

Stephen Raleigh Byler

# Searching for Intruders



*A Novel in  
Stories*

*WM*

WILLIAM MORROW

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

SEARCHING FOR INTRUDERS. Copyright © 2002 by Stephen Raleigh Byler.  
All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.  
No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever  
without written permission except in the case  
of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.  
For information address HarperCollins Publishers Inc.,  
10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business,  
or sales promotional use. For information please write: Special Markets Department,  
HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

FIRST EDITION

*Designed by Kate Niehols*

Printed on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 0-06-621294-4

02 03 04 05 06 QW 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

## PART I

*U-Haul* 3

Roaches 5

*Little League* 31

Helper 33

*Limp* 43

Floating 45

*Bunny* 69

Shooting Heads 71

*Diet* 93

Beauty Queen 95

C O N T E N T S

PART II

*Golf* 135

Flying 137

*Fighter* 157

Daddy 159

*Party* 165

Down Again 167

*Peaches* 173

Quantum Mechanics 175

*Barbecue* 195

Searching for Intruders 197

*Deer* 225

Perrito 227

## Searching for Intruders

This was while Alethea's cancer was taking over again, but before we realized it. We had been getting along well again, renting a house back in Reading.

There was a heat wave and we had no air conditioner. It was late, almost 2:00 A.M. We were naked in bed. She was caressing me and we were about to make love when we heard the screams.

"What was that?" she said, stiffening.

"I don't know," I said, sitting up myself.

I crawled out of bed and tiptoed across the room, naked, to turn off the fan, which was oscillating and whirring. I switched it off and sat back down on the bed at Alethea's feet. She had pulled the sheet up over her breasts.

"Whatever it was, I didn't like it," she said. She looked pale, terrified.

"*Shh*. Listen," I said, putting my fingers up to my lips.

We heard it again, or thought we heard it. It was so faint that it was hard to be certain. It was a kind of a high-pitched squeal followed by what sounded like it might have been a human voice saying, *No!*

"Did you hear it that time?" she said.

"I think so."

"What was it?"

"I don't know," I said.

I was still naked. I stood up at the foot of the bed and pushed the window up higher than it already was. I put up the screen and stuck my head out. I listened for ten or fifteen seconds, but I didn't hear anything else. I sat back down at the foot of the bed and looked back at Alethea. She was still sitting up in the same position, with her beautiful long, dark, but thinning hair spilling down onto the sheets she had wrapped around her body and chest.

"It might not be anything. It's probably some drunk people coming out of the golf course clubhouse," I said.

She pulled her knees up to her chest and locked her hands in front of her shins.

"Wait, there it was again," she said, dropping the sheet, sliding up to the end of the bed next to me. She covered her chest with her arms and peeked out the window. "Didn't you hear it?" she said.

"I think I heard it," I said.

"What was it?"

"I don't know."

"It sounded almost . . . inhuman," she said.

"It sounded like a dying rabbit," I said.

"Like what?"

"Like a dying rabbit. Rabbits squeal like that when they're dying. They sort of scream," I said.

Just as I finished talking, the sound came again. A faint, barely audible, high-pitched moan.

"That doesn't sound like a rabbit," she said.

"No, probably not."

I dug around and found my boxer shorts balled up in the sheets at the foot of the bed. I got out of bed and put them on.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"I don't know."

I went out of the bedroom and flipped the light on at the top of the steps. I went downstairs into the kitchen and out through the back door onto the porch. I was barefoot and I wasn't wearing a shirt, so I felt a bit naked, a bit exposed, but I didn't feel like going back in and looking for clothing. The porch light was on. I reached inside the door and turned it off and then came back out and stood on the edge of the porch. I listened for a while from there and then I walked out into our yard and listened some more. I bent down, squinting, trying to get a clear view through the trees. I knew there was a set of tennis courts beyond them and, on the other side of the courts, the eighteenth green. For some reason, though I couldn't even see the green, I pictured a man and a woman there. I imagined the woman pinned in the sand trap, screaming for help. I held my breath for a few seconds, staring through the trees, listening.

I heard a noise behind me and I wheeled around. It was Alethea. She was standing on the back porch with her arms folded. She had put on a long shirt that came all the way down over her hips like a dress. I looked back into the trees and then off at the neighbor's farm to the right. The lights were on in the house. I listened and looked for silhouettes moving inside, but once again, I couldn't see or hear anything.

I walked all the way back to the edge of the yard where the woods began. I took a few steps into them, but I didn't have any shoes on. I stopped and listened a little more and then I turned and walked back to the porch. Alethea had stepped back inside the storm door. She moved to the side as I stepped in.

"Well?" she said.

I shrugged.

"You didn't see anything?" she said.

"No, I didn't."

We stood there staring out through the storm door window into the trees.

"I guess that doesn't mean there's no one out there," she said after a few moments.

"I guess not."

I shut the main door and bolted it.

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"What do you think we should do?"

"I don't know."

"I don't know either," I said.

I drew myself a glass of water and drank it straight down while she stared at me. I wiped the sweat off my forehead and poured another glass for myself.

"Water?" I asked.

"I'm not thirsty," she said.

"Are you sure?" I said, drinking some more down.

"I'm sure."

"You're probably dehydrated," I said, refilling my glass.

"I don't care if I am," she said.

We stood there in silence for five or ten seconds. She stared out through the window in the door. I drank some more, making loud gulping sounds without meaning to.



"Well, should we go back to bed?" I said, exhaling after my last swig.

She was still staring outside with her arms crossed. "I guess," she said, without looking at me.

The lights were still on in the kitchen. I turned them off and went over and stood next to Alethea. I stared out through the window and gazed into the dark trees, like she was.

"You see anything out there?" I said.

"No, nothing."

I stood there with her for what must have been nearly a minute.

"Well, I'm going to go upstairs now," I said, watching her. She kept staring out into the dark. I turned around and headed across the kitchen for the steps.

"I'll be up after a bit," she said.

When I got up to the bedroom, I turned the fan back on and I scooted the dresser it was resting on a couple of feet closer to the bed. I made sure the fan was aimed in such a way that the air would be coming over us, cooling us, as we slept. I stood in front of it and let the air blow on my face for a while and then I climbed back into bed. I left my boxer shorts on this time. I lay on my back, interlocked my hands behind my neck, and stared at the ceiling, listening. I had planned to wait there like that until Alethea came up and got back into bed with me, but the whir of the fan had a hypnotizing effect. I fell asleep.

After a while, I flinched awake, aware of something, though I wasn't sure what. I didn't know how long I'd been sleeping. I was in bed alone. Alethea still hadn't come up.

I got out of bed and turned off the fan.

"Alethea? Are you down there?" I said softly.

I went back downstairs into the kitchen and I called for her again.

"Alethea? Are you in here?" I said.

I looked in the living room thinking maybe she'd lain down on the couch and fallen asleep, but she wasn't there. I called down into the basement and waited, listening, but there was no response there either. I came back into the kitchen and looked outside through the back door. The porch light and the light attached to the side of the garage were on. The back door was unlocked. I put on some sneakers, stepped out onto the porch, and called for her again.

"Alethea?" I didn't know whether to shout or to whisper. "Are you out there?" I said.

I walked into the back yard and looked off toward the neighbors' where the lights had been on, but they were off now. I looked to the left of the house where, a couple of hundred yards away, there were more houses and, past them, more wooded areas. The porch light and the floodlight on the garage were pouring light into the back yard. I walked to the back edge of the yard to the wooded area and peered in. The lights from the house were shining on the near side of the tree trunks and the trees were casting shadows on the ground. Where the light from the house ended, it was very dark, very difficult to see. I realized again that I was practically naked. I was wearing only my boxer shorts and sneakers, but I walked back into the woods anyway. I walked back in as far as the light from the house reached, and stared back into the dark. I could just see the outline of the tennis courts on the other side.

"Alethea, are you out there?" I said out loud, in a normal voice. "Alethea?" I said a little louder, almost shouting, but there was still nothing.

I went ahead and walked the rest of the way through the trees and came out at the edge of the tennis courts. They were nice clay courts with fancy, low fences. I gazed out across them, staring at

the perfect white stripes that marked the boundaries. I noticed two sets of footprints in the tidily swept clay going toward the baseline on the right side of the court. I followed them. Both sets of tracks stopped at the back fence, in the corner. The clay was smeared in that area as if someone had shuffled around or lain out on the ground. I stared at the smeared-out area for a few moments and then looked at how the tracks started again. Both sets started. I got down on my knees and looked. The one set of footprints was considerably larger than the other. In a few places, the big print was planted on top, covering, even wiping out the smaller footprint. The bigger one was, I figured, about a size thirteen. The other print looked like a woman's or child's size. I examined the smaller one, trying to remember what size Alethea wore, but there was no way to tell if it was hers. I didn't know what the bottom of her shoes looked like. I didn't even know if she had put shoes on.

I followed the tracks back up to the net and onto the neighboring court. They went straight across the other court and out the other side onto the grass, where I could no longer track them. I walked past a small building that was apparently the tennis pro shop and across a patio to the next set of courts. I stood and looked over the gate, but there were no tracks there, no sign that anyone had been through.

I walked along the outside of the last set of courts. I stopped on the far side of them. I looked in toward the golf clubhouse parking lot. There were a few outdoor lights on the building and there was light from the swimming pool illuminating part of the lot—enough to show just a silhouette of a person if there had been someone. But there was nothing there, not as far as I could tell.

I walked past the last tennis court through another set of trees until I came up on the eighteenth green. I stood there for a moment looking around. There was no wind. The pin was in,

jutting up out of the cup in the center of the green, but the flag hung limp from the top of it. I walked over to the pin and took it out and then I jammed it back in the hole again. I walked over to one of the sand traps and peered down over the edge. It was a very deep bunker. It dipped down well below ground level in the belly—so low that if you sat or lay in it, no one would be able to see you unless they walked right up to the edge. In fact, someone had been lying in it. There was a wooden ladder that led down into the trap and there were footprints that started at the base of the ladder. They led over to the deepest section in the corner near the tennis courts and then the sand was smeared—smeared in much the same way that the area in the clay courts had been—as if someone had lain down there for some reason. The sand was even dug out a bit. It looked like someone had wanted to make the sand trap deeper than it already was—perhaps to conceal whatever it was they were up to.

I looked up the fairway for Alethea, or for anything, but it was very dark in that direction. I scanned the parking lot near the golf clubhouse again, but I didn't see anything. I looked back toward the tennis courts, toward the tennis pro shop. There I did see something. I saw it just out of the corner of my eye: a black silhouette moving quickly between the courts, moving across and behind the building. Without taking time to think through what I was doing, I dropped to the ground and rolled down into the sand trap. The steep lip sent me tumbling down into the belly of it. I came to rest on my back and I lay for a moment breathing heavily, trying to figure out what to do. I didn't know where Alethea was. If she was outside somewhere, where this other figure was lurking, she could be in great danger. But she could also be in danger if she had fled back into the house. Maybe this guy had seen her go back

in. Maybe now he was moving in toward the house. Maybe now he was stalking *her*.

I crawled on my stomach, on my elbows, up to the edge of the bunker and I lifted my head slowly to look out over the lip. I saw it clearly this time: the same silhouette. It came out from behind the building and moved across the tennis court where I had seen the tracks earlier. It scampered across, hunching down almost to the level of the net.

When the figure went off the far side of the court, it disappeared into the darkness of the trees. It seemed to be heading in toward the back porch.

I lay there for a few moments, panicking. Suddenly I felt unsure whether Alerthea had ever left the house. Maybe I hadn't checked it carefully enough. I remembered that I had never checked the upstairs bathroom—the most obvious place. And I had been calling very softly when I was looking for her, almost whispering. Maybe she hadn't heard me. Maybe she had gone into the bathroom to take a bath, which she often did, and fallen asleep there. Maybe she'd even fainted.

Whatever the case, I felt certain she was in the house. And now this other figure was headed through the woods toward the back door.

I climbed out of the bunker and shuffled through the cluster of trees that separated the green and the first set of tennis courts. I hid behind a couple of small shrubs next to the court, catching my breath, and then ran up to the tennis pro shop. I peeked around the edge of the building and searched for movement in the illuminated section of the trees on the far side, near the house, but I didn't see anything. I had seen the figure disappear into the woods, but I hadn't seen where it had gone after that. It wasn't very

appealing, the idea of having to head into the dark trees where I could be waylaid, but it was the shortest way in and now I felt like I had to get back there fast—like Alethea’s life depended on it. The only thing for me to do was to make a run for it all the way to the back porch. I certainly wasn’t going to sneak through the trees slowly, and make myself an easy target for something I couldn’t see. If he was going to take me out, he was going to have to take me out running.

That is what I did. I ran. I sprinted. Once I tripped on a log, on a small tree that was lying horizontal on the ground. My shin slammed into it and I landed on my face in the moist dirt, but I hopped back to my feet, my adrenaline pumping, and started running again. I sprinted, utterly believing that something hiding in the dark had set the log there and that whatever had set it there was about to pounce on me. I sprinted on through the dark section of woods. As I came into the light from the house I felt some relief, like I was almost in the clear, but as I came out of the trees into the lawn, the floodlight on the garage and the porch light flicked off and right after that, the kitchen and living room lights went out. Now, as I sprinted, I had a decision to make. I could keep running straight for the back porch door where I had been planning to enter, or I could veer off behind the garage and figure out what to do next. Why had the lights gone off? Was the figure already inside, stalking Alethea? Had he come into the basement and flipped the breaker? Had he seen me running? Had he turned the lights off from right there in the kitchen, right by the back porch door? I had to process all of this in just one or two seconds, running at full tilt.

I veered off. I stood with my back to the garage, trying not to breathe so heavily that I’d be heard. Now I felt I had to *sneak* into

the house. Alethea might be inside—or she might not—but this intruder was in there now, I was certain of that.

I figured he must have seen me or he wouldn't have turned off the light. But now I was also wondering: *Why had he turned out the light?* With it on, after all, he could see me, he could see where I was outside the house. Was it because I wasn't his target? Was it because it was only Alethea he wanted? Was he *more* concerned with concealing himself, with concealing whatever it was he was doing, than with capturing me? Did he figure, from inside the dark house, that he'd be able to see me, but not me him? I came to a kind of split-second conclusion that seemed to me, in that moment, profoundly significant: I decided that for this figure, remaining in the dark where he couldn't be seen was more important even than getting whatever it was he was after.

What I wasn't going to do was walk right into the house. I tried to remember what windows were open or unlocked. There was the laundry window on the far side of the garage, but if this guy had any intelligence, that was the first place he would look for me to come in. It was the first window on the other side of the garage and he had seen me veer off in that direction. I couldn't go around the house the other way because I'd have to go right by the porch, in plain view. Just inside there were the light switches for the lights he'd flipped off when I'd come running out of the woods. He might still be standing there, watching for me.

Whatever I was going to do, I needed to do it quickly.

I made another split-second decision. There were a few folding chairs propped up by our little hibachi, by the garage. I set one up as quickly and quietly as I could right next to the garage wall and I stepped up on it and grabbed onto the roof. Normally I strain just to do a couple of pull-ups, but at that moment, with my adrenaline

pumping, I was able to yank myself up silently and easily. As soon as I was up, I had the presence of mind to take my shoes off so my steps would be more difficult to hear inside the house. I tiptoed over to where the roof gabled up to the main part of the house and I hoisted myself up onto the next level. I looked behind me for a moment, leaning on the chimney. I could see the tennis courts through the trees and I could see the parking lot in front of the golf course. I scanned everything hoping I'd see Alethea, but I didn't. I felt certain she was inside, that he was holding her hostage. I thought of the screams we'd thought we'd heard earlier and I thought of the smeared-out area on the clay tennis court and the dug-up area in the sand trap. *Jesus*, I thought, *what had this guy done? What had he done to someone else to cause them to scream like that? What did he have in mind for Alethea?*

I had to get inside the house, immediately.

I walked swiftly and furtively along the tidge of the roof. I was comfortable moving at these heights—I had worked on construction crews earlier in my life. I went all the way to the front of the house. I walked down to the right edge where I knew there was no window and sat there for a moment, listening. I heard some movement in the opposite corner of the house near the laundry room. I was right. Having seen me run behind the garage, he had gone looking for me near the laundry room window. I dropped my legs down over the corner of the roof and I grabbed onto the rain gutter. I hung for a moment to keep myself from swinging and I dropped down onto the lawn. I rolled as I landed so I would land with less noise.

I knew the basement door was on that side of the house. We didn't always lock it. We did if we thought of it, but we went in and out of that door at least a couple of times a week, taking out



trash, and we often forgot to secure it. I went down the steps that led to the basement door and tried the knob. It turned. I eased the door open and went in, closing it and locking it as quietly as I could behind me. I crept up the stairs and stopped at the door that led into the kitchen. It was shut, but not latched. All the lights were out in the house, but I could still see, just barely, into the kitchen through the crack in the door. I crouched. I watched and listened.

Now this may not come as a surprise to you, but it did to me at that time. I heard, from behind the basement door, through the crack, the sound of Alethea speaking. She was on the phone, talking to the police.

"There's someone outside," she said. "I saw them running and then they went up on the roof, and now I don't know where they are."

She was calling from the kitchen phone. Except for the sound of her whispering, the house was perfectly silent.

"We thought we heard some screams and then I went out looking and now I think someone's trying to get in," she said.

I pushed open the basement door and came out into the kitchen.

"Will?" Alethea said. "Wilson!"

I still felt anxious, like the stalker was somewhere in the house. I felt we should be whispering, but Alethea said my name out loud. "Wilson? Was that you out there?" I realized that she understood me to be what she had been fearing.

"Oh my God, just a minute," she said out loud into the phone. "Oh my God, it's my boyfriend," she said to the police. "I think it was him I was hearing." She smiled, hunched her shoulders, and put her wrist to her forehead. She covered the phone.

"Was that you on the roof?" she said.

"It was," I said softly.

She smiled and shook her head.

"Sweet Jesus, Will," she said, putting the phone down and embracing me.

"Are you sure you're the only one in this house?" I said while she hugged me.

She looked over her shoulder and shrugged. "I think so," she said.

"Was that you that turned out the lights?" I asked.

"I was afraid. I saw someone running."

She quit hugging me, held her hands on the outside of my arms, and looked at my face. "Was that you running?" she said.

"Yeah, that was me."

She stepped back and put her wrist to her forehead again.

"I don't believe this. I can't believe it," she said, smiling.

"How long have you been in the house?"

"I had just gotten back," she said.

"Where were you?"

"I went out through the woods. Through the tennis courts."

"What in the hell were you doing?" I said.

"I was looking," she said, "for the cause of the screams."

I finally felt, at least somewhat, relieved.

"So it was you that I saw," I said, smiling, shaking my head.

"When?"

"You came back, across the tennis courts?"

"Yes."

"Hunching over?"

"Yeah," she said, smiling shyly. "I was sneaking."

"Oh God," I said, rubbing my own forehead. "Yup, that was me on the roof," I said. I chuckled and shook my head.

"Are they still on?" I said, pointing at the phone on the kitchen table.

"Oh shit," she said. She picked up the phone and spoke into it. "Are you there? I'm sorry, hello?" she said, grinning at me. She listened and nodded. "Well, call off the dogs in that case, it was my boyfriend." There was a pause. "I don't know. I don't really know what he was doing on the roof, to tell you the truth," she said, smiling at me, "but it was definitely him. He's standing right here. I'm standing right here looking at him."

She squinted while she listened to whatever they were saying on the other end.

"Yeah, everything's fine. Would you say everything's okay, honey?" She held the phone out toward me so the officer could hear me speak.

"Yes, everything's okay," I said, projecting my voice for the first time since I'd been back in the house.

"Here, I'll give you to him," she said.

She handed me the phone. "Hello, Officer. Yes, everything's fine. I'm her boyfriend," I said.

"What were you doing on the roof?" the voice said.

I held the phone down and covered it with my hand. "He asked what I was doing on the roof," I said to Alethea, smiling.

"I'll be interested to hear," she whispered back.

"Well, Officer, I just got myself a little spooked, that's all. I thought I saw someone coming in toward the house."

"What were you doing outside?" the officer said.

"Well, I was chasing my girlfriend," I said, smiling at Alethea again.

"Chasing her?"

"I went out looking for her. Everything's fine, really."

The cop didn't speak, but I could hear his breathing.

"Seriously," I said. "No need to come out."

"We had someone all ready."

"Well, call them off, really."

"We'd be happy to come out and have a quick look around."

"It's not necessary," I said.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm positive."

"Okay." He was quiet for a couple of seconds, apparently thinking about something, and then he said, "You heard some screaming earlier?"

"Yeah, well, we thought we did." I thought for a moment myself. "How did you know we heard screaming?" I asked.

"Your wife told me," he said.

"Oh," I said, pausing. "My girlfriend."

"I guess, yes, your girlfriend. The woman that called," he said.

"It was probably some drunk people having a good time. Some drunk people coming out of the golf course is all," I said.

"I see," the cop said.

"We psyched ourselves out, that's all. I'm going to give you back to my girlfriend, to the woman that called you," I said.

I handed her the phone and she spent a few minutes reassuring him. "Yes, I'm sure, there's no one here but us. We just got all worked up. Don't bother coming out. Yes. Thanks a lot. We will. Goodbye," she said.

We sat down at the kitchen table and enjoyed a few more laughs about the whole thing. She made fun of me, laughed uncontrollably at the idea of me crawling in the sand trap on my elbows. I showed her the cut on my shin and she cooed over it a little, comforting me, but she couldn't keep from laughing at that, too. She guffawed when I explained how, swiftly and stealthily, I

had scaled the wall, tiptoed across the garage roof, scaled the next gable, and scurried all the way to the front of the house.

"That roof is pretty steep," she said, buckling over.

"It's not too steep for me," I said, laughing myself. "I was like a Green Beret. I even took my shoes off."

"You did," she said, laughing, pointing at my feet.

"Shoes off for stealth," I said, letting her have her fun.

After a while she got up and poured herself some water and stood at the sink shaking her head and laughing some more. She tilted her neck back and drank making the same kind of loud gulping sounds that I had made earlier before any of this had occurred. I stared at the scar on her neck where she had had her first lump removed one year before.

"That manhunt made me thirsty," she said.

We stood there for a little while longer, relishing the humor, and then she said, "Well, I'm going up to bed." I was glad when she said this because, although I saw the comedy of the situation, I hadn't found it all quite as amusing as she had. I didn't tell her, but I still felt vaguely uneasy.

I made sure the back porch door was locked and I went around to all of the windows on the ground floor, making certain they were secure. I thought about the door in the basement, but I remembered that I had locked it behind me when I'd snuck in. I double-checked the front door and turned off all the lights downstairs.

When I got upstairs to the bedroom, Alethea had taken her clothes back off. She was sitting in bed with a pillow propped behind her, with her breasts exposed. In fact, all of her body was exposed. She didn't even have a sheet over her legs.

Without going into it too much, that time stands out to me more than any other time we made love. I tried to convince myself

it was irrational, but I was still feeling like there was still a presence somewhere—in the house or outside—hearing what we were doing. Maybe that’s part of what made it exciting.

She got very into it. She was incredibly loud, almost violent about it.

“Harder! Harder!” she kept saying. “Come on! I said *harder!*”

I felt like I was invading her, almost violating her.

After we were through, we lay there breathing heavily, feeling the cool air from outside come over our bodies. We didn’t talk about it, but I’m sure I wasn’t the only one listening for the strange noises again. I had left the fan off this time. I wanted to be able to hear everything clearly.

“You’re not going to get up and leave if I fall asleep this time, are you?” I said.

She smiled affectionately. A cool breeze came in through the open window and blew over our bodies.

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Okay,” she said.

“Why did you go out there without me?”

“I don’t know,” she said. She was silent for a moment. “I’m not really sure why I did. I wanted to see what was there, I guess. I wanted to see what was causing the screams.”

“What were you going to do if you did find something?” I said.

“I don’t know.” She paused again. “I’m not sure.” She sighed, and then she rolled over on her side and looked at my face.

“Let’s rest now,” she said, smiling warmly, touching my cheek, tucking my hair behind my ear. She draped her leg over mine and she cuddled up, nestling her chin into my neck.

I made sure she fell asleep first this time. Then, unable to relax, I lay there thinking back over everything. As I thought through it, I realized there were still a few things that didn’t add up for me. I

still wasn't clear on what was going on with the footprints. Were they just there from tennis players or golfers from earlier in the day? What were the smeared-out areas? Why was the sand trap partly dug out? Had someone from maintenance done that?

"Alethea," I finally said. "Were those your footprints on the tennis courts?"

She didn't wake up at first.

"Alethea, were those your footprints?" I said, touching her arm.

"What?" she said, half-asleep.

"Did you see the second set of footprints in the tennis courts . . . and the sand trap?"

She rolled over, touched the side of my face with her hand, and looked at me with drooping eyes. "Oh Wilson, go to sleep, darling," she said. "Forget about it."

The sex had made me a little bit drowsy. I felt like, if I could stop my mind, I would almost be able to sleep. After a few minutes, I got up and turned the fan back on. I lay back down and pulled the sheet up over my head. Soon I fell asleep.

I don't know how long I was sleeping this time either, but I know I awoke to a pounding. Someone was banging on the door downstairs.

I shook Alethea gently, but she didn't wake up right away. I shook her again.

"Someone's downstairs," I said. "They're pounding."

"What?" She sat up abruptly. "Who is it?"

The pounding came again. This was definitely real pounding, nothing imagined.

"What should we do?" she said.

I got up and went over to the bedroom window and peeked out. There was a police car in the driveway.

"It's the cops," I said. "They came anyway."

"We told them not to," Alethea said, lying back down.

I felt relieved it was them, but also annoyed.

"I knew this would happen. They're too bored not to come out," I said.

This was strange of me, I'll admit, but I was still very drowsy, half-asleep. I went downstairs without any clothes on. When I got to the bottom of the steps and flipped the light on, I became aware of my nakedness and I switched the light back off right away. I figured, with the lights off in the house, I couldn't be seen. I planned to duck into the laundry room and grab a pair of shorts and a T-shirt from out of the dryer, where I knew I had clothes, but as I went through the living room and passed one of the windows, I noticed the shade was halfway up. I went over to it, to pull it down, and as I did, the light from a flashlight passed over my body. It came back and stopped on my crotch. I stepped away from the window. Standing away to the side, I put the shade down and then I stood there for a moment sighing, shaking my head. I peeked through the peephole on the front door. The cop was standing right there. I hurried into the laundry room and dug a pair of shorts and a T-shirt out of the dryer. I put them on and went back and flipped the front porch light on. I opened the door.

"We got a call about a disturbance," he said.

The officer was large, brawny. He was balding. He had taken off his hat and he was holding it in one hand. In the other he was grasping a Maglite. He had turned it off and he had slid his hand up to the end. He was gripping the Maglite like a billy club.

"This the right place, then?" he said.

He spoke in a rural Pennsylvania accent that was very familiar to me—a kind of Low German accent, partially inherited from the Amish in that area. His lips barely moved when he spoke. The words seemed to form from his throat.



"Yeah, we had called earlier," I said.

I rubbed my eyes trying to make it as obvious as I could that he had dragged me out of bed. I wanted to make it clear that that's why I had been naked.

He studied me.

"Sorry to be bothering you like this," he said.

Alethea came downstairs wearing a T-shirt and a pair of my boxer shorts. She appeared unusually pale.

The cop looked her up and down.

"It's kind of a formal thing, once the call's been made, we gotta check it out. You just can't know these days," he said, glancing back at me.

"Yeah?" I said.

"We just like to check on it." He paused. "We didn't mention it on the phone, but you just don't know."

"You don't know what, exactly?" I said.

He glanced at Alethea again and then he looked back at me. "Well, you pretty much gotta check it out, once the call's been made," he said. "They should've told youse on the phone." He paused again, watching her. "I mean, for all I know, it could be you," he said, fixing his eyes back on me. "You could be the one she's calling about. It could've been you on the phone, holding a gun to her head, making her tell us not to come."

"Yeah?" I said.

The officer hooked the Maglite in a ring on his belt and put his hat back on. He got a pen and a small notepad out of his shirt pocket.

"Now, you mind if I ask youse a few questions?"

I looked at Alethea. She raised her eyebrows.

"I guess not, go ahead," I said to him.

"Okay, what's your name, sir?" he said, peering at me over the notepad.

"Hues, Wilson Hues," I said.

"This your wife then here?"

Alethea was standing with her arms folded.

"He's my boyfriend," she said.

"Okay, ma'am. Your boyfriend. So youse ain't married." He paused. "Can I get your name?"

"Alethea, Alethea Shope," she said.

He scribbled on his pad.

"And what is your name, if I may ask?" Alethea said.

"I'm sorry?" he said.

"For all we know, it could be you," she said. "You could be the one causing those screams," she said.

"Okay, okay, I can see what you're saying," he said politely.

"Youse want to see my badge or something?"

Alethea shrugged.

"My name is Paul Lutz. Officer Paul Lutz," the cop said.

"What I'd like to do is ask you a few questions, that's all. Just a few questions is all," he said.

I glanced at Alethea. She just stared at him.

"Okay then." He flipped a page on his little notepad.

"This your house?" he said to me.

"It's *our* house," Alethea said.

"Okay, all right." He addressed the next question to her. "You two own it, then."

Alethea didn't say anything.

"We rent it," I said.

"And how long you been renting it?"

"Two months now," I said.

"Okay, two months," he said, scribbling. "And youse from here?" He protruded his lower lip outward after he spoke, gathering a bit of saliva that had gotten away from him.

"Yeah, I grew up nearby here," I said.

"In this neighborhood here?" he said.

Alethea sat down on the bottom step and stretched her shirt over her knees.

"No, I grew up south of town. On Reservoir Road," I said.

"Reservoir Road. Okay," he said. "And you, Miss Shope? You grow up there, too?"

"No," she said.

"Okay, okay. In town, then?"

"I'm not from here," she said.

That seemed to confuse him. He hesitated, staring at his notepad. He let rest the subject of her origins. "Well, I understand you heard some screams tonight," he said.

She nodded and shrugged.

"And someone was on your roof?" he said.

She shrugged and nodded again.

"That was me. It was me on the roof," I told him.

"It was you?"

"Yeah. We explained it on the phone," I said.

He stared at me, scratched the back of his pen on his balding head.

"I was searching for someone outside," I said.

"And did you find him?"

"No, not exactly," I said.

"You heard screams earlier, too. Is that right?"

"We thought we did."

"What did they sound like?"

"Like dying rabbits," Alethea said, smirking.

"Like dying rabbits?" he said, nodding.

"Yes, they sounded a little like dying rabbits. Strange screams," I told him.

“Okay,” he said, addressing Alethea again. “And you been outside tonight, too?”

“Yes, I was,” she said.

“Where you been?”

Alethea stood up, leaned on the banister, and crossed her arms again. She was bored and annoyed with him.

“Out back. I was out back looking around.”

“And what were you looking for, ma’am?”

She hesitated.

“I’m not sure, exactly,” she said.

“You’re not sure?”

She stared at me and exhaled and then she looked back at the officer. He was waiting patiently.

“I was looking for whatever was causing the screams,” she said, raising her eyebrows.

“Are you sure you heard screams?” he said a little too quickly.

Alethea peered at me. Her nostrils were flaring.

“I think I’m sure,” she said.

We sat there in silence for five or ten seconds while he wrote on his notepad. He flipped up another page.

“And how long were you out there?” he said to her.

Alethea sighed and shifted her weight to her other leg.

“You know, I have to say,” she said, sounding very defensive, “I guess I don’t quite understand why *we’re* being interrogated.”

The officer put his pen in his shirt pocket and stared past both of us into the kitchen. He scratched his head again and he looked up at Alethea solemnly. “You know, ma’am, youse ain’t the only ones that called tonight,” he said.

We stared at him.

“We got another call from some other folks nearby here, about

fifteen minutes after you did. They says they heard screams, too, but they says they was coming from your house. They says they seen some movement in your yard and later they heard screaming.” He pursed his large lips and looked back and forth between the two of us. “We wasn’t going to come out, but it got where we had to. You understand what I’m saying? Now, I’m just trying to work all this out myself. I’m just trying to establish some things here, in due process, is all, if youse don’t mind cooperating.”

Alethea had sat back down on the bottom step and propped her chin on her hands.

The cop addressed both of us. “Now. They said it was a woman’s voice they heard.”

I looked at Alethea. She rolled her eyes and exhaled.

“Yes, the neighbors heard a woman screaming in your house,” he said.

I didn’t want to be indicted for whatever else was going on outside, so I spoke up.

“That could have been us,” I said.

He pulled his pen back out of his shirt pocket and got ready to write again. “Okay, it could have been you?” he said.

“It could have been her screaming,” I said.

“Okay,” he said eagerly.

“We were having sex,” I told him.

Alethea stood up again at the foot of the steps. She was obviously very uncomfortable. She started shaking her head.

The cop observed her nervousness and then he started nodding and scribbling feverishly on his pad. The fact of our having had sex was apparently the missing link for him. He appeared suddenly satisfied.

“Okay, I see, okay,” he said.

A strange burst came forth from Alethea. It was part exhale, part laughter.

“Phh. Well, I’m done with this. I’m going up to bed. I’m going to leave you with the *detective*,” she said.

The officer seemed to regard this as a compliment. He looked up and nodded and then he started writing again. He was still scribbling when the bedroom door shut upstairs. He sucked his lower lip in and nodded.

“Well, I think I have enough here to go on,” he said.

I stared at him.

“I guess I can leave you folks alone now,” he said.

I was pleased that he was finally leaving our house. I wanted to get upstairs to make sure Alethea wasn’t too upset.

I took the cop out the back door and we stood there on the porch for a few moments staring through the trees in the direction of the golf course. I had switched the outdoor lights back on on the way out and they were illuminating our back yard again. Once again, they lit up the first ten or twenty feet into the trees, but made the area beyond that very dark, very difficult to see.

“Looks like some rain coming in,” the officer said, looking up at the sky and then at me.

The air did seem cooler. There was a slight breeze.

I remembered my shoes on the roof and I chuckled. The police officer watched me. It occurred to me that the evidence of my shoes on the roof might help corroborate our story.

“I think I’m going to hop up on the roof and get my shoes, so they don’t get rained on,” I said a little awkwardly.

“Okay, all right,” he said.

Though I didn’t ask him to, he walked with me around the side of the garage. He stood and watched while I stepped up on the chair, which was still against the wall, where I had left it. I pulled

my chin up above the level of the roof so I could see the shoes. They were right there on the edge. It was a little difficult. I had to grab for each shoe quickly with one hand while holding on to the roof with the other. The first shoe landed on the ground, at the cop's feet. The second almost hit him. He had to hop out of the way, but he didn't seem offended. He even held the chair, stabilizing it as I let myself back down.

We walked over to his car in the driveway and he paused for a few moments.

"Well, I hope everything's under control here," he said.

"I'm sure it is," I said quickly.

He stared pensively back into the trees.

"You know, I want you to know, I don't think youse guys are crazy."

I watched him carefully as he spoke. He did the thing with his lower lip again, stretching it outward, gathering saliva that had strayed.

"I think it's very possible there was something out there tonight," he said, his eyes still fixed on the trees.

He waited for me to respond. I just stared at him.

He glanced off at the neighbors' home and he gazed up at the garage roof, where my shoes had been.

"You know, it's a tricky business. It's just tricky." He stared at me and shook his head. "I mean, how you supposed to know?" He looked in at the house, at the window on the back side of the house where our bedroom was, and then he looked off into the trees in the direction of the tennis courts. "You know they're there, but that ain't the hard part, the hard part is *finding* them." He paused, set his eyes on the trees again.

I watched him carefully.

"Seems like I spend half my life searching for intruders," he said.

I stared, myself, into the section of trees where he appeared to be staring. He was gazing wistfully, looking horribly troubled by whatever it was he hadn't found, by whatever it was he thought was in there but couldn't see. He kept gazing for what must have been a full minute. He seemed to forget I was even there.

"Well," I finally said.

"Well," he said, flinching, looking back at me. "Yes. Give us a holler if you need anything." He took a step toward his police car, paused, and looked at me for a few moments as if he was going to say something else—as if he was going to reveal something of great importance to me—but then he kept walking. I watched him open his car door, get in, and fasten his seat belt. He waved as he pulled out. I waited until he'd backed out of the driveway and driven out of sight, and then I went back into the house.

I locked the back door and I went to the front door where the cop had first come in, and I locked that, too. I went to the basement door where I had snuck in earlier, and even though I remembered locking it, made certain it was still secure. I checked a few of the windows that I had just checked and locked an hour before. When I got upstairs and opened the bedroom door, Alerthea was curled up on her side, facing the opposite wall. She had the covers pulled up to her neck and she had her arm and leg draped over a pillow. I climbed in next to her. I left all my clothes on this time. I snuggled up behind her, also on my side, also facing the opposite wall. She had already fallen asleep, but she must have felt me crawl in. She scooted backwards, into me.

"I dreamed he came back again. He's not back again, is he?" she asked, half sleeping.

"No, I don't think so. It's just you and me here," I said.