

**SUMMER CLUB
& the Creatures**
an erotic novel by
James A. Richards

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Published in the United States by

GLB Publishers

P.O. Box 78212, San Francisco, CA 94107

www.GLBpubs.com

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Library of Congress Cataloguing Control Number

2006909853

ISBN 978-1-934203-01-9

1-934293-01-7

First printing March, 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER ONE

'The end has arrived early tonight,' he thought.

Neither the sun nor the moon can be seen. There are no stars. There is very little light.

Hours earlier than usual, the entire world of this nondescript, struggling town has become dark. The buildings are now shadows on shadows. A small, dying city that cannot hide its pain and loss; not in the daylight nor in the dark of wind and rain and thunder.

"Go ahead home," says Mrs. Walters. "With the power out, I have to close the store early. There really isn't anything to do." Nodding, David Barton takes off his apron and pulls on his coat. He looks around the darkened store and through the grocer's large and cracked window. The storm has gotten worse. "Are you sure?" he asks her. Though overweight and insecure, David does have one advantage: at twenty-two, he'll be able to handle a walk home better than a blue haired, anorexic 70 year old woman. "I'll be fine," she insists. "My daughter is coming to pick me up. Go on. I don't pay you pennies to worry about me. Go."

Pausing outside the store, David assesses the world around him. Sheets of rain come pouring down, turning his view into a watery blur. Only the occasional flash of lightening reveals the dreary, old and crumbling buildings of the neighborhood he calls home.

Pulling his coat and hood close to him, David begins his long trek. He passes one battered tenement after another. The wind and rain keep fighting him, as if nature has decreed that David Barton should be forbidden sanctuary. He keeps pushing forward. Nature, laughing at him, pushes back. This battle continues for four more blocks. Finally, David surrenders and huddles into an alcove.

His field of vision is narrow: the world remains a blur of rain and wind. Nevertheless, he can see across the street, in another alcove, a woman. He has seen her before. She is young and tall and lithe and has always greeted him on the street with a smile that seems to read "go ahead and dream kid. That's all you'll ever get." Tonight, this woman is leaning comfortably against a brick wall. Her black hair is sleek with rain. Her T shirt is damp and clinging to her breasts. Jeans are molded to her body. David can't help but stare at this fantasy come to life. She looks over and sees him. The "dream on kid" smile returns to her face.

A man arrives. David has seen him before, too. He is a perfect match for the woman: tall, athletic and confident to the point of cocky. His body, also in simple jeans and wet t shirt, is as finely sculpted as any statue. He also gives David a sort of "go ahead and dream kid" smile. These two beautiful individuals embrace and kiss passionately. David cringes. Here is the type of woman he has always wanted and the type of man he has always wanted to be. The two enter an adjacent door, their destination and purpose obvious.

Nature has stopped laughing and the wind has eased. David walks around the last corner to arrive at home: a century-old Victorian guesthouse that has decayed into a shadow of former grace. Once one of the city's premiere hotels, its ornamental façade is no longer

lit with the soft glow of gas lamps. Now neon shines bright. Some of the windows are held together with tape. The entrance's awning is torn. Some of the facade's decoration has disappeared.

Inside, the hotel's long history and sad condition are almost comforting. After all, this dark and dying place is home. Mr. Reynolds, the owner, is exactly where he was this morning: leaning on the counter, re-reading the day's paper, with little white flakes falling from his balding head. He looks up to give David a slight frown. It's the closest thing to a smile the old man can manage. He hands David his mail with a short grunt.

David glances to his right. Sitting in the lounge are the two "sisters" who share a room on the third floor. Calling themselves "sisters" is their idea of irony. They are not related. One is light skinned, the other dark. Both wear tight clothes over slightly bulging figures. David has never learned their last names. He has never asked and they have never offered. The "sisters" prefer it that way. The dark one, who calls herself Tiffany, insists that their customers enjoy a certain ignorance. It is the best choice in their line of work.

David forms a trail of rainwater as he walks over the worn carpet. Tiffany and Amber (the light one) offer friendly, tired smiles. David nervously smiles back and hurries to the elevator. Inside, he presses his floor and awaits the carriage's standard three jerks before ascending. Reaching the third floor, he quietly turns the corner to his door.

Once inside, David dumps his mail on the table and quickly moves to the bathroom to remove his wet clothes. The bathroom is a tricky place for him. A creature is in here that he prefers to avoid. It's not the family of mice under the sink, or the occasionally leaky toilet. It's a piece of glass permanently affixed to the wall: a cracked but clear mirror. Looking into it means looking at himself. There is nothing David hates more. But the creature is here. It will not go away. Taking off his damp shirt, David's eye catches his reflection. Looking back is a man of 22 with sandy hair, blue eyes and no muscle definition. His arms are mere tubes of flesh and his stomach a pale shelf of gelatin. A young man of no means and no accomplishments. With a sigh, David strips and begins his shower. The shower stall is one of the few things in his efficiency that actually works right. David takes great pleasure in this; many of his neighbors are not so lucky.

Stepping out, David grabs a towel and dries off. The steam has temporarily blinded the creature on the wall. He puts on his bathrobe and returns to his four dingy walls. Around him are piles of books and papers and clothes. A small, black and white TV clings to life on an old fruit crate. A metal dinette table, with two matching chairs, sits next to the kitchenette. A worn, unmade bed dominates the room.

The only window is fairly large and without drapes. When needed, David will hang a sheet over the rod. He hasn't had to do this for months because the apartment across the alley has been vacant.

Until now.

The rain has slowed enough to provide a clear view through the two windows. David looks in surprise: there are boxes and furniture scattered around the other efficiency. No order. The only thing certain in its place is a large, battered brass bed graced with satin sheets. The lights are on, but no one is there.

Suddenly, a door opens (apparently to the bathroom). But it is the person emerging which is the most surprising: it's the woman from the street. *She must have just moved in.* Wearing only a robe and toweling her hair dry, she seems even more a vision. Tossing the towel aside, she turns back to the bathroom door, calling to someone. She then removes her robe. The sight is incredible: her breasts are small, but solid and pointing to the heavens. Her figure narrows to a thin waist, with a small, dark triangle between her legs. She is a fantasy come to life, a dream woman from the ideal world imagined by every young man.

This is the first naked woman David Barton has ever seen.

He keeps staring. She is oblivious to him. As she turns away from the window, he can see her tight, sensual rear. Beneath his own robe, David's penis begins to stir.

The person she has been calling to emerges from the bath.

It is the man David saw her with downstairs. He is wearing only a towel around his small waist. His arms are well muscled; chest broad and stomach are as hard and defined as David's are soft and flabby. He calls the same fantasy world home. This ideal man draws this ideal woman to him for a deep kiss.

The man looks up, and sees David across the alley. He smiles, and directs the woman to see for herself. They both silently laugh. Embarrassed, David begins to move away from the window.

They motion him closer. They want him to watch.

Mesmerized, David pulls up a dinette chair. The man lowers his head to one of the woman's breasts. He licks around the nipple before pulling it into his mouth. Her left hand reaches down and caresses the man's penis, which grows longer and longer. A moment later, he sits her on the bed—still in David's full field of vision—and his head disappears between her legs. The woman's hands play with his wet, tangled hair. His tight, perfect rear is elevated in the air. Her breathing becomes deeper and deeper, those beautiful breasts moving up and down. She looks over and smiles at David.

David's hand moves into his robe. He begins to caress himself there.

The man worships her for an amazing eternity. Eventually, her eyes close and her head is thrown back. Separated by two sets of closed windows, the drizzle and the alley, the woman silently cries out.

Her breathing begins returning to normal, as the man moves up to kiss her. She whispers in his ear, and they switch places. Now the woman is squatting, placing her own perfect rear high in the air as she disappears between his legs. The man closes his eyes, relishing her tongue and mouth. His own sculpted chest heaves. He opens his eyes and looks at David. The man smiles.

Amazed, David remains frozen to his chair. His hand moves up and down.

The man stops the woman. He guides her up to the bed, laying her on her back, her head in David's direction next to their window. Her breasts are pointed at the ceiling. He moves to her, his wet, erect penis sparkling in the light. Taking it into his hand, he places it against her and slowly pushes it in. Once inside, he looks across at David and smiles again.

They rock back and forth with increased speed. The man looks again at David—and gives him a thumbs up.

This is too much for David, who leaps from his chair and throws off his robe. Jumping onto the bed, he again takes himself in hand, envisioning these two beautiful people together, who have been performing for him as much as pleasing themselves. His hand moves up and down, faster and faster. David's heart is pounding, his breathing heavy. His imagination quickly evolves to a new scene: he is the man in the other room with her. David has the muscles, the abs, the cocky confidence. He is the "real man", feverishly making love to this incredible woman. Within seconds, he cums—squirting semen across his chest with an amazing force and hitting him in the chin.

David lays his head against the pillow, to catch his breath and calm down. He grabs a dirty T shirt on the bed to wipe himself dry. Cautiously, he crawls across the bed and over to the window to see what they are doing now. But the rain has picked up again. The world has returned to the watery blur of an hour ago. He can see little more than shadows. He lays back and closes his eyes. Sleep arrives in seconds.

* * * *

The world seems no brighter the next day. The sun has returned, but the decay remains. There is no longer a company in this company town, and every corner mourns the loss. David is standing outside the hotel, enjoying the warm sun and ignoring the battered buildings. When he woke up this morning, a set of green curtains guard his new neighbors across the alley. At first he is disoriented. *Was it real? Did they actually put on that show last night? Was it a joke they were playing, a dream I had, or something completely different?* Only his sticky stomach and stained shirt seemed to confirm the impossible: it really did happen. It takes some time for him to gather himself together. After a quick shower, he heads out, hoping to enjoy the day.

It is Thursday morning, a day off for David. This means an exciting day comprising of a visit to the used bookstore, a trip to McDonald's and a walk home. He does all of this

alone. Everything he does he does by himself. This is a constant in David's life. It began in his days at the orphanage, where the kids kept away from him. He didn't know how to play their games or talk their talk. They considered him strange and teased him when they weren't ignoring him. Later, the group home was even worse. During that time, with his identity struggling and hormones surging, the boys played cruel tricks and the girls laughed at him. Only Mrs. Adelaide, the home's librarian, took a liking to him. A lady who was then in her sixties, she brought him into the magical world of Shakespeare and Milton—and especially Robbins. She tried to steer him to the classics, but even today he often turns to the same type of junk novels she relishes.

Walking the seven long blocks to the bookstore, he tries to remember those few good times with Mrs. Adelaide, rather than the other, more painful, moments. It does not work. Instead, the memory of a particularly bad person creeps into his mind: Carl Spencer. Carl was the home's most athletic and popular guy. He routinely used a sense of humor in any situation. When David first arrived, he was envious of Carl. He took a rare and scary chance of attempting a friendship. But Carl responded by using David as the butt of a variety of pranks and crude jokes. Carl became even more popular. David responded by simply placing everyone else at a distance and staying to himself. Using distance ever since has both protected him and left him very lonely.

David arrives at the corner of Samson and 14th Street. Here is his favorite store, Frank's Used Books. The windows may be dirty and cracked, and the facade covered in decades of soot; but to David, this is the only place where he can truly escape. He often spends hours inside, browsing through the different worlds that exist on each shelf.

Before going inside, David stops to notice the newspaper dispenser on the sidewalk. He rarely buys a paper; as he cares very little about the outside world. Nevertheless, David squats down to take a quick look. Headlines include *Carter Reassess Hostage Crisis*, *Reagan Gains In Polls*, and *New Technology For The 80s*. Nothing seems too interesting to him.

Opening the door, an elderly black gentleman with little hair but a pleasant smile looks up at him. "Mornin', David."

"Morning, Mr. Baur."

"That there was quite a storm last night, huh?"

David begins checking out the "New Arrivals" shelf. "Sure was. When did it let up, do you know?"

"Not exactly. I had a hellava time, though. Kept driftin' in and outa sleep. It's been a-rainin' too much. It's suppose to be summer now, not spring. It bugs me, but my wife ain't got no problems with it."

"Oh?"

“Nope. But knowin’ her, she could sleep through a bomb blast.”

David smiles at that remark. However, none of the books in front of him look at all interesting. “Is this all the new stuff?” “If ya look in the back corner, you’ll find some more stacked on them tables. I’ve been checkin’ them out myself. Some of ’em look pretty good. My daughter’s comin’ in this afternoon, too. She has a pretty good chance at gettin’ in college, ya know.” David walks past several dusty shelves of old and warped books, both hard and soft cover. Some are only a few years old but many were published well before David was born. Overhead, the aging light fixtures give the room an almost surreal glow. At the rear of the store are boxes stacked upon boxes covering the floor and the long folding table. Each is overflowing with aging books. He begins to dig through them, like an archeologist searching for that one special piece—an item he’ll recognize as special only when he spots it.

Within minutes, that special piece surfaces. It’s not the author or the cover that attracts him, but the intriguing and simple title: “The Life Of Anderson.” He opens it to find a handwritten message. It reads, “To Johnny. May your future be as meaningful to you as Anderson’s was to him. Happy Graduation, Grandma.” David’s ultimate test of a book’s quality is its first few sentences. He flips through to the page one:

The cold is his enemy. No matter where he goes or what he tries, the enemy will not go away. It stays with him, like the most vicious of animals, who has taken a bite and will not let go.

With a smile, David takes the book up to Mr. Baur at the counter. “How much is this one?” Baur looks the book over and shrugs. “For you, two bucks.”

“Come on, that’s all?”

“Hey, youz my best customer. Two bucks.”

“Thanks.” David pays him and walks out the door. There, he gets a surprise: Amber is standing next to the newspaper machine. She is wearing tight jeans and an especially tight tank-top. Her bra-less nipples point through the white fabric. She’s seems tired to David. This should be no surprise; usually the “sisters” sleep in until early afternoon. “I dun figured you’d be here.”

“Why?”

“Mr. Reynolds was askin’. Seems somebody’s been lookin’ for ya.”

“For me?” David asks in surprise. “Why me?”

“Dun know. Some guy in a fancy suit. He looks a little like one of ma regulars, some lawyer or accountant or somethin’. It ain’t him, but it sure looks like somebody like that.”

“And he asked for me?”

“Yep. Said straight out, ‘David Barton.’ I know. Ma sister and me was there. Dun surprised all of us. That old bitty Miz Bell was there too. Soz, ya knows it gonna git ’round the buildin’ by tanite.”

“It doesn’t make any sense. Why would anybody want me?”

“Dun know. Did ya do somethin’ wrong? Like, while makin’ extra money?”

“No. I just have my job at the store. Am I in trouble?”

“How should I know? He’s gonna come back soon. That’s whys I come to get ya.”

David nods and the two silently walk back to the hotel. His mind is still puzzling over two basic questions: *who is this man and what does he want? Am I in trouble for something? But what? Did the couple across the street file a complaint for his peeping? Would they do that after putting on their show? If the show really happened, of course. The whole situation frightens David. What could any of this mean?*

As they round a corner, David realizes something. He turns to Amber: “Thanks for coming to get me.” He seldom interacts with other people, so his skills at courtesy and small talk are limited.

“You bet, Sugar,” she replies with a friendly smile.

As the two of them arrive, they discover in the lounge a curious Tiffany, Mr. Reynolds and Mrs. Bell. They are sitting together on a small settee, looking strangely like a trio of gossip vultures eyeing their new and frail prey. David tries a smile, mumbling “Hi”.

Mrs. Bell is a woman in her 80s who looks like a bizarre crossing of Barbara Billingsly and Agnes Moorehead. She manages something close to a sympathetic smile. “Hello, dear. You had a visitor today.”

“That’s...that’s what Amber told me.”

“He says his name is Mr. Packard and that you knew he was coming today.”

“No, I didn’t. I...I don’t know a Mr. Packard.”

Reynolds will have none of this. With a lion-like anger, he growls “What’d you do wrong, boy?”

David tenses, trying not to let the man frighten him. “Nothing, I mean, I don’t know. I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Don’t give me shit, kid,” roars Reynolds, each word hitting like a fist. “What the fuck you do?”

“Will you stop it, old man,” Tiffany intercedes. “It ain’t none of your business no-how.”

“It is if he brings trouble to my building! What the fuck you do, faggot? You sellin’ drugs or somethin’?”

“No! I don’t want what he wants. Just leave me alone, okay?” David quivers in response.

“No, kid, it ain’t okay. You done somethin’ real shitty, and now somebody’s pokin’ his nose around here. He says you know what it’s about. You’re gonna tell me.” “There’s nothing to tell. Nothing...nothing I know about, anyway.”

Reynolds bounces to his feet—and David jumps back in fear. “Like fuck. You’re gonna tell me what this shit’s about.”

Out of the corner of his eye, David sees the elevator doors open. “I don’t know anything. Just leave me alone, okay?” He rushes inside, Reynolds’ booming voice following him as the old man fires away from the lounge. “Fucker, what did you do! You gonna tell me! I don’t want no trouble here, got it, fag!”

The doors close, cutting off Reynolds’ tirade. Tears begin rolling down his cheeks as David presses his floor. The three jerks follow. In seconds, the elevator stops and David runs to his door, fumbles with the keys and slams the door shut behind him. He flips on the light, stumbles across the room, and throws himself face down onto the bed.

Why is this happening? What’s going on? What did I do wrong? His body shivers and the tears roll down his face. *Something scary is happening*, he thinks. *I just know it.* The tears keep flowing. His body continues to shiver. *Why me? Why? What did I do wrong?* The old man’s voice echoes through his head, with the words “fucker” and “fag” repeating themselves. *What did he have to yell at me? It’s not my fault. It can’t be my fault.*

He hears a slight knock on his door. At first he tries to ignore it. *What do they want now?* Whoever it is knocks again. “Go away,” he yells back. “Leave me alone.”

“You left your book,” says Amber’s voice through the door. “I comes to give it to ya. Dun worry, I’m alone.”

Taking a moment to catch his breath, David wipes away the tears with his hand and slowly walks to the door. Opening it, he sees Amber there, with his book in her hand and a concerned look on her face. “You okay?”

“I don’t know,” he whispers.

She hands him his book. “You don’t really know what that guy wants, does ya?”

“No.”

“Well, if ya dun know, than it cain’t be that bad, can it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Look, don’t worry ’bout the old man. He an asshole. Tiffany and me’ll take care of him.”

“Okay. Thanks.” She nods as he slowly closes the door.

A few more tears slowly roll down his cheeks as David leans against the door. The book is in his hand. He takes some deep breaths, calming himself. *Maybe she’s right*, he thinks. *Maybe it’s not as bad as I think. Still, why does this man want me?*

David looks around his room. The bed is damp from his tears, but otherwise the world appears normal. The books are still piled on the floor. The TV is still on the crate. Yesterday’s mail is still on the table. The breakfast dishes are sitting in the sink. The damp shirt remains on the floor next to his bed.

The green drapes are still in place across the alley.

Wiping his face again, David walks over and sits at the table. He glances at each envelope. He receives lots of junk mail from sweepstakes wanting entrants and magazines wanting subscribers. But there is something new on the pile: a letter on the group home’s stationery. The handwriting on the envelope is unmistakably Mrs. Adelaide’s. Curious, he rips it open and finds a scribbled note inside:

Dear David:

I’m sorry, but I haven’t much time. I’ve learned something really important today. Mr. Greenfield doesn’t want me to tell you this, but you have a right to know. If you had your own phone, I’d be calling. I have some big news. They found your family. Or rather, they found you. I don’t know all the details, but apparently it is so big it even has taken Mr. Greenfield by surprise. I do know that the lawyers involved are named Packard and Lakes.

I’m going to corner them before they leave here today and talk to them. Now, don’t be worried. I know this is out of the blue and seems very bizarre and even a little scary. But it seems someone in your family went to a lot of trouble trying to find you. This is a good thing. I know how easy it is for you to get upset. This really is good news. It must mean they love you and want you. Be excited! Call me collect if you need to talk, don’t

worry about the bill. I am so happy for you, David. You should be happy too!

Your Friend, Mrs. Adelaide.

David stares at the letter, reading those two sentences over and over again: *They found your family. Or rather, they found you.* The words amaze him. *They found you.* His family is alive. They have been searching for him. After all these years, they have been searching for him and they have finally found him.

He hears a soft knock. Slowly, letter still in hand, he goes over to the door. "Who is it?" his voice surprisingly calm. "It's me," Tiffany calls through the wood. He opens to find her there, dressed in her standard tight jeans and t shirt. "Amber's takin' care of the old man an I gots a phone call watchin' the desk. That Pickerd or Parker guy is comin' back in half a hour or so. He wants to see ya in the lounge. You okay with that?"

David pauses a moment. "Yeah, I guess."

"You look a little better. Figure out what he want?"

Unsure how to answer, he simply hands her the letter. She glances at it and looks up at him. "Shit! You family!"

"I guess."

"You dun look happy. What're they like?"

"Who?"

"Shit, kid, you family. What're they like?"

"I don't know. I never knew them."

"Maybe they okay then. This lady say it good. Why ain't ya happy?"

"I don't know. I don't know how I feel."

"Well, I gotsta watch the desk. Miz Bell is there now, an' she ain't the best if ya know whats I mean. Come on down with me."

Quietly, he follows her to the elevator. As they descend, David looks at the letter again. *They found your family. Or rather, they found you.* His family. Something he hasn't thought about since he was a young boy. He was always told he had been abandoned at the orphanage door. It has always bothered him, but other kids at the orphanage and home were abandoned. At least he wasn't alone in that. It was one of the few things he had in common with them. *It seems someone in your family went to a lot of trouble trying*

to find you. As David thinks more about it, questions fill his mind: like, why would they go to such trouble to find him? Why would they need to, since he was specifically given to that orphanage? *This is really good news. It means they love you and they want you.* Is it? Who are these people? What are these people like? Why do they want him now? Does he want them? His mind is filled with questions—and fear. *This is a good thing. I know how easy it is for you to get upset.* Is it such a good thing?

“Ya worried, ain’t ya?” Tiffany asks him as they arrive at the main floor. David nods. “It’s so weird.”

“Ya, I guess. But don’ get too bothered. You dun know enough t’ get too worried yet.” The doors open and they walk to the counter. “Yea, I guess.”

Behind the counter, Mrs. Bell gives them another plastic smile. “You guess what, dear? Do you remember what that man wants?”

“It ain’t none a your business, Miz Bell.”

“Oh, then what is, Tiffany? Perhaps what your ‘sister’ and Mr. Reynolds are doing together in the back office?” “No, that ain’t got nothin’ to do with ya, neither.” “Oh?” The plastic smile remains in place.

Tiffany joins her behind the counter. “Yep, it’s just business.”

“And what kind of business is that, dear?”

“It ain’t yours, Miz Bell. Good-bye.”

Still wearing her artificial sweetness, Mrs. Bell nods first at Tiffany, then at David, then walks over to the open elevator doors. Once she is gone, Tiffany sighs, “What a bitch.”

David looks at the letter again. *Mr. Greenfield doesn’t want me to tell you this, but you have a right to know.* This is not surprising. Greenfield has never liked David, and always looks at him in an odd way. *Be excited!* David is anything but excited. “I wonder what my mom is like.”

“Well,” says Tiffany, “if she’s anythin’ like my mamma, you’ll wanna kick her in the ass.” David looks at her in surprise. “Hey, my mamma was a whore, okay? Ain’t no glossin’ over it. Guess you could call it the family trade. But ma point is, your mamma dumped you at a orphanage. Your daddy probably knocked her up real good and dumped her, so she dumped you.”

“Then why do they want me back?”

“Who knows, maybe she found God. My mamma tried that and I didn’t buy it. Ain’t no way God would take time for the likes o-her.”

“I wonder if it’s a brother or a sister.”

“Maybe. ’Course, that wouldn’t be so bad. Maybe your mamma dumped them, too. Who knows? I just thinks it’s real strange that a lawyer is comin’ an’ nobody else.”

“What do you mean?”

Tiffany looks odd, almost as if someone has just pounded her foot, but she’s not allowed to scream. “Look, I ain’t trying to worry ya no more, okay? It ain’t none a my business, but I likes you. You a nice kid. But think about it: if your mamma and daddy are so fired up to find you, why ain’t they here? Why the ambulance chaser? Why they not write you a special letter? Why they not comin’? Why is it this Addie lady is writin’ an’ not them? It all too strange. Somethin’s goin’ down, and I say watch you back.”

Another uncomfortable moment passes, as she falls silent and tries to busy herself at the counter. “Okay”, David says softly. He slowly walks over to the lounge and sits down on a chair in the corner. He eyes keep returning to the letter. *I know this is out of the blue and seems very bizarre and even a little scary.* Bizarre is definitely the right word. Looking at the old Grandfather clock next to the wall, he reflects on the last several hours: the storm, the neighbors across the alley, and now this news. *They found your family. Or rather, they found you.* They found him. But will they like what they see? David certainly doesn’t. He never has. Most people—from Carl and the kids in the home right up to Mr. Reynolds—have always told him in one form or another that he is unacceptable. *What the fuck you do faggot?* Some people do take pity on him. They always have. That’s how Mrs. Adelaide came to his aid, and why Mrs. Walters hired him. *I like you. You a nice kid.* He’s even pitied by hookers. *How low is my worth,* he wonders.

David takes some more deep breaths. He knows that he needs a distraction to calm down. He looks about the room. The lounge has seen little change over the decades: the original woodwork has mostly survived—battered and scratched, but still intact. The drapes are cheap copies of old Victorian’s, something Mrs. Reynolds lucked into before her death. The same goes with much of the furniture, which are cheap laminate replicas of oak antiques. Even the original wallpaper, though poorly patched in many places, still hangs with pride. Through Mr. Reynolds’ stinginess the room has somehow managed to retain a sense of its old elegance.

David’s eyes again fall on the clock. The lawyer will be here soon. *Will he bring my parents? What will they be like? What do I say to them?* He glances over at Tiffany, who is now sitting at the counter and reading a magazine. He thinks about what she said: *Its all too strange. Somethin’s goin’ down and I say watch you back.* Maybe Tiffany has a point. *If they didn’t want me then, why would they want me, now?* Another thought goes through his mind: maybe after they finally see him again, they still won’t want him.

In the near distance, David can hear the main doors open and footsteps toward the counter. He chooses not to look, but he can hear a voice say, "Hello, I'm Mr. Packard. Has Mr. Barton returned?"

"Yep, he's over in the lounge."

"Thank you."

Still scared, David slowly lifts his head. The man walking in is slightly shorter than he, with gray hair and beard. He seems to be much older, perhaps in his sixties. He is dressed in an expensive double-breasted suit and holds a large, leather case. He carries himself with the air of an aristocrat, like the type David has seen in movies and on television. It is almost a surprise that, when the man finally introduces himself, David doesn't hear an English accent.

"Mr. Barton?"

David clamps his hands on the chair's armrests. "Yeah?"

"My name is Philip Packard. I am an attorney with the estate of Mr. Harrison Thorndyke. I presume the name Thorndyke is familiar to you."

"No."

Mr. Packard looks a bit surprised. *Why is that? What does that mean?* Instead of answering, the older man presses on, like a gentleman soldier on parade. "In any event, I hope it is all right that we meet here. I realize that your room would be more private, but I did think we would be more comfortable down here."

David glances over at Tiffany, who is trying not to look like she's listening.

"Unless," says Packard, "you do prefer we go upstairs..."

"No, that's okay."

Mr. Packard sits across from him on the settee. "I understand that there has been some confusion as to why I am here. I was under the impression that a Mrs. Matilda Adelaide was to write you about my visit."

"She did, but I didn't see the letter until today."

"What did she tell you?"

Not certain how to answer, David pauses for a minute, briefly unclamps a hand and shows him the letter. Mr. Packard scans it. "So she was unable to write you with many details."

“No.”

“Were you able to call her?”

“Not yet. I only read this about half an hour ago.”

“I see.” The man takes a moment to collect himself. For the first time, David can see the elegant and confident Mr. Packard actually become uncomfortable. “Well, this does complicate matters. I was under the impression that you would have received more information by now and be ready to leave.”

A shrill of fear ran up David’s spine. “Leave?”

“Yes, leave to take you to your grandfather’s house.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Well, I suppose that would make sense. May I ask, how much do you know about your parents?”

“Nothing. Only that my mother left me at the orphanage about a month after I was born.”

Packard shifts his position on the settee. He is obviously trying to formulate his next sentence. David, however, gathers up his limited courage and interrupts the man’s thoughts: “Where is my mom?”

Packard gives him a sympathetic sigh. “Your mother is dead. She died several years ago.” This is one piece of news David hadn’t expected. *My mother is dead.* He glances over to Tiffany, who responds with a blank stare. “What was her name?”

“Samantha. Samantha Thorndyke.”

“And my Dad?”

“His name was Andrew Barton. I don’t think that he knew about you. He has also died.”

Again, David looks to Tiffany. She looks back in shock: none of this fits the cruel scenario she confidently painted him. *Your mamma dumped you at a orphanage*, she had told him. “Why?” David asks the stranger.

“Why what?”

“Why didn’t my dad know about me?”

“Because your grandmother didn’t tell him.”

“I don’t get it.”

“It was the Fifties,” Mr. Packard explains in a calm, almost fatherly way. “When a young girl became pregnant, it was a scandal. She either married the father and suffered a tarnished reputation or secretly gave up the baby. In your mother’s situation, the family did not want any hint of scandal. So, your father was not told and your mother was sent away to have the baby. Your grandmother arranged the details.”

David takes a moment to absorb this news. It all makes sense. In fact, it fits the very same scenario that put many of the other kids into the orphanage. This commonality is almost comforting. The clamps in his hands loosen a little. Yet, despite this news, he somehow always expected a far more complicated reason for his abandonment. There has never been a specific cause for this feeling; but it has always been there. “Then why was I told that I was anonymously abandoned?”

“Apparently your grandmother wanted to retain a certain...well, a certain sense of control. She also made certain...arrangements concerning what you would be told and whether you were to be adopted and who was to watch over you.”

This news is another painful rap on his weak self esteem. “She never wanted someone to adopt me? She made certain no one would have me?”

“Apparently.”

“I don’t get it. Why wouldn’t she want me to have a home? Why would she have me watched? Who did the watching? How could she force the orphanage to do those things? I don’t understand, did she hate me that much . . .”

“I’m not totally clear on any of this, myself. I certainly don’t think ‘hate’ is the most accurate word. In any event, your grandfather is your only remaining relative. He is very ill. I would imagine that he’ll be able to explain more of all this when we return.”

“Return? Return where?”

“To the family home on the other side of the state.”

“And he didn’t tell you why she did those things?”

“No. It may be that he wants to speak to you personally and privately.”

David leans back in his chair. The clamps tighten again.

“I am sorry,” says Packard. “I realize how difficult and painful this situation is. Nevertheless, I have been instructed to take you back to Mr. Thorndyke.”

David again turns his head in Tiffany's direction. But she is taking extra care to appear busy. "What if I don't want to go?"

"Well, that is a thought which has crossed my mind. However, your grandfather seems to be of the impression that there would be no question."

"I don't get it."

"Perhaps you should try calling Mrs. Adelaide. She may have more information than I can provide. If you'd like to try now, I am willing to wait."

David pauses a moment. Mrs. Adelaide is probably the only person in the world he trusts. She always protects him, always advises him. Even today, he feels that pity has been her key motivation—as it seems with everyone else—but she has always been there. He can always rely on her.

"Okay," David tells Mr. Packard. "I'll try."

"Thank you, sir. Do you need the number?" "No." This is a telephone number he will never forget.

David rises and slowly walks past Mr. Packard and out the threshold of the lounge. Tiffany still has a magazine in front of her face, but he can make out her left eye following him to the pay phones next to the elevator. He dials. The operator answers. David gives her the information for the collect call and waits.

He keeps his eyes to the wall and the phone affixed to it. He doesn't want to look at Tiffany. He doesn't want to look at Packard. He doesn't even want to make this call. David just wants the world to melt away and leave him alone. He is so unprepared for all of this. Until an hour ago, his life was a sad but neat, little package. He always knows where he is when the sun goes down at night. He always knows where he is when it rises again. He knows he always has Thursday off, and that he'll just barely make the rent in time. He always knows he'll be alone, without any true friends or confidants. He may cry at this life, he may hate himself and this life, but at least he knows it. There is comfort in a known misery.

A voice intrudes: "David? It's Mrs. Adelaide."

"Hello."

"Did you get my letter?" Her voice, normally smooth, warm and calm, is now very animated.

"Yes. I read it today."

"Goodness, the mail takes forever these days. Have you heard from the lawyers?"

“One of them is in the lounge now.”

“How are you taking the news?”

David pauses, unsure how to describe his response.

“Oh, David, don’t be frightened.” Her maternal voice returns. “This is the most wonderful moment of your life. I know it’s scary. It’s OK to be scared. But trust me. This is more wonderful than you know.”

His voice quivers, “I don’t understand a lot of what he’s telling me.”

“David, you’ve always been able to trust me before, right?”

“Yes.”

“No matter what it’s been, right? Working in the library, getting that job, even that other boy you tried to make friends with, right?”

The memory of Carl Spencer doesn’t help. “Right.”

“No matter what, no matter how it turned out, I’ve always tried my best for you. Right?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

Her motherly voice raises a pitch.

“You guess?” “You have,” he sighs.

“Okay. Are going to trust me now?”

“Yeah.”

“No matter what I say?”

“Yes.”

“Then promise me this: you’ll go with the lawyer to meet your grandfather.”

“I don’t know . . .”

“Yes, you do.”

“But I don’t know any of these people. He’s asking me to pack up everything and take time off from work just to meet people who never wanted me in the first place. I can’t afford the time off. I don’t know if I want to see them. I don’t know if I can handle that.”

“David, I’ve known you most of your life. As separate as you felt from everyone else, all you kids shared one very special feeling—wondering about your real family. This is your chance to find out about them. It may be your only chance. Take it. Take it now.”

“I don’t know . . .”

“Yes, you do. Take it now. Promise me you’ll go over to that lawyer and tell him yes.”

“But . . .”

“David! Promise me.”

He looks around him, now seeing Amber and Mr. Reynolds standing with Tiffany and Mr. Packard. All are staring at him anxiously. Tiffany, of all people, mouths to him three little words: *Try it. Go.*

Through the phone, he can hear Mrs. Adelaide’s urgent voice. “David? David, will you promise me?”

David’s resistance is as weak as ever. “Yes, ma’am. I’ll go.”