DOUBLE-BLIND, a novel – excerpt

MICHELLE BUTLER HALLETT

DOUBLE-BLIND, a novel: excerpt

MICHELLE BUTLER HALLETT
Published by Killick Press, October 2007.

Shortlisted for the 2008 Sunburst Award

It's the late 1970s, the final icy winter of the Cold War. American psychiatrist Josh Bozeman finds himself in St. John's, Newfoundland, as part of covert research group SHIP, the Society for Human Improvement and Potential. But SHIP defines "improvement" and "potential" as anything that can be forged into a weapon.

Enter Christy Monroe, one of Bozeman's favourite patients, a nine-year-old girl with an extraordinary psychic gift. She becomes Bozeman's subject in a SHIP double-blind experiment where the whole reality is dangerously obscured, blurring the lines between patient and doctor, duty and conscience, sanity and madness.

Twenty-five years later, Bozeman is drawn back into an even darker paranormal agenda that sends him back to Newfoundland as the principal player in an endgame that could have mortal consequences for Christy, or for his own soul.

Double-blind is a feverish story of complicity, empathy, and the extremities of duty and love.

Chapter One

The proving ground

Once, in 1946, when I was delirious, I dreamt I heard "Retreat" in the middle of the day. Skewed. The flag wasn't lowered until 1700 hours. The first time I envied my brother was watching the flag come down, 1939. I was standing next to Daddy, and Bobby was way up on Daddy's shoulders, so high, where I used to sit. Bobby's blond crewcut glittered. Daddy and I saluted, and Bobby, who might have been two, lifted his arm but nearly fell. Daddy caught him without thinking, his broad palm slapping Bobby's back, keeping him safe. I would have watched him fall. That was during a long posting to Fort Tecumseh–odd name for a base in a southern state.

That flag in 1946: somebody outside was lowering it at the wrong time of day, and I was stuck in bed. I was eleven, I was naked, burning up with fever, all manic and weak and longing to stand up. Pain shot paths up my right leg, and our father was still so far away. Bobby used to brag Daddy was too important come home, even in peacetime. *My Daddy's Captain Tom Bozeman, Corps of Engineers, and guess what? He's maintaining communications in some place called Gander.* Hard belly pains made me dream I'd eaten rocks and glass, and God, the deep ache in my right leg, torn by invasion, sniper's bullets and thin smoke trails, unknown reconnaissance to the brain, neurons severed and burnt. I yelled at the sniper to lay down arms, imagined him all hollow-cheeked, haunted and Union. Frightened me when he reared up in a tattered Confederate uniform, beard alive with birds. Begged my Daddy to shoot him, shoot the sniper, forgetting Daddy had been gone over four years.

Four years since he'd said to my mother in 1942, his Georgia voice soft: *Mercy, Alice, don't cry. It's like the poem. "I could not love you, Dear, so much, loved I not honour more."* She was so mad. She knew he had to go, knew why he had to go, was proud that he would go, but she didn't want him to go. Daddy sat down with me and Bobby, with a map of some island called Newfoundland, way northeast of Mama's hometown, Boston. Bobby was five,

reading with a little help from me. All the Bozemans were smart, or at least we were supposed to be, but Bobby was brilliant. Knew things before he was shown or told. Spooky-smart, Daddy called it. On our last trip to the library, Bobby and I had taken out a book on old pagan gods, and we'd played at being priests of Moloch, carting sacrifices in our red wagon: marbles, alphabet blocks, a blanket. Now Bobby held that blanket, dead grass stuck to it, as Daddy pointed on the map to the middle of Newfoundland. *I have to help build a base. Newfoundland mustn't fall, because from Newfoundland the Nazis could take the St. Lawrence, then the eastern seaboard, then North America.*

Bobby understood this before I did. Understood in his gut, I mean. I was still intellectualizing it all, checking and approving of my father's patriotic logic when Bobby threw himself at Daddy, wailing: *Don't go.*

The map got all crumpled.

On the other side of the wall, Mary Jane Bedford was crying because her Daddy was going away, too.

Daddy made me and Bobby promise to look after each other, because no one else in this world can understand and help a man like his own brother. We marched to bed, singing "Remember Pearl Harbour."

The base mothers kept telling me I was the man of the house until I ran away from one of them and cried. Luckily my face didn't get wet until I was in my own room. Mama didn't say I was the man of the house. She let me and Bobby be kids. She never repeated Daddy's orders that Bobby and I look after each other, because she felt she never had to. But the other adults, seeing me as the oldest boy on the base, urged me to look out for the younger ones. *They all look up to you, Josh. Watch them good, y'hear?* I couldn't really watch them if I was part of them, so game by game, I detached. Thought about it every night. Mama kept brushing her hand across my forehead, trying to obscure something. *You look like your Daddy when you worry. Go play.*

Summertime, 1946, and Daddy still wasn't home. Bobby was nine, older than I'd been when Daddy left, and getting downright lippy. I'd grown quiet and tall. We never played Spies and Heroes anymore. The July afternoon I found Bobby and his friends in the

pool, I could have given them a switching myself. It was only a wading pool, a sunken cement square Daddy had designed. Little engineering side-project, he'd called it. We'd had a lot of rain, then a lot of sun; the water in the pool was low and dirty. Then we had another rainy day. Animals drank from the pool when it was full, but not then. Five boys splashing in that water: mouths, noses, eyes.

I yelled blue murder. I even picked Bobby up. He struggled so much I dropped him, but the wet imprint of his body on the weed-cracked concrete didn't last long. The boys all stood and stared at me. They were wet. I was sweaty. The sunlight weighed a hundred pounds. And I swore at them. Told them to stay the hell away from standing water. Hadn't they heard of polio?

Quiet. Five crewcuts, heads below mine.

Then Bobby met my eyes and spoke in dead imitation. *Stay the hell away from standing water. Haven't you heard of poli-oli-oilo?*

Five snotnosed boys following Bobby, mocking me. *Poli-oli-olio.*

So I took Bobby's arms. I'd drag him home. Humiliate him. Teach him a lesson. On a grinding hot day after nearly half his lifetime with Daddy gone.

Bobby pushed me. Hard. I landed in the pool, flat on my back, dirty water closing over me. I tore out of it, spitting and coughing and fit to pound Bobby until he bled.

Like the other boys, Bobby had run.

When I found him, he was playing quietly in his room. My whispers did not interrupt him. I showered, then ran him a bath. I heard little splashes as I dressed, and I explained to Mama we'd gotten dirty.

Bobby and I observed new rules of engagement after that. So long as he was home for lunch and dinner, I didn't go looking for him. That tricky balance of understanding kept us civil to each other in the house, so Mama didn't suspect.

For most of August, I was on my own. Felt strange but peaceable. Bobby and I did go to the library together; that hadn't changed. Bobby still liked reference books, but he mostly took out *The Hardy Boys*. I kept looking for the book of poems Daddy liked, but I didn't know who wrote them. I read some Edgar Allan Poe, which I liked because it rhymed, but

most of it went way over my head. Then I read back issues of *YANK*. First I only wanted to read the *GI Joe* strip, but after a while the articles filled out dull hours. Either that, or walking way out past where I was allowed to go. Maybe a mile east of the proving ground were woods. Oak and elm, lots of beech, sweet little paths between them. No one went there, because the trees failed at the edge of a cliff. The drop was six or eight feet, depending where you came out, and straight onto more trees. Be awful hard to get someone out, even for the Corps of Engineers. So I never told anyone about it. Last thing we needed was a little kid wandering there.

The night Bobby was late for supper, I guessed he must have followed me to the woods. Didn't take much thought. My first fear was that I wouldn't find him before dark, and then I'd have to confess I wasn't watching him but likely he'd been watching me, confess I'd gone past the proving ground.

The search party found Bobby inside an hour, not too far in the woods, sitting down and leaning against an elm. The corporal who carried him out looked afraid of something. *Boy's burning up, Mrs. Bozeman.* Mama felt Bobby's forehead, nodded and frowned. Bobby's eyes were glassy, and his head lolled against the corporal's arm*: Josh, I got scared, so I sat down and waited for you. But I grew in the woods. I feel tall.*

On that walk home with the corporal, Bobby and Mama, I felt short. Like something was pushing down on my brow.

Lecture and sullen confession, me sitting on a wooden kitchen chair, supplying *Yes, ma'am* and *No, ma'am,* until Mama put her hand, then her lips, to my forehead, still trying to wipe something away.

Josh. You're feverish.

I tried answering her, all the words perfectly sensible in my head, just so many of them. I remember taking off my clothes, discarding them like feathers on the stairs, trying to sing "Remember Pearl Harbour" so Daddy would still be proud.

Poli-oli-olio.

Bobby was moved to the hospital. No one told me this. I dreamt it. Dreamt it like I was told to dream it: Bobby's open eyes receiving green walls, bright lights. And his

breathing, chest like a flat tire. His struggle was briefly my struggle, both of us sounding like frogs, gup-gup-gup, until Mama shook me, calling my name, almost crying, begging me to breathe.

I was sitting up in bed, breathing just fine, when the telephone rang.

Mama shouted something to God.

And that was when I heard "Retreat" in the middle of the day.

So I went on patrol. Sacrifices to Moloch, ancient Egypt, and in the living room was a sarcophagus. Dull yellow, silver hatches, black wheels. Except where the head should rest amongst gold, turquoise and black, was a puckered iris. This sarcophagus was as still as a disguised Martian from *War of the Worlds*, long legs folded up somewhere, death ray well hidden. The markings on the dial blurred when I tried to read them, and the puckered iris whispered.

I dared myself to touch it. Because that would make Bobby laugh, once I told him.

The metal was cold, cold like weapons in the armoury in winter, cold but ready.

Mama was crying.

My right leg gave out. I wasn't supposed to be out of bed, I don't even know how I got to the living room. I only knew I had to face and slay that sarcophagus. I called my mother because the sarcophagus got big then, and even though I shut my eyes, I knew it was there, scary as a kamikaze pilot, a grinning Nazi, a mushroom cloud, and it stole strength from me and Bobby. The same gutfall, years later, when I was a resident adjusting a mirror for an iron-lunged patient so he might better watch President Kennedy in Dallas. Turn the angle just so, just in time for the truth of blood and fall. Was this it, then? Was this beast in the living room the object my mother cursed? I couldn't let it get her. And I couldn't tell her I knew Bobby was dead, because she hadn't told me. Couldn't tell her I knew Bobby had thinned out in the gup-gup-gup and now hid somewhere bright, waiting for me to find him. Scared. And I couldn't get to him. Weeks avoiding Bobby, and now he needed me, but I couldn't reach him. Who could believe me? Who could forgive me? And Christ, what would I do when my Daddy got home?

Bobby's middle name was Lee.

My name is Dr. Joshua Sherman Bozeman.

My brother needed me. I didn't save him.

Came a time some patients truly needed me. I didn't save them, either.

I killed one.

I didn't mean to.

The rest is not my business.

I became a paediatric psychiatrist because I wanted to be like the doctor who checked up on me every year, wherever we were stationed. He had these dark eyes, very inviting, but only to a point, because he could hide behind them. I never knew what he was really thinking, and until I was sixteen, I believed him when he said I was doing fine.

He set me long tests, a lot of writing, a lot of math. Some of the tests got really strange, like trying to guess what shapes were on the backs of cards, or studying photos of places and trying to imagine what might have happened there. I asked if they were IQ tests.

—More than that, Josh.

As I handed over my dream diary, just like I did every year, I asked if anyone else on the base was doing the tests.

—We only give them to promising students.

Promising. God, I liked that word.

I never knew how many questions I got right. The year I turned sixteen, I asked my father over hamburgers in town why I kept seeing this doctor.

He smiled, proud. —Because you're smart.

—Spooky-smart?

—Yes.

—What's the doctor's name?

—Smith. Dr. Need-to-Know Smith.

—Dad.

—You're spooky-smart, Josh. You figure it out.

Years later, we were in another diner, another town. My father traced the letters ROTC in the condensation on his glass. He stared me down, eyes happy, face dead serious. —You finally over that Peace Corps nonsense? You ready to pay what you owe, boy?

—That's Dr. Boy to you.

My father laughed, proud again. —Captain Dr. Bozeman. My son, the shrink.

Then he gave me a book of poems by T.S. Eliot. He'd written on the title page: *This might help you understand people. Do me proud. Your loving father.*

It hurt. It probably wasn't supposed to. But it made me remember being angry at my mother for being sick, dirty and listless, made me remember yelling at Dad: *How can I be kind if I don't understand her?*

Like I said, paediatric psychiatrist. Therefore, in its infinite wisdom, the army stuck me a base hospital in a farming state treating guys returned from Vietnam.
More or less returned.
We were so isolated. Farms, farms, thin roads, farms, the interstate an hour away. It was July 1968. The base was its own world. The hospital was its own fiefdom. The psychiatric floor was a feather on a demon's wing. And Lieutenant Toby Lewis's first words to me were not reassuring.

—I'm no coward.

The lieutenant was undergoing psychiatric evaluation prior to possible courtmartial. He was accused of throwing a grenade at his own men.

Lewis's nose jutted out over his receding chin. His forehead was sloped, and his hairline was in retreat. When he tucked his chin down and darted his gaze, he lacked only long whiskers.

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees. —Do you know what sort of men we're sending over there?

—Tell me.

—I can't sleep. I close my eyes, and I hear them. You won't get it, Doc. Combat virgin. And I'm a headcase.

A moody rodent of a headcase with eyes like Dr. Need-to-Know Smith's.

I enjoyed considerable freedom at that hospital, and I helped a lot of patients. I published my first papers on the research I performed there, branching off from Ewen Cameron's psychic driving. I had no desire to erase Lewis's psyche and start fresh, but I did need to coax out the truth of why he threw the grenade. How else could I judge his fitness for courtmartial? Sedation and headphones seemed humane.

Ewen Cameron had died the year before, a brilliant career behind him. He'd been head of the Canadian and American Psychiatric Association, then head of the World Psychiatric Association. Cameron had also been at Nuremberg, part of the Doctors' Trial, evaluating Nazi scientists. Cameron treated mental illness as he would physical illness: tangibly. The word from the Allan in Montréal was that the patients walked in relative freedom, dignity intact, as Cameron bypassed the dim dead end of orthodox psychoanalysis and attacked the structural flaws of his patients' brains. I considered his methods a form of chemotherapy, ragged risks taken to heal the patient. Above all, do no harm. Yet how can we know? In the 1960s and 1970s, doctors treated breast cancer with cobalt. In the early 2000s, women were returning to hospital with chest bones in decay as old radiation gnawed and burned. Before the delayed rot of cobalt, before the muted revelations of the 1980s when Cameron's former patients sued, before denial collapsed, Ewen Cameron and men like him were moral weights. Models. Giants of daring and hope. Their methods, if you questioned them, bore up tidily as ends and means. So long as you were certain, or even hopeful, that you could ease a patient's suffering, you did it.

Certainty is a young doctor's luxury.

Like Cameron, I dared to hope.

So I was verging on happy when I tied a tourniquet round Lieutenant Lewis's arm.

Lewis wasn't pleased. —What's that for?

—Just a tranquilizer.

Lewis watched his blood vessels swell, sudden vulnerability beneath the skin. —You're breaking into my vein?

—Not available in pill form yet. Keep still.

—Stop. Don't!

—Are you refusing–

Lewis bolted. I yelled at him to come back and sit down. Two orderlies in the corridor, the private mopping and the corporal wheeling a laundry cart, caught Lewis easily. None of the staff liked Lieutenant Lewis, who alternately abused and flattered them, but it was almost certainly an accident he went face first into the mop bucket. It was deliberate when the corporal took a towel and wrapped it around Lewis's neck, intending to choke him quiet. I ordered them to stop.

The orderlies froze, the private kneeling on Lewis's arms, the corporal winding the towel.

I shook my head. —Let him up.

—Aggressive and dangerous, sir.

Weeping, airless, Lewis struggled.

The private got to his feet. —Sir, hospital regs–

—Why am I repeating myself, Private? Help him up. Now.

—Yes, sir.

Lewis's face quickly lost its purple; the corporal's face lost none of its joy. The private had set his lips straight here at the edge of corruption. The corporal was getting a hard-on.

Christ. —Just get the patient back to my office. Gently. That's hardly gentle, Corporal.

—Sorry, sir. He slipped. Straitjacket, sir?

I rapidly sterilized a patch of Lewis's skin. Cameron's legacy, the model for us all: patients treated as patients, not burdens or savage symptoms. Surely there'd been no brutality on Cameron's watch. No tolerance of such lack of restraint. Failing already. God damn.

—Just hold him still until I get this in.

The lieutenant struggled still, but it was weak. Token bravado. —Burns. Burns.

I asked the corporal for a clean towel, then dismissed the orderlies. When they were gone, I mopped my face, then Lewis's. Then I waited for him to resurface.

—Lieutenant? Can you hear me?

—Jesus, my mouth is dry. What's a man got to do to get a Schlitz around here?

—Lieutenant, where are you?

—Stateside. Some doctor's office. Hey, Hose-man.

He was sufficiently oriented.

—Lieutenant, I need to ask you some questions.

Lewis sang the opening of "I Saw Her Standing There."

—Lieutenant, tell me about the incident with your platoon on the second of February, 1967.

—Bad shit. Talk about something else.

—We need to focus on the second of February, 1967. You were wounded. How did it happen?

—Been wondering where my Purple Heart is. Sergeant threw a grenade at me. Missed. Broadside of a fucking barn. Can I get you a drink, sir?

—Why would the sergeant do that?

—You already know.

—I need to hear it from you. Sit up.

—Your voice, Doc. Come from where? Like wires between poles. Soothing. Done. But I, wait, no…faded. Got this problem, but don't blame my mother. She doesn't know. I…fuck, what did you shoot me up with?

—Tranquillizers for your anxiety, a little morphine, something for nausea.

—Sergeant caught me wearing ladies' underwear.

I felt sick. Such a struggle for this sordid nugget? —Well, that's no big deal. Lots of guys bring their girls' panties. Or wear pantyhose in the swamps. Keeps leeches from sticking.

—No, sir. Wearing ladies' underwear. Pink satin frilly ones. Perimeter patrol, by myself. Sashaying around that clearing like I was Marilyn Monroe. Kept that underwear hidden for months. Stole it from a hooker. Ready to cream myself when the sergeant rustles through and finds me. And he's staring at me, and I'm staring at him, and…you ever done something so bad you know you might as well keep…do something worse, because…no

going back? Play it again, Lewis. "I Saw Her Standing There." Sashayed for him. Just once. Turned my back and laughed, whole thing weird. Sergeant says, *Look here, I found me a faggot.* But see, I'm not a faggot. Just like wearing ladies' underwear. He…

Lewis retched, dozed, spoke.

—He fucked me. Screwed me to the ground like I was a backwards cunt. Took the underwear. Told everyone. Saw it when I got back. All smirking. On me, got my arms, throat. Tore off my pants. Sergeant really tall, waving those panties like a flag. *Bare ass. Told you so. Not fit for command.* And he ordered us to move out. Weren't his orders to give. I was the CO. God damned in…insubordination. So I countermanded, gave other orders to…Doc, you know all this. Not telling.

I kept my voice soft. —You've told me this much.

—Fine, do worse, no going back, Marilyn Monroe. Me and the sergeant. All it was. Rest were baggage. Stood up, pretending I was dignified, shaking. Told him I was still the CO. Air got crackly and damp between us, you know? He backed down. Never thought he would. Called me *Lieutenant Bare Ass* under his breath. Didn't care. Ordered us back to where we'd been fired on a few nights before. All snug and warm, foxholes, almost pretending it didn't happen. Fucking scout camp. I threw grenades. Easy as taking a leak. Wasted someone. Thought I got the sergeant. Bits of someone came down on me. Makes a sound like wet earth raining. Cocked it. Not hunting. Spraying. Flare went up. Everyone saw me. Then I had to finish it. Barely worth the bullets. Someone shot me. Missed my spleen. Bled like fuck. Sergeant's up on one knee, lobbing his grenade. Didn't throw right, bleeding like that.

Lewis was sitting forward now, knees on his elbows, head heavy. He spat, but no saliva came.

—Broadside of a fucking barn.

The truth of Lieutenant Toby Lewis, squalor recorded on reel to reel. Sober, he heard the playback, wiped his face, signed forms. Fit for courtmartial.

I don't know if he ever faced one. I lost all track of him after Colin O'Connor and the Society for Human Improvement and Potential looked in on the case.

But, for a little while longer, O'Connor and SHIP were not my worries.

Lieutenant Tom Parnell's phantom behaviours–taking off his shirt, plucking his eyelids till they bled–returned like the smell of unburied death. The little moan. Then the scream, like an epileptic's, wordless and knowing, frantic signal: *I'm falling.* Then he'd crawl.

His file was a list of meds and questions. *Agitation? Mania? Rapid cycling?*

Tom Parnell stood six feet two and weighed a lean one-eighty. He was a stevedore's son who dreamed of becoming a teacher, so ROTC it was. His eyes were blue, one splotch of green in each, as though the artist had not yet finished his work. Tour of duty: twenty-two months. Respected, even loved by his men, carefully protected one night when he lost it. He'd stayed conscious behind the craziness somewhere, he'd told me, remembered screaming about bees on recon, then crawling near elephant grass. Hostile ground. His men bound and gagged him, hid him behind the elephant grass, promising him and one another they'd figure out the bees tomorrow, once they'd gotten through the night. Except tomorrow became knees in mud, metal to the head and *du mi ami*–"motherfucker" in Vietnamese. Parnell, bee fugue clearing, skin swelling with insect bites, left nostril host to something laying eggs, heard it all: death and departure, rescue helicopter.

—Rescued for what, Doc? Bees?

Parnell no longer slept unless sedated. He also flashed back beyond Vietnam to the origin of the bees. I told him, *We have to confront the bees. Smoke them out.* Parnell would shake, reach for my voice–any voice–and I'd say it over and over, like a lullaby or a spell: *Take the step, and form the word. Take the step.*

Many afternoons I lost him.

—Doc, your voice. Please. Talk to me. Your head's gone dark. Christ, it's all buzzing.

Knees thudded the floor. He cried and fell. Parnell could fight off most men; often it took two or three of us to get him immobilized. Injection and straitjacket, old and new. Canvas rasped, and my hands got wet holding Parnell's face. I demanded eye contact,

ordered, finally begged for it. Recognition might float a moment in Parnell's eyes, then sink, obscured by chemicals or memory.

Parnell's anguish made him a danger to himself, but I was sure he'd been misdiagnosed, even mistreated. He was not bipolar. Nor was he suicidal. He told me under a cocktail like the one I gave Lewis that he felt abducted and dumped.

I argued loudly with Colonel Heron, the chief doctor, against electroshock for Parnell, but I had no idea how to proceed. And my ignorance scared me, surely as an iron lung.

So I asked for clearance to dare a little further.

Colonel Heron leaned back in his chair so his Adam's apple pointed at the ceiling. —You won't do electroshock, but you'll ask for experimental meds. Bozeman, are you a natural born shit-disturber, or did someone teach you along the way?

—Dr. Cameron in Montréal did…the rooms and the ward don't have to be locked.

The statement trailed my guts behind it.

—Colonel, I want to see the day when we don't have to restrain the patients. When they can walk around and engage in useful therapies as part of their integration back into society. The right psychopharmacological agents–

—We don't have that much Valium in the whole US of A.

—More than Valium and Thorazine, sir. Far more than psychoanalysis. We can rewrite these men's minds.

Heron drummed his fingers. He only did that when nervous.

I kept talking. —I'm getting nowhere treating symptoms. The patients are getting nowhere. I want to treat the cause. I want Corporal Schmidt able to look at an officer without going for his throat. I want Lieutenant Parnell out of that padded room before he breaks his neck.

—I heard about yesterday. Where was Corporal Loder that you had to take a patient down?

—Loder had Parnell's legs.

—Oh.

I spoke more quietly. —There's scopolamine.

—Make up your mind, Bozeman. Scop's older than you.

—I like it. Gets some nasty stuff out of the patients. Inhibitions go down, memory's blurred. Patients keep their dignity. And they can heal.

—That polio patient you got walking again when you were a resident. How'd you do it?

I smiled. I was very proud of that. —Extensive psychotherapy, post-hypnotic suggestion, amphetamines, many gentle words. I can be very persuasive.

The colonel squinted at me, unhappy. —I'm no psychiatrist, Bozeman. I'm forced to trust you.

I had my snappy answer ready, but the Heron cut me off.

—Do no harm.

I worked on Parnell, Schmidt, and several more in my care, published more papers. Got the attention of Colin O'Connor and the Society of Human Improvement and Potential.

Tom Parnell was nearly ready for release when O'Connor first came to see me.

—Dr. Bozeman? I don't mean to whisper. But this floor is so quiet.

—This is floor is also locked. How did you get in here? Who are you?

—Colin O'Connor, Society for Human Improvement and Potential. We're a federally funded mental health research organization.

O'Connor looked like he read *Playboy* the way a devout man read the Bible. His suit was tailored, his curly hair was too long, and his Chelsea boots had pointed toes. He kept gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses in his chest pocket, and he wore a wedding band. His voice was Boston, like my mother's.

Corporal Schmidt walked by.

O'Connor smiled. —Your patients are in uniform?

—Show me the man who can find dignity in pyjamas or a johnny coat. Mr. O'Connor, I'm sorry, but I wasn't expecting you, and I–

Somewhere down the hall, Parnell moaned. I'd steadily decreased his meds. Twenty-seven days without flashback, without the unreasoned descent.

Parnell cried the cry.

O'Connor chatted on. —Your paper on decoding hallucination was very good. But your memory research, that's what–

Schmidt called for an orderly. For anyone.

O'Connor finally took a breath. —I want to offer you a job. Research position.

Parnell screamed about the bees. I ran past O'Connor.

Schmidt and a sergeant were standing on either side of Parnell, ready to protect. Fellow patients, each rotting in his own illness, each clinging to respect for rank: out of those struggles came compassion. At that moment, sergeant and corporal protected the lieutenant far more than pills or locked doors.

Parnell did not see me, even though I stood right in front of him. He tried to laugh. It was ghastly. —Bees.

The sergeant scanned the room. —No bees here. Windows don't open. If there was a bee, I'd squash the fucker before it got near you.

Parnell swatted, twitched, briefly recognized reality. —Dr. Bozeman. Bees. Shit. Shit. See them this time? But they don't exist. Bees, yeah, all right. Bic. Bic. Buzz. Secret, can't tell you. No bok-bok here. All. Bees.

He dove under the table, scrabbling on his belly to the sergeant's feet, covering his head with his arms. Above, chess pieces wobbled. Schmidt and the sergeant knocked me on my ass and slipped down next to Parnell.

I stayed where I was.

The sergeant's square hands were on Parnell's shoulders. —Bees are gone, sir. Listen, no buzzing. Got them all, didn't we, Schmidtie?

Schmidt was cheek by cheek with Parnell now. —Yes, sir, no bees. Perimeter clear, sir.

Parnell flopped onto his back. Sweat flew. —God damn it, I'm not allowed to tell you. Fuck this. Move out. Gum under this table. Right, wait. Dr. Bozeman. Loder. No. I am not going in that fucking jacket. Doc, please.

A buckle dangled in my line of sight and reflected sunlight as a flash of flame. I did not turn to it. —Loder. Nice of you to show up. Now put the straitjacket away.

Loder bent over. —You want the meds?

Parnell was crabwalking backwards and came up against the heater, cursing the touch of hot metal. But he knew where he was. It was the fastest I'd seen him escape the bees. —I'll ask the lieutenant. Parnell, you want something? Or are breathing and visualization okay?

—Me? Sure. Just a pill. Breathing. Fine in a minute. Just breathe.

Parnell swallowed Valium. I got up off the floor. My patients settled back into their social patterns. And Colin O'Connor waited in the common room doorway.

O'Connor dogged me back to my office. —Research, Dr. Bozeman. Helping others. We pay well. Your profile shows–

—What profile?

—You were part of a trauma study when you were a boy. The data's been rolled into SHIP.

I slammed shut a file cabinet drawer. —Profile. Me.

—Shows you're a born healer with the necessary detachment and devotion to medical progress. And you don't mind moving to another state. Promising.

The stab of pleasure when you feel special. Chosen. Bit dizzy afterwards. I had a feeling I knew, but I asked anyway. —What do you want, Mr. O'Connor?

—I want to second you from the army to work on lab rats.

My father had a feeling, too. Said he was suddenly afraid for me and asked for leave. He was coming to see me.

What could I say to that?

We met at a new chain restaurant by the interstate.

—Your mother's speaking again, Josh. She says hello. I asked if she sent her love, and she nodded. Real progress. She reads your letters over and over, wishes you'd write more.

—Dad, the work–

—I know. She still hasn't forgiven me for not writing much during the war. Even when I could, the letters were censored. I almost wondered what the point was.

Those letters: thin paper, creased enough to tear, big black marks, touched over and over.

—The funniest part, Dad, was how they sometimes blacked out your address. As if we didn't know you were in Gander.

—I did move about a fair bit. Goose Bay for a while. Desolate. These people have chicken fried steak on the menu?

—It's awful.

My father started out the window a while. —You could watch your dog run away for days.

Our glasses of Coke sweated. His hair was more salt than pepper, and his blue eyes were very bright.

—Dad, how's your work going?

—Communications. Secret.

—Understood.

—Josh, do you know what you're getting into?

A sweet little blonde waitress arrived with her notepad. The sweat on her forehead reminded me of a hooker I'd been with a few nights before. She'd had little cuts in her armpits, and when I commented, she told me she shared a razor with two other girls. I warned her she could catch hepatitis that way and gave her an extra five. The waitress was prettier, more delicate–less worn, I guess. Her harassed innocence made me smile.
We ordered, me too startled by my father's question to decide if I wanted fries or mashed. *Josh, do you know what you're getting into?* I hadn't even told him about O'Connor. He barely knew about my work. So his next question was even stranger.

—Remember the first broadcast of the Army-Navy game?

—Captain Bedford invited us over. Me and Bobby lay down on our bellies on the floor, chin in our hands, and Mary Jane sat on the sofa. She was still as that Egyptian cat goddess, Bast. Mary Jane hated football, but she wasn't letting her Daddy out of her sight. We were so jealous of her. Television set and her Daddy home, even if he was injured. Even if he barely talked. All he said was *The war is on* at kickoff and *That, boys, is your commander-in-chief* every time the camera cut to President Truman. I knuckled Bobby's head and whispered you'd be home soon. Then I got a fright. Because I looked back at Captain Bedford, and he wasn't watching the game. He wasn't watching anything. Had the thousand yard stare. What was his injury, anyway?

—All I know is Jack Bedford was promoted to major and fouled up some meaningless project. Deskjobbed after that. Stacks of paperwork kept falling over. Afraid everyone was out to get him, but afraid in a quiet way. Wouldn't even mention it unless he'd had a few beers.

—Mary Jane?

—Keeps house for him. Never married.

We drank Coke. I wanted something stronger. Damn it, I wanted my mother to be there and explain what the hell was eating my father, even if she couldn't explain what was eating her. Those two always understood each other. Mama's sick times got longer and longer, but my father always seemed to get it, somehow. Or at least he knew how to be kind.

Radio silence between two sets of cutlery.

My father was studying me. —It's like looking into a mirror twenty-five years ago.

I blurted it out as the plates arrived. —I've taken a contract with a federal outfit.

—You're leaving the army?

—Seconded for now.

My father poked his mashed potatoes. —What sort of work?

—Research.

—Secret?

—Yeah. Dad, what's troubling you?

—Not sure. Where are you going?

—Camp Hero, up in Long Island. Pass the pepper. Dad. The pepper?

My father passed me the salt. —That's Montauk. Spooky stories coming out of Montauk.

—And then we'll see.

The waitress chanced by. My father called her *darlin'* and ordered two Budweisers. It wasn't available; he snorted and ordered Pabst. Then he became someone else. —There should be honour in the Pledge of Allegiance.

—Dad?

—Ends and means. Duty, honour and a good night's sleep are not always the same thing.

More silence.

My father returned to his comfortable role of the philosopher of football. Then he moved steadily through the degradation of popular music, surprising me with his admiration for Jimi Hendrix. Worrying his napkin, he confessed misgivings about de-escalation in Vietnam. —We're just going to abandon these people? After storming in and trying to save them? We can't finish like this. It's not a strategy. It's a whimper.

A few months later he'd call me, long-distance connection staticky, in tears over My Lai. It would be only the second time I heard my father cry.

The diner was getting noisier, My father patted his belly and considered dessert. —Great society. LBJ was right. This country was founded on saying *No* to corruption and tyranny. But obligations all round…my God, it gets complicated. So tell me, Dr. Bozeman, what's your prescription?

—Honour.

—Mercy, yes. They got peach pie here?

Peaches are sometimes called Persian apples. A distant cousin I met only once, Peter Bozeman, led me through the Bozeman Peach Orchard one morning when the sky was

indigo. Bees thickened the air. Bobby wasn't long dead, and I could have whirled round and stolen blossoms from every tree. Soft ground and the past, stories of the family hero, Carver Bozeman, starved out by the Civil War, damn near broken by conducting along the Underground Railroad–I imagined a deep voice, much deeper than mine, just the right side of indignant when questioned: *Of course they're my slaves. Can a man not travel north with his own property, suh?* He planted the orchard in 1866, waiting out the first three years, praying for fruit.

My cousin Peter told me the Tree of Life bore peaches, not apples. Standing there almost smothered in the scent of promised fruit, Peter and I agreed we could forgive Eve. Later that evening, my father looked at me over the edge of his book and asked *Do I dare to eat a peach?* He never explained himself. I had to figure it out later when he gave me the book of Eliot. Much later I heard mermaids singing, and it nearly destroyed me.

It was hard to say goodbye to Lieutenant Parnell. We were playing Scrabble in the common room, and with him I often just relaxed, as I no longer needed to observe him so closely. The backs of his hands–tiny puncture scars over his veins–reminded me of hesitation. I'd helped him, perhaps healed him, but I'd also gleaned data from him: dosages, infusion times, effects.

I smiled, genuinely happy. —You'll still have flashbacks, but they'll decrease with time.

—Am I cured?

Parnell was not playing well. Normally he took an early lead. Twice he'd started games with real gems: *satsuma* and *abridge*.

I laid out the tiles for drive. —Cured as you're going to get. Everyone has nightmares.

Parnell tallied my score, then laid out *comrade*. —Alexander the Great woke up screaming. Hit the floor, thought he was in battle.

I spelled *erase*. —I'll put a letter in your file, recommending tranquillizers as you need them. You can judge when.

Gas. —And if bees buzz?

—Get yourself to an emergency room. I just might beat–what the hell is that?

Parnell sheepishly took back two tiles. —Just trying to use my *Z*. Get it?

I shook my head.

Parnell glared at the edge of the table.

The move to Long Island wasn't too hard. I had moving down to a science. The most important part: always keep your boxes. Fold them flat, hide them away, but keep them. And don't own too much stuff.

I had doubts at Montauk. Blight. But I'd signed a contract, given my word. I was a conduit for data and should have been content. Walking past the dunes, white sand between my toes, the facility behind me and the Atlantic in front of me, I felt like I was on the far edge of the earth. Solitude like that is only brief comfort. I called O'Connor one afternoon, demanded his secretary put me through. Told him I'd made a mistake. O'Connor drove all the way out to see me, arriving with a delivery. I watched from a high window as he followed the attendants wheeling an occupied stretcher.

I knew better than to go meet him.

I waited until I was paged by my number to a briefing room. Only O'Connor was there, wearing an ID badge that read *Visitor* in green, meaning he had full access to the facility. My badge, pinned to my white coat, displayed my red number, meaning I had limited privileges. The doctors, like the soldiers and the subjects, were numbered. It was fun being nameless the first few days, like playing Spies and Heroes. It was irritating the next few days, like an itch. By week two, being nameless was dull and safe, like the beige paint. I was Dr. Sixty-Two. I had always been Dr. Sixty-Two. And I had always kept my mouth shut while Dr. Twenty and Dr. Eight defined and expanded experimental parameters. The most I ever did was perform first and second screenings with the Zener cards–the sort Dr. Need-to-Know Smith had used on me–something a trained monkey could have done. It was the attempt to influence brain signals that upset me.

O'Connor's nose twitched. —You guys burn dinner?

The briefing room walls were light green, the chairs white plastic buckets, the table black.

I glanced up at a ventilation duct. —Rhesus monkeys. Microwaves. Brain damage and some scorching of the skin.

—Still on rhesus monkeys? Behind schedule.

—The frequency's not refined. And I'm not sure it can be if we don't understand the brain signals we're studying in the first place. If we don't properly plan the research, we can't justify it.

I kept my last thought quiet. *I want patients, not subjects.*

—We're at war, Doctor. Soviet psychiatrists–

—At the expense of our own?

—This way, the debris of society can give us something back.

My nails were bitten to the quicks, and my index fingers were marked with paper cuts.

—Dr. Sixty-Two. Did Carver own slaves?

Strange to hear a name. Even incomplete.

—He most certainly did not. The peach orchard wasn't established until after the Civil War. My great-uncle had labour troubles. But Carver, no. He helped the Underground Railroad, for God's sake.

—A good man?

—One of the best.

—Where'd he get the money to start the orchard? Not too many peach trees left after Sherman's little stroll. Doctor, your ancestor was Union intelligence. Records are incomplete, but near as I can figure, the orchard money passed through General Sherman's hands.

Sherman. Hard war. March to the sea.

O'Connor said some more about the Bozeman name and its origins, shared his theory that Carver assumed the name and never dropped it. I waited for him to finish. I

used to study Civil War-era photographs of haunted men in beards, believing I'd recognize Carver Bozeman by singing genes alone.

No one knew what he'd looked like. Beyond haunted and a beard, of course.

I realized then I had no idea what colour O'Connor's eyes were. I forced myself to study him. It was like looking into a bright light. Colin O'Connor simply seemed right. All the appealing confidence of a smooth conscience and the distant focus on ends, not means. Under O'Connor, borrowing his perspective, I might duck worry and simply do my job.

The ventilated air freshened. Or we had just grown used to it.

O'Connor concluded. —Carver had a few sleepless nights, but that hardly kept him from working for his country's greater good.

Duty, honour and a good night's sleep.

I spoke to my father twice while I was at Montauk. I'm pretty sure the phone line was tapped. I was careful. He told me I sounded like my mother when she was thinking about Bobby but wouldn't say.

I didn't know what he was talking about, because my mother never spoke of Bobby. After he died, she packed up every scrap that boy had owned and did away with it. That's what it felt like. I don't know if she gave it away or threw it away or just packed it away, unmarked boxes dragged with us on each move. All I do know is that I didn't cry at the funeral–I was too weak, propped up in a wheelchair like a wet rag doll–and I didn't cry at home, everyone congratulating me for being strong for my mother, for once again being the man of the house until my Daddy came home.

That was the first time I managed it. Pulling away from them all, scurrying back into myself. Emotion paralysed. For my own good.

Six weeks later, I yelled blue murder when Mama told me I couldn't have Bobby's comic books, a big stack of *Namor the Sub-Mariner* and *Captain America*. They were gone. That's all she could say: *They're gone, Josh.* I screamed, she hollered, and Mrs. Bedford rang and rang the doorbell, but we wouldn't answer. Then I fell down because my leg was still weak and I refused to wear my brace. My mother picked me up under the arms, and I pushed my face into her bosom–she was wearing a lavender dress, and she smelled of lilac

dusting powder and sweat. Then she helped me to bed. We never spoke of it. Not how I cried, not how I fell, not how I wanted those comic books more than I'd ever wanted anything. Mama must have been as good at paralysing her feelings as I was.

I thought about Bobby at Montauk. Dreamt of him one night, cold in the woods, sick, waiting for me to find him.

One of the subjects I observed at Montauk was a frightened blond boy.

I was very glad to leave for more peaceful work O'Connor had found for me up in Canada. Newfoundland, of all places, though St. John's, not Gander.

I've heard laughable stories in the last few years about the work at Montauk. Time travel, aliens, unicorns. No. We did nothing Steve Rogers or Captain America wouldn't have been proud of. Funny storyline with Namor the Sub-Mariner sometime in the 1960s. He attacked the surface world when he discovered Atlantis was destroyed by atomic testing.

Chapter Two
Scopolamine and salt cod

Fog in St. John's invades the streets, the sky, the trees. I've stood at an upper window of the old Janeway Children's Hospital and watched things disappear. A fog bank might sit off the coast most of a summer day, and though the sky was dark blue and the playgrounds were full, the foghorn would blow. Late in the day, little threads of fog stretched ashore. The Narrows might already be obscured, Cabot Tower just a feeble shadow, the Southside Hills gone. It might take a few hours; it might take twenty minutes. West of the city, the sky remained clear and likely would until sunset–another beautiful night in Paradise, Topsail and Chamberlains. I liked walking around downtown St. John's on those evenings, took comfort from the existence of others, even strangers, despite the fog. Those walks reminded me I was alive, permitted me some dim parody of question and

emotion: So many people, who were they all? What echoed in their heads? Whom did they love? The fog and the stink of the harbour also reminded me I was serving in a foreign country. Hardly overseas, but hardly home, either. Not that army brats grow up with much sense of home beyond the flag. And not that SHIP was supposed to work on American soil.

St. John's pumped raw sewage into the harbour. Still does. Some nights the harbour smelled like that squalid pool at Fort Tecumseh.

Consent was not an issue in the early 1970s the way it is now. Consent was something given to you by fully functional human beings, signed in a hurry in the pained fever heat of appendicitis, or discussed at great length as a tumour sprouted tendrils and spikes. Consent was not the concern of those the Government of Newfoundland's Department of Health called *imbeciles, morons, idiots* and *juvenile lunatics*–the old gradations of intellect, hidden accusations of bad families or inborn deviance. Wading past the labels, I found mostly what I expected. Some of the children looked remarkably alike: thin lips, smooth philtrum, sad eyes, scowl. These children weren't inherently bad, as some of the nurses thought, but they were remarkably ill-equipped to handle their impulses. It was first called foetal alcohol syndrome when Jones and Smith published in 1973. I carried out supportive research, published papers of my own, helped get it recognized. I had five FAS kids over the years at Raddle House. They were sickly and belligerent. They had almost no sense of smell. One had webbed fingers. Every one of them was dead by twenty-five, three of them before they turned fifteen: weak hearts. The one with webbed fingers was Nancy Oliver.

O'Connor had put me in contact with Newfoundland's Deputy Minister of Health, Phillip Monroe. Newfoundland was short on many things, it seemed, but their need for medical specialists was frightening. Desperate for oncologists, cardiologists, psychiatrists, even dentists for Christ's sake, the provincial government recruited internationally. Newfoundland had been seeking a paediatric psychiatrist to work in a new institution called Raddle House for almost two years when I was hired.

I asked about existing facilities.

The "facilities," Monroe wrote back, *apart from overcrowded Pleasantville, are kitchens, bedrooms, basements lined with old mattresses, and locked doors. Government is spending nearly eighty thousand dollars on Raddle House, which will open in June of 1970. Can we have you in place by then?*

In place? I was lost. I was to be entrusted with the well-being of both temporary patients and wards of the Crown, as they're called in Canada, and in my briefcase were study templates. I was to work for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I was to work under a broader contract with SHIP.

Of course, I told no one about SHIP.

Phillip Monroe met me at the tiny airport. Monroe was in his fifties, barely five feet tall, dark hair tufty. He looked like he'd walked out of a newsreel from the Depression, like he'd never gotten enough to eat as a child. He'd arranged an apartment for me on the old Pepperell base, and he decided to show me around St. John's before driving me there.

He talked a lot.

Rowhouses staggered up hills in a rough line of colours once bright, like some acid vision of barracks. Monroe's voice wound up and around my head, in and out my ears, until I thought, having been airsick, I'd now be seasick. Monroe's driving maundered, too. His car had a bench seat, so I was folded up against the dash as we wove gently in and out of a right line, rolled leisurely through a red light, and at one point reversed smartly back down a one-way street, Monroe still talking as he gazed over his shoulder. He'd gotten past recent socio-economic developments, offered up as some sort of proof–though proof of what, I wasn't sure–to stories of untreated beriberi, rickets, polio and TB.

Monroe frowned after saying *TB*. —Brother and sister died of it. Hard times. I was living at my uncle's here in St. John's so I could matriculate. School in Cape Hassle only went to sixth grade, because that was all the teacher had. Then I got the word Jim and Elspeth were down with consumption. So I couldn't go back. Jim wasn't long, about eight months from when he first coughed blood. Elsie lingered about two years in the San. And now look. I'm with the Department of Health. There's the harbour. One of the first settled places in North America.

I needed to explain Jamestown and Roanoke, but my head spun. —Croatoan.

—Crows? Inland a bit, once you're away from the water. Ravens, too.

—*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary…*

—Had a few Americans here over the years. Couldn't move for you Yanks during the war. You're still down at Argentia. The odd one in Pleasantville, too.

I felt scripted into a role I didn't expect: the foreigner. Suddenly Monroe's accent was the standard, and mine was ridiculous. In his car, I sounded like a yokel. —How did you come to call it Raddle House?

—We were going to call it Wicklow House, but that got the Protestants upset. Then it was Kent House, which put the RCs in an uproar. Dr Raddle nearly went round the bend with it. There he was, head of a steering committee for this nearly million-dollar children's facility, having to referee all these squabbles over what to name the place. Solved that tidily. Went and died. Here we are. Signal Hill.

We got out, and the wind knifed us. The fresh air settled my stomach. —It's beautiful.

That night I was being honest and polite. I'd just come from Montauk, so the Atlantic was hardly new to me the way Monroe thought. It did make me feel small. In August of 2003, when I was offshore in a helicopter, the Atlantic humbled me again. Terrified me, really. But that night with Monroe I could face it.

My eyes watered in the wind, blurring the view from that blunt cliff.

Monroe pointed into darkness. —See that?

A lighthouse beamed and blinked, and the ocean foamed over worn rocks.

Monroe was cold but content, having simultaneously welcomed a newcomer and put him in his place. —You can see it all up here, Dr. Bozeman, heaven and hell and everything in between blocking the sky. Fog's coming in.

Driving me to my apartment, Monroe delivered another lecture, this one of the old American Fort Pepperell, or Pleasantville as it was now called, its streets curving in the shape of a cowboy hat. After dark pines and straggling spruce, grey and purple rocks and salt water, Fort Pepperell was a comfort. Under the streetlights, behind the mist, the

unmistakable architecture of a US base, this one dominated by its hospital–by then the Janeway. The foghorn that night kept waking me up.

I said Nancy Oliver had webbed fingers. She also had green eyes, a broad forehead, bitten nails and a smile fit to break your heart. Her file was thin for someone in care as long as she was. Four foster homes had chewed her up and spit her out after she stole money, assaulted other children–once chasing a much older boy with a thick fallen branch, waving it over her head–and, strange for a girl, set a fire. She could go days without speaking, then talk in packed blurts that exhausted everyone else. Her IQ was high for a child with FAS, but I didn't realize that until much later. The webbed fingers on her left hand marked her out as a freak; she'd been tormented endlessly about the skin. I was surprised a plastic surgeon hadn't repaired the hand, especially given Canadian Medicare. Wouldn't have cost her parents a cent. When I asked, the answers were dissipated little shrugs, as though the idea had occurred to someone years before who had since been stoned to death.

Nancy was one of the first patients admitted to Raddle House. Officially she was a transfer from some subsection at Pleasantville, but they really didn't have a place for her. Unlike many of the Raddle House patients, Nancy had not been labelled unteachable, but no allowance was made for schooling. I was told she could make up missed time when she stabilized. The same was said for Corey Tucker and Stephen Hiscock.

I spoke with Corey Tucker's mother more than the other parents, despite Violet Tucker's five-hour drive to St. John's. Mrs. Tucker was under considerable pressure to make Corey a ward of the Crown, and I admired how she considered that an easy way out and fought it.

At our first meeting in November of 1970–the opening of Raddle House was delayed, some troubles with construction–Mrs. Tucker told me Corey was the third of five children.

Corey squealed, one long *eeee*.

Mrs. Tucker scowled, angry at someone. —That's all Corey says, Dr. Bozeman, and him twelve. Sometimes when he looks at me with them gorgeous blue eyes, I sees that he knows there's something wrong with him. But he don't know how to fix it. Neither do I.

Corey was arranging toy cars in a straight line, taking care that the bumpers were even.

His mother continued. —He was normal until about eighteen months. One week he was babbling the blue streak, and the next he was a boat hauled ashore. Stopped looking at me. But he was all for the tickling and the rough-housing with his father. It's like he's smart but got no sense, like the smartness in him is locked away. I know he's not retarded. If he was retarded, he wouldn't be counting them cars. Look, he's got them done by colour this time. He'll do type next, just you watch. Everybody's after telling me I'm not mothering him proper. Schizophrenia, right, that's what the doctors are after saying, poor mothering. I'm not…I love the boy. I do. But there's definitely something wrong with him. And he's getting big. I don't know if I can handle him no more.

I studied my notes. —Does Corey demonstrate inappropriate affection?

—God, no. He hates to be touched. He won't let no one touch him. Except me or his father. And even then, it's got to be his idea.

As if he heard her, Corey ran to his mother and put his head on her knee. Then he squirmed and bolted back to the toy cars.

—Dr. Bozeman, I don't like to beg. I've always looked after my children with whatever I was given. I've made that baby bonus stretch further than any other woman in Bright's Cove. But I got to beg now. Take Corey at Raddle House.

Corey's squeals went short and jagged, and he threw toy cars against the wall, hard enough to smack off tiny wheels and leave dents.

Mrs. Tucker took her son by the shoulders, whirled him around and slapped his right hand. —You put the doctor's Dinkies down this minute!

Corey raised his hand to slap his mother back.

I ordered Corey to a corner, where he sat like a yogi and rocked.

Mrs. Tucker's cheeks were hot. Arms around her ribs, she rocked, too. —He listened to you. How did you do that? I hardly ever hit him. My father says that's half the problem, says I'm after spoiling him. How can I hit a child who doesn't know if he's in the world?

Corey hummed. Not quite a tune, but something musical. I knew it but couldn't place it.

I learned a lot about autism with Corey Tucker. He was admission number fourteen.

A cottage hospital doctor referred Stephen Hiscock. Even now I can't say with certainty what was wrong with Stephen.

He'd been very bright, perhaps a prodigy. There were notes in his file about singing solo in church at four, about not colouring but shading with crayons at five. Stephen had also moved a great deal, his parents being members of a tiny evangelical sect. Like Nancy Oliver, he could go days without speaking, but Stephen's silence was like an anorexic's fast: he seemed to have a plan. He was aware of his surroundings and wept when his parents left him at Raddle House, admission number thirty-two.

The afflictions of many of the other patients were far more profound, rendering them unfit for my rigorous studies. From the first days I treated Nancy, Corey and Stephen for what they were: my favourites.

It would be at least a year before we even got to Zener cards. Time to do some good.

The morning I met Kathy Renouf I had a wretched dream.

It was March of 1972. Deciduous trees were still bare and pointy, and the conifers were dull. Raddle House, three-storied, flat-roofed and stupidly designed with many windows, since barred, had been open just over a year, and I was damn lonely. I'd bought a house, an entire detached red brick bungalow to myself. Elm Place, off Carpasian. Brick was unusual in St. John's. I guess the house looked American to me. The quiet I craved after ten, twelve, sixteen hours a day at Raddle House blessed me first, but then it smothered me. Nearly two years in St. John's and the only people I knew were a few other doctors, the nurses at Raddle House, and my housekeeper.

So I got a dog, a Newfoundland bitch called Stella that the breeder out in Port au Mal didn't want to give up. She'd whelped two litters and was still in demand, but once she became mine I immediately had her spayed. She rarely barked. She woke me in the mornings by slobbering on my face, and afternoons she'd be waiting by the front door with the lead in her mouth, my new reason for leaving work on time. Grooming her coat and cleaning her hair from the furniture was a full time job, but it was so easy to keep her happy. All she wanted were long walks and to sleep on my bed.

In the dream, Stella had led me to a pond where the ice had melted at the shore. The day was warm, and the sky was faint. I knelt down between trees starved for soil; roots stuck out. I waited to warn people away from the melted edges. Skaters laughed, didn't see me, and just as I surrendered to sleep on roots and rocks, a heavy girl with bright brown eyes skated towards me. *Rotten ice*, she said, but I kept quiet and hid.

The dream was stubborn, memory of it holding fast no matter how quickly Stella and I walked along Elm Place. Dutch elm disease had taken hold. Many yards had stumps. Stella dragged me onto Carpasian, down past Rennie's River and over King's Bridge to an Anglican cemetery. There St. John's changed from smug wealth to a crumbling downtown, all puddles, broken boards and snow. My head was full of dosages and reaction times, a mess of numbers I'd dreamt about most of the night before the heavy girl on the ice. I felt sick and distant, like I hadn't slept at all.

Kathy was chasing a hat. It was a flat-knit thing she called a tam, and the wind had taken it. As she ran and slipped, her long brown hair obscured her face. The hat landed on some snow, then near a bare tree, and finally in a puddle of dirty slush near Stella. I picked up the hat, wrung it out, offered it back. Kathy turned so red.

Every Saturday for the next month I walked Stella in the same area around the same time, and Kathy was always there. Eventually we dated, but we didn't have much to talk about. She was nineteen and in St. John's from somewhere called Ellsworth Bight, working for her aunts, who kept a convenience store. Kathy called it a superette. Her father and brothers were fishermen, but Kathy had been sent to St. John's to learn a trade. I said she should go to university; she waved her hand and said she didn't have the patience to be

a teacher or a nurse. No, not much to talk about, just the arcing biochemistry of joyful fucking. Once I got her very drunk, and she dressed as a librarian for me, the spinster kind with the glasses and a bun, even a tweed suit originally bought to wear to Mass. Every time I kissed her somewhere, she had to shush me. She made more noise than I did.

Given time, I might have fallen in love with her. The deep love that lasts. God knows she was my main distraction from the stink of Raddle House. Kathy and Stella both.

Some of the Raddle House patients had started to fear me, forcing me to ease off and build their trust again. Explaining this to O'Connor took good words and time. Even writing those reports, especially the one for October 1972, made me want to scream. My sudden hatred for my patients galled me. Wild Turkey would have helped; I had Canadian Club or Crown Royal. Unreachable: schizophrenia, severe retardation, palsies, depression, nervous tics, obsessions, catatonia; Thorazine, scopolamine, Valium, wheelchairs, cribs, gurneys, straitjackets; analysis and electroshock; children, children who needed help only I could give them, help that came not as hands supporting them to dry land but as breaths to someone drowning; children abandoned as monkeys, mongoloids, idiots, monsters, useless. I was failing. As I'd failed patients before. Raddle House was becoming a warehouse, an institution, a hiding place, a prison, where all I could do was gather data and prescribe drugs. Ewen Cameron had been a visionary. Cameron had been a rebel for his patients' sakes. Cameron had waded through symptoms and dispensed compassion.

But me? Bozeman?

Bozeman was a failure.

—Oh, my Jesus.

Violet Tucker had come to visit her son.

—Oh, my Jesus, I prayed, and it worked.

For the last year, Corey Tucker had been unresponsive. By the time he was admitted, he'd stopped interacting with even his mother, instead remaining on watch every day at a chair by the living room window, studying the empty dirt road or the fascinating universe kept between his fluttering fingers. An elderly neighbour across the street also sat

in a chair by his window, as he had done since something called resettlement. Sometimes he and Corey had seemed to communicate by hand gestures. In his first few months at Raddle House, Corey communicated by banging his head against the wall, or by squealing. His pitch was painful.

I wrote my report. *Once again the main problem remains the individual will, a force which is not only present but surprisingly strong in the subjects. The less severely retarded patients who function in the high moron range can be made more compliant and easier to direct after deep sleep therapy, albeit with the limitations already put in place by their handicap. Advanced psychic driving should be explored. The more severely retarded patients are useful only for post-ECT EEG data, and this data is also of little use to me, as I have no control group. However, I forward it to you for your own comparative purposes.*

Kathy, naked and bored one night while I tried to explain without giving too much away, rolled her eyes and lit another cigarette. —The patient this, the patient that. What's his name?

I shall now move my study to the second level, wherein trust becomes an operative factor. Lack of expression has hampered any efforts at individual connection in the past. Most of the patients simply cannot communicate at a level where any meaningful conversation can occur.

Kathy waited gracelessly for me one rainy afternoon when I couldn't leave on time. —Honest to God, Josh, your office is some dull. I don't know why I bother telling you how to decorate. You don't even use that record player. Or is that just for music therapy? If you ask me, you could use a little music therapy yourself.

She shook Neil Young's *After the Goldrush* out of its cardboard sleeve, dropped the record on the spindle and the needle on the vinyl, sang along: —*Southern man, better keep your head...*

I scowled at her. —Do you mind?

Kathy shrugged and brought the needle back to "Tell Me Why."

Outside the doorway to my office, Corey resisted the gentle push of the orderly– it was Joe Rideout, now that I think on it–so he might stare at the pretty lady.

Kathy's courtesy was reluctant. —Hello.

Corey Tucker became rock still. He did that a fair bit in his first few months at Raddle House. Joe was preparing to pick Corey up off his feet, but I shook my head at him, because I could follow Corey's line of sight past Kathy to the record player.

I held out my hand. —Come in, Corey.

Corey nodded in time to the song.

When it ended, Corey squealed. Kathy jerked back and banged into my desk, but I just leaned over the record player and placed the needle back to the start of the song. It played again, and Corey nodded in time, squealing once more when it ended. I repeated that song five times; each time it ended, Corey made less noise until he merely grunted. I played it a sixth time, and Corey sang it word for word, in a nasal but never flat voice that was a dead copy of Neil Young's. Only then did Corey suffer Joe Rideout to grasp his arm.

Kathy turned on me as soon as she decently could. —I thought you said that one couldn't talk.

—Kathy, I have a lot of work to do. Can you go walk Stella for me?

Three patients in particular possess greater intelligence than previously supposed. One had been diagnosed a juvenile schizophrenic, but I am confident his problem is autism. Another came from the Pleasantville facility; her diagnosis has always been vague, but she is clearly troubled. A severe neurosis, possibly accompanied by depression, seems to fuel kleptomania, compulsive lying and aggression. She has been a patient since the age of ten. Now fifteen, she displays highly inappropriate sexual behaviour in an attempt to get what she wants. Standard testing puts her IQ at 94. She could become very dangerous, to herself and others, if not reformed. The third is a twelve-year-old boy from the island's northern peninsula. His parents are schoolteachers and thereby afforded him many advantages over his peer group. After learning to read at the age of four, this patient displayed marked artistic ability and some musical talent. Since the age of eleven, when he suffered an apparent collapse, he has remained nearly catatonic. His intellect, however, is clear from his history. These three subjects, I believe, would lend more usable information to our studies, mainly through their abilities to communicate. To that end, I am initiating special programs

for them to strengthen their identities as separate from most of the patients at Raddle House, as connected to one another, and as of special interest to me.

Corey would sing "Tell Me Why" for hours, and when he tired of the lyrics, he improvised harmonies. He taught the song to three others, and when Joe Rideout sang along with him one afternoon, Corey actually smiled.

When I got home that night, Kathy was sitting in the kitchen, light off, kettle cold, twiddling her gold cross pendant. Hunched, blouse tight, she looked fatter. She'd made something she called *fish and bruise*–so I heard it anyway–and the kitchen reeked of salt cod and pork fat. I could have thrown up. I'd planned to just mix a drink and flop into bed and finally sleep, but Kathy asked if I loved her.

I took her to bed. She didn't ask again, and I fell asleep. Until 0310. Heart beating fast, sweat coming, dreaming of ice, open water and oblivious skaters pushing brooms. Kathy was in bed next to me, looking so much younger,

Trying not to wake her or Stella, I went out to the kitchen. Message on the notepad by the phone: *Call O'Connor*.

The last time O'Connor had called, my report had been late.

I puzzled out time zones as I poured a drink, decided to call him in the morning. Then I worried about work.

Advanced psychic driving. Could I do it? Bypass the will and the handicap–I knew how to do that–regress the patient to infancy and start over? Basic KUBARK interrogation relied on regression in normal adult men, yes, regression to infancy, a short trip for many in Raddle House; most of them were little more than infants now, and several were less, staring, despite fed bodies, with a lassitude seen in children nearly dead of starvation, or with the anxiety of mother-deprived rhesus monkey pups feeding from and clinging to a furred-over bottle with an abstraction of a mother's face above it. I'd shocked monkeys, learned technique. Regress them, wipe clean their minds the way nurses wiped their bottoms, plant suggestions, directions, start again? Bypass the will, yes, but bypass the defects?

I took my drink into the living room, sat down and flicked through a book, watching words go by. It was the book of poems by T.S. Eliot my father had given me. *Do I dare to eat a peach?* Of course I dared. It wasn't a matter of daring. It was a matter of doing. The daring was in thinking these children were not beyond help. The daring was in the hope. I went back to the kitchen and rooted in the pantry: canned peaches, heavy syrup, non-perishable food at the outpost. As the fruit plopped into my bowl, I thought of brains preserved in formaldehyde, of researchers struggling for clues in the brains of psychopaths and the retarded. All they found was grey flesh folded in on itself, terribly easy to cut, identical to Einstein's. Then the cause wasn't physical. It must be mental, it must be the mind, and therefore it must be the will; the will must be tangled up with invisible defects or even just stubborn neuroses: these children had the power to be cured. There would be failure. There was always failure. I picked up the poetry again, but I was too tired to make much sense of it. Raddle House, Tom Parnell, the polio ward where a patient walked: some patients could be reached. Even at Raddle House. With them the work would start, and on the more stubborn cases, the work would be refined. *Till human voices wake us and we drown.* Deep sleep therapy, I'd tried it before, but it had simply been heavy barbiturate dosing spiked with electroshock. Psychic driving meant deep sleep and headphones playing the message over and over until the will was broken down–or bypassed, as I preferred– whatever was necessary until the mind regressed so the psychiatrist reset and rebuilt it. Meant reaching kids like Corey Tucker. The methods would need testing, refining, work. No one therapy could be guaranteed to work for every patient, but to try: how else might I succeed? I tipped the bowl to catch the last of the syrup. No, not try. Dare.

I explained it to the nurses.

—The beauty of electro convulsive therapy, or ECT, is that it rids the brain of debris like a good spring cleaning. It's like resetting circuits.

Five patients were waiting in their wheeled cribs out in the corridor, one hand, studded with an IV port, taped to a crib rail, very quiet, but then they were always quiet, topped up with tranquillizers or naturally still. They watched, because they watched

everything, uncomprehending, not in the least curious, but because watching was as normal to them as breathing.

—In the past, injuries as severe as spinal fractures could occur, which is why I advocate the use of muscle relaxants. I find scopolamine gentle and reliable. As children feel little or no pain from this procedure, and dosage can be dangerously tricky, I do not give anaesthetic.

I asked for a tongue guard and applied saline gel to the temples.

—The technique I'm using today is called Page-Russell, after Doctors Page and Russell, as I'm sure you could figure out. Page-Russell involves several short shocks versus a longer one, and I feel this technique is especially advisable in the younger patient. You will observe some twitching in a moment, as ECT overwhelms the seizure threshold. Scopolamine damps down the worst.

I opened the current and travelled somewhere I did not want to go. Some brittle landscape, hard fruit on the ground.

—In adult patients, some confusion is observed after treatment. In our patients, I expect us to observe confusion and, once an effective schedule has run its course, some stirring of infantile curiosity. What we're aiming for is a sort of high-speed repair job. We're trying to give these children what nature, or their parents, could not: knowledge and stability.

Little shocks. Doubt like pits and seeds.

—We're going to ride them roughshod. I want to be honest with you, ladies. Deep sleep is the most humane way to accomplish this. We will keep them under for several days, and during that time they will wear headphones, which will play messages. These will be very positive messages, like *You're a good boy* and *Let the doctor help you*. I believe positive messages are key here. We have in some cases ten years to make up for. We'll be waking them three times a day to feed them, then easing them back to sleep. Because it's time we stopped viewing these children as lumps of flesh and started viewing them as human beings we can heal, if only we find the way.

I came to Newfoundland to help.

Nancy told me later she felt paralysis.

—It's scary. Can't move. Something bad is coming.

I dismissed this. She did go out of her way to get my attention after those treatments, after she recovered, like she wanted to get on my good side, make me happy. Like she was Stella, wanting to go for a walk. But if she knew another treatment was coming, she cried and cursed me out like she was some worn out old carnival performer. Stephen spoke a little more after recovering, but only when spoken to first. Even then he was anxious. Disorientation lasted longer in Stephen.

No one remembered these treatments. I dreaded giving them just the same. The patients came on stretchers, usually restrained; Nancy was almost in hysterics. Gauging voltage for a child's brain is difficult. Nancy Oliver had the body of a young woman; Stephen Hiscock was just gone fifteen but looked closer to twelve. So, sedated or aware, quiet or crying, they lay on stretchers while I squirted saline solution and fitted electrodes to each temple. Sometimes I smelled ammonia. My patients wore diapers and johnny coats. They had brown eyes, green eyes, blue eyes. They wriggled, they writhed, or they shook. I had to help them. I had to try. It should have bothered me no more than a gastroenterologist stenting a blocked bile duct; invasive, yes, but necessary. Benefits and risks. Me and two nurses, timing rough: tongue guard and switch. I loathed the tongue guards. They looked like ice cream pops on a stick, and often I'd focus on that incongruous brown jutting out of a patient's mouth as the electricity passed temple to temple and the spine went whipcord. Nurses were struck. The patient often released a terrible noise, gagged but audible. After the first two weeks, I ordered all the patients sedated before they were wheeled to the treatment room. It calmed all of us down. I still used tongue guards. And, thank God, only one nurse asked me how ECT works, because I had to tell her the truth.

—No one rightly knows.

Afterwards, Corey Tucker spoke.

Sentences.

I still can't explain it.

His mother studied him through one-way glass. —I prayed for this, and it worked.

Corey, his eyes shut behind dark glasses, was playing an unplugged bass guitar, rocking back and forth. In the room with him was Stephen Hiscock, a paintbrush tucked behind each ear, one between his teeth and a fourth in his right hand; he was painting a mural of an immense castle with many rooms from each of which candlelight glowed.

Mrs. Tucker smoothed her hair behind her ears. —What have you done? Because that's, that's not the boy I brought here. That–he's–this is amazing.

—He's playing the bass line from "Heart of Gold." Music therapy. I let the patients listen to my records. Corey's autism…we're not sure how it all works, or what entirely is going on, but it's my belief that autistics are overwhelmed by their senses. They can't filter the stimuli, can't sort the information. See how his eyes are closed? He's using just hearing and touch.

I was so pleased a month after those initial treatments when Corey and I could sit down together and then organize beads and talk at the same time. The first day he'd been unresponsive. The second, he glared at me sidelong, then averted his eyes, as though I'd kicked him, and stimmed by fluttering his fingers. Slowly, over the following weeks, he suffered my presence next to him as we sorted beads into those organizing bins with little drawers for screws and nails. Later he could tell me how blurry the first week was, how much he'd been afraid of me. He said visions blew up in his head: the torments of bright light, a dissipating of self into a fog, a slow coalescence back to bedsheets, my accent, and the clicking of beads.

Corey's mother stepped away from me and sought the door. —I got to go see him.

I'm sorry to say I grabbed the woman's arm. —Please don't.

—Dr. Bozeman, I'm after driving five hours to get here. I want to see my son.

I sighed. It hurt to tell Mrs. Tucker this, but I had to be concerned about my patients first. —The last two times you visited and left again, Corey got very agitated. We had to tranquilize him.

She stared at me, then acquiesced to the doctor, her voice small. —Oh.

Neither of us spoke a moment. Then Mrs. Tucker asked if she could watch him a while longer, to which I of course said *Yes*. Time passed. My feet hurt from standing in one position.

Mrs. Tucker pointed to the others in the observation room with Corey. —Who's that?

—Stephen Hiscock. He paints.

—No, the one with the hockey helmet on.

—Nancy Oliver. She's–

—You've got a girl in there? Doing what?

—Crossword puzzles.

—Does she bang her head off walls, too?

—Sometimes.

—You're sure I can't go in and see Corey?

—I'm sorry.

—I see.

Stephen painted. Nancy wrote. Corey played.

Then Mrs. Tucker surprised me. —When can I take him home?

—Corey needs the treatments here, and I can't really say. You want to take him home?

Mrs. Tucker turned round, the corners of her mouth drawn down in fury and disgust. —He is my son.

—Yes, ma'am.

Then she turned away. —I don't want to take him home.

She picked up her purse and left, a gift of memory guiding her back out through the corridors. I wondered if I shouldn't go after her, but these three were my special three, my advanced subjects. Every moment of observation was crucial. Besides, Stephen's painting was so very interesting.

I got so very tired. My drug and ECT studies were well received, but they were merely a first phase. Equipment–and a special box of bourbon–was being shipped from

stateside: new headgear involving electrical signals aimed at the brain, a step up, thank God, from radiation. I still can't bear the scent of well-done beef. Some studies involved just the electrical signals, some just the drugs, but mine were to combine both. My double challenge was to heal while garnering what I might. It was easier to try to heal in an outpost, where no one kept a direct eye on me, where my reports might be delayed. Soon I was testing hypotheses on other patients, just so I might spare Nancy, Stephen and Corey just a little more. It couldn't last. The parameters were in place, and SHIP demanded results.

Kathy had gotten predictable and cold. So had our scarce time together.

Apparently I didn't respect her as a person. This was foolish. I was paying her damned university tuition. I was the only man in her life who had ever encouraged her to think. I dreamt about taking her up against the stone wall of Cabot Tower one night, gulls crying. I was appalled and did nothing of the sort. But then neither did I enjoy the smell of salt by Harvey's Wharf or juddering hand-jobs in my car, me staring at the harbour, breathing with the foghorn, the too-old hooker keeping quiet.

Then Todd Hawco arrived at Raddle House. He was difficult. Behavioural therapy and modified psychic driving had little effect on his obsessions, his outbursts, his compulsive utterances of a sound best transliterated as *Hegh*. Todd was fourteen and had Tourette's. A social worker and a GP, armed with quick conclusions and so-called common sense, had removed him from his home. Said social worker had written a letter, stating that poor parenting and perhaps even abuse had led to Todd's behaviour, which was clearly a manifestation of repressed anger.

For several corrosive months, that letter wielded more power than God and good medicine.

Todd's parents, Rob and Shirley Hawco, begged to see him. Utter misery in my office. Shirley Hawco gave examples of her "parenting style." She was as shocked as Violet Tucker had been that anyone thought she might harm her child. —We just wants Todd back. Tell us, Dr. Bozeman, for the love of God, where did we go wrong? He's an only child, is that it? I tried having more. Is it my fault?

Rob Hawco sat cross-armed, muscled by a life's fishing and disappointments, studying the wall to his left. I could tell them nothing new. Until the social worker's claim was investigated, I wasn't permitted to say much to the Hawcos. I could confirm Todd's agitation at coming to Raddle House, his being delivered by a social worker he'd tried to strike, and I could confirm that Todd was receiving the best available treatment, but the government had placed Todd Hawco in Raddle House, so it was not up to me to release him to his family. Not without paperwork. Tears glinted on Rob Hawco's face, and in the pit of my frightened heart, I knew I had no real idea how to help his son.

Beads, paintbrushes and so many failures.

O'Connor had promised me an assistant, but screening took a while. You needed a certain toughness to work for SHIP, a toughness that could carry you past doubts.
I drove back to Raddle House one evening to finish some charts and then read some mail. Unlocking the side door, I felt a surge of happiness. I was needed here. And I had freedom to dare.

Which helped as I cursed the weather. I despised sleet even more than snow, because sleet was so damned indecisive. People joked of suicide in March and April, when snow would melt only to make room for another blizzard. I believed them. Winter in St. John's would crack Job.

Raddle House was quiet. Lights were out, patients were in bed, sedated as necessary to ensure proper rest. Numbers for a liver toxicity test crowded my head. At least none of my patients had turned blue, though Nancy Oliver was not tolerating the side effects well. I nodded to Brenda Greeley, the night nurse, who smiled and said she'd already been speaking to him.

—To whom?

Brenda gently pushed her tea out of my view. —He said you were expecting him. Then he said he'd be on walkabout, like an Australian. He explained walkabout. It's so romantic.

—Who?

—Second floor, I think.

I honestly wondered if she was high. Nurses had broken into the meds cabinet before. Fired, of course. The last two had let their boyfriends in after hours. When the police asked what they'd been looking for, they'd said *Anything at all, right, whatever's on the go, pills like Sunday dinner*. They'd found LSD. The government wasn't too long paying for a new system of locks and checklists. The nurses' boyfriends ran from dragons with many eyes by the Arts and Culture Centre, ran all the way to a cemetery, shoved at gravestones, trying to hide. The omnipotent dragons pursued.

On the second floor, a man nearly as tall as myself, blown-dry hair, ski-god face–he looked a lot like Spider Sabich–dressed in orange plaid pants and a tan permanent press shirt so thin his blonde chest hair showed, pointed at me with a lit cigarette. A Harold Robbins novel peeked out of one lab coat pocket, balanced by a paperback drug manual in the other. He smiled. —You must be Bozeman.

His accent, built on stiff vowels and easy flatness, marked him out for what Newfoundlanders called a mainlander.

I gave him my best officer's stare. —Who the hell are you?

—State of the art, eh. Unused space, room to breathe, loads of potential. You from Kentucky? Alabama? O'C never did say. Jamie Fraser. Residency at the Allan, specializing in dissociative disorders. You?

—Residency on a US Army base you've never heard of. Paediatric psychiatry. O'Connor sent you? He might have said.

—Surprise. I'm sailing on the same ship, eh.

—You're Canadian.

—So? Dual citizenship, for what it's worth. Born in Maryland, grew up in Ontario, little town called Reddenborough, partway between Ottawa and Kingston. But as far as Uncle Sam's concerned, I'm his point man in the frozen north, eh. You must find living here like being trapped in a long Newfie joke.

It was all I could do not to call him an asshole to his face. —I like it here.

Fraser sensed a power imbalance out of his favour and quickly righted it. —We're going to be as good as married the next few years. Go for a drink?

—I just ate.

He punched my arm and smiled. —Drive behind me. One-ten Spancraft, by Batter My Heart Park.

—Bannerman.

—Whatever.

It was dangerous to drive in that sleet.

Fraser's house was at least seventy years old, wiring and plumbing decrepit. The light in the living room dimmed as Fraser flicked on a light in the kitchen. —Going to fix the place up. Make a fortune when I sell it.

—How long have you been with SHIP, Fraser?

—A few years, off and on.

He returned with two glasses of rye, ready to propose a toast.

I still despise rye.

—To partnership, eh. Watch your step.

Christ, partnership. Med school textbooks, medical journals, issues of *Hustler* and paperback novels were piled on the floor, despite a small and empty bookcase against the east wall. I picked my way past the books to sit down.

—Nice bookcase.

Light played with the spindles carved to look like braids. Fraser reached under a chair cushion, pulled out a psychiatric journal, folded it open and passed it to me. —Gift. Guy in my hometown's a woodworker, eh. Seen this?

—"Possible Defensive Aspects of Dissociation," by Dr. A. Bennett. What of it?

I hadn't read the paper. I hardly read anything. My journals lined a special shelf in my office, spines virginal.

Fraser took a stiff swallow. —Multiple personality. Dissociative identity disorder, if you like the new name. You know how some of it happens?

I did, but I shook my head. Fraser would tell me regardless.

Fraser pronounced it carefully, as though nudging hot food off his tongue without wanting to spit it out. —Molestation. It's simple. Related to regression during torture, but it seems to be unique to girls. It gets so bad that they retreat and create in their mind another self. Or selves. Then the abuse happens to the other self while the original self winks out. I wonder why not boys. Girls are more compliant, I guess. Amazing, eh?

This conversation could not be going where I thought.

—One of my studies when I was at McGill…

I put down my drink.

—…is how these walls, these protective mechanisms, are created.

—You just said–

—Yeah, but precisely what kind of abuse? And how much? Is there a universal limit? Or are the breaking points unique to each subject? Controlled trauma, in a clinical setting, with–you feeling all right?

—Fine.

—Of course, this needs to be set up and executed in as humane a way as possible.

—Of course.

—O'Connor's got me up to speed with your work with scopolamine and Demerol. I'd never thought of that combination. Jesus, that's twilight sleep. A memory-fucker. Compliance within consciousness and some degree of ego freedom, if we set it up right. Dosages for smaller bodies, enough to hide memories unless we want them cracked open.

Then Fraser abruptly switched subjects, slipping down a long hill of reminiscence of life in Reddenborough and then at McGill. I was bored stiff. For over forty minutes. At least it distracted me from the frightening new reality of someone else reporting to O'Connor.

Mercy would have to go underground.

I cut Fraser off before he could return to his desire to explore trauma bonding. —I need to go. Get some sleep.

Fraser blinked, surprised at this interruption. —You can find your way home from here, eh?

—I've lived in St. John's for two and a half years. I'll manage.

The night air was cool but hardly refreshing.

Fraser's voice echoed off my car. —See you tomorrow, Bozey.

I didn't sleep at all. I tried reading Eliot, but I didn't understand anyone better for doing so. Not Fraser, not my mother, certainly not myself.

I got cold, sitting up.

I got lost in a blizzard once. Seventh grade. My father was posted to Smithfield. School closed early, and I walked home. We all did. The wind took up, the snow thickened, and the front door the house was locked. Was my mother gone somewhere? Each bit of snow felt like jagged glass, and I was cold down to my marrow. I pictured ice in my blood, and I banged on windows, banged on doors. By then the snow blocked even the houses next door. I yelled blue murder, but my mother couldn't hear me. My legs hot, then cold, then hot again, and I knelt down, because it was warm and safe to do so. My father found me. I'd passed out. Wrong house. Frostbite, ears, face and feet. I damn near lost three toes. Couldn't play football all that summer because I had to learn to run all over again. Pneumonia, too. In the base hospital for two weeks. Kneeling on the bed, head down to face a bucket, nurses pounding my back: *Cough, Josh, cough it up.*

My mother stayed next to my bed in the hospital. She begged me to keep walking even when I cried.

Then, once I was better, she seemed exhausted. Like I'd sucked something vital from her, something I couldn't give back. She collapsed. I'm sure I saw it happen. The day the doctor told us I could go home. Worried determination had so hardened my mother's face; now she softened, sighing, and shut her eyes.

She didn't bathe for a month after that.

There I was, recovered, sunburnt and learning to run, while she was just limp. How could she be, when I was fine? When everything was fine?

Because it had to be.

She was bathing again by the time I went back to school, but she never opened the curtains. And she rarely went outside.

I thought she was weak.

The morning of the day Kathy died, I was reviewing charts and nurses' reports with Fraser when he said something about double-bagging.

—Christ, Fraser. You'll be drilling holes in their heads to release evil spirits next.

—Trepanning has its uses, too.

—I said *No*. Double-bagging is primitive, useless and dangerous. It failed in the 50s. What the hell do you think you're going to get from it?

—I'll make Stephen Hiscock talk.

—Stephen Hiscock is perfectly capable of speech. He simply chooses silence. He communicates quite adequately through his paintings, which you'd see if you bothered to look.

I still remember those paintings: miniatures seemingly etched, startling and complex, and of course that growing mural in the observation room.

Fraser rolled his eyes. —Painting. What will that get him in the real world? He doesn't even say his own name. He's sick. It's our job to heal him.

—Do no harm.

—Investigative medicine.

—Strapping a boy to a gurney and hooking up IV barbiturates to one hand and amphetamines to the other is not medicine. It's–

—Research. And we're behind schedule.

The foghorn sounded. I suddenly wondered how I'd gotten there. Knowing Fraser's name, his eye colour, his taste for peroxide blondes and his regular donations to Easter Seals made him even harder to take than the numbered doctors at Montauk.

Upstairs, Todd Hawco shouted at Corey Tucker, who swore back. Todd was deteriorating; institution life was doing him no favours. Corey was improving and would even speak to Fraser, though he wouldn't make eye contact; this new doctor had not earned

Corey's trust. Fraser had, however, earned Nancy Oliver's obvious infatuation. He was a credit to the white coat and did nothing to encourage Nancy's feelings.

So I should have been able to trust him.

I didn't.

But I gave him no further answer. Patient charts came and went; my eyes burned. I thought of Kathy and her last cynical kiss. Sometimes I felt I was being used. I know some nights I'd used her.

I left work around two and took the long walk to the old train station downtown, now the CN bus terminal. I was supposed to be writing another overdue report for O'Connor, but it could wait. It was safer unwritten anyway; I'd completed no SHIP work in months.

I walked fast, trying to leave thoughts behind.

A memory of duck and cover. Under my school desk, I saw secrets. Outside, the air raid siren strained to howl, weighted by something, possibly time, and our teacher was almost joyful. *Duck and cover, children, duck and cover.* Pencils and paper discarded, books left behind, but beneath the fun we were all afraid. The siren arced, demented cousin of the foghorn. One boy picked his nose. A girl, head down beneath her arms, displayed ruffed bloomers that matched her dress. Did the boy who sat next to me really put all that gum beneath his desk? Who designed the radiation symbol with its sections and endless circle? I'd ask my father, whenever he came home. The siren stopped. All clear sounded. As we emerged from beneath our desks, two boys mimed planting the flag at Iwo Jima, and we all applauded. Our teacher smiled and called us to order, and for that afternoon fractions were charged with meaning.

Kathy's bus had arrived, and she was crossing the parking lot for her Pacer. Secondhand, it had been someone's expensive toy, automatic transmission and eight-track player. I figured it had been sold as scrap and then resurrected after an accident, black ice maybe. Inside it stank of gas and oil, and the exhaust manifold rattled with every acceleration. Whenever she went *out home*, it didn't.

Kathy found me before she found the car, and her mouth stretched into a meaningless smile. She did not kiss me, and I did not try to kiss her. I took her bags.

—Josh, we need to have a talk.

I nodded. —You first. I'll drive.

We'd had a few talks over the summer. Kathy would sit up in bed until I got home, and her voice would poke me as I unknotted my tie and then walked around in shirt and socks. Some talks lasted two or three drinks. With ice. At least with Kathy I didn't have to take notes. I'd insert *Yeah, Uh huh,* or *I see what you mean* at the right places.

Just like now.

I waited for a break in her monologue as I drove steadily east.

—And if Mom asked me once more when we were getting married, couldn't I get a commitment out of you, how much longer was I going to slut out to this American doctor fellah, and why wouldn't you come out to meet them because you can't be that busy? Then she starts in on how working in the store was the best thing that ever happened to me, kept me in line, and didn't the nuns at school teach me nothing? To top it off, I made the mistake of saying I don't go to Mass anymore, so then Dad got into it, called me every name under the sun, saying how grand I'm after getting since going to university–

—University.

—What?

—You aspirated the *u*. There's no *h* in university.

—Josh, are you correcting my pronunciation?

—It slips when you go home. I can always tell when you've been behind the bay.

—It's *around the bay*. I suppose the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain?

—Say again?

—Josh, you give me one reason not to get out of this car right now.

We were coming up on Middle Cove Beach, where we'd been twice before, once on the Fourth of July; she'd packed a picnic basket; the waves crashed; the sandwiches blew away. The other time I'd been too put out by fog, black water and these little fish washing ashore to do much except say *I feel so sorry for you, if you think this is a beach.*

—Christ, Kathy, we're going forty miles an hour for a start. Do we have to argue?

—I am not arguing. I am trying to have a talk.

—You're aspirating again.

—Have you listened to a single word I've said? If you had the slightest bit of respect for me as a person–

Gravel under the tires–we lost the turn and grazed the cliff above the beach. Maybe a hundred and twenty feet. We fell through fog. Somewhere in those blank seconds our heads hit the windshield. Time, interrupted by darkness and cold water washing back and forth over my knees. My chest was stuck to the steering wheel. Prying away meant agony without breath. Then the water was up to my waist. The water was all that mattered. When the tide sucked the water back down to my knees, I forced open the door and fell. I couldn't reason out why my legs were so weak when it was my head and chest that hurt. I glanced back at the car, forgetting something. A large hole in the windshield on Kathy's side, remaining glass spiderwebbed with impact; perhaps her skull would show the same lines on an X-ray? Okay, okay, hole in the windshield, so she was in the water. Indifferent salt water. Someone was driving a nail into my forehead, no, a screwdriver, performing leucotomy, forgetting the eye socket, and I was stumbling, splashing, trying to part the water and find Kathy, because it was simple logic. She wasn't far from the car, straight line. Salt water invaded every hole I had and drank me, and I couldn't see the shore. Cliffs blackmarked with ancient soot, some sort of mineral deposit Kathy had explained, sheared up on either side of me, the roots of trees and weeds grown too far pointed to the air, dry and stunted. Weak, weak. I reached back for the voice of my sergeant at Basic, *Keep moving, you pansy, you faggot, you shit-eating Momma's boy.* I followed the waves, stumbled on rocks, beat up my hands. The salt got into cuts. *I don't know, but I've been told, Eskimo pussy's mighty cold.* Cold salt water. It slaps. The first shock is sickening, and it only gets worse. The cold penetrates and replicates, viral. The taste, Christ, you choke before you've even swallowed. The damned water is never still–knocks at your legs and hushes any cry you might have breath left to make. The cold might be merciful, or it might trail you along for hours, but eventually the cold is sudden heat, like you've pissed yourself or begun to

bleed, and it takes you in malignant arms and hides your face and puts you to sleep. Somewhere, I chanted and ran. *I don't know but I've been told, NATO water's fucking cold.* Then the cold sweetened to fire in the fog. If I was warm, then Kathy was, too. I stopped worrying, thinned out and blew away.

—Three cracked ribs, broken wrist, concussion, hypothermia, and a couple of teenagers already whacked on beer, pot and acid, scared out of their stoned little minds because they heard the car go over the cliff and thought you were a sea monster until you collapsed, seaweed stuck to your face. You're a statistical blip, Bozeman. You shouldn't have been able to walk away from that.

Gold-rimmed aviators, thick moustache and tailored suit, handsome and unwelcome against the light green wall: Colin O'Connor.

A young nurse pursed her lips, but O'Connor smiled, and she smiled back, oddly pleased. When she left, O'Connor closed the door and leaned in close as conspiracy. —You still like nurses? No, don't try to sit up. They've just moved you out of intensive care.

I stared at him, at the wall, at him again. I'd known for a while I was in a hospital room, but I hadn't cared.

O'Connor pulled a chair up to the bed. —What do you remember?

It hurt to speak. —Cold.

—She's dead. But you knew that.

I tried to turn away, but I was too heavy.

—My boss is pissing down my throat to get you back on track.

How could it hurt so much to breathe?

—Bit pink, wasn't she? She could have compromised you, Bozeman. Libber in a poncho. She was part of that sit-in at the university, for God's sake.

—I think–

—If you tell me you loved her, I'll fire you right here and now.

My ribs throbbed.

—Bozeman, she was taking you for every cent you had. You didn't even know her.

—And you did?

—Opened a file on her the night of your second date.

—Who–

O'Connor had his hand on his hips, looking like Bobby mocking me. —Us. Your side. The good guys, remember?

Neither one of spoke for a moment. An air bubble jerked along my IV line. Grief tore.

I promised myself I'd never feel pain like that again.

I heard my own voice whispering, up near the ceiling and accented with more of the south than I knew. —I want my Daddy.

I was not myself.

My father studied me as I cooked supper. I fried chicken legs, poking them with a fork, recognizing dully that I'd cooked the same supper four days in a row. I adored fried chicken, but the scent of the skin cooking nauseated me. I considered it the price of good eating.

Twice I thought of Stella, but her welfare was too far away. I didn't care who walked her, who fed her. She was simply not my problem.

My ribs were still bandaged, but it was my father who walked as though he'd been gored.

—I don't understand it, Josh. How could they have let it grow like that? Don't mental patients get checkups?

—They're supposed to.

My father sat at the kitchen table, bowl of lettuce and tomato salad vivid next to his uniform. He was sixty-two then, hair completely white and face deeply lined. Liver spots mottled the backs of his hands. His wedding band, bought long after coming back from the war, was thin. He'd joked with me on the phone, somehow: *Who was that Boston pansy who called first? Sounded like he wanted to label you Section Eight. Josh? You still there?*

—Josh, you all right?

I tried to answer, give something flippant so we could continue playing that everything was all right. A nod. A wink. Anything. I just looked at the salad, fork in my hand. *Dad, I just wanted to be a good American. Make you proud. Anything to make up for the God damned polio.*

Because the polio took Bobby away and made Mama sad. And Mama got so sad she needed a hospital. Amphetamines, insulin comas, electroshock: best of care did nothing for her. She languished in a chair, in a bed. Silent. Breast cancer went missed.

Dad retreated, poured oil on the salad. I turned the chicken. We ate quietly, reading the newspaper.

He took no time off. Said he had work to do. Said he needed it. I stayed in the house, curtains drawn. Less glare on the TV that way.

It marked me. It. Depression, I suppose. But I couldn't name it. Had no right to name it. Because it was. And I was not.

Passed a week like that. Colonel Tom Bozeman went to work early, came home late, and Dr. Josh Bozeman was there, either cooking supper or watching TV. That's all I wanted us to be, because now that I had it, the closeness of father and son was a threat. My father saw right into me. Always could. He knew I wanted to be a doctor before I did. He knew when a girlfriend broke my heart. Knew just what to ask me about Bobby. So I didn't dare talk to him. Not after that kind of pain. Talking to him would only jeopardize my numbness. He said something about how after great pain, a formal feeling comes, and I knew he was quoting poetry again. I didn't ask who. I kept falling asleep in front of the TV, waking up to the whine of a test pattern and the scratchiness of the old blanket my father had laid over me. Twice more he tried to crack me, asking one evening who Kathy was, because I'd said her name in my sleep.

—Or Nancy. You called out to a Nancy last night. Sounded scared.

—Just a dream.

—Josh.

I was harsh. —My work is secret.

—You can leave the Agency any time.

—Dad, I'm a psychiatrist. A paediatric psychiatrist. Just a psychiatrist.

—Tell me what's wrong. Please.

—I'm fine.

—That's what your mother said.

I could have struck him. —Stop.

—Nearly twelve years of *I'm fine*. I even believed her for a while. Josh, you are not fine. Christ, boy, the woman died. It's got to bother you.

—I won't let it.

—Pardon me? I didn't hear you right.

Cramps in the wheelchair, hating the sarcophagus. *Be strong, Josh. Be strong for your mother.* —I can't let it bother me. I have too much work to do.

I needed it.

I was back in Newfoundland before Thanksgiving. Well, American Thanksgiving.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

"Do I dare to eat a peach" and the image of singing mermaids come from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Double-blind is published by Killick Press, an imprint of Creative Publishers, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada.

Want the whole book between your hands? Order directly through my publisher, through amazon.ca, chapters.indigo.ca, or amazon.com. Cover price: $19.95.
ISBN - 10:1897174217 ISBN - 13:9781897174210

If you'd like a signed copy, you can purchase *Double-blind* directly from me; just drop me a note: mbutlerhallett@gmail.com. PayPal preferred, but I'm flexible.