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PREDATORS

In the early eighties, Ed was a plainclothes security guard at the Eatons Centre. The supervisor insisted he should act in this role as a security guard who stayed in plainclothes because he thought Ed looked sketchy and shady. Shoplifters, muggers, pick pockets, pimps, and the rest of the criminals, his supervisor said, wouldn't suspect him; instead, they would be friendly towards him. Ed told Aino he was surprised, because, as it developed, the security supervisor was right, at least partially. Characters with unsavory backgrounds befriended Ed, uncombed, unshaven, his clothes faded and worn, as he loitered and lounged in the food court and shopping mall concourses, wearing a Blue Jays or Maple Leafs baseball cap.

But Ed told Aino sometimes he felt as if he was undergoing an identity crisis. His parents were immigrants from the Azores, but he was born and raised in Northwestern Ontario. Aino grew up in Hornepayne, where her father worked as a freight train conductor and engineer and her mother was a social worker. Her mother's mother was Ojibway and her mother's grandfather was Scottish and Ojibway, and her father was Finnish. Growing up in the seventies and eighties, when she told people she had Indigenous blood they tended to use that trait against her. So, she never told anyone about her racial or ethnic background, or she told them she was Finnish, which was true, at least in part. Usually nobody bothered asking because they said she looked "Canadian," whatever that meant. Still, Ed told Aino, people in his hometown constantly asked him from which Indian reservation he originated: Lac Seul, Fort Severn, or Big Trout Lake? If they didn't think he was Indigenous, they thought he was an immigrant, refugee, or illegal alien and asked him his country of origin. Was Ed an Iranian refugee? Were his parents from Iraq? Was he an illegal migrant from Mexico? Were his parents from Italy and did they make homemade blueberry wine and import cheese from the old country?

Greece? A bookstore clerk in downtown Toronto asked him if he was from Turkey. His skin was dark and became significantly darker during the summer. He did not feel white or Caucasian. Sometimes perfect strangers called him the N-word, especially on the downtown streets where he travelled to work in the largest shopping mall in the core of Toronto, on Yonge Street. Ed had to admit he did not feel white.

Later, in the nineties, when potential employers asked him on job applications if he was a member of a visible minority he felt like answering, yes. In any event, he certainly did not feel white but colored, maybe Hispanic. He definitely felt more kinship with Black people, Hispanics, and other members of visible minorities than he ever felt Caucasian.

Now, after he graduated from high school in Northwestern Ontario in the class of 1983, he was studying print journalism at Centennial College. But he figured he should simply drop out of college, or at the very least change majors. He could never write a sufficient number of articles in the allotted time, ahead of deadlines. His interviewing skills were disrupted by his wandering mind, his nerves, his repetitions, his occasional stutter and stammer, an impediment he couldn't comprehend and which doctors dismissed as not worthy of worry or consideration. Ed didn't feel comfortable talking to people in a prominent position and place, city councilors, company presidents, school board trustees, executive directors of group homes, homeless shelters, and food banks. He often shunned them when he needed to speak to them as sources of background and off-the-record information and for quotes and opinions. Then, when he wrote an article, editorial, or column they didn't like, which was inevitable if you did your job as a journalist properly, they sent him angry, outraged phone calls and messages and complained to his profs and instructors.

Sometimes when Ed received his returned assignment from the journalism prof, and he looked at his grade and the slashes and underscores, the exclamation marks and critical notes, the corrected errors and proofing, he felt no shortage of shortcomings. At the very least he felt he was involved in a never ending spelling bee because of the grades knocked off for spelling mistakes and punctuation errors. He realized he would never become a writer. He certainly was not a natural and skilled writer. Likewise, he could not meet a deadline like a reporter. He thought he should simply give up journalism studies at community college and change his major. Better yet, Ed thought, he should simply find work in an auto factory in Oshawa or Oakville and live in the suburbs, after he saved some money. He realized the only reason he took journalism was because he loved to read newspapers and newsmagazines. He also loved to read books about Watergate.

He needed work and the security company at the largest shopping mall in Canada was the only place that called him. In fact, security for the downtown shopping center practically hired him on the spot when he handed them his job application. He told Aino he wondered if they hired him because he always went to their food court for coffee in the morning, before he rode the subway to the Scarborough college campus. Ed didn't understand why he was hired, but the pay was good, and the security company somehow always scored him tickets to the best concerts and that summer alone he went to concerts by the Police, Supertramp, and David Bowie at Maple Leaf Gardens, Exhibition Stadium, and a few other venues, including the amphitheater at Ontario Place, where he saw some Canadian rock acts he had listened to on one of the few radio stations available in his hometown in the late seventies and early eighties.

Meanwhile, Ed was still receiving calls from his parents urging him to come home to work for the railroad like his father. If he didn't like the hard labor of track maintenance, his dad thought he could gain employment as a freight train conductor, brakeman, switchman, or engineer.

Anyway, even though Ed had finished his shift, he ended up following Aino, his suspect, because he thought she was cute and pretty, after he spotted her shoplifting in the swimwear section of the department store. He also ended up walking behind Aino and behind a young man, with a limp, dressed like a fashion model impersonating a business executive, who seemed to be following her. Meanwhile, he silenced his walkie-talkie and kept it handy in the inside breast pocket of his jean jacket, but he turned down the volume on the radio.

Aino had just finished putting the bikini in her backpack, which she had also stolen earlier in the spring from a sporting goods store. She walked out of the women's swimsuit section of the Eaton's Department on Queen Street, when she found herself trailed by a tall man in a three-piece suit. He looked so tall and distinctive, with his limp. Where did he come from? Aino immediately thought that an in-store detective was following her. She wanted to return the overpriced bikini to the swimsuit racks in the lingerie and underwear department, but her limited experience taught her to stay put and remain calm for the moment. She reassured herself she and a spiffily dressed businessman just happened to be travelling in generally the same direction.

Then again, Aino quickly thought she should be concerned that she was being followed, regardless of whether the man was a businessman or a store detective or overdressed security guard. But the security guards she knew did not carry briefcases, unless he was a special security guard or police officer, a police detective,

who had been building a case on her for the past several months and had finally caught her. Oh, God, she wasn't certain; she didn't know what she should do, and she could feel her heartbeat start to accelerate. If she walked out of the store with the unpaid swimsuit, and he was a security guard or a police officer, she was inviting a takedown and arrest. She did a quick mental calculation. Aside from the odd gait from his bum leg, she speculated the man had to be a businessperson from his style of dress and maybe even the cologne he wore, which she thought was Old Spice and a bottle of which she stole herself, originally, for her father's birthday.

Aino stepped out of the revolving shopping mall doors onto crowded Yonge Street. The man continued to follow behind her, limping as he walked; she could tell by the distinctive clatter of his laces pointy polished black shoes. Now the fear intensified inside her.

She thought she should run, but she had never fled before—or at least only once—when a store mystery shopper caught her. He was so angry he made her fear for her physical well-being. She feared that mystery shopper would attack her, throttle her neck, as he gripped her arms until she kicked him in the groin. She screamed rape and her assailant became alarmed and afraid. Then, free of his grip, she ran as fast as the running shoes she stole could carry her into the subway station. She just could not understand why an ordinary person would care so much about something she stole from a wealthy store. Aino wore those sneakers when she walked out of the store in the Yorkdale shopping center. Then she ran across the massive parking lot of the shopping center before she disappeared into the subterranean corridors and tunnels of the subway station.

Now, months later, Aino was confronted again outside of Eatons Centre in downtown Toronto.

“Excuse me, ma'am, I'd like to talk to you about that swimsuit you just took.”

“I'm sorry,” Aino said, turning around, “I didn't mean to—”

“You forgot—”

“You read my mind. I'm sorry.”

“I'd just like to speak with you about it,” Lars said.

He was a good-looking detective or cop—in house or undercover, Aino admitted to herself. And she was finally willing to surrender; in fact, she felt relieved she had been caught.

“Please follow me,” Lars said.

Since he sounded so authoritative, Aino followed Lars outside the shopping center downtown onto busy Queen Street, near where it met Yonge. Then she noticed that she was also being followed by a young man in a

jean jacket and denim pants and footwear that looked like construction boots or cowboy boots. He looked familiar, and she realized he looked like the young man who lived down the street from her on Oakwood Avenue. Now she thought it was likely she was being followed by not one but two undercover police officers, or one plainclothes security guard and one plainclothes police officer, or two plainclothes security guards. This second young man, though, she thought she recognized, as he followed them through the department store and into the concourse of the shopping mall and up the banks of escalators. They passed through a domed glass entrance and two sets of revolving doors on Yonge Street, exits to the department store and domed shopping mall.

When they reached the intersection Aino was surprised: they completely passed any rear or side or private entrance to the Eaton's Department store or the Eatons shopping center.

"Wait a minute. Where are you taking me?"

"To Second Cup café for coffee—to chat."

Aino thought it was sounding as if he was giving her a chance to redeem herself and explain her actions, unless he wanted to have sex, which she also considered a real possibility. She thought it possible that he wanted to extort her into having sex. And then what? She thought he was incredibly good looking, despite his limp. If he released her for a onetime session of sex, she, desperate, was not certain she could or would say no. He looked handsome, he smelled nice, he had a calm demeanor, and he appeared like a well-dressed plainclothes detective.

As Ed, disappearing from her view, followed her and the dandy man with a limp along the Queen Street and then the Yonge Street sidewalk, he noticed the bikini, bright red, made from a smooth soft material, fell from her backpack onto the cement sidewalk. He couldn't help smiling to himself as he eyed the skimpy swimsuit on the ground. Someone had stepped on the bikini top, and dragged it along the street, as it adhered to the chewing gum stuck to the sole of their shoe and kicked it into the gutter. Ed took the untouched bikini bottom sitting on the cement sidewalk and stuffed it into the inside breast pocket of his jean jacket, leaving the bikini top on the sidewalk. He followed her as she walked behind this spiffy character with a bothersome leg into the Second Cup café and then they stood before the carafes of coffee.

"What do you want?"

"Sorry. I don't want anything."

“Please, have a coffee and even a muffin. If you don’t want to eat it, I’ll have it. Please, relax.”

“I can’t relax.”

“Okay. I’ll order you a muffin and a coffee. How do you like your coffee.”

Aino needed a coffee, even though the caffeine might make her jittery, but she was already tense and nervous.

“I’ll get an Irish Cream, one cream and one sugar.”

“That’s their most popular coffee, Irish Cream.”

When they sat down at a table, he took out a notebook and a beautiful luxury pen. He started to ask her questions: “So why did you take the bikini?”

“Because I liked it. It looks aesthetically appealing.”

He drew a grim expression and wrote her answer down in his notebook. She felt her face growing hot.

“But you don’t really need that bikini, do you?”

“No, I don’t. I have several at home already.”

“I think you would look great in that bikini, if you don’t mind me saying.”

Realizing events seemed to be taking a slightly bizarre turn, Ed rested his forehead on the upraised palm of his hand, losing his serious, professional demeanor, as he listened to this exchange. When Ed cursed as he spilled his coffee, she stared at him, while she fielded interview questions from the tall young man. She wondered if this second interlocutor was an undercover police officer. Meanwhile Ed wondered if he should call his supervisor on the radio. But for what reason? Nobody appeared in danger and Eddie had already booked off work.

Ed felt relieved Lars didn’t ask her if she stole these bikinis as well, so she said, “Thank you very much. I don’t even go to the beach. My skin is sensitive, and I burn very badly. I can’t swim, and I don’t like the sand. I heard there’s even toxic heavy metals, like lead and cadmium in the sand of Toronto beaches. So, yeah, I guess I don’t really need the bikini.”

“Did you feel tense before you stole the bikini?”

Then she felt distracted by the young man whom she now recognized as her neighbor, who lived several houses down the street from her on Oakwood Avenue. As a measure of her desperation, she told Lars she

thought she was being followed. She asked Lars if the young man in the denim jacket and black jeans was his partner and associate.

Lars paused and looked about the café and stared into Ed's eye for a moment longer than most people would have found comfortable. At that moment Ed feared he had been detected conducting surveillance on them, but then Lars resumed talking with her. Lars advised her not to worry, telling her he was a random stranger, and she was acting a bit paranoid.

“Sorry, to interrupt. I mean, before you took the bikini.”

Aino felt self-conscious as her face grew hot and sweaty again. She felt embarrassed and her face felt suffused with redness.

“Yes,” Aino said. She remembered what lawyers advised clients in television dramas. She remembered what she read about speaking with police officers: to maintain your silence, to not speak, if you were being treated as a suspect. Now Aino feared she would be arrested if she refused to speak.

“Did you feel the tension building before you took the bikini?”

“Yes,” Aino replied. She wanted to explain about how the tension built every time she stole something from the store. She wanted to confess she wanted to stop stealing. She had even gone to a family physician to explain about her uncontrollable urges to steal. When she arrived at the clinic for the appointment, the doctor was perky and kind. But she could not bring herself to explain. So, she said she needed a prescription for birth control pills. She obtained a prescription for birth control pills even though she was still a virgin and did not expect to have sex with anyone.

Ed slowly sipped his coffee, as he, intrigued, sitting behind the pair in the Second Cup café, listened, as the interlocutor continued to ask her questions of a psychological nature. Lars queried her with deeply personal and intimate questions all related to what he explained sounded like kleptomania. Aino started to feel confused. But she thought that if it helped her avoid being arrested, she should co-operate. When Lars turned off his handheld tape recorder, she realized he was recording their conversation as well. Earlier, though, Lars had asked her if he could record their conversation, but she hadn't been paying attention. He slipped his cassette recorder into the jacket pocket of his suit jacket. He thanked her for her time and for answering his research questions for his background survey.

“Oh, before I forget, here's my name and telephone number.”

He handed her a business card with a fancy emblem. She quickly slipped the business card into the back pocket of her faded worn torn jeans. She was still anxious, having been panic stricken, so she didn't even catch a glimpse of the name embossed on the card.

“Wait a minute. I'm free to go?”

“Why wouldn't you be? It is a free country.”

Aino wanted to ask the man if he worked for the police or as security for the department store. But she thought she should leave the café quickly while she still had her liberty. She realized he did not even ask for the return of the bikini.

Curious about Aino's intentions and next movements, Ed followed her out of the café and along Yonge Street. She looked around suspiciously outside the Second Cup café and then along the busy pedestrian thoroughfare. Ed realized then she knew he was following her. Still, she felt more concern about her interrogator, and she glanced through the plate glass storefront windows at the tall, slender young man inside the café writing notes studiously in his notebook. Then she looked down at her backpack and noticed the zippered compartment was open. The bikini was missing. She figured the swimsuit must have fallen out of her open backpack as she walked alongside him, as they walked out of the department store and south on Yonge Street. Then she noticed a clump of clothing on the Yonge Street sidewalk; it was the bikini top. A hundred dollar bikini bra stepped on by shoppers and pedestrians downtown like it was a dirty oily rag. She couldn't find the bikini bottom, which Ed had stuffed inside the breast pocket of his jean jacket. She also didn't notice she had dropped the business card when she bent over to examine the bikini bra. Ed couldn't help noticing and ogled her backside, thinking she had a cute bum.

Aino wondered if she should pick up the bikini bra and throw the apparel in the clothes washer. People wasted so much these days. But she thought there was a chance the bikini was ruined. She noticed a hole in the apparel and thought it even looked punctured. Maybe a dog bit it. Still, she loved the feel and comfort of the fabric. She picked up the skimpy top from the sidewalk, ashamed that she had been observed by numerous pedestrians on busy Yonge Street, picking up what they perceived to be nothing more than dirty cloth. She looked around for her interrogator, but he was back in the café, and she believed she should be prudent to leave before she exhausted her supply of good fortune.

Having noticed that Aino had dropped the business card, Ed examined the business card and noticed the name, Lars Jensen, a graduate student at the University of Toronto. Ed dropped the card—worried if he kept it he would have to make notes about what was evidence. He realized he had no interest in pursuing anyone associated with this scenario, except he thought she was pretty. He liked her face, narrow and chiseled, and her body, thin but curvy and womanly. He remembered she was his neighbor, who lived several houses and duplexes down Oakwood Avenue from him.

Her uncle complained to her aunt that their niece acted a bit flirty around this next door neighbor. Her uncle observed her promiscuous antics as he washed his pickup truck in the driveway: Once, after she had showered and arranged her hair and applied makeup, and headed to the university campus for evening classes, she had stopped in front of Ed as he walked behind her on the sidewalk, near the bus stop on Oakwood. On a hot spring evening, when she was wearing short shorts and a tank top, she strode in front of him. She stopped, because she wanted him to notice her cleavage and body as she bent over to tie her laces, which were already perfectly laced. But she didn't realize he was only a few steps behind her when she bent over, so when she stopped he, absentminded, wondering where he had lost or misplaced his Metropass, collided with her butt. In fact, she made eye contact with him while she gazed at him through the gap in her legs, as he backed away. He apologized, but, hot and bothered, she giggled nervously as she toppled over. He helped her onto her feet and then purposefully strode to the subway station.

Now, having finished his shift, he followed her down Queen Street, along which she hurried as if she was escaping the scene of a crime. He admired her looks, her unblemished smooth skin and the cleavage of her breasts and backside. He thought that he would like to know her intimately.

She boarded the Queen Street streetcar, even though the shortest route was to take the subway home, but the station was in the basement of the shopping center, the scene of her shame, and she couldn't return there, not at this time. So she ended up taking the long way home, because she wanted, needed, to get away. She rode the red metallic clanging streetcar to University station and boarded the subway without having to use a transfer. She carried a monthly Metro pass she bought regularly on the last day of the month. A small town girl from Hornepayne in Northern Ontario, where there was no public transit, Aino loved to ride the subway and city buses everywhere, including to department stores and shopping malls and shopping centers in the far-flung suburbs.

Ed walked along Queen Street, making a half-hearted effort to follow her. As a plainclothes security guard who had finished his shift an hour ago, Ed decided not to return home via the subway beneath the shopping center, and he merely followed her.

When she arrived home late, she discovered she had locked herself outside of the side entrance to the house. She decided she would open the basement window, squeeze through the narrow gap, and crawl over the kitchen sink and countertops into the basement. Ed, heading home further down the street, noticed her from the laneway, but she waved him off.

“Everything’s all right,” she said, “I just locked myself out.”

He nodded, said he understood, and asked her if she needed help. She reassured him she didn’t require his assistance, but she appreciated the offer. He watched her crawl through the window into her basement apartment.

That night she watched a movie by Woody Allen on CITY TV. Then, when she tried to sleep, she remembered the tall, slender young man with the limp and his voice and demeanor. He looked her in the eye when he asked her questions and she spoke hesitantly, except when he was writing her answers. And she thought with his height and chiseled features, he had striking good looks. She thought he was one of the better looking men she had ever met face-to-face. Even his limp she found endearing.

In the darkness of her bedroom, she covered herself with her comforter and sheets to protect her nudity and modesty, even though it was hot and sweaty, and she had her privacy, the basement to herself. Still, she felt guilty, as she started to touch herself. She rubbed and stroked herself furiously until, panting, she came. She gasped in ecstasy with a mental image of the tall, handsome young man with a limp. She couldn’t remember the last time she came so hard, but she was full of tension and unsatiated longing. She thought she needed to know the identity of the man with the limp.

Then she remembered she accepted his business card, but she was so afraid and distracted she couldn’t remember where she put it. She checked her backpack and then looked in her jeans, rumped at the foot of her bed. Aino remembered she had slipped the business card in her back pocket.

But the card had disappeared. She thought long and hard as she sat at the end of her bed in her bedroom downstairs in the basement of her aunt and uncle’s house on Oakwood Avenue. In fact, she could hear them having sex upstairs because their bedroom was directly above her room. Looking at the digits on her clock-

radio, she observed the time was barely past two in the morning. She realized she dropped the card, it having fallen out of her pocket when she bent over to pick up the swimsuit top. She remembered because she was conscious of the fact her tight blue jeans exposed so much of her backside.

She threw on a pair of sweatpants, a hoodie, and her running shoes. She grabbed a paperback book by Alice Munro, *The Lives of Girls and Women*, before she hurried out of her uncle and aunt's house on Oakwood Avenue. She hurried out of her basement bachelor apartment, the rent for which her mother had agreed to pay until the start of winter. Then her mother warned her she would have to learn lessons of self-reliance, independence, and maturation. She stood at the corner of Oakwood and Eglinton Avenue West, reading the Penguin vintage paperback edition of *Brave New World*, waiting for the twenty-four-hour trolley bus. Eventually, she rode the trolley bus, forty-five minutes later, through the cool, calm, quiet night to Queen Street, where she eventually caught the twenty-four-hour streetcar.

She disembarked from the all-night streetcar at Queen and Yonge Street, at the downtown intersection, abandoned, except for a homeless man, beneath a blanket, sitting on a dairy carton case. She followed the route she took around the corner earlier yesterday when the tall, limping young man escorted her to the coffee shop, where he conducted his own interrogation. She scoured the grimy, dirty sidewalk, with wind blow newspapers, the *Toronto Sun*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, which showed the pictures from The Police concert at Exhibition stadium, until she finally found the business card beneath a discarded newspaper, the classified ads of Now. She examined the business card beneath the dim light of the department store. His name was Lars Jensen, a graduate student, who double majored in twin social science disciplines, specializing in kleptomania at the University of Toronto. She grew outraged.

He was not a cop; he was a graduate student who specialized in psychology and criminology. She felt as if his interception and interrogation of her was wrong. She rode the streetcar and trolley bus back home through the cool night and early morning until she arrived home. Her uncle had locked the back door while she went on her starlight and twilight adventures. She started to sob, realizing she had forgotten the house key, which opened the side door and was the only exterior entrance to her basement apartment. Her uncle probably wanted her to move out of his house, even though she was his niece, whose mother paid a modest rent. She found the same open basement window and managed to crawl through the gap and maneuvered like a gymnast into the basement.

Then, instead of relief, she felt angry, so she couldn't sleep. She had to take one, then two, and then three Valiums from the bottle she had stolen from her friend's mother's bathroom cabinet. Finally, she slept, but when she awoke in the afternoon, she felt inertia, despair, paralyzed, too afraid to leave her apartment. She decided to stay at home. She made herbal tea and read the Margaret Atwood novel she had stolen from the bookstore chain, just south of Bloor Street. She could not remember the last time she stayed home all day, especially in Toronto, where she loved to ride the bus and subway, read paperback books, engaged in people watching. Then, she felt so outraged that this graduate student in psychology and criminology had interviewed her. She overcame her fears and called him.

"You're the young woman I interviewed yesterday, right?"

"Yes, you're the young man who questioned me," she replied, testily.

"Yes, I interviewed you. I recognize your voice."

"Yes, you interrogated me," Aino said accusatively. "But you didn't tell me you're a psychology student."

"I am a master's student. I'm doing a joint graduate degree in psychology and criminology."

"But that isn't the word I'm thinking of. You didn't act, like, well, properly."

"You mean ethically?"

"Yeah, exactly. I wonder if it's even legal what you did."

"I was merely collecting background material for my research in kleptomania. My faculty advisor was wondering if it was a good choice of topic, but then I pointed out there's so little research in the field, and he reluctantly agreed."

"But I'm not your guinea pig."

"I agree absolutely. You're not my guinea pig. The interview was merely background information I'm collecting. All the questions were essentially field research questions. They were part of a survey."

"You mean I'm not the first person you interviewed?"

"Absolutely not."

"I don't understand."

"The survey was totally anonymous. Did I even ask you your name once?"

Aino realized now he hadn't asked for her name. She said nothing and then she sighed and became less guarded. "Do you expect me to give you my name."

"No. Absolutely not."

Angry, she hung up the phone. She wanted to report him, but to whom. Telling herself he didn't sound clinical and professional now, just like an ordinary guy, she called him back and tried to explain she believed firmly what he did was wrong. She also wanted to ask him for a meeting, when she realized that they were probably about the same age. Finally, she asked him, "How did you get involved in this, uh, business."

"I stole myself. I prefer not to delve into details unless you really want to know."

"Yes, I want you to tell me. You tricked me."

"I did not deceive you."

"Yes, you did. Now tell me."

"Ok. I think my urges centered around cassette tapes and my music collection. I was a musician in a rock and roll band when I was a teenager. I loved listening to hard rock and metal. Most of the time I bought tapes, but then I started to steal the cassettes after I saw how easy it could be, and I became skilled. Then I dropped out of high school to tour with our rock band after we started to land gigs in bars and taverns across the prairies. At every town and city on the tour I went to a music store and stole cassette tapes. Then, when fewer bars showcased our band, or wanted us to play for drinks and their motel room or lower pay, I ended up stealing food from grocery stores and supermarkets because we hardly earned enough money. Then one day I stole roasted pumpkin seeds from the convenience store of a gas bar. Since our band started playing in all these community centers and bars and taverns across the prairies, I nurtured a taste for pumpkin seeds. The owner spotted me stealing a pack of them and came after me with a shotgun, screaming he would shoot me. I couldn't believe it. I was still a teenager and I'd never seen somebody go crazy with a gun before and I was frightened. Besides, I had already paid for a tankful of gas for the van. I ran into our touring vehicle. While my band members asked me why this mechanic in oily coveralls was waving a gun at us, I sped away. Then I realized we had forgotten the drummer. We circled back to the filling station and rounded the gas pumps to pick him up and raced off. The mounted police sped past our van with their sirens screaming on the highway. I panicked and floored the accelerator pedal and sped down the Trans-Canada highway faster than I had ever driven, all over pumpkin seeds to which I had become addicted, even though they caused me to bleed from the rectum when I

went to the washroom. Then, at an intersection with a grain elevator, I sped through the stop sign and a truck hauling cattle broadsided the van. The injuries I received from the car accident landed me in Foothills Hospital for several months. But all the other band members, when I finally regained consciousness and emerged from my coma, seemed more upset about the injured and dead farm animals. The police and farmers were forced to shoot the mortally wounded cattle. Anyway, I guess the hospital stay and my head injury cured me; the same way that kind of shock and prolonged hospitalization might have cured an alcoholic or drug addict. But I never played music again after that accident, never felt inclined, and I've always theorized why."

After Lars invited Aino to his office in the university, she hung up the telephone and continued to feel conflicted. She thought she would like to personally know and become intimate with this young scholarly man, but she also nurtured doubts about his credentials and identity.

The following day she went to the York University library where she had been a student for a semester, until first her father, who was estranged from her mother, and then her mother refused to pay any more money for tuition and pricey textbooks. She conducted library research into Lars Jensen. She discovered he was the author of a single published academic paper on kleptomania. He was working on his joint master's degree in psychology and criminology at the University of Toronto. The biographical note mentioned he had been pursuing an undergraduate degree in music and education, so she thought parts of his story checked out and he had a slightly intriguing background. She understood it was unusual for undergraduates to get research papers published in academic journals, but he had done it somehow. She thought she had to give him credit for that accomplishment.

When she discovered he wasn't much older than her, she wanted to be with him. She thought at first she was straight, then gay, and, later, she wondered if she was bisexual. Now, as she felt an attraction for this man, she realized the truth was not so simple.

Later, as she attempted to piece together events and understand her situation and life and relationships, she remembered Ed followed her at the end of his shift, when he saw her take the bikini. He also followed her to the Second Cup café, where she spoke with this tall, well-dressed man with a limp. Then he followed her across town on the streetcar and then at Ossington the trolley bus. From the bus stop at Oakwood and Eglinton Avenue, he followed her on foot to the house where she lived.

The following day, Aino realized she was locked out of the house and had again misplaced or forgotten the key to the side door, the entrance to her living quarters, her basement apartment. Again, she crouched down to enter the brick house through the open basement window. Ed paused on the sidewalk where it met the driveway and walked up the laneway to where she crouched to enter the ground window.

“You dropped this outside the Eatons Centre,” Ed said. “It fell out of your backpack.”

Aino turned crimson. She took the bikini bottom from his hands. “Thanks,” she said, adding, “sorry.”

“Sorry for what?” Ed asked. “There’s nothing to be sorry about.”

Aino turned back, looking crimson, and then crawled through the basement window inside the house. She slithered and slid inside the basement and locked the downstairs window from the inside. Rightly or wrongly, she concluded he was smitten and felt an attraction for her.

Several nights later, filled with longing, Ed waited and lounged outside her house. Sipping a takeout coffee he had gotten from the nearby Tim Hortons on Eglinton Avenue, he leaned against the brick retaining wall outside her house, the street light at the corner barely casting enough light into the night shadows for him to read his paperback book, *1984*, by George Orwell. He had never entered a woman, loved with lust and passion. It was a little past midnight when he rapped on her side door. He knocked on the door several times. Aino probably should have been alarmed at the insistent rapping at that hour of the morning, but she calmly went to the side door. She peered at him closely through the screen and glass in the darkness and then she recognized him with wide eyes. She turned around, looked at the closed door that led to the first floor, and checked to see if the door to her uncle and aunt’s quarters was locked. When she was satisfied the door to the ground floor of the house was firmly locked and her uncle and aunt were fast asleep, she led Ed downstairs to her bedroom.

In the darkness and warmth of her bedroom, she wrapped her naked legs around him in the darkness of her narrow bed. Like an experienced lover, she embraced him with her legs and held him inside her, gripping him with a tightness and strength neither of them expected. She felt the warm quiver over her loins as she gripped him with muscles and reflexes over which she never thought she had control. He told her she made him feel more wanted and needed than ever.

