

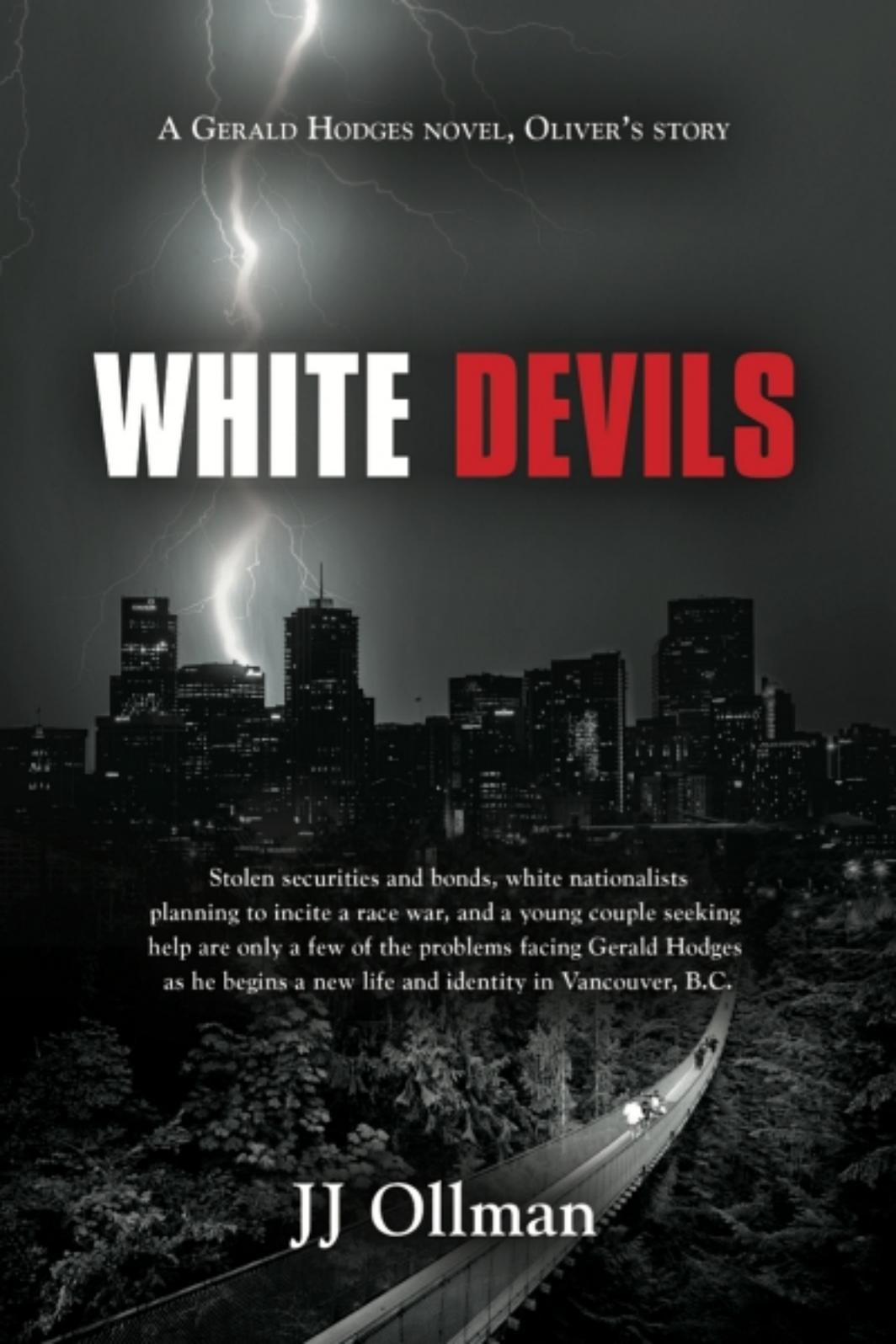
Stolen securities and bonds, white nationalists planning to foment a race war and a young couple seeking help are only a few of the problems facing Gerald Hodges as he begins a new life and identity in Vancouver, B.C.

**White Devils:
A Gerald Hodges novel, Oliver's Story**
By JJ Ollman

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A GERALD HODGES NOVEL, OLIVER'S STORY

WHITE DEVILS

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-310-2

Epub ISBN: 978-1-64719-311-9

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-64719-312-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.

2021

First Edition

Edited by Ricki Walters and George Marino

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Ollman, JJ

White Devils: A Gerald Hodges novel, Oliver's Story by JJ Ollman

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021900017

Previous books written by JJ Ollman include:

Trust Me now

Cassandra's Moon

The Book Club Murders (Book 1, A Gerald Hodges novel)

Brothers, Tale of the River Rats

The Devil's Kettle (Book 2, A Gerald Hodges novel)

Impious, Thoughts on growing up Atheist in a Judeo-Christian culture

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Chapter 1

April, six months later

“That’s not going to work, Larry. Your plan lacks seriousness, depth, and a genuine chance of success.”

Larry snorted, the tattoo on his left cheek rippled from the rush of air emanating from his nostrils. “You’ve always got something better, don’t you, Blondie?”

Connie smiled because he was used to this from Larry the Nazi. Connie studied him. Larry was significant, not just tall, but large: broad shoulders, muscular, taut. His neck was thick, melding into the trapezius muscle sitting atop his shoulders. His core was broad and hard. It wouldn't be difficult to imagine him as a professional lineman in the National Football League. Connie chortled. Larry reminded him of Bluto, the big, stupid character in the old Popeye cartoons.

“Now what, Blondie? Are you laughing at me?”

His face red, fists clenched, Larry glared at Connie.

Connie retained the smile and held his ground. He knew how to handle a person who always resorted to physical intimidation when he couldn't contemplate other options. His experiences with a brutal stepfather had taught him plenty.

“I’m not laughing at you,” Connie said, his voice steady.

“It kind of looked that way.” Larry’s red face seemed to darken.

Connie didn't move. He held Larry's stare; his tone was soothing. “I know you put some thought into this, but did you research the alarm system, the number of guards inside and out, how much time we need to get the job done, getting our bodies out of there safely? I'm sorry, but we need a better plan.”

Larry paused as comprehension seeped into his brain. He broke off the stare.

Connie watched Larry's Adam's apple move up and down. The large muscles in his shoulders and arms relaxed. His head drooped.

“I just wanted to give an outline for now. I don't have enough info to account for those other factors.”

Larry actually sounded intelligent, but Connie could almost see the steroids leaking from his skin. He knew his brain had been compromised. In fact, it was probably one of the reasons Larry joined the white

supremacist movement in the first place. The ‘roids had built gigantic muscles on the man but had partially atrophied his brain in the process.

He stepped close to Larry and placed a light touch on his shoulder.

“It’s a nice beginning. We’ll study the place inside and out, observe, and check the location of guards.”

The cocked slant of Larry’s head reminded him of the German Shepard he had as a child.

He felt sorry for Larry.

As for the rest of them, *God, why did I partner up with this group of idiots?* The one and only reason was money, lots of it. That, and he needed help. He couldn’t do this by himself. But he was barely sure these men were capable of carrying out his plan in the precise manner they had to without getting caught or killed. They were all in the “muscle” category, nothing sophisticated about any of them, except possibly Agostino.

Larry was not the brightest of the bunch, but Connie was sure he was the easiest to manipulate. He didn't want to see anyone killed whether they were bystanders or this little group of Nazis he had joined out of necessity.

It hadn't been difficult to meet them. Connie had roamed the tough bars in the seedier parts of Vancouver for two weeks, seeking out men such as these. Eventually, he had ingratiated himself by pretending to buy into their philosophy. In turn, they opened up about their plans to pull off a series of small robberies to finance their activities. It didn't take much to convince them of putting their efforts into one gigantic score. They all agreed it would be well worth it if they could succeed.

Jessie Norbert James was whom he met first, a medium-sized, naturally bald man. He didn't have to shave his head to fit in with the skinheads. He was slightly built and appeared non-threatening, but his looks were deceiving. He carried two knives, one of which, the seven-inch blade, he kept tucked into the waist of his jeans and hidden by a denim vest he always wore. The other resided in a boot sheath. The second time they met in Cudgill’s Pub, slurping beers and playing pool, Jessie had busted a pool stick over another guy’s head and then cut him superficially in just the right places to make him look like bloody hell and go to the hospital. All because the dipstick had moved the cue ball slightly with his hand as he set up his shot.

Jessie introduced the other four to him. None of them were intellectual giants, but they seemed like they could grasp enough and would be disciplined enough to pull off his caper. Connie held some confidence they would.

Larry Flud, Agostino Bellimino, Scott Johnson, and Riff Beckendale rounded out the group. Only Bellimino sported a head of hair. It was black, curly, and luxurious. All of them had tattooed their arms so heavily they looked like shirtsleeves. Only Larry had a facial tattoo, which they would need to hide some way if he was going to be seen by anyone.

Connie was the most presentable and believable when playing a visible role. Agostino was the only other one who could play a lesser, but still prominent part.

Chapter 2

June, just outside Capilano Suspension Bridge Park

Sweat decanted from Oliver's head and neck. His pace didn't slow as he wiped it from his eyes. Muscles straining and joints aching he committed to finishing the last mile of his route. Eight months ago he never would have thought he could complete a ten-mile run and actually feel like he could go farther. His eyes lifted to the top of the hill where his personal trainer waited, stopwatch in hand. Satisfaction filled his thoughts as he sprinted the last hundred yards.

Madison Dupree clicked the stopwatch and smiled.

Her excited voice broke the silence. "Got you at one hour and fifty-nine minutes. Your best time."

Oliver beamed. Life was beautiful, Parkinson's or no Parkinson's. He loved the natural high the firing endorphins produced in his brain. Running, stretching, and exercise, along with the drug his doctor had chosen to help him manage his disease—Levodopa, a synthetic substance that is converted into dopamine, permitted him to live a normal life, at least as healthy as he possibly could.

He stood straight, hands on hips while breathing deeply. He always liked to end his runs with a short sprint. Running was only one part of his regimen. Flexibility, strength, and martial arts training were all a part of his daily routine.

As Madison led him through his necessary post-run stretching routine and then cool down walk around the park, they talked.

She had become more than just his personal trainer, and now assumed a loosely defined role of an associate in Oliver's "help" business.

She spoke, "It seems like the Holtz brothers liked the results of your work so much that they added a bonus to your check."

Payne lifted an eyebrow, begging the question, how much?

Madison toyed with him a little before she related the amount. "A thousand."

Payne half expected the news and nodded approvingly. The business had gone well. It seemed like in a city the size of Vancouver all sorts of people were willing to reach out for help, whether it was to expose an embezzler, stop a wife abuser, or an occasional assist to the police. It

wasn't as if Oliver needed the money. He had plenty with no worries of where his next meal would come from. Lucille had ensured that.

He did it to make up for all of his past wrongs. Although nightmares continued to make an occasional appearance, they occurred much less frequently, and he attributed that fact to the good deeds he was performing.

The doctor's news of his condition had been a shock, but he had shaken it off quickly, made his plan, and followed through. He had to admit he was good at his new profession, and another benefit was that he enjoyed his work. It seemed he had always managed to make some good friends who accepted his peculiarities and saw him for the good man he was. Madison was a great find. Months ago, the morning after making his plan, Oliver had scanned the ads for personal trainers. With typical thoroughness, he checked out references, track record with clients, and integrity before interviewing and hiring Madison full time. After three months, Madison impressed him enough to work her way on board as an associate in Oliver's personal business. It was a suitable arrangement for both.

"Get in," Madison said.

Oliver did as commanded and flopped onto the front passenger seat and Madison drove them to his Sunset Inn suite. The Hyundai Elantra glided to a stop. Payne departed, breezily walked into the Inn and up to his room for a shower, as Madison parked the Elantra in its designated spot in the underground parking lot.

After showering, Oliver dried himself with one of the plushest, softest towels he could find.

More than nine months had passed since his harrowing ordeal on the North Shore of Minnesota and his near-death experience at the Devil's Kettle. He had escaped with the help of two friends. Both of them knew he was a fugitive and wanted for murder, but both of them had become convinced of his redemption and the soundness of his character. It hadn't been an act. He had turned his life around.

Several years ago he was a sick, damaged man, wrought by obsessive-compulsive disorder and a touch of Asperger's. Today, only the obsessive-compulsive disorder and hint of Asperger's remained. A

strange infatuation had twisted his passion for a woman so much that he committed heinous crimes in the name of love. He was guilty, no doubt about it, but he had seen the light, as they say. He discovered, in one fleeting moment when he contemplated self-destruction near the cabin where he had killed his last victim, that his death would be wasted. He vowed that he would spend the rest of his life making up for his past transgressions, and Lucille helped him redeem himself. He owed her everything, but they were estranged and no longer involved as husband and wife. But Lucille believed in him, his capacity for love, compassion and indeed, would support him in his quest for redemption.

He sighed. He wished he could see Lucille again. They loved each other, but their vast differences forced them apart.

He sat on a comfortable armchair paging aimlessly through his new passport. At first, he had not cared for the new name she had given him-- Oliver Payne. He had requested a different, more suitable name, but now changed his mind. He had gotten used to it.

The name rolled from his lips several times. Practice makes perfect, he told himself. He never slipped when introducing himself to clients — or anyone for that matter. Gerald Hodges he was no more.

Madison hadn't returned from the parking garage so he stood and walked to the dresser in the bedroom of the one bedroom suite.

He unpacked the carefully folded socks he had bought at Landmark Clothiers in Winnipeg and arranged them back to front, left to right, in the top drawer of the dresser. He methodically repeated the procedure with his underwear, t-shirts, and dress shirts. He preferred folding his dress shirts carefully with nary a wrinkle rather than hanging them in a closet alongside his dress pants and jeans. It was a peculiarity that used to drive Lucille crazy, but it was the only way he could exist.

A faint knock at the door made him turn abruptly. Because he was not yet comfortable with the idea he wasn't still being pursued by the police, a stab of fear seized him. He drew in a deep breath, turned, and walked to the door.

"Yes," he said in a measured voice.

No response.

"Yes," he said louder.

No response.

He peeked out the eyehole in the door and saw no one. Grasping the knob, he turned it as if in slow motion and cracked the door open. He felt and heard something slide away from the bottom of the door.

A newspaper.

An imperceptible smile defined his face when he fully opened the door and bent down to pick it up.

The headline blazed: Vancouver Riots after Canucks Lose Stanley Cup Finals to Boston. An incredible photo captured vehicles overturned, fires burning, fans running, police swinging riot batons, and among all that, a young couple in the forefront of the picture splashed across the front page. The woman's legs sprawled on the pavement as the young man helped support her upper body and kissed her lips. Payne stared at the photo, not even bothering to read the caption or story beneath it. Something about the scene captured his emotions. It exposed an evening of riot, fear, fire, and love.

Crossing the neatly kept living room, his eyes never leaving the photo, he found the leather sofa and sat. The hard cushion did not complain as he nestled in, devouring every detail of the picture of the couple as he did so.

The granular quality did not lend itself to high definition, but he noted the obvious, such as the young woman's legs laying bare up to the cheeks of her derriere. Her hair was less than shoulder length, and her blouse was sleeveless. The man who was kissing her displayed short hair, no beard, and muscular arms supporting her upper body. No tattoos on either were visible. Batons in hand, police were running around the couple, apparently trying to get to the riotous crowd behind the two.

Fascinated, Oliver continued to stare at the photo. His eyes wandered to a thousand other details: a Chevrolet Blazer burned in the background. He knew it was a Blazer because of the shape and the logo, which was barely discernable when he squinted; young men dressed in tee shirts and jeans running away from the police were carrying homemade torches; police in the background were swinging batons, cracking heads, backs, legs, and shoulders.

The coded knock on the door jarred him free of the picture: three quick and two delayed beats told him it was Madison. He laid the paper on the coffee table and walked to the door and opened it.

Madison stood outside the doorway until Oliver nodded and she entered.

Chapter 5

Jessie lounged, feet propped on a battered, half-broken coffee table in a three-room shack outside the city. It was private, isolated, secure, and surrounded by twenty acres of trees, rolling foothills, and an idyllic creek flowing through the middle. He wasn't in the habit, but today he was in a contemplative mood. As soon as they found out the group had been betrayed, he'd become enraged, had broken several cue sticks by repeatedly slamming them over the table his feet were now propped upon. Not psycho-killer enraged, but a controlled, considered, destructive rage.

Now that he was done with that, he needed time to think. He thought about the fact that Larry, Agostino, and Scott had nearly bumped into the couple during the night of violence in the city. In fact, they had helped start the riots, tipping over vehicles, setting them on fire, and generally helping to madden the drunken locals who were outraged at the hometown team's loss in the Stanley Cup's final game. After making eye contact with Connie and Natalie at the same time, Agostino had alerted the other two and they chased them through the streets, only losing sight of them when a line of riot police got in the way.

Think, he told himself. *Did Connie just use them, or did Natalie convince him to keep it all for themselves? If they found them, it would be easy to get what they wanted. Pain always helped accomplish that. But why would Connie and Natalie risk exposing themselves on the streets? Was it to meet the contact and sell the securities and bonds? How would they find them? They had to find them—but how?*

Larry popped his head in the doorway. Jessie didn't even notice until Larry slammed the door shut, almost breaking the latch.

"Nothing, we got fucking nothing," he said, his steroid induced fury building.

Jessie didn't speak, just looked into space.

"Did you hear me, Jess, we got nothing, and you just sit there?" He spat the words out.

"You lazy son-of-a-bitch. You just sit there?" he said again with more emphasis.

With a calm voice, Jessie responded. "I've been thinking."

"Yeah, well, I've been thinking too. Me and the others go all around the city, searching, asking everyone we know if they've seen them or to

tell us when and where they see them, and all you do is just sit here...thinking.” A frightening, twisted facial change crossed Larry’s face. “Maybe you’re in on it with them, huh? Are you? Cause if you are I’ll fucking smash it out of you right now.”

Larry took three steps toward Jessie.

“If I was with them, don’t you think I’d be gone by now?” And then Jessie risked his life. His voice was taut, loud. “You big, dumb fuck, you think I’d still be here?”

Larry stopped. The twitch around his right eye was working overtime. He didn’t know what to say, but he clenched his fists.

In one smooth motion Jessie sprang to his feet like a cougar, snatched the knife from his waistband and pushed his face into Larry’s. The blade of the knife was against Larry’s throat, eliciting a thin trickle of blood that coursed slowly down a crease in his neck. A soft, controlled voice emanated from Jessie. “I’m here. I’ve got more brains than the four of you put together. My job is to think. Thinking saves time for everybody. Your job is to do what I say. If you’ve got a problem with that, tell me now.”

The door opened. Agostino, Scott, and Riff walked in. They stopped when they noticed what was happening.

Riff’s voice shook when he asked, “What’s going on?”

Sweat poured from Larry’s face as blood soaked into the collar of his t-shirt.

Jessie carelessly pulled the blade away from Larry’s neck, eliciting a brief cry of pain.

“Nothing, just establishing the pecking order.” After making a show of wiping the blood from the knife onto Larry’s shirtsleeve, all while burning a stare into Larry’s eyes, he returned the knife to the waistband of his jeans and stood a few feet away from his quarry, waiting for any action the steroid charged Nazi might take.

Larry backed several steps away with one hand to his throat stanching the flow of blood. His lips quivered. He didn’t say a word, but moved to the bathroom to tend to himself.

“Jesus man, did you have to do that?” Agostino said after Larry disappeared into the bathroom.

Jessie, who had sat back down with his feet up on the table again, said, "I did what I did. He questioned my commitment, so I relieved him of any doubt as to where I stood in this fucked up mess."

Agostino sounded sympathetic when he said, "I get it, but man, we don't need to be fighting each other. We need to be together on everything if we're going to find Connie and his girlfriend."

Jessie tilted his head to one side as if considering what Agostino had said, then drew his knife from his waistband again, brandished it slowly in the air with smooth cutting motions, and almost whispered, "This is what will keep us together. Do you have anything else you would like to say that could enlighten me?" It all came out cold like chilled air flowing from a freezer.

"Just one thing," Agostino started, and then paused. Jessie turned his face up and his frigid eyes narrowed as if to say, spit it out.

Agostino shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "We got a source that we can check and maybe find out where they're staying. His name is Anthony, some guy that's always on the streets who sees a lot and will talk about it."

"Keep going." Jessie ran the blade against the fingers of his other hand, checking its sharpness.

The current scenario he and the other two had just witnessed disturbed Agostino, but his body language and expression didn't reveal it. He knew Jessie was volatile and could be extremely violent, but he always assumed there was a calculated reason for his actions. Now he was beginning to believe that that might have not been a totally accurate view. It hadn't been just a one-off, but a cumulative body of interactions over the course of several weeks that convinced Agostino to consider the possibility that Jessie might have to be dealt with in a negative manner before this whole thing was finished. But his fear of Jessie and his unpredictable behavior would have to be overcome.

Agostino continued. "He's a different little dude. He spouts this really fast poetry, rap-like stuff about things and people pay him for it, but we also heard he gets paid for other things."

"Like?" Jessie asked.

"Like information. He keeps his eyes and ears open, gets around the city, plus he's got other people working for him that do the same thing. I

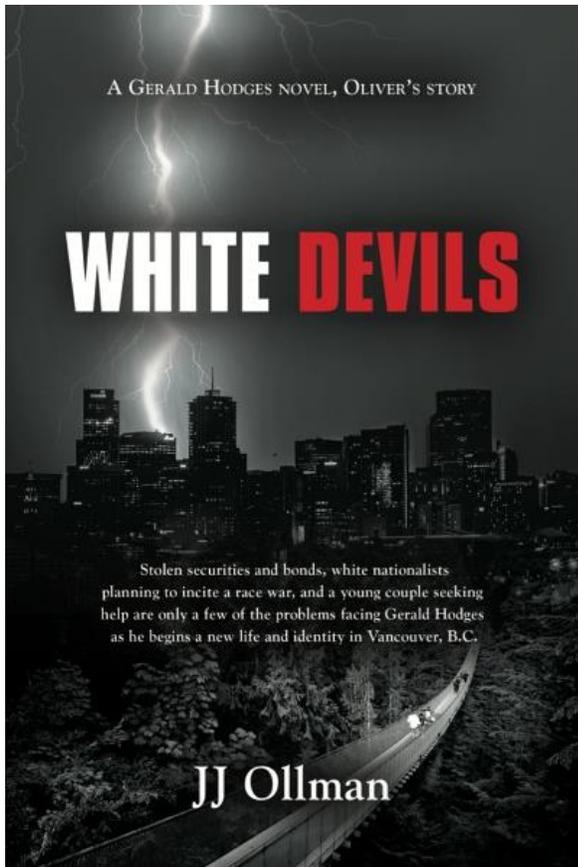
think we could get something out of him.” His eyes shifted to where Jessie continued to play with his knife.

Silence. A minute passed before Jessie returned the knife to its resting place in his waistband. His lips parted and formed as close to a smile as he ever exhibited and he said, “I think you should get out there and get to it then.”

“Yeah, well, we thought we’d get something to eat first and lay this on you to figure it all out before we did anything,” said Riff, who had been standing next to the others watching and listening to the preceding.

“Good idea, especially the part about letting me decide what to do,” said Jessie. “In fact, I’m kinda hungry myself.” He spread his arms out in an all-encompassing motion. “Riff, why don’t you wrestle up some pastrami sandwiches for all of us.”

Riff nodded in obedience and shuffled to the tiny kitchen.



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