

James laughed again. “Congrats,” he said.

“Thanks. Wanna talk to him?”

“Sure.”

She handed the phone to Jake.

“Hey,” Jake said.

“Hey. You did it.”

“Sure did.”

“When?”

“No idea.”

Mary grabbed the phone. “James, you’ll be the best man, won’t you?”

“Can you think of a better man?”

“Only one.” She grinned at Jake. “James?”

“Yeah?”

She felt the tears. “I just wanna say thanks.”

“For what?”

“For being there for him.”

“Worked both ways.”

“I know,” she said. “But thanks anyways.”

“My pleasure.”

“Good night, James.”

James hung up his phone and looked at his television. He wasn’t watching. He was thinking of his future and other things. Things were happening too fast and he felt uneasy. He wished he could slow things down. The phone rang again, and he knew it had to be Brenda checking up on him.

“Hi, Brenda,” he said into the phone.

“Fuck Brenda, you asshole,” Angie slurred.

He hung up and it rang again. He picked it up.

“You’re mad or what?” she said.

“I really wish you wouldn’t call,” he said.

“Why? You don’t like me anymore?”

“Why am I talkin’ to you?” he asked, and then hung up.

It rang a few more times. A half hour later, it started ringing again. This time it was Brenda.

“What’s the latest on the home front?” she asked. “Any more bad news?”

“Just one.”

“What happen now?” she asked.

“Jake ‘n Mary are gettin’ hitched.”

“You’re kiddin’?”

“No.”

“Good for them.”

“How’d the interview go?” he asked.

“Good. They’re gonna send me an offer. I’m the only one they interviewed.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thanks. I’m checking some places down here,” she said. “You gonna come down with me?”

“You want me to?”

“Yes.”

“Consider it done.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“When are you gonna pop the question?” she asked, then said, “Sorry, I shouldn’t ‘a said that.”

“No, that’s okay. I’ll ask when I ask ‘n not a moment before or after.”

“I’m gonna hold you to that.”

“You do that.”

“Just thought I’d call to let you know I have a new job,” she said.

“Me ‘n Jake are goin’ up river with Ernest,” he said. He then

realized he hadn't been up river since he was eleven.

"When?"

"Couple days. I'll know tomorrow," he said. "Think I should sell my house?"

"I can't make 'at decision for you," she said. "It's a big move."

"I can rent, I guess, but I'd rather sell than be a landlord."

"What about Jake 'n Mary?"

"They're thinkin' of leavin' too."

"Really? Where?"

"Yellowknife," he answered. "Nothin' here for a young couple." *Young couple. Why do I feel old all of a sudden?* "I'll pick you up tomorrow," he said, having nothing else to say.

"James?"

"Yeah?" He knew what was coming.

"I love you," she said and waited for him to say it. He didn't. Instead, he said the same thing she'd heard a million times before.

"Me too."

Why can't you say it? Tell me. "See you tomorrow," she said.

"Yeah," he said and hung up the phone.

From out of nowhere the tears came. Great big sobs were being forced from the depths of his being and there wasn't a fucking thing he could do about it.

He slowly dropped to the floor and willed himself to stop. He couldn't. He willed himself to disappear. He prayed to the Powers That Be to help him. He lay there for what seemed like hours, but no help came. *Fuck you, 'en.* He looked to see if anyone had seen. He was alone. *I'll always be alone.*

He got to his feet and wiped his eyes and thought about going for a drink. *Jus' one.*

No such thing as one.

Fuck off!

A picture flashed through his mind.

It's time.

He reached under the sofa and pulled out the old homemade gun case his mom had made in another time and another place. He smelled it, and the memories returned. *Tanned moose skin! Mom! Dad! The Redstone! Home!* He didn't fight the tears this time. *Mission schools! Residential schools! Hostels! Hellholes! Shitholes!* He closed his eyes and hung his head. *Dark rooms! Hairy hands! False promises! Little boys! Shower rooms!*

Once again he dropped to his knees. *The pain! The foul stench of his breath! His hairy hands!* The scream that came had been bottled up for many years and then some. *Why?*

You know why.

Fuck off! He wiped the tears from his eyes and took out the gun. *Why not?*

Why not?

Nothin' to it.

'Course not.

Put it in my mouth 'n pull 'a fuckin' trigger.

Do it.

Fuck off!

He thought about it. *Will I burn in hell?*

Anywhere is better 'an 'is fuckin' place!

Fuck off! He sat on the floor and put his head against the wall. He loaded one shell. Click! *Nothin' to it.* He put the barrel under his chin and put his thumb on the trigger. He closed his eyes and tried to think of what to say. *Famous last words.*

Tick! Tock! Tick! Tock! *Why is 'at clock so loud?* He opened his eyes. *What 'a hell is 'is?* He was in a long hallway that somehow looked familiar. *What 'a fuck is 'is? Where is 'is?* It smelled like an institution: sterile. The walls were barren and painted an ugly green made uglier by the fluorescent lights that gave off a low, steady hum.

Tick! Tock! Tick! Tock! He looked up at the clock like he'd done a million times in a former life. *Four o'clock. Why always four?*

You know why.

Fuck off!

Not now 'n not ever.

He started walking down the hall to the stairway, but something was not right. The end of the hall kept getting farther and farther away. *What's goin' on?*

It suddenly came to him. *It's a dream! I'm in my fuckin' dream!* He closed his eyes and willed himself to wake up, but before he could do it he got a feeling he was not alone. *Someone is . . .*

He opened his eyes and stopped moving. He stopped breathing. He waited. *Where're you?*

The young Indian boy emerged from the wall as if pushed. James jumped. *Shit!*

The boy was dressed in a pair of pyjamas and his hair was cut very short. *I'm in 'a hostel 'n it's thirty years ago! It's 'a day I was . . .*

The day you were what?

Fuck off!

The little boy's head was bowed for one second, and then he looked up at him. What James saw made him take one step back. His eyes were empty. *Fuck sakes!* He wanted to run, but he couldn't. Something was keeping him here. *What? Who're you?* He received no answer. He continued looking at the little boy. The little boy was looking at him. Or was he? It was as if he was looking right through him. *Move! Run! Get outta here!*

As if he'd heard, the little boy started walking down the hall. He disappeared into the wall and re-emerged in the shower room. James looked around. *How'd I get here? Why am I here?*

A picture of the room and bed flashed in his mind. *That didn't happen!* He turned on one of the showers, and the cold water hit him as though he'd been slapped. He gasped and held his breath. He tried to push the pictures from his mind. He couldn't. They

were too disgusting. *The pain! The foul stench of his breath! His hairy hands!*

He kicked off his pyjama bottoms and pulled off his top and threw it to the floor. He hoped the water would wash away the stench. It wouldn't and somehow he knew this, but that didn't stop him from trying. He reached for the soap and began scrubbing. He prayed. *Please, help me.* His breathing came faster, his actions more urgent. He could still smell his breath. He could still feel his hairy hands. He scrubbed harder. *It's not comin' out.*

He stopped. *Someone is watchin' me.* He turned and saw another boy. *What's he doin' here?* He dropped the soap and immersed his face in the water. He willed the other boy to disappear. *He can't be here. This is not real.*

After what seemed like an eternity, he slowly opened his eyes and the other boy had disappeared. *It's a dream.* He looked up at the ceiling and the tears returned, this time accompanied by a scream. *This is real! It's not a dream!* He tried to hold them in. He couldn't. He closed his eyes. *Why is 'is happenin' to me? Is 'is right? Am I bein' punished?* He wished his parents were there. He wondered if they knew what was going on, but how could they? His body trembled. *This is wrong!*

After his tears had flowed down the drain and after his cries had dissipated, he reached for his pyjamas and wrung them out. Then an idea formed in his young mind. It was a horrible one, but it was the only one he could think of. He put the pyjamas around his neck and slowly tightened them. But he couldn't do it. Something or someone was preventing him. He looked around. *Who're you?* He received no answer, so he tried again. But again something would not let him.

He was now sobbing. The memory of what had gone on in that room dragged his young body to the floor. *Why?* The scream that followed came from the depths of his being and echoed off the shower room walls. It was a silent scream, but if it were given

a voice, it would've sounded like a million porcupines crying in the dark.

After another eternity had come and gone, he sat up and dried himself with his pyjamas, then wrung them out again. He put them on then walked into the hall and turned towards the dorm. He thought about the other boy. *Was he really there?*

He looked up at the ceiling. *I'm in 'a dorm. I'm in my bed. How'd I get here? Maybe it was a dream.* He looked at the boy in the next bed. *Is he up?* He looked like he was staring at the ceiling, but James couldn't tell and he really didn't care.

He closed his eyes and tried to drive the memory into the Dream World. *Things like 'is don' happen. Or do they?* He thought about the other boy. *Was he real or part 'a my dream? Does he know what happened?*

James opened his eyes and was sitting on the floor of his house. He still had the gun in his hand. *Was 'at real or a dream? Who's 'a little boy? Why's he in 'a shower?* He knew who and why. *They're part 'a the Dream World 'n not real. Or are they?* He thought about it and for one of the very few times in his life everything became clear and his mind was made up. *This time. This time it's for good.*

He put the barrel under his chin and put his thumb on the trigger. He closed his eyes and said the only two words that came to his mind. "Fuck it."

CHAPTER 6

DEEP DARK SECRETS

Wednesday, September 29, 1999

The old wolf stood on the highway where he had found the fish and searched for more. He found nothing. He looked in the direction the truck had gone and hoped they'd return. They didn't. After a few seconds, he turned north to meet the caribou.

Jake and Mary got up at eight and told her mom and dad about their plans. Her mom hugged them both, but her dad was more cautious. "Take care of her," he told Jake.

"I will," he said.

Mary went to work and wrote up her letter of resignation that morning and gave them three months' notice. *We could head to Yellowknife right after Christmas.* She was walking on air.

Meanwhile, Jake had walked over to James's house and found it locked. He could see the television still on and banged on the door. *Did he do it?* He looked through the window and saw James coming out of his bedroom looking like shit.

"You look like shit," he said when James let him in.

"Feel like it. Didn't know I was so outta shape."

"Same here."

"I gotta take a wash," James said and went into the bathroom.

Jake looked in the spare bedroom and was surprised to see the gun on the bed. He picked it up. He worked the lever and out

popped a shell. He put it in his pocket and returned the gun to the trunk.

“You had breakfast?” James asked from the bathroom.

“Jus’ coffee.”

“Wanna go to Sal’s? My treat.”

“Sure. You need company to Helena?”

“Sure,” James answered as he came out of the bathroom. He grabbed his jacket and followed Jake out the door.

Sarah James smiled when they walked into Sal’s. “Mornin’,” she said. “Whatcha gonna have?”

“Gimme two bacon ‘n eggerts to go ‘n couple cups of coffee,” James said.

She returned with their coffees. “What’s new?”

“Diddly,” James answered. “Jake popped the big one.”

It took her a few seconds to get that one. “He did?” She looked at Jake. “You did?”

“Yep.”

“When?”

“Las’ night.”

“When’s ‘a big day?”

“No idea.”

“What about you?” she asked James.

“What about me?”

“When’re you gonna pop the question?”

“Geez, Sarah. I thought we were jus’ good friends?”

“Not me!” she said. “I meant you know.”

James shrugged. “Who knows.”

When they left the coffee shop, James said, “There, you don’ have to send out invites now. Be all over town by time we get back.”

Jake laughed at that one and knew it would be.

The highway was covered with yellow leaves. They were half-way to Helena when Jake asked, “What you remember ‘bout Tom Kinney?”

Asshole. “Not a hell of a lot. Big, fat ‘n a beard.” *Smelly ‘n hairy.*

“Not ‘at tall. He was short. We were small.”

“So what happens now?” James asked.

“No idea.”

They drove in silence for a while before Jake finally said something that made James tense for a few seconds. “So far it’s just me ‘n Michael ‘n he’s dead. I wonder if there were others.”

James kept his eyes on the highway. “I’m sure there were.”

“No doubt.”

Little do you know.

Brenda was waiting for them in the terminal. She held James like she hadn’t seen him in years and that, he figured, was a good sign. She also gave Jake a hug, and he looked like a kid again.

“Congratulations,” she said.

“Thanks.”

“There’s a message for you at the airline counter,” Brenda told James.

James went to the counter. A few minutes later, he was back. “David wants me to pick up Mutt and Jeff,” he said.

Half an hour later, they were on the highway heading home. One live body, two dead and two walking dead.

Daryl walked down the blood-splattered steps and looked at the shed. He carried a small bag with most of his clothes and wondered if he’d ever be back. *Not likely.* He’d made up his mind to return to Yellowknife with his mom and get on with life, or what was left of it.

He walked to the van and looked at the bush guard and thought about Mutt and Jeff and knew he was the one who killed them. It was an accident, but he’d killed them nonetheless.

He thought back to yesterday and his tearful reunion with his mom at the Helena airport. He thought he’d hate her for aban-

doning him and Larry, but he didn't. He'd cried and today he felt better. They'd gone to see Larry, and his mom had cried for what seemed like forever. Larry would be leaving for Yellowknife today and would return in December for his trial. He would probably get five to ten, if he were lucky.

"You okay?" Grace asked.

He looked up at Grace and Bertha, who'd come with him to help clean the house. "Yeah," he answered.

His mom wouldn't go into the house. She'd run out years ago and had promised never to return.

Around four o'clock, they dropped Brenda off at her apartment. "Wanna come for supper?" she asked James. *You can make me cum afterwards.*

"Long as it's not fish," he said. *Don' mind if it smells like fish.*

She laughed.

They drove to the church and unloaded the bodies of Mutt and Jeff. James then drove Jake to his house.

"Gonna hang a For Sale sign on my door," Jake said as he got out.

James looked at the house. "Lots 'a memories," he said.

"Any good?"

He thought for a while. "Can't think 'a one," he said.

"It's jus' a house."

"Got 'at right."

"Gonna change," Jake said. "See you in a bit."

James drove home. He checked himself in the mirror. He needed a shave and a shower and some major fumigation, but for now he washed, shaved and changed his shirt.

When Jake came back, James said, "Ya know, if you were gonna stay, I'd give you my house."