

# THE SHADOW AND THE GUNMAN

By Richard Bowes

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## PART ONE

IN THE AUTUMN OF MY senior year of high school my Shadow spoke to me. The summer before that, John F. Kennedy was nominated for president and my mother died behind the wheel of her car.

Until then my Shadow had been vague, hard to pinpoint, a secret friend who slipped in sometimes to get me into trouble. My mother's Shadow, on the other hand, was clear and mean and often appeared when she drank. It wasn't just two sides of the same person. As a little kid, at least a few times, I saw Mother and Shadow together.

Her death hardly gave me pause. Since she had been drinking, I managed to tell myself it was the Shadow who had died. As always, my mother would show up sweetly apologizing for being late for the funeral.

Aged sixteen, I told no one any of this. The Code of Silence for the Boston Irish was simple. Certain things you didn't tell other people. Lots of things you didn't even tell yourself.

When he came to the wake, my stepfather had little to say. His divorce from my mother when I was ten was devastating. Not that Frank was all that great. Usually he ignored me. What I appreciated about him was that, like most people, he had no Shadow. While he was around we looked like a TV family.

All around me, aunts and cousins broke down. Grammy, my grandmother, aged visibly at the death of her youngest. Grand-Aunt Tay was badly shaken. I alone was dry-eyed.

On one occasion or another at the wake, each of my uncles, Bob the lawyer, Mike the cop, Jim who had the bar in Field's Comer, got lit and talked to me about Ellen, their little sister. She had been their father's favorite. I was the first and favorite grandchild. Terrible Tom Malloy, my grandfather, had founded the bar and the family fortune, such as it was. His sons had gone in fear of him.

Jim, the eldest, shook his head sadly. "They had hopes for you, Kevin. School and all. When you have time to recover, you have to think about your future."

My plans included college but otherwise were vague. I thought sometimes about a .38 that rested in the upstairs hall closet.

The day of the funeral Aunt Tay hugged me. I don't think anyone else has ever been called that. Teresa was her given name, like the saint, and she was very proud of it. But when, as first grandchild, I called her Aunt Tay, it stuck. Even Gramny, her sister, began calling her Tay.

This thin, white-haired lady with great blue eyes looked at me and said:

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#### BY FELL NIGHT

When I was small and down or scared, we had recited this verse. Tay Fallon was a storyteller, a poet. I tried to slip by her, saying, "Come on, Tay, I'm fine."

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#### BY FELL NIGHT

She repeated and stood in my way. With a bored sigh, I gave the response:  
WITH STICK AND BONE

"Dilleachdan," she said in Gaelic, which I didn't understand. "It's hard for those of us with the gift." It wouldn't surprise me if she knew I was thinking about the revolver upstairs. Tay had been born with a caul and claimed a kind of second sight.

She insisted that I too had a gift, though what it was she never said. All I knew for sure was that I lived under a teenage curse: I was too smart to be a tough kid and too screwy to be a smart kid. The high school drama society was where I hid out.

Maybe the ability to see and to believe two completely different things is the very base of second sight. My mother had always said she wanted her effects to be given away to charity. That fall her sisters-in-law turned what had been her bedroom into a faceless guest room. Still, I managed to believe in one corner of my mind that she was alive.

In an Irish household of my grandmother's generation, the eldest male, whatever his age, was Himself. His wishes might not all be law, but his every failing would surely be ignored as long as possible. My grandfather had died before I could remember, so when my mother moved in with Gramny and Aunt Tay, I became Himself.

That fall, I strained against the ropes and found there were none. My all-boys public school downtown made everyone wear coat and tie. But away from there, I started dressing like a street punk and growing my hair like JFK's. I carried cigarettes and even smoked a few. I Shuck sips of whiskey at home and found

winos willing to buy me half pints. At the Y where I had learned to swim a couple of years before, no one noticed when I started showing up again.

My grandmother's house, a gray Queen Anne on the hills of Dorchester, was a minefield of memorabilia. But my favorite was the .38 hidden in the upstairs hall closet. Oiled and cleaned and wrapped in a piece of chamois, it was something I wasn't supposed to know about.

At first all I did was take it to my room and spin the cylinder. A box of ammo was wrapped with the revolver, but at that time, I never loaded it. Once, I put the barrel to the side of my head and pulled the trigger. When I did, I felt that someone was with me. But when I looked, I was alone. That time, I was careless about putting the revolver back.

Tay noticed. Had I been a few years younger, she might have whipped up some dark and special tea to snap me out of it. Instead, feeling in need of help, she leaked word discreetly to her nephew Bob, the lawyer. Bob's wife, Aunt Alice, had a friend who recommended a shrink. Money was found to send me to him twice a week.

Tuesdays after school and early on Saturdays, I went over to Kenmore Square and talked to Dr. Charles Petrie, a fat middle-aged guy with nubby sweaters. Tuesdays, in blazer and loafers, I told him about my school problems.

"The Drama Society, remember, sir, I told you they're doing Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth, Part One. I told Mr. Royce, the faculty advisor, I wanted to be Hotspur, a great part, this rebel who stutters when he gets excited." Petrie nodded like he knew the play. "Yesterday, I found out I'm Poins, who's this minor accomplice. And he's not even in the last part."

A pause followed until it occurred to Petrie that I had stopped talking. "What," another pause, "was your reaction to this?"

"I got real pissed."

"Yes?" He wrote that down. "Go on."

His office was part of a suite with a dozen other analysts. Tuesdays, there was a receptionist and the place was full of patients: unhappy fat ladies, tense guys clutching briefcases. The entire building was busy.

Saturdays, the building was quiet and the office empty when I'd come in wearing black chinos and a warm-up jacket. Petrie and I never talked about my mother or the gun or what it was I did after leaving the office.

One Saturday I told him, "I'm in this long hallway, a sort of gallery with this

soft kind of light and these middle-aged guys standing there. One of them looks at me, and says, ‘You’re twins.’”

The phrase “middle-aged guys” seemed to interest the doctor. He nodded and wrote that down. “Do you remember any more of your dreams?” he asked.

I almost never remembered dreams. The week before, a guy called Joe had actually said that. Looking where he did, I glimpsed a horribly familiar kid giving the special hard smile I sometimes practiced in mirrors. Then the kid was gone and Joe shook his head, saying, “Just seeing double.”

While I wondered how to explain that, Petrie said, “Time’s up, Kevin. See you Tuesday at three.”

Emerging from his office I found the waiting room no longer empty. A patient with long strawberry blonde hair sat on a couch leafing through a New Yorker.

She wore slacks and ankle-high riding boots. One of them rested on the low table in front of her in a way that was absolutely cool. With the dead accuracy of a kid, I realized she was a crucial few years my senior. I also knew that skin and bones like hers were expensive.

When she looked up, it was right into my wide eyes. From my limited experience of lovely girls, I was prepared for her to realize our differences in age and sophistication, frown and go back to her magazine. Instead, she nodded like she understood what she saw. That was a feeling I never got from Petrie. Smiling, she asked, “Is your shrink giving you anything good?”

Not sure what she meant, I shook my head. She nodded toward one of the offices. “I’m seeing Kleinman, a dullard but occasionally useful. My name is Stacey Hale.” Stacey held out her hand.

“Kevin Grierson,” I said and took it. She left something in my palm. “Next time, have him give you those.” I looked down at a green, heart-shaped pill. “Dexedrine,” she said. “You’re here on Saturdays?” Dr. Kleinman’s door opened as I nodded.

Out in the hall, I still saw her face. The pill was a little bitter when I washed it down at a water fountain. At first, I felt nothing. But by the time I reached the Y, I was sailing. Far away kids shouted in the pool; in the gray lighted Gallery middle-aged men whispered.

Some guy I didn’t know said, “Ten dollars to pose,” and led me into an alcove. “Open your clothes. Let them slip down. Yes! Jacket and shirt off your shoulders, hands behind you like you’re cuffed. Look tough.” I gave my practiced hard smile. “Freeze!” He was creepy but he didn’t touch me. Besides, all this felt like

it was happening to someone else.

That afternoon, I bought a milk shake at a luncheonette and couldn't finish it. Inside my head, something crackled like the blue sparks on streetcar wires. Gray and dowdy streets slid by around me until I found myself standing at a fence watching an engine shuttle cars in the Boston and Maine yards. In the distance, slanting October sun hit the John Hancock tower and I thought about Stacey.

Tuesday in blazer and slacks, I looked at Dr. Petrie and said, "You know, sir, there's this kid in school who was having trouble like I'm having. His doctor gave him a certain prescription and it seemed to help."

The drug never again worked like that first time. But by Friday when we read through Henry the Fourth, I already knew all my lines and most of everyone else's.

Saturday morning, tingling from speed and anticipation, I came out of Petrie's office and found the waiting room empty. Stacey's doctor didn't even seem to be there. I was stunned. Outside at the curb sat a red MG with its motor running. Only when the horn blew did I focus. "Hey!" I said.

Stacey smiled. "Can I ask a big favor?" Anything! She must have seen that. "This is a no-parking area. Could you find a place for it? Oh, do you drive?"

I shook my head, ashamed to let her down. She turned off the motor. "Then can I ask you an even bigger favor?" Any plan imaginable could be canceled. "Wait here and if the cops come by, turn on the motor and pretend you're going to pull out." She tossed me the keys and went into the building, saying, "I'll buy you lunch. It will be a chance to talk."

Conscious of the immense trust, I sat vigilant in that front seat. Once or twice, I turned on the ignition and ran the motor, looking front and rear for the police car that never showed.

Later that day, in some town like Needham, we stopped at a drive-in and sat in the car nibbling hamburgers. Neither of us had much appetite. We giggled about that, then each took out a green pill and washed it down with the last of our Cokes. "How did you end up seeing Dr. Petrie?"

Wanting to make an impression, I told her, "Playing with guns. That made them think I'm suicidal."

She looked at me, nodded and said, "Yes, they would."

That afternoon we drove out into the country. The leaves were changing. We parked on a road overlooking a gold and red valley and she told me, "I have to see a shrink to fulfill a probation requirement. There was a little party at school, kind of an

orgy actually, and I ran amok. You know how it is.” Only able to dimly imagine, I nodded.

“Kleinman at least understands it’s all a game. He gives me prescriptions, collects his fees and doesn’t interfere.” She laughed. “The only trouble I have with speed is that once in a while, out of the corner of my eyes, I see this snake dart.”

Emboldened, I told her, “Sometimes, just for a second, I see this Shadow beside me. He has my face.”

She stopped laughing. “There’s someone you might want to talk to. He’s called Dr. X. I’ll mention you to him.” She started the car. “It’s getting late. Where do you live?”

In Dorchester, neighborhoods went by the names of Catholic parishes. Mine was Mary, Queen of Heaven. “Queena Heaven. You can drop me at any MTA station.”

“And miss seeing a place called Queena Heaven? Just give me directions.” It was dusk as we arrived. Stacey glanced at Snyder’s Market and the Stop and Shop, the bars, the Shamut Bank and the elevated station. We drove up the steep hill past the brick gothic church.

The street I lived on ended with a cement wall. Beyond that, row after row of wooden three deckers marched down to the Boston harbor and ten thousand diapers flew like banners from their back porches.

Seeing my grandmother’s house with Stacey was like seeing it for the first time; I noticed how gray and spooky it looked in the dying light. “Hey,” I said, “it’s haunted but what the hell.”

She leaned over and ruffled my hair. Sunday morning I could still feel the touch of her hand. Her interest in me was a mystery I didn’t want to unravel.

Next Saturday, I watched her car again. Afterward, Stacey found a deserted stretch of road and gave me my first driving lesson. Several times our hands touched and a jolt went through me. When she dropped me off at home, I said, “Dr. Petrie isn’t doing me much good. What about this guy Dr. X?”

Stacey kissed me on the mouth and said, “We’ll see.” She must have known that she owned my soul.

Inside, my grandmother, a flurry of flour and white hair, was busy in the kitchen. “Jimmy, my love,” she said, mistaking me for her son the bar owner, “run down to Snyder’s for some baking powder before he closes.”

The following Saturday, very tense, Stacey asked, “Do you have any pills?” Feeling I’d failed her, I shook my head. It was cold sitting in that little car. When Stacey came out she had been crying.

She sat for a moment before saying, “I’ve got a scrip. But I’m broke.” Desperately, I searched my pockets and came up with sixty cents. “This is bad, Kevin. I need something or I am going to flip out.” My heart leaped at this opportunity. I had her drive me to the Y.

Saturdays, they gave kids swimming lessons. We swam bare ass and got yelled at by counselors in trunks. But some of us found out that instead we could walk past the locker room into this long gallery where kids got treated with great respect.

There, frosted windows set in deep alcoves let in a pearly light and older guys always stood around the door. When I came in, one of them whispered, “Fred.” Everyone always whispered like it was church. Fred was the name I used. This was the guy who said he was Joe and once thought that I was twins.

Joe was safe and generous. He made a little gesture indicating both of us and we stepped into one of the alcoves. Deftly he positioned me on a window ledge and showed me his bald spot. My eyes went out of focus. Far away, someone whistled the theme from *The High and the Mighty*. Joe stuck the money in my pants and murmured, “You’re a good kid, Fred. Where do you live?”

“In a projects,” I told him and waved good-bye.

When I proudly handed her the money, Stacey regarded me curiously. Innocent in a strange kind of way, I couldn’t imagine why. A few minutes later she came out of a drug store already looking much better and said, “You are definitely ready for Dr. X. You can learn a lot. But watch out for him. And remember you come there as my friend.”

That struck me as odd. “Is he a psychiatrist?”

“No. He hasn’t let that happen to him,” She took Beacon Street out of town.

I remember asking, “His name is Dr. X?” as she turned off Beacon and down a curving suburban road. Ponds lay behind stands of trees. Victorian mansions spread over the tops of hillocks.

“He needs to protect his identity. There are a lot of things society just doesn’t understand.”

Without slowing, she drove through a set of open iron gates, went up a curving driveway and parked under a portico. “He has a nice house,” I said.

“Actually, this is my mother’s place. He practices here while she’s away.” Before getting out of the car, Stacey slipped some of the pills from the bottle into her pocket.

She called, “Hello?” when she opened the front door. The place was quiet, dark with the curtains mostly drawn. On the hall table was a used Kleenex and a coffee cup filled with half-drowned cigarettes. In a corner lay an empty glass. Wine had dried into the rag.

To our left was a book-lined room that I identified as the library. A figure in a black suit stirred on a couch, a small man with a round face and a fringe of gray hair. “A new communicant ?” he asked in the voice of a testy troll. For a bad moment I thought that this was Dr. X.

“Hello, Max,” said Stacey. “Max was once an Episcopal priest,” she explained as she led me through a big kitchen. It stank of garbage and dirty dishes. On the table lay an open dictionary with pages hollowed out to create a pocket. On a sideboard a silver bowl had been polished till it shone in the gloom. Upstairs, someone put on a record, jazz piano.

Lonely notes echoed through the halls. Stacey opened a door and motioned me down a flight of stairs. At the bottom was a low, windowless room. Walls, ceiling, floor were all painted a dead white. Bright lighting was set in the ceiling. The only furnishings were a white table and two chairs.

At the table facing the door was a guy, older, maybe thirty. A black beard made it hard to tell. “Dr. X,” said Stacey, “this is Kevin.” He was big and looked like he had once been fat. He wore a blue Oxford knit shirt outside his pants.

“Hi, Kevin.” Dr. X rose to shake my hand. “Stacey’s talked about you.”

“And look what he bought us.” She held up the vial.

“Oh boy, vitamins! Thanks, Kevin!” Grabbing with the impulsiveness of a kid, he washed down a couple of the pills with the contents of a huge pewter stein that he picked up from the floor beside him. “Stacey said you were acting. What play.?”

Self-consciousness seized me. “Henry the Fourth. It’s pretty stupid. Just school.”

“It’s a great play!” He put the vial in his pocket. “It’s about the demimonde.” He waved his arm to indicate the house, the three of us. “About the street and rich people slumming. Wonderful lines! Falstaff says, ‘Let us be Diana’s foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon.’”



“I just have a small part. Poins, he’s a...”

“Poins!” Dr. X slapped his hands together. “Terrific! Poins is the knife, the street trickster. Even Falstaff is wary of him. Poins is some kind of disinherited son. He and Prince Hal are very young. Boys are natural street people, powerless, disposable. Poins disappears from the play because that happens to people like him.”

Dr. X in his exuberance walked over to Stacey, put his hands on her breasts, and kissed her. He looked at my sudden jealousy and smiled. She excused herself and went back upstairs. It occurred to me that Dr. X may have known what play I was in and read up. If so, that was more trouble than Petrie had ever taken.

I sat in one chair with Dr. X opposite me and we listened to distant music. “Thelonus in San Francisco,” he explained, taking out the vial and offering me a pill. He handed me his stein and I washed it down with warm beer.

Soon, my attention to detail became more intense. The only thing on the table was a blank prescription pad. I noticed the name Blumstein at the top. In a far corner of the floor was a bolt lock. It took me a moment to see the outline of a trap door. The music from upstairs changed at one point. Dr. X’s mouth moved like he was tasting the notes. “Could, playing Bach’s Goldberg Variations,” he said.

That first Saturday, we talked for hours. Some of the insights which bowled me over are true of any unhappy sixteen-year-old. “Half the time you feel like an alien in this land. In this world.”

Other things he saw were phenomenally accurate. “You have, let’s see, three uncles,” he said, staring into my eyes with his intense pinned ones. “The youngest one’s a priest . . . no, a lawyer. The middle one’s a cop, of course. And the oldest one does what? Runs a bar.”

Never had I discussed my mother’s family with Stacey. He smiled at my surprise and said, “What makes this an Irish joke is that the bartender has all the money.”

At that moment someone knocked on the door upstairs. Dr. X rose, shook my hand, and said, “See you next Saturday?” as if he looked forward to it. I nodded eagerly.

A fox-faced man with red hair, the next patient, brushed past me on the cellar steps. Stacey was not to be found on the first floor and I was shy about going upstairs. Max still lay on the library couch. “Go in peace,” he said as I left.

Outside was a cold drizzle. That didn’t bother me. My pulses skipped. Lights were on in other houses. But Stacey’s, when I looked back from the end of the

driveway, was dark. Then I saw her at an upstairs window. My heart bounded with speed and passion. She saw me. Or rather she saw the one who for a moment stood beside me. Because he blew her a kiss and she returned it.

Too excited to let that worry me, with a Bostonian's sixth sense, I headed for the nearest streetcar stop.

In the play, Falstaff says about Pores, "If men were saved by merit what hole in hell were hot enough for him." Monday at rehearsal, remembering all Dr. X had told me, I bounced on my toes and talked like Fred who lived in a projects.

"Easy does it, Grierson," said Mr. Royce, the faculty advisor. "This is Shakespeare, not the Untouchables."

Over the next couple of weeks, I saw Dr. X regularly. Like amphetamine, he was never as good as that first time. When there were pills on the table he'd give me an upper or a downer. If there weren't, he borrowed some of mine.

I came to understand that there were ways in which he was a fool. Sometimes he said stuff like, "I'm a quarter Irish, a quarter French, a quarter English with a bit of German and smattering of Jew. Blood boils in me." He called speed vitamins and claimed it enabled him to read other peoples' minds.

Despite that, he had his moments. "Who is the third who always walks beside you?" he once asked. "When I count there's just you and me. But when I look there is always another walking beside you." Later I realized he was paraphrasing T.S. Eliot. But right then, the words hit home.

He followed it up. "Everybody's got another self, Kevin. Most people, the dull, the mundane, never show it. But some get to let that dog run."

Every Saturday, I drove with Stacey out to her house. I thought about her constantly. Everything else, school, family, Dr. Petrie, even the Gallery, was backdrop to those rides. Yet, each week she seemed a little more distant. We talked, but any mention by me of Dr. X and she became silent.

Max was always present and there were others: college guys in tweed jackets clustered around a lady who smoked a pipe, a man in a turtleneck who played guitar, girls wearing leotards, a very light-skinned negro man with a much older white woman.

One week when we came in, Max sat in the library with a plump pale girl close to my age. Stacey grimaced and muttered, "Slug," under her breath.

Max introduced her. "Lisa. An acolyte, undergoing the process of finishing herself." He added, "We have an oubliette, you know," as if he couldn't imagine my

not wondering about that.

Everyone, but especially Dr. X, needed more and more drags to function. When I went downstairs after meeting Lisa, he waved a prescription at me. “Kevin, there’s a druggist in Coolidge Corner. A careless guy. I want you to go over there and break this. No one would suspect your choir boy face.”

It struck me as a bad idea. I shook my head and Dr. X told me, “You refuse because your mundane persona still holds sway. There’s a little treatment I recommend. Isolation. Once you’re alone, the stronger part of your personality can take over.”

Suddenly understanding I looked toward the trap door and repeated the unfamiliar word, “Oubliette.”

Dr. X smiled like I was a prize pupil. “From the French oublier, to forget. Don’t worry about our doing that. You won’t be in there long. Maybe a couple of days over the Thanksgiving weekend.” At the time, nothing more was said.

The Saturday before Thanksgiving, Stacey and I found Max and everybody else downstairs in Dr. X’s office. “Just in time to witness a graduation ceremony, Kevin,” said the doctor, unlatching the door to the oubliette.

He opened it to reveal a wooden ladder leading down to pitch dark. From below a tiny voice cried, “It’s cold down here. I’ve come to terms with myself.”

Dr. X descended. Max waited at the top of the ladder. He extended his hand to Lisa. Her eyes were empty. All she wore was one of Dr. X’s big Oxford weave shirts. “Lisa was bold enough to want to confront herself,” said Dr. X, glancing at me. Max and the others smirked.

When Stacey and I went back upstairs, she looked at me, really looked at me, for the first time in weeks and said, “Kevin, this is no place for you. I thought you could handle Dr. X. But my judgment was off, maybe my timing. You’re almost ready, but you’re still a kid. He sees your potential too. Get out of here before he hurts you.”

She kissed me on the mouth and said, “When I need someone, I’ll call and you’ll be ready.” On my way home, I managed to forget the warning and the brush-off and remembered only the kiss.

The first thing I did when I got in the door was to turn off the fire under a pot in the kitchen. Tay still worked as secretary to professors over in Cambridge. That day she was helping one of them sort his papers.

My grandmother was present but not totally accounted for. She sat in the

living room in the midst of boxes of photos and papers. With a bright smile she said, "Here's one of you, Jamey." From a faded photo taken before the turn of the century, a baby stared wide-eyed in the midst of a vast christening gown.

"Nah, this is me, Gramny." I was in a snapshot of my mother, my grandfather, and myself on the front steps of the house. My mother stood looking up proudly at Terrible Tom Malloy, saloon owner, ward heeler, legendary terror. He looked like a meaner, smarter version of his sons.

He stared right at the camera with clever, cold eyes. One arm he had around my mother. I was a blurry bundle in the other. I remembered when I was about ten my mother telling me about her father. "Your uncles are still afraid of Daddy. If the old man came back and told them to, they'd all line up to get hit."

We sped off from a family gathering like it was a getaway. She had suddenly pulled me away from my cousins and loaded me in the car as her brothers stood looking stunned. "When I want, I make them afraid of me too." She laughed. "I just did it now." The laugh scared me more than the driving. It meant that my mother was drunk and her Shadow was at the wheel.

The next picture I found was a familiar one of my parents' wedding. It was wartime. In the background girls with flowers, guys in uniforms smiled at the couple walking arm in arm. In a spring dress and wide hat my mother, beautiful as some half-remembered forties movie star, leaned on my father's shoulder and smiled at the camera.

My father in his navy blues stared bewildered and adoring only at her. He came from New Jersey, met and married my mother while waiting to go overseas. With hundreds of others, he died when the cruiser LaSalle went down in the South Pacific. He had almost no family. Once I had imagined I was secretly the son of a hero, the Lone Ranger, maybe, or Ted Williams. Now I saw too much of myself in him to fantasize.

"Poor lamb," said my grandmother, looking at my father. "He hadn't a piece of meanness in him." She put out her hand and I helped her upstairs for a rest.

Back on the couch, I found photos of my mother from childhood up to the time of her second marriage. For a long while there was nothing. As she got older she hated to have her picture taken.

Then at the bottom of the box was one I had never seen. A few years before, Aunt Alice had taken candid photos with her new flash camera. Alice was no artist, the pictures were unfocused, feet and heads were cut off, radiators were centers of attention.

But in one, she had caught my mother walking into a room with a glass in her

hand. At first, the photo appeared to be a double exposure. Two mothers looked up. But instead of being identical, one wore a tired smile. The other, partly eclipsing the first, looked angry at being caught.

That night after the TV stations left the air, I sat sleepless at the kitchen table staring at papers. Some documents had my name on them. Every time there was a creak or bump in the house, I half expected the front door to open and my mother to come in. Once I looked up to find Tay watching me.

“Ah, Kevin, you’re so wise and owl-eyed lately. And you haven’t been eating. There’s ham and eggs in the ice box.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Cocoa then. You always liked me to make cocoa.” Tay moved to the sink to fill the kettle. She looked over my shoulder at a picture of my mother at her junior prom. “She was her father’s favorite.” I nodded, interested.

Then she said, “Remember the story I told when you were small. How once there was a king with three sons who did not suit him and a daughter who suited him very well indeed? And as it happened...”

Impatient at what I saw as bedtime stories, I said, “And she gets cheated and gets turned into a magic hawk or something. I remember but I’m a little old for that. There’s stuff about me, Tay...I need to figure things out.”

She waited, but words could take me no further. After a long pause, she reached out and patted my hair. “Faileas,” she said.

It didn’t occur to me that she recognized my trouble and was also struggling to put words to it. Sullen, I turned away from her. That Monday, I took the double photo of my mother and the papers with my name on them to school and stuck them in my locker, intending to study them later.

That year, family Thanksgiving was at Uncle Jim’s house in Milton. Crying, “God bless us,” Gramny and Tay were lost in the flurry of little cousins as soon as we came in the door.

Thanks to the speed, I ate almost no dinner. But I drank quite a bit. Afterwards, kids laughed and screamed, women washed the dishes and my uncles leaned on the furniture with their glasses. As the oldest nephew, I was allowed in their presence.

They were talking about Kennedy. “Sure, a great day for the Irish,” said Bob with a phony brogue.

“The black Irish,” said Mike.

“That’s niggers to you,” Jim said and they looked my way, noticed my distaste.

Uncle Bob poured me a beer. “From what I see, you’re not much interested in school. College has gotten really expensive. Maybe you should think of the navy. Three years, see the world.”

“My boards and SATs are fine. I’ll probably go to BU.”

Jim said, “Bob went to college and law school and is broke. Mike graduated from high school and has finally got his head above water. Me, I got an eighth grade education and I’m the one everyone comes to for dough. The thing is, now there is no dough.” We were sitting in his twelve room house. Neither of his brothers seemed to be hurting.

“Granddad put aside money. My mother...”

“Your mother raised an aristocrat,” said Bob, sounding aggrieved. “Boot camp would be a change for you.”

“Kevin never listens to anyone. Maybe he’s in love,” said Mike, giving me the dead-eyed glance cops reserve for outsiders. “You got a girl friend, Kev ?”

How to explain about Stacey and myself? I just shrugged. But I started thinking of her. Then Jim remarked, “Dad used to say when he took off his belt, ‘Whip a young dog who’s too big for his pants and puppy drawers fit him fine.’” They laughed but in their eyes, I saw no joking.

When I was small, they had sometimes intimidated me. Even at sixteen, I was skinny and my uncles were all big. But I remembered what my mother had said about them and their old man. Full of pills and booze, I just stared the way my grandfather did in the picture. For that moment, I was not alone. They choked like they had glimpsed my Shadow.

It was late when I saw Tay and my grandmother home. All my thoughts ran to Stacey and I slipped away. Connections were slow. It was alter one when I looked up at dim lights flickering in her second floor windows. I had to knock for some time before Max appeared. His pupils small as BBs, he waved me in like I was expected.

“Stacey?” I wanted to know. He ignored the question.

Lisa sat in the kitchen with a trace of drool beside her mouth, sorting pills. “Once my inhibitions got broken down, Dr. X was able to show me that I’m the

woman of situations. Yesterday, for instance, the situation was that everyone needs to get sleep. So I cashed prescriptions for these.” She handed me a pill shaped like a torpedo.

Thelonius played upstairs. “Isolation and realization,” said Max and poured Johnny Walker. “Drink up.” I marveled at how little effect any of this had on me and my Shadow.

A time later, I found myself up on the second floor knocking on a locked door. After a while, the music and voices inside stopped. In the silence, I called “Stacey!” The door swung wide and Dr. X stood in an open bathrobe. He was semi-hard. Behind him, a slab of moonlight, maybe streetlight, fell on a slim figure on a wide bed. “Stacey?” I stepped into the room.

“Don’t let him see me,” she said. Immediately, Dr. X turned on a lamp. Stacey was covered by a sheet. Her hands were tied before her with the bathrobe cord. Instead of getting mad at Dr. X, she said to me, “What the hell are you doing here? Did I invite you?”

Dr. X laughed. “Look at how angry this makes him. Wait downstairs, Kevin. There’s something we have to do.” I knew what he intended. But I obeyed.

My heart should have been crushed. I should have been staggering and falling down. Instead, remote and cold and wide awake, I moved with great purpose. Down in the kitchen, Max gave me another pill. I yawned and pretended to lose my balance when he led me to the white room. I slid down the wall and lay on the floor with my coat as a pillow.

Max watched me and then went back upstairs. I slept open-eyed the way sharks do. Everything was red and grainy and I could see myself lying on the floor. “You’re in the Eye of Storm,” a voice whispered in my ear.

It was a while before Dr. X appeared. He held me up while Max emptied my pockets. I watched them guide me toward the open trap door with my head lolling, empty pockets hanging out like dogs’ ears.

As Dr. X opened the trap door, I made it as easy as possible for Max to hold me upright. When they brought Lisa out of the oubliette, Dr. X had gone down to help her. As I watched from above, he descended again.

That’s when my Shadow and I made our move. Max, stunned, looked from the zombie he held upright to the figure who grabbed him. Dr. X, wide-eyed, breathed, “Doppelganger!”

Then I swung Max over the trap door. I planted a shoe on his skinny ass and shoved him down on top of Dr. X. I slammed the trap door and locked it shut. On

the table were my keys, wallet, and cigarettes. There was also a prescription pad. Everything went in my pockets.

From the oubliette, Dr. X said calmly, "I thought you were more mature than this, Kevin. Just undo the latch and we can talk." Upstairs on the kitchen table were many pills which I scooped up. Only then did the booze and drugs start to hit me. My stomach lurched, blood banged in my head.

Upstairs, Stacey cried out like she was still tied up. I waited but she didn't say my name. I needed fresh air. "Don't forget to call me!" I yelled and headed for the front door. She started to wail.

In the library, the situation was that Lisa snored with her mouth open.. "Don't do the thing that will get you killed, little boy," Dr. X yelled while pounding the trap door. "I see death around you. Cold nights and bad days, Kevin!"

In the first light, water trickled in gutters. The air smelled of wet dead leaves. A voice beside my ear said, "We got plenty of vitamins." I didn't turn to look. The face of your Shadow is always closer to your fears than your hopes.

## **PART TWO**

Back home, I got to my more without encountering Tay or Gramny. A red torpedo from the cache put me out. Late in the day, I looked at the foot of the bed and saw a guy with a banged up face and hair that looked like the army had gotten him.

It took me a moment to recognize my Shadow. He smiled like that hurt him and spun the cylinder of the revolver. "This is one sport you'd be good at," he said as he aimed at his temple. "Mom liked to play roulette too. Only, she did it with a car."

He pulled the trigger. I jumped as the hammer clicked on an empty chamber. "People kill themselves when they don't have the nerve to kill someone else. Like Mom with her brothers. She could get mad and scare them. But not always. I know they screwed her out of money. Instead of getting mad at them, she killed herself.

"Don't make that same mistake. You don't have to kill. All you have to do is show Uncle Jim that you aren't afraid. Take the gun and visit him today. I'll be there. We'll talk about our future. And his. Do it or you'll end up looking like this."

There was more but all of it scared me and I woke up dry-mouthed, soaked in sweat. More drugs kept me awake and distracted. Till dawn, my thought were all fantasies about Stacey and me. Somehow I was older, more dangerous, and driving a black Thunderbird. She got very excited each time I saved her from Dr. X.

That morning, nerves pulsing in my skin, I went to Petrie's office on the



chance I'd meet Stacey. It turned out to be the last time I saw him. At one point, I tried to ask what the word Doppelganger meant. But he looked up at me squirming in my seat and said, "You seem to be having side effects. I'm canceling your prescription."

Afterwards, as I should have known, there was no sign of Stacey. Things started to jump like on a bad TV and I saw a red MG out of the corner of my eye. When I turned, it was gone. Not wanting to be alone, I headed for the Gallery.

Joe might be there. He had once seen my Shadow. That Saturday, the place was busy. Lots of guys stood at the door. Kids had come from the pool wearing towels. I spotted Joe talking to one. He looked my way, amazed, like he saw double again. But he made the gesture indicating him and me.

As I stepped forward, Max appeared on my left. He had a bad gleam in his eyes. His hand was in his pocket. At my right hand was Dr. X, who lisped, "Say, we have a prior date!"

"Joe!" My shout got the Gallery's attention. Guys peered out of alcoves. Dr. X got his hand over my mouth. Max snapped something and stuck it up to my nose. It smelled like sweaty socks.

"Amyl nitrite," I heard Joe say as my head spun. Guys started zipping their flies; boys edged away. "You're hijacking the kid!"

"I'm a licensed psychiatrist," Dr. X told him. "This is an escaped patient?" Their voices sounded like I was under water. Then the hands were gone from my face.

People started to run. A fleeing kid opened a fire door. An alarm began ringing. Someone yelled, "Raid!" Fresh air rushed in and my head cleared. Max was on the floor with a bloody lip.

I saw that Joe had slammed Dr. X against a wall. "Get out!" he yelled. Like a rabbit, I bolted down the fire escape.

For a while I just put distance between that place and myself. Finally, pain stabbed my side and I lay behind an empty loading dock in an alley. My heart would not stop pounding. My nose bled. I passed out wondering what had happened to Joe, who had fought for me. My Shadow said, "None of this would have happened if we'd gone to visit Uncle Jim."

Later I was awake and dry-heaving through the fence around the train yard. A cop car raced by and I tried to shrink into the sidewalk. My Shadow said, "Stacey told Dr. X where you'd be." All I wanted was to die.

Then I stood beneath an el with a steam whistle screaming inside my ears. A hand was in my pocket. Said my Shadow, "Take a red. Steady your head." I tried to swallow dry-mouthed and choked on the pill. If Dr. X didn't kill me, I thought, my Shadow would.

From a bridge, I tossed every pill and prescription onto a busy expressway. To exorcise my double, I chanted over and over, "Stay away from me. Stay away from me."

Blood pounded like something was busting out of my brain. He whispered in my ear, "You'll miss me while I'm gone." Later, huddled aching on a park bench, I spotted a flash of red. When I turned, there was no MG. My Shadow was gone and I felt empty.

On the roaring subway home I frantically searched the faces visible amid bags and boxes from Filene's and Jordan's, from Raymond's and R.H. White's. A woman on the first burst of Christmas shopping formed the word "Disgusting" as she and her friend stared at me.

At Queena Heaven it was cold and dark. My head spun as I tried to be sure everyone else off the train left the station ahead of me. Across the avenue, bodies glided, street light gleamed off the ice at Curtis Park. They had flooded the playground for the first skating of the year.

Crossing the street, I sat not far from a small fire on the shore. People warmed their hands. Little kids whose parents had forgotten about them slid by on their shoes. One old couple skated arm in arm. At the center of the ice, guys played freeform hockey.

It was important to pull myself together. I promised God a lifetime of monastic devotion if he would just make my head stay still. After a bit, my breathing slowed, the ringing in my ears died down, my brain slipped a cog or two.

Before me, goalies crouched in front of improvised nets. Pucks hissed, jumped on ice bumps. Bodies collided. A kid who had been my best friend in sixth grade skidded twenty feet on his back.

We barely nodded now. But seeing him evoked hot afternoons crouching shiftless waiting for grounders at third. More than memory, it was a dream which smeared time and circumstance. I was eleven years old when I rose from the bench. Walking up the hill I was going home to my parents.

Not my stepfather, my real father. He and my mother and I lived in my grandmother's house. Just the three of us. I knew they would be standing outside in summer sunlight, she in her picture hat, he in his navy uniform. I would tell them about my Shadow. They would explain that it was a nightmare and I would rest easy

in their arms.

Not even the sight of that house in darkness stopped my dream. Lights were on in the living room. From the front hall I saw my grandmother sitting on the couch with all the lamps lit and the family photos spread out before her. She had made tea. Laid out three cups. "Here he is after all!" she exclaimed, like she and my parents had been worried.

I stepped into the room. "Kevin," she said. "Dr. Exelman has been waiting for you."

"Hi, Kevin," said Dr. X, as he moved between me and the door. "Did you forget about the overnight seminar?" He wore horn-rimmed glasses I had never seen before. They helped mask the swelling of one of his eyes. His smile was vitamin enriched.

A battered suitcase from the upstairs closet stood next to the couch. "Dr. Exelman helped me pack a change of clothes and your tooth brush so you'd be ready as soon as you came home," My grandmother smiled brightly as I stood paralyzed.

"We had a long talk about you, how smart you are," Dr. X chirped, "about your amazing family. Now, Mrs. Malloy, I'm afraid we're late. We have to hit the road." He picked up the suitcase and stepped forward to put an arm around my shoulder.

"First, let me use the bathroom." I ran upstairs. My thought was of the .38. The door to the closet was ajar. I fumbled with the light cord, heard Dr. X behind me. Reaching up, I pushed aside the imitation alligator binocular case, the bag full of Christmas ornaments. I tore through the shelf.

"No, the gun isn't there," said Dr. X. "I remembered your mentioning it, so I looked. I also tried to find my property which you stole." He stood at the head of the stairs. "You caused me considerable professional embarrassment, Kevin. Are you going to summon your imaginary friend? I'm ready." "Get out of this house!" I stood all alone.

Dr. X advanced slowly, speaking hypnotically. "You bad little boy. First you are going to return the vitamins and minerals you stole. Then you, and I hope your Doppelganger, are going to come out to the house for a little therapy."

The back stairs were at the end of the hall. I edged toward them. "Stand still, Kevin," Dr. X said softly. "If you run, I will do something very regrettable to Granny." He stepped forward and grabbed my arms.

Below, the front door opened and a voice called, "Mary? Kevin?" It was Aunt

Tay. "Mary, do we have guests?"

"Dr. Axelrod came by to take Kevin on a trip. They're upstairs."

Dr. X didn't hesitate. "Stacey's the one who told me how to find you here. Told me to bring you back." My body felt weightless as he propelled me down the stairs.

Before us in overcoat and suit, a hat set on her head, stood Aunt Tay. "Yes?" she said in a voice which had quelled generations of graduate students.

"Pardon me, madam," said Dr. X. "But young Kevin is due at an overnight seminar the school has organized. And I"

"Indeed?" She looked at me. "Kevin?"

I tried to speak. No sound came out.

"Let go of him," she said. "I'm his guardian."

"Ah, his Aunt Tay! He's mentioned you. His grandmother and I have already discussed this." He started forward. I bobbed with him like a balloon. My grandmother stood at the living room door. These two women were so frail. I didn't want anything to happen to them. "If you will excuse me, madam," said Dr. X, trying to move past her.

Aunt Tay did not step aside. Instead she looked at me and said, clear and steady:

\* \* \* \*

BY FELL NIGHT

My mouth wouldn't work. She repeated:

\* \* \* \*

BY FELL NIGHT

Again I couldn't speak. "An interesting folk rite," said Dr. X. "Perhaps I can return someday and record it." He made to move past her. Tay said:

\* \* \* \*

BY FELL NIGHT

And what sounded like my mother's voice back when I was a little kid answered:

WITH STICK AND BONE

Tay said:

\* \* \* \*

BY BLACK LIGHT

And I turned to see my grandmother answer, her voice young:

DOWN NARROW ROADS

When Tay said:

\* \* \* \*

BY CAT'S SIGHT

My grandmother responded:

THROUGH TIMES HARD AS ROCK

Dr. X said, "This young man has prostituted himself. He stole pills and prescription pads. He needs treatment."

\* \* \* \*

BY OWL'S FLIGHT

Said Tay. My own voice way at the back of my throat was more a moan than anything as I answered along with my grandmother:

PAST FEAR THAT FREEZES BLOOD

"Ladies," said Dr. X. "Kevin, here, is a most rare and fascinating case. Doppelganger syndrome. In other words, he has a double." Giving no sign that she had heard, Tay chanted:

\* \* \* \*

BY MAIN MIGHT

Dr. X tugged at me but I wouldn't move. "Let me work with Key. . . ."

Something crackled like ice breaking. Dr. X choked. My grandmother and I answered:

OVER NIGHTMARE'S DARK BRIDGE

Tay never raised her voice:

\* \* \* \*

BY ALL RIGHT

Our final response was:

I WILL COME TO YOU

A silence followed. Dr. X tried to speak and couldn't. My grandmother could. "My son is a police officer," she said. "Get out of this house, or I'll have you arrested."

Tay stared stony faced. It took a long moment, but Dr. X finally let go of me and backed out the door. He made certain signs with his fingers like he was warding off evil spirits.

"Who was that?" my grandmother asked as the door closed. Then she felt tired and went upstairs to rest. The last few days and the weeks before that and the months all the way back to summer caught up with me. I slumped against the wall.

Tay led me out to the kitchen, fed me bread and butter, hot soup and cocoa. She sat with me and said, "The things that man said can't be so. But even if they are, I love you."

I couldn't reply.

"With your mother too, I called it Faileas. It was too much for her, poor pet."

"Faileas?" I got out the words with difficulty, my throat was so tight.

"A Shadow. Such as you have. Sometimes you should pay a little attention to what old women say. Not always, mind you. At my age, words whiz about in the head like bees."

I looked at her, wanting more, and she asked, "Remember the story I used to tell about Prince Caoimin? How at his birth all the small folk, the fairies good and bad, stood over his crib and hurled wishes at him? One side wished him happy days, the other grievous nights, one side great wealth, the other bitter poverty, one the hand of the princess, the other lonely death.

“Now, I know you feel too grown up for such things. But think how it could be that there were just too many wishes for one tiny baby to handle. Maybe in their trying to win the wishing they put too great a burden on one small head.”

Once, I would have grown impatient. But this lady may have saved my life with a poem, so I listened. “When your mother was born, your grandmother knew she would have no more children. Your grandfather had won her with his brains and charm. But he had his black side, all drinking and violence. His sons are well enough but they feared and respected only that black side of him.

“Mary wanted something better for Ellen. She tried with my help to give her blessings. We thought we had succeeded. But your grandfather had his hand on her too. She was his favorite and deep in her lurked the very essence of him. It was the same when you were born. We wished but he touched you.”

The tea kettle whistled and when she rose to take it off the flame, her step was a little unsteady. “All of us from myself to the Pope have two selves, good and bad. It’s the way we are. What was sad was to see your mother as pained as one who’s been cut in two, unable to be at peace until she died.”

When she sat back down, the house was absolutely silent. Maybe it was my Shadow’s being absent, maybe the drugs and terror were shock treatment. But at that moment I realized that my mother was never coming back. I remembered the two faces in the photo, smiling and apologetic and scowling and malign. Good and bad, both halves of her were dead.

That night, finally, I was able to cry for her. Right then, I cried for all poor souls who find themselves cut in two. I cried for my grandmother and for Tay and myself. I cried for drunks and users, for the crazed and the scared of this fucked up world. Sweet Jesus, that night I cried for us all.

### **PART THREE**

FOR THE next week or so, I was stunned by grief. The world was a distant rumor. At school, kids talked about applying to Harvard and MIT. My mourning was so delayed that no one but Tay recognized it. No Shadow dogged me, no red MG flickered at the corner of my eyes. Common sense should have kept me away, but stark loneliness drew me to the Y.

Saturday morning, the Gallery was silent and empty. As I paused, an iron hand grabbed my arm. Turning, I saw a raincoat and a long Irish face, a cop. “Looking for the pool, son?” Jumping at the bait, I nodded eagerly. He led me to the locker room and said, “Another bathing beauty,” to a big man with a Y sweatsuit.

The trap sprang. They knew. With a sadist’s smile, the man pointed to a

locker. “STRIP DOWN, PUNK!” Scared, I obeyed. They laughed when I shivered bare ass, unable to meet their eyes. “MOVE IT, LITTLE GIRL!” I ran to the piss and chlorine stinking pool.

A hunting party of counselors in trunks waited there. They knocked me into the water and held me under. They cheered when I choked and stamped my hands when I tried to get out. A couple I knew from school or the Gallery. They were the worst.

Then they were gone. I heard their shouts as they turned the showers on a fully clothed kid who wouldn't strip. He saved me. Slipping, gasping, shinnying wet into pants, shoving on loafers, I grabbed my jacket, abandoned everything else and got away.

Coming home frozen and half drowned, I felt I could fall no lower. I was wrong. Uncle Jim stood in the kitchen washing dust off his hands. “Here he is,” Granny said brightly. I was glad she wouldn't notice how messed up I'd gotten.

But Jim did. “Enjoy your swim?” he asked. All I wanted was to get to my room and lick my wounds. But sensing my weakness, he followed me into the hall. “Your Uncle Mike tells me they got a vice sweep on.” He saw me wince.

His breath was boozy as he said, “We got some matters to discuss. Like your future.” Noticing I was still damp, he added, “Maybe you should go in the navy, you like water so much.”

The navy sounded like three years worth of what had just happened to me. I was still shaking. “Let's talk later, Jim.”

Angry, he always got quiet. But he never lost the smile. “Is it the dope that makes you not understand me? We're going to have a little walk and talk.” As with the man at the Y, I saw he meant me harm. And again, I folded.

My uncle shoved me out the back door. His Caddy was parked at the end of the driveway. “You look like shit. I see you wasting your time in school. I want you to pre-enlist before graduation, not wait for the draft. I want it settled today.”

“My college boards are good enough. My mother said there was the money her father left.” I sounded pathetic.

We paused next to the fence at the end of the street and he said, “Like we've been trying to tell you, there is no money. It got used up. On your mother. On other stuff. Understand?”

Not knowing what to say, I just stared at him. Fast as a snake, the back of his hand caught the side of my face. My head bounced on the chain links. He hit me



again. Far below, Boston Harbor spun. I tasted blood.

“Understand?” he repeated. This time I managed to nod. “You stupid bastard, it’s about time someone took you down a few pegs.” He hit me again. My head jerked back.

“You think I don’t know about your personal habits? The goof balls? About how you earn pocket money? I look at you and I know.” With each question, he shook me. “Understand?”

Instead of nodding I dodged. He hit me left-handed on the side of the head. My ear rang. “Big commotions here last week,” he said. “Morn let it slip about some guy looking for you. Shithead, keep your freak friends away from her and Tay. Understand?”

I nodded but he smacked me anyway. “Understand?”

“Yes, yes I understand...please don’t!”

“And while you live in this house, which won’t be for long, you keep your hands off what doesn’t belong to you. What did you do with that .38?”

“Nothing.” I braced for another blow.

It didn’t come, though he didn’t believe me. “There’s other stuff missing. Papers. More...She forgets. Mom took your mother’s death hard. Me too. I’m not letting you get like your mother.” Reflectively, Jim banged my head against the fence a couple of times.

He pushed me toward the car. “Get in. We got to do something about you.” I noticed Mrs. Reardon next door, a delivery boy from Snyder’s among others, observing with great interest the public display of my fall. Word would get around Queena Heaven.

The afternoon seemed flat and metallic, unreal even while it happened. Jim drove to Field’s Comer and brought me into his bar. We went back into his little office. “You could save us both trouble, if you knew about those documents.” My mind was frozen. I really didn’t remember taking them. He gave me a whiskey and made me sign papers. The whiskey numbed the pain in my mouth. “You got nothing on under your coat. What the hell’s wrong with you?”

He made me put on a white shirt a few sizes too big. Then he took me to a barber who was an old army buddy. “Kevin is going in the service,” he announced as clippers ran over my temples.

Afterwards he stopped in another place to drink and place a couple of bets. I

sat beside him in shock. The face in the bar mirror was no longer mine.

Jim's beating was professional. The face was unbruised. But swelling had turned the eyes into narrow slits. The hair was gone except for a half-inch-high swath on top of the head. It was the face the Shadow had worn in the dream the week before.

Jim saw my expression. "Any further thoughts on what happened to the .38?" he asked. Once I remembered the dream, I knew where the gun was. But I just shook my head and he didn't press me. Jim knew just how to put someone over the edge.

At the recruiter's office, the sergeant was another of Jim's pals. I signed papers there too. The sergeant said it was good doing this now and that they'd take me right after school. He gave me something for Tay to sign as my guardian. By then none of this mattered.

To make sure I had nothing to live for, Jim said as he dropped me off, "You've been hiding behind women too long. Next weekend, I'm moving you out of here to somewhere that I can keep an eye on you. Get Tay's signature. Any whining to her and I'll kick your ass."

Tay was home when I walked in the door. "Oh, Kevin," she said and other stuff. But my ears hummed and I didn't hear. What had happened hurt too much to tell her. My future was hell. But it didn't matter. I wouldn't be around for it. I fell face down on my bed and passed out.

When I awoke, it was deepest night. Confused, aching, I got up and took off the unfamiliar shirt with prickly hairs down the back. Guys from school had seen me that morning. Nowhere in the city could I hold up my head. But I had the cure.

On my desk was a note from Tay, a plate of sandwiches and a glass of flat ginger ale. The note read:

\* \* \* \*

BY ALL RIGHT

I WILL COME TO YOU

It meant nothing to me. I couldn't eat. But my thirst was intense, so I drank the soda.

The house was cold, silent. In my grungy jeans, I padded down the hall and opened the door of what had been my mother's room. In the dream, my Shadow had said, "Her brothers are still afraid to go in there."

Remembering, I lifted the mattress. There was the .38 and the ammunition. All I had to do was load the revolver and blow off the side of my head. Picking it up, I saw a vial of pills.

“Shoot yourself,” said a voice behind me. “And you finish Jim’s work for him. Like our mother did. He set you up for this. Look, I laid something aside. A couple of those codeine will cut your pain.”

The magic my Shadow brought was black. But it was magic. “How’s life been without me?” he asked. “Pool parties? Manly outings with Uncle Jim? Going to send me away? No, huh.”

Back in my room, stoned, I held the revolver at the ready and looked in the mirror again. Instead of a face I didn’t recognize, I saw a face that could be anyone: all-American boxer, army recruit, hired killer. And this time, I saw it twice.

I slept most of Sunday. Not wanting to involve Tay, I didn’t talk much. All she could do was pat my hand. Monday morning on my way into school, I saw a familiar face. One of the guys from the Y pool. Hate twisted me. Standing in his path, I looked death into his eyes. By himself, he was frightened. And he should have been. I had a loaded .38 in my school bag.

In study hall that day, guys stared at me and whispered a story that was going around. I dropped Dexedrine and looked at the papers from my locker. I got scared, then angry. Documents ran from my grandfather to my mother, from my mother to me. I owned a share of the house and Jim was trying to throw me out. It seemed I owned a small part of his bar. Without Tay’s signature the army enlistment was worthless.

The Drama Society rehearsed after school. A couple of people looked at me strangely. Grebesky, a forward on the hockey team, was Mistress Quickly, the tavern keeper. Grebesky had his moves down but he couldn’t remember his lines. Nobody laughed as Mr. Royce, the drama advisor, kept prompting him.

In my ear, the voice said, “Early tomorrow, we’ll go visit Uncle Jim and have a little talk.” The thought made me uneasy.

Then I realized there was a stir on stage. “Take five,” said Mr. Royce. “Grierson, get down here.”

At first, I thought I’d missed a cue. Wondering what the big deal was, I came off the stage into the gloom of the auditorium. And my eyes bugged. Royce stood in the center aisle. Stacey was with him. “Nothing to worry about, Grierson,” he said. “Your cousin assures me it’s just a minor family emergency.”

“They were really nice about letting me in,” said Stacey in an unfamiliar bright, chirping voice. She had on a blue dress with a Peter Pan collar. “When I called, Grandmother said you were here.” She smiled girlishly. “Sorry to take Kevin away, Mr. Royce. It was fascinating watching you direct.”

Royce stared at her, enchanted. Girls hardly ever entered the school. I could hear the guys on stage behind me, panting. It turned out we came from a real affectionate family. “Hey, cuz!” I said and kissed Stacey on the mouth.

“Very good, Grierson, you can go. Try to pay more attention,” said Mr. Royce. As I picked up my coat and book bag he added roguishly, “.You never told me you had such a lovely cousin.”

“Right,” I muttered as we walked through the rotunda and out the door. “I can imagine that coming up in conversation. ‘Don’t give me detention, sir, I have a lovely cousin.’”

“He’s a filthy pervert,” Stacey said matter-of-factly. Out on the street, she glanced around, then she looked at me, assessing. “I need your help.”

I was looking too. Now that she wasn’t putting on an act, Stacey seemed tense, desperate. I stayed cool. “What’s wrong?”

“Dr. X. He’s up in New Hampshire, collecting money, drugs. He’s coming back tonight. Then he’s taking me to Mexico.” She took my hand. “Kevin, he’s crazy and I’m scared.”

I wanted her. My life depended on it. But I just said, “Don’t go.” She shook her head. “It isn’t that easy. Things are slightly out of control. My mother and stepfather are coming back next week. Dr. X threatens to stay in the house and confront them. My father has wanted to hospitalize me all along. If I can’t straighten the situation out, my mother will let him.”

Because of how she had helped wreck my life, I said, “You told me to get lost. You told Dr. X where I lived and about the Gallery.”

“No, I said you weren’t ready yet. And he forced me to tell. I was stuck in the god-damn oubliette. In my own house. You humiliated him and he took it out on me. Today he locked me in the bedroom but I got out. Kevin, I recognized something in you the first time we met. Seeing you now, I know you can get rid of Dr. X.”

I hesitated. But my Shadow whispered, “Dr. X is a punching bag. Tell her about your fee.”

“Before I get rid of Dr. X,” I told Stacey and used the same gesture Joe in the Gallery used to indicate the two of us.

She said, “You’re a creep.” But the deal was made.

Looking up and down the block, I asked, “Where’s the MG?”

“Dr. X has it. He says it’s his now. That’s another thing. You have to get it back.” She started walking toward the streetcars and I followed. “When I first met him he seemed brilliant. After what you did to him, everything dried up, the drugs, his power. Everyone who hung around deserted. Even that toad Max.”

We didn’t speak much on the steamy, crowded ear out to her mother’s house. Anticipation kept me hard and on edge. I watched Stacey. She was beautiful. There’s a brief time in youth when depravity does no more than refine the features.

By night her stop looked like something out of a European spy movie, gleaming tracks, frosted breath, figures walking in overcoats as faces at lighted windows moved past in the other direction. “In case this is a trap,” said the Shadow, and I slipped the revolver out of the bag into my overcoat pocket.

The house, it turned out, was dark and silent. Stacey picked up a half empty bottle of J&B in the kitchen and took it up to the master bedroom. We both took a swallow. As we undressed, I took deep sleeping breaths and watched Stacey.

In soft light, she stepped out of her dress and her shoes, undid the stockings and slipped them off. She took off her bra and slid out of her panties. She sat on the bed and beckoned.

I’d dreamed this scene often. But all my experience was of people doing things with my body. Now that it was time to act, I smelled piss and chlorine, heard laughter. Remembering the shame, I froze. Those bastards that Saturday had crippled me.

“It’s easy. Maybe even fun,” my Shadow whispered. My hand brought up the bottle and I took a swig. My feet had trouble finding the floor. But Stacey wanted this to work. She put one hand on my waist, the other on my thigh, and guided me gently. When I came, it was a relief and wonder.

After that she let me play. At one point I felt like we were a pair of beating wings. I remember running my hands over every inch of her skin. I wanted, like I never had with anyone, to make Stacey want me. Caught in the moment, I forgot there was a meter running.

But Stacey didn’t. The last thing she did was to kiss me long and hard on the throat just below my chin. “Something for those gorillas at school to see,” she whispered. Then she rose and I noticed that exactly half an hour had elapsed.

We smoked a cigarette, had some more whiskey. "Sorry to spoil things," Stacey said, "but he's going to be back soon." We dressed and she got busy.

Dr. X had already begun to pack. She moved a suitcase and a cardboard box full of papers down to the front hall. "He can take his things. What I want out of him is all the keys. And make sure he knows he can't return. Ever."

We put most of the lights out and Stacey went back up to the bedroom. After a few minutes she put on a record, the Goldberg Variations. I sat on the stairs with the .38.

Dr. X drove up fast. The car door slammed; his key was in the front lock. For an instant I panicked. But my Shadow whispered, "This will be fun too." My hands steadied as I slipped off the safety.

Dr. X flicked the switch in the front hall and the first thing he saw was his belongings. He looked flabby and flushed, like he had been drinking. Out of the darkness I said, "Good evening, Dr. X."

It took him just a moment to recognize my voice. "You little pussy. She let you fuck her. Now she thinks you're going to save her? No witches to help you? Weird kids like you disappear and nobody is at all surprised." He made a move.

I stood up and leveled the gun. Dr. X faltered. My pulses jumped. "Stacey wants the keys back. Lay them down on the table and you can take all of this you can carry. Understand?"

"I'm taking the car," he said and turned to leave. For a moment the gun was leveled at the back of his head. Then I raised it and squeezed hard.

WHAM! The revolver jumped like a snake. The explosion and the impact of the bullet in the wall above his head were simultaneous. I had never fired a gun before. But I heard myself say, "That felt good!"

Dr. X stood frozen. "Empty out your pockets. Understand?" I said. He didn't jump fast enough. "UNDERSTAND?"

When Stacey came out of the bedroom and stood at the head of the stairs, I had Dr. X lying face down on the floor. She went and called a taxi.

"I think you've done remarkable work integrating Super Ego and Id," said Dr. X. "But I also see you turning that gun on yourself unless you're careful. I know what you're really into, Kevin. Forget that spoiled bitch. You need a man like me."

For a while, I listened appreciatively. I really had learned stuff from him, and he talked a great show. But he began to whine and I had to press the gun into the

back of his head to shut him up. When the taxi came, I let him take his belongings.

As the taillights disappeared down the driveway, Stacey descended and looked at the hole in the wall. "Firing that gun was really stupid," she said. "I hope I can get all this fixed up before Mother gets back."

I unloaded the revolver, stuck it back inside the book bag. "I don't even know his real name."

"Botley, Herbert Botley. He taught freshman psych." Stacey sounded like she had already dismissed him from her mind.

It occurred to me that it would be nice to be close to her again. Reaching out, I suggested, "Let's go back upstairs."

"That wasn't part of the bargain. Do you let your customers have extras?" Startled, I was silent. She showed me to the door without a kiss. "I'm leaving right after you. Repairmen will be here in the morning. Do you need money to get home?"

I shook my head. "Maybe I can call you."

"I don't think so," Stacey said, dosing the door.

That just about broke my heart. At the same time I kind of admired how she had carried everything off. It was cold. I stuck my hands in my pockets and listened to my Shadow.

"Tomorrow we visit Uncle Jim. We go out early when he's nice and hung over. Wait in the garage. Show him the gun, let him know the family curse is still in operation. We want money and we want him to stay far away from us. But I don't think that will be a problem. A bullet or two in the dashboard of his Caddy and he'll cry real tears."

I felt better about it than I had before. But I still wasn't happy. "What about school?" As we approached the station, a streetcar swung out of the dark a few hundred feet down the track. We picked up our pace.

"Forget school. Tay understands what's happening. Or thinks she does. She'll cover for us. Forget Boston. We should go to New York before Christmas. Find girls who make Stacey look like Grebesky. Sugar Daddies. Guys like Joe but rich. We should go to college there."

It sounded good. We crossed the outward bound tracks as the streetcar stopped. My Shadow boarded right behind me.

\* \* \* \*

Richard Bowes makes his third appearance in F&SF with “The Shadow and the Gunman.” All three of his stories, which stand alone, are about Kevin Grierson at various points of his life, and all three will appear in Richard’s novel, Minions of the Moon. This story is the Shadow’s origin tale

Another Kevin Grierson story appeared in Tomorrow Magazine. Richard has also sold stories to Pulphouse Magazine, and the Year’s best Fantasy and Horror. His three novels, War Child, Feral Cell, and Gobin Market, were published by Warner/Questar.