

# Chapter 19

## HARMLESS AS A DISNEY PARK

**H**AD THE FIRE that razed the barn destroyed my foster home as well? I wondered every time I parked across the road. The house had never been in good repair. Perhaps it just collapsed. More than once I'd thought of purchasing the lot, but what would be the point? I'd never cross its boundaries. I couldn't step out and explore. I was stuck inside the car. The long lawn I'd once played on would forever be a memory beyond the tinted glass.

I'd driven to Mt. Hope after listening to Dr. Behr's tape. For the first time ever, it had felt like empty ritual. How long can the golden fuel of recollection last? The magic of the place refused to come. Had reliving what I said under hypnosis rent the spell?

Kirin wanted me to call on her and Roy. I wasn't crazy about spending time with him, but seeing her would give the day a needed lift. I put the Jag in gear and pulled out of St. Paul's.

A little past Mt. Hope, south of Whitechurch Road, the unaccustomed emptiness began to fade. Farms and rural businesses sped by, basking in a sun just newly at its summer prime. At Caledonia, the bridge had traffic backed up for a kilometre. It took nearly fifteen minutes to descend the main street to the river.

On Hwy. 54, heading toward Onondaga, I turned the AC off and opened all the windows. To my left, the waters of the Grand. To my right, fertile fields gifted to the Iroquois who sided with the

Crown when the Brits and Yankees came to fisticuffs. I began to envy Kirin and the summer she had planned.

Brantwood Park turned out to be a large mown flat with camper-trailers up on blocks. Weeds grew underneath and rust leaked from their door and window frames. A two-rut dirt track cut across the field.

The office was a single-wide converted to a store. Fishing lures and bug juice jostled next to Stokeley's beans and Minute Rice. The man behind the counter, a Mohawk with his grey-hair in a ponytail, wore a deep-billed cap that shaded eyes the colour of old leather. He was sorting postcards on a rack beside the cash. The cards read *Brantwood Park, Six Nations Territory* in yellow script, with views across the river from the flat. No rusting trailers anywhere in evidence.

"Help you, son?" he asked, squaring off a batch of cards.

"Can you tell me which trailer is Roy Calhoun's?"

"Blue and white one by the dock. You looking for him?"

"His girlfriend, actually. Tall? Long blond hair? Very pretty? She has a daughter."

"No one like that here."

"She's supposed to be visiting. She would have arrived last week. Maybe you haven't seen her yet?"

"I doubt it. There's nobody at Roy's, period. Hasn't been since last September."

"September?"

"End of the season. He rents the place year round but only uses it in summer."

"And he hasn't shown up?"

"That's right."

"Is that usual?"

"Normally he sets up end of May, beginning of June."

"He hasn't been around at all?"

"Nope."

"Not even to pay rent?"

"He writes post-dated cheques."

“That’s odd. His girlfriend is a friend of mine. She said they’d be here for the summer.”

“Did she say when they’d be coming?”

“Not exactly. ‘After school’s out,’ because of her little girl.”

“School just finished last week. Could be they haven’t made it yet.”

“Right. I should have checked. Sorry to bother you. I’ll come by some other time.”



I bypassed the Spadina cutoff from the Gardiner—my usual route home—and carried on to Kirin’s place in Scarborough instead. Her Honda wasn’t there but the small garage was open. A shirtless teenager with gold rings in his nipples pushed a smoking lawnmower across the lawn. He stopped when I pulled in.

“You looking for the lady who lives here?”

“Is she home?”

“Nah. Gone for the summer.”

“When did she leave?”

“Last week. Tuesday, I think.”

“Did she say where she was going?”

“She mighta. I don’t remember.”

“Caledonia? Onondaga?”

He shrugged. “Coulda been.”

“Any idea when she’s coming back?”

“She paid me in advance two months. I’m supposed to keep an eye on the place. Cut the lawn, clear out fliers. Stuff like that.”

“I don’t suppose she left a number you can reach her at?”

“She said there weren’t no phone.”

“How about a forwarding address?”

“She musta made arrangements at the post office. All I seen is fliers. You a friend of hers? I can take a message if you like. Tell her you came by or something if I see her. What’s your name?”

“David Ase.”

“Okay. I’ll try to remember. But I don’t think she’s coming back. Not till the end of summer. She had her Honda pretty loaded up.”

“You saw her leave?”

“Her and her little girl.”

“You live around here?”

“Over there.” He nodded vaguely across the street. “What about you? From around here?”

He couldn’t not have noticed that the Jaguar didn’t fit the neighbourhood.

“Downtown,” I said.

“Got anything you need done? Anything at all?”

I shook my head. “Sorry.”

He gave me the once over. “Too bad.”



There had to be an explanation.

Kirin’s house was empty. She’d left the week before with Carlin. Her directions to the trailer park were good. Roy himself had written them, or so she said. So why was Roy’s place empty? And where had Kirin gone?

Simple answer: she and Roy had started their vacation somewhere else. She’d mentioned day trips to Lake Erie. They might very well be there. Camping sites were cheap and the beaches suitably romantic.

“David? Are you sensing something?”

I had a client with me, a plain-jane, thirty-nine-year-old gay man. He saw me once or twice a month for psychic guidance through a love affair. The object of his interest, Craig, was only seventeen. Donald—”not Don, *please*”—didn’t need a psychic. A good psychiatrist or self-help book would have told him that his special bond with Craig had no higher meaning than the hormones of a man poised on the cusp of middle age. And that his would-be lover was a psychopathic little shit who withheld sex to spur him on to

more and more expensive gifts. I was scarcely better. In my own way, I'd been stringing him along. Donald didn't want the truth, and I was most assuredly not giving it.

"Sorry. Just a flash. Nothing specific. It may not even have to do with you."

"What?"

He sounded breathless, as if my flash might tell him the location of Atlantis.

I said the first thing that popped in my head.

"Water. Lots of water."

*The Grand River. Lake Erie.*

"Oh, but it *does* have to do with me! You're amazing. Craig wants to see Niagara Falls. He's never been. He mentioned it last week."

"I suggest you take him, then."

"Really? Will he . . . you know?"

"Sleep with you? That depends entirely on you. How you arrange the trip."

I could see the wheels turning when he left. A lazy road trip to the Falls; every tourist trap that caught Craig's eye; dinner with a lot of booze; Craig jumping Donald's bones to show his drunken gratitude. And when things didn't go like that, Donald would be back, hoping for another tip to help him into Craig's young pants.

*Just a flash.* Well, at least when Donald left, he left with hope.

I poured a rye and ginger after he was gone and took it to the study. Roy had said he worked at a marina. I sat at the computer, tapped the mouse, and googled "*grand river*" +*marina*. The results, all sixty-thousand of them, only told me there was more than one Grand River in the world. I tried the online yellow pages next and got a manageable list of numbers.

The first two hadn't heard of Roy Calhoun. I got lucky on the third.

"Roy? Yeah, he works here. Or at least he used to."

"Oh? How long ago was that?"

"Up until last month. He asked me for a couple of weeks off

then never bothered showing up again. You a friend?"

"Of a friend."

"He's not in trouble, is he?"

"No, nothing like that. I'm just trying to reach him. Actually it's my friend I want to reach. I don't suppose you have Roy's address?"

"He has a trailer up the Grand."

"I know. It's empty. But he has a place in Brantford, right?"

"So he says."

"Any idea where?"

"I never asked."

"Would you have it in your records?"

"Records? Mister, the only records I keep say I work alone."

"What about a phone number?"

"No offence, but I wouldn't give it to you even if I had one."

"I understand. Sorry to bother you."

I made to hang up.

"Say, mister—want to do me a favour? You see Roy, you tell him to give me a call. It's high season. I found me a replacement, but he sucks. I need a good mechanic. I should probably kick Roy's butt, but I'll take him back if he wants."

"I'll be sure to tell him."



Canada-411 online turned up exactly one Calhoun in Brantford, William R. It wasn't Roy.

Bell Canada's unlisted database—access courtesy of one disgruntled worker, sex, and payments to his bank account—held no number for Calhoun.

The postal substation in Scarborough refused to say where Kirin's mail was going. I made a mental note to add Canada Post to my stable of protected servers.

Finally I called up Kirin's file on my computer. /Burke<Enter> took me to the lines I wanted:

Edwards, Burke:

- photographer  
(Edcon/ImagePlus Productions)
- former lover
- father of Carlin Neemes

I called Edcon/ImagePlus first, but Burke had left, so I tried his home. He answered on the second ring. The curttness of his greeting—*hello* compressed into a single syllable—made me wish I hadn't called. Some men try so hard to come across as masculine their every utterance suggests the world's an adversary.

I introduced myself and gave a neutral story about trying to reach Kirin. As I figured it, no way would Kirin go away with Carlin unless Burke were in the loop. She hadn't disagreed when I'd described him as a bastard who used Carlin to maintain a hold on her.

"You're a friend of Kirin's?"

*What kind of friend?*

I played dumb. "Yes, we're friends."

"Since when?"

"A while now."

"How come I haven't heard of you?"

*Because you're so possessive she's afraid of how you'll feel about her having male friends? Friends of any kind?*

"Do you know where I can reach her?" I asked.

He wasn't used to people stepping past a gauntlet he'd thrown down.

"She's away," he conceded after a long, combative silence.

"For the summer. Yes, I know. With Carlin. Did she leave an address?"

"What's it to you?"

I took a breath and counted to three.

"Mr. Edwards, Kirin's just a friend. We're not involved—not that that has anything to do with anything." *Satisfied?* "Now, do you know where I can reach her?"

“She’s gone camping. Left a mailbox address in some town called Caledonia.”

“On the Grand River. I know it. She mentioned she’d be down that way. Can you give it to me?”

A millisecond pause.

“She phoned me at the studio when she told me. I haven’t got it here.”

Now he was telling fibs, plain and simple.

“Are you saying you don’t know where to find your daughter and her mother?”

He took the bait.

“Hang on a second. She did send a postcard. Came on Friday.” I heard shuffling sounds. “Yeah, here it is. ‘Hi, Burke. Just to let you know we’re here. Arrived yesterday. We’re staying in a trailer—did I tell you that? Cramped, but Carlin loves it. Took her swimming in the river today. She says hi.’”

Why was he reading it? To reinforce his claim on Kirin and her daughter?

“Does the card say where it’s from?”

“Place called Brantwood Park. Yeah, that’s it. That’s where she said she’d be. Brantwood Park.”

As soon as he hung up, I sent an email to Josh Byron.



The bar was long and dim with a sour smell of decades’ worth of cigarettes that no No Smoking sign would never cure. Byron had responded curtly with a time and location. The address was on Yonge Street, near Front, tucked between a drugstore and a travel agency.

Byron had a booth already and was doing his chameleon act, the one he’d done so well at Gato Nero. With both hands wrapped around a glass of draught, he looked as if he hadn’t left the place since 1950.

I ordered from the bar and went to join him.



“David.” He raised his glass.

I lifted mine. “Josh.”

His eyes went to the clock above the bar.

“You’re punctual.”

“Two pm—*Star Trek* time.”

He frowned.

“I guess you never watched *Star Trek*. Captain Picard schedules everything for fourteen hundred hours.”

“Funny—I never picked you for a TV addict.”

“I’m not. I only watch what’s out on DVD.”

He nodded distractedly.

*Uneasy about something... more than Kirin's disappearance  
... not sure what to say...*

“Did you drive or fly?” I asked, making conversation.

“Drove.”

Why lie in answer to a neutral question?

“No, you didn’t,” I said.

“I didn’t?”

“Ottawa to Toronto’s five and a half hours. You didn’t drive last night—,” his email had come in at one a.m., “—or you’d look fried. And there’d be road sign in your eyes if you’d driven down today.”

He shook his head. “You’re good. Ever thought of working in intelligence?”

“Certain agencies have tried to push me in that direction.”

“Those same agencies are very pissed at you right now.”

“The redoubtable Ms. MacKenzie?”

“Yeah. Subira.”

He drained his beer and signalled for another. He wore a short-sleeved dress shirt, minus tie. His biceps nearly split the sleeve. I’d forgotten how pumped up he was. And short. My mind’s eye had made him taller.

“She wasn’t very happy when you took your little trip without informing us.”

“I can’t say pleasing her was much of a priority.”

“As your report made clear.”

“I thought I’d toned it down.”

“Toned down? Intelligence is not the joke you seem to think it is. Did you ever stop to think we wouldn’t be the only ones who read it?”

“Did Ms. MacKenzie ever stop to think I don’t like being coerced?”

Byron looked away and took a breath.

“She expected some resistance on your part,” he said evenly.

“And she thought threats would help? Sorry if I don’t feel guilty for expressing my editorial position. What’s she got to be pissed about anyway? She got what she was after.”

Byron started toying with his glass.

“Yeah, well, that’s the problem. On the strength of your report, the powers that be instructed us to drop Cassandra Island. Now this—your friend, Kirin, disappearing. Subira has ambitions. You’re not making her look good. First, you take initiative you shouldn’t have, involving a civilian—”

“Didn’t stop you from calling on me.”

“—then send us catty journals telling us Cassandra Island’s clean. Subira eats crow, delivers your report and gets a reprimand for letting you go up there without training or support. Then your friend goes missing, *after* you’ve assured us Cassandra Island’s as harmless as a Disney Park. Furthermore, you choose to tell us in a properly detailed communication like the one you should have sent us in the first place.”

I waited a long beat. The issue here was Kirin, not the politics of CSIS.

He went back to playing with his beer, turning it in quarter circles.

“We’ve been instructed to hand the matter over to the appropriate agencies. The police, in other words. Our higher-ups don’t want to hear about Cassandra Island any more, which, thanks to you, is clear as far as they’re concerned. And since your friend isn’t a psychic—”

“Not professionally, no.”

He looked up sharply.

"I haven't known her all that long," I explained, "but I sense she's special in some way."

Byron went completely still. A vein beat at his temple.

"Why wasn't that in your report?"

I thought it was implied? It didn't seem important? Either might be true. But Byron hadn't asked to get an answer.

*Frustration... anger... not at me... directed elsewhere... a feeling of responsibility...*

"You stood up for me," I said. "You think your boss screwed up. She shouldn't have used threats. You fought about it after my report came in. You made her see I'd done my bit, and convinced her she should trust my instincts. If I said Cassandra Island wasn't fronting for a cult, then it wasn't. Now Kirin's disappeared, and you don't know what to think or who to blame."

Byron sat back, staring at the ceiling. The tendons of his neck stood out in sharp relief.

"How *could* you have been wrong," he asked, his head descending slowly till his eyes met mine, "about Cassandra Island?"

"You had people there before."

"They couldn't read between the lines the way you do."

"Is it possible the place is being used? Some other group's behind these suicides and disappearances?"

He shook his head.

"You show up there with Kirin," he said, ticking points off on his fingers. "Two days later, Roy appears, the same time he quits his job. He puts the moves on Kirin, who doesn't stand a snowball's chance in hell against his charms. A couple of weeks later they've *both* vanished, along with Kirin's daughter. No, someone picked her out and told him she was there."

"But that's what I'm saying. It could have been one of the other guests."

"You cleared them all."

*Irene... Margie... Don... Reggie...* He was right; if there'd been more to any one of them than met the eye, I would have sensed

it.

“And what about the others?” he went on. “The six we showed you pictures of? Does this group we can’t track down keep people stationed there? Different scouts, all the time? We procured Cassandra Island’s records. No individual guest’s name coincides consistently with visits from the psychics who disappeared or drowned.”

Procured—obtained illegally?

“If the police look into this,” I asked him, “what happens?”

“Kirin and her daughter are a missing persons case. You or someone else will have to file the report. CSIS can’t. It’d look like we were asking the police to do our grunt work.

“When they get on it, which won’t happen fast—Kirin’s on vacation and people have been known to change their plans—Toronto and the OPP will synchronize their efforts. Provided they’re not currently at odds.

“They’ll check out leads. The obvious one is where Kirin’s mail is being forwarded to. And who knows? It might pan out. But Kirin wrote a postcard saying she’s somewhere that she isn’t. That smells like planning to me. Planning that wouldn’t overlook the possibility of her mailbox being watched.

“So unless something else turns up, Kirin and her daughter’s file stays open but they’re never found. Like the others.”

He took a sip of draught, grimaced, and shook salt into the glass.

“One more thing. Police involvement doesn’t get us any closer to the group responsible. Could, in fact, have the opposite result.”

“Assuming it exists.”

“It exists all right.”

“Tell me something, Josh. Does Subira know you’re here?”

“She’s in the loop, yes,” he answered warily.

“And you flew down at your own expense?”

“That’s right.”

“To tell me that you’re off Cassandra Island and involving the police is useless?”

A smile played around his lips.

“Pass me your cell,” I said.

He felt his pockets and produced a small Nokia, then watched as I thumbed 4-1-1 and Send.

“Paxton,” I replied to the recorded prompt. “Cassandra Island.”

His expression didn’t change while he listened to me book a reservation.