

WATERFALL

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It's a busy downtown street on a Saturday night: the traffic is heavy, fast and noisy, the pedestrians relentless in their need to get somewhere; and the lights change, flash and entice. The pavement tosses the hurried city from one curb to the next, then to the next, and so on.

There is a single human being that stands motionless. You may wonder why he is the only person to stand still. If he had any idea why, he'd tell you.

He is not unnoticed. Most pedestrians look twice as they brush past him, and faces glance momentarily from open car windows. His tuxedo is an unusual sight, and the sleeves and collar are torn, the knees and the back are soiled, and the tie is half-undone. He remains fixed to his small space of pavement, another oddity to the passers-by, with no apparent reason to be there.

Finally, one person speaks to him:

"You thinking of going in? It's okay pal, I've stood here lots of times too, trying to get the nerve to go in."

He turned to face the heavy, middle-aged man that had spoken to him. "Pardon me?"

The heavy man motioned uncomfortably to the building in front of them, an x-rated movie house. Suggestive posters and promises of fantasies fulfilled were stapled to the walls.

"Aren't you planning on going in to see the show?"

He stared vacantly at the girl in the ticket window, feverishly accepting payments and distributing tickets and coin slot tokens.

"I hadn't planned on it," he answered at last.

"Why not?"

The still man opened his mouth but did not have an immediate answer. After some thought, motionless but for the wrinkled brow, he answered slowly. "I don't think I would normally go into a place like that."

“Well excuse the suggestion!” the heavy man tried to sound indignant, and he folded and unfolded his arms nervously. “I didn’t know I was talkin’ to someone so righteous.”

“Oh, I’m not,” he replied, patting the heavy man on the arm. “You should go in and see the show if you want to.”

The heavy man smiled a little and relaxed his arms, pushing his hands into the worn pockets of his old pants. “I kinda like the shows, you know? There’s no harm in that, eh?”

“Everyone should have a hobby ...”

“You think so?”

“Sure,” the still man said to his companion who was turning and shuffling over to the ticket line.

The still man watched until he disappeared through the doors.

“Hey mister.”

The man turned to see a small boy of ten or eleven, his young eyes looking cautiously up and down the street.

“Are you talking to me?”

Yeah, man. Need some blow?”

“Some ... blow?”

“Coke. Nose candy. Need some?”

The still man smiled. “Oh, I understand. No, thankyou, I’m okay.”

“What about grass?” the boy persisted.

“That’s all right.”

“I got hash comin’ in next week. I could meet ya. Couple o’ grams mister?”

“No, really, I don’t need any. Thanks just the same.”

The boy shrugged and moved away, joining up with an older teenager and crossing the street.

The man now moved and followed in their general direction. But he was in no hurry and they quickly were lost in the moving throngs of the sidewalk.

He stopped when he heard music being played. A guitarist sang and played from a large enclave of a bookstore entrance and a crowd had gathered. He was good, bills and coins lay about the walkway around his feet.

He asked for a request. There was a quick response and he played.

The man squeezed against the wall next to two women and he watched the guitarist.

The song ended. A young man on the other side of the crowd made the next request. "Would you play a love song for us?" he asked. "We're on our honeymoon." He beamed at his wife whose face was lit in gratitude and affection.

The still man against the wall gasped. He leaned forward slightly. Several people noticed and looked at him.

"Are you okay?" one of the two women next to him asked.

The love song started and he felt more pain, but he wasn't sure why. He straightened up, only to feel a wave of sorrow at the sight of the honeymooners kissing.

"Oh, it's you," the lady spoke again. "Oh god, I am so sorry about everything. Can I help you?"

Ne looked at her bewildered. "I can't." he managed to say. "Thank you though, but I can't. I ... I don't know..."

He stumbled from the crowd and leaned on a mailbox at the edge of the sidewalk. He then stepped away quickly and directly into the path of a roller-skater carrying a pizza. All went down in a heap, and the pizza fell into the street and was run over by the next passing car.

"Nice move. Really nice," the roller-skater muttered., standing up and looking for injuries.

"I'm sorry, it's my fault. Let me pay for that," he said quickly and he reached for a wallet that wasn't there. "I ... I have no money."

"Forget it," the roller-skater said, still brushing off his scratched knees. "Yeah, forget it, I'm late.: He turned and skated away.

The man went back to the safety of the mailbox. He remembered being desperately upset a few minutes ago, but he couldn't recall what the reason was.

He scanned the sidewalk for answer, the storefronts, but all was dark and confusing. He searched the other side. Still he saw no reason for the pain he felt. Then he caught sight of a formal clothing store. Next to the store name was a picture of a bride and groom. The pain came back.

He walked toward the store; his eyes fixed on the sign. He stepped into the street. Tires squealed as four lanes of cars tried to stop or otherwise avoid him. In the last lane was a cab who came so close that the fender of the car actually touched the man's knees.

"You idiot!" the cabbie shouted as he jumped from his vehicle. "I almost ..."

The cabbie stopped yelling when he faced the man. The cabbie looked shocked. He looked sad.

"Jonas!" the cabbie gasped. "What are you doing here? Oh, it's awful what happened. I'm so sorry."

"It's all right," Jonas answered though he hadn't a clue what the cabbie was sorry about. He just felt a fear, a terrible distress.

"I'll give you a life, Jonas. Hop in."

"I can't," he answered quickly, confused.

"I have to help you. Let me," the cabbie insisted.

Jonas backed away slowly at first, then ran as fast as he could down a side street, his tuxedo tails flapping crazily, like wings of a frightened bird trying to escape. He kept going for several blocks before stopping at a park bench. He sat down.

He couldn't remember what he was running from. He didn't know if he was supposed to be there or not, or somewhere else. It didn't seem to matter. The distress he had felt had been used up as energy as he ran from the cabbie. Now he felt nothing. He watched the still trees in the little park and felt better.

He fell asleep on the park bench.

The sun was glimmering just over a horizon of city buildings, and a hand touched him gently on the shoulder. Jonas opened his eyes. A policeman leaned over him.

"We've been looking for you Jonas," he said.

Jonas swung his legs from the park bench abruptly and stood up. He faced the cop, who had a very sad, very sympathetic look about him.

"Oh, no," Jonas whispered, and he bolted across the park grass as suddenly as he had stood. He could hear the cop call after him, but the voice trailed away as he went around the first corner. He darted between two narrow buildings and sprinted down the sidewalk of the street he'd been on the night before. It was almost deserted now, so early on a Sunday morning. The few pedestrians stepped out of the way of the fleeing man in the tuxedo, and they could hear him mouthing panicked sounds as he ran past. The look on his face varied from wild fright to squinting in anguish, and he wept. He didn't need to see, he knew now where he was going.

He turned a corner where he knew he must, and his legs kicking and his arms flailing, ran to the next corner, turning it as fast as his legs would take him.

He saw the church. Tears fully burst from where they had been welling. His legs slowed to a half-motion, suddenly feeling tired. With a renewed energy he sprinted again for a few yards, then slowed again, as though his body may collapse. He stopped where the walkway from the church front door met the sidewalk.

His sobs became heavier and uncontrollable. He walked heavily to the doorstep and fell onto his knees. The ringing of the sudden gun shots came back to his ears, and he felt the twist of her pain, the woman in his arms. He caressed the stains on the asphalt. He curled up on the ground and rocked himself and cried and cried.

"Sit down here Jonas."

"Thanks."

The nurse helped him into his chair in a doctor's office at the hospital.

"Can you tell me anything?" Jonas suddenly asked, looking up at her.

"Dr. Stephenson is on his way. He'll explain everything."

She sat next to Jonas, and she held his hand in hers, stroking his fingers softly. He scarcely noticed. His eyes studied the undone laces of his shoes.

The door opened and the doctor came in. quietly the nurse rose and left them alone. The doctor swung a chair closer and sat down. He was much older than Jonas, a thin man, not very tall, and white, white hair. His face was soft with concern.

"Jonas, my name is Harold Stephenson. I'm the doctor caring for your wife.

Jonas looked up from the floor, his eyes cautiously pleading.

The doctor shook his head. "I'm very sorry Jonas. She is still alive but barely. There is considerable damage and we don't think we can keep her with us for very long." He paused and his gentle voice came closer to a whisper. "There are some decisions to make. Her family are with her, but you should help."

"Kate's going to die?"

"Yes," the doctor whispered, and his voice cracked. More assertively he repeated: "Yes."

Jonas showed no obvious reaction to Dr Stephenson's answer. He sat still, no lines visible in the expression of his pale face.

Dr. Stephenson leaned closer. "Is there anything you want?"

"... I want?" Jonas echoed, his eyes vacant and he did not seem to comprehend what was being asked of him.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"I don't think so," was the subdued reply.

"Maybe I should sleep some more," Jonas wondered out loud.

"Would that help?"

"Oh, I think it would," Jonas assured him, closing his eyes right away and trying to sink into the leather chair more comfortably.

Dr. Stephenson left when it was clear he was asleep.

Jonas woke up and looked around. No one was with him. The office did not breathe with him, he felt no comfort in the leather chair cradling his shoulders and ribs.

He stumbled across the room and bumped through the door and into the hallway.

The walls were white. The floor was white. The ceiling was white. A passing orderly glanced at him from under white skin.

Jonas hurried around a corner, bumping into a white nurse. He fell, she didn't, and he ignored her offer of help, scrambling down the next white hall that confronted him.

His vision failed him. He could see only white. He stumbled faster and faster in search of colour of any kind, a distinguishing contrast that he could find assuring or recognizable.

When he felt a burst of air, he assumed he'd found his way outside, but he couldn't see anything but bright, bright white sunlight.

The next time he woke up, Dr. Stephenson was in his office a few feet away.

"Do you feel better?" Dr. Stephenson asked.

"I'm not sure. I don't feel as tired anymore."

"I'm glad."

"I need to see her."

"Yes."

"And the family. I'm not helping. I don't know what happened."

"They understand." Dr. Stephenson leaned forward. "You've had a shock, an unimaginable shock. I could give you a lengthy medical explanation of what has happened, but I don't think you need that now. You need to see your wife but considering this shock, and the fact that you've only just woke up as well, let's take a few more minutes here before we go. Is that all right?"

Jonas nodded and folded his hands. "So, what do I do now? What is the next step in something like this?"

"It's really up to you. Let me fill you in on some of the details so you'll know how things stand. First, your brother-in-law ... Matt?"

Jonas nodded again. "Matt."

"He's making the arrangements for you and the family. You can see them shortly. Second, there's a police detective who needs to talk to you, you'll need to give a statement. He has pictures so you can identify the gunman, and he's bound to upset you simply by the nature of his questions. I told them nobody talks to you until I say, so you let me know when you're ready."

"Did they catch him?"

The doctor hesitated but he could see Jonas wanted to know. He had planned to be forthright but was worried about some of the things that were bound to be discussed. "Yes," he said. "Almost right away. Your friends, some of the police who had been invited too, they chased him down."

"He's in jail?" Jonas asked.

Dr. Stephenson paused again, he expected this topic but wasn't thinking it would come up so soon. For the first time he failed to meet Jonas' eye as he spoke to him. "Actually, there was a bit of a shoot-out."

Jonas could sense some bitterness in the old doctor's voice. "Meaning?"

"Only he was shot, twice in the leg and once in the back, and banged up pretty good. It shattered some bones and he will be in hospital for a while.

It was not a difficult story for the doctor to recount, and in the pause that followed Jonas wondered what was the cruel secret that seemed to underly the doctor's voice. Then it dawned on him.

"He's in this hospital, isn't he?"

"... he is ... it was the closest for him too."

Jonas laughed wryly and stood up. He gazed out the window, shaking his head, but he made no further comment.

Instead he asked another question. "Are you married?"

"I was. I'm a widower."

Jonas looked back from the window to the doctor. "How long ago?"

"Just last year. We were together almost forty years."

Without expression, Jonas' eyes moved to a painting on the wall beside the doctor's desk, where the doctor was sitting. It was of a small waterfall, and it pictured a young couple picnicking on the grass beside the calm water just down-river from the waterfall.

"Nausett Falls?"

"That's right. Have you been there?" Dr. Stephenson questioned.

"Oh, I've been there. We've been there. Many times. Not many people know about it or want to make the drive. We picnic, and swim." Jonas moved closer to the painting, gently touched one side of the frame. "I like how the water never really gets very warm there, even in July, from all those streams coming from the hills. There is something very cleansing about the feel of the cold current running around you. Afterward we'd warm up by lying in the sun, like these folks are, here in the painting. We'd lie there and tell each other secrets, things we would never tell anyone else. Our words were always hushed just enough by sounds of the falls, the spray and the rush over the rocks. We knew no one else could hear our secrets, just us." Both of his hands were now on the frame, as though Jonas was sizing the picture to see if he could step in.

"It was our favourite spot too," Dr. Stephenson said in a distant and wistful tone. He was turned around enough to be studying the painting as well.

Jonas looked back at the doctor. "I'm sorry you lost your wife," he said softly.

They moved for the door at the same time. Dr. Stephenson walked with Jonas through the corridor to an elevator, they went down a couple of floors, then down another hallway. Dr. Stephenson kept to the

pace Jonas set: slow, afraid, unknowing. They reached the room where Jonas' wife lay, her family around her. They came to him, he tried to apologize for being absent, they hugged him harder.

Leaving Jonas with the family, Dr. Stephenson was paged and asked to take a phone call.

"Yes," he said on the phone. "I'd like to be there."

A few minutes later Dr. Stephenson had met with another doctor at the doorway to the gunman's room.

"I'll do all the talking, you just watch and give me your thoughts afterward. This is only a preliminary interview, I thought you might like to hear what he has to say, and I could use the extra feedback when I do my notes for the report. There will be police there in there too."

Dr. Stephenson nodded that he agreed with his associate, a Dr. Tremini, a psychologist on staff at the hospital.

They went into the room. Two policemen stood at the door.

The prisoner, the gunman, was handcuffed to his hospital bed. His left leg was in a large cast. A moveable table was half pushed from his bed, the food tray upside down on the floor, the food strewn across the room in the direction of another policeman who sat by a window. Mashed potatoes and gravy dripped from the venetian blinds.

"So, you're Michael Smith," the psychologist started, standing at the foot of the bed, Dr. Stephenson beside him.

Smith casually turned his head to look at them. He was a young man, cheerful looking and handsome. He grinned. "Who are you?"

"Dr. Tremini."

"Who's he?" Smith nodded at Dr. Stephenson.

"Another doctor. Let me set the parameters of our discussion. I'll be asking all questions. You'll address your answers to me."

"Oh," Smith grinned wider. "You're not a 'doctor' doctor. You're a head doctor. I've been expecting you. Well that's okay, I'll tell you what you want to know so long as you say please. We must remain civilized."

Tremini paused to look at his clipboard.

The cop spoke. "he's waived his right to a lawyer. It doesn't matter what you ask him."

"Please," Tremini looked sharply at the officer. "I will structure the course of this interview."

"Come on, doc," Smith sneered. "This isn't a game show. Ask me what you really want to know. Don't you want to know why I did it?"

"I'll get to that. First, I want to know what your studies were at university. And what did you do in your spare time."

“Seriously? Come on, doc, that’s boring.” He laughed. “All right, I stayed in my dorm all day and all night reading mercenary magazines. I play violent video games. Weapons. Killing. What do you want?”

“What did you do with your friends? Do you have friends?”

“Friends? Oh, I have lots of friends. They’re all militant like me. They’re busting me out any minute. I told them: ‘wait for the shrink to come in, then bust me out’. I told them to be sure and off the shrinks. I told them to cut your balls off.” Smith laughed for a second, then stopping, motioned his finger at them to come closer. “Ask me why I did it, doc. That’s what matters.”

“I want more background on you first. If you don’t want to cooperate, someone else can question you. Or perhaps the assessment will be postponed, and no one will be coming around to ask you anything.”

“No,” Smith said quickly. “Okay, I have friends, we do stuff.” He grinned again. “We kill all day long on our games.” He looked directly at Dr. Stephenson as he spoke, noting the anger in the old man’s eyes and the sweat dotting his forehead and lip.

“You don’t live in a dorm. You live at home with your mother and father.”

“Very good,” Smith struggled to clap with his handcuffs on. “You’re better at doing your homework than me. Oh! I know! You’re leading into the part about my childhood now. Well, that’s *really* interesting. I hate my dad. I’m going to kill him next. But I love my mom. I really love her if you know what I mean. I’ll have to off her too, but not right away.”

“Is that how you really feel?”

“Yeah, it really is. I’m nuts. I shot a chick on her wedding day. That’s nuts, doc, take it from me. I hate authority. I hear voices. I’m Jesus Christ. Got the picture? It’s what I want.”

“what else do you want, Mr. Smith?”

“I want to rip your guts out of your chest!” Smith thrust forward, pulling his handcuffs to their limit, his face turning nasty, and suddenly shouting. “I want to suck your brains out through your nose! I want you dead!!”

There was a pause as Tremini jotted on his clipboard, ignoring the gunman. Smith glared at him, then at Dr. Stephenson. With his good leg he kicked the table further from the bed. “I want you to ask me why I did it!!” he screamed.

Dr. Tremini still wrote, he didn’t look up. Dr. Stephenson spoke instead.

“Why’d you do it?” he asked in a quiet, tense voice.

Both Smith and Tremini looked at him in surprise.

“Why’d you do it?” he asked again.

Smith lowered his brow and angrily strained at the handcuffs. “You’d like to know, wouldn’t you, old man?” he growled. “Well I offed her, that’s all that matters. She was happy, so I offed her! He was happy, I’d have offed him too! Why’d I do it, old man?!” he shouted louder and louder. “I’m gonna get you! I’m gonna kill you! I don’t need a reason!”

The two doctors left the room.

"You shouldn't have said anything. I was positioning him to tell us."

"I know," Dr. Stephenson sighed. "But what do you do with someone like that?"

Tremeni looked at his associate evenly and he coldly told him what he'd like to do. "If I had nothing to lose, I wouldn't hesitate to kill him. I'd slit his throat in a moment."

"Jonas?"

"Yes?"

"Telephone call for you. We have a private room behind the nursing station if you'd like."

"I would."

He followed the nurse to a small room with a table, a few chairs, and a chalkboard.

"Just a minute and I'll transfer it," she said before closing the door behind her.

The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hello son."

His shoulders relaxed and Jonas rested his head on his free hand. "Dad! I'm really glad to hear from you."

"I don't know what to say, son," his father's voice came slowly, filled with affection. "I'm awfully sorry for what you have to endure. I'm thinking of you, thinking of you all the time."

"Thanks dad. I'll tell you though, this is so much tougher than I could have ever imagined ... and I can't have imagined this, not ever."

"I wish I was there. Maybe if ..."

"No, dad. You can't travel and I don't want you even considering it. We had this conversation about you travelling for the wedding and it's the same. You need to take care of your health. I'll visit you soon, like we would have together."

"Okay. I just wish I could be there. You must be very alone."

"I am. Hearing from you helps."

There was a short pause.

Jonas' father spoke next. "What is the medical opinion? Is there anything they can do?"

Jonas clenched his jaw; he knew he was losing control of the outward calm. His speech was weak, it strained with the sobbing that now overtook him. "There isn't any hope, dad. I'm just waiting."

"I wish I could reach out and put my arm around you. Its been so long since I lost your mother, and I know the circumstances are different, but I know how you feel. It's tough. It always will be. I wish I could comfort you." He cleared his throat. "You hang in there. Look for someone to lean on ... talk to anyone, don't try to take all of the hurt on by yourself."

"I'll try," Jonas said as he wept. He waited a moment before adding: "He's here too."

"Who is? Who's there?"

"The guy that did it."

"What do you mean he's there? Why would they take him there?"

"I don't know ... he was shot in the back or something as he was arrested. I don't know why they brought him here."

"Is he going to die?"

Jonas didn't answer. His father prompted him again. "Jonas, what condition is he in?"

"The wound is not life threatening."

This time there was a very long pause. Jonas was short of breath and wheezed as he cried into the phone. The wheezing was short, rapid and getting louder.

"You stay away from him, Jonas," his father said with a steady voice.

"He didn't have any reason, dad!" Inside Jonas had raised his voice a lot, but emotion smothered most of the outcry; only his father could hear the force of his words. "They talked to him, and he doesn't care, he didn't know her or me, he just felt like it and he is so indifferent! What do I do?! What do I go home to now? And I know what he is, what he thinks of this, and how can I go home, what do I go home to?"

"Just stay away from him."

"I don't know, dad. I couldn't see this coming and I don't know what to do now."

"Go see a friend," his father urged. "Just impose on someone because you know they won't mind. I wouldn't mind, and you wouldn't, so do it while you can still come to terms with this."

Jonas held the receiver with two hands against his face and slowly he brought the sobbing under control.

"Do it Jonas."

"I'll try, dad ... it was good of you to call."

"You have to go?"

"Yeah, I should. Like you say, I have to get a grip, and hearing from you tears me up more. But I'll call you again, or you call me."

"Okay son, take care."

“Bye dad.”

The line clicked and the dial tone replaced it. As it became longer, Jonas clenched the phone receiver harder and his weeping increased. He didn't hear the recording at first, but then he heard the voice say 'please hang up, this is a recording', and he smashed the receiver on the table, splitting it into fragments.

“Why should he get to live!” he screamed. He pulled the phone away from the wall, snapping the cable.

“I need to do something! Something!” He threw the phone against the chalkboard, cracking both.

Dr. Stephenson came into the room. Jonas, not seeing him, lifted a chair over his head. Making no attempt to stop him, the doctor watched him smash the chair into the table, snapping off one leg and bending the others. The chair bounced back, its momentum causing Jonas to stumble into the doctor.

Jonas appeared surprised. “Why should he live?” His voice was calmer, but he looked beaten. “What right does he have and what are mine? I should do something this time.”

Dr. Stephenson only put his arm around Jonas, he didn't say anything. They walked out of the room without speaking.

A nurse slipped in after them and quietly picked up the broken pieces of furniture.

Dr. Stephenson sat at his desk. He turned his chair to face Jonas, who was beside the painting of the waterfall. Jonas looked lazily at the oil colours that swept the blue of the sky, the green of the grass and leaves, the white of the spraying water.

“It's a place I won't ever forget, but I can't ever go there again. What would I do? Who would tell me their secrets?”

“Maybe I'd hear some of hers repeated in the water, I don't know. It heard everyone with me. Kate told me what frightened her. She told me what she wanted to do on her sixty-fifth birthday, and she thought it was silly, but I promised her it would happen. I told her where I wanted to spend our first anniversary, and she promised to go there with me. We talked of our deepest emotions for each other, even when they were unusual or confusing.

“I'm the only one who knows these things ... me and the waterfall. We know her secrets. And she knows ours.

I can't fathom a simpler happiness than those moments with Kate. I was so complete when we stood at the church, hand-in-hand.

“I never saw the drop coming ... but suddenly the river fell over from under me”

Jonas turned to face Dr. Stephenson. His expression was calm and simple, it did not convey any emotion left or right of centre.

“I love this waterfall. It's been a good friend.”

“I can tell.”

“It’s not its fault, you know. I know it’s not to blame.”

Dr. Stephenson waved Jonas over from the rest of the family outside of his wife’s room.

“How is everyone doing?”

“Holding up. Kate’s mom and dad are finding things very hard. But each of us have had access to counsellors.”

“Good. Let me know if there’s anything else I can do.”

“Could I rest in your office occasionally?”

“Of course. I’ll get an extra key right away. We can chat there some more if you like, or just spend time on your own.”

“That will help.” Jonas smiled.

As Dr. Stephenson turned away Jonas spoke again, a hesitant tone in his voice. “Dr. Tremini ...”

Dr. Stephenson nodded. “He’s good.”

“Didn’t he see the guy, Smith?” Jonas asked, haltingly once again. Dr. Stephenson studied the look in his eyes for a few seconds, glanced to his clenching fists.

“It doesn’t matter Jonas.”

“He did see him, didn’t he?”

“Yes. We both did. He’s nothing. Don’t waste anything on him.”

Jonas’ eyes were glazed over, and he didn’t seem to hear the doctor. “He really didn’t have a reason, did he? You should have a reason to kill someone.” He paused and looked at Dr. Stephenson with eyes more piercing than his soft eyes would normally look, and a sternness in the lines on his face, the tense cheeks that were not his custom. “I have more of a reason to kill than he did.”

“Jonas ...”

“I do, don’t I?”

“It’s not in you. This city knows you for something else entirely.”

“I don’t know anymore. Maybe it’s in me now.”

Their eyes were fixed on each other, neither would give away the look they exchanged, the will to deal with the tragic.

“His life is already over; it holds nothing for him. And you, you are hurting badly, but there’s a lot of life left in you. The good parts of life.”

“Maybe.” That was all Jonas could say.

“He’ll be gone tomorrow anyway, they ---”

“Tomorrow?” Jonas interrupted.

“Yes, they move him to a cell downtown. He won’t be hurting you in the same way. I’m sorry he was ever here; it’s been that much harder.”

“That’ll be two hundred for that one.”

Jonas could hear the man’s voice, but he concentrated on the metal in his hand, the barrel that pointed wherever he wanted, the trigger so light.

“It’ll do the trick. It’s not the biggest I got, but it’ll put a decent hole in a burglar.”

“Bullets?” Jonas queried, turning his attention to the proprietor.

“How many?”

“Um ... small. The fewest in a box you have I guess.”

The man crouched and fumbled with some boxes in the display case. Jonas unconsciously touched the wig he had on, licked his false moustache, blinked from behind the sunglasses.

A small box was placed on the counter in front of him.

“That enough?”

“Sure.”

“That’s two-twenty, plus tax. You want it?”

“I do.”

“Okay, I’ll register you for it and we can ring it up.”

The man behind the counter was about to start the paperwork but paused when Jonas pulled a large handful of \$100 bills from his pocket. He counted ten and pushed them across the counter, taking the gun and bullets.

“Say they were stolen,” Jonas instructed vacantly.

Jonas sat in a chair facing the elevator.

His hand was thrust in the pocket of his overcoat, his fingers nervously clutching the handgun, its metal sliding from his perspiration. He had not slept the night before, but he was anything but drowsy.

“Jonas!”

The voice was so without warning that Jonas jumped. He almost fell out of the chair. He almost shot himself in the leg.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“Dr. Stephenson!” Jonas gasped, but recovered. “No, that’s all right.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Oh ... I’m just resting. I just needed to get away from the crowds.”

“But here?”

“You know,” Jonas muttered awkwardly.

“Sure,” the doctor was smiling, and he studied the nervous man in the chair, the eyes that were reluctant to meet his, the one hand in the pocket of his coat.

“Well, I don’t want to disturb you if you came here for a little peace and quiet,” Dr. Stephenson said again. “Why don’t you stop by my office in a little while. I’d like to chat.”

“Okay ... I will.”

Dr. Stephenson began walking away, but he stopped and walked back. “I’m getting pretty old, Jonas. I think I’ll retire next month. I’ll be looking for things to do, I don’t even have any grandchildren to spoil. Maybe we can talk about what I can do in my retirement.”

“Sure. I’ll stop by soon.” Jonas responded, happy to be left alone.

The doctor stepped into the elevator and was gone.

Jonas looked at his watch. It was five minutes past the time that Smith was supposed to be moved. He stood not far from the elevator. He made note of the policeman also waiting.

Jonas’ hand was on the gun and his finger on the trigger. His mind was set on the matter at hand.

Two orderlies lifted Michael Smith from his bed and into a wheelchair. The taller orderly rested his casted leg on the footrest. The leg slipped the last inch before falling to the footrest.

“Idiot! Does it look healed to you?” Smith snapped at the orderly.

The orderly didn’t answer him, didn’t even look at him.

“Never mind,” Smith said, suddenly friendly. “It’s just your job, I know.”

The door opened and a policeman came into the room. He unlocked the handcuffs that held Smith’s right wrist to the bed, and re-cuffed it to the wheelchair.

A nurse came in next, and she and the policeman began to talk.

“Take him down,” the policeman said to the orderlies, turning away from the nurse momentarily.

“Someone will meet you in the lobby.”

The shorter orderly pushed the wheelchair into the hall, the tall orderly beside him. They began to walk down the hall to the elevator.

The tall orderly and the shorter orderly were silent, sluffing casually along the corridor. Smith also said nothing, but he smiled and winked at hospital staff who happened to be in the hall, and had stopped to look disapprovingly at him once last time.

The trio stopped at the elevators. The shorter orderly pressed the down button. All three looked absently at the closed white elevator doors in front of them.

Slowly he stepped from the shadow of the doorway nearest to the elevators, into the white hall. Smith and the orderlies were stopped thirty feet away. He began to approach them, his steps slow and light. An evening hat was pulled low over his forehead, and his head was lowered so that it could not see them, only watch his steps. He held a newspaper over his right hand.

The shorter orderly pressed the down button again, though it was lit, apparently believing that that would help an elevator arrive more quickly. The tall orderly glanced down the hallway, then back to the closed, white elevator doors. Smith dug dirt from beneath his fingernails, scratched the skin of his wrist below the handcuffs.

He was fifteen feet away. He raised his head so that his line of sight under the hat would include the shorter orderly, the tall orderly, and Smith. His right index finger pressed more firmly against the metal appendage it rested on, below the newspaper.

The elevator doors began to open. A nurse glanced out from inside, and realizing they meant to get in, she stood to one side, holding the 'open door' button. The tall orderly put his hand against the elevator door. The shorter orderly swivelled the wheelchair sideways, intending on backing Smith in, but inadvertently turning Smith to face the man who's approached them and stopped, just two feet away from them.

Smith slowly looked up at the man in front of him. He saw the end of the newspaper face him, and the hollow tube protruding from it. He heard the first blast.

The first bullet entered Smith just below the neck, shattering his collarbone and ripping the loose flesh surrounding it, spraying the red debris across Smith's chin. The force of it knocked Smith backward and sideways in his wheelchair, and they began to tip into the elevator.

The nurse started to scream.

The second bullet hit Smith in his upper left arm as he fell, exploding the flesh and blood over the white uniform of the shorter orderly, standing behind Smith's arm.

The tall orderly began to look behind him for the source of the shots.

The third bullet missed Smith high as he fell, lodging in the open elevator door. The fourth missed low just before he hit the floor; it ricocheted off the metal plate of where the doors met and stopped in the wall at the back of the elevator.

The shorter orderly looked in horror at the blood, pieces of flesh, and pieces of clothing that had turned his chest from white to pink and red.

The fifth bullet hit Smith in the mouth just as his head hit the floor. It broke teeth from their roots, shredded to back of his tongue, and tore a hole through his brain to the back of his head, growing larger

as matter collected at the front of the bullet and was pushed with tremendous power and velocity; then burst a hole out the back of his head the size of a baseball and sent blood and bone and brain and hair over the white floor and the white shoes and white stockings of the screaming nurse.

The tall orderly pressed his hand over the gun held by the man behind him. He pulled it in his direction. The finger let loose of the trigger. There were no more bullets shot.

Smith's head rested on his right cheek, filling the elevator floor with the blood running from his wounds. His eyes were wide. His mouth was open. His right hand was under his body, the wrist still shackled to the wheelchair. One wheel of the chair was spinning.

Jonas glanced at the lights of the elevator. One elevator had stopped several floors above him.

He wondered what was taking so long. He wondered where those shots had come from.

The policeman in the lobby had gone running up the stairs.

It was July. The river was not running as fast. It was one year from the day they had been married. It was almost a year since Jonas had last been to the hospital. It was almost a year since he had said goodbye to his wife.

He stood up from the blanket that was spread on the grass, the handgun pressed tightly in his fingers. He watched it for a few minutes, reflecting the sunlight as he turned it over in his palm. He raised it slowly to his lips, tapping them softly and looking out over the water running easy and blue, and he remembered.

He took the gun by the barrel and casually tossed it to the river, spinning it to the middle of where he expected the river would be the deepest.

He lifted his t-shirt from his arms and over his head. Tossing it next to the picnic basket, he dove from the bank into the clear water.

He sprang up from under the surface, the splash and the cool spray of the waterfall washing away the tears on his face.

The sun flashed off his wet hair as he shook it. The water listened to him crying, to him laughing.