

DOWN IN THE HOLE

Jake looked through the eyehole. “Who is it?”

“Detective Sergeant Barker. Open up.”

Ash fell from a cigarette in Jake’s mouth. He hummed a ditty while he worked the locks.

“Last one.” Jake opened the door, spun around, fell.

Barker stepped over.

Jake said, “Make yourself at home. Mi casa ... whatever.”

“Too much to drink tonight?”

“Nope.” Jake picked himself up, staggered to the couch. He slid down, heels digging into the carpet.

Barker snorted, brushed newspapers off a chair, sat. He looked around; saw empty bottles, empty casks, plates. “Your wife’s been reported missing. Her boss says she hasn’t showed for three nights.”

“You seen Betty? I sure could use a Bloody ... Betty Mary.” He laughed, then coughed.

“That can wait. Do you know where your wife is, Jake?”

“At work.”

Barker looked around the room, then at Jake. “Where’s the phone?”

“On the box.” Jake pointed at the television.

Barker got up, flicked a pile of clothes from the television onto the floor. The phone was underneath, off the hook. He lifted it to his ear, pressed the receiver, nodded, put the phone down. “Mind if I look around?”

Jake shook his head, tapped ash into a wine bottle. Barker walked into the kitchen. Jake drank from the bottle, coughing at the taste. He shrugged, finished the rest.

Barker came back. “The door’s locked.”

Jake moaned, pulled some keys out, jangled till he found the right one. He went into the kitchen, unlocked the screen door to the backyard. “For functions of all sizes, long as they’re small.”

They walked outside. Jake flicked on a light. A poodle with matted brown fur pranced over, rubbed on Barker’s leg.

“Excuse me, officer.”

Barker stepped out of the way.

Jake kicked the dog. It ran off, whimpering. “That’s Rupert, he thinks that hole over there is the john.”

Barker covered his nose, looked at Jake, held for a minute, then nodded.

At the front door, Barker said, “Keep the phone on the hook. If Betty calls or turns up—”

“Will do, top of the evening.”

Jake shut the door, went into the kitchen, bent down under the sink. He heaved out a four-litre bottle of kerosene, then dragged it to the backyard. Set the bottle next to the hole, undid the lid, tipped. Lit another cigarette, listened to the liquid drain.

When it was empty, he dropped the cigarette into the hole. Flames spat out. Jake jumped back, the flames lowered. He shuffled over, shook his head.

“No more Bloody Marys for me.”