

End of the Line

A
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Hard up for Cash

Howling winds battered cotton ball puffs of snow. Inclement weather kept most of the wise in the safety of warm homes, save addicts jonesing for the next ride. Junkies braved tundra like wind chills, slippery roads and limited visibility. Lovers Monk and Tweedy used and pushed, but used more than they sold. Early in this snowy night they worked tirelessly.

“Come on. Hurry up and roll those packs,” Monk commanded. “We got to gather up some green.”

“I *am* hurrying. I could finish if you’d get off me!”

Beep. Beep.

Monk curiously peered through smoke stained ratty curtains. An early seventies model baby blue Monte Carlo, with a brown hood and bondo on the rear quarter panel idled in front of their shotgun shack. Blowing smoke from its tattered tail pipe, an emissions nightmare, the car’s driver sat on the horn.

“Hey, y’all open?” he called out.

“I’m your Huckleberry,” Monk answered jovially.

“Let me hold a nickel bag.”

“Sorry dude, this ain’t the value village,” Monk said. “A quarter is the smallest piece I move.”

“Bust it open for a brother and let me get the five cent piece.”

“Twenty-five or roll, bitch!”

“Fuck y’all!” the driver yelled, and punched the gas causing his junk yard car to zig zag on the icy road.

“What’s up with that?” Tweedy raved. “A minute ago you were going on about us being hard up for cash.”

“Yeah, but I ain’t running no penny pinching five and fucking dime store up in here. This is the shit, and they got to pay for it,” Monk proclaimed, as he held up his dope to admire it.

Not running lights or sirens, a police car, two cops deep, pulled up close behind the Monte Carlo like they had been at the drive in window of a fast food joint.

“What’s up with that?” a cop’s voice echoed against the frosty and silent night. “You ran off paying customers in a freaking snow storm. I’ll never know how a dumb ass like you even thought you could do business. Get a job,” the vice cop joked harshly, as he exited the passenger side. “Give me that bag you didn’t want to break before I haul your stupid ass to jail.”

“Hold it down, dude. It’s bad enough you come around here scaring off my business with your black and white, then you take my product to boot. I don’t get why you always have to threaten me.”

“Did I hurt your feelings, stoner?” the cop asked.

“You know you’ll get the stuff. What choice do I have?”

“Tell me Monk, how is it you’d like this to go down?”

“I’d like you to stay the hell out of my life. Since I know that’s not happening, maybe when you come to steal my dope you could just do it and spare me all your lip service. Here,” he said shoving a coke filled corner cut from a plastic sandwich bag toward the cop. “Take it and get gone.”

“Even crack heads can dream.” the cop said, and trudged through the snow back to the warmth of the car. Once ensconced in the shotgun seat the cop offered to share the spoils with his partner. “You should take a taste. It makes this job tolerable. Some famous writer once said, ‘There is only so much reality a man can take.’”

“I can hold it in the road. You should try a taste of that. You need to walk it straight and narrow for a while,” the partner said. “Everybody knows I.A. is sniffing around your door.”

“I’m golden,” the cop said. “I have more solid busts than any badge on the street.”

“That’s just it,” his partner said. “Sooner or later some dooper is bound to roll on you.”

“They’re all a bunch of goobers, just like Monkey Boy there who thinks he’s too good to sell small packs.”

“I’m telling you, man,” his partner warned. “They aren’t all as stupid as you think. Not to mention, you ride that Monk guy way to hard. He fuckin’ hates you. That’s all it’ll take, one vengeful little shithead to bring you down.”

“You know this little asshole,” the cop said. “He spent a lifetime on the short bus. You can’t melt him down and pour him on me. He’s nothing, never has been, never will be!”

All the way back to childhood

Monk slammed the door and cursed.

“Why won’t you tell me why that cop constantly terrorizes you?” Tweedy asked.

“Back in school I used to kick it with his little sister. He got all puffy a time or two and I had to kick his ass,” Monk admitted.

“That bitch, Jane?!”

“See why I never mentioned it,” Monk barked. “Now, shut up and roll the bags.”

“I’m tired of all this mess,” Tweedy said desperately. “It’s always the same. We never have enough money. That cop’s bustin’ your balls and some fucker’s always creeping around our door. I’ve been thinking about ditching this hell hole. Let’s do this ‘til the light of day and get up out of here. What do you think of that?”

“Say what?”

“Come on Monk, let’s turn all the stuff we’re holding, keep the cash and bust out of here. You know we can make a fresh start and go straight. We can go south or maybe to California, anywhere far away from here.”

“I ain’t going to no California.”

“You choose the place,” Tweedy said. “I don’t care where we end up. As long as we are together and we break out of this death trap.”

“You think we can make it clean?” he asked soberly. “You know if we push all Bo Bo’s goods and hold the change. We can never come back. He won’t send goons, be breakin’ our legs himself.”

“Fuck him,” Tweedy said roughly. “He’s made a killing off us all this time. He owes us!”

“You’re serious?”

“We can do this. We can do anything. The change will do us good,” Tweedy said as she embraced her lover. He hesitantly pressed his lips to hers.

Crash into Paradise

Four A.M. found Monk and Tweedy blurry eyed and buzzed. Unforgiving blizzard conditions hampered their sales, so they packed their bags and Bo Bo’s dope. They lit out to rob a store for their venture capital. To their dismay, a surly attendant pulled a gun and called the cops. Tweedy wasted no time. She dropped to her knees, begged for forgiveness and offered to pleasure the store clerk. Pondering her proposal was the last thought to cross his mind. She shot him in the head. Stood over him and fired again into his genitals. Whipping around she fired off two more rounds into the chest of a customer.

Tweedy hurried to the back of the store and hovered over a woman trying desperately to control her crying, to no avail. Snatching her by her red pony tail, Tweedy dragged her captive to the in-store ATM. After two brutal smashes from the barrel of the gun, Tweedy forced the woman to withdraw cash and hand over her car keys. Tweedy ignored the woman’s pleas for mercy and unceremoniously shot her point blank. Monk and Tweedy tarried long enough to pick up road snacks and took off in the stolen car.

Tweedy at the wheel, she blazed a trail toward the Jersey line. *Thunder Road* blared from the radio. On edge and wildly fidgeting, Monk switched off the music.

“I love that song,” she complained.

“How do you even know that old crap?”

Ignoring her lover, Tweedy locked her eyes on the highway and rushed on toward freedom. Sleep called, not as powerfully as the need for another hit, Tweedy and Monk decided to stop just before the break of dawn. They checked into the Hotel Paradise. Dropping bags on the floor Monk slammed Tweedy on the queen size bed. He pulled out a knife, ripped open her shirt and smoothed out a line of cocaine across the tattoo of the cartoon Tweedy bird on his lover’s chest.

Tweedy was a Boy Scout

Sweat-soaked Tweedy left Monk on the floor. She turned on the water, surveyed the tiny room and then took a long shower. Avoiding the mirror, which reflected that which marked her as something other than what she longed to be. Hurriedly she stood under the lukewarm spray and scrubbed away flecks of dry blood on her wrists and hands.

Tweedy had taken a life before, more than one. She justified the killing in war and in prison. Her commanders said the Iraqis hated Americans; they loathed our

freedoms and liberties and would kill babies to cut at the heart of our society. Amid minefields and constant fire, Tweedy believed it was kill or be killed.

In prison she found out the hard way that nobody gives a damn. Day one turned her out as a bitch. Guards and wardens had no time to hear the time immemorial tale of inmate rape. Tweedy handled it herself. Twenty-four hours later she went to solitary confinement not as a victim but as the victor.

Dirt, sweat and blood swirled down the drain. Scars, tattoos and her member remained the same no matter how much soap she used.

Meanwhile Monk huddled in a corner and stealthily sent text messages to Jane. He bragged of a plan to change everything and a bright future. At long last they could be a family. Jane pondered the possibilities from the secrecy of her sewing room, which Bill honored as her sacred space. She wrote back and pledged her undying love and commitment to try anything to be together.

Sister Named Jane

Standing in the dark among barren walls and the strong order of mildew the cop poured a drink with one hand while poking out digits on his cell with the other.

“Halo.”

“Hey, sis. What ya doing?”

“Nothing. How you doing?”

“Barring the storm. All is well with me,” he said. “I just busted your little boyfriend’s hump, again.”

“When are you going to let bygones be?” she asked.

“When are you going to get your virginity back?” the cop asked. He swilled some drink and then added ice.

“We were in love,” Jane explained nostalgically.

“You were just thirteen.”

“I knew what I was doing,” she insisted.

“Sure you did, Jane. That’s why you got knocked up and married at fourteen.”

“Bill is a good man,” Jane said with less vigor. “He takes care of me and Ivan.”

“He’s a pervert. I’d bust his ass, too, if he weren’t rich,” the cop said. “It’s sickening. He’s older than our father.”

“He’s my husband and we have a good life.”

“I hear you. At least one of us got out. You’ll be okay and give your son a chance at something better than we had.”

“Stop it with the doom and gloom,” Jane said. “You’re a police officer. You’re not as bad off as you make out.”

“Yep, that’s me living the life of luxury,” he said. “Every day is a holiday.”

“Kick the habit and your life could be pretty damn decent. You might meet someone. I know for a fact Lynn Harrison has always carried a torch for you.”

“My ‘habit’ as you call it is the only thing I love other than being a cop.

“Love?! You know what; I think Monk drove you to this.”

“Say what?”

“Being a cop isn’t a love in your life. It’s all about him.”

“So what if I did become a cop just to put that bastard away?”

“Here’s what,” she said loudly. “You’ve let a guy you barely know own you for more than half of your life.”

In a single gulp he emptied his highball glass and started to pour another. Words yelped from his pocketed police radio. Abruptly the cop covered the receiver on his sister midsentence. Still holding the whiskey he drank straight from the bottle.

“He’s really done it this time,” he said after hearing the short blast of coded information.

“It’s not what you think. He’s changed,” Jan responded.

“What do you know?”

“I know he wants a new life, a better one.”

“Did you also know he may have killed three innocent people, robbed a store and stole a car?”

Jane heard the ring of truth resounding in her brother’s words. How else could Monk keep up all the lofty promises he made? What to do?

Pushing the phone in his pocket the cop put the bottle on the counter. He pivoted around as he decided to take it with him and hurried to his car.

All the way to Hell

Tobacco stained fingers held a Styrofoam cup, his eyes trained on the blue hue illuminating the window of a hotel room in the early morning calm. Swilling the last gulp of bourbon and java, the cop took a bump off his knuckle and roistered up to the door. Two kicks and the door didn’t give.

“I know you’re in there,” he shouted. “Don’t even try to lie. If you don’t come out with your hands up this is going to get ugly.”

Tweedy and Monk jumped from the bed. Both knew the voice at the door.

“Of all the pigs in the world how did that fucker find us?” Tweedy asked in a panic.

“How am I supposed to know? This is bad,” Monk said. “We’re fucked. Check for a window or something in the back.”

“It has bars. I looked when we got here.”

“Why do you do shit like that?”

“Prison life, something you’ll get know about if we don’t get out of here. Our only way out is the front door or through that window. We need an element of surprise,” Tweedy explained.

“That freaking cop has the element of surprise. We’re through dealing,” Monk whined.

“It’s too late for crying,” Tweedy said. “We can walk out with our hands up or we can go out in a blaze of glory.”

“I’m not in the mood to die today,” Monk said.

“Me either,” she said, and pressed her lips against Monk’s and bit him.

“Ouch,” he yelped, and patted at the blood trickling down his chin.

“That’s going to be all the pain you feel. I’ll take care of this. Put on your pants, and follow my lead,” she said.

Guns ablaze, Tweedy and Monk burst through the window and lit up the morning. Hotel guests, pimps and everyone in proximity busily worked mobile phones. Some dialed 911 while most turned the scene into virtual paparazzi with an array of flashes from their cell cameras.

Tweedy hit the ground in a roll and swept the legs from under the cop. He toppled. She kicked away his weapon and put her gun to his head and ordered Monk to tie him up. He ran back in the room and grabbed soiled sheets from the bed to bind the cop.

“You little faggot, as soon as I get out of this I’m going run my gun up your ass,” the cop said maliciously. “You can get off on it before I blow your brains out.”

“That’s big talk from a limp dick with no gun,” Tweedy said. “Maybe I’ll play out your little butt fucking fantasy on you. How would you like that?”

“Stop being a fool,” Monk said, as he ripped the sheet into strips. He pulled the fabric cords tightly, cutting into the cop’s skin. “That should hold him. Let’s get out of here.”

“You want redemption? Here it is. Kill the pig,” Tweedy demanded. Monk stood paralyzed. After several seconds she yanked the gun from his hand and bashed the handle against the cop’s head. A stomach curdling thud sounded at the connection of metal, flesh and bone. Holding her gun to the cop’s bloody temple and ramming the other against the seat of his pants she whispered, “Stay away from us or next time I’ll add necrophilia to the fantasy fun.” She licked his ear, let the sweet taste of his blood mix with her saliva and then spat in his face.

An EMS cherry top foreshadowed the crimson tide soon to roll when the ambulance arrived on the scene, with a state trooper responding not far behind. Tweedy emptied her clip into the EMS driver and the other tech. Snatching their blood spattered bodies out of the way, she and Monk drove off in the emergency vehicle with the strobe lights still aglow.

Hanging out the window, Tweedy sprayed a round of bullets toward the approaching state trooper. Finding their mark, flying shrapnel shattered the windshield, sending the cruiser into the gully. Tweedy cackled with morbid delight.

On the Move

“It’s about time you answered your phone,” a relieved Jane said.

“What do you want? I have a massive headache,” the cop groaned. “I’m in no mood to hear your mouth.”

“It’s Monk,” she said. “I think that that freak has boxed him in something awful. I need you to help him.”

“Help him?! You’ve got to be kidding. The two of them made a fool of me not to mention the tranny tried to bash my brains in,” the cop snarled.

“Do this for me,” Jane said. “I need your help.”

“Where is he?”

“They’re on the road.”

“To where?” he demanded.

“Will you make sure Monk’s okay and get him away from that psycho?”

“Tell me where to find him.”

“He’s afraid the state lines are guarded so they looking for a place to ride out the storm in Burlington.”

“When do you expect to talk to him again?” the cop asked.

“He sends me test messages when he can.”

“Keep him writing. I’m on the move.”

Bring Down the Walls

“Hey man, where are you?” the cop’s partner asked.

“I need you to punch the clock for me.”

“Got ya covered already,” his partner said. “Our shift started two hours ago. Where are you?”

“Thanks. I can always count on you. I need another thing.”

“Go ahead.”

“I need you to ride through the Berg or somewhere and pick up an invisible piece for me.”

“Awe man, where are you?” his partner asked.

“You gonna help me or what?” the cop asked.

“Jesus, tell me you’re not tied up in that shit storm over in Paradise.”

“Listen, I really need you on this one,” the cop said. “You got to get me a phantom and meet me at the Rahway Bridge Tavern. Can you be there in an hour and a half?”

“I told you to lay low,” his partner said. “So what did you do, bring down the walls all the way to Hell?”

“That’s great insight into the obvious. Thank you. Now, can you be there or not?”

“I’ll be there and then I’m out,” his partner retorted.

“Fine. I’ll be at the bar.”

“Of course.”

Both ends of the line fell silent as each officer sworn to uphold the law stared at his cell phone and pondered the eeriness of the moment.

Souvenir Stand by the Old Abandoned Factory

“Be cool,” Tweedy advised, as they approached a deserted strip plaza. Leaving the ambulance in a parking deck three miles away the duo had walked through the wooded fence line between the river and the Interstate. “Back in the day this was a crash haven for homeless and meth heads.”

Crunching through a fresh layer of snow over the empty parking lot, Monk ran his eyes across the murals and gangland script covering the walls. He spotted dead weeds that once clung to life through cracked asphalt, a real jungle land.

“Jesus, how do you even know about this place?”

“Some things are better left unsaid,” Tweedy replied.

“True that,” Monk agreed. “Will we be safe to stay a night or two?”

“These squatters won’t be any problem, but I’ve got to tell you I think we need to get on out of town, the sooner the better. Waiting for the heat to die down is a mistake,” Tweedy said. “I have an awful feeling.”

“Let’s hold up here at least until tomorrow,” Monk said. “They’ll be watching the bus stations.”

“I thought of that. We’re gonna have to boost another car, but we can’t do that out here in this ghost town.”

“It’s been a crazy day. I need to get my wits about me. I don’t really want to stay here either, but we need time to think. Everybody’s out to get us, one misstep and we die.”

“You guys are cops or something?” a craggy prostitute asked as Monk and Tweedy entered an old souvenir stand.

“How can you look at me and say that?” Tweedy asked, gesturing to her tattoos and piercings.

“You’re wearing city jackets,” she noted.

“EMS guys let us have a couple of extras they had in the truck,” Tweedy said.

“They got any more?”

Burning whatever was close at hand, a group of men shared a bottle and heat around a fifty-five gallon drum in the warehouse. Monk and Tweedy sat awhile next to the welcomed warmth. Northern winds wailed and brought a biting chill through broken windows and wrecked dock doors.

“I need some fresh air. I’m going out to hit the head,” Monk announced.

Tweedy watched him slink away. A gut wrenching hunch forced her to follow. Keeping a good distance, Tweedy gritted her teeth and clinched her fists as she saw Monk making a secret call. Betrayal didn’t hurt, not much at all. She hated being able to feel, not a love soon lost, but that she had doubted what she long knew.

It’s Personal

“What you drinking?” the cop asked.

“I’m not.”

“Give me a shot of Jack and two Buds,” the cop called to the bar keeper.

“I said I’m not drinking,” his partner restated. He had circled the joint before entering; now he gave a visual inspection of the layout, exits and patrons.

“Good on you, the drinks are for me.”

“Looks like you have lined up enough soldiers already.”

“I drink too much, I’m too hard on pansy ass criminals, I use too much. If you’re going nag like a wife then you need to start putting out,” the cop said.

“You’re a dick.”

“You sound just like a bitch to boot. What color panties are you wearing?”

“Fuck you,” his partner said, and stood to leave.

Grabbing his shoulder with a meaty hand, the cop pushed his partner down on the bar stool.

“So I’m a dick. Some people aren’t good at anything.”

“Your mother must be so proud.”

After giving his partner a wink, the cop gulped the whiskey, slammed the shot glass on the bar top and took a long pull of Bud. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve and finally spoke. “Gimme me what I came for and then you can go on your merry way.”

“I hope you get shot with it,” his partner said, handing over a 9 millimeter gun, making no attempt to conceal the exchange.

“What do I owe you?”

“If you really want to do something for me, give the gun back and let’s head to our side of town and go to work.”

“Speaking of work, clock me out when you get back to the station.”

“Do it yourself,” he said. “We’re done.”

Wasting no time to exit, the cop’s partner hopped off his wooden seat. In dramatic fashion he implored the other officer.

“Let ‘em walk for the love of God. Come on back with me, otherwise this is going to be the end of you.”

“I’ve been long over and you know it. This is not about the loot; it’s personal.”

“It’s always been personal with you and him. Step back and look at the situation,” his partner said. “Monk fucked up this time, I mean really. He’s gone for life. He knows if he ever casts his shadow in this town, that prison won’t keep you or Bo Bo from reaching in to strangle him. You won.”

“I’ve already told you the boy’s not that smart.”

“If he’s stupid enough to come back we’ll run him up a pole and put him in a cave and let the state run a lethal needle in his arm.”

“Sounds good on TV,” the cop said. “But real world justice moves like a fat boy in a buffet line. I ain’t got time for that. What if some two bit lawyer drops the ball? I can’t watch another one of these degenerates walk. In the last twenty-four hours he killed three people in a store, two emergency medical techs and a state trooper.”

“Did he put that knot on your head?”

“You know I think they have a two drink minimum at this fine establishment,” the cop said. “You drinking or leaving?”

End of the Line

“I have a lock on them. Do you have any updates or any idea how much fire power they are holding?”

“Nothing more than the last time I talked to you. He must not be able to get away from her,” Jane said. “You have no idea how much this means that you are taking care of this for me.”

“I fully intend to take care of it for you. I’m going to rid you of that good for nothing once and for all.”

“I didn’t tell you for that,” Jane said furiously.

“What did you think I was going to do?”

“Are you listing to me? Are you listening to yourself? You aren’t making any sense.”

“I don’t care about anything anymore,” the cop said.

“Let him slide. Do it for me. He’s going to go straight for me.”

“Tell me you’re not still fucking him. You know shacks up with Tweedy. Christ, he probably has AIDS.”

“I don’t know if you’re trying to be a cop and do what you think is right, if you’re mad about me and him or if you use Monk to vent your anger because you’re an addict.”

“Your little boyfriend and his bitch are drug dealers and cold killers,” the cop said. “They’re a menace to society.”

“Don’t give me that shit. You turn your head when it suits you. Do this for me. I’m begging you. Let him go,” Jane said desperately, “Do you really want to arrest your nephew’s father?”

“Don’t try that crap on me. It’s no secret Monk’s the one who got you pregnant. The way I see it the boy will come out better not knowing the sort of scum his daddy really is,” the cop said.

“So just like that you are going to become a killer, a menace to society? Is that it?”

“It’s not illegal if you don’t get caught. Besides, if I don’t get him, Bo-Bo will. Which one do you want? At least I’ll have mercy.”

It’s Best If You Don’t Know

Jane tried to sleep. It wouldn’t come. She knew her brother would never let Monk go free. She jumped out of bed, dressed quickly and told her husband, “I’m sorry but there’s someplace I gotta go.”

“Where are you off to so late, darling?” Bill asked.

She took a gun out of the drawer and said, “It’s best if you don’t know.”

Bill grabbed her by the wrist, pulled her close and kissed her hard.

So many times before Bill could tell by Jane’s dress, perfume, hair, make-up, pretty underwear and mostly how she looked him in the eye and lied that she was off to see her lover. As she would walk out the door he knew she had every intention of pleasing another man, to enjoy and be enjoyed. In those times, Bill would gaze over her body. He’d imagine how her lover appreciated her. The baby left no notable evidence on her form. She was firm, slender and a salacious lover.

This time was different; an honesty resonated in Jane’s voice. She had a hardened look unlike her usual sensual smile as she prepared to leave. A hardness engulfed her speech, movements and mannerisms, one he had not known. Bill had no idea where his young bride was going, but he knew with all his being she would not return, not this time.

Out of Gas

“Go ahead,” Tweedy said. “I’ll make sure nobody remembers seeing us.”

“You’re not going to kill them are you? They’re losers. If the police even thought to talk to them it’s not like they’re credible. Come on, let’s go,” Monk said earnestly.

“You wanted to stay the night. Let me take care of this.”

“Fine. I don’t want any part of it.”

“I said for you to go on, I don’t need help.”

“You’ve crossed over,” Monk said. “Something’s changed in you. It’s like I don’t know you anymore.”

“We made a choice. We decided to risk it all. I believe in that. There’s nothing I’m not willing to do for you, for us to have a chance at a normal life together.”

“Normal?!”

“Long before we started this both of us had been through a thing, the kind of thing that changes people, you, too. ‘cept you don’t want to change. You want things to be the way they were. How is it that you don’t see there’s no going back?” Tweedy asked.

Monk held his tongue.

“I’m going to handle this like I said. Then I’m out of here. You can come with me or not. I’ve gone past the point of caring.”

Monk broke camp and headed west for the river. Imagine his surprise when the cop eased out of nowhere. Cornered and tired of coming out on the losing end Monk lifted his arms in the air and surrendered.

The cop laughed in his face, “Ha! You didn’t think this could last.”

Monk leaned forward to speak and the cop collapsed in his chest. Tweedy put a round in the back of the cop’s knee. Monk let him go and watched as he fell face down in the field.

“This ain’t what I had in mind. This isn’t my scene,” Monk said frantically. “In prison or over yonder I think you got touched.”

“We’ve done enough talking. We got no choice but to finish what we started, together. Today the walls come down, all the way to Hell.” Tweedy handed a gun to Monk and nodded her head to the fallen cop.

“I can’t.”

“You have to!” Tweedy yelled.

Minutes clicked by and Monk did nothing but shiver.

“You pussy. I should have killed the bastard in Paradise,” Tweedy said, and callously pumped the officer full of lead while Monk looked on in horror.

“Did you see which way he came from?” Tweedy asked.

“No. He was out here waiting.”

“Imagine that. I bet he came across the bridge. Let’s go look for his car.”

“What about the police blockades?” Monk fretted.

“You dumb ass. That cop came to kill you. He didn’t alert the troops. We’re done here. Freedom’s just across the Jersey line.”

“What if…”

“Stop your worrying. You’re going to have to man up sooner or later.”

“How about you shut up, right about now!”

Tweedy’s Curl

“How did *she* find us?”

“Janey…”

“I meant for both of you to shut up. Don’t think just because you are the baby’s daddy I won’t punch a hole through your ass. You’re never going to be with me and Ivan, and now my brother’s dead. What do I have to lose?” she yelled.

“You bastard!” Tweedy cursed.

“That’s right tramp, he was talking the same line of crap to both of us. The only real choice he ever made was to pack his nose full of cocaine,” Jane said angrily.

“Janey...” Monk began to speak as he yanked Tweedy in front of him and pushed a gun to her head.

“No, don’t you Janey me. That’s my brother laying in the puddle of blood at your fucking feet. You have been stringing me along for ten years. It’s over!”

“She did all the killing, not me,” Monk said, as if he were pleading for his life.

“Surely you don’t think you can put that punk bitch up as a shield,” Jane said. “I’ll kill her out of spite. I knew he was a fruit back in school. No surprise to me he came home from the Gulf wearing panties.”

Nervously Monk gripped the pistol. Tweedy slid her hand toward the knife she had in the center of her back. Jane held her gun trained on Tweedy’s chest. The thought crossed her mind that one shot might take them both. She looked at her dead brother, his face frozen in time, lifeless and pressed in the bloody snow. She remembered his piercing words about her son. Maybe it was for the best he never knew his real father. And what of her, what kind of mother was she, a cheater, a liar and a killer? Her thoughts trailed off. Calculation and anxiety moved from eye to eye. Monk and Tweedy’s heavy breath sounded like the growls of tapped wild animals. It was time. Somebody had to die.

No More Opportunity

Billed as a lover’s spat amid a carnival threesome, nightly news broadcasts spun the story to generate interest. Lost lives, sexuality, drug dependency, violence, hope, an attempt to make a better life and immortal love, all compelling stories in their own right fell wayside to the drama of blood lust.

I watched it played out while adding in the pieces the dayglow reporter omitted until a drunken brawler hurled a beer bottle into the TV set. Surprisingly a small electric fire ignited and burned the exploded television until every bit of it was gone.

Fists and cross words flew all around me. Immune and disinterested, I kept my seat in the Lion’s Den trying to detail the events in an Internal Affairs report. I couldn’t find the words to describe my partner, Tweedy, Monk and Jane. How do you say, “No one saw them when they were standing. No one saw them when they fell.” I’m not sure it will suffice to write “It’s over now.”

Truthfully, I think I’ll burn this damn report much like the TV set. Perhaps I’ll pack a bag and go to Florida to get myself some sun. No point in hanging around this tired old town, everything’s been done. I drained my beer thinking of my partner, Jane, Tweedy and Monk. In sorted ways they lived on the edge all the way to the end of the line. Most likely it was those four souls who inspired me as I raised my empty glass and headed south.