

The
Disappearance
of
Tina Martini

By R. A. Conti

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MISSING HANDICAPPED TEEN GIRL FOUND DEAD

An early-morning hiker walking along a path in the woods found fourteen-year-old Christine Martini's lifeless body exactly two weeks after she was abducted. He recognized the yellow t-shirt, blue shorts, and pink sneakers she had on the last time her mother saw her. Her fully-clothed corpse was hidden from view below one of the bridges on Henry Avenue in Roxborough. Police have begun a citywide manhunt for her killer.

(Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, August 15, 1960)

Monday, August 1, 1960

1.

Mom and Dad blew up again this morning, Tina thought. Things are always tense but sometimes they lose control. He shouted at her and she screamed back. When he left for work, Mom was shaking. I thought she was going to cry but she didn't. She just looked at me.

Maybe it's my fault. I think Mom and Dad both wish I'd never been born. I think I wish that, too. But what can I do?

After breakfast, Mom put the radio in the front window and turned it on low. Then she took me out to the porch. It wasn't cool, but there was a breeze. Mom sits on the porch with me a lot but never talks to me. She just shuts her eyes and listens to the radio. Mom says the music relaxes her but I don't see how. It's loud and twangy. People sing words I don't understand but she seems to. I know because sometimes she sings along in a low voice.

Dad doesn't pay any attention to me. He's never hit me like he's hit Tony or Ralphie when they've been bad. Sometimes I wish he would hit me. Then at least he'd be paying attention to me.

Vicky mostly ignores me, too. You would think that your older sister would take an interest in you and help you get used to being a teenager. But now that she's graduated from high school and has a job, she's too busy, I guess.

2.

On the hot and humid August morning, in the Germantown section of the city of Philadelphia, Annette Martini and her daughter Tina sat on the front porch of their brick house on Hansberry Street at Keyser. The house was at the end of a row. The porch was concrete. Concrete steps led down to the sidewalk. The wooden porch railing had been painted dark green years ago but the color had faded. In some places, the paint had flaked off. The spindles were once white but were now faded from exposure to sunlight and dirty from the exhaust of passing cars. Hansberry wasn't a busy street but there were a lot of houses close together. Which meant a lot of families, most of whom had cars. Old trees lined the street but there was no tree directly in front of the Martini house. Nor did they have a car.

Annette sat in a wooden high-back porch rocker with a sagging rattan seat and back. It was painted the same green as the porch railing and was similarly faded. Tina sat on an old kitchen chair her father had picked off of someone's trash and carried home. The radio played a rock'n'roll song but not loud enough to bother the neighbors. Annette was resting her eyes and hoping for a breeze.

Through the open window, they heard the phone ringing. Annette opened her eyes. She was a short, wiry woman. Her twenty years as a hardworking homemaker were taking their toll on her body and she had aches and pains most of the time. Annette grunted and slowly got out of her chair. She walked to the screen door and opened it. As soon as her mother was inside the house, Tina made a decision.

Ten minutes passed before Annette finished talking on the phone. She went outside and found Tina's chair empty. She knew the child hadn't come into the house. Annette hung over the porch railing and looked down the sidewalk in both directions but didn't see Tina. It was hot and

even small exertions took real effort. Plus, she was tired. Just living her life took effort. She sat back down in her chair. *I'll just wait awhile*, she thought.

After two hours, Tina hadn't returned. Annette went inside and called the police. But she didn't call her husband Rocco at work. He was hard to get hold of because he drove a Bond Bread delivery truck all day. Then Annette went back out on the porch and sat down again. She assumed that, by the time her husband's workday ended, Tina would be back at home and he would never find out that she'd briefly gone missing.

3.

Tina was used to the route she and her mother took when they pulled their rickety shopping cart as they walked to the Acme supermarket on Germantown Avenue. She hurried along Hansberry Street, easily crossed several smaller streets, and approached busy Greene Street. Three little girls were playing hopscotch on the sidewalk in front of a row house near the corner. Tina ignored them as she walked by. She was focused on the overgrown lot across Greene Street and the narrow path through the tall weeds that led to the back of the Acme parking lot a block away. *Once I'm in the weeds, no one will see me*, she thought. *I'll be free*. Tina never thought to ask herself if freedom meant anything more than escape.

4.

As Tina approached the corner of Hansberry and Greene Streets, a powder blue 1951 Studebaker coupe was slowly moving toward her on Greene Street. The driver was Maggie Fallon. She was twenty-eight years old and had close-cropped blonde hair, a round face, and a pudgy body. Maggie had just left the Sisters of Saint Joseph convent behind The Saint Francis of Assisi School on Logan Street. She had gone there to end her time as Sister Mary Margaret.

Until recently, Maggie would never have imagined she wouldn't want to be a nun for her entire adult life. Then something happened to change the way she saw things.

Her mother Delores died suddenly two months before the end of the recent school year. She had been living alone since her husband Dan died several years earlier. Without warning, Delores had collapsed in her kitchen. Her neighbor Florence found her the next day. Florence called the convent and Sister Mary Margaret was summoned out of her classroom. When she heard the news, Maggie felt her life shift cataclysmically.

The doctors told Maggie that a brain hemorrhage had caused her mother's death. She likely died slowly and painfully but the doctors didn't mention *that* to Maggie. They saw no need to upset her further.

After the funeral, Maggie took some time to reflect on what had happened and realized that losing her mother had turned her life upside down. Although she was a member of a religious order in which the women referred to each other as sisters, she suddenly felt alone in the world.

At the end of the school year, she told the Mother Superior she wanted to quit the order. The Mother Superior patiently counseled her to reconsider but Maggie knew she couldn't stay. Her grief was overwhelming and would distract her from anything she tried to do in the future. There was no way she could again stand in front of a chalkboard and try to teach children. As of this morning, she was no longer a servant of Christ. Now, she was just Maggie Fallon.

Maggie couldn't help but feel guilty that she had somehow failed her mother. Now that she was no longer a nun, Maggie also felt she had failed God. She was hoping that, once her

shock and grief wore off, she would figure out what to do with the rest of her life. But as of this moment, Maggie Fallon didn't have much of a reason for living.

As her car neared Hansberry Street, she noticed someone at the corner. The slender, frail-looking, dark-haired girl was wearing a yellow top, blue shorts, and pink sneakers. She appeared to be trying to cross the street. Cars were zipping by and the girl seemed overwhelmed. Maggie slowed down. The child looked at her car. Maggie recognized the girl's face. "Tina Martini!" she yelled.

Tina froze on the curb. Maggie flipped the turn signal and swerved onto Hansberry Street. Then she parked and ran toward Tina. "You might not remember me. I was your fifth-grade teacher, Sister Mary Margaret." Tina looked puzzled but didn't try to move away. "It's okay. Do you need help?" Maggie asked.

Tina didn't look at Maggie. "My parents hate me," she mumbled.

"Come with me," Maggie replied. She took Tina's hand. They crossed the street. After they got into the car, Maggie started it.

Tina sat quietly on the bench seat. She wondered what was happening and felt bewildered. *Should I have gotten in the car?* she thought. *Who is this lady? Where are we going? I didn't ask her to take me anywhere. Does she know where I live? Is she taking me back? What if I don't want to go back?*

Tina turned and looked at Maggie, who was looking straight ahead and focused on driving. Then she looked out the window. *She just turned at the end of the block*, Tina thought. *Now she turned again. And again. She's not taking me back home!*

But where is she taking me?

What have I done?

5.

A half-hour after Annette Martini called the police, a red and white 1956 Ford police cruiser pulled up in front of her house. She was glad it was the middle of the day and not many neighbors were outside. But she knew some were likely to notice the police car and come out to see what was happening.

A colored policeman wearing a dark blue uniform got out. He was tall. Annette stiffened. It was unusual to see colored people in the neighborhood. She wondered why the police hadn't sent a white cop.

He noticed her standing on the porch and approached. Annette saw the serious expression on his face and stepped back. He started to come up the concrete steps. "Do you *need* to come up?" she asked, harshly.

The officer decided to be deferential and moved his foot off the step. "No, ma'am," he said. "I'm Officer Jackson. Can you please tell me what happened?"

"My daughter's been abducted!" Annette exclaimed. "I left her on the porch and went inside to answer the phone. When I came back, she was gone."

Officer Jackson's facial expression didn't change. "Are you *sure* she's been abducted, ma'am? Maybe she just went for a walk."

"She's never done that. She can't. She's retarded and needs someone with her always."

"Oh, she's handicapped?" Officer Jackson asked. Annette nodded. "I see."

"You have to look for her. It's already been an hour," Annette lied. "Who knows where she could have been taken."

"I'll need a description before we can start looking. What was she wearing?"

Before she could describe Tina's clothing, Annette had to think for a moment. "A yellow top... and... blue shorts... and... pink sneakers. I think."

Officer Jackson nodded. "That's helpful. And I'll need a recent photo that clearly shows her face."

Annette didn't know how to reply. Not only did she not have a recent photo of Tina, but she couldn't recall anyone in the family ever having taken *any* photos of Tina. Then she remembered Tina had posed for a photo when she finished sixth grade. "I, um, think there's one from school."

Officer Jackson nodded again. "Good. Please go and get it. And don't worry. It will be returned."

Annette had no idea where the school photo was. Her older daughter Vicky's high school graduation picture hung on the wall in the dining room. There were some snapshots of her younger sons Tony and Ralphie when they were at the beach two summers ago. *But where could Tina's picture be?* she thought. *Maybe it's in her room.*

"Stay right *there*," Annette said. Then she went inside.

6.

Maggie drove carefully. Frequent driving was still new for her. She'd never had a passenger before and didn't want to make any mistakes. She headed toward her mother's small row house on Taney Street in Roxborough. The trip took about twenty minutes. Maggie and Tina rode in silence.

When they arrived at her house, Maggie parked the Studebaker, turned off the engine, and got out. Tina didn't move. Maggie went around the car to the passenger side. She leaned down and looked at Tina. "Would you like to come in?" she said.

She opened Tina's door and waited. Tina got out slowly. As soon as she was out, Maggie closed the car door. She looked Tina in the eyes and smiled. "Please follow me," she said.

Maggie turned and started walking toward the house. Tina followed behind her. She looked at the house. It was different from the one she lived in. It had no front porch and was set back from the sidewalk. A long stretch of lawn with a cement path led up to the door. There were some bushes on the front wall under the big window.

Maggie had recently inherited the house along with the old Studebaker. She'd also inherited several thousand dollars and a cat named Simone. Her mother had left everything she had in the world to Maggie. Now Maggie's plan was to share everything she had inherited with Tina.

7.

Back in 1930, Maggie's parents Daniel and Delores had met at the Atwater-Kent Radio Factory on Wissahickon Avenue in Germantown. Dan had been a supervisor on the assembly line and Delores had worked in the office. They married in 1931. Maggie was born in 1932. The family moved to the house on Taney Street in 1933 when Maggie was one year old. The house had belonged to Dan's uncle Walter who had never married. Walter had always liked Dan and left everything he had to his favorite nephew in his will.

Delores quit working to take care of the baby and didn't go back to work until Maggie started attending the local Catholic parish elementary school in 1938. Then Delores got part-time jobs at several different stores in the Germantown business district. Later, when Maggie started high school, Delores started working full-time again.

Maggie had always done well in school and Delores had been proud of her daughter. All the nuns praised her. Maggie hadn't been any trouble as a teenager, either. Strangely, she never had many dates. But that was okay with Delores. She thought most of the neighborhood boys were juvenile delinquents or beatniks (or both) and was glad Maggie didn't go out with them. Maggie also never had many girlfriends. In Delores's opinion, the girls weren't much better than the boys were.

After she graduated from high school, Maggie found jobs in some of the same Germantown stores where her mother had worked. She was a diligent worker, was never late, and took on extra tasks whenever she was asked. But Maggie wasn't happy. When she was alone in her room after the workday or workweek ended, she reflected on her life and realized it wasn't going the way she would have liked. In fact, she hated it.

Two years after she graduated, Maggie told her parents that she was thinking of becoming a nun. Her mother was shocked but shouldn't have been. Maggie always seemed to have felt a special bond with the nuns at school. Delores hadn't argued with Maggie but turned colder after Maggie followed through and applied to become a novitiate. Although he felt baffled, her father Dan was more supportive.

Early in 1952, Maggie joined The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia. Their Motherhouse was in Chestnut Hill. The order traced its origins to 17th-century France. They came to Saint Louis in 1836. From there, four Sisters came to Philadelphia in 1847. Their first ministry was with orphans. Maggie ended up being assigned to teach at the Saint Francis Parish School in Germantown.

After Maggie was gone, Delores resented that God had taken her only child and stopped going to mass. She also was skeptical of her daughter's motives. Why had she become a nun? Was it out of her fascination with nuns, a desire to teach children? Perhaps a great love of God? Or, as Delores feared, merely a desire to get away from her parents?

Delores was grateful for one thing, however. Some orders sent their nuns to other cities, other states, or even faraway countries. Maggie had stayed close to home. Germantown was only a few miles away from Roxborough.

Then Dan died suddenly in 1955. He had been working at the Veterans Administration office in the defunct Atwater-Kent factory. Dan had earned a decent salary. He also had a good pension and a lot of life insurance. Delores found herself well-off but completely alone and, feeling abandoned, became even unhappier. She no longer needed to but kept working just to keep busy.

On a pleasant spring afternoon in 1960 when Delores was putting around in her kitchen, she felt a sudden jolt in her brain and almost blacked out. She fell against the kitchen table and then collapsed on the floor. At that moment, she needed Maggie but her daughter was nowhere around. As she lay on the floor, helpless and likely dying, Delores said a weak goodbye. She hoped Maggie would say a prayer for her.

Mrs. Johnson from next door found Delores the next day. She immediately called the convent and the police. When Maggie heard the news, she went into shock. The school caretaker drove her to the house. When Maggie arrived and saw her mother's corpse, she said a prayer for her soul.

Then, feeling overwhelmed by many strong emotions she couldn't handle, Maggie said a prayer for her own soul.

8.

Upstairs in Tina and Vicky's bedroom, Annette rummaged around in Tina's nightstand and found her sixth-grade photo. It was already two years old and Tina's face had matured a little. She was a teenager now but hadn't been when the picture was taken. Annette wondered where the time had gone. She tried to recall what their lives had been like two years earlier.

Probably a lot like they are right now, she thought. But maybe they're about to change.

Annette was right.

9.

Maggie hadn't done anything to alter her mother's house since she started living there again. She left almost everything as it was when her mother was alive. It wasn't out of any sense of nostalgia or respect. Maggie couldn't decide what, if anything, needed changing.

Her life had reached a place she never thought it would go. When she first left home to become a nun, she thought her whole future was set. She would serve God until she was old. Then she would die and (hopefully) go straight to Heaven. Now that her mother was gone and she had left the convent, she didn't know where she was going, either in this world or the next.

She hadn't found herself. Not yet, anyway. But today she had found Tina and brought her home with her. It seemed a natural thing to do. The problem was that Maggie had no idea what to do next.

Tina stood in Maggie's living room and looked around. *This is nice*, Tina thought. *It's prettier than my house. I like the flowers on the wallpaper. And that sofa looks nice.*

Does this lady live here?

"You'll be safe here," Maggie told Tina. "It's a quiet neighborhood. Nobody bothers anybody. People keep to themselves. It'll just be you and me."

"Okay," Tina replied, meekly.

"I have food and I'll get you some other clothes. I don't have a TV, though. I hope that's okay."

"Um, sure."

"Good. I think you'll like it here."

It was the first time in Tina's life that anyone had ever suggested that she could *like* anything. Mostly, things had just been given to her. Food, clothes, orders. (Clean your room. Don't pick your nose. Leave *that* alone. Stop crying.) She looked at Maggie and tried to recall who she was. Maggie noticed the puzzled look on Tina's face. "Wait here," Maggie said.

Tina gingerly sat down on the sofa. It was old but seemed elegant. The fabric was a dark burgundy and felt soft. The sofa in Tina's house had been made of coarse tan cloth that was stained and ripped in places. Tina liked Maggie's sofa.

Maggie returned a few minutes later. She was carrying what looked like a black dress. "Remember this?" she asked, smiling. Then she put a weird hat on top of her head and held the dress in front of her. Tina recognized what she was looking at. It was a nun's habit (although she didn't know that's what it was called.) "Now do you recognize me?" Maggie asked, smiling.

Tina nodded. She smiled back and knew she was okay.

10.

Annette went downstairs with the photo and headed toward the front door. She overheard Officer Jackson talking to someone outside. "Her handicapped daughter wandered off," he was

saying. When Annette went out on the porch she saw that another cop had arrived in a second police car.

“She can’t have gone far,” the other officer said. He was white. Annette felt relieved. “We can start a search.”

“Yeah. She’s getting a picture,” Officer Jackson replied. He heard the screen door slam and turned. “Oh, here she is now. This is Mrs. Martini.”

Annette ignored the colored cop and looked at the new officer. She went down the steps and handed him the photo. “This is all I could find,” she said.

The white officer nodded. “That’s good,” he said. “I’ll go back to the station and make some copies and then we’ll start a search. I’m sure your girl is okay. We’ll find her. I promise.”

“Please hurry, officer,” Annette pleaded. “She’s never been alone for very long.” She hoped her concern sounded convincing.

He nodded respectfully. “Yes, ma’am. We’ll do our best.” Then he turned and walked back to his police car. A moment later, Annette was alone with the colored cop again. She didn’t know what was going to happen next.

Just then, another car pulled up. It wasn’t a police car. It was painted blue and white letters were painted on the side that said WCAU News. “Oh, shit,” the colored cop said. Then he turned hoping Annette hadn’t heard him.

She had.

11.

Tina’s father Rocco was a grocery store deliveryman for Bond Bread. He worked out of the depot in Nicetown and liked his job. To his customers, he was known as Rocky, the affable, jovial Bond bread guy. He greeted everyone cheerfully and whistled while he worked. No one in the stores knew his last name. No one at the Bond Bread distribution depot knew much about him. Away from his home and family, he could be, and *was*, somebody different.

Rocco was driving his truck back to the depot to have lunch and reload for his afternoon deliveries. He had the radio on and a news bulletin interrupted the music. “A handicapped girl has been abducted from her Germantown home,” the announcer said. Rocco turned up the volume. “The police aren’t saying anything but the girl’s mother, Mrs. Annette Martini, insists she would have never wandered off by herself. A search is underway. More updates as we get them.”

Rocco was so shocked that he nearly slammed his truck into the loading dock. He stopped about an inch from the steel rail. Luckily, no one saw. Everyone else was inside getting ready to eat in the lunchroom. He hurried in and dropped his clipboard on the dispatcher’s desk. Then he ran out. Mr. Browning, the dispatcher, yelled at him. “Rocky! What the hell?”

“My kid’s been abducted!” Rocky yelled back. Then he was gone.

12.

“It’s almost lunchtime. Are you hungry?” Maggie asked. Tina nodded. “Okay. So am I. How about I make us a couple of sandwiches? Sound good?” Tina nodded again. “Great. Do you mind sitting here while I get it ready?” Tina shook her head. “Okay. I’ll be fast, I promise.”

No one had ever promised Tina anything before and she wasn’t sure what the word even meant. She waited patiently. Maggie came back a few minutes later. “Everything’s ready. C’mon into the kitchen and sit down.”

Tina got up and followed Maggie through the dining room into the sunny kitchen. It seemed hotter than it was in the living room. Tina frowned. Maggie noticed. "Yeah, it's hot in here. The sun comes in all afternoon. But it's great in the winter. You'll see."

Tina didn't know how to react. Would she be *living* here now? Is that what Maggie was intending? If it was, Tina was okay with it. She liked Maggie and her house.

Tina looked around the kitchen. On a mat on the floor by the back door, she saw two small bowls. Tina paused to look at them, puzzled. Maggie noticed. "Those belong to Simone, my cat. Do you like cats? Are you okay with them? She's pretty shy and keeps to herself so you might not even see her. But she won't bother you."

"Uh, okay," Tina said. She didn't know if she liked cats because she had never been around them. She'd seen them outside when she walked to school but had never been close to one. But if Maggie said the cat was okay, Tina felt okay.

Maggie didn't mention that Simone had been her father Dan's cat. Back in 1953, he had gotten Simone from a neighbor whose cat had kittens. He named the cat for his favorite jazz singer, Nina Simone because when the kitten was little, she complained a lot and he thought she was singing. When she got older, she became quieter. After Dan died in 1955, Simone became *very* quiet and rarely meowed.

"Sit down and let's eat," Maggie said, smiling. She felt happier than she had in months. Suddenly, her life no longer felt pointless and confusing. She had a purpose again.

Lunch wasn't fancy. Just a couple of boloney sandwiches and some orange juice. As they ate, Maggie felt the need to chat. "I never told you this, but you were my favorite pupil," she said. "You weren't like the other kids. I didn't like them much, even though they were in my classroom every day. I know you missed some days and I worried about you when you were gone. But you always came back and tried to do your work as best you could."

Maggie paused and took a bite of her sandwich. She started chewing. Tina waited. Then Maggie finished chewing and went on.

"I used to wish some of the other kids would go away and *not* come back. I know it wasn't very nice, but if I could have, I would have had only you in my class. The rest of the little brats could all go to-." Maggie stopped herself and grinned. "Well, I shouldn't say any more."

Tina didn't know what to say. She ate her sandwich. For the first time in her life, she wasn't thinking about her mother, father, sister, brothers, or her house. She wondered if all that had been just a dream. Then it occurred to her that *this* might be the dream. That was okay. She would make it last as long as she could. *I won't wake up*, she thought. *Ever.*

But Tina wasn't dreaming. She was in a new place with someone new to take care of her. Someone who *wanted* her to be there. Someone who genuinely *liked* her and cared about her.

After lunch, Maggie asked Tina to go back into the living room and sit on the sofa. While Tina waited for Maggie to clean up, she reflected on what was happening. *Lunch was great*, she thought. *I like this lady. I don't remember her very well but she seems to remember me. And she seems to like me. I think she wants to be my friend. And she wants me to be her friend, too. I could get to like it here.*

13.

Tina's older sister Vicky had been born in 1942, just before her father Rocco was sent to Europe to fight in World War II. Tina was born early in 1946, just over nine months after Rocco came home from the war. He had been tall and slender back then. Years later he became a bear of a man.

After Annette gave birth to Tina, Rocco strutted around and bragged that he was the proud father of a second daughter. Vicky was almost four. Rocco and Annette had enjoyed her presence in their lives and looked forward to starting over with another baby.

But, almost from the beginning, Tina had not been like Vicky. Tina hadn't seemed aware of Annette when she fed or changed her. Often, Tina kept her eyes closed or looked vacantly past Annette, which unsettled her mother. She had been ready and eager to bond with her new daughter but it seemed her new daughter wasn't interested. Annette thought Tina's behavior would change eventually and tried not to worry.

When she took the baby for a one-year checkup with the pediatrician, he told her Tina did not seem to be responding as expected to external stimuli. "It might not be a problem," the doctor said. "But her cognitive development isn't normal for a one-year-old."

Tina's second year hadn't been much different from the first. When Annette took Tina to the pediatrician on her second birthday, he told Annette that Tina's development was retarded and there was cause for concern. Annette didn't like hearing the word 'retarded' and immediately panicked. The pediatrician recommended running some tests but when she told Rocco he replied that they couldn't afford them. "She'll either be okay or she won't," Rocco said, dismissively.

Annette had wondered how he could be so callous. Where had his pride gone? She didn't know that Rocco had also noticed Tina's lack of interaction with what was around her and begun to suspect something was wrong with her. He didn't like having a flawed or damaged daughter. *Vicky's perfect*, Rocco had thought. *Shouldn't Tina also be perfect? If she isn't, why isn't she?*

He refused to think it could be *his* fault. It must be Annette's. Rocco began to suspect he wasn't Tina's real father. He wondered if, when he was away in the war, Annette had been unfaithful to him and a 'retarded' daughter was her punishment for what she had done. From then on, he wanted nothing to do with Tina. He also paid less attention to Annette. She knew something was wrong but didn't ask what it was. Rocco had a temper and she feared if she provoked him, he might throw her and her daughters out on the street.

14.

Rocco started walking home from the where the trolley car stopped. He noticed a red police car a block away. A crowd of neighbors was milling around. He thought they might be standing in front of his house. *Damn!* he thought.

He hardly knew anyone in the neighborhood and liked keeping his distance. Now he would have to approach them and they would likely try to talk to him. He didn't know what to say.

My wife screwed up, came to mind but he knew he couldn't say *that*.

My daughter's missing, seemed bland but it was the only fact he had.

As he got closer, Rocco noticed a tall colored police officer talking to some of the neighbors. He liked seeing a colored guy in the neighborhood even less than seeing his white neighbors. *What the hell is going on?* he thought.

The officer was watching Mrs. Martini and noticed her react when she saw her husband walking down the block. He turned. Officer Jackson saw a hefty, swarthy Italian guy who looked like he could do a lot of damage if he ever got angry. The cop had some questions to ask Mr. Martini and hoped he wouldn't provoke him.

"Here comes my husband now," Annette said. She sounded surprised.

Rocco reached the front steps and looked up at his wife. He ignored everyone and glared at her. "What the hell happened?" he asked.

"Tina's gone," Annette replied. Officer Jackson heard fear in her voice and wondered what was going to happen next.

"I heard on the radio," Rocco replied, angrily. "How could you let that happen?"

"I was sitting out here with her. We were listening to the radio. It was nice on the porch. Then the phone rang and I went in to answer it. When I came out, she was gone."

"Who the hell called?" Rocco asked.

"It was my sister."

"Which one?" Rocco asked, sharply. He didn't like either of Annette's sisters. He referred to Susan as 'the skinny bitch' and Brenda as 'the fat cow.'

"It was Susan."

"Oh, *her*. What did *she* want?"

"Just to talk. She had a fight with Al."

Rocco was aware that he and his wife were having a family discussion in front of his neighbors, most of whom were strangers. And in front of the colored cop, who *definitely* was a stranger. But he was pissed and didn't want to restrain himself. "That bitch always fights with Al. It's what they do."

Annette was about to respond but Officer Jackson stepped in front of Rocco. "Excuse me, Mr. Martini, I need to ask you a couple of questions." He nodded toward the screen door. "In private, if you want."

"You mean in my *house*?" Rocco asked, aghast. Officer Jackson nodded. "Hell, no."

He turned toward his wife. "Get inside!" Rocco barked. He didn't care who overheard.

Officer Jackson blinked. "But, sir."

Rocco ignored him. He pushed Annette into the house and slammed the front door. Then he pulled her toward the kitchen. She was afraid of what he was going to do. "Rocco, I..."

He glared at her. "Why the fuck did I have to hear about this on the radio? What the fuck were you thinking? Why did you call the fucking cops?"

"Because she was missing," Annette stammered. "She's never been missing before."

"So what? You couldn't just wait for her to come back?"

"I did. I waited two hours."

"You shoulda waited until I came home."

"But that might have been too late."

"Then it would have been too late," he bellowed. He didn't add what he was thinking.

And we might have been rid of her.

"I was scared. I guess I wasn't thinking."

"Now everybody's watching us. I don't like it. It's all your fault."

Annette didn't answer.

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15.

After they climbed the steps to the upstairs hallway, Maggie opened a bedroom door and flipped a light switch. A table lamp next to the single bed came on. Tina's eyes widened. She had never seen a more inviting room.

"This is where I slept when I was your age," Maggie said. She pointed. "Those are my dolls. And some of my board games and a few puzzles. Oh, yeah, on those shelves are some of my Golden Books."

Tina looked around as Maggie pointed out stuff. Then her eyes fell on something Maggie hadn't mentioned. "And that's my little dollhouse."

It was a wooden two-story house. The outside was painted to look like siding and the inside rooms were painted to look like wallpaper, rugs, and wood. There were little doors that opened and closed and the rooms were filled with colorful wooden furniture. Tina saw little dolls, too. She was enchanted.

Maggie noticed. "You can play with that all you want," she said. "It was my favorite toy."

Tina immediately felt certain it would become *her* favorite toy as well.

16.

Vicky Martini had been standing on her feet all day and was tired. It had been busy at the downtown beauty salon where she worked. The August heat was brutal outside and she suspected women came in just to spend time in the air conditioning whether their hair needed doing or not. She'd had several customers but earned very little in tips. No one was in the mood to be generous.

Now, as she rode home at the end of the workday, she slumped down in the trolley seat. The window was open and steamy air blew on her face. She wasn't looking forward to another hot night in the house.

Vicky stood up when the trolley passed Manheim Street. She pulled the cord that alerted the trolley driver that someone wanted to get off, then made her way to the back doors. The trolley slowed as it approached Hansberry Street. It stopped moving and the doors wheezed open. Vicky stepped down to the street and walked to the curb. The doors closed and the trolley started gliding away.

When Vicky started walking along Hansberry Street, she spotted a crowd two short blocks away. *What's that all about?* she thought. As she got closer, she saw a red police car. *What's going on?* Vicky thought. As soon as she crossed tiny Henrietta Street and approached Keyser Street, she saw that the crowd was gathered in front of *her* house. Despite the heat, Vicky sped up.

Officer Jackson spotted the statuesque girl walking toward the crowd. She was wearing dark shorts and a light top. She had dark hair, a long face, soft features, and a puzzled look. The officer wondered who she was and why she had suddenly appeared.

"There's Vicky," someone said.

"Does she know?" someone else asked.

"Probably not."

"Poor girl. She's about to get a shock."

Vicky nodded to a few of the people she recognized but avoided looking at the colored police officer. *What's he doing in this neighborhood?* she thought. People she didn't recognize said hello. Vicky was used to being snubbed. She had been the most attractive teen girl in the neighborhood for several years. All the husbands ogled her when she walked by. All the wives hated her. *Why are they being so friendly?* she wondered.

She reached the front steps. Her parents had come back outside after their argument in the kitchen and had their backs to her. Someone yelled, "Hi, Vicky."

Rocco turned. "Here she is now," he said.

Annette turned. Vicky saw her face. "Mom?" she said. "What's going on?"

"Tina's gone," Annette replied.

Vicky frowned. "What do you mean, *gone*?"

"She's missing. Since this morning. The police are looking for her," Rocco said.

"How did this happen?" Vicky asked.

"She was in her chair when I went in to answer the phone. I was only gone ten minutes. When I came back, she was gone."

"Little bitch ran away," Rocco muttered. Then he looked around to see if anyone had heard him.

"That's impossible!" Vicky replied. "She wouldn't run away."

"That's what I think!" Annette said. "This is her home. We're her family. She was abducted!"

Vicky grimaced but didn't say anything. She scowled at her mother. "How could you leave her alone for all that time?"

"I couldn't help it. Your Aunt Susie kept me on the phone."

"You shoulda hung up on her. She gabs too much anyway."

"Vicky! She's your godmother," Annette replied.

Vicky scoffed. "Yeah, she is. Lotta good *that's* done me."

She pushed past her parents and went into the house. Vicky wasn't sure if she would ever want to come out again. Then again, she wasn't sure she could stay inside. Her little sister was missing.

17.

After she went inside, Vicky found Tony, who was ten, and Ralphie, who was eight, sitting at the kitchen table. They were starving and wanted their dinner. They had been splashing in a friend's backyard wading pool all afternoon. A hot dog would be nice. Or, better yet, a hamburger. But their mother wasn't in the kitchen. She was out on the porch talking. Tony and Ralphie weren't pleased.

Something was going on but they weren't sure what it was. When they saw Vicky come in they thought about asking her to feed them. The grim look on her face made them change their minds. Neither boy had ever been close to their oldest sister (or, in fact, either of their sisters.) Vicky was old and Tina was weird. They assumed all girls were weird and didn't let it bother them.

But they *were* hungry. And they knew Vicky could cook. They had seen her make spaghetti and meatballs. The meal had been good. "Um, Vicky?" Tony said.

"What do you want?"

"Um, do you know when Mom's gonna make us dinner?"

Vicky looked at Tony and immediately felt sorry for him. *He has no idea what's happened, she thought. And probably wouldn't understand even if I told him. Compared to mine, his world is simple. Somebody takes care of him. That's all he knows. Well, somebody was supposed to take care of Tina, too. But now she's gone.*

Vicky stopped her train of thought. *But it's not Tony's fault.*

"I'll make you something," she said. "I'm hungry, too. How about boloney sandwiches with pickle slices? Or, you could have cereal and milk."

"Um, whatever you're gonna have is fine," Tony replied. He felt relieved someone was going to feed him. Ralphie did, too. He rarely said much. He let Tony do most of the talking for him. The boys were inseparable except at school where they were in different grades. Mostly,

they stayed out of trouble. When they got into any, their father dealt with them. Sometimes harshly.

Vicky threw together a quick meal and sat down with the boys in the stifling kitchen. There was a small fan blowing hot humid air but they didn't notice. Tony took a few bites of his sandwich in silence. Then he couldn't resist asking the question that was bothering him.

"Um, Vicky?"

"Yeah, Tony?"

"What's going on outside?"

"Why are all those people on our front steps?" Ralphie asked. His sister and brother looked at him, astonished that he had spoken.

"Tina's gone," Vicky said.

"Yay!" Tony said. Then he noticed his big sister glaring at him and winced. "Sorry."

"Is she coming back?" Ralphie asked. "Should we make a sandwich for her?"

Vicky nodded reassuringly. "Yeah. She's coming back, Ralphie. But no one knows when. So we'll make something for her when she's back."

"Okay," Tony replied.

"Can we have some ice cream for dessert?" Ralphie asked.

Vicky looked at her littlest brother. "I'm not sure mom bought any."

"Well, could you check?"

Vicky was glad for the distraction and got up. She opened the freezer and saw a carton of cheap store-brand ice cream in the freezer. "Is chocolate okay?" she asked, grinning.

"Sure!" the boys replied in unison.

18.

The first newspaper article about Tina's disappearance was published in the late edition of The Evening Bulletin.

Handicapped Girl Abducted from Germantown Porch

On Monday morning, Annette Martini called the police to report that her handicapped teenage daughter Christine had disappeared from her front porch. Police responded, canvassed the neighborhood, and found nothing. Mrs. Martini insisted her daughter had been abducted but police would not confirm that. The 14-year-old girl was last seen wearing a yellow t-shirt, blue shorts, and pink sneakers. Police are asking the public for help. If you see this girl, call the police immediately.

19.

Tina was alone in Maggie's former bedroom which now was hers. She was overjoyed. *A little house! she thought. With little furniture and little people. She said I could do whatever I wanted. I'm gonna move things around, just to see how they look in different places.*

That couch. Maybe it would look better on the other wall. Oh yeah, I like that. Now where to move the chair? Over by the window! Yeah, that's it. What about the upstairs? There's a big bed in one room and a tiny bed in the other one. That must be the baby's room. Where's that baby? There she is. I'm gonna put her in her bed. It's time for a nap.

Tina played with Maggie's dollhouse until bedtime. What she could do enchanted her. She tried placing the sofa under the front window, putting the hutch on a different wall in the dining room, and locating the kitchen sink closer to the back door. Then she put all the pieces

back where they had been. She didn't want to upset Maggie by changing too many things. After all, it was *her* dollhouse, not Tina's. But Tina already loved it.

To Tina, it wasn't merely a toy. She finally had a house and family all her own. And she could do with them whatever she pleased.

Maggie trusted Tina and left her alone. She wanted her to become accustomed to her house. It was Tina's new house, now. All of it. Not just the bedroom with the dollhouse but all of the other rooms, too. There was even a basement but Maggie thought she wouldn't let Tina go there because it was full of old junk. It also had dark corners and might frighten the girl.

At bedtime, Maggie asked Tina to brush her teeth and Tina did. Then Maggie apologized that she didn't have any pajamas for Tina and suggested she sleep in her underwear. Tina agreed and took off her yellow top and blue shorts. Tina got into bed. Maggie asked if she wanted to say her prayers and Tina looked at her as if she hadn't understood the question. Maggie knelt next to the bed and bowed her head. She waited to see if Tina would join her but she didn't. *Oh, well,* Maggie thought. *It's only her first night. We'll work on this.*

"Dear God," Maggie said. "Thank you for bringing Tina safely to me. I promise to take care of her as best I can- with Your help. Please bless her and keep her in Your care."

Tina wasn't sure what Maggie's words meant but she felt the kindness in her voice and smiled. Maggie stood up. She was about to turn and leave but had a thought. "Can I kiss you goodnight?" she asked. Tina nodded. Maggie kissed her on the forehead. Then, almost in tears, she said goodnight and left the room.

Tina couldn't fall asleep. She tried to recall everything that had happened since that morning and couldn't remember it all. She liked Maggie but also knew Maggie's house wasn't her real house. And Maggie wasn't her real mom. But those things seemed unimportant. She was safe in bed and someone was taking care of her. That was what was most important.

After she fell asleep, she had a wonderful dream. She and her older sister Vicky had traded places. New Tina was beautiful. She had a job, went out with boys, danced and sang, and spent time with her little sister telling her stories about the things she (New Tina) liked to do. They had fun together and whenever New Tina was at home, she and her little sister were inseparable, kind of like Tony and Ralphie were.

20.

It was almost midnight. Annette was trying to fall asleep but couldn't. Or, maybe she already had and this was a nightmare she would soon awaken from.

She assumed everyone blamed her for Tina's disappearance but didn't believe it was her fault. She'd often left Tina alone on the front porch when she went in to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. Tina had always been right there in her chair when Annette returned. *The only way she could have left is if someone took her,* Annette kept thinking. And, she felt strongly, if Tina *had* wandered away for some reason, she would have been found by now and returned.

But Tina was still missing. What if Annette was right and Tina had been abducted? What did that even mean? Annette wasn't certain she wanted to know. That girl that Elmo Smith had abducted last winter was found dead two days after she disappeared. But Elmo Smith was in jail and due to go on trial soon. Annette felt sure no one as evil as he was could have suddenly appeared.

But, Annette thought, why would Tina run away? Where did she think she could go? This is her home. We're her family. What could have made her think running away was a good idea?

Annette realized, despite all the time they spent together, she didn't know her second daughter very well. Annette rarely talked to Tina, never asked how she was doing, and never told her stuff mothers tell their daughters. In all the years since Tina had come into their lives, Annette (and everyone else, it seemed) had treated her as if she was an outsider, an interloper, an alien. She was there, but no one paid much attention to her. Now Tina was no longer there and she was getting *lots* of attention.

Annette wanted to cry. She wanted to reach out to her husband and have him comfort her. Tina was his daughter, too. Or, was she?

Annette had never admitted what Rocco had suspected, that she'd been with another man while he was away in the war and that the other man could be Tina's real father. The truth was, that Annette had slept with someone else just before Rocco arrived home after the war ended. She was distraught because she hadn't heard from him in over a year. Then she received a letter from the Army telling her that Rocco was dead. Annette had a man who was taking her out and providing her with a diversion from the dismal wartime routines. He had been trying unsuccessfully to bed her for months. In her grief, Annette turned to him for comfort and he succeeded.

Two weeks later, Rocco got off the Wayne Avenue trolley. He was still in uniform and carrying his duffel bag. He hurried to the little apartment where they were living before they bought the house. Hoping to find Annette alone, he wanted to take her to bed as soon as he arrived. Luckily, Vicky was playing at a friend's apartment elsewhere in the building. Rocco didn't say anything when he came in. He looked at Annette. She was in shock. *He's supposed to be dead!* She thought. *I'm supposed to be a widow. Am I dreaming this?*

Their eyes locked. His eyes held lust. Hers, shock, and fear, although Rocco was too excited to notice.

A moment later, she knew she wasn't dreaming. Rocco had lifted her skirt, taken down her panties, and was fucking her right there in the kitchen.

She found herself wanting it as much as he did but not for the same reason. Rocco was ecstatic to finally be home from the war. He was celebrating his return and the start of what he hoped would be a normal life. But it wasn't a celebration for Annette. She wasn't ecstatic. She was hoping that adding Rocco's sperm to that of her recent lover still inside her would conceal that she had been unfaithful.

When Annette later found out she was pregnant, she convinced herself it was Rocco's child. He had assumed the same thing until Tina showed signs of retarded development. His pride wouldn't allow him to consider that one of his children couldn't be completely normal. He assumed Tina's abnormality *had* to be Annette's fault.

Rocco's suspicions about Annette's infidelity were strengthened when she later gave birth to two sons who showed no signs of retarded development. He made up his mind that Tina was not his real daughter and Annette became his wife in name only. In his view, Tina was punishment for Annette's infidelity. From then on, Tina was her mother's problem, not her father's.

Until today.

Suddenly, they had become a family that had suffered a tragedy. Rocco didn't like that his neighbors had gathered outside his house. He didn't like that the cops had come, the radio reporter had tried to question him, or their name was mentioned in the newspaper. He preferred not being seen or heard. Suddenly, everyone in Philadelphia who read the newspapers or listened to the radio knew a handicapped girl was missing and that he was her father.

For a few minutes before he fell asleep, Rocco wished he could go missing, too. Just until all this blew over.

INTERLUDE 1

On the evening of Monday, December 28, 1959, Maryann Theresa Mitchell of the Manayunk section of Philadelphia went with a friend to see *South Pacific* at the Roxy Theater on Ridge Avenue. She was an 11th grader at Cecilian Academy in Mount Airy. After the movie, she was returning home alone when Elmo Smith spotted her waiting at a bus stop as he drove by in a stolen car. He snatched the girl, attacked her, raped her, crushed her skull with five blows, and then dumped her an hour later, still alive and begging to be taken home, into a ravine in Lafayette Hills, Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia.

Tuesday, August 2, 1960

21.

Vicky woke up earlier than usual. She remembered it was her day off and wished she could have slept longer. Then she remembered something else. Vicky looked across the room at Tina's bed and saw that her little sister wasn't in it. *It's not a nightmare*, Vicky thought. *She's really gone*.

She got out of bed and put on shorts and a top. Then she went downstairs and walked into the kitchen to get some orange juice. On the table was the tabloid Daily News. One of the neighbors had brought it to show her parents. Vicky gasped when she saw the large picture of Tina from when she graduated from sixth grade along with the headline that read, **Another Elmo Smith?**

Vicky didn't know whether to scream or cry. She panicked and went back to her room. She tried not to break out in tears. Instead, she looked around the room. Most of the stuff she saw belonged to her. There were old toys she'd played with when she was little and passed on to Tina. There was a bookshelf that had a pile of Little Lulu comics and several Nancy Drew books. But there was nothing that *belonged* to Tina. She hadn't been given things of her own, only hand-me-downs from Vicky or her girl cousins. *This is more my room than hers*, Vicky realized. *I live here. She only slept here*. Then, feeling guilty about her absent sister, and, for the first time, yearning to see her, Vicky did cry.

21.

When Tina awoke, she was missing her older sister but didn't know why. She opened her eyes and looked around. Vicky wasn't there. Neither was Vicky's bed. Then Tina remembered she wasn't in her room. She recalled yesterday and last night and looked at the dollhouse. Just like the dollhouse, her world had been rearranged.

Tina smiled.

The bedroom door moved. Tina gasped. The door opened all the way and someone walked in. "Good morning!" Maggie said, cheerfully. Tina looked puzzled. Maggie noticed.

"Remember me?" she asked, smiling. "Maggie?" Tina thought she recognized her but wasn't sure. The woman looked different but Tina didn't know why. "I was Sister Margaret Mary, your fifth-grade teacher." She paused so as not to alarm Tina.

Then the former Sister Margaret Mary began reminding Tina of her time in fifth grade.

The Catholic elementary school hadn't been able to afford special programs for handicapped pupils so they were put in regular classes. If they or their parents didn't like it, the kids could transfer to public schools. Some nuns didn't like having handicapped students. A few even saw the children as abominations. If the handicapped kids conformed, the nuns put up with them. If they needed special attention, the nuns became annoyed. They didn't see handicapped kids as children of God.

Fortunately for Tina, that was how Sister Margaret Mary saw her. She had noticed how the other nuns and pupils treated handicapped kids and her heart had gone out to them. Sister Margaret Mary noted the sly ways some students tried to annoy Tina. Because the girl sometimes talked incoherently when she became emotional, the other kids tried to provoke her. Sometimes they said nasty things when she was in earshot hoping to hurt her feelings. Other times, they baited her with friendly talk and small gifts they later withdrew, hoping to anger or confuse her.

Tina tried to endure their teasing and torture. Sister Mary Margaret admired her. But she couldn't abide what the 'normal' kids did and went out of her way to protect Tina. Tina never realized it, of course. She was so busy trying to keep up with schoolwork that she sometimes understood but other times bewildered her. No one helped her, either in class or at home. Sister Margaret Mary wanted to give her extra help but was ordered not to. She was told that Tina would have to learn to cope or she would never survive as an adult. Maggie didn't agree with the order but didn't disobey it, either. She watched over Tina as best she could and regretted when fifth grade ended. She didn't know if Tina's next nun would be as sympathetic as she was.

"I made you a special breakfast," Maggie said. "Are you hungry?"

Tina nodded.

"Good. Put your clothes on and we'll go down and eat."

Tina got out of bed but hesitated. Maggie figured out why. "Um, do you remember where the bathroom is?" she asked. Tina nodded shyly. "You want to go before we eat?" Tina nodded again. "Go ahead."

Ten minutes later Tina and Maggie were sitting at the kitchen table. Maggie had given Tina a plate of pancakes. There was butter and syrup in front of her. "I wasn't sure how you liked them, so I put everything out," Maggie said. Tina had seen pancakes but couldn't recall how she liked them because her mother rarely made them. Maggie saw her hesitate. "Well, I like mine with lots of butter and syrup. Should I do yours that way?" Tina nodded. Maggie took care of adding syrup and butter to Tina's pancakes and then passed her the plate. Tina looked at it as if she didn't know what to do with it.

She watched as Maggie used the side of her fork to cut into her pancakes. Then she stabbed a piece laden with butter and syrup and raised it to her lips. Maggie hesitated. "Go ahead. Try them," she told Tina. Then Maggie inserted the pancake into her mouth and started chewing. "Ummmm. I make a *great* pancake," she said, smiling proudly.

Tina did what Maggie had done. The doughy sweetness filled her mouth. She smiled. "Ummmm," she said, mimicking Maggie.

"Good, huh?" Maggie asked. Tina nodded and took another piece. "I'm glad you like them." She was also glad she had found Tina and rescued her from whatever her life had been before. Maggie felt confident she could give Tina a much better life and hoped that they would become best friends.

I think I found my purpose, Maggie thought. She tried not to see rescuing Tina as a miracle but wanted to. Maggie wanted to believe God was loving Tina through her. But she also wanted to feel God was loving her by giving Tina to her.

"When we're done eating, let's go back upstairs. Some of my old clothes are still in the dresser in your bedroom and in the closet. You might like to try some of them on to see if you like them. How's that sound?"

Tina's mouth was full of pancake and she didn't answer. But she smiled. Maggie glowed with pleasure.

I don't know what's happening but I like it, Tina thought. *Am I dreaming or is this real? Maggie is nice. She seems to like me and wants to take care of me. That bedroom is wonderful. I could spend hours there and never get tired of it. These pancakes are also wonderful. I could eat them every day and never get tired of them.*

But I'm afraid. How long can this go on?

22.

Rocco would rather not have been sitting on the trolley heading to the Bond Bread depot in Nicetown. But what choice did he have? Skipping work would mean losing a day's pay. It wouldn't help bring Tina back and might hurt the rest of the family.

He wanted to believe the girl had just wandered off. But he feared what his wife kept arguing, that Tina had been abducted. He vaguely recalled what had happened with that evil guy Elmo Smith last December. That girl he abducted and murdered had been a normal teenager. Tina wasn't. She was a helpless child. Rocco didn't want to believe anyone would want to hurt her. Or could. Yet he feared the worst.

As he rode, his thoughts drifted back to when he came home from the war. Vicky was just three years old and didn't know him. Annette hadn't mentioned Vicky's daddy much because she didn't know if she or Vicky would ever see him again. Vicky liked the shiny buttons on daddy's uniform and the funny hat he let her try on. And she saw how her mother acted differently when he was there. He did his best to win her affection and she soon became accustomed to him.

What Rocco didn't know was that Vicky was more excited when her baby sister appeared nine months after daddy came home. Baby Christine took a lot of mommy's attention but Vicky didn't mind. She kept busy in the new house they had moved to and made friends in the neighborhood. She was proud of her new baby sister and showed her off.

Not long after he returned, Rocco had found the job he still had. He delivered packaged baked goods to corner grocery stores and supermarkets. He wasn't a salesman, just a delivery man. But he was strong and could easily lift the boxes of cakes, pies, bread, and rolls. He enjoyed physical labor. He liked to whistle while he worked and got along well with the other drivers and people in the stores he served.

Two years after Tina's birth, Tony was born. When Annette took the infant to a new pediatrician, she also took Tina. Tony was developing normally. But Tina was not, and the doctor expressed his concerns. Annette had tried not to panic. The doctor recommended they have Tina tested. Annette knew there was no money to pay for anything but the most basic medical care for her children. She mentioned what the doctor had recommended to Rocco but he told her everything would work out all right for Tina.

It hadn't.

Rocco had also noticed that Tina had seemed different but hadn't said anything or worried about her. He would talk to her but she seemed not to hear him. He wondered if she was ignoring him. Not willing to allow any disrespect or defiance from his children, Rocco had yelled at Tina. "I'm talking! Pay, attention, damn you." Tina looked past him as if she had no idea what was going on. Frustrated, Rocco had walked away.

After a few more times, Rocco had complained to Annette. "What's wrong with that kid?" he asked. "Is she deaf?"

Annette shook her head. "No. She's not deaf."

"She acts as if she can't hear me. What could be wrong with her?"

"Nothing's wrong with her," Annette had insisted. But she knew her husband was correct. Tina was different, although Annette didn't understand how different until much later.

23.

Officer Jackson showed up not long after Rocco left for work. He made his way through the small crowd in front of Tina's house and went up the steps. "Any news, officer?" someone yelled. Officer Jackson shook his head. He knocked on the screen door and Annette appeared on the other side. "Morning, ma'am. I need to interview your other children, your daughter's friends, and any schoolmates that might be around."

"Um, okay," Annette said. "My older daughter is up but my sons are still asleep."

"Okay, can I talk to your daughter? What was her name, again?"

"Vicky."

"Right. Can I talk to Vicky?"

Annette nodded. She was getting used to seeing a Negro at her front door. It wasn't strange anymore. But she didn't want it to become normal, either. *They should stay with their own kind*, she reminded herself. *It's better for all of us that way*. Then she reminded herself that he was only there to help. She sighed. "Okay. I'll ask her to come out."

"Um, ma'am, it would be better if we spoke in private. Can I come in?"

His request startled her. "You want to come *inside* my house?" she asked, warily.

Officer Jackson nodded. "Yes, ma'am. Is that a problem?"

"My husband's not here. He had to go to work. He's not union and they'll dock his pay if he doesn't show up and we can't afford it." Annette paused and looked at Officer Jackson. He didn't respond. She shrugged. "Well, okay."

Before she could change her mind, Officer Jackson opened the screen door and walked into the living room. He took a quick look around and tried not to react to what he saw. Shabby didn't begin to describe the room. The cloth on the arms of the tan sofa was almost worn smooth and there were stains on the cushions. The wallpaper was a multicolored fleur-de-lis print meant to look festive but was dirty, worn, and torn in spots. It just looked forlorn. There was a worn linoleum 'rug' on the floor. *These people have a hard life*, Officer Jackson thought. *They didn't need another tragedy on top of the one they were already living. I hope losing their daughter doesn't break them.*

Annette had stepped back when he stepped inside the door. She wondered what the neighbors would think of her for allowing a colored cop inside her house. "Where's your daughter, ma'am?"

"She's in her room. It's also Tina's room."

"Could I go up?"

Annette tried not to show panic. "No! I'll call her down. Wait right there."

Officer Jackson stood perfectly still and waited. He knew he couldn't talk to Vicky where he was standing just inside the door. Everyone outside would be able to overhear what they said. He needed to gain her confidence and that meant they needed to speak in private.

Annette went to the bottom of the nearby steps. "Vicky! Could you come down?"

A moment went by. Then a door opened upstairs and they heard footsteps. "Sure, Mom."

Officer Jackson waited.

More footsteps in the hallway. Then a pair of long white shapely legs appeared at the top of the stairs. The legs turned into a torso as Vicky descended. She was wearing white short shorts and a blue top. Vicky's beauty distracted Officer Jackson and he had to remind himself why he wanted to speak to her. He also had to remind himself he was in a white family's house and anything he said or did could be misinterpreted.

“Morning, miss,” he said. “I’ve been asked to interview as many people who knew your sister as possible, starting with the family. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

Vicky shrugged. “I guess it’s okay, although I don’t know how much help I can be.”

“We’re trying to figure out where your sister might have gone,” Officer Jackson said.

“She didn’t *go* anywhere,” Annette said, irately. “She was abducted.”

“Um, yes, ma’am. That’s one possibility we’re working on. But we have to consider all the possibilities.”

“So, what did you want to ask me?” Vicky said.

“Um, can we talk in private? Somewhere away from all those people outside? Maybe in the kitchen?”

“My kitchen?” Annette asked, aghast.

“Um, yes, ma’am. That would be the most convenient one. Unless you would prefer I drive your daughter back to the station where I can interview her in private.”

“No, no. I guess it’s okay,” Annette said. She was worried about what Rocco would say when he found out that a colored man had been in their kitchen, even if he was a cop.

Officer Jackson gestured to Vicky. “Please lead the way,” he said. Vicky walked toward the dining room. Officer Jackson followed. Annette wondered how she was going to live this down. She followed them.

Vicky stopped by the refrigerator. “Do you want to sit down?” Officer Jackson asked. Vicky looked at her mother who was standing behind Officer Jackson. Annette was shaking her head. She was afraid Officer Jackson might *also* sit down.

Vicky shook her head. “I’m okay. Whad’ya want to ask me?”

“Tell me about your sister’s habits. Things she liked to do. Places she liked to go, if any. I understand you and she slept in the same room. Did you two talk about anything when you were alone?”

“Well, I never took her out. She went shopping with Mom,” Vicky explained. Annette nodded. “I walked her to school a few times when she was younger. But mostly, she stayed home.”

“Okay. Did you and she talk about anything? You know, teenager stuff. Music, movies, places she might have heard about that she wanted to go to?”

“Nope. We never talked much. She listened to music with Mom but never told me if she liked it.”

“How about movies? Did she ever go?”

“Not that I know of,” Vicky said.

“Did she watch TV?”

Vicky shook her head. “Ours is broken now but I don’t remember if she did when it was working.”

“Okay. Thanks. You’ve been very helpful. I kinda feel a lot of sympathy for what you’re going through. I have a little sister and it would just about break my heart if she disappeared.”

Surprised by his understanding, Vicky looked at Officer Jackson’s face. She was used to cops having hard faces that showed no expression. But his face was soft. She saw concern and care. *Maybe it’s because he’s a colored cop*, she thought. *Maybe they’re different.*

Officer Jackson turned to Annette. “Tina went shopping with you?” he asked. Annette nodded. “Where did you go?”

“The Acme over on Germantown Avenue.”

“Oh, yeah. I know that one. And you walked?”

Annette nodded.

“Our officers fanned out in that direction but couldn’t find any trace of her. Maybe we should look again. Thanks for your help. When can I talk to your boys?”

“Whenever they get up. It’s summer so I let them sleep.”

“Okay. I’m gonna call this information into the station.” He nodded toward Vicky. “Thanks for your help.”

“You’re... um... welcome.”

Officer Jackson headed toward the front door.

“Um... thank you, officer,” Vicky said.

“I’ll keep you posted throughout the day. Thanks again.”

24.

After breakfast, Maggie said it was time to clear the table. She asked Tina to help her by moving the dishes to the sink. At first, Tina wasn’t sure she heard Maggie correctly. She wasn’t allowed to handle dishes at home. Her father had forbidden her to even touch a plate after she dropped a few when she was helping her mother set the table when she was twelve. “Does she think we can just run out and buy new ones?” Rocco had bellowed.

Annette had defended Tina. “It was just an accident, dear,” she said. Rocco immediately thought that dropping the plates wasn’t the *real* accident. Tina was. But he didn’t say it aloud.

Tina was extra careful and cleared Maggie’s table without dropping anything. Maggie praised and thanked her and asked her to sit while she washed the dishes. She was being cautious and didn’t want Tina to wash them yet because the soap and water made them slippery.

Maggie had planned to go shopping to buy more clothes for Tina but then realized she couldn’t take Tina out with her and couldn’t leave her alone while she went out. Then she remembered that she had mentioned that her teenage clothes were still in her room.

They went upstairs to Maggie’s (now Tina’s) bedroom. Maggie went to the dresser and opened the top drawer. It held underpants and a few teenage bras. She thought she should buy new underwear for Tina and closed the drawer. Then she opened the one below it.

This one had several pairs of shorts and a few pants. Maggie was chubby now but had been a skinny fourteen-year-old similar to Tina. She lifted a pile of shorts and moved it to the bed. “Try these on,” she said. Tina looked at them. She was used to hand-me-downs and had received clothes from her older sister and some of her cousins. She hesitated. “Go ahead,” Maggie urged. “They’re yours. All of them. If you like them, that is.” Tina had never been asked if she liked anything she was given.

“Um... all of them?” she asked, cautiously.

Maggie smiled and nodded encouragingly. “Yeah. If they fit and if you like them. They’re all yours. Want to try them on? Go ahead.”

Tina had never been asked to try anything on before. If she was given something, it was expected she would wear it, whether or not it fit, she liked it, or it suited her. She reached for the pink shorts at the top of the pile. “I used to love those,” Maggie said. Tina smiled. She began to hope she would love them too. But first, she had to try them on.

She slid out of her blue shorts and stepped into the pink ones. Then she hiked them up. They were perfect! Maggie gasped. “Wow! They look great on you. I’m so happy. Do you like them?”

Tina nodded.

“But they don’t go with that top. Shall we look for a different one?”

Tina nodded again.

Maggie opened the third drawer. She took out a small pile of colorful tops and laid them next to the shorts on the bed. "Pick one," she said. "Whatever you think matches your shorts."

Tina looked at the pile. Then she looked at Maggie. "Go ahead, honey. It's okay. They're all yours if you want them."

Tina moved several tops aside and chose a powder blue one. She took off her yellow shirt and put on the new one. "Yes! Perfect choice. I'm so glad my stuff fits you. Um... do you like it?" Maggie asked. Tina nodded enthusiastically. "You know, since my clothes fit so well, I bet my sneakers might fit you too. They're in the closet. Wanna look?" Tina nodded.

Maggie went to the closet and opened the door. Tina gasped when she saw a frilly dress hanging from the rod. There were plain dresses, too. "Oh, do you like them?" Maggie asked. Tina nodded. "I hope they fit you, too. This is really great, Tina. I'm really happy. I held on to this stuff for years but never knew why. Now I know. It was because you would come to live with me someday and I could give everything to you."

Although people had given things to Tina before, no one had ever seemed happy about it. The impression she got was that people were unloading old stuff they wanted to get rid of. Even at Christmas when she received a new pair of socks, a scarf, or a sweater, her parents never waited to see if she was happy. They just seemed to assume she would be grateful for anything she received. What choice did she have?

Now, Maggie was giving Tina a choice. She could have everything, or just take the things she liked. But she liked everything and that wasn't a problem. Maggie was delighted to give Tina whatever she wanted. No one else in Tina's life had ever been happy to give her what she wanted. No one had even *asked* what she wanted. They hadn't even cared.

But Maggie did care.

When is this gonna end? Tina thought. When is my mom gonna show up and take me back? This can't go on. It's too good. Maggie's too nice. She seems to like me. Nobody's ever liked me before. And I like being here, but I'm still afraid. When will things go back the way they've always been?

25.

Officer Jackson didn't return until late Tuesday afternoon. "We fanned out again," he told Annette and Vicky. "Officers knocked on doors and showed Tina's picture to people and asked if they had seen her but no one had. We searched that overgrown vacant lot behind the Acme. It's like a jungle in there but there's a path from Greene Street to the Acme parking lot-."

Annette nodded. "I know," she said. "That's the path we used to take."

"Yeah, I thought so. But there were no clues anywhere. We looked for an item of clothing, footprints, even overgrowth that could have been trampled down, but found nothing. I'm sorry. I was hoping to have better news."

"We were hoping you would, too," Vicky said. Officer Jackson looked at her. Their eyes met. She saw his frustration. He saw her grief. Both felt overwhelmed by uncertainty.

"If she was abducted, like I've been saying, she could be anywhere," Annette said.

He nodded. "Yeah. That's true. But if she was abducted, you would think someone would have seen or heard something- a person, a car, a scream... *something*. But it was so hot everybody was inside sitting in front of their fans or out back watching their kids in wading pools."

"So, now what?" Vicky asked.

Officer Jackson frowned. He didn't like the only answer he had. "We keep looking, but without any clues or leads there's nothing to go on."

Vicky looked distraught. "Meanwhile, Tina's out there somewhere. We don't know if she's in trouble, or hurt, or in some kind of other danger."

Officer Jackson had a sudden thought. He looked at Annette. "Does she know your phone number?" he asked.

Annette nodded. "Yeah, I think she does. I tried to get her to memorize it when she went to school."

"So, maybe she'll call," Officer Jackson said, although he felt that was unlikely. But someone else might. The story was in the newspapers, on the radio, and the TV. Tina's picture had been flashed around the city. If she was anywhere in public, someone was bound to spot her. But if she wasn't... well, Officer Jackson didn't want to speculate. *These people are already scared out of their wits*, he thought. *I don't want to make it any worse for them*. He knew Elmo Smith had already been mentioned. Although Smith was awaiting trial, a copycat could have taken Tina and done God-knobs-what with her. The city was on edge.

Vicky saw how distressed he was. "Well, thanks Officer Jackson," she said. He looked at her. "You've done a lot."

He shook his head. "But not enough. We haven't found her yet. I'm sorry."

"What happens now?" Annette asked.

"We keep looking and hoping for a break. We set up a tip line and we might be able to offer a reward. Sometimes that gets people to look a little harder."

"You would think when somebody's child is missing, *everyone* would look," Annette said.

"I agree," Officer Jackson replied. "But people got other things in their lives. They get distracted. They forget."

"Meanwhile, my sister is still missing," Vicky said.

Officer Jackson nodded supportively. "Afraid so, Miss." Vicky heard genuine concern in his voice.

"My name's Vicky."

"Miss Vicky. But we'll keep trying to find her. I promise."

26.

Tina spent all day Tuesday playing in Maggie's old childhood bedroom. It was her bedroom now. Maggie brought in a table fan that was just strong enough to keep Tina from sweltering in the August heat. Besides the dollhouse, there were some stuffed animals and larger dolls with different outfits Maggie's mother had made when she was little. Tina found dressing and undressing the dolls and changing how they looked almost as much fun as rearranging the furniture in the dollhouse. She had discovered change and found she liked it.

Things had always been the same in her house. No one paid much attention to her. She tagged along with her mother as she did chores only because there was nothing else to do. Her mother never said much to Tina. She didn't ask what Tina wanted for lunch, if she would like a cool glass of lemonade, or if she would enjoy sitting on the porch. Annette just decided what Tina would do or receive and made it happen without asking.

"Here," she said when she handed Tina a glass of lemonade. "Come with me," she said when she went out to the backyard to hang the wash. "Sit down," she said when she was working

in the kitchen and Tina was watching. "Get out of my way," Annette often said when Tina got under foot.

Annette had been looking forward to when school started in September. Tina was supposed to attend a public school for 'special' kids. *That's what they call retarded kids like my daughter*, she thought. But she doubted, if the other kids were anything like Tina was, that any of them were 'special.' *They're probably just burdens to their parents the same as Tina is*, Annette thought. *But what can I do? I'm stuck with her.*

What Annette didn't know was that Tina had sensed her mother's feelings, knew she was a burden, and wished things could be different but had no way of changing them. Then she decided to walk away and everything changed. Boy, had it changed! Better than she could have ever dreamed.

27.

Teen Girl Still Missing

Police continue the search.

No clues to her whereabouts have emerged. Police have not ruled out abduction but have found no evidence. The public's help is urged. If you see this girl, call the police immediately. There may be a reward.

(Evening Bulletin, Tuesday, August 2, 1960)

Tina was still in the news. That was the gist of the newspaper stories and TV reports. A kid hardly anyone (except, perhaps, Sister Margaret Mary) had ever paid attention to was suddenly the focus of the entire city's attention.

Tina knew nothing about it. Maggie kept the radio turned off and didn't get any newspapers delivered. Instead of being in a Roxborough row house two blocks from Henry Avenue, Tina could have been deep in the woods or on a secluded mountain top. She and Maggie were in their own little world. And that's where they wanted to stay.

INTERLUDE 2

Around midnight on Monday, December 28, 1959, Maryann Mitchell's mother Sarah called the Fifth District Police to report that her daughter hadn't come home. Only five days earlier another teenage girl had been stabbed in the same area and the police were concerned. They began an immediate search for Maryann.

Wednesday, August 3, 1960

28.

Vicky got up at her normal time and headed back to work. As she rode the trolley and subway, she hoped she could get through the day without her co-workers at the salon asking questions, offering sympathy, or giving advice. She especially dreaded the possibility that they would speculate about what had happened to Tina.

Vicky often used scissors. What if someone said something especially insensitive and she reacted strongly? She could injure the woman she was working on. She could also get fired.

Everyone turned when she walked into the Excelsior Salon. Some were surprised to see her but didn't say anything. Mrs. Carlyle, the matronly owner, took Vicky aside as soon as she came in. "You sure you wanna be here?" she asked.

"I wanna do my job," Vicky replied.

"I appreciate that. But can you concentrate on your work?"

"It's better than concentrating on what happened to my little sister."

Satisfied by Vicky's reply, Mrs. Carlyle nodded. "Okay, then. But please be careful. If you need to stop or take a break, just do it. One of the other girls will fill in."

"Thanks, but I'm here to do a full day's work."

Satisfied by Vicky's assurance, Mrs. Carlyle nodded. "Okay."

No more was said for the rest of the day. Vicky wondered if Mrs. Carlyle had told the other girls not to mention what was happening. Thankfully, none of them did. Nor did any of the customers. They were mostly wealthier Rittenhouse Square ladies who had busy social lives and didn't gossip about what was in the news. If they had known about Tina, no one would have suspected that Vicky was her sister.

29.

Officer Jackson was disappointed when he arrived at the Martini house on the third day and found Vicky wasn't there. He didn't ask where she was. He just reported that nothing new had developed and they were still searching.

"Have any calls come in?" Annette asked.

"Not yet."

"Do you think any will?"

"I hope so, Mrs. Martini. We need all the help we can get."

Annette looked at him. He didn't seem optimistic. "You don't think we'll get her back, do you?"

"Honestly, Mrs. Martini, I have no idea. Sometimes we find people and sometimes we don't. But we try."

"Yeah. But that's not good enough."

"It's all we can do. But, maybe if I interview more people who knew her I can get some ideas. How about your boys?" he asked.

"They're still asleep."

"How about her friends?"

"She didn't have any," Annette replied.

He seemed surprised. *Don't all teenage girls have friends?* he thought. "None of the neighborhood girls?"

“Not a one.”

“Why?” Officer Jackson asked.

“Why do you think? She’s retarded.”

“That’s hardly a reason-.”

“It’s all the reason they *need*. You know how kids are.”

And I know how adults are, Officer Jackson thought. *Pretty much the same as kids.*

Prejudiced. That poor girl. I wonder what her life was like. No wonder she ran away.

“How about kids at school, or maybe her teachers?” he asked. “Anyone you can think of?”

“Well, she had nuns at Saint Francis. But I don’t know if any of them would remember her. The classes are so large...”

“That could be helpful. Maybe I’ll visit the convent and see if anyone remembers her.”

“Yeah. You do that,” Annette replied, curtly.

30.

Maggie assumed people were looking for Tina and didn’t want to take her out of the house. She was also afraid to leave Tina by herself so soon after she came to live with her but hoped she could trust Tina to be home alone as time went by. She also assumed she and Tina would go out together eventually when the search for Tina fizzled out.

But Maggie would soon need to buy food. Fortunately, there was an old-fashioned grocery a few blocks away and they still delivered. Maggie’s mother Delores had been a regular customer for years and the owners, an older couple named Cohen, were more than happy to restart regular deliveries. All Maggie had to do was tell them what she wanted.

At breakfast, she asked Tina what foods she liked. Tina looked at her as if she hadn’t understood the question. Maggie tried to think of common foods. “Do you like hamburgers, hot dogs, pork chops, French fries, milk, cookies, ice cream, cereal, bananas?” she asked.

Tina shrugged.

“What did your mom make for you?”

“Whatever she wanted.”

“And she never asked you what *you* wanted?” Maggie asked. Tina shook her head. “Not even on your birthday?” Tina again looked as if she hadn’t understood. “Usually, moms make something special for their kids’ birthdays,” Maggie explained. “Sometimes it’s a whole meal. Other times it might just be a special cake or pie they ask for. If tomorrow was your birthday, what would *you* like?”

Tina shrugged.

Maggie gave up, for now. It was beginning to dawn on her that no one had ever treated Tina as if she was a person. She thought about crying but didn’t want to embarrass or alarm Tina by doing it in front of her. Then she wondered if Tina had ever cried because she felt neglected. *Or, maybe she just got used to it*, Maggie thought. *Kids are so adaptable. Maybe they’re too adaptable. Maybe they should make more of a fuss. Or, maybe we adults should make a fuss for them.*

31.

Just after noon, Officer Jackson arrived at the convent behind the Saint Francis School. He parked, walked to the front door, and rang the bell. Then he waited but no one came. He rang again. Still no answer.

“Can I help you, officer?” someone behind him asked. Officer Jackson turned and saw an older Negro man.

“Are any of the nuns around that I can talk to?”

“No. Sorry. They’re away on a summer retreat. It’s down the shore and it’s really a beach vacation but they have to make it sound like it’s religious,” the man answered, smiling.

“Do you work here?”

“I’m the caretaker for the church and school. The convent sometimes, too, if something breaks. Otherwise, they don’t let me in.”

“Because you’re colored?”

“Because I’m a man. It’s only for women,” the man said. Officer Jackson nodded. “Did you need something?”

“I wanted to talk to the nuns about a missing girl. She used to go to school here.”

“That girl in the paper?”

Officer Jackson nodded. “Yeah. Tina Martini.”

The man shrugged. “I guess you’ll have to wait until the nuns come back.”

“When will that be?”

“Sometime Friday.”

“Oh,” Officer Jackson replied. “I hope the girl will be found by then. If not, I’ll be back.”

“Okay, Officer. Good luck.”

“You, too. Thanks for your help.”

32.

Tina and Maggie were eating lunch just after noon.

“Do you like to take baths?” Maggie asked. “Sometimes I like to get in the tub when it’s hot and just enjoy the water. Would you like to do that?”

Tina nodded.

“Great. It’s pretty hot again today. How about you get into the bathtub for a while after we finish eating?”

Tina nodded again.

“Okay.”

Tina didn’t seem enthusiastic and Maggie wondered if she truly wanted to do it. Then she realized that Tina might be thinking that Maggie was going to join her. *Maybe she’s embarrassed about her body*, Maggie thought. *I know I was at her age*. But Maggie didn’t know if it was safe to leave Tina alone.

“Um, I can stay and talk to you or I can leave you alone for a while if you want. It’s up to you.”

“Alone.”

“Good. While you’re in the tub, I’ll do some straightening up after I do these dishes. But if you need me for anything, you can just call me. Plus, I’ll knock on the door every once in a while to see if you need anything. Okay?”

Tina nodded again. Then she looked at Maggie and smiled. “That sounds very nice,” she said. Maggie was thrilled.

She took Tina upstairs, found a fluffy towel, and started running the bathwater. She asked Tina to check to make sure it felt right. Tina put her hand under the faucet. Then she turned the hot water spigot a little. “How’s that feel?” Maggie asked.

“Good.”

“Okay. I’ll wait until it fills up and then leave you alone for a while.”

“Okay.”

Maggie let the water rise to the overflow outlet and then shut the faucets. “It’s all yours,” she said. “After I leave, just take off your clothes and pile them on the toilet seat. Then you can get in and get cool. Have fun!”

Then she left.

Does she think I’ve never taken a bath before? Tina thought. Of course, I’ll get undressed. It would be stupid to get in while I’m still wearing my clothes.

Tina wondered if Maggie was going to get her some fresh underpants. She’d been wearing the ones she had on since Sunday and hoped there were other ones around. *Maybe I’ll mention it when she knocks on the door, Tina thought.*

She undressed and eased herself into the lukewarm water. When she felt her behind hit the hard bottom of the tub, she sighed contentedly. The water was the perfect temperature. Just like everything else in Maggie’s house was perfect. Tina wondered how long it would stay that way, then put the thought out of her mind.

Tina had always liked getting wet. She sometimes showered with her mother and occasionally went out in the backyard when it was raining and stood enjoying the cool moisture flowing around her. Tina would close her eyes and imagine she was a fish. She didn’t know what kind and it didn’t matter. She just wanted to be part of a different world.

After Maggie left Tina, she went to Tina’s bedroom and opened the top bureau drawer. She saw the underpants but felt uncomfortable about letting Tina wear them. *She should have new ones, Maggie thought. I might have to go out. But I don’t want to leave her alone, not even for a few minutes. She’s my responsibility now and I’m going to take good care of her.* Maggie also knew she couldn’t take Tina with her. *They’re probably looking for her. But I’m not going to let anyone take her away from me. She deserves a better life and I’m going to see that she gets it.*

Maggie decided to go through the entire bureau to see what else she could find that Tina could use. To her amazement, she found a package of three panties under some old sweaters in the bottom drawer. They were brand new. The package was unopened. *How did this get here? Did I put it here? Did Mom? Why? Didn’t I like them? Maybe I thought I already had enough. Or, maybe God had me put them there because He knew about Tina long before I did.*

Maggie felt even more certain she was doing God’s work and was happier than she had ever been. She also felt certain it had been no coincidence that she was driving along Greene Street when Tina was trying to cross. God had brought them together. And if Maggie had even thought for a moment that she should ignore the girl and keep going, she would have been defying God’s will.

She’d been called.

Strangely, it was a stronger and clearer call than when she thought she had been summoned to take vows. Now Maggie realized that vows were just words. Anybody could say them. But serving God took action, and that was what Maggie was doing. She would go on as long as there was breath in her body. Tina would have the good life she had been denied and that she, as a child of God, deserved.

Maggie would see to it.

33.

Late that night, Rocco and Annette were in bed. A large stand fan in front of the window oscillated left and right. It blew hot air over them.

They both felt exhausted. The stress of the past three days had caught up to them. They felt irritable, too. Frustration at the police, neighbors, and the media made them feel they had no privacy anymore. Their bedroom was their only sanctuary. But it was hardly a *genuine* sanctuary, because it was the place their real feelings about each other came out.

“What are we gonna do if they don’t find her?” he said.

“Like you care whether or not they find her.”

“Of course I do! She’s my daughter.”

“Suddenly she’s your daughter?” Annette asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve ignored Tina for years. Now you care about her?”

“Do you care about her?” Rocco said.

“She’s with me all day.”

“She *was*. Until *you* let her disappear.”

“So you’re blaming me?” Annette said.

“Who *else* would I blame? You’re her mother. You’re home all day. It’s your job to take care of her.”

“And what’s your job?” Annette asked.

“I got to work so I can support this family.”

“Is Tina a member of this family?”

“Of course she is,” Rocco replied.

Annette couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “Then why didn’t you ever treat her as if she was?”

Rocco couldn’t look at her. “You know why.”

“No, I really don’t.”

“It’s because she’s not mine,” he said.

“She’s *what*?”

“Not my kid.”

“What makes you say such a ridiculous thing?” Annette asked.

“Because she couldn’t be.”

“What do you mean?”

“My other three kids are *normal*,” Rocco replied. “Tina is retarded. That can mean only one thing.”

“And what is *that*?” Annette asked, combatively.

“She’s not my kid.”

Annette felt too tired to be livid so she just responded. “*What?*”

“You fucked somebody else while I was gone and Tina is your punishment.”

Now she *was* livid. “Rocco! You son of a bitch!”

“You know you did! Why don’t you just admit it?”

“*You’re* her father!” Annette insisted.

“No, Annette. If I *was* her father, she wouldn’t be retarded. She’d be like Vicky, Tony, or Ralphie.”

“You bastard!”

“I’m not a bastard. You’re a whore. And you know it.”

“I hate you!” Annette said.

“Yeah, so what else is new?” Rocco replied, cynically. Annette had no idea what he meant.

None of their past arguments or their strained domestic relationship had ever dissuaded Rocco from getting on top of his wife whenever he felt like it. Rocco never asked if he could do it. He just did. She’d lay helplessly beneath his big body while he did whatever he wanted. It wasn’t rape but he gave her no choice. When he finished, he would roll off and remove his condom. Then he would fall asleep. Annette was usually panting and aching from his violent movements. She hadn’t enjoyed sex since they conceived Ralphie. That was before Rocco became obsessed with Annette’s possible infidelity and his rage took over. Now, there was no longer a relationship to speak of. It was merely a miserable marriage.

So, what else was new?

INTERLUDE 3

On December 18, 1959, 17-year-old Joyce Ann Davis was attacked around 10:30 pm a half-block from her house in Manayunk while walking home from a Christmas party. She was stabbed five times in her right arm and hospitalized for five days. Her attacker was still at large. The proximity of that attack to the disappearance of Maryann Mitchell galvanized the police into action and they searched for Maryann through the early morning hours of December 29, 1959.

Thursday, August 4, 1960

34.

Officer Jackson returned early Thursday morning. He seemed down. Annette let him in the living room to get him out of earshot of the few neighbors who were hanging around outside. No media had shown up yet.

“I wanted to give you a full report, Mrs. Martini. We’ve done a lot of looking. A lot of officers have been involved. But, sadly, we’ve gotten nowhere. I’m afraid your daughter has completely disappeared.”

Annette shook her head. “That’s impossible. Where have you looked?”

“We went back to that overgrown lot behind the Acme and searched again. Then we fanned out to the stores on Germantown Avenue. We thought maybe she went into a store because it was so hot. Some of them have air conditioning. We talked to almost all of the store keepers and showed them her picture but no one remembered seeing her. Then we went to the movie theaters- the Orpheum, Band Box, New Lyric, and Wayne Avenue Playhouse, just to see if maybe she went inside or *tried* to go inside just to get cool. Oh, and we also talked to the shopkeepers on Wayne Avenue. We stopped at Happy Hollow, too.”

“She’s never been to any store except the Acme. Never been to the movies or Happy Hollow, either.”

“You never took her anywhere?”

“She didn’t like to go out,” Annette lied. The truth was, no one had ever taken Tina anywhere except to school. No one had even *asked* Tina if she would like to go anywhere. No one cared what she liked. What she wanted hadn’t been important.

“So, any other ideas?” Officer Jackson asked.

Annette thought for a moment. “She only went to school.”

“Yeah. I’m going there tomorrow so I can talk to the nuns.”

“Good.”

“I hope it will be.”

Neither mentioned what the futile search implied. That Tina hadn’t run away or wandered away. But, as Annette had been insisting, Tina had been abducted. The truth was, she could be anywhere in Philadelphia. Maybe she wasn’t even in Philadelphia anymore. Worse, maybe she wasn’t alive anymore.

Officer Jackson left.

Not long after he departed, a TV news van showed up. The neighbors clamored around the truck hoping to get a glimpse of who the station sent. Would it be a reporter they had seen on TV or just a photographer?

Allison Conway got out of the van. She was the perky, upbeat blonde who had covered the Elmo Smith crime months earlier. Allison paid no attention to the neighbors. “That the house?” she asked her cameraman after he got out. He nodded. “Okay. Let me know when you’re ready.” Then the sound man got out.

Hoping to somehow get on camera, the neighbors watched and waited.

The cameraman lifted his film camera. The soundman handed a microphone to Allison. She walked to the front steps. The Martini porch and front door were behind her. The door was open but no one stood in the screen door. Annette was in the kitchen and didn’t know what was going on outside on her front step.

Allison signaled to the cameraman and he pushed a button. Then he nodded. "This is Allison Conway at the scene of the Germantown tragedy that's been playing out since Monday when fourteen-year-old Christine Martini mysteriously vanished from this very front porch. Since then, police have been searching frantically but haven't turned up a single clue as to her whereabouts. Her family has been waiting for news that has yet to come. As of this morning, Tina is still missing. Cut."

The cameraman lowered his camera. "I'm going to knock on the door. Will this cord reach that far?" Allison asked. The soundman nodded. "Good. Let's see if we can get someone inside to talk to us."

She marched up the steps. At the same moment, Vicky was coming down the inside stairs. She was about to leave for work. Vicky noticed a woman coming up the front steps and hurried to the screen door. "Hello, Miss. I'm Allison Conway from Channel 6 News. Can I talk to you?"

"About what?" Vicky asked.

Allison ignored Vicky's question and signaled to the cameraman to start his camera again. She waited for a moment and then turned back to Vicky. "You're the older sister, right?"

Vicky nodded. "Yeah."

"How do you feel about your sister's disappearance?"

Vicky glared. "How do you *think* I feel, Allison?"

"Um, I don't know. Why don't you *tell* me and our viewers?"

"Like shit," Vicky replied.

Allison didn't react. "Um, could you phrase that in another way? This is TV."

"I feel awful. Tina's my baby sister. We sleep in the same room. I used to walk her to school. Now I can't even imagine what's happened to her."

"And what do you think *has* happened?" Allison asked as suggestively and menacingly as she could.

"Nobody knows," Vicky replied with a pained expression on her face. "The cops don't know. The neighbors don't know. It's like she's fallen off the face of the earth."

"Do you think she just wandered away?" Allison asked. "I understand she's handicapped."

Vicky nodded. "Yeah, she is, but she wouldn't just wander away."

"So, you think someone lured her or took her?" Allison asked.

"I don't know. But I wish whoever *does* know would contact the police and get my sister back home. Please. She's only a child. Have pity on her."

"What's your name?" Allison asked.

"Vicky."

Allison tried to sound sincere. "Well, Vicky, I hope your plea doesn't fall on deaf ears."

"Please get this on TV as soon as you can."

"Cut!" Allison yelled, startling Vicky. Without thanking Vicky, Allison turned and walked down the steps. She had gotten the dramatic footage she wanted. All she had to do now was a wrap-up and they could go back to their air-conditioned studio.

She stood at the bottom of the steps again and signaled for the cameraman to start shooting. "So, there you have it. A dramatic, heartfelt plea from Tina Martini's older sister. This is Allison Conway reporting from Germantown for Channel 6 News."

The film camera stopped running. The soundman took the microphone from Allison. She got in the truck while the camera and sound men packed their equipment in the back. Then, without looking at the house or the small crowd of neighbors, they drove away.

Vicky blinked. She had only been half awake when she came downstairs and would have likely remained on autopilot until she arrived at work. But now she was wide awake. *What just happened?* she thought. *Did I just help bring back my sister or make a fool of myself on TV?* Then Vicky remembered their TV was broken and assumed she would never see the report that had just been filmed.

Allison Conway's TV interview with Vicky aired at noon. Because of what Allison had done, the other TV stations sent their news teams. One arrived around the same time as Officer Jackson returned just after one pm.

He knocked at the screen door. Annette answered. She saw him and then looked out at a camera pointing at the door. A man carrying a microphone was coming up the steps. "Oh, shit," Annette said, under her breath. Officer Jackson heard her.

"Want me to tell him to get lost?" he asked. Annette nodded. Officer Jackson turned. "This is the site of an ongoing police investigation. Out of respect for this family, I'm asking you to leave them alone." The TV reporter paused. He hoped his mike had been on and the camera had been running. It had. *I got something, he thought. It's not much but maybe they can use it.* He remained at the bottom of the steps. Officer Jackson looked right at him. The reporter looked back. Officer Jackson glared.

"I'm just doing my job," the reporter mumbled.

"Leave them alone," Officer Jackson replied. The reporter backed off. He and his crew went back to the van but didn't drive away. *No colored cop is gonna order me around, he thought. I'll just wait around until he leaves.*

35.

Maggie had just finished the lunch dishes when she heard the doorbell. Tina was upstairs getting ready for her afternoon bath. Maggie was looking forward to some quiet time. She thought she ought to start with a prayer since she had so much to be thankful for.

She looked out the front window. A blue delivery van was parked out front. It said Cohen's Grocery on the side. Maggie hurried to the door and opened it. She saw a smiling young man holding a box. He had a handsome face, light hair, and an un-athletic but not unattractive build. Maggie noticed his strong arms.

"Maggie Fallon?" he said.

"Yup. That's me."

"Where do you want this?"

"In the kitchen."

He stepped through the door and Maggie led him toward the kitchen. "Nice house," he commented.

"Thanks. It was my mom's. She died back in April. I grew up here."

"Yeah, Mr. Cohen told me your mom had passed. Sorry to hear it. I bet you miss her."

"Well, yeah. But I didn't see her much in the past few years."

"Were you away?"

Maggie shook her head. "No, actually, I was nearby. I just couldn't leave when I wanted to."

"Were you very busy?"

“You could say that. I was a teacher at a Catholic School.”

The man smiled. “Really? I went to a Catholic school. I didn’t know they had lay teachers now.”

“I wasn’t a lay teacher. I used to be a nun.”

Her reply surprised him. “Really?” He looked at her and seemed to be taking in her figure. She was wearing shorts and a top and he couldn’t imagine a body like hers dressed in a nun’s habit. “You?”

Maggie grinned. He immediately liked her smile. “You seem to find that hard to believe.”

“Well, yeah. I mean, you’re real pretty. The nuns I had were ugly.”

Maggie grinned embarrassedly. “Um, thanks, I guess.”

He looked sheepish. “Sorry. I hope I won’t go to hell for saying that.”

She shook her head and smiled. “No. It’ll take a lot more than *that* to send you to hell.”

“So, I guess you live here all alone, now. With your mom gone, I mean.”

Maggie nodded. “That’s right. I’m studying to get my teacher’s certification so I can teach in the public schools.”

“Wow. That’s great.”

“I hope it will be,” Maggie replied.

Just then there was a noise upstairs. Tina had walked from her bedroom to the bathroom.

“I, um thought you said you lived alone.”

Maggie nodded. “That’s right. I think my cat must have knocked something over.”

“Oh. Your cat. Yeah.” He knew cats didn’t make footsteps that sounded human but had to let it go. “Well, my name is Rick. I’m the delivery guy. I guess I’ll be seeing you regularly.”

“I guess you will, Rick.” She reached into her pocket. “Here, I almost forgot.” Maggie handed him a dollar bill. “A little tip. I can’t promise to do it every time, but I’ll try.”

“It’s not little, Miss Fallon-.”

“Please call me Maggie.”

Rick put on his best smile. Not the one he used for most customers he delivered to. The one he used when he met pretty women. “Well, thanks, Miss Fallon. I appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome. I appreciate the quick delivery. Let me give you a check for Mrs. Cohen.”

“Yeah. Don’t want to forget that. She might fire me if I came back empty-handed.”

Maggie grinned. “C’mon, she’s not that bad, is she? I remember her from when I was a kid. She was always giving us kids candy when we came in to buy stuff for our moms.”

Rick smiled. “No, she’s great. I was only joking. You won’t tell her what I said, will you?”

Maggie shook her head. “Of course not. It’ll be our little secret.”

“Whew! Thanks, Maggie. Nice meeting you. I hope your cat’s okay.”

“I’m sure she is. ’Bye, Rick. See you soon.”

“I hope so,” Rick replied.

He drove away with a big smile on his face. *If all nuns were as hot as her I’d still be a Catholic*, he thought. He had delivered groceries to the old lady who lived in that house for several years and would never have imagined she had such an attractive daughter. Now he tried to imagine a way he could get closer to Maggie, maybe ask her out, or maybe get her to ask him in. *Maybe for lunch or dinner*, he thought. *Then maybe for more*. As he continued on his delivery rounds, he decided to call to see if she needed anything or possibly stop by with ‘free’ stuff. Maybe even some cat food.

36.

Rick was twenty-one years old. He was from Olney. Born in 1939, he had vague memories of a father who was among the first drafted in 1942 and who had never returned from the war. His mother had worked as a seamstress, bookkeeper, waitress, newsstand attendant, and a host of other odd jobs, none for very long. It wasn't that she was incompetent, it was that her employers hadn't believed she was as old as she said she was.

Even in her late 20s, Edna Allison had resembled a waifish teenager. People felt sorry for her and gave her jobs but then wondered if they would get in trouble for hiring someone underage and let her go. She got used to it and moved on without a fight. *I can't change how I look, she thought. If they can't deal with it it's not my problem.*

In 1947, she and her seven-year-old son were living in a room on Old York Road just north of Broad and Olney. Edna had no job and had taken to solicitation. She hung around Broad and Olney where people got on and off busses and the subway and hoped men would notice her and like what they saw. She knew she was likely to attract perverts but didn't care. Earning money to support her son was more important than who she chose to let screw her.

There were one or two other women that hung around in the same area but they stayed out of each other's way. Edna used to stand in the alley between the movie theater and the drug store and watch passing pedestrians and cars. Sometimes she would hike up her skirt a little. Other times she batted her eyes and hoped to attract someone's attention. Occasionally, she went up to a man and asked for a dime or a quarter. If the man gave her something, she offered him more. Most men turned her down. Some didn't. Edna always came home with enough money to keep her and her son going.

One day a car slowed as the driver was gawking at her. She hiked up her skirt and smiled. Then she spotted a police car across the street. So did the driver of the car that had been ogling her. He drove off quickly. Edna hoped the police car would, too, but it didn't. It made a U-turn and stopped where she was standing. She didn't try to run.

A cop got out and walked toward her. The closer he got the more surprised he became. While Edna looked young and slender from a distance, she looked almost child-like up close. The cop was concerned. "What are you doing out here?" he asked.

"Nothing, officer."

"Why are you hanging around?"

"I'm not."

"I think you are and I think I know why."

He reached into his back pocket and took out his wallet. He had just gotten paid and it was full. He pulled out a twenty. Edna saw it.

"Um, I don't usually get that much. I'll do whatever you want. Just don't arrest me, please, I have a son."

This kid has a kid? he thought. His heart softened. "Get in the car," he said. She thought that was where they were going to do it.

"Okay."

She walked to the car. He opened the front door. She got in. Then he got in. "Where do you live?" he asked. She thought he wanted to do it in a bed. But that would be a problem. The place where she was living didn't allow men visitors.

"Um, we can't go there. Men aren't allowed."

"I'm a cop. I can go anywhere I want to. Tell me the address."

“It’s just up Old York Road. I’ll point it out.”

He started the car and drove away from the alley.

Five minutes later, Edna pointed. “It’s that big house on the corner.” He stopped.

“Do you have any possessions?”

“Just my son’s and my clothes.”

“Go pack up. You two are coming with me.”

“Are we going to jail?”

He wouldn’t answer. “Make it quick. I’m on duty,”

Edna got out and went in the front door. The cop waited. Ten minutes later, she came out with a suitcase and what looked like a seven-year-old boy. His face lit up when he saw the cop car. The cop got out and walked around the car. He opened the back door. “Get in,” he said to the boy. Almost gleeful, he jumped in. The cop took the bag from Edna and put it on the floor behind the passenger seat. “You can jump in the front if that’s okay.”

“Sure. Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

Twenty minutes later, they stopped in front of a small apartment building in Roxborough. “What’s this?” Edna asked.

“Your new home,” the cop replied.

“Who lives here?”

“I do. It’s nice. You’ll like it.”

He reached for the suitcase and then escorted Edna and Rick through the entrance and up two flights of steps. The cop had a two-bedroom apartment on the top floor. Edna liked it immediately although she saw that it needed some straightening up. “This is nice,” she said. “How long have you been here?”

“We moved in right before the war,” the cop replied.

Edna frowned. “We?”

“My wife and I.”

“Your wife?”

“Well, ex-wife. I went away a married man but came back to find out I was single again. She was living here with another guy she met while I was in the war. I threw them out and kept the place.”

“My husband didn’t come home,” Edna said.

“I’m sorry... So, do you think you’ll like it here?”

“You’re asking us to move in with you?”

He nodded.

“We’ll sleep in the extra bedroom?”

He pointed at Rick. “That will be *his* room.”

Edna looked at him. “Are you sure about this?” He nodded. “Absolutely, positively sure?” He nodded again. “Okay, then. Rick, this is our new home. And...wait, I don’t know your name.”

“Gary Wallace.”

She smiled. “And I think Gary is your new dad.”

Rick had no recollection of his old father and was willing to accept what his mother told him. Besides, this guy was a cop. How cool was that?

"I have to get back to work. You guys stay here and get settled in. There's some food if you want it. I can get more later. But don't go out. I only have one key. I'll get another so you can have it."

And that was how Rick's 'parents' got together. They remained together until Edna died suddenly in 1957. Gary took her death hard, very hard. He didn't want Rick around to remind him of Edna. "You're eighteen," he told Rick, after the funeral. "You can take care of yourself. Get lost. I never want to see you again."

Luckily, teenage Rick was as handsome as his mother had been pretty. Girls had started noticing him when he was just fourteen and he'd been popular in high school. Rick was used to sneaking in and out of girl's bedrooms at night and was accustomed to using females to get whatever he wanted. He didn't think he'd have a problem finding someplace to sleep.

He also didn't think he'd have a problem finding a job. He went around to the little stores scattered throughout Roxborough seeking work. When he got to Cohen's grocery, it was Mrs. Cohen he spoke to first. She thought he was cute and decided he might be fun to have around. Mrs. Cohen told Mr. Cohen Rick would be good for business. There were lots of ladies in the neighborhood who would like a handsome delivery boy to visit them from time-to-time. He knew she was right, but also knew that their grocery business wasn't the only thing on Mrs. Cohen's mind. Mr. Cohen chuckled and hired Rick on the spot. For a couple of weeks, Rick slept in the storeroom and ate food from the grocery until he saved enough to get a room nearby.

37.

"Mrs. Martini," Officer Jackson said. "I need to talk to your boys. I've been putting it off but maybe they could help us in the search. Are they around?"

"Yeah. They're in the kitchen."

"Great. I want to interview them separately."

"I don't know....," Annette replied.

"What do you mean?"

"They might not want that."

Officer Jackson frowned. "Well, it's standard procedure so I at least have to try."

"Okay. Tony! Come in here."

"Why?"

"Officer Jackson needs to talk to you."

"Who's that?" Tony asked.

"The cop who's trying to find your sister," Annette replied.

"A cop? Do I have to?"

"Yes, you do. It's important."

"Can Ralphie come, too?" Tony asked.

"Not yet. It's your turn first."

Annette and Officer Jackson heard kitchen chairs scraping across the worn linoleum floor. A moment later, Tony walked in. Behind him, they saw Ralphie. Annette glared at her younger son. "Just you, Tony." Ralphie's face fell.

Tony stopped and looked at Officer Jackson. He had never seen a colored man up close and felt awkward. Officer Jackson smiled at Tony but the boy didn't feel any better. Ralphie lurked behind Tony as if he hoped Officer Jackson wouldn't see him.

"Not you, Ralphie. You'll get your turn."

"Awww, Mom," Ralphie moaned.

“Back to that kitchen. Finish your lunch.”

“I ate it all.”

“Then go outside and play in the yard.”

“Without Tony?” Ralphie asked.

“Yes. Without Tony. Just for a few minutes.”

Ralphie gave her instructions some thought and decided he wouldn’t follow them. He wanted to see what was going to happen with Officer Jackson and didn’t move. “Ralphie...,” Annette said. He still didn’t move.

“It’s okay,” Officer Jackson said. He smiled. “Boys, come on in here so we can talk.”

Tony walked in. Ralphie followed as close to Tony as he could. They stood side by side. Officer Jackson looked even taller close up than he had from across the room. They tried not to seem scared. Officer Jackson sensed what they were feeling. “You’re not in trouble. I need to ask you some questions. You could be a big help to me.”

“That’s right,” Annette said.

Officer Jackson turned to her. “It would be better if I talk to them alone.”

Annette stiffened. “Um, okay, I guess. This gonna take long?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I’ll go and clean up in the kitchen.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Martini.”

She walked away. The boys didn’t seem to notice. They were focused on Officer Jackson. He turned. Before he could say anything, Tony spoke.

“Are you a real cop?” he asked.

Officer Jackson nodded. “Yes, I am. Why do you ask?”

“I didn’t think colored people could be cops.”

Officer Jackson looked at Tony. They both knew what word Tony could have used instead of ‘colored’. Officer Jackson was grateful the boy had tempered his speech. It made him feel optimistic about the interview.

“Oh, yeah. There’s a few of us.”

“Um... could I be a cop?”

Officer Jackson nodded. “Sure. Someday. You gotta finish high school first.”

Tony frowned. “Yeah. That’s what I thought.”

“Do you have a gun?” Ralphie asked, meekly.

“Yes, I do.”

“Can we see it?”

Officer Jackson shook his head. “It’s locked in my car.”

“Oh,” Ralphie said.

“I’m not allowed to show it to anyone else for safety reasons,” Officer Jackson explained.

“Oh.”

“Boys, I want you to think about your sister.”

“Which one?” Tony asked.

“Tina.”

“Oh, *her*.”

“Yeah. She’s gone missing and we’re trying to find her. Do either of you have any idea where she could be?”

“She never went anywhere except school,” Tony said. Ralphie nodded.

“She never went to the movies or shopping or out with friends?” Officer Jackson asked.

Tony shook his head. "I don't think she had any friends and we don't see movies. Our TV is broke, too."

"Yeah," Ralphie said, dejectedly. "All our friends get to watch stuff we can't see."

"That's tough," Officer Jackson said. He was hoping to gain their trust, hoping they could think of something that would offer a lead or a clue. The boys might not think they knew much about their missing sister but they all lived in the same house and people pick up things without being aware of what they see.

"Let's play a little game," Officer Jackson said. The boys' faces brightened. "Close your eyes. Think of your sister. What do you remember about her? What did she say? What did she like to do? Did she play with you? Did she take you to the playground?"

All the boys could think about was how much of an embarrassment Tina had been. When their friends stopped by and she was on the porch or in the living room, the other boys wouldn't look at her. After they left the house, the other boys asked 'Who was *that*?' Tony and Ralphie would just mumble, 'Our sister,' but felt ashamed. But they couldn't admit how they felt to the cop.

"She was your older sister, right?" Officer Jackson asked. The boys nodded. "I bet you just tried to stay away from her, didn't you?" The boys nodded again. "Yeah. I also have a big sister and she drove me nuts when I was your age. But now she's my best friend." Tony and Ralphie understood how big sisters like Vicky or Tina could drive you nuts, but the idea that either one could become a best friend seemed ridiculous. Tony and Ralphie were best friends. They were all they needed. Not their *sisters*.

Officer Jackson sighed. "Thanks, boys. You've been a big help."

"We have?" Tony asked, surprised.

"Yeah."

"But we didn't tell you much."

"That's right. But I learned a lot."

"What is it?" Tony asked.

"I can't say. But thank you." Annette walked in. Officer Jackson assumed she had been listening from the next room. "And thank you, Mrs. Martini. I'll be back when I have some news."

"I hope it's soon," Annette said.

Officer Jackson sighed. "So do I, ma'am," he said. "So do I."

What he had learned from the boys confirmed what he had picked up from Tina's parents and older sister, that Tina was almost an outcast in her own home. Officer Jackson felt sorry for the girl. He almost understood why she had run away. If that was indeed what had happened. And he wondered, if she was found, would she even want to come back? *Come back to what?* he thought. *This sad place? These selfish people? Maybe she's better off where she is.* He hoped he was right and that she was safe somewhere and not in danger. But it was his job to find her and he would remain dedicated to that task until he knew what had happened to her.

38.

After another tense day of waiting, being questioned, and hearing nothing good from the police, Annette and Rocco were again in their bedroom hoping to unwind before they tried to fall asleep. Annette felt the need to talk. She didn't know if Rocco would listen but didn't care. Something needed to be said.

It was still hot. She was lying next to Rocco. The fan was turned up on high and oscillated back and forth blowing warm air over their bodies. The streetlight outside threw a dim light on the pair.

“The other night, what you said about Tina not being your child- that hurt my feelings. You have no idea what it was like those three years you were gone. And that *last* year when I never heard a single word from you. I thought you were dead and we were all alone in the world.”

Rocco grunted. “You had your mother. She was right nearby.”

“Yeah, but she wasn’t *you*. Then, after the war ended you *still* didn’t come home. I believed I was right and you were gone. If you knew how I cried! I had to be careful around Vicky. But when I was alone, all I could think of was you. Dead!”

“So, you’re saying Tina’s definitely my daughter?”

Annette didn’t know how to reply. She decided to say nothing.

Rocco grunted again. “Yeah. That’s what I thought. Who was he?”

Annette tried to make her voice sound as pained as possible. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

Rocco became alarmed. “Wait. Did somebody *rape* you?”

Annette saw her chance. “Uh, huh,” she said.

“Oh, my God. Why didn’t you *tell* me this, Annette?”

“I couldn’t. It was too awful.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Annette replied as meekly as she could. “I stopped thinking about it a long time ago.” *And maybe now he’ll stop thinking about it, too*, she thought.

But, after she turned on her side and tried to fall asleep, she started to remember.

In the summer of 1944, Annette found a part-time job working on the assembly line at the Asher’s Candy Factory on Germantown Avenue. The company was founded in 1892 in Center City, Philadelphia, and moved to Germantown in 1900. Three mornings a week, she walked to Germantown Avenue and rode the 53 trolley six blocks to work. Annette brought home enough extra money to feel she was able to adequately care for her daughter. Her mother, Rose, took care of Vicky when Annette was at work.

Annette went in on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Like the other women, she carried her lunch in a paper bag. When she got to work, she put her lunch and coat or jacket into a locker and put on a blue smock, a hairnet, and cotton gloves. Then she went to her position on the candy assembly line.

Many of the women were older than Annette was. A couple of them were younger. The war food rationing was taking its toll on the women and most looked gaunt and undernourished. A few were fat, likely not because they were somehow getting more food but because they had been heavy all their lives.

The only man was Ben Hedges, the supervisor. He kept candy production moving at a satisfactory pace. He also took advantage of his position to approach some of the women and offer them extra pay for extra ‘favors.’ Some of the women liked his attention. Others didn’t.

Annette’s memory faded and she fell asleep.

INTERLUDE 4

Two days after Maryanne Mitchell's disappearance, a Whitemarsh township highway department work crew found her body in a remote area of Lafayette Hills, a suburb of Philadelphia. Her head and face were covered with blood. She wore two rings. Her underpants were draped over her right arm and there was writing in red lipstick on her exposed abdomen.

Friday, August 5, 1960

39.

The girls at the Excelsior Salon were watching the sidewalk outside the front window. "Here she comes," Gretchen said. "Now, everybody, be cool. She's going through a lot right now. Let's give her all the support we can." The others nodded.

Vicky came in. She said hello and went to her chair. Then she got ready for her first appointment. Callie came over. "So, um, how are you doin', Vicky?"

"Okay, I guess."

"Saw you on TV."

"You did?" Vicky asked.

"Yeah. You were great."

"It was awful. That woman was a-." Vicky stopped herself. Mrs. Carlyle, the owner, was looking right at her. She didn't allow profanity in the salon. "It was hard."

"Well, we're hoping for the best," Callie said.

Vicky frowned. "I don't know," she replied.

"Don't say that. Things will work out okay. The cops will find your sister. I just know it."

"Thanks, Callie. I hope you're right. It's just so hard not knowing..."

Mrs. Carlyle clapped her hands. "Okay, girls. Time to open up. Big smiles, everyone. Remember why we're here," she said. It was her regular morning ritual. She unlocked the front door and then walked over to Vicky. "If you need time, you just let me know, okay" she whispered. "One of the other girls can take over."

"I'm here to work, Mrs. Carlyle."

"Okay. That's probably the best thing to take your mind off what's happening."

To convince her boss she was being sincere, Vicky nodded. "Yeah." Mrs. Carlyle walked away.

If any of the customers who came in had seen Vicky on TV they didn't recognize her in her hairdresser smock so no one said anything. Nor did anyone mention the story that was all over the news about the missing girl. But the other hairdressers thought about what was happening and wondered why Vicky had never mentioned a handicapped sister. They wanted to ask Vicky about Tina but the place was busy with customers and they didn't want to converse in front of them.

At lunchtime, Vicky went into the back to eat. Gretchen was already at the small table. She waited until Vicky sat down and opened her bag lunch. "You never told us about your sister. Must be awful having someone like that in your family. But I bet everyone loves her and takes care of her," Gretchen said. Vicky didn't reply. "So how much younger is she?"

"Almost four years. I was born just before the war. She was born after my father came home."

"Why was she retarded. Oops! I mean handicapped?"

"No idea. We didn't know at first. Took a few years. She just didn't develop normally. I mean she looks almost normal but her brain just didn't develop like yours or mine."

Gretchen frowned. "I hope I never have a kid like that."

Vicky nodded. "Yeah. It's hard on the family."

"What do you think happened to her?"

"No idea. She's never wandered away before."

"So you think somebody took her?"

Vicky shook her head. "She likely would have screamed if somebody just grabbed her. My mom was inside and would have heard something."

"So, it's a complete mystery?"

Vicky nodded. She appreciated Gretchen's concern but would rather not be discussing it. "Yeah. And it's tearing me up inside."

"Why?"

Vicky sighed. "Could I have done something to prevent this? Could I have protected her, taken care of her, loved her more?" *Or loved her at all*, Vicky thought but wouldn't confess aloud. "I just don't know."

"It must be hell."

Hoping to end the conversation, Vicky nodded, "It is. All we can do is wait." She took a bite of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich and chewed for as long as she could hoping that Gretchen would stop asking questions. It worked.

40.

Three cars were parked in front of the convent when Officer Jackson drove up. Nuns were milling around. A couple had suitcases and were carrying them up the steps to the convent door. He saw the Negro caretaker carrying two bags and hurried up to him.

"Can I help?" Officer Jackson asked.

"Oh, hello, officer. You're just in time. They just got back."

"Can I carry something?"

"Yeah. Grab a couple bags out the trunk."

Officer Jackson picked up two suitcases. They were heavy. He wondered what was in them. *They don't wear normal clothes*, he thought. *Just those habits. How much underwear do they need?* He didn't plan on asking.

He followed the caretaker into the convent foyer and sat the suitcases on the marble floor. Then he looked around. The interior had a subdued elegance he thought must be conducive to a religious lifestyle. There was dark wood, light grey paint on the walls, and high windows.

"What do you want?" a voice asked, sharply. Officer Jackson turned. A short round older-looking nun stood staring at him. She had an authoritative stance and he assumed she was the Mother Superior. "Well, Mother-."

"I'm not her. She's in her office. What do you want?"

"I'm here because a girl has disappeared. She used to go here and I'd like to talk to her teachers."

"Who is she?"

"Christine Martini."

The nun frowned. "Oh. *Her*. She disappeared?"

"Yes. On Monday morning. We've been searching all week."

"All week?"

"Yes, ma'-." He stopped himself.

She smiled. "I'm not a ma'am. Just a sister. Beatrice Joan."

"Could I please talk to the Mother Superior, sister?"

"You won't have to. I can get you what you need. Follow me."

Sister Beatrice Joan walked down the hall and opened a door under a sign that said Records. She went to a file cabinet and opened a drawer. "Let's see. Martini... Martini... yes.

Here she is." She pulled out a folder. Then she walked to a table and switched on a light. "Eight years. They're all here. Where do you want to start?"

"How about with her latest year? Then we can work backward."

"All right. That would be eighth grade- Sister Grace Immaculata. She's upstairs unpacking. I'll go get her."

"I'd appreciate that. Thank-you, sister."

Officer Jackson spoke to four of Tina's nuns. A fifth was unavailable. He asked when she would be back. "She's not coming back," Sister Beatrice Joan said, without emotion.

"Was she transferred?" he asked.

"She left the order. I think she was here on Monday to see Father Jenkins."

"What was her name?"

"Sister Margaret Mary. But her real name is Margaret Fallon. She lives in Roxborough, I think, but I'd have to check that to be sure."

"Could you get me her address?"

"Sure. Wait here."

Officer Jackson left the convent feeling a genuine respect for people who could give their lives to serve something greater than themselves. He didn't realize that was exactly what he was doing with his life because there was one big difference. He could have sex and they couldn't. Of course, he might not be having actual sex anytime soon, but Officer Jackson was okay with waiting. He had a job to do. It wasn't the education of children. It was finding a child. He prayed the outcome would be a happy one.

41.

In the twenty-four hours after Rick met Maggie, he hadn't been able to stop thinking of her. It wasn't just that she was attractive. She did have a nice little body that he thought was ripe for sex. She also had a house and a car and likely would land a good job when she became a teacher. Rick saw her as his ticket to an easy life.

He didn't want to be a grocery deliveryman forever. He didn't want to work at all if he could avoid it. With a girlfriend or wife like Maggie, he might not have to. She could be the breadwinner and he could stay home and goof around all day. Maybe he would fix up that car of hers and make it into a hot rod. Or, fix up that house. It looked like it hadn't been redecorated in decades. Rick could pretend he was doing something to contribute to the relationship even if his contribution wasn't in the form of money. And, he felt certain, Maggie would love him for it.

But, first, Rick had to get Maggie to *like* him. He thought that might be easy. He guessed that she was at least eight years older than he was and, because she had been a nun, likely had little or no sexual experience. Luckily, Rick had enough for both of them. If he could get her in bed, convincing her they were made for each other should be easy. Rick was certain a woman lucky enough to have great sex would do anything for her lover. He didn't know the word gigolo but that was what he was aiming for.

While he was delivering grocery orders on Friday, Rick drove by Maggie's house a few times to see if he could spot her. Maybe she would be getting her mail, picking up the newspaper, or getting out of her car (or *into* her car to go somewhere; Rick wasn't fussy.) He'd stop in the middle of the street, honk the horn, and wave. Then when she recognized him he'd give her the biggest, sexiest smile he could. Rick felt certain she would wave back. She might even walk over to the van and say hello. He would ask how her day was going and offer to get her something from the store. She would say, "Oh, please don't go to any trouble." And he

would say. "It's no trouble. I'll stop by later." And then 'later' would grow from 'stop by' to 'come on in' to 'I'm just making dinner, you hungry?' to 'I was just heading to bed, wanna join me?'

Rick had it all worked out.

All he had to do was to get the ball rolling.

42.

Maggie and Tina settled quickly into a pleasant daily routine. They ate breakfast and did light chores around the house. (Maggie was impressed by the things Tina knew how to do.) Then they ate lunch. Tina lounged in the bathtub during the hottest part of the afternoon while Maggie read or studied. Then she made dinner. Tina helped. She liked setting the table. Arranging the utensils and plates just right seemed to fascinate her. Maggie hadn't let her near the stove yet but was considering allowing Tina to help with simple cooking. Maybe spaghetti, soup, hamburgers, or hot dogs. They had all the time in the world.

Tina's favorite meal was dinner because of the treat Maggie gave her for dessert. Cherry Popsicles. She had never eaten one at home. Her mother had refused to buy them because she insisted they were a waste of money. Luckily, Maggie could afford them, and the joy she received when she watched Tina eat one enchanted her. For the most part, she'd had a happy childhood. But, the pleasure Tina seemed to get from simply eating a cherry Popsicle was beyond anything she ever recalled experiencing. Maggie felt even more grateful that Tina had come into her life. She was getting to enjoy adolescence all over again and (good as it was the first time) was certain it would be far better this time.

Just after it got dark, a strong storm came up. Maggie watched Tina as they heard the first rumbles of faraway thunder. She knew some normal kids were terrified of thunderstorms and wondered if handicapped kids were the same or worse. Luckily, Tina wasn't disturbed. She stayed close to Maggie while the storm was at its height and refused to consider going to bed until it was over.

They sat in the living room and enjoyed the pleasant cool breezes that wafted in through the front window. Tina grinned when lightning flashed and then steeled herself and held her breath while she waited for the thunderclap. When it came, she let out a sigh. Maggie noticed and started doing it with her. They made it into a game and played it until the storm was over.

It was the first cool night that week. Maggie made sure Tina had a sheet and a light blanket if she needed it. Tina got ready for bed and climbed in. Maggie was still wide awake. The ozone from the lightning had sharpened her senses. "Um, would you like me to read you a story?" Maggie asked. Tina looked puzzled. "Didn't your parents read to you?" Tina shook her head. "Well, I'd love to do that. Interested?" Tina nodded enthusiastically.

Maggie went to the bookshelf. She rummaged around and found an old Golden Book. It was *The Poky Little Puppy* and she remembered it immediately. Although it was published when she was ten years old and too old for the book, she'd fallen in love with the story the first time she read it. Maggie had had a puppy when she was little but the dog ran away and she hadn't wanted another. But she had read and reread the book. The cover was worn and some of the pages were crinkled. Maybe back then she had wanted to pretend the real world wasn't important and she preferred retreating into a pretend world where things were always the same and bad things never happened. Maybe that was why she'd become a nun. Because the real world was scary and the convent was safe. Maybe God would protect her. Maybe God was allowing her to protect Tina now.

"Five little puppies dug a hole in the fence and went for a walk in the wide, wide world," Maggie read. Tina's eyes widened. A few days ago, she'd gone for a walk in the wide world and something wonderful happened. And it was still happening.

"Through the meadow they went, down the road, over the bridge, across the green grass, and up the hill one after the other," Maggie went on.

Tina listened raptly. After she fell asleep, she dreamed of puppies. She was one of them. They went up over the hill, one after the other. Tina belonged. For the first time in her life, she knew what happiness was.

43.

The sun had gone down but it was still hot. Vicky was hearing thunder. *Maybe things will cool off a bit*, she thought. *It would be nice to sleep without sweating.*

She looked out of the window and saw lightning flashing in the distance. Vicky had liked thunderstorms when she was little. She found the loud booms and bright flashes exciting. Later, when she learned what caused the booms and flashes, thunderstorms lost some of their excitement. Vicky was hoping for something exciting to take her mind off of what was happening.

She looked at her sister's empty bed. *Is she sleeping in a bed tonight?* Vicky thought. *Or did something awful happen to her? Could she be lying in a ditch, like that poor girl Elmo Smith murdered? Why can't the police find her? That Officer Jackson seems to be trying but he might be the only cop who is. Maybe a missing retarded girl isn't important to the police. Or anyone else.*

Vicky hoped she was wrong and finding Tina was important.

What a screwed-up world this is, she thought. *A world that thinks handicapped people are inferior to normal people. Yet who or what is normal? Everything and everyone is messed up. I'm messed up, only I never knew it.* Vicky was feeling guilty for ignoring Tina all those years. She had never felt her presence until it was gone. *And now it may be too late*, she thought.

What if Tina was gone forever? What if Vicky never got to say she was sorry? She felt Tina's absence and acutely felt her inadequacy. Although she was only eighteen, Vicky felt her life slipping away. *Do I want to spend my life doing old ladies' hairdos?* she thought. Then she wondered if she had any choice. *Maybe it's too late. Maybe I'm already stuck. Maybe that's all adulthood is. Just getting stuck and never changing. And then you die.*

As Vicky tried to fall asleep, she wondered if she wanted to wake up again. *To what?* she thought, sleepily. She didn't know if there was a good answer.

INTERLUDE 5

On Wednesday afternoon, December 30, 1959, Maryann Mitchell's body was removed to a funeral home in Conshohocken. Philadelphia police took the rings and some other personal items to the Mitchell house where her father Edwin identified them. Then they took him to the funeral home where he identified her body.

Saturday, August 6, 1960

44.

In the few days she had been with Maggie, Tina had found she looked forward to playing in the bathtub during the hot August afternoons. As soon as they finished lunch, Maggie helped Tina run the water and get in the tub. Then Maggie left Tina to play by herself. She had found a box of Maggie's old bath toys- a few small boats, a duck, and a painted rubber mermaid- in the closet in Maggie's room. The toys brought back pleasant memories for Maggie and she was pleased Tina liked them and wanted to play with them.

Maggie went downstairs to clean up after lunch. Just as she was moving the sandwich plates to the sink, she heard a knock at the front door. She went to the living room and looked out of the window. There was a red police car parked at the curb. Maggie immediately panicked. *Could they have found me already? she thought. How? Well, I'm not giving Tina up. I'll do whatever I have to do to keep her.*

She reminded herself of how to react when confronted with something unexpected. Maggie took several slow, deep breaths. Having been a nun, she knew how to appear calm even when she wasn't. (Having to adhere to that kind of discipline and deny her real feelings was one of the reasons she had left the convent.)

Maggie went to the door. She forced herself to smile before she opened it. A tall, friendly-looking Negro police officer stood there. "Afternoon, miss," he said. "I'm Officer Jackson. Do you have a moment?"

"What's this about?" she asked, calmly.

"We're investigating the disappearance of a girl."

"Really?" Maggie asked. She hoped her expression of surprise was believable.

He nodded. "Yeah. Happened on Monday. She's been missing all week."

"I had no idea."

"It's been in all the papers and on TV and radio," Officer Jackson replied.

"Oh, I don't get the papers and I hardly ever watch TV or listen to the radio." Maggie thought of a quick lie. "I'm kinda busy studying."

"Oh? What for?"

"I'm taking some exams to get certified to teach in the public schools."

He smiled. "Good for you. Actually, that's kinda why I came to see you," Officer Jackson said. Maggie had a puzzled expression on her face. "Do you mind if I come in for a moment?"

"I guess so." He stepped into Maggie's living room. She was hoping to get rid of him quickly and didn't close the door. "How can I help?"

"The missing girl was a pupil of yours three years ago."

"Really? Who is she?"

"Christine Martini."

Maggie nodded. "Oh... Christine. Yeah, I remember her. Real nice kid. Very well behaved."

"That's not what the other teachers said. They said she was hard to handle and acted out a lot."

"No. As I recall, she was very good in my class. She's handicapped, right?" Maggie asked. Officer Jackson nodded. "She didn't learn much but she tried and that was all I asked. I

promoted her to sixth grade because I didn't see any benefit in keeping her back. Repeating fifth grade wouldn't have made any difference."

"And you're *sure* she behaved herself?" Officer Jackson asked.

"Yeah. She never gave me any trouble."

"Why do you think your experience with her was so different from the other teachers?"

"Well, officer, I observed how the other kids teased her or tried to bait or annoy her. I stopped that as soon as I saw them doing it and kept a close eye on her from then on. Maybe she felt secure in my class because she knew I was looking out for her."

"That's interesting. Maybe she did. You haven't seen her since then?"

Maggie pretended to be thinking and delayed answering. Officer Jackson waited.

"Well, I guess I would have seen her in the schoolyard a few times," Maggie replied. She was careful not to lie and say she hadn't seen Tina at all. Officer Jackson nodded. He wrote something down on a little notepad. "You say she's missing?" Maggie said.

"That's right. She just vanished from her front porch Monday morning. Her mom went inside to answer the phone. When she came out ten minutes later, the girl was gone."

Maggie frowned. "That's so sad. Any clues as to what happened to her?"

"Not a one. Her mother claims she was abducted but we're not sure what happened to her. We're interviewing people who knew her. That's why I came to see you. We're hoping somebody will remember something about her that can give us a lead."

Maggie sighed. "I wish I could be more help."

"You *have* been helpful. Thanks. I appreciate your time."

"No problem, Officer. Children are precious. Every one of them is special in God's eyes. I hope she's okay. Good luck. I'll say a prayer for the family."

She eyed the front door as if she was expecting him to leave but he didn't move.

"Oh, that reminds me. At the convent, they told me you had just resigned from the order."

Maggie tried not to show any alarm. She nodded. "That's right, I did."

"If you don't mind my asking... why?"

Maggie shrugged. "I don't mind. It's because of the school."

"Was something wrong with it?" Officer Jackson asked.

"In a way- yeah."

"What was it?"

"I was frustrated. Kids don't need to learn as much about religion as they do about reading, math, science, and history. The world is changing and the schools aren't changing to give the kids what they need to live successful adult lives."

"But religion is important. It provides a moral foundation," he commented.

"Yeah, it does. But there was too much emphasis on religion and not enough on education."

Officer Jackson nodded. "Oh, I see. And that's why you want to teach in the *public* schools?"

"Yeah. I feel I can do more good there."

"I'm glad we have people like you who care about our kids."

"Do you have any kids?" Maggie asked.

"No, miss. I'm not even married."

"Handsome guy like you? Oh, sorry. Can I say something like that to a cop?"

Officer Jackson smiled. "It's okay, miss. I appreciate the compliment. And I thank you for giving me so much of your time."

“Well, thanks for doing your job, officer. I hope that girl’s okay.”

“So do I, miss. So do I.”

Maggie couldn’t help but notice the concern in his voice. She had the impression that Officer Jackson no longer thought Tina was okay. Fortunately, Maggie knew the truth. Tina was *more* than okay. She was upstairs lounging in the bathwater. Maybe, for the first time in her young life, Tina was happy.

“Bye, Miss Fallon,” he said. Then he left. Maggie watched as he walked to his car, got in, and drove away. Then she breathed a sigh of relief and closed the door.

There was something else about Tina that Maggie hadn’t mentioned. It was the way she saw Tina. Most people looked down on the girl. They saw her as handicapped, retarded, and inferior. It saddened Maggie that others only saw Tina’s imperfections. To her, Tina was not just a precious child, but one of God’s *most* perfect children. Maggie felt certain God saw her as perfect because He had made her the way she was. And she felt she was sent by God to take care of the girl.

While Officer Jackson was interviewing Maggie, Rick happened to drive by. He saw the red police car parked in front of Maggie’s house and wondered what was going on. He thought it unlikely that she was trouble. *Maybe the cop is a friend of hers*, he thought.

It was a Saturday. He was busy with deliveries and didn’t have time to wait to see how long the cop was there. As he drove away, he wondered if maybe the cop wasn’t an *old* friend but a *boyfriend*. *She told me she was a nun until recently*, he thought. *Could she have found a boyfriend so soon after leaving the convent?* Maybe she was making up for lost time.

Whatever the reason, Rick thought he had competition and decided he needed to move more quickly to get closer to Maggie. *I’ll stop by tomorrow on my day off*, he thought. *Maybe I’ll bring flowers or candy. I’ll say I’ve been thinking about her and invite her to go to the movies with me.*

Rick had no idea what movies were playing that weekend. After he got back to the grocery store, he grabbed a Saturday newspaper. He ignored the front page story about the missing handicapped girl and turned to the movie listings. His eyes were drawn to an ad for *Little Shop of Horrors*. *That looks interesting*, Rick thought. *But girls don’t like horror movies*. Then he noticed another ad. *Oh, here’s one she’s sure to like. G.I. Blues. It’s got Elvis in it. Girls love Elvis, right? Maybe even ex-nuns do.*

Before he quit for the day, Rick pilfered a box of Whitman’s chocolates. Then he went home to plot his Sunday visit to Maggie’s house. *I might only get one chance*, he thought. *I gotta get this right.*

45.

Vicky was grateful for a busy Saturday at work. Two of the other stylists had the day off so they could go down the shore for the weekend with their boyfriends. Vicky and the others were happy to spend the stifling hot day in the air-conditioned salon.

Gretchen was working on Mrs. Miller. She was a regular customer who came in on the first Saturday of the month whether she needed to or not. Mostly, it was to get touch-ups. She liked to linger in the chair and chat. The hairdressers assumed Mrs. Miller had to get out of her apartment for some reason and joked that it was to get away from her husband. But they had no clue what the reason for her wanting to get away from him might be.

As soon as Gretchen started working on her, Mrs. Miller started chatting. “You reading about that retarded kid from Germantown that’s gone missing?” she asked.

Gretchen froze and looked at Vicky. "Yeah. I heard about it. It's really sad."

"Everybody seems to think somebody like Elmo Smith took her. But I don't think that's likely."

"You don't?" Gretchen asked, still looking at Vicky.

"Nope. I think she just ran away. Retarded kids have it hard. Their families don't like them. Their teachers don't like them. They don't have many friends. *If* they have any at all. I think that kid just wanted to go in search of a better life. And I sincerely hope she found it."

Vicky had been about to cut Mrs. Morris's hair but paused when her hand started shaking. Mrs. Morris didn't notice but her boss Mrs. Carlyle was watching and she noticed. "Vicky?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Carlyle?"

"Could you come over here a moment? I need to ask you a question. If Mrs. Morris doesn't mind."

"Of course not," Mrs. Morris said. "Take your time. It's nice to sit here in this air-conditioning."

Vicky walked over. "You okay?" Mrs. Carlyle whispered.

"I think so, ma'am."

"Did she upset you?"

Vicky shook her head. "No, ma'am."

"You're not gonna say anything, are you?"

"Of course not."

"Okay. If she says anything else, I'll step in and change the subject. Okay?"

Vicky nodded. "Thank you, ma'am."

Mrs. Carlyle smiled. "You're welcome. Now get back to Mrs. Morris."

Gretchen knew why Mrs. Carlyle had asked Vicky to come over. When Vicky came back to her chair, Gretchen spoke to Mrs. Miller. "Think this heat wave will ever break?" she said.

"It's August in Philadelphia. I'm way older than you, honey, and I've seen a few summers like this one. It'll break. But not soon. Might be another week or more. We might get a thunderstorm or two, but they won't do much. That's just how it is."

"Yeah. I wish I was down the shore right now," Gretchen said.

"Watch want you say, dearie. Your boss might hear you."

"I bet she wishes *she* was, too," Gretchen replied. Mrs. Carlyle heard her. So did the others. Everyone smiled except Vicky.

She wouldn't rather be down the shore. If she could have had anything she wanted, this wouldn't be the first Saturday in August but the last Saturday in July. And her sister Tina would still be safe at home.

46.

Normally, Rocco liked being at home on the weekends. When it was hot, he would go down to the basement with a chair and a portable radio so he could listen to the Phillies games. He was glad he didn't have to drive his truck and make deliveries on Saturdays. Some of the other men did. Their stores were so busy that they ran out of Bond Bread products rapidly and their inventories had to be replenished frequently. Rocco's delivery route was quieter and his stores got deliveries once or maybe twice a week. And he got the weekends off.

But today he would have preferred not to be at home. He would even been willing to go to work if that was the only way to get away from the house. If he had a car, he would have

driven off and found a cool spot under the trees somewhere along the Wissahickon Creek and maybe napped or hung out by himself and pretended he wasn't who he was and didn't live the life he lived. And didn't have the family or problems that he had.

It wasn't just his missing handicapped daughter that bothered him. Rocco had an unconscious and therefore unacknowledged sense that his life should have been other than it was. Before the war, Rocco had been happy. He'd liked who he was, the woman he was married to, and the daughter they had. Then he was sent off to the war. The Rocco that left before the war wasn't the same one that came back after the war and nothing had ever been right since. This latest crisis with Tina was only one in what seemed a long line of problems that had plagued him.

Rocco wanted his youth back. He wanted to be the slender, rakishly handsome man who had charmed Annette, the shy, pretty girl he had pinned his dreams on. He wanted the life they had dreamed of having together. They hadn't necessarily wanted a house with a white picket fence and roses growing by the door, but they had hoped for a life free of problems. When they met, the Great Depression was ebbing and things were getting better. People were starting to look ahead to the future and saw hope instead of continuing despair.

Then the war came. It brought with it a new and different kind of despair. The struggle to survive didn't get easier, it got harder. Instead of just worrying where his next few dollars would come from, Rocco worried if the next bullets would hit him and he would die thousands of miles from Annette and his daughter without ever seeing them again.

Even when the war ended, the worry hadn't stopped. Once a person is in a situation like war, they can't go back to peacetime. Peace is no longer real. Only struggle is. And that's what Rocco's life after the war had been. Fifteen long years of struggle. His only happiness came in short bursts when he unloaded his truck and walked cheerfully into a store. Then the world was as it had been before the war. It was pure and simple. People were happy to buy the food he sold. He was happy to put it on the shelves. Happiness seemed to be everywhere.

But then, at the end of each day, he had to come back to a home that happiness no longer touched. His wife didn't make him happy. His daughters didn't make him happy. His sons occasionally did but it was fleeting.

Rocco found himself envying Tina. He wanted to believe she was someplace better. But even if she had been taken someplace worse and bad things had been done to her and she was now dead... maybe she was *still* better off. Just because her ordeal was over.

What had been the point of coming home? The war hadn't made him grow up, it had made him grow weary. He would never have admitted it aloud, but Rocco almost wished he hadn't returned. *Maybe I shoulda died in one of those firefights*, he thought. *Maybe instead of the GI next to me getting hit, the bullet should have found me. Maybe he deserved to live more than I did and his getting it was a mistake.*

That was what Rocco felt his life was like: a cruel mistake.

47.

While her husband was brooding in the basement, Annette was sitting on the back step in the shade trying to make sense of what had been happening for almost a week. She was not used to being the center of attention. Nor was she used to people- especially cops- coming and going. She didn't like that TV, radio, and newspaper reporters had loitered in front of her house. Annette wanted to go back to being someone people never noticed, never even thought of. She had liked being invisible.

She had never thought of her daughter Tina as someone extraordinary yet Tina had done something out of the ordinary and her family was suffering for it. *Surely there must be other missing kids in Philly*, she thought. *Why is everybody so concerned about my kid?*

Annette knew why. It wasn't because of Tina. It was because of that evil guy from eight months ago. Until this week, she had forgotten his name. Now, she wished she had never heard it. Ever.

Elmo Smith, she thought. *It even sounds evil. Who names their son Elmo? Why not a normal name like Tony or Ralphie? His parents must have been weird. And that made him weird. And then he killed that poor innocent girl. She had to suffer for what his stupid parents did. People are so selfish!*

If Annette still had any tears left in her she would have cried. But she'd exhausted her tear supply long ago. Over the years, there had been so many disappointments, so many hurts, large and small, so many times she'd cried because that was all she could do, that now crying was no longer an option.

Annette realized she was out of options. She may have had options once but those days were far behind her. Maybe she had options when she was a teenager. Maybe when she met Rocco. Maybe when they first started getting serious. Maybe when Vicky came along. *We could have stopped at one*, Annette thought. *But we didn't*.

Annette didn't know it but she felt trapped in a life that- given a choice- she would never have selected. *Rocky and I just wanted to be together*, she thought. *We just wanted to be happy. We loved each other back then. What happened to us? We hate each other now. Life is crazy.*

Then Annette did something she hadn't done for at least a decade. She began to fantasize about what her life could have been like if Rocco hadn't come home from the war, if (as that Army letter had said) he had truly been killed in action.

She recalled the first time Ben Hedges had kissed her. He had meant it to seem like a friendly, affectionate kiss that didn't mean anything but it had made her feel something she had missed without realizing it. When Ben kissed her, she'd thought of Rocky. Rocky's kisses had led to much more and Annette missed what they led to. Then she missed Rocky. She wondered if she would ever see him again, if he would ever touch her again, if she would feel him inside her again. If not, then who would take his place? Ben Hedges? Maybe.

Then, the same day the war ended, the day that letter from the Army came, the day she found out she was a war widow, Ben Hedges took Rocky's place. Annette had never been able to recall what it had felt like the first time Ben made love to her. All she remembered, while Ben was fucking her, was thinking about Rocky being dead.

During those few weeks before Rocky came home, she and Ben slept together a few more times and she did recall those. Ben made it clear that he wanted to be with her. He offered her a new life and she felt willing to consider what he was offering.

Would Tina still have been retarded if Annette had married Ben? Maybe the mixture of Ben's sperm and Rocky's sperm was the cause of Tina's retardation. Maybe Annette's promiscuity caused Tina's suffering. *That poor girl never hurt anyone*, Annette thought. *She never really even bothered anyone. Yet everyone treated her as if she was a bother. We were so cruel to her. Now she's gone. God knows what's happened to her.*

Annette wasn't sure she wanted to know. Maybe it was better for everyone that Tina had vanished. Even Tina.

INTERLUDE 6

The coroner's autopsy on Wednesday, December 30, 1958, estimated that Maryann Mitchell had been dead for about twelve hours when the road crew found her. It was the blow to her head that had killed her. While police continued to search the area looking for items that were missing, her body was transported to a funeral home in Manayunk.

Sunday, August 7, 1960

48.

Both newspapers had sensational headlines about the missing handicapped girl. The Bulletin headline read: **Police Baffled by Handicapped Teen's Abduction**. The Inquirer headline read: **Is Tina Martini Alive?**

Long stories detailed the events of the past week. There were numerous comments from family members, friends, neighbors, police, and others. Most of the comments were made up by reporters or editors. The publishers had decided to inflate Tina's story and use it to scare people into buying newspapers. The papers invoked Elmo Smith and ran sidebar accounts of his abduction, rape, and murder of Maryann Mitchell the previous year. No one could avoid concluding that another grisly drama was playing out and what the likely outcome might be.

Editorials criticized the police and demanded direct intervention by the mayor. A massive city-wide search was called for. All concerned citizens were warned to be vigilant. They were also reminded that their daughters could be at risk. No family was secure.

49.

Fortunately, Maggie didn't subscribe to the newspapers. Nor did she listen to the radio or watch TV. Her Sundays were given over to God. Since she left the convent, she had established a Sunday routine of contemplation, prayer, and attendance at mass. She couldn't go to church today but could spend time in contemplation and prayer and hoped she could get Tina to join her.

"Normally, I go to mass on Sundays," Maggie told Tina while they were eating breakfast. "But I decided not to go out today because it's too hot." Maggie didn't like lying but hoped God would forgive her this once. She was staying home to protect the wonderful child He had entrusted to her care.

"But I would like to spend some time praying. I can wait until this afternoon when you're in the bathtub. Or I can do it this morning and you can join me. Would you like that?"

Tina knew what mass was but wasn't sure what praying was. She looked at Maggie as if she didn't understand. Maggie decided to explain.

"I get on my knees. I close my eyes. Then I think about God. About how much I love Him. And how much he loves me. He's given me this gift of life. He made me. He made the world. I like to thank Him whenever I can."

Tina continued eating. Maggie wasn't sure she heard or understood what she was saying.

"Did you say prayers before you went to bed at home?" Maggie asked. Then she realized she hadn't repeated her prayers at Tina's bedtime. She made a mental note to try doing it again.

Tina shook her head.

"Did your sister or your brothers pray?"

Tina shrugged.

They all went to Catholic school, Maggie thought. Didn't they learn anything? What kind of parents do they have? What was the point of sending them to Catholic school if it wasn't for religious education? I told that cop I thought it was too much. But maybe I was wrong. Maybe it was too little.

"Um, well, why don't we try it after breakfast?"

"Okay," Tina replied. But she had her doubts.

I don't know what I would say to God, she thought. Or if God would even listen to me. He never has before. I prayed for the other kids to leave me alone but they didn't. I prayed for a

mom and dad who would like me, but they never seemed to. I prayed for an older sister who would be my friend but she never was. I prayed for other girls to be my friends, but no one ever wanted to. Until now, anyway. Maybe God has answered at least one of my prayers and sent me Maggie. So, I guess I ought to thank Him.

But I hope He understands that I'm not good at putting things into words. I don't want to mess up my prayers. Maggie might be mad at me if I do. Or God might be mad. I've had people mad at me all my life until now. I guess I should just give praying a try and see what happens. Maybe I'll get it right. It's worth a try, anyway.

50.

On Saturday night, Rocco had some trouble falling asleep. It wasn't because of the August heat. He kept wondering if there was something more he could be doing to help find Tina. *I can't leave this up to the cops*, he thought. *For all I know, they're not doing a damn thing. That Officer Jackson might be lying. They might already know what's happened to her and they're not ready to admit they failed.*

He finally fell asleep. When he awoke early Sunday, he had an unusual urge. He got up and dressed in long pants and a short-sleeve shirt. "Do you have to work today?" Annette asked.

"No. Why?"

"You're getting all dressed up. Are you going somewhere?"

"Yeah."

"Where to?" Annette asked.

"Church."

"Church?"

"That's right," Rocco replied, gruffly.

"Why?"

"I'm just going. Is that all right with you?"

"Yeah. Do you want me to go, too?"

"I don't care," Rocco answered.

"Okay." Annette turned over and closed her eyes.

Rocco finished dressing and went downstairs. Vicky was already up. She was in the kitchen. Rocco saw a box of corn flakes and a bottle of milk on the table. He also saw the Sunday paper. "Where'd that come from?" he asked.

"Mrs. Harris brought it over. She thought we would want to see it."

"God, won't these people leave us alone?"

"Why are you dressed up?" Vicky asked.

"Goin' to mass."

"Really?"

"Yeah. That okay with you?" he asked, still gruff.

"Uh, sure. Mind if I come along?"

"Nope. Get a dress on."

"I will. Gimme a minute."

Twenty minutes later, the father and daughter arrived at the Saint Francis of Assisi church. Large noisy fans on stands blew air but didn't do much to mitigate the August heat. Rocco hoped the mass would be short and wondered if he should have given in his impulse to be there. "Let's sit in the back in case we want to leave early," Rocco said. They slipped into a pew by the door and waited.

Rocco couldn't recall the last time he'd been inside the church. It might have been for Ralphie's first communion, whenever that was. He had never felt comfortable in churches but didn't know why. When he was a kid his parents had made him go. He usually tried to ignore what was going on in the mass and pretended he was somewhere else. Sometimes it had worked. Other times it hadn't, and Rocco had to endure incomprehensibly boring activities that had no value or meaning. When mass was over he always felt relieved.

He wondered if he would pay attention today. Then he recalled that most of the mass was spoken in Latin and he wouldn't understand it anyway. Rocco started to regret coming. If he'd been there alone, he likely would have walked out before the mass started. Maybe he would have taken a walk instead of going right home. But Vicky was with him and he didn't want to look like an idiot for showing up and then leaving early.

Then the priest came out and it began.

The mumbo-jumbo went on for a while. Rocco sat, knelt, or stood along with the others in the mostly empty church. Around the middle of the mass, the priest went up onto a podium. "Pax vobiscum," he said. "Welcome on this hot day. I promise to keep this short."

"God, I hope so," Rocco muttered. Vicky grinned.

"As many of you know, this week brought sad news about one of the former students in our school. Her name is Christine Martini. She just graduated in June. She's gone missing. Our parish is devastated and we've all been praying for her safe return. Every one of our children is precious. Remember what Jesus said in the gospels. 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.' I ask that you keep Christine and all of the children in your prayers."

It wouldn't have occurred to Rocco to think about *why* he awoke with the urge to attend mass. That kind of thinking was not something Rocco ever did. For him, in his conscious mind, life was not an abstract concept. Events were events. Urges were urges. Actions were actions. Rocco's daily existence was more like that of a dog or cat than some humans. He had never reflected on the abstraction called 'life.' None of what happened day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month, or year-to-year added up to anything. Certainly not to a thing called 'Rocco.'

He hadn't always been that way. But combat had taught Rocco that life was cheap. It could be taken in a flash, leaving only fading and painful memories. Nothing was under his or anyone's control or made any sense. It was all random. So why think about it?

Vicky was young enough to still be trying to understand life. Did it have meaning? If so, what was it? And where did *her* life fit in? She wouldn't have dreamed of asking her father any of these questions. They walked home in silence and didn't talk about the priest's mention of Tina to Annette, who didn't ask.

51.

After breakfast, Tina played in her room while Maggie puttered around the house. Near eleven, Maggie went upstairs. "I would like to pray now. Would you like to join me?" she asked. Tina nodded. She put down a piece of dollhouse furniture and stood up. "Come into my room," Maggie said.

Maggie's room was completely different than Tina's. The bed was larger. It had a metal headboard and footboard. The white sheets were neatly tucked under the mattress corners. Two pillows were stacked at the head of the bed. A crucifix hung on the wall over the headboard.

A dark wooden bureau stood against one wall. There were some pictures on top but Tina couldn't see them from where she stood. A corner closet was on the wall next to the front

windows. A mirror was attached to another wall. There was a worn rug on the floor. The wallpaper had small flowers arranged in peaceful patterns. Tina liked the way the room felt. *This is Maggie, she thought. No toys, just adult things. Someday, I want a room just like this one.*

“I usually kneel next to the bed because of the crucifix,” Maggie said. She knelt. Tina knelt beside her. “Then I say a few words to God.”

“What do you say?” Tina asked.

“Sometimes it’s just, ‘Hello again, God. It’s me, Maggie.’” Tina grinned. “Other times I go right into my prayer.”

“What prayer?”

“I usually say a Hail Mary first. Remember those?”

Tina nodded. “I think so. ‘Hail Mary, full of grace.’”

“That’s right! Do you remember the rest?”

“Yeah. Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

“Very good. Then I just talk to God. But not always in words. Sometimes I just think of things to tell God and say them in my head. You can do that if you want.”

“What should I say?”

“Whatever you want. You could pray for someone else, thank God for something, ask God’s help with something, or just think about God’s blessings and miracles. Those are the hardest.”

“Okay, I’ll try,” Tina said. She closed her eyes.

Hi, God, it’s me, Tina Martini. Remember me? I haven’t talked to you much because I didn’t know what to say and I felt embarrassed. But things have changed. I think you have given me a miracle. I’m sure I didn’t deserve it but I’m really thankful for it. Maggie has saved me. Please keep her safe and well and keep us together forever.

Tina opened her eyes. She looked up at the crucifix and wondered if that was her link to God. *Did he hear my prayer?* she thought. Then she recalled something she’d heard in religion class. *He hears everyone’s prayers.* She smiled.

Maggie was lost in her own silent prayer. *When I left the convent I wasn’t sure I was doing the right thing but now I’m absolutely certain I was. Thank-you for sending Tina to me. I will treasure her always.*

She opened her eyes and looked at the crucifix. Nothing else came to mind. “I need to pee,” Tina said.

Maggie smiled. “Okay. You go ahead. I’ll go downstairs. You can play. I’ll come get you when it’s lunch time.”

Just as she reached the bottom step there was a knock on the front door. Maggie looked out and saw Rick, the delivery man. *I haven’t ordered anything, she thought. And they’re closed on Sundays, anyway.*

She opened the door.

“Mornin’ Miss Maggie!” he said, cheerfully. “Hope you’re having a great Sunday.”

“Um, yeah. It’s been quiet. Just the way I like it.”

“I brought you a little something.”

“But I didn’t ask for anything,” Maggie said.

“This is my treat. I saw them on the shelf and thought, ‘Miss Maggie would probably love those.’” He offered her the box of Whitman’s chocolates.

Her face lit up. "Wow. Whitman's. They used to be my mom's favorite. I haven't seen a box in years."

Rick congratulated himself for choosing a gift that she already treasured. He assumed that would make her like him more quickly and hoped *that* would lead to something more.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

"Um, not right now. I'm doing some cleaning and don't want to stop. I'm not good at cleaning so when I get going I have to finish or it never gets done."

"Oh, okay. Well, I was wondering if you'd do me the honor of seeing a movie with me. We could go tonight. There's a new Elvis film playing. You do like Elvis, don't you?"

"He makes movies?" Maggie asked.

"Yeah. Didn't you know?"

Maggie thought she heard a noise behind her but didn't turn to look. She hoped Rick hadn't heard it. Because he was standing outside the front door, he hadn't.

"Um, no. I was in a convent for ten years. We didn't have movies. We had a TV but hardly had time to watch it. They kept us busy."

"Well, he's very entertaining. I'm sure you'd enjoy him. The show's at seven."

"Seven? Oh, I can't." Maggie tried to quickly come up with a believable lie. "I've got... I've got... a *prayer* meeting."

"I thought you gave all that up."

Maggie shook her head. "I stopped being a nun but I'm still a Catholic."

"Oh."

Rick felt defeated and tried to come up with something to prolong his visit but couldn't. He sighed. Maggie took his sigh as a cue to disengage.

"Well, I gotta go. Thanks for stopping by. And thanks for the chocolates. I'll think of Mom when I eat them." Rick immediately felt disappointed. He had hoped Maggie would think of *him*.

He didn't want to leave but it seemed pointless to stay. "Okay. 'Bye."

Maggie closed the door.

"Did that guy ask you for a date?" Tina asked.

"Uh, yeah."

"Is he your boyfriend?"

"No! I just met him a couple of days ago," Maggie said.

"Would you *like* him to be your boyfriend?"

"Actually, no. I don't *want* a boyfriend."

"You don't? Well, I do."

Maggie grinned. She knew Tina was teasing her and felt delighted. "Tina! I think he's a little *old* for you."

Tina got the joke and smiled back. "Not *him*, Maggie. But somebody."

"You're only fourteen."

"But I won't always be fourteen. Soon I'll be old enough to ride in cars with boys, go to dances, and maybe go on dates. And have a boyfriend."

"I like the way you think, Tina. Ready for some lunch?"

Rick drove away feeling frustrated. He'd assumed getting Maggie to agree to a movie would be easy. Now he wondered if he had done something wrong. *Is it me?* he thought. *I'm a lot younger than she is. I thought that would be a plus. Well, I'm not giving up. I'm coming back*

tonight. When she leaves to go to that prayer meeting, I'm gonna follow her. Then, next week, maybe I'll go to that prayer meeting too.

52.

That afternoon at the Martini house, Rocco was sitting on a folding chair in the cool basement listening to the Phillies doubleheader on the radio. Annette was outside hanging the wash. The boys were playing at a friend's house down the block. Vicky was sitting quietly in the living room. She was trying to grasp everything that had happened since Monday and having no success.

Someone knocked at the screen door. Hoping it wasn't another reporter, Vicky got up. She walked toward the door and saw Officer Jackson. "Oh, it's you," she said.

"Am I bothering you?"

"Do you wanna come in?"

"Okay."

Officer Jackson opened the door and walked into the living room. Vicky didn't invite him to sit down.

"I suppose you saw the papers," Vicky said.

"Yeah."

"Is it as bad as they say?"

"We don't know, Miss Martini. We just don't know."

"It's almost a week and you've found nothing, right?"

Officer Jackson nodded. "That's right. We've looked everywhere. I talked to your sister's teachers. They weren't very helpful. Except the one I saw yesterday."

"Who was it?"

"Maggie Fallon. She was known as Sister Margaret Mary at the school."

"She's not a nun anymore?"

"No. She quit. Who knew you could just quit God?"

His casual question surprised Vicky. She assumed he was tired. It had been a difficult week. "Isn't this your day off?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Can't take a day off."

"They won't let you?"

"I won't let myself, Miss. This is too important a case. I won't rest until we find your sister."

"But what about your personal life?" Vicky asked.

"Don't have one. My life is my work."

Vicky looked at him. "I admire you, Officer Jackson. Although I wouldn't want your job for a million dollars."

"And I wouldn't want to be in your position- my sister missing, no idea what happened to her, hoping for the best but fearing the worst, the newspapers trying to get everyone riled up about another Elmo Smith. I'm sorry, Miss Martini." Vicky felt grateful for his sympathy but didn't respond. She didn't know how to. "I'm sorry for what you and your family are going through and I promise I won't rest until we find your sister."

They stood in silence. The August heat was almost palpable. The mystery of Tina's disappearance hung over them. Both knew they would have liked to say more, and would have liked to talk about their doubts, anxieties, and fears. But they weren't friends. They weren't even acquaintances. They had met because of a bizarre event that no one should have to experience.

Vicky shook off the heat and her deep foreboding. She tried to force a smile. "Would you like a glass of lemonade?" she asked.

"That would be great."

"Wait here."

Vicky turned and walked toward the kitchen. Officer Jackson watched her move and couldn't help but like what he saw. *She's a very pretty girl, he thought. And she seems nice, too.* Then he caught himself. *But she's a white girl. I've gotta be careful. This is a white family in a white neighborhood.*

Vicky came back with a glass of lemonade. Annette was right behind her. "Afternoon, Mrs. Martini," Officer Jackson said.

"I didn't say that stuff that's in the papers," Annette blurted out. "You gotta believe me."

"I believe you, ma'am."

"I would never complain about you or the other cops. I never said you weren't doing everything you could. And I definitely never said somebody like Elmo Smith took her."

"I know, ma'am. They're exaggerating."

"They're lying," Vicky said.

He nodded. "I know we don't like what they did, but in a way, it's good because now they've got the whole city looking for Tina. It gives me hope. Somebody's gotta see her somewhere. She can't have just disappeared."

"I hope you're right officer," Vicky said.

"So do I. I don't know if you're into prayer, but it might be something you can try."

"Actually, my father and I went to mass this morning."

"You did? I'm glad to hear it. Maybe God will help us find your sister. After all, she's one of His most precious children."

"Is she?" Annette asked.

"According to that ex-nun, she is."

"Yeah," Annette said.

Vicky looked at Officer Jackson. She liked what she saw. And she liked what he said. *If only he was white, she thought.*

Then he finished his lemonade, said goodbye, and left.

53.

Tina and Maggie were eating dinner.

"You know, Tina, I wasn't always a nun. It was only for eight years. Before that, I was a normal girl. I had boyfriends. I went on a few dates. It was fun."

"My sister Vicky tried to have boyfriends but my father didn't like them and told them to go away."

"That's too bad. What did she do?"

"Nothing. She was afraid of him. I thought she might sneak around but she didn't. I used to think if I was her, if I looked like her and talked like her and was normal like she is, I would have all the boys I could get."

"Good for you," Maggie said.

"So, how many did you have?"

"Only a couple."

"Who were they?" Tina asked.

“I knew this guy Danny Marshall in high school. He had dark hair and wore glasses and wanted to be an engineer. My dad liked him but Danny didn’t like me.”

“How do you know?”

“He never tried to kiss me.”

“Never?” Tina asked. Maggie shook her head. “You’ve never been kissed?”

Maggie grinned shyly. “I didn’t say that.”

“So, you *have*. Tell me all about it. What’s it like?”

“You’re an eighth grader. Weren’t there any boys you liked?”

“Sure,” Tina replied. “But they didn’t like me. They never even noticed me. Nobody did. Mostly, I felt as if I was invisible.”

Maggie shook her head. “Not in *my* class you weren’t.”

“Yeah. *You* saw me, but nobody else ever did.”

“Nobody?” Tina shook her head. Maggie stood up and walked around the table. She leaned down and hugged Tina. “I’m sorry,” she said.

“For what?”

“The world, Tina. The world.”

54.

a.

Officer Jackson was at home in his apartment in East Germantown. He was thinking about Tina Martini and wondering how, after a week of searching, not a single clue had been uncovered. *People don’t just disappear*, he thought. As soon as he had that thought he knew it was false. The truth was, people disappeared all the time. Sometimes it was because they wanted to. Other times, it was because someone else wanted them to. Most of the time the searches, if there were any, turned up nothing. But that was because they were often small efforts that used limited resources.

The search for Tina had been massive. Dozens of cops had questioned dozens of people and scoured several miles of Germantown near where Tina lived. *It’s almost as if she was invisible*, Officer Jackson thought. *Or, maybe she was visible, but people just didn’t bother looking at her. Maybe because they didn’t want to see her. Maybe because she made them uncomfortable.*

He was beginning to wish that he had met the girl at least once. *I know what it’s like to be invisible*, he thought. When he took off his uniform, he became just another tall Negro. If he was in his neighborhood, people like him saw him. If he was someplace where black people and white people mixed, often he felt almost invisible.

A white storekeeper might ignore him and serve the white person who came in after him first. He knew the same thing was true for other black people. White people preferred not seeing them unless they absolutely had to, and then they would make the interaction as short as they could.

If he happened to go into a white neighborhood, people did see him, but not as just another person. As a black man, he was seen as a threat. He didn’t belong in their world.

But how could Tina have been a threat? She’s just a handicapped kid. If anything, people should have looked out for her, not shunned her. But I think that’s what they did. And I think that’s why we can’t find any clues about her. To most people, she didn’t exist. If they noticed her at all, some might have wished that she hadn’t existed.

Officer Jackson thought about Tina's family. He wondered how Tina could have survived for such a long time in such a loveless environment. *She must be an extraordinary child*, he thought, *to put up with their indifference and lack of concern*. It almost made sense to him that she would one day just get up and walk away. What reason did she have to stay?

He almost wished he could give up the search and hope she was in a better place. But that was not possible. Tina would have to be found whether or not she wanted to be. She may have escaped to a better life, but she wouldn't be allowed to keep it. The city demanded it. His bosses demanded it. The mayor demanded it. A missing girl had raised the specter of another crazed rapist and murderer loose in the city.

Everyone felt threatened. It was his job to make that feeling go away. He couldn't rest until the situation was resolved.

If Tina wasn't found, and her abductor caught, there would be chaos. *That girl likely never imagined what she would cause just by getting off her porch chair and walking away*, Officer Jackson thought. As much as he admired her, he felt sorry for her. As much as he wished to leave her alone, he knew he couldn't.

He went to bed knowing that tomorrow he would start the second week on the case and had nothing to show for all his effort. *Somebody knows where she is*, he thought. *I wish that person would do us all a favor and come forward. That might not be what Tina would want, but this is no longer about her. It's about a city in fear*.

Then he fell asleep.

b.

It was late. Vicky was in her bed. The August daytime heat had ebbed slightly. A small fan was blowing cool air over Vicky's almost naked body. Wearing only underpants, she lay inert in the light from a table lamp.

Vicky looked over at Tina's bed. It had remained empty for a full week. *It seems like a lot longer*, Vicky thought. *But maybe that's because I never paid her much attention while she was here*.

For the first time in her life, Vicky was missing her sister. But (Vicky realized) Tina had never been more than merely *present*. Vicky had never treated her as if she was special. At school, Tina had been an embarrassment. Kids Vicky's age knew Vicky only as 'that retarded girl's big sister.'

Vicky had resented being labeled that way. She had wanted to be like the other kids, one of the regular kids, but couldn't because she had an irregular sister. Although Vicky was never deliberately mean to Tina she was never deliberately kind, either. Mostly, Vicky resented Tina. Luckily, Tina never noticed.

Now, Vicky felt guilty.

She liked that Officer Jackson was committed to finding Tina but couldn't help but wonder if he would find her dead. That was what the newspapers seemed to suspect. The thought of that bed remaining empty from now on drove Vicky over the edge and she started to sob.

"I'm so sorry, Tina," she whispered. "I was a bad big sister. It wasn't your fault. It was mine." Vicky sobbed some more. "I was *so* selfish. And I'm so ashamed. You never did anything to hurt me yet I treated you as if you didn't exist or as if I hated that you did." More sobbing. Vicky let herself go. After a moment, she tried to go on. "What a fool I was! I would be surprised if you didn't hate me. I hate me right now."

c.

Lying in her bed in Maggie's house, hate was the farthest thing from Tina's mind. She didn't want to think about what her life had been like until a week ago. She didn't want to recall how it made her feel to be neglected, ignored, to be a non-person. Maybe she was even hated. But all that was in the past and deserved to be forgotten. Tina had found a new life. Maggie was her new friend and promised to take care of her and treat her well for the rest of her life. For the first time she could recall, Tina wished her life would be a long one.

INTERLUDE 7

Thursday, December 31, 1959. A flat black ballet slipper was found on Ridge Avenue and turned over to Philadelphia detectives. Maryann Mitchell's friend Constance Kearns identified it as hers. It was in Maryann's possession the night she disappeared. The discovery led police to suspect that Maryann had been killed in Roxborough and her body dumped in Lafayette Hills.

Monday, August 8, 1960

55.

As soon as he sat down at his desk at the Fourteenth Precinct, Officer Jackson got the first break in the case. Someone had phoned in a tip. The person recalled seeing a girl dressed like Tina board the H bus at Hansberry and Greene Streets. Officer Jackson thought this fact, if true, could change everything.

He went back to the Martini house and spoke to Annette.

“Someone saw your daughter get on the bus,” he said.

“So?”

“Well, if it’s true, it suggests that she wasn’t abducted but ran away.”

“It can’t be true,” Annette replied.

“Why not?”

“You can’t ride a bus or trolley unless you pay the fare.”

Officer Jackson nodded. “That’s right. So?”

“She never had any money. I’m not sure she even knows what money is.”

“You didn’t give her an allowance?”

“What for?” Annette asked.

“Kids like to buy stuff. You know, candy, a Popsicle, maybe a little toy.”

“She wasn’t like that.”

Officer Jackson should have been surprised by what Annette was telling him but wasn’t. “She didn’t like *toys*?” he asked.

“She never had any.”

“What did she play with?”

Annette shrugged. “She didn’t play.”

“All kids play.”

“She didn’t. I swear, she just sat there day in and day out... watching.”

“Watching what?” he asked.

“I have no idea.”

“Didn’t you talk to her?”

She nodded. “Sure- a little.”

“What did you say?”

“I told her what to do.”

“That’s all?” he asked.

“What *else* would I tell her?”

That you loved her might have been nice, Officer Jackson thought but didn’t say aloud.

“Maybe asked how she was doing? Or, if she wanted anything? Or just if she was happy?”

Annette gave him a scornful look. “Why should *she* be happy? Nobody I know is happy,” she shot back. Officer Jackson ended the interview.

The investigation shifted. Officer Jackson began to suspect that Tina might have been planning to run away and had somehow hoarded enough money so that, when the opportunity arose, she could just escape. The police kept the tip away from the media so people would continue looking for her. When he got back to the precinct, he contacted the bus company and got the driver’s name.

56.

Rick never made it back to Maggie's house on Sunday evening. He fell asleep in the afternoon heat and awoke too late to make it worth his while to spy on her. But he kept thinking about Maggie. He wondered why the cop had been at her house and why she hadn't let him in when he showed up with candy and asked for a date. It never occurred to Rick that Maggie might not be interested in- or, worse, not *attracted* to- him. He assumed there was something else going on.

He hoped she would call in another grocery order but thought it was risky to just wait until she did. *Maybe she doesn't eat much and the food I delivered will last her a long time*, he thought. *I can't wait. I gotta move quickly*. Rick decided he would pilfer some food and stop by to offer it to her. *If I put it in a box that's too big for her to carry, she's gonna have to ask me to put it in her kitchen*, he thought. *Once I'm in, I'm gonna figure out a way to stay awhile*.

Rick walked around the store and looked at foods he thought a single woman might like. He thought canned vegetables and fruits would be good. *Everybody likes peas, corn, string beans, and fruit cocktail*, he thought. He picked a Betty Crocker chocolate cake mix. *Who doesn't like chocolate cake?* He grabbed a few bananas and apples, too. He rounded out his selections with a dozen fresh eggs, a pound of butter, and a bag of sugar. *This is stuff everyone uses*, he assured himself. *She'll love it*.

Rick hid the box in the delivery van and waited until there were a few additional orders. Then he left the store. He made all the other stops and drove to Maggie's last.

Maggie and Tina were in the living room. It was cooler downstairs. Tina had brought some dolls down and was playing on the floor. Maggie was reading. They heard a noise outside. Tina got up to look out of the front window. She saw Rick unloading a big box from the blue van. "Your boyfriend's here with your food," she said, smiling.

Maggie looked puzzled. "My boy-? What food? I didn't order anything."

"Well, he's got a big box and he's heading for the door."

"Go upstairs, Tina."

"Why?"

"Please don't ask. Just do it."

"Okay," Tina said.

"And take those dolls with you."

Tina gathered up the dolls and hurried upstairs. Rick knocked just as she reached the top of the steps. Maggie waited until she heard Tina walk to her bedroom. She said a quick prayer that Tina would be quiet for a while and opened the door.

"Mornin', Miss Fallon. Remember me?"

"Of course. What are you doing here?"

"Got some food for you," he replied.

"But I didn't order anything."

"I know. This is a complimentary delivery."

"But I don't *need* anything," Maggie protested.

"Maybe not now, but it's regular stuff everybody uses at some time or other."

Maggie didn't know what to say.

"Should I put it in your kitchen?" Rick asked.

"Uh. Yeah. Okay, I guess. But I'm on my way out. So just put it on the table and I'll put it away later."

“A couple of things need to go into the fridge. I’ll put them away for you.”

“No!” Maggie shouted. “I’ll do it.”

“Whatever you say.”

Rick dropped the box on the table and took a quick look around the kitchen. He didn’t know why. Maybe it was just to see if he could spot something else he could bring to her later. She walked into the room. “Here,” she said, proffering two quarters.

He took them. “You don’t need to do that, but thanks,” Rick said. He tried to think of a way to prolong the visit. “I’ve been out making deliveries for a while. Could I have a glass of water?”

“Sure,” Maggie said. She went to the sink and took a clean glass from the dishrack. Then she turned on the tap and filled it. “You want some ice cubes?”

“That would be great.”

Maggie went to the refrigerator and opened the freezer. She took out a metal tray and sat it on the sink. Then she pulled a lever on the tray and freed a couple of ice cubes. She dropped them in the glass and handed the glass to Rick. He took a sip and smiled.

“That feels good. I was so dry.”

“Yeah. It’s still hot. We got several more weeks of August to get through.”

Rick saw an opportunity to start a conversation. “What do you do to keep cool?”

“Fans, mostly. Sometimes I go into the basement. It’s cooler there but I can’t stay too long.”

“You ever go where it’s air-conditioned? Like stores or movies?”

Maggie shook her head. “Can’t afford movies and I don’t want to be tempted to buy stuff in stores.”

Rick saw an opening. “Well, that Elvis movie I told you about is at an air-conditioned theater.”

Maggie looked at him. She tried to think of a way to tell him to back off but wasn’t used to dealing with men and couldn’t come up with anything that would be firm but inoffensive. She frowned. “Like I told you, I need to study.”

“Oh, right. I forgot.”

“And you need to leave. I have to go pay some bills.”

“All right. I guess I have to get back to the store.”

“Yeah. I’m sure they need you.” *And I don’t*, Maggie thought. *So leave me alone!*

Rick headed toward the front door. “Okay. Well, see you next time I make a delivery.”

“Yeah,” Maggie replied. She immediately considered switching grocery stores. Maybe even shopping at the big Acme two miles away.

“Bye, Miss Fallon.”

“Bye.”

She closed the door. Rick was gone- for now. Maggie had a feeling she would be seeing him again. Possibly soon. She suspected what his intentions were and wasn’t offended. She also wasn’t interested. However, she didn’t know how much effort it would require to make it clear to him that she wanted to be left alone. He seemed like someone who wasn’t inclined to give up easily.

Maggie was right.

57.

Vicky's co-workers had seen the headlines in the Sunday newspapers and avoided talking about Tina. Instead, the women gossiped about what they did on their day off. Some had dates. Others hung out with friends. The two who had gone down the shore with their boyfriends kept quiet. That hadn't wanted to make the others jealous. No one asked Vicky what she did. She was glad they hadn't.

Mrs. Carlyle took her aside. "I saw the papers yesterday. It doesn't look good. I'm sorry. I hope they're wrong. But if you need some time off, just tell me."

"They're lying," Vicky said.

"Really?"

"Yeah. There's no news, no tips, no nothing. Just a week of searching with no results."

"That must be hard for you and your family."

Grateful for Mrs. Carlyle's concern, Vicky nodded. "It is. But the cop who's working on the case is doing all he can. If she's gonna be found, he's the one that will do it."

"I'm glad for that, at least."

"So am I. I trust him."

While she worked, Vicky thought about Officer Jackson. She hadn't met many Negroes and didn't know much about them but he was one of the nicest and most helpful people she could imagine. *I think it's more than just because of his job*, Vicky thought. *I think it's just the way he is.*

Vicky wouldn't allow herself to admit that she not only trusted Officer Jackson but liked and was attracted to him. What would her co-workers have thought of her if they found out something like *that*? She might even get fired.

58.

It's been a whole week, Annette thought. *Was Tina abducted or did she run away? I have no idea. And does it make a difference?* She stopped herself. *Well, it does to me. How could she have just run away, after all I put up with for her? That's so ungrateful!*

That nigger cop keeps coming back. I don't think it's for Tina. I think he has a thing for Vicky. I've seen the way he looks at her. They're all like that. They like white women and white girls. It's disgusting. I don't like having him in the house but what can I do? I hope this is all over soon so I never have to put up with him again.

I lied to Rocco about Ben Hedges but I don't care. I don't care about anything anymore. My life is shit and will never be anything else. If I could, I would just walk away like Tina did. Maybe she was right.

But where would I go? Where did she go? Far away? Or, is she somewhere nearby hiding and hoping we'll get tired of looking and give up? Well, I'm ready to give up right now. Even if I could get her back I don't think I'd want her.

I don't think I want anything. I don't care if I live or die. If I thought my life would have come to this I would have never married Rocco. I would have been a party girl like Ben Hedges wanted. I would have let guys give me nice things just because I was pretty and let them screw me. Then, when I got to be this age, I wouldn't have had four kids- well, now, only three- and a husband who's no better than a lump of dirt. I might have had a nice apartment instead of this crummy house. And some money. Maybe I could have been independent. Maybe guys wouldn't come around anymore because I was older, but I wouldn't have cared. I would've had enough of them.

I think I've had enough of this, but what can I do? The boys need me. Vicky doesn't. Neither does Rocco. I'm not sure he needs anything except a piece of ass once in a while. That's all I am to him, anyway.

My life. What a joke. But nobody's laughing because it hurts too much.

59.

Tina was in bed but couldn't fall asleep. She was thinking about her family. *All those years I put up with them, she thought. Why didn't I run away sooner?*

It didn't occur to Tina to ask why she ran away when she did.

The moment the screen door had closed behind her mother, Tina knew what she wanted to do. She stood up and looked around. There was no one walking anywhere near the house. She walked to the top of the steps and looked down. Tina had never walked down those steps alone before. Someone- her mother, Vicky, her father- had always been with her.

She hesitated for only a moment and then walked down the steps and reached the sidewalk. She looked left toward Wayne Avenue. *Too many cars, she thought. I might not get very far before mom comes back.* Tina turned to her right and started walking toward Greene Street which was several blocks away.

She knew the route well and covered it more quickly than she and her mother ever had because they always pulled a rickety shopping cart behind them. Tina passed many row houses, crossed several small streets, and passed three little girls playing hopscotch on the sidewalk. She ignored them.

Greene Street traffic was busy. She was used to crossing at the corner but had only done it with her mother along. Tina knew what to do- look both ways before stepping off the curb- but when she looked, all she saw were oncoming cars. *Don't they ever stop?* she thought, trying not to panic.

A blue car was slowing as it approached the corner. She thought it was going to turn. Tina looked at the woman driver. The woman looked at her. "Tina Martini?" the woman shouted. Tina was startled. She nodded. "Stay there!" the woman ordered. She turned onto Hansberry Street and parked. Then she jumped out.

At that moment, Tina knew why she had left the porch.

60.

After she brushed her teeth and peed again, Maggie made sure Tina had fallen asleep and then went to her room. She put on the little table fan and aimed it at her bed. She stripped down to her panties, folded her shorts and top, and put them on the chair.

Maggie hadn't always been neat and precise in her routine actions but had learned to be more mindful when she was at the convent. The nuns were taught to do everything slowly, carefully, and prayerfully. The goal was to offer every deed to God. Maggie had developed good habits (no pun intended) and they hadn't lapsed after she left. Not yet, anyway.

She laid down. The bedside light was still on. Maggie realized she had forgotten to kneel to say a quick prayer. But now that she was already in bed, she didn't feel like moving anymore. It was too hot. *So much for my nun discipline,* she thought, humorously.

Then she prayed anyway.

"God, I like what's happened but I'm worried that it can't stay the way it is right now. It's not just Rick that I worry about, although I'll have more to say about him in a moment. It's the whole world. Right now, we're safe here. It's our little sanctuary. But sanctuaries don't last.

Sooner or later, they're invaded. Please, I beg of you, don't let any harm come to Tina. Please warn me so I can protect her. If we have to run far away, I'll do it. She deserves a good life. Somehow, I want to see that she gets it."

"About Rick... I hope you won't be mad at me for saying this, but he is kinda sexy in a bad boy kinda way. I think it's just an act, but I like it. If I had met him before I rescued Tina I would have let Rick pretty much do whatever he wanted." Maggie paused to reconsider her words. Then she went on. "Well, maybe not *everything*," she added, blushing. "I don't want to go into that now. But now that Tina's here, she comes first. I might need your help keeping a focus on her when Rick's around. I don't think he'll give up trying. Not yet, anyway."

Maggie ended her prayer and thought about the way Rick made her feel the first time he came to deliver her groceries. That tingle in her crotch was something she hadn't felt in years, since before she became a nun. She'd thought about it and tried to recall it *while* she was a nun but never had much success. Now she was free to feel it again, to do what most normal women did, and be lusty if she wanted. Maybe even wanton, although she thought she'd make a fool out of herself if she went *that* far.

Still, Rick was kinda cute.

So was that cop. Maggie didn't think it strange that she was attracted to a Negro. She was raised by parents who taught her how ugly and despicable prejudice and racism were. They taught her to see everyone as equal. So that cop wasn't a *colored* man, to Maggie. He was just another man.

But Tina came first.

Maybe when Tina was older, Maggie would have a boyfriend. Maybe when Tina got one, they could double date. *We could tell people we're sisters*, Maggie thought. *No one would suspect we weren't*.

Maggie decided to start thinking of Tina as her younger sister. *That family of hers never wanted to be related to her*, Maggie thought. *But I do. I'd be honored if she forgot about her real older sister and started thinking of me that way*.

Maggie fell asleep believing that the sister her parents had never given her had finally come into her life. She was happy.

61.

In her dream, Tina was standing across Hansberry Street looking at her house. She saw herself and her mother come out on the porch and sit down. She heard the rock'n'roll music playing low on the radio. Her mother sat in the rocker and closed her eyes. Tina sat quietly. Nothing was happening. It was hot and nobody wanted anything to happen.

Then the phone rang inside the house. Annette opened her eyes and got up slowly. She went in. Tina saw herself sit for a moment. Then she stood up. She looked at the screen door. Then she looked at the steps. Then she was standing at the top of the steps looking down. Then she was at the bottom. She turned right and started walking toward Greene Street. Then Tina didn't see herself anymore.

Her mother came out a few minutes later. She saw the empty chair. She went to the railing, leaned over, and looked in both directions. Then Annette shrugged. She went to her rocker and sat down. She closed her eyes and stayed that way for two hours.

Finally, she slowly got up and went back inside the house.

Tina saw a red police car arrive and a colored cop talk to her mother. People started gathering in front of the house. Tina saw her father come home from work and then her sister.

News cars appeared. Then other cop cars. That colored cop came back repeatedly. Vicky and her father left for work and then came home.

She saw a van, a man with a camera, and a woman standing at the screen door talking to Vicky. Tina saw her sister's face. "So, you think someone lured her or took her?" the TV reporter asked.

Vicky looked past the reporter and straight into the camera. "I don't know. But I wish whoever *does* know would contact the police and get my sister back home. Please. She's only a child. Have pity on her."

When she awoke in the morning, Tina recalled the dream. She told Maggie about it at breakfast. "I think my family is missing me," she said. What she meant is that, after seeing her family in the dream, she was missing them.

"If you want me to take you back, I will. I won't keep you here."

"Really?" Tina asked.

"Yes. It's your choice where you want to live and who you want to live with."

"My choice?" Tina said, astonished. No one had ever offered her a choice before, especially not one as big as this.

"Yes."

"I can *choose* where I want to live?"

Maggie nodded for emphasis. "That's right."

"I want to stay with you."

"Okay. I'm glad. But if your feelings ever change, you just let me know and I'll take you back."

"My feelings aren't gonna change, Maggie. Ever."

INTERLUDE 8

On New Year's Day, police interviewed the bus drivers for routes A and Z. Neither had seen Maryann Mitchell the night she disappeared. The police concluded that she was abducted from the bus stop.

Tuesday, August 9, 1960

62.

First thing in the morning, Officer Jackson went to the bus depot on Erie Avenue and talked to the driver of the H bus. The man couldn't recall the girl but admitted he didn't look at his bus passengers. He just listened for coins dropped in the fare box and then drove on. The only time he noticed a passenger was if one asked a question or he had to make change for a fare. Even then, he tried to avoid eye contact.

After the interview, Officer Jackson had mixed feelings. It *could* have been Tina who boarded that H bus. Or it could have been another girl who happened to be wearing the same kind of clothing. Yellow tops, blue shorts, and pink sneakers were all fairly common. Likely there were thousands of girls in Philadelphia who had one, two, or all three items in their wardrobes.

At mid-day, the Mayor's Office announced a \$1000 reward for information leading to Tina's whereabouts. Officer Jackson went back to the Martini house with news about the bus driver and the reward. He hoped it was again Vicky's day off.

It was.

When he arrived, she was sitting on the porch. "Can we talk inside?" he asked even though there were no other people around. The neighbors had given up milling around the Martini's front steps. It was too hot. They chose to stay inside in front of their fans or go about their daily routines. After a week, a missing handicapped teenage girl was old news.

Vicky brought him into the living room. Again, she didn't invite him to sit. She waited.

"I, um, feel I need to be honest with you," he said.

"Uh, oh."

"No. It's not bad. I just want to be realistic."

"Okay. What is it?" Vicky asked.

He told Vicky he'd interviewed the bus driver but the man hadn't seen Tina. But he thought it was better if Tina ran away than if she had been abducted.

"Why do you say that?" Vicky asked.

"It's better for her. And better for the city. It means there's not another maniac like Elmo Smith running around. But we're not gonna tell people about this yet."

"Why not?"

"Because we want everyone to keep looking for her," Officer Jackson explained. "If they feel threatened by a maniac, they'll be more vigilant. No one cares much about a runaway girl."

Vicky frowned. "No one but her family."

"And me," Officer Jackson said.

Vicky nodded. She looked at Officer Jackson and saw the concern on his face. "And why is that?" she asked.

"Like that ex-nun told me, children are precious. Even handicapped kids."

"Especially handicapped kids- like my sister."

Officer Jackson looked at her. He wanted to ask a question but knew it was risky. Yet the answer could confirm his theory that life at home was so miserable that Tina had chosen to escape.

"So, you recognize that now?" he asked.

Surprised (but not shocked or offended) by his question, Vicky looked at him. She frowned and nodded. "Yeah, I do," she said, sadly. "All those years we neglected her. Things

could have been different. She could have been happy. We could have *made* her happy. But instead, we treated her as if we didn't want her around. I guess maybe she finally got the message."

He grimaced. "Yeah. I think she did. I'm sorry."

"Not as sorry as I am, Officer Jackson. I might never see her again."

"Don't give up hope, Miss Martini. People can't stay in hiding for long. They have to come out and when she does hopefully someone will recognize her and call the police."

"And then what?" Vicky asked.

"And then we bring her back home."

Vicky grimaced as if she was in pain. "This was never her home. We were never her family. Now, we may have lost her forever."

"But you can take comfort that no one abducted her and maybe harmed her. Maybe she's in hiding, now but at least she's likely okay."

"That's something, I guess. She was never okay here. We all knew it but wouldn't admit it. We didn't want her. Nobody did. That's what's so sad. It wasn't her fault that she was retarded. It was just life. Yet we punished her for being different. I'm so ashamed...."

Vicky wanted to start crying. But she also wanted to be comforted. Officer Jackson would have been willing to comfort her but knew he couldn't. Even if she had asked him to hold her while she cried, it could have touched off a firestorm that could engulf the city. He imagined the headlines. *Predatory Colored Cop Takes Advantage of Grief-stricken White Girl.*

If they had been alone somewhere where it would be safe, Officer Jackson felt certain he could have offered to comfort Vicky and she would have welcomed it. But not here. Not in the shabby living room of a white family's row house in a white neighborhood, in a city run by a white elite that saw the very existence of Negroes as some kind of a threat. To what? Their whiteness? Their power? Their egos?

Vicky and Officer Jackson were two human beings brought together by a tragedy. The color of their skin shouldn't have had any effect on the quality of their humanity. Officer Jackson should have been able to hold Vicky while she cried for her missing sister. He should have been allowed to think about asking Vicky out (when this was all over, of course) without feeling guilty. Vicky shouldn't have felt guilty because she would have liked it if he had asked her out and might even have said yes.

But there they were. Standing three feet apart. Separated by a social divide that was centuries old. And showing no hint of ever closing.

Vicky sobbed. "I'm sorry, Miss," Officer Jackson said.

"For what?"

"That I don't have better news... That this ever happened."

"Yeah, so am I. But it *has* happened."

63.

Rick had a dilemma. He didn't want to give up on Maggie but didn't know what else he could do to reel her in. He also wondered what she was doing. *Is something else going on with her?* he thought.

Although Rick appreciated a challenge, he preferred not having to make too much of an effort to achieve a goal. He wasn't willing to give up on Maggie because the payoff, should he succeed, would be amazing. *Aim high!* Was his motto.

He couldn't get her out and she was unwilling to let him in. She didn't want to see the Elvis movie and the only way he had set foot inside her row house was when he was carrying a box of food. He hadn't been inside long enough to catch a glimpse of anything personal that he could use to entice her. He had noticed there was no TV and thought that was strange. But Rick wasn't about to buy her a TV in the hope that she'd be so grateful she'd let him watch it with her.

But what if he didn't *buy* a TV? There was a small twelve-inch TV in the back of the grocery. Mr. Cohen kept it there for important things like afternoon ball games. He liked to sneak back to check the score when his wife was taking care of a customer at the cash register.

Maybe I can convince them the TV is broken and take it to get fixed, he thought. Then I can bring it to Maggie. I can say it's a loaner. But if she likes it, I can get her a bigger one.

Rick decided it wouldn't be necessary to tell Mr. Cohen the TV was broken. He hadn't used it once this summer, anyway. Maybe the store was too busy for him to sneak into the back room. Rick decided to 'borrow' the TV and, if and when Mr. Cohen discovered it was gone, explain that he had tried to turn it on but it wouldn't work so he'd taken it to be fixed.

64.

Maggie was puttering around downstairs. Tina was enjoying her regular afternoon bath. The bathroom door was open. Tina was absorbed as she played with the toys. She didn't notice movement in the doorway. Then she heard a soft sound. She looked up. An orange tabby cat was sitting atop her clothes piled on the toilet seat and looking at her.

Tina was thrilled.

"Hello, kitty," she said, softly. "Did you come to watch me play?" The cat ignored her. "Well, I'm glad you did. I've been waiting to meet you. You're so pretty. Are we friends now? I've never had a cat friend." *I've almost never had human friends, either, Tina thought. Maggie might be the only one.*

The cat ignored her. Tina didn't care. She was so pleased Simone had come in that she stopped playing and just looked at the cat. Simone didn't look back. She closed her eyes and dozed off.

Tina tried not to move too much. She wanted to remain as quiet as possible. Because Simone was shy, Tina worried if she moved suddenly she might frighten Simone. Then, if she ran out of the bathroom, she might never come back. Tina began hoping that Simone had come to her for a reason. Maybe because she wanted to be Tina's friend. Maybe even Tina's cat.

Maggie came upstairs to check on Tina and noticed Simone. She smiled but didn't say anything. Simone was used to Maggie and didn't move. "She likes you," Maggie whispered.

Tina smiled and nodded.

Simone stayed on the toilet seat until Tina slowly stood up so she could get out of the tub. She tried not to do too much splashing so she wouldn't startle Simone. Then, when Tina put one leg out of the tub, Simone jumped off the toilet seat and hurried out the door. *I guess her little visit is over, Tina thought, smiling. I hope she comes back tomorrow.*

Tina didn't have to wait a whole day to see Simone again. At bedtime, Maggie was reading to her. Simone came into the room as if she wanted to listen. Neither Tina nor Maggie reacted to Simone. They didn't want to startle her but looked at each other and smiled.

Tina fell asleep before Maggie finished reading. Maggie stood up quietly and tiptoed out of the bedroom. Simone stayed curled up on the rug. Maggie wondered if the cat would stay there or get into bed with Tina. She hoped, if that happened, Tina wouldn't be startled and move

abruptly. Such a reaction might scare Simone away and she might not come back for a while, if ever.

Simone stayed where she was all night. So did Tina. In the morning, Simone followed Tina downstairs after she got dressed. Maggie felt pleased. She assumed a new era in Tina's life had just begun and she was happy she was able to witness it. *Maybe Tina and Simone will become fast friends, Maggie thought. Wouldn't that be something? It would be great for both of them.*

They did and it was.

INTERLUDE 9

Around 3 pm on January 3, 1960, Maryann's body was brought home to her family's DuPont Street house. An open casket viewing took place later that evening. Maryann again wore the rings that were used to identify her corpse. Her mass and burial took place the next day. Her mother was unable to walk and was held up by her father. Classmates from her school also were there.

Wednesday, August 10, 1960

65.

Officer Jackson was running out of ideas. Tina was still missing. He was still baffled. The tip about the girl on the H bus proved worthless. The newspapers were becoming more inflammatory. They were not only arguing that another Elmo Smith could be loose in the city, they were implying that the police were either incompetent or didn't care.

It was getting ugly.

Officer Jackson was also annoyed. He wasn't a detective. No detective had even been assigned to the case. His bosses were content to let him handle everything. As long as he reported on everything he was doing, the investigation could continue and they wouldn't interfere.

A week ago, he had teams out searching for Tina. Now, he was the only cop working on the case. *Maybe the papers are right*, Officer Jackson thought, cynically. *Maybe no one in the police department gives a damn.*

Except him.

Officer Jackson suddenly realized there might be another reason they were letting him work alone. If the case didn't get solved successfully, he could be the scapegoat. *It's all the colored cop's fault*, he thought, imagining what the bosses would say. *Those cops just aren't as good as white cops are.*

But Officer Jackson was as good as or better than any cop- Negro or white- on the force. He was good because he cared. The disappearance of Tina Martini wasn't just a *case* for him. She wasn't just the object of a search. She was a person. Her family were people. They had suffered a tragedy. He had been assigned to help them deal with that tragedy and wasn't going to let them down. But he wondered if maybe he cared *too* much about people and not enough about policing. *Maybe this isn't the right job for me*, he thought.

But being a cop wasn't just a job for Officer Jackson. As he had told Vicky, this was his life. This was who he was. Helping people was all he had ever wanted to do. It was the way his parents had raised him to be. 'Never forget you're part of a community. Never put yourself above others. Never turn your back on people in need, whether you know them or not,' his parents had told him.

Officer Jackson wasn't about to turn his back now. The Martini family needed him. But he had nothing new for them. He needed a break in the case but didn't see one coming. Officer Jackson was frustrated.

66.

When Annette awoke she immediately recalled that she had been dreaming about Ben Hedges. He had been her supervisor when she worked at the Asher's Candy factory during the war. He had also been a little (well, maybe a *lot*) more than that.

At first, she had felt awkward when her boss said hello especially warmly at the start of her shift, or stopped to praise her work as he walked along the assembly line. She tried to be courteous and returned his greetings respectfully. But she wasn't seeing him greet or talk to the other women who worked there the same way. Annette wondered what was going on.

Then he started chatting with her. He noticed her wedding ring and asked if she had any children. He also asked if she knew where her husband was in the war. That was when she made the mistake of telling him she didn't know. "Oh, top secret, huh?" Mr. Hedges asked.

She shook her head. "No. It's not that. He hasn't written in a while. I guess he's too busy fighting."

Annette hadn't liked thinking about Rocco fighting or being in danger. She always hoped he was far away from the battles, somewhere where it was safe. Maybe guarding supplies or making food to feed the other troops. But she had no evidence of that. He had never mentioned what he was doing in any of the letters he sent. He wasn't allowed to and would have been censored if he had. But Annette wished she would hear from him, at least. A simple message was all she craved. 'I'm okay. I miss you. How's my daughter?' Rocco didn't even have to ask how *she* was. She just yearned for some contact.

Ben Hedges figured out that Annette was missing her husband and it was possible he was already dead but she hadn't yet heard from the Army. He knew that could happen. He didn't hope-for her sake- that it had, but Ben wasn't interested in Annette after the war ended. He was interested in her *now*. And he decided to offer himself as someone sympathetic she could talk to when she was feeling anxious or alone.

He made up a lie about a sister whose husband was also away in the war. He mentioned how she was agonizing over where he was and what was happening to him. Ben said she had found that it was helpful not to keep her fears to herself but to have someone to talk to. "She talks to me," he said. "And she tells me it helps her cope."

Ben hoped that Annette would start seeing him as someone she could talk to similarly. Just a friend, of course. For now, anyway. He hoped he could become something more eventually. At least for a while. Until Annette's husband came home. Or, she found out he wasn't coming back. It made no difference to Ben. He didn't want a relationship with her for the rest of his life. Just for the rest of the war.

In mid-afternoon of the last Saturday just before Christmas Day of 1944, Ben knocked on Annette's apartment door. He was hoping he would find her alone. (Luckily for him Vicky was playing with a friend in another apartment.) He was carrying a box of Asher's best chocolates. Annette had helped assemble these boxes but never dreamed of being able to have one. They were too expensive. Ben showed her the box and smiled warmly. "I wanted to wish you a merry Christmas and give you a little gift. I know you see these every day but you've probably never had one." He handed her the box. She looked at it.

Annette felt embarrassed but also grateful. Not for the chocolates. For Ben's visit. "Oh. Oh, my. This is something special. Thank you so much, Mr. Hedges."

"Please call me Ben. Go ahead and open them if you want to. I can tell you with every confidence they are excellent."

"I'm sure they are. But I'll wait to open them at Christmas."

"Suit yourself. I know you'll love them."

Ben stood awkwardly at the open apartment door. Annette realized she ought to invite him in. She stood aside and he walked into her little apartment. There was a small, sparsely decorated Christmas tree in the corner of the living room. Other than that, there were no other Christmas decorations.

Annette closed the door after Ben entered. "Um, won't you sit down?" she said, still feeling awkward. He sat on her small sofa. She placed the box of candy on the coffee table in front of the sofa.

"Can I offer you anything? Some coffee, tea, a glass of water?" she asked.

"I'd love some coffee if you can spare it. I know it's hard to get."

“Oh, yeah. My mom just got me some. I’ll make a pot.” She turned and headed for the kitchen. Ben watched her walk away. She looked good in her plain blue dress. Very good.

Ben smiled to himself. He was *in*. All he had to do now was figure out how to stay close to her long enough for her to change from seeing him as her boss to seeing him as a man. Maybe even a man she could want. A man she would invite to come back. Maybe even a man she allowed in her bed.

67.

Vicky liked her job at the Excelsior Salon. She liked her co-workers, her boss, and even the clients, mostly. (Some of them were bitchy but she had gotten used to dealing with them.) She knew how lucky she was to have gotten the job right out of high school. Most girls who graduated from Dobbins Vocational and Technical High School as hairdressers only got jobs in little neighborhood salons. She was working downtown in an upscale place that catered to rich Rittenhouse Square ladies. If it hadn’t been for her teacher, Mrs. Emerson, she would never have known about the job. All she wanted to do now was make Mrs. Emerson proud that she had recommended Vicky. So far, Mrs. Carlyle, the salon owner, seemed happy with her work.

But, since Tina’s disappearance, Vicky had been having trouble concentrating on what she was doing and had almost made some serious mistakes. Luckily, the customers never knew. But (she suspected) Mrs. Carlyle had noticed. Maybe that was why she kept asking Vicky if she needed time off to deal with Tina’s disappearance. Vicky didn’t know how much more uncertainty and stress she could take before she freaked out. And she thought she knew what Mrs. Carlyle would do if and when she did freak out. She would fire Vicky on the spot. The reputation of the Excelsior Salon was too important to tolerate any but the best hairdressers. If Vicky couldn’t handle the pressure, she would have to go. Mrs. Carlyle was sympathetic but she was also a savvy businesswoman and her business came first. Vicky knew that and tried to keep her emotions about her missing sister under control when she was at work. But the longer Tina was missing, the harder it was for Vicky to remain calm.

68.

Officer Jackson didn’t visit the Martini house on Wednesday. He had nothing to offer. Not even hope. With the newspapers getting increasingly hysterical and his bosses pulling back from the case, Officer Jackson found he was all out of hope. The only thing that he felt could solve this case now was a miracle. And they were too rare for him to count on.

Then he got a break. He was at his desk in the 14th precinct when his phone rang. “Officer Jackson,” he said.

“You the cop that’s looking for that missing retarded girl?” a woman asked.

“Yes, ma’am. Do you have any information?”

“I might. My kid was playing hopscotch out front last Monday. She was with two of her friends. A girl walked by. They didn’t pay her any attention. Then, a few minutes later, they saw her again. She was across the street. They think they saw her get into a car.”

“What kind of a car?”

“My daughter’s only six years old, Officer. She doesn’t know anything about cars.”

“Okay. What color was it?”

He heard the woman repeat the question. There was a pause as someone in the background answered. “Blue, she said.”

“Light blue or dark blue?”

“Just blue.”

“To whom am I speaking?”

“Mrs. Dickens. I live at 111 Hansberry. The kids were out front playing.”

“This was definitely on Monday?”

“She thinks so.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Dickens. Your daughter has been a big help.”

“Do we get the reward?”

“I don’t know, ma’am. I’m not handling that. But I’ll be sure to mention your tip to the people that are.”

“You promise? I don’t want to get cheated.”

“I promise. If your tip leads to Tina’s recovery, I’ll make sure the reward people know it. Right now, I’ve gotta follow this up. Thanks again.”

Officer Jackson hung up before Mrs. Dickens could say anything else. He didn’t know if the tip was any good. Lots of people owned blue cars. He wasn’t even sure the kids saw the car on the day Tina disappeared. They could have been prompted by their parents. Or, Mrs. Dickens could have made up the entire story hoping to get the reward.

Then he remembered something. There had been an older blue Studebaker parked near that ex-nun’s house when he went to interview her. Officer Jackson knew he had to go back.

Tina was enjoying her daily bath when Officer Jackson arrived. Simone was with Tina again. Everyone in the house, including Maggie, was feeling content.

She heard a knock and went to look out the front window. She saw the red cop car and immediately felt anxious. *Oh, it’s that cop again*, she thought. *What does he want this time?*

She went to the door and opened it. Officer Jackson smiled when he saw her.

“Afternoon, miss. Sorry to bother you again. I had a couple of additional questions. Got a minute?”

“Sure. Go ahead and ask.”

“That blue Studebaker outside. Know whose it is?”

“It was my mom’s. She left it to me. But it doesn’t work.” The spontaneous ease with which Maggie lied shocked her. She hoped she wouldn’t get caught in the lie if the cop decided to talk to any of her neighbors. “Um, why are you asking? Know somebody who might want to buy it? I can’t afford to get it fixed and I don’t need it anyway. I’m probably gonna just junk it.” Maggie’s creative embellishments shocked her even more. *Lying is so easy*, she thought. *But it’s a sin!* She tried not to show an expression of concern on her face.

Officer Jackson grimaced. “Just following up on a tip, miss. It was a long shot.”

“Um, what was it? Are you allowed to tell me?”

“Some kids thought they saw a girl resembling Tina Martini get into a blue car last Monday. But they’re not sure. And neither am I. I think they or their parents might have made it up.”

“I’m sure they don’t mean any harm. Maybe they were just trying to help. But there must be thousands of blue cars in the city.” Maggie paused and smiled. “I bet most of *them* even work,” she added, drolly.

Officer Jackson didn’t grin. He was feeling even worse. He had wasted a trip and felt bad about bothering this ex-nun again. “Sorry to have taken your time, miss.”

“Don’t be sorry. It was nice seeing you again. I’m sorry you haven’t found Tina yet. I’ve been praying for her.”

“Yeah. You keep doing that. Maybe it’ll help.”

Rick was driving around making deliveries and thinking about some new excuse he could find to go back to Maggie's house. He drove past the house just as Officer Jackson was pulling away. *What the hell? Rick thought. Why is a cop here again? What's she up to?*

Maggie didn't see Rick's blue truck drive past her house. As soon as Officer Jackson said goodbye she had closed the door and breathed a sigh of relief. Then she was overwhelmed by guilt.

Lying is a sin! That was too easy. What's happening to me? I've been lying to protect Tina but does that make it okay? Isn't it still a sin? Am I doing the wrong thing?

Or, maybe I've always had a sinful nature and that was why I left the convent. Maybe I even want to sin with Rick. I know why he's been stopping by. I know what he wants. And he's tempting. If Tina wasn't here, maybe I'd give in. But she is here and she comes first.

Then Maggie fell on her knees and prayed fervently for God to help her figure everything out. If God was listening, He didn't offer any advice. Frustrated, Maggie got up and resumed her housework.

69.

Because of her dream, Annette found herself thinking about Ben Hedges all day. *I wonder whatever happened to him, she thought.*

After his Christmas visit, she realized how lonely and hungry for male company she was and started letting him take her out. But she never let Vicky see Ben. Instead, she got Rose, her mother, to take Vicky. Of course, she had to tell Rose what she was doing. Rose wasn't happy about it.

"You're a married woman!" Rose barked.

"Am I, Mom? I haven't heard from him in a year. I believe he's dead."

"But you don't know he's dead, Annette. Remember when the priest said 'Til death do you part?'"

Annette didn't argue. She knew her mother was right. She had no right to date someone. But she *needed* to. She needed to go out, have fun, and try to forget the war, even if it was only for a few hours. What was wrong with that?

"You're married!" Rose repeated. Then, as if she had read her daughter's thoughts. "That's what's wrong with it."

Rose willingly took Vicky when Annette went out with Ben. What choice did she have? Vicky was her granddaughter. But Rose hoped her daughter wasn't playing with fire. *What if he gets her drunk and tries something?* Rose worried. *She doesn't belong to Ben, she belongs to Rocco.*

Annette felt she didn't belong to anyone and could do whatever she pleased. Everything would change when the war ended, anyway. Life would go back to normal. For now, she would take whatever diversion she could get. Anything was better than the bleak life she was living.

Ben found that he enjoyed Annette's company more than he would have expected. She was a pleasanter companion than most of the other women at Asher's Candy that he had tried to have relationships with. They were mostly dull. Annette was fun. She was chatty, had a charming laugh, and a wry sense of humor. Ben wasn't used to being with women who made him laugh and he grew to like Annette a lot.

On Tuesday, May 8, 1945, Germany's surrender was announced. That same day a letter from the Army arrived in Annette's mailbox. It informed her that her husband had been killed. While most of the country was celebrating, she was mired in grief.

Ben happened to stop by to help her celebrate the end of the war in Europe and she told him about the letter from the Army. Seeing how distraught she was, he realized his opportunity to bed her had arrived. He offered his arms for her to cry in. In her grief, she clung to him. He patted her hair. Then he squeezed her closer. He kissed her. First on the forehead, like a child. Then on the lips, as they had done a few times before. But this time was different. He felt something had changed. Maybe it was her resignation. She'd realized there was no point in not giving in to Ben, not doing what she knew he wanted.

The rest was easy. He coaxed her, sobbing and unresisting, to her bed and easily undressed her. She let him lay her down. Then he got on top of her. He was gentle but she was numb and didn't notice. When he finished, she looked up at the ceiling and wondered if she wanted her life to continue. Then she remembered her daughter and knew that it had to.

Annette didn't know it but Ben thought this was a new beginning. He had come to like her enough to consider getting serious about her. Now that her husband was dead, maybe they had a future. Annette wasn't sure she wanted one. She wasn't sure she wanted anything.

Hoping Ben might get the hint and leave, Annette feigned sleep. He was done with her for now and got dressed. Then he kissed her on her forehead and left. Annette started crying again but wasn't sure why. Was it for her dead husband and the life they had that was now over? Or, did she cry because of what she'd allowed Ben to do? Or, were her tears for a future that had suddenly changed? But to *what*?

The truth was, Annette didn't cry for any of those things. She cried for herself. For the girl and woman she'd been but had now lost and would likely never find again. *That* Annette's life was over. There was now a new Annette and she didn't know what sort of life, if any, this new Annette was going to have.

INTERLUDE 10

Elmo Smith, an ex-convict on probation, worked along with Flossie Smith, his mother, at the Lafayette Motel in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. Mrs. Smith was on the housekeeping staff and Elmo was the handyman. Police were given a tip about a stolen car at the motel. The tip was provided by the soon-to-be ex-husband of a woman Elmo Smith was dating. Smith was arrested on the same day Maryann Mitchell was laid to rest.

Thursday, August 11, 1960

70.

It was a slow news day. Around noon, that pushy TV reporter Allison Conway and her crew again showed up at the Martini house. She took up a position at the bottom of the front steps with the empty porch in the background.

“It’s been almost two weeks since the Martini family of Germantown’s handicapped daughter was abducted right from this very porch in broad daylight by a person or persons unknown,” Allison intoned into her microphone. She paused for effect and frowned. “So far, the police have turned up not *one single clue* as to the girl’s whereabouts. Needless to say, the family feels the police have failed them.

“Christine Martini was a pupil at the Saint Francis of Assisi School until June. No one there has any clue about the kid’s whereabouts. There is a one thousand dollar reward for information leading to her return. But she’s *still* missing.” She paused again for effect.

“It seems to this reporter that the Church, the Police, and the City of Philadelphia have all failed this girl and her family. What’s wrong with us? Don’t we care about our children? What if another Elmo Smith is loose in the city? What if, after he’s done whatever he’s doing to Tina Martini, he decides to come for *your* child or one of your neighbors’ children? We shouldn’t rest until Tina Martini is found and brought home safely. If we let this go on much longer, what does it say about our city? What does it say about *us*? I’ve done *my* share. Now do yours. Please, get out there and help find Tina Martini!”

Allison looked at the cameraman. “Was that too strong?” she asked. He shrugged. “Hopefully, it’ll get on the air and get my ratings up. This summer’s been awful.”

Allison and the crew hurried back inside the van and drove away. The report aired on the six-o’clock news. Many people saw it. Among them were the mayor and police chief. Both were apoplectic.

At seven, Officer Jackson was still at his desk in the 14th precinct. His phone rang. “What the hell do you need?” a voice said.

“Who is this?”

“Commissioner Gray. The Mayor wants to know what you need.”

“For what?” Officer Jackson asked.

“To find this missing retarded kid.”

“We’ve done everything we could.”

“Maybe you have, but she’s still missing. An hour ago Allison Conway went ballistic on the news. She all but accused the police of incompetence.”

“We’re not incompetent, Commissioner. There have been no good leads. I’ve followed up every scrap of information I’ve received and nothing had come of any of them.”

“This kid has to be found, officer. People think another Elmo Smith is running around.”

“We have no evidence of that,” Officer Jackson replied, as calmly as he could. “The kid’s mom said she was abducted but it seems she ran away.”

“I don’t give a good god damn *how* she came to be missing. I just want her found.”

It had been another long, frustrating day. Officer Jackson sighed audibly. “So do I, Commissioner. So do I.”

The Commissioner didn’t like hearing Officer Jackson’s sigh. He felt it was disrespectful. *Who does this colored cop think he is?* the Commissioner thought. *Doesn’t he know how to follow orders?* “Watch it, officer!” he barked.

“Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.”

“If you need help, just ask. If you can’t solve this, just say so. I realize you’re not a detective and you’ve been doing a detective’s job for almost two weeks. If you can’t handle it, that’s okay.”

Officer Jackson needed to defend himself. “I *can* handle it, Commissioner. But I can’t make up leads. We’re stuck.”

“That’s not good enough, Officer Jackson. By tomorrow, I want us *un*-stuck. You got that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Now go do your job.”

After the Commissioner hung up, Officer Jackson sighed again. He wondered how much longer he was going to be a cop. *Maybe it’s only a matter of days*, he thought. *But I’m not giving up. I’ll do my job until they fire me.*

71.

Maggie had been thinking about Tina’s continued schooling. She had been scheduled to start attending a public high school that catered to handicapped kids but Maggie knew that would be impossible now. Since she had been a teacher when she was a nun at Saint Francis of Assisi, Maggie felt qualified to undertake Tina’s education and decided to start preparing lessons.

I’ll probably have to start by going to the library, Maggie thought. They should have some information about educating handicapped kids. But I can’t take Tina with me. And I don’t know if it’s safe to leave her in the house alone. Maybe I can sneak away while she’s in the bath. But if she calls me and I’m not here, what will she do? She could panic, and all the trust and good will we’ve built these past two weeks could be lost.

Maggie decided she would have to at least try. *I’m gonna tell her I have to go out and she must stay in the bath until I come back. If she’s occupied, maybe she won’t notice how long I’m gone. And Simone will keep her company.*

Maggie thought she had a good plan. But she had neglected something. What if someone stopped by? What if Tina, from her bath, heard someone knocking at the door? What would she do? Would she react? Would it scare her? When she later realized she hadn’t considered every possibility, Maggie made it clear to Tina that she should ignore any knocking and just stay in her bath. She hoped Tina would obey. Tina assured her she would.

72.

Later that afternoon, Tina was in the bathtub again. Maggie was reading in the living room and heard a knock. She looked out and saw Rick’s truck. *Not him again*, she thought. *He can’t keep doing this. I’ve got to be more firm this time.*

She went to the front door and opened it. Rick stood there smiling. In his hands was an Admiral twelve-inch portable TV. “Look what I brought you,” he said, cheerfully.

“A TV? You’re delivering *those* now?”

“Only to you.”

Maggie frowned. “I didn’t ask for a TV,” she said.

“Everyone should have one.”

“I’m not everyone.”

“But you do need to relax occasionally, don’t you? You can’t be studying *all* the time.”

Maggie scowled. "I *don't* study all the time. But I don't want to be distracted, either. TV is such a waste of time."

"Well, it's all reruns during the summer, that's true. But if you haven't seen the shows, then they're all new! And new stuff will be on in the fall, which is only a few weeks away."

He waited for her to say something. She couldn't think of any other arguments. "Where do you want it?" he asked. Then he pushed past her and walked in.

Maggie put her hands on her hips. "I *don't* want it, Rick."

He wasn't dissuaded.

"Sure you do. You'll thank me in a couple weeks. You'll see."

He spotted a round table in the corner by the front window. Usually, the table held a plant or flower vase but it was empty. "That would be the perfect spot," Rick said. "And there's an outlet right underneath." He sat the TV on the table and dropped the cord toward the floor. Then he knelt down and plugged it in. He got up and pulled out the antenna. Then he flipped the TV on.

A game show appeared on the little black-and-white screen. People were applauding. The sudden intrusive noise startled Maggie. Rick had his back to her. He looked at the screen. "Oh, look. Price is Right is on. That's a great show. You'll love it."

"Rick. I want you to listen to me."

He turned. "Okay."

"Are you listening?" she asked. He nodded. "Turn that down!" She almost yelled but then stopped herself because she didn't want to alarm Tina upstairs. He lowered the volume.

"I don't want a TV. I can't afford it and I don't need it. So please take it back wherever you got it from."

"You don't have to afford it. I'm loaning it to you."

"I don't care. I-Don't-Want-It-In-My-House. Get it?"

Rick decided to try a different tack. "What is it with you, Maggie? Is it me? Do you hate me? You don't even really know me."

His use of the word hate struck a chord. Maggie had always been taught to love. Being a nun was, in a sense, an embodiment of love. Love of God. Love of Man.

"I don't hate anyone," she said, defensively.

"Then why can't you see what I'm trying to do for you?"

Before she could answer, there was a noise upstairs. Maggie thought Tina had dropped one of her bath toys on the floor. She hoped Tina wouldn't make more noise as she retrieved it. She didn't. Rick noticed.

"My cat," she lied.

"Yeah. That cat. The one I've never seen."

"She's very shy," Maggie said. "I don't even see her much. She just comes out to eat."

"And what does she eat?"

"She likes Cadillac cat food."

"Where do you get it?" Rick asked.

"From the store."

"What store?"

"The market," Maggie said.

"What market? Not Cohen's. I didn't bring any to you. Are you shopping somewhere else?"

Maggie had to come up with a quick lie. The fact that she was getting good at lying disturbed her but she had no choice. “I *was* buying it but then my neighbor’s cat died and she gave me all her food. She had a lot.”

“Oh. Right. Your neighbor. Which one?”

“Mrs. Johnson. You probably don’t know her.”

Rick shrugged. “No. I don’t.”

Maggie saw an opening. “Now will you please turn that thing off and take it away? I’ve got studying to do and you’re interrupting my routine.”

“Right. Your routine.”

“Yes, Rick. Just like you have a routine in your life, I’ve got a routine in mine. Right now, it’s all about studying. Hopefully, it will soon be teaching.”

Rick grimaced. “Yeah, *teaching*.” He said the word contemptuously. “Why would anybody want to do *that*? Kids are brats. There are too many of them in the world. They just get in the way.”

Maggie tried to control herself. “I don’t see them as brats. I love kids.”

“Do you plan on having any?” he asked.

“Maybe someday. But not soon. I’ll be too busy.”

Rick realized that, once again, he wasn’t getting anywhere. He was failing yet another attempt to worm his way into Maggie’s life. He thought his mention of kids might suggest sex and he could get her to talk about dating, boyfriends, or marriage. What her plans were. What her hopes were. But that effort fizzled. So, it seemed, had bringing her a TV. He had one last ploy.

“I tell you what, Maggie. I’m gonna leave this for a few days. I think you’ll watch it. But if you don’t, I promise to come back and take it away.”

Maggie’s priority was getting him to leave before Tina made any more noises upstairs. “Okay,” she said. “But I’m not making any promises. And I can’t afford it. Maybe when I get a job. But not now.”

Rick decided he could accept a small advance instead of a major victory. “Okay. You’ll like it. I’m sure of it.”

“But I’m not. Now, can you leave so I can get back to my studies? I don’t want to fall behind.”

Rick walked to the door. “Okay, Maggie. Um, study hard.”

“I will.”

He left. Maggie breathed a sigh of relief. She looked at the TV. It was still on. The sound was turned down. She walked over and switched it off. Then she wondered what she should do with it. She tried to lift it but it was too heavy. *I’m stuck with it until he comes back*, she thought. But she was worried that Tina would see it and want to watch it and it would disturb the quiet of their household. Maggie got down on her hands and knees and reached under the table. She grasped the plug and pulled it from the socket. *I’ll tell Tina it’s broken*, she thought. *Another lie, but what can I do?*

73.

The Martini family hadn’t seen Allison Conway’s report on the local evening news. They didn’t know anything had happened until people again started gathering outside the house around six-thirty. On her way home from work, Vicky got off the trolley car and again saw a crowd. *Now what?* she thought, tiredly.

“Here comes the older daughter,” someone said as she walked along Hansberry Street.

“Hi, Vicky,” someone else said when she got closer to her house.
“What’s going on?” Vicky asked.
“We saw the news.”
Vicky frowned. “What news”
“About your sister.”
“Did they find her?” Vicky asked.
“No, she’s still missing.”
“So why are you all here?”
“To see what we can do. Maybe help search for her. The police ain’t doing shit.”
Vicky was annoyed. It was hot. She shook her head. “You’re wrong,” she replied, wearily. “The police have been reporting to us almost every day.”
“You mean that colored cop?” someone asked.
Vicky nodded. “Yeah. That’s Officer Jackson.”
“They couldn’t assign a *white* cop?” someone else said.
Vicky bristled. “What difference would *that* make?” she asked.
“You know how lazy niggers are,” someone else commented. “Maybe he’s lying to you. Maybe he hasn’t done *anything*.”

Vicky was too tired from a day’s work and worrying to argue. She didn’t want to defend Officer Jackson but believed there was no other cop- white or Negro- who could handle the case as well as he was doing. But these people were racists and wouldn’t believe her if she said anything. She walked past them without saying another word and went into the house.

At dusk, Rocco went out on the porch and ordered everyone to go home. He didn’t thank them for being there. He almost sounded as if he was angry that they had gathered. He kind of was. Their presence wasn’t helping. Rocco suspected they were hanging around only because they hoped to get on TV or the radio or have a newspaper reporter quote them in a story.

Rocco didn’t want any more stories. He was tired of all the attention. Rocco wanted Tina’s disappearance to play out to its conclusion as quietly as possible. He wasn’t optimistic about the outcome. He’d already resigned himself to his daughter being found dead. If she was found at all. He didn’t like thinking about it because he didn’t want to imagine what the end of her life might be like. Would she scream? Cower in fear? Fight? Go limp? Whimper?

Would she think about her father and mother and sister and brothers at the end? *Why would she do that?* Rocco thought. *We never thought much about her.*

What bothered Rocco the worst, however, was the thought that Tina would die alone. He knew that, although she was part of their family, she mostly wasn’t. Tina had been mostly alone. To Rocco, living alone was one thing. Dying alone was something else.

Back when he was in the war, Rocco had seen men die. Some of them had been his buddies. None had been alone. There had always been others around. Maybe they couldn’t have helped the dying men or saved them but at least the dying soldiers knew *someone* was there. The thought of Tina maybe dying with no one there got to Rocco and he almost felt like crying.

When he went back inside, he ignored everyone and wearily climbed the steps. Rocco undressed when he got into the bedroom and lay down. He didn’t fall asleep. When Annette came to bed an hour later, Rocco waited until she turned out the light and settled in and then reached his arm around her. Thinking he wanted sex, Annette pushed his arm away. But for once she was wrong. Her husband of twenty years hadn’t wanted sex. He wanted her to ease his pain, to comfort him. Had she known, it wouldn’t have made any difference. She still would have pushed him away. Annette had no comfort to give anyone. She had run out of comfort years ago.

INTERLUDE 11

The Philadelphia police interrogated Elmo Smith for ten straight hours. The next evening, they escorted Smith to the places in Roxborough where Maryann Mitchell was last seen alive. Several people said they recognized Smith as having frequented the premises. When police examined the stolen car, they found blood, a nickel, a bobby pin, and the top of a lipstick tube. The dome light in the car had been smashed.

Friday, August 12, 1960

74.

The city woke up to find the Friday morning newspapers had amplified Allison Conway's TV tirade. **Handicapped Girl Still Missing**, the *Inquirer* headline read. **Citizens Urged to Search**, said the sub-headline. The headline on the front page of the *Daily News* read **Has Tina Been Murdered?** Saturday was designated as a citywide Search for Tina day.

The TV stations sent reporters back to the Martini House. Rocco left for work before they arrived. Vicky wasn't so lucky. As soon as she came out the front door she regretted not sneaking out the back. There were cameras trained on her. She panicked but quickly composed herself.

"You're the sister, right?" a reporter asked. He shoved a microphone in her face.

Vicky nodded. "Yes."

"Do you miss her?"

"Of course," Vicky replied.

"Where do you think she is?"

Vicky shook her head. "I have no idea."

"Do you think she will be found?" another reporter asked. Vicky saw another microphone pointed at her.

She looked into the camera. "I certainly hope so."

"Do you think she's still alive?"

Vicky glared. "Why don't you shut the hell up?" she barked. Then she angrily pushed everyone out of her way and walked toward the trolley car stop at the corner. Her final line wasn't shown on TV. They cut to a shot of the empty porch.

She calmed down as she rode to work and arrived hoping for a routine day. But her co-workers had seen Allison Conway's inflammatory broadcast and wanted to talk about it.

"We wanna help," Doreen said.

"Help how?" Vicky asked.

"We wanna search. We all live in different parts of the city. We can get out neighbors to help look around to see if we can find any clues."

"The cops are doing that," Vicky said.

"But they can't be *everywhere*. Besides, they've come up with nothing."

"They're doing all they can. She could be anywhere. Maybe not even in the city anymore."

"Is that what you think?" Doreen asked.

"I don't think anything. I don't know."

"Well, we're gonna help, Vicky. Tomorrow. Like the newspaper says. We're gonna search."

Mrs. Carlyle chimed in. "Um, girls?" They stopped chatting. "We're open tomorrow, remember? And we're booked up all day. We can't let our customers down. If you want to keep your jobs, you'll come in and work like you're supposed to."

"But the *search-*," Janet said.

"Do it Sunday."

Mrs. Carlyle looked at Vicky. She looked at Mrs. Carlyle. 'Thank you,' Vicky mouthed. Mrs. Carlyle nodded. Everyone went back to work.

75.

Tina was sleeping on her side. She felt something move and opened her eyes. Simone the cat was stretching next to her. "Hello," Tina whispered. "Welcome to my bed." Simone didn't look at Tina when she spoke. But the cat didn't leave, either. Tina looked at Simone. "I guess you're not shy," she whispered. "You were just waiting for me to show up so we could be best friends. Well, I'm here now and I'm not going anywhere."

Maggie tiptoed to the bedroom door and looked in. She saw Simone lying next to Tina and smiled. *I think everything's gonna be okay*, she thought. Then she went downstairs to get breakfast ready.

Tina and Simone came down together awhile later. Simone hung around Tina's chair while she ate breakfast. Tina thought about giving Simone some of her food but Maggie asked her not to. "If you do that, the next thing you know, she'll be up on the table eating out of your bowl," Maggie explained. Tina didn't think that would be such a bad thing but didn't argue. Instead, she petted Simone. The cat purred.

76.

Annette had watched the commotion happening in front of her house from the dining room. She was glad the reporters had questioned Vicky instead of her. She didn't know what Vicky told them and didn't care. *Maybe now that she's talked to them they'll go away*, she thought.

But they didn't. They milled around for a while. Annette hid in the kitchen. The reporters saw no activity in the house and decided not to hang around. Annette felt relieved when they finally left.

Although she and Tina had spent every day together since school ended, she didn't miss her daughter's company. Maybe because Tina was never much of a companion. She didn't say or do much. Tina was just kind of there, like a piece of furniture. Except that, unlike furniture, she did move around. And sometimes she helped. If Annette asked her to. But Tina never volunteered or pitched in. She had been afraid to. She was never sure what she was allowed to do or forbidden to touch. So she did nothing unless she was told. Annette got tired of always having to tell Tina what to do and often went hours without saying anything. Tina just remained quiet and tried to keep out of the way.

It had been nearly two weeks since Tina had disappeared and Annette didn't like thinking about it. She didn't like thinking about change. She valued sameness and routine. It was what her life as a homemaker had become. Day in and day out, everything was done automatically, without thinking, without feeling. Annette knew her daily routines well enough to have done them in her sleep. Some days, she almost felt as if she *was* doing them in her sleep. Those days were her favorites.

Her routines were what had made her wait two hours before she called the police. Annette hadn't been able to imagine that anything in her life would change and she assumed Tina would reappear. When Tina hadn't reappeared, Annette finally realized something different had happened.

After everyone left, Annette hoped the rest of the day would turn out to be quiet and she could resume her routine. Change could happen elsewhere, in other people's lives. She didn't want any more of it in her life. What was it good for? Only heartache and pain and she had plenty of those already.

77.

Rocco's co-workers had also seen the TV news and the newspaper headlines. Luckily, he managed to load his truck quickly and start on his route before anyone could talk to him. He didn't like to talk. Not about big stuff, anyway. He didn't mind a quick chat about the Phillies, or the weather, or maybe fixing something at home (which he rarely did.) But Rocco didn't want to talk about his wife and kids. Nor did he need to know anything about the other men's wives or kids.

In the past, no one had asked him about his family. But now that Tina was missing, his home life was public knowledge and he felt exposed and vulnerable. What if the guys wanted to ask about his wife, his older daughter, or his sons? What if they wanted to ask what it was like having a handicapped kid? He had never mentioned Tina to anyone. All his records showed was that he was married with four kids. He drove a truck. All that was important to him were his deliveries, not his family.

As he drove between stops, he wondered if things in his life would ever go back to being normal. Normal for him was routine, quiet, and regular. Nothing unusual. Nothing radical. Just everyday living with no highs and lows to unsettle things.

In the harsh light of another day, Rocco didn't know if he should worry about Tina or be angry at her. If she had been abducted, it seemed necessary to worry. But the implications were overwhelming and Rocco had already faced them. If Tina had run away, well, maybe he didn't have to worry as much. Maybe she was okay somewhere. Maybe she'd even found someplace better. Maybe he even envied her a little if she *had* found someplace better.

Rocco wouldn't have admitted it out loud, but he didn't like his home life. It didn't matter because he couldn't change it. He wouldn't have even known how to change it. *Maybe Tina just wanted a change*, he thought. *Maybe that's all that's happened and all this fuss about her is stupid. Maybe we should just forget her.*

Rocco decided forgetting his retarded daughter was the best thing he could do. *Tina?* he thought. *Tina, who?*

He stopped his truck in front of a grocery store and unloaded a large box packed with baked goods. When he got inside, Rocco greeted the cashier cheerfully and then whistled as he went to the bread aisle. He moved some older merchandise and stacked the new stuff on the shelves. Then he took the empty tray and wished the same cashier a pleasant day as he went out.

This was the way life was supposed to be. Simple. Just do his job. Go in, deliver food, and get out. Over and over. Every day. With no interruptions or changes. No catastrophes or disasters. No kids getting lost, running away, or getting abducted. No wives being unfaithful. No need to reach out in the dark for comfort and being rebuffed.

Rocco wondered if his life would ever be simple again.

78.

Allison Crowley's inflammatory TV news report implied that police were either indifferent to finding Tina or incapable of determining what had happened to her. The Mayor and Police Commissioner were not pleased. Officer Jackson had seen the news report and expected he would again be hearing from someone higher up.

He was right.

Officer Jackson tried to think of a way to avoid going to his desk and just taking out his patrol car. But it was payday and he needed to get his check. That meant he would have to show up inside the precinct in person.

He walked through the door and greeted Wally, the desk sergeant. Wally ignored him. He saw two other cops as he walked to the pay window. Neither looked at him. When he saw Gladys, the woman who did much of the personnel paperwork and handed out paychecks, he smiled.

“Mornin’, Gladys. How ya doin’ this fine Friday?”

Gladys didn’t reply. She reached into a box and took out an envelope. It held his paycheck. She waved it toward Officer Jackson but didn’t hand it to him. “I shouldn’t be telling you this, Officer Jackson, but this could be your last one.”

“Is it that bad?”

Gladys nodded. “Chief’s not happy with you. Nobody is.”

“I’ve done all I can.”

“Maybe you think you have. But *they* don’t.”

“What do they think I’ve been doing for two weeks?” he asked.

“I don’t know. But this missing retarded kid’s got the city in an uproar. Maybe they shouldn’t have sent you to investigate in the first place.”

“Yeah. I’m no detective, Gladys.”

“Don’t make no difference, now. Whole department’s lookin’ bad. They’re gonna want somebody to blame.”

“I’m not stupid. I already figured that out.”

Gladys nodded. “Never said you *were* stupid, officer. And I’m glad you figured it out. What you need is a break in the case. Did you get anything at all? Any leads? Any clues? A hunch, even?”

Officer Jackson shook his head. “I followed everything and got nowhere. That kid doesn’t want to be found. Either that or someone doesn’t want us to find her.”

“You think she’s still alive?”

“God, I hope so,” he replied.

“You think somebody like Elmo Smith took her?”

Officer Jackson shook his head. “Actually, no. I think she ran away from home. Or wandered away. My guess is that she couldn’t stand living there anymore.”

Gladys nodded knowingly. “Sounds bad.”

“You have no idea.”

She handed Officer Jackson his check without another word. Officer Jackson went out to his car. He sat in it awhile not knowing where he ought to go. It seemed useless to return to the Martini house. He had no news. He had no leads. He had nothing. Tina Martini was still missing.

79.

Rick had watched the TV news on Thursday evening. It included Allison Conway’s rant as well as images of the school and some nuns. He went to Maggie’s on Friday afternoon. Tina was in the tub again. Maggie wasn’t home. She had gone to the Roxborough library to do some research.

Rick knocked on the front door but no one answered.

Upstairs in the bathtub, Tina heard the knocking. As Maggie had instructed, Tina ignored it and continued playing.

Feeling annoyed, Rick pounded on the door. He thought Maggie was ignoring him but wanted badly to talk to her and felt justified in being more forceful. He was reaching the end of his rope.

Still no answer.

Upstairs, Tina heard loud banging that frightened her. She tried to ignore it but it continued. Tina got scared. She got out of the tub and dried herself quickly. Then she got dressed.

The banging continued. Tina decided she needed a place to hide. There was nowhere upstairs she felt safe. She hurried downstairs. Rick was listening at the door and heard her bare feet stomping on the steps. "Maggie!" he yelled. "I know you're in there. Open the damn door!"

The booming male voice panicked Tina and she ran to the basement door. She opened it and looked down the steps. Maggie had warned her never to go down there alone but it seemed the best place to hide. She found the light switch and turned on the light. Then she closed the door behind her and tiptoed down the steps.

"Maggie Fallon!" a man's voice yelled outside.

"What?" Maggie said.

Rick turned. Maggie was coming up behind him with an armload of books.

"Um, I just stopped by to talk to you."

"What about?" Maggie asked, annoyed.

"Didn't you tell me you used to teach at a Catholic school?"

"Yes. I quit in June."

"What school was it?" Rick asked.

"Saint Francis of Assisi in Germantown."

"Yeah. That's where that missing girl went."

"What missing girl?" Maggie asked.

"The retarded kid."

"Oh, you mean Christine Martini?"

Rick nodded. "That's the one."

"She was my pupil three years ago."

"So you *knew* her."

"A little. The class was so big it was hard to know any of the kids."

"Do the police know you had her in class?" Rick asked.

"Yes. A cop's been here twice asking about her."

"And what have you told him?"

"Not much. I didn't recall much about her from when she was in my class."

"But what about *since*?" Rick asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Have you seen her since she was in your class?"

"I don't know. I guess I would have seen her in the playground at recess."

"That's all?" Rick asked.

"Why are you asking? Have *you* seen her?"

"No. But I've been looking. I drive around the neighborhood all day. Maybe she's somewhere I could spot her. There's a thousand-dollar reward for someone who sees her."

Maggie was surprised. "Really? That's a *lot* of money. They must want to find her bad."

“Well, they do. She’s retarded. There’s no way to tell what kind of trouble she could get herself into. And she was likely abducted, although the police keep saying they have no proof. Everybody else thinks somebody like Elmo Smith did it.”

“Elmo who?” Maggie asked.

“That guy that murdered that girl from Manayunk last winter. It was all over the news.”

“I was living in the convent. We didn’t see much news. We were too busy serving God.”

Rick scoffed. “Yeah, God. Wonder what *he* thinks about all this? How could he let a helpless retarded kid get abducted and maybe killed? Not much of a god, if you ask me.”

“No one asked you,” Maggie said. She pushed past Rick and unlocked the front door. Then she went inside. Wishing she would never see him again, she slammed it shut in his face. Unperturbed, he walked away.

80.

It’s Friday night, Vicky thought as she rode home from work on the trolley. I used to go out on Friday nights. I used to have dates. I used to hang out with my girlfriends. I used to have a damn life! Now what do I have? A job that keeps me on my feet all day. I come home too exhausted to even think about going out. All I got to look forward to is going back to work on Saturday morning. What the hell has happened to me?

Vicky knew where these kinds of thoughts always led. Regret. A desire to escape. A wish that somehow someone would rescue her from drudgery. *I used to believe in Prince Charming. That he would rescue the Princess. I used to believe I was a damn princess. Well, Princey-boy, where the hell are you? I’m waiting.*

Vicky almost thought getting married to someone- *anyone* with a job and a wish to have a wife and start a family- would be better than this. In the back of her mind, she knew she’d likely end up like her mother but didn’t care. She just wanted out. Now.

She got off the trolley and walked toward her house. Some people were there again. *That stupid TV bitch! she thought. Why can’t they just leave us alone? Tina’s gone. The cops are searching. No one can do anything. It’s too damn hot and I’m too damn tired to deal with this.*

Vicky pushed past the people and went up the steps. Someone called out but she ignored them. She went inside and didn’t say anything to her mother or father. She hauled her tired body upstairs and closed her bedroom door. Then Vicky fell on her bed and cried. Not just for herself, but for Tina, her mother, and all the hurting women in the world.

In her short time in the adult working world she had come to learn that hurt was far more common than anything else. Happiness was a childhood fantasy and she wondered why parents let their kids indulge in it. *Maybe it’s so the kids will look forward to growing up, she thought. If their parents told them the truth, they might just want to kill themselves.*

Even though Vicky didn’t have anything to live for, she didn’t want to kill herself. She just wanted to cry. And that’s what she did.

INTERLUDE 12

When Philadelphia police forensics investigators examined the stolen car, they found blood on the back of the back seat, on the roof just above the rear door, and on the front floorboards. The car jack found in the trunk also had blood on it. The blood that was found was type A, the same as Maryann's. Three strands of auburn hair, similar to Maryann's hair, were also found. Neither Elmo Smith's fingerprints nor those of Maryann Mitchell were found in the car. Since Maryann's body had been found in Lafayette Hill, Elmo Smith was transferred from Philadelphia custody to Montgomery County custody and placed in Norristown Prison.

Saturday, August 13, 1960

81.

a.

As riled up as the city had been about finding Tina on Friday, an intensified heat wave made everyone lethargic on Saturday. Very little searching took place. Most people did their best to avoid the almost one-hundred-degree heat. They stayed inside, went shopping or to the movies where it was air-conditioned or went down to the New Jersey shore where it was cooler.

b.

Rick was busy most of the day making grocery deliveries. He drove by Maggie's house several times to see if that cop car was back but never saw it. He couldn't stop thinking that Maggie was hiding something but couldn't come up with a way to find out what it was. Rick was frustrated. He was also hot and tired and looking forward to having Sunday off. Part of him still hoped he could persuade Maggie to go see the Elvis movie with him.

c.

Vicky and her co-workers had a quiet day at the salon. Several customers canceled their appointments at the last minute because it was too hot to go out. The hairdressers had free time to relax, chat, and enjoy the air-conditioning. Mrs. Carlyle wrote it off as a profitless day.

d.

Officer Jackson stayed home. He was at a dead end. Although it was hot in his apartment, he had a quiet place to go over everything that had happened. He hoped to find something more he could do. But nothing appeared.

He dreaded the likely onslaught of inflammatory headlines in the Sunday newspapers and wondered if he would still be a cop on Monday morning. *Well, I guess I could go back to shining shoes*, he thought, grimly.

That had been his first job. As a kid, he roamed through the Germantown business district with a shoeshine box asking men if they wanted their shoes polished for a quarter. It was hard to resist the friendly-looking colored boy. He attracted enough customers to bring in enough money to pay for his hobbies and buy Christmas presents for his family. He'd also enjoyed being outside among people. Most were friendly. A few weren't. Despite the racial prejudice that pervaded society, hardly any of the white people had ever acted mean.

e.

Rocco again spent Saturday in the basement. He brought down a folding chaise lounge and set up his transistor radio so he could listen to the ball game. He was also hoping for a nap.

Annette took care of feeding the boys and did some chores. Then she went out in the backyard. Although it was hot, there was a breeze. She sat on the back step in the shade and wondered if things would ever go back to normal. Then she wondered what normal was.

f.

Because of the increased heat and humidity, Tina spent longer than usual in the bathtub. Downstairs, Maggie sat near a fan and looked at the books she brought home from the library.

She started writing lesson plans and thought she would start easing Tina into schooling soon. It was her goal to make it fun, but practical.

g.

Tony and Ralphie were oblivious to what was happening in the adult world and liked it that way. After breakfast of cereal and milk, they hurried down the block to their friend Jimmy's back yard. Jimmy had an inflatable pool big enough to hold several kids and their boats and other aquatic toys. Jimmy's mom didn't mind Tony and Ralphie being around all day. She felt sorry for the boys. It wasn't because their older sister was missing. It was because of the family they were stuck with.

82.

As she reflected on the past two weeks, Maggie felt that everything was coming together nicely. Tina was happily settled into her new life. She (Maggie) was happy. They had established a stable home.

Rick was a problem. But she thought she could deal with him and he wouldn't cause any more trouble. She had been firm with him and would become more insistent if he persisted in annoying her. If she had to, she was prepared to call the police. Maybe that nice Officer Jackson could give her some advice on dealing with Rick.

Maggie looked forward to praying again on Sunday and hoped Tina would join her. They had much to be thankful for. Maggie wanted to give God the credit for making things work out. If Tina had left her front porch a minute earlier or Maggie had been driving up Greene Street a minute later, they would have never seen each other and wouldn't be together now.

Maggie speculated about what could have happened to Tina if she hadn't rescued her. Maybe the police would have found the girl and taken her home. Maybe she would have wandered through the neighborhood, no one would have helped her, and she would have gotten lost. Maybe even hurt somehow. Maggie imagined a lost, lonely, hungry Tina being rebuffed by callous people she asked to help her get home. Maybe people would have even made fun of her and pushed or kicked her away.

Why do people have to be so cruel? Maggie thought. She recalled the students in her fifth-grade class who had teased and tormented Tina. Maggie wondered what kinds of homes they were raised in and what kinds of parents they had. *Why can't they be like me? Why can't they help instead of hurt? I don't know. Maybe I don't want to know.*

83.

After a light supper, Annette cleaned the kitchen. Just before dusk, Rocco went out to sit on the front porch. There was no storm coming but the air had started to cool. *Maybe it won't be as hot tomorrow*, Annette thought. She decided to go to bed early.

Upstairs, she stripped off her sweaty clothes and got in the shower. As she was soaping up, she looked down at her body. Her youthful attractiveness was gone but she didn't look bad for a woman who would soon turn forty. Her breasts were starting to sag and she had put on a little weight around her middle. But she still had a pretty, if tired, face. It wouldn't turn heads the way it had when she was twenty, but she thought she looked pleasant.

She didn't feel pleasant, though. The past twenty years had been hard. Starting with Rocco leaving to go to war so soon after Vicky was born. Annette had hated being alone. Her

mother Rose was eager to help with the baby but, for Annette, having her mother around wasn't nearly as good as still having her husband would have been.

Rocco (she had only called him Rocky when he made love to her) had been a sweet, patient, and attentive lover and Annette was thrilled by the effect she had on him. The fact that all she did to get him hard enough to want her was merely to walk around the apartment naked thrilled her. His hardness fascinated her. She liked lying flat under him and feeling his stiff rod plunging into her. It made her feel alive. When Rocco left and took that life with him, she felt lost.

But she had never been unfaithful. She gave in and had sex with Ben Hedges only after she got the letter that said Rocco had been killed in action and she had become a widow. Ben wasn't Rocky, but in her grief, she allowed herself to imagine that he was.

And then Rocco suddenly came back. She couldn't have been more shocked. His rod was ready to reclaim her and did. She never saw Ben again. She never told Rocky about the letter, either. Their life went on. But then, sometime later, for reasons unknown and maybe unfathomable, life took a strange turn.

Annette went to bed with the fan on high. Warm air blew over her sweat-free skin. Sleep felt good. She started dreaming. In her dream, her handsome husband went off to fight the war and came back unchanged. No Army 'regret to inform you' letter ever came. Annette had never met Ben Hedges.

And, she had two sons and only one daughter.

84.

Officer Jackson went out for a walk after dark. He sometimes strolled down to one of the clubs on Chew Avenue. The Kit Kat had a silly name but was a nice place. One of his oldest friends, Jerry Howard, owned it. Jerry was always glad to see Officer Jackson and welcomed him warmly when he walked in. Only he didn't call him Officer Jackson. To Jerry, Officer Jackson was just Carl.

However, to the others in the club who occasionally saw him, Carl *was* Officer Jackson and he liked that he was. He made himself available in case his neighbors had things they thought he could help them with.

There were always problems with the Philly police. Often they were small infractions like parking tickets or a traffic stop for a busted headlight or taillight. Some neighbors were drunk in public. Carl told people he would see what he could do and sometimes made the citations and fines go away.

Some people sometimes got caught doing stuff they weren't supposed to be doing or in places where they weren't supposed to be. These kinds of problems were harder for Carl to fix because they were not mere infractions of rules. They bordered on actual crimes. Still, he tried his best to give people advice they could use and told them to keep him informed about what happened. Everyone he helped was grateful.

Carl put a dollar bill on the bar and asked for a cold beer. Jerry frowned at the dollar and handed him a bottle of Schaefer. Carl took a sip and looked around the room. Folks were in booths chatting quietly. Someone had picked out a few jazz records on the jukebox and a piano, sax, and drum ensemble was playing. (Jazz was mostly what Jerry had on his jukebox. He hated R'n'B music. Said it gave him a headache.) Carl started tapping his foot. Then he noticed Natalie. She was looking right at him.

When Carl was growing up, his parents had lived with his uncle in a house on Crowson Street, which was just a block off Chew Avenue. Natalie had been his next-door neighbor. She was a couple of years younger than Carl but had somehow always seemed older. She was also somewhat more adventurous than he ever dreamed of being. This was another way of saying that Natalie tended to do stuff that sometimes got her into trouble. Often the trouble wasn't serious. No one ever got hurt (except their feelings) and there were no serious consequences (except for some stern parental warnings and an occasional grounding.) Nothing ever seemed to bother Natalie and she went on behaving (or misbehaving) exactly as she wanted to.

As she got older, and her parents had less and less influence on her behavior, it was Carl who came to her aid and helped her get out of sticky situations. Carl wondered if she had gotten herself into another one and was about to ask for his help. It had been awhile, but his affection for Natalie had never waned. He looked at her as more of a little sister than a friend and was eager to be of assistance.

Carl lifted his beer bottle in an offhand greeting and Natalie smiled. Then she got up and came over to him. "Evenin', Carl," she said, smiling. "How's my favorite cop?"

"Okay. How's my favorite troublemaker?"

"I, um, got some news."

Carl stiffened. He thought she might be in trouble again and about to ask for his help. "Oh? What is it?"

"I'm getting married."

"Really? You? I remember how you swore to me that would *never* get married. Who's the lucky guy?"

"Um, he's not here tonight," Natalie replied. "He's... well, actually... he's over in Vietnam right now."

"Oh, wow."

"His tour is almost over. He wrote me that he hadn't been able to forget me and I've kept him going over there and asked me to marry him."

"And you said yes," Carl said, smiling.

"Yeah. But it wasn't just because he asked me. I have a little surprise for when he gets back."

"A surprise?"

"Yeah. I'm carrying his baby."

"Natalie, that's wonderful. I'm happy for you both."

"Thanks. I thought you'd be. So... are you happy I'm not in trouble for a change?"

Carl nodded. "Yeah. But I was never angry at you and was always glad to help you out."

"Thanks. I always appreciated what you did. How is it being a cop? Working on anything special?"

Carl nodded again. "Have you heard about that retarded girl from Germantown who's missing?"

"The one who was abducted?" Natalie asked.

"Well, we don't know that she was. That's my case."

"Oh, man, that must be rough. It could be a nasty business if she ends up like that poor girl from Manayunk last year."

Carl shrugged. "We're stumped. She seems to have disappeared completely. There's no trace, no clue, no nothing. But, in a way, that's a good thing because there's no body, either. Just a big mystery."

“Well, if anybody can solve it, it’s gonna be you, Carl.”

Carl didn’t answer. He didn’t want to admit that he didn’t agree. The way this was dragging out, it was looking less and less like there would ever be a resolution and Tina Martini’s name would be added to the long list of missing people who somehow vanish and leave only grief, frustration, and questions behind. Only God would know what had truly happened.

But what could he do? Carl wasn’t God. He was just a cop.

INTERLUDE 13

On Wednesday, January 6, 1960. Joyce Ann Davis, the teenage girl who was stabbed back on December 18, was taken to Norristown Prison and identified Elmo Smith as the man who had attacked her. She also identified his car. Both identifications contradicted her original testimony that she had been attacked by a seventeen-year-old boy and that the car was white.

Sunday, August 14, 1960

85.

The Inquirer's Sunday story began with a boldface headline. **WHERE IS TINA MARTINI?** The story that followed was more lurid than last Sunday's was. 'Will her body ever be found? Has another heinous Elmo Smith hidden her corpse? The police and Mayor have provided no updates. Do they know the truth and are refusing to tell the family?'

Someone had left the newspaper on the porch. Rocco saw it when he opened the front door. He didn't pick it up. He didn't even want to touch it. He hoped a big wind would carry it far away.

"Are we going to church again, Dad?" Vicky asked when she came downstairs. Rocco grunted. She didn't ask again.

After lunch, Annette went upstairs so she could lie in front of the fan. Rocco went back to the cool basement. Vicky sat alone with the newspaper (she had brought it in.) She'd read the article several times and started sobbing.

Officer Jackson knocked softly. Vicky looked up from the newspaper and hastily wiped her tears. He noticed. "Is this a bad time?" he asked.

"Yes it is, but you can come in."

He opened the door gently and stepped into the shabby living room. "You saw the paper?" he asked.

Vicky nodded. "Is there any hope?" she said.

"I don't know what to tell you," he replied. Vicky nodded. "You've been crying."

Vicky nodded again. "What else is there to do?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I know. Thanks."

"For what?" he asked.

"You tried."

"Yeah. But what good did it do? She's still missing."

"And maybe she's already dead," Vicky replied, grimly. Officer Jackson heard the resignation in her voice. Then the full impact of her statement hit her and she started crying harder. Officer Jackson again wanted to offer to hold her but was afraid to. Vicky wouldn't have said yes but would have wanted to. It was a screwed-up world they lived in where two hurting human beings had to hesitate to comfort each other. Vicky hated it. So did Officer Jackson.

"My mom's lost it," Vicky said through her tears.

"What do you mean?"

"I think the pressure's finally gotten to her. She laid out breakfast and lunch without saying a word and she's walking around as if she doesn't know where she is anymore."

"People cope with tragedy in different ways."

"Is that what this is, a tragedy?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'm no expert but I think it is."

"Do you still think she ran away or was she abducted?"

Officer Jackson hesitated. He wanted to answer honestly but was afraid of how Vicky would react.

"I don't know. Either one is still a possibility. She could have just walked off the porch and then somebody picked her up."

"But where did they take her?" Vicky asked.

“That’s the big question.”

“Why wouldn’t they have just brought her home?”

Officer Jackson again hesitated. He wanted to be honest with Vicky but reminded himself she was, in a sense, also a victim. “What if she asked them not to?” he said, gently. “Or wouldn’t tell them who she was or where she lived?”

Startled, Vicky looked at him. “You mean, what if she wanted to start another life?”

Officer Jackson nodded. “Yeah, sort of.”

Vicky looked down. “I wouldn’t blame her,” she said, softly.

“You wouldn’t?” he asked.

“No. She had a shitty life here.”

“You cared about her, didn’t you?”

Vicky shook her head slowly. Then she looked at Officer Jackson. It was time to confess. “No. Hardly at all. Not enough to make her want to stay, anyway. I saw what was happening, and how she was treated, but never did anything to change it. And now it’s too late.”

Officer Jackson wanted to counter Vicky’s despair. “It may not be too late, Miss Martini. Despite what the paper says, she could still be alive. We could still find her.”

“Yeah. But even if you did... would she *want* to come back?” Vicky asked. Officer Jackson didn’t answer. He didn’t even shrug. Because he didn’t know.

86.

Around dusk, another thunderstorm started. Maggie and Tina were sitting in the living room enjoying the thunder and lightning. Tina was again wearing her yellow t-shirt, blue shorts, and pink sneakers, all freshly-laundered. Rick’s blue van pulled up in front of Maggie’s house and he ran through the heavy rain to her front door. He knocked. The storm was so noisy that Maggie didn’t hear him. He knocked harder.

Maggie looked at Tina. Then she got up and walked slowly to the door. “Who is it?” Maggie asked, cautiously.

“It’s Rick.”

“What are you doing out on a night like this?”

“I’m here for Tina Martini,” he replied.

Tina hid behind the sofa.

Maggie opened the door so she could face him. “What makes you think she’s *here*?”

“I figured out that’s what you’ve been hiding. Now where is she?”

Maggie tried to remain calm. “Why didn’t you just tell the police?”

“Oh, no. I’m not stupid. I’m gonna bring her back to make sure *I* get the reward.”

“Is that all you care about?” she asked.

“What *else* is there to care about? So where is she?”

“I don’t know,” Maggie said.

“You’re lying.”

He pushed the door open. Maggie fell backward.

“She’s not here!” Maggie yelled. “Go away before I call the police.”

“Tina! Tina!” Rick yelled. He heard a whimper from behind the sofa. “She *is* here. I knew it. You’re coming with me, girl.” He started toward the sofa.

“Tina, run!” Maggie yelled. Tina darted out from behind the sofa and ran out the front door. Rick tried to block her but was so drenched from the storm that he slipped on the wooden floor and fell down.

“Stop! I just want to take you home,” he yelled as he struggled to stand up.

Tina ran down the block in the direction of Henry Avenue. The heavy rain made it hard for her to see but she was a good runner and kept going.

Rick ran out and got in the van. He started chasing her. “Stop. Stop,” he yelled out the window. “I’m here to help you.”

Maggie ran after the van. She tried to think of a way to get to Tina before he did.

Tina ran past the intersection and down the next block. She made it to Henry Ave and ran across to the other side. She headed toward the bridge and tripped over a metal expansion joint. As she stumbled, she reached out to the wall that ran along the bridge to stop herself from falling. Rick jumped out of his van. He grabbed her arm as she was regaining her balance.

Maggie caught up with them and also grabbed Tina. She screamed at Rick to let Tina go. He told her he wanted that reward so bad he could taste it. Maggie told him he was crazy. Then Rick tried to argue. “You and I could split it,” he said.

Tina was terrified. She thought Maggie was about to turn against her. “No!” she screamed. She broke free and ran along the bridge. She saw trees and figured she could lose Rick in the woods. Tina reached the end of the bridge and tripped over another metal expansion joint. She reached out to grab the wall but it had ended when the bridge ended. Next to the bridge was an embankment. Tina fell toward the grass and slipped when she tried to regain her footing. Then she fell sideways and went over the edge of the embankment.

The bottom was forty feet below.

Maggie and Rick had run after Tina but were unable to catch her. Unable to react fast enough, they watched Tina disappear into the darkness.

“What have you done?” she screamed.

“What have *I* done? You abducted her.”

“No. I *saved* her! God told me to do it. You killed her.”

“No, she fell and killed herself,” Rick argued.

“But if you hadn’t threatened to take her back home she would still be alive. You’re a selfish evil man.”

“And what are you?” he yelled back. “A selfish evil *woman*.”

“I loved her.”

“What’ll we do now?”

“Why don’t we go after her?” she said.

“It’s a forty-foot drop. She’s already dead.”

“Oh, my God. What have we done?” Maggie repeated.

“I’m getting away from here as fast as I can,” Rick replied. He started walking back toward his van.

Maggie ran across Henry Avenue and then started walking home. Each assumed the other wouldn’t tell what happened because the police likely wouldn’t believe their stories and would arrest them both for kidnapping and murder.

The heavy downpour soaked Maggie from head to toe. When she arrived home, she locked the front door and went upstairs to the bathroom. She stripped off her wet clothing and threw it in the bathtub. She tried not to look at Tina’s bath toys on the shelf. Then she towed herself dry. Naked, Maggie walked to her bedroom. She put on clean underwear, a top, and shorts and then went downstairs.

Maggie knew what she had to do but couldn't bring herself to do it. For the first time in her life, Maggie was afraid to kneel and pray. She feared what God would say or do to her when she begged forgiveness for what had happened to Tina.

Instead of praying, Maggie sat on the sofa. She was in shock. Everything had happened fast. The end had come as suddenly as the beginning. Tina was dead.

Simone came from another room and sat next to her. Maggie petted her cat. "Your friend is gone, Simone. It's just you and me again." Simone looked up at Maggie and let out an unearthly howl. Maggie had the urge to howl back but didn't. She remained still and waited for Simone to finish howling.

It took a while.

87.

Rick had taken the blue van from outside Cohen's grocery without Mr. or Mrs. Cohen's knowledge. He thought he was on his way to becoming a hero by returning the missing handicapped girl to her family. He hadn't planned to reveal where he'd found her, preferring to make up a story about seeing her wandering near the woods and stopping to pick her up. He figured she would likely be mostly incoherent and be unable to refute his story. All he wanted was the reward, and maybe a headline. His picture in the paper might be nice, too. But the money would be the best.

Now, not only wouldn't he be a hero and get a reward, but he had witnessed an accident that led to a death and Rick just wished he could erase his entire almost two-week encounter with Maggie Fallon. *I wish I'd never met her*, he thought. *This is all her fault. If she hadn't called for groceries, I wouldn't have known she existed. And that retarded girl might still be alive.*

If anyone had seen the blue delivery van stopped on Henry Avenue near where the girl was found, the Cohens could get into trouble. Then *he* would get into trouble. Rick didn't know what to do.

Maybe I should wreck it and then convince them some kids stole it and took it for a joyride, he thought as he was driving around in the heavy downpour. *They might believe me.*

But Rick didn't want to wreck the van or abandon it. If he did, how would he get home? His only hope was that everything on the bridge had happened so fast that no one had driven by. *Maybe I shouldn't worry*, he thought. *I'll just park it where it was and go home.*

That was what he did.

Maggie would have expected that witnessing or even causing the death of an innocent girl would have somehow affected Rick. She had a fairly optimistic (and unrealistic) view of human nature. Rick had the opposite view. To him, goodness was an illusion that infected the weak. Evil was everywhere and one had to deal with it as best one could. There was no escaping it. God didn't enter into the world. There were only people, each more selfish than all the rest. Only self-interest enables a person to survive. Kindness doesn't accomplish a damn thing. To Rick, Maggie was a fool.

88.

Later, Maggie went to her bedroom. She lay in bed with the fan and light on but couldn't fall asleep. Maggie kept seeing Tina vanish as she fell down the embankment.

Around one o'clock, she went into Tina's room and sat on Tina's bed. She wondered what she should do about the room. *Maybe I should get rid of everything*, she thought. *I don't*

want any reminders of Tina or my childhood. Maggie wasn't sure if she even wanted to stay in that house. *I should probably just sell it and go away- far away.*

Maggie sat there sleepless. As the overnight darkness became deeper and more isolating, she thought back to that Monday when she was driving along Greene Street and she spotted Tina at the corner of Hansberry. Without questioning her urge, Maggie had immediately supposed God was asking her to stop and pick up Tina. She had assumed she would merely be driving Tina home. Then Tina said the words that changed both their lives. 'My parents hate me.' Maggie immediately knew what she had to do. She had to rescue Tina from her dismal life. And, until a few hours ago, that was what Maggie thought she had done.

But, what if it wasn't? What if instead of *saving* Tina's life she had caused Tina's death? *If I hadn't stopped to pick her up, the cops would have found her right away and taken her home. Tina would be alive today.*

Maggie felt overwhelming guilt. *Maybe it wasn't God who told me to pick her up*, she thought. *Maybe it was me trying to impress God, trying to do a small work of mercy to compensate for letting God down when I quit the convent. But I screwed up.* Maggie was unaccustomed to using or even thinking of any profanity. But what difference did a few more sins make now that she had been responsible for what had happened to Tina?

Then Maggie started thinking of ways to defend herself. *I took good care of her and she was happy. How could God have let her die the way she did? Could her death be my fault? I don't think so. If it's anyone's fault, it's Rick's.*

An even darker thought came to Maggie. *Maybe it's not Rick's fault or my fault. Maybe it's God's fault. Maybe He's not the loving, compassionate, benevolent God I thought He was. Maybe He's a monster that tricks the gullible like me and devours the innocent, like Tina. Maybe nothing is my fault and He used me.*

How could I have been so stupid?

Overwhelmed by the question, and exhausted by the events earlier in the evening, Maggie fell into a fitful sleep. When she again opened her eyes, it was light. At first, Maggie didn't know where she was. She hadn't slept in that room for at least twelve years. Then she recalled who *had* been sleeping there and wished she could go back to sleep, maybe forever.

Tina!

How will I ever atone for this? she thought. Maybe by going back to the convent? But if I do that, how can I live with the secret inside me? No, maybe I need to go to confession. Or, maybe to the police.

INTERLUDE 14

On Thursday, January 7, 1960, Elmo Smith requested a visit from his mother and girlfriend. His mother urged him to confess if he was guilty but he denied any knowledge of the murder. By the end of the day, however, there was a signed seven-page confession.

Monday, August 15, 1960

89.

A solitary hiker found Tina's body early Monday morning. He hurried back to his car and drove to a pay phone to call the police. They were on the scene within the hour. As soon as Officer Jackson found out he prepared himself to tell the family. By early afternoon, Tina's body had been moved to the coroner for an autopsy.

Annette was on the porch in her battered rocker when she saw the police car coming along Hansberry Street. She immediately got a bad feeling. *Oh, shit!* she thought.

She hoped the car would drive past her house but it stopped right in front. Officer Jackson got out. There was no one around. Annette noticed the expression on his face. It looked foreboding.

He came up the steps. "Afternoon, Mrs. Martini. I have some news. Could we go inside?"

"You can tell me out here. No one's around."

Officer Jackson sighed. "Okay. We found Tina."

"Where is she?"

"She's...she's... at the morgue."

"I knew it!" Annette exclaimed.

"Did you?"

"I told you she had been abducted but you didn't believe me. Where did you find her?"

"A hiker found her in the woods near Henry Avenue."

"How did she get *there*?" Annette asked.

"We have no idea, ma'am."

"I don't suppose you have any idea who did it?"

He shook his head. "No. We don't. It's still a mystery."

Annette scowled. "My kid is dead and all you got is a mystery?"

"I'm sorry about your daughter. We tried everything we could. We looked everywhere. I followed every lead. I interviewed people and then went back and interviewed some of them a second time."

Annette scowled at Officer Jackson. "So, some maniac rapist and murderer is still on the loose."

"We don't know that, ma'am."

She glared at him. "You don't know. You don't know! *Why* don't you know?"

"We just don't," he replied. "She may have been a victim. But maybe she wasn't."

"What does *that* mean?"

"Maybe she wandered away. Maybe she got lost. I don't know. It's a tragedy."

Annette smiled derisively. "Yeah. It's a tragedy all right. That story is bull. Why would she just *wander* away? She'd never done anything like that before. She never went off this porch. Suddenly she got the urge to leave. I don't believe it."

"It's a theory."

"So I guess you're done?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. There's nothing more I can do."

"I don't think you did much of anything."

"I did," he replied. "But I'm sorry you feel that way. And I'm sorry about Tina. I'm going to leave now. But if you need me, if the media bothers you, or your neighbors, or *anyone*,

just call me and I'll deal with them." Annette didn't reply. She was livid. "Oh, one more thing. I will let you know when you can have the body."

Have the body? Annette thought. *What for?* Then she realized. *How are we going to pay for a funeral?* She frowned. "Uh, yeah. Okay, officer."

"Bye, Mrs. Martini. I'm sorry it ended this way."

"Yeah. So am I."

Annette went inside after he left. She didn't know what to do. *Should I cry? Should I scream? Should I get rid of her bed and everything else that belonged to her? Or, should I ask God why this had to happen to me? Why did I have a retarded daughter? Was it because I let Ben Hedges screw me those few times? Was it a punishment? Or was it an accident?*

90.

Annette was sitting alone in the living room when Rocco came home from work. She had cooked hot dogs for dinner. The boys were in the kitchen eating theirs. There were two on the pan for Rocco and Vicky. Annette wasn't hungry.

"That cop was here again," she told him.

"What'd he want this time?"

"They found Tina."

"Where is she?" he asked.

"She's dead."

Rocco's facial expression remained impassive. "Dead?"

Annette nodded tiredly. "Yeah. *Dead.*"

"Shit!"

"That's all you got to say?"

"What else can I say?"

"She was your goddamn daughter!" Annette replied.

"Yours, too."

"Yeah, mine, too."

They fell into silence. It lasted until Vicky came home from work. She found her parents in the living room. They were sitting quietly and not looking at each other. Their faces were grim. "What happened?" Vicky asked.

"Tina's dead," Annette said.

Vicky nodded. A wave of grief mixed with massive guilt overwhelmed her. She sat down. "I guess I'm not surprised. Was she... murdered?"

Annette shook her head. "Cops don't know. She was found in the woods near Henry Avenue."

"So... it's over," Vicky said. "My poor sister. She never hurt anyone. She never would even have *thought* of hurting anyone."

Rocco scowled. "If somebody hurt her, I'll find the son-of-a-bitch and kill him with my bare hands," he said. Annette looked at him. She suddenly recalled her handsome and virile husband who had gone off to the war. She knew very little about what he'd done while he was away but did not doubt that he believed he could kill someone with his bare hands. Maybe, in combat, he already had.

But the man sitting on their shabby couch wasn't the man from fifteen years earlier. Present-day Rocco was a tired, forlorn, broken man. He was old before his time. Maybe it was the war that took all he had and left only a hollow shell.

Annette knew, although she hadn't gone away to war, that she was just like her husband. It wasn't the toll the war took but almost fifteen years of a hard life. Rocco had always worked but they never had it easy. There always seemed to be more expenses than money to pay for them. The family never got ahead. They hadn't even been able to afford a car. Their broken TV would stay that way.

Life in the Martini household without Tina wouldn't change much.

91.

On Monday night there was a big headline in the Evening Bulletin. **Missing Handicapped Teen Girl Found Dead.** Maggie didn't see it. She didn't see the news on TV or hear it on the radio, either. Maggie was still stunned by what happened on that bridge on Sunday night.

And, she was haunted by unanswerable questions.

Hadn't God wanted Tina to be happy? Hadn't He sent Tina to Maggie so Maggie could *make* her happy? Did He only mean for Tina's happiness to last a mere two weeks?

Maggie couldn't believe that was all God had intended. She was overwhelmed by guilt and confusion. Had she misunderstood God her whole life? If she wasn't here in this sad world to serve God what was she here for? Maggie had no answers and felt lost.

INTERLUDE 15

Elmo Smith confessed that Maryann Mitchell was still alive when he pulled her from the car and dumped her in Lafayette Hills. She pleaded for Smith to take her home but he told her to walk home. Then he abandoned the stolen car and went back to his apartment.

Wednesday, August 17, 1960

92.

In the early afternoon, Officer Jackson parked in front of Maggie's house and walked toward the front door. She was in the kitchen. He knocked. She froze. *If that's Rick, I'm going to kill him*, she thought. Maggie took a steak knife out of the drawer and held it behind her. Then she went to the window and looked out. *Oh, it's that cop*, she thought. She sat the knife on the coffee table and went to the door.

"Afternoon, Miss Fallon. I wanted you to know that we found Tina Martini."

Maggie forced herself to smile. "You did? That's wonderful. Is she back home with her family?"

Officer Jackson shook his head. "No, miss. I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but she's dead."

Maggie feigned surprise. She didn't think she looked very convincing. "Dead? What happened?"

"We don't yet know all the details," he replied. "But she was found beneath a bridge on Henry Avenue."

"Really? That's so close to here."

Officer Jackson nodded. "Um, yes it is."

"What a coincidence."

He looked at her in a way that made her feel uncomfortable. "Is it?" he asked.

Maggie tried to remain calm. "What do you mean?"

Officer Jackson sighed. "When I came here before, she was here with *you*." He glared at her. "Wasn't she, Miss Fallon?"

Maggie saw no reason to lie. She nodded. Officer Jackson waited. He wanted the full story.

Maggie looked down. "That Monday... I had just left the convent at Saint Francis of Assisi and was driving up Greene Street. I saw a kid trying to cross. I thought that kid might be in trouble. When I saw who it was everything became more urgent and I stopped to help. Right after that, everything became clear to me."

"Clear to you? I don't understand."

Maggie looked at the cop. "My life had come apart. I'd lost my mom in May and then resigned from the order in June after school ended. I didn't know what was going to happen to me, or what I was going to do. I was feeling lost, confused, and, I don't mind telling you, *scared*. Then I saw Tina. The only thing she said to me was, 'My parents hate me.' At that moment I knew what God wanted from me, what my purpose in this life was. It wasn't to be a nun and teach school. It was to help Tina. That was when I decided to bring her here. This is where she stayed for the past two weeks."

"How did she end up where she was found?" he asked.

"Some guy figured out where she was-."

"Did he kill her?"

Maggie shook her head. She didn't know why but she needed to protect Rick. "Oh, no. Her death was an accident."

"Who was he?"

"I won't tell you. It won't make any difference now, anyway. He came here Sunday night during that big storm to take her to the police. He wanted the reward money. She managed to run

out the front door and headed toward Henry Avenue. It was raining hard. I tried to stop him. She ran all the way to Henry Avenue. We caught up with her on that bridge. We both grabbed her but she was wet and she slipped out of our grasp and ran toward the woods at the end of the bridge. Then she tripped and fell down the embankment. That's how it happened. It's the truth. I swear it, officer”

Officer Jackson nodded wearily. “I... I believe you.”

“You do? Why?”

“Because you were a nun, Miss Fallon. You wouldn't lie about something like this.”

Maggie knew she had lied about other things but didn't argue.

“I loved her, Officer Jackson. I want you to understand that. I'm not sure anyone else in her life ever did but *I* did.”

“I know that,” Officer Jackson said.

Maggie thought she was going to cry. It was a relief to finally tell the truth. “All I wanted was to keep her safe, nurture her, and watch her grow. I was going to educate her myself. I thought God had sent me to rescue her. Some rescuer I turned out to be.”

“What did you do after she fell?”

“We thought she was dead. We left.”

He grimaced. “I'm not sure she *was* dead, Miss Fallon. She was found *under* the bridge. We assumed her killer had put her there. But now, after what you just told me, I wonder if she *crawled* there to get out of the rain.”

Maggie looked shocked. “You mean she could have still been *alive* after she fell?”

He nodded. “She could have been. Maybe she was waiting for someone to come down and help her.”

Maggie gasped. “Oh, my God! Poor Tina. I *failed* her.”

“There was no way you could have gotten down there. The guy who found her hiked there from over a mile away.”

Maggie shook her head in anguished disbelief. “I'll never forgive myself.”

Officer Jackson said no more. After he left, Maggie made a decision. It was her only logical action but she had to wait until nightfall before she could carry it out. That was okay. She knew she would be doing the right thing.

93.

Officer Jackson drove away almost in a daze. The full impact of everything he had been dealing with for the past two weeks was just beginning to hit him. *So many sad, hurting people*, he thought. *So much tragedy*. Some tragedies were visible, like a missing girl. Some tragedies were invisible, such as a misshapen, loveless family that was beaten down by life and had nowhere to turn and then was struck by tragedy.

He drove to Henry Avenue and parked at the bridge. Officer Jackson got out of his car slowly and walked slowly to the sidewalk. He looked over the wall to the ravine forty feet below. It was the first time he had seen it.

Suddenly, he imagined the scream and the gasps of horror as that innocent fourteen-year-old girl disappeared over the edge. He winced as he imagined he felt the thud as her body hit the soil below. Maybe she cried, maybe she whimpered, maybe she hadn't been able to understand what had happened and lay there thinking someone would come to help her. Then she felt the rain beating down on her and decided to crawl under the bridge for shelter. Then, a while later, abandoned and alone, she died.

Why had Tina been there at that moment? Why had she been on the bridge forty feet above? Why had she been with Maggie for two weeks? Why had she gotten out of her chair on a hot summer day and walked away from her house? Why had she been born into an uncaring family?

What did her life mean, if anything? What did *anyone's* life mean? His, Maggie's, Vicky's?

Officer Jackson sighed and admitted to himself that he wasn't going to figure it out. Not now. Not ever. It was just the way the world was and there was nothing he (or anyone else) could do about it.

Maggie Fallon had done the right thing. She had tried to help an innocent girl nobody cared about. Tina should have found a new life in a new home and been okay. Instead, she was dead.

He got back in his car and drove away hoping to put the case behind him.

94.

When it was dark, Maggie went to the kitchen. She filled Simone's food and water bowls and rummaged in her purse for her keys. After she found them, she turned out the lights and unlocked the front door. Then she went out.

Maggie didn't lock the front door. She walked to her mom's blue Studebaker. After she unlocked the doors, she rolled down the windows partway to let in the cooling night air. Then she got in and started the car. Maggie drove to Henry Avenue and turned right.

Some of the bigger streets that intersected Henry Avenue went downhill almost to the river. At the bottom of the hill was Main Street. That was where the streets ended. Close by Main Street was the river.

Maggie drove along Henry Avenue and turned right at Walnut Lane. It was a sloping street that took her toward the bottom of the long hill. Maggie slowed as she approached the traffic light on Main Street. No cars were following her. The light changed from green to yellow. She stopped and waited. When the light changed back to green she floored the accelerator.

The car barreled across the intersection and crashed through a wooden barrier. Then it rolled down a grassy slope and splashed in the river. Water immediately started spilling in through the open windows. As the car sank, Maggie took her last few breaths of air. Soon, the old blue Studebaker was on the bottom. A few moments later, Maggie was no longer alive.

95.

Maggie shook her head to clear it. She thought she knew where she was but felt confused. *I shouldn't be here*, she thought.

"That's correct," a Voice replied.

"Then why *am* I here?" Maggie asked.

"Someone wants to talk to you."

"My mother?"

The Voice didn't reply.

"Maggie?" someone said. It wasn't her mother's voice.

She looked to her left. Tina stood several yards away. Maggie looked at the girl. She was different. She looked normal. Maggie didn't understand how but she knew Tina's handicaps were gone.

"Tina, I'm so sorry. I never meant for any harm to come to you."

“I know that, Maggie. You saved me.”

Maggie shook her head. “No, I *failed* you. You fell and were killed.”

“It was an accident. You were trying to save me from that bad man who wanted to take me back to my parents.”

“I couldn’t let him. But I never dreamed you would get hurt.”

“As you can see, Maggie, I’m not hurt. In fact, I’m doing great. I didn’t belong in your world or my parents’ world. But I do belong here.”

Maggie looked at Tina and felt relieved that Tina felt she was where she belonged.

But Tina was sad because she knew she (Maggie) wasn’t where she belonged. Maggie couldn’t remain in Heaven.

“Maggie, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“Why did you do it? Why did you kill yourself?”

“All I wanted was what was best for you, Tina. But I failed you.”

“But what you did to help me was right.”

“But it ended so badly,” Maggie replied. “I couldn’t live with myself.”

“As you can see, it didn’t end badly. I’m happy.”

“I’m glad, Tina. Really I am. Whatever happens to me, I’m happy knowing you’re okay.”

Tina turned away from Maggie and looked up. “Excuse me... Couldn’t you let her stay here?”

“There are rules,” the Voice said. “She committed suicide.”

“But she *saved* me!” Tina argued.

The Voice remained silent. Maggie started to flicker and dissolve. “Goodbye, Tina,” she said. “I love you.”

“Goodbye, Maggie. Maybe we’ll meet again someday. We have all of eternity.”

Maggie smiled as she faded. “I’d like that.”

A moment later, Maggie appeared at the gate of Hell.

If Tina still had human eyes, she would have cried after Maggie vanished. Instead, she began to pray for Maggie’s soul. Maybe her prayers could somehow redeem Maggie and one day they *would* be together again. Until then, Tina would remember every detail of the amazing two weeks she spent with Maggie. They were her last two weeks on earth but they had been the best weeks of her life. She didn’t miss her parents, her siblings, or her house. But she did miss Maggie (and Simone.) Maggie had possibly been the only human in her entire lifetime who had truly loved her.

INTERLUDE 16

Because of extensive publicity and heightened public emotion, Smith's lawyers petitioned for and were granted a change of venue for his trial. It was moved to Gettysburg.

Thursday, August 18, 1960

96.

Officer Jackson was putting the finishing touches on his written report. He heard someone mention that a car had been found in the Schuylkill River near Manayunk. A hunch made him get up and get the details. He found two reporters who hung around the precinct hoping to get stories. They were chatting as they waited.

“What kind of a car was it?” he asked.

“An old Studebaker.”

“What about the driver?”

“She’s dead,” the reporter said.

“Any ID?”

“None. But the tag’s been traced to a Margaret Fallon of Roxborough.”

Officer Jackson nodded and went back to his desk.

The coroner’s autopsy had determined that Tina hadn’t been murdered and her death was ruled an accident. She died as a result of injuries sustained when she fell down the embankment. The reason she was on that bridge at that time remained a mystery.

The police released a statement that emphasized that another Elmo Smith was not on the loose. It was merely a case of a handicapped girl who ran away from home. Likely she got lost and couldn’t find her way back. It was sad, but it was over and the city was safe.

Although Officer Jackson was sorry that Tina and Maggie had died, he thought he understood why. He didn’t know it, but he’d come up with almost the same reason Tina told Maggie. *Those two women just didn’t belong in this world*, Officer Jackson thought. *They were too good for it, too pure. Hopefully, they’re in a better place now.*

Saturday, August 20, 1960

97.

There was a small funeral for Tina at the church. Some of the neighbors had taken up a collection that helped pay the expenses. Some of the men Rocco worked with also contributed. The church didn't charge anything. Tina was in a cheap coffin. Hardly anyone came.

After the burial, Annette, Rocco, and Vicky went home. The boys were at their friend Jimmy's house. Their parents hadn't wanted them to endure something they likely wouldn't understand.

The city had moved on. After the police assured everyone that Tina's death had been an accident, people stopped worrying that another maniac was loose. The newspapers found other things to write about.

Annette wanted to move on, as well. But during the mass and as she watched Tina's coffin being lowered into the grave, she couldn't stop thinking about that Monday morning only three weeks earlier. *What if I had called the cops right away?* she thought. *Would that have made any difference?*

Later, Annette, Rocco, and Vicky were sitting in the living room again.

"I never thought it would end like this," Annette muttered.

"What?" Rocco said.

"I sat on the porch for two hours and waited for her to come back. I didn't want to start worrying. Maybe she had just gone for a walk around the block. Maybe a friend came by and invited her to go somewhere-."

Vicky shook her head. "Mom, she had no friends and you know it."

Annette frowned at her older- now, *only*- daughter. "I didn't know that. And neither did you. She may have had school friends we never knew about."

Vicky scoffed. "No, Mom. She *didn't*."

Annette knew the real reason she had waited. She had hoped Tina had vanished from their lives forever. Annette hadn't wanted her to come back.

She went on with her lie. "But then something told me to call the police. I will admit that I didn't want to, but I did."

"Two hours wouldn't have made any difference," Rocco mumbled. He didn't want to admit in front of Vicky that he had yelled at Annette for calling the police without his permission.

"Maybe you're right. But I shouldn't have waited. I should have called right away."

"Damn right, you should have!" Vicky said.

"Well, the only thing I could think that would get their attention was that she must have been abducted."

Rocco nodded. "Yeah, that makes sense."

"But was she? Really?" Vicky asked.

"What do you mean?" Annette said.

Vicky thought back to the conversation she had with Officer Jackson. "What if she'd just had *enough*? What if she just got off the porch and walked away?"

Annette tried not to feel provoked by Vicky's question. "Had enough? Enough of what?" she asked.

"This house, Mom. Us. Her life. The way she was treated. Or mistreated."

"Annette looked at Vicky. "You make it sound like we did something wrong."

“Didn’t we?”

“No!” Annette said.

“Maybe Vicky’s right,” Rocco commented. Annette glared at him. “But it’s too late now. It’s over.”

Annette nodded. “Yeah,” she said, gloomily. “We just buried her.”

Vicky abruptly got up and started walking away. “Seems to me we started doing *that* a long time ago.”

“What the hell does that mean?” Rocco shouted.

Vicky stopped and turned. “You know damn well what it means. None of us ever wanted her in this family. And that includes me. I never treated her like a little sister. I just wished she would disappear. Now she has. I’m so ashamed!”

Annette looked at Rocco. He looked at her. Neither was willing to accept Vicky’s feelings. They didn’t feel shame, sorrow, regret, or anything else. They were also unwilling to admit they hadn’t felt anything except resentment toward Tina for years.

It hadn’t been Tina’s fault that she was retarded. But Annette and Rocco didn’t think it was *their* fault, either. They believed they could have been a different family without her. Maybe even a happy family. But that could never happen now. From now on, they would be known as that Martini family whose retarded daughter ran away and ended up dead.

Annette and Rocco felt cursed.

Vicky felt disgusted. Not just with herself or her parents, but with the world that could allow an innocent girl to suffer the way Tina had suffered. She wondered if the world would ever change and kids like Tina would be supported instead of shunned. She wondered if people like her parents would ever be able to welcome people like Tina into their lives.

Vicky realized what had been missing from their household all these years. It was love. That was all that was needed to give Tina a different life. Vicky found herself wishing that somehow, in the end, Tina had found what she’d been denied most of her life.

A little bit of happiness, at least, Vicky thought. Not enough to offset years of misery but maybe enough to give her a taste of what could have been. And maybe she’s in a better place now. She didn’t belong here. That’s the sad truth. But maybe there was a place she would have belonged and she’s finally gone there.

Vicky shook her head to bring herself back to reality. *What the hell am I talking about? She’s dead!*

98.

That night, Vicky was in what would now be only her bedroom. She felt something had changed. Not in the room, but inside her. She looked at Tina’s bed and again realized she would never again see Tina in it. Not that she had paid much attention to Tina when she *was* in it. Before, the emptiness had been temporary. Now it was permanent. Tina was gone.

Vicky heard footsteps in the hall. Her mother appeared in the doorway. Vicky ignored her. Annette saw Vicky looking at Tina’s bed. “We can get rid of that stuff,” she said.

“What?” Vicky asked.

“Tina’s stuff. It can all go.”

Vicky turned and glared at her mother. “Leave it!” she said. Annette turned and walked out.

Vicky wasn't prepared to let go of Tina but didn't know why. Her guilt for having resented her sister's presence was buried deep within her and Tina's absence haunted Vicky. *She was harmless. Yet I treated her like dirt. Maybe worse than dirt.*

Then it occurred to Vicky to do something she would never have dreamed of doing just a few weeks earlier. She got up and walked slowly to Tina's bed. She sat down. The mattress felt pretty much the same as the one she was used to. But the room looked different. Vicky's perspective had shifted. Instead of seeing from her perspective in her own bed, she was seeing the bedroom from Tina's perspective. It made all the difference.

Vicky stretched out on the mattress and laid her head on the pillow that hadn't been used in three weeks. She looked up at the ceiling. *This is what she saw every night before I turned out the light*, Vicky thought. Vicky wondered what Tina had been thinking and feeling when she was lying there. *Was she thinking about herself, about me, about our family? About her life? What kind of life was she seeing? Was it a good one or a bad one?* Vicky guessed she already knew the answer. If it had been a good one, Tina wouldn't have run away.

"My poor sister," Vicky mumbled.

Tina had never asked anything of her older sister and yet Vicky had resented her. For what? For being Tina? For being handicapped? For just *being*? It would seem so.

Then Vicky closed her eyes. A moment later, she was asleep. Vicky dreamed about the earliest days of her life with her little sister. She had been almost four years old when her mother brought the new baby home from the hospital. Her father was beaming. Her mother looked exhausted but seemed happy. Vicky was ecstatic. She had been playing with dolls and suddenly had a *real* baby. None of the other girls had real babies in their lives and Vicky felt special. Her mother warned her that baby Tina wasn't a doll and Vicky couldn't handle the infant as she handled her dolls.

Vicky watched intently as her mother cared for Tina. She saw mom prepare the baby bottles and put the baby in her little cradle in her parents' bedroom. She heard baby Tina sometimes cry when she awoke and watched her fidget when mom changed her diaper. Vicky was fascinated.

As time went by, Vicky got used to Tina and didn't pay as much attention to her. Tina started growing. Then she started doing things dolls didn't do. Things such as crawling and walking and making noises with her mouth.

When Vicky started school she wasn't able to be with Tina all day. Then, when Vicky was eight, Tony was born. By then, babies no longer fascinated her. When Ralphie came along a year later, Vicky complained to her girlfriends that her mom needed to stop having kids.

By then, Tina was as old as Vicky had been when Tina was born. But Tina wasn't like Vicky was back then. She was different. Maybe even weird. She didn't watch as mom took care of the new baby. She didn't play with dolls. She didn't say anything Vicky could understand. Vicky began to wonder if something was wrong with Tina and began to feel embarrassed about having Tina as a sister. Later, she began wishing Tina had never been born.

That was where Vicky's dream ended. She awoke crying. It wasn't because of grief. It was because of guilt. *Maybe I did love her when I was little*, she thought. *But I hated her later on. I'm sure she knew it, too. I never did anything to hurt her but I bet I hurt her anyway because she probably knew how I felt about her.*

Tuesday, August 23, 1960

99.

Just after lunch, Officer Jackson stopped by to return Tina's school photo. Annette had gone upstairs for a nap. Rocco was at work. Vicky was downstairs reading but couldn't concentrate. She was still trying to make sense of what had happened.

She heard a knock and looked at the screen door. "Oh, it's you," she said.

He didn't smile. "I have your sister's picture. I promised your mom I'd get it back to her."

"Come on in."

"Thanks."

He opened the door and stepped into the living room. Vicky was in her father's high-backed chair. She gestured for him to sit. Officer Jackson went to the sofa.

"I was hoping to see you again," he said. "I wanted to tell you how sorry I am about your sister. We did all we could."

Vicky nodded. "Did you ever find out where she was for those 2 weeks?"

"No," he lied. "It's still a mystery. We don't know how she got from here to those woods on Henry Avenue."

"You didn't come to the funeral," Vicky said.

He grimaced. "I didn't think you'd want me to."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a cop," Officer Jackson replied. "And because I failed you- and her." *And because I'm a Negro*, he thought but didn't say. He suspected she had the identical thought.

"You did all you could."

"But it wasn't enough."

"What do you think happened to her?" Vicky asked.

"It's possible someone tried to help her. Maybe she didn't know who they were and didn't let them. Or, maybe she accepted their help, but for some reason, they couldn't keep it going. Maybe they even tried to bring her home but she didn't want them to and she ran away again."

My poor sister, Vicky thought. "But she wasn't abducted?"

He shook his head. "We don't think so. Her death was caused by the fall. Not by anything or anyone else. But we don't know *why* she fell. We assume it happened during that big thunderstorm."

"I hate not knowing."

"So do I," Officer Jackson lied again.

Neither spoke for a few moments.

"I like to think she's at peace now," Vicky said.

He nodded. "So do I. It's the only thought that makes all this bearable."

Vicky's face darkened. "Nothing will *ever* make it bearable," she replied.

He looked at her. "Not for you. I understand."

"Do you? To you, it was just a case. But she was my sister. I knew her. But I didn't. I could have loved her. But I didn't. At least, not recently. Not since she was little. It's not just her death I can't bear- it's the *life* she could have had that I didn't make happen."

"I understand. I feel sorry for you- and her."

Vicky sighed. She felt drained. "Thanks."

“Look, Miss Martini, if you ever need to talk, here’s my card.” He pulled a card from his pocket and laid it on the coffee table. “Call me anytime.”

“I wouldn’t want to bother you.”

“I’d prefer it if you did. This case has deeply affected me. It even made me wonder if I should be a cop. I got too involved. It bothered me too much.”

“I think that makes you a *better* cop,” she said.

“Maybe. But I can’t seem to let go of the hurt.”

She forced a smile. “Get used to it. That seems to be what life is mostly about.”

“Yeah. Unfortunately, I think you’re right.” Then he paused. “Um, do you think there’s ever *any* happiness?”

“I guess maybe in small ways there is. But there’s no happily ever after. I don’t know why they tell little girls there is. It’s all lies. It was for Tina, anyway.”

He looked at her and wondered if he should ask a somewhat more personal question. Then he decided to risk it. “What about you? Do you think *you’ll* find happiness?”

“I don’t know. I don’t like to think about it. I’m only eighteen but today, because of my grief, I feel much older. And I wonder if life is worth living.”

“Please don’t say stuff like that. It is.”

“Really, officer, why?”

He recalled what Maggie had told him about Tina’s last two weeks on earth. How happy she had been. “Because, Miss Martini, happiness can come when you least expect it. And from where you least expect it,” Officer Jackson said. He hoped he sounded believable.

Surprised by his optimistic statement, she looked at him. “You know this for a fact?” she asked. He nodded but didn’t explain. “I hope you’re right.”

“So do I, Miss Martini. So do I.”

Officer Jackson got up. She also stood. He offered his hand for her to shake. Vicky took it. He put his other hand over their clasped hands and looked into her eyes. She didn’t look away. “Call me anytime. I’d be more than happy to hear from you,” he said.

“Thanks.”

Then he left. Neither expected they would ever see the other again.

Thursday, August 25, 1960

100.

The trial of Elmo Smith began in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The Philadelphia newspapers, radio, and TV covered the opening day of the trial extensively. Despite the hysteria around the disappearance of Tina Martini, she was not mentioned in any of the reports.

Her parents were relieved. They preferred not to be associated with what had been a lurid crime committed only eight months earlier. They also wanted to fade back into obscurity. That was where they felt they belonged.

The trial lasted a week. Elmo Smith was convicted on Thursday, September 1 after the jury deliberated for just 90 minutes. The judge sentenced him to die in the electric chair. He was executed in April of 1962.

Despite the earlier media hype when Tina was still missing, there had been no connection between the murder of Maryann Mitchell and the disappearance of Tina Martini. Maryann Mitchell had been abducted, raped, and dumped in the ravine where she was found dead within two hours. The city had been outraged.

No one but Maggie and Officer Jackson knew it, but during her final two weeks, Tina Martini had found the love and happiness to which she was entitled but never received. If there had been any similarity between the girls, it was that both were victims. Maryann was the victim of a brutal crime. And Tina was the victim of an uncaring family and indifferent society.

Until her abduction, Maryann had lived a normal life. Her happiness had preceded her disappearance. Tina's happiness had *followed* her disappearance. Her previous life had been abnormal. But those last two weeks... her *last* two weeks... well, Tina had been happy. Very happy.

It was all because she had decided to get out of her chair and walk away from her house. She had reached Greene Street just as Maggie was approaching in her mother's older blue Studebaker. Was it due to coincidence? Or, (as Maggie had first believed but then came to doubt) had God brought them together?

No one will never know.

THE END