

Whatever Happened to Charlie?

Andrew James Paterson

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Not good, I muttered as I hung up the receiver. Money was getting low again and I needed some mindless temporary work. Envelope stuffing or snail-mail lettering or, a notch above and for better pay, some proofreading work. I had actually trained myself to avoid reading form letters for their content.

There was no way I could ever go back to serving drinks. I was by now too old to be a waiter person in any watering hole in which there were enough customers to actually make money. And there was no way I could ever be a hack guitarist, unless I upgraded my sight reading skills and confined myself to anonymous studio work.

That was a thought de jour, but an absurd one. Recording technology had made session hacks obsolete, just as I along with many other former pop pundits had predicted.

My second-floor apartment felt damp, even though it wasn't even cold outside yet. It was still too early to turn on the heating, and the landlord always appreciated those money-saving loopholes. The building itself was permanently aging, without any foreseeable climax.

I rarely spoke to the landlord and I spoke even less frequently to the other tenants. Joanne Turner, who lived on the ground floor at the building's front, was a designer with a pleasant enough personality. Megan Standish, living right behind Joanne, was a nut case with a cat. Pets were forbidden, but the landlord turned a blind eye. Any serious landlord hangs onto predictable tenants for as long as possible.

The phone rang and I did not recognize the incoming number. Therefore, I took the call.

'Is this Alan Radford?' , the voice was not immediately familiar.

'Yes, speaking. Who is this and how can I help you?'

'It's Oliver Venn, and I want to talk with you about a project I'm coordinating.'

I felt my shoulders tensing, but not enough to hang up on Oliver Venn. He had always liked me, although I had always been suspicious of him.

'I'm putting together a compilation CD of local bands from the late seventies and early eighties, and there's a Filing Clerks track I wish to include.'

I nodded to myself. I had suspected that Oliver Venn's phone call might involve The Filing Clerks.

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‘Which track are you interested in, Oliver?’.

‘*Wardrobes of Suture*’.

‘Oh, that one.’.

I had anticipated Oliver wanting to use *Freeway Breakdown*. That had been the song The Filing Clerks had become identified with, to the detriment of all the band’s much better recorded and unrecorded numbers. *Freeway Breakdown* had been used in a former friend’s independent movie, on the tail credits. I had yet to receive any publishing residuals, even though the movie played quite frequently on a certain specialty TV channel.

‘I take it that *Wardrobes of Suture* is a spilt between yourself and William Douglas, Alan?’.

‘That’s right, Oliver. That track’s seventy-five percent William and twenty-five me.’.

‘And William’s percentage goes to his estate?’.

‘That’s correct.’.

My former colleague William Douglas had died of AIDS-related complications over ten years ago. His estate received all Filing Clerks payments directly attributable to him, whether administered by myself or by royalties’ agencies.

Not that The Filing Clerks exactly comprised any sort of gold mine.

‘Well, that’s pretty straightforward, Alan. Now, what about performing rights?’.

I sighed. This was where things were going to become complicated. This was where I might have to inform Oliver Venn that *Wardrobes of Suture* might not be usable.

‘There never were any performing rights involved, Oliver. There was myself, William, Simon Drysdale the drummer, and a guy named Charles or Charlie Fenwick who had put up the money for that single.’.

‘For *Freeway Breakdown* with *Wardrobes of Suture* on the B-side?’.

‘Uh huh. Simon Drysdale’s irrelevant, right?’.

‘I’m not worried about your old drummer, Alan. Unless he did any writing for which he was unaccredited.’.

‘Simon Drysdale could barely even write his name, Oliver.’.

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Oliver chuckled.

‘I remember him as being a definite stick in the mud. But Charlie Fenwick might be a problem.’.

‘Yes.’, I cursed Charlie Fenwick under my breath.

‘What’s that movie with *Freeway Breakdown* on the tail credits?’.

‘*Cottage Retreaters*, by Melanie Gordon? It plays on a certain speciality channel quite frequently and I’ve yet to receive any residuals.’.

‘Did you do all the necessary paperwork, Alan?’.

‘I doubt it. Melanie and my friend Ken, who was in charge of the soundtrack, just stuck it on. I gave them the master and they took it from there.’.

‘You have the original master?’.

‘Yes. I inherited it from William. The engineer at the studio had discreetly given it to William when we both became suspicious about what Charlie was doing behind our backs regarding our lost album.’.

‘That’s when The Filing Clerks severed their partnership with Charles Fenwick?’.

I took a breath and reached for a cigarette.

‘I’m not certain that we ever did completely break with Charlie. You see, he stole all of the singles from the distributor’s warehouse. I found out later that he had convinced certain people in the recording industry that he’d been the brains behind our ‘hit single’, that he’d been the writer.’.

‘I have that single. The writer’s credits are on the record label.’.

‘Yes, but not on the sleeve jacket. Charlie designed the sleeve, and airbrushed the Polaroids so that we all look interchangeable.’.

‘So your distributor, Waverley wasn’t it, thought Charlie had written *Freeway Breakdown* and *Wardrobes of Suture* and The Filing Clerks were a band he’d formed to play on his record?’.

‘That’s how Waverley saw it. That explains why they authorized Charlie and the engineer at Cakewalk to mix *Invitations Only* behind our back.’.

‘And *Invitations Only* was never completed or released?’.

‘That’s right, Oliver. William and I, Simon as well, became suspicious as to just why the engineer was vacationing in Finland in the middle of February.’.

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‘What happened next?’.

‘ We went to Waverley, explained that Charlie wasn’t even our manager but a rich asshole with an impressive car , and then made it clear that we were very pissed off with what Charlie and his engineer friend had been doing to our bedtracks. They’d overdubbed this hack engineer’s assistant playing bar-band clichés on top of my rhythm tracks. They’d wanted to make things more accessible.’.

‘So, let’s get this straight. Waverley abandoned your album because it had gone over-budget?’.

‘Yes, and because there was obviously dissension within the band. Charlie had justified what he’d done as an ‘executive decision’.’.

‘And do you know whatever happened to Charlie? Where we might contact him, because it looks as if we’ll have to if we want to use *Wardrobes of Suture* as part of our compilation?’.

‘ I have no idea whatever happened to Charlie Fenwick. I know that he lived with his parents somewhere in Scarborough, but presumably that was twenty years ago.’.

‘ I know that he’s blown off other people as well, Alan. He used to be involved with Canadian Disney, but there were allegations.’.

“Of what?’.

‘ Theft. Embezzlement. Charles Fenwick does not have a nice reputation.’.

‘Was he ever charged, Oliver?’.

‘There were only allegations. I can contact some Canadian Disney people I know and find out if they know anything about Charlie. But I’m going to need your help if we want to use *Wardrobes of Suture*.’.

I took a deep breath and ground out my cigarette.

‘Personally, Oliver, I never want to see or talk to the fucking asshole ever again.’.

‘You don’t have to, Alan. But we have to ascertain his whereabouts. It must look like we’ve attempted to track him down. Please. Try to contact some of his old friends.’.

‘He’s blown off a lot of people.’.

‘I know that, Alan. I’m the one who told you. But what about your old drummer, Simon? Wasn’t he allied with Charlie, against you and William?’.

‘ No way, Oliver. Simon detested Charlie even more than we did. Simon resented anybody who was

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cutting into his profit margin, especially when they didn't even really do anything.'

'Other than represent themselves in the recording industry as being the manager of The Filing Clerks. You guys should have been keeping a close eye on Charlie Fenwick. You thought he was a harmless gopher and you found out differently the hard way.'

'Tell me something I don't know, Oliver. Okay?'

'I'm going to look up 'Charles Fenwick' across the country. It's quite probable that he's relocated.'

'I would have if I were him. He's probably changed his name as well.'

'I know, Alan. But try to contact some of his old friends. Didn't he have rich girlfriends all over the place? Isn't that where his money came from?'

'A few that I can remember. I remember first names of a few. No surnames.'

'Think, Alan. Think. Try to look up his parents in Scarborough. As long as we've made the effort to track him down, then we can proceed. Okay, Alan.'

I nodded to myself.

'Okay, Oliver. I can remember one hair salon where a girl named Michelle worked. She was the one of Charlie's girlfriends who I could actually have a conversation with.'

'Well, start with her, then. I have to sign off now, Alan. I have to deal with members of other defunct bands who haven't spoken to each other for nearly two decades.'

I hung up after he did. I looked up Magic Curls Hair Salon and was relieved to find they were still in business.

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Michelle Belanger was professionally engaged when I arrived at Magic Curls Hair Salon. She was busily engaged, styling the locks of an eighteenish Rod Stewart clone complete with the requisite fake English accent.

‘ Oh, my God.’

‘You’re Michelle, right?’

She hadn’t so much changed in nearly twenty years. Rather, she had perfected herself. Her own curled hair could have almost been an advertisement for the establishment at which she still worked.

‘You’re Alan, from the band known as The Filing Clerks? You still look ageless.’

‘Thank you. I see that you’re busy with a client, but I need to talk to you.’

Michelle Belanger concentrated on the left side of her client’s shag hairstyle.

‘Can you come back in a couple of hours?’

‘Sure. See you then.’

I decided to kill two hours watching a movie, as there was a cine-complex two blocks south of the Magic Curl. I opted for an allegedly controversial film about a tribe of teenage wasteland denizens who randomly decided to kill the local bully. The movie unsettled me, not because it was so determinedly amoral but because it seemed unable to decide whether or not it was a comedy. Then I decided that everything outside standard psychological cause and effect systems was by definition a comedy.

Except , I didn’t find the movie very funny. I found it merely a relatively harmless means of killing time.

Two hours later Michelle was anxious to close down shop. Rod Stewart had long vanished, mercifully.

‘I get a lot of those clients. The early seventies have never quite gone away.’

‘Unfortunately. Do you want to go for a drink?’

‘You can drink if you wish, Alan. I’d prefer juice.’

‘That’s okay. I don’t have to drink.’

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Michelle led me to the nearest cafe past the twenty-minute maximum donut shop. I noticed the more upscale cafe forbade smoking, but I wasn't about to object.

She ordered cranberry juice while I ordered Earl Grey.

'So, Alan. This must be about our mutual friend Charles.'

She was much more direct than I remembered her being. I recalled her having crushes on both William and Simon. Michele and Simon might have even had a brief affair. Simon Drysdale, the quietly anonymous drummer, had actually fancied himself quite the Lothario.

'Of course it is, Michelle. I need to obtain his address, or his e-mail, or his phone number.'

'Why do you need to speak to Charlie Fenwick after all these years, Alan?'

I felt my coffee, which was still too hot to drink

'I have no need or desire to speak to the man. But I need to contact him, for legal reasons.'

'Oh?', Michelle Belanger's eyes narrowed.

'Nothing desperate. But, I've had an offer to include *Wardrobes of Suture* on a compilation CD of music from the late seventies to early eighties.'

She sipped her latte.

'And you need Charlie's permission?'

'We need to go through the motions of contacting him. We have to do this according to the rules.'

'Who's we?'

'Myself and Oliver Venn. Formerly the singer for Heavenly Voices and now an A&R for Dupont Records.'

'I remember Heavenly Voices. They were a gay band, right?'

'Yes, they advertised themselves as such.'

Oliver Venn and Heavenly Voices had been up front about their sexualities, before it became as offhand as it was by now. Oliver Venn had always been quite friendly to me, even though some of his band members looked down on The Filing Clerks for being peekaboo about their bisexuality. Oliver and his cronies had considered bisexuality itself to be peekaboo.

'Are you in touch with the others? William and Simon?'

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I gulped at my coffee.

‘William’s been dead for ten years now, and I have no idea whatever happened to Simon Drysdale. We were never exactly close friends.’

‘ Yes, I recall that.’

Since she had actually spent a few weeks with the drummer, I suspect he must have blown off steam about William and myself on at least one occasion.

‘But you three and Charlie were incorporated, right?’

‘Yes. Present Utensils, he called it. That was his name, not ours.’

Michelle laughed.

‘That’s because the three of you would have never agreed on a name. But, does Present Utensils still exist?’

‘That’s what I don’t know’.

I signaled to the waitress that I wanted a refill. Michelle shook her head.

‘Look, Michelle. I can’t honestly remember whether or not Present Utensils was formally dissolved on that day back in 1981 when Waverley Records fired Charles from the band’s current project.’

‘*Invitations Only?*’

‘Yes, that was the working title.’

‘Which was never released because you’d gone over budget?’

I probably glared at her.

‘Charles Fenwick, and his accomplice the chief engineer, went over budget. The pair of them took six days to do what we could have done in two.’

‘That’s highly unlikely, Alan. You guys argued all the time, about what songs to do and about arrangements and everything else. The three of you wasted so much time, trying so hard to sound different from everybody else and from your first record that actually made an impression. *Freeway Breakdown*, now.....that was the song. You should have tried to follow that one up, instead of trying so hard to be artistic.

‘ That’s hypothetical, Michelle.’

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‘No, Alan. It’s practical. Also, you and William were using drugs.’.

‘Yes. So what?’.

Michelle finished her juice and fidgeted with her purse.

‘I haven’t seen Charles Fenwick for almost as long as you haven’t, Alan. I have no idea how to get in touch with the man, and I have no desire to do so. Sorry I can’t really help you.’.

Then it was time for me to also finish my tea and pay up.

‘ You guys were blowing it You should have concentrated on making a record that was likely to sell. I realized I’d never get my money back from either you guys or him, so I just wrote it all off. Charles had lots of other girlfriends, whom he’d hit up for money , and who weren’t in a position to be as philosophical as I was about it.’.

I remembered some of Charlie’s other suburban girlfriends, who always tried so hard to fit in downtown but who never even came close to pulling it off.

‘I have to go home, Alan. My husband and I are going to a movie. But, do you remember a woman named Kathleen? An older woman, who was one of Charlie’s friends?’.

I vaguely remembered Kathleen. She was nearly old enough to have been Charlie’s mother, or perhaps his aunt. Apparently her husband had been loaded , in the financial sense of that word.

‘Do you recall this woman Kathleen’s last name, Michelle?’

‘Norris. Good luck with your career, Alan.’.

Career? I watched Michelle Belanger exit briskly without looking back at me. People who become successful without needing to reinvent themselves don’t need to bother with people who desperately must .

When I arrived back at my conveniently tiny one bedroom apartment, I put off looking up K. Norris in the residential phone directory. Michelle Belanger hadn't told me whether or not Kathleen Norris was a married woman, but I more than suspected she was. Charlie had been the type to cultivate married women with rich husbands, whose occupations frequently took them out of town and possibly out of the country.

I checked my answering machine for messages and also my e-mail. The e-mail served primarily for writing-related correspondence and for a former long-distance liaison who had metamorphosed into an electronic pen pal. The e-mail had not been active but there was a message on the answering machine.

Oliver Venn had called me. He had snail-mailed a memo to every C. Fenwick he could find in the phone directory not only locally but nationally. That was probably a fair postal bill, and I suspected that Dupont Records had some serious money invested in their historical compilation project. But Oliver shared my suspicion that , if Charles Fenwick was indeed still alive, that he had not only blown town but also changed his name.

Oliver had given me his home telephone number so I decided to return his call.

'Good evening, Alan.'

'The same to you, Oliver'.

' I presume you have some news?'

I swallowed before responding.

' Not much, I'm afraid. I did look up that hairdresser whom Charlie used to scrounge off, but she didn't have a lot to say to me.'

'I presume she has no idea whatever happened to Charlie boy?'

' No, Oliver, and she really couldn't give a shit. Both Charlie and The Filing Clerks are blasts from the past whom she has long written off.'

'I see.'

I reached for my smokes and lit one.

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‘ She did suggest that I look up another one of Charlie’s matronly benefactors. A woman named Kathleen Norris. An older woman, must be over sixty by now.’.

‘ Well well. I vaguely remember gossip about The Filing Clerks’ manager being a gigolo’.

I snorted after exhaling.

‘ More like a gigolo wannabe. Anyway, I suppose I have to look up K. Norris in the residential directory, but I’m not exactly optimistic. Most of them, if any, will be male.’.

‘Not necessarily, Alan.’.

‘ If I recall correctly, Kathleen Norris was definitely a married woman who’s husband was always ‘somewhere else’.

‘Oh. Well, good luck finding her.’.

‘Thanks for the encouragement, Oliver.’.

Oliver said something to somebody else at his end of the line. Something indecipherable but probably catty. It might well have been about me.

‘ I should inform you, Alan , that I contacted Waverley records and Distribution today.’.

‘I guess they still exist, then.’.

‘Just because Waverley wrote The Fling Clerks off a long time ago hardly means they’ve gone under. Joe and Albert are still running the ship, and they’re a valuable resource for this project because they distributed several other acts that we want.’.

‘Oh, right. What are the other bands you want to include?’.

‘ Well, let’s not mince about it. Heavenly Voices and also The Suburban Sissies.’.

Oliver was certainly making sure that he was included in his own compilation. The Suburban Sissies had been a predecessor to Heavenly Voices, less danceable and far wittier. Also, not as up front about being queer, despite their moniker. I remembered their meat and potatoes drummer who held the band together while never saying more than two words to anybody else on the planet.

‘ Well, you of course are well represented. And who else might we be including?’.

‘ The Snakes , The Rastafarian Rebels, Franco’s Nightmare, Vanilla Twisters, oh I can’t name them all now for you, Alan. But you can get a sense from that?’

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I could definitely recognize a pattern. Only one token punk band and almost no sexually-ambivalent art school bands. None of those subtly subversive art school bands whom The Suburban Sissies had blatantly modeled themselves on , before siphoning off into Heavenly Voices and becoming a positively-gay pop act.

However, since so many people I still interfaced with refused to recognize any life I had outside of The Filing Clerks ; I wished to be included in this historical compilation. I also wished to be paid quite royally for my cooperation.

‘The Snakes? That sounds like an administrative nightmare to me, Oliver.’.

Oliver made a drinking noise at his end. Oliver had company and I found myself wondering whom he might be.

‘ Oh, for sure. The singer’s in and out of either prison or rehab, the bass player OD’d, and the drummer found religion and studied jazz. The guitarist has disappeared off the face of the earth, so the singer’s our best bet.’.

‘They al had punk names. Do you know any of their birth certificate names?’

Oliver sounded stumped .

‘Aside from the singer, I don’t. I’m probably going to need a research assistant.’

‘ Well, if Python Montgomery’s back in the slammer then you know how to contact him.’.

‘Yes, but I’m really looking forward to that, Alan . You might recall that I got bashed by this gang who followed The Snakes around years ago. In early 1979’.

I butted out my cigarette. I remembered Python Montgomery once attacking me in a club lavatory, because I was with a girlfriend whom he’d taken a shine to.

‘ Once you make token inclusions, Oliver, then you have to follow through on them. And, on that note, I’ll try all the K.Norrises in the phone directory tomorrow. They can only tell me to go fuck myself.’.

‘Now you’re talking. Did Charlie’s hairdresser who wasn’t on fire tell you why you might try finding this Kathleen Norris person?’.

‘I picked up that she might have her own reasons for trying to locate Charlie Fenwick.’.

‘Like she wouldn’t mind getting her money back?’.

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‘Yes. Something that basic. Anyway, have a pleasant evening, Oliver. No doubt we will be talking soon.’.

I hung up, thinking that Oliver was more likely to have a pleasant evening than I was. As long as he was capable of forgetting about obscure and obsolete rock bands among whose members everybody was either dead or else not on speaking terms.

I opened a beer, and then set about finding K.Norris in the phone book. I hated bothering strangers, and I wasn't looking forward to explaining my life since 1981 to somebody who may or may not have reinvented her life since that dreadful year. I had a fairly low opinion of anybody who could have been fooled by Charles Fenwick, including myself.

The third K. Norris down the list turned out to be the lucky one. Kathleen Norris had never forgotten The Filing Clerks because she had never managed to forget Charles Fenwick. Ms. or Mrs. Norris's throat sounded like it belonged to somebody who had been trying to forget something for a long time, but had only managed to make matters much worse.

'Charlie convinced me that you guys were his and my meal ticket. Fat chance in hell. I should have listened to my second mind, but I was far too green by half.'

I summoned up the nerve to ask her if she felt like meeting for drinks.

There was a moment's dead silence at the other end of the line, then an assent.

'Sure. I've got shit that I need to tell you about. Meet me at Rhino's, just inside Parkdale.'

Then she hung up and I was on my way to Rhino's. I deduced that Rhino's was midway between her place and mine. I didn't drive, and I hoped that she wasn't.

I recognized her upon arrival. Kathleen Norris had been a Rubens model, but now she was a peroxide blonde. She was drinking a Manhattan, seated in the smoking section of the bar.

'You haven't changed a lot, Alan. You still look far too earnest to be fun.'

I really needed to hear that. I was hoping to hell that she actually had something to tell me about Charles Fenwick, whether or not that something was good or bad news.

'I remember you, too. Didn't you used to have a daughter with fake ID?'

'I sure did and I still do. Jill and I used to come and watch The Filing Clerks, in all those punker bars. Jill thought you guys were cerebral, and I thought you guys might just be weird enough to become a good novelty act. Jill was right, as usual.'

I wondered about Jill's father. I didn't recall Kathleen ever sitting with any men, except for Charles Fenwick. Charlie always bragged about her husband being always out of town and too rich to know what exactly was going on with regards to his savings account.

'Well, Alan. What are you drinking?'

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I assumed that she wasn't buying me anything.

'Beer', I motioned to the waitress. I ordered a Big Rock, a dark ale from the province of Alberta.

'Cheers'

I toasted her when our drinks arrived. I wondered whether or not she was married to anybody now, as she no longer appeared to have a lot of spending money.

'Well, let's see. Surely you stopped doing music, right Alan?'

Of course I had. What was I supposed to do, play out my life in country bands like the one parking in front of the bar across the road?

'I'm a writer, not that I make a living from it.'

'That's appropriate. You always seemed to be a bit of a bookworm. And what about William and Simon?'

'William passed away a decade ago. AIDS. I don't know what became of Simon. For all I know, he might be a studio drummer or he might be a real estate shark.'

'You've had no reason to keep in touch?'

I lit a smoke, since she was persistently exhaling hers into my face.

'I have no need to contact Simon Drysdale. I have no use for that guy whatever. I have even less use for Charles Fenwick, but I do need to obtain an address or phone number for the latter so that things can be done by the book.'

'Somebody wants to re-release one of your records? Which one, if you don't mind me asking?'

I shook my head.

'Don't get your hopes up, Kathleen. It's not the unfinished masterpiece that you contributed so generously towards.'

'It's *Freeway Breakdown*? The one you had a hit with?'

'What hit? Nobody ever saw a fucking cent from that record, except for Charlie. All returns went toward his debts, which was fair enough. But he stole the remaining copies of that single from Waverley's warehouse and so there are none in circulation. None.'

'Well, Alan. Did you expect him to behave differently?'

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‘I guess that was typical enough, after what he tried to do behind our backs when recording *Invitations Only*.’

‘Money talks and bullshit walks.’

Kathleen finished her drink and ordered another. I decided to take it slowly.

‘When Charlie played me some of what you guys were working on in that studio, I decided right then and there that we needed to invest in another act.’

‘Really? Such as who?’

I had never been aware of Charles Fenwick flogging any other acts. Charlie had always made noise about signing other acts to a label that he wanted to start, but I’d never seen any evidence.

‘Victor Everest and The Universals. Remember them?’

I did. They’d been a bunch of studio players with a sex-symbol singer.

‘We wanted to get behind a band with a sexy singer. Nobody thought you were sexy enough. We thought you guys could have used a girl singer, but you all told me to fuck off.’

‘Yes, we did.’

I was about to tell her to fuck off again, but I bit my lip.

‘So, Miss Kitty, whatever happened to the fabulously sexy Victor Everest and his bunch of universal session-hacks? Didn’t he try for a solo career?’

‘He sure did. But he overheard me and Charles arguing. I realized that Charles was two-timing me, that he was lying to me about the actual returns on Victor. You guys I’d written off by this time, but Victor was really hot.’

Victor Everest, with or without his faceless band called The Universals, had enjoyed a minor hit in 1980. I couldn’t for the life of me remember the title of Victor’s minor hit. I made a mental note to ask Oliver Venn about Victor Everest. Was he also to be included on Oliver’s compilation?

‘So, Kath. When was the last time you ever had any dealings with Charles Fenwick?’

‘Nineteen eighty-one, nineteen eighty-two, somewhere around there?’

This was after any of The Fling Clerks had associated with the man.

‘You were both behind Victor Everest, but you found out he was screwing you?’

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She looked at me angrily.

‘Sorry, I mean financially.’.

Kathleen Norris composed herself and ordered another Manhattan.

‘I warned Charlie that I was prepared to take him to court. He laughed in my face and told me I didn’t stand a prayer of getting any money from him because everything between us was just useless paper. I screamed at him and told him I never wanted to see his face again, and he obliged.’.

‘So you never had any certifiable contracts with him?’.

‘Nothing except a handshake. I guess because we saw each other all the time, because we were involved, I was dumb enough to trust the little asshole.’.

Kathleen lit another cigarette and cleared her throat.

‘Were you guys ever incorporated with him?’.

I nodded at her while signaling the waitress for another draught.

‘Present Utensils. His name, none of ours.’.

‘If I recall correctly’, she snorted, ‘your band could never agree on the time of day, let alone monikers or titles or stage clothes or anything actually worth making decisions about. Anyway, does Present Utensils still exist, even after twenty years?’.

‘That, my dear, is what I’m not sure of. Oliver Venn, the A&R guy from Dupont Records, can’t proceed with using *Wardrobes of Suture*

‘*Wardrobes of Suture*? Your disco B-side?’.

‘Yes, that’s the one Oliver is set on. We can’t okay it until we have all the necessary paperwork done. And we might need to cut Charles Fenwick in, even though it’s fuck all money.’.

‘Oliver Venn? Didn’t he used to be a singer?’.

‘He certainly did. With Heavenly Voices and, before that, with The Suburban Sissies.’.

‘Yes, I remember him. He was a big faggot.’.

I remembered Kathleen Norris having a thing for real men. Not that Charlie Fenwick was any great butch specimen. William and I had always suspected that Charlie was really queer, because he seemed to try so hard with so many different women.

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‘I am also a big faggot. Get it?’.

Kathleen seemed to have difficulty digesting her drink, let alone my shocking revelation.

‘You had a husband, right? Jill’s father? Wasn’t he Mr. Moneybags?’.

Kathleen glared at me.

‘Ron took off in 1982. I have no idea where he took off to or whether he’s even still alive. Do you understand, Alan? I don’t want to talk about my husband. It wasn’t as if he didn’t know about Charles and about many other younger men. Get it?’.

I nodded silently, even though I was dying to know what kind of a man Kathleen’s husband had been. I was also curious as to whether or not his surname was ‘Norris’.

‘I think I’d better be finishing this drink and then taking off . Thanks for agreeing to meet me, Kathleen. Sorry for dragging up so many cans of worms.’.

‘Oh bullshit you’re sorry. Please don’t patronize me, Alan, even though it’s your style.’.

‘Fine.’.

I stood to leave. It was only eleven o’clock but the beer had made me tired.

As I walked away from her table, Kathleen Norris suddenly called after me.

‘Hey! Alan! If you do manage to track down Charles Fenwick, please call me. The jerk still owes me money and I’d love to give him a good piece of my mind.’.

I promised her that I would, even though I had absolutely no intention of speaking to Charlie.

I didn't see any street car approaching and I felt like walking for a while. Kathleen Norris, with her endless cigarettes and Manhattans and tacky peroxide , had depressed me and walking it all off seemed the constructive thing to do.

I wondered whether her long-missing husband had been replaced and how frequently. I also hoped that she hadn't intended to drive home.

The sound of hard-core punk music began increasing in decibels as I walked east. I wondered where the sound might be coming from, then remembered that a monthly queer-punk night had temporarily relocated to a generic bar opposite the Queen Street Mental Health Centre.

I was tired, but not enough to simply go home and fall asleep. I had occasionally been tempted to try out the queer-punk parties but had always balked. I knew the young artist who organized the monthly events and respected him, but I also knew the soirees had become so terribly crowded they had already outgrown their original location.

Sure enough, as I approached The Incinerator the music had become deafening and the marquee legible. A band called Riot Cell 69 was advertised and presumably in full throttle.

I paid a ten dollar cover and received a hand stamp. The club certainly was filled beyond capacity and they didn't care about possible repercussions.

There were throngs of male, female, trans and inter-gendered people , mostly but not exclusive in their early twenties , holding court around the clubs two bar areas. There were later-twenties groups and couples seated around what had now become a mosh pit. And then there were the moshers.

The moshers were not exclusively late teens or early twenties. There was a fortyish man with grey hair bumping wildly against a much younger lad with jet black hair. My drink almost fell out of my hand as I realized the older man was Oliver Venn.

What the hell was Oliver doing here, Oliver who had detested punk twenty years ago and who wasn't exactly including much of it on his compilation-in-progress. Was he wearing his A&R hat tonight, or had

he suddenly developed a taste for much younger punker-boys?

‘Oliver! Of all people!’.

‘I could say the same about you, Alan. Put your beer down and join the party.’.

I obliged, as a throng of all genders thrashed around and bumped against me. I realized that Oliver was out on the town with the younger man, whom he introduced as Brad. The music was simultaneously polyrhythmic and devoid of rhythm, so free-form moshing was encouraged and copping feels was more than tolerated.

A Mohawk-haired Latino youth and his dancing partner playfully bumped against me. The partner grabbed at my crotch, which wasn’t quite hard enough to encourage any further playfulness.

‘I remember you. Didn’t you used to sing for that old punk band The Filing Clerks?’.

‘Uh huh.’.

‘You guys were awesome. *Freeway Breakdown*. All right.’.

I let them bump against me without returning the pleasure. I had never considered The Filing Clerks to be a punk band, even though we had been around during the end of the seventies and we had played at many of the standard punk venues. But all the heavy-duty punkers had hated us. The Snakes and The Vipers and all of their clones had spat and thrown beer at us, and even unplugged our amplifiers. So being fondly recalled as a proto-punk band might have been intended as a complement, but I couldn’t quite take it that way.

When the band finished their number I decided to leave quickly before they began playing another.

‘You’re leaving us already, Alan?’.

Oliver’s friend Brad covered his ears in disbelief.

‘I’m afraid I am leaving, gentlemen. I had an exhausting meeting that I’ll tell you about tomorrow, Oliver.’.

‘Let’s have tea tomorrow, Alan.’.

I nodded as the band tore into a number even faster than it’s predecessor. I could see Oliver suggesting a time and place, but I couldn’t read his lips.

Oliver and I agreed to do lunch the following day , and he insisted on doing it at a bistro practically next door to Dupont Records' office.

The midtown cafe was full without overflowing, and the service was more than adequate. I looked over the menu and decided not to take chances.

'Soup de jour, deux croissants, and fruit salad.'

'Tres bien, Alain'.

Oliver smiled at me for not completely mangling the French language. I clued in that Oliver was vegetarian while I most certainly was not.

'So where were you coming from last night, Alan? Before you found yourself so at home with the mosh pit crew?'

I grimaced. I had hardly been comfortable with the speedy punk-metal music and the relentless slam dancing.

'I'd been in research mode, Oliver. With one of Charles Fenwick's former sexual and financial benefactors.'

'Oh, dear. This being the dowager?'

Kathleen Norris might indeed have been many things, but dowager had never been an appropriate description for the woman.

' I don't think so, Oliver. Ms. or Mrs. Norris is probably old enough to be our mothers, as well as Charlie's, but I doubt that she's rolling in the dough these days.'

Oliver sipped his cranberry juice.

'But she had money twenty years ago.'

' Her husband did, and her husband trusted her. which was where Charles Fenwick conveniently entered the picture.'

The husband was always out of town andKathleen's her name?'

‘That’s right.’

‘Kathleen had access to his savings account?’

‘That’s pretty accurate.’

‘So where’s the hubby nowadays?’

‘I don’t know and neither does she , unless of course she’s lying. But why would she be? If I were trying to collect from her, she might well pretend to be unaware of Mr. Moneybags’ whereabouts. But not the other way around.’

Oliver nodded impatiently.

‘ But we’re more concerned about Charlie than about Mr. Norris. Does she have any idea whatever happened to Charlie?’

‘She says no, but she’d love to know where he is because he double-crossed her. Hey, Oliver, you must remember Victor Everest and the Universals? Are they included along with your CD-in-progress?’

Oliver picked at his salad, after appraising the dressing.

‘No, I’m afraid not. I looked into it but I couldn’t deal with his estate.’

‘Not him? What do you mean ‘his estate’?’

‘I mean exactly that. Victor Everest , or Victor Everett if you prefer, took his life nearly fifteen years ago.’

‘Oh, my God. I didn’t know that.’

‘Didn’t you know him, Alan?’

‘No’, I shook my head angrily. ‘ Not everybody knew each other just because they were in the record industry. I mean, I remember meeting the guy once and thinking he was a complete asshole , just so fucking full of himself. But this is no good, about the man killing himself.’

‘Why should you particularly care, then? It’s not as if you ever knew the man and his death was hardly an unusual event in an industry so full of individuals with delusions of grandeur.’

‘ What do you mean, Oliver. I’ve had periods of depression myself. But, also, I found out last night that Charles Fenwick and Kathleen Norris had money behind both Victor as a solo artist and Victor with his band of session-players.’

'I never knew that?'

'Well, Kathleen told me all about it. They'd already written off The Filing Clerks because we were too arty and not sexy enough.'

'Hah hah. Victor was admittedly very sexy, in a much too obvious sense of the word.'

'Anyway, Victor's record was recouping their loan but Charlie was doctoring the books. He wasn't cutting her in, as he should have been.'

'Did Kathleen Norris have anything on paper with Charlie?'

'She admits that she didn't.'

'Shit, Alan. I wish our friend Kathleen had shaken him down in 1982 or whenever. Not that the paperwork existed, unfortunately.'

'I know.'

'Or even later in the eighties, when Charlie was working for Canadian Disney and had some sort of local profile.'

'I know. I guess she was still financially flush until well after that.'

'Could be. But when did her husband leave her?'

'Nineteen eighty-two, she told me last night. She was actually quite chatty until the subject of Mr. Norris came up. Then she became negative and rather obnoxious.'

I ate my salad without any dressing. I thought Oliver was mocking me, but I was probably being paranoid.

'Maybe she had another rich husband until much more recently.'

'It's possible. I wonder how we might find out without having to bother her again.'

'I wouldn't worry about her, Alan. Unless for some reason she is protecting Charlie for her own gain or out of some weird loyalty. I think you should contact Test Plan Records. That's what I suggest you do next.'

'They were Victor Everest's label?'

'That's correct. The A&R is a woman, Suzanne Doriat.'

'I've never heard of her, not that I've had anything to do with the recording industry for more than

twenty years.’.

‘ She’s fairly new at Test Plan. I’m not sure where she came from, but she’s not at all unpleasant.

I let out a sigh of relief.

‘ By the way, Oliver, anything more news about Waverley records?’.

‘ Not really’, he snorted ,’They have a couple of acts that I can make a deal about and that’s about it.

Dependable while remaining almost invisible, that’s Waverley for you. Good old reliable Albert and Joe.’.

‘I just remembered something.’.

‘What?’

‘ On a few occasions over the last few years, I was accosted by a guy named Mike Kennedy, who would bug me about the masters for *Freeway Breakdown* and *Wardrobes of Suture*.’.

‘Really?’.

‘Oh yes. The guy was really obnoxious. Until recently, I didn’t have the master to that record.

William’s sister had it stashed safely away somewhere.’.

‘Because Waverley wanted to dump it onto *Invitations Only*?’.

‘Yes, damn it. This guy , Mike Kennedy, was a pushy bastard. He would never take no for an answer.’.

‘Sounds like somebody who would do well for himself in the business. Now that you mention it, I know whom you’re referring to. He wants to re-release the entire Waverley catalogue, especially what he considers to be vintage punk .’.

‘I always thought Mike Kennedy was a dealer for a certain local celebrity chef. But I guess he has a few other tricks up his sleeve.’.

‘I know he’s interested in The Snakes and The Vipers, but there are performing rights obstacles. Another problem is the phone number and e-mail address I had for Mike Kennedy are no longer in service’.

‘ Well, you might need to deal with him, but I don’t . Say, Oliver. Since when have you had the time for day for punk bands? You used to be so insistent that queers did not and should not play punk rock.’.

Oliver grinned at me, somewhat sheepishly.

‘ I still can really do without the music. But, whatever Brad enjoys , it’s all right by me’.

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'I hear you, sir. I'll call Suzanne Doriat at Test Pilot after we pay our bill.'

Test Pilot records had certainly moved up in the world from the time when I had once visited their offices. In the early eighties, Test Pilot had been a reception room and a small office down in Lower Cabbagetown. Now they owned two large adjoining suites up in Yorkville. I waited in the reception area with the feeling that if I breathed too hard I might kill the plants or permanently damage the furniture.

Test pilot had been formed by a guy named Bert Gamble over twenty years ago. Bert's formula was to sign up the post-punk or 'new wave' acts who were either already radio-friendly or who were easily malleable. In the final days of The Filing Clerks, the band had enjoyed a reputation of being hostile and unmanageable. Charles Fenwick had encouraged this reputation.

If only The Filing Clerks, particularly that lead singer Alan Radford, hadn't been so damn arrogant and stubborn, they would have realized that they needed somebody to make them over. That band could have done very nicely for themselves but they blew it.

I remembered the day when I had taken a demo tape of songs I had recorded in an old friend's MIDI-studio , after the breakup of The Filing Clerks, to Test Pilot for appraisal and a possible recording contract. After Bert Gamble pretended to listen to my sales pitch , he asked me whether or not I was still involved with Charles Fenwick. When I had told him that I definitely wasn't, I got the impression that I had said the wrong thing. I found out later that Charles had informed all of his contacts in the local recording industry that he had written *Freeway Breakdown* and that The Filing Clerks were three untalented bar musicians who had merely played on the track.

The morons only had to read the record label to see the writing credits. But I guess they only looked at the sleeve, where only the art director knew for sure.

I hadn't been aware at that time of Charles Fenwick's involvement with one of Test Pilot's flagship acts of the early eighties. I had been unaware of Charlie's and Kathleen Norris' investment in Victor Everest and his faceless session band.

Bert Gamble recorded and distributed Victor Everest and The Universals and he swallowed Charlie's line about The Filing Clerks being a bunch of session hacks? Talk about stupidity!

Suzanne Doriat entered the reception area and then escorted me to her office. On the walls I could see several gold records for Test Pilot acts, all well after my time. For years I had listened predominantly to instrumental music, largely film soundtracks but also baroque classical and the intentionally ambient. The names on the gold records meant little if anything to me.

Suzanne Doriat was probably in her late-twenties and friendly enough. Her disposition became friendlier when I introduced myself as something other than an accountant or private investigator.

‘So what can I do for you, Mr. Radford?’.

‘I’ll get to the point.’.

‘ Good. Cigarette?’.

‘Later, perhaps.’.

I watched Suzanne light up and then I cleared my throat.

‘ I understand that Test Pilot once had some dealings with a man named Charles Fenwick, whom I believe once managed one of Test Pilot’s first acts.’.

‘First acts?’, Suzanne frowned, ‘ I’ve only been here just more than a year.’.

‘That might be true. But isn’t your vintage catalogue still in distribution? There seems to be a renewed interest in the late seventies and early eighties, and Test Pilot had some acts who would definitely qualify.’.

‘Which act are we talking about, Mr. Radford?’.

‘Victor Everest and The Universals. Or, Victor Everest as a solo act.’.

Suzanne Doriat took a long drag on her cigarette and shook her head.

‘ Did you know that Victor Everest committed suicide almost twenty years ago?’.

‘I did, Ms. Doriat, although I was only recently informed about this.’.

‘You hadn’t known Victor back in the early eighties.’.

‘No’, I decided to have a cigarette myself.

‘So why are you looking for this Charles Fenwick, then?’.

‘ He fucked around with my band, The Filing Clerks. And I’ve found out that he violated contracts with Victor Everest, as well as with one of his co-investors.’.

‘Sounds like a charming character?’.

‘He was, in his own nebbishy way. That’s why he fooled it looks like more than just a few people.’.

Suzanne Doriat took a drag on her cigarette and butted it out.

‘I’ve heard of The Filing Clerks. My older cousin has a copy of one of your singles, *Freeway Breakdown*.’.

‘That was our one and only record. *Freeway Breakdown* with *Wardrobes of Suture* on the B-side.

There was an album also, that was never released because Charles Fenwick mixed it behind our backs and consequently Waverley Records wrote it off when it went well over budget.’.

‘Sounds like a lot of stories I’ve heard about the early eighties, Mr. Radford. All these reluctant pop bands suddenly wanted to be experimental and wound up wasting studio time. Test Pilot avoided that type of band like the plague.’.

She smiled at me after her mini-lecture.

‘ I presume you know Oliver Venn, Ms. Doriat? Yes, of course you do. He gave me your name.’.

‘Oliver’s assembling that CD of late seventies and early eighties bands. Your band is on it, right?’.

‘Well, he wants *Wardrobes of Suture*, but we have to go through the motions of trying to contact Mr. Fenwick.’.

‘I see your point, Mr. Radford. Oliver’s planning on including a couple of early Test Pilot acts, like The Motoroids and Laughing Gas. He was interested in Victor Everest, but Victor’s estate put a stop to that.’.

‘So, anything from Victor’s catalogue goes to the estate. Meaning his family?’.

Suzanne nodded.

‘His sister. Victor’s parents both passed away and left everything to his sister. I don’t have her name or number, but Bert might if you need to contact her.’.

‘ Bert Gamble is still here?’.

‘Of course’ , Suzanne lit another smoke. ‘Bert manages the books, just like he always has.’.

‘And is there any connection between anybody else in Test Pilot’s vault and Charles Fenwick?’.

‘Not that I’m aware of. You’d have to ask Bert about that.’.

I decided that it might be worth holding my nose.

‘Bert? Do you have a second?’.

Suzanne Doriat sat silently for half a minute, puffing on her cigarette and thinking about obviously something other than Test Pilot Records’ ancient vault.

‘What can I do for you, sir?’.

The fiftyish gentleman didn’t remember me, which was just fine .

‘I’m attempting to track down a man named Charles Fenwick. I understand Test Pilot once had dealings with Mr. Fenwick, back in the early nineteen-eighties.’.

Bert Gamble’s face reddened considerably.

‘What did you say your name was again, sir?’.

‘Alan Radford.’.

‘You’re not with the police or the government , are you?’.

‘No’, I swallowed.

‘ Then who are you and what do you want with us?’.

‘ I used to be a musician who had bad dealings with this man Charles Fenwick. I know that one of the first acts you signed to Test Pilot, Mr. Gamble, also had shady dealings with this man.’.

‘And you think we’re likely to be dealing with him? Not bloody likely !. I haven’t heard Charles Fenwick’s name in well over a decade and now you’ve ruined a very good track record. Get the hell out of my office and go look for that scumbag somewhere else!’.

Bert Gamble abruptly turned on his heel and slammed his office door behind him.

Suzanne Doriat waited until Bert’s door was firmly closed and then laughed.

‘Well, Mr. Radford. I’d say you just opened up a major can of worms.’.

‘I don’t think so, Ms. Doriat. You can’t open up a can of worms unless you know where the can is located.’.

‘Very good’, she exhaled.’ Well, sir, I should be getting back to my pressing assignments in our current decade. But there’s something else I should inform you about, if you don’t already know about it.’.

‘What might that be?’.

‘ There was a man named Michael Kennedy, who claims to be running his own label called OMG,

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asking about re-releasing some of Test Pilot's vault.'

'Yes, I've been accosted by this man.'

'Accosted is exactly the right word, Mr. Radford. Michael Kennedy is an asshole. However, while he has mercifully vanished from our radar, there's now somebody else trying to get the same project going.

And she too is a serious piece of work.'

'This is news . Does this woman perhaps have a name?'

'Jill Sutton-Norris. Does that ring a bell?'

'

When I arrived at the residence listed for Jill Sutton-Norris, there was a sizable crowd loitering around in front of the walkway to her apartment complex. It was a very mixed gathering , in terms of age and demographics. A police car was blocking off the one-way side street which the apartment complex faced toward.

There was also yellow police tape, cordoning the sidewalk as well as the building. Somebody had been killed, this was quite apparent. I could see five other apartments in the building, in addition to the one in which fingerprints detectives and a coroner were performing their duties.

I had no difficulty striking up a conversation with an onlooker.

‘ It’s the man in number four. He’s been stabbed. ’, a woman in her late twenties proclaimed to me.’.

‘Do you know the man’s name?’.

‘Michael. ’.

‘Michael Kennedy?’.

‘Yes, that’s it. Michael Kennedy.’.

The young woman identified herself as Paula Lopez.

‘Do you have any idea how long the man’s been dead?’.

Paula shook her head.

‘I know the cops arrived about an hour ago, but I don’t know how long he’d been dead before the body was found.’.

‘Who found the body?’.

‘Jill Sutton-Norris, who rented the apartment. They live upstairs from me.’.

‘Where’s she? Do you know?’.

Paula looked me over for a second.

‘I don’t know. But I suspect she’s either in protective custody or else at a hospital.’.

Yes, either possibility seemed likely. Since Paula seemed quite willing to talk to a stranger, I decided to see what else I might learn about Jill and Michael.

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‘I was never quite sure how Jill made her living, and the same with Michael. Neither of them seemed to have nine-to-five type jobs. I think they might have some connection to the music industry, and probably they both worked out of their apartment. I was never that chatty with either of them, so it wasn’t like I was ever invited over to their apartment.’

‘But it’s probably similar to yours, Paula?’

She nodded

‘So there would be what?’

‘A bedroom, a bathroom, and a living area that could be divided into two work stations, with not a lot of space left over.’

‘That sounds pretty cramped.’

‘You’re right about that, sir.’

‘Alan Radford.’

‘Pleased to meet you, Alan. It’s awfully tight for one person, let alone a couple.’

‘Which they were, I take it.’

‘Oh yes.’

Paula Lopez surveyed the crowd, which had began to thin out. There were still several individuals she identified as other tenants , including an older gay male couple and a single woman with dreadlocks. The she lowered her voice.

‘I did call 911 one night, when I could hear him beating her. I had warned them about this on one previous occasion.’

‘Oh, shit. Have you told the cops. Paula?’

She shook her head

‘They haven’t talked to me yet. But, I presume they’ll be interviewing all the other tenants in the building, and when it’s my turn I will tell them.’

I nodded as I observed the fingerprint detectives and the presumed coroner exiting the front door of the building. The coroner looked at least fifty and he was whispering to the two detectives, who then walked down the sidewalk to report to a policeman sitting in the parked car.

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I heard Paula addressing me now.

‘You haven’t told me your connection to Jill and Michael, Alan. Were they friends or associates of yours?’.

‘No, not really.’.

‘Then what brought you here?’.

‘I used to be a musician, in a band called The Filing Clerks.’.

She didn’t recognize the name, but I was assuming that myself and the band were well before her time.

‘I’ve been trying to trace a man who once had business dealings with The Filing Clerks. Who once, to put it delicately, really fucked us around.’.

‘Was that Michael Kennedy?’.

‘No, although I had previously encountered Mr. Kennedy on a couple of occasions.’.

Paula Lopez watched the crowd thinning out further. The woman with the dreadlocks now returned to her apartment on the ground floor, and the gay male couple followed suit.. I wondered what their take on Jill and Michael might have been, but presumably a homicide detective would be talking to them shortly.

The same would be true regarding Paula, so I decided to finish my story and then sip away.

‘Jill Sutton-Norris was the daughter of a woman I’d known twenty years ago and whom I tracked down the other evening. Jill used to come and watch our band, along with her mother, back in nineteen-eighty.’.

‘My God! That long ago?’.

‘Uh huh.’. I tried to keep my voice level. ‘I’d been given Jill’s name by an A&R person for a record company that once had their own negative history with the man I’ve been looking for.’.

‘Oh?’ , Paula’s face had become quite wary.

‘It seems that Jill had taken over for Michael, with regards to some business he was involved in concerning various music from the late seventies and early eighties. Michael was trying to re-release a lot of vintage Toronto punk records as well as other product from that era.’.

‘And he was interested in your band, Alan?’.

‘He had accosted me on a couple of occasions.’.

‘Accosted sounds like the right word.’.

I nodded. Paula had already made it clear that she strongly disliked Michael Kennedy.

‘ I hadn’t encountered the guy for a few months, and in fact I’d almost forgotten about him until his name came up in conversation with a man I know who’s initiated his own compilation of music from that period.’.

‘ So, somehow this led you to Jill?’.

‘Yes. I’d never heard her referred to as Jill Sutton-Norris until yesterday. I had looked up her mother under the name ‘Norris’, but I don’t know where the ‘Sutton’ comes from. It might come from her father, whom the mother says mysteriously disappeared almost twenty years ago.’.

Paula watched the homicide detective interrogating the gay couple in their downstairs apartment.

‘They’re going to be calling on me very soon, Alan. Did you also know Jill’s father?’.

‘No. I ‘ve always had the sense that he was rather well-off and also never home.’.

Paula nodded, and then wrote her phone number down on a piece of scrap paper before identifying herself as a tenant and walking up the sidewalk and into the building.

I watched Paula walk up the stairs and then open up her door on the second floor. Then I decided to leave the premises and catch the nearest subway. If I were lucky, I might well be able to catch the late night local news. I hadn’t seen any media-types at the crime site, but that didn’t necessarily mean this murder wasn’t already public knowledge.

There was no mention of Michael Kennedy's murder on the late-night local news, but there was a tiny item in the crime section of the next morning's Globe and Mail.

Michael Kennedy, age forty-six, had been stabbed to death in the apartment he shared with his common-law spouse Jill Sutton-Norris, who had found his body upon returning home in the late afternoon. Both Kennedy and Sutton-Norris were freelancers working in the music industry, according to neighbours.

There were no pictures. And there was no suspect, at least none that the police wished citizens to be looking out for.

I absently scanned the rest of the Globe and Mail and then the phone rang.

'Morning, Alan. You've read the paper?'

'If you're referring to the murder, Oliver, I knew about it yesterday afternoon.'

'That so?', I could hear Oliver muttering something to his younger friend.

'I called on Suzanne Doriat at Test Pilot, who informed me that Jill Sutton-Norris had taken over Michael Kennedy's re-release business or whatever their project. I recognized Jill's name as being Kathleen Norris' daughter.'

'The woman whom you had drinks with the other night?'

'Yes. The older woman who had some sort of unofficial partnership with Charlie Fenwick.'

'And who got screwed out of her investment in Victor Everest.'

'Yes, Jill's mother would love to find out whatever happened to our friend Charlie. Jill used to come watch The Filing Clerks with her mother over twenty years ago.'

Oliver was drinking either juice or coffee at the other end.

'Where's Jill now, Alan?'

'Either police custody or psychiatric observation, from what a neighbour told me. Mind you, that was about five-thirty yesterday afternoon.'

'She's not a suspect?'

'Not as far as I know. I struck up a conversation with one of their neighbours, Paula Lopez. The

neighbour didn't mention anything about break-ins or robbery , just that Michael Kennedy had been stabbed.'

'That looks like he wasn't killed by a stranger.'

'It doesn't appear that way, Oliver. I remember Kennedy as being a drug dealer. I don't know whether he still had his illicit business or whether he'd given it up.'

'It's not as if he had a job at some record label, other than his own enterprise, which may not even be legally registered. He and Jill were working entirely on spec.'

'So you think Michael Kennedy was killed over a bad drug deal? I don't know about that.'

'What do you mean, Alan?'

'The neighbour, Paula Lopez, told me that she'd once called 911 about Michael and Jill .'

' Oh shit.'

'Volatile relationship is, believe, a charitable description.'

'Well, I think you'd be hard pressed to find anybody who actually liked Michael Kennedy. Whenever I saw that individual approaching, I made a point of crossing the street. The guy had no manners, no tact, and...'

'No sense of his own insignificance.'

'Yeah, that's about it. So, what are you going to do now?'

'I don't know, Oliver. We still have to obtain some sort of mailing or contact address for Charles Fenwick.'

'You thought Kennedy or Jill might have been useful.'

'It was a lead, a lead I felt worth following up on .There's some sort of network emerging here. The Norris family, and whomever Sutton might be, and Charlie Fenwick and now the late Michael Kennedy. You know what it's like when people hold grudges.'

There was a moment of dead air at Oliver's end of the line.

'I try my damndest not to hold grudges, Alan. What do they accomplish? I mean, Charles Fenwick played a major role in derailing your music career, but it wasn't as if he was the only culprit.'

'I know, Oliver. I know.'

There was nothing like condescending hindsight to make me feel like one big fat failure.

‘If I hear any further details I’ll call you, okay?’.

‘Okay, Oliver. Have a nice day.’.

I hung up the phone and decided to play some music. I picked out a CD of Bernard Hermann’s film soundtracks for Alfred Hitchcock.

I glanced over to the far top left of my shelving, where I kept old vinyl. Sure enough, there was my one copy of *Freeway Breakdown* and *Wardrobes of Suture*. I scowled at the three generically interchangeable musicians pictured on the back of the sleeve. Produced by Charles Fenwick, sleeve design by Charles Fenwick.

If only I’d insisted on the writing credits being included among all the other pertinent information on the back of that fucking sleeve!

I spent the afternoon trying not to think about Charles Fenwick and Oliver Venn and the unrealized potential of The Filing Clerks and the murder of Michael Kennedy, that sleaze entrepreneur who had been in a partnership with Jill Sutton-Norris daughter of Kathleen Norris , who had been taken for a bad ride by none other than Charlie Fenwick.

I treated myself to a French movie about the time-honoured practice of gleaning, making both fundamental and creative use of surplus foods and goods and other scrap materials. I recognized the movie as being a highly insightful documentary essay about a multiple of subjects, but my concentration was never quite with me. When the movie finished, I browsed in a nearby bargain book store and bought myself a murder mystery, by an English writer that my former band-mate William had once enthused about.

Back home I looked at the clock and realized that it was time for the aggressively local news report.

Michael Kennedy's murder was now the leadoff item. A composite drawing of a man wanted for questioning by the police was generated into the right-hand frame, almost on top of the anchor.

The drawing looked like's somebody's very accurate portrait of Charles Fenwick.

The anchor breathlessly informed her viewers that a neighbour of the murdered man had described this stranger to the investigating homicide detective, who now appeared briefly to remind everybody that the unnamed man was not a suspect at this time.

Yeah, right. he's not a suspect even though everybody watching this newscast is now supposed to be looking out for the man. That 222-TIPS informer number certainly provided an incentive for citizens to get on the horn and claim their rewards, even when they didn't have anything more than the flimsiest evidence to back up their claims.

Well, I certainly recognized the man whose face had been approximated by the detectives with their computer composites. But I hadn't seen the unofficial suspect . I'd only been trying to track him down without ever having to speak to the jerk again.

I opened a beer and then retrieved Paula Lopez' phone number.

'Hello?'

‘It’s Alan Radford. The musician you were talking to yesterday after Michael Kennedy’s murder.’.

‘Oh yes. What’s up? Were you just watching the news?’.

‘Yes. Have you ever seen the guy they’re looking for?’.

‘No.’.

Paula was silent for a second. I wondered whether she was going to talk to me, then I reassured myself that she wouldn’t have taken the call if she hadn’t felt like talking.

‘Mark and Jonathan, the gay couple I pointed out to you, they gave that man’s description to the police. They called on me with their drawing and asked me whether I’d ever seen this man. Mark’s an acclaimed artist, so he probably gave that sketch to the cops.’.

‘Which made their composite easier to arrive at. What’s Mark’s last name?’.

‘Gardner. Mark Gardner.’.

I’d never heard of the artist, but I was impressed. Paula’s neighbour Mark had indeed drawn an accurate impression of Charles Fenwick twenty years after the last time I ever saw the man.

‘Mark and Jonathan were really pissed off about this guy. Yesterday morning, he buzzed their number when there was no answer from Michael and Jill’s.’.

‘I can do without that type of visitor, Paula.’.

‘Everybody can. Then this guy kept on bugging Mark about Michael Kennedy’s schedule, or about where Michael might be at that very moment. Mark lost it and asked him how the hell was he supposed to know, that he and Michael weren’t particularly friendly and that he didn’t even like the jerk.’.

‘Mark and Jonathan disliked Michael Kennedy. What about Jill?’.

‘They could deal with her, without having to be unnecessarily chatty about it.’.

I nodded silently. I’d known far too many neighbours who’d insisted on becoming my best friends. The trick with neighbours was to keep the conversation brief and trivial. The weather was always a safe subject, while pets were much riskier.

‘Michael accosted me because he thought I had something that he needed. I take it he only spoke to people who he considered useful.’.

‘Yes, that’s accurate. The man had limited social skills.’.

‘Getting back to the man the police are looking for, you’re sure you’d never seen him before.’.

‘Never.’.

I had no reason to disbelieve her.

‘Mark finally told the guy to go away and leave him alone. So the guy told Mark that he was weird.’.

‘The pot calling the kettle black’.

‘Exactly, Alan. So Mark and Jonathan felt that they should describe this guy to the cops.’.

‘About Jonathan, Mark’s boyfriend I presume?’.

‘Yes?’

‘He wasn’t present during Mark’s altercation with our visitor?’.

‘No. Mark complained about the man after he finally huffed off.’.

‘Paula, do you think Mark and Jonathan would be willing to talk to me?’.

‘I think so’, she answered slowly. ‘They had to clean up their apartment a bit before talking to the detective.’.

I grinned to myself.

‘Well, I’m not a cop. But I’m interested in this man that the cops are looking for.’.

‘Because he looks like the guy that you’re trying to track down?’.

‘You’ve got it. Thanks a lot, Paula. I may well be talking to you later. How was your session with the detective by the way?’.

‘Tense. I mean, pretty much as I expected. The man wants the facts, and isn’t very interested in anything he considers speculation’.

‘Well, I guess that goes with the territory. I take it you told him about the 911 incident?’.

‘Oh yes. I have no reason to keep quiet about wife-beaters.’.

I glumly agreed, while wishing to change the subject. I recalled two former neighbours who had too often kept me awake.

‘I have to run now, Alan. I’m going to a movie.’.

‘I just saw The Gleaners and I.’.

‘That sounds like a bit too much for me to handle tonight. We’re going to see The Deep End, because I

really Tilda Swinton.’

I also liked that actress, so I thanked her again and let her get on with her life. I wondered who she was referring to by ‘we’.

Mark Gardner just might have been the friendliest person I'd ever talked to on the phone. Upon calling him and inquiring whether I could have a few minutes of his time, he invited me over for tea and cocktails.

Jonathan Borins, Mark's partner, greeted me and invited me to sit down. Jonathan was generically attractive, with obviously enough of an income to afford a permanent gym membership.

While Jonathan prepared herbal tea, I looked over Mark Gardner's canvases. They were impressive and they weren't merely portrait sketches. They played with pictures, teasing the spectators in a yes-I-see-it-no-you-don't sort of manner.

'Mark's slipped out to the grocery store down the street.'

I refrained from asking what kind of groceries Mark was purchasing. I remembered Paula informing me that Mark and Jonathan felt the need to do some housecleaning before being interviewed by the homicide detective.

Sure enough, Jonathan lit up a joint and offered me a little hit. I thought about it for a moment and then thought why not. I had never been much of a pot-head, cheap uppers and booze had been The Filing Clerks official drugs. And then we made a little money, so the cheap uppers were replaced by cocaine.

William became addicted to heroin. He'd kicked it well before he became sick, but the junk did of course take over his life and make him difficult to be around.

Jonathan Borins was explaining to me that he made his living as a catalogue designer for a local art gallery., not Mark's dealer who was up in Yorkville where there was serious money exchanging hands.

I was impressed. I was also jealous.

The door opened and Mark Gardner walked in with a bag containing juice and more tea. The juice was a tropical mixture, clearly intended to be mixed with either vodka or gin.

'Here we are, Alan. it's never too early for libations.'

I thought it was, but I kept quiet about it. Certain individuals became more talkative when libations were involved.

Mark was attractive in a less generic mode than his partner. He looked like he both worked out and

used his sun lamp.

‘Jonathan’s made you tea? Do you want something else to drink?’.

‘Not just yet, Mark.’.

I smiled as Mark mixed vodka and tropical fruit juice into a blender and then poured drinks for Jonathan and himself.

‘I’ll take a hit of that, dearest.’.

Mark accepted the joint from his boyfriend and then made himself comfortable in his wicker-chair.

‘Now, Alan. You seem far too pleasantly reserved to be a friend of that man the police are looking for.’.

‘Charles, or Charlie, was not a friend. I did have an association with him over twenty years ago.’.

‘Really? Are you a musician?’, Jonathan wanted to know.

‘I was.’., I responded glumly.

‘Do you still play?’.

‘No.’.

I had never understood what people meant by the verb ‘play’. I suppose they were referring to whether or not I was a freelance player, taking whatever uncreative jobs were available. I had always considered session-musicians responsible for the birth of punk rock. Rote professionalism provoked exciting amateurism, and thank God for that!

‘I’m a writer now, but an acquaintance of mine is putting together a compilation of Toronto bands from the late-seventies and early-eighties. He wants to include my band, The Filing Clerks, but there are legal procedures that must be followed through.’.

Mark Gardner took a hit on the circulating joint and then passed it over to me.

‘So, where does that odious man fit into the picture, Alan?’.

I sighed after taking my hit and passing it over to Jonathan.

‘Charles Fenwick was this kid who introduced himself to the band, fawned over us, and made it clear that he could raise money to produce a record for us. He described himself to people in the industry as being our manager. We considered Charlie to be a rich kid with a truck and a few wealthy lady-friends.’.

‘But he’s so unattractive.’, Jonathan Borins looked incredulous.

‘He looks innocent’, Mark now spoke slowly.

‘Yes, that’s a good way of describing him. We..., well William and myself, thought Charlie was like one of the kids in the audience , You know, the real world. Plus, he had access to money. So he became a partner in the band.’.

‘So now you have to count him in?’.

‘No’, I finished my tea. ‘I have to make it appear like I attempted to locate and then contact him. I was hoping that he’d fallen off the face of the earth, or been killed by somebody else who he fucked around with.’.

Mark smiled as Jonathan excused himself.

‘Well now, Alan. Your nasty wishes might in fact be coming true, in a rather roundabout way. It certainly looked to me like your friend Charlie had some sort of serious grudge with our recently deceased neighbour.’.

‘I had a passing acquaintance with Michael Kennedy.’.

‘Lucky you. We had more frequent dealings with him, all of them rather unpleasant.’.

‘I know. Paula told me about their fucked-up relationship.’.

‘I don’t mind Jill. I could never see what she might have seen in him, not that we should really be disrespecting the dead.’.

I grinned. I decided to pour myself one of Mark and Jonathan’s cocktails.

‘Help yourself, Alan. When Michael wasn’t around, Jill would be quite friendly. She had us over a few times for libations and we all would have fun.’.

‘Liquid libations, Mark?’.

‘Oh, we’d smoke grass or dope. I know that they were both into harder drugs, but neither Jonathan nor I paid any attention to that.’.

‘Was there anything unusual about their apartment?’.

‘No’, Mark poured himself another cocktail. ‘Their apartment is exactly the same shape and size as ours. They could have put more effort into personalizing it, but then people all have different interests.’.

Then Mark remembered something.

‘ Michael was a photographer, and many of his photos were on their walls.’

‘I didn’t know he was a photographer. Did she tell you if he ever exhibited? Did she try to pick your brain, about art dealers and all that?’.

‘I discouraged her’, Mark Gardner grinned. ‘ But they’re professional quality. It’s the subject matter that might limit his market.’

‘Let me guess. They’re all of rock bands.’

‘Of course. Some of them are at least twenty years old. You’re familiar with a punk band called The Snakes, Alan?’.

‘I certainly am’, I declined to elaborate. ‘ I take it you guys were already living here when Michael and Jill moved in?’

‘ That’s right . One night, when we were having cocktails with Jill, she told us that she’d moved here from Halifax. Michael had also lived there, but he moved here before she did.’.

‘ Really? Did Michael have some sort of job offer here?’.

‘I doubt it’, Mark snorted. ‘ The guy was a dope dealer, one who wanted to up his ante by switching over to the recording industry.’.

‘Yes, Michael was also interested in The Filing Clerks.’.

‘Jill told us all about these ancient punk bands, most of whom we’d never heard of. You must realize, Alan, that punk rock was well before our time.’.

I resented the reminder, but I tried not to let on.

‘ So many of these bands Jill was talking about had all either died, or been in recovery and gone back to school, or whatever. They were all impossible for her to deal with, because most of the band members had long ago stopped speaking to one another.’.

‘Well, Mark, I guess The Filing Clerks also fit the stereotype. William is dead, and I don’t know whatever happened to the drummer.’.

‘ The drummer?’, Mark laughed. ‘Since when does the drummer know whatever happened to the drummer?’.

I also laughed.

‘According to my friend Oliver, who’s putting together the CD, I needn’t worry about the drummer’s current whereabouts. But Charlie Fenwick was the money regarding the record that Oliver wants to use, so the appropriate procedures must be followed.’

‘This might be useful to you, Alan.’

‘Yes?’, I finished off my drink and refrained from pouring another.

‘There was an older guy who was a frequent visitor to Jill and Michael’s. An old rocker, a guy named Steve Weston.’

Steve Weston was a familiar, even legendary name. Steve Weston was an expatriate American who now made his home in Toronto. He was a session-guitarist who had reinvented himself as a rockabilly dude twenty-five or so years ago, and then kept on doing the same old thing ever since. Steve Weston had allegedly been a studio-player on many vintage punk records, and the man also enjoyed a reputation for being a pharmaceutical disaster.

‘I know who that is.’

‘I thought you might. The guy is quite the crone.’

‘Yes, junkies are notorious for aging poorly. Do you know where the guy hangs out, Mark?’

Mark looked vague, then remembered something.

‘Jill told us all about Steve Weston. How he supposedly and anonymously cleaned up some early American punk records, how he supposedly tuned down an offer from a well-known arena rock band. The guy definitely milks his mythology. But, he makes his living now as a producer more than a player or performer. Maybe you should run Steve Weston’s name past your friend putting together the compilation CD.’

I made a note to call Oliver Venn and do so as soon as I got home.

‘Thank you so much for your hospitality, Mark. I should be on my way, and you guys have been very helpful indeed. Goodbye and thanks, Jonathan’.

I called out to the work room, where Jonathan was hard at work on his computer. Then I remembered one last question.

‘Do you know where Jill Sutton-Norris is right now, Mark?’.

Mark looked aghast.

‘ She fainted and had to be rushed to hospital. Not when she found Michael’s body, but during the police questioning. She just couldn’t take it.’.

I chose not to respond. I thanked Mark again and told him that I might want to talk to either himself or Jonathan again. Then I let him close the door behind me.

.

It was only four-thirty when I arrived home, which meant that Oliver Venn was still holed up in his Dupont Records office.

‘What is it, Alan? I’ve had a typical day from hell.’

I didn’t encourage him to elaborate.

‘I just had a rather pleasant visit with two of Michael Kennedy’s neighbours.’

‘Not the woman you met outside the apartment?’

‘No, not Paula. A couple named Mark and Jonathan. Artists.’

‘Oh?’, Oliver had always been ambivalent about artists. ‘Did they know Michael Kennedy very well?’

‘Well enough to dislike him.’

‘That hardly makes them unique, Alan.’

I decided I needed a cigarette.

‘Mark, in particular, told me things about both Michael and Jill that I didn’t know before. Did you know that Michael Kennedy was also a photographer?’

‘I think I may have seen some of his shots of live rock bands somewhere before. Maybe on a CD sleeve, I don’t know.’

‘He’s not a half bad photographer. He probably could have made a living at it, if he’d hooked up with the right people.’

‘Maybe the right people didn’t want to get involved with Michael Kennedy. He wasn’t exactly Mr. Convivial Personality.’

‘Mark and Jonathan liked Jill, but disliked Michael.’

I could hear Oliver asking his young boyfriend to get something at the store.

‘They got along okay with Jill? Yes, I certainly found her easier to take than Michael. Are Mark and Jonathan social friends with Jill?’

‘I wouldn’t necessarily go that far.’.

What I mean, Alan, is could they describe their neighbours’ apartment?’.

‘ Yes, they could do that . Michael and Jill’s apartment was pretty functional, aside from the rock photographs. Basically an office with a bedroom.’.

‘Well, that sounds typical enough.’.

‘Something more potentially helpful was learning the identity of Michael’s most frequent visitor’.

‘ Charlie Fenwick?’.

‘No, Oliver. No such luck. But Charlie called on Michael one day and really annoyed Mark. Charlie started asking Mark if he knew Michael’s whereabouts and his schedule. He had no concept that Mark didn’t know and didn’t give a shit.’.

‘Sounds like a real charmer. So, who’s Michael’s best friend?’.

‘ Steve Weston.’.

‘Really? I knew that Steve Weston helped Michael Kennedy with musical details occasionally. Steve Weston’s a producer, right’.

‘Producer and guitarist. He used to be quite famous as a guitarist.’.

‘Famous meaning notorious. Also has a reputation for substance-abuse.’.

‘Do you know what studio Steve Weston works out of, Oliver?’.

‘ I think he gets around a fair bit. Wait a minute....., he produced that really terrible rockabilly band, The Drainpipe Boys. That would be Legend Audio, way the fuck up in northern Etobicoke.’.

‘I can look it up. I suspect Steve Weston ghost-plays on some of Legend’s product.’.

‘Probably. He’s supposed to be on a lot of early New York punk records. I mean, Steve Weston must be pushing sixty.’.

‘ He’s a ghoul, to put it mildly. But I’m going to try contacting him.’.

‘ Did he know Charlie Fenwick?’.

‘He might have.’.

‘ Charlie Fenwick is wanted by the police, Alan. He might become a hard man to get hold of, but not because of any unknown address. I’ve got to sign off. I still have a few things to do here before closing

down for the day.’.

After hanging up, I looked up Legend Audio in the business directory. I left a message for Steve Weston , after the receptionist had informed me that Mr. Weston had canceled a scheduled session because he was depressed about a close friend’s death..

Then I switched on the teenage variety show running immediately prior to the dinner-time news. The lead item on the local news reaffirmed that police were still looking for the unnamed man who was a dead ringer for Charles Fenwick. Anybody who had seen the man was being urged to come forward, and now there was a reward incentive.

So why hadn’t somebody come forward by now? Either Charles Fenwick had slipped out of town, or else somebody was protecting him. Who, and then why?

After the weather report, I fixed myself a functional supper , as I'd never amounted to anything other than a functional cook. I digested my turkey sandwich and basic salad with a fruit beverage, rather than a beer.

I switched on the television and tried to watch an epic movie. British diplomats in Africa during the second world war and their affairs, both military and romantic. I was about to give up on the overblown epic when the phone rang.

The caller was Kathleen Norris and I decided to take the call.

' I need to talk to you, Alan.'

' Well, here I am. '

' I mean, I'd prefer to talk face to face. Can you meet me for a drink?'

I noted the singular and wondered why she persisted in using it.

"Yes. In your favourite bar, Kathleen?'

It was easier to make it Rhino's than to actually consider picking another bar. So I agreed to meet her at Rhino's, with its horrible juke box and dreadful lighting.

The street car was mercifully fast. When I passed the Gladstone Hotel, I recognized some of the people out for a night of cheap beer and karaoke. A rotund gentleman leading the pack had once called himself Clive Tatters and sung for a sub-punk band called The Chippers. Now he looked like he'd given up heroin for the relatively harmless addictions of potato chips and ice cream.

Kathleen Norris was already at Rhino's when I got there. Her face tipped me off that she had selected the country music originating from the bar's juke box.

Kathleen should relocate to the Gladstone, I thought to myself. She could reinvent herself as either Kitty Wells or even Patsy Cline, although I had no desire whatever to hear the woman attempt singing.

' Do you like country music, Alan?'

I shook my head. I mildly resented her implication that people were supposed to age gracefully by developing a taste for country music.

‘What do we need to talk about?’.

I noticed Kathleen was drinking beer rather than Manhattans.

‘Michael Kennedy’s family’, she lit a cigarette. ‘ Since , quite frankly , I’d never approved of Michael, I’d never asked my daughter let alone her boyfriend about his family. But, of course I had to deal with them today. At the funeral.’.

Yes, the funeral. It had been private , meaning strictly families. I wondered whether Jill’s father had somehow turned up. Or the mysterious Mr. Sutton, if they weren’t one and the same person.

‘Doesdid Michael have a large family?’.

‘No. His parents and a sister, that’s it. The parents didn’t have a lot to say. Not to me, not to Jill, and not really to each other.’.

‘They were expecting their son to die young?’.

‘ I think so, Alan. I mean, it would have been easier for them if Michael had died of ‘ natural causes’ , but I got the sense that his death wasn’t exactly unexpected.’.

I lit a smoke as my beer arrived.

‘ What about Michael’s sister?’.

‘She’s more to the point’, Kathleen promised. ‘ She and Jill used to be friendly, but clearly that had fallen apart.’.

‘Really? Did the sister explain this to you, or did Jill? How is Jill, anyway?’.

‘Much better, thanks.’, Kathleen butted out her cigarette. ‘ It was Michael’s sister, Tess, who talked to me for quite a while. Jill might open up later, but it’s still too early.’.

‘Okay, then. Tell me about Tess. Where did she come up from, for the funeral?’.

‘Halifax.’.

I remembered that Jill and Michael had moved to Toronto from Halifax.

‘ Tess manages a restaurant in Halifax, one of those awful pickup bars just above the art college. Jill and Michael once worked for her, before moving on to the record industry’.

I wondered if Kathleen Norris knew exactly how Michael had supported himself economically, at least until recently. I decided not to broach the subject, at least not yet.

‘ Is Tess married, or in a common-law relationship?’.

‘She was until recently. But here’s where things get really skewed, Alan.’.

I sipped my beer, as did she.

‘ Up until maybe a half-year ago, Tess Kennedy was married to a guy named Karl Jensen. Another guy not unlike Michael, in terms of being financially unstable and a girl never knowing exactly where whatever money is really coming from.’.

‘ Tess and Karl broke up, it sounds like.’.

‘That’s putting it mildly. She has a restraining order against the guy.’.

‘Oh, great.’.

I wondered again how much she knew about her own daughter’s fucked-up relationship.

‘ Karl at least had the good sense to get lost, to take off somewhere to parts unknown.’.

‘ So, neither Michael’s sister nor Jill or you know where he is now?’.

‘If we did, we’d be on the phone to the cops. Tess’ husband, Alan , is a dead ringer for our friend Charlie Fenwick.’.

‘Who the police are looking for in connection to Michael’s murder.’.

‘You’ve got that right’, Kathleen lit another cigarette. ‘It looks like our man has been here and then taken off again.’.

‘Maybe yes and maybe no, Kathleen. Either somebody knows where he is and is covering for him , or possibly he’s vanished again.’.

I told her about Michael and Jill’s neighbours Mark and Jonathan and their unpleasant exchange with the man answering the physical and psychological descriptions of Charles Fenwick.

‘ So I guess Jill’s gay neighbours described the nasty visitor to the police, then.’.

‘ Mark’s an artist. He drew a sketch for the detective. But that encounter was some time ago, Kathleen. Did Jill mention to you at all about whether she’d seen Charles or Karl or whatever his name is more recently?’.

‘Yes, she did.’., Kathleen motioned the waitress. ‘ Last week, Wednesday or Thursday. She described meeting him for me today, after the funeral. It was brief but quite unpleasant.’.

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‘Unpleasant how? Please be specific.’.

‘Karl was looking for Michael. He clearly had something to settle.’.

I sipped on my beer for a few beats.

‘I find it strange that she didn’t contact you earlier about seeing Charles or Karl or whatever she now knew the man by. She remembered him from twenty years ago, right?’.

Kathleen nodded.

‘She’d no doubt heard you get wound up and rant about the bastard and how he ripped you off and the whole story. She knew you wanted to give him a piece of your mind, so why didn’t she tell you earlier. When Michael was alive?’.

‘I don’t know, Alan. Maybe she had her reasons for stringing the man along. Maybe Charlie was up to something with Michael that she was afraid to jeopardize. Maybe she thought I was too likely to fuck up something Charlie had going with Michael.’.

Kathleen’s explanations seemed plausible, but I still had my doubts.

‘Jill did make it clear to me that Charlie had been Michael’s acquaintance, not hers. She’d seen enough of the guy twenty years ago.’.

‘But she didn’t know what Michael’s dealings were with Charlie?’.

‘If she did, she didn’t tell me anything about them.’.

‘And you mentioned that Michael’s sister used to be friends with Jill but they’d grown apart?’.

‘Yes. That would be consistent to Jill being involved in some sort of business venture with Charlie Fenwick.’.

‘Maybe’.

I declined asking Kathleen about her daughter’s pharmaceutical habits. As for Charlie, when he’d been associated with The Filing Clerks, he had disapproved of William’s as well as my own indulgences. However, twenty years was more than enough for attitudes to change and habits to develop.

‘Are you going to order another beer, Alan?’.

I shook my head.

‘I have to get going’, I lied. ‘Is Tess Kennedy still in Toronto?’.

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‘Yes, she is. But she didn’t give me the number of her friend who she’s staying with, and she’s also talking to the police.’.

She would have introduced herself to the police, unless they’d already traced Karl Jensen to Halifax and to whatever business he had supported himself by down there.

‘Can you do me a favour, Kathleen?’.

‘It depends.’.

‘If you hear from her again, can you get in touch with me? Like, immediately?’.

She nodded.

‘Even better, can you give her my number’.

Again, she nodded.

‘One more question. Was Jill’s father at the funeral?’.

‘No!’, Kathleen glared at me. I haven’t seen Ron for over twenty years and I could care less where he is and whether he’s even still alive.’.

I told her I understood, even though I didn’t. Then I thanked her for the information and put my coat on. This time, I waited for the street car rather than walking home and finding a detour.

I checked my phone messages when I got back to my glorified bed-sitter, and Steve Weston had returned my call while leaving a number. The number seemed familiar and it matched that of Legend Audio. I decided to call him first thing in the morning, and the receptionist informed me that Mr. Weston had canceled all sessions and appointments for the upcoming week.

Not good, I muttered to myself. Not at all good. I hoped to hear from Tess Kennedy, but I wasn’t optimistic.

I methodically scanned The Globe and Mail and there were no further developments in the crime department. There were only throwaway reviews of unpromising movies and then there was the obituary section.

Kennedy, Michael David : Suddenly, on Tuesday October 9, at his residence at 115 Isabella St.. Survived by his sister Theresa Kennedy and his friend Jill Sutton-Norris. Was cremated after a private funeral Thursday morning. Donations can be made in Michael's name to the Addiction Research Foundation at 33 Russell St. in Toronto.

Well, things seemed to be well in place with regards to the funeral and the cremation. People who were expecting to die had their posthumous affairs in order, not people who 'died suddenly'.

'Suddenly' was a word more typically associated with suicide or murder, the diametric opposite of 'after a long illness'. I'd read a few to many of the latter causes of deaths over the past decade and a half. The nature of the survivors was always a clue, the charity often had more to do with the survivors than with the deceased.

Michael's parents were conspicuously absent from the death notice. That did not mean that they hadn't discreetly attended the very private ceremony, but it was possible that they were either one or both dead or else already out of the picture. Perhaps Jill wanted Michael's parents to believe their son had died a death by chemical misadventure rather than by foul play.

I did wonder whether or not Michael Kennedy was still using, and whether drugs had been involved with whatever altercation had led to his being killed.

The phone rang, and the incoming caller was neither Tess Kennedy nor Steve Weston nor even Jill Sutton-Norris. It was Ben Mullen, who promptly introduced himself as a homicide detective.

'I understand you're trying to locate a man called either Karl Jensen or Charles Fenwick. Is that correct, Mr. Radford?'

'Yes, I guess that would be accurate. Specifically, officer, I need to obtain a residential or e-mail address, or even a phone or fax number, for the man I used to know as Charles Fenwick.'

‘This is about copyright, or some sort of music-publishing business?’.

‘That’s correct’.

Detective Ben Mullen informed me that the pair of us needed to meet face to face. I didn’t see any point in arguing otherwise.

At least he didn’t request for me to haul my ass down to police headquarters or anything institutional. We agreed to meet in a doughnut shop on Yonge near Gerrard.

I expected to be greeted by a man resembling a hockey coach, and indeed I was. Hockey coaches look like cops because they frequently are.

Ben Mullen motioned for me to sit down, as if I was going to sit somewhere else.

‘So, Mr. Radford’, at least he didn’t waste time getting down to business, ‘What is or was the nature of your relationship with Karl Jensen?’.

I stirred my coffee.

‘I used to sing, play guitar, and do most of the writing for a band called The Filing Clerks, from 1978 to 1980. There were two others, one deceased and another I have no idea where. Charles, or Charlie, Fenwick introduced himself to the three of us in 1979. He had money and seemed to be talented at speaking to people who weren’t inclined toward talking to any of the band members.’.

‘This Charles Fenwick, he had a clean-cut image.’.

‘Squeaky-clean, unless you knew the guy. I later realized that he was stringing along all his rich girlfriends whom he was borrowing from. Anyway, Charlie put up the money for a single. The single attracted some attention, particularly the A-side *Freeway Breakdown*.’.

‘Was it a hit record?’.

‘Depends on your definition, sir. None of us got even remotely rich from it.’.

‘Why not? Did it have a wide-distribution?’.

‘Not really. The single, *Freeway Breakdown* with *Wardrobes of Suture*....’

‘*Wardrobes of?*’

‘*Suture*. I may have been making it up back then, but I’m not now. The B-side was actually a co-writing credit, between myself and William Douglas, who passed away several years ago.’

‘How?’.

‘AIDS-related complications.’.

That was a standard obituary description. Keep things dispassionate and official when talking to formidable strangers, I’d learned that fairly early on in life.

‘ But Fenwick, along with your drummer whose name you haven’t yet told me...’.

‘Simon Drysdale.’.

‘Drysdale? So the four of you were partners in some incorporated venture on behalf of The Filing Clerks?’.

‘ Shortly after the single began attracting attention , after we began picking up an audience who couldn’t have cared less about the rest of our repertoire.’.

‘Go on, Mr. Radford.’.

‘ We all realized that we needed a distributor, so we went in with Waverley records and Distribution.’.

‘Oh yes, we’ve been in contact with them. Out in North Etobicoke.’.

‘Yes, way out there. Anyway, Waverley decided to invest in an album , so they paid for recording time. Not a large budget, only three thousand dollars. The three of us, in retrospect, overestimated our possible options with that budget.’.

‘How so?’, the detective looked blank but not because of indifference.

‘There wasn’t enough money for being arty or ‘experimental’ in the studio. Frankly, it would have made more sense to do a live record and then package it smartly.’.

‘I take it there was friction within the band ?’.

‘Within the band, but also between the band and Charles. Waverley, and the engineers at the studio, saw Charles as the producer. We saw him as a co-partner who occasionally had good ideas and often was just right out to lunch.’.

‘Did things sort of go to Charles’ head?’.

I finished my coffee and ordered another.

‘No, I wouldn’t put it like that. Simon, the drummer, didn’t want Charles in the studio at all. William and I saw him as an outside point-of-view, or a gopher.’.

‘A drug dealer?’, the detective’s tone changed sharply.

‘No, sir. If Charles was involved with drugs, we never saw any of it.’.

I quickly decided to confess to my own indulgences with certain stimulants.

‘I’d laid down parts , on both sides of the initial single , that weren’t part of the songs as played live.

We were in a studio, so we thought in terms of using the studio rather than merely recording our live versions of the particular songs. For that reason, William and I considered Charlie to be basically harmless.’.

‘Were you friends?’.

‘No, I wouldn’t use that word. We didn’t hang out socially. He didn’t connect to most of William’s and my own friends .’.

Ben Mullen sat silently for a second, then became alert again.

‘The man you refer to as Charles Fenwick was initially known to the police in Halifax under the name Karl Jensen. He had points in a small-scale recording studio, along with Michael Kennedy whom I believe you were also acquainted with.’.

‘Yes. I didn’t consider him to be a personal friend, either.’.

‘Is that so? Anyway , Jensen and Kennedy financed their little studio with drug money. Nothing big enough for the cops to move in on them for, you realize. Over the last decade, we’ve learned that moving in against small fries doesn’t help anybody. Best to keep them under sustained observation.’.

I’d known this for years. It was mildly reassuring to know that cops had also learned to recite this particular strategy.

‘Jensen and Kennedy , although not together or at the same time, both relocated to Toronto because they’d become big fish in a little pond. Jensen’s wife , who was Kennedy’s sister, had kicked him out. Jensen was a pretty nasty piece of work.’.

‘I’ve heard this. I always thought he was trying too hard with all his girlfriends.’.

‘Maybe he didn’t like women?’.

What did Detective Ben Mullen mean by this deduction, that Charlie Fenwick was a big closet case or something?

‘How did you know Michael Kennedy, Mr. Radford?’.

‘Do you mean years ago, or more recently?’.

‘Both.’.

‘ Kennedy used to be associated with certain entrepreneurs loosely involved with the punk scene.’.

‘Yes, he was a drug dealer. This we’ve known for years.’.

‘ Recently, like a couple of years ago, I kept running into the guy on the street and he’d be harassing me about where the master tapes were for *Freeway Breakdown* and *Wardrobes of Suture*, because he was remixing and remastering all the Waverley Records catalogue. I used to ignore him, because I’ve only recently obtained the master tapes from William’s estate and because I always found Michael Kennedy aggressive and obnoxious.’.

‘That’s hardly unusual in the music industry, is it?’.

‘Only a few days ago, sir, a friend of mine named Oliver Venn, who is putting together his CD-compilation from the late-seventies and early-eighties, contacted me about using *Wardrobes of Suture*. That is why I’ve been forced to obtain some sort of contact address for Charles Fenwick , to adhere to the standard procedures involved. Oliver says the drummer is out of the picture, but that it would be best policy to make some sort of registered contact with Charles, or at least his address.’.

‘ Why is the drummer out of the picture? Weren’t you friends?’.

‘Not really. Simon was definitely the odd man out. ‘.

‘Were Simon and Charlie friendly?’.

‘Not really. I mean, maybe they had more in common than either of them did with William or myself. They were both into cars and girlfriends, and kind of obnoxious about it.’.

‘You and William were gay? Were you lovers?’.

‘ We were bisexual, then, and we were certainly not lovers.’.

Indeed. William and I had anticipated those lazy rumours and joked about those who would be dumb enough to perpetuate and then believe them.

‘ And you’re sure you have no idea where Fenwick or Jensen or whatever his name might be now, do you Mr. Radford?’.

‘No, sir.’.

‘Well, if you do, then contact me immediately. Do you understand me?’.

I did. I wondered if Detective Ben Mullen understood that it perfectly suited my purposes for Charles Fenwick to be in police custody.

I decided against going straight home . It wasn't as if I were expecting any urgent phone calls, and if particular individuals did try to contact me then I would have preferred not to be caught unprepared.

A movie seemed like the best course of action, or make that non-action. Being a passive spectator was as good a way to deal with life as any other , although it had never been terribly profitable.

I recognized a title of a movie beginning in ten minutes and gave the cashier seven dollars. I'd seen the trailer, which promised a blend of forties noir and fifties melodrama. Noir was male and outside of the family , melodrama female and inside of it. The strained relationships were the attraction.

The mother, played by the marquee actress with top billing , suspected that her son had killed his much older sleazy male lover. Therefore, Mom covered up for Junior. Mom therefore got her fingerprints all over the evidence, which made things pretty steamy indeed.

The movie was set in the present, but this was the fifties all over again with a contemporary homo update. Dad was conveniently overseas, as he always was when Junior is at least experimenting with particularly older men. I could easily predict the gay press panning and even targeting this movie, but I was always a passive spectator when a good thriller was unfolding before my very eyes. Mysteries were by definition about closets and dubious role models and Freudian howlers, so what indeed might be the big deal ? Mom's actions provided blackmail material for sure, and true to form the blackmailers became a key plot component.

After the movie finished, with an obviously unresolved conclusion, I decided to go home and check any messages. The movie had exhausted me and I needed caffeine , but not in some barely functioning mid-downtown drug den.

As I approached the stairs descending to the subway, I could see a tall skinny man ahead of me whose wide-rimmed hat failed to conceal familiar curly hair. The man was walking much faster than all the other pedestrians.

It was definitely Charlie Fenwick hurrying toward the subway and heading south. Suddenly I was also heading south .

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Charlie was carrying a suitcase, obviously moving toward Union Station and out of town. He must have had some unfinished business here until very recently, or why wouldn't he already have slipped away? Surely he must have been watching the TV news or seen the front page of The Toronto Sun?

He passed through the turnstiles without having seen me behind him.

Then some tourists from out of town got ahead of me in the ticket line and required information. I could hear them asking prices and then directions. They weren't even in the right lineup, for Christ's sake.

I tried to push ahead but received static from the others in front of me. When I was finally able to buy a single fare and then drop the damn token into the slot, I could hear an approaching train.

I hoped it was on the north platform but no such luck. Far ahead of me, I could see Charlie catching the southbound train, in the second car from the front.

I didn't see any other train just behind the one I had missed. I thought about running back up onto the street and hailing a cab to Union Station, then I thought it would be faster to wait for the next train. Maybe Charlie would have to hang around and kill some time in Union Station. Yes, this made more sense to me.

But there wasn't another train moving south for a long time. I heard an announcement that all southbound trains had been delayed because of a suicide at one of the stations to the north. Somebody had jumped in front of a train, right in broad daylight at a busy suburban station.

Emergency crews were on the scene and service would be restored. How shortly? How could they know?

Now I ran upstairs onto the street and hailed a cab. I told the driver to take as many short cuts as possible and I gave him a big tip when he came through for me.

But when I got to Union Station, I didn't see Charlie Fenwick. Not in the bar or the coffee shop or the waiting room or anywhere. A train had just left for Montreal and he had probably grabbed it.

Now it was time to go home and see if anyone had called.

My building had been almost completely razed by the time I arrived home. Along with three fire trucks and a squad of firemen now extinguishing the last vestiges of the blaze , I could also see my neighbours, all standing helplessly on the safe side of the tape-barrier.

‘When did the fire get started? How? Who discovered it?’.

Joanne Turner, who lived in the apartment at the rear of the ground floor, informed me that she had smelled something at roughly three o’clock. She had looked for the superintendent, who kept the key to the fire alarm. The superintendent, as was so typical, wasn’t available and neither was his wife. Joanne had remembered that Ira, a downstairs neighbour of hers, was quite mechanically skilled and probably able to pick the lock. Ira came through, the alarm was set off , and all the tenants at least had the sense to get the hell out of the building before the firemen needed to give them instructions.

So much for the smoke detectors, I thought to myself.

There was also a police car and two men in uniform present. Arson. So who and why, and who was the intended target?

My question was answered when Detective Ben Mullen pulled up to the scene of the crime.

‘ Good thing you live on the second floor, Mr. Radford.’.

No way I was about to argue with the detective, at least regarding this observation.

‘ Nobody’s killed. Nobody’s even burned. One cat dead, in the front apartment on the ground floor.

I knew that Megan Standish , who had lived in the front apartment for many years, discreetly kept a cat. Pets were in theory illegal, but then the cat had been useful at eliminating rodents. Too bad no tenants had insisted upon keeping guard dogs, who were at least hypothetically much more effective against arsonists than cats

Joanne Turner now identified herself to Ben Mullen as the one tenant who had been home when the alarm had gone off. She recalled seeing a man with a wide-brimmed hat and curly hair ringing another doorbell than hers and then leaving abruptly when there had been no answer.

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‘ A thin man with an oversized hat and curly hair, Ms. Turner?’.

Joanne nodded. She hadn’t observed the man doing anything in addition to ringing the doorbell and then leaving. He had left some time before Joanne’s nose smelled fire , but the description certainly matched the man I had followed to presumably Union Station.

‘ I saw this man entering the College Street subway and traveling south. I followed him, because he looks a lot like Charles Fenwick.’.

Ben Mullen recognized the name while Joanne Turner did not.

Unfortunately, he made the southbound train while I got stuck in the ticket lineup, and then there was a delay on the southbound line.’.

‘I know’, Mullen gritted his teeth, ‘Suicide on the Davisville platform.’.

‘ When I finally made it to Union Station, Fenwick or Karl Jensen or whatever his real name is was nowhere in sight. A train had just left for Montreal, so that’s probably our best bet.’.

Mullen looked at me as if I were extremely stupid.

‘Was it an express train for Montreal, Mr. Radford?’.

‘No?’.

‘Then how do we know that our man won’t be getting off at any of the many stops along the route? How do we know he hasn’t picked out some small town that neither of us have even heard of ?’.

He had a point, so I didn’t respond. I was relieved that the fire hadn’t managed to spread to the second floor and thus there could be no possible damage to anything valuable or otherwise in my one-room apartment. I now wanted everybody, including Detective Ben Mullen, to declare the emergency over with and just go away and leave me alone.

The detective wrote down Joanne Turner’s name and number, and handed her an address for temporary accommodation. Then Mullen commanded me not to proceed any further in my search for Charles Fenwick. The police in Montreal and indeed throughout eastern Ontario and west rural Quebec were on the case and in touch with each other.

I casually agreed to butt out. Then I watched Detective Mullen confer briefly with the squad cops and the firemen, before instructing the crowd to disperse.

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Joanne Turner didn't exactly have a home to return to, so I invited her up for a drink. She accepted.

'Well, Alan, I've never envied any of the second floor tenants. That is, until today.'

I handed her a beer. The heat had made the refrigerator redundant.

'Cheers, Joanne. Cheers to good luck and fortune.'

'Cheers

Joanne bummed a smoke from me. She had recently quit, but now she felt like smoking. I watched her light up.

'The man named Charles Fenwick, who I was discussing with the detective?'

'Yes? That's the man I saw calling on...presumably you, then.'

'The cops are looking for him in connection with a murder, also of a minor acquaintance of mine.'

'Oh'., she smoked silently for a few long seconds. She'd always been cordial to me, but we'd never really talked about our respective lives and careers.

'Charlie Fenwick, who has been living in Halifax under the name Karl Jensen, was a former business associate whom I needed to track down, for legal reasons.'

'Not a friend?'

'No.'

I resented her question but tried to avoid showing it.

'Charlie had been a former benefactor of my old band, The Filing Clerks. An old acquaintance of mine wants to put together a compilation of late seventies and early eighties music.'

'Really. I didn't know you were a musician, Alan.'

'Well, I guess I was. Haven't been for years. Anyway, for legal reasons I have to show an effort to contact the asshole who produced the record in question. So. I've been trying to locate him. Without having to deal with him if at all possible.'

'Well'., Joanne smiled while exhaling, 'It looks like the police are on the verge of dealing with Karl or Charlie or whatever the man's name is.'

'Yes', I sipped my beer, 'Except none of what's happened makes sense.'

'The murder and the fire?'

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‘Neither of them make sense to me, in relation to Charles Fenwick.’

‘You hadn’t seen him for how long, Alan? Twenty years?’

‘I know. I mean, fanatical possessive behaviour is entirely consistent with the guy who fucked The Filing Clerks around. And maybe Charles and Michael Kennedy..’

‘The recently murdered man, who worked in the recording industry?’

‘Yes. I guess that’s an accurate description. Maybe Charles and Michael did have some weird scheme or business venture that went wrong. But it doesn’t make sense for Charlie to torch my building, Joanne.’

‘Well, since when does arson make any sense to begin with? Unless, there’s an insurance angle.’

‘If Charles Fenwick even knew that I was looking for him, it makes more sense for him to think I want something from him and then confront me about it. He’s far more likely to challenge me, to do something provocative, than to run away. Let alone trying to torch my building.’

‘Unless he knew his days were numbered and he literally wanted to go out in a blaze.’

‘I don’t think so’.

I opened another beer for Joanne and then one for myself.

‘This Charlie guy, he was your band’s manager?’

‘He was a guy with a van’, I snorted. ‘But he did invest money, and talk to people who wouldn’t talk to any of us, so....’

‘So. There you go.’

Joanne sipped on her beer absently. Then she remembered something.

‘Crazy Megan’.

‘What about her?’ I’d barely spoken two words to Megan Standish since she had moved in on the ground floor. I’d tried my best to avoid her.

‘There was a guy.....another guywho was knocking on the front door. I saw Megan answering and I didn’t think anything of it, at least at the time.’

‘He wasn’t looking for me. Was he, Joanne?’

‘I don’t know, Alan’. She took another cigarette. ‘I’d never seen this man before either.’

‘What did he look like?’

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‘Stocky, with a square jaw and a beer gut. About the same age as the guy you’re sure is Charlie.’.

Charlie was about four to five years younger than myself.

‘What colour hair?’.

‘Dirty blonde’, Joanne exhaled. He wore a moss green wind-breaker, and black jeans.’.

‘How are your drawing skills?’, I smiled at her.

‘Probably rusty. I cheat by doing everything on my PC.’.

I encouraged her to revive her drawing skills. Joanne butted out her smoke and then got down to it.

Five minutes later she showed me her result. Joanne Turner was no Mark Gardner , but she had come through for me in a big way.

She had drawn a very grim gentleman indeed . A familiarly grim gentleman, with no sense of humour and far too much determination.

Simon Drysdale had been a very determined fellow, as long as he was surrounded by others who would gladly do all the work for him.

‘I’m impressed, Joanne. You draw very well , and your skills has been appreciated.’

‘You wish to take it with you, I presume.’.

She finished her beer and then rose.

‘ I certainly do.’.

And I too finished my beer and saw her out. Sometime we would go for drinks under more light-hearted circumstances. Some time down the road.

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Nobody , not Detective Ben Mullen or Detective Anybody Else and not even Mrs. Kathleen Norris, had called me about having even a minor lead on Charlie Fenwick's whereabouts.

That meant that he might have taken the train to Montreal and disappeared into that wonderfully impenetrable metropolis. Or that he could have slipped off the train at Kingston or Peterborough or continued on to Halifax, where he certainly did have a history that he would be smart to avoid.

Or he might have possibly gone all the way to Montreal, grabbed a taxi to Dorval, and then flown to London or Tokyo or somewhere in Australia or anywhere unexpected and unknown.

Any safe location where the wanted man could be anonymous.

Charlie Fenwick had flown the coop, so to speak. I'd almost nabbed him, except for a suicide on the Toronto subway tracks and then a suspicious arson.

And the description of the mysterious caller at my apartment complex certainly did resemble Simon Drysdale. I'd always known that Simon had despised Charlie, but not myself or William, god bless William. Did Simon think that I'd struck semi-posthumous gold and was hoarding it from him?

Was Simon Drysdale really the type of burnout rocker casualty who thought that The Filing Clerks could have been some kind of monster band and who was consequently blaming me for ruining his life, depriving him of his just reward, or just fucking up royally? Simon Drysdale had always been a passenger, tagging along for the ride while others did all the work for him. Did he suspect me of somehow being in cahoots with Charlie?

And just maybe the mysterious arsonist wasn't Simon Drysdale, even though the description and Joanne Turner's drawing certainly looked and sounded like the undependable drummer.

The phone rang.

It was Oliver Venn, wanting to know if I might be his date for Lube Groove.

Lube Groove was a queer, multi-sexual punk and rock and roll night held monthly at a particularly slimy nightclub..... The Rocking Sockette. I'd initially been tempted to try out Lube Groove, but then I'd

thought better of blessing the event with my presence.

‘You’re not going with young Bradley?’.

‘Young Bradley is on hiatus. He’s in New York at some experimental queer film festival, leaving me all alone with people my own age. Come on, Radford. It’s on me. Have at least a drink, and then if you’re bored we can go somewhere else.’.

I suspected that Oliver and I might well be the only older types present at Lube Groove.

‘I don’t know, Oliver. You know me. I no longer have the ears or attention span for loud rock music.’.

Oliver Venn laughed.

‘You never did, Alan. But even you must know that you’re an icon to the queer-rocker crowd.’.

‘Yes. *The Filing Clerks* were right up their alley, because at least myself and William did play cat-and-mouse about sexuality. Quite the opposite of you and your lot.’.

‘Yes’, Oliver sounded bitter for just a moment. ‘That’s why glam-rock is back with such a vengeance. But I won’t digress, because I think it’s all good clean fun.’.

‘Who’s playing, anyway? Not that I keep up with any of those old joneses.’.

‘*The Tarnished Angels*. Ever heard of them?’.

‘They’re named after a Rock Hudson movie. I guess that’s sort of a clue.’.

‘A movie directed by Douglas Sirk, and that is definitely another clue.’.

‘Do they sound melodramatic?’. I was beginning to get at least curious.

‘They sound like a cross between *The New York Dolls* and *The Rivas*. The worst possible surf music. Are you interested in a trashy night out of the town? I personally think you could use such a night.’.

‘What the hell, Oliver. I’ll stay for at least an hour. But.....I need to talk to you . We need to talk about yet another interesting development in *The Filing Clerks* saga.’.

Oliver Venn thought silently, and then suggested that we should meet in a nearby pub and then we would go to The Rocking Sockette after our serious chat.

The nearby pub was crowded as it was a Friday night and thus seats were difficult to find. Oliver and I strained to hear each others’ voices as we sipped our Guinnesses, feeling rather conspicuous amid the

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noisy and very heterosexual university student crowd.

‘My downstairs neighbour, who is admittedly more than a tad eccentric, described the strange caller to my perfectly sane other neighbour, who has offered me this rendition of the unexpected caller.’.

Oliver Venn studied Joanne Turner’s portrait of the long-lost gentleman.

‘Well, it’s obviously your former drummer, Alan. Always the odd duck out among the three of you, and definitely filling out nicely in the girth department. The poor fool must have somehow gotten wind of our little historical project.’.

‘All too true, my friend. But he might have learned more about the project, and why it ultimately needn’t concern him, if he had called me and arranged for tea or even another beverage.’.

‘It’s all too possible that Mr. Simon Drysdale is not even close to resembling a reasonable person, Alan. Unless the man has a perfect double, he is at least a psychotic arsonist if not a would-be-murderer.’.

‘The person who torched my apartment building wasn’t too worried about whether or not the building was empty. That at least is certain, Oliver. But.....why didn’t he make sure I was home before torching the building?’.

‘Your guess is as good as mine, Alan. Let’s finish our drinks and get out of here.’.

‘Agreed’.

The Rocking Sockette was only a block plus a half away. The building hosted the world’s ugliest graffiti mural, as it had done for more than a decade. The inside also left much to be desired, but the crowd was highly desirable.

The Lube Groove was seriously peroxided, with every other fabulous dressing on the top and side. Screaming queens and muscle boys, trucker dykes and outrageous femmes, and many trans-gendered individuals crossing in definitely more than two possible directions. I had no sense of being any kind of icon and that was fine by me. I wanted to hang tight with Oliver Venn, who definitely had at least something up his extremely uncanny sleeve tonight.

Band equipment was classically positioned on the stage, but there was still no sign of even the technical crew. A DJ played out a predictable mixture of glam-rock anthems, punk rantings, and early-nineties grunge.

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'I requested *Wardrobes of Suture*', Oliver Venn almost giggled , 'but the DJ glared at me.'

'Too disco. Or maybe New Romantic. They'll probably trot out *Freeway Breakdown*, though. Another beverage?'

Oliver cut me off and pushed his way toward the busy bar. Then, the instant that he returned with two bottles of Keith's, the advertised band suddenly scrambled onto the stage and brandished their respective instruments.

'Ladies, gentlemen, and all the rest of you....Presenting.....*The Tarnished Angels!*'.

A bass player wearing fake mink, a girl guitar-player wearing serious rubber, and a geek keyboard noodler wearing a sci-fi lab coat all checked their tunings and began the first aural assault. The singer...left side leather boy and right-side in fishnet stockings, mounted the stage and stuck out his tongue.

There was also a drummer, at the very rear of the stage. He was obviously hired for the evening, for he wore a dirty blonde wig and nothing else in any way resembling a costume. He looked bored and older than the other *Tarnished Angels*, and he wasn't acting.

Except for the fact that he didn't belong. When Oliver and I rushed the stage along with our throng of juniors, we realized exactly what was wrong about the drummer.

We were looking at Simon Drysdale , barely disguised as a butch trucker. He was the hired professionally-tight drummer who in reality was a very loose cannon .

As the geek keyboard player concluded his instrumental break and the guitar player tossed off an exaggerated Mod-revival chord, the power throughout The Rocking Sockette died. All the lights came up as two recognizable police officers pushed their way onto the stage, grabbing the mike from the split-personality singer.

'Show's over, kids. This bar has been charged with overcrowding.'

Then the cops ducked. A flaring firecracker whizzed by their ears, letting off both an explosion and a stink.

Then a second bomb whizzed in our direction.

'Clear out, everybody. Move, Alan. Fuck!'

Simon Drysdale had been aiming for us, no doubt about it.

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‘The guy’s trying to kill me.’.

‘Oh yes. And everybody else. But don’t rush the stage and blow it, Alan.’.

I was tempted to rush the stage and shake the life out of the drummer. Then I recognized Detective Ben Mullen , staring down Simon Drysdale while *The Tarnished Angels* packed away their instruments.

There was another cop standing between Mullen and the audience still remaining in the dance pit.

The other cop resembled Charlie Fenwick.

‘What the fuck?.....’.

‘No, Oliver. The cop is not Charlie. But you ain’t the only one fooled.’.

Oliver doubled up when he got a load of Simon Drysdale now advancing on the cop resembling Charlie.

‘I’ve wanted to do this for twenty years, man. You fucked me around twenty years ago and now I’m in a position to kill you.’.

‘Oh shut up, Drysdale’, Ben Mullen stepped in front of his partner. ‘You don’t even have a weapon other than your big mouth.’.

‘That’s what you think, asshole’.

Simon Drysdale quickly retrieved another of his flares and hurled it at the two cops. He missed Mullen’s partner’s face, but only by a narrow margin.

‘Chill out, Simon. We need to talk.’.

The two cops, myself and Oliver Venn, and the many customers remaining in the club all veered their heads to observe a young woman running toward the stage.

‘It’s Jill. Just freeze for a minute, Simon, and listen to me.’.

Mullen and the Charlie-lookalike cop backed away from Simon Mullen, but they still remained obviously prepared for an implosion.

Oliver Venn and I looked at each other, almost speechless. it had occurred to both of us that Simon was now out of fireworks.

‘What are you doing here, Jill? You’re not cooperating.’.

‘I never made any half-assed agreement with you, Simon. I told you I wanted to get rid of my husband,

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but I didn't say anything about having him killed.'

'That's a matter of interpretation, you ungrateful bitch.'

'No it isn't, Simon.'

Ben Mullen stepped in between Jill Simon-Norris and Simon Drysdale. His partner, who was not Charlie Fenwick, attempted to clear out the crowd, who weren't moving anywhere.

'This sure tops *The Tarnished Angels*, doesn't it?'

'You said it, Jeff'

The crowd were enjoying the unscheduled spectacle. Many wondered whether Jill Sutton-Norris was the unhinged drummer's spurned lover. Some even wondered whether or not the drummer was actually a cop.

Ben Mullen now blew his stack.

'Everybody out, now! In case you haven't noticed, your concert's over!'

Nobody moved toward the door. Everybody watched Jill Sutton-Norris now walking slowly toward Simon Drysdale.

Ben Mullen and his partner suddenly cut her off, and then handcuffed Simon Drysdale.

'Simon Drysdale, we are arresting you for the murder of Michael Kennedy. This way, sir.'

The throng watched as Detective Mullen and his crony cleared a path and led the drummer out the left side door. Everybody had become silent, except for myself.

'And also for attempted arson. This asshole, who used to be my drummer, tried to burn down my apartment building.'

'What?', an incredulous queer skinhead standing in front of Oliver and myself exclaimed.

'It's true. He's in attempted arson recovery.', Oliver burst out laughing quite insanely.

The lead singer for *The Tarnished Angels*, who were now frantically rearranging their gear and getting ready to mount the stage again, overheard Oliver's explanation for my additional charge.

'I think you guys should get up on stage and sing about it. You used to be one of The Filing Clerks, am I right?'

'Filing Clerks. Fling Clerks. Filing Clerks.'

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Oliver Venn and I looked at each other.

‘ I guess we don’t have any choice, do we Ollie?’.

Oliver grinned at me.

‘Let’s do it, Alan. Let’s just the two of us go stark raving bonkers.....As long as they’re not expecting *Freeway Breakdown*’.

We ran up onto the stage, let the band begin an uncharacteristically funky vamp, and we were grateful that the music was loud enough to drown out our embarrassing attempt at explaining the most recent events in our lives.

The night after our auspicious performing debut, Oliver Venn invited me over to his rather swank apartment. There was no roommate, there was a DVD player and screen, a full bottle of Malibu rum, and no young Bradley.

‘You’ve guessed correctly, Alan. Young Bradley is history. He’s found true love in The Big Apple and I’m happy for him. It might last a week, give or take a few days either way.’

I had the impression that Oliver had planned on celebrating his recent breakup. The trouble was, I was too exhausted for celebration.

I had decided to avoid my halfway demolished apartment building for a few days, at least until the ashes and cobwebs had been satisfactorily cleared away. So I had checked into a local hotel, one that I had known full well was a front for hookers and dope-dealing. I’d wound up buying drugs just to avoid becoming sleepy, since the hotel was too noisy for sleep. I had recognized a few old-rocker types who had long become permanent residents, and I had grudgingly indulged in some of their pharmaceutical rituals, confident that I wasn’t going to become a permanent resident.

Now I was crashing. Now I wanted to go home and sleep for at least a whole day, except that Oliver Venn had requested my company and I wasn’t about to decline him.

‘But you must have some of this rum, Alan. My old friend Neil Turner brought it back from Jamaica. You must remember Neil?’

I remembered Neil Turner, a former keyboard player for Heavenly Voices who now spent at least half his life in the Caribbean. Neil had been one of those far too perfect people, a seriously bionic man with never a hair or thread out of place. Oliver Venn, on the other hand, had some very appealing rough edges to him.

Whatever I had once thought about Neil Turner and professional tourists, I found myself in a position where declining Oliver’s libations offer was far more trouble than it would be worth.

‘Cheers, Oliver.’

‘To our new career.’.

I grimaced. Maybe half the kids at the Rocking Sockette knew who Oliver Venn and I had been nearly twenty years ago. The others couldn’t have given a shit. Not that anybody, especially two older geezers attempting to rap twenty years too late, could have followed Simon Drysdale’s act.

As for the hired drummer with a mission, the guy who’d always been reliable and frankly quite boring..... well, Mr. Simon Drysdale had provided the most excitement any of the city’s ancient rock clubs had seen in years. The Lube Groovers had witnessed a real live murderer setting off firebombs, trying to blow everybody’s head off in the literal sense of that expression. Amazing, and then exhausting.

I sipped my Malibu, slowly.

‘ I couldn’t believe Simon’s girth’.

‘ Me neither’, Oliver nodded. ‘ Your former drummer used to be skinny’.

‘Yes. Like a cab driver who took too many diet pills to stay awake.’.

‘Right, Alan. Simon took Elvis drugs. Nothing illegal, everything over the counter.’.

‘ Now, Oliver, I wonder whether Simon killed Michael Kennedy. Whether Charlie Fenwick might have threatened the stupid fool, but been all hot air when the chips came down.’.

‘Who knows, Alan. Until last night, I’d always figured Simon Drsydale for a tolerable non-entity.’.

‘Well, there’s a myth that’s been truly shattered.’.

We sat silently for a moment. Oliver inserted a DVD of an old Rock Hudson movie, without asking me whether or not I felt like watching it.

“You’ve seen this movie, right Alan? *Magnificent Obsession*?”.

I nodded. A movie starring Rock Hudson as a neer-do-well playboy who repented by transforming himself into a life-saving doctor somehow seemed appropriate after our shenanigans of the previous night.

I settled down to watch the movie. I didn’t really feel like talking, and I could feel Oliver Venn playing footsies with me. I was going to subtly encourage him , and then see if I felt like taking matters further.

The doorbell rang.

I looked at Oliver, who clearly was not expecting company.

‘Just a second.’, Oliver yelled after a second ring. ‘Who is it?’.

There was dead air for a good pause, then a squeaky male voice spoke up.

‘It’s Charles Fenwick. I know you’re in there, Alan. I need to talk to you.’

Oliver looked at me.

I shrugged.

‘Let him in. If he causes any trouble there’s two of us.’

Oliver put his arm around my right shoulder.

‘That’s the right attitude, Alan. Let’s answer the door together, and make a strong impression.’

I laughed nervously as Oliver instructed Charlie Fenwick to please enter. I glanced out the window and there he was, stockier than in his early incarnation but the same deceptive baby-face Charlie’s innocent look had fooled many suckers in the man’s prime, including myself.

But I didn’t want revenge, even though I was sure Charlie was still one of the world’s prize assholes. I just wanted to deal with the man strictly by the book, even if that meant not only paying off Charlie but also sending money to Simon Drysdale, care of Toronto’s infamously unpleasant Don Jail.

The door opened and Charlie Fenwick finally entered. The creep was clearly nervous, and I’m sure he suspected Oliver Venn and myself of being a couple.

‘Hello, Charles. I haven’t seen you for ages. Is there anything we can do for you?’

Charles Fenwick stood ill at ease, shifting his eye-line between Oliver and myself.

‘Your name is Oliver Venn, right?’

Oliver nodded tentatively

‘You used to play in that gay band....Heavenly Voices?’

‘Since you phrase it so nicely, yes. Now what can I do for you, Mr. Fenwick?’

‘I hear the three of us have business to discuss....about some compilation you’re putting together. Am I right, Mr. Venn?’

Oliver and I grinned at each other, and then Oliver commanded Charlie to just relax and have a seat. Charlie and I then actually shook hands.

‘You’ve heard correctly, Charles. I feel this matter could be settled within minutes. Don’t you, Oliver?’

Oliver winked at me.

‘ So whatever happened to William and Simon?’ , Charlie was now asking of me.

‘ Charles, their stories are far too complex to be told in such a brief time. Please, just sign these forms and then be on your way. Your cheque will be in the mail.’.

Charlie’s face reddened, and then he nervously signed the contract and handed the forms to Oliver. Then he stormed toward the apartment door without any further ado, slamming the door on his way out.

‘Very good, Alan. Well done. Now, what were we doing, before we were so rudely interrupted?’.

I kissed Oliver.

‘We were playing footsies. Shall we resume?’.

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