

CRIME SCENES

Philip Brooks

Flanked by empty oven mitts, a casserole cooled on the stove. I was hungry but didn't dare. *Uneaten dinner*, I scribbled on my pad.

In the living room, an old mahogany radio the size of a refrigerator played warm and low. *Lonely music*, I wrote. I wiped away tears and dusted the figurines. A coy beauty of finest china offered me her hand for kissing, but I couldn't take my eyes off the cracked peasant on his three-legged donkey. I took out my pad. *Only time will dismantle, number and file these nightmares alongside the others.*

I got in my car and lit my pipe. As the compartment filled with cherry smoke, I drove the streets, waiting for rain. I wanted to see the world melt.

In a sleepless donut shop, I ordered coffee and something with funny-colored icing on it. The waitress was blind but her dog had talent. He shook hands, played dead, did most of the pouring and made change. A cab driver in a turban got coffee to go and poured many, many packets of sugar into it. 'It reminds me life is sweet,' he said. Too easy, I thought. I took out my notebook and pencil, but couldn't think of anything better. Instead, I borrowed a bucket of the funny-colored icing and used it along with every coffee-stir in the place to construct a shrine to my loneliness. There was just enough room in there for the dog and me. Together we listened to the waitress call his name, entreating, then ordering, whimpering, then shouting. It was unbearable and I made a move to leave.

The dog put a paw on my arm. 'Shhhh,' he said. 'She beats me when she thinks no one's looking.'

FOREIGN POLICY

Martin Sorrell

There's the Coke machine outside the bunk block.

Alongside the machine that dispenses Marlboro.

Alongside the water-fountain, kept a welcome few degrees above zero.

He can grab himself a can and draw in smoke, trying not to think about Lew and Spud and Ann-Marie breaking from rehearsals to go out on the lake in Escanaba, Michigan. Try not to think of them taking a couple of hours off before the gig, skating out to the ship full of timber, frozen in, past the fishermen playing their lines through boreholes in the ice.

He can splash his face and neck and feel it dry. Then do it again, and the whole of his head.

How long has he got to go?

When the temperature drops he can play some basketball with whichever of the guys are up for it who don't have their own plans for rest and recreation, who don't go to see the Bruce Willis movie in the cinema.

Basketball and a game of pool. Get in some cue action. Escanaba. Big Lew and Buddy Spud and Ann-Marie out on Lake Michigan. Ann-Marie and Spud. Ann-Marie and Lew. Lew and Spud.

Pool, basketball. Then maybe his bunk to work out new ideas on his keyboards, write them down, send them home.

How much longer has he got?

Tomorrow, if there is a tomorrow, he'll be in a Humvee on airport duty. Next week, if there is a next week, they'll be sent

against the big warlord in the province to the south, the Seat of Kings, so-called.

So now?

He can go back out for a last Marlboro, breathe the night with lights and guys and smoke. He can close his eyes to really hear the sound. He can close his eyes to really smell the smell. He can start to walk outwards. To the sound and the smell.

And then there's wire.

And then there's wire.

And then there's wire.

And then there's wire.