

Peter Mladinic

## Unsolved Mystery

A kid lived in Baltimore, the early 1990s.  
His mother fatally overdosed on heroin,  
his father gave him to the kid's aunt,  
who lost him. His name was Roland.  
The aunt neglected him. You might say  
Let's see it. All I can say, she was absent.  
It's hard to see him opening a fridge  
and finding it empty, hard to say what  
he did for food, or to see him waking up  
on a mattress on the floor, or dressing,  
or out with friends. He had no one.  
He likely got strangled by a predator.  
You'd like to think he's alive but likely  
he died before age 12. He had nothing.  
Have you ever looked in the eyes of  
someone who has nothing? I haven't.  
The predator's hands on Roland's throat  
to keep him from telling, the fear in  
Roland's eyes, then his blank eyes—  
I only know he disappeared.

## Humpback

When I was a little kid, my friend's father had a stash of girlie magazines with all these beautiful centerfolds. Yet he himself was humpbacked. I'd see him, as I am now, in my mind, and seeing his humped back I instinctively want to turn away. He kept the girlies in a cubbyhole, off the bathroom. His stash of lust: *Dude, Nugget, Daddy, Uncut, Handjobs, Kingsize, Sex Life*. All we did was look; this was before puberty.

He wore a grease-monkey suit, he owned an auto upholstery shop, he was Polish, his name was Adolph. The suit was dull silver with dull blue lines I see up around his humped back, blue lines that splayed out like finite fishbones, of fish fossils embedded in rock from prehistoric times. His egg head, bald on top, flat in back, must have been crammed with cleavages, that deep line between breasts he fondled,

kissed, sucked and bit while jacking off. Nothing wrong with that. He was married, had two kids and a successful business. He lived in a house on a hill, wore dark-framed glasses. His skin was light brown, even his bald head, wisps of black hair on the sides. His face, wide and drawn, seldom smiled. Though he was outgoing, inside he was private, the Adolph even his wife, Adele, didn't see, is my thought.

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No one around, he visited pics of girls  
buxom, hot to trot during the Cold War.  
He stroked to a pic in *Sin*: a young woman  
knelt, her mouth around a big hard cock  
and cum dripping, the private Adolph.  
The Sundays he went to mass were rare,  
but he did go. I'm not sure if he walked  
a path in woods that led to the river  
and stood on the riverbank and looked  
at the weeping willow on the other side,

the most beautiful tree I've ever seen  
that wasn't in a photograph. I wonder if  
he ever saw it. He was always working,  
either at his shop, stitching upholstery,  
needle in hand, or at home, a hammer,  
a saw, or the spirit level—dull silver,  
like a heavy ruler, in the center a yellow  
liquid bubble—he used to build shelves.  
He spoke in low spurts, like snores.  
The women in his girlie stash loved him.

## Reciprocity

I want a can opener that has a beak  
like a hawk's, that I can push into the lid  
of a can of pineapple juice, and see  
the hollow triangle like an upside down  
baseball diamond.

I want a chimney, a path through elms,  
a negligee pinup, and a smoking jacket  
that's silk and lightly padded and has  
little diamond-shaped patterns, a lapel  
with long curves, and a silk belt that goes  
through loops, that I can either leave  
hanging loose or tie. I want a picture of  
Rita Haworth in a pillbox with a veil  
that falls past the bridge of her nose.

If you help me get what I want I'll help  
you, Ethel, one of the dead,  
cold in your grave, wanting everything.  
The yellow eggcup you made in the shape  
of a duck has green wings. Its webs and bill,  
a light orange. It's on my sill.

As you primp your permed hair in a mirror  
in your brick house on a hill,  
I could gather orange and grapefruit rinds  
to bring to your compost, I could wax  
your green Plymouth. I saw your husband's  
mother, but never yours.

Did you live in a house on a hill after you  
moved from the house I remember?

You picked me up from school one day  
in your Plymouth. Its interior, light gray  
smelled damp. I could put an egg  
in the cup you baked in a kiln.

## Blue Jacket

*Abby Williams and Libby German, respectively ages 13 and 14, were close friends, and victims of a double homicide that occurred near Delphi, Indiana, in 2017.*

Can you ever stop chattering about news,  
weather and, What did you have for lunch?  
and look at Libby and Abby, Their faces  
in pictures resemble wanted posters. Their  
bodies below the Monon bridge near Delphi.  
Except what you'll see is the railroad ties  
of the bridge, that one picture with Abby  
on the bridge, then the one of evil incarnate  
in a blue jacket, a hand in his jeans pocket.  
You'll hear evil's voice: Guys, down the hill.  
You won't see Libby and Abby after evil took  
their lives, you'll see the tilted winter trees  
and leaf-strewn rocky ground. Mostly it's  
the bridge, high, long, splintery, rickety  
the girls walked, and evil followed, and led  
them down the hill. You'll see no weapon,  
you'll not know cause-of-death. The cops  
know but are not releasing that, not yet.  
Evil resembles a man who is white, either  
young or early middle-aged. A hood  
under the jacket is up by his neck. He has  
a full head of hair, a hand in one pocket.  
You'll see and hear evil, see Abby in a pic  
Libby took, who recorded evil's voice. Her  
video hints evil had walked the Monon  
High Bridge before. It's thought evil lives  
in Delphi or nearby. You'll see steep hills,  
trees that look like sticks and thicker trees,  
all minus leaves. The ground strewn  
with rocks and big brown leaves, mostly  
you'll see the high, narrow, rickety bridge.  
It looks scary to people afraid of heights.

## Albert Place

In the face of not knowing what to expect  
we're weak though we try to be strong.  
Albert Place was shaped like an S.  
Dense trees made a dark green dome.  
On my bicycle I looked at a yellow  
ambulance in front of a small brick house.

Joanne lived there, her father's final hour,  
whirling red top of the ambulance.  
I pedaled onto that street, turned left  
and rode down South Park Drive  
onto North Park Drive. On TV Clark Kent  
ducked into a washroom, took off  
his specs and loosened his tie's Windsor.

Look! Up in the sky! Superman  
walked through walls, stopped a maniac  
launching a missile, never doubted  
a thing, got on with most everyone.  
You and me, bending to tie a shoelace  
and it breaks, that wasn't him.  
In Valley Hospital Joann stood crying.  
Her mother's arm drew her near.