

## Chapter 1

The alarm was ringing, I had a boner, and I had to get up and do my paper route in the cold, miserable rain. Through the little top-hinged window above my bed I could feel the cold air on my face and hear the rain falling. I found the off button on the clock, remembering tonight was a school dance. The possibilities of the dance gave me the energy to get moving.

So I put on my rough jeans and a too-small grey turtleneck with my grandmother's old crewneck sweater over that. Then yesterday's socks. My dog, Buffy, was nestled into the bed covers and I leaned over and hugged her. She rolled over, exposing her warm white chest. She was sleepy and slow from having been curled up all night.

I passed the door to my parent's and then my brother's room and sailed down the half flight of stairs to the living room. My dad's ashtray was overflowing with stale cigarette butts. His empty glass of rye sat there, too.

In the kitchen, I had some OJ and walked downstairs to our homework area. I put on my North Stars, zipped up my black wind breaker, and went out the front door. I still had the faded red *Telegram* bag I used before old man Bassett stopped publishing. I slipped it over my head. Now I delivered the *Globe*. Even with the cold and the rain, it was beautiful. No one else around, the air smelled rich and full of good things and the street had that clean look that rain brings. I rode my bike the few blocks up to Sheddon & Reynolds to get the papers.

As usual the plastic was broken and some of the papers were wet at the corners. *Lazy bastard*. I'd seen him do it before. He just picked up the bundle and threw it from the back of the truck. He probably made ten times more money than me and he still couldn't do his fucking job right. He didn't have to collect his wages from pissed off customers, did he? *Dick*.

I'd deliver Mrs. Hunt's paper last. She was an old lady who'd told me she had trouble sleeping and asked if I could deliver the paper quietly. I'd learned to fold it and slide it, almost

soundlessly, across her wooden porch floor. I know she appreciated it because she told me every time I collected.

The only reason I kept this shitty paper route was that I had a lot of apartment buildings I delivered to, so it was easy. I went into the Seabreeze Apartments and dropped the soaking bundle of papers on the floor. I knelt, took the wire cutters from my bag, and cut the wire. I slid the papers from the broken plastic and sorted them, spines down, in my bag. The ones for the Seabreeze were delivered by the Super. I just wrote apartment numbers with blue wax crayon on the top of each paper and left them in a neat pile under the railing at the foyer. The apartments went downhill after the Seabreeze. I had to walk the halls and they weren't in the best shape.

I thought of Kim every day now. About a month ago, as I'd been leaving 205 Reynolds, one of the pair of buildings across from the Seabreeze, I saw Kim Haldane. My heart jumped and my breath got short. I'd known her a few years since she'd moved here from Buffalo. We were in the split Grade six/seven class at New Central School. Every erectable guy in the school noticed her. And remembered.

She didn't seem the same that morning. I was guessing she'd been out all night. She looked down and defeated. But even then, I wanted her like I wanted Bridget Bardot. From the first time she'd strutted into class, she'd been every guy's ultimate but unattainable goal.

I looked at her as I shifted my paper bag. She stopped for a minute, taking a final drag from her cigarette, and flicking it into the grass. "How's Richie the paperboy?" she said.

I felt like she was making fun of me but there was something sad in her voice. "How's Kim?" I said.

"Kim's shit, Richie, but her paperboy's beautiful."

I looked at her and didn't know what to say. What did she mean? "Will you go to school today?" I asked, desperate for conversation and worried that she'd had no sleep.

"I'll sleep 'till lunch, then we'll see," she said, walking into the planted circular courtyard between the paired buildings. She was sensational: tight blue jeans in black shiny boots with a red leather jacket. It hurt to think how good it would be to see her naked.

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I did the final apartment buildings, six houses, my high school library, and I was riding home, soaked through, hoping for some warm toast or porridge with hot chocolate. I tried to smoke a cigarette on the way home, but it's hard in the rain. I got a few drags in so at least I wouldn't have a nic fit before heading to school.

As I walked in, Dad was just putting on his overcoat.

"Papers all done?"

"Yup."

"Another day, another dollar, eh boy?"

"Yeah, hopefully."

He put on his fedora and walked out calling back, "I'll see you at dinner."

I never knew how he did it. Smoke cigarettes and drink well into the night then up with the birds and off to work in Toronto well before 7:30.

Mom was standing in the kitchen wearing her slippers and housecoat stirring cream of wheat on the stove. Perfect. "I'm going for my shower, Mom; will the cream of wheat be ready by then?"

"Of course, hurry, Richard so it doesn't cool too much." The light was on under Robert's door, so I just tapped. "Hi."

"Hi, Richard, sorry about the rain."

"It's alright – I like rain."

I had saved my Levis jeans for school as I knew I'd want to be wearing those tonight for the dance. I'd wear runners to school, but my Dad had given me a pair of his old black leather Chelsea boots – they were made of kid leather that was so soft it was beautiful. I'd wear those tonight.

Mom seemed happy this morning. I could tell by the way she moved – how fast or slow – how her body rocked in front of the stove – she was good.

Embarrassingly, I didn't need to shave every day, so I just brushed my teeth before throwing my wet clothes into the hall and stepping over the edge of the tub into the shower. It was a nice shower as my Dad had just paid some Italian guy to re-tile it with a new sliding glass door.

I dried off, successfully ignoring my dick's endless requests for attention, and put on some deodorant. My hair was long, nearly black, and pretty thick so I used a brush to keep it neat. I pulled on my freshly laundered Levis and then made my bed, thinking about which shirt to wear. I felt cool with a bare chest leaning over the bed. I pictured Raquel Welch lying there opening her arms to me with those beautiful...

“Richie – your breakfast's getting cold!”

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My only sibling, Robert was at the new table they'd bought from De Boers. It had a bright yellow frame with a brown-grey surface where the corners were cut out in circles to fit over the tops of the round legs. I slid in beside him and we both ate our hot cereal with brown sugar and milk. I had two bowls – Robert barely finished one.

“Who are you going to the dance with, Richard?” my mom asked.

“Jack, Doug Haroldson –.”

“Oh.”

“Jack's funny – he talks to me, you know?” Robert said.

“He likes talking to you, Robert. He's told me,” I said.

Robert didn't reply – just nodded his head quietly. But I knew he'd heard, and I knew it would mean something to him.

After breakfast Mom asked us to brush our hair and teeth again. I was done first because I only did my hair and was at the door about to go when Mom came down from the living room.

"Give me a hug, Richie." She looked at me with her arms on my shoulders. "Those green eyes—you're so beautiful."

"Ah, Mom, stop it." I hugged her back and split quickly. Truth was, I liked that she thought my eyes were cool. I imagined she had cleaned up his cigarette butts and booze while he shaved. Nice way to start the day.

On the road, the rain was just a faint drizzle. The walk to school was nice – had a cigarette and thought about which girls I might get some action from that night.