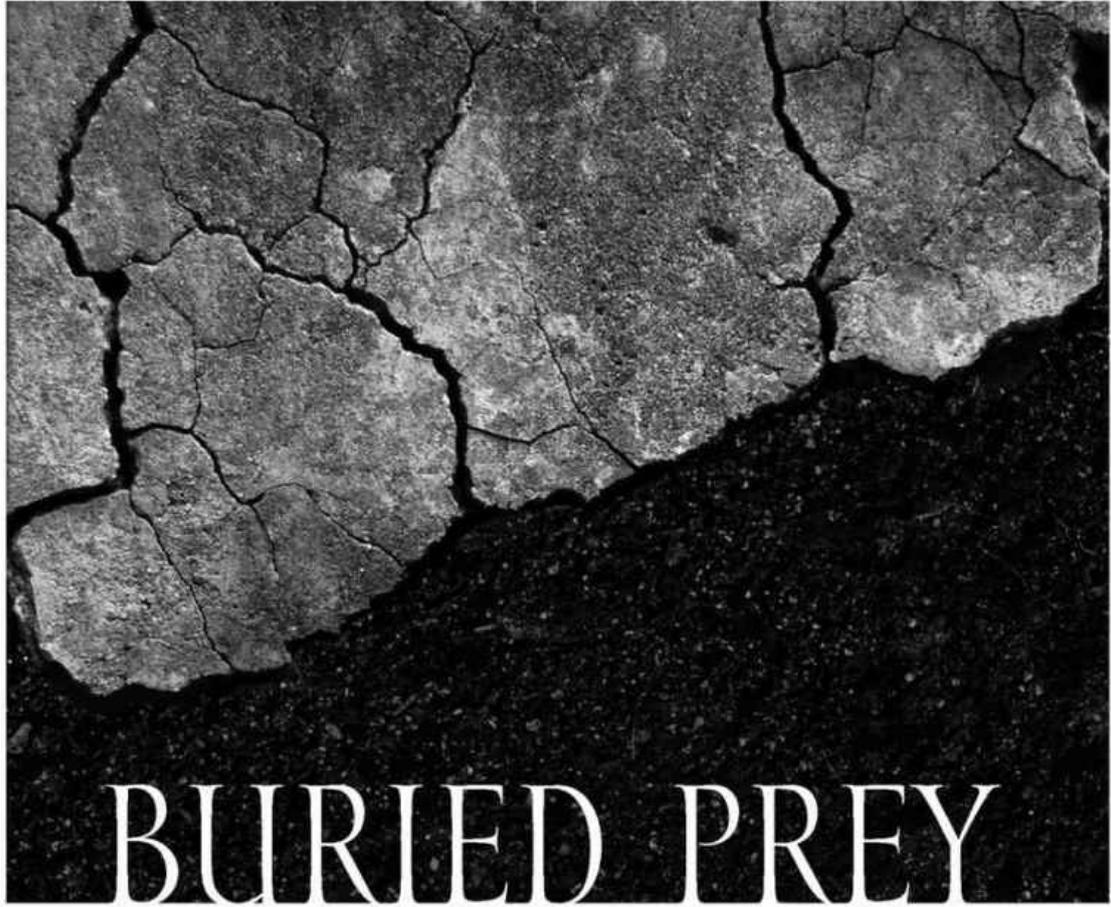


**JOHN SANDFORD**

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

New York





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*For Michele*

# 1

The first machines on the site were the wreckers, like steel dinosaurs, plucking and pulling at the houses with jaws that ripped off chimneys, shingles, dormers, and eaves, clapboard and brick and stone and masonry, beams and stairs and balconies and joists, headers and doorjambs. Old dreams, dead ambitions, and lost lives, remembrance roses and spring lilacs, went in the dump trucks all together.

When the wrecking was done, the diggers came in, cutting a gash in the black-and-tan soil that stretched down a city block. A dozen pieces of heavy equipment crawled down its length, Bobcats and Caterpillar D6s and Mack trucks, and one orange Kubota, grunting and struggling through the raw earth.

Now gone silent as death.

The equipment operators gathered in twos and threes, yellow helmets and deerskin work gloves, jeans and rough shirts, to talk about the situation. Slabs of concrete lay around the trench, pieces of what once had been basement floors and walls. Electric wire was gathered in hoops, pushed into a corner of the hole, to await removal; survey stakes marked the lines where new concrete would go in.

None of it happening today.

At one end of the gash, twelve men and four women gathered around a bundle of plastic sheeting, once clear, now a pinkishyellow with age. It was still set down in the earth, but the dirt on top of it had been swept away by hand. A few of the people were construction supervisors, marked by yellow, white, and orange hard hats. The rest were cops. One of the cops, whose name was Hote, and who was Minneapolis's sole cold-case investigator, was kneeling at the end of the bundle with her face four inches from the plastic.

Two dead girls grinned back at her, through the plastic, their desiccated skin pulled tight over their cheek and jaw bones, their foreheads; their eyes were black pits, their lips were flattened scars, but their teeth were as white and shiny as the day they were murdered.

Hote looked up and said, "It's them. I'm pretty sure. Sealed in there."

THE DAY WAS HOT, hardly a cloud in the sky, the July sun burning down; but the soil was cool and damp, and smelled of rotted roots and a bit of sewage, from the torn-up sewer lines leading out of the hole. Another woman, who'd walked into the pit in low heels and two-hundred-dollar black wool slacks that were now flecked with the tan earth, asked, "Can you tell what happened? Were they dead when they were sealed in?"

Hote stood up and brushed the dirt from her jeans and said, "I think so. It looks to me like they were hanged."

"Strangled?"

"Hanged," Hote repeated. "There appears to be some upward displacement of the

cervical spine in both girls—but that’s looking through a lot of plastic. Their arms go behind them, instead of lying by their sides, so I think they’ll be tied or cuffed. Anyway—let’s get them over to the ME.”

“What else?”

“Marcy . . .” Hote was always reluctant to commit herself without all the facts; a personal characteristic. Most cops were willing to bullshit endlessly about possibilities, including alien abduction and satanic cults.

“Anything?”

“There’s a lot of tissue left,” Hote said. “They’re mummified—it’s almost like they were freeze-dried inside the plastic.”

“Will there be anything organic left by the killer?” The woman meant semen, but didn’t use the word. If they could recover semen, they could get DNA.

“If there was anything to begin with, it’s possible there are still traces,” Hote said. “Since hardly anybody had heard of DNA back then, we might find the killer’s hair on them. . . . But, I’m no scientist. So who knows? Let’s get them to the ME.”

One of the cops in the back said, “Marcy? Davenport’s coming down.”

Marcy Sherrill, head of Minneapolis Homicide, turned and looked over her shoulder. Lucas Davenport, a dark-haired, broadshouldered man in black slacks, French-blue shirt, his suit jacket hung by a finger over his shoulder, was trudging down the earthen ramp toward the group around the plastic sepulchre. He looked as though he’d just stepped out of a Salvatore Ferragamo advertisement, his eyes, shirt, and tie all entangled in a fashionable blue vibration.

She said, “Okay. This makes my day.”

An older man said, “He worked on it. This.” He gestured at the plastic.

“I don’t think so,” Sherrill said. “He’d have been too young.”

“I remember,” the old man said. “He was all over it. I think it was his first case in plainclothes.”

SHERRILL WAS THE SENIOR active Minneapolis cop on the scene, a solid, raven-haired woman in her late thirties, with a great slashing white smile and what an older generation of cops called a “good figure.” She’d had a reputation as a cop not afraid of a fistfight, and still carried a lead-weighted sap on a key ring. Sherrill had come on the police force at a time when women were still suspect when it came to doing street work. She’d erased that attitude quickly enough, and now was accepted as a cop-cop, rather than as a woman cop, or, as they were still occasionally called, a Dickless Tracy. She’d hardly mellowed as she moved up through the ranks and would someday, most people thought, either be the Minneapolis chief or go into politics.

There were five retired cops in the group around her, men who’d worked on the original investigation. As soon as the bodies had been discovered, the police had been called, and word of the find had begun leaking out. All over the metro area, aging cops and ex-cops got in their cars and headed downtown, to look for themselves, to see the girls, and to talk about those days: the hot summers, the cold winters, all the time on the sidewalks before high-tech came in, computers and cell phones and DNA.

DAVENPORT CAME UP, and the gray-hairs nodded at him—they all knew him, from his time in Minneapolis—and he shook hands with a couple of them, and a couple who didn't like him edged away, and Sherrill asked, "How'd you hear?"

"It's gone viral, at least in the cop shops," he said, peering at the plastic sheeting. He worked for the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and, with his close relationship with the governor, was probably the most influential cop in the state. Minneapolis was technically within his jurisdiction, but he was polite. He flipped a thumb at the sheeting and asked, "Do you mind if I look?"

"Go ahead," Sherrill said.

Hote pointed and said, "They're faceup, heads at that end."

Lucas squatted in Hote's knee prints at the end of the plastic, looked down at the withered faces for a full thirty seconds, then, paying no attention to the neat crease on his wool-blend slacks, got on his knees and crawled slowly down the length of the bundle, his face an inch from the plastic. After a moment, he grunted, stood up, brushed his knees, then said, "That's Nancy on the left, Mary on the right."

"Hard to know for sure," Hote said. "It likely is them—the size is right, the hair coloring . . ."

Lucas said, "It's them. Nancy was the taller one. Nancy was wearing a blouse with little red hearts on it, that she got from her father on Valentine's Day. It was the last gift he gave her. It's wadded up between her thighs. I can see the hearts."

Sherrill looked up at the sides of the trench and said, "I wonder what the address was here? We need to pull some aerials and figure out which one was which. I thought the guy who did it . . ."

"Terry Scrape," Lucas said. "He didn't do it."

She stared at him: "I thought that was settled. That he was killed . . ."

Lucas shook his head. "He was. I was there. I thought, back then, that there was a chance he was involved. But with this . . . I don't think so. There was somebody else. Somebody with a lot more energy than Scrape ever had. Somebody pretty smart. I could feel him, but I could never find him. Anyway, he hung it on Scrape like a hat on a witch, and we had us a witch hunt."

"I gotta look at the file," Sherrill said.

"Scrape lived way over by Uptown," Lucas said, remembering. "There's no way he killed these kids and buried them in the basement of a private house, under the concrete floor. He was only here for a few weeks, homeless most of the time. He lived in a hole under a tree, for part of the time, for Christ's sakes. He didn't even have a car."

"Gotta get the addresses, see who was living here," Sherrill said again.

Lucas looked up out of the hole at the surrounding neighborhood, as Sherrill had, and said, "I knocked on two hundred doors. Me and Sloan. We never got within two miles of this place. Never crossed the river."

"Mark Towne owned a bunch of these houses down here," said one of the older cops. "The Towne Houses. I don't know if these were his."

Lucas said, "That seems right to me. Before the kids came in, it was mostly elderly.

Retired railroad workers, lots of them. Towne was buying them up for a few thousand bucks apiece.”

Sherrill said, “We’ll check.”

“Towne got killed in a car crash, maybe ten, fifteen years ago,” somebody offered.

Lucas nodded at the bodies: “How’d they come out clean like this? So flat?”

A guy in a yellow helmet said, “I was pulling up the pieces of the basement slab, to load ’em up.” He gestured at his Cat. “I got hold of that one block and tipped it up, and there they were.”

“You could see them?” Lucas wasn’t disbelieving, just curious.

“I could see the plastic and something in the plastic. I had to check in case . . .” He stopped and looked around the hole, searching for a place that didn’t look back at him with bony eye sockets. “You know what? I got the creeps looking at it. I had a feeling it was something bad, before I ever got down to look.”

Lucas nodded at him, said, “Bad day,” and then turned back to Sherrill. “I’d keep the slabs around. He must’ve poured the concrete right over the top of them. You might find fingerprints, some kind of impressions. Something.”

She nodded. “We’ll do that.”

“And you gotta find the Joneses, the parents, and let them know, right away. Before the news gets out. If you want, I’ve got a researcher who can find them, and I can have her call you with the phone numbers. I heard they got divorced a couple years after the kids were killed . . . but I don’t know that for sure.”

“If you’ve got somebody who could do that . . . but have him call me.”

“Her,” Lucas said. And, “I will.”

SHERRILL AND DAVENPORT drifted away from the group, and Sherrill asked, “Haven’t seen you for a while. How’ve you been?”

“Busy, but nothing crazy,” Lucas said. He touched her on the shoulder, and added, “This Jones thing. It was amazing, if you worked it. Big news—cute little blond girls, vanishing like that. The way things are now, I doubt anybody will care. It was too long ago. But the guy who did it is still around. We can’t let it slide.”

“We won’t let it slide,” she said.

“But you’ve got other things to do, just like I do. And the girls are dead.”

“You sound like you’ve got a special interest,” Sherrill said.

Lucas looked over to the plastic-wrapped bodies: “You know, all those years ago . . . I kinda messed up. I’ve always thought that, and now . . . here it is, back in my face.”

A Channel Three TV truck slowed on the open street at the far end of the gash. One of the older cops called, “We got media.”

Lucas said to Sherrill, as they stepped back to the group around the grave, “You got my number if you need anything. I’ll get you that information on the Joneses.”

She said, “I’m still a little pissed about the last time.”

The winter before, Lucas had trampled all over a Minneapolis investigation of a series of murders that started in a Minneapolis hospital. It had all ended with a shoot-out in a snowstorm, to which Sherrill felt she had not been properly invited. Grenades had been involved.

Lucas grinned and said, “Yeah, well, tough shit, sweetheart. Listen, I remember a lot about this thing. If you need me, call. Really.”

She softened, but just half an inch—she and Lucas had once spent a month or so in bed, and that month had been as contentious as their hands-off relationship since then. “I will.” And, “How’s Weather feeling?”

“Getting better; she was pretty cranky last month.”

“Say hello for me.”

Lucas said he would, looked a last time at the hole with the plastic-wrapped bodies: “Man, it seems like it was a month ago. That was the year of Madonna. Everybody listening to Madonna. And Prince was huge. Soul Asylum was coming up. I used to go to the Soul Asylum concerts every time they played Seventh Street Entry. And we’d ride around at night, look at the crack whores, listen to ‘Like a Virgin’ and ‘Crazy for You’ and ‘Little Red Corvette.’ Hot that summer. And I mean, Madonna was young, way back then.”

“So were we,” said one of the old cops. “I used to dance.”

Another asked, “What’re you gonna do about this?”

“We’ve got one more guy to catch,” Lucas said. “I hate to think what this cocksucker’s done between now and then. Excuse the French.”

LUCAS WENT BACK to his office, in the BCA building on the north side of St. Paul. It was a solid, modern building, which felt more like a suburban office complex than a police headquarters. He climbed the stairs to his second-floor office, with a quick flash of a hand at a friend down a hallway. His secretary said, “Hi, I need to—” and he said, “Later,” and went into his office and closed the door.

The image of the dead girls hung in his eyes, the stony smiles asking, “What’ll you do about this?”

Lucas pulled a wastebasket over beside his desk and propped his feet on it, tilted his chair back and closed his eyes, and let himself slip back to the first days of the Jones case. He took the investigation a day at a time, as best as he could remember it, and there wasn’t much that he’d forgotten.

And when he got to the end of the review, he decided that right at the beginning, he’d done something worse than anything else he’d done in his entire career since then—even though some of the things he’d done since then were technically criminal. Criminal, but not immoral. What he’d done back then was immoral: he’d caved.

He’d been a still-impressionable kid eager to get into plainclothes, and a path had been laid out for him. That path meant putting the early days of his career in the hands of Quentin Daniel, a very smart and occasionally quite a bad man. Daniel wanted to be chief of police, and maybe mayor.

The Jones case was an ugly one, with all kinds of frightening undertones, and as the head of violent crimes—Homicide—Daniel was on the hot seat. He’d pushed a strong and legitimate investigation, but when a suspect popped up, somebody who was essentially unable to defend himself, and against whom there was substantial evidence, Daniel had grabbed him and held on tight.

Then the suspect got himself killed, and once you kill a guy, you own him, for good

or evil. If he's innocent, and you kill him, your career may be over; if he's guilty, well, then, no harm done.

Scrape, Lucas thought, had seemed to him innocent even at the time; and now, almost certainly so. He could have pushed harder, he could have slipped more information to the *Star Tribune*, he could have publicly challenged the verdict on Scrape . . . but he hadn't.

He'd done some poking around, but then, as the youngest member of Daniel's team, he hadn't rocked the boat. Daniel hadn't been dumb enough to forbid him from continuing an investigation, but had simply joked about his efforts—and kept him on the hop with daily investigative chores in the middle of the crack explosion—and Lucas had eventually let the Jones case go.

Had caved, had given up. Had put the Jones girls in his personal out-basket.

God only knew what the killer had done after that. In the best of all worlds, he might have frightened himself so badly that he never again committed a crime. But in the real world, Lucas feared, his own . . . negligence . . . had allowed the killer to continue to kidnap and murder kids. That's what these guys usually did, after they started.

A thin cold blanket of depression fell over Lucas's thoughts. He ran his hand through his hair, once, twice, again and again, trying to make the train of thought go elsewhere.

The Jones girls, back for their summer reunion tour.



**THEN**

## 2

There was an instant, just before the fight, when Lucas Davenport's overweight partner said, "Watch it, he's coming," and he pulled his nightstick and Lucas had time to set his feet. Then Carlos O'Hearn came steaming down the bar, through the stink of spilled beer and hot dogs with relish and boiled eggs in oversized jars, came knocking over bar stools like tenpins, a beer bottle in his right hand, while the bartender leaned away and said, "Nooooo . . ."

Ten feet out, O'Hearn pitched the bottle at Lucas's head. Lucas tipped his head to the right and the bottle went by and bounced down the bar, taking out glasses and ashtrays and silverware as it went, so it sounded like somebody had dropped a kitchen tray. A woman made a scream-like sound, but not quite a scream, because it seemed more *interested* than terrorized. Lucas didn't register much of that, because he was focused on O'Hearn, who'd spent some time as a Golden Gloves fighter, in what must have been the germ-weight class.

O'Hearn was one of three siblings known as the asshole brothers to cops working the south side. They also had an asshole mother, but nobody knew for sure about the father. Fleeing Mother O'Hearn may have been simple self-preservation by whoever had made the mistake of impregnating her three times, because she was as violent and crooked and generally rotten and no-good as her sons.

The O'Hearns usually did minor strong-arm robbery, but they'd gotten ambitious and had gone into the back of a True Value hardware store, from which they'd stolen a pile of power tools. Everybody knew exactly *what* they'd taken because of the video cameras that the asshole brothers hadn't noticed, up on the ceiling behind silvered domes. The cameras had taken photos that would have made Ansel Adams proud, if Ansel Adams had ever taken pictures of assholes.

Enzo and Javier were already in the Hennepin County jail, and the bar owner had called 911 to report that Carlos had come in, and was in a bad mood, which usually led to a fight and broken crockery.

So Lucas and his partner rolled, and here they were, O'Hearn coming down the bar with a Golden Gloves punch. Lucas set his feet, dodged the bottle, and, with a reach about nine inches longer than the Golden Glover's, and with an extra eighty pounds or so, and with a fist loaded with a roll of nickels, tagged O'Hearn in the forehead.

The punch had been aimed at his nose, but O'Hearn, too, could dodge, and though the punch crossed his eyes, his momentum kept him coming and they collided and O'Hearn got in two good licks to Lucas's ribs as they went to the floor, where Lucas pinned his arms and his partner started playing the Minnesota Fight Song on O'Hearn's back and right leg with his nightstick.

O'Hearn took about six shots before he whimpered the first time, then Lucas got back just enough to pop him in the nose with the weighted fist, and blood exploded across the bar floor and O'Hearn went flat.

After that, it was routine.

ALL OF WHICH EXPLAINED WHY, when Lucas rolled out of bed and stretched, a lightning stroke of pain shot through his left side, from the cracked ribs he'd taken from those two quick Golden Gloves punches. He stretched again, more carefully, then looked down at the soft round ass of a blond-haired woman and said, "DeeDee. Rise and shine."

"What?" She sounded drugged. She wasn't getting much sleep, she said, between her law practice and keeping two guys happy.

Lucas said, "Get up. You got a bitter woman to talk to."

DeeDee McAllister groaned and said, "Go away."

He smacked her on the bottom and said, "C'mon. You told me not to let you sleep. Let's go. You got a client. You got a three o'clock."

She pushed up and looked at the clock on the bedstand: two o'clock. Dropped back and said, "Ten minutes."

"Ten minutes," Lucas agreed.

They'd rendezvoused in his first-floor apartment in an old brick house in Minneapolis's Uptown. He had two rooms, and a three-quarters bath, with a compact kitchen at one end of his living room, and an oversized leather chair that faced an undersized television.

He headed for the bathroom—a shower, no tub—scrubbed his face, brushed his teeth, hopped in the shower, sudsed up, rinsed, and was out in five minutes.

He stopped to look at himself in a full-length mirror on the back of the bedroom door: he was tall, dark-haired, broadshouldered, heavily muscled from twenty years of hockey, the last few as a first-line defenseman for the Minnesota Golden Gophers.

He'd lost some muscle since graduation, but that was okay. He'd stopped the obsessive muscle-building workouts, at the advice of the team trainers, and started spending more time on endurance workouts, with lighter weights and more reps. And he was running more.

"You think my dick is bigger than average?" he asked, looking at himself.

McAllister pushed herself up, saw him posing in the mirror, said, "Oh, for Christ's sakes," and fell flat again.

"Well, what do you think?"

"You've seen about a million times more penises than I have, since you spent your entire friggin' life in locker rooms," she said. "I've seen about four."

"Four?" He sounded doubtful.

"Okay, six. Or eight. No more than eight. You've seen a million."

"Yeah, but they weren't, you know, erect," Lucas said. He looked in the mirror again. "I think I'm fairly big."

"I'd say you're on the big side of average," she said. "Now let me get my last minute."

"You think I'm big," he said.

"Big side of average. Maybe. Now gimme my goddamn one minute."

He stood sideways: Big.

---

HE STEPPED around a pile of hockey gear next to the bed, got out a fresh pair of shorts and a T-shirt. As he was pulling on a T-shirt, McAllister sat up and said, “One thing is, your body gets me hot.”

“Gets me hot, too,” Lucas said. He rubbed his nipples with the palms of his hands.

“Ah, Jesus.” She rubbed her face. “He plays with his own tits.” She watched him dress, and smacked her lips and scratched her ass.

“C’mon,” he said. The apartment bedroom had a tiny closet, too small for his growing collection of clothes, so he’d bought an old oak clothing rack from a used furniture store. From it, he selected a clean pair of uniform pants and a shirt. DeeDee got out of bed and went into the bathroom, stared at her face in the mirror above the sink, and said, finally, “I almost look happy.”

“That’s good.”

“I wish Mark could see me this way,” she said.

“Would I have to be standing here?” Lucas asked. Mark was her husband; McAllister was a divorce attorney. She sometimes talked about Mark’s gun collection.

“I’d have to think about that,” she said. She stepped back into the bedroom and picked up her underpants. “He has a nasty temper and you could protect me. Make me kinda hot seeing two guys fighting over me. Like a princess.”

“Everything gets you hot. A domestic protection order gets you hot,” Lucas said. They both knew he was telling the truth.

“On the other hand,” she continued, “it’s considered somewhat *déclassé* for a prestigious divorce attorney like myself to be caught screwing a humble cop. Even one with an average dick.”

“Large.” Lucas checked himself in the mirror: Hair still damp, uniform shirt tight across the shoulders and loose around the waist, tightly pressed slacks. Chicks liked pressed slacks, even the hippies; or at least, he suspected they did. His study of women continued. “So you’d have to decide whether you’d rather get beaten up, or be considered *déclassé*.”

“Yeah. I hate to think which way I’d go,” she said. “Getting beat up only hurts for a while.” He turned and watched her get dressed: she’d draped her clothes neatly on wooden clothes hangers, and hung them on a curtain rod: a woman’s business suit, navy blue jacket and skirt over a white blouse, big pads in the jacket shoulders, a narrow red ribbon tie. She had fairly wide, feminine hips, and the combination of shoulder pads and hips made her look, from the back, like a duck.

Lucas didn’t say so. His study of women had gotten *that* far. Quack.

Instead, he picked up his duty belt and strapped it around his waist, pulled the Glock from its holster, did an automatic check. He didn’t much like the weapon—too white-bread, in his opinion—but that was what he’d been issued and was required to carry. When he made detective, he’d change to something classier. European or something.

McAllister was back in the bathroom, checked herself in the mirror, and came out, smiled, not shyly, but said, “Don’t kiss me, you’ll mess up my lipstick.”

“I’d like to throw you back on the bed and do you one more time,” Lucas lied. She was attractive, all right, and she wasn’t short on enthusiasm, but he was itching to get

out in the car. He liked working nights, and this night was going to be interesting. Early August, people all over the street, and the heat had been building for a week. Rock-out. “Or maybe twice.”

“Save it,” she said. “I gotta go talk to the bitter woman.”

Lucas stuck a finger through the Venetian blind and peeked out: the sky was clear and blue and shimmering with humidity. No sign of her husband.

Party time.

LUCAS HAD BEEN A COP for three years. He’d graduated from the University of Minnesota after five years of study, and four years of hockey—he’d been a rare redshirt the first year, to pick up weight and muscle—with a major in American studies, which, he quickly discovered, qualified him to go back to school. He considered law, but after talking to a few law students, decided that life might be too short.

One of his AmStud professors suggested that he look at law enforcement. “My old man’s a cop,” the professor said. “You’ve got the attitude. I think you’d like it. Do it for a few years, *then* look at law school.”

His mother was against it: “You’ll get shot. Then there’ll be nobody left.”

She meant, nobody left in the family. His father had died of congenital heart disease when Lucas was in fifth grade. His mother had now been diagnosed with breast cancer, and had convinced herself that she wasn’t going to make it.

Lucas had looked into it, sitting up in the university’s medical library, and thought she was probably right. He tried not to dwell on that conclusion, because there didn’t seem to be anything he could do about it.

Stopping cancer, he thought, was like throwing your body in a river to stop the water. You could weep, scream, demand, research, and pray, and nothing seemed to help. The only help he’d found was in denial: he didn’t think about it, particularly when she seemed to be in remission.

He also didn’t worry about his own heart—his father’s mother had German measles during the pregnancy, he’d been told, and that accounted for the defect that eventually killed him. No genetics involved.

LUCAS WENT OFF to the police academy, scored at the top of his class—would have been at the top in any class anyone could remember—spent a few weeks on patrol, spent six months working dope, then went back on patrol.

Dope was interesting, but he didn’t get to do much investigation. He mostly hung out, a white guy in a letter jacket who always knew the spread on college sports, and tried to buy dope in commercial quantities by making friends with the dealers he met. The dealers were everywhere—meeting them wasn’t a problem. The problem was, some of them didn’t seem like bad guys. They were more like guys his age who couldn’t get real jobs. So they’d come up with a kilo, or a pound, and then the real narcs would move in, and bust the dealer. . . .

The whole thing smacked too much of betrayal. You made friends, you bought dope from them, you busted them. The accumulating bad taste moved him back to patrol, which was fun for an ex-jock, a hockey defenseman. There was some excitement, new sights—new insights—and the sense that he was doing something worthwhile.

But after three years, he'd decided he wouldn't do it for too much longer. They'd make him a detective, and pretty quickly, or he'd find something else to do.

What, he didn't know.

Law school. Something. The military? There were no decent wars in sight. . . .

LUCAS WAS OUT sitting on the hood of his assigned squad when Fred Carter, his partner, finally showed up. Carter had missed the second-shift briefing, said he'd been caught in traffic, but he smelled of an Italian meatball sandwich.

"What're we doing?"

"Usual," Lucas said. "Homer's pissed at you."

"I'll talk to him. It was unavoidable," Carter said.

Lucas said, "You got some tomato sauce under your lip. I'd wipe it off before you talk to him."

Carter was a fleshy, bull-necked man who looked like a cabdriver, with blunt features and fingers, and a growing gut. He wasn't stupid, but he was going nowhere in the police department. He knew it, and didn't care. He was in for twenty, and then out. He'd gotten fourteen, and now his main concern was to avoid injury, and to plot out his move to state government, for a second dip in the pension stream.

That attitude was the main bone of contention between them: Lucas enjoyed the occasional fight and didn't mind chasing a man through dark backyards. Carter said, "I don't care if you get your ass kicked, but the problem is, you pull *me* into it. Stop doing that."

"We're cops," Lucas said.

"We're peace officers," Carter snapped back. "Try to keep a little fuckin' peace, okay?"

Yeah, keep a little peace. But what did it mean if a guy went through life thinking about nothing but football—Carter was a big Vikes fan—and a pension? What kind of life was that?

ON THIS AFTERNOON and evening, they checked out their squad and started rolling around in south Minneapolis, taking in the sights; it was one of those late afternoons in the city when everything smelled like melting Juicy Fruit, spilled Orange Crush, and hot tar. Then a drunk Ojibwa, down from Red Lake, climbed up on a fire hydrant, for reasons unknown, gave a speech, fell off, and gashed his head on the top nut. They thought for a moment that he'd been shot, until a witness explained. They called an ambulance and had him transported to Hennepin General, and rolled again.

Carter was short of his quota on traffic tickets that month, so they hid at the bottom of a hill and knocked off three speeders in forty-five minutes, which put him back

square. It wasn't a quota, it was a performance metric. The chief said so, with a straight face.

They hit a convenience store on Lyndale, scowled at the dope dealers, who moseyed off, and Carter got a fried cherry pie and a Pepsi. They rolled away, and the dope dealers moseyed back. A half-hour later, they checked out a report of a fight in the parking lot of a bar. There'd been one, all right, but everybody ran when the car pulled up, and there were no bodies and no blood, and nobody knew who was involved.

They got a couple more soft drinks, Diet Coke for Lucas, another Pepsi for Carter, and moved along, arguing Coke versus Pepsi, took a call about another fight, this one at an antique store.

When they got there, two women, one heavy and one thin, both with fashionable blond haircuts, were squared off on the sidewalk, the dealer between them, a clerk peering out from the gold-leafed doorway. The fight hadn't actually taken place yet, and Lucas and Carter separated the two women, one of whom told the other, "You're lucky the cops got here, or I would have stuffed that chiffonier right up your fat butt."

"Oh, yeah, bitch-face, let me tell you . . ." What she told her couldn't be reported in any of the better home furnishings magazines, Lucas thought, as it included four of the seven words George Carlin said you couldn't use on television. The fat one was definitely ready to go, until Carter said, "If we have to take you in, they *will* discover any chiffoniers you got up there. It's called a body-cavity search, and you won't like it."

That cooled them off, and they left in their respective Mercedeses.

"It's the heat that does it," Carter observed to the antique dealer.

"Maybe not," the dealer said. "It's a gorgeous chiffonier."

"WHAT THE FUCK is a chiffonier?" Lucas asked, as they rolled away.

"One of those coffee-serving things," Carter said. "You know, that go around in circles."

Lucas studied him for a moment, then said, "You got no idea what a chiffonier is."

"That's true."

"But I liked the way you handled it. That strip-search line," Lucas said. "Took it right out of them."

"Like I said: keep the peace," Carter said.

"Really. You shoulda been a cop or something."

AT FIVE O'CLOCK, Lucas spotted a man named Justice Johnson, who'd beaten up his old lady once too often; a warrant had been issued. They corralled him in the recessed entry of a locksmith's shop. He'd been eating a raw onion, as though it were an apple, and it bounced away into the gutter as they cuffed him. He didn't bother to fight, and bitched and moaned about his woman, who, he said, did nothing but pick at him.

"Bitch said I'm a dumbass," Johnson said from the backseat of the squad. He was