

A Time for Every Purpose

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Fictionwise Contemporary Science Fiction

Nebula Award(R) Finalist; Year's 25 Best Mystery and Crime Stories Pick

Shaunessy sat on the step leading into the laundromat. His jeans were faded, his hair tousled, and he clutched a superball in his slender, unlined right hand. He wore a ripped Moetley Cruce T-shirt that made him feel less than he was. He repeated his title to himself for reassurance: Shaunessy. Detective. Homicide. Time Force.

The summer heat, thick with humidity, surrounded him. He remembered the neighborhood well. Throughout his childhood, they had called it Willy Street. Its run-down buildings were home for the city's poor, the counterculture, and the vagrants. By now, 1994, the renovation project that had started in 1986 had blossomed into a revived neighborhood: rejuvenated Victorian homes stood beside houses that hadn't seen paint or repair since the mid-1930s. The residents of the redesigned homes now called the area Williamson Street. In another decade, only the aging hippies who had never been able to leave Madison would use the area's nickname.

He remembered the neighborhood well. But he hadn't remembered what it was like to be fourteen.

Shaunessy ran his hand through his soft hair, feeling the dampness of sweat at the roots. His heart seemed to be beating twice as fast as normal, and he knew that it wasn't caused by waiting for Rothke. A fourteen-year-old's body felt different from a seventy-year-old's. That was what Kaiser had tried to warn him about. *You were just a kid, Michael*, Kaiser had said. *A kid's body doesn't react like an adult's.*

How well he was learning that. He had gotten an erection watching a woman walk down the street — not a very attractive woman, slightly

obese, but wearing a sundress so small that he saw her breasts straining against the fabric.

His pants were getting tight just from the memory. He stretched out his legs and tugged at the hems. Then he took a deep breath and went over the plan in his mind.

Rothke would arrive at six with a bag of laundry. He had been explosive all week — the heat combined with his particular mental unbalance. At six-fifteen, Connie Grayson would walk in. She was a college freshman whose parents had bought her a condo in one of the renovated buildings. Her washing machine had broken down, and she had a date at eight. She would strike up a conversation with Rothke, ask him if he was a student. He would later say it was like a bomb going off in his head — of course he wasn't a student. He wasn't a pampered rich boy who had money and brains and looks. He was a hard-luck kid who lived in a \$400 studio next to those nice expensive homes. He would scream at her and bang her against the washing machine, over and over, until the blood ran down its white side. Then he would drag her over to the dryer and shove her inside, close the door, and plug the machine with as many dimes as he had, leaving it to run until Kathy McGill would arrive a half-hour later to discover the body.

The only thing Shaunessy could do, he figured, was stop the conversation. His fourteen-year-old body wasn't strong enough to stop a twenty-two-year-old man from beating a woman to death. And he had to stop Rothke, otherwise the man would go on to commit twenty-four other murders. The Time Force had discovered long ago that if the first murder was prevented, the others usually were too.

Shaunessy bounced the superball, watching its colors spin as it traveled from his hand to the sidewalk. At two minutes to six, the digital watch on his left arm beeped. He sat up and leaned against the painted yellow brick near the door, scanning the sidewalk and waiting.

It took a minute before he realized that Rothke was standing at the crosswalk. This Ray Rothke had neatly trimmed black hair and was clean-shaven. He wore a pair of brown shorts and tennis shoes. His tanned legs were muscular, and his bare chest was covered with scars. He clutched a blue duffel bag in his right hand.

Then the light changed and Shaunessy spotted the abnormality. Rothke's movements were sharp, jerky, too tense. He looked like a man who was wound so tight that a snip of the string would send him whirling out of control.

Rothke bounded up the two steps leading into the laundromat, leaving behind him the faint scent of sweat and aftershave. This was the closest Shaunessy had ever been to Rothke; when they finally brought him in, after the Beverly Martin murder, the chief wouldn't let Shaunessy in the same building.

Shaunessy clutched the superball so tightly that the bones in his hand hurt. Goddamn bastard. If his body had more strength, he would go in there and kill Rothke right now, put an end to it before it even began. But he had to follow the rules of the Time Force. Killing Rothke would divert the timestream onto the wrong path. Preventing Connie Grayson's death would have no negative effect whatsoever.

He hunched forward, listening as Rothke banged washer doors. Finally, Shaunessy heard a click and the sound of water running into a machine. He glanced through the open door. A fan was blowing hot air into the street. Rothke sat on a folding chair, his feet propped on one of the washers. He was thumbing through the newspaper someone had left on a table.

"You okay?"

Shaunessy's heart exploded in his chest. He backed up against the wall and found himself staring at a young woman resting a laundry basket against her hip. Almost instantly he had another erection, and he crossed his hands in front of his lap. How had he survived fourteen?

"I didn't mean to scare you." She smiled. Her teeth were perfectly straight and white. Softness eased her face into the photograph that Shaunessy had stared at for hours.

Connie Grayson.

He didn't even have to look for the mole near her right breast, but he did, staring at it on the very crest of the swell rising from her white tube top.

"That's all right," he said.

She swung the basket around in front of her and went in the door. He scrambled to his feet and followed her. Rothke closed his newspaper and watched her. Grayson set down her basket near Rothke. She opened a washer door, grabbed something lacy, and threw it inside. Shaunessy went over and leaned on the washer on which Rothke was resting his feet.

"Ma'am?" Shaunessy was shaking. The laundry was twice as hot as the outdoors.

She looked up. Her eyes were big and blue. The photograph hadn't

captured the wistful intelligence in her face.

"I need to use the phone. Can I borrow a quarter?"

She brought her lips back into a slight frown. Rothke had been right. The condescending attitude was there. Shaunessy was okay as long as he was a kid playing on the steps. But now that he was panhandling, he had gone down a class.

She dug in the pocket of her cut-offs (Shaunessy tried not to watch) and brought out a shiny coin. He took it. Quarters still felt strange to him, even though he had been in this time period for nearly twenty hours now.

"Thanks," he said.

He crossed the room and plugged the quarter in the slot, hearing the ting-ting as it fell through. Announcements plastered against the wall fluttered in the breeze of the fan. He turned. Rothke was staring at Grayson with the same kind of interest Shaunessy had shown. She had nearly finished loading the machine.

Shaunessy picked up the receiver. No dial tone, just as he had expected. He had disabled the phone around noon. He slammed the receiver against its holder and jiggled the coin return. With a clatter of metal against metal, the quarter fell into the little slot. He slipped the quarter out with his index finger and cupped it. Grayson was pouring laundry soap into the machine. Rothke had stood up.

Shaunessy hurried across the room. He let all the worry he felt fill his face. "Here, ma'am," he said, shoving the quarter back at her. "The phone doesn't work."

She closed the lid on the machine. Water streamed over the clothes. Rothke's machine began the spin cycle. Grayson took the quarter and studied Shaunessy. He shifted from one foot to the other.

"Is something wrong?"

"I'm — not sure. My mom was supposed to pick me up two hours ago, and she's never late." His voice cracked on the word "late," and he swallowed, feeling an embarrassment rise. That, at least, he remembered — a sensation nearly fifty-six years old.

"Oh." Grayson frowned. He knew that she would understand trauma caused by late mothers. Two years earlier, her own mother had missed picking her up from high school. Grayson had caught a ride home — to discover her mother unconscious at the base of the stairs. She had apparently tripped and hit her head coming down.

Grayson scanned Shaunessy. "Come on," she said. "You can use my

phone."

She put her hand lightly against Shaunessy's back, propelling him forward. At the door, she turned and said to Rothke, "Will my laundry be all right here?"

He shrugged. "I ain't got no use for lacy underwear."

The hostility in Rothke's voice made Shaunessy shiver, but Grayson didn't seem to notice. They went out the door. Ninety degrees with attendant humidity felt cool after the oven the laundromat had become. Shaunessy took a deep breath. He didn't realize how nervous Rothke had made him.

Grayson led him to the light. They stopped for a moment, but the street was empty, so they crossed on the red. She led him to a remodeled Queen Anne on Wilson across from the train tracks. As she reached into her pocket for the keys, he stared at the upper floor. He had seen pictures: the neat, carefully furnished living room with its turret window; the pots and pans hanging from a stylish kitchen. The University of Wisconsin was attracting wealthy students during this period, and Grayson was one of them.

She opened the door and let him inside. He waited at the base of the carpeted stairs until she started up them. "Ma'am," he said. "I think you should probably know that that guy in the laundromat — "

"Yes?"

"He's pretty weird. Kinda scary weird. I'd stay away from him if I were you."

She looked at Shaunessy, her gaze penetrating, as if she were trying to tell whether he was referring to Rothke or himself. "I'll remember that," she said.

The last two stairs creaked under her feet. She stopped at the landing and unlocked the darkly stained wooden door.

The apartment was spectacular. Sunlight streamed in the tall rounded windows. Oriental rugs covered the hardwood floors, and throw pillows were set carefully but casually on the wide white couch. The room was cool, even though he could see no air conditioner.

"The phone's over there," she said, pointing to a table next to her wide-screen television set. A viewer. Something he had not planned on.

He started to dial, wondering how he was going to fake this one.

"The viewer's blown," she said. "Sorry."

He nodded and tried not to sigh with relief. The number he dialed was his home phone number, but his parents would still be at work. He smiled. If he had had more time, he would have spent some time with them.

"Dad?" he said into the ringing phone. "Yeah. Mom hasn't come yet. I been waiting near the laundromat."

He paused, listening to a ringing sound that hadn't existed since the year 2000. "I don't know. She was supposed to be there two hours ago."

He paused again.

"Some lady let me use her phone."

Grayson moved a magazine on an end table, pretending not to watch him.

"Okay. Thanks."

He hung up. "He'll be here in about fifteen minutes."

She smiled. "I hope everything's okay."

"Me, too." His voice rose slightly on the end of the word "too." Fourteen. If he could wait until she took her laundry out of the washer, he would have saved her and stopped the killings.

She ran a hand over her cut-offs. "You gotta go back to the laundry?"

He nodded.

"I'll walk you down." She picked up her keys and opened the door. The hallway seemed dark after the brightness of the apartment. He reached the base of the stairs and opened the main door for her. Stepping onto the street felt like stepping into a sauna.

"Jesus, it's hot," she said.

He glanced down the street to the crosswalk. Maybe Rothke would be gone already. Maybe, by taking Grayson home for those few minutes, Shaunessy had already diverted the timestream.

"I hope your mom is okay."

Shaunessy swallowed. "Me, too."

"That happened to me once," she said. They passed a hedge covered with rose bushes. The scent filled the humid air. "My mom didn't pick me up. Turns out she had fallen down a flight of stairs and knocked herself out. She was okay though."

They stopped at the crosswalk. This time, cars swished past. The red don't-walk hand glared at them from the other side of the street.

"She drinks too much," Grayson said.

Shaunessy looked at her, startled. A piece of information he didn't know. Maybe —

But diverting the timestream now wouldn't change the past, only the future. He smiled to himself. Detective reports didn't cover everything.

"My mom," he said. "She doesn't do any of that stuff."

Grayson nodded. The light changed. Two cars stopped, one a little past the faded white line. In twenty years, the city would erect automatic electronic barriers, activated with the light change, so that a vehicle couldn't stop halfway into a crosswalk without damaging a fender.

Grayson was watching him. "Your mom will be okay," she said.

"I know." He tried to sound unconvinced. As they stepped up the curb, she put her hand lightly on his shoulder. Nice girl. In the other timestream, the one he had (probably) diverted, the world lost a gentle human being. No one deserved to die like she had.

They reached the steps to the laundromat, and he took a deep breath. Rothke was still inside, sitting next to a dryer. Grayson's washing machine had clicked off.

"You got drying to do?" he asked, glancing at Rothke.

"No," she said. "I have a dryer at home. But I'll wait if you want."

He shook his head almost too quickly. She had to leave. "I know where you are if I got to use the phone again. Thanks, though."

"Okay." She went inside. He followed. The place seemed to have grown hotter. Rothke's cheeks were deep red and beads of sweat ran down the side of his face. He didn't even glance at them. Grayson opened her washer, grabbed her laundry basket, and threw the crumpled, soggy clothes into the bottom.

When she was done, she balanced the basket on her hip, like she had before. "You sure you don't want me to wait?"

His heart was pounding. Almost there. Just a few more minutes and she would be gone. "Yeah. My dad should be here soon."

"All right." She smiled at him. "I hope everything is going to be okay."

"Me, too."

She nodded at him and walked out the door. He went back to his perch on the stairs and watched until she crossed the street. Gone. She was gone. And Rothke still sat in the laundromat, angry, but alone. Shaunessy

breathed a sigh of relief. Mission accomplished. With one little lie, he had saved twenty-five lives.

He went around to the time portal on the side of the building and stepped inside. In a few seconds, the master computer would kick in the time dislocation equipment and send him to the next programmed stop. These transitions into younger versions of himself were almost instantaneous. He felt a slight warp, a change from humid air to frosty with the loud boom of a thunderclap, and then he was in a different body, an older body, wrapped in a thin, heater-lined coat, standing beside an electronic squad. He blinked twice at the transition into darkness, then his eyes adjusted. The West Towne parking lot, about five years before they tore the old mall down. His heart was a large lump in the back of his throat, beating not with excitement, but fear. He had hoped he wouldn't be here, hoped he would arrive somewhere else on this cold October night.

He dug his hands farther into his pockets and remembered.

They had called him so quickly that he hadn't had time to dress properly. The squad had arrived within two or three minutes. They didn't want to waste time and they wanted him there from the beginning. A rookie had driven him to the scene.

When he was a child, the West Towne area had grown, filled with McDonald's, B. Dalton's, and all the other important chains. The high-tech industries moved in, and West Towne was the place to be. But in this point on the timestream, 2025, the high-tech industries had grown old, the buildings dilapidated. Eighties construction hadn't withstood time and harsh winters well, and many buildings were sagging. The old mall itself had very few open stores. The movie theaters had been turned into retail space and auditorium rentals, and the mall management kept the common areas open all hours, making the mall a target for vagrants and adding to the high crime rate.

He never knew if Aimilee had gone to West Towne on her own or if Rothke had brought her there.

Kaiser opened the door, a younger Kaiser, the man Shaunessy had known before they joined the Time Force, back when they were simply policemen. Shaunessy had forgotten that Kaiser once sported a goatee — or perhaps Shaunessy had never known. A fear rose in him, one he never let himself examine. His perceptions were important to his job and yet his perceptions, his memories, were always inaccurate. One afternoon, he could return from a mission and find that his entire life had changed.

He had hoped that would happen after stopping Rothke.

Kaiser's eyes were brown pinpoints in the dim reflection of the only unbroken streetlight. "You should come with me, Mike."

Shaunessy swallowed. It was harder the second time. He knew what to expect and it wasn't fair. He had prevented the first murder. Connie Grayson had lived through that night at the laundromat. Rothke wasn't supposed to kill anyone. The first murder prevented, the others stopped.

He moved away from the car. "Aimilee?" he asked, unable to keep silent any longer.

Kaiser nodded. "I'm sorry, Mike. They want you to verify her."

He had never understood that. The second time he was living through this night, and he still didn't understand it. He glanced at his watch, not a digital anymore, but a simple illuminated computerized timer, and realized that all he had to do was step back into the portal and he would be home, twenty-five years in the future, this night a single gaping hole in the past.

But he had to see. Maybe she was just injured. Maybe something had changed. Maybe —

They stepped past the heavy glass doors of the mall. Four police and the coroner stood near the entrance of the old J. C. Penney's store. When they saw Shaunessy, they parted.

He could have described the scene from memory; it had replayed in his brain so many times. She lay there, naked, in the remnants of her bloodied clothes, one hand covering her breasts and the other her groin. Her head, that beautiful leonine head with its tawny eyes and shock of blonde hair, had been bashed in, bashed and bloodied until shards of bone protruded through the skin.

No man should be asked to look at his daughter like that. Especially twice in one lifetime.

His coat suddenly felt too hot, and he switched off the little heater to prevent himself from burning alive. He glanced at the strawberry birthmark on her shoulder, the little flower tattoo on her right wrist. Confirmation. The second time.

"That's her," he said, surprised that his voice didn't crack. But his body wasn't fourteen anymore. It was forty-five and it had fathered that woman lying naked on the cracked tile. His only daughter. His only child. "That's my Aimie."

Kaiser put his arm around Shaunessy's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Mike."

Shaunessy knew how the dialogue went. He was supposed to ask, *Who did this?* And Kaiser would reply, *We don't know*. But Shaunessy said nothing.

Kaiser's grip tightened. "We'll find the bastard that did this."

Shaunessy nodded. He knew who did it. Rothke. That goddamn bastard Rothke. And not one hour ago, in a different lifetime, he had stood a foot away from the man in a laundromat that had been torn down in the year 1997.

"I think I want to go to the car," he said.

Kaiser let his hand slide, then he rubbed the space between Shaunessy's shoulder blades. "Let me know if you need anything."

"Yeah." Shaunessy turned his back on the scene, knowing it was now doubly reinforced in his mind. His girl bludgeoned by Rothke and he would never know how because Rothke wouldn't remember. The Time Force had never let anyone go back and prevent Aimilee's death. *It would send the timestream on a negative path* was their simple one sentence response to his request. But who decided what negative was? Each action, each change was determined by the Board of Extra-Legal Advisors. Some major changes were acceptable, some not. Someone as lowly as a detective couldn't decide. Someone as lowly as a detective didn't even have the power to save his own daughter.

Years later, after he had joined the Time Force, he learned that they had put a lock on the entrance to Aimilee's death. He could look at the body as many times as he liked, but he could never travel a few hours earlier, be here in the mall at the time of the attack. Her death was a protected event. Important. What would Aimilee have done if they had let her live?

He would never know.

The air outside the mall was biting cold. Shaunessy took a deep breath, feeling the sharpness invade his lungs. He was alive. He had lived twenty-five years past this event. Aimilee was Rothke's fifteenth victim. They pegged him on his twenty-fifth; until then no one had even known the deaths were related. Sentencing included murder prevention, but not life prevention. And Shaunessy had fought for the assignment. Shaunessy never let them know how badly he wanted Rothke. Only Kaiser knew the depth of Shaunessy's hatred. Shaunessy wanted to stop all of Rothke's crimes, even though the Board wouldn't let him kill Rothke to do so. And so far, Shaunessy had failed.

He walked to the car and leaned against it. The first time, he had

waited, numb, until someone had driven him home. This time, he would send himself home.

Shaunessy stuck his hand inside his coat, then stepped into the portal. The warp seemed stronger, almost a dilation in the timestream. No sound accompanied this movement, but a strong ache dug into his wrists and fingers. The arthritis. Damn. He had forgotten that.

He opened the door to the travel booth and stepped into the office. Light as clear as sunlight filled the room. Conversations echoed. Some officers watched shimmering holos near their desks. Others drank coffee — no one called it decaffeinated anymore, the caffeine ban being nearly thirty years old — from their personal brewing cups and studied the hard copies a runner dropped on their desks. Kaiser smiled up at him from the other side of their partners' desk.

Everything was the same. Nothing had changed. Shaunessy felt both relieved and disappointed.

"Mission accomplished?" Kaiser asked.

Shaunessy sighed. That was the problem with this work. If the mission succeeded, no one knew about the changes because their lives had drifted with the time field. Only the officer and his immediate supervisor on the Board had any memory of the unaltered time. Success and failure depended entirely on the countenance of the person exiting the time booth.

"No," Shaunessy said. He sat down on his side of the desk and pushed a button activating the holographic computer screen. It shimmered silver above his desk. He tapped in PRIVATE, TWO DIMENSIONAL, and called up Rothke's file, looking through it until he found the first murder. Kathy McGill. Died 7 P.M., the hour, in another timestream, when she would have discovered Connie Grayson's body.

Damn the man. It wasn't the student comment that provoked him at all. It was some internal mechanism, some private string snapping that would take anyone with it.

"Want to talk about it?" Kaiser asked.

"No," Shaunessy said. He shut off the screen and studied his hands. They were thick and gnarled, the knuckles swollen with pain. He vaguely remembered having the arthritis cured, but that was probably in another timestream, one that got changed along the way for other, unknown reasons. Or perhaps it had been a dream. In this life, dream-tripping and time-traveling weren't very different at all.

He was trapped now. He couldn't go back any earlier. The Time Force didn't allow their people to become self-aware children, and besides, Rothke was eight years older than Shaunessy. Only special squads were allowed to take their bodies into pre-birth times they had researched heavily. That work took certain skills and experiences in time dilation that Shaunessy only vaguely understood. He had been too old when he joined the Time Force to go through the more sophisticated training. He had never researched the times he had traveled to. He had only traveled here, in his hometown, placing his consciousness into his already existing body at various ages to prevent murders along the timestream. And he had been successful, until Rothke.

Now Shaunessy had to give over the case to someone who could travel earlier, who could find the actual time to divert Rothke from his murder scheme, but Shaunessy would lose the satisfaction of knowing that Rothke had been stopped. Sure, Aimilee would be alive, but if the timestream diverted, Shaunessy would never know (except, perhaps, for vague dream memories) that she had died. He wanted the satisfaction of saving her. For once in his life, he wanted a personal vengeance. He had waited twenty-five years for it. He wasn't going to get cheated out of it.

He called up the Rothke file again, asking for a holographic sequence of the memories picked from Rothke's brain. He had been born in early 1972 to a college co-ed named Diane Rothke. She had named him Raisin, but from the time he could remember, he had called himself Ray. The early visions he had of his life were startling. A woman, with a thin, hollow face and vacant eyes, striking repeatedly, first with her fists, then with a paddle, and finally, as he grew older, with a skillet across the skull. That had been the last time, the time he left home. He had always been violent, like his mother, striking out at things in anger, bashing them. Small things first. A stray cat. A dog that chased his bicycle. It wasn't until Kathy McGill (Connie Grayson) that he killed his first human being.

"Jesus," Shaunessy whispered. Rothke was predisposed from the beginning. The Board should have seen that. This wasn't a homicide case. Rothke was a case for eradication. The man should never have been born.

Shaunessy typed in a request for reclassification, including a copy of the holo tapes. Sometimes the Board operated lazily, trying to go back to the most recent time to solve a crime, figuring the more distant the time, the larger the diversion in the timestream. The larger the diversion, the greater chance for major change. And it was the Board's job to prevent a complete alteration in the present as they knew it. So far, the Board had achieved it — at least, so far as anyone knew.

Reality was a shifting mass of perceptions, of memories, different for each member of the Time Force, because each remembered a different (and inaccurate) version of the past. The masses had no such problems. If a shift in the timestream occurred, they shifted with it, their memories altered or eradicated, their life patterns changed in as smooth a manner as possible. Only the Time Force had to deal with philosophical questions of reality. The Time Force and the Board that controlled the timestreams in all their infinite variations.

Someday someone would make a change that would eliminate the Time Force or the Board or the supersophisticated computer that made the prognostications on change possible. That worry had nagged at the back of Shaunessy's brain the way the threat of nuclear destruction had nagged at his father. Always present, rarely acknowledged.

Shaunessy acknowledged it now because he was tired and feeling defeated. All he wanted to do was prevent his daughter's death. It seemed little to ask, considering all the things he had done.

A slight beep notified him of the response to his petition. REQUEST DENIED, it read. PROBABILITY FOR MAJOR CHANGE 51 PER CENT. Two percentage points lower and they would have granted his request. Goddammit.

He slammed his fist on the desk, then winced as the pain shimmered up his arm. Kaiser looked up. "Anything I can do?"

Shaunessy shook his head. He called up the old files, the flat files, and searched until he found what he was looking for. Raisin Rothke was conceived in the spring of 1971, the result of a rape. His mother, an eighteen-year-old college student, opted to bear the child and raise him herself, but the strain of the attack and his birth had twisted her somehow, turned her violent, causing her to beat him and finally kill herself in December of 1986.

A rape. Shaunessy took a deep breath. All he had to do was prevent the rape. So simple. It didn't matter that he wasn't licensed for 1971. He would research. And he would go. He had a 49 per-cent chance of success. And success meant that, no matter what he did, the Board wouldn't prosecute. If he failed —

He didn't want to consider failure.

* * * *

Shaunessy stepped out the time portal to find himself gazing up West Washington Avenue at the Capitol. The big, white domed building

dominated the Square as it always had, but West Wash looked different. The street was narrower, the buildings more run-down. Shaunessy took a deep breath and coughed. The air was thick with smells he had never noted before. Gasoline, oil, and something else, something noxious, rising from the east.

He touched his shoulder-length wig to make sure it was still there. The last few hours had been among the strangest in his career. He had to return to that period near his twentieth birthday when he had blacked out, here, near the train depot (and no one had ever known why. Was it this? Was he actually riding a timestream that had remained constant?), pick up his younger body, and bring it to the time portal where he outfitted it with the clothes he had brought and traveled into 1971.

And now he stood in front of the same depot that he would faint before twenty-nine years in the future, watching as huge cars with thick fenders zoomed down a road he had thought he knew.

The strains of Jefferson Airplane — a group he recognized from his mother's collection — echoed from up the block. He turned and looked up Bedford Street.

It was very close to the street he had known as a child. Houses curved along one side, leading to the university. A cardboard company and the old school district building stood on the other. But farther on, the high rise dorms were missing.

Goose bumps ran along Shaunessy's arms. A month's research hadn't prepared him for the way this time period felt. He rubbed his sweaty palms along the front of his faded jeans, stopping as his right hand encountered the peace patch he had meticulously sewn on in the costume room the day before.

He took a deep breath and sighed. Diane Rothke lived on Mifflin Street. With luck, he would find her home.

As he started to walk, he tugged on the sleeves of his dashiki. The draping garment made him nervous. He was used to shirts that closed around his wrists, hid his watch. This time, he couldn't wear a watch — hippies never did — and so he felt naked.

A couple strode down the street toward him in the growing twilight. The young man wore a white shirt and black pants. His girlfriend, in a skirt and tight summer sweater, clung to his arm. Shaunessy averted his eyes as he passed. He knew that hippies were in the minority, and he had read of some dislike between them and the "straight" kids, but he had no idea what to expect from them. This couple merely passed, saying nothing.

Finally, he turned on Mifflin Street and stopped. The street was a mishmash of houses, some still single-family dwellings. In a big house on the center of the block, kids lounged on the lawn. The smell of marijuana rose thick in the air. A young girl with hair down to her hips was turning over a record on the record player someone had dragged outdoors. He checked the number on the house. It was Diane Rothke's.

Shaunessy crossed the street and started down the sidewalk, his sandals flapping against the concrete. "Hey man," he said when he reached the edge of the lawn. "You seen Diane?"

The words felt strange in his throat, and shivers ran up his arm. This wasn't real. The pasts he had gone to before were real, but they were his pasts, his memories. But this, this was something out of books and videos, twisted by his imagination and turned into a world that never was, that never should have been.

One of the guys on the lawn rolled over on his back and stared up at Shaunessy with bleary eyes. He extended a joint, fat, crude, and handmade. Shaunessy took it, understanding the etiquette because his parents used to do the same, during holidays when he was a child, hiding in the kitchen, smoking joints and talking about business deals. He put the joint in his mouth and took a small toke. The smoke stabbed at the back of his throat and made his eyes water. He handed the joint back trying not to think of the diseases lurking in the saliva of the boy lying on the lawn.

"I — " Shaunessy stopped. His voice sounded strangled. The guy on the lawn handed the joint over his head to a girl. Then he propped himself up on one elbow.

"Diane ain't here. She said she was going down to Rath and then she had some other stuff. Who're you, man?"

Shaunessy could hear the suspicion in the tone. Maybe he looked as uncomfortable as he felt. "Mike. Tell her I'm looking for her, okay?"

"Will do."

Shaunessy rubbed his hands against his pants. The Rath meant the Rathskellar. That much hadn't changed. He hurried past the party and turned on Bassett Street. The older houses were still in good shape. A middle-aged woman looked at him suspiciously from a picture window. The marijuana had left him dizzy. By the time he was born, in 1980, the residents of these streets would move. The bombings, the student encroachment, everything would change and force these people, some of whom had owned their homes since the Depression, out west, into the

suburbs.

He walked up Bassett until he reached University Avenue, and there he stopped and swallowed heavily. Nothing looked the same. No Humanities Building rising square and ugly against the skyline. No bridge leading to the castle that was Vilas Hall. The shops filling University Square Four, his favorite place as a child, were gone. Instead he saw older buildings, stores with names he didn't recognize. A narrower, run-down street, covered with people and earnest-looking students.

He didn't turn on the street as he had planned. He couldn't. It unnerved him too much. Instead he took a little jaunt to Frances Street, then walked past State Street, turning his head when he saw the two-way traffic and the broken, boarded-up windows. This was Madison as an impoverished person's war zone, filled with nightmares on every corner.

He kept walking toward Lake Mendota, toward Langdon Street, thinking he would be safe on Greek Row. The frat houses had been there since time began, and their red brick, Victorian structures still dominated the street in 2050. Frats were forever and his time-tortured mind could relax there, among them and the trees.

But Langdon Street was a mini-nightmare. It looked deserted. What few cars stood alongside the frat houses were rusted and ripped. The houses looked deserted and a few had boards across their windows. A young man stepped out of the door of one, his black hair cropped short, and his white shirt open at the neck. When he saw Shaunessy, he stopped.

"Get the fuck out of here, you freak," the kid said, but Shaunessy thought he could hear fear in the kid's voice. "You creeps don't belong here. Get the fuck out."

A few more boys joined him at the door, probably to see what the commotion was. But the panic that had been building in Shaunessy's stomach since he stepped out of the time portal erupted. He ran down the block, past the other houses, past the Wisconsin Center, looking new as it rose a few stories into the sky. The Red Gym was the same, big, bright-red brick with towers rising on two sides. Then the Union parking lot and finally, finally the Memorial Union, standing like a snapshot in the middle of his muddled memory.

He dashed across the street beside the Memorial Library, feeling like he had come home. He stopped beside some young trees near the front of the Union, panting and checking down the road for the frat boys. They hadn't followed him. He touched his wig to make sure it was straight, then he gulped air.

Diane had to be here. He only had twelve hours in this timestream, and he had wasted one just looking for her. Besides, if he continued this abnormal behavior, he might get caught. He and Kaiser figured the Monitors would be onto him within three hours. Then they would have to figure out what he had done, how he had arrived here and why. He had destroyed the memory on his computer tabs, and he was hoping that no one had the sense to check the master computer. Then they wouldn't know what he was after, and he would be harder to find. If they didn't find him before he completed his mission, he would be safe. Both he and Kaiser would be safe, since Kaiser had helped him get here in the first place.

"You okay?"

A girl touched his shoulder. She was wearing a worn peace symbol T-shirt that he could see her nipples through. Her eyes were big and brown, and something in their expression reminded him of Connie Grayson.

He nodded, moved her hand, and bounded up the stairs. He pulled back the smooth metal handle on the door, thinking that this, at least, was the same. The Union, even more than the frats, was a constant. He had spent more time in this building than perhaps in any other but the Time Force offices. As a kid, he had waited here for his father to finish teaching class, and then, as a young adult, he had studied criminology here between beers and loud, silly parties.

He stepped inside and stopped. The main layout was the same — the ice cream store and concession stand to the right, the Lakeside Cafeteria straight ahead, the stairs leading to the second floor slightly off-center, the large open space filled with cause tables and politically active students handing out buttons. Near the bulletin board and the old 1940s clock the hallway headed toward the Siftskellar and the Rathskellar.

Conversations hummed around him. The clean-cut students avoided him as they came through the door, but a few of the others, dressed as he was, nodded as they passed. Shaunessy was too numb to nod back. He was wasting time, wasting time at being shocked. No wonder the research was necessary, the years of study. He didn't know what was important and what wasn't. He knew who was president and he knew about the Vietnam War. He knew about the anti-war movement and how, in Madison at least, it would die tonight because of some guys named Armstrong and a crude, homemade car bomb. But he didn't know what to touch and what not to touch, and he didn't know how to get past the memories, the inaccurate ones, the future ones, ticking like a time bomb in the back of his head.

"Either you're on some really good shit or you don't belong here."

He looked over. The girl again, standing beside him like a faithful puppy, a frown creasing her smooth forehead. Then he realized that she didn't look like Connie Grayson. He had actually seen this girl before, on one of his classes on detection. She had gone undercover, one of the truly courageous ones, the ones that risked mental deterioration and time shock if they ever decided to return home.

A flush ran up his cheeks. So far, she didn't recognize him, but she had noticed something strange about him, something strange enough to make her comment that he didn't belong in this time period.

"Good shit," he repeated, trying to sound drunk. He had no idea what this era's drugs did to the speech center. "I was on Mifflin, you know, and they had this stuff. Good shit. Makes the world fucking pretty, you know?" He reached over and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Makes you fucking pretty, you know?"

She didn't flinch away as he had expected. He let his hand fall, lightly brushing her breast, and this time she did back up ever so slightly.

"And now I want a beer." He brought his thumb to her nipple and tweaked it. "You want a beer?"

"No." She moved out of his grasp, over near the first cause table.

One of the boys handing out pamphlets looked at her. His hair just brushed the back of his collar and he was clean-shaven. "Everything okay?" he asked.

"Guy's on something," she said, indicating Shaunessy with her head.

"I'll buy," Shaunessy said.

"Leave her alone," the guy said.

Shaunessy leaned over. The guy smelled of soap. Shaunessy said in a loud whisper, "She's got nice tits."

"Will you get out of here?" the guy snapped. Shaunessy didn't have to be asked twice. He pushed his way past three girls wearing short, short skirts and high heels. Then he stepped under the arch and stopped near the door to the Siftskellar.

The cafeteria looked wrong. There was only one window and one cash register island. A single student grabbed a hot cup and poured himself coffee from a dispenser. Then he took it to the cashier who yawned as she punched the numbers in a cash register that Shaunessy had never seen before. It seemed to have keys — like an-old-fashioned typewriter — no

computerized beeps and whirs. A bell rang as the register opened. The cashier handed the student his change, and he disappeared into the main dining hall.

Shaunessy moved on. No woman resembling Diane's description sat in the outer cafeteria or in the main hall. But the guy on Mifflin Street had said the Rath, not the Sift.

Shaunessy walked through the Sift to the Rath. The open bar curved along the cafeteria's brown wall, students lining up for beer, wine, or popcorn. Shaunessy got in line too, hoping he looked old enough not to flash his ID as so many others were doing. He slid his hand in his pocket and fingered the money he had taken from costuming. It felt worn and too thin.

As he stepped up to the bar, he pulled out a single dollar and clutched it. The boy behind the bar looked up. His face was drawn and white, and he looked tired. He rubbed his hands on his blue-and-white-striped smock and leaned forward.

"What you want?"

"Gimme a beer," Shaunessy said. He figured he would look more authentic carrying something to drink.

"What kinda beer?"

Kind. He didn't know which beers existed and which didn't. "A — light beer."

"We don't serve dark beers, and I don't make your decision for you. Pabst, Miller, Old Milwaukee — "

"Yeah. Old Milwaukee." Shaunessy held out his dollar, and the student took it, giving Shaunessy change and a paper cup filled with a caramel-colored liquid. He took a sip as he walked away and almost spat it out. Preservatives, additives, and something else, something that almost made the beer taste like the can it had probably been stored in.

"Shit," he muttered to himself. He scanned the tables as he passed, looking for a dark-haired, serious girl. Every time he saw someone dark-haired, he studied her before moving on.

Finally, he went into the Rath itself. It was a small room, but hadn't changed much in all the years that he had known it. Paintings of dwarves and elves, illustrating German sayings written in Gothic script, lined the walls. His favorite, a depiction of the battle between the beer and wine drinkers, seemed fresher, newer. The tables were thick slabs of wood. Only the chairs differed. They apparently were the ones originally designed to

go with the tables.

A group of students sat in one booth, drinking two pitchers of beer and eating popcorn. Another group sat near the war painting, and up on the little stage, two clean-cut boys were playing darts. In the darkest corner sat a group of young people dressed like himself. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he recognized Diane Rothke.

She wore her black hair long. It curled under at the ends and hugged her bare arms. Her tie-dyed shirt tied at the waist, leaving a bare patch between her ribs and her hips. Her denim skirt ended mid-calf, and she hid her feet in a pair of clunky brown boots. The entire effect was neat and attractive. She seemed almost too healthy to be the woman who had nearly beaten her son to death. Maybe, if he prevented this rape as he planned, she would stay neat and healthy and attractive.

He settled down in a chair in the center of the room where he could sip his beer and watch her. She sat with two men, both older than most of the students, and both with very long hair, down almost to their waists. They were having a heated discussion, which they carried on in whispers. He knew next to nothing about the young Diane Rothke. Her school records had been impeccable. Her grades, until 1971, were high and she attended class. Beyond that, no one had commented about her. Apparently, she was a lot more radical than he had thought.

He should have sat closer so that he could hear the conversation. Perhaps she had a different reason for being out so late on this night. The Armstrongs were supposed to blow up the Army Math Research Center some time after midnight to prevent it from conducting any more work for the United States Government. Their homemade bomb would destroy the Physics Building and, in the process, kill one researcher working late on a project. The bombing wouldn't be unusual in and of itself, but the death of the researcher would be unique. It would discredit the local anti-war movement and sound another chime in the death knells of the movement nationwide.

And Diane seemed to be involved in something secretive. He leaned back in his chair, took another sip from the metallic beer, and winced. He hadn't done enough research. He only suspected her involvement in the bombing because that event had dominated everything written on the period. If he had known more, he would have been able to guess better.

Finally, the two men stood up. One placed his hand on Diane's head, almost in a benediction. Then they left. She took a sip from the cup in front of her, grabbed a backpack, and began to zip it up. Shaunessy picked

up his beer and wandered over to her table.

"Mind if I join you?" he asked.

She shrugged. "I'm leaving in a minute."

"Let me buy you a beer." The best thing to do was to keep her by his side, however he could manage it. Buy her a few beers, take her to her apartment, anything — well, almost. He knew that he couldn't sleep with her. The best thing he could do, besides preventing the rape, was to prevent her from having any sex at all on this night.

"Do I know you?" she asked.

"Not really," he said. "But I've been studying you. You're a fascinating lady."

"Bullshit. You'd do better if you asked me my sign."

He smiled, as he knew he was supposed to, even though he really didn't understand her. She finished zipping the backpack. He put his hand on hers. "Really," he said. "I want to spend some time with you."

"Maybe later, okay? I got a meeting to go to."

"It can wait for at least one more beer."

"No." She slung her pack over her shoulder and stood up. "It can't. What's your name?"

"Mike."

"Mike. Christ, you're normal. I prefer something a little more hip, you know, like, Jesus, I don't know. Mike sounds like you should be pumping gas or something." She pushed her hair out of her eyes with one hand. "I don't really mean to be offensive or anything. It's just that, like, you're not *intriguing* me, you know?"

"Give me a chance," he said. "I want to — "

"I gotta go. Call me. I live on Mifflin." And she hurried off through the crowd. As he slid out of the booth after her, his hand brushed the paper cup. It toppled, splattering beer onto the floor. He pushed past four people standing in the doorway and hurried to the hall in time to see her boot-clad feet round the corner heading toward the Union Theater Box Office. Or what should be the Union Theater Box Office. He didn't have time to think about it. He had to follow her, and quickly.

A hand grabbed his arm. He tried to shake it away, but couldn't. He looked down at the girl with the large brown eyes. "You're not on anything," she said. "You're Michael Shaunessy."

"Let me go," he said.

"You're not authorized for this time period, sir."

"Look," he said, trying to keep his voice down. "Either you come with me and we discuss it or you let me go. Otherwise you're going to blow this thing wide open. And frankly, sweetheart, at that point it's your ass as well as mine."

"If this was legal, they would have notified me."

He wrenched his arm free and ran up the three stairs and then went past the Union Theater Box Office. Diane was gone. He glanced up the stairs leading to the Union Theater, but decided that she couldn't have gone that way. If she were going upstairs, she would have used the stairs across from the Rath.

He ran to the double glass doors and looked out. She was standing in front of Science Hall talking with a middle-aged man. Shaunessy let out a sigh of relief.

The girl caught up to him. "You can at least tell me what's going on," she said.

"What's your name?"

She frowned. Across the street, Diane gestured wildly. "Huh?" the girl asked.

"I can't remember your name. What is it?"

"Elspeth Gordon."

He remembered her then. An intellectual cop who was a tad too weak physically. A commendation list that almost matched her infraction record. She was a good cop when she didn't have to play by the rules. They put her undercover rather than dismiss her from the force.

"Well, Elspeth," he said, deciding to take the risk. "See that girl over there? The one talking in front of Science Hall? She's going to get raped tonight. I plan to stop it."

"You can't," she said. "Tonight's a major night. Nothing gets touched."

"This does," he said.

She shook her head. "I can't let you. You know about majors."

He knew about majors. He also knew about Ray Rothke. Shaunessy grabbed the collar of Elspeth's T-shirt and pulled her up on her toes. She gasped. "You let me," he said. "Or I won't be responsible for what happens to you."

"You know I got to call for reinforcements," she said.

Diane Rothke turned her back on the man. She started up Bascomb Hill. "Fine," Shaunessy said. "You do that. Just leave me alone, okay?"

He let go of Elspeth's shirt and pushed open the final door, stepping out into the growing darkness. Diane was striding purposefully up the slanted sidewalk. He ran across the street, up the stairs and started up the sidewalk, behind her. Halfway up, he looked behind himself. Elspeth stood on the corner, watching. He wondered how much time she would give him and what she would tell the Board of Extra-Legal Advisors. But he couldn't worry about it now.

Few other students were on the hill. Some were lying on the grass. One was coming down past the Old Music Hall. Bascomb Hill looked like it should look, except for the chain link fences marking off the grass. The building at the top, Bascomb Hall, had a small dome that mimicked the dome on the Capitol, exactly one mile away, down the hill and down State Street. If Shaunessy turned around, he would be able to see it, shining in the darkness.

He didn't turn.

Diane shrugged her shoulders to adjust her backpack. She called a hello to two students making out in the grass. One of them waved back. She walked until she was directly across from the statue of Lincoln. Shaunessy looked at the old statue in surprise. For some reason, he didn't think it would be there. He knew that it was a replica of the statue of Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in D.C., but for some reason, he had thought it arrived later, not earlier. In the semi-light, the statue looked old and careworn, like Shaunessy felt, despite the young body he wore.

Diane walked on the small sidewalk that led around the side of North Hall. North and South Halls were built on the opposite sides of the hill. They were the oldest buildings on campus, once housing both students and classes. By the time Shaunessy attended the U.W. in the late 1990s, the halls were being remodeled. They had been professorial offices. The remodeling converted them into tiny classrooms. He didn't know what the halls were used for in Diane's time.

He caught the door just as it closed and followed Diane up the stairs. North Hall had a claustrophobic feel: the walls were too narrow, the stairs too high. The place smelled of chalk dust and cigarettes. Most of the rooms were locked and dark, although a few were open. Narrow rooms, filled with too large desks and too many books, and usually a middle-aged man, bent over a stack of papers, squinting into the light. Shaunessy

stayed to one side, making sure that he wasn't seen.

At the top of the stairs on the second floor, he saw Diane near the end of the hall. She ducked into a room and closed the door behind her. Shaunessy scanned the hallway. He saw no one else. A drinking fountain jutted out of the wall just past the door Diane had closed. He walked casually toward the fountain, glancing in all the rooms as he passed.

Most were dark, but the one Diane was in had a light on. As he looked in the frosted glass, he saw six young people, sitting around a table, books open in front of them. Most of the students were male, clean-cut, wearing white shirts, although both girls — Diane and another, smaller woman — were dressed in the more radical clothes of the period. The student sitting at the head of the table, a too-thin young man, wore a faded jean jacket and a T-shirt with a picture of a skull against a blue background. He was speaking, gesturing at the book in his hand, the cigarette in his mouth bobbing as he moved his lips.

She was studying. They were having a late-night study session.

He bent over the water fountain and turned the round handle. Cold water, tasting of iron, brushed against his tongue. He drank anyway, glad to be rid of the taste of beer.

Suspecting that she had had something to do with the bombing was elementary historical paranoia, rookie level. The reason Diane Rothke had passed through this university with nothing more than a grade sheet and a record of her expenses was because she had been a good B-student who disappeared, as so many B-students did, into the silent nonexistence bought by good enough grades and a quiet personality.

A study session. What was he supposed to do while he waited?

He certainly couldn't burst in. And he couldn't sit outside. Nor could he pace the halls. The professors studying in the offices below would get suspicious. Finally, he tried the door opposite the room Diane was in. It was unlocked. Another small classroom. He turned on the light, grabbed a book sitting near the floor, and pretended to read, all the time keeping an eye on the frosted glass and Diane Rothke as she studied with her friends.

They spent four hours in the room.

The janitor passed twice, glancing suspiciously at Shaunessy both times. Toward the end of the fourth hour, he came into the room.

"I gotta clean this," he said.

"Go ahead." Shaunessy didn't move.

The janitor wheeled in a mop and pail. "I gotta mop the floor."

Shaunessy sighed. "Can't you do it later? I'm waiting for my girlfriend. She's in there."

"I get off at three," the janitor said. His voice was high and whiny.

"What time is it now?"

"Two-thirty. Ain't no one supposed to be here past midnight."

Shaunessy thought about the professors downstairs and the students across the hall. Obviously that rule was well enforced. "If she's not done in fifteen minutes, I'll help you mop. Okay?"

The janitor wheeled his mop and cart back outside the room. "If she ain't done by then, you can mop alone."

Shaunessy nodded. The janitor wandered off down the hall, grabbing a pack of cigarettes out of the pocket of his green coveralls.

The door to the study room opened. Shaunessy shut off the light in his room.

"...can finish up tomorrow," one of the clean-cut boys was saying.

"I'd like to finish tonight." Diane.

The jean-jacketed boy held four books against his hip. "I'm tired, Diane. If we don't know it by now, we don't know it."

Diane leaned against the door and sighed. "It's just that — "

"*Hablas tu espanyol?*" the other girl asked. Her tone was malicious.

Diane's eyes narrowed. "*Nein.*"

"*Si,*" the other clean-cut boy — a blond — said. He put his hand on Diane's shoulder. "*Ella habla espanyol muy bien.*"

"*Si ella habla muy bien, ella no quiere estudiar mas,*" the girl said.

"Great sentence," Jean Jacket said. "This is not an oral exam."

"Could have fooled me," Diane said. "I really want to work more."

"Tomorrow." Jean Jacket and the girl went down the hall.

The blond stayed with Diane. "Fuck studying," he said. "I got something I really want to try."

Diane tossed her long hair over her shoulder. "Forget it, Benny. Either I study or I go home and sleep."

"It'll take half an hour tops. And I don't want to get into your pants." Apparently, the last was meant as reassurance.

Diane sighed. "All right. But a half an hour."

"You got it."

Shaunessy squinted at Benny. He was slender, almost gaunt. His hair was cropped tightly against his skull, revealing his ears and accenting the hollows of his cheeks. Something in the set of his lips and the delicate way he moved his hands reminded Shaunessy of Ray Rothke.

Shaunessy's heart took an extra beat. He couldn't prevent the rape by keeping Diane away from the rapist. She had known him all along. All Shaunessy could do was wait until the attack began and hope that he was stronger than that strangely determined young man.

They walked down the stairs. Shaunessy followed. He kept an eye open for the janitor, but didn't see the man. On the first floor, most of the office lights were out. A few still burned near the end of the hallway. He hadn't expected the campus to be alive so late at night. He tried to remember if people studied so late on campus when he was a student, but he couldn't. He had never returned to his college period. The memories of those days were over fifty years old, untested and unrevised.

Benny pushed on the metal bar in front of the door. It clunked and the door swung open, revealing a small patch of sidewalk, and then, darkness. Diane stepped out into the night. Benny followed her. Shaunessy managed to catch the door before it closed.

The couple walked, not touching, up the hill to Bascomb Hall. Bits of their conversation drifted back to Shaunessy. He kept his distance, but remained close enough to grab a door should they go inside.

When they reached the top of the hill, Benny stopped and opened his backpack. He pulled something out. Shaunessy took a deep breath. Diane laughed and took her backpack off. Shaunessy stepped over the chain link fence and onto the grass. Quietly, he walked across it until he reached the Lincoln statue. He put his hands on the cold, ridged metal and peered around the side.

Diane lay facedown on the sidewalk. Benny put a tarp over her, its plastic sides making loud crinkling noises in the night quiet. Shaunessy frowned. Benny picked up the container he had taken from his backpack, shook it, and it rattled. Then he stood over Diane, legs spread, and pointed the container down.

Shaunessy heard a sharp hiss and the scent of paint reached him, bringing with it memories of his cousin's tree house out in Spring Green. They had spray painted it the summer he was twelve. The cans rattled and

the color hissed, smelling strongly of paint. Some of the paint drifted his way, and Shaunessy's eyes watered.

"Okay," Benny said. The hiss stopped and he stood aside. Diane threw the tarp back and got up. She handed the tarp back to Benny. He took it and shoved it and the spray paint into his backpack. Diane walked around the place she had lain.

"It's great," she said.

"That should scare the shit out of someone, huh?" Benny had moved closer to her. Shaunessy felt his muscles become taut. "You sure you don't want to come back to my place?" Benny said.

"No — " Diane said as she turned her head toward him. Then she backed away. Benny was clearly too close. He grabbed her cheeks between his thumb and his forefinger, pulling her near. With his other hand, he ripped open her tie-dyed shirt.

That was it. This moment was the beginning of Ray Rothke. Shaunessy lunged forward, grabbed Benny by the back of his scrawny little neck, and pulled him away from Diane. She made a moaning sound, lost her balance, and fell against the sidewalk. Benny dove into Shaunessy, hitting him broadside and knocking him a few steps to the left. Diane was screaming, the sound loud and piercing in the darkness.

Shaunessy righted himself, catching a glimpse of Diane's breasts swinging in the semi-light, and remembered Aimilee's hand trying to protect her own breasts, even though it didn't matter, even though she was dead. She was dead. And this man's action, this Benny's action, had started it all. Shaunessy growled as he grabbed Benny and flung him into Lincoln, banging the boy's head against the stone. Benny slumped down, still slightly conscious, but unable to move.

Diane had stopped screaming.

Shaunessy knelt beside Benny, grabbed the boy's wrists, and pulled them forward. Shaunessy ripped the sleeves off his dashiki and tied Benny's hands and feet together.

Something brushed his shoulder. Shaunessy turned. Diane stood behind him. "Thanks," she said.

Shaunessy nodded. He had done it for himself. Himself and Aimilee.

"Is he secure?" she asked.

"Yeah," Shaunessy said. "He can't get away."

Diane swallowed. "Then I'll call the cops." She got up and tugged the

remains of her blouse over her breasts. "You were following me, weren't you?" she asked.

"No," he said, not caring if she knew that he lied.

He watched her walk down the hill, boots clunking, head up, and knew that was the last he would ever see of her, perhaps the last he would hear of her too. He took one final look at the man who would have been Ray Rothke's father and sighed. He had done it. He had diverted the timestream. Then why the hell did he only feel tired? He was supposed to be elated. Revenge was supposed to be sweet.

Maybe revenge would be sweet, when he got home and looked at his daughter — his beautiful daughter. Then things would be right and he would face any charges the Board brought against him with courage and conviction. Locked timestreams. 51 per cent for change. He would show them. He *had* shown them.

He got up, dusted off his knees, and walked to the place where Diane had lain. There, beneath the second-floor balcony jutting out from Bascomb Hall, Benny had spray painted Diane's figure in white. It looked like a woman's body marked in coroner's chalk. Shaunessy shivered. Thanks to him, coroners would mark twenty-five fewer forms in the years to come.

As he scanned the hill, he sighed. He could return to the time portal and leave now, or he could wait for the police and explain Diane's situation. But home pulled at him. The real home with proper buildings and people who spoke a clean version of English. He decided to go down the other side of the hill so that he could avoid Diane and the cops she brought with her.

He walked along the side of Bascomb, past the wrought iron railing leading into the basement rooms. When he reached the top of the stairs looking down over the west side of campus, he frowned. Brakes squealed below, and a white van, traveling too fast, tore around the corner. It pulled up between Chamberlain and the Physics Building.

Shaunessy's stomach twisted. He couldn't go down these stairs. That van belonged to the Armstrongs, and in a few minutes, it would blow up with a force that would destroy a building, kill a man, and wake the entire town. He watched for a moment, fascinated, as a tall, lanky young man got out of the driver's side.

In the background, sirens wailed.

The young man looked up. He called something to his friend, then got back in the van. Shaunessy's mouth went dry. They had heard the sirens

and they were going to leave. Shaunessy ran down the steps taking them two at a time, nearly tripping as he reached the broad concrete landing a third of the way down. He was nearly to the bottom when the van door slammed. The lanky man and his friends got out.

"...is stupid."

"We've got this far," the lanky man said. "We're finishing it."

Shaunessy stopped to catch his breath. They were going through with it. One of the boys disappeared, and Shaunessy knew what he was doing. He was mixing the chemical with the fertilizer that filled the back of the van. The mixture would slowly combine, and a reaction would build in the tiny space. Within fifteen minutes, the van and its contents would blow.

The sirens were getting closer. The lanky man shifted nervously. Finally, his companion returned. They slapped each other on the back and started to run. A squad car pulled around the corner. Apparently, the driver saw the running men and stopped in front of them. One man cried out and tried to dodge the car. He tripped and nearly fell.

Shaunessy's fist was shoved against his mouth. They had to leave. Only one man was supposed to die in this explosion. That was all the timestream needed. If more people died, especially cops, this would be too big — it would kill the movement sooner. It would create ripples that he, with a limited knowledge of the period, couldn't even foresee.

The cops were out of the squad. They had stopped the men and were questioning them. The men were gesturing wildly. Shaunessy ran the rest of the way down the stairs. He waved his arms and started shouting, "It's going to blow! It's going to blow!"

The tall, lanky man turned and spoke to one of the cops. "Jesus!" the cop exclaimed. He shoved the man into the car and then got in himself. The other cop didn't have to push the lanky man's companions inside; they got in themselves. The car wheeled around the corner, brakes squealing.

Shaunessy wiped the sweat off his forehead and checked his wrist. No watch. He didn't know how much time had elapsed. He looked back up the hill and saw Elspeth along with two extremely tall men. Special Forces. They were waiting for him. If they were waiting, he had time to go to them. Maybe then he could explain —

A huge boom echoed throughout the night, and Shaunessy was thrown off his feet. Bits of debris rained around him. He could feel pieces of wood and metal fall beside him, but he could hear nothing. He wondered if his

eardrums had ruptured. His head ached, his back ached, and he had trouble breathing. He had to get up, had to get out of here before he got hurt, but he couldn't move.

Suddenly, someone grabbed his arm and pulled him to his feet. He was facing Elspeth. She was covered with dust, but otherwise seemed unharmed. Of course. She would know where to stand to avoid the fallout.

"You have to come with us, sir," she said. Her lips moved, he read them, but he couldn't hear the words. He was being arrested, brought back to face the Board and whatever punishment they decided to give him. He wondered what kind of change he had affected — he didn't want to think about that, the repercussions that stretched eighty years into the future all because the Armstrongs were supposed to escape, not get caught in the act.

The two Special Forces men grabbed him and yanked him forward. They kept him moving, half-dragging him across the concrete, until they stopped in front of South Hall. A time portal he hadn't known about. Here. It made sense. They had to get him out of there before more cop cars and fire engines arrived.

As they stepped into the darkness of the portal, he could feel their fingers digging into the soft flesh of his arms. His ears rang and he could taste blood in the back of his throat. He had hurt himself this time. He had jeopardized his career and injured a body that should have been undamaged. He had made a change in a major event, altered time without approval. They wouldn't let him off lightly, if "they" still existed. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the hands digging into his arms as time warped around him. The movement added to his dizziness. The change wasn't as instantaneous. He caught a flash of confused faces, heard someone call, "Mikey!" then pain bit into his hands as the pressure in his ears eased. He stepped into the light and blinked, recognizing the gray walls of his office. At least that was the same. He couldn't see Kaiser anywhere, but a middle-aged woman leaned against his desk. She wore an official government uniform. Had he done something big enough to get the government's interest?

"Daddy?" she said.

He looked at her, saw the tattoo on the right wrist, the age marks lining her eyes, the salt-and-pepper curls, making her look like her mother, her beautiful long-dead mother. His heart beat circles around his chest, and he started to shake. "Aimie?"

His voice cracked and he cleared his throat. God, he was dizzy. They

needed to give him medical attention first.

"God, Daddy, don't worry. We'll see you through this. We've been through worse, and they say it can't be as bad as it seems. I got a good attorney. His name's Bill Kaiser, and they say he's the best — "

"Kaiser?" An attorney. Shaunessy nodded. He usually hated changes upon his return, but this time a lump was building in the back of his throat. She was alive. She was *old*. She had memories of him that he would never share. "It's good to see you, sweetheart," he said, extending his hand.

She touched him, her fingers warm, her smile warm. "Don't worry, Daddy," she repeated.

"I won't," he said and let them lead him down a long, winding hall he didn't recognize. He turned in their grasp to watch his daughter, waving at him from the front office. He wished he could wave back, but then decided it didn't matter, just like what waited down the hall from him didn't matter. Nothing mattered, but the girl — the woman — waving at him, fully clothed, fully vibrant, and fully alive. When he couldn't see her anymore, he straightened his seventy-year-old body and walked into the room housing the Board, confident that their decision would make no difference to the joy he would find in his future.

The End