

The sequel to SNOWBOUND is a slice-of-life story that spans many years before Kyle Lancer learns he must confront supernatural forces for the woman he loves.

THE LOST PEOPLE

By Larry Quillen

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11695.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



**THE
LOST
PEOPLE**

**A NOVEL BY
LARRY QUILLEN**

ALSO BY LARRY QUILLEN

JENNY CAY

DIGGER

THE ROGUE

THE RAMPART ALERT

SNOWBOUND

Copyright © 2021 Larry Quillen

Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-474-1

Epub ISBN: 978-1-64719-475-8

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-64719-476-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

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

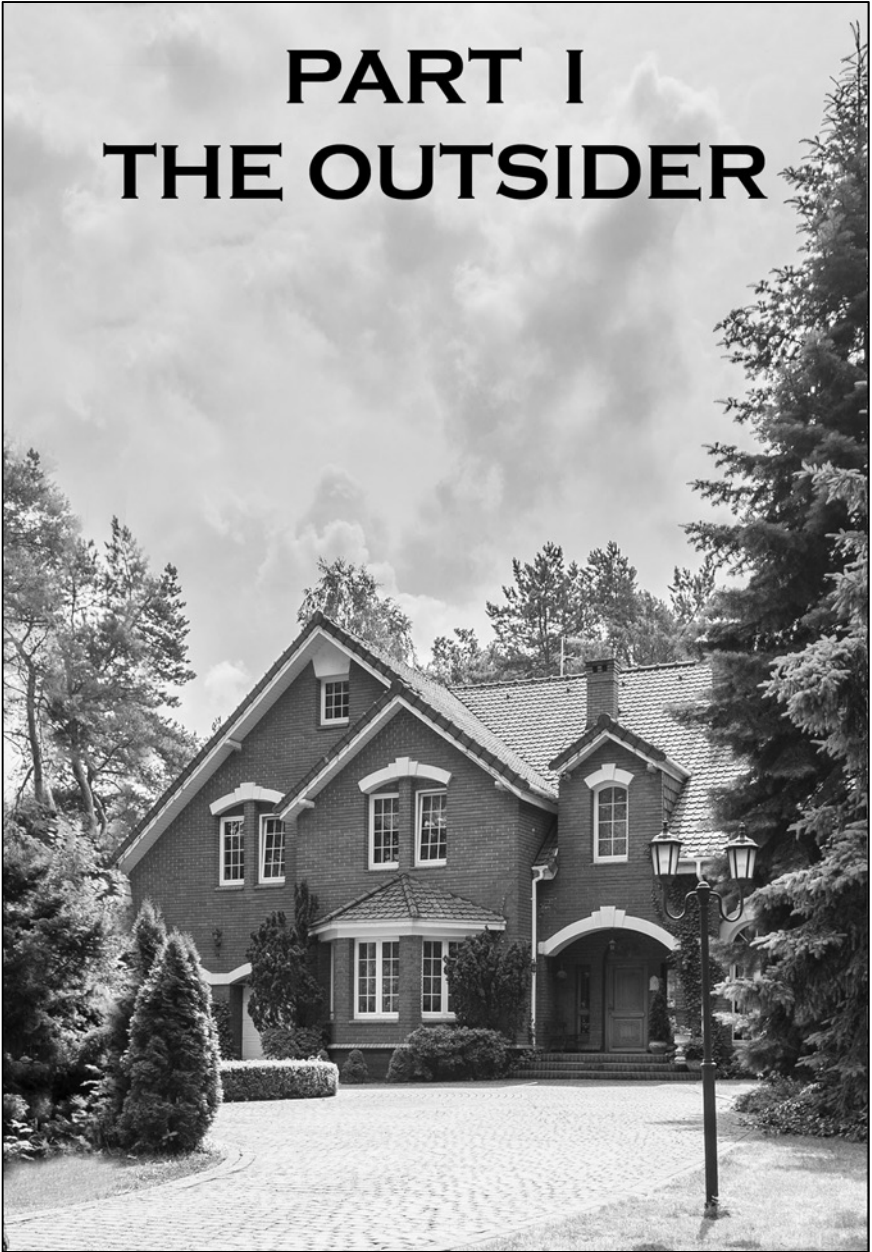
Printed on acid-free paper.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events or locales, is unintended and coincidental.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2021

First Edition

PART I THE OUTSIDER



1

DEBBIE CROSS WAS sitting at her aunt and uncle's dining table in West Hartford, Connecticut, surrounded by the noise and laughter of her extended family on Christmas Day 1952. The big pile of presents beneath the gaily decorated tree had been opened, and mounds of food from Aunt Rose's kitchen had been demolished by young and old alike.

Debbie, with a special man, Kyle Lancer, at her side, watched as her Uncle Paul approached the dining room with one of his Christmas presents, a Kodak Brownie Hawkeye Flash camera. He was taking pictures of everyone, everywhere in the house with his new toy. He took a shot from the dining room doorway, trying to get everyone around the large table in the picture. Then he approached the table opposite Kyle and Debbie and asked them to move their chairs close together. Debbie pretended annoyance but did as her uncle asked. With their shoulders touching, she felt Kyle's hand searching for hers underneath the table. She quickly took his hand and squeezed it, secretly telegraphing how she felt about him amid the noise and bustle of the people around them.

If it weren't for him, she would be dead at the hands of a psychotic mass murderer.

* * * *

THE LOST PEOPLE

When she was twelve, Debbie had moved into the home of her Uncle Paul, Aunt Rose, and their three daughters, Shirley, Martha, and Carol, after her father had been killed in the war and her mother had abandoned her. She had since graduated from a Catholic boarding school and was now the manager's secretary in the same Pratt & Whitney department where Kyle Lancer worked as an engineer.

Unknown to Kyle until a few days ago, she had been infatuated with the tall, good-looking man for months. When he greeted her in his Southern accent each morning as he passed by her desk, it made her smile. She had taken a quick look at his personnel file. What she learned about his background and heroic war experiences had reinforced her positive feelings for him.

They had met socially at the department Christmas party a couple of weeks ago. She had offered to help the other department secretaries collect tickets at the function to give her a reason to attend and hopefully meet him socially for the first time. At that party David Hobbs, another Pratt employee who sometimes practiced hypnotherapy for his friends and coworkers, had invited Debbie, along with Kyle and three others, to his Massachusetts farmhouse the following weekend. Once they were there, a snowstorm had isolated the five guests in the old colonial farmhouse, leaving them with no means to escape or to let anyone know they were snowbound with a serial killer. She and Kyle had survived the weekend, but she had been cut underneath her left breast and Kyle's right leg had been slashed with a sword.

* * * *

Debbie and Kyle lingered with other adults at the large dining table, some finishing their wine, others drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes while telling tales about each other, mostly for Kyle's benefit since the others at the table had heard them before. Kyle was treated to some funny stories from Debbie and her cousins, Shirley and Martha, about the things they and Carol had gotten into, and gotten away with, while they were growing up. After several wild stories

involving Carol, the absent daughter, Kyle thought she was the reason for most of Uncle Paul's gray hair.

When the families with young children began their rounds of hugging, kissing, and wishing everyone a Happy New Year, Kyle turned to Debbie and said he thought it was time for him to leave as well. She nodded, and then joined him as he worked his way out of the dining room on his crutches. On the way, he thanked Aunt Rose for the delicious food, then shook Uncle Paul's hand and thanked him for his hospitality. "Come early on Sunday," Uncle Paul said, reminding Kyle of his invitation. "I'll take a look at those stitches and then we'll spend some time out in the shop before Rose calls us for dinner." Kyle promised he would.

Out in the crowded hallway, Kyle turned to Debbie. "I hope your cut is doing all right."

Debbie smiled as she bit her lower lip, then asked, "Would you like to see the stitches?"

Kyle glanced at the people hugging, kissing, and shaking hands in the hallway and then at her sweater. "Uh, sure."

"Not here, silly," Debbie said as her cheeks reddened. "Come with me. Let's see if we can find a little privacy." She led Kyle halfway down the hallway to an open door on the other side of the house. When Kyle, struggling with his crutches, entered the room she closed the door. "There, alone at last . . . for a couple of minutes," Debbie declared with a bashful smile.

Kyle stared wide-eyed at his surroundings. The room was larger than his entire apartment and was filled with expensive, ornate furniture. The huge living room with its fireplace, television console, Christmas tree, chairs, and tables had been amazing; the dining room with its chandelier, long ornate table, brocade covered chairs, bone china, sterling silverware, and crystal glasses was awesome; but this room was astonishing. Hanging from the ten-foot ceiling was a crystal chandelier. There was a dresser with a padded brocade bench. Nearby were two wingback chairs with a small table in between. On the table was a Tiffany lamp with a shade made of leaded glass. Along the inner wall was a door leading into the master bath as well as two sets of folding

doors that were slightly ajar. One set revealed shelves with men's hats and shoes and rows of men's suits and shirts, the other doors disclosed shelves with women's hats and shoes and rows of gowns, dresses, and coats. Silk brocade drapes with sheers framed the tall windows. Underneath one pair of windows was another Tiffany lamp on a small writing desk of carved wood. In the center of the room was a huge ornate bed that currently served as a depository for winter coats. Among them were two full-length mink coats. "Wow, is this your room?"

"No, silly, this is Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose's bedroom. Mine is upstairs. I didn't think you'd want to climb those stairs on crutches."

"You got that right."

"Have a seat on the bed if you'd like to get off those crutches."

Kyle gladly took her up on her offer. He had been forced to use the crutches since leaving the Massachusetts hospital last Saturday. As a result, his armpits had become chafed and painful. He found an empty space on the edge of the bed and propped his crutches next to him. He took a moment to look at the opulent splendor surrounding him. The awesome display of so much wealth was both overwhelming and humbling. "So, how is your wound doing?" Kyle asked, trying to focus on the woman rather than their surroundings.

"It's doing fine. Uncle Paul has volunteered to take the stitches out on Sunday if it looks all right to the family doctor. I'm looking forward to taking a nice tub bath again."

"He said he'd do the same for me. A hot shower sure would be nice," Kyle said. Then he added, "I'm thinking about going back to work on Monday."

"Do you think you're ready?"

"I'm about to go nuts in my apartment so I'm going to give it a shot," he said, then looked up at her, smiling. "So, uh, you want to show me your stitches?"

Debbie glanced at the closed door, then out the windows. Seeing no one outside, she pulled her sweater up her bare torso with both hands until it was high enough to reveal the stitches beneath her left breast and an inch or so of her

bright red bra. "See? Four little stitches. I don't think the scar is going to be too bad, do you?"

Kyle tried to concentrate on the wound but found himself wondering if the rest of her underwear was the same color as her bra. "I think it will look fine, Debbie. It'll be something you can show your grandchildren someday while you're telling them about the weekend you spent in a haunted house."

Debbie pulled her sweater back down. "My grandchildren won't believe it any more than I do, and I was there."

"Thank goodness you were."

"Why would David cut me there? Did you see him do it?"

"Uh, no. I didn't," Kyle lied as he recalled the sharp tip of the old saber pressing against Debbie's chest in the filthy barn stall. "I guess he cut you while you were hypnotized before I came into the barn."

"The paper says he has confessed to killing Susan and the Stones but they're going to do some tests to find if he's sane enough to participate in his own defense. He'll never hypnotize me again, that's for sure."

"I'm glad you woke up when you did."

"It was so weird. One minute I was sitting by the fire, the next thing I remember I woke up on that filthy straw in the barn."

"Hobbs said people wake up on their own after a while if the hypnotist isn't there with them. I'm sure glad you woke up when you did."

"When I saw him swinging the sword at you, I looked around for something I could throw at him and saw the gun."

"Thank goodness, you're not afraid to use one."

"My daddy taught me how to shoot a gun. I never thought the things he tried to teach me would ever be useful to me. I guess I was wrong," Debbie said quietly. "How about your wound?"

"It's doing okay. I have a gauze pad on it to keep my pants from rubbing the stitches. You want to see it?" Kyle offered with a grin as he put his hands to his belt buckle.

Debbie's eyes widened as she looked down at the man's hands. "Uh, not right now. Someone might want their coat."

“Maybe you should have locked the door.”

“A closed door is a locked door around here. If anyone wants in, they’ll knock first and ask permission to enter.”

“Which should give us time to get untangled,” Kyle said with a grin.

“Untangled?” Debbie asked with quizzical frown.

Kyle gazed into her eyes. This was the first time he’d been alone with Debbie since her Uncle Paul had brought him home from the hospital last Saturday night. It might be his only chance to find out if she still felt the same way about him as she did then. Was the Pratt & Whitney Engineering Department manager’s secretary as interested in an illicit kiss now as she was that night? He was about to find out. He grabbed his crutches and pulled himself up off the bed. As he gazed at Debbie’s red lips, he recalled the friendly banter they had shared about a dusty old Raggedy Ann doll they had found in the attic of an old farmhouse last weekend. “Your lips don’t look dusty today, Raggedy Ann.”

Debbie stepped close, put her hands on his shoulders, and looked up at him, an enigmatic smile on her face. “Don’t you think we should check anyway, just to make sure, Raggedy Andy?”

“Absolutely. Until someone starts knocking, take all the time you need.”

Debbie pulled herself up onto her toes, pressed her lips against his for a couple of seconds, then released him. With her feet back on the floor, she glanced at the door for a second, confirming that it was still closed, then moved her hands inside his crutches and around his waist. With her body against his and her head resting against his chest, she said, “Oh, this reminds me of how we held each other out in the snow last Saturday.”

“We’re lucky we survived that day,” Kyle said, feeling good. It hadn’t been much of a kiss, but it was enough to let him know she still felt the same way about him as she had while they were snowbound in Massachusetts.

“Yes, we are,” Debbie agreed as she leaned back enough to look up at his face. “I still remember how sad I felt as I

watched you ski away from me that day. I was afraid I'd never see you again."

"When I left you, I thought you might be the last person I'd see in this world."

"And yet, here we are . . . alive . . . safe . . . and alone again."

Kyle paused trying to find the right words to say what he wanted to say. Out on a cold, snowy road last Saturday, with their arms wrapped around each other, he thought he was in love with this woman. It occurred to him now that the way he felt about her then, when nothing or no one else in the world mattered to him but her, was probably more fantasy than reality. Fantasy or not, because of the way he felt about her at that moment, he had knowingly risked his life to save hers. By the end of the day, she had saved his life, creating a bond between them Kyle hoped would remain for the rest of their lives.

At her request, he had called her every night since they had returned to Connecticut. During the long conversations they had gotten to know each other by sharing tales of their past. They discovered they enjoyed the same kind of music, mostly. She was a big fan of Frank Sinatra, but not country music. She didn't know anything about the Grand Ole Opry; had never heard Hank Williams sing. He didn't care for grand opera; had never heard Enrico Caruso or Maria Callas sing. They both liked the big bands such as Benny Goodman, Jimmy Dorsey, and especially Les Brown with singer Doris Day. Her 1945 recording of "Sentimental Journey" was still being played on the radio. Glen Miller's music, especially "In the Mood" and "Moonlight Serenade," was still popular with them and millions of other young people even though the airplane he was in had disappeared over the English Channel in 1944. Each of them had albums of Bing Crosby's and Nat "King" Cole's music, as well as the bobby-soxers' idols, Frank Sinatra and Perry Como.

They liked the same kind of movies, mostly. She didn't care for the scary ones; he didn't care much for the weepy love stories. She liked the new Mario Lanza musical, *Because You're Mine* and had enjoyed *Come Back Little Sheba* but

THE LOST PEOPLE

hadn't seen *Sudden Fear*. Kyle had enjoyed *Sudden Fear*, staring Joan Crawford and Jack Palance as well as *Viva Zapata!* starring Marlon Brando and Jean Peters. They had both seen and enjoyed *Singin' in the Rain*, *High Noon*, *Road to Bali*, and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. The conversations usually morphed into talking about the weekend at the farmhouse and how tragic it was for Susan and the Stones to die that way and how lucky they were to survive the weekend. They avoided talking about religion, wealth, and politics.

During those nightly telephone conversations, Kyle had avoided telling her how he had felt about her out on that road. He wanted to but didn't think a phone conversation was the right way to do it. Now, with her arms wrapped around him, he decided it was as good a time as any. "When we were on the road last Saturday, just before I left, I thought about telling you I loved you."

"Really?"

"We've greeted each other at work every morning for months, but except for a few minutes at the department Christmas party, I never had a chance to get to know you outside of work until last weekend." Kyle paused, then added, "I thought we got to know each other while we did all the little things together up there. So, when we were out on that road, I didn't feel like you were a stranger. I felt like I knew you well enough to tell you I felt that way about you, but I didn't because I figured you'd just take it as a line of bull."

She bit her lower lip. "I wish you had told me," she said, paused, then quietly added, "I sort of felt the same way about you as I watched you leave, not knowing if I would ever see you again."

Kyle paused as he gazed into Debbie's eyes. They hadn't come right out and said they loved each other, but it was awfully close. Close enough for him to take a breath and continue. "We got along so well up there, in spite of everything, I thought we might enjoy getting together once we got back home," he said. "I know Brozinski wouldn't like it if he heard me asking his secretary for a date, and I wasn't sure if I'd have the chance to ask you today with a bunch of your

relatives around, so I took a chance last Saturday night and asked you out New Year's Eve."

"I'm glad you did. I'm looking forward to it," Debbie said, and then added, "And I'm glad your leg felt well enough for you to come today and meet my family."

"Thanks for inviting me, and thanks for my canteen. It's the best Christmas I've had in a long time." Kyle paused for a few seconds as he gazed about the room, then focused on Debbie and said, "But, I've got to tell you, now that I see where you live and how you live, right now I feel like a kid looking in the window of a candy store without a penny in his pockets."

Frowning, Debbie released Kyle and took a step backwards. "Oh, please don't feel that way, Kyle." Looking worried, with eyes sparkling with tears, she said, "I'm Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose's niece. I lived with my parents in a rented, rundown house during the first twelve years of my life. I'm living here because Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose were nice enough to take me in after my daddy was killed in the war and my mother abandoned me, not because I belong here." She made a sweeping motion of her arm about the luxurious bedroom. "None of this belongs to me, Kyle. None of this will ever belong to me. The only dowry I have is what I've saved from my Pratt salary. I don't have any more right to any of this than any other girl thrown out on the street by her parents. Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose don't have to let me live here. I know that."

"Debbie," Kyle said in an intense voice. "While I was growing up, I had a small upstairs bedroom in a house with a bunch of other people living in it. When I was in the army, I had a cot surrounded by other men's cots, if I had a bed at all. The one-bedroom garage apartment I'm living in now is smaller than this room and all the furniture is my landlady's worn castoffs, but it's the finest living accommodations I've ever had." Kyle paused, and then made a circular motion with his hand. "Maybe none of this is yours, but you're accustomed to living in a West Hartford mansion. Living in a tiny one-bedroom apartment like mine would be a huge step

THE LOST PEOPLE

down from what you're used to here. I can't believe you'd be happy in a place like that after living here."

"Why? Do you think I'm too 'high society' to be happy living like that?"

With an ache in his chest, Kyle watched as tears overflowed Debbie's eyes and ran down her cheeks. Kyle slowly shook his head. "No, I don't," he said softly, knowing it was a lie.

"Something very special happened to us last weekend, Kyle. Neither of us expected it to happen, but it did. I know there are differences between us, but I really believe there is somewhere on earth where we can find happiness together. I really do."

"Debbie, I learned in the army that any obstacle can be overcome. Go over it, around it, or blast it to smithereens, whatever it takes to get the job done." Kyle paused, and then continued. "I believe we can handle anything life throws at us if we want to be together bad enough."

"Oh, Kyle, so do I," Debbie murmured softly, then reached up and wiped a tear from her cheek with her forefinger. When she saw mascara smeared on it, she looked in the mirror. "Oh, my goodness. I've made a mess of my face," she said, then hurried over to the dresser, grabbed a handful of tissues, and wiped her face.

"Yeah, but it's a nice mess."

Debbie walked back to Kyle, sniffed again, and then smiled. "You think so, huh?"

"Yeah, I do. So, are we on for New Year's Eve?"

"I certainly hope so!"

"I won't be able to dance much, but there'll be three other couples at the table. If we're lucky, they'll be fun to be with for a few hours."

Debbie stepped forward and slid her arms around his waist, pressed herself against him again, then turned her mascara-smeared, tear-stained face up to him and closed her eyes. She murmured softly as Kyle pressed his open mouth against hers. When Debbie released Kyle, her eyes grew wide. "Oh, my gosh!"

"What's the matter?"

"I can't let you out of here looking like that," she said, then hurried over to the dresser and grabbed another handful of tissue. "You've got my lipstick on your mouth."

Kyle smiled, recalling the first time he'd gotten her lipstick on his mouth out in the snow last Friday night. They had covered a lot of ground since then. "I can live with it."

"It would embarrass me to death, and you know it," she said as she scrubbed her lipstick off Kyle's mouth. "There, that's better."

"I guess it means there's no chance of me getting any more."

"Not at the moment."

"Maybe later?"

"We'll see," Debbie said, took a quick look in the mirror, grabbed more tissues, and then headed for the door to the master bath. "Excuse me. I've got to make some repairs."

"Hey?"

Debbie paused at the open door, then turned. "What?"

"Is all of your underwear red?"

Debbie's eyes grew wide and her mouth flew open. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Yes, I would."

"Fat chance!" Debbie called out as she closed the door.

Kyle slowly worked his way toward the bedroom door with his crutches, opened it, and then turned to look back at the elaborately furnished bedroom with mink coats casually tossed onto the ornate bed. He slowly shook his head, still amazed at the display of wealth.

* * * *

Kyle had grown up working in his father's hardware store in Helleston, a small town in North Alabama. The teenager enjoyed working in the store after school and on Saturday. His father assumed Kyle would be working full-time in the store after graduating from high school and would someday take over the store. His daddy's plans sounded fine to the teenager.

However, Uncle Sam had different plans for his future when Kyle graduated from high school in May 1944. Shortly after

THE LOST PEOPLE

graduation, Kyle was drafted. By November he was already out of boot camp and on his way to fight the Germans as part of the 99th Division.

Only seven months out of high school, the teenager was in a foxhole on a snow-covered ridge in the Ardennes on the sixteenth of December when the Battle of the Bulge erupted. Kyle was one of eighty-nine thousand American casualties in the battle. He was later awarded a Purple Heart for his wounds and a Silver Star for single-handedly destroying a German machine gun crew on the first day of the battle.

After the war ended in 1945, Kyle returned to his parents' home and his dad's hardware store after he was discharged. Soon, to his daddy's profound disappointment, Kyle decided to leave the store to attend college on the G.I. Bill. After four years at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute in Auburn, Alabama, he accepted a job as an engineering trainee with Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford, Connecticut, over a thousand miles from home. The starting salary they had offered him was more than any company in the South had offered and a lot more than his dad could afford to pay him. However, when he got to Connecticut, he discovered the cost of living was a lot higher as well. The Pratt & Whitney interviewer had failed to mention it.

* * * *

As Kyle waited for Debbie, the image of the woman with tears ruining her makeup made him tremble as he looked about the luxurious bedroom. What the hell was a redneck from Alabama doing in a place like this? He was living in a garage apartment in Newington and driving an old Ford coupe. She was driving a Jaguar and was living in a West Hartford mansion. He shook his head in despair as he reflected on the chasm between the lifestyle he could afford and the lifestyle these people lived every day.

While holding Debbie out in the snow last Saturday he knew, without a doubt, that he loved her and wanted to be with her for the rest of his life. Since then, reality had begun to take a toll on his fantasy. Debbie had told him none of the trappings of high society impressed her, but Kyle was pretty

sure she didn't really mean it. If he had the option of living here rather than his one-bedroom garage apartment in Newington, he'd be out of there in a minute. Even if she was willing to come down to his level, being the poor relatives of wealthy people didn't appeal to him.

Debbie rejoined him and they worked their way down the hallway to the front door hugging and shaking hands with other relatives milling about. Aunt Rose reminded him he was invited to come to dinner on Sunday. At the door, Debbie paused with a smile as Kyle turned toward her.

"Uh, well, thanks again, Debbie. I really enjoyed it," Kyle said while surrounded by other people in the hallway.

"You think you might need some help getting to your car on those crutches?"

"Uh, yeah, as a matter of fact, I will."

Debbie smiled as she held the door open for him. With her help, he negotiated the steps, and then carefully worked his way down the sloping curve of the driveway, past the Cadillacs, Lincolns, and Packards to his old Ford coupe. Once there, he explained to Debbie he needed to get in on the passenger's side and slide over the bench seat to the driver's side. Once he was inside the car, Debbie closed the passenger's side door and came around to the driver's side while Kyle cranked down his window.

"Thanks for the help," Kyle said.

"How're you going to get out of there?"

"The same way I did when I came here. I'll sort of pull myself out the driver's side door."

"Oh, well, be careful on the way home."

"I'll try."

"And be careful going up and down those stairs to your apartment. They're awfully steep."

"Tell me about it," Kyle said. He lived in a rented one-bedroom apartment above his landlady's garage in Newington. The stairs were outside, allowing him to avoid disturbing his landlady when he came home after the bars closed, but they were a real aggravation when it was raining, snowing, or when he had to use crutches.

THE LOST PEOPLE

“Thank you for coming and thank you for my canteen. I’m looking forward to using it when you’re ready to do some more cross-country skiing.”

“Thanks for my canteen, too,” Kyle said. “Maybe I’ll be ready to ski in a few weeks.”

“I’d like that. You said you already have cross-county skis. Would you help me buy a set?”

“I’d be happy to. We’ll find a pair that will fit you better than those you had up at the barn.”

“I hope so, those things were too long and heavy for me,” Debbie said, paused, then added, “I hope the mob of people today didn’t overwhelm you.”

“You’ve got a great family, Debbie. Thanks for inviting me.”

Debbie bit her lower lip, thinking of how many of her female relatives had told her she had a very handsome boyfriend. She had replied that they were only good friends who barely knew each other. They didn’t believe her. Inviting a man to spend Christmas Day with her and her family spoke volumes otherwise. She glanced about. Seeing no one else in sight, she leaned her head into the open window and pressed her mouth against Kyle’s for a moment, then pulled her head back. “There! You can wipe that off when you get home.”

Kyle smiled up at her. “Uh, New Year’s Eve is almost a week away. Would you like to get together and do something before then, Saturday night maybe?”

Debbie stared at Kyle, her eyes wide and her mouth agape. “Oh, my goodness!” she cried with her hand on her chest. “You’re asking the Engineering Department manager’s secretary for a date? You could get into a lot of trouble doing that.”

Kyle grinned. “So, I’ve heard. How about you? You might be in trouble if Brozinski found out you dated one of his engineers.”

Debbie shrugged her shoulders and smiled. “I’m willing to take the chance.”

“So am I. So, what about Saturday?”

“Hmm . . . let me check my calendar,” she said, gazing thoughtfully off into space. Then she looked back down at

Kyle and smiled. "I think I can work it in. It so happens my social calendar is free for the rest of the century."

"I'll call you tomorrow night. Between now and then, think of something you'd like to do that a man on crutches can do with you."

"Okay." Debbie turned to go, then abruptly stopped and turned back around. "Oh, by the way, the answer to your question is yes."

"What question?"

"The one you asked me in the bedroom . . . about my underwear."

Kyle frowned momentarily, then he remembered, and his eyebrows shot up and his mouth dropped open.

"Bye. Talk to you tomorrow," she said, then turned and walked away.

As Kyle watched Debbie walk up the driveway, he smiled. There was no doubt about it. Sometimes X-ray vision like Superman had would come in handy.

2

BY THE TIME KYLE called Debbie the following night, he had racked his brain, trying to come up with something fun to do on a first date with a rich, beautiful woman. Going to a nightclub, drinking some good liquor, and dancing to a live band was what he usually suggested to a woman for their first date. If she was a decent dancer, it was usually a good way for them to get to know each other and have a good time after a tough week at work.

He wasn't a great dancer and those dances from South America were beyond him, but he loved to jitterbug, and he could waltz and foxtrot as good as most others. This time it was different. Not only was he unable to dance, but after buying a woman drinks all evening, there was a good chance he'd wind up in her bed before the evening was over. He knew that wasn't going to happen either.

Kyle sighed. He enjoyed being with Debbie, but sitting in a noisy nightclub, trying to carry on a conversation with her, while all the people around them were dancing, wasn't his idea of a good time on Saturday night. New Year's Eve was coming up next Wednesday. It was going to be even worse.

The only thing he could come up with was to take her out to dinner and a movie. He wasn't sure he could sit in a theater seat that long, but it was the only thing he could think of to pass the time without requiring him to come up with interesting things to say to a woman that long. He knew he was more of a listener than a talker, and Debbie didn't

seem to be very talkative on Christmas Day, leaving the other women at the table to dominate the conversation. That wasn't good. Sitting around in silence watching other people having fun wasn't a good way to spend a first date. When he called her on Friday night, Debbie had the same concerns about his leg he did, but he told her he was willing to try it, so she agreed.

"Don't come to the door on those crutches, just honk your horn. Uncle Paul usually insists that his girls' dates come to the door, but in your case, I'm sure he'll make an exception."

"Thanks. I'd appreciate it," Kyle said, recalling the length and slope of the Cross driveway.

* * * *

They dined at an Italian restaurant. Afterwards, they decided to watch *Ivanhoe* starring Elizabeth Taylor and Robert Taylor. Kyle found a row with an empty seat to his right where he parked his crutches, then he turned and extended his leg in that direction. For a while, things were going fine. After they finished their drinks and popcorn, they held hands in the darkened theater. About an hour into the movie, however, Kyle's leg began to ache so much he couldn't concentrate on the movie. When he told Debbie he needed to get up and stretch his leg, she joined him in the lobby and suggested he take her home where they could watch television or listen to records down in the den. Kyle agreed.

Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose were watching *Your Show of Shows*, starring Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca when they came in. Debbie told them Kyle's leg was hurting, so they were going down to the den to listen to some records.

Down in the den, Kyle plopped onto the old comfortable sofa and waited while Debbie stacked some albums on the turntable. She joined him on the couch but not close enough for him to reach out for her. He was about to ask her to move closer when she asked, "Do you like to play Monopoly?"

"Sure, but it's been a while."

"I'll see if Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose want to play," she said. "Be right back."

THE LOST PEOPLE

Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose agreed. Soon, a card table and four chairs were set up in the den. Uncle Paul brought down a bottle of Burgundy and four glasses. It soon became obvious to Kyle that the others played more often than he did.

During the game, Aunt Rose asked Kyle and Debbie if they had plans for New Year's Eve.

"We're going to Chez Pierre."

"That's a very nice supper club," Aunt Rose said. "The last time we were there, the band and floorshow were wonderful."

"We're not sure how long Kyle's leg will last, but we're going to try it for a while."

Aunt Rose turned to Kyle. "If it hurts too much, you two can come back here and we'll toast the New Year together. We're not going out this year."

"Thanks, we might take you up on it."

Aunt Rose went bankrupt first. Kyle was holding his own until his shoe token stopped on Boardwalk. Uncle Paul had a hotel sitting on it. It took Uncle Paul ten more minutes to bankrupt Debbie.

A few minutes later, Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose said their goodnights, reminded Kyle he was invited to come back for dinner tomorrow, and took their wine glasses upstairs. Kyle worked his way back to the couch and let Debbie lift his leg and rest his foot on the old wooden coffee table. When Debbie joined him again, she sat near him on his left.

"Don't bother wearing nice clothes tomorrow. Sunday dinner is sort of casual around here. Besides, you'll get sawdust on you in Uncle Paul's woodworking shop. I know I always do when I'm out there. Wear jeans or something you won't have to dry clean."

"I'll do that," Kyle said, then took another sip of his wine in the quietness of the room as he looked at the woman sitting beside him. At the Pratt & Whitney Christmas party a couple of weeks ago, Debbie had told someone he was shy. Kyle decided to let her know his shyness was overrated. He put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her toward him. He felt resistance for an instant before she leaned toward him and turned her face to him. Kyle kissed her closed lips for a few seconds. When she didn't respond, he broke the kiss and

leaned back, frowning and confused. She had been willing to be kissed out in the snow and cold at the farm and in the bedroom on Christmas Day. They had even kissed at the dining table on Christmas Day while a kid held a sprig of mistletoe over them. Now, in the privacy of her uncle's den, she was cold as ice. He wasn't sure what was going on with this woman, but whatever it was, wasn't good.

Maybe he did love her, he thought he did out on that road, but now, in a moment of privacy, she was as cold as the mythical Greek statue of Galatea that Pygmalion carved out of ivory and fell in love with. Aphrodite brought her to life, and they married. Was marriage what it would take for Debbie's cold exterior to melt? The thought was distressing.

"What's the matter?"

"Uh, my leg is killing me. Maybe I'd better take it home," he said, making a point of rubbing it as he spoke.

"You sure?"

"Pretty sure," Kyle said, hoping she would try to talk him out of leaving. If she did, her next kiss might have a little more feeling than the last one.

"Oh," she said softly. "Well, I hope it feels better soon."

Kyle stumbled up the stairs on his crutches. They kissed again at the front door. To his surprise, her goodnight kiss at the door was more affectionate than the one in the den. He made his way back out to his car and headed back to Newington, dumbfounded once again with women in general and this one in particular.

Tonight, he had discovered that, although the rich lived higher on the hog than most folks, they acted pretty much like everybody else in a relaxed social atmosphere. He had quickly become comfortable with Uncle Paul's banter. Soon the two were trading barbs about the other's game skills. On the other hand, Aunt Rose had remained very formal, both in words and actions, throughout the game. Where both Uncle Paul and Kyle had tended to slouch with their elbows on the table as the game progressed, Aunt Rose and Debbie had remained stiffly upright in their chairs during the entire evening.

THE LOST PEOPLE

* * * *

When Kyle returned to the Cross residence the following afternoon, Debbie told him Uncle Paul had already removed her stitches. A few minutes later, Uncle Paul led Kyle into the master bedroom and closed the door. After Kyle dropped his pants, Uncle Paul examined the wound, declared it healthy, removed the stitches, and then invited him out to his woodworking shop where they spent the afternoon working on a coffee table project until Debbie knocked on the door, poked her head in, and announced dinner was ready. As they left the shop, Uncle Paul invited Kyle to come back again the following Sunday. Kyle said he would like to.

At the dinner table with the three others, Kyle tried to remember to sit up straight, keep his elbows off the table, and take small bites. His only serious *faux pas* was taking a sip of wine before Uncle Paul said the blessing.

After dinner, Debbie suggested they play Hearts, and everyone agreed.

Later, after Uncle Paul and Aunt Rose had gone upstairs and Kyle's leg was resting on the coffee table again, Debbie asked, "How's your leg doing tonight?"

"So far, so good. Aunt Rose's pot roast was wonderful. Thanks for inviting me."

"You're welcome," Debbie said, then paused as she gazed at Kyle. "I wasn't sure you'd come today."

"Why not?"

Debbie silently gazed into Kyle's eyes. "You left last night a little, uh, disappointed. Right?"

"I think 'confused' would be a better word."

"I can understand why you might feel that way, but I warned you while we were out skiing last Saturday that I didn't think you'd like to go out with me."

"Yes, you did." At the time he couldn't imagine not enjoying an evening with this beautiful, vivacious woman. He was sure she couldn't resist his manly charms once he got her alone. He was wrong. She could and did.

"I enjoyed going out with you, really I did," Debbie said. "I might not have shown it the way you expected me to, but I did."

"So did I."

"Uh-huh. Up to the point where I confused you, right?"

"Uh, right."

Debbie bit her lower lip. "Kyle, there's somethings you don't know about me that makes me very cautious about getting involved in a relationship. It has nothing to do with what Mr. Brozinski might do if he found out we dated. It's just . . . me," she said as she touched her chest with the point of her forefinger. She folded her hands in her lap and looked down at them for a few seconds before she looked up at Kyle with sparkling tears in her eyes. "Please . . . don't give up on me until you know me a little better."

"You're a fascinating woman, Debbie. I'd like to hang around and find out what's going to happen next with you."

"So, do you think I might confuse you again if we went to Chez Pierre on New Year's Eve?"

"Probably, but I'm willing to risk it."

"So am I," Debbie said as she wrapped her arms around Kyle and pressed her lips against his. After a few seconds she pulled away and gazed at him, smiling. "Better?"

"Much better," Kyle said, and they kissed again, this time Kyle moved his hand down to her rear. Debbie broke the kiss and gently removed Kyle's hand. "Please don't," she said softly.

Kyle released her and they separated. Her kisses had improved significantly, but apparently this rich West Hartford woman placed a higher premium on the exploration of her anatomy than most other women he had dated. He wasn't sure he could afford the price nor the time it would take, no matter how much he thought he cared about her. One thing was certain: his chances of getting laid New Year's Eve were between slim and none and Slim had just left town.

* * * *

THE LOST PEOPLE

The following Monday, Kyle returned to work. He first told his group leader, Ralph Jenkins, and then his supervisor what had happened. Afterwards, other engineers dropped by to get a first-hand report on what they had read in the newspaper. He didn't get a lot of work done, but he was exhausted by the end of the day.

COMING NEXT

THE TOMATO PATCH

A PREQUEL TO JENNY CAY

SHE WAS WATERING the tomatoes she had planted to disguise what was buried beneath them. Suddenly, an arm covered with tattered clothing and rotting flesh grabbed her ankle. As she frantically tried to free herself from the grasp of the grisly hand, another hideous arm burst from the ground, wielding a knife. As the blade slashed her, she tried to scream, but no sound came from her throat.

She awoke in the darkness of her bedroom, her skin damp with sweat. As she gasped for air, she could feel her heart pounding. It had happened again.

JENNY CAY

Book 1 of the Dan Warden Series

A former deputy sheriff and a woman in the DEA witness protection program try to outrun Bahamian drug smugglers.

EXCERPT FROM JENNY CAY

RICK WALKED OVER to the dying man, looked down at him, spat on him, and snarled, “*¡Pedazo de mierda!* You let a woman get the best of you!” Rick continued to look down at the man for a moment, then kicked him hard in the ribs. When he saw no reaction, he turned and looked at Dan and Jenny. “Now, what should I do with you two?”

Dan’s mind had trouble processing what he had just seen. He had never seen a man kill another man in cold blood. He had killed a couple of men when he was a deputy sheriff, but that had been in a running gun battle, and they were trying to kill him at the same time. Not like this. The heavysset man simply pointed his weapon and fired, as though he were shooting at a paper target. Dan shook his head. There was no doubt about it. This was the end of the line.

A peaceful feeling came over Dan. It hadn’t been a bad life. He hadn’t done everything he had wanted to do, and he hadn’t accomplished as much as he had wanted to do, and there had been a few things he might have done differently if he had a chance to do it all over again, but, all in all, it had been a good life. “Go ahead, you bastard,” Dan said bitterly. “Whatever you’re going to do...do it and get it over with.”

Download this book from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or iBookstore: <http://larry.booklocker.com/>

DIGGER

Book 2 of the Dan Warden Series

Deputy Dan Warden hunts for an elusive serial killer who leaves baffling clues. A woman who may be clairvoyant offers to help interpret the clues, but Dan's task becomes more difficult when a raunchy, homicidal ex-con shows up with his mentally challenged half brother. A personal agenda to reunite with his ex-wife and children adds to the pressure as Dan tries to close the case before the killer strikes again.

EXCERPT FROM DIGGER

THE KILLER PULLED OUT of the parking area and turned north. Ten minutes later, he turned his headlights off as he approached the farmer's pasture; then he found the well-used dirt road and drove the short distance to the illegal dump by moonlight. He parked near the edge of the big ditch, looked about for lights, then dropped the tailgate and opened the big black plastic bag enough to expose the dead woman's lower body. He removed her panties, wrote his number on her torso, then pulled the bag down and retied it.

After checking the area for lights once more, he picked up the bag and carried it to the edge of the big ditch. The killer paused for a moment with the weight of the woman's body in his arms, then dropped the bag. He watched it roll down the bank and come to rest on the refuse already there.

The killer gazed down at the big trash bag for a moment, trying to decide how he felt about the woman's death. He felt nothing. It was very disappointing. He had put a lot of time and effort into planning this one.

Download this book from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or iBookstore: <http://larry.booklocker.com/>

THE ROGUE

Book 3 of the Dan Warden Series

Dan is asked to return to the Bahamas to help identify a rogue agent. As a covert agent, Dan learns his life depends on his skills in identifying who's his friend, who's willing to sacrifice him for personal gain, and who wants him dead to avenge old grievances.

EXCERPT FROM THE ROGUE

CALLAS PAUSED, THEN SAID, "You will be asked to make no contact with anyone associated with the DEA in the Bahamas, or with the Royal Bahamas Police Force, or to identify yourself as a DEA representative to anyone there."

Dan frowned and his eyebrows went up. "You've got a rogue cop down there? One of your people is on the take?"

"We're not sure. We need a knowledgeable outsider for a week or two to assess the situation."

Dan chuckled. "Your timing is perfect, Callas. I had already cleared my schedule for some time off next week. I was planning to go to Alaska, but those plans got scrubbed."

"What's in Alaska?"

"Jenny Smart is, or was when I talked to her on Monday. I was thinking about going up to see her next week, but she said she was leaving town and didn't know when she would be back." Dan paused, frowning at Callas. "She's in your witness protection program. Do you know where she is?"

"No, I don't," Callas said honestly. "I wish I did."

"I'm giving odds on the Bahamas."

"It would be dangerous if she were there," Callas said.

"I agree, but danger has never stopped that woman from doing something."

Download this book from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or iBookstore: <http://larry.booklocker.com/>

THE RAMPART ALERT

Book 4 of the Dan Warden Series

In this fourth book of the Dan Warden series, a woman kidnaps a baby from a shopping cart. In the weeks that follow, Dan Warden remains convinced that the child is alive. He joins in the hunt, while innocent lives for hundreds of miles around are devastated by the woman's action.

EXCERPT FROM THE RAMPART ALERT

"NINE-ONE-ONE. What is your emergency?"

"He's beating me up again! You better get here fast. He says he's going to kill me!"

Lieutenant Jason Rampart, a deputy for the Chickasaw County, Alabama, Sheriff's Department, heard his cell phone chime, saw that it was a call from his wife, and answered it as the couple continued their tirade. "Hi, Patsy. What's up?"

"He's gone!"

Jason frowned at the frantic voice. "Who's gone?"

"My baby!"

"Johnny? Johnny's gone? Gone where?"

"I don't know."

"Where are you?" Jason asked as he ran to his vehicle.

"At The Big Bag! He was in my shopping cart. Now he's gone!"

"Have you told the manager?" Jason asked as he started the engine and turned on his behind-the-grill emergency lights.

"He's right here. I guess he heard me screaming."

"Have you called nine-one-one?" Jason asked as he turned on his siren and pulled out into traffic.

"You're my nine-one-one!"

Download this book from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or iBookstore: <http://larry.booklocker.com/>

SNOWBOUND

In 1952, David Hobbs is a wealthy charismatic psychopath. He's also a self-proclaimed hypnotherapist for friends and coworkers. While under hypnosis during therapy sessions, Hobbs' guests reveal misdeeds from their past that has caused someone's death. Hobbs intends to dispense justice himself by killing them and burying their bodies in the abandoned ice pit in the old farmhouse cellar.

EXCERPT FROM SNOWBOUND

Holding his protected left arm in front of his neck, Kyle looked up at his adversary, knowing Hobbs was about to kill him. He felt no fear, only regret that he had failed to save Debbie's life. If what Hobbs said was true, if they had met in a former life, then surely they would meet again in another life. If there was a God in heaven, when they met again, he would destroy this devil for all time.

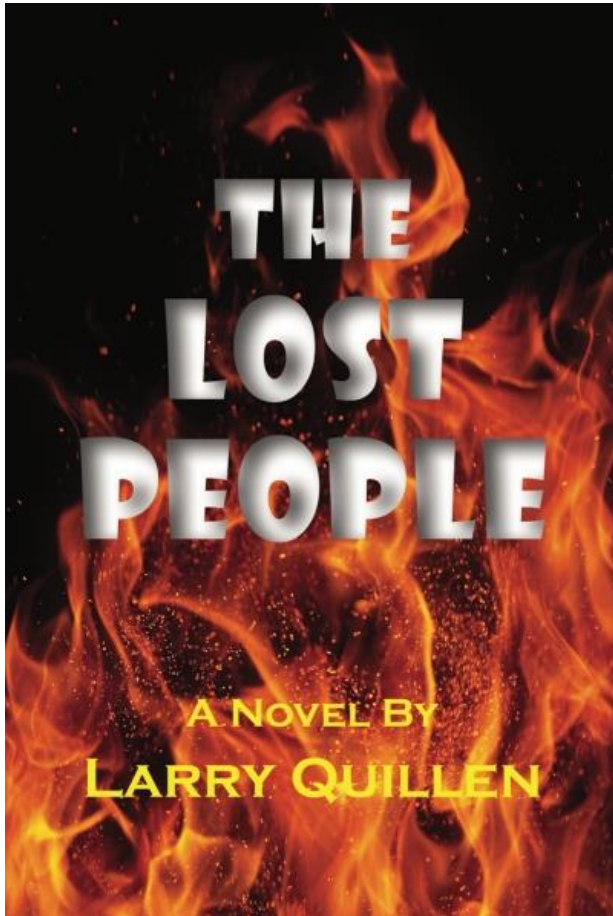
Hobbs smiled as he looked down at his adversary. "So, this is the way it is to end between us this time. *Bon.*"

Kyle's eyes momentarily widened when he saw Debbie appear in the stable doorway less than ten feet behind Hobbs with the gun in her hands.

"*Le coup de grace, mon ennemi,*" Hobbs said as he held his sword high with both hands while smiling down at Kyle, enjoying the moment of victory.

Kyle watched as Debbie raised the gun in both hands. Both men heard the metallic clicking sound as she cocked the hammer of the single-action revolver. Looking puzzled, Hobbs paused. The gunshot rang out in the quietness of the barn hallway.

Download this book from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or iBookstore: <http://larry.booklocker.com/>



The sequel to SNOWBOUND is a slice-of-life story that spans many years before Kyle Lancer learns he must confront supernatural forces for the woman he loves.

THE LOST PEOPLE

By Larry Quillen

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11695.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**