

ECHO
FOREST



ECHO FOREST

A Film in Print

By

Craig R. May

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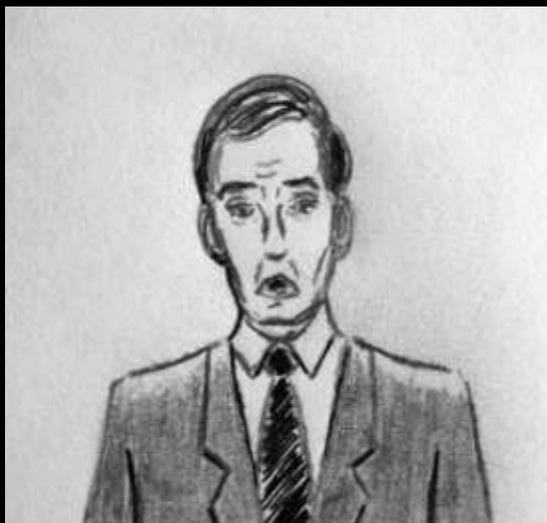
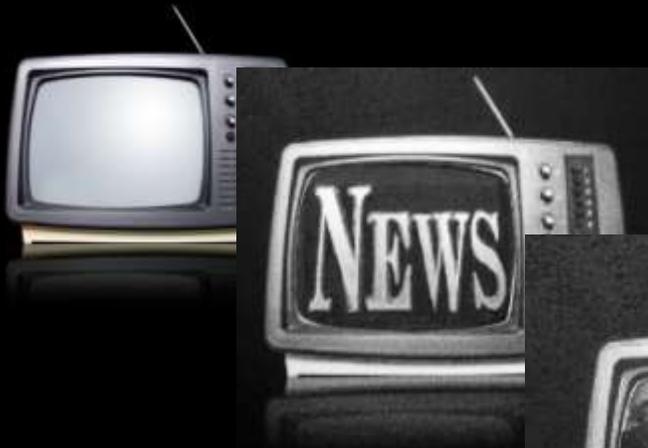
This is a work of fiction. Names, places, and events are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

For

*Sylvia, Dorothy, Shanda, James, Aurore,
and so many others, yesterday and today.*

Your stories will always resound.

Thirty Years Ago



"...Many of you will undoubtedly remember the heartbreaking story of sixteen-year-old Susan Linwood..."



“...who was found dead by police at her home...”



“...in the small town of Marigold, Ohio, last fall.”



“The girl’s emaciated body was covered with bruises, cuts, scalds, and more than one hundred cigarette burns...”



"...Susan's stepmother, thirty-seven-year-old Gretchen Bainbridge, told officers at the scene that Susan had suddenly returned home that evening of October twenty-sixth, after disappearing two nights before.

According to Mrs. Bainbridge, the girl was near death, and mumbling incoherently about a gang of boys who had assaulted her.

Her story was confirmed by her seventeen-year-old daughter, Patricia; her fifteen-year-old daughter, Sally; her fourteen-year-old son, Jack, and her eight-



year-old son, Joseph. Her eleven-year-old daughter, Marion, however, broke down in front of authorities during their investigation, saying 'Get me out of here, and I'll tell you everything'...



"...Marion's words offered a chilling prelude to a ghastly tale of abuse and torture which had been inflicted upon Susan,

beginning the previous summer. The violence was primarily instigated by Mrs. Bainbridge, who permitted and even encouraged both her own children and their friends to participate in it. Susan spent the last two weeks of her life confined to the basement of the Bainbridge house, before succumbing to shock and brain damage. The ensuing trial, which has been described as the most searing courtroom drama in Ohio history, concluded today after six weeks. A cry of victory was heard from inside the Steadman County Courthouse as the jury announced their verdict after deliberating for five hours...





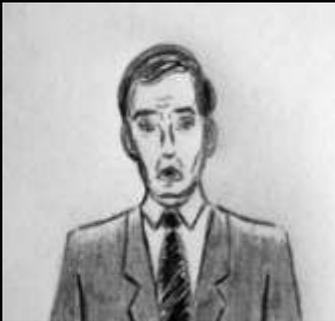
"...Gretchen Bainbridge was found guilty of murder in the first-degree, and recommended to serve a life sentence in the Ohio State Women's Penitentiary.

Patricia Bainbridge was convicted of second-degree murder and, likewise, recommended to serve a life sentence in the Ohio State Women's Penitentiary. Jack Bainbridge was convicted of manslaughter, as was Roy Howell, a fifteen-year-old neighbor of the Bainbridge family who participated in the torture. The prescribed sentence for both was two to twenty-one years in the Ohio State Reformatory. Official sentencing will take place one week from today...





"...The defendants showed little to no emotion as the verdict was read, including Mrs. Bainbridge, who hid her face from the photographers waiting eagerly outside the courtroom. There were shouts from onlookers addressing her as 'Gretch the Wretch', as well as an urge to 'fry the bitch'.



Marigold residents expressed relief and satisfaction to reporters following the convictions, but remained as stunned and outraged over the crime itself as when it came to light nearly a year ago."

"...Why, it's unforgivable, what those fiends did to that little girl. I think they all got off way too easy. They shoulda had done to them just exactly what they did to Susan...an eye for an eye..."





"...It's definitely had an effect on me. I didn't know Susan Linwood, but I lived a few blocks from the Bainbridge place, and I would see her walking to school every morning. Then, toward the middle of October last year, I didn't see her anymore. I just keep asking myself...why?"



"...Indeed, even with the closure which the end of The State of Ohio vs. Bainbridge has finally brought, the biggest question from the town of Marigold—and the rest of the nation—regarding the unspeakably brutal murder of Susan Linwood remains, simply, 'why?'..."



"...Why was this senseless crime committed against this innocent girl, and why did no one—including Susan herself—take action to stop it while there was still time?..."

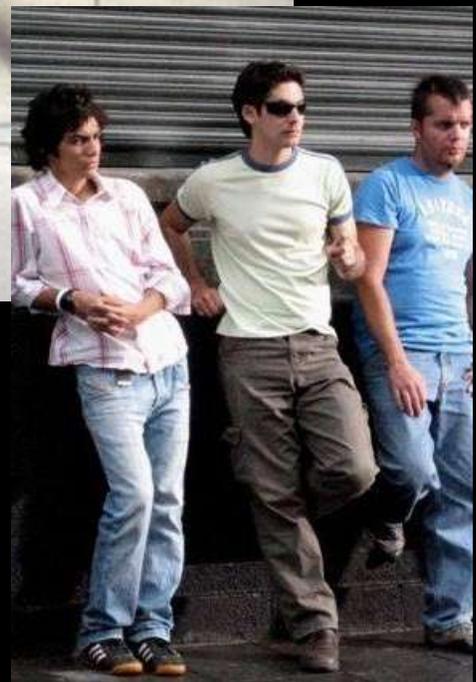


Susan Mary Linwood

1965-1980

Today







“...The summer went way too fast, guys. I’m not ready for this, yet.”

“Me, neither. Back to pencils, back to books...back to Bergen’s dirty looks.”



“You just had to mention her, didn’t you, Phil? Kate Bergen, the bloodiest battle-ax of Marigold High.”



“Ah, yes...both the place and its people are even uglier after you’ve been away a while.”

“I’ll take the Shop-Rite over it any day.”

“You gonna keep that job?”

“Mom won’t let me. Rule is, no working during the school year. I can work all I want in the summer, but grades are number-one priority from September to June.”





“Wish my folks would lay down a rule like that. They’re gonna start charging me rent this year. So, every weekend, I’ll be draggin’ couches and driving the old moving van for Dad if I want to eat and sleep under his roof.”

“Well, at least you’ll get a workout. I might sign up at the gym...get ripped for when I head off to Ohio State next year. Phil, I cannot believe we’re seniors. This is all she wrote, man...we better make the most of it.”



“Must be nice. I’ve got *two* more years—eighteen more months of this torture to get through...I don’t think I can hack it.”

“You want me to hold you while you cry, Den?”





“Yes! Hold me, Jimmy...please, hold me! It’s too much!”

“Awww...there, there...”

“You know, you guys are getting some really weird looks right about now.”



“Screw the looks. Public approval is a luxury a man in love can’t afford.”

“Okay, okay...not that I’m against it, Dennis, but I would really like to have a girlfriend during my last year of high school, and if the women around here get the wrong idea, it’ll ruin my chances.”

"...Yeah, you're right. I'm kind of in that boat myself. Let's make a pact right now that we will not graduate as single men...at *least* not virgins."



"Speak for yourself, there, Den. Some of us have already achieved that particular, uh, badge of manhood."

"Yeah, well, not all of us exemplify the title of 'the Velvet Hammer' the way you do, Mr. Jimmy Sheppard."

"Screw you. I am no Velvet Hammer."

"You get lucky without even trying."

"That's just it. I don't try...although...there's a first time for everything. Damn...where'd *she* come from?"



"Berea."



"How do you know?"

"We moved her and her dad here from Berea over the summer. Her name's Kit MacGuire."



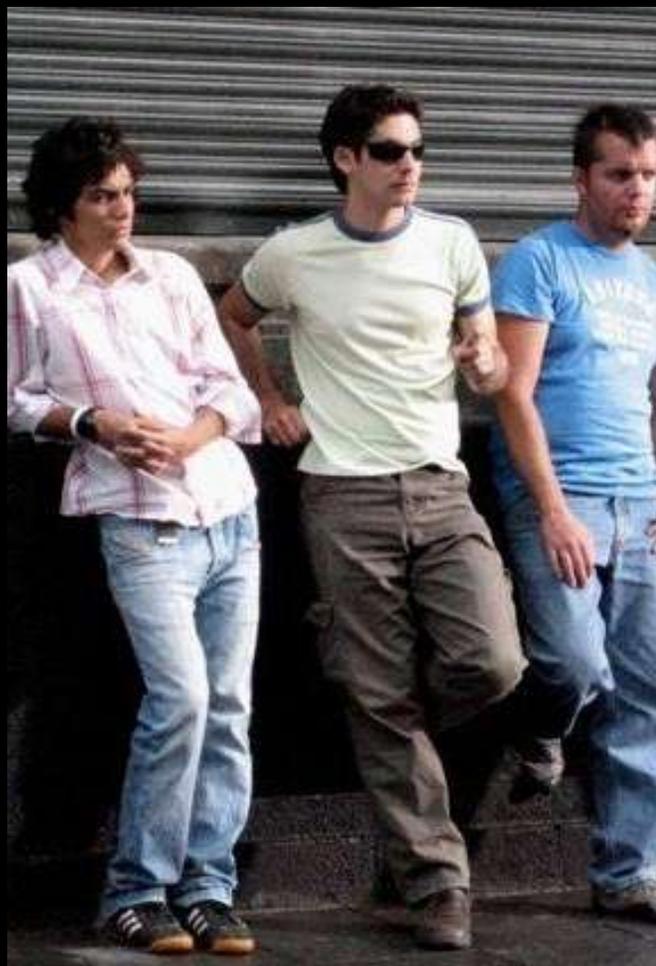
"How come you never mentioned her?"

"Do I ever mention any of the people my dad's company moves?"

"You better, when they look like *her*."

"Well, I don't know that I'd get this one in my sights too fast...might be a little hazardous to your health."

"Why—she got a boyfriend?"





"More dangerous than that. Her dad's a real bastard. He's this big, mean guy...he was in a car accident in Berea, and now he can't work. The bank foreclosed on their house. That's why they moved here. He can't drive, either, 'cause he was drunk when the crack-up happened...DUI, license suspended for a year. He was even plastered when we were working for him.

And he belted Kit right in front of us...she dropped some stupid bowling trophy of his, and he cracked her."

"Are you kidding me?"

"No. He knocked her down."

"Did you guys do anything?"

"Dad told him more or less to back off, and he did. You know how big *my* dad is. And he helped her up. But man, was he pissed when we got out of there."



"Well, *I'm* pissed, now. That's totally wrong..."



“...Well, this is a great start to a new year at a new school, Kit...”



“...Welcome back to purgatory, ladies and gentlemen...you’re now juniors, another year closer to your entrance into the adult world. I warn you—this year will go fast, and next year will go even faster, so enjoy this time. Cling to it. Hold it tight to your bosoms, for you won’t get another chance at being completely irresponsible, irreverent, and unreliable ever again like you have now. Uh...when I called the roll a minute ago, there was one name—and face—in our cozy homeroom that I didn’t recognize...”





“...Kit?...Where are you?...Ah, there you are. Would you mind standing up and giving us an introduction?”



“...I’m Kit MacGuire. I’m from Berea. My dad and I moved here this summer.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Kit. We’re glad to have you with us. Is there anything special you’d like to tell us about yourself?”



“...Um...I don’t like to talk in front of people?”



"...I asked you to stay for a minute after because I couldn't help noticing your arm. What happened?"

"I fell. During the move, I was carrying a bunch of boxes and I fell down the stairs."



"...And your eye?"

"That happened when I fell, too."

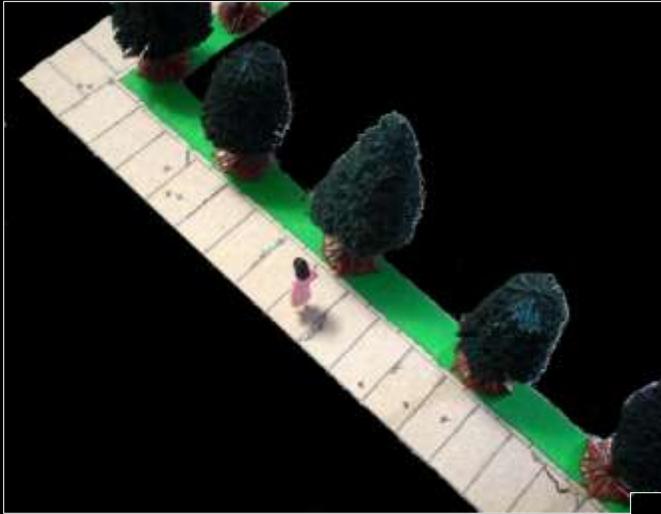


"Are you sure?"

"...I'm sure."

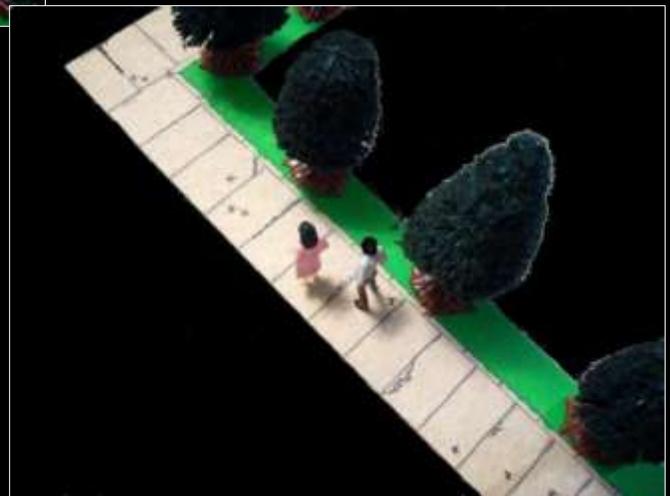


*...Yeah, go on and stare at me.
Stare at me and laugh. You
bitches have no clue. You
pampered, spoiled bitches wouldn't last five minutes if
you had to put up with what I do...so you stare, and you
laugh...you'll never know how fucking lucky you are...*



"...Hey. How you doin'?
You're new around here,
aren't you?"

"Yeah."



"Yeah...I'm
Jimmy Sheppard."

"Hi."

"So you're Kit MacGuire."

"Who told you?"



"We have fifth period study hall together. I noticed you
when old lady Bergen called your name on the roll.
Then she yelled at me for talking."

“I have four study halls. I don’t remember you.”

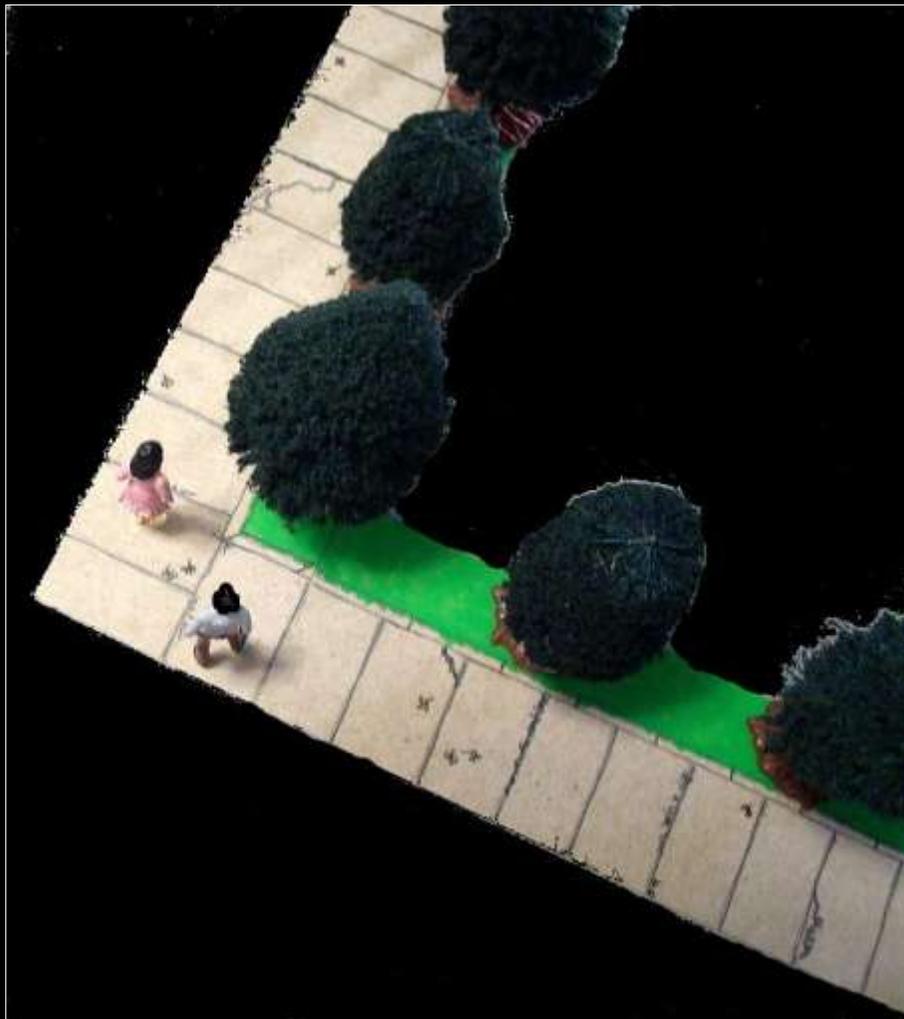
“Four? Why so many?”

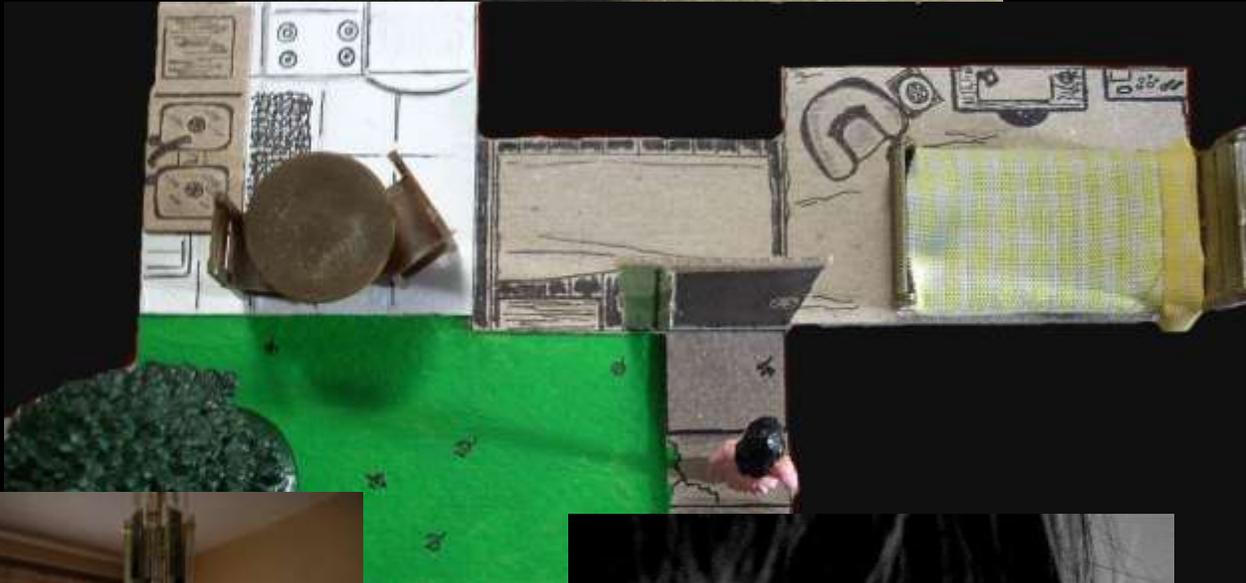
“Who cares?”

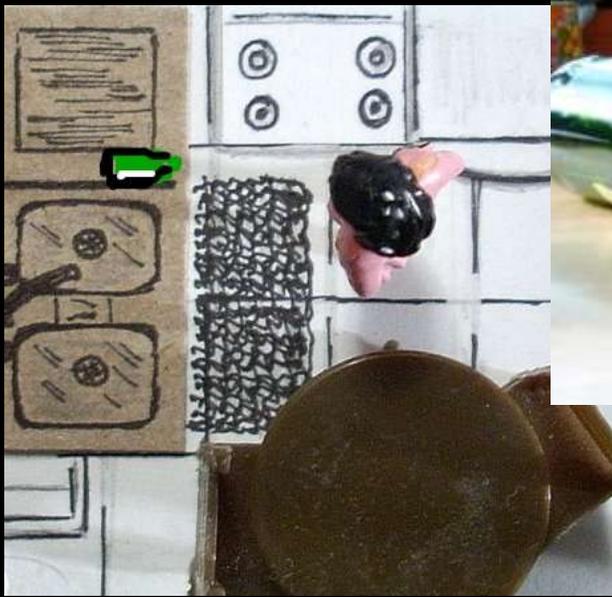
“No big deal...just being friendly.”

“Well, you’re being annoying, too.”

“...I walk this way every day. I’ll see you tomorrow...”





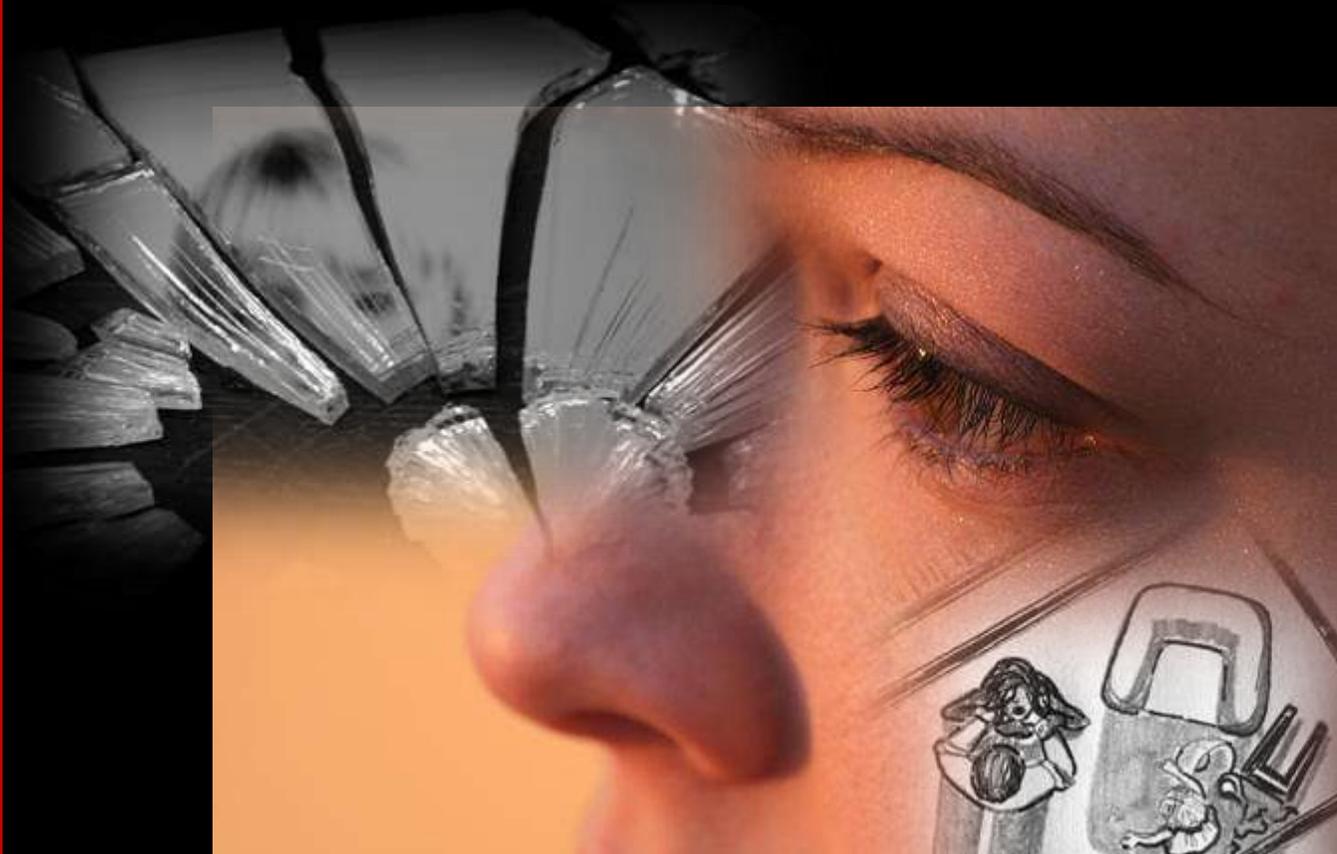


“At least I’ll have some peace
for a while.”



“...Hi, Mom...”





"...FUCKIN' BITCH! You wanna call me a drunk? You wanna try yellin' at me again?"

"Daddy, you're hurting Mommy!"

"I'll hurt her all right! By the time I'm done with her, she'll be hurtin' so bad she'll never stick her nose in where it don't belong again the resta her goddamn life!"

"Please...please..."

"You gonna leave me alone? You gonna learn to keep your big mouth shut? Huh?..."



"...Hope you learned your lesson, cunt."

"...Mommy, should I call the doctor for you?"

"No, honey...no. At a time like this...one thing you should never do is involve other people."

"Why not?"

"Because it's no one else's business. Don't you ever forget that, Cookie. When you tell other people your private business, they talk behind your back. And I won't have anybody gossiping or feeling sorry for us.

This is just the way it is sometimes, when you're married...your grandma told me the same thing whenever Grandpa used to hit her. Besides, if I did tell anybody, that might make it worse."

"Why?"



"Cookie, you can't expect people to help you when you're dealing with something like this—like I said, it's private, and bringing outsiders into it just complicates things.

Even if Mommy called the police, the most they could do is put Daddy in jail...and then we wouldn't have anywhere to go."



"...But I don't want him to hurt you."

"I'm not really hurt that bad, baby...and your daddy loves us both, but he has a lot of pain inside him...he can't help getting angry

like he does...but as long as I live, I won't let him lay a hand on you. That's a promise. I know you don't understand, but just remember that the most important thing is for us to stay together as a family...and so that's why you must never tell anyone about these problems between me and your daddy...never, never, never!"





“...Cookin’ for
one tonight,
huh?”

“...I didn’t think you would
want anything.”

“Why not? ‘Cause I don’t
work anymore?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“I know when you’re bein’ fresh.”

"I wasn't being fresh!"

"You mind your tone with me, girl!"

"...I'll make you something—it'll only take a few minutes."

"Goddamn right you will. And don't even try givin' me no TV dinner."

"I won't. Just let me finish and I'll—"



"There...you're finished. Now, get up and cook."



"...You look just like your mom right now."

"Do I?"

"Yeah...good-lookin' woman, she was...made up for her bein' so stupid...I'll bet you've already got the boys lookin' at you in school, your first day there. They lookin' at you, huh?"

"I didn't notice."



"Bet it won't be long till you got 'em followin' you around like a pack of dogs, same as back home."

"You know I never had any boyfriends following me around."

"I'm not talkin' about boyfriends...I'm talkin' about *boys*."

I'm no fool. You're seventeen years old. Guess it's a little late for the old birds 'n bees chat, huh?"



"...Your supper's ready."



“...You’re growin’ up...but don’t grow up *too* fast. Understand?”

“...Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“...Yes, Dad.”

“Daddy...you should call me Daddy. You’re too young to call me Dad yet. Call me Daddy. Go on...call me Daddy.”

“...All right...Daddy...”



"Hi, there. You sitting out here all by yourself?"

"That's how I like it."





“My friends and I usually sit on the other side of the building. In winter we go to the lobby.”

“That’s fascinating.”

“Mind if I join you for a few minutes?”

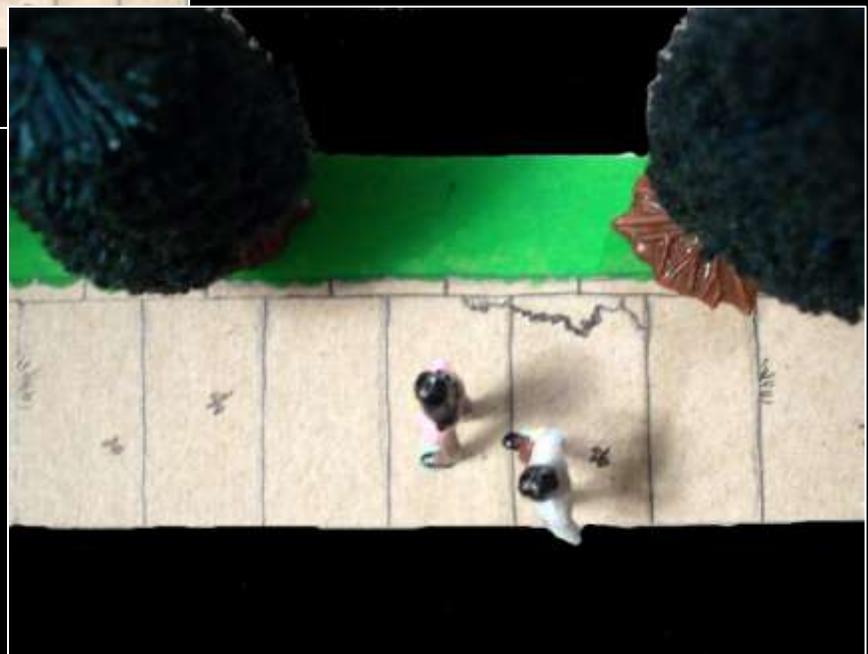


“...I’m leaving.”



“Hi!”

“You again?”





"I told you I walk this way home every day, too."

"How lucky am I?"

"...Look, I don't want anything. Why can't we just be sociable with each other?"

"Sociable?"

"Civil. Polite."

"I know what it means, dork."

"I've been called worse."

"I believe it."

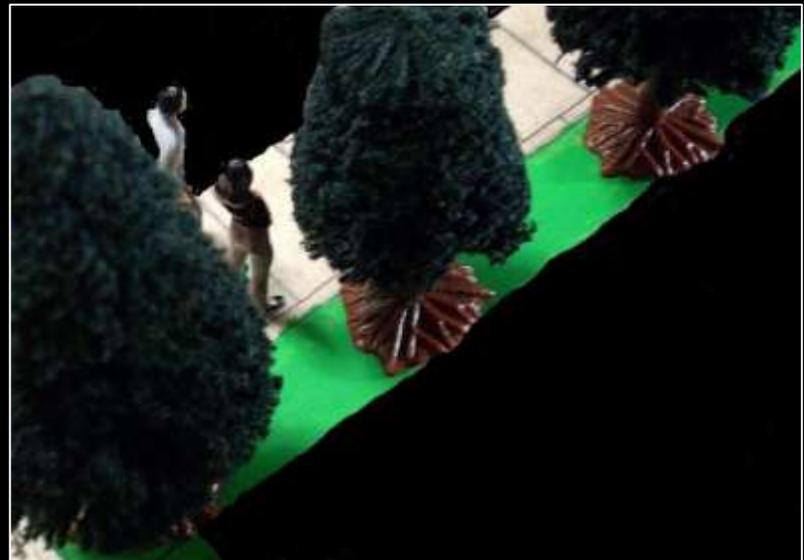
"...So, what do you think of Marigold?"

"It stinks."

"Right on...what about good old Marigold High?"

"I'm gone as soon as I turn eighteen."

"Oh...you want to drop out?"





"Brilliant."

"Why do you want to drop out?"

"Because I do."

"When do you turn eighteen?"

"Jesus, you're a pain in the ass!"

"Sorry...just being—"

"—Sociable, I know."

"Yeah."

"You're something else."

"Does that mean you don't mind me walking with you?"

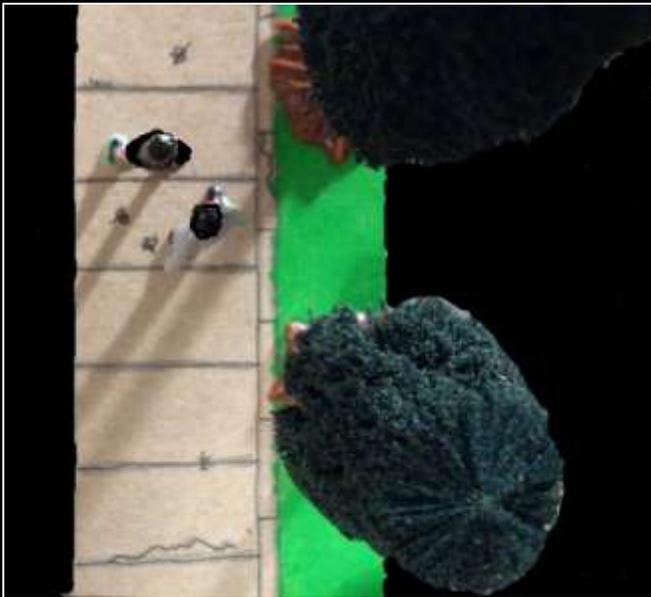


"I guess not."

"Cool. Where do you live?"

"Beech Street."

"Oh...that's farther than me. I'm on Ashford. It's only a couple more blocks...Hey, you want to come in for a few minutes? You can meet my family. My mom just made



some doughnuts from scratch."

"No, thanks. I can't."

"Homework? Oh, no—four study halls. Why can't you come in?"

"I just can't."

"Do you have to work? Do you have a job?"

"No."

"Can I have your cell number?"

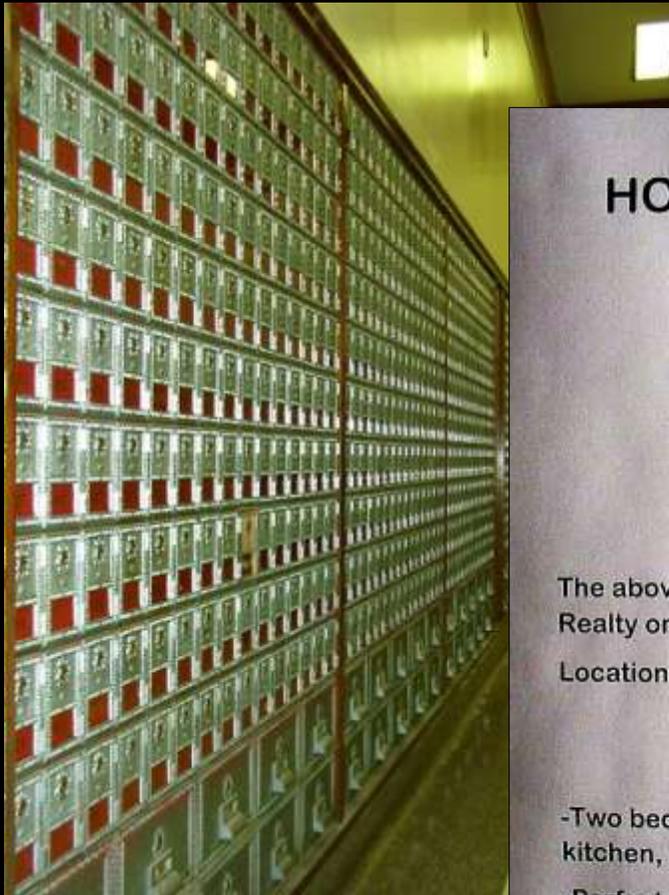
"I don't have a cell phone."

"Really? Can I have your home number?"

“No, I don’t think so.”

“...Well, this is my street...are you sure you can’t stop in?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry, but I have to go. Thanks for the invite, Jimmy. I’ll see you.”



“...I can’t imagine anybody from town will bid on it.”

HOUSE FOR AUCTION



The above property will be auctioned by Cardiff Realty on Tuesday, September 12, at 5:00 pm

Location: 3850 Lower Danvers Rd.

Marigold, OH 44223

(Echo Forest)

-Two bedrooms, bath, living room, dining room, kitchen, basement, attic

-Perfect fixer-upper

-Good location

Bidding will start at \$10,000



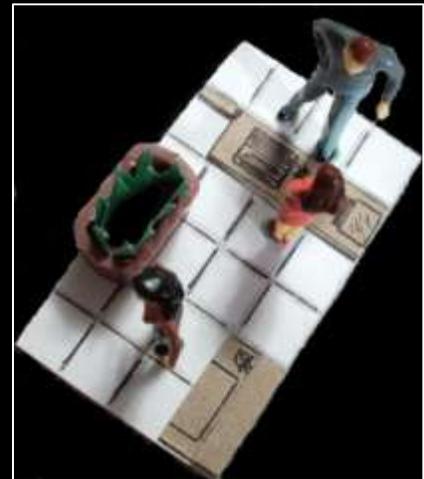
"I can't, either. Think what it'd be like to live in that house after what happened there. Not to mention the shape it's in."

"I remember when that story broke, thirty years ago. This

town's never been the same since."

"Did you know any of them?"

"Only in passing...I'd see Mrs. Bainbridge on the street every now and then—she always looked so mean—just like the kind of person who would do a thing like that. And there was that brood of hers,



running around. They'd go to church Sundays, over at the Baptist. *She'd* never go, but she sent the kids real regular."



"Probably gave her an hour's peace. Did you know the girl? Susan Linwood?"

“No. The poor kid didn’t even live here that long before it all happened. I don’t think anybody really got to know her...God, that was awful.”

“Well, she’s at rest now. But I pity the person buys that house...if anybody even does. I don’t know as I believe in ghosts, but you can’t tell me when things like that go on in a place, that they don’t leave a kind of a vibration behind.”

“An echo.”

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*"...Gonna getcha!
Gonna getcha!"*

"No, Mommy!..."



*"...Daddy, I want this
one."*

*"Well, it's right there
waitin' for you, Kitten..."*





...Hang on, girl...another six months, and you'll be eighteen.



*Kit...I just want to help
you...but I don't know how...*





“...The policy of isolationism, like any political policy, has its advantages, one of the main ones being that it

discourages involvement in wars which do not directly concern the interests of the nation practicing it. The question I would like to put to you for our discussion today is this: What are the possible ramifications, or disadvantages, both internal and external, of the policy of isolationism?...Jimmy? Any thoughts?”



“...I think you have to consider the possibility of the abuse of power in isolationist nations.”



“Abuse of power...toward the citizens of the nation, or outside its boundaries?”

“Both, sometimes.”

“And what do you think would be the most appropriate response by other nations to such a scenario?”

“...If something wrong is going on inside any country, other countries have a responsibility to put a stop to it, even if it doesn't directly affect them.”

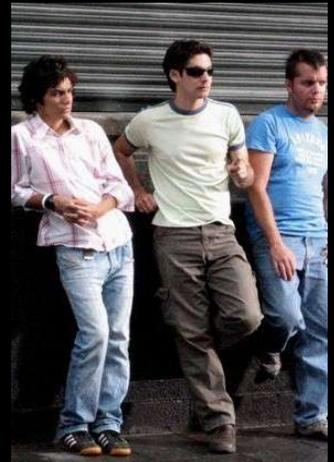


“...So, you get her to talk about her dad?”

“Haven't asked.”

“You going to?”

“I don't know. I want to, but I feel like I ought to get to know her better first.”



“That's a switch.”

“It's not funny, douche-bag. You know I didn't mean like that.”



“Whoa...don't get all monthly on me, man. I didn't mean it was funny about what her dad's doing to her, just...usually, you barely know their last names before you strike, Mr. Velvet Hammer.”

“Can’t help it if I’ve grown up a little. Maybe you should give it a whirl.”

“Boys...boys. Jimmy, he didn’t mean anything by what he said. Lighten up. You’ve been a tight-ass ever since you saw this girl. You’re not married to her yet—hell, you two haven’t even gone out.”



“I’m working on that. And I’m sorry you think I’ve been a tight-ass, but this whole thing—Kit being knocked around at home—it’s got me so I can’t hardly think of anything else.”

“Well, what can you do about it? I mean...so, you like her. So, her dad hits her. Even if you do end up going out, what difference will it make? What’re you gonna do—beat up her old man? Great—then you and your brother can share a jail cell.”



“And if everybody had your attitude, where the fuck would we be as a society?”

"Where the fuck *are* we as a society that this shit still happens all the time?...Look, Jimmy, I know you want to help Kit, but this problem's a lot bigger than you. Seriously, it is."



"He's right, man."

"...So, what should I do?"

"Go to Guidance and tell Wessner about it.

Let her talk to Kit. That's what she's there for."

"And what if she doesn't do anything?"

"...I don't know. But chances are, anything you try to do yourself will just add fuel to the fire."



"Hi, Kit."

"...Hi."

"How's your day going?"

"Okay."

“Good...Hey, I was wondering—would you like to grab a bite to eat after school? At Casey’s, down the road?”



“...I don’t know. I have to get home.”

“Aw...just for a few minutes? We could eat fast. And the burgers at Casey’s are to die for.”

“I really shouldn’t.”

“Well...think about it during your study hall, okay?”

“I don’t need to think about it. I’ll go. As long as it’s just for a few minutes.”



“Cool...I’ll meet you at the gate at three.”

“All right.”

“...Thanks for coming here with me. I promise I won't annoy you.”

“Hedge your bets. Anyway, I can't stay long.”

“I know...is it just you and your dad at home?”

“Yeah...who told you I lived with my dad?”



“...Oh, nobody. I just got that impression, somehow.”

“This does look good. Beats cooking at home...thanks, Jimmy.”

“No problem. Do you cook for your dad?”

“Sometimes.”

“You have any brothers or sisters?”

“No. You?”

"I have two brothers— Mickey and Billy. Mickey's eighteen, and Billy's five. Then I have a sister, Natalie. She's seven."



"Wow...full house."



"You know it. Sometimes Mom says she feels like Maria Von Trapp."

"My mom died a year and a half ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that. My dad walked out right about then. We haven't seen or heard from him since."

"Must be rough on your mom, to have to take care of you all by herself."

"It is, sometimes, but she's a strong lady. She teaches physics and biochemistry at Akron U. I help her out a lot. Actually, me and the two younger ones are no problem...it's Mickey who's giving her gray hair. He's been in juvenile court twice. Now that he's an adult, Mom's scared to death he'll wind up in jail."

"How is it that you've turned out so well?"

"I don't know...I guess I'm not mad at the world like Mickey is. He's been that way ever since Dad left."

"...I can relate to being mad at the world."

"You mean you are?"

"No...well...sometimes."

"I think everybody is, sometimes. What about your dad?"

"...What about him?"

"Is he mad at the world?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Somebody put that shiner on you."

"...What shiner?"

"The one under your makeup."

"I do not have a shiner."

"Then why do you wear your hair like that, to hide half your face?"

"Excuse me?"





“And your arm...why do you favor it so much? Did your dad do that, too?”

“...You have a hell of a nerve.”

“I’m sorry. But it looks like somebody did a real number on you, and if it wasn’t your dad, who was it?”

“Nobody did a number on me.”

“Come on, Kit...give me some credit, will you? All I want to do is help—”

“I fell down the stairs when we were moving, okay? That’s how I hurt my face and my arm.”

“Kit, my friend Phil helped move you into your new house. He told me he saw your dad hit you—”



“He’s full of shit!”

“Look, I just told you about my brother. I have trouble in my family, too—it’s nothing to be ashamed of...”



“I have no trouble in my family! But since *you* have so much, why don't you go the fuck home and play Mr. Fix-It there?”



“...Jimmy, just go away. I have nothing to say to you—”

“Well, I have something to say to *you*. I’m sorry. I wanted you to know that I know I was way out of line earlier.”



“Great. Congratulations. Now, will you please get the hell out of here?”

“Can’t we talk?”

“No. I have homework.”



“With four study halls, you have homework.”

“Yes!”

“It’s Friday night.”

“So, I like to get my homework

done right away!”

“Kit! Who’re you talking to?”

“That your dad?”

“Yes. You need to leave. *Now.*”





"Why? You're not allowed to have friends visit?"

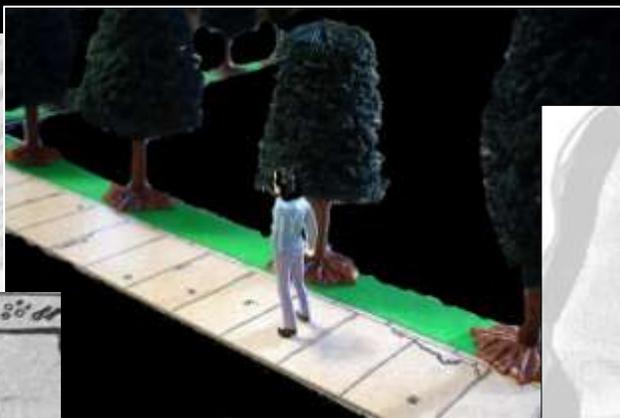
"I'll talk to you on Monday, Jimmy. Now get lost."

"...Someone from school, that's all."

"A boy?"

"...Yes."

"That figures...what'd I say a few nights ago? Better not ever let me catch him in here...or you, sneakin' out. You know what'll happen if I do..."





“...Mickey, what in God’s name were you *thinking*? What are you trying to do...deliberately destroy your life?”



“Chill out, Mom—all they took was a radio! I wasn’t even part of it—”

“If you were *there*, you were part of it! You were in the car while these thug friends of yours stole the radio!”

“Mom, it was a joke! They went in Tony’s house and took the radio for a prank! He’s not even pressing charges!”

“That’s not what Tony’s mom told me when she called here earlier! If his parents press charges, you could go to jail! *Real* jail! You’re not a minor anymore, Mickey!”



“What’s the matter now?”

“Hi, Jimmy. Guess what?
Your brother is a felon.”



“I am NOT a felon.”



“What’s a
felon?”



“Watch TV,
Billy!”



“Okay, Mom.”

“...Put the kettle on, would you, Jimmy?...So they dragged me out of my ten o’clock chemistry class today saying I had an urgent phone call—my son had been named as a suspect in a local robbery. Well, I knew it couldn’t be *you*...and it wasn’t likely to be Billy...honest to God, Jimmy, I’m about to have the big one. First your dad walks out...then



Mickey turns into a delinquent—how is he ever going to amount to anything with a felony on his record? What did I do to *deserve* this? Is it karma? Was I with the Gestapo in my last life?”

“I don’t think you were with the Gestapo. Maybe the Salvation Army.”



“...I love you, Jimmy. I love *all* you kids—I know I get uptight—but I wouldn’t trade any of you for diamond mines and a date with George Clooney. It’s just Mickey—lately I feel like he’s taking after his father, more and more...the way he acted out when he was young—and it scares me so.”

“Well, Mom, there are other people going through worse. A friend of mine is in real trouble.”

“Hopefully, he’s not *too* good of a friend of yours.”

“It’s a she. She’s in bad trouble, and I don’t know how to help her.”

"Don't tell me she's—"

"No, no. Not *that* kind of trouble."

"...Good. I was thinking, 'Jesus, that's *all* I need'."



"Her dad's beating her."

"...Has she reported it?"

"No. She won't even admit to it."

"Then there's not much you can do."

"That's what Phil said. Well, I can't just stand by and watch, either, you know?"



"I didn't say you should. Would this girl talk to the guidance counselor at school?"

"I tried to suggest it to her tonight, but I didn't get a chance. And I'm afraid if I go to Miss Wessner on my own, she'll never speak to me again."

"...This is more than a friendship, isn't it?"

"...I think it could be, with time."

"I see. My advice—don't play the hero. If this girl—what's her name?"

"Kit."

"If Kit won't help herself, no one will be able to help her. That's the tragedy of people in her predicament. Talk to her again. Try to persuade her to see Miss Wessner.

Aside from that, it's out of your hands."

"I know. I just don't want her to end up like Susan Linwood."



"...Surely it's nothing like that."

"I don't know. Like I said—she won't talk about it. But the marks are there."

"Well...not to sound callous—because any degree of abuse is unacceptable—but it's unlikely that Kit's situation is anywhere near Susan Linwood's. Monsters like Gretchen Bainbridge aren't exactly lurking around every corner."





"Susan Linwood in her basement bed

All alone and filled with dread.

The rats keep her company, they eat her stale bread.

They crawl on her face when she's finally dead!"

"Billy...Natalie—that is *not* funny! I do not ever want to hear it again! Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mom."

"All right, now, both of you go get into your pajamas; it's bedtime...I'd love to know what sick bastard made that up. As if people around here need to be reminded."



“...Sometimes they do need to be reminded.”





"Happy Monday. You have a good weekend?"



"It was okay...you?"

"Well, aside from the drama of Mickey being charged with breaking and entering, it was great."

"Oh, no..."

"Yeah. Mom's fit to be tied."

"Is he in jail?"

"He was for a little while on Saturday morning. Mom was so mad at him, she was going to leave him there, but then her maternal instinct took over and she bailed him out."



"He's lucky."

"That's what she told *him*. So...am I forgiven for the other night?"



"...Yes. But I might not forgive you again."

"Duly noted."

"Good."

"Would you like to meet me somewhere after school?"

"I can't, Jimmy."

"Well, how about if I just walk you home?"

"I guess that would be all right."

"Awesome. Three o'clock? The gate?"

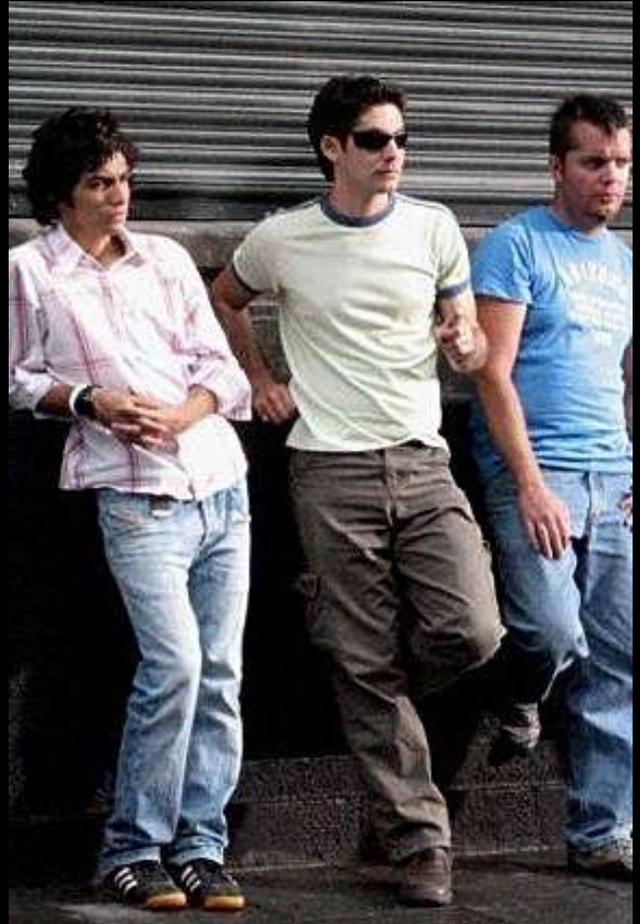
"Sure. I'll see you later."

“...What’s the scoop?”

“She’s okay with me walking her home...but I didn’t tell her we’d be taking a shortcut.”

“You really think it’ll do any good?”

“It’s worth a shot. She’s one proud girl...and since she won’t let me ask her anything, I guess I’ll try telling.”





“...So, why are we going this way?”

“I wanted to show you something...no, don't look at me like that. I just wanted you to experience Echo Forest. “

“And why do they call it Echo Forest?”

“Listen...HELLO!...Hear that?”

“Wow...”

“You try.”

“No...”

“Oh, go on.”

“...HELLO?...That's too amazing! I've never heard such a clear echo before...except when my mom and I visited the Grand Canyon.”

“Were you close to your mom?”

“...Yeah...”

“Well, now you know why these woods are called Echo Forest.”

“I guess I do...what's that over there? Is that a house?”





“Yeah...that’s the other thing I wanted to show you.”

“I know that house...it’s the one in the poster.”

“You saw the posters for the auction?”

“In the post office...I heard some people talking about it, too. They said it belonged to a family by the name of Bainbridge.”

“Used to. It’s stood empty for thirty years...some say it’s haunted.”



“It looks the part...Who was Susan Linwood?”

“...That makes sense. If you’ve heard the name Bainbridge, you’ve heard about Susan Linwood. One’s never mentioned without the other.”

“What happened to her? Those people made it sound like something awful.”

“It was...”



"...Back in the summer of 1980, there was a country-and-western singer who played here in town. His name was Lennie Linwood..."



"...He had his daughter, Susan, with him. They always traveled together."

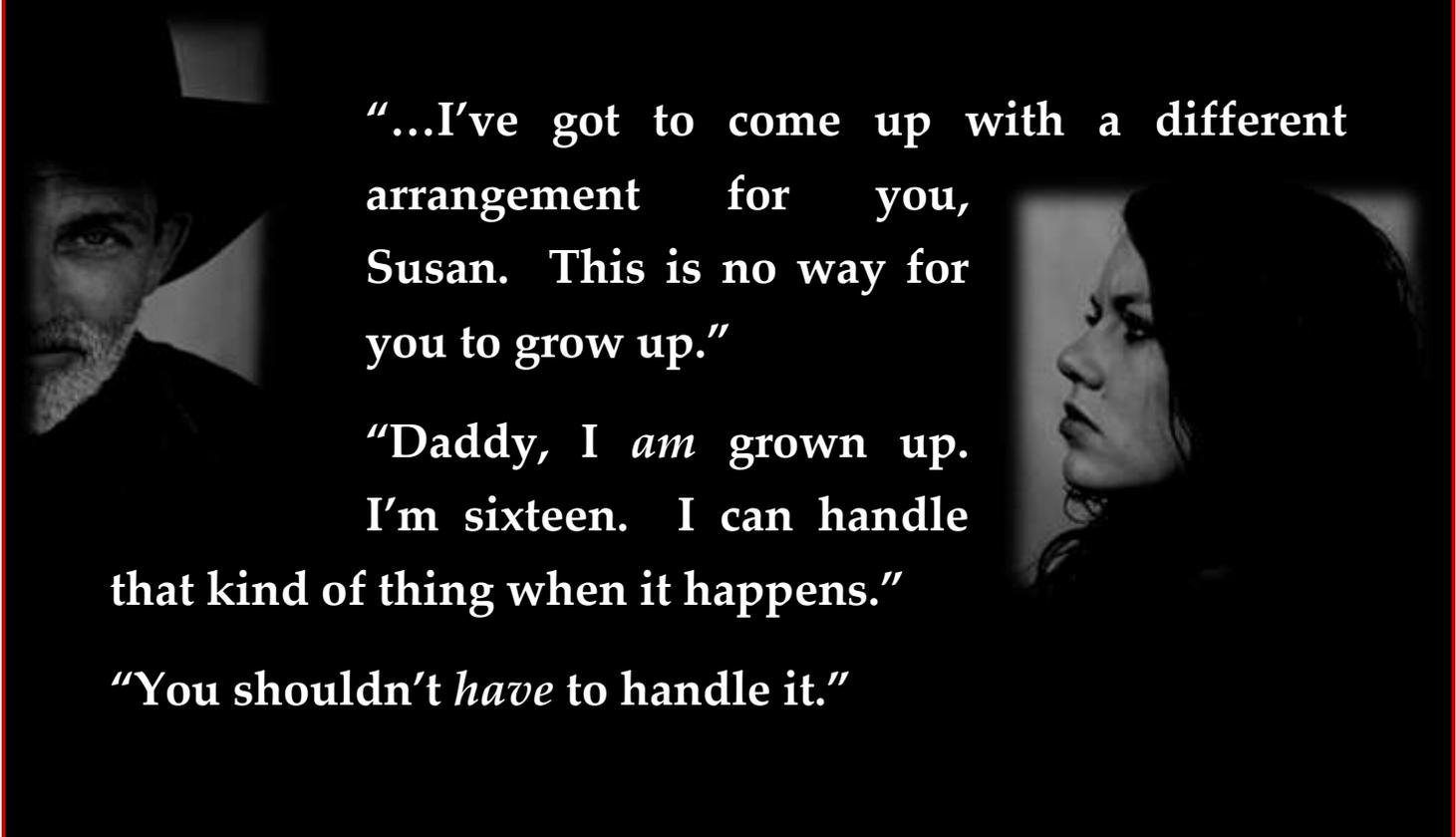
"Hey!"



"Hands off, asshole! That's my daughter!"

"...Easy, man...sorry."

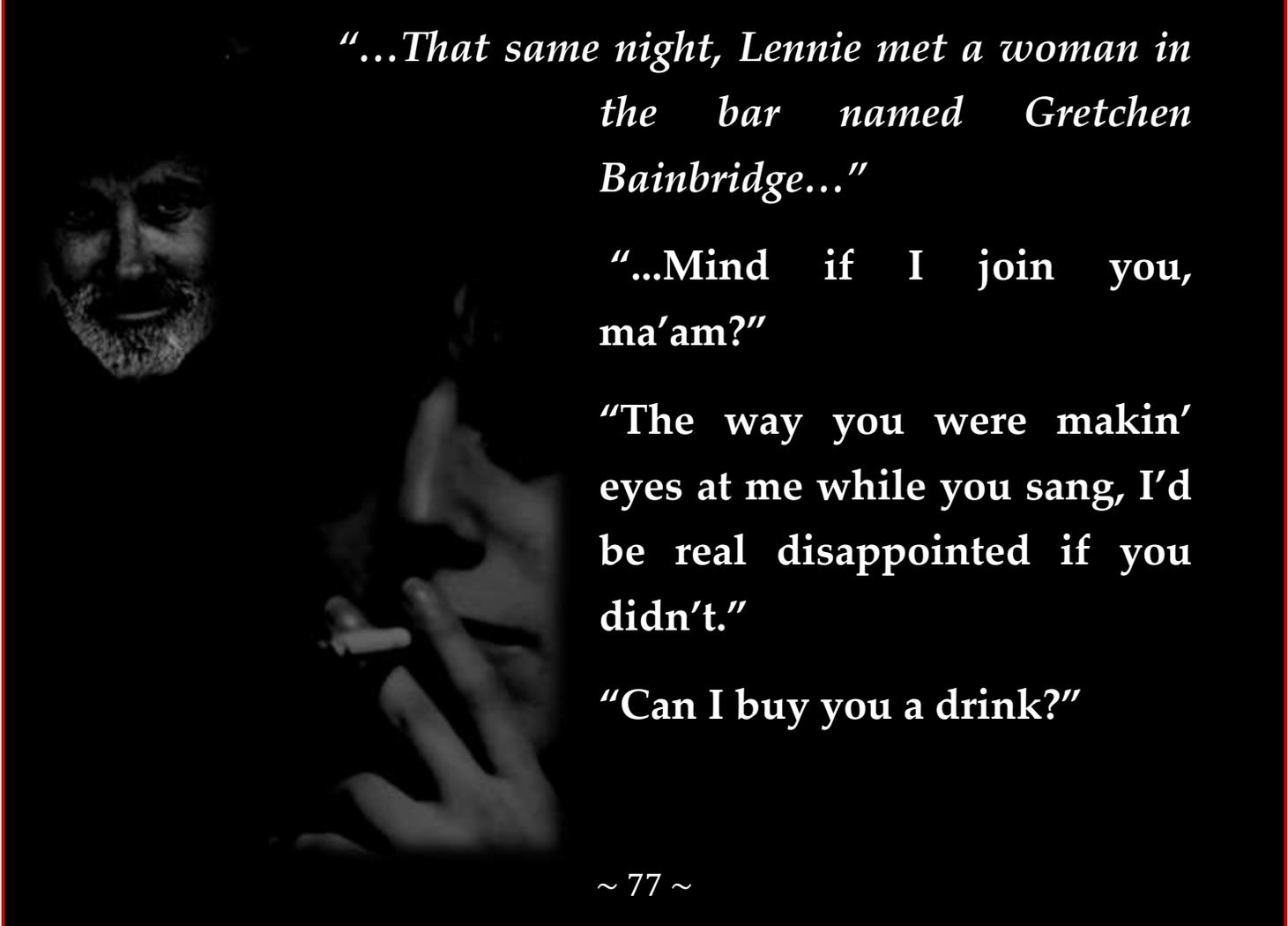




“...I’ve got to come up with a different arrangement for you, Susan. This is no way for you to grow up.”

“Daddy, I *am* grown up. I’m sixteen. I can handle that kind of thing when it happens.”

“You shouldn’t *have* to handle it.”



“...That same night, Lennie met a woman in the bar named Gretchen Bainbridge...”

“...Mind if I join you, ma’am?”

“The way you were makin’ eyes at me while you sang, I’d be real disappointed if you didn’t.”

“Can I buy you a drink?”

"Sure.
Gretchen...thanks."

"My pleasure.
Well...here's how."

"...Y'know, I don't think
I've ever heard a better version of 'You Don't Know Me'
than you just did."



"Aw, Ray's got that one
cornered."

"No, I mean what I say. I
like the way you did it
better."

"Well, thanks."

"My pleasure."



“...Feel like I’ve been on the road ever since I was born...I *have*, really...my daddy was a carnival man. That got me into show business.”

"At least you're not a clown."

"Depends on who ya ask...So, you're on your own, with five kids."

"Sure am. That black Irish bastard father of theirs up and died on me three years ago."

"That's hard."

"That's life. But we've all got our burdens to bear, don't we?"

"You can say that again...I got one of my own to bear...but I don't know what I'd do without her."

"Her?"

"My little girl, Susan...there she is...I'll introduce ya, and you tell me if she ain't the prettiest thing you ever...Susan? Hey, Susie!"



"Cookie, I want you to meet a new friend of mine...Gretchen. Gretchen, this is Susan."



"Hi, Gretchen! Nice to meet you."

"Likewise."

“...Hey, Daddy, can I have money to go see a movie? Some kids outside invited me.”

“Sure can, hon...”

“Thanks, Daddy! See you later!”

“Be careful.”

“...She’s a spunky thing, isn’t she?”

“That’s my little Cookie...”

“What is it?”

“I just hate seein’ her grow up in places like this. It ain’t right. I’d give anything to get her settled down with a good woman to look after her...but there aren’t many women who want a husband they only see once or twice a week.”

“...I suspect you just haven’t met the right one...yet.”



"...You know, you're the best thing that's happened to me in a long, long time, Gretchen."

"And you're the best that's happened to me. Gets damn lonely for a single woman in a town like this."

"Aw, you got friends. Good-hearted dame like you has to."



"Ha! You don't know Marigold...bunch of leftover Puritans...all of 'em look down on me because I don't have a man."

"Well, you couldn't help it he died."

"Hmm? Oh...no, you're right. I couldn't help that."



A close-up, black and white photograph of a man's eyes, looking slightly to the right. The image is grainy and has a high-contrast, almost ethereal quality.

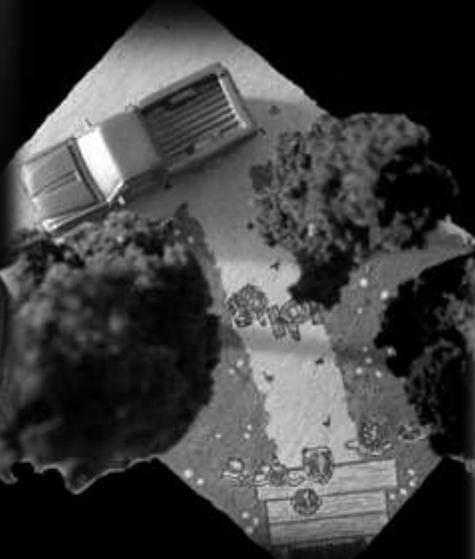
"Listen...I'll be here about another two days, then I've got a couple gigs lined up in Cleveland...so I could lodge Susan up

there and wing down here and see you in-between. You okay with that?"

"I have a better idea...why don't you just come and stay at my place, now? And let Susan stay there while you play Cleveland? It'd save you a bundle on lodging, and I'd treat Susan like one of my own."

"You sure are the motherly type, aren't you?...Well, I guess I just might take you up on that...only thing you should remember is that Susan's been her own boss for a long time, and she's used to doin' as she pleases. So, don't be afraid to be firm with her."

"I don't think that'll be a problem."



**"Hey,
everybody."**

**"Hi, Len...kids, you know
Lennie...this is his girl, Susan. She's
gonna stay with us for a few days while her dad goes out
on the road..."**

**"...Susan, this is my oldest
daughter, Patty..."**





"...Sally..."



"...Jack..."

"...Marion..."



"...and Joey."

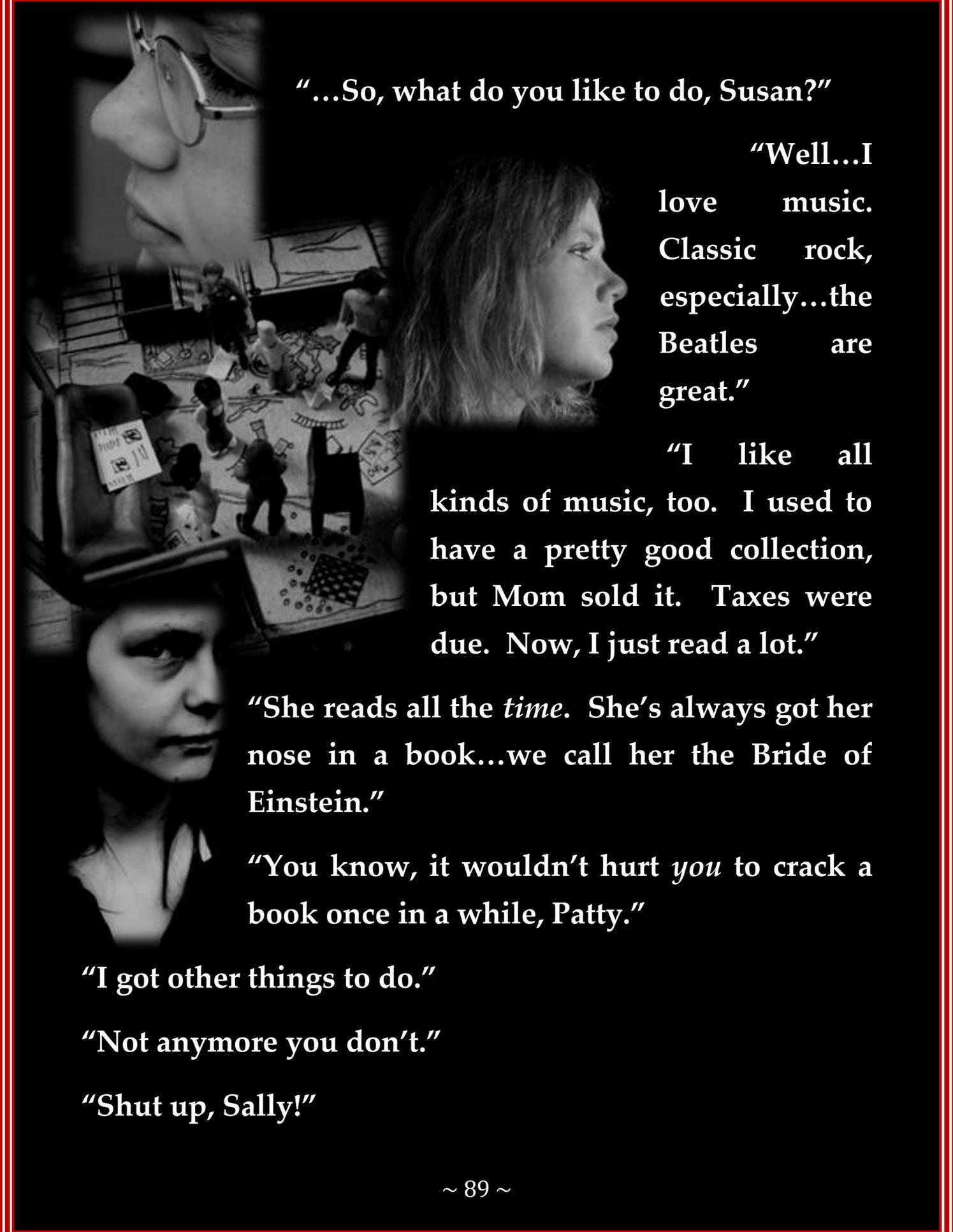


"Hi...just call me Cookie...all my friends do."



“Girls, you’ll have to share your room with Susan. Why don’t you help her take her things inside now and show her around while I start supper? Len, you better get goin’.”





"...So, what do you like to do, Susan?"

"Well...I love music. Classic rock, especially...the Beatles are great."

"I like all kinds of music, too. I used to have a pretty good collection, but Mom sold it. Taxes were due. Now, I just read a lot."

"She reads all the *time*. She's always got her nose in a book...we call her the Bride of Einstein."

"You know, it wouldn't hurt *you* to crack a book once in a while, Patty."

"I got other things to do."

"Not anymore you don't."

"Shut up, Sally!"

“...Your name’s Marion, isn’t it?...What do you like to do?”



“Roller skate.”

“Me, too! Maybe we’ll go together sometime.”

“I like to play dress-up.”

“Is that right?”

“Joey’s the actor in the family...I’m sorry about Patty. She’s really upset over her boyfriend. Well, ex-boyfriend, now. They were together for almost a year.”



“That’s too bad. I’d love to have a boyfriend, but my dad and I move around too much.”



“You’re lucky. There sure isn’t much to choose from in Marigold.”

“There’s this handsome young man here...would you like to be my boyfriend?...”

“...What do you like to do, Jack?”

“Don’t pay any attention to him...he gets in those moods. Let’s go up and I’ll show you our room.”



“...Patty and Marion and I all sleep here, but we have to take turns with the bed...whoever isn't in the bed sleeps on that mattress in the corner...Jack and Joey have the other

bedroom. So, what do you think?”

“...Well, it's—homey. Where does your mom sleep?”

“Downstairs. She's got real bad asthma, so it's better for her that way. She can't work because of it, either—”

“Sally, what the hell? Mom said you told Susan about me and Roy!”



“I didn't tell her anything...except that you were split up.”

“...If you weren't so sickly, I'd beat the shit out of you.”

“Oh, shove it.”



"You better quit tellin' lies about me!"

"I told you what I said!"

"It's none of her goddamn business about me and Roy!"



"Gretchen...can I help you somehow?"

"...Sure...you can set the table. Bowls are in that cupboard, there. Spoons are in the drawer."

"...Are the other spoons in the sink? I'll wash them."

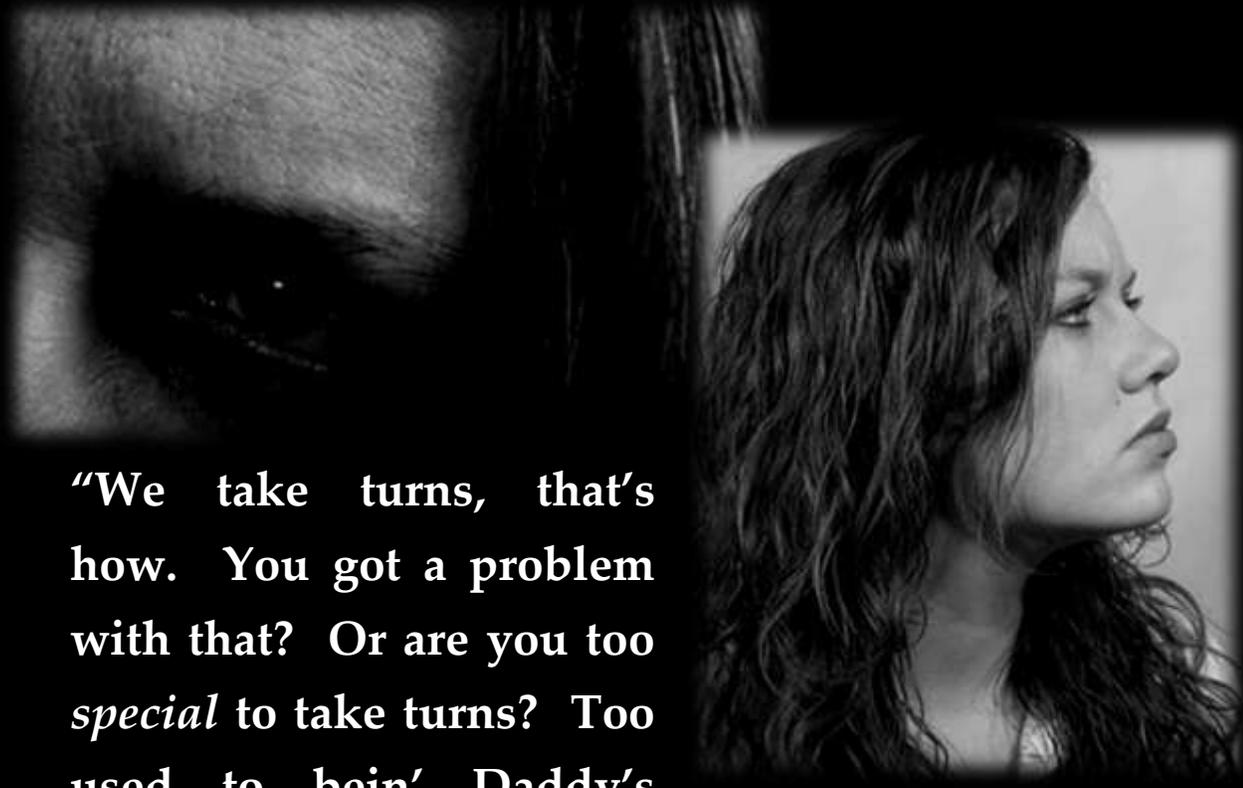
"No, that's all we got."

"...You only have three spoons?"

"That's right."

"How do you eat, all of you?"





“We take turns, that’s how. You got a problem with that? Or are you too *special* to take turns? Too used to bein’ Daddy’s only little darling, maybe?”

“No...taking turns is fine.”

“Well, I’m glad you approve, Susan.”





GLLLLLLLLRRRRRRRRGGLLLL



“...You know, Gretchen...I was thinking...I could walk over to McDonald’s and get us all something.”

“So what are you saying...that the supper I made wasn’t good enough?”

“No, I just thought—”

“I’m not all that interested in what you *thought*. If you don’t like the provisions in this household, Susan, then maybe you’d better find another place to stay until your dad comes back to claim you.”





"I'm sorry...I was just trying to be nice."

"All right...hack...hack...hack...in that case, why don't you bring me another drink? My goddamn asthma's about got me prostrated...it's the only thing helps keep my throat open."



"Can I have something from McDonald's, Mama?"

"No, you *cannot*, Joey. And don't ask again...any of you."





"You pregnant, Susan? That could be why you're so hungry."

"No...it's not too likely."

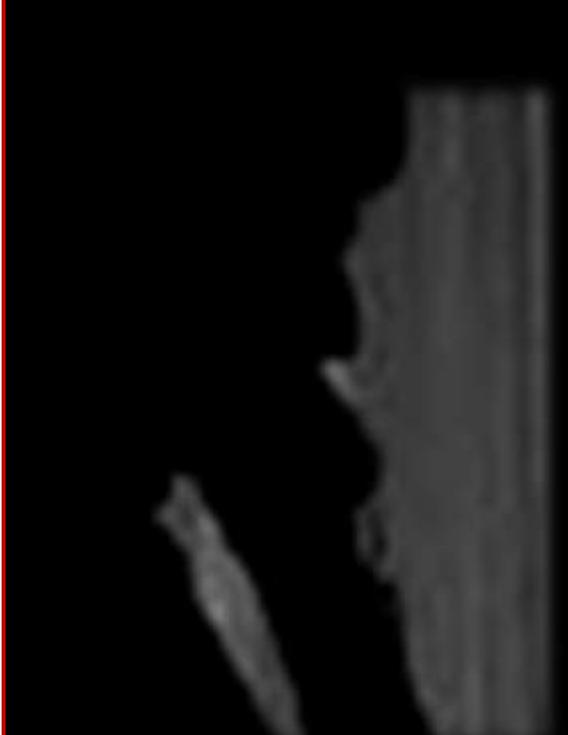
"I'll bet...are you sure your daddy didn't dump you here just to keep you from chasin' boys?"



"...Oh, Patty...you're something else. By the way, Susan...it seems to me that if you've got money to throw around at McDonald's, you should have some to contribute to the Bainbridge budget."



"...Yeah...I can do that, sure."



“...I

miss you too, honey...and when you get back, I’m gonna show you just how much...

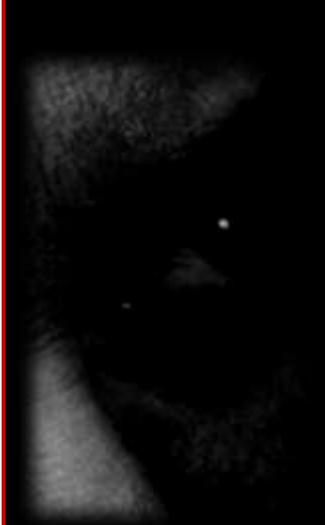
Oh, now, I can’t do that...the kids might hear...Susan?...She’s doin’ fine, just fine...Yeah, yeah, she

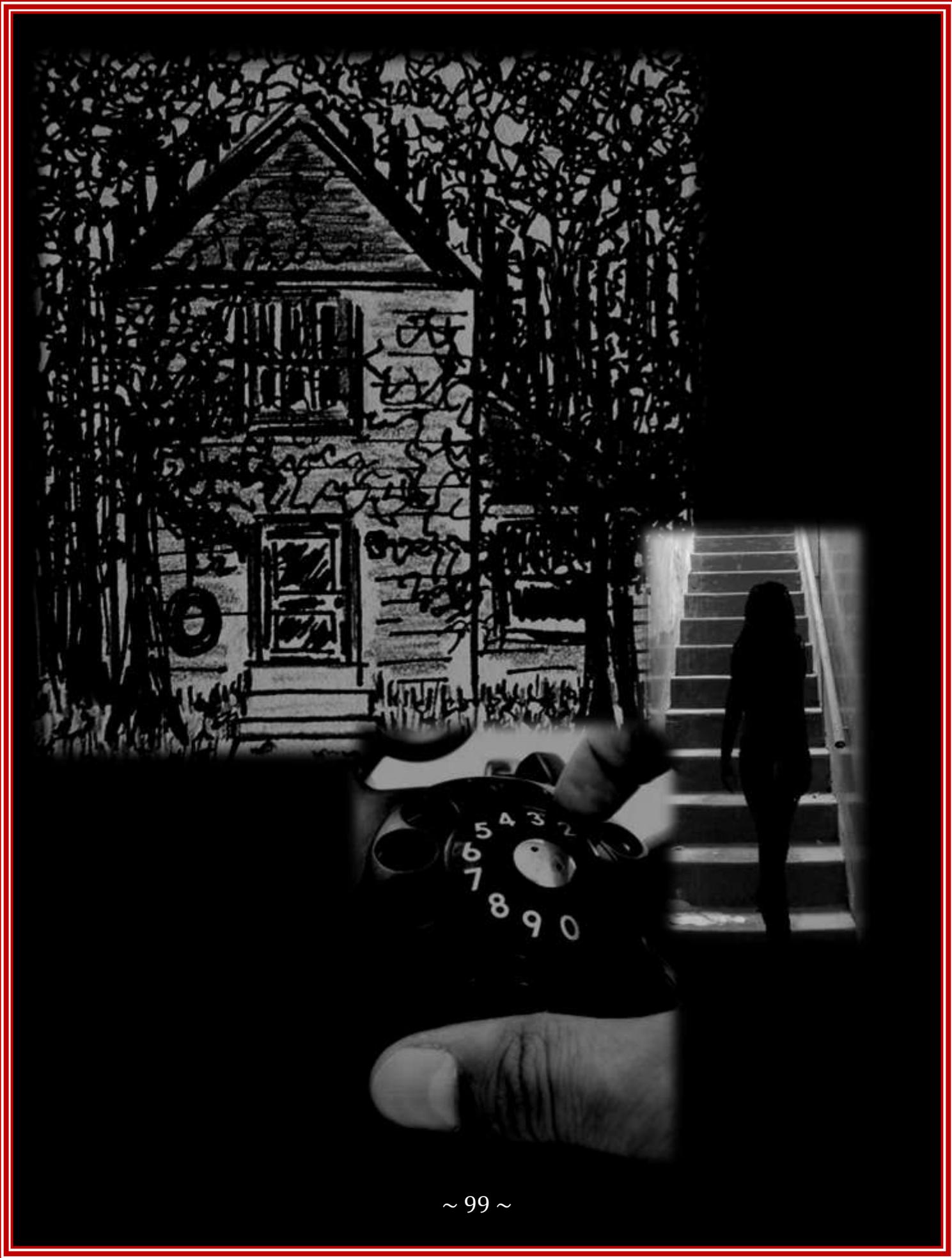
seems happy...No, she’s already in bed, asleep, but I’ll tell her you asked about her...*No—I told you, Lennie...she’s*

upstairs, in bed, asleep. You’ll get to see her in a couple of

days...you

wouldn’t want me to disrupt a growing girl’s rest, would you...?”







“...Well, now...just what might you be up to, Susan? Not thinkin’ of making a long-distance call to your dad on my phone without asking first, are you?...Hmm?”

“...You wouldn’t let me talk to him earlier.”

“You’re right...I wouldn’t...You know, maybe it was a good thing you pulled this little midnight stunt...because I think we need to have us a good girl-to-girl talk...about your daddy. Well, that’s who he is to *you*, but to me and the rest of the world, he’s just another man. And every man wants a few basic things...a home, and a decent woman to run it for him, and the peace of mind that she’s got his affairs under control...Now, you wouldn’t deny your daddy those things, would you, Susan?...”





“...And remember this, too...when a man finds a good woman who offers him all that, things can get real nasty, real fast, if anybody

comes between them...even the man's own child. You see, Susan...good, reliable women aren't exactly thick on the ground for—*wanderin'* types like your dad—but children are pretty expendable when you come right down to it. I've talked with your daddy, and he told me he's real tired of cartin' you around the country, and sacrificing his whole life to lookin' after you. So, if you really love him the way you let on...maybe you better try not being so selfish. After all, there are a lot worse places than this where you could wind up if he *really* wanted to unload you.”







"...That's really good, Susan."

"Thanks. That's Cinderella...my favorite fairy-tale character. Joey, there, was my inspiration in his beautiful outfit. And she's for you."



"Really?"

"Really."

"Thank you...why don't you sing that song again? The one you wrote."

"Well...I guess I can do that."

"...When the sun rears its head

I think of my love for you.

When I look out at the night...



A black and white close-up photograph of a man's face, focusing on his eyes and nose. He has dark, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the right.

...I think how I miss you.

When I turn down my bed,

my arms ache for you.

But my darling, my darling,

Don't ever despair...





*"...Though miles divide
us—*

Though time marches on—

I'll always belong to you."

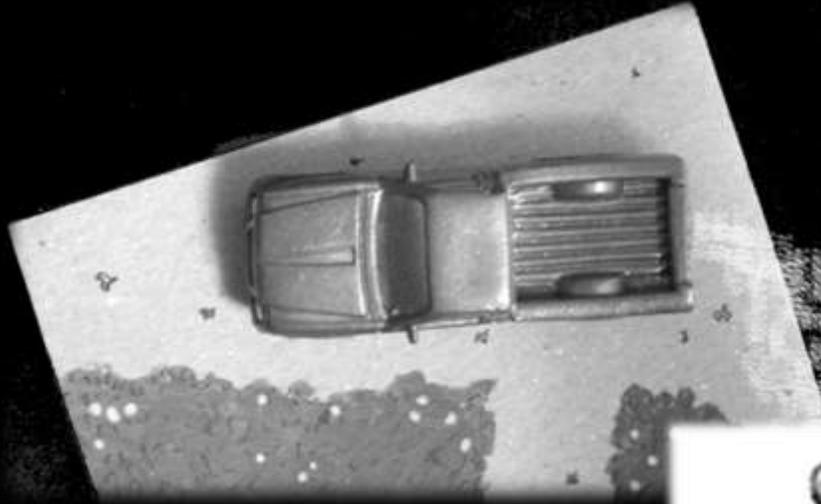
"Yay! That was beautiful!"

"Thank you, Marion...are you feeling better, Sally?"



"Yeah...just one of my fainting spells, that's all."

"Oh...here comes Dad!"



"There she is...how's my girl?"

"I've missed you so much, Daddy."



"Well, you're not the only one who missed him, Susan...how about lettin' somebody else cut in for a minute?"



"I thought she'd never let you go."

"I told her we'd grab some burgers at McDonald's and bring 'em back."

"What? Daddy, I thought we were leaving!"

"...Let's hop in the truck, sweetheart. We'll talk on the way."



“...I been doin’ some tall thinkin’ these last few days while I was on the road...about you...and me...and how we just don’t seem to belong anywhere. We don’t even have a permanent address, except a damn post office box.”

“So? What’s wrong with that? We’re happy, aren’t we?”



“...You might be, but that’s because you’re so young. You don’t know yet what you’re missin’ by not having a home to call your own.”

“Will you get *off* that, Daddy? The only home that means anything to me is one where you are. It isn’t a house with a yard and a fence—it’s being together, like we always have been. Why should that have to change?”



"Honey, will you just please listen and try to see things from my side for a minute?...I'm *not* happy with this arrangement of ours. I want you to be settled down in a place where you can have friends, and go to the same school all the time, and not

have to be traipsin' around the country. Now, Gretchen and I have talked, and she agrees with me."

"What do you mean?"

"We're gonna get married, her and I."

"No...Daddy, you've only known her for a *week!*"

"I realize that, Cookie, but sometimes that's all it takes—"

"It's *crazy*, Daddy! It's *beyond* crazy! Do you have any idea what she's really like? She's *horrible*, even to her own kids!





"Now, Susan, you've got to give her a chance. Any woman who's been raisin' five kids by herself is liable to be a little snippety at times, but underneath, she's got a heart of gold."

"Daddy, she *hates* me!"

"That's not so."

"You weren't in that house with her all the time I was— she's never had one nice thing to say to me! She treats me like trash, no matter how polite I am to her—"

"Susan, she doesn't *know* you, yet. You can't expect—"



“That’s what I just told *you!* How is it okay for you to talk about marrying her after only knowing her a few days, and *not* okay for me to live with her for a solid week and say she’s a total *bitch?*”

“That’s *enough!*”



“...Susan...when you’re older, you’ll understand better. I only want what’s best for you. I’m not sayin’ it’ll be easy at first, but after a while, you’ll see I made the right choice for us both. Really, you will...”

"...It wouldn't be long until Lennie found out just how right Susan was about Gretchen...but by then it was too late. The trouble started when he learned that his new wife had been married before—not once, but twice..."

"...You told me you were a widow!"



"Well, I might as well be! Goddamn deadbeat husbands never send me nothin' half the time...anyway, what're you bitchin' about? You got what you wanted—somebody to babysit your damn daughter while you run around the country singin' your honky-tonk songs..."

"...And things only got worse when he was out on the road..."

“...Is that my blouse?”

“Oh...I guess it is. I must've taken it out of the closet by mistake—”

“Bitch! Don't you ever touch my clothes again—do you understand me?”

“Patty, it was an oversight! I didn't mean to—”

“Take it off! Now!”

**“What’s the problem,
girls?”**



**“She stole my
blouse and when I
asked her to give it
back, she
deliberately tore
it.”**

**“No, I
didn’t!”**



**“You callin’ me a liar,
Susan? Huh?”**



"Mom, what's going on?!"



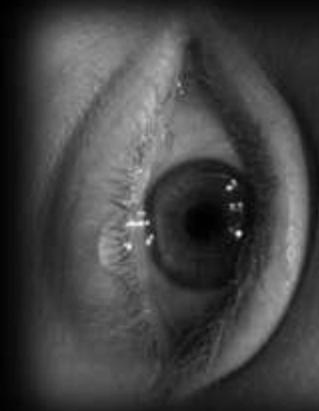
"Just let 'em go at it...it's their fight. I guess that'll teach you to steal other people's clothes, Susan!"

“...Hey, Susie...want me to show you the judo move I just learned?”

“...Okay.”



“...How was that, Mom?”



“Nice job, Jack. Susan finally proved she was good for somethin' around here.”

"...Things didn't get much better when Lennie came home..."

"Daddy, I need to talk to you. There's stuff going on here you should know about."



"Not now, darlin'...later, after I take a nap. I'm all in. Must be I'm gettin' older...these tours really take it out of me anymore."

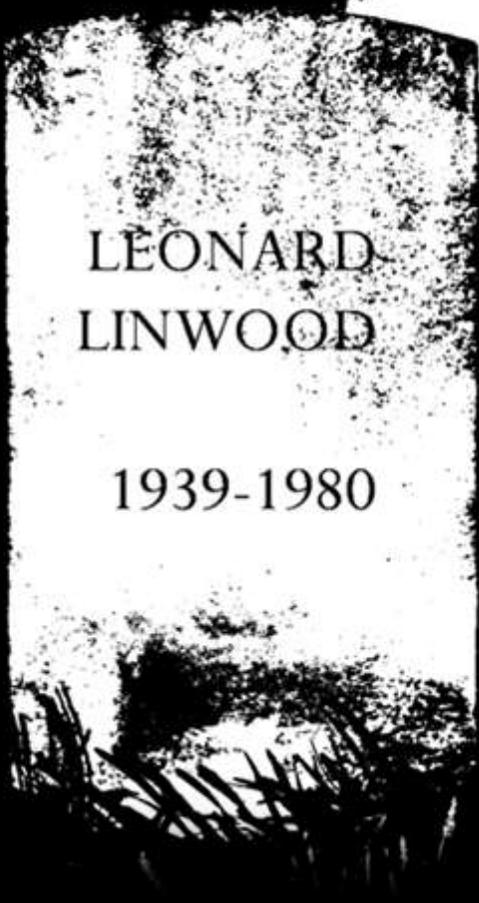




“You little bitch! Joey heard what you told your dad!”

“I didn’t—”

“Don’t you lie to me! Just remember—he leaves *again* in two days.”



LEONARD
LINWOOD

1939-1980

"...But Gretchen proved wrong there. Lennie died that same night...it was as though he had known that his time was limited, and wanted Susan to be taken care of when he was gone. Still, he made one hell of a mistake when he chose Gretchen to take care of her..."



“...That son of a bitch up and dies of a heart attack and leaves me worse off than I was before! Goddamn it! Now I got *another* mouth to feed—*he* wasn’t insured—I won’t get any more alimony—and I’m PREGNANT AGAIN! MOTHERFUCKER! I told him to WATCH HIMSELF!!!”



“...Damn doctor wants me to stay in bed as much as possible till this baby’s born. That means you’re gonna have to quit your mopin’ after your dad and start doin’ more

around here. Can’t expect Patty to help because she’s already workin’ weekends and after school, and Sally ain’t that strong. So you need to mind the younger kids and the house while I’m down, understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I’m countin’ on you to keep things runnin’ smooth. Anything goes wrong, your ass is grass. Got it?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“...You want some help, Susan?”





"No! Mom wants *her* to do it, Marion!"

"It's okay, Marion. Thanks for asking, though."



"...So, have you ever had a boyfriend, Susan?"

"I guess you could say I have...when my dad and I lived in California for a while, a couple of years ago."





"What was his name?"

"Chris...he was cute as all-get-out. A really nice guy. I miss him."



"I'll bet he misses you, too."



"What kinds of things did you do with him?"

"Well...we would go to the movies, or to the park...and just sit and talk. Sometimes he'd take me roller-skating, or for a hamburger...once I went to a party at his house that his big brother threw while their parents were away."

"What happened there?"

"...I guess we made out a little...in his room."

"Why would you do that, Susan?"

"...I don't know...it just came naturally. We liked each other, and it felt right."





"How'd that feel, tramp?"

"...You burned me...why did you do that? Why do you hate me so much? What did I ever do to you?"

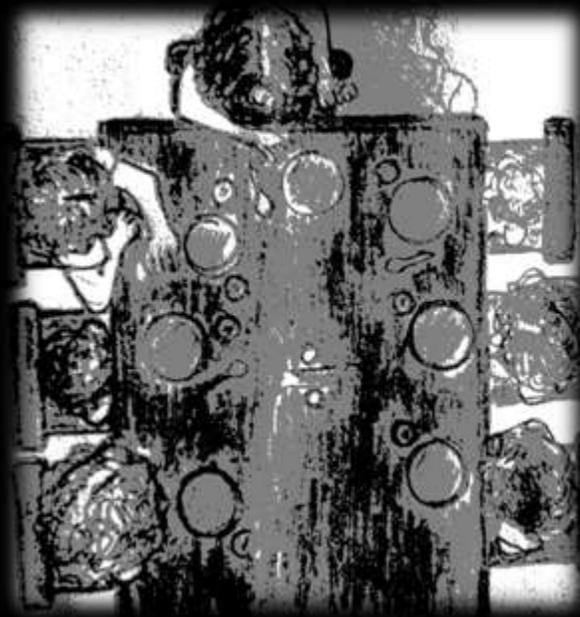
"You're a little slut who thinks she's better than everybody else."

"That's not true—"



“Oh, Susan, for God’s sakes quit your blubberin’ and go
put some salve on your face. Patty, mind you don’t mark
her again where people can see it.”





“...Ten dollars is missing from my purse...anybody wanna fess up?...You speak up now, come clean, there won't be any punishment. You don't, and I find out who it was...well, you know how that goes around here.”

“Susan was in your purse earlier, Mom.”

“...Susan, is this true?”

“...Okay...I was looking for a tissue. But I swear I didn't steal any money.”



"...You know somethin'?...I wanna believe you. I really do. Life's been pretty rough on you lately, honey, and I'd hate to have to make it any worse. So, I'll tell you what...I'm gonna let this one slide."

"Mom!"

"Shut your mouth, Jack!...Well, aren't you gonna thank me, Susan?"

"Yes...thanks."

"No problem, dear. Now, eat your soup."

"I don't have a spoon...I'll have to wait for one."

"No, no...go ahead. Your fingers are sticky enough that you don't need a spoon. Go on...eat your soup."

"...I can't..."



"All right, then. Go up to your room. You can do without supper tonight."



"But I haven't eaten all day—"

"Patty, get the board."

"No! *Why?*"

"Because you didn't mind me when I gave you an order, that's why."

"Can I use it on her, Mom?"

"You know you can, Patty. And make sure you give Jack a turn, too."





"...The board had been used on all the kids at one time or another. During that late summer, it was used on Susan a lot...but she seemed to take it in stride, like everything else, as though it was just a part of her new life that she had to accept. She never complained or told anybody what she was going through. She even went to church with the Bainbridge kids every Sunday and professed her faith at the altar..."



"...She started school that fall, and made a few friends there. One of them was Roy Howell, Patty's ex-boyfriend..."

"Hi, Susan. How's it going?"

"Hi, Roy...I'm glad you came by, but this really isn't a very good time. Gretchen's resting."

"I can come back later. Maybe we could go for a walk or something."

"I don't know...I don't think Patty would like that."

"Oh, she'll get over it."

"Well, maybe. Joey, don't let that ball go in the road."

"I won't."

"So...they keep you pretty busy around here, huh?"

"They sure do—"





“JOEY!”



"I TOLD
YOU TO
WATCH OUT FOR THE KIDS!!! WHYN'T
YOU MIND ME??? HUH? *HUH?*"

"Mama, it wasn't her fault! She told Joey
not to let the ball go in the road—"



"She was makin' up to Roy, Mom. He come
here to talk to her, and who knows what else."



“...Oh, so not only were you not lookin’ after the kids, but you were cozyin’ up to Patty’s ex-boyfriend!”

“What?”

“No, Patty, it wasn’t like that at all...we were just talking!”

“Don’t you play all innocent with us! Little slut!”

“Please, Gretchen—I swear!”

"Mom, she wasn't making up to Roy. She's not that type. The important thing is that Joey wasn't hurt."



"...She's really got you fooled, don't she? Well, she ain't got *me* fooled...nor Patty, nor Jack. They know her for just what she is—a

lying, filthy, disgusting little whore! What should we do with her now, kids?...How're we gonna teach this little tramp a lesson she won't be liable to forget?"



"...Put her in the basement. Let her live there a while. She ain't fit to live up here with us."

"Good idea. And this is just how we'll do it..."



“NOOOOO!!!”

“...It was viewed as a mixed blessing by everyone, later on, that Gretchen lost the baby she was carrying not long after that...”



"...They kept Susan in the basement for a couple of days, and then Gretchen let her go back to school. Teachers noticed her bruises, and finally, she was called to the guidance counselor's office...but she still refused to say anything about what was going on at home. That was Susan's last day of school. Somehow, word got back to Gretchen that she had been to see the guidance counselor, and from then on, she wasn't allowed out of the house. If she wasn't working upstairs, she was locked in the basement. And during the last two weeks of October, things got worse than ever for her..."



“...Wake up, slut.
There’s friends
here to see ya.”



“Gretchen...?”

“Well, hi, Roy...come
have a drink and
dance with me, why
dontcha?”

“...No, thanks...”



"Aw, you big, bashful baby...I haven't been dancin' in so long I had to see if I remembered how."

"...Is Susan here?"

"Sure, she's in the basement. Go on down...she's entertainin' a bunch of her friends..."



"...HAHAHA!!! How'd ya like that, little tramp?"

"I think she *did* like it!"

"OOOOOHH...she *liked* it!"

"What the *hell*...what's goin' on here?!!!"





“We’re teachin’ Susan a little lesson.”

“Yeah...she’s mouthy to Mom and she talks behind people’s backs.”

“She never does as she’s told. She even got kicked outta school. She’s probably pregnant from all her screwin’ around.”



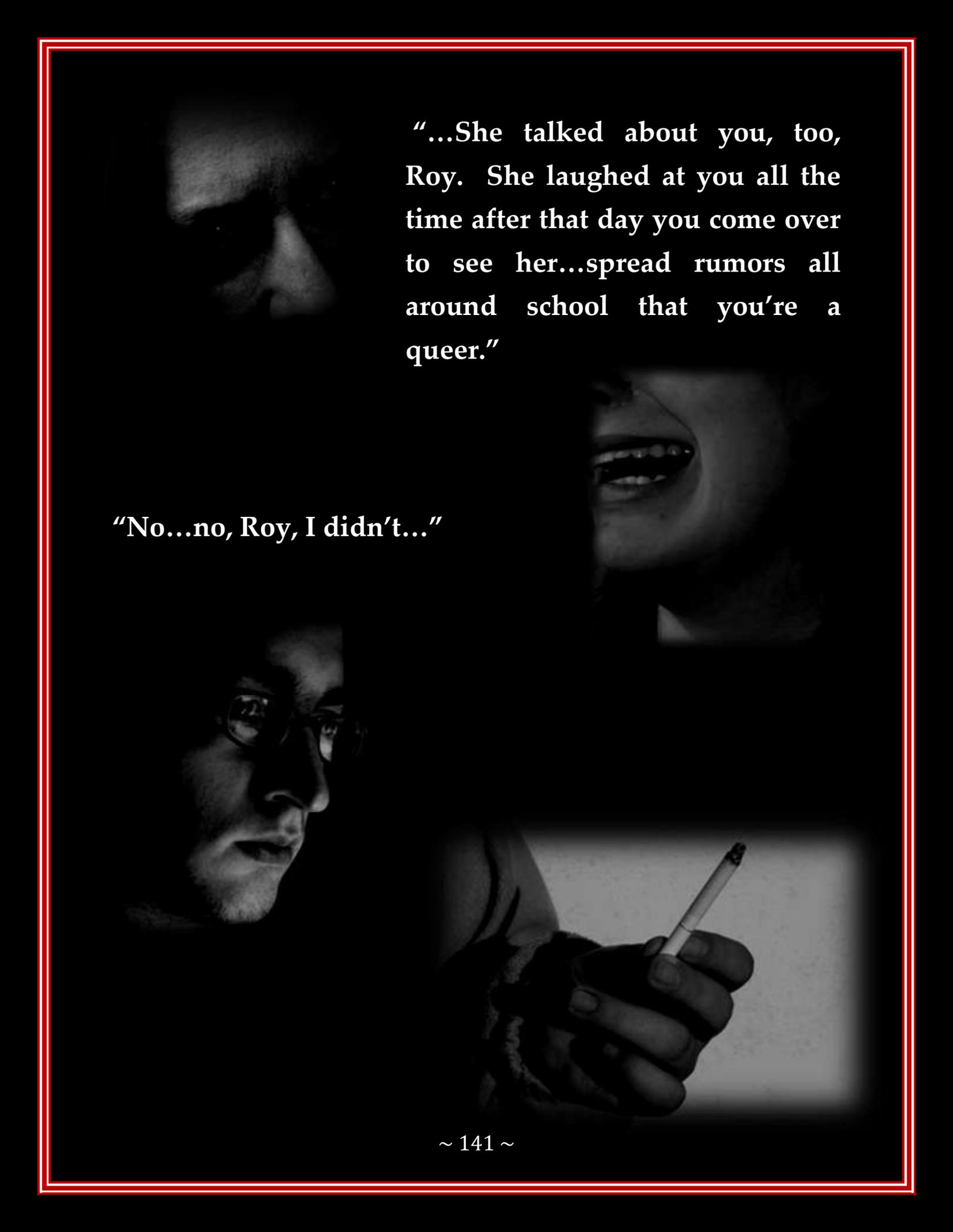
“...Sally?...You’re part of this?”



“Susan said some not-so-nice things about Patty, Roy. I tole her you wouldn’t like that, even if you are broke up. She told people at school that Patty was a whore. Now, can you beat that?”

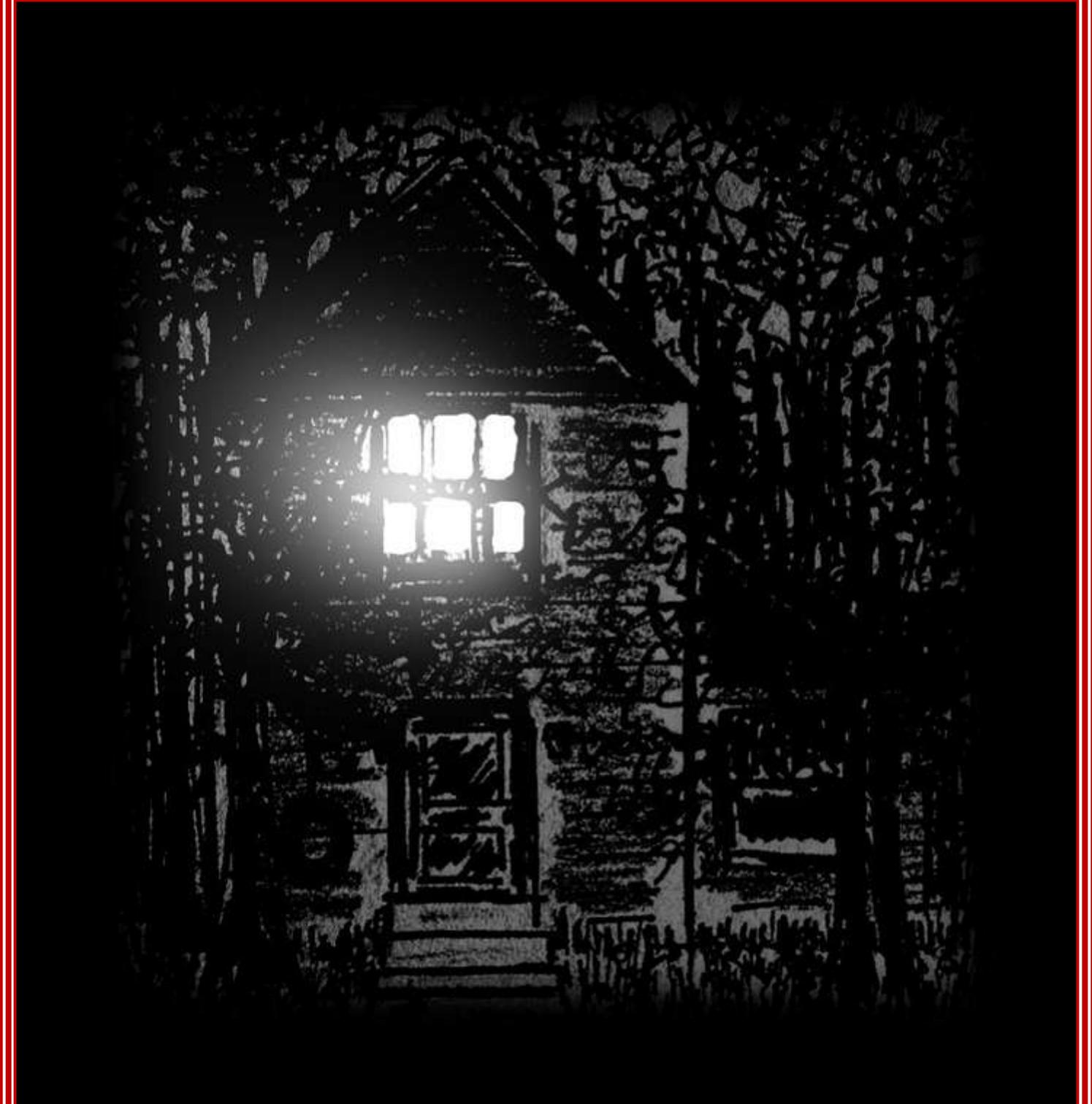


“...You wanna try it, Roy? Go on, burn her. It’s fun.”



“...She talked about you, too, Roy. She laughed at you all the time after that day you come over to see her...spread rumors all around school that you’re a queer.”

“No...no, Roy, I didn’t...”



"...Susan wasn't always in the basement. Sometimes, Gretchen let her upstairs for a bath..."



“...Goddamn it...Jack, hold her legs! She’s gettin’ hot water all over—it’s burnin’ me!”

“Hold still, you stupid bitch!”

“At least with the gag on, she can’t scream in our ears like she did.”

“HAHA...you got your brother there to thank for that, Patty...”

“My God...what are you *doing* to her?!!”



“The dirty skank’s gettin’ a bath, Sally, whaddya think? Don’t just stand there with your head up your ass! Get in here and help!”

“...I don’t want any part of that.”



“...What the hell is wrong with you, Sally? Whose side are you on around here?”

“I’m not on anybody’s side, Mom! I just don’t want any part of that.”

“She’s got it comin’ to her!”

“Why? Mom, why are you doing this?”

“...Because when I look at her, I see that slut who took your dad away from me. And not only that, but I see everything I used to be—and everything I’ve lost—and if somebody doesn’t step in and teach her a lesson before it’s too late, she’ll turn out no better than I did. Don’t you see, Sally? I’ve got her best interests at heart...just think of it as tough love. Doesn’t the Bible say, ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’? Her dad even told me she needed discipline. And she does—you know she does.”

“I only know what you’ve said about her.”





“Well, you’d better believe me. And you’d best believe me when I tell you to keep your mouth *shut*. Otherwise, you just might find *yourself* down in the basement keepin’ her company...That goes for you, too, Marion.”



“...It wasn’t like no one from outside knew what was going on. The house was fairly isolated...but remember the name of the woods around it. Sound carried.

People heard Susan screaming. One girl who saw the torture firsthand told her mother about it...”

“...Mom, they were really beating Susan up today over at the Bainbridges. They were kicking her around on the floor.”



“Well, then, she must have done something she shouldn't have.”

“...And even adults who saw what was going on failed to respond.”

“...Hi, Gretchen...thought I'd stop in for a chat...I finally got everything put away after the move.”

“Why, I'm glad you did, Edna. Sit down...coffee's on.”

“...Hi,



“My Lord, whatever happened to your face, child?”

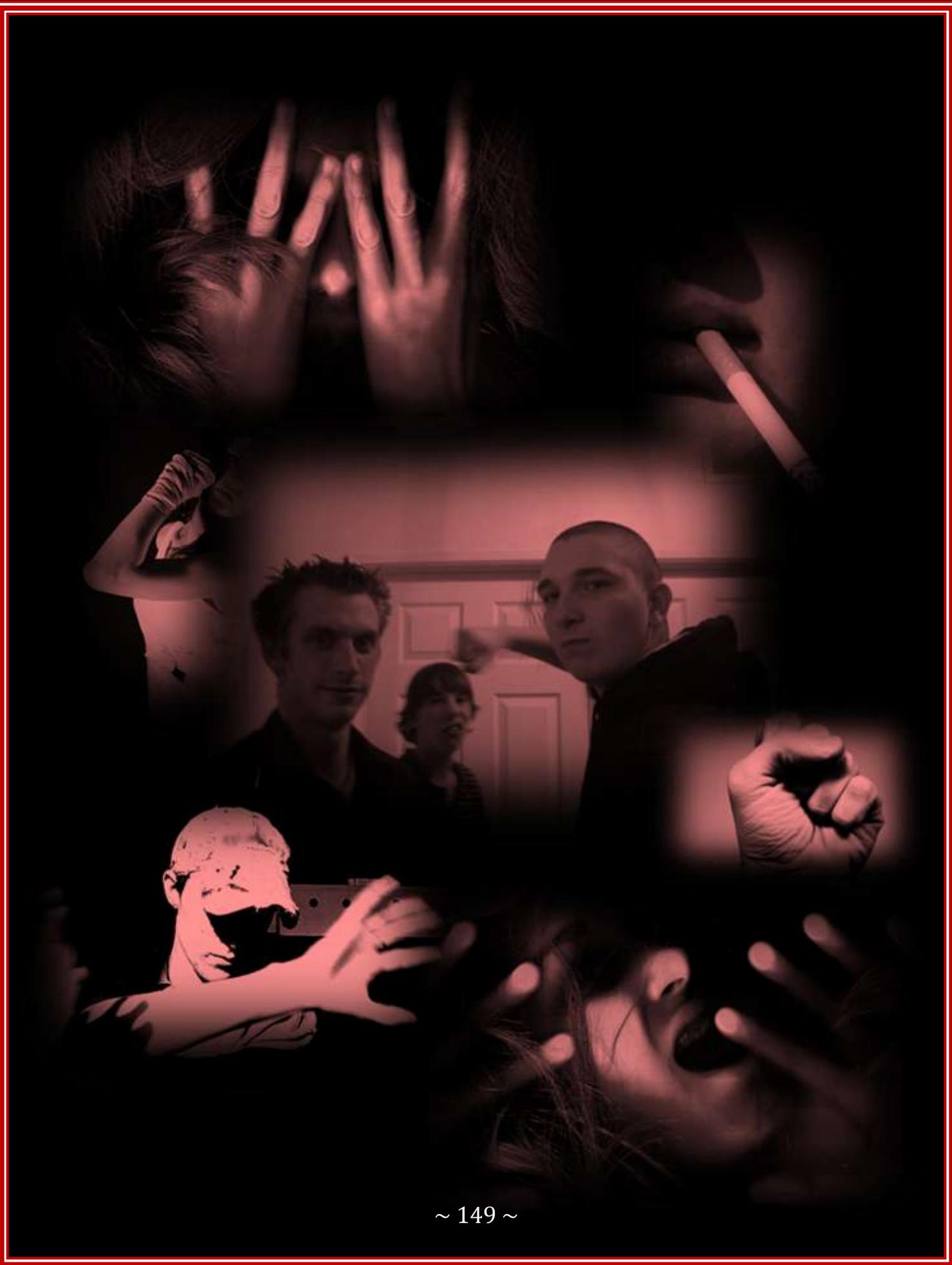


“Oh, that’s nothin’. I tried to kill her, but Mom wouldn’t let me, so she got off easy with just a black eye. That’s how I broke my wrist, too. I told her next time, I’d break the fuckin’ cast on her.”

“Get upstairs, Susan...now. Go on, get out of my sight!”









"...After about two weeks of being starved, beaten, burned, and dehumanized, it was clear to everybody in the Bainbridge house that Susan wasn't going to last much longer. That worried Gretchen a little—but then she came up with a plan..."



“...Now, write! Write everything I say, and don’t try anything cute, or I’ll clout your head backwards. Start with ‘To Whom It May Concern...I am leaving this house and I hope none of you comes looking for me...’”



“...All right, Patty...Jack...you two are gonna get rid of her tonight. You’re gonna take her across town and dump her in the hollows. We can’t take the chance of her dyin’ on us here...when the police find her, they’ll think a gang of boys done it, and this note’ll do the rest...”



"MOM!"

"...You ain't goin' anywhere! Get her back downstairs!"



"...Right then, a social worker showed up. Gretchen showed her the note she'd just made Susan write. That was all it took to satisfy her..."



"...But Gretchen never got the chance to dispose of Susan, because the poor girl died the next day, after being thrown around the basement by Jack, Roy, and the other neighborhood thugs. She hit her head and blacked out. She never woke up."

"...Faker! Faker! Get up!"

"Mom, it's over...she's dead..."



"She's faking it! FAKER!"

"Roy, get her out of here! Take her downstairs and call the police!"

"Okay, Sally...c'mon, Gretchen..."

"Faker...she's not dead...she's not dead..."



“...I’ll tell you

exactly what
happened, Officer.

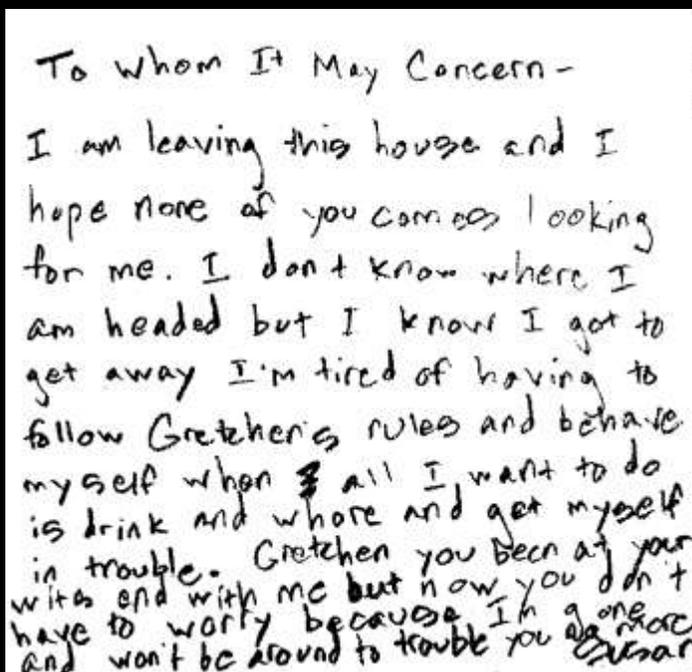
Susan was a wild
girl...no morals, no
morals at all...she’d
have as soon bedded
a boy as looked at

him...and all my other kids’ll vouch for that...well, just
night before last, she went and sneaked out of the house,
and left a note in the mailbox sayin’ she was runnin’
away for good. I know I shoulda come down right then

and reported it, but I was
hopin’ she’d come back on
her own—”

“Do you have that note,
Mrs. Bainbridge?”

“Yes, sir, I do...it’s right
here.”



To whom It May Concern -
I am leaving this house and I
hope none of you comes looking
for me. I don't know where I
am headed but I know I got to
get away I'm tired of having to
follow Gretchen's rules and behave
myself when ~~for~~ all I want to do
is drink and whore and get myself
in trouble. Gretchen you been at your
wits end with me but now you don't
have to worry because I'm gone
and won't be around to trouble you no more.
Susan

"...Who're you?"

"Roy Howell...I'm a friend of Gretchen, and her daughter, Patty."

"Did you know Susan?"

"No, sir...I really didn't know her at all."



"...So, did it happen as your mother described?"

"Yes, sir. Susan just wandered into the yard lookin' like that. We guessed she was beat up by a gang...she kept mumblin' about boys."

"All she ever thought about was boys. She brought it on herself."





“It’s really too bad...Mom tried so hard to teach her better ways. But Susan was just too headstrong to learn.”



“...What is it, honey? What’s the matter?...I know you must be upset about your sister...but is there something else wrong?...Are they not telling the truth about what happened to Susan?”

“...Get me out of here, and I’ll tell you everything...”



"...So, what happened then?"

"Gretchen got twenty years to life...she only served eighteen before they paroled her. Patty served six...Roy and Jack did about three years each, and then they were let loose, too. You gotta love the American criminal justice system. Roy Howell died of lung cancer when he was twenty-one...the same thing got Gretchen a while back. But as far as I know, the others are still out there, somewhere."

"...Jesus...that's scary as hell."

"It is scary as hell."

“But what I still don’t understand...is *why* they did it. If Susan never gave them any cause.”

“Mob mentality. The Bainbridge kids had gone without too much for too long, and they wanted to make someone pay for it. That person just happened to be Susan. If she hadn’t been in that house, it very likely would have been Sally or Marion who died...you had a group of kids who were given free reign over another human being—all their actions were sanctioned by Gretchen. That made everything they did okay in their



eyes—even the older ones. In court, whenever they were asked why they treated Susan the way they did, they all pretty much gave the same answer—‘Gretchen told me to.’”

“And Susan never fought back?”

“They said she did in the beginning, but then she got too weak. Plus, her will to live was gone.”



“...Did you say that Susan’s nickname was Cookie?”

“Yeah, it was.”

“...That was my mother’s nickname for me.”

“...Too amazing...And now you know all about Susan Linwood—the dark secret of Echo Forest.”

“...Why did you tell me all that?”

“Because you asked.”

“I didn’t ask until you brought me here and told me who lived in that house—oh, my God—Jimmy, what time is it?”

“Just past three-thirty.”

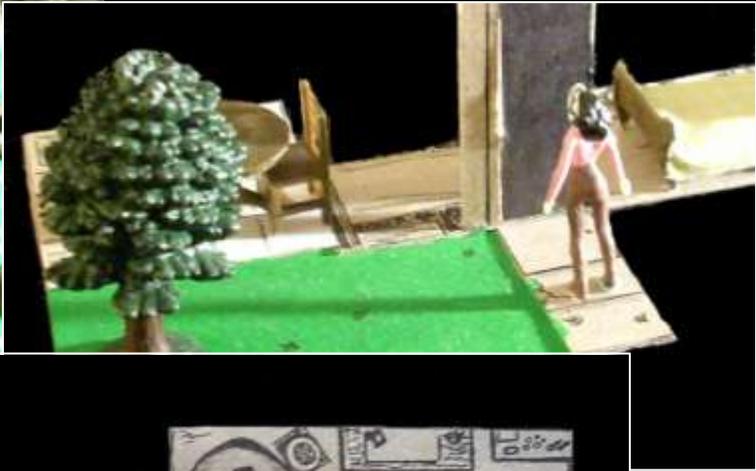
“Shit! I’ve gotta go—which way do I—”

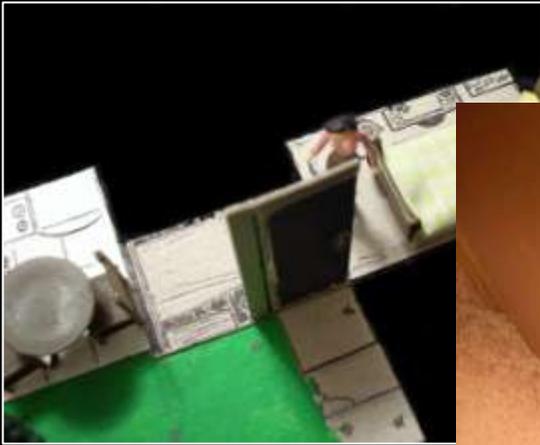
“Relax—I’ll walk you—”

“No! There’s no time! I’ve got to get home, *now!*”

“...Okay, well, just follow this road—you’ll come out about a block from your street. Are you sure you—”







“...Dad! Look, I know I’m late—”

**“You sure as hell are. But this’ll
be the last time...”**





“...Hi, Kit...Jimmy told us to—”

“...What?”



“...Jimmy called me this morning. He said to tell you he wouldn't be here today. His brother's gotta be in court, so he's there with his mom.”

“...Thanks...I'll see you.”

“...Should we tell somebody?”

“No point...one look tells all. Man, when Jimmy sees that, he'll go on a rampage. I'd better call and break the news later.”



“...How did it happen this time, Kit? Another fall on the stairs?”

"...I don't know what you're talking about."



"Kit, the school administration has a duty to intervene in a situation like this. With a phone call or two, with or without your consent, we can have you removed from your father's custody...immediately."

"A situation like what?"

"...Why won't you let me help you?"

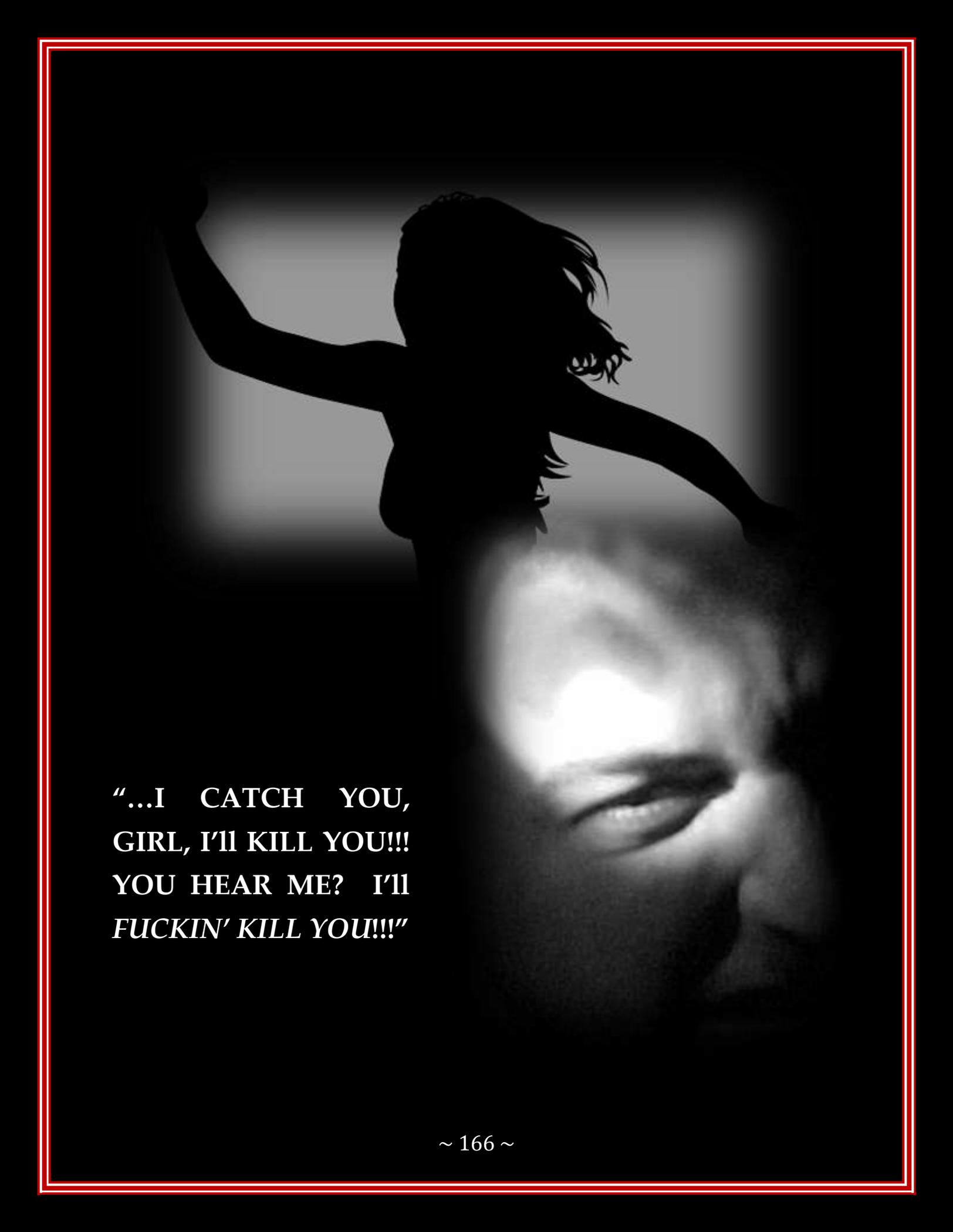
"I don't need your help."

"Your face is bruised and you have a cut lip."

"There's nothing wrong with my face."

"...Your clothes are disheveled...there's a pine needle in your hair...what did you have to do, Kit...spend the night outside, hiding from your dad?"

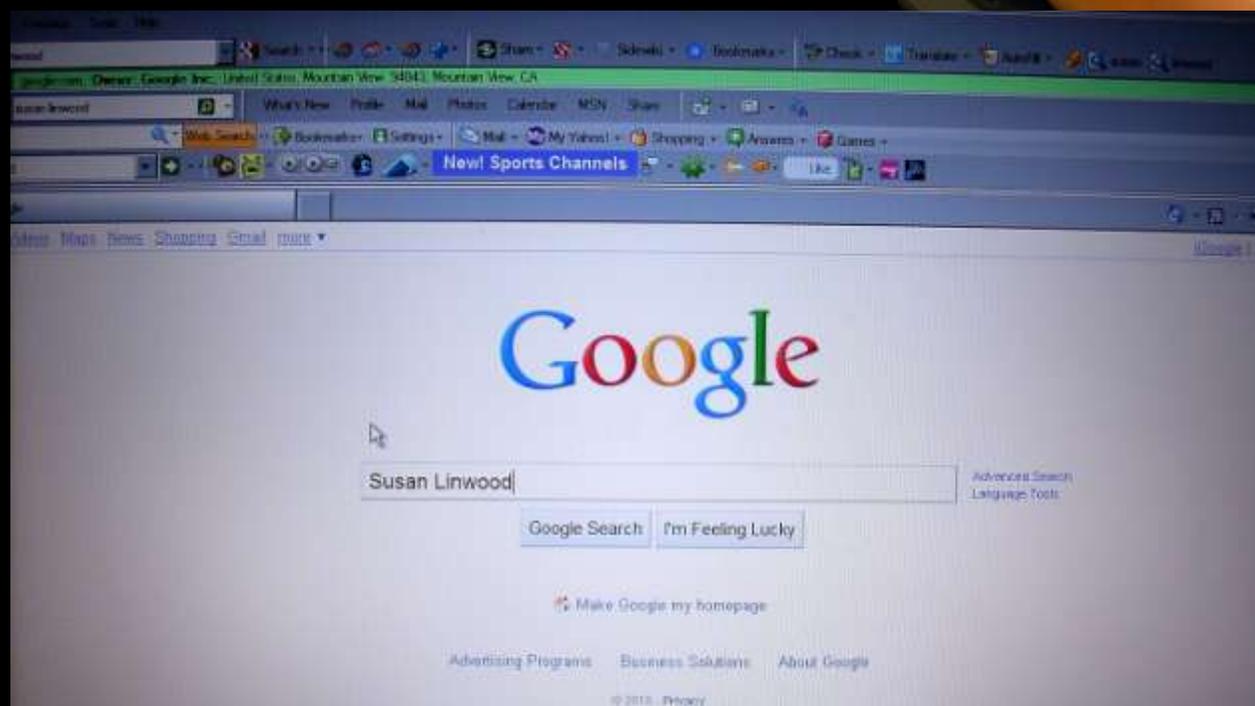




**"...I CATCH YOU,
GIRL, I'LL KILL YOU!!!
YOU HEAR ME? I'LL
FUCKIN' KILL YOU!!!"**

“...Kit, I have an obligation to report this...as I said—with or without your consent. Now, you can make it easy, and go with me up to Miss Wessner’s office, or you can wait until she summons you herself. But you *will* eventually have to talk to her, and probably others as well.”





[Susan Linwood – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.](#)

Susan Linwood (born January 3, 1965-died October 26, 1980) was a sixteen-year-old girl in Marigold, Ohio, who was brutally murdered by her stepmother, Gretchen Bainbridge...

[CrimeLibrary.com. The Torture-Murder of Susan Linwood...](#)Susan's father, country-and-western singer [Lennie Linwood](#), had left his daughter in the care of her new stepmother while he traveled...

[The Sad Case of Susan Linwood – Facts and Myths](#)



"...the girl's emaciated body had been so cruelly battered that even hardened police investigators and forensics analysts were speechless at the sight..."

"...At the time I first saw the body of Miss Linwood on October twenty-sixth, I believed her death to be the work of a lunatic," said Dr. Andrew Kanin, who performed the autopsy..."



Susan Linwood



Patty Bainbridge



Jack Bainbridge



Roy Howell



Gretchen Bainbridge

"...She was a shy girl, but very likeable, always polite and helpful..."

"...She loved the Beatles, and wrote her own songs..."

"...She wanted to be a singer like her father..."

"...Susan never did anything to any of the Bainbridge kids, or Gretchen..."

"...She was good, and Gretchen was evil, and it was as simple as that..."

"...All her nails were broken from scratching at the basement walls..."

"...They made her drink urine..."

"...They rubbed salt in her wounds..."

"...She could be heard screaming constantly, but nobody called the police...they figured it was none of their business..."





The mattress where Susan's body was found

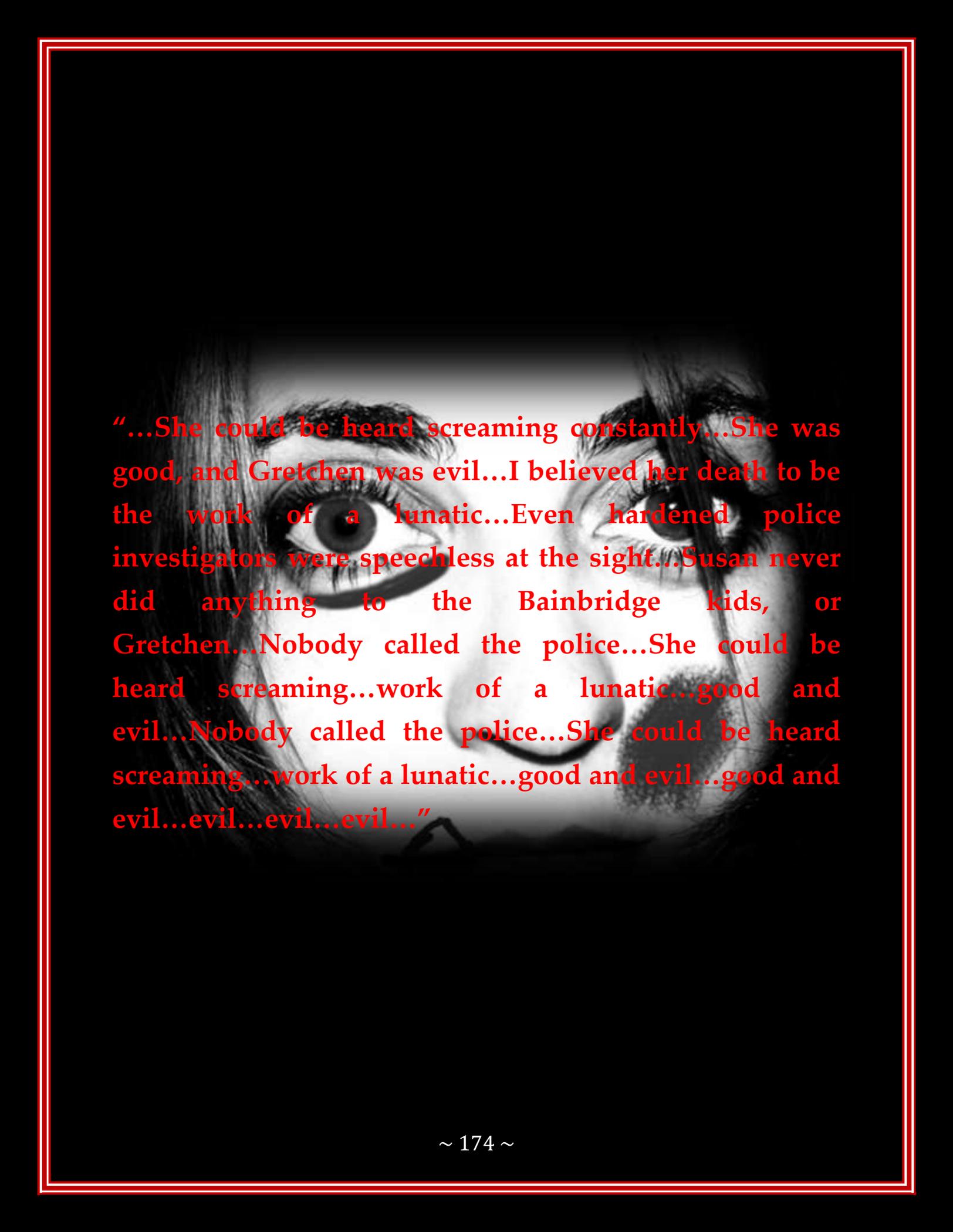




“...I’m sorry to have startled you, hon. You’re supposed to go and see Miss Wessner in her office.”







“...She could be heard screaming constantly...She was good, and Gretchen was evil...I believed her death to be the work of a lunatic...Even hardened police investigators were speechless at the sight...Susan never did anything to the Bainbridge kids, or Gretchen...Nobody called the police...She could be heard screaming...work of a lunatic...good and evil...Nobody called the police...She could be heard screaming...work of a lunatic...good and evil...good and evil...evil...evil...evil...evil...”



...Shortcut...I'll take the route through those woods...it's gonna rain like hell in a minute...





...I must be out of my mind...but I have to do this...





*Someone else
was here, too...*



*My God...I wonder if that's the same mattress...it's like
they never cleaned up the scene of the crime...*



*The
basement
door...Oh,
Kit, why
are you
doing this?*





“AAAAAAAAHHH!!!”



“...Who is she?”

“...Where’d she
come from?”

“Is it Susan? It’s got to be...”

“No, dummy...Susan’s tied up.”

“How’d she get in here?”



“Hey—who the hell are you?
What’re you doin’ in our
basement?”

“...Wake up! How’d you get in
here?”



“...I
don’t...know...where I
am...”

“Could she be drunk or
something?”

“I don’t know. But we gotta
tell Mom. C’mon, get up.
You get up, right now!”





"Mom? Mom, come here, quick!"

"...Well, now. What the hell's this?"



“We found her in the basement, at the foot of the stairs. She musta sneaked in somehow.”



“...That what you did?...You sneak in my house? You tryin’ to steal from me?”

“No!...No...please, I swear—I don’t even know how I got here...”



“I’ll bet she’s a friend of Susan’s. She probably broke in to try to rescue her—”

“SHUT UP!...That so?...You from the high school?...You know Susan?...Any of you kids seen her before?”



“No, Mom.”



"What's your name, girl?"

"Kit MacGuire...I swear I don't know how I got down there..."

"Maybe I can refresh your memory..."



"You still not know how you got in my basement?"



"...No...no..."



"She must be stoned or something. She acted real out-of-it when we found her."

"...Did she, now?...Well, well. She don't look so good at that...maybe she's been livin' hard. Probably a hooker...bet that face

gets her a lotta gravy. That what you are, little girl, huh?...You a pavement pounder?...Cat's really got a hold on your tongue, don't it?"



"No! I just...I came in...to get out of the rain!"

"...Rain?...*Rain*?...You think we're complete morons, kid? There ain't no rain."

"...Rain...rain...rain...it's even raining inside..."

"...Damn...you *are* stoned, aren't you? Never mind, guys...just leave her be for right now...must be a leftover from the Acid Age..."



“...Don't worry...we'll handle her all right...it'll be as easy to get rid of two as one...Jack—Patty—go bring the other little bitch up here.”



“...Oh...Roy's out there. Hell, we got us a party here tonight. Let him in, Sally.”



“Evening...whoa...who's *that?!*”

"Some dumb broad who turned up in the basement, just now...she's stoned shitless. Prob'ly got in through that damn window that won't latch right. Maybe you could fix it for me sometime...pay me back for all that beer I ain't supposed to be givin' ya."



"Are you gonna call the cops on her?"

"Cops?...C'mon, Roy...*think.*"

"...What're you gonna do with her?"



"Mmm...looks like she'll be joinin' the other one in the hollows across town tonight."

"...She's been beat up pretty bad."



“...Yeah...looks kinda like a gang of boys had their way with her.

Ain't that funny?...She'll fit right in with Susan when they find 'em

both...*hack...hack...hack...*Goddamn asthma...this

stuff's the only thing keeps my throat open.”



“...Raining...pouring...the old man is snoring...”

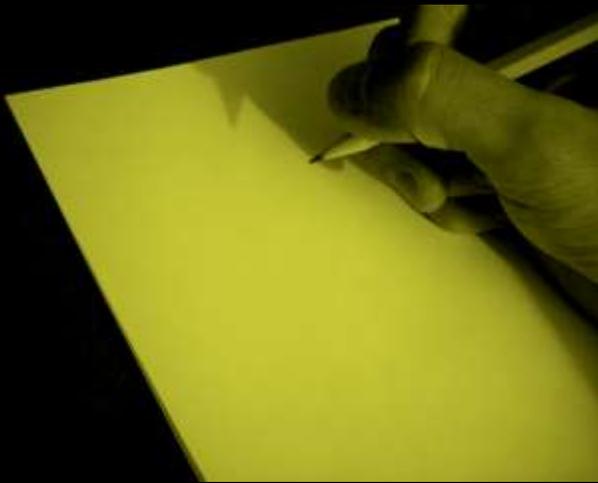


“See what I mean? Stoned. We ain't had no rain for a solid week.”



...My God, it's her...it's Susan...I can't let on that I know...

“...Put her down at the table. Susan?...Wake up, now, stupid. Wake up and listen...You’re gonna write a note. I’ll tell you what to say...Damn it, *pick up* the pencil!



...Okay...now, write! Write everything I say, and don’t try anything cute, or I’ll clout your head backwards. Start with ‘To Whom It May Concern...I am leaving this house and I hope none of you comes lookin’ for me’...You got that?...Good...Now, write ‘I don’t know where I am headed, but I know I got to get away...I’m tired of having to follow Gretchen’s rules and behave myself...when all I want to do is drink and whore and get myself in trouble...Gretchen, you been at your wits’ end with me...but now you don’t have to worry because I’m gone and won’t be around to trouble you no more’...Now, sign it...all right...fine...give that here...looks good, Susan. You done that so well, you can have some crackers.”



“...I don’t want any
crackers...I’m not hungry now.”



“Goddamn little troublemaker, right to the end, ain’t
ya?”

"Mom, somebody's at the door!"

"I got my own ears—I can hear the damn doorbell! All right—Roy, Jack, Patty—get these two to the basement! Now!"



"HEEELL—"





“...I hear one sound, you’re both dead.”



“Good evening. I’m Olivia Parkins, from Child Protective Services. Are you Mrs. Linwood?”

“I was, briefly, but now I’m Mrs. Bainbridge again. What can I do for you, Miss Parkins?”

“Well, I’m here about Susan, your stepdaughter. I was sent by the guidance department at Marigold High School to inquire after her, as she hasn’t been there for almost two weeks.”



"I should have known it was Susan you were here about...none of my other children give me a bit of trouble, but that one's what you might call a bad seed. You're right—Susan hasn't been to school in two weeks. I'm fully aware that it's my responsibility to see that she goes, but lately that takes somethin' I don't have in me. You see, I recently suffered a miscarriage..."



"Oh, I am so sorry to hear that."

"...Then, just before, my poor husband passed away. Plus, my asthma's flared up real bad...*hack...hack...hack...*so, things've been very chaotic around here, as you may imagine. But I got *another* blow dealt me today when I took in the mail...she ran away, Susan did, last night. She left this in the box..."





"...Quit fightin' me, or I'll carve my initials on you. You don't believe me, just ask Susan, there. She's got 'em on her belly."







"...I am terribly sorry to have bothered you, Mrs. Bainbridge...I know how upset you must be right now."

"That's quite all right, Miss Parkins. I appreciate your concern."

"I'll see that this gets noted on Susan's records at the school. By the way...you did the right thing by reporting this to the police, even though it hasn't been twenty-four hours since you saw Susan."

"You may bet I got right over there this morning when I saw that note. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that they find her and bring her back here soon...so many things can happen to a young girl alone out there nowadays."

"I'll say a prayer for Susan...and for you, Mrs. Bainbridge. You're a good woman."

"Thank you, Miss Parkins. Good night."





“...Son of a bitch! Now I’ll have to wait till *tomorrow* to get rid of those two bitches...and I’ll have to go to the police station first thing in the morning. I sure hope *that one* don’t poke her nose in and find out I ain’t been there yet, the dumb bitch!”

...This can’t be real...I have to be hallucinating or something...it’s impossible. But it’s so vivid...it doesn’t feel like a regular dream...What am I going to do?...What am I going to do?



“Who are you...are you real?”

“...You scared me...yes, Susan...I’m real. You’re not alone down here anymore. I’m Kit.”



"...How'd you get in the house?"

"I'm not sure myself...every second I think I'm gonna wake up somewhere else."

"...I know that feeling...I've had it for a long time...are you an angel?"

"...No, Susan. I'm not an angel, but I sure wish I was...so I could get us out of here."

"You're prob'ly strong enough still to get out...me...I'm gonna die...I can feel it."

"You don't want to talk like that, Susan. You're alive now...as long as you're breathing...there's a chance."

"...A chance...for what?"

"Just a chance. Susan...I need some time to think...about what we can do. In the meantime, I want you to keep talking. I think you might have a concussion, so it's important that you don't sleep, okay?"



"...'Kay..."

"...Susan...I know...well, I've...*heard*...about what they've been doing to you...and I am so, so *sorry*...but...*why* did you take it? Why did you ever let it go this far? Why didn't you...why didn't you ask anyone for help while you could?"

"...It wasn't so bad at first...my daddy was alive, then...I wish he was here, now..."

"...I know..."

"...I guess I was sort of ashamed, later on...when it got worse..."

"Ashamed...yes. And embarrassed..."

"...Yeah...I told my dad...but he didn't believe me, I don't think. And who would, if he wouldn't?"

"Why didn't you run away?"

"...Nowhere else to go..."

“...Why didn't you tell the school guidance counselor the truth, when you had the chance?”

“...How did you know about that?”

“...I guess I just can't believe that the guidance counselor at your school wouldn't have asked about the marks on you.”

“...She did...on my last day there.”

“Why didn't you let her help you?”

“...I was afraid...I couldn't face it...how bad things were. I knew I'd get even worse punishment if anyone found out I'd ratted...and I thought I could stick it out for another two years...till I was eighteen...if I had to...”

“...So did I.”

“What?”

“Nothing...it's okay. Just keep talking.”

“...I'm glad you're here...”

“...I am, too.”



“...I’ve been prayin’ for a long time...that God wouldn’t let me die here alone. He must’ve finally heard me...they say He always has a plan...”



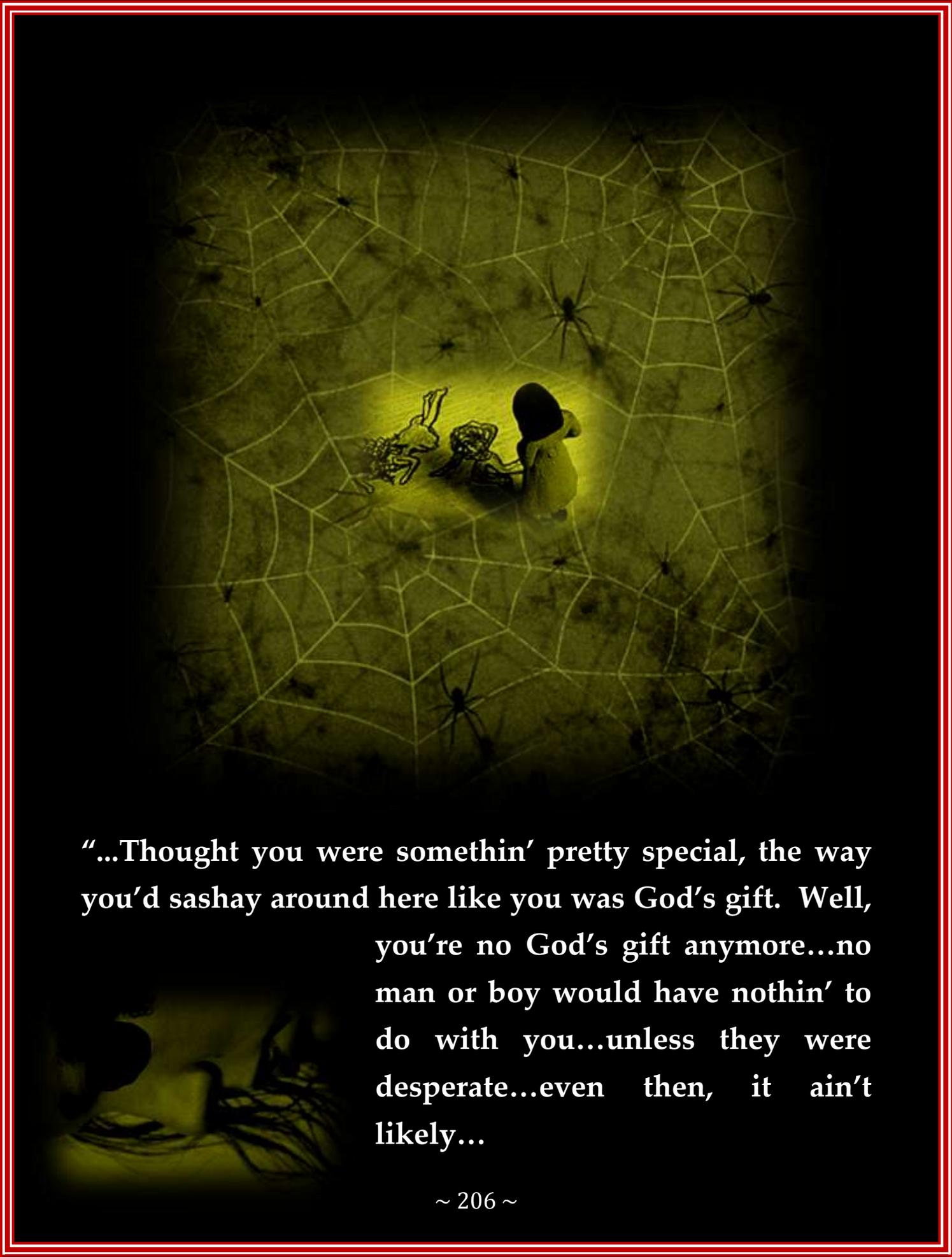
“...Well, so do I, Susan. You’re not gonna die...and we’re getting out of here.”

“...Oh, no...someone’s coming...”

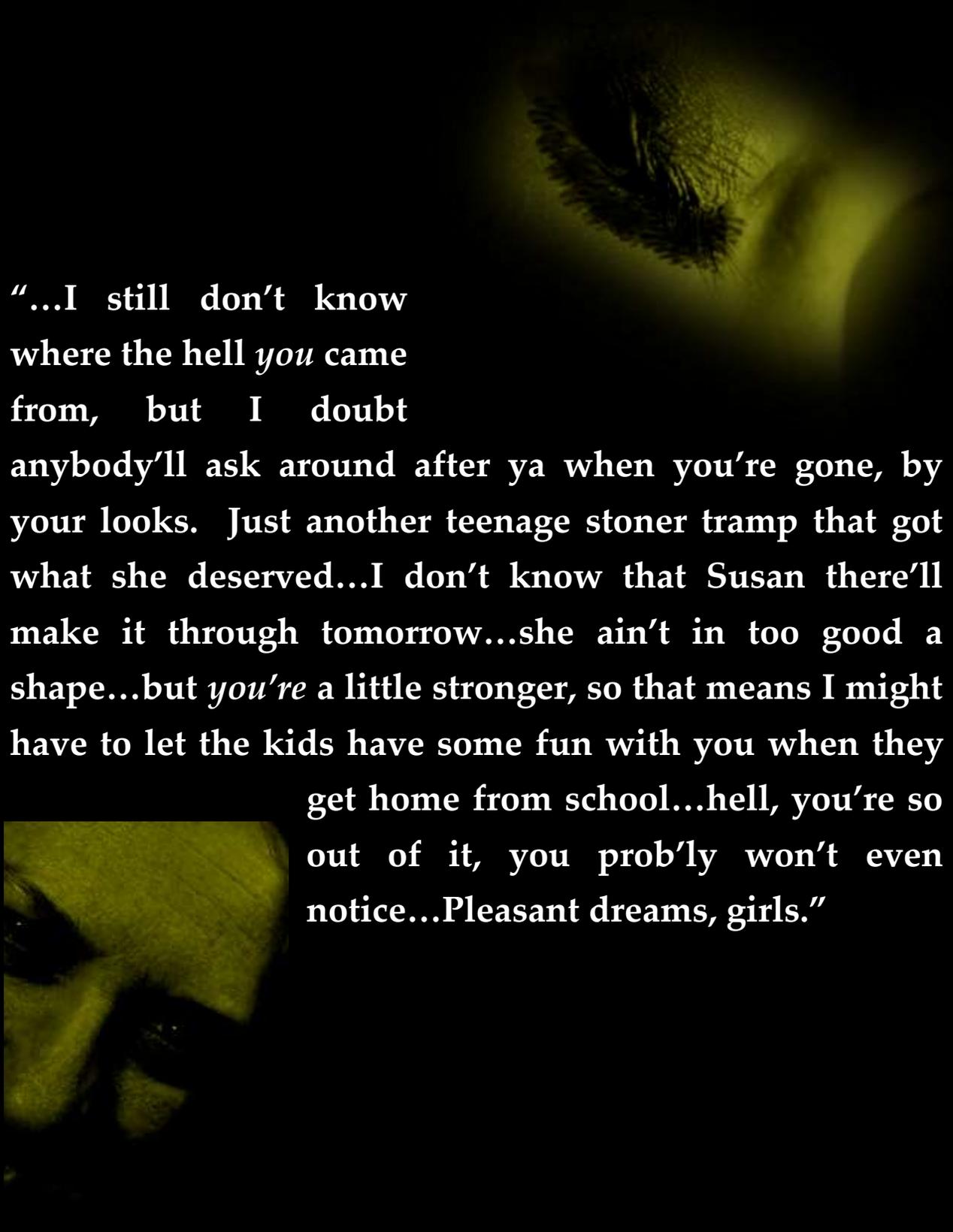
“...Don’t be afraid...”

“...Looks like you two got a reprieve till tomorrow night...that’s when you’re both goin’ to the hollows across town. Can’t wait to be rid of you...’specially you, Susan. Nothin’s gone right for me since the day I first saw your face. Guess I even liked your old man more’n I ever liked you. That perky little smile of yours...that bouncy walk...you ain’t so perky and bouncy *now*, are ya?...”





“...Thought you were somethin’ pretty special, the way you’d sashay around here like you was God’s gift. Well, you’re no God’s gift anymore...no man or boy would have nothin’ to do with you...unless they were desperate...even then, it ain’t likely...”



“...I still don’t know where the hell *you* came from, but I doubt anybody’ll ask around after ya when you’re gone, by your looks. Just another teenage stoner tramp that got what she deserved...I don’t know that Susan there’ll make it through tomorrow...she ain’t in too good a shape...but *you’re* a little stronger, so that means I might have to let the kids have some fun with you when they get home from school...hell, you’re so out of it, you prob’ly won’t even notice...Pleasant dreams, girls.”





“...Oh, my God...”

“Susan, it’s all right. It’s over. Now come on. Let’s get out of here.”

“...No...you shouldn’t...bother with me...you should just get out while you can...”

“I’m not leaving you here.”



“...I’ll never forget this...”

“Neither will I.”





***“OH,
GOD!!!”***



“Susan, it’s okay! One
foot in front of the
other...come *ON!!!*”

“I
CAN’T...”

“Yes, you can!...You’ve
got to try! *PLEASE!!!*”

**"...Rest...please let me rest
a minute..."**

**"It's too late, Susan! We
have to get out of here!
This whole house is—"**



"Going so soon?!!"



“...Sneaky
little
bitch...not so
stoned after
all...”







“...Mama?...MAMA!!!!”

“The basement’s on fire!!!”

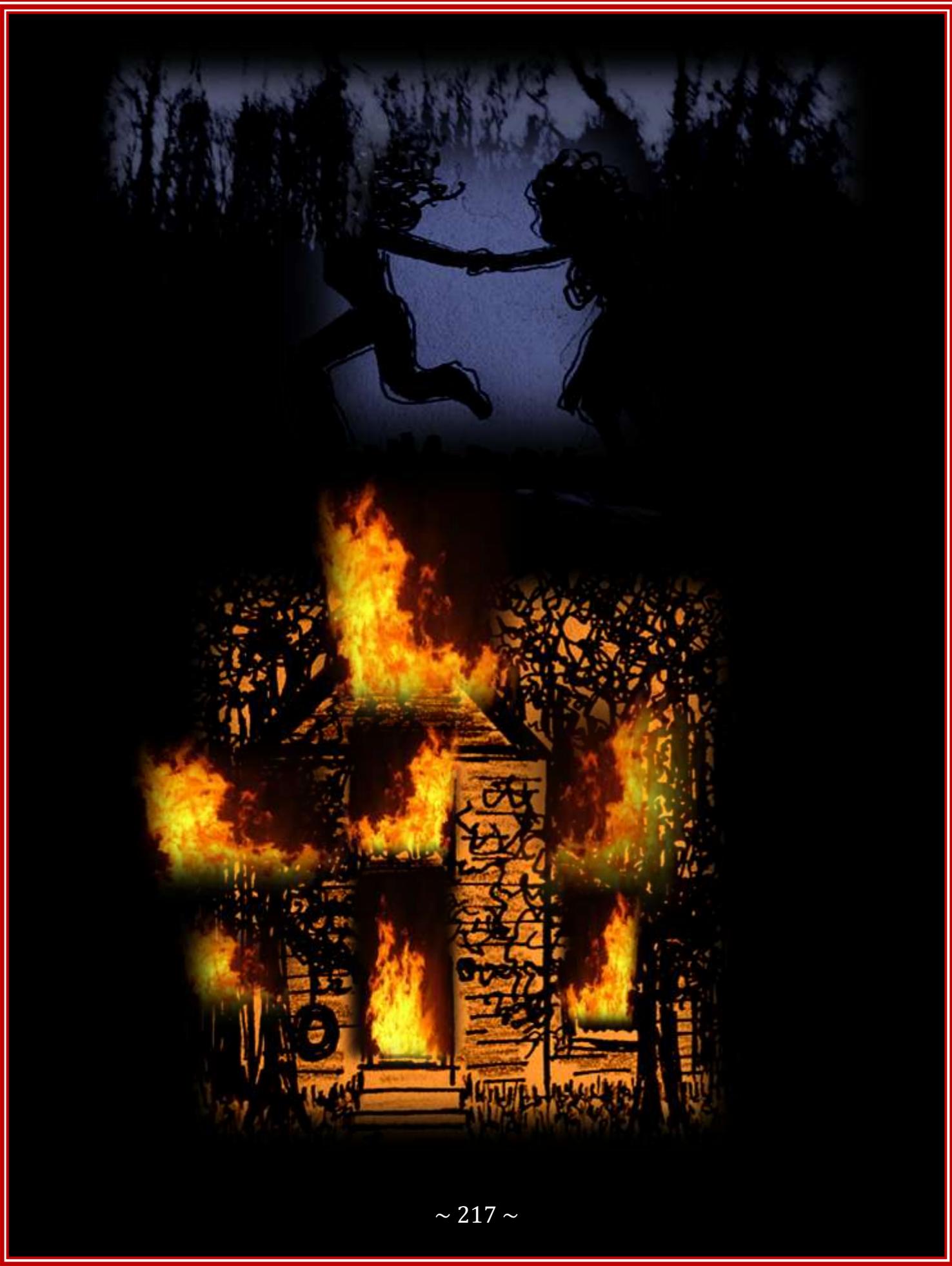
“Come on, kids! EVERYBODY OUTSIDE!!! NOW!!!!”



“...Please...just leave me behind...get help...”

“If we can hide in the woods...we’ll have a chance...”













"...Kit!"



"...Hi, Jimmy..."





"Kit...I was half out of my mind...the hearing was short...I went to school...Phil and Dennis told me your dad beat you again...Kit, I refuse to let this go on...I don't care if I lose you as a friend...even if I have to break his neck myself..."

"...You won't have to do that. And just so you know...there's more than one reason why they call this Echo Forest."

"...Did you come here to report what happened?"



"...Yes..."

"...Thank God..."

"Can I be of some help?..."

"You sure can...this is my girlfriend."





"Hi, there...what happened, honey?"

"...I've been having problems...with my dad. He beat me."

"...I'm so sorry. But you came to the right place. I'm Susan Gates. What's your name?"



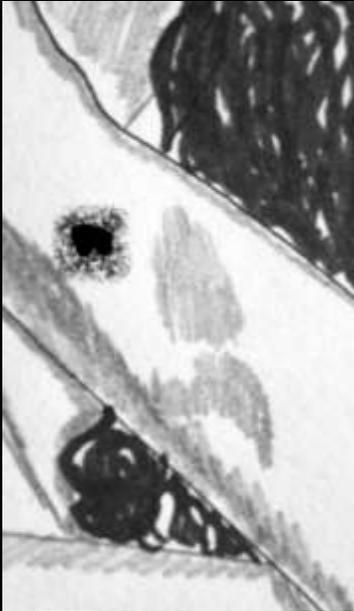
"Kit...Kit MacGuire."



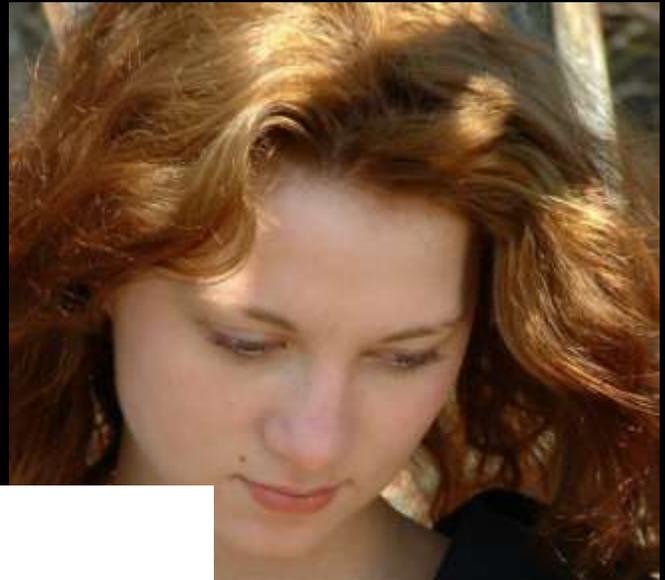
"...Have we met before, Kit?"



"Anything's possible..."



"Cigarette burn...those are nasty..."



"...I've got personal experience."

"...This is so crazy..."



"I know, hon. But don't worry about anything right now, okay? You're safe here. Let's get you inside."





Written, drawn, and photographed

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: If you or someone you know is experiencing child abuse or domestic violence, PLEASE report it to your local police department, school administration, or child welfare agency.

You may save a life...even your own.