

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

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A Mind Game

A small obscure article on Page 16 of the Daily Mirror caught my attention. A small time hood, while snatching a purse from a middle-aged matron, had died of a heart attack while the crime was taking place. Although all this had taken place six weeks ago, the police were still investigating, puzzled as to how an apparently healthy twenty-year old could have suffered this heart failure when no resistance was offered by the victim.

I read the article again and then again. Nothing about this uninteresting drama that had been relegated to Page 16 should have aroused my interest; however, something about this story was picking at my mind. I'm not a medical man nor am I particularly interested in medicine, but I am a retired lieutenant of homicide, two years' retired from police work.

Shrugging my shoulders, and folding the newspaper, I departed the restaurant that I had entered with nothing more serious on my mind than coffee and doughnuts. Now, it was encumbered by this rather uninteresting but nonetheless unusual story. Walking toward Westminster Park, I was still mulling it over in my mind. Concentrating on my new job as an insurance investigator should be my priority – not dwelling on the fate of some small-time crook who in all probability no one mourned.

Reaching the park, I selected a bench and began soaking up some rays of sunshine. Although willing my mind to do so, it would not let go. Like a barn-sour horse returning to its stall, this purse snatching kept encroaching on my thoughts. Only one solution – visit the precinct where the crime had occurred, examine the files and free my mind of this nagging feeling. The 11th Precinct was within walking distance and I set out at once.

Presenting myself and providing identification to the desk sergeant, I asked to see the detective in charge of this case. Entering the investigative division, Detective Sergeant Bill Hastings greeted me with a large smile. He had been a patrolman under my command some years before. He was happy to accommodate my request; produced the file, and offered me his desk. I spread everything out and studied the file meticulously. Hastings watched me intently; obviously curious, but not saying a word.

As in all cases of this sort, an autopsy had been performed on this young man – nothing unusual was found. It determined only that an apparently healthy youngster had just stopped living. The police, not satisfied, had ordered a second, more comprehensive autopsy, requesting test for all known poisons and toxic substances – same results. This youngster had been in perfect health – every organ functioning perfectly. His healthy heart had just stopped beating.

I wrote down the victim's name and address and returned everything back in the folder and turned my attention to Hastings. He had watched me intently through my examination of the file, not saying a word, his face revealing nothing although I'm sure I had aroused his curiosity as to my interest in this case.

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

"Something is missing," I finally offered. A smile crossed his face. "I agree. Pray, tell me what we have missed. I'm certain that an apparently healthy twenty-year old dropping dead for no apparent reason would arouse anyone's suspicions. We have had a dozen minds, both medical and police working on this, not that it is such an important case, but the loose ends annoy us. Numerous theories have been brought up, examined and discarded. Yes, there is something missing. Do you have a clue as to what it might be?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to reveal this nebulous idea that had been nibbling at the back of my mind but some inner instinct told me to be silent. Keeping a completely noncommittal look on my face, I replied: "At the moment, I have nothing to add but tell me about your questioning of the victim and your personal feelings regarding her." Hastings studied my face for a moment as if trying to determine why I would ask a question such as this. "It is strange that you should ask. A middle-aged matron, victim of a purse-snatcher would ordinarily be consoled, checked for injuries, questioned and promptly forgotten. She was examined at the emergency room, found to have suffered no injuries and released. The patrolman interviewing her was unable to complete his report at the time because of the woman's hysteria – not unusual at all. He made an appointment for the following day and encountered the same hysteria, and a refusal to discuss the case. My partner and I were subsequently assigned this chore of getting a cohesive statement."

Hastings continued. "The questioning was held in her luxurious 12th floor apartment on Chelsea Place. This impeccably groomed and dressed woman was obviously under great strain. She offered nothing other than the fact that she was present at the scene and that her purse was stolen – no background information – no description of the theft – nothing! This behavior might ordinarily not alert us but for the fact that this lady was a past assistant district attorney, and that she is presently teaching law at the university – very strange behavior indeed."

"It has been a month now. I have racked my brain over this and am still no closer to an answer. The missing element is still missing and I have no clue as to what it is or where to start looking." Hastings paused, waiting for my reaction. I offered nothing but an expressionless face, although inwardly I was churning. Thanking him for his help, I departed the precinct building.

It was too late in the day to accomplish any meaningful work, so I wandered around the city without any apparent destination in mind - my mind was wandering in concert with my feet. Walking until I was exhausted and with sore feet, I arrived at my apartment door. No conclusion concerning the case had been reached and no future action seemed advisable. Not even bothering to cook, I raided the refrigerator for leftovers and when finished eating I headed for the bedroom and threw myself into the sack.

It was an uneasy sleep. I tossed and tossed – no place in the bed seemed comfortable. Finally toward morning I fell into a deep sleep, interrupted by a long forgotten nightmare – a forty-year old nightmare, a nemesis that had plagued me for three years until scrubbed from my

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

conscious mind. It had now surfaced and my life would never be peaceful again until I buried it – not in my subconscious but out of existence.

I dragged myself from bed, more exhausted than the previous evening. Stumbling into the bathroom to relieve myself and then to the kitchen. A pot of coffee was soon perking. Hunched over the coffeemaker, my hands held over the rapidly heating coffee for some warmth, I tried to gather my thoughts – no use. I needed the coffee.

After a seemingly interminable wait, the coffee was brewed and sitting at the table, I deliberately refrained from thought until starting on the second cup. My brain began to entertain a stumbling disjointed series of thought. By the time I reached the bottom of that second cup, my thoughts had coalesced into a working plan. Certain that my nightmare had furnished me with the missing link in this strange case involving the lady professor, it was imperative that I develop some sort of rapport or friendship with her.

Somehow I had to learn everything about this lady. I refused to voice this but knowing deep down that my future peace of mind or possibly even my sanity could rest upon my success in this project.

How do I approach this difficult task? The first step was obvious – visit the university and newspapers and obtain background information. My current employer would have to be notified. If a leave of absence could be managed – fine. If not, I would just quit. I was determined to follow this thing through to some conclusion. The following morning, I presented myself to the university administration office seeking information on Professor Nadine Benjamin. The fall semester was scheduled to start in two months: and, Ms. Benjamin was teaching two of the classes.

Strolling over to the enrollment office, without a great deal of direct questioning, I was able to acquire additional information. Ms. Benjamin would be teaching a course in Law Ethics – yes, she was a fine teacher, one of the best. She had been teaching twelve years at this university and was highly regarded by her peers.

In my earlier years as a detective I had entertained the idea of a law career and had subsequently enrolled at this very law school. Hours of credits were slowly accumulated and in all probability a law degree would have been earned. My promotion to Lieutenant of Detectives had temporarily halted my academic efforts due to the heavy work load of my new position.

When after a long period of adjusting to my new job, I attempted to pick up my studies. It was evident that my ambitions for a career in law had become diluted. I did make numerous efforts to pick up my studies and did pick up a few credits. It soon became evident that I was losing enthusiasm. The credit hours gained were few and far between. Eventually I just gave up.

Enrollment was still open and yes, my credits gained over the years would qualify me for the course in Law Ethics. I filled out all the paperwork necessary for enrolling. After all these years I was ready to start school again.

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

Wandering over to the law school I familiarized myself with the building. As classes were not yet in session, there was very little activity.

The next week was spent acquiring more background information on Ms. Benjamin. Born and raised in New York, she attended the university at which she now taught. A short stint working for a prestigious law firm was followed by five years as an assistant district attorney. At the age of thirty-three, she married Milton Benjamin, a federal judge twenty years her senior. It was an apparently happy marriage which ended with his death four years ago. The picture building in my mind was that of a bright, talented and dedicated woman. Except for a few not so clear newspaper pictures, I still had no idea what she looked like. No hurry – the first day of class would furnish this information.

The day before classes were due to start, I visited the law school and entering the cafeteria acquired my coffee fix for the mid-morning. A smattering of students was present and wandering around the tables, coffee cup in hand, listening to the various conversations I caught the name, Benjamin. I sat down at an adjacent table and unabashedly listened in to the conversation in progress. Several of the young women at the table were enrolled in the same class as I and were gathering information from a previous student of Benjamin.

Most university faculty members acquire nicknames during the course of the year and these names are used freely around campus. The more notorious have nicknames that are passed down from year to year. Benjamin has acquired two names, both used freely by the young women at the next table: “Benjamin the bitch” and “the ice queen”. Ten minutes of eavesdropping indicated to me that the job facing me would be monumental in difficulty. Some of the comments I overheard, “How can her boyfriend stand her.....boyfriend? – even if she had one she would freeze him if he got close.....if he managed a hard-on it would be in all probability freeze solid and break off in her!” Rough talk from young ladies, but if Benjamin was anything like the dragon that the young women had portrayed my intention of becoming friendly with her seemed remote.

The following morning I was at Room 210 twenty minutes early and selected a seat at the front of the class as close as possible to the teacher’s desk. My classmates began trickling in – most selecting seats to the rear of the classroom. At two minutes to nine, Professor Benjamin made her appearance. The image I had built in my mind was that of a middle-age stern matronly female. At her appearance, that image vanished.

My eyes beheld a very tall brunette with a Junoesque shape. Her skirt came to her knees, displaying a beautiful, strong pair of legs. Walking into the room with the regal bearing of a queen or empress, she drew many admiring looks. As she crossed to the front of the classroom she stopped and turned to face the students. I caught my breath as I studied her face.

A rather long pale-complexioned face with a nose that might be considered a bit long by some was surrounded by a wealth of black hair cut just off her shoulders. Her full-lipped mouth was generous with large white teeth with just a hint of overbite. Dark eyes, almost black looked out from under somewhat heavy brows. It was a face that if judged by its separate parts would not be considered especially attractive but col-

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

lectively, formed a harmonic balance that was both unique and hauntingly beautiful.

By any standards, Nadine Benjamin was a beautiful woman. The image of the “ice queen” did not seem to fit her.

She looked us all over and without saying a word proceeded to her desk busying herself with some paperwork. Upon completing this chore, she arose, walked to the center of the room in front of the class and introduced herself, then asking each of us to stand and introduce ourselves and provide a few sentences of background information. Those at the rear began their introductions and each student spoke in turn until only I was left. I slowly uncoiled myself from the slumped position at my too small desk and rose to my feet. Ms. Benjamin was standing very close to the front of my desk and her eyes widened imperceptibly as I stood – not that I am especially handsome, but I am very large – just shy of 6’7” and weighing slightly over 260 pounds – 260 well-proportioned pounds – a genetic gift of my large-boned Polish mother. The face she was viewing was a facsimile of my average sized Irish father. Wavy brown hair starting to gray, bright blue eyes and a rather crooked smile. My ex-wife (in one of her better moods) once described me a “a not too bad looking large object.”

“My name is Stanislaus MacBride – my friends call me Stan. I’m 50 years old and work as an insurance adjuster. I studied law some years ago and due to circumstances failed to finish my studies. The time and inclination are now available, so here I am.”

I dropped back into my seat and Benjamin turned her attention to the class. She began laying out the rules of behavior that she expected. “There will be zero tolerance for absenteeism unless covered by a medical excuse. Any absence not covered will result in a failed grade for that day. All papers are to be typed double-spaced and must be neat. Talking in class will not be tolerated, and if deemed disruptive to the class those guilty will be dismissed from class receiving a failed grade for the day. I’m here to teach – you are here to learn. I’ll do my job to the best of my ability. I expect no less from you.”

This little speech was delivered in a firm, quiet voice, not threatening in any way. The quiet response from the class indicated that the message was received – maybe not welcomed but nonetheless received. This woman’s reputation of being ‘tough’ had obviously preceded her.

Thus began my reentry into the field of law. This teacher was proud to be all that the administration office had promised – always tough but also very fair. She was extremely perceptive to the needs of her students. Although she showed no favoritism, I sensed that I held a slightly special status in her eyes. Whenever there was communication between us my tongue seemed to thicken slightly and my right foot seemed to want to emulate the movements of my left foot. My built-in male radar, however, was picking up pheromones from this seemingly cool lady – an almost imperceptible change in her bathing and a subtle altering in the timbre of her voice when she addressed me. My work as a policeman and my inclination to stand at the perimeter of discussions had made me quite adept

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

at picking up the nuances of a person's speech and their implications. To what degree this interest entailed, I was not sure.

I worked my tail off to achieve good grades. Other than showing politeness and courtesy, I made no special overtures to gain her confidence. My gut feeling told me this lady should not and could not be conned. Although I was reluctant to admit it, I was under her spell and definitely falling in love.

These nightmares of mine were occurring more frequently – at least twice a week. I would awaken trembling, sweating and enervated in the early morning hours, unable to return to sleep. How to get out from under the relentless grip of these nerve-wracking nightmares seemed to be beyond my powers. The thought of consulting a psychiatrist crossed and re-crossed my mind, but I thought, not just yet. My teacher, I was sure, held the solution to my problem.

A week after the semester had started I spotted her in the cafeteria after class having coffee alone at a table. Gathering my courage and willing my two left feet to act in the manner of two normal feet, I approached her table, coffee in hand and asked if I might join her. She hesitated only slightly and then motioned me to sit. The discussion carried on that particular day is rather vague in my memory. My prime objective was to avoid spilling my coffee; to not tip over the condiments, and to keep from making too many stupid statements. In contrast to my inner turmoil and anxiety she seemed to be her usual calm, composed self.

Visiting the cafeteria after class seemed to be her routine. I decided to make it my routine as well. I must have been a not too unacceptable coffee companion because after our next scheduled class I encountered her at her usual table in the company of several students. Upon seeing me, she motioned me over and said, "Please sit down and join in the conversation. We're discussing a legal problem that I'm sure will be of interest to you."

From that point on, it seemed natural to join her at our coffee break after class. At times, there would be others sharing our table and conversation. Most of the time, we were alone. Away from the classroom, I was able to observe this woman in a more relaxed mood – less as a teacher and more as a woman. Others had explained to me that the name 'ice queen' had been attributed to her because of her inability to smile, but this was not so. Nadine Benjamin smiled with her very dark, very expansive eyes. When her eyes began smiling, just the faintest whisper of a smile reached her mouth and then only, fleetingly – easily missed by the unobservant.

As befitting a woman as large as she, her hands and feet were proportionally large. She exhibited great poise and moved her body gracefully and with economy of effort – a little unusual for a woman of her size. Most eyes, both male and female, focused on her when she walked through the crowded cafeteria – a strikingly beautiful woman.

Although not too certain how successful, I tried to keep my conversation on neutral ground. She gave no outward indication that our talks were anything other than teacher-student interactions. There was however an awareness developing that at times was almost palpable. We never

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

spoke of this or inferred that it existed. It lay as an undercurrent, hidden but nonetheless always present. Although her words were noncommittal, her eyes sometimes belied these very words.

I can't ever remember enjoying the company of any woman more than that of Nadine Benjamen. I made no attempt to change the nature of this relationship. The teacher-student status seemed an impregnable barrier and she gave no indication of wanting to breach it. Under any other circumstances, I would have acted in a bolder manner; however, my feelings for her were such that I refused to initiate anything that would endanger that relationship as it now existed.

This status quo held until one bitter cold day, the last day of Christmas vacation. After doing research at the law library until closing time, and while crossing the almost deserted faculty parking lot, I heard the sound of a starter motor weakly cranking away with no accompanying growl of an engine. The wind chill factor must have been close to -40 below, and a light sleet-like snow was driving almost horizontally. What fool other than me would be out on a night like this? I was cold and it was very late but after hesitating only momentarily my cop training took over and I headed toward the sound of the car in trouble. By now, the battery sounded almost dead and, upon approaching the vehicle, I recognized it immediately. It was Nadine Benjamen's classic old Porsche. After knocking on the frosted window several times, it slowly lowered a couple of inches. "It's Stanley MacBride – can I be of some help?" The window was lowered half-way and her face, white and ethereal in the light of the mercury vapor parking lot lamps showed that she was startled at first, and then relieved. "Oh Mr. MacBride, if you can get this machine started, please do." I opened the door and motioned her to push over. Upon closing the door I smelled gasoline and realized that the carburetor was flooded.

Suggesting that we wait a few minutes to let the excess gasoline drain off, I took my first good look at her and realized she was shivering uncontrollably. Amidst her protestations, I removed my down-filled anarak. "Lean forward", I ordered as I pulled the garment over her head and shoulders, imprisoning her arms within the body of the garment. "Lift up", I said, pulling it under her bottom and thighs. It was so large that it reached her ankles. I then tucked it tightly around her to provide as much warmth as possible. I then pulled the hood tightly around her face. The cold was now beginning to creep toward my bones but the thermal underwear, flannel shirt and sweater should help keep it at bay. I could only imagine the flimsies she wore under that imitation fur coat.

"I know that I should have had this old clunker tuned up but I have been putting it off." At these words I did not even try to start the engine, knowing what had to be done and done quickly, I replied: "Stay here, I'll be right back." Exiting the car, I slammed the door shut and sprinted for my old Buick. Keys already in hand, I quickly unlocked the door, slid in, depressed the accelerator pedal and turned the key. The engine fired up immediately as I knew it would. I'm an excellent mechanic and I do my own engine work. This car has never failed to start, even in the bitterest cold.

I whizzed it out of the student lot and drove recklessly to her car, slammed to a stop and leaped from the car. Pulling the door of the

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

Porsche open, I literally dragged her from the seat. She seemed unable to walk so I picked her up and deposited her in the front seat of the Buick. Her apartment was twenty-five minutes away; mine was only five minutes away. I headed for my apartment, probably making the trip in less than four minutes. The car heater never had a chance to warm the car and the interior was still freezing when I pulled up in front of the building. Leaping from the car, I raced around to the passenger side and opened the door. Her legs seemed unable to function, so I lifted her bodily from the car seat and with her in my arms climbed the stoop and unlocked the front door – not an easy job with a 185-pound woman in my arms. I seemed to have the strength of ten as we headed up the stairs to my second floor apartment.

Managing to open the apartment door quickly, I twisted the thermostat just inside to its highest setting. Carrying her to the bedroom, pulling the bedclothes down, I sat her on the edge of the bed. Her feet and stockings were soaked as was the bottom of her shirt. Getting rid of her shoes and being unable to find the tops of her stockings, slid off her skirt and then removed a pair of silky pantyhose. Lifting her to the middle of the bed, I got her head onto the pillow and covered her after removing the anarak which had become damp. Rummaging in the closet, I scrounged up another blanket and an additional quilt which were added to her coverings. Rushing to the kitchen, I turned on the coffee maker, which was filled and ready to go, retrieved my one bottle of brandy, and readied it for adding to the coffee. Checking back in the bedroom, she was resting quietly but still shivering. I placed my heating pad double-wrapped in a towel between her feet. Back to the kitchen to pour the coffee, lace it with brandy and then back to the bedroom. Raising her to a sitting position and checking that the coffee was not too hot, I placed it to her lips and induced her to drink slowly until she had consumed the entire cupful. After placing her head back on the pillow, I rummaged in my bureau and came up with a pair of heavy wool boot socks. Reaching under the covers, I placed them on her still cold feet.

With the heating pad, the wool socks and the quilts, she should be warming up; however, she was still shivering. Reaching under the covers, I encountered a bare thigh, still cold – icy cold. Unhesitatingly, I tore off my clothing, flinging them to the floor, lifted the covers up and slid in beside her. Rolling her onto her left side, I lay against her back, spooning ‘so to speak.’ Being blessed with a great metabolism, I create a great deal of heat. A former bed partner of mine once remarked that having me in her bed was the equivalent of an extra-heavy blanket. Throwing my right arm across her body just below her breasts and clutching her tightly to me, every bit of me was pressed against her. She made no objection to this drastic treatment. Still shivering uncontrollably, her body did not seem to be warming. “Patience, MacBride!” I told myself.

The shivering finally began to subside and warmth began returning to her flesh. Although lust was the farthest thought from my mind when I entered the bed, it now made its appearance as her body began warming. Keep in mind, this beautiful woman was naked from the waist down and I was totally naked, lying tightly against her. My feelings for her were very deep and in spite of enormous mental effort, Priapus began exerting his

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

influence. Surely she could feel that hard object pressing and quivering against her buttocks.

I was in a terrible quandary. Her body was warm now and she was no longer shivering. My presence in the bed was no longer necessary. Should I stay and enjoy this exquisite contact and end up embarrassing us both, or should I remove myself as gracefully as possible? After agonizing over this for some moments, my gallantry exerted itself and I decided to leave the bed. Releasing my tight hold on her waist, I began to remove my arm. She immediately clamped my arm in place with the inside of her right arm. "Stay as you are, MacBride...I'm comfortable if you are...I've never been so cold in my entire life and I've never felt as warm and comfortable as I do now. Please don't move."

These were the first words she had uttered since I had removed her from her Porsche and she added nothing more but continued to hold my arm securely against her body. Lust finally got the upper hand. Although my arm was held securely in place, my hand was free. I began a slow stroking of her stomach, reaching under the bottom of her blouse, encountering bare flesh – a beautiful expanse of flesh as smooth as cream. The tight hold she had on my arm was relinquished and my hand began exploring new areas. It moved upward to her breasts. The nipples were hard and had a pebble-like texture. Her large but not too large, beautiful breasts were so soft, it seemed almost cruel to stroke them with my rough hands.

I began stroking her entire body – her stomach, thighs, buttocks, every part of her that I could reach. Placing my hand on her soft mons veneris I gently inserted a finger in her cleavage. She responded with a moan and a shudder. As my hand was continuing its slow, sensuous way over her body, I was experiencing feelings for this woman that had eluded me during the entire fifty years of my life.

Her breathing had quickened and, being more confident, I slid down slightly in the bed, placed my hand behind her knees and exerted pressure. She obliged by raising her knees toward her chest. Upon reaching between her legs, I found her moist and ready. Her state of excitement seemed equal to mine. As I fumbled around trying to enter her from this position, I became all thumbs and despairing at my ineptness, began to set in. Just before total panic set in, her hand reached across her hip and guided my member directly to its goal. I entered her slowly by degrees until we were fully joined.

Now began the slow dance of two people making love without benefit of words. She responded beautifully to my moves. Words would have been superfluous. She uttered a low moan as a spasm shook her body. With an enormous effort of will I controlled my urge to just let go. My hand was once again under her blouse stroking her breasts. Another spasm shook her, accompanied by a loud cry. Any remaining control vanished and I began climaxing. This triggered another spasm in her. Straining against her, I spent myself totally. Having reached an ethereal plane never before achieved, I slowly came back to earth, remaining pressed tightly against her.

I desperately wanted to express my love for this woman but was not

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

quite sure of how to start so I refrained from speaking. Our breathing slowly returned to normal and still she remained silent.

As anxiety on my part began to set in, she finally spoke. "MacBride, that was beautiful! You're a good lover." She continued. "No! Don't say a word until I've finished and no apologies, please! I've been attracted to you from that first day in class when you smiled that crooked smile. It may be hard to believe but my heart actually gave a little lurch. I can't remember that happening since my teenage years. I experienced difficulty breathing when we talked and at times even became moist between my legs. Call it what you like – lust, chemistry, magnetic attraction, or love at first sight. Whatever it was, it just happened"

She paused, and then said, "Go ahead and tell me that I'm a foolish middle-aged woman who is overly romantic and that these things don't happen at my age. As a 6'3", 185-pound female, I've found it difficult to sexually surrender myself totally to a man. My responses toward you just now were unique for me. Whether it was due to your obvious maturity, your presence of mind, or the sheer bulk of you, I don't know. Although you manfully tried to hide your feelings toward me, they were very obvious. Whatever it was or whatever you did, I was deeply affected."

Collecting my thoughts carefully, I responded: "I've been attracted to you from the moment class started and soon found myself falling in love. I'm sure that I have been in love before; however, other women have not generated the feelings that I have for you. Why am I so attracted to you? Is it your beautiful body, your marvelous mind, your regal presence? I'm not sure. It's probably all that and much more. You have certainly gained my respect as well as love. You are in my thoughts constantly. My job at the insurance company has suffered because you are always intruding. If this behavior on my part is middle-aged foolishness, then I plead guilty also. I've been hesitant about approaching you, not that you intimidate me as a woman but as my teacher you appeared unapproachable."

Minutes passed with no response from her. These long pauses, while contemplating something deeply, were peculiar to her. Finally, her response was to roll over, face me and throw her left leg over my waist.

"Do you think you could possibly give me an encore, MacBride?"

I answered in the affirmative and as she helped me reach the state necessary to repeat the previous performance, she murmured, "Even your smaller parts seem to be king-sized!" I entered her very slowly and we made love face to face. Our love-making was slow and gentle with much tenderness. Touching, nibbling and exploring – it was as if we were trying to make up for the months of denial. We responded beautifully to each other. As I was kissing her, I tasted the salt of her silent tears.

Upon completion of our love-making, I must confess that while holding her tightly, I fell into a deep sleep. It seemed only moments later that I awakened, reached for her and found only an empty bed. I sat up and called for her. Dressed in my old terry cloth robe, she entered the bedroom, bent over me in the bed, bit my ear and kissed me. "Get up, MacBride – class starts in one and one-half hours. Time for a shower and breakfast." She turned and retreated to the kitchen. The Professor was ready to start work.

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

The first day in class after our love-making was a waste. My mind was completely in turmoil and refused to comprehend a single fact. She was cool, collected and very professional. Could this be the same passionate bed-partner of the evening before? Had it been just some lighthearted adventure for her? Had she been honest in her declarations? I felt like and was acting like some school boy. I should have stayed home. Nadine handed out our assignment for the week. My copy had a note: "Dinner at 7:00, #173 Chelsea Place." The world again turned bright.

That night, we ate, made love and talked until late. Talking one-on-one with this exciting woman was as exhilarating as making love to her. Hers was a keen, incisive mind, both logical and emotional, a rare combination in the women of my experience.

Our times together were spent about equally between our two apartments and our classes took up a good deal of our time. She being a lawyer and my studying the law precipitated conversations concerning crime and prevention and punishment. On several occasions, I approached the subject of muggings and purse-snatching but got no response or reaction. This idyllic existence came to an end one March evening at her apartment. It was rather late and I was almost asleep. She was reading under the reading lamp when the phone rang. She answered it and I heard the faint sound of the caller's voice. The receiver being jammed into my chest accompanied by the words, "It's for you, Lieutenant" shocked me awake. With a sinking feeling, I picked it up from my chest and answered, "Stanley MacBride speaking." "Lieutenant", the voice responded, "This is Detective Sergeant Grimes speaking. I have some bad news for you. Your apartment was robbed and trashed earlier this evening. Hastings gave me this number where you might be reached. Hope I haven't disturbed you." While Grimes was rattling off this information, Nadine was glaring at me. Informing him that it was too late to accomplish anything this evening, I would look into the situation in the morning.

Hanging up the receiver, I turned and faced an angry woman. Before I could say a word, she opened up on me. "You bastard! You spying bastard! You hounded me last year – I, the victim was questioned and re-questioned. What are you looking for? Is this the way police work is conducted these days – by crawling into the victims' beds? Get out of my sight! Get out of my bed!" With these words, she doubled up her knees and gave me a vicious kick with her feet in an effort to force me from the bed. I resisted.....turned toward her, grasped her shoulders, saying: "Please, Nadine – listen to me!" Her response was a hard elbow chop to my nose. I felt the crunch as the cartilage gave way under this onslaught. My oft-abused nose was once again leading the way and was paying its usual price. Blood began spewing from my nostrils. This was a wild woman whom I had in my grasp. Throwing my weight atop her, I pleaded with her, "Please Nadine, please listen." She responded with a wicked thrust of her knee toward my groin. This was not the cool, sophisticated Professor Benjamin that I was pleading with. She had metamorphosed into an angry, vicious female who felt betrayed. "Stick with it, MacBride", I told myself. "This tigress will eventually exhaust herself and then hopefully listen to reasoning. Exhausted, she finally gave up struggling and lay quietly under my smothering weight. Raising my head from her shoulder, I was appalled at her appearance – a wild tangle of bloody

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

black hair framing an equally bloody face. Her shoulders, breasts and the bedclothes were also splattered with my blood. I could only imagine what my own face looked like.

She lay quietly now, her face wreathed in this grotesque mask, devoid of any expression. I began, "Sweetheart, please listen. I love you – have loved you from the beginning. Although I was a policeman for many years, I have done no police work for two years and am not involved with the police now. I'm not a police spy. The story of your purse being snatched and the unexplained death of your assailant triggered memories and raised questions that had to be answered. I've been plagued with nightmares since reading that article and felt that you were the one person who might shed light on my problem. Let me tell you of an incident that occurred 40 years ago."

"I was a timid, oversized, slightly clumsy nine-year old with a funny first name. Those attributes drew the attention of the school bully and he made life miserable for me – assignments missing from my desk, a foot surreptitiously tripping me in the classroom, dog turds in my desk, total intimidation. I think you get the idea."

"One morning, while at recess, I found a small leopard frog in the grass by the perimeter fence. After capturing and imprisoning it in my upper hand, I was examining it. That bright golden eye gazing at me from between my fingers is still vivid in my mind. The bully's approach was sudden and startling. He seized my wrist and twisted it cruelly. The frog dropped to the ground and while trying to escape became entangled in the grass. 'Huh', he uttered, 'it's only a frog', as he brought his foot down upon the small, helpless creature – then ground it into the grass."

"I know you have heard the expression, 'a red haze of anger'. It is not just an expression. That haze was obscuring my vision as he started away. My head felt as though it would burst. I wanted him to drop dead and cannot deny it. As my intense hatred was directed at him, he crumpled in his tracks, face down, his legs still going through the motions of running."

My eyes were closed while recollecting this story. I had stopped restraining Nadine and had rolled to my back, snuffling and trying to clear my nostrils which were still dribbling blood. I felt her stir and there her hands were on my face pushing wads of tissue into my nostrils. She then began wiping my face with the damp wipes she kept at her bedside. I opened my eyes and viewed her face close to mine. Gore clotted her hair and her face was a mask. She placed a finger on my lips as I started to speak. "Shhhhh", she said, and continued her ministrations, replacing the wads of tissue in my nostrils. She then left the bed and returned shortly with ice cubes wrapped in a towel which she placed across my nose and eyes. Before my vision was blocked by the towel, I saw that her hair was tied back and most of the blood had been washed from her face and chest. She lay beside me and held me tightly.

It was some time before I began speaking again. "I killed that boy. At first they thought he had fainted – then one of the teachers who had been summoned realized that he was not breathing. Nobody seemed to know what to do and when the school nurse arrived it was too late to do anything. I was hysterical and kept crying that I had killed him. The nurse

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

kept repeating that I had nothing to do with his death – that it was accidental. I became more hysterical and finally was given a sedative. I was placed in the psychiatric ward of our local hospital. Three weeks there and then I was released, spending the next three years under the care of a psychiatrist.”

“At the bully’s memorial service he had somehow evolved into a fine, upstanding youngster, the apple of his mother’s eye and a credit to the community. They even mentioned angels taking him by the hand and leading him to heaven. A more sadistic individual I have never met. If there is a heaven and a hell, then I’ll wager he is burning in hell right now.”

“An autopsy could find no apparent cause for his death. The death was simply listed as heart failure. Eventually, I was able to bury these events deep in my subconscious memory. The newspaper story of your purse-snatching jogged my memory and I began having nightmares. You seemed to be my only salvation.” Leaning over and kissing her eyes, I stroked her temples with my fingertips, thinking that if any good had come out of this, it was my finding this woman.

Again, her long pause. “MacBride, sorry about the nose. It was accidental.” She went on. “Your story is uncanny because it is a carbon copy of my experience. The hysteria and the guilt associated with it are identical. My legal training, however, kept me from blurting any of this to the police. They would not have given it any credibility. They would in all probability considered me a mental case. It has been constantly preying upon my mind. I’ve replayed the scene countless times, always to the same conclusion. I wanted him dead and he obliged me by dropping dead. How can something like this happen? Do we have a strange power that can stop people’s hearts on demand, or is it coincidental that they dropped dead naturally just as we directed anger toward them? It’s an incredible coincidence but maybe it is only a coincidence. I’m afraid to show anger toward anyone.”

I did not feel like any more conversation and, warmed and comforted in her arms, fell asleep in that blood-spattered bed. Even though nothing had been resolved, a great weight had been lifted from my mind. I have never slept more soundly. There were no nightmares. The cartilage in my nose had been manipulated into some semblance of order and stabilized by a Plaster of Paris bandage.

I awoke with a painful, somewhat swollen nose but felt good. Nadine was quiet but seemed to be in good spirits.

I really pride myself on my self-discipline and control. Hers was at least equal to mine. The next day at school, there was no trace of the previous night’s trauma showing. She was her usual alert self – poised and completely tuned to the moods of the students. My love for her knew no bounds. I thought to myself, “How lucky can you get, MacBride?”

Nadine suggested that I move in with her until my apartment was repaired. Salvaging what I could, I made the move. March became history and April was well advanced. A main topic of discussion was the two strange deaths. All my experiences as a policeman were utilized and coupled with Nadine’s sharp analytical legal mind, we attacked the

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

enigma as a team. Every facet was examined and reexamined. Various theories were considered and dismissed. We always arrived at the same quandary. Either we both had extraordinary mental powers, or the deaths were a result of the most far-fetched of coincidences.

We were able to obtain copies of the two autopsy reports. I turned them over to a friend of mine, a retired coroner, probably the best pathologist I have ever known. He could come to no definite conclusion. Dead end!

The time spent living with her gave me the opportunity to better know this wonderful woman. We were both strong-minded and stubborn and it could have presented problems; however, our maturity prevailed. How someone like myself with a mixed Irish-Polish cultural background and Nadine with a Romanian-Jewish background can develop this empathy seems highly unlikely. Although our personalities are certainly dissimilar, there is a commonality in our interests and values.

By choice, I have always been somewhat of a loner. Although showing respect for others, the group of people that I work with and relate to, seem more like acquaintances than friends. 'Best friend' seems to be a term in common usage but I'm not too certain of the exact meaning of the term. It seems to be thrown around quite extravagantly and as a result the term loses some of its power.

I'm always floating around the fringes of any group of friends, always dipping my toes in but never plunging wholeheartedly into the intimacy or camaraderie. It is not snobbishness on my part, because I have a great deal of interest and curiosity concerning others; however, most conversations end up discussing personalities and events – soon becoming boring and tedious, to be avoided if possible.

Almost none of the people of my acquaintance appear to regard their lovers or spouses as their 'best friends.' Their so-called best friends seem to be outside the marriage or relationship. This seemed to be true in my case as well. Although I always respected and loved the women in my life, I never considered them to be my best friends.

It may be that love has clouded my judgment but I sense much deeper currents in this relationship than I have ever encountered previously. Time spent in her company seems to be compressed. The hours slip by like pickets in a fence. None of our days together seem to have enough hours.

Two stray charged particles bouncing around in a sea of 12 million others have finally found, after fifty years of aimless wandering, that particle of the proper polarity.

A requirement expressed by both was that we needed 'space' – time alone. However, it appeared at this period in our relationship that neither of us wished to spend time apart. For my part, I wanted to spend as much time in her company as possible learning more about this unique woman. Although Nadine keeps reiterating that she needs this space also, she makes no effort to gain it. On the contrary, all sorts of excuses are made to keep me close to her. I suspect that she thinks of me as being more than I am. I'll try to live up to this rather than to dissuade her.

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

She has inferred that I am one of the greatest lovers of the Western World. I don't put too much credence in this inference; because, in my extensive research into her background, nothing surfaced to indicate any expertise on her part that would enable her to make such judgments. I myself am aware that I probably don't even belong on the fringes of this exclusive club. I haven't indicated this to her; however, I'm doing my best to live up to this high billing.

Nadine is not without her foibles. Placing jar lids and bottle caps on loosely created a few minor catastrophes for me. Spitting her toothpaste in the sink and omitting to rinse it away disconcerted me at times. The facial bruises I acquired from walking into half-open cabinet doors in a dark kitchen have almost faded. The response to my complaint was, "Just turn on the light and you'll have no problem."

Aside from these idiosyncrasies, she proved to be a beautiful human being - warm, generous, vibrant and perceptive to others' needs. These were just a few of her many attributes.

Although she had never exhibited a sense of humor in the classroom, a subtle sense of humor now became apparent, usually directed at me. While working on some small repair project in the apartment, I might hear something like, "Watch all those thumbs, MacBride. Don't damage any of them." In the process of performing my daily strenuous exercises, she was likely to say, "Go easy on the jumping - this building is only standard construction!" When entering an elevator, she might comment: "Better check the load limit." These comments were always delivered straight-faced with just the barest hint of a smile.

For the past two months, a sensational trial had been taking place in our city. Television and the newspapers were having a field day covering every aspect. It seemed to have caught the attention of everyone in the city. Bobby Leslie, a known molester of children, was being tried for the murder of a seven year-old girl. I had not been following this trial closely; however, Nadine had been keeping abreast of all developments and decided that the final week of the trial would be of interest to me. She was particularly interested in the dynamics of the case - a gruesome murder, a psychopathic pedophile, a lightweight judge, Clarence Burley (Nadine's description), and a brilliant defense lawyer, John Hawkins - known for his intimidation of lightweight judges. She had a gut feeling that there would be some fireworks or the possibility of a mistrial.

As a policeman, I was quite familiar with court procedures. My experiences, however, consisted of the interminable waiting before being called to testify and upon testifying, fending off the efforts of a defense attorney to shake my testimony. The inept efforts of a defense attorney on the over-zealousness of a prosecutor always left me equally disturbed. This was my first experience as a full-time spectator at a murder trial. We sat in the front row of spectators behind the defendant's table.

It was as Nadine had predicted. John Hawkins, both flamboyant and clever, was more than Burley could cope with. Hawkins took and got away with, more liberties than any self-respecting judge would have allowed. He was a master at cross-examination and it was evident that he had done his homework well. His research on each prosecution witness

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

had been done to such a degree that he seemed to have access to their minds. Even the professional witnesses were wary of his questioning and their wariness was evident to the jury.

At the start of this trial, the evidence against Leslie and the eyewitnesses to the crime seemed irrefutable. This guy Hawkins was like a surgeon, probing with his scalpel of a mind. He did his job well by casting doubt or attempting to cast doubt on every bit of the prosecution's evidence.

The prosecution's presentation of their case was well done but Hawkins seemed to have the jury mesmerized and I could see doubt on several faces. After the final summations, this case did not seem as solid due to the obfuscating tactics of the defense, but surely the solid evidence presented against Leslie would result in a guilty verdict.

Wrong! It took two days, but the jury had finally reached a verdict and Nadine and I were present when this verdict was delivered. The jury foreman intoned, "We find the defendant not guilty."

Pandemonium erupted in the courtroom. The parents of the slain girl were on their feet, the mother screaming and the father mouthing loud curses. As the bailiff and the countless guards surrounded Leslie, a swelling roar erupted from the spectators. The judge was banging his gavel and mouthing something - probably ordering the courtroom cleared. The sound of the crowd was ugly and threatening. The prosecutor was on his feet with his staff and they all had shocked looks on their faces - almost sure victory snatched from their grasps.

This complete scene unfolded in a matter of seconds. My gaze then switched to Leslie, still standing, with his lawyer at the defense table. He was smiling. It may have been a smile of relief but it seemed that he was smirking in defiance. In spite of the plethora of evidence against him, this cretin was going to be freed to again prey on children. In my judgment, the evidence against him had been incontrovertible.

A great black rage engulfed me at the sight of this smirking pedophile. I directed a blast of pure anger and hatred, thinking, why should this killer of children live? The smirk disappeared from his face and crumpling to the floor he slid under the table. When he started to crumple, I glanced at Nadine, recoiling at the sight. Her look of pure hatred was directed at Leslie also. As he disappeared under the table, her face cleared - eyes widening, she turned on me with a stricken look. We reached for and held each other as if to keep from drowning in our despair.

Our personal nightmare had returned with a vengeance. Clutching each other and sunk in our despair, we were unaware of our surroundings. Nadine, her face buried in my shoulder, her hands digging into me like talons, sobbed and gasped uncontrollably. We seemed to be isolated in our own time warp. The shouting, milling crowd seemed remote and distant. We were an island of despair in a sea of turmoil.

I finally became aware of somebody tapping my shoulder and a voice saying, "Pardon me, sir but you will have to leave the courtroom." I looked around and realized we were the sole remaining occupants. In a stricken state of mind, we had been unaware of the room being vacated. I nodded, and taking Nadine's arm, started to leave the building - then,

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

hesitating, turned to the bailiff and asked, "Have they removed Leslie's body?" The bailiff looked momentarily confused and then understanding showed on his face. "That S.O.B. isn't dead. He apparently fainted from the shock of hearing the innocent verdict. The doctor placed some smelling salts under his nose and that bastard was on his feet and scuttling out the side door in less than a minute. I wish he had dropped dead. He's probably already planning some more of his dirty work. We haven't heard the last of him."

At these words, sunlight seemed to flood this somber courtroom. Or was it enlightenment and relief that made bright our surroundings? Mixed looks of wonder and relief and joy appeared on Nadine's face. Tears were coursing down her cheeks and she was smiling, the first full smile I had ever seen on her face. This same light must have shown on my own face, for when she looked up at me, her smile broadened.

She took my arm. "Let's go, MacBride. We have much to do. Let's get on with living. We'll do it together."