



MALICE: A Short Story by
Angel Berry

MALICE

“These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination to him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” – Proverbs 6:16-19

September 23, 8:55 p.m.

When Detective Justin Young walked into the A-1 Bar that night he was feeling relaxed and carefree. He was meeting a couple guys from his old crew for some drinks and he could hardly wait to see them. He saw Rich and Mike sitting at the bar and he walked over and clapped Mike on the back and then took a good punch in the side from Rich.

“What’s going on, Mr. Homicide?” Rich said teasingly to Justin. He laughed and his smooth brown skin crinkled around the eyes. He gestured for the bartender and Justin ordered a beer.

“You know me,” Justin said, sitting down on a bar stool between them, “I have the ability to solve crimes wherever I go.”

Mike laughed and a deep rumbling issued from his barrel chest. “We miss you out there is all Rich is saying.”

“Awww,” Justin said jokingly, ruffling Mike’s red hair.

“How are they treating you over there at Homicide?” Mike asked, batting Justin’s hand away.

“Not bad. It’s a change.”

“Yes?” Rich said. “I heard you got that floater, the Russian guy who turned up in the river?”

“Uh huh. It took a while to ID him. Never really got the whole story of what he was doing in the States.” Justin replied, guzzling his beer.

“Hmm.” Mike ran a hand through his beard. “We wanted to ask you about that. You know, word on the street is that the Russians are supplying the Irish mafia right here in Philly.”

“What?” Justin asked, surprised. “Mac Kennedy?”

Mike nodded to him.

“I don’t think so. That guy is old school.” Justin wasn’t buying it. “Doubt it.”

“No, no,” Mike replied, turning to Justin. “From the information we have, Mac Kennedy is being pushed out by his nephew, Dominic. Dominic knows that Mac’s connects aren’t going to deal with him while Mac’s alive, and even though Dominic’s a murdering bastard he’s not gonna kill his uncle. He went direct to the Russians – not Philly Russians, but Russia Russians.” Mike looked at Justin to make sure he was following him.

“No,” Justin said, still not convinced. “Mac is old school and so are the guys that he deals with. They’d get rid of this Dominic guy if he stepped out of line no matter who his uncle was.”

“Not if somebody started to get rid of them first. You know Renaldo Shaughnessy in Chicago? Dead.” Rich informed him. “Alexander Quinn, still haven’t found that guy.”

“The old guy in Vegas?” Justin asked surprised.

Mike nodded. “We’ve got a CI that says the control of power has shifted. He says there’s this guy in Russia by the name of Vladimir Arsov. Vladimir worked for a long time as a bodyguard for this Russian dude, Ivan Byko. Ivan was found murdered in his home about six months ago shot execution style. This dude was the main man in Russia, but in the end they found him in his boxers, on his hands and knees dead on his own living room floor. Now Vladimir has taken his place at the table, but people don’t trust him because of what happened to Byko. Now if this Vladimir could get someone with enough cash to buy from him, someone as mean as he is, well, then he knows soon others will follow suit. That’s all we know for now,”

Mike said, “but from what we can tell, this Dominic has people afraid.”

“And you’re telling me that none of the Irish bosses are going to do anything about him?”

Justin asked in disbelief.

“Well,” Mike said, “not everyone is unhappy with the change if you catch my drift.”

“What do you know about Dominic Kennedy?” Justin asked.

Rich signaled for the bartender to bring three more beers. “That he’s a murdering bastard but he’s smart. If we can get something on him we may be able to get to Mac Kennedy. Right now we’re going after this guy Joey Boyle. The Black Hand has a contract out on this guy for popping some gangster’s brother in a robbery. Thing is, Boyle used to work for the Kennedy family and if my gut is right – and it usually is – he’s gonna have something on the Kennedys that we can use to get to Mac.”

“What makes you think he’ll talk to you?” Justin asked.

“Because he knows that the longer he stays on the street, the sooner the Hand will get to him and they’re an unsavory bunch,” he said, sharing a laugh with Mike. “We’ll be the only thing standing between him and a bullet in his ass. I know you’re working homicide now, Justin, but we could use you on our side with this. Maybe you’ll find out what happened with your floater. Captain says he can pull a few strings with Homicide to get you in with us. What do you say?”

Justin didn’t even have to think about it. “I’m in.”

September 25th, 4:23 a.m.

One. Two. Three. Justin counted silently to himself as he tried to still his breathing. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath and waited as his ears tuned themselves to their surroundings – until the sound of the wind whistling through the bare, leafless trees was as crisp

as the cold air he was breathing deeply through his lungs. He could feel the tension in the men around him. It was the wee hours of the morning and all was quiet on the city block. He nodded as Mike pointed two fingers at him, motioning to him that he was to be second through the door and then, *boom*, the Enforcer hit the door and they were in.

“Police! Hands up! On the ground now!” The squad quickly entered the house, methodically spreading out to cover the upper and lower floors.

With his experienced eye, Justin quickly took in the situation, noting the dimness of the room and the three men who were standing in the main dining area as they made entry. When they had approached the dilapidated house, Justin had noticed then that the windows were covered with what appeared to be blankets. Their fugitive, Joey Boyle, was a small, Irish, heavily bearded man who was rumored to have a paranoid, rather nervous disposition. He had been involved in an armor truck robbery three months prior, and in addition, was also wanted for the murder of one of the men who assisted in the robbery.

From what Mike had told him, the man Boyle had killed had secreted away to Philly with the intention of doing this robbery with Joey just to make some extra money on the side. He got himself murdered by Joey and another man in their attempt to rob him of his share of the loot. Unfortunately and unbeknownst to Joey, the man they robbed and murdered just so happened to be the brother of a member of the Black Hand, a Jamaican crime family out of New York. The police were hoping to get to Joey before the Black Hand did and offer him a deal and protection in exchange for information on organized crime in Philadelphia, specifically, the Kennedy family and they had gotten an anonymous tip that Boyle was hiding out in this home.

Suddenly a gunshot rang out and Justin raced to the back of the house through the kitchen and out the back door to see his comrades wrestling a man to the ground. The struggling man

was average height, mid-forties, slim and wiry, heavily bearded and strong as a man three times his size. Once they had him under control and handcuffed, Justin kneeled down in front of him

“Joey Boyle?” He asked.

“No, Donald Duck, man. What the fuck’s going on?”

“Mr. Boyle, I’m Detective Justin Young. We have a warrant for your arrest. Here let me help you up,” Justin said politely, as he bent and lifted Joey off the ground.

Joey stared hard at the young detective and tried to gauge whether or not he was soft. Though the detective was friendly and polite, Joey could see the steely look in his eyes and decided that he wouldn’t do well if he tried to fight again.

“Yeah, well I don’t know a Joe Boyle,” Joey answered, squaring his shoulders and returning the detective’s stare.

“Look, Joey,” Justin said, “I can still arrest you for assaulting a police officer. You and I both know that when your prints come back the tag is gonna say Joey Boyle. Do you want to go down for murder and robbery?”

Joey stared at Justin and nonchalantly shrugged his shoulders.

Justin tried a different tactic. “When you go to the county to await trial, Joey, I can almost promise you that you’re going into general population where the Jamaicans can reach you. All I want to do is talk, Joe. Maybe we can help each other out.”

Joey exhaled and shook his head in disbelief. If it hadn’t been for the contract on his head he would have refused. Either way, he was screwed and he was tired of looking over his shoulder. He nodded and bowed his head as Justin escorted him to the squad car.

Johnson Monaham sat on the porch in his usual spot and watched the residence that sat

directly opposite his own house. It was four in the afternoon, and that pervert Larry Gordon would be leaving for work soon. Johnson sat at this very window every day at this very same time and watched Larry leave the house where he lived with his indulgent mother to venture off to work in a rusty, gray minivan. *Who would give a pervert a job?* Johnson did not know.

Like clockwork, the short, peevisish looking man exited the ranch style home dressed in his usual blue work uniform. Johnson leaned forward in his wheelchair, his eyes widened under bushy, gray eyebrows, and peered at Larry the same as he did every day – as if he'd missed something about the man that he hadn't seen before; that if he studied him hard enough, he would discover that new flaw in what he already deemed to be a freak of nature. *Same flabby body, same receding hairline, same dark glasses.* Larry climbed into the van and drove away.

Johnson sighed and sat back in his seat. He had lived in this house for forty years and that Gordon woman had been in her house just as long. He remembered when she had moved in that house with her husband. Gary Gordon had taken the easy way out and blown his head off in the Gordon bathtub to escape having to live his life. Young Larry had been about ten then, but a peculiar child as far as Johnson had been concerned. While he had never had any children of his own, he had been around enough of them, and Johnson had never known a child – a boy child for that matter – that didn't go out to play with other kids his age, ride a bicycle, climb trees – something.

That boy didn't do diddly-squat. He'd sit on the porch sometimes with a vacant expression on his face and watch the other children play and when the boy reached his teenage years, he became even odder. Mrs. Gordon didn't send the boy to the public school with the rest of the children, but preferred instead to send him to a private school for boys where he was gone most of the year. He would come home from breaks solemn and reserved, but attentive, and

Johnson didn't like the way he watched the other children.

Johnson had known something was wrong with him and his suspicions were confirmed when an adolescent boy from a few blocks over accused Larry of sodomizing him in the Gordon garage. Larry had lured the boy into the backyard with the promise of toys and at seventeen years old, Larry Gordon was hauled off to the penitentiary for raping an eleven year old boy.

Mrs. Gordon didn't move away as Johnson had hoped she would. No, she held her ground though her house was egged and vandalized with spray paint that spelled out the ways in which she and her son would burn in hell; she stayed through two vehicles whose gas tanks had been clogged with sugar.

When the notices came in the mail that a sex offender was moving back into the area the neighborhood was outraged. Ten years later and Larry Gordon was coming home to his mother. Johnson didn't like it at all and a year later he continued to keep an eye on the Gordon home. Wheelchair or no wheelchair, if that son of a bitch touched another kid in this neighborhood he'd be eating one of Johnson's shotgun shells.

He was interrupted from his reverie by the sound of a car horn blowing. He leaned forward in his seat to peer down the street and then smiled. He heard the screen door slam against the house at the corner as little Lisa Young ran out to meet her uncle. Her blonde, seven year old pig tails flew behind her as she leapt into the man's arms. *There's his girl*, Johnson thought, smiling. Johnson and Lisa had made fast friends. She was allowed to ride her bike from one end of the corner to another, and on one of their many chats, she'd proudly told Johnson that her uncle was a detective.

Johnson had never met him, but he was glad that she and her mother had someone to look out for them. Lisa had once told him that her dad had died in a war – Johnson assumed the

Middle East – and that her uncle, Justin, took care of them. Johnson chatted with the little girl almost daily and he looked forward to seeing her child grin – a grin that was missing two front teeth of which she assured him would grow back in no time. This led them to the discussion of Johnson having lost his teeth long ago which required him to have these nifty teeth that the dentist gave him which he could remove at any time – he’d demonstrate to Lisa to her utmost *ewww* delight.

Johnson watched as the pair entered the house and then wheeled himself to the kitchen for a cup of coffee.

“Justin, what are you doing here?” Rachael asked her brother from her seat on the couch. She was exhausted and hot. She’d done a ten hour shift at the factory and had just made it home with Lisa. Had Justin walked in five minutes later he would have caught his little sister sprawled on the couch under the fan in her undies.

“Just wanted to stop by and check on you guys.” He answered.

Lisa was jumping all over him so he grabbed her by her ankles and hung her upside down while poking at her ribs.

“Stop, Justin, or she’ll throw up,” Rachael told him.

Lisa squirmed and laughed aloud and her little glasses fell to the carpet beneath her head. Justin stood Lisa upon her feet and then rushed for Rachael who leapt from the couch. She was too slow and he caught her arms and subdued her then screamed to Lisa, “Get her!”

He and Lisa pounced upon Rachael and tickled her – Justin attacking her rib bones as Lisa went after the soles of her mother’s bare feet. She fought them feverishly at first, but eventually, they wore her down and together Lisa and Justin tickled Rachael until tears came to

her eyes. She shrieked and her head thrashed from side to side as she tried to free herself. Soon the three of them were laughing hysterically. They showed her no mercy and the torture continued until she pleaded with them to release her.

Justin was so glad to see his sister laughing. She was always so serious and it made him feel good to see her smiling. He loved his sister and was proud of her for taking such good care of his niece all on her own. He reached down and helped her off of the floor.

Lisa jumped upon his back and they headed for the kitchen. “What’s for dinner?” He asked.

“Cereal,” Rachael said, climbing back onto the couch. *She didn’t have to watch out for Lisa while she played outside since Justin was here.* She closed her eyes and caught a few winks.

Justin stood beneath the hot spray of the shower with his head bent and his hands flat on the tile in front of him. He closed his eyes and exhaled, letting the hot water run down his back and buttocks until it started to cool then turned the knobs and stopped the spray before sliding the glass doors of the shower back and sighed as he thought of Rachael. She had left for the factory an hour ago. He’d gotten up and took Lisa to school so that his sister would be able to sleep a little longer before going to work. He’d stayed the night with them as he did sometimes and kept extra clothes at his sister’s house for that purpose.

As he shaved, he thought about the interrogation that he was going to have this morning with Joey Boyle. Twelve years of being in law enforcement had introduced Justin to some hardened criminals and he prided himself on being able to hold his own, but Boyle was hard as nails. Joey had refused an attorney, wanting instead to make his own deal. He was smart and he knew he had a lot to lose by cooperating with Justin. He was now in protective custody and

about to transfer to a federal prison under a false name while he awaited trial on the armor truck robbery. The Drug Enforcement Unit continued to gather information on Mac Kennedy with his assistance.

If he continued to cooperate with the police, he would do his time under an anonymous name. If he didn't cooperate, then he knew that he would be tossed into general population with no deal. Joey was content for now that the Black Hand couldn't get to him, but he knew that they weren't the type of people that depended on the police to dole out justice. He also knew that he was better off in the hands of law enforcement because eventually the Black Hand would catch up with him. There was a good price on his head and he couldn't run forever. Joey made his choice. He wanted to talk about the Kennedys anyway – particularly Dominic Kennedy. Justin dressed and grabbed a cup of coffee as he headed out the door.

LAS VEGAS

Joey Boyle sat in the passenger side seat of the van chewing his fingernails. Dominic had always given him the creeps. It'll be simple, his uncle had told him. Drive up to Vegas with Dominic and murk Alexander. Afterwards, they were supposed to throw him in the river. They wanted him found but not too fast. Dominic had awakened Alexander by shooting him in the leg while he lay in bed, and they were now riding around with him tucked in the large, aluminum storage bin that sat beneath the backseat of the van. Out of the corner of his eye, Joey looked over at Dominic who was calmly driving along like he didn't even hear the guy in the back crying. *What if the cops pulled them over?* Why couldn't they have just popped the guy right there in his bed? Alexander was scratching at the aluminum box and the sound was driving Joey insane.

"Shut up afore I come put another bullet in ya sorry ass!" Joey screamed towards the back of the van.

"You panicking?" Dominic calmly asked Joey.

"No. I just want him to shut up."

"Do you think, Joe, that maybe his leg is hurting? I mean, I'm sure it's pretty uncomfortable back there. Have a little compassion, why don't you," Dominic said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Joey stared at Dominic wide eyed. *This guy was nuts! Compassion!* Dominic rolled the toothpick he had in his mouth around under his tongue. He seemed to be enjoying Joey's discomfort and asked Joe if he put in his own work or if he was the type to send another guy. Joey responded that he did his own killing and Dominic snickered.

Kill him while he's asleep, Joey had said to him. Dominic didn't want to do that. What if a family member or someone came by the next morning and found him. It would scare the hell out of them, Dominic had said to him. Besides, he'd said, he preferred to do it at the river – no one would be around this time of night.

At times throughout the ride, Joey felt that Dominic might have wanted to stuff him into the storage space with Alexander. He had to admit he was nervous. He had never killed a boss.

When they got to the river, Dominic pulled into an isolated area and he and Joey exited the van. Joey pulled his gun while Dominic opened the double doors.

Dominic stopped and glared at Joey. "Put that thing away. You trying to scare the guy or what?"

Joey reholstered his weapon. *This frickin' guy*, he thought to himself. He was confused. They were going to kill the dude anyway. What did it matter when he pulled his piece?

Dominic reached into the storage space and grabbed Alexander who was so scared he had wet himself and Joey was so disgusted that he almost clipped the guy right then.

Dominic clapped Alexander on the back and smiled at him. "Hey, now. What you crying for?"

"Listen, Dominic –“ Alexander started.

Dominic put a hand up to stop him. "Don't beg, Alex. It doesn't look good on a man of your status.”

Alexander stopped then and stared Dominic square in the eyes. “How long do you think everyone is going to sit by while you and your brother make –“ Alexander grunted as Dominic kned him in the gut.

When he caught his breath he laughed as he lay there on the ground coughing and sputtering. “That's why we have rules, Dominic. You know that and Mac knows that. How long do you think they're going to let him keep breathing?”

“Who? Mac?” Dominic asked, laughing and shaking his head. “Let me be the first to inform you that Mac has been retired, Alex.”

“That's not what people are saying,” Alex replied in a sing-song voice. “Do you really think that everyone believes that Mac isn't in on this with you? His betrayal is worse than yours. Please, Dominic. You can't protect him.”

Dominic gestured at Joey to start walking Alex down to the river. He had to mostly drag him since the old guy could hardly use his legs from being kned so hard and Dominic followed behind them.

“Do you really think, Dominic, that you're going to cut people out of your profits; that you're going to make all that money and no one is going to come after you?” Alexander was

becoming hysterical.

“Is there a hit on Mac?” Dominic asked him.

“All I’m saying, Dominic, is that the people who you think have your best interest at heart don’t.” Alex put emphasis on the last word.

Joey threw Alex to the ground and began to kick him, telling him to shut up, then pulled his gun again.

Dominic snapped at him, “If I tell you one more time to put that thing away.” He was beginning to become impatient with Joey.

They watched as Alex tried to crawl away and still seemingly deep in thought, Dominic grabbed Alex around the neck from behind and held him in a headlock, choking the old man until he stopped flailing about.

“Get up and grab his legs. Help me get him in the water.” Dominic barked at Joey.

Together, Dominic and Joey threw Alexander into the water then walked back to the van.

Justin sat opposite Joey Boyle who regarded the detective with a steely gaze. He wondered what else he wanted from him.

“And that’s what happened, man. I’m telling you the truth,” He said in his deep Irish accent, gesturing with slim, handcuffed wrists. “Only reason I’m telling you that is because I can’t stand that bastard. He gives me the creeps. Now I heard what you said about Nevada offering the deal if I testify, but what I’m going to need is some serious protection,” Joey said, sitting back and searching the face of the detective who sat across from him.

Johnson sat in his wheelchair in front of his picture window and glared at Larry Gordon

with a scowl on his wrinkled face. He had known that it would only be a matter of time before the pervert reverted back to his old ways. Johnson watched him with a steady gaze. He was sitting there on the porch watching two little boys as they played in the street. With his very own eyes, Johnson watched as Larry slowly stroked a thumb over his groin, his gaze intent on the street. Johnson leaned forward in his wheelchair, his nose wrinkled in disgust. The two boys were small, probably eight or nine years old.

One of the children threw his head back and laughed aloud and Johnson watched in disbelief as Larry grabbed his groin with both hands and gave his crotch a squeeze. He stopped and removed his hand as he looked around then nervously placed a finger in his mouth and began biting at a fingernail before directing his gaze back to the street. Johnson grimaced in anger as he watched Larry's expression go weak and slack jawed as he leered at the boys.

Motherfucker, Johnson thought as he watched Larry, *you are done*.

September 28th, 6:08 p.m.

The smell of death hit Justin as soon as he stepped foot onto the stairs. He closed his eyes and bit his tongue and fought back the nausea that rushed over him. He pushed the door open and stepped inside. The stench was almost overpowering. He bent his head and looked around as he slowly entered the dim room and went to stand just outside the drying blood that had pooled on the floor. Slowly, he raised his eyes and took in the feet and legs, and then the severed head that rested in the bloody lap. Mac Kennedy had been wearing one of his expensive, tailor made suits and his hands rested on the sides of the white haired head that sat perfectly atop the expensive wool. Rigor mortis had already begun to set in and blood had dried and caked around the silver ring that Mac always wore on his left ring finger – a lion's head – and the ruby eyes of the beast stared back at Justin blankly.

He closed his eyes and fought another wave of nausea. *If you faint in the middle of a crime scene, they'll never let you live it down.* He slipped on the latex gloves that he held in his hands and looked around the room searching for some sign of what had happened. There was an empty glass lying on the floor beside Mac's chair. Blood sprayed the walls and dresser, otherwise, the room seemed untouched. The bed was still made – the peppermints were still on the pillows. *What was Mac Kennedy doing in a motel room alone,* Justin wondered. He had obviously been caught unawares. Justin whistled under his breath. Dominic Kennedy was going to have a hissy fit.

Justin looked down at Mac's hands and saw the cuts on his bloody fingers. He bent and searched for wounds on Mac Kennedy's face where it sat in his lap. Justin stood up and nodded – he had tried to fight. Whoever did this had either caught Mac off guard as he was coming in the room or was someone that Mac trusted. Rich was probably downstairs right now checking the security cameras. As far as Justin could see though, there had been minimal struggling so his guess was two or more guys. They had killed him on one side of the room and then propped him up in this chair so he'd be facing the door. Mac was an old guy but tough, and he had still been strong. Justin would have been surprised if Mac hadn't fought.

He heard Mike come into the room behind him. "Someone from the inside did this." He said to Justin.

Justin nodded in agreement. "What about his bodyguard?"

"Dead in a service elevator on the fifth floor," Mike said.

"I'll bet –" Justin was interrupted by his cell ringing. It was Rachael.

"Hey, Rachael," he answered. "Let me call you back. I'm in the middle –"

"Justin, Lisa is missing," Rachael said in a panic.

“Calm down, Rachael. What happened?”

She was hysterical. “I don’t know what happened to her. One minute she was there riding her bike and then the next minute she was gone. I looked everywhere. I don’t know where she is.”

“I’m on my way,” Justin told her as he ended the call.

“What’s up?” Mike asked, concerned at the worried expression on Justin’s face.

“Rachael says Lisa is missing. I gotta go, Mike,” Justin told him, heading for the door.

“Yeah, man, go. Get outta here,” he told him. “Let me know if I can help.”

Justin ran from the motel and raced over to Rachael’s.

When he arrived, Rachael was sitting in the living room with the police. The haunted look in her eyes spoke volumes to Justin.

“I fell asleep, Justin. Oh my God.” Rachael grabbed at Justin desperately. “My baby, Justin, she’s gone.”

“What’s happening?” He said to a cop in the room and flashed his badge.

“We’ve got units searching the area for her, sir. Hopefully, she didn’t get too far. We’re talking to the neighbors but so far nothing.”

“How long has she been missing?” Justin asked, looking from the officer to Rachael who sagged against the wall in shock. Justin pulled her to a recliner that sat in the corner.

“She went missing around 5:30 this evening, so about an hour far as we can tell.” The officer discreetly beckoned to Justin to follow him out onto the porch.

“What is it?” Justin asked, his heart skipping beats. He had known that something wasn’t quite right when Rachael called him at the motel. *Lisa*.

“We found her bike down the street there. Follow me,” he said, walking around to the side of the house. “We haven’t said anything to Ms. Young, but some kids in the neighborhood say it belongs to her.” He pointed at the bike.

Justin nodded. “Where was it?”

They walked back out to the sidewalk. “Down the street there where you see the squad car. House belongs to Larry Gordon. They’re talking to him now.”

Larry Gordon. Justin gritted his teeth. Larry Gordon had been so quiet that Justin had forgotten about him. He was another one of the reasons why he’d told Rachael to keep an eye on Lisa while she was outside. Though their houses were on the same side of the street, Rachael’s house sat at one corner of the short block and Larry’s sat at the other. Larry Gordon was the reason why Justin told Lisa to cross the street and ride her bike on the other side of the block. He didn’t want her meeting Larry Gordon on the sidewalk. He’d pointed Gordon out to her and told her not to speak to him under any circumstances – to run screaming if he even came near her. *Why was her bike on this side of the street?* His eyes were beginning to burn with anger.

“I want to talk to him.” Justin said.

“No can do, sir. Chief already called and said you’re not to go anywhere near Gordon. He said that’s an order,” the officer said apologetically.

“Thanks, Officer.” Justin said.

He glared at Larry Gordon’s house as the officer walked away. *What were they doing down there?*

He turned and went into the house. Rachael was still in the corner sobbing.

“What’d they say, Justin?” Rachael asked desperately, her eyes intent on his face. “Tell me.”

He turned and looked down at her. *Damn it, Justin thought, how could you fall asleep, Rachael?* He thought that in fear and frustration. He would never say it aloud.

“Come here.” He said, pulling her into his arms.

While he held Rachael to him, his cop’s brain recalled bad things that he’d seen and heard in the streets and he almost fainted. *Lisa.*

Larry Gordon sat on his living room couch opposite the detective. His mother, Shirley, was about to have a fit and paced the cracked, linoleum kitchen floor in her old house shoes. She was wearing her flowered house dress that had the cigarette burns in the lap. The lace around the sleeves had long ago begun to yellow at the wrists. She stopped to lean against her kitchen sink and glared angrily at the detective who sat across from her boy and took a drag off of a menthol and began flicking ashes onto her own floor. *I’m so pissed.*

She was fuming. She knew that the detective didn’t believe Larry. She could tell by the way that he was talking to him. *How dare they come into her house and treat her son like he was some lusty child rapist that preyed on the oh so precious children that lived in this fucking neighborhood?*

“I usually work from 4:30 to midnight every day,” Larry was telling the detective.

Stop pausing and stammering like you’re thinking ‘bout your words, Shirley screamed to Larry in her mind. She knew that was his way of speaking, but this no good pig didn’t know how sensitive and thoughtful her boy was.

“So tell me again why you’re home today,” the detective asked, sitting forward in his seat, his gaze resting on Larry.

He’s a biggun, Larry thought to himself calmly. *So that pretty little girl with the blonde*

ponytails had gone missing. Hmm. Oh, yes, and I'm the neighborhood pedophile. That's why he was here. He wanted to tell the detective that he preferred little boys. *That probably wasn't a good idea though.*

“I took the day off because I wasn't feeling well,” he said instead.

“Just a coincidence I'm sure,” the detective replied sarcastically.

Detective Jones didn't like him. He watched Larry Gordon's tongue slither across his dark, chapped lips and inwardly shivered with revulsion – the total lack of muscle tone, his odd demeanor, his mother. This guy wasn't right.

“So you don't mind coming down to the station and answering a few questions then, right?” The detective asked.

Are you asking me or telling me, Larry thought. “Sure, Detective.”

Rachael Young sat on the edge of her daughter's bed and wept. It was after midnight and the police still hadn't found Lisa. It was her own fault. She thought about Lisa out there all alone and cried out. *Was somebody hurting her baby? Where else could she have gone?*

When she had realized that Lisa was missing, she had frantically ran throughout the neighborhood searching for her. She hadn't been at the park and none of the other children had seen her. She was just gone. *Somebody had her baby.* If something happened to Lisa she would die. *Please don't hurt my baby.*

She remembered once hearing on a television show that when strangers kidnapped children, the child was usually murdered within three hours of the abduction. She had cuddled her own child in her arms then. The thought had never occurred to her that Lisa would one day be one of those children, and she cried as she thought about the lack of attention that she'd given

to posters of missing children – somehow looking but not seeing.

Someone would overlook her baby's picture just as she had looked but barely imprinted in her memory the faces of missing children on posters and milk cartons that she had seen over the years. She had had no concept of how emotionally corrosive it was to have a child go missing. Rachael wanted to talk to Justin about her fears but he blamed her. He didn't have to say it. She knew it was true. He could hardly look at her. Suffocating pain exploded in Rachael's chest and she fell to her knees as she thought about her little Lisa. She told herself to breathe. *Breathe, Rachael.* She got up and ran to the bathroom to vomit.

Sept 30th, 2:23 pm.

Johnson welcomed the detective into his home. "Can I get you something? Coffee?"

"No," Justin replied.

"Please sit down," Johnson told him, gesturing toward a chair. "I was so sorry to hear about Lisa. Me and that little girl made fast friends."

"You knew her?" Justin asked, snapping to attention.

He was tired and he could hardly concentrate. He hadn't slept in days. He had tried to sleep at Rachael's house the first night, but had to go home for fear that he would walk down the street and kick Gordon's door in. Now he just sat up and wondered where Lisa was and what was happening to her.

"Yes. She would ride her bike this way and sometimes we would chat."

"I see." Justin said. "I know the police talked to you. You said you hadn't seen her that day, right?"

"Right. I wasn't out that day. I wish I had been. That's for sure."

Justin looked the man over. "Can I ask how you got in the chair?"

“Oh, I can get around well enough without this old chair. I got into a brawl at a bar ten years ago or more and some guy went at me with a sledgehammer. My legs got all busted up and they pain me a lot especially since that arthritis set up shop in my knees. The chair just makes things a little easier.”

“Really? A sledgehammer?” Justin asked in disbelief.

Johnson shrugged. “Anyway, reason why I called you down here is I wanted to talk to you about something. Now I didn’t say this to the police because – well, I don’t know. But you know why Gordon was locked up, don’t you?” Johnson asked, gesturing over his shoulder with a thumb.

“I do.” Justin nodded.

Johnson leaned forward in his seat. “Well, one day I’m sitting here at my window as I do sometimes and I see Gordon over there sitting on his porch. Now that’s okay except for the fact that there were two young boys there playing around in the street. Well, the reason why I’m sitting there looking at Gordon is because he’s paying extra special attention to these young fellows, if you catch my drift.

Boy, I shit you not that pervert gets to squeezing and yanking on his cock and he gets this look on his face what remind me of when I’m looking at a nice ass on a woman. Only thing stopped him from his perverted ways was he remembered himself and got to looking around to see if anybody done seen what he was doing. Pissed me off so bad I almost grabbed my shotgun.”

Justin clenched his eyes closed against the red bursts of rage exploding behind his eyelids. These were different than the white streaks of lightning rage that he had become accustomed to over the last couple days. He was almost blinded with rage.

“Well, when Lisa went missing,” he could hear the old man saying, “I got this dreadful feeling in my gut, and when the police said that they found her little bike out in front of his place I damn near went and set that bastard’s house on fire. Now hopefully, justice will be served, but you explain to me how a little girl who rides up and down this street all the time just suddenly vanishes out of nowhere, and to top it all off, her little bike ends up in front of a pedophile’s house and he don’t know nothing about it. My ass.”

Justin placed his head in between his legs and breathed in and out in deep breaths.

Detective Jones is going to have another missing person if he doesn’t hurry up and find out what Gordon did with my niece.

Larry sat in his room alone and stared into space. A string of drool that had trickled from between his parted lips had attached itself to his shirt and slowly began to trail down and run along the inside of his forearm. *Stop it*, he told himself as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. *Stop thinking dirty, dirty*. He had to control his urges – that’s what the counselor said. *He had to be empathetic to the boys that he had bad thoughts about*. He wouldn’t look at the pictures and touch himself.

What had started him to think about those bad pictures anyway? Oh, yes. The detective had asked him to take a polygraph exam and he had started to think about the things that he had done that no one knew about. *That’s why you started fantasizing about the pictures*. The lie detector might reveal other things that he didn’t want revealed. *No*, he had told the detective, *he wouldn’t take it*. It had been days since the girl had gone missing and Larry doubted that they would find her alive anyway.

He thought about his job. Larry had searched for employment for so long that when the

janitorial service had called him, he and his mother had been shocked. They never looked into his background and Larry had done his job and stayed out of the way. But that missing girl's uncle told Larry's boss, Norm, that he raped kids. Norm told Larry he had to let him go after that. But Larry had known it was coming.

The girl's uncle was stalking him. He saw him some nights standing in the backyard staring up at his bedroom window. Dark stubble covered his chin and his appearance was always disheveled, but to Larry he had a vicious look about him. He wanted to mention this to Detective Jones but he feared retaliation from the uncle. *Them pigs gone stick together anyway*, his mother had said.

Larry knew that his life was in danger.

October 9th, 1:02 p.m.

Justin punched the wall repeatedly as he screamed with rage. He kicked the TV until the glass broke and then punched the wall again. The veins in his neck bulged and his skin was on fire. *I tried to be good. I tried to be good for Rachael.*

He had found the DVD taped to the windshield of his car when he'd left that morning for the pharmacy to fill a prescription for Rachael. Intuitively, he had known what it was and his legs had threatened to give out from underneath him. He'd stumbled into the house and watched the two minute video on mute. Only a thumb appeared on the screen at first and then Lisa – his little Lisa in just her underwear and a blindfold. She looked asleep and Justin breathed a sigh of relief as he watched her little chest rise and fall. *She was still alive.*

Suddenly, a hand had reached out and grabbed ahold of one of her small ankles and parted her little legs and then the video cut out. Justin couldn't breathe then and struggled for breath as he tried to calm down. Tears of rage and frustration streamed down his cheeks and for

the thousandth time his mind went to the little cabin that his parents had left to him and Rachael. It sat half a mile off of Rouge Lake. It was isolated and there was no one around for miles. Rachael wouldn't notice whether he was gone or not. She had had a nervous breakdown long ago and was popping pills like candy. It killed Justin to watch her give up, but she was convinced that Lisa was dead.

That video was the straw that broke Justin and he sat on Rachael's couch and waited for night. As always, he thought of Gordon, and he was going to get Larry Gordon tonight. He had waited too long. *Wheels of justice my ass.* He punched himself repeatedly in the head as he thought about Lisa. Why hadn't he gone after Gordon when Mike had gone through Jones' files for him and found out that Lisa's glasses had been found in the alley behind Gordon's house? They had been bent and broken, but Jones had never mentioned it to him. *Why wasn't that fucker locked up,* he had asked Jones long ago. Shirley Gordon had provided her son with an airtight alibi. She swore that Gordon had been home with her the day that Lisa had gone missing and Justin almost blew his top when Jones told him that Gordon had refused the polygraph.

Mike and Rich had been after him to let them help him grab Gordon but he had refused, and he didn't think about calling them tonight either. He didn't want any help with this. That son of a bitch was going to tell him where Lisa was or he was going to hurt him. Justin himself had finally gone crazy. He couldn't wait any longer.

Larry's eyes snapped open and his heart started to pound. There was someone in his room, but he was afraid to lift his head and look around though he knew who it was. He had known that he would come eventually.

"Get the fuck up," the uncle said, kicking the bed.

Larry sat up and swung his legs over the bed then slowly turned and looked behind him to where the uncle was standing on the other side of his bed.

“Get up and get dressed. If you make a sound I’ll knock your teeth out. Understand?”

Larry nodded but he thought about screaming. The detective wasn’t holding a weapon but he was bigger than Larry, and Larry didn’t doubt that he would knock his teeth out. If he screamed though his mother would come running and maybe he would be able to make a run for it. Larry’s eyes darted to his bedroom door.

As if he knew what he was thinking, the detective came toward him with a sneer on his face. “Put your shit on.”

Larry hurriedly dressed and then thought about crying out again as the uncle handcuffed him and then threw a cloth bag over his head. He felt himself being led down the stairs and then into the cool air as he was pushed out of the house. *I should scream*, he kept telling himself, but he was afraid that the detective would hit him. *He’s probably going to do more than that anyway*. As he was being led out the back door, Larry started to scream and then everything for him suddenly went black.

Justin had pushed Larry out of the house and into the backyard when the smaller man started to scream. Enraged, he punched him in the back of the head and Larry fell hard and his head struck the ground with a loud thump. Justin leaned over and picked Larry up and slung him over his shoulders like a sack of potatoes and then crossed the backyard to where he had parked his car on the street. There was no one outside at that time of night, but Justin could care less if anyone saw anyway. He opened the trunk of his car and dumped Larry inside. Without looking around, Justin got behind the wheel and drove away.

Larry awoke in pain. He was on a floor – a cellar floor. He tried to move and then grimaced. He was still handcuffed. He looked up and noticed the uncle sitting in a chair watching him.

“Do you know me?” He asked Larry.

“I know who you are,” Larry replied softly. The other man’s eyes were on fire. *He’s gone mad*, Larry thought.

“I am Detective Justin Young. My niece is Lisa Young. She’s only seven years old.” Justin sat forward in his seat. “Where is my niece, Larry?”

“I didn’t take her. I swear I –“

“You’re a liar!” The crazy looking man screamed and spittle flew from his mouth.

“I swear I don’t know where she is.” Larry started to cry.

“Larry, if you don’t tell me where Lisa is I’m going to kill you. I promise you that. You’d better start talking.”

Larry rested his forehead against the concrete floor. *What goes around always comes back around*, his mother had told him since he was a boy. “I swear, mister, I didn’t touch that little girl.”

He watched as Justin got up from his chair without a word and removed his jacket. He stepped over Larry and went to the opposite end of the room and Larry heard a scraping along the floor and turned to see the detective dragging an axe behind him. *Are you fucking kidding me?*

“Please, mister. Please! Listen to me – wait.”

Justin raised the axe above his head and brought it down upon Larry Gordon. The man’s

leg was severed at the knee and Gordon let out a blood curdling scream. Sparks flew as the sharp blade of the axe hit the concrete as it went through the flesh and bone of Larry's leg.

"Tell me!" Justin screamed, wild-eyed with rage as Larry curled into a ball and cried in agony.

"Oh, no. Please." Justin mocked and the sound drove Larry insane and he began to scream. Justin laughed louder until he tired of the man's screaming. "Shut up before I cut off the other one."

"Please," Larry whimpered as he watched Justin look his leg over.

"Where is she, Larry?" Justin whispered to the bleeding man. He looked over to the drain in the cellar floor. *That's where you're going, Larry.*

"Please. I didn't touch her. Please."

"Do you understand what's going on here, Larry? If you tell me where she is, you have my word that I will take you in myself. You'll do a little time in the pen but then you'll be right back out again to diddle little girls and boys to your fucking heart's content." Justin kicked Larry in the side and turned him over onto his back. "But if you don't tell me right now – today – where Lisa is, I'm going to cut you up in little bitty pieces."

Sweating, Larry began to wail again.

"She's dead, isn't she? You made that video when you took her, right?" Justin asked him. He could hear his own voice breaking with grief.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Larry placed his hands together as if praying and pleaded with Justin to let him go.

I'll bet you made that video when you took her. I'll bet you killed her right after you were done with her, you sick bastard. Justin stood again and swung the axe wildly and severed

Larry's other leg. The man screamed in anguish and went to grab for his leg but couldn't reach it.

Justin laughed. "Your leg is literally hanging by that small piece of meat, Larry. Do you see it?"

Larry lay on his back and cried in agony.

"Here let's get those handcuffs off." Justin said politely as he leaned over Larry and removed the cuffs from his wrists.

"Just tell me, Larry. Is she dead?"

As hours passed and Larry bled to death, Justin's mood did a constant flip flop. The detective begged and bargained with Larry. He pleaded with Larry to no avail.

Larry was in so much pain that he just stopped responding. Unconsciousness threatened to overtake him and he welcomed it because no matter what he said, the detective wasn't going to believe him anyway -- he was too crazed with grief and rage.

"Yeah, she's dead." Justin decided. *Son of a bitch*, he thought. *You killed her.*

He looked down at Larry. The screaming had been replaced with a whimpering that grated on Justin's nerves. *The son of a bitch is in shock.* He wanted to lift the axe and bring it down on the man's skull, but he held out hope that eventually Gordon would tell him where Lisa was and he tied the dying man up in the cellar and left him there.

The next afternoon, Justin sat on Rachael's couch and once again removed the pictures from his pocket that he had taken from Gordon's house. He had found them taped underneath a dresser drawer when he had gone to the house the night before. He had searched the Gordon house before while Shirley and her son had been sleeping, but last night had been the first time that he'd thoroughly searched the other man's bedroom. While Larry Gordon had lain in bed,

Justin had quietly went through his belongings using a small penlight that he kept on him. The pictures hadn't surprised him, but he had been relieved to not find a picture of Lisa among them. As he sat there looking at the photos, Justin was not sorry for what he'd done to Gordon – not even slightly and he cried silent tears as he stared at the photos. *Whose child was this?*

He'd make sure that the pictures got to the police.

He got up and undressed then put his clothes and shoes into a plastic garbage bag and hid them beneath the kitchen sink meaning to dispose of them later. Naked, he walked to the bathroom and got into the shower and cried more as he ducked his head under the hot stream of water.

Afterwards, he threw on a t-shirt and a pair of jeans then crept to Rachael's bedroom door and peeked inside. She was asleep under the blankets. Her wastebasket was in its usual position by her bed and was filled to overflowing with tissues. Justin quietly closed her door again and went to the couch to lie down. He closed his eyes. This time he slept.

Monday, October 21st, 3:45 a.m.

“Wait, Molly. Look!” Kevin said pointing at the small child walking in the street alone. Molly threw her cigarette butt out the window and her mouth fell open and she blinked with surprise. It was a little girl. She was only wearing a t-shirt and a pair of panties. There were no socks or shoes on her little bare feet.

“Oh my god!” Molly said as she jumped out of her car and ran to the girl. “Sweetie, how'd you get out here all by yourself? Where's your mom?”

The girl stared at her blankly and Molly knelt down in front of her. “What's your name?” The small girl started to cry then and Molly removed her jacket and placed it on her quaking

shoulders. She picked the child up in her arms and carried her to her car.

Johnson sat in his vehicle and grasped the steering wheel tightly in his hands. He watched the chubby, brown haired woman pick Lisa up and take her to her car. He waited until they drove away and then turned his headlights on before starting his car and slowly pulling away from the curb. Lisa was safe. She would be home soon.

It had been past due time to let her go. He had been tired of drugging her with the morphine that the doctor had given him for the pain in his legs. He hadn't wanted to hurt Lisa – just use her to manipulate her uncle into doing what had to be done. Things had worked out perfectly as far as he was concerned. Larry had disappeared and Johnson was absolutely sure that the young detective had finally done something about him.

Johnson wasn't sorry. He had had to push him. They had a responsibility as adults to protect children, and Johnson told himself that that's what he had done. Lisa had been a means to an end. That was all. How else was Johnson supposed to get rid of Larry Gordon?

That pervert deserved whatever had come to him. Sure Larry hadn't done anything to Lisa Young, but Johnson was certain that he had saved some other child from the danger that was Larry Gordon. *You did the right thing, Johnson. Brilliant.*

Justin Young slowly climbed the steps of the cathedral. Once he was inside, he removed his hat and looked around. He was alone in the church save for one woman who sat in the front pew with her head bowed, her lips moving silently as she made her petition. Justin stared at the large statue that stood upon the altar and bowed his head in deference to the figure that represented a most holy sacrifice.

He had begun to come to church after Lisa had been found. She had appeared out of nowhere – had been found dehydrated and slightly drugged wandering along the side of the road. Her small wrists and ankles had been severely chaffed by whatever had been used to bind her, but otherwise, Lisa was physically unharmed. At first she wouldn't speak, not even to Justin or Rachael, and when she did, her traumatized mind was unable to recall anything of significance, and they were just grateful that she was home alive and well.

What didn't make sense to Justin was the fact that Larry had been dead for several days before she appeared. *Where has she been all that time?* The doctors had been relieved to tell them that Lisa had not been molested, and Justin couldn't make sense of it in his brain. Who would drug a child and hold onto them for weeks only to let them go unharmed? His mind would sometimes go to the crippled old man that lived down the street, but he would dismiss the thought.

Nothing was left to grieve for except Justin being unable to escape the guilt that gnawed at him constantly. Though Larry had been guilty, he had not been guilty of hurting Lisa. He tried to convince himself that some other child had surely been saved from Larry, but the guilt always came back to haunt him. When he closed his eyes at night, all he could see was Larry Gordon pleading for his life. All he could hear when he closed his eyes was Larry's anguished screams as his limbs were severed. He had nightmares about Larry – his bloody hand reaching out to him, a desperate plea in his eyes as Justin swung the axe, and he woke up most nights in a cold sweat.

Justin walked over to the confessional box and entered then knelt and made the sign of the cross.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been a month since my last confession...I want to confess the sin of fornication. I have lied. I have committed the sin of murder upon an

innocent man...”

Justin waited for the priest’s words of absolution and then exited the confessional. He didn’t feel any better now than when he had entered – he never did – but he would keep coming nonetheless.

He donned his hat as he exited the church. It had begun to rain and he lifted the collar on his coat to protect his neck from the drizzle, walking to his car with his head down. His tears mingled with the rain.

Justin headed home.

“My Jesus, I place all my sins before you. In my estimation, they do not deserve pardon, but I ask you to close your eyes to my want of merit and open them to your infinite merit. Since You willed to die for my sins, grant me forgiveness for all of them; thus I may no longer feel the burden of my sins – a burden that oppresses me beyond measure. Assist me, dear Jesus, for I desire to become good. No matter what the cost, take away, destroy, and utterly root out whatever you find in me that is contrary to your Holy Will. At the same time, dear Jesus, illumine me so that I may walk in your Holy Light.” – St. Gemma Galgani, A Prayer for the Forgiveness of Sins