

Detective Gilly thinks he's tracking a fugitive professor, but soon finds himself chasing the ghost of a dead chemistry genius and trying to foil a racist plot to alter the course of human evolution. A suspenseful techno-thriller.

Voices of Babylon

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1985.html?s=pdf>

***Miracles***... “She was too young to understand the significance of it, that she was living in a world where cures for anything, from toenail fungus to AIDS, were few and very far between. A cure for asthma. What would the world give for that?”

***Clear Light***... “It’s probably added seventy-five to a hundred points to your IQ, y’know.”

***Parallax***... “It’s a neuro-paralytic, shuts down the cognitive processes. Potent, but harmless.”

***KC***... “Just a kid’s toy, a cash cow with a PG rating. The rest of it’s not for primetime, strictly X-rated.”

***Babylon***... “I asked him what the hell good a drug like that was. He laughed and said it wasn’t the kind of drug that cured anything but a pain in the ass.”

***Flashback***... “It’s also addictive as hell. It’s like some sort of insidious pornography you can’t stop looking at. Your memories become like best friends. You play with them. You wear them like fancy clothes. You define yourself by them. They affirm your illusions about who and what you are. They preen you and pet you and comfort you. And then comes the payback.”

***China Syndrome***... “Yes, Carson used me, me and every scientist who came before me. He used his parents, he used his school teachers, he used his priests, his poets, and his philosophers. He used everyone and everything that touched him in life. But in the end, the crime was his and his alone.”



# Voices of Babylon

---

Ken Jasper

This is a work of fiction. The characters, business establishments, places and events described herein are imaginary or are used fictitiously; any resemblance to real persons or events is entirely coincidental.

VOICES OF BABYLON  
Revised Edition  
Published by Ken Jasper

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 2004 by Ken Jasper. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise) without prior written permission of the author. For information on reprints and excerpts, contact Ken Jasper c/o Booklocker.com, Inc. at <http://www.booklocker.com>, or visit the author's website at <http://www.kenjasper.com>.

ISBN-10 1-59113-711-X  
ISBN-13 978-1-59113-711-5  
Printed in the United States of America.

Cover Design by Ken Jasper.

The author gratefully acknowledges reprint permission for the following:

Excerpt from "Kid Charlemagne" by Walter Becker, Donald Fagen ©1976, 2004 by UNIVERSAL-MCA MUSIC PUBLISHING / ASCAP. Used by Permission. International Copyright Secured. All rights reserved.

J. Robert Oppenheimer speech excerpt reprinted by permission from the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. All rights reserved.

Booklocker.com, Inc.  
2005

USAIR FLIGHT 711 touched down in the gloomy drizzle at Greater Rochester International Airport at a little after four o'clock the following afternoon. Gilly rented a car at the Hertz counter and forty minutes later, a stapled set of Internet-generated maps in hand, was navigating the streets of suburban east Rochester.

Spring, already in full bloom in Charlotte, was at least two weeks off here in upstate New York. The trees were still lifeless, gray skeletons. Flattened graves of dull grass along the roadsides showed where the last of winter's snowdrifts had only in recent days given up the ghost. Salt covered everything with a deathly pallor.

Pelham Road looked much like the Syracuse neighborhood Gilly had grown up in: the tree-lined street, the sidewalks, and that distinctive 1920's eclectic potpourri of architectural styles known as Period. His surveillance was brief: a single pass around the block. Then he pulled up and parked a short distance down and across from the Robbins residence, a modestly elegant two-story stone Tudor. He drew a pair of 7x35 binoculars from his duffle and took a moment to focus on the front porch.

Before leaving home, he had run a second, more invasive PerFactFinder search on Kathy Lamont. It showed the house was a three-year-old purchase. The move had come soon after the death of her father and the probating of his estate. The family company was now jointly own by Kathy and her younger sister, Mary, who lived in Boston. Lamont Entertainment provided food, beverage and parking concession services for sports stadiums and arenas, airports, racetracks, and highway service areas worldwide. Gross revenues for the previous tax year: \$612,440,900.

A tidy little income that might have brought some consolation, but only two months after moving into the Pelham Road house, Kathy's husband had been diagnosed with cancer. Four months later he, too, had died, leaving her with two, barely teenage children.

Gilly set the binoculars aside and checked his watch. With dusk still three hours away, he fished in his duffle and found the Raymond Chandler paperback he had been trying to finish for two weeks. Slouching comfortably behind the wheel, he turned to his bookmark and for a few moments strained to recall where he had left the classic whodunit.

It was just after nine o'clock when he woke from a short nap, his stomach grumbling at its hollowness. He had turned the last page just as twilight fell, and then quickly dozed off. The closed book was still propped on the steering wheel.

Across the street, a porch light hanging from the shed roof cast an amber hue over the front door, and an upstairs bedroom window's curtains glowed warmly. Gilly made another brief survey of the house through the binoculars and then started the car, drove around the block, and parked at the curb in front of the large, gray shake-shingled house that backed up to the Robbins property.

He was relieved to find no lights on. While he invariably found trespassing an exhilarating business, he was always mindful not to lose sight of its many hazards. At one time or another he had been tripped up by everything from nosy neighbors and biting dogs to skateboards and clotheslines. The trick, if there was one, was to stay alert and look casual, like you belonged here.

"Right," he chuckled, climbing out of the car. "Welcome home, Gilly." He shut the car door and headed up the driveway.

No dogs barked. No lights came on. In back, both garage doors were down. Sloshing over the damp turf, his shoes were soggy by the time he reached the low chain link fence at the rear of the property. He quietly vaulted the fence and came up behind a six-foot high cedar hedge, which ran the length of the yard. Toward the middle, he found a narrow gap between two of the fragrant shrubs and paused briefly to look things over.

The layout was familiar: an attached, side-entrance garage centered on the back of the house, entered on the right by a sweeping asphalt turnaround. A fluorescent light glared from the kitchen window above the driveway. And typical of the older developments, the utility lines had been routed through the backyard. Looking up, Gilly followed the service drop from a nearby utility pole to the corner eave above the kitchen. He blew a breath and shook his head. He glanced back at the utility pole and confirmed that there were no climbing rungs. As a kid, he would have shinnied right up the thing—in shorts, if anyone had dared him. The thought prompted a grin. *Those were the days, Gilly!*

He made his way along the evergreen hedge to its end at the right edge of the property, and again paused to survey the layout. He could see kitchen windows along the side of the house, but it was dark on the driveway beneath. There had to be curtains drawn, a fact he confirmed, moments

later, when he arrived behind the trunk of a leafless maple tree just across the driveway from the back porch. Panting slightly from his short run, he looked over at the power lines descending the side of the house in steel conduit and disappearing into the foundation a few feet above ground. Alongside the conduit, black telephone and TV cables also disappeared without fanfare into the foundation stone.

“Damn,” he whispered.

Since the 1950’s, residential building codes had required exterior junction boxes for all utilities. Not so when this house was built. He would have to do some splicing.

In sodden shoes, he quietly crossed the driveway and ducked behind a billowing yew at the corner of the foundation. Through the wall he could hear the low hum of an appliance—probably a dishwasher—but no voices. He fished the TelTail module from his coat pocket and pulled on the connector to draw several feet of wire from its reservoir. With his jackknife, he carefully split the outer insulation of the telephone cable and separated the four inner conductors, pressing them into the four narrow channels of the TelTail’s clamshell connector and snapping it shut. The black plastic module he wedged tightly into the crotch of the yew, and the wire he draped invisibly across the densely needled branches. It wasn’t the ideal installation, but the Robbins kids were too old to be hiding in the bushes anymore, and short a visit from the phone company, it probably wouldn’t be detected. And anyway, Gilly figured, he would be out of there in a day, two at the most.

He closed his jackknife and slipped it back into his pocket, zipped his coat, and turned to leave.

Jerry Fagan’s cackling voice came out of nowhere: “Why didn’t you just walk up and ring the doorbell, Cam?”

Gilly took a few seconds to extricate himself from the shrubs. His eyes briefly searched the shadows and found Fagan standing just across the driveway, hands deep in his trouser pockets, his expression mocking but cordial.

“Kind of an interesting job you’ve got, slithering around in the bushes, peeping through windows. Reminds me of my high school days.” Chuckling, the fugitive professor started toward him in a casual stride. “There was this girl, Jeannie Barboni. She had the biggest jugs in the tenth grade.” Stepping to within a few feet, Fagan kept his hands in his pockets. “Good to see you again, Cam.”

“Jerry,” Gilly coolly acknowledged.

“I’d been meaning to call you for another barbecue before all this came up. How’s my little soccer protégé doing?”

“She’s fine, Jerry.”

“Good. Good. Anyway, Jeannie was the object of every guy’s lewdest



fantasies, even the seniors'. One night I climbed up on her garage roof to see if I could get a look at her through her bedroom window." Snickering, Fagan bowed bashfully to his shoes. "My bad luck, her old man chose that night for a meeting of his business partners out on the patio. I was stuck up on the roof for three hours, just sitting there."

"No Jeannie?"

"Oh, she came up, all right, but she pulled her shade first thing, before she ever took her blouse off." He glanced toward the back door. "Say, you hungry? I saw you sitting out front there in your car since about four-thirty. You want a sandwich or something?"

"I could eat, I guess."

"Good. Let's do it." Fagan took his arm and turned him toward the back door. "You should've just rung the doorbell. I mean we're friends, right?"

"I thought about it," Gilly replied, miffed at himself for blowing the stakeout. "But I wasn't absolutely sure you were here, and I didn't feel like harassing Kathy if you weren't."

Fagan laughed. "Well, you're nothing if not considerate, Cam. Come on, we'll have a bite to eat and then we can talk."

He brought Gilly in through the back door and up a half flight of stairs into the kitchen. A long plank banquet table and six chairs filled the center of the room. Seated in a chair at the end, behind several stacks of papers, was a woman who, despite being somewhere in late middle age, could only be called very well preserved.

Kathy Lamont Robbins raised indignant eyes at her guests. She had a long face, not too narrow, with a long thin nose and colorless lips. There were laugh lines at the corners of her eyes, but they seemed out of practice. Her short, dark brown hair had been professionally cut and colored. Gilly wondered for a moment why he had not taken the time to look her up in his old Colbarth annuals. Then he remembered that he wasn't sure where the moldy old volumes were.

"Hey, Kath," Jerry said loudly. "I want you to meet my friend and our fellow Colbarth alumnus, Cameron Gilly. I finally talked him into coming inside for a bite to eat."

"When I want to meet the alumni," she said, returning to her calculator, "I'll go take in a class reunion. This isn't funny, Jerry. If this guy can track you down here, so can the police. You're putting me and my kids in danger."

"Relax, Kath." Fagan peeled off his jacket and tossed it across the back of one of the chairs. "Make yourself comfortable, Cam."

"I'll relax as soon as you get yourself and him out of here," Kathy grumbled.

Smiling, Fagan went over and began rummaging in the refrigerator. "How's roast beef on rye sound, Cam? A little Thousand Island dressing,

some lettuce, slice of tomato?"

"Anything's fine," Gilly said.

Fagan took out bags and bottles and set them on the counter. "You know, this is rather awkward for me, Cam. I really didn't expect Nichole would ever be hiring you to snoop on me."

"She hired me to find you, Jerry, not snoop on you."

"Mm. That's rather splitting hairs, isn't it?"

"No. I do a lot of snooping on people, for one reason or another. This is only the second time I've been hired to find someone. I think I know the difference."

"Okay, I'll give you that one. So you found me. What now?"

"Now I tell you what Nichole told me to tell you, that whatever trouble you've got yourself into, she doesn't care. She wants you home. She's worrying herself into ulcers over this."

Fagan nodded thoughtfully as he carefully positioned several thin slices of red roast beef across both pieces of bread.

"Sounds to me like good advice," Kathy remarked, viciously tapping the keys of the calculator.

Fagan chuckled. "Don't listen to her, Cam. She doesn't mean it."

Kathy looked up and glared at him. "I sure as hell do! I'm not kidding, Jerry! I want you out of my house, away from me and my kids!" She continued boring holes in the back of his head for some time, as Fagan spread mayonnaise on the bread. Finally, with an exasperated sigh, she went back to what she was doing.

It looked like the monthly bills, but Gilly was not going to risk facing the woman's wrath by craning his neck to get a better look. He stood by while the sandwiches were finished.

"Okay, Kath," Fagan said, setting the sandwiches on plates, which he then handed to Gilly. "Just let me get us something to drink and we'll get out of your life." He took a couple beers from the refrigerator, fetched his coat off the chair, and nodded toward the stairs. "Come on, Cam. Let's go find someplace quiet to talk."

Moments later they were seated across from each other at a picnic table in the dark yard behind the garage, quietly eating and tending their thoughts.

Finally, Jerry said, "I want you to know there's no hard feelings, Cam. I know you couldn't turn Nicki down. I really wish you had, though. That's one thing about her. She'll stay on you till you go her way."

"I had no problem taking this on," Gilly said curtly. "Nichole's a nice girl. She's a good mother and a good wife, and I think she did exactly the right thing."

"Mm. Too bad," Fagan said, and he bit deeply into his sandwich.

"You want to tell me what the hell this is all about, Jerry?"

"Not much."

“Don’t you think you at least owe Nichole an explanation?”

“Absolutely. And as soon as I can safely give her one, I will. In the meantime, I don’t really need you dogging me around, trying to make me feel guilty about it. No matter what you may think, Cam, my family does come first with me. And despite what Nichole may think, I didn’t come up here to re-ignite some ancient college romance.” He laughingly gestured with his sandwich toward the house and added, “As anyone can plainly see.”

Gilly kept eating, as much for his gnawing hunger as for lack of reply.

Presently, Jerry continued: “Look, I’m sorry you got involved in this, Cameron. I know the whole thing looks crazy, but it’s not. I’m in the middle of something... well, pretty bad. Bad enough there’s seven guys dead because of it. And I’m sure you can appreciate I don’t feel much like joining them. Right now I don’t want to put Nicki and Jimmy in danger by their knowing anything about it.”

Gilly finished chewing. “Why not tell me, Jerry? I don’t have to tell Nichole anything, and maybe I can help.”

Fagan shook his head. “Maybe it’d be different if she had just picked your name out of the phonebook, Cam, but I know you. You’re a neighbor and a friend. Besides, you’ve got a teenage daughter back in Charlotte who needs you.”

“You can’t just leave your family high and dry, Jerry. Whatever it is you’ve got yourself into, you can’t just hide out forever.”

“I’m not talking about hiding out forever. But if this thing blows up, I could end up doing some jail time, Cam. Talk about leaving my family high and dry, that’d be the worst situation short of getting myself killed.”

“You know the FBI is all over this, now. Kathy was right about one thing: I found you, and they won’t have that much trouble doing the same.”

“The FBI?” Fagan snorted. “They’re the least of my worries.”

Gilly paused with the beer bottle a half inch from his lips. “Really?”

“Look, Cameron. In case it isn’t obvious, there are some real dangerous people in this. They’re not after me so much as what I know. As far as the cops and the FBI are concerned, they don’t even know what it is I’m involved in. In fact, there may not even be any laws broken—not by me, anyway. With a little luck, this whole damn thing might just blow over, given a little time. How much time, I don’t know—a week, a month, maybe six months.

“In the meantime, I’m trying to figure a way to protect and provide for Nicki and Jimmy, and maybe even save my damn career. And in the short term that means staying out of Charlotte and away from my family. I know it sounds cruel, but that’s the way it’s got to be. If you really want to help me, you’ll go home and tell Nichole to sit tight and quit worrying. As soon as I know it’s safe, I’ll come home. Okay?”

Staring across the table at Fagan’s pleading face, Gilly wondered what

the hell he was going to do now. He had only been hired to find the guy, not to kidnap him and drag him back home to his family. But that's what it was going to take, wasn't it? So what now?

"Finish your sandwich and we'll go for a ride," Fagan said. "Where's your car?"

"Back here." Gilly gestured toward the back street. "Where we going, if it's not too rude to ask?"

"STRAIGHT AHEAD AND all the way to the end, then take a right," Fagan said.

Gilly thought he recognized the freeway even before Fagan directed him to the on-ramp. "Where we going?"

"Nowhere. I just wanted to get the hell out of there. Kathy's pretty pissed off."

"Can't say as I blame her."

At the on-ramp straightaway, Gilly hit the gas to catch up with the through traffic.

"No, me neither. I shouldn't have imposed on her, I guess."

"You been seeing her?" Gilly asked, after a short silence.

Fagan did not reply right away, but sipped his beer and then gave a self-abusive sniff. "Not the way you're thinking, Cameron."

"Then what way?" Gilly was remembering their poolside conversation back in October and Fagan's glowing references to his old girlfriend.

"We're just friends," he replied seriously, and then laughed. "No, don't say it. I know that sounds lame as hell."

"Hey, I believe you, Jerry. But I wouldn't expect Nichole to."

"No, me neither." Fagan reached forward and turned on the radio, pushing the TUNE button until he landed on an oldies station. "We'll stay on this road for a while."

"Has it occurred to you, Jerry, that whatever this threat is you're facing, by running away from it, you're only putting Nichole and Jimmy at risk?"

"If I thought that were true," Fagan told his side window, "I'd have gone straight to the police, believe me."

Gilly took a moment to mull over that one. "You got the damn mafia after you?" It was the only explanation that made any sense.

Fagan turned with a surprised look. "What makes you say that?"

"That restaurant massacre was a professional hit. If you're afraid you're next on the list—too afraid to go to the cops—but not afraid for your wife and kid, well, for me that comes up mafia."

For a time it seemed some kind of confession was imminent. But then Fagan took another sip of beer and gestured ahead. "This'll turn into I390 up here. Just stay straight."

They were headed toward the airport. Gilly saw in the distance the

headlights of a commercial jet on its final approach. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“Listen, Cam, I really don’t want you sticking your nose in this, okay? You can’t help me, and you can’t help my family—except by going back to Charlotte and staying clear of this thing. You hear what I’m saying?”

Gilly watched as the jet’s headlights dropped below the horizon. “You putting me on a plane?”

“I’m not putting you anywhere,” Fagan grumbled. “I just want you to go home and butt out, Cam.” He was quiet for a moment and then said, “When you wake up tomorrow... You got a hotel room for the night?”

“No, just a reservation. The airport Marriott.”

That reply seemed to worry Fagan for a time. “I’ll be leaving Rochester tonight,” he said, finally. “I don’t want you dogging me, Cam. If you do, you’ll only be putting yourself and Amanda in danger. I’m not just trying to scare you off, either. You need to believe that. You can’t help me, but you can get yourself killed, or worse.”

Gilly laughed. “How can I get myself worse than killed?”

The look on Fagan’s face was ghastly. “You can, Cameron, believe me.”

Driving along, Gilly took a series of snapshot glances of his passenger. “Okay,” he acknowledged. “I guess I’ll take your word for that.”

They were just passing the airport exit. Wherever they were headed, Gilly thought, it wasn’t for the ticket counter at USAIR.

“Keep an eye out for the Lexington Avenue exit,” Fagan told him. “You’ll want to be in the right hand lane.”

It was as the old Buick was passing on his left that Gilly first noticed it. The dimly illuminated license plate on the back, caked though it was with dried salt from the winter roads, seemed to leap into focus.

Not long after he had turned forty, his eyes had started to go and had grown progressively worse, particularly over the last few years. He could still see well enough to carry on his daily life, and did not yet need glasses to drive, but reading had become all but impossible without lens.

And yet, staring at the passing license plate, he found he could easily read the tiny registration tag in the corner. He glanced down at the driving console. Everything was sharply in focus. Even the odometer he could read without squinting. He noticed a piece of hair stuck to the console faceplate.

“Don’t you think you ought to be watching the road, Cam?” Fagan reminded him.

“I was just noticing my eyes seem to be working a little better than usual.”

“Is that so?”

Gilly looked over and frowned at Fagan.

“Okay, this is it coming up.” Fagan gestured ahead at the Lexington Ave exit sign. “You’ll be hanging a right at the end of the ramp.”

But Gilly was having difficulty sifting any meaning from the other man's instructions. The clarity of Fagan's pronunciation was almost computer-like. It seemed to Gilly he could see and feel the curves of the syllables, the edges of the sharp consonants, the soft cloudiness of the vowels, but their meaning escaped him. And as the last reverberations of Fagan's remarks were absorbed into the seats and carpeting, other sounds—of the highway, of Fagan's breathing, of Gilly's own heartbeat, of the air itself—rushed in to fill the void.

"Concentrate, Cam," Fagan said calmly. "Concentrate. Put your turn signal on and take this exit."

The steering wheel felt like a billion tiny points—*atoms!*—at his fingertips. The car seemed to be driving itself, following the exit ramp, slowing to the recommended ramp speed, 35 MPH.

"Pull over to the shoulder," Fagan said, and the car obeyed. It rolled to a soft stop and the gearshift moved into park. "You won't be able to drive much longer."

"Damn, Jerry," Gilly said, breathlessly, almost in a whisper. "What the hell's going on here? You drugged me?"

"Relax, Cameron. You'll be fine." Fagan looked over and snickered. "But of course you are relaxed, aren't you? You couldn't get worried if your life depended on it."

How true that was. In all his life, Gilly had never felt so relaxed, not without being dead asleep. Despite the hypersensitivity of his senses, there was nothing alarming about it, or even particularly exciting. He could smell the dust in the air, taste its dryness, almost feel its particles bombarding the walls of his nasal passages.

"Come on, we'll switch," Fagan said, opening his door and getting out. The cabin filled with cool, fragrant air, sweet and penetrating, indescribably pleasant. Gilly's door opened and Jerry was there, bending down. "Move over, man."

Gilly's body complied, but it was not clear to him how. He had understood the order well enough, and was agreeable, had even relayed the message to the proper nerves to make it happen. But it was as if there was nothing at the ends of those nerve bundles, no muscles to carry out the directive. And yet his body complied. He imagined himself an inchworm, his spineless form moving along the seat in an oscillatory fashion, finally reaching the passenger door and disintegrating into it.

The other door slammed shut. Jerry put the car in drive and hit the gas. Gilly saw the streetlights trailing away behind. He felt a sudden impulse to laugh and then realized he was already laughing, had been for... how long?

"Glad you're enjoying it," Fagan said. "It's a pity the circumstances aren't better. You and I could have made quite a weekend out of it at my place on the Outer Banks. Oh well, maybe next time, eh?"

“What is this stuff?” Gilly heard himself ask.

“It’s the perfect buzz, Cam. No bummers, no nausea, no paranoia, no hangover.” Fagan paused and then laughed. “You won’t be needing your reading glasses for a few days, either.”

“I don’t know where they are.”

“But it doesn’t matter, does it?”

“No, not a bit—Whoa!”

A wave of deep, brilliant red light shot through the windshield, and through him, on its way to infinity.

“Whoa!” he repeated.

The warm candy-apple redness pulled him forward, trying to draw him in. The seatbelt held him back.

“What the hell *is* this?” he asked.

Fagan was amused. “What the hell is what?”

“You’re all r-red, Jerry.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. And soon I’ll be all green. Watch it now, Cam. Here we go, three, two, one—”

Green! *Huge* green! *Green* green! Cool, soft, pushing him back into the seat. And suddenly Gilly got it. The traffic light! They had been waiting for the damn traffic light to change! “God, I love it!” he laughed.

“I knew you would.”

“I feel fucking fantastic!”

Fagan laughed tolerantly, as if Gilly’s ravings were an old story. “Believe me, Cam, you ain’t seen nothing yet. I hope you got yourself a shower this morning, my friend, because you’re about to meet the Almighty God.”

Music filled him, light and sweet and melodic, shooting through his body like fine threads of brightly colored luminescence, like curving laser light. He was smiling, smiling so hard his jaws ached. “Holy shit!”

“I know, Cam,” Fagan said. “Believe me, I know.”

“Where are we?” Gilly asked, but he could barely hear himself beneath the sound of distant waves thrashing sandy beach. He was lying on a forest floor beneath a boundless canopy of deep green treetops so dense the sky was shut out completely. His head was filled with the smell of grass and damp earth and rotting wood, of fungus, of warm stone, of pine pitch and musty shadows. He felt the soft caresses of a warm, savory wind. He heard himself take a breath, in three quick, stuttering pulls, like a sobbing child.

“We’re in heaven, Cam,” came Fagan’s distant chuckling reply. “We’re in heaven.”

Gilly smiled hard.

## 4

# Genius

*TAP-TAP-TAP!*

It was like being jarred from a daydream in the middle of a business conference, the way his mind suddenly flipped on with his eyes already open. Except this was no conference room. Six inches in front of his face was a gray, leather-wrapped steering wheel. With a greasy, black, smudged fingerprint... *What the hell?*

*Tap-tap-tap!* “Hey, Mac! Wake up!” *Tap-tap-tap!*

Gilly rolled to his back and peered up at the driver’s door window, his eyes squinting at the brilliant glare of the gray sky.

*Tap-tap-tap!* “Come on, Mac!”

The ruddy-faced cop scowled impatiently, his wedding ring poised to tap the glass again.

“Wake up! Unlock this door!”

Gilly closed his eyes and sighed, for a moment trying to recapture the dream he had just lost. But it was no use. And he could feel the cop’s growing impatience. Grudgingly, he pulled himself together, found the electric lock button and released the door locks. Before he could locate the door handle, the officer had the door open and was pulling him up.

“You okay, Mac?”

Gilly pressed his fingers to his eyes and yawned. “Okay? Yeah, I’m fine.” The obvious question—*Where the hell am I?*—he kept to himself, gazing through the windshield. A pink and orange Dunkin’ Donuts shop stared back at him from across the parking lot.

“Been drinking?”

*Drinking?* Gilly turned a startled face to the cop, as he suddenly recalled sitting down with Fagan at the backyard picnic table. And then everything else came flooding back.

“Well?” The cop leaned into the open door and sniffed the air.

“Just a beer, with dinner last night,” Gilly said, and then had to laugh,



knowing how lame that answer would sound to a street cop who had probably heard it every working day of his life.

The officer stared skeptically, tipping his head side to side, observing Gilly from different angles. “No,” he acknowledged, finally, “you don’t look drunk or hung over.”

“Never felt better,” Gilly declared, more than a little surprised at the truth of it.

“Uh-huh. How ‘bout breaking out some ID?”

Gilly pulled his wallet from his back pocket and fished out his driver’s license. The cop studied it for a moment, comparing Gilly’s face with the photograph, then handed it back.

“Rental car?”

“Yeah. I’m a private investigator, from North Carolina, here on a missing person case.”

The cop’s eyes widened. “Carrying a gun?”

“No, the guy isn’t dangerous.” Gilly flashed a grin, but the cop replied with a steady frown. “I guess my lack of sleep just caught up with me.”

“Uh-huh. Well, next time you need a nap, Mr. Gilly, try a hotel, okay? There’s plenty of ‘em around.”

Minutes later, huddled over a steaming cup of coffee in the donut shop, he had to laugh. *Never felt better*. How true that was. His mind was clear. His body was rested. And his vision, he realized, scanning the sports page of the complimentary *USA Today*, was amazingly sharp.

The whole thing seemed like some kind of dream, even the parts that were not. His blown stakeout, the uneasy situation in Kathy Robbins’ kitchen, those first crazy hallucinations—they looked harmless and comical and unreal to him now, a TV sitcom. Fagan had taken him to a game arcade somewhere, probably more for his own amusement than Gilly’s. With hallucinations like this stuff produced, just sitting in a chair in the corner would have been a major event. Not that the games in any way clashed with his state of mind. All things considered, he had had one hell of a great time—

“More coffee?” the waitress interrupted, her pot poised to pour.

Gilly waved her off. “No thanks. I’m good.”

Breakfast behind him, he returned to the car and checked his computer. There was a message icon flashing in the notation area. He clicked to maximize the TelTail window, and an information box popped up, showing three outgoing phone calls, one long-distance—to an unlisted Chicago number—and two local. He double-clicked the Chicago call. The TelTail had caught the last ring before someone answered.

“Matt, it’s Jerry.”

“Jesus.”

“Relax. Everything’s okay.”

"I told you to use my cell if you had to call me. Are you completely nuts?"

"Sorry, I forgot. But this is sort of an emergency. Nichole hired a private detective to find me. He followed me up here to Rochester."

"Jesus."

"And Kathy's pissed off. She wants me out of here, pronto."

"Can't blame her."

"So, we talked about your hideaway."

"Oh, man. God, Jerry, I don't know."

"Come on, Matt. I just need a place to lay low for a while, just till things cool down. A couple weeks at most."

A long, contemplative silence. "I don't like it, Jerry. You're putting me in a spot, man. Have you talked to Eddie yet?"

"No."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Why don't you call him for me, Matt?" Jerry asked snidely.

"I suppose you're kidding, but I will if you want me to."

"Go ahead, then."

"You know, Jerry, your problem isn't just yours alone, old buddy. You've put the whole operation in jeopardy. I mean I'm genuinely flattered you bothered to tell *me* what's going on, but why you want to keep it a secret from the others—that I don't understand."

"There's no reason to tell them, Matt, or I would. Right now I'm the only one with his feet in the fire, and I'm doing everything I can to keep it that way—"

"What, like dropping in on Kathy? That's keeping her feet out of the fire? And now you want me to hide you? Come on, Jerry. Listen to yourself. All I'm saying is you ought to at least let the others in on it."

"Not yet. All I'm asking is a little time and a place to sit and figure out what to do next."

Someone sighed.

"Why don't you just go back to Charlotte and tell the cops you don't know anything about what the little gook was up to on second shift. Dump the whole damn thing on his head. I mean he's dead, y'know? Where's the harm? After all, he was selling the stuff, right?"

"Yeah, he was. But do me a favor, Matt, and don't ever refer to him as a gook again, all right?"

"Yeah, sure, okay. I didn't mean anything by it. But you know that's the way the cops will look at him, and I just think you might as well use that to your advantage, that's all. So what are you going to do about this detective?"

"I lost him, but he isn't going to stay lost long. I gave him a couple hits of three-sixteen and left him in a parking lot across town."

“Three-sixteen?”

“Yeah, three-sixteen,” Jerry echoed irritably. “So, I’ve got about seven hours to get my ass out of town. You going to help me out here, Matt, or what?”

“Christ. You sure there’s no one else following you?”

“I know what they’re after, Matt. Believe me, if they knew where I was, they wouldn’t be hiding in the friggin’ bushes, peeking through the windows, okay? So, about that house, Matty?”

A deep, tired sigh. “My sister’s due back from Paris in ten days, maybe sooner. What then?”

“Hell, I don’t know. I haven’t seen Eugene in a while.” Fagan paused. “Or maybe I’ll stop in for a visit with old Heineman, I don’t know. Listen, I’ll worry about that when the time comes. So how about it, eh?”

“Okay, okay, it’s yours. I don’t know what there is in the way of food there, though. Probably not too much. They’ve been gone almost six months.”

“You want to meet me at the airport?”

“You make your own travel arrangements, old buddy. When you get it all squared away, call me on my cell phone.”

Fagan snickered. “Your cell phone, right.”

“I’d appreciate it. In the meantime, I guess I’ll just wait for your call and see you tomorrow.”

“Right. So long, Matty, and remember to brush regularly.”

The line went dead. Gilly heard Fagan chuckle to himself just before he hung up. The call had been logged at 9:46 PM.

He clicked on the next call, logged in twenty minutes earlier, and listened as Kathy’s daughter arranged to meet with a friend after school the next day. The last call, at 10:18 PM, was Kathy herself, phoning for a cab, probably to the airport.

Gilly took out his cell phone and dialed Nichole Fagan. He was about to hang up when, after seven rings, she finally answered.

“It’s me, Nichole,” he announced.

“Cameron! Thank God! Where have you been? You were supposed to call me last night! I’ve been tearing my hair out!”

“Don’t do that,” he laughed. “It’s one of your more endearing assets.”

“Oh, cut it out. What’s happening? Did you find Jerry?”

“He found me, actually. And you can put any concerns about his midlife crisis to rest, Nicki. His relationship with Kathy Lamont is at best borderline hostile.”

“Oh, Cameron, I don’t care about that. Is he all right?”

“Physically, yeah. Mentally, I don’t know. He’s got himself in some kind of mess, that’s for sure.”

“Where is he now?” she asked impatiently.

“I’m not sure of that, either, but I think he’s left town.”

“He’s not coming home? What’d he say to you?”

“Not too much. I’ll fill you in as soon as I get back. I’ve got a feeling there are a lot more interested parties involved in this than just you and me.”

“You coming home today?”

“I hope so, but there’s something I’d like you to do first.”

“Anything. Name it.”

“Got a couple names for you. Ever heard Jerry talk about someone named Matt, or Matthew?”

Nichole gave a disgusted sigh. “Yeah, sure. Matthew Herlighy. He was one of Jerry’s college pals, one of those stupid Irish Culture Club weirdoes. He lives in Chicago, I think.”

“Wouldn’t happen to know his phone number, would you?”

“Are you kidding? How often do you think I’d call him? If you want, I’ll look it up in Jerry’s Rolodex.”

Gilly told her to go ahead. The number, when she gave it to him, did not match the number from the TelTail, but he made a note of it anyway. “Okay, good. Next: Jerry ever talk about someone named Heineman?”

“Heineman? Absolutely! He was Jerry’s doctoral advisor. Izzy Heineman. I even met him a few times. Nice old guy. Real Old World Jewish, if you know what I mean.”

“Uh-huh. Happen to have his number handy?”

“I can look. Hold on.” She was back seconds later. “Got it. Isidor L. Heineman.” She rattled off the phone number. “Want the address? He lives in Turinburg.” Gilly took down all the information she had.

“That’s a huge help, Nicki. Now, how about Eugene? Jerry ever mention anyone by that name?”

“Eugene? Uh-uh. Don’t know any Eugene.”

“You sure?”

“Absolutely positive. Nerdy name like that, I’d sure remember it.”

“Okay, then, one more. He ever mention someone named Eddie?”

“Hell’s bells! Now that’s one name I don’t need to look up!” Nichole said with cringing distain. “Eddie Roundhouse. He was the club creepy crawler.” Gilly asked her what that meant. “Oh, I don’t know, he was sort of a super nerd, real smart, but real weird, too. He made all their drugs. He wound up taking a dive into Highland Creek Gorge.”

“What? You mean he’s dead?”

“Completely. He went off Stagersaw Bridge one night back in ‘75. He was drunk, or stoned, tried to do a handstand on the railing. He was nuts.”

“You’re sure about that?”

“That’s the only Eddie I know. Jerry was there when it happened. They were on their way back from a frat party, all of them stewed to the gills, naturally. The weirdo tried to do a handstand and over he went.”

“Doesn’t sound right. Eddie Roundhouse? You wouldn’t happen to have an old yearbook around, would you?”

“Are you kidding? I’m looking right at them, all seven years of them, enshrined on the fireplace mantel, right here in the den. Hold on a sec, I’ll take a look.” He heard her set the phone down. A moment later she was back. “I’ve got it. Oh God, this may take a while, Cam.” He told her to take her time. “Here we are,” she announced moments later. “Edward Perin Roundhouse, Class of ‘74. Says he got his A.B. in biochemistry in ‘72, though. I told you he was real smart.” She then added, “What the heck’s going on here, Cameron? This is sounding like some sort of college reunion.”

“Yeah, it is, but I don’t know what’s going on. Let me start digging and we’ll see what turns up. I’ll call you as soon as I learn anything.”

Gilly hung up. He dialed up PerFactFinder on the computer and entered “Matthew Herlighy” in the search field. Seconds later the engine revealed only one individual by that name, living in Winnetka, a northern suburb of Chicago. Gilly ordered a top layer profile on him. Next, he entered “Edward Perin Roundhouse” in the search field. But even the broadest sweep on that one came up empty, with the terse reply “No Information Found.” Finally, he tried Heineman. The engine found only one Isidor L. Heineman, living, as Nichole had indicated, in Turinburg, a small town about twenty miles north of Colbarth on the west side of the lake. That made sense. Turinburg had long been a popular retirement spot for Colbarth professors.

Gilly picked up his cell phone and dialed the number. Presently, a woman answered the phone.

“May I ask who’s calling?” she said, when he asked to speak with Heineman. Gilly introduced himself. “And what’s this about, Mr. Gilly?”

“I’m a private investigator on a missing person case. I understand my missing person was once a student of Professor Heineman’s. I thought perhaps—”

“My father retired twelve years ago. I very much doubt he can be of any use in your investigation.”

In the background, a man’s cranky voice cautioned the woman not to go sticking her nose into his private affairs. She covered the mouthpiece for a time while they argued. When she returned, she said, curtly, “Just a moment. My father will speak with you.”

It was some time before he came on the line. Gilly introduced himself and explained whom he was looking for.

“Oh, yes indeed! Jerry Fagan. He was one of my graduate students. That would’ve been, oh, let me see, ‘75 to ‘78?”

“That fits,” Gilly said. “How about Matthew Herlighy?”

“Mm? Herlighy? Yes, he was one of Fagan’s cohorts, not one of my

students. I think he might have been Hugh Lintel's. Photochemistry, if I'm not mistaken. But, as I say, he wasn't one of mine, so I don't really remember him."

"That's okay, sir. What you said fits perfectly. Let me run one more name by you, if I may."

"Certainly."

"Ever heard of an Edward Roundhouse?"

There was a long silence and then it sounded like Heineman had expelled his last breath into the phone. Finally, the old man said, "I won't discuss him over the phone."

Gilly frowned and checked his watch. "I can be there in a couple hours."

Turinburg was a two-hour drive. The tiny town Gilly barely recalled from his college days, when a skinny-dipping indiscretion in Turinburg State Park had required his appearance before the local magistrate, cleared up with a twenty-five dollar fine.

He found Heineman's house a block from the main drag, small and dark, secreted almost entirely behind a thick bulwark of cedar trees, with the front porch and door barely visible. A carefully lettered mailbox at the roadside announced, "I.L. Heineman."

A middle-aged woman answered the doorbell. Probably in her early forties, she was short and stocky, with frizzy brown hair and a homely ethnic face. She didn't smile, as she held the storm door open.

"My grandfather's expecting you." She let the storm door hiss shut behind him and closed the inner door. "Please try and keep your meeting brief. He's been very sick, and he needs his rest. Follow me."

Gilly was escorted through a maze of dark, narrow hallways, the walls festooned in ancient photographs. Eventually the tunnel opened into a cozy sunroom, with windows on two sides and warmly stained, tightly packed pine bookshelves on the others. Small Persian rugs covered a floor of purple and green mottled slate. In the corner, an old console TV stood dark. A baseball game was playing from an invisible radio. Heineman was sitting in a rocker, gnawing on the earpiece of his glasses as he rocked.

"Papa?" the woman said, softly. "Mr. Gilly is here."

Heineman started in his seat as if he were going to stand but then decided against it. She directed Gilly to a narrow sofa against one of the windowed walls.

"Is it Gilly?" In person, the old man's voice crackled like breaking billiard balls. His accent was somewhere deep in Eastern Europe.

"Yes, Professor." Gilly leaned forward and extended his hand, but soon realized the old man was not going to welcome him with a handshake, so he let it drop.

"You'll have to forgive me," Heineman said, fumbling to put on his glasses. "When you work in science as long as I have, you gain a healthy

fear of germs.” He wagged a finger toward the baseball game. “Debra, you’ll turn that off and leave us, please.”

The woman gazed fearfully at Gilly, but nodded and left the room, closing the door behind. Seconds later, the radio fell silent. Gilly sat down on the sofa. Heineman turned toward him in the rotating rocker.

“I want to thank you for agreeing to see me, professor,” Gilly began.

“I’ve got no love for social chitchat, Gilly,” he replied, gravely. “It seems I’m being haunted by a ghost.”

“Sir?”

“You asked about Edward Roundhouse. What do you know about him?”

“Almost nothing,” Gilly admitted. “His name came up in a taped conversation between Jerry Fagan and Matt Herlighy.”

“Taped? You said you were looking for a missing person. Who is it?”

“It’s Jerry, Professor. His wife hired me to find him.”

The old man nodded. Something in the way he moved his head made Gilly suddenly aware of his blindness. “Nichole?” Heineman said with a scant smile.

“Yes, sir. She told me she’d met you before.”

“I remember her. Pretty girl, dark hair, nice figure. So Jerry’s run out on her?”

“No, I wouldn’t characterize it that way, Professor.”

“Oh? Then how *would* you characterize it?”

“He’s on the run. From what, I’m not sure. But these other guys, Herlighy and Roundhouse, are involved somehow.”

Heineman gave a dry laugh. “Then you don’t know.” In a skeptical gesture, he raised blind eyes to the rafters. “Edward Roundhouse is dead, Gilly. He died twenty-five years ago this spring. Fell off a bridge, into a gorge.”

“Highland Creek Gorge,” Gilly supplied specifics.

“You know the campus?” Heineman said with some surprise.

“Yes, sir. I’m a Colbarth graduate myself. I got my bachelor’s and master’s degrees in electrical engineering. Class of ’74, in fact.”

“Really? Then surely you must have heard about Edward.”

“Not that I recall, Professor. Stagersaw had a reputation as a suicide bridge, but I never paid much attention to those stories.”

Heineman shrugged. “Okay, well, we’ve got the legends out of the way, so let’s talk facts, shall we? So, Edward Roundhouse.”

“He was a student of yours?”

“A student of mine,” he echoed, nodding. “Yes, well, that’s a matter of perspective, Gilly. But if you mean that he took courses from me and that I was his doctoral advisor, then yes, that’s so.”

“He was smart?”

The old man smiled. “Smart? Edward Roundhouse? Smart? No, he

wasn't smart. He was beyond brilliant, Gilly, and I am not being melodramatic. If his other professors were still alive today, they would tell you he was the greatest mind any of us had ever encountered, and we had known some great ones. Many of us had worked the Manhattan Project, with the likes of Fermi and Oppenheimer and Teller. Several times in my young life I had audience with Einstein himself, Gilly, so you can believe I know brilliance when I see it."

Gilly smiled. Back in his undergraduate days, he had had three physics professors who'd worked the Manhattan Project, men could put two hundred engineering students to sleep in a matter of seconds on the subject of  $F=MA$ , yet hold the same audience breathless with their tales of the first atomic bomb.

"As an incoming freshman, Edward was only sixteen," Heineman continued. "Doubtless he could have succeeded at a much younger age, but sixteen was as young as Colbarth would take him. Still, he finished the undergraduate program in just over two years. He tested out of all the science and mathematics requirements. Only the English and history requirements prevented him from receiving his bachelor's degree the day he entered.

"That was in the fall of '72, I believe," he went on, airily, searching his mind while his gray eyes grazed the ceiling. "But it wasn't until the following spring, when he rescued poor Geller, that we began to realize what Roundhouse really was.

"Arthur Geller, you see, was a colleague of mine. For ten years he had been struggling with a vexing problem in large-scale polymer production. After one particularly frustrating run of bad luck, someone suggested he talk his troubles over with Edward, and poor Arthur decided he had nothing to lose. They spent one afternoon together, Arthur and Edward. One afternoon. About four hours. Edward told him what to do, explained to him exactly why it would work."

Heineman laughed fondly. "Poor Arthur. He was stunned. Afterwards, he came to me with his head in his hands. He told me he'd never felt so small and worthless in his whole life. But by then I knew exactly how he felt. He went back to his lab and ran a few tests, saw that it all worked just the way Edward had said it would. A couple weeks later he passed it all over to Dumont, and voila, four years later his polymers were all over your car and your clothes and your house. But poor Arthur, he never did another worthwhile thing with himself. It just killed him."

"I can imagine," Gilly sympathized.

"And that's how the government got into it, too," Heineman said with a shrug. "Arthur's Dumont research was actually funded by the Defense Department. Most of our work was. It was all neatly covered up by front operations like Dumont and Westing Labs and the like, but the money was



straight out of Washington. We didn't like it much, but we were perpetually starved for funds.

"So when Arthur took his polymer process to Dumont, he gave all the credit to Edward. I suppose it was the head of research there who brought Roundhouse to the attention of the Defense Department. However it happened, it was only a month or two later we were honored with a visit from a couple men from DARPA—that's the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. They interviewed me and Arthur and a couple of Edward's other professors, wanted our opinion of the young genius."

"And you told them?" Gilly asked.

"Sure, we told them," he chuckled.

"They were impressed?"

"Impressed!" he scoffed. "Next thing I knew, they'd put half the basement of Blake Lab off limits to everyone but Edward and me. Even the janitorial service didn't have access to our inner sanctum. Edward and I had to sweep the place ourselves. And they stocked the lab with instrumentation I'd only read about in trade journals, it was so new." Shaking his head, he added, "It was like being invaded by an advanced alien civilization.

"Of course I can laugh about it now, but at the time it was no laughing matter. One of the DARPA men told me, 'Professor, what we've got here is an extraordinarily valuable piece of intellectual property.' That's what he called him, intellectual property. And that's when I realized what they had in mind for me. I wasn't going to be Edward's mentor; I was going to be his assistant."

"Doing what, Professor?"

"Ah! That was precisely my question at the time. Tell me, what do you know about LSD, Gilly."

The question caught Gilly off guard. "Acid?"

The old man smiled tolerantly. "Yes."

"I know what it does," he acknowledged, balking at any admission of his youthful indiscretions.

"Ever heard of MK-ULTRA?"

"No."

"It was a CIA research project, started in the early Fifties, to perfect mind-control drugs for the Cold War. They field-tested LSD extensively as a potential interrogation drug and truth serum, and later as a method of hypnotizing subjects into committing murder. Eventually, though, they realized you could not hypnotize people with LSD, and you could not make them tell the truth, either. By the mid-Sixties, even the drug's most ardent advocates had given up on it as a clinical tool. As far as most researchers were concerned, it was of no more therapeutic value than marijuana, and probably less. MK-ULTRA degenerated into a schoolboy practical joker's club, where they went around dosing each other's morning coffee, dumping

it in Christmas party punch bowls, that sort of thing.”

“Sounds like fun,” Gilly observed.

“Yes, I suppose. But the old idea still had its proponents somewhere in the darker corners of government, because they were spending a lot of taxpayer dollars for Edward’s insights.”

“You and Eddie made acid?”

A wan smile. “As a starting point, yes. We set up a fermentation tank to grow ergot. You know what that is?”

“No.”

“It’s the chemical base of LSD. It’s produced by a fungus that grows commonly on grains of rye. Interestingly enough, in the Middle Ages, ergot was a scourge of sorts, responsible for some fairly widespread mass food poisonings. Eventually someone discovered it could hasten the onset of labor in pregnant women, and it was prescribed for that purpose as far back as the late fifteen hundreds. But not until the 1930’s was its active principle, lysergic acid, isolated in the laboratory and made a target of careful study.

“It was Albert Hofmann, a Swiss chemist, who first synthesized LSD, in 1938. He took lysergic acid and methodically appended to it a host of common functional groups. The twenty-fifth derivative he tested was a compound of lysergic acid and diethyl amine, which he named LSD-25. LSD stands for *lyserg-saure-diathylamid*. The *s* comes from the German word *saure*, meaning acid.

“Interestingly enough, Hofmann had expected the compound to be effective as a circulatory and respiratory stimulant, but its effect on laboratory animals was unremarkable, so testing was discontinued. Five years later, though, he repeated his synthesis, intending to do more extensive testing on it. Somehow the drug inadvertently entered his system, and he found himself besieged by hallucinations.”

“It was an accident?” Gilly asked with amusement.

The old man smiled. “You might be surprised at how many great scientific advances were derived from accidents, Gilly. Much of modern medicine took its direction from age-old tribal remedies—plants and fungi and venoms—that had been discovered long ago by very primitive peoples, mostly, I think we can assume, by accident. When a plant seemed to give relief from pain, as the opium poppy does, we took it into the laboratory and performed a chemical dissection to determine which compound produced the painkilling effect. Then we would do what Hofmann did and try variations on the theme, appending various functional groups to the common residue, trying them on ourselves or other guinea pigs to see what would happen.

“And that, Gilly, is precisely what was so remarkable about Edward. He had some kind of sixth sense about biochemistry. He seemed to understand how brain chemistry worked decades before there was even a technical

language for such things. He never just threw chemicals at problems to see what would happen. He seemed to have an intuitive sense of how a particular chemical would affect the central nervous system. There was no accident to Edward's method. He looked at a problem and dreamed up a solution, and more often than not it worked."

"Remarkable," Gilly acknowledged.

"Indeed. I have heard many pithy definitions of genius—one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration, that sort of thing. But those definitions do a serious injustice to true genius. Newton had everyday experience with force and mass and action and reaction. All he had to do was determine their interrelationships. That's brainy, but it's not true genius. True genius, you see, is intuitive. Einstein's special theory of relativity, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, those are the products of true genius, because there is nothing in the human experience that would lead you to such deductions. And that's the kind of genius Edward was.

"Despite my natural Jewish skepticism when it comes to messiahs, Gilly, in a very short time I became convinced that Edward was possessed of abilities that could rival the Jesus Christ of legend. I was looking forward to a world free of disease, free of insanity, perhaps even free of our own mortality. Sobering possibilities, you'll agree."

"So what happened?" Gilly wondered.

"What happened? He died," Heineman said with a shrug. "The story goes that he and some friends were crossing Staggersaw Bridge one night on their way home from a party. Supposedly they were all drunk, daring each other like stupid schoolboys. Someone dared him to do a handstand on the bridge railing. They say he was doing a perfect handstand, and then over he went, into the gorge."

"Jesus," Gilly groaned, recalling the view from that lofty overlook.

"The police came. They found lots of blood, but no body. It was spring, though, and the creek runs strong at that time of year. They searched the banks all the way down to the lake and dredged the shoreline for several days and never found a body. But thirty people had seen him go over, and it's at least a fifty-foot fall to the rocks. You don't live through a fall like that.

"A couple days later, DARPA sent a team to disassemble the laboratory, collect Roundhouse's records and notebooks and files. Two days after he died, it was as if he had never been," Heineman concluded in a tone of peculiar ambivalence.

Gilly waited patiently through the ensuing protracted silence and then finally asked, "What is it, Professor? What's the matter?"

Heineman's expression became even more enigmatic. Was he smiling, or on the verge of tears?

"Would it surprise you to know that Edward frightened me, Gilly?" the

old man asked, staring at him with empty eyes. “He had no apparent regard for humanity at all. He viewed his fellow man as little more than a curiosity to be probed. He was a perfect testament to the amorality of science.”

Gilly laughed. “That’s a common complaint about all scientists, Professor. My wife used to say it about me.”

Heineman shook his head. “If your wife had ever known Edward, she would never say it again about you. But I don’t mean to say he was evil. I am not talking about *immorality*. No. Quite simply, Edward was incapable of making moral judgments. And that made him dangerous.”

Frowning, Gilly asked, “How so?”

“Gilly, a genius incapable of moral judgment is a tool beyond the wildest dreams of the unscrupulous. I used to tell my wife, God rest her soul, if the devil has his hands on Edward Roundhouse, then this world will rue the day.”

Heineman removed his glasses and put his fingers to the corners of his eyes, the total gesture seeming to signal the end of the interview. In the ensuing silence, Gilly began to wonder why the old man had agreed to see him in the first place. He had assumed there was something more to the story than a two-decade-old tragedy.

“I take no pleasure in this,” Heineman said at length. “If Jerry Fagan has somehow become mixed in matters concerning Edward or his work, it’s important you should understand what you may be getting yourself into. Be very careful, Gilly.”

Startled, Gilly said, “I’m afraid I don’t follow you, Professor. What is it you think I might be getting myself into?”

“I don’t know.”

Gilly shook his head, frustrated. “When I first sat down, you said something about being haunted by a ghost. What did you mean?”

“Only that you aren’t the only one curious about Edward. Just last fall a couple FBI men stopped by, full of questions about the work Edward was doing before he died.”

“Really.”

“Yes. Among other things, they wanted to know if he had ever expressed any political opinions on the subject of China or Israel.”

“Oh? And what did you tell them?”

Heineman smiled archly. “I told them we never discussed politics, that our research was still classified, and that the university’s privacy policy forbade discussions of former students except under a court order. I also reminded them that his work had been funded and directed by the Defense Department. I told them to take their questions there.”

“They bought it?”

“Sure, they bought it,” Heineman replied, throwing his head back in a deep yawn. “I’m sorry. I’m afraid I’m overdue for a nap.”

Gilly took the remark as a signal and got to his feet. "I want to thank you for your time, Professor."

"Please remember what I told you, Gilly."

Gilly went to shake the old guy's hand and then remembered his aversion to the custom. He turned and headed for the door. "Shall I remember you to Mrs. Fagan?"

"Yes, please. Tell her I hope she finds Jerry in good health."

"I will." In the doorway, Gilly paused to look back. "Professor?"

"What is it?"

"You don't think Roundhouse is dead, do you?"

Heineman smiled wanly. "No, I don't, Gilly. I never did."

"How come?"

Heineman turned his face to the window and shrugged. "Well, for one thing, he didn't take drugs. He didn't drink. How is it he got so drunk he thought he could do handstands on Staggersaw Bridge?" He turned back to Gilly. "Besides, Edward was a physical weakling. I don't think he could've done ten pushups."

Gilly nodded. "Thanks for everything, professor."

"Be careful, my friend."

Gilly turned and left.

## Sweepstakes

JIMMY FAGAN ANSWERED the doorbell.

“Hey there, James! I like your pants.” The boy had on a huge pair of army-green cargo pants. Gilly figured you could put at least another full boy in with him. He hated the fashion. “Your mom around, Jim?”

“Is that you, Cameron?” Nichole appeared in the kitchen doorway, primping her hair with her fingertips. “This is unexpected,” she said nervously.

“No news, Nicki. No news at all,” he reassured her.

She approached and briefly embraced him. “Come on, we can talk in the den.” She commandeered his arm and ushered him into Jerry’s study. With the door closed she turned to him. “What’s going on, Cam? I thought there wasn’t anything else for us to do but wait.”

“There isn’t, Nicki. But I don’t really have anything else going at the moment, so I was just kind of curious. I was wondering if you’d mind if I took a look at those old movies of Jerry’s.”

She gave him an odd look. “What, the college movies? Are you kidding? God, take ‘em. Get ‘em the hell out of here. After what Jerry did to you, as far as I’m concerned you can burn the damn things.”

Gilly had spent much of his return flight from Rochester carefully weighing the depth of his report to Nichole. In particular, he had had serious reservations about telling her Jerry had drugged him. When finally he did tell her, Nichole flew into a fearsome rage. At the time, he figured the only thing restraining her from a total, full-blown caterwauling, scratching, hissing, vase-throwing female tirade was the fact that they happened to be sitting in a quiet restaurant.

And now, two days later, it was clear the woman was still teetering on the edge of eruption.

He went to the corner where the projector was set up on a small table. Beside it was a cardboard box full of film cans. He picked up a few to see if

they were full. They were.

“Must be seven or eight years of film there,” Nichole muttered. “Jerry’s entire college life, minute by minute. Makes you wonder, doesn’t it, when a guy thinks so much of his humdrum life he’s got to record it for posterity?”

Gilly smiled, holding up one of the reels. “I’m not going to be looking through a window on his sex life, I hope.”

“No,” she replied with a blush. “Thankfully, his movie camera never made it into the bedroom.”

“That’s a relief.” He placed the reels back in the box and closed the flaps. “While I’m here, Nicki, I’m going to remove my tracer from your phone. If the FBI gets into the act, we don’t want to show our hand.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if they stumble onto my tracer, it’ll raise red flags all over the place. They’ll be hauling my fanny in for interrogation, threatening me with all kinds of legal torture if I don’t tell them everything I know.”

“Would you tell them?”

“I’d have to. There’s no such thing as detective-client privilege.”

“Christ!” she muttered, turning away.

“I know.”

She wandered over and collapsed into the desk chair. “I just can’t believe Jerry would do something like this. I mean he’s always been a little crazy, but he’s never been stupid crazy.”

Gilly picked up the projector cover and set it loosely in place on the machine. He turned to Nichole.

“I’m not so sure I know just what it is he did, Nicki. I think we need to give him the benefit of the doubt, as hard as that is to do under the circumstances. Sometimes even the best of plans spin out of control.”

She gave him a skeptical look. “You’re being very charitable, Cameron, and I appreciate it. But you said it yourself the other night: He didn’t buy that damn KC drug from some street corner dealer. Obviously he and Minh were making the junk. That’s the only theory that makes any sense at all.”

“Seems to me it’s a little early yet to be positing theories. We’re pretty short on data.”

“Maybe you’re right,” she said with a long sigh. “But I’ll never forgive him for drugging you, especially considering you only went up there as a favor to me.”

Gilly laughed. “Oh, don’t fret too much over that, Nicki. All things considered, the drug made for one hell of an entertaining evening. It doesn’t seem to have done me any damage, and I’ve had two days of extraordinary eyesight, which at my age is nothing to sneeze at.” He turned back to the projector and began wrestling the cover into place.

“Well, you’re a very good sport, Cameron.”

“Not really, Nicki. I’d still relish an opportunity to take a poke at your

husband.”

Nichole frowned. “Well, I’m afraid you’ll have to get in line for that!”

“That’s okay, I’m a patient man. Oh, by the way, I phoned that attorney friend of mine. I couldn’t really get into the details with him, because I’m not his client and there wouldn’t be any attorney-client privilege. I gave him your number, though, and he should be calling you today or tomorrow. When he does, you can tell him everything.”

“Thank you, Cameron. You’re a lifesaver. I don’t know what I would’ve done without you.”

“Forget it, Nicki. What are friends for?” He picked up the projector and then promptly replaced it on the table. “Say, would you mind jotting down the names of the other guys in that club of his?”

“Sure,” Nichole said, nodding tiredly. “How about I just mark them in one of Jerry’s yearbooks?”

“That’ll work.”

She got up and went to the fireplace mantel, took down the ‘75 annual, and toted it back to the desk. She took a small pad of Post-it page markers from the drawer and started flipping through the yearbook. “I don’t mind telling you,” she said, tapping one of the Post-its onto a photograph, “it gives me the creeps just looking at these weirdoes. I sometimes wonder if there are other wives out there somewhere who look at Jerry the same way. You think?”

“No,” he laughed, picking up the projector and heading for the door. “I’ll take this stuff out to the car.”

AMANDA WAS SEATED at the breakfast table with a huge sheet of magazine subscription stickers in front of her.

“That doesn’t look like homework,” Cameron tartly observed, lugging the projector and film box through the kitchen on his way to the den.

“I finished my science and English. I’ll do my history reading tonight. What’ve you got there?”

“Just some old movies from Mr. Fagan’s college days.”

In the den, he set the projector and film box on the desk and then headed back for the projection screen.

“What’re you going to do with those?”

“Mrs. Fagan wants me to burn them.”

“Can’t she do that herself?”

“I guess not,” he said, pausing as he passed behind to look over her shoulder. “So what’re you into now?”

“American Digest Sweepstakes. I found it in the trash.”

“That should tell you something,” he said, moving on to the garage.

“We might win. Never can tell.”

“Don’t hold your breath.” He took the screen from the trunk and



slammed the lid.

“So what color Jaguar do we want, Daddy?”

He paused again in passing and pretended to dwell on the question. “Anything but Band-aid,” he said, finally, picturing the Kowalski’s new Maxima. Why anyone would own anything the color of Band-aid, he could not fathom.

“Forest Green?”

“Love it.”

Back in the den he thumbed through the dozens of film reels and finally chose one labeled “Sept. ’74.” It took a few minutes to figure out how to work the projector’s “Auto Load” feature, but then, with the drapes tightly drawn and the lights out, he switched on the machine and leaned back comfortably in the desk chair, his fingers laced behind his head.

The film opened in a kitchen. It might have been any kitchen in Collegetown—they had all looked pretty much the same, with their linoleum countertops, white-enameled cast-iron sinks, and plain painted wooden cabinets.

There were three guys in the picture. Gilly shook his head at all the long hair, remembering Jimmy Fagan’s huge pants, and wondering just who it was invented all these fashions that made young people look like hell.

It appeared to be a celebration of the purchase of a fresh “lid.” A tall kid in a flowery acetate shirt was holding up a small Baggie full of green shredded leaves. On the counter stood a three-foot high Lucite bong, in rainbow hues. Gilly remembered those well. The technological progress in dope paraphernalia was one of those historical studies that seemed to cry out for undertaking by someone with a comedic flair. What could be more impractical than a three-foot high water pipe?

Regardless, Fagan’s friends seemed quite proud of the acquisition. Over and over they filled it from the Baggie and demonstrated for the camera, with all the drama they could muster, just how one went about getting stoned to the bejesusbelt.

Gilly opened Fagan’s yearbook in his lap and flipped through the Post-it marked pages, squinting against his rapidly deteriorating vision to identify the cast.

It was easy. The tall kid with hair like Moe Howard of the Three Stooges was Jonathan “Jack” Reginald Barns, AB Chemistry, 1974. Seated on the counter, the muscular, good-looking dark-haired kid with the fledgling mustache was Phillip Carson Breaux, AB Chemistry, 1974. And last, the pudgy kid with the bad complexion, the Prince Valiant haircut and the incredibly short fingers was Matthew Bryan Herlighy, also AB Chemistry, 1974.

Presently the scene switched to a more familiar venue, the low stone wall in front of the bank on College Avenue. This time it was Herlighy and

Barns and another kid, a beanpole with a black, flat-brimmed sort of cowboy hat that cast a deep shadow over his face. John Samuel Linden, Gilly finally decided. AB Biochemistry, 1974.

Gilly had to smile. Watching Fagan and his friends stroll down College Avenue, past the deli and student center and the old barbershop and Duke's Place, he found himself searching the milling crowds of bell-bottomed longhairs for his own visage and for Susan. They could easily have been there the day this film was taken. With sunshine such an anomaly at Colbarth, its appearance could spawn spontaneous celebration, and no place more so than Collegetown.

The scene changed again. Fagan was in a backyard somewhere, leaning under the raised hood of a dark blue Chevy Vega. Behind stood an old ramshackle garage, the kind with the two shed doors hinged vertically off each side of the doorway. Fagan turned his head, then his body, revealing a socket wrench clutched in his hand. He said something funny to the camera, which responded by bouncing up and down in its laughter. As they came together, a hand reached out from behind the camera and passed Fagan a lit joint, which he took up and enjoyed for posterity.

Next came a tour of the bowels of one of the university buildings. Suddenly realizing what it was, Gilly leaned forward and squinted at the out-of-focus image. At the end of a long corridor the camera paused while a punched access card was inserted in an electronic door lock. The door was flung open, revealing three long rows of chemistry lab benches piled high with roller coaster-like tangles of glass tubing and bulbs and flasks and beakers. Standing at the center bench, with his pen poised at his notebook as he turned to face the interruption, was a kid with eyes of huge radiant intensity that belied the apparent slightness of his physique. His un-stylishly short black hair, running down in front of both ears in a pair of long, woolly sideburns, was possessed of but a single unruly curl that looped down over the left eyebrow. Though his gaze did not acknowledge the camera, his long, narrow face revealed a benign recognition of his guests. He grinned boyishly, with thin, colorless lips and then quickly covered his mouth and whiskered chin with one hand.

Gilly quickly flipped to the page in the yearbook, but he had no doubt who it was. Edward Perin Roundhouse, AB Biochemistry, 1972.

He recalled Heineman's characterization of the young genius. The devil's tool? Looking at this comical figure, it seemed rather less than unlikely. Rather less.

Another switch of scene. Another familiar setting: the Tyler Sykes Hall cafeteria. A young man and woman were sitting at a table covered in lunch litter. They showed mostly irritation at the camera's prying eye and made futile hand gestures at the cameraman to cut the scene.

He recognized the woman immediately: Kathy Lamont, twenty-five

years younger, and the very portrait of feminine charm. Her hair hung long and blond to her shoulders, a style, he recalled, that was not a style, but a fashion of nature. Yet it was a testament to Kathy's honest good looks that she had still stood apart from the crowd in an age of peasant dresses; hairy legs and armpits; uncombed, un-styled hair; and unabashed displays of pasty white, pimply faces.

Kathy's costar, Gilly confirmed after quick referral, was Daniel Loway Corley, the last of the club. He was ordinary looking, not thin or bulky, with average brown hair and a nondescript face. Even in his irritation with the camera's persistent invasion of his lunch, his facial expression lacked any real emotion.

Studying him, Gilly couldn't help thinking this one didn't fit. The others—even Roundhouse—seemed cast from the same vague sort of mold: smart Ivy League brats with too much time on their hands. Wise guys. Delinquents. But not this one. Not Corley. There was a manifest straightness to him. This kid was a boy scout if Gilly had ever seen one. This kid was completely out of his element—

Gilly turned from the screen to the open doorway. "You say something, Mandy?" He waited a moment and then there it was again, a low quiet moan. He reached forward and shut off the projector. "Amanda?"

Suddenly there was another noise, a beady noise that gradually evolved into the sound of water cascading to the vinyl floor. Frowning, he stood and went to the door.

Down the short hallway he saw Amanda sitting at the kitchen table, her head cradled in her folded arms on the tabletop.

"Hey, screwball," he chuckled on his way down the hall. "Wake up!"

Not until he reached the kitchen doorway did he observe the source of the noise, and then Gilly felt a surge of panic. Several tiny threads of water were streaming off the edge of Amanda's chair. Beneath her a large puddle had formed and was following the unevenness of the floor, heading toward the refrigerator. He saw then that the seat and back of her gray corduroys were dark with wetness.

He paused in the doorway and stared in disbelief. He fought back an ominous chill. Was it possible? He looked for some other explanation, an overturned soda bottle, a leak in the ceiling, anything.

"What on earth?" He went to the table, stepping gingerly to avoid the puddle. He grabbed her upper arm and neck and shook her gently. "Amanda, honey, wake up!"

"Aaaaahn," she said.

Gilly leaned over and looked into her face.

Her eyes were wide open, blinking rhythmically.

Another surge of panic. He shook her again. "Mandy? You all right, honey?"

Nothing.

He tried to lift her off the table, but she suddenly went limp, and before he could get a better grip on her, she slipped off the chair and crashed to the floor.

“Holy *Jesus!* *Mandy!*”

He pulled her up by her arms, and her head lolled senselessly like a spring-neck child’s toy.

“Honey, please wake up! Please!”

Kneeling in her puddle, he carefully lifted her in his arms and then carried her into the family room and laid her on the sofa. He dropped to the edge of the cushion and stared into unrecognizing eyes. He patted her cheek lightly. “Amanda, wake up! Please! Oh, God, please wake up!”

The girl’s response was the same: “Aaaahn.”

“*Shit!*” He ran to the kitchen phone and punched in 9-1-1.

It was only minutes, but it seemed hours before the ambulance pulled into the driveway. The medical techs brought their gurney through the front door into the family room.

“She was just sitting there at the table,” Gilly explained, “doing that sweepstakes thing, and all of a sudden she pees her pants and she’s like this!”

One of the techs listened to her heart, while the other took her blood pressure. They stared into her empty eyes, into her mouth, up her nose, in her ears. They kept turning and looking to Gilly, but said nothing.

“What is it?” he demanded. “What’s happened to her?”

The one tech shook his head. “I’m not sure. She’s awfully young for a stroke. Has she hit her head recently, or fallen hard?”

“Not that I know of. I was gone earlier for about half an hour. She was fine when I got home, and she didn’t say anything about hitting her head.”

“She seems stable. All her vital signs look normal. Come on, let’s get her on the gurney.”

Together the three men lifted her from the sofa.

“She taking any drugs you know of?”

“No. Nothing. Not even a decongestant. She never gets headaches or cramps or anything like that.” Gilly wracked his brain for something to tell them, anything that might unscramble the puzzle. “I don’t know.”

The other tech went to the far corner of the room to talk into his radio, describing Amanda’s condition and symptoms.

“Well, okay,” the response came back, “let’s transport her right away.”

Outside, the normally quiet cul-de-sac curbs were lined with anxious parents and excited children looking on as Amanda was loaded into the vehicle. Gilly climbed in behind the gurney and the door was closed.

“We’re going to give her a little oxygen,” the tech explained, as he proceeded to strap a nasal inhaler around Amanda’s head.

The ambulance lurched forward down the driveway. Gilly settled himself in the jump seat and stared into his daughter's vacant eyes.

She had never been really sick before. There was the chickenpox, of course, but that was about it, that and a couple dozen colds. She had come home from school with a stomach bug once and thrown up all over the front stairs. When was that? Second grade? Or third? What did it matter, really? The point was that she was a very healthy girl. She ate well, got lots of exercise, plenty of sleep, didn't smoke or drink or take drugs.

At the hospital, the triage nurse waved the technicians straight through the automatic doors into the ER. Gilly followed them down the long hallway to one of the examination rooms. Two nurses were waiting and immediately began undressing the girl.

"Where's the doctor?" Gilly asked frantically.

"Right here." A dark-haired man in white resident garb came panting through the doorway. "I'm Dr. Sharrard. What have we got here?"

"Not sure," the blonde nurse replied, "but possible stroke."

Shoving the nurse aside, Sharrard made a wry face and shook his head. "Not likely, not at her age." He turned to Gilly. "You her father? Hold old is she?"

"Yes. Cameron Gilly. Her name's Amanda. She's fourteen."

Sharrard did not offer to shake hands. He was already probing Amanda's eyes with a pocket flashlight. "So what happened, Mr. Gilly? When did this start?"

Gilly quickly recounted the events of the past forty minutes, while Sharrard continued with his examination.

"She's not epileptic, is she?" he asked, after Gilly had finished.

"No."

He began examining Amanda's lower legs and feet. "Any chance she might've received a snake bite, Mr. Gilly?"

"No, not in the last two hours, anyway."

"Any allergies to foods or medications?"

*Allergies? God, who knows?* Cameron's mind was swimming. His answers more than ever sounded to him horribly inadequate. And worse, rehearsed. He had never felt so stupid, so inept, so incompetent, so weak, so small.

"Okay, then," Sharrard said finally, stepping back from the examination table. He went to the sink to wash his hands. "I'm going to go ahead and let the nurses get her into a gown, Mr. Gilly. In the meantime, I'll go make arrangements to have her admitted."

"She's continuing to void," the one nurse said, staring between Amanda's legs at a small pool of pale urine accumulating on the sheet.

"So get a pad on her," Sharrard said sharply. "Then I want to get an IV in her. Let's draw some blood and have a look. And see how soon we can

get her in for a CT. I want to dispense with this stroke business first thing.”

Sharrard finished drying his hands and turned for the door. “While they’re getting her set up, Mr. Gilly, why don’t you come with me and we’ll get the paperwork taken care of.”

Gilly jumped at the opportunity. He had not seen Amanda naked since she was nine years old, and he had a profound visceral aversion to doing so now.

Sharrard walked him back to the triage center. “I’ll stop back and pick you up on my way back from admitting. In the meantime, the nurse can put your daughter’s insurance information and medical history into the system.”

With a seemingly constant flow of fresh trauma victims into the ER, it took nearly a half hour for the triage nurse to finish up with him. Afterward, he went over and sat down in the waiting area. On the wall-mounted TV, one of the cable news networks was featuring yet another in their endless series of wonk debates over the African fertility crisis. Gilly exhaled a long sigh, dropped his head back against the wall, and closed his eyes.

He had always been so lucky. Up until now, he had led a charmed life. True, he had lost his wife and childhood sweetheart to some dark force he still could not comprehend. But in Amanda he had retained a piece of her flesh and her spirit, and together they had been blessed with comfort and leisure and health that were the envy of the world. Nothing mattered to him, not really, so long as he had Amanda. And nothing scared him so much as the possibility of losing her.

He remembered the day she was born, Susan roused from her fitful slumber by the first subtle contractions. Susan had not bothered to wake him, snoring peacefully at her side, but lay quietly for hours, savoring the magic that was about to envelope their life. He woke to the radio alarm and, opening his eyes, found Susan staring at him, her face inches from his, smiling in that way that always cut him straight to the bone. “I love you, Cameron,” she whispered, and then she kissed him on the forehead.

When she told him she was in labor, he panicked. For five minutes he raced around the house looking for his shoes and his wallet and his car keys. Susan stood at the foot of the stairs, watching him, laughing, mocking him. “Relax,” she kept saying. “Relax, Cameron. There’s plenty of time.” So he bolted his breakfast and spent the next two hours washing his car.

Amanda arrived at 4:39 that afternoon. Twenty-one inches, seven pounds, six ounces. “Absolute murder!” Susan said of her labors. Gilly sat in the LDR rocking chair, his infant daughter in his arms, her eyes blinking rhythmically against the brilliance of a new world, and he wept uncontrollably. Until that moment, he had thought all life’s great secrets had already been revealed and there was no magic left. But the warmth, the sound, and the smell of new life were indescribably delicious. Absolute magic.

“Mr. Gilly?”

He opened his eyes to find Sharrard standing before him.

“Sorry I took so long,” the doctor apologized. “The regular admitting clerk is on vacation.” He nodded toward the door. “Shall we go back and see your daughter?”

“What do you think is wrong with her?” Gilly asked, as they made their way down the long corridor.

“I don’t know, Mr. Gilly. Actually, beyond the obvious, I don’t see anything wrong with her at all. My examination revealed no evidence of physical trauma, no bruises or puncture marks of any kind. Although we can’t discount the possibility of stroke or brain tumor, I think given her age those are very unlikely. Clearly, however, there is something wrong. I’d like your permission to run a CT, or maybe an MRI, see if we can pinpoint the problem. Or at least eliminate some of the more obvious possibilities.”

“Whatever we need to do,” Gilly said, at once nodding and shaking his head.

“Okay, I’ll go ahead and schedule it. Tell me, Mr. Gilly, has your daughter ever been involved with illegal drugs?”

“No, never,” he said reflexively. “What kind of drug would do that to her anyway?”

“Well, barbiturates in combination with alcohol can cause suppression of the respiratory system, with resulting brain damage, sometimes coma and death. Not that I see any indications of barbiturate use in your daughter, Mr. Gilly. Actually, as I said, I see no indication of anything abnormal at all. Her reflexes are fine. Her heartbeat and blood pressure are normal. So is her temperature. Her pupils respond properly to changes in light. In fact she appears to me to be fully conscious, almost like someone in the final stage of Alzheimer’s, sort of an infantile conversion. Of course, Alzheimer’s doesn’t progress from onset to stage four in the space of twenty minutes, not in my experience it doesn’t. But let’s get a CT and see what that turns up, okay?”

“Okay.”

They arrived at Amanda’s door just as the blonde nurse was coming out. To Sharrard’s raised eyebrows she replied, “No change, doctor. We’ve got her in a gown. Sandy just took blood and urine samples to the lab.”

Sharrard nodded. “Okay, then, I’ll run down and try to get her scheduled for a CT. They’ll need your signature on that, Mr. Gilly. You going to stay here?”

“If I’m not in the way.”

The doctor smiled. “No, Mr. Gilly. You can be sure that if you get in the way, Janet here”—he gestured at the nurse—“will get you out of the way, and fast.”

Nodding, Gilly turned and went into the examining room.

Amanda was lying on her back on the table, her eyes directed at the ceiling, but focused on oblivion. An IV-tube was taped to her arm. A probe was clamped to her index finger, the attached heart monitor in the corner giving out with regular beeps in time with her heart. On the chair her sodden clothing was neatly folded and stacked.

Gilly stepped to the head of the bed and gazed down into the girl's unresponsive eyes. "Daddy's here, sweetheart," he whispered, leaning down to kiss her forehead.

Closing his welling eyes, Gilly could still see her sitting there at the kitchen table, licking those stupid Jaguar stamps and sticking them to the sweepstakes form. American Digest Sweepstakes. Somebody was suing them, weren't they? For fooling all the old people into thinking they had won? Another all-American scam—

It was as if he were being electrocuted. His hair stood straight off the back of his neck and up his arms and legs. His skin seemed stretched to the breaking point, trying to contain him.

American Digest! His mind reeled. American Family. Reader's Digest. It couldn't be!

But he could still see the envelope. He remembered standing there by the mail slot, flipping through Saturday's mail—a couple quarterly reports on his mutual funds, a VISA bill, a wine catalog, the usual grocery store circulars, and the American Digest Sweepstakes. And there was Amanda, licking those stupid Jaguar stamps.

Licking them! Is it possible? Would they do that? Would Jerry do that? Would anyone do that?

No. That was too crazy, too stupid, too mean.

He struggled to reign in his mad imagination, but the fear remained. His heart was pounding, his palms sweating, chills racing up and down his back. It couldn't be. But still it made sense. Too much sense. It was too crazy, too stupid, too mean.

And too true.



Detective Gilly thinks he's tracking a fugitive professor, but soon finds himself chasing the ghost of a dead chemistry genius and trying to foil a racist plot to alter the course of human evolution. A suspenseful techno-thriller.

Voices of Babylon

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1985.html?s=pdf>