoire with a minimum of rehearsal time. He had agreed with Stan and Frank to keep it to recognizable tunes. No free-form improvisations of difficult jazz, and nothing without a rhythm. Nothing too 'artistic' and nothing with annoying difficult lyrics he would be obliged to remember. By keeping the band entirely instrumental, he could also avoid having to say much if anything to the audiences. Just bow occasionally and introduce the two sidemen.

He had never been much of a country music enthusiast, but he now found particularly Patsy

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Cline tunes easy to play and then play on top of. He remembered the songs from all those lesbian writers he'd once known in Toronto. Well, Alan Benson had always disliked country music but Victor Watson not only loved it but also played it exquisitely. People can change, despite what the cynics steadfastly maintain.

He'd become aware of the young girl who always sat in front of the bandstand. He knew that her name was Julie because Stan and Frank had been coveting her and attempting to make functional conversation. He'd also overheard Stan and Frank shaking their heads about young Julie's hopeless crush on Victor Watson. Victor didn't seem to be much for the ladies, the sidemen both agreed. They didn't think he was queer or anything, just probably recovering from a bad relationship of sorts. Well, it was touching that his sidemen worried about him just a little bit.

Victor remained at the bar until past last call one evening. Usually, he conducted his business with the bartender, presented Stan and Frank with their percentages, and then slipped out. But on this night he somehow felt like sticking around. He didn't wish to be leaving at the same time as young Julie who obviously had a crush on him. So he bought a cigar for himself and talked a bit to his sidemen, intending to hang out for maybe a half hour.

Stan in particular was talking about the three of them becoming more of a band and then touring. Stan's car could easily hold the equipment and they could tour at least across Northern Ontario and maybe even Atlantic Canada.

But Victor was in no hurry to leave Barrie. Things were quiet and peaceful and his relationship with the musicians was fine just the way it was. Why spoil something good by making it more of a production than it needed to be?

He could tell that Frank was powdering his nose every time he peed. He could tell that both Frank and Stan were baffled by his contentment. They wished to be little fishes in a big pond and he was quite satisfied to be the opposite.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Victor took one good long pull on his cigar and then decided to leave. The three of them had made more money than they usually did on that night and, in their own quiet but proud manner, they had celebrated their success.

He carried his Telecaster and small Fender amplifier down to the basement, butted out the cigar, and then bade his sidemen and his employer good night.

The two patrol cops found his body outside the bar at about four thirty in the morning. The streets were almost completely deserted, except for a man sleeping in a nearby doorway who obviously was incapable of beating another man to death.

‘He’s dead, Larry.’

Officer Rutledge and Officer Billington set about gingerly checking the dead man’s identification and inspecting the scene of the crime while touching as little as possible. Officer Billington checked all of the dead man’s pockets and found nothing but a Toronto Dominion bank card belonging to Alan Benson.

‘This man had some association with that bar, Jeff.’

Jeff Rutledge raised his eyebrows.

‘What have you heard, Larry?’

‘The owner.....Steve Landry.....had some suspicions about this man. He was a musician who had been playing there under the name of ‘Victor Watson’.

Rutledge scowled. Steve Landry’s bar had constantly been a subject of neighbourhood complaints. The bar and the man himself were serious eye-sores.

‘Why was Steve Landry suspicious about this musician?’

Larry Billington scratched his head. He recalled the bar owner having a gut feeling that something was wrong with the man without being able to put his finger on anything particular or

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

describe any suspicious incidents.

‘Benson or Watson or whatever our friend’s name was always insisted on being paid in cash and it was always an uphill battle for the man to sign the necessary voucher.’.

‘Perhaps he was illiterate?’.

‘That’s just it, Jeff. The man rarely spoke, but whenever he did too many big words would slip through the cracks. ‘.

‘Aha. And I presume our friend has no cash on his person?’.

‘You presume correctly. ‘.

Jeff Rutledge paced around the body, collecting his thoughts before making the necessary phone calls.

‘I wonder if Alan Benson is our friend’s real name?’.

‘You may have a point there, Jeff. I guess we’d better check the DNA and everything else. Including the Missing Persons lists.’.

Jeff Rutledge nodded. It was quite possible that the dead man had been living under at least one alias. So he made several strategic phone calls and then the two policemen waited anxiously for the local coroner to arrive.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Teddy @ Andrew James Paterson, 1999

Sergeant Rick Devlin nearly tripped over the man who lay perfectly still and face up on the sidewalk at the local major intersection. The beat cop cursed himself for not keeping one eye facing down - in this neighbourhood such an eye-line was not only practical but necessary.

Devlin didn't have to feel the man's pulse to know that he was dead. *Rigor mortis* had set in probably quite some time ago. There were no signs of any foul play or anything like that. In this designated neighbourhood, foul play was for younger people and this man was at least sixty if not seventy.

Of course the dead man didn't have any identification on him. He was more than likely of no fixed address.

Damn! The cop cursed into the deserted neighbourhood that was active at night and dull as hell in the daylight. Dull because the denizens' routines were nothing more than routines.

The old man's liver or heart or kidney or some other once vital organ had probably expired. Plain and simple - an autopsy would be a pointless formality. But Sgt. Devlin did have to obtain the corpse's name if at all possible. This might prove to be an uphill battle.

Damn!

'His name was Teddy. That's what I heard people calling him and that's what he called himself.', the proprietor of Margaret's Smoke Shop informed Sgt. Rick Devlin while taking stock of her daily closing inventory

'*Who* called him Teddy, Miss.....?'

'Langley. Mrs. Margaret Langley. Or Marg.'

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Rick wondered if there was a Mr. Langley and where he kept himself busy.

‘Well, Sergeant, I mean the few men and women that I ever noticed talking to our dead friend..’

Rick Devlin glanced at the proprietor impatiently.

‘There were only a few people of his own general age who’d talk to him. He didn’t even exist, as far as the younger people were concerned. ‘.

That was not exactly unusual, Rick noted impatiently. Did Margaret have any sense of what the dead man had talked about with his small group of contemporaries?

‘ Nothing that seemed too involved. Just small talk - like about the weather for example.’.

Rick frowned. He wanted to know if Marg Langley ever witnessed any transactions or exchanges between Teddy and his street friends. Was Teddy just another worn-out boozier or what was he?

Marg closed the door to the smoke shop as the clock on the wall had just passed by the six o’clock closing hour.

‘ I’m sure that I heard Teddy and this woman Katie once talking about meds. But don’t quote me when you get around to interviewing Katie.’.

Who was Katie and why was Marg afraid of her ?

‘Katie buys a pack of smokes from me at least once a day. It’s her meds, Sergeant. You have to smoke like a chimney just to stay awake. Come back around noon hour and look for a woman about sixty who tries to pass for twenty-five. Katie always wears old tartan slacks.’.

Rick nodded. He needed a pack of smokes himself but he knew that Marg had already cashed out for the day.

‘Oh, Sergeant’, Marg called after him as he opened the door from inside. ‘Katie has red hair.’.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Rick kept walking even though he had registered this useful detail. His shift was almost over and he still had to contact the precinct. He wasn't looking forward to dinner - let alone tomorrow.

He decided to go for a drink first, but a good safe ten blocks away from the intersection where he had stumbled upon Teddy's corpse. His beat position was one commonly referred to as 'entry level'.

Rick walked into a bar that came with a certain reputation and ordered a scotch neat. He knew damn well that he had paid his entry level dues and that if he didn't get a promotion soon he was going to be making some noise about it.

As he was a gentleman sitting alone and capable of buying a single-malt scotch and then tipping nicely; a lady of the evening approached his table and indicated availability. Rick looked at his watch and then nodded. Dinner could wait - let alone tomorrow.

'What's the matter with *you*, Mister Man?'

This was not an unexpected question. He was not exactly performing tonight and Rick knew it all too well. A tryst in a downtown-east hotel with a call girl had initially seemed like a constructive distraction and now it seemed like an obligation. He had to get his money's worth and not waste her time and he was a failure.

'Sorry. You're right, Madam. It's not happening and how much more do I owe you?'

Rick paid the girl another forty dollars and they agreed to call it a night. He was to slip out first since the hotel room was hers. Only the dumbest tourists wondered why certain hotels charged such a high rate for overnight accommodation.

Damn! Now he wanted another drink but he knew that would be a mistake. Rick walked up to the nearest pay-phone and called Gina. He told her he'd been working late and that he was

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

upset about the corpse on the sidewalk. At least *that* part of his excuse was true.

Now he had to kill time. He couldn't sleep and he couldn't just shoot the clock and make the time disappear. He couldn't kill time by literally *killing* time and there were too many places he no longer felt safe in. There were too many places where the owners didn't have the guts to come right out and tell him he was unwelcome. They always let him enter and *then* they would make him feel unwelcome. It wasn't subtle cruelty - it was more like their own feeble stupidity.

Now he had to kill time. This was the best description of how he spent most of his waking hours.

Rick's boss Warren Mountford scowled at him. Warren did not need to hear about yet another dead homeless man with no identification; yet this was an important part of his job description.

Reinforcements had kept their part of the bargain. They had carried the dead man to a conveniently nearby autopsy room and they had searched his pockets.

'Of course there would have to be no identification of any variety. Damn it, Devlin. Why did you have to literally trip over this loser?'

Rick couldn't answer this question and he wasn't about to be taking any stabs at it.

'The man has been referred to as 'Teddy'. We don't even know if that's his real name.'

No, 'Teddy' might have indeed been a generic street name. Rick remembered that 'Teddy Boys' were an English variety of fifties juvenile delinquent types who dressed in Edwardian drape coats. The dead man's overcoat had been far less stylish, to put it bluntly.

'I'm seeking out a woman named 'Katie' - who Marg the Smoke Shop proprietor says was sort of his friend.'. Whatever 'friend' actually might have meant

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

‘Right. The smoke shop.’, Warren’s face livened up somewhat. ‘Our friend Teddy smoked a pipe. Take a good look at it, Devlin.’.

He stared at the pipe for a second. It was ancient but he could see that it had once been quite an expensive variety of pipe. It was possible that Teddy had found it in an antique store where the proprietor knew next to nothing about vintage pipes.

Still, a pipe was highly unusual among down and out men - especially if there were no traces of crack cocaine or any other illicit drugs in the pipe’s bowl. And the pipe was clean. Teddy was a man who took pride in these sort of details.

It was beginning to seem possible that Teddy had once been a man of means if not wealth. But how on earth was he supposed to follow up on this hunch; and who exactly would benefit from this knowledge if indeed this hunch were to be proven correct?

Katie Forsythe *was* probably in her sixties but she still made herself up as if she were in her twenties. Her hair was dyed red and she dyed it herself - probably several times a week. She wore a fur coat that she must have been wearing for almost forty years, and a pair of plaid slacks on which the wear and tear had also become apparent.

And Katie wore pumps, even though the plaid trousers effectively nullified the desired effect.

‘So, you want to talk to me about Teddy?’. Katie butted out her cigarette and then lit up another.

Rick nodded assent. He silently handed Katie the microphone.

‘Teddy was a real old-fashioned gentleman. He hadn’t been on the street for too long; but he’d been in and out of the shelters.’.

Rick nodded. ‘He was too much of an old-fashioned gentleman?’.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

‘Oh, for sure. He’d often buy me drinks, even though he barely even touched the stuff.’.

Katie exhaled away from Rick’s face, unaware of the fact that the cop was himself fumbling for his pack of smokes.

‘The first couple of times we went to The Sandman for beer, Teddy let me do all the talking. He’d just lay back and puff on that pipe of his, which never bothered me because his pipe had a sweet aroma.’.

Yes, the pipe.

‘Teddy was a smart man, not like a lot of other men I’ve known. After a while I became aware that I was hogging the conversation, so I got him talking. Teddy was a smart man. He could really go on all night about politics and sociology stuff.’.

‘Really?’, Rick exhaled and scowled.

‘Oh yes. Federal politics - not just local by-laws and shit. He wasn’t much of a drinker; but after a pint he’d start talking especially about a man named Windover. Used to be the Prime Minister almost twenty years ago.’.

Rick remembered the name. He couldn’t remember Windover’s first name or whether the man had been Liberal or Conservative.

‘Teddy was an odd duck in this neighbourhood, Officer. Most of the older men remembered World War Two or The Korean War. Teddy would always start yapping about Windover - *James* Windover, that was his first name.’.

‘*Why* this minor politician, Katie? *What* was so important about an old Prime Minister?’.

‘Everything, for God’s sake.’., Katie stared down at Rick. ‘At least, according to Teddy. If it weren’t for that awful James Windover, Teddy would have been the man at the top. Teddy would have been the man running this country and the shit wouldn’t have hit the fan like it did back then. Teddy would have made sure none of that bullshit never happened.’.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

‘What are you talking about, Katie?’.

She lit another cigarette.

‘Don’t ask me, Officer. When I’d ask Teddy what the hell he was blathering on about; he’d clam up. He’d become aware of people staring at him like he was nuts, and then he’d stand up and go away. He figured he must *look* drunk and that all the other people were staring at him. He thought the other people in the bar were shrinks or cops or whatever.’.

‘Teddy didn’t take any medication, did he?’.

‘Not that he ever talked about’, Katie exhaled and shook her head. ‘Mind you, that might be why he didn’t drink too much. Not that rules and regulations have that effect on *me*. You got to remember, Mister, that in this neighbourhood a politician is a politician. Like nobody keeps track of them because none of them are ever going to do anything important’.

Rick decided that it was too early for drinks himself. He felt that he could talk to Katie again if he needed to, so he thanked her and stood to leave..

‘Hey, Officer!’, she called out after him. ‘Teddy was a real gentleman, and he was as sane as they come.’.

When Rick checked his telephone messages at first he groaned. His parents were passing through town and they were insisting on dinner. Then he realized that Gina would be working and that he would be able to deflect any parental inquiries about his deteriorating marriage.

Stan and Janet Devlin had made a reservation for a French bistro called *Le Rendezvous*. It was their favourite restaurant with their favourite chef and something would have been seriously out of whack if Mom and Dad had made their reservation elsewhere. They were smiling when Rick arrived and he immediately found himself relaxing.

‘A hard day on the beat, son?’, Stan Devlin ordered a carafe of white wine.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

Rick nodded. His parents understood that details of his work tended to be confidential; but Rick realized that both of his parents had always been informed about politics - about who was who and who was for or against whom as well as what.

So he told them that a friend of his had mentioned the name 'James Windover' and that he wanted to know more about the man.

'James Windove?. He was sort of a wishy-washy type.', Janet Devlin shook her head sadly.

'I don't know if that's the appropriate description, Janet. Windover seemed bland on the surface but he was reportedly a pretty nasty character behind the scenes.'

The roast lamb dinner arrived for Rick, after his parents had received their plates of Atlantic salmon.

'James Windover was pretty nasty to his Trade Minister, Stan. What was his name again?'

'Denison. Edward Denison. How's the lamb, Richard?'

'Excellent, thank you Dad. What did Windover do to do this man Denison?'

Stan Devlin looked at his son quizzically.

'Merely hung his minister out to dry in public, that's all. Denison didn't want to sell off everything to the Americans and Windover used his Trade Minister as a pawn. Windover knew what he wanted to get done all along and Denison was the fall guy.'

'Whatever became of Edward Denison?'

'I don't know, Janet. I know he retired from politics suddenly - well before the next upcoming election. I know that there were rumours of nervous breakdowns and alcoholism, but I really don't know.'

Janet Devlin started to say something and then refrained. Depression was not a particularly appropriate subject for dinner conversation and everybody knew this. So Rick's parents began describing a play that they had both attended in Ottawa the night before leaving. They wondered

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

if Rick had seen this play, having never been able to remember that their son disliked going to the theatre. But Rick was used to this misunderstanding, and he was grateful to his parents for the dinner and the information.

Rick didn't want to go home just yet. He knew that Gina had gone to some movie with her friend Bonnie and that they would be going out for drinks later. Rick did not want to sit around the house by himself.

He decided to go to a bar for at least one Scotch. He avoided trade bars as he was not in the mood for company. He didn't relish being alone; but he did not want company. He wished to sit in a bar where he could observe the various dynamics without having to talk to anybody besides the bartender.

He could overhear the conversation between the two men three tables to his left. Mike was informing Geoff that he would have to come out to his girlfriend sooner or later and Geoff was resisting. Rick looked away from these two men, angrily. They were both too old not to have dealt with whether or not they were gay and they should just keep their stupid mouths shut and then get on with their lives.

Two tables to his right he could overhear a tall black man asking his white brunette companion if she wished to go for a nightcap at some other bar or else go home with him now. When the woman informed the man that the nightcap would be unnecessary; Rick found himself smiling along with the man.

As he finished his second Scotch Rick realized that he needed more smokes. He started to walk towards the bar and then he realized that he should buy another pack in the smoke shop that he always walked past on his way home. It was getting late, and he did wish to be home before Gina arrived.

Silent Symphonies

Andrew James Paterson

10/17/09

There was no more time to kill. There were no patterns worth repeating so there was finally nothing worth continuing. Public figures had always died in public, whether they liked it or not.

So now he picked out a comfortable location on the sidewalk, slowly lay down on his back, and then closed his eyes. Since he knew that the local pedestrians were usually careful about their step; he did not have difficulty falling into a deep and peaceful sleep.

©© 2009 Andrew James Paterson

All rights reserved